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Histories of and for 'Contemporary Dance'

Rethinking Dance History Pedagogy in and from the Periphery

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ABSTRACT

The paper argues that true decolonization of dance history pedagogy requires a dismantling of epistemological hierarchies of value that promote only certain dances as worthy of aesthetic theorization and critical attention. These valued dances are ones from Europe and neo-Europe, usually staged for an audience, and always labelled 'art'. Often, they appropriate practices from the much broader field of dance, presenting these appropriations as novelties within art institutions of the Global North that dominate the discourse on dance, including who are considered 'professionals' and what is valuable enough to constitute 'core' subject matter for future generations of dancers – in practice as well as theory. In the process of colonialist extractivism, theoretical frames for art dance inimical to the continuously changing life of dances utilize history (singular) to make dances from peripheries of (neo-)European (former) empires appear either within anthropological frames of exotic otherness and folk culture or as belated reactions to the centre and the vanguard at the heart of these empires. Tracing the emergence of the unmarked-as-white discourse and its effects on dance history textbooks and pedagogy alike, this paper suggests some steps towards a more equitable future.

KEYWORDS decolonization; historiography; dance; value

RESUMO

O artigo defende que a verdadeira descolonização da pedagogia da história da dança requer o desmantelamento das hierarquias epistemológicas de valor que promovem apenas certas danças como dignas de teorização estética e atenção crítica. Essas danças valorizadas são as da Europa e da neo-Europa, geralmente encenadas para um público e sempre rotuladas como "arte". Frequentemente, elas se apropriam de práticas do campo muito mais amplo da dança, apresentando essas apropriações como novidades dentro das instituições artísticas do Norte Global que dominam o discurso sobre a dança, incluindo quem é considerado "profissional" e o que é valioso o suficiente para constituir o "núcleo" do assunto para as futuras gerações de dançarinos – tanto na prática quanto na teoria. No processo de extrativismo colonialista, os quadros teóricos para a dança artística, hostis à vida em constante mudança das danças, utilizam a história (singular) para fazer com que as danças das periferias dos (neo-)impérios (antigos) europeus apareçam ou dentro de quadros antropológicos de alteridade exótica e cultura folclórica, ou como reações tardias ao centro e à vanguarda no coração desses impérios. Traçando o surgimento do discurso não marcado como branco e seus efeitos nos livros didáticos de história da dança e na pedagogia, este artigo sugere alguns passos em direção a um futuro mais equitativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE descolonização; historiografia; dança; valor

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Histories of and for 'Contemporary Dance': Rethinking Dance History Pedagogy in and from the Periphery

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The Danced Past

Dancers learn dance history through practicing dance in (studio) spaces that usually precede any higher education in Dance. In other words, dancers' understanding of the history of their practice and its value in relation to other dances and cultural practices is primarily taught to them in and through dance practice by pedagogues who have a vested interest in their own practice and generally lack degrees in critical historiography or academic theories about knowledge production. For this reason, dance is often considered an 'oral' tradition where knowledge is inherited from previous generations without recourse to writing, or where writing or even language is secondary to corporeal, experiential understanding.

Yet, emphasis on orality and oral history (or, I should say corporeality and corporeal history) makes it far too easy to uncritically dismiss the role that institutions or learning environments play in the transmission of specific ways of understanding dance and dancing in local contexts. Learning environments always have their own histories, and institutions always impose value-judgments, ideological and political agendas, and aesthetic preferences on corporeal practices. These unofficial, unwritten histories answer questions about origins – who first danced these dances, where, and why? They delineate genealogies – who are the experts who know about the history and the practice as it is today? In most cases, these are represented as unchanging truths but are, on closer inspection, anything but.

Although I am writing from the context of an art school in the Global North, even in the Global South, especially in similarly state-supported learning environments for dance, dances' histories tend to be overdetermined by the whiteness of the institutional and theoretical frames that provide teachers their accreditation and pedagogical qualifications, teaching materials for relating the past to the present, and ways of thinking about and valuing dance through ideological constructions like capitalism or the nation state (what, for example, is 'cultural heritage'?) By looking at some influential early histories claiming to tell the story of dance – not dance manuals but books arguing they represent all kinds of dancing – I point to the unmarked whiteness of the theoretical frames used to canonize what is valuable in dance. Since the whiteness of the history template is unmarked, it unconsciously dominates dancers' claims about the past and present of dance in ways that favour dances from Europe or neo-Europe, that is: settler-colonialist white-majority states that reproduce the imperialism of nineteenth-century Europe.

To give a concrete example: in the 2024 meeting of the Choreography & Corporeality Working Group in Manila, Chen Ya-Ping noted how she has had to 'decolonize her mind' – to refuse the expectation that a philosopher like Deleuze would be better

suited for understanding contemporary dance in Taiwan than Zhuangzi, whose texts, like those of Daoist philosophies in general, interrogate precisely the concepts used by the choreographer and dancers in question. Chen's experience underscores Hamid Dabashi's (2015, 30-34) argument that philosophy as a discipline tends to limit itself to a particular (white) genealogy, where philosophical traditions from outside of Europe (here: Daoism) are excluded from the discipline proper – as indecipherable due to a genealogy not tracing itself to Ancient Greece.

Because the academic project of dance studies requires methodological tools, and institutions of higher education privilege the white genealogy of philosophy (and Ancient Greece as a point of origin), the unmarked whiteness of philosophy both reinforces the legitimacy of the academic inquiry into dance and restricts these inquiries into white theoretical frames. Decolonizing the mind means rethinking the role of philosophy and theoretical frameworks in the discourse around corporeal praxis, including reconsidering how dances past and present get described, analysed, and represented. What, for example, is the relation of conceptual frames to local values and histories? Whose language is being used to do the describing and why?

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) has called the Eurocentric mindset also evident in institutional and theoretical frames of dance history and pedagogy 'epistemologies of the North'. He argues that epistemologies of the North emphasise the rational subject at the expense of sensorial, experiential, and corporeal knowledge to excuse the abyssal line that epistemology creates between the coloniser (human) and the colonised (other). (de Sousa Santos, 2018, esp. 20- 25) In the academic discipline called Dance Studies, this epistemological imperative is evident in the requirement to first create a cultural practice called 'dance' separate from practices called 'music', 'theatre', and so on; and then to divide this practice into forms by professional artists valued as superior to the rest – the forms discussed as 'merely' a tradition or pastime, even when they are practiced in the exact same spaces as 'art' dances with equal dedication from their practitioners; finally, to praise the named authors of the former when they appropriate the latter into authored art production, separated from their contexts, including the political and cultural violence in which some of these corporeal practices first emerged.

As Joann Kealiinohomoku (1970/2001) observed over half a century ago, this separation of art dance into a superior form of dancing has had profound impact on how dance is researched and written about. Even today, critical writing and scholarship tend to reserve aesthetic discourse in dance for art dance, and everything else – the majority of practices commonly understood as dancing – is relegated into the realm of ethnography (ethnochoreology). Although deliberate efforts are being made to dismantle this di-

vision, it is still very evident in academic discourse, scholarly associations, Higher Education programmes, and publishers' catalogues, not to mention public discourse of reviews or focus pieces in the press, or dancing as it appears in reality television shows.

Art, like thinking (Dabashi, 2015), is still defined through its proximity to whiteness, and in dance, this proximity means adhering to Eurocentric ideas about dance where a separation exists between dancer and audience, leading dance practices to strive for a certain kind of space-audience relation as emblematic of artistry. (On this spatiality, see Stanger 2021) Major institutions in the Global North still get to define what qualifies as art and what in practices seeking to be labelled art is understood as new and interesting – the vanguard of dance and dance studies alike. As a result, as Ananya Chatterjea (2020, 1-23) has shown, although all sorts of dances are 'contemporary' in the sense of taking place in the here-and-now, only certain (white) art practices get defined as 'contemporary dance', the vanguard form that is then defined as of highest import to the future of all dance.

