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Dancing Precarity

A transdisciplinary study of the working and living conditions in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin

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Preamble

The roots of this doctoral dissertation date back to 2010, when Prof. Dr. Katharina Pewny asked me at the end of my last oral exam of my Master in Theater Studies at Ghent University if I would be interested in applying for a research project as a PhD candidate. I had already arranged a voluntary internship at K3 – Zentrum für Choreographie|Tanzplan Hamburg, thus I told her I was interested but that I desired to expand my work experience within the performing arts sector first. Away from paperbacks and hardcovers, I was ready to explore new territories and to delve into the brave new world of work. As a production assistant for the weekly professional training program and the residency program at the choreographic center in Hamburg, I often lend an ear to the many conversations among the contemporary dance artists in the communal kitchen during lunchtime. Those exchanges often dealt with their financial concerns and their chase after funding. At the end of my internship in May 2011, I assisted with the organization of a symposium curated by dance artist Angela Guerreiro entitled *Surviving Dance –Kunst/Wirtschaft/Politik*. The event engaged artists, audiences and institutions and was intended to be a platform for a discussion of the working conditions in dance in the context of the completion of the funding program Tanzplan Deutschland. After my first footsteps wandering into the brave new world of work, I returned from the journey to Hamburg in consternation. I was shocked by the precarious working conditions in the contemporary dance profession. Nonetheless, I was also curious: I wanted to dig deeper into the raised issues during the symposium and explore not only the impact of the working conditions on the dance artists' lives, but also on the work they make. However, I questioned whether the conventional methods I had learned during my studies would suffice to conduct this research. I envisioned a more sociological approach to the matter stemming from an urge to engage more directly with the dance scene itself. This vision brought me to Prof. Dr. Rudi Laermans, who, as a professor of sociology, was also one of the main witnesses of the development of contemporary dance in Flanders since the 1980's. He would therefore be the person *par excellence* to engage in such an interdisciplinary project. After meeting Prof. Dr. Laermans over a cup of coffee in Leuven, I was excited not only to pursue an academic career devoted to the performing arts, but

to immerse myself in the brave new world of the social sciences as well. Hence, the research project *Choreographies of Precariousness* was born. Finally, Prof. Dr. Christel Stalpaert, with expertise about the cultural-historical aspects of dance, complemented the supervising team quite suitably.

However, I was not yet satisfied with the work experience I had gained in Hamburg. I sought to engage more in the performing arts sector in Belgium while writing the application for research funding. I ended up working at the contemporary dance school P.A.R.T.S. as a production manager, organizing rehearsals, events, and tours for the students. I was very fortunate to have come across this job opportunity as it truly enabled me to establish a whole network and to gain the trust of many dance artists and dance institutions, which certainly facilitated the setup of my research in Brussels and in Berlin. After roughly three years of working on and off at P.A.R.T.S., it was time to return to academia. With Prof. Dr. Pewny, Prof. Dr. Laermans, and Prof. Dr. Stalpaert, I could count on a wonderfully interdisciplinary team behind me and together we explored new horizons between performing arts scholarship and the social sciences. I am especially grateful for the support of my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Katharina Pewny, who has made this research project possible. She has fully devoted herself to the project and I have felt nothing but encouragement and recognition. I am also more than thankful for the many critical yet always constructive comments that Prof. Dr. Laermans provided throughout the years. Since the onset of the project, he has certainly been a navigator directing my course in the unacquainted open waters of sociology. I am proud that I have landed somewhere at the intersection of performance and dance studies, art and labor sociology, and cultural and urban studies. I also want to thank Prof. Dr. Christel Stalpaert for her insightful feedback and her full engagement in the events we organized in the frame of the project. I feel tremendously blessed to have had such a smooth and fulfilling collaboration with all three supervisors and I particularly want to express my gratitude to them for making this process so enjoyable. In addition, I want to thank Prof. Dr. Pascal Gielen and Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter, who were part of the Doctoral Advisory Committee, for their guidance and their positive evaluation of my yearly progress. Prof. Dr. Brandstetter's hospitable invitation to participate in the weekly dance studies seminar ensured that I did not lose contact with the academic context during my period of fieldwork in Berlin. In that frame, the many enlightening conversations with Anne Schuh contributed to shaping a structure in my qualitative findings.

While research and writing are often very solitary efforts, I truly appreciate the solidary efforts of my fellow researchers who always show genuine interest in each other's work and well-being. I want to thank all my colleagues at S:PAM for creating such a pleasant work environment. I would like to express my thanks to Simon Leenknecht in particular for being my right-hand man throughout the research project. Together we have dedicated many hours to studying statistics for dummies and exploring the ins and outs of SPSS. Together with Prof. Dr. Katharina Pewny, we have organized a doctoral

school interuniversity specialist course on *Art and Capitalism: Art as Work* with Prof. Dr. Bojana Kunst and the two-day symposium at CAMPO entitled *DANCE NOW: Work with(out) Boundaries* with Prof. Dr. Mark Franko, Prof. Dr. Gabriele Klein and Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter as keynote speakers. Thereafter, we teamed up as guest editors for a special issue of *Dance Research Journal* on “Work with(out) Boundaries: Precarity and Dance”, also with Prof. Dr. Katharina Pewny and with Prof. Dr. Rebekah Kowal. It certainly merits mention that Simon has delivered brilliant editing work and has always been a pleasure to work with. However, I also want to thank my colleague Sofie de Smet, with whom I discovered the unexplored territories of in-depth interviewing, coding transcriptions and the systematic analysis of qualitative data; Leonie Persyn, my loyal neighbor in the office during the final phase of my research, who was always prepared to absorb my work-related tension; Dr. Jeroen Coppens, with whom I regularly shared train delays in the commute between Antwerp and Ghent and also occasionally a far too early traffic jam on the E17 when yet another train strike did not suit our schedule; and many, many more.

This research would not have been possible without the help and support of many institutions. I want to express my gratitude to Flanders Arts Institute, in particular to Dr. Delphine Hesters, for helping me set up the survey in Brussels and for proofreading the survey reports. I especially thank wpZimmer, in particular Patrick Sterckx (now: DE Studio), Elke Decoker (now: WorkSpaceBrussels) and Carine Meulders, for their support with the survey setup and for their very kind and generous offer to lend me a flexdesk in their office and trust me with a key. I truly enjoyed the warm atmosphere and the delicious lunches shared among the staff and the resident artists. I am also grateful for the devotion from Tanzbüro Berlin to the project, in particular for Simone Willeit’s (now: Uferstudios) many efforts to improve the Berlin survey and expose the call for participation in the Berlin dance scene. I also thank Béla Bisom for helping me understand the ins and outs of the German freelancing system. Furthermore, I thank P.A.R.T.S., in particular Theo Van Rompay and Steven De Belder, for trusting me as the school’s production manager at the very beginning of my career and for supporting me further after I exchanged that position for one at the university. I really do hope all these collaborations will continue to last in the coming years. Lastly, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) for giving me this research opportunity. Thanks to their generous support, I was not a precarious worker myself these past four years.

Most significantly, this research would not have been possible without my fourteen case study informants from the Brussels and Berlin contemporary dance scenes. I am so grateful for their willingness to participate in the project and I could not be more thankful for their generous time and effort devoted to this project alongside the myriad other projects on their agendas. I therefore want to dedicate this dissertation to all fourteen of them, because I literally could not have done this work without them. In particular, I would like to thank the dance artists whose work I discuss in detail in the dissertation;

Igor Koruga, Liz Kinoshita, Eleanor Bauer, Michael Helland, and Jeremy Wade. I often dreaded reading their feedback and comments more than reading those of my supervisors, but I believe their input at every stage of the research has only improved the quality of my work. I also thank the many contemporary dance artists that I have crossed paths with since 2010, Kinga, Alma, Hendrik, David, Eveline, Moya, Erik, Rosa, Anja, Dennis, Lea, Hermann, Shai, Kareth, and Jozefien among many more. I feel privileged to work at the intersection of two fields, the performing arts sector and the academic world, in which work relationships often become friend relationships and vice versa. I therefore consider many of the aforementioned people also my friends. However, I particularly want to thank my closest friends for constantly reminding me that life and work are not always interwoven. In no particular order, I thank Emilie, João, Stefanie, Sara, Michiel, Chloé, Eva, Dimi, Florence, Lore, Sam, Renée, Fientje, Liese, Sylvie, Wim C., and many more.

Naturally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my family for always supporting me whichever path I chose to follow. I thank my grandmother and grandfather, who I believe have infected me with the performing arts microbe. In the absence of available alternatives, I used to watch *The Sound Of Music* every weekday after school for half a decade in their home. I also would like to thank my aunt Bie, who regularly took me to see a play in the city of Antwerp, and who is therefore at least partly responsible for my career trajectory. I thank my father, in whose footsteps I now seem to follow, although clearly not as a PhD in mathematics. I thank my mother, who has always let me follow my heart although this surely must not always have been an easy thing to do. I want to thank my brother for making growing up so easy and I want to congratulate him and his newlywed bride. Saving the best for last, I am more than thankful for the everlasting support of my partner Wim, who was so brave to join me when I moved to Berlin for a year to conduct my fieldwork. I really appreciate the mornings he let my alarm snooze for half an hour and the many coffees he made when I was working from home. I want to thank him for always being there to support me in everything I do. Lastly, I want to thank my faithful cat Astra for keeping me company on the many lonesome days spent at my writing desk.

Annelies Van Assche
Ghent, September 30, 2018

List of Images

Cover photo: *Streamlined* (2014) by Igor Koruga. © Photo by Tomislav Sporiš

1. Image from program folder of the symposium *Surviving Dance - Kunst/Wirtschaft/Politik* (2011), curated by Angela Guerreiro
 2. Image from my desk: books and fieldnotes
 3. Image from *VOLCANO* (2014) by Liz Kinoshita. © Photo by Giannina Ottiker
 4. Image from *No Money, No Love* (2002) by Jochen Roller. © Photo by Simon Friedemann
 5. Image from *Streamlined* (2014) by Igor Koruga. © Photo by Tomislav Sporiš
 6. Image from *10 Journeys to a Place where Nothing happens** (2013) by Maike Lond. © Photo by Rania Moslam and Grits Ragelis
- Intermezzo A: *45 Minutes*, song text from *VOLCANO* (2014) by Liz Kinoshita, Clinton Stringer, Salka Ardal Rosengren, and Justin F. Kennedy
7. Screenshot from *Crisis Karaoke* (2016) by Jeremy Wade
 8. Image from *Only Mine Alone* (2016) by Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević. © Photo by Vladimir Opsenica
- Intermezzo B: monologue “So Much To Do”, excerpt from the performance text from *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck. Text by Eleanor Bauer.
9. Drawing from *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck. © Drawing by Eleanor Bauer

Table of Contents

Preamble	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Probing Precarity	7
1.1 Popularization of the precariat	10
1.2 Precarious labor in post-Fordism	15
1.3 Artistic work and self-precariation	18
1.4 Work without boundaries	23
1.5 Coping with the trauma of precarity	25
1.6 Mayday, Mayday, Mayday!	26
1.7 Performing precarity	29
Chapter 2 Field of Inquiry and Methodology	35
2.1 ‘Guinea pigs for the new economy’	35
2.2 Dance and/as work	37
2.3 Social sciences meets dance studies	42
2.4 Field of inquiry: Brussels and Berlin	46
2.5 Quantitative study: mapping challenges	50
2.5.1 Situating precarity in two dance capitals	57
2.5.2 Income	62
2.5.3 Motives and satisfaction	67
2.6 Qualitative study	69
2.6.1 Case study informants	69
2.6.2 Ethnographic fieldwork	72
Part 1 Lifestyle and Survival Artists	81
Chapter 3 ‘Lifestyle Artists’	83
3.1 A bohemian work ethic: being an artist as a life form	83
3.2 ‘Human time’	88
3.3 The interweaving	91
3.4 ‘Personal-professional confusion’	93

Chapter 4	Survival Artists	99
4.1	‘Tactics of the weak’	99
4.2	Internal subsidization	102
4.3	‘Heart jobs’ and ‘wallet jobs’	107
4.4	Teaching dance, a sustainable practice	109
4.5	Active performer	112
4.6	The barter system: a ‘tit-for-tat economy’	116
4.7	Buffers, cushions and networks of support	119
4.8	Tactical pieces and ‘precarity solos’	127
4.9	Solo-tude?	134
 Part 2 The Fast, the Mobile and the Flexible		137
Chapter 5	The Fast	139
5.1	Chasing your own tail	141
5.2	Chasing funding	144
5.2.1	Direct funding: the project	144
5.2.2	Too low or too late	150
5.2.3	Tactics of resilience.....	156
5.2.4	‘Betting on several horses’	159
5.2.5	Indirect funding: the Belgian artist status	160
5.3	Chasing programmers.....	166
5.3.1	Personal branding and self-promotion.....	168
5.3.2	‘Weird extended courtships’.....	176
5.3.3	The programming paradoxes	179
5.3.4	Communication tactics.....	181
5.3.5	Sharks and Vultures.....	184
5.4	Chasing papers	187
5.4.1	<i>Bureaucrazy</i> : freelancing systems in comparison.....	187
5.4.2	Dole control and ‘hacky ways’	195
5.5	Creative fire alarm.....	202
Chapter 6	The Mobile	209
6.1	Mobility in time and space	209
6.2	Indirect funding: the residency	211
6.3	Uninterrupted work	217
6.4	Unconditional work	218
6.5	The good, the bad, and the residency.....	221
6.6	A precarity trap?.....	225
6.7	On the road	227
6.8	Liquid dance communities	229
Chapter 7	The Flexible	237
7.1	Flexible accumulation.....	237
7.1.1	Polyvalent: ‘Being an amateur in everything’	239

7.1.2	Flexible: ‘Permanently on-call’	244
7.1.3	Adaptable: survival of the fittest	245
7.2	Flexible performativity	249
7.3	The fast, the mobile, and the flexible in <i>VOLCANO</i>	253
7.4	Temporary dance artists?	260
 Part 3 Burning out and Slowing Down		265
 Chapter 8 Burning out		267
8.1	Physical precarity: the vulnerable body	268
8.2	Mental precarity: the vulnerable mind	274
8.3	<i>Crisis Karaoke</i>	276
8.4	An ‘epidemic of panic’	281
8.5	The artist burnout: ‘manic depression’	286
8.6	The project burnout: diffusion’s delusion.....	294
8.7	‘Only mine alone’?	296
 Chapter 9 Slowing Down		303
9.1	Exodus to academia?	303
9.2	Recharging and refueling	306
9.3	‘It’s time for <i>RECESS</i> ’	308
9.4	‘There is no escape’	312
 Conclusion Precarity’s Plural Character		319
Collective care		321
Questions of quality.....		326
On shortcomings and future paths		329
 English Summary		333
 Dutch Summary		337
 Bibliography		343
 Annexes		363
Annex 1: tables		365
Annex 2: the Artist’s Social Fund - Künstlersozialkasse		375
Annex 3: informed consent		379
Annex 4: overview of interviews and fieldnotes.....		381
Annex 5: Nvivo coding tables and charts		387
Annex 6: minimum wage scales in the collective labor agreement for performing arts		391
Annex 7: logbook excerpts		393
Annex 8: NVivo coding schemes Brussels and Berlin		397

Introduction

In line with the description of ‘the new spirit of capitalism’ by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005), the artist performs immaterial labor on a flexible basis within the context of temporary projects, a situation that also demands persistent networking in order to ascertain future work opportunities. In 2002, dance scholar Mark Franko was probably one of the first to address the convergence between dance and work with the release of his book *The Work of Dance. Labor, Movement and Identity in the 1930s* (2002), which offers new tools for dance scholars to study the relation of politics to aesthetics. Following up on these two seminal works, I wanted to explore what is particular about contemporary dance artists today and their relation to work and how it ties in with more general issues of the project-based labor market and neoliberal society at large. I proceeded my research from the hypothesis that precarity is reflected in the work and lives of the artists as well as in the aesthetics and subject matter of their artistic work. Within this frame, I set out to examine the extent of precarity within the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin, which both attract a high number of contemporary dance artists from elsewhere in Europe, the US and beyond. As I encountered a noticeable lack of research on the values, motivations and tactics involved in contemporary dance artists’ trajectories, I desired to investigate the matter. For example, we do not know to what extent precarity is intertwined with motives, such as the desire to avoid working within hierarchically structured dance companies or to engage in projects that allow democratic forms of decision-making. Therefore, this study primarily questions if and in what ways the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists affects the working process and the end product. In addition, I inquired into how the project-based regime, in which contemporary dance artists are largely dependent on conditional funding for financial and infrastructural support, takes its toll on their social and private life and their physical and mental state. Or in other words: to what extent is precarity in its plural forms (socio-economic, mental, physical, etc.) intertwined with working on art?

The book consists of three parts, preceded by two chapters that contextualize the research. The first chapter “Probing Precarity” forms the starting point of my research. In this chapter, I introduce the discourse on precarity, the precariat, and precarious labor.

In the second chapter, I outline my field of inquiry and present the methodology I have developed for this research. The methodology essentially combines methods from dance studies and the social sciences. Based on a quantitative study, the chapter provides an empirically grounded status quo of the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin. In addition, I unravel the qualitative approach I have followed within the research project. In this phase of my research, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork in both cities to explore more in-depth the multidimensional precarity and more complex issues the survey findings revealed. In order to do this properly, I spent one year interviewing and observing fourteen case study informants in the Brussels and Berlin contemporary dance scene. Furthermore, from a dance studies perspective, in order to fully grasp the working conditions in contemporary dance through the lens of its practitioners, it was necessary to explore the artistic output in which contemporary dance artists in these two fields of inquiry publicly address their socio-economic position and precarious working conditions, and this as key part of the fieldwork. This dissertation thus also discusses the emerging aesthetic of precariousness in which the precarious nature of artistic work has been made visible on stage.

In the first part of the body of this book, I juxtapose the notions of lifestyle artists and survival artists, which at first sight seem opposite terms. In the chapter on “Lifestyle Artists”, I argue that a *bohemian work ethic* prevails among the contemporary dance artists within my fieldwork. The concept itself is oxymoronic as it consists of a combination of self-contradictory elements, including a bohemian lifestyle versus a strenuous work ethic. As this book demonstrates, perhaps the lifestyle of a true bohemian artist is the ideal contemporary dance artists hope for, but the reality actually demands much work, such as a good dose of systematic self-management, endless networking, and a great deal of self-promotion, among other things. Nonetheless, the values and motives for making art in contemporary capitalism have remained the same as back in nineteenth-century bohemianism: artistic pleasure, temporal autonomy, lifelong learning prospects, a relatively free work environment, opportunities for self-development, and self-realization, among many more. Drawing on my qualitative data, I have outlined that at least the contemporary dance artists within my fieldwork construct a habitus, where work time and private life are closely intertwined, or one in which life and work even depend on one another. A bohemian work ethic therefore includes the choice for an autonomous lifestyle as an artist, but simultaneously, also the ambiguous acknowledgement that this comes with actual work to ensure one’s survival in the art world.

In the next chapter “Survival Artists”, I discuss that in the bohemian work ethic artists have developed a variety of survival tactics so they can carry on to practice their profession despite the economic challenges affecting their work and lives. Especially the outline on the different forms of internal subsidization illustrates that in the art world, money is not an end but a means. Furthermore, I uncover a primary security system of

bartering, in which goods or services are directly exchanged for other goods or services without using a medium, such as money. This type of symbolic exchange economy lives on in late modernity, with an important side-effect of inciting social cohesion and solidarity.

All in all, I address several individual survival tactics in the first book part that demonstrate that the contemporary dance artists in my fieldwork show themselves resilient towards the prevailing precarity in their profession. The outlined survival mode impacts not only the lives but also the artistic work of my informants. Not only is the quality of a piece affected by the working conditions in which it was made and in which it continues to have a life, but the prevailing survival mode also greatly affects the aesthetics of the artistic work. A noteworthy consequence of the survival mode is the creation of tactical pieces and precarity solos. Producing a highly marketable dance piece is key to not suffer a project burnout. In theory, the creation of a solo requires a smaller budget than group pieces do, and in that same line, a solo is certainly highly marketable, because of its low costs for the hosting venues and therefore also the more affordable ticket price.

The three chapters in the second book part look at the causes and effects of the fast, mobile and flexible *modi operandi* in the contemporary dance scenes in Brussels and Berlin. The first chapter on “The Fast” deals with a threefold chase: drawing on contemporary dance artist Igor Koruga, this chase is portrayed as an accelerating loop of Wile E. Coyote trying to catch the Roadrunner, a vicious cycle of chasing funding, chasing programmers, and chasing papers.

There is a threefold sense of uncertainty when applying for funding: you do not know *if* you will receive a subsidy, *how much* money you will be granted, and *when* the sum will arrive. Above all, project-based subsidies engender a precarious position because one is dependent on financial support that is temporary and conditional. It is always accompanied by precarity, since artists invest time, work effort, and often also their own money, when applying for project funding without the guarantee they will receive it. The search for funding, and thus work opportunities, is accompanied by maintaining a network of professional contacts. As we will see, a career in contemporary dance in Brussels and Berlin develops between institutions, which demands new competences in order to sustain itself. The persistent chase after programmers, which requires networking skills, personal branding and self-promotion abilities, and the development and application of tactics in communication can be best understood in the context of Pierre Bourdieu’s discourse on the different forms of capital (1986). In the context of this chase, the social dynamics at play prove to be fundamental in advancing contemporary dance artists’ careers, because programmers are gatekeepers who control and provide the artists’ access to support, in terms of infrastructure and production budget. Needless to say that the informality of this type of social production system does not come without

threats, for instance when artists adapt their work to a programmer's demands or vision thus undermining their actual intentions.

The third kind of chase deals with the bureaucracy that comes hand in hand with autonomous work. In terms of social security, Belgium and Germany have quite distinctive freelancing systems in the independent arts sector. As a consequence of the bureaucratic freelancing systems for artists in both countries as well as the public funding systems dominated by project subsidies, contemporary dance artists have to deal with a fair amount of paperwork. While many freelance and self-employed workers are confronted with this type of bureaucracy, especially the bureaucratic authorities' cluelessness about and their lack of acknowledgement of how contemporary dance professionals work autonomously seems to be at the cause of a deep and chronic sense of frustration. In addition, the different work economies in the contexts that my informants work in cause manifold problems requiring paperwork.

In the second chapter on "The Mobile", I address the mobility of contemporary dance artists in time and space, especially in uncovering the mechanism of the residency system on which most project-based contemporary dance artists have come to rely. My findings seem to reveal several flaws of the residency system that can be generalized as well as a number of specific flaws that are linked to particular residency programs or spaces. This type of inter-organizational career management requires an insurmountable amount of management and planning that leaves only little time for research and experiment. As we will see, this general lack of time for creative work, regulated in limited time blocks, seems to undermine the quality of the dance pieces we see on European stages.

