

ANNE-LIIS MARIPUU

The role of modern dance
in shaping artistic and gender
discourses in Estonia in the 1920s



ANNE-LIIS MARIPUU

The role of modern dance in shaping artistic
and gender discourses in Estonia in the 1920s



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Press

Department of Literature and Theatre Studies, Institute of Cultural Research,
Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Tartu, Estonia

This doctoral thesis was accepted for defending the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Theatre Studies on August 27, 2025, by the council of the Institute
of Cultural Research, University of Tartu.

Supervisors: Professor Anneli Saro (University of Tartu)
Dr Heili Einasto (Tallinn University)

Opponent: Dr Hanna Järvinen (The University of the Arts Helsinki)

The dissertation will be defended on October 14, 2025, at 13.00 in the Senate
Hall of the University of Tartu (Ülikooli 18–204).

ISSN 2228-2548 (print)
ISBN 978-9908-57-003-7 (print)
ISSN 2806-2175 (pdf)
ISBN 978-9908-57-004-4 (pdf)

Copyright: Anne-Liis Maripuu, 2025

University of Tartu Press
www.tyk.ee

CONTENT

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
INTRODUCTION.....	9
1. CURRENT SITUATION OF THE FIELD OF RESEARCH.....	14
2. BRIEF HISTORY OF ESTONIAN MODERN DANCE	16
2.1 Context.....	16
2.2 The beginning. Plastic dance	18
2.3 The mid-to-late 1920s. <i>Ausdruckstanz</i>	25
2.4 The 1930s.....	33
2.5 Summary	38
3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	40
3.1 Traveling theories (Edward Said, Dongchao Min)	41
3.2 Transgression (Chris Jenks)	43
3.3 Regimes of the arts (Jacques Rancière)	45
3.4 Gender performativity (Judith Butler)	47
4. SOURCES.....	50
4.1 Periodicals.....	51
4.2 Other sources	52
5. METHODOLOGY	56
5.1 Historical method.....	56
5.2 Discourse analysis.....	56
SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES	58
CONCLUSION	63
REFERENCES.....	67
SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN	76
PUBLICATIONS	81
CURRICULUM VITAE	158
ELULOOKIRJELDUS.....	160

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Article I.** Maripuu, Anne-Liis. Forthcoming in 2026. From the Weimar Republic to Estonia. The migration of Rudolf von Laban's dance theory. – *Nordic Theatre Studies*, accepted April 22, 2025.
- Article II.** Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2023. Erootikast ja varasest moderntantsust Elmerice Partsi loomingu näitel [On eroticism and early modern dance in the work of Elmerice Parts]. *Ariadne Lõng* (1/2): 39–60. https://ariadnelong.ee/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ariadne-Long-2023_2_Maripuu.pdf.
- Article III.** Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2024. Transgressing the Borders of Art and Non-art: The Case of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky. *Nordic Journal of Dance* (2): 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2024-0012>.
- Article IV.** Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2021. Performativity of gender by early modern dancers on and off stage. The case of Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo. *METHIS. Studia humaniora Estonica* (27/28): 223–243. <https://doi.org/10.7592/methis.v22i27/28.18450>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to dedicate myself to exploring the history of Estonian modern dance – a rich and often overlooked part of our cultural history. This journey has been both intellectually rewarding and personally meaningful, and it would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement I received along the way. To everyone who walked this path with me, I offer my heartfelt thanks.

I am profoundly grateful to my main supervisor, Prof. Anneli Saro, whose expertise, patience, and encouragement have guided me through every stage of this research. Your invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and insightful feedback has been a gift. You guided me not only with academic rigor but also with genuine care through the inevitable highs and lows of the doctoral journey. I also wish to thank my co-supervisor, Dr. Heili Einasto, for her clarifying and perceptive comments, which sharpened the precision of the thesis.

I would like to thank both Dr. Hedi-Liis Toome and Assoc. Prof. Aimar Ventsel for their constructive feedback during progress reviews throughout my doctoral studies. My thank goes to Dr. Toome also for her detailed and attentive preliminary review – your feedback was invaluable in finalising the manuscript. I am grateful to Dr. Hanna Järvinen for the careful reading of the final version of this dissertation and for the honour and pleasure of having you as my opponent in the public defence. I extend my appreciation to all the lecturers whose courses I attended during my studies, as well as to the fellow students who engaged thoughtfully with my work.

Sincere thanks to Hille Roots, Sille Vadi, and Aivi Reimand for their practical help in navigating the various challenges I encountered as a PhD student.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the researchers I met at various conferences, whose genuine interest in my work and in the history of Estonian modern dance was truly heartwarming. Their encouragement greatly strengthened my motivation. I am also deeply grateful to the Estonian Cultural Endowment and the Estonian Association of Theatre Researchers and Theatre Critics, whose financial support made it possible for me to attend conferences abroad.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the many museum and archive staff members whose generous support greatly aided my research, especially to Simmo Priks from the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, who never left a question unanswered and kindly put me in contact with the Kolt family.

I am deeply thankful to the relatives of the dancers, whose openness in sharing their family histories added a profoundly personal and enriching dimension to this work. In particular, I wish to thank Deborah Kolt, wife of George Kolt (a son of Herman Kolt's brother), and Merike Kull, the daughter of Ama Parts, who was adopted by Elmerice and Kaarel Parts. My thanks also extend to Carl Eric Laantee Reintamm and Martin Hurt, who kindly shared invaluable information about Aino Siimola-Jooss and Edith Oltorp, respectively. Each of these encounters – most of them virtual – reaffirmed my conviction that new sources can indeed be uncovered.

While writing is often a solitary task, I never felt alone in this journey. I am especially thankful to my husband, Juan Camilo, for his stimulating, valuable feedback, unwavering patience, and constant encouragement. As a doctor himself, he knew how to support me through this process. A very special thanks goes to my friend and colleague, Madli Pesti, whose genuine interest in my work and belief in its relevance provided a great source of motivation throughout.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my mother for giving me the time and space to write by taking care of my daughter, Micaela. To Micaela, my heartfelt thanks for reminding me, every single day, of the joys and priorities beyond this academic journey.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the early history of Estonian modern dance – a field that has so far received little scholarly attention. Modern dance began to develop in North America and Europe at the turn of the 20th century, ushering in significant changes. It not only transformed the dance world by offering an alternative to ballet but also reshaped women’s lives by making them authors of their work and creating new working opportunities.¹ This study traces the arrival of modern dance in Estonia and examines the impact it had on the country’s cultural and social landscape.

Although there is no single definition of the term “dance,” it is generally possible to distinguish between two fields of dance in the Western society: theatre dance and social dance (Siegmond 2023, 45). Western theatre dance is typically performed in formal settings, often within a theatre, where it is choreographed and set to music. Historically, its dominant form was ballet, with its structured techniques and emphasis on grace and form. This supremacy waned with the emergence of modern dance, which spread rapidly across cultures and geographies, becoming a transnational phenomenon, much like ballet.²

Modern dance was pioneered and largely driven by women, who worked as dancers, choreographers, and administrators. Before its rise, women were primarily confined to performing works created by male choreographers, with their roles largely defined by male perspectives, where their movements and representations were shaped to align with male-dominated ideals and often designed to cater to the male gaze (Kolb 2009, 33–34). Modern dancers rejected ballet’s narrative conventions, classical techniques, and restrictive attire – such as tights, corsets, and pointe shoes – in favour of new narratives. Their portrayals of female characters, along with their innovative movement styles, contributed to a transformative representation of women on stage. Early female modern dancers not only expressed personal stories and self-images through movement but also bridged the gap between their onstage and offstage persona (Manning 1992, 105).

In Estonia, the 1920s marked a shift in women’s roles in the public sphere. More women pursued higher education, entered the workforce, and claimed their place in public life. Nevertheless, in conservative circles women were seen as housewives, with their roles limited to caring for the home, husband, and children. Such views assumed that women were mentally and intellectually unfit for

¹ Despite the significant presence of women on European ballet stages – and the fact that some ballerinas, such as Marie Sallé and Lucile Grahn, became choreographers in the 18th and early 19th centuries – women generally had limited involvement in the programming and production of ballets around the turn of the 19th century (Kolb 2009, 1).

² Contrary to popular belief, modern dance was not limited to the Western world; it reached countries such as China and India, as evidenced by the research of Nan Ma (2023), Prarthana Purkayastha (2014), and others.

“men’s professions,” particularly leadership roles.³ As “new women,” modern dancers challenged these assumptions. Independent, educated, and professionally engaged, they led unconventional lives and worked outside the home, openly contesting prevailing gender norms.

The study follows a case study method, concentrating on the lives and artistic work of two under-researched dancers-choreographers, Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo. Their distinct artistic approaches and contrasting dance styles reveal the breadth of expression within modern dance and highlight the controversies surrounding different dance trends. This research seeks to recognize their legacy and ensure their rightful place in Estonian dance history. Together with Ella Iibak, probably the best known Estonian modern dancer, they were among the most significant exponents of the art form in Estonia.

The main focus of this research is the 1920s – a decade in which modern dance established itself as a recognized art form in Estonia. Subchapter 2 also provides a brief overview of the preceding decade – the 1910s –, as well as an outline of the main trends and transitions that followed in the 1930s. As modern dance was still a new phenomenon in the 1920s, its formative and transformative influence is easier to trace. By the end of the decade, the central figures examined in this thesis concluded their active careers as dancers. Thereafter, Neggo devoted herself to teaching and choreographing ensemble works with her students, while Parts focused on teaching stylized folk dances. By this time, several significant shifts had occurred, including a decline in interest in dance trends such as plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz* – which had dominated until then – and a shift from solo performances to large-scale choreographies, marking the end of a phase in the history of Estonian modern dance.

The study is guided by three central research questions:

- 1) How did modern dance travel to Estonia and establish itself in the 1910s and during the first half of the 1920s?**
- 2) How did Estonian critics describe and interpret modern dance during this period?**
- 3) How did female modern dancers portray femininity on stage and negotiate their lives beyond the stage?**

By addressing these questions, the research aims to shed light on the broader cultural dynamics that shaped the reception of modern dance in Estonia.

The primary source material comes from Estonian-language print media, particularly reviews, critiques, and interviews published between 1913 and 1937. The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating concepts and theoretical perspectives from sociology, aesthetics, gender studies, and dance studies. The theoretical framework draws on several key notions, including Edward Said’s traveling theory and its alternative interpretations, the concept of trans-

³ For discussion of the “new woman” in Estonia, see Kirss 2006, 762–766; Hinrikus 2015, 174–177; Kirikal 2021, 31–35. For the situation of women in Estonia in the 1920s, see Reinfeldt 2013.

gression, Jacques Rancière’s notion of the regimes of the arts, and Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. These frameworks serve as analytical tools for interpreting the empirical material, offering a rich and nuanced lens for examining the intersections of gender and art. At the same time, they reveal certain theoretical limitations, which are discussed in Section 3. Methodologically, the study combines historical research with discourse analysis.

My interest in the history of modern dance in Estonia began about a decade ago, when I read Heili Einasto’s *100 aastat moderntantsu. Pilguheit Eesti poolelt* (*100 Years of Modern Dance: An Estonian Perspective*, 2000). The book not only introduces the most prominent figures in modern dance history but also explores their connections to Estonian dancers. It was during this reading that I first encountered Gerd Neggo, who, like me, was born in the small town of Kuressaare on the island of Saaremaa and, in her early adulthood, studied in Germany. I became curious: what might have inspired someone from Kuressaare to engage themselves with modern dance? What was known about modern dance in Estonia at the beginning of the 20th century? I later discovered that Neggo had left the island before she turned ten – but by then, I was already immersed in the rich history of Estonian modern dance.

The research questions reflect my broader interest in the emergence of new cultural phenomena, particularly the pivotal role of women in driving these transformations.⁴

Terminology

In order to establish a clear and consistent framework for this study, it is essential to define the key terms and concepts that will be frequently referenced throughout the dissertation. It is important to note that, in the context of modern dance history, no standardized terminology exists in the Estonian language. Consequently, this chapter not only seeks to provide a coherent framework for the present research but also offers an overview of the terminology relevant to the subject, serving as a resource for anyone interested in Estonian modern dance.

I use the term “modern dance” (in Estonian, *moderntants*) as a generic term. I understand it in a manner similar to Riikka Laakso (2023), viewing it as a form of dance modernism that sought alternatives to the techniques, movement vocabulary, and themes of classical ballet. “Early modern dance” (*varane moderntants*) refers to the formative years of modern dance, which in Estonia correspond to the 1910s and the first half of the 1920s. In international research, the terminology used by researchers varies according to research tradition, language, and, at times, individual scholarly perspective.⁵

⁴ Numerous researchers have highlighted the ways in which women’s roles in Estonian cultural history have been overlooked or marginalized. See, for example, Hasselblatt 2015, 176–193; and Marling and Sepper 2018.

⁵ Great overview of what has been regarded as “modern dance” since its birth is offered by Michael Huxley (1994) in a book chapter “European modern dance.”

In Estonia, the dominant trends of modern dance were plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz* (in English, dance of expression). Neither can be defined as a codified style, as their practitioners did not establish formalized techniques; therefore, I refer to them as trends.

Plastic dance dominated in Estonia from the mid-1910s to mid-1920s, while *Ausdruckstanz* became popular in the mid-to-late 1920s. Plastic dance (in Estonian, *plastiline tants*) was referred to in Estonian print media using various terms, including *kunsttants* (art dance), *uus tants* (new dance), *vaba tants* (free dance), and *paljasjalgne tants* (barefoot dance). I prefer the term “plastic dance,” as it is still in use today – although typically applied to modern dance in Estonia throughout the interwar period, not solely to the early 1920s.⁶ The term “plastic dance” made a comeback in Estonia in the late-1920s when *Ausdruckstanz* started losing its dominant position. Understandably, the term designated then something else than it did ten years earlier.

My research indicates that the term “plastic dance” entered Estonian dance discourse in 1913, when Finnish modern dance pioneer Maggie Gripenberg toured Estonia. It can be assumed that it was taken over from Finnish language (in Finnish, plastic dance is referred to as *plastinen tanssi*). Finnish theatre researcher Johanna Laakkonen (2013, 29) suggests that the term “plastic dance” may have originated with Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, who used the term *plastique animé* to describe expressive dance compositions based on his eurhythmics exercises. “Plastic” referred to the expression of emotions, according to the researcher, distinguishing it from his *gymnastique rythmique* exercises, which only interpreted the structure of music. Dance researcher Irina Sirotkina (2018), on the other hand, associates the term “plastic dance” with Isadora Duncan, who called her art, in French, *danse plastique*, connecting it to the *arts plastiques* (Manzano 2010, as quoted by Sirotkina 2018, 32).

The term *Ausdruckstanz* is translated into English as “dance of expression” (Manning 2006, xxxii; Franco 2007, 80).⁷ In the Estonian press, *Ausdruckstanz* was referred to as *uus tants* (in English, new dance), *absoluutne tants* (absolute dance), or *vaba tants* (free dance). Today it is most often rendered as *väljendus-tants*. In my dissertation, I will use the German term (*Ausdruckstanz*) to refer to the trend, following the practice of many English-language researchers. Its practitioners were known as *Ausdruckstänzer*.

The work of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt cannot be classified strictly as either plastic dance or *Ausdruckstanz*, although it did share certain similarities to the latter. Similarly to *Ausdruckstänzer*, the duo most likely regarded dance as aesthetically independent from other art forms. However, the thematic content of their work differed significantly. Rather than aiming to express a “reflection of

⁶ The notion „plastic dance” was also widely used in Finland, Sweden, Latvia, and Russia (Laakkonen 2013, 19; Hammergren 2002, 34, as quoted by Laakkonen 2013, 29; Vidzemiece 2024, 438; Sirotkina 2018, 32). In German- and English-speaking countries, on the other hand, one speaks of “free dance” (in German, *der freie Tanz*) (Oberzaucher-Schüller 2017, 232–234).

⁷ According to Susanne Franco (2007, 80), the term *Ausdruckstanz* should not be translated into English as “expressionist dance,” as it would make the concept the equivalent of the expressionist movement in literature, painting, film, and theatre.

the rhythm of the cosmos” (Franco 2007, 80), their dances explored embodied experiences – such as the effects of drugs or the mechanical movements of machines. In the Estonian media, no specific term was used for their choreographic language.

In her dissertation Heili Einasto (2016, 10) uses *vabatants* (in English, free dance) and *plastiline tants* (plastic dance) or *plastika* (plastics) as generic labels. She defines *vabatants* as a dance form based on natural movements without a codified technique and regards *väljendustants* (*Ausdruckstanz*) as a subcategory of *vabatants*. Her choice of terminology is understandable, given that the term “plastic dance” is still commonly used, as pointed above. However, considering the historical origin of the term, its generic application appears imprecise. The term *vabatants* seems more appropriate, particularly given that the concepts of freedom in dance were central both to plastic dance (which sought to liberate the dancer from the constraints of classical ballet) and to *Ausdruckstanz* (which emphasized emancipation from the strictures of musical accompaniment). Nevertheless, the convention among Western European scholars to use the same term for the early developmental phase of modern dance can introduce ambiguity in this context.

Building on the above, I propose the following periodization of Estonian modern, along with the corresponding terminology.

Table 1. Dance trends and their dominant phases.

Dominant phase	1913–1924	1925–end of the 1920s
Generic term	Modern dance	
Dominant dance trend	Plastic dance, also free dance	<i>Ausdruckstanz</i>
Main representatives	Ella Ilbak, Elmerice Parts (until app. mid-1920s)	Gerd Neggo, Alice Jürna

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introductory chapter followed by four research articles. The first subchapter offers an overview of the current state of research in Estonia, highlighting the personalities that have attracted scholarly attention. The second subchapter focuses on the history of modern dance in Estonia, tracing its development from the 1910s to the mid-1930s. Based on my research findings, it presents the most significant individuals and dominant dance trends in chronological order. The aim is to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of modern dance in Estonia and to contextualize the following subchapters. The third subchapter presents the research questions and the theoretical framework, explaining the rationale for selecting specific theories and concepts. The following subchapter gives an overview of the sources used in the study. The fifth subchapter outlines the methodological frameworks that were used to answer the research questions. The final section summarizes the four research articles individually and then concludes with a synthesis of the main findings, an examination of the study’s limitations, and suggestions for future research.

1. CURRENT SITUATION OF THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

The history of Estonian modern dance has been scarcely studied. Before the Soviet Occupation, two articles were dedicated to the development of Estonian theatre dance. The most extensive overview is offered by Jaan Pert (1934) in his article “Eesti kunsttants” (“Estonian art dance”) published in the magazine *Eesti Noorus*. Hanno Kompus’ article “Jooni tantsukunsti arengust Eestis” (“Characteristics of the development of dance art in Estonia”) was published in 1938 in the magazine *Teater*.

From 1944 to 1991, Estonia was under Soviet rule. As the Soviet regime labelled modern dance as a “degenerate art”, and acknowledged only ballet and staged folk dance, both the practice and research of modern dance were basically impossible until Estonia regained independence. The situation was aggravated by the fact that those who fled the country at the end of the Second World War – including most proponents of modern dance – were branded as enemies of the people in the Soviet regime. The exception to this rule was Lea Tormis’ book *Eesti balletist (About Estonian ballet, 1967)*, which begins with a short introduction about the Estonian modern dance scene. As a former student of Gerd Negro, she was well aware of the role of modern dance in Estonian dance history.

Unfortunately, the restoration of independence did not lead to a surge of research into the history of modern dance. The history of modern dance in Estonia has yet to be fully written. In 2019, prior to beginning my studies, I published two articles in which I highlighted prominent dancers and examined the prevailing dance trends of the period: “Modernse tantsu algusaastad Eestis I (1913–1925)” (“The Early Years of Modern Dance in Estonia I (1913–1925)”) and “Eesti modernse tantsu algusaastad II (1925–1939)” (“The Early Years of Estonian Modern Dance II (1925–1939)”). The articles offer a short overview of the field, however much more in-depth research and critical analyses are still needed.

Ballet occupies a somewhat stronger position: publications on ballet theatres, dancers, and choreographers far outnumber those on modern and contemporary dance. However, most of these works are commemorative in nature (some are (auto)biographies or photo albums) rather than analytical studies. A notable exception is Heili Einasto’s extensive research on Rahel Olbrei, the founder of the permanent ballet troupe at the Estonia Theatre. Einasto defended her dissertation *Eesti balleti rajaja Rahel Olbrei: loometegevus, retseptioon, pärand (Artistic Activities, Reception and Legacy of Rahel Olbrei, the Founder of Estonian Ballet)* in 2016 and, two years later, published a book *Rahel Olbrei – Eesti tantsuteatri rajaja (Rahel Olbrei, founder of Estonian dance theatre)*. Estonian–Finnish ballet encounters has been examined by the Finnish researcher Riikka Korppi-Tommola (2024) in her article “Virolaisen ja suomalaisen baletin kohtaamiset ja venäläisvaikutteet – 1917–1991” (“Encounters between Estonian and Finnish ballet and Russian influences – 1917–1991”).

Fortunately, research landscape is more developed for individual modern dancers. Korppi-Tommola has published three articles on Ella Ilbak, one of Estonia's most renowned early modern dancers: "Tanssi Suomen ja Viron kulttuurisillalla. Ella Ilbakin vierailut Suomessa 1920- ja 1930-luvuilla" ("Dance on the cultural bridge between Finland and Estonia. Ella Ilbak's visits to Finland in the 1920s and 1930s") and "Valkea liekki: Ella Ilbak, Viron tanssiva kulttuurilähettiläs" ("White Flame: Ella Ilbak, Estonian dancing cultural ambassador"), both in 2018, and "Virolaisen ja suomalaisen varhaisen modernin tanssin yhteyksistä 1917–1991" ("On the links between Estonian and Finnish early modern dance 1917–1991") in 2024. A photographic analysis of Ilbak was carried out by U.S.-based dance and theatre scholar Karl Toepfer, who presented his findings at a Tallinn conference in a lecture titled "A Foreign Perspective of Early Modern Dance in Estonia: How Ella Ilbak's Photographic Image (1915–1948) Changed My Life."

Gerd Neggo's life prior to her 1924 remigration to Estonia was explored by Jana Mätas (1998) in a student research paper titled "Gerd Neggo enne tantsustuudiot" ("Gerd Neggo – before the dance studio"). I gave a broad overview of Neggo's life in the article "Moderntantsu algusaastad Eestis. Gerd Neggo 125" ("The early years of modern dance in Estonia. Gerd Neggo 125," 2016) and a more comprehensive account in "'Keha üksi kõneleb.' Tantsija, koreograaf, pedagoog Gerd Neggo 130" ("The body alone speaks.' Dancer, choreographer, pedagogue Gerd Neggo 130," 2022). I also provided a detailed overview of Neggo's study years in Germany in the article "Gerd Neggo, Helmi Nurk, Aino Siimola ja Ida Urjan – Rudolf von Labani õpilased aastatel 1921–1924 Saksa maal" ("Gerd Neggo, Helmi Nurk, Aino Siimola, and Ida Urjan – Rudolf von Laban's students in Germany 1921–1924," 2019). Neggo's 1934 dance production *Kalevipoja süit* (*Suite of Kalevipoeg*) has gained some attention from Heili Einasto in the article "Tantsitud 'Kalevipoeg' läbi rahvuslike soostereotüüpide prisma" ("*Kalevipoeg* danced through the prism of nationalist gender stereotypes," 2017).

My 2018 article "'Minu element on erootika.' Elmerice Parts – 140" ("My Element is Eroticism.' Elmerice Parts – 140") focused on the life and artistic work of Elmerice Parts. Roosmarii Sarapuu's study, "Tiina Kapperi tantsustuudio" ("Dance Studio of Tiina Kapper," 2023), examined the life and work of one of the most prominent dance pedagogues and choreographers in Tartu during the 1920s and 1930s.

The history of modern dance in Estonia remains largely underexplored. One reason lies in ideology: under the Soviet regime, both the practice and the study of modern dance were effectively impossible. By the time Estonia regained independence, very few scholars were engaged in this area of inquiry. This shortage of researchers continues to affect the situation to this day.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF ESTONIAN MODERN DANCE

The aim of this subchapter is to reconstruct the history of modern dance in Estonia. As the research articles address the topic through a theoretical lens, they do not provide a comprehensive account of broader historical developments. This subchapter seeks to fill that gap by offering a contextualized narrative based on archival sources.

