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Editorial

In this issue, we are happy to present one article in each of our three categories: research, practice-oriented and a rather new category, emerging scholar. Together, they indicate the diversity in the field of dance research, of both topic and format. We are also happy to publish a contribution from Latvia for the first time, and with it, we are expanding the journal's notion of Nordic.

Camilla Damkjaer's article, «Inversion? Circus Hand-Balancing and the Discourse of the Upright Body», details how circus hand-balancing relates to the upright body as the normal default position. Damkjaer argues that, as a postural practice that physically inverts the body, circus hand-balancing, paradoxically, also affirms the upright body on several levels. The article covers representational as well as technical and experiential elements of circus hand-balancing. More broadly, it elucidates aspects of the cultural history of the upright and inverted body.

Dita Jonīte's practice-oriented article «The drama of contemporary dance in Latvia and the dance performance *Out*» introduces the evolution of the Latvian contemporary dance scene through the work of choreographer Olga Žitluhina. It focuses on Žitluhina's *Out* (Ārā, 2013), a piece inspired by Henrik Ibsen's play *Brand*. Jonīte's analysis identifies parallels between Žitluhina's artistic and pedagogic approach and struggles to establish contemporary dance in Latvia, and Ibsen's tragedy. The article offers an evocative reading of Žitluhina's piece of choreography and the recent history of Latvian dance.

Lena Dahlquist's emerging scholar article, «Collaborative Artistic Dance Making Process—Practicing Democracy», is based upon her master's thesis published in 2021. Dahlquist researches her own teaching practice, and in the article, she

investigates one specific learning design applied for a dance-making project in which the students engage in dialogical processes, aided by the didactic tools value clarification/*rundam* and deliberative conversation. Dahlquist's research demonstrated how a design made for learning about and through a collaborative, creative dance-making process provided the 16-year-old participants not only with knowledge about aesthetic processes but also possibilities of developing and practicing their democratic skills.

These three articles offer us a view into the opportunities that diverse dance and movement practices provide in tracing embodiments of normativity and interlinking with other art forms. They also show us the wider societal influences that dance, dance-making and choreography have through fostering social skills and developing cultural heritages.

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Issue Editors

Inversion? Circus Hand-Balancing and the Discourse of the Upright Body

Camilla Damkjaer

ABSTRACT

I kroppens historia har den upprättstående kroppen varit ett tema i filosofiska diskussioner, något som undersökts naturvetenskapligt, såväl som utgångspunkten för praktiska sätt att upprätthålla sociala normer. Det är även möjligt att iakta en viss diskurs om den upprättstående kroppen som modell för vad det vill säga att vara människa. Samtidigt har människor sedan länge experimenterat med motsatsen: den omvända positionen. Figuren handstående är ett av de mest tydliga exempel på försöket att vända upp och ner på den upprättstående kroppen. Inom cirkus har handstående även utvecklats till en egen konstform. Denna artikel undersöker hur cirkuspraktiken handstående förhåller sig till den upprättstående kroppen. Artikeln föreslår att handstående förhåller sig till den upprättstående kroppens diskurs på ett paradoxalt sätt, i och med att den både vänder upp och ner på diskursen och förstärker den. Artikeln argumenterar för att detta kommer till uttryck inte bara på ett representativt plan, men också på ett tekniskt och erfarenhetsbaserat plan.

ABSTRACT

In the history of the body, upright posture has been the theme of philosophical reflections on human nature and the object of scientific explorations and practical measures ensuring social norms. It is even possible to locate a certain discourse of the upright body as a model for understanding what it means to be human. However, humans have long experimented with the opposite: the inverted position. The handstand is probably the epitome of this endeavour to invert upright posture. Within circus performance, hand-balancing has been developed into an art form of its own. This article examines how hand-balancing relates to the upright body. The article argues that circus hand-balancing participates in the discourse of the upright body in a paradoxical way, both inverting and reinforcing it. The article argues that this is expressed not only on a representational level but also on the technical and experiential levels of the practice.

Inversion? Circus Hand-Balancing and the Discourse of the Upright Body

Camilla Damkjaer

Inverting hand-balancing

In the history of the body, upright posture has been the theme of philosophical reflections on human nature as well as the object of scientific explorations and practical measures ensuring social norms. Indeed, it is even possible to locate a certain discourse of upright posture as a model of understanding for what it means to be human (Vigarello 1978, Gilman 2014). However, humans have long experimented with the opposite: the inverted position. The figure of the handstand is probably the epitome of this endeavour to invert upright posture. The question is how this inversion relates to the discourse of the upright body.

Handstands, in a variety of forms, exist in many different physical practices, such as gymnastics, diving, street dance, yoga, circus and capoeira. Even if these handstands may be variations of the same principle, handstands are practiced in different ways, for different purposes and with different associated meanings. Within a circus performance, balancing on your hands has been developed into an art form of its own, where the handstand becomes the starting point for artistic expression within the performing arts.

The effect of turning the body upside down is easily associated with the circus's capacity to provide a different world with other rules, a mythical space that inverts expectations. Part of the myth surrounding both traditional and contemporary circus is the idea of circus as, by definition, subversive—even if this myth of course needs to be and is being questioned (Fricker & Malouin 2018). In the case of hand-balancing as a specific discipline, I suggest that understanding how it relates to social norms also needs to be explored

through analysing if and how hand-balancing participates in the discourses of the upright body.

In fact, there seems to be quite a discrepancy between the myth of the subversive circus body, turning all rules of gravity, anatomy and society upside down, and the rather strict, repetitious training of hand-balancing, striving towards a body ideal that also builds on ideals of clean lines, total bodily symmetry, combined with measured strength and perfect flexibility. But to understand hand-balancing's relation to the upright body, we need to go into much more detail. In this article, I will analytically invert circus hand-balancing to discuss whether circus hand-balancing participates in the discourse of the upright body and how this may happen on representational, technical and experiential levels.

Though informed by my background as a performance scholar, my methodology lies close to practice-based ethnography, as used by, for instance, Greg Downey (Downey 2015) and Luïc Wacquant (Wacquant 2006). For approximately ten years, I have been practicing hand-balancing, discussing hand-balancing with circus practitioners and teachers and trying to understand the technical foundation of the discipline and its bodily implications. Though I have not had the chance to be an apprentice or an official student, a large part of my understanding of hand-balancing comes from dialogues with specialists. I am especially indebted to my conversations with Thierry Maussier, who has many years of experience teaching hand-balancing to circus students in higher education. It is largely through these discussions that I have come to gain a better grasp of the technical aspects of the discipline.

My analytical approach is to conduct a socio-historical reading of hand-balancing practice, seen in relation to circus history and the cultural history of the upright body. First, I will look into existing research on the ideology of the upright body and the way it may continue today. Second, I will address the relationship between the history of circus hand-balancing and the discourse of the upright body. Third, I will look more closely at the technique of hand-balancing and the traces it may carry of this discourse on a practical level through the incorporation of ideas and ideals. Finally, I will explore how the hand-balancer's experience of the inverted upright body relates to the discourse of the upright body. Thus, the article sheds light on some aspects of the on-going cultural history of the practice of the upright and inverted body.

The upright posture and the discourse of the upright body

In different historical periods, upright posture has been used to define the relation between humans and other animals, as well as the relation between body and mind, individual and society. Since the 1960s, a critique of the ideological assumptions of these ideas has been developed, not least in the vein of Foucault's analysis of the disciplining of the body. The training of the upright position is already part of what Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault 1991), describes as the development of the organic body. With the organic body, Foucault means the body that was constructed *as* natural and organic in order to create a body that was measurable and controllable and could be analysed in its movement, tasks and progression. This analysis of the upright body as part of an ideology was further pursued by Georges Vigarello's work (Vigarello 1978). Vigarello showed how the upright posture became a crucial site of modern education and the formation of citizens across school systems, training regimes, medicine and fashion (Vigarello 1978). To become upright was

considered part of becoming a complete, civilised, autonomous and well-behaved subject.

More recently, the topic of the upright body has come to the fore again to understand how the history of this discourse continues to inform our understanding of bodies, bodily diversity, health and posture. One example of this recent interest is Sander L. Gilman's article ««Stand Up Straight»: Notes Towards a History of Posture» (Gilman 2014). Gilman approaches the upright body from a historical perspective and points out how, within modern Europe, the upright posture came to have a specific relation to the understanding of the civilised subject. Moreover, within this discourse, the upright posture was used as a feature to distinguish humans in terms of ability, gender and race. Even if it originated in Europe, this understanding of posture also spread to other parts of the world.

Gilman goes into detail about the way this discourse developed and spread in different domains. As Gilman writes, 'The idealized upright static and mechanical posture in early modern West seems to have originated in the late 16th century with both the development and representation of military drill formation' (Gilman 2014, 58). From here, it spread into many different fields of training, from dance to singing, fencing and different kinds of sports and physical education. At the same time as social practices for rendering the body upright expanded, different interrelated scientific understandings of upright posture were developed within evolutionary, medical and biomechanical understandings of the body.

