

Springback
spreading the word around dance

doks

Springback + local dance writers
Mölndal and Göteborg, Sweden
30 MAY – 2 JUNE 2026

WEST COAST STAGE DANCE NAVIGATION →



DANCE NAVIGATION

From 30 May to 2 June 2026, Springback partnered with DOKS to attend West Coast Stage in Mölndal and Göteborg, Sweden. The project, entitled 'Dance Navigation: Skills for Writers, Thinkers and Connectors', consisted of practical workshops on 'word generation' from dance and on the 'dramaturgy of language' as ways through which both readers and the writers themselves can navigate relationships with dance.

The outcomes are published here. They include short-form performance reviews, a self-directed freestyle response to one of the performances (Maria Naidu's *On and On and On On and On*), and writing exercises about sampling the movement of the world, and navigating between the moving image and words.

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Cover photo: DOKS/Peter Buchschatz

CONTENTS

Flash reviews

Bobbi Lo Productions: Dancing with the Dead <i>Cecee Rowland-Huss</i>	2
Maria Naidu: On and On and On On and On <i>Sanjoy Roy, Ann-Sophie Cordes</i>	2
Takuya Fujisawa: Come Wander With Me <i>Oonagh Duckworth</i>	3
Nathalie Ruiz: Sound of a Wire <i>Markus Hallmark</i>	3
Jenny Larsson: I Wanna Talk About Dance <i>Sanjoy Roy, Markus Hallmark</i>	4
Heidi Vierthaler/Skånes Dansteater: Myller <i>Ove Haugen</i>	5

Freestyling from Maria Naidu's *On and On and On On and On*

Where the individual and the collective coexist <i>Markus Hallmark</i>	6
Even an old cynic <i>Oonagh Duckworth</i>	7
What goes on in the body goes on in the mind <i>Ingeborg Zackariassen</i>	8
An Electric Slide <i>Sanjoy Roy</i>	10
Coming home to your body <i>Ove Haugen</i>	11

Exercises – Sampling

Rose Garden <i>Oonagh Duckworth</i>	14
Direction – Purpose – Shadow <i>Sanjoy Roy</i>	14

Exercise – from moving image to words

Extravagance and control: Esther Williams <i>Ann-Sophie Cordes</i>	15
"The pain of the smile" <i>Ingeborg Zackariassen</i>	15

FLASH REVIEWS

Bobbi Lo Productions: Dancing with the Dead

Isn't dancing about death like screaming about silence? Whatever your relationship with dance may be, I think most of us connect dance to movement and death to stillness. Yet dance has also been used throughout time as a way of understanding and coping with our deepest fears and sorrows, which are often related to death – take the medieval Danse Macabre, for example, created to remind us of our inevitable mortality.

Dancing with the Dead was created and performed by Bobbi Lo Production, with choreography by Lava Markusson and Michael Tang, and music by Hans-Ole Amossen.

The performance begins before the audience even enters the stage space. A small group of us enters the space first, while the rest of us are given a simple task: to click our tongues later



Dancing with the Dead.

Photo: DOKS/Peter Buchschatz

on in the performance, at a given signal. Once inside, we are seated in a semicircle around the dance floor, where the first group stands within a circle of eight LED pipe lights.

A spoken text introduced themes of death before five dancers emerge, moving with an unsettling blend of playfulness and emotional detachment. Their almost-smiling expressions create an intriguing ambiguity, making it difficult to interpret their intentions. The gifting of flowers brings the group of audience members on stage back to their seats.

As the performance progresses, the atmosphere shifts dramatically. What begins as energetic and playful develops into a tense and emotionally charged sequence in which one dancer appears to struggle for survival. The combination of aggressive choreography, rolling smoke, and pulsating music creates a powerful sense of helplessness. This culminates in a moving scene of mourning, where audience members are invited to place flowers on the fallen dancer, while lights suggest the soul leaving the body.

The final section offers a more hopeful perspective on mortality. By dissolving the boundaries between life and death, effectively depicted through moving the lights around, the work suggests that death is not an ending, but a return to a state where nothingness makes us everything.

Cecee Rowland-Huss

Maria Naidu: On and On and On On and On

They say it's more fun to do dance than to watch it, and so it proves in Maria Naidu's hour-long *On and On and On On and On*. The setup is simple: an assorted ensemble of dancers doing the Electric Slide, a simple step-sequence made famous from music videos, films, protest movements and parties. The performers start scattered, then gel into the familiar grid of the line dance. The music changes seamlessly – disco, funk, house, drum 'n' bass – but the beat goes on. So does the dance. Spectators are all faced with the same question: do I join in, and if so, when?

I decide to join in. I have a ball in this movement of the people, this alignment with the room, this staying in step while varying in style, this seepage of sweat, this ebb and flow of energies. I feel a touch sorry for those who – whether for dodgy knees, social awkwardness, or any number of other reasons – don't merge with the dance. I guess there's no such thing as a genuinely open invitation. I also vaguely worry about using a dance that, despite its history of copyright claims, fundamentally belongs to no one. But mostly I am in the groove, and just fine with going: everybody dance, doo-doo-doo-doo clap your hands, clap your hands.

Sanjoy Roy

Maria Naidu's *On and On and On On and On* slowly transforms the black box theatre into a crowded social dance floor driven by house beats from New York-based DJ Rich LaMotte.