This study represents the first comprehensive attempt to provide an overview of the Estonian modern dance scene from the mid-1910s to the mid-1930s. It seeks to highlight the diverse community of dancers, choreographers, and teachers who shaped modern dance in Estonia. This subchapter also seeks to outline the defining characteristics of the two most prominent dance trends of the period: plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz*. As will become evident, the main representatives of the new form of art were women, thereby connecting dance history with women's history. In addition, the subchapter explores the socio-economic conditions that supported the introduction and establishment of modern dance in Estonia. However, due to the richness and complexity of the field, it is not feasible to discuss every contribution in detail.

The subchapter is structured chronologically and divided into five parts. Section 2.1 provides context by briefly outlining the political events that shaped the territory that would become the Republic of Estonia, life in its major towns and the situation for women at the time. Section 2.2 examines the emergence of plastic dance – a dance trend that dominated the Estonian dance scene from the mid-1910s to the mid-1920s. Section 2.3 explores the rise of *Ausdruckstanz*, which gained prominence on Estonian theatre stages in the mid-1920s. Section 2.4 traces the development of the modern dance scene in the 1930s, leading into the concluding section, 2.5. Figure 12, located at the end of the subchapter, presents a graphical depiction of Estonian dancers and their teachers.

2.1 Context

Modern dance began to emerge in Estonia during the 1910s, a decade defined by significant political upheaval. This period encompassed the World War I, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the proclamation of the Estonian Independence in 1918, and the Estonian War of Independence (1918–1920), which ultimately secured the country's sovereignty. Prior to independence, the territory that would become the Republic of Estonia had been part of the Russian Empire since 1710, with political and cultural power largely concentrated in the Baltic German minority. The instability and uncertainty of these transformative years delayed the artistic development of modern dance in Estonia, preventing it from fully taking root until the political situation had begun to stabilize in the early 1920s.

The early 20th century was a time of significant social and cultural transformation. Industrial development led to increasing urbanization, with an increasing

number of Estonians settling in towns. By 1922, 27% of the population resided in urban areas, the majority of whom were ethnic Estonians (87,7%) (Ainsaar 1997, 43; Zetterberg 2010, 400). The largest urban centres were Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu, and Narva. Since the late 19th century, the railway network connected major Estonian cities with each other and with St. Petersburg and Riga, while steamboat routes linked Tallinn with Helsinki and Stockholm, facilitating both domestic and international travel. In the 1920s, electricity became a transformative force: electric lamps replaced gas street lighting, and gasoline-powered trams gave way to electric trams (Nerman 2007; Tallinna tramm... 2023). The use of telephones expanded steadily, with 1750 subscribers recorded in Tallinn in 1917, and regular radio broadcasts began in 1926 (Erelt 2004).

These developments also influenced the arts, including dance. Urbanisation made it easier for performing artists to attract audiences and dance teachers to attract students. Technological advancements contributed to shorter factory working hours, enabling workers to engage more actively in cultural and social life.⁸ The improved transportation system and installation of telephone lines facilitated greater efficiency in the artists' touring operations.

The fight for women's rights in Estonia begun in the late 19th century.⁹ By the early 20th century, women were increasingly visible in various public spheres. Urbanization and technical advances sharply increased the number of female industrial workers (Kivimäe 1995, 132). Around the same time, it became possible for women to work as village schoolteachers, reporters (Mälk 2000, 169), editors, singers, and actresses.¹⁰ Those with greater financial security pursued careers as scholars, artists or physicians, and sought higher education in European and Russian universities (Kivimäe and Tamul 1999, 45–71; Hinrikus 2015, 174).

In the 1920s, the women's public roles continued to expand. Women's greater independence was significantly fostered by the expansion of educational opportunities (Hinrikus 2015, 174). The first gymnasium for Estonian girls was established in 1906; in 1905, the University of Tartu accepted the first female auditors (free listeners), and, in 1915, the university made possible for women to acquire higher education. In 1918, Estonia granted women the right to vote.

Nevertheless, although men and women were alike in public-law matters, family law kept married women under their husbands' guardianship for most of the Republic of Estonia, despite the efforts of women politicians of the time (Leppik 2017, 357; Kiirend-Pruuli 2020, 4). According to politician Emma Asson-Peterson, by the mid-1920s, an anti-feminist movement was emerging in

⁸ One popular leisure and pleasure activity was dancing; often, a dance party followed a theatre performance. For more information on night dancing in Estonia from 1880 to 1940, see Leivategija 2023, 193–214.

⁹ For an extensive overview of the history of Estonian feminism, see Karro 2022, 57–112.

¹⁰ Journalism and theatre exercised a strong pull on the new women. According to Roberts (2002), author of the book *Disruptive Acts. The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, both fields offered women paid work, new means of expression, financial independence, and cultural visibility.

the society (Sakova 2005/2006, 123). As literary scholar Aija Sakova (2005/2006, 124) summarises, “she [a woman] was needed and her skills used in fight for a democratic state, but now she was becoming inconvenient.” In conservative circles, a woman was still primarily seen as a housewife, unsuited for professional work.

2.2 The beginning. Plastic dance

Based on my research, it can be argued that the Estonian public became aware of modern dance through the performances of **Maggie Gripenberg** (also spelled Grippenberg in the Estonian media, 1881–1976). Gripenberg was an admirer of Isadora Duncan (1877–1927), probably the best-known modern dance pioneer, and a student of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), a Swiss composer, musician, and music educator. Gripenberg’s performances not only introduced local audiences to plastic dance but also helped to establish the idea that dance could be regarded as a legitimate art form, rather than merely immoral or sinful entertainment. Many reviewers noted the refined and chaste quality of her dance performances. (R. S. 1913; -ik. 1913; *Plastiline tantsukunst* 1913; *Paruness Maggie Grippenbergi...* 1913) It is known that Ella Ilbak, Karl Krahe, and Ida Urbel saw Maggie Gripenberg performing in the 1910s (Ilbak 1990, 36; Pütsep 1975; Metsman 2015), and all went on to become dancers.

The Finnish modern dance pioneer toured Estonia in the autumn¹¹ of 1913, giving recitals in Tallinn (*Tantsu uuesti...* 1913), Tartu (*Paruness Maggie Grippenbergi...* 1913), and Pärnu (*Maggie Gripenberg* 1913). Her tour received significant attention in the local press, with at least five reviews published in multiple Estonian-language newspapers and magazines. For comparison, **Sent M’Ahesa**¹² (born Else von Carlberg, 1883–1970) performed in Estonia in the same year – once in January in Tallinn and again in September in Pärnu (*Sent M’ahesa, die berühmte...* 1913; *Sent M’Ahesa* 1913). Notably, however, none of her performances received reviews in Estonian-language newspapers.¹³ Nonetheless, she rapidly garnered admiration among Estonian-speaking audiences, as evidenced by her multiple tours in Estonia in subsequent years.

Although Duncan herself never performed in Estonia, she was widely known there; Ella Ilbak (1990, 35) recalled in her autobiography that “everyone had read about Isadora Duncan and seen pictures of her” probably around 1913 or 1914. Duncan captivated Estonian poets and writers such as Gustav Suits, Johannes Semper, and Henrik Visnapuu, the latter of whom knew her personally (Suits 1913; Semper 1919; Visnapuu 1927).

¹¹ Maggie Gripenberg gave her very first dance performance in Estonia on the 30th of March in 1913 (*Museumi pidu...* 1913).

¹² Sent M’Ahesa was a Swedish dancer, translator and journalist, born in Riga. In 1907 she moved to Berlin to study Egyptology and in 1909 she gave her first dance recital performing “ancient Egyptian” dances.

¹³ Sent M’Ahesa’s performance in Tallinn was reviewed by German-language newspaper *Revalsche Zeitung*, see “Die Kunst...” 1913.

The performances of touring choreographers and dancers played a pivotal role in shaping Estonian dance scene. They not only introduced local audiences to new forms of dance but also inspired some to pursue it themselves. Female touring artists, in particular, demonstrated that a professional career as a dancer and choreographer was both possible and respectable. At a time when the status of dance and dancers was still quite low, their presence helped elevate the art form's credibility. It is important to remember that, in the early 20th century, dance was not held in high regard. In 1918, renowned Estonian writer and critic Friedebert Tuglas remarked that dance "is practised by that half of humanity whose philosophical and psychological interests give no reason to think highly of them." Against this backdrop, the impact of these pioneering artists was not merely artistic but also cultural, helping to shift public perceptions and lay the groundwork for a more respected and professional dance tradition in Estonia.



Figure 1. Elmerice Parts. Photographer unknown. Newspaper image from the Finnish newspaper *Suomen Kuvalehti*, January 19, 1924.

By the mid-1910s, it became possible to study modern forms of movement in Estonia as well. In 1914, **Elmerice Parts**¹⁴ (born Elmerice Elisabeth Meyer, 1878–1974) launched a course in “aesthetic gymnastics” in Tartu, with the stated aim of “increasing women’s flexibility and grace while contributing to their health” (Estetiline gümnastika... 1914). At this early stage, modern dance was still closely associated with various forms of gymnastics. Many future dancers studied harmonic or rhythmic gymnastics before transitioning into professional dance.

Parts taught in Tartu what she had learnt under Hade (Hedwig) Kallmeyer (1881–1976) a year before in Berlin. Kallmeyer’s private education institution trained women to become physical culture teachers in Harmonic Gymnastics. She was a student of Genevieve Stebbins (1857–1934), herself an apprentice of François Delsarte (1811–1871), the French singing coach and orator who developed a cohesive theory of non-verbal expression (Mullan 2017, 165–169). Stebbins systematized Delsarte’s theories (Mullan 2017, 169) and laid both the practical and philosophical foundations for expressive dance and for the Kallmeyer’s somatic work (Ruyter 1999, 67–68). As argued by Nancy Ruyter (1999, 67–68), Stebbins “was the first in a long line of American women who thought deeply about expressive movement as an art.” According to Karl Toepfer (1997, 147), she was also the first to associate the “natural” female body with Grecian-style tunics and chitons. Without a doubt, Delsarte’s and Stebbins’s work inspired many dance pioneers, including Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis¹⁵ (1879–1968) (Mullan 2017, 169–170; Järvinen 2023) – a fact that has been often neglected.

Parts’ course culminated in a public performance of plastic dance at a charity event held at the Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu in April 1915 (Suur pidu-õhtu 1915). This event may be considered the first noteworthy performance of plastic dance by Estonian dancers.¹⁶ Hanno Kompus (1938, 201), an Estonian art and

¹⁴ Elmerice Parts was the second child of four children of Konrad Alexander Johann Meyer, a lessee of a mansion in southeastern Estonia, and Elisabeth (born Lehnbaum) Meyer. She received her education in Tartu, first at a German-language elementary school for girls and later at a girls’ secondary school (Liim 1998, 160–161). In 1904, she completed her high school final examination as an external student in St. Petersburg. After finishing school, Parts devoted herself to piano playing and painting (Kallas 2012, 144). She took courses with Oswald Heinrich von Sass (1856–1913) in Kuressaare (EKM EKLA f 193, m 106:58). In 1909, she married to Kaarel Parts (1873–1940), who would later serve as Estonia’s Chief Justice from 1919 to 1940. The couple adopted three children (Pärtelpoeg 2002).

¹⁵ Ruth St. Denis was a pioneer of modern dance, born in the USA. She was inspired by Genevieve Stebbins. In 1915, she co-founded the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts.

¹⁶ De facto, the first dancer of Estonian heritage who performed “barefoot dances” was Agathe Marie Margens (born Hermann, 1874–1964). Her performance took place at the German Theatre in Tallinn in 1911 (Inez Orbeliani 1911). Margens was a singer who had studied dance under Bekefy and Frémont, ballet artists of the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg (Agathe Margens-Hermanni... 1930). It is noteworthy that Margens performed in Tallinn disguised as Inez Orbeliani (also Inessa Olberjanin or Olbriani), a member of aristocracy from Georgia, Russia, or Caucasia (sources are contradictory) (Adson 2017, 135; Tormis 1967, 16; Pert 1934, 153). The identity of the dancer was soon revealed, causing quite a scandal. It appears that the scandal was not sparked by the performance’s poor quality or perceived indecency, but rather by the fact that an Estonian woman was performing before the Baltic nobility (Adson 2017, 135; Pert 1934, 153).

theatre critic, recalled that the dancers were dressed in white tunics fastened with golden ribbons, which also encircled their loosely flowing hair. According to the reviewer, the dancers moved freely and gracefully – running, jumping, or bending like a bow – alone, in pairs, or “in lovely groups” (Kompus 1938, 201). Among Parts’ students was a 19-year-old Ella Ilbak (Ilbak 1990, 35), who would later become a central figure in Estonian modern dance. Without a doubt, Tartu was at the time the focal point of modern dance in Estonia.

In 1916, Parts acquired a qualification as a gymnastic teacher in Tartu after finishing a course under Mr. Rutski (EKM EKLA f 193, m 106:58). No source confirms Kompus’ (1938, 202) claim that Parts studied under Claudia Isachenko in St Petersburg in the mid-1910s. Before embarking on an international career as a solo dancer, Parts experimented with stage acting. In October 1919, she performed the role of Salome in Oscar Wilde’s play of the same title, directed by Paul Pinna and staged at the Drama Theatre in Tallinn (Uudiseid teatri alalt 1919). Parts begun her solo career in 1920, at the age of 42. In 1922, Parts undertook further training in Berlin with Jutta Klamt¹⁷ (1890–1970), a German dancer, choreographer, teacher, and theoretician. After concluding her active dance career, Parts worked as a gymnastics and dance teacher in Tartu (Pert 1934, 158) until the late 1930s. In 1945, Parts fled the advancing Soviet forces and relocated to Germany, later emigrating to the United States, where she remained until her death.

Ella Ilbak (1895–1997) continued her dance studies in St. Petersburg, enrolling in the rhythmic gymnastics courses led by Serge Wolkonsky (1860–1937), one of the earliest Russian advocates of eurhythmics and a student and close associate of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Jaques-Dalcroze developed a training method that emphasized the experience and understanding of music through bodily movement, which became a foundational training approach for many early modern dancers. Ilbak also studied at Claudia Isachenko’s (1884–1951) School of plasticity and stage expression (Школа пластики и сценической выразительности). Isachenko, a Russian actress and dancer influenced by Isadora Duncan, developed her own system of movement training, by drawing on Delsart’s techniques (Sirotkina 2021). In 1917, following her father’s death, Ilbak returned to Estonia (Ilbak 1990, 62), and in May 1918, gave her first plastic dance performance at the Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu (Ella Ilbak 1918), regarded as the first full-length plastic dance performance by an Estonian dancer.

The establishment of the Republic of Estonia in 1918 and the conclusion of the Estonian War of Independence in 1920 created new opportunities for young dance enthusiasts to pursue modern dance studies abroad. In 1919, Ilbak continued her training in France with financial support from the Estonian Ministry

¹⁷ Jutta Klamt, a student of Hade Kallmeyer, founded a school in Berlin in 1920 and achieved considerable renown with her ensemble. Klamt and her husband, Gustav Fischer-Klamt, believed that movement was a form of racial hygiene, and she presented her work as a model of “Germanic” aesthetics. In 1933, they joined the National Socialist Party and actively participated in aligning the dance world with Nazi ideology. After undergoing denazification, Klamt reopened her school in 1952 and taught at the Freie Universität Berlin until 1969. (Guilbert 1999, 113)

of Education (RA ERA.1108.5.1122). She studied at the Raymond Duncan's academy, Georges Hébert's gymnastic school, and Maria Rutkowska's ballet studio¹⁸ (Ilbak 1990, 85–86). Ilbak became one of Estonia's leading representatives of plastic dance.



Figure 2. Ella Ilbak in a dance pose. Photographer unknown. Alvar Loog's private collection.

One of the defining features of plastic dance in Estonia was its strong connection to music. Dancers were described as “illustrating” (H. Idam 1913) and “interpreting” music (KAH 1915; Ilbak 1918a; Naata Nael 1921), using bodily movements to convey the unique emotions and sensations evoked by the score (P+A 1913; Uus wool... 1913; -t. 1920; Ilbak 1918a, 1918b). Plastic dance presented body and mind – entities that were regarded as separate – as inseparably intertwined, each influencing the other (Uus wool... 1913). Both dance and body were considered the most effective means of making the dancer's inner life visible (Uus wool... 1913; H. Idam 1913). In this view, the body was endowed with the capacity to “speak” and to express the inner world of the dancer (Ilbak 1918b).

¹⁸ Raymond Duncan (1874–1966) was a dancer, artist, poet, craftsman, and philosopher, and brother of dancer Isadora Duncan. Georges Hébert (1875–1957) was a pioneering physical educator who developed a system of physical education and training known as “Natural Method” and a wide training program known as “Hebertism.” Maria Rutkowska was the first character dancer at both the Grand Theatre in Warsaw and the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, and from 1900 to 1912, a soloist at the Mariinsky. Before 1914, she relocated to Paris, where she established and ran her own dance studio.



Figure 3. Elmerice Parts in a dance pose, 1922 or earlier. Photo by Carl Schulz Studio. ETMM 5530 T402:1/27:1.

The main source of inspiration for Estonian plastic dancers were the “Orient” and ancient Greece. Dance concerts typically consisted of ten to twelve numbers. Intermissions between the dances were often long, as the performer needed time for costume and make-up changes. The concert was accompanied usually by a pianist, seldom by an orchestra.

Ilbak and Parts were not the only representatives of plastic dance in Estonia. **Beatrice Tobias** (1911–1998), daughter of renowned Estonian composer Rudolf Tobias, began performing following her father’s death in 1918 to help support her family. She toured several cities in Estonia in 1922, 1923, and 1926 before emigrating to the United States, where she gained recognition as an accomplished illustrator. Another noteworthy figure was **Karl Krahe** (1890–1922), who may have been the first – and possibly the only – male plastic dancer in Estonia. His first dance recital took place in 1918 (28. juulil kawatseb... 1918). According to the contemporary newspaper accounts, he studied with a ballerina named Helzen, received instructions in plastic dance from Serge Wolkonsky, and reportedly sought advice from Maggie Gripenberg (28. juulil kawatseb... 1918; Noor kunstnik... 1918). Krahe also pursued painting and literature (Metsman 2015; Muuseumiroott 1994). While reviews of Tobias’ performances were generally positive –influenced in part by her youth and her father’s fame – Krahe’s critical reception was more reserved (-s. 1918; Adson 1970).

Ida Erlemann (1889–?) and **Tiina (Kristine) Kapper** (born Lebedeva, 1895–1947), were lesser-known yet significant figures in the development of plastic dance in Tartu. Erlemann pursued modern dance training at the Jutta Klamt School in Berlin, completing her studies in 1921, and upon her return to Tartu introduced plastic dance and gymnastics in various educational institutions (Kleis 1932, 37). By the mid-1920s, she had expanded her reach beyond the school system, offering public courses, as evidenced by contemporary newspaper advertisements (Ida Erlemann 1926). Tiina Kapper initially studied ballet under Laurent Novikov (1888–1956) and Aleksandr Chekrygin (1884–1942) in St Petersburg where she was born (Tiina Kapperit... 1930, 9). After relocating to Estonia, she briefly studied and performed with **Veera (also Vera) Berting**¹⁹ (born Lokmin, later known as Vera Alexandrova, 1893–1968) in Tallinn (Kompus 1920). From 1921, Kapper began teaching dance in Tartu (ETMM 8462 T184:1/193:4), and by 1924, she had established a collaborative relationship with the Vanemuine Theatre. Her students would go on to constitute the theatre’s first permanent professional dance ensemble in 1935 (Sarapuu 2023, 311). Through-

¹⁹ Veera Berting was born in Moscow and received formal training in ballet, expressionist dance, and drama at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS), where she graduated in 1918. Due to the Russian Revolution, she relocated to Tallinn and emerged as a pioneering force in the nascent Estonian dance theatre, where she became a founder of the Estonian dance theatre. There, she assumed the roles of director, choreographer, and performer in one of Estonia’s earliest independent dance productions, *Koreograafiliste etüüdide õhtu* (*An Evening of Choreographic Études*, 1919). In 1923, she married a Swedish engineer and subsequently moved to Stockholm, where she established as a prominent and influential dance instructor. (Dahl 2018; Eesti entsüklopeedia 2020)

out the late 1920s and early 1930s, Kapper attended summer courses in Vienna with Gertrud Bodenwieser (1890–1959) (ETMM 8462 T184:1/193:16), a leading figure in Austrian *Ausdruckstanz*.

In Estonia, plastic dance performances took place at a theatre or *seltsimaja*, a building of *selts* – a cultural, recreational, educational, or occupational society, which offered regular evening entertainment for the public (Leivategija 2023, 6–7). Both venues carried high social and cultural prestige. The choice of venue, as well as the ticket pricing, played a significant role in shaping the public perception of dance and in determining the composition of its audiences.

In 1921, while organizing her first tour in Estonia, Elmerice Parts (EKM EKLA f 224, m 68:32) wrote to Mr. Leoke, the local organizer of her performance in Viljandi, emphasizing the importance of setting ticket prices on par with those of high-profile concerts: “Prices should be as high as they are in case of the best concerts. (...) Should 150 marks be too expensive in Viljandi, then cut it down to 125 marks.”²⁰ The letter also mentioned a tiered pricing structure, with seats in the back rows costing as little as 25 marks. This correspondence illustrates the value placed on dance as an art form by its early practitioners and their desire to position it within the broader landscape of high culture.

2.3 The mid-to-late 1920s. *Ausdruckstanz*

In the mid-1920s, *Ausdruckstanz* became the dominant dance trend in Estonia. It was introduced from the Weimar Republic (1918–1933), where several Estonian young dance enthusiasts studied it. The movement’s leading figures were **Rudolf Laban** (1879–1958) and **Mary Wigman** (1886–1973). Laban was one of the most influential European choreographers and dance theorists in the 20th century. Wigman, Laban’s best-known student, studied with him from the mid-to-late 1910s before they went their separate ways in the early 1920s. She is regarded as one of the most important figures of *Ausdruckstanz*. Wigman presented a solo performance in Tallinn in 1926 (Mary Wigmani... 1926) and in 1928 the *Kammertanzgruppe von Rudolf von Laban*, directed by Dussia Bereska, performed in Estonia (Linde 1928).

My research shows that in Estonia, *Ausdruckstanz* was perceived as the antithesis of plastic dance, particularly because of its distinct relationship with music. While plastic dance sought to visualize music, *Ausdruckstanz* aimed to free dance from musical dependence. Music was not meant to dictate movements through a fixed rhythmic structure; rather, as Henrik Visnapuu (1924) explained, it served to complement the dance. According to Estonian critics, *Ausdruckstanz* was free from literal thought; it did not aim to (re)present, mime, or replicate life (Moodsa kunsttantsu... 1928; J. P. 1927; R. K.-P. 1924; -s. 1923). According to Susanne Franco (2007, 80), the term *Ausdruckstanz* refers to a heterogeneous

²⁰ For comparison, one kilogram of butter cost about 140 marks and one kilogram of wheat flour about 63 marks (Hindadest Tartu... 1921).

group of choreographic languages and teaching methods that shared several key principles. These included the aesthetic independence of dance from other art forms; the close connection between bodily movement and emotional or mental states, reflecting the rhythm of the cosmos; the dancer's dual role as both creator and interpreter; and the major importance of improvisation.

Ausdruckstanz reached Estonia primarily through the efforts of **Gerd** (born Gerda Elwine) **Neggio**²¹ (1891–1974, later also Olak-Neggio). Neggo's first known dance teacher was Ella Ilbak (Ilbak 1990, 63; -on 1934, 266), under whom she studied in Tartu. It is unclear when Neggo relocated to Tartu; however, by August 1918, she was already known to be living there (Aavik 2014, 122). In 1919, Neggo moved to Stockholm, where she worked as a secretary at the Estonian Embassy until 1921 (*Eesti välisteestistus* 2006, 181). During this period, she studied with Anna Behle (1876–1966), a pioneer of modern dance in Sweden, who had herself trained at Isadora Duncan's school in Berlin and in rhythmic gymnastics under Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. In 1907, Behle co-founded a school in Stockholm with Louise Wikström, which offered instruction in Duncan-inspired dance, gymnastics, and Dalcroze-based rhythmic exercises for both children and adults; among their notable students was Maggie Gripenberg (Hammergren 2018a).

