

## Chapter 4

### Problems of the Modern and the National in Dance Art in Finland

The concepts of the modern and the national, and their companions modernity, modernism, nationality and nationalism, have had various meanings through time. These concepts and their meanings have been and still are targets of never ending discussion in various areas of study in the academic world. For example, Susan Stanford Friedman's article (2001) in the journal *Modernism/Modernity* offers an enjoyable but at the same time complicated excursion about the changing meanings of modern, modernity and modernism. Modern and national have been also linked to dance and dance research by using concepts such as modern dance, American modern dance, German Ausdruckstanz, Finnish free dance, national ballet, modern ballet, Russian ballet, Finnish ballet and national dances and by discussing topics such as nationalism in dance and modernism in dance (e.g. Morris 2006, Burt 1998, Franko 1995, Manning 1993). The body of discussion and knowledge relating both to modern and to national is so extensive that I hesitate to participate and make my own contribution. Nevertheless, there is no way of avoiding it, as discourses characterizing the modern and the national in society as well as in dance are essential for my research.

Throughout my thesis I have been careful about my choice between the phrases 'Finnish dance' and 'dance in Finland'. Mostly I have preferred the term 'dance or dance art in Finland' for dance in Finland was not, and is not, only Finnish dance art. This does not mean that dance in Finland during my research period did not include national features, but they were just part of it. Using a contemporary term it might be said that dance is transnational; it does not follow the borders of nation-states but it can still participate in the construction and imagination of a nation and take part in the discussion of modernism.

Dance art in Finland began as an imported product at the turn of the 20th century, but voices soon emerged that started to speak openly about the need to establish Finnish dance art (Helsingin Tanssiopisto 1920, 1921). Some national

references can already be found in the first *Swan Lake* at the Finnish Opera in 1922. The celebration of the birthday of prince Siegfried resembles Swedish-speaking Finns' celebration of Midsummer around the Midsummer pole (Appendix 18, p 246 photograph of the first act of the *Swan Lake* in 1922). Even the dresses of the dancers remind me of the national costumes of the rural districts of Finland. By the end of the 1920s the use of such expressions as Finnish Terpsichore (Enäjärvi, 1928c) and Finnish Ballet (Suonio, 1928) or Domestic Ballet (af Hällström, 1929a) were clear indicators of nationalist aims to build Finnish dance art. Especially the qualifier 'Finnish' was related to the ballet group at the Finnish Opera. Similarly early modern dance as part of physical education considered Finns as "good material for the modern trend of physical exercises", as Annsi Bergh (1900-1932) the Finnish gymnastics and dance teacher of the Hellerau-Laxenburg School put it (cited in Enäjärvi, 1928a, p 867). This kind of statements referring to nationality were not presented only because dancers were Finns or supposed to be Finns and work in Finland. The Russian origin of many dancers of the Finnish National Opera was a constant target of irritation during the 1920s and Finnish modern dancers studying, performing and working in the Central Europe also held contradictory feelings and views.<sup>1</sup> The question, "What makes dance in Finland Finnish dance", is a complex one and has no comprehensive answers. It depends on dancers, choreographers and venues but also on movement material, choice of a subject matter, use of music and setting and so on. In addition, dance is intertwined with larger ideological purposes, such as a construction or imagination of a nation, and legitimation and promotion of dance art in Finland.

In the 20th century, the modern era also reached dance art. Jukka Relander, a well-known Finnish historian, argues in his article 'Dancing to Freedom' (2006) that dance in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Finland, with a weak tradition and as a politically neutral form, was able to express features of modernity more freely than other arts. These features are individualism, emancipation, self-expression, breaking of cultural conventions and traditional communal ties etc. I return to this argument of Relander after my own discussion of the appearances of the modern and the national in dance. As Ritva Hapuli (1995) discusses and Jukka Relander (2006) points out, the modern in Finland did not mean only new -isms

with new forms in arts or in dance; it also referred to changes in the life and identity of human beings, both women and men. That is in how they understood, identified, expressed and embodied themselves as individuals and as members of different social and cultural groups in the changing world that through new forms of communication gradually started to reach most of the European population. The various forms and meanings of modern were acknowledged also in dance in Finland and were presented in dance works as well as discussed in several articles and reviews on dance. However, issues and features relating both to the modern and the national are so multiple and expansive that in order to clarify and ease my task in this chapter it pays accurately articulate the starting points, conditions and limitations of my exploration.

In line with the title of this chapter my focus is on how the modern and the national appear in dance art in Finland, and especially how these terms were used, characterised or defined, and what kind of ideas were linked to them during the 1920s and 1930s. At the beginning of this chapter I examine with the help of discourse analysis, written texts, dance articles and reviews, which have constructed discourses of modern and national in dance and given meanings for these concepts. I analyse on the cultural experience of modernity and nationality, that is, how being modern and/or national were present or absent in some Finnish dance texts, and how modern and national were connected to each other. The much-discussed question, whether modern dance was modernist or not is ignored, as this chapter primarily sketches discourses of modern and national in order to examine how *Loitsu* participated in and perhaps constructed those discourses. In other words, how it was modern and national. Finally, I consider what kind of additional interpretations postmodern time and context, in which Leena Gustavson and I live, have given to Elsa Puolanne's *Loitsu* and our new constructions of it.

#### **FORUMS FOR DISCOURSES OF THE MODERN AND THE NATIONAL IN DANCE**

By the end of the 1920s, the young Finnish dance art existed in different modes. The Finnish National Opera had a small permanent ballet group, and many dancers had temporary contracts with the Opera. Ballet was gradually beginning to institutionalise and legitimise itself, and the term Finnish ballet, referring to

the ballet group of the Finnish Opera, appeared in dance writings. The young ballet of Finland was under many pressures. On the one hand, the international ballet scene was under the spell of Russian ballet, and George Gé and many dancers had close ties with Russia and Russian ballet. On the other hand, patriotic forces in a young nation, recently separated from Russia, rejected or were suspicious of everything that was labelled as Russian. In order to legitimise itself ballet had to find a balance between the nationalist and artistic demands of the developing ballet.

In the field of early modern dance, the first students of Maggie Gripenberg had gone to Central Europe to deepen and supplement their dance studies. By the 1920s some of Gripenberg's former students, Taina Helve, Helvi Salminen and Esteri Suontaa, had already established schools of their own. New trends and ideas of German and Central European modern dance and gymnastics schools were brought to Finland. A strong alliance between new gymnastics and dance emerged in physical education, and dance exercises and improvisation were integrated as part of the new women's gymnastics movement that began to interest many Finnish women, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In Finnish writings on dance the term 'modern' was generally used to refer to early modern dance, and especially its latent possibilities to reveal and express inner feelings and emotions, and the capacity of dance to improve the quality of human life (e.g. Idman 1921, Laaksonen 1925). These were common features and goals of early modern dance in Europe and America. For example, the communication of emotions was the core of John Martin's (1965 [1939]) theory of modern dance as a modernist genre (Morris 2006). The 'modern' in ballet was articulated in Finland some years later and it was usually connected to some features of the works of the Ballets Russes de Serge Djagilev and the Ballets Suédois (e.g. Niskanen 1925, af Hällström 1945a). John Martin (1965 [1939]), an advocate of modern dance, did not accept Djagilev's modernism that according to him was not based on dance but on music and painting. In Finland the uncertainty and confusion about what was new and modern in dance can be seen clearly in the leaflets of the Helsinki Dance Institute (1920, 1921). They state the aim of the Institute was to establish national ballet on the basis

of the classical school reformed by the work of Michael Fokine, but the work of Isadora Duncan, and Dalcroze-based plastic dance were also respected, and Dalcroze studies were included as part of the curriculum. Yet the leaflet (1921) asked if Dalcroze-based studies, which were rather seen as music education, could produce dance art, and if so, what kind of dance art.

The coincidence of modernist and nationalist forces shaped the birth process of dance art in Finland, and by the end of the 1920s there seems to have been a desire and need to clarify new terms and concepts of dance and to set borderlines between different genres and trends both in dance and gymnastics. This was done in various dance and gymnastics articles and reviews in Finnish culture theatre, sport and gymnastics journals and periodicals, such as *Tulenkantajat*, *Aitta*, *Astra*, *Näyttämö*, *Naamio*, *Kisakenttä*, *Urheilijan joulu* and *Työläisnaisen Urheilulehti*, and also in some newspapers and weekly magazines, such as *Uusi Suomi*, *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Svenska Pressen* and *Suomen Kuvalehti*. The participants of these written discourses were dance, theatre and music critics, representatives of modern dance and gymnastics, and sometimes 'ordinary' members of the dance audience.

