



*Essays on and  
around Dancing*

Riitta Parvia







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Essays on and around Dancing  
Writings of a Multimedia Artist and Dance Movement  
Psychotherapist, Interdisciplinary Perspectives.

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To Bjarne Aasum, Namron OBE, György Kadar,  
Chunhong Wang and Ellen Mentzoni.

# **JAMA**

## *Struggle*

“Kuuseen kurkottaa  
katajaan kapsahtaa”

Struggle to widen views.



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# Essays on and around dancing

## Preface

This collection of essays is about the phenomenon of dancing, about what people do when dancing in their rituals, community events, in recreational and therapeutic activities. The field of dancing is wide. The focus here is on a pioneering work in dance education beyond performance tradition, in creative multimedia work, dance movement psychotherapy (DMP) and DMP education. These essays were written over decades for diverse occasions, education, lecturing, conferences, journals or text books. Never intended as a book this collection lacks anything like a linear progression towards an intended goal, and certain ideas appear repeated in several essays viewed from varying viewpoints. It is hoped that this collection, in spite of its shortcomings may give the reader some insights.

My aim here is first to give an idea of the kind of impulses, that brought me into creative education in dance and therapy. I will then go on to present the essays in a few words, and let the essays speak for themselves.

In the early 1960s American Modern dance was introduced in Finland. This new individual training form attracted women, who came from backgrounds such as gymnastics, free dance or ballroom dance. My background was in music, arts and crafts, and in competition dancing. Boogie Woogie was the speciality of my dance partner and me. We also danced our own dances, we could go to the sea ice in a dark, raging winter storm to dance with the forces of the nature. Modern dance training, the imitation of the teacher's movements and endless floor routines made some of us to ask when do we start to dance. The purpose of the training was not our dance, it was to train dancers to the teacher's performing group. A visiting American dance pedagogue, Joel Schnee, inspired me to introduce Graham technique in Norway where I was to move. It thus happened that Graham and Chilkovsky techniques were introduced by me in Norway, in Tromsø autumn 1964.

My Norwegian dance students were used to the same instrumental teaching methods of command and imitation which had frustrated me. I wanted to find new ways of teaching, asking myself: How can one method be used in different cultures, with different body types, why does something not feel right, why do I doubt things, why does learning more functional movement habits meet resistance, what hampers learning, where can I find answers? Besides teaching dance I taught and studied at a theater school, danced

with patients at the North-Norwegian Psychiatric Hospital, and I got Milieu therapy education. Milieu therapy was a new therapy form in psychiatry, its perspective was wide, its syllabus included subjects such as body work and group therapy methods, ecophilosophy and radical thinking. The goal of therapy was not to adjust the patient to society. The Norwegian health minister Karl Evang stated; a person whom society has made sick is not sick, but someone who does not do anything to change the sick society is sick. Milieu therapy taught us to view mental problems in their wider cultural and societal contexts.

The body therapies provided answers to my many dance questions. After having taught dance for six years and worked with myself, I was ready for further studies. The Place, London School of Contemporary Dance in London was the place for dance studies. In London I also trained martial arts with Peter Payne, whose therapeutic attitude convinced me. He taught me how to free my joints, to make myself light, and to acquire a whole new concept of strength combined with mental activity. He taught me the spiritual dimension of the art.

The only dance therapy education advertised on MA-level was found in New York, in the Mental Retardation Center under New York Medical College. The Center was founded by the parents of retarded children 20 years earlier. The dance therapy education, however, centered on individual dance therapy aimed for private practices, rather than for the retarded in institutions.

The dance therapy perspective obviously stemmed from the 'language of movement' of the German modern dancer Mary Wigman, whose students introduce it to dance therapy. The language of movement originated in the philosophy of the French theater man Françoise Delsarte and his law of correspondence. Adapted to dance therapy an exact correspondence was seen between the movement observed and the emotion expressed. We students did not learn the language of movement, we learned how our teacher interpreted us to us. The education awoke questions in my mind about the basic assumptions, perspectives, methods and ethics of the therapy. One thing was clear; I was not going to learn what I came for, group dance therapy. I decided to complete the study, but started to see what else one can do in New York City, the center of Modern dance in the world.

The purpose of arts education is to learn a trade. In European tradition arts education starts with the imitation of defined forms, in dance it means positions or attitudes as they are called. Gradually one learns to combine

This collection of Essays on and around Dancing by Riitta Parvia,  
a multimedia artist, a European pioneer clinical dance therapist,  
psychotherapist, educator, lecturer, the author  
of 'Tie kohti terapeutista tanssi- ja taidekasvatusta' (BoD 2022),  
is a contribution to our understanding of dance as an inclusive  
conception, a cultural product within its intercultural context.  
She widens her views towards a broad understanding of dance, and  
deepens her perspectives towards cultural  
meta levels and spiritual dimensions.  
Forthcoming: 'A Way of Dance towards a kinesthetic interaction theory.'