The vanguard, moreover, is sublimated into something simultaneously ephemeral – requiring capital to be physically present in the metropolis to see the work performed *right now* and to immediately participate in the discourse – and of lasting value, a canonized reference against which the novelty and originality of all future work is evaluated. Access to the vanguard, in other words, also defines whose scholarship shares the qualities of the vanguard, making this kind of dance scholarship the domain of the affluent and privileged scholars from the centre (metropolis), who define that centre through their scholarship. The cutting edge of dance scholarship borrows the mantle of philosophy, with the same Eurocentric exclusions and prejudices; the centre the vanguard creates always-already entangled in the festering guts of the empire.

Research in the histories of dance is similarly dependent on institutions that adhere to epistemologies of the North: memory organizations like archives and companies founded around a particular individual or group; dance schools and institutions offering accreditation, including postgraduate degrees that legitimize scholarly endeavours; funding bodies, publishers, and associations that elevate particular histories as of importance. Canons of art, in other words, are not independent of capitalist accumulation. Histories of dance, whether corporeal, oral, or written, perpetuate divisions between different legacies, forms, and pedagogical imperatives of dance, taught to new generations in pedagogical situations. Regardless of how pedagogical training or professionalization is legitimized locally, these hierarchies are always evident in curricula and textbooks alike: what constitutes a particular dance (form, style, genre); which dances are of particular value (art, culture, heritage); whose histories get told as exemplary (authorities,

experts); what are the correct ways of acquiring expertise in the particulars of a dance (pedagogy, practice).

From a metahistorical perspective, academic discourse on dance history still owes much to certain early twentieth-century books from (neo-)Europe, mostly works in English, the hegemonic language of dance studies. As is typical to Eurocentric ideas of scholarship, early authorities on dance sought to justify what they saw as an important emergent field by citing eminent scholars who had referenced dance and dancing in their work. The paradox, here, was that many of those eminent scholars – such as Havelock Ellis – were referencing dance to advocate for eugenics and pseudoscientific racism. They, in turn, referenced – or, in the case of Ellis, outright plagiarised (Alter 1992, 30–32) – earlier (white) histories of dance. Admittedly, some dancers openly advocated for eugenics, choosing to cite such explicitly racist histories (see Scolieri ,2013 on Ellis and Ted Shawn), but for the most part, the (unmarked) citation of (unmarked-as-white) expertise created a hegemonic ideology where dancing just happened to always culminate in white practices even when what was discussed as relevant in dance history shifted with changing aesthetic preferences.

In the following, I demonstrate that even today, the histories represented by dance textbooks *unconsciously* repeat arguments and structures originating as racist justification for a particular white corporeal practice as true art. In other words, there is, to develop Philip Ewell's (2020) musicological argument, a white racial frame for thinking and writing about the history of dance that I argue needs to be interrogated and agitated in order for dance to truly include an international array of makers and practices and for dance scholars to discuss these practices without tripping over (neo-)European norms and expectations.

Art, Authority, Authorship

As Robin Lakes (2008) has outlined, Global North art dance practices have long cultivated a master teacher tradition where authoritarian pedagogical practices are subsumed under professed revolutionary novelty or historical importance of the choreographic oeuvre rehearsed and reproduced by dancers. With some caveats, I see this authoritarianism as the legacy of the concentration of authorship on the figure of the individual choreographer at the turn of the twentieth century, intertwined with a new kind of understanding of the danced work as an ideal planned by the choreographer-author to the most minute detail, but also divorcing the task of the choreographer from dance pedagogy. In the first decades of the twentieth century, this choreography-centric understanding of dance authorship shifted the understanding of a work of art in dance, which

had previously focused on the interpretive powers and particular skills of dancers, into an abstract ideal of 'authorial intention' of the choreographer, supported by written publications by and on the choreographer-author. Simultaneously, the dancer, previously the focus of reviews and histories, faded into an (imperfect) executioner of the choreographer's work.

Choreographic authorship set dance that was art apart from dance that was not art; and helped reinforce hierarchies whereby only art dance merited philosophical (aesthetic) consideration. In a corporeal, temporal praxis, the repeatability of the historical reference point of past greatness required a historiographical and theoretical endeavour of reinforcing the canon of masterworks and their ingenious authors. This reinforcing took three routes. First, at the tail end of the nineteenth century, the purpose of notation systems shifted from a dancing master's tool of marketing their dances to dancers to notation experts preserving choreographers' staged works on paper. The project of preservation of past greatness sidelined the earlier 'oral history' of transmission from dancer to dancer and cast it as something necessary but essentially untrustworthy. Yet, because most dancers did not read notation, reproduction of past masterpieces also allocated the guarding of the authorial intention of the original genius to the repetiteur, a person never credited but acting as an intermediary between the spirit of the original and the corporeal mortals worshipping at the author's altar.

The author's intent was reinforced by a second trajectory of (auto)biographies, especially important for white women seeking recognition as authorities of dance beyond the hegemonic form of ballet. Drawing from the new genre of the 'celebrity portrait' interview in popular magazines and newspapers, these books were manifestos of artistic practice, separate from the dancing masters' tradition of pedagogical emphasis. These books focused more on the person of the artist than their pedagogies; on aesthetic and societal aims rather than dance training or specifics of choreographic composition. (See Järvinen, 2012 for more)

The third trajectory was creating the knowledgeable spectator – the critic, the scholar, the historian – apparent in a new genre of dance literature aimed at the general public. These included autobiographies of dancers aspiring to greatness as well as authoritative accounts of histories and current practices of dancing, making the authors of such works the arbiters of value in dance. As in all arts, the emergent discourse increasingly elevated men into positions of power and influence, as employment opportunities, social norms, review practices, and philosophical theories about 'genius' all favoured male authors. (Woolf, 1928/1973; Nochlin, 1989, 145-178; Battersby, 1989)

Although dance notation fell out of favour with film, the economic imperative of copyrightable choreography (with accompanying ideas about recognizable authorial

style) quickly became normative for dance companies, at festivals and in criticism, resulting in copyright lawsuits over choreographic legacies and step sequences alike. (Kraut, 2015; cf. Vaidhyanathan, 2001, esp. 185–187, 200–201n25) Copyright further separated art dance from other kinds of dancing, its sole function to sequester only certain (choreographable) dances as art – dances that had authors and presented works recognizable as art within the capitalist system. Some minoritarian voices within this Eurocentric model of making art have resisted the desire for a singular genius and legacy works through, for example, collective creative attribution, less author-centric methods of composition, or situated practices. In an economy of copyright, however, funding and performing opportunities, licencing systems, review structures, prizes and awards, all tend to reinforce the singular choreographic author (or trademarked technique) model.

Unlike dance pedagogy, practice, or criticism, dance research usually requires affiliation with and accreditation by universities and research institutions. These institutions, too, are always-already conditioned by the epistemologies of the North to value Eurocentric thinking, writing, and reason over corporeal, experiential, holistic understanding of the world. The choreographic author's art dance fits these imperatives because the reproducibility of the staged dance performance is amenable to the written scholarship – stable, fixed, ideal rather than corporeal, messy, and constantly changing. It also fits the Eurocentric philosophical frameworks that further offer explanatory power to the dance scholar writing about this dance, validating its significance and adding to its value as a cultural product worth remembering and revering by future generations.

The division where authoritative statements (such as this one) are declared from positions seemingly removed from most of the practice of dancing proper is a particular characteristic of (neo-)European dance scholarship, explaining something of why participant-observation and ethnography fit other kinds of dance research with less friction and are so rarely used to analyse staged art dance. In other words, Eurocentricity of art dance practices, research on those practices, and philosophy alike is what reinforces the century-old division Kealiinohomoku (1970/2001) noted of aesthetic and theoretical engagement reserved for practices considered art. However, dance scholars' distance from the practices they write about is often an illusion, as many dance scholars explicitly work as and with dance makers they publish about. The access to the vanguard, as noted, is a precondition to cutting-edge scholarship, and working with whoever you represent as the vanguard gives you a head start in becoming an authority on that vanguard.

Since the 1990s, practice-based research in dance – scholarly endeavours that seek to articulate dance makers' perspectives from within the practice – has sought to validate corporeal knowledge in academic scholarship more generally. When the maker becomes a scholar, however, they encounter the academic bias for textuality – the need

to articulate corporeal practice as scholarship in a regime of text, writing, and theory. To utilize (Eurocentric) philosophical notions and theoretical frames to validate subjective processes means imposing philosophy's explanatory power on dance, again reinforcing the power of (Eurocentric) philosophy over the practice-led inquiry of dance.