Signs of this discussion had appeared already in the early 1920s, but the discussion became livelier by the end of the 1920s. This cluster of public discussion in the press supports my earlier suggestion (pp 45-47) that borderlines between different genres and trends in dance and gymnastics were not yet definite during the first decades of dance art in Finland. However, during the late 1920s and early 1930s the borderlines between classical ballet and modern dance, as well as between modern dance and gymnastics, were drawn with the help of various polarisations and for various reasons. This confrontation or wish to set boundaries, one of the central features of modernism (Friedman 2001), happened in Finland through such juxtapositions or binaries as

- national, domestic ballet - German-based modern dance
- light movement - heavy earthbound movement
- controlled body - emancipated body
- graceful and flattering ballerina expressing the joy of dance - philosophical amazons

- beautiful dance - ugly dance
- performing dancer - creative dancer
- civilised dance - primitive dance
- educated dancer - inborn artist.

### **DANCE DEBATE IN *TULENKANTAJAT* IN 1929**

One of the most outstanding debates on the interpretations of the new and the modern in dance took place in 1929. The debate was published on the pages of the modern and cosmopolitan literary and culture periodical *Tulenkantajat*. The print run of the periodical was 4500 (*Tulenkantajat* 10-11/1929, p 180) and its readership was quite marginal and elitist - mostly artists, journalists and culture-oriented people, who were interested in European or international culture and art. However, provocative articles of *Tulenkantajat* were widely commented in the Finnish press. Dance and physical culture as part of modern life received a lot of attention in *Tulenkantajat*. Thus, it can be assumed that *Tulenkantajat* was also read by dance artists, dance writers and dance audience. For example the personal archives of dance teacher Martta Bröyer included clippings from *Tulenkantajat*. The importance of the dance debate in *Tulenkantajat* in 1929 has been acknowledged later, and the debate has been reprinted, explored and discussed by many researchers, e.g. Tiina Suhonen, Ritva Hapuli and Virve Sutinen in the research appendix of *Tanssi* magazine 1/1998 and by Jukka Relander in *Finnish Dance in Focus 2006*.

The parties of the discussion, or even the disagreement or fight, in *Tulenkantajat* were Antti Halonen (1903 - 1985), a 26-year-old university student and a forthcoming dance critic, and Irja Hagfors (1905 - 1988), a 23-year-old graduate from the Hellerau-Laxemburg School. Halonen and Hagfors can be considered cosmopolitans. They were well-educated members of civilised families. Halonen was the son of Pekka Halonen, one of the most prominent national romantic painters in Finland. Hagfors was the daughter of teacher and translator Edwin Hagfors (PhD) and her mother belonged to the prominent Marchander family. During the 1920s both Halonen and Hagfors spent some time in Central Europe. Antti Halonen attended ballet classes in Paris with Alexander Volinine and the former Russian ballet teachers of the Helsinki Dance Institute, Lyubov Egorova

and Natalia Suvorova. He also studied social dances in London and Berlin. Later Halonen became a prominent writer on culture and dance. Irja Hagfors was a student at the Gripenberg School and the Salminen-Naparstok School, and she also attended the ballet classes of George Gé. In 1926 she enrolled in the Hellerau-Laxenburg School graduating in 1928 (Körperbildung und Tanz Diplom). In the autumn of 1928, she started to teach at the Helvi Salminen School and had her first public dance performance in Finland in November 1928. The following year Hagfors left Finland and was engaged by various theatres and dance groups in the Central Europe, such as the Plaza Theatre in Berlin, Stadsteatern in Zurich; she was also a member of the Harald Kreutzberg group and the Trudi Schoop Dance Theatre. At the outbreak of the Second World War she returned to Finland and later worked as a choreographer, dance teacher and dance critic.<sup>2</sup>

At first glance it seems that the debate in *Tulenkantajat* was a dialogue between Antti Halonen and Irja Hagfors, but a more detailed look at its linear and sequential structure reveals that the editors of *Tulenkantajat* also had a remarkable role in it.<sup>3</sup> Dance seems to be the theme of *Tulenkantajat* 5/1929 (18.2. 1929). A photograph of Serge Lifar and Alicia Nikitina and titles of dance articles were presented on the front cover of the periodical. Two articles, 'Klassillisen baletin uusi aika' (The New Era of Classical Ballet, Halonen 1929a) and 'Koreografiaa Pariisin näyttämöillä' (Choreographies in the Theatres of Paris) were written by Antti Halonen, and Raoul af Hällström's article 'Kotimainen balettikysymys' (A Domestic Ballet Issue, 1929a) was placed between them. Still, the dance debate was actually started by Irja Hagfors when she commented on Halonen's articles in the following number of *Tulenkantajat* under the title 'Uuden ajan tanssi ja klassillinen tanssi' (Dance of the New Era and Classical Dance, 1929a) with a subtitle 'Käsitteiden selvittelyä' (Towards Clearer Concepts). After receiving this article by Hagfors the editors of *Tulenkantajat* (1929c, p 105) asked Antti Halonen: "What on earth had he written about dance art?" In reply the editors received Halonen's article 'Molokin viimeiset pidot' (The Last Feast of Molok, 1929c), which commented Hagfors' article (1929a). Both Hagfors' (1929a) and Halonen' (1929c) articles were published in *Tulenkantajat* 6-7/1929 (18.3. 1929). The following *Tulenkantajat*

8-9/1929 (3.4. 1929) included Irja Hagfors' comments to Antti Halonen" entitled 'Tanssi-ilon ja analyysin ei mitenkään tarvitse häiritä toisiaan' (Joy of Dance and Analysis Need not Disturb Each Other, 1929b). The debate was closed with the final evaluative words of the editors.

Editors, who have tried to remain neutral during the dance debate, express their admiration to Miss Hagfors. Only a few representatives of her field can both dance and write. It should also be remembered how well received her recent dance performance was. The artist shows herself that her claims are valid.

Toimitus, joka on tätä tanssikeskustelua pyrkinyt hoitamaan puolueettomana, lausuu ihailevan tunnustuksensa neiti Hagforsille. Sillä harvat hänen alansa edustajista osaavat sekä tanssia että kirjoittaa. Muistetaanhan vielä, mikä ihastuksen neiti Hagforsin äskeinen tanssinäytäntö herätti. Taiteilijatar osoitti itse teossa päteviksi esittämänsä väitteet.

*Tulenkantajat* 8-9/1929, p 31.

The role of the editors of *Tulenkantajat* seems to have been bigger than they themselves claimed. My opinion is that they not only moderated but steered and evaluated the debate in order to bring modern dance art as it was articulated by Hagfors to their agenda of modern and international culture, where it easily settled.

The dance debate in *Tulenkantajat* occurred in a year that was remarkable for both modernists and nationalists in Finland. On the one hand, Olavi Paavolainen's collection of articles *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* was published as a declaration of international, modern and liberal view of life, but on the other hand, the rising conservative, nationalist and extreme right-wing movement was organised under the Lapua Movement. The following year, 1930, the cultural group *Tulenkantajat*, which had included supporters of both right- and left-wing politics, split because of political differences, and the publication of the periodical *Tulenkantajat* came to an end.

My main and detailed concern and further examination stays in this debate in *Tulenkantajat*, but it is supplemented with some other dance texts relating to it.

The debate in *Tulenkantajat* did not deal with issues of national in dance directly and openly. Nevertheless, the tense and intertwined relationship between the modern and the national in various issues related the national in dance as part Halonen's and Hagfors' writings, although it was implicit. Discourses of the modern and the national in dance did not only take shape in the context of a distinction between ballet and modern dance, as the debate between Hagfors and Halonen is usually interpreted (Sutinen 1998, Relander 2006), but it also included other voices and emphases.

As presented at the beginning of this chapter discourse analysis is used for analysing written dance texts. The theory of discourse analysis is not here introduced systematically and comprehensively. Instead, I briefly refer in my text to main questions and features of discourse analysis that have stimulated the analysis of texts. This started already above. My discussion on the articles within their global and local context introduced the settings and participants of the debate and presented how different texts relate to the preceding ones (Baker & Galasinski 2001).

### **VOICES OF MODERNISM AND NATIONALISM**

Language users are not isolated individuals, but members of groups, institutions and cultures, and they are interested in meaning. Barker and Galasinski (2001) articulated two types of question that were posed by language users and analysts. They are: 'What does it mean in this situation' and 'Why is this being said or meant in this situation?' The main participants in the dance debate in *Tulenkantajat* were living in the same era and shared an interest in international dance culture, but they were also integrated in different dance genres, institutions and groups. Halonen, a young male cultural writer and a student of Russian emigrant ballet teachers in Paris, was a representative of classical ballet and Hagfors, a young graduate from the Hellerau-Laxemburg School, was a representative of new or modern dance. Their personal ties with different dance genres also made their understanding of the modern in dance quite different. Their texts and views imported international dance discussion to Finland, but it is also fascinating to follow how their voices and views constructed dance art in Finland.