At first, the room feels almost ordinary. White lights remain on while the professional dancers move through small repetitive foot patterns. The movements are restrained, almost casual. Audience members stay seated on chairs and cushions around the edges of the floor, watching carefully.

Gradually, something shifts. The dancers begin separately before falling into shared rhythms and synchronised steps. Someone joins in. Someone gestures "follow me," teaching the movements to newcomers. The floor starts to grow.

The repeated footwork remains the same, but upper bodies drift in different directions. Arms loosen. Eyes wander. Individual styles emerge inside the collective rhythm. As the disco-infused house tracks build, the room slowly begins to resemble a scene from *Saturday Night Fever*.

By then, the room is glowing pink and purple, the floor crowded with moving bodies. Observation slowly shifts into immersion. Throughout the hour, the professional dancers hold the pulse steady while others move freely between participation and distance, entering and leaving the dance floor on their own terms.

By the end, almost nobody can sit still – even the critics are moving.

Ann-Sophie Cordes

Takuya Fujisawa: Come Wander With Me

Grey hues and muted, beetle greens are the tone of Takuya Fujisawa's *Come Wander With Me*. Muffling black felt its texture.

Four different figures are moving together. A family? Conspirators? Future friends? They fold and unfold a dark, thick felt cloth that covers an oval table surrounded by chairs. The cloth becomes drapery, protection, costume, mask, a glove puppet – each image morphing into the other before our eyes. The dancers' movements are equally molten. Spiralling down then undulating up onto the table to form fleetingly compositions. Théodore Géricault's seminal *The Raft of the Medusa* depicting beseeching, shipwrecked sailors comes to mind, as do mountains, or mating slugs.

At one point the table is tilted on its side. It becomes a looking glass in which we see three silhouettes, but there is only a single figure gazing at themselves. Multiple perspectives or narcissism captivated?

A cone of light reveals a couple kissing, while the others avert their gaze turning towards the shadows. Tenderness turns into tension and then reverts back in this perpetual, human push-me-pull-you dance. *Come Wander With Me*, a choreography created in close collaboration with composer Emiliano Sacripanti, is certainly polished, sleek and fluid, but sometimes so much so that it seems to slip out of one's grasp, leaving little to hold on to.

Oonagh Duckworth



Sound of a Wire.

Photo: DOKS/Peter Buchschatz

Nathalie Ruiz: Sound of a Wire

Four performers dressed all in black stand in a line, staring into the eyes of the audience. Behind them is an array of instruments: clarinet, saxophone, cello, and a harmonica, all jumbled together with electronic equipment. They compound the turmoil that is soon to come. *Sound of A wire* is an eclectic performance that explores hysteria both in movement and in sound.

Nathalie Ruiz, choreographer and dancer in the piece, engages in a duet with a black gauze scarf as if it is a cursed object. She drags it, flies it over her head in the wind, and carries it as if it equaled her own weight. Her body, in turn, contorts with exorcist-like tension that fills her muscles and bones. Ruiz is then joined by musician Fågelle (Klara Andersson), who immediately drags her thick curtain of long blond hair over the laps of audience members as a prelude to electronically looping her own purging screech.

Combined with the three musicians' reactive, eerie score, Ruiz's commitment to the exploration of madness feels both intimate and honest. However, whilst the crescendoing musicians slowly steal the show, her movement quality holds only one note. By the end, *Sound of A Wire* is teetering on ridiculousness, losing itself to the chaos that drew you in the first place.

Markus Hallmark

Jenny Larsson: *I Wanna Talk About Dance*

Words never do dance justice, and so it proves with Jenny Larsson's *I Wanna Talk About Dance*, which replays recordings of people talking about what dance means for them – and too often ends up repeating generalisations such as dance is joy, dance is freedom. Et cetera.

We get more from watching dancers dancing. We're outdoors, forming a seated circumference to two musicians in the centre of the plaza. They're circled by three dancers, stylistically distinct, who respond to the music they're offered, from driving beats to ambient moods, folksome to rocky, smooth to scratchy.

Larsson's contemporary improvisations – floats and lunges, jumps, staggers and swivels – feel generic, unstructured, the kind of thing people do when they "feel" the music. Much more interesting are the other two dancers, whose stylistic rigour holds the ground for them. Paloma Madrid's improvised flamenco

stakes out its territory, all footwork, torques and attitude. Best of all is Julian Namroud's elastic, highly articulated body-popping, his body a whole ensemble of physical tones, timbres and rhythms, as unpredictable as they are coherent; perhaps only the musicians' arms and fingers come close in terms of texture and dexterity. That is something I would wanna talk about.

Sanjoy Roy

I Wanna Talk About Dance starts off by doing just that: voice recordings from 27 interviews, amplified through speakers, relate what it means to dance. In the centre of an outdoor plaza, three dancers begin orbiting a guitarist and drummer. The dancers come from different backgrounds: flamenco, hip-hop and contemporary.

The piece intends to relate these three different dance styles by putting them in the same



I Wanna Talk About Dance.

Photo: DOKS/Peter Buchschatz

space, yet the chemistry that this combination might have produced, fails to combust. When contemporary dancer, choreographer Jenny Larsson, mimics the moves of the flamenco and hip-hop dancer, the mirroring isn't reciprocated and despite the beaming smiles, an awkward tension is left in the air. A generic drum and guitar score, kitsch voice recordings, and the dancers' simplistic circling, dissolve the individual power of the strutting flamenco and popping hip-hop.

