

Expanded choreography and history writing in the flesh

Independent dance artists claiming their past

KAREN VEDEL

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at artist driven initiatives in Denmark since the 1980s that have aimed to document, collect, and archive the remains of an art form otherwise deemed short-lived, ephemeral, and marginal to the history of the performing arts. Approached through recent dance history as well as dance and archival theory, it unpacks how dance artists have taken on the task to create platforms to allow for insights from the past to inform the present as well as the future. The discussion engages two examples, each of which belongs to a different archival paradigm, before investigating in more detail a still ongoing dance archival/(hi)story project initiated in 2018 by a group of choreographers and dancers whose concept of their craft is informed by an expanded notion of choreography. Facilitating platforms for transgenerational exchanges between dance artists, the project named *Danish Dance Stories* explores participatory formats for the sharing of tangible remains, documents, stories about dance and the lives of dancers as well as the corporeal transmission of choreographic material, training approaches, artistic philosophies, and proposals. It will be argued that in the project's entanglement of the ephemeral with the remains, the stories and the embodied traces, dance history writing becomes an artistic project in itself.

KEYWORDS

Ephemerality and dance history writing, expanded choreography, dance theory, archival theory, participatory archiving

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"Due to the much-discussed ephemeral or immaterial nature of dance and choreography work on the one hand and the increasingly short lives of projects and structures on the other, it should be noted here that no exhaustive history of dance can be written through retrospective document analysis alone. Instead, such a history must begin by documenting present-day currents. Today it is possible to state that a divergence in content between artistic documentation and a scientifically composed dance history does exist, a divergence in which the latter risks leaving contemporary changes to be forgotten by overlooking them." (Sabisch 2013: 89)

Framing key topics in my paper, the quote from philosopher and dance scholar Petra Sabisch stems from her comprehensive study on the situation of contemporary and experimental dance, choreography, and performance art in Europe 1990-2013. In the following, I will explore the alleged challenge to dance history in an era characterised by more or less sporadic attempts at documenting and archiving dance in addition to short-lived artistic experiments by independently producing dance artists and groups.¹ How does the above-mentioned idea of dance as an ephemeral art form play out in relation to the expanded notion of choreography which, over the past 10-15 years, has emerged as a formative discourse in dance aesthetics – and what are the historiographical implications? Taking into consideration the shifting rationales of archival strategies (Cook 2013), my investigation engages cursorily with attempts at dance archive-building in Denmark since the late 1980s before going into more detail with the participatory dimension of the most recent initiative entitled *Danish Dance Stories – A mapping of dance histories*. From this perspective in an expanded notion of choreography and its effects on the documentation and archiving of dance remains, I propose that initiatives such

¹ The research presented here is a work in progress, the first step in a larger international study on artist-driven archival initiatives relating to dance. A preliminary version of the paper was presented in a guest lecture at the Malmö Theatre Academy in February 2021.

as *Danish Dance Stories* have the potential to generate otherwise inaccessible knowledge of choreographic sensibilities as well as insights into the historically contextualized thinking of independent dance artists.²

The end of dance as an inherently ephemeral art form?

Peggy Phelan's (1993) well known argument that the live performance event 'becomes itself' through disappearance and is not only un-repeatable but also un-documentable, has for many years been central to ontological debates of performance as an art form. Ephemerality as an aesthetic premise has - perhaps even more so - been seen as central to dance. However, as is equally well known, Phelan's claim has also been disputed, not least in the wake of recent years' interest by artists and scholars in exploring the afterlife of dance and performance (Franko 2018, Allsopp and Lepecki 2008; Lepecki 2010; Jones 2013; Kaye 2018).

Moreover, from within dance scholarship it has been propositioned with increasing fortitude, that to insist on the precarious and passive place of dance as the emblematic art of the present not only does disservice to the artform and devalues its history - it also ignores important 'durabilities' of dance to use a term coined by Randy Martin (2019:xiv). In addition to the temporalities of training and rehearsal, the temporalities of movement imprints lingering in the flesh and of body-to-body transferral of gestures packed with insights, these durabilities include the various temporalities of the spectators' engagement with the performance (Reason 2003, 2006).

