

# Nordic Journal of Dance

– practice, education and research



Volume 9(1), 2018

# Contents

Editorial .....	3
<b>Research Articles</b>	
<i>Josefine Löfblad: Bodily Archiving in 69 Positions</i> .....	4
<i>Tua Helve: Political by Design: Costume Design Strategies within the Finnish Contemporary Dance Productions <i>AmazinGRace, Noir?</i> and <i>The Earth Song</i></i> .....	14
<i>Karen Schupp: Dancing the 'American Dream': Dance Competition Culture in Times of Shifting Values</i> .....	32
<b>Practice Oriented Article</b>	
<i>Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt: A Body of Accents</i> .....	44
<b>Book Review:</b>	
<i>Corinne Lyche Campos: Dansbaren — The Mob without Flash (2016)</i> .....	52

## Editorial Board

### Issue editors:

*Katarina Lion and Elisabet Sjöstedt-Edelholm*

### Board members:

*Franziska Bork Petersen, Denmark*

*Laura Navndrup Black, Denmark*

*Eeva Anttila, Finland*

*Leena Roubiainen, Finland*

*Sesselja G. Magnúsdóttir, Iceland*

*Anette Sture Iversen, Norway*

*Hilde Rustad, Norway*

*Elisabet Sjöstedt-Edelholm, Sweden*

*Katarina Lion, Sweden*

Cover photo: Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt by Kyoto Art Center

Original design: Bente Halvorsen

Revised design: Arild Eugen Johansen

Publisher: Dans i Skolen on behalf of Dance Education Nordic Network (DENN),

[www.dansiskolen.no](http://www.dansiskolen.no), [dis@dansiskolen.no](mailto:dis@dansiskolen.no)

Printing: IT Grafisk AS

ISSN 1891-6708

# Editorial

In this issue of *Nordic Journal of Dance*, the readers are invited to an in-depth exploration concerning research and self-reflective processes. The articles in this issue present important and different theoretical perspectives such as intercultural, micro- and macro definitions of the political situation today in the United States as well as in Sweden. The discussions also touch upon the aesthetic analyses of a dance piece as a performance act of archived bodies, as well as the political meaning of different costumes on performing bodies and of cultural appropriation. The political body in performance and as performance is our focus in this issue. We are therefore proud to present these important and updated articles for the readers and hope they offer a forum for new perspectives and personal reflexions.

The first research article by Josefine Löfblad is an analysis of Mette Ingvarsten's *69 Positions*, a dance work in which the audience participates in a guided tour through Ingvarsten's own "archive". Löfblad's analysis of this performance states that the archive includes both actors and audience bodies. Löfblad states that the Body-archive can be stored in single bodies and even transmitted between different bodies by repeatedly reappearing in or during a performance. This discussion leads to the research paper *Political by Design: Costume Design Strategies within the Finnish Contemporary Dance Productions AmazinGRace, Noir? and The Earth Song* by Tua Helve. She is a researcher and costume designer who investigates how costumes in three contemporary dance performances in Finland communicate political meaning. She states that costume design not only connects political meaning through its aesthetic choices, but also reveals the versatility embedded in this area of everyday garments as costume within contemporary dance performance.

The last research article is Karen Schupp's *Dancing the 'American Dream': Dance Competition Culture in Times of Shifting Values*. Using the concept of dance competitions in a critical political perspective Schupp shows how and why local dance studios participate in these kinds of events. The article focuses on different dance genres, which compete in regional and national events for awards. Schupp's text raises significant questions about the influence of the United States' democratic ideals and the effects of supporting this competitive dance stage. The informal power- relations in the field of dance are also discussed in Corinne Lyche Campos' review of the anthology *Dansbaren — The Mob without Flash*. It is of great interest when it sheds light on the political and democratic perspective that Dansbyrån as a cultural project represented. This issue also includes an essay of Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt. In *A Body of Accents*, she reflects on her own personal right to participate in and perform the Japanese dance called Nihon Boyō. In this text, she also reveals how her previous experiences in life became a filter for what she was capable of perceiving and embodying.

Finally, we hope that the readers will find these articles of value when it comes to our exiting field of dance as practice, education and research.

*Elisabet Sjöstedt-Edelholm and Katarina Lion*  
Issue Editors

## Bodily Archiving in 69 Positions

Josefine Löfblad

### ABSTRACT

Recently, an interest in archives and archiving has been noticeable amongst artists as well as scholars. This paper analyses Mette Ingvartsen's *69 Positions* (2014), a dance work in which the audience participates in a guided tour through Ingvartsen's own "archive". The aim is to look at how archival traces and archival practices "perform" in the work, with a specific focus on bodily archiving. As a theoretical framework, I draw mainly on André Lepecki's (2016) conceptualization of "the body as archive", whereby reenacting becomes a mode of inventive archiving that actualizes not-yet utilized potential in a work. In this analysis, I propose that Ingvartsen's body and the bodies of the audience create a collective body-archive, which collectively actualizes (previously virtual) intimacy. In addition, I argue that blurring the distinctions between body and archive and between reenactment and archiving are ways of insisting that dance does not disappear but remains, counter to "archival logic" (Schneider 2011, 99), by being stored in bodies and transmitted between bodies and by repeatedly reappearing—always more or less altered—in or as performance.

### ABSTRAKT

Under senare år har det funnits ett tydligt intresse för arkiv och arkiverande bland såväl konstnärer som forskare. I den här artikeln analyseras Mette Ingvartsen's *69 Positions* (2014)—ett dansverk som kan ses som en tydlig representant för arkivintresset, i vilket publiken guidas genom Ingvartsen's eget "arkiv". Artikelns syfte är att undersöka hur arkiverade rester och arkivpraktiker "agerar" i verket, med fokus på kroppslig arkivering. Som analytiskt ramverk används huvudsakligen André Lepecki's (2016) konceptualisering av "kroppen som arkiv" varigenom återuppförande (*reenactment*) blir en form av kreativt arkiverande som aktualiserar ett verks inneboende, ännu inte utnyttjade, potential. I analysen föreslås att Ingvartsen's kropp och publikens kroppar tillsammans bildar en kollektiv arkivkropp som kollektivt aktualiserar (tidigare virtuell) intimitet. Jag argumenterar slutligen för att ett utsuddande av distinktioner mellan kropp och arkiv, liksom mellan återuppförande och arkiverande, är sätt att insistera på att dans inte försvinner utan sparas, men på icke-"arkivlogiska" vis (Schneider 2011, 99), genom att lagras i kroppar, överförs mellan kroppar och återkomma—alltid mer eller mindre förändrad—i eller som performance.

# Bodily Archiving in 69 Positions

Josefine Löfblad

## MDT, 18 October 2016

Mette Ingvarsten personally greets us (about 70 spectators) when we enter, one by one, into the gallery-like room built upon the stage of MDT.<sup>1</sup> The floor is white, and we are surrounded by white, metal grid walls on which hang written documents, pictures and video screens. When all have entered, Ingvarsten gathers everyone together and explains that we will be guided through her archive. She begins the guided tour by describing how she wrote to performance artist Carolee Schneemann with a proposal to reconstruct *Meat Joy* (1964) with the same performers as in the original version. From one of the written documents, which she takes from the wall, Ingvarsten reads aloud Schneemann's negative, yet detailed, answer to the request. In her response, Schneemann emphasises that the work would have a radically altered meaning today if performed by the (now) aging bodies of the original performers. The refusal to *reconstruct* the work—and hence the refusal to try to put together the old version of *Meat Joy*—incites the verbal and bodily *reenactments* that follow.<sup>2</sup> Ingvarsten initially describes *Meat Joy* in words:

Over here there are four women lying on the floor. Their asses are almost touching while their legs are pointing up towards the sky. They are moving their legs in a delicate kicking action and they look as if they are enjoying it immensely. The image looks a bit like an erotic flower opening its petals in all directions. Now four men come and pull the women out of this first constellation. They are carrying the women on their backs, you have

to imagine them bent forward. The women look strangely dead and at the same time in positions of total submission or devotion. This continues for a short moment before the men grab the women in a new position; they are now carrying the women in front of them and the women are playfully kicking their legs, until the men put them down in a circular configuration. (Ingvarsten 2016, 11)

Ingvarsten quickly assembles me and three other spectators into a closely standing group. In synchronization with her verbal account, we are encouraged to sway to and fro and subsequently collapse on the floor. Alternating between verbal accounts and bodily enactments, or a combination of both, Ingvarsten continues to perform a thorough reenactment of *Meat Joy*. She finishes by showing a video clip from the original performance event and thereafter continues to the next performance piece

## Introducing “the body as archive”

The description above is of the very beginning of 69 *Positions* (2014), a participatory work (Bishop 2012) by the Danish-born and internationally renowned choreographer Mette Ingvarsten in which the audience is guided through Ingvarsten's own “archive”. The guided tour is divided into three parts. In the first, naked and sexual performances from the 1960s, entailing more or less audience participation, are reenacted. The second part consists in reenactments of previous works by Ingvarsten herself that explored nudity and/or sexuality. The third part comprises a

lecture as well as bodily and imaginary explorations of more recent—and sometimes even imaginary—sexual practices. Throughout the performance, it is the archival remains and artefacts (i.e., the documents, books, pictures and videos exhibited in the gallery-like room that the audience enters) that trigger the verbal and bodily reenactments.

There has recently been a theoretical interest in “the archive”, particularly in art history and performance studies.<sup>3</sup> Archives and archiving have also been of major interest to dance scholars, as is evident in anthologies such as *Preserving Dance Across Time and Space* (Brooks and Meglin 2013) and *Transmission in Motion* (Bleeker 2017), the former concerned with dance preservation and the transmissions of legacies while the latter focuses mainly on the transmission of dance through digital archives and technologies. However, in contrast to these anthologies, which deal mainly with archiving and transmission as functions that either follow or precede a performance, I am interested in how archives and transmissions of dance might play a role in the dance performance itself. Thus, this article aims to examine how archival traces and archiving practices are employed in *69 Positions*, with a particular focus on bodily archiving.<sup>4</sup>

Given the recent interest in archives, it is perhaps not surprising that “the body as archive” has become an often utilized concept in dance and performance studies.<sup>5</sup> André Lepecki has famously identified a “will to archive” in contemporary choreography, manifested as various forms of reenactment whereby body and archive become one and the same (Lepecki 2016, 120).<sup>6</sup> As Lepecki argues, bodily archiving (as reenactment) generates an opportunity to set free the intrinsic, although not yet utilized, possibilities of a work of art:

[O]ne reenacts not to fix a work in its singular (originating) possibilization but to unlock, release,

and actualize a work's many (virtual) com- and impossibilities, which the originating instantiation of the work kept in reserve, virtually. (Lepecki 2016, 120)<sup>7</sup>

It is therefore the surplus capacity of a work that can be activated through a reenactment performed by a new body. And by embracing the differences and alterations, always bound to repetitions and transmissions, reenactments, by implication, challenge or even entirely suspend authorial control of the original (Lepecki 2016, 115–16, 124–25, 132–33).

Julie Tolentino and Martin Nachbar are two choreographers who have famously engaged in archiving in and through their bodies, and are two of the four examples in Lepecki's essay on bodily archiving. In her performance series *The Sky Remains the Same* (2008–), Tolentino collects works by other artists and archives them in her body. The archiving procedure starts with the original author/performer performing the work in front of Tolentino and the witnessing audience. Next, the original author/performer, in this case Ron Athey, repeats the work while Tolentino simultaneously reenacts it (Lepecki 2016, 120–22). Although Tolentino's archiving seems almost identical to the manner in which dance is commonly transmitted (by being demonstrated by a teacher/choreographer/master to be imitated and repeated by a student/dancer)—a similarity that Lepecki (2016, 122–23) also acknowledges—Tolentino insists on the term archiving, “thus indicating the body as *the* privileged archival site” (Lepecki 2016, 123). In *Urbeben Aufbeben* (2008), Nachbar reenacts Dore Hoyer's *Affectos Humanos* (1962/64) by describing the process of reviving the piece, his description interspersed with bodily illustrations of the work (Lepecki 2016, 124–25). Nachbar explicitly states that he enters the archive as well as becomes a bodily archive (Lepecki 2016, 126–27). In *69 Positions*, however, it is the audience that steps into the

archive and that, instead of witnessing, participates in most of the archiving. In the following analysis, I will therefore expand the notion of “the body as archive” to denote how Ingvartsen’s body joins together with the bodies of the audience to create a *collective body-archive*. It is furthermore a collective bodily archiving-as-reenactment that I suggest actualizes intimacy, and the analysis will therefore unfold how this actualization is produced.<sup>8</sup>

### **A collective body as archive**

Throughout *69 Positions*, Ingvartsen interweaves a rather traditional lecture, or guidance, with other features and forms of presentation: she exhibits pictures and reads from texts; she plays music and video films. Most significantly, though, she accompanies her verbal guidance with bodily demonstrations, either performed by Ingvartsen alone or together with spectators. Occasionally, she leaves the spectators to reenact a dance work, or part of a work, on their own. Ingvartsen’s narration is lively and (as the quotation in the description above illustrates) appeals to the audience’s ability to evoke imaginary events in the room. It is a narration that Lepecki designates as a “fictive-affective historiographic witnessing” (Lepecki 2016, 173). The witnessing is triggered by remains that thus act as kinds of “narrative factories” (Lepecki 2016, 174). Hence, “memories” are evoked through archived traces of past events. These are events that have actually taken place, but which the majority of the present audience has not experienced when they happened (in the past). Not even Ingvartsen was present during the performances in the 1960s, but nevertheless she acts as a witness. She is thereby using, yet twisting, the supposed authenticity of archived sources in order to produce several fictive (and affective) memories, knitting them into a (hi)story.

The performance of *69 Positions* clearly displays a “will to archive” (as a “will to reenact”) (Lepecki 2016, 118–20), and the bodily archiving takes

place during the performance as well as precedes it. Ingvartsen’s body is an archive that, before the audience enters, has incorporated a number of works. When the performance starts, we are thus *in* her archive (i.e., the gallery-imitating room with archival remains) as well as *in front of* the archive that is Ingvartsen’s body. And since a body, according to Spinoza as interpreted by Lepecki, is a “set of velocities, intensities, and capacities of affecting and being affected” (Lepecki 2016, 125), a bodily archive must consequently be an affective transmitter of memories. But to fully release and transmit the real and fictive memories stored in her body, Ingvartsen’s bodily archive must proceed from a purely verbal description to a full corporeal enactment (see Lepecki 2016, 174). Thus, from Ingvartsen’s body-archive (which has already archived her own works as well as the works of other artists), dance and bodily practices are transmitted to the audience by being reenacted in, through and between their bodies, thereby creating a collective body-archive that jointly archives by reenacting.

However, the archive, and consequently also the body-as-archive, does not merely transmit but also transforms its content, where the content might be statements or dance or both, because the archive, according to Lepecki drawing on Foucault, is a system that “turns ‘statements’ into ‘events and things’” (Foucault, cited in Lepecki 2016, 127). Here, Lepecki compares the archive to choreography or, more precisely, to dance instructions and scores as transformational systems that turn written statements into movement (2016, 127–28). Furthermore, (bodily) archives tend to transform and invent beyond original authorial intentions and control (see, e.g., Lepecki 2016, 124). In *69 Positions*, it is the gathering of the audience’s affective bodies in a participatory situation that—triggered by archival remains and a fictive-affective narration inciting a bodily event—enables the transmissions and transformations to occur.

But more specifically, *what* is being actualized through the collective bodily archiving in *69 Positions*?

## Intimacy

A theme that runs consistently through the performance is sexuality. In the introduction to *69 Positions*, Ingvartsen points out that she explores the political and social dimensions of sexuality as opposed to sexuality as an intimate and private matter:

All the videos, images and texts that we are going to look at for the next two hours have been selected according to how they expose an explicit relationship between sexuality and the public sphere. That is how they reveal that sexuality is not only something personal, intimate and private that we should keep behind closed doors, but rather something that participates in how our society is built and the way politics function. (Ingvartsen 2016, 7)

But despite that the explicit theme is sexuality as a public and political matter, I suggest that what happens in *69 Positions* is that the performance, as a public and participatory event, is turned into something intimate, even private.

The intimacy is first and foremost produced through a combination of nudity and bodily proximity: Surrounded by a closely standing audience, Ingvartsen reenacts Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes* (1965), verbally and bodily, by taking off all of her clothes and then putting them on again while simultaneously describing the work. In close collaboration with the audience, Ingvartsen subsequently reenacts Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* (1968). Ingvartsen greets everyone (as one of the male performers in *Dionysus in 69*) and then starts to dance ecstatically while encouraging spectators to participate. And as her own dancing turns into a collective dancing, involving

more or less everyone in the room, she strips her body naked (except for socks and shoes) and thereafter continues to be naked for the rest of the performance. Since Ingvartsen repeatedly produces situations in which there are close bodily interactions between her and the spectators, the nudity becomes an integrated part of the interactions, and the spectators are therefore drawn into—become part of—the nudity itself.

But the nudity and proximity are also combined with another kind of intimacy, which challenges power structures as well as gender roles. In *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997), Rebecca Schneider describes how Carolee Schneemann, in works such as *Eye Body* (1963), utilized her own naked body as an artistic tool, thus coalescing the masculinity, authority and activity of the artist (as seeing subject) with the femininity and passivity of the nude (the seen object) (Schneider 1997, 33–36): “*Eye/Body* suggested embodied vision, a bodily eye—sighted eyes—artist’s eyes—not only in the seer, but in the body of the seen” (Schneider 1997, 35). In *69 Positions*, it is the guide/lecturer/author who undresses in front of us. And during the undressing and dressing in the reenactment of *Parades and Changes*, Ingvartsen constantly maintains eye contact with a member of the audience. Consequently, Ingvartsen’s body is a naked—and “explicit”—author’s body, which returns the gaze of the spectators and keeps the audience under scrutiny. In addition to the nudity and bodily proximity, the eye contact creates an extra layer of intimacy while simultaneously unsettling boundaries and hierarchies between dressed and naked, subject and object, seeing and seen.