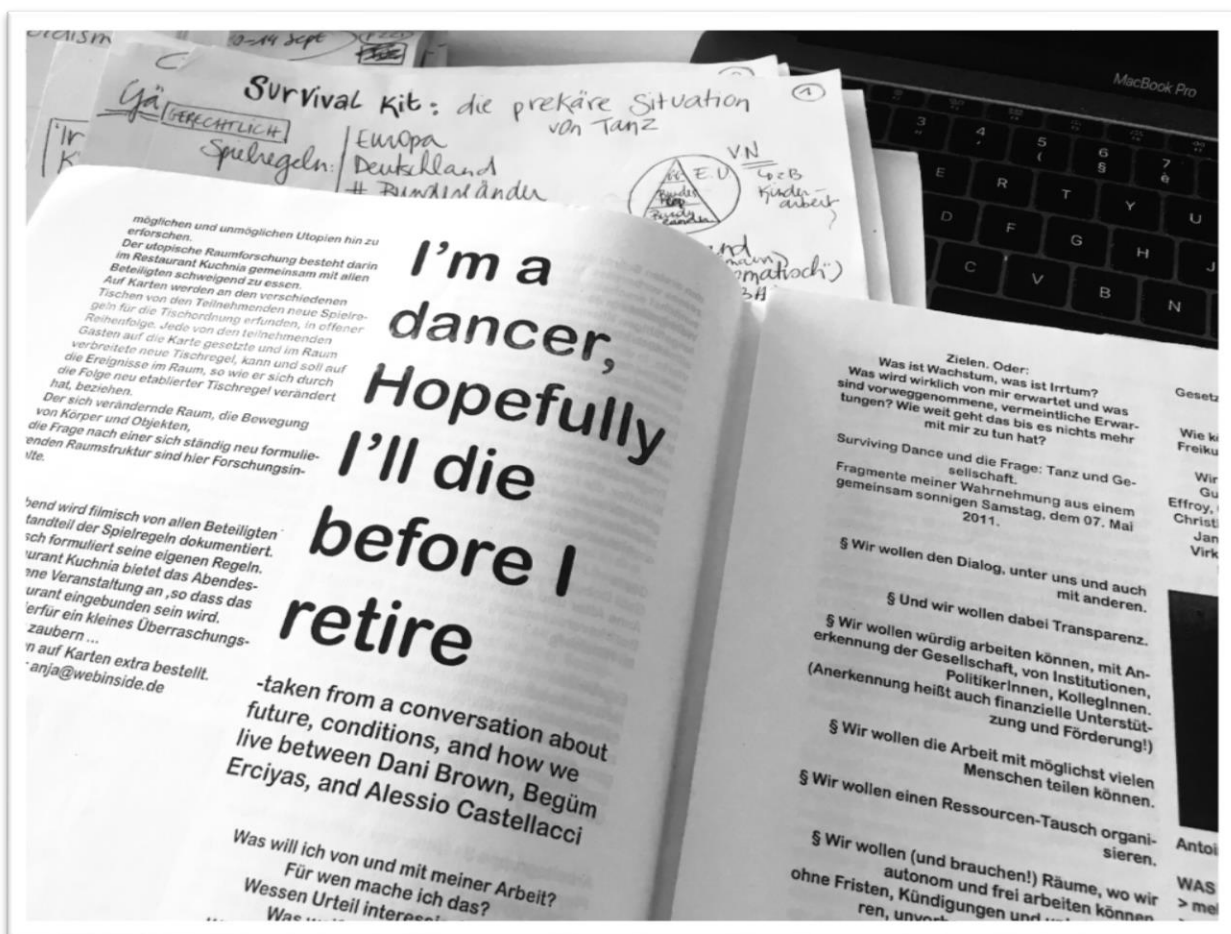
In the third chapter on "The Flexible", I focus on the faculties of respectively polyvalence, flexibility and adaptability as seen through the lens of contemporary dance. Drawing on my qualitative data, I conclude that a dance artist's body ought to be polyvalent, flexible, and adaptable, but also their entire set of pragmatic transferable skills needs to be marked by polyvalence, flexibility, and adaptability and this in order to remain employable. These three qualities overlap and interweave constantly. This second part of the book reveals that the fast, mobile and flexible *modi operandi* bring about more adaptable pieces that do not necessarily require a theater space, but in line with the neoliberal logic they can be performed anywhere and anytime. In addition, I provide an in-depth discussion of how the three dimensions of *the fast*, *the mobile*, and *the flexible* are reflected in dance performance, for which I carefully selected *VOLCANO* (2014) by Brussels-based contemporary dance artist Liz Kinoshita as a case.

In the third part of this book, I address the physical and mental consequences of doing everything fast, mobile, and flexible. Essentially, I perceived this third part as the pinnacle of my research, fusing the analysis of my anonymous qualitative data with the performances of precarity I encountered during my fieldwork. In these performances of precarity, contemporary dance artists publicly address the plural forms of precarity and precarity's penalties on one's physical or mental state within their artistic work.

In the first chapter on “Burning Out”, I distinguish different levels of precarity that affect contemporary dance artists other than the already addressed socio-economic precarity. While I focus first on physical precarity and the vulnerable body of a contemporary dance artist, I quickly move forward to quite a unique form of mental precarity prevalent in the arts: the core of *artistic precarity* seems to be grounded in the fact that an artist is never certain whether their work will be appreciated by a choreographer, a peer, a programmer, a critic, or an audience and whether the quality of their work is ever good enough to be considered a genuine artist. I argue that the plural character of artistic precarity in the accelerated work regime oftentimes results in a twofold deceleration of burning out and slowing down.

In the last chapter “Slowing Down”, I address several tactics of deceleration in response to overburdening or to avoid burning out. I unveil the double paradox of slowing down as a tactic of resistance against the forces of neoliberalism: ultimately, slowing down does not turn out to be subversive, because firstly it proves to be rather an accelerating form of deceleration so as to increase our productivity, and secondly, slowing down has become commodified itself. I come to conclude that the unfair and precarious working conditions contemporary dance artists specifically deal with are thus tied in with a more general point at issue affecting our society in late capitalism at large. However, saying ‘no’ collectively to these unfair and precarious conditions is extremely challenging in the contemporary dance sector, because many artists are still willing to work despite of the precarious conditions.

Image 1: program folder of the symposium *Surviving Dance –Kunst/Wirtschaft/Politik* (2011), curated by Angela Guerreiro



Chapter 1

Probing Precarity

Precarity is certainly not a new concept. Research on precarity has emerged from theories on post-Fordism's flexible work formats and cultural entrepreneurship (e.g. Ellmeier 2003; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005), from literature on organizational sociology and creative industries (e.g. Florida 2004; Pratt 2008), and from studies of the intellectual or creative precariat (Rambach 2001; Lorey 2006; Loacker 2010). Studies have been conducted on the aesthetics of precariousness in both the visual and the performing arts: researchers such as André Lepecki (2005), Nicholas Bourriaud (2009), and Katharina Pewny (2011a) define them as relational, flickering, blurring, corporeal, transformational and posttraumatic. However, the semantics of precariousness is relatively new: it became part of the jargon within the media and social sciences only after the recent turn of the century. In the same period, a noun emerged that refers to those living in precarious conditions: the *precariat*. By way of introduction, I will sketch out the trajectory the discourse on the precarious has taken in European society. A narrower look at the meaning of the word *precarious* can be helpful, especially in the context of precarious labor in the arts. Accordingly, it will become clear why the notion with regard to the artistic existence has gained such popularity during the last decade and how I will continue to use this notion throughout this study.

In her book, *Das Drama des Prekären: über die Wiederkehr der Ethik in Theater und Performance* (2011a), Katharina Pewny dissects the German word *prekär* and in his text “A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality” in *The Drama Review* (2012), Randy Martin similarly analyzes the etymology of the English word. Following their example, I attempt to do the same with the Dutch word *precair*. The Dutch dictionary *Van Dale* (2005) gives an extensive interpretation of the word and its origins. As a first semantic field, it describes it as ‘granted until further notice, in prayer: a precarious permit; a precariously possessed way, eq. *precario*’ (transl. from Dutch from *Groot Woordenboek Van De Nederlandse Taal Van Dale*, 14th ed., s.v. ‘precair’). In Roman law, the adverb *precario* indicates that the right to live in a certain place may be withdrawn at any time. It literally means *in temporary use*.

In line with Pewny's conclusion, one is therefore legally uncertain because one has only a temporary residence and no knowledge about or say in when that period expires. Additionally, the term denotes a lack of power or control because the resident is always dependent on a higher authority (see also Pewny 2011a, 27-28). As a second field, the dictionary defines a precarious situation: it is associated with an unstable, fragile state, even without further discussion of the context of the situation. In this sense, everything that is entitled *precarious* has a rather negative connotation of uncertainty or difficulty. When both semantic fields merge, it seems that that which we call *precarious labor* refers to employment, or at least paid labor, under uncertain conditions, which, however, is authorized by social legislation. Following Pewny (2011a) and Kalleberg and Vallas (2017b)¹, I thus understand precarious labor as involving work that is carried out in a variety of economically and legally insecure circumstances, such as the absence of long-term contracts and career prospects, low wages, poor working conditions, and only minimal or no social protection, among other things. Currently, concepts such as precarity and precariousness have become quite established and even function as a rallying cry, particularly among artists and creative workers. Interestingly, and ironically, the online *Oxford English Dictionary* already puts the word 'precarious' in the context of the arts by defining it as: 'dependent on chance; uncertain: ex. he made a precarious living as a painter' (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'precarious', accessed February 14, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/precarious>). Randy Martin is one of the first theorists to discuss precarity in relation to the dance field, stating that 'precarity, ephemerality, instability are frequently voiced as lamentations by dancers, presenters, and audiences alike. Dancers too struggle to make a living; presentation venues strain against diminished support; audiences contend with escalating ticket prices' (2012, 64).

Since the turn of the century, as also Pewny observes, the media have infused the term precarious with a broader meaning as referring to all people who live under precarious conditions, namely the precariat (2011a, 63). This word is a contraction of *precarious* and *proletariat* and is used to refer to the growing group of people who balance on the edge of insecurity since the economic shift from Fordism to post-Fordism from the 1970's onwards set in motion a destabilization of living and working conditions (Ellmeier 2003). Post-Fordism marks the era in which the economic system of production increasingly differs from the assembly line, which Henry Ford launched in his car factories. In the post-Fordist society, full-time jobs with long-term contracts slowly disappear to make room

¹ Also the title of this introduction was inspired by Kalleberg and Vallas' introductory text "Probing Precarious Work: Theory, Research, and Politics" to the 2017 volume of the book series of *Research in the Sociology of Work* devoted to precarious work, in which the authors develop a critical overview of the sprawling literature that has addressed precarious forms of paid employment to bridge the gap between the scale of precarious work and the social scientific understanding of it (2017b, 1-30).

for other work methods, such as flexible and project-oriented work. Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) introduce this era as the new stage of capitalism, which mainly takes place in the cultural sector, since flexible work formats are most easily applied in the case of immaterial labor, which the Italian autonomist Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) has described as work in which production does not result in durable or material goods. I will return to this later on.

The neologism *precariat* (or more precisely its Italian form *il precariato*) was coined shortly after the protest against the G8 in 2001 in Genoa and used as a slogan in 2004 during the May Day protest in Milan (Breman 2013, 3). For the most part, the word *precariat* refers to people who generally live an uncertain life and who feel excluded from society. These people are usually not highly educated and are often unemployed for a long time. However, the people that are according to this definition members of the *precariat* can be distinguished from those who have been termed ‘les intellos précaires’ (‘precarious intellectuals’). In their popular book with the same title (2001), Anne and Marine Rambach discuss a group of self-employed creative workers from the exact sciences and the arts, culture and media industry, who did engage in higher education. Their interview-based study documents the lives of several poverty-stricken French intellectuals and particularly illustrates the sometimes painful gap between their high level of symbolic recognition and their low financial gains. The precarious intellectuals possess cultural capital and are in most cases employed in the service sector, but they are often for other reasons merely temporarily employed on the basis of freelancing, project hopping or parallel work. These atypical forms of employment constitute the ideal type worker representative of a neoliberal post-Fordist society. Indeed, the generic term *precariat* links the low-educated and third-generation social benefit-dependents to self-employed individuals or project workers in the spheres of the sciences, the arts or the creative industries. Most importantly, it should be noted that the precarious intellectuals are often considered poor by choice. Someone who is poor by choice is socially acceptable and therefore possesses what Richard Lloyd terms status privileges that are typically denied to the urban poor (2010). It concerns an – at least partly – voluntary adoption of relative poverty driven by the desire to lead a self-directed and autonomous working life. This research will show that such a (partly) voluntary adoption certainly exists among contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin.

1.1 Popularization of the precariat

In the German-speaking world, the expression *precariat* entered the list of words of the year of the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (the Society for German Language) at fifth place in 2006. As Pewny pointed out in her book, the list consists of words shaping in a leading way the public debates in the corresponding year and suggests that poverty and financial problems already marked German media debates in previous years (2011a, 63). For example, the expressions *Ich-AG* (state-facilitated support for starting independents, in English referred to as *Me Inc.*) and *Teuro* (which is a contraction of *teuer*, the German word for *expensive*, and *euro*) prominently figured on the list of words of the year 2002. In 2004, the social welfare instrument *Hartz IV* could be found in the top of the list.² Two years later, when *precariat* captured fifth place, the expression *Generation Praktikum* landed on second place. The expression literally means *generation internship* and, at that time, referred to the generation of students who during and after their studies did great efforts to obtain an unpaid internship, thus deferring the perspective of paid labor. In short, Pewny thus demonstrates that impoverishment, financial insecurity, and the decoupling of work and income effectively engaged German media since the turn of the century.

The notion of the precariat is not just a media hype but has meanwhile become the cornerstone of a still expanding social scientific literature that partly joins in with the discourse on Post-Fordism (see e.g. Kalleberg and Vallas 2017b for an insightful state of the art). In the German-speaking world, Pewny points out that Ulrich Brinkmann et al. already presented in 2006 a comprehensive study of precarious labor (indeed the very same year the word *precariat* ended on the fifth place of the German words-of-the-year-list). The authors define remunerated labor as precarious when, due to these activities, the employed clearly fall under the level of income, protection, and social integration that contemporary society defines as standard. Although this definition suggests that precarious labor is atypical or flexible employment, it should not be merely understood as a temporary deflection from the accessible norm of full-time employment. Rather, following Lorey (2006), Bologna (2006) and Pewny (2011a), precarious labor has become the norm, even for the middle class. Most significantly, Brinkman et al. underline that precarity is ‘a notion [...] whose specific content can change according to the development of remunerated labor. The category of precarious work therefore refers to those norms

² I will explain the German social welfare instrument referred to as Hartz IV in the next chapter, when I discuss my field of inquiry and situate precarity in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin.

that are aggregated under the notion of normal or standard work relations' (2006, 16).³ The latter imply full-time work, social security, or the possibilities to be represented (through unions) and to have a say in the work conditions. These standards are clearly modern ones and in fact emerged and were institutionalized within the context of the Fordist regime of accumulation. Consequently, precarious labor deviates from a particular historical situation and economic development. Thus, precarity is a relational and historical category. The relational character of the precarious, which comprises both precarity and precarious labor, is reflected in the fact that it is primarily conceived in terms of a series of absences or protective gaps: no full-time employment, no regular contract, no full package of social benefits, among other things. Therefore, economist Guy Standing, whose influential view on precarity has greatly informed my research, contends that

the precariat consists of people who lack the seven forms of labour-related security [...] that social democrats, labour parties and trades unions pursued as their "industrial citizenship" agenda after the Second World War, for the working class or industrial proletariat. Not all those in the precariat would value all seven forms of security, but they fare badly in all respects. (2011, 10-11)

The seven forms of labor security Standing refers to are labor market security (or adequate income-earning opportunities, epitomized by a government commitment to full-time employment), employment security (guaranteed by, for instance, regulations on hiring and firing), job security (or the opportunity to retain a niche in employment), work security (safety and health regulations, etc.), skill reproduction security, income security (co-guaranteed by minimum wages and wage indexation), and representative security (having a collective voice through, for instance, trade unions). The lack of these forms of labor security typically aggravates the possibilities to plan one's future: for someone working under precarious conditions, the future continually lapses into the background because one has to focus on an ever-to-reproduce present.

In addition, to live in precarity means dealing with a social status that is revocable, which raises the question how individuals cope with such a situation and what the physical and psychological (and social) consequences entail. This research will reveal a variety of pathologies, such as exhaustion, anxiety, burnout, and physical harms, all of which could be tied in with the prevailing working conditions.

³ My own translation from the original German: 'Aus den bislang vorgestellten Bestimmungen geht hervor, dass Prekarität ein Begriff ist, dessen konkreter Inhalt sich mit der Entwicklung der Erwerbsarbeit verändern kann. In modernen Arbeitsgesellschaften bezieht sich die Kategorie "prekäre Beschäftigung" auf jene Normen, die unter dem Begriff Normal- oder Normarbeitsverhältnis zusammengefasst werden' (Brinkman et al. 2006, 16).

Although André Gorz already announced several decades ago the end of the working class in *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* (1997, originally published in 1980 as *Adieux au prolétariat: Au-delà du socialisme*), Standing argues that while the old classes may persist in agrarian societies, our capitalist society simply needs a new vocabulary when referring to class relations in the market system of the new millennium. In *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*, he situates the precariat as a dangerous class-in-the-making between the proletariat and the unemployed (Standing 2014a, 31; compare with *The Precariat* from 2011). Within this emerging class, Standing discerns three subgroups. A first one consists of precarious workers coming from the proletariat. For one reason or another, they were expelled from the working class and left their community with a sense of despair, yet they remain linked to their pasts and are alienated because they cannot reproduce that past. The second subgroup mainly comprises denizens (minorities, migrants, etc.), who live without a sense of a past or a home and who are thus also alienated. The third and final category is that of Anne and Marine Rambach's precarious intellectuals: the (highly) educated people who carry out their work without future prospects, since the nature of their labor does not permit it. Hence, according to Standing, they 'experience a sense of relative deprivation or status frustration' (2014b, under "Coming together") as they are aware that there are not many genuine chances to substantially improve their situation. The three groups have in common that they are not in possession of all the seven already mentioned forms of labor-related security. Standing describes ten features of the precariat in his charter and distinguishes distinctive relations of production, of distribution, and to the state; the lack of occupational identity; the lack of control over time; detachment from labor; low social mobility; over-qualification; uncertainty; and poverty and precarity traps. In an entrepreneurial, self-organized and project-based regime, for example, the lack of occupational identity, refers to the challenge to formulate an effective definition of what one in fact does. Cultural studies expert Angela McRobbie points out that there is still no comprehensive occupational category for the creative workers with a slash-identity, such as the 'curator/project manager/artist/website designer who is transparently multi-skilled and ever willing to pick up new forms of expertise, who is also constantly finding new niches for work and thus inventing new jobs for him- or herself, who is highly mobile, moving from one job/project to the next, and in the process also moving from one geographical site to the next' (2016, 31).

Sociologist Jan Breman attacked Standing's ideas about the precariat as a class-in-the-making identifying it as a bogus concept in an issue of the *New Left Review* (2013). One may certainly question why Standing exposes the precariat as a class-in-the-making on the one hand and as dangerous on the other. Firstly, in response to Breman's critique, Standing stresses that the precariat is an emerging class, because to date it is internally divided. The precariat will stay a class-in-the-making as long as it remains fragmented in three subgroups (which all three share relations of production, of distribution, and to the

state that are distinctive from those of the proletariat). However, Standing predicts that more and more people in the different groups of the precariat will recognize that their situation is not due to personal failings but to structural factors and policies, which will unite them, thus forming an actual class. Secondly, the precariat is therefore also dangerous, because when the precariat becomes ‘enough of a class-for-itself’, they will gain the collective power to protest and jointly seek structural change (2014b, under “Class consciousness and voice”). In fact, Anne and Marine Rambach have already classified the precarious intellectuals as ‘dangerous’ in 2001 when they state in their book that ‘les “classes dangereuses” son dans les murs’ (The dangerous classes are between the walls, 2001, 284). In fact, the ‘dangerous classes’ is a known concept dating back to the nineteenth century in France as discussed by Louis Chevalier in his book on the *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (1973, first published in 1958), hence the authors’ use of quotation marks when adopting the term. Anne and Marine Rambach suggest that the dangerous classes are all around: in the hallway next door, in the office, in the waiting room. The presence of the precarious intellectuals in these familiar rooms – and institutions such as the universities for example – is acknowledged in silent consensus as the (cultural) sector has accepted the development of precarious work. Most significantly, they note that the precarious intellectuals are everywhere and everyone is aware of their exploitation, yet few people – including the precarious themselves – speak up and protest. In their words: ‘The precarious, they are the hidden face, the shameful face of the environment. They are everywhere, we know many of them, but their status should not be disclosed’ (2001, 284).⁴

One may wonder how the precarious intellectuals can be dangerous if they silence themselves and if their situation is continually normalized by themselves and others. I would argue that the collective action Standing refers to is almost always undermined in a project-based regime, in which flexible work spawns an every-person-for-themselves environment. Particularly the independent arts scenes lack strong unions and collective lobbying voices. As my research will show, many artists continue to silence themselves. Nonetheless, at the same time, the members of the precariat are more and more likely to revolt, as the May Day Parades in Southern Europe and the international Occupy Movement demonstrate. Collective representation in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin also seems to be gradually rising since the foundation of the Koalition der Freie Szene in 2012 in Berlin, Art But Fair in 2013 in the German-speaking world and State of The Arts (SOTA) in 2013 in Brussels and the modestly growing visibility of labor unions for arts and culture (ACOD Cultuur in Belgium, ver.di Darstellende Kunst in Germany). While these examples do not necessarily indicate (violent) revolt, as the

⁴ My own translation from the original French: ‘Les précaires, c’est la face cachée, la face honteuse du milieu. Ils sont partout, on en connaît plein, mais leur status ne doit pas être ébruité’ (Rambach and Rambach 2001, 284).

concept of ‘dangerous classes’ implies, however, they do testify to a growing ‘class consciousness’ and a careful beginning of collective care and of organized protest. Perhaps, I could cautiously propose that the precariat is gradually turning their endangered status into a dangerous one, in line with Standing’s prophecy?

Guy Standing is responsible for the introduction of the precariat in Belgian media, which therefore occurred about a decade later than in the German-speaking world. The publication of his book, *The Precariat: A New Dangerous Class* (2011), attracted much media attention.⁵ In fact, Standing had already coined the term ‘precariat’ in his 2009 book *Work after Globalization*, in which he substituted his previously-employed term ‘flexiworkers’. In an interview featured in *Terzake* in 2012, a Flemish daily late-evening news show with guests, Standing predicts that the civil unrest prevailing in Europe at the time would lead to more protest. He points out that fear accompanies socio-economic insecurity, causing unrest. Yet, this fear will eventually change sides as the precariat grows in numbers, because the members of this dangerous class will realize they have nothing to lose whereas the affluent certainly do. Art sociologist Pascal Gielen was probably the first to refer to the precariat in the Belgian arts and cultural sector in his *State of the Union* presented at the Theaterfestival of 2011, in which he talks about an arts economy ‘marked by a post-Fordist work, in which temporary contracts and project work create a new precariat of mostly highly skilled creative workers’ (2011, point 6).⁶ Already before Gielen introduced the notion of ‘precariat’ in the cultural sector, performing artist Diederik Peeters pertinently addressed this notion without naming it as such in a speech on the occasion of the release of a field study about the Flemish performing arts sector in April 2011.⁷ At the start of his speech, he sets out by wondering why he, of all people, was asked to posit a statement for the occasion. Nonetheless, the reason became very clear to him when he finished reading the field study, as he puts it in his speech: ‘I am the typical example of the post-Fordist, immaterial cultural worker slash job hopper who is so thoroughly portrayed and analyzed in that publication’ (Peeters 2011, 19). Interestingly, he continues by expressing that this class consciousness came as quite a shock to him

⁵ See, for example: Lieven Sioen 2011 in *De Standaard*; *Terzake* of January 27, 2012 on VRT; Gie Goris 2012 in *MO**.

