

Coeval Dancefutures in the Nordics Dance-as-Art after the Decolonial Turn

INGRI MIDGARD FIKSDAL

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art in the Nordics and discusses strategies towards coeval dancefutures away from contemporaneity as a colonial idea(l) of time. The future of dance-as-art in the Nordics needs to be pluralised for the artform to be representative of the regional demography and, as such, stay relevant. This paper proposes two research strands that can contribute to this pluralisation. The first investigates how the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art shape the leading dance education courses in the Nordics in terms of curricula and student mass, and how these could be expanded. The second strand focuses on diversifying the professional field through artistic research in choreography as a format of speculative future fiction that can suggest new, coeval dancefutures.

Dance-as-art is frequently equated with the genre referred to as Contemporary Dance, a highly contradictory term. Rather than denoting all dance forms of the present, it commonly implies a specific set of formalized dance techniques and choreographic formats derived from Western-European and North American modern dance of the twentieth century. Contemporary Dance holds a somewhat exclusive access to formal dance education, art funding as well as networks of dissemination and distribution in the Nordics. Other dance forms are often met with a denial of coevalness by the Contemporary Dance field, hence largely excluded from the realm of art.

This paper argues for the creation of structures for a large variety of coeval dancefutures through revising professional and ethical standards in the Nordic dance field. Instead of continuing to claim the defining power of what constitutes dance-as-art, those of us who currently do have access to education, funding, and dissemination need to take responsibility for challenging and expanding these systems to create a diverse, cultural sustainability within dance-as-art.

KEYWORDS

dancefutures, coeval, artistic research, decolonial, dance, choreography, temporality

Coeval Dancefutures in the Nordics

Dance-as-Art after the Decolonial Turn

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to propose strategies to diversify dance-as-art in the Nordics and to discuss coeval dancefutures away from contemporaneity as a colonial idea(l) of time. The future of dance-as-art in the Nordics needs to be pluralised for the artform to be representative of the regional demography and, as such, stay relevant. This paper argues for the creation of structures for a large variety of coeval dancefutures through revising professional and ethical standards in the Nordic dance field. Instead of continuing to claim the defining power of what constitutes dance-as-art, those of us who currently do have access to education, funding, and dissemination need to take responsibility for challenging and expanding these systems to create a diverse, cultural sustainability within dance-as-art.

This paper proposes two research strands that can contribute to this pluralisation. The first investigates how the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art shape the leading dance education courses in the Nordics in terms of curricula and student mass. The second strand focuses on diversifying the professional field through artistic research in choreography as a format of speculative future fiction that can suggest new, coeval dancefutures. As an example of this, a case study of the performance *Fictions of the Flesh* is included in the paper.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

To meet the challenges outlined above, the research is informed by a theoretical framework employed to expand current boundaries of dance-as-art. Central to this paper is the term coevalness, as described by anthropologist Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other* (1983). Coevalness means to recognize that we all share the same timeframe.¹ Fabian addresses how the idea of progress within Modernity has been defined through a denial of coevalness in claims such as “European cultures are more progressive than South American cultures”². A similar denial of coevalness can be found in much of European and North American dance theory and history writing. Swedish dance theoretician Katarina Lion addresses how major sources³ in dance history separate Western dance-as-art from other dance forms, where all non-Western cultures are seen as one big, inseparable unit living in a timeless and immutable state bound by tradition and/or religion.⁴ This view reflects a limited Western-centred understanding of dance-as-art, which is still surprisingly common in the Nordics today.

A foundational idea of this research is not to claim coeval dancefutures as a concept defined and cemented by this paper, but rather to argue for the creation of structures for

1 Fabian 1983.

2 Author’s example of denial of coevalness.

3 Selma Jeanne Cohen, Deborah Jowitt and Francis Sparshott.

4 Lion 2000, 87.

dance practitioners from a large variety of dance traditions in which to propose manifold, diverse futures after The Decolonial Turn. Decolonial thinking has existed since the beginning of colonization in the fifteenth century, in opposition to the paradigm of exploitation of the Global South and East in the name of discovery and progress inscribed in Modernity. But when referring to The Decolonial Turn in current times, what is often meant is the movement announced by W.E.B. DuBois in the twentieth century which is still unfolding. At stake here is the decolonizing and emancipation of knowledge, power, and being of the formerly colonized.⁵ The Decolonial Turn stretches across a number of disciplines and areas of society, and this paper particularly addresses the decolonization of dance-as-art.

Within The Decolonial Turn, the Modernity/Coloniality school of thought is central. In the lecture, *Decolonizing Time*, sociologist Rolando Melken Vazques discusses how during Coloniality, a multiplicity of indigenous approaches to time were eradicated to make room for Eurocentric chronological temporality. This chronological temporality embraces capitalist ideas of progress and development within Modernity, which has ultimately taken us into an unsustainable global situation, both regarding inequality of people as well as an exhaustion of the environment. To start to overcome these inequalities, Vazques suggests a decolonization of temporality. This implies understanding modernity and the intertwined capitalism as a limited historical project, rather than something universal which defines the contemporary. His claim is that we must make space for relational temporalities and radically other ways of knowing and doing.⁶ This calls for a questioning of the contemporaneity of Contemporary Dance as a colonial idea(l) of time, which will be discussed in section 2 of this article.

Another key source is Boaventura de Sousa Santos and his pivotal book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (2014), which also adheres to the Modernity/Coloniality school. Santo's central claim in the book is that global social justice cannot be possible without global cognitive justice. Although The Decolonial Turn is sweeping both art and academia, there is still a long way to go to recognize the plurality of knowledge systems of the world existing away from a Eurocentric epistemological hegemony, also in the world of dance-as-art.

Lastly, the theoretical framework of this paper includes Rosi Braidotti's critical posthumanism. Here, Braidotti addresses epistemic challenges in the Humanities in relation to an expansion of the boundaries of the human subject. This is highly transferrable to the challenges of the research into the expansion of the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art where to work across differences is central.