Dance scholar Mark Franko, a prominent voice in theorizing the historicity of dance as an art form, suggests that the close affinity between the notion of ephemerality and the work of dance has - if not dissolved - then diminished considerably in recent years. Linking this development to the rising interest in choreographic reenactment, he writes:

"The aura that ephemerality has cast on the dance work in modernity is perhaps finally succumbing to its own intellectual and artistic mortality because of reenactment. This death of ephemerality opens a space for recalling—in the sense both of remembering (or wishing to remember) and summoning back. For these

2 Before going any further, I wish to situate my complicit interest in the topic of archiving dance and dance history writing: Having published my PhD in 2005 on dance as a performing art in Denmark 1900-1975, I have, several times, been encouraged to write the chronologically subsequent chapters of a 'Danish dance history'. While my response has been hesitant, I have been considering how this task might be undertaken in a historiographically interesting manner. How might such a project help develop the methodological approach initiated through the PhD, which included spending time with aging dancers (up to 85 years of age) in order to learn about their training, peruse through their scrapbooks, programs, and record bits of choreographies still residing in their bodies? In addition to research focused on artist mobility (Vedel 2014), the impact of collaborations and cultural policies, and the development of structural frameworks for independent dance groups and dance artists (Vedel 2011), my backing of a more comprehensive history writing project has, in the intermittent years, gone into supporting artist-initiated endeavours to document, collect, and archive the remains of dance as a performing art (Vedel 2000). Two of these are discussed in the following: the dance collection of the Dance Information Centre at the House of Dance and *Danish Dance Stories*.

reasons, reenactment should be understood as post-ephemeral." (Franko 2018:6)

Noting the complex relations between recall of the past in the present, Franko sees choreographic re-enactments as a dramaturgical modality characterized by 'overlapping temporalities' that destabilize chronicle time (2018:2).³ A recurring feature in the theoretical discussions on re-enacting and (re)archiving is a focus on the dance work (Lepecki 2010, Lepecki 2012; Jones 2013). What happens to this notion of 'the work', one might ask, when the notion of choreography is expanded to include relational scores, and the duration of the event is opened up while actively relying on the engagement and initiatives of those involved?

For the purpose of this paper, it is notable that both Sabisch and Franko, in their discussion on ephemerality and its relevance to dance historiography, underline the task at hand as no less an artistic than an academic undertaking. On these grounds I have teased out three intertwining perspectives that structure my paper: In order to better understand the implications of recent aesthetic developments for artistic documentation and ultimately for dance history writing, I will first probe the entanglement of discursive and artistic explorations in expanded choreography. Next, I briefly introduce two archival initiatives relating to independent dance groups and artists in Denmark at around the turn of the century in terms of their relation to the artistic field on the one hand and their underlying archival rationales on the other. Thirdly, I will look in more detail at an artist-driven dance history project, the still ongoing *Danish Dance Stories*, conceived from within the discursive potential of expanded choreography. Here, my discussion centers on participatory archiving as it is approached in the project's focus on the active involvement of the dance community in the sharing of stories as well as practices and provocations.

Expanded choreography and the implications for dance history writing

The notion of an expanded field of art enters the discourse through American art historian Rosalind Krauss' article "Sculpture in an Expanded Field", written in 1979 at a time when art criticism was still struggling to find the vocabulary with which to discuss works at the intersection of sculpture, architecture, and landscape art. In Krauss' words, the installation work of artists such as Mary Miss, Robert Morris, Alice Ayccock, and Richard Serra (to name just a few) freed the category of sculpture from being intrinsically linked to commemorative representation in specific places (1979:38). Instead, the field of sculpture was opened up to accommodate 'theoretical developments and practical implications' of visual artists working in three dimensions (1979:44). With this expansion, the idea of the sculptor as *auteur* was also reconsidered making space for other roles to emerge, for instance the role as instigator of particular operations, motivations, techniques, and ways of interacting with others. As noted by art historian Claire Bishop, in her important contributions to the formulation of an aesthetic of participation, already the 1960s and 70s had seen art works in which 'some or all authorial control' was ceded (Bishop 2006: 12). Placed in relation to theoretical discussions offered by among others Umberto Eco

³ Reenactments will be discussed in more detail in the larger project.