In 1921, Neggo continued her dance studies in Germany under Rudolf Laban. After immigrating to Estonia in 1924, she began teaching and performing. In 1926 (Gerd Neggo 1926), she established a dance school in Tallinn under the name *Gerd Neggo tantsu- ja liikumisestudio* (*Gerd Neggo's Dance and Movement Studio*), which helped to shape a generation of dancers.²² While her studio was neither the first nor the only one in Estonia at the time, it was the first institution dedicated specifically to modern dance and the first to offer systematic and long-term training in this emerging art form. Neggo also actively popularised women's gymnastics in Estonia – a field that appears to have become increasingly important to her over time. In 1944, Neggo fled to Sweden.

²¹ Gerd Neggo was born in Kuressaare, the daughter of merchant Otto August Neggo and Amalie Lydia Neggo (born Schillert), a former private school teacher (SM 10466:1 Ark). Around the turn of the 20th century, the family – by then a household of four – relocated to Siberia in search of improved economic prospects. Their intended destination was either Yakutsk or Irkutsk, though sources differ on this point (-on 1934, 266; SM 10466:1 Ark). The family soon returned to Estonia and settled in Tallinn. Neggo earned her private teacher's certificate in 1912 (ETMM 8462 T 184:1/111:7) and taught German at the Jakob Westholm School in Tallinn from 1913 to 1916 (*Per aspera ad astra I* 1985, 143; Mänd 1935). In 1925, she married Paul Olak (1880–1949), an Estonian journalist, dramaturg, and a long-serving managing director of the theatre Estonia. They had no children.

²² She changed the opening date to 1924 in the 1930s.



Figure 4. Gerd Negro in a dance pose, mid-1920s. Photographer unknown. RA ERA.R-39.1.40.

Three more young dance enthusiasts from Estonia studied under Laban in the early-1920s: **Helmi Nurk** (1900–1996), **Ida Urjan** (1901–?), and **Aino Siimola** (born Leberecht, later Jooss-Siimola, 1901–1971) (for detailed accounts of their study periods, see Maripuu 2019c). Following the dissolution of *Tanzbühne Laban* in 1924, Nurk married soon and retired from dance. Urjan first joined Albrecht Knust and led with him the *Hamburger Bewegungschöre Rudolf von Laban* (*Hamburg Movement Choirs Rudolf von Laban*), then later she joined Jooss in Münster and Essen, where she was preliminarily active as a teacher. Before joining Laban, Urjan had studied with Tiina Kapper in Tartu (Eestlased kunsttantsus... 1935). Siimola joined Kurt Jooss (1901–1979) already in Münster where he formed his company, and in 1927 she followed him to Essen where Jooss co-founded the *Folkwangschule für Musik, Tanz und Sprechen*. Jooss and Siimola married in 1929. Alongside Jooss, Siimola took on choreographic and directorial responsibilities (Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, 23438).

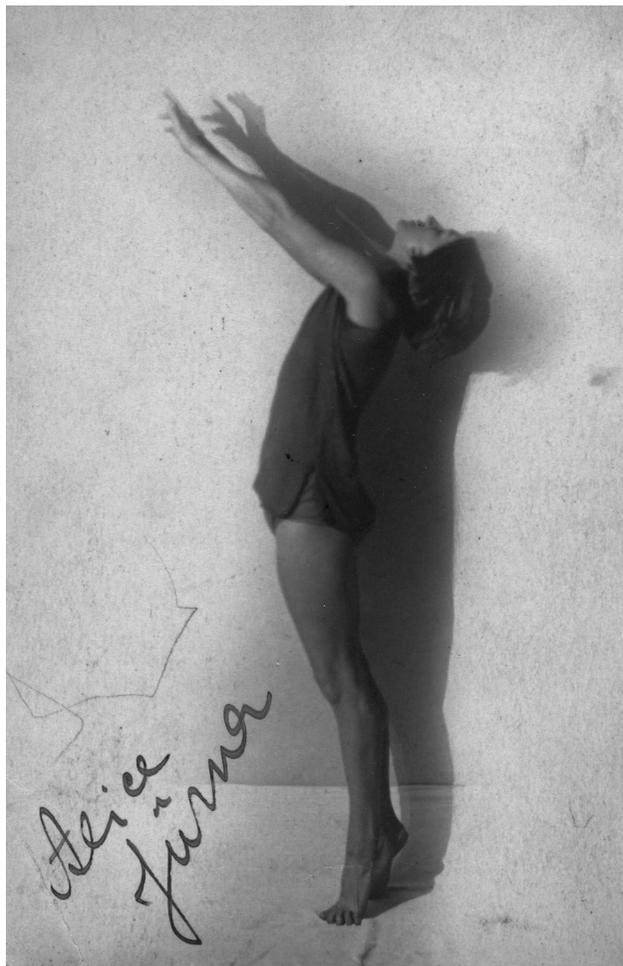


Figure 5. Alice Jürna in a dance pose. Photographer unknown. ETMM T402.

Among Mary Wigman's students was **Alice Jürna** (later Jürna-Klohn, 1902–1964) (Tantsijanna Alice Jürna 1927). She began her studies in Dresden in 1922, and by the 1924/1925 theatre season she was performing with the *Mary Wigman Tanzgruppe* (Schuldt-Hiddemann 2018, personal communication). During the 1925/1926 season, Jürna worked at the theatre in Gera, where Yvonne Georgi (1903–1975), a former student of Wigman, was working as a ballet mistress. Jürna later joined the theatre in Duisburg. (Tanzabend... 1927) Jürna's relationship to Estonia was less stable than Neggo's. In 1922, she choreographed dances for a theatre production at the *Hommikteater* (Morning Theatre) (Andresen 1966, 46) and in 1925, she taught in Neggo's dance studio while Neggo was ill (ETMM 8147 T426:1/10:1). Jürna toured in Estonia twice in 1927 as a soloist – once early in the year and again towards the end. While her first tour received favourable critical reception, the second received unexpectedly negative reviews (ArA. 1927; B. L. 1927). This shift in reception may explain why she did not perform in Estonia thereafter. Her disappointment is referenced in a letter from Justa (Aita) Kurfeldt (ETMM T362/1:63) to Helmi Tohvelman, both of whom were students of Jürna and Neggo. That same year, Jürna became engaged with Oskar Klohn and settled in Germany, and gave birth to their son in 1929.

At that time, it was not easy for young women to study abroad. A striking example is that of Aino Siimola. Under Estonian law, women required a permit from their husband – or, if unmarried, from their father – in order to be issued a passport. When Siimola's father refused to grant permission, she married Julius Richard Sander, thereby securing the legal right to travel. (Laantee Reintamm 2020, personal communication) In the early theatre programs of *Tanzbühne Laban*, she is listed under the name Aino Sander. Her story not only highlights the challenges young women faced at the time but also her determination and willingness to defy familial and societal constraints. It also illustrates the powerful appeal and influence of the emerging modern dance movement.

The years of study in Germany brought considerable hardship. Days were long, and the rapidly escalating inflation threatened basic subsistence. Neggo recalls beginning each day with four hours of physical training, followed by rehearsals, as all dancers were actively involved in Laban's dance ensemble. Laban was unable to provide his dancers with salaries, offering only reimbursement for expenses and a modest allowance (Preston-Dunlop 2008, 87). As inflation worsened, financial resources dwindled, and the dancers suffered frequently from hunger (Preston-Dunlop 2008, 81, 90; -on 1934, 267). The German mark depreciated so quickly that it was impossible to buy a theatre ticket in advance for the following day, as the price could have doubled overnight (Preston-Dunlop 2008, 81). Paradoxically, the same inflation that had initially made studying in Germany affordable for Estonian dancers had by then escalated into hyperinflation, destabilizing the very conditions that had enabled their education.



Figure 6. Gerd Negro's students in a dance pose, 1927. Photo by Karl Akel. Eesti Ajaloomuseum (Estonian History Museum) AM 12854:173 F 5496:173.



Figure 7. Gerd Negro's students in a dance pose, 1927. Photo by Karl Akel. Eesti Rahva Muuseum (Estonian National Museum) ERM Fk 3102:29.

Other notable dancers and choreographers of the mid-1920s include Elmerice Parts and **Herman** (known from 1940 as Heigo, also as Heiko) **Kolt**²³ (known also as Oginsky and Kolt-Oginsky, 1902–1977), who collaborated on performances in 1926 and 1927.²⁴ Some sources state that Kolt studied under Serge Wolkonsky in St. Petersburg in the mid-1910s (Kolt n. d.; Brys 1956). In 1925, he studied dance in Warsaw under a ballerina named Cooper, and from 1928 to 1930, he trained under Ellys Gregor in Berlin (ETMM 8462 T 184:1/56:4), with whom he later performed. His dance partners included, in addition to Parts and Gregor, Lilian Looring, Nora Liina, and Elly Lukk from Estonia; Sedà Zaré, a dancer of Armenian origin; and Helene Schelda, Latvian born dancer. In the early 1940s, Kolt became a recognized dancer and choreographer at the opera house in Graz, Austria (Peters 1954). He continued his career in Belgium, where he was regarded as the pioneer of a new, expressive art of dance and dynamic flag play (Verstraete 1987).

Parts and Kolt's work coincided with the dominance of *Ausdruckstanz*, however, they cannot be classified as representatives of this movement. Instead of using the body merely as a tool to visualise mental and emotional processes, they treated it as a source of inspiration, exploring themes such as the effects of drug use, sensuality, and mechanized movement (Articles II and III provide a more detailed analysis of their joint performances). Their performances exhibited notable parallels with those of avant-garde dancers such as Anita Berber²⁵ and Valeska Gert^{26, 27}. In order to attain a more comprehensive understanding of Parts' and Kolt's artistic contributions, and to evaluate the extent to which their work may be classified as avant-garde, further research is required.

²³ Herman Kolt (baptized under the name Gold) was a son of Augustus Kolt, born in Estonia, and Evdokiya (also, Eudookia) Kolt, born in St Petersburg. Both he and his brother Alexander were born in Warsaw. According to George Kolt (n. d.), Augustus was "almost certainly associated with the Ciniselli Circus in Warsaw from the eighteen nineties to 1914, when the family moved to Tartu."

²⁴ Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt performed together also in the autumn of 1929 (Semper 1929, 1307–1309)

²⁵ Anita Berber (1899–1928) was a German actress, dancer, and writer. She studied dance at Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's school in Hellerau and ballet in Berlin with Rita Sacchetto. In 1916, Berber had made her debut as a cabaret dancer. Her dances – titled as *Cocaine* and *Morphium* – challenged conventional boundaries through androgyny and total nudity. Berber's path crossed with Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt in 1926 when they performed in Alkazar, a cabaret in Hamburg.

²⁶ Valeska Gert (1892–1978) was a German dancer, pantomime, cabaret artist, actress, and pioneering performance artist.

²⁷ Concerning Anita Berber as avant-garde artist, see Wohler 2009, 67–88; and concerning both Berber and Valeska Gert, see Kolb 2009, 167–221.



Figure 8. Herman Kolt in a dance pose, late 1920s. Photographer unknown. Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (National Digital Archive, Poland) 1-E-2939.

By the mid-1920s, modern dance had firmly established itself as both a recognized and popular art form. Its pioneers succeeded in reaching a broader audience, attracting significant attention and fostering deeper cultural appreciation. There was no longer any doubt that dance was a legitimate art form. For the most part, the dance of this period was met with enthusiasm and garnered active support from critics and journalists. This cultural shift reflected broader changes in society's perception of the performing arts, as dance moved from the margins of entertainment into the core of national cultural production. Throughout this era, the dominant dance trends were plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz*, which shaped the evolving dance landscape.

2.4 The 1930s

Although my research focuses on the 1920s, an overview of the following decade is necessary, especially given the scarcity of information about it. But before turning to dance developments, it is worth noting the major political events of the era. Depression severely affected Estonia's economy, leading to declining incomes, rising unemployment, and worsening living standards. This led to political turmoil. In March 1934, a pre-emptive military coup d'état was conducted by Konstantin Päts and Johan Laidoner. This marked the beginning of the "Era of Silence." In 1939, the Soviet Union forced a mutual assistance treaty on Estonia, establishing Soviet military bases and ultimately leading to occupation of the country in June 1940.

During the 1930s, the dance landscape reached unprecedented professionalism. The systematic dance education introduced in the mid-1920s had produced a growing pool of trained dancers and choreographers, many of whom secured positions in professional theatres as performers, choreographers, or movement directors in the following decade. Many graduates opened dance and/or gymnastics studios following their studies, thereby making dance and physical education more accessible to the general public. The popularity of dance and gymnastics reflected a wider cultural association between physical activity and modernity (Kannike and Uiho 2022, 229).

By contrast with the 1920s, the sharp distinctions between dance genres (ballet vs. modern dance) and dance trends (plastic dance vs. *Ausdruckstanz*) begun to blur. Despite earlier criticisms of ballet for neglecting a holistic bodily expression (Neggo 1927), ballet technique increasingly found its place in modern dance training. For instance, by 1929, students at Neggo's dance studio were receiving instruction in ballet alongside other movement techniques (Gerd Neggo 1929). The prevailing belief was that a dancer should train in both disciplines, that did not mean, though, that ballet technique was incorporated into the performances of modern dancers.

Ausdruckstanz, dominant since the mid-1920s, was clearly losing its appeal. Audiences began to favour works with greater clarity (J. P. 1928; R. K.-P. 1929).²⁸ This doesn't necessarily mean, though, that Rudolf Laban's or Mary Wigman's principles completely lost their significance, rather some ideas that *Ausdruckstanz* was associated with, became less desirable. The decade's dominant productions were large-scale narrative choreographies, or "pantomimes," featuring coherent storylines, clearly defined characters, and specific settings.²⁹

²⁸ In the Weimar Republic similarly, criticism of modern dance took a more concrete shape (Kolb 2009, 241). Alexandra Kolb (2009, 223) links the criticism in Germany with the onset of New Objectivity, which involved a transition from expressionism to a more "objective" treatment of reality.

²⁹ Karl Toepfer (2019) offers an extensive overview of pantomime's history in his remarkable book *Pantomime: The History and Metamorphosis of a Theatrical Ideology*, which spans over 1 300 pages.



Figure 9. A scene from a dance performance *The Organ Grinder*, staged and choreographed by Gerd Neggo, 1936. Photo by J & P Parikas. ETMM 4868 Fk 1465/kl.

In the early 1930s, Neggo remained one of Estonia's leading choreographers. In collaboration with her dance studio and the Drama Studio Theatre (renamed the Estonian Drama Theatre in 1937), she staged and choreographed *Nõiarõng* (*The Organ Grinder*) with music by Jaap Kool in 1929 (restaged in 1936); *Õudne külalaine* (*Don Juan*), a ballet-pantomime by L. Angiolini with music by Gluck in 1930; *Lumemees* (*The Snowman*) by Erich Korngold in 1931; and *Coppélia*, a comic ballet by Léo Delibes, in 1933.

The modern dancers' engagement with ballet was not unique to Estonia. Kurt Jooss was also convinced that modern dance techniques alone were insufficient and pursued ballet studies in Vienna and Paris after leaving Laban's dance ensemble. Jooss gained international recognition with his ballet *Der grüne Tisch* (*The Green Table*, premiered in 1932), which was performed in Estonia in 1937, together with other choreographic works. For Estonian dancers and choreographers, Jooss appears to have been a particularly influential figure. According to Salme Reek, a former student of Neggo, Jooss had a profound impact on Neggo (ETMM 8147 T426:1/10:1).

Alongside Kurt Jooss, Mary Wigman was highly regarded by Estonian dancers in the 1930s, many of whom sought to study with her or attend her courses. Among them was **Laine Lind** (later Mets or Metz, 1915–2004), a former student of Neggo. Lind studied in Dresden from 1934 to 1937 and, upon completing her training, returned to Estonia to open her own dance studio in Tallinn (Uus

tantsustuudio 1937). In 1944, she fled to Sweden and later emigrated to Canada (Siit ja sealt 1948).

Although solo dance was no longer the dominant form, it did not disappear entirely. Among the notable Estonian soloists of the period were **Nora Liina** and **Edith Oltorp**. Nora Liina (born Raudsepp, later Kaplinski) (1906–1982) studied under Neggo before training in ballet in Paris under Nikolai Legat (1869–1937), ballet dancer, choreographer and teacher born in Russia, and later in Essen under Kurt Jooss (Tõusew täht Eesti... 1934). Oltorp (1902–1980), also a former student of Neggo, worked as a teacher of dance and gymnastics. She did not give her first solo dance recital until 1937. In 1938, Oltorp took a course under Kurt Jooss at Dartington Hall, England, where he had emigrated (Eestlanna Kurt... 1938). Meanwhile, Ella Ilbak gave her final performances in Estonia in 1933, though she continued to perform abroad for several more years.

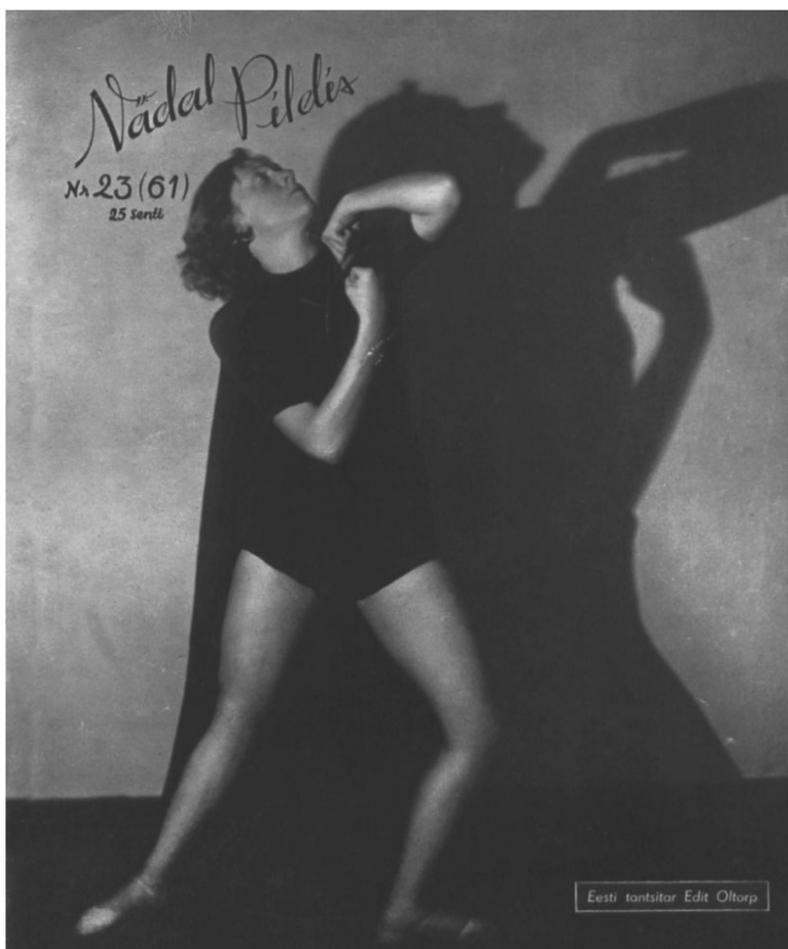


Figure 10. Edith Oltorp in a dance pose. Cover of the magazine *Nädal Pildis* (23), December 8, 1937.

In the 1930s, questions began to arise about the development of a distinctly Estonian form of theatrical dance (Pert 1934, 160–161). This issue was of particular significance to Gerd Neggo, who created numerous works inspired by Estonian folk traditions. She is best remembered for *Kalevipoja süit* (*Suite of Kalevipoeg*), which incorporated stylized folk-dance elements. The piece was based on the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*, set to music by Estonian composers Evald Aav and Eugen Kapp, and premiered in 1934 (ETMM 8679 T426:1/5). Elmerice Parts also composed, taught, and performed stylized national dances with her students. In 1935, she published *Laste tantsud* (*Children's Dances*), a book reflecting her engagement with pedagogical and folkloric approaches to movement.

Notably, both Neggo and Parts were already experimenting with the integration of folk-dance elements into modern dance in the 1920s. In 1924, Parts choreographed *Pulmapoiss* (*Wedding Guest*) (H. R. 1924), and in 1927, Neggo created *Variatsioonid Eesti rahva rütmidest* (*Variations on Estonian folk rhythms*), set to music by the Estonian composer Adolf Vedro (theatre program from Alvar Loog's private collection). However, it was not until the 1930s that public interest in articulating a distinctly national dance form intensified significantly. As in many parts of Europe, nationalist sentiments intensified in Estonia as well during this decade.

In summary, the decade was defined by several key transitions: a shift from solo performances to large-scale choreographies (referred to at the time as “pantomimes”), and the incorporation of ballet techniques – once rejected by early modern dancers – into the curricula of modern dance studios. At the same time, the search for a distinctly Estonian form of modern dance inspired choreographers to use elements of folk dance, a process that positioned dance as a medium of cultural identity.



Figure 11. Eduard Ahas' painting of Elmerice Parts performing in stylized folk costume. In private possession of Merike Kull.

2.5 Summary

Modern dance began to emerge in Estonia during the 1910s, gradually establishing itself as a distinct artistic form. By the late 1930s, the genre had undergone rapid development, progressing through at least two distinct phases before its suppression in the 1940s.

This period witnessed a profound shift in attitudes toward theatrical dance. In the 1910s, debates persisted over whether dance could be considered a legitimate art form; by the 1920s, these questions had largely been resolved. This transformation elevated dance to a respected and integral component of Estonia's cultural landscape. Consequently, dancers, choreographers, and teachers gained societal recognition and respect. For many women, the profession offered unprecedented visibility and admiration, providing a platform for creative expression and professional acknowledgment that had previously been unavailable.

As demonstrated in this subchapter, the Estonian modern dance scene was closely connected to broader European developments. Estonian dancers trained with some of the era's most renowned artists, immersing themselves in contemporary international trends and techniques. Upon returning to Estonia, many played a pivotal role in introducing and teaching these innovations, while others continued their careers abroad in prestigious dance ensembles or schools. Through these exchanges, Estonia remained linked to the wider European cultural landscape, with its dancers both contributing to and drawing from the evolving traditions of the period.

In June 1940, Soviet troops occupied Estonia, a period that lasted until the Nazi invasion in July–October 1941. The Soviet Red Army began its reoccupation in January 1944. In the autumn of that year, fearing the advancing Red Army, approximately 80 000 Estonians fled their country, among them Gerd Negro and Elmerice Parts.

The Soviet occupation removed modern dance from Estonian theatre stages, as the genre – like modernist art in general – was deemed incompatible with Soviet cultural policy and therefore prohibited. However, the embodied knowledge of modern dance, preserved by dancers, choreographers, and educators who continued their professional activities under the new regime, proved more resistant to erasure.³⁰ Consequently, it can be argued that modern dance maintained a residual, though often obscured, presence in occupied Estonia through the continued practices and pedagogies of these individuals.

