

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in "*Writing Choreography: Textualities of and beyond Dance*" on 28 March 2024, available online: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003397427-2>.

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Motifs and insights: Textual choreography, dance studies and local conditions in Finland

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This chapter outlines some themes that could be understood to ground the orientation of textual choreography that the book *Writing Choreography: Textualities of and beyond Dance* addresses. It draws upon dance and performance studies in focusing on issues in progressive contemporary choreography from the perspective of Western dance art during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The text touches upon such notions as North American postmodern dance, the textuality of dance, conceptual dance, expanded choreography and artistic research in detailing influences on, tendencies in and characteristics of textual choreography. In so doing, the chapter interlinks related insights and issues to the developments of dance art in Finland. It makes concrete the movement of transcultural influences in dance and how the conventions of dance and choreography evolve in local environments as hybrid forms and through different contemporaneities. Short vignettes by the authors play with words and themes to introduce the contents of each section. The chapter is meant to offer insight into the context from which *Writing Choreography* was initiated and to provide context for the other sections of the volume.

Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss a selection of significant interlinks we perceive between choreography and language and writing and text from the perspective of Western dance as a performing art form. Whilst we might briefly note some earlier developments, our examination mainly relates to the choreography of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. We support the fact that choreographic history is a “collection of interlinked — but not linearly, smoothly connectible — paths” (Leon 2022, 27), which appear differently when observed from different

situational positions. As the authors of this book are mainly based in the Nordic and Oceanian contexts, *Writing Choreography* can be understood to be addressing Western dance art from its periphery. In the following, we will discuss some fragments of the related canon of dance and will include specific insights into developments in Finland. We, the authors of this Chapter, are white, middle-aged female dance-artists, choreographers and artist-researchers, who have worked in the context of the Finnish dance scene, mainly in Helsinki since the early 1990s. We both have experience in a range of approaches to contemporary dance, site-specific performance, somatic methods, improvisation and affiliated artistic research. Being aware of our privileged position, these practices inform the perspectives from which we write. We acknowledge that we are offering only a partial and schematic view of developments in choreography and that different geopolitical contexts have different kinds of related contemporaneities and experiences. In contextualising present-day practices and forms of writing choreography and discoursing with dance studies, we hope to advance its sphere by highlighting tendencies, issues and impacts. At the same time, we hope to offer relevant background information conducive to informing the other sections of the book. This chapter, therefore, is more theoretically oriented than many of the rest, which mainly speak from the practical perspectives of the dance-artists, choreographers, dramaturges, writers and interdisciplinary artists contributing to the volume.

Emergent horizons

Dance! Feet and legs fencing at the French Court. Express! Ephemeral and magnetising individual expression of the non-verbal reaches of corporeality. Act! Moving into a random avantgarde and workmanly everyday gestures. Partner! The intermix of diverse sources and contaminated genealogies form hybrid localities. Alter! Peripheries change traditions.

Deriving from the Greek words *choreia* and *graph*, etymologically the term “choreography” relates to movement, dance and rhythm, notions of space or region, as well as writing (Foster 2011). What is well established in the Western canon of dance art is the understanding that writing has been involved in the practices of choreography ever since European court ballet began its emergence in the early 16th century. Dancing masters in the Italian and French courts, who were quickly copied by those in other European countries, wrote dancing manuals. These guidebooks, containing both writing and drawing, were first about social dances and intended for the members of the court. Later, they described ballets that were performed by professional dancers on proscenium stages.

According to André Lepecki, the first version of the term “choreography” was coined by the French dance theoretician and dancing master Thoinot

Arbeau in his book *Orchésographie* from 1589, to denote “a technology that creates a body disciplined to move according to the commands of writing” (Lepecki 2006, 6). Arbeau’s book included instructions for dancers, musicians and fencers, and was an innovation in dance notation at the time (Arbeau 1967; Cohen 1974/1977). In 1700, Raoul Feuillet published *Chorégraphie*, in which he introduced the dance notation system devised by Pierre Beauchamp, who was the principal dancing master in Louis XIV’s court and supported the professionalisation of dance. Known as the Feuillet notation system, it allowed for a detailed inscription of the movements of different body parts, especially the feet and legs, as well as describing spatial movement patterns of dances. It was widely adopted in England and throughout Northern Europe allowing knowledgeable readers to develop required movement skills and learn dances without relying on the instruction of dancing masters. It also conveyed some teaching methods for professional dancers, something which began to be increasingly focused upon, and thus the gulf between social and concert dance widened (Cohen 1974/1977; Au 1988/1995; Foster 1998a). These developments in codifying, preserving and disseminating choreography had a foundational impact on the conception of dance in the West. Susan Foster points out:

Even though construed as a language in Enlightenment thought, the body’s gestures begin to signify that which cannot be spoken. This unique role of gesture prepares the way for a complete separation between dance and text that occurs in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Dance becomes imbued with a dynamic charisma, and text is assigned the ability to interpret and theorize about the ephemeral yet magnetizing presence of the dance.

(Foster 1995, 234)

The above-mentioned anecdotes underline that, at the inception of the modern view on choreography, writing was important to the evolution of Western dance art. The understanding that choreography is the art of writing dances on paper is still significant for many of us, even if it is a definition that Foster (2011) surmises was last used by Rudolf Laban in his book *Choreutics* (1966). In line with the previous quotation, she also points out that the term “choreography” fell out of use in the 19th century, only to re-emerge in the early 20th century to denote processes of individual expression through movement and the act of creating dances (Foster 2011). This orientation was typical to what became known as “modern dance,” a term that brings together two different genealogies, namely, American modern dance and German Ausdruckstanz.

