

Editor's Introduction

Turning Points and Continuity: Reformulating questions to the archives

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Under the title, “Turning Points and Continuity: Reformulating questions to the archives”, this special issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies* gathers articles emanating from a joint research project – as well as articles by invited guest writers – all dealing with the period 1880-1925. The issue is published with support from the Swedish Research Council. The project, and consequently also this collection of articles, centres on the twofold task of re-examining the period of the so-called modern breakthrough in performing arts and to rethink the historiographical approach, thereby adding to the theoretical and methodological toolbox of historical research. The geographical focus of the project is Sweden, but the research objects – e.g. actors, dancers, texts, and genres – exist on an international scale and, accordingly, the investigations stretch into Finland, Norway, Denmark, and other countries.

As hinted at by the subtitle of this journal issue, the articles address the role of the research question in historical research. From the point of view of editor, I see the investigations as revolving around a naïve, yet immensely productive question: what kind of information can be teased out of a particular material? It is as if the researchers have bracketed previously told (hi)stories, put the sources on the table, and simply asked what the possibilities are with such material. This kind of strategic naivety has made it possible to make novel findings, extract different information, and produce substantially new knowledge from the historical records. Basic questions gave rise to a number of operational research questions through which the researchers scrutinized the material, which ranged from private to public documents, from letters to contracts, from photos to history books. Taken as a whole, this collection of articles can be seen as a theoretical and methodological exploration of the possibilities of

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historical research.

The articles' close readings of historical sources are not primarily done to investigate what has happened and what is true, but the texts, objects and visual representations are, instead, examined as instances of representation and understanding. Instead of going down the historian's traditional path and examining the truth-value of historical records – delving into what possible facts about historical events and persons the records carry – the contributing researchers generally centre on the materiality, narrativity, and discursivity of their sources. How was a particular performance, person, or line of events understood and represented? Why was it described, depicted, and interpreted in this way? And what impact did these representations, discourses, and recordings have? Consequently, the reader of the articles will not primarily find information on the historical persons that are mentioned – such as Albert Ranft, Anna Robenne and Ellen Hartmann – but instead, analyses of how these persons are represented, constructed, and “staged” in written and visual accounts. Neither will the reader find the complete and true description of a particular dance or theatre performance, but instead, detailed examinations of how variously these specific performances were described and judged in reviews – and the possible underlying reasons for this.

Furthermore, the researchers apply and introduce a range of theoretical and methodological approaches in their investigations, from new materialism, affect theory, and Archival Studies to more established approaches such as deconstructive and feminist readings. Hereby, the articles also shed light on the interrelations between some of the researcher's most fundamental tools: the research question, the theoretical perspective, and the research method. The articles show how new theoretical perspectives generate new questions, and, in turn, how these questions might need novel methods to be answered – but also vice versa, that recent methodological advancements can produce other research questions, which then require development on the level of concepts.

Lastly, in addition to reformulating questions and applying new methodologies and theories, several of the articles also make use of new source material. By picking up seldom used artefacts and types of sources – such as employment contracts and letters – and by actively turning their focus to sidestepped genres – such as operetta and “light” entertainment – the articles give stimulating insights into the field of performing arts of the fin-de-siècle.

Following an introductory text that presents the research project, the first article of the issue is Lena Hammergren's “Embodied Spectatorship? Interpreting dance reviews around 1900”. In her analyses of Swedish reviews of dance performances by Isadora Duncan, Artemis Colonna, and Loïe Fuller, Hammergren addresses the corporeal and sensorial levels of written accounts. While the female writers examined had been trained in dance, the opposite held for the male writers, a fact that becomes important through the analysis. With the help of concepts such as kinaesthetic empathy, Hammergren elucidates the differences between various critics' approach to and judgement of the perfor-

mances. Hammergren argues for the political potential of reviews as an arena for voicing female experiences and for the importance for historical research to take embodied responses into account.

In “Affective Economies in the Tug of War between Idealism and Anti-idealisms: Reviewers’ reactions to Anne Charlotte Leffler’s *Sanna kvinnor* (True Women)”, Birgitta Johansson Lindh also contributes to the rethinking of reviews as historical sources. In her reading of reviews of the 1883 premiere of Leffler’s play, Johansson Lindh focuses on the emotive responses of the critics. Instead of treating the reviews as more or less truthful reports on the performance, which can be considered a common approach to these kind of historical sources, they are, here, approached from the perspective of affect theory. By applying Sara Ahmed’s concept affective economy, Johansson Lindh demonstrates how the discourse of the reviews is connected to structures of gender and affect.

The question of gender is also highly present in H el ene Ohlsson’s article, “Representing Pariah Femininity: Sexuality, gender, and class at the fin-de-si cle”. Ohlsson closely reads a series of letters between King Oscar II and Baroness Henriette Coyet, all dealing with the famous actress Ellen Hartman. Leaning on Tracy Davies’ feminist historiographical methodology and Mimi Shipper’s concept pariah femininity, Ohlsson unpacks the discursive construction of Hartman in the letters. Ohlsson’s interest in this article lies not so much in the question of Ellen Hartman’s true being, but rather in how the actress was depicted as morally doubtful, asexual, or excessively sexual in the correspondence.