⁶ My own translation from the original in Dutch: ‘een economie die getekend wordt door een postfordistische arbeidsethiek waarin tijdelijke contracten, projectarbeid een nieuw precariaat van meestal hooggeschoolde creatieve arbeiders schept’ (Gielen 2011, point 6). Joost de Bloois has extensively commented on Gielen’s *State of the Union* speech, analyzing the notion of precariat deeper in this context, see: De Bloois 2011. De Bloois has also written extensively on precarity in the last decade.

⁷ On April 4, 2011 the former Flemish Theater Institute (VTi) released the results of their study *Ins & Outs. Field Analysis of the Performing Arts in Flanders*. For the occasion, VTi had invited Diederik Peeters to posit a statement, which was published on June 15, 2011, entitled “Bespiegelingen van een Sprinkhaan” (“Meditations of a Grass Hopper”) on the website of *Etcetera*, a Flemish journal for the performing arts, and under a different title “De goesting van een typische individuele kunstenaar” (“The appetite of a typical, individual artist”) in *Courant 98* (2011).

since he had always been under the impression of being a unique self, though simultaneously realizing that also that image is in fact completely in accordance with the characterization of the neoliberal creative worker.

1.2 Precarious labor in post-Fordism

Post-Fordism and the increasing institutionalization of precarious working and living conditions are often related to the growing predominance of immaterial labor. The latter notion gained quite some theoretical prominence after the publication of *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in 2000. It is also widely used by other influential authors who have roots in 1970's Italian autonomist Marxism, such as Paolo Virno and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. In 1996, Maurizio Lazzarato defined the concept of immaterial labor as the kind of labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity. The first aspect, the informational content of the commodity, refers to the changes taking place in labor processes of workers in big companies (in industrial and tertiary sectors), where the skills for direct labor increasingly involve cybernetics and computer control. The second aspect of immaterial labor, the activity that produces the cultural content of the commodity, refers to how activities that are traditionally not recognized as work become more important for work, defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, norms, and public opinions. Lazzarato puts it as follows:

The activities of this kind of immaterial labour force us to question the classic definitions of work and workforce, because they combine the results of various different types of work skill: intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labour; and entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation of which they are a part. (Lazzarato 1996, 136)

The production cycle of this kind of labor is not defined by the factory walls, but happens in society. He points out that small 'productive units' (individuals) are organized for specific projects and they are likely to exist only for the duration of those projects (Lazzarato 1996, 136). It is in this regard that Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have released their writings on 'the new spirit of capitalism' (2005), in which the economy increasingly revolves around project-oriented and project-based work: in this 'new spirit' of capitalism alternating projects generate new collaborations and partnership through which networks are constituted. Lazzarato names precariousness, hyper-exploitation,

mobility, and hierarchy as the most obvious characteristics of immaterial labor. He notes that in this kind of work regime, it becomes difficult to distinguish leisure time from work time (1996, 137). Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos enhance that today's composition of *living* labor is the response to the risks imposed by *immaterial* labor: 'precarity means exploiting the continuum of everyday life, not simply the workforce' (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006, under "B. Immaterial labour and precarity"). In this respect, it should be noted that the term immaterial labor also suggests that the material infrastructure and embodied character of both 'the general intellect' (to quote Virno 2004 paraphrasing Marx) and emotional work does not seem to matter much. Moreover, as also Virno admits, many modes of immaterial labor actually have a relational and performative nature. Hence, Sergio Bologna – whose ideas also stem from autonomist Marxism – proposes in his study on the disruption of the middle classes to speak of relational labor instead.⁸ Although Bologna links the transformation of the middle classes primarily to changes in lifestyles and identities, he goes beyond these dimensions when discussing how those working in precarious conditions, often self-employed, are obliged to look for new market opportunities and to make these productive through their simultaneous participation in both local and global networks. Katharina Pewny notes in her book that one of the resources thus emerging and characterizing precarious activities is relational labor in Bologna's view: the initiation and cultivation of relations, since they function as the essential condition for the selling of own products or services (Bologna 2006, 13; Pewny 2011a, 69). Typical examples of activities making up relational labor are the mediation of contact persons in institutions (networking) and the production of ideas or concepts that often do not bring immediate gains in the economic sense. According to Bologna, self-employed workers must recognize their relational labor as such in order to be able to plan, calculate, and measure it in the future. I follow Pewny when she claims that Bologna's ideas are thus very relevant for understanding the situation of precarious workers in the performing arts, since their careers primarily consist of this type of labor.⁹

Post-Fordism, which describes a work regime grounded in flexible work formats and immaterial labor, should be distinguished from neoliberalism, which refers to a neoliberal economy that promotes entrepreneurial freedoms through competition, deregulation, and privatization. Although the term neoliberalism was coined much earlier in the twentieth century, it resurges in the 1970's alongside the rise of post-Fordism, and from then on it has become the dominant guiding principle for economic thought and management at least in Western society. In the first instance, as David Harvey puts it in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2007), the doctrine is a

⁸ My own translation of the German book title, *Die Zerstörung der Mittelschichten: Thesen der neue Selbständigkeit* (Bologna 2006).

⁹ For a more thorough discussion on Bologna's relational labor and examples from performances that deal with this type of labor, please consult Pewny 2011a.

theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey 2007, 3)

Moreover, since the 1970's onwards, neoliberalism resurfaces as an ideology and has become a hegemonic mode of discourse in political-economic thinking in favor of deregulation, privatization, and a withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision. Harvey claims that almost all states have embraced at least some version of neoliberal theory, be it voluntarily or not, and have adjusted at least some practices or policies accordingly (2007, 3-4). Importantly for this study, Harvey also emphasizes that neoliberal ideology has widespread effects on society's way of thinking, which have become incorporated in how people understand the world (2007, 4). As sociologist Pascal Gielen puts it, this concerns 'the neoliberalism that has left the political arena and [...] has dissolved into society to permeate it' (2010b, 3). It should be noted that the term neoliberalism has changed meaning over time and is widely discussed among sociologists and economists who offer a range of definitions and interpretations of the notion (e.g. Michel Foucault, Milton Friedman, David Harvey, among many more). Both liberalism and neoliberalism depart from the same starting point praising the value of individual freedom and autonomy as the ultimate condition to develop a better society, but they interpret it quite differently. While nineteenth-century liberalist ideology proclaimed the freedom of individuals as long as it does not limit the freedom of others, current neoliberal ideology is more skeptical about the use of individual freedom thus subjecting it to predetermined formats and procedures. In this book, I employ the notion of neoliberalism to refer to the ideology derived from socio-economic and political thinking favoring the value of individual (entrepreneurial) freedom, yet simultaneously bearing in mind that the deregulation comes hand in hand with more subtle forms of control or *governmentality*, to use a more Foucauldian term. The neoliberal form of governing is grounded in maximizing market liberty and entrepreneurial freedom through deregulation and privatization, thus restructuring society according to the principle of the dynamic process of competition. As Ulrich Bröckling puts it in his *The Entrepreneurial Self*, 'competition is the most effective mechanism for increasing human ability to learn and thereby improve conditions for all' and it is the ideal tool for conditioning people because 'it channels the innate addiction to self-aggrandisement rather than attempting to suppress it' (2016, 60). However, the regulations that do exist are, as also Gielen points out, in tendency surveyed more strictly within this internal competition (2013b, 22 and 2014, 197). Paradoxically, due to deregulation and the accompanying self-responsibility

and increase in paperwork, as we will see further, neoliberalism's promise of freedom remains often unfulfilled. In his book, Harvey concludes that neoliberalism has been mostly a 'political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of the economic elites' (2007, 20). In a similar vein, I proceed from the acknowledgement that neoliberalization has been an approach especially aimed at the middle class, including the creative class (Harvey 2007; Gielen 2013b) and the emergence of the precariat can thus to some extent be attributed to this neoliberal turn. Although neoliberalism is a very complex notion, for the purpose of this book I continue to use it in reference to the political-economic ideology dissolved into society in favor of liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms through deregulation, competition and privatization.

1.3 Artistic work and self-precarization

Be it immaterial, relational or living labor, the relationship between labor and the making of contemporary art has been thoroughly discussed by Bojana Kunst, who stresses that since the nineties, especially the European contemporary dance field has been marked by artworks that make the artistic work processes visible, particularly the immaterial labor performed.¹⁰ In the performing arts sector, much of the labor is generally defined as immaterial as the production process is dominated by project-based and network-oriented activities shaping cultural-informational content. I would add that this is especially so since that which is created – and is thus visible – remains an immaterial product in the form of ephemeral live performances. In *Artist at Work* (2015a), Kunst outlines the proximity of art and contemporary capitalism by focusing on the visibility of work. She offers several examples that demonstrate that the artist in contemporary society has become a prototype of a contemporary flexible and precarious worker, because their work is connected to the production of life itself. Most importantly, she proposes to rethink the dividing line between artistic work (product) and work itself (process), or between the artwork and art as work, because in many artistic practices also the line between life and art is vanishing. In this vein, several artists perform their own working and living conditions as their way of broaching a pressing situation, thus

¹⁰ See especially *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (2015) for a collection of her writings and thoughts on the relationship between labor and contemporary art.

demonstrating their survival skills and exploring several ways to ensure a sustainable creative practice. Indeed, in the new millennium, the artist as precarious worker has become a recurrent theme on stage. In the black box as well as in the white cube, artists use their voice to publicly comment on their socio-economic position through underlining their work as an artist. Performing artist Eleanor Bauer and visual artist Ina Wudtke both do so by drawing on Belgian philosopher Dieter Lesage's text "A Portrait of the Artist as a Worker" (2006, originally published in 2005). Ina Wudtke had asked the philosopher to write an introduction for a catalogue on her work, but instead of writing about her artistic work, Lesage decided to highlight all the work, be it remunerated or non-remunerated, that Wudtke continuously performs as an artist. Wudtke then chose to perform this poetic essay in a video installation with the same title (2006), emphasizing the whole range of activities she executes in order to make a living as an artist, such as her work as a DJ and magazine editor.

Eleanor Bauer was likewise inspired by Lesage's essay for one of her earliest productions, which she continues to retake. Her ever-developing performance of *ELEANOR!* (2005) gives a critical portrait of the performing artist today as a 'post-Fordist art prostitute' (*ELEANOR!* 2005, paragraph 1). The infamous words by Lesage quoted in the performance state:

You are an artist and that means: you don't do it for the money. That is what some people think. It is a great excuse not to pay you for all the things you do. So what happens is that you, as an artist, put money into projects that others will show in their museum, in their Kunsthalle, in their exhibition space, in the gallery. So you are an investor. You give loans nobody will repay you. (Lesage 2006, 34)

These words already reveal that there is something in her metaphor of the prostitute that does not apply: artists do not do it for the money. However, they are looking for other forms of currency, such as recognition or self-development. This makes artists ideal exploitable subjects and therefore also susceptible to what political theorist Isabell Lorey has termed 'self-precarization' (2006).

Lorey's work on precarization is partly inspired by Judith Butler's multi-faceted theorization of vulnerability. Butler distinguishes 'precariousness' from 'precarity'. 'Precariousness' is a socio-ontological concept marked by physical vulnerability and dependency and is foremost always an aspect of life (2004). There is a necessity to recognize this inevitable uncertainty of being as a shared condition of human life: the maintenance of life is never guaranteed and therefore uncertain. The condition that makes life possible, according to Butler, is precisely that what makes life precarious. Her ideas are derived from Levinas' vision on precariousness: he claims that the human body is precarious because it is exposed to the Other, to temptation, to destruction, etc. Human life is precarious because it depends on the life of the Other and vice versa (Butler 2004; see also Pewny 2011, 24). 'Precarity', instead, is the unequal, politically regulated

distribution of all sorts of risks on the one hand and the social protection regarding precariousness on the other. Elaborating on the idea that governments are actively involved in the regulation of precarity, Lorey introduces the notion of governmental precarization through neoliberal policies encouraging marketization, competition and entrepreneurship within the context of a deliberately trimmed-down welfare state (Lorey 2006). Hence, precarization can today be defined as a process of normalization of socio-economic insecurity. In Fordist times, flexible work formats and, concurrently, insecure incomes were considered the undesirable exceptions to the rule of full-time employment and permanent contracts. Yet, as indicated earlier, what was once the exception has increasingly become the norm in the post-Fordist work regime. However, especially within the creative professions, precarization as coercion induced by the state and the market is complemented by precarization as choice, or what Lorey describes as ‘self-precarization’ (2006, 198). Creative workers in particular seem to be willing to sacrifice material benefits for the sake of immaterial ones such as artistic pleasure, temporal autonomy, a free work environment, and opportunities for self-realization (Lorey 2006; Laermans 2015; McRobbie 2016).¹¹ In that regard, Arne Kalleberg makes the somewhat philosophical distinction between objective and subjective job rewards in his article on *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* (2011). Among the subjective job rewards, not only the intrinsic rewards such as the ‘degree of meaning, challenge and interest that people obtain from their jobs’ are likely to vary considerably from one person to the next, but also the perceptions of the quality of co-worker relationships (Kalleberg 2011, 9). Furthermore, he posits that job rewards differ in the degree to which they are easy or hard to measure, because they vary in the extent to which they are objective as opposed to subjective (Kalleberg 2011, 8). Particularly in the creative industry, objective precarity can thus be compensated by subjective job rewards.

In her most recent book *Be Creative* (2016), Angela McRobbie examines freelance self-employment and short-term project work. Her book sets out to rethink the sociology of employment, which ought to engage more fully with the entrepreneurial culture and with the self-employment ethos which in contemporary capitalism is a necessity for survival (McRobbie 2016, 4). In so doing, she particularly concentrates on the responsibility of pedagogy in the UK context, as it seems to not only prepare middle-class (art) students for an entrepreneurial career path filled with precarious jobs without

¹¹ It should be noted that a wider *expressive revolution* was happening from the 1960’s onwards, in which ‘various forms of authority and discipline, previously accepted as evident, were from then on contested in the name of personal self-development and the individual right “to be oneself” or the value of authenticity’ (Laermans 2015, 327). As Laermans point out in his discussion of ‘expressive individualism’, Boltanski and Chiapello have also (partly) incorporated an artistic critique on ‘self-estranging disciplines and bureaucratic hierarchies precluding personal creativity at the price of a growing social insecurity and inequality’ (2015, 329). This is also to some extent already discussed in the widely known *Empire* (2000) by Hardt and Negri.

welfare protection and social security but also encourage them to pursue this path (McRobbie 2016, 11). As a consequence, UK-based art students ‘act as guinea pigs for testing out the new world of work without the full raft of social security entitlements and welfare provision that have been associated with the post-Second World War period’ (McRobbie 2016, 35). Indeed, this is much in accordance to what Boltanski and Chiapello have already discussed under the title of a new spirit of capitalism (2005). Thus, the students attending art colleges are Bologna’s ‘new middle class’ injecting bohemian values and paving the way for a new post-welfare era. It should be pointed out that unlike Standing, who defines the precariat as an ‘emerging and dangerous class’, McRobbie, following Bologna, speaks about a re-making of (a fraction of) the middle class, in which ‘ideas of creativity and innovation compensate for and to an extent obscure the shrinking realm of protection along with welfare and many entitlements’ (McRobbie 2016, 45). Precarity thus requires a new vocabulary switching the registers to a political and pedagogical process, because ‘with such encouragement to become a creative practitioner, questions about making a living fade into the margins and the value of sheer hard work and constant activity take over’ (McRobbie 2016, 12). Much in line with McRobbie’s point, Guy Standing talks about precarization emphasizing that the precariat is subjected to the ‘habituation to *expecting* [his emphasis] a life of unstable labour and unstable living’ (2014b, paragraph 7). The process of precarization that they describe, I would argue, is not merely externally induced (by the state, the market and education), but McRobbie actually quite straightforwardly depicts the accompanying self-imposed process of self-precarization – though without naming it so explicitly – when she refers to ‘willing self-exploitation’. She notes that the ‘seemingly exciting compensation for work without protection is the personal reward of “being creative”’, because one’s inner talents and abilities are being cultivated on a daily basis instead of being lost and unused (McRobbie 2016, 35). ‘Pleasure in work’, in McRobbie’s words, ‘is a seductive offer made by capitalism’ (2016, 105).¹² However, does this mean the internal willingness to self-exploit is in fact also externally induced?

This matter dates back to a much older artistic ethos of self-expression (i.e. art for art’s sake) in relation to material gain and it ought to be explored in the context of Bourdieu’s *The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods* (1993, originally published in 1980), where he points out that an artistic work ‘always consists partly of *working on oneself* as an artist [his emphasis]’ (109). Additionally, and most importantly, he

¹² As indicated before, her main thesis stresses that this self-precarization, though she terms it self-romanticism, intersects with and is nurtured and managed by the prevailing governmental discourse and art school curriculum (which is at least so in her field of inquiry in the UK) (McRobbie 2016, 38). This is also her main point of critique vis-à-vis Richard Florida: if the Florida-effect refers to the potential that culture and creativity have for urban generation and growth, Florida fails to consider the city’s historical conditions, infrastructure and the role of the state in providing education and training (2016, 46).

distinguishes the accumulation of symbolic capital alongside the pursuit of a certain level of economic profit (material gain). When artists are poorly remunerated, different exchange rates between other currencies apply. A common question asked among artists thus may be: 'if I do this, what do I gain from it in exchange?'

For example, when the above-mentioned Eleanor Bauer was asked to perform a solo for free for a benefit for the hungry in New York and pay her own plane ticket after her studies in Brussels to do so, she agreed out of firsthand enthusiasm for the context of the invitation. She felt recognized by the dance community in New York and was excited to fly back to her former artistic community to perform something. However, when she started to think about what she should create for the occasion, she began to reflect on the conditions that were shaping her decision. The context of the benefit that she had agreed to, requesting her to pay into performing something new for free, ended up being the catalyst for – to use her words – an 'ironic (however humorous) and self-deprecating turn towards self-disgust in being a hopeless product of this precarious and relentless art market in which recognition is constantly substituted for money' (personal communication on August 13, 2018). Following Bourdieu, authors such as Hans Abbing, Rudi Laermans and Delphine Hesters agree that the symbolic capital of (performing) artists refers to the public recognition or their good reputation as professional and therefore genuine (performing) artists. As Laermans points out, an artist receives recognition 'from already consecrated peers or others – read: from important critics, established curators, "serious" collectors, and the like – who have the legitimate power to ascribe value' (2015, 251) and whom Bourdieu identifies as 'symbolic bankers' (1993, 263). Bauer's revelations on the situation brought forth a cynical new piece of critique towards the inescapable necessity of self-promotion which results in a chase after recognition and exposure to invest in one's future. Significantly, in line with Bourdieu's logic, Bauer's observations point out that the accumulation of symbolic capital by accepting the invitation may be converted into economic capital in the future. The piece eventually premiered at the benefit that caused her to reflect in the first place and carries her own name in the title: *ELEANOR!* With a good dose of self-criticism, the title thus is a self-mocking witticism revealing how the artist's identity is too often conflated with the artwork, and selling one's artwork often comes down to selling oneself. In reflecting upon the accepted conditions, Bauer thus seems to be highly aware of the self-precarization that comes hand in hand with the accumulation of symbolic capital. An ironic comment in the performance quite outspokenly reveals a critique towards herself and the field in response to her own choice to accept the invitation: 'Let's be honest, if I really wanted to feed the hungry, I could spend 600 euros more efficiently than on a plane ticket to New York'.

In the context of self-precarization, David Throsby (1994) introduces the 'work-preference model of artist behavior', which supposes that when artists receive more income, they will not use it to work fewer hours in the arts in order to have more leisure

time, but instead they will just work more (see also Abbing 2003, 437). Returning to Bauer's reference to the piece as a critical portrait of the performing artist as a 'post-Fordist art prostitute', artists in fact invest money or use extra money to be able to (make) work very much unlike prostitutes. Consequently, the metaphor of the prostitute rather refers to the unavoidable promotion of the self and the selling of the performer's body, which is the actual material of the work (something that is often forgotten when the art world is too often related to the notion of immaterial labor). In brief, *ELEANOR!* is about the traps of currencies such as recognition, passion, self-development and money constantly being traded off for each other. With a tone of humor as a survival tactic for dealing with the harsh realities of the art market, it is thus a piece that does not try to hide the extent of exploitation and self-precarization going hand in hand with artwork and the accumulation of symbolic capital (in view of gaining economic capital in the future). This performance example thus illustrates the long-established spirit of material disavowal, theorized by Bourdieu in the 1980's.

1.4 Work without boundaries

However, it is crucial to observe that precarity does not only surface on a socio-economic and socio-political level. The post-Fordist work regime, marked by project-based, transnational and informal labor, has caused increasing difficulties in distinguishing work time and private life.¹³ Standing (2014a, 22) rightly argues that one of the precariat's defining features is a lack of control over time. In that respect, he specifically refers to *tertiary time*, which comprises all the work done outside of paid labor time and hybridizes work and leisure. Notably, tertiary time is not characteristic of precarious work alone and is also not a new phenomenon: Standing uses the term to indicate all unpaid work time, such as domestic work or the afterschool activities in education for preparation and correction. However, the precarious labor regime is dominated by work without boundaries, in a twofold sense. On the one hand, many professionals nowadays conduct

¹³ Many of the ideas worked out in this section are inspired by the conference *Dance Now: Work with(out) Boundaries*, which was jointly organized by Prof. dr. Katharina Pewny, research assistant Simon Leenknecht and myself on March 18 and 19, 2017 in CAMPO, Ghent, as part of the FWO-funded research project *Choreographies of Precariousness. A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin*. See: <http://s-pam.ugent.be/en/research/conferences/dance-now.htm>. As a result, the organizers of the conference guest-edited a special issue for *Dance Research Journal* together with Prof. dr. Rebekah Kowal on the theme *Work with/out Boundaries: Precarity and Dance*, of which Prof. dr. Helen Thomas is editor-in-chief.

their work in a mobile work environment that is becoming increasingly transnational. On the other hand, and most importantly, since the 1990's, due to the project-oriented and immaterial nature of many professions, it has become less evident to delineate where work time ends and private life begins. Psychologists Michael Allvin et al. claim that the working lives of post-Fordist workers therefore have the potential to destruct work as we know it. They argue that people's control in their work increases, while their control over the conditions of work decreases: it is now up to the individual to establish a distinction between work and leisure, and to maintain personal limits (Allvin et al. 2011, 5). Work without boundaries is not a new phenomenon: what changed is that it has now become ubiquitous and hegemonic especially in Western society. Contemporary dance artists, for instance, have been working this way ever since the term 'contemporary dance' emerged during the 1960's.

Overall, precarity goes hand in hand with a constant state of temporality. Standing (2011, 18–19) refers in this respect to the 'precaritized mind', characterized by short-termism, multi-tasking and, crucially, a permanent stand-by feeling: a sense one has far too much to do at all times, but taking a time-out would entail the risk of missing opportunities. Drawing on the works of Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) and Boris Groys (2002), Bojana Kunst links this continual time pressure to the notion of 'projective temporality' in her book *Artist at Work* (2015a). The time dimension and the uncertainties as well as the pressures it entails are included in the notion of project work as the verb 'projecting' always refers to the realization of potentials and thus to future action (2015a, 154–158). Yet, the projective temporality Kunst describes, is particularly marked by the combination of the fear of not having sufficient work in the future and the concomitant pressure to work too hard in the present. The projective temporality causes creative workers to let the present slip away, because of the promise that their projects will succeed in the near future. More and more, artists are living in the future, but this sharply contrasts with the fact that their socio-economic precarity prevents them from having secure future prospects on (or in) the long run. In other words, time is not on your side when you are a precarious worker. For example, contemporary dance artists are often only temporary dance artists, who, between their temporary projects, are taking up many other job descriptions such as administration, accountancy, production and tour management, promotion and communication, while, among still other things, preparing for the next project and finalizing the previous. These drawbacks may at least partially explain why the notion of artistic practice has gained so much currency over the last years. In contradistinction to 'doing a project', 'having a practice' revolves around an – assumingly – durational activity that is more sustainable than a project, which is inherently connected with the temporary.