(*The Open Work*, 1962) and Roland Barthes (*The Death of the Author*, 1968), Bishop draws the line from Happenings and the scores of the Fluxus movement in the 1960s to relational aesthetics, dated by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) to the late 1990s (Bishop 2004:61).

As is well known, dancers and choreographers – many of whom had links to Black Mountain College and Judson Dance Theatre - played a central role in the interdisciplinary explorations in the experimental art scene in New York from around 1960 and onwards into the -70s. It is therefore no surprise that also this era of dance history has been discussed in terms of its expanding aesthetics and conceptual boundaries (Johnston 1998 (1968), Jowitt 1989, Banes 1993, 1998). Moreover, in the emerging field of dance studies in the late 1980s and 1990s, Susan Foster argued for choreography to be seen as a structuring system for any kind of movement (Foster 1986, 1995), while Mark Franko (1993, 1995) and Randy Martin (1998) pointed to the inherent theoretical and political potential of dance and choreography.

The notion of expanded choreography gained new and enhanced currency in the artistic and cultural political discourse of dance artists and dance writers in the early 2000s. Petra Sabisch, in the historical study on qualitative changes in the European dance field and its practices since the 1990s, names the launch of *Manifesto for a European Performance Policy* in 2002 as a seminal event instigating a change not only in modes of perception and the aesthetics of dance but also its organisational and funding structures. Authored by four high profile dance artists: Jérôme Bel, Maria le Ribot, Xavier le Roy, and Christophe Wavelet, the manifesto opted for recognition of the voice of the artist and the social impact of artistic activities (Sabisch 2013: 4). Its publication was followed by a long row of artist-driven fora in the shape of symposia, seminars and conferences.⁴ This line of events was furthered through dialogue with dance and performance scholars such as André Lepecki and Ric Allsop, editors of the 2008 issue of *Performance Research* entitled *On Choreography*. In close alignment with the vocabulary emerging from within an expanded notion of choreography, the stated aim of the issue was to:

"[P]osition choreography in relation to the contexts and discourses of contemporary culture; to open concepts of performance and performance-making; and to an expanded view of what choreography might mean now as a generative, productive, or even redundant term" (2008:4).

While some did, in fact, claim the death or 'end of choreography' (Hildebrandt 2016:71), the focus was not least on the liberation of choreography from dance, and on replacing the understanding of choreography as a 'system of command' with an acknowledgment of the ongoing investment by dance artists in support

4 The list of conferences in the wake of the publication of the Manifesto include Giessen 2009, Cologne, and Berlin 2010; *Choreography as Expanded Practice*, Barcelona 2012, as well as the defense of Mette Ingvarsen's PhD *Expanded Choreography: Shifting the Agency of Movement in the Artificial Nature Series and 69 Positions* at MDT, Stockholm in 2016. *The Postdance Conference*, MDT, Stockholm in 2017.

of 'self organization, empowerment and autonomy' (2016: 7).

Dance artists (re)claiming the history of dance was one of the ways in which the process of self-empowerment gained momentum in the early decades of the 2000s. An example of the entanglement of the historic, the artistic, and the discursive is the book project entitled *The Swedish Dance History* initiated by the grassroots non-profit network INPEX in 2009.⁵ According to the website, the publication was realized through a collective effort "to conceive a book through strong democratic practices." As such, anyone inclined to submit an article was encouraged to do so. There was no editorial board, and all contributions were accepted - unless 'overly self-promoting or politically hazardous.' With the publication costs covered by grants from arts and research foundations as well as dance institutions, the book was distributed free of charge. Initially planned for a period of twenty years, *The Swedish Dance History* was, in the end, published for four consecutive years between 2009 and 2012 resulting in four volumes with a span of 5000 pages and a total of 9000 copies. Offering a range of material on philosophy, politics, choreography etc, the publication bore little if any resemblance to academically researched and formatted dance history writing. Rather, it offered a plethora of inspirational texts for choreographers and dancers in their artistic work.