1.2. Research Strategy and Methodology Within Artistic Research in Choreography

A central artistic research strategy in choreography is to consider the entanglement of theory and practise in the work, and to use this as a starting point for the development of project specific methods. (The project specific methods for the case study *Fictions of the Flesh* are described in section 4.) Rather than understanding theory and practise as separate entities or applying one as anterior to the other, a strategy is to operate with the concepts of movement-thought and thought-movement⁷. Movement-thought denotes how thinking happens through movement and refers to the idea of bodily cognition which suggests that: "our physical experience of the world affects how we think, and that the thinking is formed by the specificity of that individual, given body. On the other hand, embodied cognition can also be understood as the "thinking" that happens in the body in itself on a precognitive level."⁸ But thought-movement also includes the findings or thoughts which spring out of practice-based research, such as ideas that emerge from working physically with choreography in the studio or on site. The term thought-movement on the other hand, refers to how theoretical research undertaken, such as reading and writing, moves and inspires the thinking about practise and again the practical choreographic work.

Movement-thought and thought-movement can be understood as an atomization of the

5 Maldonado-Torres 2011, 1-15.

6 Vazques 2015.

7 Fiksdal 2019, 23.

8 Fiksdal 2019, 176.

term *bodymind* commonly attributed to American feminist disabilities studies scholar Margaret Price. *Bodymind* refers to the enmeshment of body and mind to such a degree that the physical and mental processes are difficult or even impossible to discern.⁹ The use of the term in relation to the case study *Fictions of the Flesh* is an attempt to resist the Cartesian mind-body dualism which has dominated much of Western philosophy, and which seems particularly counterproductive when discussing artistic research in dance and choreography.

2. Dance-as-art in the Nordics: A Denial of Coevalness

In the Nordics today, *dance-as-art*¹⁰ is to a large degree equated with the genre referred to as Contemporary Dance, a highly contradictory term. On the one hand, the term could denote all dance forms of the present. However, it tends to imply a specific set of formalized dance techniques and choreographic formats which primarily derive from Western-European and North American *dance-as-art* of the twentieth century.^{11 12} When the term Contemporary Dance is used in capitals in this text, it refers to that specific legacy. The genre is not uniform; however, a common denominator is an intrinsic and often unquestioned link to *dance-as-art* which entails a somewhat exclusive access to formal arts education, art funding as well as networks of dissemination and distribution. Other dance forms are commonly seen as respectively traditional/cultural/ritual/social/museal/commercial/folkloric/etc, without a problematization of the often-reductive use of these terms. There is generally a denial of coevalness in how these “other” dance forms are met by the Contemporary Dance field.

The equating of Contemporary Dance with *dance-as-art* is clearly manifested in arts education where it is the most common BA dance program.¹³ The consequence of this dominance is that students from these programs are more likely to pursue further education and research in dance at MA- and PhD-level. This is yet again reflected in who receives (public) funding to support their artistic production and subsequently get programmed by presenting venues and festivals. People with dance backgrounds other than Contemporary Dance are to a large degree excluded from higher education, and consequently have little access to funding systems and to networks of distribution and touring within the world of *dance-as-art*.

This claim is supported by a representative statistic sample from the Norwegian context

9 Schalk 2018, 5.

10 (Norwegian: *dansekunst*) The term *dance-as-art* used in this text refers to the dance forms that are taught within institutions of art education, dance forms that receive funding from arts councils and dance forms that are presented in art contexts, such as theatres, festivals and gallery or museum spaces. In the Nordics, these dance forms very often correspond with the genre of Contemporary Dance defined further down in the text.

11 Sortland 2021, 82.

12 Although it is difficult to give one definition of Contemporary Dance, it is commonly seen as building on the following historical legacy (simplified here): In the early 1900s, the pioneers of modern dance challenged ballet as a dominant form of *dance-as-art*. Some central choreographers and performers were Ruth St. Denis, Isadora Duncan, and Loie Fuller in the US, and Kurt Jooss, Rudolf Laban, and Mary Wigman in Germany. In the 1950s, the genre of American modern dance became established through the work of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Lester Horton, and Katherine Dunham to name a few. From the 1960s and onwards, there was a break with the Modern Dance tradition into what has been called post-modern dance, represented by choreographers such as Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, and Anna Halprin in the US. Concurrent to the postmodern dance movement(s) were amongst others Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater* in Germany and the development of *Butoh* in Japan by Tatsumi Jihikata and Kazuo Ohno. In the 1970s and 1980s, this historical legacy laid grounds for the development of the myriad of aesthetic expressions which is now commonly referred to as Contemporary Dance in the Nordics. (Le Moal 1999, 705-706 and Reistad 1997, 61-109).

13 Some examples: Stockholm University of the Arts offers a BA called Dance Performance, but states that “The Bachelor's Programme in Dance is for students who are interested in learning through dance and who want to work as artists in the professional field of contemporary dance.” ([Uniarts.se](http://uniarts.se), “Dance Performance - Bachelor”). Uniarts in Helsinki offers a BA simply called Dance, where “Students' primary focus is contemporary dance”. ([Uniarts.fi](http://uniarts.fi), “Dance (Bachelor's Program)”). The Oslo National Academy of the Arts offers three BA-programs in dance; Bachelor in Classical Ballet, Bachelor in Contemporary Dance, and Bachelor in Jazz Dance. ([Khio.no](http://khio.no), “Dans”). A discussion often heard amongst peers is whether Classical Ballet and Jazz Dance “belong” within arts education, being understood as respectively museal and commercial dance forms.

