

Imaginary Properties

The Relationship between Sensation, Perception, and Reflection in Contemporary Dance. An Artistic Research Project into the Epistemology of Dance from a Dancer's Perspective

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1. Synopsis

Context of the Proposed Research: Dance as Knowledge Culture

The notion of *Dance* as a *culture of knowledge* has gained much prominence in recent years. Considerable effort has been made to understand, to theorize and to validate the specific type of knowledge-creation that is at play in contemporary dance-making, and to identify how it possibly might differ from other forms of knowledge production.

In an attempt to articulate this mode of knowledge-creation, the concept of *bodily knowledge* has been put forward, substantiated by the claim that a dancer's way of knowing is not merely a mode of knowing *about* the body, but *in* and *through* the body. However, one of the risks of this conceptualization, and one of its main shortcomings, is that it reduces a dancer's knowledge to the realm of movement, specifically to *kinaesthetic intelligence*. Thus it implicitly reiterates an ontology of *Dance* as being based on *movement* and it neglects to consider *how* the *kinaesthetic* sense interrelates not only with the other senses, but also with other forms of cognition and processes of thought and reflection.

Re-thinking Knowledge-Making in Dance-Based Artistic Research

I would argue that what is needed in order to further develop the concept of (bodily) knowledge embedded in and created through Contemporary Dance/Performance is an understanding of how sensation, perception and reflection are interrelated and how these involve interaction with others and the environment. From an artistic point of view, the crucial question is to understand how, in the creative process and as performers, we can actively alter our own habitual modes of relating and interacting in order to create new spaces for other modes of action and perception: How can our perception be altered through the manipulation of the senses, and how can this altered perception possibly enable new spaces for mental reflection? How, in return, can a more developed understanding of the interrelatedness inform the creative process of dance- and performance-making? How do physical and cognitive forms of

knowing inform and interact with each other? What type of reflection is engendered through this interaction and how does it play out on the performativity of the dancer?

Artistic Research from the Dancer's Perspective

I propose to tackle these questions from the perspective of artistic research, combining research in and through creative practice with a thorough theoretical investigation into an enacted approach to embodiment and perception.

While most artistic research in Dance is conducted by choreographers and dance pedagogues who are working *with* dancers as *objects* of research, I believe that it is important to also include the perspective of the dancer as the *subject* of research. Not only does the dancer-researcher's perspective promise new insights into the processes that are at play in performance-making, but it also constitutes a considerable epistemological challenge with regard to its specific mode of knowledge-production: one in which the dancer assumes at the same time the roles of the subject *and* the object of research. I believe that reconsidering the concept of *bodily knowledge* from the dancer's perspective will be instrumental in answering my main research questions theoretically, and, thus, contribute to the debate about the epistemology of dance-based artistic research. Moreover, the research, embedded as it is in artistic practice, aims at developing the research(ed) method in terms of performance, i. e. it makes its case by sharing the knowledge with other dancers, thus putting to the test as well as corroborating the findings that have been made in and through artistic performance.

Research Methods: Combining Theory and Practice

The practice through which I want to focus my investigation are the so-called *Manipulations* – a training method developed by *Body Weather*. The *Manipulations* are one of the cornerstones of the *Body Weather* training practice; as such, they promote an increased sensitivity and awareness of the body, leading to the creation of new movement potential; they are practiced in couples, whereby one person *manipulates* the body of his or her partner through a very specific application of touch, weight and pressure. My long-time collaboration with *Body Weather Amsterdam* since 2002 as

dancer and founding member of the performance project *Something Here That Is Not There* with an extensive performance experience creates the frame of reference from which the research is developed.

The focus of the *theoretical* investigation, at the early stage of the research process, is on the study of the literature that deals with the epistemologically specific situation of dance- and performance-oriented artistic research. In the further course of the research, studies from the field of cognitive phenomenology and embodied realism will be examined.

Internationalization and Cooperation: Research and Knowledge Transfer

At the Theater Academy in Helsinki, Artistic Research in the Performing Arts has very strongly developed as a discipline with great impact on the field and a growing international recognition. Next to the doctoral research proper, one of my main aims throughout the next years is to develop structures of cooperation and exchange between dance & research communities in Berlin/Germany and Finland. In the 1st year of my doctoral studies, two projects are also directed towards this goal: an artistic research lab in cooperation with Tanzfabrik Berlin and a residency in Finland.