Ten years after the launch of *Manifesto for a European Performance Policy*, the wording of the call for the 2012 Barcelona conference on expanded choreography shows the organizers' confidence in the broader impact of the ongoing conceptual and aesthetic changes in choreography⁶:

"Aesthetically [choreography] is gaining momentum on a political level as it is placed in the middle of a society to a large degree organized around movement, subjectivity and immaterial exchange. Choreography is not a priori performative, nor is it bound to expression and reiteration of subjectivity; it is becoming an expanded practice, a practice that is political in and of itself." <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34425/expanded-choreography/> (accessed on 10 January 2021).

As the quote suggests, the political and theoretical dimension of choreography, which had been implicit in dance scholarly writing since the 1980s, had by 2012 become an articulated, celebrated, and shared understanding in the European community of independent dance artists.⁷ Not only had the artist-driven activities been successful in building a discourse around the expanded practice of choreography as seen in, among other places, journals, artistic research, and an enhanced theoretical focus in the training of choreographers, but the voices of choreographers and dance artists had also become empowered through the

5 The information about *The Swedish Dance History* relies mainly on the website: <https://theswedishdancehistory.wordpress.com/about/> (22 February 2021)

6 The conference organizers were Mårten Spångberg, Bojana Cvejic, and Xavier le Roy.

7 As noted by André Lepecki, the proposal was made explicit in Franko's essay entitled "Dance and the Political: states of exception" (2007).

process of exploring political and aesthetic insights of their trade.⁸

Important to the larger argument of this article is, moreover, the fact that as new discourses and contextual structures have developed, the scope of what is deemed relevant to dance history writing has also widened. Today, dance history is neither limited to the artistic products nor to the legacies of individual artists or dance institutions. Rather, it engages in more comprehensive terms the choreographic practices and the structures and provisions within which they are carried out. With the widening of the critical scope, questions have also emerged about viable strategies for documenting and archiving, whereby various aspects of choreographic activities can be made available for the future. In the following, I will approach these questions through a discussion of the shifting paradigms framing three archival initiatives in the area of independent dance in Denmark since the mid 1980s.

Shifting archival frameworks

Archival theory has long since established that archives are contingent, shaped by social, political, and technological forces (Manoff 2004:12, Hedstrom 2002:37). Many will also agree with Derrida (1996) that there is no political authority without control of the archive and nod to the idea that the drive towards archiving traces of the past facilitates both memory and the obscuring or even erasure of memory (Hedstrom 2002:39, Cook 2013:101). It follows that the logic underlying archival practices and their emergence and/or decline is closely linked to structures of power (Manoff 2004:12; Featherstone 2006:593). The dissolution in 2016 of the archives of the Royal Danish Theatre, at the time the second oldest in Europe after the archive of the Paris Opera, constitutes an example of the provisional nature of archives.⁹

The Canadian archival studies theorist Terry Cook (2013) has identified four overlapping archival frameworks, or paradigms, emerging at specific historic times and captured under the headings of 'evidence', 'memory', 'identity', and 'community'. Each one of these is aligned with a certain idea of the role of the archivist, who – in holding the power to determine what should be added to and retained in the collections - plays an important role in the shaping of history. Emerging around the time of the French revolution, the first archival paradigm in Cook's genealogy was governed by a concern for juridical legacy, truth, and evidence (2013:107), and the role of the archivist was seen as being neutral and objective. The now disbanded archives of the Royal Danish Theatre can be seen to belong to this paradigm, even if the role of the archivist in this case coincided with more operational functions in the theatre such as stage manager (Hallar 1989).

8 As has been explored by, among others, Mette Ingvarsen's in her artistic PhD from 2016 entitled *Expanded Choreography: Shifting the agency of movement in The Artificial Nature Project and 69 Positions*.

