

# Nordic Journal of Dance

– practice, education and research



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## Editorial

This issue is a collaboration between the *Nordic Journal for Dance* and Nordic Forum for Dance Research (NOFOD). NOFOD's 16th conference, *The Dancer and the Dance: Practices, Education, Communities, Traditions and Histories*, was held at Kristiania University College in Oslo in April 2024. With 120 international participants and 68 presentations of different formats, the conference highlighted a diversity within academic and artistic research, dance genres and styles, and research topics. This diversity is also represented in the articles of this special issue.

This issue begins with two of the conference keynotes. In 'The Art of Dancing in History/Research/Today', Elizabeth Svarstad reflects on how to approach past dance practices from a contemporary point of view, emphasising the importance of the researcher's practical knowledge and bodily experience when researching dance and dancers in history. In 'On the Embedded Embodiment of Dancers in Language-based Site-specific Choreography', Leena Rouhiainen argues that there is a continuity between situated, lived bodily experience and writing, and she recommends considering language and linguistic expressions as integral to the medium of dance.

The next three contributions are research articles, covering various topics. In 'The Invisible Work of the Costume Performer', Lorraine Smith discusses costume performance and the potential for costumes to conceal the performing body's cognitive, physical and emotional labour. Using a range of examples and feminist concepts relating to invisible work and emotional management, she examines this possible impact from the performer's perspective. In her article 'Drawn into Dancing and Danced into Drawing: Exploring Deleuze's Lines of Flight through Dancing – Drawing Approaches in Early Childhood Dance Pedagogies', Tuire Colliander explores how dancing-drawing approaches can enhance children's participation and experience in dance. The third research article is written by Anne-Liis Maripuu. In 'Transgressing the Borders Between Art and Non-Art: The Case of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky', Maripuu investigates early modern dance in Estonia during the 1920s, focusing particularly on Part and Kolt-Oginsky's performances, which faced criticism for

including eroticism and acrobatic elements. The article critically examines the line between art and non-art in dance in the 1920s.

Several of the conference presentations were practice oriented in different formats, three of these are in the practice oriented part of this issue. In 'Becoming Foreign to Oneself: Embodied Encounters with Patients' Written Memories of Mental Hospitals', Kirsi Heimonen explores the potential of corporeal practice in her encounters as an artist-researcher with written memories of mental hospitals. Through combining Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), an embodied movement method, and phenomenology, she discusses the unexpected encounters with writings and the physical locations inseparable from them. This article is published posthumously with the permission of Kirsi Heimonen's close family. In 'From Form to Fumbling: Reflections on Creating and Collaborating across Archival, Choreographic and Performative perspectives', choreographer Solveig Styve Holte and performer Magdalene Solli give insights into their work with the archive of the Norwegian dance company *Hovik Ballett*. The authors detail their experimental approaches to contemporary dancers' encounters with this dance-archival material from the 1960s and '70s. In 'Unlearning Dance: Reclaiming the Power of Dancing', Ieva Ginkeviciūtė and Indre Gin explain how they through a series of workshops collectively research how dancers can unlearn habits and reconnect with their subjectivity. The article is published posthumously with the permission of Kirsi Heimonen's close family.

In this issue we also include three off-topic articles: two research articles and one book review. In 'Chakras and Shingles – Historical Fragments of the Chakra System in Contemporary Yoga', Camilla Damkjær uses an autoethnographic approach of her personal experience with shingles. She draws on her extensive knowledge with and about yoga as she sets out to explore how a 'complex inheritance of ideas related to the chakra system, rooted in different cultures and times, may re-occur in contemporary yoga'. In 'The Dancing We', Camille Buttingsrud and Ellen Kilsgaard discuss the intergenerational dance project *Superpower Ensemble*, demonstrating how the participants, both children and

adult artists, experienced co-creating a production as a 'we'. Aligning bodily-affective choreographic work with philosophical theories, they discuss how dance might have relevance beyond the artistic realm. The last contribution in this issue is Karen Vedel's thorough review of the book *Passion och protest. Den svarte danskonstnären Claude Marchants liv och verk* (2024) by Astrid von Rosen and Bo Westerholm. Marchant was an American dance artist who led Ballettakademien in Gothenburg between 19678 and '84. Vedel argues that one important contribution of this book is that it challenges structural blindness in the existing canon of Swedish dance history.

Finally, I want to thank the members of the NOFOD board for their work in making the conference possible: Hilde Rustad, Petra Hulthenius, Ami Skånberg, Lars Dahl Pedersen, Sarah Pini, Tuire Colliander and, last, but not least, Kirsi Heimonen. It was with great sorrow that the board received the message that she passed away not long after the conference. It has been a pleasure to collaborate with her, and sadly the Nordic dance research community has lost an important voice, collaborator, researcher, and dance artist.

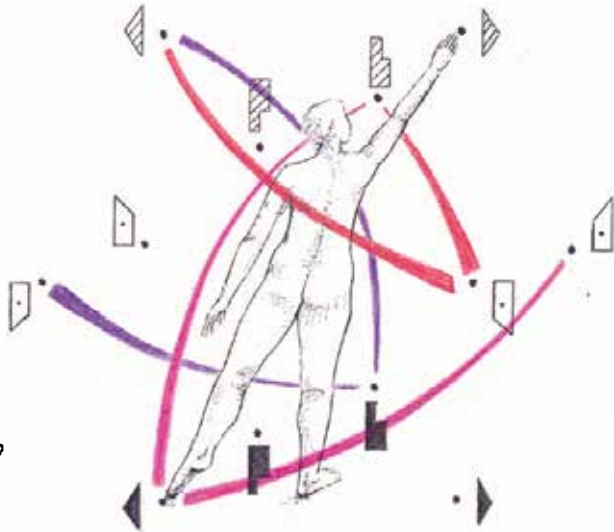
The NOFOD board's main work is planning for and arranging dance research conferences, and our next conference will take place in Iceland in 2026. The board welcomes dialogue with both former conference participants and NOFOD members. Everyone can contact the chair or national board members, and NOFOD members can suggest issues for discussion to the general assembly. For information about NOFOD, its board members, and how to become a member, please see [www.nofod.org](http://www.nofod.org).

*Irene Velten Rothmund*

*Issue Editor and Chair of the Board of NOFOD, 2022-2024*

# CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN LABAN/BARTENIEFF MOVEMENT STUDIES

English-speaking Intensive  
Live-Online & in Berlin, Germany  
Applic. Deadline: Feb. 20, 2025



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## The Art of Dancing in History/Research/Today

Elizabeth Svarstad

### ABSTRACT

This combined academic-artistic keynote presentation was held at the 16th NOFOD conference: *The Dancer and the Dance: Practices, Education, Communities, Traditions, and Histories*. As a dancer and researcher in the field of historical dance, interpreting historical sources for dance is a great part of my work. Reflections on how we can approach past dance practices from a contemporary point of view, the artist and researcher's subjectivity, and what factors come into play when interpreting dance in history are essential parts of my work. A turning point in my research, when I realized that I could not separate the researcher from the dancer, forms the starting point for discussing the importance of the researcher's practice knowledge and bodily experience. Through examples from findings about dance and dancers in history, I am presenting a combination of three methodological approaches that acknowledge how the researcher's experience may affect the upshots. Hermeneutics; interpretation and sense-making in meeting with the historical source material, tacit knowledge; implicit and undefinable in a dancer/dance-literate researcher, and practice-based research; acknowledges practice and an artistic relation to the material being studied in research on past practices.

### SAMMENDRAG

Denne kombinerte akademisk-kunstneriske keynote-presentasjonen ble holdt på den 16. NOFOD-konferansen *The Dancer and the Dance: Practices, Education, Communities, Traditions, and Histories*. Som danser og forsker i feltet historiske danser dreier en stor del av arbeidet seg om tolkning av historiske kilder for dans. Refleksjoner rundt hvordan vi kan nærme oss tidligere dansepraksiser fra et nåtidig synspunkt, kunstnerens og forskerens subjektivitet og hvilke faktorer som settes i spill når man tolker dans fra historien er en viktig del av mitt arbeid. Med utgangspunkt i et avgjørende vendepunkt i forskningen min – da jeg innså at det ikke var mulig å holde meg selv som forsker adskilt fra meg selv som dansekunstner diskuterer jeg viktigheten av forskerens egne praksiskunnskap og kroppslige erfaring. Gjennom eksempler fra funn om dans og dansere i historien presenterer jeg en kombinasjon av tre metodologiske tilnæringsmåter som anerkjenner forskerens erfaring og hvordan erfaring påvirker forskningsresultatene. Hermeneutikk; tolkning og meningsdanning i møte med historisk kildemateriale, taus kunnskap; det implisitte og udefinerbare hos en danser/dansekyndig forsker og praksisbasert forskning; anerkjenner praksis og en kunstnerisk relasjon til materialet som studeres i forskning på fortidig praksis.

# The Art of Dancing in History/Research/Today

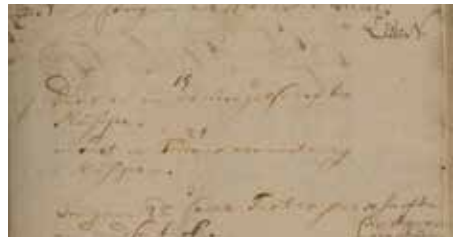
Elizabeth Svarstad

Knowledge about dance in the past enables us to reflect on, question and make conscious choices about our practice and art from a long and essential perspective. As a dancer and researcher in the field of historical dance, interpreting historical sources on dance is a big part of my work. I use European dance manuals and collections that contain dance-notated choreographies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to reconstruct dances for performing and teaching. In addition, 15 books on dance from several different Norwegian archives were the primary sources for my research on dance as social education from 1750 to 1820. I wanted to investigate what dances people in Norway were dancing when nobles in the courts of Europe were dancing minuets and country dances, bourrées, sarabands and gigue. I discovered that people in Norway were doing exactly the same, at least in terms of minuets and country dances.

Essential parts of my work include reflections on how we can approach past dance practices from a contemporary point of view, the artist's and researcher's subjectivity and what factors come into play when interpreting historical dance. A turning point in my research arrived when I realised that I could not separate my identity as a researcher from my identity as a dancer. This forms the starting point for discussing the importance of the researcher's practice knowledge and bodily experience. In this talk, I will present examples from findings about dance and dancers in history that highlight three methodological approaches, all of which acknowledge how the researcher's experience may affect the research results. First, hermeneutics focuses on interpretation and sense-making in meeting the historical source material; second, tacit knowledge refers to the implicit and undefinable knowledge possessed by a dancer/dance-literate researcher; and third, practice-based research acknowledges practice and an artistic relationship with research material on past practices.

As an independent artist and researcher in the field of historical dance and dance history, I appreciate being asked to share some of my work in dance, which is a very generous recognition of my work. I work in what many would consider quite a small field, specializing in eighteenth-century court dance in Norway. Also, I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity not only to share my research but also dance my solo *Love-dans* at the conference.<sup>1</sup>

When I was invited, the board asked me if I wanted to give an academic or an artistic keynote. When I told them that I could not decide, they suggested a combined keynote, so I will talk about some methodological approaches to research in dance history and also about my combined work as a researcher/dancer and a dancer/researcher.



*From Information i Dandsingen av Mons. Dulondel. XA HA Qv. 8on. The Gummerus Library, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology*

## A Dance Lesson

On a wooden floor stands a young man. He is holding his head upright but not stiffly. His shoulders are pulled back, and his back is straight. His feet are turned outwards with the heels together. His knees are straight, and he is paying attention to keeping an elegant posture. At the same time, he breathes and tries to look as relaxed and natural as possible. His arms hang down at the sides of his body, and his hands are neither closed nor open but something in between.



From Danse-Bog, Kiøbenhavn 1753. XA HA Mus. 3b. The Gunnerus Library, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology

He slides his foot to the side and stands with his knees straight. He takes his arm to the side and makes a circular movement up to his head and carefully puts his fingers on the brim of his hat. He holds the hat in the proper way, just as the dancing master has taught him and as he has practiced over and over again. He looks at the dancing master and lowers his arm in the same big circular movement as before, sweeping his hat off his head. He takes a breath, looks forward, and bows his head and upper body. He holds the position as long as he thinks is necessary to honour the dancing master. The young student rises, and again he takes his right arm to the side, in a circle, and puts his hat back on his head. He is careful to place it exactly the way it was before, navigating with his hand right above his right eye and helping with his left hand at the back of the hat to ensure that it is properly in place.

The dancing master takes up his pocket violin and brings it towards his shoulder. He checks the tuning of the strings and lifts the bow. When the student sees the bow lift, he does a plié and prepares the minuet step.

The student was Christopher Hammer, a Norwegian official taking a dance lesson from dancing master Monsieur Dulondel at Sorø Academy in Denmark, probably around 1751 or 1752. This is how I imagine it might have been for him to learn to stand, walk, perform a bow and dance. My imagination of Hammer's dance is based on information in an archival manuscript and on Hammer's notes from his dance lesson, contained in seven sheets of paper preserved in the Hammer collection at the Gunnerus Library in Trondheim, which was a very important source and a very valuable find in my doctoral work. I will return to the manuscript later.

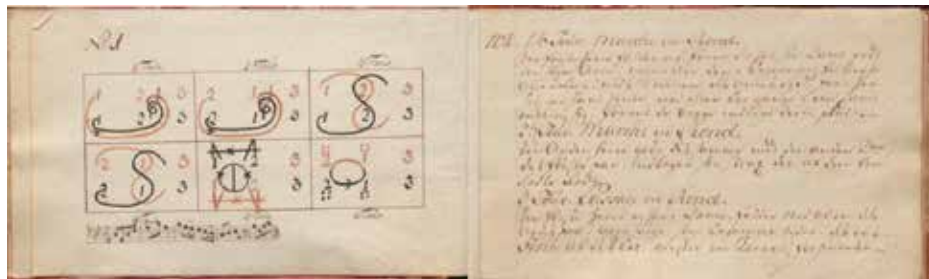
Hammer's experience of his dance lesson belongs to a time that we do not have direct access to; however, we

have a chance to step into the dance of the eighteenth century through our own bodies and through sources that contain information about historical practice. We can try to recreate and perform what Hammer describes about his experience with our own bodies by interpreting his words and signs.

## Interpreting Historical Sources for Dance

Examples of historical dance books include manuscripts with dance descriptions and music. Some of these also have notation, while others have only notation and music, and still others have dance notation and dance description with only four bars indicating the music. Some of these sources are bound, printed books—beautiful objects/artifacts made with brown leather, thick paper, and gold ornamentation. Others are thin pamphlets or only single sheets of paper. For some of these sources, we know the author or the owner, while for others, we do not have any information about the provenance. Most of the books are just collections of dances. However, some of the books include information about how to stand, walk, perform bows, and behave politely.

From the beginning, it was clear to me that I wanted to keep my research close to dance itself. I could also study the people who danced, the students, the dancing masters, the repertoire, the origin and development in the dances. In fact, I did a little bit of everything, but I stayed close to dance itself all the time, and the descriptions of dances were the sources I mainly worked on.



Friderik Willh. Weis. Characteristiske Engelske Dandse. Ms 292 d. The University of Bergen Library, Manuscript and Rare Book Collection

## My Researcher/Dancer Turning Point

For a long time, I kept the researcher part of myself and the dancer separate. I thought that my research would be stronger if I did not involve myself as a practitioner. I did not want to put myself or my personal dance experience into the research. As strange as it sounds, and it feels strange to think back on it now, I was very rigid about it. I strongly wanted distance between my academic research and myself as a dancer. I thought my experience as a dancer was irrelevant and was, in fact, afraid that if I put my personal experience into the research, it would weaken my work. I was afraid of being too empirical, or too artistic, or too positivist. I restricted myself. I was not free in my work.

I had already worked a lot on reconstruction and interpretation. In my search for theory and methods, I read in the field of cognitive neuroscience; I read about mirror neurons and reenactment theory. I also bought heavy and expensive books on forensic science and police investigation methods, to name a few. There was nothing wrong with exploring these texts. However, they did not fit very well with what I wanted to research.

I was on the wrong track.

So.

There I was at a turning point.

With the help of my supervisors, I realised that I could not separate the researcher from the dancer. There was no way around it. I had to find a way to take advantage of my experience as a dancer – a researcher and a dancer in the same person. From that point on, as I designed and conducted my research, I felt free and not so restricted.

I worked on developing a combination of three methodological approaches that acknowledge how the researcher's experience may affect the research results.

The following three methodological approaches formed the basis for my historical dance analysis:

1. Hermeneutics: Interpretation and sense-making in meeting historical sources on dance.
2. Tacit knowledge: The implicit and undefinable in a dancer's, or dancer/researcher's, knowledge.
3. Practice-based research: A method that acknowledges practice and an artistic relationship between the researcher and research material on past dance practices (Svarstad 2017, 31).

Hermeneutics is a common methodological framework in research in history that offers a theory about how meaning can be made when we meet historical material. Interpretation from a hermeneutic perspective describes how sources at all times are put in a new light and must be read again against the background of preconceptions that are continually shifting (Svarstad 2017, 32).

Norwegian historian Knut Kjeldstadli argues that an interpretation process starts with certain prejudices through which the material is interpreted. Parts of the material are seen in the light of its totality, and the understanding of the totality is increased through insight into the parts (Kjeldstadli 1999, 124). This process happens continuously at all levels of the work and offers every meeting with the source the possibility of new answers to old questions as well as new questions.

Kjeldstadli states, "when we try to understand the past, we are humans formed by our time and background.

We wear our own glasses, our preunderstanding or horizon in the meeting with the material from the past. Our preconditions contribute to forming questions and colouring the answers” (Kjeldstadli 1999, 40).

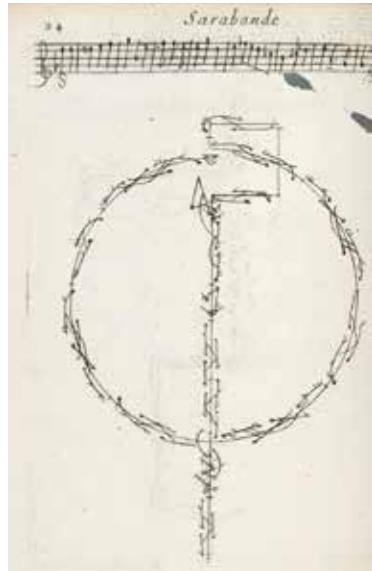
## Notes from a Dance Lesson

The young student sits down in his room in the evening. He lights a candle, finds some paper and a quill pen. He dips his pen into brown ink and writes down what he has learnt at the dance lesson. In quick and rough strokes, he writes about how to stand, perform a reverence with a hat and how to dance the minuet, how to keep the rhythm and how to practice the steps in a circle. He uses Feuillet notation to draw the positions of the feet and the figures in the dance.



From *Information i Dandsingen* av Mons. Dulondel. XA HA Qv. 80n. *The Gummerus Library, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology*

Feuillet notation is a system for recording dance movements that was developed in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Entire choreographies from the eighteenth century have been preserved thanks to Raoul-Auger Feuillet, who published the system in *Chorégraphie* (1700a) and in several collections of dances.



Example of Feuillet notation: Raoul-Auger Feuillet. *Sarabande pour une femme*: *Recueil de dances*. Paris, 1700b.

## Discovering Dance Notation in Trondheim

As a master's student, I sat in the library of the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen with my classmates (many of you in this room were there, and I wonder if you remember this). I had a moment I will never forget. We were shown some of the library's real treasures, and I was completely blown away when I got to put on white gloves and hold an original collection of Pecour choreographies in Feuillet notation. I remember the group starting to leave the room one after another to continue with the library tour and that I did not want to stop looking through the book. I could have sat there for hours. From that point on, I dreamed of finding an example of Feuillet notation in Norway. And there it was—in Hammer's notes in Trondheim!

The documents were already known, but no dancer familiar with Feuillet notation had seen them before. No wonder my blood started pumping and my hands shaking. I could feel the confetti falling from the ceiling!

When I found Hammer's notes from his dance lessons, I could easily see that they contained information about dance. I could read the notation immediately (in



*From Information i Dandsingen av Mons. Dulondel. XA HA Qv. 80n. The Gunnerus Library, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology*

the middle of the page), and I could recognise a few French words. But the rest: no.

I started the work of transcribing the text, but I could not do it. I could understand only a letter here and there. I needed help. My work on transcribing the Hammer notes provides an example of how the hermeneutic circle and my pre-existing prejudices affected my work with sources. I started out thinking that the text was all in French, so I contacted a professor of Old French at the University of Oslo. We sat together for more than an hour. We were able to recognise a few more letters together but could not make sense of the text until the professor suddenly said, “This is written in Norwegian.” Or maybe Danish, as Danish was the written language in Norway at that time due to the Danish-Norwegian union at the time. Then I started again, and after learning to decipher Hammer’s gothic handwriting, I was finally able to, letter by letter, interpret the content of the notes.

It is not easy to recognise one’s own prejudices, or glasses. However, if I try to name some of mine, they may lie in what has made me the dancer I am today. I have studied with different teachers, learnt, copied, developed myself, and gained knowledge, skills and experience that makes me knowledgeable in dance. However, this experience may sometimes stand in the way of my interpretation of historical sources. It can be difficult

to free oneself from all that hard-earned knowledge. Maybe I am too bound to what my teachers viewed as right or wrong, beautiful or not? And although I am very interested in different answers to my questions, I may not be aware of where I am free to interpret or what maybe keeps me from trying out certain pathways or directions.

## Researching Past Practices

One of the challenges when researching past practices in the field of dance is gaining access to what is bygone from a contemporary point of view. When dancing masters wrote their collections and manuals, they wrote them as a help for the memory, using as few words as were absolutely necessary.



*From Engelske Dandse for 1791 med Tourer af Hr: Borek og Musiken af Jacobsen. Pricatarkiv nr. 10, Åkerarkivet, arkivserie La, 0001:16. Regional State Archives of Hamar*

The first line in this English dance (*engelskdans*), a dance for many couples at a time, reads: “First man and lady swing one Tour right hand then fall down around the second couple.” How do they swing, how do they hold hands, what step are they doing while swinging, what is “fall down,” how do they fall down around the second couple? These are just a few examples of the kinds of questions I ask when trying to reconstruct a dance from a written description.

In its time, it was assumed that the reader or user of a dance book knew the terminology used, the short, keyword-like language, and that they knew the practice and how to perform the steps, figures and tours of the dance. When we do not know the practice, we must be aware of how the researcher’s experience creates the basis for an interpretation and that the approach and outcomes are dependent on the researcher’s expectations of the material.



From XII Engels danse. Hs. 8634:657. [1753?]. National Library of Norway

Another example of a question I have asked is about the expression *ballansere* (to balance). It can be found in the source material with a number of different spellings: *balansere*, *ballangere* and abbreviations such as *bal.*, *ball.*, or *bals*. It can be interpreted as the step *pas balancé* as in the French eighteenth century technique or a *demi-coupé* to one leg and then balance. A *pas balancé* can also be a valse step, as we know it in classical ballet. I collected all the information that I could from primary sources and dance manuals from the nineteenth century, including sources from Norway, Scandinavia and Europe. I was able to recognise a step that has developed over time from balancing on one leg, to a step with a hop and a jump, more like an *assemblé* or a *pas de basque* (Svarstad 2017, 2024).

However, when I reconstruct a dance, I have to make choices about what step I perform or what step I choose to teach the dancers to perform. Many times, I have changed my mind later, with other dancers, maybe from different backgrounds, and have changed the step or the quality of the step. If I handed out Hammer's notes, or my transcription of them, to you and asked you to do the movements, you would all do them differently. We would have seventy different ways of performing the reverence. Unique ones. And we can never know if any of us are doing it exactly the same way as Hammer, or Monsieur Dulondel, did it.

## Tacit Knowledge

The concept of tacit knowledge is related to hermeneutics. Michael Polanyi explains that we are able to “know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1983, 4). Thus, tacit knowledge

is not explicit and articulated knowledge, but rather, it is undefinable, implicit and tacit. When Finnish dance researcher Jaana Parviainen uses the concept of tacit knowledge, she takes it as an epistemological approach to bodily knowledge, drawing on Polanyi's difference between focal knowledge and tacit knowledge: focal knowledge is the knowledge about the object or the phenomena in focus, while tacit knowledge is defined as knowledge working as a background for what is in focus. Parviainen states that “we are switching between tacit knowing and focal knowing every second of our lives. We blend the old and well known with the new and unforeseen; otherwise, we would not be able to develop our potential” (Parviainen 2002, 17–18) and “articulated knowledge and bodily knowledge of dance should not be treated as competitors; on the contrary, they are usually interwoven or complementary modes of profound dance knowledge” (Parviainen 2002, 22). When Parviainen speaks about dancers as subjects of knowledge, she acknowledges each individual's subjective process.

Bodily knowledge implies more than understanding how movements technically are or should be done. The expressed intention and the totality of the movement becomes an important part of the knowledge. The unique aspects of the dancer's lived history and ability to express her or himself through movements can be explained with the concept of tacit knowledge.

How can my contemporary body and knowledge approach past, or lost, practices when the phenomenological aspect is challenged by history or by working with historical documents?

Dance scholar Susan Foster says, “The historian's body wants to consort with dead bodies, wants to know from them. What must it have felt like to move among those things, in those patterns, desiring those proficiencies, being beheld from those vantage points? Moving or being moved by those other bodies?” (Foster 1995, 6).

The historian's bodily history is a part of the subjectivity of the researcher and is also a basis for reflecting on the starting point for the research, the process of interpretation, the performance and how we derive meaning from the sources. As I have shown, when reading dance descriptions and trying to make a practice out of the text and make it make sense as a dance, there are many questions that the source itself does not answer.

The questions are the missing pieces, or gaps, that need to be filled with something to make the dance a dance. There is a gap when the dance description is difficult to understand, when the pattern does not make sense, and when we do not recognise certain expressions or ways of dancing. The dance description may leave you on the left leg and tell you to do something that is impossible from that position or at least would look very strange if you tried to do it. Then it is the researcher's task to make choices about how to fill the gaps.



From *Svend Henrik Walleke, Musik og Tuure Bog medelt[?] inhentede Lærdomme for mine Elever udi Dands og afgivet af mig S.H. Walleke Aaret 1816. Mus.ms. 299:36. The National Library of Norway*

One example is an expression in the dancing master Svend Henrik Walleke's manuscript from 1816. The expression is found in several of his dance descriptions in the book and is spelt in several different ways: *Pagde Ridaron*, *Pagderiden* and *Pagderidaron*. I had not seen anything similar before, and I could not make sense of it. Was it a dance figure, a dance step, the name of a person, or maybe this person's special step or movement? Nothing in the description or the book gave me a clue about what it might mean. Google did not help me, nor could old Danish or Swedish dictionaries or the Language Council of Norway.

But with the knowledge and experience that sometimes French dance terminology takes on a phonetic spelling in the Norwegian source material, I got the idea of saying the word out loud, pronouncing it in different ways, trying a Norwegian accent, then Swedish, Danish, German and French accents... and there it was!!

*Pas de rigaudon!*

I knew *pas de rigaudon* from studying French court dances, so I was able to fill the gap, solve the problem,

answer the question and make it make sense.

Foster says, "Once the historian's body recognises value and meaning in kinesthesia, it cannot dis-animate the physical action of past bodies it has begun to sense" (Foster 1995, 7). For me, it does not have to do so much with historical bodies – although of course it does, to some extent – but when I imagine and try out a dance, I try to establish a movement, an expression, a way to hold the body that gives meaning to me. I read the descriptions and imagine trying them out. I check every point in the description again and check in with myself physically to see if I am doing something that both gives meaning and fulfils the instructions. As mentioned earlier, throughout my research and art practice, I have strived to be close to the dance itself at all times. In the material, I have seen, or "met," many persons, and these persons have been carriers, creators of dance and movement material; however, I do not try to consort so much with these bodies. Rather, I try to consort with the dance – movements that make sense in my moving body – and search for an aesthetic and an expression that I can embody. It is a combination of all my knowledge and experience and the adjustment of factors, including the room, my dancing partners, a musical relationship, the audience, etc., and the communication between them.

When Foster says that the historian recognises value and meaning in kinesthesia, that is at the core of where I want to be when performing for an audience. I want the audience to recognise value, meaning and movement in kinesthesia. I will return to that later.

## Reconstruction

Before I talk about the third methodological approach, practice-based research, I want to say a few words about reconstruction. Reconstruction is a common and established methodological approach in the field of dance studies when working with historical sources on dance. Reading historical dance descriptions or dance notation and making them into movements and dance can, in dance scholar Helen Thomas's words, be viewed as "bringing back past dances (lost and found and preserved) to the stage" (Thomas 2004, 39). I have worked a lot with different definitions and also questioned different processes, names and concepts, which are beyond the scope of this presentation. However, I define my work with reconstruction following dance scholar Linda Tomko, who states that a reconstruction

should be made from the broadest possible base of source material and that “reconstruction may illuminate kinetic and kinesthetic ways that dance made meanings in specific historical societies and moments” (Tomko 2004, 327–28). She also states that when a dance material can find reflection in movements and the sensing of movements, reconstruction can be seen as a technology, a physical and exploratory method for understanding. It also functions as a form of representation (Tomko, 328). In this way, reconstruction becomes a dialogue between the historical and the bodily experience.

## Practice-Based Research

Acknowledging practice as part of the research method is well established in many disciplines. Practice-based research acknowledges the artist’s position and the use of what performance researchers Baz Kershaw et al. call “creative doing with reflexive being,” with their focus on activity, process and action as factors in their research (Kershaw et al. 2011, 63). A reflective practice is according to Morwenna Griffiths a “relational self, embedded in time and place, and as becoming what it is not yet” (Griffiths 2011, 184). To be reflexive implies a certain attention to the individual perspectives and positionality of the researcher. These methodological approaches lead to uniqueness in research; when our bodily experience informs the outcome, every outcome becomes unique. I base my interpretation, consciously and unconsciously, on all of my experience and, from a hermeneutic perspective, this basis will be different every time I work with particular material.

## Who Am I as a Dancer?

I was educated by the Norwegian Ballet Academy, now Kristiania University College. My background is mainly in classical ballet, but also contemporary and jazz. After finishing the ballet academy, I specialised in historical dances, mainly eighteenth-century dance.

I spent years taking summer courses and private lessons and self-studying to learn the technique, the repertoire of choreographies, the aesthetics, and the history, as well as learning to read and write Feuillet notation. But before that, I had my whole childhood of dancing. Being a shy girl who never said anything in public, I felt free when dancing. In dance, I could express myself. I could just dance.

My mother took this picture of me:



*Photo: Author’s private collection*

The caption says, “I learned to dance long before I could walk.”

However, walking naturally was not without challenges for me.

My father took this picture of me:



*Photo: Author’s private collection*

I am wearing leg braces. My parents never imagined that I would become a dancer.

I guess I just felt like dancing.

In my childhood and youth, I danced anything I came across. I danced freestyle/disco jazz. I was a Norwegian and Nordic champion several times. I danced swing, folk dance, cabaret, jazz, modern, ballet, tap, ballroom and more.



Photo: Author's private collection

When I was introduced to baroque dance at the age of 25, I knew I had found my style. I was fascinated by the context, the system, and the fact that dances from three hundred years ago were there for me to experience. Going into baroque dance was what really made me a performing artist, and as soon as I started dancing baroque dance, I could not do anything else.

In the following years, I worked to become a skilled baroque dancer. I danced in concerts, dance productions, operas and events. Most of the time, it was expected that I would wear a costume. I wore beautiful dresses with a corset, pannier and wig – expensive and impressive costumes that the audience admired.



Photo: Elisabeth Wathne

Dress, big skirt, corset... Again, I was about to reach a turning point.

## Love-dans

When The Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies commissioned a work for their conference “The Eighteenth Century in Practice” in 2013, I had the opportunity to do something I had thought about for some time: work with a contemporary choreographer in combination with baroque dance. I asked Anne Grete Eriksen, and we created *Love-dans*.



Love-dans. Photo: Magnus Skrede

Wearing a man's costume was extremely liberating for me. In fact, the whole *Love-dans* project was liberating. I realised how the dress and the whole costume had been restrictive, so taking off the corset, not using a wig, wearing clothes closer to the body and showing my legs and my footwork—*Love-dans* became my project of freedom.

Also, through wearing pants and a jacket, I realised that we had managed to blur my gender. People who didn't know me did not know for sure if I was a man or woman, and it felt so liberating to know that people did not categorise me as a woman. I realised that my dance was more focused. That was my goal. I wanted to break free from frames and control. Moving in and out of the baroque movements and Eriksen's choreographic concept also felt extremely liberating, and this turning point as a performer in historical dances meant a lot to me. I felt free.



Love-dans. Photo: Nicolas Tourrenc

French baroque dance in itself has no narrative, but this solo communicated a wide range of different themes and feelings. In Norwegian, the word law means “lover” in English. In Sweden, I performed the solo with 40 copies of the Swedish psalm book under the title “Får jag lov?” [English translation: “May I?”]. A memorable experience was when I performed it at Eidsvoll at the 200-year anniversary of the Norwegian constitution, on the day 200 years after the paragraph concerning whether Jews should have access to the country was signed into law. With members of several religious organisations in the audience, it felt extremely meaningful to dance with and on the law books, moving them around and tearing the paper. All the different occasions of performing this piece have added something to it, and I have enjoyed performing often over the past ten years.

## Again and Again

In the time that has passed since I finished my PhD in 2018, I have again and again had the opportunity to reflect on how I work with these methodological

approaches. Through my work as a performing artist and a choreographer, and as a lecturer and a teacher in historical dance and dance history, I move between the historical source material and the bodily interpretation of the content in the sources all the time. In this way the methodological approaches form a continuous process moving between conscious and unconscious levels in me. With every group of students I work with and with every perspective I meet and with every question I have, I am led to think and reflect in new ways. And it will continue.

I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the colleagues, friends, artists and researchers who have supported and inspired me. Like Christopher Hammer, I stand with a straight back, I take a breath and I do my reverence.

The keynote presentation included videos of excerpts from the performances *Sarabande* (premiere 26 August 2022) and *Virtuose Valdres moter Versailles* (premiere 23 October 2019).

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### Endnotes

- 1 *Love-dans* was performed as part of the artistic program of the conference. Dance and choreography: Elizabeth Svarstad, harpsichord: Gunnhild Tønder, choreography: Anne Grete Eriksen, costume design: Magne Kristiansen. <https://www.nofod.org/oslo-conference-2024/preliminary-program/>

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**Dr Elizabeth Svarstad** holds a BA in dance from The Norwegian Ballet Academy (Kristiania University College), an MA, and a PhD in dance studies from The Norwegian University for Science and Technology. She is an expert in historical dances and teaches at The Norwegian Academy of Music and The Academy of Opera in Oslo. She is also an independent dancer, choreographer, teacher, and researcher. Svarstad is an editorial board member of *The Nordic Journal of Dance* and has published with *Ibsen Studies*, Dreyer, Frank & Timme, Routledge, and Bokselskap, and has contributed to *The Nordic Minuet* (Open Book Publishers 2024).

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## On the Embedded Embodiment of Dancers in Language-based Site-specific Choreography

Leena Rouhiainen

### ABSTRACT

This keynote presentation, held at the 16th Nordic Forum for Dance Research (NOFOD) conference, scrutinises how two cases of progressive forms of site-specific and language-based choreographic practices by performing dancers enact embedded embodiment. The addressed works of Paula Kramer (2021) and Kirsi Heimonen and Leena Rouhiainen (2022; 2024a) both entail motional exploration of chosen physical environments as well as their language-based articulation. The presentation introduces concrete examples from these works and discusses the site-specificity and language-use by the dancer-performers in dialogue with conceptions from embodied cognition and phenomenology. The examination of the notions of embedded embodiment or intercorporeality and the gestural base of language is the means through which the presentation suggests that there is a continuity between situated lived bodily experience and writing. The presentation likewise recommends that we consider language and linguistic expression integral to the medium of dance.

