

Embodied Spectatorship?

Interpreting dance reviews around 1900

LENA HAMMERGREN

ABSTRACT

The article intertwines historiographical analyses with research methods focusing on embodied responses to performances. It argues that dance reviews can be interpreted from a sensorial viewpoint, analyzing ways in which language articulates so-called kinaesthetic, or affective responses. The argument is based on theories of agency and embodiment (Noland). Swedish reviews from performances by Isadora Duncan (Stockholm, 1906), Artemis Colonna (Stockholm, 1903), and Loïe Fuller (Gothenburg, 1907) are investigated, and it is concluded that these kinaesthetic sensations are visible mainly in the language of female writers and spectators. Moreover, in arguing that an embodied spectatorship is important in order to understand the view of the period as a turning point in dance aesthetics, an emphasis is put on the importance of including the practice of dancing by both professionals and amateurs in this historical narrative. Besides embracing the emergence of the professional dance avant-garde, the interpretation focuses on the importance of a corporeal education of the audience. In particular, female audience members seem to, via a dance performance, identify with forms of sensory experience in tandem with visually evaluated objects of art. It is argued that the change in the female viewers' perceptions had a potential political effect in that it gave voice to both corporeal sensations and women's experiences in ways new to the public arena. Thus, it is in these experiences the important turning point in dance history emerges, rather than merely in the performances themselves.

KEYWORDS

Embodied responses, kinaesthesia, dance reviews, Isadora Duncan, Loïe Fuller, female spectatorship, amateur dancing.

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INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to intertwine historiographical analyses with research methods focusing on embodied responses to performances. It investigates Swedish dance reviews from the period around 1900,¹ and it explores these archival sources from a sensorial viewpoint. It is a perspective from which ideas about kinaesthesia and affect become important. Kinaesthesia embraces an individual's sensory perception of movements and muscular tensions.² These sensations are something you can be aware of, as well as adjust and improve. Affect refers, in more overarching terms, to sensory feedback from one's own body, and is pre-cognitive and pre-linguistic, thus "resisting classification in terms of particular emotions".³ As the argument will show, these sensations are mainly visible in the language of female writers and spectators.

Analyzing Swedish newspaper reviews from this period in time involves some interpretative problems, mainly due to the genre of writing dance critique. These reviews focus on the overall visual aspects of dance performances. Sometimes, if the dancer is a woman, they show a specific glance at the female anatomy, as in the following review in which the critic argues the dancer (Isadora Duncan) has "slouching shoulders, ugly arms, ugly legs, and very ugly feet."⁴ If there is a recognizable story in the dance, the reviews can focus the narrative itself and interpretation of roles.⁵ The use of detailed movement descriptions is absent, and is of much more recent date.

However, given the fact that the turn of the century saw several new forms of movement performed on stages (both within high and popular cultures) I find

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1. For a more in-depth historical study of dance during this period, see Hammergren 2002.
 2. Reason & Reynolds 2010.
 3. Reynolds 2012a, 87.
 4. Laurin 1906, 386. His critique concerns Isadora Duncan's performance in 1906, in Stockholm. All translations of Swedish citations are made by the author.
 5. One example is when scenes from the classical ballets *Swan Lake* and *Giselle* were performed in 1908 in Stockholm, as part of guest performances by Anna Pavlova and dancers from the Maryinsky theatre, St Petersburg (Hammergren 2002, 95-6).

it important to understand both the performances and the receptions of these movement practices from an embodied perspective. Thus, I am interested in what it means to enter into a new movement technique and to change your habitual way of moving as a performer, and how the audience perceive it. However, one has to bear in mind that even though the performed aesthetics on stage underwent changes, the manner in which the critic was able to describe it through language might not have changed at the same speed.⁶ Nevertheless, I argue that looking at audience perception, and in particular how it is articulated in the language of the dance critic, have a potential to complement, and sometimes change, mainstream dance historiographies (often based on the notion of “turning points” at the beginning of the 20th century). In these histories, canonical choreographers-cum-dancers, and their innovations of new choreographic structures and movement styles are put at the forefront. It is not often that analyses of audience reception are included.⁷

In order to analyse the potential effects of embodied experience, several theories are helpful, e.g. Carrie Noland who points out ways in which corporeal (dance) practices can both create new movement knowledge and change discursive conventions.⁸ The concept “dance practices” is also central to my analysis, and I use the following definition: “‘practice’ strains the definition of artistic labor by distancing it from an expectation of production [...] placing it rather in the flow of process, learning, or procedure.”⁹ This understanding of the concept helps maintain a focus on the continuous transformative and experiential dimension that is part of learning to dance by both professionals and amateurs, rather than an emphasis on the choreographic form and the performance itself. I will also argue that audience reception is a transformative learning practice.