However, the blurring of boundaries, the going in and out of participation while observing and being observed—i.e., the collective, participatory archiving in *69 Positions*—was not a particularly comfortable experience for me. Although I have worked as a dancer, participating as a spectator in any kind of interactive performance is not something I enjoy, thus participating in the sexual reenactments in



*69 Positions* was even more uncomfortable and I quite consistently tried to avoid taking part in the bodily reenactments. A collective body-archive is not a unity, however, but consists of individuals that affect and are being affected differently. Thus, not everyone was as uncomfortable as I, and some of the spectators repeatedly volunteered to participate in the reenactments. Moreover, at the specific performance that I attended, a woman completely undressed along with Ingvarsten's undressing in the reenactment of *Dionysus in 69*. It was a spontaneous and improvised participation that was clearly beyond authorial intentions and the spectator/choreographer relation prescribed by Ingvarsten, which she signalled by (after a short interaction) ignoring the woman and continuing the performance according to the script. The naked spectator was thereby left amongst the rest of us in a somewhat too intimate and awkward situation. The incident is an example of how Ingvarsten, regardless of nudity, kept her authority and thereby also kept the audience—the seeing subject which in relation to the naked object usually tends to be freer (and, in the darkness of the auditorium, more anonymous)—in a firm grip. On the other hand, it also illustrates how reenacting may always and in unforeseen ways slip out of authorial control and that the (body as) archive never secures a work as it once was, but always transforms, invents and transgresses.

The intimacy is eventually taken to yet another level when Ingvarsten (together with the audience), in the third part of the performance, explores contemporary sexual practices that utilize non-human elements. These are practices that enter the body and, as Ingvarsten puts it, “aim to transform the inside of the body on a molecular level”, thereby erasing “borders between the inside and the outside, or between private and public space” (Ingvarsten 2016, 73). Here, as in the previous two parts of the guided tour, it is the artefacts from Ingvarsten's “archive” that evoke the reenactments. However, when reenacting the

last of these molecular-modifying practices, we are not presented with a physical artefact. Instead, we are instructed to close our eyes and listen to Ingvarsten's verbal account:

You are now sitting in a waiting room. You don't exactly know what you are waiting for, but the people in front of you are being led in through two large swinging doors, one by one. It's very clear that you can only enter on your own, and when the woman comes to pick [sic] you up, you follow her without asking any questions. She leads you into a very dark room where she asks you to take off all of your clothes. (Ingvarsten 2016, 79)

Through Ingvarsten's description, the spectators are undressed and then become part of a very intimate and sexual fantasy in which electrodes are placed onto as well as into—are penetrating—our own fictive, naked bodies (Ingvarsten 2016, 79–81). Since Ingvarsten seems to refer to an imaginary sexual practice, the participation is consequently purely imaginary. But even though the narration is fictive, the “fictive-affective” narration (Lepecki 2016, 173) might nevertheless penetrate our own actual bodies, since the events verbally depicted—while reenacted in our fantasy—could potentially incite some real and intimate bodily responses. Hence, the archival body, with its “capacities of affecting and being affected” (Lepecki 2016, 125), not only performs the archiving-as-reenactment between Ingvarsten's body and the audience's as collective body-archive, but even transmits and transforms intensities deep inside of our bodies, through our most intimate sensations and imaginations

## Conclusion

*69 Positions* is a performance that takes place in an archive and that pivots around the archival traces of bodily works and practices. The archival traces

incite the verbal and bodily reenactments. Drawing on Lepecki's notion of "the body as archive", in which reenacting becomes a mode of inventive archiving (in and through bodies) that actualizes what has previously been virtual in a work (Lepecki 2016, 120), I have demonstrated how *69 Positions* produces a collective body-archive—an assemblage of affective bodies—that transmits and transforms and thereby actualizes intimacy in the performance situation. Hence, although intimacy is already inherent—virtually present—in all of the ("original") works and practices that are being reenacted, it can be fully actualized, released and heightened through the manner in which Ingvarsen performs the subject of sexuality as a bodily close and naked guided tour with audience participation.

But why conflate body and archive? What is the potential benefit of conceptualizing the body *as* archive and reenacting *as* archiving?

As Jacques Derrida points out in *Archive Fever* (1996), archiving techniques, structures and systems of preservation implicitly shape and affect what is later archived, even before the archiving itself occurs: "[T]he technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future" (Derrida 1996, 17). Conversely, what is not regarded as "archivable", i.e., what does not fit into the archive, its systems of classification and ways of functioning, might potentially, and problematically, not be seen as saveable at all, especially in a society such as ours, which clearly privileges the documentable and measurable and which archives on a large scale.

Performance and dance have commonly been considered as disappearing and as difficult, if not impossible, to save (see Phelan 1993, 146; Siegel 1972, 1). However, these are notions that have recently been contested by performance scholars writing on the archive. In *Performing Remains* (2011), Rebecca Schneider questions the supposed dichotomy between

archive and performance (and in performance she includes dance, ritual and other bodily practices):

If we consider performance as 'of' disappearance, if we think of the ephemeral as that which 'vanishes', and if we think of performance as the antithesis of preservation, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the archive? (Schneider 2011, 97)

As Schneider's question indicates, not acknowledging bodily ways of saving has political implications that reach beyond questions of whether performance, or dance, disappear, since it might mean to ignore non-Western and non-patrilineal ways of saving and writing history (see Schneider 2011, 99).<sup>9</sup> Schneider thus argues for a reversal of archival logic:

When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of re-appearance and 'reparticipation'... we are almost immediately forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body ... becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory... (Schneider 2011, 101)

By making repetition and transmission *as* performance or *as* reenactment modes of remaining, and by turning the body into a "kind of archive", Schneider blurs distinctions between body and archive and between performance and archiving, thus subverting the logic of the archive.

Conflating body and archive by conceptualizing the body *as* archive is to insist that dance—despite its ephemerality—does not disappear but remains in ways that defy archival logic (see Schneider 2011, 104–

05). In *69 Positions*, it is particularly the audience's bodies that become dance's (affective) bodily archive, which reenacts, transmits and transforms the dance. Dance subsists in bodies, circulates between bodies and reappears—never exactly as before, but with more

## Endnotes

1 MDT is a venue for experimental dance in Stockholm.

2 Here, I compare reconstructions to reenactments, where the former commonly strive “to be as close as possible to the original” (Hutchinson Guest 2001, 65) while the latter are more inventive, which will be further elaborated below.

3 See, e.g., Borggren and Gade (2013); Jones and Heathfield (2012); Osthoff (2009); Taylor (2003).

4 Ingvarsten's works have been researched by dance and performance scholars including Bojana Cvejić (2015) and André Lepecki (2016), but apart from a brief analysis by Lepecki (2016) that compares *69 Positions to Speculations* (2011), which also consisted of a guided tour, I have not found any scholarly writings on *69 Positions*. While Lepecki's analysis has functioned as a foundation to build upon in my analysis, this paper contributes a closer analysis of *69 Positions*.

5 See, e.g., Eisner (2013); Noland (2013).

6 Lepecki's “The Body as Archive” firstly appeared as an article in *Dance Research Journal* (see Lepecki 2010, 28–48). I am, however, citing the slightly expanded version of the essay which was published 2016 as a chapter in the monograph *Singularities* (2016). Lepecki's text is to a large degree a response to two previous articles, namely Ramsay Burt's “Memory, Repetition and Critical Intervention” (2003), about contemporary dance that in various ways re-uses historical dance, and Hal Foster's “An Archival Impulse” (2004), about so-called *archival art* (see Lepecki 2016, 118–20).

7 For his conceptualization of “the body as archive”, Lepecki draws mainly on philosophers such as Leibniz, Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi. “Compossibles” and “impossibles” are concepts that he borrows from Leibniz (as they are interpreted by Deleuze) that describe “the infinite inventivity of the monad” (Lepecki 2016, 120).

8 Methodologically, I am heavily influenced by performance studies, and thus I place emphasis on my bodily encounter with the performance as a live event (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007, 43). The primary source of the analysis therefore consists in memory notes from my own (bodily) involvement as a participating spectator at MDT on 18 October 2016. Since *69 Positions* was one of the subjects of Ingvarsten's own artistic research project at Stockholm University of the Arts, there is a book, published in connection with Ingvarsten's PhD defence, containing a detailed description of the performance as well as Ingvarsten's manuscript. When quoting Ingvarsten's guidance, I am citing that book.

9 Schneider clarifies what she means by archival logic by stating, “According to the logic of the archive, what is given to the archive is that which is recognized as constituting a remain, that which can have been documented or has become documented” (Schneider 2011, 98).

## References

- Bishop, Claire. 2012. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso.
- Bleeker, Maaïke, ed. 2017. *Transmission in Motion: The Technologizing of Dance*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Borggren, Gunhild, and Rune Gade, eds. 2013. *Performing Archives - Archives of Performance*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Brooks, Lynn Matluck, and Joellen A. Meglin, eds. 2013. *Preserving Dance Across Time and Space*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Burt, Ramsay. 2003. "Memory, Repetition and Critical Intervention: The Politics of Historical Reference in Recent European Dance Performance." *Performance Research* 8(2): 34–41.
- Cvejić, Bojana. 2015. *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eisner, Rivka Syd. 2013. "Living Archives as Interventions in Ea Sola's Forgotten Fields." In *Performing Archives—Archives of Performance*, edited by Gunhild Borggren and Rune Gade, 127–145. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Foster, Hal. 2004. "An Archival Impulse." *October*, no. 110: 3–22.
- Hutchinson Guest, Ann. 2001. "Is Authenticity to be Had?" In *Preservation Politics: Dance Revived, Reconstructed, Remade*, edited by Stephanie Jordan, 65–71. Alton: Dance Books.
- Ingvartsen, Mette. 2016. "EXPANDED CHOREOGRAPHY: Shifting the Agency of Movement in *The Artificial Nature Project and 69 Positions*", PhD diss., Stockholms konstnärliga högskola & Lunds universitet.
- Jones, Amelia, and Adrian Heathfield, eds. 2012. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 2007. "Performance Studies." In *The Performance Studies Reader* (2nd ed.), edited by Henry Bial, 43–55. London: Routledge.
- Lepecki, André. 2016. *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Lepecki, André. 2010. "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-enact and the Afterlives of Dances." *Dance Research Journal* 42(2): 28–48.
- Noland, Carrie. 2013. "Inheriting the Avant-Garde: Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, and the 'Legacy Plan.'" *Dance Research Journal* 45(2): 85–122.
- Osthoff, Simone. 2009. *Performing the Archive: The Transformation of the Archive in Contemporary Art from Repository of Documents to Art Medium*. New York: Atropos Press.
- Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Schneider, Rebecca. 2011. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London: Routledge.
- Schneider, Rebecca. 1997. *The Explicit Body in Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Siegel, Marcia B. 1972. *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance*. New York: Saturday Review Press.
- Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Lena Hammergren for encouragement and initial help with this article as well as for invaluable help as supervisor of my master's thesis, which this article builds upon.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Josefine Löfblad** has a BA in Theatre Studies from Stockholm University and recently completed an MA at NoMAdS. In addition, she has a dance education from the Royal Swedish Ballet School and the School of Dance and Circus and has worked as a contemporary dancer and choreographer, predominantly with her own touring company. She is the co-

founder of Köttinspektionen, a venue for experimental dance, theatre and visual arts in Uppsala, Sweden, where she worked in 2014–2015. This article consists of some modified parts of her master's thesis, which explored the relation between dance and the archive.

*[Josefine.lofblad@gmail.com](mailto:Josefine.lofblad@gmail.com)*

# Political by Design: Costume Design Strategies within the Finnish Contemporary Dance Productions *AmazinGRace*, *Noir?* and *The Earth Song*

Tua Helve

## ABSTRACT

This article examines costume design within three Finnish contemporary dance productions in the 2010s, *AmazinGRace*, *Noir?* and *The Earth Song*, by respective costume designers Soile Savela, Sanna Levo and Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila, to identify the ways in which costume works within performances with political themes through cases that make use of 'everyday' garments as costumes. Here, everyday garments as *costume* refers to identifiable forms, silhouettes and connotations, as opposed to fantasy or 'abstract' costumes. Political, as defined by the themes of these performances, means subject to power relations: societal inequality, ethnicity and otherness and climate change. Despite having shared ground in employing everyday, real-life costume components, all three designs operate with a distinct strategy. Hence, this article discusses three strategies for materializing political aesthetics through costume: one that is *inclusive* in its use of 'ordinary' clothes as costume; one that builds itself through *ready-made* connotation and representation in costume; and one that is *associative* in its approach towards the capacity of costume. This investigation, from the perspective of a costume researcher and designer, not only argues for the potential of costume to communicate political meaning through its aesthetic choices but also reveals the versatility embedded in this under-researched area of everyday garments as costume within contemporary dance performance.

**Keywords:** costume, costume design, dance, performance, aesthetic, political

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä artikkelissa tutkin tapoja, joilla esiintymispuku toimii nykytanssiteoksille keskeisenä elementtinä. Keskityn pukusuunnitteluun kolmessa suomalaisessa nykytanssiteoksessa 2010-luvulla: teokset ovat *AmazinGRace*, *Noir?*, ja *The Earth Song*, joiden puvut ovat suunnitelleet Soile Savela, Sanna Levo sekä Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila. Teosten pukuilmaisuus perustuu olemassa olevista vaatteista ammentavaan, muotojen, siluettien ja merkitysten kautta tunnistettavaan suunnitteluun, ei mielikuvituksellisiin tai 'abstrakteihin' pukuihin. Lisäksi teokset käsittelevät poliittisia, valtasuhteisiin liittyviä teemoja: yhteiskunnallisia kysymyksiä, etnisyyttä ja toiseutta sekä ilmastonmuutosta. Huolimatta teoksia yhdistävästä ratkaisusta käyttää realistista vaatetta esiintymispukuna, teosten puvut toimivat teoskonteakteissa toisistaan poikkeavin keinoin. Käsittelem tutkimuksessani näitä pukuilmaisun kolmea erilaista strategiaa tuottaa poliittista estetiikkaa: *inklusiivista*, arkipäiväisyyden avulla luokseen päästävää; *valmiina käytettävää*, visuaalista tunnistettavuutta hyödyntävää; sekä *assosiatiivista*, vapaisiin mielle yhtymiin pyrkivää strategiaa. Tutkimukseni pääasiallinen menetelmä on esitystallenteisiin perustuva sisällönanalyysi. Analyysin myötä tarjoan näkökulmia puvun moninaisiin mahdollisuuksiin kommunikoida poliittisia merkityksiä esteetiikkaan liittyvien valintojen kautta. Samalla avaan ikkunan laajasti käytettyyn, mutta aiemmin vähän tutkittuun ilmiöön: pukusuunnitteluun, joka perustuu 'arkivaatteiden' käyttöön tanssiteoksissa.

# Political by Design: Costume Design Strategies within the Finnish Contemporary Dance Productions *AmazinGRace*, *Noir?* and *The Earth Song*

Tua Helve

## Introduction

In combination with choreography and the overall artistic creation, the component of *costume* shapes the experience of a contemporary dance performance. Theatre and dance scholar Rachel Fensham summarises the concept of a dance costume as ‘a radical constellation of materials with ideas’ (2014, 45). Here, ‘materials’ indicate the concrete and ‘ideas’ the conceptual aspects of a designer’s work. Merging these two aspects forms a ‘constellation’: the conscious and constructed choices of how to dress the body in the context of a performance. ‘Radical’ refers to the centrality of costume to choreography. As dance scholar Preston-Dunlop stated, ‘what a dancer looks like influences how the movement performed will be perceived’ (1998, 72). Thus, decisions made in costume design impact performance and, to a certain extent, have a concrete effect on the expression of ideas, beyond visual, and emotion to the audience.

This article investigates aesthetic choices in costume within dance productions that possess political themes. In this context, *political* refers to a specific stance towards dance that aims to comment on the global, local and intercultural economic, ecological and humanitarian landscape. I chose political dance performance as a specific context for analysing the ways in which costume conveys meaning in relation to a theme that, first, has been clearly articulated, and second, suggests societal importance. In particular, I was eager to examine the use of ‘everyday’ garments as costume for these ends. Within dance performance, design practice that makes use of everyday garments as costume is a well-established tradition. However,

this tradition remains under-researched in terms of its versatility. While early court dances in Europe often included everyday fashions, in the course of the twentieth century, costume choice came to signify several distinct artistic aims. In 1960s USA, specific works by artist-designer Robert Rauschenberg with choreographer Merce Cunningham (e.g. *Story* 1963) and artists at the Judson Dance Theater exemplified contrasting approaches to costume: one in which costume, although mundane, was a design element, versus one in which low-key costumes were mainly used out of necessity. In present-day Finland, both approaches to the use of everyday garments exist. Here, I discuss cases that indicate in distinct ways the substance of these costumes for dance making.

