

Chapter 6

Proposals for a New Performative Dance History

On Sunday evening 15 April 2007, almost five and a half years after starting of my PhD studies, I viewed the DVD *Loitsu: Danced Histories?* on my computer. My senses followed the peaceful stream of words, images, poses and movements. The time had come to summarise and evaluate the work with *Loitsu* and evaluate, how the research on the pages and in the studio has contributed to my and that of others understanding of the past, particularly the past of Elsa Puolanne's *Loitsu* in the context of dance art in Finland. Along with watching the DVD I considered the following statement of the Finnish historian Mirikka Lappalainen:

Badly written research can not be good at all, because history research does not "exist" outside its written appearance.

Huonosti kirjoitettu tutkimus ei ylipäätään voi olla hyvää, koska historiantutkimusta ei ole "olemassa" kirjallisen asunsa ulkopuolella.

HS 11.1. 2007, Lappalainen, originally quoted in *Ennen ja nyt* 2/2005.

It is evident that by her statement, Lappalainen wants to underline the quality of history writing and its relation to how the past is narrated and understood, but at the same time, at least in quotes, she denies the existence of history research outside its written appearance. My view is opposed to this view. By presenting the written and detailed description of the first performance of *Loitsu* of 1933, I asked if it was enough for written dance history on its own to represent the past of dance. I also suggested that the articulation of writing bodies is different from the practice of moving bodies (Rothfield 1994). Therefore, this thesis was dedicated to the search for and research into *Loitsu* and its meanings on the pages as well as in the studio. I aimed at being as transparent as possible in the theoretical and practical starting points and choices that I adopted during the work.

It is not exceptional in choreography to use dances of the past as inspiration or material for new dance works. Many choreographers have done this. However, their works are usually not understood as dancing histories but as works of art.

My interest is to use dances or traces of dances of the past not only as a tool to choreograph but also as a method to explore, construct and present the past as dancing histories. In this final chapter I summarise the research process and the outcomes of the thesis and argue for a dance history which calls into question the Lappalainen's statement that "history research does not exist outside its written appearance" by including a danced history of *Loitsu* as essential part of the research.

Dichotomies are still common in contemporary dance research. There remains a tendency to distinguish research from art and written scholarly research from so-called artistic or practice based research. Written research is usually carried out by an academic scholar who examines art as an object without personal involvement in the process of creating art, whereas practice based research is often done by an artist who turns into a scholar. S/he creates an artwork or artworks part of the research, and explores and reflects them with a particular theoretical framework, such as phenomenology, sociology or feminism. In this thesis I have used art for researching and constructing the past. However, my aim is not to argue that a scholar can be an artist or vice versa, but to produce a presentation and performance that challenges the boundaries of research and art as well as boundaries of old *Loitsu* created by Elsa Puolanne and new ones by Anne Makkonen and Leena Gustavson

Firstly, the DVD *Loitsu: Danced Histories?*, a performative construction of the partly lost *Loitsu*, is discussed not as an appendix of the research but as a part and an outcome of the research. The research process is reflected on as a whole. How each position in the field of the theory of history created different kind of histories that contributed some knowledge, understanding, interpretations and experiences of *Loitsu*, and how they together participated in the construction of a new *Loitsu*. In addition, some advantages and limitations of multi/interdisciplinary research are taken into consideration, and ambiguity of the boundaries between research and art is revealed. When a historian moves into the area of the relative nature of the knowledge and experience of the past, as I have done, it means that the ethical dimension of history has to be addressed, too. The thesis ends in a brief consideration how the research

process with *Loitsu* can be used, adapted, developed and probably challenged in my future research.

