

Introduction to the writer: Moa M. Sahlin born in Gävle, Sweden 1974. Her work as an educator, dancer and choreographer focuses on solidary queer feminist, post contemporary dance art. To spur new or more well-articulated development within the field of the arts – academics, activist work and postmodern ideas are continuously influencing. Moa's artistic co-ordination of Writing Movement 2.0 in 2017-2018 have been co-creating critical thinking focusing on choreography primarily in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Introduction to the event of this text: This is an essay based on Moa M. Sahlin's memories of "Danish Dance Stories". An artist-driven initiative focusing on the collegial meeting and the artistic exchange in a historical perspective. The negotiation on what "dance history" is or can be, and how this dance community based geographically in Denmark 2018 is at play and in concert. The open invitation on the project webpage asks: "How can we begin a common conversation of the future, crosswise of standpoints?" The individual dance artists that initiated the project are Stine Frandsen and Nanna Stigsdatter from Danseatelier, Carolina Bäckman and Andrea Deres from Fanclub.



Rebecka Berchtold running in and out of the maze. Photo: MMS

Herstory¹ nurturing future memory, again.

In a cafe in Umeå, Sweden, around the 6th to 9th of May 2008, I had a conversation with choreographer Rani Nair. She had again performed *Gingerbread Land* (Pepparkakeland). Then and still, a choreography that is a critical analysis of the new racism and xenophobia that at the time were creating dark shadows across Europe. It deals with the risks involved in having a skin colored like a "gingerbread" in Sweden at the time when the Swedish Democrats started to reformulate and re-design. The risk of being harassed by neo-Nazis and racists was very present in everyday life – and in addition – a growing number of "normal" Swedes and Europeans blamed all domestic problems on immigration. It is now painful to remember me saying, "You don't have to perform this performance again since the Swedish Democrats don't have any chance of getting into parliament of our anti-racist country Sweden!" Since then I have educated myself on the issues involved in white privilege.

10 years later, on the 5th and 6th of May 2018, I visit a symposium in Copenhagen which gathers more than 60 dancers – mostly Danish living professionals, some Nordic/European migrated or diaspora now part of the "nomadic-tribes-life" mostly common amongst us. The care for a broad spectrum of generations, is more key to the event than nationality or home base. A translating practice between different languages happens, yet Danish and English is the most common. During a break I ask Andrea Deres why she and Carolina Bäckman, Nanna Stigsdatter and Stine Frandsen are inviting us to a collegial field of postmodern choreography conversations? I remember her mentioning curiosity of the development of collective working methods, linking generations and to remember or reactivate dance history making.

In present time, looking back I realize that it is a historic date. The 5th of May is celebrated in Denmark as Liberation day. This was the day that the German forces surrendered in Denmark under World War II.

¹ Herstory: In the 1970s and 1980s, critical perspectives emerged in fields such as sociology, history, ethnology, comparative literature and political science. The point that students, researchers and teachers made, inspired by the growing feminist movement, was that the research in these areas largely ignored women.

The first location of the symposium is HAUT². HAUT share this space with a theater called S/H³ – Sort/Hvid. It's problematic to enter the teater at this time – timewise and empathically. Not geographically, that is a walk in the park, close to the train station and all. It's something else that is the problem. A use of a word in a title of a performance that has big banners on the walls in black and white is using the “dot-dot” word. The dot-dot word? Yes, the dot-dot word! If I say the n-word to some of you in our POC-community⁴, you know what I mean with the “dot-dot” word. The title of a performance now called *Black Madonna* by Madame Nielsen, Christian Lollike with S/H, used at the time of the premier the dot-dot word in the title of their performance, since then the title has changed⁵. At the time it was alarming and made me wonder about who is welcome? It sets an affective tonality to this symposium of Danish Dance Stories, creating tunnels of opinion and closing doors. Now I do not know, it is complicated and problematic.

I let go of that thought feeling thoughts phenomenon, when Halla Ólafsdóttir meets my eye. Our embodied knowledge of dance history together makes us bigger and reminds us of all the good stuff that people have made. Our kind of mutual understandings in cultural-spatial terms, institutional responsibilities or political-economic ones, is our common ground. I sit down and listen to the first lecture – *Dansehistoriernes Sorte Boks* (The Black Box of Dance Histories) – a more linear approach to history that Karen Vedel⁶ share in Danish. Halla translating some words in my ear and I am writing and sketching to keep track and focus. In present time I read “Fokine”, “in the beginning” and “Alvin Ailey 1981”. The year 1981 is the first time, and a beginning of a tradition, for that Alvin Ailey company to visit Tivoli in Copenhagen.