This analytical framework, with a focus on sensorial experience, fits in well with ideas on agency and embodiment, as Carrie Noland develops them. She suggests that by repetitive bodily training you can/might alter pre-existing cultural meaning and discursive conventions. “As a result of repetition and training, bodily experience of the behavior [...] can produce a situation in which the performance of the act does not correspond to the discursive existence it is given. Through retraining, dissonance can be created on the level of the gestural, and thus discursive norms can be brought into confrontation with movement practices in such a way as to subvert cultural expectations [...] the moving, trained, and trainable body is always a potential source of resistance

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6. See Conner who points out the problems of describing dances of this period because there was no suitable vocabulary established (Conner 1997, 46-8).
 7. There are some important exceptions where scholars have looked at female spectatorship during the first half of the 20th century, see e.g. Manning 1997 and Elswit 2014.
 8. Noland 2009.
 9. Andrea Philips cited in Bryan-Wilson 2012, 66.

to the meanings it is required to bear.”¹⁰ Noland argues against the dominance of a Foucauldian theory in which the idea of bodies being inscribed by society and discourses is central. She insists that the kinaesthetic experience places pressure on the socio-cultural conditioning a body receives, and, consequently, that it can lead to changes in e.g. movement practices and in socio-cultural discourses and bodily conventions. It is my suggestion that it also has a capacity to change audience reception. Consequently, I will argue that the move towards an embodied emancipation found in dancing practices carried out by both professional artists and dance amateurs goes hand-in-hand with emerging new modes of performance receptions.

Moreover, in order to situate the interpretation of the reviews within a larger socio-cultural context, I have found cultural theorist Hillel Schwartz useful. He argues that certain kinaesthetic experiences were foundational in many practices and artefacts created during this period in time.¹¹ Consequently, it is possible to propose that new sensory stimuli are at work and that they influence the perception of dancing.

THREE DANCE EVENTS

How, then, do these ideas connect to my interest in dance around 1900 with particular focus on dance performances in Sweden? I intend to argue that it is possible to conceive of this period as a time when there is an emerging change of modes of perception. In some instances, different kinds of non-normative sensations appear and they are communicated in public with the help of dance reviews. Thus, I add to the analysis made by dance scholar Susan Manning who has emphasized the importance of looking at early modern dancing from the perspectives of both kinaesthesia and representation.¹²

I will address this idea through the analyses of three performances taking place in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, and in Gothenburg, a large city on the Swedish west coast. The first example is Isadora Duncan’s visit to Stockholm in 1906, the second concerns a lesser known dancer, performing under the artistic name of Artemis Colonna in Stockholm in 1903, and the final example is Loïe Fuller’s performances at the venue Stora Teatern, in Gothenburg in 1906. In addition to reviews, I will make use of excerpts from unpublished memoirs written by the Swedish musician, movement and song pedagogue Anna Behle.

THE SENSORY WORLD(S)

Using the idea that new sensorial experiences are both performed and perceived, it is crucial to reflect upon the kind of sensory world that could be conceived as forming a norm to the audiences around 1900. Stockholm had a large number of private theatres, variety venues, as well as venues for the

10. Noland 2009, 174-5.

11. Schwartz 1992, 73.

12. Manning 1997.



Figure 1. Studio portrait of opera dancers Maria Karlsson and Robert Köller in a Spanish divertissement. Unknown photographer. Musik- och teaterbibliotekets fotosamling, Stockholm.

very popular genre of the operetta. Even the Royal Theatres (the Opera and the Dramatic Theatre) became privatized during the late 1880s.¹³ The government's attitude was that it was formally incorrect for the state, and any of its ministers and departments, to engage in businesses.

