

Methodological Demonstrations in Finnish Dance Research and Decoding of Dancing Research

Tanssiva tutkimus: Tanssintutkimuksen menetelmiä ja lähestymistapoja.

Authors: Järvinen, Hanna & Rouhiainen, Leena (toim./eds.),
Nivel 3. Helsinki: Taideyliopiston Teatterikorkeakoulu, 2014.

This anthology of collected research articles (*Tanssiva tutkimus: Tanssintutkimuksen menetelmiä ja lähestymistapoja*, *Dancing Research: Approaches and Methods in Dance Research*) can be considered the first volume focusing mainly on methodological questions in dance research written in Finnish. As the first part of the title indicates, dancing is strongly emphasised in the articles in the volume. Seven writers out of eleven are actually bodily involved at some points of the research processes they discuss. The collection gives a good impression of the state of dance research in Finland, particularly of the approaches and methods that are commonly being used. The writers' diverse backgrounds from universities all around Finland affect the manifold impression the book offers (University of the Arts Helsinki, Aalto University, University of Helsinki, University of Tampere, University of Turku and University of Jyväskylä). In general, it is a good sign for the research field that dance research is practised in several universities, even if it could still be considered a marginalised academic discipline. However, the contribution of the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki is represented in several aspects in this volume, for instance, in practice-based research.

The studies presented cover a wide field of research orientations. Theoretical frameworks and methods derive from phenomenology, ethnography, dance pedagogy and dance history and analysis, as well as narrative and artistic research. Interestingly, several approaches in different texts interact with each other, thereby giving readers an opportunity to view how



each individual research topic can draw tools from diverse directions and areas. An interdisciplinary use of theories and methods is present in several papers, but since the articles are quite short, it is not always quite evident how these diverse areas relate to one another, or how tools and concepts are determined or applied in relation to source materials.

Each scholar in the collection presents examples of her/his own subject matters where methods have been applied. Even the paths of researchers' concrete study processes are discussed, allowing the basic problems and challenges writers face in their concrete work to be brought to light. Seldom are practical

challenges discussed explicitly in the main text of a scholarly article. The more 'research-in-practice' is presented in these texts, the more evident and transparent the chosen approaches become. In this way, the approach seems to support the argumentation. As the editors of this carefully edited book, Hanna Järvinen and Leena Rouhiainen, mention in the *Preface* that the main emphasis of this collection is not on the methods; but instead, how methods have been used (*menetelmällisyydessä*), as well as what kind knowledge, choices and methods can be realisable/followed and carried out in dance research more generally. As a dance studies book, this volume addresses the huge shortage of methodological dance theory editions in Finnish, and thus completes the offering of several seats of learning despite its emphasis on practical approaches to dance.

Theoretical and methodological approaches require a longer time span and thorough study in projects where researchers can internalise the chosen theories and tools. In the current anthology, Leena Rouhiainen presents a competent and surprisingly extensive overview of phenomenological research approaches, including those practiced in Finnish dance research. Her text indicates how a phenomenological framework is utilised in several ways. Essential for such study is a concentration on bodily experimentation with a specific phenomenological attitude. Kai Lehtikainen previously published an edition of dance analysis in Finnish (2014). In this volume, his article crystallises the intertextual approach while analysing dance. Meanings are constructed with the different aspects and components of each performance and textualised with its sociopolitical, cultural and historical contexts. As an example, Lehtikainen provides a nuanced analysis of Lloyd Newson's and DV8 Physical Theatre's performance *Enter Achilles* (1995).

Most of the writers use their own previously, possibly partly, published material. I assume this leads to several issues: These texts mediate assimilated,

compact and well-written substances, but new published research would be extremely important and useful to the field in circumstances where publishing opportunities are quite restricted, at least in Finnish language. Petri Hoppu has combined ethnography, history research methods and dancing in his research processes. According to him, dance ethnography can methodologically be attached to historical methods. While analysing a historical dance—the minuet—and contextualising it with sociocultural environments, Hoppu uses his own dancing, interviews and analysis of the archive resources as the tools of inquiry. Aino Kukkonen uses her previous material (concerning the Helsinki Dance Company) and introduces the historical approach from her experienced scholarly perspective. In this text, she concentrates and opens up the paths of a researcher facing practical challenges while searching for information about the past. Eeva Anttila's research belongs to the field of action research, particularly participatory action research. She thoroughly reviews her own personal previous research areas and backgrounds in pedagogic research.

