

Decolonising or Recolonising: Struggles on Cultural Heritage

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This article directly responds to an article authored by Iacono and Brown published in Dance Research (2016), and considers issues emerging since its publication. The core topic is the UNESCO Convention from 2003, and in our view, criticism in the 2016 article is based on misinterpretation. We address the claims that the Convention is marked by binarism and provide in-depth background for the concept of intangible cultural heritage. We also caution against using the biomorphic term 'living cultural heritage' as its application stands in an ambiguous relation toward essentialist, organicist and totalitarian ideologies. We end with a discussion on attitudes toward globalisation and the concept of innovation. These, we argue, have profound implications for recent discussions on decolonisation.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, Heritage studies, Binary oppositions, Bio-morphic terms, Ethnochoreology, Dance studies, Post-colonialism

Introduction¹

Agents in the dance field have discovered the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage and have listed many dance forms as such. The concept coined by the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage² has become a favourite term, and articles discussing it have appeared from many circles, also from the world of dance. One of these is the circle of activists working to promote and implement the Convention's aims, including academic researchers³ We, the authors of the present article, belong to this circle.⁴ We aim to counter ideas put forward by representatives of a second circle, a group of researchers and workers who, in our understanding, try to challenge the Convention and its ideas.⁵ Their tools are mainly overarching theoretical discourses. A claim is that the ICH concept is a subdivision of the already well-established terms Cultural Heritage and Heritage Studies as represented in issues of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* since 1994. Even if they stay on a general level, their ideas tend to side-track dance as a specific and practical phenomenon. It is hardly visible in the portfolio of Heritage studies. One article, which in our eyes represents the views of the second circle particularly clearly and pointedly, is, however, on dance. Valeria Lo Iacono and David H. K. Brown wrote it in 2016, and we employ it here as a point of departure for our discussion and as representative for the work of the circle we wish to

challenge.⁶ We will focus and comment on this one article from *Dance Research*, mirroring the nature of its presentation in our discussion. We, therefore, engage with strategies of the discourse presented, address the claims of binarism, the problems of biomorphism, attitudes to globalisation and the concepts of innovation. Our direct response aims to preserve a discursive unity and contribute to public debate while foregrounding our disagreement.

Confused discourses

Iacono and Brown's article has provoked us, and an overarching reason for that is the authors' staging of their presentations and discussions.⁷ The authors engage with sets of words and concepts that some academic discourses and some of the Convention texts have in common. These words and concepts entail a superficial similarity, and they are, at times, given quite different meanings. The authors, for example, address the terms tangible and intangible throughout the article from a perspective quite the opposite to the one used in the 2003 UNESCO Convention. They talk about dance as heritage, including any kind of dance, such as even post-modern dance⁸, or restrict the meaning of the term "dance" by claiming it has its "own terms"⁹, which is hard to envisage from other perspectives than that of contemporary dance.¹⁰ This signals a significant change to the meaning of the term dance, suggesting it refers to contemporary dance only.

We feel that Iacono and Brown perform in the genre of academic discourse. Still, the play discussed belongs to the genre of an international agreement, two totally different genres in terms of aims and construction of the plot.

Different genres often use different kinds of language; we debate genre and language of the 2016 article. They read the Convention text as if it was a theoretical academic discourse and not a legal document. We will draw on some ideas from Ludwig Wittgenstein to make our point. Being one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, his initial aim was to purify language by bringing all confusions and complexities in the usage of familiar concepts

to a complete scientific clarity and distinction. This attitude rests on the assumption that for scientific purposes, everyday language lacking logical transparency could be replaced by a language of perfect philosophical sharpness.¹¹ Later, however, Wittgenstein realised that it was not the potential of everyday language, but rather his limited concept of logics which was an obstacle for him to develop a scientific language suitable for everything. This idea brought him to a breakthrough in developing the pragmatic approach in logics. Thus, later, he focused his research on how concepts operate in everyday speech and how they sustain meaningfulness in our lives.¹² In this way, Wittgenstein was a philosopher who managed to reverse his own beliefs completely during his lifetime and to dismiss the possibility of creating a language superior to other languages. Academic discourse often seems to have this ambition of superiority.

In a certain sense, we could say that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*¹³ corresponds to UNESCO 1972 convention, yet *Philosophical investigations*¹⁴ correspond to the UNESCO 2003 Convention. In his second book, he developed his famous concept of "language games", arguing that there are many language genres. Each is distinct as a particular language game that employs its own rules. An international convention and a free general academic discourse would be two examples of two quite different language games. The academic discourse needs to read a text from another language game, understanding the rules of this game before bringing it into the game of its own – the academic discourse.

