

# Nordic Journal of Dance

– practice, education and research



Volume 14(2) 2023

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Cover photo: Ortenheim

Original design: Bente Halvorsen

Revised design: Arild Eugen Johansen

Publisher: Senter for dansepraksis (SANS) on behalf of Dance Education Nordic Network (DENN),

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Printing: IT Grafisk AS

ISSN 1891-6708




The joint committee for  
Nordic research councils in the  
humanities and social sciences



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# Editorial

 In this issue of the *Nordic Journal of Dance*, we present both research- and practice oriented articles, as well as a report from SANS's conference in November that marked the 40th anniversary of the organization. SANS, which was established in 1983 under the name Dans i skolen (Dance in school), has during these 40 years strengthened dance as a subject both in practice and theory in a wide range of activities, including courses, workshops and seminars/webinars, building competence and networks and spreading knowledge to teachers, teacher educators, students and pupils. We have also strengthened the focus on dance artists as teachers or artist pedagogues as a bridge between the arts and the education system. We are the proud publishers of the *Nordic Journal of Dance*!

In her research article, 'Proposition for Eventual Might of Teaching Choreography: Choreography Pedagogy in the Context of MA Choreography Studies', Jana Unmüßig, nurtured by her work as a lecturer in the MA in Choreography Studies at Uniarts Helsinki, discusses pedagogy in the context of the MA. She focuses on expanded choreography and artistic research pedagogy and, among other things, describes "potentially relevant teaching technologies for expanded choreography pedagogy in MA Choreography Studies, with an extensive account on embodied speaking followed up by intra active dialogue and listening".

In the practice oriented article, 'Embracing a Precarious Life', Clara Sjölin grapples with the work life of the freelance dancer from a personal perspective. Spurred initially by a sense of loneliness, an attempt to organise a solid structure around herself in the form of a consistent gathering of peers fails. This in turn leads to an exploration of the complexities of 'in/stability', understood both as a way of navigating one's work life and a way of approaching dance and

dance training, specifically improvisation. A key moment appears in a dance class where accepting—or *rejecting*—the invitation of one's partner is experienced as a novel suggestion. Comparing her own teaching of professional and community classes, Sjölin subsequently notices that malleable, readily manipulated movement seems to be the dominant, perhaps default, response in the professional dancer. Always on the go, always responsive; the very same skills that support the dancer's ability to navigate the neoliberal logic of the nomadic work life instilled feelings of loneliness in the first place.

In the article 'Punking: How Appropriation and Institutions Provide the Protection and Longevity of an Elusive Art Form', Alyssa Britermos writes about a dance style from the 1970s that emerged in LA during the civil rights movement and was developed by BIPOC queer men in underground LGBTQ+ clubs. It was a blend of sharp, exaggerated poses and movements inspired by Hollywood movies and pop culture. Although its popularity faded by the end of the 1980s, punking influenced the development of other dance styles but was never included in dance history. Britermos discusses how a dance style can be forgotten and then regain importance and points out the significance of preserving it as an art form.

Enjoy!

*Anette Shure Iversen,  
Issue Editor*

# Proposition for the Eventual Might of Teaching Choreography: Choreography Pedagogy in the Context of MA Choreography Studies

Jana Unmüßig

## ABSTRACT

This artistic research article discusses choreography pedagogy in the context of MA choreography studies in respect to expanded choreography and artistic research pedagogy. Both frameworks are means to carve out ponderings on eventual tools for teaching choreography as a research practice. The three potential tools that are explicitly discussed in the article are embodied speaking, intra-active dialogue, and listening. In addition, the article draws connections between experimental dance and choreography pedagogy emerging at the beginning of the 20th century in the USA and the pedagogical considerations of early-2000s Europe at the time of the Bologna Process.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä taiteellisessa tutkimusartikkelissa käsitellään koreografiapedagogiikkaa koreografian maisteriopintojen yhteydessä suhteessa laajennettuun koreografiaan ja taiteelliseen tutkimuspedagogiikkaan. Molemmat viitekehykset ovat keinoja raivata pohdintoja mahdollisista välineistä koreografian opettamiseen tutkimuskäytäntönä. Kolme potentiaalista työkalua, joita artikkelissa käsitellään eksplisiittisesti, ovat ruumiillistettu puhuminen, intra-aktiivinen dialogi ja kuunteleminen. Lisäksi artikkelissa luodaan yhteyksiä Yhdysvalloissa 1900-luvun alussa syntyneen kokeellisen tanssin ja koreografian pedagogiikan ja Euroopassa 2000-luvun alussa, Bolognan prosessin aikaan, esiintyneiden pedagogisten pohdintojen välille.

# Proposition for the Eventual Might of Teaching Choreography: Choreography Pedagogy in the Context of MA Choreography Studies

Jana Unmüßig

This artistic research into choreography pedagogy in the context of MA choreography programmes appears to as an indeterminate plane of thought. Indeterminate research speculates that the ontological concern is an “unending dynamism” (Barad 2012a, 9) that produces a dynamized and non-linear epistemological path. The writing commits to differently structured ways of knowledge production and its articulation towards a knowledge horizon(tality) that allow differences in sensing, understanding, and knowing. The research here is nurtured by my pedagogical activities as a permanent part-time lecturer at the MA Choreography programme at University of the Arts Helsinki, where I teach, supervise, and mentor MA students.

The article describes potentially relevant teaching technologies for expanded choreography pedagogy in MA choreography studies, with an extensive account of embodied speaking followed by intra-active dialogue and listening. In addition, it invites the reader to a historical hiatus of pedagogies that foster choreographic expansion and expose the reader to research on choreography pedagogy in the higher education context. Theoretical frameworks are sourced from artistic research pedagogy, more-than-human/posthuman educations studies, dance education research, dance studies, and sound studies.

The research is closely related to post-qualitative research's grappling with the critical limits of research data (St. Pierre 2013, Koro-Ljungberg, Löytönen, and Tesar 2017) in that it proposes artistic research stance concerning data collection and its interpretation. Central in artistic research, as it is understood and practised in the Nordic countries, is the notion of

exposition, in which an artist's practice turns into a medium of research (Kirkkopelto 2015) through a simultaneous interleasing of an aesthetic proposition and the showing of its performativity. In artistic research expositions, data and their interpretation are so tightly interlinked that one could speak of an “undoing of data through artistic research” (Rouhiainen 2017, 67).

In this article, the “undoing of data” (Rouhiainen 2017, 67) is activated few times through the performative gestures of a fictitious choreography class. When writing strikes a more performative tone, the reader is addressed as a fictitious choreography student. In most other places of the text, the reader is invited to remain on a plane of present tense and to wonder, wander, and co-meander with the author while reading. The reader is thus encouraged to constantly change positions when adapting to the changing horizons present in the different sections of the text. This is shown in the 2000s and the establishment of the Bologna Process: “Since its beginnings, the Bologna Process was placed in the context of European and international cooperation, and in particular it was intended to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European Higher Education by fostering the students' mobility and creating the framework for the international dimension of higher education.” (de Wit, Deca, and Hunter 2015, 3). This intention was effectuated by first establishing a European Higher Education Area, and within this area, educational frameworks, master of arts (MA) programmes, including MAs in choreography, were adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Bergen in

2007. These new MA programmes substituted older programmes with longer cycles, leading to changes in the national diplomas.

Through the Bologna Process, MA studies have not been formally defined as research-level studies but conceived as means to deepen and apply undergraduate studies. However, there has been increasing discussion, e.g. at the art university where I permanently teach, that teaching should not only be research-based but that BA and MA students should gain research skills through their studies. This researchification of undergraduate and graduate studies challenges the formal outset of MA studies, as referred to above. The increased demand to provide research skills in MA studies calls for pedagogues in MA programmes to invent new methods of teaching. The article suggests that these methods may be informed by artistic research pedagogy. Hence, this artistic research article is targeted at artist-researchers inquiring into current pedagogical practices in higher art education, researchers exploring choreography pedagogy at the MA level, and choreography teachers working in MA choreography programmes.

I choose to particularly focus on expanded choreography, a choreographic paradigm from Western theatre dance, because it is the context I have researched through my doctorate (Unmüßig 2018) and that I now embody as an artist-researcher. Stressing the embodied implication to the aforementioned context of Western theatre dance, is chosen to signal the commitment to the practice-based nature of the research and this text. Embodiment also plays an important role in the pedagogy I activate within MA choreography programmes. I will outline my interest in embodiment in greater detail in this article. At this point, it should be noted that I have been engaged in somatic practices (Perceptual Breathing of Ilse Middendorf since 2003, the bodywork of Marion Rosen since 2019), and I hold a MA in choreography focused on somatic movement and body practices in the study module of movement

research. Hence, even though I do not teach physical practices, physicality is incorporated into and through my teaching by my constant attentiveness to my corporeality and embodiment. It would be relevant to enquire at large into somatic bodywork-informed pedagogy in MA choreography studies because of Doran George's poignant question: "How do teachers and students use the idea of authenticity and its undergirding conception of the natural, where the aim is clearly not to resist dance establishments, but to achieve success with them?" (George 2020, 143). However, such enquiry is not the topic of this article and must be picked up another time. The present article first and foremost aims to speculate on choreography pedagogy within the paradigm of expanded choreography for MA choreography programmes.

Let us continue from here. Imagine<sup>1</sup> that this is a choreography class, that you are an MA choreography student at a higher art education institution, and that I am the choreography teacher. Learning/teaching choreography begins with curiosity.

My standpoint is that of a permanent part-time lecturer in choreography working predominantly in the Nordic country of Finland, with recent teaching experiences at the MA Choreography programme of University of the Arts Stockholm. I activate my pedagogical activities through my knowledge in choreography, which I gained via education (an MA in choreography and a doctor of arts in dance), freelance work as choreographer (2008–2015), and my perspective as artist researcher (Unmüßig 2018, 2021). As a lecturer in choreography, I enmesh myself in an attempted simultaneity, constantly shape shifting and engaging with orienting (Ahmed 2006) while speaking within a politics of location (Braidotti 2018) to bring forth the question of the subject of teacher: "What is a teacher, what is the teacher relationship, what are the pupils, what is the position of the researcher?" (Braidotti 2018, 210) As a lecturer in choreography, I do not work with pupils but with students—I like

to name the people coming into the MA for two years to expand on their existing practice artist-students. What is a choreography lecturer? Does a choreography lecturer teach choreography? Can one even teach choreography? How can I position myself as a lecturer in choreography and an artist-researcher from a new-materialist perspective? How can choreography be taught in the paradigm of choreographic expansion? Questions entangled with other questions, strings crossing other strings while aspiring to “show the pedagogy ‘(re) (con) figuring’ the lecturer in process of ‘ongoing (re) pattering’” (O’Malley 2019, 60).

Have a look. Have a broad look. Use a peripheral view. Don’t focus, or focus and then undo the focus. Zoom in and then go back to the peripheral view. Let your perception roam towards a sense of (dis) orientation. Close your eyes, open them again, and look at what you see/perceive in terms of choreography.

In this class, choreography is practised and discussed along with the notion of expanded choreography that has been coined by different scholars (Lepecki 2005, Cvejic 2015, Joy 2014, Leon 2022) and artists alike (e.g. Xavier Le Roy, Jérôme Bel, Mette Ingvartsen, Boris Charmatz, Eszter Salomon) since the 1990s. This is, however, a slippery notion, as dance scholar Anne Leon reminds us: “There is no single, organised, expanded choreographic movement—no body of theorists or practitioners who claim a conceptual/artistic territory.” (Leon 2022, 22) Instead, Leon discusses expanded choreography in the following terms:

Contemporary “expanded choreography” appears as a non-centralised network of practices and ideas probing what “else” choreography may be, while choreographic history appears as a collection of interlinked—but not linearly, smoothly-connectible—paths. What choreography has been in Western dance history is therefore as variable and complex as contemporary (expanded) choreography; the two are at times in accord, at times in tension. (Leon 2022, 27)

Task: Write an essay on expanded choreography in a non-linear manner and ponder how your work contributes or not without ever using the notion of expansion.