To provide context for the analysis of various strategies in the use of everyday garments as costume, as a means of creating a political aesthetic, I examined three Finnish contemporary dance productions from the 2010s. I selected the performances for their engagement with overtly political themes, as open-ended examples for this investigation; another selection criterion was that the performances comprised free-standing productions, as this is the prevalent mode of dance making in Finland.<sup>1</sup> Hence, *AmazinGRace* by Kirsi Törmi (2010) addresses regional and national societal issues (Zodiak 2011), such as state savings, in dialogue with reflections of life and happiness; *Noir?* by Sonya Lindfors (2013) debates ‘race’ and otherness (Zodiak 2013a); and *The Earth Song* by Sari Palmgren (2013) contests climate concerns (Zodiak 2013b). As professionals, these choreographers entered the field at various points in time: Törmi graduated in 1999,

Palmgren in 2004, and Lindfors in 2013. However, an ethos which comments on our contemporary society characterises their artistic approaches.<sup>2</sup>

## Context for the cases

*AmazinGRace*, *Noir?* and *The Earth Song* were performed within *Zodiak—Center for New Dance* in Helsinki, Finland. *Zodiak* is a production house and dance organisation that has played a central role in the independent Finnish contemporary dance scene since the late 1980s.<sup>3</sup> It was founded by a group of self-sustaining dance artists to promote dance as a noteworthy free-standing art form and to establish an arena for cutting-edge expressions of the period, based on a variety of approaches (Zodiak 2017). Under these circumstances, political thought was involved in many of the *Zodiak* choreographers' artistic philosophies as well as in the themes for formulating movement (Ojala and Takala 2007, 15, 35). Since the launch of the national network of Regional Centers for Dance in 2004, *Zodiak* has also functioned as one of seven regional centres for dance in Finland. To allow for diversity within their criteria for advancing artistic excellence and innovation, performances are selected based on open applications (Zodiak 2017).<sup>4</sup> *Noir?* and *The Earth Song* were produced as part of *Zodiak*'s seasonal programme, whereas *AmazinGRace* premiered in Kajaani and opened in *Zodiak* in autumn 2011.

Hence, the three productions selected for analysis fulfil 'normative expectations about theatre dance' (Burt 2017, 5). They are performed in a theatrical space, engage with light, sound and costume design, and create a division between performers and spectators. Although they invite spectators to action, these overtures are subtle rather than disruptive. Regarding performers, the productions include non-dancers, either live or on video, as an integral part of the whole; notably, a pregnant professional dancer and mother is included in *The Earth Song* (2013).

The dancers in *Noir?* are of African ancestry, calling into question the Finnish canon of dance, which is predominantly, if not exclusively, 'white' (Lindfors 2017). Hence, the performances join the discussion about which bodies are accepted to dance.

## The political aesthetics of costume choice

The ways in which political concerns are performed both involve and emphasise decision making about aesthetic qualities. Here, *aesthetic* refers to features that are perceivable by the senses; accordingly, elements with tactile, aural, visual and even olfactory properties in relation to space and time within a given context are chosen to contribute to the aesthetics of a performance (Di Benedetto 2010). At times, performance may replicate pre-existing aesthetics, or it may propose a singular approach, deviating from any identifiable aesthetics. Viewing performance in relation to these choices and their variants helps the spectator better understand aesthetic qualities. Furthermore, an aesthetic choice achieves its substance in relation to the contribution of elements within the overall context, not just the performance itself but also the social, historical and cultural environment (Banes and Lepecki 2007); in another context, the meaning changes. Notably, in decisions made about these elements in choreography, aesthetic qualities are deemed critical for creating movement and costume for a dance work. Although the means they use are distinctive, both bodily comportment and costume constitute material responses to the frame of a performance.

Costume scholar Joanna Weckman has examined the varying connotations of aesthetics within performance contexts through research on reviews and scholarly texts about stage costumes in Finland. In her view, critics most often relate costume to visual aesthetics and, particularly, in a limited manner, to ideals of beauty (2014, 56; 2009, 172). Although these notions arise beyond contemporary



(dance) performance, they deserve to be addressed more deeply in this context. Connecting the role of costume with pleasing audiences and with sensual, mainly visual stimuli dismisses several central aspects within costume. First, such an approach overlooks not only the material input of a costume for performers and spectators, but also the manifold skills required in designing costumes. Second, it seems to neglect the joint creation of aesthetic experience in performance, shaped by and for thematic concerns. In fact, Weckman alluded to 'costume aesthetics' (2015, 14, footnote 8) as a concept that covers the implementation of intellectual and practical processes related to costume design and making (see also Barbieri 2017, xxii–xxiii). Here, I elaborate on Weckman's work by articulating the ways in which costume aesthetics function as a reflexive part of the overall aesthetics in contemporary dance, specifically while aspiring to a contemporary expression. My choice of cases also expands on prior research by indicating the capacity of costume within political performance.

A close reading of costume within dance indicates distinct strategies to contribute to political aesthetics, always in relation to other artistic elements. This occurs regardless of the scale of the production in question. Thus, within a broader concept of everyday garments as costume, each example analysed in the main part of this article includes one specific strategy for design: inclusive, ready-made or associative. While it is true that institutional or other well-supported productions enjoy access to broader resources, this article maintains that resources influence the process more at the practical, and less on the conceptual, level. This means that the intended aesthetics stem from the artistic team, rather than from the scale of the production. Thus, I propose the applicability of these strategies for contemporary dance of all scales. Through their articulation, this investigation intends to enrich the discussion of aesthetics and politics in the making of dance performance.

## Analytical approach

My analysis makes use of visual and audio-visual material, such as photographs and video recordings, to consider the costume design outcomes of the selected works. To complement information available via videos, I use sources from promotional material, provided by *Zodiak*, as well as the artists' own websites, programmes and articles. This means analysing costume design in live dance performances via documentation, not the visual material of costumes or performances as representations. For this purpose, I apply a content analysis method for 'recognizing meanings' (Krippendorff 2012, 27) from various texts not only in the literal sense but also as a reference for other forms of information. Content analysis supports the aims of this research to better understand the strategies used to design political aesthetics with costume from what is perceivable through design outcomes and to better comprehend costume choices within each specific political frame, as well as their direct connection with the active role of other artistic elements.

Informed by the first-hand knowledge I possess as a costume researcher and designer, I discuss the research material against the backdrop of *design tools* in general, as examples of choices that costume designers make in their own creative processes; tools refer to means of expression and together comprise a toolkit from which artists choose the means for a particular work. Here, I work with aspects such as colour, rhythm and balance, use and misuse, and scarcity and excess of elements.<sup>5</sup> Identifying these choices in each example reveals conceptual thinking pertinent to each strategy and its interrelationship with the achieved aesthetics. To identify further contrasts between the cases as three distinct strategies for design, I employ theatre scholar Aoife Monks' notion of 'wrong' bodies, which describes the interplay between a performer's 'real' body and imaginary bodies that a costume creates for the spectator (2015, 105). Overall, this allows me to probe the 'direct connection' between

the costume design process and its outcome (Helve and Pantouvaki 2016, 166) with a focus on the use of design tools as part of the overall process.

### **Costume design: Its process and implications for the performance**

The costume design process begins the moment anyone on the artistic team proposes the first costume idea. Costume ideas often develop in ways intimately interconnected with the performance context and inform the choice of design philosophy and principles (Norgren 2003). These, in turn, materialize in the concrete design tools with which a costume is created within the frame and resources of the current production (Uusitalo 2006; Bicât 2012; Hopgood 2016). In independent contemporary productions in Finland, the above conceptual and material choices do not always involve a clearly articulated costume designer. Costume design may begin collaboratively, with or without a professional designer, as is evident in the programmes and material collected from

Finnish choreographers.<sup>6</sup> Yet, these design-related explicit or implicit choices are central to performance making, since they define the foundation for costume aesthetics as an integral part of the overall aesthetics. The analysis of political implications through costume extends to the settings where the costume process begins, since these implications influence the costume frame to develop a political aesthetic.

As this article suggests, a vital way for costume to produce meaning in performance is to both apply and disturb learned behaviour on dress and clothing, since costume negotiates the ways in which we read appearances based on lived experiences in a contemporary society.<sup>7</sup> This is the case for both costume in general and for everyday garments used as costume in particular. Thus, costume helps not only to add everyday attributes to performance but also to materialize flaws,

*The low-key expression in AmazinGRace (2010) exemplifies an aspiration towards inclusion through costume within contemporary choreography. Costume designer Soile Savela, choreographer Kirsi Törmi. Photo: Irja Samoil/Zodiak—Center for New Dance.*



taboos or platitudes of society and the self (see also Barbieri 2017, 167) by, for example, being worn by a 'wrong' body to indicate an incongruous combination of costume and the costumed body, be it in relation to gender, stereotyped imagery or the overall aesthetics of a performance (Monks 2015, 105, 127). In this vein, as my analysis intends to show, costume may function according to or against its habitual identity, through scarcity or excess, creating the backdrop that allows for dance to comment on culturally bound configurations.<sup>8</sup>

### Political by design

All the selected performances credit the input of a costume designer: Soile Savela (*AmazinGRace*), Sanna Levo (*Noir?*)<sup>9</sup> and Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila (*The Earth Song*). In their designs, they rely on variations of seemingly everyday garments. A close, contextualised reading of these variations, as well as an examination of their design tools, render visible the ways in which politics materialize in distinct aesthetic choices for costume. This suggests a distinct design strategy in each case: inclusive in *AmazinGRace*, ready-made in *Noir?* and associative in *The Earth Song*.

### AmazinGRace

In *AmazinGRace* (2010), choreographer Kirsi Törmi utilises material she collected for the performance via video-recorded interviews with 51 people in Kainuu, a northern Finnish region along the Russian border with fewer than 80,000 inhabitants. In addition to spoken language interaction, she encouraged the interviewees, aged 4–74,<sup>10</sup> to provide corporeal responses to her questions (Törmi 2016, 91–2). To support her aim of respecting this collected material, the choreographer chose to invite Heikki Törmi, a non-professional dancer, as the second performer. A lack of training in dance would befit the expression of corporeal responses (Törmi 2016, 88, 93, 94).

In the performance, the interview material guides parts of the scripted frame story as well as forming the

core of the expression of physical movement. While the frame story literally shouts out a political critique concerning such national and regional issues as state savings, the poverty line, innovation hype and the condition of the national personification of the 'Finnish Maiden',<sup>11</sup> the movements convey a soothing atmosphere. Here, the two performers aim at authentic transmission of physical movement by the local people. The performers take turns repeating the corporeal material with projected extracts from the video-recordings, without speech. This layered presence of the local people in the performance, with their views on life, society and being in the world (Törmi 2016, 91), connects any (vague) notions of this region with individual narratives.

By sharing these singularities, the performance suggests a commonality amongst the local people and between the local people and outsiders, despite a surface impression of Kainuu as a juxtaposition of pristine nature, with clear waters and taiga forests, with a serious unemployment rate in the region. In this way, Savela's costumes seem to work towards a similar 'authenticity' as the performers do, with overlapping implications for a specifically 'real' and adequately 'universal'—that is, an identifiable—person. In so doing, the costume outcomes imply the principle of remaining in dialogue with the political aesthetics in the performance.

Thus, the dancing duo in *AmazinGRace* wear seemingly generic everyday garments: hoodies with sturdy pants of woven material for the female, and jogging pants for the male performer; both wear a dull red t-shirt underneath their hoodies, and neither wear shoes or socks (Figure 1). While the costume aesthetics seemingly bring forth the 'authentic' aspect of the training/street-style clothes tradition in dance, often associated with random choice, a breakdown reveals instead a carefully constructed composition. An illusion of a carefree everyday is created through systematic choices in the design: one



performer wears fern green on the bottom, while the other wears the same colour on the top. As a second colour, and with a similar intensity, in the opposite garments, a grey mélange appears in variations. A similar balance is employed in the lines, shapes and volumes of the garments. The costumes are loose enough to enable movement yet remain faithful to the corporeal interview material: The costumes do not act as instigators for new choreographical qualities. Similarly, the costume neither hides nor emphasises sex. Yet this choice towards gender neutrality does not seem to signal additions to the thematic concerns of the performance.

Hence, costume design for *AmazinGRace* reflects a common choice: embodying political meaning in everyday clothing that aspires to low-key expression. While costume choices communicate the political through the moods of the everyday, they also exemplify means of expression through design tools, such as the choice of colour, material and other compositional decisions.<sup>12</sup> Through these decisions, the design for *AmazinGRace* relies on mutual resemblance and uniformity of the costume elements as well as the characters/bodies, instead of oppositions

*In both movement and costume, Noir? (2013) materializes political meaning, and thus creates political aesthetics, by borrowing and twisting clichéd imagery related to blackness. Costume designer Sanna Levo, choreographer Sonya Lindfors. Photo: Uupi Tirronen/Zodiak—Center for New Dance.*

or contrasts. Although such costumes form a style of everyday that is roughly suited to a time span of nearly 40 decades, verbal accounts put the performance in the 2010s. Following this temporal focus, the overtly commonplace costume—enhanced by the overall naturalistic aesthetics—allows the spectators to perceive consistency, if not a correlation between the performing and the performed bodies. This suggests, following Monks, costume making's use of 'right' bodies, with the performing bodies becoming synonymous with the 'real' bodies of the performers.

In terms of design tools, this indication of 'real' bodies proposes the use of costume in alignment with its everyday attributes. Thus, in this performance, rooted in Kainuu, the costume design subtly makes tangible an authenticity within the specific context. Such a lineage of costume design responds to political themes derived from various subordinate positions within the power relations of everyday life, caused by, for example,

Bourdiesian forms of 'capital'. To disrupt this, a commonplace costume works towards the inclusion of all people. Through a respectful identification of people and garments, it suggests a community for 'ordinary' people, one that offers freedom from the prevailing order as the capitalist standard is pushed aside and other values predominate. In this community, a plain costume suggests equality. Along these lines, it harkens back to such predecessors as artist Reijo Kela in Finland<sup>13</sup> and the Judson Dance Theater in the United States as canonical examples of the aesthetics of 'ordinary' with political connotations in their ethos.

## Noir?

Borrowing a distinct strategy from *AmazinGRace*, Sanna Levo's design for *Noir?* (2013) appears rich and eclectic in its various constellations (Figure 2), with the costumes ranging from casual clothing to fringe, fur and bow ties, among others. Following the title,<sup>14</sup> the performance relies mainly on the colour black, underlining the thematic statement of the performance, which examines questions of black<sup>15</sup> identity in contemporary Finland as experienced by four black Finnish artists (Zodiak 2013a). *Noir?* was advertised in relation to contemporary social change in Finnish society, with statements such as 'a new generation of young Finns with a multicultural background is growing up' (Zodiak 2013a). Within this frame, choreographer-performer Lindfors stages select caricatures from the past, embodying the repression of minors, and sets them in dialogue with the 'real' young contemporary performers. This is not performed literally but rather in the sequence of scenes, and with the support of costume.

During the first half of the performance, the performers, three professional dancers and one professional musician, introduce themselves to the spectators with brief histories of who they are and where they come from. This is performed in a manner that implies the 'authenticity' of these stories;

nonetheless, true or false, as expressed in *Noir?*, the stories indicate the commonplace misreadings still prominent in encounters with a dominant 'white' Finnish society. In costume decisions, this materializes in black, casual, street-style garments as the costumes for the contemporary 'real' people. The impression is further highlighted with natural hair and make-up, in contrast with scenes that underline the theme of otherness through the use of wigs. Throughout the performance, two styles of wig appear, equally artificial-looking: one blond, with straight, strong but silky hair; and the other black, curly, so-called 'Afro' hair. In Monks' terms, both are equally 'wrong' for the performers, thus indicating not only one but two bodies that the 'real' performing bodies are not. In this vein, the wigs are first applied in the transition from the opening scene to Lindfors' history. In this transition, in darkness, Lindfors adds to her contemporary costume the wigs—blonde beneath, Afro on top. She walks downstage and rhythmically starts a verbal, English-language propagation. Soon, after removing the wigs but remaining in the black everyday costume, she starts the 'true' story, as the spectators are encouraged to believe, about her background, now in her native Finnish language instead of English.

In the following scene, theatrical lighting reveals the singing actor-musician Deogracias Masomi wearing a black, embroidered Western shirt, a black cowboy hat, and the same black pants Masomi, the contemporary, wore earlier. This costume, juxtaposed with the musical adaptation, mistakenly steered me to interpret the song as a cowboy song. In fact, it has little to do with cowboys. The song, called *Strange Fruit*, was famously recorded by Billie Holiday in the 1930s and has a strong political message against racism (Blair 2012). From the song, the performance continues to a full Western film soundscape. Making cinematic movements, the black cowboy moves forward from the back and shoots his co-performers in their everyday contemporary costumes, then shoots

them again, and again. After one final shooting at the audience, he smoothly shifts to dance movement, the Congolese *ndombolo*, as Masomi, without the hat and in plain lighting, returns from the caricature to his contemporary self, which is explained as part of his life story.

As the black body temporarily adopts the iconic cowboy outfit, this costume choice marks a new emphasis within the performance on using a design tool that selects garments against their stereotypical usage. Underlining whitewashed Hollywood representations, it materializes the controversy of a black body inhabiting an exclusively white character, the American cowboy. Furthermore, as choreographer Lindfors (2017) explains, the costume has its roots in Congolese (post)colonial history, where the Western style was adopted from American cowboy films as a sign of modern masculinity (Pype 2007, 264). In addition, wearing Western fashion in general refers to *sapeurs*: advocates of style and manners within the subculture of *la sape* (*Societe des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elegante*), from the early twentieth century onwards (Gondola 1999, 26). For *sapeurs*, their refined style also became a central means for resistance (Fletcher 2002, 104). With this knowledge, Masomi's costume embodies a double meaning as it is being worn by both a 'wrong' and 'right' body (Monks), with a heightened theatricality. However, the costume elements, the trousers, the shirt and the hat adapt equally well to all roles, from static singer to cool-headed cowboy to history-reflecting Finn. Only the trouser legs need to be adjusted to the tensed quadriceps in lower *ndombolo* positions.