Especially in the North American context, the 1960s witnessed another far-reaching change in the conception and production of dance. In an effort to establish dance as a contemporary art form, the predominantly white avantgarde in New York broke away from the conventions of ballet and modern dance. They viewed dance as an art form with the potential to act in and on the wider

cultural field, an art form that could be critically investigated, actively reflected upon and de- and reconstructed. They championed experimentality and eschewed traditional modes of representation (Foster 1986; Monni, Järvinen, and Laakso 2022). The medium of dance itself was questioned, and new kinds of choreographic approaches emerged, including the use of improvisational chance, rule and task-based strategies. The vocabulary of dance was expanded to include everyday movements, the performance of which presented the actions themselves rather than aesthetic representations of them. What was of interest was a dissolution of the performer's self and achievements, presenting a more workmanlike image of the dancer. Through its anti-illusionary approach, dance performance could be perceived as an attempt to portray dance as theory. For instance, a dance performance could be conceptual, its choreography enacted through performers interpreting scores, tasks or rules, rather than via a series of preordained movements, temporalities and spatial relations. Another period-defining change was that dance was often presented in public spaces rather than being confined to the theatre. With these shifts, choreography began to involve the arrangement of movement in conjunction with a diversity of sources, such as sculpture, film and spoken and recorded text, providing dance-artists with opportunities to critically investigate and reflect on the form of choreography itself. Dance-artists had active ties with such progressive art phenomena as happenings and performance art practices, as illustrated by the work of Allan Kaprow, E.A.T and Fluxus among others (Foster 1986; 2011; Banes 1992; Kukkonen 2014; Monni, Järvinen, and Laakso 2022). Choreographers collaborated not only with dancers but increasingly with artists from other mediums "exploring interdisciplinary modes of performance between dance and theatre, video and film, lighting design, new digital media working with set designers and sculptors" (Foster 2011, 66). Additionally, visual artists like Robert Morris adopted the roles of choreographer and performer in their own works (Rosenthal 2011).

North American dance of the 1960s and 1970s has resonated strongly in contemporary Western dance contexts ever since, Nordic and Oceanic countries included. Related developments have had an impact on the textual choreography that this volume addresses. In the 1980s, dance critic and historian Sally Banes coined the term "postmodern dance" to depict some of the developments from this period. Banes uses examples drawn from the work of the Judson Theatre and Grand Union collectives to describe the characteristics of postmodern dance in contrast to the already-canonised American modern dance. She refers to minimalism, everyday movement, chance-methods and emerging somatic practices, such as release-technique and contact improvisation. Despite some dispute about "postmodern dance" as a term, in the international field of dance studies, it now refers specifically to the aforementioned North American developments in dance (Banes 1987; 1992; 1995; Kukkonen 2014; Järvinen 2018). However, in the Nordic countries, there was

no such canonised modern dance tradition against which postmodern dance could evolve. In Finland, there were some individual modern dance-artists and groups active during this period but not enough to generate a strong professional modern dance scene with its own identity. Here, modern dance progressed and developed in relation to European and American influences. It developed through individual Finnish dance-artists first studying and working in these continents, then returning home to pursue their careers as well as through invited international artists teaching and performing in Finland (Kukkonen 2014; see also Laakkonen 2018).

It is worth noting that, in Finland, the term “postmodern dance” was first introduced in the 1980s at the same time as the term “contemporary dance” came into use. Since then, contemporary dance has been used as an overarching expression to denote modern, postmodern and new dance, as well as such theatrical dance that bears influences from German Tanztheater and Japanese Butoh dance (Hämäläinen 1999). Currently, the two terms are used interchangeably and have replaced a third term used at the time, namely, “new dance.” It denoted a European approach to contemporary dance, which incorporated influences from North American postmodern dance. The term was popularised by a British magazine titled *New Dance* (1977–1986), which featured practices of dance that advocated body-friendly, sensation-based-movement methods, differing from the more externally motivated movement skills typical to conventional modern dance and ballet. It, likewise, introduced its readers to new critical perspectives, including feminist and Marxist thinking. British new dance was also influenced by practices of performance art, radical theatre and experimental film, as well as the thinking of European theorists, such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan (Rouhiainen 2003; Kukkonen 2014; Järvinen 2017).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the influences of late-modern dance techniques, such as Hawkins and Cunningham, as well as work emerging from Amsterdam’s School for New Dance Development, were important for progressing the dance field in Finland. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Butoh dance also brought new insights through dance-artists such as Masaki Iwana and Anzu Furukawa, who performed, conducted workshops and created choreography for Finnish dance-artists and audiences. German Tanztheater, especially through the work of Pina Bausch, was much admired, impacting the work of many Finnish choreographers. Likewise, American-born choreographer Carolyn Carlson collaborated closely with Finnish dancer Jorma Uotinen at the Groupe des Recherches Théâtrales de l’Opéra de Paris and continued to invite many Finns to perform in her pieces through the years. In the 1990s she even directed the Helsinki City Theatre Dance Group for a few years. These developments led to a more intense investigation of the body, and from the 1980s onwards, sensitivity to its experiential stances became central to contemporary dance practices and processes. Corporeality, together with the non-verbal

reaches of experience, became an increasingly central source of both content and meaning in Finnish dance contexts (Kaiku 1997; Rouhiainen 2003).