One of the many “practices and ideas” (Leon 2022, 27) encapsulated in the debate on expanded choreography, as Leon discusses, is the wrestling with the status of the human body, human embodiment, and its relation to dance and movement, which shows how choreographic expansion in different historical phases, from seventeenth-century Ballet to contemporary performance-orientated choreographic objects, have questioned “(...) the equation of choreography with the teleological function of dance-making and corporeality as its primary medium (...)” (Leon 2022, 30). Wrestling from a theoretical vantage point with human embodiment as an eventual perpetuation of a human-centred understanding of dance and choreography, I actively embrace corporeality and human embodiment for my practice as a lecturer in choreography. The apparent friction between a discursive interest in challenging notions such as human embodiment and activating my lectureship through human embodiment signals the outset of the research where epistemological paving interlaces with ontological concerns by means of non-linear dynamism, including ambivalences.

As discussed in this article, I recognise the relevance of embodied listening and embodied speaking for teaching/mentoring/supervising MA choreography students to activate a learning process in which students begin shifting their perceptions of their existing bodies of work. This shifting seems to be crucial to exploring the “what else” (Leon 2022, 27) of choreography.

## **From Artistic Research Pedagogy to Choreography Pedagogy**

To be able to engage in expanded choreography, students need a research mind that creates an appetite



for “probing what ‘else’ choreography may be” (Leon 2022, 27). This requires me as a teacher to introduce ways of engaging with choreography in an (artistic) researchy manner. Therefore, I tilt the focus to artistic research pedagogy: “Teaching artistic research is an extension of art-making practice that employs the language of research practice to encourage a perceptual shift.” (Gauthier/ Mazza 2020, 44) Gauthier’s and Mazza’s articulation of artistic research pedagogy clarifies that to teach artistic research is foremost a question of how to perceive an already existing practice by means of an altered perception. To teach artistic research entails the triggering of a perceptual shift to critically progress from where the artist-student was before in relation to their artistic work.

Engaging as a choreography lecturer in choreography with students in the educational frame of MA choreography studies entails a shift in perception that can take place through one-on-one mentoring or supervision but also when I, as lecturer, bring the conversation always back to the student’s work process if the cohort is small enough. I teach MA choreography cohorts with 3–5 students per cohort; this teacher-student ratio allows personalised conversations about each student’s work. Thus, the following reflections on language, dialogue and listening are applicable for small student cohorts.

For the context of choreography teaching at the MA level, I adapt and alter Gauthier/Mazza’s work: teaching choreographic research is an extension of a clearly identified practice that might entail any practice (e.g. computer engineering) that deploys the language of artistic research practice to encourage a perceptual shift. I have changed two crucial details: a widening of the realm of practice (from artistic practice to any practice) and a narrowing of the realm of language (from language of research to artistic research language). This opening broader spectrum of practices is straightforwardly linked to the expanded idea of choreography as a “non-centralised network of

practices and ideas” (Leon 2022, 27). The narrowing of language is driven by my language-based pedagogical practice with choreography students and by my artistic research interest in finding an artist’s language that reflects the intricacy of artistic practice and work processes.

In my adaptation of Gauthier/Mazza’s work, artistic research language does not mean the usage of scientific research vocabulary (Henke et al. 2020, 11). However, I propose artistic research language to be a way of being-with-language where language by means of speech is sensed and embodied. Sensed and embodied speech partakes in the paradigm of non-transcendental knowledge (Thayor Bacon 2003): “For Thayor Bacon, (...), non-transcendental knowing is situated in the context of the world and in our everyday experiences.” (Koro-Ljungberg et al. 2009, 687).

## **Embodied Speaking**

In my language-based teaching/supervising/mentoring, I activate artistic research language as a language that overcomes the body–mind separation and is instead embodied. The crucial aspect of activating embodied speaking in my work as a lecturer is listening to my embodied self-awareness; that is, sensing how my nervous system might be more aroused in one part of the pedagogical encounter than the other, such as when my hands become sweatier or my skin’s colour changes; that is noticing how different concepts and topics evoke different memories and emotions in me; that is noticing my breathing that goes unevenly, where audible exhalations give me the space I need to experience more spaciousness in my body.

The tracking of my process of embodiment anchors me as speaker more on the plane of the present tense. Embodied speaking through embodied self-awareness allows me to be present, which lets me to better listen and attune to the student’s present-at-hand questions, concerns, and wonders.



Since I ground myself in the present tense, the student is heard and seen in the very moment of the encounter, which implies that I leave projections aside and instead practise attending to the actuality of the meeting. In doing so, I aim to produce conditions in which the student begins to trust me as pedagogue and hence starts to unravel their thoughts about their making. These aims are set in place because of my observations of what happens if I do not ground myself in the present tense: students open up less about their artistic practice.

The attention to the now—the plane of the present tense—aims at inducing a trustful relationship between me and the student. This is crucial for instigating the student's perceptual shift: The student recognises how they perceive their artistic-conceptual-emotional situatedness when relaxing into a trustworthy encounter, and in a subsequent step, they disclose their considerations about their work. Dialogue is central to this process, and it is something I will return to later in the article. This situation is bound to ethics insofar as, due to my embodied self-awareness, I practise respecting my psycho-emotional limits, which in return allows me to sense and respect the students' psycho-emotional boundaries.

When dialoguing with a student within this process, I synthesise what the student has spoken about and articulate invitations with curiosity to stretch the student's boundaries. These invitations most often consist of differently structured questions (e.g. tentative, rhetorical, direct, open, etc.) to raise awareness of a "what else" (Leon 2022, 27) of unactualized potential. In the moments of asking questions, I actively practise curiosity as a practice of care (Ingold n.d.) so that poking the student's process from different angles through questions invites the student to look at their practice from different angles and perceive their practice and work anew while feeling safe. This process of poking needs to be established gradually. I would never ask a more direct question when the students

and I just get to know each other. Instead, at any moment of the conversation, I need to work actively with inhibition and weigh the right moment to ask a question—when the student and I have developed enough trust to ask more critical questions.

Another important and yet critical aspect of my research is that I move with intuition in these places of wording and asking questions. Moving with intuition, even when feeling grounded in the intuitive, entails the risk of not finding the right word—words that close the space of encounter. Language-based and body-bound teaching/mentoring/supervising to instigate a researchy process of asking what else choreography may become requires me as a lecturer to engage in a "process of 'ongoing (re) pattering'" (O'Malley 2019, 60): Constantly questioning my assumptions, adjusting my wording, tracking my embodied self-awareness, acknowledging mistakes, and engaging in mini-sequences of repair. All these instances constitute potential elements of the choreography pedagogy that I attempt to lay out in this article. At its horizon, questions such as the following arise: What is my intuition based on, really? How does this way of teaching relate to students situated with differently structured experiences (racialized, sexualized, and ableism-based discrimination)? How can one engage with moments of insecurity or even failure in the encounter with students? Such questions are important to address and hint at the necessity of future research in which they can be fully reflected. For the present article, however, my aim is to give insight into my process as a pedagogue and choreography lecturer when teaching/mentoring/lecturing. An important format for encounter between students and myself to happen is intra-active dialogue.

## Intra-Active Dialogue

I suggest that dialogue be understood in terms of intra-action (Barad 2012b). The new materialist philosopher-physicist Karen Barad develops intra-action from an agential realist perspective: "Intra-

actions enact ‘agential separability’—the condition of exteriority-within-phenomena. So, it is not that there are no separations or differentiations, but that they only exist within relations.” (Barad 2012b, 77) This intra-active dialogical form invites a differentiation between student and teacher by actively acknowledging their interconnectedness. Our differences (e.g. role and status within MA choreography studies) exist in relation to each other. We are co-dependent. We affect each other. Therefore, an intra-active dialogue implies dialogically speaking “through one another” (Barad 2007, 93). To dialogue interactively requires that I, as a teacher, am not an outside eye commenting from an external position on a student’s work or lecturing a class. Instead, I speak from within the dialogical situation. I remain available to be affected and critiqued by what students say and practice “criticality which is operating from an uncertain ground of actual embeddedness.” (Rogoff 2006, 2). Sourcing questions and comments from such a relational model of implicitness bring forth questions that matter because they directly intra-act with the students’ work process and artistic identity construction.

## Listening

Intra-active dialogue is nurtured through a clear sense of positionality, respect for the other’s boundaries, and listening. There are long periods in which I actively listen to what students say but also to the silences of what they do not say.

Listening opens up a space of potentiality to what else and what next could be heard and addressed. Listening can also be understood as a technology of research—of researching the mights of choreography. Therefore, when I, as a teacher, listen, the student is implicitly exposed to a potential research tool. Listening opens up a creative space where that which is not yet fully articulated can begin to unfold because time slows down when one listens, which also creates a heightened sense of nowness—the plane of the present

tense—which emerges through my embodied self-awareness, as I have fleshed out above. “(...) listening immediately slows time, extending a space of concern, even of pleasure. Listening stretches us toward that which calls attention, stretching in return a given frame of address.” (LaBelle 2021, 8) The experience of slowed-down time when listening as a pedagogue is crucial for continuing to track my embodied awareness in the pedagogical setting. In addition, a deaccelerated time experience allows me to initially inhibit reactive answers or questions in dialogues with student.

The actions of speaking, listening, and speaking again describe a movement that is an apt gateway into teaching research skills for the context of expanded choreography in small cohorts of MA choreography students in different pedagogical formats (mentoring, supervising, teaching). Expanded choreography itself is also described as language by choreographer Jérôme Bel: “choreography is just a frame, a structure, a language where much more than dance is inscribed” (Bel in Bauer 2008, 42) Anchored in the expository nature of artistic research, by means of carefully deploying speaking and listening, choreography’s potential as a container that entails “much more than dance” (Bel in Bauer 2008, 42) may be conveyed.

## Stretching Out into Choreography Pedagogy History and Research

To start, I would like to acknowledge that choreography practitioners and pedagogues whose work and labour, in formal and informal educational settings, are essential to the ponderings I articulate in this article, which would not have been possible without them. This account will be brief and by no means exhaustive. In addition, I recognise the Western and US-centric angles I propose. I’ll turn back to this critical point at a later moment, further down.

Margaret H’Doubler, inspired by John Dewey’s emphasis on process when making art—fleshed out in

*Art as Experience* (1980)—focused her conception of dance pedagogy on the immediacy of the experience while dancing when she established the first major in dance for dance teachers at the University of Wisconsin as early as 1926 (Koff 2021, 26). A former student of H'Doubler at Wisconsin University, San Francisco-based dancer, choreographer, and teacher Anna Halprin taught using various workshop formats outside of the higher education context in a similar way to her teacher and contributed to choreography in its expanded dimension. Halprin worked predominantly in her open-air studio through which she expanded choreography out from the studio. She attended to choreography's expansion by re-thinking and embracing the body–life nexus. Halprin was also one of the pioneers of teaching the making of choreographic scores in lieu of fixed steps (Morse 2015; Ross 2009). Many of the dancers participating in Halprin's workshop were later part of Robert Dunn's workshop at the Cunningham Studios in New York, which led to Judson Dance Theater, where indeterminacy-informed score-based procedures and tasks were experimented with (Morse 2015, Unmüßig 2018). Robert Dunn's wife, Judith Dunn, taught in similar ways to her husband but in the context of higher education at Bennington College, USA (Burt 2006).

This briefly laid out genealogy of the US approach to teaching choreography is relevant for the European choreography pedagogy context of the early 2000s in the aftermath of the Bologna Process. At the turn of the century in the late 1990s, there was growing re-interest by European choreographers to rearticulate and unpack the legacy of the Judson Dance Theater (Burt 2006). Some of these choreographers became prominent figures in the European dance and choreography field, such as Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmatz, and *Mårten Spångberg*. These three individuals framed their works in terms of expanded choreography, solidified through the conference at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona (MACBA)

in 2012, and were part of MODE05 (2005), an extended conference that “ (...) aimed at creating a critical platform to creatively question and rethink existing models of dance/choreography education.” (Melzwig, *Spångberg*, Thielicke 2007, 10). Later in the article, I will examine a contribution by Garrison, *Spångberg* and Le Roy to the publication of MODE05.