Demands of efficiency in neoliberal academia further encourage subservience to extant ways of thinking and doing – the first things that come to mind are, after all, regurgitations of the hegemonic norms whereas resisting these norms takes effort. White epistemologies that reproduce Romantic ideas of the artist-genius as a secular god push practitioners to uncritically present their work as benefiting the individual or society at large in order for artist-scholars to participate in a knowledge economy steeped in capitalist accumulation and colonialist extractivism. With neoliberal attacks on 'useless' art and research directing who can risk becoming a professional in the arts and in research alike, and with the emphasis on the vanguard artist and academic imperatives like 'publish or perish', it is hardly surprising that dance research, especially practice-led research, is a field of predominantly white and relatively affluent people, whose experiences of dancing match the unmarked-as-white theoretical frames they absorbed from their teachers. There would be nothing wrong in this – Europeans, as Dabashi (2015) notes, have every right to privilege their local thinking – were it not for the fact that these (neo-)European frames are represented as universally true standards to which *all* dance and dance research should adhere to an extent that their normative status has become invisible.

Eurocentricity is evident even in theories seemingly arising from the practice of dance, such as kinesthetic empathy, especially as developed by dance critics John Martin and Edwin Denby in the 1920s and 1930s. After the First World War, the rise of formalism in critical discourses of art was intimately tied to notions of abstraction and media-specificity as aspirational goals of all art making. In the preceding decades, US modern dancers had explicitly distinguished their novel aesthetic from not just ballet, seen as a European import, but both 'folk' and social dancing, and dance on variety stages. From the outset, 'kinesthetic empathy', an immediate, empathic corporeal affinity between the dancer and the (knowledgeable) spectator, was a tool for valuing dance. Any dance that was 'pure' of the influence of other arts – a dance *an sich*, so to speak – was better and more modern than a dance 'tainted' by reliance on music, narrative, or excess of costume or stage design. Since true understanding dance was predicated on extralinguistic, sensorial affinity, if a critic failed to feel this kinesthetic empathy with a particular dance, it indicated the dance was not 'pure' enough.

Unsurprisingly, aesthetic 'purity' correlated with whiteness: racialised bodies and non-white dance forms could not extract themselves from cultural signification to the degree that true abstraction required, and as abstraction was the most important quality in dance, only white forms were truly worthy of canonisation because only white bodies could be universal and thus 'abstract'. As Sally Gardner ([2004]) has noted, "the idea of empathy must rest on an assumption that bodily 'expressions' are natural and therefore accessible and recognisable to everyone," which "begs the question of how one can enter into the (bodily) experiences of another across [cultural, social, gender, etc.] difference."

In defining 'pure' dance, kinesthetic empathy relied on the previous paradigm of 'natural dancing', foundational to much of the 'free form' or early modern dance movement. From the 1890s to the 1920s, 'free form' dancers opposed the hegemony of ballet in art dance and sought to establish dancing as essential to creating healthy bodies. (See Carter & Fensham, 2012) The argument about dancing as healthy and thus of societal value rested on aesthetic value judgments that were deeply racialized: untrained or 'malformed' bodies were not acceptable as natural dancing bodies, because they failed to adequately express the aesthetic and moral norms that made such dancing art ('beauty', 'grace', 'rhythm'). As in contemporary body culture more generally, the aesthetic of natural dancing emulated nineteenth-century fantasies about 'classical' Graeco-Roman art as supreme forms of whiteness. (See e.g. Leoussi, 2016, 48–66 on 'ethnic Hellenism'; Walsh 2020; also Foster 2019, 142-144) But whiteness itself was foundationally insecure: a gradation where local race politics dictated qualia of individual economic, sexual, physiological and mental features to determine whose whiteness was white enough, limited only by the larger international framework of pseudoscientific racism. (E.g. McMahon, 2016, esp. 170; Painter, 2010)

'Primitives' on the other side of what de Sousa Santos calls the abyssal line had undoubtedly not been subject to degeneration and were frequently compared to children glorified by the natural dancing movement, but their dances were explicitly excluded from the natural dancing aesthetic as uncultivated. Although the primitive could be praised as retaining something lost to the white subject, and aspects of the primitive could be appropriated to enliven the white aesthetic norm, natural dancing sought to rediscover the ur-whiteness underneath the degenerative effects of urban modernity. Natural dancing was unmarked as white, relying on white aesthetic norms, and promoting a dynamic racial politic tied to eugenic ideas about (reproductive) health that only gained in valence after the crippling effects of the First World War. (E.g. Walsh, 2020; Kant, 2016; Järvinen, 2012)

Kinesthetic empathy, in contrast, originated as a structure of power in which dances and aesthetics excluded from the theoretical frames and histories of dance as 'irrelevant' not-art could nevertheless be absorbed into and staged in the white bodies dancing appropriately 'abstract' dances. As in natural dancing, the unmarked whiteness of the theoretical frame also marked the abyssal line that separated art from not-art. Transferred to practice-led research in dance, kinesthetic empathy has shifted from the critic's empathy towards staged dance to a dancer's explanatory power over their practice. It now creates in the dancer a universal, unmarked-as-white subject whose dance is immediately self-explanatory to an enlightened spectator. As with the critic failing to feel kinesthetic empathy over the colour line, any failure to understand the dance of the self-universalised subject is not indicative of any failure of the dancer-author-researcher or their dance. Rather, the fault lies in the defective empathy of the critical observer. When the hegemonic theoretical frames of practice-led research are difficult to apply to practices not focusing on the agency of and expression by the creating subject, these theories effectively buttress the limits of what kinds of dances can be in focus in practice-led inquiry and whose dancing is seen as of interest to the institutions funding this research.

Writing Dance Histories

The interplay between science, theories of art, and Eurocentric norms is also evident in how histories of dance have been structured to propagate white practices as the vanguard art of dancing. Although many European dancing masters wrote of their art in relation to the past of their art form and other arts, books outlining how present practices in dance related to past practices or what kinds of dances existed worldwide only emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The division of dance research that Kealiinohomoku (1970/2001) noted was immediately evident in this literature. Books describing general histories of dance (e.g. Vuillier, 1898; St.-Johnston, 1906) established a format for discussing history of dancing from the Graeco-Roman antiquity to the present day, organized in ways that effectively separated the genealogy of art dance from folk and social forms, Europe from the rest of the world.

In contrast, early 'anthropological' accounts relied heavily on the accounts of white colonizers' explorers, soldiers, missionaries, and traders. *Dancing*, by Mrs Lilly Grove (1895) construed a hierarchical progress of dancing from the primitive to the modern – a hierarchy that implied racial hierarchy where more elaborate dances indicated a

more advanced culture, culminating in white dances. Grove's ideas of 'progress' of cultures reflect the interests of her second husband, Sir James George Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*. Like the early books on dance history, Grove's work is largely forgotten today. Dance anthropology (ethnochoreology) as a science traces its roots to later male authors like Curt Sachs, whose 1933 *Eine Weltgeschichte des Tanzes* no longer simply listed examples of dances from around the world but attempts at analysing dancing as a behaviour. In the first part of his book, Sachs categorized dances through movements, forms, themes, and relationship to music, building a dichotomy of distinct cultural types. Although Sachs (1937) was far better than Grove in listing his sources, he likewise authoritatively discussed dances he had never witnessed let alone danced, relying on biased accounts by other white people. Like Grove's ideas of cultural progress, Sachs's cultural types implied racial hierarchy of 'development' and superiority of white European dances.