(see tables in Appendix).¹⁴ The dominance of the genre becomes particularly visible within the funding known as Fri scenekunst – kunstnerskap from the Arts Council of Norway. This is a (up to) 5-year funding that finances artistic production, administration, and touring with up to several million NOK per artist/group per year and is such the largest funding available to performing arts practitioners within the non-institutional field in Norway. Within Fri scenekunst – kunstnerskap, a total of 116 million NOK was awarded to Contemporary Dance practitioners between 2016 and 2020, whilst other dance genres received none of this funding-type at all.

That being said, there are initiatives within the Norwegian arts and culture sector at large that aim to pluralize the field along the lines of the country's demographic development.¹⁵ However, a common approach is to try to include and assimilate minorities into the structures as they exist today, without changing the structures in themselves. Writer and performing artist Camara Lundestad Joof address this issue: "We forget that this is a question of democratization. (...) it is painful to never see yourself reflected in the dominant artistic expressions of the society you grow up in. (...) Kids today are going to make art. They will just not do it at "our" institutions. And it is often in liminal spaces that the avantgarde art happens. Instead of assimilating minority groups into current dominant structures for art and culture, the structures should expand towards a broader range of people. The institutions will be less relevant if they cannot keep up. (...) This goes beyond visible representation. (...) Who writes the plays, who directs, who is the dramaturg, who works in the communication department, who is the head of the theatre? And before all of this; who do we educate? What do the curricula look like?"¹⁶

Finnish dance historian Hanna Järvinen discusses the structural challenges of pluralizing dance-as-art in the article Decolonise Nordic Dance. She makes an essential point about how many dance forms have "different codifications of what "dancing" entails and consequently,

14 Sources in the other Nordic countries show similar patterns: including Sweden:

<https://www.uniarts.se/english/courses/bachelor-programmes/dance>

<https://www.kulturradet.se/sok-bidrag/beviljade-bidrag/?c=Scenkonst&y=&m=#9883A>

https://dansenshus.se/2019/?post_type=dh_show

<https://mdtsthlm.se/>

Finland:

<https://www.uniarts.fi/en/study-programmes/dance-bachelors-programme>

<https://www.danceinfofi/en/factsfigures/the-structure-and-funding-of-the-dance-sector-in-finland/>

<https://www.taike.fi/en/grants-and-subsidies>

<https://www.danceinfo.fi/en/groups-category/choreographers/>

<https://www.zodiak.fi/en/archive/performancearchive>

Denmark:

<https://ddsks.dk/da/dans-koreografi>,

https://www.kunst.dk/for-ansoegere/tildelinger?tx_iftilskudsbase_general%5Baction%5D=list&tx_iftilskudsbase_general%5Bcontroller%5D=Grants&cHash=c0b80aca4d7e67cb68bab1489f0e6676,

<https://www.dansehallerne.dk/en/performances/>, <https://bora-bora.dk/forestillinger/>

and Iceland:

<https://www.lhi.is/en/contemporary-dance-practices>, <http://www.reykjavikdancefestival.com/>.

15 An example that provides an overview is this strategy document: [Regjeringen.no](#), Mangfold i kunst og kultur.

16 Joof Dagbladet 2.8.2020 (author's translation).

different ways of evaluating what is excellence”¹⁷ than those currently acknowledged as art. This indicates various ways of understanding notions such as quality and authorship, work, choreography, as well as the organization of artistic processes which might not fit today’s rigid educational or funding structures. “To achieve diversity in practice, dance education and art dance institutions need to change on the organisational level, to allow different methods, approaches, and praxis of dance. (...) Who get to participate in the decision-making processes (in the dance world) is quite limited, and too often old-fashioned divisions like “ethnic” versus “art”, “amateur” versus “professional” dance still prevail.”¹⁸

Artistic research on a third-cycle level was granted official PhD status in Norway as late as in 2018. The accreditation is held by The Oslo National Academy of the Arts alongside a few other educational institutions for art in Norway. Yet, to be able to do a PhD in Artistic Research is still a rare thing only possible at a small number of universities globally. This speaks for the underdog status of practise based artistic research in academic circuits, and how art just in recent years has started to become recognized as validated knowledge systems in these contexts. But this newfound recognition mostly comes to the advantage of the few working within the formats of Contemporary Dance. Hence, for coeval dancefutures to be achieved within both ground level education as well as in artistic research, there is a need for a further expansion and diversification of validation of methodologies and knowledges along the lines of Järvinen’s argument of making space for difference.

As demonstrated by the statistic samples in the appendix as well as through the arguments of Joof and Järvinen, there is currently a denial of coevalness within Nordic dance-as-art. How can dance-as-art be pluralized and become a conglomerate of coeval forms and formats?

3. Towards Coeval Dancefutures

The objective of this paper is, as mentioned, to propose strategies to diversify dance-as-art in the Nordics and it follows two main strands. The first strand investigates how the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art shape the content within leading dance educations both in terms of curricula as well as what student mass the institutions attract. The educational system is the crucial first step to expand the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art and has great potential to further down the line pluralise postgraduate research in dance, recipients of arts-funding, as well as dissemination of dance as a coeval artform. It is essential for educational institutions to summon and centre experts from other dance forms than Contemporary Dance and make these experts the main voices in developing arguments and practises for change. This can be a catalyst for re-examining and decolonizing curricula, stimulating revising of professional and ethical standards, and pluralizing the student masses and, as such, lay the grounds for coeval dancefutures.