This mechanism of intertwining stereotypes with personal histories continues in the costume and performance of the following acts. These feature, for example, Josephine Baker by Esete Sutinen, wearing a 1920s flapper dress, indicative of the Jazz Age, when Baker first performed in Paris, together with a black Afro wig that covers the dancer's face. Similarly, the

spectators meet a Black Panther Party protagonist, by Ima Iduozee, from the US-based revolutionary social movement of the 1960s, wearing a black fur vest, perhaps as an interpretation of a black leather jacket, and a black beret hat, peculiarly enough with a little black moustache. This character, however, acts in contrast to his threatening looks. Instead of any harsh gestures one might anticipate from the costume, Iduozee presents an insecure character pleading to please the spectators. Again, the spectator is given a moment to acknowledge any stereotypical connotations related to a specific costumed body. Furthermore, these scenes indirectly, and others more explicitly, equip *Noir?* to comment on minstrel shows.<sup>16</sup> References to this US-based tradition, popular since the early nineteenth century, remind the present-time spectators to view any remnants of this tradition, present also in Finnish society, through a critical lens.

Twice during the performance, the light designer Erno Aaltonen is choreographed to enter the stage as 'himself'. This young Finnish artist, not black but white, wears a black shirt, a black baseball cap, and black jeans or workwear trousers with the legs rolled to the ankle, revealing black socks in black shoes. The shirt has white buttons in the front as well as a white breast pocket, and the cap features a white logo. This combination highlights the effect that such a costume philosophy creates: While the performance steers the spectator to read costumes as representations with specific connotations, simple white details become an additional pointer that demands explanation. Here, the details indeed refer to the black/white discussion (Lindfors 2017); costume and choreography work towards the same end. Materializing a second body, after Masomi, that can be read as either 'right' or 'wrong' (Monks), Aaltonen becomes an even more apparent tool for representing this false polarisation.

As the above examples of *Noir?* indicate, through its overall aesthetics, the political meaning becomes evident. Kilumanga (2016, 7) reported an intended

'wit and humour' in treating the theme and thereby in the costume. Some of the elements indeed create playfulness, even humour, in the movement. However, the humour caused by the excessive use of elements in costume seems to function as a mirror for the spectators. The excess can be received as awkwardly 'wrong' and thereby as a critical approach in the use of these elements: For instance, the unduly exhaustive fringes whipping in the Josephine Baker flapper dress, and the curly hair trembling in the wigs with a smile on the dancers' faces, both as a minstrel-style disguise and as a natural, relaxed expression. Thus, the visual material highlights the use and misuse, together with the lavishness of the elements, as a central means of expression. This, together with the shifts from one scene to another, as well as from 'true'/'right' performers to 'wrong' bodies inside the scenes, repeatedly indicate the theatrical mechanism in the performance. Costume is used to produce stereotypes and, respectively, through staged, theatrical changes, to erase them (Monks 2015, 104).

However, as each caricature in a new costume, in my reading, refers to a specific history,<sup>17</sup> the challenge in these costume decisions appears in their representative natures, the ways in which they replace a rough sense of familiarity via identification with the intention to read them *correctly*. From this viewpoint, the impression of costumes as full stories, instead of allusions to them, urges the spectator to know black history in order to join the narrative. Preoccupied with single accounts, with my background, I failed to read these restrictively normative heroes, exoticized entertainers, and incorrectly encountered individuals as either broader categories or sites for emancipation. Hence, the question arises, as the performance also toured youth festivals, as to what extent this information, these events paraded in costume, are familiar to spectators of different age groups, backgrounds and geographical coordinates, in Finland and abroad?<sup>18</sup> Is the performance equally designed for those who cannot

read the cultural references, and does the costume play a role in inviting the spectators to learn? Would it suffice with fewer references through costume?

Finnish costume designer Milja Amita Kilumanga, who shares a similar, multi-ethnic background with Lindfors (Kilumanga 2016, 6), determined in her analysis of *Noir?* challenges in designing for a performance that explores black identity and associated stereotypes in Finland in the 2010s, asking if the choice of costume based on the concept of 'a "borrowed" black image' supports the development of the subject matter (Kilumanga 2016, 8, 9). As the performance-makers' rationale for these choices, Lindfors (2017) first mentions empowerment through the 'borrowed' characters. This includes aspects of agency and playfulness. Second, she articulates the aim to underscore the lack of socio-political knowledge about the roots of black (popular) culture, a deficiency she also faced during her own choreography education in Finland. Notably, what is 'known' through the 'borrowed image' partly arises from the cultural knowledge of each spectator. My reading no doubt differs from one with a wider personal or other perspective on, for example, Congolese subcultures. Thus, costume shows its capacity for not only inclusion but also exclusion.

As *Noir?* exemplifies, costume holds a central role in conveying political meaning with ready-made connotations and representations as its tools. This surely demonstrates one aspect of the expressive potential within costume. However, in this case, the voice of costume is tied to what is already known. Due to limited contextualised understanding of black heritage in Finland, these costumes are presented with the task of communicating predetermined, or extra-choreographic, information (see also Fischer-Lichte 2008, 139; Renvall 2016, 80). This tendency of reading the *Noir?* costumes with a consistent intensity related to black dance history might be contrasted with moments that allow the spectator a lighter reading and

a freer interpretation. Yet, what may remain beyond the reading of an average spectator may be vital for the performing bodies and the logic of the performance as they have conceived it. The costumes, in spite of prior knowledge, transmit political meaning through layers of (globalised) cultural representation, identity, and agency, as Lindfors (2017) stressed, which indicates the capacity in costume to influence performance on multiple levels.

## The Earth Song

Similar to *Noir?*, *The Earth Song* (2013) by costume designer Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila (Figure 3) creates expressions with variations of mainly black garments and also offers a wealth of visual cues. The design for this performance, the theme of which focuses on the 'human relationship to the environment, to the circulation and use of energy' (Sari Palmgren 2017), draws from increasingly global cultural references, from streetwise subculture to sumptuous pop, in a highly finished manner. In doing so, the aesthetics deliberately avoid any easy connotations of its theme, such as earth tones, sustainable (looking) fibres or an artsy hippie-style. Yet, in line with sustainability and recycling as concrete actions that guide the process of making *The Earth Song*, all sourcing for the costumes was based on reuse, including materials, ready-made garments and accessories (Koiso-Kanttila 2014; Manninen 2015, 10).

In the opening scene, pregnant performer Maria Saivosalmi sings in a dazzling, short-sleeved, knee-length sequin dress. Understanding the title, *The Earth Song*, in a literal sense, she could be Mother Earth, and thereby the splendid costume could be a reference to the diversity, as well as pricelessness, of our planet. Leaving minimal chance for this musing, the performance swiftly unfolds into the semblance of a rock concert: Four dancers appear, performing fast, intense repetitive movements at the back of the stage. Due to costumes that draw from youth street fashion

indicative of the 2010s, with shorts over leggings, vests, t-shirts with bold front prints and black jeans, together with sports/casual wear details, such as zippers (instead of buttons) and recognisable, mid-market brands, including Adidas, Converse and Nike (instead of Michael Kors or Versace, or no visible logo at all), it is as if the dancers are at an underground night-club. The dancers move to the front and then dissolve, except the female dancer, Lotta Suomi, wearing grey-scale-patterned leggings and shorts, and a black, sequined, bomber-style jacket, who begins a monologue. After a prolonged moment, her contemplation reveals the subject matter of climate change.

Throughout the performance, all costume parts fit the bodies and serve the movement. Due to this, in tandem with stylistic and aesthetic aspects, the costume appears 'right' to the performers, proposing a 'here and now' within the theatrical event. With seemingly little connection to the political content as such, the design employs a variety of chosen garments, a refined mix of patterns, tones, textures, shapes and weights, and several parts of each costume. It plays with these diverse qualities, such as sequined materials that appear and re-appear on stage. Similarly, by adding or removing items, other minimal changes in the costumes create a vivid temporality. As to the strategy, these costumes function similarly to the artists who chose to 'be themselves' to convey meaning, instead of to 'become, metaphorically' what they were to comment on, or to 'express an ideal metaphorically', as Burt explained in the context of the Judson Dance Theater (2006, 17).<sup>19</sup> By not depicting a solution to its thematic question, but instead creating an urban event as a meeting point for individuals addressing the same theme, the design foils a predetermined, or metaphoric, meaning. In contrast, it allows an airy space for multiple interpretations, for perceiving both its aesthetics and political stakes.

With such a strategy, the rock-style aesthetics of *The Earth Song* refuse to repeat familiar patterns related to political concerns over climate change.





By contrast, the costumes persuade the spectator to imagine more, to create fresh associations within the performance. The cohesion varies only in the closing scene. Here, the male dancers Jukka Peltola and Jukka Tarvainen enter, place themselves in the empty front stage, sit down cross-legged, and wear furry hats. The ascending light reveals that the hats have ears and muzzles, as if representing a bear and a wolf. The dancers sit still and sing a song; the light goes out, and the performance ends. The wild animal hats and cross-legged seating posture create an animal-like image, yet the ambiance is closer to a bedtime storybook illustration of humanised, stable and controlled characters rather than actual restless, unpredictable wildlife. In this disquieting scene, the costume seems to make a clearer statement on the human domination of and dependency on the planet Earth, as well as on human frailty and the survival of other mammals in an eco-catastrophe. In one reading, this could connect to the singing Mother Earth in the beginning. Yet, as such headgear frequently appears among individual youths in the crowds of wintery Nordic cities, the design choices could equally well continue the same logic that

*In The Earth Song (2013), ecopolitical implications appear in costume in and through the aesthetics of the design. Costume designer Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila, choreographer Sari Palmgren. Photo: Uupi Tirronen/Zodiak—Center for New Dance.*

holds no fixed connection to a predetermined reading. The dancers can be viewed either as a continuation or as an expansion of the prevailing aesthetics.

Based on *The Earth Song*, I derived the third strategy for designing political aesthetics, the last one within this article, in choosing to trust the associative power of costume—associative in the sense that the design avoids illustrating, or representing, the obvious. Here, costume belongs to the whole yet simultaneously appears independent enough to have its own ‘voice’ to address the spectators. This approach has previously been noted in terms of film costume (e.g. Bruzzi 1997, xiii) as well as in theatre and scenography (e.g. Goebels in Lehmann 2006, 86; McKinney and Butterworth 2009, 83). However, a clear pattern for designing such an experience remains unarticulated. Presumably, this strategy also works through subjective experience, more prominently than the two parallel

strategies: inclusive and ready-made. To me, the key in *The Earth Song* appears in the joy of life permeating the pressing theme. This means the choice not to force a political implication in the costume, but to contribute to the overall aesthetics by cherishing the presence of the performing bodies. Despite their fine-tuned individuality, these bodies appear as a random sample of a Western population: they could be children, the elderly or people of various backgrounds. By grasping this notion through the costume, an overarching equality that applies when encountering climate change, despite the ultimate individuality of our times, I am willing to adhere to the political subtext concerning the performance.

## Conclusions

The analysis of these three cases reveals three distinct strategies for making design decisions in costume within overtly political dance performances. These strategies include multiple aesthetic choices that work towards the aspired overall aesthetics. *AmazinGRace* relies on resemblance to the everyday, to the casual look that allows identification via everyday simplicity. This strategy refers to predecessors who steer the focus to the performers, with less drama and spectacular settings; who apply the functionality of costume through looser silhouettes and flexible materials; or who benefit from the movement that the everyday garments as costume anticipates—for example, what a pair of jeans enables a performer to do. While this strategy in contemporary performance may be useful in questioning structures in dance, for costume, it appears problematic if the strategy includes a fake impression of ‘no’ costume,<sup>20</sup> meaning there has been no design for the costume. As this article argues, ‘no’ costume is a paradox: Thinking about what to wear in a performative context indicates costume. Therefore, costume should not be dismissed, even where it makes use of existing, ready-made and, to some eyes, barely considered garments. By contrast, such a design indicates equal conceptual

thinking, which results in using select design tools for creating expression. The ‘intensity’, as well as quality, of costume is an inherent part of creating (political) aesthetics in performance.

In contrast with the above example, the political aesthetics in *Noir?* rely on dialogue with ready-made connotations. That is, the performance draws from historical examples, recognisable from their visual representations. These are brought to the spectators to both question the flaws that still influence contemporary Finnish society and to diversify the field of contemporary dance in Finland. In this process, costume appears as a vehicle. First, through stereotypes, it allows the spectator to identify characters. Second, through the play of ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ bodies, as well as through the change between roles (Monks), it equally disrupts the previous meaning. This role for costume may support a political theme in performance, as it does in *Noir?*, yet it does so by framing the domain of costume and limiting its ability to communicate beyond predetermined content.

In the third example, the tool for political aesthetics in *The Earth Song* appears in association. Through nuanced yet adequately independent design, costume supports the performing bodies to depart from generic ‘anybodies’ as well as to resist being specified body/character representations. This strategy permits the spectator to choose which cues to follow. It suggests meaning, not through symbols and signs, but through the logic that it creates within the chosen context, without pushing interpretation. It allows the application of the full capacity of costume, including its intricate social, cultural, emotional as well as aesthetic aspects—or a tailored mix of these. For the spectator, the connotations may be derived with intuition or intellect.

Discussing costume design within contemporary dance with a political theme has resulted in the identification of strategies for incorporating political aesthetics within contemporary dance. These strategies are derived from the aspirational aesthetics of each

performance, aligned with their political themes. From these different approaches, those of identification, ready-made and association, within the use of everyday clothing as costume, I propose a pervasive understanding of costume design as an active practice or, paraphrasing Lepecki (2006, 5), an 'open and dynamic system of exchange'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the strategies that this article investigated only involved cases in which costume design was based on everyday garments. Rather than creating a false hierarchy between various strategies, I seek to articulate the variations of potential. Thus, by unfolding the variety of design decisions through a select number of performances, this article has pinpointed the creative capacity embedded in costume. Further strategies for political aesthetics reside within designs that create imaginative, unforeseen costumes.

## Endnotes

1 For the structure of the field, as well as share of government and other subsidies, see Dance Info Finland (2018).

2 Törmä explains this turn in her career in her doctoral dissertation (2016).

3 *Zodiak Presents* prospered from 1986 until the introduction of *Zodiak—Center for New Dance* in 1997.

4 In recent years (2013–2016), the yearly *Zodiak* programme has consisted of roughly 25 productions with approximately 190 performances, with an average of 100 spectators (*Zodiak* 2018).

5 Among designers, similar aspects as 'tools' are well known and have previously been theorised by, among others, scenographer and professor emerita Pamela Howard (2009) and costume designer and professor Caroline F. Norgren (2003).

6 Email communications with choreographers Anna Mustonen, Tomi Paasonen, Masi Tiitta and Taneli Törmä, among others, in November 2017.

7 See, for example, Entwistle (2015) and Kaiser (2012) in the field of sociology/fashion studies.

8 Within dance, Cooper Albright (1997, xiv) traced mechanisms to read a categorisation of cultural identity—for example, gender and race. As examples of means for disrupting impressions of performers onstage, 'configurations of social identity', she names consistency/resistance and reinforcement/refusal.

9 In the *Noir?* programmes, due to funding issues, Levo is credited as a costume consultant. However, in a personal communication on the dialogic process of *Noir?*, Lindfors articulates Levo's role as the designer (Lindfors 2017).

10 The video recording of *AmazinGrace* refers to an age range of 3–74, while Törmä's dissertation (2016, 92) mentions the 4–74 range. The latter is correct (Törmä 2017).

11 The 'Finnish Maiden' refers to the shape of Finland on a map and thereby, in the arts, to a young woman as a symbol of the country.

12 For similar aspects of composition and its 'constructional elements' in dance, see Monni (2015).

13 The connection to Kela appears twofold: not only in relation to costume, but also due to Kela's roots and his enduring work, *Ilmari's Ploughed Field* (1988), in the Kainuu region (see Kukkonen 2016).

14 In the French language, *noir* means black.

15 Following the title of *Noir?*, as well as the vocabulary present in various promotional materials for the performance, I use the term 'black' in my analysis. For further discussion on this terminology, see e.g., DeFrantz (2002, 4).

16 For a summary of minstrelry, see Gonzalez (2014); for the use of costumes in minstrelry, see Monks (2010, 80; 2015).

17 Lindfors (2017) names these as the 'ghosts of the past'.

18 For similar discussions within dance, see e.g., Hammergren and Foster (2016, 291–3); Törmä (2016, 99).

19 Burt applies Phelan's terms *metaphor* and *metonymy* (1993), in the context of costume design/scenography, Renvall refers to this discussion in his Master's thesis (2016).