What needs underlining are the diverse ways in which the transcultural influences discussed above have contaminated each other and the local conditions in which they were forwarded. This implies that dance and choreography developed through hybrid forms in Finland (Korppi-Tommola 2012). Hanna Järvinen (2018, 223) notes: “Peripheries can be viewed not simply as places imitating the centres, but as hybrid places that change traditions, as freer spaces in which different approaches meet and impact each other.”¹ In the intermix of influences and approaches, what can be argued is that, before the late 1990s, the use of language, text, writing and speech were not focal to either choreographic practice nor the performance contexts of contemporary dance in Finland.

The absent presence and textuality of dance

Note! Diversified bodies. The problem of presence: inscribed bodies writing heterochronic performance in the era of new postmodernism. Scribble! Deconstructed bodies. Professional theories of corporeality decode human existence and the commonplace. Register! Political bodies. A political pluralisation of the transcultural.

Until the 1980s, the most common methodologies for dance studies had been via history, movement analysis, anthropology and aesthetics. A work that first broke with these approaches was Susan Foster’s *Reading Dancing* (1986). In it, Foster observes the meaning-generating and meaning-subverting forces in choreographic works. According to Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (1995, 2), it “demonstrated the congeniality of Roland Barthes’ physical and dynamic concept of textuality to dance theory and analysis. Foster showed how dance, like literary text, goes down in ‘language.’” Elizabeth Dempster (1995) argues that Foster’s vision of the body’s movement as an act of writing reminds us of the bodily grounds of reading, writing, dancing and watching dance. Additionally, since dances come into existence through bodies that both produce and reproduce them, dances are texts written of and through inscribed bodies. She opines: “If postmodern dance is a ‘writing’ of the body, it is a writing that is conditional, circumstantial, and above all transitory: it is writing that erases itself in the act of being written” (Dempster 1995, 33). Foster herself argues:

When the body is allowed to develop a polyvalent significance, dance likewise becomes a practice or activity rather than a contained object. Its dancing-ness comes to the foreground so that dance proliferates from a single phenomenon into countless different forms for making meaning. The body, no longer the stylus, the parchment, or the trace, becomes the process

itself of signing, a process created mutually by all those — choreographers, dancers, and viewers — engaged in the dance. In this world of writing dancing, the body of this text could, as if in counterpoint with the writing body, leap off the two-dimensional page: it could turn, lunge, twist, kick, suspend...and with a final gesture — was it “Going my way?” or “Thumbs up”? — vanish.

(Foster 1986, 227)

The above view relates to the fact that, by the 1990s, the socio-cultural and political dimensions of embodiment, deconstruction and the linguistic turn, as well as the problem of representation became focal concerns of feminist theory, sociology, literary and cultural studies as well as philosophy and co-relatively of dance studies. Through the critical questioning of categories and conceptions related to embodiment, such as race, gender, identity, visibility and the gaze, what emerged was an understanding “that visual, temporal and nonwritten ‘texts’ such as dance, could provide” these issues with astute critical analyses (Goellner and Murphy 1995, 1; see also Kukkonen 2014). Identity, subjectivity and embodiment began to be understood as complex performative phenomena enacted in relation to their situational settings. Following these developments, some dance scholars have pointed towards a textual turn in dance (cf. Franko 2015; 2019; Lepecki and Morris 2019).

Dance scholars, such as Lepecki (2004a) specifically began to observe the problem of the presence of the body, which had previously been the discursive and ontological position through which dance had defined itself as an autonomous art form. He underlined that the body remains absent or only ambiguously present in the historical inscriptions of choreography and argued that this carries political implications for 20th-century dance practices and theories. Performed movement is never completely describable in words or images, and thus the body is only partially implied in choreographic notations. In his writings, Lepecki (2004b) repeatedly addresses this asymmetry between writing and dance that specifies dance’s presence as a motion that escapes regulation and documentation. Lepecki even opines that it is this strange split between the body and presence that allows us to start addressing dance as a complex critical theory. He writes:

In capturing the evanescent dance, the scholar, the critic, the dance audience, even the dancer relies on a complex integration of sense-memories, associations, displacements, kinesthetic memories. Such is the inscription of the mnemonic traces of dance onto the body and the unconscious. But there is also an inscription of the dance onto the mnemonic mechanisms of technology, either through photography, film, the writing of the critic, or movement notation.

(Lepecki 2004a, 4)

Here, Lepecki discusses the complexity that characterises the absent presence of dance performance and its documentation by and for human bodies. He comes to underline that this complexity relates to a crisis in how to approach the visible dancing body and its endless referentiality. The presence of movement already slips into absence before it can be grasped by vision or language in any satisfactory way. Lepecki (2004a, 129) opines: “Before an absent presence and an absent movement, the problem dance puts before writing is of how movement and words can be placed under arrest. Dance confronts us with the impossibility of such a project.” He agrees that choreography involves writing that aims at guaranteeing that dance’s present is given both a past and a future but notes that it is in a constant “dissatisfaction before its own project” (Lepecki 2006, 125). He claims that choreographic writing aims at capturing dance that disappears in the act of its materialisation, it aims at capturing “irretrievable nows” (Lepecki 2006, 124). However, in his view, dancing and writing are co-dependent. They reshape each other via a sense of a shared, yet never fully graspable, ground (Lepecki 2004b).