The second strand consists of artistic research in choreography and dance, where choreography is proposed as a format of speculative future fiction. Speculative fiction is a broad category which includes several genres, but the common denominator is the imagination of a (future) world different than today, and therefor inspirational to coeval dancefutures. Famous subgenres include science fiction, fantasy, utopian, and dystopian fiction and alternate history to mention a few. Canadian novelist Marie Jakober writes that “the great gift of speculative fiction (is that) it makes us think, and specifically, it makes us think differently. It makes us examine things we have never examined. Even better, it makes us re-imagine things we thought we knew.”¹⁹ In the case of this research, this implies to think differently about and to reimagine what dance-as-art can be. In practise, it is central that research groups consist of teams lead by a primary investigator (choreography and dance are rarely individual endeavours) where the majority of the collaborators are trained within other genres than Contemporary Dance and can provide expert knowledge of these dance forms. Here, the research framework should combine readings of both theory and fiction. Speculative fiction can offer a rich alternative to framing of bodies, abilities, ethnicity, and gender, which can move us closer to coevalness of manifold choreographic expressions.

17 Järvinen 2021, 109.

18 Järvinen 2021, 109.

19 Jakober 2008, 30.

Non-realist representation, for instance in works by authors N.K. Jemisin, Nnedi Okorafor, Chen Quifan, and Octavia Butler, can inspire new ways to imagine bodies and movement in pluralized, coeval dancefutures, and further challenge methodologies as well as structural limitations within current perceptions of dance-as-art. Here, the works of SF scholars such as Sami Schalk, Mark Rifkin, and Shelly Streeby provide additional context to the fiction-reading. Braidotti further emphasizes how subjectivity is both embodied and embedded, as well as inter-connected to others, including non-humans. Her critical posthumanism links feminist, decolonial, and environmental discourses that are also commonly found within speculative future fiction literature. This makes critical posthumanism an especially fruitful source to choreography as a format of speculative future fiction, as well as to Coeval Dancefutures in the Nordics as a proposal at large. Ideally, this artistic research can stir up colonial categories of dance-as-art within the professional field and create encounters with audiences that can propose coeval dancefutures and be transformative.

3.1. Coeval Artistic Research Context

Although there is still far to go to reach coeval dancefutures in the Nordics, there are choreographers and dancers who challenge the position of Contemporary Dance as unanimous to dance-as-art. An example is the work of Elle Sofe Sara, choreographer and director, whose performances shed light on the social, political and cultural specificities and challenges of the Sámi People.²⁰ In an interview with Maria K. Landmark for hermetikken.no, Sofe addresses the problem of Samí art and choreography not being considered contemporary art or dance-as-art. She says: “I believe we need to become conscious of how contemporary art is art which is created now, in the contemporary, independently of what cultural background the maker has or what tradition she belongs in. I’m thinking of dance forms which traditionally haven’t been understood as contemporary dance, such as street, folkdance, tap, African dance styles or Samí dance. (...) My performances being Samí is something which springs from that particular tradition, but still being part of contemporary dance even if I wear a kofte (a traditional Samí jacket²¹). (...) traditional elements are also part of the contemporary.”²²

Another central figure in Norway is choreographer and researcher Thomas Talawa Prestø. He is the artistic director of Tabanka Dance Ensemble that performs within the Talawa Technique™, one of few fully codified African and Caribbean dance techniques.²³ Prestø is careful to refer to Tabanka’s work as “high-quality, contemporary dance work”²⁴ explicitly making a point of the coevalness of Talawa Technique as dance-as-art. Prestø is also a PhD fellow at the Norwegian Theatre Academy in Fredrikstad, and one of the few artistic researchers in dance in Norway working to decolonize a common Nordic understanding of Contemporary Dance.

To avoid confusion regarding terminology, Sofe and Prestø’s claims to contemporary dance are here interpreted as claims for coevalness for their dance forms as dance-as-art, rather than wishes to belong to the particular tradition of Contemporary Dance defined here as a specific set of formalized dance techniques, choreographic formats, and presentation contexts.

Within the Nordics, other important voices include, but are not limited to, the Finland-based choreographers Sonya Lindfors and Marika Peura, Denmark-based Phyllis Akinyi and Georgia Kapodistria, as well as Sweden-based Marit Shirin Carolasdotter, Nasim Aghili, Rani Nair and BamBam Frost. But despite the efforts of individual practitioners, the systemic, institutional hegemony of Contemporary Dance still needs to be challenged further to create pluralized, coeval dancefutures. Hence, it is important to address both the system of higher education as well as artistic research in dance and choreography.

20 Ellesofe.com 22.4.2021.

21 Author’s note.

22 Hermetikken.no 22.4.2021. (Author’s translation.)

23 Tabankadance.com 22.4.2021.

24 Tabankadance.com, 22.4.2021.

4. Case Study in Artistic Research: Fictions of the Flesh

The following case study serves as an example of the second research strand described in section 3. It proposes choreography as a format of speculative future fiction and aims to think differently about and to reimagine what dance-as-art can be. *Fictions of the Flesh* was conducted in Oslo from January to June 2021. The performance and artistic research project provided an initial opportunity to investigate some of the topics of this article at large, as well as to develop and test artistic research methods more specifically. *Fictions of the Flesh* argues for one possible coeval dancefuture of jazz dance as a genre which is commonly denied coevalness in the Nordic context.



Photo: Simen Thornquist

The following description of this working process serves as a practical example of a strategy for practice based artistic research in choreography as a format of speculative future fiction as outlined in the previous section.

Fictions of the Flesh took shape as a site-specific solo performance for public space, created in collaboration with Fredrik Floen (costume) and Mariama Fatou Kalley Slåttøy (performer and co-choreographer). *Fictions of the Flesh* was started by delving into the bodymind-archive of Slåttøy, a professionally trained jazz dancer. In a Norwegian dance context, jazz dance's status as dance-as-art is often questioned and the genre is commonly understood as primarily one of entertainment or commercial dance.²⁵ In the book *Jazz Dance. A History of the Roots and Branches*, American choreographer and dance scholar Carlos Jones discusses how racism has prevented jazz dance from taking its rightful place in the artistic arena. He writes that "to discuss jazz dance and not acknowledge the issue of race greatly diminishes the truths that exist in the art form."²⁶ Jones links the history and aesthetics of jazz dance to the racial biases in the cultural history of the United States with its racial prejudice, racism, and classism. He claims that race and class have dictated the status of jazz dance. Although this might be less explicit in the Norwegian context, there is reason to believe that similar mechanisms are operative.