And at the end, after dragging audience members on stage for a dance party, the dancers take turns to cheesily confess how dance makes them feel. Between "Dance is my therapy", "I dance to feel strong" and "Dance is freedom", *I Wanna Talk About Dance* talks so much yet says so little.

Markus Hallmark

Heidi Vierthaler/Skånes Dansteater: Myller

It literally looks dark in the beginning of Heidi Vierthaler's new work for Skånes Dansteater. Five motionless dancers dressed in shorts stare in different directions. A narrow slit of light hints at another world, while a looming shape in the background suggests a landslide of boulders. Are they trapped?

But the scene shifts. The dancers burst into springy leaps and verbal outbursts, as in a freaked-out sports pitch. And soon the "boulders" turn out to be cushions which the dancers tackle with wild energy. From here,



Skånes Dansteater, *Myller*.

Photo: DOKS/Peter Buchschatz

the piece turns playful, ranging from jerky outbursts and comically flailing limbs to more poetic, undulating and soft movements.

So, is this a work about finding ways to survive and communicate in an ever-changing world? Maybe, but since play is one of these ways – perhaps the most important – it is equally about how many forms and expressions you can create with a cushion. How many ways can you carry it, lie on it, touch it or be touched by it?

Finally, the audience is invited to participate, and it's certainly touching to see the vulnerability that arises here. Myller's main target group is children, but when adults, with all their inhibitions, enter the stage, it becomes even more touching. What has gone before feels like a necessary and valuable warmup for a work that now really begins: genuine encounters, communication and authenticity.

Ove Haugen



FREESTYLING FROM MARIA NAIDU'S ON AND ON AND ON AND ON AND ON

Photo: DOKS/Per Hemberg

Where the individual and the collective coexist

Markus Hallmark

Dancefloors are a unique space in which an individual can find freedom in bodily expression, comforted by the fact that everyone else around them is doing the same. You can drop your guard, maybe with the help of a little alcohol, because there is no real right or wrong way to dance. You can let loose in any way you like. But what happens to the dance floor when a “right” way to dance is introduced? Maria Naidu’s *On and On*

and *On On and On*, presents this scenario with a black box stage, a live DJ, a dozen dancers and a looping dance sequence – the Electric Slide. Somehow, paradoxically, the individual and the collective blend into one. I thought I’d walk you through the process of how exactly that happens, and what it might mean.

When you first enter the black box, you notice chairs and pillows lined around the edges of the stage. As you find a place to sit, you notice 80s funk music is already playing, even though the dancefloor is empty. Eventually one dancer takes centre stage, slowly and nonchalantly

starting to groove to the beat. A bit after, another dancer joins. Then a couple more. Soon enough, you are witnessing a crowd of dancers spread across the dance floor, all following the same pattern of steps: four to the right, four to the left, four back, a rock back and forward, and lastly a kick that turns you 90 degrees to the left.

You witness this pattern for a while, before musking up the courage to join. The pattern seems simple enough after watching it for a while, and the desire to be part of the crowd overcomes any hesitations.



When you stand up to join, you struggle a bit to catch on. But despite the embarrassment of a few missteps, you are committed to master the dance and blend in with everyone else.

Eventually you get the hang of it, or enough to follow the flow of movement surrounding you, which is when you notice yourself opening up. The stress of blending in is gone, and you start to find your own comfort and groove. You play with the sequence, adding some swing in the hips or the raising of your arms. You feel safe and secure knowing you can always fall back on the simple step sequence.

You notice the energy of others around you, occasionally sharing a smile with those dancing next to you. You might take a break and watch once again from outside the dance floor, witnessing the tide of rhythm flow and recede in an anti-clockwise rotation.

How beautiful it is that both the individual and collective can coexist so strongly in one space. You are free to explore your own desires within a set structure held together by yourself and those around you. Is it freedom within submission?

Somehow this performance (if we can call it that), and subsequent paradox, feels emblematic of Scandinavian individualism: the importance of personal autonomy and the importance of not standing out in a community (Law of Jante). It's maybe why the performance works so well in Sweden – it offers the Swedish public both individual freedom to find themselves within a set structure of collective steps, with social virtues and trust holding the structure together.



Photo: Mattia Grusell

What would the performance look like if someone in the middle of the dance floor suddenly abandoned the Electric Slide and did their own dance sequence? Would they be kicked out? Would people follow suit? I wonder if people would actually be relieved to break free from the chains of a repetitive 18-step sequence. Would an interruption make for a more interesting and enjoyable experience? It's hard to know: such a situation would be an unlikely occurrence in Sweden.

So let me take you back to the dance floor once again. Sweaty bodies, red lights, disco funk. Everyone is still doing the Electric Slide. The air is hot, but you notice a coldness between individualistic bodies, throwing doubt on whether the collective dance structure holds us together or keeps us apart. How long has it been since you arrived? 45 minutes, an hour? It would be nice to reach out and hold someone's hand while you dance, but you quickly remember that it isn't part of the 18-step sequence. So you stick to yourself and continue the Electric Slide. How long will this go on for? Say it with me now: For on and on and on on and on... unless?

Even an old cynic

Oonagh Duckworth

One of the things I like most about being in a theatre is that you don't have to interact with anyone else. You're in a dark space, alone with your thoughts and the things happening on stage.

I suspect I am not alone in dreading the ever more prevalent trend for "audience participation". It comes along and spoils everything, as though our lives were not already packed enough with superficial, transitory, social dealings. Some of us, when we go to the theatre, crave a bit of passive coasting, quiet contemplation or simply some surreptitious shut eye. To me, participation can usher in pretence for the sake of politeness, and I don't always feel up for it.