² HAUT is a stage/production house that co-produces Danish dance stories. They share address with the theater S/H.

³ S/H – Sort/Hvid is a small city theater founded by the City Council and the State. The theater also receives funding from public and private foundations. *Black Madonna* is a performance of Madame Nielsen in collaboration with S/H.

⁴ The term “person of color” (pl: people of color, persons of color; sometimes abbreviated POC) is used primarily in the United States to describe any person who is ethnically non-white. The term encompasses all non-white people, emphasizing common experiences of systemic racism.

⁵ “We have chosen to change the title to *Black Madonna*. The first title, was an expression of the contradictions in the performance, but some people viewed it as racist, and that was not our intention. The performance has inspired a fierce debate. We have listened to the criticism, and we will attempt to incorporate it into the performance,” writes Theater Sort/Hvid about the title change.

⁶ Karen Vedel (DK) is a Associate professor Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen.

After some time Karen moves from lecture to workshop, by activating the black boxes. Those kinds of black boxes used as archives for magazines, reports and other objects. Smaller groups of five begin to herstory with the content of the boxes. In one box, a pair of red pants belonging to one of the dancers in my group. She explains how she in her education had to do a lot of “flying-low” that included sliding on the floor. She could do that sliding on the floor with more ease in these pants, yes, the kind of straight line cut with white stripes on the side, you know? Do you remember that nervousness, euphoria and exhaustion of all that running and sliding? Did you get better at it or did you walk away from it? She became a super-heroine in her red pants and now she folds them and put them back in the box.

We get introduced to Samlingen⁷ (SE) – Amanda Apetrea, Nadja Hjorton, Stina Nyberg, Halla Ólafsdóttir and Zoë Poluch (Zoë not present this time). They are a collective who are opening up the collective methods in a workshop named *Hersay and hearsay of Danish dance*. Herstory is unfolded with the plural and complex. A starting point is given with the year of 1879, which is the year Bournonville died. The paper on the wall is now our horizontal timeline that continues into the year of 2019. We write and add to the timeline using digital search engines, conversations IRL and some materials from Karen's Black box.

Next day goes into a more dancy part. It's a more action-based approach to Herstory, which includes more physical dancing in the middle of the room. Four “oracles” look at the dances danced and give answers to four writers who are asking questions. The writers are instructed to sit with their backs to the dancers. One writer asks one oracle, “Why are they dancing now?” The answer is complex, yet specific and we laugh a lot. We swap roles and I dance all the dances I remember from 100 years. My whole corporeality time travels 100-150 years, in one hour. Yes, the wars, fights, peacemakings, struggles, celebrations, fuckings, lovings, births, styles, manners, ideas of rooms, use of time, we as humans have danced. Dancing and making prophecies from and with a bit of trio A, Rivers of Mercury and what not in our shared dance story made up and sustained. Annika B. Lewis pops by and we do a quick on-the-go update of our shared colleagues, state of choreography and performance art etc.

⁷ SAMLINGEN is what it wants to be! One time it looked like this:<https://vimeo.com/88636286>

Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt⁸ (DK) is the last one up to share a lecture/ workshop with the title *Our Body Moves Beyond Borders – or on How Danish Dance Herstories are International and in Concert*. She is continuously at the venue Skogen⁹ in Gothenburg, so I am familiar with her work. We can recognize synergy effects and threads that got woven since our Junge Hunde¹⁰ days. We might have more resilient networks now –thanks to our ancestors through networking like a trampoline practice, for you dear “next generation” to make new definitions of gravity on? During Cecilie’s workshop we did some quick writing practice from organized sitting. It ended in an up-cycled version of an old book of German theater that was impregnated with cis men. The new title is the same as the workshop, *Our Body Moves Beyond Borders – or on How Danish Dance Herstories are International and in Concert* – the book is now filled with newly glued handwritings in different bright colored papers. Have a look at this one edition at danskedansehistorier.dk or #danskedansehistorier2018.

A thought. Who is developing what and why? The artistic director of Dansehallerne, Efva Lilja¹¹, invited Anna Koch¹² in 2005 to transform her studio and forum “ELD” to become the venue “WELD” at Odenplan, Stockholm. Anna Koch now lives in Stockholm and Gothenburg. During a spontaneous ‘fika’, post-symposium, she told me that Yvonne Rainer is going to choreograph a new piece for Weld company this fall. Have we created a matriarchal dome, or is this just some words in the new album by Björk called Utopia?

⁸ Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt (DK) is a dramaturge, performance artist, researcher and a PhD fellow at the University of Copenhagen, crossing borders of academia and art.