Innovations in dance education from around the 1930s resulted in new kinds of choreography in the USA in the 1960s, which crossed the Atlantic and influenced European choreographers in the late 1990s. This has sparked debate on how to teach choreography in higher education in the early 2000s. Linking the different historical phases and locations remains partially speculative and could be explored further in another article. This speculation, however, also taps into the potential of how “ (...) choreographic history appears as a collection of interlinked—but not linearly, smoothly-connectible—paths.” (Leon 2022, 27)

In early-2000s Europe, the Bologna Process and its introduction of MA Choreography programmes and composition classes, which had often been part of choreography studies prior to the Bologna Process, were largely revised by, for example, the introduction of theory-based courses on choreography and its history as well as research methodologies (Monni and Royo 2015). Dance pedagogy research on the teaching of choreography in higher education in the aftermath of the Bologna Process has been done in consideration of reflection in choreography classes (Leijen 2009), bodily knowledge in choreography teaching (Hämäläinen 2007), evaluation of choreography classes (Hämäläinen 2009, Lavender 1996), and mentorship in choreography training (Lavender 2009). These inquiries refer to choreography as a form of dance making—producing knowledge specific to dance (Hämäläinen 2007) rather than embracing the opening and multiplicity of expanded choreography. As previously mentioned, research on transversal knowledge has been conducted that combines theory

and practice in choreography training (Melzig, *Spångberg* and Thielicke 2007), one of the founding pillars of the opening of the pilot phase of the Inter-University Centre for Dance, Berlin, in 2008. Furthermore, dance study scholar Constanze Schellow, who contributed to the abovementioned publication from 2007 on transversal knowledge, critically examined (2018–2022) the institutionalization of theory in higher education dance art at both the BA and MA levels.

### **Perspectives on Openness in the Field of Expanded Choreography and Its Teaching**

There is little research literature that explicitly deals with how to teach expanded choreography in the context of higher art education. Dance scholar Larry Lavender and dancer Caitlin Spencer, who presented at the National Dance Education Organization (NEOD) Conference in 2011 and shared their joint paper *Choreography in the Expanded Field* over the course of the conference proceedings, attend to expanded choreography pedagogy in the context of art college education. The authors leave it open whether their scrutiny is targeted at the BA level or for the rare MA level studies in the college context. Their enquiry is poignant since the authors carefully dismantle and challenge the equation of how choreography and proscenium-based concert dance have been discussed as one and the same within modern dance and how this conception has formed choreography pedagogy mostly resulting in the teaching of modern dance composition (Lavender and Spencer 2011, 104). Instead, Lavender and Spencer

(..) wish to give choreography students the leeway to transgress modernist dance values, principles, devices, modes of production, etc. as readily as they might affirm and replicate them. The openness we seek entails commitment to the idea that no one kind of dance or dancing “owns” choreography

or controls its terminology, its means, its ends, its settings, its criteria of value, or anything else about it. Indeed, choreography need not even involve dancing. (Lavender and Spencer 2011, 103)

The suggested openness allows students to define choreography according to their chosen corporeal explorations, choreographic premisses, and methods, which corresponds to an understanding that “choreography is better to be conceptualised as choreographies—not reducible to a singular meaning or practice, but rather a network of historically-situated ones.” (Leon 2022, 26).

In their joint article *We facilitate therapeutic sessions for those who are still addicted to teaching. – Learners Anonymous* (2007), the artist Geoffrey Garrison and the choreographers Xavier le Roy and *Mårten Spångberg* challenge the idea that openness in educational frameworks offers more playful and non-violent forms of learning. They state that openness instead produces just another kind of violence. The authors compare educational frameworks to shopping malls in which students are offered “customised experiences” (Garrison, Le Roy, *Spångberg* 2007, 36.) and where “there is no possibility to leave” (Garrison, Le Roy, and *Spångberg* 2007, 37). Within this backdrop, students may be trapped within the openness of a pedagogical proposal. The ponderings of these three authors are peculiar for at least two reasons. First, they do not differentiate between various levels of studies in their educational framework: MA students who are generally more mature and older than BA students might be very capable of embracing openness as a way of learning. Second, Le Roy and *Spångberg* seem to distinguish between educational and pedagogical frames and the actual art field. They both were proponents of the notion of expanded choreography in the 1990s and advocated choreography as an open concept; however, within the educational context, they question the open. Discussing openness within the context of the intersection between education,

pedagogy, and art is complex and yet important. Openness is a condition that can only be embraced when ethically considered. It requires trust and dialogue among students, teachers, and art education institutions.

## Attempting an Ending: Open, Open, Open

To teach choreography encapsulated in “contemporary choreographic field’s open-ness to re-definitions of choreography” (Leon, 2022, 23) requires that I as a teacher undergo self-reflection and constantly search into what the mights of choreography could be and how to teach them. This involves constant searching movements with no pre-set method. Instead, it requires considered (i.e. ethically limited) experimentation. I propose that students should sometimes attend to matters not directly related to choreography. Then again, what can be considered not related to choreography if expanded choreography may touch any material or any context?

What struck you most as you read the newspaper this morning? How do you feel about that? How does what you’ve read this morning dialogue with where you are right now in terms of your artistic identity construction in the field of choreography?

This text now comes to an end by proposing yet another set of questions. The eternal return (Birnbaum 2005) or the unending dynamism of Barad still carries the plane of thoughts—the constant re-patterning and re-figuring of the lecturer-in-process. Walking towards a very growing opening: open, open, open. Maybe this is what teaching choreographic expansion is about: inviting into a practice of availability. How to invite? By sensing-echoing-listening-stuttering-movingForward-movingBackwards-movingSideways, and then again something like that. Around the inarticulate and articulate, the articulable and the inarticulable: re-searching.

## Endnote

1 The notion of imagination as it is used in the article is a reference to philosopher Marina Garcés’s work on imagination: “Imagination, as we have seen, is not a spontaneous force of an individual faculty of fabulation, but an art of relating to the limits of what we know, of what we recognize and do not recognize, of what there is and what there is not.” (Garcés 2022, 7).

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## Embracing a Precarious Life

Clara Sjölin

### ABSTRACT

This article presents research focused on the precarious life of an independent dance artist in a European context. The aim of this study was to identify ways to understand and cope with the various unstable aspects of the lifestyle and profession of independent dance artists. Together with a group of fellow dance artists, I explored understandings of instability and stability and investigated how collective action might reinforce a sense of stability. I position this study in relation to current economic trends in which the individual is increasingly in focus, with few social security benefits, and the dancer is often faced with solitary living and working situations. I applied a performative, practice-led research methodology supported by feminist post-human theories. The findings led to discussions of the complexity and entanglement of stability and instability, which evolved into a joint phrasing of in/stability, in which I explored how the fluid practice of dance corresponds with not only a wider socio-political landscape but also an ever-changing world.

### SAMMANFATTNING

Denna artikel delar med sig av forskning med fokus på den osäkerhet frilansande danskonstnärer i en europeisk kontext befinner sig i. Forskningen söker efter att förstå och hantera de olika instabila aspekterna som följer med livsstilen och yrket som frilansande danskonstnär. Tillsammans med en grupp andra danskonstnärer har jag utforskat vår förståelse av instabilitet och stabilitet, och undersökt hur kollektiv handling kan förstärka känslan av stabilitet. Jag placerar denna studie i relation till nuvarande ekonomiska trender där individen är alltmer i fokus, med få sociala rättigheter, och där dansaren ofta ställs inför solitära levnads- och arbetssituationer. Jag tillämpar en performativ, praktikledd forskningsmetodik och har stöd av feministiska posthumana teorier. Resultaten leder till diskussioner om komplexiteten och sammanflätningen av stabilitet och instabilitet, som utvecklades till den sammanslagna formuleringen in/stabilitet, där jag diskuterar hur den flytande danspraktiken överensstämmer med sociopolitiska strukturer men också med en ständigt föränderlig värld.

# Embracing a Precarious Life

Clara Sjölin

## Is consistency outdated?

In this text, I share my thoughts on dance, drawing from my MA thesis research, in which my initial interest was to investigate how coming together as a group could contribute to feelings of stability. I explored this question by inviting a group of five dance artists to a dance studio setting. I scheduled weekly gatherings with them over a period of five weeks, in which we danced, talked, and reflected together. I attempted to create a consistent group in which everyone participated in each session, as I thought consistency would contribute to feelings of stability. The reality differed from my initial plan. The people present in each gathering changed, some cancelled at the last minute, and we did not manage to be all together, not even once. I was challenged by a fluctuating group, and I had to think of last-minute solutions, be flexible, and adapt to the situation. The commitment that I imagined was clearly not achievable.

I asked myself, *If the gatherings can continue, how do I imagine them happening, maybe in a different way?* and replied to myself, Maybe by pushing harder to have a consistent group. As I looked back at what I had written, I began to think that the statement seemed domineering and made me question why I wanted a consistent group. If I continued to be disappointed with the reality of this not working out, should I just drop that ambition? I began to consider that, in the freelancing world, having a consistent team to work with is a near impossibility. This led me to ask questions, such as *How might it be possible to redefine and look at stability in a dance artist's life in a new way? How can stability be explored without seeking to copy the structure of full-time employment as it is*

*'usually' structured? How can we, as dance artists, create a structure for coming together that contributes a sense of stability yet matches our fluid lives?* On the other hand, this line of thinking made me hesitate and wonder: *Am I suggesting that there is a need to 'give in' to neoliberalist norms of work?*

## Theoretical framework

In my research, I applied a performative, practice-led research methodology in which I explored the topic of in/stabilities in a dance studio setting in two contexts: the first being the gatherings with a group of dance artists, as outlined above, and the other in my teaching context where I offered evening dance classes for adults and an improvisation class for professional dancers. My analysis process is supported by the post-humanist theory on diffraction (Barad 2014), in which I attempt to go beyond binary thinking and see the knowledge produced as entangled and interfering with itself. For me, that means not viewing stability and instability as a mere dichotomy. At first, I attempted to counteract instabilities with stability, as I saw them as opposing each other, but through the lens of diffraction, I began to notice the complexity of both and how they are intertwined with one another, which led me to adopt the joint phrasing of in/stability.

To further understand my thinking around the queries on in/stabilities that I am raising, I will offer some of the literature mapping out two key concepts of this research—the precariat and artistic nomadism.

One could say that freelance dance artists belong to the social class called precariat. Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt (2018) defines the precariat as 'A precarity

based on short-term contracts, being one's own boss and own employee, performing social and geographical flexibility, having freedom to follow one's desires and to decide the rhythm of work, and only a few social rights, if any' (8). Expanding on the idea offered by Ullerup Schmidt, Alexandra Kolb (2013) describes how the economy has shifted from industrial mass production, in which workers passively do as they are told, to a creative workforce that aligns with artists' precarious and flexible situation. Artists and cultural workers have long been models of the precarious worker, who has emerged as a consequence of neoliberal working conditions. Hence, Kolb explains that artists' long-established bohemian lifestyle and outsider status in society have now become the norm in current employment practices (Kolb 2013).

The precariat comes with a geological flexibility, which Jenny Roche (2018) draws attention to through the concept of artistic nomadism. Artistic nomadism can be observed in the format of international art residencies in which the infrastructure that emerges enables – and assumes – mobility but often does not meet the need for financial support to create art. State-funded support is usually organised on a project basis, which also makes it difficult for artists to create a continuous and financially secure existence. The requirement of the nomadic artist contributes to the difficulty of making a living from art in the area in which one resides (Roche 2018). Constant travelling and engagement in different artistic projects become a demand and an expectation placed on the artist (Van Assche 2017).

The idea of nomadism can also be discussed regarding the actual practice of an artist. Moving between identities by entering multiple selves (Colin 2015) is argued to be embedded in the practice of an artist. Noyale Colin (2015) highlights how artists in collaboration can practice a distribution of attention and presence that takes them beyond a singular 'I'. In collaborative dance improvisation, the dance that emerges is relational and rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), revealing the relationship between the

self and others. Such ideas of nomadism are in line with the thinking of theorist Rosi Braidotti (2013).