According to Barker & Galasinski (2001) discourse analysis is ideological and multifunctional and forms power/knowledge. Text as a whole serves three functions - ideational, interpersonal and textual - at the same time. Firstly, through the ideational function language refers to realities 'outside'. That is the speakers' or writers' possibility of articulating their experience of the world as well as their internal world of cognitions, emotions, perception and so on. Secondly, the interpersonal function refers to the interaction between the speaker and the addressee by means of text. Speakers can have particular speech roles and, through their utterances, they can set up social relationships with those they address. Their enacting gives them particular position in relation to their audience. Thirdly, the textual function of language makes the text intelligible to its addressee; it is responsible for making discourse appear 'as text'. Discourse is ideological by means of these functions. It represents shared ideas of the members of a group, and to quote Barker & Galasinski "it can be also understood as the attempt to fix meaning for specific purposes" (2001, p 66). These points of views are kept in mind when the ideas and articles of Halonen (1929a, b, c) and Hagfors (1929a, b) are taken into closer examination.

Antti Halonen uses a constantly passive and dictating voice in his article (1929a). This creates an impression that he is an author who knows how things have been, how they are at the moment and how they should be. Halonen starts his article from a fighting position with the following statement: "the viability of old classical ballet has been long discussed and it has been claimed that transfusion of new trends is essential for it" (Halonen, 1928a, p 79). He continues by representing classical dance as the basis for choreographic art that can combine with itself new means of expression. Still, new means are not presented as essential but as possibilities for classical dance. Halonen suggests the modern as one option for ballet. In other words, he seems to deal with dance art as a hierarchical structure, in which classical ballet has been given the highest status or it is seen as basis that cannot be challenged or changed. Even the heading of his article, 'The New Era of Classical Dance', refers to this untouchable and unchangeable truth about classical ballet.

Halonen prefers to see ballet as “a play that replaces missing lines of the play with silent phrases of the human body”(1929a, p 79). His view of ballet is better suited to traditional classical ballet than the new creations of the Ballets Russes de Serge Diaghilev. Thus is understandable that Halonen uses a critical tone of voice to review unnamed modern ballets of the company. In his discussion on the modern in dance he points to the external features of ballet, the introduction of new movements that are considered very modern, burlesque, comic and angular and also very flexible and poetic, but sometimes unstylish and boring in their angularity and repetition - partly due to the use of modern music. According to Halonen ballet or ballet tableaux in one or two acts of the Ballets Russes have reduced the drama and events too much. He shares André Levinson’s partiality for classical ballet. Yet, if Levinson underlines the classical dance and its technique as a centre of ballet performances (e.g. Levinson in Suhonen 1991, [1925]) Halonen draws his attention to the dramatic events of ballet performances.

Finnish ballet is neither referred nor discussed in Halonen’s article, although it at the time of writing actually fulfilled his wish for classical ballet. George Gé’s modern ballets in the spirit of the Ballets Russes, such as *Petrushka* (1929), *Poème* (1931), *Vesipatsas* (1931) and *Le Bal* (1933), were later performed at the Finnish Opera (Appendix 3, pp 217-218). However, the situation at the Finnish National Ballet was introduced in the same number of *Tulenkantajat* by Raoul af Hällström, whose views of modern ballet and modern dance art seem to be more complex and ambiguous than Halonen’s.

Af Hällström had stated his faith in the Russian ballet in his review of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Finnish Opera, and particularly his enthusiasm for the Ballets Russes de Serge Diaghilev, whose performances he had seen in Paris (af Hällström 1928). The Ballets Russes was able to dance both classical ballet and modern pieces that stepped into to the area of modern dance, and this was according to af Hällström (1928) made possible by ballet training that can do miracles for the human body. George Gé, ballet master of the Finnish Opera, has not been sufficiently adaptable to use the modern style; instead, his area is the old classical ballet and in that he is a proper director, af Hällström writes. This

review of the *Sleeping Beauty* can be read as an intervention in the repertoire policy of the Finnish Opera or even as impetus or encouragement for Gé to move towards modern choreography, which he actually soon did in his choreography *Petrushka* in 1929.

Before the performance of *Petrushka* af Hällström (1929a) argued in *Tulenkantajat* that Finnish ballet was now ready to accept some critical comments, not only supportive encouragement as before. Straightforwardly he calls ballet master George Gé as a dilettante who cannot dance, choreograph, teach or direct the Finnish National Ballet any further. According to af Hällström (1929a) Gé's supremacy was possibly due to his colleagues, the incompetent dance critics, who lavished praise on Gé without any expertise in dance. Evidently, he did not consider himself as one of them, but instead he explicitly uses his position and power as a cultural and dance critic to make dance politics at the Finnish Opera by lobbying for Alexander Saxelin to replace George Gé. Unlike Gé, Saxelin was educated as a dancer. He had graduated from the Maryinsky Ballet School, but was not employed as a dancer or a teacher at the Finnish National Opera. However, *Petrushka*, Gé's first modern work, soon transformed af Hällström's opinion about his artistic and choreographic abilities. "New gesture has arrived in Helsinki and it is 'beau geste'", af Hällström (1930, p 30) announces in *Tulenkantajat*. Although the new gesture was shy and tentative, and borrowed consciously or unconsciously from the Ballets Russes, it offered, according to af Hällstrom, a possibility for Finns to know what happened abroad. In 1929 modern ballet beside classical ballet had appeared at the Finnish Opera, and this had af Hällström's blessing.

Af Hällström's writings during the late 1920s and early 1930s reveal that despite his admiration for ballet and new forms of modern ballet some ideas and performances of modern dance perplexed him. Unlike Halonen, af Hällström respected and was to some extent fascinated by modern dancers' honest aims towards independent creativity, but at the same time, and even in the same articles (1929b, 1930), he constantly used scornful expressions when speaking about modern dancers. However, the short Finnish word 'kai' (perhaps) in his

article (1929b) reveals some hesitation against the distinction between ballet and modern dance. Af Hällström states:

What an enormous difference there is between these dancers (he refers here to modern female dancers) and dance girls and fairytale princes of the Opera. Neither of these categories *perhaps* tolerates each other, but both have great tasks of their own.

Mikä ääretön ero onkaan näiden tanssijattarien ja oopperan balettityttöjen ja satuprinssien välillä! Kumpainkaan kategoria ei *kai* siedä toistaan, mutta molemmilla on suuret tehtävänsä.

af Hällström 1929b, p 624.

In the 1920s and 1930s af Hällström preferred ballet to modern dance, but he contributed to both dance genres. He invited ballet and modern dancers to establish the Union of the Finnish Dance Artists in 1937 and expressed his conviction as follows.

I believe is that there will soon be a time, when two competing dance trends will not exist. Then "free", "new", "plastique" dance and traditional academic dance will appear parallel and they will be melting into one. The result will be a truly modern, virtuoso, expressive and internally intensive dance art of modern times.

pian koittaa aika, jolloin ei enää ole kahta keskenään vihamielistä tanssisuuntaa. Silloin "vapaa", "uusi", "plastillinen" tanssi ja perinteinen akateeminen koulutanssi esiintyvät oppiaineina rinnakkain, sulautuvat näyttämöllä yhteen. Tuloksena on oleva tosimoderni, taiturillinen, ilmeikäs ja sisäisesti intensiivinen uuden ajan tanssitaide.

af Hällström 1945a, p 139.

But, as revealed in the previous Chapter 3 (pp 123-124), af Hällström's tone of writing changed after the Second World War. After the War he did not show any understanding toward modern dance and dancers. In this he followed Halonen in 1929. However, it might be too narrow-minded to include af Hällström among the most powerful balletomanes and dance critics (Arvelo & Räsänen, 1987) repressing the development of modern dance in Finland. The modern, young, optimistic, curious and more tolerant af Hällström has been forgotten, as Ritva Hapuli suggests (1998). This was done not only by Arvelo &

Räsänen and other writers but also by af Hällström himself, too (e.g. Hällström 1946, Vienola-Lindfors & af Hällström 1981). It is evident that before the Second World War af Hällström's texts did not yet represent so strongly ballet-biased discourses as those of e.g. Antti Halonen. As matter of fact, af Hällström and Irja Hagfors tried in some extent to have real exchange and development of ideas, views and experiences of the modern - not only to defend their personal likes and dislikes. The discourses and interplay of the modern and the national in dance in the 1920s and 1930s were perhaps more extensive and much more complex than presented in existing dance histories.