Although aimed at popular audiences, these early histories and studies of dance helped structure complex corporeal practices into hierarchies, severing not just white from not-white, but 'contemporary/modern' dances from 'traditional/ritual' practices, 'high' art from 'low' entertainment of variety stages and social or participatory dances alike. From circa 1905 onwards, North American 'free form' dancers in particular began to justify their practice through publishing autobiographies that, together with interviews or portrait pieces in the press, quickly became references for the emergent critical literature that sought to justify the cultural significance of dance as an art form – its need of funding and institutions for teaching and practicing (white) art dance beyond ballet and variety theatre stages. (On dancers' autobiographies, see e.g. Järvinen, 2012; Hammergren, 2017) Rarely overtly racist, this emergent discourse nevertheless articulated racialized hierarchies through aesthetic norms, associating art with metaphors for physical and moral elevation and affective elation and not-art with base desires, crouching or bent posture, and the syncopated rhythms of ragtime. Excess and disharmony became racialised, even as advocates of 'primitivism' argued for their sublimation in art (by white dancers, of course) as a 'cure' to modernity.

For most of the twentieth century, the intimate connection of dance scholarship and vanguard practice helped to establish canonical figures, excusing their problematic pedagogies, exploitative labour practices, even outright white supremacist ideologies. (On these issues, see e.g. Srinivasan, 2011; Scolieri, 2013) For the past century, the repertories taught by dance companies or works emphasised as masterpieces in dance pedagogy or scholarship have been overwhelmingly white because the histories and the theoretical apparatus taught to analyse dancing has favoured white traditions and genealogies.

As I have previously argued in an article translated for this journal (Järvinen, 2023), even explicitly racist practices such as blackface have long been excused in works deemed 'masterpieces', propagating a legacy of racism through continuous return that such a status elicits. This is not because critical voices would not have opposed racism in dance practice but because hegemonic power not only silences criticism but absorbs it into itself, making tiny concessions to elide any attempts at changing actual relations of power. The hegemonic representational regimes of dance in performance, online forums, textbooks, podcasts, museum exhibits, and the like still reflect the hagiographies cultivated in the dance literature of the first decades of the twentieth century. With the truly globalised world of post-Internet dance, where art emerges from very different genealogies and theoretical starting points, this myopic whiteness also needs to change. Dance needs to be understood as a cultural formation, constantly changing like the dancers who engage in it – and so does scholarship. In other words, this text, too, is grounded in a particular place.

Situated Knowledge

Teaching in a university that, until very recently, was a conservatoire-style vocational art school focusing on European contemporary dance practice and very much opposed to ballet, I am simultaneously situated within the hegemonic art practices in dance and very far from its Anglophone centre. Although situated in the Global North, Finland is on the periphery of that North, outside of the former and current empires who decide on global policy and whose histories dominate also the definitions of what it means to be European, say, or white. Finland was part of Sweden from the twelfth century to 1809 (or 1721, for south-east Finland) and then part of Russia until 1917. Despite some attempts in the sixteenth century, Finnish only became a written language from the 1830s onwards. In the arts, there is no 'origin' to be had, nothing that would have survived eight hundred years of colonialism and self-colonialisation, the pursuit of whiteness through adherence to Eurocentric epistemologies and colonialism.

As my colleague Petri Hoppu is fond of saying, there is no such thing as "Finnish dance" – everything is imported. Even the so-called folk dances are invented traditions from the second half of the nineteenth century, a civilizing project by the predominantly Swedish-speaking leisure classes: heteronormative couples in geometrical formations following the distinct beat of fashionable dances of leisure classes of yesterday (quadrille, polka, mazurka, etc.) – dances superseded in the ballroom by more modern fashions (notably, the waltz). As elsewhere in the Norden, the advocates of national dance culture could aspire to a particular upper-class European corporeality and Nordic unity

through these ‘proper’ folk dances, distinct from the unruly bodies of ordinary people dancing. (See Vedel ,2011) Dancing associated with lewdness and alcohol consumption in local festive practices, strongly condemned by the Lutheran state church in the throes of the second Pietist reform, could be removed from the national body whilst local pride was emphasised through a palette of invented national costumes specific to each commune. Even so, Finland saw several bans of dancing from 1888 onwards, and dancing was even briefly criminalized during the Second World War. (Tikka & Nevala, 2020)

As in other Nordic countries, the new folk dance represented an aspirational ideal for the emerging nation state, and in many ways, any dance meriting the monicker ‘art’ served a similar purpose. (E.g. Hoppu, 2011) After independence, the art practices in dance – whether ballet, modern dance, or European contemporary dance – were developed from foreign models, their histories affected by half a century of Cold War dance diplomacy. (Croft, 2015; Korppi-Tommola, 2012) What is forgotten, even actively silenced until quite recently, is the active participation of all Nordic countries in colonialism, including intra-Nordic colonialism. (See e.g. Palmberg, 2009/2020; Keskinen, 2019.) Although Finns love to represent themselves as victims of first Sweden and then Russia, the people most affected by intra-Nordic colonialism are the Saami peoples, the only Indigenous peoples in Europe recognized by the United Nations. (N.B. I am using the spelling ‘Saami’ at the recommendation of the Giellagas institute, as the spelling Sámi is specifically North Sámi, the largest (hegemonic) of the Saami languages.)

The Saami peoples’ homeland, Sápmi, spreads across Northern parts of Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. These countries have not only tried to forcibly assimilate Saami peoples, repressing Saami culture as pagan and primitive. Blocking the traditional migration routes across national borders, these countries treated Sápmi as “empty land” in a manner very similar to settler colonialist states like Australia. Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway have also all enriched themselves by logging, mining, and polluting Sápmi, damming its rivers for energy production, and appropriating aspects of Saami culture for stereotypical exoticism in cultural and tourism industries. Indigenous resistance has included rethinking of representation of past and present practices as coextant: with the Saami, this intertwining of temporalities is evident in pedagogical practices of the Siida Museum and Nature Centre in Inari (Aanaar/Aanar/Anár) and Sevettijärvi (Če'vetjäu'rr/Čevetjävri/Čeavetjávri) that employs elders to teach key knowledge and skills to pass them on to the next generation but also rethinks what these skills could be used for in the present. (See Siida, 2025)

As a child, I spent my summers in Köyliö in southwestern Finland, 600 kilometres south of the southernmost parts of Sápmi. Yet, the name Köyliö is of Saami, not Finnish, origin – a trace, like many similar place names all over Finland, of Saami having once

lived much further south. Like many Finns in the 1970s, my parents also took me to the Arctic Ocean, driving across what is known as Lapland, the northernmost third of Finland that is Sápmi. In the news, we watched the Alta-Kautokeino protests, environmental protests led by Saami against the Norwegian government's damming of the Alta river in Finnmark that lasted throughout the 1970s ending only in 1983. These protests were formative for most of the other environmental movements in the Nordic countries, and their legacy is prominent in the work of many Saami artists today, including in dance. To give but one example, Pauliina Feodoroff's *Matriarchy*, first conceived for the first Saami Pavilion in the Venice Biennale in 2022, brought together video, installation, performance and dance elements to criticize extraction colonialism in Sápmi and raise funds for Indigenous restoration projects counteracting the effects of climate change that affect the Arctic. (García-Antón, 2022; Feodoroff, 2022)

Feodoroff is Skólt Saami, one of the 'dancing people'. Especially since the Saami culture revival movement of the 1970s, the Skólt ka'dril (quadrille) has become focal in their contemporary identity, distinguishing the Skólt from both other Saami peoples and the culture of the colonizers. Following the Second World War, Skólt Saami were forcibly moved from the Murmansk bay area in the Soviet Union to Njeä'llem (Nellim) and Če′vetjä′urr (Sevettijärvi) in Finland, where they faced discrimination in part because unlike other Saami peoples, the Skólt follow the Orthodox faith. Dancing was one means of holding onto a particular minoritarian identity within a minority already subject to colonialism. (Hoppu & Jouste, 2025)

International collaboration with other Indigenous peoples has both strengthened the position of Saami in the countries that still occupy Sápmi and highlighted the global similarities in the colonization processes that now also intertwine with exacerbating climate change. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi People (2025) was established in 2021, the same year as the National Museum of Finland repatriated over 2,000 artefacts from its collections to the Siida Museum. (Finnish Heritage Agency, 2021) In June 2025, after nearly eight years and reprimands from the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the Finnish parliament finally passed the revised law on Saami Parliament elections that grounded suffrage on international law and Saami language and culture. However, at the time of writing, Finland has still not ratified the International Labour Organization's Convention 169 concerning the rights of Indigenous peoples on the grounds that land rights in Sápmi have not been reconciled – notably because the state refuses the demands of the Saami peoples.[2]

