

REFLECTIONS ON THE EMBODIED FIELD. BHARATA NATYAM DANCE IN WARSAW AS AN EXAMPLE SITE

ALINA KACZMAREK

PH.D. CANDIDATE INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY
POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Abstract

This article presents an ethnographic reflection on constructing the field when the subject of the research is an encounter with dance practitioners of Bharata Natyam, a classical Indian dance practised in Warsaw. The author shows the essential methodological and theoretical issues related to researching movement, where apart from the researcher's subject of study, she herself and her body are a part of the researched landscape of experience. The embodied aspect of acquiring the dance of foreign origin by Polish dancers needs a re-conceptualisation of the notion of ethnographic field. The article shows the case of Bharata Natyam dancers in Warsaw, who work on their own corporeality to embody the movement and make it a part of their own body image and therefore their identity. The strategy of researching kinaesthetic culture is outlined on the basis of, among others, the assumptions of phenomenology, which gives the body a respected place in every kind of human experience.

* * *

Niniejszy artykuł ukazuje etnograficzne rozważania związane z konstruowaniem terenu badań, kiedy obiektem zainteresowania jest spotkanie z tancerkami uprawianego w Warszawie indyjskiego tańca klasycznego bharatanatjam. Autorka podejmuje próbę przedstawienia zagadnień metodologicznych i teoretycznych istotnych dla analizy znaczeniowej ruchu, gdzie, poza badanymi, sama badaczka i jej cielesność stają się elementem przestrzeni doświadczenia. Drażnienie znaczeń związanych z ucieleśnionym aspektem praktyki tańca o korzeniach kulturowych obcych dla Polskich tancerek wymaga przewartościowania pojęcia etnograficznego terenu. W artykule przedstawiony jest przypadek warszawskich tancerek bharatanatjam, które wyrabiają swoje ciała, aby taniec w nie wniknął, i tym samym włączają go w swój *schemat motoryczny* i zarazem tożsamość. Zaprezentowane strategie radzenia sobie z badaniem wspólnoty kinestetycznej opierają się między innymi na założeniach fenomenologii, która oddała cielesności należyte miejsce w każdym ludzkim doświadczeniu.

Key words: fieldwork, body, dance, embodiment, movement, thick participation, body memory.

INTRODUCTION

The ethnographic exploration of experience, which is generated by dance – in this case the Indian Bharata Natyam dance, is based on a shift from the traditional model applied in anthropology, which implies long-term fieldwork carried out according to

the paradigmatic pattern generated by Bronislaw Malinowski. Since then, the concept of the field has expanded enormously, even if the early twentieth-century concept is still lingering. Describing a less obvious “field”, the realm of dance, which is a field that loses its located character, is of particular importance in this context and needs some justification. The subject of my study, which is Bharata Natyam dance practice, is heterogeneous and variable, and forces me as a researcher to cope with the shifting landscape of experience. The dance, which is of South Indian origin, is an extremely structured technical dance movement combined with theatrical performance, which refers to deeper philosophical and religious meanings rooted in Indian artistic tradition. In Warsaw dance schools, Bharata Natyam dance has been reproduced and relocated. The material for analysis here are the narratives of women dancers practicing Bharata Natyam in Warsaw, either learning or teaching it in one of two dance schools: “Mohini” and “Nataraja”. Their temporary study visits to India, from where this dance originates, are also a relevant element of the phenomenon. Therefore, the research field is distributed between various places where the dance is practised and becomes more mental than localized. This concept requires that a multi-sited research be followed, based on shared experience rather than on some particular location. The body, as the place of experience and the essential tool of imaginative understanding of the researched reality, becomes also a part of the field. In this case, I myself am also a “native” of sorts. My autobiographical subjectivity is under analysis and becomes a part of the landscape of experience my study strives to grasp.

GENEALOGY OF THE FIELD

Nowadays the extension of anthropological encounter or field of research is easily noticeable. The field is understood less as a distinctly separate place and more as a set of embodied research practices, as well as a distance offered by professional separation (Clifford 1997, p. 90). However, this perspective on experienced space is possible due to feeling it in practice and the subsequent reevaluation of the classical paradigm of fieldwork that once justified anthropology and its scientific authority. Its benchmark used to be a travel, preferably to a distant place, where the anthropologist immersed himself/herself in direct contact with the locals over a longer period of time (Amit 2000, p. 2). Traditionally, long-term immersion was associated with an interest in the informal knowledge and embodied practices, and the imperative to listen (Clifford 1997, p. 86). In the field, the researcher is not just present; as a tool for obtaining information, s/he is open to listen to what the place of research and its inhabitants, the natives, can tell him or her. In this classical approach, where the object of study was often an exotic location, it was an important step for scholars to actually travel to the place, which served as a laboratory. Physically leaving home, travelling to and

from a significantly different place tangibly moved the researcher to his/her specific field, which became the site to be constructed for the use of positivist science. Intense, deep research in a canonical model was provided by the practice of spatial long-term residence in the community (Clifford 1997, p. 59). As pointed out by Gupta and Ferguson, who are mentioned by Amit, distance from home provides a clearer perspective on the experience of the field (Amit 2000, p. 4).