In Finland as well as in the rest of Europe, as far as I know, ballet was articulated before the Second World War in written texts almost totally by male dance, theatre, music or culture writers and critics, who usually had no experience of performing ballet or any sort of dance. Ballet dancers and especially female dancers were not supposed to write about their work and experiences as dancers. The voice of the ballet dancer was seldom written down, but it was the external gaze of the ballet writer, which became the voice for ballet. In the case of modern ballet, these writers often paid attention to the external features and changes that modern ballet had brought to classical dance. This seems to be case of Antti Halonen in his articles in *Tulenkantajat*, but Raoul af Hällström's discourse of the modern in his early writing refers also to the inner world of the modern, for example his characterisation of the true dance art of the modern times as modern and virtuoso as well as expressive and internally intense (1945a).

In contrast to ballet writing, early modern dance was presented not only by male dance and culture writers, but often also by female writers and female dancers themselves.<sup>4</sup> In their writings, the inner world or the soul of dance was the base of modern dance, to the extent that the whole dancer was understood as a medium of dance, not only the movements of her body. The Finnish-Swedish modernist poet Hagar Olsson writes after the visit of Mary Wigman in Finland:

The modern dancer is not an artist, but a medium that directly and freely performs the inner experience of the soul with rhythmic movements.

Den moderna danserskan är inte en artist, utan medium, som direkt, obehindrat omsättar den själsliga upplevelsen i rytmisk rörelse.

Olsson 1926, p 43.

It seems that in the decades preceding the Second World War there were various competing discourses of the modern and the national, but after the War the dominant discourse, which was most often and most cuttingly articulated by Raoul af Hällström, blessed ballet and modern ballet, but tried to silence modern dance and its discourses of the modern.<sup>5</sup>

Irja Hagfors, a practising female dance artist, saw and experienced the modern both as external and internal features of new dance in her articles in *Tulenkantajat*. She used an active voice and considered herself openly the mouthpiece of the dance of the modern era. Still, although her voice is not authoritative, she suggests a different point of view from Antti Halonen, and perhaps even from representatives of modern dance in Finland.

My aim is not to be polemical against Mr. Halonen, but I could not resist my desire to present the view of dance of the modern era as regards some points he made.

Tarkoitukseni ei ole polemisoida herra Halosta vastaa, mutta en ole voinut vastustaa halua tuoda esille uuden ajan tanssitaiteen kantaa eräissä hänen käsittelemissään kohdissa.

Hagfors 1929a, p 101.

Unlike Halonen, who considers dance a given hierarchical system, Hagfors does not think hierarchically in her article, and her definition of dance is expansive and gives space for various forms and genres of dance (Sutinen 1998). Hagfors writes:

According to the contemporary dancer dance is the same as art of moving, which has an artistic power of expression. Every movement that is genuine and expressive is dance.

Nykyajan tanssijan käsityksen mukaan tanssi on yhtäkuin liikuntataide, siis liikehtemistä, jolla on taiteellinen

ilmaisuvoima. Jokainen liike, joka on aito ja ilmehikäs on tanssia.

Hagfors, 1929a, p 101.

Hagfors understands and tolerates the criticism of classical ballet toward its younger sister, which she calls new dance. She even asks for more time for new dance to develop and show its possibilities both as an art form and as a technique. Still it is clear for Hagfors that the aims and the character of new dance are not same as these of classical ballet. New dance is

more profound and it aims more inward, its starting point is the experience of the soul.

syvällisempi ja enemmän sisäänpäin suuntautunut kuin klassinen, sen lähtökohta on sielullisessa elämyksessä.

Hagfors 1929a, p 101.

Hagfors specifies further the difference between a modern dancer and a classical dancer. A contemporary dancer, who performs and composes her/his dances, is in a different situation from a ballet dancer who only performs dances, but who does not create them. "Every modern dancer has to be a creative artist, whereas a classical dancer is mostly only performing", as Hagfors (1929a, p 103) writes. Therefore, she argues that modern dancers have concentrated on the creative act and neglected the technical side of their work, whereas classical dancers have developed their technique at the expense of creativity. Although Hagfors shares the view that the inner world or soul is the base of modern or new dance, she underlines the fact that the human body is the instrument of dance and analyses in more detail than usually the case in Finland the role of technique in modern dance. This might be understood as a shift, or perhaps more precisely a suggestion for a shift, toward more external embodiment. No Finnish dance research has noticed this shift and discussed it further.

Beside reading Hagfors' article (1929a) as a clarification of terms of dance and of differences between classical and modern dance, I suggest that it can be read also as her contribution to early modern dance in Finland based on her dance studies in Central Europe and her acknowledge of German and Central European

modern dance. Her article echoes perhaps more what was happening at that time in Ausdruckstanz in Germany and Central Europe than in Finland. After her graduation from the Hellerau-Laxenburg School in 1928 Hagfors performed and participated in the German dancers' conference in Essen. The themes of that conference, such as dance theatre, clarification of dance terms and dance notation (Müller & Stockemann 1993), were also central in her article in *Tulenkantajat*.

The situation of modern dance in Germany and Finland is not openly compared in her article. Her only direct comment to the situation in Finland was the suggestion that new or modern dance should replace the term 'plastic dance', commonly used in Finland. She reasons this by saying that plastic dance is not used in the home country of this new dance trend, Germany. According to Hagfors there is no ground for the new dance trend being more plastic than classical dance. Still, this suggestion to change of concept might also indicate her wish to imply that plastic dance in Finland was not yet as fully developed or aware of all the new ideas and forms of modern dance as it was in Central Europe. From the present perspective it seems that the late 1920s and the early 1930s were the period when new gymnastics and dance trends were gradually imported from Germany to diversify the Duncan- and Dalcroze-based plastic dance in Finland. New names, such as Wigman, Laban, Palucca, Bode, Günther and Palucca, were presented, new movement and dance schools were established and the soft and plastic arm movements gave way to strongly arching backs and high jumps. Hagfors was one of the harbingers of this shift in early modern dance in Finland.

However, Halonen did not read Hagfors' article as an attempt to promote modern dance in Finland, not even as an invitation for having open discussions on what the modern can mean in dance. He understood her article more as a counterattack on his 'truth', classical ballet. Halonen's answer to Hagfors was personal, and it saw complex discourses of the modern only as a battle about whom is right. His article begins:

A destructive storm had again passed the earth and left destruction behind it. The burning "sanum" from the dark German chambers of doctrine has forced its way to the arena of classical dance art, bringing with it the terrifying Molok of quibbling and reasoning. The feast of the monster was luxurious and the destruction perfect.

Tuhoava taifuuni on jälleen kulkenut maan yli ja saanut hävitystä jälkeensä. Analyysin polttava "sanum" on tunkeutunut klassillisen tanssitaiteen areenalle saksalaisuuden hämäristä oppikamareista, tuoden muassaan tietoviisauden ja järkeilyn kammottavan Molokin. Hirviön pidot olivat yllälliset, hävitys huolellinen.  
Halonen 1929c, p 105.

With colourful expressions and choice of words and metaphors Halonen almost creates an impression that the German-born dancer – an amazon, a valkyrie - has succeeded in raping the blue-blooded princess of classical dance and has destroyed the joy of dance with the words of art philosophy. He also expresses his satisfaction that Finnish classical dancers have not lost their joy of dance.<sup>6</sup> After his emotional outburst Halonen tells that the editors of *Tulenkantajat* had asked him to comment on Hagfors' article. He hesitates by using the following to follow how their voices and views constructed dance art in Finland.

It would be daring of me to go to that deadlock and to play a dance-aesthetic-literary hide and seek game - so thick is the jungle that Miss Hagfors has unexpectedly conjured up from the spouts of art philosophy. I am afraid of losing my way there, and as it difficult for me to find Miss Hagfors there.

Menemiseni tuohon umpikujaan leikittelemään tanssi-esteettis-kirjallista sokkopiiloa, olisi sangen uhkarohkea edesotto, niin tiheään viidakon neiti Hagfors on odottamatta loihtinut taidefilosofina vesoista. Yhtä paljon kuin pelkään sinne eksyväni, yhtä vaikea minun on löytää sieltä neiti Hagforsia itseään.

Halonen 1929c, p 106.

Nevertheless Halonen continues his article and accuses Miss Hagfors and all the dancer-amazons of the Laxenburg Castle of abandoning the joy of dance because of their insistence on rationality. Throughout the article (1929c) he refuses or is unable to discuss further the ideas presented by Hagfors. Halonen

simply disregards the views that do not suit him. He did not even stop to consider those views that he actually shared with Irja Hagfors, such as the impossibility of combining ballet and new dance and his and Hagfors' common longing for dance drama.