The above relates to how dance can be considered both a means of malleable inscription and a (re)presentation of changing socio-cultural values and political issues. Foster (1998b, 5) suggests that choreography is a “tradition of codes and conventions through which meaning is constructed in dance.” While choreographers sort, reject and construct physical images, they manifest a style of decoding prevailing choreographic conventions that determine how dances and bodily gestures mean what they do. In this sense, Foster observes that choreographers theorise corporeality. Choreographers engage with and fashion the body’s semiotic field, and choreography can be considered a “theoretical act in which decisions made about the development and sequencing of movement entail a reflection on corporeal, individual, social and political identities” (Foster 2013, 27). Foster (2013, 27) proposes that choreography presents “a theory of what the body is, what it has been historically, and what it might become in the future.”

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In the 1980s, the contemporary dance field in Finland became more professionalised. Several dance theatres, many of which are active to date, were founded in the 1970s. Commenting on recent developments, dance critic Irma Vienola-Lindfors wrote:

The 1970s witnessed the burgeoning of tenacious free groups which have also received state subsidy — although not to a sufficient extent. The dance theatres *Raatikko* in Vantaa, *Rollo* in Helsinki, *Mobita* in Tampere and *Aurinkobaletti* in Turku, as well as the folkdance group *Katrilli* are at present clearing a path for the professionals in their field. The Helsinki City Theatre Dance Group, with Jorma Uotinen as artistic director, stands on a firm basis.

(Vienola-Lindfors 1984, 10)

Since the 1970s, influential international dance companies performed at the Kuopio Dance festival and “in addition to high-class performances, [the festival] has yielded courses, for example, on which amateurs and professionals in the field have had a chance to get vital supplementary tuition” (Vienola-Lindfors 1984, 13–15). The first Finnish magazine focusing on dance, *Tanssi-lehti*, published its premiere issue in 1981. The National Dance Council was established in 1983, and dance finally received an official status in the national arts management system. Aside from the Ballet School of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, professional education was made possible by the founding of the dance department at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki in 1983. It offered Master of Arts degrees in contemporary dance performance and choreography. The Theatre Academy earned the right to offer third-cycle education in 1988, which supported the development of various approaches to dance research in the following decade. In turn, Zodiak Presents was founded in 1986 by a critical group of dance-artists with backgrounds in new dance. These dance-artists were in search of a freer relationship with the body and identified more with ideas emerging from the visual arts, live and performance art, as well as experimental theatre rather than with the conventions of modern dance or ballet (Monni 2007). After ten years of work, the collective evolved into the governmentally supported Zodiak Centre for New Dance, which is still an influential venue for contemporary dance and performance in the country.

In the 1980s, books focusing on Finnish dance art and dance-artists were published with more frequency. They offered different perspectives on the evolution of Finnish modern and contemporary dance and included, for example, a book commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Kuopio Dance Festival entitled *Celebration of Dance* (Reunamäki and Patomäki 1984) and the visually ambitious volume *Uotinen The Art of Dance* (Miettinen et al. 1985), which portrayed choreographer Jorma Uotinen’s work. An anecdote worth mentioning is that in his renown solo Jojo first premiered in 1979, Uotinen recited excerpts from Pablo Neruda’s poetry while dancing. The 50th anniversary of the Union of Finnish Dance-Artists was celebrated through a published volume focusing on the developments in dance during the previous five decades (Arvola and Räsänen 1987). Riitta Repo (1989) published a study about the professionalisation of and education in dance in Finland. The developments mentioned in the previous paragraph and these publications point to the fact that, in the 1980s, discursive exchange around dance increased and played an important role in strengthening understanding of the art form and its potentialities.

Towards the end of the 1980s, and into the 1990s, Finnish dance was a heterochronic intermix, shaped by simultaneous, oppositional and referential interconnections between several different interests, tendencies and developments. Dance-artists of this period employed a variety of distinctly different expressive and aesthetic approaches to explore a range of processual relationships with the medium of dance. They also tested expectations of and relationships to

dance audience(s) (Makkonen 2017). Dance–artists became interested in things critical theorists and philosophers had to say about the body, gender, politics and society, exploring them in relation to performing and choreography. New dance representatives, such as Sanna Kekäläinen, Kirsi Monni, Liisa Pentti and Riitta Pasanen, were especially curious about concurrent theoretical insights emerging from feminist theory, poststructuralism and phenomenology (Monni 2007; Kukkonen 2014). At the same time, the first doctoral studies in dance were published. Aino Sarje completed her doctoral dissertation in aesthetics at the University of Helsinki in 1994. It addresses Finnish conceptions of dance art in the 1980s on the basis of interviews from 100 dance–artists and experts (Räsänen 1994; Sarje 1994). Jaana Parviainen earned her doctoral degree in philosophy at Tampere University in 1998 with a dissertation entitled *Bodies Moving and Moved*, which explored the nature of the dancing subject and the dance work through a phenomenological perspective (Parviainen 1998). In 1999, Soili Hämäläinen was the first Doctor of Arts in Dance to graduate from the Theatre Academy with a dissertation exploring ways of teaching choreography (Hämäläinen 1999). By the end of the 1990s, several dance–artists and choreographers began their doctoral studies at the Theatre Academy, including Riitta Pasanen-Willberg, Leena Rouhiainen and Kirsi Monni.

