

REVIEWS

Susanne Ravn and Leena Rouhiainen (Eds.)

Dance Spaces: Practices of Movement

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Wow! What an anthology! As I open the book and start reading *Dance Spaces: Practices of Movement* edited by Susanne Ravn and Leena Rouhiainen¹, I am immersed into the space² – or rather: spaces – that my meeting with the book produces. The book makes me dwell – spaciouly – in a vibrating spot between my embodied dance practice and thinking and knowing about dance. It is easy to think of the body as alpha and omega in dance as movement practice. The central contribution of this book is, instead, a decentralisation of the body as the most important, *separate* entity in dance. The authors, in what could be called a post-modern and post-humanist way, push the body slightly out of central focus and blur it with spatial layers. Dance becomes complex and ever-changing movement practices that both produce and are produced by a space that is intensive more than extensive³ and even more so through movement. The red thread through the anthology is the understanding that space is not a static entity that serves as a backdrop for our actions, but instead a dynamic phenomenon that we both live in and live, form and are in-formed by as moving and relating bodies. As the authors in their articles take me through different spatial layers connected to a wide spectrum of movement practices, the book happens to me, no matter what.

CONNECTIONS ACROSS SUB-SECTIONS

After the introduction, the ten articles of the anthology are divided into four sub-sections, something that is probably done in order to make the book more accessible. The naming of the different

sections is not easy, though, and they seem somehow contradictory to the complexity of dance as spatial movement practices that the book seeks to discuss. The naming of the sub-chapters seems to lead my understanding into a direction that the actual reading of the articles under that section resists. Susanne Ravn's "Interacting Spaces in Argentinian Tango", for example, does not need to become compromised under the sub-section "Space and dance genres", as it contributes with philosophical perspectives on how dance unfolds as interaction and insights about embodied competencies as well. Ravn's discussion of how the process of interaction in Argentinian tango is produced through processual bodies acting through pre-accelerations and relational intervals in movement is also highly interesting in relation to dancers dancing together in other genres. For me, the book makes the most meaning when I ignore the naming of the sub-sections and allow the articles to speak to me across the categories they are put into.

EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE SPACE

Sarah Rubidge's "On choreographic space" is the perfect opening article for the anthology. It serves as the key to the spatial landscape(s) that the rest of the book both builds on and connects to. The chapter is most certainly about "choreographic space", but also more generally on space, and on how space is produced in and through movement. Rubidge introduces a dialogue about extensive and intensive space with geographers like Doreen Massey⁴ and Nigel Thrift⁵, social theorists like

Henri Lefebvre⁶, philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari⁷ and Brian Massumi⁸ and dance scholars such as Valerie Briginshaw⁹. Rubidge explains *Extensive space* as the space inherited from Descartes; a space that is static, divisible, measurable and external to us. *Intensive space*, on the other hand, is in flux, its contours malleable, it is multidimensional rather than metrical, and it is experienced kinaesthetically rather than optically. All the rest of the articles in the anthology demonstrate, build on and develop the thoughts of space as intensive space, and especially Massey, Massumi and Deleuze and Guattari are used in several of the articles. The fact that the same (or at least corresponding) theoretical background is used and treated through different movement examples in the different articles binds the anthology together and turns it into a solid theoretical contribution to the on-going discussion about space within the human sciences.

A WORLD THAT ENVELOPES US

I find all the articles in the anthology interesting and I learn from all of them. Having said that, I find that they, in various degrees, manage to open up the *spatial* aspects of the practices they are demonstrating. Hanna Järvinen's article "Dancing back to Arcady – On Representations of Early Twentieth-Century Modern dance" and Paula Kramer's "Dancing in Nature Space – Attending to Materials" are two articles that manage to open their different themes into truly spatial discussions. Through studies of photographs taken to represent modern dance ca. 1900-1930, and in discussion with philosopher Michel de Certeau¹⁰, Järvinen shows that almost none of the photographs she has studied represent modern dance as actual snapshots of dancers in movement. Instead, they are carefully composed photographs to represent particular aesthetic and/or ideological values. The space of the dance images is not to document, but to symbolize the, at that time, contemporary pedagogy and ideology that genders dance as female

and represents it as healthy and joyful exercise that can cure the ills of modernisation and even serve eugenic aims. Paula Kramer in her article, again, extends widely into a political space with a clear ecological standpoint as she discusses practice-as-research engaged with outdoor dance. She defines nature space in dialogue with dance and performance artist Bettina Mainz as "... always in relationship to space being alive and happening".¹¹ The thoughtful contribution of Kramer is that she gives the human body a decentralised position along with the loss of control within the environment. Instead, dance as movement practice in nature space, is described as one of adaptation, intervention, co-existence, resistance and play.