In the past, the need to purify the field, at least conceptually, from tourists, missionaries and government troops was obvious. Being in such a workplace involved specific, more focused and disciplined attention (Clifford 2004, p. 140). In such circumstances it was necessary to distinguish scholars from the writer-travellers or missionaries, that is people staying in the community for a long time, but devoid of academic authority. In order to ensure scientific objectivity, ethnographers marginalised emotions and the experience of gender, race or sexuality in their studies (Clifford 2004, p. 157). A peculiar *habitus*, which constituted the discipline, was built around the tendency to avoid those components (Clifford 2004, p. 160). Feminist scholars, including Kirsten Hastrup, oppose this approach. She sees a fundamental contradiction in the aspiration for objective science and disagreement on what anthropological research practice brings – a deep, engaged contact (Hastrup 1995, p. 56), an encounter permeated with a very personal dynamic. Being sensitive to ethics, being harmless and being involved in that anthropological encounter are important issues in the feminist approach.

As the trends in anthropology changed and opened up the discipline of ethnography “at home”, new definitions of the field were developed. It is now seen more as a space of embodied tendencies and practices (Clifford 1997, p. 53). Vered Amit summarises the practice of anthropology in the field as being “there” and not elsewhere (2000, p. 5). The field is characterised by the presence and absence, accompanied by methods such as interviews, analysis of documents and reception of various media (Amit 2000: 12). Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork must be experienced as performed rather than merely communicated in the dialogue (Amit 2000, p. 1). Field site is constructed, shaped by conceptual, professional and financial opportunities (Amit 2000, p. 6). The field created by the researcher is always a choice from many possible, equally good conceptualisations (Clifford 2004, p. 164).

Currently the field has become dynamic, mobile and set in the global context, regardless of the chosen conceptualisation. The image of the place of research as a lonely island has already been abandoned, because translocal and transnational flows of people, practices and subjects are ubiquitous. The emergence of multi-sited anthropology and the transnational flows contributed to the redefinition of the ethnographic field (Marcus 1995). Clifford observes that multi-sited research is an oxymoron, and asks how many places one can explore deeply (Clifford 2004, p. 144). Nevertheless, objects of study such as frequent migrants or travellers demand that the concept of field is adapted to this phenomenon and that research becomes multi-sited (Amit 2000, p. 8).

The exotic pattern (shared living due to participant observation) retains its significant authority. However, in practice it has been decentralised. Different spatial practices have gained legitimacy. The criteria for assessing the “depth” and the “intensity” of research are changing. Contemporary political, cultural and economic transformations are bringing both new pressures and new opportunities for anthropology. The scope of research has widened (Clifford 2004, p. 147). The anthropologist must adapt to circumstances that are imposed by the research field. In some situations, ethnography must follow its subject, as in the case of ballet dancers and yoga practitioners (Amit 2000, p. 11). The Polish Bharata Natyam dancers are a related case.

During fieldwork, the researcher’s experience emerges in relation to Others (Amit 2000, p. 1). Physical presence is needed in the field, allowing one to explore the flow of intersubjective human experience (Amit 2000, p. 11). According to Hastrup, the “lived experience”, which consists of thoughts, desires, words and images, is considered as “primary reality”, and this experience, socially shared by the ethnographer, is the first step toward anthropological knowledge (Hastrup 1995, p. 79). In the case of Bharata Natyam, my practising the dance together with my informants constitutes that lived experience. In a situation when the site is not located (it can occur anywhere, at any gym or in other environment where there is but a little space), what Rosaldo calls “deep hanging out” with the subjects (Clifford 1997, p. 56) is of particular importance. Space, as Michel de Certeau understood it, is produced discursively and corporeally practised. Clifford points out that the place does not become a space “until it is practised by people’s active occupation, their movements through and around it” (Clifford 1997, p. 52). In this perspective “nothing is given about a field”, but everything must be “worked, turned into discrete social space, by embodied practices of interactive travel” (Clifford 1997, p. 52). In this context, the study of dance is associated with the discovering the path of the physical and mental aspects of researched dance reality, which have been developed by dancers.

Hastrup, in turn, points out that the reality of anthropology is constituted in the relationship of continuity between the ethnographer and the world. According to Vendler, to whom Hastrup refers, people cannot be understood outside some degree of shared human experience. Here begins reflexivity in anthropology, which is an inherent component of any empirical ethnography (Vendler, *Understanding People*, quoted by Hastrup 1995, p. 50). This is more visible in case studies focused on the near field of research. In a place intuitively located at “home”, an anthropologist might feel better than a foreigner and delicate nuances of relationships within the culture could be easier to notice. The role of the researcher may still be a challenge, requiring necessary vigilance associated with the nuances, which are being communicated. The downside of research “at home” is that the anthropologist is located within the well-known social categories, so there is a possibility of a greater emphasis on his or her compliance to norms (the excuse provided by a foreigner’s ignorance of the rules is not available)

and a dangerous tendency to acknowledge familiar concepts without doubts (Hastrup 1995, p. 153). This is what Barbara Czerniawska called “home-blindness”: a situation in the field when meaningful issues, which could be a fruitful research data, are taken for granted with their modes of construction. The way to handle this problem is to keep an attitude of outsidership even “at home” (Czerniawska 1997, *Narrating the organization. Dramas of Institutional Identity*, quoted by Löytönen 2008, p. 23). Visweswaran, however, proposes an idea of fieldwork which is not based on the dichotomy of “home” and “field”. Here, “home” is the location of a person in the restrictive framework of discourses and institutions, and working in it implies a confrontation with what has been learned. It makes space for unorthodox new ideas of what fieldwork should look like (Visweswaran 1994, p. 113). Even if the ethnographer is positioned as a person from the inside, “native” to his or her own community, the research and analysis involves taking a certain distance, and a translation of differences (Clifford 2004, p. 174).