### **BALLET AND NEW DANCE: AN IMPOSSIBLE COMBINATION**

Halonen (1929a) straightforwardly condemns the reformers of classical ballet putting forward the idea combining classical and plastic dance. Halonen again gives no names to specify his views or give concrete examples. He is the authority; readers do not need to know precisely. According to Halonen the opposing attitude of ballet and new dance toward gravity makes their combination impossible. Ballet tries to reverse gravity and aims at elegant lightness, whereas plastic dance makes use of gravity and seeks deep earth-bound movement.

Hagfors (1929a) agrees with Halonen that there is no way to combine ballet and new dance, but she justifies her views otherwise. The different relationship to gravity is no more a valid reason for separation, and by presenting statements like this, Halonen shows his lack of knowledge of developments in new dance, Hagfors suggests. Also new dance acknowledges a huge variation of movements, and it has discovered that there are deep movements beside light movements, Hagfors states and refers to three different types of dancers defined by Rudolf Laban, namely Tieftänzer, Mitteltänzer and Hochtänzer.

In her article Hagfors did not accept Halonen's authority. She claims that the combination of ballet and new dance is impossible both technically and artistically. The classical school aims at bodily control only with muscular tension and strength, and requires the same qualifications and aims for all dancers. New dance admits the importance of muscular development but at the same time it tries to expand the movement possibilities of the whole body with the help of relaxation. Hagfors argues that there is no common ideal body for a modern dancer as there is for a ballet dancer. Even modern dance techniques are personal and individual for Hagfors. Halonen (1929b) had claimed that the art of Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman was so individual and tied to their

personalities that their schools could not transmit and teach their heritage to their students. According to Halonen these only copied their teachers. Hagfors answered by claiming that technique can be taught to students, but art can not. You have to be an inborn artist.

As part of longing for what is new, the longing for individuality, originality and authenticity are the most common shared objectives that have been connected with modernism in the arts. Early modern dance in Finland appreciated the individuality and originality of each dancer and regarded all human beings as possible dancers capable of self-expression. However, not all possible dancers were considered dance artists. Inborn talent makes a dancer a dance artist (e.g. Jalkanen 1924, Hagfors 1929a). Hilda Laaksonen (1925) recalls performances of plastic dance and simultaneously characterizes the modern dancer, who is not only a dancer but an artist.

Not every dancer, who has a good technique and musical talents, is a real artist. Before s/he can put her audience under a spell s/he must have a rich emotional life, plenty of imagination, a strong sense of beauty and be multiple civilised. In order to be a great artist, s/he has to be an *individual*, whose creations are original and independent and reflect his/her own thinking and emotions. Spectator will stay cold for the performance, if the soul of the artist does not speak to her/him beside beautiful dresses, playful lines and beautiful music. The real artist is the one in whom the spectator sees *the human being* who thinks, feels, suffers, plays, enjoys and is *alive!*

Jokainen tanssija, jolla on hyvä tekniikka ja musikaalinen äly, ei silti suinkaan vielä ole todellinen taiteilija. Ennenkuin hän saattaa katsojansa lumota, täytyy hänellä olla rikas tunne-elämä, herkkä mielikuvitus, voimakas kauneustaju ja monipuolinen henkinen sivistys. Ollaakseen suuri taiteilija, täytyy hänen olla *yksilö*, jonka taideluomat ovat omintakeisia, itsenäisiä, hänen omaa ajatus- ja tunnemaailmaansa kuvastavia. Ellei katsojalle kauniitten pukujen, leikkivien ja tuskantäysien viivojen ja kauniin musiikin ohella puhu taiteilijan sielu, jää katsoja kylmäksi. Todellinen taiteilija on vasta se, jossa katsoja näkee *ihmisen*, joka ajattelee, tuntee, kärsii, iloitsee ja *elää!*

Laaksonen 1925, p 184.

The way of expressing individuality seems to have a different emphasis or interpretation in modern dance and in ballet. In modern dance as well as in

women's gymnastics that integrated dance as part of physical education, it meant the individuality of all human beings. However, this individuality did not automatically lead to an artistic career, but you were free to express yourself and try to be an artist. In ballet individuality was only granted to the dancers who performed and interpreted great roles. Their individuality and originality made them stars, and they stepped out from the line of the corps de ballet, for example af Hällström constantly calls most of the female dancers of the Finnish Opera as girls, but qualifies some dancers as stars.

### **DANCE DRAMA**

Drama and story had been the frame or focus of dance art until the first decades of the 20th century. Ballet told stories with written librettos. Neither Halonen nor Hagfors wanted to give up dance drama. Both of them were actually supporters of dramatic dance art and introduced one dance work as an example of a successful dramatic dance form. These works as well as the ideas of Halonen and Hagfors present different views on how modern times would or should be seen in dramatic dance art. Halonen gave as an example *La Chatte* of the Ballets Russes, without mentioning the choreographer George Balanchine, and Hagfors' example was *Der letzte Pierrot* by Max Terpis at the Berlin Opera.

The plot of *La Chatte* received most of Halonen's attention. A young sportsman fell in love with a cat, and asked the Greek goddess Aphrodite to transform the cat into a girl. Aphrodite fulfils his request, and the man and the girl dance a love duet. However, Aphrodite wants to test her metamorphosis, and sends a mouse as a temptation for the girl. The nature of the cat is stronger than human love, and the girl runs after the mouse. Aphrodite understands that her metamorphosis is not reliable. She decides to withdraw his magic trick - the girl turns into a cat again - and the young man dies of sorrow. Halonen does not comment at all on how the plot of *La Chatte* actually uses, as well as varies, conventions of classical ballet. It includes a conventional love duet and an unhappy ending of a classical ballet, a man dying of love. The opposition of classical ballet, the real world versus the supernatural world, has changed in *La Chatte* into a young sportsman of the modern times versus the Greek goddess Aphrodite, and the traditional metamorphosis of a girl becoming a swan

happened this time in the opposite direction - a cat becomes a girl. The idea of modernity in the plot of *La Chatte* seems to mean a variation of classical ballet, and this was perhaps also one of the reasons why it pleased Pekka Halonen, who just before presenting *La Chatte* had stated his motto: "the modern often means the death of romantic fairytales" (Halonen, 1929a, p 80). But *La Chatte* did not banish romantic fairytales, and Halonen evaluated it the "best that modern ballet can offer" (p 81). From the present perspective it seems that Halonen was cautious with the content of the modern. He would have preferred modernity to mean just a variation of classical ballet that would not have challenged the dominant position of classical dance as the self-evident touchstone of dance art.

Hagfors presents the contribution of modernity to dance drama from different point of view. As discussed earlier, she did not want to give any dance genre a self-evident and hegemonic position, and therefore she did not claim particular straightforwardly that classical ballet is a totally dead form of art. Instead, in her article she argues that classical ballet has not fully understood and used dance as a dramatic expression. According to Hagfors dance drama has different qualities from spoken drama. It can not express the intellectual plot of spoken dramas as classical ballets have tried. A plot of classical ballet is on the paper of the programme leaflet, but the plot was not seen on the stage - it only gives a pretext for dance numbers, Hagfors claims.

She considers words as an expression of thoughts and movement as an expression of feeling, instinct or emotion. According to Hagfors the content of real dance drama can not be put into words on paper. Therefore, Hagfors argues Max Terpis' *Der Letzte Pierrot* does not tell a story but it evokes feelings and emotions. Pierrot, the last romantic figure, was relocated in contemporary time, but he was not able to get along with modern life. The spectator was able to understand the content of the drama, since s/he was also living in a modern era, Hagfors states, but points out that this sort of dance drama had not yet been performed in Finland.

#### **OWNER(S) OF DANCE**

In 1929 neither ballet nor modern dance programmes employed the terms 'choreography' or 'choreographer'. The programme of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Finnish Opera (1928) tells that the ballet was composed and directed by George Gé, written by Marius Petipa and danced and performed by the dancers of the Finnish National Ballet. Also dances in Maggie Gripenberg's dance performances in 1929 were both composed and danced by herself and her students. The debate in *Tulenkantajat* brought the seldom-used terms choreography and choreographic into discussion in Finland. Halonen uses the term 'choreographic play' in his article as a definition for ballet and argues that ballet performances have both dramatic and choreographic aspects. Hagfors (1929a) remarks that choreography is a notation system for dance composition. She could not understand why Halonen used the terms 'choreographic play' and 'choreographic art', instead of dance drama and dance art. Neither did she understand what he meant by the choreographic side of ballet performances.