Many performance genres were under debate at the time. Some of these discussions were linked to the fact that many of the private theatres created repertoires dominated by German farces, operettas, and French comedies, and people belonging to the cultural elite demanded that serious drama of a higher artistic quality should play a larger role. With regard to dance, the classical ballet at the Swedish Royal Opera was under heavy critique concerning both the repertoire and the quality of the dancing.¹⁴ Furthermore, many kinds of dance genres were included in the discussions without a fixed artistic hierarchy, even though some critics of course had personal favourites. I imagine that the following response to dance performances of various genres exem-

13. Rosenqvist 1990, 44-63.

14. See e.g. the women's magazine *Idun*, vol. 19, no. 18, 1906, 220.

plify the mainstream reception during the period. Carl Laurin, an influential art historian, theatre critic and pedagogue, wrote the following review: “Beautiful, passionate dance is the most refreshing you can experience, but alas, it exists today only at the variety venues. Sometimes you can find the artistic, Dionysian dance there, but never anywhere else. It is the folk dances that are entertaining, Spanish dancing, cakewalk, mazurka, czardas, and the Swedish peasant dances [i.e. folk dances].”¹⁵ His reference to “passionate” dancing could be interpreted as a desire to see physical expression on stage, but, as is shown in his review of Duncan’s performance cited at the beginning of this chapter, it is often combined with a voyeuristic gaze at the female body.

Owing to the kind of repertoire given at the many private venues where dancing took place, one can imagine that the audience was used to short dance routines, interspersed with music and other kinds of entertainment, emphasizing visual images, attractive costumes, as well as the enjoyment of listening to familiar tunes. Going to the theatre also meant taking part in a pleasurable social event. In this amiable context, new performance structures, new aesthetic expressions and new movement vocabularies were suddenly introduced, thus offering the viewers the possibility to engage in new kinds of corporeal sensations and perceptions.

Moreover, it was probably not only the new aesthetics on stage that inspired people to experience movement differently. According to Hillel Schwartz, there were several mechanical inventions produced in the US before World War I “that made possible a significantly different sense of physical movement”, e.g. the zipper, the escalator, the motion picture camera, and the roller coaster.¹⁶ They all provided new kinaesthetic sensations, emphasizing “a grounded human body moving nonetheless fluidly, rhythmically, naturally, and in the sense that any part of the body could be called upon, freely,” exactly as the movement practices of the early modern dance was performed.¹⁷ Is it possible to argue that similar sensations became part of the sensory world of people in Sweden? I would argue this is a feasible interpretation, even if the zipper was first used in Sweden in 1911, the first roller coaster was set up in Malmö in 1914, and the first escalator was installed at the newly built department store NK in Stockholm in 1915.¹⁸ The introduction of these mechanical inventions to Sweden came later than when my three performances took place. Thus, there exists not a causal relationship between inventions and kinaesthetic sensations, but a kind of movement-focused zeitgeist in which trains, cars, electricity, moving pictures as well as photos, newspaper articles, and debates about the new machines could be imagined to have made people intensely aware of new modes of experiencing movement.

15. Laurin 1908, 336.

16. Schwartz 1992, 88-9.

17. *Ibid.*, 77.

18. About the zipper, see Karlsson, “Knäppupp! Om blixtlåsets historia”; about the roller coaster, see *Baltiska utställningen, Malmö Stad*.

ISADORA DUNCAN – AN EMBODIED PERFORMANCE RECEPTION

Duncan's guest performance opened 1 May 1906 in a venue called Östermalmsteatern, a private theatre run by Albert Ranft, which, at the time, usually housed operettas. The opening night was not sold out, but after several reviews, a massive advertisement campaign, as well as reduced ticket prices, the audiences arrived in droves, and the one-week visit was extended with an additional week. There was a clear disagreement between the reviewers with regard to how they evaluated the performances. Even among the positive ones, there was always some aspect that the critic found reason to decry. Some objected to the way in which the program was constructed; a full evening with solo dances, albeit interspersed with music, was difficult to comprehend. Duncan's physical appearance was scrutinized, sometimes negatively and other times positively evaluated.¹⁹ A review written by the theatre critic Boo Hjärne describes her dancing as beautiful, but "so pure and chaste that a poor sinner longed for some sensuousness, without which dance becomes too monotonous."²⁰ Such types of reception appear misogynistic, and, within my analytical frame, I think it also reveals the established modes of embodied receptions because of the reviewers' focus on and desire for a more energetically dynamic dancing to well-known melodies (cf. Laurin's review above).