⁹ SKOGEN is an artist run house for performing arts, supporting and producing associated artists from Gothenburg and abroad, organizing their work and research in formats like residencies.

¹⁰ “A “Junge Hund” is a young and up-and-coming professional performing artist with great talent who’s on the brink of a breakthrough... The main reason for the festival’s existence is to help these artist further towards their artistic goals, and to create contact with a greater audience both nationally and internationally.” This festival run in Aarhus, Denmark 2007-2012.

¹¹ Efva Lilja is an artist and Professor of choreography, working with performances, visual art, film and writing. From 1985 to 2005 she was Artistic Director of the E.L.D Since 2016 she is the Director of Dansehallerne in Copenhagen.

¹² Anna Koch is a dancer/choreographer and artistic director at Weld. Here she works and presents her own artistic work and cultivates the organisation. In 2018 Anna is working on preparations for next years artistic work. She is having residency at both Weld and Skogen through the year.

Back to Copenhagen and the symposium. We walk from HAUT to a venue where Udviklingsplatformen for Scenekunst¹³ have their office, kitchen and co-working space. In a conversation with Fanclub-Andrea, during the preparation of tapas we talk about language and our geographical stories. She mentions the place Stjärnsund. Surprised by someone knowing that place which is so close to my aunt, I kind of shout of excitement. A group called The non existent Center¹⁴ is based close to there. When the super local territory knowing is shared, the deterritorialization gain potential. Center and periphery blurs and gravity shifts. Local, global and glocal – again and again in this flow – what happens in one local community inspires one visitor and something else happens in the next community. Like flocking? Flocking is considered an emergent behavior arising from simple rules that are followed by individuals and does not involve any central coordination. After this rich and relational building symposium I get curious of Danske Dansehistoriers next move, a residency for five days at Vestjyllands Højskole in June.

On the train back home I return to the “dot-dot word”, exposed in that venue by Madame Nielsen and Christian Lollike. The performance “Black Madonna”, that at its premiere in Copenhagen has/had a racist title. I asked the organizers of Danish Dance Stories about it and they explained that they were collaborating with HAUT in this space for the symposium and nothing to do with that specific performance. I wonder, if tension is felt on my skin, how is it for someone of our POC-community? Remembering Mara Lees book¹⁵ *När andra skriver. Skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid*. Did Mara write this, or did she quote someone? I read the text about time on page 66-67. I cannot figure out how to quote her. I write to her in a chat forum. We might have a conversation. I remember it like, “time is both linear and circular so when we combine the two it becomes revolutionary, in text.” This text is re-visiting that moment in time when I did not know what to do.

In conversations after that moment, we can pause and gather resources to continue that conversation. Is this continued conversation nurturing

¹³ The Development Platforms an independent organisation initiated by the Danish Arts Foundation and the Bikuben Foundation with the purpose of furthering the development of independent performing arts, project-based theatres and less established theatres.

¹⁴ The art group The non existent Center runs Ställberg Mine, a arena for contemporary art and thought in Ljusnarsberg, a rural municipality in Bergslagen.

¹⁵ Mara Lee Gerdén “När Andra skriver: skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid” Dissertation in Literary Composition, Poetry and Prose, Valand Academy, 2014 <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A913191&dswid=-2897>

heightened values of diversity, fairness and resilience? When you read my text do you boost art, identity makings, togetherness and secure integrity? How is this then organized within the performing arts that is now present with in Denmark? Do my Danish colleagues have something similar to the organization TRYCK¹⁶? TRYCK questions the stereotypes and exotic pictures of the African diaspora that dominate Swedish society. They want to help broaden the representation and the shape. When cultural expressions, conveyed by white are regarded as universal human, blacks often get the cultural identities of the margins. That kind of given representation logic, TRYCK wants to question”.

A generous traveling grant is given for the Danish Dance Stories residency. Is the traveling grant from the union? I wonder how many of us there that also are members of a union? How can we use transnational knowledge building to secure our workplaces? The Swedish Union for Performing Arts and Film have over the past years collaborated on issues concerning gender equality, discrimination and abuse. One equality and diversity checklist is made. “Since norms are usually unspoken, they are hard to spot. They are even more difficult to see when we ourselves are the norm. In visualizing norms we can include consciously instead of risking unconsciously excluding. Diversity is about seeing and giving space. The diversity checklist will help to make visible the standards of performing arts organizations that affect our workplaces and what is being performed on our scenes.”

