This article presents and discusses solo dance practices developed by Katrín Gunnarsdóttir during the years 2014–2020. She started to develop her practices with the solo work *Saving History* (2014), a chronological charting of her relationship with borrowing movement. As a consequence of that process she became interested in exploring the virtuosity of slowly morphing one movement into another, and that research developed into another solo work, *Shades of History* (2016). The act of warming up and getting ready for a performance formed the basis of the third solo, *Dancing (to)* (2020). Through this series of solo performances, Katrín has realized her ongoing interest in dancing labour, performing the archive and a focus on the dancing rather than the dancer.

Í þessari grein er farið yfir dansaðferðir þróaðar af Katrínu Gunnarsdóttur árin 2014–2020. Hún byrjaði á að þróa aðferðir sónar með sólóverkinu *Saving History* (2014), sem byggði á sambandi Katrínar við lánað dansefni. Eftir þetta fyrsta verk fékk hún áhuga á að skoða þá tæknilegu færni sem felst í því að þróa hreyfingu úr einni í aðra og síu rannsókninna varð annað sólóverk, *Shades of History* (2016). Íðjan við að hita upp fyrir sýningar var síðan grunnurinn fyrir þriðja dansverkið *Dancing (to)* (2020). Með þessari röð sólóverka hefur Katrín þróað með sér áhuga á dansandi vinnuaflí, að draga fram og sína safn hreyfinga og að einblína á dansinn frekar en dansarann.
Dancing labour: Practising a personal archive
Katrín Gunnarsdóttir

Making the dance by dance-ing
Although my career is based mainly on my work as a choreographer, I sometimes think I am a dancer first. I think best by dancing in the studio (a cliché, of course). I have tried other methods, including working from home and dancing in the kitchen (another cliché), but the studio is my preferred habitat. The best studios are those I can return to and develop a history with. Uninterrupted studio time allows me to achieve a state of flow—rehearsing, mastering, feeling the details and intricacies of movement, observing gradual bodily shifts. I take enormous pleasure in working through ideas, rhythms and repetition in the studio. This joy also extends to the processes of working with other dancers, but I find it necessary to understand my physical proposals through my own body.

My solo works have evolved from this place of physical research, working alone in a studio. While working by oneself on a solo performance can be lonely, solitude allows thoughts and observations to surface that would otherwise go unnoticed. Over many years of spending time in a studio, one develops (consciously or not) a set of skills, practices and working methods drawn from one’s personal archive. What hidden practices might I find in my dancing body? How does my labour-intensive way of working alone in the studio influence my solo work?

Hidden practices
Since 2014, I have created a series of solo performances that make my solitary studio-practices visible in one way or another. My first solo in this series, Saving History (2014) took as its starting point the chronological charting of my then 15-year-long engagement with borrowing dance material from other choreographers. I wanted to gain a better understanding of my physical vocabulary, and I was also interested in the act of mastering and rehearsing material and the dancer’s concentration when striving for perfection, alone in the studio. Our freelance, project-based way of life demands this skill set to be able to jump between residencies and working methods, embodying a variety of techniques and styles. This solo was conceived as a physical mixtape, cutting and pasting together 26 distinct references from other artists that I had at some point incorporated in my earlier choreographies. I wanted to make my borrowing practice visible to pay tribute to this well-honed methodology, experiencing dance history through my own body.

The relationship to found, borrowed material becomes a conversation between the work, the body of the dancer, and the context [...] referencing becomes a process and a mode of communication; without any precise ownership, and only the personal filter, the piece enhances our experience of movement. It is neither in a canon, nor in the body of the performer fully—she is constantly pointing to an outside.

(Stamsund’samtalen 2016)

Saving History can be viewed as a 35-minute dance history mixtape—a chunk of tirelessly rehearsed borrowed material that flows constantly from one movement to the next. I used this movement...
vocabulary as material for another solo, *Shades of History* (2016), dissecting it into sections (hands, feet, circles, jumps etc.), all woven together with gradual transitions or «manual fades.» During the process, I burrowed into a dance studio and sequenced sections of movement, allowing gradual transitions to take shape through labour and repetition. In the finished performance, one movement can be seen morphing slowly into another, evolving and shifting in a meditative state of flow. It is difficult for the body to delay and remain in this in-between state between movements; for me, it is a virtuosic transformation, creating the illusion of a dance that remains still yet moves forward, feeling the materiality of movement by slowing the process of flow. The process of repetition also helped me to shift the focus from the dancer to the dance itself, transcending the body of the dancer in the pure, uninterrupted bodiless flows of movement to movement.