9 In existence since the building of the Royal Danish Theatre in 1748, the archive was created to serve the artistic work of the institution. As such it was based on the obligation, promise, and perceived potential of 'doing' history in the shape of re-staging and hence constructing a national repertoire of dramatic works as well as ballets, which became increasingly important towards the end of the 1800s (Hallar 1989).

I have found Cook's overview of the shifting mindsets governing the collection and storing of historical remains helpful in structuring my introduction to the archival initiatives to create archives for independent dance groups and artists in the latter part of the 1900s. The first of these is Dansedokken, created in the mid 1980s in the then Theatre Studies Department [da. Teatervidenskab] at Copenhagen University under the professorship of Kela Kvam. It constituted a part of The Documentation Centre for Group Theatre [Dokumentationscentralen for Gruppeteater a.k.a. Dokken], a comprehensive documentation project on political group theatre in Denmark established in 1975.¹⁰ In the first phase of around ten years of the archive's existence, student volunteers from Theatre Studies reached out to collect material from independent group theatres which included photographing and making sound recordings. According to theatre scholar Stig Jarl, the collection was future-oriented, based on the idea that documenting and archiving material pertaining to independent group theatre was important to the cultural memory of Danish performing arts.¹¹ In Denmark at the time, modern and contemporary dance was considered an emerging art form and independent dance groups not only worked on the periphery of the Danish group theatre movement, they were also much fewer in number and had less support for their productions than their counterparts in the Danish group theatre movement. As a consequence, the collection was less of a priority than was the case with the larger area of political group theatre. While the dance documentation collection was started later and was smaller in size, it grew at a quicker pace than the collection of materials from the group theatre towards the end of the 1980s. At the time, the collection was driven by Jytte Kjøbek, herself both an academic and a dance artist, who was employed by the Theatre Studies Department in a position with salary support from the state. In terms of archival frameworks, I assign Dansedokken to Cook's second paradigm, typically found in collections formed in national, state, or university libraries, where specialized documentation units were built to support academic programs (Cook 2013:108). Labelled 'modern archiving', Cook characterizes the underlying logic as 'memory-focused' with a widening historical interest in the lives of 'ordinary people' (ibid).

My next example relates to the collections in the Dance Information Centre at the House of Dance (Dansens Hus, today Dansehallerne), an institution established in 1990 and initially driven by members of the independent dance community with rudimentary funding from among others the Danish Actors Union and the Municipality of Copenhagen. Focused on dance as a performing art in Denmark, the archive of the House of Dance was built on documentation provided by independent artists and dance companies, both past and present. The accumulation of documents, visual and other archival remains was strategically conceived as a building block and a stabilizing factor in the projected platform for dance as a contemporary art form outside the Royal Danish Theatre (Vedel:2000). Thus, the archive in the House of Dance was in

¹⁰ Stig Jarl, personal communication 15 April 2021.

¹¹ As this is written, Dansedokken as a physical entity is located at The Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Copenhagen University, *en route* to the Royal Library awaiting digitization.

several important respects aligned with Cook's third paradigm, according to which archives are seen as a societal resource for a wide range of uses, the most important of which is to facilitate identity-formation in a world where both institutions and technologies are rapidly changing (Cook 2013: 113). In 2008, the Dance Information Centre founded the project named *dansearkiv.dk* as an online archival framework reliant on the then widely held democratic promise of visualization and accessibility facilitated by digital technologies. Conceived as a pilot for a more substantial online archive, *dansearkiv.dk* was made possible through private foundations, which involved the transferral of dance videos to digital formats as well as the creation of a database that digitally showcased some of the assembled documentation relating to the works of independent artists and companies from around 1980. Kamma Siegumfeldt, Jeannette Ginslov, and Ann Kristin Hauge, employees of the House of Dance, all of whom were involved in overseeing the project as well as in digitizing the video material and in creating the data base, all had a background as professional dancers.¹² However, as tends to be the case with project-funded initiatives, when the money ran out, *dansearkiv.dk* was also shelved. Thus, the partially realized - and ultimately aborted - attempt at creating a dance documentation resource within a dance institution, then on the margins of the performing arts establishment, is yet another example of the contingent nature of archives. While the online version of *dansearkiv.dk* remains accessible online in a rudimentary form that has long been superseded by new technologies, the physical material on which it relies was, in 2015, transferred to the Royal Library where access is currently limited to research purposes.¹³ While the ambition to create a stable referent for dance outside the Royal Danish Theatre may have been too optimistic or premature in political terms, the existence of the database together with the digitized filmed material and the physical parts of the collected material, point to a hitherto unexplored chapter of performing arts in a Danish context.