Biographical material, especially autobiographical ones, are likewise at the centre of Rikard Hoogland’s “What Do Theatre Autobiographies Conceal?” In his reading of texts by and about Albert Ranft, the leader of a huge private theatre empire, Hoogland examines what could be called the theatrical quality of such writings, namely the way in which they stage certain events and characters. The question is not whether or not the autobiographies truthfully conform to real events and persons, but rather what other types of information they carry and how they function as a staging of the self. Using Diane Taylor’s widespread terms, Hoogland furthermore discusses if autobiographies as historical sources could be placed in between the archive and the repertoire.

In her article, “The Employment Contract as the Materialization of the Social Order: Contracts at Albert Ranft’s Stockholm theatres, 1895-1926”, Lovisa N aslund too deals with the theatre empire of Albert Ranft, but from a financial and organizational perspective. N aslund’s material consists of employment contracts, a material not extensively used within theatre history research. By closely reading and comparing contracts, N aslund demonstrates a correlation between the form and content of the contract and Ranft’s dominant position in the theatre landscape of that time. Moreover, N aslund places the employment contract in relation to the invisible social contract, arguing that the rules and regulations that are missing from the written contract could be considered a part of the taken-for-granted social contract.

In his article “History Repeating Itself: The function of turning points and continuity in three historical narratives on operetta”, Mikael Strömberg deals with the central dichotomy of the research project from a postnarrative stance. With operetta history as his example, Strömberg argues that historical research meets a threefold challenge, which could be called a historiographical, historical, and a narrative task: firstly, to critically read and possibly contest previous research on historiographical grounds, secondly, to look for and investigate new archival material that can deepen and widen the historical knowledge and possibly undermine hegemonic understandings, and, thirdly, to develop new narrative strategies and a consciousness with regards to the way historical research is written and the way in which argumentation gathers strength.

In “Activating Dance Records: Conceptualizing research into the Swedish, Nordic and global archives pertaining to the Russian dancer Anna Robenne”, Astrid von Rosen focuses on sidestepped material while, at the same time, addressing methodological questions regarding the archive. Introducing recent conceptualizations from Archival Studies, especially with regard to how concepts of value, representation, and the record are being rethought, von Rosen’s article aims to bridge the gap between disciplines, pointing towards a revamped methodology of archival research within performing arts history. Instead of viewing the record as a neutral container of facts, von Rosen reflects on the process of activation of the record. Furthermore, by juxtaposing the journeying life of her research subject – the Russian dancer Anne Robenne – with her own archival travels, in physical as well as digital space, von Rosen discusses the role of the researcher her-/himself.

In “The Performance of Pictorialist Dance Photography”, Karen Vedel also touches upon the subject of cultural mobility, turning her interest towards a particular type of dance photograph. From the perspective of new materialism, Vedel examines the pictorialist photos of Waldemar Eide and Henry B. Goodwin featuring the ballerinas Vera Fokina and Jenny Hasselquist. While the work of the (male) photographers – in studio and in the post-photographical process – have often been the focus of research on pictorialist photos, the contribution made by the (female) models have been largely ignored. In her article, Vedel discusses the role of the dancer in the production of these photos and, furthermore, considers the way in which the photos, in their materiality, took part in transmedial processes of meaning production.

Willmar Sauter closes the journal with his article, “Deconstructing Turning Points: A postscript on the canonization of the avant-garde 1900”, scrutinizing three texts dealing with the, so called, breakthrough of modern theatre. Sauter examines texts by Gösta M. Bergman, Christopher Innes, and Erika Fischer-Lichte with a particular focus on how the three historians construct periodization. By not only taking the three authors’ conceptualization into account, but also relating this to their respective personal and professional background, Sauter deepens the understanding of the subjectivity of history-writing and the way in which this impacts on the outcome. Making use of the historiographical theories of Thomas Postlewait and Jacques Derrida, Sauter argues for a history-writing that does not primarily use historical sources as evidence of the his-

torian's hypotheses, but that the sources themselves become inspiring agents.

"Not only, but also..." is a phrase that could serve as an epigraph for this issue of *Nordic Theatre Studies*. The researchers not only present fresh historical knowledge, complementing our understanding of the period 1880-1925, but they also revitalize the historiography of theatre and dance through introducing and trying out new perspectives, analytical tools, and questions. Consequently, these articles are not only of relevance for Nordic scholars, but the historiographical advancements make the articles relevant to all scholars, teachers, and students of theatre and dance history. As a joint endeavour, the articles show what is possible to achieve within historiographical and historical research with the seemingly naïve strategy of reformulating questions to the archives.