

The Art of Dancing in History/Research/Today

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ABSTRACT

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

SAMMENDRAG

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

The Art of Dancing in History/Research/Today

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

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

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

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



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

A Dance Lesson

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



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

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

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

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

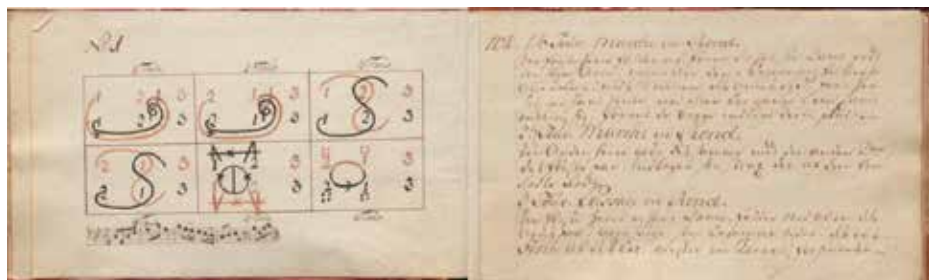
Hammer's experience of his dance lesson belongs to a time that we do not have direct access to; however, we

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

Interpreting Historical Sources for Dance

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

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



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

My Researcher/Dancer Turning Point

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

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

I was on the wrong track.

So.

There I was at a turning point.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

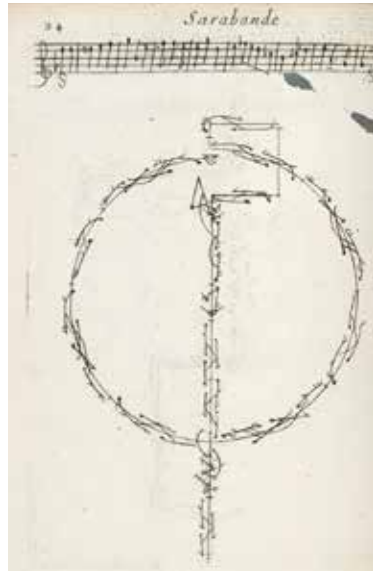
Notes from a Dance Lesson

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



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

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



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

Discovering Dance Notation in Trondheim

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Researching Past Practices

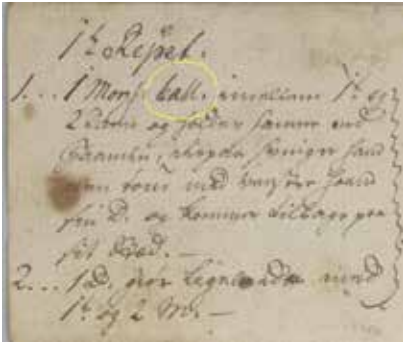
One of the challenges when researching past practices in the field of dance is gaining access to what is bygone from a contemporary point of view. When dancing masters wrote their collections and manuals, they wrote them as a help for the memory, using as few words as were absolutely necessary.



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

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

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



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

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

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

Tacit Knowledge

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Pas de rigaudon!

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

answer the question and make it make sense.

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

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

Reconstruction

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

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

Practice-Based Research

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

Who Am I as a Dancer?

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

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

My mother took this picture of me:



Photo: Author's private collection

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

However, walking naturally was not without challenges for me.

My father took this picture of me:



Photo: Author's private collection

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

I guess I just felt like dancing.

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



Photo: Author's private collection

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

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



Photo: Elisabeth Wathne

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

Love-dans

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



Love-dans. Photo: Magnus Skrede

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

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



Love-dans. Photo: Nicolas Turrenc

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

Again and Again

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

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

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

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

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Endnotes

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

BIOGRAPHY

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

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