The landscape of the field experience is not obvious which can cause some confusion. The field is what the researcher chooses as the field and it does not necessarily have to be the result of some self-awareness of a social group whose members are surveyed. This shift reflects the ethnographer’s even greater role in the construction of the field (Amit 2000, p. 14). Here arises the question about what happens to anthropology when researchers adapt their field of research and practice to the circumstances. According to Vered Amit, anthropology would not remain itself, if they did not negotiate the field (Amit 2000, p. 17). Still, fieldwork is a crucially important measure of professionalism and it is imperative for an anthropologist to do it (Clifford 1997, p. 53). Fieldwork remains the distinctive basis of the discipline even though it is also subject to renegotiation (Clifford 1997, p. 89). What is discussed now is the dictate to leave “home” and the fact that research was inseparably associated with travel, both phenomena dependent on colonialism, associated with the researched group’s race, class and gender, as well as with the definition of centre and periphery, cosmopolitanism and locality. The criteria to measure “depth” are also ambiguous. Less controversial is the requirement of the intensity of interactivity undertaken during research. Clifford suggests purifying the discipline from the heritage of exotic travel, and maintaining both the intensity and interactive styles combined with disciplined research based on displacement to and from the “community” (Clifford 1997, p. 89).

GUIDELINES TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF DANCE AS A ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD

In the circumstances produced by the study of dance, the role of bodily presence of the anthropologist should be emphasised. I was attempting to co-experience along with the subjects of my research. In this situation, the body subjected to disciplinary

practices of dance becomes a kind of complement to the space experience. This raises the possibility of contextualisation of a dancer's narratives in view of the researcher's own immersion in this sphere. Helena Wulff, a researcher working with ballet dancers, disagrees with Hastrup's notion of blurring the dichotomy between a native and an anthropologist, and instead proposes a rather nuanced, shifting, multiple subjectivity experienced by many anthropologists (Amit 2000, p. 7). The subject of Bharata Natyam dance renders itself to such a fluid approach, where the researcher herself is subjected to "observation", understood here as being open to a multitude of sensory stimuli. This is necessary in order to understand the process of internalising a new set of rules of action, which involves acculturation and learning the techniques of body movement and performance (Hastrup 1995, p. 78) required by Bharata Natyam. In this way, the dance makes a place for a new concept of a native, a new approach to the subject of study and to who this subject could be (Amit 2000, p. 7). However, this is just another aspect of the field of my experience, which complements my studies and allows me to imaginatively understand the relationships examined, because, as Hastrup says, such is the nature of understanding (1995, p. 75). The landscape of experience in the phenomenon I strive to describe has several dimensions, such as space as a certain locality, as a body, and primarily space as a dialogue with interlocutors, which expands the field conceptually and gives a variety of possible ways of understanding and analysing.

Some fundamental epistemological issues can only be addressed in and through practice (Grau 2007, p. 1). The specificity of analysing dance practice focuses on Giddens's discursive forms and on practical consciousness, to which the acting person has access during the action, but which s/he is not able to express verbally; s/he just "knows" and feels it in the body (Samudra 2008, p. 666). Bourdieu, too, saw this theory of practice as important, connecting the bodily with social forms. At the same time, Bourdieu perceived non-verbalised body experience as unconscious, which Samudra sees as a mistake. The involvement in kinaesthetic practice helped to discover that one can be a completely conscious subject acting within the body, even if being conscious does not necessarily imply encoding all the meanings of one's actions in words (Samudra 2008, p. 666). From my experience, both unconscious affects and body acts, as well as practical consciousness, were coexisting together in the field, where some data were showing affects and some suggested how the conscious mind cooperates with the body during the practice of dance. Finally, the anthropologist is faced with the problem of putting into words exactly those practices which his informants found impossible to verbalise. Pertinent questions are also how to analyse physical skills which are a socially shared experience, and how to understand particular kinaesthetic culture (Samudra 2008, p. 666). Another problem, which arises, is that the shared ground, that is the body movement, is not entirely shared, because the body itself belongs to one person. The body becomes the "authentic" location of emotions and affects: emotions are expressed and experienced in the body, while affects define what body can do (Pile

2010, p. 11). The anthropologist carrying out the research has to translate that memory of collective body into an inherently discursive academic consciousness (Samudra 2008, p. 666). Samudra tries to answer that dilemma with the concept of “thick participation” in the field. By that she understands a type of ethnography, which is rooted in the body, where the body is not only taken under consideration, but also becomes one of the main tools of the research. This very modern stand concerning the relation of the body and mind criticizes former divisions where the body was perceived as biological, natural and universal, not cultural, and hence not interesting to social scientists (Samudra 2008, p. 666). Ethnography has always been an attempt to understand the Other while using the anthropologist’s self as an instrument for capturing knowledge as much as it is possible. Researchers on kinaesthetic culture emphasise their own physical “I”. The body as the existence in which we are and where we operate is a tool and instrument which drives the acquisition of knowledge (Samudra 2008, p. 666).