### ABSTRAKTI

Tämä Nordic Forum for Dance Researchin (NOFOD) kuudennestatoista kansainvälisessä konferenssissa esitetty pääpuheenvuoro tarkastelee kahden progressiivisen paikkasidonnaisen koreografisen lähestymistavan ruumiillisia ja kielellisiä yhteyksiä. Paula Kramerin (2021) sekä Kirsi Heimosen ja Leena Rouhiaisen (2022; 2024a) teoksiin kuuluu sekä valittujen fyysisten ympäristöjen liikkeellinen tutkiminen että niiden kielellinen artikuloiminen. Puheenvuoro tarkastelee näitä teoksia konkreettisin esimerkein ja pohtii paikkasidonnaisuutta ja tanssijoiden kielenkäyttöä vuoropuhelussa ruumiillisen kognitiotieteen ja fenomenologian käsitteiden kanssa. Nojaamalla käsitykseen ruumiidenvälisyydestä ja ruumiiden situationaalisesta muovautuvuudesta se ehdottaa, että eletyn, kokeuksellisen ruumiillisuuden ja kirjoittamisen välillä on jatkuvuutta. Puheenvuoro kannustaa lukijaa ymmärtämään kieltä ja kielellistä ilmaisua olennaisena osana tanssia.

# On the Embedded Embodiment of Dancers in Language-based Site-specific Choreography

Leena Rouhiainen

## Introduction

I am happy that the 16th Nordic Forum for Dance Research (NOFOD) conference, held on 23–26 April 2024 in Oslo, took as its focus *The Dancer and the Dance*. After all, in dance studies, the problem of the performing dancer has been focused on less than diverse issues and forms of choreography. This conference importantly added to the body of dance research that addresses the shifting embodiment, agency, and identity of dancers. The previous articulations in this area have reflected—in some cases only implicitly—the kinds of dance and dancing the addressed dancers were engaged in. They typically have also taken the individual dancer’s perspective. For example, in relation to the lineage of Western modern and contemporary dance, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a special interest in the kind of embodied experience dancing affords to dancers, and the moment of dancing was addressed as a form of thinking-in-movement (Sheets-Johnstone 1981). During this time, it was still typical that the different dance techniques of modern dance strongly marked the dancer’s body. By the end of the 20th century, this situation shifted when contemporary dance’s eclectic vocabularies required skilled dancers without rigid stylistic imprints on their bodies (Foster 1997). Since then, increasingly interdisciplinary genres of performance that combined technology, site-specific approaches, and interaction with different species have led to dancers being depicted to embody a moving identity that accumulated and altered through encounters with new choreographic patterns and frames (e.g. Roche 2015). Additionally, unfolding choreographic processes based on devising, scores, and other improvisatory means likewise underlined the artistic agency of dancers, their choices, and their actions as important contributions to the way performances materialise.

In this presentation, I will look into how a few progressive forms of language-based choreographic

practices depend upon, orient, and highlight the embedded and even extended embodiment of performing dancers. My focus here is on site-specific practices that entail motional exploration of chosen physical environments, as well as their language-based articulation. In addressing this issue, I will introduce two concrete practical examples, explore embedded embodiment, and focus on related language use by dancer-performers in dialogue with insights from embodied cognition and phenomenology (cf. Kramer 2021; Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2022). My objective is to further understand the embodied agency of dancers in present-day contexts, where they engage in an extended field of practice.

## Context and Concepts

### Site Specificity

I will contextualise and position what I have to say throughout the presentation as I introduce my understanding of the concepts used herein and the site-specific performance cases I discuss. With site-specificity, I refer to dance and choreography that are practiced and performed in response to specific sites and places, that is, in non-theatre real-world locations. This genre of performance has a broad scope and varies in its aims, focus, and location; yet, in dance scholar Victoria Hunter’s terms, it can be distinguished through its engagement with “everyday rural and urban environments” and “opportunities to explore space, place and environment through corporeal means” (Hunter 2015a, 2). Here, I will specifically focus on site-specific practices that utilise the “performers’ sensory responses as means of developing” content for dance and choreography (Hunter 2015a, 16). In many cases, site-specific choreographic performance processes disrupt the known identities of the sites and can either celebrate or contest and contradict their habitual functions (Hunter 2015a, 1). Hunter (2015b) points out

that such site-specific processes have the “potential to both locate and re-locate the individual, drawing their attention to the site whilst simultaneously challenging pre-conceived notions of the site . . .” (Hunter 2015b, 459). Ethnographers Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman (2014) suggest that to embody urban sites implies a process of becoming embodied and that the experience of place has a profound impact on the sense of our individual and collective selves and can situate us within larger contexts.

My interest here is how the embedded embodiment of performers of site-specific choreographic processes informs movement and language-based articulation. To address this, I will explore some aspects of the work by Paula Kramer, as expressed in her book *Suomenlinna // Groupius: Two Contemplations on Body, Movement and Intermateriality* (2021), in which she focuses on how movement and choreography emerge in collaboration with a specific site at Länsi-Mustasaari on Suomenlinna Fortress Island in front of the Helsinki downtown area. She visited and explored this site for 42 days between December 2016 and May 2019. These visits formed the basis on which she generated a workshop, a performance, texts, photographs, and video material. The second case that I will consider is the approach to textual choreography that I developed together with dance-artist and university researcher Kirsi Heimonen. Our approach involves a phenomenologically inspired score through which we physically explore urban sites through an attentive and motional approach and generate words with which we continue to produce collaborative texts that depict our embedded embodiment in the sites. At this point, we have employed this approach at five different sites, publishing both articles and a video of our work. Here, I mainly discuss the site of the Hakaniemi bank in Helsinki that we explored in 2021 (Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2021, 2024; Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2022, 2024a, 2024b).

## Language-Based Artistic Practice

I borrow the expression “language-based” from the special interest group convening under the Society for Artistic Research. They promote what they call “language-based artistic research” and consider language within artistic research from a broad and transforming perspective. Their aim is to expand the

idea of language-based practices to include diverse fields, such as the visual arts, performance, film, theatre, music, choreography, and literature, and thus move beyond writing, speaking, and listening (Language-Based Artistic Research Group n.d.). In addition to being interlinked with language-based artistic research, with its emphasis on dance performance, language, and textuality, this article also relates to the expanded field of choreography that—while being an indefinable notion—involves experimental and progressive choreographic work concerning both language-based and sociopolitically engaged practices. As we write together with Kirsi Heimonen, expanded choreography:

. . . invites us to look at how else choreographers can approach choreography besides the known conventions of dance. It positions the choreographer as an investigator experimenting with diverse society related questions and problems from the perspective of movement and performance. The open-endedness of expanded choreography also entails that its medial specification is dependent on the problem posed or question explored by each specific work. (Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2024)

In the performance practice that I highlight herein, the performer and the choreographer amount to being the same person, and the practice can also be linked to what has been termed *textual choreography*. This is because the performance practices, at least as one of their aspects, utilise words and writing as means of conveying the experience of motionally embodying sites. In doing so, these practices have generated poetic texts that aim to evoke and even perform the embedded embodiment of the dancers at the site.

Textual choreography can be understood as focusing on the connotations of writing that the term choreography entails. In her book *Choreographing Empathy* (2011), dance historian Susan Foster shows that etymologically, the term “choreography” denotes things such as dance, rhythm, place, region, and the act of writing. As a performance-related practice, choreography indicates an elaborate correspondence between processes and places, as well as their translation into writing. Writing and text thus pertain to choreography, and this feature of choreography has been taken up in various ways by present-day choreographers. They have done this to the extent that dance scholars

Joellen A. Meglin and Lynn Matluck Brooks discuss textual choreography in the following manner:

Different angles or vantage points come into focus, depending on whether the object of inquiry is a text inhabited and inscribed by bodies, or a dance/movement practice originating in or shaped by a text. By “embodied texts,” we mean the choreographic manifestations of adapting literature – be it poetic, dramatic, or narrative in form – into the stylised movements of dance. By “textual choreographies,” we refer to the innumerable ways in which literature has imagined the ontological fact of existing in a body. (Meglin and Brooks 2016, 2)

The manner in which Kramer (2021) and I and Heimonen (Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2021, 2024, Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2022, 2024a, 2024b) have utilised text in our expanded choreography, however, moves in the opposite direction. Our approach extends embodiment into verbal text. While both practices depended upon somewhat open performance scores, the explorative and motional site-specific practice engenders text instead for a text informing the manner in which movement performance is executed. It is specifically here that I am interested in further understanding embedded embodiment. By embeddedness, I refer to an understanding in which our actions, experiences, and knowledge are considered to evolve through a close and complex interplay between the body and the world. This interplay involves processes of adaptation to, co-regulation with, and entanglement with other people, materialities, and environments, as well as sociocultural meanings and conventions (e.g. Gallagher 2020). My more specific interest is in how embedded embodiment can be understood to extend into writing practices and how the text itself carries connotations of embodiment. In this respect, it is interesting what Foster has noted about choreography. For her, choreography is a form of theorisation “about what a body can be and do” and exposes how dance articulates “social, aesthetic and political values” (Foster 2011, 5). In short, she considers choreography to be about the practical theorisation of corporeal, individual, and social identity (Foster 2011, 4).

In her book, Kramer (2021) describes her intentions and practical process through at least four different ways, including descriptive accounts of the progression of her process and working towards a performance,

diary entries on experiences of working at the site (in relation to seasonal changes and describing the score that evolved for the performance), poetic and evocative passages of experienced encounter, and related images. She does not explicitly address how the site-related texts she portrays in her book emerged. In contrast, Heimonen and I (e.g. Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2021; Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2022) describe the method through which we explore the sites we work at and how we experience the site to inform—and even generate—the words with which we continue to produce co-authored poetic texts. Our publications mostly involve the poetic textual choreography generated in relation to our chosen sites as well as more scholarly discussion about the premises and nature of our collaboration.

Here is an example of a diary entry by Kramer on her embodying the Suomenlinna site:

I am with surface, with crust, with movement underneath. I sink into the rock, meeting its form as I come out with my elbow. I see, feel, hear, taste, smell, sense winter all around me, with its quietness and cold. (11.02.2018) (Kramer 2021, 40)

Another example from Kramer is a poem on encountering and working with a found buoy:

### **Meeting Buoy**

Once upon a time  
you arrived on a beach  
by the sea  
rocks and pebbles all around.

I pulled you up to meet with you  
and over time we became friends.

Spending time together  
over the course of a year.  
Meeting and playing and testing  
and trying and dancing and  
resting.

And we performed together  
on the surface of time.

In the winter I let you rest –

the world is still  
the grass is still  
the sea is ice.

Sometimes I move  
and sometimes I am still also.

Will you be there next time I come?  
(Kramer 2021, 53)

Here in turn is a short extract from the textual choreography produced by Heimonen and me on the basis of our exploration at the Hakaniemi bank in Helsinki during winter solstice on 21 December, 2021.

*The spatial waters and skies pierce an urban landscape.*

*Edges, rigorously structured space.*

*Muddy deep water.*

*A challengingly cold breeze.*

*A loose stone paving.*

*A seagull swimming the bay.*

*The hubbub of roaring cars.*

*A circumscribed islet tightly guarded by streets, lanes, alleys, bridges and a highway.*

*Efficient function.*

*A junkie stooping on the shoreline, freezing.*

*Trees growing in boxes escaped into hibernation.*

*Moss and lichens deploying their tired generosity. Passers-by proceeding in their ways.*

*Boatless and shipless docks echo the past.*

*Aversive melancholy.*

*Do not fall under. Will anybody be saved?*

*Rows of empty metallic benches. The Hakaniemi bank at some prior moment.*

*One pitiful boat returning from sea.*

*Suddenly, without warning, wet lime tree trunks in a row*

*slide under the breastbone.*

*The chilly dimness lacks breath, holds tightly.*

(Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2022, 76)

## Embedded embodiment and language

To respond to how we might understand the poetic texts above to deal with embedded embodiment and embodying place, I will shortly turn to a few phenomenological insights about embodiment and the bodily base of language. Here, I utilise the terms embedded embodiment and intercorporeality interchangeably to denote similar subject-body-world interdependencies. I do this to tentatively interlink

embodied cognition and phenomenology for the purposes of this article. I understand intercorporeality to be a basic characteristic of our human embodiment. In promoting his view of carnal intersubjectivity or intercorporeality, phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes how we understand the gestures and acts of other people on a pre-intellectual level through the workings of the pre-personal body-subject (Merleau-Ponty 1995/1964). Merleau-Ponty describes the pre-personal body-subject as an anonymous or impersonal subject and even a natural self, pointing out that it operates and perceives even before a sense of a personal or reflective “I” emerges. He describes it as follows:

Each time I experience a sensation I feel that it concerns not by own being, the one I am responsible for and for which I make decisions, but rather another self which has already sided with the world, which is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them. (Merleau-Ponty 1995/1962, 216)

This dimension of our embodiment is in contact with and operates in relation to its surroundings prior to our personal intentions and, in many cases, direct awareness. It is here that the body, on an immediate level, responds to and accommodates its surroundings, involving human and more-than-human others, things, and places and their situational conditions. In Merleau-Ponty's (1995/1962) view, our understanding of other beings and objects is based on the nonconceptual affective, perceptive, and motional abilities of our bodies. Philosopher Scott Marratto argues that our individuality and “. . . relations with others are established first of all on the bases of our shared embodiment” (2020, 197). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty himself writes, “The constitution of others does not come after that of the body; others and my body are born together from the original ecstasy” (1995/1964, 174). The shared embodiment that Marratto points to can be understood as the basis of the ongoing regulation between our bodies and their surroundings, in which the body adapts to the latter, and we, through our body, project our practical interests and interpretations on our surroundings.

It is evident that the lived sense of place is likewise opened through our bodies' actions and movement. Our kinesthetic experience shows us that the world in

its lived sense is given to us as an if-then-structure. Our surroundings are part of the self-regulatory system of our bodies. According to phenomenologist Jaana Parviainen (2006), when we are in motional interaction with the world and adapt to it, we form bodily and kinesthetic forms of knowing. This is experiential knowledge about the whereabouts of objects and a tactile-kinetic understanding of the characteristics of the environment that trigger bodily sensations and opportunities for movement. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, "there is knowledge of place which is reducible to a sort of co-existence with place" (1995/1962, 105). The specific quality of any lived space is influenced by our previous experiences and our habits and skills, which partially determine how we move in and relate to our surroundings. However, our surroundings also involve culturally and historically determined material constituents. The lived body enlivens these by adapting to them and potentially reveals something new about them. We thus conceive of our surroundings against habitual and predetermined backgrounds in ways in which we can also be oriented towards an only imaginary and potential world (Merleau-Ponty 1995/1962; Heinämaa 1996).

Philosopher Shaun Gallagher underlines that in an intersubjective context specifically, "... interaction has an autonomy that goes beyond what the participating individuals bring to the process" (Gallagher 2020, 104). He continues to note the following:

Attunement, loss of attunement, and re-established attunement maintain both differentiation and connection between individual agents. These processes result in the creation of meaning that goes beyond what each individual qua individual can bring to the process. In this regard, it is the interaction itself that contributes something that is not reducible to the actions of the individuals involved. (Gallagher 2020, 104)

These passages underline that it is our immediate perceptive and motional participation with others and our surroundings that generates significance and meaning. In interaction this occurs in ways that cannot be accomplished without the interplay of the involved agents. This, I assume, is the lure of immediate site-specific exploration.

Dancer and dance scholar Karen Barbour writes about the dialogic interaction with sites:

Site-specific choreographers often utilize sensory awareness and somatic methods that support slowing down and paying attention, acclimatization and acculturation, participatory observation and mapping... These methods lead into improvisational responses and the development of movement material for choreography, and the choreography evolves in an ongoing dialogic process with the site. (Barbour 2019, 112)

In turn, Victoria Hunter describes the quality of site-specific choreographic processes:

The site actively informs the form and content of the work in a manner unpredictable prior to the choreographer's engagement with the site... the choreographer effectively enters into a cyclical 'dialogue' with the site as each choreographic development presents an intervention within the site which in turn affects the practitioners' experience of the site, which then informs the following stage of the choreographic process. In this sense the choreographer's relationship with the site develops through a process of constant referral and co-existence through which the emerging work develops. (Hunter 2015c, 296)

In the case of Kramer's site-specific work, the manner in which she learned to know and communicate with the site at Suomenlinna Island emerged through repeated visitations and a slow observational process. As an example, she writes,

I walk some 25 minutes to the site and once I have arrived roam around some more. At first I enter the site this way and that, moving here and there, testing, slowly becoming acquainted. The site is varied, where do I start today? (Kramer 2021, 41)

Kramer also writes about the site-related writing she engaged in:

My initial diary entries are interspersed with notes from seminars, meetings, conferences, telling me

later that I did not yet have a dedicated movement journal. With time, the work intensifies; from September 2017 onwards becoming much more concrete and gathering impact, vitality. (Kramer 2021, 42)

The first stages of my and Heimonen's method lay down the manner in which we go about exploring sites and producing words with which we later continue writing. Our score prompts us to do the following:

1. Explore the site by being attentive to how it resonates in and extends your body. Move in response to it. After spending some time at the site and sensing its impact, respond by writing down single words or two-word phrases in your notebook.
2. In the next few days, allowing the impact of the site to linger with you and using the words written at the site, write five to ten sentences, again conveying the sense of contact with the site. (Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2024a, 171)

What the above implies is that the work at the site by all three performers requires a form of attentive present-ness and time for exploration. Present-ness here refers to the manner in which performers are connected mainly to their immediate lived experience of the situation that attentive and receptive engagement with the site opens up (Hunter, 2015b). This, in turn, results in postural, gestural, and motional responses to attending to the environment. In the examples I discuss, aside from bodily actions and movements, the responses also involve words and writing. I have argued elsewhere that in becoming engaged with the lived moment of movement exploration, it is the motional stance of the body that forms the horizon through which the world is opened to the dancer. The motional stance forms the anchor through which other aspects of the exploration come into consciousness. Here, there is a flood of shifting sensations, feelings, imaginations, recollections, perceptions, and thoughts that are erased and replaced by each other as the motional stance continues (Rouhiainen 2003). The lived moment of motional exploration is thus not only about the experience of sensorimotor activity.

Shaun Gallagher writes about the bodily basis of

language and refers to the communicative theory of gesture, in which gesture is considered “essentially language and functions primarily in communicative contexts” (2004, 118). He details gestures as expressive movements and speech—and, by extension, I would say some embodied forms of writing—that are activated in communicative situations and are not consciously thought of beforehand yet contribute to the accomplishment of thought. He argues that “. . . we do not have to be conscious of embodied functions for them to effectively accomplish thought. Gesture and language shape cognition in a prenoetic manner” (Gallagher, 2004, 123). He therefore opines that the emergence of language is profoundly dependent upon our preconceptual bodily interaction with others and our surroundings. From his perspective, pre-propositional first-order forms of language are movement, with the “movement of vocal cords, tongue, lips and hand gestures being the primary examples” (Gallagher, 2020, 156). As other aspects and forms of language are acquired, these first-order forms continue to be utilised, and Gallagher (2020) notes that language continues to process first-order interaction further into more sophisticated contexts. However, he underlines the following:

To say that language accomplishes thought is not to say that there is first something inside one's head that then gets put out or expressed, but rather to say that the expression is the thought, and that language generates meaning. Through it we discover what we, and others, mean. (Gallagher 2020, 156)

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's insights, Gallagher points to the fact that we are born into language. In Merleau-Ponty's thinking, language is what could be called a founded tradition, something that preexists in us humans and operates as a condition for all our behaviour. While it does not completely determine our being, it structures our perception and understanding, and we are never fully placed outside of language. Merleau-Ponty writes that language is “our element as water is the element of fishes” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 17 as reported by Madison 1990/1981, 108; cf. Rouhiainen, 2024).

Additionally, it is important to note that while language depends on the body, language also transcends the body. Language is not accomplished without the motional body, but it is not reduced to

physical movement, either. The meaning generated in language is not “reducible to physical markers and movements that generate language” (Gallagher 2020, 156). Rather, language and its forms of expression bring with them an intersubjectively formed field of significances and denotations that impact the meaning that linguistic expressions convey. Interestingly, from a phenomenological perspective, this does not mean that “there exists only, language, but rather . . . that language is the mode of manifestation of being. Things other than language come to be in language” (Moran 2000, 282). This notion highlights that language appropriates things and gives them expression in order for them to be exposed as certain entities. Linguistic expression can support the unfolding and evolution of things into their fuller being. When considered in this way, there is a performative sense to language. While things find a place in language, in the best cases, they become articulated in ways in which their ownmost nature becomes recognised and allows them to become what they are in any given situation. Merleau-Ponty describes this as follows:

It would then be found that the words, the vowels and phonemes are so many ways of “singing” the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as naïve onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence. (Merleau-Ponty 1995/1962, 187)

These short notions about language emphasise that language is bodily based and fundamentally a gesture that expresses our practical and situational embeddedness. It originates from the same preconceptual motional contact we have with our life situations that other forms of site-specific movement expression originate from. In my work with Kirsi Heimonen, we were both struck by the experience of realising that we did not invent the words that we wrote down at the site in relation to our exploration. We felt that they were simply given to us, as if the site spoke through us (Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2024b). Here, the embedded interaction with the site generated something beyond what we could have done individually.

To end this presentation, I would like to argue against the previously held view in phenomenologically

oriented dance studies, that posits that there is a sharp distinction between bodily experience and its verbal expression (e.g. Parviainen 1998). On the contrary, especially when writing is informed by a focal awareness of our situationally embedded embodiment and its lived spatiality, there is a continuity between bodily experience and verbal expression. It is true that words and writing borrow from the shared lexicon of language we are familiar with, but in the cases discussed herein, writing did so in ways in which the lived experience of the explored site impacted the use of language. As different forms of language-based and writing practices have become increasingly utilised by dancers and choreographers, Kramer’s (2021) and Heimonen’s and my own (e.g. Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2024) approaches being only a few examples, I would like to argue that continued exploration of the interrelationship between embodiment, language, and writing in dance is called for. Could we not understand language through its gestural bodily basis and consider it a multimodal form of expression and communication whose sign systems include images, movements, music, and even objects and events, as well as words, sentences, and text (Kauppinen 2020)? I would also like to suggest that dancers continue to cultivate their embodied relationship with verbal language, words, and text—perhaps even coming to consider them as one of their expressive mediums that bear witness to bodily motion and interaction and articulate relational aesthetic, material, interspecies, social, and political values. Language and linguistic expression could thus be considered to belong to the medium of dance and its performance and to genuinely extend motional embodiment.

The keynote presentation at the NOFOD conference ended with a showing of the video *Writing the Shadows as Choreography* (Heimonen, Rouhiainen, Uunila and Nykyri 2021), which includes video clips of Heimonen and me exploring Tarja Halonen Park in Helsinki and a soundscape in which we read the textual choreography generated on the basis of this site.

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## The Invisible Work of the Costume Performer

Lorraine Smith

### ABSTRACT

In the field of costume performance, the power of costume to create and communicate meaning and metaphor and enhance performer embodiment and audience connection has been evidenced and commended. There has been an abundance of research from both designer and performer perspectives, with a focus on the evolving relationship between the body and the costume. However, does 21st-century progressive experimental costume performance, which may include the use of unconventional materials, have the potential to impact the labour of the performer?

Costume can both reveal and hide the body, arguably making the work of the body visible and invisible. This research article builds on the paper presentation “The Invisible Work of the Costume Performer”, delivered at the NOFOD Conference 2024. It examines the potential for costume to conceal the cognitive, physical, and emotional labour of the performing body and the resulting impact this may have on the performer.

Building on the understanding of Western traditional approaches and hierarchies in performance making and the complex relationship between dancer/performer and pain, the performance projects *PING* (2014), *PANG* (2021), and *You Can Take Me Home Toni* (2023) are interrogated. From the perspective of the performer, and informed by discussions with designer Daphne Karstens, Lorraine Smith analyses and contextualises these projects through the lens of feminist concepts relating to invisible work and emotional management. The article concludes by identifying possible solutions for making visible the invisible labour of the performer in costume performance and for the management of this workload on the performer’s body.

### SAMMENDRAG

Kostymers evne til å skape og kommunisere mening, og til å styrke utøverens kroppslige uttrykk og kontakt med publikum er godt dokumentert. Det finnes mye forskning fra både designer- og utøversperspektivet, med fokus på utviklingen av forholdet mellom kropp og kostyme. Men hvilket potensial har progressive eksperimentelle kostymeforestillinger i det 21. århundre, som kan inkludere bruk av ukonvensjonelle materialer, til å påvirke utøverens arbeid? Kostyme kan både avsløre og skjule kroppen, og dermed gjøre kroppens arbeid synlig og usynlig. Denne forskningsartikkelen undersøker kostymets potensiale til å skjule utøverkroppens kognitive, fysiske og emosjonelle arbeide og den resulterende innvirkningen dette kan ha på utøveren. Artikkelen undersøker forestillingsprosjektene *PING* (2014), *PANG* (2021) og *You Can Take Me Home Toni* (2023). Basert i utøverens perspektiv, samt diskusjoner med designeren Daphne Karstens, analyserer og kontekstualiserer Lorraine Smith disse prosjektene med en feministisk linse, gjennom konseptene usynlig arbeid og emosjonell håndtering. Artikkelen avsluttes med å identifisere mulige måter å synliggjøre og håndtere det usynlige arbeidet til utøveren i kostymbaserte forestillinger.

# The Invisible Work of the Costume Performer

Lorraine Smith

## Introduction

I am a performance maker and researcher with a background in dance. After a transformative period performing and choreographing for the MA in Costume Design for Performance at the London College of Fashion (2008–2014), I began to regularly collaborate with costume designers to devise and perform in costume-led works. When I refer to costume, I mean costume that has been designed and incorporated into the performance, with equal importance to the moving body and other creative elements. As a result, if you were to remove the costume, the performance would probably not work.

My work at the London College of Fashion enlightened me regarding the haptic nature of costume (Driscoll 2011; Dean 2015) and its potential impact on the performing body and the audience (Smith 2018). As a performance maker, costume has become a vital creative vehicle for exploring and communicating meaning and metaphor to the audience, as well as a tool for performer embodiment. My research, informed by my artistic practice, is from the perspective of the experiential performer-maker and focuses on the impact of costume on the performing body and the devising process. Much of my previous research has explored the positive impacts of costume, with only one publication (Smith 2021) examining the risks of costume through its potential impact on performer behaviour and embodiment as well as the impact it can have on the audience.

Daphne Karstens is a costume designer, wearable sculpture artist, and performance maker based in the Netherlands and an alumnus of the MA in Costume Design for Performance at the London College of Fashion. She has collaborated on a wealth of projects, including traditional stage performance, experimental performance, costume performance, installations, cabaret, and festival events. Karstens' designs, considered to be wearable art rather than traditional garments or stage costumes, are experimental and

innovative, utilising unconventional materials that push the boundaries of material in relation to body, shape, and structure (Karstens 2024).

Working with unconventional materials is challenging compared to traditional textile-based design, which tends to allow complete body movement for the performer. By contrast, nonconventional material designs can be awkward, uncomfortable, and risky to work with. However, it is this very nature of the materials that is exciting to work with and that enables higher levels of experimentation, allowing for fascinating body-costume dialogue and relationships to form. This is why Karstens and I have chosen to collaborate on such innovative wearable art costumes.

In 2019, I attended and performed at the Innovative Costume of the 21st Century Conference, Moscow. Sadly, all the exhibition photography of the costumed performers included the names of the designers and photographers, but not of the performers. This absence of the performer is not the norm in the performance sector or the world of Critical Costume.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is usually the costume designer who is missing from the acknowledgements, reviews, etc. However, this did highlight concerns regarding a wider blind spot concerning the important contributions and labour of the performer. Since 2019, I have been engaging with more unconventional, larger-scale, and heavier costumes, which has raised interesting questions regarding the labour of the costumed performer. Rachel Hann and Sidsel Bech state that “costume is both an act of revelation and concealment, as it shapes action while simultaneously disguising the body’s form and texture” (2014, 4). I would add that it hides the performer’s labour.

Building on the understanding of Western traditional approaches and hierarchies in performance making and the complex relationship between dancer/performer and pain, the performance projects *PING* (2014), *PANG* (2021), and *You Can Take Me Home Toni* (2023) are explored. The costumes for all these works



Figure 1: PING costume. MA15 Costume Design for Performance final showcase, Lillian Baylis Studio, Sadler's Wells (2014). Photograph courtesy of Alex Traylen.



Figure 2: PING costume. MA15 Costume Design for Performance final showcase, Lillian Baylis Studio, Sadler's Wells (2014). Photograph courtesy of Alex Traylen.

were created by Karstens and are a continuation of the collaborative relationship we have had since her time studying for the MA in Costume Design for Performance in 2013-2014.

From the perspective of an experiential performer-maker, and based on discussions with Karstens, I analyse and contextualise our experiences of working with these costumes through the lens of feminist concepts relating to invisible work and emotional management. In turn, I answer the following question: Does 21st-century progressive experimental costume performance have the potential to impact the labour of the performer?

Finally, it is important to recognise that my engagement with the projects identified in this article were fully consensual and that the working approaches were ethically sound. Karstens always had my safety and

welfare at the forefront of the process and constantly checked in with me to make sure I was happy with the wearable art costumes and my engagement with these items. Any labour, discomfort, and risks taken were of my own choosing.

## PING & PANG

*PING* (2014) and *PANG* (2021) are performances conceived and designed by Dutch designer Daphne Karstens, with Angela Woodhouse as choreographer for *PING* and Karstens as director for *PANG*. These two pieces can be performed separately or together, and they aspire to become the future triptych *PANG PING PONG*.<sup>2</sup> The works were performed as a diptych at the Amsterdam Fringe Festival in 2021.

*PING* is a wearable sculpture performance that was originally created in 2014 as Karstens' final master's project. I was the original performer, and I have performed the piece several times over the years. Inspired by Samuel Beckett's prose work "Ping" (1966), the performance explores the relationship between the physical body and the *out-of-body or spiritual body* through the struggles of a person submerged in an unknown and ephemeral world (Karstens 2024).

*PANG* is a body installation in which scenography and costume become performance design. Research experiments and residencies began in 2020, with the final form developing over a five-week period leading up to the festival premiere. The performance was inspired by the process of the Big Bang theory and the creation of dimension and shape, which were interpreted as a live visual slow-motion process (Karstens 2024).



Figure 3: PANG rehearsal discussion in full body costume. PANG & PING, Bau Studios, Netherlands (2021). Photograph courtesy of Mikki de Gier.



Figure 5: PANG & PING, Plein Theater; Amsterdam Fringe Festival (2021). Photograph courtesy of Frank Wiersema.



Figure 6: Detachable full body costume. PANG & PING, Plein Theater; Amsterdam Fringe Festival (2021). Photograph courtesy of Frank Wiersema.

Due to the progressive nature of *PING* and *PANG*, whereby the designs also act as scenography and props, some may question whether the work can be considered costume, particularly as I do not wear all the design elements in the conventional sense. Jane Bennett's concept of "human-nonhuman assemblages" (2010, xvii) can be attributed to Karstens' designs and, as such, verifies that these creations do act as costume. When I am in contact with the wearable sculpture, we become an assemblage of living, vibrant materials in a dynamic interplay (Bennett 2010) – a "symbiosis between material(s)/costume and the moving body" (Smith 2022, 105).

The *PING* costume involved a white morph suit, a removable white netted tubular layer, an integrated smoke system, and tubing attached to the suit (see Figures 1 & 2). The performance involved sustained slow fluid movements, the removal of the restrictive outer layer, slowly carrying and hanging the heavy outer layer on a hook, and finally delivering graceful limb-extending choreography to enhance the smoke trails emitting from the costume tubing. Core strength and physical endurance were needed to hide any exertion and maintain the otherworldly sense of the piece. For example, I had to engage in very slow sustained movement to appear effortless and ephemeral while wriggling out of the tight tubular structure and always became stuck on the smoke pack strapped to my back.

*PANG* consisted of a large triangular wooden structure with three separate areas at each point, which I had to crawl between via the half metre or so of space under the platform (see Figure 3). Each platform was comprised of a sheet of triangles made from hard plastic

that could be moved from underneath via the hands or by pushing with the head, back, and other bodily surfaces (see Figures 4 & 5). The first platform had large triangles in bronze, the second medium triangles in mirror gold, and the third small silver triangles. This final platform had a detachable full-body costume, which allowed me to stand on the platform and then manoeuvre to the stage floor (see Figures 3 & 6).

Each section of *PANG* started with minimal movements that grew larger over time, with the aim that my body would not be seen at all. Each triangular layer was very heavy and hard to manoeuvre, and all had sharp edges that scratched my body. I was unable to see the physical effects of the dynamic interplay when engaged as part of the costume-body assemblage. There was also a lot of time during the devising and performance of *PANG* in which I had to lie and crawl under the structure, which was somewhat uncomfortable.



Figure 4: PANG rehearsal discussion under the bronze layer. PANG & PING, Bau Studios, Netherlands (2021). Photograph courtesy of Mikki de Gier.



Figure 7: Straw pom-pom costume. YCTMHT, Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). Photograph courtesy of Rachel Deakins.

The detachable silver layer was particularly physically restrictive and risky. The sculptural form tightly encased my body, with my arms enfolded to my chest. I had poor vision and no way to catch myself if I fell. The triangles were also joined tightly with elastic, meaning that when I moved in this assemblage, sections would erratically pop inwards towards my body and specifically towards my face. This was the costume that had Karstens most on edge when I was interacting and performing with it, and she regularly discussed potential adaptations to reduce potential risks.



Figure 8: Straw costume (2nd layer). YCTMHT work in progress. Dance Edits, Dance City (2021). Photograph courtesy of David Griffith.



Figure 9: Straw costume (base layer). YCTMHT, Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). Photograph courtesy of Rachel Deakins.

## You Can Take Me Home Toni

*You Can Take Me Home Toni* (YCTMHT)<sup>3</sup> is an autobiographical live multiform performance, which is led by personal stories that connect to my secret fandom of 1980s pop icon Toni Basil and her *Word of Mouth* video album.<sup>4</sup> At the heart of the work is the concept of shame and how those we idolise can empower us to embrace our past transgressions, explore our identities, and achieve self-acceptance. This production was completed in 2023 and is currently touring different festivals and venues.

The work uses performance techniques from theatre, dance, cabaret, and costume performance, including poetry, wearable art costumes, projected visuals, and ethical audience participation.<sup>5</sup> The 55-minute production aims to entertain and challenge audiences through honest and taboo-breaking stories relating to vaginas, sexual assault and harassment, queer experiences, and identity. Overall, the show is a celebratory and visually dynamic performance that reflects the audience's own bodies and experiences through a shared identification and empathy with my own / the character's journey to self-acceptance.

As stated previously, the project involves unique wearable art costumes created by designer Daphne Karstens. Karstens' designs were used to inform the dramaturgical development of the work, and her avant-garde approach was utilised to reflect Basil's 1980s style and palette. The production structure has eight sections, with seven reflecting the music videos of the *Word of Mouth* video album: "Mickey," "Nobody," "Little Red Book," "Time After Time," "Be Stiff," "Space Girls," and "You Gotta Problem." Each music video has a unique visual quality that is reflected in the aesthetic of the



Figure 10: Boxing tutu costume. YCTMHT, Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). Photograph courtesy of Rachel Deakins.

relevant section and links to key themes/memories in the work. My fandom of Toni Basil acts as a dramaturgical device to thread the sections and themes together into a cohesive narrative.

Five of the production sections involve wearable art costumes. There are also costume elements that are used to interact with the audience, but as these items are not worn by myself, they are not explored in this analysis. My longstanding collaboration with Karstens means I have complete trust in her to utilise my initial ideas to produce costumes that are visually impactful and can influence the dramaturgy of the work. I now endeavour to describe these designs and my experience of working with them.

The first section (“Mickey”) starts with an entertaining opening dance number, followed by dialogue and accompanying movement based on childhood memories of vagina incidents and sexual assault. The costume consists of three layers. The top layer includes a pompom cloak of around 1,000 blue and white striped paper straws and a red and white striped paper straw headpiece covering the whole head (see Figure 7). The middle layer comprises a red and white paper straw skirt, red leotard, red and white ankle warmers, and black cap with black plastic straw hair (see Figure 8). The base layer consists of a red leotard with a nude latex pubic front piece (see Figure 9). The top and middle layers are removed on stage during this section. The pompom layer is made up of two segments connected at the front and back with Velcro. The front Velcro is ripped open to remove this layer, while the straw skirt layer is removed via a zip at the back. Performing in these multiple layers makes the body heat up quickly, and the pompom layer is also very heavy and bulky.

Certain aspects of these straw costume layers have to be worked with in specific ways. The voluminous pompom straw layer needs/encourages larger movements, including spinning, whirling, bouncing, and shimmying. Both the pompom and skirt costumes create distinct sounds, such as hollow rattling, when moved in. This means that when delivering dialogue dressed in the middle layer, the choreography can only include stillness and upper body movements.