It seems obvious that modernism in dance did not bring into discussion only the formal qualities of dance, such as changing movement forms - angularity and the use of gravity - and different kinds of structural devices in dance - one-act ballets and brief solos. In addition, the question of who creates or even owns dance got new interpretations. The request of modernity for originality, authenticity and individuality did not relate only to dance works but also to how the tasks of dancers, choreographers, spectators and dance writers were comprehended and defined. In contemporary terms I would suggest that Halonen and Hagfors also discussed the shifting roles of the dancer, choreographer, and perhaps even the audience. This happened not only by describing what they do, perform, dance, create and so on but also by adopting new terms and concepts.

In his article Halonen (1929a) already uses the term 'choreography' in the current meaning of it, the art of inventing and composing ballets and dances. He also discusses some works of the Ballet Russes Djaghilev but does not pay any attention to choreographers, nor give names to them. He mainly concentrates on ballet dancers, e.g. Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Olga Spessivtseva, Vera Nemtchinova, Marina Semyonova, Anton Dolin, Serge Lifar and Alice Nikitina, and their performing abilities. Clearly, he did not yet see the choreographer as

the author and owner of the work. In his writing *The Dying Swan* is not a solo choreographed by Mikhail Fokine, but Anna Pavlova's solo. *Giselle* is not a ballet by Jules Perrot, Jean Coralli or Marius Petipa; it is Olga Spessivtseva's *Giselle*. However, his writing already implies at the growing importance of the choreographer in modern ballet, although he reluctantly accepts this contribution of the modern to classical ballet.

In the late 1920s the performer, dancer and creator of modern dance was often the same person, and s/he was seen as a dancer or more often a dance artist, not a choreographer (Hagfors 1929a, Steward & Armitage 1935). Choreography, then known as a notation system of dance composition, was an external system for capturing dance composition, and perhaps a questionable and inadequate term for modern dance artists who considered the dancer the medium of dance, and not only her/his movements. Yet, by presenting some aspects of Laban's movement analysis Hagfors suggests that the technique of new dance at least in Germany - perhaps to lesser extent in Finland - paid attention also to the external embodiment of dance as revealed earlier.

### **INTERPLAY OF THE MODERN AND THE NATIONAL IN DANCE**

The connection in modern dance with the modernist movement in Finland influenced the history of dance art in Finland. The modern dance art as presented by Hagfors and other modern female dancers was related to the modernist international movement. Ballet in Finland preferred to present itself more as a national dance art. An excellent example of this is Heikki Klementti and his review of *The Sleeping Beauty* in *Uusi Suomi* (Klementti 1928).

Heikki Klementti (1876-1953) was a many-sided and powerful musical actor in Finland. He was a composer, a choir leader, a music critic with *Uusi Suomi* and a music researcher. He published many books and articles on the history of Western and Finnish music. Matti Huttunen (1993) characterises him as a music critic who was well-known for his severity and patriotism. According to Huttunen the first Finnish music historians at the turn of the 20th century, Klementti among them, were strongly nationalist-minded and supported the Hegelian conception of history, which had two main features. Firstly, it tried to

trace the history of a nation far back into the past. Secondly, it regarded the history of a nation as a development of the national spirit and self-consciousness. The nationalism of Klementti and many of his contemporaries included 'essentialist' assumptions of the nation (Smith 2001) and in order to build the nation they highlighted and supported phenomena that for them expressed their views of Finnishness.

In 1907 Heikki Klementti published an article entitled "What is 'Finnishness' in Music" in the journal *Säveletär*, in which he analysed the character of Finnish music. Huttunen (1993) claims Klementti having a habit of combining and fusing various facts and experiences in a way serving his nationalistic purposes. It is possible to see him showing this habit and style of writing also in his review of the *Sleeping Beauty*, in which he tries to characterise Finnish dance art.

The cocktail that Klementti (1928) mixed and served in order to include dance art as part of Finnishness is intriguing but extremely confusing. At first, he states that it is good for dance art, and particularly for Finnish dance that ballet does not include too many narrative stories. It is enough ballet being a whole. Klementti's opinion is that contemporary dance art wants to be something more than it should be. It has become too symbolical and philosophical and tried to express more than it is possible through movement. Here Klementti definitely refers rather to early modern dance than to ballet. He explains that this kind of dance art was born as a reaction to the virtuosity of Russian ballet. According to Klementti the best solution between these two trends - German-based early modern dance and the virtuoso Russian ballet - is Finnish dance art as represented by the Finnish Opera. Further, Klementti stands up for Finnish ballet. He claims that the philosophical programme of modern dance may prevent spectators from seeing the actual movements of the body. According to him the dancers in the *Sleeping Beauty* did not present detached tricks but were "led by some kind of an ethos or the symmetry of wholeness, which based on the natural plastique movements of individual." He uses the term "Finnish dance art" in his article, and justifies his view by comprising to it what he has seen abroad. Without hesitation Klementti states that our ballet dancers are better than dancers of many prominent ballet companies but does not mention any by

name. The only concrete example in his review is his disapproval of the fat ballerinas of the south. The strength of Finnish dancers is naturalness and the real basis of Finnish dance is 'home-made', not 'manufactured' in St. Petersburg or in Paris. And Klementti (1928) continues: "Our dance has thus a cleaner basis and more fresh air". A feeling for nature, and especially Finnish nature, was considered one of the basic features in domestic music by the pioneers of Finnish music history. Moreover, for Klementti nature was the absolute authority and he believed that the best musicians had always followed their instincts (Huttunen, 1993). Now, Klementti wants to apply the same argument to dancers. For him Edith Wolhstrom as Princess Aurora was the best example of a home-made dancer, who did not use much make-up and performer without false virtuosity that could be seen on the stages of Paris and St. Petersburg.

At the beginning of the 1930s when national and patriotic forces had reached a dominant position in Finnish society, the home-made and natural quality of Finnish dance was also supported by including ballets with Finnish music and libretto to the repertoire of the Finnish Opera (Appendix 3, pp 217-218). *Okon Fuoko* (1930) was an exotic ballet pantomime to the music by Leevi Madetoja. In the following year, 1931, there were three ballets with Finnish music. The first full-length domestic version of a classical fairytale ballet, *Sininen Helmi*, was performed to the music by Erkki Melartin. A modern one-act ballet, *Poème*, was choreographed by George Gé to the music by Jean Sibelius, the most prominent Finnish composer. The last premiere of 1931 was the full-length ballet, *Vesipatsas*, to the music by Väinö Rautio. Gé continued to use neoclassical and even expressionistic choreography in *Vesipatsas*, although that style did not appeal to the big audience and the number of performances was only four. The characterization of these ballets is by Raoul af Hällström (Vienola-Lindfors & af Hällström 1981, 40, 43-45).

It is fascinating to see that, although there was a strong desire to construct national ballet in Finland, modernist features as a choreographic style were used even during the extreme years of patriotism. A cosmopolitan, Gé, was inspired by modernist works of the Ballets Russes. He used and copied external modern forms in works of his own. These modern features were perhaps surprisingly

accepted and even encouraged also by nationalist writers as Heikki Klementti. He wrote after the first night of *Vesipatsas* that “the era of Russian point work is over” (US 3.12.1931).

The constant state of ferment in dance art as well as in Finnish society produced strange combinations that have been ignored and passed over in silence. Modern as a movement of change and national as a movement of conservatism can be presented and comprehended not only as opposite and hostile trends, but also as forces and concepts in constant interplay. History of Finnish ballet is not only a national history of classical ballet at the Finnish National Ballet; it is also a history of the modern at the Finnish National Ballet. History of Finnish free dance is not only a history of modern dance, but it is also a history of the national in Finnish free dance.

Therefore, I hesitate to give my full support to Jukka Relander’s (2006) statement that dance as an art form had a special advantage in the young independent nation of Finland that feared conflicts and the collapse of order. According to him this

meant that cultural life had to take part in a carefully ritualised ring dance around the national totem pole. Dance itself was not affected by this demand and was able to take liberties which others were denied...It has preserved its status a free art form, more marginal and therefore more essential because, at its best, dance can use movement to express words that dare not be uttered elsewhere.

Relander 2006, p 18, 21.

It is fine that a prominent Finnish historian writes about dance and the potential of movement to express ideas too provocative to be said aloud. However, it is also quite idealistic and exaggerated to give the impression that dance could have been a total outsider or a politically neutral participant in the complex discourse of national in Finland. Hagfors and Halonen’s debate, which is also widely referred to and quoted by Relander, dealt explicitly with issues of the modern in dance, but discourses of the national were implicitly present as my analysis of the debate shows. Openly patriotic writers, such as Klementti, even

wanted to construct Finnish dance, especially ballet, as part of the fragile national culture of the young independent state.