Similarly, I now also resent another even more ubiquitous online trend: the email that follows almost every commercial transaction. The hypocritical refrain "Your opinion counts. Please evaluate your experience with us", blatantly flattering us, masquerading as concern to beef up some sales stats. It's something I curmudgeonly refuse to do, especially as, on the whole, I've "participated" – or rather done most of the work myself – in online airport check-ins, automatic supermarket checkouts and then ended up "chatting" with an infuriatingly unflusterable AI bot that systematically sends you straight back to the website that you were unable to fathom in the first place.



Photo: Mattia Grusell

I feel duped because, in the name of connectivity, our real-life connections are diminished and cheapened. Sometimes this impression haunts me when I'm asked to jolly up and engage in an artist's "practice".

So what made *On and On and On On and On* work differently for me? Arriving in the space I felt a familiar dread: oh no, we're going to have to do some performative participation, how cruel. But, there was no MC, no egging on, no bright lights illuminating our reluctance and making us scuttle further into darkness like the guilty cockroaches these experiences make me feel I am. No, we were at liberty to just flop down and watch.

And then, something good happened. There was a rhythm, a crowd, all different: some young, some not, some dark-skinned, some pale, some ultra trendy, some frumpy and dumpy, moving in the gloaming. They were already stepping in unison to a mash-up of different music. Some numbers I knew well, others not. And they didn't stop, they carried on

and on – on a constant roll – bodies, or people rather, joining the group, while others dissolved back to the edges. And still, no one was giving instructions, no one was cajoling or coercing us to join.

So now I'm sitting on the floor watching the feet: step, step, kick swivel, trying to work out which directions they're turning to. East, west then east again, this is not easy, directions have never been my forte. So I get my hands to do it, an old trick from my dancing days. Everyone "marks" with their hands first, less energy, more mental precision, the body mirrors the mind in miniature. Got it!

I have to try, and in I go. No commentary, criticism or encouragement, we are just doing the thing, together, as individuals, as a collective, as a group. It's so basic, it's so therapeutic. It's a ritual, a rhythm: we are all feeling good, not high or hysterical, but grounded, and, dare I say it, connected. A hotchpotch of people feeling the groove, the vibration, the energy and the joy. Dance – bodies moving together – can do this, it's uncontrived social healing without a sermon, and even an old cynic like me can't resist.

Maybe because we often yearn to share our most profound experiences with someone else: a sunset, a rainbow, the sight of a child discovering something for the first time yet, bizarrely, witnessing them alone means we can appreciate them more fully. *On and On and On On and On* combines these two paradoxical notions – a big bunch of disparate characters each, individually, sharing a wonderful thing altogether. Bring it on!

What goes on in the body goes on in the mind

Ingeborg Zackariassen

It's the last weekend in May, the birds are chirping, and even the Gothenburg trees have reluctantly entered full bloom. The last couple of days, when observing the transformation into spring, I've noticed that people are starting to loosen up their hips slightly and starting to – yet not quite managing to – shed that Scandinavian stiffness of the neck, that perpetually clenched jaw.

A big group of people are gathered at Atalante, a small, artist driven venue in the centre of Gothenburg. I often come here to see dance performances, and the place is often full, but I don't think I've ever seen it this crowded. Damn, I've forgotten to put on my glasses, and when I look across the room, familiar faces from the local dance field are blending together with more unfamiliar ones: programmers, producers, writers and artists from all over. A blurred sea of people gathered for the first edition of West Coast Stage. In fact, the place is so full, those of us who arrived just a few minutes ago are forced to stay on top of the staircase, a few steps too far from the little bar in the corner which could have offered that comforting pre-performance beer.

My eyes catch Maria Naidu, the choreographer, who stands on the steps only a metre or so away. With a strong, yet soothing voice, she's speaking into a microphone. I catch the words "on and on and on on and on". She says the words several times, with different iterations, and come think

of it, I can't quite remember the words – not because she's not clear, but because the words have shifted into something else. I reach out to grasp some of them: "gathering", "community", "resistance"... but the words dissolve into new constellations, a new pace; the words have a life of their own, they've changed from signs and symbols into the sounds of a hypnotising rhythm.

We enter the room through the carpeted corridor leading into the stage. The part of the room where the audience would normally sit is covered by a black curtain, chairs and cushions are placed all the way along the four walls, and the only focal point is the empty dance floor in the middle.

There's anticipation in the air, and some of us look nervously around for the perfect empty chair. I choose a cushion on the floor near a corner of the room. From here I can see everything.

A couple of confident-looking people dressed in slightly more colourful clothes than the rest of us stay standing, swaying, talking, laughing, and I notice a few taking more space in the room. Even if they're not yet fully dancing, they seem to be moving quite freely, like they're ready to bust some moves any second. A couple of them start grooving with the music, subtly at first, but quite soon they have become a trio and then a quartet... One by one, more people join in until they are a small ensemble moving with the same steps, the same groove, electric slide, spreading across the floor. They're wearing different styles of clothing, and it's as if their bodies are speaking with slightly different accents and their faces have different expressions – some smile, some

look serious but cool, as they simultaneously change direction with a small kick of the right leg.

I enjoy watching audience members "crack the code" and slowly join in the dance. It can be a bit confusing at first, to realise when to change direction, but we soon understand that these 18 steps go on and on, track after track, and nothing really changes, except the music.