As Gilman points out, Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory had the consequence that upright posture became not only a characteristic of the human species, but also a developmental history that shows how humans became humans. This was the starting point of a branch of research still ongoing, exploring how and why humans have become bipeds and what the consequences are physiologically and cognitively. At the same time, it provided a new scientific basis for

the idea that humans, among other things, through their upright posture, are superior to animals in terms of intelligence. Thus, Darwin's thoughts carried an already-existing discourse into science. Importantly, Darwin was not alone in this assumption; it was a prevalent feature in both philosophy and science in the 19th century (Gilman 2014, 63–64).

At the same time, posture has increasingly become the site of medical knowledge and intervention. As Gilman writes, 'In the 19th century, there is an entire medical sub-speciality that defined the healthy body and treated the ill body based on notions of ill posture' (Gilman 2014, 66). Here, and within the training systems that were advised in relation to medicine, 'Bad posture is not only a sign of physical pathology but also of moral degeneration' (Gilman 2014, 66). Thus, rectifying people's posture was not only a medical but also a societal issue.

Thus, the modern discourse of the upright body has been developed and depends on links across many different areas such as philosophy, science, medicine, educational systems, training cultures and fashion. Following Foucault, Vigarello and Gilman, I would thus claim that to stand is not simply something humans do and are evolutionarily and morphologically geared to do. To stand, that is, stay upright on your feet, is a part of a discourse if we understand discourse to not only include linguistic structures that regulate what we can know and think, but also the physical and institutional practices that regulate our behaviour. To stand—and, especially, to stand in a certain way—is to participate in a discourse that also includes implicit expectations about what a subject is. On a symbolic level, the discourse of the upright body has associated the upright posture with values of superiority, moral correctness, intelligence, strength, autonomy and independence.

Where do we stand in relation to the upright posture?

The discourse of the upright body has been an integral part of the modern understanding of the body and the subject, but it may be relevant to ask whether it still exists. It seems as if the upright posture continues to intrigue us and pose challenges even today, both scientifically, practically and ideologically, even though it has also been subjected to critique.

Within different scientific fields, the upright body continues to be of interest. For instance, contemporary evolutionary biology is still discussing how and why humans have become biped. As Carsten Niemitz points out, more than 30 scientific hypotheses as to how and why the human species became upright have been proposed in the 20th century (Niemitz 2009, 241), and the discussion of them continues today. If we look to chiropractic practice, physiotherapy and other related fields, upright posture is central to our understanding of muscular-skeletal functionality and health. How this may continue the ideology of the upright body within physiotherapy has, for instance, been discussed by David Nicholls (Nicholls 2018). A lot of research attention is necessarily still focused on helping humans cope with difficulties, pains or dysfunctions when it comes to standing upright or walking. Therefore, we have not yet finished understanding how to practice upright posture, or, for instance, how to deal with the effects of sedentary and immobile lifestyles on posture and muscular-skeletal health.

Within cognitive sciences and phenomenology informed by cognitive sciences, there is also renewed discussion of the upright position and its consequences. In the chapter «The Upright Posture—It's Current Standing» in *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher puts this question at the centre of an enacted understanding of embodiment, seeing environment, body, sensation, action and mind as mutually constitutive (Gallagher 2017).

Gallagher also includes cultural and social aspects as part of an enactive understanding of the evolutionary development of human cognition (Gallagher 2017). This idea dismantles the classical understanding of the upright position as an evolutionary predetermination of the human body, seeing it instead as part of an ecological system that is also constituted by cultural meaning-making.

The key question for our understanding of current postural practices, including hand-balancing, is of course whether the traces of the discourse of the upright body—as a carrier of social and moral ideas about the body—still play a role in our understanding of the upright posture. Treating this issue in its entirety is beyond the scope of this article. However, what does appear is that, even if the moralising discourse may have moved out of the sciences of posture, the discourse does continue in the sense that the upright posture is still seen as central to *normality* in our social environment.

This is something that has been brought up in the critique of the discourse of the upright body, not least from the perspective of disability studies. The normative assumptions implicit in the idea of the upright posture are something that has been addressed by, for instance, Thomas Abrams in the article ‘Is Everyone Upright? Erwin Straus’ «The Upright Posture» and Disabled Phenomenology’. (2014) and Jack Rusczek in the article ‘Living the Upright Posture With a Disability: Challenges and Lessons for a Philosophical Anthropology’ (2014). Both articles address the understanding of normativity inherently implied in Erwin Straus’ account of the upright body in ‘The Upright Posture’ from 1952 (Straus 1952). But their work also reminds us more generally that differently abled bodies have been largely ignored in thinking and research focusing on the upright body and that we live in a culture that ‘values independence, mobility, productivity and physical strength’ (Rusczek 2014, 100). Abrams also points to the fact that the

‘economy of personhood’ relates to the upright body, as there are material hindrances that make it hard to participate in society if one does not meet the requirements of uprightness. As he writes, ‘there are material prerequisites that bodies must meet to perform phenomenology in the first place. Only then do humans get to be subjects’ (Abrams 2014, 571).

The discourse of the upright body has also been criticised from a feminist perspective. This critique addresses the cultural associations of the upright body and their links to a certain kind of masculinity. Instead, Camille O’Connor provides a feminist relational perspective. In the interpretation of the upright posture and its consequences for experience, O’Connor suggests that being upright also involves vulnerability, exposing a vital chest, and allowing softness and touch, thus emphasising not only independence but also relations (O’Connor 2014). This leads to a different vision of the upright human: ‘So yes, we are upright, alone and fighting to stay on our feet. But from where I stand, I can see another way of conceiving of being human: a way that appreciates the primacy of our reaching out, even our losing our boundaries in the other’ (O’Connor 2014, 92).

To the extent that we live in a culture where uprightness is related to certain values and where many socio-material mechanisms depend on uprightness, we can say that we are still part of the discourse of the upright body. Even if we do not deliberately believe in a discourse of the upright body with all its associations, we may nevertheless participate in it through the ways in which we practice posture.

Representations of the inverted body in circus history

Hand-balancing as a circus discipline has evolved parallel to the modern discourse of the upright body and the question relevant for the line of this article is how it has related to this discourse. However, it can be difficult to track this question, as circus and circus

disciplines do not have a unified history, and historical research into specific circus disciplines is fragmentary. What we commonly understand as circus evolved from the modern equestrian circus as it was developed by Philip Astley and others at the end of the 18th century (Stoddard 2000, Jacob 2002). Today, it is mostly the development of contemporary circus, generally practiced without animals and within theatre spaces, that is the driving force of the development of circus, at least in many European countries, Australia, Canada and South America. As with many other circus disciplines, it is difficult to trace the history of hand-balancing specifically, as very little research is available. What one can conclude, however, is that hand-balancing probably has many different roots. In the history of Chinese acrobatics, or 'baixi' (Mauclair 2002, Jacob 2008), elements of hand-balancing seem to have been present, for instance, as a part of contortion exercises. Also, the travelling performers in Europe, before the formation of the modern circus, seemed to have done balancing exercises on their hands. Here, I will limit myself to looking at some fragments of the history of hand-balancing that may have influenced hand-balancing's relation to the discourse of the upright body.

Modern circus grew out of a close relation to a military tradition—a societal institution where the upright position was being intensively rehearsed through standing and marching (Gilman 2014), and with a circus perspective, we can add: riding. It was, to a large extent, former military horse riders who brought the activities that we understood as circus under the same roof or tent. When Philip Astley and others started showing their acrobatic virtuosity on a horse at the end of the 18th century it was, among other things, a way for them to use and live on the skills they had developed within the military (Jacob 2002, 24–40). Furthermore, staying upright on a horse (and doing acrobatic tricks while doing so) was part of the circus' representation of the relation between humans and animals. Within this

frame, we can say that doing hand-balancing became a way to confirm the (military) uprightness of humans compared to animals.

Another interesting track to follow is how modern circus developed at the same time that bodily culture in general underwent an important shift at the end of the 18th and during the 19th century. As already mentioned, the bodily education of the citizens came into focus and new regimes of bodily training were developed. The development of the circus was influenced by expansion of gymnastics, early body building and flexibility training. Handstands were often included in different gymnastic systems of the 19th century, and there were porous relations between gymnastics, dance, circus, variety and theatre. In fact, 'gymnast' was not an unusual appellation for circus acrobats. Even if this history has not been traced in detail within circus research, there is reason to believe that there are fluid relations between the use of handstands in these different fields. But in the circus, hand-balancing was not only used for training but for performance, thus participating in the discourse of the upright body.

Thus, historically, the circus is not that far from the practices that are often described as part of the training of the upright, standing position and its ideologies. On a representational level, when presented in the circus performance, one could say that the feat of balancing on the hands was the exaggerated proof of how a human body masters the erect position, even upside down. Part of the circus' aesthetics depended on how humans overcome and exceed human nature: defying gravity, doing the impossible, or mastering even inverted postures. As such, it can be read as a way to surpass the erect posture through another upright posture, demanding even more mastery.