It is immediately evident that not only the authors with whom we are opening our discussion but also their inspirer Kirschenblatt-Gimblett¹⁵ takes a text which belongs to the legal domain and integrates it into a discourse of academics without any critical notification of changing discourses. Accurate interpretation of a legal text requires either to confront it with another legal text from the same legal entity or with an action of the author(ity) standing behind the text. Yet having provided a quotation from the Convention, Iacono and Brown do not engage

with the complexity of meaning of the quotation provided within the context of UNESCO consulting, for example, operative directives or later decisions of UNESCO.¹⁶ Instead, the authors of the 2016 article allow UNESCO's text to be commented on by an academic as if UNESCO were a physical person participating in academic discourse. UNESCO is an organisation where the countries of the world cooperate and negotiate formulations of legal documents within the field of international politics. We do not say this to indicate an intention to suspend a free discussion of academics concerning UNESCO's decisions and deeds. Yet, the regular hermeneutic practice requires that a text be seen as a part of certain discursive and textual continuity. When this practice is not observed, one falls into confusion because the original language game rules are ignored. The pretence is that any text can be immediately dealt with in a free academic discourse without any mediation of a hermeneutic effort.

What is an international convention?

An opening endeavour for this article is to set the stage in accordance with the 'play' we are discussing, an international Convention. Our way of presenting the stage may be a simplification, and it may take on the spirit of an *advocatus diaboli*. In our opinion, it is all too easy to discuss our current topic out of its context, as often happens. We try to use a metaphorically based narrative, and we acknowledge that we may at times overstretch the analogy to explain the problem as we see it.

The UNESCO Convention is a legal document, an agreement between the countries of the world about how they have decided to define the central concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and how they want to cooperate and promote the joint goals defined in the same agreement. Many published articles discuss the Convention on the stage of an abstract, theoretical academic discourse¹⁷. They do not bother to engage with or investigate either the intrinsic purpose or the actual functioning of the Convention in practical terms. The ICH Convention is played on the stage of international cooperation, and we researchers need to

bring our tools there. We need to adapt to the genre and understand some of the plot structure. So how does the play, that is, the Convention, present itself?

- 1) By reminding about the work UNESCO does in securing human rights, the Convention stresses the connection to the rights of individuals.
- 2) By '[c]onsidering the importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development, it presents a vision of its ultimate aims.
- 3) By '[r]ecognising that the processes of globalisation and social transformation, [...] give rise, [...] to grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage, [...],' it points to the main problem that the Convention aims to address.

In other words, ICH is a basis for the cultural diversity of humans, being a value for the world and the individual. Many of the old local dances across the globe are threatened by globalisation processes. The Convention is not a 'to-the-good-for-all' idea but a sharply defined cause, and in terms of dance, the old local material is given priority. In the eyes of many agents of main-stream arts and research, such dances are considered relatively insignificant and out of line with trends in contemporary academic discourses, which one can see in books on dance education.¹⁸

The Convention argues that the cultural diversity of the world represented by ICH is a shared value for humanity and calls on all nations of the world to help safeguard it. The countries are simply the units that can take on such obligations for the world's population.

A consequence of this world order is that each nation's authorities need to decide which ICH practice to nominate, taking into account practices from their own geographic area. Each state should nominate on behalf of the practitioners of an element. The idea is not that the nation should take ownership of ICH elements in its country or that UNESCO should.

The 2003 Convention was not initiated from the western or the northern side of the world, but rather from countries that felt unjustly treated by that side. Two parallel lines are working for protecting the rights of, particularly, communities in the southern and the eastern parts of the world. One led to the UNESCO Convention that the countries of Asia, Africa, and South America fought through despite resistance from the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and Russia.¹⁹ The convention was also built upon strategies already established in Japan and Korea.²⁰ As of this writing nearly all countries of the world (except the abovementioned UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Russia and a few others) have ratified the convention. The second line was taken up by the World Intellectual Property Organisation, WIPO, which strives for the legal protection of resources such as the traditional expressions in the poorer parts of the world. Here African countries took the lead, whereas many Western countries resisted.²¹

UNESCO's stage for playing "The safeguarding of Intangible Heritage" is complex, based on many events and ideas of the past. Still, it has precise aims for its work, and the plot about cultural diversity threatened by globalisation is compelling. We would now like to go into what we consider inaccurate interpretations proposed in the 2016 article.

The claim of binary opposition

Already in the title of the article, Iacono and Brown raise very strong claims of criticism of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, the first of which is coined with the term binarism and explained as follows:

"[...] the binary oppositions of 'tangible'/'intangible', frequently used to describe material and immaterial elements of culture and heritage, create a false dichotomy. This label is particularly problematic for dance, given its complex, multi-dimensional nature in which intangible and tangible elements are indissolubly linked."²²

The core definition in the Convention at just this point is: “The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – *as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith.*”²³ [italics added]

The Convention does not create any dichotomy between tangible and intangible but sees practices (the immaterial aspect) and their tools or results (the material part of a practice) as a whole. The problem with the 2016 article and many other discourses scrutinising the tangible and the intangible is that they take the term apart and discuss one word at a time, which leads the discussion astray. However, the term to be accounted for is *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, and how the three words may be interpreted each on its own is a totally different and practically irrelevant issue.