Memories from my years as a dancer, of learning hours and hours of choreography flash through my head, or rather through my body. I can feel my feet moving to the rhythm, mirror neurons activating, as complexity is translated into simplicity and my brains tells me: I'm ready to go!

I could never just watch and not join in, not in a room full of happy dancing people. I mean, how often does this happen? We are here, side by side, we see each other, but we don't confront each other, no one is leading or following any more, and the steps become secondary, just like Maria Naidu's words melted into the microphone earlier.

The music presses on, disco, groovy, sweaty. No one is performing, yet everyone is performing. It's simple, it's joyful, it's beautiful. I get up, my feet follow the pattern, my hips sway with the groove, someone next to me adds a spin and a clap. As more people join in, the air gets thicker, and I soon feel my soaked shirt sticking to my back. I have to leave the room, I have to drink some water.

When I re-enter, people are still dancing, some seem hypnotised, others energised, some

have totally abandoned their cool, while a few others seem a bit more self-conscious. I notice an urge in me to be an observer. That familiar feeling of having joined in, of having enjoyed it, but that now I'd like to see a development of this beautiful dance. But it doesn't happen, it just goes on and on, just like life does. It's with a slightly unsatisfied feeling that I leave the theatre, as I didn't get my dramaturgical "fix" as a spectator. Yet when I think about it later that evening, it occurs to me that it might in fact be of utmost importance that this particular dance stays non-hierarchical, that it stays as a movement that belongs to all of us. Because this is more than just physical activation, it's physical activism. This kind of work goes beyond performance. Even though we are in a safe place, inside a theatre, the feeling of being part of something bigger is powerful.

Dance is a connecting tissue. In a time when art and culture is being put into question, where it's being instrumentalised rather than appreciated, while democracy itself is crumbling due to inequality and the displacement of democratic power... Maria Naidu shows that a dance performance can simultaneously be a gathering, an action, and a democratic symbol.

The morning after, I woke up by my legs moving with the pattern of the electric slide. It would still be days before my internal rhythm went back to normal. I kinda miss that spontaneous, involuntary groove. I guess my mind was infected by that funky disco beat. It just goes on and on and on on and on...

An Electric Slide

Sanjoy Roy

An attempt to render three simultaneous layers of experience: a story, a step sequence, song lyrics

You start sitting, or maybe standing, your back to the wall of a dim-lit hall, waiting for the show. Some figures are moving casually across the central area, but otherwise they seem no different from you. An ambient groove plays, soft light glows. Someone begins a small step sequence, side to side, back and forward. Others start syncing in, at first scattered in their own placings and facings, then aligning so that they begin to form a grid. The music shifts but the beat goes on. The steps stay the same, but the style varies between people, and between iterations of the sequence. More hip drop here, more bounce there, a jut or a snap, maybe a scuff with the foot, the embellishment of a finger or a flick. People like you start peeling off from the wall and joining in, and the question comes to you, as to everyone: will you remain a wallflower, or will you stop watching and start dancing?

You decide to cross the threshold, stepping out into the now thronged yet still ordered space. Right left right touch. The transition from watcher to mover takes a little while to settle into. Left right left touch. Indeed, you discover that it's not just about steps, it is also about flow. Back back back touch. Words in your brain start morphing into sounds: oh, aah, mmm, shhhh. Front touch back touch. That's more like it. Front shunt. You find that as the dance changes face at each iteration, you too become reorientated. Right left right touch. It's as if you are letting go of a self, a being with

will and purpose. **We are one. And that's the way it is.** After all, even your own name is arbitrary, so why not forget it for a while? Left right left touch.

Your mind stretches and spreads through itself through your body. **It's electric! Boogie woogie woogie.** You feel the lift of a hip as you scooch round. Back back back touch. A current of motion ripples through flank-shoulder-neck-head as you pivot. **And the beat goes on, just like my love, everlasting.** You drop in a little bounce on a forward step. Front touch back touch. And pick up the rebound on the way back. **'Cause there's music in the air and lots of loving everywhere.** A spiral of pleasure wriggles through you and you wonder: is that funky? Front shunt. Whatever it is, you decide to just get down on it. **Life is simple. Move your body.** You yield to your own flow. Right left right touch.

It's not only your flow, though. **Down the line, all the time.** It's a flow that everyone is in. Left right left touch. You've stopped consciously noticing the others. **Another one gone and another one gone, another one bites the dust.** But you can still sense them physically. Back back back touch. They're moving together but not quite as one, because they too are all in their flows. **Now that you got my love, you want to change your mind.** But they are in alignment. Front shunt. And if someone, including you, gets out of line, it's no big deal. **Release all the tension, release all the pressure.** Because the group remains, and smooths them back in. Right left right touch. In the fullness of time. **Give me the good life, give me the bon bon bon bon bon bon vie.** It's not a mistake, it's just an occurrence. Left right left touch.