At the same time, the hand-balancing body was not only presented as excellent or superior, but also as deviant. For if there is something that has been persistent in the history of modern circus, it is the myth of it being on the outside of society. We

find this in multiple forms, from the artistic interest in the figure of the ‘saltimbanque’ (circus performer, itinerant performer, acrobat referred to also in poetry and painting) at the end of the 19th century, to the representation of circus in popular culture today. Also, contemporary circus often refers to this myth. However, both historically and today, this is a myth with modification needed (Fricker & Malouin 2018).

The modern circus has historically built itself not only outside, but also very much within and in relation to the majority society. As Brenda Assael has shown, modern circus during the 19th century deliberately played on the limits of bourgeois and middle-class society (Assael 2005). In the circus, the current gender norms were both exceeded and confirmed, especially in terms of what women were allowed to do. Circus allowed the audience to see both perfect and so-called deviant bodies, and the circus was thus highly involved in the negotiation of bodily norms. The human capacity to master the animal world was demonstrated, and the circus also participated in the colonial way of presenting what was considered strange and exotic. As a result, circus was not only an alternative to, but also a carrier of social structures. Nevertheless, the circus deliberately played on the idea of an alternative world in the way it presented itself (Assael 2005).

Within the myth of the circus, the acrobatic body (including hand-balancing bodies) has been presented as extraordinary in their capacities and deviant in their lifestyles and behaviour. In that sense, one could ask if hand-balancing has presented alternatives to the ideals of the upright body. Indeed, one could say that circus hand-balancing represents both an excessively skilled upright body, strong and flexible enough to stay upright even upside down, and a deviant body, showing the possibility of inverting the social expectation of contained bodies that stay in ordinary positions. We may find an example that is telling in terms of how these contradictory representations of the body

may coexist in Katrina Carter’s analysis of acrobatic feats performed by men injured in American civil wars (Carter 2018). As Carter shows, it is not unusual to see disabled performers perform, showing their skills rather than their disabilities. She draws attention, for instance, to one-legged acrobats performing hand-balancing and contributing to the development of the technique. Here, the body is presented as deviant, but at the same time, it is the capacity and the skill of the body that is underlined.

Thus, in terms of how the hand-balancing body is represented in the circus, it has participated in the discourse of the upright body in a paradoxical way. It seems to have been both a contradiction of the upright body—a deviant, excessive body—and a reinforcement of the upright body—an even more capable upright body. Today, I would argue, this paradoxical relation continues. Within circus performance, hand-balancing is still one way of presenting an excessively skilled body. At the same time, contemporary circus has started questioning the way the circus performer is presented, allowing for more vulnerable presentations of the circus body (Lavers, Leroux & Burt 2019).

Hand-balancing technique – practicing biomechanics

Just as standing, walking or running, balancing on one’s hands is a bodily technique that happens in culturally specific ways. Through these bodily techniques, different social and ideological understandings of the body are possibly sedimented in the individual body through enculturation. Therefore, I would like to explore the relationship between the circus hand-balancing technique and the discourse of the upright body, starting from the technique as it is understood and practiced today.

Circus has developed its own hand-balancing technique, which is different from the way handstand is used, for instance, in gymnastics, dance or other

bodily practices. Here, balancing on one's hands is not only one acrobatic feat among others, but a discipline of its own, with its own vocabulary, progression, props and so forth. This requires a great amount of precision and detailed adjustments, which are specific to circus hand-balancing.

As the history of hand-balancing has not been thoroughly explored, it is hard to say exactly how technique has evolved. However, through images, we can trace how handstands have actually become more and more aligned, upright and straight during the 20th century. On pictures from the 1920s and 1930s, the recognisable 'banana handstand' is still current. Since then, a straighter and more aligned form of hand-balancing has been developed. Though the details of this process are still not well documented and researched, it seems reasonable to think that the circus schools in the former Soviet Union had a capital role in developing this technique into a repertoire, and today, it is often referred to as the 'Russian' technique. The Soviet circus schools were among the first state-funded circus schools, and one of the innovations was to draw more heavily on other kinds of expertise to develop the circus training (Jacob 2002). In this way, it seems that the technique was specialised through the use of a more scientific and biomechanical understanding of the body.

Indeed, it is a biomechanical understanding of the body that is the basis of the discipline as it is practiced today, although not all teachers are explicit about the theoretical underpinnings of the practice. This understanding underlines how the hand-balancing body needs to move in such a way as to permit an efficient distribution of weight. This efficiency starts with the proper placement in a simple handstand, which is considered the base position and the starting point for all other positions. Here, the hand-balancer is supposed to place the bones of the body as close as possible to one central line. This becomes the starting point for more complex balancing positions, where it

is more complicated to distribute the weight correctly, for instance, in different one-arm balances where one is working with a much smaller surface or flags where the legs are extended far from the base of the hands.

This biomechanical understanding of the body in a certain way ties the technique of hand-balancing to the history of the discourse of the upright body, in the same way as other biomechanically informed practices, including physiotherapy and other forms of rehabilitation. One example of this link today is the way 'proper alignment' is still part of many forms of physical training, rehabilitation, dance and somatic practices. Also, within the training of hand-balancing today, the idea of a correct position and an ideal 'alignment' play an important role. The physiological and biomechanical alignment, which is ideal in hand-balancing, however, is not the same as in the upright standing position.

Due to the inverted position, the technique of circus hand-balancing requires a different way of aligning the back. By extending and locking the shoulders and tilting the pelvis, the back is flattened in a way that differs from how other practices see the aligned body in the standing position. Actually, it seems that in this position, the back is even straighter than in the aligned upright position on one's feet. The purpose in this case is not to sustain a healthy posture but to learn to master a posture that allows the maximum number of tricks with a minimum effort through biomechanical efficiency. By aligning the back in this particular way, the technique makes it possible to stabilize an otherwise very unstable position so that the hand-balancer can create different figures. To reach this, however, is extremely difficult; therefore, many years are spent training the 'ideal' position in a simple handstand.

Also in other ways, hand-balancing training cultivates a biomechanically efficient body. For instance, once the hand-balancing body starts performing figures other than the basic handstand, different kinds of

symmetry are demanded. In particular, the split position of the legs plays a central role, as it is often used for mounting and descending, and for different one-arm balances. Ideally, the hand-balancer should have perfect split, again so that the weight of the body can be distributed as efficiently as possible. If this is not the case, practitioners are encouraged to engage in sustained flexibility training to reach a more well-adapted physical set-up on this point.

When we look more closely at hand-balancing as a technique, it therefore turns out that hand-balancing requires a very biomechanically analytical approach to the body—requiring that each body part, movement and progression is separated and monitored in detail—compared to the upright position. This is because it is biomechanically more difficult to balance on your hands. As the shoulders are not as stable as the hip joint, and as one's centre of gravity is further away from the ground, a more detailed control of the position is needed. Due to this difficulty, where the margin of errors is extremely small, an even more perfect control of each joint and each movement is needed.

Of course, one could say that a biomechanical view of the body is simply a description of the functioning of the body. However, as we see in hand-balancing, biomechanical knowledge is not only a tool to describe, but a tool that engages with and changes the body. Biomechanical ideals in hand-balancing not only describe a body as it is but demand a restructuring of the body according to the lines of biomechanical efficiency. The great advantage of this is that it has made the development of a very detailed and sophisticated technique possible and has allowed even more incredible postures. However, we must be conscious that biomechanical principles may be used in ways that go beyond the individual body, attempting to achieve an impossible ideal. If biomechanical knowledge is employed normatively, without taking into account the actual physiological

differences of individual bodies, one may force bodies into an unobtainable ideal rather than helping bodies to balance.

Thus, on a technical level, one can say that hand-balancing is not in opposition to the discourse of the upright position—even if one stands upside-down—but participates in it in an even more complicated way. It inverts the upright position but builds on the same biomechanical idea as the upright body. It makes the hands the ground for balancing, but it requires an even more symmetrical body. It builds on the apparent symmetry of the body, but demands it to an extent that goes beyond the constitution of most bodies. It inverts the upright anatomy of the body, but the position demands even more alignment, analysis and control.

The experience of hand balancing—the precarity of upright posture

Technically, hand-balancing requires years of training in order to restructure one's body and balancing system. How this process and the act of balancing are perceived by the performer may be important to understand in relation to the discourse of the upright body. On the one hand, hand-balancers often comment on the satisfaction of mastering and succeeding a figure—thus confirming the picture of hand-balancing as being a matter of control. But at the same time, the process of learning and performing hand-balancing also includes situations where one may fall, wobble, stumble, feel tired and in other ways be in lack of control. This is, of course, particularly pronounced in the novice's experience. However, I would argue that it is also an integral part of the experience of the practice on different levels of expertise in different kinds of situations. This largely depends on the ways in which perception changes when inverting the upright position.