The roots of jazz dance are, to a large degree, West African. African dances were practised by slaves forced to work in the plantations in the Americas (approx. 1619-1865) and gradually developed into African American dances through a mixing of dances from different African tribes

²⁵ Dahl 2016.

²⁶ Guarino and Oliver 2014, 231.

and countries. They were shaped further by restrictions imposed upon the slaves regarding what dances they were allowed to practise. Some dances incorporated movement from various parts of Europe observed on the plantation.²⁷ In the early 1900s, this diverse heritage generated the Jazz Age in the United States, where jazz dance, including both social and performed dances, developed alongside jazz music. Today, some jazz dance practitioners emphasize the core principles derived from an African aesthetic that includes personal style, improvisation, connection to the music, and dynamic play. Others highlight how the rhythms of jazz music (also largely deriving from West African music traditions) is inseparable from and the driving force behind jazz dance, with characteristics such as syncopation, polyrhythms, and polycentrism. In the second half of the twentieth century, jazz dance developed in multiple directions, merging with elements from, for example, classical ballet and modern dance, as well as forming different independent dance genres. In Nordic dance schools and dance education, the vocabulary from classical ballet is largely included and frequently used to teach and characterize the style of expression. At the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, jazz dance is described as “(a) specific physical style (with a) close relationship to rhythmic music. It requires students to acquire a high level of dance technique.”^{28 29}

In *Fictions of the Flesh*, a question was how a decolonization of temporality could affect the perceptions of jazz dance understood as a coeval art form. In the research, this attempt implied a study of Slåttøy’s jazz dance archive and the history of jazz dance described above, combined with inspiration from African futurism through Nnedi Okorafor’s BINTI novellas³⁰. Here, the main character’s extended corporeality becomes a manifestation of radical multi-species openness. The protagonist, Binti, finds herself part Himba, Meduse (an octopus-like alien creature), Enyi Zinariya (desert-people with telepathic abilities) and New Fish (a living, breathing spaceship that transport beings between galaxies) through a number of inter-species amalgamations. This manyfold composure visibly changes Binti’s appearance through blue tentacles sprouting from her head, but as importantly, through an immense extension of her sensory apparatus which grants her more-than human experiences and abilities that aid her as a Master Harmonizer (a peacekeeper of the universe). This serves as an inspiration to think (and dance) across difference.



Photo: Simen Thornquist

27 Guarino and Oliver 2014, xv.

28 *Khio.no* 28.22.2020.

29 A version of this paragraph was written together with Mariama Fatou Kalley Slåttøy in connection with the premiere of *Fictions of the Flesh* at Black Box Theatre in Oslo as an expanded program text.

30 Okorafor 2015.

Another source of inspiration was the Sinofuturist novella *The Story of Dao*³¹ by Chinese writer, editor, and researcher Regina Kanyu Wang. In Wang's story, the other-than-human creature, Dao, has escaped a life traversing the world wide web, into a mycelium network on the island. Here, they have become the dominant consciousness of the network and uses an old ginkgo tree as their headquarters. When extreme weather and the rise of sea level caused by global warming threatens the island and the species living there, Dao finds a way to modify the genetic code within Ginkgo that allows the tree to consume more carbon dioxide through photosynthesis. This code is spread to all the islands' plants through the mycelium network, which enables a reversal of global warming.

The Story of Dao proposes an other-than-human embodiment which might seem unapproachable through (human) dance and choreography. However, there is great potential within this type of shock of sensibility that, according to philosopher Gilles Deleuze, gives thought the power to "bring into being what does not yet exist".³² In order to expand conceptual boundaries (here: in the case of dance-as-art), one approach can be to "force" sensibility to confront its own limits. This shock of sensibility takes place through a fundamental encounter. Whilst an object of re-cognition is a representation where our knowledge, values, and beliefs are confirmed, a fundamental encounter disrupts our systems of knowledge, challenges our ways of being in the world, and forces thought in a manner which produces a rupture with habit. But the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, where we see and think this world differently.³³ It might be a stretch to claim a Deleuzian fundamental encounter on behalf of *Fictions of the Flesh*, however, a central aspect within speculative future fiction is to produce exactly these types of ruptures with habit to create potentiality for new worlds to occur. And this is precisely why speculative future fiction is such a powerful tool to help imagine coeval dancefutures for dance-as-art.

In the work with *Fictions of the Flesh*, the choreographic language gradually developed through combining new and historical jazz dances from Slåttøy's bodymind archive with Binti- and Dao-inspired movement and embodiment. Performed in public spaces in the Grønland, Grünerløkka and Tøyen-areas of Oslo, the dance would shift abruptly between kicking, throwing, and stomping movements, slow, flowy, or gliding transports through space, pauses where Slåttøy observed her surroundings or got into dialogues with by passers, and sequences of crawling-movements that distorted her human shape.