With the outcomes of my research, generally speaking, I envision to be able to contribute to the growth of the above-mentioned *knowledge culture*, both in theory and in practice. More specifically, I believe that a better understanding of the knowledge embedded and created in and through Contemporary Dance will change our understanding of this artform. The experience and the knowledge that can be gained from contemporary practices of dance, I would argue, go far beyond established notions of dancers as virtuous movers who have developed *kinaesthetic intelligence*. Artistic Research, as a discipline and as a new approach to the production of knowledge in and through the arts, can help to promote a new understanding of the function and the role of art-making, and, thereby, open up new possibilities to artists who come to realize the often dormant, unconscious potential implicit in their practice. It is one of my main concerns, to contribute on an international scale to the growth of the discipline and to the dissemination of knowledge it brings forth.

2. Time Plan

Phase	Emphasis	Aims & Results
1. Year	Theoretical reflection about the conceptual premises and the epistemological issues of the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistic Research Lab • Residency • Draft of a paper on the topic of <i>bodily knowledge</i> in the context of the epistemology of dance performance • Re-conceptualisation of the notion of <i>bodily knowledge</i>
2. Year	Methodological inquiry into the practical movement research method and development of Research into Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing-on of the research method to one or more dancers • Experimental development of the research method • Investigation into the <i>performativity</i> of the research method • Creation of a dance performance • Interdisciplinary translation research • Creation of a <i>research installation</i> and presentation
3. Year	Dissemination and Transmission of the Research Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing various formats of presenting research results according to the context
4. Year	Dissertation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating and integrating the results of the theoretical investigation with reflections about the practical research

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4. Detailed Project Description

4.1 The Epistemological Issue

The concept of *bodily knowledge* and its re-articulation: The case of the *Manipulations*

I suggest that the *Manipulations* provide a useful entrance into studying and rethinking the relationship between sensing, perceiving and reflecting, and that the articulation of the operative concepts - embodied as implicit knowledge in and through the *Manipulations* - contributes to a critical re-formulation of the concept *bodily knowledge* (Parviainen 2002; Hämäläinen 2007).

I would argue that the creative potential of the *Manipulations* is not confined to the realm of the *kinaesthetic*, but that it extends across perception to the realm of *mind*, allowing for a specific type of reflection: *embodied reflection* (Kinsella 2007). The *Manipulations* offer a very specific methodical framework for experiencing the body differently. Over time, repeated and practiced regularly, this experience becomes embodied and re-enacted as a mode of knowing in and through the body (Parviainen 2002), both of the giver and the receiver of the *Manipulations*. In my research, I want to focus on the part of *receiving* and investigate how the receiver's perception of self in relation to the outside is altered through this touch-manipulation, thus providing insight into the relationship between sensation, perception and reflection at the intersection of body and environment.

The questions that follow from there are: does this altered perception of self enable not only another mode of (bodily) knowing, but also of thinking and reflecting? Does it produce an altered subjectivity, a *disposition* (Damschen et al. 2009) for another mode of organizing the relationship between sensing, perceiving and reflecting?

As a highly sophisticated form of somatic practice, the *Manipulations* promote raising awareness of bodily perception as well as an increased capacity for the deliberate direction of one's attention under physically extremely challenging conditions, thus enabling new potential for movement and perception (Snow 2002). Apart from this value for the practice of dance-oriented movement research, it is my hypothesis that the *Manipulations* further provide excellent and solid empirical grounds to rethink concepts and methods that are theoretically crucial for artistic research in the realm

of contemporary dance performance research. *Somatic attention* (Csordas 1993), *introspection* (Gallagher 2002; Varela/Shear 1999), *reflection-in-action* (Schön 1983), *perception as action* (Noë 2004), *tacit knowledge* (Polanyi 1966) and *the body without organs* (Deleuze/Guattari 1987) are some of the concepts that will be employed in order to re-consider the notion of *bodily knowledge* as well as the specific *type* of *bodily knowledge* that is embodied in the *Manipulations*.

I believe that reconsidering the concept of *bodily knowledge* will be instrumental in answering my main research questions theoretically. Moreover, it will contribute to the discussion about the epistemology of dance (Pakes 2003, 2004, 2009; Gehm/Husemann/Wilcke 2007; Rouhiainen 2007).

4.2 Methodological Inquiry

Movement Research: Experimental Development of the *Manipulations*

The practical research will further develop a movement research method that is based on the *Manipulations*. From this inquiry I hope to gain insights into the performative nature of the relationship between sensation, perception and reflection – and answers to my research questions.

In the original set-up of this practice, the main task of the receiver is to minimize muscle tension in order to increase his or her availability to be moved. The focus is put on actively observing any sensations evoked by and accompanying the application of touch, weight and pressure.