Whereas the upright position gives a visual

overview, sight has another phenomenal character in hand-balancing. Neurologically, vision is, of course, crucial, as vision interacts with other senses within our sense of balance (Downey 2015, 173–175). However, on an experiential level, the visual overview disappears. Instead, one enters into a more tactile relation to space and, of course, to the ground or the apparatus. However, reliance on visual input is strongly felt at the same time. Even if hand-balancers train to balance with closed eyes (in order to train the other parts of the balancing system), there are situations when sudden changes in vision make the balancer wobble, as when the light changes or disappears, thus leading to an experience of how central vision is to balancing—and how vulnerable balancing can be without it.

Another aspect of balancing that one is made aware of through hand-balancing is the fact that the sense of balance is a system where all parts are dependent on each other. Even if we, in daily speech, refer to a sense of balance, balance is not one sense but many. As Downey accounts for in the article ‘Balancing between Cultures: Equilibrium in Capoeira’, balance is a relational or ecological system in which the vestibular system, proprioception, tactility and vision interact (Downey 2015). As balancing on your hands is biomechanically more complex, this becomes even more apparent (Downey 2015, 182–183). If only one of the sources of sense information changes, everything else can become unclear in one’s perception—at least until one has acquired the capacity to compensate. If someone suddenly turns off the light, I might lose the precision of my perception. Even a slippery surface can confuse tactile impressions and make it very difficult to maintain balance. In this way, the experience of hand-balancing emphasises to what degree our balancing system is relational.

Furthermore, hand-balancing puts emphasis not only on what I *can* sense, but also on what I *cannot* sense, or *cannot sense yet*. The learning process in hand-balancing is to a large extent based on what I

would call a sensorial discrepancy, where the subject is constantly made aware of what cannot yet be sensed. At each stage of the process, and in the process of learning each new figure, it is not rare that one is made aware that a leg is too low or too high and that one is tilting, even if it does not feel that way. Developing hand-balancing is a constant fight to be able to sense what cannot yet be sensed. In this way, the experience of hand-balancing is not a holistic process where everything unites perfectly, but a quite violent process where the individual is confronted also with the incomplete capacity to sense.

Seen from an experiential point of view, hand-balancing thus contains many characteristics that have the potential of—indirectly and by contrast—making the subject aware of its own perception and distribution of the senses within the upright position. One could say that the subject within hand-balancing becomes aware of the complex bodily structures of consciousness that even the upright position contains. If the discourse of the upright body underlines the autonomy of the subject, hand-balancing underlines the subject’s dependence on these relational processes. If the discourse of the upright body underlines the unity of the subject, hand-balancing underlines its internal complexity and its limits. Though there are moments where one experiences euphoric control, there are just as many where one experiences vulnerability, confusion or disorientation.

Conclusion

Though the moralizing aspects of the discourse of the upright body, as it was expressed in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, may seem foreign to us today, the discourse of the upright body has not completely disappeared. As the critique shows, the upright body is still considered a default position, a strong part of what is considered normal. Though we may wish to see art practices as subversive, we also need to be aware of the extent to which they carry

such discourses. Here, the cliché that hand-balancing inverts the upright body is one that needs to be modified.

As shown in this article, circus hand-balancing may invert the body physically, but it does participate paradoxically in the discourse of the upright body on some levels—representationally, technically, experientially. Thus, hand-balancing is not necessarily a privileged site to explore a critique of the discourse of the upright body. However, it is a fascinating site for seeing the complexity of how this discourse works on many levels and how these are deeply integrated into bodily techniques and experiences. Furthermore, as hand-balancing is an artistic practice that calls for deliberate reflection on what and how artists communicate, there is a potential for discussing, varying and modifying how we may deal with the discourse of the upright body.

Indeed, this is something that calls for much more research into the socio-cultural specificities of different postural practices. Such work can shed light not only on circus hand-balancing or similar practices, but also on the way inverted, tilted and twisted postures have been and are involved in the discourse of the upright body. This is relevant not only to understand circus as an art form or other forms of bodily training and display but also to understand the complexities of posture and the specific ways in which postural practices are socially and culturally informed.

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BIOGRAPHY

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Camilla Damkjaer's research concerns the practices and philosophies of the body and the methodologies of practice-based research. Her research focuses on the articulation of embodied knowledge in circus, dance and yoga. She is also particularly concerned with the

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The drama of contemporary dance in Latvia and the dance performance *Out*

Dita Jonīte

SAMMENDRAG

Danseforestillingen *Ute* (*Ārā*) av Olga Žitluhina som er basert på Henrik Ibsens berømte drama *Brand* (ofte også kategorisert som en tragedie), byr på visse paralleller med forfatterens kunstneriske og pedagogiske strategier og utviklingen av samtidsdans i Latvia. For det første avdekker både Ibsens skuespill og de ovennevnte prosessene en historie om en søken etter å følge personlige idealer, om en reise for å overkomme feil samt fysiske og mentale utfordringer. For det andre har Olga Žitluhina sin egen visjon for samtidsdans i Latvia, og hun har jobbet utrettelig for å utvikle denne sjangeren fra begynnelsen av helt siden midten av 1990-tallet, og dette pågangsmotet deler hun med hovedpersonen i både *Brand* og *Ārā* med deres evne til å se bortenfor hva vanlige personer kan, til å forutse fremtiden og forestille seg den.

I løpet av 25 år har mange viktige initiativer blitt gjennomført: etablering av en profesjonell danseorganisasjon, produksjon av et titalls danseforestillinger, ledelse av kunstnerisk iscenesetting for den internasjonale samtidsdansfestivalen *Laiks dejot* (*Time to Dance*), opprettelse av et studieprogram ved Latvias kulturakademi som i sin helhet er viet samtidsdans. Denne kreative prosessen har alltid vært fulgt av finansieringsproblemer, organisatoriske utfordringer og en dystopisk holdning mot Olga Žitluhinas personlighet og hennes kompromissløse kunstneriske holdning.

ABSTRACT

Based on Henrik Ibsen's famous drama *Brand*, Olga Žitluhina's dance performance *Out* (*Ārā*, 2013) presents certain parallels with the choreographer's artistic and pedagogic strategies and the development of contemporary dance in Latvia. First, both Ibsen's play (often also defined as a tragedy) and Žitluhina's pedagogic activities trace the pursuit of personal ideals as a journey of overcoming mistakes and physical and mental challenges. Second, just as the tragic protagonist of *Brand* and *Out* can see beyond what ordinary people can see to predict and envision the future, Žitluhina has a vision of contemporary dance in Latvia and has worked tirelessly since the mid-1990s to develop this genre from scratch. She has contributed to dance with many major initiatives: establishing a professional dance association; producing dozens of dance performances; leading the artistic direction of the international contemporary dance festival *Time to Dance*; and creating a study programme at the Latvian Academy of Culture dedicated entirely to contemporary dance. This creative process has always been accompanied by funding difficulties, organizational problems and negative attitudes towards Žitluhina, her personality and her uncompromising artistic stance. Inspired by Olga Žitluhina's dance performance *Out*, this article explores her contributions as choreographer and teacher to the development of contemporary dance and art in Latvia.

The drama of contemporary dance in Latvia and the dance performance *Out*

Dita Jonīte

Spring 2003 marked the official beginning of professional contemporary dance in Latvia, when the first class of academically educated contemporary dance choreographers graduated from the Latvian Academy of Culture. Established in 1999, this study programme was the initiative of dancer and choreographer Olga Žitluhina (b. 1960), whose work during the 1990s was an imperative petition for the birth of the new genre. The Olga Žitluhina Dance Company (1996–2012) created dozens of dance productions and organized *Time to Dance*, which grew in the ten years since 1998 from occasional modern dance nights into an international festival of

contemporary dance. Žitluhina also initiated Dance Day, an annual event on April 29—an international day of dance that includes open dance classes with artists of different genres at various dance venues.

In 2013, one landmark event highlighted the entire scope of developments in Latvian contemporary dance, including its problems: the contemporary dance performance *Out*. The concept was inspired by Henrik Ibsen's drama *Brand* (1866), which is sometimes characterized as a tragedy. There are several parallels between that performance and the creative work of dancer and educator Olga Žitluhina. In European culture, a tragic hero like *Brand* is able to see beyond his time; the same can be said of Žitluhina, who has worked tirelessly to develop the contemporary dance genre in Latvia since the 1990s. This has been a challenging process for all concerned; there have always been funding difficulties and organizational problems, and Žitluhina's activities and uncompromising position have often provoked an ambivalent response. Ibsen's *Brand*, Žitluhina's *Out* and the development of contemporary dance in Latvia each in their own way trace the ambitious road taken by a protagonist in pursuit of their ideals, exhibiting a willingness to self-sacrifice, the courage to risk making mistakes and a readiness to face physical and mental challenges.



Figure 1. Scene from the performance *Out*, 2014.
Photo: Jūlija Žitlubina.

