

# Nordic Journal of Dance

– practice, education and research



Volume 14(1) 2023

# Contents

Editorial ..... 3

## Research Articles

*Sarah Pini*: Cognitive Ecologies of Presence(S) in Three Different Dance Forms ..... 6

*Irene Velten Rothmund*: Dance Technique and Power Dynamics in Higher Education:

A literature review ..... 20

*Hanna Järvinen, Lena Hammergren, Elizabeth Svarstad, Petri Hoppu and Astrid von Rosen*:

Choreographing Histories: Critical Perspectives on Dance Histories in Nordic Dance Practices and Scholarship..... 31

## Emerging Scholar

*Martina Cayul Ibarra*: *A Swan Lake*: Exploring the Materiality of Water in Alexander Ekman's Ballet ..... 48

## Practice Oriented Articles

*Carolina Bäckman*: Car(ry)ing the Past, Present, and Future—

A Deep Dive into Danish Dance Stories ..... 56

Performing relationality: Weaving Bodies, Movement and Things

*Eva Meyer-Keller and Julia Schade*: A Conversation About

What it Means to Work Collaboratively in Between Practice and Rresearch ..... 67

*Esther Wrobel*: Unfolding Microgravity and the Interplay Between Awe, Wonder, Curiosity, and Humility

in Artistic Research ..... 74

*Gun Lund*: Digital Footprints—Technology and Equality..... 84

*Charlotte Østergaard*: Listening Through and With Costume ..... 90

## Off-topic Research Articles

*Hanna Pohjola, Eytan Sivak and Åsa N. Åström*: Performing With Parkinson's: Leaving Traces ..... 100

*Anna Öberg and Charlotta Ruth*: Passing On—The Power of Oral Transmission ..... 116

*Susanna Hammus*: GuiDance of Butterflies: Practicing Ecosomatics and Dancing Towards

More Sensitive Bodily Presence and Planetary Feeling..... 124

## Issue editor

*Franziska Bork Petersen (DK)*

## Editorial board:

*Franziska Bork Petersen, Denmark*

*Laura Navndrup Black, Denmark*

*Raisa Foster, Finland*

*Leena Roubiainen, Finland*

*Sesselja G. Magnúsdóttir, Iceland*

*Anette Sture Iversen, Norway*

*Hilde Rustad, Norway*

*Elizabeth Svarstad, Norway*

*Andreas Berchtold, Sweden*

*Katarina Lion, Sweden*

Cover photo: Frida Gregersen

Original design: Bente Halvorsen

Revised design: Arild Eugen Johansen

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

[www.dansepraksis.no](http://www.dansepraksis.no) [sans@dansepraksis.no](mailto:sans@dansepraksis.no)

Printing: IT Grafisk AS

ISSN 1891-6708



nordic forum for dance research  
**NOFOD**

**NOS-HS** The joint committee for  
Nordic research councils in the  
humanities and social sciences



**NORSK  
TIDSKRIFT-  
FORENING**

## Editorial

This issue is conceived as a collaboration between *Nordic Journal of Dance* and the Nordic Forum for Dance Research (NOFOD), a journal and an organisation whose members, readers and boards are linked by their care for dance in Nordic countries and related research. NOFOD's 15th conference was delayed due to COVID-19, taking place at the Danish School of Performing Arts in July 2022. Under the title '*Moving, relating, commanding: Choreographies for bodies, identities and ecologies*', close to 90 researchers, students and practitioners shared their work and discussed the state of the art of 'expanded choreography', its historical, social and aesthetic dimensions and its relevance in other disciplines.

As per NOFOD custom, participants shared and discussed contributions on social dimensions of dance alongside presentations on aesthetic aspects and dance pedagogy. It is a great pleasure to see some of the diversity of the different topics and voices represented on the pages of this issue:

In her article 'Cognitive Ecologies of Presence(s) in Three Different Dance Forms', Sarah Pini addresses how dancers relate to the idea of presence. She investigates how dancers articulate their lived experiences of presence in relation to different dance traditions and contexts. Pini suggests framing presence in an embodied ecological sense.

With the research article 'Dance Technique and Power Dynamics in Higher Education – A Literature Review', Irene Velten Rothmund compiles a historical review of literature and research that deals with learning situations between teachers and students in higher education in dance. Velten Rothmund focuses her analysis on dance techniques and power dynamics in the context of higher education. The study is conducted as a thematic analy-

sis of the literature, which leads her to identify three clusters of strategies in the material – *reflexivity* of traditions in dance, *activity* and *embodiment*. The study of the literature shows that there are strong forces for both the conservation and reform of the teaching of dance techniques.

'Choreographing Histories: Critical Perspectives on Dance Histories in Nordic Dance Practices and Scholarship' is a text based on a conference roundtable by NOFOD's Dance History working group. Their contribution focuses on (approaches to) dance the working group members saw as excluded from the conference call. The text compiles the contributions 'Expanding Choreography? Theorizing Spectatorship in Relation to Choreography and Historiography' by Lena Hammergren, 'Norway Has a Short Dance History' by Elizabeth Svarstad, 'Skolt Saami Dance and Scholars' Role' by Petri Hoppu, Astrid von Rosen's 'Caring for Claude Marchant: Practising Black Dance History Making in a Very White Context' and Hanna Järvinen's 'Histories of Exclusion and Inclusion'.

Martina Cayul Ibarra has written a text in the emerging scholar category in which she presents her approach to Alexander Ekman's 'A Swan Lake', informed by New Materialism. Through the concepts of discursive practices, intra-activity and somatechnics, she provides a perspective for exploring how water, as non-human materiality, intertwines with the dancers' bodies.

Conference contributors also shared their practical dance research in a number of formats, from discussions to studio workshops. Some of these contributions have found their way into the practice-based category of this issue. These include Carolina Bäckman's text 'Car(ry)ing Past, Present, and Future – A Deep Dive into Danish Dance

Stories', which details her turning back to the archive created by the artist-driven initiative Danske Dansehistorier (Danish Dance Stories). The collaborative platform initiated sharing the personal (hi) stories of dance practitioners across generations. Through writing, Bäckmann contemplates the stories in line with the project's original intention of creating a generative understanding of the past and future of dance in the Danish context.

Julia Schade engages in conversation with the choreographer of the conference performance *Living Matters*, Eva Meyer-Keller. Their dialogue touches on topics such as the dramaturgies of entanglement, strange materials, infrastructures and care, and we publish the account of their exchange as 'Performing Relationality: Weaving Bodies, Movements and Things. A conversation about what it means to work together between practice and research'.

Dance artist Esther Wrobel shares her insights from a participatory performance process linked to her piece 'Microgravity'. The vertical dance work explores references to space travel and its associations with awe and wonder. Drawing on neurophenomenology, Wrobel discusses her pedagogical insights and decision-making. In the article 'Digital Footprints – Technology and Equality', Gun Lund examines how dancers in a performance can influence the visual and spatial experience of the performing space through the use of technology.

A new group of NOFOD conference participants was made up of international costume designers and researchers. They enriched our Copenhagen gathering with investigations of the choreographic properties and potential of costume. To mark the significant contribution of this relatively new field of choreographic research, we are particularly happy to include Charlotte Østergaard's article, based on her conference keynote. In 'Listening *Through* and *With* Costume', Østergaard—whose

artistic research is based on a long career in designing dance costumes—accounts for co-creative artistic (research) processes, in which she takes the performers' experiences of and responses to specific costumes into account.

We also include in this issue three 'off-topic' research articles. Hanna Pohjola, Eytan Sivak and Åsa Åström's article 'Performing with Parkinsons: Leaving traces' explores the experiences of eight dancers who have Parkinson's disease (PD). The research shows, amongst other things, how dancers experience dancing as an embodied language and as conducive to living social and personal identities that are not defined by PD.

In the article 'Passing On—The Power of Oral Transmission', Swedish choreographer Anna Öberg describes how the ways of 'passing on' knowledge in folk dance traditions can contribute to different approaches to sharing knowledge in the field of artistic research.

Utilizing multi-sited embodied autoethnography, Susanna Hannus aims to respect and recognize our companion species by dancing with butterflies. In her article 'GuiDance of Butterflies: Practicing Ecosomatics and Dancing Towards More Sensitive Bodily Presence and Planetary Feeling', she offers insight into how to be in contact with butterflies and how contact with them can affect movement and somatic experiences. Her main interest is advancing ecosomatics. She does this by contemplating what she terms 'a planetary feeling', which aims to strengthen our appreciation of our sensorial contact with our environments.

Finally, I want to thank the board of NOFOD for their long, hard and committed work to make the Copenhagen conference possible: Lars Dahl Pedersen, Irene Velten Rothmund, Petra Hultenius and Elizabeth Svarstad. As well as Sesselja Magnúsdóttir, Astrid von Rosen, Mikko Orpana and Karolina Ginman, who were unable to join the conference.

Engaging in volunteer organisations, such as NOFOD, rarely brings as much joy as when preparations and organising culminate in a gathering of individuals who share a diverse connection to dance. Our conference in Copenhagen in 2022 perfectly exemplified this sentiment.

*God læselyst!*

Franziska Bork Petersen  
*Issue editor and chair of  
the board of NOFOD 2019-22*

## Cognitive Ecologies of Presence(S) in Three Different Dance Forms

Sarah Pini

### ABSTRACT

Presence is a central yet controversial topic in the study of performing arts and theatrical traditions, where the notion of 'stage presence' is generally understood as the performer's ability to enchant the audience's attention. How do dancers relate to the idea of presence in performance, and how do they understand, enact, and perform presence in their artistic work and practices?

In this article I offer an investigation into presence's variations in three different dance practices and choreographic contexts: the case of the *Ballet National de Marseille* during the staging of Emio Greco's piece *Passione*; Contact Improvisation in the case of independent groups of *contacters* in Italy and Australia; and Body Weather, a radical movement ideology developed by Japanese choreographer Min Tanaka in the context of the company Tess de Quincey and Co. in Sydney.

To illustrate how presence in dance practices emerges in relation to a complex and dynamic environment, I propose a cognitive ecological approach to the notion of 'stage presence', which considers both the co-presence of audiences and performers and the socio-cultural context of the performance event. By exploring how dancers articulate their lived experiences of presence in relation to their different dance contexts and traditions, I suggest framing phenomena of presence in an embodied ecological sense.

### RESUMÉ

Nærvær er et centralt, men kontroversielt emne i studiet af scenekunst og teatraliske traditioner, hvor begrebet 'stage presence' generelt forstås som performerens evne til at fortrylle publikums opmærksomhed. Hvordan forholder dansere sig til ideen om nærvær i performance, og hvordan forstår, iscenesætter og udfører de nærvær i deres kunstneriske arbejde og praksis?

I denne artikel tilbyder jeg en undersøgelse af tilstedeværelsens variationer i tre forskellige dansepraksisser og koreografiske sammenhænge: tilfældet med *Ballet National de Marseille* under iscenesættelsen af Emio Grecos værk *Passione*; Kontaktimprovisation i tilfælde af uafhængige grupper af *contacters* i Italien og Australien; og Body Weather, en radikal bevægelsesideologi udviklet af den japanske koreograf Min Tanaka i forbindelse med selskabet Tess de Quincey and Co. i Sydney.

For at illustrere, hvordan tilstedeværelse i dansepraksis opstår i forhold til et komplekst og dynamisk miljø, foreslår jeg en kognitiv økologisk tilgang til begrebet 'scenenærvær', som både tager højde for publikums og udøendes tilstedeværelse og den sociokulturelle kontekst af forestillingsarrangementet. Ved at udforske, hvordan dansere italesætter deres levede oplevelse af nærvær i forhold til deres forskellige dansekontekster og -traditioner, foreslår jeg at rammesætte fænomener af nærvær i en kropslig økologisk forstand.

# Cognitive Ecologies of Presence(S) in Three Different Dance Forms

Sarah Pini

## Introduction: The classic model of theatrical presence

The concept of presence is a much-debated topic in the literature of the performing arts; in the history of theatre and theatrical practices, it is a central yet controversial notion which involves varied theoretical and methodological approaches (Goodall 2008; Power 2008; Fisher-Lichte 2008, 2012; Zarrilli 2009, 2012; Giannachi and Kaye, 2011; Macneill 2014; Trenos 2014; Sherman 2016) and specialised journals dedicated to exploration of the theme.<sup>1</sup> In the last decades numerous interdisciplinary projects in performance studies have dealt with deepening the understanding of phenomena of ‘presence’.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing from the research I carried out during my doctoral project (Pini 2021), in this paper I focus on the notion of the performer’s *presence* (in Western performance traditions: *stage presence*). This term refers to the impact of a performer on an audience, defined by the English Oxford Dictionary as “the ability to command the attention of a theatre audience by the impressiveness of one’s manner or appearance”.<sup>3</sup>

The view that considers stage presence a prerogative of the performer, and her ability to direct the audience’s attention, is what Jon Foley Sherman describes as ‘the classic model of presence’ (2016). This classic version refers to “the sense of perceiving something about the performer, a unique truth about the performer magnified by the stage” (Sherman 2016, 2). According to Sherman, the classic model of stage presence conceals audience participation because it describes something that happens to them—the perceiver’s perception becomes passive, more like

reception. The limit of the classic model of stage presence is that it focuses primarily on the performer’s agency and neglects the intersubjective and interactive aspects embedded in the performance event. These include how audiences are ‘present’ for the performers and how this mutual relationship shapes performers’ experiences of presence.

This article addresses the notion of presence in three performative dance contexts to provide alternative theoretical and methodological approaches that challenge the ‘classic’ notion of presence in performance (Sherman 2016).

To provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of stage presence in its complexity, I extend the investigation to other performative traditions and consider its experiential situatedness in a specific environment and cultural context. Through a cognitive ecological and ethnographic approach, in this paper I present an investigation of *variations* of presence (Noè 2012) in three different dance practices and choreographic contexts: I briefly address the case of the *Ballet National de Marseille* during the transmission of presence and kinaesthetic knowledge in the staging of Emilio Greco’s piece *Passione* (Pini and Sutton 2021), Contact Improvisation (Deans and Pini 2022) in the case of independent groups of contacters in Italy (Bologna, Ferrara, and Arezzo) and Australia (Sydney, NSW), and Body Weather, a radical movement ideology developed by Japanese choreographer Min Tanaka in the context of the company *Tess de Quincey* and Co. in Sydney and Bellambi, Australia (Pini 2022; Pini and Deans 2021).

To illustrate how presence in dance performance practices emerges in relation to a complex and dynamic environment, this article proposes a cognitive ecological approach to stage presence which takes into account the co-presence of audiences and performers and the socio-cultural context of the performance event.

### **Cognitive ecological framework: An emergent distributed model of presence**

Several performance scholars have argued that, rather than being a quality or a skill, presence is inherently a social event, and audience and performers constitute a performance event by their phenomenal *co-presence* (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Power 2008; Zarrilli 2012, 2009; Trenos 2014; Heim 2016). In the book *Stage Presence* (2008), Jane Goodall observes how the phenomenon of stage presence is intrinsically mutable and dynamic, a product of social constructions, shaped by the evolution of aesthetics and of scientific and political ideas across time (Goodall 2008). Scholars in theatre and performance studies have in fact pointed out how the sense of presence in performance can “be created through an interaction between actors, text and audience; that is, in the ‘moment to moment’ unfolding of the performance rather than the realisation of a metaphysical ideal” (Power 2008, 53). In this context *presence* becomes understood as an emergent phenomenon. As Philip Zarrilli emphasised, “the sense of stage presence emerged in the spatiotemporal realm of experience, embodiment, and perception shared between the performer(s), the performance score and its dramaturgy, and the audience” (Zarrilli 2012, 120). Zarrilli inscribes the phenomenon of stage presence within a specific ‘spatiotemporal realm’ of experience; locating it within a specific spatiotemporal performance context situates it in a specific place and context. Presence is therefore understood not only as a quality possessed by specific individuals but also

as a perceptual and cognitive process that unfolds within different social actors, the performers, and the audience, and within a specific performance setting. In this sense presence is to be understood as a process, as a perceptual, cognitive, and cultural phenomenon that is context dependent.

Recently, in the field of dance and performance studies there has been an increased interest in analysis of performance practices through cognitive approaches (Paavolainen 2012; Sofia 2013; Blair and Cook 2016; Kemp and McConachie 2019; Vass-Rhee 2015; Weber 2016; Hansen and Bläsing 2017; Hansen 2022), particularly in the paradigm of the ‘4E cognition theory’, a recent current in cognitive science that recognises the central role of the body in shaping the mind (Sutton and Bicknell 2020; Hansen and Vass 2021).

To provide an account of the phenomenon of presence that can encompass the multifaceted renderings inscribed in a complex event such as a dance performance, I suggest adopting a cognitive ecological framework.

Cognitive ecological theory provides a useful framework for investigating cognitive processes in the relationships between the social and the material (Leach and Stevens 2020, 98).<sup>4</sup> As cognitive anthropologist Edwin Hutchins has observed, cognition must be understood as co-constituted by the interaction and interconnectedness of perception, action, and thought among particular social beings and complex environments. He reminds us that “an understanding of cognitive phenomena must include a consideration of the environments in which cognitive processes develop and operate” (Hutchins 2010, 706). According to Hutchins, perception, action, and thought are to be understood as inextricably integrated with each other (2010, 712). Cognitive ecology, a growing field in cognitive science, is “the study of cognitive phenomena in context” (Hutchins 2010, 705) that understands cognition not as internal

to the individual but as constituted by the interaction and interconnection of perception, action, and thought across particular social beings and complex environments.

Evelyn Tribble and John Sutton have employed cognitive ecology in the analysis of early modern theatre and suggested that “cognitive ecology facilitates a system-level analysis of theatre: this model of cognitive ecology would posit that a complex human activity such as theatre must be understood across the entire system” (2011, 97). In this view cognitive ecology emerges as a valuable framework in which to address the multidimensional, perceptual, and interactive aspects of live performance.

Therefore, to grasp the phenomenon of stage presence in dance I suggest adopting a cognitive ecological approach, which can address and account for not only audiences and performers’ perceptual relationship but the cognitive ecology of the performance event, which includes dancers’ co-presence and how they construct meaning, the embodied experience of the performers and how this is shaped by different dance and performance practices and traditions, the socio-cultural context, and the situatedness of the aesthetic performance event.

## **Methodology: A cognitive dance ethnography of presence**

Current interpretations of stage presence in performing arts oscillate between theory and practice, but they generally tend to infuse the lived experience of presence with more theoretical analysis. I believe dance can provide a more embodied account of the phenomenon of stage presence, allowing the practice of performance to inform philosophical reflection.

Also, if presence can be understood as a cognitive and cultural phenomenon, the direct experience of those who enact it, the performers, is missing from current interpretations. While the experience of spectating has been more broadly investigated, the lived

experience of stage presence from the performers’ point of view has often been overlooked or filtered through theoretical interpretations relying on philosophical accounts (see Lepecki 2004; Jeager 2006). Therefore, I addressed the experience of presence among diverse groups of dancers and performers by engaging in a multisite ‘enactive’ dance ethnography fieldwork in Europe and Australia (2014–2017). Enactive ethnography is an engaged form of participant observation termed by social anthropologist Loic Wacquant (2015). This approach to research consists of conducting immersive fieldwork based on ‘performing the phenomenon’, which in my case means training and practising together with the participants of my study. This methodology aims to reduce the distance between the observed and the observer, enabling the ethnographer to gain a closer perspective and deeper understanding of the practices under investigation. I could access these practices thanks to my professional dance training in ballet and contemporary dance.<sup>5</sup>

Conceptually my work rests on a bedrock of ethnographic and phenomenological frameworks, including somatic attention (Csordas 1993), thick participation (Samudra 2008), carnal sociology and enactive ethnography (Wacquant 2015), apprenticeship and embodied learning as ethnographic methods (Downey, Dalidowicz, and Mason 2015), and phenomenology of the body and dance (Pini and Pini 2019; Ravn 2009; Ravn and Hansen, 2013).

In the next sections I will provide a brief introduction of three case studies and present evidence from my fieldwork to illustrate the ways in which different dance forms provide a more complex account of presence that diversifies, enriches, and expands the view provided by the classic model of stage presence.



*Image 1. Dancers of the Ballet National De Marseille (BNM) in Emilio Greco's Passione. Photo Credit: Alwin Poiana (courtesy of BNM).*

## **Contemporary Ballet: Distributed embodied presence**

I have addressed the notion of stage presence in Contemporary Ballet (CB) in the case of the *Ballet National de Marseille* (BNM) and the staging of the piece *Passione* by Italian choreographer Emilio Greco and Dutch dramaturg Pieter Scholten. During my fieldwork I attended the version of *Passione* danced by seven dancers of the BNM ensemble and performed by the musician Frank Krawczyk in May and June 2017 at the *Theatre la Criée* in Marseille (Pini and Sutton, 2021). *Passione* was created and danced as a solo by the choreographer Emilio Greco, and after he took the direction of the BNM in 2014, he recreated the piece for the company.

The directors Greco and Scholten developed a dance training method called Double Skin / Double Mind (DS/DM) which enhances physical and mental awareness to make intention and form coincide. The training method (DS/DM) constitutes the ground for the specific idiosyncratic movement vocabulary the directors developed, as well as the entirety of their choreographic production. The directors' vision is based on the power of the dancer's body, and in

1996 they published their artistic manifesto "The 7 Necessities",<sup>6</sup> which also provides the direction for *Passione*:

*\_I have to tell you that my body is curious about everything and that I am my body*

*\_I have to tell you that my body is escaping from me*

*\_I have to tell you that I can control my body and play with it at the same time*

*\_I have to tell you that you have to turn your head*

*\_I have to tell you that I can multiply my body*

*\_I have to tell you that I am not alone*

*\_I have to tell you that I am abandoning you and leaving you my statue*

*Passione* is a dance piece that consist of seven different solos; every solo embeds and is inspired by—among many other elements—one of the principles in Greco and Scholten's artistic manifesto. Thus, with this piece,

the dancers of the BNM are tasked to meet not only the audience's and the choreographer's expectations, but also to embody the choreographer's aesthetic, artistic vision, and conceptual framework.

The piece *Passione* involves a series of solos, as well as an explicit reference to the metaphysical presence of God, since it is a work based on *St Matthew Passion* and choreographed on the homonymous composition of Johann Sebastian Bach. Given these premises, from the dancers of the Ballet National de Marseille (BNM) I was expecting an account of presence similar to the version reified by the classic model. Nevertheless, as soon as I started conversing with the BNM performers about this piece, interestingly, a quite different picture began to emerge. Here I present some of the reflections provided by the dancers of the BNM about their experience of stage presence with this specific choreographic work:

*He [Emio Greco] makes it really through the movement to make you connect with them [audience]. He doesn't really say like 'be present' but more like 'be aware', be aware they are there, be aware of your surroundings, and if you are aware of your surroundings, you automatically interact with the audience. (Nahimana Vandembussche, Marseille, 28 May 2017)*

Reflecting on the dancers' strategies to achieve and enhance their presence when dancing this piece, one dancer of the ensemble revealed:

*I think about going through the whole [unfolding] time of the piece, every time, and during the show I imagine myself going through every feeling [embodied in each different solo] and I try to keep it until the end, when I make my entrance running on stage, that's the moment, until I stop*

*running, from the moment Denis [first solo] enters the scene, for me, in my mind, I run, I start running. (Nonoka Kato, Marseille 02 June 2017)*

Another dancer of the company explained that what she refers to as 'presence' is the atmosphere that emerges throughout the unfolding of the performance, from meeting with the energy of the dancers on stage, with the audience, in a mutual relationship with the space of the theatre:

*I dance between Angel and Vito, actually Angel gives me a lot of energy, and every time is completely different [...] For me Angel leaves atmosphere on the stage, and then I enter after him. The energy and the audience also, they watch him dance, and the audience also makes atmosphere, not on the stage, but in the theatre. (Aya Sato, Marseille, 02 June 2017)*

Drawing from my fieldwork among the dancers of the BNM, I suggest an interpretation of phenomena of presence in Contemporary Ballet as *distributed* and *embodied*. Expounding from the accounts of my interviewees, stage presence in this context of practice is understood not as an individual skill, nor as a quality of the singular performer, but as an affective state arising from the mindful interactions distributed across the various elements of the performance ecology: the presence of the audience, the specific atmosphere of the piece, the theatre space, the choreographic demands of the performance, the dancers' specific roles in the piece, the emotions embedded in each solo, and the energy that emanates from the other dancers of the company who perform the piece with them, which is felt strongly, even when they are not physically present on stage.

## Contact Improvisation: Interkinaesthetic social presence

My investigation into variations of presence in performance also concerned Contact Improvisation (CI), a duet-system-based dance practice developed by Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark Smith, among many other US dancers and choreographers, in the 1970s and by members of the Judson Dance Theatre in New York (Banes 1987). Since its inception, CI has become a prominent expression of postmodern dance and performative art, with workshops, festivals, and jams sessions organised and practiced worldwide.

I conducted part of my fieldwork in Sydney, Australia, joining CI classes and a workshop led by CI teacher and choreographer Alejandro Rolandi. During one of our conversations, Alejandro provided me with this account of presence:

*If Contact Improvisation can enhance presence, I think it is mainly because it forces you to notice, it pushes you to be aware of what is going on because you are interacting in real time with another person [...] It is a reaching out, it is a sensorial extension that reaches out to what's happening beyond the immediate [...] Presence is simply that ability to engage fully with your surroundings. (Alejandro Rolandi, Sydney, 23 March, 2017)*

During my fieldwork I took part in CI jams organised by independent groups of contacters in the cities of Bologna and Ferrara (Italy), and I attended the Global Underscore (GUS) 2017 in Arezzo led by CI facilitator Caterina Mocchiola. The GUS is a framework for practicing and researching dance improvisation that has been developed since 1990 by Nancy Stark

*Image 2. Contact Improvisation Global Underscore event in Arezzo, Italy, streamed live, 2017. Photo Credit: Sarah Pini*



Smith (Koteen and Smith 2008) to guide dancers' experiences through the changing states of the jam. My informant Caterina gave me this definition of the Underscore in relation to presence:

*The Underscore is a practice about presence, and there is a series of changes of states, of this presence [...] I guess the presence can start from sensation, but it also becomes an awareness that you will create, and it changes, and it morphs while you go through the experience.* (Caterina Mocchiola, Arezzo, 24 June 2017)

The GUS, a significant dance event for the Contact Improvisation community, happens once a year around the period of the Northern Hemisphere summer solstice. This special CI event was danced simultaneously and streamed live across all the GUS jams that took place in 55 countries around the globe.

*During the Global Underscore this net expands out of the actual physical room where we are practicing, and we reach through what she [Nancy Stark Smith] calls the telescopic awareness. We reach the other sites by using the imagination, you connect to memories, sensations, experiences you shared, and everything kind of feedbacks in and out, it's a constant, it's a flux of information, technique, movement.* (Caterina Mocchiola, Arezzo, 24 June 2017)

The kind of feedback loop enacted through the GUS jam is what Nancy Stark Smith calls the device of *telescopic awareness*. Several comparative studies addressing bodily perception and agency in dance have highlighted how Contact Improvisation presents some distinctive features characterised by an emphasis on certain sensory modalities, including

privileging the sense of touch over vision (Bull 1997), challenging habits of movement (Pini, McIlwain, and Sutton 2016), kinaesthetic interdependency and *multiperspectivity* (Behnke 2003), and the cultivation of an interkinaesthetic sense of agency (Deans and Pini 2022). During CI jams, the 'stage', the space of the performance, is the entire space occupied by all attendees of the jam. CI dancers can decide to stop their dance and become audience at any point during the unfolding of the jam, and any member of the 'audience' is free to change her vantage point and join the dance whenever they feel is their time to join. Thanks to the interchangeable roles of both performers and audience, in this context of practice, a sense of presence emerges through an interconnected loop of mutual influence between the various elements of the CI jam. I call this phenomenon the *interkinaesthetic social presence* in CI, a term that I borrowed from phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke (2003) to describe the experience of presence within the practice of CI.

### **Body Weather: Omnicentral situated presence**

The third dance form investigated during my fieldwork is Body Weather (BW), a radical and anti-hierarchical movement ideology developed by Japanese choreographer Min Tanaka and MAI-JUKU performance group in Japan between the 1970s and the 1980s. BW presents similarities with Butoh, an avant-garde dance form developed in Japan in the 1960s by dancers who followed the artistic direction of Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata. Butoh is a dance form consisting of "an emphasis on the transformation of the dancer into something else, an intense physicality that may result in explosions of movement across the stage or a strictly contained tension beneath the surface of the skin, and a focus on themes such as death, marginality, and nature" (Candelario 2019, 12). Tanaka developed his solo work and movement methodology in dialogue with the work of Hijikata.<sup>7</sup>

BW is a training method and performance practice that investigates the interconnected relationships between bodies and their environments. The body in BW is not conceived as a fixed entity but like the weather, constantly changing and transforming. Another important concept in BW is the idea of the space as a dancing partner. BW methodology was introduced into Australia by the choreographer Tess de Quincey in 1989.<sup>8</sup> I conducted my fieldwork in Sydney and Bellambi (NSW, Australia), where I attended BW classes and workshops organised by members of the dance company *Tess de Quincey and Co* in Sydney. One of my interviewees, Sydney-based visual artist and performer Kirsten Packman, provided me with an interesting account that describes the relationship between space and the dancing body in BW:

*When I see space beeing changed by the body, that's when I see presence, not just about the body but the spatial relationships, what's going on, so the activation across space, not just to other dancers but how the body is inhabiting space, it's almost as much as about the body as space, sculpted by space.*  
(Kirsten Packman, Sydney, 01 April 2017)

During an interview, choreographer Tess de Quincey mentioned how in “the Body Weather training, what’s at the back, how is the space changing around you, in front of you, behind you, to your sides, feeling the sensitivity of an entire space, it has an impact” (Tess de Quincey, Sydney, 16/05/2017). This idea of the space as a dancing partner that shapes the experience of the performer was framed by Tess de Quincey, who told me:

*The relationship to be danced by space, that space is not nothing, it is something, and Min [Tamaka] used to talk about the endless stories that are available through space, that everything in history lives there,*

*Image 3. Body Weather workshop in Australia, 2017. Photo credit: Gideon Payten-Griffiths.*



*if you become danced... I was used to this expression 'cut the space with your arms' which we do in the ballet, but all of this is centred through the self-centering of the human, where if your arms get danced by space, by the intricacy of the stories, that in itself gives power to something beyond the human that also expands the presence, because one is engaging and in exchange with those histories and sensitivities. (Tess de Quincey, Sydney, 16 May 2017)*

I call the experience of presence in *BW omnicultural* and *situated* to emphasise the salient features of this practice, which include a focus on the idea of groundedness and imagination and the development of a heightened sensory awareness, interoceptive sensitivity, and *omnicentrality* understood as blurred boundary between the performer agency and the environment in which she is immersed (Min Tanaka in Marshall 2006).

These aspects highlight how different dance forms are informed by specific traditions and cultural contexts, which in turn shape different dance artistic practices and methods that promote different ways of relating, sensing, and enacting presence in performance. With these examples issued from the device of the *telescopic awareness* in CI and the concept of *omnicentrality* in BW, and the distributed presence of the choreographer and performers in the case of the *Passione* piece by the BNM, I suggest more complex and interesting relationships between performers, bodies and senses, audience, stage, and environment than are included in the classic model of presence, which is centred merely on the performer's agency to enchant audience attention.

## Conclusions: Cognitive ecologies of presence in dance

To address the complexity of presence as a cognitive, aesthetic, perceptive, and interactive phenomenon, I suggest considering not only the perceptive relationship between the artists and the audience, but also the overall ecology of the performance, which includes the presence of the audience and the artists, the ways in which they construct meaning and the specific 'situatedness' of the performance event in a given environment and sociocultural context. My research sought to explore phenomena of presence in context. To do so, I considered not only audiences' and performers' perceptual relationships but also the cognitive ecology of the performance event. As one of the *Ballet de Marseille* dancers powerfully outlined: "Stage presence is the capacity to blend together with energy, with the other dancers, with the atmosphere, with what we have to do, with what is being asked" (Angel Martinez-Hernandez, Marseille, 28 May 2017).

From my fieldwork it appears that dancers understand and experience presence not as an individual skill but as an emergent property that arises from interaction with the audience and context. With this paper I show how different forms of presence can be enacted differently across three distinct dance genres and how differently they depart from the classic model. Through my study I also illustrate how the exploration of dancers' lived experience can provide an alternative interpretation of the phenomenon of stage presence that moves away from the so-called *classic model of presence* to embrace and account for the situational, multidimensional, interactive, and intersubjective aspects of performing.

By focusing on the cognitive ecologies of different dance practices, in this article I have highlighted the importance of conducting a more comprehensive analysis of phenomena of presence in performing arts that considers both the lived experience of the artists, their situatedness in a particular environment

and cultural context, and the role that a specific performance ecology plays in shaping the experience of presence. By offering a broader understanding of the phenomenon of presence in different dance contexts, this article illustrates how a cognitive ecological ethnographic approach can provide adequate tools to address the complexities of phenomena of presence in performance.

## Endnotes

1 For further information on the topic, see the International Journal of Presence Studies: Revista Brasileira do Estudos da Presença <https://seer.ufrgs.br/presenca>

2 Among the various research projects focused on the theme of presence in performing arts, see The Presence Project directed by Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye of the University of Exeter (UK), in collaboration with Mel Slater (University College London) and Michael Shanks (Stanford University), active between 2005 and 2010. Further details can be found on the project website: <http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/presence/presence.stanford.edu/index.html>

Another project was conducted by the research group *Performativité et effets de présence* directed by Louise Poissant and Josette Féral of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). The laboratory investigated various forms of presence in the interpenetration between the virtual and the real in theatre, dance, opera, and multimedia arts. For more information, see the website: <https://effetsdepresence.uqam.ca/>

In October 2022 the research group Performance and Cognition of the ICNOVA/NOVA University Lisbon, Portugal, held the conference *Presence, Absence, Invisibility (PAI)* to raise and address questions of presence that are central to the theory of performing arts and to the training of performers: <https://lisbonpai.netlify.app/>

3 Definition of stage presence, 2019, in English Oxford Dictionary. Retrieved from [https://www.lexico.com/en?search\\_filter=dictionary](https://www.lexico.com/en?search_filter=dictionary)

4 For further examples of cognitive ecology in relation to analysis of choreographic practices, see also Vass-Rhee 2015.

5 I was familiar with the environment of the BNM due to my professional dance training during the first edition of the international insertion program D.A.N.C.E. (Dance Apprentice Network aCross Europe, 2005–2007), which included an apprenticeship period at the Ballet National de Marseille. The company was directed at that time by Belgian choreographer Frédéric Flamand (2004–2014).

6 For more details on Emio Greco | PC choreographic methodology and The Seven Necessities artistic manifesto, see Pini and Sutton 2021 and Bermúdez 2007.

7 For further information on Min Tanaka's biography and artistic career, see a recent interview with the artist (Ozaki 2022) available at: [https://performingarts.jpf.go.jp/E/art\\_interview/2204/1.html](https://performingarts.jpf.go.jp/E/art_interview/2204/1.html)

8 For deeper insights into the practice of Body Weather in Australia, see Snow 2002.

## References

- Banes, Sally. 1987. *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Behnke, Elizabeth A. 2003. "Contact Improvisation and the Lived World." *Studia Phaenomenologica* 3: 39–61.
- Bermúdez, Maite. 2007. "Capturing Emio Greco / PC." In *Capturing Intention: Documentation, Analysis and Notation Research Based on the Work of Emio Greco / PC*, edited by Scott DeLauntha, 22–25. Amsterdam: Emio Greco PC and AHK/Lectoraat.
- Blair, Ronda, and Amy Cook. 2016. *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bull, Cynthia Jean Cohen. 1997. "Sense, Meaning and Perception in Three Dance Cultures." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, edited by Jane C. Desmond, 269–87. Durham: Duke University Press Books.
- Candelario, Rosemary. 2019. "Dancing the Space: Butoh and Body Weather as Training for Ecological Consciousness." In *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*, edited by Hellen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, 11–21. London: Routledge.
- Csordas, Thomas J. 1993. "Somatic Modes of Attention." *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 2: 135–56.
- De Quincey, Tess, and Ian Maxwell. 2019. "Tess de Quincey: A Future Body." In *The Twenty-First Century Performance Reader*, edited by Teresa Brayshaw, Anna Fenemore, and Noel Witts, 166–169. London: Routledge.
- Deans, Catherine, and Sarah Pini. 2022. "Skilled Performance in Contact Improvisation: The Importance of Interkinaesthetic Sense of Agency." *Synthese* 200, no. 139: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-03629-7>.
- Downey, Greg, Monica Dalidowicz, and Paul H. Mason. 2015. "Apprenticeship as Method: Embodied Learning in Ethnographic Practice." *Qualitative Research* 15, no. 2: 183–200.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge.
- Giannachi, Gabriella, and Nick Kaye. 2011. *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Goodall, Jane. 2008. *Stage Presence*. New York: Routledge.
- Hansen, Pil. 2022. *Performance Generating Systems in Dance Dramaturgy, Psychology, and Performativity*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Ltd.
- Hansen, Pil, and Bettina Bläsing. 2017. *Performing the Remembered Present: The Cognition of Memory in Dance, Theatre and Music*. (Eds.) London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, Performance and Science: Interdisciplinary Dialogues.
- Hansen, Pil, and Freya Vass. 2021. "Editorial: On Perception." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 26, no. 3: 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2021.1977483>.
- Heim, Caroline. 2016. *Audience as Performer: The Changing Role of Theatre Audiences in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Hutchins, Edwin. 2010. "Cognitive Ecology." *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2, no. 4: 705–15.
- Jaeger, Suzanne M. 2006. "Embodiment and Presence: The Ontology of Presence Reconsidered." In *Staging Philosophy. Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy*, edited by David Krasner and David Z. Saltz, 122–141. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Kemp, Rick, and Bruce Mcconachie. 2019. *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance and Cognitive Science*. London: Routledge.

- Koteen, David, and Nancy S. Smith. 2008. *Caught Falling: The Confluence of Contact Improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith, and Other Moving Ideas*. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions.
- Leach, James, and Catherine J. Stevens. 2020. "Relational Creativity and Improvisation in Contemporary Dance." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 45, no. 1: 95–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03080188.2020.1712541>.
- Lepecki, Andre. 2004. *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Macneill, Paul. 2014. *Ethics and the Arts*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Marshall, Jonathan. 2006. "Dancing the Elemental Body: Butoh and Body Weather: Interviews with Tanaka Min and Yumi Umiumare." *Performance Paradigm* 2 (March): 54–73.
- Noë, Alva. 2012. *Varieties of Presence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Ozaki, Tetsuya. 2022. "Artist Interview: Min Tanaka." *Performing Arts Network Japan*. [https://performingarts.jp/f/e/art\\_interview/2204/1.html](https://performingarts.jp/f/e/art_interview/2204/1.html).
- Paavolainen, Teemu. 2012. *Theatre/Ecology/Cognition Theorizing Performer-Object Interaction in Grotowski, Kantor, and Meyerhold*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pini, Sarah. 2021. "Stage Presence in Dance: A Cognitive Ecological Ethnographic Approach." PhD thesis Macquarie University. <https://doi.org/10.25949/19435088.v1>.
- Pini, Sarah. 2022. "On the Edge of Undoing: Ecologies of Agency in Body Weather." In *Collaborative Embodied Performance: Ecologies of Skill*, edited by Kath Bicknell and John Sutton, 35–52. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, Performance and Science: Interdisciplinary Dialogues. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350197725.ch-002>.
- Pini, Sarah, and Catherine Deans. 2021. "Expanding Empathic and Perceptive Awareness: The Experience of Attunement in Contact Improvisation and Body Weather." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 26, no. 3: 106–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2021.1983293>.
- Pini, Sarah, Doris McIlwain, and John Sutton. 2016. "Re-Tracing the Encounter: Interkinaesthetic Forms of Knowledge in Contact Improvisation." *Antropologia e Teatro* 7, no. 7: 226–243. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2039-2281/6268>.
- Pini, Sarah, and Ruggero Pini. 2019. "Resisting the 'Patient' Body: A Phenomenological Account." *Journal of Embodied Research* 2, no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.11>.
- Pini, Sarah, and John Sutton. 2021. "Transmitting Passione: Emio Greco and the Ballet National de Marseille." In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, edited by Katarina Farrugia-Kriel and Jill Nunes Jensen, 594–612. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780190871499.013.51>.
- Power, Cormac. 2008. *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi B.V.
- Ravn, Susanne. 2009. *Sensing Movement, Living Spaces: An Investigation of Movement Based on the Lived Experience of 13 Professional Dancers*. Saarbrücken: VDM.
- Ravn, Susanne, and Helle Ploug Hansen. 2013. "How to Explore Dancers' Sense Experiences? A Study of How Multi-sited Fieldwork and Phenomenology Can Be Combined." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 5, no. 2: 196–213.
- Samudra, Jaida Kim. 2008. "Memory in Our Body: Thick Participation and the Translation of Kineshetic Experience." *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4: 665–81.