Elsa Puolanne created and performed *Loitsu* in 1933, at a moment when the elitist and narrow but loud modernist and international cultural movement in Finland was already more or less silenced by nationalist forces and values, or adapted and modified to nationalist aims, as was the case with women's physical education, as discussed previously. However, *Loitsu* was evidently modern, but it included also national tunes. It is the interplay of the modern and the national that generates and opens various meanings of *Loitsu*. The tension between an individual and his/her communal and traditional ties are present and evident in *Loitsu*, which is a highly individualistic and self-expressive solo set in the landscape of the national past.

#### **MODERN AND NATIONAL *LOITSU***

Elsa Puolanne named her solo *Loitsu* after the title of the music. It was one of the Six Piano Pieces by Erkki Melartin. Almost all titles in Melartin's work, *Syyskuva* (Autumn Image), *Salaperäinen metsä* (Mysterious Forest), *Noita* (Witch), *Loitsu* (Spell), *Virvatulet* (Will-o'-the-wisps) and *Peikkotanssi* (Dance of the Trolls) referred to supernatural phenomena in the Forest. The Six Piano Pieces were published in 1923, and they are generally considered one of the high points of Melartin's piano oeuvre. As a composer Melartin is usually categorised under the title national and late romanticism, but sometimes, as in *Six Piano Pieces*, he added some impressionistic and expressionistic elements to his works. *Loitsu* is considered a good example of this (Korhonen 1997). Nevertheless, the piece starts with "national echoes" from the ancient past of Finland. That is a simple Kalevala melody, which uses 5/4 rhythm of the poems of *Kalevala*, the collection of Finnish oral poetry and one of the pillars of Finnish nationalism. Soon, these clear and simple tones of the Kalevala spread out and are accompanied by strong loud, impressive or even expressive piano chords that towards the end of the piece slowly fade into silence. Kalevala's ancient past and nature encounters new modern tunes, perhaps signals of challenges of the modern era for the foundation of the Finnish nation.

*Loitsu*, the title of the music and dance, opens up religious, metaphysical and ethical themes. It has had various interpretations and meanings through time. Rationalism and positivism did not convince all people in the modern Western society at the beginning of the 20th century. Spells, witches and wizards were not anymore servants of the devil in the battle between good and evil as they were in the Middle Ages. They were now seen as phenomena and figures that were, especially among expressionist artists, used to express irrational, mystical and occult sides of human experience and emotions of life. The visible and 'real' world around and outside man was not everything that he could perceive and experience. This mystic expressionism was very evident in Mary Wigman's dances and views. The otherness of mystic world, or 'Ecstasy and the Demon' as Susan Manning (1993) entitled it in her book on Wigman, was the source of which the nationalism and feminism of her dances emerged.

In her brochure *Composition* (in Sorell 1984 [1925]) translated into Finnish by Puolanne (1930) Wigman categorises mystic dances as a subcategory of emotional dances.<sup>7</sup> *Composition* does not straightforwardly teach someone how to compose dance; it is more like an openly interpretative characterization of what dance and composition meant to Wigman. Her voice is definite, demanding and absolute, and Wigman's authority surely fascinated young dancers, as Elsa Puolanne. *Composition* guides a dancer to integrate herself in the act of composition in accordance with the experience and Wigman's model. However, Wigman also underlines the uniqueness of each composition and its ties to its creator, as an evidence of the personality of its creator. She demands the dancer to feel her inner self so that she would be able, through composition, to give a permanent state, a form, for ecstasy of her own. The act of composing is a mystical experience that can be made visible through the dancing body, the dancer. According to Wigman you give form for your dance by composing it but true dance is inside you as a part of the wholeness of the universe.

In *Loitsu* Elsa Puolanne shares Wigman's inclination for unseen forces. Wigman and her *Hexentanz II*, as well as her ideas on the composition of mystic dance seem to be obvious intertexts of Elsa's *Loitsu*.<sup>8</sup> Wigman writes:

We may call a dance mystic when it is symbolic of cosmic powers in its expression and form, when the personal life experience of the *choreographer* yields to the dance visualization of the incomprehensible and eternal. The mystic dance presupposes the *choreographer's* personal maturity. It will emerge only from a state of spiritual awareness.

Wigman 1925 in Sorell 1984, p 93.

In his translation Sorell uses the term choreographer, although that word was not used during the 1920s when Wigman wrote the article. Puolanne's translation refers to the dancer by using the Finnish word 'liikehtijä', literally a person who moves. It corresponds to the view that in early modern dance, especially in dance solos, the dancer was regarded both as the choreographer and the medium of dance, and dance was above all seen as art of the performer, as Michael Huxley (1999) argues. Sorell's choice of the word actually indicates the separation of performer (dancer) and the artist (choreographer) and dance as an art of choreographer that was the dominant notion at the time of his translation. The article was published first time in English in 1973. The shifting role and status of the performer are taken into consideration later in Chapter 5.

The word *Loitsu* ('spell') also appears in Wigman's text 'The Dancer' (1930). In her writing the experience of the act of turning is connected with being under a spell. Wigman describes the turning of a dancer, spinning around herself as follows:

Is she not for the moment the central point of the world, the pivotal point to the act of motion, a part of the oscillating motion of the orbiting stars, a symbol? And at the next instant there is the awareness of being unable to bear this state of lightness. She is conscious that the spell must break, that she must roll back to the same heaviness from which this flight grew, that her unity with the elements must be sundered. Everything is still swaying. One last whirl and she tears herself away from this mad revolving world, she staggers, the motion dissolves into separate, single movements. She feels her body again: stillness, quietude, self-control, a last moment of longing for what has been - and gone is the communion with space.

Wigman 1930 in Sorell 1984, p 119.

Variations of turning were used both in *Hexentanz II* and *Loitsu*. Wigman spins on the buttocks and Puolanne steps and runs around the circle of light. Both solos referred also to witchcraft and mystic forces. Still, the basic attitude of the dancers and the atmosphere of dances are different. In *Hexentanz II* Mary Wigman sits on her buttocks and spins around herself. She is the centre of the circular movement or perhaps even in the centre of the universum. Her simple movements are very much space-orientated, as is her sharp gaze that is directed outwards and towards the spectator through the mask (*Hexentanz II* in Tegeler 1986, Manning, 1993). Actually, this was not common to Wigman - she mostly performed her dances with eyes half-closed. In *Loitsu* Elsa Puolanne steps and runs in a circle, and her attention is often directed downwards and focused toward the centre of the spot of light. Her movements are space-orientated, but not precisely directed to space. Wigman reaches out from the centre toward her audience in order to reach and capture them, Puolanne reaches toward the specific spot in the centre of light without direct contact with her audience. Mary Wigman's witch appears as an unreachable ruler living outside our shared reality. She has power over unseen forces and she can use them. In Wigman's terms her dance is absolute, whereas the *Loitsu* by Elsa Puolanne is not. It seems to be more a process of assuming the position of the ruler, of becoming the master of unseen forces. In the earlier photos of *Loitsu* (Photographs 2-5, pp 181-184) Elsa Puolanne appears as an innocent young girl but in the later photos (Photographs 6-9, pp 185-188) she looks like a confident middle-aged woman. These photographs of performances of *Loitsu* also suggest a process in Elsa. This creates an impression that the process is never finished and that we, as spectators, can bring our own contribution to it. In *Hexentanz II* Wigman uses a mask and the probable changes on her face during the performance are hidden. Her witch is fixed to the mask; the character is not personal and alive. Her dance is absolute, perhaps not even human.

Even though *Loitsu* was a brief solo among Elsa Puolanne's other dances it was especially often noticed and commented in contemporary press reviews in the 1930s and 1940s. Naturally comments and interpretations also were brief. The interpretations and evaluations of various critics have been collected and summarised as follows.<sup>9</sup> The qualities of *Loitsu* as well as the dancer's

expression were described with such words as mysterious, dramatic, impressive, dark, touching, suggestive and almost demonic. *Loitsu* was considered a brief and tight composition dealing with the fear of unknown. One critic (H. in Vapaus 19.6. 1945) wrote that Elsa was presenting primitive fear toward supernatural forces and attempting to rule them through magic rituals.

Elsa Puolanne herself experienced her solo as a revelation of her own inner forces, her inner self (interview 20.2. 1992). It was a very conventional interpretation of the time. My interpretation of her words is that in *Loitsu* she identified herself as an independent person without fear and with knowledge and experience of her own strength. After seeing our first demonstration in August 2002 Mirri Karpio even suggested me that Elsa's motivation in her *Loitsu* was to free herself from the pressures and expectations of her family, mother and siblings that directed her. She was trying to find and make her own choices under external pressure. In my very first meeting with Elsa Puolanne in 1990 I also got an impression that this particular solo had a very special, personal and concrete meaning for her, but at the same time it also captured some feelings, thoughts and ideas common to all human beings through the times. *Loitsu* did not appear to me only as an individual outburst of a dancer's inner feelings of the 1920s and 1930s but also part of wider discussion, and not only before and during its performing time but also later.