The theories on the life of dance artists just discussed correspond very well to my own lived experiences of being situated in this lifestyle and profession. The experiences that I carry with me have been the main driver to carry out this research, and the literature has informed and supported the research throughout. Below, I will further raise some perhaps provocative thinking that goes in line with the discoveries I have made and intend to discuss.

## **Implications for the practice of dance**

The whole logic of the neoliberalist market can be further reflected in the dancing itself. Meghan Quinlan (2017) discusses the link between neoliberalism and somatic work by defining Gaga as a neoliberal metatechnique in which the understanding of technique, choreography, and improvisation is blurred. Gaga is perhaps one of the most sought-after training methods in the dance market today, and its focus on being able to switch between different dance styles is what is expected of a dancer today (Quinlan 2017). Rather than specialising in one dance technique, it is becoming more common for dancers to know different movement styles – and also to be creative – and to have an ease with improvisation and their own personal creation, in order to meet a competitive industry and satisfy the various aspirations of choreographers (Quinlan 2017).

One explanation for why dancers have become 'neoliberalist' workers is the structure of funding bodies. Choreographers usually receive their financial support on a project basis and are therefore rarely able to employ their dancers on a full-time basis, forcing dancers to work for other choreographers, and because each choreographer has their own way of working, style, and preferences, the dancer becomes a fluid, neutral, and willing worker (Roche 2018). The dancer has gone from being the ideal advocate of a particular technique to one who 'incorporates multiple "aesthetic regimes"' (Roche 2018, 154).

Researcher Claudia Brazzale (2014) draws a connection between a dancer's way of moving and neoliberalist political logic, as she discusses the kinetic mobility of the dancer being not only a requirement in dance technique 'but a fundamental aspect of a dancer's being-in-the-world' (111). A dancer's skill to *travel through space* – finding freedom and mastering the space through the moving body – transforms, according to Brazzale, into a geographical and social mobility, and prepares the dancer for transnational, cosmopolitan success based on a nomadic lifestyle. Brazzale (2014) speaks of a romanticised artistic nomadism, which in fact 'aligns with current neoliberal logic organised around the production of mobile subjects' (109).

## Dance improvisation and not knowing

Before addressing the theories presented above in relation to my findings, I return to the gatherings I arranged and the idea of consistency not working out. When I ask myself if I should find more flexibility in the way I organise, I realise that I struggle to balance being adaptable and having high ambitions, because for me, ambitions often come with certain expectations. I therefore ask myself how I can think big and make plans while still learning to deal with disappointment if it does not turn out the way I wanted. Even if I were a 'fluid dancing subject' (Roche 2018, 2) ready to adapt to the particular requirements of a choreographic work, I still feel I have a way to go in learning to deal with unexpected changes. For dancers to have open minds in creative processes, Roche explains, 'According to Vonmoos (15 September 2016), this openness includes being "ready to try whatever will come through the process...[and] letting go of expectations"' (Roche 2018, 13).

During the gatherings with the collective of dance artists, 'not knowing' was a phrase that appeared many times. In the last gathering, I asked myself and the participants: *What have these gatherings done for*

*you?* and I replied, writing down: *My skills in being spontaneous/coming up with tasks/adapting were improved and resulted in me feeling at peace with not knowing.* As I observed what I had written, I began to use 'not knowing' as a way to describe the instabilities of the life of a dance artist. Not knowing on a macro level might relate to the work structure in which our lives are situated and the financial worries that come with it. In creative processes, part of the journey tends to involve not always knowing how the work will develop.

As my research moved away from the gatherings and into my teaching context, I began to explore the overarching theme around in/stabilities in movement. I developed various dance improvisation tasks that explored being in/out of balance, risk-taking, trust, decision-making, openness and availability, and individuality and autonomy. I explored these tasks in two contexts: with my students in the evening classes for adults that I offer, and in an open improvisation class for professionals. What I discovered was that dance improvisation as a general practice continuously teaches you the ability to cope with the state of not knowing. As one enters a dance improvisation, a key aspect is the practice of staying in the present moment and letting oneself be taken where the dance goes. To improvise is to follow impulses and to stay spontaneous and flexible, and as one dances with others, the ability to listen in and actively trying not to control or foresee the movement are important aspects (Bozic and Olsson 2013). I see these skills resonating with the ability to manage being in a state of not knowing. This leads me to argue that as dancers, we are taught to deal with changes and instabilities, and our profession as dance artists can ultimately become manageable since our dancing practice has already trained us to live and embrace its precariousness.

As Colin (2015) notes, dance is a 'constant state of flux', and, as Johnson (2005) argues, art prepares us to live more in tune with ever-changing nature. This made me wonder how the skills of dancing could be highlighted

and incorporated into life more broadly as a way to negotiate the instabilities of diverse varieties. If we learn to embrace fluctuations in life, we might be able to cope with instabilities better, and what I want to argue for is that dance improvisation is doing exactly that – embracing instabilities. Bozic and Olsson (2013) uphold the statement of dance improvisation being useful for embracing instabilities by proposing that business managers could better cope with the fast-changing environment that we face today by learning improvisational skills from artists (Bozic and Olsson 2013).

At Stockholm University of the Arts, I took part in a dance workshop with Caterina Mora,<sup>1</sup> which became an inspiration for my research. In the workshop, I was introduced to an exercise that I link to this way of looking at dance improvisation. Mora explored power structures in tango couple dancing, and as we were asked to dance with another person, she asked us to practice being invited to movement and inviting another, and as an individual, having the power to decide whether to accept the invitation. I saw this as a practice in staying present in the moment, without planning or predicting what movement will come next or trying to manipulate or have expectations of how the dance will be. To return to the notion of inconsistency and learning not to be disappointed when things unexpectedly change, this exercise offered by Mora can also teach dancers not to expect or control the unfolding of the dance.

## **A flowy dance quality**

As part of my research, in the gatherings as well as in my teaching context, I offered an improvisation task inspired by Mora's workshop, in which I asked the students to dance two by two using physical touch. The intention was to focus on staying present in the moment and trying not to control where the movement would go. What I observed from the participants dancing was that they repeatedly fell into a habit of allowing themselves to be manipulated by the other, which made it obvious to me how well-trained dancers are in following the flow

of someone else's impulses or direction. This observation can be supported by my experience of teaching the exercise first to amateurs and then teaching the same exercise to people who had gone through dance training. The unfolding of the same exercise was significantly different; the amateur dancers moved with autonomy and allowed space for responding and taking decisions, whereas the trained dancers devoted themselves to the proposal of the other by immediately following. The trained dancers' developed awareness of responding to physical touch, from years of doing hands-on tasks and following the touch, keeping the flow and momentum going, made it clear to me that for a contemporary dancer today, this is an expected skill.

This observation made me reflect on the extent to which our ways of dancing, movement tendencies, and qualities have been co-created with the development of our current socio-political trends and norms. If I were to look at dance through the same lens as Quinlan (2017) and Brazzale (2014) and draw a connection between dancing and the sociopolitical climate, would the norms of our dancing, as I have observed in my study and described above, also be a result of the neoliberal world we live in? Is my flowy dance quality more a result of our contemporary socio-political times than just my 'natural tendency of moving'?

## **Promote or oppose?**

I argue that dancers are, through improvisation, trained to stay present and to constantly shift and adapt, and are therefore prepared for a world subject to change. To cope with the instabilities of life, we can benefit from what dance improvisation offers; however, I am left with a dilemma. If I continue with my argument above – that dancers should work towards an even stronger flexibility to cope with the instabilities of life – one might also think of it as a 'giving in' to the precarious, and arguably difficult, lives that we are living. On the other hand, I criticise dancers' expectation to always be flexible and available; hence, the purpose of my research was to

challenge these trends. This leads me to question how far to go with my own manifestation of embracing the unknown, for which I am so devotedly arguing.

But at the same time, trying to counteract these flexible trends by aiming for the solid structure of traditional employment did not work out as a strategy. I have come to understand that holding onto structures or principles is not necessarily helping me feel stable. Rather, it makes one grasp onto 'things' as a coping strategy to avoid losing control. One can argue that life is unpredictable by nature, so it might not all be the fault of an economic system, but rather a question of acknowledging a world in constant transformation.

For now, I will continue to use the flexible dancer I am to embrace a precarious life, whether it is an adaptation to current liberal trends or an attempt to live in tune with the ever-changing world.

## Endnote

1 Caterina Mora, Dance Workshop, Stockholm University of the Arts, 18 November 2021.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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# Punking: How appropriation revitalised it and the role institutions play in the protection and longevity of this elusive art

Alyssa Briteramos

## ABSTRACT

From the streets of Los Angeles in the early 1970s, a dance style named Punking emerged. This occurred at the height of the civil rights movement in the underground LGBTQ+ clubs of LA by a group of BIPOC queer men. A blend of sharp, exaggerated poses and movements borrowed from Hollywood films and pop culture became an art form that reflected their identity and encapsulated the escapism and liberation of a group of young queer people growing up in an environment where being queer was illegal and dangerous.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the dance faded, but it still influenced dance styles such as jazz, house, and even vogue. In the early 2000s, interest in the dance was reignited. However, its name and origins remained elusive, prompting an investigation into its history, shifting narratives and exclusion from dance history. In this article, I will explore how a dance form becomes lost in translation and how this dance can be preserved and introduced into institutionalised spaces to offer resources and legal protection for an art form on the verge of erasure from history.

## SAMMANFATTNING

På Los Angeles gator i början av 1970-talet dök en dansstil, vid namn Punking upp. Det skedde samtidigt som medborgarrättsrörelsen tog fart. I de underjordiska HBTQ+-klubbarna i LA var det en grupp BIPOC-queermän som utvecklade Punkingen. Det var en blandning av skarpa, överdrivna poser och rörelser inspirerade av Hollywood-filmer och popkultur. Där och då skapade de en helt ny konstform som speglade deras identitet och som i sin tur blev en politisk frihetsrörelse för en grupp unga queermänniskor som växte upp i en miljö där det var olagligt och farligt.

I slutet av 1980-talet kom dansen att bli mindre framträdande och det höll i sig under hela 1990-talet. Stilen glömdes bort. Influenser fanns kvar och de påverkade utvecklingen av jazzdans liksom stilar som House och Vogue. Punkingen kom alltså att påverka dansens olika uttryck i praktiken men i danshistorieskrivningen blev den aldrig inkluderad. I min text kommer jag att diskutera kring frågor som hur en dansstil kan glömmas bort för att ett antal år senare återigen bli viktigt att bevara. Jag kommer även att belysa vikten av att dansstilen introduceras till fler och får de resurser som behövs för att återerövra en status som konstform.