Many reviews are taciturn when it comes to describing Duncan's dances and interpreting the movements and/or their effects in more detail. There is one exception however, written by a female journalist Anna Branting, in which both the metaphorical language and the use of the personal pronoun "I" mark a difference to the language of her male colleagues, hence it provides an additional entry for analysis. In my interpretation, it articulates a new kind of experience, and it reveals an emerging (or perhaps merely potential) change of embodied perception: "I cannot describe Isadora Duncan's dance. It is as if I, for only a moment, had existed in another world, sometime imagined and dreamt of, but never fully known, a world of serene, light-hearted and yet thoughtful happiness. Most of all, I would like to remain silent [...] but still be able to collect my memory of her and drink it as a beverage of purity and chastity in the middle of this whirling, distorted common life we live together."²¹

Branting is clearly trying to describe an experience that escaped the normal conditions of her sensory perceptions (I cannot describe...). The chosen personal pronoun, continuously used throughout the paragraph, underlines the deeply felt experience that she is trying to communicate. Her choice of metaphors situates this experience within a joyful and meditative dream, far

19. Carl G. Laurin is the most negative critic, see, Laurin 1906, 385-6. In *Svenska Dagbladet*, the reviewer describes details about her physical appearance, which is judged not too favorable, but this impression is nevertheless harmonized by stating that once she starts dancing, all the negative aspects concerning her physique are forgotten (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 May 1906).

20. Hjärne cit. in Hammergren 1995, 190.

21. Branting, *Stockholmstidningen*, 2 May 1906.

removed from the bustling noise and hectic speed of everyday life. Her reluctance to describe the dancing is overcome by a vibrant desire to give voice to this extraordinary experience, which fills her whole being like a drink of “purity and chastity”.

This review gives me reason to refer to a contemporary discussion on the concepts of affect and kinaesthesia. If affect, as Dee Reynolds defines it, precedes “the kinds of cognitive differentiation that separate our emotions into distinct and identifiable categories”,²² Branting can be described as struggling with putting into words that which in fact is difficult to translate into language. Furthermore, I assume that all three critics cited above, Laurin, Hjärne and Branting, encountered a similar problem of translating affect or kinaesthesia into words, but with one big difference between them. According to Dee Reynolds kinaesthesia works across different senses, and its “intermodality means that a movement or action can be experienced [...] both as a visual image and as a movement sensation; when perception of another’s action is also experienced as one’s own movement sensation, this process becomes empathic.”²³

It is my proposal that what distinguishes the two male critics from Anna Branting is that only she experiences Duncan’s dancing as occurring also in her own body; metaphorically speaking filling her to the brim like liquid in a vessel. Only Branting experiences kinaesthetic empathy and the language with which she tries to communicate with her readers situate this embodied reflection in a world in which normal language does not exist, i.e. in the dream world.

Although Branting was alone among the critics in revealing such kinaesthetic empathy in her writing, at least one more individual did the same. Anna Behle was, at this time, educated as an organist and took singing and piano lessons at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm. She went to see Duncan’s performances in 1906, and the following is how she recollected it in her unpublished memoirs: “The curtain opens. Deadly silent. Isadora entered. Ran barefoot over the stage with light [ethereal] steps. Whirling grey veils prolonged her lines, the music played a classical melody [...] you sat breathless, your eyes filled with tears [...] Silent and touched by the experience my female friend and I walked home in the mildly warm spring night. When we reached my house, I cried out; this is what I want to do. I want to dance! [...] the stiff, Swedish audience, burdened with tradition was liberated, happy.”²⁴