This was the time when artistic research began to be debated more heatedly. The department of theatre studies at the University of Helsinki began to focus on performance studies, which impacted discussions in contemporary dance and theatre, and strengthened the field of performance and live art. Consequently, the programme in Live Art and Performance Studies was founded in 2002 at the Theatre Academy. At this time, community dance entered and expanded the field, impacting the professional identity of dancers and choreographers. Related socio-political debate concerning who is allowed to dance, and how dance is discussed and introduced in different social contexts also emerged (Heimonen and Kaiku 1999). All of this activity impacted the hybridisation of dance art as it moved beyond proscenium stages and out into society more broadly. Speech and projected text in performance began to be more commonplace in performance. In these respects, the Finnish dance scene could be understood to coincide with European trends. Lepecki (2004b) argued that, by the early 21st century, European contemporary dance, as a transcultural practice with choreographers from diverse training backgrounds, social and national contexts and conflicting aesthetic lineages, had moved from a theatrical to a performance paradigm. In this context, choreography became a field of trans-disciplinary creation “where the visual arts, performance art, political art meet performance theory” (Lepecki 2004b, 172).

At the beginning of the 21st century, in Finland, there was a renewed interest in the heritage and influences of American postmodern dance. For example, the work of postmodern dance luminaries Steve Paxton, Lisa Nelson, Yvonne Rainer and Deborah Hay were staged at the Kiasma Theatre and

Zodiak Centre for New Dance in Helsinki. However, in the broader Western dance context, there also was discussion about a new postmodernism in dance. The term highlighted the fact that, alongside the influences of American postmodern dance, things such as emotion, narrative, virtuosity and interpretation began returning as viable artistic approaches. Paradoxically, such things were eschewed by the original American postmodern dance movement. In any case, the continued use of hybrid forms, visible multiculturalism and the fusion of high and low culture all revealed the complexity of contemporary dance at this time (Reynolds and McCormick 2003; Kukkonen 2014). This was also evident in the Finnish dance scene. Over the past few decades, a diversity of thematics have informed dance performance: explorations of gender, ethnic, generational and cultural backgrounds, co-authorship and devising methods, digital technologies, other dance forms (folk, street, historic and culturally specific dances), other art forms (film, sound, performance art and the visual arts), the changing role and position of the audience (participatory performance) amongst others (Makkonen 2017). In Finland, and elsewhere in the Western world, the term “choreography” is currently applied to describe processes of structuring and regulating movement, not necessarily only the movement of human beings, in highly diverse situations, both within and beyond theatre dance contexts.

The discursivity of choreography and its expanded field

Recast! In the pulling apart of choreography and dance, object and text pose poignant problems. Contort! Complicated correspondences and limitless disorientation. Uproot! Transversal ideas redefine visual-auditive-sculptural practice in between communicative media. Transplant! Not-dance, a misnomer.

In current European contemporary choreography, a number of choreographers incorporate philosophy and critical theory into their creative processes, utilising reading, writing and discussion as artistic methods. They simultaneously experiment with choreographic practice and various communication media, resulting in conventional performance-making being imbued with and/ or disrupted by concepts, texts and language in performance (Cvejić 2015; Monni 2022). This tendency relates specifically to conceptual dance and informs the recent approach of expanded choreography in association with such choreographers as Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmant, Mårten Spångberg, La Ribot, Vera Mantero, Jonathan Burrows, Tino Senghal and Mette Edvardsen, amongst others. Anna Pakes points out:

These artists offer a reflexive engagement with the task of choreography, questioning its premises and results. They tend to eschew conventional dance virtuosity and choreographic structures. They often replace or

supplement choreographed movement with dancers speaking or interacting with various kinds of object or text.

(Pakes 2019, 196)

Pakes (2019) unfolds the opportunities and problems the term “conceptual dance” invokes. She notes features that are similar to conceptual art, for example, those of self-reflectiveness and the use of irony. Interestingly, whilst artists affiliated with conceptual dance present their work at dance venues and festivals, they do so in ways that question audience expectations of dance. They typically evade virtuosic bodies and identifiable dance techniques, and the work often involves dancers speaking, something that can be considered a disruptive strategy in relation to a traditionally non-verbal art form. Anti-aestheticism is also a feature. Pakes implies that the idiosyncratic movement these choreographers utilise causes disorientation and thus no longer provides aesthetic pleasure for the audience. Conceptual dance does not, however, reject the physical medium, which differentiates it somewhat from conceptual visual art, which highlights the importance of the artistic idea over all else. Choreography requires perception in order to be appreciated, and choreography associated with conceptual dance can be understood as employing a physical medium in an extended sense. The extended medium, however, is where dance and choreography begin to separate into choreography that is dance, and choreography that is not dance. The later makes use of other means of presence, presentation and performance. The “pulling apart of choreography and dance within the art form is arguably part of a wider trend towards expanding the notion of choreography” (Pakes 2019, 201–203).

Pakes (2019) understands conceptual dance to be a genre, a mode of dance that performs an idea through engagement with questions of (de)materialisation, an approach consistent with conceptual art in its deployment of various other things, events or occurrences. Instead, Bojana Cvejić considers the term a misnomer. According to her, the term “conceptual dance” has never been introduced “in a programmatic way by makers of this work, i.e., the choreographers who are attributed the label” (Cvejić and Le Roy 2014, 145). Indeed, it is commonly received that these choreographers have denied the appropriateness of the term (Fabius 2012; Pakes 2019). Yet, according to Jeroen Fabius (2012), Cvejić acknowledges some similarities between conceptual art and what has been termed “conceptual dance.” In her view, conceptual dance operates as a theory that is made manifest by practice, it is self-reflexive and interrogates the characteristics of the discipline, the apparatus of the theatre and the production of meaning in contemporary culture. It also addresses the frames of perception and operates as an institutional critique (Fabius 2012). Still, Cvejić (cf. 2015; 2018) argues that choreographers like Jonathan Burrows and Xavier Le Roy are not working conceptually, rather they pose choreographic problems. She presents a theoretical term “expressive concepts”

which denotes how choreography might contribute to philosophical thinking concerning relationships between the body, movement and time. Here the experimental orientation of dance offers a practical framework for theorising embodiment, perception and other philosophical questions (Cvejić 2015; 2018).