Tragedy or drama

A tragedy is essentially a dramatic composition in which a character encounters and struggles with insurmountable obstacles, usually resulting in the protagonist's imminent demise. Although Ibsen characterized his work as a 'dramatic poem', re-reading the play and watching the dance performance *Out* several times highlighted the symbolic presence of the elements of tragedy both in this production and in Latvian contemporary dance since the mid-1990s. The 'funeral' of the Olga Zitluhina Dance Company at the end of 2012 was a shocking event and a true demise. Before their two final performances, the company addressed their wider audience through the press, saying exactly that—we invite you to celebrate our funeral.

The tragic protagonist can look beyond her or his present. Olga Zitluhina and the protagonists of her dance productions cannot be viewed as tragic in the classic understanding of this term—as protagonists in a classical drama who offer more to society than it can return (because society does not usually accept its heroes in the present). A tragedy is also a conflict that cannot ultimately be resolved in a positive way. There is still no financially secure contemporary dance troupe in Latvia, nor is there any financial backing for dancers seeking to maintain their professional standing. Contemporary dance artists are always askers, borrowers and renters, and their work, which is based on pure enthusiasm alone, is taken for granted. This is why the processes of contemporary dance might more appropriately be described as drama, in which hardship is perceived simply as the succession of distressing events and trials in people's lives. In any event, the literal drama continues; financial support for this art form remains sporadic, and artists must try to survive from one project to the next, earning their living by teaching or other means and confining their artistic practices to evenings and weekends.

Out and outside money

Developed between 2011 and 2015, Olga Zitluhina's *Out* was co-created with the fourth intake of students at the Latvian Academy of Culture during their third year of studies. The project turned out to be surprisingly successful; *Out* was performed 40 times—a record in the history of Latvian contemporary dance—and the production captured almost every relevant national award and nomination.

Funding for the production's creation was secured in 2013 through the Ibsen Scope Grants competition, which the Norwegian government initiated in 2007. Submitted under the title *Moved by Brand*, the Latvian project received one of four scholarships granted in 2013. The jury explained their decision as follows: 'The project shows an impressive and inventive insight into the relationship between text, theatre and dance'.¹ The production was the result of successful collaboration on several levels: a large ensemble of performers (15 dancers), original music, and a targeted approach to the dramaturgy of the performance, stage design and lighting that was at once imaginative and reserved.

The production's tragic character and dramatic antinomies is evidenced by two events. The first of these was the dialectical relationship between reality and the creative process. Although the Olga Zitluhina Dance Company staged frequent dance performances, represented Latvia at international contemporary festivals and promoted contemporary dance locally by developing various professional activities, the troupe had announced their retirement at the end of 2012. They never secured base funding to meet the essential needs of the country's only professional contemporary dance troupe (such as payments for regular training, work and rent), and this state of crisis was intensified by physical and mental exhaustion.

Secondly, in the 2013/2014 season, when the Olga Zitluhina Dance Company ceased to exist,

1 <https://ibscope.com/grants/winner/moved-by-brand/>

Žitluhina herself was working with her fourth group of contemporary dance choreographers at the Latvian Academy of Culture. Through a fortunate coincidence of various circumstances, an opportunity arose to apply for a scholarship from the 2013 Ibsen Scope Grants competition. To develop the production, an equal amount was secured through other project competitions, including the State Culture Capital Foundation. For the dance students, this was basically unpaid work that formed part of the study process.

Performance booklet for *Out*

Contemporary dance is characterized by thoughts and reflections on the present day, space, time and society. Viewing the performance booklet as part of the performance, the booklet for *Out* was designed to look like a propaganda newspaper or a pre-election publication that touched on pressing issues while revealing the thought process behind the production's creation. This in turn formed the energy volume of the dance performance; opinions and sentiments about the questions posed by Ibsen's *Brand* lived on in the dancers' movements and the production's message and, of course, also affected audience perceptions.

Rather than simply listing dancers' names, the newspaper-format booklet was used to introduce each of them, with a short description of their achievements in socially useful work. However, these accounts were partly fictitious; during the production period, dramaturgist Inta Balode had asked each performer to email their answers to a question posed in the play or to share their feelings about how they might react in similar situations. For example, what the young dancer Alise Putni a would do if she suddenly found herself in a position to save someone's life (as in an unsuccessful suicide attempt by a desperate person)? To complicate the matter, she would have to risk her health or even her life to do so. Additionally, the dancer was supposedly due to attend Carte Blanche auditions on the following day after a two-year wait to join the

Norwegian dance company. Based on the dancers' reactions and answers to these questions, Balode created the following description of Alise: 'She makes swift and correct decisions. In difficult times, we hope to have people around that are able to see and react. That is Alise'. It was followed by a depiction of the event explaining this description of the young woman, and a summary: 'Alise always acts with truth and purpose' (text from the programme notes).

The process of creating the dramaturgy for the performance through the newspaper excerpt provides an insight into the performer's or creative team member's interest and presence in addressing the questions posed by life and the play. Similarly, the movements of the young dancers embodied tension and emotional intelligence as they danced on their platforms and moved across the performance space from one podium to the other, with or without blindfolds, following another dancer or leading them. The newspaper included individual fictitious 'calling cards' for each protagonist and creative team member. In an idealistically optimistic, self-ironic and witty manner, each card referred to plans, accomplishments and resolutions, past paradoxes in communications with culture policymakers and funders, and a retelling of a conflict with a high official, shedding light on the role of sex and gender in culture funding.

The short creative resumés of the production's musicians and artists incorporated irony and play with notions of *Brand*. For example, the following fact was included as one of Olga Žitluhina's life victories: 'A call from the President's office with an invitation to the round table discussion Ethnic Minorities for the Development of Latvia' (text from the programme notes). While this was an actual fact, placing it alongside '1st place in a figure skating competition in 2nd grade' and a picture of Olga Žitluhina with her orders of merit conveyed the relative meaningfulness of lifetime achievements. Žitluhina was then asked 'What do you take responsibility for?', to which she answered

‘Openness (because I believe that the body holds the truth, and blisters, bruises and scratches do not have to be hidden)’ (text from the programme notes). Among other things, Olga Žitluhina herself distributed these newspapers to the audience before the performance.



Figure 2. Scene from the performance *Out*, 2016.
Photo: Andrejs Vasjukičs.

Dancing on tables

While the dance performance does not follow the plot of the play in any literal sense, the newspaper text relates closely to Ibsen’s work in many of its aspects and nuances. Throughout the performance, for instance, each dancer embodied *Brand’s* ‘all or nothing’ creed by performing their solo part to the point of physical exhaustion and maximum bodily expression. They also showed a willingness to take risks, moving from one podium to another while blindfolded as viewers were finding their seats before the scheduled performance began.



The podiums were placed at different heights between the viewers, and the seats were distributed around the performance space to heighten the sense of inclusion. [Figure 3] This spatial arrangement invited the viewer to take an active part in the journey undertaken by the dancers (and by *Brand*). The performance also attempted to shift society (i.e. the audience) out of its comfort zone; at the end, to the sound of an emotional and vital song by Dzelzs Vilks (a rock band), the dancers invited the audience to join in their vigorous movements on the podiums. When the dancers looked each audience member in the eye and invited them to step onto the platform, each viewer had to fight an inner battle in deciding whether to do it. They could make an excuse and say ‘I don’t wish to surrender to anyone’s pressure’ or ‘I don’t want to do what everyone is doing’. On the other hand, they could choose to overcome their meekness and insecurity and rise from the warmth and comfort of their seat. Opening up and freeing their own bodies in this way could be interpreted as an inner victory on the road to personal freedom. Conversely, refusing to participate could be seen as a clear stance against conformity.

Just like *Brand*, Olga Žitluhina is defined by idealism, ambition, a refusal to compromise, a strong will and constant dissatisfaction with previous achievements. Unlike Ibsen’s play, however, the dance performance was life-affirming and charged with youthful energy and humour. This created a paradox, as a performance that conveyed the experience of extreme drama and ethical questioning turned out to be harmonious and emotionally appealing. One possible explanation is that the dancers were Olga Žitluhina’s students. At the time, they were a united team, a close-knit ensemble, youngsters full of energy and passion—independent personalities who could plug into a unified group while also revealing their own separate individuality. Žitluhina and her

Figure 3. Scene from the performance *Out*, 2016.
Photo: Andrejs Vasjukičs.

colleagues have always pursued this combination of individuality and unison—the uniqueness of a personality coupled with the energy of a community of like-minded professionals.

The stage costumes devised by costume artist Šeila hinted at the movement of sea creatures; a motif of amphibious fins enlivened the dancers' black clothes—or maybe they were trolls? During training, student choreographers might as well be called trolls. In this context, the troll realm (based on Scandinavian mythology) connotes the otherworldly origins of human life—a dream, an illusion, an irrational element of the psyche. Like trolls, students must be open to all opportunities presented; at the same time, they must find themselves, their true core. The choreography of this performance was defined by a range of reproduced series of movements, expressive gestures, sharp turns and changes of direction. At the same time, each dancer breathed character, narrative and energy into these movements through their individual approach and personal presence.