20 Here I allude to Yvonne Rainer's *No Manifesto* (1965).

21 With these words, Lepecki refers to the dancer's body.

## References

- Banes, Sally and André Lepecki. 2007. Introduction to *The Senses in Performance*, edited by Sally Banes and André Lepecki, 1-7. Worlds of Performance, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Barbieri, Donatella. 2017. *Costume in Performance. Materiality, Culture, and the Body*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Bicât, Tina. 2012. *Costume and Design for Devised and Physical Theatre*. Ramsbury: Crowood Press.
- Blair, Elizabeth. 2012. "The Strange Story of the Man Behind 'Strange Fruit'." Music News, National Public Radio. September 5, 2012. <https://www.npr.org/2012/09/05/158933012/the-strange-story-of-the-man-behind-strange-fruit>
- Bruzzi, Stella. 1997. *Undressing Cinema. Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Burt, Ramsay. 2006. *Judson Dance Theater. Performative Traces*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Burt, Ramsay. 2017. *Ungoverning Dance. Contemporary European Theatre Dance and the Commons*. Oxford Studies in Dance Theory, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dance Info Finland. 2018. "Facts & Figures." <https://www.danceinfo.fi/en/statistics/performances/>
- DeFrantz, Thomas F. 2002. *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Di Benedetto, Stephen. 2010. *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre*. New York: Routledge.
- Entwistle, Joanne. 2015. *The Fashioned Body. Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity.
- Fensham, Rachel. 2014. "Repetition as a Methodology: Costumes, Archives and Choreography." *Scene* 2(1+2): 43-60.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, translated by Saskya Iris Jain. London: Routledge.
- Gondola, Ch. Didier 1999. "Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth." *African Studies Review* 42(1): 23-48.
- Gonzalez, Anita. 2014. "Navigations: Diasporic Transports and Landings." In *Black Performance Theory*, edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, 19-32. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hammergren, Lena and Susan L. Foster. 2016. "Dancing the Political." In *Choreography and Corporeality. Relay in Motion*, edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz and Philipa Rothfield, 291-305. New World Choreographies, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Helve, Tua and Sofia Pantouvaki. 2016. "Sharing 'Untamed Ideas': Process-based Costume Design in Finnish Contemporary Dance through the Work of Marja Uusitalo." *Scene* 4(2): 149-72.
- Hopgood, Jeremy. 2016. *Dance Production: Design and Technology*. New York: Focal Press.
- Howard, Pamela. 2009. *What is Scenography?* 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kaiser, Susan B. 2012. *Fashion and Cultural Studies*. London: Berg.
- Kilumanga, Milja Amita. "Race as Costume. The Challenges and Choices that a Costume Designer Faces when Designing a Representation of the 'Black Woman'." Master's thesis, Aalto University, 2016.
- Koiso-Kanttila, Karoliina. 2014. Interview with the author. August 26, 2014.
- Krippendorff, Klaus. 2013. *Content Analysis. An Introduction to Its Methodology*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kukkonen, Aino. 2016. "Rural and Urban Encounters in Reijo Kela's Choreographies *Ilmari's Ploughed Field* and *Cityman*." *Nordic Theatre Studies* 28(1): 64-75.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. [1999] 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Lepecki, André. 2011. Introduction to *Dance. Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by André Lepecki, 14-23. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.
- Lindfors, Sonya. 2017. Telephone interview with the author: December 8, 2017.
- Manninen, Elina. 2015. "From Growth to Compost." *Finnish Dance in Focus 2015–2016*, 10-11. Vol 16. <http://www.danceinfo.fi/finnish-dance-in-focus/>
- McKinney, Joslin and Philip Butterworth. 2009. *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Monks, Aoife. 2010. *The Actor in Costume*. London: Palgrave.
- Monks, Aoife. 2015. "Playing the Body: Costume, Stereotypes and Modernity in Performance." In *Costume*, edited by Ali Maclaurin and Aoife Monks, 104-40. Readings in Theatre Practice. London: Palgrave.
- Monni, Kirsi. 2015. "Considering the Ontological Premises for Tools in Artists' Education—on Poiesis and Composition." *Nordic Journal of Dance* 6(2): 4-11.
- Norgren, Catherine F. 2003. "Seeing Feelings: Costume Design and Dance." In *The Dance Experience. Insights Into History, Culture and Creativity*, edited by Myron Howard Nadel and Marc Raymond Strauss, 239–54. 2nd edn. Hightstown: Princeton Book Company.
- Ojala, Raija and Kimmo Takala, eds. 2007. *Zodiak—Uuden tanssin tähdet*. Helsinki: Like.
- Palmgren, Sari. 2017. "Performances: The Earth Song." <http://www.saripalmgren.com/the-earth-song/>
- Preston-Dunlop, Valerie. 1998. *Looking at Dances: a Choreological Perspective on Choreography*. London: Verve.
- Pype, Katrien. 2007. "Fighting Boys, Strong Men and Gorillas: Notes on the Imagination of Masculinities in Kinshasa." *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 77(2): 250-71.
- Rainer, Yvonne. [1965] 2012. "On Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses called *Parts of Some Sextets*." Reproduced in *Dance. Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by André Lepecki, 4. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.
- Renvall, Janne. "What Makes the Difference in Costume Design for Contemporary Dance? From the Point of View of Pieces of Colour, Colour and Play and a Costume Designer." Master's thesis, Aalto University, 2016.
- Simpson Fletcher, Yaël. 2002. "'History Will One Day Have Its Say': New Perspectives on Colonial and Postcolonial Congo." *Radical History Review* 84(1): 195-207.
- Törmi, Kirsi. "Koreografien prosessi vuorovaikutuksena." [Choreographic Process as Interaction.] Doctoral thesis, Theatre Academy, 2016.
- Törmi, Kirsi. 2017. Personal telephone communication with the author: December 15, 2017.
- Uusitalo, Marja. 2006. "A Dancer's Costume—Visionary and Concrete." In *Theatre People—People's Theatre: Finnish Theatre and Dance 2006*, edited by Kaisa Korhonen and Katri Tanskanen, 96-102. Helsinki: Like.
- Weckman, Joanna. 2009. "Puku ja tutkimus." In *Näkyvää ja näkymättömiä*, edited by Laura Gröndahl, Teemu Paavolainen and Anna Thuring, 172-200. Näyttämö & Tutkimus 3. Helsinki: Teatterintutkimuksen seura. <http://teats.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/TeaTS3.pdf>

- Weckman, Joanna. 2014. "Kun sai hyvät kritiikit niin... sen muisti aina'—näyttämöpuku, pukusuunnittelija ja teatterikritiikki." In *Teatteri ja media(t)*, edited by Marjatta Häti-Korkeila, Hanna Järvinen, Jukka Kortti and Riku Roihan-korpi, 37–71. Näyttämö & Tutkimus 5. Helsinki: Teatterintutkimuksen seura. <http://teats.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/TeaTS5.pdf>
- Weckman, Joanna. "Kun jonkun asian tekee, se pitää tehdä täydellisesti"—Liisi Tandefelt pukusuunnittelijana 1958–1992." Doctoral thesis, Aalto University, 2015.
- Ylitalo, Silja. 2013. "Musta on pintaa." *Maaailman kuvalehti* 12, December 4. <https://www.maaailmankuvalehti.fi/2013/12/pilkat/musta-on-pintaa>
- Zodiak 2011. "Esitysarkisto 2011. Kirsi Törmi: AmazinGRace." <http://www.zodiak.fi/kalenteri/amazingrace>
- Zodiak 2013a. "Performance Archive 2013. Sonya Lindfors: Noir?" <http://www.zodiak.fi/en/calendar/noir>
- Zodiak 2013b. "Performance Archive 2013. Sari Palmgren: The Earth Song." <http://www.zodiak.fi/en/calendar/earth-song>
- Zodiak 2017. "Zodiak Info. History." <http://www.zodiak.fi/en/zodiak-short/history>
- Zodiak 2018. "Zodiak Info. Vuosikertomukset." [Annual Report] <http://www.zodiak.fi/info/vuosikertomukset>

## Acknowledgements

This work was developed as part of the research project, 'Costume Methodologies—Building Methodological Tools for Research in the Field of Costume Design' funded by the Academy of Finland.

I am grateful to artists Karoliina Koiso-Kanttila, Sonya Lindfors, Soile Savela and Kirsi Törmi for their contributions. The supervisors of my ongoing doctoral thesis project, Professor Sofia Pantouvaki (Aalto University) and University Lecturer Johanna Laakkonen (University of Helsinki), have been generous in their time and commitment to this writing process. I am thankful for Pii Ahonen at *Zodiak*, Aino Kukkonen, Tiina Suhonen, Joanna Weckman, *Costume in Focus* research group members, and Professors Ossi Naukkarinen and Peter McNeil, for their support in the development of this article. I thank *Zodiak—Center for New Dance* for providing images 1–3 and Kirsi Törmi for the *AmazinGRace* DVD.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Tua Helve**, MA, is a costume designer and a doctoral candidate. Her thesis project at Aalto University, Department of Film, Television and Scenography, investigates costume design within dance through contemporary Finnish examples. Within this project, her latest credits include the article, "Sharing 'Untamed

Ideas': Process-based Costume Design in Finnish Contemporary Dance through the Work of Marja Uusitalo" (2016). Beyond her thesis, she lectures in Finland and abroad on costume choices and design decisions within dance.

[tua.helve@aalto.fi](mailto:tua.helve@aalto.fi)

# Dancing the ‘American Dream’: Dance Competition Culture in Times of Shifting Values

Karen Schupp

## ABSTRACT

Dance competitions—events where local dance studios that are focused on contemporary, jazz, ballet, hip hop and tap compete in regional and national events for awards—are not simply venues for entertainment; they are a microcosm of the social and cultural values in the United States. Competitors need to persevere despite personal challenges, the open entry system for competitions makes it seem that anyone who can pay the entry fee has an equal chance at winning first place, and the construction of a glamorous performance all reinforce the myth of the American Dream—if you work hard, you can achieve fame.

Drawing on original and previously published theoretical and empirical studies of the culture surrounding dance competitions, this article investigates dance competition culture in relation to shifting United States democratic ideals. If the dance competition culture does in fact reflect broader United States socio-cultural and political values, what does this mean in relation to Donald Trump’s ascendancy and the emerging political values of ‘Generation Z’ or those who were born after the year 2000 (the key participants in dance competition culture). Examining both the dancing that occurs in and the frameworks and practices that support the dance competition culture raises valuable questions about the performance of United States democratic ideals on the dance competition stage.

## ABSTRACT

Dansekonkurrencer, arrangementer hvor lokale dansestudier fokuseret på contemporary, jazz, ballet, hip hop, og step, konkurrerer om præmier til regionale og nationale arrangementer, er ikke bare underholdning; de er også et mikrokosmos af sociale og kulturelle værdier i USA. Konkurrenterne skal vise udholdenhed på trods af personlige udfordringer, det åbne tilmeldingssystem for konkurrencerne gør at alle der kan betale tilmeldingsgebyret har en chance for at vinde, og opførelsen af en glamourøs optræden, styrker myten om den amerikanske drøm -hvis du arbejder hårdt kan du opnå berømmelse.

På baggrund af både originale, og tidligere offentliggjorte teoretiske og empiriske studier af dansekonkurrencekultur, undersøger denne artikel dansekonkurrencekulturen i forhold til de skiftende amerikanske demokratiske idealer. Hvis dansekonkurrencekulturen afspejler bredere amerikanske socio-kulturelle og politiske værdier, hvad betyder det så i forhold til Donald Trump’s opstigning, og de fremadskridende politiske værdier af ‘Generation Z’, de børn og unge født efter år 2000 (de vigtigste deltagere i dansekonkurrencekultur). Undersøgelse af både dansen, og de rammer og praksis der understøtter dansekonkurrencekulturen, rejser værdifulde spørgsmål om indflydelsen af amerikanske demokratiske idealer på dansekonkurrence scenen.



# Dancing the 'American Dream': Dance Competition Culture in Times of Shifting Values

Karen Schupp

## Introduction

Dance competitions continue to grow in popularity within the United States and internationally. In the United States, dance competitions are events where local, private-sector dance studios focused on contemporary, jazz, ballet, hip hop and tap compete in regional and national events to win titles and awards. In these events, most of the participants are white, upper-middle class, female adolescents and children. In my view, these events are not simply venues for entertainment, but they also appear to reflect competitive, conservative and capitalistic social and cultural values that are spreading in and beyond the United States as the culture surrounding dance competitions continues to evolve.

As a former dance competition participant and current dance education researcher, my investigation of dance competition culture combines theoretical and empirical research and performative autoethnography (Spry 2011) to look at dance competition culture in a layered way. This mixed-method approach leverages my previous experiences as a dance competition dancer, teacher and judge to inquire, interrogate and contextualise current practices and values in dance competition culture. To date, I have investigated how gender operates in dance competition culture (Schupp 2017); what is bought, sold and invested in as part of the competition experience (Schupp 2018a); and the connections between commercial dance and competition dance (Schupp 2018b), as well as creating a pseudo-documentary style web series that satirically examines dance competition culture.<sup>1</sup> Each of these research projects has demonstrated a connection

between dance competition the culture's practices and values and the dominant social cultural values within the United States, including ideas about gender, race and ethnicity and capitalism.

The 2016 United States presidential election represented a significant shift in political values. It is more than likely that this shift toward more conservative values will 'have an international impact on policies, practices and pedagogies associated with dance education', particularly those that aim for broader inclusion in and access to dance (Rowe, Martin, Buck, and Anttila 2018). Therefore, after the 2016 United States presidential election, I had a strong desire to look back at the work I and others have completed about dance competition culture in relation to the shifting values in the United States. If dance competition culture, which is a significant site for learning dance in the United States, does in fact appear to reflect conservative, competitive and capitalistic principles, what does this connection mean in relation to Donald Trump's ascendancy and the emerging political values of the Generation Z those born after the year 2000 (Cassandra Report 2015; Barr 2016), which makes up the overwhelming majority of performers in dance competition culture. In this article, I summarise my previous research to briefly discuss the microcosm of dance competition culture in relation to the conservative values represented in Trump's presidential campaign and early presidency, along with the generational characteristics of Generation Z, which adheres to more progressive values. Analysing both the dancing that occurs in and the frameworks and practices that support dance competition culture

may raise pressing questions about the performance of shifting United States values on dance competition stage.

## **Methodological Approaches for Researching Dance Competition Culture**

My approach for examining dance competition culture is multifaceted and draws upon my own experiences with dance competition culture, as well as contextualising the experiences of current participants. As such, my data has come from careful reflection of my own experiences; information collected from current participants, including both students and teacher/choreographers, and observations of current dance competition practices in relation to theoretical knowledge about dance, society and politics. Using a multipronged approach and theoretical knowledge permits a comprehensive understanding of this highly complex cultural phenomenon.

The use of performative autoethnography has allowed me to leverage my embodied experiences and form research questions based on my time in dance competition culture. Performance studies scholar Tami Spry (2011) explains that in performative autoethnography, 'the critical stance of the performing body constitutes a praxis of evidence and analysis' (20), making the performance of data both the process and product of the research process. In my own work, this has occurred through the performance of Miss Karen, a character based on my experiences in and with dance competition.<sup>2</sup> As Miss Karen, research questions emerge in response to the things Miss Karen says and does. At the same time, the character of Miss Karen often calls upon information revealed through empirical research and the theoretical framing of dance competition culture.

Empirical and theoretical research is often used in conjunction with the performative autoethnographic approach. Empirical research is valuable to the study

of dance competition culture because it highlights the experiences of those who participate. In my own work, mixed-method paradigms, such as those outlined by educational philosopher John W. Creswell (2009, 2013), that combine cross-sectional surveys with one-on-one interviews provide an 'on-the-ground' awareness of dance competition culture. Theoretical research offers a mechanism to connect participants' experiences to larger frameworks of knowledge, providing a contextualisation of the values, both implicit and explicit, in dance competition culture.

## **An Overview of Dance Competition Culture**

Competition is present in many of the dance styles that are derived from African roots and aesthetics. Jazz and tap dance, two of the early forms present in dance competition, for example, continue to rely on a friendly sense of competition to push the forms forward. Historically, this could be seen as tap dancers 'traded eights' during the days of Vaudeville and as jazz dancers challenged each other in social dance contexts in the early 1900s. Competing to gain a sense of respect, whether on stage or in social settings, has long been a part of jazz and tap dance (Guarino 2014).

In some ways, dance competition culture captured the inherent competitive nature of these dance forms to create form venues for competition. As they currently exist, competitions began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. In her work discussing how jazz dance training occurs via dance competitions and conventions, Lindsay Guarino (2014) provides a brief overview of the beginning of dance competitions. Dance Masters of America, an organisation founded by dance teachers in 1884, offered their first official competitive event in 1963. This was followed by other non-profit dance organisations offering competitive events and, soon after, the emergence of for-profit competition events. The first private dance competition was the Summer

Dance Festival in 1970, which I participated in throughout the 1980s. From this point forward, dance competition culture rapidly evolved.

As a former participant in dance competition culture, it has been endlessly interesting to consider how it has evolved from its humble beginnings in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, at eight years old, I performed my first solo in a dance competition run by a local Kiwanis Club, a non-profit organisation. I performed my two-minute dance on a high school stage, with no special lighting and the house lights on, and the music played from a simple sound system. After all the competitors in my category performed, an adjudicator joined the young dancers on stage to publicly announce first, second and third place awardees; to explain her rationale for the ranking; and to provide feedback to all the dancers. The entry fee for my solo was \$5 USD (\$13 USD adjusted for inflation). At this point in the history of dance competition culture, participating in dance competition was not yet a requisite for the financial success of private-sector dance studios, making it a somewhat special opportunity to participate. In the early 1980s, dance competitions were reasonably priced, the public adjudication framed the events as educational, and the production elements were relatively low-tech.

At today's competitions, young dancers perform short choreographed dances in professional settings (sometimes that are temporarily constructed in non-performance spaces) for a panel of judges. LCD cycloramas, sidelights and, in many cases, live projections are used to 'professionalise' the performance space. As the performance occurs, a panel of judges, typically seated front and centre in the auditorium, provide audio-recorded feedback and assign a numerical score. Feedback is only provided to the teacher (not necessarily to the students) after the event. Although the judging is subjective, there are unstated standards about what qualifies as good dancing and a good dancer. The stereotypical

competition dancer is young, long and lean, very flexible yet toned; performs movements that require power and mobility in the lower body that draws from jazz dance, ballet and acrobatic tricks, all while telling a story through facial expressions, movement quality and musicality; and wears costumes that highlight the dancer's gender and creates a sense of uniformity for a group (Weisbord 2010; Schupp 2017; Schupp 2018a). At most competitions, each participant receives an award based on a predetermined scoring rubric.

Offering an average of twenty-two to twenty-five regional and one to three national events per year, dance competition organisations are largely for-profit businesses (Schupp 2006; LaRocco 2012; Guarino 2014; Schupp 2018a). Entry fees do not differ much from organisation to organisation. For regional events, groups cost \$40–50 USD per person per entry, duos and trios cost \$50–55 USD per person per entry, and solos cost \$100–110 USD per entry (Schupp 2017; Schupp 2018a). This is in addition to the costs incurred for costumes, props, choreographer fees, warm-up attire and weekly lessons.