- Sherman, Jon Foley. 2016. *A Strange Proximity: Stage Presence, Failure, and the Ethics of Attention*. New York: Routledge.
- Snow, Peter. 2002. "Imaging the In-Between: Training Becomes Performance in Body Weather Practice in Australia." PhD thesis University of Sydney. <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/1775>.
- Sofia, Gabriele. 2013. "Lo studio della relazione attore-spettatore e i nuovi modelli cognitivi." *Antropologia E Teatro. Rivista Di Studi* 4, no. 4. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2039-2281/3696>.
- Sutton, John, and Kath Bicknell. 2020. "Embodied Experience in the Cognitive Ecologies of Skilled Performance." In *The Routledge Handbook of Skill and Expertise*, edited by Ellen Fridland and Carlotta Pavese. London: Routledge.
- Sutton, J., & Bicknell, K. (2021). Embodied experience in the cognitive ecologies of skilled performance. In E. Fridland, & C. Pavese (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of skill and expertise* (pp. 194–206). London: Taylor and Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315180809-20>
- Trenos, Helen. 2014. *Creativity: The Actor in Performance*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Open.
- Tribble, Evelyn, and John Sutton. 2011. "Cognitive Ecology as a Framework for Shakespearean Studies." *Shakespearean Studies* 39: 94–103.
- Vass-Rhee, Freya. 2015. "Distributed Dramaturgies: Navigating with Boundary Objects." In *Dance Dramaturgy*. New World Choreographies, edited by Pil Hansen and D. Callison. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137373229\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137373229_5).
- Wacquart, Loïc. 2015. "For a Sociology of Flesh and Blood." *Qualitative Sociology* 38, no. 1: 1–11.
- Weber, Rebecca. 2016. "Interacting Cognitive Subsystems and Dance: Choreographic Creativity." In *Multimodal Perspectives in Performing Arts*, edited by Maria Grazia Sindoni, Janina Wildfeuer, and Kay O'Halloran. New York: Routledge. Routledge Studies in Multimodality. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315621180>.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. 2009. *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski*. New York: Routledge.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. 2012. "'... Presence ...' as a Question and Emergent Possibility: A Case Study from the Performer's Perspective." In *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*, edited by Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye, and Michael Shanks, 119–52. New York: Routledge.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Sarah Pini** is Assistant Professor in dance at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). She works interdisciplinarily at the intersection of arts and health, cultural and medical anthropology, phenomenology of the body and illness, performing arts, dance, and embodied cognition. Her research focuses on the human body as a socio-cultural phenomenon, exploring the relationships between mindful dancing bodies, practices, environments, and cultural contexts,

and how such entanglements shape processes of meaning-making, healing, and well-being. Sarah's research has been published in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, *Synthese*, *Performance Research*, *Collaborative Embodied Performance: Ecologies of Skill (Bloomsbury)*, and *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, among others. [www.sarahpini.com](http://www.sarahpini.com)  
[spini@health.sdu.dk](mailto:spini@health.sdu.dk)

## Dance Technique and Power Dynamics in Higher Education: A Literature Review

Irene Velten Rothmund

### ABSTRACT

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a heightened emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, with an urge to reform the relationship between teachers and students. During this same period, a growing body of research has been conducted on unequal power dynamics in the teaching of dance technique. In this study, I am doing a literature review of 20 articles published between 1998 and 2020, which especially addressed dance technique and power dynamics in the context of higher education. I am particularly exploring strategies proposed in the literature to challenge unequal power dynamics within dance technique training in higher education. Through a thematic analysis of the articles, I have identified three clusters of strategies in the material: *reflexivity of traditions in dance*, *activity*, and *embodiment*. The research shows that there is a rather high interest in continuing and reforming the teaching of dance technique, and that there are several examples of empirical research related to heightening the students' activity in their learning process. However, there is still a need for more research on this topic, especially concerning the connection between embodiment and empowerment.

### SAMMENDRAG

Det har siden årtusenskiftet vært et økt fokus på kvalitet på undervisning og læring i høyere utdanning, med særlig vekt på endringer i forholdet mellom lærer og student. I den samme perioden har det blitt publisert gradvis flere artikler som setter lys på ujevne maktrelasjoner i undervisning av danseteknikk. I denne artikkelen gjør jeg en litteraturstudie av 20 artikler som har fokus på danseteknikk og maktrelasjoner i høyere utdanning. Artiklene er skrevet mellom 1998 og 2020. Jeg undersøker hvilke strategier som forfatterne foreslår for å utfordre ujevne maktstrukturer i danseteknikk i høyere utdanning. Etter en tematisk analyse av artiklene har jeg identifisert tre hovedstrategier i materialet: *Bevissthet om tradisjoner i dans*, *aktivitet* og *kroppsliggjøring*. Resultatet av analysen viser at det er en relativt høy interesse for både å opprettholde og videreutvikle undervisning av danseteknikk. Det er spesielt mange eksempler på empirisk forskning i tilknytning til å øke studentenes aktivitet i læreprosessen. I artikkelen argumenterer jeg for at det fremdeles er behov for mer forskning på temaet, spesielt i forbindelse med sammenheng mellom kropp og myndiggjøring.

# Dance Technique and Power Dynamics in Higher Education: A Literature Review

Irene Velten Rothmund

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a heightened emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning in higher education (Biggs and Tang 2011, 3), with an urge to reform the relationship between teachers and students (Barr and Tagg 1995, 17), thus empowering students in the learning situation. The question of power dynamics is highly relevant in the field of dance, in the context of both learning dance technique and rehearsing choreography, as teachers or choreographers can easily take on, or even be given, the role of an authority in the situation. Lepecki has referred to choreography as a *system of command*: “Indeed, as a system of command, the choreographic scoring reveals the formation of obedient, disciplined, and (pre) formatted bodies – technically and subjectively fit to produce and (more importantly perhaps) to reproduce certain staged images conveyed by an authoritarian will” (2016, 16).

Dance technique has been, and to a large extent still is, an important part of the formation of the dancer to be *fit to produce or reproduce choreography*. Just as Lepecki connects choreographic scoring to an *authoritarian will*, dance technique has been criticized for authoritarian tendencies and unequal power dynamics in the teaching situation. For instance, Dragon describes how the training of dance performance artists in higher education has traditionally been rather teacher-centred and often authoritarian. However, since the turn of the millennium, there has been increasing interest in merging holistic, process-oriented, and student-centred work, such as somatics, into dance technique (2015, 28–29). Moreover, a growing body of research has been

investigating unequal power dynamics in the teaching of dance technique for the last two decades. I consider this as an important question, not least in connection with the education of professional dancers. In this study, I will do a literature review of research articles from this period, which especially address dance technique and power dynamics in the context of higher education. My aim has been to get an overview of how central this topic has been in the period and, more specifically, to investigate the strategies proposed in the literature to address this problem. My research question is:

*What strategies are suggested by dance researchers to challenge unequal power dynamics within dance technique training in higher education?*

## Materials and Methods

This review belongs methodically to what Sutton et al. (2019) describe as the *qualitative review family*. They have classified the types and families of literature reviews and stressed the importance of being systematic and explicit with the methods used (2019, 203).

To select the relevant articles, I conducted a literature search in Oria, the Norwegian university library database, using the search words *dance technique*, *power dynamics*, and *higher education*. The search was delimited to articles that were accessible electronically and written in English. Supplementary search methods were also applied by browsing through journals for dance education, such as *Research in Dance Education* and *Journal of Dance Education*, and by checking reference lists. Through this reference checking, two book chapters

were included. I did not intend to find all existing articles but to select the ones that especially addressed the research question of this study. Thus, my approach was interpretative rather than aggregative (Sutton et al. 2019, 212).

The literature search was conducted several times between April and October 2022. After reading through the collected articles, I selected 20 articles that addressed the question of power dynamics in the teaching of dance technique in higher education. To get an overview of the articles, I first briefly categorized them contextually based on the details of the authors and the research methodology. Then, I did a thematic analysis of the content of the articles to identify common themes across the articles. These methods were similar to two review types within the *qualitative review family*. As in the *qualitative systematic review*, I am comparing themes across individual studies (Sutton et al. 2019, 207), and as in the *qualitative meta-synthesis*, I am identifying “a specific research question and then search for, select, appraise, summarise, and combine qualitative evidence to address the research question” (Sutton et al. 2019, 208).

## Contextual Overview of the Articles

The articles were written between 1998 and 2020. Of these 20 articles, 13 were written in the last ten years, thus showing an increasing recent interest in this topic. I did not specify the kind of dance technique in the search; however, half of the articles addressed modern or contemporary dance – ten explicitly and one implicitly. Furthermore, eight investigated Western concert dance in general (including modern or contemporary dance) and one performed a study about ballet. All the articles were written by authors affiliated with institutions in English-speaking countries: ten in the USA, six in the UK, two in Canada, one in New Zealand, and one in Australia. In all of

the articles, at least one of the authors was a dance teacher; thus, this academic research had a strong base and closeness to the practice of dance and dance teaching. Only one of these teacher-researchers was male, and the rest were female.

This brief quantitative overview shows that this topic has had an especially high interest among female dance teacher-researchers in the field of modern and contemporary dance in the USA and the UK. If the search had included other languages, I might have found a more geographic diversity. However, as English is a common language for academics in many countries, this might not be the main reason. This may rather indicate that the USA and the UK have a leading role in research on dance and dance education and that this topic has a special high interest among dance teacher-researchers in those countries.

The majority of the articles have a theoretical foundation in pedagogical theory, either within the framework of critical and feminist pedagogy or relating to theories of student-centred learning in higher education. Several of them use a combination of the two, and Alterowitz (2014) shows how feminist pedagogy and principles of student-centred learning are interconnected. In addition, a few articles use perspectives from sociology or theory about embodiment. Regarding research methods, three of the articles are theoretical, with historical overviews and discussions on paradigms within dance technique and dance education (Dyer 2009; Dragon 2015; Barr and Oliver 2016). The others are empirical. Seven are seen from the teacher’s point of view, either the researchers themselves or other teachers (Fortin 1998; Smith 1998; Lakes 2005; Burnidge 2012; Rimmer 2013; Fitzgerald 2017; Richmond and Bird 2020). Ten discuss students’ experiences with different pedagogical methods (Green 1999; Răman 2009; Dyer 2010; Harbonnier-Topin and Barbier 2012; Alterowitz 2014; Dryburg

and Jackson 2016; Akinleye and Payne 2016; Rimmer 2017; Huddy 2017; Dryburgh 2019).

Most of the articles refer to other research relevant to their themes, and some have especially many cross-references between the articles: Fortin (1998), Lakes (2005), Dyer (2010), Răman (2009), Burnidge (2012), and Alterowitz (2014). This shows that there is a growing research field gradually developing more knowledge concerning dance technique and power dynamics. One of the articles, Barr and Oliver (2016), makes a more thorough literature review, with feminist pedagogy as a theoretical lens. My article makes a supplementary contribution to this, with an emphasis on unpacking the concrete strategies made in the articles.

## Thematic Analysis of the Articles

Common to all the articles is an urge to change unequal power dynamics in the learning situation. In this analysis, I have searched for the practical strategies the researchers suggest to make this change happen. One solution, or maybe even a trend, has been to abandon dance technique or the teaching of set movement material altogether and replace it with improvisation and different kinds of exploration or somatic practices. “A number of writers in the field of dance research have in fact questioned the process of learning through imitation, considering it to be superficial and alienating” (Harbonnier-Topin and Barbier 2012, 301). However, the authors of the 20 articles are not content with that solution; instead, they suggest other strategies to overcome the problems with authoritarian teaching approaches within dance technique training.

Through a thematic analysis of these articles, I have identified the following three clusters of strategies that are common in the material:

- 1) reflexivity of traditions in dance,
- 2) activity, and

3) embodiment.

### 1. Reflexivity of traditions in dance

All three theoretical-based articles, as well as some of the empirical-based, address how traditions in dance can be an obstacle to change. I have identified three specific strategies in the material: *to be aware of the impact of hidden traditions*, *to expose authoritarian behaviour*, and *to challenge the link between codified techniques and authoritarian practices*.

Dragon describes how more process-oriented work, such as somatics, has been merged into dance technique as a way to empower the students. However, she points out that teaching traditions are often silently embedded into dance classroom experiences, with the risk of perpetuating authoritarian teaching practices (2015, 25–26). Lakes also stresses that the teaching methods often pass uncritical from generation to generation and that there is a striking irony that “authoritarian teaching methods are often utilised as a means toward the end of anti-authoritarian concert dances” (Lakes 2005, 3). They both argue for the need to *be aware of the impact of hidden traditions* in dance. Dragon adds that reflexivity of traditions is important for both teachers and students, as many dance students enter higher education expecting to be “taught as they were taught.” She suggests heightening the awareness of the educators’ dance teacher identity, which comprises values, philosophies, and practices (2015, 26). “Through examining our teaching methods, situating them historically and contextually in a specific teaching and learning environment, and sharing our pedagogical choices, we (students and faculty) can be empowered to consciously create our teaching and learning cultures” (Dragon 2015, 31). The strategy of Lakes (2005), Richmond and Bird (2020), and Clyde Smith (1998) is to *expose authoritarian behaviour*. Lakes describes numerous examples of authoritarian behaviour from both

choreographers and teachers, and by that, she exposes what she calls the hidden curricula in the dance class. She urges teachers to re-examine their own inherited pedagogical heritage (2005, 16). Richmond and Bird similarly show examples of their own experiences with authoritarian teaching methods, arguing for a heightened reflexivity of values and pedagogical knowledge among dance teachers (2020, 6). Smith discusses the connection between authoritarian teacher behaviour and submissive student behaviour and the need to expose both (1998, 143).

The last strategy regarding reflexivity of traditions is *to challenge the link between codified techniques and authoritarian practices*. Dyer (2009) describes two different paradigms of teaching dance technique: one focusing on an aesthetic vocabulary and the other on sensing and understanding one's own body. The former paradigm has been criticized for using authoritarian teaching methods, while the latter is often associated with empowerment. However, Dyer argues that authoritarian pedagogical approaches need not be wed to the study of traditional dance technique aesthetics. She writes that the harm is not in the performance of codified movements itself but in the teaching framework it is presented in: "The technical vocabularies of specific dance techniques can be utilized in a variety of ways for personal meaningful discoveries and artistic experiences in dance without incorporating authoritarian teaching approaches" (Dyer 2009, 120). Burnidge (2012) agrees with Dyer and adds that it is not the content of the dance, but rather the methods used "that are of utmost importance in creating change toward a more democratic, more contemporary pedagogical environment in dance" (Burnidge 2012, 46).

## 2. Activity

All 10 articles based on empirical studies on students' experiences with various teaching methods, as well as some of those based on teachers' experiences, are, in different ways, concerned with students' activities in the dance class. One article analyses what kind of activity is already going on in a dance class (Harbonnier-Topin and Barbier 2012). Then, there are several other articles analysing the results from interventions with different methods for heightening the students' activity and the feeling of empowerment. I have identified six interconnected strategies in this material: *interaction, enquiry, feedback, collaboration, critical thinking, and community*. These strategies resonate with principles within both feminist pedagogy and student-centred learning (Alterowitz 2014, 9). In addition, there is one common challenge visible in the material regarding *the students' expectations*.

Harbonnier-Topin and Barbier show that the *interaction* between teachers and students is complex and diverse when learning through demonstration–reproduction (2012, 301). By doing an activity analysis of teachers and students in contemporary dance classes, they find that the students are doing with, doing after, seeing, questioning, performing alone, practicing alone, and working between autonomy and dependence. The authors conclude that this pedagogical method is far more complex than it is usually presumed to be and that learners always make some personal choices in their learning strategies (2012, 321). In several of the other articles, the main emphasis is to challenge the traditional interaction between teachers and students by shifting the role of teachers from experts to facilitators of learning (i.e. Răman 2009; Fitzgerald 2017). The strategies used are, for instance, to let the students shape goals, objectives, and content (Dyer 2010, 114) and involve the students in discussions, reflection, and collaboration (Fitzgerald 2017; Alterowitz 2014). Dryburgh (2019, 96) writes that it is important to

establish a safe environment of respect and care to enable emancipatory learning.

Another strategy to lessen students' reliance on the teacher is the use of *enquiry*, for instance, by giving the students time for experimentation with particular steps to enable self-discovery (Alterowitz 2014, 12) or using improvisation to foster an empowering sense of individual artistry and ownership (Rimmer 2013, 145). In Rimmer (2017), the students are given different problem-solving tasks, such as improvisation, investigating principles alone and with a partner, and making their own phrases. The goal is to facilitate the students to become active agents of their learning (2017, 224–225).

The use and function of *feedback* are discussed in several articles, often in connection with *collaboration* and *critical thinking*. In dance technique, feedback is traditionally given as one-way corrections, and to activate the students more in the process, Akinleye and Payne (2016) suggest focusing more on the students' response to feedback by using collaboration and critical thinking. Huddy (2017) applies digital technology as a tool for students' self-assessment. By learning to evaluate their progress, the students assume more responsibility for their learning, they develop their learning capacity and ability for critical reflection, and the collaboration between the students is heightened (2017, 179–182). Răman (2009) uses collaboration in pairs, encouraging the students to provide feedback to one another and to evaluate their own learning as a way to promote critical thinking as well as to enhance the learning of technique. She states that this collaborative learning mode shifts the power structure of the class, and her role as a leader becomes less emphasized (2009, 81). Dryburg and Jackson (2016) similarly combine feedback, collaboration, and critical thinking. In a project using a flipchart as a tool for reflection in action and dialogical enquiry, the students are given time to write, discuss, and reflect during the classes.

By getting such possibilities for enquiry in a dance class, “the student is empowered to define their own learning process; making choices, setting questions, finding their voice, identifying objectives, realising authenticity, and supporting each other” (2016, 142).

There are a few authors who suggest making connections between the dance classroom and the *community* at large. Dyer encourages students to reflect on pedagogical and socio-political processes and to consider how this “related to their larger social values, ideologies and actions outside of the classroom” (2010, 111). Burnidge emphasizes the need to build a safe and supportive environment rather than an atmosphere of competition and favoritism. “A community needs to be created where acceptance and respect of individual knowledge and cultural differences come from both the teacher-facilitator and from each participant” (2012, 44). Fitzgerald considers the dance class a politically complex environment and a place to foster responsible citizenship (2017, 1). She considers peer feedback, collaboration, and freedom of choice as socially engaged strategies. She argues that building mutual trust and support is a way to promote empowerment and social transformation. “Perhaps the cultivation of reciprocity in dance technique, which is essential in fostering growth of a democratic community, can contribute to our students' growth as responsible citizens who have a deep concern of the welfare of other individuals” (2017, 7).

These examples show that there has been a fair amount of empirical research regarding heightening the students' activity in the dance class and that there are many advantages with such a student-centred approach. However, as many as 11 of the articles report on one particular challenge with this approach, namely, *the students' expectations*. As mentioned earlier, because of the often-hidden traditions in dance, there is a tendency for students to expect to be “taught as they were taught” (Dragon

2015, 26), which puts pressure on the teacher to live up to the students' expectations of how a dance class should be (Alterowitz 2014, 13; Fortin 1998, 54). This applies especially to fresh students entering higher education (Rimmer 2013, 143; Dryburgh and Jackson 2016, 134). It is also often mentioned in research working with alternative methods for feedback, as some students expect to be told exactly what to do (Barr and Oliver 2016, 102; Burnidge 2012, 46), preferring feedback delivered as right or wrong, and not as more reflective suggestions from the teacher (Dyer 2010, 128). Such a focus on getting the movement right or wrong positions the teacher as a figure of authority and judgement (Rimmer 2017, 221). For some students, the lack of authority is equated with the teacher not being able or proficient in the technique (Akinleye and Payne 2016, 146).

Several of the authors argue that there is a need to be aware of these challenges, as the requirement to learn in new ways can potentially inhibit a student's transition into a new learning environment (Dryburgh and Jackson 2016, 134). Rimmer comments on this problem as follows: "Altering one's perception of the teacher as the provider of technical dance knowledge to that of a facilitator of individual knowledge can be a radical shift for some students" (2017, 223). Dryburgh writes that the active participation of students in learning, although intended to promote liberation, can be experienced as burdensome, irrelevant, or obstructive (2019, 92). Dyer emphasizes the need to find ways to "negotiate teaching and learning roles within a student-centred framework with students who do not desire to exceed agency in their learning or to play active roles in the classroom" (2010, 128). Similarly, Burnidge writes, "as an educator I need to continually question the theories and practices of my field while encouraging my students to do the same" (2012, 46).

### 3. Embodiment

A connection between embodiment and empowerment is mentioned in some of the empirical-based articles, especially in the articles addressing somatics and how somatics informs dance technique. I have identified two strategies in this material: *refuting the myth of the ideal body and facilitating embodied knowing and sensory authority*.

Both Green (1999) and Barr and Oliver (2016) argue that certain body ideals are also a part of tradition that tend to be passed on unnoticed, working as an authority on its own. "The perfect body becomes a standardized ideal that serves as a self-imposed assessment tool by and for students" (Barr and Oliver 2016, 101). The constant focus on an externalized view of the body, as reflected in the mirror, objectifies the dancers' body, and it also gives more power to the teacher in defining rights and wrongs (Green 1999, 81). The strategy suggested in both these articles is to expose these body ideals as just myths. A heightened reflexivity about this is a way to *refute the myth of the ideal body* (Barr and Oliver 2016, 109). In addition to such a general reflexivity, some authors suggest a shift in focus from an external image to internal experiences. Burnidge writes that dance often places the demands of external form over internal experiences and student needs, making the teacher the gatekeeper of the form with the power to externally judge students and their body (2012, 44). Green writes that somatic practices can be a tool to be aware of how the ideal body is a social construction (1999, 88). Similarly, Richmond and Bird argue that a somatic approach to dance can shift the focus from how the body looks to how it feels, from product to process, and this can encourage self-understanding and promote the empowerment of dancers (2020, 137).

This connection between focusing on the internal experiences of dancing and empowerment is further explored in some articles emphasizing the

need to *facilitate embodied knowing and sensory authority*. Fortin writes that the role of the teacher “is to facilitate students’ process of becoming expert of their own bodies and lives by interrogating and analysing their own experience” (1998, 65). She ties bodily awareness to the development of personal authority, which provides leverage for empowerment (1998, 66). Other authors have similar arguments:

A heightened proprioceptive awareness is a way to reclaim ownership of the body (Green 1999, 81), and it enables the participants to have further control over their movement exploration and empowers them within their own bodies (Richmond and Bird 2020, 137). By this, the students are encouraged to rely on their own subjective experiences as a source of knowledge and the acknowledgement of a bodily level of meaning (Fortin 1998, 61). The connection between critical thinking and embodiment is emphasized by some authors: “When we see the dancer as embodied rather than made of body and mind, we can better realize the moving dancer is critically thinking and analysing as she or he moves” (Akinleye and Payne 2016, 147). Dryburgh and Jackson focus on cyclical learning through combining embodied experiences and reflection in practice. They use dialogic and investigative feedback as a way to envision embodied knowing (2016, 136). Burnidge writes, “Somatic study gives voice to the body and to movement as a way of knowing” (2012, 45). She explains the connection between embodiment and empowerment like this: Somatic practice brings awareness of inner sensations, movements, thoughts and feeling, and mind–body connections. Thus, “A somatic approach to dance seeks to facilitate an environment where students can be supported to discover self-agency and the inner empowerment that sensory authority can engender” (Burnidge 2012, 44).

## Conclusion

The analysis of the articles has shown that there is a relatively high interest in both continuing and reforming the teaching of dance technique. There is a growing field of empirical research regarding power dynamics and student empowerment in higher education.

This provides an important base for further research regarding the further development of the teaching of dance technique. This article contributes to this field of research by providing an overview of existing research and by identifying the concrete strategies the articles suggest. I have identified three clusters of strategies in the material: *reflexivity of traditions in dance*, *activity*, and *embodiment*. *Reflexivity of traditions in dance* is an important starting point, as hidden traditions might otherwise easily be an obstacle to change. *Activity* is by far the biggest and most worked through, corresponding to a heightened emphasis on student-centred learning in higher education. This body of research provides many relevant suggestions for further empirical explorations. However, the challenge with students’ expectations seems to be a common problem that needs to be addressed more. The question of *embodiment* is visible in the material, but it seems to be harder to grasp and it is less worked out in these mainly pedagogical-oriented articles. I will argue that there is a need for more research on the connection between embodiment and empowerment within dance education and that a more thorough use of theory about embodiment, such as phenomenology, could provide an even more in-depth understanding of the topic.

## References

- Akinleye, Adesola, and Payne, Rose. 2016. "Transactional Space. Feedback, Critical Thinking, and Learning Dance Technique." *Journal of Dance Education* 16 (4): 144–148.
- Alterowitz, Gretchen. 2014. "Toward a Feminist Ballet Pedagogy: Teaching Strategies for Ballet Technique Classes in the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of Dance Education* 14 (1): 8–17.
- Barr, Robert, and Tagg, John. 1995. "From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 27 (6): 12–26.
- Barr, Sherrie, and Oliver, Wendy. 2016. "Feminist Pedagogy, Body Image, and the Dance Technique Class." *Research in Dance Education* 17 (2): 97–112.
- Biggs, John, and Tang, Catherine. 2011. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 4th ed. Berkshire: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Burnidge, Anne. 2012. "Somatics in the Dance Studio: Embodying Feminist/Democratic Pedagogy." *Journal of Dance Education* 12 (2): 37–47.
- Dragon, Donna A. 2015. "Creating Cultures of Teaching and Learning: Conveying Dance and Somatic Education Pedagogy." *Journal of Dance Education* 15 (1): 25–32.
- Dryburg, Jamieson. 2019. "Location of Possibilities. Exploring Dance Technique Pedagogy Through Transformation and Care." *Journal of Dance Education* 19 (3): 89–97.
- Dryburg, Jamieson, and Jackson, Louise H. 2016. "Building a Practice of Learning Together: Expanding the Functions of Feedback with the Use of the Flipchart in Contemporary Dance Technique." *Research in Dance Education* 17 (2): 130–144.
- Dyer, Becky. 2009. "Merging Traditional Technique Vocabularies with Democratic Teaching Perspectives in Dance Education: A Consideration of Aesthetic Values and Their Sociopolitical Contexts." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43 (4): 108–123.
- Dyer, Becky. 2010. "The Perils, Privileges and Pleasures of Seeking Right from Wrong: Reflecting upon Student Perspectives of Social Processes, Value Systems, Agency and the Becoming of Identity in the Dance Technique Classroom." *Research in Dance Education* 11 (2): 109–129.
- Fitzgerald, Mary. 2017. "Community to Classroom. Reflections on Community-Centred Pedagogy in Contemporary Modern Dance Technique." *Journal of Dance Education* 17 (1): 1–7.
- Fortin, Sylvie. 1998. "Somatic: A Tool for Empowering Modern Dance Teachers." In *Dance. Power, and Difference. Critical and Feminist Perspectives on Dance Education*, edited by Sherry B. Shapiro, 49–71. Champaign: Human Kinetics.
- Green, Jill. 1999. "Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body." *Dance Research Journal* 31 (2): 80–100.
- Harbonnier-Topin, Nicole, and Barbier, Jean-Marie. 2012. "'How Seeing Helps Doing, and Doing Allows to See More': The Process of Imitation in the Dance Class." *Research in Dance Education* 13 (3): 301–325.
- Huddy, Avril. 2017. "Digital Technology in the Tertiary Dance Technique Studio: Expanding Student Engagement through Collaborative and Co-creative Experiences." *Research in Dance Education* 18 (2): 174–189.
- Lakes, Robin. 2005. "The Message behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogic Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals." *Arts Education Policy Review* 106 (5): 3–18.
- Lepecki, André. 2016. *Singularities. Dance in the Age of Performance*. Oxon: Routledge.

- Råman, Tanja. 2009. "Collaborative Learning in the Dance Technique Class." *Research in Dance Education* 10 (1): 75–87.
- Richmond, Courtney, and Bird, Kaylee. 2020. "Dance Teaching Pedagogy: A Time for Change." *Dance Research Aotearoa* 6:129–145.
- Rimmer, Rachel. 2013. "Improvising with Material in the Higher Education Dance Technique Class: Exploration and Ownership." *Journal of Dance Education* 13 (4): 143–146.
- Rimmer, Rachel. 2017. "Negotiating the Rules of Engagement: Exploring Perceptions of Dance Technique Learning through Bourdieu's Concept of 'Doxa'." *Research in Dance Education* 18 (2): 221–236.
- Smith, Clyde. 1998. "On Authoritarianism in the Dance Classroom." In *Dance, Power, and Difference. Critical and Feminist Perspectives on Dance Education*, edited by Sherry B. Shapiro, 123–146. Champaign: Human Kinetics.
- Sutton, Anthea, Clowes, Mark, Preston, Louise, and Booth, Andrew. 2019. "Meeting the Review Family: Exploring Review Types and Associated Information Retrieval Requirements." *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 36:202–222.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Irene Velten Rothmund**, PhD, is currently working as an associate professor at the Department of Performing Arts, Kristiania University College. She holds a PhD in Theatre and Dances studies from Stockholm University (2019) and an MA from the NoMads programme, NTNU (2009). She was educated as a dancer and dance teacher at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts

and the European Dance Development Centre in the Netherlands, and she has been working as a dancer and dance teacher for more than 20 years. She is currently chair of the Nordic Forum for Dance Research (NOFOD). [irenevelten.rothmund@kristiania.no](mailto:irenevelten.rothmund@kristiania.no).



# Choreographing Histories: Critical Perspectives on Dance Histories in Nordic Dance Practices and Scholarship

Hanna Järvinen Lena Hammergren, Elizabeth Svarstad, Petri Hoppu and Astrid von Rosen

This text is based on a roundtable organised by the five authors at the 2022 NOFOD conference in Copenhagen. As scholars and practitioners invested in the research and teaching of dance history both inside and outside academia, we wanted to address the pressing issue of how 'history' is defined and positioned within Nordic dance scholarship and practices today. Dance, as we think of it and practise it in our everyday lives, is far more diverse than the so-called 'contemporary dance' that the white authors listed as scholars and practitioners in the conference call indicate.<sup>1</sup> For this roundtable, we wanted to show that dance theory and practice-led work in dance go far beyond the Eurocentric idea of contemporary dance present in the conference call, and to advocate for a more inclusive understanding of the practices of making or researching dance in the future.

Our work arises (1) from this broader understanding of dance in previous inter-Nordic research and education projects, such as the Dance in Nordic Spaces research project or the Nordic Master of Arts in Dance Studies programme, which treated different forms, traditions, and practices of dance as equally valuable and (2) from our cross-disciplinary, activist work conducted in resonance with the globally emerging domains of critical archival and critical heritage studies, in which we have focused on the precarious heritage of previously undervalued ways of dancing and people who have been entirely excluded from official (national) histories of dance.

Consequently, our title shifts Susan Leigh Foster's 1995 book *Choreographing History* into the plural, indicating how, a quarter of a century later, we dance historians must question whose histories we tell, how, and for whom, as well as what kind of archives and documents these histories are based on and how they can be put in motion by our interpretative work.

Instead of a traditional academic article, the following can be considered an intervention, one in which we five authors address how dance lives and breathes in our practices and the connections between our dancing bodies and our scholarly, pedagogical and artistic endeavours. Specifically, we have been thinking of dance through the general shift in historiography from national narratives to a more comprehensive understanding of 'the Norden' as a shared geographic and historical location; as well as the shift from ethnonationalist histories towards a more inclusive understanding of locality (e.g., Vedel 2011). Addressing performance practices as inherently internationally interconnected, we ask what these intercultural discourses signify in the contexts of dance in 'the Norden'. In this way, we hope to emphasise that diversity is, indeed, a strength.

To briefly introduce our individual interests, Lena Hammergren has been working on archives of spectatorship, that is, the (historical) roles of the spectator as a constitutive part of (documenting) choreography. This is not just a theoretical interest but, rather, something that she finds crucial to

1 The names listed in the call were Susan Foster, André Lepecki, Andrew Hewitt, Mette Ingvarsten, William Forsythe, Steve Paxton, Bojana Cvejic, Ali B. Duffy and Alison Beaty. On the repercussions of such limited perspectives, see, e.g., Chatterjea 2020.

discuss with students in courses on historiographical methodology. To think of choreography as an extended concept, as we often do today, invites us to imagine what part spectators play in a performance, who they are, and also what we consider worth documenting and how spectatorship could be made part of an archive.

Elizabeth Svarstad is a dancer, choreographer, and researcher in the field of historical dance and dance history. She teaches at the Norwegian Academy of Music and at the Academy of Opera at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Her research in and on dance and social education in the eighteenth century has revealed the importance of dance in Norway at the time. She is concerned about a mistaken assumption that Norway has a short dance history and questions how this assumption can be changed when, for example, Norway's higher education institutions in dance have long ignored the teaching of historical dances.

Petri Hoppu focuses on the role of dance ethnography and social dance practice in historical research on Skolt Saami dance culture. He examines how local perspectives on past and present dancing can create possibilities for indigenous dissent and resistance. He is currently working to promote Skolt Saami dance culture with Skolt activists and scholars from the Giellagas Institute for Saami Studies at the University of Oulu. This work includes, for example, participation in organising a dancing exhibition with a theme of the Skolt quadrille at the Skolt Saami Museum Ávv in Neiden, Norway, and making archival material containing Skolts' dances available to them.

Astrid von Rosen conducts her research within a critical-heritage-studies context, a domain that seeks to unravel and shift the brutalities of dominant, white, Eurocentric history-making. She is currently engaged in combining dance practices with archival studies and digital methodologies to explore the

life, work and legacy of black dance artist Claude Marchant (1919–2004). By doing so, her contribution rejects the historical exclusion of a major black artist who worked across continents and devoted over 30 years of his career to developing African-derived dance, showdance and dance theatre, in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Hanna Järvinen teaches at a department of artistic research, a field that very much struggles with its Eurocentric bias. Her work has focused on ideas of othering in art dance, specifically questions regarding the use of racist stereotypes or the construction of nationality on stage through costume and choreography. She is concerned with who get left out of hegemonic histories and why; how authorship or expertise are defined; and how colonialism, nationalism, gender and social class intersect in the various stagings of the past in the present and for the future.

## Expanding Choreography? Theorising Spectatorship in Relation to Choreography and Historiography

Lena Hammergren

This presentation reflects on the kind of performance documentation scholars place in archives and what kind of dance histories the archives then support. It thereby adds to Hanna Järvinen's discussion, as described at the end of this article, regarding who is left out of history and what kind of documents are left behind, as well as to Astrid von Rosen's notion of transforming affect into substantial documentation.

Let me begin by posing a question: What if we would include spectatorship in the conceptualisation and archiving of 'choreography'? I ask this in relation to how dance communities today define the concept of an expanded choreography, that is, how 'the meaning of choreography has transformed from

referring to a set of protocols or tools used in order to produce something predetermined, i.e., a dance, to an open cluster of tools that can be used in a generic capacity for both analysis and production.’ This is how the Expanded Choreography conference in Barcelona advertised itself in 2012. In addition, we encounter performances today, many of which include audience participation and other immersive activities. I would argue that they have situated spectators as embodied subjects, not as passive observers. However, this change of viewpoint has mostly disregarded the audience in terms of how the documentation of contemporary choreography enters the archive, as well as the domain of dance history. Thus, one could argue that the concept of choreography has not been expanded to the degree one might think given current discussions.

To reflect on the initial question, I must consider theorizations of spectatorship and the manner in which they have disrupted how we view what constitutes choreographies. Ramsay Burt (2009, 6) has argued that US dance scholarship (from the 1980s and 90s) has problematised normative assumptions about the way spectators perceive dance performances, which has, I would add, in turn, disrupted ideas about choreography as an autonomous entity. Note that this occurred before various dance communities began to discuss expanded choreography. The scholars Ann Daly (1987) and Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996) have argued that female viewers and African-American audiences, respectively, are excluded from appreciating works by, for example, George Balanchine, because of the aesthetics of his choreographies.

It is not a question of not being able to appreciate particular dances because of their identitarian aspects but, rather, one of acknowledging the “way beholders use their embodied knowledge to process corporeal information as they watch dance” (Burt 2009, 4). Consequently, you are at fault if you

consider choreography apart from its audiences or various contexts/cultural values, which interact with audience expectations. Thus, I could ask the following question: What kind of contextual information could be used to form an *integral* (not an additional) part of ‘choreography’? The word ‘context’ is a bit tricky. When used by dance anthropologists, it is often conceived of as a stable concept, using which one can place dancing in ever-widening contextual horizons. Here, the different contexts are perceived as stable, although they are different from one another. Also, the work or the dancing itself remains static, with a stable interior.

In contrast, it is possible to conceive of context as a fluid, constantly changing concept, and Randy Martin (1998, 58) proposes that there is *no stability* between a dance’s interiority and exteriority, that they are continuously interweaving. Based on this, Martin created a method he called ‘overreading’, a form of analysis that appropriates ‘the internal movement of dance as an organizing principle in the conceptual ordering of context’ (Martin 1998, 55 – in an analysis of Bill T. Jones’s and Arnie Zane’s *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land* from 1990).

Continuing from these perspectives, what can be said about the consequences of conceptualising ‘choreography’, dance history and the archive in relation to my initial question? I suggest considering ideas about fluid contexts and the meeting of the interior and exterior of a choreography and combining them with the proposal that we, as audience members, use our ‘embodied knowledge to process corporeal information’ (Burt 2009) as we watch a dance performance.

I will use a short example to explain this further, one situated in older dance history. In an earlier NOFOD presentation (Gothenburg, 2017), I analysed Swedish reviews of Isadora Duncan’s performances in Stockholm in 1906. Instead of

repeating her canonical and ‘universal’ position in dance history, I read her dancing through the subtext of how it was encountered by her viewers. In short, I argued that, especially in female writings, an embodied viewing practice (i.e., the performance’s exterior) could be seen, one that matched the performance’s interior (Isadora’s dancing), to use Martin’s terminology. This leads me to question how one could conceive of this historical past. Should it be the imaginations of Duncan’s dancing alone that define her choreography in the historical archive as a universal and pioneering work, or should it be placed in a geographical, locally positioned meeting point (in urban Sweden) between its interior and exterior—in my example, in its capacity to speak in a particular way to only female audiences?

Consequently, I argue that the approach we take will affect what we place in the archives today and how future dance histories will be narrated. In fact, I find several examples of work by dance scholars that, in different ways, approach the same or a similar topic. One example is Astrid von Rosen and her various projects on performing the archive of dance in Gothenburg. It is also addressed by Josefine Löfblad, a Swedish PhD candidate, who writes about Mette Ingvartsen’s performances and how audiences have been invited to create a kind of collective body-archive (Löfblad 2018). Another example is practitioner-researcher Funmi Adewole Elliott (2020), who speaks about “choreography as a practice of cultural citizenship” and how dance comes into being in the public sphere (in an intimate connection with its audiences) when analysing work by Thomas ‘Talawa’ Prestø. Together, these scholars question the definitions of choreography in relation to contexts and audiences, and I see this as one step toward truly expanding the concept of choreography and asking ourselves how it can best be archived.

## “Norway Has a Short Dance History”

Elizabeth Svarstad

It is a common assumption that Norway has a short dance history. This statement is used widely, without being contested or discussed.

As a teacher and dance artist in the field of historical dances and dance history, I have often encountered the statement. I have felt the need to prove and justify the value of early history in both higher education and the performing arts. Not only dance history but dance history in practice—the bodily experience of reconstructing dances based on historical sources—is undoubtedly valuable for dance students. Through knowing our history, we can understand why we are doing what we are doing as dance artists today. Therefore, the assumption that Norway has a short dance history can hamper students and artists attempting to explore and learn about our field’s history. Why does the assumption that Norway has a short dance history seem to remain common?

A google search for ‘Norwegian dance history’ [norsk dansehistorie] leads to examples and statements like this: ‘The history of professional dance in Norway is relatively short’ (The Ministry of Culture and Equality, 2013), ‘Norway is a young country with a short dance history’ (Scenekunst. no 2014), ‘Norway has a short “stage” or theatre dance history’ (Arts Council Norway 2015) and ‘The art of dance in Norway has a short history’ (Danseinformasjonen and the CODA festival).

The statement seems to be based on the fact that the national ballet company in Norway was established as late as 1958 and, therefore, the history is short. Norway’s neighbouring countries, Denmark and Sweden, have had national ballets and royal theatres since the eighteenth century. If a national ballet company should be the parameter that defines

a country's dance history and if the situation in Norway is compared to those of Denmark and Sweden, it is clear that Norway has a short dance history. However, following the theme of this article, it is high time this assumption and the way such assumptions continue to be expressed—especially the way our field is safeguarding its own history—be challenged.

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely how the assumption “Norway has a short dance history” became a common statement, and finding ways to change it is difficult.

The book *Historien om norsk ballett (The History of Norwegian Ballet)*, written in 1989 by Valdemar Hansteen, may have contributed to the assumption's establishment, or at least, it has not helped change it. He states, “we cannot discount that Norway has a less glorious ballet history than its neighbour countries Denmark and Sweden” (Hansteen 1989, 5). It is not my intention to reproach him for causing the assumption that Norway has a short history. After all, he points to the work of teachers and choreographers and the work that we do not see on stage but is necessary for the visual results presented on stage. He also mentions what he names ‘the anonymous part of the tradition’—according to him, ‘second-rate’ dance, by which he means dance as a part of shows, theatre performances, operettas, and other types of entertainment.

Dance on rock carvings, dance in the middle ages, dance teachers in the eighteenth century and some itinerant dance troupes are also mentioned in the introduction as part of the early history of dance in Norway. Nevertheless, when Hansteen compares the history of ballet in Norway to those of Sweden and Denmark, he holds that Norway's 30 years of ballet history (as of 1989) is in an entirely different league.

Lena Hammergren points out, in her book, that it is interesting to see how dance historians have chosen to introduce and conclude their texts

and what views on dance, culture and society are reflected in those choices (Hammergren 2009, 9). She also writes that it is interesting to see how obvious certain explanations for the origin of dance have been repeated in text after text. This is exactly what happened in Norway, thus showing a national example of the phenomenon.