In her text "The Project at Work" (2014), Bojana Kunst describes the project as the prevailing mode of production of artistic work and notes that the project no longer has a border between professional (work) and personal (life) investment. Most importantly, she

notes, project work is not exclusively prevalent in the art sector, but slowly replaces full-time and long-term employment in Western society in general in a variety of forms (such as short-employment contracts, consultancy work, or self-employed freelancing). In his essay “Leben als Projekt” (“Life as a project”), Boltanski even suggests that the project culture in the network society is invading the private sphere to the extent that precarious workers currently think in terms of ‘project: parenthood’ or ‘project: child’ (2007, paragraph 14). Indeed, as I pointed out before, also Tsianos and Papadopoulos observe that as work becomes incorporated into private time, the exploitation of the workforce happens beyond the boundaries of work and is distributed across the whole time and space of life (on *living* labor: Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006, under “B. Immaterial labour and precarity”). In that respect, Richard Sennett pointed out that art making is the most unalienating form of labor, because this work is so closely related to life (Sennett 2016). It is therefore not surprising that work in the arts is essentially characterized by hazy boundaries.

1.5 Coping with the trauma of precarity

Following scholars such as Richard Sennett (2012, 157), one might say that due to its normalization in the present-day reality, many human beings suffer the trauma of precarity. A popular notion associated with the reaction to trauma is that of ‘resilience’ (Neocleous 2013; Bracke 2016). Resilience can be defined as ‘the ability to adapt to changing conditions and prepare for, withstand, and rapidly recover from disruption’ (Risk Steering Committee 2010, as quoted in Bracke 2016, 52) and relies on ‘the ability of a substance or object to bounce back and spring into prior shape’ (Bracke 2016, 54). Sociologist Sarah Bracke even claims that ‘in precarious times, resilience is the new security’ (2016, 57). However, resilience does not align with security as much as with survival. Political economist Mark Neocleous puts resilience in the context of the neoliberal regime when arguing the following:

Good subjects will “survive and thrive in any situation”, they will “achieve balance” across the several insecure and part-time jobs they have, “overcome life’s hurdles” such as facing retirement without a pension to speak of, and just “bounce back” from whatever life throws [at them], whether it be cuts to benefits, wage freezes or global economic meltdown. Neoliberal citizenship is nothing if not a training in resilience as the new technology of the self. (Neocleous 2013, 5)

According to Neocleous, resilience has come to form the basis of '*subjectively* [his emphasis] dealing with the uncertainty and instability of contemporary capitalism' (2013, 5). Nevertheless, he states the obvious when he writes that we ought to do more than merely survive: we need to resist mere resilience and resist (self-)precarization (2013, 7).

Contemporary dance artists seem to be resilient subjects, because they have to be skillful in flexibility, persistence, and adaptability. To quote Andrea Ellmeier once more: 'the new creative workforce is meant to be young, multi-skilled, flexible, psychologically resilient, independent, single and unattached to a particular location' (2003, 3). Similarly, McRobbie claims that 'the young middle class is being "made up" to withstand and prepare for a world of seemingly self-directed work, often interrupted and relatively unprotected' (2016, 189). Thus, they are taught to be resilient and their challenge is to invent new forms, or tactics, of social protection for themselves. This book exposes manifold tactics through which artists show resilience and withstand the precarious nature of the work: they hope for the best but prepare for the worst. They adopt their transferable skills of creativity and flexibility to minimize risks and hedge themselves against existential precariousness thus bending neoliberalism's demands to their advantage. I will tackle an array of examples from my fieldwork in the three parts of this book, which altogether provide more insight into the everyday tactics of individual resilience. Nevertheless, I propose to take it further and I argue that exposing precarious work can also be an act of resistance to the exploitative demands of neoliberalism and this in a twofold manner: in what follows, I will continue to discuss two forms of resistance to precarity by first briefly outlining the activist discourse towards precarious work (i.e. a collective resistance among precarious workers prevalent in the public sphere) and introducing tactics of collective care and resistance within the art world. Secondly, in the same context of exposing precarious work, I argue that through performing precarity, artists use their own strengths to break the silence. However, simultaneously and paradoxically, this supposed act of resistance remains a form of resilience because they employ their own creativity to withstand the prevailing working conditions and to survive in the performing arts field – which is exactly what neoliberalism wants them to do.

1.6 Mayday, Mayday, Mayday!

According to Lauren Berlant, the root of precarity goes back to a generalized condition of dependency that neoliberal economic practices now mobilize in unprecedented ways (2011, 192). Berlant observes a new precarious public sphere and points out that this

‘occurs not only in the debates on how to rework insecurity, but [...] is also an emerging aesthetic’ (2011, 192). As argued above, there has indeed emerged an aesthetic of precariousness in which the precarious nature of artistic work has been made visible on stage (see also Kunst 2015a; Pewny 2011a; Van Assche and Pewny 2018) and in the public sphere. The latter dates back to the early 2000’s, when all types of precarious workers organized themselves as activists fighting for their rights in cities in Italy, Spain, and France on May 1.¹⁴ This day is often referred to as May Day, a public holiday known as Labor Day or the International Workers’ Day. On this day, European flex-workers gather in cities like Milan and Barcelona to demonstrate, to protest, to parade in defense of their social rights as a way out of generalized precarity. In fact, May Day is a call for help: ‘mayday’ is an emergency call used internationally in radio communication as a signal of distress derived from the French ‘m’aider’. In the context of these *EuroMayDayParades*, Italian activist Alex Foti formulated a rather prophetic definition of the precariat:

The Precariat is the sum of all people with non-standard job forms that have the social standard around which collective life increasingly involves. It is a condition of generalized social precarity and singularized job precariousness. It is the exclusion of a whole generation - and soon, an entire society - from social rights bearing guarantees of collective self-defence. (Foti 2004, paragraph 7)

The precarious nature of artistic work has appeared in the public sphere, for example, in the infamous open letter from a dancer who refused to participate in Marina Abramović’s MOCA performance (2011).¹⁵ After auditioning for the performance event during the Los Angeles Museum Gala dinner, dancer Sara Wookey rejected the job and informed Yvonne Rainer – whose reputation and status can compete with Abramović’s – about her reasons for doing so. Essentially, she was offered a meager payment of 150 USD to lie naked on a slowly rotating table for about four hours during the dinner disregarding physical and verbal harassment from guests (which is Abramović’s performance mode). Additionally, she was asked to commit to fifteen hours of rehearsal time and to sign a confidentiality agreement, which stated that she could be sued for 1 million USD plus attorney fees in case of breach. Rainer immediately criticized this form of exploitation and expressed her

¹⁴ It should be noted here that I discuss the notions of precarity and precariousness in the context of the socio-economic situation of the post-Fordist workers in Europe, which must be distinguished from the socio-economic and socio-political precarity of groups, such as refugees, gypsies and other minorities, and precarious work in agrarian societies. In that regard, it must be kept in mind that indeed not *all* precarious workers were actively included in these events, but specifically those engaged in flexible and temporary work (such as creative work, but also care work) within a European context.

¹⁵ For an elaborate description and analysis of this performance event and the conflict between Rainer and Abramović in the context of the proximity of art and capitalism, please consult Sara Wookey’s text “Disappearing Acts & Resurfacing subjects: Concerns of (a) Dance Artist(s) Acts” in: Cools G. and P. Gielen (eds.), *The Ethics of Arts. Ecological Turns in the Performing Arts* (2014) and Bojana Kunst’s *Artist at Work* (2015, chapter 2.4).

concern in a letter to the artistic director and Abramović, who disregarded the commentary as failing to understand the irony of the performance event and Abramović's critical attitude towards the wealthy donors. A few days after Rainer's letter, encouraged by the support of such an authority figure, Wookey revealed her identity in an open letter, in which she condemned the particular working conditions by stating that it obscured 'a situation of injustice in which both artist and institution have proven irresponsible in their unwillingness to recognize that art is not immune to ethical standards' (Wookey 2011, paragraph 12). Wookey had the courage to come out and speak up about the manifold ethical issues coupled to the event, such as power abuse, fair practices, exploitation, and the courage to say 'no'. Declining a job for a renowned artist – and not unimportantly, a job that could probably further one's career – and then to publicly address the reasons for doing so, unmasking a celebrated artist who has the power to damage one's career, shows tremendous bravery. Most significantly, her open letter is a resistant act, breaking the silence of the precarious intellectuals. In Wookey's words:

I would rather be the face of the outspoken artist than the silenced, slowly rotating head (or, worse, "centerpiece") at the table. I want a voice, loud and clear.

Abramović's call for artists was, as the LA Times quoted, for "strong, silent types." I am certainly strong but I am not comfortable with silence in this situation. I refuse to be a silent artist regarding issues that affect my livelihood and the culture of my practice. There are issues too important to be silenced and I just happen to be the one to speak out, to break that silence. I spoke out in response to ethics, not artistic material or content, and I know that I am not the only one who feels the way I do. (Wookey 2011, paragraphs 6-7)

Other examples of addressing precarity in the arts in the public sphere include the organization of symposia, debates, and working sessions that discuss the precarious working conditions in the arts, such as there were 'Solidarity. How do we work together?' organized by the already mentioned SOTA, Flanders Arts Institute and others on February 27, 2016 in Brussels, or the annual Branchentreff, a get-together of the performing arts industry organized by Performing Arts Programm in Berlin. The most direct effect of the public discourse on precarity within the arts is without doubt the codification of fair practices, starting with the demand for a fair remuneration for all labor. In Flanders and the Netherlands, extensive propositions for such codes have been made. The Flemish code by SOTA et al. is underwritten by a coalition of organizations, ranging from artist organizations to unions (SOTA et al. 2016). In Berlin, the Landesverband Freie Darstellende Künste (LAFT) introduced a recommendation for a minimum standard fee for freelance performing artists (in theater and dance) when granting subsidies or other forms of official financial support in October 2015. These recommended fees have been reconsidered for the first time and as from June 1, 2017 they are increased to 2,300 euros per month for freelance artists with insurance obligation through the artist's social fund

(Künstlersozialkasse) and to 2,660 euros per month for others. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that this concerns a recommendation, or a guideline, rather than a legal obligation. As long as these fair-practice-instructions are only ethically and not legally binding, their impact will remain rather restricted.

1.7 Performing precarity

Lastly, the precarious nature of artistic work is addressed in the public sphere when artists perform precarity. In recent contemporary dance performances, precarity has increasingly become the theme of artists' creations. In these instances, I suggest that precarity is positively deployed for productivity and this is possible as long as existential insecurity can be kept under a certain level. In line with Lauren Berlant's analysis of the 'cinema of precarity' (Berlant 2011, 201), I argue that artists create 'performances of precarity' by drawing inspiration from their working and living conditions and making them visible onstage. This concept is inspired by the work of Katharina Pewny, especially her analysis of 'performances of the precarious' in European theater (2011b). In a performance of precarity, artists perform their own working and living conditions as their way of broaching the topic of the pressing situation of socio-economic insecurity in which they are forced to live, demonstrating their survival skills and exploring several ways to ensure a sustainable creative practice.¹⁶ In a similar vein, in his book on *Ungoverning Dance*, Ramsay Burt proposes that the institutionalized dance sector has a mechanism (or a Foucauldian *dispositif*) that performs a regulating function, but several dance performances problematize and disrupt this function (2016, 4-5). He uses the term 'ungoverning' to identify this as a process of deconstructing or 'unworking' artistic or aesthetic conventions. In Burt's view, dance performances that ungovern are political in the sense that they generally take 'the form of institutional critique or critique of neoliberalism, or a general revelation of relations of power' (2016, 235). These performances, as Burt puts it:

They draw attention to the generally invisible conditions through which dance circulates within its market. By doing so they offer performative critique of the

¹⁶ Performances of precarity may also be related to some extent to what Shannon Jackson terms 'social works', which are (political) art forms and that help imagine sustainable social institutions and explore forms of interdependent support such as social systems of labor (Jackson 2011, 14).

economic and political system of neoliberal capitalism, whose rules the market of dance must obey. (Burt 2016, 5)

Burt's definition of ungoverning dance performances could easily be applied to define performances of precarity. Accordingly, several of the ungoverning dance performances discussed in Burt's book are simultaneously performances of precarity as they reveal the working conditions and expose the workings of neoliberal exploitation. As an example, Burt discusses the BADco. performance *1 Poor and One 0* (2008). At the core of the multimedia performance is the 1895 film *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* by the Lumière brothers. As a critique to post-Fordist labor and by using the film as a reference point, the collective performs a series of reflections on (wasting) time, the separation of work time and leisure time, and the difference between leisure in a Fordist and post-Fordist economy. Burt concludes that BADco's performance offers a collective space for critical thinking (2016, 98), which is – as I pointed out before – lacking in an informal, project-based and therefore precarious work regime. The performance ungoverns dance precisely because it offers this collective social and political realm. Hence, Burt contends that in the process of ungoverning, independent dance artists 'resist the way the institutionalized dance world seeks to police and enclose common resources, reshaping it in line with neoliberal ideas about self-regulating markets' (2016, 7). Breaking the silence and publicly opening the discussion using the performative tools artists possess, as I argued before, are indeed signs of protest against the prevalent conditions. However, true resistance to the forces of precarity and the neoliberal art market seems somewhat unattainable because continuing to make art even as a form of protest is precisely what neoliberalism wants. However, by advocating fair practices in the arts in public events – as mentioned above – and especially by performing precarity, artists are demonstrating resilience as resistance: they are doing more than surviving dance, because they are attempting to turn precarity into productivity, thus paving the way to a sustainable future. In turn, performing precarity may beget deprecarization.

Deprekarization is a term borrowed from sociologist Klaus Dörre, who outlines several counter-strategies against precarity in his German text "Entsicherte Arbeitsgesellschaft. Politik der Entprekarisierung" ("Unsecured Labor Society. Politics of deprecarization", 2005). In that vein, theater scholar Katharina Pewny has demonstrated that a few predominantly white and male directors or choreographers have been able to make a success story through performing their own precarity in the first decade of this century (2011a and 2011b). Drawing on Dörre, Pewny employs the notion of deprecarization in an analysis of Jochen Roller's trilogy *Perform Performing* (2002–2004) and the positive influence his trilogy has exercised on his future trajectory. Pewny has proven that Roller managed to *deprecarize* himself since he was able to turn his unstable working conditions into full-time employment as Kampnagel's head dramaturge in Hamburg and artistic

director of their live art festival (2011a, 222). In a related vein, the editors of an issue of *The Drama Review* on performance and precarity state the following:

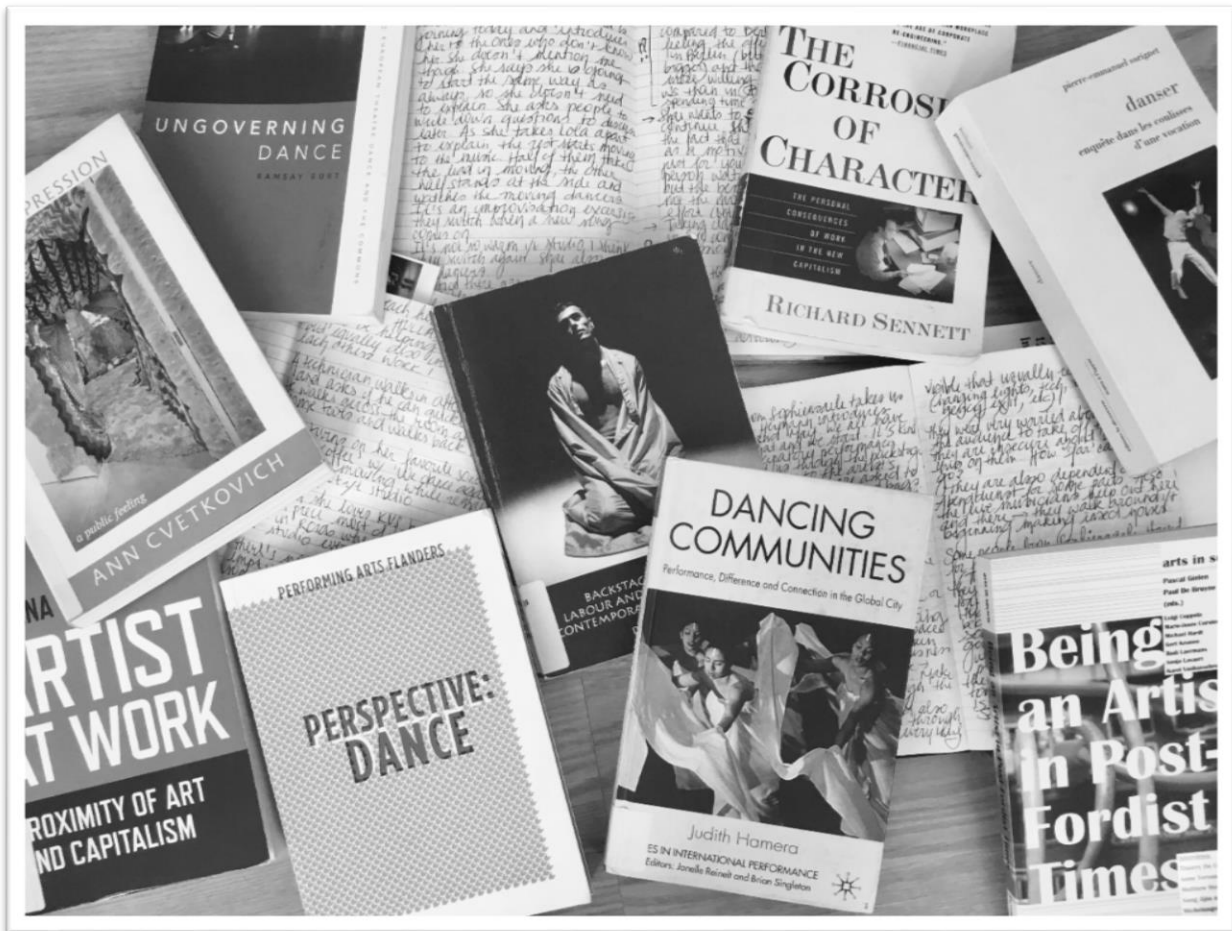
Deploying precarity to critique precarity might in some ways be reminiscent of Brecht's deployment of the alienation effect as a form of materialist critique [...]. Brecht attempted to deploy alienation positively in order to provoke critical thought that might lead to actions of resistance and change. (Ridout and Schneider 2012, 9)

What is described here is the alienating effect of making the profession's precarious working conditions visible onstage as a tactic or a form of resilience as resistance. In staging the invisible work of dance, artists highlight the lack of recognition of dance as work. Addressing this issue helps to construct a more sustainable future in dance overall, and this in a double sense: first, the issue receives increasing public attention and thus becomes harder for political economists to ignore. Secondly, because many of the audience members can relate to the addressed issues, these performances turn out to be quite successful in galvanizing those who are sympathetic to the artists' cause and this in turn can produce a more stable trajectory for the artists. Indeed, 'deploying precarity to critique precarity' may not rely on an alienation effect as suggested by the editors of *The Drama Review*, but quite the opposite: identification. Those artists who are most explicit about their precarity (or exploit it even), seem to gain a lot from it precisely because the audiences can relate.

In the performance of the abovementioned *ELEANOR!* on November 26, 2008 in Montpellier, Bauer situates her own story in the reality of the evening's audience through conducting a demographic survey questioning their professional lives. In various cases, the demographic survey coincidentally prevailed that most of the audience members work in the art and cultural sector anyway. For example, in the mentioned performance a meager number of 13 out of 113 audience members (11.5%) raised their hand when asked whether they did not fit into any of the (artistic and cultural) categories she had mentioned. This indicates that more than three-quarters of the audience worked in the arts and culture and proves that the majority of the audience members can recognize these issues. She realized very quickly that people recognized themselves in what she was saying and thus stopped referring to herself as the artist when citing Dieter Lesage's text, but started putting the audience in the artist's position by addressing them as the artists. Nonetheless, one may wonder which efficacy performing precarity has when most of the audience is already aware of the precarious conditions. It may precisely be because the audience relates to these issues that these performances of precarity turn out to be successful and that the artists have gained from it on the long run. This though may seem somewhat counterproductive, as the artists then end up profiting from what they criticize. Nonetheless, even though Bauer's precarity solo put her on the map, she nevertheless remains on the road to deprecariatization, in the sense that the socio-

economic precarity inherent to the project-based performing arts sector still applies. While the instances in which these performances of precarity can potentially lead to actual deprecarization are most likely rare, they may be considered a successful tactic for developing a more sustainable practice, and let's not forget, for breaking the silence. In its essence, this book will discuss the precarious nature of artistic *work* – with an emphasis on work – and the emerging aesthetic in which this precarious nature has been made visible onstage.

Image 2: books and fieldnotes



Chapter 2

Field of Inquiry and Methodology

2.1 ‘Guinea pigs for the new economy’

Although only a limited number of scholars have devoted their research on socio-economic circumstances in the arts to the contemporary dance profession, a better understanding of the contemporary dance artist’s work could make a modest contribution to the numerous and extensive studies on precarity. Artists generally belong to the third – and notably not the largest – subgroup within Standing’s definition of the precariat and can be identified as those which Anne and Marine Rambach termed the precarious intellectuals: they are (highly) educated workers in the creative economy, carrying out their work without future prospects, since the nature of their labor does not permit it. Contemporary dance artists, in turn, are merely one fraction of that subgroup within the precariat. Hence, I will depart from this context to outline my field of inquiry and the potential relevance of this research, yet simultaneously, I remain cautious and conscious about the limited scope of this study as not to overestimate the weight of this research. The creative sector is only a part of Ulrich Beck’s *The Brave New World of Work* (2000), within which art is merely a segment, and within which, in turn, contemporary dance is probably the smallest subdivision.

In line with the description of the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), the new figure of the creative workforce performs immaterial labor on a flexible basis within the context of temporary projects, a situation that also demands persistent networking in order to ascertain future work opportunities. Following up on their seminal work, various other scholars, including Virno (2004), Gielen (2010b), Pewny (2011a), and Kunst (2015a), have nominated the performing artist as the paradigmatic example of this new creative workforce occupied with immaterial and transnational project work. Indeed, the kind of project-based work carried out by performing artists in the context of personal networks can be seen as exemplary for current socio-economic

changes within the cultural and innovative economy and therefore artists are often identified as the forerunners in the contemporary institutionalization of this project-oriented work regime. Dutch artist Jan Ritsema, too, names the artist as the explorer for this new economy:

What [is described] here is what neoliberal semio-capitalistic economies foresee for their future workforce: [...] Instead of slaving for somebody else, many more people will become their own slaves. Artists seem to be the explorers, guinea pigs, and teasers for this new economy. (Ritsema 2015)

However, putting the (performing) artist in this prototypical position remains somewhat questionable. Would it perhaps not be more interesting and instructive instead to highlight the peculiarity of artistic labor in light of what we already know about project work and immaterial labor and learn from that unique status of the arts?

