

## REVIEW

Karen Vedel and Petri Hoppu (eds.)

### Nordic Dance Spaces: Practicing and Imagining a Region

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*Nordic Dance Spaces: Practicing and Imagining a Region* belongs to the series of *The Nordic Experience* that studies the Nordic region as a geopolitical concept through historical, political and cultural analyses. As the title of the book suggests, the notion of dance space is the key that connects the articles. The theoretical framework is largely based on Henri Lefebvre's thoughts on space as historically and socially produced; space is formed by activities, discourses and lived experience. Lefebvre's concepts of space link many articles, though often these concepts are taken as such and discussed by means of the material at hand and there are hardly any counter-arguments. In addition, one wonders whether Lefebvre's theory on space is the most suitable in some cases to highlight the findings. Nevertheless, using Lefebvre's concepts of space in the midst of manifold interests ensures the cohesion of the book. The recurrent question of the relationship between theory and practice also exists in each article as each methodological frame guides the findings.

The challenge of this kind of collection from various authors is to find a balance between the articles' interconnection and independence. Nevertheless, each article has a connection to a cultural and political dimension at the chosen time-place continuum, not forgetting the significance of individual dancers or teachers. The editors' introduction forms a firm base for the historical and ethnographical approach of the collection. The new mobility paradigm constitutes the backbone of the articles, where nomadism, fluid mobility and instability blossom in their complexity. Dance

spaces are seen through geography, global flows and intercultural perspectives, where the notion of transnationality opens up a manifold concept chapter by chapter.

The overall theme of power and hierarchical structures are the focus and how they are reflected in dance forms, cultures and individual dancers and their motility. The guiding role of Nordic states and organizations to movement and motility is clearly pointed out. Furthermore, there exists a tendency to shift towards the way in which dance can cast a critical perspective on society and not just to illuminate or reinforce the prevailing system and situation. A further question would be whether dance actually changes the structures of society and how, whereas the dancers' adaptability and versatility is clearly shown in many articles. This book paves the way to the growing significance and impact of dance in different areas of society through its evidence – particularly in the latter part of the twentieth century – showing how cultural politics is interwoven in the life of dancers and their activity.

The articles visit manifold dancing spheres in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the borders are crossed not only through individual or organizational mobility but also geographically through the Baltic States to Russia in the Barents region and to North America. The differences and similarities between the countries and regions offer certain categorizations that help to organize the material and offer findings. However, the texts go beyond the categorizations and discuss how cultural stereotypes are produced, maintained and questioned, and how they contin-

ue to stay and change. In other respects, the scope of the book is also wide: the time period spans over a hundred years, and dance forms vary from popular dance practices like ballroom, folk dance and rock 'n' roll to theatrical dance forms like ballet, contemporary and African American jazz dance. Thus, dance as a profession and as an amateur activity are placed side by side. This reflects the overall tendency to cross borders, "scapes" and spheres, and to look carefully at the phenomena at hand. Regional, national, local, global, dynamic spaces overlap, collide, depart, transform and exist side by side with particular dancing spaces.

Reading the title and cover image I was also expecting a site-specific theme that does not prevail as such, not as an experiential theme. Nevertheless, various dance locations are discussed. For example, the workplaces of dancers in the early decades of the twentieth century when the opera stage, ballet dancer turns to rope-dancing at the Tivoli Gardens or dances at a restaurant (Anne Margrete Fiskvik). The issue of a lived experience is also slightly touched on in the descriptions of folk dance competitions where participants dance on grass, on a wooden floor or on tarmac (Mats Nilsson). Though these examples above are seen through economic or self-developmental perspectives, the ethnographical material opens up in manifold directions.

As mentioned above, the articles' range of issues is huge: from the question of how dance artists' mobility is increased through the actions of the Nordic Council (Karen Vedel) to the Nordic stereotypes like Nordic "moodiness" and the power of American critics towards Nordic performances (Inka Juslin). One of the historical perspectives examines the influence of the leading people in dance and their social background in the first decades of the twentieth century (Egil Bakka). Concepts like nationalism, Nordicness, "spheres" and the transnational are woven throughout the book and new concepts like "movementscape" (Lena Hammargren) are also presented. A critical eye has been cast on the material, which is based on

ethnographic fieldwork. One example is the role of the Norwegian press to communicate, to reinforce stereotypes or to incite young Norwegians to riot when rock 'n' roll arrived in Oslo (Inger Damsholt).

This scholarly book offers rich standpoints through its nine articles by seven Nordic scholars, where dance is taken as practice, as a part of spatial processes and seen as an integral part of the socio-cultural and political realm. The book does not dwell only on the Nordic soil through its research material; it reaches toward global spheres, and touches upon the complexity of society including political, geographical, economic, socio-cultural and historical situations. Thus the framework is large and leads towards cultural studies. Nevertheless, the connection of the conditions of dancers, teachers, performances, gatherings or competitions to the findings of the political or socio-cultural realm is present and clearly stated. While reading the book I wondered whether there was room for the role of chance in dance and politics in this context. The corporeal dimension that is stressed in the introduction is not overly on display, but is present; it is not as lived or experienced in a phenomenological sense, but more as an ethnographic one. Its embodiment is presented as the performed region in the Barents region (Karen Vedel) or as the Nordic region constituted through folk dance performances and negotiations (Petri Hoppu). The authors of the book are immersed in their themes and they refer to each other's chapters and earlier writings that describe the circle of Nordic dance scholars around the theme. This, thus, forms a kind of cohesion between the multitude of perspectives.

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