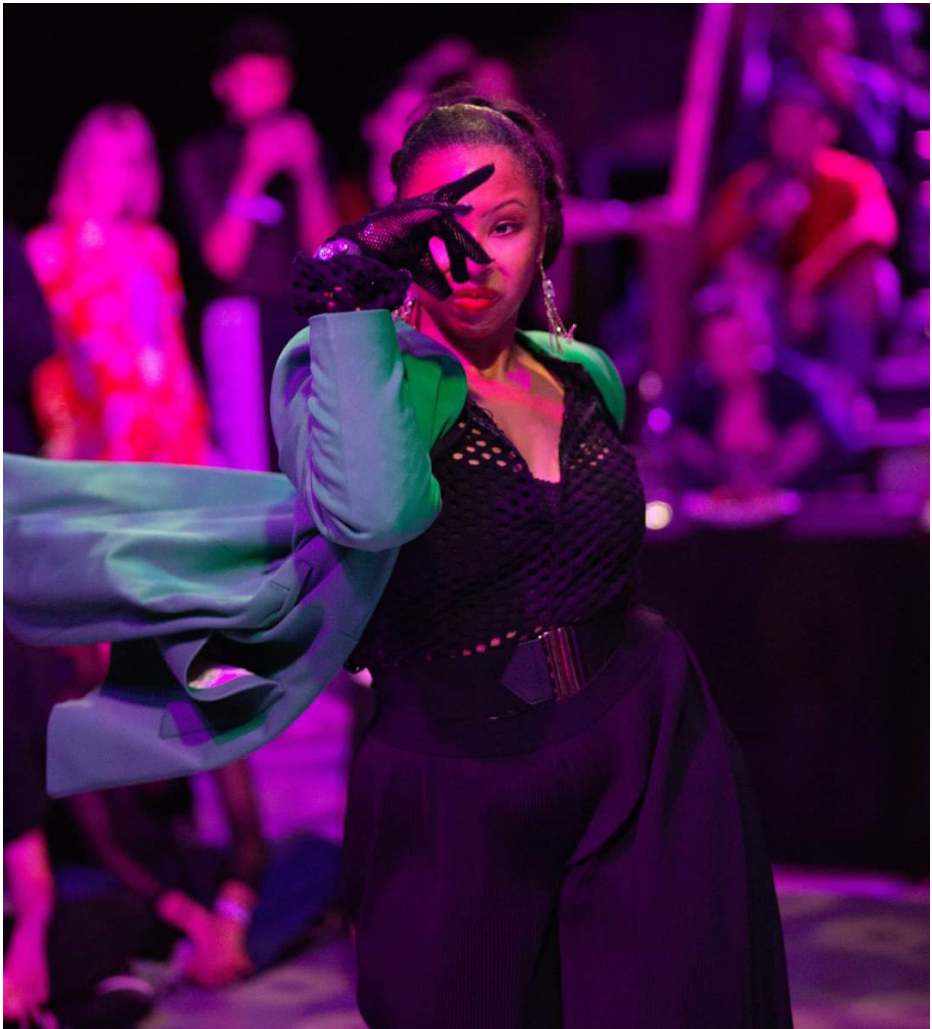
observation, has become overshadowed by a barrage of misinformation; misrepresentation and the popularity of dances fueled by machismo, such as breaking, popping, locking, hip hop and house.

## 1. Introduction

This article intends to illustrate the story of Punking's origins, which have been hidden due to the stigmatisation of its roots, misinformation, and fragmentation. The present article also explores how

this artform has shaped my artistic practice, personal narrative and consciousness of the ethical ramifications of representation. This is an investigation of the development of this artform, from the underground to the mainstream, as a modern-day example of how the appropriation of art creates shifting narratives that impact access to the cultural aspects of dance. Lastly, this article discusses how institutions can be crucial in

*Soul Sessions, Oslo, Credit: Ortenheim*



archiving and researching history by helping preserve the remnants of this dance's legacy.

My interest in, practice of and research into this artform's culture and history led me to numerous encounters; experiences and conversations with the pioneers, masters and, from my perspective, geniuses of this art. These experiences set my trajectory for the last 20 years, enabling me to reveal and elevate Punking's hidden history while finding my own voice within it. Ultimately, my artistic journey involves the deepening of my knowledge of a hidden subculture, which has not only transformed me but also empowered me to be more authentic, compassionate and empathetic as an artist. By integrating the lessons and experiences of the subculture into my artistic practice, I am motivated to create work that is meaningful, powerful and relevant to a wider audience.

### ***1.1 The Renaissance: The Early Roots of Punking/Whacking/Waacking***

In the aftermath of the civil rights movement, 1970s Hollywood was brimming with an explosion of new dances generated by inner-city BIPOC youth who were driven by the need to escape and express themselves. Social dances, from 'soul dance' to 'locking' and 'popping', would become emblems of identity and pride for marginalized youth and cultures confronting the challenge of surviving the sociopolitical unrest within their neighborhoods. While the emergence of dance TV shows, such as 'Soul Train' and 'American Bandstand', exposed and introduced this counterculture revolution to the US and the world, bringing mass attention and fame to its originators and practitioners, one style would remain largely underground and underexposed due to the rampant homophobia of the era (George Cassidy, 2019).

The dance style termed Punking, later referred to as Whacking, was birthed adjacent to the locking movement in the underground LGBTQ+ clubs of Los Angeles by a group of young, BIPOC (black, indigenous,

and people of color) homosexual men. They named their dance Punking as an attempt to reclaim the homophobic slur 'punk' and transform it into something positive, a dance style. Between 1972 and 1976, Punking flourished at the height of the emerging soul and disco era, which was characterized by sharp, exaggerated poses and strobe-light movements inspired largely by Hollywood silent films and other imagery. Their collective inspiration was drawn from a range of sources that reflected the pop culture of the era, combining dramatic storytelling, gymnastics, martial arts and other influences that merged into an artform that was a reflection of their identities (Vargas, 2022). Gradually, this dance became an expression of their liberation as young queer people who resisted the Sodomy Law, which banned homosexuality and forbid dancing with people of the same gender in open, public spaces in California until 1976 (Weinmeyer, JD, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. Despite these circumstances, they continued to dance in homosexual clubs, such as Paradise Ballroom, Ginos and Ginos II, and introduced their style to heterosexual clubs throughout the LA area, seizing the attention of many dancers and choreographers in the LA dance industry while simultaneously opening a door for other underground LGBTQ+ movements and artforms, such as vogue and ballroom culture, to emerge and receive recognition in mainstream culture (Wikipedia, 2023).

Occasional TV, stage and film appearances alongside music artists such as director/choreographer/singer Toni Basil, Diana Ross, Grace Jones, David Bowie and Madonna would introduce elements of the dance to a wider audience, fueling its popularity beyond the clubs. Soon, well-known, established street dancers would adapt and rebrand the dance under the name and spelling Waacking to separate itself from the original culture and stigma surrounding its queer roots (Vargas, 2022). Despite the dance's growing popularity, its influence on music videos and increased media attention being paid to street dance culture,





*Originators of Punking/Whacking in Toni Basil at The Roxy, 1976; Credit: Toni Basil.net*

*Birdseye View, Exposé: Punking: An American Classic, Insideout Studios*



the story of its origins and creators remained invisible due to a lack of representation and the reluctance of prominent spokespeople to bring their stories to the public (Vargas, 2022).

By the late 1980s and 90s, the dance continued to be performed in music videos, underground clubs and shows, despite the disappearance of many of its creators due to incarceration, violence and the looming AIDS crisis, which ravaged the LGBTQ+ community. By the mid- to late 90s, Punking slowly became a silhouette of its past glory, while remaining a subtle influence on other dances, such as street jazz, house and even Vogue, until the early 2000s, when a new generation of dancers began to reintroduce it publicly in New York City's underground house and hip hop clubs and battles.

Dance events all over the world, particularly in Europe and Asia, have embraced this style and included it within their competitions, workshops, showcases and education since its resurgence in 2007. However, while interest in the dance has reemerged, the history of this expression and its originators remains elusive due



*Photo Collage with Pioneers*

*Credit: Alyssa Chloé, Ana Sanchez, Lovisa Silverberg,  
Sapphire Lounge, NYC*

to the appropriated practices and altered narratives surrounding its origins and creators. This shift in its history has been a key example of how appropriation has contributed to the survival and accessibility of the dance for a new audience, as a significant concern arises from the lack of proper acknowledgment and understanding of its history and originators. These shifting narratives have prompted an investigation of its origins.

## **2. Presentation of the Practice**

In this section, I will present my investigation, focusing on four practices and methods that I explored and

researched from 2003 to 2023. The origins of my research stem from my background as a trained dancer in modern and jazz and my introduction to the underground street dance community of NYC. This research encompasses experiences in New York City and Los Angeles as a practitioner, choreographer, and teacher. Throughout this period, I also had the privilege of studying, interviewing and immersing myself in an emerging community alongside a diverse

group of influential artists who played a pivotal role in globalizing the artform. This experience allowed me to witness firsthand how the narratives evolved and shifted during the process of globalisation, as well as to explore the dance's roots via multiple perspectives.

## **2.1 Language**

Throughout this investigation, several terms and names are used for the dance, which are based on the geographic location the dance represented, the time and era of the dance and the evolution of the style. For example, while the dance was simply referred as Waacking or Whacking commercially and globally, dancers based in California who witnessed the dance from its genesis in the LGBTQ+ underground clubs in the 1970s often refer to the dance by its original name, Punking or 'Punking, Posing, Whacking'. Another name for this dance is The Vogue. This language has become integral to defining and differentiating between the various generational hierarchies of the practitioners of the style, from the original inventors of the style to the pioneers who learned the dance directly from the originals to its modern-day, global incarnation.

## **2.12 The Foundation of the Practice**

The foundation of this practice stems from various methods, techniques and philosophies that connect with the physical and emotional aspects of the dance while incorporating reference points from TV, films, pop culture and artwork. The blending of these elements serves as a template with which to express an individual story through the integration of the elements of posing, behaviour, movement and space. In addition to these elements, the rhythm, sharpness and emotional connection within the movement also contribute to the execution of the dance.

The combination of these influences allows participants space in which to experiment with various identities, characters and expressions.

Within this practice, improvisation and individual interpretation are encouraged, allowing dancers to infuse their unique personalities and stories into their performances. Therefore, the dance is an expression of the individual, as compared to styles that rely heavily on choreography and dancing in unison.

This form of expression serves as a catalyst, manifesting uniquely within various gendered bodies. As a woman working within this practice, my initial experience revealed an intensified representation of femininity, evoking a profound sense of physical empowerment. Conversely, in my observation of my male counterparts, this art form elicited a physical response that revealed vulnerability and sensuality. The harmonization of these qualities appears to embody the very essence of this dance, seamlessly blending classic elegance with contemporary vigor.

Another notable characteristic of this practice is the importance of club culture. The atmosphere of the club, from the music to the energy, all became integral to understanding and connecting with the style, particularly as someone from another era and region. While the studio offered space to practice and perfect choreography, practicing in the clubs, on the floor, and perfecting my moves in front of dance legends such as Tyrone Proctor, Archie Burnett and others provided an atmosphere for me in which to experience the dance's liberating quality. Based on the concept 'Each one teaches one', these exchanges were a conversation about movement, bridging and shared experiences through dance and movement among generations.

## **2.13 Media Research**

In addition to studio classes and workshops, my research included watching and examining TV footage of variety shows that featured many LA dancers, such as 'The Midnight Special', 'Hot City' and 'The Big Show', and music videos from various musical artists, ranging from Toni Basil and Jody Watley to Paula Abdul. However, the main sources of footage featuring

the creators of the dance are *Diana Ross, Live at Caesar Palace*, and early Grace Jones TV appearances. Until 2023, these sources of footage would remain the only known documentation of the originators shared publicly.

### 3. Methods

In this section, I will describe the most notable teachers and methods that had the most influence on my practice, as well as my personal impressions and reflections on these experiences. The duration of these studies is from 2003 to 2023, and they occurred in New York City, Los Angeles and Europe. This research is the result of a combination of participating in dance classes/workshops, interviews and ongoing dialogues, as well as my own experience as a practitioner.

#### 3.1 NYC Underground/Brian Green

My first experience witnessing this style was in spaces in the underground clubs of New York City, where it thrived as a nod to the nostalgia of the previous generation of dance and music that emerged from the soul and disco era. This style resembled a freer form of jazz dance that was blended effortlessly with other styles, such as locking, house, lofting and street jazz, and was considered part of New York's underground house dance culture. As a newer generation of house dance enthusiasts began to flock to these underground spaces, the exposure of Waacking generated wider interest. At the forefront of teaching this style to the younger generation was dancer/choreographer/teacher Brian Green. Green began incorporating the style into house classes in the now-defunct New York Dance landmark Fazil's in the early 2000s. Fazil's was an old dusty studio in the heart of Manhattan that had been occupied by greats ranging from tap dancers to street dancers and even martial artists, such as Bruce Lee. These classes had begun generating sufficient attention and interest among students to offer weekly classes and workshops in more commercial studios,

such as Broadway Dance Center and Peridance Dance Center.

Through Green's efforts, the recent resurgence of interest in this style has sparked numerous inquiries about its origins, historical context and references. While glimpses of the style were captured through video documentation from 1980s TV shows and films, the available information regarding its origins remained a mystery, leaving many unanswered questions even for Green himself. Questions such as *Where does it come from?*, *Who were the originators?*, and *Who and what influenced the development of this style?* began to emerge among newcomers to the dance, necessitating Green's effort to invite its pioneers and originators to New York City. This inclusive approach aimed to foster an environment of education and collaboration, inviting contributions from those who played significant roles in shaping the art form. Through this collective endeavour, the goal was to piece together a comprehensive historical timeline and shed light on the rich heritage of this dance style for the new generation.