Expanded choreography has come to be understood as choreography that is closely interlinked “with language and with the codes of visual-audial- sculptural practice” (Joy 2009, 12–13). It seems to have replaced the term “conceptual dance” and refers to the field of choreographic practice as it is undertaken beyond dance. In 2012, a much-cited conference titled *Expanded Choreography: Situations, Movements, Objects* introduced expanded choreography in the following manner:

In the last few years the term “choreography” has been used in an ever-expanding sense, becoming synonymous with specific structures and strategies disconnected from subjectivist bodily expression, style and representation [...] Aesthetically, it is turning away from established notions of dance with its strong association with skill and craft, to instead establish autonomous discourses that override causalities between conceptualization, production, expression, and representation. At the same time, it is gaining momentum on a political level as it is placed in the middle of a society to a large degree organized around movement, subjectivity and immaterial exchange. Choreography is not a priori performative, nor is it bound to expression and reiteration of subjectivity, it is becoming an expanded practice, a practice that in and of itself is political.

(e-flux Announcements, n.d.)

Whilst expanded choreography is an indefinable notion, it relates to experimental and progressive choreographic practice that is socio-politically engaged. According to Anna Leon (2022) the term “expanded choreography” implies both a core from which expansion may occur and the potentiality of limitless opportunity, perhaps even rendering the term choreography redundant. She notes:

[...] expanded choreography may be seen as an encapsulation of the contemporary choreographic field’s open-ness to re-definitions of choreography — what Bojana Cvejić has called “concept ouvert de chorégraphie [open concept of choreography]” — not only widening already-existing notions but also asking what else choreography can do, what else it can work with, what else it may be. To be sure, other terms could have played the same role. “Expanded choreography” has, however, the advantage of avoiding dichotomous negations — as in the binarity of “not-dance” — replacing them with an opening of potentials.

(Leon 2022, 23)

Expanded choreography invites us to look at and experiment with what else choreography could be. It invites us to look at how else choreographers can approach choreography besides the known conventions of dance. It positions the choreographer as an investigator experimenting with diverse society-related questions and problems from the perspective of movement and performance. The open-endedness of expanded choreography also entails that its medial specification is dependent on the problem posed or question explored by each specific work (Cvejić 2018). With expanded choreography, we are also faced with new problems, as Cvejić poignantly expresses:

[...] the choreographic ideas shift their objects out of dance, and so we might be forced to think another problem that the expansion of choreography choreographs for us: the new forms of entangling life and work that contemporary dance expresses once it leaves the theater that protects its relative autonomy as an artform.

(Cvejić 2015, 231)

With these developments, writing and text, in different forms and modalities, have gained impetus and wield influence in the field of progressive dance. Choreographers further share and discuss the practical artistic processes of choreography in multiple and diverse artistic and increasingly academic contexts (Blades and Meehan 2018). A growing number of choreographers work with language-informed textual approaches, experimental forms of writing and artistic research. They regularly utilise scores, texts, words, writing and talking in their performances and perform philosophical and theoretical concerns and conceptions. They introduce their artistic processes and thinking through both online publishing and via traditional printed media (cf. Klien, Valk, and Gormly 2008; Burrows 2010; Rethorst 2012; Hay 2013; 2015; Manning and Massumi 2014; Forsythe 2016; Ingvartsen 2016a; 2016b; Longley 2016; Gansterer, Cocker, and Greil 2017; Kramer 2021). In recent years, a number of books about choreography that, to varying extents, also discuss language, text and writing have been published in the area of dance studies (cf. Lepecki 2010; Foster 2011; Joy 2014; Cvejić 2015; Pouillade 2017; Blades and Meehan 2018; Brown and Longley 2018; Pakes 2020; Butterworth and Sanders 2021).

Noteworthy is that the writerly, textual and language-based approaches forwarded in choreography have been offered an explorative arena through the academic research field of artistic research. Artistic research is conducted by artists, including choreographers, and encompasses artistic processes and outcomes employing “a variety of epistemological models as well as trans-disciplinary, collaborative, and participatory practices” (Caduff and Wälchli 2019, 1). While not excluding more conventional conceptualisation and theorisation, artistic research emphasises that art practice involves a material form

of thinking and that artistic articulation, in the form of artistic processes and artworks, conveys artistic knowing not articulatable through any other means. Therefore, along with published volumes of diverse kinds of reflective writing, the outcomes of artistic research in dance and choreography typically include performed dance and choreography.