There are few books on the early dance history of Norway. Of other books on dance history, Egil Bakka has written *Europeisk dansehistorie (European Dance History)*. In this thorough and excellent book, he includes information from the earliest traces of dance in history up to our modern day. Through the book, he provides a significant amount of information on popular dance and folk dance, alongside the social dance of the upper class and the impact of European dance in Norway. This book is the richest and most informative book on Norwegian dance history. However, it is written for the dance curriculum in Norwegian high schools, as is the case for Roy Lie Jonassen's *Dansens historie (The History of Dance)*, another book written especially for the high school curriculum. Therefore, it may not have the force needed to contest the established assumptions. Although we see new dance research uncovering more and more facts regarding the situation for dance in the eighteenth century, for example, there still is much work to be done.

Institutions in Norway should also take responsibility for how historical practices are maintained in their own activities, higher dance education, as well as the Opera and theatre institutions. We continually see examples in which the music, singing and text and, often, also period costumes in, for example, the works of Shakespeare or Handel, are performed in so-called historically informed practice. In contrast, the body and its movements and dance are detached from the setting and almost always presented without the slightest hint of knowledge about past movement practices.

In an interview published on the Danseinformasjonen website, journalist Thea Ericson Aarnes (2022) asked what position historical dances have in the field of dance. One of the facts that was pointed out is that, while music students in Oslo and elsewhere in Norway have lessons in baroque dance, dance students are no longer taught dances from early dance history. She points out that it is interesting to see how the field of music appreciates dance in education, while paradoxically, it appears as if the field of dance is undermining its own past, which is interesting and sad at the same time.

How can we hope for the assumption to change? More research must be done, and the field must take collective responsibility for strengthening and acknowledging history and, likewise, refer to, use and increase respect for events and activities related to dance, beyond highlighting institutions such as the national ballet companies.

## Skolt Saami Dance and Scholars' Role

Petri Hoppu

Nordic national dance narratives leave Saami<sup>1</sup> groups almost totally beyond their scope. Typically, it is stated that the Saami do not have any dance history of their own (e.g., Bergholm 1977, 26). Skolts' dances have been admitted to be an exception to the dominant narrative, but even their dance culture has been ignored.

Skolts are one of the three Saami groups in Finland. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, they have danced popular couple and group dances, mainly of Russian origin, as an essential part of their culture. Traditionally danced by four couples

in a square, the quadrille is the best-known of the Skolts' dances and was prevalent until the Second World War (Hoppu 2020, 29–30).

Skolts' cultural and social reality changed gradually throughout the nineteenth century, when the surrounding colonial powers, Sweden, Norway, and Russia, began to draw and close their borders in Sápmi, the land of the Saami. Skolts' territories were among those that hit the hardest (Linkola and Sammallahti 1995, 48–51.) In 1920, the border between recently independent Finland and Soviet Russia was drawn as a straight line through the Skolts' homeland, and half of them came under Finnish jurisdiction, in the Pechenga region, and the other half came under Soviet rule (Lehtola 2002, 66). Finally, as a part of the peace treaty between the Soviet Union and Finland after the Second World War, the Pechenga Skolts were evacuated to the west and settled in the eastern parts of the municipality of Inari, in Finland (Lehtola 2004, 44–62).

After the war, the Skolts' dance culture faded because they did not want to stand out from other ethnic groups in their new places of residence. However, as a part of the Saami cultural renaissance that began in the late 1960s, they started to revitalize their dances (Hoppu 2020, 32–33). Two performing dance groups emerged in the 1970s, and initially, most of their dancers had been born in Pechenga, so they knew the dances since their early childhoods (Rausmaa 1978/1979).

The biggest questions, in the 1970s and today, concern the struggle for survival: How can the Skolts avoid complete assimilation into the dominant Finnish culture? How can such a small but distinct ethnic group survive in modern society? What is Finnish scholars' role in this development?

---

1 There are several options for the spelling of the word Saami in Saami languages. The Giellagas Institute for Saami Language and Cultural Studies recommends "Saami" in English because this spelling is considered neutral, that is, not emphasising any particular language.

For researchers of Saami culture, it is extremely important to be aware of the biases that emerge from one's background if one is a member of the dominant culture. Michael Hart (2010, 5–11), a Cree nation scholar and indigenous rights advocate, points out the states dominating indigenous peoples' territories inevitably destabilise their worldview, for example, through research and education. To counter this development, he maintains that it is necessary to integrate the indigenous perspective into research, recognizing local values and aspirations, and to secure real opportunities for participation and influence among the members of such communities. Researchers Lydia Heikkilä and Tuuli Miettunen (2016), from the University of Lapland, emphasise that the Saami have the right to influence the production of information about themselves and their public image. Saami research is never neutral, but it has consequences for the Saami people, and these must always be taken into account.

Regarding the survival of Skolt Saami dances and the research related to it, I will turn to Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's (1996) ideas about how Mesoamerican culture has survived. He refers to three modes of struggle in Mexico. The first of these modes is resistance, in which the subaltern aim to preserve one's own decision-making capacity and cultural patrimony (Bonfil Batalla 1996, 132–135).

The resistance against the dominant culture has most clearly taken place in the form of prohibitions against the use of Skolts' documented folklore material that is preserved in the most prominent Finnish tradition archive in Helsinki. To explain the background of these prohibitions, I must clarify that, at the end of the 1970s, the Skolts' traditional dances were documented in detail by Finnish researchers. However, when the material was stored in the archive, it was stated that it was not allowed to be used for folklorist purposes. This prohibition still exists today. This ideological position

was supported by many Skolts and Finnish scholars who feared that the cultural products of the Skolts would be abused by, for example, Finnish folklore groups. This had already happened in neopaganism at the time, so there were very concrete reasons for this fear. The resistance to outsiders using the Skolts' folklore material is still apparent today, though the essentialist stance has weakened significantly. Nevertheless, the Skolts still find it awkward that, for example, Finnish folklore groups with no Skolt members would perform the quadrille because the dance is seen as strongly connected to Skolt culture, especially when performed in Skolt costumes. (Hoppu 2020, 34–35.)

The second mode of struggle is the constant and selective appropriation of foreign cultural elements (Bonfil Batalla 1996, 135–137). The formation of folk dance groups in the 1970s was already a form of appropriation because the Skolts incorporated folklorist dance activities from the Finnish culture to revitalise their dances, whose original contexts had disappeared. At the end of the 1990s, children at the Sevetijärvi elementary school began learning the quadrille. Thus, despite once being the primary fortress of the dominant Finnish culture, the local school became a source of cultural learning for the Skolts. They could now use the educational system in a way they never had before. Moreover, the quadrille was one of the themes in the workshops held during the international Skolt Saami language and culture conference in Inari, in June 2012. During the last few years, the Skolt quadrille has been rehearsed in courses that the Skolts living in the capital region have arranged in Helsinki (Hoppu 2020, 35–38). Recently, activists have also published an instruction manual for the quadrille (Saxholm, Moshnikoff and Gauriloff, 2022).

The third mode, innovation, refers to creativity, which allows the forging of new elements and the modification of older ones, enabling subtle

cultural adjustments to changes in the framework of oppression and aggression within which the minorities live (Bonfil Batalla 1996, 138). Contemporary Skolts develop new hybrid forms of culture, fusing, for example, traditional forms of Skolt singing and rock music (Oksanen 2005). The quadrille is now danced in more versatile contexts, and it may be done in different compositions, for example, with two couples. Traditionally, the dance was accompanied by mouth organ or accordion. Today, however, accompaniment by bands with violins, electric guitars, and other instruments are common. Music and dance can be combined in forms that have never been seen and heard before.

Through the modes of resistance, appropriation, and innovation, local perspectives on past and present Skolts' dancing can create possibilities for indigenous dissent. Scholars from the majority culture can support this development, for example, by providing material with which to revive Skolt dance traditions. As a tiny community, the Skolts need support from Finnish scholars, but development must occur in terms of the Skolts' conditions. It is essential to let the formerly silenced voices of the Skolt Saami be heard in defining how to develop their dance culture. This can be achieved through a constant dialogue between the Skolts and scholars, recognising the Skolts and as the agents and experts in their dances.

## **Caring for Claude Marchant: Practising Black Dance History- Making in a Very White Context**

Astrid von Rosen

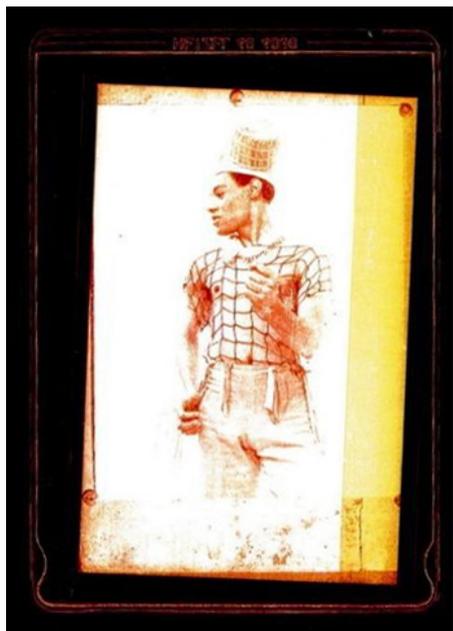
My contribution to this roundtable concerns activist ways of practising black dance history-making in an equally Swedish and international (e.g., cross-continental) context. Together with local (Gothenburg) practitioners, I have explored the life and legacy of international black dancer, choreographer, singer,

actor and costume maker Claude Marchant (1919–2004). Addressing the critical historiographical issues brought forth by Hanna Järvinen in her section of this round table, Marchant exemplifies 'people and dances that have been *excluded from histories*' (For my previous scholarly publications on Marchant, please see von Rosen 2021b and 2022).

My research aims to reject the historical exclusion of a major black artist—one almost completely excluded from history—by posing asking how to best unravel and shift the lack of substantial black dance histories in our Nordic context and beyond. My contribution is both critically (in order to instigate change) potent and innovative in how it combines recent critical archival theory (Caswell and Cifor 2016; Gilliland, McKemish and Lau 2017; von Rosen 2017a and b) and black dance history (Burt 2020; Clarke and Johnson 2006; DeFrantz 2002; Johnson 2016; Sharpe 2016) alongside participatory approaches (Findley 2017; Flinn 2011; Flinn and von Rosen 2023, Sexton 2015) to dance history making. Since 2013, my research has been engaged in developing activist and Dig Where You Stand (e.g., participatory history making from below) approaches to dance archives and archiving (von Rosen 2017a; von Rosen 2020b; von Rosen 2021a and b; von Rosen 2022).

An important method applied throughout the Marchant project has been to purposefully juxtapose his personal life stories, as well as the stories told and dances conducted by his dancers and other collaborators, with the results derived from in-depth archival explorations and scholarly analysis. This is what my research proposes: in including Marchant's own writings and the voices and movements of a selection of dancers and collaborators, the exploration becomes a critical montage that can set ethnonationalist and simply unfair dance heritage history in motion.

To provide an overview of the extensive, cross-continental research endeavour I am conducting,



*Practice example 1: Claude Marchant and the Canon. Dance artist Claude Marchant is featured in this experimental collage. Courtesy of the Claude Marchant Archive. © Bo Westerholm.*

first, the research explores Marchant's path to dance and early career in a poor, racist and homophobic United States. He danced with the legendary Katherine Dunham and starred on Broadway before touring South America, the Middle East and Europe with his own dance group and conducting cross-genre work in Italy. Second, I draw on international exploration to demonstrate the relevance of Marchant's work in Sweden from 1967 onwards. Marchant employed African-derived dance, political dance theatre and show dance to give dancers a career outside the elitist ballet world. Taken together, my research has an overall objective of making a significant contribution to the interconnected domain of globally oriented critical archival studies and performing arts historiography.

As space here is limited, in the following, I will contribute three examples from the frontiers of my networked research practice. Let us enter the archive and begin grappling with the canon in relation to the practices of black dance history-making.

Here, I present an image representing how the non-canonical history of the performing arts emerges

from the archive, in this case the private archive of Claude Marchant and Bo Westerholm, Marchant's partner in life (see also von Rosen 2022, 132–134). While the image contains no date or other details explaining its context, it has a vibrant quality, featuring an artistic moment from Marchant's extensive career. If more closely examined, the image is clearly an experimental montage featuring a young Claude Marchant in warm red and brown hues, wearing a net top, trousers decorated with ribbons and a pill box hat. The background is very light, as if overexposed, and on the image sides, we see yellow and orange-brown sections, some heads of screws and an outline reminiscent of a slide. In particular, it is a type of image that falls outside of canon, an image that will not be selected for theatre exhibitions featuring predominantly white theatre histories. In other words, the image is layered with reasons for it being excluded from the canon. Tellingly, this image was rejected by the organisers of a talk on independent performing arts in a Swedish context. Instead, they wanted a picture featuring white actors from a canonised theatre group wearing pig masks and pink tutus (this is discussed more extensively in von Rosen 2022, 134–135). In an ongoing exhibition on the independent performing arts at a major museum, only one photo of Marchant (whose legacy and contribution to dance are huge) was included, without any additional information. Tellingly, the canonised, white theatre group was extensively featured in the marketing, as well as the exhibition space.

This example shows how the canon operates, or weaves its fabric, via the repetition of images (e.g., those of the white theatre group), that is, via aesthetics. How, then, can this thick fabric be cut up and rearranged in new, more just and more inclusive ways? I suggest that,



*Practiced example 2: Speculative Futures Seminar and workshop to activate Claude Marchant's archive, November 12, 2019 at the University of Gothenburg. © Astrid von Rosen*

by exploring the choice and circulation of images, we can expose how the canon operates and pinpoint what scholars and other history makers can address when they want to change history. Now, I will move on to the second example from my networked, collaborative, practice-inclusive archival and activist research.

This colour photograph shows participants dancing during a research seminar and Dig Where You Stand/Dance Where You Dig archival activation workshop (this method is further described and analysed in von Rosen 2019b). These activities took place at the University of Gothenburg, on November 12, 2019, as part of an extensive celebration in memory of Claude Marchant (1919–2004). The scholarly seminar was led by me, and Bo Westerholm led the practice-based workshop, which was aimed at physically testing some of Marchant's dance movements. Old bodies, as archives, were activated, and dance knowledge, in various ways, was transmitted to new bodily archives (the bodies of the participants not previously acquainted with Marchant's dance).

On a large screen, a black-and-white photograph (see p. 41) was shown featuring Marchant and some of his first students at the Ballet Academy in Gothenburg. Marchant's frozen movement seen in the photograph,

functioned as a source of inspiration for the workshop. As shown in the colour photograph, the participants engaged vividly in the bodily research activities.

What I want to suggest here is that the physical activation of movements in and beyond the black-and-white photograph in a very direct way opens up space for speculative futures regarding Marchant's legacy. Our actions demonstrated that it is possible to give space to people and dances excluded from mainstream performing arts history, such as Claude Marchant, including the thick fabric of African-derived dances, dance theatre, choreography for gymnastics, fashion and night club shows, disco competitions, singing, acting and people he worked with. As dance scholars and other engaged persons, we must also understand the value of Marchant's huge networks, friendships and many hours of teaching dance classes and making costumes. As space is very limited here, for more information and data on Marchant, please visit my Expansion and Diversity project's open access research database: <https://expansion.dh.gu.se/organization/361> (accessed 2022-11-21).

The next colour photograph (see p. 42) shows



an outdoor Dig Where You Stand/Dance Where You Dig archival activation on the evening of November 12, 2019, in memory of Claude Marchant. We danced the conga in Kungsgatan Street, at number 15, where Baletakademin had its first studio, which was used from 1967 to 1968. The participating dance and research activists were as follows: Bo Westerholm, Barbro Carelius Hallgren, Pia Thörngren, Anita Synnstedt, Marie Apelberg, Kristina Klausson, Mayvor Thorin, Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt, Gun Lund, Astrid von Rosen, Eleonore Lind and Eva Ingemarsson, who took the photograph and, therefore, is not visible among the conga dancers. These cross-border and collaborative participants represented Claude Marchant's family and colleagues, academic researchers and first- and second-generation students who danced for Claude Marchant.

Theoretically, this quotation from the critical archival research domain helps to sum up my scholarly stance, as practically demonstrated above: 'Radical empathy offers a way to engage with others' experiences that involves discarding the assumption that we share with them the same modal space of belonging in the world' (Caswell and Cifor 2016, 31). What emerged during the project of creating a history

of Marchant can be understood as a 'network of care'

*Claude Marchant and students in the Gothenburg Ballet Academy's dance studio, late 1960s. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Claude Marchant archive. © Bo Westerholm.*

(Dekker 2023; von Rosen 2020a; von Rosen 2019a). Such a network of care is fluid, as in moving and living, but quite sustainable. Within it, collaboration across time, place and practice, as in dance and academic research, can continue to craft powerful histories beyond the canon.

While the 'network of care' only represents a sliver of all the theory invested in my project, I believe that the concept manages to sum up what is at stake as we strive to forge a new dance history path involving very diverse practices and heritages. For those directly involved in canon critique and research, my goal is to work together in a network, keep digging, keep transforming affect into substantial data, and keep making the findings publicly accessible. My experience is that the digital realm is useful because it facilitates this process to a great degree. I argue that every research-based dataset, no matter how tiny, that is added to a relational, open access, post-custodial database contributes to an apparatus that, now and



for future stakeholders, will help challenge the canon. To accomplish the desired change, I believe we have to deliberately explore dance that has not been archived in major institutions. We must care about archival fragments, archival mess, and all sorts of bodies as archives. To have an inclusive dance history, we must make a firm and brave decision not to begin with the safe and familiar, namely canonised white theatre groups that are loved by the media, audience members with strong voices, and archival institutions that willingly care for their own legacies.

My research represents the first comprehensive study of Marchant encompassing his entire cross-continental career and lasting relevance. I demonstrate that, by choosing the relatively unknown but nevertheless major dance artist Marchant as an exemplary case study, a new performing arts history for a globalizing world emerges, one capable of unravelling and changing increasingly irrelevant white, Eurocentric dance and cultural heritage narratives. I argue for the crucial importance of understanding as many diverse aspects of Marchant's

*Practiced example 3. Archival activism  
Dance activation of Claude Marchant's archive by way  
of a Conga at Kungsgatan, in Gothenburg, November  
12, 2019. © Eva Ingemarsson.*

life and work as possible. Therefore, I strive to examine different kinds of dances and dancers, diverse practices of performance making, pedagogy, marketing, friendships, business relations, and funding.

To conclude, I find it urgent to problematise performing arts history's failure to include extensive, cross-continental—and always local—histories, such as Marchant's. A vital asset of my activist history-making practice is that it makes accessible unique archival materials and hitherto unpublished life stories pertaining to dance lives. This matters because it is evident that the voices and bodies of practitioners, such as Marchant himself, his students, and collaborators, have relatively low status in canonization processes. Now, let us move on to Hanna Järvinen, who will further explain why this roundtable is critical.

## **Histories of Exclusion and**

## Inclusion

Hanna Järvinen

First, a simple recommendation not invented by me. In fact, I actually cannot remember where I first heard of it.

Instead of speaking of the dances of ‘minorities’ or ‘the marginalised’ or even the entire Global South, speak of people and dances that have been *excluded from histories*.

The difference is subtle but important. First, stressing that history is as it is written *separates the general pastness of the past from history*, which is a construct in the present narrating that past. By this, I mean that, as a historian, I know that even the most boringly conservative of archives contain materials that directly contradict textbook versions of history. Archives are full of surprising opinions, chance encounters, people and dances one has never heard of before. Any history is always *post factum*, created with 20/20 hindsight and never neutral.

Second, stressing exclusion points to how these histories are *quite deliberately* selective and always authored by certain interested parties – not always historians in the sense of the academic discipline but, for example, politicians, teachers and journalists. The people who are historically excluded are the *majority*, not the minority, of people. In dance, they are the *mainstream*, not the margin (e.g., Dodds 2011, especially 18–21; Chatterjea 2020, 1–23).

Thus, speaking of those people and dances that have been excluded from histories also draws attention to how history places value on and privileges only what, in the Global North, is labelled ‘art’ and, even within that, a tiny fraction of the people who created that art. My earlier research has focused on authorship and canonisation, the process by which only certain people and certain kinds of dances are elevated as having a particular kind of worth and value. Like histories, canons of

art always seek to represent themselves as neutral and unchanging when, in fact, they are constantly renegotiated – the Harold Blooms and Jeffrey Blacks of this world simply refuse to admit that this is the case. From the perspective of dancers, it is also notable that practitioners have relatively little say in who are selected as the canonical or vanguard artists; rather, canonisation is a complex networking process involving private money, funding bodies, relationships to critics and journalists and, importantly, scholars and historians (e.g., DeNora 1995, 4–8, 186–91; on dance, Dodds 2011, especially 18–21).

Those histories and canons, however, perpetuate themselves in various institutions, including dance festivals and universities. The Nordic countries are no exception in elevating the marginal few into dogma about the greatness of geniuses. Questioning local histories and canons, however, is fraught with tensions deriving from the distance between the local and the centre of whiteness (whether the festival circuit in Central Europe or Anglo-American dance literature), or when the local interpretation of a practice is quite different from how the audience of (privileged, white, Euro-American) connoisseurs ‘reads’ the dance in a theoretical framework for analysis or discourse that reflects only their connoisseur concerns (e.g., Mensah 2005; DeFrantz 2007). In other words, I am troubled by the hegemony of a tiny fraction of largely foreign pundits in ‘Nordic’ dance studies.

This concern is the more pressing with the internet and social media making all kinds of dances more available. Availability, however, does not translate to understanding, not of the complex histories and contexts of these dances nor of who can claim authority over these dances and why (e.g., Banerji & Mitra 2020). Taught in peer groups online, the new generation of dance makers is growing up with an unprecedented variety of values; they are exposed to different aesthetics and ideas about what

is desirable in dance. This shift should influence who and what institutions include: Who count as dancers? What kinds of bodies do we see dancing and teaching dance? What kinds of dances are ‘art’ dances, and who gets to decide where the borders of that category lie?

If dance is to have meaning, find new audiences and inspire new makers, we who seek to discuss dance must seriously rethink our histories and canons—who we remember, what names we repeat, and why those particular names are repeated and not others. In view of what dance is becoming, globally, the overwhelmingly white narratives of greatness are increasingly irrelevant to practice because they can no longer explain or analyse that practice in a meaningful way. Yes, it is typical of white people to claim expertise in whatever is not working within the white paradigm—this is the practical legacy of colonialism, after all. However, I claim that, increasingly, the new and interesting in art dance is not coming from the white institutions resisting change and that, as a consequence, expertise that is reliant on recounting the names of white predecessors in the narrow field of art dance is also going the way of the dodo. However, that is all right; that is even laudable. After all, is it not the point of all histories to stress change? It is not the point of all canons to praise the vanguard and new?

## Conclusion

As noted, these five short texts all stem from a deep concern for diversity in what we understand as dance in the Nordic context. The presentations reflect our daily professional struggle to find alternative ways of responding to current concerns in teaching, researching and practicing dance histories. For us, history is very much present in dance practice, and we all argue for the importance of understanding different kinds of dances and dancers—not merely what is understood as ‘art’, let alone the ‘vanguard’

in dance. What kind of dance—and whose dancing—is deemed significant for future generations of dance makers and scholars alike is of increasing importance in a globalising world.

As historians, we are also concerned with documentation and archival practices and the uses to which these are put in choreographing dance histories. Dance is both indicative of and formative for broader trends in culture and society; how bodies, gender, social status, ethnic or political alliance, or aesthetic value come together in moving corporealities. Present-day practices directly result from past precedents and what of the past gets selected as worthy of retelling. We hope that our short presentations not only criticise what seems to us as excluded from the NOFOD discourse but highlight the richness of dance as a field and the many directions dance scholarship can take in the twenty-first century.

## References

- Aarnes, Thea Ericson. 2022. “Elizabeth Svarstad – Dansehistoriens forkjemper”. Danseinformatjonen. Accessed 20 November 2022. <https://danseinfo.no/intervjuer/elizabeth-svarstad-dansehistoriens-forkjemper/>.
- Adewole, Funmi. 2020. Africanist Choreography as Cultural Citizenship: Thomas ‘Talawa’ Prestø’s Philosophy of Africana Dance. In *Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*. Eds. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca & Alice Lagaay. London: Routledge, 299–309.
- Bakka, Egil. 1997. Europeisk dansehistorie: for VK1 og VK2. Oslo: Gyldendal undervisning.
- Bergholm, Kari. 1977. Suomalaisen kansantanssin tyylipiirteitä. In *Tanhuvakka. Suuri suomalaisen kansantanssikirja*. Eds. Pirkko-Liisa & Esko Rausmaa. Porvoo: WSOY, 24–27.

- Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo. 1996. *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*. Translated by Philip A. Dennis. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Burt, Ramsay. 2009. "The Specter of Interdisciplinarity." *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 1: 3–22.
- Burt, Ramsay. 2020. "Elroy Josephs and the Hidden History of Black British Dance." In *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies*. Eds. Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, 236–246. New York: Routledge.
- Caswell, Michelle, and Marika Cifor. 2016. "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives." *Archivaria* 81: 23–43.
- Chatterjea, Ananya. 2020. *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South–South Choreographies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clark, Vève A. & Sara E. Johnson. 2006. *Kaiso: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Daly, Ann. 1987. "The Balanchine Woman." *Drama Review* 113: 8–21.
- Danseinformasjonen and CODA International dance festival. Accessed 1 July 2022. <https://codadance-fest.no/events/norsk-dansehistorie/>.
- DeFrantz, Thomas F. 2007. "Review of Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement, by André Lepecki." *TDR: The Drama Review* 51, no. 3: 189–191.
- DeFrantz, Thomas F. 2002. "African American Dance: A Complex History." In *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*. Ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press. 3–17.
- Dekker, Anett. 2023. "Please Put It Somewhere Safe." Seminar presentation at Digital Sustainability conference hosted by GRIDH Gothenburg Research Infrastructure in Digital Humanities and the research program DIGARV. University of Gothenburg 27.4.2023.
- DeNora, Tia. 1995. *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna 1792–1803*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Dodds, Sherril. 2011. *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Erichsen, Chris. 2014. "Danseinformasjonen fyller 20 år." *Scenekunst.no*. Accessed 1 July 2022. <https://www.scenekunst.no/sak/danseinformasjonen-fyller-20-ar/>.
- Expanded Choreography*. 2012. MACBA: Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34425/expanded-choreography/>
- Findlay, Cassie. 2017. "Participatory Cultures, Trust Technologies and Decentralisation: Innovation Opportunities for Recordkeeping." *Archives and Manuscripts* 45, no. 3: 176–190.
- Flinn, Andrew. 2011. "Archival Activism: Independent and Community-led Archives, Radical Public History and the Heritage Professions." *InterActions* 7. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pt2490x> (retrieved 29.22.2019).
- Flinn, Andrew & von Rosen, Astrid. 2023. "An Introduction to the Long-Awaited English Translation of Dig Where You Stand". In *Dig Where You Stand: How to Research a Job*. Ed. Sven Lindqvist. London: Repeater Books, 1–19.
- Gilliland, Anne J., Sue McKemish & Andrew J Lau, eds. 2017. *Research in the Archival Multiverse*. Clayton Victoria: Monash University Publishing.
- Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. 1996. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Hammergren, Lena. 2009. *Dans och historiografiska reflektioner*. Stockholm: Stiftelsen för utgivning av teatervetenskapliga studier.
- Hansteen, Valdemar. 1989. *Historien om norsk ballett*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

- Hart, Michael Anthony. 2010. "Indigenous Worldviews, Knowledge, and Research: The Development of an Indigenous Research Paradigm." *Journal of Indigenous Voices in Social Work* 1, no. 1: 1–16. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/15117>
- Heikkilä, Lydia & Miettunen, Tuuli. 2016. Yhteisöllisyys ja eettisyys saamentutkimuksessa. Agon, (2). <http://agon.fi/article/yhteisollisyys-ja-eettisyys-saamentutkimuksessa/>
- Hoppu, Petri. 2020. "Dancing Agency: Skolt Saami Identities in Transition." Puls 5: 26–44.
- Jonassen, Roy Lie. 2008. *Dansens historie*. Vetre: Tell forlag.
- Johnson, Jasmine. 2016. "Black Dance." In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*. Online resource. <https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/black-dance>. doi:10.4324/9781135000356-REM1661-1
- Kulturdepartementet. 2011. "Dans i hele landet". 2011–2014 strategy paper by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture. Accessed 1 July 2022. [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kud/kunstavdelingen/rapporter/utredninger/strategi\\_dans-i-hele-landet-2013.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kud/kunstavdelingen/rapporter/utredninger/strategi_dans-i-hele-landet-2013.pdf)
- Lehtola, Veli-Pekka. 2002. *The Saami People – Traditions in Transition*. Transl. by L. Weber Müller-Wille. Inari: Kustannus-Puntsi.
- Lehtola, Veli-Pekka 2004. *Saamelainen evakko*. Inari: Kustannus-Puntsi.
- Linkola, Martti, & Sammallahti, Pekka. 1995. Koltanmaa, osa Saamenmaata. In *Koltat, karjalaiset ja setukaiset: Pienet kansat maailmojen rajoilla*. Eds. Tuija Saarinen & Seppo Suhonen. Kuopio: Snellman-instituutti, 39–57.
- Löfblad, Josefine. 2018. "Bodily Archiving in 69 Positions." *Nordic Journal of Dance* 9, no.1: 4–11.
- Martin, Randy. 1998. *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mensah, Ayoko. 2005. "Corps noirs, regards blancs: retour sur la danse africaine contemporaine." *Africultures* 62: 164–171.
- Banerji, Anurima & Mitra, Royona, eds. 2020. Decolonizing Dance Discourses. *Conversations across the Field of Dance Studies*, vol. XL. <https://dancestudiesassociation.org/publications/conversations-across-the-field-of-dance-studies/decolonizing-dance-discourses>
- Oksanen, Taru 2005. Tiina Sanila – Sää'mjannam rocks! *Pop-lehti* 6, no. 5: 12.
- Rausmaa, Pirkko-Liisa. 1978/1979. *Kolttien tanssi-perinteet*. Manuscript. Folklore Archive, Finnish Literature Society.
- von Rosen, Astrid. 2017a. "'Dream no Small Dreams!' Impossible Archival Imaginaries in Dance Community Archiving in a Digital Age". In *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*. Eds. Geraldine Morris & Lorraine Nicholas. London: Routledge, 148–159.
- von Rosen, Astrid. 2017b. "Activating Dance Records: Conceptualizing Research into the Swedish, Nordic and Global Archives Pertaining to the Russian Dancer Anna Robenne". *Nordic Theatre Studies* 29 no. 1, 117–137.
- von Rosen, Astrid, Marsha Meskimmon & Monica Sand. 2018. "Transversal Dances across Time and Space: Feminist Strategies for a Critical Heritage Studies". In *Gender and Heritage: Performance, Place and Politics*. Eds. Wera Grahn & Ross J. Wilson. London: Routledge, 169–184.
- von Rosen. 2019a. "Radikal empati i dansarkivet: Om-sorg om den ryska dansaren Anna Robenne." In *I avantgardens skugga: Brytpunkter och kontinuitet i svensk teater kring 1900*. Ed. Rikard Hoogland. Göteborg: LIR skrifter, 203–242.
- von Rosen Astrid. 2019b. "Kroppsligt kunskapande i dansarkivet: sinnliga, scenografiska och transformativa forskningspraktiker." *På Spissen forskning / Dance Articulated*, 1–18.

- von Rosen, Astrid, Eugenia Klimova & Olga Nikolaeva. 2020. "Russian Relations: Radical Empathy as a Method for Researching the Migrant Dancer Anna Robenne in Russian Archives." *Nordic Theatre Studies* 32, no. 2: 89–105.
- von Rosen, Astrid. 2021a. "Scenographing the Dance Archive - Keep Crawling!" In *Scenography and Art History: Performance Design and Visual Culture*. Eds. Astrid von Rosen and Viveka Kjellmer. London: Bloomsbury, 29–46.
- von Rosen, Astrid. 2021b. "Om Claude Marchant: Ett historiografiskt bidrag till svart danshistoria i Sverige." *Nordic Journal of Dance* 12, no. 1: 4–21.
- von Rosen, Astrid. 2022. "Affect and Digital Caregiving: Challenging the Performing Arts Canon with a 'Dig Where You Stand' Database". *Archives and Records* 43(2): 128-142.
- Saxholm, Sari, Moshnikoff, Minna, Gauriloff, Mari. 2022. *Sevettijärven kolttakatrilli. Čevetjääu'r ka'dre'l*. Inari: Sámi duodji.
- Sexton, Anna. 2015. "Archival activism and mental health: being participatory, sharing control and building legitimacy." PhD diss. University College London.
- Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Vedel, Karen, ed. 2011. *Dance and the Formation of Norden: Emergences and Struggles*. Trondheim: Tapir.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Lena Hammergren** is Professor emerita in Performance Studies at Stockholm University, and in Dance Theory at Stockholm University of the Arts. Her research focus mainly dance and historiography, both from national and international perspectives.

**Petri Hoppu** is Principal Lecturer of Dance at the Oulu University of Applied Sciences and Docent in Dance Studies at the Tampere University. His areas of expertise include theory and methodology in dance anthropology as well as research of Skolt Saami dances, Finnish-Karelian vernacular dances, and Nordic folk dance revitalization.

**Hanna Järvinen** works as University Lecturer and the Director of the Doctoral Programme in Artistic Research at the University of the Arts Helsinki. Her expertise lies in histories of modernism in early twentieth-century

dance, authorship and canonisation, and decolonisation of dance studies.

**Astrid von Rosen** is professor of art history and visual studies, scenography studies, at the Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg and the director for cross-faculty Centre for Critical Heritage Studies. Her areas of research are scenography studies and cross-disciplinary performing arts and critical archival studies.

**Elizabeth Svarstad** works as an assistant professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music and at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts where she teaches historical dance. She also works as a dancer and choreographer.

## A Swan Lake: Exploring the Materiality of Water in Alexander Ekman's Ballet

Martina Cayul Ibarra

### ABSTRACT

This article analyses Ekman's ballet *A Swan Lake* from the perspective of new materialism, which is understood as the agency of the non-human, particularly the role of water in the creation of movement and in the script of the ballet. The question guiding this article concerns how the materiality of water takes place in Ekman's ballet. I propose that by paying attention to the corporeality of dance itself as a discursive practice (Barad 2003), it is possible to appreciate the creation of a kind of language or code that can be interpreted. Following Barad, a discursive practice not only is language or what is said but allows certain things to be said. Here, both the bodies of the dancers and the water allow things to be said. In other words, encounters of the materiality of the human, that is, the bodies of the dancers with the non-human agency of the water, provoke new ways of moving and therefore form part of the choreographic composition, thus co-creating the ballet itself.

**Keywords:** new materialism, modern ballet, non-human agency, Swan Lake

### SAMMENDRAG

I denne artikkelen søker jeg å analysere Ekmans verk med *New Materialism* som perspektiv. *New Materialism* innebærer å se på det ikke-menneskelige og ikke-menneskelig agens med særlig blick på vannets rolle i både bevegelse og i ballettens handling. Hovedspørsmålet i artikkelen er på hvilke måter vannets materialitet er til stede i balletten *A Swan Lake*?

Jeg vil foreslå at vi ved å ta hensyn til selve dansens kroppslighet som en diskursiv praksis (Barad, 2003), kan se verdi i et slags språk eller en slags koder som igjen kan tolkes. Ifølge Barad er en diskursiv praksis ikke synonymt med språk eller noe som blir uttalt, men heller det som gjør at visse ting kan sies. Her er det ikke bare danserens kropp, men også vannet i seg selv som uttrykker noe. Sagt med andre ord er det møtet mellom menneskelig materialitet, altså dansernes kropp, og det ikke-menneskelige, nemlig vannet, som fremprovoserer nye måter å bevege seg på og dermed bidrar i den koreografiske komposisjonen og er med på skapingen av selve balletten. Det er nettopp det som står for den ikke-menneskelige agens.

# A Swan Lake: Exploring the Materiality of Water in Alexander Ekman's Ballet

Martina Cayul Ibarra

## Introduction

Alexander Ekman's *A Swan Lake* tells a story about the creation of the ballet in both classical and contemporary versions, creating a version in which a *lake* is put on the stage and the dancers are swans that swim in it. The ballet was first performed in 2014 at the Oslo Opera House by the Norwegian National Ballet. I first encountered this ballet while watching television in 2016, and the water captured my perception immediately. I again encountered this work on an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article is based on my dissertation for my bachelor's degree in aesthetics in the research project *New Materialisms in Literary and Audiovisual Narratives of the Southern Cone*.<sup>1</sup> In the analysis, I aim to examine Ekman's work from the perspective of new materialisms, that is, by focussing on the agency of the non-human, which in this case is the role of water in the creation of movement and in the script of the ballet. The question guiding this article is, "How does the materiality of water take place in the ballet *A Swan Lake*?" I aim to answer this question by referring to the feminist theorists Karen Barad and Nikki Sullivan and the dance scholars Nigel Stewart, Paula Montecinos Oliva and Marie Bardet. The study is based on audiovisual materials, including a recording of the premiere of the ballet (Tudor 2014) and the documentary *Rare Birds* (Rives 2014), which provide insights into the creative process and technical elements involved in bringing ballet to life.

## From the classical to the contemporary

In 1877, *Swan Lake* was first performed by the Bolshoi Ballet, with music composed by Tchaikovsky and choreography by Julius Reisinger. This four-act work tells the story of Prince Siegfried, who falls in love with the young Odette, who is transformed into a swan by Rothbart's spell. Although the ending has frequently been modified, the work has a strong tragic charge.<sup>2</sup> In its classical form, the dancers wear pointe shoes, white tutus, and feathered crowns to represent the swans, and the lake is alluded to by lighting effects or scenery. In contrast, Ekman's *A Swan Lake* consists of two acts and a short scene that diverges from the classical narrative. The first act is set in 1877 and portrays the creation of the ballet, blending absurd and mimetic elements related to swans. This act plays with temporality, incorporating mid-twentieth-century style elements such as a television set and pastel pink costumes. The second act, set 137 years later, features dancers in aquatic costumes performing on a stage that has been transformed into a lake. They shift between dancing in the water and engaging in everyday activities, emphasising the diverse ways in which we interact with water in our lives. The third act introduces a dancer dressed as a swan-winged robot, adding a contemporary twist to the narrative.

## New materialism and new approaches to dance

In my analysis, I take the perspective of new materialisms from Barad (2003) and Sullivan (2012). They pay particular attention to the capacity of the

non-human to generate effects, whether by encounters between bodies or by the adaptation of a body to a certain materiality and the consequent development of a technique. In particular, I am interested in the contact of the dancers' bodies with the water and vice versa, as the confluence of human and non-human materialities from which dance emerges. The concepts of *discursive practices*, *intra-activity* and *somatechnics* allow us to understand the relationship between the human and the non-human, that is, the dancers and the water.

Discursive practices, as proposed by Barad (2003), refer to the performative nature of meaning and the continuous performance of the world's differential intelligibility.<sup>3</sup> Barad emphasises that agency is not limited to humans and that the distinction between subject and object is dissolved, as both human and non-human entities possess agency and therefore contribute to the shaping of meaning. Intra-activity, according to Barad, refers to the causal material enactments of human and non-human corporealities that come into contact with each other, highlighting the possibility of an open future.

Sullivan's concept of somatechnics<sup>4</sup> concerns the inseparability of the soma (body) and techné (techniques), emphasising that bodily-being-in-the-world and the materialities encountered shape corporealities, identities and differences. This perspective acknowledges the effects of the environment and specific materialities on the body, which lead to the transformation of corporeality and the development of bodily techniques that respond to contextual needs. For Sullivan, technés are not tools that we manipulate for a purpose, but techniques and/or *orientations* in the Heideggerian sense that we learn within a particular tradition or *ontological context*. This means that technés develop situationally, referring to modes and responding to contextual needs.

Although the authors presented here do not study dance, I find their theoretical approaches useful for

shedding light on the agential relations between water and dancing. Nevertheless, some authors have worked specifically on the relationship between the agency of the non-human and dance, including Nigel Stewart (2010), Paula Montecinos Oliva (2018) and Marie Bardet (2012). The first two specifically studied the role of water in dancing.

Stewart's concept of environmental dance<sup>5</sup> highlights the connections between the human body and the natural environment, including animals and plants. He argues that the environment influences how we move, transforming our bodies into landscapes or *bodyscapes*<sup>6</sup> and highlighting the mutual influences of human and non-human entities. The agency of the non-human is not only what an object guides someone to do or is a mere response to exterior inputs, but also the connections between different bodies (human and non-human) that, by mutual influence, provoke and create something new.

Montecinos Oliva conducted dance workshops on the shores of lakes in Argentina, exploring bodily perceptions and living environments. Her approach resonates with Ekman's creative process in *A Swan Lake*, as both seek to integrate movements that go beyond disciplinary constraints to engage with the materiality of water. Montecinos Oliva also seeks to incorporate movement that escapes from a specific disciplinary conception and goes beyond a single category of dance style by combining techniques and creating new ones. Montecinos Oliva's research demonstrates how human bodies in water adapt and respond to their properties, developing a somatic intelligence that emerges from embodied experience.<sup>7</sup>

Bardet (2012) explores the intersection of dance and philosophy, emphasising the importance of the dancer's body and its engagement with the environment. She suggests that dance involves more than just inventing something entirely new; it involves a mindful approach that allows for reengaging with familiar habits in diverse ways and attending to

the context. Dancing entails transforming sensory experiences into movement and noticing what may have previously gone unnoticed in everyday life. Bardet highlights the dynamic nature of bodies in motion, constantly shaping and reshaping them through their own deformations.<sup>8</sup> In shaping dance, it is essential to combine various movements, enabling the body to influence and be influenced by others and ultimately creating new ways of moving in and with space. Additionally, Bardet perceives dance as a practice that challenges the limitations imposed on the body, aiming to deactivate restrictive logics. Rather than moving in impossible ways, dance involves pushing the boundaries of the body and discovering movements that are not impossible but have yet to be realised.<sup>9</sup>

## Swans dancing

This analysis focuses on the recording of the ballet's premiere. The first act is a meta-narrative exercise in the origin of *Swan Lake*. In a parodic tone, the “producers” of the ballet ask why a prince would be in love with a swan. In contrast, they also propose a scientific approach to the mobility of birds, the character of the ornithologist, and her explanations of the behaviour and movements of the swans. At this point, it is interesting that the dancers show the aggressiveness of the swans, moving away from the idyllic notion presented in classical ballet. The first act sets the stage for the new interpretation of *Swan Lake*.