The costume for the third section (“Nobody”) explores memories of sibling bullying and homophobia. The costume includes red satin boxer shorts and a white cropped vest, a red boxing glove tutu, and red boxing gloves worn on the hands (see Figure 10). The tutu, consisting of 16 boxing gloves, is worn via a red nylon harness worn over the shoulders and waist. Like the straw costume, the boxing glove tutu is heavy and somewhat cumbersome to move in, and the boxing gloves make the hands very sweaty. The choreography for this section includes boxing moves, ballet positions, authentic gestures, and moments of abstract slow flowing movement. The choreography also features a moment in which I roll on my back and lift my legs in a sustained position. This causes the boxing gloves to fall and hit me in the face.

The sixth section (“Little Red Book”) plays with representations of the (un)feminine body via the embodiment of the imaginary cockney character the *Marchioness of Merkin*,<sup>6</sup> aka Meryl. The costume is made up of a triangular brown hair costume of shoulder-to-floor length, with elasticated wrist straps on the underside and a satin headband with a hair broach attached (see Figure 5). The section includes a monologue and a short dance sequence.



Figure 11: Hair costume. YCTMHT, Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). Photograph courtesy of Rachel Deakins.

This costume is very weighty and sweat inducing, and, like the straw pompom costume, it choreographically encourages spinning, bouncing (vertically and horizontally), skipping, swooshing, shimmying, and shaking. As the costume is floor-length, the movements must be very considered to avoid stepping on the hair, which is extremely slippery underfoot.

Similar to the sixth section, the seventh (“You Gotta Problem”) involves the embodiment of a phantastic character – a giant vagina as a form of bodily celebration and female sexual energy. The costume design includes a fluorescent pink leotard base and a large vagina made from different shades of red and pink padding and netting, worn via a nylon harness (see Figure 12). Hidden inside the netting are two small pockets for storing pink confetti. The section is a four-minute dance involving cavorting and cheeky and vulgar choreography, including aggressive hip thrusting and other sexually connotated moves. The dance also includes the throwing of the pink confetti over the stage and audience. This costume is quite light and unrestrictive, allowing for the liberation of movement and personality.

The eighth and final section (“Space Girls”) explores stories of sexuality and queer awakening. The section contains a mix of short monologues, posing, expressive gestures, and abstract movement. The costume consists of a bright yellow unisex jumpsuit and a tabard top layer covered with multiple bright yellow spherical boobs with orange nipples (see Figure 13). The boob forms are created via inflated beach balls inserted into each globular material pocket. Although this costume is light to wear, the mass of boobs can be difficult to manage due to the positioning of the upper spheres, which can force the head back into a somewhat jarring position.

Most of these costumes are heavy, hot (causing extensive perspiration), and at times awkward to work with. Overall, the costumes need a lot of extra physicality, energy, and attention to perform in. Nonetheless, these bespoke costume designs are visually impactful and hyper-visible, creating a spectacle that demands the audience’s attention. The costumes, combined with the dialogue, strongly communicate the themes, meanings, and metaphors of the work. Therefore, only essential movement/choreography is required for the piece. The costumes allow me to fully embody all the characters in the work, be it past versions of myself, a giant merkin, or a vagina.

## Devising

There is a spectrum of hierarchies when creating performance (Butterworth 2009; Pollatsek and Wilson 2021), ranging from traditional didactic forms, in which the choreographer/director makes all the decisions and the performers are viewed as voiceless tools, to more collaborative devising methods, in which a non-hierarchical approach and shared authorship usually occur (Crickmay 2015). However, Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling challenge the assumption that collaborative devising is fully democratic and non-hierarchical, particularly if there is an artistic director or choreographer operating as the main decision-maker and/or dictating the final vision of the production (2006).

Creating live performance is predominantly an interdisciplinary process that typically involves numerous collaborators, including the director, choreographer, performer(s), costume designer, sound artist, and lighting designer. My own artistic practice is multiform and has included traditional performance, costume performance, cabaret, and live art. *YCTMHT* is a great example of this, amalgamating a myriad of art forms that necessitate collaboration to devise the work.

My devising approach for *YCTMHT* was to foster a respectful and non-hierarchical environment with an openness to play, sharing, observing/listening, and discussing (Smith 2022). Although I gave each collaborator much creative freedom, as the director-performer of an autobiographical work, it was somewhat unachievable to fully implement democratic decisions. However, I was open to what the final vision of the production would be. This was particularly evidenced by the impact that the costumes had on the dramaturgy of the work. Karstens was very much an “authorizing agent” (Sajjani 2016, 88) or “active co-creator” (Radosavljević 2013, 180) during the devising process, with her *signature style* (Helve 2022) being a prominent feature of the production. Although the costumes were at times physically challenging to work with, each aided the devising process and enhanced the final creative outcome. In fact, the discomfort added to the embodied journey of my character, reflecting visually and performatively painful and difficult emotional and physical moments in the narrative.

Equally, in the devising of *PING* and *PANG*, there

was collaboration in which I had a confident voice as an experienced performer-maker alongside Karstens as the lead artist. Karstens' role was a designer-director dyad, with an understandable focus on the wearable sculptures. Although it should be noted that this was Karstens' first professional role as a director, she had a very clear vision for the final performance.

What was particularly impactful for all three projects was Karstens' approach to working with the materials that place the moving body at the centre of her creations. Every design would be tried and tested on her own body. For example, she would always send me videos and images of herself wearing and moving in each developing costume for *YCTMHT*. This experimentation with the materials on her own body meant that Karstens had a physically intuitive understanding of the materials to inform the costume design, which she could also share in support of my own explorations with the individual items.

Another important element to Karstens' collaborative approach was her openness and directness (a great Dutch quality). We engaged in discussions relating to my experience of the costumes, finding solutions to any issues. Such discussion is vital when working with progressive designs. Costume is like a dance partner, and it can take time to build a relationship and synchronicity with it. This was particularly evident with the elements of *PANG*, which were hard to crack due to the unyielding and unforgiving nature of the wearable sculpture materials and structures. Even when choreography was set, you could not trust that the triangle sheets would behave the same way each time.

A perfect example of this working approach is illustrated by a particularly frustrating day of rehearsal with the *PANG* bronze triangles. Karstens wanted the triangle sheet to be moved in a certain way based on her external/audience perspective. However, as I was underneath the sheet, affecting it without any awareness of the visual outcomes, it felt almost impossible to meet this request. After some heated back and forth, I said, "OK, you try and do it then!" This was a fantastic moment – a chance for Karstens and I to swap our inside/outside perspectives. This shared experience of the physicality of working with the triangles and of the cognitive difficulties involved in manipulating the material for the desired outcome, together with Karstens' specialised knowledge of the material,



Figure 12: *Vagina* costume. YCTMHT, Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). Photograph courtesy of Rachel Deakins.



Figure 13: *Boob* costume. YCTMHT, Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). Photograph courtesy of Rachel Deakins.

allowed us to resolve the issue. This mutual ground and exploration of possibilities was central to the rehearsal process and led to improved ways of working with the wearable sculptures (see Figure 4).

## Injury/Pain

Historically, there has been a harmful relationship between dance training/performance and pain. From the agony of pointe work to the *dance until you drop* of Pina Bausch's *Rite of Spring*, whether through training or professional performance, there is still a culture

that normalises enduring discomfort and pain (Wright 2022; Lampe et al. 2019; Molnar and Karin 2017). In fact, this culture has permeated beyond the rehearsal room and stage, with society and the media venerating the performer who suffers for their art (Molnar and Karin 2017). This resignation to tolerating pain also pervades costume performance. I have witnessed performers pass out due to a heavy headpiece or constricting corset. My own body has been marked by tight, sharp, or rigid materials, and my muscles have been strained by heavy costumes.

When I joined the project to develop *PANG*, I was replacing a young graduate dancer who had helped with the initial experiments. On the first day of rehearsal, I managed to strain my shoulder while improvising and experimenting with one of the heavy triangle sheets. I believe this was partly due to my attempt to prove myself as the older non-technical dancer, perpetuating the unhealthy expectations of enduring pain that we usually learn through traditional training practices (Lampe et al. 2019). Even though Karstens checked in on my welfare, I kept quiet about the pain and discomfort I regularly felt devising and performing the work. This resonates with Marika Molnar and Janet Karin's assertion that managing and hiding pain can relate to "notions of vulnerability, weakness, fragility, and inadequacy" (2017, 4).

I also inadvertently perpetuated the *suffer for your art* ethos throughout the devising of *PANG*. Karstens offered alterations to manage the scratches from the sharp-edged triangles, including alternative base layers. But I chose to continue with a simple long sleeve top and leggings. Arguably, this reflected the British *stiff upper lip* and the expectation to endure, wearing my scratches as a *badge of honour*. I also consented to working with the risky silver detachable costume, including the decision to retain the dangerous manoeuvre from the platform to the stage floor. There was almost a thrill and sense of pride that I had delivered this challenging and risky feat – a feeling not uncommon to a performer accomplishing a difficult acrobatic move.

The costumes of *YCTMHT* also raise health and safety risks. Nearly all the costumes are heavy, and I have had to regularly manage overworked muscles post-rehearsal and post-performance. On one occasion, when rehearsing in the boxing glove tutu, I overestimated the impact of the costume's weight when rolling to the floor and lifting my legs in the air. The additional force caused

my legs to snap over my head, triggering a spasm in my neck and shoulders. I have also had a lot of near-miss accidents while slipping and tripping on elements of the wearable art, perhaps the most common risk of working with costumes.

However, I have chosen not to make changes to these costumes for dramaturgical and aesthetic reasons. For example, Karstens offered to trim the hair costume to minimise the tripping hazard, but I said no. The visual impact of a hair costume that flows from head to toe is worryingly more important to me than my own safety. I also originally chose to have pointe shoes as part of the boxing glove costume for the third section. As I had never worked in pointe shoes before, this was arguably a level of artistic masochism I was willing to endure for the work.

## My Labour

Overall, my struggles and labour throughout the devising and performance stages of the three works were physical, cognitive, and emotional. My physical labour was high and unrelenting for all the projects due to the sheer weight and bulk of the *PANG* triangular sheets, the *PING* outer layer, and the cumbersome size and weight of the *YCTMHT* costumes. Trying to perform movement with this extra weight puts further strain on my muscles and joints, increasing physical risk to my body as an older performer.

Cognitively, costume performance is always challenging. Part of the fun is learning how to build an understanding of and relationship with the costume, and this has been the case for all the costumes in *YCTMHT*, which also includes numerous quick costume changes. This was minimised due to Karstens' design process of wearing/testing the costumes in development. She also worked with me to amend costume elements to improve the comfort and ease of removal for quick changes when requested.

For *PANG*, my cognitive labour was very demanding due to the complexity of understanding the nature of the unconventional materials and how to work with them in an impactful and safe way. *PANG* was troublesome, as I could not see how my interactions were impacting the material, nor could I conventionally wear all the elements. Regardless of what the audience were witnessing, from my performer perspective in *PANG*, it was hard to become an emergent form (Bennett 2010) whereby

my body and the costume merged into one embodied assemblage through performance (Smith 2022).

My emotional labour for *PANG* was also quite high, mostly due to my self-inflicted silence. During the devising period, I felt physically tired and irritable for most of the rehearsals, and I cannot say I enjoyed the challenge of engaging with the progressive designs. I reverted to traditional performer type, choosing to hide or to make jokes about my struggles and frustrations and pointlessly worrying that this was needed to maintain professionalism and a good working environment.

In her book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Arlie Hochschild proposes the concept of *emotion management*, which requires us “to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild 1983, 7) or to remain “in accordance with employer-defined rules and guidelines” (Kaplan 2022, 841). This articulates the emotional dissonance (of pain, frustration, and discomfort) that I engaged in (i.e., emotional labour) to maintain the traditional/social expectations and hierarchies of the rehearsal room and the occupation of a performer, even when this was not expected or part of the working environment Karstens was offering. My emotional labour was unrelenting because of my perceived need to hide my frustration and discomfort from the team when working with the wearable sculptures, as well as to manage my fears of injury and feelings of inadequacy. This was very much self-imposed and not something Karstens was creating or enforcing as part of the project.

I would also argue that I had to engage in emotional management in the making of *YCTMHT* in relation to my memories of trauma and the meanings connected to some of the costumes. For example, the base layer of the straw costume relates to a genital accident and helps to communicate the physical pain and psychological trauma of the event. The nude latex pubic front piece also echoes the Barbie doll vagina-less body to express the loss of innocence and the sexualisation of the female body. This is heightened by the red leotard, a clothing item I have worn in the past, which manifests feelings of vulnerability and sexual objectification (experienced by many females in dance and gymnastics). To reiterate, these are costume choices I have willingly accepted and want as part of the overall dramaturgy of the production.

The amalgamation of these three types of labour

– physical, cognitive, and emotional – in the devising and performance of work can be exhausting and is usually (perceived to be) unseen, leading to feelings of underappreciation. However, the addition of a wearable sculpture will not only increase this labour but also probably hide it. The concept of *invisible work*, coined by feminist writer and sociologist Arlene Daniels (1987), is used to describe the types of unpaid labour usually carried out by women.

Building on Daniels’s concept, Erin Hatton suggests three interconnecting sociological mechanisms through which work becomes invisible. The first is sociocultural, via restrictive frameworks of gender, race, class, and age; the second is sociolegal, whereby the labour is absent from legal definitions of employment; and the third is sociospatial, with the labour existing outside the socially constructed workplace (Hatton 2017). Applying these mechanisms to costume performance, it is possible to understand how the performer’s labour may be ignored or undervalued due to the hierarchies involved in creating performance (particularly if you are young and female); due to the enduring historical view that performance is a passion, hobby, or vocation and therefore not real work (evidenced further by the general low pay that performers receive); and due to the body and its labour being hidden (partially or fully) by the costume itself. In the case of a costume that reveals more of the body than the performer is comfortable with, this can significantly increase the hidden emotional labour of the performer.

## Conclusion: Solutions

Returning to the question – does 21st-century progressive experimental costume performance have the potential to impact the labour of the performer? – I would answer yes. The performance projects analysed in this article are examples of unconventional costumes, with *PING* and *PANG* acting as costumes, props, and sets. However, the evaluation is still relevant to costumed performance in general, whether the body and its labour are partially or fully hidden. I would therefore like to share the following suggestions to make visible the labour of the costumed performer – and arguably performers in general.

Many performers, particularly those of us from a traditional dance background, are partly to blame. We perpetuate the practice of working through pain and remain silent throughout our experiences. Enduring

pain should not be viewed as an achievement, nor should voicing discomfort be seen as a sign of failure or weakness. We must stop doing this; instead, we should vocalise our experiences and discuss reasonable expectations for managing our labour. For example, most of my issues with *PIAG* and *PANG* were manifested by my own continuation of negative cultural working practices.

We must also challenge individuals and projects that propagate the view that performers are voiceless tools and celebrate those who give agency and empathy to performers. As Royona Mitra advocates, we are embodied subjects whose life experiences invigorate and contribute to the devising of performance work (Mitra 2015). Directors and choreographers must also foster an environment in which performers have agency and are treated as valued, respected collaborators who are offering their embodied selves (physically, cognitively, and emotionally) to the work. As Megan Wright states, “if dancers come to understand ourselves as workers and not ‘athletes of God’, we’ll value our work as [dignified] work” (2022, 30–31). Therefore, as members of the performance sector, we must push for these cultural changes to promote the best working practices as our art

forms become more innovative and experimental. One of the main reasons I continue to collaborate with Karstens is her body-centred and ethical devising approach.

From a specifically costume-based perspective, it is important that designers, directors, and choreographers experience the costumes themselves wherever possible to gain empathy and understanding of what is being asked of the costumed performer and how to best collaborate with and support them in the creation and performance of the work. This is evidenced by Karstens, who tries and tests designs on her own body, which improves the devising and performing process for both designer and performer.

We all contribute our valuable labour to the final creative outcome, be it the performer labouring in the heavy costume, the designer completing repetitive crafting processes, or the sound artist spending hours layering soundtracks on a computer screen. By openly voicing our visible and invisible physical, cognitive, and emotional labour of devising and performing work, ideally in action, we can collectively understand and value the labour of each collaborator and aim to ethically improve our working practices.

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## Endnotes

1 Critical Costume is an international platform, including conferences, exhibitions, and events, that aims to promote research, practice, and debate regarding the historical, cultural, social, and artistic contexts of the interdisciplinary study of costume (<https://www.criticalcostume.com/>).

2 Please note, these costumes/names have no relation to the characters in Puccini's opera *Turandot*.

3 Development of the production began in July 2021 with an Early-Stage Commission from Dance City and funding from Arts Council England. Upon completion, with further support from Arts Council England, the show had premieres at the Stockholm Fringe Festival and the Creative Centre, York St John University (2023). In 2024, it was performed at the Durham Fringe Festival and the Voila! Theatre Festival.

4 Toni Basil is an American singer, actress, choreographer, dancer, and filmmaker. Basil received a Gold Album and Grammy nomination for her 1982 *Word of Mouth* long-form video album (VHS), which she conceptualised, produced, choreographed, and directed (Basil 2017). The album's hit single "Mickey" was a double platinum record, which was later installed in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as one of the ground-breaking singles of the 1980s. Basil is also the founding member and manager of The Lockers, credited with bringing street dance to prominence through numerous TV performances (Basil 2017).

5 The stage manager asks audience members before the show if they want to engage in audience interaction. This involves explaining what the options are, what their involvement will be, and how the stage manager will instigate and support audience members in taking part. This approach protects both performer and audience and allows for impactful ethical engagement in the show.

6 A merkin is a pubic wig commonly worn by women, dating back as early as the 1450s (Blakemore and Jennett 2001).

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## BIOGRAPHY

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## Drawn into Dancing and Danced into Drawing: Exploring Deleuze's Lines of Flight through Dancing–Drawing Approaches in Early Childhood Dance Pedagogies

Tuire Colliander

### ABSTRACT

This article explores Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of 'lines of flight' as a philosophical concept and a phenomenon in dance pedagogical learning events by focusing on approaches combining dancing and drawing in an early childhood educational context. I share how the enquiry has been guided not only through the concept of thinking with theory (Jackson and Mazzei 2023) but also through dancing with theory through a series of creative approaches.

This study is situated in the field of artistic research, with its theoretical framework in post-human theories (Barad 2007), intra-active pedagogy (Lenz Taguchi 2010) and assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) thinking. Diffractive reading (Barad 2007) is used in narrating the key moments, theorised as translations, that have been significant in researching the lines of flight and the intra-active relationship between drawing and dancing.

The central claim is that working with dancing–drawing assemblages may expand children's potential entry points and modes of participation. This can support more diverse, inclusive and participatory forms of dance pedagogies. Through dancing–drawing approaches, dance improvisation may become a mode of multimodal meaning-making, fostering rich and varied artistic experiences for children where embodied and artistic thinking intersect in novel ways.

### ABSTRAKTI

Tämä artikkeli lähestyy varhaisiän tanssipedagogisia tilanteita monimuotoisina ja dynaamisina oppimistapahtumina, joissa kehollinen ja taiteellinen ajattelu risteävät uudella tavalla tavoilla. Keskiössä on Deleuzen ja Guattarin (1987) paon viiva -käsitteen hyödyntäminen sekä pedagogisessa ajattelussa että käytännössä siten, että se tukisi tanssikasvattajien työskentelyä monitahoisissa tanssipedagogisissa tilanteissa. Artikkelin ehdottaa, että paon viivan teorian hahmottaminen voisi auttaa paremmin huomioimaan toiminnan yllättäviä uusia suuntia ja tarttumaan rohkeammin tanssitilanteissa nouseviin lasten ehdotuksiin.

Tanssipedagogiikkaa tarkastellaan tässä artikkelissa posthumanistisen ja uusmaterialistisen teorian kautta, keskittyen erityisesti yhteisluontoutumisen (Barad 2007) ja kehkeytymisen käsitteiden kautta avautuvaan pedagogisten tilanteiden uudelleenahmotteluun. Artikkelin pyrkii haastamaan perinteisiä, myös varhaisiän tanssipedagogiikassa ilmeneviä hierarkioita, jotta eettinen kohtaaminen tanssin kautta tulisi mahdolliseksi. Yhtäältä artikkelin tavoitteena on haastaa toiminnan ihmis- ja aikuiskeskeisyyttä määrittelemällä toimijuus ihmistä laajemmaksi ja suhteissa tapahtuvaksi ilmiöksi. Toisaalta artikkeli pyrkii esittelemään monenlaisia uusia tanssia ja piirtämistä yhdistäviä menetelmiä Deleuzen ja Guattarin (1987) sommitelman käsitteen avulla. Artikkelin keskeinen ajatus on, että multimodaalisuuden lisääminen ja monenlaisten rinnakkaisten ilmaisumuotojen salliminen voisi lisätä tanssipedagogisten käytäntöjen inklusiivisuutta ja saavutettavuutta sekä inspiroida tulevia tanssipedagogisia toimintamahdollisuuksia.

# Drawn into Dancing and Danced into Drawing: Exploring Deleuze's Lines of Flight through Dancing–Drawing Approaches in Early Childhood Dance Pedagogies

Tuire Colliander

## Introduction

This article explores Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of 'lines of flight' as a philosophical concept and a phenomenon in dance pedagogical learning events by focusing on artistic approaches combining dancing and drawing in an early childhood educational context. This process stems from an ongoing project for my artistic doctoral research at Uniarts Helsinki. My doctoral work aims to extend early childhood dance pedagogies by searching for novel arts pedagogical approaches to dance inspired and guided by improvisation, playfulness and collaboration with children. I utilise post-human and new materialist theories as a framework and examine learning events as intra-active (Barad 2007). This study is situated within the framework of artistic research (Gröndahl 2023), with my dance pedagogical practice as the central focus and method of enquiry. The methodology is situated within post-qualitative research (see e.g. Denzin 2013; Koro-Ljungberg 2015; St Pierre 2015), and my professional subject position is viewed as an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) of dance pedagogue–dancer–researcher in which my three professional roles converge as an inseparable reconfiguration.

Drawing has become a versatile approach in my dance teaching and supports children's participation in learning activities. I previously presented an original child-centred storyboard method (Colliander 2024) created by children, which can facilitate children's agency in composing and notating choreography and support communication and shared meaning-making. In this article, I aim to share in detail how investigating Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of lines of flight has guided my research not only through the concept of *thinking with* theory by Jackson and Mazzei (2023) but also through a series of creative approaches to theory that become *dancing with* theory. Three research questions guide me through this article: How does the philosophical

concept of lines of flight unfold through multimodal artistic approaches? How might this understanding support educators' work in practice? and What kinds of pedagogical tools that combine dancing and drawing emerge during the process? Using diffractive reading (Barad 2007), I highlight the significance and potential of new thought arising unexpectedly in co-created dance explorations by considering artistic agency as relational and emerging intra-actively with children, educators and the surrounding world.

This study's dance pedagogical context is Finland's early childhood public education and care system. This predominant institution serves nearly 90% of children aged 3–5 years and reflects a diversity of gender, age and various social and cultural backgrounds (Statistics Finland 2023). I have engaged in a longitudinal collaboration with an early childhood education and care unit in Helsinki since 2019, providing the possibility for the emergence of an in-depth understanding and for relations to evolve. In this article, I navigate the reader through my research process by narrating the key moments, theorised as translations, that have been significant in researching the lines of flight and the intra-active relationship between drawing and dancing.

## The Existing Research Landscape for this Research to Enter

Other researchers have engaged in dance pedagogical research from post-human (Engdahl and Ceder 2023; Flønes et al. 2022; Pape-Pedersen 2022; Pollit et al. 2021) and post-qualitative (Bruzzone and Strindsberg 2023; Jusslin et al. 2020; Østern et al. 2023) perspectives. Pollit et al. (2021) contested the traditional ways of teaching the weather as a separate phenomenon in early childhood education by using dance improvisation to research human entanglements with the weather, generating a 'more nuanced, integrated and kinaesthetic understanding of weather systems' (1149). This

aligns with my motivation to study the lines of flight in embodied ways, as presented later in this article. Flónes et al. (2022, 94) showed how their intra-active and collaborative choreographic pedagogical initiative facilitated children's engagement in dancing beyond previous experiences, aligning with my experiences of using abstract lines as a visual starting point for dance improvisation. I concur with Pape-Pedersen (2022), who acknowledged both early childhood education and care and kindergarten teachers' professional knowledge as profoundly bodily, emphasising the bodily relational, spatial and material as well as emotional and affective aspects of learning that take place in and through dancing. Closely related to my theoretical thinking in this article, Engdahl and Ceder (2023) provided a Deleuzian approach to teaching creative dance. Their original concept of *dancemblage* combined dancing with thinking through assemblages (Deleuze 1987), which is an essential aspect of my research methodology, as will be discussed in detail later in this article.

Jusslin et al. (2020) described a process of shifting from qualitative research methods into the paradigm of post-qualitative enquiry, leading to a blurring of the distinct boundaries between theory and research. This perspective closely aligns with my study and their 2020 diffractive analysis, which connects with my methodology. Ostern et al. (2023) proposed the concept of performative research for a paradigm capable of accommodating both artistic and post-qualitative research, which is an exciting articulation since both of these fields are combined in my research. With the performative paradigm for post-qualitative enquiry, they aimed to create space for research that values movement, artistic freedom and experimentation and considers learning and knowing to be constantly in a state of becoming, which are essential qualities for my enquiry (Ostern et al. 2023). Bruzzone and Stridsberg (2023) employed post-human and post-qualitative methods to enhance learning experiences in their creative dance practice concerning sustainability in engineering education. This aligns with my beliefs about the importance of multimodal approaches.

Combining drawing and dancing as reciprocal artistic tools in early childhood pedagogical settings is not a thoroughly researched phenomenon, which presents a gap for this research to address. However, drawing is a widely used method in research conducted

with children, and it has been explored within dance pedagogical research as a multimodal and reflective approach to reach out for information about children's experiences and meaning-making in dance (Bond and Stinson 2000; Svendler Nielsen 2012; Bond and Deans 1997). The Segni mossi project (Segni mossi, n.d.) investigates 'the interaction between dance and graphic sign with children and adults' and offers a significant change of view in interweaving movement and drawn lines during the dance pedagogical learning events. One of the key ideas common to Segni mossi and this study is to liberate the movement and drawing from imitating something representative while working with one's own embodied ideas and embodied thinking on more abstract-level visualisations. Thus, the drawing may become an investigation into the moving body, a trace or recording of movement and a past moment as well as a notation or a visual memory, which Beauce (2023), Haley (2018) and Leister (2023) researched in the dance context. Yet another fascinating perspective to drawing was presented in Tervahartiala's (2022) doctoral work, in which she explored drawing as a method, a methodology and an object of both making and researching, leading to the view of drawing being a non-human post-humanist actor, researcher and knower.

## Intra-Action and the Concept of Lines of Flight as Lenses in this Research

The theoretical framework of this research encompasses post-human theorising, emphasising Barad's (2007) agential realism and notion of intra-action, which Lenz Taguchi (2010) introduced into an early childhood educational context. According to Barad (2007), agencies constitute each other in their intra-actions:

*'Intra-action' signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.* That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction', which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. (33)

Thus, thinking with intra-action, the educational focus on traditionally viewing learning as an individual

achievement can be shifted towards a shared process. The idea of separate subjects becomes decentred as 'the encounters between things, beings and forces are constantly, actively reconfigured as a result of their relationships with each other' (Malone et al. 2020, 89). Another perspective for conceptualising these dynamic reconfigurations opens up through Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept and theory of assemblages. Assemblages are wholes whose properties emerge from interacting – or rather intra-acting – components, transcending the sum of their parts (DeLanda 2006, 5). Later in this article, I discuss how viewing body–pen–paper entanglements as non-human assemblages may offer new insights for dance educators.

The theory of intra-action encourages rethinking ontological and epistemological views, emphasising the ethical implications of our entanglements with the world. Barad (2007) proposed the concept of ethico-onto-epistemology as 'an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being' that describes 'the study of practices of knowing in being' (185–87). My objective is to extend traditional human-centred dance educational approaches into a framework that emphasises ethical relationality and responsibility, not solely among humans but within a more inclusive and extensive network of more-than-human relations (Malone et al. 2020). This research seeks ethical encounters through Barad's (2007) concept of response-ability. According to Bozalek and Zembylas (2017), this concept in educational settings encompasses attentiveness, responsibility, curiosity and empowering one another.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) lines of flight is an inviting concept for theorising the complexity of dance pedagogical learning events with children. It describes a transformative moment that gives rise to a new and unexpected thought or activity. Davies (2014) viewed lines of flight as generative and powerful, but their complex, interdependent nature resists binary labels, such as good or bad (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), and the lines of flight may sometimes even be dangerous, as Deleuze (1988) explained:

When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts. (19)

Creating safe spaces for learning is essential for educators. Nevertheless, it is not simple to enable working with emerging lines of flight and make them something that may be picked up and become productive. The following chapters explore how viewing dance pedagogical events through lines of flight and assemblage thinking can enhance educators' ability to navigate new activity directions.

## Dance Improvisation as a Pedagogical and Methodological Approach in Artistic Research

This research explores dance as a multifaceted and holistic artistic phenomenon with significant educational potential. Dance pedagogical practices in my study are based on improvisation as agential (Ravn 2020), playful (Hermans 2022) and relational (De Spain 2014; Land 2022; Pollitt et al. 2021) practices, without an orientation for any specific dance style or technique. This implies that everyone can dance, that there is no singular correct way to dance or perform a movement, and that a multiplicity of expressions is valued (Anttila 2013). In post-human and intra-active theories, dance can be understood as a transcorporeal material-discursive practice. Here, creativity originates from the moving body, which is seen as constantly becoming and forming new entanglements with other human and non-human entities. (Lenz-Taguchi 2012). This perspective contests traditional educational paradigms that place the child at the centre of pedagogical practices. It advocates movement to decentre the child, supported by Murriss's (2016) reconceptualisation of the child as post-human.

This research is situated in the context of artistic research and is centred on each artist's ways of working, with no existing pre-designed methods and methodologies (Gröndahl 2023; Hannula et al. 2014; Rouhiainen et al. 2014). Hence, thinking and knowing unfold in and through my dance pedagogical practices in emergent and often surprising ways (Borgdorff 2012). There are contact points with the frameworks of artistic research, post-human theorising and post-qualitative methodology (Denzin 2013; Koro-Ljungberg 2015; St Pierre 2015). These frameworks have supported articulating and theorising my non-conventional, playful, embodied and emerging research methods. I have engaged in the embodied qualities of being, doing and

knowing at all stages of my research. Therefore, Mazzei and Jackson's (2023) concept of *thinking with* theory has become an approach to *dancing with* theory. This means that I explore theoretical concepts by dancing with children, which has often proved to be a fruitful way to deepen our understanding of the concept itself and its implications within pedagogical practices.

I approach artistic research through the concept of translation, following Farquhar and Fritzsims (2011), who explained Derrida's (1985) poetic transposition as not producing a copy but rather involving the growth or enlargement of the original. This is important when conveying embodied knowledge into formats suitable for academic knowledge distribution, which often feels reductive. This view makes it possible to identify and value the excess that emerges in translation. There is an ethical dimension embedded in the act of translation. Farquhar and Fritzsims (2011) addressed the inevitability of inadequate representations of the other by referring to Ricoeur's (2006) notion of linguistic hospitality. MacRae (2022) raised the essential ethical aspect of producing several different translations from the same event, such as translating videos into words and drawings, since the translations complement each other and offer 'new ways of making sense of the event' (349). Also, in Barad's (2007) theorisation of relations between body and world as a process of material exchange and differentiation, translations are considered new creations and thus performative.

## **Narrating a Diffractive Analysis of *Dancing with* Lines of Flight**

Barad's (2007) concept of diffractive methodology contributes to the analytical insights presented in this article, since it 'provides a way of attending to entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another' (30). I apply diffractive reading to work with the theories and created research materials, including written and drawn notes in working diaries, videos and photographs of workshops and artistic events, material artefacts such as children's drawings, gifts received from children and other miscellaneous stuff collected by me and writings and drawings produced by me returning multiple times to the research materials during diffractive readings. I follow how material agency operates within my research assemblage and search for entanglements that glow

(MacLure 2013), by which I mean those materials and moments that draw my attention and create something new. My diffractive reading is guided by my three research questions: How does the philosophical concept of lines of flight unfold through multimodal artistic approaches? How might this understanding support educators' work in practice? What kinds of pedagogical tools that combine dancing and drawing emerge during the process? I narrate the research process by focusing on three translations that have moved my understanding of the concept of lines of flight. These translations are from textual to visual – drawing the lines of flight; from visual to embodied – dancing the lines of flight; and from embodied to entangled – becoming with lines of flight in/through dancing–drawing assemblages.

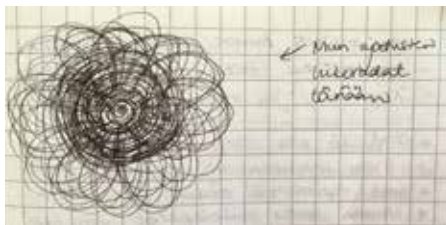
## **The First Translation: From Textual to Visual – Drawing the Lines of Flight**

Here, I share my process of planning and implementing the *Käännöksiä – Transpositions* research event, which followed the fieldwork I conducted in a Helsinki City Early Childhood Education and Care setting from October 2019 until the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the work in March 2020. My aim in designing the event was to translate some of the key experiences and insights gained during the fieldwork for presentation at the research event, which was pre-examined as part of my doctoral work. The research event occurred under pandemic restrictions, which significantly guided the practicalities and limited the number of participants to one or two children at a time, with one adult accompanying them. The concept for the *Käännöksiä – Transpositions* research event was my own, but the initial idea of involving children in the event's creation materialised through collaboration with my four- and nine-year-old children – the only children with whom I could work during the pandemic isolation. The event was built as a construction site that contained the features of a dance workshop, an interactive installation and a dance performance.

Preparing for the *Käännöksiä – Transpositions* research event, I shifted between planning, reading theories and writing about my goals concerning the event, repeatedly returning to the fieldwork through my research materials. The concept of lines of flight

from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) seemed to come across frequently as I read theories of post-human and new materialist childhood studies and ‘thinking with’ (Jackson and Mazzei 2023), for example, Diaz-Diaz and Semence (2020), Malone et al. (2020), Myers (2019) and Rautio and Stenvall (2019). I attended *Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) to better understand the concept, starting with the foreword. There, according to Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xvii), who translated the work from French to English, the concept of ‘flight’ bears meanings for fleeing or escaping, as well as for flowing and leaking. Diffracting through this thought, I revisited my working diary from the fieldwork. Suddenly, my drawing (Picture 1), which unfolded at the daycare when my thoughts were stuck, started to glow (MacLure 2013) and drew my attention.

October 29, 2019  
 Day 3/46 of fieldwork  
 Academic year 2/8 of the doctoral project



Picture 1: The trajectories of my thoughts today. Drawing and photo: Tuire Colliander.

This drawing originally emerged as a creative form of writing when words were not enough to convey my feeling of being stuck in my thinking, as I was planning how to conduct the movement practices with the children. Now, reviewing the drawing by thinking with the concept of lines of flight made the emergence of the phenomenon of lines of flight as a new understanding and visual translation evolved in my working diary (Picture 2).

Even though my professional education has been in dance, and drawing has never been my passion or even an interest, I have been surprised by how integral and significant drawing has become during my doctoral process. Both drawings presented here are connected with an intense experience of not working with drawing

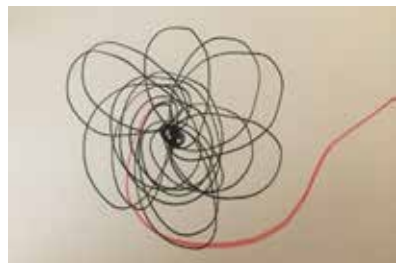


Picture 2: A visual translation of the line of flight diffracted with Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xvii). Drawing and photo: Tuire Colliander.