Since the emergence of artistic research in Europe in the 1990s, especially in the Nordic countries, writing has been one of its most seriously debated issues (cf. Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén 2014; Schwab and Borgdorff 2014). When understood as a form of knowledge production, artistic research has both utilised and questioned known forms of scholarly writing in an attempt to portray the artistic undertakings inherent in it. The inclusion of any explanatory text at all in artistic research has even been contested in an effort to substantiate the ownmost aesthetic and epistemological qualities of the art in question (Borgdorff 2012; Pérez Royo 2012; Mersch 2015). Artist–researchers most often employ inter- or transdisciplinary insights to interlinking art, theory and research practices, engaging multi-media formats of dissemination in order to do so. They creatively utilise and challenge spoken word and written text, integrating reflective appraisal or critique directly into the artworks themselves or in supplements to these works. Operating in between art and writing, these experimental methods of articulating artistic research have been dubbed hybrid texts (Schwab and Borgdorff 2014). In artistic research, writing has thus been conceived of “*as an operation of the ‘in-between’*” unfolding itself in-between materiality and the intelligible” (Schäfer 2020, 87, emphasis in original). Finding approaches to writing and conceptualisation that convey the sensuous and material thinking inherent in artistic processes has been considered far more important for the field of artistic research than the construction of more conventional research methodologies (Rouhiainen, Anttila, and Järvinen 2014).

In order to adequately expose art and its contents, diverse literary forms, such as poetry, manifesto, text and image collage, procedural, fiction and fabulation writing have been experimented with and utilised in artistic research (Lilja 2015; Varto 2018; Caduff and Wälchli 2019). Some examples in and from choreography include performance writing, which experiments explicitly with ways writing might interact with other art forms, and performative writing, which underlines the kinds of performances texts themselves generate by involving readers as active co-authors and co-generators of the text. In *Performing Writing*, Della Pollock (1998, 80) asserts that “Performative writing operates metaphorically to render absence present,” minding the gap between the known and the not-yet-known. She continues by noting that “The writer and the world’s bodies intertwine in evocative writing, in intimate co-performance of language and experience” (Pollock 1998, 80). Artistic research in choreography also explores intertextuality, approaches to language-based arts, collaborative writing and electronic and media-sensitive writing. These

modes and methods have supported artist–researchers in their aspirations to accommodate the not-yet-known as well as the processual, multimedial and trans-disciplinary features entailed in artistic research processes (Hilevaara and Orley 2018; Schäfer 2020; Language-based Artistic Research Group, n.d.). In the Nordic context, examples of choreographers forwarding experimental writing and/or textual choreography through the field of artistic research are Simo Kellokumpu (2019), Marie Fahlin (2021), Eleanor Bauer (2022) as well as the duo Heimonen and Rouhiainen (Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2021; Heimonen and Rouhiainen 2022).

Artistic research operates at the threshold of the writeable and the unwriteable and involves a movement of translation. As such, artistic research writing has a “theoretical and aesthetic potential beyond literary studies as well as literature itself — and that is — especially in times of an increasing functionalization and specialization of science and art — capable of providing valuable critical impulses” (Schäfer 2020, 93). This relates to choreography in that much of current progressive choreography is about establishing relationalities with different subject matters, practices, conventions and contexts. As argued above, it often is a critical and even theoretical practice that intertwines movement, action, thinking, writing and reading. Jenn Joy (2014, 15, 17) opines that “To speak of choreography or to speak choreographically is also to speak of history, of writing and of dancing as entangled forms” and characterises choreography as “a form of knowledge production and distribution, an economy of transversal ideas.” She also recognises that “the writing implicit in choreography is already complicated by its many correspondences” (Joy 2014, 16). Writing has a significant preservative function and can offer retained inroads into the transience of the live performance of choreography. The reading of writing as choreography forwards open-ended interpretations or translations that have both immaterial and material implications for their readers. With this said, it is evident that current choreographic practice generates experimental problems which produce various (im)material forms of writing, voicing and theorising that disrupt conventional ways of perceiving and conceiving of embodiment, interaction, movement and material (Joy 2014; Cvejić 2016).

* * * * *

Dance–artists and choreographers engaging with artistic research have advanced progressive thinking in choreography in Finland for almost three decades. Those artist–researchers, who have focused on the advancement of creative or experimental writing and text in dance and choreography, include Leena Rouhiainen (2010; 2017), Kirsi Heimonen (2009; 2021; 2022), Lynda Gaudreau (2020; 2021), Joa Hug (2020), Simo Kellokumpu (2020) and Jana Unmüßig (2021). Others have advanced critical conceptions of choreography by addressing the ageing dancer, a new, non-representational paradigm of dance, the impact of Alexander technique on spontaneous choreography,

processual and participatory choreography, contextual choreography, developments in contact improvisation, choreography as a self-organising system as well as somatic choreography as a form of resistance (e.g., Pasanen-Willberg 2000; Monni 2004; Lahdenperä 2013; Thorsnes 2015; Törmi 2016; Mäkinen 2018; Orpana 2022; Turunen 2022). Some of these dance-artists and researchers presented their work at the 7th International Colloquium on Artistic Research in Performing Arts titled *Elastic Writing in Artistic Research* and arranged by the Theatre Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki in 2021 (CARPA7, n.d.). Several have engaged in the activities of the Special Interest Group of Language-Based Artistic Research supported by the Society of Artistic Research (Language-based Artistic Research Group, n.d.). All in all, these activities highlight that artist-researchers in choreography in Finland continue experimenting with and inventing new ways to convey choreography through words and texts.

Aside from artistic research and theoretical discussions around dance and choreography, the rise of accessible digital and social media has advanced a more variegated discourse about and around dance in Finland. Critical and urgent discourses in and on dance were forwarded by dance-artists themselves in contexts such as the online magazine *Liikekieli.com*. The magazine founded by dance-artists Thomas Freundlich and Valtteri Raekallio in 2004 closed down due to a shortage of resources in June 2023. While it existed, it aimed at filling the gap created by an increasing lack of dance reviews in local newspapers and also as a way to acknowledge the versatility and plurality of dance in Finland (Markkula et al. 2023). It is becoming evident in Finland and other Western dance contexts, that discourse no longer simply encircles a silent dance but instead permeates it in emergent ways. Olli Ahlroos (2016, n.p.) suggests that recently a linguistic turn has occurred within dance.