Iacono and Brown are right that the 2003 Convention is built upon a wish to expand the concept of Cultural Heritage as used by the 1972 UNESCO Convention.²⁴ Bakka explains the fundamental difference between the conventions as follows:

I propose to consider the two Conventions to be two different paradigms in the safeguarding of cultural heritage; the first a paradigm for preserving, seeing, experiencing and understanding monuments in contrast to the second paradigm — for keeping up and living with practices. The first paradigm is connected to the 1972 Convention, which aims at preserving historical monuments, groups of buildings and sites and also natural heritage. The second paradigm springs from the 2003 Convention, and at its core, it is about keeping up practices, continuing making traditional boats, continuing singing and dancing.²⁵

Both paradigms combine material and immaterial aspects of Cultural Heritage, so the principle of binarism is not found in any of them. However, the two aspects are the defining cores, the first in the 1972 and the second in the 2003 Convention. It is a misconstrued idea,

spread among several writers early in the history of the Convention. They claimed that the term Cultural Heritage includes a “tangible” and “intangible” subdivision, the first dealing with the material and the second dealing the immaterial. This is the basis for this misconceived idea about binary opposition. As it is practised, cultural heritage has material and immaterial components, the latter of which is also made material through documentation, for instance, by filming or notating dance. Therefore, the whole 1972 Convention works with the material objects by identifying and solidifying the material elements into fixed authorised versions for transmission. The 2003 convention incorporates material components such as tools and implements into the immaterial practices transmitted from generation to generation. To dance a dance is an immaterial practice, and it includes the body as an instrument. A collection of dance costumes, a sheet of a dance notation, or a DVD sitting in an archive that never is used for purposes of dance practice is, however, only material heritage. The two paradigms are, therefore, totally distinct from each other.

The philosophical problem of binarism

We would also like to address the issue of binarism from a philosophical point of view since Iacono and Brown criticise the UNESCO convention by making “connections between the post-dualistic social science literature, which presents powerful critiques of Cartesianism.”²⁶ According to the authors, the three powerful critiques to which they want to pay attention belong to Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens. Each author is discussed in a separate section of the article.

To begin with, we wish to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that René Descartes himself presented the first most powerful critique of dualist Cartesianism. In his letter to Princess Elizabeth of Palatine, Bohemia, Descartes explains that he knows three primitive notions: the first is the soul, the second is the body and the third one is the notion of the union of the soul

and the body. Further, Descartes explains that these are actually conceived in three different ways:

The soul is conceived only by the pure intellect; body ... by the intellect aided by the imagination; and finally what belongs to the union of the soul and the body ... is known very clearly by the senses... it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation and from the study of things which exercise the imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body [28 June 1643].²⁷

In such a way, Descartes himself offers a rarely discussed solution to the Cartesian problem: the union of the body and the soul is a theoretically unachievable notion because our intellect and imagination are confused in this regard; according to Descartes, however, it is not a problem at all in practice, but rather a basic everyday experience. This is precisely the experience with the work of the UNESCO's Convention: a theoretical discussion to separate tangible from intangible would lead to another kind of cognition (intellect or imagination), but in the practical work with the Convention, as shown above, there is no need to distinguish or separate between the tangible and the intangible as such. The terms are only pointers towards two different points of departure. We would urge that researchers engaging in the discussion of the so-called Cartesian split particularly in relation to heritage discussions and the UNESCO conventions revisit Descartes to scrutinise his solution.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in fact, came to very similar conclusions in his investigations. He noted that some basic philosophical problems dissolve once one takes a practical stance, when, for example, one stops asking philosophical questions.²⁸ In the *Philosophical investigations*, he presents a brief summary of this meditation. This extremely important quote will be presented in full:

The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. – We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!²⁹

[parentheses and italic in original].

All kinds of systems based on binary logic are obvious examples of wishes for this “crystalline purity of logic” to which Wittgenstein refers. These are attempts to define terms to give them universal validity. Judith Lynne Hannah’s comprehensive attempt to define dance can serve as an example. Doing this, she is setting up dance in binary opposition to all phenomena which are not dance.³⁰ Even if she draws upon empirical material from many sources, her main tools are theories and models of the social sciences, which in Wittgenstein’s analogy is a slippery ice. When one gets on the rough ground – for Wittgenstein, it was researching everyday use of language – the artificial binary “clarity” consequently disappears. In fact, Wittgenstein finds the world populated by a diversity of practices, “language games,” as he says. These language games are deeply embedded in forms of life, such as setting up an international law or writing an academic article. As for defining dance, “getting on the rough ground” confronts all the different language games at play within different cultures. In one language game, a “dance” may be art or play; in other – religion or politics. Finally, a “dance” in a language game—such as Judson Dance Theater—may become a non-dance.