One year later, her wish was fulfilled, and she and her friend Louise Wikström (who was a teacher in physical education) opened a Duncan and Dalcroze inspired institute for “danse plastique”. Behle’s prose is more straightforwardly descriptive in comparison to Branting’s vivacious metaphors, but it also puts emphasis on an inner, silent, but still embodied feeling that reveals

22. Reynolds 2012b, 124.

23. Ibid.

24. Behle, “Memoirs”, 55-6.

itself through somatically experiencing a breathless state²⁵ as well as through the eyes, through tears of emotion. In addition, her description of how the grey veils (Duncan's gauzy costume) becomes integrated with the dancer's movements and body shape (prolonging her lines), reveals an interpretation that has moved beyond a mere visual observation of a movement vocabulary or a female physique. This sensation and its verbal description have turned into a kinaesthetic empathy with the dancing ("I cried out [...]. I want to dance"). The quote speaks of an ability to perceive another's actions as one's own, as does Branting's review. For Behle, the desire to dance is so strong that a major hindrance is noticed merely in the margins of the memoirs-manuscript, when she shortly remarks that she unfortunately lacked something of the most essential: a well-trained body.²⁶

For Hjärne and Laurin, Duncan's performances did not fully succeed in opening the possibility for the viewers to escape the normal conditions of sensory experience. Thus, I would argue that they only had a visual image, an image that never entered the kinaesthetic and empathetic dimension.

ARTEMIS COLONNA – THE IMPORTANCE OF SENSORY EDUCATION

It is fruitful to make a comparison between the reception of Duncan's dances and the reviews of a guest performance, which occurred three years earlier in 1903. This offers the possibility to contextualize the 1906 receptions, and to investigate what the process of learning to sense differently can imply.

In October 1903, the German director and author Ernst von Wolzogen visited Stockholm with his *Überbrettli* cabaret. This genre is described as more sophisticated artistically than the traditional cabaret.²⁷ One of the artists in von Wolzogen's company was a dancer with the artistic name Artemis Colonna.²⁸ Like Duncan, Artemis Colonna danced barefoot in a Greek tunic, in solo dances to well-known classical composers such as Chopin and Beethoven. However, the artistic context of a cabaret was different from the more elite art context

25. Attempting to breathe (as in being breathless) is often described as an example of being aware of somatics, i.e. kinaesthetic experience. See Sklar 2008, 86.

26. Behle, "Memoirs", 55-6.

27. Bergman 1966, 241.

28. Alexandra Carter has suggested that Colonna's real name was Miss Newham, by referring back to Guest 1992. The dancer Guest writes about appears in London at the Alhambra theatre in 1870 and this would mean that, if one believes her to be around 20 years old then, she would be around 50 years old when she performed in Stockholm in 1903 and in London in 1908. See Carter 2005. I have made a similar suggestion based on finding a drawing of a Miss Newham from a magazine at the Dance Collection in New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, with the inscription "1908". However, the image depicts a young woman in a Greek tunic decorated with flowers (Hammergren 2002, 48 and 166, footnote 103). It might be possible that the drawing is an idealized image and the dancer Newham really is Artemis Colonna, who, in this case, continued to dance during a long career. This conclusion could explain Branting's comment regarding the "old" dancer.

in which Duncan performed, and her performance was a full-length evening event. A dancer dancing without tights, and sometimes even without music (as Artemis Colonna did in one dance) – was indeed provoking and many in the audience were shocked. Carl Laurin, who was negative about Duncan's body and performance in 1906, focused, in 1903, on the anatomy of the dancer, Artemis Colonna, this time, however, with a positive result: "It is beautiful not having to see these badly coloured tights and to be able to watch how the muscles play during the dancing."²⁹ Leaving aside whether or not he ends up with a negative or a positive response, it is obvious that the norm of perception stays the same in both examples, with a focus on evaluating the female physique.