#### 3.2 Ana Lollipop Sanchez: Punking + Posing = Whacking

Ana 'Lollipop' Sanchez, an esteemed street dance pioneer from Los Angeles, is renowned as a trailblazer for women in street dance. In 2003, she returned to the mainstream after receiving a personal invitation from Brian Green to judge The House Dance Conference. During her visit, she introduced her unique approach to the style she referred to as 'Punking/Whacking', which she had pioneered after learning directly from the originators of the dance in the 1970s. This was the first time the name Punking was introduced to the dance scene of NYC. Collaborating closely, Green and Sanchez embarked on a fruitful partnership spanning from 2003 to 2007. Sanchez conducted workshops and performances, delving more deeply into the LA roots of the dance and unearthing valuable insights about



its origins. Their collaborative efforts significantly contributed to expanding the knowledge base and understanding of this art form.

Our dialogue and training within this practice and style continued from 2005 to 2011. I dove deeply into her methodology, called *Punking + Posing = Whacking*, while introducing her approach to NYC within my practice, classes and workshops. Among the methods she introduced was an exercise she referred to as ‘a reflection of a feeling’, which was a blend of movement and the in-depth analysis of images from film or photographs, which served as references for her approach. She also shared in-depth anecdotes about the originators’ approaches and contributions. These specific influences served as a foundation, which was integrated into her evolution within her style, combined with influences from her background in salsa, soul dance, martial arts, and locking. Beyond the originators of the style, she also studied imagery and performances from Hollywood actresses such as Rita Hayworth and Cyd Charisse.

Within her practice, an overarching emphasis was placed on the significance of clothing as an extension of the movement. While working with her, she actively incorporated a diverse array of garments, such as jackets and scarves, into our lessons, aiming to explore their potential within the dance. The utilisation and control of attire could be used to accentuate specific movements or poses.

Overall, from the strategic utilisation of space to the thoughtful selection of clothing, organic behaviours and gestures, and the cultivation of an unabashed emotional connection to the music, each element played a pivotal role in interpreting and embodying the essence of the dance. Listening to music through an emotional ear and connections to one’s deepest emotions, as compared to simply hearing and moving to beats, were essential to the physical expression of the sound. Through an exploration of her methods, this became the foundational structure of my practice.

This comprehensive understanding allowed me to reintegrate my music and utilise my own inspirations and background, seamlessly amalgamating all these elements with my personal movement vocabulary.

### **3.3 Adolfo ‘Shabba-Doo’ Quinones: Shway Style or Shabba-Doo’s Way**

Adolfo Shabba Doo Quinones, a trailblazing figure in street dance, is renowned as a founding member of the Soul Train Gang on the popular TV show ‘Soul Train.’ Additionally, he gained prominence as one of the Original Lockers and achieved fame through his leading roles in the movies *Breakin and Breakin 2*, in which he portrayed Ozone. Notably, during the evolution of the Punking/Whacking style in the 1970s, he emerged as the first notable heterosexual dancer to master this style, a revolutionary feat in 1970s Hollywood, which was known for its pervasive homophobia and closeted culture.

Quinones’s artistic journey led him to blend elements of punking, locking, soul dance, and salsa, accompanied by incorporating masculine gender expression, as compared to the more feminine expression of the originators. His approach garnered significant attention and widespread appeal among the mainstream public, eventually becoming popularly referred to as Waacking or the Shabba-Doo, a clear separation from the dance’s queer roots in the media.

In later years, from 2005 to 2012, he developed his comprehensive methodology known as ‘Shway’ (Shabba Doo’s Way), which intricately wove together Punking/Whacking, soul dance and locking. This intensive training program aimed to help dancers deepen their understanding of his methodology, which included codifying the style. From 2008 to 2009, through extensive conversations and training, we diligently explored and experimented with his techniques, which he referred to simply as ‘Shway’ or ‘Shway-Style Waackin’, refining the associated vocabulary before introducing it to classes worldwide.

Similar to Sanchez, Quinones's style had evolved by amalgamating elements from the original expression of Punking, imagery from masculine figures in Hollywood and his unique interpretations of locking and soul dance. From my perspective, they shared similar foundational influences and had a profound influence on one another. He was the yang to Sanchez's yin.

Central to Quinones's method was his philosophy of ESP, which stands for emotional, spiritual and physical. The 'emotional' facet encouraged dancers to connect and express themselves viscerally and uninhibitedly through movement. The 'spiritual' dimension emphasised the interconnectedness of all beings and their connection to something greater. Lastly, the 'physical' aspect focussed on developing the physical prowess and strength necessary to dance to one's fullest potential.

Although this dance was originated by homosexual men, Quinones insisted on dispelling the misunderstanding that one's ability to dance well is connected to one's sexual identity. He emphasised that understanding the style depended on two factors: how well one understands the inner workings of the dance within a cultural perspective and how one relates these ideas to one's own identity and expression. These philosophies helped me experience his approach to its fullest and delve into my own story through movement. Throughout the training, we would explore these concepts through different types of music, emotional conversations and dialogues that tapped into our inner psyches, as well as intense physical training that became a psychological and physiological test.

Within his understanding, his method was the adaptation of the dance style known as locking, which he insisted I learn and incorporate into my practice. From his perspective, to be able to merge the hypermasculine expression of locking with the feminine expression of Punking/Waacking offered a balanced yin-yang effect, with locking offering a

physical power base and Punking/Waacking providing fluidity and elegance. This combination helps to stimulate and control the flow and momentum of the style, as compared to allowing the dance to control the person.

I also believe that actively exploring the feminine and masculine qualities and energies of the style was a way to access and express these traits safely, without judgment or the threat of being stigmatised for being perceived as a 'homosexual'. This also could have been a tool via which to access the feminine. I also believe that this combination is what appealed to male dancers becoming more interested in the style because locking was closely more associated with male dancers than women in the 1970s.

Notably, the emphasis on storytelling through behaviour and acting was emphasised, in addition to the physical movements. From my perspective, his exceptional skill lay in his capacity to assume and embody various characters, seamlessly integrating them into 'vignettes' and 'scenarios' interwoven throughout the dance. The foundation for this was Sanford Meisner's acting approach, which centered on the concept of 'acting truthfully under imaginary circumstances.' The incorporation of these acting principles illuminates the initial Punking/Whacking style, employing visual elements and movies as a guide to embodying characters and integrating them into the dance.

The integration of this concept, as a practitioner, was revolutionary for my practice, as it was the key to making this dance relevant to my personal experiences and inspirations while honouring the integrity of the core elements of the dance. This also gave a deeper insight into the inner workings of the original expression. The introduction to these acting methods was groundbreaking for me, as it introduced me to dance as a medium for acting and storytelling, transcending mere movements and steps. Being able to connect and tap into the deepest, most profound

aspects of our human experiences, from the joys to the traumas, and transform them into movement and expression is an ultimate goal of this practice, as is the mastery of being vulnerable while expressing movement, even while in character.

In his words, 'Within the pain, in the eye of the storm, is where real art exists, when you are alive at that moment and can feel real pain, can you appreciate real happiness.'

Between 2008 and 2010, I assumed the role of the inaugural instructor to introduce Shway's style and methodologies to the dance community in New York City, specifically at Peridance Dance Center. However, as profound as his methods and teachings were, I became increasingly aware of a concerning shift in his narrative that marginalised the contributions of the originators in favour of financial gain and the protection of Quinones's own legacy. This observation prompted an examination of the concepts of ownership and the evolving narratives surrounding original artforms. It led me to question our responsibility to safeguard the legacy of the original creators, particularly when most of the originators are dead. I contemplated how these changing narratives could impact the integrity of the dance form in the long term. Does this shift empower the dance's evolution, or does it lead to the erasure of the originators from its history?

### **3.4 Viktor Manoel: Punking: Action + Reaction = Movement**

About 7 years after what has now been termed the resurgence of Waacking and several of its pioneers being reintroduced to the new generation through workshops and dance events, new perspectives, methods and alliances emerged to introduce the style globally. This allowed cultures and generations far removed from the style's origins and roots in LA's gay underground to access it. Soon, many international students began to flock to NYC to train and research, seeking mentoring and opportunities to introduce

the style within their own countries. While a new generation of dancers began to adopt and represent the style internationally through the emergence of the collective known as the *International House of Waacking*, led by 'Soul Train' pioneer, Tyrone Proctor. Several conflicting messages concerning the dance's name, histories, originators and references emerged from this collective, which created a direct conflict between New York City and Los Angeles regarding these themes and issues. From my perspective, I witnessed the narratives of the dance shifting in favour of upholding the legacy of the individual and protecting their resources, rather than the art form itself. The scene was rapidly becoming divided and fragmented, with conflicting narratives and misunderstandings surrounding the dance itself and its representation.

Viktor Manoel is a dancer, choreographer and athlete from Mexico who is based in LA. He had established himself as an esteemed influencer in the LA jazz dance scene and dance industry. Before he entered the jazz world, he was the only remaining original Punker from the collective of men who created the artform itself. At the age of 17, Manoel was introduced to Punking and the friends creating it at LA's Paradise Ballroom. Drawing from his background in Mexico's Ballet Folklórico, where he performed the Deer Dance, Manoel instantly connected to what his friends had termed Punking.

His background as an originator led him to an opportunity to tour with music icon Grace Jones and, eventually, David Bowie on the Glass Spider Tour. After incredible success in the industry, he walked away, as he witnessed the raging AIDS crisis cast a shadow over the entertainment industry. He turned his attention to charity and the health and wellness field.

In 2010, famed director/choreographer Toni Basil invited him to contribute his recollections about his time as an original Punker in the 1970s and dance history for her upcoming book on the history of street dance. This meeting launched his return to the dance

world, this time to connect with a new generation searching for answers and insight into a dance that had fallen into a state of chaos. In 2011, I invited Manoel to come to NYC to participate in the Circle of Dance, a workshop and discussion I created to speak about the origins of Punking/Whacking, as told through the voices and gaze of artists from LA, through three different perspectives: that of an originator, that of an observer and student and that of a choreographer. The panelists for this event include Toni Basil, Ana Sanchez and Viktor Manoel.

Throughout this discussion, Manoel is quick to strip away the narratives that have emerged in the modern-day Waacking community, which center on a romanticization of disco, glitter, fabulous outfits/costumes and glamour. His explanation of the style emphasizes the dance being 'an expression from oppression' that uses movement as a means of escaping the hardships and dangers of existing as a gay man in Los Angeles in the 60s and 70s. The gay clubs became a safe space and offered protection, escapism and a chance to express oneself freely away from the homophobic gaze. He speaks of how he and his friends grew up in the housing projects of LA, with aspirations of finding success in Hollywood (Circle of Dance, 2011).

Manoel is also very specific about the term 'Whacking', including its spelling, origin and position within the context of Punking. According to him, the word 'Whack', which means to strike with force, was borrowed from the onomatopoeia of the 1960s TV series 'Batman' and was the second element to evolve after posing. He went on to further explain that Punking is the dance's original name, which encompasses both posing and whacking elements. From his perspective, the dance has evolved from the original expression of 'Posing', which included posing, the usage of space and athleticism, to its commercialised version, 'Waacking', which placed heavier emphasis on arm movements. The name was changed to detach the dance from its

queer roots and thus provide access to those outside of the circle, allowing them to dance socially and professionally. He also explains that there was a distinction and hierarchy in terms of which names were used and how. According to him, Punking was the name used by the originators of the style, while the dancers who were outside their circle were Whackers or Waackers, a term that they borrowed after overhearing the originators describe their movement.

In his class, rather than teaching steps, his approach centres on offering the tools to help dancers connect internally and thus express themselves and experience the original essence of the style. He describes this as 'using physical artistry to create beauty out of the ugly'. He gradually guides students into the energy of the dance through tasks and exercises to ignite emotional vulnerability by connecting deeply to music. Unlike most dance styles, in which the dancer simply dances to the beat of the music, in Punking, the music serves as a soundtrack, supporting one's story through movement.