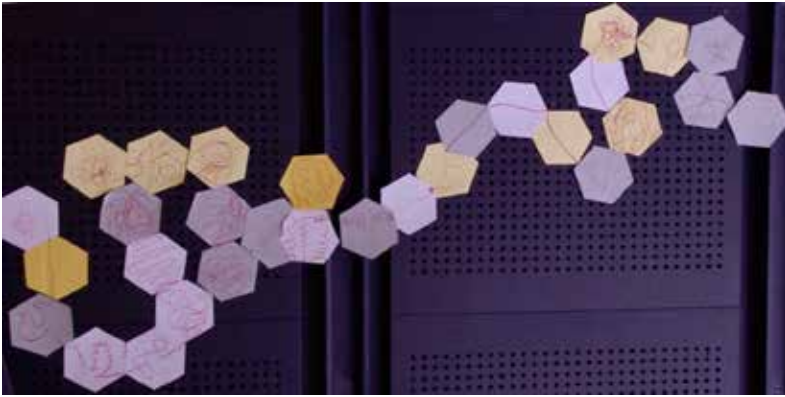
as an individual human being with an intentional idea but rather using drawing as an exploratory mode, not knowing or controlling where it might lead. Tervahartiala (2022, 333) articulated this kind of exploratory drawing as a form of meaning-making that does not occur as a bilateral process between the drawn and the drawing but as an investigation with the drawing as a non-human other and a companion.

## The Second Translation: From Visual to Embodied – Dancing the Lines of Flight

At the *Käännöksiä - Transpositions* research event, the concept of lines of flight was explored with children, supporting my aspirations of researching *with* children rather than on them and engaging them in my research in multiple ways. Taking a participatory approach, I wanted to recognise and value the children's essential contribution as co-producers of my research and to support the complexity of knowledge produced as a community (Gibbons and Nikolai 2019; Reason 2010; Tisdall 2015). First, I briefly introduced the concept's philosophical origin in a way that I considered relevant to the four- to six-year-old participants and the accompanying adults, followed by re-creating the original drawing from the fieldwork and layering it with an escaping red line as a line of flight (Picture 3).



Picture 3: The layered drawing. Drawing and photo: Tuire Colliander.



Picture 4: Part of the collective artwork assembled from the lines drawn on the papers.  
Drawings: Participants. Photo: Tuire Colliander.

The participants were invited to create lines of escaping thoughts on paper, which were then translated into movement, with a live electric guitar musician creating a translation into sound. After the dancing, the papers were attached to a collective artwork on the studio wall, which expanded during the event (Picture 4).

The process of simultaneous translation of the drawn lines into movement and sound led to a line-body-sound-space entanglement that felt like an ongoing becoming with all the participating agencies rather than a representation of an intentional interpretation of the visual image in dancing. As I analysed the video footage from this moment, I found sections in which only the participants were visible. Still, there were momentary sensations of seeing ‘me’ through ‘them’ in the participants’ movements, not as a reflection but rather as an emerging diffraction of ‘us’ as a constant becoming. Engdahl et al. (2022) explored assignments of mirroring in their dance pedagogical research, reporting experiences of not knowing who was leading and mirroring, seeing one’s movements through someone else’s body and not achieving a sense of ownership of the dance in their article. This is in line with my experience of movement produced not as belonging to anyone but as emerging in our intra-action.

Surprisingly, this exploration of dancing the concept of lines of flight unfolded first and foremost as an embodied experience of intra-action – another

theoretical key concept in this research. In addition, multiple creative ways to engage in the process of translating the line into movement emerged. For example, dancing could stem from forming the shape of the line(s) with one’s body, translating the form or the visual quality of the line into movement or creating a route in space by using the line as a map or trajectory for approaching the space. These translations of embodied multimodal meaning-making gave rise to not only thinking with the philosophical concepts but also dancing with them, leading to the next lines of flight, focusing the dancing-drawing approaches to exploring the acts of drawing and dancing as intertwined.

### **The Third Translation: From Embodied to Entangled – Becoming with Lines of Flight in/through Dancing–Drawing Assemblages**

After exploring the concept of line of flight at the *Käännöksä - Transpositions* research event, my interest in drawing as a dance pedagogical tool became more focused on the intra-action between the drawn lines and the dancing bodies. I explored different techniques for utilising drawn lines and movement during a series of workshops centred on the first iteration of the children’s thesis, known as the prototype, which will accompany my academic thesis (Picture 5).

April 19, 2023  
Prototype workshop 4/11  
Academic Year 6/8 of the doctoral project

*We dance using touch as an impulse into movement. One child sits apart, arms around their legs. I perform a dance movement, landing beside them, hoping that my outstretched palm invites them to join in dancing. I recall using this gesture during fieldwork when a child struggled to create dance movements. I approached them with an open palm, inviting them to touch it. The touch gave me an impulse to dance. After a few repetitions, the touch became a reciprocal invitation, encouraging the child to create movements. Now, I sit beside a reluctant child who clearly rejects me, annoyed and upset by my close presence. Unable to further negotiate participation in dance, I join the group instead. Later, we gather in a circle with our prototypes, inviting the group to draw lines on the pages, imagining the markers as aeroplanes taking off the paper and flying routes in the air. The previously reluctant child is now participating eagerly.*

The Segni mossi project (Segni mossi, n.d.) encouraged me to view the potential of the drawn line as a generative element rather than a representative figure. Simultaneously, the act of drawing became merely a trace of a more-than-human moving-drawing assemblage, freeing it from the habitual skill-focused evaluation orientation. Furthermore, thinking about subjectivities through more-than-human assemblages shifted the focus of individual children into more complex entanglements with other human and more-than-human bodies.

In practice, working with the entanglements of dancing-drawing assemblages may be approached in various ways. For instance, the explorations might have begun with movements translated into lines after dancing or during the dance while collaborating with a partner to provide documentation. The documented line, or part of it, served as an impulse for further dancing. Sometimes, the lines have been drawn first, for example, to create a score for choreography. Lines drawn during the dancing, as traces of the movements, often inspired rich verbal and embodied interpretations and further discussions with the participants. The translations between the verbal, the embodied and the visual representations showed a capacity to break the barriers between language, body and the visual.

## (In) Conclusion

In this article, I shared how researching the concept of lines of flight has given rise to various innovative methodological ways of combining dancing and drawing in early childhood dance pedagogical practices through multiple examples of dancing-drawing assemblages. I conclude by highlighting the key insights and their importance in fostering new educational opportunities.

Dance pedagogical learning events with children typically occur in 'the flux of constantly re-materializing posthuman child bodies' (Land 2022, 74) and contain an overflow of embodied thinking and emerging creative ideas. During the fieldwork, I constantly experienced this kind of enthusiastic, high-energy participation, which seemed to immediately find and cross the borders



Picture 5:  
*Traces of the markers taking off from the prototypes. Drawings: Tuire Colliander and the participants. Photo: Tuire Colliander.*

I had tried to create for safe working. Numerous simultaneously shown and verbalised ideas gave the impression of individualistic random pathways rather than a collective focus on a shared process. From these experiences, the drawing displayed in Picture 1 was created because I felt my paths forward were overly reliant on strictly controlled adult-led methods, that I have been critical of. While I support the implementation of safety regulations in dance education, I also advocate for educators to provide greater opportunities for spontaneous engagement and unexpected outcomes. Hence, finding the right balance between freedom and rules is a continuous and context-dependent journey. An essential insight into the nature of the lines of flight is that even adult-led practices and firm guidelines governing learning activities, which may seem to inhibit the emergence of lines of flight, can simultaneously 'create a coherent space in which the new can emerge', as articulated by Davies (2014, 8).

Taking dance improvisation as the starting point for dancing and the primary tool for guiding emerging learning events opens a feasible avenue for 'collaborative invention and creation among children and teachers', as articulated by Lenz Taguchi (2010, xiv). The second translation shows how the shared research experiment transforms the relationship between the dance pedagogue-dancer-researcher and the participants, leading to a learning partnership (Martin et al. 2018). This connects with Land's (2022, 77) thoughts on how 'improvisational, responsive moving is an act of world-making, of reciprocity in motion, and of vulnerability through movement'. This is another way of expressing that dance has a deep ethical dimension, as it cultivates response-ability among educators and students, where moving is an act of living in a world together with our human and more-than-human companions. From this viewpoint, the dancing in the second translation invites us into a shared vulnerable state, moving without knowing who is leading or being able to predict where the movement will take us. This blurs the boundaries between dancing and thinking bodies, allowing a line of flight to emerge, as I see the moment as an embodied experience of intra-action, revealing unexpected directions in intra-active and emergent dance pedagogies.

I view dance as a powerful method of embodied learning that has great potential to support diverse

learners. Therefore, I am interested in contributing to teaching methods that promote more inclusive, participatory forms of dance education. According to Lenz Taguchi et al. (2016), collective dance improvisation creates movements that allow children to engage in and become part of a shared body – an assemblage – that is not made up of structured and functional components. Instead, the assemblage represents a collection of acts, performances, moments and functions that together form a body. Similarly, due to the growing diversity in early childhood education and care, the assemblage of creative methods used in dance improvisation should be diverse and include multimodal strategies. In this way, it becomes possible to expand the potential entry points and modes of participation to meet and respect the needs and interests of diverse groups of children. An example of such an entry point was made visible in the third translation, when one participant shifted from reluctance to active participation through an alternative pedagogical pathway. Through the practical research experiences shared in this article, it becomes evident that working with dancing-drawing assemblages may shift communication beyond linguistic, embodied and visual boundaries, enabling the use of one's different competencies and engaging playfully with varying forms of expression.

In this article, I showed how understanding the lines of flight as a phenomenon can encourage dance educators to create spaces to engage in curious and playful experimentation, appreciate unexpected ideas and consider them to offer feasible paths to follow. Exploring the philosophical concept through thinking and *dancing with* theory opens exciting opportunities for embodied learning for all ages. *Dancing with* theory encourages thinking with the whole body and through movement to foster rich and diverse artistic experiences for children. Potentially, this would allow diverse children to fully engage their creative potential in dance, acknowledging the differences in embodied thinking. Thus, I claim that through drawing-dancing approaches, dance may become multimodal meaning-making by which the focus shifts from the individual body's intentions to the more-than-human assemblages and their entanglements. At best, beautiful dances may emerge through the interplay between bodies, music/sound, pens, paper and spaces as both physical and social environments.

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## Transgressing the Borders of Art and Non-art: The Case of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky

Anne-Liis Maripuu

### ABSTRACT

Modern dance made its way to Estonia in the 1910s. By putting on stage a new woman and picturing her in a new way, modern dance challenged many members of society, sometimes even being seen as disgraceful. In 1926 and 1927, Elmerice Parts (1878–1974) and Herman Kolt-Oginsky (1902–1977) created scandals with their dance numbers in Estonia. According to reviewers, the dancers transgressed the line between art and non-art. The artists were attacked for making use of acrobatic and “erotic” elements; not surprisingly, the latter aspect was seen more critically. The aim of this article is to understand where the line between art and non-art lay in the 1920s. I come to the conclusion that artfulness was associated predominantly with spirituality and the unconscious: When the dancer focused on bodily experiences and highlighted their physical body parts, it became non-art. The main source of information is articles published in print media in 1926 and 1927. I analysed the data using qualitative methods.

### RESUMÉ

Den moderne dans kom til Estland i 1910'erne. Ved at vise en ny kvindetype, der agerede på en ny måde, på scenen, udfordrede den moderne dans dele af samfundet, og den blev endda af nogen, betragtet som skammelig. I 1926 og 1927 skabte Elmerice Parts (1878-1974) og Herman Kolt-Oginsky (1902-1977) skandale med deres dansenumre i Estland. Ifølge anmelderne overskred danserne grænsen mellem kunst og ikke-kunst. Kunstnerne blev klandret for at gøre brug af akrobatiske og “erotiske” elementer, og ikke overraskende blev sidstnævnte aspekt set mere kritisk på. Formålet med artiklen er at forstå, hvor grænsen mellem kunst og ikke-kunst lå i 1920'erne. Jeg er nået frem til den konklusion, at kunstaspektet overvejende var forbundet med spiritualitet og det ubevidste; når danseren fokuserede på kropslige oplevelser og fremhævede sine fysiske kropsdele, blev det til ikke-kunst. Data stammer primært fra artikler offentliggjort i trykte medier i 1926 og 1927. Jeg har analyseret data ved hjælp af kvalitativ forskningsmetode.

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## Introduction

Modern dance was recognized as an art in Estonia in the 1920s. The new genre did not make its way to prestigious theatre stages without scandals and bans, though. The best known of these is the Gripenberg scandal,<sup>1</sup> a riot that broke out during a performance by Maggie Gripenberg, a Finnish dance pioneer, and Onni Gabriel in the city of Tartu in 1919. Few people know of the mid-to-late 1920s scandal involving Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky. Articles for and against the duo filled the pages of Estonian newspapers and magazines in 1926 and 1927. According to several critics, Parts and Kolt-Oginsky's dances were "immoral", "inartistic," and therefore unsuitable for theatre stages. Due to moral grounds, the local education authority of Tartu even prohibited school students from attending their performance, and a rumour went around that city-dwellers planned to interrupt their performance with "rotten eggs, bats and caterwaul" (Aa. 1927). However, according to Parts (1926), her goal was not to alarm her audiences but to revive the art of dance in Estonia so that it stays in contact with contemporary life. Her and Kolt-Oginsky's efforts did not go completely unnoticed—many reviewers praised them for renewing local dance art.

For many people, nevertheless, the duo transgressed the line between art and non-art. Transgression is conduct which exceeds boundaries, breaks rules, or moves beyond conventions (Jenks 2003, 3; Wolfreys 2008, 3). This means that a transgressive act presupposes a rule or a norm, something to trespass on; otherwise, there would be no transgression. Often, we are unaware of the rules that guide us through our daily lives; when someone exceeds a certain boundary or crosses a certain line, the norm becomes visible. In other words, a transgressive act makes apparent what was primarily concealed and hidden. Becoming aware of the norm, on the other hand, allows us to analyse its origin: What

produced the rule? Examining Parts and Kolt-Oginsky's performances as transgressive acts means asking about dominant ideas about art or artfulness. What made modern dance "artful" in Estonia in the 1920s?

Elmerice Parts (b. Meyer, 1878-1974) was one of the first Estonian modern dancers. She studied harmonic gymnastics in 1913 with Hade Kallmeyer and in 1922 became a student and a dancer of Jutta Klamt.<sup>2</sup> Both Kallmeyer and Klamt taught in Berlin at that time. Parts began her career much like many early modern dancers—first as a gymnastics teacher and an advocate for women's health; she taught "aesthetic gymnastics" in her hometown Tartu in 1914 and 1915. At the time, modern dance was still in its formative years and intricately linked to gymnastics. To support their independent and creative lifestyles, many early movement enthusiasts worked as teachers. In 1920, Parts started an international career as a solo dancer, performing alongside Herman Kolt-Oginsky in 1926 and 1927. Her active dance career concluded in 1928, and she took up a career as a dance pedagogue specializing in creating stylized national dances. In 1945, Parts fled Soviet forces to Germany and later emigrated to the USA, where she stayed until her death. She was married to Kaarel Parts (1873-1940), the chief justice of Estonia from 1919 to 1940.

Herman (later Heigo or Heiko) Kolt-Oginsky (1902-1977) was born in Poland, his parents moved to Estonia in the 1910s. By the mid-1920s, he was a young, promising actor with some dance education. After performing with Parts, he studied with Ellys Gregor in Berlin and toured with various female dancers. At the beginning of the 1940s, Kolt-Oginsky became a recognized dancer and choreographer at the opera house in Graz, Austria. He continued his career in Belgium, where he founded the dance group Thor. According to Erik Verstraete (1987), he was regarded as the pioneer of a new, expressive art of dance and dynamic flag play.

Parts and Kolt-Oginsky primarily lived and

performed abroad, in the Weimar Republic, which was experiencing a remarkable cultural renaissance. The duo was undoubtedly attuned to the latest trends of the time. Their repertoire bore similarities to those of avant-gardists of the day, for example, to that of Anita Berber,<sup>3</sup> probably the most notorious dancer in Germany, whose repertoire contained pieces like *Kokaine (Cocaine)* and *Tänze des Lasters (Dances of Vice)*, and that of Gertrud Bodenwieser, an Austrian dancer known for *Dämon Maschine (Demon Machine)*. These works explored themes like the rise of mechanization, excessive alcohol and drug use, and the loosening of social norms, particularly for women.

This article examines the question of artfulness by analysing the scandal the duo caused in Estonia. The case study research aims to answer this question: What did critics consider art and what not? My research began by gathering data about the performances from both physical archives (Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln) and digital sources (DIGAR, arthistoricum.net). In Estonian-language print media, I found a substantial number of articles, sixty-four, mostly introducing the dancers before their performance, along with thirteen reviews and two polemic articles about the role of acrobatics and eroticism in modern dance, one article written by Parts, four playbills, and three pictures. The most relevant sources of information regarding the aim of the research are the reviews. To give a valid interpretation of the results of the analysis, it is important to link it to established literature and prior studies, as well as to the specific context and location of the study.

Discourse analysis was used to analyse the reviews, focusing on what critics found artistic or inartistic. The dancers were attacked preliminarily for two reasons: first, for being too “erotic” and, second, for making use of acrobatic elements. The critics considered both acrobatics as well as “eroticism” inartistic. In other words, for many people, it was the presence of these elements that defined the line between art and non-art: Had Parts and Kolt-Oginsky avoided these elements, critics would have considered their dance numbers artistic.

The next two sections explore the theme of “eroticism.” First, I will examine its positive aspects, as eroticism was not viewed entirely negatively. Then, I will shift focus to its more controversial, “bad” side. The

third section delves into critiques surrounding the use of acrobatic elements in performance. Before concluding, I will ask whether the scandal surrounding both “eroticism” and acrobatics was driven by societal concerns about the body.

## I. Erotic and artistic

Accusations of being immorally erotic probably came as a surprise to Elmerice Parts, as eroticism and sensuality were not anything new or unexpected on the modern dance stage—nor were they absent from her repertoire. Among her solo dances, for instance, one finds a sensual *Dance of Salomé*<sup>4</sup> (1921), of which a new version was titled *Eroticism* (1923). Not only did Parts represent sensual figures, but she also defined her art through eroticism by claiming that eroticism was her “element” (“Ungari lehtede...” 1924). Nonetheless, her dancing was considered artistic, and, as a matter of fact, by the mid-1920s, she was one of the most praised and acknowledged dancers and choreographers in Estonia. This indicates that being sensual on the theatre stage did not necessarily mean that the boundary between art and non-art had been transgressed. So, what made Parts’ “eroticism” artistic?

The earliest modern dancers, both in Estonia and elsewhere, drew inspiration from two primary sources: ancient Greece and the “Orient.” Many of them encountered Antiquity through Delsartism, a movement named after the French teacher François Delsarte (Järvinen 2023). Around the same time, growing interest in non-European cultures led to performances that portrayed Eastern cultures in ways that were often exoticized and eroticized (Miettinen 2023). From today’s perspective, both of these representations are problematic, as the researchers show; the idealization of ancient Greece is linked to the pseudoscientific racism of the beginning of the last century, while depictions of the “Orient” reflect a process of othering.

As historian Edward Ross Dickinson (2011, 98) has claimed, these images of the ancient world offered two contrasting modes or “keys” for dance: the refined and spiritual, and the erotic and expressive. The “Orient” was imagined back then as a primitive and sexually loaded place. “Oriental” figures permitted dancers to embody passion and sensuality according to contemporary cultural stereotypes (Dickinson 2011, 102). For Europeans, the “Orient” constituted “an imagined space of primitive, primal, ‘real’ experience, an antidote to the

constraint, rationality, and consequent incapacity for the unmediated experience of the self that many understood to be increasingly (and oppressively) central to Western life,” as Dickinson (2011, 113) has pointed out. This does not mean, though, that all “Oriental” dances were erotic.

Ancient Greek dances, on the other hand, were associated with chasteness and an asexual body. For many, classical sculpture defined the ideal of beauty and gave modern dance a lofty character. Dickinson (2011, 110) has also pointed to the vicious circle of simulations: ancient Greek-themed dances were considered chaste because the dancers were simulating statues by being genuinely naked; statues, on the other hand, were considered chaste because they were only simulations. Modern dance rendered nudity as beautiful and not as sexy (Dickinson 2011, 109).

Ancient Greek dances were not considered chaste by everyone all at once, at least not in Estonia. The question of chasteness was raised most clearly in connection with Maggie Grippenberg’s performances in Estonia in 1913. The reviews and articles written in support of her allow us to see that many considered her dancing at that time sinful and unchaste (see e.g. R. S. 1913; “Paruness Maggie ...” 1913); for this reason, it was forbidden for the pupils of the city Pärnu to attend her solo dance performance (ik. 1913). Similarly, Isadora Duncan’s early performances were often interpreted in erotic terms (Järvinen 2023). Deployment of classical Greek references was not unique to dance performance in this period: bodybuilders, athletes, and filmmakers used the same vocabulary (Dickinson 2011, 101).

As dancers drew inspiration from historical sources, modern dance obtained a museal (Brandstetter 1995, 58–97) or archaeological (Dickinson 2011) character. Because of the museal character of the style, the dancer was not perceived as herself on stage; instead, she was believed to be a figure from another time and place and not a “real” woman. This is why her dances were not considered transgressive: The museal character made it possible for the spectators to accept the Greek and “Oriental” dances as art, regardless of the sensuality of the represented figures and the scarce dresses.

As shown in this section, neither sensual figures nor bare skin was considered scandalous on the theatre stage at the beginning of the last century. Therewith, the question concerning Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s work becomes even more intriguing: Why were they



*Fig 1. Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky performing together. Photo: Zander and Labisch. The photo was published in a German magazine called UHU in November 1926.*

considered so alarming?

## II. Erotic, therefore, inartistic

Altogether, thirteen reviews were published about Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s performances in Estonian-language press media: six in 1926 (four positive, two negative) and seven in 1927 (three positive, four negative). It is impossible to say how many reviews, if any, were written by women, as the identities of only half of the reviewers are known. The reviewers’ opinions could not differ more profoundly: while one reviewer (L-d. 1927) claimed that their dances barely contained “eroticism,” another (Rumor 1927) accused the duo of pornography. It is important to mention that eroticism was mentioned only by the reviewers who were critical of the duo, whereas the reviewers with a positive attitude towards the dancers did not discuss the topic.<sup>5</sup> Parts’ connection with eroticism was by no means a critics’ illusion. In an article written as an answer to Rasmus Kangro-Pool’s critical review, she (1926) stated that one of her and Kolt-Oginsky’s aims was to express “erotic enthuse.” While Parts undeniably had an interest in eroticism, it is

doubtful that her dances were pornographic.

Let us now see what the reviewers regarded as “erotic.” In *Woman*, Parts “moved her breasts voluptuously while pulling her shoulders together” and “made snakelike movements with her hips like a belly dancer.” Both dancers “kept their mouths half-open” while dancing as a signal of strong passion, the critic (R. K. P. 1927) guessed. According to an unidentified critic (“Parts-Oginsky tantsuõhtu” 1927), “Parts distorted her mouth and eyes by pulling them, twisted the middle of her body, and opened her legs.”

The relationship between eroticism and modern dance was discussed most thoroughly by Rasmus Kangro-Pool, alias R. K. P., a literature and theatre critic, and by the writer Johannes Semper, and, in view of this, I will concentrate on the following mainly on their writings. The two were keenly interested in contemporary theatre and dance. During their study years in Germany (Kangro-Pool studied in Heidelberg and Hamburg between 1920 and 1924, and Semper in Berlin from 1921 to 1925), both had a great opportunity to get to know the newest trends.

Neither rejected nor denied eroticism on stage. Semper (1926) even stated that eroticism was an integral part of the art of dance by declaring: “Eroticism is the origin of art and a secret source of half of human actions.” The critics’ problem with Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s dances was not the presence of eroticism or sensuality, but how it was presented. In other words, the critics did not blame the dancers for creating erotic dances but for presenting eroticism “wrongly,” this means in an inartistic way. Semper (1926) accused the duo of creating dances that contained “remelted nature and temperament,” while Kangro-Pool (1927) for displaying “inner urges.” According to the central thesis of the critics (Semper 1926; R. K. P. 1927), Parts and Kolt-Oginsky had failed to transform or redesign eroticism into art, and they also claimed that the spectator is left with the impression that the dances were too realistic or lifelike. What the critics meant by “art” or “artful,” remains unclear, though. However, Semper drops us a hint by comparing Parts with Edith von Schrenck.

Schrenck was a German-Baltic dancer who performed in Estonia shortly after Parts and Kolt-Oginsky. According to Semper (1926), eroticism “manifested itself [in Schrenck’s dances] in the frame of art.” The statement is interesting, as Schrenck was by

no means a sensual dancer; on the contrary, her dances seem to have presented something unearthly and lofty. The critics of her time (Bergmann 1926; Wgh. 1926) compared her with a girl or a child, and according to them she portrayed “soul experiences.” The dance historian Karl Toepfer (1997, 163, 166) claims that one of Schrenck’s trademarks was seriousness, favouring dances of a tragic, melancholy, or elegiac character. No dancer seems to be further from sensuality and eroticism than Edith von Schrenck. This raises the question: What could have Semper considered erotic in her dances?

The answer is: her physical body. In his article, Semper (1926) claims that the material used by the dancer to express herself—her body—is “already in itself more erotic than any other material: a word, sound, marble or colour.” Therefore, for Semper, eroticism was an integral or essential part of a physical body; according to him, all bodies were erotic. Semper’s ideas echo in Kangro-Pool’s (R. K. P. 1927) review published a year later.

When both Schrenck’s and Parts’ creations were regarded as erotic, why were Schrenck’s dances considered artistic and Parts’ not? What sets the two apart is how eroticism is presented in their works. Schrenck’s repertoire did not entail dances with sensual content, meaning that her eroticism was subtle, hidden, and veiled. In contrast, Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s eroticism was not. One should suppress eroticism, Semper (1926) explains, and not “underline” or highlight it as the duo did. For the art of dance to be artistic, its material—the body—had to be tamed, and curbed. In other words, the body had to be freed from overt sexuality. Only a dance piece with hidden or concealed eroticism was considered artistic, so their dances were declared non-art. Eroticism was unacceptable as itself on stage; it had to be altered, given a different form in order to be accepted as art. Semper (1926) states in his article that the artist needs to “transform” eroticism before it gets integrated into art; with other words, eroticism should become something else before it becomes part of art; something different from what it already was. Here too eroticism is kept at distance and not allowed to exist here and now similarly to sensual “Oriental” dances.

Semper’s ideas are very similar to ones expressed by Rudolf von Laban, a hugely influential choreographer and dance theorist who was already known in the Weimar Republic during Semper’s years there. It is probable that Semper was familiar with Laban’s book

*Die Welt des Tänzers*, published in 1920. Laban (1920, 157–58), similarly to Semper, differentiated between an “erotic work of art” and a dance performance with “erotic content.” Neither assigned any artistic quality to the latter. According to Laban, the aim of a dance performance with “erotic content” was to arouse the spectator. The similarities between Semper’s and Laban’s ideas make apparent where Semper’s ideas and convictions about art originate. Kangro-Pool’s (1924a,b) positive attitude towards Laban’s theories is manifested in his reviews of dance performances by Gerd Negro, who was a former student and dancer of Laban.

By insisting that eroticism remain hidden and transformed into something else, the critics asserted a certain authority. Schrenck’s eroticism was independent of her: She was considered erotic by the critic not because she presented on stage a sensual figure or an erotic scene but because of her body—something that was inseparable from her. The explanation was simple: Eroticism is intrinsic to the human body. Parts and Kolt-Oginsky, on the other hand, depicted sensual scenes. This means that the nature of the performance (erotic/unerotic) did not depend on the spectator anymore. Additionally, sensual content made it clear that the (female) dancer was aware of her sensuality. When spectators were confronted with overtly sensual figures or erotic scenes, the performance was seen as inartistic. In short, “appropriate eroticism” gave the spectator a chance to perceive and see something as erotic, whereas “inappropriate eroticism” did not. In the latter case, the spectator was expected to accept the choreographer’s artistic decision to depict erotic subject matter and show what hitherto had stayed veiled. In this case, the roles reverse: The spectator, whose gaze until then had defined sensuality, is now left without agency: They either have to accept the creation as it is (and that is erotic) or declare it non-art. It is the question of the artistic freedom of a female choreographer that is at stake here.

As evidence, the critics did not attack the eroticism in Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s dances, rather it was the way the duo presented eroticism that was found alarming: the staginess and embeddedness of the sensuality; the fact that the dancers were aware of the erotic nature of their dances. And this constituted the border-crossing.

### III. Acrobatic, therefore, inartistic

Parts and Kolt-Oginsky were not only attacked for alleged eroticism but also for the use of acrobatic elements. True, this fact gained less attention from the critics and was not discussed as fiercely. Once again, not all the reviewers were critical of the use of acrobatic elements. Altogether eleven out of thirteen reviewers acknowledged the presence of acrobatic elements; many of them (“Elmerice Partsi ja...” 1926; J. K. 1926; Linde 1926a,b; Mettus 1926; W. M-s. 1927) were positive that the acrobatic elements enriched the dances and were artistically justified, while the opponents were convinced that acrobatic elements stood apart from the whole and “did not enable an artistic whole to be formed” (Os Ri. 1926). For the reviewers, the author of the dances was Parts; it can be assumed, though, that the idea to integrate acrobatic elements in the movements came from Kolt-Oginsky. His choreographic works produced for the opera Graz in the 1940s prove his interest in the genre. As his father was a circus artist, he was acquainted with the circus from an early age.

Among the movements that the critics considered acrobatic were, for example, a headstand, a cartwheel, and a piggyback ride (Semper 1926). Unquestionably, many considered dance lifts acrobatic. One of these lifts was described as follows (“Elmerice Partsi ja...” 1926): “Parts wrapped herself around her partner while he formed pirouettes without holding on to her.” Acrobatics were associated additionally with “technical” (B. A. 1927), “imitative” (Os Ri. 1926), or “mechanized” dances (Linde 1926b). In *Machine nr 13* (also *Machine*), the dancers embodied a machine by “displaying mechanical movements and postures” (“Parts-Oginsky tantsuõhtu” 1927). In *Morphium b*, the duo depicted “morphine’s weakening and destructive effect on the human body and soul with feeble convulsive movements and facial expressions” (W. M-s. 1926). The opponents of the duo considered all acrobatic elements inartistic, claiming that they belonged to the circus arena (R. K.-P. 1926; Os Ri. 1926). (The only critic who saw similarities to the circus but did not consider it negative was Bernhard Linde [1926b].) An even bigger problem constituted for some critics the “imitative” or “technical” dances like *Machine nr 13* that, according to Kangro-Pool (R. K.-P. 1926), were “in discordance with artistic requirements.”

What was the problem with imitativensess?

If the dancer's goal is to create an illusion or imitate an action, an unidentified critic (Os Ri. 1926) explained, dance becomes a matter of "rational technique and spiritless acrobatics, jumping, hemming and hawing." It was believed that "high" art should express inner feelings or the unconscious and not see as its aim reproducing, that is, copying already existent movements. There are two aspects that the opponents were critical about. First, when a dancer reconstructs a real-life object (like a machine), she is using her mind (and not trying to connect with her inside). Second, "proper" dance art should not deal with real-life objects or situations; instead, it should focus on the hidden inner (not the exterior) world. Making real-life objects a subject of dance meant turning the gaze to the outer world and giving real objects an importance and visibility that was unusual at the time. This means that imitating or copying was considered by the opponents as per se an inappropriate method.

As shown, Parts and Kolt-Oginsky's opponents expected the art of dance to be soulful, to express the unconscious and inner experiences. Acrobatic elements, on the other hand, focused on the choreographer's constructivist abilities and prioritized performativity over expressiveness; additionally, they dealt with the exterior world. It can be said that both the method (imitation) and the subject matter (exterior world) of their dances were perceived as border-crossing by their opponents.

#### IV. The body problem

I believe that the accusations against Parts and Kolt-Oginsky had something to do with prevailing ideas about the human body. Behind the claims made for eroticism and acrobatics lurked the conviction that the body and bodily experiences did not belong to the theatre stage. In other words, it was the "body-centredness" of their art that probably disturbed some spectators (and not necessarily eroticism or acrobatics); the duo's decision to contradict the idea of the body as something low or dirty and, hence, inappropriate for "high" art.

In modern dance, the body of a dancer was considered a tool or an instrument (Klein 1992, 183; Kolb 2009, 96) rather than a source of inspiration or an object of study. This is intriguing considering the fact that modern dance made the body—especially the female

body—more visible than before. Dance was associated at the time with the search for archaic structures "underneath" or "beyond" culture and rationality (Kolb 2009, 45–46). The new philosophy of movement sought to establish a connection between body movement and the depths of human consciousness (Kolb 2009, 97). A female dancer was considered particularly suitable for this purpose, as a woman was believed to have preserved the exceptional harmony between the body and soul, and that made her "uniquely qualified to lend an exterior, physiological shape to her interior self" (Kolb 2009, 102). Edith von Schrenck, who the reviewers contrasted with Parts, seems to have been exactly that kind of dancer.

Parts and Kolt-Oginsky's "material," on the other hand, was not the unconscious or inner truth. Instead, their gaze was turned towards physical bodies, both human and non-human (Parts stressing her womanliness by moving her breasts; copying the movements of a machine) and bodily experiences (effect of a drug). The body, instead of being a tool, an unavoidable element of the art of dance, became a subject of interest, an area of focus. Parts and Kolt-Oginsky's bodies were not part of an ancient time and place; on the contrary, they belonged to the contemporary world. Instead of a museal figure, a real wo/man stood on stage. This means that it became impossible for spectators to ignore the dancer's physical body. And this is what ensured, in my opinion, uproar. As already pointed out, the human body was considered dirty, low, and not worthy of being a subject of "high" art.

As shown above, the dancer's physical body (the one not wrapped in the veil of antique chasteness) was perceived as erotic and therefore held the potential to sexually arouse the spectator—something that "high" art should never do (Semper 1926; Laban 1920, 157–58). It was the body, again, that constituted the problem, but this time it was the spectator's body. Being sexually aroused or excited means to be affected, or influenced by someone (even if there is no physical contact between the bodies); It means that someone's body has an effect on someone else's body by impacting and influencing it. The act carries with itself an invading, trespassing character (despite the fact that the feeling might be positive): It means that someone has reached someone else's body, crossed a certain neutral border between two people and therewith evoked certain feelings.

I believe that Parts and Kolt-Oginsky's artistic work

was declared inartistic because the duo gave the body and bodily experiences in their dances a central role, making the body uncommonly visible. This discomfort was hidden behind the accusations of “eroticism” and acrobatics. The dancers’ oeuvre went against the norm: The dancers saw the body as a source of inspiration (not an instrument) and considered bodily experiences appropriate for the theatre stage. The debate over the artistic value of Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s performances reveals that a performance was considered artistic when it enabled the spectator to ignore the dancer’s physical body on stage. When the dancer, on the other hand, highlighted her/his physicality or depicted bodily experiences (instead of the unconscious), the dance number was regarded as inartistic.

Although modern dance gave a female dancer many privileges connected to her physical body (among them the freedom to decide on movements, themes, and dresses), she had to disregard and ignore her corporeality, her “bodyness.” As shown, the body of the female dancer was accepted on stage only as an instrument, a tool for visualizing inner experiences. Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky challenged these ideas and norms with their dance numbers, thereby putting into question the border between “high” and “low” art.

## Conclusion

As claimed at the beginning of the article, a transgressive act makes one aware of surrounding norms and rules that might otherwise remain disguised. The scandal caused by Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky with their performances highlights the boundaries of art. First and foremost, that there is no one way of defying the domain of art or artfulness. As has been shown, what some reviewers considered transgressive and, therefore, inartistic, was seen by others as an attempt to renew the art of dance in Estonia. In their eyes, the dancers did not cross artistic boundaries; rather, they expanded them. This confirms what Chris Jenks (2013, 2–3) has noted: Transgressions are context-specific and vary considerably across social and temporal spaces.

The criticism against the duo centred on two main points: the use of acrobatic and “erotic” elements. However, what exactly was meant by “eroticism” and acrobatics remains unclear. The opponents’ conservative and rigid stance on eroticism on the modern dance stage

was influenced by Rudolf von Laban’s ideas. This scandal reveals that there were rules and norms a dancer had to follow if they wanted to be considered a “serious” artist. Early modern dance, although sometimes referred to as “free dance,” did not free a dancer from all the rules. It is important to note that the critiques we have today were predominantly written by male reviewers, offering us a limited, gendered perspective on the controversy.

Based on the findings of this article, I conclude that the opponents were mainly troubled by the “body-centredness” of Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s repertoire. Through acrobatic and erotic elements, they depicted physical experiences (*Morphium b*), stressed their body parts (*Woman*), and imitated a machine (*Machine nr 13*). Their interest in real-world physical bodies diverged from the dominant ideas about modern dance that urged them to see visualizations of unconscious layers or inner experiences on stage, where her/his body served as a tool for this expression. But the dancers did not aim to reveal something that was hidden inside them—instead, they presented bodily experiences; The meaning of a dance number was inscribed on the dancers’ moving bodies. In this way, the spectator was confronted more than ever with the dancer’s physical and corporeal existence.