You let yourself go with the group. **Here I am. Here I am. Here I am.** And maybe you lose your sense of

self. Back back back touch. But maybe that is also what you gain. **Everybody dance, doo-doo-doo-doo clap your hands, clap your hands.** The loss is the win. Front touch back touch. In abandoning your self, you become your body. **We are one. And that's the way it is.** In time, in space. Front shunt. With others. **It's electric! Boogie woogie woogie.** In the same time. **And the beat goes on, just like my love, everlasting.** In the same space. **'Cause there's music in the air and lots of loving everywhere.** It could go on and on and on. **Life is simple. Move your body.** On and on. **Down the line, all the time.** Except it can't. **Another one gone and another one gone, another one bites the dust.** Because time brings an end to all things. **Now that you got my love, you want to change your mind.** Including this sense of ever-presence. **Release all the tension, release all the pressure.** Among these other ever-presences. **Give me the good life, give me the bon bon bon bon bon bon bon vie.**

The beat stops abruptly. **Here I am. Here I am. Here I am.** Even if your flow still has some momentum. **Everybody dance, doo-doo-doo-doo clap your hands, clap your hands.** It's weird, though, this return. Right left right touch. This return to the real world. Left right left touch. Which for a while feels like the unreal world. Back back back touch. Transitions take time to settle into, you know this from before. Front touch, back touch. Soon enough, though, you are back to normal. **Front shunt.** Or maybe not quite? Right left right touch. Maybe there's something that does go on and on and on, on and on. Left right left touch. Even in diminuendo. Front touch back touch. In your body's memory. Front shunt. In every body's memory.

Coming home to your body

Ove Haugen

“Do you think that the energy you generate on stage with your dance can be converted into electricity that could, for example, power a toy train set?”

This amazing question was asked by a young person – perhaps 15–16 years old – after the Ivorian street dancer Oulouy’s performance of his work *Black* at the Nolltrefem cultural centre in Halmstad, Sweden. It was an evening in April 2026, and the question has lingered in my mind ever since, ready to pop up whenever I see a dance piece and feel the energy work within me.

One of these occasions came at the end of May, when Maria Naidu’s *On and On and On On and On* was performed at Atalante in Gothenburg. For once, I didn’t know in advance what kind of performance it was (except that there would of course be dancing). My intention, if the cliché may be forgiven, was to stand naked before the work of art, but a few minutes before the performance I was, so to speak, dressed in a costume. That costume took the form of an introduction, or rather a manifesto, which Naidu read aloud and with emphasis. It was about solidarity, participation and the need for a common movement in the double meaning of the word. It was about being a counterpoint to the anxiety, polarisation and alienation of our time.

So far, so good. I began to sense what was coming, and my sense was confirmed when I stepped into the black-box theatre, where

cushions and chairs were lined up along the walls. *On and On* was a part of West Coast Stage – an ongoing two-day dance festival – and among those taking their seats on the cushions and chairs were a striking number of people who worked in the dance field. They seemed to know exactly what was coming, and you could almost see their feet twitching.

At the same time, the ensemble began to make its entrance – it was not a theatrical entrance but an almost discreet appearance, as if they were part of the audience. One of them was the dancer and choreographer Viktor Fröjd, and for reasons I will return to, I was no longer in doubt about what to expect; rather than being in a theatre to see a dance piece, I found myself in a club. The fact that we as an audience were invited to participate was implicit, and it wasn’t long before a majority were on the floor. The dance was the Electric Slide – a line dance that, according to Wikipedia, was created in 1976 to the song Electric Boogie (performed by Marcia Griffiths). “It is known for its simple steps – 18 altogether – which are repeated by rotating 90 degrees for each turn.” An uninterrupted loop of house underscored the entire “performance”.

It was at this moment that the audience question from Halmstad popped into my head: “Do you think that the energy you generate on stage with your dance can be converted into electricity that could, for example, power a toy train set?”

If Oulouy could power a train set with his solo performance, the energy from the packed

dance floor at Atalante could power Sweden’s railway network.

* * *

Afterwards, when I left the sweaty venue and stepped out into the early summer air of Gothenburg, I had a minor aha moment. It started with a flashback to an evening in 2017 when I went from being moderately interested in dance to being completely affected. It was a performance that did not resemble *On and On* in the slightest. It was Ohad Naharin’s *Decadance* Gothenburg at the Gothenburg Opera. The division between stage and audience was clear, but there was a common denominator with *On and On*, namely interaction. In one sequence, people in the audience were invited up on stage to act with the professional dancers, and I was moved in a way no work of art had moved me for years. I started to cry. Not because I participated; just like in Atalante, I kept my place on the chair where I had sat from the very beginning, but luckily, we have the blessed mirror neurons, the remarkable neurons that allow us to experience, within ourselves, something of what the dancers experience.

But why so moved? Why tears? The short explanation is that it has to do with vulnerability, the one that arises when dance so clearly departs from being a show to reach deeper, human layers. Of course, this can be achieved even with only professional dancers on stage, and interaction is also no guarantee of quality, but for me, audience participation became a clear entrance to dance as an art form,

and it undoubtedly represents a trend on contemporary stages. Among the performances I saw at West Coast Stage, the majority contained some form of interaction.

It's easy to see this as reflecting a mindset shared by many choreographers, even if they themselves haven't lifted the audience up onto the stage. The legendary Frenchwoman Maguy Marin decided early in her career to devote herself to what she describes as "the forgotten bodies, those who have been pushed aside." Italian Silvia Gribaudo uses humour to resist the narrow body norms of the traditional dance scene and instead portray the beauty of imperfection. The Norwegian Alan Lucian Øyen balances the virtuoso capacity of professional dancers with a movement pattern where the bodies should be like those of an ordinary person, and his compatriot Jo Strømgren tells in an interview with Skånes Dansteater's Magazine why he likes to work with non-professional dancers: "... when you see a classical dancer do ten perfect pirouettes in a row, the feeling is 'wow, how skillful' – but 99.9% of the population cannot relate to that. If an actor with a beard manages one and a half turns before falling, we empathise with him. And only then does the work communicate with the audience."