³⁰ Among them one finds **Helmi Tohvelman** (1900–1983) and **Ida Urbel** (1900–1983), both of whom played significant roles in Soviet Estonia. Urbel studied under Gerd Negro from 1924 to 1926 and held various positions at the Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu, where she worked from 1935 until 1980. Tohvelman first trained with Ida Erlemann in Tartu and Negro in Tallinn, and later attended courses with Mary Wigman in Dresden. During the Soviet occupation, Tohvelman served for many years as a movement director at the *Noorsooteater* (Estonian Youth Theatre). However, she is particularly remembered for her influential pedagogical work at the Estonian National Theatre Institute and at the theatre faculty of the Tallinn State Conservatoire. (Urbel, Ida n.d.; Tohvelman, Helmi 2000)

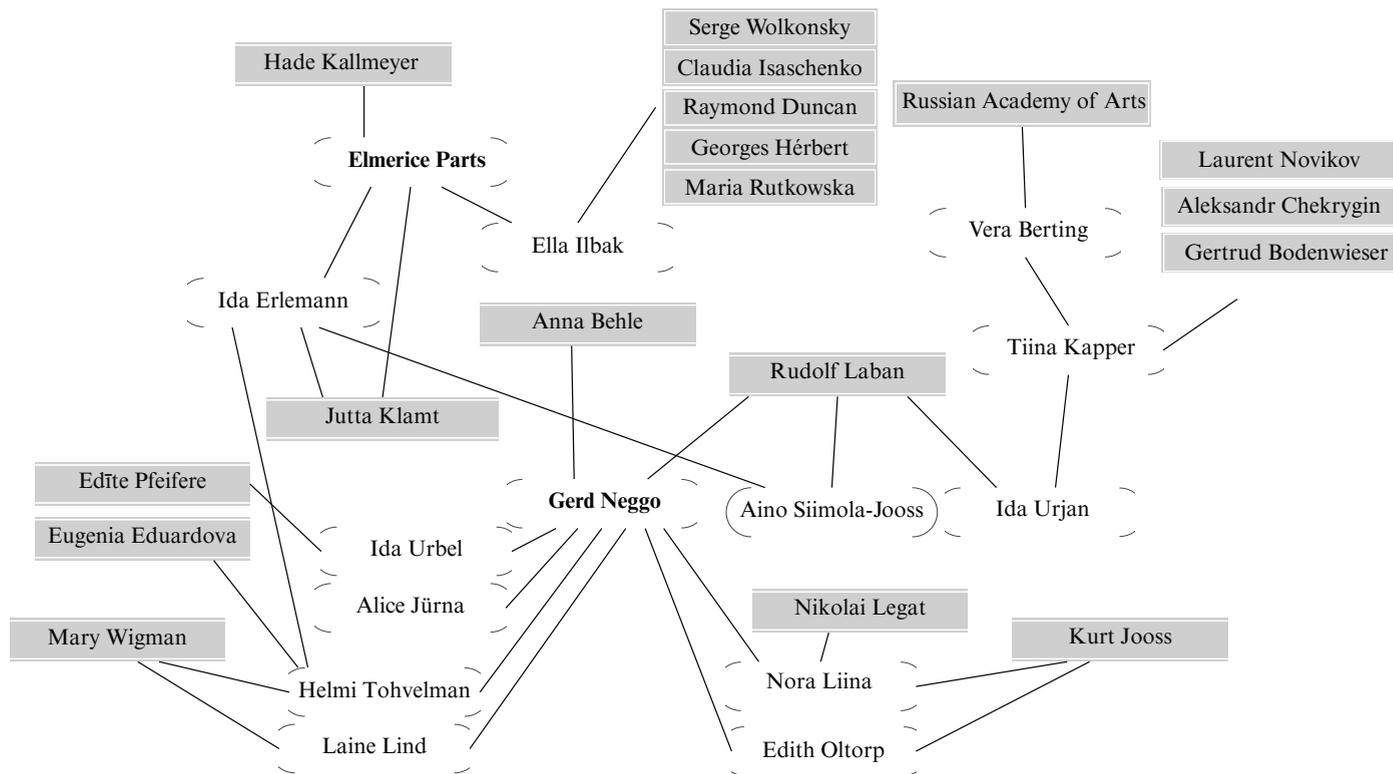


Figure 12. Estonian modern dancers and their teachers. The names of dancers and teachers active in Estonia are displayed on a white background, while their foreign teachers appear on a grey background.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research addresses a significant gap in the study of Estonian modern dance history by examining its introduction and development from the early 1910s through the late 1930s, with particular emphasis on the 1920s. It investigates the transmission of modern dance trends to Estonia and delves into their wider cultural and social significance. The thesis explores how modern dance challenged dominant conceptions of artistic legitimacy and womanhood, both on and beyond the stage. Set against the backdrop of prevailing social and cultural norms, modern dance occupied a space of continual negotiation – challenging and redefining the boundaries between the “appropriate” and “inappropriate,” the “moral” and “immoral,” as well as what was recognized as “art” and what was dismissed as “non-art.”

The dissertation aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How did modern dance travel to Estonia and establish itself in the 1910s and during the first half of the 1920s? (Subchapter 2 of the introductory chapter and Article I.)
- 2) How did Estonian critics describe and interpret modern dance during this period? (Subchapter 2 of the introductory chapter and Article I, Article II, and Article III.)
- 3) How did female modern dancers portray femininity on stage and negotiate their lives beyond the stage? (Subchapter 2 of the introductory chapter and Article IV.)

The theoretical framework is grounded in several key concepts, including Edward Said’s traveling theory and its development by Dongchao Min, the concept of transgression, Jacques Rancière’s notion of the regimes of the arts, and Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Leaning on Said’s traveling theory alongside Min’s development of it, this research analyses how the ideas and principles associated with modern dance changed when moving from one cultural context to another, with a particular focus on Rudolf Laban’s ideas as they travelled from the Weimar Republic to Estonia in the mid-1920s. Chris Jenks’ concept of transgression is applied to analyse how modern dance challenged prevailing aesthetic, moral, and social norms, particularly through an examination of the reception of joint performances by Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt. To understand the broader cultural and aesthetic implications, Rancière’s theory of the regimes of the arts is used to explore how art disrupts the distribution of the sensible. Finally, Butler’s theory of gender performativity is employed to investigate how Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo enacted gender both on and off stage, contributing to the shifting cultural image of women.

3.1 Traveling theories (Edward Said, Dongchao Min)

When I began my research on the history of modern dance in Estonia, it quickly became evident that, for Estonians, modern dance was an imported phenomenon. Trends arrived from abroad – plastic dance from Germany and Russia, and *Ausdruckstanz* from Germany. This underscores the character of modern dance as a travelling phenomenon and raises the question of how movement across borders shapes what is transmitted.

In Article I, I explored the transformations in Rudolf Laban’s theory as it travelled from the Weimar Republic to Estonia, drawing on Edward Said’s (1983, 226–247, 1994, 251–65) concept of traveling theory and Dongchao Min’s (2017, 1–16, 2014, 584–592) development of it. Laban’s ideas reached Estonia in 1924 with Gerd Negro. Since their introduction is related to a single individual, their trajectory can be traced more clearly than that of other ideas that preceded *Ausdruckstanz*.

Said (1983, 226) claims that “movement into a new environment is never unimpeded.” His central question is what happens to a theory when it is used in different circumstances and for new purposes, and what this “can ... tell us about theory itself” (Said 1983, 230). His main example is Georg Lukács’s phenomenon of reification as explained in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). Said’s work has inspired extensive research on the travel of scientific ideas (Harding 2019, 613). He challenges the conventional notion of theory as fixed, instead arguing that “the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity” (Said 1983, 226). He identifies “three or four stages common to the way any theory or idea travels” (Said 1983, 226). There is a point of origin; a distance traversed; conditions of acceptance or resistance; and transformations through “new uses, new position in a new time and place” (Said 1983, 226–227). These movements are characterised by “selective appropriations, productive misunderstandings and discontinuous translations according to historical and local circumstances” (Neumann and Nünning 2012, 5).

Dongchao Min, whose work examines the travel of the ideas and knowledge of feminism from the West to China, has developed an alternative traveling theory. She expands the framework to include “the people in the places where the theories are received and how these people either welcome, adopt, or are suspicious of the theories that travel” (Min 2019, 6). Furthermore, her alternative traveling theory studies the links between discursive and material conditions and explores “the complexities of the relationship between power and influence that underpins what does and what does *not* travel” (Min 2019, 7).

Min, like Said, focuses on circulation and transformation of scientific texts across cultural and historical contexts. For this reason, not all of their suggestions directly apply to the present study. Thus, I highlight certain particularities that are specific to the field of dance theory.

Dance is a bodily practice that requires systematic, long-term training under the guidance of a mentor or teacher. It involves forms of knowledge that can be

transmitted only through direct, person-to-person interaction. Dance theory, therefore, is inseparable from the material that holds it – the dancer’s body. The dancer’s body functions as a living reservoir, a vessel that holds and enacts this knowledge. As a result, one cannot truly obtain someone’s choreographic principles and ideas solely by reading books. Written texts can certainly spark interest and provide valuable information about existing dance theories, but they cannot fully convey the embodied knowledge at the core of dance practice.

This makes the transmission of dance theory dependant on the dancer’s ability to travel and engage in embodied learning. Consequently, the movement of dance theory is shaped by political, social, and personal conditions that either enable or restrict such travel. By contrast, the dissemination of scientific ideas is less constrained: the physical book containing a scientific theory is separable from the knowledge itself, and the materiality of the book neither does affect nor alter the idea it conveys. For this reason, scientific ideas can be transmitted effectively in written form.

To travel means to become popular and gain recognition in new cultural context; merely crossing a border does not constitute travelling. Min (2017, 7) differentiates between translated texts and texts that have “travelled well,” that is, texts that have been translated and texts that have been translated and have become significant. Dance theory “travels well” when it is actively practiced in a new context. For this to happen, it must appeal broadly to both practitioners and audiences. Cultural journalists play a pivotal role in this process: through their writings, they have the power to introduce and popularize these theories, shaping public perception and fostering broader recognition. In contrast, scientific ideas do not rely on widespread recognition and are independent of the perspectives of cultural journalists.

The concept of traveling theory, as developed by Said and later adapted by Min, underscores that a theory changes when transplanted into a different context. This suggests that, like any other dance trend, *Ausdruckstanz* manifested in subtly different forms across various countries. It serves as a reminder to exercise caution when applying definitions from one cultural context to another. Viewed through the lens of traveling theory, modern dance emerges simultaneously as a global and local phenomenon: global in its widespread practice across continents, yet local in how it acquires unique traits within each cultural and geographical setting.

Said and Min focus on the modifications and reinterpretations that theories undergo as they traverse cultural and geographical boundaries. They pay less attention to the potential transformations that a concept itself might generate within the receiving cultural context. The following sections examine the changes a travelling theory can bring about in the target culture.

3.2 Transgression (Chris Jenks)

Modern dance introduced genuinely novel ideas into the Estonian cultural landscape. The emergence of new cultural phenomena often serves as a kind of litmus test, exposing the elements that are readily assimilated into a society and those that encounter resistance or rejection. Although modern dance was relatively swiftly embraced by the broader public in Estonia, its development was not without scandal. One of the most contested disruptions was the joint performances of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt, which appeared to transgress the fragile boundary between art and non-art. Many critics viewed their performances as excessively erotic and acrobatic, thereby questioning its legitimacy as art. Tartu's education authority even prohibited students from attending their dance performance on moral grounds (Aa. 1927).

The term "transgression" comes from Latin *transgressio*, meaning "a going over, across" or "a violation of the law." In cultural theory, it denotes the act of crossing boundaries – whether physical, mental, aesthetic, social, or political. This means that, in order to exist, transgression necessitates a norm to challenge or a border to cross. Chris Jenks (2003, 2), author of the book *Transgression*, argues that these norms are often veiled and invisible until someone performs a transgressive act which brings the dominant norms and rules into the open. Importantly, Jenks (2003, 8) reminds us that the meaning of a transgressive act does not reside solely in the actor's intentionality but often in the context of its reception. In other words, by making the governing norms and rules visible, a transgressive act deepens our understanding of the society in which it occurs.

The concept of transgression is a powerful tool for analysing cultural phenomena, as it creates a vital link between art and society. It enables us to see how art and society reflect and challenge one another. Moreover, it is important to consider not only what was deemed transgressive, but also what was regarded as non-transgressive, as both reveal underlying cultural values and boundaries.

The analyses in Article II and Article III indicate that eroticism, in and of itself, was not inherently problematic for critics and reviewers; on the contrary, it was often regarded as an integral part of the art of dance. The source of contention lay instead in the female dancer's autonomous decision to portray herself sensually – even overtly erotic – outside the accepted frame. Had Parts and Kolt chosen to perform their erotic dances in the "Orientalist" tradition – where female sensuality is mediated through culturally accepted narratives – the critical response might have been more favourable. Instead, Parts presented the image of a modern Western woman: a sensual, corporeal subject.

At this juncture, it is crucial to acknowledge that most critics were men, while the dancers were women; their critiques, therefore, often reflect not only their aesthetic preferences but also their conceptions of how femininity should be portrayed on stage.

Social norms evolve; what is considered transgressive today may be regarded as ordinary in the future. As Julian Wolfreys (2008, 10) claims, "the idea of the transgressive" has no stable identity, form or meaning. In the 1910s, modern

dance was viewed by some cultural journalists as inherently transgressive. In 1913, a performance by Maggie Gripenberg, a Finnish pioneer of modern dance, was banned for school students in the city of Pärnu on moral grounds (-ik. 1913). Her dances were deemed unchaste and morally questionable (R. S. 1913). Isadora Duncan similarly faced accusations of excessive eroticism (Järvinen 2023), suggesting that such criticisms were not unique to Estonia. However, shortly thereafter, debates concerning chastity largely disappeared from Estonian print media.³¹ This development underscores the fluidity of the concept of “transgression,” as what counts as a boundary-crossing act depends on the prevailing values and norms of a society, which are subject to rapid change.

Moreover, perceptions of what is considered transgressive are shaped not only by the temporal context but also by differences among individuals and groups within the same period. As Wolfreys (2008, 10) asserts, “[w]hat is transgression for one is affirmation for another.” In the case of Parts and Kolt, it is noteworthy that only approximately half of the reviews (six out of thirteen) were critical. Their supporters argued that the duo played a significant role in revitalising Estonian theatre dance. Moreover, the performers themselves did not view their dances as transgressive. As Parts (1926) explained, her intent was not to shock or disturb audiences, but rather to rejuvenate and elevate the art of dance in Estonia.

Notably, the perceived transgressiveness of a performance depends not only on time and audience but also on venue, which often plays a crucial role in defining the function of the performance (entertainment or art). A performance considered transgressive on a theatre stage may be judged differently in a cabaret, even by the same spectators.³² Several Estonian critics (Semper 1926, 334; R. K.-P. 1927b; Rumor 1927) remarked that they would have enjoyed Parts and Kolt’s dances more in a cabaret setting. This discrepancy indicates that certain topics or forms of expression were not inherently inappropriate but were regarded as unsuitable inappropriate for theatrical presentation. Within this framework, theatre can be understood as a conservative space, regulated by established conventions and normative boundaries.³³

Analysing the formative years of modern dance through the lens of transgression yields critical insights into the prevailing normative structures and societal conventions of the period. It reveals not only which behaviours and artistic expressions were deemed acceptable but also highlights the tensions that occurred when these boundaries were challenged.

³¹ The topic briefly resurfaced in connection with Ella Ilbak’s first dance performance in 1918.

³² In the Weimar Republic, Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt performed also in cabarets. For more information, see footnote nr 25.

³³ A valuable contribution to this topic is offered by Ulrike Wohler (2009) in her article “Tanz zwischen Avantgarde und Klassische Moderne: Anita Berber und Mary Wigman.”

3.3 Regimes of the arts (Jacques Rancière)

Jacques Rancière conceives of art as inherently political, not because it conveys explicit political messages, but because it possesses the capacity to unsettle established orders. Central to his theory is the concept of the “distribution of the sensible” – the system that determines what is visible, sayable, and thinkable within a given social order. Art, according to the French philosopher, becomes political when it intervenes in this distribution.

In the realm of aesthetics, Rancière differentiated three “distributions of the sensible”: the ethical regime of images, the representative or poetic regime of art, and the aesthetic regime of art. He coined the notion “regimes of the arts” to describe how different historical periods conceive of art and determine what is recognized as such. As he puts it: “There is no art without eyes that see it as art” (Rancière 2007, 72). The notion challenges some of the prevalent approaches to art within contemporary humanities, particularly those that interpret artistic practices in linear, mono-causal historical narratives (Deranty 2010, 116); it first emerged in his work *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000).

In the context of this research, the representative aesthetic regimes of the arts are the most relevant; therefore, the following discussion will focus on these two. Key indications regarding the fundamental logic of the “representative” or “poetic” regime can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Deranty 2010, 121). For Aristotle, the decisive factor was the selection of a proper subject, that is, the choice of the “important” actions performed by “relevant” characters (Deranty 2010, 121). Rancière (2013, 17) explains that the representative regime is characterised by “forms of normativity that define the conditions according to which imitations can be recognized as exclusively belonging to an art and assessed, within this framework, as good or bad, adequate or inadequate.” In other words, the representative regime organizes the sensible by determining what can be considered a legitimate subject of art, which genre it belongs to, and how it should be represented (Tanke 2011, 80). Its principles of representation specify, for instance, what qualifies as a “high” or “low” subject and how each ought to be handled (Tanke 2011, 81). Within this system, a representation is evaluated based on how closely it adheres to established standards.

The aesthetic regime of art reverses the fundamental principles of the representative regime, invalidating most of its principles. According to Rancière (2013, 18–19), the aesthetic regime “identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres.” At its core, it abolishes the norms and transgresses the boundaries established by the representative regime. Aesthetics, in this case, arises from the recognition that there are no predetermined rules for presenting the objects, situations, and people of everyday life in art (Tanke 2011, 82). The aesthetic form of art involves ways of making and doing that challenge the relationship between various objects, subjects, modes of presentation, and the values assigned to people and things (Tanke 2011, 85). With this in mind, transgressive acts can be seen as inherently

linked to aesthetics. Transgression involves crossing boundaries with the aim of reaching a space beyond norms and rules, where these constraints no longer apply.

It is important to bear in mind that the representative regime did not cease to exist with the birth of the aesthetic regime at the beginning of the 20th century (Deranty 2010, 125). For Rancière, the regimes are not strictly separate historical stages; rather, they convey frameworks for organizing perception, which may overlap and allow for exceptions (Tanke 2011, 77).

As previously discussed, modern dance emerged as a radically new artistic phenomenon. Nevertheless, a significant portion of its early manifestations aligned more closely with the representative regime of the art, rather than with the aesthetic regime. Several scholars have pointed out that both plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz* did not unsettle dominant representations of femininity; rather, their portrayals frequently conformed to prevailing norms. As sociologist and dance theorist Gabriele Klein (1994, 208) notes, “[t]he new ideals of *Ausdruckstanz* remained embedded within the bourgeois discourse on the ‘natural’ morality of the feminine.” Klein (1994, 208) further argues that the so-called “liberation of the body” merely marked a shift from old forms of subjugation to new ones.

By contrast, many avant-garde artists transgressed conventional boundaries of “legitimate” artistic expression, by disentangling art from fixed rules, hierarchies, subject matters, and genres. According to cultural sociologist Ulrike Wohler (2009, 75–76), avant-garde artists sought to abolish the distinction between “high and low, art and pornography.” In this sense, their work can be situated within what Rancière terms the aesthetic regime of art. They portrayed on stage activities and characters that had not previously been represented by dancers. For instance, Anita Berber and Elmerice Parts, together with their dance partners, performed the effects of drug use on stage; Valeska Gert, embodied a figure of a prostitute and enacted an orgasm as part of her performance.

What distinguishes plastic dancers and *Ausdruckstänzer* from avant-garde artists, in my view, is their different relationship to the body. As demonstrated in Article III, for plastic dancers and *Ausdruckstänzer*, the dancer’s body functioned primarily as a tool – an instrument through which internal emotional or psychological states were externalized and made visible. In contrast, avant-garde artists reoriented this conception by positioning the body not merely as a vehicle for expression of internal states, but as a generative site of artistic creation in its own right. Their work shifted the focus towards the immediacy of physical experiences and sensations. Rather than using the body to convey emotional content, they made bodily sensations the very subject matter of their performances. In doing so, they challenged traditional aesthetic hierarchies that reduced the body to a tool for expression.

By transgressing established aesthetic norms, Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt contributed to a shift in the “distribution of the sensible” as defined by Rancière. This distribution, established by the representative regime, comprises the divisions and boundaries that determine, among other things, what is visible and audible within a given aesthetic-political order (Rockhill 2013, xi). When art contests this distribution, it challenges not only what is deemed sensible but also

what is thinkable and, consequently, what is possible (Tanke 2011, 76). In this sense, art has the capacity to render visible what was previously invisible and thereby enact a political intervention. More than that, by “fashioning new subjects, introducing new objects, and offering a new estimation of the capacities of those inhabiting the distribution,” art can challenge and potentially overturn the customary distribution of the sensible (Tanke 2011, 104). By foregrounding the physical (rather than purely expressive) dimension of the dancer’s body and presenting femininity as an embodied subject capable of agency, desire, and sensual experience, Parts and Kolt contributed to the re-distribution of the sensible.

Jacques Rancière’s concept of the regimes of the arts provides a framework for understanding the political significance of avant-garde dance. Female avant-garde artists transgressed established boundaries by granting visibility to subject matter and characters previously considered unworthy of representation within the dominant aesthetic framework.

3.4 Gender performativity (Judith Butler)

Modern dance was not merely an aesthetic phenomenon; it also had profound social implications. In its formative years, modern dance played a crucial role in shaping women’s lives beyond the stage. It offered them opportunities to earn a living and live independently at a time when their employment options were severely limited.

Leaning on Judith Butler, I examined in Article IV, how Elmerice Parts and Gerd Negro “did” gender on and off the stage during the 1920s, in other words, how they represented femininity in their dance productions and how they embodied and navigated gender roles in their personal lives. According to the US-born feminist philosopher, gender is not a fact or a fixed entity, but rather a performative act – a way of “doing” rather than “being.” In making this claim, Butler highlights that dominant gender norms are contingent upon the repeated actions of individuals. Analysing the artistic work and autobiographies of female modern dancers as a series of repeated actions reveals how they transgressed conventional gender norms in both artistic and social contexts.

According to Butler, gendered behaviour is learned behaviour; no-one is born as a “woman” or a “man,” but learns to act as one while growing up. The idea of gender is a sum of various acts of gender, Butler (2010, 190) asserts. Gendered acts define what a society in given time period understands as “feminine” or “masculine.” In other words, as gendered subjects, we create the idea of gender and, in doing so, define the content of the term. Butler understands gender as a normative construct; wherein repeated gendered acts constitute and reinforce the very norms they appear to express. The performative character of gender is connected to the fact that gender is achieved through repetition (Meyerhoff 2015, 2). (For more detailed analysis, see Article IV pages 225–226.)

In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Butler develops the concept of gender performativity. Rather than focusing on how acts of gender – and the

categories of “feminine” and “masculine” – change or acquire new meanings over time, Butler (2011, 177) emphasizes that gendered subjects must continually “cite” normative frameworks in order to be recognized as viable subjects within a given social context. However, these norms are not immutable, and, over time, their meanings shift. I claim that, in the early 20th century, modern dancers contributed significantly to this process of transformation by challenging traditional gender expressions through their artistic practices and personal lives.

The question of how norms become destabilized is explored in Butler’s later work, particularly in the chapter “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” published in *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Butler (2016, 18) contends that the very existence of norms and normative behaviour demonstrates the power that norms exert over individuals; they act upon us, shape us, and render us “susceptible to their action.” Within this domain of affectability, in this realm of “being affected” something queer can occur, “where the norm is refused or revised, or where new formulations of gender begin” (Butler 2016, 18). These moments of disruption give rise to forms of gender that “break with mechanical patterns of repetition, deviating from, resignifying, and sometimes quite emphatically breaking those citational chains of gender normativity, making room for new forms of gendered life” (Butler 2016, 18). This is what seems to have happened at the beginning of the 20th century, when new women – represented, among others, by modern dancers – emerged.

Modern dancers enacted gender in ways that diverged significantly from prevailing societal norms. By engaging in a publicly visible profession, they resisted the traditional domestic roles expected of women at the time. In pursuing artistic ambitions, seeking formal education, and establishing professional careers as dancers, choreographers, and educators, they advanced alternative models of femininity defined by independence, creativity, and intellectual engagement. This defiance of convention reshaped cultural perceptions of women in the arts and laid the groundwork for future generations to imagine new possibilities for themselves within both artistic and public life. Through their work, modern dancers expanded the very meaning of womanhood in the cultural sphere.

In the context of modern dance, performers redefined the representation of women on stage, offering portrayals that frequently challenged male-defined ideals of femininity. Through expressive movement, bold choreography, and innovative performances, they presented alternative models of womanhood that reflected a more multifaceted and empowering vision of femininity (see Article II and Article III for further discussion). In doing so, they also bridged the gap between their stage representations and their off stage personas.