[2] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2025) will publish their most recent recommendations 4 December 2025. Their extant publications on various issues regarding forest and mining industry, tourism,

Given that the institution in which I work is the only university giving out doctoral level degrees in Dance, the exclusion of all folk dance, including Indigenous dances, from the curriculum of the Dance programme effectively limits practice-led degrees in Dance to the white Eurocentric norm. Currently, the most famous Saami dancers in Finland all have professional backgrounds in white forms, notably ballet. As in the other Nordic countries, many of them have spoken against cultural appropriation, stereotyping, exoticization, and white saviourism evident staged representations of Saami as well as other art forms. (See e.g. Weckman, 2023, 12-16 on "A Lapp Dance"). As recently as 2019, an award-winning Finnish choreographer collaborated with a Finnish composer to create a work allegedly 'celebrating' Saami culture – without consulting any Saami artists or inviting any Saami into the gala performance. Auri Ahola, former ballerina of the Finnish National Ballet, who is Inari Saami, stressed how the work exoticized Saami culture, and stressed that the Saami are not in need of 'rescue'.[3]

Yet, the fact that Ahola is an expert and a professional of dance because she is a ballerina, trained in a white form and looking white when dancing on the stage that receives the most state support of all dance companies in Finland, exemplifies how art's proximity to whiteness assimilates into itself also dancers who embody also very different life experiences and epistemologies. In universities and research, epistemologies of the north force the colonized to use the words of the colonizer in an attempt to be taken for a rational subject and listened to, but this attempt is undermined by the colonizer's insistence on being the final arbiter of not only reason but of humanity itself. (de Sousa Santos, 2018) This unmarked, hegemonic whiteness of art makes teaching the many histories of dances in an art school context difficult: who has the expertise to speak of and for dances, especially dances not taught as focal in the curriculum? What even is the curriculum that defines what is of importance for the future generations of dancers and dance pedagogues taught in these institutions? I would suggest looking for the unconscious framing of the future through the histories in dance textbooks.

Two or Three Dance History Textbooks

Coming to dance from outside of the pedagogical legacies of the studio and from a country so peripherical to the textbook histories that a yawning chasm seems to exist

military presence, etc. are, however, not available in English. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman only focuses on racism and language rights (https://yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu.fi/en/rights-of-the-sami). The Sámi Parliament has materials on livelihoods, justice, and responsible tourism: https://samediggi.fi/en/areas-of-expertise/livelihoods-justice-and-environment/.

[3] More on this and other Saami dance makers' strategies of navigating Nordic arts discourses in Järvinen (2021).

between local histories and those referenced in scholarship as canonical, I was slow to realize the advantage in this positionality: when everything in the local comes from somewhere else, the only way of understanding the histories of dances is to first understand that there is no origin, no authenticity to be had. The result is a liberation from the burden of history: it no longer matters that the imperial centre claims what you do is a belated reaction to some kind of vanguard that they invented, because when they say that, when they claim to be the origin, you know they are lying. As Hoppu and Jouste (2025) have shown with the Skólt Saami ka'dril, dances adopted by a particular people as cultural signifiers can become tools for resistance and agency regardless of any ideas of 'origin'. Cultures have never been static nor had clear borders, and the travels of dances should be a cause of celebration as much as dances' capability to bring people together into a community.

In other words, I want to evoke bell hooks's (1990, 341) words about marginality as a site of radical possibility,

> …to identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation [- to say -] that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. [- It is -] a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. [-N-]ot speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

These new worlds require a decolonization of the mind and a rethinking of theoretical frames in local languages and contexts. Dancing may be nonverbal, but how dancers conceptualise and articulate their practices – how they understand dance as signifying something – depends on the semantics, grammar and syntax of a language, even phonetics (as in the alliterative English phrase "words create worlds"). For dance practitioners to stake their claim in the aesthetic and theoretical realm, dance research should not be as overdetermined by Eurocentric philosophy and the English language as it currently is, nor as tied to these orders of discourse. Thinking of corporeal practice in local theoretical frames is imperative not to expand extant canons but to deconstruct the power of canons as unchanging and universally true. Especially in the age of the Internet, when all dance is seemingly instantly available and separated from specific histories, the field of Dance Studies needs histories in the plural that also take historiography itself as a political endeavour in which anti-colonialism is long overdue. Of course, I acknowledge

that not all who teach dance practice want to become historians and do this questioning, but this is where collaboration becomes crucial.

Collaboration certainly made me acutely aware of the balancing act between extant scholarship in local languages, different histories and different canons, and the specificity of pedagogical imperatives in a particular place. Co-editing the first Finnish language textbook on history of dance arts (Monni, Laakso & Järvinen, 2022), we quickly noted that in a trilingual university, the book had to be translated into English (Monni, Laakso & Järvinen, 2023) because some students were using automated translation tools to read it. Since the book was written for BA students in my home institution, it was originally conceived as filling in gaps in extant work available in Finnish. It also reflects the institution's Eurocentric curriculum and focuses on what, in Finnish, is called "taidetanssi", which we translated as 'Dance Arts' – "the historical trajectories and features of Western dance as a performing art," as we put it in the book's Introduction, noting that "we need to question any Eurocentric history that emphasises almost exclusively white actors and normative bodies," but that this book is still only a beginning. We also used partitive case in our titles, signifying partialness and ambiguity over definite knowledge over the subject matter, a nuance almost impossible to convey in English.

We had 18 authors in the original volume, many of whom were invited to write of practices and colleagues who were of particular importance to their own art practice. We commissioned one text from a US colleague writing on Black sensibilities (DeFrantz, 2023) because although our translation budget was non-existent, so, in a country of less than six million inhabitants, was the pool of authors willing and able to write a textbook article on their topic of interest. In hindsight, the translation of the textbook revealed the restrictions in the perspectives offered: as soon as the focus was not in expanding the extant discourse in Finnish – writing of historical predecessors of whom nothing existed in Finnish before – what remained was the hegemonic and the canonical. For example, the text I had written on ballet that I conceived as to be read in parallel with a recent history of the Finnish National Ballet company (Laakkonen et al., 2021) seems redundant in English because most English-language textbooks already cover histories of ballet to excruciating detail – and ballet is not even taught in our Dance programme! Hanna Väätäinen's chapters on disability dance (Väätäinen, 2023a) and Afrodiasporic modern dance (Väätäinen, 2023b), envisaged as inclusive, were effectively segregated in the chronological structure where other chapters covered only the normative bodies and predominantly white practices of the same era. Although Väätäinen's chapter on Black dance also discussed the politics of pan-Africanism and the links between Africa and the diaspora, the separation of this history into a chapter of its own parallels how, in US

textbooks, normative whiteness is construed by setting Pearl Primus, Katherine Dunham, and Alvin Ailey into a separate genealogy that never shall meet any of the great whites sharks on the other side, with José Limon as the liminal space of recognition that histories are not quite so straightforward in practice.[4]

My guilt at not having succeeded in our textbook project was somewhat alleviated when I read the relatively new French textbook, *Nouvelle Histoire de la danse en Occident* (Cappelle, 2020), with a more ambitious outline of covering all Western dance from prehistory to the present. Like our textbook, it is arranged in chronological order, but starting from evidence of dancing in cave art. On the level of chapter titles, the French volume mentions only two women by name, both US dancers who made their reputations in Europe – Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan. In contrast, *eleven* men get chapters of their own, and with the sole exception of Sergei Diaghilev, the impresario of the Ballets Russes company, all of these are ballet choreographers: Auguste Bournonville (even if his name is repeatedly not capitalised) and Marius Petipa (twice) from the nineteenth century; Mikhail Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Leonid Massine from the Ballets Russes, with George Balanchine adopted to the US context; Roland Petit, Maurice Béjart, Jiří Kylián, and William Forsythe filling in the ranks for the rest of the twentieth century. Exemplifying the closeness of the canon and the canonised, Forsythe also wrote the preface to the book.