The origins of the movement itself stem from his method known as Action/Reaction = Movement and Gender Savageness, which was the fusion of both masculine and feminine energy, imagery and essence in a provocative manner. References are also a key component of his method and include a book of classic photographs of Dietrich, Garbo, Joan Crawford and Gloria Swanson, called the Four Fabulous Faces, which he describes as their 'bible'. In addition, art deco paintings by Erté; silent films; gymnastics; ice skating; one's own culture and the music curated by the famed DJ and original punker MichaelAngelo all contributed to its aesthetic, expression, and execution, resulting in a full artform that the originators termed Punking as a way transform the negative connotation of this word into a positive one.

This soundtrack created by Michael Angelo used the musical breaks from soul records, dispelling the myth that disco music was the dance's soundtrack.



*Exposé; Punking; An American Classic,  
Credit: Insideout Studios*

Among the songs used were ‘Papa Was a Rolling Stone’, by the Temptations, which emphasized the posing element; ‘The theme from Shaft’, for rhythm; ‘Beyond the Clouds’, by Quartz, and ‘Just As Long As We Are Together’, by Prince, which highlighted all the dance’s elements.

There is an emphasis on the foundational element of the style, posing as a frozen behaviour, as well as the execution of the pose as a jump cut, with a strobe-like rhythm and effect. In his approach, one notable characteristic stood out—the playful exploration of gender expression and performative. As students traversed the dance space, their movements were infused with exaggerated gestures and behaviours, purposefully defying the rigid gender norms and roles entrenched in hip hop culture.

#### **4. Examination of Methods from LA to NYC**

As a practitioner and observer, here is my initial

impression of Manoel’s information about previous methods learned from the NYC and LA experiences. Collectively, NYC and LA emphasise of the club atmosphere as a foundational point for the style and a space for complete freedom of expression.

However, in NYC, there was no awareness or understanding of the elements, the direct influences, or even the original name or vocabulary that emerged from LA’s scene. The majority of the information was delivered from the media’s perspective, which, in my opinion, was very limited because of the dance’s origins within homosexual underground club culture. Also, the influence of NYC’s hip hop battle culture, vogue and ballroom has increased over time as battle culture has become the standard and structure for how the dance is presented, performed and experienced. This stands in stark contrast to LA’s original presentation and experience of the dance, as a collective group of individuals performing together. In my opinion, this shift has drastically transformed the dance’s initial goal of ‘conquering sound’ into one of conquering another dancer. Due to this, the essence of its original style has been stripped away, which has also contributed to the fragmentation of the culture. This has created debate among its practitioners regarding what is most valued in the representation of the style, the importance of recognition or validation from a contest or the roots of the dance itself.

Regarding the methods of LA artists (Sanchez and Quinones), here are the similarities I could draw out:

1. The dance is a cathartic tool via which to transform painful experiences and use them as an initial driving force of the dance.
2. The fusion of both masculine and feminine energy, which were all accessed and explored in various ways, is crucial. In the case of Sanchez and Quinones, this occurred through their mastery and usage of locking and martial arts techniques.

3. Hollywood's visuals and imagery serve as a template for inspiring character and behaviour.
4. The emphasis is on the concept 'me against the music'. In other words, dance is a battle between the individual and the music, as compared to a battle between two individuals.
5. The importance of bringing one's own individual expression or emotional experiences to the dance is the aim, as compared to imitating another's steps or patterns.

The differences or the conflicting messages were as follows:

1. The sources on the influences on the dance, Sanchez and Quinones themselves were not able to completely identify, for example, the books, films, and TV shows that directly impacted the dance's evolution.
2. The names and vocabulary used to name the style and its elements, how they are used to differentiate between themselves in a hierarchical context (i.e., originator versus student) and how they define these terms (i.e., Pinking, Waacking and Shway) differ.
3. The music specified by the original expression of Pinking, as compared to music used by dancers outside their circle (i.e., instrumentals, disco, songs with lyrics and house), differs

#### **4.1 Overall Interpretation and Application to Practice**

Throughout my investigation of this dance from multiple perspectives, I have continued to ask myself, as both a practitioner and researcher of Pinking/Posing/Waacking, the following questions:

1. How easily and quickly can a dance form be obliterated due to shifting narratives and the detachment of its original social-political context?
2. How do names and narratives shift once they

become commercialised and commodified?

3. What role can institutions and archival practices play in the preservation of art forms such as this, which are birthed in underground scenes, and can protective legalities succeed when support from the artform's evolved community is fractured?

Within my practice, the methods I have explored have unlocked ways of expressing the dance without losing the integrity or essence of its style. By understanding the essence of the art form, I came to realise that it is truly an expression of the individual and that, to actively contribute to it, one must be willing to boldly and honestly express oneself, as well as to show vulnerability.

The various methods that I have learned have allowed me to draw inspiration from influences from my past, from pop culture and imagery to music. Over the years, my practice has evolved as an amalgamation of the methods used by my mentors; the influence of pop culture from my era; and the rich dance cultures of NYC, LA, and Europe. My style has evolved by infusing NY's club culture with LA's foundation and techniques and applying these methods within Europe's street-dance and performing-arts scenes. Using these tools, I can continue to expand my practice and adapt to settings ranging from street dance to contemporary dance, while remaining authentic to the dance I have studied and performed.

As a member of NYC's dance scene, I have witnessed how this community has influenced the exposure of and access to the style. Many dancers from all over the world travel to NYC to research its history, as well as for training and to compete in events, despite the dance's origins in LA. For many like myself, NYC is where they are introduced to this dance.

However, this perspective raises questions regarding authenticity versus evolution, particularly within the global community, which has been largely influenced by and loyal to NYC culturally, even if



its representation of the style and narratives are contradictory to the dance's LA culture. In addition, while there have been several well-established choreographers and dancers who have claimed to be relevant to the dance's history through their association with the originators and/or their role in popularising the art form itself, many of them are unable to fully answer or agree regarding the answers to the following questions:

*What is the original name of the dance ?*

*What are the direct references of and inspirations for the style?*

In my opinion, this has created a cycle of misinformation that has overshadowed the legacy of the originators' contributions to the dance world and continued to fuel the shame and stigma surrounding its roots in homosexual culture. This has also contributed to how the world continues to benefit and borrow from the style without having to fully acknowledge or address the original creators' contributions or influences within choreography or history more generally.

Manoel's reemergence as the last originator of the style has offered vital information and insight into the dance and culture's elusive history, inspirations, and language. However, I believe that a lack of access to documentation for this information has created several challenges regarding his message being fully understood and embraced by the "Waacking" community. From my perspective, this nonacceptance has fuelled a competitive dynamic between the original culture versus its evolution within a global community that has been built largely loyal to NYC perspectives and ideologies, despite documentation regarding the dance's LA roots, history, and timeline.

Manoel has addressed this in 'Waacking Sharing', a 17-minute film commissioned for Russia's

IHOW (International House of Waacking) Chapter. 'By using the word "Punking", you are giving respect back, to our gay culture, I think my friends who are always on my mind, deserve a little respect. All our originals were "Punkers", for me "Waackers" are those who learned the dance. But now, "Waackers" are people just doing an element (arms), and "Punking" is the entire original gay style' (Waacking Sharing, 2022).

Despite Manoel's efforts to share his story and encourage many to use the name Punking as a means of validating the original creators, many dance events and competitions all over the world, from NYC to Europe to Asia, remain hesitant to embrace this name.

Many of these events draw hundreds of dancers from all over the world. They are searching to connect and represent the international Waacking community throughout NYC, Europe, and Asia. Instagram sites such as *Waacking*, *dance* and *Waackingworld* use their platforms to feature the latest battle videos and choreography from all over the world, generating over a hundred thousand followers and views. New shows such as 'D.I.S.C.O.', by choreographer Josepha Madoki, tour Europe, lifting the narrative of Waacking, as a full-fledged glamorous, flamboyant gay dance of the 1970s driven by disco music and rotating arms and performed in military precision. However, with no public acknowledgment of Punking in these instances, there is a clear indication of perpetuating the dance's detachment from the original name, culture, and history, which can be perceived as a form of obliteration. I believe this is due to a desire to protect their resources and reputation within the community and thus gain a wider audience base.

## **5. How can institutions offer protection to ensure the longevity of the artform?**

Art forms such as music and literature often involve borrowing or using the components of an original expression, whether this is a melody, a lyric, or a plot



point. In many cases, this practice is protected legally, and compensation is issued to the original artist through royalties, licensing fees, or other forms of payment. In some cases, sampling has offered artists more longevity, relevance and financial security in recent days (Music & Sound Effects, 2022).

However, in dance, these legalities do not exist regarding movement vocabulary beyond a choreographic context, particularly such movements originate in a subculture. It is the responsibility of the community to uphold the tradition and vocabulary of these dances through oral history, education, and practice. Due to access to social media, many street dances and their creators are often supported and defended in rapid succession, including TikTok creators. (Harvey, 2021). Some cultures, such as ballroom and vogue, have become globalised and mainstream and are committed to protecting themselves from misrepresentation in the media.

However, unlike most dances that emerge from these subcultures, the lack of documentation, the stigmatisation of its roots, fragmentation, and constant changing of narratives have left Punking and its creators on the verge of erasure from history. Ironically, this has been driven by the community that has borrowed from and developed because of it. From my perspective, due to this lack of support, institutions will continue to play a large role in the protection and preservation of this art form through documentation and archiving.

An example of this is the multidisciplinary avant-garde performing arts venue known as The Kitchen, which is located in NYC's Chelsea neighbourhood. In 1981, a dance program entitled "Street Dance 1A," which was presented by director/choreographer, Toni Basil, represented a historical review of and attempt to conserve dance styles that emerged from LA's early street dance movement (1971 to 1981) and included the originators and inventors of the dance. This program featured a young dancer by the name of Andrew Frank,

who is cited in the written program and bio as an inventor of Punking/The Vogue and is shown demonstrating and discussing his style with clarity, intention, and humour. Consequently, the term used throughout the film, when referring to the dance is 'Punking' or 'The Vogue'.

According to one review of this show, 'Andrew Frank could follow a slinky move with a defiant one, and Miss Basil's (Toni Basil) explanation that his kind of dance flourished in the homosexual clubs made his delight in physicality an applied gay liberation manifesto' (Anderson, 1981). This reflection of this evening provides a notable glimpse into the original style's history and inventors, which have remained largely hidden from the public. Today, this film remains part of The Kitchen's archive, as well as part of the permanent exhibition at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Archival practices of these kinds of performances reinforce the importance of institutions such as The Kitchen and The Getty Museum hold regarding the longevity, preservation, and accessibility of historical documentation of the vital voices in this dance's history.

In the case of Punking/Whacking, I believe in using institutionalised spaces to finally redirect the needed resources to support artforms like this, which come from disenfranchised, marginalised groups. Like many indigenous artforms, its creations have been sampled, renamed, and recycled without their creators' consent. Do appropriation and evolution have a place in the preservation of lost artforms and history? In this case, they do. Appropriation has continued the legacy of an expression that has been rebranded to encourage the worldwide acceptance of this dance. Through retrieving and managing archival images and movement material and publishing articles that focus on this particular history, it will begin the long-overdue process of documenting this particular moment in dance history while also gradually decolonising and deconstructing the outdated structures and gazes long held against artforms that develop outside traditional

institutional standards. This is long-overdue retribution and a progressive step for a culture that has long been silenced due to timing, stigma, and fear.

## 6. Update

In May 2023, Exposé Dance Festival's, 'Punking: An American Classic' became the first event in the world exclusively branded under the name 'Punking' in Sweden. Under its program '*Punking: From Its Roots to Evolution to Archiving as a Practice*', I was granted permission to share the filming of the Kitchen's 'Street Dance LA' for the first time in Europe. This film premiered to an audience of dance researchers and educators from all over the world, including Punking originator Viktor Manoel. For the first time in 40 years, Frank's dance and interview were introduced to a new generation of dancers eager to hear his story, which has been long shielded from the world. Throughout this event, dancers were also given a rare opportunity to learn directly from Manoel himself, as well as his protégée, Lorena V, and witness a cross-generational perspective on Punking/Whacking, from its original generation to its evolution.