In opposition to Laurin's view, the majority of critics thought the dancing impossible to perceive as art. One reviewer even feared the audience risked fainting during the performance.³⁰ Anna Branting, who wrote very positively about Duncan, made a comparison between Duncan and Artemis Colonna in the 1906-review. "The deplorable copy of Isadora Duncan, whom we saw some years ago, seemed to me as an elderly seamstress suddenly gone mad. She was so terrible [to look at] that I, to great scandal, started laughing. Duncan is the sublime personified."³¹

The language and metaphors used are strange in this context of dances to classical music, an elderly working class woman (the seamstress) on the verge of having to be admitted into a mental hospital. It is obvious Branting has experienced something very uncomfortable, which is both personally felt and even endangers the social contract of how to behave as an audience member (by starting to laugh and thus creating a scandal). Consequently, I interpret Branting's reference to Colonna's performance in 1903 as an indication that she was not yet capable of sensing differently, she lacked the possibility to sense in opposition to the established norm.

In this context, it is productive to include the educational context in order to understand how audiences perceive performances. The notion of understanding audience reception as a learning process is articulated by Hillel Schwartz and Ann Cooper Albright in a discussion about the inability for many audience members around the turn of the century to see "beyond the usual pose or traditional narratives, especially on the music hall stage,"³² where many dancers also performed.

Further support for this analysis can be found in social scientist Sean Sayers's discussion and critique of Rancière's ideas of the "distribution of the sensible".³³ The concept refers "to the way in which roles and modes of participation in a common social world are determined by establishing possible modes

29. Laurin 1903, 612. The tights he refers to are probably the tights worn by ballet dancers.

30. *Stockholmstidningen*, 2 October 1903.

31. Hammergren 2002, 49.

32. See Schwartz cited in Albright 2007, 32.

33. Sayers 2005.

of perception [...] what is apprehended by the senses.”³⁴ When changes occur, perceptions and experiences should be conceptualized as “something that escapes the normal conditions of sensory experience,”³⁵ a kind of disconnected sensation being experienced beyond the norm. However, Sayers notes something lacking in the theory: “A new distribution of the sensible is not only just a matter of overcoming the social barriers which are preventing the excluded from speaking and creating new genres [...] as a condition for its possibility, people must have [...] capability and expertise; [and] they imply skills which come into being only with education and culture.”³⁶

Even though Rancière’s ideas deal with an explicit political theory that can seem far removed from my discussion about audience reception, I argue that the change in female viewers’ perceptions has a potential political effect in that it gives voice to both corporeal sensations and women’s experiences in ways new to the public arena. I find it fruitful for my analysis that Sayers underlines how these public utterances rely on educational practices. Moreover, Carrie Noland stresses the embodied result of repetition and training, i.e. a process of learning to sense differently that takes time. Artemis Colonna could, of course, have been an unskilled dancer attracting negative critique,³⁷ but it is also possible that Branting was unused to seeing this kind of dancing, and that the 1903-experience initiated a learning process in which the new genre of dancing became increasingly easier to simultaneously encounter visually and experience kinaesthetically. As Sayers emphasizes: “[t]he senses must be educated if they are to be extended.”³⁸ Adding to this emerging potentiality of learning to sense differently were the many schools for mostly female children, teenagers, and amateur adults offering courses in new movement practices, of which Anna Behle’s institute was but one. Several of the schools relied on ideas of “danse plastique”, i.e. expressive movement imagined to be favourable for a general character-strengthening education, and not specifically for training professional dancers. Therefore, I argue, it is relevant to imagine that several (female) audience members had direct experience themselves of some of these movement techniques, and that it affected their responses.³⁹

In my interpretation, not only a change in movement perception is on its

34. Ibid.

35. Dasgupta 2008, 71.

36. Sayers 2005.

37. Another reviewer remarks that Colonna performs in the same strange (in Swedish ‘egendomliga’) genre as Miss Duncan, which I find further supports my view that viewers were unaccustomed to this type of dancing (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 October 1903).