Regarding the relationship between teacher and follower, and between hero and crowd in Ibsen, there clearly comes a moment when a majority of students rise up and protest—especially if followers and crowds are granted free will. Assuming that the truth is somewhere between, Žitluhina's choreography rarely seeks to enforce ideals at any cost but undoubtedly raises the bar to the highest level for her dancers and her students.

Movement in *Out*

The promotional campaign for *Out* said that its premiere on 8 December 2013 would 'start the *Out* movement, which will initiate a different morale, a different responsibility, a different growth'. In creating the performance, Olga Žitluhina also decided to create a new association of dancers and performers in the hope that this time would be easier. The association survived for a short time, and the group met frequently

at workshops and developed various projects. However, faced with the reality of having to work at other jobs to support everyday needs, the community gradually faded out. Tragedy commonly involves a conflict between the idea proposed by the hero and an inability to make this idea come true in the real world. Yet, despite everything, Olga Žitluhina still knows what she is doing; instinctively, she knows what direction to take, and she remains certain that this dance genre must persist.

Viewing the podiums as both symbolic mountains and safety islands, the wandering of *Out's* dancers and artists—students at the time—can simultaneously be seen as a determination to overcome the obstacles of life's journey. As the performance opened, the dancers had to find their way from one podium to the next while blindfolded. They achieved this by holding on to their companions' shoulders, legs and arms, but mostly they relied on themselves—their sense of balance and the experience of their body—the cuts and bruises on their limbs evidencing their complete lack of self-pity.

After some time, a single dancer separated from the group. Lifted up by her feet, it looked like she was walking on clouds; she could reach the sky. Is this lightness only achievable by someone brave enough to be herself/himself, free and unburdened by the mundane and the materialistic?

Olga Žitluhina undoubtedly ranks among the leading figures of Latvian dance. Over twenty-five years, her creative work has always encountered obstacles and difficulties, but she has never lost the sense of responsibility needed to ensure that Latvian contemporary dance will continue to develop, along with new generations of choreographers and new areas of artistic activity. The subtitle of *Out* in the programme notes was a carefully chosen quote from Ibsen's play: 'That you lacked strength may be forgiven, But never that you wanted will'.

BIOGRAPHY

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1



Kollaborativ danskonstnärlig process – en övning i demokrati

Lena Dahlqvist

SAMMENFATTNING

Artikeln redogör för innehåll och resultatet från en undersökning av en design för lärande i en danskonstnärlig process på gymnasiets Estetiska program inriktning Dans. Syftet med min observationsstudie var att undersöka och lyfta fram didaktiska verktyg i en kollaborativ kollektiv process och utveckling av kunskaper i dans i enlighet med Skolverkets kunskapskrav kring förståelsen av en konstnärlig process. Det empiriska materialet speglades vid analysen i designteoretikern Staffan Selanders (2017) vokabulär *dialogiskt förhållningssätt, domänspecifik kunskap och meningsskapande sammanhang*. Analysresultatet visade att eleverna genom designens didaktiska verktyg fick möjlighet att utveckla kunskaper i och om en konstnärlig process, hitta sin egen danskonstnärliga röst och samtidigt få träning i en demokratisk process. Konklusion blev därmed att metoden Rundan/Values Clarification utvecklar kunskaper både i danskonstnärligt skapande och i deliberativ demokrati.

Nyckelord: design-för-lärande, konstnärlig process, deliberativ demokrati, value clarification

ABSTRACT

This article refers to an investigative study of a design in a creative project at Estetiska programmet Dans at an upper secondary school. The didactic choices, tools and methods used in the project was analysed from a design-for-learning-perspective. The study was exploring how a design in an artistic collaborative process can provide knowledge development in an artistic process. The data was analysed by using the vocabulary of Staffan Selander (2017), such as *dialogical approach, domain specific knowledge, and meaningful context*. The result shows that Value Clarification/Rundan as a method in combination with deliberative conversation can provide and develop knowledge in creating dance as well as a practice in deliberative democracy.

Keywords: design-for-learning, artistic process, deliberative democracy, values clarification.

Kollaborativ danskonstnärlig process – en övning i demokrati

Lena Dahlqvist

Som undervisande danslärare och undersökande danskonstnär har jag erfarit att man i praktiskt danskonstnärligt kollaborativt skapandearbete kan utveckla förståelse för att skapa danskonst och samtidigt praktisera demokrati. Jag har i en observationsstudie av en grupp 16-åriga danselever på gymnasiet undersökt didaktiska metoder och verktyg i min egen praktik. Observationerna gjordes i ett dansskapande projekt i ämnet dansgestaltning ur ett design-för-lärande perspektiv (Selander 2017). Jag upptäckte att eleverna med i en designad estetisk läroprocess kunde arbeta på ett konstnärligt utvecklande och samtidigt deliberativt demokratiskt sätt.

Innehållet i den här artikeln bygger på en observationsstudie i samband med min masters-uppsats på Stockholm Konstnärliga Högskola *Kunskapsutveckling i en danskonstnärlig process – praktikinära studie av design i ett skapandeprojekt på gymnasiet* (Dahlqvist 2021). Empirin i studien bestod av en deltagande observation i ett skapandemoment i gymnasieämnet dansgestaltning med en grupp danselever på ett nationellt gymnasieprogram Estetiska programmet inriktning Dans. Studien utgick från didaktikforskare Staffan Selanders teori om design-för-lärande (Selander 2017). Undersökningen syftade till att lyfta fram och synliggöra en design i gymnasieämnet för förståelse av en konstnärlig process hos tio danselever i årskurs 1 på gymnasiet. För att uppnå mitt syfte formulerades tre forskningsfrågor. Den första frågan gällde på vilket sätt man kan designa undervisningen i ett skapandemoment för att uppfylla Skolverkets kunskapskrav (2011b) för konstnärlig process. Den

andra frågan gällde på vilket sätt ett meningsfullt sammanhang kan utformas i ett skapandemoment och den tredje frågan på vilket sätt man kan skapa utrymme för personligt uttryck i en kollektiv kollaborativ konstnärlig process. Resultatet svarade på de tre forskningsfrågorna samt visar att undervisningsdesignen som den är utformad tränar demokratiska färdigheter. Innehållet i den här artikeln bygger på mitt ovan nämnda mastersarbete.

Texten börjar med en kort beskrivning av material och metod samt inramningen för min studie. Därefter kommer ett stycke om danskonst och demokrati – en social process, följt av en presentation av de didaktiska verktyg som användes i skapandeprojektet och den konstnärliga processen. Därefter kopplar jag min undersökning till några andra studier med ett dialogiskt förhållningssätt. Artikel avslutas med en konklusion från undersökningen av designen i en estetisk kontext.

Material och metod

Det empiriska materialet i min studie består av tre delar. Det utgörs dels av videofilmade deltagande observationer (Denscombe 2009), ca fyra timmar, dels av noteringar av projektplanen och genomförandefaser samt min tidigare erfarenhet av undervisning i ämnet. Materialet analyseras utifrån ett design-för-lärande-perspektiv (Selander 2017). Analysmetoden består av en närläsning och kvalitativ tolkning av den insamlade empirin. Genom att även notera aktiviteten i det videospelade materialet närläses aktiviteten, det vill säga all interaktion noteras och analyseras. Empirin tematiseras därefter

och delas in i kategorier utifrån Staffans Selanders begrepp, *dialogiskt förhållningssätt, domänspecifik kunskap samt meningsskapande aktivitet* (Selander 2017). Dessa begrepp är centrala både i relation till designens utformning och genomförande och kan kopplas till uppfyllande av kunskapskrav i ämnet och vald arbetsform. Analysen av empirin ligger till grund för mitt resultat. Konklusioner relaterar till forskningsfrågorna och studiens övergripande syfte att lyfta fram och synliggöra designen för förståelse av en konstnärlig process i ett skapandemoment på gymnasiet i ämnet dansgestaltning.

Inramning för min studie

Designen och undervisningens genomförande i dansgruppen utgör ramen för min deltagande observationsstudie och insamlingen av det empiriska materialet. I varje lärsituation finns ett mönster och en form som påverkar handlingsutrymmet ur ett socialt, ämnesmässigt och etiskt perspektiv (Hauge 2016). Det gäller också i skolans värld och i det dansgestaltande skapandeprojektet som undersöks i min studie. Skolverkets riktlinjer för Estetiska programmet utgår från examensmålen där eleverna ska ha utvecklat kunskaper kring att "skapa, uppleva och tolka konst och kultur" (Skolverket 2011a). För att ge möjlighet att utveckla dessa förmågor har jag tillsammans med min danslärarkollega Susanne Nordin utformat en designad läroprocess i form av ett kollaborativt kollektivt dansskapande projekt. Projektet ingick som ett moment i ämnet dansgestaltning och utformades för tio danselever i slutet av första året på gymnasiet. Danseleverna skulle genom undervisning utveckla kunskap och färdigheter i dansimprovisation, komposition, koreografi samt i att framföra ett dansstycke inför publik (Skolverket 2011b).