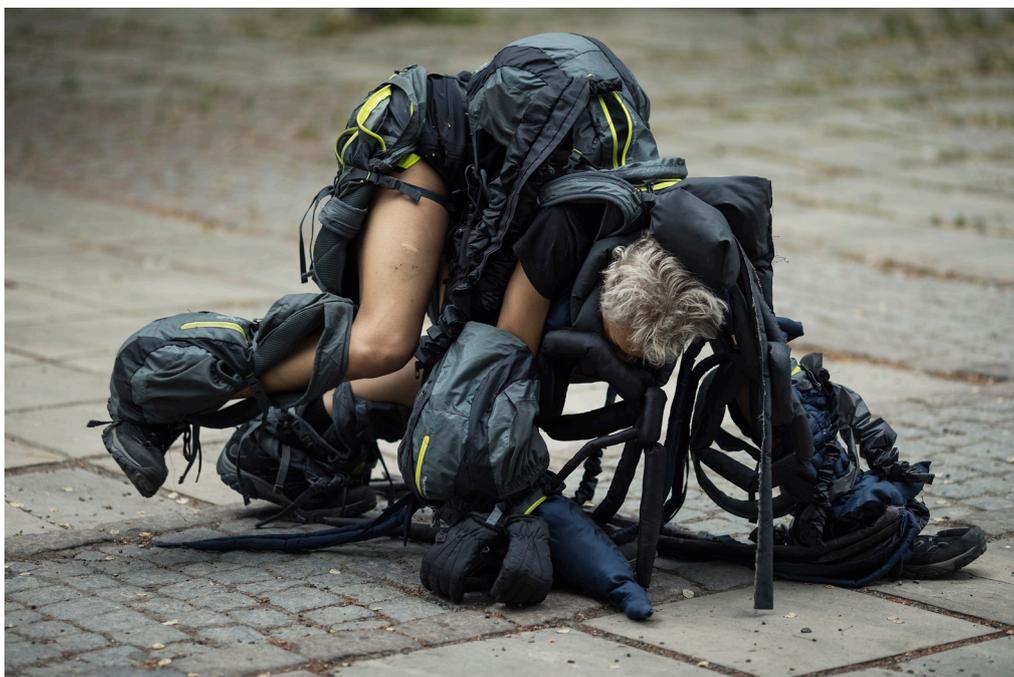


Photo: Simen Thornquist

31 Wang 2019, 343-57.

32 Deleuze and Patton 2004, 147.

33 O'Sullivan 2006, 80.

A central parameter in the development of the choreography was the work with a customized costume developed by Fredrik Floen. Floen built a grey and black muscular “body” of rucksacks sitting on Slåttøy’s own body and added a number of long tentacles and claws that could be released from the rucksacks and swing or sway with Slåttøy’s movement. The costume was inspired by several tropes from speculative future fiction literature and film, such as the figure of the backpacker often found in dystopian SF; someone who flees disaster and carries their belongings with them.³⁴ Another trope was the classic Marvel hero whose body is often somewhere between human and machine, both in terms of function and appearance. The tentacles and claws were inspired by Binti’s amalgamation with the Meduse, where she sprouts tentacles from her head in place of some of her plaited hair, as well as octopuses in themselves being creatures that literally think with their bodies³⁵, referring to the concept of the bodymind.

To perform in public space rather than the theatre, as well as the choice of the specific performance sites in Oslo represents another aspect of the creation of coeval dancefutures. Brazilian journalist, editor and researcher Patrick Brock describes the scenery: “The Vaterland square of Grønland (in Oslo) is known in the city as the meeting point of small-time drug dealers. To call it degraded is a matter of perspective. Still, Grønland and particularly other places where foreigners congregate indeed are places that straddle the borders of Norwegian otherization and the country’s uneasy acceptance of difference. As the dancer moved around the park on a typically overcast Oslo day, it drew the attention of loiterers, drug dealers, and passers-by alike. Some started questioning: Is she sick? Is she having drug issues? One of them soon came up to ask questions. A spark of interest had been lit. Suddenly, the unspoken barriers that separate convivence in Norwegian public spaces and the Grønland zona franca had been transformed. I cite this as an example of the transcendently transformative role that futuring can play. Futuring goes beyond genre conventions even as it drinks from its sources and uses its time-tested strategies; it is about imagination and innovation. (...) *Fictions of the Flesh* (...) represents strategies for transformation that expand the conception of utopianism. They challenge the status quo and propose new ways of imagining; they are radical “futuring.” ” (Brock 2021).

In this particular site-specific context, *Fictions of the Flesh* met audiences who would not necessarily come to the theatre, but who happened to pass by whilst the work was being performed. This approach entailed a certain democratization of dance-as-art as something which is not only for privileged audiences, hence, an important aspect of coeval dancefutures.



Photo: Simen Thornquist

³⁴ An example of this could be Octavia Butler’s character Lauren Olamina: Butler 1993.

³⁵ [Pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org) 29.4.2021.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to propose strategies to diversify dance-as-art to move towards coeval dancefutures in the Nordics. The paper questions the idea of Contemporary Dance as a colonial idea(l) and how this genre holds a little-challenged claim to dance-as-art. This is visible throughout the content of dance education, through who receives funding to create professional work, as well as through what is presented on stage. As the demography of the Nordics is changing, dance-as-art needs a revision of its conceptual boundaries and ethical standards to stay relevant. However, there is denial of coevalness of many dance forms in the Nordics and this denial follows colonial logics and ideas of art. Therefore, we need a decolonization of the field of dance to expand towards a broader range of people both in terms of dance practitioners, people who take part in the decision-making processes in the dance world, as well as audiences. It is necessary to recognize and make space for the plurality of knowledge systems that exist within dance and choreography and allow for different methods, approaches, and praxis of dance. An important part of this is to challenge the educational institutions and what is here centred as dance-as-art. This can be done through inviting experts from other dance genres than Contemporary Dance to be part of the decision-making, to teach and research with the students, as an approach to work across difference. This type of groundwork can help with the decolonization and development of curricula within dance education and is likely to diversify the student masses. Further down the line, this will diversify the professional field and what is considered dance-as-art. Hence, a crucial building block toward coeval dancefutures is coeval dance education.