Part of the appeal of dance competition culture comes from the entertainment factor and familiarity of the dance styles performed and taught. Dance competition culture is heavily influenced by trends in commercial dance, or dance used in the service of selling a product (Schupp 2018b). Examples of commercial dance range from dancing in an advertisement for a product to performing as a back-up dancer for a celebrity to help sell albums, tour tickets and products. The primary dance forms drawn upon in commercial dance include jazz dance, contemporary, hip hop, ballet and specialty skills, such as acrobatics, all which can be seen on dance competition stage. Commercial dance aims to be entertaining and can be seen on television, in movies and advertisements and music videos and concerts, venues that are all readily accessible, especially through social media, to people around the globe. Commercial dance

tends to feature dancers who align with gender norms through their costuming, make-up and body attitudes. Although most commercial dancers are adult professional dancers, most competitive dancers are children; yet competitive dance choreography and costuming for children is greatly influenced by how adult commercial dancers move and what they wear. Many judges and master teachers in dance competition culture work in commercial dance, and many dance competition participants are inspired by commercial dance (Schupp 2018b). The accessibility of commercial dance contributes to making dance competition culture attractive to Americans.

Although dance competition culture described above is primarily a United States phenomenon, it is spreading across the globe. Dance competition organisations, such as Showstoppers and Kids Artistic Review, now offer regional competition events outside of the United States. And although they may not exist to the same extent on a corporate level as they do in the United States, there are dance competition organisations outside of the United States that host similar events, such as NZ Dance Brands in New Zealand and Dance Life Unite in Australia. Social media, particularly YouTube and Instagram, and dance-focused reality television shows that use competitions as both the format (*So You Think You Can Dance*) and as the content (*Dance Moms*) are accessible throughout large parts of the world, including Scandinavia. Each of these scenarios can be framed as cultural exports that convey specific cultural and political values that thrive in the United States.

Current research indicates that private-sector dance studios connected to dance competition culture are the primary location for amateur dance training in the United States (Weisbord 2010), and in 2012, dance competitions generated \$488.6 million USD in revenue (Kaczanowska 2012). Clearly, the growing popularity of dance competition culture in the United States indicates its appeal to both the youth who participate

and their guardians who finance their participation. Although children and adolescents are the primary performers and students, adults do contribute to dance competition culture; parents and guardians pay for lessons (meaning they must find the experience of being in dance competition to be of value to their children), teachers and choreographers determine the class and choreographic content, and judges determine the implicit standards of dance competition culture.

## **Selling Working Class Values**

The United States is a representative democracy rather than a direct democracy. Yet American democracy is still founded on the principle of 'liberty and justice for all', a political system that espouses the equal representation of all people and a strong belief in the power of individualism. Although Americans may have differing views about how to implement these ideals, at its core, American democracy is popularly perceived to be for the people, by the people. Each of the main political parties, the democrats and the republicans, prioritise talking for and speaking to different groups of people.

In the 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton, the candidate for the Democratic Party, emphasised making college affordable, eliminating pay discrimination based on gender, reforming immigration laws to provide a pathway to citizenship and maintaining a federal healthcare system, among other progressive initiatives (Carroll 2016). Trump, the candidate for the Republican Party, promised a return of manufacturing jobs to the United States, to build a wall between the United States and Mexico to prevent undocumented immigration, to implement travel bans targeting specific Middle Eastern countries and to eliminate the federally mandated healthcare system, along with other conservative oriented initiatives (Qui 2016). Clearly, each campaign strategy took a different approach to serving 'the people' and appealed to different sectors of the United States electorate.

Part of Trump's rise to power may stem from the reluctance to discuss class in the United States. Trump's campaign was constructed to 'appeal to the working class', yet in actuality, 'during the primaries, Trump supporters were mostly affluent people' (Lupu 2016, third paragraph). In her examination of the misguided analysis of the working class by progressives and the professional class, Joan C. Williams (2017) demonstrates how the United States has moved away from class consciousness toward 'class cluelessness'. Williams (2017) outlines how dismissing the actual concerns of the working class has led to a 'class comprehension gap that is allowing the United States and Europe to drift toward authoritarian nationalism' (location 89). For the working class, opinions that appear to be sexist or racist are often grounded in economics. For example, because working class jobs do not typically come with childcare, placing both parents in the workplace creates financial and practical complications, which is why there may be resistance to increasing the presence of women in the workforce (Williams 2017). This leads to the perception that gender expectations are more binary and traditionally performed among the working class. Trump structured his campaign by selectively prioritising perceived working-class values (e.g., not promising equal pay for equal work), thereby bringing attention to American values that many conservatives felt were diminished during Barack Obama's presidency.

Trump also won the white vote, particularly in predominately white suburbs and small towns (Drum 2017). Essayist Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) posits that Trump's ascension to power is based in white supremacy and the 'negation of Obama's legacy as the foundation of his own' (fifth paragraph). Coates (2017) argues that Trump's focus on the needs of the white working class was a strategic way to appeal to white voters in general, including many affluent white voters. Here, it is important to note that white supremacist ideas were not absent during the Obama era. For example,

the birther conspiracy theory, which Trump—back when he was just a citizen—promoted, aimed to render Obama as ineligible to serve as president and was rooted in racial resentment (Klinker 2014). Trump leveraged the recent dismissal of the working class and American class cluelessness to promote white supremacy. In this way, 'Donald Trump is not the product of white supremacy as much as a backlash against contempt for the working class' (Coates 2017, n.p.). By hiding racist ideology within the perceived needs of the working class, Trump reinforces whiteness without overtly bringing attention to race. For example, the racist undertones of harshly eliminating undocumented immigration are less apparent when immigration reform is posed as necessary to saving working-class jobs. In reality, Trump has a long history of discriminating against black Americans and non-white people (Coates 2017). As such, it is important to recognise that Trump made a tactical decision to bring attention to the white working class and their values and struggles, not to the needs of working-class citizens of colour. Trump resurrected the 'myth of the virtuous white working class [as] central to American identity' (Coates 2017, n.p.) as a way to reinforce whiteness.

Although initially difficult to see, this selling of white working-class values to upper-middle-class white communities plays out on the competition stage. The participants of dance competition culture come from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, yet most are white female adolescents and children. In my observation, the advertising and images for dance competitions tend to feature long and lean white female children performing with great athleticism and passion, which reinforces the presence of whiteness in dance competition culture.

White ideals are embedded in the movement performed on stage. The most common forms of dance on the competition stage are contemporary and jazz, which here are highly influenced by ballet techniques and are considered normal or

'un-marked' culturally (Weisbord 2010); they are accepted as 'white' or 'a-cultural' dance styles. Alexis Weisbord (2010) explains how jazz and hip hop are considered normative, even though they stem from non-white cultural backgrounds, because of their commodification, appropriation and acceptance by the dominant white culture and the inherent emphasis on ballet technique. Weisbord (2010) also addresses the adaptations of non-white dance forms on the competition stage through the use of a more upright torso in hip hop, the prioritisation and dominance of ballet technique in jazz and contemporary dance and the choreographic use of vogueing-influenced walks, pivots and poses. In other words, the elements of dance forms that are rooted outside the Western dance canon are regularly used to enhance normative practices on dance competition stage. Ideas about what constitutes a 'good dancer' are rooted in movement characteristics that stem from ballet (e.g., flexibility and control), not movement characteristics rooted in non-Western forms (e.g., musicality, polycentrism). Although choreographic influences from non-Western dance forms are evident, Eurocentric and white aesthetics dominate the ideas about technique and performance.

In dance competition culture, there are clearly defined expectations of gender. The upper-middle class believes that the working-class values have clearly defined gender roles (Williams 2017), which parallels the binary performance of gender on dance competition stage. For example, a mixed-method research project examining gender in dance competitions finds that there are implicit appearance norms based on gender, gendered movement expectations, clear ideas about how genders should choreographically interact and that boys hold a privileged place (Schupp 2017a). In terms of appearance, girls should have bodies that are long, lean, athletic and toned, and boys should have bodies that are athletic and toned. One's gendered appearance in terms of make-up, hairstyle and costuming matters for all, but more so for girls,

and often reflects adult ideals and practices. When it comes to movement, girls should move in a fluid way and prioritise movement that features control and flexibility, while boys should move in a hard-hitting way and prioritise movement that features strength. If performing a boy–girl duet, it is expected that the boys should primarily lift the girls. And finally, although many in dance competition culture believe that boys work very hard, they acknowledge that boys have an advantage in competitions because of their scarcity.

Although performing on the competition stage represents perceived working-class ideas, the prioritisation of white values and traditional ideas about gender, the price of participation is primarily not aligned with working class economics. The cost of dance competition culture, meaning both fees for the competitions themselves and the lessons, costumes and so forth is very expensive. As an extreme example, the author of *All In! My Amazing Journey as a Dance Dad* writes that he spends \$30,000 USD per year to fund his daughter's participation in dance competition culture (Colley 2014). Although that amount is on the far end of a spectrum, costs quickly add up as children prepare for and participate in dance competition culture. This is reflected in where many dance competitions occur. An examination of the calendars of dance competition events shows that they gravitate toward suburbs, places that are historically known as affluent and white, and mid-sized cities. Similar to how Trump sold white-working class values to win the votes of affluent whites, dance competition culture uses traditional values rooted in working-class ideas to sell dance to upper-middle-class, primarily white, Americans.

## Shifting Generational Values

Generation Z's political tendencies are still emerging and will continue to evolve as this cohort moves into adulthood (Dorsey 2016; Pitkin 2017). However, research suggests that Generation Z is developing a

social consciousness, especially in relation to gender and race (but not class, similar to older generations). Their social consciousness and ability to mobilise to advocate for gun violence prevention in the United States speaks to their potential as agents of social change.

Generation Z embraces multiculturalism and diversity as part of who they are (Cassandra Report 2015; Barr 2016; Dorsey 2016). As such, it is predicted that they will want social progress that reflects the diversity that is present in their daily lives. Only thirty-three percent believe that people of colour have equal opportunities for success, indicating that they are aware of the problems related to access and achieving success (Dorsey 2016). Generation Z seems to honour diversity and value equity but is also aware of dominant cultural preferences and values. Generation Z has much broader and fluid ideas about gender and sexuality. One study finds that only sixty-three percent of the surveyed sixteen- and seventeen-year-old participants identified as straight (vs. seventy-eight percent in the general population) (Barr 2016). At the same time, they believe that women do not have the same chances at success as men (Dorsey 2016). Taken together, Generation Z welcomes a more fluid approach to gender and sexuality while also acknowledging gender inequities.

As discussed in the previous section, dance competition culture includes primarily white participants, and the dance forms performed privilege Eurocentric aesthetics, even when incorporating elements from non-dominant and non-European dance forms. Yet the types of dance available as competitive categories have changed significantly since my participation in dance competition culture. When I participated in the 1980s and 1990s, the categories included jazz, lyrical (now often referred to as contemporary), tap, ballet, acrobatics, musical theatre and open (a catch-all category). Today, competitions offer categories for hip hop, folklorico, clogging and

'ethnic', among others. Although there are numerous complications surrounding how these dance forms are appropriated within the more popular categories and relegated as 'other' in dance competition culture (Weisbord 2010), their presence in dance competition culture indicates an opportunity for dance competition culture to shift in relation to the multiculturalism and diversity that Generation Z values.

Although there are clear expectations regarding how gender manifests in terms of movement, appearance and interactions in dance competition culture, there are also instances that point to the complexity of a binary construction of gender in dance competition culture. For example, dance, particularly competitive dance, is viewed as a feminine activity. In his work examining the perseverance of young male dancers, Doug Risner (2009) discusses the numerous challenges boys face inside and outside of dance. Their participation outside of dance is devalued, and community and family members often bully them. Yet inside of dance, they may find a community that encourages their participation. This encouragement can often result in privileges and advantages not offered to girls, such as the chance to offer choreographic input, opportunities for advancement and extra attention. In this way, dancing in a competitive environment provides a welcoming space for boys while simultaneously privileging them, reflecting Generation Z's beliefs of gender inclusivity and their recognition of male privilege within this sphere.

Although the fluidity of gender is more difficult to perceive, the experiences with gender of dance competition participants are not as rigid as they appear to be when viewed from the audience's perspective. In competition dancing, most dances aim to tell the story of a song through choreography and facial expression. A recent project examining gender in dance competition culture found that participants did not think the gender of a musical artist needed to match the gender of a performer as long as the story was

successfully conveyed (Schupp 2017a). Additionally, given the emphasis of boys dancing in an aggressive manner and girls dancing with in fluid movements, dance competition participants tend to believe that all genders should learn both masculine and feminine ways of moving (Schupp 2017a). Behind the scenes, there seems to be a much wider understanding of gender and sexuality although this is not yet regularly performed on stage.

Generation Z is also characterised as being risk-adverse yet desiring constant feedback about their progress so that they can continue to improve (Cassandra Report 2015). At dance competition events, the performance format changes little from organisation to organisation (meaning the procedural expectations are clear and consistent), competitors perform choreographed, well-rehearsed dances (versus improvised dances that require embracing the unknown more fully), and participants receive feedback on their dances from expert judges. In this way, dance competition events cater directly to these generational characteristics.

## **Purchasing and Performing the American Dream**

Although Trump supporters and many people in Generation Z have divergent beliefs about many social and cultural issues, they are quite unified in their belief in the American Dream, that is, in the belief that if you work hard and pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you can succeed. Trump and his supporters have repeatedly used the rhetoric that they are fighting for the common man (Burns 2016) while simultaneously proposing cuts to federal programs that disenfranchise poor Americans and privilege the extremely wealthy (and corporations). Unlike Obama who worked toward creating equity, Trump's focus on equality dismisses the unique challenges of non-dominant populations. He and his supporters believe in the American Dream because they have achieved it, without acknowledging

existing privileges, or believe that acknowledging systemic privileges somehow diminishes their own chances of achieving the American Dream. The overwhelming majority of Generation Z believe that the American Dream is possible (Dorsey 2016). However, they also acknowledge the very real systemic challenges to achieving this. Characterised as pragmatic and realistic, they seem to be prepared to address the inequities in achieving the American Dream.

Achieving the American Dream requires financial capital; those with more capital are more likely to achieve success than those without. Although the United States economy is best described as a mixed economy, it is popularly perceived as grounded in capitalism and capitalist values. Competition is inherently a part of capitalism. Privately owned corporations and businesses compete for customers, workers and capital, which gives more power to those with financial capital to determine what is available in the marketplace. This system is certainly at play in dance competition culture.

Dance competitions operate on a 'pay-to-dance' system. Dance competition industry is unregulated, expensive and responds to and drives the ideas of their consumers, who are largely middle- and upper-middle-class white Americans, the same demographic that voted for Trump. Additionally, the aesthetics and educational practices of dance competition culture are directly influenced by commercial dance, where dance is used to sell a product (Schupp 2018b). The fact that dance competition participants pay entry fees and perform dance styles that are frequently used to sell products raises questions about what exactly is being sold, bought and invested in.

On a surface level, it appears that dance competitions are selling a contest, but further investigation reveals the experience is much deeper than that for participants, who are largely members of Generation Z (Schupp 2018a). First, dance competitions sell a performance venue that allows



young dancers the chance to perform among their peers on a professional-looking stage for a panel of respected experts. As part of that performance, participants buy the chance to compete and receive constructive criticism from the judges, the opportunity to participate as an audience member and a token of recognition for their performance in the form of various awards and trophies. Dance competition participants' investments, however, go far beyond these simple financial transactions; dance competitions sell an experience grounded in performance and entertainment. Competitors gain several proficiencies that are valuable beyond dance, such as resiliency, perseverance, time-management skills, self-efficacy and interpersonal awareness as they train for and prepare to perform at these competitions. Dance competition culture provides a place to perform on a professional stage, develops community for and cultivates transferable proficiencies for the youth who participate; these intangible qualities motivate many participants in these dance competitions (Schupp 2018a). In other words, young dancers are required to work hard and rebound from challenges to achieve their opportunity to shine in the spotlight, and this process of dedication, perseverance and achievement drives the participation of many.

In many ways, dance competition culture gives young people the chance to perform the implicit ideals of the American dream and for parents and guardians to witness and support this. The open entry system makes it seem that dance competitions are open to all. As young dancers prepare to compete, they encounter and must overcome numerous obstacles. Then, as a result of their hard work, they have the chance to experience a moment in the spotlight as they share their accomplishments by performing on stage. However, socio-economic factors are at play in dance competition culture. Although dance competition culture provides a place for young dancers to develop a sense of pride through working hard and succeeding as

dancers, this experience is only available to those who have the financial capital to participate.

## Closing Thoughts

Clearly, the growing popularity of dance competition culture in the United States and beyond indicates its appeal to Americans and links to specific cultural values. Dance forms and practices are not static: they evolve in response to social and cultural factors. Dance competition culture is not immune to this evolution. Because competitive dance is performed by youth but is financed by the participants' parents, it provides a unique site to observe how differing generational values are negotiated on stage.

As evidenced in this brief exploration of dance competition culture, it is a complex phenomenon. As such, examining dance competition culture through various lenses is needed to further understand the positioning of dance and dance education. Further areas of inquiry include examining access to dance competition culture for youth of colour and comparing dance competition culture to other dance cultures for youth. Pursuing each of these inquiries will provide greater insights into dance competition culture and the values inherent in positioning competition as a requisite to learning dance, as well as the values performed on stage.

## Endnotes

- 1 Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/c/MissKarenWins>
- 2 For a full examination of the performative ethnographic approach used to research dance competition culture, please see: Schupp 2017b.