38. Sayers 2005.

39. Susan Manning makes a similar argument concerning female spectators of early modern dance in the US, and the impact of their experience of physical training on viewing performances (Manning 1997, 162). This training could also be put in a larger context, in Sweden, of emerging new pedagogical ideas and of women’s rights.

way during this period, but also, importantly, there seems to be a gender division between what is visible and possible to articulate by whom. Paraphrasing Sean Sayers, the capacities among audiences to receive new genres depend on education, and most of the movement and dance courses were aimed towards women. Thus, not everyone was yet able to both visually and kinaesthetically, appreciate the new movements being performed in different kinds of venues. Apart from education, this gender divide can also be explained in relation to a more general “appreciation of the new art form during its early stages.”⁴⁰ Lynne Conner has noticed that, in contrast to the male-dominated profession of music critics in the US press, the majority of the articles “on the solo dance movement published in journals before 1915 were written by women”, hence, they were more interested in these new dance forms.⁴¹

ABSTRACTION, CORPOREALITY, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY – TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

In the following, I will use my third and final example in order to further the discussion of a potential embodied response to performances, but also as a means to make some historiographical conclusions on the effects of addressing corporeal practices and the kinaesthetic experiences of them.

Loïe Fuller never visited Stockholm, but just after Duncan met an enthusiastic audience, Fuller performed at Stora Teatern in Gothenburg. For several days before the opening night on April 17, the daily newspapers announced Fuller’s performances together with 10 beautiful dancers.⁴² On the opening night, her performance followed upon a German farce called *Bort med karlarne!* (Get rid of the men!), so the context was more similar to Artemis Colonna’s performance in an artistic cabaret than to Isadora Duncan’s elite art.

Fuller is particularly interesting for my discussion because of the reception of her art form. Several French poets and artists wrote at length about her performances and in Norway the visual artist and author, Christian Krogh, wrote a very appreciative review.⁴³ Thus, one could imagine, here is a site for investigating a potential new mode of embodied perception, articulated in their reviews, given the authors’ particular command of language. Moreover, Rancière has written about Fuller from a perspective in which it becomes productive to discuss the articulation of the turn-of-the-century aesthetics and modes of reception. He departs from the famous descriptions of Fuller’s dances by the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé and argues that the new art that Fuller brings forth “comes from a new body, relieved of the weight of its flesh, reduced to a play of lines and tones, whirling in space.”⁴⁴ In stressing the visual play of lines,

40. Conner 1997, 36.

41. Ibid.

42. E.g. in *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 10 April 1906.

43. The critique by Krogh is referred to in a pre-performance article in *Göteborgs Handels och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 14 April 1906.

44. Rancière 2013, 94. Chapter 6 in the volume is dedicated to the analysis of Loïe Fuller’s art.

Ranci re places abstraction in the innovative forefront of how we conceptualize ‘the modern’. From this viewpoint, the body merely guides the spinning, swaying and swirling that is central to her dances.⁴⁵ Even though Ranci re speaks about a “new body”, he is unable to attend to the physicality of it, and to the affective response to this corporeal dimension.

It is fruitful to compare Ranci re’s analysis to dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright’s analyses of Fuller’s dances.⁴⁶ Whereas he highlights the visual and imaginative responses, Albright details the importance of an embodied response to the dancing in which the movements of the torso are central, the flexible spine, as well as “the sequence of movement from center to periphery, and back again.”⁴⁷ She emphasizes the combination of visual and embodied reception and asks, “What would it mean to allow Fuller both a sensate connection to her physical body as well as an acute visual sensibility.”⁴⁸

The Swedish reviews of Fuller continue the neglect of an embodied response, and they do not reveal any explicit kinaesthetic reactions. Perhaps this was due to an atmosphere of science and technology brought forward in both the initial reports about her visit and in the program description. The press focused on the novelty of the *Radium dance* (which did not use real radium, as Pierre and Marie Curie had convinced Fuller it was too dangerous⁴⁹). Fuller’s wish to perform, what a Swedish critic called “a kind of cosmic ballet”,⁵⁰ with titles such as “On the Sea of the Ocean”, “North Pole”, “The Big Moon”, “Sunset”, “Volcanos-Eruption”, “Rolling Clouds” and “Approaching Fires”,⁵¹ was not all together successful. One critic argued it was na ve and belonged rather to the variety scene.⁵² From another description, it appears that a large veil, probably covering the proscenium, was used for projections of images of e.g. a snowstorm and a shipwreck.⁵³ The performance is also called “an improved cinematographic show”, which further adds to the stress on the technological aspect rather than corporeal, movement innovation.⁵⁴ I can imagine that the technological aura of Fuller’s performances hindered an association (either cognitively or through kinaesthetic empathy) with the viewers’ own corporeal experiences. However, it could be argued, as does Hillel Schwartz⁵⁵, that ex-

45. Ranci re uses the expression “guided by her body” in his description. Ibid.

46. Albright 2007.

47. Ibid., 32.

48. Ibid., 25. Albright makes a nuanced discussion of a combination of the presence and absence of the female body in her analysis of Fuller, stating that she created “a dialogue between the inside movement and its outside image”, 49.