Within the field of artistic research in dance there are choreographers and dancers working outside of Contemporary Dance who implicitly argue for coeval dancefutures. Still, artistic research in dance needs to broaden further to encompass the diverse dance field in the Nordics. Coeval dancefutures can be developed through a decolonization of temporality as a colonial idea(l) of time and through work towards epistemic justice within manifold genres of dance and choreography. Within this strand of research, speculative future fiction is proposed as a tool to imagine the future of dance differently and to diversify bodies, abilities, ethnicity, and gender amongst both practitioners, decision-makers, and audiences. An artistic strategy is to research through movement-thought and thought-movement to be explicit about the embodiment of research in dance and choreography. The research project and performance *Fictions of the Flesh* is a case study of one approach toward coeval dancefutures and aims to expand the conceptual boundaries of dance-as-art through combining logics from jazz dance and speculative future fiction. Through its choreographic specificities as well as being performed in public spaces, *Fictions of the Flesh* seeks to create ruptures with habit as well as contributing to coeval dancefutures also through reaching audiences that perhaps would not have come to the theatre.

A foundational idea of this paper is to not claim coeval dancefutures as a concept defined and cemented by this specific research. Instead, the aim is to argue for structures within education and research which can create space for dance practitioners from a large variety of dance traditions where manifold futures can be proposed. To quote Braidotti: "A new agenda needs to be set, which is no longer that of European or Eurocentric universal rational subjectivity but rather a radical transformation of it (...) In the case that a socio-cultural mutation is taking place in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-media society, then the transformation cannot affect only the pole of 'the others'. It must equally dislocate the position and the prerogative of 'the same', the former centre. (...) We can collectively empower these alternative becomings."³⁶ Hence, a fundamental aspect of this research is that instead of continuing to claim the defining power of what constitutes dance-as-art, those who currently do have access to networks of education, funding, and dissemination need to participate in challenging and expanding these systems to create new, coeval dancefutures.

³⁶ Braidotti 2013, 51-4.

AUTHOR

Ingri Midgard Fiksdal (b. 1982) is a Norwegian choreographer and researcher based in Oslo. She holds a PhD in artistic research titled *Affective Choreographies* (2019) from the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Fiksdal is currently an affiliated artistic researcher at the University of Oslo with the project *CoFUTURES: Pathways to Possible Presents* led by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay. Her choreographic work is funded by the Arts Council of Norway and has been performed at Kunstenfestival des Arts, Palais de Tokyo, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Santarcangelo Festival, and the Beijing Contemporary Dance Festival alongside extensive touring in the Nordic countries.

REFERENCES

Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brock, Patrick. 2021. "Fiksdal, Floen and Slåttøy's *Fictions of the Flesh*: a lesson in futuring." CoFutures webpage. <https://notes.cofutures.org/2021/05/20/fiksdal-floen-and-slattoys-fiction-of-the-flesh-a-lesson-in-futuring/>

"Bio Elle Sofe Sara" Elle Sofe's webpage. [Ellesofe.com](https://ellesofe.com/), 22.4 2021. <https://ellesofe.com/>

Butler, Octavia. 1993. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Four walls eight windows.

Dahl, Natalie. 2016. "Dansekunst, samtidsdans og jazzdans. Diskurser om norsk dans anno 2016." Danseinformasjonen's webpage. <http://danseinfo.no/images/stories/mb/05-Natalie.pdf>, 2016.

Deleuze, Gilles and Paul Patton. 2004. *Difference and Repetition*. London: Continuum.

Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other*. New York: Colombia University Press.

Fiksdal, Ingri. 2019. *Affective Choreographies*. Oslo: Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo.

Finbog, Liisa-Rávná. 2019. "The Duojár: An Agent of the Symbolic Repatriation of Sámi Cultural Heritage". by Jennifer Markides & Laura Forsythe. *Research Journeys In/To Multiple Ways of Knowing*. Dio Press Inc. 93-102.

Grunfelder, Julien, Gustaf Norlén, Linda Randall and Nora Sánchez Gassen. 2020. "State of the Nordic Region 2020". Nordic Council of Ministers.

Guarino, Lindsay and Wendy Oliver. 2014. *Jazz Dance. A History of the Roots and Branches*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Landmark, Maria. 2021. "Elle Sofe – Samiskhet i samtidskunst», [Hermetikken.no](https://hermetikken.no), <https://hermetikken.no/elle-sofe-samiskhet-i-samtidskunst/> (22.4.2021).

Le Moal, *Philippe*. 1999 "Dictionnaire de la Dans». *Bologne: Larousse-Bordas/HER. 705–706.*

Jakober, Marie. 2008. "The Continuum of Meaning: A Reflection on Speculative Fiction and Society". Lee Eastman and Randy Schroeder. *The Influence of Imagination: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy as Agents of Social Change*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company. 27-31.

Järvinen, Hanna. 2021. «Decolonise Nordic dance». *KOREOGRAFI 2021*. 86-118.

Joof, Camara Lundestad. 2020. «Den (selv) gode venstresida. For noen er kunsten litt friere enn for andre», *Dagbladet* 2.8.2020. <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/den-selvgode-venstresida/72705479>

Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo. "Bachelor i jazzdans". [Khio.no](https://khio.no/en/studies/academy-of-dance#bachelors-in-jazz-dance) Instituton webpage <https://khio.no/en/studies/academy-of-dance#bachelors-in-jazz-dance> (28.11.2020)

Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo. "Dans". [Khio.no](https://khio.no/studier/dans) Instituton webpage <https://khio.no/studier/dans> (21.4.2021)

Lion, Katarina. 2020. *Les Sacres. En socio-kulturell analys av tio versjoner av ett våroffer*. Stockholm: THEATRON.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2011. "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—An Introduction". *Transmodernity*. Fall 2011. 1-15.

Okorafor, Nnedi. 2015. *BINTI, the Complete Trilogy*. New York: Daw Books.

O'Sullivan, Simon. 2006. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

[Pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/octopus-suckers-thinking/). 2021. «Thinking is for suckers, but if you're an octopus, suckers are for thinking". <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/octopus-suckers-thinking/> (29.4.2021)

[Regjeringen.no](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kkd/mangfold/mangfold.pdf). 2021. "Mangfold i kunst og kultur". <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kkd/mangfold/mangfold.pdf> (11.5.2021)

Reistad, Helge. 1997. *Dansekunst*. Vollen: Tell forlag.