Present-day Finnish choreographers regularly incorporate speech and text in their performances. They are inspired by critical theory and philosophical conceptions which they address in their artistic and artistic research work. In 2018, *Liikekieli.com* published an issue on the relationship between choreography and text, highlighting the views of some choreographers working in this area. In it, Jenni-Elina von Bagh, who dialogues with philosophical concepts in her choreography, describes her interests:

Thinking becomes articulated differently when placed beside bodily practice and vice versa: with theoretical thinking bodily practice inevitably gains new means of expression [...] I am interested in the shared resonance between philosophy and staged practice. I would like to call this a moment of translation, in which a philosophical concept turns into or becomes a scenic frame. [...] I am interested in handling philosophical concepts in performative and scenic settings, in which composition, impressions, transitions and collisions generate new comprehension and re-organise thinking.²

(von Bagh 2018, n.p.)

In the same volume, Simo Kellokumpu (2018) discusses his choreographic approach through a neologism: choreo-orientation, in which he has moved from thinking about choreographic writing to forwarding a choreo-reading practice. He contemplates what happens to choreographic thinking, practice, body and movement when the choreographic potential of reading is observed. More specifically, he plays with shifting the reading of printed signs into the reading of the inter-relations between the body and its environment (Kellokumpu 2018).

In engaging with language, writing and text, choreographers often choose to address timely societal questions and political and global crises. choreographer Veli Lehtovaara addresses ecological issues via a mix of different art forms and media. His cross-artistic works contain speech, text, singing, movement and video, performed in a variety of public locations. They juxtapose relationships between linguistic and bodily expression underpinned by concepts drawn from critical theory and philosophy (SPACETIMELOVE, n.d.). Maija Hirvanen's choreographic approach is informed by performance studies and critical theory through the activation of formats such as the performance-lecture. She states that her "interests range from the relationship between art and different belief systems, collaborative processes within cultural practices and performance as collective memory to mechanisms of re-learning" (Maija Hirvanen — Choreographer, Artist, n.d.). Elina Pirinen utilises poems and texts she has written along with objects and materials to explore embodied experiences of feminism. Whilst engaging in intense physical activity, the performers often also speak and sing. Pirinen has developed a method she calls dark choreographic writing, a freely associative form of writing, exploring hard-core emancipation (Elina Pirinen, n.d.). During the last decade, Sonya Lindfors has actively campaigned against racism, and her artistic work addresses ideas of power, representation, black body politics and decolonial thinking. In 2009, she founded and continues to lead UrbanApa, an anti-racist and feminist art community designed to re-think what should be done and ways to do it. In her work as an artist and artistic director of UrbanApa, she utilises different performative and social formats including written publications as sites of empowerment and radical collective dreaming (UrbanApa, n.d.; Sonya Lindfors, n.d.).

In conclusion

In the writing of this chapter, what has become most evident to us is the plethora of existing approaches to what could broadly be considered linguistically and textually informed choreography. We observe that what makes these different takes on the use of language, writing and text in choreography most interesting are the actual artistic questions that are addressed and the specific means, methods and materials through which this is done (Monni 2015). These approaches critically reorder choreography. They highlight

choreographing as a process of politically underpinned change-making, especially when the questioning and material formation relates to current challenges of our societies and world.

In this chapter, we have gathered together different insights depicting different orientations and views which address both historic and recent developments in writing and choreography from various international and local vantage points. We have also situated some of these developments in relation to the field of artistic research. This collection of anecdotes and accounts about dance and choreography begins to chart, if only partially, some of the ways in which language, writing and text inform present-day choreography. We recognise that in expanding and redefining the field of choreography, writing in choreography takes inspiration from many sources beyond dance. More could be done to contemplate influences from other art forms and theoretical disciplines, considering, for example, bodily approaches to creative writing, *écriture féminine*, concrete poetry, procedural writing, artist publications, performance texts, dramaturgy and the like, but we leave that task to the artist– researchers of the future.

What also needs noting is that the term “contemporary dance” is currently being critically viewed. It is the contemporaneity the term refers to which is being questioned. The critique proposes a rethinking of the temporality of both a dance performance and contemporaneity of dance itself in ways that underline the complex relationships between past and present, appreciate different geopolitical locations, including power issues and identity politics, and acknowledge different human and more-than-human agents. The critique also relates to our incapacity to grasp our own times as certain historical periods. It encourages us to retain reflexivity and to be open to potentiality, recognising that we need some distance to value the implicit in the present from which the unforeseen emerges. The eclectic jumps and transcultural moves in the contents of this chapter are filled with gaps that will hopefully inspire the curious reader to inquire after alternative views. Following Lepecki (2012, 21), we believe that our fragmented account proposes interlinks across time, location and perspective, creating possibilities for “trans-historical and trans-geographic transformations [that] hopefully will reveal zones of generative resonances and dissonances, lines of convergence and divergences between texts, authors, choreographers, and artists.” The following chapters of this book offer various perspectives which testify to the fact that choreography as a language-based, writerly and textual practice, is a presence which can never quite be grasped, and a form which continually assumes unforeseen forms.

Notes

- 1 Translated by Leena Rouhiainen.
- 2 Translated by Leena Rouhiainen.

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