Although it is clearly not intentional, this emphasis on male ballet choreographers as individualized author(itie)s exemplifies how unconscious bias in who matter in dance history overshadows even a textbook that includes explicitly feminist readings of ballet, notably Hélène Marquié's (2020) excellent chapter on the Parisian dance scene in the nineteenth century. Similarly, the fact that this list has more Russian men than any other gender or nationality begs the question where is 'the West' of the title? Russian and Soviet ballet hold a prominent place, but the rest of Eastern Europe is equally prominently absent from the book's pages.

Similarly, it is clearly not intentional that the book construes all dancing into a white genealogy. Much like early twentieth-century histories of dancing, it begins with evidence of dance in prehistory, followed by Greece and Rome, with Medieval Europe also getting a chapter. Almost incidentally, even prehistory becomes contextualized as white history through exclusion of all histories of dances from non-European contexts and, consequentially, all the other possible trajectories from this prehistory to the present day elsewhere in the world. In our Finnish textbook, by contrast, the discussions on ancient past and ritual contexts were framed as important for later definitions of dance as

[4] See e.g. Reynolds & McCormick (2003), the index of which has 34 individuals meriting more than 10 lines of references – 8 of these 34 are women and all apart from Limón are white people.

an *art* – our ideas of dance arts as staged, for example, as a legacy of the amphitheatre, or how anthropological interest in danced rituals inspired art dance practices since the turn of the twentieth century. In other words, our starting point was how histories are something that dance practitioners *use*, and how the different uses to which stories and sources about the past have been used create different histories for dance that we understand as art.

In the French volume, several of the texts are translations from English, with books originally published in English dominating the short source lists. In a French book, this underscores the hegemony of Anglo-American scholarship in dance studies even in former European empires with strong dance research traditions. When 'art' is explicitly the not-tradition, the not-ethnographic, what better locus of historical amnesia than the settler-colonialist twentieth-century empire! In other words, US dance history rose to prominence together with US imperialism after the First World War, and this explains much of the prominence of US artists represented as vanguard in dance textbooks. With the hegemony came the inevitable universalization of the US discourse: the primary arbiter of modernity is reduced to US opinion, where all modern dance originates with Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan and the Denishawn company, followed by key choreographers from Martha Graham to Merce Cunningham, the latter a transitional figure to the next avant-garde of postmodern dance of the Judson Dance Theatre. African-American choreographers are segregated into a separate genealogy that has a similarly vanguard relation to both dance in Africa and in the diaspora. Asia is butoh, everything else (like Bharatanatyam) is 'traditional' dance, unchanging and un-modern. Europe is ballet, with the Ballets Russes as defined through Orientalizing French and English sources represented as due to the influence of Isadora Duncan; and Ausdruckstanz, culminating in Pina Bausch. The primary focus in ballet, however, is Balanchine, an honorary US genius, with Forsythe as the figure who takes US innovations back to Europe. Although this is a caricature of dance textbooks, it is also the narrative that anyone engaged in pedagogy of histories of dance has to actively resist, because it makes everything else in dance *reactionary*, a belated adoption of this vanguard hegemony.

In the French textbook, the twentieth century section in particular is overdetermined by this US-centric narrative. Apart from two chapters, the focus is on white art dance, and those two are US-centric – one on minstrelsy, Broadway and Hollywood musical numbers (Thuries, 2020) and another on hip hop (McCarren, 2020). Although the two last chapters of the book (Fratagnoli & Pagès 2020 and Germain-Thomas, 2020) destabilize this bias for ballet and US modern and postmodern dance a little, the book

still leaves an overwhelming impression that 'dance' primarily means staged choreographic creation by singular artists in white genealogies. This would be less of an issue were the name of the book "A New History of *Staged* Dance in the West".

Our Finnish textbook, by contrast, has no chapter on musicals or breaking, but also makes no claims to represent all dance. Yet, its open access availability masks how it represents the interests of a specific pedagogical institution that, in the local context, wields hegemonic power over what, in dance, qualifies as art. When art dance is the hegemonic narrative to which pedagogy aspires and you literally write the textbook to that effect, how do you teach the intertwined histories of dances *beyond* it?

Revivals of Archives

History is always, especially in textbooks, about politics of the present day. History is a construct that scholars create out of what remains of the past, sometimes quite selectively citing only what fits current paradigms and belief systems. Historians of dance struggle with the burden of proof and evidence precisely because corporeal practices do not leave sources that are commonly understood as proof in academic (Eurocentric) historiography: texts, writing, notations. Such sources are always-already mediated, and in dance, the desire for access to the unmediated past has resulted in the strange practice of recreating past dances in the form of reconstruction, revival, and re-creation.

In the instances where pedagogues engage in actively re-creating a dance from archival documents, the dancing that results seemingly offers a different relation to past dancing bodies than the archive overdetermined by words. However, what is selected for reconstruction is more often than not something hegemonical and canonised as art dance – in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment* (Franko, 2017), all but three of the 30 texts discuss European or neo-European staged art dance and only one article (on a Black Canadian photographer's pictures of capoeira) a practice not explicitly labelled art. From a dancer's perspective, as Mark Franko (1989) noted, what is often the most interesting is what cannot be found in the archive – that which has to be left to the imagination. Yet, the hesitation and not-knowing that is interesting in thinking about what a dance might have been like never reaches the public performance stage that is usually the end result of these kinds of historical pursuits.

In historiography, interpretation of source materials necessitates dealing with not knowing and never being able to know, since what remains are often fragments that do not explain themselves. The everyday and the self-evident are the first to disappear because they are self-evident at the time; and archiving separates what is archived from its

socio-cultural context. (See e.g. Guarato, 2024) Although often claiming the exact opposite, reconstructions tend to be foundationally anti-historical in that the staged work does not reveal anything of the reconstruction process or the extent of sources used; or allow for critical engagement with methodology. André Lepecki (2010, 35) claims reconstructions free dance from economies of authoritative authors but effectively, the reverse is true: staged recreations tend to be expensive luxury projects that require time and institutional resources, and in the copyright economy they become products distributed as widely as possible to justify the investment, with the explicit purpose of benefiting the makers' economical future as author(itie)s on value (of the past) for the future. Much of the reconstruction business thus effectively *impedes* critical research and overwrites what remains in archives in favour of a marketable product to transform the authority of the past author to the reconstructors. They do not "enact the promise of the end of economy" (Lepecki 2010, 35) but re-enact appropriative capitalist reproduction of the already hegemonic.

Although by no means all dance history teachers have the capital required for reconstruction work, reconstructions still permeate representations of past dance in classrooms because of their active marketing as products make their mediatized reproductions available for teachers, who look for illustrations of the past dance *an sich*, in movement and colour. Reconstructions of so-called 'lost masterworks' from time before film became widely used as a medium of documenting dance are particularly toxic in this regard, because in using them, pedagogues reinforce the reconstruction as the same as the past dance, impeding critical engagement with the economy of authorship, canons, production logics, and historiography.

In dance scholarship, especially practice-led work, much emphasis is placed on the dancer's body as an archive, the dancer as the carrier of the past in their present-day practice (as in the aforementioned Lepecki, 2010). The body as an archive seeks to emphasise corporeality as crucial to history of corporeal practice, and has become a genre in (neo-)European staged art dance, in museum practices, and academic research. Whereas in historiography, the role of the archive is to preserve something apart and beyond lifetimes of mortal bodies in order for future generations to critically re-evaluate and engage with what is preserved, the metaphorical use of the word 'archive' in the body-as-archive derives from the same unmarked-as-white theoretical frame as kinesthetic empathy: the idea that an immediate, corporeal understanding dance is possible across differences in socio-economic status, gender, age, or culture – and across change over time. But the mortality of physical bodies raises the question who has access to the body as archive, how, and to what ends? Whose archives are valued? Look-

ing at the discourse, the body-as-archive is almost always a white body from (neo-)European art context, already canonical. As with reconstruction, this focus predetermines the return to these figures something reinforcing hegemony rather than critical engagement or addressing epistemological questions crucial to any archival work.