I agree, it is challenging to determine the extent to which modern dancers and their artistic work contributed to societal change. However, as public figures whose private and professional lives were frequently documented in the local press, it is reasonable to suggest that they played a significant role in reshaping cultural imaginaries surrounding womanhood. Their visibility and influence extended beyond the stage, as their performances and personal stories often became a focal point of public discourse. In this way, their work and presence in

the public eye likely had a lasting impact, inspiring not only future generations of women in the arts but also contributing to a wider cultural shift toward more diverse and empowering representations of women in society.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of this study provides a valuable lens for examining how cultural and societal boundaries were negotiated at the beginning of the twentieth century in relation to the emergence of modern dance as a new cultural phenomenon, thereby offering deeper insight into its impact within the Estonian context. Edward Said's concept of traveling theory, together with Dongchao Min's alternative model, provides a framework for examining how dance theory is transformed when entering new cultural and geographical contexts. Complementing this perspective, the concepts of transgression, regimes of the arts, and gender performativity illuminate the impact and transformative effects of modern dance within its receiving context. The notion of transgression highlights the shifting boundaries between art and non-art, while Jacques Rancière's idea of the regimes of the arts situates avant-garde dance within a broader political and aesthetic framework. Similarly, Judith Butler's concept of gender performance offers a lens for understanding how Estonian modern dancers introduced new ways of "doing" gender, both on stage and in their everyday lives.

4. SOURCES

In this subchapter, I introduce the main sources of the thesis and explore the types of information they yield. At this juncture, it is important to underscore that any attempt to reconstruct events from the distant past – as well as to engage with lives and experiences significantly different from our own – requires a comprehensive and reflective engagement with all available materials. Consequently, this subchapter introduces not only the sources referenced in the thesis, but also those that have contributed to my deeper contextual understanding and facilitated a more nuanced connection to the subjects of this research.

The investigation began with a thorough search in the following archives or institutions: the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, the National Archives of Estonia, the Estonian Cultural History Archives, the Saaremaa Museum, and the Deutsche Tanzarchiv Köln. Additionally, I consulted the personal archive of Alvar Loog, an Estonian opera and literary critic.

In addition to physical collections, I utilized various digital resources, search engines and online archives. These included the digital archive of the National Library of Estonia (digar.ee); arthistoricum.net – Fachinformationsdienst Kunst, Fotografie, Design; the virtual reading room of the National Archives of Estonia (<https://www.ra.ee/vau/>); the Museums Public Portal (<https://www.muis.ee/>); the digital collections of the National Library of Finland (<https://www.kansallis.kirjasto.fi/>); the National Digital Archives of Poland (<https://www.nac.gov.pl/>), and the Digital Library of Latvia (<https://digitalbiblioteka.lv/>).

From these collections, I identified the following types of sources: periodicals (newspapers and magazines); first-person accounts (letters and articles written by the dancers); government documents (applications, certificates, and address sheets); printed ephemera (e.g. theatre programs); visual sources (photographs, paintings, and drawings); and published and unpublished memoirs. No film footage of the dancers has been preserved.³⁴

Rather than dividing sources into “primary” and “secondary,” I approach them as integral parts of broader discourses, following theatre and dance scholar Lena Hammergren’s (2018b, 138) recommendation in her insightful article “Many Sources, Many Voices,” published in *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*.

³⁴ According to a newspaper announcement, Gerd Negro’s ensemble was filmed for the documentary *Kas tunned maad...* (*Do you know the country...*) in 1931 (Kinodes näeme 1931). In a letter to Mr. Virgo dated December 6, 1927, Ella Ilbak mentions that the Parisian magazine *L’Éclair* had proposed filming her (EKM EKLA f 155, M 4–7). It is not known whether the filming took place or not. Additionally, I learned from Merike Kull, through personal communication, that Elmerice Parts was also filmed.

4.1 Periodicals

A significant portion of information regarding Estonian modern dancers and their performances comes from historical Estonian-language newspapers and magazines. These reviews and critiques offer rare insights into performances, including descriptions of costumes, movements, and thematic content. As Karl Toepfer (1997, 334) asserts, “the most detailed and accurate descriptions of the dances themselves remain buried in local newspaper reviews, in difficult-to-obtain journals, and in photographs and drawings.” Yet, as theatre historian Thomas Postlewait (1990, 167) cautions, theatre reviews are challenging to interpret. As a form of subjective writing, they reflect the personal preferences, biases, and understandings of the individual reviewer with respect to the art of dance. Nevertheless, as such, these sources contribute to broader cultural and aesthetic discussions surrounding the emergence and development of modern dance in Estonia.

Regarding the primary research period (1920 to 1927), which is the focus of Articles I–IV, I identified 100 articles dedicated to Elmerice Parts (and later to Herman Kolt as well), published both before and after her (their) performances and 44 articles focused on Gerd Neggo. The comparatively smaller number of reviews concerning Neggo can likely be attributed to the later start of her solo career in Estonia. Additionally, I located relevant articles from both earlier and later decades that contribute to situate modern dance within Estonia’s broader historical narrative.

Most reviewers’ identities remain unknown, as it was customary to write under initials or pseudonyms, and some articles were left unsigned. Although it is impossible to determine how many reviews – if any – were written by women, the fact that most identified reviewers were male suggests that the majority were authored by men. This highlights a key limitation in using periodicals as sources: the gendered lens through which modern dance was often viewed and critiqued. Such bias undoubtedly influenced both its public reception and its broader representation in Estonian cultural discourse.

Among the reviewers and critics with known identities were art and literature critic Jaan Pert (alias J. P.); writers Karl August Hindrey (alias KAH), Artur Adson (alias ArA.), and Johannes Semper (alias Naata Nael); literature and theatre critics Rasmus Kangro-Pool (alias R. K.-P.) and Bernhard Linde; theatre figure and cultural journalist Voldemar Mettus (alias W. M-s.); and art and theatre critic Hanno Kompus. Several of them demonstrated a marked interest in modern dance. Kangro-Pool (R. K.-P. 1927a) observed Rudolf Laban’s performances and even had the opportunity to follow his lessons in Hamburg. Semper (1982a, 1982b) attended performances by Mary Wigman and *Tanzbühne Laban* in Berlin in 1921 and 1923. Visnapuu’s personal acquaintance with Isadora Duncan, a seminal figure in the development of modern dance, positioned him particularly close to the evolution of the dance scene (Visnapuu 1927).

In addition to recording reviewers’ and critics’ subjective impressions of performances, periodicals also provide factual accounts of the dancers’ education, international engagements, and performances both within Estonia and abroad.

Newspaper advertisements further contribute to this body of knowledge by detailing the venues and dates of performances, sometimes including the titles and sequence the dances presented.

4.2 Other sources

First-person accounts

Articles written by dancers and choreographers provide valuable insights into their personal perspectives on dance. These writings often reflect the choreographers' aesthetic values, creative processes, and theoretical engagements with dance. They also serve as platforms for artists to articulate their responses to contemporary artistic trends. For many, such texts functioned as strategic tools for visibility and legitimacy, especially for women and other marginalized figures in dance history. According to historian Elizabeth Claire (2017, 159), it was common at the time for "women choreographers, notably those experimenting with modern dance forms," to write about their artistry as a "means to promote their choreographies and guarantee their artistic posterity."

To the best of my knowledge, Elmerice Parts authored three texts: the article "Tantsust" ("On dance," 1922), an unpublished manuscript, "Mõningaid mõtteid tantsust" ("Some thoughts about dance," likely written in 1924, RA EAA.2111.1.4292), and "Elmerice Parts oma tantsu iseloomust" ("Elmerice Parts on the nature of her dance," 1926), written in response to Rasmus Kangro-Pool's negative review of her and Herman Kolt's performance. Why the daily newspaper *Postimees* declined to publish Parts' 1924 manuscript remains unclear. In 1935, Parts published a book *Laste tantsud (Children's Dances)*, a small volume featuring 26 dances she created for children of different ages.

In 1927, Gerd Neggo published the article "Märkmeid uuest kunsttantsust" ("Notes on the new artistic dance"), followed by "Märkmeid kehakultuurist ja kehatehnikast" ("Notes on physical culture and body techniques") in 1931. In 1935, she published a rather emotionally titled piece, "Lühidalt – midagi kohutavat. Kehatehnika ja kehakultuuri sihid" ("In short – something terrible. The goals of body technique and body culture"), which was followed a year later by "Kuidas jääda nooreks ja terveks" ("How to stay young and healthy"). Over time, her focus increasingly shifted toward body culture. Her 1956 article "Lavatantsust" ("About theatre dance"), written after emigrating to Sweden, demonstrates her continued engagement with dance.

In total, four interviews with Neggo have been identified. The first, "Moodsa kunsttantsu sepikojast" ("From the forge of modern dance") appeared in the daily newspaper *Päevaleht* in 1928. Another, "Rütmi ja muusika võlus. Kuidas Gerd Neggost sai tantsijanna" ("In the charm of rhythm and music. How Gerd Neggo became a dancer"), by an unidentified author (-on, 1934), was published in the magazine *Romaan*. In 1936, on the 10th anniversary of her dance studio, two more interviews were conducted: one in *Päevaleht* (titled "Tänane intervjuu," or

“Today’s interview”) and another in the daily newspaper *Uus Eesti* (titled “Kehatehnika kunstikõrguses,” or “Body Technique at an artistic level,” by A. V.).

The preserved correspondence centres primarily on professional matters, offering valuable insight into the daily life of dancers, choreographers, and dance teachers. Letters between Elmerice Parts and her husband (EKM EKLA f 224, m 68:32) and Mr. Leoke, as well as Gerd Neggo’s correspondence with Mr. Palu from Viljandi, reveal the logistical challenges involved in organizing dance performances in Estonia during the early 1920s (ETMM 8679 T426:1/9:1; ETMM 8679 T426:1/9:2; ETMM 8679 T426:1/9:3). Particularly revealing is Neggo’s 1925 letter to Mr. Virgo (EKM EKLA f 155, m 4:15), which shows that settling in Estonia after her studies in Germany was not necessarily part of her original plan.

Government documents and institutional records

Government documents and institutional records provide factual and administrative information. For example, the application submitted to the *Haridusministeeriumi Kutseoskuse Valitsus* (Ministry of Education’s Department of Qualifications), accompanied by copies of school certificates, offers a comprehensive overview of dancers’, choreographers’, and dance teachers’ career. A folder on Gerd Neggo contains, among other items, a copy of a certificate issued by *Tanzbühne Laban*, confirming Neggo’s membership in the dance ensemble from December 1923 to November 1924 (ETMM 8462 T184:1/111:6).

The manuscripts of the *Eesti biograafiline leksikon* (*Estonian Biographical Lexicon*, EKM EKLA f 194), published in four editions between 1926 and 1929, and *Eesti avalikud tegelased* (*Estonian Public Figures*, EKM EKLA f 193), published in 1932, constitute important sources of biographical information. Additional biographical details appear in the address sheets (in Estonian, *aadresslehed*, RA. TLA.1376). These sheets list basic information (such as name, address, and date of birth), along with details about profession, family status, ethnicity, and, in later records, religious affiliation.

Nevertheless, because address sheets were typically completed by the individuals themselves rather than by official authorities, the reliability of the information cannot be assumed. The same applies to lexicons, where entries were often composed by the dancers and choreographers themselves – or by close associates. For instance, Elmerice Parts, who was born in 1878, listed her year of birth as 1885 on an address sheet from 1921 (RA TLA.1376.1.189). Furthermore, in questionnaires submitted to the editors of the *Estonian Biographical Lexicon* (EKM EKLA f 194, m 19:30) and *Estonian Public Figures* (EKM EKLA f 193, m 106:58), she provided 1888 as her year of birth. These inconsistencies underscore the importance of critically assessing archival materials, particularly when dealing with personal data that may have been intentionally modified for social, professional, or personal reasons.

Printed ephemera

Theatre programs are valuable primary sources, providing researchers with details about the number, sequence, and titles of the dances performed. In some cases, they also list composers and the titles of the accompanying musical works. Eleven programs related to Elmerice Parts have been preserved, four documenting her performances with Herman Kolt. The archives also contain three theatre programs from Gerd Neggo's solo dance performances and twelve from the performances of her dance studio.

Visual sources

Photographs offer valuable means of examining how dancers chose to present themselves, capturing moments of self-representation. However, such representations are mediated through the photographer's gaze, with artistic and technical decisions – ranging from composition and lighting to framing – significantly shaping the final portrayal. Given the technological limitations of the period, all photographs were taken in controlled studio environments.

Drawings and paintings, by contrast, provide valuable insight into how dancers and choreographers were perceived by their contemporaries. Elmerice Parts was portrayed by three artists. Latvian painter and graphic artist Reinholds Kasparsons depicted her performing a waltz; she is shown mid-jump, smiling, and wearing a light Greek tunic. His drawing was published in a Latvian magazine *Svari* (Dejotaja Elmerice Parts 1921). Eduard Ahas, a young Estonian artist, painted her in a stylized folk costume, likely performing the dance *Pulma-poiss* (*Wedding Guest*), with swirling fabric suggesting quick, energetic movement and a focused expression conveying intensity and effort (see Figure 11). In stark contrast to these depictions is Karl Krahe's interpretation of the dancer. In his watercolour, Parts is not presented as a serious performer; instead, the grotesque style suggests a caricature or parody. She is shown dancing the *Dance of Salome*, as indicated by the skull on the floor. Krahe's work is housed in the Tartu Art Museum (TKM TAA 2640).

To my knowledge, only one drawing of Neggo exists: a portrait by Estonian artist Ants Laikmaa, depicting a young, serious woman with large dark eyes, held by the Art Museum of Estonia (EKM j 62471 FK 5537).

Published and unpublished recollections

Memoirs offer intimate perspectives on historical events or figures, revealing personal impressions and contextual details often absent or underrepresented in other sources. They add nuanced and humanized understanding of the past, enriching the historical record through subjective yet insightful recollections.

Among Estonian dancers, only Ella Ilbak is known to have written memoirs. Unsurprisingly, both Parts and Neggo are referenced in her autobiography *Otsekui hirv kisendab...* (*As the Deer Cries...*, 1990, 32–35 and 63). Parts also appears

in the memoirs of several cultural figures: Liina Reiman (1960, 101–116), an Estonian actress; Paul Pinna (2010, 216), an Estonian theatre director; and Voldemar Mettus (1967), an Estonian theatre critic. She is further recalled by the writers Pedro Krusten (1978, 81–86) and Aino Kallas (2012, 142–147). Neggo, in turn, is remembered by Leo Kalmet (1982, 118–120), an Estonian theatre director, and Salme Reek (Lõhmuste 1987, 7), an Estonian actress and Neggo's former student.

In addition, information can be gleaned from the correspondence of Parts' and Neggo's contemporaries. For example, the published correspondence between the Estonian writers Artur Adson and Friedebert Tuglas, *Paaži ja Tuglase kirjavahetus 1917–1944 (Correspondence between Paaž and Tuglas 1917–1944, 2011)*, provides insight into the private reflections and critical evaluations of two prominent cultural figures. Written without intent for public release, these letters offer a candid perspective on modern dance and performance, exposing informal discourse, critical attitudes, personal biases, and aesthetic preferences absent from formal reviews or institutional records.

The Estonian Theatre and Music Museum holds a shorthand report of a 1971 with Neggo's former students, including Nata Slasnikova (born Blinova), Lea Tormis, Juta Arg, Boris Blinov, Justa Kurfeldt, and Salme Reek. The conversation was conducted by Marika Oja, from the editorial office of the newspaper *Kodumaa*, and Lea Tormis, an Estonian theatre and dance researcher (ETMM 8147 T426:1/10:1). Relevant personal information about Aino Siimola-Jooss can be found in responses of her husband, Kurt Jooss – likely addressed to the critic Horst Koegler – preserved at the Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln. Oscar Neggo's memoir of the Neggo family is preserved at the Saaremaa Museum (SM 10466:1 Ark) and an undated manuscript memoir by George Kolt on the Kolt family history was kindly shared with me by Deborah Kolt.

5. METHODOLOGY

This subchapter outlines the research methodology employed to address the research questions introduced in subchapter 3. The study adopts a multi-methodological approach, combining qualitative analytical tools. At the core are the historical method and discourse analysis. The first is applied to narrate the history of modern dance in Estonia and to situate the research in its broader context. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, enables to deepen our understanding how modern dance was received in Estonia.

5.1 Historical method

As noted in subchapter 1, the history of Estonian dance has not been systematically examined in existing scholarship, making the creation of a comprehensive narrative of Estonian modern dance history one of the aims of this study. To construct this narrative, I employed the historical method, which enabled a careful reconstruction of modern dance history through the examination of archival materials and primary sources (the research results are presented in subchapter 2).

The historian's work typically involves three stages: collecting data, analysing it, and communicating findings (Postlewait 1991, 157). It is important to bear in mind that there is no "objective truth" waiting to be uncovered in the past (Davis et al. 2011, 90). All evidence represents a "constructed event," meaning that someone has already assigned meaning to it while designating and representing it. In other words, decisions have been made about what is documented, how it is depicted, by whom, and for what purposes (Postlewait 1991, 160).

The investigation commenced with a thorough search for archival records, including visits to several key archives. Later on, I examined the collected material closely, with the aim of identifying recurring patterns, thematic consistencies, and significant deviations. This process involved systematic organization and contextualization of the sources, alongside critical reflection on their historical positioning, authorship, and potential biases. Source criticism, a fundamental tool in the historian's methodology, involves the systematic evaluation of sources to assess their reliability, bias, perspective, and historical context.

Through this analytical lens, I sought to reconstruct the early history of modern dance in Estonia, piecing together fragmented narratives and bringing underrepresented voices into view to form a fuller understanding of the field's development during the early 20th century.

5.2 Discourse analysis

There are more than 50 varieties of discourse analysis, each requiring different techniques and strategies (Islas Weinstein 2024, 410). Discourse analysis is not a single method; rather, it is a broad, interdisciplinary field of approaches that

explore the production of meaning as a socially framed and situated practice. My understanding of the discourse analysis is based on the two-volume handbook *Diskursforschung. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (2014), edited by Johannes Angermüller et al.

Discourse analysis looks beyond the “immediate message of a text to reveal how it produces and disseminates particular ways of knowing” (Jupp 2006, 75). It holds that meaning is not a fixed or inherent in language, but emerges through the dynamic interplay between “language,” “practice,” and “contexts” (Angermüller 2014, 25). Language, as a component of discourse, is inseparable from the social practices and historical contexts that shape its use and interpretation. Consequently, discourse must therefore be understood in its heterogeneous nature, acknowledging the multiplicity of factors – linguistic, social, and cultural – that influence its construction and reception (Angermüller 2014, 25). A discourse-analytical approach, therefore, seeks empirically grounded insights into socially and historically situated phenomena by closely examining selected materials.

In this study, I employed discourse analysis to investigate how modern dance shaped artistic and gender discourses in 1920s Estonia. First, I explored the reception of *Ausdruckstanz* in Estonia and Germany, paying particular attention to the aspect of travel and the influence of local cultural contexts on its understanding and acceptance. I then turned to the construction of artistic legitimacy, exploring how notions of artfulness were intertwined with discourses of eroticism. Finally, I analysed gendered discourses surrounding female modern dancers, focusing on how their performances and artistic agency were interpreted, discussed, and sometimes contested in critical discourse.

The discourse analysis began with identifying relevant documents and textual passages as units of analysis. I then engaged in a close, iterative reading of the material: reading and re-reading the texts to become thoroughly familiar with their content. This process allowed for a deeper and nuanced understanding of the sources and provided a foundation for interpretation. Since meaning is always shaped by broader historical, cultural, and political dynamics, particular attention throughout the analysis was given to the sociocultural context in which the texts were produced and received. As I worked through the material, recurring patterns, dominant themes, and discursive regularities began to emerge. This process provided a basis for more focused analysis, enabling the exploration of how meaning was constructed and how various discursive strategies reflected or contested prevailing societal norms and values.

In this subchapter, I outlined the methodological approach employed to address the research questions and objectives. By combining the historical method with discourse analysis, this study adopts a multi-dimensional perspective that enables a comprehensive understanding of modern dance in Estonia – not only as an artistic form, but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon shaped by a complex network of interconnected forces.

SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES

The dissertation comprises four research articles. Article I examines how dance theory evolves when transferred between cultural contexts. Article II and Article III engage with the critical debates provoked by modern dance performances. Article II analyses the complex relationship between early modern dance and eroticism through the work of Elmerice Parts. Article III examines the joint performances of Parts and Herman (also Heiko) Kolt (also (Kolt-Oginsky), focusing on why some reviewers refused to recognize their work as art. Article IV has two main objectives: first, to examine the lives of Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo; second, to analyse how critics characterized their performances in relation to femininity. In both cases, the analysis is framed within the context of the traditional vs the new woman.

The theoretical framework underpinning these articles vary according to their objectives. The primary source materials of the articles consist of various types of texts from the print media, and the principal methodological tool employed is discourse analysis.

Article I. Maripuu, Anne-Liis. Forthcoming in 2026. From the Weimar Republic to Estonia. The migration of Rudolf von Laban’s dance theory. *Nordic Theatre Studies*, accepted April 22, 2025.

This article examines how *Ausdruckstanz* (in English, dance of expression) travelled from its origin in Germany to Estonia in the mid-1920s. It explores the introduction and dissemination of this modern dance form across national borders, as well as the transformations it underwent in its new environment.

The article draws on Edward Said’s concept of travelling theories, as well as Dongchao Min’s development of what she terms alternative travelling theory. Both frameworks emphasize that theories are not static; rather, they undergo transformation as they move across different cultural and geographical contexts. Said (1983, 226) rejects the conventional notion of theory as fixed, proposing instead that “the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity.”

Ausdruckstanz was selected as the focus of this study because of its sudden emergence in Estonia, largely catalysed by the return migration of a single individual – Gerd Neggo, a former student of Rudolf Laban, one of the leading figures of *Ausdruckstanz*. Laban’s ideas achieved significant popularity in both Germany and Estonia, sparking extensive interest among cultural journalists in both contexts.

To understand how *Ausdruckstanz* was explained and described in both Germany and Estonia, I familiarized myself with articles and book chapters dedicated to the dance trend. A comparison of the descriptions provided by cultural journalists revealed certain differences, suggesting that *Ausdruckstanz* was introduced somewhat differently to the audiences in the country of origin, Germany, and the

destination country, Estonia. For example, Estonian journalists placed less emphasis on Laban's dance notation system; additionally, Laban's ideas received little to no criticism in Estonia. This supports Said's and Min's claim that the movement of theories is characterized by "selective appropriations, productive misunderstandings, and discontinuous translations according to historical and local circumstances" (Neumann and Nünning 2012, 5).

The fact that the movement of ideas alters not only philosophical or theoretical concepts but also notions related to movement and dance underscores the importance of examining widely used concepts. Such concepts may acquire different connotations and interpretations as they cross national borders, shaped by the distinctive cultural, historical, and social contexts of each country.

The second conclusion is that dance theories travel differently from abstract theoretical concepts. Unlike the latter, dance theory is not only conceptualized in the dancer's mind but also transmitted through practice – acquired in dance classes and embodied in nonverbal form. Consequently, the dissemination of dance theory depends, among other factors, on the physical mobility of dancers, thereby linking the transmission of dance theories to broader financial and social conditions.

Article II. Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2023. Erootikast ja varasest moderntantsust Elmerice Partsi loomingu näitel [On eroticism and early modern dance in the work of Elmerice Parts]. – *Ariadne Lõng* (1/2): 39–60.

https://ariadnelong.ee/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ariadne-Long-2023_2_Maripuu.pdf.

This article explores the intersection of modern dance and eroticism in the work of Elmerice Parts through an analysis of diverse print media sources. At a time when most modern dancers deliberately avoided sensual or erotic themes, Parts' engagement with such motifs distinguished her work within the broader modern dance landscape.