In the second act, a 6,000-litre pool transforms the stage into a lake. Unlike other versions of the ballet, such as Mikhail Fokine's *Dying Swan* or Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*, in this version, water plays a major role because it forces a different mobility and creates a choreography in which new swans are presented. At the same time, it shows aspects of everyday life by which we relate to water: showering, drinking, playing and swimming. An important aspect is the sound of water and how the dancers' movement connects with water, provoking not only a particular

rhythm but also a sonority. Hence, both the orchestra and the dancers' bodies produce sound.

Act II of the ballet introduces everyday interactions with water, diverging from the traditional focus on dancing swans and ballerinas. It shows children playing, a couple on a water tricycle, a person showering and a woman drying her hair, which leads to a blackout when her hairdryer falls into the water. The scene includes rubber ducks, playful water activities and the practical use of water for hygiene. The ballet breaks free from its traditional swan-centric focus, transcending the prince–swan princess storyline. It explores new territories beyond its original boundaries, inviting us to reconsider our sensory experience of water and our understanding of animality.

## Co-creation with water

The process of creating Ekman's ballet is portrayed in the documentary *Rare Birds*, which shows how the choreographer tried to create “some kind of bird” that would be his own swan. In the documentary, he pays attention to the movements of these birds, their wings in flight, their long necks and open chests when they face each other to fight. In the documentary, Ekman mentions that he tried to capture the generality of the movement, to imitate the intention of the movement, whether aggressive or attractive. One dancer says that by incorporating such movements and dancing them, he becomes more than a human being; he becomes one of the animals.

As observed in the documentary, *Rare Birds*, while creating the script and choreography, Ekman and the corps de ballet had to learn to move in the water and relearn how to dance. First, exercises were performed to break the habitual axis of the dancers, which then had to be reconstructed or regained until they were able to dance in the water. First, they had to learn to fall on wet plastic in the rehearsal room to lose their fear. They were then able to explore and learn new movements by increasing the amount of water. In



Fig. 1. *Ornithologist in A Swan Lake (minutes 31.01)*

addition, Henrik Vibskov, the costume designer, had to create costumes using permeable materials and design shoes that would allow the dancers to slide without slipping to prevent them from falling. To understand the process of the creation and incorporation of water mobility, the concepts of discursive practice and somatecnics are helpful analytical keys.

I propose that the water in *A Swan Lake* encounters other materialities, such as the dancers' bodies, which provokes actions or discursive practices, such as sounds, movements and choreographies. According to Barad's concept of discursive practices,<sup>10</sup> they are not exclusive to human activities but involve the (re)configuring of the world by establishing boundaries, properties and meanings. Based on Barad's concept, I consider that the intra-action of the water with the dancers' bodies produces a discursive practice that consists of dance and sound. Instead of focusing on what things are, it explores the possibilities arising from the encounter of distinct materialities that are mutually influential. In this context, the dance itself can be considered a discursive practice in which the dancers' bodies affect one another. The physical space in which they perform, whether it is a wooden stage, a concrete street, or, in this case, a "lake", also influences them.

Sullivan's (2012) somatecnics can be distinguished according to the dance style (e.g., classical, modern or contemporary) to the extent that dancing on tiptoe or barefoot leads to a distinct bodily

and cultural mobility and identity. An orientation learned in a particular style, a certain mobility is the ontological context, leading the dancers to move in a specific way.

Following Stewart's concept of the bodyscape, the ballet shows the interweaving of the dancers' bodies with the environment, particularly at the beginning of the second act, when the black-clad swans glide through the water, slapping their jackets to create visual images of splashing drops and producing sounds. This points to a deeper understanding of dance. Following Bardet, dance is not about moving in an impossible way but rather about playing with the limits of the skin to find movements that are not impossible but have not yet been put into practice. This can be clearly seen in Ekman's ballet and the dancers' exploration of

Fig. 2. *Swan water tricycle. A Swan Lake (1.20.09)*





Fig. 3. Practicing. *Rare Birds*

water, how they learn to move with and in water, and how they seek to incorporate the animality of birds, including the aggressiveness of swans. In brief, the choreography explores the actualisation of this not-impossible mobility.

### Concluding considerations

In this article, I utilise the theory of new materialisms to study the effects of working with new surfaces, specifically water, in dance. The documentary *Rare Birds* (Rive 2014) portrays initial encounters with a wet surface, which results in instability and falls. Because *A Swan Lake* is a version of *Swan Lake* that has a “lake” onstage, the challenge extends beyond maintaining

balance on a slippery stage; it also involves presenting animal-like mobility. Ekman’s ballet intertwines the corporealities of water, birds and dancers, creating a discursive practice and a novel interpretation of *Swan Lake*.

The question that guided this article was “How does the materiality of water take place in the ballet *A Swan Lake*?” The materiality of water is observed in the process of creation, particularly the possibilities of movement realised by the swans and the dancers to create Ekman’s ballet. Furthermore, in scenes that allude to everyday activities, there is an appeal to a sensual experience of water that is often disregarded. The ballet shows us that we can recognise everyday aspects that might go unnoticed but that, when staged, generate empathy or, in Bardet’s (2012) words,<sup>11</sup> allow us to be touched by movement.

Fig. 4. *A Swan Lake* (minute 48.19).



## Endnotes

1 With the guidance of Dr. Valeria de los Ríos and the framework of the research project Fondecyt N°1180552: "Nuevos materialismos en narrativas literarias y audiovisuales del Cono Sur" (New materialisms in literary and audiovisual narratives of the Southern Cone).

2 In the first act it is announced that the queen commissions her son, on his birthday, to find a wife. In the second act the prince goes hunting near the lake and meets Odette as she transforms from swan to human. Siegfried falls in love with her, and it is reciprocated, but he does not know that to break the spell he must promise her his love. In the third act, a ball is held to present candidates for the prince's wife, and Rothbart arrives with his daughter Odile. They trick Siegfried into thinking Odile is Odette, and he mistakenly declares his love for her. The fourth act takes place at the lake, and the ending varies according to the version. In some versions, Odette dies because the spell is not broken, and in other versions they live happily ever after.

3 "...meaning is not a property of individual words or groups, but a continuous performance of the world in its differential intelligibility" (821).

4 "...the inextricability of soma and techné, of bodily-being-in-the-world, and the dispositifs in and through which corporealities, identities and difference(s) are formed and transformed, come to matter, if you like" (302).

5 "...the plethora of dance and somatic practices concerned with the human body's relationship to landscape and environment, including the other-than-human world of animals and plants" (2010, 32).

6 "...here the dancing body develops into a symptom (not merely a sign) of the landscape, and therefore into not just a body moving in a landscape but rather a 'bodyscape' or 'body topography'" (2010, 35).

7 "El agua conecta materialidades desde el contacto con una movilidad interna que está siempre fluyendo, migrando, inestabilizando hábitos y saberes cristalizados u "objetivos", y dando una nueva comprensión a los estados de incertidumbre." (Montecinos Oliva 2018, 148).

8 "Para la danza, el carácter dinámico de los cuerpos en movimiento da y toma forma, al reencontrar sin cesar su propia deformación." (Bardet 2012, 222)

9 "El trabajo de exploración de la danza en su realización no pasaría por un repertorio de todos los gestos posibles en un cuerpo... sino que más bien se consagraría más bien a desactivar ciertas lógicas que los vuelven imposibles" (Bardet 2012, 219).

10 "...are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted" (828).

11 "El movimiento del otro pone en juego la propia experiencia del movimiento del observador: la información visual genera, en el espectador, una experiencia cinestésica (sensación interna de los movimientos de su propio cuerpo) inmediata" (Bardet, 2012, 229)

## Bibliography

- Barad, Karen. 2003. "Posthumanist Performativity." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3: 801-831
- Bardet, Marie. 2012. *Pensar con mover: Un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*. Buenos Aires: Cactus.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Marion, Sheila. 1992. "Studying *Water Study*." *Dance Research Journal* 24, no. 1: 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1477869>
- Montecinos Oliva, Paula. 2018. "Hidrofeminismo y la Práctica Como Investigación." *A. Dnz* 3: 144-149. <https://adnz.uchile.cl/index.php/ADNZ/article/view/52756>
- Rives, T. M. 2014. *Rare Birds*. Marquee TV. <https://www.marquee.tv/watch/rives-rarebirds>
- Stewart, Nigel. 2010. "Dancing the Face of Place: Environmental Dance and Eco-phenomenology." *Performance Research* 15, no. 4: 32-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2010.539877>.
- Sullivan, Nikki. 2012. "The Somatechnics of Perception and the Matter of the Non/Human: A Critical Response to the New Materialism." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 3: 299-313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506812443477>
- Tudor, Jeff. 2014. *A Swan Lake*. YouTube. Accessed 21 January 2023. [https://youtu.be/coBjFlxA\\_QA](https://youtu.be/coBjFlxA_QA)

## BIOGRAPHY

**Martina Cayul Ibarra** is a Chilean sociologist with a degree in aesthetics from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and a Diploma in Art and Education from the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina). She is currently pursuing a master's degree in *arte, cultura y pensamiento latinoamericanos* (art, culture and Latin American thought) at the Universidad de Santiago de Chile. Cayul Ibarra is Coordinator of the Circle of Studies on Art, Territory and Technology in the Southern Cone at Universidad de San Martín

(Argentina) in collaboration with Argentinean artist Jerónimo Veroa. She is Researcher in Charge of the FONDART 666184 project "Rastreado la territorialidad migrante de las comunidades bolivianas y peruanas de la ciudad de Iquique" (Tracing the migrant territoriality of Bolivian and Peruvian communities in the city of Iquique). Her research is funded by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Heritage of Chile.

[martina.cayul@usach.cl](mailto:martina.cayul@usach.cl) | [mrcayul@uc.cl](mailto:mrcayul@uc.cl)

## Car(Ry)Ing the Past, Present, and Future—A Deep Dive Into Danish Dance Stories

Carolina Bäckman

### ABSTRACT

*Danish Dance Stories* is an artistic initiative manifested through a series of collegial encounters in 2018 and 2021, which revolves around the sharing of personal (hi)stories across generations and geographic affiliations. Documentation from the events and contributions from participants have been organized as *stories* on the website [danskedansehistorier.dk](http://danskedansehistorier.dk). By revisiting and through the writing process engaging in conversations with the content of the *stories*, the text is an attempt to articulate and reflect on issues and potentials of the initiative.

The conversations raise questions about hegemony, hierarchy and access, discussed through the lens of the terminology that constitute the ambiguous title of the initiative; *Danish, Dance* and *History*. By leaning onto the knowledge and experience of colleagues, complexity, multiplicity and repetition are proposed as a possible direction for a future local dance community.

### RESUMÉ

Danske Dansehistorier er et kunstnerisk initiativ manifesteret gennem en række kollegiale møder i 2018 og 2021, som kredser omkring deling af personlige (hi)strier på kryds af generationer og geografiske tilhørsforhold. Dokumentation fra arrangementerne og bidrag fra deltagere, er organiseret som historier på hjemmesiden [danskedansehistorier.dk](http://danskedansehistorier.dk). Ved at genbesøge og gennem skriveprocessen indgå i samtaler med historiernes indhold, er teksten et forsøg på at italesætte og reflektere over initiativets problemstillinger og potentialer.

Samtalerne rejser spørgsmål om hegemoni, hierarki og adgang, diskuteret gennem linsen af den terminologi, der udgør initiativets tvetydige titel; *Dansk, Dans* og *Historie*. Ved at læne sig op af kollegers viden og erfaring foreslås kompleksitet, mangfoldighed og gentagelse som en mulig retning for et fremtidigt, lokalt dansefællesskab.

# Car(ry)ing the Past, Present, and Future—A Deep Dive Into Danish Dance Stories

Carolina Bäckman

*Danish Dance Stories (DD)*, in Danish *Danske Dansehistorier*, is an artist-driven platform organized and curated by freelance dancers and choreographers Carolina Bäckman, Andrea Deres, Stine Frandsen, and Nanna Stigsdatter. So far, the initiative has manifested itself through a series of collegial encounters: four weekend symposiums in 2018 and 2021 (in Copenhagen, Roskilde, Odense, and Aarhus) and a week-long residency in 2018 in Ringkøbing. They all included sharing personal (hi) stories of dance across generations and geographic affiliations. On the webpage *danskedansehistorier.dk*, the stories that emerged from the encounters are presented through sound, text, and still images.

To acknowledge and celebrate the situated and personal perspectives (see also Haraway 1988), Carolina Bäckman wrote this article as a personal reflection. The article is based on an essay produced at a residency hosted by the performing arts association

HAUT at Copenhagen University in August 2022 and in collaboration with Karen Vedel from the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies. I, Carolina, spent a few weeks revisiting the *DD* initiative through its website. It was a rare opportunity to dwell on what *DD* has produced so far and reflect on the issues and potential of the initiative. I used writing as a medium to process and reflect on the materials in accordance with the intention of the initiative—to create conditions for encounters and dialogue—and thereby, the research unfolded through the following written conversations with some of the *stories* on the website.

The website offers a multitude of navigation possibilities: a *map*, an index of *stories*, and a categorization system of *tags*. In this article, I focus on stories within two of the tags: #car(ry)ing and

*A live mapping of danskedansehistorier.dk in the dance studio at Copenhagen University. August 2022. Photo credit: Carolina Bäckman*



#future dance. Re-encountering the participants of the symposiums and the residency, by going into written reflections with their documented contributions, provides a possibility to reformulate, articulate, and substantiate central issues concerning the initiative. These are largely connected with the complex terms that constitute the title—Danish, Dance, and (Hi)story—together with concerns of response-ability, community, and care-taking—all perceived in relationship to the past, present, and future. I also engage in dialogue with four local colleagues—Lisa Nyberg, Phyllis Akinyi, Teresa Fogh Schou, and Mette Garfield—who are all working in the field of dance and the arts but who have not participated in any of *DD*'s events. They were invited to scrutinize the website, bring new perspectives, and shed light on some of the blind spots a project like this inevitably produces.

## Car(ry)ing a bag of histories

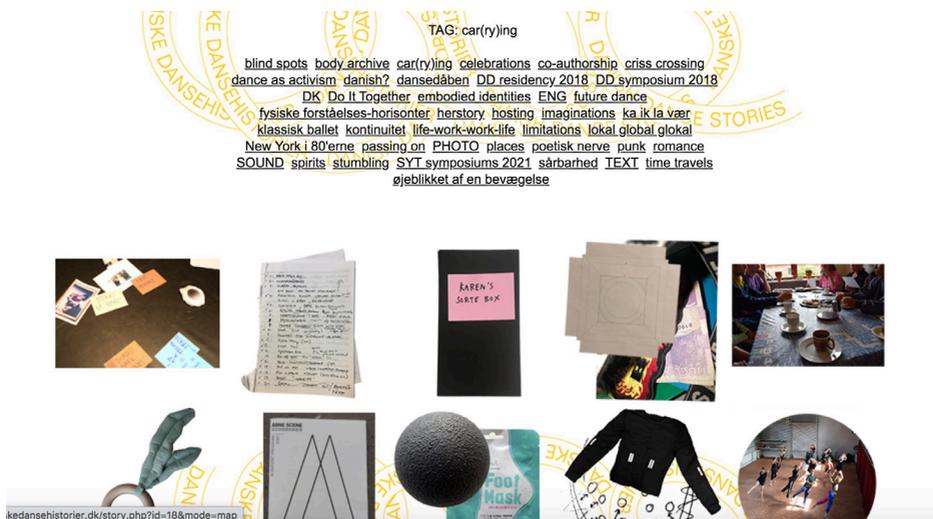
I dive into the 13 stories within the tag #car(ry)ing. In the story *Containers of knowledge*, I encounter Karis Zidore and Emilia Gasiorek. The two dancers/choreographers participated in the 2018 *DD* Residency and had been invited to converse about the first edition

of *thecarrierbag festival*, which they both had been part of organizing one year earlier. Inspired partly by science-fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin's essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (Le Guin 1989), they proposed the festival as a carrier bag—a place that gathers and holds its content, a container that has the ability to receive and to hug. In the story, they reflect on the relationships between container and content, arriving at the value of *the way* we carry knowledge (Gasiorek and Zidore 2018).

I test out thinking of *danskedansehistorier.dk* as a carrier bag, a container of stories. This materialized metaphor releases me from the rigid idea of an archive as documents organized in boxes on shelves; instead, the bag supports and even enhances messiness and lack of linearity—its content can move around, become somewhat shaken, and come to touch other content. Like a box, the bag is a holder, but with its soft, moldable contours, it embraces what is inside. A car(ry)ing bag.

With *Danish Dance Stories*, we have aimed at hosting encounters, which provides room for the participants to share and listen to each other's

*Screenshot from danskedansehistorier.dk.*



experiences, thoughts, intimacies, and imaginations, which are re-membered through movements as much as through words. The stories reciprocate in the space, calling for other stories, new understandings of the present, and hopes for the future. Instead of organizing a rigid archive, I begin to understand the work as *unarchiving*—a continuous *practice* of care, affect, and response-ability (Springgay, Truman, and MacLean 2019).

What does the Danish Dance Story bag hold? All materials stem from the encounters and conversations, of dancing together and sharing practices. Some of the stories were documented during the symposiums and the residency; others are organized interviews that took place at an adjacent time. Some refer to the initiative itself: motivations for participating, contextualization of workshops, and critical reflections. Others are anecdotes, formulations of praxis, and discussions on certain topics. Somehow, they all touch life with dance.

I investigate more stories within #car(ry)ing and dwell with the double connection: caring and carrying. What stories do we carry? What stories do we care for? Carrying as a way of caring. Who cares for (Danish) dance, and who is carrying it? I listen to colleagues, some I know, some I have never met before. I hear them say things I have never thought of, things I think about all the time, and things that expand my horizons. I experience the stories differently depending on where I place myself for the occasion. The bag is what gathers me in, holds me, and ensures that my colleagues and I are not scattered by the wind. That we can be found (again).

## History and hegemony

As I go further into the anarchic bag, I am reminded of *community* and how dance always happens through relations. Unable to separate the current study of the website and my personal memories of past events, I become impressed by artistic initiatives and

moved by the struggles and achievements that have taken place among us.

Lisa Nyberg enhances the experience of community through the site. She suggests that if this is not an archive, it could be a *collection* of stories. A bag is designed for the purpose of collecting, and Nyberg's reflections add to my perception of the site as an *anarchive* of interconnected spirals and circles. Through dancing, I have fostered the premise that there are no straight lines in the world. Donna Haraway proposes that there are not any points either. Just happenings, dreams, disappointments, conditions, humanity, and trees—interwoven, carried, and cared for, for a while (Haraway 2018, 37).

In her lecture at the DD Symposium 2018, within the story *Dansehistoriernes Sorte Boks*, Associate Professor Karen Vedel talks about the Royal Danish Theater's continuous and systematized journaling of events and materials. According to her, in addition to sustaining the repertoire, archiving serves to consolidate the institution's hegemonic power. History is power, and the archive is the key. Vedel (2018) states (my translation), "The archive is the memory of the institution" . . . "Not everyone is privileged to have one." Vedel found a box with clippings in the Royal Theater's archive, materials that could have relevance to the history of dance in Denmark but that did not fit in any of the institution's categorizations. She brought a similar box of fragments of the past to the symposium, and it was with these floaters that we as participants at the symposium were invited to connect—with lives and dance outside the institution, outside official history, as a beginning for a responsive anarchiving process.

Karen Vedel's contextualization confronts me with the historical connotations of the site. Being caretakers for the memory of the field, being archivists, seems by far to be a responsibility beyond the capacity of this initiative. But by organizing and joining stories within the label *danskedanshistorier.dk*,

we are miming historiography. This is, of course, also intentional: to critically question constitutions of past, present, and future dance. Maybe a supplementary title is needed to enhance the attentiveness to community: *Danish Dance Stories—a place of remembering?*

To provide more possibilities for labelling the site, Teresa Fogh Schou had prepared a list that she brought to our encounter (my translation):

A collage, a collective memory, a rhizomatic net/work, a manifesto, a call, a claim or an invitation to a political project, an artistic exploration, an artistic experience(?), an artwork in progress, a mouthpiece, a platform(?), a community, an entanglement of lives, a manifestation of us as part of history, a time travel, a time capsule, a waiting place(?), a personal database for dancers – is it the new *Linked In?*

### **Danish? Dance? Stories?**

The story *I agree with the question mark* pokes and scratches as Lydia Östberg Diakité and Vibe Overgaard critically scrutinize the concepts of *Danish*, *Dance*, and *History*. I am grateful that this story is part of the content: the way it touches, affects, and reminds of other stories, but especially how it shakes the bag itself. “The title provided for an umbrella that had to be negotiated again and again” (Overgaard 2018).

In the anarchic bag, I also reapproach a text, *DD Selv-Interview*, where us initiators engage with these concepts, attempting to unfold our motivations and concerns (Bäckman, Deres, Frandsen, and Stigsdatter 2018). The text contributes more aspects to complex matters, but I dwell with the immanent negotiation of the title, hoping to come a bit further.

*Danish. Dance. Stories.* Why did we put *Danish* in the title? By framing the initiative in a Danish context, we as initiators wanted to situate the

encounters while attempting to curate a program that would substantiate the diversity and internationality and that we experience as characterizing dance in relation to Denmark. The word also carries an inherent friction and thereby makes a discussion on inclusion and exclusion apparent. But as it sometimes feels like the connotations of the title bring more harm than healing, we are recurrently in doubt about its eligibility.

The categorizations of *Danish* and of *History* traditionally support hegemonic power, exclusion, and norms. Östberg Diakité reflects on the (dis)agreement she felt of claiming, or being forced to be “a part of History” when applying to participate in the 2018 residency (Östberg Diakité 2018). I listen again to this crucial and complex perception. Our motivation as organizers was to create a possibility to meet, share, and gather stories as a community across generations. In (playful) ways, we also hoped to respond to what we experience as a common feeling of lacking history. Did the participants sign up to *be a part of history?* Is the be(com)ing part of history a voluntary act? And if so, who provides that choice?

As I allow myself to dwell, I find the usage of the term *history* more and more confusing. Some direction is restored as Overgaard and Östberg Diakité refer to Paula Caspão’s workshop *Danish dance (bi)stories – in small parts*. Caspão separates the term *History* as a powerful construction or systematization of cultural identity from *Historicity* as the awareness of dealing with and looking upon history (Caspão 2018). I want to trust that the initiative’s different attempts at activation have and will contribute to a critical, responsible, and humble debate on the construction of history and how it matters.

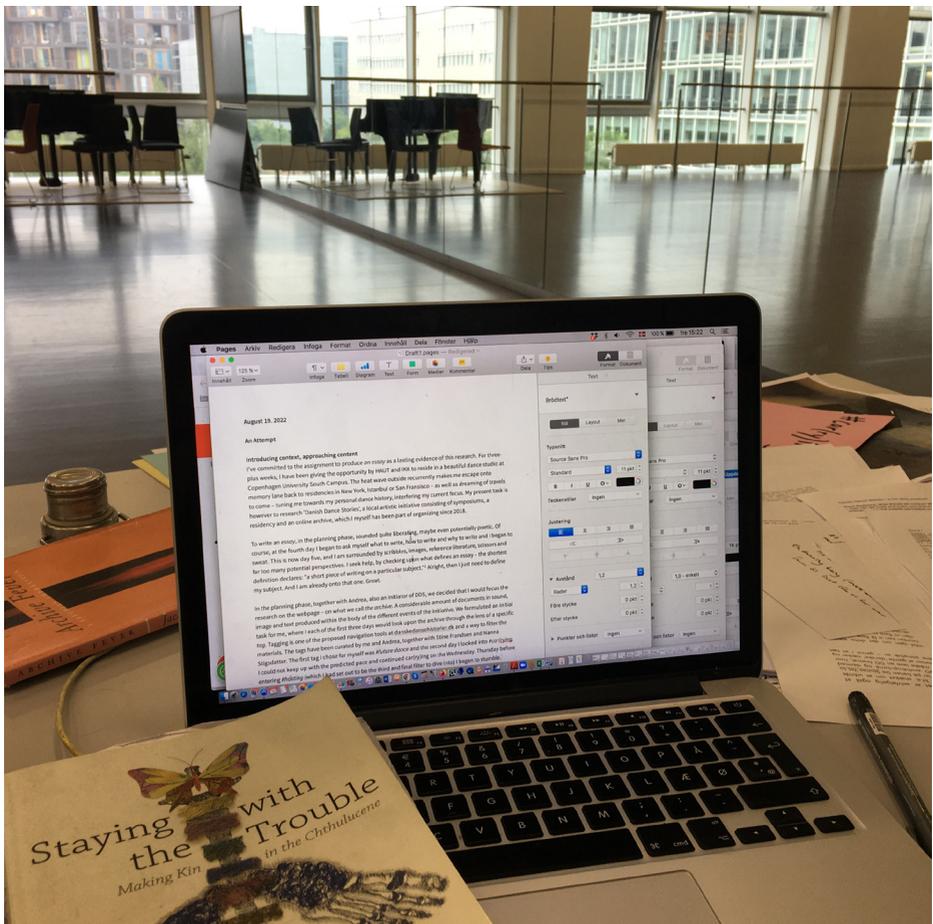
*Stories, Historier.* Adding plurality was an attempt to rupture history’s officiality, and by selecting *Stories* instead of *Histories* in the English translation, we as initiators hoped to

enhance content above category. As a response to the inadequacy in the Danish language, some participants claimed the Danish word “storie” during the DD Residency in 2018.

Throughout the site, I experience an attendance to splitting of categorizations and invented wordings. As we had inflected the term *History* into plural form, how could the word Danish be challenged? How can it be pluralized? Danishes? More-than-Danish? Neither really works. Lydia suggests changing the title to “local” or removing its reference to nationality all together. Maybe this would be, if not a solution, a valid

response to an issue. *Dance stories; Dansehistorier*. I sense how this title releases a lot of tension and makes it easier to spell out. But something happens to the friction within the other words. With *Danish* out, the connotation of *History*, the weight of which was enhanced by the national connotation, is weakened. By removing Danish, history is somehow also diminished, and as this happens, I sense that some agency gets lost. Because I want to claim that personal stories—stories of illness,

*From the process at Copenhagen University.  
August 2022. Photo credit: Carolina Bäckman*



failure, motherhood, and childhood—should have a part in *History*. Even though, or maybe because, the itchiness and guilt remain present, this uncomfortable title should perhaps not be erased but remain as fuel for future debates. The umbrella title for the three symposiums in 2021 is *Stories yet to be told*.

Phyllis Akinyi pointed out to me that the amount of material on the webpage has become quite voluminous, and as there is no official archive of Danish dance history outside of the Royal Danish Theater, this gathering of stories does matter. It has become a significant collection, and as a sum, it tells a story of Danish dance. With the expansion follows a responsibility, Akinyi reminded me. When I examine the content of the bag, it is quite clear that most of the stories stem from Western traditions, and several are connected to institutions such as the Danish National School of Performing Arts. I start to believe that *dance* is the elephant in the room. At least the application and meaning of the term *dance* need to be scrutinized further within and beyond DD. There are certainly more stories to be told, and even more stories to be listened to.

## Storytelling as a way of rewriting multiple futures

My writing process, like my reasoning, feels more ungraspable, blurrier as I steer in spirals to get somewhere (else). I am reapproaching #future dance, without being clear of what direction(s) leads me there. I browse again in *Staying with the trouble*, leaning on Haraway's entangled formulations. I rest my eyes on an image of an octopus and read about surrendering to the capacity of thinking through "tentacular thinking" as a possible necessity for planetarian survival by thinking about other stories, other entanglements and relations, composting, grieving, and taking responsibility. (Haraway 2016, 57, 32-44).

Holding onto the tentacles, I trust that a multitude of

directions lead to a pathway to the future. By thinking multiple thoughts, or by sharing multiple stories, the healing becomes collective. A tapestry is woven for others to attach to. History-writing is not an act of becoming immortal (that is not the point, as there is no point)—instead, I linger on the thought that the practice of storytelling (and listening) is crucial to survive as a whole.

### In the future we'll be nostalgic about the times when Denmark was still held by gravity.

From the Danish Dance Stories story  
*Imaginations unfolded*

I associate Haraway's writing about tentacular thinking with dancing. To multiply attention, to think together, and to think simultaneously are essential aspects of dancing. More than forty years ago, dancer and philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone wrote the article "Thinking in Movement" about dance improvisation, about different kinds of thinking, and about the distinctions between thinking and words. Sheets-Johnstone writes about dancing-thinking that "the very ground of this nonseparation [thinking and doing] is the capacity, indeed, the very experience of the dancer, to be thinking in movement" (Sheets-Johnstone 1983, 400). Some pages later, Sheets-Johnstone continues that "thinking in movement is an apt descriptive rendering of a way of being in the world, a way which can be clarified and elaborated further" (Sheets-Johnstone 1983, 404). I think the world (and the words) needs thinking in movement and that dancers should acknowledge this knowledge.

The stories of *danskedansehistorier.dk* spring from being(s) with the experience of thinking in movement. As such, I sense how dancing-thinking exists in the cracks between words. Memories, proposals, ambitions, dreams, and perspectives spirally connect past and future dance(r)s for wor(l)ds to come. I zoom in on some of the wordings

formulated by the participants at the workshop *Øjeblikket af en bevægelse udfoldet*, and I want to believe that dancing-thinking provides opportunities to rupture categorization and to allow for more in-betweens and particular entanglements (Danish Dance Stories 2021). Future formulations from a past presence, from remembering in movement:

*Blossom ears*

*dimensions of pink*

*Cracking earthquakes out of my thighs*

*The panther-woman was born inside a tree.*

*I touched it and it started to remember me  
we are rocks and trees, waves and materials we do  
not yet have discovered.*

Sara Hamming's suggestion through the title of her workshop at the 2018 residency, *At fortælle om historien er at stamme*, gets somewhat lost in translation (Hamming 2018). "At stamme" means to stutter, but in Danish, it is also the word for a tribe, as well as the trunk of a tree. I am attempting

translations: *To tell about the bi/story is to stutter. (Re)telling the (bi)story is stuttering. Or maybe, Repetition as a mode of telling stories. To story tell is to practice a tribe. History is to stem (from somewhere). To hesitate. To risk being patronized and to insist on being listened to. Storytelling is to connect with one's roots.* I let Hamming's proposal, through its multiplicity and entanglement, provide me with an exit. An exit out of this text, out of this research, and (back) into a community of dancing beings. I do feel that I have arrived somewhere. Not at a point, but at many places—in the cracks, the in-betweens, the entanglements, the past, the future, the present.

*From the workshop "Øjeblikket af en bevægelse – udfoldet". at DD Symposium in Aarhus. 27 June 2021. Photo credit: Andrea Deres*



## References

- Haraway, Donna J. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3: 575–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.
- Haraway, Donna J. 2016. *Staying with the trouble – Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. 1989. *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. Dancing at the Edge of the World*. New York: Grove Press.
- Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. 1983. "Thinking in Movement." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39, no. 4: 399–407. <https://doi.org/10.2307/430239>.
- Springgay, Stephanie, Anise Truman, and Sara MacLean. 2019. "Socially Engaged Art, Experimental Pedagogies, and Anarchiving as Research Creation." *Sagepub* 6, no. 7: 897–907. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419884964>.

## Website references

- Bäckman Carolina, Andrea Deres, Stine Frandsen, and Nanna Stigsdatter. 2018. "DD Selv-interview." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=33&mode=stories>.
- Caspão, Paula. 2018. "Danish dance (hi)stories – in small parts." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=23&mode=stories>.
- Danish Dance Stories. 2021. "Imaginations unfolded." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=36&mode=stories>.
- Danish Dance Stories. 2021. "Øjeblikket af en bevægelse udfoldet." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=39&mode=stories>.
- Gasiorek, Emilia, and Karis Zidore. 2018. "Containers of knowledge." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=55&mode=stories>.
- Hamming, Sara. 2018. "At fortælle om historien er at stamme." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=24&mode=stories>.
- Vedel, Karen. 2018. "Dansehistoriernes Sorte Boks." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=18&mode=stories>.
- Östberg Diakité, Lydia, and Vibe Overgaard. 2018. "I agree with the question mark." <https://danskedansehistorier.dk/story.php?id=14&mode=stories>.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Carolina Bäckman** is based in Copenhagen and has been working within the artistic field of dance and choreography for 20 years. Since November 2022, she holds a MFA in Dance & Participation from the Danish National School of Performing Arts. She enjoys working in collective structures, where the in betweens and overlaps are allowed to form the artistic process. The

figure of the dancer, historiography and community seem to be recurrent topics in her work. Together with Andrea Deres, Stine Frandsen and Nanna Stigsdatter, she is the initiator and producer of the artistic initiative Danish Dance Stories.



# Performing Relationality: Weaving Bodies, Movement and Things

A conversation about what it means to work collaboratively in between practice and research

Eva Meyer-Keller (Berlin) and Julia Schade (Ruhr-University Bochum)

This conversation brings together artist Eva Meyer-Keller and performance scholar Julia Schade. Eva works at the intersection of performance and visual art and is based in Berlin. Before graduating from the School for New Dance Development (SNDD) in Amsterdam, she studied photography and visual art in Berlin (Hochschule der Künste) and London (Central St. Martins and Kings College). In her work, she draws attention to that which is always already there. Her works create spaces in which it is possible to notice what is intentionally or accidentally overlooked. Since 2017, she has been working on a series that engages models, procedures and concepts from the natural sciences.

Her newest piece, *Out of Mind*, which premiered on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2023 at Sophiensaele in Berlin.

Julia is a performance and media scholar at Ruhr University Bochum. She was so intrigued by Eva's piece, *Living Matters* (2019), that she wrote about it in her dissertation, exploring its "dramaturgy of response-ability" and thereby situating it within new materialist discourses of entanglement and more-than-human temporality.

For the last year, Eva and Julia have been in close exchange about Eva's new piece, *Out of Mind*. They have shared thoughts on each other's projects, their interest in feminist theory and science and what it means to work in between artistic practice and research.

Julia (J): I would like to start by talking about an aspect of your work, Eva, that deeply fascinated me when I first saw your performance piece, *Living Matters*, in 2019. I was very intrigued by the way you relate bodies, movement and objects to each other. The piece is part of a series you have been working on since 2017, in which you engage with models from the natural sciences. *Living Matters* deals with biological processes, such as cell division, which are performed on stage through an assemblage of bodies, props and everyday objects, including blackberries, contact lenses and theatre spotlights. This always involves the apparatus of the theatre, including its cables, lighting and sound equipment. Within this arrangement, surprising things happen, such as a squished grape mutating into a fluorescent deep-sea monster under

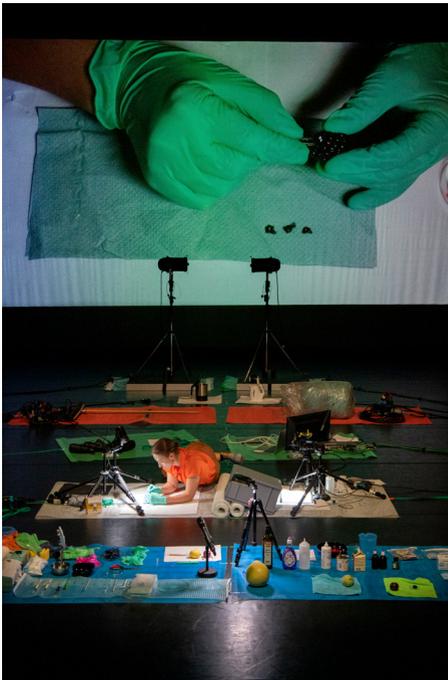


Photo 1

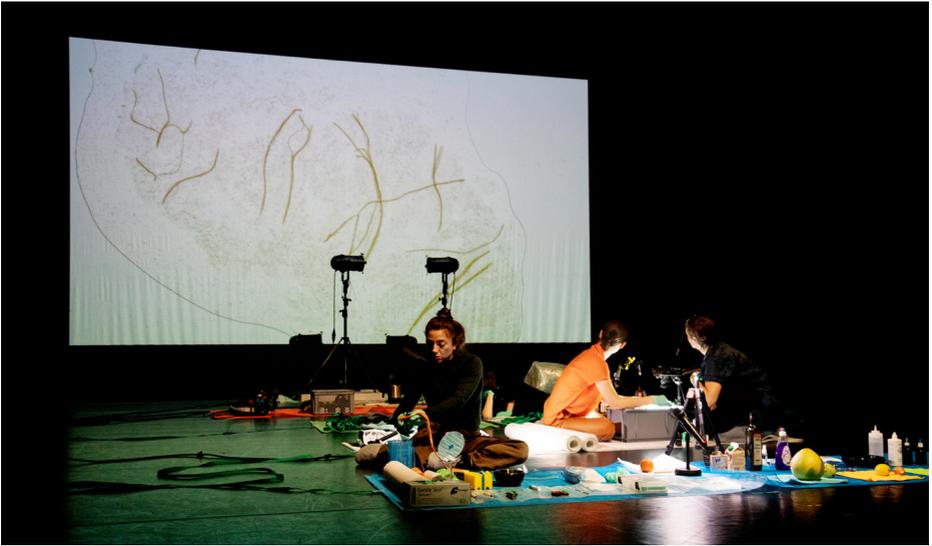


Photo 2

the eye of a microscope and tampons performing mitosis. How would you describe this relationship between bodies, movement and objects?

Eva (E): While performing, we are on a threshold at the limit of what is possible for us to handle. So, in that moment, we need to surrender and pay attention. The objects are all somehow the same; there is no hierarchy between them. The camera is like a face mask or a blackberry. The technical equipment is

not only technical equipment; we also take it apart, and we move it around just like the other things. We mix the video live on stage, instead of exporting it to invisible technicians, although there is a technician in *Living Matters*, taking care of the light and

Photo 3



*sound*. Often, I have the technician on stage; but in *Living Matters* I did not want to do that. At the same time, there is a lot of care and responsibility for each other in this work.

J: This aspect of care and responsibility is very important. When I saw the piece, it was clear to me that the process of entangling followed a certain logic that I, from the outside, could not understand. From the audience, I somehow became a witness to this process of webbing and weaving, realizing that none of these bodies and objects stood for themselves. Rather, there was a sense of enormous care and responsibility for each (more-than-human) agent and movement within this fragile web of relations. You have been working with this, as I would call it, dramaturgy of response-ability for 10 years now, even before it became a thing to read Donna Haraway (2017) in the arts and engage in discourses about more-than-human entanglement. In your piece *Pulling Strings* (2013), which you call 'a choreography for a space', you literally created this cat's cradle web of everyday objects in which every single one was connected to a string and interlaced with other ones within this fragile but confusing net. You, as a performer, move objects by carefully pulling the strings with extreme care for the whole construction. I have the impression that *Living Matters* is more about the whole process of weaving bodies, movement, material and things together, even though there is also a scene where you move props on stage by actually pulling strings. Would you agree?

E: In *Pulling Strings*, I wanted to make the apparatus of the theatre—and the things in it that often remain invisible—visible and support it on stage. Here, the theatre plays itself, and the supporting things (lamps, microphone stands, trash cans, etc.) become the main actors. In the piece, I also intervene in the theatrical processes backstage because I kidnap the trash can from the technicians. In *Living Matters*, the connections are on different levels.

Each person involved brings a lot to the table. We try not to keep our *Living Matters* lab clean; instead, the contamination, and the respective subjective experience is part of the project, our togetherness, and the blurring of the personal and professional.

J: Let us talk a little bit about what all this means for your own role as a performer and choreographer. You are performing yourself and not placing yourself as an outside-eye choreographer giving directions. In this way, you are entangled in the processes on stage with your co-performers, a team of women (Annegret Schalke, Agata Siniarska and Tamara Saphir) with whom you have been working for a long time. How important is this for you?

E: I used to enjoy being outside because I was fascinated with the details you can choreograph from an outer eye perspective. I used to really be into the edges of the performance space or up on the ceiling, such as in *Pulling Strings*, places that are usually overlooked. This has really changed. These days, rather than being the outside eye, I prefer to perform in my pieces because when I am in them and when we are developing these things together, it is a very different role of directing. It is more like, 'okay, so let us really get into it together', into the juice, and let us stay with this matter or with the dough or the water. Let us get wet. Like this, it is more like a journey we are taking together, and we are sometimes confused, curious, sidetracked or overwhelmed. We figure it out together. The medium somehow gets thicker and more dense and many more facets and layers appear. It is not like I come into the process with this one clear idea that then crystallizes.

J: I like that there is this fascination with a certain materiality in your work, as you made it clear before by saying "let us stay with the water". For example, now, in *Out of Mind*, it is water. Before, in *Living Matters*, it was also about exploring liquids: You had this whole laboratory on stage with different macro lens cameras, which looked like microscopes,

that were projecting their images onto a big screen where you could observe how a squished blackberry turned into a bunch of moving and twitching tissue under the gaze of the microscope. In this way, the theatre becomes a research lab in which you explore a certain materiality very seriously, asking how it affects the movement and the bodies. Maybe you could even say that you develop your piece, including the choreography of bodies and things, through the materiality of the water, the dough, and the liquid.