Sunday 10th of June is the beginning of the residency with Danish Dance Stories at Vestjyllands Højskole¹⁷. We are dropping in, all 30 of us and then Else Mathiassen¹⁸ invites us to Vestjylland højskole by telling a fable about two water pots. One water pot with a crack in – it spills some water – and during the years flowers grow along the way. Fellow participant Kamma Siegumfeldt¹⁹ tells me that Else have done some pioneer work within this højskole for the dance community. When she tells us historical facts

¹⁶ TRYCK is a member association consisting of cultural workers from the African diaspora operating in Sweden, for example performing artists, dramaturgs, visual artists, directors, filmmakers, photographers, singers, radio producers, performing arts producers, cultural writers, media and humanities researchers.

¹⁷ The højskole of Vestjyllands is a place with space to grow indoors as well as outdoors, a cultural power plant, placed in the beautiful nature by the Fjord of Ranking and nearby the North Sea.

¹⁸ Else Mathiassen has been employed at Vestjyllands Højskole for 30 years, the last 16 years as principal. She’s leaving this position in the fall of 2018 and will focus on theater in Mors.

¹⁹ Kamma Siegumfeldt is a cultural manager with specific knowledge about the Danish, Nordic and Baltic contemporary dance communities as well as EU.

about the højskole getting established for the poor farmers to become good citizens. She also contributes with brilliant satire. Underlining the historical fact that nor women nor the really poor women were part of this reform. A laugh that lets go of some tension when realizing that this historical fact still is circulating amongst us artists, often part of the precarious and women. Yet, how easy life is with all meals served with crispy eco-veggies from the permaculture garden. I smell the great roses to and from "our house" to the main house. This is more than promised already, blessed we are. Yes, it's romantic with collectiveness close to the sea, developing gardens, hot names on workshop leaders and 30 dancers. Almost like Kurt Jooss, Mary Wigman, Rudolf Laban and the first polyamorous days? We are also aware that collectivity is, or is going to, create a base of values. If Kurt Jooss did not take Rudolf and Mary away from the Nazis, what would they have done for and with them?

To stay with the trouble(s) and make string figures with Donna J. Haraway²⁰, within the practice of curiousness, I now jump to breakfast. The breaking of the fast we keep during nighttime. Also breaking the fast pace of urbancity to a slowing down and sensing and feeling again? Perhaps a new countryside milieu is more nurturing for meetings with new colleagues? We eat breakfast with our colleagues, while study buddies from other, parallel courses at the Højskole, also are practicing their passion in this shared space. Across from me sits Lydia. Lydia_me on instagram. We meet in a calm dancer to dancer look and gaze that connects with some sort of understanding. We are in the same workshop group with Paula Caspão²¹ named, '*Danish Dance (Hi)stories' In Small Parts*. We both have lived experience as kids in collectives. Knowings of group dynamics, deepness and thickness in our bones. We continue that and other conversations during the week with that shared experience as a reference point.

This great week has to be lived and live and even though this text is now using up our time on Terra, I push this into an envelope. A digital envelope. "A slice of time a shared space between us" as Rani Nair wrote in that book. Lydia and I are also talking with Ellen Söderhult, Tamara Alegre, Kalliopi Siganou, Andreas Haglund, Paolo Gile. We continue a conversation about solidarity within the queer feminist, post contemporary and postcolonial stage art scene that we share. It's more than 10 or 20 years

²⁰ Donna J. Haraway lectures at the San Francisco Art Institute, April 25, 2017. Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.

²¹ Paula Caspão is a writer, researcher, dramaturge, and intermedia artist, working at the crossroads of choreographic practices and performance with other fields, and between theory and practice.

between and my study buddies from Copenhagen and DOCH talk about their five year plans. One plan is, as an example, to continue practice a specific solo for two years and tour it. Knowings on how to produce, tour, network and stay practicing your art have developed. I realize that change have happened. Oh, we have reached a higher ground. Lovers keep on loving. How lost some of us where after dance educations 20 years ago. DIY have shift to DIT²² and the timetable of the residency is also organized this way.

Three "main" workshops run parallel and then we have time slots for own or shared interests. formulated as self-organized workshops. Danish Dance Stories team now sign mails, "Stine, Nanna, Carolina, Andrea" and soon after that the sender is SNCA, a new persona or? A Library is set up with some books that each and every one of us brought. It's now a hub for readings, low voiced conversations one on one. New creations and composed workshops get titles and are written on special cards. In the workshop *How we slowly move into that Kurt Jooss²³-Lilavati Häger²⁴-Rani Nair story²⁵*, I get to know that one colleague went to Folkwangschule. She is the one telling me that if it was not for Kurt, Laban and Mary had done more for the Nazis. We also have conversations on how choreographers' legacies are shared, cared for or kept and forgotten in the archives.