Relevant points from Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy

It seems to us that none of the three authors, Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu or Giddens, selected as examples in the article really wanted or managed to overcome binary logic in general. They targeted certain dualist metaphysical assumptions, but not binarism as such.

Taking on three gigantic philosophical efforts simultaneously (Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu or Giddens), Iacono and Brown missed the depth of each one of these. Take, for example, Merleau-Ponty. In their text, we find explanations of Merleau-Ponty's concepts and philosophical system based only on quotations from secondary sources. They do not let the philosopher himself speak. Only one book, the most widely known, *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002 [1945]), is referenced.³¹ Iacono and Brown omit Merleau-Ponty's lectures (2002 [1960])³² in which he directly touches upon the questions of tradition and heritage. The last of Merleau-Ponty's books, *The Visible and the Invisible*, was published post-mortem and was followed by a collection of working notes. They are undoubtedly more relevant for the issue under discussion, yet the authors building their theory on Merleau-Ponty's work have not taken this into account either.³³

In a note from July 1959, Merleau-Ponty, for example, reflects: "Dualism – – Philosophy. The problems posed in Ph[enomenology of] P[erception] are insoluble because I start there from the "consciousness" – "object" distinction."³⁴ In another place, he comments on Sartre's philosophy, which makes it more difficult to attribute the idea to one or another; "We are beyond monism and dualism because dualism has been pushed so far that the opposites, no longer in competition, are at rest the one against the other, coextensive with one another."³⁵ It is true that in this quotation, Merleau-Ponty expresses his wish to move beyond dualism, very similar to the intention of the authors of the article "Beyond binarism". Yet Merleau-Ponty's self-criticism provided in the quotations above clearly shows that he deems this move to be an extremely difficult act which, like a practising dancer, he tries to repeat again and again in order to reach more perfection. Moreover, in his late thoughts and unpublished manuscripts, he changes the discourse on body/mind into the couple of visible/invisible and tangible/intangible. Although the 2016 authors may not have been aware of or had access to these items, it is strange that the authors of "Beyond binarism" do not take into consideration

the book in which it is evident how Merleau-Ponty spends the last months of his life not only explicitly using the concepts tangible and intangible but also pondering on the constitution and continuity of tradition.

As one could see from the last lectures and meditations of Merleau-Ponty, there is a special place for the concepts of tangible and intangible. These concepts in themselves, however, as elaborated by the philosopher, have no relation to the usage of the same concepts used in the UNESCO 2003 Convention or the article “Beyond Binarism.”

Living heritage as biomorphic redundancy

The next term we want to scrutinise is the term ‘living heritage’ promoted by Iacono and Brown. It is not used in the Convention text, and the Aide-memoire uses it once: where the Subsidiary Body invites the States Parties ‘to make sure that documentary evidence to be provided under criterion R.5 relates clearly to living heritage and not, for example, to lists of monuments and places or of accessions in a museum.’³⁶ It is, however, loved and frequently used by NGOs and activists in the field.³⁷, and a close parallel to another popular term *living tradition*.³⁸ These are actually inherently binary concepts at their roots, the antonym being *dead heritage* or *dead tradition*.

The expression is biomorphic that is ascribing an organic form or attributes to a being or thing, which is not human or organic. Such is a cultural heritage which is not living in the sense of being a biological organism. This is, of course, a frequently used expression colloquially, a kind of metaphoric adaptation of common words. The problem is, however, the function it is given in discourses, and the lack of stringency and consequence it represents. Does living heritage mean practised heritage, which is probably the intention in the quotation above? In that case, it is a redundancy, because the main criterium for Intangible Cultural Heritage is that it is practised, in opposition to old objects in museums, or recordings that are

not used as part of a practice. So, either something is (part of) an ICH element because it is practised, or it is not.

We may also ask if it is pertinent and appropriate to characterise Egyptian Pyramids as dead cultural heritage, since according to the definition above they are not living. Even if the Pyramids may not be part of a practice, and therefore not ICH, they play a prominent role in our consciousness about history, and as a target for tourism. Why would it be proper to call them not living, that is dead? Actually, hardly anyone does, and the term living heritage is reduced to a value judgement similar to authentic, that the Convention has banned. When used, the concept of living seems to function as an attempt to divide ICH elements into more or less living, whereas live and dead are antonyms and dichotomies and not two extremes on a range of possibilities. Boasting of one's own ICH as living opens a claim that competing elements may not be as alive, that some of them are of less quality and value.

Iacono and Brown continue their argument on the premise that the Convention is based upon binary oppositions, without referring to any point in the convention text that supports that premise, and while pursuing a lengthy discussion on the potential meanings and problematic connotations that the term 'intangible' can have. The discussion disregards the actual definition of the full term Intangible Cultural Heritage, even if citing it. In conclusion, they present an alternative to the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

We define the concept of 'Living cultural heritage as embodied by individuals, in connections with the artefacts they produce and use and the environment they interact with and as expressed through practices, activities and performances.'³⁹

Here the heritage aspect is left out of the definition and therefore does not have any function. The term, in reality, is just "living culture". Otherwise, it is nothing else than a paraphrase of the definition in the 2003 Convention. The result is that the primary motivation of the

Convention is ignored, and the intended prioritisation of a specific part of the world culture is totally lost.