THE DVD *LOITSU: DANCED HISTORIES?*

Apart from the fact that a new *Loitsu* in Chapter 5 is described as an open-ended process, it had to be presented and included in the thesis in a 'finished' form. For this purpose the lecture demonstration *Loitsu: Danced Histories?* was slightly modified, filmed and edited on the DVD.¹

There were some essential points and qualities in our live demonstrations that I wanted to retain in the DVD. Firstly, the DVD had to maintain the event-like quality of the live performance as well as the openness and transparency of what we were doing and why. Secondly, it had to be clear to spectators that both Leena and I were continuously present on the stage as part of the event. I suggested to the lighting director Jouko Seppälä, who planned the filming and shooting, that we had to take as long shots as possible and later cut them as little as possible in order to support the above-mentioned features of a live event. The media designer Sari Koskinen, who was also present in the planning meeting for the DVD, proposed the division of the screen to three parts showing the material filmed simultaneously by three differently located cameras. The suggestion was excellent, since it enabled spectators to decide where to look and how to direct their gaze. This recalled a live event in which a spectator can, by directing his/her gaze, cut and edit the work for his/herself. These fundamental decisions on the filming and the editing of the DVD were made beforehand, and we kept them during the shooting and the editing work.

The major change on the DVD compared to the live event was that it became bilingual. The lecture demonstrations were given in English or in Finnish, but on the DVD both languages were used simultaneously so that a text spoken in Finnish has subtitles in English and visa versa. This was done not only for the sake of better understanding but also for my own desire to share with my foreign audience the sound, rhythm and intonation of the Finnish language, Elsa's, Leena's and my language.

The live lecture demonstrations of *Loitsu* were performative events distinguished from performing events

by the level of and the nature of the engagement of the artists (and researchers) with the spectators and, in response, the engagement of the spectators with them and with the work.

Preston-Dunlop & Sanchez-Colberg, 2002, p 4.

By presenting the DVD *Loitsu: Danced Histories?* as part of my thesis I wanted to make the readers of the thesis also spectators of the performative event, even if I knew that the 'finished' work on the DVD is not same as the lecture demonstration but an other layer of interpretation. However, different representations of our process with Elsa's *Loitsu* reveal and support my opposition to closed and definitive readings of any text, already argued in Chapter 5.

Loitsu: Danced Histories? is both an art work and a research into an art work. As part of the academic research the intersection, interaction and articulation of the writing and moving bodies (Rothfield 1994) has to be explained and analysed to some extent on the pages of the thesis. However, it is evident that the performative event on the DVD also constructs experiences that could not be written on the pages as truths about the past of Elsa's *Loitsu*, but which still are open to intersubjective communication on possible interpretations, and perhaps to some extent shared experience of the past of her *Loitsu*. This experienced performativity is not *Loitsu* and its past as they were. It is *Loitsu* and its past as they are, but which comprehended and took *Loitsu* and its past as its intertexts alongside many contemporary intertexts. These contemporary intertexts were generated by Leena and me.

THE POSITIVIST AND EMPIRICAL START

From the very beginning it was evident for me that history, as an interpretation of the past, in postmodern era, is a complex and multi-layered process of construction. In the introduction of the thesis I presented discussion on the truth in history and showed my own longing for some kind of knowledge and understanding of the past, not only of the ample imaginaries in time suggested

by Keith Jenkins (1999). Some further consideration is needed to what extent the thesis has fulfilled my longing or whether I have created just ample imaginaries of *Loitsu* in time but not in history.

In my research the first movements toward the past of dance art in Finland were taken by introducing the existing Finnish dance histories in Chapter 1. The discussion and analysis of the existing histories showed that there are various representations of history, and academic history research is just a tip of the iceberg (Kalela 2000). Indeed, this is very true concerning Finnish dance history. It became obvious that the starting points of dance history in Finland - the dominant and repeated non-academic narrative of Finnish dance by Raoul af Hällström, limited academic research and abundance of remnants and traces of the past in people's memories and in archives - offered several opportunities and challenges for my study. It might be useful to give more information on the events in dance and to correct some inaccuracies in existing histories by using proper sources; or it might even be interesting to deconstruct af Hällström's narrative. The existing histories of Finnish dance hinted at complex and captivating discourses of nationalism, modernism and gender, which are widely dealt with in cultural studies and even in some studies in dance history (e.g. Adair 1994, Burt 1995 & 1998, Franko 1995, Manning 1993), but not much in Finnish dance history.