More examples could be mentioned, but hopefully I've made myself understood: The aha moment was about the importance of interaction for contemporary dance. Or at least for my embrace of dance as an art form.

* * *

Having said that, I would like to add one more aspect, which is related to interaction and the mirror neurons: In the aftermath of *On and On*, I became aware of what primarily distinguishes dance from other art forms. It's the healing potential of dance.

There could be objections here. First from those who can testify about hard-working dancers whose bodies are worn out before their time. Second from those who, on the one hand, believe that all forms of artistic expression – literature, visual arts, music, etc. – can save a person from perishing, and who, on the other hand, believe that one should not have an instrumental view of art and culture.

I do not dispute either of these objections, but still, as the bearer of one of our oldest social rituals, dance is in a special position. The dancer and choreographer Kit Brown, affiliated with Skånes Dansteater, put it well after I had spent an hour trying to ask intelligent questions about a piece he had choreographed: "Even in a very serious, theatrical and contemporary form, dance is still what it has always been: a bunch of people who gather around a drum and move together."

Choreographer Viktor Fröjd has expressed similar thoughts, and as mentioned, it was clear to me what *On and On* would be about when I saw him in the ensemble. I had previously interviewed him about the performance *Festen – The Party* (so invitingly interactive that I also stepped onto the dance floor) and got to know him as one of Sweden's foremost

representatives of street and club dance. We talked about our era's lack of shared rituals and experiences. Contemporary man is left to himself, scrolling on his phone, and at the same time there is a need for and a longing for the social power, the participation that, for example, the street and club dance tradition is based on. "Thought is not enough to achieve this participation; you have to listen to the body."

In other words, it is about an absolute presence and reminiscent of how many religious people relate to their faith or how ancient and folk traditions relate to their surroundings, nature and fellow human beings.

It is in this context that the therapeutic function of dance emerges. Like other art forms, dance can comment on our times and examine what it means to be human, but it's from the perspective of Kit Brown and Viktor Fröjd that it becomes clear why I so tangibly felt the energy of *On and On*. It is from their perspective that it becomes clear why I started to cry when I sat at the Gothenburg Opera and watched *Decadance Gothenburg* (the therapeutic or healing function is not limited to street or club dance). Like so many others, I walk around with a sense of separation between the body and what we call the self or the mind – or the soul, if you will – and this condition was successfully overcome by the works I mentioned.

* * *

In conclusion, which I did not know when I started writing, this text seems to be about the self's return to the body that houses it.

The philosopher Alan Watts spoke in one of his lectures – The Nature of Consciousness – about the false separation between these two entities. He points out that we rarely think of our bodily functions as part of ourselves. We do not include the heartbeat, the activity of the glands, the digestion, etc. We talk about our legs the way we talk about our trousers: we are not them; we merely have them. We say, “my blood circulates” and not “I circulate my blood”.

What I experienced when I saw *Decadance Gothenburg*, and later *On and On*, was the possibility of coming home to my own body, to what is honest and authentic within me, which also includes a fusion with the world around me.

This context is becoming increasingly difficult and increasingly important in our screen-based society. Let me mention another thinker, David Thurfjell, historian of religions, who in his book *Anspråkstagen – Människans bot mot meningslösheten* (*Being Claimed – Humanity's Remedy for Meaninglessness*) writes about the differences between a digital and physical connection to the world. He argues that one crucial difference lies in the embodied experience of engaging with a real landscape. He uses forests and trees as an example of the real landscape, but let's play with the idea that the forest can simply be replaced by the dance floor: “If you go far enough into the real forest, after a while you will notice how your thoughts stop spinning and you are filled with a kind of bodily presence. The feeling of the repetitive movements of the joints, the blood pumping, the warmth spreading, the sweat and the

breath, does something to one's experience of being. (...) It is the wordless bodily knowledge of all this that gives the feeling of a right to a homeland, which makes one deeply sense the invitation to togetherness that is hidden in the landscape, the offer to be claimed.”

The individual I saw on the dance floor was no longer merely an individual. She was not a lonely satellite in the universe, and thanks to the mirror neurons, I experienced the same thing. I was a body. I circulated my blood. I was being claimed.

No wonder dance feels like an excellent complement to the hours I have spent on a therapist's couch.

* * *

However, the initial questions remain.
Can Oulouy's dance power a toy train set?
Can the energy from *On and On and On On and On* speed up Sweden's railway network?

Perhaps the questions got lost or became increasingly irrelevant as the text progressed. But then again, it's all about energy and the young questioner's wide-eyed wonder at what dance can accomplish has probably been an underlying driving force behind everything I've tried to clarify.

If I may venture an answer, it must be that dance can benefit from technology, but the reverse – asking dance to serve technology – would reduce it to a mere tool in a way that could ultimately diminish this remarkable art form. So, let us refrain from trying.

EXERCISE – SAMPLING

An exercise set by Ingeborg Zackariassen in which we went outside and observed the world, then wrote from the sensorial experience, transforming perception and observation into language.