This artistic tension can be framed as a conflict between the representative regime (also referred to as the poetic regime) and the aesthetic regime of art, as described by Jacques Rancière in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. According to Rancière (2013, 17), the representative regime is normative: It contains definitions “according to which imitations can be recognized as exclusively belonging to an art and assessed, within this framework, as good or bad, adequate or inadequate.” The aesthetic regime, on the other hand, frees art from “any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres” (2013, 18–19). As I have shown, Parts and Kolt-Oginsky’s opponents were convinced that not everything can be regarded as artistic; instead, there are elements that are inartistic per se—a viewpoint that the artists clearly did not share. As the first stance is common to the representative regime, the latter characterizes the aesthetic regime of art. The significance of the aesthetic regime lies in its power to transform the distribution of the sensible established by the representative regime. In other words, the aesthetic regime can redefine “who can have a share in what is common to the community based

on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (Rancière 2013, 8).

It is difficult to give a final assessment of the duo. As half of the reviews written about them were positive, it is possible to say that by presenting new elements (acrobatics and eroticism), they succeeded—at least partly—in “transforming the distribution of the sensible,” that is, changing the general understanding of “high” art. On the other hand, the absence of successors points to the limited long-term impact of their artistic contributions. One should not forget that, at the same time, Estonia was undergoing a shift towards nationalism, a cultural tide that may have further constrained the duo’s influence and the reception of their ideas.

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## Endnotes

1 Maggie Gripenberg (1881–1976), a student of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, inspired many Estonian early modern dancers. A brawl that ended Gripenberg and Gabriel's performance in 1919 was provoked by a group of Estonian writers and artists. Allegedly, their dances were not as artful and original as expected. For more details, see: Anneli Saro, "Maggie Gripenbergi küllalistendused Tartus," *101 Eesti teatrisündmust* (Varrak, 2017), 64–65. For a thorough analysis see: Tõnis Tatar, "Gripenbergi skandaal kui avangardistliku aktsionismi ilming," *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi* 1–2 (2022): 77–101.

2 Elmerice Parts' connection to Jutta Klamt is not unproblematic, as Klamt was willing to compromise her style to the aesthetic and political dogma of the Nazis. Not only did Parts study with her in the early 1920s, but she also taught at her school during World War II. It is a topic that, without doubt, needs further investigation.

3 Concerning Anita Berber as avant-garde artist, see: Ulrike Wohler, "Tanz zwischen Avantgarde und Klassischer Moderne: Anita Berber und Mary Wigman," *Avantgarden und Politik. Künstlerischer Aktivismus von Dada bis zur Postmoderne* (transcript, 2009), 67–88; Alexandra Kolb, *Performing Femininity: Dance and Literature in German Modernism* (Peter Lang, 2009) 06–215.

4 The dance was initially created for a theatre production called *Salome* with Elmerice Parts in the leading role. Oscar Wilde's play premiered at the Drama Theatre in Tallinn in 1919. The figure of Salome was very popular at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century and inspired many dancers to create their own versions of Salome's "veil dance."

5 The only exception was Bernhard Linde (1926b), who considered their dances "erotic" but was not critical about it.

## BIOGRAPHY

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## Becoming Foreign to Oneself: Embodied Encounters with Patients' Written Memories of Mental Hospitals

Kirsi Heimonen

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the ways in which an artist-researcher has encountered an extensive archive comprising Finnish individuals' written memories of mental hospitals through a corporeal approach. The process of reading these accounts and the making of a short film, titled *Here. Somehow*, based on selected excerpts from some patients' and visitors' writings and a site-specific choreographic process, forms the core around which insights spiral.

Attuning to the writings and physical sites through corporeality was enabled through the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), an embodied movement method. This article deliberates on the potential of corporeal practice, through movement, to transform, reveal, and mediate something that is ineffable. What does it mean to research hunches and fractures, to read, write and perform through one's vulnerable corporeality – which is inscribed in and transformed by SRT – to the extent that one eventually becomes foreign to oneself? A phenomenological approach with an interest in affects and atmospheres offers one way to discuss this unexpected phenomenon arising out of an encounter with writings and the physical locations inseparable from them.

### TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä artikkeli keskittyy siihen, miten taiteilija-tutkija kohtaa ruumiillisessa lähestymistavassaan suomalais-ten mielisairaalakokemuksia ja -muistoja käsittävän laajaan kirjallisen arkiston. Näiden muistojen lukemisen prosessi ja lyhytelokuvan *Täällä, jotenkin* tekeminen joidenkin potilaiden ja vierailijoiden valituista muistoista sekä paikkasidonnainen koreografinen prosessi muodostavat tutkimuksen ytimen, jonka ympärille oivallukset kiertyvät. Kirjoituksiin ja fyysisiin paikkoihin asettautuminen ja mukautuminen tapahtuu ruumiillistetun liikemenetelmän Skinner Releasing -tekniikan (SRT) avulla. Artikkelissa pohditaan ruumiillisen praktiikan mahdollisuuksia muuttaa, paljastaa ja välittää jotain sellaista, mikä on sanoin kuvaamaton. Mitä tarkoittaa aavistusten ja murtumien tutkiminen, entä lukeminen, kirjoittaminen ja esittäminen haavoittuvana ruumiillisuutena, johon SRT on piirtynyt ja muuntautunut niin, että lopulta tulee vieraaksi itselleen? Fenomenologinen lähestymistapa ja siinä kiinnostus affekteihin ja atmosfääreihin tarjoaa yhden tavan keskustella tästä odottamattomasta ilmiöstä, joka syntyy kirjoitusten kohtaamisesta ja niihin erottamattomasti liittyvistä fyysisistä paikoista.

# Becoming Foreign to Oneself: Embodied Encounters with Patients' Written Memories of Mental Hospitals

Kirsi Heimonen

This artistic research forms part of a multidisciplinary research project<sup>1</sup> that has focused on the bodily, spatial, affective, and multisensory aspects of Finnish individuals' writings about their memories and experiences of mental hospitals<sup>2</sup> (Jäntti et al. 2021). Although I have written with and through them and made artworks based on them (e.g., Heimonen 2020, 2021a/b, 2022), something perplexing and poignant in these memories and my encounters with them continues to challenge me. They carry on haunting me. It is as if something that is hazy, indistinct, and inexplicable in the suffering, shame, and anxiety concealed in these accounts draws me toward them again and again. Rather than taking the memories as an object of study, I have felt it crucial to approach them in different corporeal ways, and to appreciate what is ineffable in them along with insights that unfold gradually and unexpectedly through a corporeal process, in which the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT)<sup>3</sup>, an embodied movement method, plays a pivotal role. This article focuses on an attentive reading of the written memories and the unfolding of the notion of atmosphere, especially in relation to the process of making a short film, *Here, Somehow*<sup>4</sup> (2021b), based on these memories.

Being in an asylum or mental hospital has carried and continues to carry a sense of shame and stigma, and hence is something that is shrouded in silence. For many patients, writing about their experiences was an arduous process. They reported taking weeks to do it, the burden of their lived experiences constraining the amount of time they felt able to write in one day. Some told us (the researchers) that we should not write about such experiences at all, as they were so painful: the whole theme should be forgotten. Others thanked us for undertaking research on this subject. Various thoughts, feelings and affects evoking particular atmospheres hover around the written memories and physical locations of the mental hospitals at different times. In total, the research material consists of 92 writers' memories, dating from the 1930s to 2010s.

The sensitivity of my corporeality, which has

emerged and been cultivated through somatic movement practices over several decades, including entering, unfolding and intersecting with this research process, continues to surprise me. Unlike the patients, I have chosen to adopt certain practices, and have become indoctrinated, especially by SRT and its underlying theory, which unfolds experientially, including its particular social-cultural body. Nevertheless, how corporeality attunes to, is affected by, or moves is in part unforeseeable: for example, how the spatiality of corporeality creates unknown domains related to the sites and atmospheres around one (cf. Heimonen 2020). Above all, SRT as a practice is not only a medium for art-making but has also become a medium of artistic research which enables communication between the obscure and clear and the known and unknown. Hence, the movement method continues to show its potentiality as well as its relation to that which can be articulated. The present research path, involving artistic actions such as the making of a short film and writing through corporeality, has been an exploration that has entailed both drifting and following clues, all part of the erratic nature of creative discovery (Borgdorff 2011, 57). On the whole, the encounter of two archives, namely the corporeal archive and the written one consisting of experiences of mental hospitals by patients, relatives, visitors as well as members of staff and their children who lived in the hospital area, is a dynamic one that overlaps and intertwines in the research process. Here, the archive of corporeality "as an endlessly creative, transformational archive" (Lepecki 2010, 46), rather than re-enacting a past dance, suggests throwing oneself into the unforeseeable transformative choreographic process of SRT in which the writings of patients, especially, have been inscribed in my corporeality along with the impact of the sites themselves in the act of choreographing. As I was reading others' memories, my corporeal archive was activated, especially through the attention and awareness I have practised in SRT,

and the written material started to make corporeal sense as a perplexing experience beyond rationality that transformed my corporeality itself as well as the emerging movements in the choreographic process of film-making.

## Atmospheric reading

The patients' writings, touching on bleakness, loneliness, abandon, isolation rooms, anxiety, disorientation, gratitude, side effects of medicines as well as descriptions containing the accurate and detailed description of the materiality and immateriality of the mental hospitals they were in, seized my attention. Without realizing it, those accounts inhabited the spatiality of my corporeality finding their dwellings in the corporeal spaces designated by SRT, such as the caverns in the body, the valleys formed by the hip, and in the window-like spaces in the spine. Above all, I was haunted by some fragments of memories that insisted on action. Perhaps the fact that I was one of the few who had had a chance to read the collected and archived material in the first place affected the act of reading and my corporeal response. It is noteworthy that the written accounts, amounting to over 600 pages of typed or handwritten text that impressed me on the first reading, have remained in my corporeality throughout and ever since the research process. Such instant corporeal attunement in reading has similarities with the description given by Anna Jones Abramson,

[t]here is often a feeling of catching up in attunement: it is a matter of suddenly paying attention, or having one's attention seized, but with a distinct affective and bodily charge. (Abramson 2018, 344)

While reading the memories, the porousness of my corporeality appeared to be immense; words swam into its finite and infinite spaces, and rather than being immovable, words and sentences continued moving, swinging, spiralling and floating in its spatiality. Furthermore, the location of my reading, the room in which it occurred, became a co-actor in the reading process, since its shifting light conditions, the shadows of the plants in and outside the room gradually moving on the wall, the view from the window, with its slightly changing landscape, or the sounds coming from

the stairwell all affected my reading, and hence the selection of the excerpts included in the manuscript of the short film. Each reading occasion was experienced as a unique atmosphere, in which I was captured by certain sentences and fragments of the memories, their rhythm, the tone of the words used and their textual space all inexplicably affecting my corporeality. The spatiality of my corporeality became a channel through which the sites and atmospheres depicted, along with the textual space of the writings and their surrounding environment were read in and through me. This experience reveals the potential of language to embody material sensuousness and to further illuminate how the relationships between language, (im)materiality and corporeality are intertwined, enriching alternative ways of communicating.

The first reading sessions took place during December, the darkest season in Finland, a time which increased the weight of the participants' lived memories. I was forced to read lying on my back on the sofa, since I felt too heavy to sit upright. In addition, the condensed text became alive, entering the room through the corporeal, its content and quality overlapping with the temperature and humidity of the room and with the dim light coming from the window and the shadows it cast. The dark winter season and its light conditions seemed to emphasize suffering and anguish, which pervaded the room. This process of reading has its roots in the practice of SRT, in which through the cultivation of suppleness, instant awareness and/or the spatiality of corporeality the imagery of the vocabulary of SRT becomes embodied, while the technique takes over, guiding perception to be aware of new realities (Dempster 1996; Lepkoff 1999). Furthermore, as a poetic practice (Emslie 2021, 2), the vocabulary of SRT refers mostly to such domains of nature as a field, rainforest, pool or cloud inviting one to surrender to the images, "to experience something larger than self," as Joan Skinner, the founder of the technique, describes it (Skura 1990). To immerse oneself in the images of SRT and being transformed by them (Dempster 1996; Skura 1990) as well as transcending the known self brings a kind of safeness to a state of disorientation. This merging into an image, a word or a site is about being fully present, being so attentive that the known I becomes obscure. All this has informed this research journey, in which I have exposed and immersed myself especially in patients' written memories of mental hospitals, a process

in which the borders between inner and outer, past and present, and the other and oneself have become blurred. I have also been mesmerized by the tone and quality of the writings. They were all lived through in the depths of the corporeal; they have felt special, precious, and needed to be handled with care. Gradually, in the research process, the known I has become vague, transparent and slipped away beyond the notions of the person and the personal (Heimonen 2020). Experiencing all this brought air, space, and an awareness of all that is around one.

It seems that the already cultivated notions of SRT, such as suppleness, maintaining a watchful state, shifting one's awareness or allowing it to shift (Skinner 2005) were transferred to the process of reading without my being cognisant of it at the time. Hence, the salient feature of this corporeal research process was that I did not myself choose my way of reading, sensing, and perceiving the written texts, but was guided and led by this corporeality, which cannot be totally controlled. I allowed this to happen and surrendered to the situation as if I were at one and the same time an attuned reader and a witness of the whole reading event. Or rather, had not the allowing of this already occurred decades ago when I became dedicated to the continuous practice of SRT? Embodied movement practices change one slowly and firmly, each guiding one in its special way of being in the world. The way this transformation takes place can be surprising, as in the act of reading described above. Importantly, such corporeal changes are irreversible, shifting and outweighing the rationalising self, which only later tries to figure out what has occurred.

Perhaps SRT carries something of its uniqueness in its awareness, attentiveness and allowing things to unfold, as described by Anthony J. Steinbock (2004, 39):

To describe modes of attentiveness in relation to affective forces is precisely to be reflectively attentive to attention in a unique way, not merely as a meta-reflection on what something is, but as an inquiry into how or the way in which things are given and our openness to them.

He also describes how to bracket "a self-imposition so as to let the phenomena flash forth as they give themselves [...] dispose ourselves to be struck *in which ever* way the phenomena give themselves" (Steinbock 2004, 39-40, italics original).

The above quotations don't apply exclusively to reading but also to moving, in which the known I steps back to allow the phenomena to appear. This forgetfulness of the self or self-imposition is allied to a phenomenological reflective attentiveness (Steinbock 2004, 40). The mode of attention I have embodied in practising SRT has thus required the momentary disappearance of the known I, or rather the intertwining of the known and the inconceivable. This has brought connectedness with and in the world, and instead of focusing on oneself, the relational aspect of one's existence, one's connection with the human and more-than-human, has become both meaningful and crucial. Above all, this emergent notion of the self has prohibited me from taking others' feelings personally and becoming distressed by them, despite allowing one's corporeality to be a carrier of memories. In addition, rather than an enclosed object, one's experience of corporeality has become open, incomplete, participatory and (even) more sensitive.

To submit oneself to the affective forces of the phenomena in atmospheric reading, as here, is to surrender to the words and sentences, and all that lies around and beyond them. Atmospheric reading has been described as follows:

Instead of attempting to decode or impose meaning, an atmospheric reader attempts to tune into a world in which causes remain foreign even as effects strike with vivid intensity (Abramson 2018, 353).

Here again, surrender to or acceptance of the event is crucial, as the main principle of letting go in the practice of SRT may lead to releasing of (muscular) tension and thinking patterns which would otherwise prevent one from perceiving how each moment discloses itself as well as transcends the known I (Heimonen 2022; 2021a; Emslie 2021, 12; Skura 1990). To supplement Abramson's description, acknowledgement of the alterity of the present writings is also to acknowledge their integrity, a stance towards them and a way of handling them that can be considered ethical. Or more accurately, both the written material and the reader become foreign, a moment of unfolding occurs, their boundaries become blurred, and, in their intersection, something emerges and hovers.

The reader's corporeal atmosphere shifts at each

instant as one reads, being affected by the overlapping, intersecting, and shifting atmospheres issuing from the memories of events, environments and spatiality experienced beyond what the words alone signify, and by the ambience of the room where the reading happens. Memories and experiences often relate to a specific time of day, season or a unique quality attached to their site or event; for example, the qualities attached to the walls, corridors or patients' rooms are suffused with gloominess or a sense of separation (Heimonen 2022). One extract from the memories conveys a sense of abandonment on returning to the hospital:

The rooms, corridors, hospital slippers, the locked cupboard, everything seemed to taunt me, "Here you are, you've failed again. You couldn't survive on your own. Now you're dependent on the help of others" (SKS 484, patient).

In this account, the environment is felt as almost hostile, illuminating the patient's relationship with it, how it affects the patient. Physical objects become alive and judgmental. While reading this fragment and encountering this kind of abandonment, the boundary of my corporeality becomes stiff and sharp, and my breathing becomes shallow. In contrast, the sense of spatiality of the surroundings described by the writer in the following fragment expands the boundaries of my corporeality: "I paid attention to the wide corridors that gave rise to a feeling of space when walking through them ... and that brought imagination into play" (SKS 0395, patient). The sheer variety of the memories challenges the reader-mover, whose attentive corporeality is suddenly confronted with huge changes as if riding on a roller coaster.

## Atmospheres in and around corporeality

The notion of atmosphere has been mentioned several times, but what is meant by it and how does it aid in illuminating the experience of reading writings about mental hospitals and mediating their content in movement in the form of a short film with a former hospital as its milieu? Etymologically, atmosphere, defined as a "gaseous envelope surrounding the earth," derives from the words *atmos*, meaning "vapor, steam" and *sphaira* meaning "sphere" (etymological dictionary, n.d.). It has been described as indeterminable, indistinct,

diffuse, neither subjective nor objective, as something "thinglike" and "subjectlike", as intersubjective, and as a "tuned space", namely a space characterized by a certain mood and thus something both spatial and emotional (Böhme 2017, 2, 5; 1993, 121). Overall, atmospheres relating to people and things are felt and experienced instantly in bodily presence (Böhme 1993; Böhme 2017, 26; Hasse 2011), and although one can react to their felt presence, it is impossible "to comprehend them through cognitive concepts" and thus "we only relate ourselves to them or live in them" (Hasse 2011, 57). Gernot Böhme introduces the aesthetics of atmospheres by focusing on how when something is present, the attention, in terms of locality and physical presence, is shifted (Böhme 2017, 26). This is also the case in my research project on the lived experiences of patients and my way of researching them. The ambiguity of the term atmosphere as something that subsists between subject and object, how it emanates from things and persons, and how, always existing in atmospheres, we affect and are affected by them, situates it in a hazy frame. Nevertheless, this indistinct nature appreciates each singular event and is noticed by the perceived, the perceiver and the unique sensitivities of corporealities. Above all, to sense the atmosphere the perceiver is corporeally present in a certain way (Böhme 1993,122; Grant 2013, 20–21). The present writings indicate that the patients – who were either forced into or on their own initiative sought admission to a hospital – were highly sensitive not only to the behaviour of the staff, such as tone of voice, but also to features of the buildings, such as the bleakness of the corridors. In addition, in the atmosphere as described above by Böhme and Hasse, the corporeal presence of the perceivers, namely the patients, was strong, as can be read in their descriptions.

Affects are closely related to atmospheres. Here, I consider affect as a prereflective encounter with oneself and an "other", whether human or more-than-human, through a lived corporeal awareness. Karen Barbour (2019, 128) outlines affect in the context of site dance as

[...] a transpersonal capacity by which a person is affected through or within their embodiment in relationships with people, sites and place, objects, sensations and activities, ideas and institutions and other affects.

To combine these, a crucial feature of a prereflective, transpersonal affect is that it occurs in an encounter, which in turn contains a lived embodied awareness in a specific situation. Practitioners of various somatic methods continue practising corporeal awareness and attention as guided by their own somatic tradition. Although the principles, ways of working, and theories underlying somatic movement methods vary, the sense of corporeality entails some kind of continuous awareness with the practitioner's surroundings.

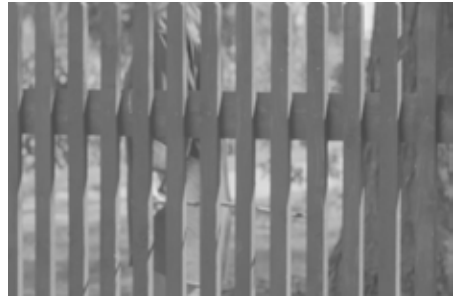
Corporeal exposure and a feeling of situatedness are important in experiencing affective atmospheres. Grant delineates how "the experiencing human is of the atmosphere", and "the experience of an atmosphere is a specific mode of the coming-forth of that body" (Grant 2013, 22). In this artistic research, for corporeality to become a spatial-temporal milieu for channelling affective events involving reading, moving and writing has demanded reiterating the releasing process until there is little left of the former I with its strains and demands. Corporeality itself has become an ever-changing atmosphere, a spatial formation which is constantly attuning to the surrounding materialities and immaterialities with instant readiness and acute awareness. This enables one to be fully present in each event, in which forgetting oneself as a determined subject in that instant may lead to estrangement from oneself. This shift towards becoming foreign to oneself through the ongoing practice of SRT, and hence in the different phases of the research process, has indeed been "the revelation of the experiencing body to itself" (Grant 2013, 22). The more sensitive my corporeality has become, the more foreign to myself I have also become.

## **Towards filming: Lingering and pausing in the sites of the mental hospital**

Reading the experiences and memories of some patients and visitors unfolded a sense of altered spatial-temporality and strangeness, which intensified in the process of making the short film, *Here, Somehow* (2021b), which was one of the results of the haunting force of those written accounts. The film's milieu was Lapinlahti hospital in Helsinki, a former (and the oldest) mental hospital in Finland, built in 1841. The atmosphere of the location struck me instantly with an inexplicable

power, such that during one visit, the lived experience of one corner in it disturbed my breathing to the extent that it was impossible to remain there a minute longer. The hospital felt odd as well as fascinatingly decayed, and at times something ominous hovered in its confines. Nevertheless, I visited its outdoor and indoor sites regularly over a period of one year, and the architecture of the building, its thick walls and long corridors as well as the surrounding park gradually became familiar. During the visits, lingering, sitting, leaning against the wall, wandering and dwelling on it as well as attuning to it and inhaling its different atmospheres in various locations during the different seasons allowed my corporeality to attune to the material and immaterial circumstances of the site as a whole.

Beyond everything, to surrender to one's surroundings and attuning to its atmospheres became a compositional process of dwelling in spaces. In that process, certain sites were paired in the manuscript with a selected fragment from the writers' memories, and for each of these pairings the nature of movement started to emerge at the intersection of the spatiality of corporeality and the textual space of the written excerpt. The phenomenologist Stuart Grant (2013) outlines a phenomenological-performative methodology for the understanding of atmospheres, and how the experience of being in a place can be illuminated by performing bodies. In a *Bodyweather* workshop on atmospheres, he outlined an embodied performative methodology for capturing, measuring and reporting on atmospheres. Emphasizing the body as the medium and site of the performative mode of enquiry and reporting, he spoke about how concrete, direct embodied experience of the environment is needed in creating the aesthetics of atmosphere and how performance is able to live and render both the time of the experience and the space performers "carry the original atmosphere" (Grant 2013, 24). In my artistic research, the so-called original atmosphere is layered and manifold, as I started by attuning to and immersing myself in others' lived atmospheres by reading their accounts and then attuning to the atmosphere of the mental hospital. In exploring and lingering in different sites within and outside the hospital, the memories of others were present in the sediments of that location, alongside the shifting seasonal and corporeal conditions. Together, these phenomena suggested a certain atmosphere that



Screen captures from *Here, Somehow*. Cinematographer: Raimo Uunila.

continued exerting its grip on me, and hence the short film may mediate something of the atmospheres related to patients' lived experiences of mental hospitals, of the quality and textual space of their writings, and of the physical locations to which they allude.

Pausing, spending time in the outdoor and indoor sites of a former mental hospital and inhaling its historical strata generated in me a state of non-possession due to the overwhelming impressions these made on me, along with the read memories already dwelling in and inhabiting the spatiality of my corporeality. In lingering and attuning to the empty rooms, staircases and the trees surrounding the buildings, the spatiality of my corporeality absorbed the surrounding sites and realities, and elements of a multi-layered history with its lost presences began to disclose themselves (Heimonen 2020, 39). By exposing and immersing myself to these sites and memories, the contours of my corporeality became blurred. All this intensified the sense of being foreign to myself, of having an alien nature as if I was situated between myself and various other absent presences, somewhere at the crossing point of shifting atmospheres. This sense of estrangement persisted in watching the film. It was as if I did not know the sequence of events or what the mover was doing in each site. Thus, I have not spoken of myself as the mover in the first person, but instead spoken of "the-one-who-moves". Nevertheless, sensing the materiality of the floor, earth, walls, and windowsills and paying attention to the gravity passing through my feet to the ground or the floor, I avoided the possibility of being entirely lost while lingering and moving in these places.

Furthermore, the sites and their materiality paired with the chosen fragments prompted the emergence of the site-specific choreography into which

sites such as the staircase or balcony were woven. The nature of this intertexture between the mover and the materials made it difficult to discern who or what is the producer of the work, since not only do the artist's sensibility and experiences inform artistic actions, but materials also have their own agency that both tacitly and explicitly informs those actions. (Rouhiainen 2017, 148). The various sites were so crucial in the process of choreographing that each site became a co-partner in movement (see pictures 1-8). Barbour describes developing a choreography as an ongoing dialogic process with the site, that is, a process in which site-specific choreographers use "sensory awareness and somatic methods that support slowing down and paying attention, acclimatization and acculturation, participatory observation and mapping" (Barbour 2019, 112). The way SRT is embedded in and continuously transforms my corporeality is the source of my choreographic exploration, which in this instance was prompted by the historical strata of the chosen sites and the fragments of written memories already inscribed in my corporeality.

The patients' written fragments originated from their stays in the hospital and its setting, the words emerged from the movements and encounters of their corporeality with their surroundings interwoven with affects and atmospheres. The writers of the memories sensitively experienced "spaces with vital qualities" which "are to be perceived in their instant totality" (Hasse 2011, 57). Perhaps the notion of being affected by different atmospheres is related to imagination, which David Abram (1997, 58) outlines as not being:

[...] a separate mental faculty [...] rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves



beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible.

Nonetheless, something of those atmospheres as spatial bearers of mood (Böhme 1993), and the writers' articulation of the presence of the environment (Grant 2013) had been informed through their moving and being corporeally present in it. This then passed into my (the reader's) corporeality, inducing a particular way of moving and choreographing. In the practice of SRT, hidden or unknown realities are available through the

imagination, which is released by letting go of conscious control and preconceived ideas, and thus images characteristic of SRT have the potential to communicate nonverbal information (Skinner et al. 1979).

In different phases of making the film, the manuscript was the basis on which all the important decisions, such as those related to editing or to the soundscape, including whether to have two different voices reading the text fragments taken from a variety of writers, were made. Since the writers had answered the call and mailed their memories to be read and researched, it was necessary to give them and other people living with mental problems something more than solely academic publications. Inviting them to the premiere was a somewhat alarming and risky undertaking, as although the short film is the outcome of a collaborative effort with other professionals, it only offers one interpretation of the written material. The site of the premiere was the auditorium of Lapinlahti<sup>6</sup>, and hence watching the film





was an unfamiliar experience owing to the audience being aware that the sites depicted on screen were situated in close proximity to where they were sitting, and thus productive of multiple atmospheres.

Perhaps the film offered its spectators an opportunity to attune to some of the patients' lived experiences of mental hospitals, as fragments of rarely heard individual views, fates and histories were embedded in the performer, site, sound and voiced text rendering them memorable. It is hoped that future showings of the film will prompt further public discussion on the current situations of people living with mental problems and illnesses, their care and the almost abolished former mental healthcare

system with an asylum or a mental hospital set in a park. From this perspective the film is also a socio-political act as it mediates something of how one affects and is affected by not only the human but also the more-than-human present in institutional care settings.

## Afterword

This article has spiralled and curved around the notion of atmosphere and how one can become foreign to oneself in a research process by exposing oneself to words, physical sites and all that is beyond them. Now, after re-reading the written memories several times and living with them for some years, while they continue to exist as if freshly imprinted in my corporeality, the unsayable and absent presence of the words, sentences, sites and corporeality have expanded, demanding further attention. The notions of affect and atmosphere in the collected memories and hospital sites resist control and an ending – something of the research





material continues to leak, affect, spread and have an impact. It is as if words were an obscure power without meaning or as if a hand was passing through the wall of a white corridor to gain a glimpse of another reality. The indeterminable and diffuse nature of the atmosphere captures into its sphere, certainties fade. Moreover, the articles and the short film have addressed only a modest part of the written material – much remains to be found both in the collected archive and in corporeality.

In this research project, I have repeatedly been asked what the cost of exposing one's vulnerability to the materials is and how I protect myself. Several years ago, I described how vulnerability is a method of communication, since communication is like a rupture or wound in both parties requiring fragility (Heimonen 2011, 188). Instead of armour, spatiality, availability, the suppleness of corporeality and the momentary disappearance of the known I have led to allowing affects, feelings, and thoughts to enter my corporeality, to dwell, move and continue their journey in artworks and writings, or to leak into unknown terrain. Life and research projects leave traces, marks, and scars in the corporeal, yet through moving and writing these marks can be erased, disappearing in the fractures in the text and infinite caverns of the corporeality. The notion of letting go posited by SRT strengthens and encourages me to continue this corporeal transformative journey.

Atmospheric reading relates to the way in which Virginia Woolf outlines reading as attunement resonate. On the first phase of how to read a book, she writes, "Wait for the dust of reading to settle; for conflict and the questions to die down; walk, talk, pull the petals from the rose, or fall asleep" (Woolf 1960, 242). This advice also resembles the process of attuning to the sites of Lapinlahti hospital, as I lingered there aware of the

overwhelming strata of atmospheric impressions. It was from these that movement gradually began to emerge in an encounter with a given site. In SRT, one's skeletal rather than muscular nature is cultivated, a process which seems to unfold a space between the joints and limbs, "a suspended relationship to gravity which can be likened to the suspension of a dust particle in a shaft of sunlight" (Skinner et al. 1979, 11). This image encourages to halt and experience spaces in one's corporeality that enable dust, as unknown and hazy, to linger in one's corporeality, suspending or displacing some previous ways of moving. The process of letting go also encourages "it" to move one, to experience being danced (Skinner 2005; Skinner et al. 1979, 12) and, eventually, to become foreign to oneself, at least momentarily.

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## Endnotes

- 1 In the research project, *Engraved in the body*. Ways of reading Finnish people's memories of mental hospitals, the other four researchers approached the same material from cultural and literary perspectives in the context of psychiatric history.
- 2 The material was collected and archived together with the Finnish Literature Society (SKS).
- 3 Henceforth SRT
- 4 The short film was shown as part of a lecture presentation I gave at the NOFOD conference in 2024.
- 5 I began the practice of SRT in 2004 and qualified as a teacher at the introductory level in 2017.
- 6 Lapinlahti is currently occupied by an organization working for and with people living with mental problems and has workspaces for artists and therapists.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Dr Kirsi Heimonen** (1955–2024) was University Researcher at the Research Institute of the University of the Arts Helsinki. Her background was in dance, choreography, somatic movement practices and experimental writing. Her late artistic research interests focused on the way in which written memories from mental hospitals transmit bodily intertwinement with the environment and the unsayable. Most recently she was involved in a textual choreographic project with Professor Leena Rouhiainen.

## From Form to Fumbling: Reflections on Creating and Collaborating from Archival, Choreographic and Performative Perspectives

Solveig Styve Holte and Magdalene Solli

### ABSTRACT

*Frå Form til Famling / From Form to Fumbling* premiered on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 at Henie Onstad Art Center that takes its starting point in the material traces in the archive after Høvik Ballet. In this article, choreographer Solveig Styve Holte and performer Magdalene Solli reflect on the choreographic and performative parameters of this creation, with a focus on one piece of solo material that was included. How may archival material inform and transform how and what we create? In addition to investigating that topic, this article addresses how different modes of collaboration were explored in the creation process, as are recounted from choreographic and performative perspectives. This article is written from both perspectives, letting the different experiences from the process and the polyphony from the performance make it into the reflection at large. The process of engaging in transformation, transmission and transpositioning changes not only our understanding of the material but also our understanding of ourselves as dancers and choreographers. In that regard, this article recounts how our relation to the archive started, developed and transformed, both in our bodies and perceptions, during the long creative process. It also describes how the passing of time, and our time spent with the archives, affected us and the overall choreographic decisions made concerning the performance.

### SAMMENDRAG

*Frå Form til Famling / From Form to Fumbling* hadde premiere 2. November 2023 på Henie Onstad Kunstcenter og spring utifrå dei materielle spora i arkivet etter Høvik Ballett. I denne artikkelen reflekterer koreograf Solveig Styve Holte og utøver Magdalene Solli kring dei koreografiske og performative parametera i produksjonen, gjennom å løfte fram eitt spesifikt solomateriale. Korleis nærar og endrar eit arkivmateriale korleis og kva vi skapar? Artikkelen gjer synleg ulike samarbeidsformer som vart utforska i prosessen, sett frå både ein koreografisk og performativ ståstad. Å skrive frå to ulike perspektiv gjer at fleire erfaringar og opplevingar frå prosessen får rom i refleksjonen som heilskap og gjer performansen sitt fleirstemmige vesen synleg. Gjennom prosessen har ikkje berre forståinga vår av arkivmaterialet vore i endring, men òg sjølvforståinga vår som dansar og koreograf, i ein vedvarande prosess av transformasjon, overføring og transposisjonering. Teksta greier ut korleis forholdet vårt til arkivet starta, utvikla og endra seg undervegs, både i kroppane våre og i persepsjonen vår, gjennom ein langvarig skapingsprosess. Og den skildrar også korleis dette aspektet av langstrakt tid, med ei fleirårig undersøking, påverka arbeidet, oss og dei overordna koreografiske vala i arbeidet.

# From Form to Fumbling: Reflections on Creating and Collaborating from Archival, Choreographic and Performative Perspectives

Solveig Styve Holte and Magdalene Solli

## Introduction

Frå *Form til Famling* / *From Form to Fumbling* (FFtF)<sup>1</sup> premiered on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 at Henie Onstad Art Center. The present article outlines the choreographic and performative parameters of this creation and the ways in which archival material informed and transformed how and what we created<sup>2</sup>. Different modes of collaboration were explored in the creative process, as we recount from choreographic and performative perspectives. In doing so, we assert that the process of engaging in transformation, transmission and transpositioning changed not only our understanding of the material but also of ourselves as dancers and choreographers. This article will recount how our relation to the archive started, developed and transformed, in our bodies and perceptions, during the long creative process. It will also describe how the passing of time, and spending time with the archives, affected us and the overall choreographic decisions made concerning the performance.

FFtF was created by working with archival materials from Høvik Ballett (HB)<sup>3</sup>, including photos and film from its first period, spanning 1969 to 1975. The title of the performance was a reversal of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's (NRK) program *Fra famling til form* from 1969, which marked the first time the company's work was captured on film. The performance lasted for four hours and stretched through the art centre and out into the surrounding park and fjord, inviting the spectator to actively reflect on why something is remembered and something else is forgotten.

## The archive

The archive from Høvik Ballett is scattered and stored in many different places, and a substantial part of the film documentation from the early years of their work has been lost or deleted. Our choreographic creation began

with encountering the material archival traces, and from there, constructing, creating and suggesting were central to the mode of production. Choreographically, I see dance archives, in general – and this one, in particular – as a part of our shared commons, and my interest is in how we can approach, care for, carry and transpose these archival traces into the world again today. This requires understanding the movements in the archive as material objects that we can embody. To do so means separating the dance or the movement from the dancer or choreographer who initially danced or created them. It thus makes sense to think of the movements as having a life of their own, a life that can reappear in the here and now and that is present and possible to find in the archive. Daniel Blanga Gubbay described this in his article 'The movement as living non-body':

Movements are real objects, separated from the sensible objects through which they appear. Dance is made of the encounter between real objects (the movements) and sensible ones (the bodies) on which or through which they appear. And if so far we thought dance as movement of the body, we can now think it as movement of the movements among different bodies. (Gubbay 2018, 124)

Given that we consider the materials in the archive as a found object, our exploration started with working with these materials as a group, while knowing that we would later work individually. The performers were asked to choose one fragment from the archive as a starting point. Through conversations, physical explorations and shared studio work, each fragment was contested with social and political events and histories that we came to consider through our interests and explorations. These comprised the social and political context, movement materials and stories of Høvik Ballett, which we combined with other approaches to choreographing and performing than those held in the movement material.