Archives organize knowledge and restrict access to experts of knowledge production – they are, as de Sousa Santos (2018, 198) notes, "the official cartographer of the abyssal line". But archives always-already also preserve things not intended to be preserved and thus offer possibilities of resistance for scholars reading what is archived deliberately against the grain. The order of the archive constrains what can be said of past dance by not preserving the moving body as is, but this is not a problem for historiography, because historians accept that most of the past is inevitably beyond the capture of archives or scholarship to begin with! Dance is no more extralinguistic than most human everyday experience, but it is more important than much of everyday experience, often associated with important moments that are recalled, remembered, illustrated and written about. Although archives privilege the privileged, dance is one of the aspects of ordinary peoples' lives that does leave material traces by virtue of not being quotidian activity, and these traces can be used to discuss how communities change over time. (See e.g. King-Dorset, 2008)

The body-as-archive discourse resists the gaps that historical archives always have, and replaces the extensive training required of historiographical archival labour with the corporeal expertise of present-day dancer accessing the bodies of others across difference. In historiography, archival work requires specialist training in translating what remains into something that people of the present can understand, and this training takes time and effort not usually available for dance practitioners seeking to create a product for the festival circuit. The division between dance history classes and practice classes in most academic institutions with Dance departments not only disperses dance historians into other departments but emphasises the histories told to dancers in the practice classes.

Teaching Dance History in Practice

In my home institution, this differentiation between history classes and teachers on one hand and practice classes and teachers on the other results in little time devoted to the complex chains of transmission of the practice in the classroom where the practice takes place. As a teacher, I know very little of what the practice teachers have claimed about the histories of the practices they teach. Even though my home institution has actively sought to dismantle the requirement of professional art practice as a condition

for even getting accepted into the programme, most of the students already have some European contemporary dance background prior to their studies. Given the emphasis on formal qualities of dances in the studio as well as the job market, the histories of how a particular dance relates to, shifts and reacts to other practices in the global circuits of transmission and exchange are often still brushed aside. As Jonathan Burrows (2010, 31-36, 65) notes, connections, borrowings, intertextualities are often too complex to verbalize in each moment of the dance, but in the capitalist logic, spurious claims about 'originality' and 'authenticity' are also actively used to deny these complex connections.

In an institution with the explicit mandate of teaching artists and where the doctoral programme focuses on Artistic Research – practice-led research in art – the (neo-)European paradigm of what qualifies as art reigns supreme. The normative whiteness of the theoretical frames taught as most relevant to artistic research condition interpretations of history as well, and dances beyond (neo-)Europe are only very slowly making their way into the consciousnesses of teachers and scholars. Despite our best intentions, our textbook project, an investment by this particular institution and delineated by its curriculum design, exemplifies how dance history too often shackles future practitioners into the ideological chains of a (neo-)European canon and its colonialist history whereby ballet is somehow magically universal and the US the heart of all innovation. The unmarked whiteness of this understanding of what is valued in dance needs to be put under scrutiny, as, for example, Ananya Chatterjea (2020) has done with the term 'contemporary dance'. To reiterate an old metaphor: it is impossible to change how the histories of dances get taught by adding new details onto the extant map, because the process of mapping itself is a form of colonialization and violence that needs to be questioned.

But how to teach history of contemporary dance, when the very term 'contemporary dance' is always-already escaping definition and yet assumed to be legibly itself – notably, dance contextualized as art in the Eurocentric legacy system and staged in the specific festival circuit dominated by white gatekeepers, white audiences, and white voices. With its Eurocentric claims to universality, contemporary dance also carries inequities, perpetuating the power of metropolises over the peripheries and a colonizer's right to appropriate what they see as fit in order to further uphold the centrality of the currently focal white institutions to dancers' careers. As a pedagogue, I have a responsibility to my employer and my students who aspire to this market that troubles me.

In a recent class for doctoral researchers in artistic research, I kept thinking of the ground on which we danced, not just in terms of ancestral connections or ecologies that participants brought up, but very concretely in terms of the surfaces on which the dancing in our school takes place. As Simo Kellokumpu (2019, "A Dance Mat") observed, a dance mat is not only a by-product of the fossil fuel industry – it is a technology that

privileges certain kind of movement and subjecthood. Shoes are forbidden on a dance mat, dance in bare feet or in socks! Similarly, a studio that has a wall of mirrors and a barre reinforces the frame of ballet pedagogy, the mirror standing in for separation of the dance from the audience in the presumed proscenium space, as well as for judgment of the self in the disciplining practice of rehearsal on the barre, the height of which is a normative standard for flexibility as well as degree of support. Outside, the concrete corridors of the school or (if the weather permits) the asphalt of the street invite a very different kind of dancing, often in sneakers rather than socks or ballet slippers, but still tied to capitalist logic of fossil fuels and production chains. As our student body expands to dancers from different technical backgrounds and danced histories, are the spaces of our school able to provide them with what they need or are they expected to change their dancing to the restrictions of the space?

What of the aesthetics that the students pick up in class from who the teacher praises and for what? Recently, teaching a course for our Dance MA programme, a student with hip hop and figure skating backgrounds pointed out that movement practices also taught as sports focus of “tricks”, specific virtuosic movements that require skill. Questions of aesthetic qualia, self-expression, or community – the values these art school dance students usually prioritize – recede to the background. (See also DeFrantz, 2004) This led to a discussion on how, for example, the exhibition of breakdancing in the Paris Olympics of 2024 transforms a practice originating from urban, Black, dispossessed youth culture into an international commodity, a sport with a rigid set of rules and structures. I brought up how the brouhaha surrounding the Australian representative, Raygun, had misogynistic, ageist, and anti-intellectual overtones – protests about how she was selected, how she is a dance researcher (the implication being she is not a dancer), or how she is older than many of the other competitors all align with concerns expressed by hip hop scholars about breakdancing’s dancesport classification and the increasing disparities between practitioners. (E.g. Ng & Fogarty, 2023) The students listed other classes taught in dance schools with similar histories of appropriation and commodification: where do all these dances come from and who decides the schools’ curriculum?

The sportification of breaking reflects a larger shift in how dance is taught in dance schools catering to the general public in Finland. Here, the strong historical connection of modern and contemporary dance with women’s gymnastics in particular has created a dance education system where dance as art and dance as sport cohabit the same spaces and share genealogies of teachers. (E.g. Makkonen 2010) In the twenty-first century, however, these spaces have increasingly focused on dance competitions against each other: on having specialist coaches select ‘the best’ students for showcases

where representatives of different schools get ranked, and these rankings help attract new students and media attention alike. The focus is on virtuoso tricks because those perform best with competition judges and television audiences alike, but the increasing disjunction between what is valued in dance schools and the different values of the art field is concerning for many reasons, not the least because of the ahistorical manner both treat dances from the Global South as exotic commodities to be appropriated.

The first aspect of my own rethinking dance history pedagogies is that engaging with local histories can affect how international practices get understood – and not only when hegemonic practices place the local as always-already belated reaction so as to keep the vanguard at the heart of the empire. By this, I mean that canons of art and hierarchies of value are hegemonic in that they get represented as universal and unchanging, but in practice, all canons are local and shift as aesthetic preferences and interpretations of history change. (Järvinen, 2023) Without understanding the local as a site of radical possibility, students will not acquire a sense of agency, of themselves as makers of history instead of merely being the products of histories. Without a sense of agency, they will not become interested in history or see the value of critical engagement with histories of dance, and without critical engagement, they cannot develop as dancers or human beings.

In practice, I have often began my classes by asking students to locate themselves through idols, communities, and genealogies. The first, dance idols, means asking them to name people and practices they revere regardless of whether they themselves engage in the same practices. The second, dance communities, requires they reflect upon how their friends or family members dance. The third asks them to write their own, personal histories in dance, linking what and where they have danced to a chain of other dancers' practices. Of these exercises, the first is very fast, prompted with "you have one minute", aiming to bring out the immediate first reaction that reflects what the students' idea of canonical heroes is like. I have often continued the exercise by asking the students to reflect their proximity to their idols in terms of which continents they come from and what is their idols' economic or cultural status. The second exercise prompts students to think outside of art practice, to expand the idea of what is dancing – but also again to locate the students in time and place. The third exercise builds a preliminary history, noticing how each and every dancer is already part of history and rhizomatic genealogies of dance practitioners. There is potential to find connections within the group when several students have worked with the same teachers, but also a possibility to point to how pedagogical heroes are often not the people represented as important figures in dance in textbooks or in the media.