Pierre-Michel Menger, whose *The Economics of Creativity* (2014) is one of the few comprehensive qualitative studies exploring the work and working conditions in the art world, stresses that artistic innovation and creativity penetrated various other sectors of production. Especially the intrinsic qualities of art and art making, such as imagination, playfulness and improvisation, but also organization and communication forms between the members of art worlds, have always served as prototypes for other sectors (Menger 2014). I propose that a better understanding of the workings of the contemporary dance profession by comparing two cities in which artists operate within different freelancing systems¹ can be insightful for a variety of fields, such as urban studies, labor sociology, political economy and the cultural field itself.² Artistic career paths are inclined to be non-linear and non-hierarchical, and as Delphine Hesters points out, they are rather trajectories with a large improvisatory character (2004, 86). This atypical career path has much in common with the rising freelance entrepreneurial trajectories, especially prevalent among the younger generation of (highly) educated workers in the creative

¹ In Germany, independent artists generally work self-employed, whereas in Belgium they hold the employee status, yet in neither case they truly belong to these statuses – which explains also why the notion of bogus self-employment has gained popularity in the debates. See especially the article on the topic of bogus self-employment in Germany in *brand eins* of March 2017 by Christian Sywottek, who points to the exploitative working condition under self-employment, using several examples from freelancers in different professions, including one choreographer. The author notes that income gap among the individually self-employed is enormous: 23% of the have a gross income higher than 25 euros per hour, whereas one quarter have an income below 8.50 euros per hour, while all of them are subject to the same duties and conditions.

² Investigating atypical forms of work might also important today, as we encounter more flexibility within employment situations, such as opportunities to work from home or co-working spaces, flexible hours determined by the employee, consultants hopping projects and firms, and so on.

economy in Western society.³ Nonetheless, communication scholar Greig de Peuter holds that freelancers from the creative industry, particularly artists, may indeed be prototypes of the post-Fordist work regime, but they are too quickly called ‘role-model workers’, because they are also the ones who try to resist it the most. He warns that ‘after all, a role model always carries within it the potential to become a bad example’ (De Peuter 2014, 279). De Peuter’s warning is a valid one: within this contribution, it should be kept in mind that the study of contemporary dance artists’ work can teach us many good and bad practices, which should be dealt with critically. First and foremost, I emphasize that this study exposes the workings of the profession and its principle aim is to demystify the work of artists and shed light on the working conditions – or as choreographer David Hernandez once put it in an interview: ‘by humanizing the situation of artists, people can let go of the myth that artists are just lazy and feeding off of taxpayer money’ (Van Assche 2016, 54).⁴ The information and knowledge revealed through this study is a minor step towards creating better conditions for the contemporary dance profession – and perhaps for many freelancers working in the grey zones between the employee status and self-employment – and that is why, in this book, contemporary dance artists are understood as ‘the guinea pigs of the new economy’, or at least as a very particular segment of a much larger colony of guinea pigs.

2.2 Dance and/as work

In 2002, dance scholar Mark Franko was probably one of the first to address the convergence between dance and work with the release of his book *The Work of Dance. Labor, Movement and Identity in the 1930s* (2002), which offered new tools for dance scholars to study the relation of politics to aesthetics. He departs from the hypothesis that 1930’s dance in the US conveyed ‘the physical presence of work in aesthetic and critical terms, bringing laboring bodies into visibility as historical agents’ (Franko 2002, 2). Following up on Franko, I proceed to explore what is particular about contemporary dance artists today

³ See especially “The Persistent Pandemic of Precariousness: Young People at Work” by Lefteris Kretsos (2010).

⁴ The interview was published in Dutch in *Etcetera*: ‘Ik denk dat de mythe van de luie kunstenaars die leven van belastinggeld kan worden doorbroken door de situatie te humaniseren’ (Van Assche 2016, 54).

and their relation to work?⁵ One may wonder what is as a matter of fact exceptional about contemporary dance artists within the category of the performing arts?

Firstly, in contrast to theater, dance does not necessarily demand language skills, which allows for a more transnational orientation. In the introduction of the edition of *Dance Research Journal on Global/Mobile: Re-orienting Dance and Migration Studies*, Paul Scolieri describes the dance world as a nomadic one, constituted by a mobile set of performers, choreographers, teachers and audiences in search of economic prosperity, political asylum, religious freedom, and/or artistic liberty (Scolieri 2008, v-xx). Contemporary dance artists settle in what urban studies and cultural industries experts define as creative cities, which stand for cities that function as magnetic fields for creative workers, who, as if they were migratory birds can perch there and use it as a base for their further flights (see also Florida 2005; Hesters 2006; Pratt 2008). Brussels and Berlin, among others, act as such a base. In this respect, Berlin-based contemporary artist and philosopher Diego Agulló writes that ‘Berlin has become a paradigm of post-Fordist social organization. [...] There is a continuous flow of people from an international network moving in and out of the city generating short term alliances in the so-called ecosystem of cultural industry’ (Agulló 2017, paragraph 4). A common question asked among contemporary dance artists therefore inquires into where their peers are based rather than where they live. In the introduction of her book *Dancing Communities* (2007), Judith Hamera summarizes this beautifully in one sentence: ‘Dancers make cities as friends, as partners, as corps and, in so doing, remake themselves, their audiences, and each other every day, day after day’ (Hamera 2007, 1). In the 2008 report commissioned by the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers entitled *Dancers Keep Moving: International Careers and Transition*, dance artists are indeed depicted as

⁵ In her book *Backstage Economies: Labour and Masculinities in Contemporary European Dance* (2014a), anthropologist Dunja Njaradi explicitly points to the contemporary dance artist in particular, emphasizing the importance to acknowledge dance as living labor and living labor as the driving force of the contemporary form of capitalism. As I pointed out earlier, Tsianos and Papadopoulos hold that today’s composition of *living* labor is the response to the risks imposed by *immaterial* labor (2006). As work becomes incorporated into private time, the exploitation of the workforce happens beyond the boundaries of work and is distributed across the whole time and space of life. In this respect, Njaradi argues the following: ‘The investigation of dancers’ lives has a great importance for understanding our contemporary political present not because they are the paradigmatic example of immaterial labourers, but because they are living labour in general’ (2014a, 169). While all labor presupposes life and the reproduction of life on the one hand, and the abstraction of that life as commodity on the other hand, it must be refined here that dance is not living labor more so than other labor per se, but what Njaradi seems to call attention to here is that the feature of living labor is something that is often overlooked in the performing arts, because the art world is repeatedly related to the notion of immaterial labor. Laermans (2015) and Kunst (2015a), for example, combat aesthetic fetishism, which only looks at the artwork as a product by revealing art as work. Furthermore, in a same manner as teachers, for example, the body is the primary material for work, but much of the labor remains invisible: like much of a teacher’s labor happens outside of the classroom, also much of a performing artist’s labor happens ‘backstage’.

pioneers of the transnational labor market because their ‘double mobility (across borders and across careers) constitutes a case that may very well be taken as a model for mobility and employability of workers in general’ (IJdens et al. 2008, 15). However, I would be careful about the use of ‘pioneer’ in this context, while we know that this is certainly not only true for dance artists: the statement also applies to opera singers, musicians or ballet dancers in the performing arts sector, and consultants or managers in the private sector, to name only a few. Nonetheless, it remains important to acknowledge that in contradistinction to many other professions (even including several performing arts professions, such as text-based acting), dance artists are particularly transnationally mobile. What differs today from the nomadic lifestyle of dance artists in the past is that the work of project-based contemporary dance artists is nowadays produced in various locations in periods of residency, whereas the mobile lives of dance artists in the past were a consequence of touring finished productions. Interestingly, the transnational mobility of project-based contemporary dance artists knows a decoupling of the conception of a work, the production of a work (generally in residency periods) and the presentation of a work, which results in a deterritorialization. In other transnationally mobile performing arts branches, such as opera or ballet for example, the conception, production and presentation are generally coupled to one location abroad. In contrast, residencies in contemporary dance are in general short and the research (conceptual and studio work) does not necessarily lead to the presentation of an outcome. Furthermore, producing a contemporary dance performance in a project-based funding system requires several consecutive residency periods in various locations and the presentation of the outcome (if any) is not necessarily connected to the location of these consecutive residencies. Since travelling has become much faster and more efficient than before, dance artists do not have to rely solely on resources from their base country, but find infrastructure and co-production budgets across the borders. The present-day digital era allows people to connect even more effortlessly and consequently constitutes virtual and mobile dance communities. Accordingly, in line with Paolo Virno’s notion of ‘not-feeling-at-home’ (2004, 34-40), visual artist John Di Stefano calls attention to the twentieth-century perpetual loss of home that stems from an increasingly transnational, mobile and media-saturated world (Di Stefano 2002, 39). This aspect of the contemporary dance profession is examined to the full in the chapter “The Mobile” in part II of this book.

Secondly, in contrast to classical dance, contemporary dance tends to focus on creative (and collaborative) processes rather than on (specializing in one) technique. This may explain partly why contemporary dance artists appear to favor project-oriented work formats rather than commitment to an ensemble (next to the fact that project work has been greatly facilitated within the neoliberal regime of governmentality – not the least through granting subsidies per project). In fact, in the performing arts, hybrid career paths have become standard and the idea of a steady job is perhaps not even the most desirable path within this professional category of the arts (see also Hesters 2006;

Janssens and Moreels 2007). It should be noted that contemporary dance is an especially multifarious, even heterogeneous artistic field with an everything-but-stable identity. According to sociologist Rudi Laermans, its contemporaneity is intrinsically linked with the performative construction and reproduction of the collective belief that particular practices are genuine instances of contemporary dance (2015, 60-79). Contemporary dance is thus certainly not a unifying style. First, each choreographer has established a particular movement language, and as a consequence they recruit a relatively broad spectrum of performers with and without training. Rather than fitting perfectly in a certain idiom (as is the case with classical ballet), the personal movement style of the performer is most essential. Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, a great adaptability is crucial, because each choreographer has different expectations regarding her or his performers and their skills. Creating movement material together in the absence of a defining vocabulary or body technique is one of the hallmarks of contemporary dance practices. I would highlight that contemporary dance is not characterized by a particular movement style, but by the expansion of the definition of *dancing*: all bodily activity can be classified as dance and can become an element of choreography. As Laermans puts it:

There is the more specific name, “contemporary dance”, which may be explicitly invoked or just assumed when stating “this is dance”. Contemporary dance has been and will likely continue to be — at least in the foreseeable future — that evident and at the same time rather strange spectacle of publicly observable practices that involve the external designation and self-designation of artefacts, authors, stylistic features, institutions, et cetera, as contemporary dance. (Laermans 2015, 73)

This perception of dance stems from the focus on movement with a *pedestrian quality* in American postmodern dance, or even further back, from the falling and rolling movements introduced in American modern dance. The core idea is that the choreographer can have access to any kind of material and that s/he recharges the material with artistic substance, with or without a reference to the context from which it transpires. In that regard, Sally Banes concluded that ‘the postmodern choreographers proposed that a dance was a dance not because of its content but because of its context – i.e., simply because it was framed as a dance’ (2011, xix).

A third and very important aspect of contemporary dance is the aura of the performer rather than the performer’s virtuosity, since from the 1960’s onwards virtuosity is often viewed as a purely technical principle instead of an artistic concern. As dance scholar Gabriele Brandstetter concludes in her article on *The Virtuoso’s Stage* (2007):

What remains is virtuosity as a “transgressive scene”. And this draws our attention to the fact that contemporary performance is “deferred”, that it may be precisely in the “withdrawal of the virtuoso” that the stage opens up for a new and different evidencing of the improbable. (Brandstetter 2007, 192)

In this respect, Ramsay Burt points out that new European experimental dance performances often do not look like dance and do not seem to be concerned with presenting conventional dance movement as such, but with presenting alternative approaches to virtuosity (2016, 3 and 59). For many choreographers, however, I observe that a degree of virtuosity in the classic sense remains important, but rather in function of the choreography and not in terms of excellence. The performer's aura relates to a unique presence on stage, the capacity to attract attention, and to embody the artistic intention of the choreographer in a specific way but at the same time to radiate something very individual as a dancer. The combination of these three aspects of contemporary dance may be termed *flexible performativity*, which refers to a particular skill that dancers today have to master.⁶ The skill encompasses the adaptability to perform in accordance to the demands or expectations of a certain choreographer, but also in response to certain audiences, locations and situations. I will discuss this skill more in-depth in the chapter "The Flexible" in part II of this book.

All in all, the requirement to have an at once multicompetent and adaptable body is a rather vague characteristic of contemporary dance and therefore difficult to train. In defining my research population, I therefore rely primarily on self-definitions that are to a certain extent validated by peers, programmers, critics, audience members, etc. In addition, I choose to use the term *contemporary dance artist* throughout this book, because in line with the reality of flexible and project-based work, many contemporary dance artists combine the positions of performer and choreographer either at the same time or over a certain period of time (meaning that one swaps position according to the project one is involved in at a specific moment). As contemporary dance artists often cultivate hybrid artistic careers, fluctuating between performing and choreographing, but also teaching, and perhaps other arts-related jobs, I employ the term *dance artist* to encompass this multifacetedness and to avoid employing slash-identities (e.g. dancer/choreographer/performance artist/...), which brings us back to the issue of occupational identity discussed in the first chapter. Consequently, I distinguish the terms *dancer* (or *performer*) and *choreographer* only when the distinction is necessary for clarity of the role.

Lastly, the above implies that it is therefore impossible to truly define contemporary dance in a neutral or objective way, and by implication it is thus a challenge to delineate its practitioners or authors. Contemporary dance is often created collaboratively and thus also collectively validated, which in turn informs the notion of contemporary dance and its validation as such. In the second part of his book *Moving Together: Theorizing and Making*

⁶ I purposely put the notion of *flexible performativity* in italics as I employ a term here coined by Berlin-based contemporary dance artist Kareth Schaffer in a lecture in HZT in Berlin on February 4, 2013 and who uses the term in her practice and jargon on a daily basis.

Contemporary Dance (2015), Laermans devotes himself to the examination of the social relations within the contemporary dance world, and specifically within the making of a performance. With Luhmann's system theory in mind, Laermans examines creative working processes and zooms in on the collaborations between the choreographer and the dancer, particularly those which happen, in his terms, in a semi-directive mode of participatory collaboration. As Laermans puts it: 'collaborative dance indeed emerged within the practice of conceptual dance but rapidly changed into a generally valued mode of commonly creating dance, whatever its more specific stakes' (2015, 21). Collaborations within contemporary dance are often experiments in common decision-making. Contemporary dance artists especially value those collaborations that offer them numerous chances to explore and develop their 'self'. Most importantly, Laermans introduces the notion of 'the collaboratory', meaning the 'always contextually embedded, only partially realized and still virtual potential to co-create' (2015, 364). In his text *Being in Common*, Laermans notes that artistic collaboration is always a collaboration 'yet to come' with a shared promise of a genuine social productivity as a driving force: 'artistic collaboration nowadays bets on the potentialities of cooperation itself' (2012, 94). Lastly, it is important to note that when the collaboration is too directly product-oriented, this is often perceived as not very conducive to a productive collaboration due to the time pressure it presupposes. Collaborative dance practices essentially 'exemplify a cooperative mode of artistic creation that precedes a public performance without necessarily marking its observable features (though this may of course be the case)' (Laermans 2015, 21). Hence, these ideas about collaboration and its potential inform contemporary dance practices and working modes and therefore also the notion of contemporary dance.

2.3 Social sciences meets dance studies

At the intersection of the sociology of art and culture and the sociology of labor, a great amount of research has been conducted on artistic careers and working processes. French sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger, for example, has explored the constitutive uncertainties of creative work in numerous publications (assembled in Menger 2014). Other examples include the work of Austrian scholar Bernadette Loacker, who delivered stimulating insights into the precarious nature of artistic labor in her theater-oriented study *Kreativ Prekär: Künstlerische Arbeit und Subjektivität im Postfordismus* (*Creative precarious: artistic work and subjectivity in post-Fordism*) (2010), the different volumes on the topics written and edited by sociologist Pascal Gielen – such as *The Murmuring of the Artistic*

Multitude (Gielen 2010b) or *Being an Artist in Post-Fordist Times* (De Bruyne and Gielen 2012), or the publications by Slovenian philosopher Bojana Kunst on ‘the artist as a worker’ (see esp. Kunst 2015a). The field of contemporary dance, however, has received little attention. A new and still modest wave of research within dance studies is turning the tide: instead of analyzing the artistic products – the artworks – some scholars have started to concentrate on creative processes and on art as work (e.g. Husemann 2009; Sorignet 2010; Laermans 2015). A first branch of research within this wave concentrates on former generations’ aesthetics (e.g. Franko 2002) and their re-enactments (e.g. Stalpaert 2017) and a second branch is introduced by scholars such as Pirkko Husemann, who has investigated (collective) modes of working of two Berlin-based choreographers in her book *Choreographie als kritische Praxis (Choreography as critical praxis)* (2009). Third and last, theater scholar Katharina Pewny has examined the conditions of working and living of predominantly male theater directors and choreographers in Germany and the influence on their aesthetics as well as on their career paths since they became popular with performing their precarity (e.g. Pewny 2011a).⁷ Whereas the first focus has become a leading discourse and the second one is slowly evolving, the last side-branch of research on art as work has thus far principally studied renowned choreographers and directors. The aim is to fill this gap in research by bridging dance studies and the social sciences and thus generating the growing field of *sociological dance studies*. Aforementioned sociologist Rudi Laermans is perhaps one of the key authors in this growing field. His most recent book, *Moving Together* (2015), is a valuable contribution to dance studies stemming from sociology, because he was able to study the workings of making a dance performance in the long run, from an interesting double position as a dance enthusiast and critic since the emergence of a contemporary dance scene in Flanders during the Flemish Wave in the early 1980’s in addition to his principal occupation as a professor of sociology. In a similar vein, the work of French sociologist Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet is another noteworthy example. Sorignet is sociologist and lecturer at the University of Toulouse III, but he has also worked as a professional performer and dancer with various contemporary dance companies. He has studied the profession for several years through in-depth interviews and participant observation in the French contemporary dance scene (2010). Therefore, Sorignet is an illustration of an innovative researcher in dance studies, in this case someone versed in social sciences and contemporary dance itself.

However, it should be noted that performance studies, and certainly its segment of dance studies, have always been multi- or transdisciplinary in this way. As Richard Schechner once wrote: ‘Performance studies is “inter” – in between. It is intergeneric,

⁷ Interestingly, Pewny points out in her book (2011a) that, contrariwise, several female collectives she briefly discussed in the context of the activist discourse on precarity did not become famous with their work on precarity.

transdisciplinary, intercultural – and therefore inherently unstable’ (Schechner 1998, 360). Dance and performance scholars have drawn from a variety of disciplines and approaches, such as anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies among many others. It is important to note that when dance studies emerged in the USA and later in Germany, this was the work of dance scholars, who had typically been practicing dance professionally (e.g. the work of Susan Leigh Foster or Gabriele Klein).⁸ Notably, at the turn of the millennium, Jane Desmond explored what she terms ‘terrae incognitae’ within dance studies (particularly in the U.S.), pointing to the ‘unmapped and un- or under-explored realms of dance research’ (2000, 43). In her essay in *Dance Research Journal*, she proposes that dance scholars expand their methods of analysis to include more ethnographies and argues that fieldwork, or in her words ‘the sustained participation in and observation of communities, institutions, and practices’ carries an important potential (Desmond 2000, 43). While she is aware of a wave of dance scholarship loosely connected to cultural studies methods occurring at that time, she reveals that although these approaches deepen the engagement of dance studies with theoretical issues aligned with cultural studies, these often result in a focus on dances as ‘texts’ rather than on the practices. Desmond puts it as follows: ‘what an ethnographic approach requires that textual analysis does not is actually speaking to people, participating with them in their activities (“participant observation”), and trying to understand their own interpretations of what is going on’ (Desmond 2000, 45). Additionally, she enhances that the few contributors to dance ethnography are ‘usually not read or cited widely by dance scholars beyond the contours of the “dance ethnography” world’ (Desmond 2000, 44). To avoid some of the limitations of both ethnographic and textual approaches, Desmond suggests that dance scholars ‘combine ethnographic approaches with historical research and with “cultural studies” tools for the analyses of “texts”’ when appropriate to the research, which would help to understand how dance happens (Desmond 2000, 46). She deplores that only few scholars integrate a knowledge and practice of fieldwork in dance scholarship, which is in part a division between the humanities and social science approaches that should actively be worked on to overcome. She suggests that cross-training and collaborative research as teamwork, among other things, could be possible routes to take. While she explicitly signals the gap in dance research of ethnographies of dance institutions and audience, she does not overlook the importance of including ethnographies of practitioners and communities. I aim to fill this signaled gap by combining a textual and an ethnographic approach thus entangling conventional dance studies tools with sociological research methods. In practice, this means that I seek to

⁸ Katharina Pewny has addressed the emergence and development of dance studies in an interesting lecture we jointly held at Trier University on June 15, 2015 at the Department of German and Literature Studies, in the framework of the research cluster “Europa. Strukturen langer Dauer”.

bridge the traditional difference between an externalist and an internalist approach to dance by focusing on the working processes and conditions of contemporary dance and the influence of these on the productions we see on stage, without thereby neglecting the strengths of the multiple disciplines involved. In doing so, I do not merely study contemporary dance environments, working conditions and the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists in late modernity, which is the case in Sorignet's research for example, but also in dance anthropologist Dunja Njaradi's ethnographic study on labor and masculinity in contemporary European dance (2014a). In addition, rather than focusing solely on these 'backstage economies' – as Njaradi terms these, drawing on Ervin Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor (2014a, 54) – the inclusion of dance performance analyses is essential within my research, thus responding to Desmond's proposal to overcome a disciplinary division of knowledge by combining an ethnographic and a textual approach within dance scholarship. Since my professional career in the dance sectors in Belgium and Germany took off, I have observed that in recent contemporary dance performances, artistic precarity, or at least the socio-economic position of artists and the working conditions in the (performing) arts and in late modernity in general, have increasingly become the theme of artists' creations. I am certainly not the only one who detected this trend, as the works of Pewny (2011a) and Kunst (2015a) demonstrate. I therefore proceed from the hypothesis that socio-economic precarity is reflected in the work and lives of the artists as well as in the aesthetics and subject matter of their artistic work. Within this frame, I examine the extent of precarity within the contemporary dance scenes of both Brussels and Berlin, two cities that can be seen as creative capitals (Florida 2004; Pratt 2008) especially attracting contemporary dance artists from around the globe.⁹

However, I encountered a noticeable lack of research on the values, motivations and tactics involved in contemporary dance artists' trajectories. We do not know to what extent precarity is intertwined with motives, such as the desire to avoid working within hierarchically structured companies or to engage in projects that allow democratic forms of decision-making. Therefore, this transdisciplinary study primarily questions if and in what ways the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists affects the working process and the end product. How are contemporary dance artists, who work in a project-based regime in which they are largely dependent on conditional funding for financial and infrastructural support and who therefore work in-between institutions rather than within, physically and mentally affected by these working conditions? How do these supposedly precarious conditions influence what we see on the Brussels and Berlin

⁹ Notably, the *globe* is perhaps too strong a term, since a glimpse at the program folders of the schools, venues, and residency spaces in Brussels and Berlin already gives away that the influx predominantly consists of contemporary dance artists with a white and western background.

stages? If crucial choices are made for the sake of developing the artistic self, not the least through variable forms of artistic collaboration (see especially Laermans 2015 and Kunst 2015a), then in what ways does the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists affect the working processes, the aesthetics, and the subject matter of their creations? Or in other words: to what extent is precarity in all its forms (socio-economic, mental, physical, etc.) intertwined with working on art?