Participatory archiving: Danish Dance Stories

The consequences of the advance of digital archival technologies are too many and too significant to be considered at any level of detail in this paper. Still, it is unquestionable that digital technologies have enabled the circulation of transient and marginal cultural histories at the same velocity as monumental, established histories (Reading 2011:249). Furthermore, the online shaping and reshaping of archival bodies has also redistributed the authority to assess which of the traces from our historical past are made available for posterity.

Cook's fourth and still emerging paradigm is 'participatory archiving' used in reference to archives (be they on- or offline) that function as resources for communities of shared interests while also constituting part of their identity

12 While Siegumfeldt was employed by the House of Dance in the position as Informations Communications Officer in charge of the Dance Information Centre, the salaries of Ginslov and Hauge were paid by the state.

13 At the transferral of the archive from The House of Dance to the Royal Library, Lukas Kofoed Reimann was employed in a student internship to carry out important work in terms of indexing material.

(2013:112-13). According to archival scientists Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan (2007), who coined the term, it was conceived as a tool to “aid in the preservation of empowered contextualized narrative and thick description to avoid marginalizing cultural identities” (2007:90). A key feature in their model of participatory archiving is community involvement in the execution of archival principles such as appraisal, provenance, and ordering of material (2007:98). Responding to challenges in the realm of intercultural archiving, the model has been explored in, among other areas, the representation of marginalized first nations cultures in a Canadian context, where archivists have been working alongside members of the community. While dance as a performing art has been considered marginal to the history of performing arts (and certainly to art history), and community empowerment is a shared objective by those involved, my use of ‘participatory archiving’ as an analytical term differs in important ways from the operative model proposed by Shilton and Srinivasan as well as from Cook’s slightly more open use of the term. In the discussed project, the role of the archivists has been replaced by artists. With the project being initiated, owned, and driven by the organizing dance artists themselves in collaboration with members of the dance community, the participatory dimension is seen as more radical than in its initial conception.

Danish Dance Stories was created in 2018 by four dance artists, Carolina Bäckman, Andrea Deres, Stine Frandsen, and Nanna Stigsdatter. Conceived in continuation of the discourse and practices of expanded choreography, the project aimed to facilitate platforms for transgenerational exchanges between dance artists with the additional aim of generating and assembling objects, recordings of interviews, and other forms of documentation of dance past, present and future intended for publication online. Situated between an artistic and an archival endeavour, the project was realized with the combined support from the Danish Arts Council, private foundations as well as dance institutions and theatres. While the title of the project gestures towards *The Swedish Dance History*, the approach in *Danish Dance Stories* involved a more direct form of exchange among the artists as they explored participatory formats for the sharing of not only tangible remains, documents and stories about dance and the lives of dancers, but also the corporeal transmission of choreographic material, training approaches, artistic philosophies, and proposals. Thus, the focus was on the participants’ joint creation of a thick and multifaceted tapestry of voices over the course of two extended encounters.

In practical terms *Danish Dance Stories* started out with a two-day symposium in Copenhagen with the participation of around 60 dance artists. The program included keynote presentations of papers, the telling of dance stories based on remains brought to the symposium by the participants in smaller groups, a workshop entitled “Hersay and Hearsay of Danish Dance” with the Stockholm-based collective Samlingen - in which a timeline of past events in the history of dance in Denmark was created collectively, followed by a danced interpretation of the timeline and an oracle dance predicting the future. The evening program featured a selection of videos from the material intended to be logged on dansearkiv.dk.