Rose Garden

Through one ear I can hear the traffic: trams chinking, cars on cobbles, the murmur of the town. Through the other, bird song, or rather chatter, one to the other, claiming their territory, marking out their space in the trees, competing with the cars and with each other. Mingling the two – the sound of water, babbling from the fountains lined up to divide the two worlds – mechanic and organic adjacent, juxtaposed, juggling. This circus is a treat, everything is in fine balance. The freshly planted roses bear the names of heroic humans: Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Aphrodite, James Galway. The school girls in heavy make-up twitter like



Photo: Oonagh Duckworth

the birds. Three old ladies, white hair, black macs, Nordic walking sticks pecking the ground – “three for a girl” chorus the magpies swooping down.

Soft rain on soft petals surround, yet the centre has been left fallow, to sleep for a season. The dandelion clocks nod their head. This is the right thing to do they say, leave us be for a bit, tend to the rest, with tirelessness, tenderness and in time, we will do our best to do the rest.

Oonagh Duckworth

Direction – Purpose – Shadow

Direction

A pedestrian crossing. The people all walk from one side to the other, from left to right or right to left. Each with their own gait of weight, speed and momentum, the swing of their arms and the tilt of their heads – but the direction is always transversal. Traffic, on the other hand, is perpendicular, it advances and retreats. It's also smoother and more machine-like, all character masked behind metallic carapaces of white and grey and black. Over on the other side of the road, trams curve more gracefully – a softer feel, despite their rattling and rolling, than all those perpendiculars.

Purpose

Every being seems to have purpose, thought what they are we do not know. People are walking towards something, someone, somewhere. Even sparrows and pigeons flap and flit in search of something. We call ourselves human beings but I wonder if human doings would be more accurate. I wonder, too, if we should pass more time as beings, rather than as doings. I imagine the world would be a quieter place, and better too.

Shadow

As I'm watching the scene outside through the hotel window, a shadow looms large and crosses my field of perception. A man (a hotel guest, I guess) is passing in front of me, but my focus is still in the distance, so he appears like a large cloud, passing from left to right. A cloud that takes very small, trembling steps, because the cloud is carrying teacups and saucers, one set in each hand, with spoons that clink and chink like tiny bells. The cloud passes and my long perspective clears again. The cloud returns, this time moving from right to left. The cloud is again taking small steps, still with the tinkle of cups and saucers and spoons but even slower-moving than before. I guess he got refills.

Sanjoy Roy

EXERCISE – FROM MOVING IMAGE TO WORDS

Responding to cues in dance film clips

Extravagance and control: Esther Williams

The bathing sequence in *Million Dollar Mermaid* unfolds with almost dreamlike precision. One by one, the swimmers slide into the water, each body following the same path with the same smiling composure. The women wear yellow. The men wear red. What begins as playful spectacle gradually becomes something more carefully ordered, the performers folding into a single moving design.

Then Esther Williams appears.

She enters dressed in the same deep red as the men, gliding into the water with the same controlled ease. Although the choreography depends on synchronisation, it quietly rearranges itself around her. Formations open and close while Williams remains fixed at the centre, impossible to lose sight of.

By the end of the sequence, she is lifted above the swimmers on a throne-like platform and crowned, suspended over the glittering symmetry below. The image feels both extravagant and carefully controlled. Like many Hollywood musicals of the 1950s, the sequence presents an idealised vision of beauty, harmony and collective confidence, shaped by the polished optimism of post-war America.

The cheerful music and glittering precision remain dazzling, even as the scene's perfect order begins to feel strangely unreal. Perhaps it is impossible to watch such carefully orchestrated happiness today without also noticing the machinery behind it.

Ann-Sophie Cordes

"The pain of the smile"

Aaagh! Nightmares of drowning again.

With a gasp, Esther woke up in a pool of sweat, moving her head slowly from side to side. Her insides in knots, her shoulders aching, her blurred vision scanning the room, a mess of drenched clothes appeared to have been scattered across the tiny room.

The pain was penetrating, not only muscles but through the skin, through the bone, all the way to the core.

She arranged her hips to perfectly align with the bedframe. Her tongue like sandpaper, her ears filled with cotton.

Reaching towards the edge of the bed, she gripped the frame, and in increments, she moved her skeleton, one bone at the time, placing her feet on the smudged hotel carpet.

A slight smell of burned skin blended with the chlorine stench, as the stinging sensation of her feet meeting the floor made her mouth twitch.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5HufDgwD4w

The mirror.

She could see her mouth opening wide, grinning, but the whiteness had turned slightly pink. Why?

She felt her tongue scanning the corners of each tooth. There it was.

Uneven, sharp.

The taste of blood.

One tooth was chipped from crashing into the smoke machine the night before.

Ingeborg Zackariassen

doks

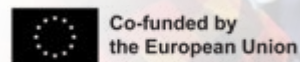
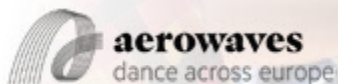
DOKS is a collaboration between Rum för Dans/Region Halland, Bora Bora (Denmark), and Bærum Kulturhus – Dans Sørøst-Norge. The project is co-financed by the EU's Interreg Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak programme.



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With thanks to

DOKS (Rum för Dans/
Region Halland/Sweden)

West Coast Stage presents pitches, works in progress and performances by choreographers working on Sweden's west coast, across Skåne, Halland and Västra Götaland. West Coast Stage is organised by Danscentrum Väst, Rum för Dans, 1024 – regional production house for dance, and Danscentrum Syd, with support from Region Västra Götaland, Region Halland and the City of Gothenburg, and in collaboration with the Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Dance Programme.

Photo: DOKS/Peter Buchschatz