It is thus evident that these research questions require a transdisciplinary multi-method approach. The methodological approach within this study is threefold, borrowing research skills and methods from both performance and dance studies and the social sciences. Firstly, a theoretical fundament is constructed through the profound literary study of recent theories on post-Fordism, neoliberalism and precarious labor. Secondly, the topic is approached in the form of a quantitative study as well as a long-term ethnographic fieldwork with fourteen diverse individual contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin. I conducted an e-survey in Brussels and Berlin with the purpose of mapping the socio-economic situation in both contemporary dance scenes, after which I build further on these findings using the qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and studio observations (after the necessary typology construction for finding the appropriate informants). Lastly, within the ethnographic fieldwork, the research questions are explored through the analysis of several performances of precarity in which the precarious nature of artistic work has been made visible on stage in content and/or in form.

2.4 Field of inquiry: Brussels and Berlin

The city of Brussels owes its status as dance capital to a number of factors, such as a regulated public funding system, especially from the side of the Flemish government, and a consistent influx of new dance talent since the end of the 1990's, particularly through P.A.R.T.S., the international dance school inaugurated and directed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. However, these are only two of the many reasons why Brussels is repeatedly referred to as one of the Meccas for contemporary dance (Hesters 2006, 4; Vlaams Theaterinstituut 2007, 9). Furthermore, Brussels has a vibrant dance scene in general, hosting several established companies, such as Rosas, Ultima Vez, and Damaged Goods, which have come to belong to the international canon. Next to these structurally supported institutions, a wide variety of artists and companies that work with project subsidies or through co-production budgets reside in the Belgian capital. Most interestingly, Belgium offers an exceptional framework for artists in general: first,

Belgium has established in 2003 a social status for artists that facilitates social security for project-hopping artists through enabling the application of the employee status in a freelance work regime. The coverage of periods between contracts through access to steady unemployment allowances is the most important advantage of this artist status. Additionally, the Collective Labor Agreement (CLA) for Performing Arts determines minimum wages for performing arts employees when employed in the Flemish or Brussels-Capital Region. I will discuss these advantages in more detail further in this section as well as in the chapter “The Fast” in part II of this book. Secondly, especially Flanders and Brussels provide suitable infrastructure in the form of research-based workspaces without the obligation to produce. Several of these workspaces specifically focus on dance and are tailored to the profession’s needs. Lastly, in the first part of his most recent book *Moving Together* (2015), sociologist and dance theorist Rudi Laermans provides a detailed introduction to the development of the contemporary dance scene in Flanders since the 1980’s. His empirically informed account proves that Flemish dance has had a strong influence on dance and its global discourses today. A community of international and like-minded dance artists has settled in Brussels and has contributed to the widely known dance made in Flanders: a mixture of conceptual, discursive, hybrid and collaborative dance. Today, Brussels is the base for highly territorially mobile and network-oriented dance professionals and thus appears to be hosting an appealing yet increasingly mobile and virtual dance community (Bauer 2007). The city seems to have become a temporary base of a constantly changing network of individual contemporary dance artists, who constitute a mobile community of potential colleagues. In theory, the Belgian capital seems to be one of the rare places in the world where a dancer or choreographer can cherish the illusion that it is easy to make a living as an artist. Therefore, Brussels is a magnetic pole attracting contemporary dance artists from around the globe (see also Hesters 2006).

In a short overview, Tanzbüro Berlin straightforwardly recapitulated that Berlin has developed into one of the most vibrant art scenes worldwide, because it is the capital of the German federation with the clustering of two systems (East and West), and because of its particularities in infrastructure (such as affordable living and working spaces) (2013). The Tanzbüro elaborates that the contemporary dance field had a meteoric growth in the late nineties with the development of an independent dance scene (*Freie Szene*) and the settlement of choreographers such as Sasha Waltz and Xavier Leroy, the establishment of the festival Tanz im August (1988), and the foundation of the venue Sophiensaele (1996) and the merger of the three existing theater venues into Hebbel am Ufer (2003), and who all together played an influential role in the development of the performing arts in general (Tanzbüro Berlin 2013). The fact that several institutions in Berlin devote themselves exclusively to dance reflects the significance of dance for the performing arts field in the city. Next to Tanzbüro Berlin, also TanzRaumBerlin Netzwerk, Zeitgenössischer Tanz Berlin e.V., Dachverband Tanz Deutschland and Stiftung Tanz –

Transition Zentrum Deutschland are each advocates for the contemporary dance scene in the German capital.

In his book *Die Räume der Kreativszenen. Culturepreneurs und ihre Orte in Berlin* (*The spaces of the creative scenes. Culturepreneurs and their places in Berlin*) (2007), Bastian Lange sketches the structural transformation of Berlin after the collapse of the wall, which promoted economic as well as cultural innovation processes. He proceeds from the hypothesis that the knowledge-based creative industries determine the dynamism of Germany's capital and that 'culturepreneurs' (cultural entrepreneurs) are responsible for the development of a creative scene. As part of the independent arts scene in Berlin, contemporary dance artists are a particular category among these culturepreneurs. In the nineties, Berlin was known as a laboratory for the new experience-based dance, club and music styles in a custom-made urban space. The originally local-oriented narrative of Berlin, which took on the form of squatting, the occupation of industrial sites and the conversion of vacant commercial spaces, has globalized itself rapidly as the narrative of 'the Berlin appropriation of spaces' in the creative scene (Lange 2007, 15). For instance, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Sophiensaele, the 'mother of all free spaces', Sandra Luzina reported in *Der Tagespiegel* ("Mutter aller freien Räume", September 19, 2016, accessed March 21, 2018) that in 1996, when the artists conquered new spaces in the city, Berlin became the capital of temporary use or 'Zwischennutzung', which can be seen as a form of indirect subsidy since both city-owned and private properties were available for non-profit enterprises. Lange is only one of the many Berlin-investigators who explain that Germany's capital appears to be an interesting base or mothership ('Mutterschiff' in German, Lange 2007, 16) for culturepreneurs, especially artists, due to its affordable living costs, the still large reservoir of unoccupied spaces since the collapse of the Wall, and a general open-mindedness of its inhabitants that allows much experimentation¹⁰. Geoff Stahl, for example, explicitly refers to Berlin as a multifaceted space of reinvention and possibility: an iconic city signaling an openness and tolerance to artists, expats and entrepreneurs, a 'creative city and *de facto* the (sub)cultural capital of Europe' (Stahl 2014a, 8). Accordingly, Berlin is what urban studies and cultural industries experts define as a creative city (Florida 2004; Pratt 2008) that acts as a magnetic pole. This magnet effect may be partly explained by the available facilities and resources that appeal to young creative workers, but also by the openness and tolerance (for example, in the city's

¹⁰ It merits mention that these statements about Berlin were made by Bastian Lange (2007) already a decade ago, however the situation of cheap housing and work spaces in Berlin is certainly changing, which is repeatedly affirmed in the media, see for example, a recent article in *Berliner Zeitung* on rent and real estate rises ("Studie: Berlin könnte eine der teuersten Städte werden", January 15, 2018, accessed September 3, 2018).

history of alternative culture, or towards the LGBT community).¹¹ As McRobbie notes, these ideas of freedom to explore 'have been taken on board extensively by policy-makers in Berlin' (2016, 47).

Within the field of contemporary dance, Brussels and Berlin similarly act as such base cities, or nodal points, which was an important reason to include both in my research on the multiple forms and effects of precarity within the contemporary dance field. However, the appeal of Brussels is limited in particular to dance. Just like Brussels is repeatedly referred to as the Mecca for contemporary dance, Brenda Strohmaier does so for Berlin and the creative professions in general: 'Today, the city attracts people from all over the world with reunited forces. For the creative professions, the city has even advanced to a Mecca' (2014, 14).¹² However, Berlin-based contemporary artist Diego Agulló writes that

people are not in Berlin all the time and the level of personal engagement and reliability is always relative. There is a continuous flow of people from an international network moving in and out of the city generating short term alliances in the so-called ecosystem of cultural industry. (Agulló 2017, paragraph 5)

Indeed, Berlin as well as its contemporary dance community seem to be constantly becoming, rather than being (Lange 2007; Strohmaier 2014; Stahl 2014a). Unlike Belgium, Germany does not provide a customized social status for artists that facilitates social security for project-hopping artists, for example, by enabling access to steady unemployment allowances. This difference in status might explain Berlin's lack of continuity, which Agulló refers to, because freelancing artists who take a chance on Berlin realize sooner than later that a career in the arts is difficult to sustain in the city? Similarly, when Serbian-born contemporary dance artist Igor Koruga was based in Berlin, he pointed out that the independent arts scene in Berlin does not in fact exist at all. He defended his statement by adding that 'people are always in circulation and passing through, because everybody is always on the move in search for employment' (Njaradi 2014a, 175). Berlin, as a creative city, thus carries a creative promise or potential that seems to be never realized but always in-the-making. All in all, Berlin appears to share with Brussels the function of temporary base of a constantly changing network of individual contemporary dance artists, who constitute a mobile and virtual community of potential colleagues.

¹¹ It is perhaps interesting to note that this general open-mindedness of Berlin inhabitants might be due to the facts that before the collapse of the wall many young people moved to West-Berlin to avoid military service as West-Berliners were exempt from compulsory army duties.

¹² Original in German: 'Heute zieht die Stadt mit wieder vereinten Kräften Menschen aus aller Welt an. Für Kreative avancierte sie zeitweise zum Mekka' (Strohmaier 2014, 14).

Yet, if even this superficial acquaintance with the field of inquiry suggests that these dance communities continue to grow and exercise their magnetic power to pull artists towards them, then how come I would hypothesize that most contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin are in a precarious professional situation? To explore this question, I conducted a quantitative study in order to get a more empirically grounded status quo as a starting point for my research.

2.5 Quantitative study: mapping challenges

The illustrated fleeting nature of the dance communities in Brussels and Berlin already indicates that their mapping is an almost impossible task. Assembling data on the size of the actual population of Brussels-based and Berlin-based contemporary dance artists and the substrata becomes quite a challenge due to the ephemeral character of the corresponding scene. Sociologist Hans Abbing also noted this specific challenge of measuring the exact population when dealing with artists:

The main problem is however, how to count the artists. This remains extremely difficult because a) diplomas do not reveal who is a professional artist, b) many professional artists are self-employed and unaffiliated, and c) many artists earn most of their income from second jobs and thus often do not appear in statistics. Therefore, if countries count artists at all, the strategies vary greatly from country to country (Abbing 2008, 132).

Seeing that contemporary dance is only a segment of dance – which is only a segment of the performing arts, which, in turn, is a segment of the arts in general – it goes without saying that measuring the size of my population was not evident at all. For Brussels, I therefore asked seven authorities within the Flemish contemporary dance field to estimate the number of people making up the scene linked to the Flemish policy, production and distribution context, which resulted in an average estimation of 375 contemporary dance artists working in Brussels (in the Flemish context). I acquired the contact data for personally distributing the e-survey in three different ways in order to contact as many people as possible, who have been active in the Brussels contemporary dance community during the last five years. First, I put together an overview of all supposedly Brussels-based applicants for dance subsidies (Flanders Dance Commission) or residencies (in workspaces such as workspacebrussels) for the last five years. Secondly, I composed a list with the names of all ex-students from P.A.R.T.S. and removed duplicate respondents. The third and last list was based on all productions that were produced or

co-produced in Flanders and/or Brussels during the last five years (provided by Flanders Arts Institute). Evidently, the second and last entry did not allow the restriction of those involved dance artists that are based in Brussels. I drew the process of collecting contact data to a close when I reached the number of 767 email addresses, which is about the double of the average estimated size of the population provided by the experts in the field.¹³ Accordingly, this method may hamper the inclusion of emerging artists, who are not yet part of the formal circuit. I have tried to avoid this in part by encouraging my contacts to forward the call for participation and share the survey link on social media (for further details, see Van Assche and Laermans 2016, Annex 1 “Research Design”).

For Berlin, I followed a similar approach: I estimated the size of the Berlin dance scene by consulting experts and assembling respondent names as well as email addresses for the mailing of the link to the online survey. First, I asked seven authorities within the Berlin dance scene (i.e. artistic directors or programmers of production houses, work spaces, theaters or training programs) to estimate the overall populations and specific subpopulations (e.g. European vs. non-European, male vs. female). Due to the already pointed out transnationally mobility and virtuality of the Berlin dance community, it was somewhat impossible to compare these estimates to a definitive reality. I received six personalized estimates, of which some are based on official figures.¹⁴ However, the size of the Berlin dance population is not much agreed upon and ranges from 600 up to 4,500 dance artists. Again, I acquired the names in three different ways in order to contact as many people as possible, who have been active in the Brussels contemporary dance community during the last five years. First, I based my list on all productions that were produced or coproduced in Berlin during the last five years. Simone Willeit of Tanzbüro provided me with all calendar data from TanzRaumBerlin from 2010 until 2015, in which she eliminated all duplicate names and all dance artists that were definitely not Berlin-based. I only took the columns ‘mainly choreographers/companies’ and ‘dancers’ into account. Secondly, an overview of all supposedly Berlin-based applicants for residencies (in workspaces) was put together for the last five years, based on the names available on the websites of DOCK 11 and Uferstudios, yet most names already appeared in the TanzRaumBerlin database. Thirdly, I composed a list with the names of all graduates from Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz (HZT), the contemporary dance school founded

¹³ In the distribution and collection of the survey data, the response rate was strictly followed up (cfr. Dillman 2011). The first mailing was followed by up to three reminders. Faulty email addresses, non-eligible respondents as well as respondents who had already participated were removed from the mailing list. Thus, the link to the survey was sent out to 589 potentially useful email addresses. The link remained active between April 20, 2015 and August 31, 2015.

¹⁴ Such as the number of dancers and choreographers registered at the Künstlersozialkasse, a German fund for artists and publicists which coordinates the transfer of contributions to the health, pension and long-term care insurances.

as a pilot project in 2006 with the support of Tanzplan Deutschland, an initiative from the Kulturstiftung des Bundes. Additionally, this list was supplemented with names from the databases on the websites of Dance Germany and Goethe Institut, which both provide a small list of dance professionals though not limited to Berlin. Duplicate respondents were of course removed from the list. This threefold exercise led to a comprehensive list of 2,066 persons. On the basis of the combination of the number of names I systematically gathered and the estimates of the consulted professionals or experts, I could assume that the Berlin dance scene comprises between 1,750 and 2,500 (average: 2,125) contemporary dance artists. Unfortunately, the cooperating organizations were not able to provide assistance in the search for up-to-date email addresses due to privacy regulations. I therefore had to rely on contact data available online with the help of the Google Search Engine and social media. The Google search was drawn to a close after 192 names on my list were connected to an email address. Luckily enough, many organizations (such as DOCK 11, Uferstudios, HZT, Tanzbüro Berlin, Tanzfabrik, etc.) were willing to send out the call for participation to their private databases via newsletters and social media (for further details, see Van Assche and Laermans 2017, Annex 1 “Research Design”).¹⁵ For both surveys, some of the email addresses were removed based on replies from the people concerned reporting that they were not professional dance artists (anymore) or that they are not active in Brussels or Berlin. However, the database may still contain some people not eligible for the study.

This study exclusively addresses professional dance artists working within the field of contemporary dance. Yet, I already pointed out that this group is not easy to circumscribe, because the identity of contemporary dance is unstable and fragmented and above all hinges on a more or less socially validated belief (Laermans 2015). In addition, since its members come and go rapidly in function of work chances, projects, or residencies, it is rather difficult to determine who belongs to the contemporary dance communities. Hence, I had to rely primarily on self-definitions that are to a lesser or greater extent – and also with more or less impact or symbolic capital – validated by peers, programmers, critics, audience members, etc. I therefore opted for a pragmatic approach that included the possibility of self-definition. More particularly, the following twofold delineation was used in the selection of the respondents: 1) those currently working professionally as a performer and/or choreographer within the contemporary

¹⁵ Simone Willeit provided me with a list of 45 people (of dance institutions, workspaces, and companies) she had contacted in order to forward the call to the artists in their database. Willeit sent out the call twice to a list of 412 single artists from the database of Tanzbüro Berlin/TanzRaumBerlin. However, this limited my control over the distribution of the survey: neither was I able to keep track of the number of people the survey had reached nor could I send regular reminders. The link to the online survey circulated on the net for about six months (April 12, 2016 to November 14, 2016).

dance field, based in Brussels or Berlin; 2) those having worked professionally during the last five years in the contemporary dance field and defining themselves as contemporary dance artists based in Brussels or Berlin

Given the aforementioned challenges to delineate the population, I decided to send the survey link to the potential respondents accompanied by a letter. The latter clearly stated that the study investigates contemporary dance artists working and living in Brussels or Berlin and that if the addressee did not meet these criteria, s/he did not need to proceed with the survey. Additionally, the questionnaire opened with two orientation questions. A first one asked the respondents whether they situate themselves in the classical, contemporary or other (i.e. jazz, tap, flamenco, etc.) dance field. The second question addresses their main occupation (i.e. choreographer, performer, teacher, etc.). Moreover, in the questionnaire's demographic section the respondents were requested to indicate if they have their residence in Brussels or Berlin and, if so, why they decided to live there. In case they did not have legal residence in either city, they were asked whether they do live there even though their legal residence is elsewhere, or if they have lived in the city during the last five years.

In line with the reality of flexi-work, many contemporary dance artists combine the positions of performer and choreographer either at the same time or over a certain period of time (meaning that one swaps position according to the project one is involved in at a specific moment). I already indicated that I therefore predominantly use the term *dance artist*. In developing the survey and analyzing the data, I took into account the social complexity this expression refers to by allowing multiple answers for most questions. Thus, only a few respondents were actually able to give one answer to a rather straightforward question such as 'which is your main occupation?' Forcing respondents to give only one answer would have resulted in non-response, dropouts or uncompleted questionnaire forms, or worse, it could have resulted in an untraceable validity problem where respondents obediently report a single main occupation when they actually have more than one. There is, however, a drawback to the use of multiple answer categories since they undermine a proper statistical analysis. Examining the data was indeed quite a challenge: trends are much more difficult to observe. Furthermore, it should be noted that many of the institutions, companies and individuals active in the Brussels dance scene receive funding from the government. Owing to the complex federal structure of Belgium, several governments are active in Brussels as funding agency. I focus on the dance scene connected to subsidies by the Flemish Government, as it provides the largest and most frequently used forms of artistic funding. The methodology and consulted database of respondents do not allow a profound consideration of the dance artists who

mainly rely on support from the French-speaking part of Belgium.¹⁶ It should therefore be kept in mind that the data I use throughout this book only provide relevant information on the Brussels dance scene seen through a Flemish lens.

The Brussels questionnaire had been started by 221 respondents, of which 115 completed the survey. The Berlin questionnaire had been started by 151 respondents, of which 72 completed the survey. However, only 94 completed questionnaires in Brussels and 63 completed questionnaires in Berlin were truly valid, i.e. they were filled out by respondents who were both active in the contemporary dance field as choreographer and/or performer and actually based in Brussels or Berlin. Hence, the analysis was done on a blind sample of 25% of the estimated Brussels population (375 people) or 16% of the Brussels database of 589 email addresses. For the Berlin population, the analysis was done on a blind sample of 3% of the estimated population (2,125 people) or one-third of the database (192 email addresses). This response level is not high, but suffices within the context of an exploratory study that wants to gain a deeper insight into the working conditions of contemporary dance artists. I am aware that the used methodology results in a sampling bias or a distortion generated by the selection of units. Indeed, the sample from the population was not taken systematically since the aim was to reach as many respondents as possible. Given this research design, self-selection was unavoidable because the respondents decide themselves to participate in the study. Hence, I cannot assess the sample's representativeness. Moreover, a well-known phenomenon of web surveys is the high unit non-response or dropout rate. A number of effectively contacted respondents decided not to partake or to drop out when they reach specific questions or toward the end of the questionnaire. I can only speculate about their reasons (such as the fact that some of the questions are rather difficult to answer in a relatively accurate way, the length of the survey or the high and relatively pressing mobility of travelling or touring artists). I have no knowledge of how many respondents participated via the open call sent out through the mentioned institutions and how many were informed via targeted email. It may be reasonable to think that contemporary dance artists who were unemployed at the time of the e-survey were more likely to complete it and therefore there is an overrepresentation of precarious conditions. However, seeing that the surveys in both cities were active for a long time span, I cautiously assume this was not the case. Nonetheless, it is possible that contemporary dance artists who consider themselves precarious were drawn to the topic of research and therefore there may indeed be an overrepresentation of artists who think their socio-economic position is an important issue to address. Similarly, there may also be a sampling bias because certain fractions of the dance population have also disappeared from the cities, for example those who have

¹⁶ A comparative study of the socio-economic position of dance artists supported by the Walloon government is certainly required to complement this study.

left the profession in the last five years or those who are successful enough that they could migrate to the countryside without affecting their success.

It is therefore crucial to bear these limitations of the sample in mind when interpreting the survey findings (for further details, see Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017, both: Annex 1 “Research Design”).

In the preparation of the questionnaire, the German Report *Darstellende Künste: Wirtschaftliche, soziale und arbeitsrechtliche Lage der Theater- und Tanzschaffenden in Deutschland* (Report on the Performing Arts: the Economic, social and labor law situation of theater and dance professionals in Germany) (Jeschonnek, Fonds Darstellende Künste e.V. and Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.V. 2010) generated a solid foundation for the construction of both the Brussels and the Berlin questionnaire. Together with other European publications, such as *Dancers Keep Moving: International Careers and Transition* (IJdens et al. 2008), *Study on Impediments to Mobility in the EU Live Performance Sector and on Possible Solutions* (Poláček 2007), *Danser: enquête dans les coulisses d’une vocation* (Dancing. Inquiry behind the scenes of a vocation) (Sorignet 2010), *The Economics of Creativity: Art and Achievement Under Uncertainty* (Menger 2014), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (Standing 2011), *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (Standing 2014a), *De choreografie van de danscarrière: kwalitatief onderzoek naar de carrières van hedendaagse dansers in de Vlaams-Brusselse context* (The choreography of a career in dance: qualitative inquiry into careers of contemporary dancers in the context of Flanders and Brussels) (Hesters 2004), *Acteurs in de spotlight: onderzoek naar de inkomens en de sociaal-economische positie van professionele Vlaamse acteurs* (Actors in the spotlight: survey of the income and socio-economical position of professional Flemish actors) (Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2014; in the following also referred to as the CUDOS-report 2014) and *Loont passie? Een onderzoek naar de sociaaleconomische positie van professionele kunstenaars in Vlaanderen* (Passion pays off? A survey of the socio-economical position of professional artists in Flanders) (Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2016; in the following also referred to as the CUDOS-report 2016), the comprehensive German report provided insights into the relevant themes that had to be included in the survey. Besides studying the relevant literature, an exploratory qualitative mapping was initiated in the form of in-depth conversations with field experts. On the one hand, these conversations allowed me to make a more accurate picture of the legal statutes and employment forms of professional dance artists in Brussels and Berlin. On the other hand, they informed me about current issues, needs and debates in the field. These explorative talks were conducted in both cities since I had to develop two questionnaires that effectively take into account the differences between both scenes – not the least differences in professional statuses – but are at the same time as uniform as possible in view of the aspired comparison of the results. In addition, I could gather information on relevant databases in both cities (i.e. Flanders Arts Institute and Sociaal Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten for Brussels, and TanzRaumBerlin and Internationales Theaterinstitut for Berlin) and was able to create possibilities to

communicate the study to the dance population in order to get a maximum response rate. All this information was gathered through personal conversations and emails with the following people and organizations:

- VTi (Vlaams Theaterinstituut, now: Flanders Arts Institute): Delphine Hesters, Bart Magnus
- Dance Commission Flanders: Leen Driesen
- Sociaal Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten: Maarten Bresseleers
- P.A.R.T.S.: Steven De Belder, Theo Van Rompay
- wpZimmer: Patrick Sterckx, Elke Decoker
- workspacebrussels: Marnix Rummens
- Tanzbüro Berlin: Simone Willeit
- Uferstudios/Tanzfabrik: Ludger Orlok
- DOCK 11: Kirsten Seeligmüller
- Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz (HZT): Nick Haffner
- Independent producer: Béla Bisom
- Various informal conversations with contemporary dance artists working and living in Brussels and Berlin

Besides these, I could rely on my previous three years of experience as production and tour manager within the Brussels dance scene and as production assistant in K3|Tanzplan Hamburg which is closely connected to the Berlin dance scene. In addition, Rudi Laermans, who co-supervises the project provided essential input owing to his aforementioned firsthand knowledge of the Brussels dance community as well as familiarity of the Berlin scene through collaborations with the Institut für Theaterwissenschaft (FU Berlin). Lastly, I could rely on supervisor Katharina Pewny's knowledge of the independent arts scene in Berlin and the ins and outs of being a freelancer. This baggage worked very much to my advantage as my name and reputation in both scenes opened many doors: for example, people were more likely to respond to the call for participation in Brussels as the call came from me personally and people knew who I was due to my work experience in the Brussels dance sector and my personal engagement as a dance enthusiast (I was and still am very often 'seen in the scene', to use the words of art sociologist Pascal Gielen, see 2009, 15). Additionally, the support of my supervisor Rudi Laermans validated my research for many contemporary dance artists, as many of them were familiar with his work (as a lecturer in P.A.R.T.S. for example). In turn, the lower response rate in Berlin could be partly explained by the impracticality of not being allowed and able to contact people personally and the lack of name recognition due to my lesser presence in the Berlin scene.