Santos, Boaventura de Sosa. 2016. *Epistemologies of the South*. New York: Routledge.

Schalk, Sami. 2018. *Bodyminds Reimagined. (Dis)ability, Race and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London and New York: Zed Books.

Sortland, Venke. 2021. "Samtidsdans». Digital learning webpage. <https://www.elevkanalen.no/hjem/scenetreff> (19.5.2021)

[Tabankadance.com](https://tabankadance.com/about-us-2/). "About us". Dance company webpage. <https://tabankadance.com/about-us-2/> (22.4.2021)

[Uio.no](http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/cofutures/about-the-project/index.html). "About the Project", CoFututres webpage. www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/cofutures/about-the-project/index.html (18.5.2021)

[Uniarts.fi](https://www.uniarts.fi/en/study-programmes/dance-bachelors-programme/). "Dance (Bachelor's Program)". University webpage. <https://www.uniarts.fi/en/study-programmes/dance-bachelors-programme/> (12.4.2021)

[Uniarts.se](https://www.uniarts.se/english/courses/bachelor-programmes/dance_). "Dance Performance - Bachelor". University webpage. https://www.uniarts.se/english/courses/bachelor-programmes/dance_ (12.4.2021)

Vazques, Rolando. 2015. "Decolonizing Temporality." Thinking Together 2015 – The Politics of Time. 20.3.2015.

Wang, Regina Kanyu. 2019. "The Story of Dao." Gary Budden and Marian Womack. An Invite to Eternity - Tales of Nature Disrupted. Calque Press. 343-357.

APPENDIX

- Higher education in Dance in Norway (as of 2021)

INSTITUTION	COURSES	AREA of STUDY	SOURCE
Oslo National Academy of the Arts	BA in Classical Ballet	classical ballet	khio.no/studier/dans
	BA in Contemporary Dance	contemporary dance	
	BA in Jazz Dance	jazz dance	
	MA in Choreography	choreography*	
	MA in Dance	dance*	
	PhD in Artistic Research	cont. dance and choreography**	
University of Stavanger	BA in Dance, PhD in Artistic Research	contemporary dance	uis.no/nb/bachelor-i-dans
	PhD in Artistic Research	N/A, new program as of 2021	
University College of Dance Art, Oslo	BA in Dance and Choreography	dance art and choreography	hfdk.no/
Kristiania University College	BA in Dance Art	cont. dance, jazz dance and ballet	kristiania.no/studier/bachelor/dansekunst/

- Production Funding – Arts Council Norway (SOURCE: kulturradet.no)***

Project support (Fri scenekunst - dans)		
Projects granted funding	Number	Total amount in NOK
CASE 1. Applications with deadline 2/9/20 (second half of 2020): ****		
Contemporary Dance	30	16 897 500,00
Other dance forms	11	4 270 000,00
CASE 2. 2018		
Contemporary Dance	43	20 350 000,00
Other dance forms	7	2 685 000,00
CASE 3. 2016		
Contemporary Dance	42	20 157 206,00
Other dance forms	7	4 020 000,00
TOTAL - Contemporary Dance	115	57 404 706,00
TOTAL - Other dance forms	25	10 975 000,00

- Performing Arts Venues Programming and Presenting Dance as their main Activity*****

Fri scenekunst - Kunstnerskap*****		
Projects granted funding	Number	Total amount in NOK
CASE 1. 2020		
Contemporary Dance*****	3	40 000 000,00
Other dance forms*****	0	-
CASE 2. 2019		
Contemporary Dance	2	31 600 000,00
Other dance forms	0	-
CASE 3. 2018		
Contemporary Dance	2	17 200 000,00
Other dance forms	0	-
CASE 4. 2017		
Contemporary Dance	2	20 400 000,00
Other dance forms	0	-
CASE 5. 2016		
Contemporary Dance	1	7 600 000,00
Other dance forms	0	-
TOTAL - Contemporary Dance	10	116 800 000,00
TOTAL - Other dance forms	0	-

Project support (Fri scenekunst - dans)		
Projects granted funding	Number	Total amount in NOK
CASE 1. Applications with deadline 2/9/20 (second half of 2020): ****		
Contemporary Dance	30	16 897 500,00
Other dance forms	11	4 270 000,00
CASE 2. 2018		
Contemporary Dance	43	20 350 000,00
Other dance forms	7	2 685 000,00
CASE 3. 2016		
Contemporary Dance	42	20 157 206,00
Other dance forms	7	4 020 000,00
TOTAL - Contemporary Dance	115	57 404 706,00
TOTAL - Other dance forms	25	10 975 000,00

* Although these MA courses are open to students from all dance disciplines and emphasize a broad approach to dance and choreography, the teachers listed as connected to the course are primarily active within the genre of Contemporary Dance. This is reflected both in the applicants as well as in the student projects I have witnessed as a visiting supervisor and teacher since 2013.

** This categorization is made on the bases of all the PhD projects taking place within or having graduated from the department.

*** Arts Council Norway is the main funding body for dance artists in Norway within the non-institutional field, providing the largest majority of their funding.

**** As the committee deciding who receives grants changes every second year, looking at alternate years shows the selections of three different committees.

***** Previously called Base Funding (Basisfinansiering). The grant can cover production, administration, and dissemination of work for up to a 5-year period and is the largest grant to be received within the non-institutionalized dance field of Norway.

***** Genre affiliation is either stated by the artist in the application or a consideration made by this author based on knowledge accumulated from 15 years of work within the Norwegian dance field.

***** This is a selection of venues in Norway and serves as an example of canonical programming of dance. Black Box Teater and BIT teatergarasjen also program theatre and performance.