An analysis of the reviews and critiques devoted to Parts suggests that her artistic career can be divided into three distinct phases. In the early phase (1920–1921), she was identified as a plastic dancer, with cultural journalists emphasizing the grace and beauty of her performances. In the middle phase (1922–1924), she distanced herself from the "sweet and 'beautiful' movements" of plastic dancers (Elmerice Partsi tantsuõhtu... 1923). The third phase (1926–1927) was marked by her collaboration with Herman Kolt, during which they staged performances that incorporated both erotic and acrobatic elements.

The analysis indicates that, in the early phase, cultural journalists did not regard her dances as sensual. Likewise, between 1922 and 1924, reviewers and critics made no reference to eroticism, although some sources suggest that certain dances by Parts may have been unusually daring. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that her performances did not provoke any public controversy. The same cannot be said of the third phase, when some critics condemned Parts and Kolt's performances as immoral and dismissed them as non-art, arguing

that the presence of eroticism disqualified the works from being recognized as legitimate art. This raises the questions: what accounts for the stark difference in critical responses between 1922–1924 and 1926–1927?

Dominant dance trends such as plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz* were grounded in the belief that the body could convey inner truths and spiritual emotions (Klein 1994, 182), functioning as a medium for expressing that which transcended the physical. Ideally, the dancer's body became "invisible," allowing pure expression to emerge. The named dance trends were associated with elevated, often sublime themes (Scheier 1992, 175), reflecting and reinforcing the cultural values of theatre audiences. Within this framework, the dancer's body had to be "cleansed" of sexuality, desire, and sensuality in order to be recognised as truly artistic (Wohler 2009, 70–76). A body that openly expressed sexuality was regarded as incompatible with artistic integrity.

These beliefs were reflected in the writings of Estonian critics. A closer reading suggests that Parts and Kolt were not criticized simply for including eroticism in their performances; rather, it was the way in which they decided to present it that provoked censure. Critics such as Johannes Semper (1926) and Rasmus Kangro-Pool (R. K.-P., 1927b) argued that eroticism could only be accepted as art if it was transformed into "something else" – that is, if it was presented on stage in a mediated form, rather than in its direct, unaltered expression, so that it ceased existing what it actually was – raw eroticism.

This suggests that, under certain conditions, theatre audiences were willing to accept sensual or erotic content as legitimate art, and that the mere presence of eroticism was not decisive. Consequently, the stark difference in critical responses between 1922–1924 and 1926–1927 cannot be explained solely by the inclusion or absence of erotic content. Rather, the perception of artistry appears to have depended on the dancer's ability to present eroticism in a visually pleasing manner. If a performance conveyed eroticism in a way that allowed (male) critics to appreciate it, it could be accepted as art.

Article III. Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2024. Transgressing the Borders of Art and Non-art: The Case of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt-Oginsky. – *Nordic Journal of Dance* 15 (2): 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2024-0012>.

In Article III, I investigate what Estonian reviewers and critics of the 1920s regarded as "art" and what they excluded from that category. The meaning and limits of such definitions often become visible when someone commits a transgressive act. As defined by Jenks (2003, 3) and Wolfreys (2008, 3), "transgression" denotes a conduct that exceeds boundaries, breaks rules, or moves beyond established conventions. Such conventions remain largely invisible until they are breached; thus, a transgressive act serves to reveal the underlying norms that would otherwise remain concealed.

The notion of "transgression" is particularly apt for describing the work of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt, whose joint dance performances in between 1926 and 1927 provoked considerable scandal in Estonia. Their choreography

challenged the prevailing distinction between art and non-art by integrating erotic and acrobatic elements. Several critics dismissed their work as “immoral” and “inartistic,” declaring it unsuitable for the theatre stage.

Erotic content, in itself, was not necessarily objectionable to contemporary critics. Parts had previously performed sensual dances without eliciting accusations of inartistic behaviour. This indicates that sensuality on the theatrical stage did not automatically transgress the boundary between art and non-art. Why, then, were Parts and Kolt’s performances judged differently?

I argue that critical disapproval arose from the central role Parts and Kolt assigned to the human body. For them, the body was not a merely an instrument of expression but a primary subject of artistic inquiry. In adhering to this conviction, the duo departed from the prevailing expectation that the body should serve solely as a tool for expression, rather than be foregrounded or made the focus of the performance. I suggest that beneath explicit concerns about eroticism lay a deeper conviction among critics that bodily experience was inappropriate for the theatre stage. It was this pronounced *body-centredness* – the refusal to treat the body as insignificant, low or impure – that most likely provoked their disapproval. By making the body strikingly visible, the duo challenged dominant notions of “high” art as disembodied or transcendent.

Parts and Kolt’s detractors maintained that certain elements were inherently inartistic – a view the artists themselves clearly rejected. This opposition reflects two distinct artistic paradigms outlined by Jacques Rancière: the representative regime of art and the aesthetic regime of art. The representative regime enforces fixed hierarchies and categories, determining which activities, subjects, and forms are recognised as art and which are excluded. By contrast, the aesthetic regime challenges these boundaries, redefining who may participate in the cultural sphere and under what terms. In doing so, it disrupts established hierarchies of value and legitimacy, opening space for forms of expression previously deemed unworthy or inappropriate for art. (Rancière 2013, 8)

The controversy surrounding Parts and Kolt’s performances demonstrates how transgressive acts can unsettle entrenched cultural hierarchies and provoke debate. By foregrounding the physical body and refusing to separate it from artistic expression, the duo not only challenged conventional notions of performance but also exposed the implicit norms that governed what could be recognized as “art” in 1920s Estonia. Their work highlighted the extent to which aesthetic boundaries were socially and culturally enforced, revealing the mechanisms through which critics and audiences policed artistic legitimacy.

Article IV. Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2021. Performativity of gender by early modern dancers on and off stage. The case of Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo. – *METHIS. Studia humaniora Estonica* (27/28): 223–243.
<https://doi.org/10.7592/methis.v22i27/28.18450>.

In Article IV, I examine how Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo performed gender both on and off stage during the 1920s. The aim is to explore how Estonian female

choreographers of the period “did” gender in their artistic productions and in their daily lives. My analysis considers how Parts and Neggo presented themselves in performances, in other words, how they choreographed their own bodies and, in doing so, performed femininity. Did they conform to, or subvert, the dominant gender norms of their time? I also examine how they enacted gender in their personal lives, assessing whether they embodied the “traditional” or the new woman.

The study draws on Judith Butler’s argument that gender is not a biological given but a performative act – something we “do” – manifested in movement, expression, voice, and other embodied practices. As Butler (2010, 190) explains, repeated acts of gender create the idea of gender, shaping, for example, how femininity is understood. These acts are not fixed and can be revised or redefined over time (Butler 1988, 523).

Both Parts and Neggo were unmistakably modern, independent women. By rejecting traditional domestic roles, they sought training abroad in the then little-known field of modern dance and went on to establish sustained careers as professional dancers, choreographers, and teachers. In doing so, they expanded the possibilities for women to “do” gender. As stage artists, they occupied a particularly visible position in this process, with their ways of living – or in other words, their performative acts of gender – subject to public scrutiny and amplified by the print media.

Parts’ oeuvre evolved considerably over the course of her career. In her early work, her stage portrayals often conformed to the ideal of the traditional woman, with reviewers describing her stage figures as “graceful,” “light,” and “joyful.” By the mid-1920s, however, cultural journalists increasingly depicted her stage personae as “forceful” and “assertive.” Similar descriptions were applied to Neggo’s stage personae, whose solo career took off in the mid-1920s. Neggo’s abstract dances – driven by rational rather than emotional impulses, according to reviewers – further challenged conventional ideals of femininity. Parts’ and Kolt’s joint performances broke new ground by foregrounding the body as a site of artistic exploration.

By staging non-traditional female figures, both dancers and choreographers challenged dominant gender norms and expanded prevailing understandings of womanhood. Their performances made visible the performative and constructed nature of gender, demonstrating that femininity was not a fixed or natural category but something that could be expressed, reinterpreted, and challenged.

As Butler argues, altering the way one performs gender has the potential to transform the very concept of gender itself. By embodying womanhood on stage in nontraditional ways and leading lives that defied societal expectations, Parts and Neggo not only resisted traditional notions of femininity but also actively participated in reshaping its meaning in 1920s Estonia.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation investigates the emergence of modern dance in Estonia, tracing its development from the early 1910s through the late 1930s, with particular emphasis on the 1920s. Central to the study are two understudied dancers and choreographers, Elmerice Parts and Gerd Neggo, both of whom played pivotal roles in shaping the history of Estonian modern dance. Alongside reconstructing the history of Estonian modern dance, this study examines the ways in which modern dance has shaped dominant artistic and gender discourses.

In this thesis, modern dance is approached as a transgressive phenomenon – one that not only transcended geographical boundaries but also challenged normative frameworks of art and gender within its new cultural and geographic context. Introduced to Estonia from abroad, modern dance carried with it novel forms of expression, techniques, and ideologies. Its emergence provoked broader debates about artistic values and gender representations, positioning modern dance as a dynamic site of both creative experimentation and cultural negotiation. Throughout its development, it remained in ongoing tension with dominant cultural and social norms, continually negotiating the boundaries of what was considered “appropriate” or “inappropriate,” “moral” or “immoral,” and “art” or “non-art.”

The theoretical framework draws on several key concepts and scholars, including Edward Said’s notion of traveling theories and Dongchao Min’s further developments of it; Chris Jenks’ concept of transgression; Jacques Rancière’s idea of the regimes of the arts; and Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Travelling theory examines how dance theories move across borders and are reshaped in new cultural contexts. Jenks and Rancière offer tools for exploring the provocative and transgressive aspects of modern dance, while Butler’s concept of gender performativity is applied to analyse the gendered acts of modern dancers, both on and off the stage.

A significant portion of information on Estonian modern dance performances comes from historical newspapers and magazines, whose reviews and critiques provide rare insights into performances, including descriptions of costumes, movements, and thematic content. Various archival records, meanwhile, offer factual and administrative information about dancers and their studios. Photographs offer valuable means of examining how dancers chose to present themselves, capturing moments of self-representation. However, given the technological limitations of the period, all the photographs were taken in controlled (studio) environments. No film footage of the dancers has been preserved.

The **first** major finding of this dissertation is that Estonia possesses a rich and dynamic modern dance history. Prominent dance trends, such as plastic dance and *Ausdruckstanz* (in English, dance of expression), were well-represented and widely appreciated. The local dance scene was profoundly international: Estonian dancers studied abroad, performed with leading dance ensembles, and trained and experimented under renowned choreographers. Through these interactions, novel

ideas and techniques were rapidly introduced to Estonia. Without question, Estonia was an integral part of the European modern dance network.

I am especially pleased to have had the opportunity to position Elmerice Parts, alongside Herman Kolt, as a significant figure in the history of Estonian modern dance. Parts' artistic trajectory is particularly compelling: beginning her career as a plastic dancer, she later developed into an artist whose performances pushed the boundaries between acceptable and transgressive dance. Performing alongside Kolt, she embodied characters that challenged prevailing gender norms and unsettled conventional representations of femininity on stage. In doing so, Parts not only expanded the expressive possibilities of modern dance but also contributed to broader cultural debates on gender in interwar Estonia.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the historiography of Estonian modern dance is inevitably shaped by available sources. A key limitation lies in the nature and scope of these materials. The scarcity of first-person accounts, such as letters and personal notes, combined with predominantly journalistic nature of the primary source material, restricts the study. Additionally, because of the international scope of Estonian modern dancers, collecting information about them is often difficult, with sources dispersed across numerous foreign archives. Language barriers further complicate this process. Even within Estonian archives, access to certain materials often necessitates the aid of a translator, as Estonia was a multilingual society at the turn of the 20th century, with Estonian, German, and Russian widely spoken.

The **second** key finding is that modern dance opened significant new opportunities for women. By providing a pathway to professional artistic careers, it offered a means of personal and economic independence, allowing many to move beyond traditional domestic expectations, embrace the ideal of the new woman, and challenge prevailing notions of femininity and domesticity. As dancers, choreographers, and teachers, women were able to occupy professional roles that were both recognized and accepted within the cultural framework of the time.

As public figures, modern dancers were prominently featured in the local media. Articles about their studies and public performances – both in Estonia and abroad – showed possibilities for independence, creativity, and professional ambition beyond traditional domestic roles. Their public presence contributed to a broader cultural shift in perceptions of women and played a pivotal role in questioning and destabilizing deeply ingrained stereotypes, inspiring subsequent generations to envision more diverse pathways for female identity and agency.

With the emergence of modern dance, women gained unprecedented opportunities to choreograph their own performances and to select themes and characters that reflected their personal experiences and perspectives. They were free to explore movement in ways that felt authentic to their bodies, breaking away from prescriptive traditions. Modern dancers and choreographers such as Gerd Negro presented women on stage as strong and autonomous, not necessarily defined by conventional notions of femininity. In the most radical performances, the female body became a site of expression and agency, emphasizing corporeality as central to identity. By centring women's physical presence and bodily-lived experiences,

choreographers and dancers such as Elmerice Parts offered portrayals of womanhood that diverged sharply from dominant societal ideals. Modern dance thus became a medium through which femininity and gender identity were critically reimagined.

The predominance of male-authored primary sources shapes and limits our understanding of modern dance in Estonia. This male-dominated critical voice risks marginalizing women's perspectives, despite their central role in the art form's development. This gap in the historical narrative raises important questions about the ways in which women's perspectives were silenced or marginalized in the artistic and cultural discourse of the time. Insights into how female audience members responded to modern dance – or how they interpreted its challenge to traditional gender roles – would greatly enrich our understanding of the gender dynamics that informed its reception.

The **third** key finding of this dissertation is that the artistic legitimacy of modern dance was continually subject to contestation. Time and again, particular performances provoked cultural journalists to question their aesthetic legitimacy and status as art. Such scepticism was frequently grounded in allegations of immorality. Because prevailing conceptions of art were inextricably entangled with moral judgment, performances deemed immoral were marginalized and dismissed as non-art – an act of cultural gatekeeping that reflected dominant social attitudes. These debates, in turn, illuminate broader anxieties about shifting aesthetic conventions and the redefinition of the boundaries of acceptable expression.

The question of whether modern dance could be recognized as a legitimate art form emerged alongside its development in the 1910s. The mere sight of a woman dancing “freely” – that is, without adhering to codified techniques or the direct guidance of male choreographers – was often sufficient to cast doubt not only on the artistic validity of the practice but also on its moral legitimacy. By the mid-1920s, the work of Elmerice Parts and Herman Kolt was publicly condemned as non-art due to its perceived eroticism. Overall, whenever dancers and choreographers pushed established boundaries and challenged dominant artistic norms, critics frequently responded by declaring the work immoral and therefore in-artistic.

Doubts about the artistic legitimacy of modern dance were, in my view, closely linked to its association with women, who functioned not only as performers but also as choreographers and authors, creating works that reflected their personal interests and experiences. In this way, modern dance provided a significant platform for women to challenge dominant artistic conventions and assert creative agency. This, in turn, frequently provoked pushback from male cultural journalists, who questioned both the legitimacy and seriousness of the dancers. Such debates reveal how gendered perceptions of creativity and authority shaped assessments of artistic value, revealing the complex interplay between innovation and social norms in the reception of modern dance.

Future research on the history of in Estonian modern dance should address several under-examined areas. A more comprehensive investigation into the

dance scene and the artists who shaped it is essential, with archival research (both in Estonia and abroad) playing a crucial role in reconstructing the dance landscape of the era. Modern dancers also inspired many artists from other disciplines, as evidenced, for example, by the drawings and paintings of performers. A closer examination of the relationship between Estonian artists on stage and those behind the easel could reveal previously unknown dimensions of this cultural period. Additionally, exploring the political climate of the 1930s and its impact on the arts – particularly in terms of gender dynamics – would provide valuable insights into how authoritarian regimes influence the creative freedoms of dancers and choreographers, especially women. This decade is marked by the rise of nationalism and an increased interest in stylized folk dances among modern dancers. A deeper exploration of the influence of folk dance on the modern dance scene could prove highly enriching. Furthermore, a closer study of the tumultuous 1940s – shaped by war and occupations – is crucial for understanding the extent to which these traumatic events were expressed or mediated through dance.

REFERENCES

28. juulil kawatseb kunstnik... *Tallinna Päevaleht* 1918, July 25.
- ik. 1913. Soome tantsijanna paruness Maggie Gripenberg... *Postimees*, October 4.
- on. 1934. Rütmi ja muusika võlus. Kuidas Gerd Neggost sai tantsijanna. *Romaan* 13 (9): 266–267.
- s. 1918. Pühapäeval, 4. aug., esines... *Tallinna Päevaleht*, August 10.
- s. 1923. Hamburg. *Vaba Maa*, November 7.
- t. 1920. Plastilised tantsud. *Postimees*, December 3.
- A. V. 1936. Kehatehnika kunstikõrguses. Vestlus Gerd Neggoga tema stuudio 10=a. tegevuse puhul. *Uus Eesti*, April 4.
- Aa. 1927. Täna Elmerice Parts ja Herman Oginski. *Päevaleht*, April 10.
- Aavik, Johannes. 2014. *Päevaraamat 1916–1929*. Saaremaa Muuseumi Toimetised. 8. Tartu: Ilmamaa.
- Adson, Artur. 1970. Meie keele Luther... *Vaba Eestlane*, December 18.
- Adson, Artur. 2017. *Siuru-raamat*. Tänapäev.
- Adson, Artur; Tuglas, Friedebert. 2011. *Paaži ja Tuglase kirjavahetus 1917–1944*. Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus.
- Agathe Margens-Hermanni 30 a. juubel. *Päevaleht* 1930, April 30.
- Ainsaar, Mare. 1997. *Eesti rahvastik. Taani hindamisraamatust tänapäevani*. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus.
- Andresen, Nigol. 1966. *August Bachmann ja Hommikteater*. Tallinn: Eesti NSV Teatriühing.
- Angermuller, Johannes. 2014. Einleitung. Diskursforschung als Theorie und Analyse. Umrisse eines interdisziplinären und internationalen Feldes. *Diskursforschung. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (Volume 1). Eds. Johannes Angermuller, Martin Nonhoff, Eva Herschinger, Felicitas Macgilchrist, Martin Reisingl, Juliette Wedl, Daniel Wrana and Alexander Ziem. Bielefeld: transcript, 16–36.
- ArA. [Artur Adson]. 1927. Alice Jürna tantsuõhtu. *Vaba Maa*, December 11.
- B. L. 1927. Alice Jürna tantsude õhtuks. *Kaja*, December 11.
- Brys, Arno. 1956. Heiko Kolt. *West-Vlaaderen* 5 (1). Accessed August 12, 2025. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_vla016195601_01/_vla016195601_01_0108.php.
- Butler, Judith. 1988. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal* 40 (4): 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.
- Butler, Judith. 2010. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2011. *Bodies that Matter*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2016. Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance. *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Eds. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay. USA: Duke University Press, 12–17.
- Claire, Elizabeth. 2017. Dance Studies, Gender and the Question of History. *Clio. Women, Gender, History* (46): 157–85.
- Dahl, Alva. 2018. Vera Alexandrova. Svenskt kvinnobiografiskt lexikon www.skbl.se/sv/artikel/VeraAlexandrova (accessed 5.07.2025).
- Davis, Jim, Normington; Katie, Bush-Bailey; Gilli with Bratton, Jacky. 2011. Researching Theatre History and Historiography. *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*. Eds. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson. Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press, 86–110.

- Dejotaja Elmerice Parts. 1921. *Svari*, November 11.
- Deranty, Jean-Philippe. 2010. Regimes of the arts. *Jacques Rancière. Key Concepts*. Ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty. London, New York: Routledge, 116–130.
- Die Kunst Sent M'ahesas. *Revalsche Zeitung* 1913, January 11.
- Eesti entsüklopeedia. 2020. Berting, Vera. Accessed July 5, 2025. http://entsyklopeedia.ee/artikkel/berting_vera1.
- Eesti välisteestistuse Biograafiline leksikon 1918–1991*. Eds. Triin Mulla, Peep Pillak, Jüri Trei and Heini Vilbiks 2006. Välisministeerium.
- Eestlanna Kurt Joossi studiosse. *Päevaleht* 1938, November 9.
- Eestlased kunsttantsus andekad. Ringkäik Tiina Kapperi, Ida Erlemanni ja Elsa Stahlbergi tantsukoolis. *Posimees* 1935, December 22.
- Einasto, Heili. 2016. *Eesti balleti rajaja Rahel Olbrei: loometegevus, retseptisioon, pärand*. PhD diss., Tallinn University.
- Einasto, Heili. 2017. Tantsitud „Kalevipoeg” läbi rahvuslike soostereotüüpide prisma. *Philologia Estonica Tallinnensis* 2 (1): 85–107.
- Einasto, Heili. 2018. *Rahel Olbrei – Eesti tantsuteatri rajaja*. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit.
- Einasto, Heili. 2000. *100 aastat moderntantsu*. Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus.
- Ella Ilbak [Advertisement]. *Dorpater Zeitung* 1918, May 10.
- Erelt, Pekka. 2004. Hallo, kes kuuleb? *Eesti Ekspress*, May 26.
- Esteline gümnaastika kursus naesterahwastele. *Postimees* 1914, March 10.
- Franco, Susanne. 2007. *Ausdruckstanz. Traditions, translations, transmissions. Dance Discourses. Keywords in dance research*. Eds. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera. London, New York: Routledge, 80–98.
- Gerd Negro [Advertisement]. *Waba Maa* 1926, August 31.
- Gerd Negro [Advertisement]. *Päevaleht* 1929, August 25.
- Guilbert, Laure. 1999. Jutta Klamt. *Dictionnaire de la danse*. Ed. Philippe Le Moal. Paris: Larousse, 113.
- H. Idam. 1913. Moodne tantsukunst. *Naesterahwa töö ja elu ja käsitööleht*, November 27.
- H. R. 1924. Elmerice Parts'i tantsud. *Waba Maa*, February 21.
- Hammergren, Lena. 2002. *Ballerinor och barfotadansöser. Svensk och internationell danskultur runt 1900*. Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag. Quoted in Johanna Laakkonen. 2013. Early Modern Dance and Theatre in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Dance* 4 (2): 30. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2013-0009>.
- Hammergren, Lena. 2018a. Anna Charlotta Behle. Svenskt kvinnobiografiskt lexicon. Accessed April 29, 2025. www.skbl.se/sv/artikel/AnnaBehle.
- Hammergren, Lena. 2018b. Many Sources, Many Voices. *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*. Eds. Geraldine Morris and Lorraine Nicholas. London, New York: Routledge, 136–147.
- Harding, Sue-Ann. 2019. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Eds. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha. London, New York: Routledge, 611–615.
- Hasselblatt, Cornelius. 2015. *Cherches la Femme. Kui sootundlikud on Eesti kirjanduslood ja teatmeseosed? Eemalt vaadates. Veerand sajandit eesti kirjandusega*. Eds. Arne Merilai and Ele Süvalep. *Studia litteraria Estonica*, 15. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 176–193.
- Hindadest Tartu turul 1920 aastal. *Sakala* 1921, January 17.
- Hinrikus, Mirjam. 2015. Tammsaare's Constructions of Femininity in Light of Weininger's Concept of Sex Difference. *Journal of Baltic Studies* 46 (2): 171–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2014.981672>

- Huxley, Michael. 1994. European modern dance. *Dance History. A methodology for study*. Eds. Janet Adshead and June Layson. Routledge, 151–167.
- Ida Erlemann [Advertisement]. *Postimees* 1926, September 9.
- Ilbak, Ella. 1918a. Mõni sõna tantsukunstist. *Tallinna Teataja*, April 27.
- Ilbak, Ella. 1918b. “Tants ja tantsjanna.” *Postimees*, May 10.
- Ilbak, Ella. 1990. *Otsekui hirv kisendab... Mälestusi ja tõekspidamisi*. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.
- Inez Orbeliani [Advertisement]. *Revalsche Zeitung* 1911, January 22.
- Islas Weinstein, Tania. 2024. Discourse Analysis. *Doing Good Qualitative Research*. Eds. Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman. New York: Oxford University Press, 410–421.
- J. P. [Jaan Pert]. 1927. Gerd Neggo. *Naiste töö ja elu* (2): 4–5.
- J. P. [Jaan Pert]. 1928. Gerd Neggo Tartus. *Postimees*, March 16.
- Järvinen, Hanna. 2023. The Significance of Antiquity for Art Dance. *Dance Arts – Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*. Eds. Kirsi Monni, Riikka Laakso and Hanna Järvinen. Theatre Academy University of the Arts Helsinki: Publication Series of the Theatre Academy 79. Accessed August 12, 2025. <https://disco.teak.fi/tanssin-historia/en/the-significance-of-antiquity-for-art-dance/>
- Jenks, Chris. 2003. *Transgression*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Jupp, Victor. 2006. *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- KAH [Karl August Hindrey]. 1915. Piduõhtu suvemuusika hääks. *Postimees*, April 28.
- Kallas, Aino. 2012. Tantsu ja akrobaatikad. *Mu saatuse maa*. Tallinn: Tammerraamat, 142–147.
- Kalmet, Leo. 1982. *Pool sajandit teatriteed*. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.
- Kannike, Anu; Uibo, Madle. 2022. *Moodsa elu õppetunnid*. Tallinn: Argo.
- Karro, Piret. 2022. 150 aastat Eesti feminismi. *Vikerkaar* (3): 57–112.
- Kiirend-Pruuli, Katrin. 2020. Personal Freedom in Estonian Marriage Law between 1918 and 1940. *Juridica International* 29: 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.12697/JI.2020.29.01>.
- Kinodes näeme. *Abieluleht* 1931, March 29.
- Kirikal, Merlin. 2021. „Olin lahti murdunud elule”: modernse soo ja keha kujutamine Johannes Semperi Teise maailmasõja eelses loomingus. PhD diss., Tallinn University.
- Kirss, Tiina. 2006. Ideaalsete naiste tuba ja uue naise rännakud. Tähelepanekuid naisajaloost. *Looming* (5): 762–773.
- Kivimäe, Sirje. 1995. Esimesed naisseltsid Eestis ja nende tegelased. *Seltsid ja ühiskonna muutumine. Talupojaühiskonnast rahvusriigini*. Eds. Ea Jansen and Jaanus Arukaevu. Tartu, Tallinn: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, Eesti TA Ajaloo Instituut, 118–135.
- Kivimäe, Sirje, Tamul, Sirje. 1999. Kõrgemast naisharidusest Venemaal. *Vita Academica, Vita Feminea*. Ed. Sirje Tamul. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 45–71.
- Klein, Gabriele. 1994. *FrauenKörperTanz. Eine Zivilisationsgeschichte des Tanzes*. München: Heyne Verlag.
- Kleis, Richard (ed.). 1932. *Eesti avalikud tegelased. Eluloolised andmed*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjanduse Selts.
- Kolb, Alexandra. 2009. *Performing Femininity. dance and Literature in German Modernism*. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Kolt, George. n.d. *Family history*, unpublished manuscript.
- Kompus, Hanno. 1920. Veera Berting. *Tallinna Teataja*, April 17.
- Kompus, Hanno. 1938. Jooni tantsukunsti arengust Eestis. *Teater* (5): 201–204.