Finally, another goal for conducting a quantitative study in the form of an e-survey was in fact for the purpose of facilitating the selection of case study informants for a

longitudinal qualitative study. My aim was to follow a small number of people active in both fields of inquiry for several months and thus conducting ethnographic fieldwork. The status quo on the contemporary dance population of Brussels and Berlin established through the survey findings could be used as a tool to select a variety of case study participants for the envisioned ethnographic fieldwork: on the one hand, the findings allowed me to develop relevant selection criteria to generate a sample of heterogeneous contemporary dance artists differing in age, gender, work experience, education level and background, nationality, income level, marital status, parenthood, and so on (typologies). On the other hand, the questionnaire form was a convenient way to inquire who would be willing to participate further in the study, hence, and yet again, using self-selection as a sample method. I decided to proceed with self-selection as it was important to continue with informants who were not afraid to talk and who were open to give me access into their (working) lives and creative processes. I am aware that this approach comes hand in hand with a sampling bias as I did not include any case study informants who were not interested in the topic per se. However, this choice also resulted in very rich and in-depth interview material, which may otherwise have stayed rather superficial. Within my research process, I devoted considerable attention to working out the survey findings in two descriptive reports as they provided very unique data on the status quo of the working conditions and the artists' socio-economic position in both dance scenes from a micro perspective, especially because the data could be analyzed comparatively. The established status quo, which situates precarity in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin, thus formed the starting point for the fieldwork in a threefold way: firstly, I gathered facts and figures on my field of inquiry, which exposed relevant topics to delve deeper into via a qualitative approach. Secondly, I selected case study units for a longitudinal qualitative study on the basis of candidates that presented themselves at the end of the questionnaire form and based on selection variables deduced from the survey data. Thirdly, I used the survey findings as presented in two descriptive reports as conversation starters for the semi-structured in-depth interviews during my fieldwork (see Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017). I will enhance on the methodological concerns within the qualitative study further in this section, but in order to do so properly, I will first share my quantitative findings on which I based the selection process for my ethnographic fieldwork.

2.5.1 Situating precarity in two dance capitals

A glimpse into the contemporary dance field suggests that most contemporary dance artists are in a precarious professional situation. In Europe, contemporary dance artists are typically job-hoppers working with temporary contracts and performing many hours

of unpaid labor. Although few official statistics are available on the specific facts and figures of the Brussels or Berlin dance population, it is widely known, for example, that regardless of their nationality, many contemporary dance artists move back and forth between different places in Europe due to international co-productions or temporary residencies and when touring their pieces (see esp. T'Jonck 2013; Laermans 2015). Furthermore, it should be noted that contemporary dance artists seem to have been working project-based ever since the term *contemporary dance* emerged in the early 1960's in the USA (especially during the Judson Church Theater). In Flanders (Belgium) in the 1980's, this production mode was standard, especially since the subsidies and decrees for dance beyond ballet would only follow after popularization of the artistic work of the Flemish Wave (i.e. the early works of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Jan Fabre, or Wim Vandekeybus). Long-term and full-time contracts for dance artists are still scarce today, even in a dance capital such as Brussels: only a minority is able to work in the same company for several years (T'Jonck 2013; Laermans 2015). Lastly, in the 1990's Berlin became the capital of temporary use: artists conquered new spaces in the city after the collapse of the Wall, which sustained this mode of working and indirectly subsidized the development of the independent arts scene, or *Freie Szene*.

In the Belgian context, professional trajectories within the performing arts were the subject of empirical research, but, similar to studies in other countries, this research predominantly focused on actors (see esp. Forrier 2007; Bresseleers 2012; Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2014, which was updated in 2016 with a comprehensive study on artists from other fields). In the few studies on the professional situation of contemporary dance artists in Belgium, dancers and choreographers emerge as job-hoppers working with temporary contracts and performing many hours of unremunerated labor (Hesters 2004; T'Jonck 2013). In the German context, the report by Jeschonnek, Fonds Darstellende Künste e.V., and Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.V (2010) contains relevant empirical data on the socio-economic position of performing artists. Besides the report, especially the recent study on fair practices in the performing arts and music by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung (Norz 2016) forms a very timely starting point for situating precarity in the German performing arts sector. This report is based on the results of an online questionnaire with 2,160 participants active as artists and 475 participants active as non-artists in the performing arts and music sector in Germany (and to a much lesser extent in Austria and Switzerland) and 22 guided expert interviews active in Germany as artist or non-artist in the performing arts and music sector. However, in an outline of the evolution of the socio-economic position of dance artists in Germany (and Europe) since the 1990's, choreographer and philosopher Petra Sabisch points to the absence of studies that distinguish the dance profession within the performing arts as one aspect of the problem (Sabisch 2016, 60). She notes that even though this precarious situation has been known about for years, it has worsened catastrophically (in particular in terms of income development and gender equality) (Sabisch 2016, 78). Indeed, the mentioned studies

generally examine the performing arts as a whole rather than providing data on its segments, thus contributing to the gap of research devoted to contemporary dance.¹⁷ Nonetheless, these recent Belgian and German reports reveal the precarious socio-economic position of performing artists and the unfair practices at fault in the European context. In what follows, I outline the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists in these two dance capitals based on data stemming from two e-surveys conducted among members of the Brussels and Berlin contemporary dance population on the general working conditions in the profession. The survey specifically inquired into the respondents' general working conditions and their motivations in their profession.¹⁸

The sample in Brussels comprises a highly educated group, with 81% of the respondents having a bachelor's degree or higher, an average age that lies between 34 and 35 and a median work experience between 11 and 12 years. For Berlin, we can distinguish 92% of the respondents with a degree in higher education (including PhD). The average age is a bit higher and lies between 37 and 38, with a median work experience of 10 years. Due to the high level of physicality and the dependence on the body, the people active in the dance profession are thus relatively young. It is therefore not surprising that dancers or performers tend to be of a younger age than those choreographing, teaching or directing rehearsals. The latter occupations indeed allow dance artists to practice their profession at an older age. Additionally, the precarious position of dance professionals and the interweaving of work time and private life especially become problematic when people get older (for example, combining the dance profession with parenthood). This brings us to Pieter T'Jonck's question in his outline of the Flemish dance landscape of how long one can endure such an unstable work life (2013, 22). Indeed, merely a minority of the respondents are older than fifty. Even though I cannot assess both samples' representativeness, these data do seem to be in line with the 'ominous awareness of the short duration of a dance career' (T'Jonck 2013, 12).

Particularly within the context of Brussels as a Mecca for contemporary dance, it made sense to ask contemporary dance artists whether they have studied at P.A.R.T.S., the

¹⁷ For example, the *Report Darstellende Künste* addresses the issue of 'Altersarmut' or poverty at an old age among performing artists in Germany who are bound to work under an antisocial system marked by self-exploitation (Jeschonnek, Fonds Darstellende Künste e.V. and Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.V. 2010, 21). The current trend of self-employment and temporary employment in the German performing arts sector make artists' pension provision even more difficult. Due to the hybrid, project-oriented and transnationally mobile nature of the profession, dance artists barely accumulate rights such as the entitlement to a decent retirement fee at older age. However, the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung-report specifically mentions the dance profession as an example, stating that due to the high physical strain, dancers have to leave the professional life quite early. The menacing poverty at an old age is therefore a bad state of affairs, which with the current trend toward self-employment and temporary employment shall affect an increasing number of artists (Norz 2016, 23).

¹⁸ I analyzed the obtained data statistically using SPSS, for which Simon Leenknegt and Wim Christiaens provided important assistance.

contemporary dance school founded by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, which has become one of Europe's most renowned places for a contemporary dance education. Since 1995, the school has generated a network of ex-students and teachers in Brussels, which facilitates the inclusion in the contemporary dance scene (and this notwithstanding the diminished importance of a diploma testifying to specific competences or qualifications within contemporary art worlds). Almost half of all respondents (46%) have studied at P.A.R.T.S. In comparison, one-quarter of Berlin-based respondents (24%) went to the local contemporary dance school Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz Berlin (HZT). Lastly, both samples consist of predominantly female respondents and European citizens.

Furthermore, in both cities almost all respondents indicate their principal occupation is performer, however it is rarely their only main occupation. In the Brussels sample, 71% of the self-defined performers combine this with other main occupations, while this is true for 78% in the Berlin sample. In accordance with the reality of flexible work or project work, many respondents combine the positions of performer and choreographer either at the same time or over a certain period of time. In both cities, the majority also help multiple jobs when they took the survey. As the findings show, contemporary dance artists seem to be often merely temporary dance artists, who between and during projects take up many other job descriptions for which, in established companies for instance, commonly trained personnel is hired: applying for funding (60% in Brussels vs. 71% in Berlin), organization and production (52% in Brussels vs. 73% in Berlin), costumes, set and props (39% in Brussels vs. 49% in Berlin), public relations (26% in Brussels vs. 44% in Berlin), etc. This reflects the extent of manifold job descriptions that come with the dance profession. Hence, the queried dance artists seem to be multiskilled and to have 'talents' going beyond dance or performing.

As *figure A* in Annex 1 reveals, most of the jobs performed in a situation of multiple jobholding by the respondents in Brussels are activities related to artistic labor (74%).¹⁹ In Berlin, however, 30% of the time budget for work goes to para-artistic activities (e.g. teaching) and 15% to non-artistic labor (e.g. bartending). This suggests that the Berlin respondents devote more time to activities not directly related to art making. The artistic activities can be divided into two categories, one comprising creative-productive work and the other administrative-organizational tasks. On average, 47% of the entire work time budget of the Brussels respondents is spent on creative-productive activities, which is almost two-thirds of the artistic work time budget. In Berlin, however, we see a different picture: the balance between both types of activities within artistic labor is somewhat equally divided. On average, 54% of the artistic work time can be spent on

¹⁹ Artistic labor includes creating, rehearsing and performing as well as related preparatory and administrative work and para-artistic activities, such as teaching, relate to the artistic practice (see also Menger 2014). Non-artistic work, such as bartending or babysitting, is not related to the arts and tends to be relatively easy to combine.

creative and productive activities, whereas 46% is devoted to preparatory and administrative work related to artistic activities. These results suggest that especially the Brussels-based respondents can in fact still spend a fair amount of their time to predominantly artistic activities, but it must be kept in mind that these entail administrative activities too. Yet, as indicated earlier, this does not mean that they are being paid for their time working on artistic activities. Berlin respondents devote more time to activities not directly related to art making.

Contemporary dance artists not only hop from job to project, but are also considered to be highly territorially mobile: they temporarily work or train abroad, have residencies across the world, and tour their dance productions (Hesters 2004; T'Jonck 2013; Laermans 2015). In order to gain some more insight in their mobility level, the respondents were asked where they worked during the last five years. In the Brussels sample, the majority of the respondents mostly work in residency or at workspaces, followed by working from home and/or in a theater. More than half of the respondents conduct their work anywhere, such as in a café, train, airplane, or hotel room. Different locations probably entail different activities carried out there: while conception, preparation, communication, and administration can happen at home, in a café, train, airplane, or hotel room, the actual creative and productive work tends to happen in residency, work spaces, or theaters (and the latter provide presentation opportunities too). In the Berlin sample, however, the majority of the respondents have mostly worked from home, as this was indicated by 95% of the respondents and marked as top-ranking location by 56%. This is followed by having worked in several residencies and workspaces, which is mentioned by 62% of the respondents but only marked as primary work place by 21% of them. However, the popularity of working from home suggests that Berlin might be lacking affordable and sufficient infrastructure.

Concerning infrastructure, of the many Brussels-based respondents working in residency or workspaces (9 in 10), more than half say that they actually work in Belgium: 13% are primarily active in Brussels, about 30% in Flanders (including Brussels), and 10% in the whole of Belgium. The other half of the respondents working in residency or workspaces predominantly do so in Western Europe, including Belgium. Of the Berlin-based respondents working in residency spaces or workspaces (6 in 10), 36% say that they work in Germany: 21% primarily remain in Berlin and 15% are active within the entire country. Almost two-third of the respondents thus mostly work in Western Europe. Overall, these figures confirm the standard picture painted above of the transnational character of the contemporary dance profession, yet they simultaneously put it into perspective: on the one hand, about half of the Brussels-based respondents working in residency or workspaces do not regularly (have to) cross the Belgian border in order to do so. This finding seems to affirm that the previously outlined public funding system and well-developed infrastructure for dance in Belgium (or rather: Flanders and Brussels) enable Brussels-based artists, or at least the respondents, to continue working to a great

extent within the country's borders. On the other hand, only one-fifth of Berlin-based respondents working in residency and workspaces do so exclusively in Berlin. A majority of Berlin-based respondents working in residency and workspaces do so also elsewhere, but they do not regularly cross the European borders in order to do so. In other words: for the Brussels-based respondents, the creative and productive work in a studio generally happens within a limited distance of their home, while for the Berlin-based respondents this generally seems to take place further away from home.

In terms of social security, both cities (or to be correct: countries) have established interesting systems that support artists. In Belgium, artists commonly work with short employment contracts, whereas artists in Germany generally work self-employed. The artist status in Belgium enables the application of the employee status in a freelance work regime; it comes with employee benefits, but the coverage of periods of non-employment through steady unemployment allowances is the most important one, since it creates a situation of stable income between short-term contracts. This kind of safety net is crucial, especially since most artists keep on practicing their profession in a situation of non-employment. However, only half of the respondents (53%) in Brussels have access to this status. In comparison, artists in Berlin can apply for membership at the Künstlersozialkasse (KSK), which coordinates the transfer of contributions to the health, pension and long-term care insurances. The members only have to pay half of the contributions due. One-fifth of the respondents are not registered at the KSK, of which the majority do not tend to have pension insurance at all. The KSK may reduce the high costs in social security associated with self-employment in Germany, yet this system does not reduce socio-economic precarity in a significant way as these monthly costs remain rather high in reference to the low monthly income. I will discuss these social security systems in more detail in when I address the theme of *chasing papers* (in the chapter "The Fast").

2.5.2 Income

One's income is an especially telling objective indicator in reference to one's socio-economic position and precarity. In Brussels, the median of average monthly net income of the queried dance artists (defined in relation to the year preceding the moment the questionnaire was completed) lies within the category of 1,000 to 1,250 euros net. However, it must be kept in mind that the respondents were asked to estimate their average monthly net income, which does not exclusively have to come from salaried work. It should be noted that we are dealing with a multiple income, a patchwork of several earnings not necessarily stemming from artistic activities alone (Abbing 2008; Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2016). Moreover, when speaking of an estimated *average* monthly income, it must be taken into account that one may earn 500 euros in month X

and 1,500 euros in month Y. Unfortunately, this aspect of potential precarity coming with an instable, unpredictable income remains invisible in the given monthly average incomes. Observing that three-quarters of the Brussels-based respondents indicate that they earn less than 1,500 euros net per month, I may tentatively conclude that the majority of the respondents have a monthly income that is lower than the official minimum wage for performing artists.²⁰ Additionally, the data in *figures B and C* in Annex 1 show a mean of 24 paid working hours out of 43 total working hours per week on average in Brussels. Almost half of the respondents are paid for half or less than half of the actual average working hours they indicated. In light of the obtained data on their financial situation and their working hours, the low average income (see *figure D*) is most likely due to the fact that contemporary dance artists tend to work many hours unpaid.

Furthermore, according to their indicated average net income, the Brussels-based respondents can be categorized in four relatively equal groups each containing approximately one-quarter of the sample. These four categories are applied in *figure E* and combined with age categories of respondents. Among them, the youngest generation is the poorest one: half of those between 21 and 30 years old earn only up to maximally 1,000 euros per month. Not even one-fifth of the youngest category has an income higher than a monthly average of 1,250 euros. Within the second age category, more than half of the respondents earn *maximally* 1,250 euros; on the contrary, within the third category, the majority earn *minimally* 1,250 euros. The oldest respondents all earn more than 1,500 euros, yet, it must be kept in mind that the aspect of ‘drop-out’ probably plays a significant role here: those who still earn less than 1,500 euros at a certain age are more likely to leave the profession. Furthermore, merely 8% of the respondents earn more than 2,000 euros net. In light of the high education level of the queried group as I indicated earlier, the Brussels-based respondents generally do not seem to earn very much.

In Berlin, I asked to estimate the average year income divided by twelve without deducting insurance costs. As artists generally work under the self-employed status, this means that in fact they reported the gross year total of all income divided by twelve. The Berlin-based respondents indicated an average gross monthly income between 750 and 1,000 euros (median). According to their income, the Berlin-based respondents can be categorized in four relatively equal groups in *figure F*, i.e. those earning (1) less than or equal to 750 euros per month (24%); (2) between 750 and 1,000 euros (30%); (3) between 1,000 and 1,500 euros (27%); and (4) more than 1,500 euros per month (19%). Merely 8% of

²⁰ The wage scales according to the CLA Performing Arts serve in this study rather as a reference point than as real steady salaries. The minimum wage according to the CLA Performing Arts results in a monthly net income of 1,460.04 euros. More comparison and references (with the Belgian living wage and minimum unemployment allowance) can be found in the annex of the report, however the numbers have been indexed in the meantime. See: Van Assche and Laermans 2016.

the respondents earn more than 2,000 euros per month. The data show that the majority of the respondents (81%) earn less than 1,500 euros on an average monthly basis, which does not seem to be very much, particularly not in light of their high education level. Taking into account that Germany has a basic income tax allowance (*Grundfreibetrag*), which is used to secure the subsistence minimum, a taxable yearly income is not subject to any income tax until 8,652 euros (in 2016, for singles).²¹ The respondents in the lowest income category therefore do not have to pay any income tax. It should be noted that the monthly averages are very low in general. I may thus assume that the average numbers are even lower after deducting income tax. Of course, it is more complicated to calculate the actual net incomes of the respondents, because when calculating the income tax, numerous regulations (e.g. several exemptions, lump sum payments, special expenses, etc.) consider the personal capacity of the taxpayer. Again, it must be kept in mind that also in Berlin, we are dealing with a substantial group that owns a multiple income. Overall, the observed numbers are fairly low, especially bearing in mind that I asked not to deduct the monthly insurance costs from these numbers. As explained in Annex 2, these costs are usually relatively high and seem quite impossible to cover with the mentioned meager incomes. According to the calculations in the Annex 2, at least one-quarter of the respondents do not really seem to be able to cover all insurance contributions or save any money whatsoever with their incomes. Additionally, observing that more than three-quarters of the respondents indicate that they earn less than 1,500 euros per month on the one hand and bearing in mind that they have not yet subtracted their insurance costs on the other hand, I may conclude that the majority of them have a monthly income that is much lower than the official minimum fee for performing artists in Berlin.²²

One expects that income tends to grow with age, which is confirmed by studies that have found that poverty in the arts predominates at a young age (Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2014; Sorignet 2010). Nevertheless, the 2016 CUDOS-study reports that the

²¹ This amount is doubled for married couples and higher for people with children. For the amounts, please consult: <https://www.steuertipps.de/lexikon/g/grundfreibetrag>.

²² The delegation meeting of the Bundesverband Freie Darstellende Künste (the German Association of Independent Performing Arts) unanimously adopted a declaration and recommendation for a minimum standard fee for freelance performing artists in October 2015. It must be stressed that this concerns a recommendation, or a guideline, rather than a legal obligation. The recommended minimum is based on the same qualification of the freelance artist at the minimum wage of the nationwide standard contract for performing arts (NV Bühne) for commonly long-term employees of theatres with public funding that belong to the Deutscher Bühnenverein (the German Stage Association). However, since the remuneration of freelance artists is not an employment relationship (including the employer's social contributions) and payment is not on a long-term basis, the additional costs for insurance and expenses as well as the necessary preparation and follow-up of an artistic project were also calculated within the context of the fee recommendation.

average income of performing artists in Flanders does not increase anymore after the age category of 35 to 44 years old (Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2016, 61). In any case, poverty at an older age is also a structural possibility in the dance profession, since several consequences of the lack of benefits and securities only emerge from a certain age onward.²³ Despite this, *figure E* in Annex 1 demonstrates that among the Berlin-based respondents, the youngest generation is indeed the poorest one: two-thirds of those between 21 and 30 years old only earn up to a maximum of 1,000 euros per month. This holds for more than half of those between 31 and 40. The ages vary within the lowest income category, which indicates that all respondents between 21 and 50 years old suffer from low incomes. Remarkably, only two Berlin-based respondents older than 41 earn more than 1,500 euros on a monthly basis. These are also the two oldest respondents in the survey. They indicate that they earn between 1,500 and 1,750 euros and 2,000 and 2,250 euros monthly, respectively. The remaining respondents over 50 years old merely earn between 1,000 and 1,500 euros on a monthly basis, which is in light of their age a rather poor form of compensation and rather a clear sign of poverty at an older age, unless they can rely on income from a partner, support from family, savings or other forms of income.

Furthermore, those Berlin-based respondents with the highest numbers of years in work experience (over 26 years) do not all belong to the highest income categories. On the contrary, their meager earnings definitely refute the idea that also within artistic professions work experience may be quasi-automatically translated into financial compensations.²⁴ In fact, there are no instructions to be found indicating that the recommended minimum fee should increase with seniority. Lastly, the Berlin-based respondents are, on average, paid for 19 hours on a weekly basis, whereas they indicate to work (paid as well as unpaid) on average around 42 hours per week (see *figures B* and *C*). This entails that almost two-third of the Berlin-based respondents (62%) are remunerated for maximally half of their actual working hours.

However, it still remains a question whether the queried contemporary dance artists consider themselves as *under-earners*? The respondents were asked about the average monthly net income they actually need. Quite strikingly, more than half of all respondents in both Brussels and Berlin state that they need only 1,250 euros or less. Surely, Brussels is a fairly economical capital compared to London and Paris, but it is certainly not the cheapest place to rent in Belgium. And while Berlin is a more affordable

²³ E.g. low retirement fees, absence of seniority (which refrains a salary from growing), and insufficient health and hospitalization insurances (which bring high costs when injured or ill).