E: In *Out of Mind* the water is very important and it is text heavy compared to other works that I have done. For me, this is very challenging. I want to find a way in which the text becomes the same; it is like material, like an object, and like the watering can or the bucket on stage. I would like the words to also have a presence and spread their scent. For *Out of Mind*, we are working on a scene at the moment where we explore how to write words into sprayed water mist, which makes them materialise in a particular way. At the same time, words function differently than objects. I am still in the middle of the process; but, maybe that is also an investigation into which I have stumbled, where I still do not actually realise that that is what I am doing. I do not have a recipe or methods; being new to something is a valid perspective. It is an embodied practice. It is a lived experience, which means that, in the process, everything is intertwined.

J: A very important aspect of work is your approach to artistic research in which you engage with very specific processes from the natural sciences. In *Living Matters*, it was cell biology, in *Some Significance*, physics, and in *Out of Mind*, neuroscience. This means that part of your artistic work is research into these fields. You go into a rehearsal process at a point where you have already done a lot of research. For example, for *Living Matters*, you had a lot of conversations with biologists at the Reber Lab, a lab for quantitative

biology in Berlin. For *Out of Mind*, you have done many interviews with neuroscientist Andrew Plested, and you even took your whole team to the Lab talking to scientists who showed you around and explained how they work. You take this artistic research, this engagement with a new research field very seriously and invest a lot of time to do that as part of your creative practice. But, at the same time, your pieces are not simply about cell division or neuroscience.

E: I do not come up with a brilliant new idea and say, 'Okay. Today, let's try it'. Instead, we engage in a new subject together, knowing that none of us is an expert. In a world that is increasingly complex, we need to dare to engage with subject matters that seem inaccessible at first. In *Living Matters*, we worked on cell division even though none of us is a biologist. My team and I, we have to tune ourselves into the topic. And then each of us has ideas, and then we try them. For example, we discuss what the difference is between mitosis and meiosis, how many objects we need if we are going to enact this and so on.

For me as a performer and as a maker, there is a period of time when I am exposing myself and my team to certain ideas and new perspectives and viewpoints, for example, cell biology for *Living Matters* or neuroscience for *Out of Mind*. I do not really want to make things about a certain subject; it is not about cell biology. It is more that we start exposing ourselves to certain ideas, research and knowledge. We get these impulses, and, at the same time, there is a certain driving force from inside; but, it is not so clear where it will end up.

Yesterday, I sat in the car and thought about the next project, in which I want to investigate ageing. And I thought back to my early works, where the content was not so heavy, and it often came later. The content appeared during the creation process; it was not there from the start. With *Growing Old* (working title), there is so much to learn and find out and so many people to talk to and research. I have started

already because I cannot resist, so I am mixing projects. As a maker, this research period is very interesting; but, of course, I would like to transfer our experiences to the audience in one hour or however long the performance will be. You cannot; but, I would love the audience to be able to get a glimpse of these experiences. If you shift your mind just a little bit or your perception a little bit, it can change so much.

J: This question of change of perception is something that you are working on right now for *Out of Mind*.

E: Yes, I even think it is relevant in *Living Matters*.

J: I would like to come back to something you said before, that your way of exposing you and your team to a new subject means experiencing it as sort of an embodied practice which affects your worldview, your perception or your embodiment. This is something that resonates with me as a performance scholar and where I feel I can really learn a lot from the way you approach certain subjects, be it through a specific materiality, such as water, or through movement. In theatre and performance scholar writing, there is always the danger of simply applying a certain theory to an artistic work, which degrades the latter into a mere illustration of the former. You told me that, for *Living Matters*, you were reading Haraway while taking walks around the ZOLLVEREIN coal mine industrial complex. I love that. For me, Haraway is an important thinker who influenced me in my work, and I love to recognize certain aspects of her work in yours. But, it would be wrong to say that you are doing a piece *about* Haraway or *about* new materialist entanglement. It would be even less interesting for me to see a piece that applies Haraway onto the stage and then shows me a choreography of more-than-human entanglement. Instead, I find it much more interesting that your piece poses the question: How does this theory affect the way I

embody, the way I work, and the way I experience? Or even: What would it mean to let the material 'contaminate' me? What does it do to the movement, the bodies, the choreography on stage? How can I think *with* it in my creative process?

E: As a non-academic, I read Haraway probably differently than you. For me, she is nearly poetry. The repetitions that she uses and, of course, what she says are so beautiful. She writes in a specific way. Her research is based on the research of people such as Lynn Margulis. I'm interested in your journey with writing. You have written different texts throughout the years, and they develop. I start a new project, and there are new ideas. And, at the same time, certain things come back. They come up again, and I guess it is similar with writing or with researching. I would be curious in what sense you could expand even the form of writing. It sounds like being a single author might not be exactly appropriate.

J: That is something I have been thinking about a lot over the last few years. If we take this sense of entanglement seriously, as you do, and view it as a responsibility for the web of relations of which you are part, be it with other people, processes or objects, then it has to have consequences for the way I write texts as a performance scholar and for the way you work in performance. This implies to make people and infrastructures visible which helped us to think, work and write because, let us be honest, we never think or develop ideas alone. This also means that the convention of single-authored texts—or artistic works—is pretentious because it simply hides these relations. This is why we need other modes of writing in order to make these entanglements visible, which is addressed by latest discussions about care, relationality and situatedness. This sense of responsibility for otherwise hidden relations becomes very clear right in the beginning of *Living Matters* when you play with word combinations around matter. What, at first, may seem like harmless

wordplay unfolds into a scenic reflection around care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) through the interweaving of bodies, movement and objects. I would say that, by doing so, the performance and its title, *Living Matters*, leaves us with very important questions: Which relations and webs of care normally remain invisible in performance (work), its apparatus and its infrastructure? To whom do these relations matter and who cares for them within and beyond the theatre? To end, I would be curious to know if you would describe this way of working with entanglement, responsibility and care within this fragile web of relations as a feminist practice.

E: Yes, it is deeply feminist. I don't need to label the work as feminist, as it is so important that underlies everything. How we relate to each other, how we engage with topics and materials, how we listen to each other and how we support each other.

J: This is a beautiful sentence on which to end.

## References

- Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, María. 2017. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Eva Meyer-Keller** (b. 1972) is based in Berlin. She works at the interface of performance and visual art. Before graduating from the School for New Dance Development (SNDD) in Amsterdam, she studied photography and visual art in Berlin (Hochschule der Künste) and London (Central St. Martins and Kings College). Her works include the performances *Death is Certain* (2002 performances in more than 200 venues around the world) and *Pulling Strings* (KunstenFestivaldesArts, Brussels, 2013) as well as the installations *Volksballons* (Palast der Republik, 2004, and Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2013) and *Handmade* (NGBK, Berlin; Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm; and Palais de Tokyo, Paris). She has worked with Baktruppen, Jérôme Bel, Christine De Smedt/les Ballets C de la B (9x9), Juan Dominguez, Kate McIntosh and Agnes Meyer-Brandis. [e@evamk.de](mailto:e@evamk.de)

**Julia Schade** (b. 1988), Ph.D., is a performance and media scholar in the Department of Media Studies at Ruhr University Bochum. Her dissertation, *Resistant Temporalities. Thinking Time in the Works of William Kentridge, Rabih Mroué and Eva Meyer-Keller*, was awarded the prize for Best Scientific Work on Social Cohesion in 2021. She researches decolonial, queer-feminist and more-than-human temporalities at the intersection of theory and performance. Her recent publications include 'Elements Matter: New Relationalities in Colonial Modernity', *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* vol 31, issue 64 and 'Dramaturgies of Response-ability', *Performance Research* vol. 27, issue 7. [Julia.Schade-f2f@rub.de](mailto:Julia.Schade-f2f@rub.de)

## Unfolding Microgravity and the Interplay Between Awe, Wonder, Curiosity, and Humility in Artistic Research

Esther Wrobel

### ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the term 'curiosity' emerged as a leading element in the development of the action performance research project *Microgravity*. The focus is on the effect of curiosity as an activator of movement in a participatory performance in which participants are invited to explore new bodily conditions for the first time (in this case, reduced gravity through a vertical dance technique). I begin with an account of what vertical dance is, its origin, and my personal experience as a vertical dancer. Through the connection between vertical dance and space exploration and an encounter with the terms 'awe' and 'wonder' (in connection to space travel), I move on to pedagogical and creative decisions regarding ways to create a participatory performance that, due to its complete physical involvement of participants, I now refer to as an 'action performance'. I will elaborate on the creative partners who joined the research and the interplay of curiosity and humility in relation to the terms 'awe' and 'wonder' based on the book *A Neurophenomenology of Awe and Wonder* (Gallagher et al. 2015), which was the initial inspiration for the use of these terms and the establishment of the imaginary universe of *Microgravity*. I will also employ my own interpretation of these terms as a researcher, drawing on first-hand participatory experiments and data gathered from participants between 2019 and 2022.

### RESUMÉ

Denne artikel afdækker hvordan begrebet 'nysgerrighed' opstod som et ledende element i udviklingen af den deltagerinddragende research *Microgravity*. Fokus er på effekten af nysgerrighed som igangsættende for bevægelse. Deltagerne inviteres til at udforske nye kropslige forudsætninger for første gang i mødet med følelsen af nedsat tyngdekraft, fremkaldt ved hjælp af teknikker fra vertikal dans. Artiklens første del afdækker hvad vertikal dans er, dens oprindelse, samt mine personlige oplevelser som vertikal danser. Herefter beskrives hvordan forbindelsen mellem vertikal dans og rumudforskning, samt mødet med begreberne ærefrygt og undren (i forbindelse med rumrejse) bidrager til de pædagogiske og kreative beslutninger i tilblivelsen af forestillingen, som jeg grundet deltagerens komplette fysiske involvering refererer til som en action performance. Jeg vil uddybe hvilke kreative partnere, der deltog i udforskningen af *Microgravity* som blevet undervejs til en tværkunstneriske projekt. Til sidst vil jeg uddybe sammenhængen mellem nysgerrighed og ydmyghed i forhold til begreberne 'ærefrygt' og 'undren', baseret på *A Neurophenomenology of Awe and Wonder* (Gallagher et. al. 2015), som var den indledende inspiration til at bruge disse begreber og etablere det forestillede univers *Microgravity*. Jeg vil også involvere min egen tolkning af disse begreber baseret på mine involverende eksperimenter og data indsamlet fra deltagere mellem 2019-22.

# Unfolding Microgravity and the Interplay Between Awe, Wonder, Curiosity, and Humility in Artistic Research

Esther Wrobel

## Unfolding Microgravity and the interplay between awe, care in artistic research

My intention in this article is to explore how the term 'curiosity' emerged as a leading element in the development of the action performance research project Microgravity. The focus is on the effect of curiosity as an activator of movement in a participatory performance in which participants are invited to explore new bodily conditions for the first time

(reduced gravity through a vertical dance technique). By sharing how the action performance came to fruition, I will elaborate on the interplay of curiosity and humility in relation to the terms 'awe' and 'wonder' based on the book *A Neuropenomenology of Awe and Wonder* (Gallagher et al. 2015), which was the initial inspiration for the use of these terms and the establishment of the imaginary universe of

*Figure 1. Image: Esther Wrobel in 'Scenography of Moon Spot'*



*Microgravity*. I will also employ my own interpretation of these terms as a researcher, drawing on first-hand participatory experiments and data gathered from participants between 2019–2022.

## From Vertical Dance Towards Participation

At the outset of this artistic research project, during my Master of Fine Arts studies at the Danish National School of Performing Arts, I focused on finding a way of sharing my personal experience as a vertical dancer. The scholar and artist Kate Lawrence described vertical dance in the following manner: 'It is a hybrid form that appropriates equipment designed to be used by rock climbers and/or industrial access workers and uses it to suspend dancers against walls. These walls are then used as dance floors, which gives rise to new physical techniques and perceptions of space for dancers' (Lawrence 2017, 11). In the years I have been practicing and performing, I have noticed that, while dancing, I get a magical feeling that I am somewhere else – somewhere entirely different from our regular world. Due to the spatial relation to gravity, I feel that I am expanding from the inside and the outside. In vertical dance, the main pressure and release point of the body shifts from the feet to the centre of the body, the pelvis, where the harness is attached to the rope. This radically changes the conditions in which the body meets its external surroundings and requires a great deal of core muscular strength. Here is a glimpse of how it can feel:

From my body archive:<sup>2</sup> *I take a giant step. I am in the air for several seconds, and I land just off the side of the building on a thick, glass panel. I take a long lunge to the end of my pendulum, grab hold of a gap between the windows with the edges of my fingers, and pause. I free one hand from the cold, flat glass, place it closer to the middle of my body, and press a little while also pulling with the hand that is left on the panel. My legs and pelvis*



Figure 2. Photo of Esther Wrobel taken by Dave Navndrup Black during the creation of *Breathtaking From The Ground Up* by Se Byen Vertikalt (artists: Mette Møller Overgaard, David Navndrup Black, and Esther Wrobel) Struer Tracks Sound Biennial 2021 in Struer Harbour.

*can float away from the glass wall; now; most of my body is hovering over a concrete place in a kind of handstand. A few children below are circling on bicycles, like a tiny flock of birds in reverse order. They are up; am I down? My legs separate and move in a slow walking motion in the air. I listen to city sounds, but mostly I hear and feel the air. I am in the centre of the city in the middle of the air. I am hanging around, like everyone else in town, but the place I am in is a totally different space with different rules. I am in a harness on the side of a building, and here, I can breathe. Here, I swim like a fish* (Wrobel, 2018).

How can one reorganise the internal connection between the brain and body to help stir movement when the conditions of gravity are drastically changed? It has been my experience that it is possible to overcome the physical challenges and strain of the horizontal position if one believes one is actually standing on the wall rather than hanging on a rope. Imagining an alternative reality allows for fantastical physical exploration to occur, and one can find oneself able to move with new superpowers, such as flying, floating, gliding, and soaring. In other words, vertical dance requires the ability to say 'yes' to an alternative reality.



Figure 3. Photo of Esther Wrobel taken during a workshop with Lindsey Butcher at the La Boule Aerial Dance Festival, La Boule, 2011

### Pedagogical Considerations

How, in a short time, can a participant feel comfortable and safe enough to learn the basic principles of moving in a harness and, moreover, explore and even play in altered gravity? What I needed to construct boiled down to two main elements: the physical and the imaginative. I had to facilitate the technical conditions so that the participants would not rely on previous rigorous physical training and find an imaginative 'other place' they could say 'yes' to.

On the cover of the book *A Neurophenomenology of Awe and Wonder* (Gallagher et al. 2015, hereafter ANPOA&W), there is a picture of the face of an astronaut in a spacesuit. His eyes are open wide, and behind him is nothing but space. I was intrigued by the theme of space travel and was immediately drawn



Figure 4. Cover photo: *A Neurophenomenology of Awe and Wonder. Towards a Non-Reductionist Cognitive Science*

to the words 'awe' and 'wonder'. In the sense that they motivated feelings that could be put into action, these terms, I felt, related to my sentiments about vertical dance. ANPOA&W is introduced as follows: "This book is about the first scientific study of these experiences (Awe and Wonder) in the context of space travel. The aim of this study was to explore what traditionally might be called the inner space of experience while traveling in outer space" (Gallagher et al. 2015, 3). The researchers explain that the setting of outer space is vital for an objective meeting of inner and outer observations. It is my understanding that the context of space travel, in relation to awe and wonder, supports genuine feelings and experiences in an objectively real, magnificent situation. "Space avoids the temptation to either reduce awe and wonder to mundane experience or explain it completely by reference to some internal processes caused by external stimuli" (Gallagher et al. 2015, 3).

In her lecture 'The Routes of Vertical Dance', Wanda Moretti discussed how vertical dance emerged in the 1970s in the aftermath of the first moon landing, which forever changed how we look at ourselves and the

planet we inhabit (Moretti 2018). Discussing the artistic manifestation of vertical dance in the promotional material for her film *Moon and Movement*, she noted that a unique 'vision of the world took shape' (Moretti 2020). As an effect of competing superpowers during the Cold War, the training that NASA astronauts and Russian cosmonauts underwent, such as horizontal suspension (which is similar to vertical dance) and parabolic flights<sup>3</sup> was on public display as a means of displaying strength. These practices captured the attention of movement artists around the world. A famous example is a work by Trisha Brown from 1970, 'Man Walking on the Side of a Building.'<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by the history of vertical dance in Moretti's research and the inspiring terms 'awe' and 'wonder' in the context of space travel in *ANPOA&W*, I began to see space as a most desirable backdrop to the *other place* I was searching for: the imaginary universe for the participatory experiment.

In an experiment described in *ANPOA&W*, the team created a simulation of a room where astronauts reside on the International Space Station (ISS) while orbiting the earth:

The design of Experiment 1...tried to leverage the affective aspects of the narrative, leaning on a framing narrative to support the sense of immersion...Research assistants explained that there would be a "launch" and participants...were whisked into a mixed-reality space, made to resemble a space capsule, with portholes (served by LCD screens) that would provide digitally-generated views of the earth from space. (Gallagher et al. 2015, 69)

This neurophenomenological experiment combined both cognition and experience; the participants were fitted with physiological sensors (An electroencephalogram (EEG), electrocardiogram (ECG) and Functional near-infrared spectroscopy

(fNIR) and required to fill in questionnaires and sit for an interview. This resulted in an emphatic 'yes' to the question, can experiences of awe and wonder be elicited in a simulated environment?

The layout and scientific rigour of the experiment discussed in *ANPOA&W* was inspiring, reassuring, and well-structured. It offered a basis for both form and content. I therefore decided to conduct an experiment inspired by *ANPOA&W* to evoke sensations of awe and wonder through an embodied experience of altered gravity in the space travel context. I planned a one-on-one 'launch' simulation titled *Moon Spot*, treating participants as if they were astronauts on a mission to Earth's moon. I arrived at a technical solution we call 'The System'.<sup>5</sup> It involves a counterweight between a side pick harness and a deadweight that creates a seesaw effect, which allows the person to have contact with a floor instead of a wall and yet retain the physical agency to jump or float with a relatively low gravity effect – similar to walking on the moon. 'The System's' technical apparatus and the moon as an exciting destination together offered the imaginary other place I sought.

Camille Butingsrud reported her experience on her website (<https://camillebutingsrud.weebly.com/news.html>) after her participation in 2021: 'I felt I could play with these new bodily forces. What followed was a joyful and intense exploration of moving as a new body in a new space, enabled to create what felt like enormously expanded moves, finding myself upside-down or flat in the air as part of the session'. It was enjoyable and inspiring to watch and guide as each person explored different bodily experiences as part of *Moon Spot*.<sup>6</sup>

To gather data from participants, I used questionnaires developed in the project described in *ANPOA&W*, with alterations to fit the bodily aspects of the experiment. At the end of the original questionnaires were definitions for awe and wonder, with an addition of a third and fourth term: curiosity

and humility. These definitions were outcomes of the analysis of interviews and writings from astronauts that had spent time in orbit around Earth on the ISS. 'Our focus was on phenomenology, that is, the experiential aspects of these descriptions' (Gallagher et al. 2015, 6). The definitions are as follows:

*AWE: A direct and initial experience or feeling when faced with something amazing, incomprehensible, or sublime.*

*WONDER: A reflective experience motivated when one is unable to put things into a familiar conceptual framework.*

*CURIOSITY: Wanting to know, see, experience, understand more.*

*HUMILITY: A sensation about one's relation to the universe or one's significance.*

(Gallagher et al. 2015, 179)

After being given the definitions, participants were asked to state whether they had experienced one or several of them. I was less interested in curiosity to begin with, as my main focus was on awe, wonder and the wish to ignite them. As for humility, I decided to leave it out entirely, as I viewed it at the time as unrelated. This assumption turned out to be incorrect, as later, when *Microgravity* began to take form as a cross-disciplinary research project with more focus on space travel, the terms 'care' and 'empathy' emerged repeatedly and became prominent. When looking back at the source of humility in *ANPOA&W*, one can draw a clear connection and identify a similar quality in its essence. I will elaborate on humility later.

The questionnaires filled out by the *Moon Spot* participants showed that the one common thing they all shared was the experience of curiosity. This result carried through to the next experiment, titled *A Visit to Saturn's Moon*. In addition to 'The System', *A Visit To Saturn's Moon* included a virtual reality simulation of an ice cave on Enceladus, a small frozen moon orbiting Saturn (drawn in the program Tilt Brush,

which was recommended by Simon Lajboschitz).<sup>7</sup>

This simulation was co-facilitated with dance artist and climate activist Tanya Rydell Montan and influenced by conversations with animator Michelle Kranot about the term 'immersive storytelling' from VR filmmaking and thoughts on how 'far' can we go. Enceladus' mysterious potential for life made it a worthwhile destination. This was an attempt to instil additional feelings of awe and wonder, like the awe described by US astronaut Gus Grissom: 'Nowhere else can you realize so fully the majesty of our Earth and be so awed at the thought that it's only one of untold thousands of planets' (quoted in Gallagher et al. 2015, 5).

The integration of VR as an immersive tool added to the 'disappearance' of the participants. A participant's description of a highlight supports this claim: 'When I finally lifted off and jumped up and got caught by gravity, I saw a crystal in front of me and forgot about the real world completely. I was like underwater yet not, and I realised the feeling of weightlessness and began swimming around'. In *A Visit to Saturn's Moon*, we can see an integration between the visual and physical as modes of 'total' transportation to somewhere else. Yet, out of 12 participants, 6 reported experiencing awe, 5 reported wonder, and 11 reported experiencing curiosity. As the report was consistent about the presence of curiosity, I began to pay more attention. What is the difference between the terms 'awe', 'wonder', and 'curiosity' in the context of undergoing an embodied moonlike-gravity crash course? Why is curiosity the most consistent feeling of all? Could it be that, in movement, other interpretations of these terms emerge that override those presented in *ANPOA&W*?

While in *ANPOA&W*, curiosity and humility are absorbed within the concepts of awe and wonder, in *Microgravity*, the opposite process occurred, and the nature of each concept began to unfold. I realised that 'awe' had a momentary effect (a 'wow' moment) when fully embedded in a physical practice. Wonder is

also harder to relate to continuously. In the context of being immersed physically in another field of gravity, it seems that participants spend some moments thinking about how things are happening but quickly return to the situation of being in a different gravitational relationship. I began to recognise curiosity as the activator that can propel participants into motion. When it comes to movement and exploration, awe and wonder can be viewed as more passive.

I now understand curiosity as a bridge towards motion of any kind – especially in the case of learning through bodily action in new physical conditions. Once curiosity is awakened, the participant can move from curiosity towards play and the unknown (often finding joy and freedom). A similar process happened to me as a researcher. Although I initially included space travel as a background element, my own curiosity about space and space research was triggered. I could not control it. I realised how little I knew about what gravity actually is and became quite thirsty to learn

*Figure 5. From the left, we see Tanya Montan Rydell in the System of Microgravity and Esther Wrobel supporting her. Photo taken by Paula Peña on November 19 during a curated residency at Åben Scene.*



more about the science of space. What do we know about other planets and the universe? How would it truly feel to be an astronaut on a remote moon? This awakening toward actual space began propelling the research in a new direction.

## Scale and Care: Reflections on Humility

‘The feeling that washes over you is the sense of scale of the universe. The feeling I got was one of recognition that “we are living on such a tiny island in a vast ocean”’ (Greg Chamitoff, Canadian astronaut, quoted in Gallagher et al. 2015, 5).

During a residency in 2020, we were unable to invite participants due to Covid. Instead, we focused on what in *ANPOA&W* would be called ‘scale effects’, which are ‘changes in perspective concerning relative size – feelings of smallness in contrast to the vastness of the universe’ (Gallagher et al. 2015, 6). As a tool for addressing scale perceptions through movement, we used video and projection. We filmed ourselves moving like astronauts in ‘The System’ and projected the footage near and far within the black box. As the black floor absorbed the light, we used sheets of paper to catch the images. Holding papers up while moving the projector slowly around, small astronauts appeared and disappeared. The action of carrying an image of a tiny astronaut was a pivotal moment for the research. It triggered feelings of care, despite knowing that the images of us projected as small astronauts were not real. We felt attentive, as if we were responsible for these tiny beings, and consequently, we developed two installations dedicated to the tiny astronauts. In June 2022, we shared these installations in *Microgravity* as part of a whole room with three volunteers. When asked if they felt empathy at any point, they all referred to the ‘little spaceman’ in a similar way as one wrote: ‘When we had to catch the little spaceman, and when I held him/her, I didn’t want to lose him/her’. The feeling of care is related to the sense of scale and fragility



Figure 6. Lucía Jaén Serrano's hands carry a tiny astronaut during a residency at Åben Scene. Photo taken by Esther Wrobel on November 9, 2022

astronaut Greg Chamitoff referred to in the quote at the beginning of this section. We noticed that it was the same care we also practice when facilitating the experiences. Looking back now at the term 'humility', which I set aside in 2019, it appears in 2023 that the practice and artistic exploration of scale captured within it the term 'humility' as depicted in *ANPOA&W* and led to the actions of carrying and caring. Just as the goal of wanting to produce awe and wonder activated curiosity as a motivation, so eventually did humility activate our wish to practice care.

"The atmosphere is very small, very thin... It made me feel that the Earth was very fragile and unprotected...and it worried me. It worried me' (Cosmonaut Alexey Leonov from Russia, quoted in Gallagher et al. 2015, 5).

Within artistic research, there is a vital unknown element. This reminds me of what Dr. Einav Katan

Schmidt told me in a moment of distress, when I asked if it was ok that I do not know exactly where I am going: 'You have to explore the unknown', she said, 'otherwise, what's the point of research?' (Personal communication to author, April 2022). In the case of *Microgravity*, its core elements were present from the beginning; the practice of vertical dance, the wish to share through participation, the imaginary world of space travel, and the concepts, of awe, wonder, curiosity, and humility. However, their relations and hierarchy shuffled along the way, producing a new sense of their connection in a choreography that I, as a researcher, was not controlling but was rather swept into as part of it. The reorganisation of the elements happens much like that of a body suspended in a rope: a choreography of form and content, of placement in space. The research as a complete organism began to find its own internal order and inform us of what was important and needed.

Today, we define *Microgravity* as a project that aims to democratise access to spacelike experiences. We call it an action performance due to the nature of participant engagement shifting from passive to (really) active as participants become co-explorers. *Microgravity* has moved closer towards science in

Figure 7. From the left we see Lucía Jaén Serrano and Yann Coppier testing a sonic travel installation. Photo taken by Esther Wrobel at a residency at Åben Scene in June 2022.



dialogue with SpaCe,<sup>8</sup> and we have also developed a VR application based on hand-painted images in collaboration with Khora and The Animation Workshop in Viborg, with support from the Danish Arts Council and VIA University College. The four pillars of meaning – awe, wonder, curiosity, and humility (reflected in action as care) – are guidelines provided to us by astronauts and cosmonauts as described in *ANPOA&W* and now are pedagogical and choreographic values that reside within *Microgravity*. While curiosity is the primary motivation for moving, awe and wonder are flashes we wish to ignite. The last to join, humility, is what we wish to practice together.

## Endnotes

- 1 Photograph taken on October 29, 2020 by Michelle Kranot at Åben Scene Godsbanen Århus.
- 2 In the section titled 'From my body archive', I share my own personal entries on embodied experiences associated with vertical dance.
- 3 Parabolic flight creates massive falls in which, for a short time, you experience weightlessness.
- 4 In this work, suspended performers walked horizontally down the side of New York City's buildings, radically changing how we perceive architecture in connection to the moving body. It both opened up a new type of stage and space for magic and wonder and served as a statement on socio-political order (which I will not elaborate on here but mention briefly, as it is an important component of vertical dance as a whole). Kate Lawrence described this work in her article 'Vertical Dance: A Tool for Producing New Social Spaces': 'Dancing on walls [is an activity] that releases the disruptive power of the physical body over the functional plans of architecture and celebrates a re-positioning and valorizing of embodied practices in the built environment, re-inserting nature into the urban fabric' (Lawrence 2019).
- 5 The system was developed initially in 2013 in a Danish Arts Council-funded research project called Systems by Esther Wrobel with riggers Karl Gaillick and Ariellah Winther at Zaccho studio in San Francisco, USA. A later adaptation was presented in 2018 with rigger Troels Fryensberg during the production of the performance Sally's Valley at Nørregaards Teater in Odense, Denmark.
- 6 A video of Moon Spot can be viewed at [https://youtu.be/7up\\_laQJf\\_4](https://youtu.be/7up_laQJf_4).
- 7 Lajboschitz is the husband of a good friend and the chief executive officer of Khora Virtual and Augmented Reality Studio. Khora later developed a VR application for *Microgravity*.
- 8 Aarhus Space Center is an interdisciplinary thematic center that covers all AU space-related activities at Aarhus University.

## Bibliography

- Gallagher, Shaun. Reinerman-Jones, Lauren. Janz, Bruce. Bockelman, Patricia. and Trempler, Jörg. 2015. *A Neurophenomenology of Awe and Wonder: Towards a Non-Reductionist Cognitive Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lawrence, Kate. 2017. "Up, Down and Amongst: Perceptions and Productions of Space In Vertical Dance." PhD diss, University of Surrey.
- Lawrence, Kate. 2019. "Vertical Dance: A Tool for Producing Social Spaces." Choreographic Practices. Bangor University.
- "Study of Man's Movement with a Space Suit in Lunar Gravity - Full Version." <https://youtu.be/dlpdX1zpUfM>
- Wrobel, Esther. 2020. "Moon Spot." [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7up\\_IaQJf\\_4&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7up_IaQJf_4&t=3s).
- Moretti, Wanda. 2018. A lecture by choreographer Wanda Moretti titled *The Routes of Vertical Dance* which I attended at the Vertical Dance Forum hosted by Il Posto in Venice Italy in 2018.
- Moretti, Wanda. 2020. "Moon and the Movement." <http://www.verticaldanceroutes.com/moon-and-the-movement>.

## Video links pertaining to the artistic research project Microgravity:

- 2022 Microgravity - Cross-disciplinary research: <https://youtu.be/cdS3C6lIRDO>
- 2021 Dance & Participation (MFA Thesis): Tiny Astronauts: Looking for Awe and Wonder, Finding Curiosity: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hvyOrY0btHXCHvkj99-8M4mEBq0pWpDI/view?usp=sharing>
- 2020 MT LAB: Part One - Tiny Astronauts: <https://youtu.be/3Sa0-vD43w8>
- 2020 MT LAB: Part Two - Paper Realities: <https://youtu.be/hdjW8QAeOdo>
- 2019 DDSKS: Moon Spot: [https://youtu.be/7up\\_IaQJf\\_4](https://youtu.be/7up_IaQJf_4)
- 2019 Testing Microgravity: [https://youtu.be/S0Bdf0\\_65gA](https://youtu.be/S0Bdf0_65gA)

## BIOGRAPHY

**Esther Wrobel.** Esther is a dance artist, vertical dancer, teacher, and artistic director of Sparrow Dance. She holds an MFA in Dance and Participation (2018/2021) from the Danish National School of Performing Arts and is a graduate of the Mathe Asher School of Performing Arts in Gaathon, Israel (2001). Esther has been based in Copenhagen since 2003 and has worked primarily

in Denmark, France, Holland, and San Francisco. Her work as an artist and teacher lives in the seam between dance and contemporary circus. In 2012, she received the Danish Arts Foundation Award for Outstanding Creativity in the Performing Arts Field.

## Digital Footprints–Technology and Equality

Gun Lund

### ABSTRACT

How can dancers control or influence variables such as lighting, music, projections or the overall spatial experience that affect the traditional hierarchy in a performative setting? The dance performance *Digital Footprints* uses advanced technologies that allow dancers to test this question in a live situation. In this article, the choreographer discusses some preliminary conclusions.

### SAMMANFATTNING

På vilket sätt kan dansarnas möjlighet att kontrollera eller påverka variabler såsom ljus, musik, projektioner eller den övergripande rumsliga erfarenheten påverka den traditionella hierarkin i en performativ situation? Dansföreställningen *Digital Footprints* använder avancerad teknologi och ger dansarna möjlighet att testa detta i live-situationer. I denna artikel diskuterar koreografen några preliminära slutsatser.

# Digital Footprints–Technology and Equality

Gun Lund

Given the main theme of this conference – *choreography and freedom* – it is entirely appropriate to discuss the role and position of dancers in a performance. Dancers usually follow instructions from a choreographer, who determines the rules and outlines. Furthermore, they are often used as material to fulfil the ideas of the choreographer. Can dancers be given an extended role as co-creators not only in the process but also in terms of influencing the scenery, music, or lighting in a live performance, thus challenging the traditional work hierarchy in a performance situation? Is it possible to establish a new (?) relationship between the stage and audience where dancers have the initiative and present their immediate reactions to special stimuli?

Our senses are deeply involved in the ways in which we connect to the outer world. How they are constructed is essential for the ways in which they can serve us. Are they reliable? What information do they mediate in both the inner and outer worlds around us? Are they capable of providing a real clue to reality?

Altering the perspective of the audience and questioning what we take for granted are important aspects of this artistic practice. In the field of science and technology, statements about the importance of different senses are often discussed as pivotal to the kind of information at hand. Vision and hearing are then often regarded as “higher senses”, which of course indicates that the senses involved in dance – balance and the tactile and proprioceptive systems – are deemed inferior. The ruling hierarchy in this is obvious and can be met with new types of artworks that prove the possibilities of all senses. In a technologically interactive field, *Good Vibrations* (2005) showed that it is possible to create a way to communicate through the tactile sense via a wireless system. Here, the dancers are reacting to impulses in the form of vibrations initiated by the audience.

It is a simple system that can also be used to reflect on the role of dancers on stage. In *Good Vibrations*, the dancers employ their knowledge and technical skills to

*(Photos 1 and 2 Good Vibrations)*





(Photo 3 Digital Footprints Synthesizer)

interpret the thoughts and ideas of someone else. They respond, but it is still an answer and not their own initiative. At the same time, the personal mark of every dancer is easily traced. Their individual responses to the same types of signals are starkly different and, thus, very personal. What they create on stage is something distinct from the work of a choreographer. Their reactions are so immediate that, in a way, they seem to have no control, even when it comes to themselves. Still, the initiative comes from the audience. This work was presented at the NOFOD conference in 2006. It is still being performed and is still being met with the same level audience fascination.

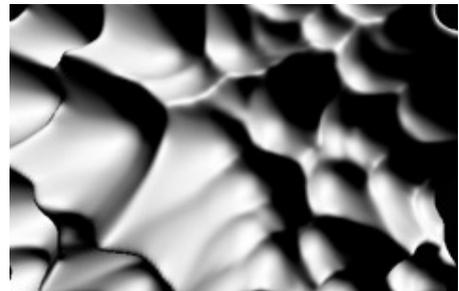
In Good Vibrations, the initiative lies with the audience, while the dancers answer with movements. They have vibrators on three joints, while the audience members are holding transmitters. A mutual dialogue may be established<sup>1</sup>. The reflections on this work led to a new project to try another way to give real initiative to the dancers. In Digital Footprints, the opposite is the case. The dancers in this piece are wearing wireless transmitters that detect spatial movements, speed, and acceleration. With this system, they can change images

or patterns projected onto the floor.

This is an advanced technique that demands great sensibility and precision in movement. For a moment, the audience may also experience new images and actually change their perception of the space<sup>2</sup> itself, a process created and controlled by conscious activities on stage. In Digital Footprints, the decisions regarding and control over technology are left to the dancers and their movements. One of the starting points is the question of the dancer's role on stage, that is, as interpreters and/or self-dependent artistic creators.

The appropriate system and tools for this work finally became a reality, thanks to Åke Parmerud, one of the most experienced composers in electro-acoustics internationally and a renowned video artist in the digital area. The system consists of a kind of synthesizer, which can create and process images that can be seen as projections onto the stage. The input

(Photos 4 and 5 Digital Footprints)



and triggering of the programme come from motion detectors that the dancer can wear on their bodies and influence images through movements. The setting of different parameters can be changed in real time.

The dancers can change their surroundings in real time, alter and transform the projections in the performance space and, thus, change the perspective and spatial experience of the audience. It is then possible to let them take the initiative and “steer” their surroundings to get the audience to react in different ways. The questions were as follows: Could the dancers be “masters” over this advanced technology? Could they create sensible feedback to enable them to transform other parameters to reach their goals? Both questions concern “freedom”. Who steers or becomes steered? Is it possible to create mutuality and an equal way of acting?

The performance starts in total darkness while a body slowly emerges in the light of the first projection. All projections were initially drawn by the dancers in a computer programme and saved as a succession of images. In this feeble light, the dancers are visible to and fro. The basic projections can be stretched out and rotated and change form in real time. Synthetic

sounds are added and mastered at the computer. The dancers move repeatedly in almost hypnotic tours, and new images are transformed and created in real time. Electronic sounds accompany<sup>2</sup> and are formed into new soundscapes aimed towards a climax where all parameters are activated.

In one of the video sequences<sup>3</sup>, the dancer wears the transmitter on their hand, which resembles a mobile phone. This makes it is easy to follow the patterns while the dancer turns, moves sideways<sup>3</sup> or in circles, changing different parameters of the images on stage. The dancer possesses conscious control of what is happening. The types of movement determine what the spectator will witness, and the dancer’s wishes and feelings in the moment are conveyed to the spectator. New images are created, affecting the spatial three-dimensional components of the performing space itself.

In another sequence<sup>4</sup>, the dancer chooses to affix the accelerator detector directly onto their body, which impels another way of movement and a feedback loop to create the desired result in the image. Watching

*(Photo 6 Digital Footprints)*



closely, it is possible to discern from the change in the picture which movements affected the development of the image. The dancer's choices made the progression. No two performances will turn out exactly the same, but the skill and sensitivity of the dancer creates images within a close frame.

In the last part of the performance, all three dancers<sup>5</sup> can activate the images at the same time. They can twist and stretch out the patterns horizontally. At the same time, however, they do not know exactly how they individually influence the result. It is their joint decision that is reflected in the space. It is a demanding task that also affects their way of movement. To create an interesting result, they also had to learn how to move the transmitters without affecting the pattern to keep it intact for a specific period of time.

## Discussion

It is generally accepted that dancers have the special talent of “muscular memory”, which means that many years after a performance, they can rework feelings and actual postures stored or even engraved in their bodies. Moreover, new scientific research has identified the so-called mirror neurons in the brain, which are activated when we see other people perform movements. Once activated, these neurons internalize the movements seen on stage. They are unconsciously activated in our brains by connecting the brain with our muscles simply by watching movements, which turn into bodily memories and activities in our muscles. We think with the whole body. Someone asked, for example, what Nureyev's arm was thinking when stretched out. The answer could be that the arm was considering the immense distance of the space in the room<sup>4</sup>.

Dancers work extremely hard to reach this high level of control, knowing inside their bodies which movements they must use to form the images they want to present to spectators in precise moments. This really is great talent. Furthermore, aside from the choreographer's solo works, they must have access to

skilled dancers who are able to transform the ideas of the choreographer onto the stage. Nevertheless, there is also an obvious space between the two, which is the field belonging to the dancers, the field where they transform what they have heard, seen, and felt into movements, a creation or translation within their bodies – the process of interpretation – the dancers as interpreters.

With the help of technology, it is possible to transform our senses, such as the tactile sense, or touch, into a remote sense, just like the eye can detect movements far away. However, in this new work, the actual activity is extended far from the body – transforming movements, tension, force, and direction in space into a visual experience that affects the performing space itself. By doing so, it questions the traditional hierarchies in the performing arts and gives the initiative back to performers.

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://emc2dance.com/works/good-vibrations/>.
- 2 The music for the performance consists of six pieces by Åke Parmerud. The choreographer chose the order and volume but left the rest to the dancers.
- 3 Digital Footprints 1 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UBeL\\_u6jZwA97f4KHeb1nnJUL77alh4f9/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UBeL_u6jZwA97f4KHeb1nnJUL77alh4f9/view?usp=sharing)
- 4 Digital Footprints 2 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SscXjI8Nsp2WVKt9HpztbvYnn1tbZOHj/view?usp=sharing>
- 5 The dancers involved in this project and presented on the video sequences are Rebecca Evanne, Hannah Karlsson and Olof Persson.

## References

- Bennet, Jane, *Vibrant Matter – A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Caswell, Michelle and Marika Cifo, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives.” *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23-43
- Levent, Nina and Alvaro Pascual-Leone, eds., *The Multisensory Museum, Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sounds, Smell, Memory and Space*. Lanham. Rowman & Littlefields, 2014.
- Rizolatti, Giacomo and Corrado Sinogaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Shlain, Leonard, *Art & Physics, Parallel Visions in Space, Time & Light*. New York. Quill, 1991.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Gun Lund** has been a choreographer since the 1970s. She is artistically consistent and is always on the lookout for the ultimate space/site for choreographic ideas, whether it be a stage, an old factory, an abandoned hangar, or a rock by the sea. Dance pieces, installations, conceptual works, and advanced projects connecting art, science and technology are all reflective of her background and broad interest in practice and theory. She studied at the Royal Institute of Gymnastics,

Stockholm, obtained a Master of Art & Technology at Chalmers University of Technology and pursued archival studies at the University of Gothenburg. She is the artistic director of the E=mc<sup>2</sup> Dance Company and the 3rd Floor Dance and Art Venue, which has an extensive archive and library for dance, including Elsa Marianne von Rosen's book collection.

[www.emc2dance.com](http://www.emc2dance.com)

## Listening Through and With Costume

Charlotte Østergaard

### ABSTRACT

In performance contexts, costume is often perceived as visual expression that is in service of, for example, a choreographer's vision. I argue that costume is also an aesthetic and poetic language in its own right that allows individuals such as performers and designers to co-conceptualize and co-create performances. In co-creative performance-making processes, I argue that it is critical that designers open-mindedly listen to performers' experiences of specific costumes and that we (designers and performer) *through* listening co-creatively explore potentialities and challenges that are embedded in a specific costume. In the co-creative process, we must pay attention and listen carefully to how a specific costume affects specific performers in order to explore the 'hidden' performative potentialities and qualities that are imbedded in a specific costume. In this article I will unfold aspects of how listening *through* and *with* costume can become a performance-making strategy and unpack details of what listening *through* and *with* the costume imply.