- Korppi-Tommola, Riikka. 2018. Tanssi Suomen ja Viron kulttuurisillalla. Ella Ilbakin vierailut Suomessa 1920- ja 1930-luvuilla. *Ennen ja nyt* 18 (4). Accessed August 12, 2025. <https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108907>.
- Korppi-Tommola, Riikka. 2018. Valkea liekki: Ella Ilbak, Viron tanssiva kulttuuri-lähettiläs. *Elo: Tuglas-seuran jäsenlehti* (2): 18–20.
- Korppi-Tommola, Riikka. 2024. Virolaisen ja suomalaisen varhaisen modernin tanssin yhteyksistä 1917–1991. *Vieraita näyttämöllä. Suomen ja Viron teatteri- ja tanssi-suhteet*. Eds. Hanna Korsberg, Anneli Saro and Mikko-Olavi Seppälä. Tietolipas 286.
- Korppi-Tommola, Riikka. 2024. Virolaisen ja suomalaisen baletin kohtaamiset ja venäläisvaikutteet – 1917–1991. *Vieraita näyttämöllä. Suomen ja Viron teatteri- ja tanssi-suhteet*. Eds. Hanna Korsberg, Anneli Saro and Mikko-Olavi Seppälä. Tietolipas 286.
- Krusten, Pedro. 1978. *Aiapidu lampioonidega*. Lund: Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv.
- Laakkonen, Johanna. 2013. Early Modern Dance and Theatre in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Dance* 4 (2): 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2013-0009>.
- Laakso, Riikka. 2023. Developments of Dance Modernisms from the 20th Century Onwards. *Dance Arts – Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*. Eds. Kirsi Monni, Riikka Laakso and Hanna Järvinen. Theatre Academy University of the Arts Helsinki: Publication Series of the Theatre Academy 79. Accessed August 12, 2025. <https://disco.teak.fi/tanssin-historia/en/the-significance-of-antiquity-for-art-dance/>
- Leivategija, Karin. 2023. “Dance is a disease for us”: dancing through the night as a threat to moral order in urbanizing Estonia. *Urban History* 52 (1): 193–214. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926823000457>.
- Leppik, Marelle. 2017. Soolise võrdõiguslikkuse küsimus Eesti Vabariigi põhiseadustes ja riigikohtu praktikas 1920–1940. *Ajalooline Ajakiri* (2/3). <https://doi.org/10.12697/AA.2017.2-3.06>.
- Liim, Allan. 1998. Saksa koolidest Tartus 19. sajandil. *Tartu, baltisakslased ja Saksamaa*. Eds. Helmut Piirimäe and Claus Sommerhage. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 140–166.
- Linde, Benhard. 1928. R. Labani kammertantsu kaks õhtut. *Kaja*, November 4.
- Lloyd, Moya. 2016. Performativity and Performance. *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. Eds. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth. USA: Oxford University Press, 572–592.
- Lõhmuste, Toomas. 1987. Vastab Salme Reek. *Teater.Muusika.Kino* (8): 4–15.
- Ma, Nan. 2023. *When words are inadequate: modern dance and transnationalism in China*. Oxford University Press.
- Maggie Gripenberg [Advertisement]. *Pernausche Zeitung* 1913, October 8.
- Mälk, Maret. 2000. Eesti naisajakirjanike esimesed põlvkonnad. *Peatükke Eesti ajakirjanduse ajaloost 1900–1940*. Ed. Epp Lauk. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 165–189.
- Mänd, Oskar. 1935. J. Westholm õpilase mälestusis. *Postimees*, March 13.
- Manning, Susan. 1992. Feminism, Utopianism, and the Incompleted Dialogue of Modernism. A Reading of the Dances of Mary Wigman. *Ausdruckstanz. Eine mitteleuropäische Bewegung der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller. Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel Verlag, 105–115.
- Manning, Susan. 2006. *Ecstasy and the Demon. The Dances of Mery Wigman*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Manzano, Jean-Philippe (ed.). 2010. *Isadora Duncan 1827–1927: Une sculpture vivante*. Musée Bourdelle, Paris. Quoted in Irina Sirotkina. 2018. The Revolutionary Body, or Was There Modern Dance in Russia? *Arti Dello Spettacolo / Performing Arts* 4 (4): 32.

- Marling, Raili, Sepper, Mari-Liis. 2018. Eesti naise roll rahvuslikus narratiivis. *Sirp*, February 23.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2016. Modernitantsu algusaastad Eestis. Gerd Neggo 125. *Teater. Muusika. Kino* (11): 46–51.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2018. “Minu element on erootika.” Elmerice Parts – 140. *Teater. Muusika. Kino*, (11): 46–55.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019a. Modernse tantsu algusaastad Eestis I (1913–1925). *TantsuKuuKiri*, November. Accessed August 18, 2025. <https://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/modernse-tantsu-algusaastad-ees-tis-i-1913-1925/>.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019b. “Eesti modernse tantsu algusaastad II (1925–1939).” *TantsuKuuKiri*, December. Accessed August 18, 2025. <https://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/ees-ti-modernse-tantsu-algusaastad-ii-1925-1939/>.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019c. Gerd Neggo, Helmi Nurk, Aino Siimola ja Ida Urjan – Rudolf von Labani õpilased aastatel 1921–1924 Saksamaal. *Teatrielu 2018*. Eds. Madli Pesti and Marie Pullerits. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 297–327.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2022. “Keha üksi kõneleb.” Tantsija, koreograaf, pedagoog Gerd Neggo 130. *Teatrielu 2021*. Eds. Alvar Loog and Valle-Sten Maiste. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 257–279.
- Mary Wigmani... *Päevaleht* 1926, October 8.
- Mätas, Jana. 1998. *Gerd Neggo – enne stuudiot*. Term paper. University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy.
- Metsman, Marju. 2015. Karl Krahe: mitmekülgne, hämmastav ja värvika elulooga tundmatu boheemlane. *Maaleht*, April 2.
- Mettus, Voldemar. 1967. *Ainus paradiis. Mälestusi meie iseseisvusajast*. Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv.
- Meyerhoff, Miriam. 2015. Gender Performativity. *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality*. Eds. Patricia Whelehan and Anne Bolin. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118896877.wbiehs178>
- Min, Dongchao. 2017. “Introduction. How far does travelling theory travel? Questions for traveling theory and translation.” *Translation and Travelling Theory. Feminist Theory and Praxis in China*. London, New York: Routledge, 1–16.
- Min, Dongchao. 2014. Toward an Alternative Traveling Theory. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39 (3): 584–592.
- Moodsa kunsttantsu sepikojast. *Päevaleht* 1928, January 6.
- Mullan, Kelly Jean. 2017. Somatic herstories: Tracing Elsa Grindler’s educational antecedent Hade Kallmeyer and Genevieve Stebbins. *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 9 (2): 159–178. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.159_1.
- Museumi pidu Wanemuises 30. märtsil. *Postimees* 1913, March 28.
- Muuseumirott. 1994. Eds. Margus Kasterpalu, Indrek Kangur and Katrin Seppel. Eesti Rahvusringhääling, 14.10. Accessed July 27, 2025. <https://arhiiv.err.ee/video/vaata/muuseumirott-karl-krahe>.
- Naata Nael [Semper, Johannes] 1921. Muusikata tants I. *Tallinna Teataja*, April 2.
- Neggo, Gerd. 1927. Märkmeid uuest kunsttantsust. *Päevaleht*, January 14.
- Neggo, Gerd. 1931. Märkmeid kehakultuurist ja kehatehnikast. *Päevaleht*, September 20.
- Neggo, Gerd. 1935. Lühidalt – midagi kohutavat. Kehatehnika ja kehakultuuri sihid. *Uudisleht*, September 12.
- Neggo, Gerd. 1936. Kuidas jääda nooreks ja terveks. *Päevaleht*, September 20.
- Neggo, Gerd. 1956. Lavatantsust. *Triinu* (12): 28–29.
- Nerman, Robet. 2007. Tallinna tänavavalgustus möödunud sajanditel. *Postimees*, March 9.

- Neumann, Birgit, Nünning, Ansgar. 2012. Travelling Concepts as a Model for the Study of Culture. Eds. Doris Bachmann-Medick, Horst Carl, Wolfgang Hallet and Ansgar Nünning. *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1–22.
- Noor kunstnik Karl Krahe... *Postimees* 1918, September 4.
- Oberzaucher-Schüller, Gunhild. 2017. Freier Tanz. *Das große Tanz-Lexikon. Tanzkulturen, Epochen, Personen, Werke*. Eds. Annette Hartmann and Monika Woitas. Laaber, 232–234.
- P+A. 1913. Prl. Maggie Gripenberg E. R. Museumi pidul. *Postimees*, April 1.
- Pärtelpoeg, Meeli. 2002. Mälestuste radadel. *Eesti Kirik* December 4. Accessed April 28, 2025. <https://eestikirik.ee/malestuste-radadel>.
- Parts, Elmerice. 1922. Tantsust. *Aeg* (6): 11–12.
- Parts, Elmerice. 1926. Elmerice Parts oma tantsu iseloomust. *Päevaleht*, February 14.
- Parts, Elmerice. 1935. *Laste tantsud: algkoolile, lasteaiale ja kodule*. Tartu: Tartu Akadeemiline Kooperatiiv.
- Paruness Maggie Gripenbergi ülesastumine “Estonia” saalis. *Päevaleht* 1913, October 5.
- Paruness Maggie Gripenbergi etteaste “Vanemuises.” *Postimees* 1913, October 11.
- Per aspera ad astra I. Jakob Westholm ja tema kool 1907–1937*. 1985. Toronto: Westholmlaste koondis.
- Pert, Jaan. 1934. Eesti kunsttants. *Eesti Noorus* 6 (6): 151–164.
- Peters, Kurt. 1954. Portrait des Monats: Karl Bergeest. *Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln*. Accessed April 28, 2025 <https://www.deutsches-tanzarchiv.de/archiv/nachlaesse-sammlungen/b/karl-bergeest>.
- Pinna, Paul. 2010. *Minu eluteater ja teatrielu 1884–1944*. Eesti mälu. Eesti Päevaleht, Akadeemia.
- Plastiline tantsukunst. *Tallinna Teataja* 1913, October 4.
- Postlewait, Thomas. 1991. Historiography and the Theatrical Event: A Primer with Twelve Cruxes. *Theatre Journal* 43 (2): 157–178.
- Preston-Dunlop, Valerie. 2008. *Rudolf Laban: An Extraordinary Life*, London: dance Books.
- Purkayastha, Prarthana. 2014. *Indian Modern Dance, Feminism and Transnationalism*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pütsep, Valdek. 1975. Pühapäevakohv Eesti NSV rahvakunstniku Ida Urbeliga. *Edasi*, April 6.
- R. K.-P. [Rasmus Kangro-Pool]. 1924. R. v. Labani tantsukunst ja prl. Gerd Neggo. *Koit*, October 11.
- R. K.-P. [Rasmus Kangro-Pool]. 1927a. Gerd Neggo kammertantsude õhtu. *Päevaleht*, January 21.
- R. K.-P. [Rasmus Kangro-Pool]. 1927b. Elmerice Partsi ja H. Oginski tantsuõhtu. *Päevaleht*, April 12.
- R. K.-P. [Rasmus Kangro-Pool]. 1929. Gerd Neggo studio tantsulavastus. *Päevaleht*, March 5.
- R. S. 1913. Paruness Maggie Gripenbergi plastika tantsul. *Sakala*, October 7.
- Ranciére, Jacques. 2007. *The Future of the Image*. London: Verso.
- Ranciére, Jacques. 2013. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*. Ed. Gabriel Rockhill. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Reiman, Liina. 1960. *Lava võlus*. Lund: Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv.
- Reinfeldt, Kai. 2013. *Naise emantsipatsiooni küsimus Eestis 1920. aastatel Postimehe ja Päevalehe põhjal*. Bachelor’s thesis. University of Tartu.

- Roberts, Mary Louise. 2002. *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin de Siècle France*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rockhill, Gabriel. 2013. Jacques Rancère's Politics of Perception. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*. Ed. Gabriel Rockhill. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, xi–xvi.
- Rumor, Karl-Ast. 1927. E. Parts & H. Oginsky. *Rahva Sõna*, April 13.
- Ruyter, Nancy. 1999. *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Said, Edward W. 1983. Traveling Theory. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 226–47.
- Said, Edward W. 1994. Travelling Theory Reconsidered. Eds. Robert M. Polhemus and Roger B. Henkle. *Critical Reconstructions. The Relationship of Fiction and Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 251–265.
- Sakova, Aija. 2005/2006. Eesti naise ühiskondlik-poliitiline ja perekondlik roll 1920. aastate alguses Emma Asson-Petersoni näitel. *Ariadne Lõng* 6 (1/2): 121–129.
- Sarapuu, Roosmarii. 2023. Tiina Kapperi tantsustuudio. *Teatrielu 2022*. Eds. Alvar Loog and Valle-Sten Maiste. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 311–324.
- Scheier, Helmut. 1992. Ausdruckstanz, Religion und Erotik. *Ausdruckstanz. Eine mitteleuropäische Bewegung der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller. Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel Verlag, 166–180.
- Semper, Johannes. 1919. Isadora Duncan. *Näokatted I. Essee de kogu*. Tartu: Odamees, 97–103.
- Semper, Johannes. 1926. Akrobaatikast ja erootikast. *Looming* (3): 332–334.
- Semper, Johannes. 1929. Kolm kehakunsti õhtut "Vanemuises." *Looming* (10): 1307–1309.
- Semper, Johannes. 1982a. Väljavõtteid J. Semper kirjadest F. Tuglasele Berliinist. *Keel ja Kirjandus* (3): 146–152.
- Semper, Johannes. 1982b. Väljavõtteid J. Semper kirjadest F. Tuglasele Berliinist. *Keel ja Kirjandus* (4): 195–204.
- Sent M'Ahesa [Advertisement]. *Pernausche Zeitung* 1913, September 24.
- Sent M'ahesa, die berühmte... *Revalsche Zeitung* 1913, January 2.
- Siegmund, Gerald. 2023. Tanz. *Theater und Tanz. Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*. Eds. Betae Hochholding-Reiterer, Christina Thurner and Julia Wehren. Nomos, 45–57.
- Siit ja sealt. *Stockholms-Tidningen Eestlastele* 1948, April 28.
- Sirotkina, Irina. 2018. The Revolutionary Body, or Was There Modern Dance in Russia? *Arti Dello Spettacolo / Performing Arts* 4 (4): 31–41.
- Sirotkina, Irina. 2021. "Школа пластики" Клавдии Исаченко. *Свободный танец в России. История и философия*. Russia: НЛЮ. Accessed November 13, 2024. http://loveread.me/read_book.php?id=101112&p=40.
- Suits, Gustav. 1913. Sent M'ahesa. Üks Baltimaalt põlwenew tantsijanna. *Päevaleht*, November 6.
- Suur pidu-õhtu. 1915. [Advertisement] *Postimees*, 18.04.
- Tallinna tramm 135 – ajaloost tänapäeva. 2023. Tallinna Linnatransport. Accessed June 25, 2024. <https://tlt.ee/tallinna-tramm-135-ajaloost-tanapaeva/>.
- Tänane intervjuu. Gerd Negro kõneleb tantsust. 1936. *Päevaleht*, April 3.
- Tanke, Joseph. 2011. *Jacques Rancière: an introduction*. Continuum.
- Tantsijanna Alice Jürna. *Päevaleht* 1927, January 28.
- Tantsu uuesti sündimine. *Päevaleht* 1913, September 24.
- Tanzabend Alice Jürna. *Revaler Bote* 1927, February 7.

- Tiina Kapperit usutlemas... *Nool* (Tartu) 1930, October 25, 9.
- Toepfer, Karl. 1997. *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910–1935*. USA: University of California Press.
- Toepfer, Karl. 2019. *Pantomime: The History and Metamorphosis of a Theatrical Ideology*. Accessed August 11, 2025. <https://karltoepfer.com/pantomime/>.
- Toepfer, Karl. *A Foreign Perspective of Early Modern Dance in Estonia: How Ella Ilbak's Photographic Image (1915–1948) Changed My Life*. Conference lecture. Accessed May 1, 2025. <https://karltoepfer.com/2024/10/29/a-foreign-perspective-of-early-modern-dance-in-estonia-how-ella-ilbaks-photographic-image-1915-1948-changed-my-life/>.
- Tohvelman, Helmi. 2000. *Eesti teatri biograafiline leksikon*. Accessed August 15, 2025. http://etbl.teatriliit.ee/artikkel/tohvelman_helmi2.
- Tormis, Lea. 1967. *Eesti balletist*. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.
- Tõusew täht Eesti tantsutaewas. Nora Liina esineb kolmapäewal „Estonias.” *Waba Maa* 1934, October 8.
- Tuglas, Friedebert. 1918. Tants ja tantsjanna. *Postimees*, May 25.
- Urbel, Ida. n.d. *Eesti teatri biograafiline leksikon*. Accessed August 15, 2025. http://etbl.teatriliit.ee/artikkel/urbel_ida2.
- Uudiseid teatri alalt. *Tallinna Teataja* 1919, September 20.
- Uus tantsustuudio. *Päevaleht* 1937, September 27.
- Uus wool kunst-tantsus. *Sakala* 1913, March 29.
- Verstraete, Erik. 1987. Heiko Kolt, een danser als een engel. *Vlaanderen. Kunsttijdschrift* 36. Accessed March 7, 2024. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_vla016198701_01/_vla016198701_01_0084.php/.
- Vidzemniece, Valda. 2024. *Modernā deja Latvijā. 20. gadsimta pirmajā pusē*. Zinātne.
- Visnapuu, Henrik. 1924. Tantsijanna Gerd Neggo esinemise puhul Vanemuises 7. nov. *Postimees*, November 4.
- Visnapuu, Henrik. 1927. Im Memoriam Isadora Duncan. *Waba Maa*, September 17.
- Wohler, Ulrike. 2009. Tanz zwischen Avantgarde und Klassischer Moderne: Anita Berber und Mary Wigman. *Avantgarden und Politik. Künstlerischer Aktivismus von Dada bis zur Postmoderne*. Bielefeld: transcript, 67–88.
- Wolfreys, Julian. 2008. *Transgression: identity, space, time*. London: Macmillan Education UK.
- Zetterberg, Seppo. 2010. *Eesti ajalugu*. Tallinn: Tänapäev.

Archival sources

- Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, 23438. Wichtigste Daten und Einzelheiten aus dem Leben von Aino Jooss-Siimola (Most important dates and details from the life of Aino Jooss-Siimola). Author: Kurt Jooss.
- EKM EKLA = Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, Eesti Kultuurilooline Arhiiv (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian Cultural History Archives)
- EKM EKLA f 224. Hans ja Jaan Leoke.
- EKM EKLA f 155. Eduard Virgo.
- EKM EKLA f 194. Eesti biograafiline leksikon (Estonian biographical lexicon).
- EKM EKLA f 193. Eesti avalikkude tegelaste kogu (Collection of Estonian public figures).

ETMM = Eesti Teatri- ja Muusikamuuseum (Estonian Theater and Music Museum)
ETMM T426 Gerd Neggo.
ETMM T362 Helmi Tohvelman
ETMM T184. Haridusministeeriumi Kutseoskuse Valitsus (Ministry of Education's
Department of Qualifications).

RA = Eesti Rahvusrhiiv (National Archives of Estonia)
RA ERA.1108. Haridusministeerium (Ministry of Education).
RA TLA.1376. Aadresslehed (Address sheets).
RA EAA.2111. Printing house Postimees (Trükikäitis Postimees).

SM = Saaremaa Muuseum (Saaremaa Museum)
SM 10466:1 Ark. Neggo suguvõsa ajalugu (History of the Neggo family). Author Oscar
Neggo, 1953, unpublished manuscript.

Personal communication

Hurt, Martin. 2020. E-mail conversation with the author, May 30 – December 7. Notes in
the author's possession.
Kull, Merike. 2025. Telephone conversations and a meeting, July 17 – August 5. Notes
in the author's possession.
Laantee Reintamm, Carl Eric. 2020. Telephone conversation with the author, October 8.
Notes in the author's possession.
Schuldt-Hiddemann, Garnet. 2018. E-mail correspondence with the author, January 29.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Moderntants kunstilise ja soodiskursuse kujundajana Eestis 1920. aastatel

Doktoritöö keskmes on küsimus, kuidas jõudis moderntants Eestisse ning millist mõju avaldas see valitsevale soolisele ja kunstilisele diskursusele. Töö sai tõuke äratundmisest, et Eesti moderntantsu ajalugu ja sellega kaasnenud muutusi ei ole seni süstemaatiliselt uuritud. Moderntants on lavatantsu vorm, mis sündis 20. sajandi alguses. Lavatantsuna mõistan koreograafi seatud liikumist, mida esitatakse reeglina teatrilaval muusika saatel.

Erinevalt balletist olid moderntantsu juhtfiguurideks naised. Uus kunstivorm andis neile võimaluse iseseisvaks eluks ning vabaduse tegutseda mitte ainult tantsija, vaid ka tantsude looja ehk koreograafina. Enne moderntantsu sündi oli tantsijanna peamiseks ülesandeks meeste loodud rollide ja sammujadade esitamine, et kõnetada sellega peamiselt meessoost publikut (Kolb 2009, 33–34). Varase moderntantsu esindajad eitasid kõike balletiga seotut: lisaks klassikalisele balletitehnikalet heitsid nad kõrvale balleriinile harjumuspärased riideesemed (sukkpüksid, korseti ja balletikingad) ning loobusid balletile tunnuslikest süžee-liinidest. Moderntantsijad löid uue koreograafilise keele, töid lavale uued lood ja naistegelased.