Collectively, these procedures transformed the original movement fragment and created a new material. Each solo consisted of dance and storytelling, and through these means, included both the memory of Høvik Ballett and other bodies and events that could have been present, we felt were missing or existed as lost potential. Through this approach, the archive was transformed into a prism, where the performance became a container for a polyphony of parallel histories, transposing the original material into different social and political contexts. We included the potential for collaborations with other female artists working at the time as allies, considered the feminist and queer liberation movement and growing environmental awareness in the 1970s and took a critical approach to acknowledging the

accumulation of wealth and fortune that has enabled the art centre to exist, both as the site of the original company and as the site for our performance.

Our work questioned how we can remember dance history, not only by naming it but also through the acts of performing and choreographing it, working from it and relating to it, and what this remembering may create in recalling movements from another time in our reality here and now. Gubbay described the potential for this to happen: '(...) the life of the movement is invisible until it is moved by a body, and yet this does not mean it does not exist, and that its life is not a continuous one. A single life lived by many bodies; a ghostly life during which it can lie for days or centuries before voluntarily or accidentally reappearing through another body' (Gubbay 2018, 126).



*Studio Space, Frå Form til Fabling, Henie Onstad Art Center. Photo by Tale Hendnes.*

## Listening and references

The studio space in Henie Onstad is where performances, concerts and live events are normally held, from 1968 until today. We wanted to transform it into a space for imaginative dances, along with a light, sound and textile installation open to the public throughout the performance. To do so, we configured the space as a nest for the performers, where they started before branching out into their different paths inside or outside the art centre. The sound installation inside the studio held traces of the different soundscapes performed in the gallery spaces and outside. Non-human agents such as chairs that were part of the original furniture from 1968 were arranged so they were lying or standing in a pattern, with chairs facing in multiple directions. The light was soft and the costumes, which were changed throughout the performance, could be seen located under a light balloon, present as a trace from those in the audience who had seen them in use during the performance. There was an installation of hanging footnotes, consisting of several used women's tights filled with stones from the beach at Henie Onstad. We wanted the reference list for the project to be in the same landscape as the performance at large, something you listen to oppose to reading. Therefore, we named them footnotes, being literally verbal notes in loudspeakers hanging inside the different "legs". The reference list both in Norwegian and English was spoken in and recorded, in advance. Four speakers installed around the tights, would at different times throughout a four-hour cycle, be played at a low volume. The sound of the footnotes was subtle so the audience had to come close to hear them. We made a conceptual choice when considering how listening and following would guide the audience's attention throughout the performance. The audience was oriented through listening rather than through reading materials - which reflected the fragmented archival material and the sense that while much still exists of the Høvik Ballett company, just as much has been lost.

I am interested in experimental techniques of referencing in contemporary choreographic practice. When the performers quoted a movement material that was part of a solo from Høvik Ballett, they named the year and title of the work. Both the choreographic work as a whole and the different solos meant we worked with many different references, to books, articles and other

artistic works in addition to the archive from HB. The choreographic work was also informed by several artistic works that have employed different approaches to art practice and archival research, such as those of Mette Ingvartsen, Xavier Le Roy, Marte Elise Stramrud, Joar Nango and Netta Yerushalmy. I wanted these references to be available for the audience while avoiding sheets or lists. The performance invited the audience to partake in a continuous, multi-layered, polyphonic experience. The idea of printing a program text, map, reference list or catalogue was for me falling into the trap of what Claire Bishop (2023) critiques as 'the information overload' within artistic research. In her article in *Art Forum*, she quotes the British artist Mark Leckey: 'The richest possibilities for research-based installation emerge when preexisting information is not simply cut and pasted, aggregated, and dropped in a vitrine but metabolized by an idiosyncratic thinker who feels their way through the world.' (Leckey; Bishop 2023)

During a performance, the performers are the *idiosyncratic thinkers*, the containers and the transmitters of the archive, in addition to the installation content. A catalogue or map would give an idea of an overview or completeness of the archive, which did not correspond with the archive we encountered. Instead, we decided that the audience would actively move around, listen to and possibly remember the content from the hanging footnotes of the used tights, where each of the legs was filled with stones that changed their relation to gravity.

## The choreographic parameters

### Performer as source and site of knowledge

In the creation process, the performer is an active co-author of the artistic work, and thus they are a source and a site of knowledge. The performer responds to the frames and concepts of the artistic work based on their knowledge, which is situated in their living practice and cultural history. In the choreographic process, the aim is to create a productive learning situation where output can be produced through the combined work of me as a choreographer and the performer/dancer/collaborator. In this capacity, choreography operates as a structure for organising and composing the artistic expression found in dance, music and costumes. The Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim's (1976) term 'et felles

tredje', which I translate as 'a common third', describes a learning situation where a triangular relation exists. When two people direct themselves towards a shared third thing or interest, they can become subjects for one another, rather than one becoming the object for the other. Skjervheim wrote about this in the essay 'Deltakar og tilskodar' ('Participant and spectator') from 1976 in relation to pedagogics. This triangular relationship has become key for me in thinking about how to work with collaborators and how to approach choreography.

#### Archive/ Choreography

Choreographer (host)

Dancer (participant)

Dancer – hosts the archive

In this approach, the archive can be the common third we direct ourselves towards. My role as a choreographer is to be a host of the work, or a facilitator for a situation and meeting, and to extend an invitation for the performer/collaborator to contribute with their knowledge and interests to a specific frame, which we can name the project. In this specific work, *FFF*, the archive was transformed from being the material traces we could find into a performative material that the dancers now hosted in their bodies and in the choreographies. Through a transformative process, where we started directing ourselves towards a thing outside of ourselves and through being with it, learning and exploring, this material thing transformed from an outside object to a lived experience that the performers and the performance now hosted the memory of, and through the performance, the memory was activated and potentially reinscribed in the cultural memory of the audience.

'The common third' could also be the choreography or choreographic methods, which refers to the organising capacity, both for how we work, what we do and when, and how we perform. In the process, I do not want the way in which the material is composed, created and shaped to be hidden, but rather to be mapped out, discussed and articulated. Language becomes a key to creating a relationship where the performer can equally discuss and critically examine the decisions that are made. In working like this, I believe we are becoming subjects for one another and resisting the usual power play or trap

of creating the other as an object for one's own desire. This means that choreographic work contains analytical, critical and social togetherness, built on talking together, listening to the unknown, acknowledging resistance, witnessing, describing and proposing. To create a work becomes an ongoing inscription we carry out together. I am unable to create anything that the performer's body does not have an interest in engaging in. We are interdependent, trusting each other and daring to be vulnerable and not knowing together, where we are enabling something in one another and in the material that none of us necessarily could have predicted or succeeded with individually. This method emphasises the relational qualities of a choreographic process, where we achieve more than any of us could have on our own. When the situated knowledge of each performer is acknowledged, the performers as a group can hold and contain a greater polyphony, which was an important aim of the creation in question.

## Layering

The performance happened both in the exhibition spaces and neighbouring liminal spaces, that is, the stairs, the reception, hallways, etc., actively working with the architecture as an archival trace that the performance would resonate with. One of the ongoing exhibitions that the performance related to was the Magdalena Abakanowicz exhibition 'Flokke av tråd og tau'. Abakanowicz, a textile artist who had a crucial impact on Norwegian artists in the 1960s and 1970s, was presented at Henie Onstad in 1977, at the same time as Hovik Ballett's work there. Her body of work and her 'Abakans' became a physical context, a material archive and an embracing time capsule to be in resonance with. The same applied to the architecture and site at Henie Onstad. The feeling that these walls, the forest, architecture and floors were the same and had seen these dances before felt as though it was a material support that gave us a sense of proximity to the original movements and histories.

Layering was an important compositional tool, in the different solo works and in the overall choreography of the performance. Layering allowed for the original fragments to be made visible together with several potential possibilities and histories, so that they co-existed in resonance with each other within the performance. The choreography was layered through

the multiplicity of performative events, and through visible traces of the archive in the performance, including through sound and costume. Layering was also applied in the choreographic process, where the archival materials met with different corporealities and contexts, by asking what absence was there or was there not in the original material, not to complete this material, but rather to continue contesting it and to create a field of friction. The performers learned the archival material through a process of critical reflection, but without the aim of authenticity or placing the archive on a pedestal. Through layering, the archival material was paired with different performative and choreographic parameters, and our interpretation opened up the possibility of the material finding multiple resonances and an expanded contextualisation.

## Transpositioning

Transpositioning as a concept for collaborations was coined by the architects in the firm Snøhetta (Aspaas 2013) to describe the process of changing positions to facilitate an understanding of interests from different perspectives. In a choreographic process, I see it as a method of observing the artistic work or specific material from another position than my own and as a process of dislocating a material from its original context. Transpositioning thus becomes a method both for developing material and for collaboration. The former occurs when an archival movement fragment is transposed to another body, context and future.

Working with existing materials creates the potential for the choreography to produce other relations than those that existed in the original. It also suggests a separation of the dance and the dancer and understanding them as two different capacities. The moment a specific dance material is interpreted and performed (or perhaps metabolised?) by another dancer/performer, it is immediately changed. The fragment is transformed through this process from a material trace to the dancer, who becomes the carrier of the archive. When learning the archive fragment, the document undergoes a new activation, and when being performed in a different body at a different time, the fragment is recontextualised. The transpositioning of the material is met with the method of layering and asserting the potential for what had been absence in the work and context of Høvik Ballett. The process of finding a form or grasping a movement material over a historical distance is an exercise in not letting time collapse or underestimating the distance. In the work in question, the distance between our interpretations and the original fragment was open and transparent for the audience, and the performance offered a multitude of approaches to transpositioning the original material through dancing and storytelling.

## It – textual material

Magdalene Solli created several materials in the creation process. The solo material described in this text, referred to as 'It', consisted of a collage of textual materials combining excerpts from the reviews and information

*Jeg skal aldri glemme den dagen i 1969 da Miriam Skjorten og en bukkett spenstig og grazios kvinnelig yndel dukket opp på mitt kontor eskortert av et administrativt og foretningskyndig vesen av bankjann, Torkel Nor, og så de skulle etablere og som en ballettgruppe og akselestykke, med basis i fridans. De søkte opphold på Høvikodden.*



*Slide from the archival material.*

That started it. they are a bouquet. Goes on. they are a springy bouquet. Moves. Beyond. Becomes. a springy bouquet of elegant female grace. Goes further than that. Becomes it and it and it. Becomes something else. Becomes more. Combines something else with more to keep becoming something else and more. Goes further than that. Becomes something besides something else and more. Something. Something new. Newer still. The grace dances, meanders forth, increasing its strength. In the next now, becomes as new as it now can be. Pending money. Imposes itself. six girls Flaunt. Touches, touched. with fate in their hand. Catches free material. Grows bigger and bigger. Nodding energetically. Builds itself up by being more than itself, gains weight, gains speed, gains more in its rush, gains on something else, passes something else, which is taken up, taken in, fast laden with what came first, so randomly. That's it.

Afterwards they wash the floor, So changed now that it's began. So transformed. Already a difference between it and it, for nothing is what it was, they have nodded and washed and knitted and danced, stretched towards the premiere. Already time between it and it, here and there, then and now where already the span of space between it and something else, it and more, it and something, something new, in this now, already has been, in the next now is and goes on. No prima donna whims nod for inside to differ from outside. Plays, shifts, eddies. Outside. And condenses inside. Gains core and substance. Gains surface, refractions, passages, impediments. Takes a turn, a whole new turn. Turns and twists, is turned and twisted. And pursues an evolution. Seeks a form.

*Excerpt from the script performed by Magdalene Solli.*

pieces about Høvik Ballett and excerpts from the book *Det* (1969) by Inger Christensen. When reading the content written about Høvik Ballett, we were struck by the infantilising language that was used. In several texts, they were not referred to as artists or women but as 'piker', a conservative term used to refer to young girls. They were collectively called a bouquet, and it was emphasised how little money they earned from their dancing. The headline of one news article, in advertising their next premiere, stated that they washed the floor themselves after the performance. When reading and watching cultural news reports from the same era, it can be seen that the male artists and musicians were not described in the same manner, with these reports neither mentioning how they washed their studios nor how little money they earned from their art. It became clear to us that Høvik Ballett suffered both from neglect of dance as an art form and of female artists in their time. Høvik Ballett was at that time a rather radical proposal in the context of Norwegian modern dance: A female collective that situated itself in an art centre actively collaborating with the artists of the time, worked with Happenings and live events inside the gallery and outside in nature as well as held an expansive vision of touring its work in schools, kindergartens and prisons across Norway. How radically different would the field of dance as an art form in Norway be today if this initiative had been

recognised, valued and described as a progressive art initiative instead of as a 'bouquet of female grace'?

In our speculation about the possibilities for parallels with other feminist movements and female artist working at that time, we first investigated the writings of Gertrude Stein and later the writings of Inger Christensen. *Det* (1969) consists of descriptions of the world, the city and how something begins and evolves, written in an accumulating structure. The textual material in question comprised a collage of the reviews and excerpts from the book by Christensen (see above, with reviews in green and Christensen's in red). Solli performed the text verbally and simultaneously moved through an accumulating composition, recalling forms from Høvik Ballett, performed with a decisiveness that was not present in the original material.

A clear correspondence appeared between the language in this book and accumulation as a compositional strategy, referencing Trisha Brown's solo work 'Accumulation' from 1971. The Judson Church movement, with its experimental dance practices, has been central to Western-centric education and understanding of dance history, and it existed as a ghost in *FFF*. But it was a ghost of ambivalence. Throughout the work carried out, I felt a resistance towards letting the canonised pioneers overwrite this local archive that has received

less recognition. It felt like an easy way out to just lean towards the parallel in the US. I started this work with a critical approach to my own understanding of the writing of history within my education and field, and the same questions as mine were raised by Aleida Assmann (2008) in the text 'Canon and Archive', about what falls out of our cultural memory and what tends to be centralised. Assmann wrote about the active and passive ways of remembering, and she proposed that the canon in our cultural history is made up of those actions or things from the past that we want to actively remember: 'Cultural memory contains a number of cultural messages that are addressed to posterity and intended for continuous repetition and re-use. To this active memory belong, among other things, works of art, which are destined to be repeatedly re-read, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented.' (Assmann 2008, 99).

In this regard, the status of the archive of Høvik Ballett is of varying character. Sigrid Øvreås Svendal produced a seminal work in which she interviewed many of the ballet's pioneers for her PhD research at the University of Oslo, and members of Høvik Ballett published a book containing images and memoirs for their 50th anniversary in 2019. Moreover, the Dance Archive of Dance Information Norway stands as an important resource in which select reviews and pieces of information about the company can be found. However, much of the archive is fragmented, stored in different places. Negatives can be found in metal boxes in the basement of Henie Onstad, and film documentation was deleted by NRK (The National Broadcasting Corporation). Materials exist, but '...they fall out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use', to reference Assman (2008, 99). This scattered status could be seen as an invitation to create a whole. This idea of wholeness, which a historian would strive towards while collecting and preserving materials, was something I actively had to resist in myself. It also felt like an easy way out, and it did not seem representative of either the memories or material that I wanted to investigate. To let the materials be as they were, stay with the ambivalence they gave us and treat them as questions, fragments and troubles felt key to the process. It seemed the way forward was that I refrain from saving them by aligning them with the American post-modern, and refrain from re-enacting them and announcing the resurrection of Høvik Ballett as a company or creating an illusion of a complete



*Magdalene Solli in Frå Form til Famling, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 2-5 November 2023. Photo by Josh Lake.*

archive by collecting and displaying materials for the audience. Rather, I saw that the archive opened up a radical possibility. If we considered the movements in the archive as having a life of their own, then these lives were potentially open to us and open to new interpretations, meanings and contexts. Assmann described the potential for this: '... they are de-contextualized and disconnected from their former frames which had authorized them or determined their meaning. As part of the archive, they are open to new contexts and lend themselves to new interpretations' (Assmann 2010, 99).

## **It- dance material**

The dance material in Solli's solo work started with an excerpt of the choreography for 'Ond Sirkel' (1969), shown on the TV program *Fra Famling til Form* (1969). Solli chose this excerpt and learned it by heart, and it led both to duo material with Ilse Ghekier and to a pedestrian phrase that became the opening material for the whole group. Furthermore, Solli used this material as a basis in her solo work, where she worked

with estrangement as a method for and effort to learn a new movement language, insisting on its autonomy and resisting familiarising it with the known (and probably canonised) dance conventions present in her body. She performed through a logic of accumulation and continuous sampling of the archival materials. In the following section, Solli describes this creation process and the performative parameters at work.

## The performative parameters

### Fields and grounds

There were several parameters contributing to the solo. It, intertwined with desires and workings, all affecting each other. The following is an attempt to put some of that into words.

With time, it became clear that the solo, in line with *Frå Form til Famling's* workings at large, needed to be thought of as a field, where several dance objects or dances co-existed and could be 'entered' and danced. As a performer, a dancer, my task was to be in that field. In this respect, my task was threefold: firstly, to perform the dances existing there; secondly, to somewhat 'instantly compose' the whole dance from start to finish following a principle of accumulation; and thirdly, to monologue a pre-recorded text I had playing in my earpiece.

I tried to work through these three tasks as separate automated flows that together created a solid foundation, applying my 'dance capacity' to manage the moments where cracks appeared between them. I felt these moments as when something seeped, or perhaps leaked. That something may have been a sensation, a feeling I could briefly allow myself to follow, producing a new shape, pattern, etc. In other words, I tried to detect, pay attention to and articulate when the layers clashed or correlated. In either case, there was the potential for something beyond the separate parts to occur, perhaps of significance.

A premise for the solo was to think of dances and shapes as autonomous things in themselves, and then to imagine both the sites of rehearsal and performance as spaces in which those dance things existed as solid part(s) of my immediate atmosphere. From there, dance(s) became things that could pass through me one by one, or simultaneously, colliding or collaborating – allowing for them to be rendered through my body in layers with friction and slither.

## Estrangement

When starting out, and choosing the archival material to depart from, I was immediately drawn to 'Ond Sirkel'. This was never performed in public, and it appeared very strange, in progress and unrealised as a dance piece. Still, there was something about the black-and-white footage of these young women with their smoky eyes and big hair updos dancing close together in sculptural forms, creating angular and tight shapes across the floor, that sparked my curiosity. Why did they move like that? It all seemed dated, with such unnecessary use of muscle power, tensions and force. I was reminded of something I had read a while ago, in Solveig's early proposal for *FFH*, along the lines of *no longer wanting to release*. Something fell into place – I could really resonate with that. Why would we? With so much needing our resistance and love, my trained dance desire to continuously allow, flow and release had already weakened. From my 'functional' dance training point of departure, I now found myself surprisingly pulled towards these completely absurd and strange shapes, the drama I sensed in them, the odd feeling of moving in such a tense body. It made me wonder if staying with the archive also meant staying with the current feel of it, a kind of estrangement, to insist on not making the familiar into known conventions, but to leap and learn, from the feeling of 'entering' these specific shapes, and from there try to understand something of the sensibilities of the dance. I had a desire to maintain a space between my body and the dance(s), to create both a separation and an intimacy at the same time, so that we perhaps both held some agency.

## Looking for the absence: Filters and accumulation

In thinking in line with Solveig about absences from the archive, we tried to 'filter' the archival fragments in terms of different dance styles, techniques, qualities and ways of moving, feeling our way around what the dance could have been – if only like this, if only like that. Once we tried to strip it down to its bare necessities in a postmodern and minimalist movement approach – what was the skeleton of this dance, in a functionalist, anatomically concerned manner? The outcome became what we call *the Phrase*. This was easily shared thanks to its simplicity; we taught it to the rest of the ensemble, and it became the basis for further explorations, both in solo and group work.

In solo work, given the simplicity and step-by-step, pedestrian logic the Phrase operated in, we felt curious to complexify not necessarily the Phrase itself, but the dancer's performance. Enthused at the prospect of finding ways to stretch the specific knowledge or specialisations we had – geeking out – we decided to appropriate the structure of 'Accumulation' by Trisha Brown, applying its compositional logic to the Phrase. This experiment gave us a taste for a continuous expansion of tasks, where we layered the solo-to-become with several tasks, rooted in an interest in the capacities of the performing body.

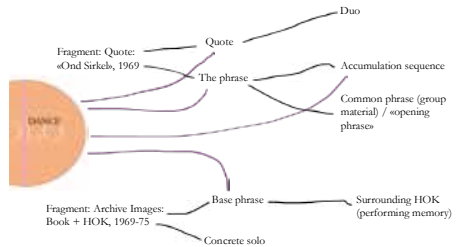
Whilst we generated ample amounts of that which was not there (material outcomes of the various modes of filtering, new compositional structures, etc.), I started to feel critical of our branching out, as if we were betraying the archive. I wanted to move closer to what was actually there in 'Ond Sirkel', to be deeply serious about the dances Høvik Ballett proposed.

## Living archive – Embodiment(s) – Learning a dance logic

The solo process at large produced several outcomes, beyond it described in this text, and unfolded as a way of learning, embodying, creating, feeling, thinking and understanding what a selection of 'dance things' in Høvik Ballett's proposal were, 'Ond Sirkel' with its dances and shapes being some of those. The length of the working period permitted on *Frå Form til Famling* was absolutely crucial for the outcomes that I partook in 'finding' and creating. This stretched over several years, which allowed for a practice of embodiment I rarely experience while working as a dancer in the independent dance field in Norway. I had time to get to know the dances in minute detail, attuning my body in how to best articulate them, sculpting around and with them.

During this process, I tried to keep my 'quests' in line with what the frames of the project made possible. I became curious as to what I could achieve with the time at hand, and I trained my body to become the 'Høvik Ballett body': to take in the language and movements, become as intimate as possible with the thing(s), the fragment and the dance, and from there, compose and dance this logic further into a fictional continuation of where they stopped. That is, I sought to pick up the forms again, and not repeat them, but continue to move somehow. Then again, I had all these questions

about why and how to be a living archive. I could not simply continue Høvik Ballett's project, which would be too simple of a move, or it could only be one of several ambitions. Instead, I became rather curious about how all the things the archive taught me could exist all at once.



## Automatisation – Repeating, rehearsing, training

Ultimately, the solo would end up comprising three outputs: the monologue of the text; the dance(s); and composition according to the principle of accumulation. I tried to enter a state of text delivery where the words simply flowed from my mouth as I heard them, allowing me to focus as much as I could on the movement simultaneously. The dance consisted of four dance objects: *the Quote*, *the Phrase*, *the Base Phrase* and *the Accumulation Sequence*. In order to achieve a similar continuous output with the dance(s), I automated these in my dancing body by rehearsing and learning certain patterns, steps, directions and rhythms. In order to achieve a steady, composed output flow aligning with the principle of accumulation, I decided on a metronomic pace, letting the movements unfold accumulatively (similarly to *the Accumulation Sequence* and 'Accumulation' by Trisha Brown). I would listen to songs with specific metrics during rehearsals and right before performing in order to have the beat in my body and move with the memory of it.

My strategy was that only things sufficiently automated could be part of the selection of objects entering into the 'field of the solo'. This was because I wanted to create surplus capacity to concentrate on the play, the sensations, feelings, correlations and contrasts between materials, accentuations, etc. In the moment of delivering the three outputs, I tried to continuously 'catch' this information and further physically articulate it at both the scales of gesture detail

and overall composition. This can perhaps be thought of as an attempt at instant composition, where I tried to ensure that the improvisational elements were chosen and informed, whilst also paying attention to the cracks in whatever fiction was rendered. To me, this was a way for the performed outputs of the solo to constantly make new connections, or never fully establish themselves into something that was perceived as stable, which I think would have been reductive of the archive.

## Metabolising?

A while after the performance, when talking to friends around the kitchen table, the word ‘embodiment’ was brought into question. None of us could really be too sure what place embodiment had in the process of becoming, or the state of being. This made me think. I had considered the learnings and intimacies with the dances of Høvik Ballett as a sort of embodiment process, but maybe it did not quite cover what I had experienced

when making *FFF?* The separations I wanted to create and uphold or even expand between me and the Høvik Ballett dance(s) were there and active, but over time, something had also moved in me, and at some point, in the process, the estrangement transformed and a desire to be changed by the dances appeared alongside – and so I was, and things also changed with that. All these forms, shapes and dances, I did not simply visit them, as they did not simply visit me, or if they did, they did so in a way that restructured my muscle fibres, coded my nervous system and sculpted my body. There is a kind of violence in this realm of real events, of what is actually happening when trying to articulate or concentrate specific movements through our soft bodies. These actions stand outside of literacy, so though I have tried my best to describe them here, they can never be fully articulated in words – to me, the work on *FFF?* lay in the realness of the movement processes, in the dancing, and not in this text that accompanies them.

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## Endnotes

1 Concept and choreography by Solveig Styve Holte. Created with and performed by Ilse Ghekiere, Terje Tjøme Mossige, Per Roar, and Magdalene Solli. Music by Ane Marthe Sørlie Holen, Jan Martin Smørdal and Kristine Tjøgersen. Costume design by Solveig Fagermo. Light design by Elisabeth Kjeldahl Nilsson. Sound design by Nikolai Høgseth. Production management by Kristin Skiftun.

2 This text concerns the lecture demonstration we held at the 16th NOFOD Conference. In the opening chapters and that titled The Choreographic Parameters, I is used to refer to Solveig Styve Holte, while in the chapter titled The Performative Parameters, I is used to refer to Magdalene Solli. Throughout the rest, we refers to our shared work and reflections during the process recounted in this text.

3 Høvik Ballett was the first independent, professional dance company in Norway, which existed from 1969 to 1989, located at the Henie Onstad Art Center in Høvikodden, which opened in 1968.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Solveig Styve Holte** (b. 1984) is a dancer, choreographer and currently a research fellow in the Department of Dance at Oslo Academy of the Arts (2019–2025), where she researches the usage of existing materials and historical archives in contemporary choreographic practice, emphasising questions of agency and shared authorship. Holte's recent works include *Frå Form til Famling* (2023) Henie Onstad Art Center, *Sixteen Dances* (2023) Rosendal Teater, *HORDE* (2021/22/23) MUNCH, Kilden and KIASMA and *Undying: A Handwork* (2022) National Museum Oslo. Holte is situated between Oslo and Folkestad, where she runs the choreographic centre YKS from her farm.

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**Magdalene Solli** (b. 1993) is an Oslo-based dancer working with performance and dance-making, as well as aspects of (experimental) education and critical text work. She is curious about what dance can contribute in any context or constellation and works on dance across genres in specialised dance groups, solo projects and cross-disciplinary collaborations. Her recent dance works include collaborations such as *Postludium 4ever* (Hommersåk/Hestånå Architecture & Taxonomic Triennale, Sandaker Senter, 2024), *Grotesker 1900-d.d.* (Black Box Teater, Oslo, 2023), *Muld* (Center424, Belgrade, 2022), and *dølge* (Dansens Hus and Nynorskens Hus, Oslo, 2022).

## Unlearning Dance: Reclaiming the Power of Dancing

Ieva Ginkevičiūtė and Indrė Gin

### ABSTRACT

The Unlearning Dance: Reclaiming the Power of Dancing research workshops, led by artists and educators Agus Margiyanto, Ieva Ginkevičiūtė, Indrė Gin, and Retno Sulistyorini, explore the unlearning dance process. This ongoing collective research aims to reconsider institutionalised and commercialised narratives in dance across various contexts, as these narratives often restrict personal expression and marginalise diverse cultural and individual perspectives. Through workshops and collaborative inquiry, the authors explore entrenched habits in dance education in terms of the body, myths, and power dynamics. The research workshops draw attention to how participants reconnect with their embodied memories, discover movement habits, and reclaim dance as subjective and inclusive practice. Ultimately, this research expands the understanding of dance as an evolving, decentralised form of expression, with significant implications for both education and performance.

### SAMMENDRAG

I workshopene "The Unlearning Dance: Reclaiming the Power of Dancing", ledet av kunstnere og pedagoger Agus Margiyanto, Ieva Ginkevičiūtė, Indrė Gin og Retno Sulistyorini, utforskes prosessen med å avlære dans. Dette pågående kollektive prosjektet har som mål å utfordre institusjonaliserte og kommersialiserte narrativer i dans på tvers av ulike kontekster, narrativer som ofte begrenser personlig uttrykk og marginaliserer mangfoldige kulturelle og individuelle perspektiver. Gjennom verksteder og samarbeidende undersøkelser utforsker forfatterne inngrodde vaner i danseutdanning når det gjelder kroppen, myter og maktdynamikk. I verkstedene rettes oppmerksomheten mot å gjenopprette forbindelsen med kroppslige minner, oppdage bevegelsesvaner og gjenvinne dans som en subjektiv og inkluderende praksis. Gjennom dette utforskende arbeidet utvides forståelsen av dans som en utviklende og desentralisert uttrykksform, noe som har en viktig betydning både for utdanning og scenisk dans.

# Unlearning Dance: Reclaiming the Power of Dancing

Ieva Ginkevičiūtė and Indre Gin

## Introduction

In this practice-oriented article, we invite you to read about the ongoing collective research led by artist Indre Gin, educator Ieva Ginkevičiūtė, and dancers and choreographers Agus Margiyanto and Retno Sulistyorini. The Unlearning Dance research emerges as a natural response to the artists' needs after long dance careers. The artists aim to disconnect from existing dance practices and theories, reclaiming their subjectivity. Unlearning practice can lead to a certain knowledge and subsequently shape a theory. Reconstructing the narrative of learning dance helps open other possible ways of working with dance.

Our research inquiry now centres on how the knowledge stored in our bodies – learned movements – can be reconfigured, how dance can be liberated from institutional constraints, and how creativity can be reignited through spontaneous, embodied expression. To illustrate these ideas, we share insights from a collaborative workshop we facilitated at the 16th NOFOD Conference, *The Dancer and the Dance: Practices, Education, Communities, Traditions, and Histories*, held in Oslo in April 2024.

## Conceptual Framework

“Dancers must hack their basic movement programs in order to adapt to new movements.”

—Steve Paxton (2018, 21), *Gravity*, Contredanse Edition.

The Unlearning Dance workshop involves more than just forgetting specific knowledge; it is about embracing the unknown and rediscovering our bodies' innate abilities to move creatively. This concept acknowledges that our understanding of dance is not only intellectual but also deeply embodied, shaping how we perform, think, and discuss movement. The Unlearning Dance workshop serves as an exploration of bodily memories, inviting

people to rethink learned dance and the embedded knowledge. Through this process, participants are encouraged to challenge their *know how* and dancing body habits to open up the questions of what we already know as a collective or individuals and what we do with the knowledge as such.

*Imagine yourself in a dance workshop where the radio is on, there is no teacher, and you are left with only yourself, the music that you don't need to choose, and the questions surrounding you. What do you do? What begins to surface from your memory? What do you notice about the movements you're making? Why was this movement the first to emerge? And if you're sharing this space with others, how do you experience being together?*

The first part of the Unlearning Dance workshop (research practice) begins with an experience that invites participants to reflect on their personal histories with dance, including their earliest memories. This scenario invites a process of self-reflection and exploration, encouraging them to tap into spontaneous movements, memories, and sensations that may be influenced by past training, experiences, or cultural contexts.

We note that we distance ourselves from any association with dance therapy or similar practices. Rather, our approach is to challenge the traditional structure and dynamic in which the main part of learning dance is dictated by the person in power – the one who *knows how to do it*. In this workshop, we decentralise and delete teachers' figures from the process; there is no teacher while you experience the Unlearning Dance workshop. In the space, there is only music (radio) and provoking questions on posters, with three main questions:

- What was dance to you when you were little?
- What is dance?
- What is dance now?



This design of the experience fosters personal discovery and renews the encounter with one's dance. Participants connect with both their past and present selves, cultivating an embodied understanding of dance within.

The second part of the Unlearning Dance workshop (research practice) focuses on collecting data from various participants across diverse contexts, reflecting the global nature of our collective, which spans different continents. We all focus on a couple of topics: the myths surrounding dance, the dance body, and the choreographic body. From this reflective exercise, valuable insights are produced regarding how these myths shape perceptions of who can dance, how dance should be performed, and the limitations placed on the body in choreographic practices. Participants in this process challenge their own notions, looking for a deeper understanding of the ways in which societal and institutional beliefs have influenced their own bodies and understandings about dance.

Through the Unlearning Dance workshop (research practices), participants with Western perspectives began to confront deeply embedded narratives about dance, such as the belief that only certain bodies are capable of dancing. By dismantling long-held myths – such as *dance has to be logical or only talented people can dance* – they reclaimed the freedom to move beyond societal pressures and performance expectations. Participants also engaged with the embodied memories connected to institutionalised dance training. By exploring alternative pathways to engage with dance, they were

able to identify ingrained habits and learning patterns. This process encouraged them to reflect more deeply on how to break free from these established norms and find new approaches to movement and self-expression.

In this context, unlearning dance became a way of confronting the legacy of institutionalised, commercialised, and centralised dance practices. As part of this research, we recently began collecting data in Java (Indonesia), where diverse cultural and social contexts have led to distinct ways of practising dance. This shift allowed us to highlight and give more visibility to decentralised forms of knowledge, acknowledging the value of local and community-based dance traditions that often remain overlooked in mainstream dance discourse.

Across the globe, so-called traditional dance institutions often preserve specific techniques and styles, creating a selective memory of movement that marginalises or erases others. The Unlearning Dance research explores the space for resisting these institutionalised memories of dance, challenging the dominant narratives and practices that have shaped dance education and performance. It seeks to open up possibilities for reimagining dance beyond the constraints of standardised techniques, fostering a more inclusive and diverse understanding of movement that acknowledges various cultural, historical, and individual experiences.

Several key insights have emerged, directly connected to the workshop activities so far:

- *Dismantling myths:* Many participants reflected on how the workshop helped them shed long-held beliefs.
- *Reclaiming freedom:* Numerous participants reported feeling liberated from the societal pressures and performance expectations that had previously limited their engagement with dance. As one participant noted, “I realised dance doesn't need to follow strict rules or be logical; it can just be a natural extension of how I feel.”
- *Embodied memory:* Participants reflected on how their bodies had internalised specific dance forms that often felt restrictive or unfamiliar. These embodied memories were typically tied to past experiences in formal dance training and institutions.



## Further Development of the Unlearning Dance Research

The Unlearning Dance collective research will delve more deeply into incorporating storytelling and video documentation methods, ultimately broadening its reach and exploring its transformative potential, always in a dialogic manner with matter. Collectively, we will deepen the theoretical and practical foundation and conduct further research about memories and dance, collaborating with experts in neuroscience, somatic practices, and embodied cognition to uncover how the body stores learned habits and how these habits can be disrupted.

Further questions to be explored include the following:

1. How does body memory change over time?
2. How does institutionalisation impact the evolution and expression of dance forms?
3. What role do personal and cultural narratives play in how dance is remembered and performed?
4. How can the process of decentralisation foster dance and other movement possibilities?

Insights from this research will inform further workshop design, allowing for other approaches to facilitating Unlearning Dance as a workshop. The Unlearning Dance research is a process of raising questions – whether simple or complex – and intentionally transforming and shaking ingrained dance habits. This practice involves resisting the urge to perform or meet specific standards, instead focusing on unlearning them. It is also about recognising the body's library of experiences and knowledge and reclaiming the power to express our subjectivity. We also see the dance as a reflection of itself. Through the ongoing development of the Unlearning Dance workshop, we aim to help participants reclaim

their dance and rethink their relationship with dance in society. By continuing to research, we hope to cultivate an environment in which movement is not confined to learned techniques but is an ever-evolving expression of the self.

## BIOGRAPHIES

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## Chakras and Shingles—Historical Fragments of the Chakra System in Contemporary Yoga

Camilla Damkjær

### ABSTRACT

*After a few days with intense yoga training, curious red spots occurred on the back across my shoulder. Curiously, it appeared right after a period where I had been reading about the chakras. So I could not help noticing that the rash was on the left side of the back, right at the heart chakra.*

With the global growth of postural yoga, various concepts connected to yoga have become more visible in the landscape of movement practices. One such concept is the chakra system. However, it can be challenging for a practitioner to fully grasp the significance of the system in a given context. In this article, I explore how a complex inheritance of ideas related to the chakra system, rooted in different cultures and periods, continues to reappear in contemporary yoga.