### RESUMÉ

I performancesammenhænge opfattes kostumer ofte som et visuelt udtryk, der servicerer (og dermed direkte eller indirekte bør kunstnerisk underordne sig) en koreografs vision. Som kostume designer anerkender og postulerer jeg, at kostumer ligeledes er et selvstændigt æstetisk og poetisk sprog, der tillader performere og designere at samskabe performances. I samskabende performanceprocesser mener jeg, at det er afgørende, at designere fordomsfrit lytter til performerens oplevelser af specifikke kostumer. Gennem lytninger kan vi (designere og performer) udforske de potentialer og udfordringer, der er indlejret i et specifikt kostume. I samskabende processer må vi dermed være lydhøre overfor, hvordan et specifikt kostume påvirker en specifik performer for derigennem at udfolde de 'skjulte' performative potentialer og kvaliteter, der er indlejret i et specifikt kostume. Ambitionen med denne essay er at udfolde aspekter af, hvad kostumeperformer lytning indebærer samt hvordan kostumeperformer lytninger kan være en strategi til mere horisontale samskabelse processer.

# Listening *Through* and *With* Costume

Charlotte Østergaard

*Photo 0* Photographer:  
Frida Gregersen  
Performance: *AweAre* – a  
movement quintet  
Performers: Alex Berg,  
Camille Marchadour and  
Josefine Ibsen  
Location: Det Classenske  
Bibliotek, Copenhagen,  
DK  
Date: 27 June 2020



## Introduction

As an art researcher, I use costume as a medium to study co-creative processes; especially I am interested in co-creatively thinking *through* and *with* costume. My research is influenced by Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988); thus, I begin this essay by briefly situating my practice.

## Artistic context

Over the past 27 years, I have had the privilege of traversing through various domains of costume – textile, fashion, design, and art – working *between* practices of conceptualising, sketching, making, fitting, wearing and performing. My artistic works have been displayed in black box theatres, at White Cube galleries, in urban landscapes and in many other exciting places and spaces. Depending on the context, I call myself a designer, an artist, an educator or a researcher. Some days I feel that I do not belong anywhere, but most days

I have the privilege of belonging everywhere. Wherever my practice is situated, underpinning my creative processes and artistic expressions is an entanglement of materialities, craftings<sup>1</sup> and human bodies. As an artistic researcher, I search for co-creative spaces where the 'mode of production' can contain tangible and intangible 'things', acknowledging the idea that the 'things' that we produce may surprise us and lead us in unexpected directions.

## Theoretical context

In *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Ursula Le Guin retells the story of human origin by 'redefin[ing] technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag[s] rather than weapon[s] of domination' (Le Guin 1986, 168). In the context of co-creative processes of performance-making, Le Guin reminds me that we as humans, metaphorically speaking, are carriers of cultural bags and that one culture should not dominate another. To me, as a costume designer,



Photo 1

Performance: *AweAre – a movement quintet*  
 Performers: Alex Berg, Camille Marchadour, Daniel  
 Jeremiah Persson and Josefine Ibsen  
 Location: Det Classenske Bibliotek, Copenhagen, DK  
 Date: 27 June 2020 The *AweAre* costume  
 Photographer: Frida Gregersen

this implies that even though I have crafted a specific costume, I cannot plan or assume how the costume will affect the performers. As a designer and researcher, I believe the costume must be seen as an invitation to listen with hospitality to different performers' experiences of the specific costume and to the potential 'transformations and translations' (Le Guin 1986, 168) that occur in specific costumed situations. In other words, I must cultivate ways of listening *through* and with the costume that invites us (the performers and I) to discover and unfold different experiences of the costume. Through and with the different experiences of the costume we must navigate and negotiate the interrelatedness between human bodies (performers) and the beyond human materialities (the materiality and spatiality of a specific costume). In the following sections, I will unfold the idea of how listening can potentially nurture a dialogical process of in-betweenness.

## **AweAre – A Movement Quintet**

In my artistic research, I use costume as a medium to

study the co-creative processes of dialogical listening between people and materialities. As part of the research, I invited participants to respond to, inform, disrupt, influence and orientate co-creative processes. An example from my research is *AweAre – a moment quintet*.

*AweAre – a movement quintet* (a movement-led dance performance) was developed for the performance festival *Up Close*, held in June 2020. In response to the pandemic lockdown in Denmark in 2020, the Carlsberg Foundation conceptualised a performance festival, titled *Up Close*, that presented twelve different performances to an audience over four days. Each artist or artistic duo was invited to create a fifteen-minute performance to be performed three times on a specific date. The invitees included

the visual artist duo Hesselholdt and Mejlvang; composer Louise Alenius; choreographer Tim Matiakis; solo-dancer Astrid Elbo; performance artist Lilibeth Rasmussen; and me as the only costume designer.

The name AweAre is a play on the phrases 'to be aware' and 'to wear'. It is a tribute to my colleague, artistic researcher and somatic dancer/choreographer Sally E. Dean. Dean introduced the term 'aware wearing' (Dean 2021) to describe, for example, how performers can become aware of the somatic impact of a costume.

The AweAre costume is a part of the series that I call connecting costumes<sup>2</sup> – costumes that connect people. From the outside, the AweAre costume appears to be a unit. However, from the inside, the experience of the costume is different. The costume has four uniform and yet varied 'body parts' to be worn on the torso. The body parts are connected via threads and surfaces. The materiality of the costume is stretchable, which means that when a performer moves, they will pull or stretch the costume and thus affect their fellow performers.

Co-creative listening *through* and with the AweAre costume

Sara Ahmed writes that 'bodies as well as objects [are] shape[d] through being orientated towards each other. An orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space' (Ahmed, 2010, 245). In the performance, it was through and with the costume that the performers could orientate towards each other, and it was through the orientation that a shared space between them could potentially emerge. However, even if the costume created a shared space between the performers, owing to the design, they did not necessarily experience being orientated by the costume in similar ways. Moreover, although I had worn the costume during the crafting process, as a single body, I had no idea of how the costume would affect or orientate the performers.

Ahmed notes that, 'if orientations affect what

bodies do, then they also affect how spaces take shape around certain bodies' (Ahmed 2010, 250). The movement of one performer would affect the group in different ways; thus, the costume potentially orientated the performers' attention towards their interconnectedness. However, being aware that the performers would most likely inhabit and be affected in different ways depending on their placement in the costume, I had to attend to their individual experiences of how the placement orientated, informed and influenced their shared space.

Before the performance, I had decided to facilitate an iterative rehearsal process, consisting of loops of physical explorations followed by sharing sessions/dialogues. In the sharings, I asked the performers to share their individual sensorial experiences of the costume. One of the performers reflected<sup>3</sup> on it as

*Photo 2*

*Performance: AweAre – a movement quintet*  
*Performers: Alex Berg, Camille Marchadour, Daniel Jeremiah Persson and Josefine Ibsen*  
*Location: Kitt Johnson X-act rehearsal space, Copenhagen, DK Date: 25 June 2020*  
*Photographer: Charlotte Østergaard*



follows: 'It [the rehearsal process] started from a very narrow point of view – with [the sensation of] myself and my limbs.'

The physical explorations were energetic and playful. One performer described their experience in these words: 'Slipping into it [the costume] was like a constant [sensation of] feedback or impulses. When you improvise, especially the start is always very sensitive because [one is thinking] where do I start and why is it starting this way. I felt like with this costume, it just comes naturally.' Another performer added, 'You want to do everything possible and stretch it [the costume] and see where it takes you and push each other.'

In the sharings/dialogues (including in the interviews), the performers referred to the costume as an entity or a body. One performer said the following: 'This fifth entity [the costume] is directing where we are going. Even though we are making conscious decisions, this fifth body becomes the joint

foundation. I don't think it was only us getting to know each other in the inside of the costume – it was also the costume forming itself in accordance with us.' In the explorations, the costume almost evolved into a person that the performers had to relate and respond to and through. The costume became an important movement-generating force that invited the performers to be playful but, at the same time, was quite demanding. One performer reflected on it in the following words: 'I think for it to work well between us, it calls for giving and taking. If we just wanted to go our own ways without listening to this fifth person, it would not have worked. It was about one person listening and another following. It had a lot of compromises.'

From the dialogue – where everyone had a chance to speak – I, as well as the performers, realised that the costume had affected the four performers very differently and created a hierarchy between them. On one end, two performers felt connected and empowered, capable of controlling or overruling the impulses and movements of the others; in the centre, the performer sometimes felt trapped and restricted; and on the other end, the performer felt on the edge with little possibility to interact with or influence the group.

The dialogues influenced and strengthened my attunement with and empathy towards the performers. For example, it was evident that the costume's stretchability and spatiality stimulated the performers' playfulness and, at the same time, resulted in a hierarchy. Listening to the performers' different experiences made me (and us) subsequently decide on exploring ways of listening to the movement impulses that seemed less dominant. It led to an investigation of how the different performers' impulses could be heard within the hierarchy, especially the two who felt less



*Photo 3*

*Performance: AweAre – a movement quintet*

*Performer: Camille Marchadour*

*Location: Det Classenske Bibliotek, Copenhagen, DK*

*Date: 27 June 2020*

*Photographer: Frida Gregersen*



*Photo 4*  
*Performance: AweAre – a*  
*movement quintet*  
*Performer: Alex Berg*  
*Location: Det Classenske*  
*Bibliotek, Copenhagen, DK*  
*Date: 27 June 2020*  
*Photographer: Frida*  
*Gregersen*

powerful. One of the performers said, 'I could feel a lot of small impulses coming all the way from the other end. You could really tune into these smaller sensations and be guided by them. I needed to be active with the strings the entire time in order to receive the messages from the rest of you.' As the comment suggests, the sharings and our dialogues heightened the performers' individual awareness to include a sensitivity towards the fellow performers.

I believe that the sharings/dialogues or the co-creative mindset expanded the performers' ways of listening to each other. The expanded listening

made the performers attentive and sensitive to the collective experience of the costume and allowed them to inhabit the shared costumed space in new ways. Listening to the different movement impulses transmitted from and through the different placements in the costume influenced the performers' experiences and created a collective sensation of being heard and valued in the shared costumed space.

So far, I have been careful not to use the word 'choreography', as I have no intention of claiming it. As a costume designer and researcher, I did not focus on creating a repeatable choreography. In the



*Photo 5*  
*Performance: AweAre – a*  
*movement quintet*  
*Performers: Alex Berg,*  
*Camille Marchadour,*  
*Daniel Jeremiah Persson*  
*and Josefine Ibsen*  
*Location: K tt Johnson*  
*X-act rehearsal space*  
*Date: 25 June 2020*  
*Photographer: Charlotte*  
* stergaard*



*Photo 6*  
*Performance: AweAre – a*  
*movement quintet*  
*Performers: Alex Berg*  
*and Daniel Jeremiah*  
*Persson*  
*Location: Det Classenske*  
*Bibliotek, Copenhagen, DK*  
*Date: 27 June 2020*  
*Photographer: Frida*  
*Gregersen*

sharings/dialogues, I asked questions that made the performers share their different embodied experiences, and through our dialogues, different ideas were co-creatively developed.

The sharings/dialogues honed my listening, helping me become more attentive to the individual performer and the collective potential of the costumed group. Our process made me realise that a costume allows me and us to listen in multiple ways that somehow go beyond the visibility of the costume. Hence, I would argue, that the co-creative process progressed through exploring the costume, listening to the performers' different experiences and through our dialogues. Listening to the performers' experiences helped me guide them, or rather the listening guided us to co-creatively realise how different the experiences of the four placements in the costume were. Collectively, we explored performative/compositional potentialities and challenges of the AweAre costume. As such the performance was not mine but ours – it was through collective listening to the entanglement of the costume that a costumed composition or score was co-creatively developed by the performers and me. As researcher, I am grateful that the performers entered our process with open minds, and I wonder if the stretchability of the costume acted as the movement-generating force. Stretchability connotes the idea of how willing we were

to listen not only to ourselves but also to the costume and each other.

One of the performers reflected on the performance as follows: 'The piece was to me a metaphor for how you connect socially with people – that there is a connection, there is a link, but it's intrinsic. It [the performance] doesn't show any rupture and it assumes we are a community that stays linked forever. But it's nice to see the many ways of following, being followed and go together in a way that we often don't discuss. It feels like this costume is showing in a way that link.'

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the three performances felt like a continuation of our co-creative rehearsal process, and hence the three performances were different. Given the rather short rehearsal time and the COVID-19 restrictions, we, the performers and I, only managed to unfold aspects of the performative potential of the AweAre costume. As for the audience experience, I gathered from direct and indirect feedback that several viewers primarily experienced the performance in the context of, and as a response to, the pandemic.

## **Concluding Remarks**

A number of costume designers, scholars and artistic researchers like Sofia Pantouvaki, Donatella Barbieri,

Photo 7

Performance: *AweAre* – a movement quintet  
Performers: Alex Berg, Camille Marchadour, Daniel Jeremiah Persson and Josefine Ibsen  
Location: Det Classenske Bibliotek, Copenhagen, DK  
Date: 27 June 2020  
Photographer: Charlotte Østergaard



Suzanne Osmond, Susan Marshall, Susanna Suurla, and Christina Lindgren, as well as colleagues from dance and somatic practices like Sally E. Dean and Lorraine Smith, have unfolded and expanded the perspectives on costume by researching its phenomenological, sensorial, somatic, material-discursive and performative potentials. As designer and researcher Susan Marshall has noted, today (at least within the community of, for example, Critical Costume) there is recognition of the fact that costume ‘has the ability to instigate performance and tell a story in its own right’ (Marshall 2021, 165). Further, as costume designer and scholar Sofia Pantouvaki argues, ‘costume has the capacity to debate and navigate the world’s becomings’ (Pantouvaki et al. 2021, 202).

The above-mentioned quotations are not only attempts to lend costume performative agency, but they are an acknowledgement of the fact that costume and performance-making are parallel processes. In other words, the material of the costume, the performers’ bodies and the choreographic material are not hierarchically positioned – where one serves the other – but instead they interact dynamically, where each part informs the creative process. As Sofia Pantouvaki beautifully argues, ‘costume

*thinking* is not [only] about costume or design, as much as about *critical thinking through costume*’ (Pantouvaki 2020).

I interpret the example from my practice as a process of co-creative thinking through and with the costume. By sharing and listening *and* through our dialogues, we negotiated through and with the performers’ different experiences of their placement in the costume. One may argue that the *AweAre* costume, and thereby I, somehow colonised the space. On the other hand, I argue that by listening, we created a temporal shared space or a community between us. I mentioned earlier that we must perform beyond our discipline. One can argue that the performers mainly performed as dancers. However, one of the performers noted, ‘the key to the score was relation to each other through the costume’. Hence, the performers performed or formed a temporal costumed listening community.

In our temporal listening community, we co-creatively searched for potentialities and challenges *in* and *of* the *AweAre* costume. Through listening, we co-creatively negotiated the performers’ different experiences of the materialities and spatiality of the costume, and we co-creatively negotiated our listening in relation to how the materiality and

spatiality of the costume connected us – not in an either-or mode but more in a both-and mode or somewhere between the two modes. In the process, we became an organism that depended on the components, which, of course, is my interpretation.

A key to cultivating a co-creative listening culture is hospitality – the mutual exchange. There is no doubt that our collective careful listenings and the dialogues were demanding and potentially also ambiguous – ambiguous because listening is affirmative as well as critical and because we listen in different ways.

As an artistic researcher, I must question how I listen. For example, can I honestly say that I listen open-mindedly? What is it that I do not hear or do not want to hear? Is my listening biased? I must be attentive towards the impact of my status and power as a researcher. I must be attentive and prevent my way of listening from forming yet another hierarchy that colonises a costumed space. As an artistic researcher, I send the listening invitation, which implies that the

invitation points to me. Hence, I must be courageous to lose control, and I must be willing to learn, un-learn and re-learn from and with my collaborators.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Natalia Gutman and the Carlsberg Foundation. I specially thank the amazing performers and co-creators of the performance *AweAre – a movement quintet*: Alex Berg, Camille Marchadour, Daniel Jeremiah Persson and Josefine Ibsen.



Photo 8

Performance: *AweAre – a movement quintet*  
Performers: Alex Berg, Camille Marchadour, Daniel Jeremiah Persson and Josefine Ibsen  
Location: Det Classenske Bibliotek, Copenhagen, DK  
Date: 27 June 2020  
Photographer: Frida Gregersen

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara. 2010. "Orientation matters", In (eds.) *New Materialism – Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost S, 234–257. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Dean, Sally Elisabeth. 2021. "'Aware-Wearing': A Somatic Costume Design Methodology for Performance." In *Performance Costume: New Perspectives and Methods*, edited by Sofia Pantouvaki and Peter McNeil, 229–244. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3: 575–99.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. 1986. "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction." In *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, 165–170. New York: Grove Press.
- Marshall, Susan. 2021., "Insubordinate Costume." Phd diss., Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Pantouvaki, Sofia. 2020. "'Costume Thinking' as a Strategy for Critical Thinking." Paper presented at Critical Costume 2020 Conference (21–23 August 2020 online) <https://costumeagency.com/project/sofia-pantouvaki/>
- Pantouvaki, Sofia, Fossheim, Ingvill & Suurla, Susanna. 2021. "Thinking with costume and material, a critical approach to (new) costume ecologies." *Theatre and performance design*, 7:3-4: 199–219.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Charlotte Østergaard** is a Danish artist, educator and researcher that over the past 27 years has worked with the body as cultural and artistic expressions. Charlotte has received several grants from the Danish Art Foundation, she has exhibited her textile artworks at curated international exhibitions, has designed costume for more than 65 performances and her costume-driven performances have been shown at, e.g., *PQ2019* (collaboration

with Sally E. Dean), *Walking Copenhagen* (2020), *Up Close* performance festival (2020), and *SWOP* (2022). In her artistic research (PhD at Malmö Theatre Academy, Lund University, Sweden) costume act as material-discursive "listening-tool" to study co-creative processes.

[charlotte.ostergaard@thm.lu.se](mailto:charlotte.ostergaard@thm.lu.se)

## Performing With Parkinson's: Leaving Traces

Hanna Pohjola, Eytan Sivak and Åsa N. Åström.

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the experiences of eight dancers, who have Parkinson's disease (PD), with dance as a performative form of the arts. The data of this qualitative research consists of a semi-structured online questionnaire and a focus group discussion. The data was analyzed using inductive thematic content analysis and approached in an abductive manner in the context of social identity theory. Two main themes emerged from the analysis: embodied social connectedness and de-medicalization of PD.

The current study emphasizes social factors regarding identity while performing with PD. The findings indicate that the dancers' experiences of watching and being watched refer to a communicative body and its dialogical relationship with other bodies. In conclusion, dancing is experienced as an embodied language with which to communicate, allowing the individual to explore how to become visible in a social environment without one's social identity being tied to PD but with one's personal identity. Furthermore, the core of the performative experience is artistry, defined as a limitless entity that metaphorically leaves traces, connecting us as human beings. However, further studies with a larger number of participants would be beneficial.

### SAMMANFATTNING

Syftet med den här artikeln var att utforska erfarenheterna av åtta dansare med Parkinsons sjukdom (PD) om dans som performativ konstform. Data från denna kvalitativa forskning bestod av semistrukturerade elektroniska frågeformulär och fokusgruppsdiskussion. Data var analyserade med induktiv tematisk innehållsanalys och närmade sig på ett abduktivt sätt i samband med den sociala identitetsteorin. Två huvudteman identifierades i resultaten av analysen: förkroppsligad social anknytning och avmedikalisering av PD.

Den här studien betonade de sociala faktorerna angående identitet när man presterade med PD. Fynden indikerade att dansarnas upplevelser av att se och bli sedda refererade till en kommunikativ kropp och dess dialogiska relation. Sammanfattningsvis upplevdes dansen som ett förkroppsligat språk att kommunicera med och att utforska kring hur man blir synlig i en social miljö utan social identitet relaterad till PD utan snarare med sin personliga identitet. Kärnan i den performativa upplevelsen var konstnärskap som definierades gränslöshet, som lämnar spår som förbinder oss människor. Ytterligare studier med ett större antal deltagare föreslås dock.

# Performing With Parkinson's: Leaving Traces

Hanna Pohjola, Eytan Sivak and Åsa N. Åström.

## Introduction

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a progressive, neurodegenerative movement disorder that is often accompanied by impaired balance and walking, leading to a reduced quality of life (Earhart 2009). Other common symptoms include tremor, bradykinesia, muscular rigidity, slowness of movements, and challenges in coordination (e.g., Houston 2019; NIH 2022). In Sweden, approximately 18,000–20,000 persons, mostly over 65 years old, are estimated to have PD, and every year, some 2,000 Swedes are diagnosed with PD (Fritz 2021).

Research investigating PD has tended to focus on different aspects of well-being (i.e., physical, psychological, and societal outcomes) and the benefits of social participation in various dance interventions. Despite the growing research interest in dance and neurological diseases, such as PD, there is a lack of understanding about the specific factors and pathways through which dance art mediates its therapeutic effects, especially on dance as a performative form of the arts (e.g., Chappell et al. 2021). Therefore, in this article, we aim to explore the experiences of people with PD with dance as this kind of art form. The subjective experiences of eight dancers with PD are described in the findings presented here. A survey and a focus group interview were used to acquire the meanings associated with the experiences of performance and the process of performing. The data was analyzed in an abductive manner in the context of identity, a concept drawn from social psychology. First, we introduce PD in general and the previous relevant research that has

investigated dance in the context of PD. Additionally, we provide a theoretical background for our proposals. Next, we describe our study design, methods, and findings. We conclude this article by discussing our findings in relation to previous research results and highlighting our study's significance.

## Background Parkinson's disease and identity

Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing interest in community-based arts and health interventions related to different serious neurological diseases, for example, PD, *multiple sclerosis*, and stroke (cf. APPG 2017; Fancourt and Finn 2019). At present, most research on the effects of dance has focused on PD (e.g., Sharp and Hewitt 2014; Shanahan et al. 2017), and now, convincing evidence indicates that music-based movement is a promising, feasible, safe, and effective adjunct therapy for individuals suffering from PD. Dancing inherently combines cognitive movement strategies, cueing techniques, balance exercises, physical activity, and enjoyment of moving in time to musical rhythms. Significant improvements in balance, gait, and functional mobility have been found in dance-based interventions for individuals with mild to moderate PD (Earhart 2009; Patterson et al. 2018; Carapellotti, Stevenson, and Doumas 2020).

The presence of a physical impairment and a disability not only imposes concrete limitations on the physical activities of daily living but may also create a kind of obstacle to an individual's social identity and agency (Smith and Sparkes 2004; Coleman-Fountain and McLaughlin 2013; Nolan

2013). It has been postulated that dancing may offer an innovative way to overcome these challenges. For example, a recent review on articulating the aesthetic, artistic, and creative contributions of dance to health and well-being across a person's life course suggests that the key contributions of dance can be presented with seven interrelated factors: embodiment, identity, belonging, self-worth, aesthetics, affective responses, and creativity (Chappell et al. 2021). It has also been claimed that PD dance classes are experienced in a social context through the importance of community, feelings of togetherness, and the ability to compare oneself with others, leading to increased self-esteem and joy (Gyrling, Ljunggren, and Karlsson 2021). Thus, the impacts of dance on the daily lives of people with PD are reflected in a positive way and often described as a sense of liberation, enhanced confidence, as well as an enlarged belief in their abilities, greater flexibility, self-acceptance, and happiness (Bar, Czamanski-Cohen, and Federman 2021).

A serious illness such as PD generally represents a comprehensive life change where the subjective identity is one of the key elements allowing the sufferer to adapt to the illness. This is apparent in previous research conducted on PD and identity. For example, after being diagnosed with PD, a person's identity may be challenged in many ways, as specifically addressed by Sheldrake et al. (2022). Three major themes emerge from their research on the identity process after the diagnosis: (a) attempts to convey, maintain, and negotiate identity; (b) resistance to a disabled identity; and (c) the centrality of an occupation and social roles in negotiating identity (Sheldrake et al. 2022). As PD is a progressive neurodegenerative disease, it is vital to understand that these aforementioned processes with the identity may exist as a continuum as the disease proceeds. Therefore, as emphasized in the systematic review conducted by Soundy, Stubbs,

and Roskell (2014), it is crucial to understand the importance of maintaining, retaining, or developing social identities that are essential for the patient's well-being and can provide hope for persons with PD. Additionally, it is important to be aware of the factors that prevent or can facilitate these processes (Soundy, Stubbs, and Roskell 2014). Wieringa, Dale, and Eccles (2022) have highlighted the need to empower a patient to self-manage one's illness as a way of mitigating the effects of PD and supporting the patient's future well-being. In other words, for an individual living with PD, the disruption of one's identity has impacts on one's self-value and sense of self-coherence. For example, it has been suggested that healthcare professionals should appreciate the complexity of the adjustment process, which is related to being able to maintain a coherent sense of self, feeling in control, and having a positive mindset (Wieringa, Dale, and Eccles 2022).

## **Identity in PD and social identity theory**

Most dance-based studies (introduced earlier) on PD were conducted in group settings (as dance classes), where dance was designed as an intervention method in the contexts of rehabilitation, re-creation, and/or social participation. Instead, in this article, we are interested in examining the subjective experiences of what it means to perform as a dancer in a dance company that is based on PD. Thus, the theoretical framework for the interpretation of the data revolves around the social psychological views on personal and social identities.

Consequently, personal identity refers to those qualities that distinguish a person from others, enabling uniqueness, while social identity refers to the traits that the person shares with other group members (Hewitt 1991, 127–28; Burr 2004, 94; Jenkins 2004, 4; Layder 2004; Burke and Stets 2009, 127–28). In more detail, the concepts of self and

identity can be defined as complementary to each other, with slightly different nuances. In short, the self is located in the social field that is polarized into the psychological level of the subject, while identity is situated socially. Despite the different nuances inherent in the concepts, they form a close symbiotic relation, owing to their social origin (cf. Freeman, Adams, and Ashworth 2015, 191–94; Pohjola 2014). This emerges from the social identity theory (SIT) postulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986), suggesting that membership in a social group has an impact on a person's own sense of identity through the internalization of perceived social identities.

Although SIT was initially developed to understand and explain intergroup phenomena, it is now commonly used in researching social support and well-being (e.g., Haslam et al. 2008; Praherso, Tear, and Cruwys 2017). One possible explanation about the benefit of SIT is the access to the psychological resources within the group membership that might offer a possibility for one's self-definition and provide a foundation for meaningful interactions with others (Jetten et al. 2014). A person's life change and transition can also be approached by means of an extension of SIT, which refers to a more detailed framework called the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) (Jetten, Haslam, and Haslam 2012). In more detail, SIMIC emphasizes the social processes that influence a person's adjustment under the conditions of a life-changing event or a chronic illness and consider how group membership can protect one from the potential harmful effects of identity loss or change (Jetten, Haslam, and Haslam 2012).

## Methods and materials

### Data and data collection

The data presented in this article consists of a semi-structured online questionnaire and a focus group discussion (e.g., Kitzinger 1995; Ochieng et al. 2018).

We selected these different data collection methods to provide inclusive participatory ways that allowed the participants to respond in the way that each one felt the most appropriate. The methods were also chosen to complement each other in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomena, that is, experiences of performing with Parkinson's. The semi-structured questionnaire was sent to eight dancers who had recently performed with *Kompani Parkinson*. Consisting of 6–15 dancers, the group performs both nationally and internationally. The choreographies are structured during the dance classes; different themes, ideas, and movement materials are devised, together with inputs from the dancers. Improvisation tasks and choreographed materials are also combined. The whole group, comprising both teachers and dancers, perform together on stage (see, e.g., <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/706099491>).

The semi-structured questionnaire (see Table 1) consisted of background information questions (six in total, two with possible comments) and open-ended questions (seven in total). Seven respondents filled in the complete questionnaire, and one respondent only answered the closed questions (i.e., background information). The open-ended questions were designed to map the whole artistic process (i.e., examining aspects of the PD classes, rehearsing the choreography, and performing, as well as the dance teacher's role in the process). All respondents (female and male) were over 60 years old. They had started dancing 0–6 years ago and had participated in both remote and dance studio-based classes. Many of them were dancing once a week (62.5%); others were doing so more often (27.5%). Most respondents also danced at home, practicing the exercises learned in the dance lessons or merely improvising by themselves.

Six of the dancers continued to participate in the group discussion. The discussion was based on their observations related to the responses gathered from the questionnaire and on their

previous international performance. The focus group discussion data was collected by ES, who also transcribed and translated the text (i.e., from Swedish to English). The discussion was prompted by open and mostly closed questions, as well as clarifying and leading questions. The speaking turns varied from a participant's single comment to the whole group's dialogue. The (approximately) 45-minute discussion was recorded using a recording device, with a video camera as a backup. The transcripts comprised 16.5 pages, with a total of 6,113 words (Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1.5 line spacing). The translated original quotations from the transcripts are presented here in italic font and/or as separate indented paragraphs. Owing to space limitations, only excerpts of the English translations are included. Due to the small sample size, the original quotations are written without any identifying content to ensure the anonymity of the dancers.

## Data analysis and interpretation

The transcribed questionnaire responses and group discussion were evaluated using inductive thematic content analysis (e.g., Braun and Clarke 2006). One of the researchers (HP), who was not previously familiar with the dancers, conducted the analysis in three stages. First, the data was read several times and then abridged into shorter paragraphs, which were then coded into several categories. The questionnaire responses (i.e., to the seven open questions) and the group discussion were analyzed separately at this stage. Second, the coded material (69 units in total) from the group discussion was arranged into subcategories (five in total) that were further abstracted by reviewing, defining, and naming common themes (see Figure 1). Finally, the data from the questionnaire responses and the data from the group discussion were combined.

The findings from the analysis are presented in the following sections under two main categories: (1) Embodied social connectedness and (2) Leaving "Mr.

Parkinson" aside. Both themes were analyzed in an abductive manner to obtain a theoretical framework. Thus, the data was analyzed according to its content. Since the participants emphasized the importance of membership in a social group, the data was interpreted separately, based on SIT.

## Findings

### Embodied social connectedness

The participants explicitly described the difference between dance classes and the process of performing. They highlighted the fact that classes that were aimed at a subsequent performance increased their *ambitiousness and excitement*. Additionally, their choreographic class and performances were perceived as strengthening their sense of belonging to a community as the *"anxiety" associated with performance was shared: We are scared together, we stimulate each other, we laugh, we feel the anticipation – it is very exciting and fun*. These above excerpts suggest that the so-called regular class and choreographic class have different areas of focus and meanings, according to the respondents. Generally, it is stated that the dance class encourages the concept of community and celebrates its voluntary and occasional nature (Houston 2019, 164). This distinction is clearly presented in the data. On one hand, PD classes were viewed as occasions where the participants considered themselves individuals. On the other hand, in the data as PD classes were viewed as occasions where the participants considered themselves individuals. Instead, the group that aimed for performance was defined as having tighter *cobesion and responsibility*, especially on stage: *On stage, you take full responsibility because we are part of the whole*.

The most meaningful aspects of performing seemed to be the challenge, excitement, and communication with the audience and the possibility to spread the joy of the dance: *Feedback from the*

*audience and that you could touch them. With your dance.* While performing, the dancers experienced joy, a boost in their energy levels, increased self-confidence, and pride from the audience's positive response. One dancer wrote:

Yes, as I said, I did not know anything about it when I started the dance. But it has been insanely fun to train before the performance – and even more fun to perform! Something happens to yourself – it feels almost electric! During the dance sessions, I feel safe and can be myself. During the performance, I become something more than myself – the feeling that I can become anyone is tickling and adds a zest for life. It may sound big, and yes, it's big! It is also the experience of: Yes! We did it – I did it!

The dancers also emphasized how the communication among the group members increased, with a deeper interrelated focus on one another while performing. Interestingly, this also seemed to enhance their artistry, as evident from this excerpt: *we interpret each other, and the interaction becomes very beautiful.* In the data, dance as an art form and artistry appeared in several different ways. A participant stated that the art must originate from *an interaction, and [you must] find your own angle within it.* Another respondent believed that artistry emerged *through the focus of movements*, while the third one said that artistry manifested itself *as an interpretation, an expression, between music and movement.* Other dancers added that artistry was not only an interaction within the group but extended beyond any physical capacities or physical impairments, as reflected in the following excerpt:

But when it has to do with artistry, there are no kinds of boundaries, so there are no hindrances. In other words, if I feel a problem in

my movements, I don't need to experience. . . . The artistry gives air, gives space, gives room, or gives possibilities. It is something different. . . / . . . There are no hindrances. The artistic part can grow. Even if we get stiffer, the artistry can still grow. When we look at each other, how the others do some dance, maybe you do not look at the movements, you look at the artistry, then in some way, it becomes a whole.

The artistry could also be found in the participants' answers about the subjective importance of dance. In detail, the meaningfulness of dance was described as *joy, passion, possibility of (emotional) expression, social and human contact, harmony, feeling able-bodied, and enhanced well-being.* One participant summarized these concepts as follows:

To dance is to let go of everything else and exist in the moment. To dance is to meet oneself and to meet others in a strong community. In the dance, it often has to cope with a stiff and awkward body – the dance helps me to get into better harmony with myself. The dance gets me in a better mood – I become happy when I dance.

Thus, the choreographic process was perceived as ranging from the actual dance lessons, the design of the choreography, and the actual performance to the feedback received from the audience. This process emphasized creativity, group identity, and feedback, that is, the experience of a sense of achievement. Both the processes of performing and the actual performance, were viewed (positively) as challenging yet rewarding. The experiences of anxiety, daring to go onto the stage, the thrill of anticipation, and overcoming the positive tension were addressed in the paradox of security and insecurity that teased oneself in a fun way. The importance of the audience and the

relevance of the feedback received from them (e.g., applause and personal greetings) were emphasized in the data. To summarize, receiving feedback was essential, as one dancer stated: there you get something back, that [the performance] has been appreciated. Interestingly, the data suggests the importance of kinesthetic intersubjectivity in the process of performing and actual performance. This could be regarded as a contribution to self–other relatedness and shared experience in a nonverbal way, focusing on an embodied social connectedness.

### Leaving “Mr. Parkinson” aside

Importantly, dancing together with the group – formed by other dancers and teachers – offered not only security but also feelings of being supported. The support and security within the group were also described as constituting an essential part of a successful performance. It was emphasized that within the group of peers, *one dared to somehow be oneself and to take the step that one struggled with*. Thus, most of the dancers who participated in the group discussion highlighted the body’s ability: *we are not hampered by our disease, but we can function; we can function despite it, in our own way*. Thus, the body was perceived as “differently abled” instead of “disabled.” However, the experiences of inclusion varied. Some dancers felt that they were getting their “voices heard”; others associated the disease with exclusion from society, as reflected in the following somewhat complementary excerpts:

A: They (the dance students who performed with the group) really blended in with us who are older.

B: Oh yes, it was far beyond our expectations. You may have an attitude [toward someone] when you are older and have Parkinson’s.

C: I am thinking about ABBA’s new song, “Don’t shut me down,” that we still kind of . . . You get used to, in some way, that when you are sick, or I think so in any case, that you are a bit . . . kind of excluded.

D: We are not excluded.

The new form of being and communicating through dancing enabled the dancers to possibly create an identity that they desired to present to others – an identity unrelated to PD. According to our understanding, for some participants, the core of identity had suffered a blow by being categorized as having PD, and they had experienced a constant struggle to prove that they were still the persons they once were, before meeting “Mr. Parkinson.” Thus, dancing represented a sense of wordless peer support and social belonging, in which the disease itself was de-medicalized, *as only dancers were present*:

It is, maybe, when you dance that you can leave Mr. Parkinson there (pointing to a far corner of the room), and suddenly, you are yourself again.

It is partly that dance helps me to train my body in terms of mobility, balance, and concentration. It is also the experience of doing it together with others with similar conditions. It’s quite rare that we talk about having Parkinson’s disease, but there is a sense of belonging within it – we understand each other, encourage, and support and help each other – but we focus on dance.

During the group discussion, the participants specifically addressed how they felt about one dancing exercise, that is, mirroring. Based on our understanding, the mirroring exercise was a medium for finding one’s personal identity and paradoxically,

both facing PD and finding freedom from it. For some participants, the exercise was pleasant and emotionally touching. Others found it extremely difficult and embarrassing; initially, they struggled with this exercise. Generally, the mirroring exercise involves the imitation of movements made by another (other) participant(s) and is often used during dance classes to enhance emotional understanding, empathy, and cohesion. One theory related to the mirroring exercise is that it enhances the understanding of others' emotional intentions by exploiting mirror neuron circuitry (McGarry and Russo 2011). However, the participants' experiences also indicated that two essential parts of the exercise were the security aspect and the courage to expose oneself to others without "shields" or roles. Acceptance of one's vulnerability was also vital in the exercise, as evident in the following excerpt from the dialogue between two dancers:

A: The mirroring was very hard for me in the beginning; I almost wanted to go home.

B: Really?

A: I thought it was extremely difficult. I went to the toilet when we started it.

B: It was very clear when you got over it.

A: Yes.

B: Because you have been a completely different person in the group, it plays a major role when you find security in daring to expose yourself.

A: I had a very difficult time with it in the first year. . . / . . . It was something that hindered me before [from] exposing myself to other people, and mirrors I feel. . . It is a bit hard for

me to explain. I felt in some way vulnerable, but I struggled and got over it, like you said, after a while. After I took on the challenge, it was very good for my self-esteem. I [had] never danced before.

Mirroring was also used in the group by merely looking at the movements of others (instead of moving with them), which might be even more personal than the actual simultaneous imitation of each movement. This also resembles the relationship with an audience while performing. According to the dancers, this form of exercise was perceived as having an impact on the quality of performance as well:

This, when we mirror each other. . . It was a way to dare yourself to become open to the others (others agreeing) . . . When [you] sit and look at [another] for two or three minutes, you get a kind of a contact that you feel when you follow each other, and you get a warm feeling inside. That we do something together and it is good even though one doesn't perform. It becomes even stronger when you are on stage doing it. There, you kind of hear how the others are interpreting what you are expressing.

Thus, the examples related to mirroring exercises indicate how the prevailing openness and permissive personal space had become developed within the group. This led to the emergence of confidence, trust, and security within both the individual and the group. The respondents also stated that the dance teachers played a crucial role in the process (i.e., from the dance class to the performance on stage), as *they made an outstanding effort to find expressions and movements suitable for all of them with Parkinson's*. Additionally, the teachers were described as offering support to dare and inspire the participants. According to our understanding, a dance teacher can be defined

as a sort of metaphorical midwife, who allows an individual to access the art that already exists within each participant. In more detail, this was mentioned in the person's relationship, not only with dancing but also with music. For example, a dancer explained that through dancing, he/she had discovered a new language to communicate with his/her other senses:

I listened to music before, but in a completely different way. A completely different way. It has now become some kind of a conversation.

Interestingly, in the data, the definition of performing was stretched beyond the actual space and time of a performance and was attached to other situations in their lives as well. For example, other "performative" contexts and environments, such as dancing at a party (i.e., with a crowd watching), dancing with the family (i.e., family watching), interacting and being watched by unfamiliar people, as well as being filmed and seen on TV and social media, were mentioned. Additionally, some of the dancers described how they had acquired self-assurance and self-confidence. All participants also believed that attendance in the dance classes had increased their creativity in their everyday lives. They were also able to connect their experiences of dance to their daily living, as one of them stated:

I have realized how much it means for my health and mood to dance and move to music. If it feels a bit heavy and depressing, it can help to put on some calm music and move to it. And if you want to get a little pep and get started, you can turn on a little more poppy music. If you are stiff or frozen, the music can help. If you go out and walk, steady music in the earbuds is a support and helps to keep pace and speed up. And singing and dancing lighten up my life. I have also become more interested in watching dance and discovering how different types of music affect the body in different ways.

## Discussion

In this article, our aim is to explore how dancers with PD experience dance as a performative form of the arts in the context of identity (i.e., SIT). In the analysis, we revealed two specific themes in the data. The former (Embodied social connectedness) and the latter (Leaving "Mr. Parkinson" aside) addressed factors related to social identity within the performance group and to a more personal level of the identity, respectively. To summarize, the social identity of the dancers emphasized the combined process of performing and the performance itself as a shared experience by the group. Cohesion, responsibilities, peer support, acceptance, and confidence were considered essential aspects of functioning within the group. Interestingly, their membership of the group and its social identity also enabled the dancers to develop a personal identity. In other words, the group offered enough trust and social support that allowed the dancers to discover themselves in a new way. Altogether, these findings are consistent with the results reported in the large body of published research literature on SIT (discussed earlier in the Background section). Importantly, the acquisition of a social identity within the PD dance group enabled an individual to discover an embodied personal identity that was not associated with PD but linked with artistry.

Notably, both social and personal identities were joined by the experiences of the dancers, emphasizing dance as being somehow unique since it embodied a nonverbal way of communication. This could be interpreted as a form of dialogical gaze within dance and distinguished by its importance in constructing identity (cf. Kuechenhoff 2007; Tateo 2014; Anttila, Martin, and Svendler Nielsen 2019; Houston 2019). First, for a dancer, performing is an inherent part of dancing, making the dance visible. Dancing can also be a way to explore how to become visible in a social environment, which is essential in the construction of identity. This was evident in the data. For example, the

excerpt where a participant emphasized the significance of discovering a new language of communication and its profound meaning, both while dancing and in everyday life, is proof that dance and music can be used to reveal something truly essential to the individual himself/herself and therefore important in developing a structured identity and gaining acceptance. Thus, the experience of being seen, witnessed (Frank 1995), can be empowering, building self-esteem as well as an identity (Pohjola 2018, 32), as this data confirms. Second, witnessing and watching others dancing were part of this dialogical gaze. As Houston (2019, 165) has outlined, witnessing and even attempting to embody another's movements comprise a form of communicative bodies.