None of these exercises argue for a body-as-an-archive approach – rather, I try to encourage students to see their bodies and communities (including their own classmates) as sources of different histories. To teach dance history is to teach to think critically of what is taught as history in the dance class, to notice how fame and fortune distort our attention also in relation to the past(s) of dance(s). My secret desire is to encourage dancers to speak up about their histories so that those histories could also influence the future of dancing in this school and beyond it. (Cf. DeFrantz & Parson, 2024)

This leads me to my second point about rethinking dance history pedagogies: the epistemo-ontological question as to what counts as 'dance'. To engage dance students' critical faculties in an art school context, it is very necessary to ask them to define 'dance' and have them converse about where and why their definitions differ. Many theories that claim to be about dance in general are conditioned solely by Eurocentric ideas of dance art, and students in an art school require reminding that their kind of dancing is not the most common way dance is understood. Next, I ask them what, then, would be 'a' dance (singular) to think of who has authority over when and where 'a' dance actually is, or when is a particular dance no longer recognizable as that particular dance? To use the above example, breakdancing at the Olympics is sport but what if the same dancer moves in their club's cypher or at an art gallery event? Apart from teaching that what is recognized as dancing is context specific, I wish the students to become able to discern expertise from the self-confidence of a would-be imperialist, because what qualifies as 'a source' on dance is a question for TikTok as much as for the historical archive. Noticing historical developments influenced by migration, colonialism, capitalism, mediation, pedagogical ideologies and academic research alike is a skill, and a skill developed by practice.

Again, the point of thinking about reliability of expertise is to foster agency, especially for students expected to labour in the works of choreographer-authors: seeing that dance history is written by people, often people enthusiastic about a particular kind of dance but also biased towards their favoured aesthetic; and conversely, that everyone has a chance to try to influence how the dance they are enthusiastic about will be understood in the future, but they can only succeed with others, as history is never singular. Fostering students' agency means showing them how history is researched and reinterpreted in the present because the potential futures we imagine together change over time. Understanding one's own genealogy helps the students to see their potential bias for, in our case, (neo-)European contemporary dance and what this may mean when encountering other kinds of dances. But given how activist students at our academy also sometimes assume white saviour roles, I also want to caution students not to establish in themselves a new hegemonical power structure in the name of 'decolonizing' art and

academia – especially given that both art and academia are themselves places of privilege and power. Or, as Rafael Guarato (2022, esp. 124) points out, articulation of hegemonical power structures does not always translate into dismantling of such structures. Description, as Katherine McKittridge (2021) points out, is not liberation. Hegemonic power assimilates critiques of itself, turning a practical demand – restitution, land rights, reconciliation – into a metaphor. (Tuck & Yang, 2012)

Usually, I am not given enough hours for students to conduct practical projects that would teach students about methodologies of historiography, but I try to include an analysis of a dance they wish to bring to the table, so to speak, and ask them to contextualize these dances in time. The theory classes are, after all, preparation for writing one's MA thesis, in which the students are expected to be able to articulate something about their practice, use source materials, and create and respond to research questions of some kind – and due to the current curriculum design, they only have eight weeks for this writing. In practice, I have ended up stressing that history is always a political science, the more political the less a historian admits to their political motivations; and that many people who have no training in historiography nevertheless write histories, some with great aplomb and self-confidence. A historian's version of Occam's razor is, that if presented with two plausible versions of events, the truth is usually neither, but something so perfectly ordinary and insignificant that nobody cared to write down or see it as significant at the time.

Today, history is more contested than ever, as conservative politicians everywhere propagate outright denialist claims and seek to directly influence curricula and textbooks, funding instruments and public projects. Simultaneously, social media is full of fake history: AI-generated fakes, misrepresentation of historical sources and events, counterfactual claims, and conspiracy theories are favoured by algorithms prioritizing engagement, and technology companies have no incentives to halt this development. In dance, internet has meant an apparently instant access to all kinds of dances, providing a plethora of online learning opportunities but also separating dances from their communities and histories. When the privileged have access and no qualms to using whatever they find online for the advancement of their careers, the need to understand local histories and community-led practices is more important than ever.

Many dance history teachers complain of institutional demands from curricular design to pressures of teaching only what programme leaders consider "of importance", i.e. the canonical narrative, and how this makes it difficult to address other kinds of dances. To shift who teaches dance history and whose dances get included in the pedagogy of dance and dance history alike may seem like a daunting task. Curricular design is often thankless administrative work requiring resistance to colleagues not interested

in changing, and over time, this is exhausting. For the privileged, the only real decolonizing action is to give up privilege in favour of minoritarian voices, to stop perpetuating colonization by self-interested focus on one's own practice as the 'correct' one, but few are truly willing to engage in this kind of decolonization. Faculty recruitment is difficult to influence, especially as new faculty is increasingly hired for posts funded with donations that come with strings attached: how a post is described often limits who can even apply, let alone whose work is seen as best fulfilling the inordinately fanciful selection criteria of these posts.

Educational systems where students pay tuition fees turn students into customers, allowed to demand teachers serve their needs, even as tuition fees limit who get to study in Dance programmes and, consequently, what gets taught. The fragility of this kind of system is now more than evident in the UK and the US. In my home institution, students are very critical of the education they receive: they are keen to notice whose dances are not represented in the classroom, whose theoretical frames are not there in their reading lists, and who are not represented in the faculty. Including students in processes like admissions or curricular design has greatly helped to foster a sense of community in the school, even as the right-wing government announces further cuts to education in the wake of disastrous austerity measures decimating the cultural sector, public healthcare, and social security. Add to this climate disaster, genocidal wars, rise of fascism, and lack of job prospects it is no wonder students have mental health issues and feel a lack of agency that repeating past injustices does not alleviate.

One important development in the shift of my home institution from a vocational school into a university is has been fostering students' abilities to articulate their practice-led thinking in expanded writing – writing that encompasses also other forms of meaning-making than grammatically correct sentences or discipline-specific knowledge. Over time, this has resulted not only in more texts on dance, crucial at a time when the sole online dance magazine recently folded and the only professional magazine have both recently foldedmerged first with a theatre and then also with a music magazine, but a new group of creative writers in and on dance. (E.g. Naukkarinen, 2024) These texts may not yet develop current understanding of past dances in Finland but they will form the basis for future histories by expanding the future archives of dance and by encouraging the sense of agency in the practitioners themselves. For a small language, they also resist the hegemony of English even when translated into English for an international readership. Perhaps, in the future, a fusion of such practices with how we write history itself might emerge, as Hayden White (1966, 127) encouraged historians to do more than half a century ago.

A Reprise

Speaking an obscure language at the periphery of Europe, I have here proposed an emphasis on the local that goes beyond European and neo-European art dance canons; histories in the plural that discuss corporeal practices in their contexts not as proof of some kind of eternal anthropological truth or origin but as having value in the present and thus for the future. Dances on the periphery are not belated reactions to the metropolis, they are their own thing, hybrid and valuable and changing with the people who dance. We all live in invented traditions and exploring those inventions as innovations is empowering, giving agency to new generations of dancers and scholars alike. The imperial centre – in Dance Studies, the United States – is of decreasing interest to me, even as I have to write in English to share my thoughts with Rafael Guarato, who translates this text.

In the three decades I have been engaging with histories of dances and dancing, the one thing that keeps surprising me is how much remains of past practices that basically no-one has even noticed let alone researched, yet. Coming together in and as moving bodies has clearly been important in the lives of so many different kinds of people in so many contexts. Dances move people, emotionally and physically (although not all of this enthusiasm is appreciative or approving in tone). As corporeal, social practice, dance offers interesting historiographical conundrums, and tracing histories of danced practices often requires collaboration between specialists of different fields and from different places. Dismantling hegemonies still requires building alternative channels for discourse that break the white theoretical frames and divert thinking away from capitalist accumulation around canonical figures. Yet, this work is well on its way, especially in the margins of dance studies, and I am looking forward to hearing more and teaching more, in many languages, of the many histories of dancers dancing.

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