### SAMMANFATTNING

*Efter en period med inten yogapraktik, fick jag plötsligt ett konstigt rött utslag över axeln. Efter som yogapraktiken innehöll tankar om chakrasystemet, kunde jag inte låta bli att fråga: "varför just över hjärtchakrat?".*

Med den globala tillväxten av postural yoga som fysisk praktik, har också chakrasystemet så som det används i yoga blivit mer synligt. Däremot kan det vara svårt för utövare att få grepp om hur systemet används, vilka ideer det har ackumulerat över tid och varifrån, och vad systemet laddas med i en given context. In denna artikel, kommer jag därför utforska hur chakrasystemet bär med sig ett komplext arv av olika ideer, praktiker, tider och kulturer – genom berättelsen om ett utslag på axeln.

# Chakras and Shingles—Historical Fragments of the Chakra System in Contemporary Yoga

Camilla Damkjær

## Infection

*After a few days with intense yoga training, curious red spots occurred on the back across my shoulder. A serious red rash, itchy and painful. I ended up at the doctor's. "It's the shingles!", the doctor exclaimed. The memories of a publicity for the vaccine came to my mind: "Are you a climber/sportsman/marathon runner? – You can also get ill with shingles." Curiously, it appeared right after a period where I had been reading about the chakras. So I could not help noticing that the rash was on the left side of the back, right at the heart chakra.*

## Introduction

The global growth of postural yoga has led to the increased visibility of various concepts connected to yoga within the landscape of movement practices. One such concept is the chakra system. However, yoga practitioners may find it challenging to understand the meanings and implications of the system in different contexts. To address this issue, in this article, I explore how a complex heritage of ideas related to the chakra system, rooted in different cultures and periods, may reappear in contemporary yoga.

The research question that I explore in this article is "How might the residues of historical ideas about the chakra system continue to influence the yoga practitioner's embodied experience in contemporary yoga?"

I will approach the question methodologically through an auto-ethnographic study of my personal experience of encountering terms related to chakras within yoga practice. Specifically, I examine a period when I was ill with shingles and simultaneously reading Anodea Judith's book *Wheels of Life - The Classic Guide to the Chakra System* (Judith 2019, first published 1987). I contextualise the question within an overview of key historical shifts in the development of the chakra system and employ Diana Taylor's concept of performance

"scenarios" (Taylor 2007) to understand how historical fragments may re-appear in practice. I aim to initiate a discussion on how a historically contextualised understanding of the chakra system could contribute to the development of yoga practice.

## Literature review

Many texts written for yoga and alternative health environments could be analysed to examine how chakras are presented today. However, due to space constraints, I will only analyse parts of Judith's *Wheels of Life* (Judith 2019), as it played a key role in the auto-ethnographical situation of my study.

For the purpose of this article, I focus on previous research on the chakra system in different historical contexts, from pre-modern medieval *hatha*<sup>1</sup> yoga in India to the chakra system as understood in the Euro-American contemporary context. This also means that I will not address other types of research, such as research that explores whether there is any scientific evidence for the chakras (e.g. Maxwell 2009, Moga 2022). While I see such proposals as part of a historical development, discussing the scientific bearing of different biological explanations is beyond the scope of this article. Similarly, I will not discuss research that examines whether practice based on the chakra system can entail measurable healing effects (e.g. Kashyap et al. 2023).

For my discussion on medieval *hatha* yoga, I will refer mostly to James Mallinson and Mark Singleton's overview (Mallinson and Singleton 2017). More research is available on specific *hatha* yoga texts (Hatley 2020, Westoby 2018 and forthcoming book). However, exploring further details of the original texts is not within the scope of this article. Regarding the transition from early tantric traditions to medieval *hatha* yoga, I will primarily reference David Gordon White (2003), as his hypothesis of internalisation is particularly relevant to this discussion.

Extensive research has been conducted on the transformation of yoga in the modern Euro-American context (e.g. de Michaelis 2005, Singleton 2010, Foxen 2020). However, as my focus is specifically on the chakra system, I will primarily refer to Kurt Leland's (2016) study on the transformation of the chakra system in the modern Euro-American context.

To understand how history is re-actualised in practice, I will refer to Diana Taylor's concept of performance scenarios as presented in *The Archive and the Repertoire – Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Taylor 2007). This concept has been developed to highlight the role of embodied and oral culture in the transmission of cultural practices (Taylor 2007, 16). A 'scenario' is an open structure that guides how a performance (broadly understood) unfolds. Through this unfolding, different elements from the 'archive' or the 'repertoire' are activated. While the 'archive' consists of documents, texts and material traces, the 'repertoire' consists of embodied practices and behaviours that 'enact embodied memory' (Taylor 2007, 20). Thus, embodied dialogues between the archive and the repertoire occur within scenarios. This process is complex, often in ways that transcend the full awareness of the participants. Indeed, the 'scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes' (Taylor 2007, 28). This may even activate conflictual histories beyond the participants' deliberate intention. As Taylor writes, 'It also haunts our present, a form of hauntology (...) that resuscitates and reactivates old dramas' (Taylor 2007, 28). Here, I propose that the chakra system functions as such a scenario.

In the remainder of the article, I will begin by discussing some of the fundamental differences between various historical understandings of the body. I will then unfold my personal embodied encounter with fragments from the chakra system, gradually moving back through time. Finally, I will summarise how historical fragments may affect contemporary yoga practitioners.

## Clashing maps of the body

*The medical explanation of shingles is that the chicken pox virus stays in the body for life once you have had it as a child. Later on, it may erupt as a rash of shingles at moments when your immune system is low or in situations of stress. The rash can appear*

*anywhere, but the virus always follows the nerve paths and therefore the rash only appears on one side of the spine. A chain of thoughts ensued in my mind: was the yoga I had practiced a little too intense? Did something stress my immune system?*

One of the difficulties within contemporary yoga practice is how to navigate between different maps of the body and their historical contexts. Today, the dominance of the bio-medical view of the body has affected the field to the extent that Mallinson and Singleton conclude that '(o)ne of the primary conceptual frameworks for the body of the yoga practitioner in today's modern, globalized yoga is the empirical, anatomical, biological and bio-medical body' (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 171).

However, concepts, ideas and images from earlier yoga history also circulate. Concepts such as *nādis* (channels) and *chakras* are recuperated from pre-modern *hatha* yoga but are reactivated in ways that are specific for today. Thus, a displacement may happen 'when terms from yogic physiology are imported into modern practices of yoga and reinterpreted within cultural and hermeneutic parameters far removed from pre-modern ones' (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 171). Thus, compared to pre-modern *hatha* yoga, the understanding of the body has been reinterpreted twice: first, through a bio-medical, anatomical lens, and second, through the modern reinterpretation of pre-modern concepts. The chakra system has been part of this double transformation, as it has been both compared to the biological body and used as the framework for the development of new practices.

For the contemporary yoga practitioner, this transformation may be experienced as a conflict between ideas. For instance, while the chakra system has its origin in pre-modern *hatha* yoga, in an attempt to understand it through a biological lens, one may ask what the chakras correspond to in biological terms. This effort to determine if there is a biological base for the chakras is a part of the historical development. However, while the biomedical body refers to an empirical body that can be observed by the scientist, the pre-modern yoga body was conceptualised as points of meditation meant to be experienced by the practitioner. Mallinson and Singleton (2017) describe it as follows: 'yogic bodies arise according to the particular ritual, philosophical or doctrinal requirements of the tradition at hand, and (...) they

are the expressions of these requirements, rather than descriptions of self-evident, empirical bodies common to all humans' (172).

The elements, centres and energies of the premodern yogic body thus encompass the physical, mental, ritual and metaphysical. When *haṭha* yoga was developed in medieval India, the idea was to manipulate these psycho-physical centres concretely through practice. The purpose was not simply exercise or health but 'to attain special powers (*vibhūti*, *siddhi*) or to reach liberation from embodied rebirth (*mokṣa*, *mukti*, *kaivalya*, *nirvāṇa*)' (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 171). In other words, the purpose was a soteriological one—spiritual liberation. Although Hatley (2024) suggests that these premodern practices were influenced by the medical concepts of the time, these concepts remained considerably different from today's. Thus, trying to align the biomedical, anatomical understanding with the medieval chakras' position in the body involves reconciling two fundamentally different perspectives on the body.

## The heart chakra, *anāhata chakra*

*As I came home from the doctor's, another line of thought appeared in my head. What if I understood the situation through the chakras instead. Had I upset my heart chakra? Out of curiosity, I turned to Anodea Judith's Wheels of Life – The Classic Guide to the Chakra System (Judith 2019). It advised, among other things, heart-opening postures. She described the process of healing the heart chakra as a way of "creating affinity" between "the composite parts of the self" (Judith 2019, 208). Indeed, "All it really takes is checking in with yourself now and then. (...) See if you get a hello in return. Begin a dialogue. Are there ways you could treat yourself better?" (Judith 2019, 209)*

According to Anodea Judith's presentation of the chakra system, all seven chakras must be balanced to obtain balance in life. The heart chakra is a central piece in this balancing, as its task is 'to integrate and balance the various aspects of our being. In so doing, it brings a radiant sense of wholeness to the entire organism (...) Within this sense of wholeness lie the seeds of inner peace' (Judith 2019, 192).

Judith defines chakras as '*an organizational center for the reception, assimilation, and transmission of life energy*' (Judith 2019, 24, italics

in original). She refers to a tantric and *haṭha* yogic understanding of the chakras, synthesising these ideas with other elements from yoga philosophy, psychology, physics, medical science and mythology in a poetic way. Through this, she attempts to provide guidance on balancing the chakras. Each chakra can be 'closed, excessive or deficient, or any of the various stages in between' (Judith 2019, 25). When the chakra is either too open or too closed, it 'may need healing by uncovering and removing whatever is blocking it' (Judith 2019, 25).

The method proposed for healing involves '*tuning into that area of the body*' (Judith 2019, 26, italics in original) in order to '*examine the meaning and function of that particular chakra*' (Judith 2019, 27, italics in original), and then engage with physical exercises, processes of symbolic visualisations, 'working through your feelings and values' (Judith 2019, 27). In this way, one might bring the chakras back into balance. As she writes in the chapter on the heart chakra:

'Each chakra receives its charge of energy by being in alignment with the sushumna, as the central column of energy. If we are not in balance with ourselves, our chakras fall out of alignment, much as the vertebrae in the spine call fall out of alignment. Unfortunately, there are no "chakra-practors" to put them back in place. This is something that we must do ourselves.' (Judith 2019, 205)

This idea of a 'chakra-practor' is particularly interesting, as it succinctly combines the premodern *haṭha* vocabulary of the Suṣumnā channel with a psychological framework and an anatomically influenced idea of postural alignment. This idea of postural alignment is extremely central in today's postural yoga.

The heart chakra holds special significance in Judith's system, as it is presented as an emotional centre. If it is out of balance, the system 'suffers the greatest loss, and causes the greatest damage if it should fall too far out of its place' (Judith 2019, 205). On the other hand, the heart chakra also has healing potential. As she writes:

'Opening the heart chakra and developing compassion, connection, and understanding for those around you naturally gives rise to the urge to heal (...) When our heart chakras are open and balanced, our very presence radiates

love and joy. This love is the essence of true healing.' (Judith 2019, 205)

As for all chakras, Judith recommends specific postures, referred to as 'heart-openers', to activate and balance the heart chakra. 'Heart-opening' and 'heart-openers' are common terms within contemporary yoga for postures that help to open and extend the upper thoracic region. In addition, the chapter includes breathing and meditation exercises, especially those focused on compassion. Thus, the proposed self-healing system is based on the analogical relation between a physiological space in the body and a psychological effect.

In this way, Judith's chakra system provides a system of self-diagnosis, psychological reflection and body-mind practice for obtaining a better understanding of oneself and potential healing. Thus, it also proposes to integrate ideas from premodern *hatha* yoga practice with medical ideas of diagnosis, biomechanical ideas of postural alignment and psychological ideas of well-being and personal development. Judith's text also functions as a scenario for practice, instructing practitioners on how to visualise the chakras, understand what they represent symbolically and how one can access them through physical practices; practitioners can thus employ the scenario as a tool. This scenario is built on the idea of a vertical line of centres in the body. However, as I will show in the following discussion, this basic structure of the chakra system has evolved significantly over time.

## Tracing the 'Western chakra system'

Anodea Judith's model is representative of how the chakras are presented today (Leland 2016, 370). As illustrated by the passages I have analysed, many layers of discourse overlap. In addition, each chakra is presented as being connected to specific Sanskrit syllables, specific metals and gemstones, as well as different endocrine glands. This combination sparked my interest in investigating the development of the chakra system.

Tracking the history of the development of the chakra system is a complex task. Fortunately, Kurt Leland has provided insights in *Rainbow Body: A History of the Western Chakra System from Blavatsky to Brennan* (Leland 2016). According to Leland, the chakra system, as it is known today, is largely

influenced by Western movements of ideas. He speaks of the 'Western chakra system', in contrast to the earlier 'Eastern chakra system', on which it is loosely based<sup>2</sup>.

As Leland shows, the Western chakra system has been influenced, especially by the Theosophical movement (Leland 2016, 91–122). The Theosophical Society was an occult, esoteric movement that had a widespread influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The movement sought to obtain spiritual enlightenment employing methods such as mystical experiences and clairvoyance. Theosophy developed an extensive cosmology of planes and auras, and to describe these planes, the chakras were included. In an attempt to determine 'correspondences' between these elements, the movement was, according to Leland, also influenced by Swedenborg (Leland 2016, 82). Through these correspondences, the chakra system could integrate ever more elements, including colours, gemstones, body parts and mythological systems.<sup>3</sup>

Theosophy's influence extended widely through its international branches and publications. Furthermore, with the involvement of South Asians in the organisation and its emphasis on studying 'the ancient wisdom of the Hindus as contained in known texts' (Leland 2016, 94), it functioned as a cultural bridge. Some of the earliest translations of premodern texts mentioning the chakras were disseminated in these publications (Leland 2016, 98).

In one of the first publications within the Theosophical Society, efforts were made to anatomically localise the chakras, reflecting an attempt to merge the premodern *hatha* yoga systems with modern anatomy and science. An example is Baman Das Basu's 1888 text, 'The Anatomy of the Tantras' (Leland 2016, 199), which attempted to link the chakras to a biological location; this idea has many subsequent expressions.

Through Leland's work, we can follow the development of the anatomical interpretation of the chakras in Judith's *Wheels of Life*. According to Leland, Judith follows the mapping of the chakras by Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater in *The Chakras: A Monograph* (1927). Leadbeater, in turn, followed an earlier mapping by the Indian medical physician Vasant G. Rele in 1927 (Leland 2017, 101). Leadbeater, writing within a Theosophist frame, envisioned the chakras as linked to different organs in the torso. This mapping was later expanded with Alice Bailey's correlation of the

chakras with different endocrine glands in *The Soul and Its Mechanism* (1930) (Leland 2017, 221). Judith continues this association of chakras with endocrine glands, for instance, by correlating the heart chakra with the thymus (Judith 2019, 190).

According to Leland, the main difference between the 'Eastern' and the 'Western' chakra systems lies in their respective purposes. As Leland writes, the Eastern system, based on tantric thinking and premodern *haṭha* yoga, is about a soteriological process, leading to spiritual liberation (Leland 2016, 42). In contrast, the Western system focuses on the possible rewards in this world (Leland 2016, 43). Anodea Judith advocates this idea of the chakras as a tool for personal development in this life. Kurt Leland interprets Judith's book as one participating in the systematisation and consolidation of the 'Western chakra system' (Leland 2016, 370), whose residues are often encountered by today's yoga practitioners. However, it is important to be aware that this syncretic system is considerably far from that of premodern *haṭha* yoga.

## Premodern chakra systems in *tantra* and *haṭha* Yoga

*After the doctor's diagnosis, I was given some anti-viral pills, and also tried some heart-opening postures. At the same time, I started wondering how the heart chakra was understood in the pre-modern Eastern chakra system. Given that I was on the look-out for a way to interpret an eruption of shingles, I even played with a speculative question: what would a pre-modern haṭha yogi have thought about a bothersome rash on the shoulder...*

Leland's work is not dedicated to an analysis of the 'Eastern chakra system'. Instead, his description of this system functions as a background to understand to which extent the 'Western chakra system' has developed independently. Leland therefore examines the first Western scholarly account of the Eastern system—Sir John Woodroffe's (a pseudonym of Arthur Avalon) *Serpent Power* (1919), which included a translation of the 16th-century *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*. This translation contributed to the spreading of the chakra system and became 'the end point of the Eastern system and the starting point for the development of the Western system' (Leland 2016, 47).

The history of the development of the tantric and *haṭha* yogic understanding of the chakras in

medieval India is far too complex for me to fully unfold here. However, to provide a sense of how this system has been reinterpreted, I will offer a brief overview. The Sanskrit word 'chakra' simply means circle or wheel. The idea of chakras in the body was first articulated systematically within tantric texts from around the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century and later developed within *haṭha* yoga during the 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century. Tantra, a movement that crossed the boundaries of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, underlined the possibility of obtaining spiritual liberation through bodily rituals, which in some traditions involved transgressing taboos. *Haṭha* yoga, a development of yoga in medieval India, viewed manipulation of the body as an important part of ritual practice, and it was thought that one could reach macrocosmic energies through the microcosm of the body.

The idea of chakras was an important element in these traditions, but they were just one element with many variations. As Mallinson and Singleton (2017) observe, 'the *chakras* were not always such a ubiquitous feature of yoga traditions and alternative or complementary schemata are common' (175). Indeed, many variations in the naming and conceptual understanding of chakras can be found. Apart from chakras, texts also mention "*padmas*" (lotuses) or "*granthis*" (knots). Furthermore, the number of chakras varied across different systems. While the most common belief was that there were six chakras (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 175), some systems included different numbers, such as four, five, nine or eleven.

As Mallinson and Singleton describe, the chakras in this tradition are 'subtle focuses for meditation distributed along the central channel of the body' (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 175). However, as the chakras were part of ritual practice and not an element of the anatomical body, they do not always have a concrete location. Instead, they were 'part of a visualized installation on the body of tradition-specific metaphysics and ritual schemata' (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 175).

According to Mallinson and Singleton (2017, 177), the earliest text that builds a consistent system with six chakras is the *Netrat Tantra* (800–850 CE), and a similar system is consolidated in the *Kubjikāmatatantra* (ca.10<sup>th</sup> century). This text was part of the tantric Western transmission tradition of Kaula Śaivism. A similar idea spread in the Southern transmission and was further distributed through two of the important ascetic

yogi lineages—the *Nāths* and the *Samnyāsīs*. The chakra system began to spread across cultures following the translation of a text from the Southern Transmission, the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* (“The Description of the Six Chakras”), by Avalon.

A reasonable question that arises is the origin of the seventh chakra, which is now present in the Western chakra system. Apparently, a seventh chakra appears in, for instance, the *Śivasamhitā* (ca.1700 CE) and the *Tirumandiram* (possibly 13<sup>th</sup> century) (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 177). However, it is unlikely that it was through these texts that the Western chakra system first incorporated a seventh chakra. As far as I can determine, the general knowledge of these texts spread after the development of the Western seven chakra system. Instead, as Leland suggests, the inclusion of a seventh chakra in the Western chakra system might be a consequence of Blavatsky’s theosophical teachings, where Blavatsky aimed to correlate different systems based on the idea of seven (Leland 2016, 125).

## Chakras in the body– or what the *haṭha* yogi might have thought about a rash

*I allow myself for a moment to imagine what a pre-modern haṭha yogi might have thought of a rash on the shoulder. It seems that the haṭha yogi might have thought that the yogic practices had not been carried out correctly. Indeed, the Haṭhapradīpikā is quite literal on this point: ‘All diseases are destroyed by correct pranayama. As a result of incorrect practice, any disease may arise.’ (Svātmārāma 2024, 2.16).*

As previously noted, the premodern *haṭha* yogi focused on internal processes in the body as a subject of meditation within a soteriological perspective. The goal of the practice was to obtain liberation. However, there were several parallel goals—such as being free of disease, avoiding old age and death and obtaining supernatural powers known as *siddhis*<sup>4</sup>. In the *Netratāntra*, where the six chakra system is first seen, the goal of yoga is expressed as obtaining ‘a divine body free from all diseases’ (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 203). To reach this state, the text suggests that ‘(The yogi) should pierce all (the chakras) (...) with his spear of knowledge’ (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 203).

To understand what ‘piercing’ could signify in this context, we must analyse what Mallinson and

Singleton (2017) have called ‘the Kuṇḍalinī model’ (180). Over time, the idea developed that the yogi should raise the breath and vital fluids upwards through the different chakras using different embodied techniques. In this tantric-inspired model, it is believed that the *kuṇḍalinī* (meaning the divine feminine energy or *śakti*) lies coiled at the bottom of the spine, and through practice, she can be raised, piercing the chakras on her way, thus accessing the nectar of immortality, *amṛta*, accumulated in the head. It was thought that ‘(t)his process gives rise to special powers (*siddhis*) and ultimately (...) to liberation (*mokṣa*) or immortality’ (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 178).

One of the most well-known places where this idea of raising the *kuṇḍalinī* is expressed is in the 15th-century compendium *Haṭhapradīpikā*. In the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, this upward movement is described as ‘an auspicious thunderbolt that raises *kuṇḍalinī*, destroys bad deeds, bestows happiness’ (Svātmārāma 2024, 2.67). This involves a ‘piercing’ too: ‘When the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī* awakens through the favour of the guru, then all the lotuses are pierced, and the knots too’ (Svātmārāma 2024, 3.2).

## Chakras outside the body – Treating chicken pox with ritual

*As I continued reading the symptoms of shingles in the light of the haṭha yogic understanding of the chakras, I directed my attention towards upward-going sensations in the body. However, the only one I could detect was a worrying tingling in the skin on the top of my head as the virus activated the nerves from the shoulders up to the top of my head...*

To better understand the ritual background of the concept of *kuṇḍalinī*, it might be useful to look further back in history and consider the hypothesis proposed by David Gordon White. In his analysis of tantric rituals in *The Kiss of the Yogini – “Tantric Sex” in its South Asian Context* (White 2003), White proposes that *haṭha* yoga builds on an internalisation into the body of tantric rituals that had played out in external space. He proposes that earlier tantric goddess rituals were reinterpreted and now rendered internal to the body. White describes the process as follows:

‘We have already noted that Hindus have been worshipping groups of Mothers (*mātṛcakras*) since at least the sixth century. These were

circular arrays of goddesses “in the world”, that is, outside the body, circles representing mandalas of every sort, including the circular hypaethral Yoginī temples. The gradual internalization of these powerful female entities was affected by internalizing their formations into the hierarchized chakras of the yogic body’. (White 2003, 222)

Prior to this internalisation, tantric rituals, or more specifically, the *kula* or *kaula* traditions, dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century, played out in external spaces. These rituals often took place outside the village in burial grounds or places of worship dedicated to different goddesses associated with the ‘yoginī’. The *yoginīs* (who were known by many names) were believed to be demi-goddesses, sometimes manifested in beings such as snakes, cats, felines or birds. However, in the rituals, they were also represented by actual, living, embodied women. To master their forces, sexual fluids were extracted, mixed and drunk—concretely or symbolically—to gain the favours of the *yoginīs*. Their forces were sought after to obtain longevity, supernatural powers or control diseases (White 2003).

Though it is difficult to assess the details of White’s work, given that it reaches over vast periods and areas, the broad line of the argument of internalisation is interesting. For my understanding of how the chakras might have been used in earlier practices related to health, there is yet another compelling detail. One aspect of these various goddesses was that they were thought to be responsible for disease. As presented by White, in one of their earliest versions, they are conceived of as ‘seizers’ (*grahas*), and they are understood to be responsible for various diseases, such as ‘potentially fatal childhood conditions of chicken pox, measles, et cetera’ (White 2003, 59).

## The chakra system as a scenario

*As I thus return to the chicken pox virus – and its later eruption as shingles in adults - it is thought-proving to think of how the goddesses related to the Yoginīs, worshipped in circles/chakras, were thought to be responsible for childhood illnesses. In this understanding, an eruption of the skin would not be interpreted as a lack of emotional balance, or a misconducted yoga practice, but a consequence of the person being “seized” by an external force.*

Leland’s analysis of the historical development of the chakra system reveals how it is constantly refashioned through processes of omission and addition. Leland attributes this mainly to faulty knowledge transmission, shaped by different variations of ‘source amnesia’ such as ‘unintentional vagueness’, ‘careless scholarship’ or ‘broken transmission’ (Leland 2016, 80–81). However, if we consider the transmission of the chakra system not as a transmission of textual understanding but as that of a scenario, we can view this process as a dialogue between the archive (or whatever part of it practitioners have had access to) and the repertoire of different evolving practices.

In all the historical instances I have examined, we can understand the chakra system as a scenario that guides practice. In Judith’s contemporary system, it is a tool for self-development. In medieval *hatha* yoga, it was part of the manuals for psycho-physical practices. In the tantric tradition, it was part of rituals played out in open spaces. In all cases, the chakras function as a structure to channel a process. The key element, especially in the medieval *hatha* yogic system and its later translations into modern systems, is the idea of a central line with a number of centres along the body. This visual idea then becomes connected to different verbs. In the *Kuṇḍalinī* model, the key verb is ‘raising’. In the contemporary model, represented by Judith, the key verb is ‘balancing’. The combination of an image of a vertical line and a verb suggests practices that may be performed, felt or imagined.

Thus, the scenario of the chakra system can come to carry many different associations, nuances and ideas through repetition and transformation across different historical, cultural and social contexts. Therefore, the chakra system is not just a single scenario but a scenario with multiple variations. Taylor (2017) describes a scenario as something sufficiently coherent to be identified and yet malleable so that it can be reactivated, or as she writes, ‘its portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats’ (28). Indeed, the chakra system shows this combination of coherence and flexibility.

## Full circle

The question I started with was how the residues of historical ideas about the chakra system may

continue to influence the yoga practitioner's embodied experience in contemporary yoga. As I have proposed, these residues may be activated as fragments, due to the way the chakra system functions as a scenario with multiple variations. As a prompt for practice, the system can be re-embodied, even without full access to all aspects of the chakra system's history. Thus, different elements of history resurface, sometimes hauntingly. By viewing the chakra system as a scenario, we can recognise its embodied processes and openness, allowing for its constant transformation and reimagining within new social and cultural conditions.

Engaging with the scenario of the chakra system may be a complex process for the individual practitioner. As the analysis of the auto-ethnographical situation shows, the historical fragments that resurface may give rise to cognitive dissonance. However, though the conflict between different models of the body may be experienced as confusing, the openness of the chakra system may also create curiosity. Indeed, the openness of the system allows the practitioner to choose what is the most valuable in a given situation. For some practitioners, the interest might lie in embodied sensorial or psychological discoveries. For others, it may be the way the system opens a sphere understood as spiritual. Thus, the practitioner can, to some extent, create a tool to suit their individual needs.

There is reason to believe that people are sincerely drawn to contemporary yoga's construction of ideas because it allows them to make some sense of processes in their lives—even if that sense may not correspond to earlier yoga systems in history or to biomedical research. Practitioners and teachers of yoga are constantly trying to find ways to engage with practices that make sense today. The process of reinterpreting existing practices, tools and concepts involves a process of re-creation and reimagining of meaning. The fragments of history are thus experienced in the middle of such a process of meaning-making.

Rather than seeing the historical context of the chakra system as diminishing the possibilities of evoking the chakras in practice, I see it as an opportunity to deepen yoga practitioners' relation to the chakras. Full knowledge of the chakra system's complex history is unattainable for any individual yoga practitioner, teacher or scholar. There will inevitably be omissions and lacuna in every transmission. However, in recent years, the

growing interest in yoga has also led to increased research into yoga history. This makes it possible to discuss the origins of ideas, how they might be integrated in practice, and which embodied experiences they can allow. Understanding the historical context of an idea may contribute to new ways of imaginatively employing it within practice.

*Thus, I have come full circle. I never fully understood why I got ill with shingles. When trying to read the symptoms through different ideas about the chakras, mostly confusion ensued. I was invited to interpret my life situation, psychology and yoga practice, but all the answers as to what might have caused the rash were open-ended. However, the experience was invested with new meanings, as the chakras brought me on a historical and cultural journey. In the end, the virus gave way. Only the tingling feeling from the shoulder to the top of the head stayed on, as a reminder of the capacity of scenarios to pass on elements of history into today's embodied practice.*

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## Endnotes

- 1 Judith's table of correspondences includes Sanskrit name, meaning, location, element, energy state, psychological function, resulting in, identity, orientation to self, demon, developmental stage, glands, other body parts, malfunction, colour, seed sound, vowel sound, sephiroth, planets, metals, foods, gemstones, incense, yoga path, rights and gunas (Judith 2019, 42–44).
- 2 Leland's use of the terms 'Western chakra system' and 'Eastern chakra system' highlights the historical development of the chakras outside of India and how that has led to the chakra systems we recognise today. When referring to Leland's work, I will use his terms. Otherwise, I will use the term 'premodern' to refer to yogic practices in India before the modernisation of yoga, as it aligns with the current conventions of yoga scholarship.
- 3 Judith's table of correspondences includes Sanskrit name, meaning, location, element, energy state, psychological function, resulting in, identity, orientation to self, demon, developmental stage, glands, other body parts, malfunction, colour, seed sound, vowel sound, sephiroth, planets, metals, foods, gemstones, incense, yoga path, rights and gunas (Judith 2019, 42–44).
- 4 This idea of *siddhis* is not unique to premodern yoga philosophy and practice but is found across various systems of thought in premodern India. However, what is new in the *hatha* yogic system is how the goal of yoga (liberation and possibly *siddhis*) is obtained through a psycho-physical process that passes, among other things, through the chakras.

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## The Dancing We

Camille Buttingsrud and Ellen Kilsgaard

### ABSTRACT

In the 2023 intergenerational dance project *Superpower Ensemble*, the participants were chosen for their individual qualities to form a greater 'we' as a group. The children added spontaneity and playfulness, whereas the adult artists inspired the children with their artistic practice, professionalism, and direction. In this article, we aim to describe the subtle processes a choreographer initiates to achieve the intended aesthetic and ethical results. Our case story is *Superpower Ensemble*, and the theme investigated through the case story is 'we-ness'. By describing these processes and this theme, we seek to demonstrate some of the manifold forms of knowledge possessed by dancers, choreographers, and artists. Their practically gained expertise in *being, being together, and being in the world* has the potential to reach far beyond the artistic realm. Their findings align with academic insights into metaphysical, philosophical realms. To show the latter, we outline certain theoretical and philosophical discoveries that reinforce the findings unearthed and explored through the bodily-affective dance work in *Superpower Ensemble*.

### DANSK RESUMÉ

I det intergenerationelle danseprojekt *Superpower Ensemble* fra 2023 var deltagernes individuelle egenskaber med til at skabe et nyt "vi." Børnene bidrog til forestillingen med sin spontanitet, leg og autentiske, uskolede bevægelse. De voksne kunstnere inspirerede børnene med deres kunstneriske praksis, professionalisme og retning. I artiklen beskrives de mange subtile processer en koreograf sætter i gang hos sine dansere, for at opnå de ønskede æstetiske og etiske mål. Vores casestory er *Superpower Ensemble*, og temaet, der undersøges gennem casestoryen, er "vi'et." Gennem at beskrive disse processer og dette tema ønsker vi at vise nogle af de mangfoldige former for viden som dansere, koreografer og andre kunstnere besidder. Deres praktisk opnåede ekspertise i væren, samvær og væren i verden har potentiale til at nå langt ud over det kunstneriske felt; deres resultater er forenelige med metafysisk, filosofisk forskning på højeste akademiske niveau. For at vise sidstnævnte skitserer vi enkelte filosofiske teorier, der understreger den viden, der blev undersøgt gennem det kropsligt-affektive dansearbejde i *Superpower Ensemble*.

# The Dancing We

Camille Buttingsrud and Ellen Kilsgaard

## Introduction

In this article, we explore the communal aspects of dance by directing the spotlight on how choreographic art may develop through a we rather than an I. We use the 2023 intergenerational dance production *Superpower Ensemble*, developed and choreographed by Ellen Kilsgaard, as our case study. Ellen's aim was to let nonprofessional child dancers and adult professional dancers explore relationality and empathy through choreographic investigations. Her work is generally driven by questions about how choreographic form can emerge through the human desire and ability to be in contact and exchange with others. Ellen has a longstanding interest in including children in choreographic thinking and is fascinated by the qualities that a young person brings to choreographic work, particularly when relating to professionally trained musicians and dancers.

Phenomenologist and dance philosopher Camille Buttingsrud's research similarly presents evidence of relational forms of consciousness in absorbed dancing (Buttingsrud 2021). Her investigations unearth and verbalise dancers' experiences of being bodily immersed. Buttingsrud's (2021) findings suggest the existence of high-order states of bodily consciousness: bodily-affective forms of reflection. In these states, dancers report, the everyday ego is replaced by an openness to something larger than the individual self. A dancer's bodily awareness and bodily intentionality expand to encompass the totality of which they are part: their self, their fellow performers, the performance environment, and the audience. One interviewed dancer even reported feeling part of 'the whole universe' (Buttingsrud 2021, 7545) during moments of profound absorption.

This article is rooted in our conversations over the past decade, reflecting on experiences and thoughts related to art, dance, creativity, resonance, bodily reflection, and thinking. Having already contributed

to Camille's philosophical research, our discussions now form the basis for this description of Ellen's choreographic work with *Superpower Ensemble*. We aim to explore what this might reveal about we-ness and, as a metainvestigation, to juxtapose the artistic findings with philosophical ideas on similar themes.

The methodology behind our cowriting is itself a fusion. The reflections presented here have emerged as much through artistic practice as through academic thinking, and we endeavour to present these on equal terms in their respective languages. Consequently, this article does not adhere strictly to traditional academic protocols. Some artistic reflections stand without theoretical references, as their basis lies in experiential knowledge accumulated through years of artistic knowledge production. Presenting artistic reasoning in this way, we hope to substantiate our claim that both academia and the arts, albeit unlike, offer rich research into the nature of *being*.

This article is structured around a description of the dance project. Initially, we provide an overview of the project's background. We then go on to detail its artistic aims and methods, alongside the academic methods employed. In the subsequent section, descriptions of the dance work are intertwined with academic reflections, complementing the artistic insights. In the final section before the conclusion, we turn to our metainvestigation and show how the lived understanding gained through dance can align meaningfully with academic knowledge.

## Background

Ellen has worked with children in dance and choreography for more than 10 years. In collaboration with dancers and musicians, she has led dance investigations with children aged 8 to 12 all over Denmark and in Greenland. These projects have employed the same core methods and have equally evolved through external inspiration from dance groups such as Kabinet K (<https://www.kabinetk.be/en>).



From this foundation, *Superpower Ensemble* emerged and took shape as a formal dance performance. In this context, a smaller, selected group of children performed for a broader audience in nonschool settings.

The initial steps were taken in 2022, when a group of 12 children, two adult dancers, Julie Schmidt Andreassen and Adrian Ulrich Skjoldborg, and two musicians and composers, Henriette Groth and Pernille Louise Sejlund, joined forces. After 10 rehearsals, the group—at this point, consisting of 10 children alongside the aforementioned adult artists—performed together before an audience of family and friends.

The group continued working on the same performance in 2023. Six of the children from the previous year returned (Eva Weber Bergendorff, Helga Heebøll-Borne, Ella Kofoed Kruse, Olga Gildin Laumann, Otilia Zelda Tarpgaard-Somer, and Otto Wolff Ornsbo), and two new children joined the group (Vilja Gaski and Wilma Spuur Hansen). At the time, they were between 9 and 13 years old. A new musician and composer, Ivar Myrset Asheim, was hired for the project. Like his predecessors, he worked live with the dancers, incorporating parts of the 2022 compositions alongside newly composed material.

During spring 2023, *Superpower Ensemble* held another 10 rehearsals, and in May and June, their performance was staged at Teater ZeBU in Copenhagen. The audience consisted of first- to fifth-grade school classes and their adult companions. In September 2023, *Superpower Ensemble* performed at Horsens Borneteaterfestival, Denmark's largest curated festival for performance art aimed at younger audiences. A full video of the performance's final version can be found at <http://www.ellenkilsgaard.com/superpowerensemble>.