The researcher’s desire is to know the movement and its essence; and hence to get closer to understanding the entire culture of movement. Knowing the movement is necessary for at least some kind of cognition; it gives an image of the practice of dance. This is true even in the light of the non-representational theory, which states that embodied affects and emotions are beyond cognition. Therefore the researcher can approach the notion of particular movement only by participation and observation. A scholar can focus on a *testimony* of affects in people’s bodies and find them in narratives about the experience of dancing which focus on what happens with the body during dancing (Pile 2010, p. 11). Researchers in the social sciences who are deeply immersed in the kinaesthetic practice discovered that they could analyse the meaningful cultural information “recorded” in their bodies. The somatic experience is recorded in body memory, a kind of carnal mind. The body memory, which is systematically and repeatedly performed, has socio-cultural significance for the individuals, including the participating anthropologist. This thick cultural participation involves knowledge stored in the body of an anthropologist and later translated into visual and textual data for analysis (Samudra 2008, p. 667). It is close to Geertz’s thick description in its focus on detail, but differs in the interpretation of social discourse; it focuses on the shared social experience. Bodily messages can be verified and analysed even when they are not encoded in the form of language (because they work in practice) (Samudra 2008, p. 667). Csordas remarks that the involvement in somatic practice is a cultural activity, which implies embodied presence of others (Samudra 2008, p. 668). People use their bodies to make contact with other people’s bodies in culturally specific, intersubjective way (Samudra 2008, p. 668).

It should be noted that verbalising body experience is not the same as reading the body as a kind of text, or the recognition that movement or sensory experiences are relevant only if they contain symbolic value. Insistence on the semiotic analysis of motion carries the risk of bending or even losing the true meaning of the movements

transmitted by the participants of a kinetic culture. A desirable result of the anthropologists' work is to identify what exactly is "going on" in the dance (Samudra 2008, p. 668). The practice of bodily motion by the respondents is often considered to be impossible to translate into words; as John Blacking commented, "it is a movement of the body; we are moved into thinking" (Blacking 1986, *Culture and Arts*, quoted by Grau 2007, p. 1). The researcher must be familiar with thick somatic involvement with its specific messages, which she has to translate from a bodily experience to words (Samudra 2008, p. 668). This means I needed to try what can be said, and what the categories used in cognitive and narrative structure of language are, and what cannot be said due to language limitations (Samudra 2008, p. 668). At the same time, while examining the Bharata Natyam dance, it was necessary to pay attention to the nature of the language used to describe the dance movements. In that process of thick participation I faced numerous issues which were linked to my being an insider, someone in between and an outsider. In the study of dance I, as a researcher, was inside the group of practitioners, performing the movement itself, as well as outside as a student of anthropology, making my *début* in embodied fieldwork and trying to retain necessary distance. Similarly to my informants, I was participating in learning the dance, which involved hard physical work and all emotions it provoked (e.g. fatigue, anger, satisfaction after achieving some level of fluidity). I was also forming relationships with others participants. Some of them I liked, some I did not, and I had to cope with those feelings while being one of the group and at the same time *writing* about them, which from the start put me (at least in my own eyes) in a difficult ethical situation. New questions appeared constantly and accompanied me during the entire research.

Aside from the shared experience and thick participation during my research, I carried out interviews with the dancers, both learners and teachers. My aim was to use those mostly individual narratives to ascertain what Bharata Natyam as a form of movement meant to my interlocutors. Interviews provided the ground for textual analyses of experiencing this kind of movement. But "both the scholar and the respondent construct a particular version of themselves in interviews which is then re-interpreted and re-represented in different ways in future productions" (McDowell 1992 "Valid games? A response to Erica Schoeberger", quoted by Rose 1997, p. 313). The format of interviews was, as Löytönen calls it, semi-structured (Löytönen 2008, p. 18), but in a varied way. As someone known to the informants, a scholar and dance class friend, I was trying to conduct ethnographic in-depth conversations, which had their basis in the initial questionnaire, but were always developing in dialogue with my informants. Questions were mostly open-ended. The interview was a stimulating exchange of experiences of the dance between the participant and me, which was also meaningful to my embodied approach. What is more, I was trying to shift from the more usual ethnographic "how do you feel about that?" approach to a close description of events which focused attention on what bodies were doing (Pile 2010, p. 9). Variations on

the researcher's participation and observation of body movement and the experience resulted in descriptions conducted in field notes, which enabled later textual analyses of that researcher's thick participation (Pile 2010, p. 11).

EMOTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS AND POWER RELATIONS
– THE USE OF FEMINIST APPROACH

The other issue I had to face in my fieldwork was the question of emotions and the manner of including them in my analyses. They were obviously intensely felt in the field, because of the intimate character of the process of learning the dance, during which participants were working on their own body. Learning the dance induced a lot of emotions both in the other participants and in me, during classes and even after them. As Teija Löytönen notices, art institutions such as dance schools have always been interesting in the study of emotions, because they are commonly seen as a places where expression of emotions is not only allowed, but even desirable (Löytönen 2008, p. 17). Similarly to Löytönen, I understand emotions not as a mere reaction to the outside world, something that possesses passive individuals, but as something intentional (Löytönen 2008, p. 19). Those emotions, as well as sensations and mood, provide the person experiencing them with some information about the outside world. They are not just psychological or mental, but are “fundamentally bound to the world – to time and place as well as to the social and cultural context of a person”. (Löytönen 2008, p. 19). In other words emotions are not an immediate expression of the person's unconditioned experience, but are dependent on the cultural norms the person has internalized. In this sense they are social constructions. In that context, emotions of Bharata Natyam dance practitioners can also be understood as belonging to a convention and fulfilling the community's expectations or, in other words, as frames within which Bharata Natyam dancers can express themselves. In the case of Bharata Natyam, I see the issue of emotionality as involving both the emotions linked with the physical aspect of the practice and the training involved, and the character of this particular dance in which choreographic emotions are expressed through special facial expressions which dancers should assume. Another aspect is that the dancer becomes more aware of herself, also emotionally, thanks to the practice (Löytönen 2008, p. 20). Moreover, the dancer produces the emotional landscape by affecting the audience. For this very reason art was often meant to widen the sphere of emotional expression (Löytönen 2008, p. 21).

In conducting research in modern anthropology, it is hard not to take into account the feminist concepts of field process. Factors such as power relations obviously appeared in my field. This aspect is particularly visible in dance classes, where the teacher works with the intimate space that is the body of the dance student. Of course, the researcher's body is also being subjected to those practises. Yet afterwards, during the interviews, I needed to ask questions, which could be considered intimate; that is to say the

terrain of power in which research took place was important. Tactics making it possible to turn the extraordinary complex power relations into more visible space that can be surveyed by a researcher are, however, available. One of them, which was applicable and meaningful with respect to my dance research, focuses on the equality and inequality of the distribution of power. It was helpful in the production of a landscape of power (Rose 1997, p. 310). Rose calls it “transparent reflexivity” and points out that it implies that power relations are treated as knowable in the first place (Rose 1997, p. 311). I found these tactics helpful in my research, but I do not accept my reflections as equivalent to the real, actual power landscape in the field (conforming with Rose’s reservation against taking such reflections for granted). The aim of situating knowledge is, as Rose points out, the production of non-overgeneralising knowledges (Rose 1997, p. 315).

Here emerges the question of positionality and situationality. The researcher’s position affects knowledge she produces (Rose 1997, p. 312). It is important to notice that although we can doubt our position and put it under scrutiny, the reflexive gaze directed at the landscape of power might still not be enough because of the distance between the informants and the researcher in the same landscape of power and relations (Rose 1997, p. 312). In my case, the differences and distances between me and my respondents were not that deep. We came from the same background of young women living and studying or working in Warsaw, so in that case the researcher was in the similar position as the researched subject (Rose 1997, p. 313), which might be counted as a virtue of the “at home” research. As a researcher, I was situated in the same landscape as my respondents. We were all dancing and sharing experience in the dance classes, learning together and being subjected to the same disciplinary dance practices, which were imposed by teachers. My status as a beginner was in a way lower than the status of women who had practised this form of dance for more than a year, very often for a long time. Carrying interviews with more experienced practitioners, I became a sort of disciple of theirs, to whom they felt obliged to explain the arcana of Bharata Natyam. This situation was very comfortable for me, as I thus had the possibility to receive more detailed descriptions from my respondents.

The knowledge I was collecting during the research was situated and partial, and so was my knowledge of the interviewed people. Feminist, post-colonial and post-Marxist critiques showed that knowledge is always produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it in some way. Situating the researcher and her interpretations of materials is possible by reflexive examination of positionality (Rose 1997, p. 305). Linda McDowell notices that “we must recognize and take into account our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into research practice” (McDowell 1992, p. 409). Fulfilling what McDowell demands here is difficult or even impossible, and causes failure from the beginning (Rose 1997, pp. 305–306). The need of being reflexive is a strategy for situating knowledge, which is followed by avoiding the false neutrality and universality which characterises so

much academic knowledge. Situating knowledge becomes a crucial goal, which is very difficult to achieve (Rose 1997, p. 306). In the context of Bharata Natyam practised in dance schools in Warsaw, the practitioners' image and understanding of that Indian dance is influenced by their (and my) being dancers from Eastern Europe. The very fact that we, in Poland, can dance Bharata Natyam and redefine its meanings is made possible by the phenomena of transnational flows. The meanings assumed by this dance here are different than the ones present in its place of origin, the Indian state Tamil Nadu. Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, mentioned by Gillian Rose, agree that the knowledge we have and produce is always limited, specific and partial (Rose 1997, p. 307). Haraway says that knowledges (because one cannot talk about one knowledge) "are produced by interpretative technologies between different actants [...] are marked by their hybrid origins" (Haraway 1991 "Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature", quote: Rose 1997, p. 307). Linda McDowell, in turn, sums up that "there are real dangers that are inherent in our own position within the powerful institutions of knowledge production" (McDowell 1992, p. 413). The researcher's positionality may of course influence the data collected and thus the information that becomes coded as knowledge (Rose 1997, p. 308). Reflexivity is formulated in notions of visibility and particular spatiality. The reflexivity looks both "inward" to the identity of the researcher, and "outward" to her relation to research and the wider world. That is followed by spatial division between the inside and the outside (Rose 1997, p. 309). In the end, it comes down to having academic humility, where nothing in the field or afterwards, while writing about the research, should be taken for granted.