Typically, any thoughts and ideas arising during the *Manipulations* are considered to be rather distracting by-products. However, it is precisely the products of this *disturbance* that I am fascinated by: thoughts, ideas, associations, moments of lucidity and of intuitive knowing, sudden and unexpected insights – mindful activities for which I (provisionally) use the term *reflection*. Rather than regarding these as secondary by-products of the actual research, the aim is to develop the capacity to pay equal attention to them and to create systems of registration and notation. Therefore, I am interested in further experimenting with the original set-up of the

Manipulations, developing and exploring the task of *receiving* in two directions: *imagination* and *reflection*.

First, I want to explore, if and how we can change our perception by using *imagination* as a tool in order to manipulate sensation. Second, I want to investigate how that altered perception possibly creates new space for the emergence of *reflection*. The enquiry will happen in 2 steps:

1. In the first step, the *real* giving partner is replaced by an *imaginary* partner. In other words: the *receiving* partner is *imagining* the actual physical application of the *Manipulations* by the *giving* partner; the memory of the experienced manipulation is re-created by the receiving partner and up-dated in real time through his or her imagination: the touch of the hands on the skin, the pressure on the tissue, on the muscle, the bone, the weight entering the body, the space that is being compressed, the extension that is being created, the tension that is being released and so on. The sensation of being moved and manipulated is self-induced. Giver and receiver, mover and moved, touching and being touched, subject and object – the dual roles of the *Manipulations* are being enacted by one and the same person. As *two* become *one*, this *one* needs to create a relation between *two*.

The difficulty lies in re-creating the kinaesthetic and proprioceptive sensation of being manipulated, while at the same time keeping the muscle effort as minimal as possible. The task is to physically investigate how close the researcher can come to the sensation of being manipulated, negotiating memory, imagination and the minimal muscle tension that is necessary in order to re-create the sequence of mental-perceptual images that are at play in the *Manipulations*.

2. In the second step, it will be examined what happens when the activity of imaginary self-manipulation is accompanied by an additional task. This second task consists in becoming aware of emerging thoughts and ideas that appear to consciousness while doing the work of imaginary self-manipulation and while simultaneously keeping track of the evidence, e.g. through writing. Both tasks or activities should be maintained independently of each other; neither of them should get more attention than the other; both modes of awareness should be brought to their fullest capacity, with neither of them losing clarity or distinction.

This combination of two apparently conflicting tasks - a highly specific *sensory* mode of awareness with an awareness of *thoughts* - raises the question about our ability to distribute our attention at will and beyond habit. How are both modes of awareness related to each other? How are they connected? Can an altered perception of our self create new passages and spaces for leaps of thought? How does this artificial redistribution of the attention - and consequently: the *sensible* (Rancière 2004) - possibly lead to the disruption of habitual self-awareness? Is *all* thought and thinking situated in the body, or can there be something such as dis-embodied thinking, after all (Varela/Thompson/Rosh 1992; Gallagher 2005; Anttila 2007).

Why are these questions relevant to be addressed and answered? Many dancers, especially in the field of Contemporary Dance, have learned to perform sensibilities that go far beyond the everyday, thus challenging our habitual perception and how we think about ourselves. I believe that research-oriented Contemporary Dance can put a challenge to existing conceptions of knowledge production and to the still widespread assumption that artistic and scientific modes of knowing are methodologically and ontologically separate and distinct. More and more, Contemporary Dance, both in training/education and in performance-making, fosters a culture of knowledge-making that integrates modes of knowing *in* and *through* with modes of knowing *about*. It is important to further develop these modes of embodied knowing and reflecting, and to better understand what a body *is* and what it *does*. Therefore, it is necessary to construct suitable research models that investigate from within, across and beyond existing epistemologies.

The methodological inquiry outlined above in this section will proceed in 3 phases: In the first phase, I will conduct the research on my own, in order to gain more in-depth understanding of the research(ed) method. In a second phase, the method will be passed on to and tested with one other dancer to gain more feedback. In a third phase, finally, the method will be applied in group work, taking the research on sensation, perception and reflection and the impact of the research method on the dancer's performativity as starting point for the creation of a performance piece.

4.3 Research Creation

From Researching Practice to Performance: *Performance, Performativity, Performability*

A main aspect of research at this stage are the questions: How does the regular practice of the research method and the embodied knowledge bear on the *performativity* (Schechner 2006) of the dancer-researcher? Has the practice of researching a specific distribution of attention - the combination of a *conceptual* with a *perceptual* mode of awareness - become incorporated and installed as a *performability* (i. e. the capacity to *performatively* enact embodied knowledge) that can be applied in a shifted context of application: in a *performance*? If that is the case, does this *performability* enable access to new potentials of movement and perception? Does it enable another layer of reflection-in-action (Schön 1983) and of choice-making? How can this *performability* possibly become applied as tool in dance improvisation and as a compositional element in choreographic practices?