In more depth, the dancers' experiences of watching and being seen could be defined as constituting an example of a communicative body, as described by the sociologist Arthur Frank (1991, 54). In the communicative body, the relationship with others and with oneself is at the same time united, dyadic, and consisting of two entities. It is not only about meeting both oneself and others but also about encountering boundaries and opportunities. According to Frank (1991, 80), this communicative body enables a two-person relationship, referring to a union that transcends the subjective body and extends into the body of the other. Thus, Frank states that a dyadic body has a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood and feels a connection to other bodies. The dyadic body perceives suffering as shared and receives assurance through storytelling and knowing that other bodies can recognize what it feels. In contrast to a dyadic body, a monadic body views itself as separate and alone (Frank 1991). In other words, as the participants watched others while dancing and were seen themselves, this enabled them to feel connected to the other dancers in the group (Bar, Czamanski-Cohen, and Federman 2021). Thus, the communicative body was formed through its relation to the others in the group. This is in line with the concept of shared corporeality, as

stated by Houston (2019, 160): despite the participants being at different emotional stages in their individual journeys with PD, there may be instances – flashes – in the dance class when their bodies align, feeling their shared corporeality.

Furthermore, dance is an embodied experience and a nonverbal form of interpreting communication. Notably, it is also somatic in its nature, arising from the physicality of the body (see, e.g., Albright 1997). In particular, the kinesthetic sensations and the kinesthetic empathy that offer a psychophysical connection between the dancer's body and its viewer are significant (Foster 2011). This was one of the most important subthemes that emerged from the data; an example was the part of the group discussion about the mirroring exercise. Previously, researchers have devised a theory about mirror cells (McGarry and Russo 2011), as indicated earlier, but the act of watching dancing has also been found to activate large areas of the brain (see, e.g., Jang and Pollick 2011). Additionally, the internal simulation of movement through observation, imitation, and imagery may contribute to functional improvements for people with PD (Bek et al. 2022). It has also been suggested that during dancing, the synchronism of the intra- and inter brain between the dancers increases (Basso, Satyal, and Rugh 2021). In this case, dancing may become a shared experience, as suggested by the excerpts quoted above.

However, kinesthetic empathy (Foster 2011) remained not only as an exercise conducted in the dance studio but extended to the experience of being present at the performance and elsewhere in the individual's daily life. Thus, through dancing, the performers became in touch with one other and their audience, sharing a nonverbal interaction that while invisible, may have left long-lasting embodied traces, as one dancer suggested. According to our interpretation, the core significance of art may be one's own embodied life experiences and emotions;

this represents a deep and rich reality of meaning with a universal resonance. Indeed, dance can be interpreted as a universal language that allows oneself to connect wordlessly with others (Pohjola 2021). This is especially meaningful in identity construction with differently abled bodies. For example, the dance artist and dance researcher Adam Benjamin (2002, 6) has highlighted the importance of understanding bodily differences – how bodies work and how to feel comfortable with the possible differences that each dancer faces. Benjamin (2002, 7) has stressed the significance of improvisation, which allows a different “settlement” of the body in motion and brings freedom from predefined steps.

According to another dance scholar, Petra Kupperts (2011, 2), physically integrated dance environments are havens for many people with impairments, places where an individual can be free to explore who one is. Thus, the choices in how to act and the ideas on how to produce movement are mutually responsive. In this case, the disease or its attachment to identity is not a priority but a detachment from PD (i.e., de-medicalization). This is evident from the data. When performing, the core intention of the group is to produce art, not the pronounced visibility of a bodily injury or illness (see, e.g., Kupperts 2000, 124). Being part of the group that worked with performing offered the participants the possibility of resisting a disabled identity and emphasized social roles in negotiating identity (Sheldrake et al. 2022). This may have supported the participants’ well-being, sense of self-coherence, and self-value (Wieringa, Dale, and Eccles 2022). This relates to Frank’s (1995) concept of post-colonialism, where the idea of a person breaking free from medical colonization (i.e., medicalization) enables the individual to regain one’s own voice with regard to one’s illness. This is also in line with previous research stating that the possible hallmark of PD does not define the individual; instead, the participant is above all a person, a dancer (Butt 2017).

As far as we know, this is the first study to describe the experiences of dancers with PD in the context of performative dance. Several limitations should be mentioned. First, in general, this study offers a narrow and personalized view of some actual phenomena; in other words, the findings cannot be generalized. Second, linguistic problems may be encountered in a discussion or an interview with a person who may experience challenges in cognitive functions due to PD (e.g., Aarsland et al. 2017; Houston 2019, 26). In fact, this challenge was taken into account by using two different ways to collect the data in order to ensure that all participants had the possibility to take part in the study. They could respond by filling in the online survey questionnaire (they were able to seek assistance if needed) and/or joining the discussion group. It should also be considered that the data consists of an interpersonally constructed discussion, which may have hindered the expression of more personal reflections and experiences. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the focus group discussion enabled both personal and group experiences to be shared, which is one strength of the study design. For instance, when one participant started having difficulties with speech or got tired in the middle of a sentence, there was always someone in the group who gently finished the sentence or created a breathing space for the other person to continue later. Lastly, research bias is possible in the current study, as the participants may have had previous positive experiences of dancing in a group. Therefore, we suggest that in future studies, a larger number of participants would be beneficial. Furthermore, as the participants implicitly referred to the traditional association with possibly negative connotations of PD, we recommend that this important topic be further researched.

## Conclusion

The social identity of the dancers emphasized their group spirit and responsibility for one another; they created a performance together, and everyone in the group became important – no matter how little or how much one participated. The experienced embodied social connectedness, peer support, and trust also enabled each dancer to explore and negotiate a personal identity that was not associated with PD. This allowed the individual to grow and learn something new about oneself and others. Significantly, this demedicalized the dancers as well. Moreover, according to the experiences of the dancers, artistry has no bounds or limitations. Even if the physical body is limited, artistry can still be reached beyond physicality. Dancing offered the individual the possibility to be part of a communicative body and to have faith in daring to open oneself and be seen. Here is my body; here is my movement – here I am. Importantly, PD was set aside; what prevailed was only dancing, a universal language that connects human beings.

The small number of participants limits the conclusions that can be drawn from our findings; thus, they must be considered preliminary. Nevertheless, our findings imply that dance as a performative art form may be a feasible way to support group membership in a unique manner, which also enhances the creation of a personal identity. In the future, studies with a larger number of participants would be beneficial.

## Acknowledgment

We thank all the dancers of *Kompani Parkinson* who participated in the study.

## Funding and authors' contributions

HP's work was supported by a grant from the Kone Foundation; the other authors did not receive any funding.

ÅÅ and HP (questionnaire) and ES (discussion) collected the data. HP conducted the data analysis. All authors co-wrote and contributed to the article and approved the submitted version. All authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

## References

- Aarsland, Dag, Byron Creese, Politis Marios, Ray K. Chaudhuri, Dominic H. Ffytche, Daniel Weintraub, and Clive Ballard. 2017. "Cognitive Decline in Parkinson Disease." *Nature Reviews Neurology* 13, no. 44: 217–31. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrneurol.2017.27>.
- Albright, Ann Cooper. 1997. *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. Hanover: University of New England.
- Anttila, Eeva, Rose Martin, and Charlotte Svendler Nielsen. 2019. "Performing Difference in/through Dance: The Significance of Dialogical, or Third Spaces in Creating Conditions for Learning and Living Together." *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 31: 209–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2018.12.006>.
- APPG (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing). 2017. "Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing." Accessed April 29, 2022. [http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative\\_Health\\_Inquiry\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017.pdf).
- Bar, Anat, Johanna Czamanski-Cohen, and Judith Dita Federman. 2021. "I Feel Like I Am Flying and Full of Life: Contemporary Dance for Parkinson's Patients." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.623721>.
- Basso, Julia, Medha Satyal, and Rachel Rugh. 2021. "Dance on the Brain: Enhancing Intra- and Inter-Brain Synchrony." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2020.584312>.

- Bek, Judith, Aline I. Arakaki, Fleur Derbyshire-Fox, Gayathri Ganapathy, Matthew Sullivan, and Ellen Poliakoff. 2022. "More Than Movement: Exploring Motor Simulation, Creativity, and Function in Co-Developed Dance for Parkinson's." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.731264>.
- Benjamin, Adam. 2002. *Making an Entrance: Theory and Practice for Disabled and Non-Disabled Dancers*. New York: Routledge.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2: 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-5-63>.
- Burke, Peter, and Jan Stets. 2009. *Identity Theory*. New York: Oxford University.
- Burr, Vivien. 2004. *Sosiaalipsykologisia ihmiskäsitelyksiä*. [The Person in Social Psychology]. Translated by Jyrki Vainonen. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Butt, Carrie. 2017. "Move Your Arm Like a Swan: Dance for PD Demedicalizes Parkinson Disease." *JAMA* 317, no. 4: 342–43. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2016.21033>.
- Carapellotti, Anna M., Rebecca Stevenson, and Michael Doumas. 2020. "The Efficacy of Dance for Improving Motor Impairments, Non-Motor Symptoms, and Quality of Life in Parkinson's Disease: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *PLoS One* 15, no. 8: e0236820. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0236820>.
- Chappell, Kerry, Emma Redding, Ursula Crickmay, Rebecca Stancliffe, Veronica Jobbins, and Sue Smith. 2021. "The Aesthetic, Artistic and Creative Contributions of Dance for Health and Wellbeing across the Lifecourse: A Systematic Review." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 16, no. 1: 1950891. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2021.1950891>.
- Coleman-Fountain, Edmund, and Janice McLaughlin. 2013. "The Interactions of Disability and Impairment." *Social Theory & Health* 11, no. 2: 133–50. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sth.2012.21>.
- Earhart, Gammon M. 2009. "Dance as Therapy for Individuals with Parkinson Disease." *European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine* 45, no. 2: 231–38.
- Fancourt, Daisy, and Saoirse Finn. 2019. "What is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being? A Scoping Review." WHO Regional Office for Europe, Health Evidence Network (HEN) Synthesis Report 67. Accessed April 29, 2022. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.pdf>
- Foster, Susan. 2011. *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Frank, Arthur W. 1991. "For Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review." In *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, edited by Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Brian S. Turner, 36–102. London: Sage.
- Frank, Arthur W. 1995. *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Freeman, Anita, Malcolm Adams, and Fiona Ashworth. 2015. "An Exploration of the Experience of Self in the Social World for Men Following Traumatic Brain Injury." *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation* 25, no. 2: 189–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09602011.2014.917686>.
- Fritz, Liselotte. 2021. "Faster and Better Treatment for Parkinson's Disease with the Manage PD Tool." Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/article/faster-and-better-treatment-parkinsons-disease-manage-pd-tool>.

- Gyrling, Therese, Magnus Ljunggren, and Staffan Karlsson. 2021. "The Impact of Dance Activities on the Health of Persons with Parkinson's Disease in Sweden." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 16, no. 1: 1992842. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2021.1992842>
- Haslam, Catherine, Abigail Holme, Alexander S. Haslam, Aarti Iyer, Jolanda Jetten, and Huw W. Williams. 2008. "Maintaining Group Memberships: Social Identity Continuity Predicts Well-Being After Stroke." *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation* 18, no. 5–6: 671–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09602010701643449>.
- Hewitt, John. 1991. *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Houston, Sara. 2019. *Dancing with Parkinson's*. Bristol: *Intellect*.
- Jang, Seon Hee, and Frank E. Pollick. 2011. "Experience Influences Brain Mechanisms of Watching Dance." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 29: 352–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/dancresejsocidan.29.352>.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2004. *Social Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Jetten, Jolanda, Catherine Haslam, and Alexander S. Haslam. 2012. *The Social Cure: Identity, Health, and Well-Being*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Jetten, Jolanda, Catherine Haslam, Alexander S. Haslam, Genevieve A. Dingle, and Janelle M. Jones. 2014. "How Groups Affect Our Health and Well-Being: The Path from Theory to Policy." *Social Issues and Policy Review* 8, no. 1: 103–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12003>.
- Kitzinger, Jenny. 1995. "Qualitative Research: Introducing Focus Groups." *British Medical Journal* 311: 299–302. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2550365/pdf/bmj00603-0031.pdf>.
- Kuechenhoff, Joachim. 2007. "Seeing and Being Seen: The Role of the Gaze in Identity and Relations." *Psyche* 61, no. 5: 445–62.
- Kuppers, Petra. 2000. "Accessible Education: Aesthetics, Bodies and Disability." *Research in Dance Education* 1, no. 2: 119–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713694266>.
- Kuppers, Petra. 2011. *Disability, Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Layder, Derek. 2004. *Social and Personal Identity: Understanding Yourself*. London: Sage.
- McGarry, Lucy M., and Frank A. Russo. 2011. "Mirroring in Dance/Movement Therapy: Potential Mechanisms Behind Empathy Enhancement." *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 38, no. 3: 178–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2011.04.005>.
- NIH (National Institute of Health). 2022. "Parkinson's Disease." Accessed April 15, 2022. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/parkinsons-disease>.
- Nolan, Maeve. 2013. "Masculinity Lost: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research on Men with Spinal Cord Injury." *Spinal Cord* 51, no. 8: 588–95.
- Ochieng, Tobias N., Kerrie Wilson, Christina J. Derrick, and Nibedita Mukherjee. 2018. "The Use of Focus Group Discussion Methodology: Insights from Two Decades of Application in Conservation." *Methods of Ecology and Evolution* 9: 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.12860>.
- Patterson, Kara K., Jennifer S. Wong, Eric C. Prout, and Dina Brooks. 2018. "Dance for the Rehabilitation of Balance and Gait in Adults with Neurological Conditions other than Parkinson's Disease: A Systematic Review." *Heliyon* 4, no. 3: e00584. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2018.e00584>.
- Pohjola, Hanna. 2014. "Identity Attachment Influences Contemporary Dancers' Career Transition." *Nordic Journal of Dance* 5, no. 1: 22–35. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2014-0004>.

- Pohjola, Hanna. 2018. "Ruumiillinen erilaisuus: Tanssi ammattina?" *Nordic Journal of Dance* 9, no. 2: 24–36. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2018-0009>.
- Pohjola, Hanna. 2021. Tanssi, sisäinen tarina ja sairausnarratiivit. *Musiikki*, no. 4: 62–72. <https://doi.org/10.51816/musiikki.113251>.
- Praharso, Nurul E., Morgan J. Tear, and Tegan Cruwys. 2017. "Stressful Life Transitions and Wellbeing: A Comparison of the Stress Buffering Hypothesis and the Social Identity Model of Identity Change." *Psychiatry Research* 247: 265–75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2016.11.039>.
- Shanahan, Joanne, Meg E. Morris, Orfhlaith N. Bhriain, Daniele Volpe, Tim Lynch, and Amanda M. Clifford. 2017. "Dancing for Parkinson Disease: A Randomized Trial of Irish Set Dancing Compared with Usual Care." *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* 98, no. 9: 1744–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2017.02.017>.
- Sharp, Kathryn, and Jonathan Hewitt. 2014. "Dance as an Intervention for People with Parkinson's Disease: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 47: 445–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2014.09.009>.
- Sheldrake, Elena, Colleen McGrath, Debbie Laliberte Rudman, and Jeff Holmes. 2022. "Understanding Identity Negotiation of Parkinson's Disease and Occupational Engagement Using Narrative Inquiry." *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Geriatrics* 40, no. 2: 113–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703181.2021.1989545>.
- Smith, Brett, and Andrew Sparkes. 2004. "Men, Sport, and Spinal Cord Injury. An Analysis of Metaphors and Narrative Types." *Disability & Society* 19, no. 6: 613–26.
- Soundy, Andy, Brendon Stubbs, and Carolyn Roskell. 2014. "The Experience of Parkinson's Disease: A Systematic Review and Meta-Ethnography." *The Scientific World Journal*, 613592. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/613592>.
- Tajfel, Henry, and John C. Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by William Austin and Stephen Worchel, 33–47. Monterey, CA: Brooks Cole.
- Tajfel, Henry, and John C. Turner. 1986. "The Social Identity Theory of Inter-Group Behaviour." In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by Stephen Worchel and William Austin, 2–24. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Tateo, Luca. 2014. "The Dialogical Dance: Self, Identity Construction, Positioning and Embodiment in Tango Dancers." *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science* 48: 299–321. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-014-9258-2>.
- Wieringa, Gina, Maria Dale, and Fiona Eccles. 2022. "Adjusting to Living with Parkinson's Disease: A Meta-Ethnography of Qualitative Research." *Disability and Rehabilitation* 44, no. 23: 6949–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2021.1981467>.

## Table and figure

**Table 1.**

Semi-structured questionnaire (submitted online).

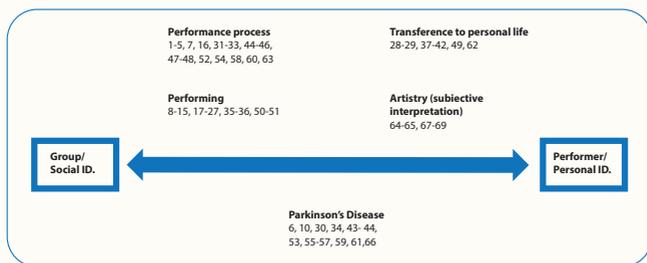
### Closed questions:

1. How long have you been dancing in the Dance for Parkinson's group?
2. Do you participate in online classes, dance studio-based classes, or both?
3. How old are you?
4. How many times a week do you dance (at home and in the group)?
5. If you dance at home, what have you learned during the dance classes? (possible comments)
6. Do you feel that the dance classes have affected your creativity in your everyday life? (possible

comments)

### Open questions:

1. Why do you dance? What does dance mean to you?
2. How does it feel to rehearse a dance choreography (that you know you will perform)?
3. What does it mean for you to perform?
4. For you, what is the difference between dancing in a regular Parkinson's dance class and having a dance class with a focus on creating a dance choreography that will be a performance?
5. What force drives (what motivates you) to perform in dance?
6. In your view, why does the dance teacher's role entail involvement in the entire process from the dance class to the stage performance?
7. What did you think was the most meaningful aspect



*Figure 1. Subthemes emerging (and related numeric coding) from a group discussion analysis (in relation to the theoretical framework, social identity theory, SIT).*

## BIOGRAPHY

**Hanna Pohjola** is an adjunct professor (title of a docent in interdisciplinary research on health and well-being), Doctor of Arts (Dance) and Master of Arts (Dance pedagogy). In addition, she has Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Health Sciences (Exercise Medicine). She also graduated as a physiotherapist. Currently, Pohjola works as a post-doctoral researcher, funded by the Kone Foundation, and as a university researcher at the University of Eastern Finland. [hanna.pohjola@uef.fi](mailto:hanna.pohjola@uef.fi)

**Eytan Sivak** is an international dance pedagogue, lecturer, and choreographer. He was a soloist with companies as The Cullberg Ballet in Sweden and The Scapino Ballet in Holland. He is currently the head teacher and the Outreach program initiator and coordinator at Ballettakademien in Stockholm, Sweden. [eytan.sivak@folkuniversitet.se](mailto:eytan.sivak@folkuniversitet.se)

**Åsa N. Åström** is the head of Dance Health at Ballettakademien in Stockholm, Sweden. Åström is one of the founders of the Swedish network of Dance for Parkinson and a co-founder of Kompani Parkinson. She is a member of the Dance for Health Committee at the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science. [asa.n.astrom@folkuniversitet.se](mailto:asa.n.astrom@folkuniversitet.se)

## Passing On—The Power of Oral Transmission

Anna Öberg and Charlotta Ruth

### ABSTRACT

*Living Documents* is a series of looped live installations developed between 2017 and 2019 based on five artist-choreographers and how they work. The project was initiated by Dominik Grünbühel and Charlotta Ruth as an artistic response to the following research question: *What is liveness and what can it be?* The research was directed towards the necessity—but also difficulty—of documenting live performances. This text reflects how the method of *passing on* (in Swedish, *tradera*) through the collaborative process with choreographer Anna Öberg, whose practice is based in Swedish folk dance, has come to influence the documentary approach. By resonating how *passing on* in the cosmology of Folk Traditions is different to other methods of physical and oral transfer, Öberg together with Ruth develop how *passing on* can be valuable beyond the realm of Folk Tradition.

Specifically, they unfold the ways in which this multi-sensorial transfer of material and knowledge from person to person and context to context can inspire documentary and reflexive translations between media and different aesthetic realms and thereby contribute to creative ways of sharing knowledge in the field of artistic research.

### SAMMANFATTNING

*Living Documents* är en serie loopade liveinstallationer utvecklade mellan 2017–2019 baserade på fem koreografer och hur de arbetar. Projektet initierades av Dominik Grünbühel och Charlotta Ruth som en konstnärligt respons på frågan: *vad är liveness och vad skulle det kunna vara?* med särskilt fokus på nödvändigheten - men också svårigheten - att dokumentera liveframträdanden. Genom samarbetet med koreografen Anna Öberg, vars praktik tar sitt ursprung inom svensk folkdans, reflekterar denna text kring *tradering* som metod, samt och hur denna kom att påverka projektets förhållningssätt till dokumentation. Genom att resonera kring hur *tradering* inom folkliga traditioners kosmologi skiljer sig från andra metoder av fysisk- och muntlig överföring utvecklar Öberg och Ruth hur detta förhållningssätt kan ges värde även utanför folkliga traditionsområden. De utvecklar specifikt hur denna multisensoriska överföring av material och kunskap från person till person och kontext till kontext kan inspirera till dokumentära och reflexiva översättningar mellan olika media och estetiska världar, och därmed bidra till kreativa sätt att dela kunskap inom det konstnärliga forskningsfältet.

# Passing On—The Power of Oral Transmission

Anna Öberg and Charlotta Ruth

## Passing On

“Our gardens de-border each other if we understand borders as processes of translation and metabolism.”  
(Elisabeth Schäfer 2021, p. 70)<sup>1</sup>

Within the genre of folk tradition, *passing on* is a central notion. To pass on means that knowledge and material, over time and on winding roads, transfers from person to person and from context to context. This entails a collective and multi-sensorial transfer, whereby repetition and re-interpretation are central in stimulating oral and physical practices such that they live and evolve rather than comprise a static archival process. This transfer is always filtered through and coloured by the social, political, and cultural contexts in which it takes place.

Generally, there are two main areas of folk dance in Sweden today. One has its origins in folk dance groups formed at the end of the 19th century and whose repertoires consisted partly of ballet choreographies in a national romantic style as well as more or less stylised dance forms inspired by the dances of people from the countryside (Sw *allmogen*). However, these dances no longer have any connection to the other area, the social phenomenon of dancing, herein referred to as social folk dance. Social folk dance is a vibrant practice that emerged from how people have been dancing on dance floors for centuries. Social dancing, that as late as the 19th century, became known as “folk” dancing. This vibrant dance practice has been a significant inspiration for Anna

Öberg’s choreographic work for many years and also served as the starting point for our common work in *Living Documents*. In social folk dance, there is seldom an originator or choreographer, nor a specifically named dance technique. Instead, the repertoire as well as the dancing itself are passed on via role models called *bearers of tradition* (Sw *traditionsbärare*), transferred from body to body and context to context.

Even if *passing on* within folk traditions has not been explicitly defined as an archival practice, there are many similarities between the notion of bearers of tradition and how contemporary researchers—for example, Andre Lepecki (2010)—have defined the idea of the body as an archive. Recently, Anna Björk, dance archivist at Svenskt Visarkiv, reflected upon this relationship in her master’s thesis, *Folkdansaren och arkivet: en undersökning av traditionsbärande som kritisk arkivpraktik* (2021).<sup>2</sup>

If we compare the activity of *passing on* with physical knowledge transfer in the realm of contemporary dance practices, we can observe that *passing on* is primarily present in the realm of teaching (translating the knowledge of a specific dance technique or body practice for the next generation of students) or in repertoire dance companies (transferring choreography from an original cast to new employees). Though conceived under quite similar malleable conditions as within folk traditions, the tacit transference of knowledge is only implicitly present—it is not articulated as a bodily archive per se. Within both contemporary dance practices and social folk dances, the bodily techniques are passed

on in similar ways. However, in terms of repertoire within social folk dance, the styles of various types of dance (e.g., the dance form polska) are to a large extent passed on with continuous change, dependent on the individual dancer. This means that any given interpreted style has many authors.

In contrast, the repertoire in the field of contemporary choreography belongs to the tradition of performing arts wherein only works that have reached a certain iconic status are iterated. Furthermore, in traditional performing art settings, the executors of the repertoire (the dancers) are thought of as tools or materials for the authors (the choreographers) rather than interpreters. Unlike dramatic texts that are interpreted and contextualised in many different ways (for example, works like *Hamlet* as well as contemporary dramatic texts exist in many different interpretations), the works of iconic choreographers, such as Pina Bausch, Trisha Brown, and Mats Ek, are seldom interpreted outright—rather, they operate under the illusion that what the audience attend to is the same work that was originally seen. The authorship is also solely given to the original author, even if they are not in charge of the transfer. The intermediary, often a dancer or choreographic assistant, acts as a medium for the transfer, and despite the impossibility of not leaving traces, the aim of this mediator role is withdrawing oneself from the artistic decision-making process.

On the other hand, in performance art in the visual art context, the idea of replaying a performance a second time is seen as the production of a new version, not the original—even if the original performer is performing. Instead, the subsequent approach is thought of as a re-enactment.

*“Re-enactment means acting out a performance again, re-making it with all the sentiments and knowledge engendered by the initial event and the here and now. It differs from pure mimicry because it entails*

*a translation from one time to another, one narrative to another, one performer to another, and from one audience to another.”<sup>13</sup>*

When comparing *re-enactment* with *passing on*, we can see both similarities and differences. In the initial stage of *passing on*, there is an act similar to *re-enactment*, whereby the new bearer of tradition recreates or recalls material from a source of inspiration before going on to make the material “their own”. At the same time, there is a difference, since *re-enactment* emphasises the recall and re interpretation that takes place between one time and another, while the act of *passing on* occurs by means of an ongoing transition over time, wherein the new tradition bearer acts in an ongoing “here and now,” all while in constant relationship to both past and future. This means that if re-enactment is about transferring or translating something from one time/situation/performer to another, *passing on* is about being a link in a continuous chain of ongoing transfers and new interpretations between times/situations/people. *Passing on* thereby emphasises the personal influence on the transference, regardless of whether it is conscious or unconscious, while re-enactment, even if transferred to another performer or another context, still focuses on bridging the specific meaning making of the original situation across time. If we look at social folk dance as a participatory phenomenon, it becomes clear that a given dance in its original creation is more than an exact form and that what it turns into depends on the relational dynamic of *who* is dancing. Folk tradition and its way of passing on oral and bodily practices across time hence allows for autonomy in how the material emerges depending on who dances/sings/plays/tells the material, at what time, and in what context.

## Performance Documentation

Artists who engage with the process of documenting their own live work often experience it as challenging for a reason similar to what is described in the quote

above about re-enactment—we are dealing with the translation of *one time to another*. The act of turning a live situation into something that can be rewatched, reproduced, and in some cases statically archived is a translation process between two very different temporalities. Engaging with the documentation of a performance while being true to the original material is a process demanding its own aesthetic decisions. An awareness is also needed regarding the fact that in these translation processes, the original work sometimes becomes obsolete in the reading of the new translation. In some cases, the reference to the live performance is even lost, and what was meant as documentation is perhaps instead turned into a music video or a professionally mixed and produced sound file.

*“A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.”*

Walter Benjamin<sup>4</sup>

## Living Documents

In the collaborative creation process with Öberg's *Living Documents* in 2017, we discovered that many aspects of *passing on* have resonance with the conceptual idea of *Living Documents* as *ephemeral performance documentation*. With that in mind, we explored how *passing on* could be used as a creative tool for defining, translating, and performing Öberg's artistic practice, thinking about the following:

- Translation and transference—between materials, contexts, and times, always on a multi-sensorial level
- Repetition and re-interpretation
- Embodied knowledge—explicit and implicit

- Participation—transference is always happening in relation to others
- Negotiation—of representations, specificities, crafts, identities, and norms
- Multitude of authorships

Inspired by *passing on* as a documentary, participatory, and multi-sensorial act of transference through repetition and re-interpretation, we applied Öberg's choreographic practice as layers and nested loops (a loop inside a loop) into the *Living Documents* loop. This approach, through *passing on*, also came to consider the loop more consciously as a medium for documentation in encounters with an audience, thinking about how every loop leaves a trace in both the performer and the visitors.

During the working process, we used the image of the layered loop to visualise how different areas of Öberg's practice are related, overlap, or collide. By repeating the layers of the loop, the areas constantly appeared in new relations, offering new possible interpretations of the materials. The concept of the layered loop also inspired the final composition of Öberg's performance—three padded stools and a sitting audience with headphones form an inner circle, Anna physically performs in a second circle around the stools, and a standing audience forms a third circle, witnessing and at times being invited to participate.

In the development phase of the process, a multi-sensorial interview was conducted with Öberg and her close musician colleague Anders Löfberg about Anna's way of working.

Taking this interview as a backdrop, composer Johannes Burström used the concept of passing on to translate a traditional tune from Setesdal (played by Anders) to a sparse texture composed to create space and direction within the loop. By using the sounds of known materials—an old bell and a creaking wooden pin chair—he suggested vague historical, spatial, and



narrative references. The sounds were arranged as extremely sparse, algorithmically generated rhythms composed in response to Anna's dancing.

Being an artist positioned between contemporary art and cultural heritage, contextualisation has always been a question at stake for Öberg. Over the years, she has continuously investigated how she can pass on knowledge and material from a social dance genre into a more experimental form of dance, situated within a contemporary context and expanded field of choreography. As part of her performance in *Living Documents*, this multiple position was put into play by having the three sets of headphones contain different perspectives. The soundtracks all commented on the physical situation that was happening live, but from three different perspectives—folk dance, contemporary dance, and anthropology. Even if it was Öberg's voice that was heard in the headphones,

*Content-wise, the starting point for Öberg's loop was her concern with the interpretation and tradition of the Swedish dance polska. Here, we see her performing at Moderna Museet in Stockholm 2019. She transfers polska while at the same time using the rhythm and movements as a basis for telling a story full of half-truths and pseudo-history of how polska came to Sweden. Set-up and materials: 3 padded stools, 3 hand embroidered cushions, 3 head phones, coffee, sweeping brush, loudspeakers, and Raspberry Pi computer controlling 4 audio tracks.*  
*Photo: Johannes Burström*

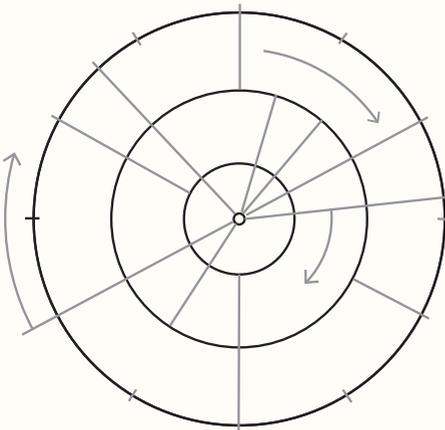
the materials for the three perspectives were created through recording colleagues during the rehearsal period, translating or engaging in an action similar to sports commentating while looking at Öberg dancing. The folk dance perspective was based on a dialogue with folk musician Anders Löfberg, the contemporary reading was done by Anne Juren, Elizabeth Ward, and Peter Mills, three colleagues active in the contemporary dance and performance scene, and the anthropology perspective was created with input from Eva Wallensteiner, a theatre ethnographer.

**Excerpts from the three different perspectives:**

**Folk dance:**

*As you can see, she is walking in a circle. . . all the time in the same direction. And she is relating her walk to some sort of beat, using a two-bounce curve to articulate it I think. . . so then it might be slängpolska. Or now the swing actually looks a*

*Logo by Maiko Sakurai Karner.*





*Anders Löfberg embodies and orally sonifies Anna Öberg's way of working. Video stills: Charlotta Ruth.*

*little bit more like balling...but that also has to do with the approach of her body—strong, upright... carrying a lot of male qualities I think... Now she changes something...she changes the rhythmisation in her feet...so now it's more of a pattern divided in three...*

**Contemporary dance:**

*So, these are pedestrian movements. A casual swing in the arms...it's a bit of "just doing it" that makes me think of Steve Paxton in the late '60s. And now she lifts the right arm slightly towards the belly... yes... Ok, here we go into a side shuffling step that reminds me about the Rite of Spring.*

**Anthropology:**

*The female dancer is moving in a circle, all the time in the same direction. And it looks as if she is up to something, or preparing something... ok... Her lips are moving...I can't bear...is she humming on a song maybe? Or is it a prayer? Ok now she changes something...*

Passing on was also used as a conceptual framework for how the audience could engage with the work. Through different means of engagement—such as switching headphones before being involved in the loop a second time, participating in the dance instead of watching, and contributing to Öberg's storytelling of polska—the audience were invited to stay inside a constant reformulation of the performance with new understandings and re-interpretations of its materials. Through this process, an ever-changing document of the performance was created, with each single audience member functioning as a new author,

carrying their own specific interpretations into the future. This scenario highlighted the fact that passing on is a subjective act that can never be controlled and is always affected by the contexts in which it takes place.

**Conclusion**

When the folk dance—specific traditions and particular way of engaging with passing on was transferred into the playground of *Living Documents*, it shed new light on how translation and transformation between media and materials can open up new understandings and interpretations of well-known, and in some specific contexts, prerogative materials. Through a folk dance perspective of *passing on*, emphasising the idea of the body as an archive (*traditionsbärare*), we found it interesting to look at patterns of archiving other live practices. We discovered potential in how this specific way of passing on might contribute to identifying new questions and approaches to address the gaps between iterations of known materials and subjects.

Based on our collaboration, we also discovered how the precision of modalities and tools within

*Photo set-up: Luke Baio.*



passing on in the cosmology of folk dance could offer new avenues for thinking about documentation and dissemination inside artistic research. Precision towards replicating the original, yet with an allowance for the tradition-bearer to make additions, might inspire the way a documenter or artistic researcher relates to media translation in the process of articulation. This also allows art forms and thought processes that emerge as tacit knowledge to transverse different platforms and aesthetic realms other than those in their own, sometimes narrow, context.

Important to our common practice-based research approach is that *passing on* is not mistaken for being a static or linear act—instead, it is an act that operates like an ever-changing whisper game or chain-letter of malleable knowledge and aesthetics. A game that entails the message to maybe be misunderstood and travel on through many people simultaneously. *Passing on* entails an ongoing transition through unstable and uncontrollable systems of interactions, relations, and interpretations, which allows things to be in flux as well as invites critical thinking and the making of aesthetic expressions to both deal and collide with one another.

*“Tradition is not a form to be imitated, but the discipline that gives integrity to the new!”*

*Robert Jay Wolff<sup>5</sup>*

*Living Documents was conceptualised by Dominik Grünbübel and Charlotta Ruth and was supported by the Swedish Arts Council, Arts Grants Committee Sweden, MA7 City of Vienna, Nordic–Baltic Mobility Program. The five looped choreographic works were developed by Grünbübel and Ruth in collaboration with PETER (Peter Mills), Jenni-Elina von Bagh, and Anna Öberg. The works have been presented at the following locations: MDT Stockholm studio and stage; Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm; East Asian Museum library/conference space, Stockholm; Dalateatern Stage Falun, Sweden; Dansehallerne/Warehouse 9, Copenhagen; brut, Vienna; Labile Botschaft shared artist office, Vienna; Studio RBG rehearsal space, Vienna; lunch room at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna; outside on grass in Stockholm; parking lot in Copenhagen; a cave in Stockholm; and in an online version at Transmitting/Documenting/Narrating, Gothenburg University (online, 2020). The methods used in Living Documents were also presented in workshop format at the Alliances & Commonalities conference on artistic research at Stockholm University of the Arts in October 2018 and in the lecture series “Best Available Copy II” at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna (2022). <https://charlottaruth.com/living-documents>*

## Endnotes

1 Schäfer, E. 2021. "Flying Garden" in *Visceral Fiction: Im\_flieger Writes Hi/Stories—20 Years Artists for Artists*, Kilian Jörg, Anita Kaya, Johanna Nielson, Elisabeth Schäfer, and Agnes Schneidewind (Eds.), p. 70. Vienna: Monochrom.

2 Björk, A. 2021. *Folkdansaren och arkivet: en undersökning av traditionsbärande som kritisk arkivpraktik*, DIVA 2021, s. 60.

3 From the announcement text of the Marina Abramovic—Seven Easy Pieces exhibition and symposium. Last accessed on 21.05.22 at <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/41383/marina-abramovic-seven-easy-pieces-exhibition-and-symposium/>.

4 Benjamin, W. 1923. "The Task of the Translator" in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, Volume, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Eds.), p. 260. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. First printed as an introduction to a Baudelaire translation in 1923.

5 Wolff, Guy. (2013). *Guy Wolff Pottery*. Retrieved 4 april 2013

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Anna Öberg** (S) is a dancer and choreographer who uses her background in Swedish folk dance as the starting point for both her artistic and research work. In 2015 she was awarded an MFA degree in Choreography at Stockholm University of Arts (Uniarts), as the first traditional dancer in its history. Commissioned works in recent years include e.g. Dalateatern, Stadsteatern, Scenkonst Sörmland, Riksteatern, Dancenet Sweden. Her stage works have been presented at e.g. Dansens Hus, MDT, Norrlandsoperan, Moderna museet, Dansstationen in Sweden, Dansehallerne in Denmark, Riksscenen Norway and Brut Imagetanz Vienna. Anna has recurring commissions as a dramaturg, moderator, and pedagogue in Sweden and abroad. During the years, she has also initiated and curated platforms for stage art, pedagogical issues and research, latest FLOCK, a new festival for scenic art in Falun, Sweden, in collaboration with Dalateatern and Folkmusikens Hus.  
[www.annaoberg.se](http://www.annaoberg.se)

**Charlotta Ruth** (S/A) plays with time and perception inside choreography and ludic systems. Her practice takes a media independent but site and context specific approach ranging between stage, gallery, public space, writing, institutional in-between spaces, games, video and online. Her work has been co-produced by for instance MDT and Dansens Hus in Stockholm, Tanzquartier, brut, WUK, Brunnenpassage and City Games Vienna. She is educated at the Royal Swedish Ballet School, holds a MFA in choreography from Stockholm University of the Arts, regularly collaborates as a performer with other artists and teaches internationally. Since 2017 Ruth is associated with the University of Applied Arts Vienna, where she concluded her PhD in Arts (2022) and currently co-leads the research projects WITHDRAWING THE PERFORMER with Jasmin Schaitl (INTRA) and Archives in Practice with Olivia Jaques and Marlies Surtmann (INTRA) as well as contributes to Outer Woman / Cordula Daus (Elise-Richter PEEK/FWF). <https://charlottaruth.com/>

# GuiDance of Butterflies: Practicing Ecosomatics and Dancing Towards More Sensitive Bodily Presence and Planetary Feeling

Susanna Hannus

## ABSTRACT

This research is a multi-sited embodied autoethnography in which I combine methods of multispecies ethnography with the autoethnographic methodology I applied before. This research has been done with butterflies and it seeks planetary feeling through dance, embodied research and ecosomatics. The data of the research was produced in Mexico in 2019 and in Spain in 2021 and 2022. It includes photography, videos, ethnographic field notes and photopaintings. This article investigates how the contact with butterflies can affect to our bodily presence and qualities of movement and dance. I look these findings in relation to ideas and practices of choreographers such as Deborah Hay and Steve Paxton and I elaborate on ecosomatic approach that resonates well with multispecies ethnography. I analyze, how the touch and the dance with butterflies created something similar Hay calls “cellular level presence” and lightness of being. I write about special quality of butterflies dancing with the wind and my dances with the wind. I suggest that sharing spaces and moving respectfully in relation to other species could be inspiring in finding new kind of movement, embodied consciousness and knowledge. These experiences could have therapeutical and healing meanings. I suggest that ecosomatics and ecologically oriented dance art and research noticing the well-being of other species could be important in searching planetary feeling, feeling more deeply our biodiverse planet while same time also working for our own well-being.

## ABSTRAKTI

Tämä tutkimus on monipaikkainen kehollinen autoetnografia, jossa yhdistän monilajisen etnografian menetelmiä aikaisemmin soveltamaani autoetnografiseen metodologiaan. Tämä tutkimus on tehty perhosten kanssa ja se etsii planetaarista tuntua tanssin, kehollisen tutkimuksen ja ecosomatiikan keinoin. Tutkimuksen aineisto tuotettiin perhosten kanssa Meksikossa vuonna 2019 ja Espanjassa vuosina 2021 ja 2022. Se pitää sisällään valokuvia, videoita, etnografisia kenttämuistiinpanoja ja valokuvamaalauksia. Tämä artikkeli tutkii, miten vuorovaikutus perhosten kanssa voi vaikuttaa keholliseen läsnäoloon, liikkeen laatuun ja tanssiin. Tarkastelen näitä löydöksiä suhteessa koreografien, kuten Deborah Hayn ja Steve Paxtonin ideoihin ja ajatuksiin sekä kehitelen monilajisen etnografian kanssa linjassa olevaa ekosomaattista lähestymistapaa. Analysoin kuinka perhosten kosketus ja tanssi perhosten kanssa synnyttivät jotain samankaltaista, jota Hay kutsuu “solutasen läsnäoloksi”. Kirjoitan perhosten erityisestä keveydestä, tanssista tuulessa ja perhosten inspiroimana tansseistani tuulen kanssa. Ajattelen, että tilojen jakaminen ja liikkuminen kunnioittavasti ja eettisesti yhdessä toisten lajien kanssa vuorovaikutuksessa voi inspiroida uudenlaisten liikelaatujen, kehollisen tietoisuuden ja tiedon syntymisessä. Tällaisilla kokemuksilla voi myös olla terapeuttisia ja parantavia vaikutuksia. Ehdotan, että ecosomatiikka ja ekologisesti orientoitunut tanssitaide ja tutkimus, joissa huomataan toiset lajit, voivat olla tärkeitä kanavia planeetan tunnun syventämisessä, jolloin myös planeettaamme ja sen monimuotoisen elämän ja meidän hyvinvointiimme voidaan kiinnittää yhdessä huomiota.