The last issue, which should be mentioned as meaningful circumstances influencing the methodology, is the fact that my informants were only women. It turned out this way for an obvious reason: because of the specificity of the local practice, where no men dance Bharata Natyam. It is important in Warsaw and generally in the Polish context that originally, in India, many men are great dancers, and movements as well as choreographies are adapted to the male body and gender. It has to be said that being a woman, and thus being in a way the same as my participants (cf. Browne 2003), most probably allowed me to talk to them about intimate aspects of the experience and not attract too much unnecessary attention during my research. I was treated like the others even though my reason for taking dance classes was first of all to conduct research, which I stated candidly at the beginning. That is to say, for some reasons the Warsaw schools dance classes are mostly attended by women. It creates circumstances in which, in the eyes of my informants, those classes are extremely feminine in their character. During interviews my participants were commenting whether Bharata Natyam was or was not a feminine dance. By talking about that, we were all "doing gender" in that space of research (McDowell 1992).

Research on Bharata Natyam dance brought up a lot of methodological questions. First of all, I had to construct the field within which I was working, because of its

heterogenic character. I had to decide which aspects of Bharata Natyam practice I would take into consideration during fieldwork and after finishing it, while working on collected materials. Eventually, embodiment became the main subject of my research. I was trying to study bodies of the dancers and my own, focusing on the corporeal experience in the Bharata Natyam movement. During my research I also paid particular attention to emotions as a part of everyday human experience, which I found impossible to omit in the study of dance. Also the researcher's experiencing her own body and movement practised through that body, feelings and reflections, which appeared in fieldwork while sharing dance experience with other women, became part of research material. My efforts were driven by curiosity about where the possibility of intellectual cognition of people's own bodies in movement ends. The example of Bharata Natyam dance was particularly demanding in that area. I was also interested in how those different aspects of movement circulate in and between researched women's bodies.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TOWARDS THE BODY

Anthropological interest in dance and research connected to that interest have their roots in a scientific hope that it is possible to carry out research on every human practice. The question: "What is the meaning of that practice?" emerges in every kind of anthropological curiosity. To begin with some theoretical genealogy, it needs to be said that the value given to body and its importance in human life varied within different paradigms current at a particular time. As it has been very often said, in the classic anthropological readings the question of the body was glided over and researchers preferred to focus on more "sophisticated" problems such as institutions in the functionalist perspective or structures of social systems. All these issues were observed from a point of view which omitted the existence of the body. In my research on the Bharata Natyam dance, especially because the chosen topic which had to take the bodily experience into consideration, I was more interested in the embodied approach to human experience, which comes from, among others, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

Experiencing the body as an object, which is always with an individual and as a subject which that individual actually is, gives it a special place; this appears to be one of the leading themes of Merleau-Ponty's works on corporeality (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 103). "Body is both the Same and the Other; a subject and an object, of practices and knowledge; it is both a tool and raw material to be worked upon (Falk 1994, p. 1)". The social practice of dance is the kind of deep activity which not only happens through the body (as indeed any action does), but which is also all about the body. Everything that is inseparable from the dance movements and its rules, for example a special outfit like the sari or heavy ankle bells used in the Bharata Natyam dance, becomes an appendage of the body (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 104) and all this

creates a space, which is meaningful and hence interesting to research. A dancer's own body imposes a specific point of view and a particular work with the body; however, the movements demanded by the rules of the dance can change this perspective, thus creating an opportunity for a different insight into enclosed reality. The uniqueness of the kinaesthetic research lies in focusing on the comprehensively experienced body, which gives some "body image" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 113). This term is defined by Bürger-Prinz and Kaila as "knowledge of one's own body as the collective expression both of the mutual relations of its limbs and of its parts" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 114). Nowadays, and in some approximation, this would be called an awareness of the body. Thanks to the body image, dancers know all the special positions of body parts in the systematic dance movement of Bharata Natyam. They inscribe the dance movement in their own body image through the learning process and disciplining practices. By this process they widen their abilities to move in a particular way and get enriched by the Indian type of movement, which is followed by meanings rooted in that dance. Another aspect of movement is the space, about which Merleau-Ponty says: "[...] by considering body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaceness of established situations" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 117). Space is important in embodiment studies, because it is felt within the body and the body in movement helps the researcher to actually see how s/he is experiencing the space. Understanding the movement and becoming skilful, gaining specific body habits is also about learning the meaning of that movement and all the meanings, which are important for the context of practice (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 158).

The body, which is an expressive space because of the spur of feelings and emotions related to music and dance, performs meaningful gestures; this can happen thanks to the non-verbalised emotional impulses (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 161). In motoric habits such as dance, the body is affected by the repetitiveness of movements (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 162). The recurrence of motions consolidates all social senses around it, but in India these motions are obviously something different from the same motions performed by Polish dancers; they are endowed with different meanings. What the Bharata Natyam dance carries with it on the Polish ground is an orientalised exoticism and the uniqueness of idealised Indian dances which dancers in Warsaw aim to embody. In her study on the human body entitled *Muzeum ludzkich ciał*, the Polish anthropologist Anna Wieczorkiewicz, concentrating on the issue of the meanings which the body carries in the European culture, notices that "the body image speaks to every spectator in a special way – and concerns him directly"¹ (Wieczorkiewicz 2000, p. 6).

¹ All quotations from Polish-language texts have been translated solely for the purpose of the current article by its author – A. K.