Paula Caspão also shares a publicly open lecture, *the Personal is/as Historical*, that creates spheres of new materialism. Problematizing capitalism with its luring pink meat color and power tripping alligators. A green field where the polyphonic and shared practices blossom and create

²² I Do It Together, works strategically to find ways and ways to jointly create an inclusive and sustainable society through collaborations.

²³ Kurt Jooss (1901-1979) was a pioneer of the Tanztheater (dance theater) movement, combining movement, text and drama. Unlike his German Expressionist contemporaries, who rejected technique in favor of raw, expressive movement, Jooss worked in the vocabulary of ballet and modern dance. His works dealt with the issues of his time: social injustice, urban alienation and post-WWI trauma.

²⁴ Lilavati Devi (1925-2002) came to Sweden as a leading dancer in a dance groupe led by Ram Gopal (1912-2003), called the Nijinsky of India. After many years of correspondence with Bengt Häger, she stayed in Sweden and married in 1954, where she continued to pursue her profession and became an ambassador for Indian dance in Scandinavia.

²⁵ Rani Nair Dancer and choreographer, trained in Indian and contemporary dance. Is a member of the Ful artist collective, consisting of artists active in performance art, music, literature, etc.

togetherness. In the workshop she emphasizes Mystory²⁶ and the notions of palimpsest²⁷.

You can find remains of our writings, cuts and pieces in a black box that SNCA, this new persona have. We dance, we take photos and we share the residency with others. We evaluate and we love to meet again. This is wrapping up and saying thanks. Sara Hamming²⁸ says it might was this time and never again when I am hoping for more.

Conversations continue back home and my dear colleague Rani Nair comes visiting me in Småland and asks me about the encounters with Danish Dance Stories. Our private, as in our kids and husbands are our company again – superlocal – as in far away from any city or professional dance community. We mention our postcolonial academics buddies. Rani linking conversations with Diana Mulinari, Professor at Department of Gender Studies in Lund. Me linking conversations with Therese Svensson, Doctoral student Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion in Gothenburg University. Pondering upon if next NOFOD²⁹ conference is a meeting point and where it is? Recognizing our dancing colleagues in the academic field, still dancing and loving to continue conversations.

What is the continuation of transforming our history, herstory and stories? Who in the artistic field have the know-how, energy and resources to invite to more collegial development with and by artists? Dansehallerne has a great track record in supporting artists in co-facilitating. Then again, who's voices are not heard, represented or seen in Denmark? Back in Gothenburg I reach out to a bookshelf for that Konsthall C³⁰ Edition 1 and a text by Nazila Kivi *Feminist Movements in Denmark and Intersectionality: Feminationalism, Sustained Right Turn and the New Left*. Nazila writes in the end, "In that

²⁶ Mystory may refer to this https://wrd.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/ulmer_mystory.pdf

²⁷ In textual studies, a palimpsest (/ˈpælɪmpseɪst/) is a manuscript page, either from a scroll or a book, from which the text has been scraped or washed off so that the page can be reused for another document.

²⁸ Sara Hamming is a performance artist and performance writer who develops concepts that performatively inquires powers in the social. Sara works with text, objects, choreography and rooms on the platform: moribund.

²⁹ The Nordic Forum for Dance Research, NOFOD, is a non-profit organization that promotes collaboration between dance scholars and practitioners.

³⁰ The art centre Konsthall C (2004-ongoing) is a public work of art; a project of urban renewal; and an art institution situated in Hökarängen in Stockholm. Konsthall C works for a democratic society based on values of diversity, equality and solidarity both in its organisation and in the content of its programmes.

light, when it comes to established parliamentary politics, all hope of political resistance seems to be lost, and the current ray of light is only to be found in the small radical group of racialized women in alliance with 'woke sisters' from larger organisations in order to provide political pressure. For now that's all we have".

The feeling is that the next generation within the collective based choreography field is not only taking over but also invites. The invitation is generous, clear and empowering. In my knowledge it takes years to build relations, networks and co-facilitating choreographies. It takes less time to destroy. My dream now is that we work on developing our agendas so conversations can continue. An example in our Nordic-Baltic hemisphere is the Kedja encounter 2019 in Turku, Finland and 2020 in Gothenburg, Sweden. We can meet quicker! This new persona SNCA re-invites us already this year to a presentation of *Danish Dance Stories 2018* on the 29th of October, Dansehallerne % Charlottenborg!