The problem of bio-morphism in social sciences

We also want to point out that many scholars have raised numerous important questions regarding the usage of bio-morphisms in social sciences such as an ‘organic state’ or ‘a living tradition’. We will not delve into the vibrant field of social ontology⁴⁰, which raises the question, “what kind of being is a social institution?”. The question is fundamental, since an answer to it governs the way we think about banks and money, universities and books, choirs and songs, festivals and dances. The whole discussion, however, is too broad and complicated, and it would lead us aside from the very centre of the problem we want to address. Therefore, we will provide only those arguments that are the most obvious in the current context.

Karl Raimund Popper, an Austrian philosopher, pondering how the Second World War was possible and what brought humanity to it, concluded that partly the enhancement of the concept of the organic state has to be blamed.⁴¹ He took on board the concepts of “closed” and “open” and applied them to different kinds of societies. Popper critically examined several types of societies and identified the main sources of totalitarianism: Fascism as military action took on itself a bio-political task to fight against “confused democracies.” Marxism also, as ideology likewise engaged with the ideal centralised organic society. According to Popper, the science of politics was obsessed with the idea of the state (institution) as an imitation of a (living) organism. It started with Plato and ended with the communist and the fascist ideologies.

In such an organism, each organ has its own function, which serves the totality. Thus, Popper argues, a totalitarian state is inspired by the idea of an organic state. It is easy to see that the politicians and the state rulers would correspond to the head, the executive and the military

power to the hands, the nourishment services of the state to the stomach, etc. One could speculate that the legs of the body in such an organic society would perhaps be shared among rikshaws or Uber and dancers. Showing how the concept of society as analogous to life forms is detrimental to and misleading from deep analysis of the nature of social institutions and the core values of democracy, Popper forces us to clearly see all consequences of the analogy and take sides on this account. For example, in discourses related to dance history, the figure of Rudolf von Laban comes immediately into the discussion. Marion Kant thoroughly discusses his bio-political views regarding dance. Here are the words of Laban as quoted in the book *Hitler's dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich*: “Here it can only be briefly remarked that racial characteristics stamp themselves in the movements, especially in the rhythm, in the posture of the body and the use of the body parts.”⁴² For Laban, dancing is motivated, if not caused, by biological characteristics. Therefore all the arguments he constructed stemmed from biomorphic assumptions and instantiated straightforward racism. Whether they intended it or not, the authors of the article we discuss unavoidably stepped into a politically sensitive field of discourse. They want us to use the term, which has attracted a massive controversy in the social sciences. It is not our aim to take sides in these political debates between democratic or totalitarian theories of society. Yet, we would argue that avoiding bio-morphic metaphors allows us to avoid many false judgements about social entities such as communities sharing certain dance practices. Here we can point, for example, to the works of Bruno Latour, who challenges us to understand communities of practice not as living social essences, but as groups of persons that associate and disassociate for various reasons.⁴³ We might add a link here to Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour's debate as a relevant digression.⁴⁴ Without going into the essence of the debate, it is enough here to notice that neither Bourdieu nor Giddens would in any way support bio-morphisms in sociology. In our view, by mixing forms of nature and forms of society, scholars should not make mistakes

even if practitioners make them. Scholars should avoid controversial concepts even if the people from the ICH communities might claim that their traditions are living and authentic.

UNESCO, for sure, operates in the arena of international politics, and strives to be sensitive both politically and philosophically to the words they use and to clarifying their intended meaning.

The concept of innovation

The continuation reveals that a central point for Iacono and Brown is to produce a concept that includes all kinds of dance. It is not clear whether they assume that the Convention has the same intention. The Convention states explicitly in the preamble that the intention is to support the cultural diversity of the world and counteract the uniformity created by globalisation. The work towards the Convention in the 1980s and 1990s aimed to safeguard folklore. The Convention, however, ended up with many broad formulations and few strict delimitations, but the original intentions and the spirit of the Convention are, in our opinion, not left behind. Expressions of traditional or folk culture still have priority, and most practitioners of such practices would say that they want to keep their practices unchanged. There will still be minor changes for each time a practice is used or recreated, which is the term in the Convention. This attitude is totally opposed to the constant push and craving for innovation in contemporary mainstream art and culture. It is an attitude of wanting to keep the continuity, stability and faithfulness of a practice that needs protection from the main-stream uncontested demand for innovation. For that reason, it is an inconsistency that artistic expressions that do not want to give up their primary intention of radical innovation want to relate their practices to the concept of ICH. The authors clearly demonstrate that they do not see this point:

At the same time, dance is fluid and flexible because people involved have the freedom or agency to innovate, even while connected to traditions. However, the amount of agency

that individuals have in innovating the dance, as well as the relationship between traditions and how individuals experience them, varies depending on the society and the genre of dance in question. For example, the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance (...) are (sic). based on traditions that have been kept as unchanged as possible for hundreds of years, with very little space for innovation. At the other end of the spectrum, there are forms of dance which are very open to experimentation, such as post-modern dance, or genres that initially appeared in hybrid form (...) such as (...) modern American tribal belly dance.⁴⁵

It is not clear whether this argumentation is a misunderstanding of ICH, or an attempt to define a totally different alternative. The UNESCO Convention is meant to safeguard *continuity* of practices. Yet from the examples provided in the quotation above (e. g. post-modern dance) one may assume that the practices which in their very origin have an intention for radical innovation and *discontinuity* should also be embraced as ICH. Moreover, the Convention and the connected material do not use the term innovation. The Convention is made to support the practices that resist intentional innovation, even if changes will occur. The Convention was made as a modest tool to safeguard traditional and mostly local practices and arts against the sweeping power of globalisation and related processes of commodification, international exchange and international tourism.

Heritage as un-restricted by geographical boundaries

Further, the authors state:

Finally, connecting dance with the broader heritage discourses through the model of living heritage will allow dance to be elevated in value as a vital part of human world heritage, but on its own terms, without being forced into pre-existing heritage models, none of which make justice to dance in its entirety.⁴⁶

This sentence seems to bring out latent neo-colonialist ideas. How and by whom can “dance in its entirety” be conceived, and even more, how can this phenomenon be conceived as having “its own terms”, which are in opposition to “pre-existing heritage models”? This conceptualisation of “dance in its entirety” seems to express the world view of contemporary dance, which takes on itself to represent just ‘dance in its entirety.’ At the same time, these hegemonic forces define themselves as the only artistically valid dance form, names it ‘dance’, defines ‘its terms’ and ignore all other kinds of dance.

UNESCO comments: "Balancing the benefits of integrating into a globalised world against protecting the uniqueness of local culture requires a careful approach. [...] Recognition and respect for the diversity of cultures also create the conditions for mutual understanding, dialogue and peace."⁴⁷

However, Iacono and Brown are positioning themselves in the middle of a discourse that promotes ideas of globalisation.

Finally, an important aspect this perspective of cultural heritage can illuminate, which is beyond the space of this essay, is the increasingly rapid transmission and transformation of dance as living cultural heritage as it takes place across social and cultural time and space, unrestricted by geographical boundaries. This will be the subject of future enquiry.⁴⁸

We argue that it would be essential and beneficial, at least for the purpose of the 2003 Convention, to define practice as unified in time and space. For this purpose, Bakka and Erlie proposed to use the term Event of Practice.⁴⁹ The term is made to cover the situations in which practices are realised: a dance party, a dance ritual or a dance performance are examples of dance events. We suggest more elements to its definition: the event is delimited in time, having a start and an end, and it is delimited in space by the reach of the participant's

perception. A practice can manifest itself in one event, which has a name, and which is repeated over and over again. All events of a practice are considered to be of the same kind, even if there will be differences from one time to the next. An example would be the Norwegian bonfires at Midsummer's Eve, where the people of small communities might meet for fun and dance next to the fire. A practice can also consist of a long series of events, each of which would have a more or less different function for the totality of the practice, as for long term work tasks such as building a boat.

People who do not carefully examine the concept of practice in light of the Convention seem to have a hard time understanding that a specific dance, such as a polka, is not the practice; the dancing of the polka is. When people dance a polka (a realisation of the polka), it happens at a specific time and in a specific space, and it belongs to a spatiotemporal continuum. It would be more in tune with the spirit of the Convention to say that even if more realisations in different places could be synchronised and coordinated via the internet, the units making up ICH elements are events of practice that function independently of the internet or similar tools. Therefore an event or more events of practice are the substance of practice, and we propose to understand each event as delimited in time and space and thus totally concrete to our perception. Large populations of the world may practice something that they label belly dancing or tango, or any other global dance form, and performers and researchers may have agreed to see it as a cohesive phenomenon under an umbrella of the same dance concept. The emphasis, however, would remain on an imagined “cloud” of mostly unrelated and scattered occurrences of the same concept of dance (such as tango or belly dance). The principle of the unity of its practice: the actual dancing of belly dance at a specific time and a specific place as part of the same continuum is disregarded. The concept of dance as a global phenomenon is evasive and very hard to define as opposed to the coherent series of events of practice. A practice taken in this meaning is easy to grasp because the practitioners will think of it as a

repeatable set of actions and often conceptualise it through a local name. The group of people associated with the same continuum of practice, and each practitioner will have ownership of their realisations. In the imagined phenomenon of "a dance", all issues of origin and authenticity, value and ownership will be irrelevant issues in relation to safeguarding. Safeguarding is helping a practice to live on where it is already functioning, not to sell it to the world, so that it replaces more vulnerable practices. Therefore, the attribution of events of practice to what the UNESCO Convention sees as an ICH element is the basis for actual diversity.