Translation Research: Visualization and Verbalization

With regard to the question of the presentation and dissemination of the research results, there are some fundamental methodical issues that frequently recur in the debate about artistic research (Dallow 2003; Hasemann 2006; Borgdorff 2007, 2008), and, therefore, will need to be reflected upon. One of the key questions is how to stage a research that combines two different modes of knowledge-making: a highly specific physical investigation into micro-sensory perception and a conceptual approach. In my view, it is necessary to create a format that makes the research process and its results cognitively accessible to the recipients. There needs to be a proper balance between various media in which the research can be transmitted. For example, one of the crucial problems of artistic research, with regard to the representation of the research outcome, is the relationship between artistic practice and written language (Pakes 2003; Borgdorff 2008).

I would like to collaborate on this issue with artists and researchers from other disciplines.

Presentation of the Research Creation: The *Research Installation*

One possible format of presentation and dissemination that I would like to further explore is the *research installation*. This format allows an *assemblage* of multiple media and means of communicating the results of the research. It combines implicit and explicit modes of knowledge, theoretical and practical forms, performative practices and representations, bodily enactments and translations into text, sound and image. The concept of the *research installation* aims at the creation of a space for sensible reflection where the outcomes of research are documented and made accessible in a mode of encounter between a multiple body of knowledge and an *emancipated spectator* (Rancière 2007) who may follow his or her own particular curiosity and interests. The installation provides an artistic framework for consolidating and documenting research results while at the same time enabling the continuation of the research process. This form of presentation, therefore, suits well the performative and process-nature both of the subject and the object of the research.

4.4 Dissemination and Transmission

A main interest throughout the research process, but at this stage especially, is to foster an exchange with various research communities and to continuously present preliminary research results and reflections about the process in an international context. These will be presented as the research develops, throughout the whole course of the investigation, not only in its final phase.

Again, one of the main methodological issues is to develop suitable formats to present the research in various contexts and to find the proper language, conceptually as well as aesthetically, for communicating the research in its process and results. In lecture-performances, seminars, workshops and symposia, the research process, theoretically and practically, will be opened up to dialogue and critical reflection.

Furthermore, I wish to realize the dissemination of the results within the context of training and education in the performing arts, for example at Teak, but also at other institutions.

4.5 Dissertation

The written dissertation marks a crystallization point in the effort to articulate and integrate the results of the theoretical investigation with reflections on the practical research. The content of the dissertation includes

- situating the research in its artistic and cultural context,
- an analysis and re-tracing of significant steps in the research process,
- a reflection on the epistemological and methodological issues of the research, underpinning its relevance in the context of the evolution of artistic research as a discipline,
- and the development of a conceptual framework as a theoretical space of reflection, drawing on theories of embodiment (Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1992; Gallagher 2005), cognition (Lycan 1999; Massumi 2002) and, possibly, phenomenology (Sheets-Johnstone 1966, 1999; Merleau-Ponty 2002; Rothfield 2005)

4.6 Collaborations and Partnerships

The research project is situated in the widening landscape of artistic performance research. To some degree, I will conduct the research individually. However, I think it is important that the realization of the creative research, especially, will happen in cooperation with other dance/performance artists as well as with institutions of the field both in Finland and abroad in order to corroborate the findings.

In fall 2011, in cooperation with *Tanzfabrik* Berlin, I am organizing an Artistic Research Lab during the *Herbstfestival*, an international dance and performance festival. The aim is to provide a platform for exchange and debate about issues of Artistic Research. The lab starts a series of events in collaboration with Berlin-based artistic researchers who are doing a PhD abroad. Another possible cooperation partner in Berlin is the recently established *Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz*, the department for Contemporary Dance at the *Universität der Künste* (University of the Arts).

Residencies in Finland will possibly be held at *Zodiak* (Helsinki) and at *Kutomo*, a space in Turku run by *Ehkä*, a collective of independent dance and performance artists. There are a number of personal contacts to professional dancers in Finland who I can well imagine to collaborate with. There is a long lasting collaboration with Katerina Bakatsaki and Frank van de Ven from *Body Weather Amsterdam* as well as contacts with practitioners based in Berlin, Amsterdam and abroad.

In the past 5 months, I have been commissioned by Dr. Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren from the University of Washington/Bothell to do research at the Bauhaus Archive in Berlin on Oskar Schlemmer and the Bauhaus Theater. This cooperation will continue in the future and I see a potential crossover-fertilization between my doctoral research and the research on and at the Bauhaus.