49. Ibid., 193.

50. *G teborgs Handels och Sj farts-tidning*, 18 April 1906. Signature N.P.S.

51. Program Lo ie Fuller, 17 April 1906. My translation of the titles.

52. *G teborgs Handels och Sj farts-tidning*, 18 April 1906. Signature N.P.S.

53. *G teborgs-Posten*, 18 April 1906.

54. *G teborgs Handels och Sj farts-tidning*, 18 April 1906. Signature N.P.S.

55. Schwartz 1992.

periences of the new technologies could also be part of a new mode of perception; it is just not yet visible in the language of the Swedish reviews of Fuller.

Consequently, the new embodied mode of perception, which I argue exists (potentially) in relation to some female audience members' experiences of Duncan's performances, cannot be traced in the Swedish reception of Fuller, neither as a kinaesthetic response in the reviews nor, as Rancière argues, as a guide to an experience of movement-as-abstraction. In his article, it seems the female dancing body can only be conceived of within two frame-works; either as a woman of flesh making merely "graceful gestures" rather than performing a true work of art, or as an abstraction, "a body that institutes the place of its becoming metaphorical."⁵⁶ I find it intriguing that this approach seems to colour the response to female dancers by both the turn-of-the-century male critics and by our contemporary male philosophers. I propose, there is a third possibility, i.e. to react with kinaesthetic empathy to the dancing body. This mode of perception allows the viewer the possibility to watch a woman and a performer simultaneously, seeing moving images as well as experiencing an empathic corporeal bond between oneself and the moving body of the woman on stage.

What I find most interesting, from a historiographical viewpoint, is that in order to understand the early modern dance and what it offers to the historical narrative, one should not only refer to the visual appreciation of new forms of dancing, but also to the potential of responding with kinaesthetic empathy. In enabling this kind of reception to develop, the practice of dancing by both professionals and amateurs is crucial. Spectators learn from sensing movement practices rather than merely cognitively interpreting the representational frame based on the visual image seen on the stage. The aim of Anna Behle's school helped to support this learning process since it offered a new bodily education for modern (wo)man complementing the traditional school education.⁵⁷ Her school was but one of many educational enterprises at the turn-of-the-century and their common goals speak to the importance of looking at dance practices and physical training as an important complement in order to analyse effects of performance receptions.

Looking at the different contexts that surrounded early modern dance give us a more complex picture of the period. Besides embracing the emergence of the professional dance avant-garde, my interpretation focuses on the importance of a corporeal education of the audiences. In particular, female audience members seem to, via a dance performance, identify with forms of sensory experience in tandem with visually evaluated objects of art. Mainstream history seldom affords sensory experiences and embodied spectatorship this powerful position, but, in my analysis, this is where the important turning point in dance history of this period emerges rather than merely in the performances themselves.

56. Rancière 2013, 103.

57. Behle 1918, 14-6.

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AUTHOR

Lena Hammergren, Professor in Theatre Studies at the Department for Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, and professor in Dance Studies, School of Dance and Circus, part of Stockholm University of the Arts. Her research focuses are dance history, and dance and cultural theory. Her list of publications in English include chapters in e.g. *Choreographing History* (1995), *Corporealities* (1996), *Europe Dancing: Perspectives on Theatre Dance and Cultural Identity* (2000), *Rethinking Dance History* (2004), and *Worlding Dance* (2009). She has also published articles on dance in the Nordic region, e.g. "Dance and Democracy in Norden" (2011); "Spaces of Encounter: Dancing Democracy in the Nordic Region" (2012); "Dancing African-American Jazz in the Nordic Region" (2014). Between 2007 and 2011, she was a board member of the Society of Dance History Scholars (today Dance Studies Association).