Val av tem för det gemensamma dansstycket utgick från elevernas önskan av att skapa dans till Avicis Without You. Eleverna framförde argument för sitt val och menade att de ville gestalta sina

tankar kring psykisk ohälsa. Dansstycket skulle vara gruppens kommunikativa kommentar till temat och en homage till artisten Tim Bergling. Temat psykisk ohälsa var också aktuellt på elevernas skola och i samhällsdebatten.

Projekt som var föremål för studien, designade och genomförde min kollega och jag tillsammans. Vi har under ett flertal år utvecklat ett nära samarbete och delar gemensamt ansvaret i alla karaktärsämneskurser inom Estetiska programmens inriktning Dans. Vi har som yrkesmänniskor inom fältet både liknande och skiftande erfarenheter från professionellt arbete med dans samt kompetenser inom olika genrer som stöttar och kompletterar varandra.

Varje projekt har dock sin egen själ och en egen specifik process (Lööv 2015; Mulinari 1996; Sahlin 1996) och att arbeta i projekt innebär att arbeta efter en plan mot ett tidsbestämt mål. Min roll i design och genomförande av projektet var att vara danslärare, utformare av undervisningen samt att inta en forskande roll i sammanhanget. Med stötning av min kollega, min tidigare erfarenhet av undervisning i ämnet samt det dialogiska förhållningssätt vi har till både danskonst och undervisning blev det möjligt att växla roller mellan aktiv undervisande lärare och en observerande forskarblick.

Danskonst och demokrati - en social interaktiv läroprocess

Designen som undersöks bygger på ett dialogiskt förhållningssätt i den skapande dansaktiviteten. Att förstå är att i ord eller handling kunna visa att man förstår (Rostvall & Selander 2010). För att inte förståelsen ska gå förlorad i lärsituationen behöver deltagarna behärska teckensystemet i kommunikationen och i sammanhanget. Här ingår läraren som en viktig part i dialogen och den kunskapsutvecklande skapandeprocessen. Lärsituationer är informationstäta, multimodala med många olika resurser och dessa bildar gemensamt

en helhet av meningsskapandet i kommunikationen (Hauge 2016; Marnar 2005; Rostvall & Selander 2010).

Min kollega och jag utgick i designen av skapandemomentet från synen på lärande där social aktivitet och kommunikation är centralt i kunskapsprocessen.

Kommunikation handlar om intention, avsikt och om att ge något en innebörd. Interaktivitet handlar om aktiviteter som är sammankopplade med varandra i olika sekvenser, där en aktivitet utgör en reaktion på en annan [...] aktivitet. (Selander 2007, s. 162)

Då denna kommunicerade gestaltning är förstälilig för gruppmedlemmarna bildas en länk mellan individerna i gruppen och i kommunikationssammanhanget (Broady 1988; Selander & Kress 2017; Säljö 2014). Detta är en essentiell och grundläggande komponent i det kollaborativa arbete och läroprocessen och nödvändigt för en demokratisk process. I en kollaborativ process behöver kommunikationen fungera och förstås av alla deltagarna i gruppen för att verket ska upplevas som meningsfullt och som ett gemensamt skapat dansstycke där alla är delaktiga i skapande och framförande, så också för våra elever. Genom att processen är kollektiv ges fler möjligheter till input som eleverna kan lägga till sina erfarenheter i kunskapsutvecklingen av och förståelsen av hur en konstnärlig process kan vara.

Didaktiska verktyg i den konstnärliga processen

För att kommunicera tankar och upplevelser begripligt för deltagarna behöver man hitta och utveckla ett gemensamt förstälilig språk (Dysthe 2003; Gibbons 2010; Säljö 2014). Detta möjliggörs med ett dialogiskt förhållningssätt i undervisningen. I dialogen utvecklas förståelsen för både det domän-specifika inom danskonstens fält, vokabulären samt aktiviteten kring

den konstnärliga processen. De didaktiska verktygen vi konsekvent väljer att använda i designen är *rundan* och *deliberativa samtal*. Båge metoderna förstås och genomsyrar genomgående den estetiska läroprocessen i det kollaborativa dansskapande arbetet.

Rundan – kommunikativ förberedelse för en demokratisk process

Rundan är en didaktisk metod som min kollega och jag använder i alla karaktärsämnen i vår dansundervisning. *Rundan* i sin form ger alla i en grupp en möjlighet att ta plats, tala och bli lyssnad på. Vi kallar samtalsformen för *Rundan*¹ eftersom ordet går laget runt. Det innebär att den som är närvarande på danslektionen svarar på en öppen fråga. Frågans art varierar dock beroende på lektionstillfälle och vara en reflektion eller som en summering av något eller bara vardaglig i största allmänhet. En viktig poäng med *rundan* är att varje elev tränas i att inför alla deltagarna i dansgruppen tala, lyssna och visa respekt. I *rundan* får eleverna ta del av varandras förväntningshorisonter (Selander 2017), något som kan öppna upp för gott samarbete och trygghet inom gruppen. På så sätt fungerar *rundan* som trygghetsskapande grund med en demokratiliknande samtalsform och som en förberedelse för skapandeprojektet.

Rundan ger förutsättningar för den enskilde eleven att få syn på sig själv, sitt språk, sina åsikter och sin egen individ, både som person och som danskonstnär. För min kollega och mig är *Rundan* en modifierad form av metoden Value Clarification, på svenska Aktiva värderingar en pedagogisk metod från 1970-talets USA (Steinberg 2020). Inom språkvetenskapen är en vedertagen uppfattning att varje människa har ett eget individuellt unikt sätt att

1 *Rundan* - den variant av Value Clarification/Aktiva värderingar (Steinberg 2020) min danslärarkollega och jag använder som metod och didaktiskt verktyg.



Figur 1. Faktorer i en estetisk lärläroprocess med demokratisk praktik i en design för lärande (egen ill.).

uttrycka sig i tal och skrift, kallat idiolekt². Detta stötts och utvecklas genom aktiviteten i *rundan* (Steinberg 2020).

Rundan och deliberativa samtal – demokrati i praktiken

Empirin visar att eleverna inom gruppen diskuterar sina danskonstnärliga förslag och att eleverna sinsemellan och med oss danslärare samtalar om vad dansrörelserna uttrycker. I förlängningen gjordes alla delaktiga i och visade engagemang i den koreografi de framträdde med. I processen visade sig också *rundan* fungera som en sömlös övergång från en alldaglig fråga till att diskutera konstnärliga val.

Generellt karaktäriseras det *deliberativa samtalet* av en demokratisk inställning till kompromisser, diskussioner och lösningar där en grupp personer gemensamt finner en lösning (Englund 2000; Fredriksson 2008). Ömsesidigheten som ska finnas i samtalen är beroende av en respekt för demokratiska värden, vilka både tränas och skapas i och med samtalen. Eleverna i studien visar detta både till varandra och oss lärare. I demokratisk anda läggs i deliberativa samtal olika argument fram och alla deltagare lyssnar. Alla visar tolerans i bemötandet av andra åsikter och tankar vid diskussionerna samt en strävan att söka gemensamma överenskommelser. Förespråkare för deliberativa samtal menar att individens syn på sig själv utvecklas genom att

personerna i samtalet speglas och bemöts av den andra (Andersson 2012; Englund 2000; Insulander 2011). *Rundans* form gör att mandatet att framföra sin åsikt fördelades demokratiskt till alla inom gruppen.

Deliberativa samtal som didaktiskt verktyg i kombination med *rundan* används i den undersökta designen för att främja gruppens kollaborativa dansskapande samarbete vid alla kompositionella och koreografiska val och lösningar. *Rundan* som form i samtalen och de lösningsinriktade *deliberativa samtalen* fungerar i studien både som ram och motor i projektet under hela framväxten av dansstycket och ger en form av aktiv träning i demokrati.

Min förståelse är att de *deliberativa samtalen* hjälper eleverna att nå gemensamma överenskommelser där alla upplever delaktighet i besluten, trots initiala skillnader i uppfattningar om utformningen av det koreografiska innehållet. Som deltagande observatör i samtalen i gruppen tolkade jag aktiviteten så att diskussionerna gav en inblick i den andras tankevärld när någon presenterar en annan åsikt. Empirin visar att den andres perspektiv och erfarenheter ger input i de deliberativa samtalen. Detta innebär synliggörande av flera handlingsmöjligheter och delade erfarenheter av personliga tankar och hur de kan tolkas (Broady 1988; Selander 2017; Säljö 2014). I *deliberativa samtal* utvecklas individens möjligheter till reflektion och handling (Englund 2000), vilket även gäller eleverna i min studie. De visar respekt och tolerans för de skilda uppfattningar och åsikter som förekommer i diskussionerna samt verbaliserar och uttrycker olika koreografiska lösningar.