## References

- Barr, Caelainn. 2016. "Who are Generation Z? The Latest Data on Today's Teens." *The Guardian*, December 10, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/10/generation-z-latest-data-teens>
- Burns, Alexander. 2016. "Donald Trump Rode to Power in the Role of the Common Man." *New York Times*, November 9, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/us/politics/donald-trump-wins.html>
- Carroll, Lauren. 2016. "Hillary Clinton's Top 10 Campaign Promises." *Politifact*, July 22, 2016. <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2016/jul/22/hillary-clintons-top-10-campaign-promises/>
- Cassandra Report. 2015. "Winter/Spring 2015 Cassandra Report: Gen Z." New York: Cassandra. <http://cassandradaily.com/life/now-available-the-winterspring-2015-cassandra-report/>
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2017. "The First White President: The Foundation of Donald Trump's Presidency as the Negation of Barack Obama's Legacy." *The Atlantic*, October 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>
- Colley, Tim. 2014. *All In: My Amazing Journey as a Dance Dad*. Bradenton, FL: BookLocker.com. Kindle.
- Creswell, John W. 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dorsey, J. 2016. "iGen's Political and Civic Outlook: 2016 National Study on the Unexpected Viewpoints of the Generation After the Millennials." Austin, TX: The Center for Generational Kinetics. <http://genbq.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/iGen-Gen-Z-Political-Civic-Outlook-Research-White-Paper-c-2016-The-Center-for-Generational-Kinetics.pdf>
- Drum, Kevin. 2017. "Here's How the Residents of Super-White America Voted in 2016." *Mother Jones*, November 20, 2017. <http://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2017/11/heres-how-the-residents-of-super-white-america-voted-in-2016/>
- Guarino, Lindsey. 2014. "Jazz Dance Training via Private Studios, Competitions, and Conventions." In *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches*, edited by Lindsey Guarino and Wendy Oliver, 197-206. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Kaczanowska, Agata. 2012. *IBISWorld Industry Report OD4843: Dance competition promoters in the US*. Report. Los Angeles, CA: IBIS World Industry.
- Klinker, Philip. 2014. "The Causes and Consequences of 'Birtherism.'" Paper presented at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Seattle, WA. <https://wpsa.research.pdx.edu/papers/docs/Birthers.pdf>
- LaRocco, Claudia. 2012. "Dance Competitions for Youngsters: Tap-tap-tapping into a National Obsession." *New York Times*, September 2, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/03/arts/dance/dance-competitions-for-youngsters.html>
- Lupu, Noam. 2016. "It's Time to Bust the Myth: Most Trump Voters Were Not Working Class." *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/05/its-time-to-bust-the-myth-most-trump-voters-were-not-working-class/>

- Pitkin, Lemuel. 2017. "GOP Tsunami Looms As Generation Z Skews Republican." *The Daily Wire*, January 25, 2017. <http://www.dailywire.com/news/12785/gop-tsunami-looms-generation-z-skews-republican-lemuel-pitkin>
- Qui, Linda. 2016. "Donald Trump's Top 10 Campaign Promises." *Politifact*, July 15, 2016. <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2016/jul/15/donald-trumps-top-10-campaign-promises/>
- Risner, Doug. 2009. *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance: An Empirical Study of Male Identities in Western Theatrical Dance Training*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Rowe, Nicholas, Rose Martin, Ralph Buck, and Eeva Anttila. 2018. "Researching Dance Education Post-2016: The Global Implications of Brexit and Trump on Dance Education." *Research in Dance Education* 19 (1): 91-109.
- Schupp, Karen. 2006. "The Culture of Dance Competitions." In: *Congress on Research in Dance Conference Proceedings*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017a. "Sassy Girls and Hard-hitting Boys: Dance Competitions and Gender." In *Dance and Gender: An Evidence-Based Approach*, edited by Wendy Oliver and Doug Risner, 76-96. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017b. "Miss Karen Gets Published! A Transdisciplinary Approach to Investigating Dance Competition Culture." *Dance Research Aotearoa* 5: 17-31.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2018a (Forthcoming). "You've Got to Sell It! Dancing on the Competition Stage." In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*, edited by Sherril Dodds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2018b (Forthcoming). "Dance Competition Culture and Commercial Dance: Intertwined Aesthetics, Values, and Practices." *Journal of Dance Education*.
- Spry, T. (2011). *Body, paper, stage: Writing and performing autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Williams, Joan C. 2017. *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing. Kindle.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Karen Schupp**, MFA, is an associate professor of dance at Arizona State University and the author of *Studying Dance: A Guide to Campus and Beyond*. Her scholarly research addresses innovative pedagogical practices and curricula in postsecondary dance education and the dance competition culture. Her current projects include a web series, *In It to Win!*, which explores the dance competition culture (<http://www.youtube.com/c/MissKarenWins>) and co-editing with Dr. Doug Risner the forthcoming volume *Case Studies in Dance Education: Ethical Dimensions in Humanizing Dance Pedagogy*. Schupp is also the Associate Editor of the *Journal of Dance Education*. For more information, please visit <http://www.karenschupp.org>. [Karen.schupp@asu.edu](mailto:Karen.schupp@asu.edu)

<http://www.karenschupp.org> and co-editing with Dr. Doug Risner the forthcoming volume *Case Studies in Dance Education: Ethical Dimensions in Humanizing Dance Pedagogy*. Schupp is also the Associate Editor of the *Journal of Dance Education*. For more information, please visit <http://www.karenschupp.org>. [Karen.schupp@asu.edu](mailto:Karen.schupp@asu.edu)

## A Body of Accents

Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt

### ABSTRACT

Dance practice is often hidden inside dance studios, where it is not available for dialogue or interdisciplinary critique. In this paper, I will look closer at one of the accents that my body has held since the year 2000. To Swedish dance academies, it is perhaps the most foreign accent I have in my dance practice. It has not been implemented as 'professional dance' in Western dance studios. This foreign accent is called Nihon Buyō, Japanese dance, also known as Kabuki dance. Nihon Buyō, Nō or Kabuki are local performing arts practices for professional performers in Japan. A few foreigners are familiar with these practices thanks to cultural exchange programmes, such as the yearly Traditional Theatre Training at Kyoto Art Centre. There is no religious spell cast over the technique or a contract written that it must be kept secret or that it must not leave the Japanese studio or the Japanese stage. I will compare how dance is being transmitted in the studio in Kyoto with my own vocational dance education of many years ago. Are there similarities to how the female dancer's body is constructed? Might there be unmarked cultural roots and invisible originators of the movements we are doing today in contemporary dance?

### ABSTRAKT

Dansutövandet hålls ofta dolt innanför dansstudio där det inte görs tillgängligt för dialog eller tvärdisciplinär kritik. I denna text kommer jag att se närmare på en av de dialekter som min kropp har sedan år 2000. För svenska dansakademier är det kanske den mest främmande dialekten som jag har i min danspraktik. Den har inte implementerats som "professionell dans" i dansstudior i väst. Denna främmande dialekt kallas Nihon Buyō, japansk dans, även kallad Kabuki-dans. Nihon Buyō, Nō eller Kabuki är lokala scenkonstformer för professionella scenkonstnär i Japan. Några få utlänningar känner till dem tack vare olika kulturutbytesprogram, till exempel den årliga traditionella teaterträningen, T.T.T., på Kyoto Art Center. Tekniken är inte belagd med någon religiös besvärjelse. Det finns heller inte några skrivna avtal om att den måste hållas hemlig, eller att den inte får lämna den japanska studion eller den japanska scenen. Jag kommer att jämföra hur dans kommuniceras och förs vidare i studion i Kyoto med min egen yrkesdansutbildning för många år sedan. Finns det några likheter i hur den kvinnliga dansarens kropp konstrueras? Finns det några omärkta kulturella rötter och osynliggjorda upphovskvinnor till de rörelser vi gör idag i nutida dans?

# A Body of Accents

Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt

## A Body of Accents

Susan Leigh Foster writes, 'I know the body only through its response to methods and techniques used to cultivate it' (Foster 1992, 480). This describes the daily struggle to 'become a body', 'become a subject' and 'become a dancer'. My own text makes use of a personal perspective to evoke a bodily experience of Nihon Buyō—Japanese dance—for the reader.<sup>1</sup> Nihon Buyō is also known as 'Kabuki dance'. It is based on ancient forms of temple dance, festival dance, Bunraku, and Nō. However, 'Kabuki dance' is not the same as Kabuki theatre, in which, since the Tokugawa banning of women on stage in 1629, only men are allowed to perform. The history of Nihon Buyō 'reveals that, contrary to the common perception of Nihon Buyō as a traditional performing art, it is a creation of the twentieth century.' (Yamazaki 2001, ix). Nihon Buyō is a resurrected art form to help women reclaim access to the stage again.

To Western dance academies, it is perhaps the most foreign accent in my dance practice. It has not been implemented as 'professional dance' in Western dance studios. In this article, I want to explore how Nihon Buyō is—or is not—foreign to my body, compared to other dance practices I have studied. I write in three sections, the first describing how my body works to adjust to the foreign surroundings, the second describing how my body reacts to a foreign dance practice, and the third describing how the foreign might be received or rejected. If I look at the various dance practices I embody, there is absolutely nothing 'Swedish' in them, and my point in this text is to question which dances are included in the canon and which are not. I never



*The author performs Shizuno Odamaki at Oe Nob Theatre, 2011 Photo: Kyoto Art Center*

learned Swedish folk dance; instead, I learned Croatian folk dance. In my professional dance education at the Ballet Academy in Gothenburg, I encountered a mix of classical ballet from Romania, Austria, the UK and the U.S., modern and postmodern dance from the U.S. and Belgium, jazz (Horton/Dunham/Ailey) from the U.S., flamenco at the barre from Spain and Sweden, and tap dance from the U.S. Even though the different dance techniques that I studied in my earlier training came from all over the world, they were not framed as 'world dance'. They were framed as techniques that a professional dancer must know in order to get a job, which we learned was something different from the folk dances of Croatia or Sweden. My dancer colleagues and I provide the living bodies for the colonisation of the world's different dance practices and their inclusion into—or exclusion from—the canon of 'professional dance'. Lena Hammergren has written about how African-American jazz was translated into Nordic

spaces, and how global movement vocabularies can critique the idea of a fixed geographical region, known as 'local' (2015, 102). Our bodies were constantly crafted as foreign to the different techniques we needed to study in order to become professional dancers. My dance practice has often been foreign to myself, and I have been struggling to embody my own body in order to make it a home, a struggle that through the years has included all the different techniques I have mentioned so far. I dance with many accents.

In what follows, I will take a closer look at one of the accents my body has held since the year 2000. Nihon Buyō, Nō and Kabuki are traditional and 'local' practices for professional performers in Japan, but a few foreigners are familiar with the practice, thanks to cultural exchange programmes such as the yearly Traditional Theatre Training at Kyoto Art Centre. I practice this technique with permission from the dance master Nishikawa Senrei, who argued that Nihon Buyō is also a contemporary technique, and I consider that this legitimates continuation of my own practice of Nihon Buyō and contemporary forms of Japanese dance.<sup>2</sup>

Japan is my second home, and my journeys to Kyoto are always directed to dance practice and to the study of Nihon Buyō (and Nō theatre) with Japanese masters. These journeys include struggles of 'becoming' in flesh and bone, in a society that always will recognise me as foreign. Most of the foreigners I meet in Japan are from other Asian countries. From 1945 until 1952, Japan was occupied by the Allied powers. I become a representative of these foreigners and intruders. It is only after a while that people understand that English is not my first language, and that I come from a very different cultural sphere than does an American person. Sweden is not that well known.

I would now like to invite you to follow me to Japan, more specifically to Kyoto.

## My body turns foreign

My body turns foreign as soon as I arrive at Kansai Airport. This foreignness is both a mental and a physical state. I turn foreign when I squeeze into the little airport shuttle, and when I step into the *machiya* where I have stayed before. Nonetheless, I feel at home. My body remembers the choreography of this house from before. I bow from my hips to Matsui san, the lady who owns the house. This particular *machiya* is a beautiful traditional *obi*-maker's house in the Nishijin area of Kyoto. It is a wooden house, and the floors are covered with *tatami*. I run with tiny steps without lifting my heels to show her that I am effective and willing to help with cleaning or cooking. I do quite well before I hit my head against a sharp corner and almost run my elbow through a paper window. I do quite well before falling out of the tiny slippers while stepping onto the raised *tatami*-clad floor through the *shōji*, the sliding paper doors. I am well aware of the clumsiness one is subject to when trying too hard to fit in.

My body turns foreign as I ride the tiny Japanese bicycle along Horikawa Street from Teranouchi in the north to Shijo in the south. The bicycle is so small that it hurts my knees. Rather than sit on the saddle, I crouch on it, knees almost touching the handlebar. In order to unburden my knees, I pedal out of the saddle and stand up as often as possible all the way down to Shijo. There is only one gear, a very low one, which requires fast pedalling. My *yukata* flutters in the wind. I smile politely and nod at the people I pass. I want to show everybody that I am a good foreigner who will not cause any trouble. After a while, deposits of lactic acid add another heavy pain to overcome. In the past, my Romanian ballet teacher forbade us to ride a bicycle because it would develop thigh muscles that were too big. He said that we would have to accept that from that point on, in our careers as ballet dancers, we would have to take a taxi wherever we were going. Even walking had

the risk of developing the wrong muscles. I did not become a ballet dancer.

I know Kyoto from riding a bicycle. I know which roads are best for bicycles. Imadegawa is a key street, essential in my Kyoto history, but the Western part of this street is to be avoided if travelling by bicycle. The traffic here is quite heavy and the sidewalks are too narrow for bicycles. The performance space Kyo Ryu Kan, run by the choreographer Peter Golightly, used to be just north of Imadegawa.<sup>3</sup> Here, Golightly taught jazz classes, and thus I was able to continue my bodily habitus from Sweden while taking a break from the 'new' Nihon Buyō body. One of the best playgrounds in the northwestern corner of Goshō—the imperial park—is reached through Imadegawa. Just north of Goshō, east of Doshisha University, the temple grounds of Shōkoku-ji provide a safe and silent bicycle space. I have experience of wobbly bicycles. I have a practice of biking north and south, and east and west, with one child on the cargo rack and another on the handlebar. I meet many Japanese mothers involved in the same practice. I think this practice makes my body less foreign. Because I emulate native mothers? Because I am a mother too, which is a global position. As mothers on bicycles, we become foreigners to the people driving cars. To me, the city of Kyoto is divided into dance spaces, study locations and playground places. I pass through different zones where I have performed, where I have studied and where I have played with my children. This is my eighth journey. Kyoto is my second home after Sweden, and yet I remain a foreigner.



*The author on a bicycle in Kyoto Photo: Peter Golightly*

## **The Japanese dance studio**

Horikawa Street is also essential to my Kyoto history. Horikawa, with its proud ginkgo trees, just about to shift into their autumn foliage. I remember them shining yellow, with oceans of gold surrounding them. Ginkgo, with its fan-shaped leaves, is often portrayed on *yukatas*, *kimonos* and *obis*, on porcelain, and on paper scrolls. The ginkgo trees are a reminder of my lessons in Japanese dance. Bicycling along Horikawa Street, from north to south—a fast ride dressed in a *yukata*—activates my body memory of the build-up before an *okeiko* (lesson), before learning a new choreography, which in Japanese is called *furi utsushi*. These are memories of anxiety, of knowing that I must show what I have remembered from last time. Two years or more might have passed since my last *okeiko*, but I must behave appropriately, and show no signs of tension. I must act as if it were yesterday. My body turns foreign as I enter the *dojo*, even though I am no foreigner to this place.

Even though the female students practicing in the *dojo* seem to keep their private space and focus, they now and then rush to correct me. This did not happen while Nishikawa Senrei was alive. I am being watched, and at the same time, I am made more foreign than ever. I have to get used to the hands of many, reaching out to my body for correction. They straighten the *yukata* if it is tied too loose, and they readjust the bow of the *obi* if it hangs askew. I bow gratefully. They help me to blend in. I glance at their bodies, smaller and thinner than my own. I stare at their shoulders. Drawn back and down in the female construction? Broader, elbows lifted in the male construction? In between, neither male nor female, for the divine construction? There are three different gender opportunities—female, male and divine. Who am I? My own body reveals itself as a giant's body. How much should I squeeze the bones of my shoulders to make myself smaller/more 'feminine'? I am being moulded into a body of ideas suitable for Nihon Buyō, where the feminine stereotype in particular is complex. The feminine stereotype is a male-to-female technique, best described as the study of an 'intentional body', as it will never be realised (Mezur 2005, 177), or as an interaction between what Foster calls the perceived, the ideal and the demonstrative body (1992, 483). Srinivasan writes about how certain female characters in the Indian dance form Bharat Natyam require the performance of the 'ideal' Indian woman's behaviour. These characters do not question patriarchal authority (Srinivasan 2012, 27). Similarly, versions of an 'ideal' dancer's behaviour are practiced in the studio in Kyoto, and are ubiquitous for many dance practices, more or less gendered; in classical ballet and in Graham technique, for example. The physical etiquette of silent doing, the quiet agreement on hierarchy and the anxiety of having to strive to become as close to perfect as possible are familiar to me from other instances in my dance education. I am a foreigner in

Japan, but while studying Japanese dance, my bodily response to methods and techniques used to cultivate the dancer is no different than it is to classical ballet, modern dance or jazz.

At night, I clean the *dojo* with Emiko san. If I wear kneepads, I shuffle myself forwards on my knees. If I am without kneepads, I try to do like Emiko san and run on all fours. This is a very effective way, but painful if you have weak wrists. She is tiny and quick, I am big and slow. 'Dancers constantly apprehend the discrepancy between what they want to do and what they can do' (Foster 1992, 485).