In September, Europe was also offered another opportunity to learn more about the originators of the dance at Italy's Eleganza Waacking Festival, which hosted a seminar with the legendary choreographer and street dance historian Toni Basil, herself, who, for the first time, would share her heavily guarded personal archive footage of the creators of Punking/Whacking publicly.

With a 90-euro admission fee and a strict no-camera policy, the audience was treated to never-before-seen footage and photographs from her six-decade career that have been newly digitalised and cleaned, along with anecdotes about the performers themselves and her creative process, emphasizing how they continuously evolved and grew as they incorporated new elements and movements from the emerging culture into their styles. Included in this seminar was footage from 1976's *Toni*

*Basil Live at the Roxy*, which was the original Punks', or Vogues', first professional appearance, to 1978's *Toni Basil's Fox Venice Show* in LA, which was the original inspiration for Diana Ross's widely acclaimed performance of 'Love Hangover' at Caesar's Palace; 1977's 'Toni Basil Special', an unsold TV pilot for the ABC network; and a portion the aforementioned film, The Kitchen's '*Street Dance LA*'. In addition to these films, Basil shared a series of her groundbreaking Pre MTV music videos and other TV appearances, fusing the artforms of street dance (a term she coined) and ballet in her productions. When asked about the names 'Punking' versus 'Whacking' or 'Waacking', a hugely debated topic of discussion throughout this festival, she simply replies as follows: 'It's up to the guys. It's not my division' (Basil, 2023).

## Endnote

1 A sodomy law is a law that defines certain sexual acts as crimes. The precise sexual acts meant by the term sodomy are rarely spelled out in the law but are typically understood by courts to include any sexual act deemed to be 'unnatural' or 'immoral'. In practice, sodomy laws have rarely been enforced against heterosexual couples and have mostly been used to target homosexual couples. In California, the sodomy law was banned in 1976.

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## BIOGRAPHY

**Alyssa Briteramos** is a freelance dance artist/choreographer/educator from the USA. She is based and active in Sweden and on the international dance scene. She has studied and worked in New York and Europe for 20 years. Furthermore, she became widely known within the NYC 'underground club'/street dance culture within numerous styles, including Punking/Whacking and Vogue, through multiple perspectives and is a leading force in her generation for the mastery of this artform. In addition, she is a purveyor of these art forms from NYC's and LA's underground club scenes in Europe. She has judged, taught, and organized numerous street dance events and battles internationally. In her practice, she explores themes of intuitive movement using behaviour, language, and expression

as a physical archive of storytelling. Because she has a background outside of institutions, her goal is to use her practice to challenge the norms of the existing structures and hierarchies in Swedish performing arts. She has been awarded numerous work and cultural grants from the Swedish Artists' Committee and within her region. She has collaborated with several artists, ranging from contemporary choreographers to street dancers. Currently, her work in the multi-award-winning dance film, *Elements: Beautiful Untrue Things* has been shown in multiple film festivals in Sweden and internationally, including both the Gothenburg Dance Film Festival and the Stockholm Dance Film Festival.

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## Recent PhD Graduate from Sweden

Katarina Lion

On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023, Ingrid Redbark Wallander presented her PhD dissertation entitled 'When Dance Became Modern' (När dansen blev modern) at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Theatre Studies, Stockholm University. The opponent for her thesis was Professor Karen Vedel from Denmark, and Professor Lena Hammergren supervised the dissertation.

This study focuses on the history of theatrical dance in Sweden between 1930 and 1960, examining how it took shape as a profession and an aesthetic expression, highlighting the different genres and aesthetics that emerged during that period. This dissertation is based on a historiographical narrative that describes the 1930s and 1940s as a period of decline, with a radical change occurring during the 1950s. Redbark Wallander emphasizes the connections between dance and emerging modernity, investigating the factors that contributed to the emergence of specific genres and aesthetics. The study includes various sources such as reviews, articles, program leaflets, posters, statutes, protocols, dance history books, biographies, memoirs, etymological books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and film clips.

Methodologically, this thesis demonstrates how various mechanisms work together to establish a genre and an aesthetic. This is achieved through historiographical and cultural theoretical approaches. The dissertation covers the development of professional performing arts dance, as well as social changes in Swedish folk homes and other areas, in a clear and illuminating manner. It also sheds light on the collaboration of various actors from different groups to create new structures that support modern dance ideas. It explains how transnational exchanges occur through international guest performances. Overall, the study makes a valuable contribution to the field of dance theory, particularly concerning the history of dance in Sweden at that time.

The dissertation was written in Swedish. If you are interested in reading more, please go to DIVA vetenskapliga arkivet. [diva-portal.org](https://diva-portal.org)

# När dansen blev modern

Framväxt, formering och förändring av ett svenskt konstområde,  
1930-1960

Ingrid Redbark Wallander



Doktorsavhandling i teatervetenskap vid Stockholms universitet 2023





## SANS – 40 år med dans!

Anette Sture Iversen

3.–4.november 2023 feiret SANS 40-jubileum med en konferanse på Høgskolen Kristiania i Oslo.

Konferansen hadde et variert program bestående av foredrag, intervju, panelsamtale og workshops. Maria Klungnes Berg var konferansier.

### Intervju med Ina Guro Moen

Et av høydepunktene i jubileumskonferansen kom allerede fredag kveld, i form av intervju med en av de to grunnleggerne av organisasjonen, Ina Guro Moen. Den andre grunnleggeren, Ragnhild Jenssen, var også til stede men kunne av helsemessige årsaker ikke delta i intervjuet. Intervjuet tok for seg bakgrunnen for opprettelsen av organisasjonen og de utfordringene, men også støtten, Landslaget Dans i Skolen møtte på i forbindelse med etableringen og arbeidet de første årene. Intervjuet ble - godt ledet av Maria Klungnes Berg - både interessant og rørende.

*Opptak av intervju kan ses bak logg inn på nettsiden [www.dansepraksis.no](http://www.dansepraksis.no)*



### Keynoteforedrag

Professor Anne Fiskvik (NTNU) valgte i sitt keynote foredrag fredag kveld, å fokusere på hvordan dansevitenskap ble etablert som fag for 43 år siden og den rolle ildsjelen Egil Bakka har spilt i den sammenheng. Fiskvik viste samtidig hvordan tidene og de politiske prioriteringene har endret seg i løpet av disse årene siden den gang, til det den siste tiden «blåser en kald vind» over kunsthøgskoleutdanningene.

### Panelsamtale om dans og danning

Fredag kveld rakk vi også en panelsamtale. I panelet satt Märtha Pastorek Gripson, Siri Mæland, Elizabeth Svarstad og Karen Høybakk Mikalsen. Godt ledet, igjen, av konferansier Maria Klungnes Berg, delte panelet viktige tanker rundt dans som danning og utdanning, ut ifra deres individuelle perspektiver i fagfeltet.

### Tema Dans som helse

Tidligere på dagen fredag fikk deltakerne workshopen Dans som helse, med Torun Mattsson (Malmö Universitet) og Märtha Gripson Pastorek (Högskolan







i Halmstad). De to forskerne tok opp en bred forståelse av helsebegrepet og viste hvordan mange sider av dansen, inkludert den kroppslige, den relasjonelle og den kunstneriske, er med i dette begrepet.

## Tema Dans som kulturuttrykk og sosialt fellesskap

Lørdagen startet med en workshop ledet av ikke mindre enn tre pedagoger: Stig-Ivan Nygård, Siri Mæland og Elizabeth Svarstad er alle erfarne undervisere når det gjelder sosiale danser, men dansene de fokuserer på er gjerne fra ulike tider og kulturer. I workshopen valgte Stig-Ivan Nygård (Nord Universitet) å lære oss *Bachata* - en dans opprinnelig fra Den dominikanske republikk

og populær særlig siste halvdel av 1900-tallet til i dag. Siri Mæland (Norsk senter for folkemusikk og folkedans) ga oss nye innnganger til (å undervise) den evig aktuelle valsen. Elizabeth Svarstad (Norges Musikkhøgskole og frilans dansekunstner) lærte oss en kontradans og viste oss hvordan hun leser og forstår de ulike turene i dansen ut ifra en skriftlig kilde.

## Tema Dans som kunstuttrykk

Konferansens siste workshop ble holdt av Karen Høybakk Mikalsen. Hun ga deltakerne innblikk i metoder for å skape med ikke-profesjonelle utøvere, gjerne i en tematisk ramme. Tankene og metodene hun presenterte ble delvis knyttet til prinsipper fra Ensemble Thinking, og erfaringer fra communitydansprosjektet Lonely Riders.

Vi sitter igjen beriket og inspirert, og takker alle som deltok i konferansen og feiringen av organisasjonens arbeid!



### Bakgrunn:

Organisasjonen ble opprettet i 1983 av Ina Guro Moen og Ragnhild Jenssen fra et ønske om, og behov for, å styrke arbeidet med dans i skolen. Dans begynte i 1970-årene å få oppmerksomhet i forskning ved ulike læresteder, og det var behov for å danne og utvikle fagmiljøer som kunne styrke faget mer systematisk. Ragnhild Jenssen arbeidet innenfor kroppsovføring ved Oslo lærerhøgskole og Ina Guro Moen var amanuensis ved Norges Idrettshøgskole og danser i Høvik Ballett.

Blant vedtektene i **Landslaget Dans i Skolen** stod det at landslaget skulle arbeide for å fremme:

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- vi er medarrangør av faglige og fagpolitiske arrangement på Seilet – huset for kunsthøgskolen i skolen
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# Nordic Journal of Dance

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Present your work in *Nordic Journal of Dance—practice, education and research*.

We have two annual deadlines: June 1 for publication in December, and December 1 for publication in June the following year.

*Nordic Journal of Dance* invites practitioners and researchers to submit a variety of texts in one of these categories:

### Research Articles:

Research articles are expected to present theoretical and conceptual frameworks, discussion on methodology, data gathering, analysis and findings related to diverse dance practices and artistic processes as well as learning and teaching dance/movement in the Nordic context. The manuscripts will undergo a blind peer review process. Artistic Research is welcome. The maximum length of the submitted article is 6 000 words including references and possible endnotes.

### Practice Oriented Articles:

The purpose of practice-oriented articles is to document and reflect upon the practical work being done within dance in different artistic and educational settings as well as with different age groups/populations. Artistic Development work is included in this category. Articles need to be relevant in the Nordic context. Articles will be peer reviewed by the board. The maximum length of a submitted article is 3000 words or less including references and possible endnotes.

### Emerging Scholars:

The purpose of the category Emerging Scholars is to offer mentoring to emerging researchers, typically MA students who would like to turn their MA thesis into a research article. Articles need to be relevant in the Nordic context. Articles will be peer reviewed by the board. The maximum length of a submitted article is 3000 words or less including references and possible endnotes.

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Articles can be written in English or one of the Nordic languages. They can include alternative textual formats (for example illustrations, poems, dialogue). Type text and headings use 12 point font size and line-spacing 1,5. Mark references using Chicago Manual of Style. Please include two abstracts of a maximum length of 200 words: one written in the language used for the article and the other in a Nordic language (for articles in English) or in English (for articles written in native language), and a 100 word biography of the author(s).

Please indicate clearly in what category you are submitting your article. For research articles, include a separate page with the name(s) of the author(s), and title of the manuscript.

Send submission to [sans@dansepraksis.no](mailto:sans@dansepraksis.no) with subject heading «Contribution to Nordic Journal of Dance».

## Volume 14(2) 2023

### Research Article

Proposition for the Eventual Might of Teaching Choreography:  
Choreography Pedagogy in the Context of MA Choreography Studies

*Jana Unmüßig*

### Practice Oriented Articles

Embracing a Precarious Life

*Clara Sjölin*

Punking: How appropriation revitalised it and the role institutions  
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## Nordic Journal of Dance–practice, education and research

ISSN 1891–6708

<http://www.nordicjournalofdance.com/>

Supported by: Senter for dansepraksis (SANS) and Norges Forskningsråd (The Research Council of Norway).

Member of Norsk Tidsskriftforening.