Iacono and Brown seemingly want to defend and promote "the increasingly rapid transmission and transformation of dance as living cultural heritage as it takes place across social and cultural time and space, unrestricted by geographical boundaries."⁵⁰ From the point of view of the quotation above, one may consider Coca-Cola, the symbol of globalisation, as an eligible candidate for ICH. It has a long tradition and it has been constantly innovating its brand. One may even claim that its advertising strategy has shaped some aspects of Christmas traditions. Yet the inconsistency in such thinking becomes immediately obvious once one remembers the preamble of the Convention: "the processes of globalization and social transformation, alongside the conditions they create for renewed dialogue among communities, also give rise, as does the phenomenon of intolerance, to grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular owing to a lack of resources for safeguarding such heritage."⁵¹ It may seem as if the authors of the 2016 article think that dance art in no way contributes to these processes of globalisation leading to "deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage".

To look at dance as unlimited in time and space is to take it out of its binding concrete realisations and turn it into an object that can be appropriated by agents on the world market. These agents look at heritage as the set of patterns that the people who transmit them from generation to generation, cannot copyright. Traditional dances can be taken away, exploited and marketed.⁵² Unintentionally or intentionally, the promotion of the global view of the 'living cultural heritage' emphasises the overarching value and importance of the global market.

We hope that we have managed to explain the difference between the two nearly opposite approaches to culture and arts as represented by Intangible cultural heritage from the 2003 Convention and the concept of Living Cultural Heritage as proposed by Iacono and Brown. The first approach aims to strengthen and give value to the cultural diversity and local expressions of the world, bound in time and space continuum of their practices. The second aims at marketing dances as a global, commodified, shared culture, removed from traditional locations of practice and local communities, belonging in the hands of the mobile dance artists in the cosmopolitan world. Iacono and Brown seem to be unaware of the criticism levelled at colonialism. They seem to consider the enormous riches of dance in the world to be material for market-oriented cosmopolitan artists, contemporary dance, or ideologies. With the intense debates on and efforts towards decolonisation in the years after the publication of the article we discuss, such issues have been given a much stronger focus recently.

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Notes

¹ The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for his/her comments.

² The Convention was signed in 2003, and by 2019 178 of the world's countries have ratified the Convention, and given this specific kind of heritage a focussed and distinctive role. In some central countries that have chosen not to ratify, including UK, USA, Australia, Canada and Russia and in some academic circles, the

specificity of the Convention seem less understood. UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, (Paris: 2003a), p. 1.

³ László Felföldi, 'Formation of the Legal Framework for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in UNESCO: How Traditional Dance is Part of Intangible Heritage.', in *Transmitting Dance as Cultural Heritage & Dance and Religion: Proceedings of the 25th Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology.*, Kuala Lumpur edn (Kuala Lumpur: 2009), pp. 9-10., Georgiana (Author) Gore and Egil (Author) Bakka, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage: Agency and/Or Critical Distance', in *Transmitting Dance as Cultural Heritage & Dance and Religion. Proceedings of the 25th Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology*, ed. by Mohammad Nor Mohammad Anis, Elsie Ivancich Dunin and Anne von Bibra Wharton (Kuala Lumpur: Cultural Centre, University of Malaya, 2009), pp. 15-21., Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. the Tongan Lakalaka: Sung Speeches with Choreographed Movements*, https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/MUSIC165/Intagible%20Heritage/Online%20Article_Kaeppler%20Safeguarding%20Intagible%20Cultural%20Heritage_Lakalaka.pdf edn, Regional Meeting on the Promotion of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for Countries of Europe and Northern America, (2004), p. 15., Wim van Zanten, 'Constructing New Terminology for Intangible Cultural Heritage', *Museum International*, 56 (2004), 36-44., Tvrtko Zebec, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage and Activities of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research', in *Izazov Tradicijske Kulture: Svečani Zbornik Za Zoricu Vitez* (Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, 2009).

⁴ Egil Bakka, 'Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage - the Spirit and the Letter of the Law.', *Musikk Og Tradisjon*, 29 (2015), 135-169.

⁵ Nicholas Adell and others, 'Between Imagined Communities and Communities of Practice', *Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen*, (2015)., Susan Keitumetse, 'UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Heritage: Practical Implications for Heritage Management Approaches in Africa', *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 61 (2006), 166-171 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20474924>>., Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production', *Museum International*, Volume 56 (2004), 52-65.

⁶ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, 'Beyond Binarism: Exploring a Model of Living Cultural Heritage for Dance', *Dance Research*, 34 (2016), 84-105.