We, Leena Gustavson and I, moved towards interpretations and meanings when I asked Leena to name postures in the photographs of *Loitsu*, and I did the same.<sup>10</sup> The naming was done in order to help our work with postures on the studio as well as to collect and compare our interpretations of them. **Chart 10** shows how Leena Gustavson and I named the postures in the photographs, and which of the names we choose to use in our rehearsals and demonstrations.

**Chart 10** *The names of postures of the photographs of Loitsu.*

<i>photograph</i>	<i>Anne</i>	<i>Leena</i>	<i>Choice</i>
1	takana/behind	tausta/background	background
2	edessä/in front of	siirto/removal	front
3	kiertäen/twisting	kierto/twist	twisting

4	hauras/fragile	oksat/branches	branches
5	tasoitus/to draw a level	sinä/you	you
6	yhteen - erilleen/ together separated	kodistus/focus	focus
7	malta/wait!	valta/power	wait!
8	miltei/almost	kohdistus2/focus2	almost

Our names suggest some shared readings and interpretations of Elsa's *Loitsu* as it was represented in the photographs. There were two recurrent themes. The first was an awareness of space, in using a term such as behind, background, in front of and focus. The second and the most dominant theme was the presence of power or force, in terms such as power, focus, fragile, to draw level and wait! In order to get to know how common our interpretations were I showed these photographs to my students at the Open University in the spring of 2005 and asked them also to name or title what they see.

My students recognised the same themes as I and Leena, i.e. awareness of space and the presence of power and force. Some even noticed the idea of a spell without knowing the title of the piece. The intimate photographs of Elsa also called some of them to place themselves into her position. The personal pronoun 'I' was widely used as well as 'you' for the focus of Elsa's attention. The list of titles created several parallel stories and impressions what was happening. They are presented in detail in Chapter 5.

All these interpretations of *Loitsu* through time have a common denominator: they all speak about forces and power, but with different voices and positions. The contemporary critics in the 1930s did not interpret the solo as an individual expression, as it was experienced by Elsa Puolanne. Instead, they saw it more as a representation of 'real magic people' of the primitive past and their fear of the unknown. Elsa Puolanne interpreted *Loitsu* in the context of the modern era, in which an individual - even a female individual - could have at least some power over her own life. The critics chose to take more general, traditional or even national approach. They linked or traced *Loitsu*, perhaps guided by the musical tones of Melartin as well as by the qualities of movements, to the

history of a nation in the past with shamans and witches, as presented in *Kalevala*.

Elsa Puolanne herself only once referred openly to the national origin of her *Loitsu*. This happened when she and her dance group performed, not for Finns, but for Austrian military groups in Lapland during the Continuation War in 1944. Then the programme leaflet (1944) introduced the solo by stating:

This dance deals with a theme from Finnish mythology. A great wizard puts a spell on evil spirits.

Dieser Tanz behandelt ein Thema aus der finn. Mythologie. Ein grosser Zauberer beschwört die Bösen Geister.

In the programme notes Elsa Puolanne herself presents *Loitsu* as a continuation of Finnish folk tradition and mythology regarding witches and wizards positive figures, helpers and healers of people. Perhaps her *Loitsu* at the time of the War was danced in order to heal people. That is to unify or harmonise people, she herself among them, by controlling the inner forces. In the 20th century people no more believed in witches that controlled the evil in the world and in people, everybody had to do it by him/herself. With contemporary eyes Elsa's *Loitsu* can be interpreted as a psychoanalytic session of Elsa Puolanne's life, which might have a healing effect for others, too.

### **LOITSU IN THE POSTMODERN ERA**

Leena Gustavson and I live in a postmodern world very much constructed and understood through various choices and power relationships. In postmodern world there is no universal truth, but we too, like Elsa Puolanne, want to comprehend ourselves. We did not at first name the powers and forces that we saw and experienced in the postures of photographs of *Loitsu*, but during the process of creating and rehearsing our new constructions of *Loitsu* some issues of power have played a central role in our discussions. It was clear to both of us, as it will be discussed in the next chapter that it is impossible to capture the past of Elsa's *Loitsu* and Elsa Puolanne as they were. Therefore, the very intimate urge of the photographs of Elsa's *Loitsu* was to place and experience

ourselves as we are in the traces of her *Loitsu*. This notion guided our constructions.

From the very beginning of the process, I repeated to Leena that we can wonder at how Elsa has moved and danced, but in our *Loitsu* she should not try to imitate her. We had to find Leena's way to walk slowly, to turn toward the audience and start to dance around the spot of light. Power, the evident content of *Loitsu*, was channelled to a parallel examination of the life of Elsa Puolanne and Leena Gustavson. What had it meant for them to be a dancer? How have they changed and why have they changed as dancers? How has their training influenced them and how was their past carried out in their dances and their bodies? How and why did they have different bodies? In Elsa Puolanne's *Loitsu* the medium of dance was the dancer Elsa Puolanne, in our constructions of it, the medium is the dancer Leena Gustavson.

The difference between the character of dancers and dances in *Hexentanz II* and *Loitsu* is crucial for my ideas of transmitting the past as dancing histories. A dance of the past, that has reached some kind of perfection, and perhaps is also notated, filmed and famous, inspired a reconstruction that is easily limited to the comparison and to the question of authenticity, without searching, expanding and suggesting the changing meanings of the dance through time. That has usually been left for written research. Dances of the past, such as Elsa's *Loitsu*, that is possible for us to capture only as traces, perhaps also signalled a call to interpret them not only by writing about them, but by choreographing and performing them not as the 'original' dance but as new creations. This has surely happened as part of dance art, when choreographers have created new dances with conscious or unconscious links to other works of art, but dancing histories have potential also for research in history. The last chapters of this thesis describe and justify the process of creating danced histories of *Loitsu*, which are performed both as a research and an art work, along with written histories.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The singer Väinö Sola at Finnish Opera presented to the Board of the Opera the idea of establishing a new company that would have only Finnish members. Sola had categorised the staff of the Opera on the basis of their ability to use Finnish language. In his list ballet master George Gé was considered Russian with poor Finnish language. In the minutes of the Board (30.4. 1926) is stated that it was especially the members of the ballet who were heard to speak Russian at the Opera. The Opera as a centre for Russians and other foreigners was openly discussed in the Finnish press during the 1920s (the scrapbooks of the Finnish National Ballet). Finnish modern dancers working abroad was also considered unpatriotic (Puolanne 1930, Vanne-Nylund 1930) as discussed in Chapter 3.
  - <sup>2</sup> The biographical information has been gathered from various sources, e.g. Haukinen & others (1993), Suhonen (1998b), and biographies in the research appendix of *Tanssi* (Dance) magazine 1/1998.
  - <sup>3</sup> Even if the articles referred to the editorial staff, only poet Erkki Vala, the chief editor, was named in *Tulenkantajat*.
  - <sup>4</sup> None of the dance articles of 1920s and 1930s that I have read was written by the ballet masters or dancers of the Finnish National Ballet. Toivo Niskanen was the only representative of ballet writing about ballet and dance. Representatives of early modern dance, such as Hertta Idman, Taina Helve, Mary Hougberg, Marianne Pontan, Helvi Salminen and Elsa Puolanne not only danced but also wrote about dance art.
  - <sup>5</sup> From this point of view, it would also be easier to understand why many prominent Finnish ballet critics had very negative attitude towards modern dance of the 1960s, based on American modern dance. It took really many decades to construct discourses and practices of dance that accepted modern dance as part of dance art in Finland.
  - <sup>6</sup> This happened although Raoul af Hällström had in the previous number of *Tulenkantajat* 5/1929 criticized their joy of dance, defined by him as an ability to perform lightness and flexibility.
  - <sup>7</sup> Sorell has translated the German words 'Kultische Tanze' as mystic dance, where Puolanne in her translation used the German term Kultische Tanze as such, and translated it to Finnish as "uskonnollinen tanssi" (religious dance). Sorell's translation seems to be a quite strong interpretation of Wigman's ideas.
  - <sup>8</sup> My comparison between *Loitsu* and *Hexentanz II* is based on the filmed section of *Hexentanz II* in 1926 (in Tegeder 1986).
  - <sup>9</sup> Elsa Puolanne had systematically collected reviews of her dance performances in her scrapbooks.
  - <sup>10</sup> I asked Leena to name postures of Elsa in the photographs after her first meeting with Mirri Karpio in January 2002. After that meeting we had a long pause, and the names were discussed and chosen in April 2002.