An 'objective' history of events, i.e. dance performances in Finland in 1917-1939, formed the basis of Chapter 2. My extensive data of 775 dance performances offered almost limitless possibilities to develop several narratives of dance in Finland. It also interacted with the existing histories and with my interest in *Loitsu*, which gave rise to many complex questions, such as to what extent early modern dance was part of physical education and how far issues of national identity appeared in Finnish dance. The complexity of the questions challenged me to consider the binary oppositions between objective and subjective perspectives of the past (Hammergren 1995), factual and imaginary constructs of the past and between found and made histories (e.g. White 1973, Ankersmitt 1994). If I changed my position from an 'objective' and 'detached' researcher to an active constructor of history, I would have to accept the

ambiguity of boundaries and relative nature of knowledge and experience. During and after writing the first drafts of Chapters 1 and 2, I faced many questions concerning the future of my research. I had to consider how I as a researcher would survive and still take into account my overwhelming data, the theory of history as well as the constantly appearing new research questions that existing histories, my own data and theory of history inspired me to ask. And how the practice based process that Leena Gustavson and I had started with Elsa's *Loitsu* in the studio at the Theatre Academy would fit to this context.

Gradually, it became evident that it was the dance, *Loitsu*, and the theory of history that I was most interested in. I decided to concentrate on *Loitsu* and show how different theories of history were present in my written and performative work with it. This brief dance solo and its creator Elsa Puolanne, hardly mentioned in Finnish dance history, became my research partners and guides in the journey to the past of dance art in Finland. Indeed, I wanted to become an expert of *Loitsu*. This required a multi- and interdisciplinary approach that would accept the output of traditional positivist history research (Ralph 1995), but at the same time be aware that this was/is not sufficient, and move towards new histories (Adshead-Lansdale 1997). Leena's and my experiments with traces of Elsa's *Loitsu* in the studio and the exploration and analysis of the Elsa Puolanne's life and *Loitsu* called for many tools and methods.

Elsa Puolanne performed her solo in three differently biased contexts. Firstly, *Loitsu* was included as part of physical education. Secondly, it was chosen as representative of the young Finnish dance art at the first performance of the Union of Finnish dance artist. Thirdly, it was performed as a solo of Finnish free dance. It was necessary in the search for *Loitsu* and its meanings to analyse how the Elsa Puolanne's life was connected to dance and physical education and changing cultural and political contexts in Finland. I had to examine complicated discussion of the modern and the national in dance and the existence, or supposed existence of these concepts in Elsa's *Loitsu*.

THE INTERPLAY OF THE MODERN AND THE NATIONAL IN DANCE

The interplay of the modern and the national and tensions between them in dance, culture and society became important for my understanding of *Loitsu* and its various meanings through time. A central feature of the modern at the turn of the 20th century was an emphasis on individuality. Individuality was clearly present in *Loitsu* in its solo form but it was challenged by Melartin's music that echoed the clash between the old *Kalevala*-based nationalism and the modern era. In Chapter 3 I characterised Elsa Puolanne 'a Finnish woman, gymnast and dancer'. In Elsa's life the freedom of modernity, which she encountered in gymnastics and dance, faced the strong ties of traditional and patriotic Finland highly valued in her family and Finnish society. The challenge to take control of her own life became a battleground of competitive discourses that defined and gave meanings to such words as 'Finn', 'woman', 'gymnast' and 'dancer'. I found these concepts relevant for the discussion of the meanings of *Loitsu*, as well as a useful motivation for our construction of a new *Loitsu*. The three of us, Elsa, Leena and I, were defined with more or less with same concepts - a Finn, a woman, a dancer and a gymnast.² Evidently, our comprehension and experience of the concepts differ, but we probably share some meanings involved in being a Finnish woman, who is a dancer and/or a gymnast at a particular moment in time.