In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy, a human is born as a bodily being whose opening to the world happens from the beginning and primarily thanks to the body and through the body. Everything that exists is directed towards the body and is received by it. As a medium through which people orient themselves in space and in time, the body possesses a kind of knowledge and understanding which comes from the direct contact with reality and has a pre-linguistic and pre-notional character (Wieczorkiewicz 2000, p. 6). The body as a subject creates sensual meanings and constitutes the basis of integrity and sense found in the world. Specific movements in the Bharata Natyam dance influence the perception of reality, and also provide some novel possibilities of that perception. Moreover, thanks to the acquired movements the dancers can share some contents outside the verbal communication. In Merleau-Ponty's view, perception is as a modus in which reality is accessible. It also shows possible ways in which the body, an intentional tool by its nature, can perform towards the object. In this context, the body is the visible form of its owner's intentions and his/her expression in the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body and the reality are two shapes of the same being in the world. The subject transcends into the world and the world is designed by the body and its experience (Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji. Fragmenty* 1993, quoted by Wieczorkiewicz 2000, p. 357).

EMBODYING MOVEMENT

In the case of the Bharata Natyam dance, in which the aim of the practitioners is to acquire certain movements mentally and bodily, such as the specific hand gestures called the *mudras* or the *ardhamandala*, the half squatting leg position, the problem is how to find that motion in the body, how to understand complex body as a being, how it is felt subjectively. Moreover, the difficulties in that matter are intensified by the movement's foreign origin, which makes it harder to familiarise with for a Polish dancer's body. It puts a dance researcher in a difficult situation, because the collected data and knowledge about dance practice is not unambiguous or clear. Filtered by the researcher's and the participants' reports, the knowledge seems hardly accessible at all. That is to say, the data collected in the research always seem to not get to the so-called bottom of the matter. However, this issue concerns researchers in any field. Anthropological knowledge is born in an ethnographic encounter between an anthropologist and his/her informants, and always has to face the problem of varying accessibility of layers of meanings.

It should be noted that verbalising bodily experience is not the same as reading the body as a kind of text. This does not mean the recognition that the movement or sensory experiences are relevant only if they contain symbolic value. Insistence on the semiotic analysis of motion carries the risk of bending or even losing the true meaning of the movements transmitted by the participants of the kinetic culture.

While examining the dance, it is crucial to consider the nature of the language used for the dance movements and special metaphors used to make it easier for Warsaw dancers to understand the movement. The Bharata Natyam dancers use their own metaphors, which are supposed to help practitioners find that motion in their bodies. The metaphors work on the imagination, giving an impulse to make particular movement. Through these metaphors, the practice of Bharata Natyam is localized into Polish meanings. Using terms, which are bonded with the local, Polish reality brings about the effect of finding the Indian dance step or gesture in the Polish dancer's body (the comparison of one of the movements to the crawl swimming style can serve as an example here). Through this kind of sentences, metaphors and expressions movement, which in its nature is hardly possible to verbalise, becomes more familiar and is adopted by the dancers.

Exchange during the research shows how thick participation allows the anthropologist to communicate between his or her own body and the bodies of others in the motion system. It may result in bodily "interviews", parallel to those verbalised. The interlocutor and the consultant in the field of dance learning can demonstrate movements, which helps the researcher to find them in her/his own body. In this way, the researcher may reach an understanding of a bodily practice and achieve greater precision in its linguistic description. Thus, the process of verbalising proceeds from non-verbal movement through preliminary attempts to describe it, for example, in field notes or through negotiating right terms with the practitioners, to the academic language (Samudra 2008, p. 670). Paul Stoller, mentioned by Samudra, considers such a "sensual" science valuable when, while writing up their research, researchers find a compromise between analytical and sensory perception, and the embodied and disembodied forms of logic build the scientific discussion. However, he sensitises researchers to the fact that embodied discourse deprives the body of, for example, the smells, textures, experienced pain, because of the analytical habit of reading the body as text. This means that certain elements of the embodied experience can be seen but not felt. Just as seeing and imagining may be close to thinking and discourse, other senses would often be associated with lack of awareness and reflexivity, and with a silent body (Samudra 2008, p. 672).

Bodily experience, such as the Bharata Natyam dance, is both subjective and intersubjective. It can be analysed by focusing on different embodied experiences. Various bodies are connected to a common practice in a single motor system. Characteristic ways of behaving, metaphors, and emotions are common for to all the dancers. Of course, they will not necessarily mean exactly the same for all and are not identically felt (Samudra 2008, p. 678). As Samudra commented, "Movement is a kind of social history enacted in presently moving bodies. As anthropologists, we can record and translate kinaesthetic experiences as they become memory in our body" (Samudra 2008, p. 674). According to Libera, every society produces its own type of body types