## Aims and Methods

On her website, <http://www.ellenkilsgaard.com/>

research-ensemble-superpower, Ellen references sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa's descriptions of relationships with resonance: '[The] difference between successful and unsuccessful relationships to the world [is] defined neither by the relative abundance of resources and opportunities, nor by one's share of the world, but by the degree to which one is connected with and open to other people' (Rosa 2016, 27). Rosa's articulation reflects Ellen's intuitive, experiential understanding of intersubjective openness and the importance of creating spaces for resonance in her choreographies. Even though such theoretical inspirations inform her work, Ellen primarily draws on 'thinking through practice' and the lived realisations her work generates. These animated reflections are embedded in our descriptions of the dance project, often conveyed in Ellen's own words.

*Superpower Ensemble* was an artistic project. Selecting children as dancers was both part of the choreographic method and a thematic choice. Although one might assume that this approach stemmed from a pedagogical calling, Ellen's ambition in working with the children has consistently been to create form', to produce a performance. Her leadership aimed to facilitate the emergence of choreographic structures rather than to teach. The children were integral members of the performance's cast and were carefully chosen as dancers. Their participation was autotelic – they danced for the sake of dancing, not with the aim of achieving anything external to their activity in the studio.

In order to assemble the right cast, Ellen had to consider each child's willingness to work physically, ability to cooperate, and eagerness to take on artistic responsibility, as she did with the adult cast. Some of the children in the preliminary projects had left or had not been reinvented as a consequence of the increasing demands. The remaining group had mutually agreed to develop *Superpower Ensemble*.

That being said, working artistically with children requires taking responsibility for their safety and well-being. Even though pedagogy was not at the core of the project, pedagogical skills were needed to create an ethical, safe, and enjoyable work space for the children. Throughout her years of leading, choreographing, and teaching, Ellen has developed methods that promote *bodily listening, nonverbal connection, and exchange*. She resists hegemonic modes of inhabiting the body

and, therefore, does not provide her dancers with set choreographies. An essential part of her work with the dancers in *Superpower Ensemble* consisted of facilitating mutual, nonverbal engagement between the nontrained children and the professional adults to create a 'shared body' where their differences could coexist and individual temperaments could contribute to the whole. Generally, Ellen finds that connecting diverse participants enhances contrasts and qualities. For her, casting a combination of adult and child dancers introduces new perspectives on human relationships in her dance performances. Such a cast might even serve as the very source of the choreographic shaping of a performance. As she explains: 'Differences can be generative and extremely productive – they can concert new, surprising, and poetic ways of coexistence'. Her goal with *Superpower Ensemble* was to make these experiences available – visible and tangible – to an audience through a well-defined artistic and choreographic form.

Most children at this age are not afraid of moving their bodies, Ellen claims. They have a strong drive to learn and possess exceptional openness to the world. 'This can be seen as an extension of the self into the unknown', she adds. To her, children's willingness, courage, and ability to let go and embrace the situation are essential dance qualities that she wanted her adult dancers to draw upon. The children approached their tasks on the floor with this force and immediacy, while the adults brought their experience as trained dancers and artists. Together, they enriched the process, as Ellen remarks: 'I wanted to see if their different levels, ages, abilities, and possibilities could constitute an immersed and simultaneously articulated dance performance'.



Ellen knew there would be a fine line between, on the one hand, *facilitating and embracing chaos and playfulness*, and, on the other hand, *setting tasks and limits and training the children's skills to nurture their drive to learn*. This balance was needed for the larger group – she wanted *vitalisation* and *direction* to work hand in hand.

'As a choreographer, I organise dance, music, space, and light. My approach to dance is not to reach a form in a certain way. Rather, I look for poetic expression and clarity in the work, and to get there, I use some performative techniques and principles as shaping factors', Ellen explains. Her techniques can be summarised as follows:

- *Playing* within specific tasks and movement qualities
- Playing with *timing, humour, and shifts* to create form
- *Surrendering* to and thriving on the energy that arises when people dance together, lean into each other, and give and receive energy, power, and meaning through shared expression
- *Immersing* in the *feelings, fantasy, and bodily atmospheres* that emerge while *discovering* the content? arising between individuals
- Receiving music through the body in the here and now and entering a playful, embodied dialogue with the musician – in other words, using one's *musicality and attunement* skills
- *Cultivating sensory awareness* of one another, of the space, and of the 'music' created through playful timing

These techniques are both required for and lead to absorption, presence, and commitment, Ellen explains. In *Superpower Ensemble*, her methods were reinvented by the fact that the majority of the dancers were children. 'To make them trust their own mere being and feel safe in the group, I made sure to work through happiness and engagement', she reveals. As we shall see in the next section, she succeeded in creating a welcoming work environment.

As part of the preparation for this article, Camille attended rehearsals and previews, engaged in conversations with the participants, and interviewed the children and the adult dancers. The interviews

were conducted, transcribed, and analysed according to qualitative research methods (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015)<sup>3</sup>. The article's academic framework is philosophical phenomenology, drawing on this tradition's theories on consciousness – Camille's area of expertise.

## Creating, Rehearsing, Performing

As mentioned, Ellen wanted the project to build on the qualities of a child's *openness*, *immediacy*, and *responsiveness*. At the same time, a performance was being rehearsed, and a theatre was booked for their first show; they were creating a piece to communicate with others on a professional level. The integration of *vitalisation* and *direction* in rehearsals was sometimes a balancing act, but it also functioned as a methodological tool, Ellen reveals.

Inspired by Rosa's resonance theories and her own artistic research findings, she nurtured group intelligence: the participants' bodily 'conversations' and intersubjective quests. The children expressed the impressions they received through their tasks and exercises, which inspired and animated the adult dancers' expressions, in turn giving the children new impressions to express. Later, during the performances, all participants experienced the same impression-expression feedback loops with their audiences. The *empathetic resonance* between the children and the adult dancers became an organic shaping factor in the creation of the choreography, constituting both its method and its expression.



The skills of the professional dancers were seen in a new light, and the children were enriched by the adults' technical and artistic expertise. 'With the children, you

get authenticity. Given a task, they do what is natural to them', Julie, one of the adult dancers, explained during our interviews. 'Their dance hasn't been formed yet; there is something very intuitive about it. (...) If you're schooled, you've been told that there are certain ways to do things'. Dancing with her younger peers, Julie gained new insights: 'I find it very inspiring'.

Working in an intergenerational team can be challenging, too, as adult dancer Adrian admitted. 'These kids are good; they jump and do turns. (...) [But] I often feel I have to take the lead with this number of children. Lead much more. With grown-up dancers, I can be an equal participant; [there's] not as much "follow me!" It's a bit more pedagogical with the children'.

Through Ellen's tasks, the children developed a practical understanding of *listening through the body*. Gradually, they stepped out of the 'student' position and became cocreators. 'When we dance, we don't have to talk', child dancers Vilja and Otilia mentioned in the interview we conducted while they were rehearsing. 'And when we crawl or run, we don't bump into each other. I don't have to see the others with my eyes; I feel them'. 'One can feel what the others do, even when one is jumping around. You can see them in the corner of your eye, or I can just sense them'. When asked how that was, they answered: 'one is alert all the time, keeping a watch around, in a way. But it's not very hard; it's easy. Sort of. I don't have to see it with my eyes; I feel it'.



Otillia and Vilja found bodily listening and bodily exchange not only easy but also more precise than when trying to follow a teacher's movements in a dance class. 'It's as if one is doing the movements more equally to Julie's and Adrian's movements when not following them all the time'. As Ellen sees it, this shows how the children were listening to or tuning into more than the mere shape of the moves. They were picking up the energy, direction, musicality, and intentions as well – qualities that, as she puts it, are expressed 'so fast that only the dancing body can perceive (...) and express [them] in an instant'.

Child dancer Otto made a similar observation about temporality, describing improvising with his peers: 'You don't have time to think about it; you just do it. It is as if the body is faster than the head, in a way'. When asked to elaborate, he explained: 'It feels that way; the head is behind. The body is quicker than the head. (...) [the movement] becomes more floating, sort of. It's not like, "Would it be a good idea to take a step to the right?" You don't think that. You just step to the right'.

From a philosophical viewpoint, this is intriguing empirical evidence of the silent capabilities of the living body. The immediacy of the pre-reflective body – its temporal presence in the here and now – encompasses more than spontaneity. In more intensely focused situations, such as dance, bodily consciousness can elevate from pre-reflective to reflective levels while retaining immediacy. In such states, the absorbed or intensely focused subject can bodily reflect on the received impressions and react through bodily expression without the delay entailed by conceptual reflection.<sup>4</sup> Ellen's understanding of Otillia and Vilja's experiences also speaks of the 'open embrace' that distinguishes bodily reflection from conceptual reflection. The specific form of intentionality seen in bodily reflective experiences involves a directedness towards the wholeness of the situation in which one is actively engaged. The subject takes in more than a single detail; they register a spectrum of aspects within the situation (Buttingsrud 2021, 754).

In order to facilitate a work environment where bodily listening, bodily communication, nonverbal exchange, and cocreation of a performance could flourish, Ellen made sure to create a friendly and encouraging atmosphere for all the participants. The fact that her method involved using the participants'

own movement material gave the untrained children self-confidence and a feeling of being seen as individuals. As child dancer Helga put it in our interview: 'We've had some dance in my class at school. (...) It was not the same as here because, here, we know each other in a different way. (...) You feel freer because you think... you're allowed. (...) It's easier and nicer with these people'.

'It's such a nice environment to be in', Otto remarked, describing his experience. 'There's no competition, just mere collaboration'. Hearing the children appreciate the freedom, openness, and togetherness she works to achieve in her dance communities affirms Ellen's practice: 'These are the qualities that are formative, that initiate the creation of choreography'.

Olga and Wilma also expressed joy in the freedom to 'do what you feel like': 'It makes me stay in my own body. It's not like "now we'll do this, and then we'll do so and so, and step forward here". We still follow some systems; we are asked to do things, but there's no right or wrong here. There's a theme, and you can do this... or this... (...) We can do it in the group. We feel that we are part of the group. Even if we don't dance the exact same way, we still dance the same dance'.

To Otto, this form of collaboration was the most important part of being a dancer in *Superpower Ensemble*: fitting in and contributing without aiming for uniformity. The complexity heightened his enjoyment: 'When you dance with someone, it also depends on the path the others take, right? That is cool. This collaboration. Like, where do we roll, jump, leap now?'



Even though Ellen's method introduced a constant element of unpredictability into the work process, the children embraced the provocations embedded in the unforeseen moves of the others. As Otto added: 'You

don't know what you yourself will do, either'. In the friendly setting they were in, being alert and accepting these challenges was part of the game.

In general, working in a bodily absorbed state might require courage. To enter this flow state, the dancer must let go of set forms of control and be willing to reinvent the rehearsal or performance over and over again (Buttingsrud 2021, 7541). Children seem to have easy access to these core aspects of absorption, Ellen remarks, aligning them with playfulness, openness, and curiosity.

Structurally, the choreography was built on Ellen's ideas, inspired by nonverbal forms of resonance found between human beings, as well as in nature. 'The skin is permeable', Ellen notes as an example. 'It gives off and takes in. In a similar way, the individual self is a closed unit that nevertheless is permeable, just like the cells in its skin'. It expresses, gives impressions to other selves, and takes in impressions from them. When individuals in a pluralistic group engage by actively opening up to one another, empathic kinaesthetic resonance is enabled, Ellen shares. This process paves the way for new forms of meaning, artistic form, and intelligence to emerge within the group. 'The individuals are not equalised; something new is created', she explains.



The adult dancers and the children also contributed to creating the choreography. During our interview adult dancers Adrian and Julie described their methods: 'We can come with suggestions'. 'It comes from us in the improvisations, not choreographically, but through our dancing, physically. We know that now we're going to fall, or whatever. But how we fall, and how we combine it with the children's moves – all those aspects of the improvisation are channelled through us. I feel there's a lot of space for our contribution. Or, collaboration'.

Ellen has worked with Julie and Adrian for several years. 'She has developed many of these methods on following and leading (...) where you take ownership and are being led into a situation that you take care of. (...) This is the unifying part', Julie added.

In their interviews, the children shared how they took ownership of the scenes they danced using their imaginations, as well. In one scene, Otilia was sitting on Julie's back while the rest of the children were walking as if in a caravan. 'It's almost as if the floor has turned into sand. (...) When we do it, it's like we're in the desert. Really!' Otilia said. 'Julie is crawling, and I'm on top of her. She's like a donkey, a very slow one'. Vilja added: 'There's a place where I'm holding Ella's head. There, I feel I'm holding a bull'.



In another scene, they assist one of the adult dancers who has fallen to the floor. Watching the eight small bodies help a grown-up body stand upright is a particularly moving scene with numerous potential interpretations. In the interviews, the children described it in practical terms. 'We are folding the (limbs of the) body; it makes it easier for Adrian to stand up'. There were feelings involved, too: 'There's a rather sad atmosphere there. And very slow music', Vilja explained. 'It's as if we are a village, or something, and there's a plague (...) When we try to raise Adrian, and he falls again and again, one feels, "Oh, no, what is happening now?"' Otilia agreed: 'It's sad, but also nice, in a way. You help a grown-up, and... We fold their body, and make it easier to stand up. It's not just the grown-ups who can help; the children can help, too. Help the grown-ups'.

Adrian also reflected on how the music made them feel emotionally connected to the different scenes. For Ellen, having live music on stage is an essential part of her methodology that reinforces her emphasis on

musicality in her dancers. 'In this context, musicality is the ability to make embodied, playful decisions in the moment and to shape the energy flow and the sensory feedback through the body', she explains. Inspired by Daniel Stern's concept of 'vitality forms', she speaks of the musical qualities in emotional content, fantasy, and sensation. These, she noted, can be played as 'decreasing, increasing, pulsating, flowing, exploding, or mild' (Stern 2010, 14).

During the performances, the children were excited but neither nervous nor afraid, they reported. The audiences – or the 'new participants', as Ellen sees them – helped the dancers concentrate and 'take it seriously', Otto observed. 'It was so much cooler with the audience'. Some spectators wondered how the child dancers could move so lively, fast, and physically close without bumping into each other. 'We felt each other', Otto explained.

The constitutive idea behind Ellen's choreographies is to embody and develop an understanding of dance as a primordial communal activity. Dance, she explains, has its roots in our very existence together as human beings. Articulating meaning and feeling through physical movement – as well as through the voice – is our way of connecting with others and with our surroundings. It is an output we produce to meaningfully express the impressions we have received – an output to which we receive a response, generating new input or impressions. 'We move and gesture, speak and create sound in order to bridge our inner world and the outside', she describes. In Ellen's view, dance, as we know it today, is a poetic expansion of basic human communication.



Seeing the creation of a dance performance from this angle, Ellen's attention throughout the *Superpower Ensemble* project was on *being together in a meaningful way*, in an *aesthetic frame*. This togetherness did not

concern only the participants; the idea of putting on a show for an external group of people was an invitation for others to experience, see, and feel the resonant qualities of the dance. The carefully facilitated bodily communication on stage was transmitted to the larger groups 'joining the conversation' – the audiences.

## Shared Insights

The communal dance experiences outlined in this article stem from Ellen's aesthetic work as a dancer and leader, creating and facilitating collective artistic expressions. They also draw from her ideas, shaped by decades of practical artistic work, reflection, and dialogue. For Camille, it has been interesting to learn how Ellen's research findings align with the theoretical work of phenomenologists and other philosophers investigating the 'we'. Let us share some examples.

'Joint action' (Sebanz, Bekkering, and Knoblich 2006), 'emotional sharing' (Szanto 2015), 'we-ness' (Zahavi 2023), and 'group agency' (Peck and Chemero 2024) are examples of contemporary philosophical research areas debating the structures behind subjective experiences of the first-person plural – the 'we'. Since 2020, scholars at the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen have explored the 'we' through research projects such as 'Who Are We? Self-Identity, Social Cognition, and Collective Intentionality' and 'Who Are We? Philosophy and the Social Sciences' (<https://cfs.ku.dk/research-activities/researchprojects/who-are-we-self-identity/>). One key question concerns the stability of the first-person singular in collective activity. In other words, how are one's perspectives as an 'I' experienced in a group situation? Does being 'one of us' constitute a group identification in which the individual self disappears? As we have heard from the dancers of *Superpower Ensemble*, this is not necessarily the case. Given the right conditions, one might experience a stable self while simultaneously being part of a group. According to Ellen's artistic research, this balance is not only possible but also required for achieving her aesthetic and ethical goals.

We also learned how Ellen was determined to create a specific atmosphere during rehearsals, enabling the dancers to feel safe and open up in the development of the performance. The term 'atmosphere' might seem elusive to many, and pragmatically, one might wonder how to go about creating an atmosphere. These questions are also the

subject of academic research. According to philosopher Lucy Osler (2020), interpersonal atmospheres are 'relational modes of experience'. They are not a mystical 'what' but rather a 'how': 'When we bodily perceive the expressive experience of participants in a group, we experience atmospheres' (Osler 2020, 3). She calls this a 'bodily form of empathetic perception' that constitutes 'social understanding' (Osler 2020, 3). Osler's theoretical discoveries emphasise Ellen's practical accomplishments in this area. The tasks Ellen assigned to the dancers during their rehearsals enabled them to sense each other bodily by listening to their own and each other's beings, movements, and feelings. This attunement led the dancers to accept and respect their own bodily expressions, as well as those of their fellow dancers. In doing so, Ellen created an atmosphere of trust, openness, and willingness to share, aligned with what the situation required.

For Ellen, *empathy* is both a condition for and an outcome of such bodily listening. Classical phenomenologist Edith Stein's work on empathy (Stein 1917) describes it as the experience a living body has when encountering another, which does not necessarily imply experiencing the same feelings as the other person. To experience empathy, Stein claims, is to feel alongside the feelings of the other. Through imagination and emotional insight, one gains a rich understanding of the experiences of the person one is facing (Svenaeus 2016, 243). Phenomenology generally understands empathy as a bodily-affective ability to 'read' the other.

In her work on shared emotions and empathy, Stein (1922, in Szanto 2015) describes how 'the relation between individual and communal experiences is constitution, not summation' (504). In other words, when a group experiences 'genuinely collective emotions', according to Stein (1922, in Szanto 2015), these are 'neither the result of emotional contagion (...) nor do they amount to a mere summation or aggregation of distinct individual emotions (...) rather they have a distinct intentional and phenomenological structure, a we-mode of being, and their own, plural subject' (505).

This was precisely what the *Superpower Ensemble* dancers experienced. Their individual emotions and motions were respected and welcomed within their communal compositions. As Ellen puts it: 'I saw the group as a *pluralistic assembly of differences*, where the dancers did not become like each other but rather created a new potential - exactly because of their

differences and, at the same time, their attunement in their dance work. Something not yet thought of arose'. One could say that *Superpower Ensemble* embodied aspects of the phenomenological theories of empathy.

Staying attuned throughout the rehearsals helped the dancers remain focused on their common goal: creating a performance. This common directedness, or 'collective intentionality', was supported by the atmospheres created in each scene and by their different empathetic encounters - by the *living environment* of the project. The philosophical field of 'affordances' draws attention to the role of living spaces and activity situations in joint action (Kiverstein and Rietveld 2021). The environment Ellen created for their rehearsals and performances afforded the children and adult artists the ability to collaborate towards their common goal.

The profound philosophical, metaphysical knowledge, often tacitly embedded in the competence of dancers and choreographers, could serve as a societal resource and should not be confined to the artistic world. Through this article, as well as our broader work, we aim to foster interdisciplinary exchanges and articulate the multiple forms of knowledge found in dance. As *Superpower Ensemble* has demonstrated, sharing individual capacities within larger groups creates new, exciting, and enlightening elements.

## Conclusion

Ellen's ambition is to create space for and cultivate meaningfulness and life force through her choreographic work. These aspects arise when people truly connect through dance, she claims. By investigating kinaesthetic, social, and affective resonance between dancers, she understands how these resonant and absorbed states of being transform into expressive forms that give rise to meaning. This meaningfulness and these forms can then be shared with an audience through yet another axis of resonance.

Dance as shared communication offers a way to discover and rediscover our interdependence and how we create - and are created - through our relationships with the world and with each other. Individual differences enrich and generate the conditions for new structures to emerge and new ways of presenting form. As Rosa's earlier quote suggests, it comes down to *being open to others* and *forming connections*. For this, trust and the freedom to be oneself are required.

Both the adult and child dancers of *Superpower Ensemble* seemed to feel this trust and freedom and to have formed genuine connections. Throughout our interviews, the children stressed the social aspects of being part of the group: 'I have so many friends here', Ella said, 'It's great'. Wilma agreed: 'You can see it when we are not dancing, too (...). There's such a great feeling of togetherness'. 'No one feels left out or anything', Olga acknowledged.

Dancing in the group, the child dancers developed self-confidence and the liberty to move according to their individual natures. They were needed, seen, and heard by the rest of the group and by the group leader, the choreographer. They could share themselves and, through their authentic selves, actively participate in the community. This also meant prospering together and influencing each other's moves and moods. As Eva



mentioned: 'When you've had a bad day, you get happy being here'. Shaking her shoulders in delight, Wilma simply stated: 'It [dancing in the group] is gorgeous!'

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## Endnotes

- 1 By form, we mean the physical body's articulations – the dance expression visible from the outside.
- 2 By content, we mean the nonphysical, nonverbal material that emerges through dance, that constitutes expressions with and beyond the physical movements of the choreography.
- 3 The interview data, which consist of audio recordings stored on a computer and Word file transcriptions, are kept secure in accordance with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data restrictions. Each of the 10 interviewees read and signed a consent form, received a copy, and were given full access to their individual data.
- 4 On the time delay implicit in reflection: 'Husserl (...) points to the temporal character of reflection. When we reflect, the experience that we reflect upon is not simply given as existing here and now, but also as having already been given prior to reflection' (Zahavi 2015, 179). For more details on bodily experiences of reflection, see Buttingsrud (2021).

## BIOGRAPHIES

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## Passion och protest. Den svarte danskonstnären Claude Marchants liv och verk

Af Astrid von Rosen & Bo Westerholm.  
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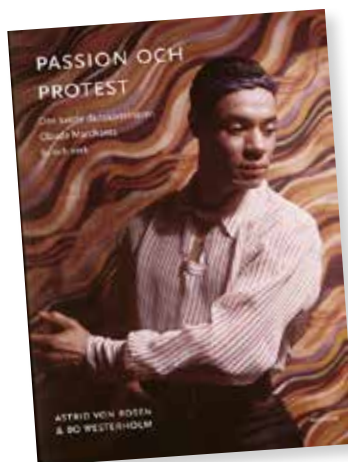
Anmeldelse af Karen Vedel

Jazzballet nød fra starten af 1960'erne stor popularitet i bl.a. Danmark, Norge og Sverige, hvor en række, fortrinsvis amerikanske, dansekonstnere etablerede sig som undervisere. Ad den vej kom de til at præge den lokalt forankrede kropskultur med dans, der havde globale rødder. Én sag er imidlertid genrens popularitet, en anden er, at jazzdans som scenekunstnerisk genre typisk rangerede lavere end hhv ballet og moderne dans og derfor længe fik mindre - om overhovedet nogen - opmærksomhed i historieskrivningen. Uagtet bogen, som anmeldes her, må betragtes som populærvidenskabelig, udgør den et væsentligt bidrag til igangværende bestræbelser på at rette op på denne skævhed.

På forsiden af *Passion och protest. Den svarte danskonstnären Claude Marchants liv och verk* ses en alvorlig ung person fotograferet fra taljen op mod en baggrund af et gyldenbrunt bølgende mønster. Han er elegant, klædt i løstsiddende skjorte uden flip og står med et let bortvendt, sænket blik, der undgår kameraets øje. Fotografiet er ét blandt mange af danseren Claude Marchant taget af forfatteren og fotografen Carl van Vechten (1880-1964), som i tillæg til sit mangeårige samarbejde med Gertrude Stein og andre af datidens forfattere havde tætte forbindelser til The Harlem Renaissance, hvis medlemmer han også portrætterede.

Som titlen afslører, er der tale om en bog, som på én og samme tid er drevet af kærlighed til, eller endda passion for dansen, personificeret ved hovedpersonen Claude Marchant - og af ønsket om at skrive svensk dansehistorie fra et mere inkluderende perspektiv. Protesten ligger, ifølge forfatterne, i bogens ambition om ikke blot at genbesøge men også genskrive den danshistoriske kanon.

Forfatterne er tidligere danser, nu dansehistoriker og professor i kritiske kulturarvsstudier ved Göteborg Universitet Astrid von Rosen og tidligere danser og



koreograf, sidenhen lærer og rektor ved Balletakademien i Göteborg Bo Westerholm. Privatarkivet, som udgør bogens empiriske afsæt, tilhører Westerholm, som var Claude Marchants livspartner de sidste 34 år, indtil han gik bort i 2004. De store mængder af tidligere u-udforskede kilder, heriblandt fotografier og tekster skrevet af Claude Marchant selv, er i forarbejdet blevet suppleret med interviews af tidligere elever, som også får stemme i bogen, og af nedslag i databaser indeholdende bl.a. billed- musik- og presse materiale. Endelig har dele af materialet fået krop i workshops, hvor danserne aktiverer arkivalierne. Denne tilgang har tidligere været anvendt af Astrid von Rosen i hendes forskningsarbejde med lokalt forankrede dansearkiver.

Von Rosen angives som pennefører og tekstens 'jeg', men herudover bliver den mere præcise karakter af medforfatterskabet aldrig 100% eksplisit. Det gør til gengæld intentionerne om at hylde mennesket og kunstneren Claude Marchant og at fremskrive et 'branchestudie' af dansen i Göteborg fra midt 1960'erne og frem.

Bogen er bygget op over tre kronologisk fremadskridende dele: Til første del, 'Claude's internationella historia', hører fortællingen om dansekonstneren Claude Marchant, som blev født i South Carolina i 1919 (el. 1920) og voksede op i staten New York under kaotiske familieforhold. Den vågnende passion for dans og mødet med en række dygtige dansekonstnere i en ung alder tilførte retning i hans liv. Blandt lærerne nævnes Lester Horton, Martha Graham og José Limon.

Størst indflydelse fik imidlertid den fremtrædende koreograf og antropolog Katherine Dunham, i hvis dansekompani han optrådte fra 1940-1945, bl.a. i store Broadway-musicals som *Cabin in the Sky* og i film som bl.a. *Stormy Weather*. Dunhams koreografier bar præg af hendes feltstudier i afro-amerikanske og afro-caribiske danseformer, som på den vis blev del af datidens amerikanske populærkultur og også kom til at udgøre et fundament i Marchants tilgang til dans og koreografi.

Det racesegregerede USA i koldkrigsårene skitseres som bagtæppe for fremskrivningen af Marchant som skabende kunstner med en bevidsthed om dansens aktivistiske potentiale i kampen for social retfærdighed. I 1950'erne fulgte en periode på syv år med eget kompani, som ud over optrædener i USA turnerede i Sydamerika, Europa og i Mellemøsten. Med et repertoire, der trak på danse med afrikanske, kubanske, puerto-ricanske og brasilianske rødder, forstår læseren at Marchants koreografier bar præg af indflydelsen fra Dunham. De følgende ti-femten år som freelance i udlandet var mærket af stor omskiftelighed og det skinner igennem, at tilværelsen har været slidsom. Ikke alene optrådte Marchant som danser og koreograf i skiftende etableringer, han optrådte til tider også som skuespiller i film-produktioner og som sanger på pladeindspilninger, der blev til i samarbejde med jazzmusikere, bl.a. Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington og Dennis Wiley.

Efter godt ti år i Italien, kom Marchant til Sverige – og her starter bogens anden del med overskriften 'Claude i Sverige'. Ankomsten i 1967 sker efter invitation af Lia Schubert, den daværende leder af Balletakademien i Stockholm, hvor fremtrædende jazzdansere som Walter Nicks og Talley Beatty allerede udgjorde en vigtig del af lærerstaben. Nu blev der åbnet en tilsvarende institution i Göteborg, hvor Marchant fik ansvar for kursusvirksomheden, som blandede danseteknisk undervisning med en stærk tro på dansens sociale kraft – og ifølge forfatterne lagde sig tæt op ad den uddannelse, han selv havde fået hos Katherine Dunham. Posten som hovedlærer og kunstnerisk leder varetog han frem til 1984.

Marchant skabte hurtigt en dansegruppe, som blev koblet til virksomheden på Balletakademien og på den vis skubbede til en professionalisering af de mest seriøse elever. Aktivitetsniveauet var højt med optrædener, opsøgende forestillinger og en årligt

tilbagevendende opvisning alt sammen koreograferet af Marchant. De store drømme for såvel skolen såvel som gruppen fremgår desuden af ansøgninger til bl.a. Göteborgs kommune, som indgår i bogens empiriske grundlag. Bogen citerer en opgørelse, som viser, at Balletakademien i 1976 havde to store dansestudier med 5 tilknyttede danseundervisere og undervisning 6 dage om ugen. På daværende tidspunkt bestod Marchant Dance Theatre, som ifølge et interview var kendetegnet ved stor kropsdiversitet, af 15 dansere. Nogle af danserne var professionelle, og andre var amatører. At Marchant valgte at blive i Göteborg tilskrives ikke mindst kærlighedsrelationen til Bo Westerholm, som i bogen har fået sit eget underkapitel. De interviews, forfatterne har foretaget, viser desuden, at der opstod en form for familieskabsfølelse omkring skolen, blev næret af Marchants omsorg for sine elever, som oplevede at blive både 'modt' og udfordret i undervisningen. Til fremskrivningen af branchehistorien hører, at dansfeltet i Göteborg under den tid, Marchant stod i spidsen for Balletakademien, voksede med etablering af nye uddannelser og nye dansegrupper, hvoraf adskillige påviseligt havde direkte forbindelse til hans undervisning.

I bogens tredje del med titlen 'Historia och framtid', fuldbyrdes bogens løbende situering af danskunstneren Claude Marchant i et større danseschistorisk felt. Det sker med fortællingen om hans virke og anerkendelse i USA mod karrierens afslutning.

Den kronologisk fremadskridende biografi er skrevet i et letlæst sprog. Det er evident, at der ligger et grundigt forskningsarbejde forud for udgivelsen og af indledningen fremgår det da også, at von Rosen i årene 2021-23 har publiceret tre fagfællebedømte artikler på baggrund af arbejdet med arkivet. I bogens tilrettelæggelse er det konventionelle akademiske format med henvisning til faglitteratur i fodnoter imidlertid blevet fravalgt til fordel for en indskrivning af kilderne i selve brødteksten. Teksten er desuden spækket med navne på familiemedlemmer og personlige venner foruden koreografer, musikere og dansekritikere. Nogle bliver mere indgående præsenteret, mens andre introduceres mere sparsomt. Endelig medvirker bogens illustrationer, her iblandt fotos fra forestillinger, undervisning og prøver i dansestudiet – samt af programforsider og plakater fra begivenheder, som omtales i teksten – til at sætte billeder på indholdet.

Bogen nærer behovet for at vide mere om dansekunstens vilkår og betydning fra perspektiver, der – sådan som det er tilfældet her – er forskudt væk fra dansehistoriens privilegier af fortællingen om hvide kunstnere. Hvis jeg skal pege på noget, jeg kunne ønske mig uddybet, ville det være en mere indgående analyse af dansetekniske underlag for Marchants undervisning. Ligeledes ville et eller to detaljerede nedslag i de koreografiske værker have bibragt yderligere forståelse af forholdet mellem den skabende dimension af Marchants kunstneriske virke og hans samtid.

Her og der reflekterer teksten over de metodiske greb, der ligger til grund for fremstillingen. Det er imidlertid først på bogens sidste sider, at læseren får indtryk af i det arkivteoretiske fundament, som vil være velkendt for læsere af andre af von Rosens publikationer. Her fremhæves begrebet 'radikal empati' (Caswell & Cifor 2016) som afsæt for en tilgang, hvor forskeren engagerer sig fagligt og respektfuldt i andres erfaringer – samtidig med en anerkendelse af de grundlæggende forskelle, som gør sig gældende i kraft af det historiske tidspunkt og de gældende livsvilkår. Ligeledes gengives von Rosens bud på et manifest, som skal understøtte ændringen af den kanoniserede fremstilling af dansehistorien. Med tydelig inspiration fra den svenske arbejderhistoriker Sven Lindqvists bog *Gräv där du står* (1978) lyder opfordringen: "Fortsätt

gräva, fortsätt omvandla känslor till substantiella data, och fortsätt göra resultaten offentligt tillgängliga." (162) Dertil stilles tre uddybende forslag om at "1) arbeta utenför de stora institutionerna och söka samarbeta med dem, 2) visa omsorg om fragment och sorterat material i privatarkiv och 3) bejaka att levande kroppar är arkiv i danshistoriens tjänst." (163) Helt i tråd med manifestets målsætning om offentliggørelse fremgår det desuden, at forskningsprojektets data nu er indlemmet i den digitale kortlægning af uafhængig scenekunst i Göteborg 1995-2000 i databasen *Ekspansion och mångfald*, som kan tilgås elektronisk via Center for kritiske kulturarvsstudier ved Göteborg Universitet (<https://expansion.dh.gu.se>).

I kraft af forfatterens insistens på at tage afsæt i det mikrohistoriske niveau lykkes det at etablere tråde mellem det lokale og det globale. Disse beror ikke mindst på Marchants stærke forankring i et netværk af fortrinsvis afro-amerikanske og afro-caribiske dansekunstnere og musikere, som op gennem 1900-tallet satte præg på scenekunsten i USA såvel som i europæiske storbyer som bl.a. Paris, Rom, Berlin, Stockholm, København – og Göteborg. I forlængelse heraf er bogens store fortjeneste ikke mindst, at den viser vigtigheden af at genbesøge scenedansens historie på en måde, der gør op med strukturelt bestemte blindheder i den eksisterende kanon.

## Call for papers: Special issue on dance in teacher education

The *Nordic Journal of Dance* invites submissions for a special issue dedicated to dance in teacher education. We are calling for papers that explore the variety of ways in which dance can be integrated into teacher education. We seek submissions that address how dance can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool within teacher education, fostering embodied, aesthetic learning processes and creativity as part of the professional qualification process.

We encourage contributions that explore the co-creation of learning experiences through dance in higher education, specifically those focusing on how dance-based and arts-based methodologies enrich teacher education and professional development. How can dance be integrated into teacher education programs to enhance teacher preparedness, shape professional identity and expand teaching practices? We are particularly interested in work that considers the impact of learning in, with, about and through dance in teacher education and the implications of dance for mental, emotional, and physical well-being in higher education.

This special issue provides a platform for advancing the Nordic and international dialogues on dance's role in education, and we welcome empirical and theoretical studies, as well as practice-oriented articles and other contributions, such as interviews with scholars and practitioners. Papers may also explore diverse research methodologies for studying dance in higher education, including innovative approaches to research. Researchers are also invited to share their findings on cross-sectoral and interprofessional collaboration in dance and the way in which it may foster innovation in teacher education.

Empirical and theoretical studies will undergo a double-blind review process. Practice-oriented studies and other contributions will receive editorial feedback.

### Important information:

- Important dates:
  - Abstract (300–500 words) submission by 1 March 2025.
  - Full paper submission by 1 October 2025.
  - Publication expected by June 2026.
- Articles can be written in English or one of the Nordic languages. They can include alternative textual formats, for example, illustrations, poems and dialogue.
- Maximum length: 6,000 words, including references, for theoretical and empirical articles and 3,000 words, including references, for practice-based articles.
- Here are the author guidelines:
  - <https://www.nordicjournalofdance.com/guidelinesresearch.html>
  - <https://www.nordicjournalofdance.com/guidelinespractice.html>



**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 **NO FOD** 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

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# 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».

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The Art of Dancing in History/Research/Today *Elizabeth Scarstad*

On the Embedded Embodiment of Dancers in Language-based  
Site-specific Choreography *Leena Rouhiainen*

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Drawn into Dancing and Danced into Drawing: Exploring Deleuze's Lines of Flight  
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Transgressing the Borders of Art and Non-art:  
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Unlearning Dance: Reclaiming the Power of Dancing *Ieva Ginkeviciūtė and Indre Gim*

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### Off-topic Research Articles

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Contemporary Yoga *Camilla Damkjær*

The Dancing We *Camille Buttingsrud and Ellen Kilsgaard*

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### Book Review

Passion och protest. Den svarte danskonstnären Claude Marchants liv och verk *Karen Vedel*

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