2 Med den språkvetenskapliga termen idiolekt avses en enskild persons speciella språk. Institutet för språk och folkminnen. (2017) <https://www.isof.se/lar-dig-mer/kunskapsbanker/lar-dig-mer-om-svenska-dialekter/jag-och-min-dialekt>

Utgångspunkten för att förstå lärande är att förstå den situation som finns för handen, som fångar en individs uppmärksamhet och utgör en utmaning. Hur individen förstår sammanhanget baseras givetvis på tidigare kunskaper och färdigheter, men det är utifrån intressen och förväntningar som orienteringen mot omgivningen sker. (Selander & Kress 2017, s. 114)

De *deliberativa samtalen* visar i min design studie på möjligheter att genomföra en forskjutning av ägandet och ansvaret för dansstycket över till eleverna. På så sätt kan en lärarroll reduceras från en traditionell autoritär position (Bourdieu 2012; Broady 1988) till att bli mer jämlik i processen som helhet. Vi lärare är i skapandeprojektet till en början samtalsledare och ser till att alla elever i gruppen får utrymme att uttrycka sig fysiskt eller verbalt. Designen möjliggör att eleverna gradvis kan ta över den ledande rollen i samtalen och fördela ordet demokratiskt. Empirin visar att den andres perspektiv och erfarenheter ger input i de *deliberativa* samtalen. Detta innebär synliggörande av flera handlingsmöjligheter och delade erfarenheter av personliga tankar och hur de kan tolkas (Broady 1988; Selander 2017; Säljö 2014).

Andra studier med dialogiskt förhållningssätt

Dansforskaren Lynn Hanna (2008) konstaterar i en studie att eleverna genom dansundervisning utvecklar andra sorters kunskaper som inte bara hör till dansteknik och danskonstens uttrycksform. Hon menar att dansundervisning utvecklar en kreativ problemlösningsförmåga och demokratisk färdighet. I likhet med vad jag såg i min studie utvecklar dialogen en förståelse för en egen personlig hållning. Samtalet menar Lynn Hanna ger en ökad förståelse och kunskap kring danskonsten som uttryck, samt den enskilde individens förståelse av sig själv i sin kontext.

Forskargruppens Nancy V. Wallace, Carlos R. A. Jones, Deborah Lipa-Ciotta & Corinne M. Kindzierski (2014) visar i en studie att deltagarna med ett dialogiskt förhållningssätt utvecklar en förståelse av den konstnärliga processen och en ökad kommunikativ säkerhet. Förmågan att våga och kunna kommunicera främjar relationerna inom gruppen. På liknande sätt visade empirin i min undersökning att elevernas aktiva deltagande i samtalen uttrycker ett engagemang i det kollektiva kollaborativa skapandet.

I det *deliberativa samtalet* kring ett rörelsematerial inbegrips den enskilda elevens tolkning av sin upplevelse och blir till en verbaliserad tanke eller rörelse. Samtalet och diskussionen ger därmed också en möjlig bild av mottagarens perspektiv och en respons på tanken, uttrycket. Dansforskaren Larry Lavender (2009) beskriver en arbetsmetod IDEA – Improvisation, Development, Evaluation and Assimilation som främjar det kommunikativa utbytet mellan alla deltagare. IDEA är ett sätt att arbeta där varje del utmanade koreografernas och dansstudenternas kreativa förmåga. På liknande sätt som Lavender beskriver fick varje elev i mitt forskningsprojekt genom det dialogiska arbetssättet kring koreografiska val möjlighet att hitta sitt eget koreografiska uttryckssätt och samtidigt ta del av andras konstnärliga tankar.

Konklusion – demokratisk process i en estetisk kontext

I artikeln har jag redogjort för min undersökning av en specifik design-för-lärande med *rundan* och *deliberativa samtal* som centrala didaktiska verktyg och metoder i en estetisk process. I den dansskapande processen spelade *rundan* en viktig roll som trygghetsgrund i elevgruppen. Den har även bidragit till en sömlös övergång in i de *deliberativa samtalen*. Resultatet i min undersökning visar att danselever med ett dialogiskt förhållningssätt kan uppnå Skolverkets kunskapskrav (2011b) och domänspecifika kunskaper med utrymme för personligt konstnärligt uttryck i

en meningsfull aktivitet (Selander 2017). Resultatet visar även att samtalen kan verka reducerade vid maktkamper som kan pågå i det sociala rummet (Andersen & Kaspersen 2007; Bourdieu 2012; Palme 2008). Designen kan därmed åstadkomma färdigheter i både estetiska och demokratiska processer.

Jag har i skapandeprojektet varit både undervisande lärare samt deltagande observatör i en forskarroll. Detta kan synas krångligt, men med en förankring i ett dialogiskt förhållningssätt har jag varit medveten om eventuella svagheter och fallor. Med andra empiriska metoder och teoretiska perspektiv hade studiens insamlade material och resultat varit annorlunda. Dock har detta ej varit intressant för mig då jag i min studie strävat efter att synliggöra didaktiska verktyg i en design-för-lärande.

Den sociala processen kan inte underskattas och den har betydelse vid inlämning (Selander 2017; Säljö 2014; Bourdieu 1995), vilket också min studie visar. Eleverna fick genom designen av undervisningen gemensamt kollaborativt i en estetisk läroprocess öva att både skapa danskonst och aktivt praktisera demokrati. Gruppen gjorde med sitt danskonstverk ett inlägg i samhällsdebatten om psykisk ohälsa och deltog på så sätt demokratiskt i ett större samhälleligt sammanhang. Dessa färdigheter kan eleverna ha nytta av som både danskonstnärer och i ett samhällsbyggande arbete på demokratisk grund.

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BIOGRAPHY

As a professional, **Lena Dahlqvist** has mainly worked with teaching dance in upper secondary school. Since the beginning of 2000, she has been teaching contemporary dance and basic classical ballet at Estetiska programmet Anderstorpsgymnasiet in Skellefteå. Her education as a dance teacher was completed in 1987 at Stockholm University of the Arts, followed by dance studies in New York for one semester. For shorter periods of time, she has taught contemporary dance at Addis Ababa University and

Hager Fikr Theatre and in Stockholm. She has also worked as a dancer for part of the 1990s. Her master's thesis in Contemporary Dance Didactics was carried out in the form of an observational study of a group of dance students in an upper secondary school. The purpose of her investigation was to highlight didactic choices and tools in a design for knowledge development in an artistic process.

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Høstens aktiviteter i



Her er noen av aktivitetene som er planlagt høsten 2022:

Felles fagdag på Seilet

13.september kl.13-16

Organisasjonene på Seilet – huset for kunst og kultur i skolen arrangerer for andre år på rad digital fagdag for lærere. Det blir en felles innledende del og deretter kan man velge blant flere workshops innen de ulike fagområdene som er representert. Følg med på nyhetsbrev, SoMe og våre nettsider. Seilet har en egen arrangementskalender:

<https://www.seilet.org/arrangementer>

Høstkurs

Som vanlig samler SANS fagmiljøet til høstkurs i oktober/november, med tilbud til både lærere i grunnskolen, kulturskolen og på MDD-linjene i vgs. Nøyaktig tid, sted og innhold er ikke på plass, men publiseres så snart det er klart på

<https://dansepraksis.no/aktuelt/>

Våre kurs er alltid gratis for medlemmer. Vi tar også imot ønsker om innhold/tematikk, så send gjerne en mail til: sans@dansepraksis.no

Nettverk for dans i lærerutdanning

Nettverket ble etablert i 2019 og har arrangert flere webinarer med tematikk som er aktuell for nettverkets medlemmer. I perioden 2022-24 vil nettverket ledes av Stig-Ivan Nygård, høgscolektor i idrettsfag ved Universitetet Nord. Nettverket tar imot nye medlemmer og vil arrangere minimum ett webinar i løpet av høsten. *Følg med!*

Norske koreografer 2: Siri & Snelle

Sent i 2021 ferdigstilte vi den digitale undervisningsressursen *Norske koreografer 2: Siri & Snelle*. Før sommeren fikk vi bevilget midler fra Sparebankstiftelsen til å sende en kunstnerpedagog ut i skolene for å hjelpe interesserte lærere til å ta i bruk ressursen i sin egen undervisning. Vi kommer til å gjennomføre prosjektet skoleåret 2022/23 og vil gjerne at lærere som er interessert i å lære mer om hvordan de kan anvende skapende dans i undervisningen, om å ta kontakt med oss: sans@dansepraksis.no

Prosjektet omfatter først og fremst Østlandsområdet, men vi strekker oss så langt vi kan. *Førstemann til mølla!*

Undervisningsressurs

NORSKE KOREOGRAFER

Siri & Snelle

2



Memberships

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

A membership in **SANS** offers you 1–2 issues per year of the Nordic Journal of Dance, electronic newsletters, reduction rates for courses and conferences arranged by SANS and more. For further information and membership fees, see <http://www.dansepraksis.no>.



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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 with subject heading «Contribution to Nordic Journal of Dance».

Research Article

Inversion? Circus Hand-Balancing and the
Discourse of the Upright Body

Camilla Damkjær

Practice Oriented Article

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the dance performance *Out*

Dita Jonīte

Emerging Scholar

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Lena Dahlqvist

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