(Libera 2008, p. 21). The practice of the Bharata Natyam dance as a fashion among the women of Warsaw is a form of tourism, a travel effected through the body. Through inscribing the Indian dance into something so bonded to the being as a body is, the Warsaw dancers mark themselves with imagined and idealised Indian spirituality and beauty. It can still be seen as an Indian dance, connoting a nostalgia towards the antiquity of India and the orientalised mystique of the Bharata Natyam dance, but in fact the currently practised dance form is an absolutely novel variation on what Bharata Natyam dance is as a genre. The question of orientalising the body appears here. Shay and Sellers-Young quote Homi Bhabha's description of Orientalism as "on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; and on the other [...] the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions, and requirements... However, this site is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability" (Shay, Sellers-Young 2003, p. 18). In a sense, the Bharata Natyam dance shows embody Orientalism and make it possible to retain the Western self-image as distinct from and superior to that of the Others – the broadly conceived "Orientals" (since Central European dancers might be seen as aspiring, in an indirect manner, to that Western image). Dancers become a repository and a guarantee of the orientalised Indianness, and are much appreciated as such. Through movement, the Bharata Natyam dance represents embodied meanings, which bring the practitioners and their audience to the imagined India. Here arises the question of modern individualism analysed by Małgorzata Jacyno. This can be repressive in an oblique way, but for dancers who arbitrarily choose their passions it becomes one of the strategies of living, aimed at achieving the maximum of well-being and various kinds of satisfaction (Jacyno 2007, p. 8). As pointed out by Libera, "Man and his body have never been so controlled, disciplined and moulded as at present", where rationalisation and self-improvement is supposed to guarantee a better life (Libera 2008, p. 14). Such regimes as practising the Bharata Natyam dance would be regarded as inhuman if they were not actually chosen by people who subject themselves to their rigour (Jacyno 2007, p. 8). The values of modern individualism are fulfilled in the freedom to choose and in the experience of one's personal biography, as a result of individual selection (Jacyno 2007, p. 23).

CONCLUSION

In this paper I focused on how the dance field, and the Bharata Natyam dance in particular, can be constructed. I found it extremely important to rethink the notion of the field in view of the fact that the research I have carried out does not belong to a single place, but is kept in the researched dancers' minds and bodies, and in mine too. This approach enabled me to conduct the research on how the dance is being embodied and how movement starts to be a part of the subjects' self. These research

questions demanded a re-conceptualisation of the traditional ethnographic field, as well as a re-valorisation of the place of the body in anthropological studies. The reflection on how dance can be ethnographically examined was a crucial starting point in trying to understand the issues of the body and movement in the Bharata Natyam dance in Poland. Investigation of the process of embodying the dance of Indian origin into Polish body image needed detailed conceptualisation of the ethnographic field. I also found the reflexive approach to emotions, relationships and power relations to be an important part of the landscape of experience, especially because of the relatively intimate character of the research, where the topic was the practitioners' own bodies. The subject of embodied movement requires special treatment, as it is a very intense mode of experience involving the conscious and unconscious, as well as the very subjective, individual and intersubjective notions. Together, they create a different dimension of the dance practice, making it possible to grasp the character of a particular movement in which the community of dancers, such as the Bharata Natyam practitioners in Warsaw, are involved and make it a significant part of their identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amit V. 2000, Introduction: Constructing the Field, [in:] ed. V. Amit, *Constructing the field. Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*, London.
- Browne K. 2003, Negotiations and Fieldworkings: Friendship and Feminist Research, *An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 2, pp. 132–146.
- Clifford J. 2004, Praktyki przestrzenne: badania terenowe, podróże i praktyki dyscyplinujące w antropologii, [in:] eds. E. Nowicka, M. Kempny, *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej. Kontynuacje*, Warszawa.
- 1997, *Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, Cambridge MA.
- Falk P. 1994, *The Consuming Body*, Bedfordshire.
- Grau A. 2007, Dance, anthropology, and research through practice, *Le Centre National de la Danse*, June 21–24.
- Hastrup K. 1995, *A passage to anthropology: between experience and theory*, London–New York.
- 2004, *O ugruntowywaniu się światów*, [in:] eds. E. Nowicka, M. Kempny, *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej. Kontynuacje*, Warszawa.
- Jacyno M. 2007, *Kultura indywidualizmu*, Warszawa.
- Libera Z. 2008, Antropologia ciała [in:] eds. K. Łeńska-Bąk, M. Sztandara, *Doświadczane, opisywane, symboliczne. Ciało w dyskursach kulturowych*, Opole.
- Löytönen T. 2008, Emotions in the Everyday Life of a Dance School: Articulating Unspoken Values, *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 17–30.
- Marcus G. 1995, Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, pp. 95–117.
- McDowell L. 1992, Doing Gender: Feminism, Feminists and Research Methods in Human Geography, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 399–416.
- Merleau-Ponty M. 2002, *Phenomenology of perception*, London.

- P i l e S. 2010, Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography, *Translations of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 35, pp. 5–20.
- R o s e G. 1997, Situating knowledge: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics, “Progress in Human Geography”, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 303–320.
- S a m u d r a J. K. 2008, Memory in our body: Thick participation and the translation of kinesthetic experience, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 665–681.
- S h a y A., S e l l e r s - Y o u n g B. 2003, Belly Dance: Orientalism: Exoticism: Self-Exoticism, *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 13–37.
- W i e c z o r k i e w i c z A. 2000, *Muzeum ludzkich ciał. Anatomia spojrzenia*, Gdańsk.
- V i s w e s w a r a n K. 1994, *Fictions of feminist ethnography*, Minnesota.

Author's address:

Alina Kaczmarek, Ph.D. Candidate

Doctoral Studies in Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences

Al. Solidarności 105

00-140 Warsaw, POLAND

e-mail: alina.z.kaczmarek@gmail.com