Kasutan mõistet „moderntants“ katusmõistena. Pean sellega silmas lavatantsu žanrit, mis otsis alternatiive klassikalise balleti tehnikale, liikumissõnavarale ja teemadele. Fraas „varane moderntants“ viitab moderntantsu kujunemisaastatele, mis Eesti puhul hõlmab aastaid 1910. aastate keskpaigast kuni 1920. aastate keskpaigani. Moderntantsu sees on võimalik eristada erinevaid suundumusi, mis erinesid liikumiskeele ja tehnika poolest. Vaatlusaluse perioodi olulisimateks suundumusteks olid plastiline tants ja *Ausdruckstanz* ehk väljendustants. Kui plastilist tantsu seostati Eestis muusika visualiseerimisega, siis Saksamaalt imporditud väljendustantsu eesmärk oli n-ö absoluutne tants ehk tants, mis on vaba teiste kunstide (sh muusika) domineerimisest. Plastiline tants oli levinud Eestis umbes 1910. aastate keskpaigast kuni 1920. aastate keskpaigani, mil väljendustants selle positsiooni üle võttis. Huvi väljendustantsu vastu hakkas kaduma 1920. aastate lõpus.

Doktoritöös otsitakse vastuseid kolmele uurimisküsimusele: 1) Kuidas jõudis moderntants Eestisse ja kinnistus siin 1910. aastatel ning 1920. aastate esimeses pooles? 2) Kuidas Eesti kriitikud kirjeldasid ja tõlgendasid moderntantsu kõnealusel perioodil? 3) Kuidas kehastasid moderntantsijad laval naist ja millist elu tantsijad elasid?

Väitekiri keskendub kahele vähe uuritud tantsijale ja koreograafile, Elmerice Partsile (sünd. Elmerice Elisabeth Meyer, 1878–1974) ja Gerd (sünd. Gerda Elwine) Neggole (hiljem Neggo-Olak, 1891–1974). Koos Ella Ilbakuga (1895–1997), ilmselt kõige tuntuma Eesti moderntantsijaga, olid nad Eesti varase moderntantsu kõige olulisemad esindajad. Uurimistöö keskendub peamiselt 1920. aastatele, mil moderntants saavutas suure populaarsuse ja kujunes hinnatud

kunstivormiks. Lisaks sellele tutvustatakse väitekirjas lühidalt 1910. ja 1930. aastatel toimunut.

Uurimus koosneb katuspeatükist ja neljast teaduspublikatsioonist. Katuspeatükis annan esmalt ülevaate uurimisvaldkonna hetkeseisust ning esitlen oma uurimistulemustele tuginedes Eesti moderntantsu ajalugu 1910. aastate keskpaigast kuni 1930. aastate lõpuni. Lisaks sellele tutvustan katuspeatükis uurimisküsimusi, uurimuse teoreetilist raamistikku, kasutatud allikaid ja rakendatud meetodikat. Teaduspublikatsioonides käsitlen erinevaid töö uurimisküsimuste ja moderntantsuga seotud aspekte, tuginedes kultuuriteoreetilistele mõistetele ja teooriatele, mis võimaldavad kogutud empiirilist materjali sügavalt ja nüansirohkelt käsitleda.

Artiklis I tuginen Edward Saidi ideele rändavast teooriast ja selle edasiarendusele Dongchao Mini poolt ning vaatlen, mis juhtub ühe koreograafi teooriaga, kui see satub uude kultuurilisse konteksti. Said seab kahtluse alla tavapärase mõtte teooriast kui millestki konstantsest. Tema sõnul (1983, 226) „ei toimu liikumine uude keskkonda kunagi takistusteta”. Sellist liikumist iseloomustavad „valikulised omastamised, produktiivsed vääritimõistmised ning katkelised tõlked vastavalt ajaloolistele ja kohalikele oludele” (Neumann ja Nünning 2012, 5). Arvestades, et Eesti moderntantsu varajane ajalugu koosneb üksnes imporditud ideedest ja koreograafilistest suundumustest, on see teadmine eriti oluline. Artikkel käsitleb Rudolf Labani ideede rännet Saksamaalt Eestisse, nende vahendajaks oli Gerd Negro, kes õppis Labani juures 1920. aastate alguses. Analüüsi tulemusena selgus, et sarnaselt filosoofilistele ideedele muutub rändamise tulemusena ka tantsuteooria. Lisaks sellele selgus, et tantsuteooria ränne erineb teaduslike ideede rändest. Kuna koreograafi väljatöötatud teadmine on kehaline teadmine, peab õpilane esmalt leidma tee oma mentori juurde, et teooria ränne üldse saaks võimalikuks. See seob tantsuteooriate rände poliitiliste, sotsiaalsete ja füüsiliste teguritega.

Artikkel II analüüsib põhjalikult arusaamu kunsti ja erootika suhetest Elmerice Partsi ja Herman (ka Heiko ja Heigo) Kolti (ka Oginsky ja Kolt-Oginsky, 1902–1977) skandaali tekitanud loomingu näitel. Artikkel toetub mõistetele „transgressioon“ ja „kunstide režiim.“ „Trangressiooni“ mõistet on põhjalikult tutvustanud Chris Jenks, „kunstide režiimi“ mõiste pärineb Jacques Rancière’lt. Kultuuriteoorias viitab „transgressioon“ piiride ületamisele – olgu need siis füüsilised, vaimsed, esteetilised, sotsiaalsed või poliitilised. Need piirid on enamasti nähtamatud, nad muutuvad nähtavaks siis, kui keegi neid ületab, sooritades sellega transgressiivse teo (Jenks 2003, 2). Jenksi (2003, 8) sõnul ei sõltu transgressiivse teo tähendus piiriületaja taotlustest, vaid on enamasti peidus kontekstis. Teisisõnu, muutes ühiskonnas valitsevad normid ja reeglid nähtavaks, aitab transgressiivne tegu süvendada meie arusaamist ühiskonnast, kus me elame. Teiste sõnadega, Partsi ja Kolti ühise loomingu analüüsimine transgressiivsena võimaldab tundma õppida toona valitsenud norme. Artiklitest II ja III selgub, et kriitikute jaoks ei olnud moderntantsu erootilisus iseenesest probleem, vastupidi, seda peeti tantsukunsti lahutamatuks osaks (Semper 1926). Seda siiski vaid juhul, kui tantsijanna ei rõhunud oma erootilisusele laval teadlikult. Just selle

kirjutamata reegli vastu Parts eksis. Ta kujutas end laval sensuaalse, isegi erootilise naisena. Siinkohal on oluline osutada tõsiasjale, et enamik kriitikuid olid mehed ja tantsijad naised; seega arvustused ei kõnele mitte üksnes kriitikute esteetilisest eelistusest, vaid ka sellest, kuidas nad pidasid paremaks naist laval kujutada. Analüüsi tulemusena ilmnis, et kõige häälekamad kriitikud (Rasmus Kangro-Pool ja Johannes Semper) olid tugevasti mõjutatud Rudolf Labani vaadetest tantsu ja erootika suhete kohta.

Moderntantsu mõjujõud tuleb kõige paremini ilmsiks Jacques Rancière'i mõiste „kunstide režiim“ kaudu. Rancière'i (2013) kohaselt eksisteerib kolm kunstirežiimi: eetiline, representatiivne ja esteetiline. Representatiivne režiim seob Rancière'i sõnul kunsti „õigete“ teemade, „oluliste“ tegevuste ja „tähtsate“ tegelaste kujutamise, esteetiline režiim see-eest ei tunnista mingeid reegleid. Moderntantsu peamised suundumused, plastiline tants ja väljendustants, kuuluvad ennekõike representatiivsesse kunstirežiimi. Kuigi moderntants andis koreograafidele võimaluse kujutada naist laval uut moodi, ei saa pidada moderntantsijate naise kujutamise viise vabastavaks, vastupidi, pigem vastasid kujutatud naised kodanliku teatrilava nõudmistele (Wohler 2009, 70–71). See ei kehti avangardistide kohta, kes kujutasid naist laval täiesti teist moodi ja kelle loomingu võib sellest tulenevalt liigitada esteetilisse kunstirežiimi kuuluvaks. Sotsioloog Ulrike Wohleri (2009, 71) sõnul on tants avangardistlik siis, kui ta muuhulgas mõtestab ümber ja esitab küsimusi kehalisuse, keha kujutamise viiside ja liikumise kohta ning vaidlustab kodanlikke soonorme. Käsitledes tantsunumbrites teemasid ja tegelasi, mida varem ei ole (teatri)lavale sobivaks peetud, muutsid avangardistid seda, mida Rancière nimetab tajutava jaotuskorraks. Avangardistide hulka kuulusid teiste seas tantsijad ja koreograafid Elmerice Parts ja Herman Kolt.

Artiklis IV keskendun Partsi ja Gerd Negro elule ja loominguale 1920. aastate alguses ja keskel, mil mõlemad olid tegevad soolotantsijana. Artiklis uurin, mis sugused olid naised, keda nad laval kujutasid, ning millist elu Parts ja Negro ise elasid. Judith Butleri kohaselt ei ole sotsiaalne sugu fakt, vaid performatiivne akt ehk midagi, mida me „teeme“. Sugu konstrueeritakse konkreetsete kehaliste žestide, tegevuste ja liigutuste korduva sooritamise kaudu, mis omakorda kujundavad indiviidi soolist identiteeti (Lloyd 2016, 575). Partsi ja Negro elud erinesid märgatavalt toona tavapäraseks peetud naise elust: nad olid haritud ning tegutsesid iseseisvate ja sõltumatute tantsijate, koreograafide ja õpetajatena. Võib kindlalt öelda, et nad „tegid“ sugu uuel moel ja sellega vaidlustasid ühiskonna poolt naistele pandud ootusi. Lisaks sellele rikastasid Parts ja Negro oma loomingu naistegelaste ringi laval, pakkudes alternatiivi meeskoreograafide nägemusele naisest (vt ka Artikkel II ja III). Butleri teooria võimaldab näidata, kuidas moderntantsu esindajad vaidlustasid valitsevaid soonorme nii kunstilises kui ka sotsiaalses kontekstis.

Suur osa moderntantsu ja moderntantsu esindajaid käsitlevatest andmetest pärineb omaaegsetest ajalehtedest ja ajakirjadest. Nendest perioodikaväljaannetest on võimalik leida väärtuslikku informatsiooni moderntantsijate loomingu kohta – oma tekstis kriitik mitte üksnes ei anna hinnangut nähtule, vaid teinekord ka

kirjeldab kostüümi, liikumist ja/või tantsunumbri ainet. Säilinud fotod annavad uurijale aimu, kuidas eelistasid tantsijad end jäädvustada, kuid arvestades tõsi- asjaga, et fotod on tehtud stuudios, ei reeda need midagi etenduse kohta. Filmi- materjali kahjuks säilinud ei ole. Nõustun Thomas Postlewaitiga (1990, 167), et teatriarvustuste tõlgendamisel tuleb olla eriti tähelepanelik, sest subjektiivsete kirjutistena hõlmavad arvustused ka autori isiklikku maitset, eelistusi ja arusaamu tantsukunstist. Lisaks ajalehe- ja ajakirjaartiklitele olen uurimuse läbiviimiseks kasutanud erinevaid arhiividokumente (kirjad, tunnistused, kavalehted, fotod jt), et leida faktilist ja halduslikku teavet tantsijate kohta.

Uurimistöö läbiviimiseks on kasutatud kvalitatiivseid uurimismeetodeid. Eesti moderntantsu ajaloo rekonstrueerimiseks kasutasin peamiselt ajaloolist meetodit. Uurimistöö algas andmete otsimisega Eesti ja välismaa arhiividest. Seejärel analüüsisin põhjalikult kogutud allikaid, et leida korduvaid mustreid või olulisi eba- reeglipärasusi. Selle protsessi osadeks olid allikate korrastamine, kontekstuali- seerimine ja kriitiline hindamine. Perioodika analüüsimiseks kasutasin diskursus- analüüsi. Lähemalt analüüsisin valitsenud soolist ja kunstilist diskursust ning käsitlesin väljendustantsuga seotud diskursuseid Eestis ja Saksamaal.

Diskursusanalüüs ei ole üks kindel meetod, vaid pigem on tegemist laia, interdistsiplinaarse meetodite väljaga, mis uurib tähenduse teket kui sotsiaalselt raamistatud ja kontekstipõhist praktikat. Diskursusanalüütikud on veendunud, et teksti tähendus tekib „keele“, „praktika“ ja „kontekstide“ dünaamilise koostoime kaudu (Angermuller 2014, 25). Analüüsiprotsess algas vaatlusaluse teema seisukohalt relevantsete dokumentide ja tekstilõikude väljaselgitamisega, seejärel tutvusin põhjalikult nende sisuga. Materjali läbi töötades tekkisid mustrid, millest moodustus analüüsi baasi. Mustreid analüüsides selgus, kuidas teatud nähtust kirjeldati või mõnda tähendust konstrueeriti.

Käesoleva uurimuse esimene järeldus on, et Eesti moderntantsu ajalugu on rikas ja mitmekesine. Lisaks sellele võib kahtlusteta öelda, et see oli tihedalt seotud Lääne-Euroopa tantsuvaldkonnaga: eesti tantsijad õppisid oma aja kõige silmapaistvamate koreograafide juures ning kuulusid toonastesse juhtivatesse tantsutruppidesse. Nende kaudu jõudsid Euroopas valitsevad ideed ja tehnikad ka Eestisse. Eesti varase moderntantsu kõige omapärasemaks figuuriks võib pidada Elmerice Partsi. Antud uurimus asetab ta koos Herman Koldiga avangardistliku kunsti konteksti. Nende ühises loomingus avaldus moderntantsu potentsiaal üle- tada piire ja vaidlustada valitsevaid norme. Seejuures tuleb silmas pidada, et kuna peamiseks allikateks on perioodikaväljaannetes ilmunud tekstid, on tulemuseks paratamatult mõnevõrra piiratud vaade Eesti moderntantsu ajaloole.

Väitekirja teine järeldus on, et moderntants mõjutas toonaste naiste elu. Moderntants andis tantsijatele-koreograafidele võimaluse elada iseseisvat elu ja teostada end ametialaselt. Moderntantsijad olid nn. uued naised, kes esitasid väljakutse valitsenud arusaamadele naisele sobivast ja jõukohasest. Avaliku elu tegelastena kajastasid tantsijate tegemisi kohalikud ajalehed ja ajakirjad, infor- meerides sellega teisi naisi naiseks ja kunstnikuks olemise uuest viisist. Uuringu üheks piiranguks on naiste kirjutatud tekstide vähesus. Enamiku arvustustest ja

muudest kirjutistest on kirjutanud mehed, tagades uurijale ligipääsu vaid ühele osale Eesti moderntantsu retseptsioonist ja ajaloo.

Uurimuse kolmas järeldus on, et moderntantsu kunsti valdkonda kuulumises ei olnud midagi iseenesestmõistetavat. Ikka ja jälle tõstasid kultuuriajakirjanikud ajaleheveergudel küsimuse, kas nähtud tantsuetenduse näol oli tegemist kunsti või pigem meelelahutusega. Küsimus kerkis üles reeglina siis, kui tantsija(d) ja koreograaf(id) oli(d) rikkunud mõnda kirjutamata reeglit või normi. Äärmuslikul juhul kuulutasid kriitikud nähtud tantsuetenduse moraalivastaseks; sellega tunnistasid nad ühtlasi, et tegu oli mitte-kunstiga. Levinud arusaama kohaselt oli kunstipärasus tihedalt seotud moraalsusega: moraalinormide eiramine välistas kunsti valdkonda kuulumise.

Eesti tantsuajaloo uurijatel ei tule tööst ka edaspidi puudust. Esiteks oleks vaja jätkata Teise maailmasõja eelse tantsumaastiku kaardistamist, et saada täielik ülevaade selle rikkusest. Oluline on tihe koostöö välismaiste arhiividega, sest mitmed eesti kunstnikud õppisid ja töötasid välismaal. Antud uurimistöö ei käsitle 1930. ja 1940. aastate poliitiliste sündmuste mõju Eesti tantsumaastikule. Oluline on välja selgitada, kuidas mõjutas „vaikiv ajastu“ ja sellele järgnenud okupatsioonid tantsijate ja koreograafide, eriti naiste loomingulist vabadust.

PUBLICATIONS

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Anne-Liis Maripuu
Date of Birth: 13.04.1985
E-post: anneliis.maripuu@gmail.com
Account of ETIS: <https://www.etis.ee/Portal/Persons/Display/5fe20da3-edb3-4d7e-948a-78df9aa07610/eng>
Blog: <https://tantsuajalugutekstides.wordpress.com/>

EDUCATION

09.2020–... University of Tartu, Institute of Cultural Research, PhD Studies
2009–2016 Free University Berlin, MA in Theatre Studies
09.2006–02.2007 Eberhard-Karls-University Tübingen, Modern German Literature, Exchange student
2003–2008 University of Tartu, BA in Theatre Studies
1991–2003 Saaremaa Ühisgümnaasium

EMPLOYMENT

09.2023–08.2024 University of Tartu, Institute of Cultural Research, junior researcher
2019–... University of Tartu, visiting lecturer

PUBLICATIONS

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2016. Modernantsu algusaastad Eestis. Gerd Neggo 125 (The early years of modern dance in Estonia. Gerd Neggo 125). *Teater. Muusika. Kino* (11): 46–51.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2018. “Minu element on erootika.” Elmerice Parts – 140. (“My Element is Eroticism.” Elmerice Parts 140.) *Teater. Muusika. Kino* (11): 46–55.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019. Modernse tantsu algusaastad Eestis I (1913–1925). *TantsuKuuKiri*, November. Accessed August 18, 2025. <https://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/modernse-tantsu-algusaastad-ee-tis-i-1913-1925/>.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019. “Eesti modernse tantsu algusaastad II (1925–1939).” *TantsuKuuKiri*, December. Accessed August 18, 2025. <https://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/ee-tis-modernse-tantsu-algusaastad-ii-1925-1939/>.

- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019. Gerd Neggo, Helmi Nurk, Aino Siimola ja Ida Urjan – Rudolf von Labani õpilased aastatel 1921–1924 Saksamaal (Gerd Neggo, Helmi Nurk, Aino Siimola and Ida Urjan – Rudolf von Laban’s students in Germany 1921–1924). *Teatrielu 2018*. Eds. Madli Pesti and Marie Pullerits. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 297–327.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2020. Eesti tantsulava Salomed (Salomes of Estonian Dance Scene). *TantsuKuuKiri* November. Accessed July 29, 2025. <http://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/eesti-tantsulava-salomed/>.
- Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2022. “Keha üksi kõneleb.” Tantsija, koreograaf, pedagoog Gerd Neggo 130 (“The body alone speaks.” Dancer, choreographer, pedagogue Gerd Neggo 130). *Teatrielu 2021*. Eds. Alvar Loog and Valle-Sten Maiste. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 257–279.

CREATIVE WORKS

- 2021–2022 editor of photo exhibition “Gerd Neggo. ’Tants üksnes on suverään’” (shown at the Estonian Drama Theatre, Vanemuine Theatre, and in the Cultural Centre of Kuressaare). The exhibition was arranged by The Union of Estonian Theatre Researchers and Critics.
- 2018 researcher and editor of exhibition “Tantsides vabaks” (“Dancing free”) brought to life together with Heili Einasto, Annely Kaldoja, and Simmo Priks. The exhibition was arranged by and shown at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum.

ASSOCIATIONS

- 2015 Estonian Theatre Union
- 2015 The Union of Estonian Theatre Researchers and Critics
- 2023 European Association for Dance History
- 2025 Gesellschaft für Tanzwissenschaft
- 2025 Eesti Tantsukunsti ja Tantsuhariduse Liit

ELULOOKIRJELDUS

Nimi: Anne-Liis Maripuu
Sünniaeg: 13.04.1985
E-post: anneliis.maripuu@gmail.com
ETISE konto: https://www.etis.ee/CV/Anne-Liis_Maripuu
Blogi: <https://tantsuajalugutekstides.wordpress.com/>

HARIDUS

09.2020–10.2025 Tartu Ülikool, kultuuriteaduste instituut, doktoriõpe
10.2009–05.2016 Freie Universität Berlin, filosoofia ja humanitaarteaduste osakond, magistriõpe
09.2006–02.2007 Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, filosoofiateaduskond, Erasmuse programmi vahetusüliõpilane
2003–2008 Tartu Ülikool, filosoofiateaduskond, bakalaureuseõpe
1991–2003 Saaremaa Ühisgümnaasium

TEENISTUSKÄIK

09.2023–08.2024 Tartu Ülikool, kultuuriteaduste instituut, nooremteadur
2019–... Tartu Ülikooli külalislektor

PUBLIKATSIOONID

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2016. Moderntantsu algusaastad Eestis. Gerd Neggo 125. *Teater. Muusika. Kino* (11): 46–51.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2018. “Minu element on erootika.” Elmerice Parts – 140. *Teater. Muusika. Kino* (11): 46–55.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019. Modernse tantsu algusaastad Eestis I (1913–1925). *TantsuKuuKiri* november. Vaadatud 29. juuli 2025. <https://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/modernse-tantsu-algusaastad-eestis-i-1913-1925/>.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019. Eesti modernse tantsu algusaastad II (1925–1939). *TantsuKuuKiri* detsember. Vaadatud 29. juuli 2025. <http://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/eesti-modernse-tantsu-algusaastad-ii-1925-1939/>.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2019. Gerd Neggo, Helmi Nurk, Aino Siimola ja Ida Urjan – Rudolf von Labani õpilased aastatel 1921–1924 Saksamaal. *Teatrielu 2018*. Toim. Madli Pesti ja Marie Pullerits. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 297–327.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2020. Eesti tantsulava Salomed. *TantsuKuuKiri* november. Vaadatud 29. juuli 2025.

<http://kuukiri.tantsuliit.ee/artikkel/eesti-tantsulava-salomed/>.

Maripuu, Anne-Liis. 2022. "Keha üksi kõneleb." Tantsija, koreograaf, pedagoog Gerd Neggo 130. *Teatrielu 2021*. Toim. Alvar Loog ja Valle-Sten Maiste. Tallinn: Eesti Teatriliit; Eesti Teatri Agentuur, 257–279.

LOOMETÖÖ

2021–2022 Fotonäituse "Gerd Neggo. 'Tants üksnes on suverään'" koostaja ja toimetaja (Eesti Draamateater, Kuressaare Kultuurikeskus, Vanemuise väikene maja). Näituse korraldaja oli MTÜ Eesti Teatriuurijate ja -kriitikute Ühendus.

2018 Eesti Teatri- ja Muusikamuuseumi näituse "Tantsides vabaks" üks uurija ja koostaja. Näitus valmis koostöös Heili Einasto, Annely Kaldoja ja Simmo Priksiga. Näitust eksponeeriti Eesti Teatri- ja Muusikamuuseumis.

ERIALANE KUULUVUS

2015 Eesti Teatriliit

2015 Eesti Teatriuurijate ja -kriitikute Ühendus

2023 European Association for Dance History

2025 Gesellschaft für Tanzwissenschaft

DISSERTATIONES DE STUDIIS DRAMATICIS UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

1. **Eike Värk.** Näitleja loomingulise pikaajalisuse ja mitmekülgsuse fenomen Salme Reegi näitel. Tartu 2012, 242 lk.
2. **Ott Karulin.** Rakvere Teater „täismängude” otsinguil aastail 1985–2009. Tartu 2013, 269 lk.
3. **Hedi-Liis Toome.** The functioning of theatre in the city of Tartu: a comparative perspective. Tartu 2015, 256 p.
4. **Madli Pesti.** Poliitiline teater ja selle strateegiad Eesti ja lääne kultuuris. Tartu 2016, 166 lk.
5. **Sven Karja.** Eesti teatrite repertuaar aastatel 1986–2006. Tartu 2020, 175 lk.