The newest manifestation of this solo obsession is *Dancing (to)* (2020), which takes as its starting point the practice of the pre-performance ritual. I realized while making the other two solo works that I had developed yet another specific practice: performing a series of dances using a playlist that prepared me for that performance. In preparing to perform, I had unconsciously created another set of dances as a by-product. In the latest instalment in my solo series, I wanted to reveal this pre-performance practice and develop it into a performance, getting lost in dances and finding them again. This involved performing a ritual every day, dancing to a playlist for three months and allowing movement material to naturally elaborate and disclose its form. Rather than ‘wasting’ those dances, I wanted to bring them on stage.

**The virtuosity of dancing labour**

My solo performances are sweaty and tiring physical work: very labour-intensive for the dancer, grappling with constantly changing dynamics (*Saving History*),
gradually changing repetition (Shades of History) or both of those methods combined (Dancing (to)). My fascination with this physically intensive way of working reflects my interest in highlighting this virtuosity of dancing labour. There is virtuosity in the transition and the duration, an element that is especially present in Shades of History.

The works are performed without music, and the staging is usually simple; nothing «hides» the effort of the moving body in these performances. Instead, I allow and amplify the sounds of effort, breath and body to resonate with the audience. The audience is invited to contemplate this effort, which is made visible, inviting an affective experience of movement. The performances involve a state of flow from one movement to the next—not stopping, not resting, always moving forward. There is an inherently virtuosic element in labour without an end product, and this endlessness fascinates me. As Paolo Virno wrote:

Let us consider carefully what defines the activity of virtuosos, of performing artists. First of all, theirs is an activity which finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product, without settling into a ‘finished product’, or into an object which would survive the performance. Secondly, it is an activity which requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience.

(Virno 2004)

Comparing politics and virtuosity, Virno also argues that virtuosity is intrinsically political—that this dancing body that no longer stops moving has also a political implication, as post-Fordist labour has itself acquired many of the typical characteristics of political action, and therefore artistic activity. According to Bojana Kunst,

[It]he labour of the artist is often strongly in tune with the ways that we are generally working today—with flexible hours, no distinction between private life and work life, a high personal investment and an emphasis on the value of collaboration, etc.—we could perhaps even say that nowadays almost everybody is working like an artist.

(Kunst 2017)

In an earlier piece, Kunst (2011) referred to the notion of dancing labour, not as a representation of work but as actual work, in terms of material rhythms, effort and how movement inhabits space and time. At the same time, dancing—like much work in our current economy—is unnecessary labour: a surplus or waste. However, dancing does not attempt to conceal that it is useless labour but rather reveals this fact, which is also the beauty of it.
Performing the archive

Andre Lepecki has argued that «the body as archive» is a central metaphor for dancers, who «access routes» to the past via the body—a disciplined, trained, and specific virtuosic body as a complex set of relations, with history written into it (Lepecki 2010). This notion of performing the archive is present in all three of the works described here, seen very clearly in Saving History as a collection of snapshots from dance history, one after another. In Shades of History, this archive is presented indirectly, blurring the lines between past and present, movement and body. In Dancing (to), the performance is partly an invented archive, creating a new ritual from past rituals, playing with lost and found movements, which are reinvented.

In this sense, one can make a further connection to the discussion of waste and surplus. Through these bodily archiving practices, the surplus capacity of previous work can be activated in a re-enactment performed by a new body, performed according to a new set of rules. This entails less spending, using existing material and reinventing a solo—perhaps always the same solo in slightly different formats. With my solo practices, maybe I am in the dancing-recycling business—minimizing my choreographic footprint, adding less uselessness.

Ecological dance-ing

In the times in which we live, dancing one’s own silly solos based on one’s own dance practices may seem a bit self-indulgent. Has the dancer inside this choreographer become parasitic, causing this dancing mania? Or is it acceptable to focus on the dancing and the doing?

Mårten Spångberg has written about the autonomous existence of dance, and the concept of being danced by a dance, granting dance agency (Spångberg 2017). I can connect with that feeling—that for me, in some ways, all of these solos are more about the dance-ing than the dancer. They were never about the dancer; they are exercises and personal rituals, a disciplined but intuitive approach to movement research. These are dances that evolved in the studio by showing up and spending time there alone with my dancing archive: giving in to the ecology of the studio, softening and contaminating my scores and structures, allowing physical labour to accumulate through time and cultivation—and making room for dance-ing.

Endnotes

1 Dance-ing is written with a hyphen to emphasize the -ing, referring among other things to its presence, practice, duration and continuity. See for example the Stockholm conference Post-dance-ing (2019).
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Katrín Gunnarsdóttir holds a BA in Choreography from ArtEZ School of Dance, Arnhem (2008) and graduated with an MSc in Economics from Iceland University in 2011. She works as a choreographer, performer, researcher and teacher. As well as developing her own choreographic work, Katrín is a member of the Icelandic art collective Marble Crowd. She is currently assistant professor at the Department for Performing Arts at Iceland University of the Arts and is chairman of the board of the association Choreographers in Iceland.

www.katringunnarsdottir.com
katrin.gunnars@gmail.com