# Guidance of Butterflies: Practicing Ecosomatics and Dancing Towards More Sensitive Bodily Presence and Planetary Feeling

Susanna Hannus



## Introduction

I have been photographing butterflies recently, attempting to understand their messages. I have tried to be guided by butterflies. I have been dancing with butterflies and improvising, with their influence and inspiration. Since I was small, I have been in love with butterflies. “Butterfly,” was my first word.

I want to begin with my butterfly poem: *A dancer flowing through music is like a butterfly flowing with the wind. Butterflies are travelers, dancers with the wind. Do butterflies have wisdom to share with us? Butterflies, butterflies, butterflies. They are masters of lightness. They know how to dance with the wind with little physical energy. Butterflies have the secret of metamorphosis, transforming their bodies from earthly beings into flying creatures, as is imprinted in their genetic heritage, in their embodied wisdom. Butterflies are pollinators of flowers and plants, making life and alimentation possible for other species. An abundance of various butterflies is*

*Photos 1 and 2. Dancing with Blue Morpho butterflies in a butterfly garden.*

*Photos: Emmanuel Rios and Susanna Hannus.*

*considered an indicator of biodiversity in nature. Butterflies are small but so meaningful, moving upon mountains, transcending obstacles, passing over whole continents, dancing, flying freely; perfectly navigating, finding optimal places for new life to be born. Butterflies, butterflies, butterflies. They leave a beautiful path for future generations.*

This is research with planetary feeling (Koistinen and Karkulehto 2021), which emphasises paying attention to the biodiversity of our planet and considering our planet as an interconnected whole. Here, I am searching for ways of ‘feeling our planet’ through butterflies, and I am paying attention to my sensory and emotional connection to our planet in my analysis as well. The methodology of this research project could be called multi-sited, embodied autoethnography. In multi-sited ethnography (Falzon

2009) dense ethnographic description is achieved, producing data in several places, contexts or sites that complement one another. In this research project, I have also combined a multispecies ethnographic approach (see, e.g., van Dooren and Bird Rose 2016; van Dooren, Kirksey and Munster 2016; Hohti and Tammi 2020; Lloro-Birad 2018) with my embodied autoethnographic research practice (Hannus 2018b; 2019; see more about autoethnography, e.g., Anttila 2003; Ellis 1999; Guttorm 2018; Pelias 2004). According to Teresa Lloro-Biradt (2018, 255), multispecies ethnography pays attention to the complex ways in which humans and nonhumans co-constitute one another as agentive beings. The researcher is not attempting to make claims about ‘capturing’ an authentic (animal) perspective. The data derived from the research were produced in Mexico in 2019 and Spain in 2021 and 2022. They include photography, dance videos, observational fieldnotes with butterflies, and dance photopaintings.

In this article, I analyse what kind of teachings or inspirations butterflies can offer dancers, somatic practitioners, and all other people who are interested of movement and creativity. I bring my movement analyses into dialogue with postmodern dance developers, such as Deborah Hay and Steve Paxton, as well as ecosomatics. In this article, my research questions are as follows:

1. How can contact with butterflies affect bodily presence and quality of movement, and what kind of bodily reactions and transformations can follow after been in touch with butterflies?
2. What kind of ideas can these embodied experiences and qualities of movement offer to ecosomatics?
3. How can these findings and embodied experiences (Research Questions 1 and 2) help in approaching and strengthening planetary feeling?

This research project is about the GuiDance of the butterflies. I am following them to specific spaces and places that they lead me to. Here, metaphorically, I am receiving their choreographic instructions, routes and inspirations of my movement. After explicating my theoretical and methodological starting points and data, the choreography of the butterflies takes me to the analyses of a cellular-level awareness of the body and a sensitive presence in dance. Then, the butterflies help me reconnect with lightness of being and dancing with the wind. I chose to follow the GuiDance of the butterflies and analyse these interconnected themes because I feel they are important in understanding the ecosomatic frame and planetary feeling.

### **From stiff hierarchies and habits to cellular presence and improvisation**

This article creates a dialogue with New York Judson Dance Theatre choreographers, such as Deborah Hay’s (e.g., 2000; 2016) work and concepts. I lived and worked as a visiting scholar in Brooklyn College in New York City affiliated with education and, specifically, art education during 2012. During that year, I did my own performances and collaborated with Finnish choreographer and dancer Jenni-Elina von Bagh while producing a performance called *Playing Storytelling* in collaboration with Brooklyn College (PIMA, Performance and Interactive Media Arts, students and art education students participated to our dance and interdisciplinary theatre project). During 2012, I became quite familiar with the Judson Church contemporary dance movement and choreographies of Deborah Hay, such as “Lightening” (2010), which I had already seen in Finland, in Pannuhalli; “Blues” (2012) in MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) in New York City; and “As the Hole Sites Go/Duet” (2012) in Sant Marks Church, in New York City. In all of these performances, I was inspired by the very strong and sensitive presence of the performers in the space and

the feeling that, every moment, the performance could change its direction and create something completely new and different. I read interviews with Hay and articles about her work and watched online videos of her practices. In doing this research with butterflies, I began reconnecting with Hay's concept of a 'cellular level presence' (see von Bagh 2018, 24).

Choreographer Jenni-Elina von Bagh (2018, 24) with whom I worked, has worked with Deborah Hay during "Lightening" (2010). She highlights that Hay pays attention on the "cellular body" (according to von Bagh 2018, 24), which is interesting in terms of this research project. During the time I saw Hay's choreographies and read about her work, I was completing my PhD research (Hannus 2018a), a performative ethnography on hierarchies in education and possibilities for unraveling hierarchies through performativity, such as dance and visual arts, positive emotional dynamics and pedagogy. Hay's concepts and methods seemed, for me, almost counter-concepts to ideas proposed in theories of social structures and power. Hay seemed to propose new avenues for human transformation through contemporary dance.

During my PhD process, I investigated different theories and analyses of power. Well-known sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1998; 2000; 2002a) argues that social hierarchies are difficult to transform because we humans are very attached to certain ways and patterns of perceiving, evaluating and acting (*habitus*), which are connected to our social class and background and to the social structures of the societies in which we live. These ways and patterns of perceiving, evaluating and acting are connected with the type of education people grow up with, and they are deeply embodied. For example, from a Bourdieuan perspective, certain kinds of dance education, such as ballet, contemporary dance or street dance, and correspondingly music education, such as classical music, rock music or hip-hop music education, could be seen as training (formal or informal) that produces or strengthens

certain kind of *habitus*, which may not be so easy to change.

Critical developers of Bourdieu's concepts have written about counter-training (e.g., Liimakka 2013; Hannus 2018a), meaning that the habits that are most deeply embodied may require counter-training, that is, repeating otherwise or practicing new corporal methods.

Gilles Deleuze (1997; 2013), for his part, writes about dramaturgical action, referring to an activity via which we can re-create, re-compose or transform ourselves or our ways of acting and moving by 're-habitualizing' ourselves, that is, exploring variation in our activities and utilising repetition. For me, Deborah Hay's thinking and practice seem very inspiring in relation to my research because it seems she is reaching further than Deleuze. Philosophically and practically, for me, it seems she is striving to go beyond movement habits while emphasizing the freshness of the movement and directing dancers' attention to the cellular level, where micro-level organic transformation is happening all the time.

In a parallel way, contemporary dance choreographer Steve Paxton considers the meaning of small-looking movements in the body. Small dances can generate new embodied modes of knowledge through orienting oneself to that which is not yet known during the improvisation process (Hohti and Tammi 2020; Mäkelä 2018.)

## **Dancing in the nature and ecosomatics**

In the last decade, practitioners of arts, dance and movement therapy and body-based somatic therapies have begun to incorporate ecological perspectives and nature immersion into their approaches (e.g., Berger 2008; Berger 2020; Beauvais 2012; Nelson 2018). According to Satu Palokangas (2022), who is a Finnish artist and developer of *ecosomatics*, *ecosomatics* emerged around 2007. I participated in her somatic

trainings in 2013 and 2015, which is why I prefer to refer to her. There are many other dance artists who have worked with the outdoors and formulated their work in relation to nature, such as Isadora Duncan, who performed already at the beginning of the twentieth century, and, later, Anna Halprin, who founded Tamalpa Institute, a movement, dance and expressive arts therapy institute.<sup>1</sup> I began elaborating on my dance practice in the outdoors and nature in 2012, when I was living in New York.

For Palokangas (2022), ecosomatics is a practice of ‘rewilding’, protecting and restoring our natural resources. While somatic practices help us attune to the inner life of the body and overcome the mind-body split, ecosomatics helps us attune to the inner life of the body and “more-than-human” (Beauvais 2012, 278; Mattenson 2018, 4). Somatics researches the sensation, perception and inner impulses in the body and develops our kinesthetic and sensory perceptions. Ecosomatics also includes the environment and one’s awareness and relationships with the natural world, in which humans and nature are understood to be engaged in a collaborative, creative process of witnessing and moving, receiving and offering (Mattenson 2018, 11, 20; Nelson 2018; see also Palokangas 2022).

### **Multi-sited embodied autoethnography, research data and photopaintings**

The methodology of this research could be called multi-sited (e.g., Falzon 2009) embodied autoethnography that combines multispecies ethnography (e.g., Lloro-Birad 2018; Hohti and Tammi 2020,17; van Dooren and Bird Rose 2016; van Dooren, Kirksey and Munsen 2016) with embodied art-based autoethnography, as I have developed previously (Hannus 2018b; 2019; see as well Anttila 2003; Mäkelä 2018). In my autoethnographic research practice, photography has been important, and I have adopted the methods of visual ethnography (e.g. Pink 2007) since I worked

in an old-fashioned photo studio from 2000 to 2004, during my studies in university. Amy Stich (2011) has written about how truly ethnographic, dense description is full of colors and life, while academic black-and-white is often loose.

The data regarding the butterflies were produced in 2019 in Mexico, as well as in 2021 and 2022 in Spain. In the first phase of this research, during from January 2019 to July 2019, in Mexico, I photographed all the butterflies I saw. I took 248 photos of more than ten types of butterflies and wrote fieldnotes regarding my encounters with the butterflies. I did this in the spirit of creating dense multispecies ethnographic data, as well as familiarising myself with the movements, habits and flying routes of butterflies. Night butterflies came to my house several times in the village of Tepoztlan, in Mexico, where I stayed in 2019. I visited the Monarch Butterfly Reserve in Valle de Bravo, where the monarchs fly from Canada to spend the winter and have their babies. I also went to Sierra Gorda National Reserve, which is one the most biodiverse areas in Mexico. There, I could spend time with an abundance of butterflies and dance with them. Afterwards, in November 2021, I constructed a photopainting collage in which I combined photography of the yellow butterflies from the Sierra Gorda area and dance photography taken while dancing in the turquoise rivers of Mexico. I gave the name ‘Butterfly River’ to this photopainting (Photo 3).

I call these collages and this technique I have developed ‘dance photopaintings’. I have written an article in Finnish about this technique (Hannus 2011). I started developing this technique more than 12 years ago as an interdisciplinary art practice. Initially, the idea was to create visual pieces in which dance, photography and painting could meet in order to tell a story. My dance photopaintings have been shown before, for example, in Art Center Salmela, in Finland, and in several theatre and cultural spaces in Finland and New York. I have often integrated photopaintings



*Photo 3. 'Butterfly Rive' photopainting. Photos Susanna Hannus and different photographers. Photopainting Susanna Hannus.*

into my performances. Making photopaintings is a method of artistic research in which I attempt to explicate my bodily understanding and combine it with rich ethnographic photographic data. I like to cultivate artisanal or organic textures and painted details, which arise from my imagination and embodied interpretations of the research process. The photopaintings shown in this article were displayed just before the publication of this article, in early summer of 2023, in a botanic garden called Talvipuutarha, in Helsinki, Finland.

In the second phase of this research, in December 2021, I traveled to Spain in order to continue investigating the influence of butterflies on dance in a butterfly park and in the nature in more detailed way. I discovered that, in southern Spain, there was a large butterfly park where I would be able to spend time close to butterflies. I spent intensive days in a butterfly garden in Costa del Sol, in Benalmadena, where I was able to share time and space with the butterflies and dance with them. Emmanuel Rios photographed and filmed me being present with the butterflies, allowing them to

land on my hair or dress, as well as my dancing with them. I also photographed the butterflies. I performed various small dance improvisations in the butterfly garden and various natural areas in Spain after being inspired by the butterflies, attempting to adopt some of their qualities of movement into my dance. After dancing in the park with butterflies or in nature, I always wrote autoethnographic fieldnotes of these experiences<sup>2</sup>. I asked permission from the personnel of the butterfly park to take photos, although all the other visitors to the park were taking photos as well. I told the staff that I was completing an artistic research project and article, which I intended to publish in the Nordic Journal of Dance. The personnel of the park welcomed me.

I have been trained as an ethnographic researcher during my PhD research (Hannus 2018a), and during that time, I learned to write specific sensor-information-based ethnographic fieldnotes (see Emerson, Fretz and



Photo 4. and 5. *Dancing with butterflies in a butterfly garden in Costa del Sol, in Spain, 2021. Photography: Emmanuel Rios.*

Shaw 1995; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Later, I focused on artistic research and writing autoethnographic fieldnotes (Hannus 2018b; 2019). I have been inspired by Carolyn Ellis's (1999) HeARTful autoethnography, in which the researcher's feelings, poetic journaling of fieldnotes and emphatic attunement to the research subject are important. When I wrote these fieldnotes, I allowed the words to come as a spontaneous flow onto the paper, without censoring myself.

### **Touch of a butterfly, butterflies as choreographers and cellular-level presence**

*"We go to a tropical butterfly garden in Benalmadena, Costa del Sol, in Spain. When I step into the tropical garden and I feel the humidity on my skin and see the green radiance of the tropical plants, I feel at home. After just a moment, a blue morpho butterfly lands on my head. The touch of her small legs feels ticklish and sweet on my skin. Energy begins to flow in my body like pearl necklace opening and moving softly, lightly, energisingly, like a waterfall of pearls flowing,*

*falling and arising in my body. My fingers want to make small dances, subtle movements. I feel like painting the air around me softly with the big blue butterflies. Suddenly, another big butterfly touches my hand. I feel a slap of her wings. It feels as if I am awaking from a dream. I feel so alive and happy, sharing this moment with these special creatures, these masters of metamorphosis and beauty. My dance continues. The touch of the butterflies makes me feel very connected with this garden. My feet feel rooted to the ground and my hands intertwined with the tropical trees and plants. I move, dance like an ice skater gliding on the surface of the ice, but in the jungle. // Blue butterflies fly and dance with me. Every now and then, they land on my turquoise dress. I become even more conscious of the small and ticklish movements my fingers want to make and how my spine would like to move me (Observational fieldnotes 7.12.2021.)*

After this experience in the butterfly park, I recalled Deborah Hay's ideas about the incorporatedness of body

and mind and cellular-level presence (e.g., Hay 2016). Jenni-Elina von Bagh has described Hay's approach as 'practicing the cellular awareness of the body' because Hay likes to reconfigure the body into over billion cells while practicing with dancers (von Bagh 2018, 24). Deborah Hay has asked the following question of her dancers: *'What if my whole body as over million cells had a potential to perceive each moment equally unique?'* (von Bagh 2018, 24.) Hay's perspective on bodymind emphasises freedom; the body is not constrained by embodied patterns and bodily histories (cf. Bourdieu 1998; 2000; 2002a), nor does it not need to re-habitualise itself (Deleuze 2013) to be transformed. Instead, it appears that, for Hay (see, e.g., 2000; 2016), in every moment, there is a new possibility.

In my interpretation, Hay's concepts could be utilised to bring the dancers to this kind of space within themselves, where they could transcend learned patterns and connect to cellular-level awareness. In this way, the dancers could be more present for the possibilities of each moment and the newness of the moment and, perhaps, perceive something new within themselves or in relation to the space, timing or other performers.

This reminds me of what happened with the butterflies. The butterflies were like my choreographers, who brought me into a new space with their touch, presence and timing. I felt sensations inside me that I had not felt before. It was almost as if I could feel the energies changing on a cellular level in my body. It reminded me of sensations I had felt during an osteopathy treatment. However, this was different. I felt a new kind of micro-movements in my body, and these movements continued into a small dance, one that felt different than before. In my field notes, I describe the feeling of energies changing in my body 'like a pearl necklace opening and moving softly'. Here, I am attempting to describe the small circular or spiraling movements that I sensed at various times in flowing sequences in my body. They started in my chest area

and the areas around my backbone. The small circular movement that my creative imagination multiplied moved towards my hands and legs and flowed back towards the centre of my body.

Observing this circular kind of micro-movement in my body made me recall Hay's concept of cellular-level consciousness. These circular, flowing movements in my body made me feel deeply connected to the place and the space I was in. They made me feel very present in that exact moment because I was starting my dance from a new space within me. These observations make me wonder whether the presence of other species could invite us to a new kind of improvisation or choreographic process, challenging some of our habits and bodily patterns. I wonder whether we could become more sensitive and come closer to what Hay called cellular-level awareness, and in this way, find new movement qualities, small dances as well as somatic ideas and methods that could be valuable for ecosomatic practice and ecological art.

In addition, I saw the butterflies as choreographers. They could be seen as fellow dancers who can invite us to a kind of contact improvisation (Mäkelä 2018), in which the touch of the other species initiated a chain of sensations and small movements in my body. Riikka Hohti and Tuure Tammi (2020, 20-21), who investigated human and animal interactions, interpreted these encounters as a form of dance, a contact-improvisation dance that includes sequences of micro-movements. What is interesting is that this kind of contact improvisation with butterflies can be very light. While working with other human dancers, one has to be ready to receive a great deal of bodyweight many times. For persons who have had injuries, disc prolapses in their spine, for example, the possibility of contact improvisation with light contact and light touch can be inspiring. Butterflies can teach lightness of movement and lightness of touch. Just meeting them, witnessing their dancing can feel emotionally lightening, as I experienced as well.

## Nomadic dances with the wind

In 2021, I explored the influence of butterflies on my dance and dancing with the wind in South Spain, in a place called Tarifa, just above the African continent. It may be a place where migrating butterflies cross from Europe to the African continent. For example, the painted lady butterfly is known from her special travel from Spain to African tropical areas, crossing the Sahara desert. In Mexico, in 2019, I visited a monarch butterfly sanctuary in Valle de Bravo. Monarch butterflies travel all the way from Canada and cross the North American continent to warm Mexico to spend the winter and give life to the next generation. These migrating butterflies are resilient nomads that have amazing skill in navigation, as shown in their dance of crossing continents.

In the photopainting below (Photo 6), I have incorporated photography of monarch butterflies in Mexico with photography of my dance improvisations in Tarifa, which were inspired by butterflies. In my dance

photos, one can see various practices of dancing with the wind and exploring balance, directions, openings and 'a feeling of almost flying' in the wind and with the wind. This collage was made just after the Russian invasion to Ukraine, at the end of February 2022. For this reason, a dove, the bird of peace, became part of this photopainting as a symbol, a wish and a dance for peace and wise collaboration between nations in order to stop the war. In the middle of the photopainting, I am dancing in front of a monument in Tarifa made by sculptor Alejandro Pedrajas. The monument represents solidarity between communities and nations. This monument was built to honour the memory of children and migrants coming from the African continent to Europe. It was touching for me, dancing there. At the same time, there was the history of migration, flows of generations in time and space, human and non-human

*Photo 6. Photopainting Nomadic Dancers with the Wind. Photos: Emmanuel Ríos. Photopainting: Susanna Hannus.*





*Photo 7. Feeling like a butterfly while dancing with the wind in a place where two continents meet. Photo: Emmanuel Rios.*

generations (multispecies), and dances with the wind inspired by butterflies. Palokangas (2022) notes that ecosomatics is about “rewilding”, restoring our natural resources and historical and social aspects are present in this process as well. This photopainting (Photos 7 and 8) shows how historical, sociological and ecological phenomena can co-exist with dance practice while practicing ecosomatics (with butterflies).

*Today, I have arrived at a bridge where the Mediterranean Ocean and Atlantic Ocean meet, a place where butterflies cross to another continent, a place where children from another continent come to Europe. This is a place of wind, wind so strong that it almost makes one fly like a butterfly. I have been dancing in the wind, trying to take the position of a butterfly when they fly over the whole continent, navigating towards the right place to stay// I have been feeling how it feels to be in the wind, dance in the wind, allowing the wind to lead you. Dancing is hard. One needs to work a great deal with balance// One needs to have a strong core so that the wind does not change your direction (Observational fieldnotes 13.12.2021).*

I have enjoyed dancing in nature, specifically in places with warm or temperate wind, and it always felt refreshing, rejuvenating and liberating. Warm, soft wind relieves stress and eases pain in the body. Soft wind helps to change the energy or emotion in the body. It feels as if light wind gives a certain lightness to the dance, although when the wind is strong, one may actually need to use more profound deep muscles in order to control one’s movement and balance.

Steve Paxton’s small dance is aimed to relax all muscular tension by bending the knees, which alters the dancer’s balance. While the dancer is focussed on sensing this alteration in balance, it allows her to move and float freely (Mäkinen 2018; Hannus 2018b, 42–43), dancing in the wind is as well as investigating the alteration of balance. If the wind is strong, one needs the tensioning of the muscles and the activating of the correct muscular chains in order to have strong feet, a strong core and support in the wind. In this way, one can find freedom for the upper body and hands to float freely, like wings in the air.

I would like to ask whether dancing in soft wind could be one modality that could be used in ecosomatic practices and somatic therapies in order to work with the inner balance of the body at the level of muscles, emotions and subtle sensations while, at the same time, connecting with the planet and nature.

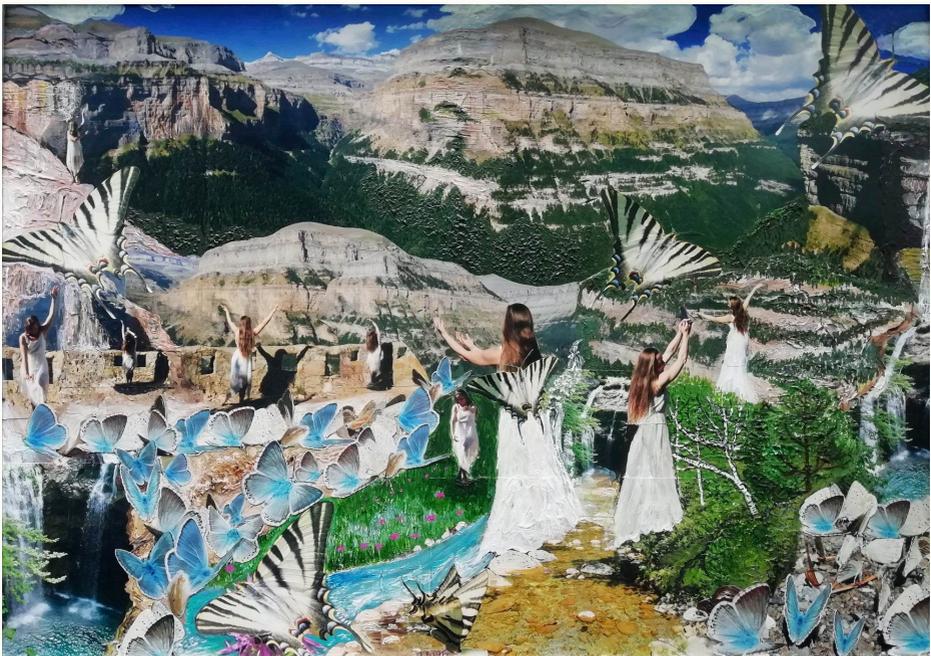
Later in 2022, my ecosomatic practice with the wind, which was inspired by butterflies, continued in the Pyrenees area in Spain, in a natural park called Parque Nacional Ordesa. Entering the national park, I met a flock of sail swallowtail butterflies dancing above a field in front of the mountains, which led me to dance. On a large, flat surface that had open views of the mountains I engaged in an ecosomatic practice, a small dance with the wind. Down by a river, I met large flock of blue wing butterflies, and they guided me to a very subtle and slow-moving dance. The next photopainting (Photo 9) shows these dances with butterflies and the wind in this mountainous Pyrenees area. The dance of this photopainting connects the earth, mountains, water and wind through butterflies while involving sensitive

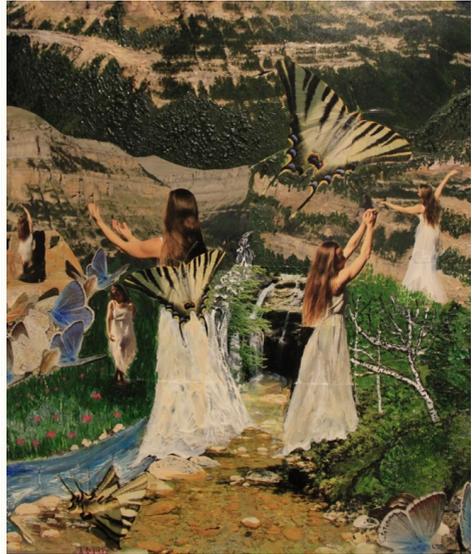
bodily presence in the search for planetary feeling (see details of the photopainting, Photos 10 and 11).

## Conclusions: Teachings of the butterflies

I am inspired by the concept of planetary feeling, created by Koistinen and Karkulehto (2021). It emphasises the co-existence of art and science, as well as human, 'non-human' and 'more-than-human,' in making new alternative worlds possible. Planetary feeling places the planet as a whole, the living ecosystem and the biodiversity of the planet into the center of research and art (see Koistinen and Karkulehto 2021, 65). In a different way than science, art or, in this case, dance can help in gaining planetary feeling, emotional intelligence and embodied knowledge in the search for solutions for our planet through creative imagination, embodied experiences and inquiries.

*Photos 8 Photopainting Butterflies of the Mountains.  
Photography: Susanna Hannus and Emmanuel Rios.  
Photopainting: Susanna Hannus.*





*Photos 9 and 10. Photopainting Butterflies of the Mountains. Photography: Susanna Hannus and Emmanuel Rios. Photopainting: Susanna Hannus.*

In this research project, time shared with the butterflies has generated new embodied knowledge of the sensations within the body. Being in respectful interaction with other species as a part of small shared dances can generate new bodily presence and a subtler consciousness of the sensations in the body. Time shared with butterflies in a butterfly garden reconnected me with Deborah Hay's (e.g., 2016) concepts of the 'cellular body', 'cellular level consciousness' and 'cellular knowledge' (see von Bagh 2018). I felt a new kind of micro-movement inside my body. These kinds of embodied experiences could be important to research in more detail, especially regarding ecosomatics and its conceptual framework.

Embodied experiences with butterflies or other species or wildlife, as well as witnessing the small dances of other species, can create a feeling of emotional and bodily lightening. Sharing spaces with butterflies or other species in a respectful manner or just being in nature can be therapeutic and healing. Butterflies guided me to reconnect with dancing with the wind. Dancing with the soft, warm wind can be applied in ecotherapies and ecosomatics to help in relieving stress and pain and working with inner

balance at the muscular and emotional levels, as well as feeling oneself to be part of the living planet Earth. Nature-immersion therapies has been noticed to reduce stress and recovering from burn out (Kjellgren and Burghall 2010). Nature can offer a feeling of home or community with nature, and it is important for wellbeing (Mayer and Frantz 2004). Sharing time and space with other species and dancing with the wind and water could help in finding a new kind of artistic repertoire and movement language, as well as practicing planetary feeling.

When planning to share spaces with non-human others for research, art, education or therapeutic purposes, it is very important to reflect on the ethical side of this situation. It is important to think, for example, about what kind of spaces the animals are living in, whether it is possible to meet them in freedom in their own living world and what time would be appropriate. It is important to reflect on the distance from the non-human other, whether it is acceptable to touch them and whether it is better to let the animal



*Photo 11. Photopainting Planetary Feeling.  
Photography: Susanna Hannus and Emmanuel Rios.  
Photopainting: Susanna Hannus.*

choose the distance, as I preferred to do in this research project. This research was carried out in nature and in a butterfly park. To investigate human-butterfly relationships, especially embodied experiences and movement, it was important to be able to continue the research after authentic nature, in a large butterfly park, where I could spend more time with butterflies. I tried to do this as respectfully I could, and I waited for the butterflies to come share their movement with me. I think that if one wants to connect with other species as part of research or art, one should also promote good for them as a means of ensuring reciprocity.

In my previous article published in the *Nordic Journal of Dance* (Hannus 2018b), I analysed dance in and with water and environmental justice issues via embodied inquiry. According to Anja Nygren (2013), an environmental justice perspective has become an important framework for scholars who are interested in climate change, the deterioration of ecosystems, rights concerning natural resources and local ecological-knowledge systems (see Hannus 2018b, 40). Now, I would like to suggest that multispecies perspectives and the protection of living conditions for species such as butterflies should be incorporated into these environmental-justice discussions. Elaborating

on ecological artistic research and the ecosomatic framework and conceptualisations could provide important information about how to “feel the planet” in terms of creating emotional and embodied caring about the future of our biodiverse planet and, at same time, taking good care of our own balance and wellbeing. Sharing spaces respectfully with other species could make us more sensitive and stimulate, in this way, something similar to what Hay called ‘cellular-level awareness.’ This cellular level and structure—although it is different in different species—connects all forms of life. An important research topic would be investigating how children could develop their planetary feeling through movement and other creative methods in relation to other species and the more-than-human world.

## Endnotes

1 In Finland, Kati Raatikainen and Gabriela Aldana-Kekoni are working with an ecosomatic approach as well.

2 In total, I have taken 448 photos in this butterfly garden. My butterfly data also include 27 small videoclips (from 10 s to 1 min and 50 s) filmed in the butterfly garden. I performed various small dance improvisations (17 improvisations lasting from 40 s to 6 min) in various natural areas in Spain after being inspired by the butterflies and attempting to adopt some of their qualities of movement into my dance. Emmanuel took dance photography (158 photos) of my dance improvisations in nature in 2021 as well.

## References

- Anttila, Eeva. 2003. *A Dream to the Unknown*. Searching for Dialog in Dance Education. Helsinki: Theatre Academy.
- Berger, Ronen. 2008. "Building a Home in Nature." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 48, no. 2: 264–279.
- Berger, Ronen. 2020. "Nature therapy: Incorporating Nature into the Arts Therapy." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 60, no. 2: 244–257.
- Beauvais, Jennifer. 2012. "Focusing on the Natural World: An Ecosomatic Approach to Attunement with an Ecological Facilitating Environment." *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 7, no. 4: 277–291.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Järjen käytännöllisyys. Toiminnan teorian lähtökohia*. [Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action]. Tampere; Vastapaino.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2002a. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2002b. *The Space of Points of View. In The Weight of the World. Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (eds.) Pierre Bourdieu. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1997. *Desert Island and Other Texts 1953–1974*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(s).
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2013. *The Method of Dramatization*. Paper presented to the Société française de Philosophie, 28, January. <http://inquietando.wordpress.com/textos-2/the-method-of-dramatization-by-gilles-deleuze/>. Printed 22.5.2013.
- Ellis, Carolyn. 1999. "Heartful Ethnography." *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 5: 669–683.
- Emerson, Robert. M., Fretz, Rachel. I. and Shaw, Linda, L. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Falzon, Mark-Anthony. 2009. *Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Introduction. London and New York; Routledge, 1–20.
- Gordon, Tuula, Holland, Janet and Lahelma, Elina. 2000. *Making Spaces. Citizenship and Difference in Schools*. Great Britain: MacMillan Press LTD.
- Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul 1995. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. New York; Routledge.
- Hannus, Susanna 2011. *Tanssi valokuvamaalauksissa*. [Dance in photopaintings]. Liikekieli.com: <https://www.liikekieli.com/tanssi-valokuvamaalauksissa-susanna-hannus/>
- Hannus, Susanna. 2018a. *Pienten askelten tanssi – Performatiivinen etnografia hierarkioiden rakentumisista ja purkamisen mahdollisuuksista kahdella yläkoululla*. [Dance of the Small Step: Performative Ethnography on Construction of Hierarchies and Possibilities to Unravel Hierarchies in Two Lower-Secondary Schools]. PhD dissertation. University of Helsinki: Department of Educational Sciences. *Researches in Education* 27.
- Hannus, Susanna. 2018b. "Dancing with Turquoise Waters of Mexico: Embodied Experiences and Observations for Environmental Justice." *Nordic Journal of Dance* 9, no. 2: 38–52.

- Hannus, Susanna. 2019. Vuorten Lapset. Luovasti lasten kanssa Meksikon 2017 maanjäristyksen jälkeen. [Children of the Mountains. Creatively with Children after the Earthquake 2017 in Mexico]. *Kasvatus* 50, no. 4: 371–379.
- Hay, Deborah. 2000. *My Body the Buddhist*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Hay, Deborah. 2016. *Using the Sky: A Dance*. New York: Routledge.
- Hohti, Riikka and Tammi, Tuure. 2020. “Touching is Worlding: From Caring Hands to World-Making Dances in Multispecies Childhoods.” *Journal of Early Childhood Studies* 45, no. 2: 14–26.
- Kjellgren, Anette and Burghall, Hanne. 2010. “A Comparison of the Restorative Effect of a Natural Environment with that of a Simulated Natural Environment.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30: 464–472.
- Koistinen, Aino-Kaisa and Karkulehto, Sanna. 2021. Kohti planetaarista tuntua – Feministis-posthumanistinen uudelleen kuvittelu ja etiikka ihmisen jälkeen. [Towards Planetary Feeling – Feminist-posthumanist Re-imagining and Ethics after Human]. *Niin & Näin* 1: 62–72.
- Lahire, Bernard. 2003. “From Habitus to Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards Sociology at the Level of the Individual.” *Poetics* 31: 329–355.
- Lee, Hannah., Lovejoy, Thomas and Schneider, S. 2006. Biodiversity and Climate Change in Context. In *Climate Change and Biodiversity* (eds.) Hannah Lee, Thomas Lovejoy and Stephen Schneider. TERI Press: New Delhi, 3–14.
- Liimakka, Satu. 2013. *Re-embodied*. Young woman, the body quest and agency in the culture of appearances. Helsingin yliopisto: Publications of the Department of Social Research 2013:1.
- Lloro-Bidart, Teresa. 2018. “A Feminist Posthumanist Multispecies Ethnography for Educational Studies.” *Educational Studies* 54, no. 3: 253–270.
- Mattenson, Mollie, Malia. 2018. *Earth Turning: Ecosomatic Exploration and Social Action Community Art Option 3, Community Engagement Project*. Lesley University DigitalCommons@Lesley. Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses. Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences. <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive-theses>. Read 2.1.2022.
- Mayer, Stephan. F and Frantz, Cynthia, P. 2004. “The Connectedness to Nature Scale: A Measure of Individuals’ Feeling in Community with Nature.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 24, no. 2004: 503–515.
- Mäkelä, Mirva. 2018. *Taiteellinen tutkimus kontakti-improvisaation arvoista somaesteettisen esityksen kehityksessä*. [Artistic research of values of contact improvisation in the framework of soma aesthetic performance]. University of Arts: Theatre Academy. *Acta Scenica* 53.
- Nelson, Matthew. 2018. “Embodied Ecology: The ecosomatics of permaculture.” *Choreographic Practices* 9, no. 1: 17–30.
- Nygren, Anja, Kaarina. 2013. *Eco-Imperialism and Environmental Justice*. In S. Lockie, D. A. Sonnenfeld, D. A. Fisher (eds.) *Routledge International Handbook of Social and Environmental Change*, 58–69. London; Routledge. <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/231402>.
- Palokangas, Satu. 2022. *Ecosomatics*. Interpage: <https://satupalokangas.com/ecosomatics>. Read 23.4.2022.
- Pelias, Ronald, J. 2004. *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic and Daily Life*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Pink, Sarah. 2007. *Doing Visual Ethnography. Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Raatikainen, Kati. 2021. Tanssi evolutiivisena eleenä. [Dance as evolutive gesture]. <https://www.liike-kieli.com/tanssitaide-evolutiivisena-eleena/> Read 25.4.2022.
- Stich, Amy. 2011. "The Color of the Ethno/Graphic." *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 1: 3–8.
- van Dooren, Thom, Kirksey, Eden, and Munsen, Ursula. 2016. "Multispecies Studies. Cultivating Art of Attentiveness." *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 1: 1–23.
- van Dooren, Thom, and Bird Rose, Deborah. 2016. "Lively Ethnography. Storying Animist Worlds." *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 1: 77–94.
- von Bagh, Jenni-Elina. 2018. *Choreographing in Nomadic traces*. Thesis. Master's degree program in choreography. Theatre Academy. Uniarts Helsinki.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Susanna Hannus** finalized her PhD in educational sciences in the University of Helsinki in 2018. Her research explored hierarchies and possibilities to unravel hierarchies in schools through everyday creative practices, artistic practices such as dance and visual arts, positive emotional dynamics and pedagogy. In 2012 she was a visiting scholar and artist in Brooklyn College, New York. She has presented her dance-based performances and visual art exhibitions in New York and Finland. Lately, Hannus's dance and visual arts, research and pedagogy have been focusing on planetary phenomena such as recuperating in natural crisis, meanings of water, multispecies and planetary well-being.

**Susanna Hannus** viimeisteli kasvatustieteiden väitöskirjansa Helsingin yliopistolla vuonna 2018. Hänen tutkimuksensa analysoi hierarkioiden rakentumista ja hierarkioiden purkamisen mahdollisuuksia kouluilla jokapäiväisen luovuuden, taiteellisten käytäntöjen, kuten tanssin ja kuvataiteiden sekä positiivisen tunnedyneamiikan ja pedagogiikan avulla. Vuonna 2012 Hannus oli vierailevana tutkijana ja taiteilijana Brooklyn Collegessa New Yorkissa. Hän on esittänyt tanssiperustaisia esityksiään ja kuvataidenäyttelyitään New Yorkissa ja Suomessa. Viime aikoina Hannuksen tutkimus, tanssi ja kuvataide sekä pedagogiikka ovat keskittyneet planetaarisiin ilmiöihin, kuten palautumiseen luonnon kriiseistä, veden merkitykseen sekä monilajiseen ja planetaariseen hyvinvointiin.

## Memberships

**SANS – Senter for dansepraksis** is a Norwegian association that works to support the subject of dance in elementary, secondary and upper secondary schools, as well as culture schools and teacher education.

A membership in **SANS** offers you 1–2 issues per year of the Nordic Journal of Dance, electronic newsletters, reduction rates for courses and conferences arranged by SANS and more. For further information and



membership fees, see <http://www.dansepraksis.no>.

**Nordic Forum for Dance Research (NOFOD)** is a non-profit organization that promotes diverse forms of dance research and practice in the Nordic region by organizing a biannual international conference and local events. A membership in **NOFOD** offers you one yearly issue of the Nordic Journal of Dance, newsletters and reduction rates for international **NOFOD** conferences.

For further information and membership fees, see <http://www.nofod.org>.



## Subscription

For an invoice of NOK 100 + postage fees a subscriber will be sent the newest volume of NJD on publication. To subscribe to the Nordic Journal of Dance, send an email to [sans@dansepraksis.no](mailto:sans@dansepraksis.no).

## Advertisements

For details about advertising rates and opportunities, please send us an email: [sans@dansepraksis.no](mailto:sans@dansepraksis.no).

# Nordic Journal of Dance

## Call for contributions—Nordic Journal of Dance

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.

### **General Guidelines:**

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(1) 2023

## Research Articles

Cognitive Ecologies of Presence(s) in Three Different Dance Forms *Sarah Pini*

---

Dance Technique and Power Dynamics in Higher Education:  
A Literature Review *Irene Velten Rothmund*

---

Choreographing Histories:  
Critical Perspectives on Dance Histories in Nordic Dance Practices and Scholarship  
*Hanna Järvinen, Lena Hammergren, Elizabeth Svarstad,  
Petri Hojpu and Astrid von Rosen*

---

## Emerging Scholar

*A Swan Lake*: Exploring the Materiality of Water in Alexander Ekman's Ballet  
*Martina Cayul Ibarra*

---

## Practice Oriented Articles

Car(ry)ing the Past, Present, and Future—  
A Deep Dive into Danish Dance Stories *Carolina Bäckman*

---

Performing Relationality: Weaving Bodies, Movement and Things  
A conversation About What it Means to Work Collaboratively in Between  
Practice and Research *Eva Meyer-Keller and Julia Schade*

---

Unfolding Microgravity and the Interplay Between Awe, Wonder, Curiosity,  
and Humility in Artistic Rresearch *Esther Wrobel*

---

Digital Footprints—Technology and Equality *Gun Lund*

---

Listening Through and With Costume *Charlotte Østergaard*

---

## Off-Topic Research Articles

Performing With Parkinson's: Leaving Traces  
*Hanna Pohjola, Eytan Sivak and Åsa N. Åström*

---

Passing On—The Power of Oral Transmission *Anna Öberg and Charlotta Ruth*

---

GuiDance of Butterflies: Practicing Ecosomatics and Dancing Towards  
More Sensitive Bodily Presence and Planetary Feeling *Susanna Hannus*

---

## 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.