SPACE UNFOLDS AS INTERACTION

Leena Rouhiainen's "From Body Psychotherapy to Performative Installation Environment: A Collaborating Performer's Point of View", Diane Oatley's "The Wound that Never Heals: Flamenco Dance as Transformation in Liminal Space" and Charlotte Svendler Nielsens "The Lived Space of Artistic Primary School Education: The Significance of Embodiment and Vulnerability" are also examples of highly interesting articles in the anthology that really dig into the dimensions of spatiality in connection to movement practices.

Rouhiainen discusses the dramaturgy of the performer, and drawing from body-psychotherapy, she links kinaesthetic knowledge rendered by the lived body as an encounter between the subject, others and the environment. She refers to them *together* as emplacement (which I compare to Kramer's decentralisation of the human body in nature space), and points to how like in many current dance performances, the focal concern in body psychotherapy is the actuality of the situation and allowing what is emergent in it to take form. Through Oatley's article, I understand more about Flamenco, as I come to understand this dance practice as a liminal space. In dialogue with anthropologist Victor Turner¹², Oatley defines the

liminal space of flamenco as a betwixt-and-between condition involving seclusion from the everyday scene, as well as a state of wishing, desiring and yearning. Svendler Nielsen is a wonderful writer on hermeneutic phenomenological approaches to pedagogical research in dialogue with the theory of Max van Manen¹³. In her article in the anthology she digs into the lived experiences of a teacher, and shows how the teacher, through her embodied attention and vulnerability, opens up for an artistic-educational space in her classroom.

SPACE AND OTHER INTERESTING THEMES

I also find Leena Hammergren's "Spaces of Encounter: Dancing Democracy in the Nordic Region", Camilla Damkjaer's "On the Representation of Space" and Shantel Ehrenberg's "A Contemporary Dancer's Kinaesthetic Experiences with Dancing Self-images" most interesting and I learn from reading them. Nevertheless, I find them less entangled with the questions of space. Other themes seem to stand in the foreground in these three articles. Hammergren's article is a sharp investigation of dance, democracy and Nordic cultures (using Swedish, Norwegian and Danish examples). The connections to space are more suggested than clearly written out and Hammergren connects to theory about space in only a minor way compared to the way the other articles do. Instead, she leans more to theories about cultural policy and politics. Damkjaer's article manages to leave the floor, climbing up into the circus discipline of the vertical rope, and to give exciting sensations of the "space up there" as a set of interweaving aesthetic tensions activated by the human body in the rope. Still, as a whole, the article seems to be more about the art of making sense of the meeting between practice and text in a lecture-performance performed on the rope – while not making the article less interesting because of that. Ehrenberg's article indicates that the writer is in the midst of learning about research methodologies, as the first third of the article deals with methodological concerns.

When she comes to her own investigation, Ehrenberg still shares insightful thoughts about dancers' multidimensional and multi-sensorial experiences in practice. She digs into the question of what can be understood as "external and internal space" in certain cases of becoming, and being, a dancer.

As I turn the last page of this anthology, I am convinced that this book is of interest for any *body* that is, like me, in a constant liminal space of wishing and yearning to understand more about movement practices, dance, body and space. The anthology ties these concepts together, making them less of entities that can be discussed separately from each other, and more like pulsars in a dynamic web that stretches dance through philosophical, political, historical, pedagogical and environmental connections. The authors of this anthology represent some of the finest writers in the field of dance. I cannot help but feel proud of the discoveries and articulations these dance practitioners, researchers and artists have made as they have seen "through" the dancing body, and blurred it with the spatial layers that the body-in-movement intertwine with. With the book *Dance Spaces: Practices of Movement* the authors contribute to a dance specific, wider artistic and more general exploration and debate about what space actually is within the human sciences (and, I dare to add, also the debates about space-time that go on within the natural sciences).

Go ahead and immerse yourself in this book; it will be well-spent space-time!

Tone Pernille Østern, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Susanne Ravn and Leena Rouhiainen, eds., *Dance Spaces. Practices of Movement*, University Press of Southern Denmark, Odense 2012.
- 2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, transl. by A- Lingis, ed. by C. Lefort, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968, p. 248.
- 3 Doreen Massey, *For Space*, Sage Publications, Los Angeles, London 2005.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Nigel Thrift, *Nonrepresentational Theory: Space, Politics and Affect*, Routledge, London and New York 2007.
- 6 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. by D. Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 1991.
- 7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. by B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987.
- 8 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Duke University Press, Durham 2002. Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2011.
- 9 Valerie Briginshaw, *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*, Palgrave Macmillan, Manchester 2001.
- 10 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. by S. Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1984.
- 11 Kramer refers to email correspondence with Bettina Mainz in this quote.
- 12 Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, PAJ Publications, New York 1988.
- 13 Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Sciences for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, State University of New York Press, New York 1990.