The state of ferment and instability of Finnish society, culture and dance penetrated Elsa Puolanne's life and *Loitsu*. The lack of dance tradition and the youth and the marginal position of dance art made dance during the 1920s and 1930s receptive and open to different ideas of the modern and the national. *Loitsu* and Elsa Puolanne, in the margin of Finnish society, reflected and constructed discourses of the modern as well as the national. In the light of my analysis and interpretation of *Loitsu* it is difficult for me to share Jukka Relander's view (2006) dance being a total outsider in "the ring dance around the national pole". On the basis of my analysis of *Loitsu* and dance articles and reviews of Raoul af Hällström, Heikki Klementti, Irja Hagfors and Antti Halonen, the dance art of the 1920s and 1930s resembled a young, unsure and imperceptible debutant in the clutches of competing discourses of the modern and the national. In dance, the multiple voices of modernism and nationalism

were later heard, supported and evaluated in different ways. After the Second World War the hegemony of ballet was supported by listening to and respecting Antti Halonen's and Raoul af Hällström's the traditional views and by silencing or even condemning Irja Hagfors' modern views . On the other hand during the last few decades modern dance has legitimated itself by discovering and appreciating again the modern radical emancipation of Irja Hagfors and by forgetting or ignoring Antti Halonen's authoritative voice of that proclaimed the only truth of ballet.

Almost all readings of *Loitsu* through time linked it to the questions of power or power struggle, which was already obvious in its title *Loitsu*, a magic spell. A spell is always an act of power. The power in *Loitsu* can and has been interpreted in many ways. It has been seen as the subjective inner power of the individual over her own life and decisions. This was for example Elsa's own interpretation. *Loitsu* can also mean and embody the power of the ancient and mythical past of the nation as many reviews stated in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, *Loitsu* can be understood, as I do, as a meeting place for different kind of desires and forces, subjective and social, and it is up to the interpreter and time to decide on the subject of the spell and who is responsible for putting it on. On the one hand, it is this openness of interpretation and on the other hand, the impossibility of reaching Elsa Puolanne's *Loitsu* that justifies my search for her *Loitsu* by constructing new ones. The uniqueness of *Loitsu* was so evident to Elsa that she laughed at me when I asked her in the corridor after the interview (1990) if I could reconstruct and dance her *Loitsu*. However, she did not refuse my proposal and encouraged me to create dance of my own. I am quite sure now, that she did not mean that it would be impossible for her to remember and repeat the movements of her solo, but it would be impossible for me or anyone else to get *same meanings* of *Loitsu* as she as the dancer and medium of it has had. The meanings can be in movements, but they are always danced and read differently. This episode in the corridor, and how I understood it, was an ethical permission for me to work with Elsa's *Loitsu*. I was free to create a new *Loitsu*, if I did not claim that it is same as her *Loitsu*. From the poststructuralistic point of view, no text has stable meanings or objective

interpretations, but any text or its intertexts can participate in the construction of another text. This notion encouraged me to construct a new *Loitsu*.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERTEXTUALITY

With the help of intertextuality I was able to construct a history that talks as well as dances. The careful reading of the traces of Elsa Puolanne's *Loitsu* and its contexts, which was done by using multiple tools in Chapters 1-4, was connected with our process of creating a new *Loitsu* in the studio. The multidisciplinary research became an interdisciplinary one, when outcomes of the previous chapters and our work in the studio were combined. This is discussed in Chapter 5 and performed in the live lecture demonstrations and on the DVD *Loitsu: Danced Histories?*.