⁷ We use an analogy here referring to disciplinary contexts as stages, and the texts discussed as plays.

⁸ Page 102.

⁹ Page 102.

¹⁰ The authors signal the ambition of "connecting dance with the broader heritage discourses," through a model they present. They claim that they can do that on dance's "own terms" and "make justice to dance in its entirety" in contrast to what has been done before. We disagree with the idea that terms or models can be found that are valid for all the worlds in the enormous field conventionally labelled dance. We cannot see that there are pre-existing heritage models with such ideas, and the authors refer to none.

¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated C. K. Ogden, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & CO., New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1922 (in English).

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. 3rd edn, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1998 [1953].

¹³ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co., 1933).

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. 3rd edn, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1998 [1953], p. 232.

¹⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, , 52-65.

¹⁶ UNESCO, *Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*
, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00026> edn, 2014 vols (Paris: UNESCO, 2014)., UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, *Aide-Mémoire for Completing a Nomination to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*, (Paris: UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁷ Jo Littler, 'Intangible Roles: Theory, Policy, Practice and Intangible Cultural Heritage', *Ethnologies*, 36 (2014), 93-105.

¹⁸ Charlotte Svendler Nielsen,, Stephanie Burridge,, *Dance Education Around the World : Perspectives on Dance, Young, People and Change* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015), in /z-wcorg/.

¹⁹ Valdimar Tr Hafstein, 'Intangible Heritage as a List: From Masterpieces to Representation', in *Intangible Heritage* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 107-125.

²⁰ Howard, Keith, 'The Life and Death of Music as East Asian Intangible Cultural Heritage', in *International Perspectives on Translation, Education and Innovation in Japanese and Korean Societies* (Springer, 2018), p. 43

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- ²¹ UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, , p. 1, Wend Wendland, 'An Insider's Perspective', in *Protecting Traditional Knowledge: The WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore*, ed. by Daniel F. Robinson, Ahmed Abdel-Latif and Pedro Roffe (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 3, pp. no pages.
- ²² Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, , 84-105. P 84
- ²³ UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006> edn, 2010 vols (Paris: UNESCO, 2003b). Italics added.
- ²⁴ UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, (Paris: 1972).
- ²⁵ .Egil Bakka, , 135-169. P.138
- ²⁶ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, , 84-105 p. 90.
- ²⁷ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 3, the Correspondence*. John Cottingham, Dugald Murdoch, Robert Stoothoff & Anthony Kenny (eds.). Cambridge University Press (1991), p.227.
- ²⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 51.
- ²⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 46.
- ³⁰ Judith Lynne Hanna, *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- ³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty., *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London and New York. 2002 [1945].
- ³² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, Including Texts by Edmund Husserl, edited by Leonard Lawlor with Bettina Bergo, Northwestern University Press, 2002.
- ³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Followed by Working Notes. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- ³⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.200.
- ³⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.55.
- ³⁶ Aide-memoire point 90.
- ³⁷ Michael Joslin, *Our Living Heritage* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1998), in /z-wcorg/, University of the South Pacific.,Institute of Pacific Studies., *Levuka : Living Heritage* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific : Levuka Historical & Cultural Society, 2001), in /z-wcorg/.
- ³⁸ Tristram Potter Coffin, *Our Living Traditions: An Introduction to American Folklore* (Basic Books, 1968).
- ³⁹ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, , 84-105. P. 90
- ⁴⁰ John R. Searle, 1995, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: Free Press.
- ⁴¹ Karl Popper, Alan Ryan, Gombich, E. H. (2013 [1945]). *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press
- ⁴² Lilian Karina, Marion Kant. *Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich*. Berghahn Books: New York/Oxford, 2003, p.271.
- ⁴³ Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. 2005, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ⁴⁴ Elif Kale-Lostuvali, 'Two Sociologies of Science in Search of Truth: Bourdieu Versus Latour', *Social Epistemology*, 30 (2016), 273-296.
- ⁴⁵ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, , 84-105. P. 101-102.
- ⁴⁶ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, 'Beyond Binarism: Exploring a Model of Living Cultural Heritage for Dance', *Dance Research*, 34 (2016), 84-105. P.102
- ⁴⁷ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/the-future-we-want-the-role-of-culture/globalization-and-culture/>.
- ⁴⁸ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, 'Beyond Binarism: Exploring a Model of Living Cultural Heritage for Dance', *Dance Research*, 34 (2016), 84-105. p. 103.
- ⁴⁹ Tone Erlien and Egil Bakka, 'Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: "Events of Practice"—A New Strategy for Museums?', *Santander Art and Culture Law Review*, 2017 (2018), 135-156.
- ⁵⁰ Valeria Lo Iacono and David HK Brown, , 84-105 p. 103
- ⁵¹ UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006> edn, 2010 vols (Paris: UNESCO, 2003b).
- ⁵² Kalu, Kenneth and Toyin Falola, *Exploitation and Misrule in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Springer, 2018)