In the summer of 2018, the symposium was followed by a five-day residency in West Jutland with around 40 participants. Again there were workshops, one of which - by Swedish dance artist Ellen Söderhult - invited dance artists to consider the crafts of the trade of ballet as a transformative form of heritage to be either studied and modified or left behind.¹⁴ Another, by portuguese dance theorist Paula Caspão approached the notion of dance histories and dance history writing from a philosophical and historical point of view. And a third, by Danish performance artist Sara Hamming, engaged the participants in a collaborative exploration of the act of history writing itself. In complementary, open formats, the residency facilitated the communication of practices including choreographic material shared in the flesh as well as conversation salons and outings in nature.

Hence, in addition to the community building characteristic of participatory archiving, *Danish Dance Stories* had elements of skills sharing and a lateral – rather than a top down – distribution of knowledge between the participants relating to their pasts, their presents, and possible futures.

Seen together, the many differently structured formats generated comprehensive documentary material, that was later supplemented with interviews as well as self-interviews, a practice developed by Alice Chauchat and Mette Ingvarsten (2009:34). The presentations and workshop propositions were transcribed and audio-recorded either in fragments or in full by the organizer collective and the sum of the material was assembled in an online archive of the events. The tags assigned in the process of structuring the documentation of the symposium and the residency for online publication were decided by the organizers as they went through the physical materials laid out on the floor of their studio. On the website, the visitor encounters a non-hierarchical map, without chronology and generic categories. Instead, one is invited to either navigate the map intuitively in reference to photographic icons from objects and moments in the events or to use the index with its assigned tags such as 'blind spots', 'romance', 'time travels', and 'dance as activism'. The past is presented in an entanglement with the present, the ephemerality of memories with the physical remains, and the dancers' stories, longings and hopes for the future are shared with the traces imprinted in their bodies. The only conventionally ordered material is the long row of podcasts with presentations, interviews, and self-interviews listed alphabetically according to title.

An artistic as well as an archival endeavour, the approach taken in *Danish Dance Stories* not only documents choreography's intertwining temporalities in the present, it also expands conventional historiographical methods by approaching them in the flesh. In an essay from 2013, performance Studies scholar Amelia Jones, addresses the potential of performance "to put pressure on how we write history and to throw in question particularly the structure of art history, which has conventionally depended on the predictability (and commodifiability) of static objects that are neatly archived, or displayed in order to be viewed and evaluated." (2013: 53) Jones advocates for the 'decontaining' potential of live performance in what she calls its 'unpredictable' and 'messy

14 <http://www.danskedansehistorier.dk/old/workshops.pdf>

embodiment' (2013:56). Following the durational and phenomenological ideas of Merleau-Ponty, her suggestion is to go to the heart of things by making them flesh.

Claiming the past for the sake of the future

A follow-up of *Danish Dance Stories* 2018 named *Stories Yet to be Told* was carried out in the spring of 2021. This time, the underlying motivation explicitly stated the urgency of the dance community to engage with their history.

"*Stories Yet to be Told* questions the lack of documentation and archiving of dance and choreography within a Danish context. How does this – directly or indirectly – affect our art form? The initiative is an artistic exploration of alternative methods and joint ownership of a collective history." (<https://www.danskedansehistorier.dk> accessed 10.04.2021)

Continuing the investigations into formats of shared ownership, the sequel furthered the exploration of the participatory approach together with members of the dance community.

The archival projects discussed here are not only informed by shifting archival paradigms, they are also situated very differently in terms of institutional frameworks that reflect significant changes in the positioning of independent dance in cultural political terms in Denmark over the past 30-40 years. Still, a shared characteristic in the discussed projects is the fact that they were initiated and driven by dance artists. By way of a closing argument, I suggest that while the task of collecting, assembling and sharing material and immaterial traces of dance is seen as a self-empowering response to the need to bring the past, present, and future into dialogue with one another, it is also an endeavour that establishes dance and choreography at the forefront of important questions about archival strategies in the performing arts in more general terms. As such, the explorations into participatory archiving in the expanded field of choreography point to the need for wider inquiries into the archival strategies and shaping of research infrastructures for comparable communities of underserved researchers, be they artists and/or academics.

AUTHOR

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