Loitsu and its past can be read in the context of the interplay between the traces of the past and the lectures and dancing in the present. This interplay appears both in historical performative and historical narrative. In *Loitsu: Danced Histories?* the relationship between a new *Loitsu* and a 'old' *Loitsu* is constantly destabilised. It becomes the birthplace of meanings, and through meanings we all, Elsa, Leena, I and spectators, have own share of *Loitsu*. Each of us comprehends *Loitsu* differently, and nobody can own it as a whole and say look, here it is. A dance is never owned or understood alone but together by all those involved in it: dancer, choreographer, lighting designer, composer, dressmaker, spectator, researcher, critic and so on.

During the multi/interdisciplinary research I have read many critical theories and cultural studies: theory of history, dance analysis, semiotics, literature studies, discourse analysis and microhistory. In addition, Leena and I have spent innumerable hours in the studio. We explored Elsa's postures in the photographs and Leena's walking, counted the bars of Melartin's music, recalled fragments from Leena's choreographies, discussed and speculated with Elsa's past as well as Leena's and my past and present. It was a challenging, risky and vulnerable choice to use so many theories, methods and tools and to move forwards and backwards between practice and theory of writing and dancing. Surely, it would have been academically more secure to limit my methodology for example to

microhistory or discourse analysis. I am aware that my expertise in the methods and the theories used in the thesis is incomplete. However, I have four arguments for using of multi/interdisciplinary methodology. Firstly, I needed all theories used in order to become an expert of *Loitsu*. Secondly, the challenge of postmodern history and our pluralistic time had to be faced not only in theory of history, but also in the interplay of the practice and the theory of history (e.g. Appleby & Hunt & Jacob 1994, Domanska 1998). Thirdly, the dialogue between the 'document-based' historians and the 'deconstructionist' historians, which Barbara Sparti (1996) requested, has to happen not only between historians, but also in a historian's thoughts and her/his research. Fourthly, true research, at least at the age of 47, has to include also a real element of risk and experiment even if it is made to achieve an academic degree.

The close look at a particular dance and dance artist has revealed an intricate interplay and complex tensions, for example between the modern and the national in dance, between found and constructed history and between practice and theory of history. Often the interplay and tensions are ignored and put aside by history, which appreciates definite distinctions, clear narratives and hidden power of the present over the past. In our pluralistic and diverse society, the past needs to be constantly re-interpreted. That is why my thesis calls for people to intersubjective discussion on their understanding and experiences of *Loitsu*. I invite them to share Leena's and my analysis and experience of *Loitsu*, since the ambiguity of boundaries, the intersection of human activities and openness to them do not construct universal truth and validity, it "strives for increasing intersubjectivity" (Hannula & Suoranta & Vaden 2005, p 45). In postmodern history research the value of the research does not relate to its ability to state how the past was, but to show and share openly the process of research - how questions relating the past are chosen and dealt with. My thesis is successful, if it invites readers and spectators to participate in the never-ending interpretation of the past and *Loitsu*. However, I am still longing for truth, but it is not achieved by convincing myself, or my readers and spectators of the fact that I know how it was with *Loitsu*. It is experienced by sharing the process of research and a new *Loitsu* with them, and getting comments either

agreeing or disagreeing with my interpretations of the past of *Loitsu* and the dance art in Finland.

My thesis is only a tentative attempt to build up innovative and constantly transformative and performative histories that weave between practice and theory. There is a lot of work to be done, and therefore, I am delighted to continue my research project *One Past, Many Histories* under the subtitle 'The Dancing 1980s in Finland'. In the near future, my aim is to create and construct histories, academic and non-academic, together with Finnish dance artists of the 1980s, and clarify and improve my theoretical conceptualisation of dancing histories alongside written histories.

NOTES

- ¹ The spoken lectures were shortened. The speaking face and body stayed on the DVD, but everything that was not considered essential was taken away. The events between lectures were not touched. During the first lecture on the DVD some photographs were also added in order to give the visual image of the places that were discussed by words.
- ² I am not a professional dancer and Leena was not a gymnast in the women's gymnastics club, as I was, but exercises of Finnish women's gymnastics were included as part of the gymnastic curriculum in Finnish schools.