Hanna Järvinen focuses on historiography, metahistory and *Foucauldian* genealogy, asking how we form conceptions concerning the past and what we need dance history for. In her insightful analysis, she points out the importance of the source criticism and suggests that dance history could use more typical history sources. According to her, dance history writing—especially that concerning the beginning of the 20th century—lacks a focus on dancers' experiences and everyday practices in the dance field, such as dance rehearsal processes. Although Järvinen does not mention it, this approach has already been realised in several pieces of Finnish dance research and in a few dissertations. Thus, it is up to the historian to give voices to 'mute' sources, as Järvinen observes.

Teija Löytönen connects the narrative approach to the dance field. This approach has been increasingly adopted in dance studies in the past few years. She finds

the approach fertile when studying the biographies of dance artists, or when narrations imply change processes in everyday practices of dance agents' lives. The path of the writer as a researcher opens up interestingly in this text, but the connections between source materials and methods remain quite narrow in the examples given in her article.

As the discussed case studies are situated in Finland, we can raise the question of applying international (dance) research literature (often Anglo-American) into local contexts. In her research on gender in oriental dance, Anu Laukkanen rightly states that the most important context in her source material analysis was cultural context—how her research literature concerning gender could be applied in her material. I would also like to raise a question concerning the teaching of oriental dance in the Finnish context: What are the circumstances in the premises concerning the basic features of the 'origins' of different dance techniques? Each dance method has developed individually, possibly in several different cultural contexts over a longer time span and even each teacher gives it its personal nuance in the method. How do we now produce meanings about 'oriental' dance forms in our cultural context? Mariana Siljamäki also explores dance forms from different cultures (flamenco, oriental dance and West African dance), but in this article, they are discussed without any definitions or contextualisations. Contextualisation of the theoretical frameworks of dance could have been utilised in the analysis, and this would have strengthened the methodological argumentation and credibility of the results. In her pedagogic research, Siljamäki utilises an elsewhere seldom used method, namely a *phenomenographic research* approach; in this way, she investigates whether the abovementioned dance forms can bring other cultures closer to Finnish dance students while practising them as a hobby.

In the interdisciplinary approaches of the articles, besides phenomenological orientations,

an ethnographical approach (dance ethnography, performance ethnography) acts as the other main common denominator in *dancing* studies. In her manifold research area, Hanna Väättäinen uses movement improvisation as a central method for analysing interview material (concerning disability, Swedish language and music). Improvisation, which could have been defined in more detail, embodies the material, and according to Väättäinen raises more questions than it offers foundations for a clear-cut analysis or certain answers. Inevitably, this notion increases curiosity in the use of visual research material, since embodied meaning interacts here with the analysis of written material of the same movement experience. Väättäinen concludes with the argument that movement improvisation as a research result might reach a *watching* audience better than a written scholarly article reaches and impacts its readers. However, it remains unclear how the interlinks between bodily movement or embodied meanings and analysis in written accounts of these experiences can be understood and interpreted without such scholarly articles.

Visual material attached to the articles would also have been interesting in relation to Kirsi Heimonen's exceptional research processes, some of which took place in the context of a financial company. Although Heimonen fluently disseminates her personal corporeal existence in writing, I would suggest that information concerning the connections between contextual happenings and the methodological approaches would have been better conveyed to receivers via visual media—if it was considered necessary after all. One of the ideals of dancing research texts could be that they engage with multimedial presentation formats, for example, internet installations where visual materials attached to the literal form could be easily available at the same time.

The more research is embodied, fastening on an active body itself, the greater the abyss that is

created between written analysis and corporeality. This seems to be the same area where dance research is interwoven into artistic research. In actively decoding the wondering around this orientation, one of the most illuminative texts in this anthology is the last article by Leena Rouhiainen, Eeva Anttila and Hanna Järvinen—“Taiteellinen tutkimus yhtenä tanssintutkimuksen juonteena” (“Artistic Research as one of the Features in Dance Research”). This article brilliantly clarifies

the backgrounds, terminology and some crucial core ideas of this approach, while raising challenges and particularities concerning the written part attached to artistic and movement-based research. Although the basic focus of the text is on the artistic perspective, this information would be helpful for the reader earlier in the volume, and the article could have been placed before the practise-based research texts.

Riikka Korppi-Tommola