### When tradition travels

Sellers-Young describes how Asian performance techniques laid the foundation for the more reduced and contemplative expressions in postmodern dance, such as Cunningham's explorations of 'motion in stillness' and 'stillness in motion' (2013, 75). Srinivasan writes about how nameless dancers from India came to Coney Island in 1904 and how Ruth St. Denis, one of the 'mothers' of American modern dance, viewed and was influenced by their performances (2012, 9). St. Denis also studied with Japanese traditional musicians (who are usually also trained in dance), according to Ted Shawn (1904, 66–76). After encounters with Asian performers, St. Denis went on to establish her career as a soloist and choreographer; she is today considered one of the pioneers of what we know as American modern dance. Srinivasan argues that the inception of modern dance in America was a collective endeavour (2012, 22): St. Denis did not invent her 'Egyptian', 'Indian', 'Japanese' or 'Thai' dances herself. The Western modernist practices, with icons such as Ruth St. Denis, Artaud, Debussy, Brecht, Yat Malmgren and Martha Graham, are appropriated artistic practices from all over the world—Japanese dance, Odissi, yoga, capoeira and many more (Foster 2009, 10). 'Western' performers unmarked their cultural roots and failed to refer to their originators.





My narrative, and my research, would have been different had I decided to move to Japan for good. It is quite impossible for a foreigner to earn Japanese citizenship, since the Japanese state attributes citizenship by blood and not by location of birth. My friend and colleague who has stayed in Japan since he was seventeen years old holds an ‘artist’s visa’ that he must renew every three years. He confirms that it is difficult to be a foreigner in Japan. In Sweden, I sometimes become ‘the woman

*The author with Nishikawa Senrei at Senreinokai in Kyoto, 2010. Photo: Palle Dablstedt*

who performs Japanese dance’. It indeed points out one of my accents as a more foreign and culturally marked dance practice, easy to ridicule when moved to a different country. Once I was even described as a nameless ‘hired dancer in kimono’. There is a conflict when deciding who is foreign to a dance practice, and who has the right to perform which techniques,

especially in the debate over cultural appropriation. I am a contemporary performer with many detectable accents, which I aim not to hide or mystify. If I approach the ballet barre, my body will instinctively adopt a certain bodily behaviour. However, in an improvisation class, someone may tell me that my movements look Japanese. This complicates any fixed understanding of 'local' or 'foreign' dance practices. Like most of my colleagues, I used to travel to the big dance cities—London, Paris and New York City—to study contemporary dance. None of this would be considered strange; rather, it would be seen as appropriate. I wanted to change direction and argue that Kyoto is also a dance city with a long tradition of many various dance practices. However, when I wear the *yukata* or *kimono* in Sweden, I become a symbol of someone who thoughtlessly steals a culture. Studying and performing American modern dance, Dutch new dance or Russian ballet in Swedish dance schools seems to be less problematic because of my ethnic Swedish background. Few see my performing of those techniques as a problem. I want to argue that *Nihon Buyō*—Japanese dance—is not more foreign to my body than other dance practices I have studied. Including Japanese dance in my contemporary work is an attempt at a non-hierarchical treatment of all dance practices, to show defiance to the ethnocentrism of dance and theatre in Sweden.

## Notes

*Furi utsushi* literary means 'pretend copying'.

A *machiya* is a traditional wooden townhouse. It is a long wooden home with earthen walls and baked tile roofs. The front of the building is usually a 'shop space', having sliding or folding shutters where goods can be displayed (in this case, *obis*). It has small courtyard gardens on the inside and a large open-air kitchen.

*Nishijin* is a district in the northwestern part of Kyoto. In this district, a traditional technique called *Nishijin* weaving originated over 1200 years ago.

An *obi* is a sash for traditional Japanese dress. The broader *obi* is an essential part of the kimono outfit.

The suffix *-san* is an honorific that is attached to the end of people's names.

A *shōji* is a door, window or room divider in traditional Japanese houses. It consists of translucent paper over a frame of wood, which holds together a lattice of wood or bamboo.

*Suriashi* means 'sliding foot' in Japanese. In traditional theatre and dance, *suriashi* is performed parallel on bent legs. This can be practised at the beginning of a class, after the greeting ritual or within the choreography itself. *Suriashi* is also used when actors and dancers enter the *Nō* theatre stage.

## Endnotes

1 I am using the Rōmaji spelling ('*Nihon Buyō*' and *Nō*) instead of the English ('*Nihon Buyo*' and '*Noh*'), since the pronunciation of Japanese syllables is not exactly the same as English. Rōmaji was developed to describe the sounds of Japanese in the Roman alphabet.

2 Nishikawa Senrei (1945-2012) held a master license from Nishikawa school of Japanese dance. She created her own original intercultural dance performances, and toured all over the world.

3 Peter Golightly was a member of the art collective *Dumb Type* and is trained in contemporary dance and *Nihon Buyō* in U.S. and Japan.

## Bibliography

- Skånberg Dahlstedt, A. F. J. 2013. *The Dance of the Sun*. Njutafilms.
- Foster, S. L. 1992. 'Dancing Bodies'. In *Incorporations (Zone 6)*, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, 480–495. Cambridge, MA: Zone/MIT Press.
- Foster, S. L. 1996. 'The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe'. In *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, edited by Susan Leigh Foster, 1–26. London: Routledge.
- Foster, S. L., ed. 2009. *Worlding Dance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Hammergren, L. 2014. 'Dancing African-American Jazz in the Nordic Region'. In *Nordic Spaces: Practicing and Imaging a Region*, edited by Karen Vedel and Petri Hoppu, 101–128. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate.
- Hanayagi, C. 2008. *Fundamentals of Japanese Dance/Kabuki Dance*, translated by Leonard Pronko and Tomono Takao. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Mezur, K. 2005. *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Female Likeness*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sellers-Young, B. 2013. 'Stillness in Motion—Motion in Stillness: Contemplative Practice and the Performing Arts'. In *Embodied Consciousness—Performance Technologies*, edited by Jade Rosina McCutcheon and Barbara Sellers-Young, 75–90. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Shawn, T. 1904. *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet: Being a History of Her Cycle of Oriental Dances*. Facsimile reprint.
- Srinivasan, P. 2012. *Sweating Saris—Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Welfield, J. 1988. *An Empire in Eclipse: Japan in the Post-war American Alliance System: A Study in the Interaction of Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Yamazaki, K. 2001. *Nibon Buyō: Classical Dance of Modern Japan*. PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, Indiana University.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt** is a Swedish performer, choreographer, filmmaker and writer who often creates stage works based on her embodied life story. Her solo performance *A Particular Act of Survival* received the Slow Food Award at the Swedish Scenkonstgalan in 2015. In December 2018, Ami premieres a new piece in which she traces the story of her great grandmother through the Noh drama *Yamamba*. In 2015, she was

appointed as coordinator, together with the visual artist Dr Lucy Lyons, of the Nordic Summer University Study Circle 7: *Practicing Communities—Transformative societal strategies of artistic research*. Ami is a PhD candidate at Centre for Asian Theatre and Dance, University of London, and she is a member of the Peer Review Board of the *Journal of Artistic Research*.

# Dansbaren – The Mob without Flash (2016)

Editors and authors: Ingrid Cogne and Marika Hedemyr

With texts by: Per Hergren, Paula de Hollanda, David Karlsson, Rani Nair, Paila Tuovinen, Lis Hellström Sveningsson.

**D**ansbyrån, an artist-run platform initiated in 2003 for the development of contemporary dance and choreography as theory and practice, was active until 2016. Placing itself within a broader feedback tradition, *Dansbaren – The Mob without Flash* offers valuable insight into the development of dance practice in a Nordic context by taking a closer look at this development in Gothenburg, Sweden. The principal authors are Ingrid Cogne and Marika Hedemyr, supplemented by Moa Sahlin in addition to other contributing authors including Per Hergren, Lis Hellström Sveningsson and David Karlsson. Comprising altogether nine chapters and 214 pages, this publication offers a variety of perspectives on dance in addition to documenting the activities of Dansbyrån.

We have always had a utopian idea of the field ... and we tried to reach it by regularly providing a platform for articulation and contextualization. (Cogne and Hedemyr 2016, p.184)

Cogne, Hedemyr and Moa presented their publication at the 13th international Nordic Forum for Dance Research in Gothenburg in June 2017. This book was a highly relevant contribution with regards to the overall theme being democracy. Not only due to its questioning of informal power-relations in the field of dance production, but also through the form of their live presentation itself, by providing an open and inclusive dialogue and showing how to experiment with form.

The first chapter invites the reader to a presentation of the book's aim through a transcript



**Dansbaren – The Mob without Flash (2016)**

Editors: Ingrid Cogne and Marika Hedemyr

Gothenburg, Sweden: Dansbyrå

ISBN 978-91-639-1538-3

Paperback

215 pages

Photos: Marika Hedemyr

of a dialogue, *in media res*, in which knowledge and its instability come into question. All that is ephemeral can go on existing perennially “as a spine”, according to Cogne, Hedemyr and Moa. An elegant metaphor both pointing to the core body-part but also in the pragmatic sense what holds a publication together. Also, *Dansbaren* as a Spine is a movement of reminding, thinking, and telling, but not claiming (p.177).

In the chapter called ‘The Talk of the Town’, Sveningsson draws a brief historical outline of the rise of the dance structures of Gothenburg from 1906 – 2016. Here, she presents the general development of a cultural policy for dance on a national and regional level, its many institutions, and the rise and formation of various new structures and innovative initiatives. Examples of how the state-led cultural policy of the 1990s pushed forward the first Swedish dance consultants on the regional level show the direct connection between those policies and the need for structural and budgetary “nurturing” in order for the Gothenburg dance practitioners to bloom. Amongst the various initiatives, we can follow how contemporary dance and its artist-led networks such as Rubicon Atalante and others not only have contributed to the field, but also to the establishment of the Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival. From this perspective the book also serves as a form of documentation of the regional development of dance in Sweden.

The book – publication, and manual is equipped with a physical tool: an orange-and-grey foldable tablecloth with a graphical design similar to that of a game board. A “sort of matrix of information that could re-activate and support our conversation” (p.13). Because it has no apparent order or instruction manual on where to begin, it opens up further creative possibilities, such as even possibly making up one’s own. Clearly, the foldable tablecloth invites “laying the table” for discussions, in order to provoke conversations, with the suggestive keywords Platform, Articulation, Work, Knowledge, Power, and Time along its edges. In addition, seven text-circles with headings attract attention depending on which side of the tablecloth one is sitting on. The phrases, graphic symbols and keywords intend to enable and select perspectives for a discussion to emerge. The headings are “Rush Hour Knowledge”, “Power and Aesthetics”, “Movement of Knowledge - Movement in Knowledge”, “Någonism – Someone-ism”, “our Knowledge, Power and Aesthetics, Dance and choreog Hour Hou mmm”””The Practice of Dialogue”, “Is Making Art First a Method?” and “Dance and Choreography – Education Beyond Clichés”, all of which can be chosen as a possible opening for a conversation. The advantage of using this discussion device is that it may possibly help facilitate dynamic exchange and advance discussions further, although it requires a well-prepared host to lead the discussion.

Introductions to the chapters (with an editor’s note) support and contextualize the aim of the selected material, which makes the different parts of the book easy accessible. According to Cogne and Hedemyr, the intertwining of creation and self-organisation within what is called “powerless structures” may also nurture hegemonic views within dance creation, thereby limiting the discourse. This may be a relevant point, considering that the majority of the work-force is made up of women. Their underlying critique of self-organization and its

perils has roots in feminist movements, with reference to Jo Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness". Following their argument, the recipe is to *cultivate* a feedback culture, creating democratic practices and the inclusion of diverse viewpoints, as well as offering a challenge to self-appointed elites.

Like a similar Norwegian initiative called Seminarium<sup>1</sup>, *Dansbaren* can also be seen as a further development of the critical response process of Liz Lerman.<sup>2</sup> *Dansbaren* is an interesting book in its use of a dialogue format, opening up for further articulations, feedback and generating further discourse. "Through practical experimentation we have created concrete situations where we have tried approaches, methods and tools for feedback" (p.137). By building upon their experiences during Dansbyrå, Cogne and Hedemyr offer the reader a point of reference which also serves as a documentation of Nordic contemporary dance. They also wish to re-activate and re-articulate material from years of critical-oriented activity, mixing old things and new thoughts (p.44).

As a publication with relevance to dance as an art-form, corporeality and self-organization, the manual offers a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the role of language, rhetoric and critical discourse in art. The manual is well worth reading for dance practitioners as well as scholars, pedagogues and institutions with an interest in audience development. Dance and theatre critics, as well as cultural administrators and policy-makers may also acquire a greater understanding of the developing contemporary-dance field. Finally, an interesting documentation of an ongoing critical practice that may urge and inspire others to do expand their scope in creating further possible feedback-situations.

## Endnotes

1 Roar and Pape 2014.

2 Lerman 2018.

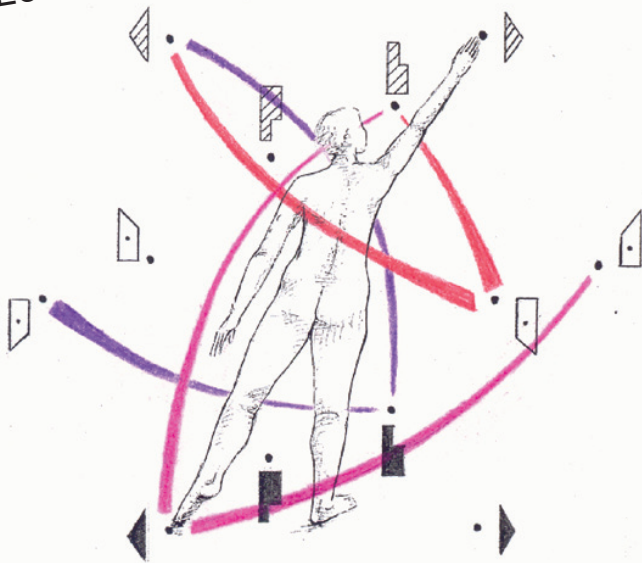
## References

- Cogne, Ingrid, and Marika Hedemyr, eds. 2016. *Dansbaren — The Mob without Flash*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Dansbyrå.
- Dansbyrå (2016). Website. Accessed August 2, 2017. <http://www.dansbyran.se/>.
- Lerman, Liz (2018). Website. Accessed May 24, 2018. <https://lizlerman.com/critical-response-process/>
- Roar, Per, and Pape Sidsel. 2014. "Seminarium. no — Cultivating Discourse Through Artistic Intervention." *Nordic Journal of Dance* 5, no. (2): 45 – 49.

*Corinne Lyche Campos*

# CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN LABAN/BARTENIEFF MOVEMENT STUDIES

Intensive format in English  
Start: July 2019 in Berlin  
Basic Level



**EUROLAB**  
**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR**  
**LABAN/BARTENIEFF MOVEMENT STUDIES**

Director: Antja Kennedy    [info@laban-bartenieff-berlin.de](mailto:info@laban-bartenieff-berlin.de)  
Phone: +49 30 52282446    [www.laban-bartenieff-berlin.de](http://www.laban-bartenieff-berlin.de)

## Memberships

**Dans i Skolen (DiS)** is a Norwegian association that works to support the subject of dance in elementary, secondary and upper secondary schools. A membership in **DiS** offers you 1–2 issues per year of the Nordic Journal of Dance, electronic newsletters, reduction rates for courses and conferences arranged by DiS and more. For further information and membership fees see <http://www.dansiskolen.no>.



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

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



## Subscription

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

## Advertisements

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



# Nordic Journal of Dance

## Call for contributions—Nordic Journal of Dance, 9(2), 2018

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

Volume 9(2) will be published in December 2018. The deadline for submissions is August 15, 2018.

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

### Research Articles:

NJD expects these articles to present methodology, findings and theoretical argumentation related to diverse dance practices and artistic processes as well as learning and teaching dance/movement in the Nordic context. The maximum length of the submitted article is 4 000 words including possible endnotes and references. 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.

### Practice Oriented Articles:

NJD expects these articles to document and reflect upon practical work being done within dance and education in the Nordic countries in different artistic and educational settings as well as with different age groups. The purpose is to introduce the experiences and conceptions of dance practitioners and educators. The maximum length of a submitted article is 3 000 words or less including footnotes and references. Please include two abstracts of a maximum length of 200 words: one written in the language used in 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.

### General Guidelines:

Articles can be written in English or one of the Nordic languages. In creating the document, type text and headings use 12 point font size and line-spacing 1,5. Mark references using Chicago Manual of Style (author-date system, see: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)). **Choose author-date (click on the box)**. For specific details on formatting and other guidelines please contact Dans i Skolen (DIS) at [dis@dansiskolen.no](mailto:dis@dansiskolen.no).

Send submission to [dis@dansiskolen.no](mailto:dis@dansiskolen.no)

with subject heading «Contribution to Nordic Journal of Dance Vol. 9(2)».

## Volume 9(1), 2018

### Research Articles

Bodily Archiving in *69 Positions*

*Josefine Löfblad*

---

Political by Design: Costume Design Strategies within the Finnish Contemporary Dance Productions *AmazinGRace*, *Noir?* and *The Earth Song*

*Tua Helve*

---

Dancing the 'American Dream':

Dance Competition Culture in Times of Shifting Values

*Karen Schupp*

---

### Practice Oriented Article

A Body of Accents

*Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt*

---

### Book review

Dansbaren — The Mob without Flash (2016)

*Corinne Lyche Campos*

---

## Nordic Journal of Dance: practice, education and research

ISSN 1891-6708

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

Supported by: Dans i Skolen (DiS) and Norges Forskningsråd (The Research Council of Norway).

Member of Norsk Tidsskriftforening.