²⁴ Because the respondents with the most work experience are not the oldest ones, we suspect that some respondents may have calculated their work experience from the moment they started dancing instead of counting the years following their first professional assignment (after training). It should be noted that the question when 'work experience in dance' starts is often posed among dance artists.

capital compared to Brussels, still, rent prices are rapidly increasing these days due to gentrification and a lack of housing, among other things. Additionally, while living costs (such as food and heating) are still much cheaper than elsewhere, insurance costs are incredibly high for freelancers. Moreover, in both cities, dance artists have to invest in their bodies in order to remain employable. This entails costs for training (master classes, workshops, auditions, yoga, etc.) and health (osteopathy, physiotherapy, massage, etc.). In addition to this, there are costs for networking, such as buying theater tickets and travel costs. Nevertheless, it seems as if most respondents have learned to cover all these costs with their rather limited income and to survive with it: they say that they do not really need much more than they actually earn. Indeed, it seems as though money is not an end but a means: following David Throsby (1994), Hans Abbing points out that a survival constraint exists among artists, which can be interpreted as a minimum income zone, an area in which money rapidly loses its importance. As soon as artists reach this minimum level, they quickly lose interest in earning more money and prefer to spend more time making art (Abbing 2008, 85). However, an interesting question would be: how do the dance artists compensate the lack of finances and how do they cover times of unemployment? These are important points that I followed up in the qualitative phase of the comprehensive research and that shall be discussed further in this book.

Subsequently, the respondents were asked to indicate the average monthly income they deem appropriate for the work they perform. As *figure F* indicates, the balance for both the Brussels and Berlin sample now decisively shifts to the higher income categories I already discerned. When considering the previous division into four categories, the majority of respondents in both cities deem an income of 1,500 euros or more appropriate. However, a closer look into the group of Brussels-based respondents within that category (see *figure F.3*) reveals that three-quarters are almost equally divided among the categories of 1,500 to 1,750 euros (22%), 1,750 to 2,000 euros (25%), and 2,000 to 2,500 euros (19% + 6%). The Berlin-based respondents that deem an income of 1,500 euros or more appropriate are divided among the categories of 1,500 to 2,000 euros (18% + 13%), 2,000 to 2,250 euros (21%), and 2,250 to more than 3,000 euros (11% + 2% + 6% + 10%). I especially note that about 10% of the Berlin-based respondents find an average monthly income of 3,000 euros or more appropriate. Whereas the median of the actual estimated earnings among the Berlin-based respondents lies in the category of 750 to 1,000 euros per month (see *figure D*), the median of the income they think they should earn lies in 1,750 to 2,000 euros per month. This is quite a noteworthy difference of 1,000 euros (while the weight shift in the Brussels-based sample is not so dramatic), which may have to do with the implicitly invoked reference group. Indeed, if dance artists regard themselves as economically independent professionals, relatively well-earning liberal professions may act as the prime reference group (or, in fact, they may even take salaried workers within the dance profession, who are paid according to their education level and seniority as a reference to get to these numbers too). Nevertheless, the respondents do not deny the

importance of remuneration with regard to their artistic work: the majority of them find it important to very important. Overall, these numbers seem to confirm what the respondents claim about the social standing of the contemporary dance profession: even though the profession is respected as a full-fledged one, this symbolic esteem does not actually translate into a proper financial compensation for the actual work effort. The answers to the questions on the average monthly income they need and deem appropriate respectively prove that at least the dance artists I contacted are prepared to work for relatively little money.

In conclusion, the Berlin data reveal slightly lower incomes, especially since the Berlin-based respondents still need to pay rather high contributions to their mandatory insurances (plus taxes). Additionally, 62% of the Berlin-respondents are remunerated for maximally half of their actual working hours, whereas in Brussels this is only true for 46% of the respondents. These estimated incomes in both cases certainly seem meager in the light of the high education level. However, the biggest issue seems to be the absence of fair payment for the delivered work effort (for further details, see Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017).

2.5.3 Motives and satisfaction

These outlined conditions are indeed precarious, so why do Brussels and Berlin continue to attract international dance artists? As mentioned, Brussels has a relatively generous cultural policy, a consistent influx of new dance talent (via P.A.R.T.S.), and its several established companies that meanwhile belong to the international canon (Rosas, Ultima Vez, among others). Indeed, when asked about the reasons for living in Brussels, the most recurring answers are work opportunities, the Brussels' scene and Brussels as a base.²⁵ In comparison, the contemporary dance field in Berlin had a growth spurt with the development of the *Freie Szene* and the arrival of dance artists such as Sasha Waltz or Xavier Le Roy in the 1990's. Berlin has proven to be an attractive base or *Mutterschiff* for culturepreneurs due to its affordable living costs, the once large reservoir of unoccupied spaces since the collapse of the Wall, and a general open-mindedness of its inhabitants (Lange 2007). This is confirmed by the respondents: the most recurring reasons for living in Berlin are cheap living, Berlin's vibe and artistic community.²⁶

²⁵ However, according to many Brussels-based respondents, the prevailing working conditions still fail to reflect the general symbolic respect the profession receives.

²⁶ Yet, in 2016, some respondents comment in the survey that Berlin is at a turning point. The city is perceived as becoming more expensive and offering less alternative spaces. The funds are too small for everyone working in the field; thus, many hardly ever work in Berlin. The scene has become oversaturated. Similar to Brussels, the respondents remark that the profession seems to be respected as a full-fledged one within the sector, but this esteem does not translate into proper working conditions.

The top motives for being active within the field of contemporary dance in both cities are artistic pleasure, lifelong learning and self-development. Overall, the respondents seem (very) satisfied about the substantive aspects of the profession, as *figure G* in Annex 1 shows. In either case, no significant relations result from the comparison of the satisfaction level and the average income categories, which might indicate that professional satisfaction does not seem to depend on income but on other more subjective and intrinsic job rewards (see also Kalleberg 2011). Together with the figures on how much average monthly income they need and deem appropriate, this finding demonstrates a tendency toward a probably widespread form of *self-precarization* within both samples: on the one hand, the figures on the average income of the queried dance artists, and their attitude toward it, demonstrate that there exists a voluntary basis for the risk of precarization. On the other hand, seeing the respondents' top motives above, the voluntary basis for this risk (i.e. the willingness to sacrifice material benefits) seems to be driven by a supposed immaterial income, consisting of the benefits of a relatively autonomous life that artists are able to lead and that is first and foremost dedicated to their artistic preoccupations. However, the question remains whether this is really the case, or do the respondents truly have no other option should they wish to continue working in this profession? This is a highly debated issue in the field: advocating fair practices in the arts is trending and numerous debate panels and working sessions about the working conditions have been organized, also in Brussels and Berlin.²⁷ Nevertheless, precisely this self-precarization at issue is reflected in the results on the average income of the queried dance artists, and their attitude toward it: the willingness to do unpaid or underpaid work suggests that the socio-economic precarity revealed in the data is at least partly voluntary and that this may stem from their desire to be a creative subject, seeing that artistic pleasure, lifelong learning, and self-development are the primary motives of the respondents (see also Abbing 2008; Lorey 2015; Laermans 2015). A respondent even explicitly mentions this self-precarization as s/he concludes that s/he undervalues her/his personal work and underestimates her/his need for or right to a proper salary:

It is confronting that when asked before 'how much I feel I need' or 'how much I should earn', I was first tempted to keep the amounts very low. It is interesting to be confronted with that and I believe we need to change this attitude.

²⁷ See particularly the events organized between 2016 and 2018 by SOTA in the framework of the long-term project *Towards Fair Practices in The Arts* and Flanders Arts Institute's initiative *Do It Together* (D.I.T.), for which SOTA proposed to create a *Fair Art Almanac*, or the annual symposium *Branchentreff* organized by Performing Arts Programm, the three-day symposium *Working Together Transnationally* held at K3|Tanzplan Hamburg (March 31 and April 1-2, 2017), and the initiatives *Art But Fair* (www.artbutfair.org), *the Artist Pledge* (<https://artistpledge.wordpress.com>), and the *Round Table Dance Berlin 2018* (<https://roundtabledance.wordpress.com>), to name only a few.

2.6 Qualitative study

2.6.1 Case study informants

In the next phase of my research, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Brussels and Berlin to explore more in-depth the multidimensional precarity and more complex issues the survey findings revealed. In order to do this properly, I spend one year observing, participating and following seven case study informants in the Brussels contemporary dance scene. Thereafter, I moved to Berlin to do exactly the same. In the process of selecting case study informants, I constructed profiles for each survey participant who indicated to be willing to partake in the qualitative study. The significant variables, or criteria, for the construction of these profiles were meant as instruments of control over the width of the sample, thus avoiding over- or underrepresentation. Together with Katharina Pewny and Rudi Laermans, I selected a total of fourteen informants on the basis of theoretical criteria (based on the aforementioned studies) and my quantitative data: firstly, I decided that the gender balance should reflect the slight surplus of women represented in the survey sample in both cities. Hence, I selected three male and four female informants in Brussels and two male and five female informants in Berlin. Age and work experience were a crucial variable: I attempted to create a balance between recently graduated and already well-established informants, but simultaneously I avoided the extremes. My youngest informant was 28 at the start of my fieldwork and my oldest 47. The majority of my informants were in their mid-thirties, which responds to the average ages as indicated by the survey findings in both cities.

Relatedly, an important question within the selection process inquired into their career status or trajectory: at which point in their career were the possible informants? What were their work-related plans during the period of fieldwork? Had they received subsidies in the past or were they currently applying for funding? To answer these questions, I had to contact the possible informants personally to inquire further. In addition, I consulted their online biographies and compared. Thus, I was able to find a balance in the degree of work between my case study informants: several had rather empty agendas, some had several dispersed plans and others were quite occupied. I also sought a balance within the type of work the informants would be involved in: would they be working on their own projects, on other people's projects, on commissions, or for a company? While my focus within this research is put on project-based work, I decided to omit exclusively company-based dance artists, but select those who largely work on a project basis, whether or not linked to the subsidy system, and, whether or not as a dancer and/or a choreographer. I was confident to take this route while there were hardly any exclusively company-based dance artists among my survey participants. In any case, some of the informants had been company-dancers in the past or they sporadically still

dance for a company on a project-basis, which also points to the scarcity of long-term contracts within dance companies (which I pointed out earlier, see also: Menger 2014, 136). Many survey participants (and also case study informants) seem to combine dancing for/with a company with other projects. Furthermore, family and children were two essential selection variables to take into account as they may greatly affect one's socio-economic position: it was my aim to include a variety of cases in terms of marital status, living situation, and parenthood. Six Brussels-based informants were living with their partners (of which all but one work in the arts sector). One informant lived with roommates, but developed a love relationship throughout the fieldwork. In comparison, six Berlin-based informants had a partner during the time of research, however, not all of them lived together with that partner. Again, only one of those six informants had a partner who worked outside the arts sector. The remaining seventh informant did not have a steady partner during my fieldwork. None of the Berlin-based informants were married. The Brussels sample included one married female with two school-bound children, one married male, and one married female with one child who had not yet reached compulsory school age. In Berlin, I was able to involve one male dance artist with two children who had not reached school age yet. In fact, one of which was born just before the fieldwork started. Next, I attempted to maintain a healthy balance in terms of education level and background: the Brussels sample included three informants educated in P.A.R.T.S., whereas the others had backgrounds in contemporary dance (and ballet) in London, United States and elsewhere in Belgium. The Berlin sample contained one informant with a P.A.R.T.S.-background, although this was only one among many art and dance-related diplomas. Two Berlin-based informants were educated in HZT, while others had studied elsewhere in Germany, Amsterdam, or Israel. Listing these backgrounds brings me to another relevant selection criterion, which is nationality.

The inclusion of at least one Belgian, one European and one non-European informant in the Brussels sample and one German, one European and one non-European in the Berlin sample was essential for tracking down legality issues (in terms of paperwork) in a transnational work environment. This resulted in the selection of three American, one Belgian, one Swedish, one Icelandic, and one South-African informant in the Belgian sample and three German, two American, one Belgian, and one Israeli informant in the Berlin sample. Moreover, I took into account the level of mobility of the informant during the fieldwork: it had to remain feasible for me to actually get a chance to follow the informant. Nonetheless, I conducted one Skype-interview due to mobility issues, which, however, turned out to be quite useful as I was able to reach the informant in the middle of a residency process. Furthermore, other selection criteria included multiple jobholding, social security and benefits, and their income levels. I selected informants who combined artistic, para-artistic and non-artistic work activities to a different degree; some taught more than they created during the period of my fieldwork; some spent much time working side-jobs whereas others avoided them; and so on. In Brussels, I made sure

half of my sample had access to the artist status, in accordance with the survey findings. Since almost all Berlin-based survey participants were members of the KSK, I decided that I had to include at least one informant who was not a member. Additionally, I selected one informant who explicitly mentioned making use of the living wage benefits (Hartz IV) via the job center. In terms of income levels, I sought a balance between low, medium and relatively high income levels according to the survey results.

First, I selected seven informants in Brussels and only a year later I selected seven complimentary informants in Berlin. I made sure similar features were covered in both samples. After I had selected six informants in Brussels, I decided to add a seventh key informant to the sample. The reason for doing so was to include someone who also works with the issues that inform my research in his/her artistic work or discourse explicitly (i.e. precarity, the socio-economic position of artists, the working conditions in the performing arts sector and late modernity in general, the effects of neoliberalism, and so on). The key informant who would therefore be particularly suitable to exchange thoughts with and bounce ideas off. A year later, I did exactly the same for the Berlin sample. Interestingly, I could verify whether I had selected suitable informants via an indirect snowball effect. In the introductory talks with the selected informants, several informants recommended peers I should talk to, some of whom were already included in my selection – which validated them as suitable informants.

In terms of ethical considerations, I decided from the start that all informants within my fieldwork would remain anonymous. To guarantee the confidentiality of the data, I provided a consent form which explained what was expected of the informants, how the data would be used and who they should contact with questions or complaints (see Annex 3). The form stated that their names would not be published and that anonymity and confidentiality of the data are ensured at each stage of the investigation. However, the informants were made aware of the possibility that some of their peers may recognize them in some of the statements published, even though these statements remain anonymous. While several informants did not have a problem sharing their identities with other informants, I agreed not to do so unless everyone gave consent. As a result, the informants were not informed about their fellow participants, however, they were free to inform others if they wished to do so. While the trajectories of several informants overlapped here and there, it was unavoidable that some informants became aware of each other's involvement in the case study – which no one seemed to mind. Interestingly, this also allowed a methodological triangulation in a certain sense, since I could double-check narratives about the overlapping trajectories in probing the different perspectives.

It should be noted here that the anonymity guarantee explains why I choose to avoid descriptive specifics about each informant whenever I make use of direct quotations in this book. The inclusion of demographic information would make my informants more recognizable to the reader, while these specifics are mostly not relevant for the points I try to make. Evidently, I do refer to demographic details of an informant whenever this

is necessary for the argument. For example, I do not distinguish Brussels-based or Berlin-based informants unless there is a noteworthy difference and therefore a reason to do so. Or, as another example, I do not refer to an informant's age unless I clearly observed an age-effect that I ought to take into account when drawing conclusions.

2.6.2 Ethnographic fieldwork

As part of the fieldwork, I conducted longitudinal semi-structured in-depth interviews (according to the instructions listed in Waege and Cambré 2001) with the fourteen case study informants over the course of two years. On the basis of a pre-written topic list and probing, I focused on content mining through concentrating solely on the theme of work in the contemporary dance profession in the Brussels or Berlin context. The exact questions were not set, but the topics were to some extent pre-listed. In Brussels, I conducted introductory talks and bi-monthly in-depth interviews with six informants and one key informant between March and December 2015. In total, I conducted an average of three recorded and one unrecorded (introductory) interview per informant (25 in total). Between September 2016 and July 2017, I moved to Berlin in order to conduct the fieldwork to offer the informants some flexibility from my side and to fully acquainted with the dance scene and sector. In total, I conducted 27 interviews, including unrecorded introductory talks and bi-monthly recorded in-depth interviews with six informants and one key informant. These interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours on average. A list of all interviews in detail is provided in Annex 4.

During my two years of fieldwork, I undertook participant observations in the studio while my informants were working on their own creative processes. These observations were of a participatory kind, because I was often asked to provide feedback or advice in terms of sound, lighting, spacing, and sometimes even dramaturgy, especially after try-out sessions. In addition, I attended performances by my informants and chatted to informants during other events in the dance scene where we (mostly by accident) both attended. It should be noted that there was relatively little work in the studio during the time of my fieldwork with regard to my informants' own creative processes. While several informants had just finished a busy period of creation and were taking it slow in terms of their own artistic work, others did not receive the funding they had applied for and thus had to postpone rehearsals and residencies. Furthermore, several informants were in the project application phase and thus mainly focused on writing and planning, or others mainly worked for other people's projects during that period. In most cases, several of these reasons were intertwined. These realities are for that matter already very telling about the working conditions in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin. As a consolation prize to compensate the missing opportunities for studio observation during a creative process, some informants invited me to observe while they were

teaching a workshop, or while they were rehearsing an already finished piece. While these latter observations did not exactly allow me to collect information on how the working conditions affect the creative process and artistic decision-making, they did provide me with an interesting insight into the conditions at the mesolevel, in terms of infrastructure and technical support. For example, I was confronted with freezing studios without functioning Wi-Fi, budgetary concerns affecting rehearsal time and conditions, generous and nutritious meals, and more generally, I could observe how artists are treated on the premises of institutions. Annex 4 provides a list of all observations.

Additionally, since it was clear from the start that much of the work does not take place in a studio, I asked my informants to keep a logbook in which they documented at least a week of work activities. Ideally, they would log down one week within a rehearsal process and one week when not under contract. Most informants provided me with two weeks' worth of logged activities, however a minority neglected to do so: while they intended to log down their activities, they found it difficult to devote time to this task as they were occupied with several other things. Also, one informant mentioned it was too complicated to distinguish work activities from non-work activities and often many things seemed to happen simultaneously, such as having a Skype-meeting while preparing lunch and answering an urgent email. The logbooks were discussed thoroughly in the interviews, often they were a conversation starter. In most cases, I was able to consult the logbooks before the interview, which allowed me to mark parts that were unclear while preparing my topic list for the interview. Several new topics came up simply by going over the logged activities together with the informant. In case my informant failed to provide a detailed log, we reconstructed a few weeks of work by means of the informants' calendar, agenda or to-do-list. For the informants, these means served as a helpful reminder-tool to talk about their multiple and concrete work tasks. I provided excerpts from several logbooks throughout this book (two in Annex 7), which I discuss and analyze particularly in part II of this book.

However, my fieldnotes from these observations and logbooks are to a lesser extent directly worked out in this book and most of the qualitative material stems from the interviews. Nonetheless, the importance of participant observation for this research should not be underestimated: these observations were necessary for building up a trust relationship with my informants. I showed interest in what goes on behind the scenes on an artistic level, I was visible in the scene by attending performances and public events (also before and after the fieldwork period) and my expertise about the workings of the sector and my knowledge of who-is-who (thanks to my previous work experience in the field) contributed to gaining trust and recognition. In addition, my feedback after observations, which functioned as a symbolic exchange for their cooperation, was much appreciated. All the above validated me as a qualified researcher conducting genuine research, at least, from my informants' perspective. The observations and the built-up trust relationship resulted in very rich interviews that summarized the information I had

gathered in other contexts and occasions (in the studio, in the foyer, etc.). The observations, logbooks and fieldnotes thus contributed to the topic list at hand for each in-depth interview.

My aim was to reconstruct how contemporary dance artists observe their work reality and what meanings they give to it and to their actions through the lens of a sample of fourteen contemporary dance artists based in Brussels and Berlin. Or, put differently, I interpreted their understanding of their work reality by means of different theoretical concepts within the interpretive Weberian tradition of *deutend Verstehen* (Weber 1978) within the social sciences, guided by predetermined research questions and hypotheses, which I discussed above. Hence, I used an interpretive perspective with the purpose of uncovering how the research subjects – project-based contemporary dance artists – define themselves and others. Unlike in the positivist approach pioneered by Emile Durkheim, Weber – but also Georg Simmel or Herbert Blumer for example – argued that the study of social action should depart from the consideration that people attach meaning and purpose to their own actions and social scientists understand these in an interpretive way. In his collection of essays on symbolic interactionism, Blumer emphasizes for example that individuals do not just act from certain intentions or motives, but they also constantly interpret their actions while they act (and they interpret also who they are or how they come across) because they possess self-consciousness. While Weber situates the meaningfulness of actions in the underlying motivation, Blumer – whose writings are much in line with Weber’s although he does not explicitly build on his work – focuses more strongly on deliberately giving meaning before, during and after (personal) actions. As he puts it:

In setting up studies of human group life and social action there is need to take social interaction seriously. It is necessary to view the given sphere of life under study as a moving process in which participants are defining and interpreting each other’s acts. It is important to see how this process of designation and interpretation is sustaining, undercutting, redirecting, and transforming the ways in which participants are fitting together their lines of action. (Blumer 1988, 53)

As he explains, an act turns into a symbol because it is observed as a medium of one or more meanings. In symbolic interaction, therefore, people consider their own behaviors and those of others as charged with meaning (or meaningful). Social facts, such as institutionalized roles or expectations to use Durkheim’s terms, do not determine the course of an interaction process, but as Blumer refines, they provide a framework or starting point that enables dynamic interaction. However, the meaning of a symbol is a question of interpretation. Within the interpretive tradition, people within a culture are seen as primary interpreters who at all times give meaning to words, but also to objects, images, actions and other possible symbols. In interpreting these, we make use of codes, which are socially shared conventions about the bond between symbols and their possible

meanings (much like Durkheim's social facts) and decipher these codes. Research within this tradition is thus aimed at finding the applicable codes within an interpretation community and wants to read the circulating symbols within that community, as the members usually interpret these. A researcher as an outsider will further interpret the observed symbols and codes drawing on theoretical concepts and insights. The qualitative or ethnographic research I undertook therefore results in my interpretations of interpretations²⁸.

From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Geertz underlines the role of anthropologists as interpreters in the opening essay of his influential book *The Interpretation of Cultures* in 1973. Geertz poses that in anthropological writings it often is obscured that 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' and this may lead to a view of anthropological research as observational rather than interpretive (1973, 9). However, as he continues;

In the study of culture, analysis penetrates into the very body of the object—that is, we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those [...]. In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third ones to boot. (Geertz 1973, 15)

As Sarah J. Tracy puts it, 'qualitative credibility is [...] achieved through practices including thick description, triangulation or crystallization, and multivocality and partiality' (2010, 843). Thus, I intended to let my informants – the sample of contemporary dance artists based in Brussels or Berlin – speak as much as possible and to empathize with their narratives. While I did not let the other players in the dance scene speak, I did include their expertise less systematically: in the preparation for the quantitative and qualitative study, I had several conversations with field residents and I studied the available information as I mentioned above. In addition, I brought my baggage along and familiarized myself through my own work experience in the field (P.A.R.T.S. and K3|Tanzplan Hamburg) and through a more informal back-and-forth communication with several experts (Patrick Sterckx, Elke Decoker, Delphine Hesters, Simone Willeit, Bela Bisom, Carine Meulders and Rudi Laermans among many others).

Hence, the in-depth interview material with my fourteen informants certainly dominates this book, however, it should be kept in mind that the observations and logbooks were necessary to do the content mining. This approach takes into account that the artists themselves are in fact the experts in their field. The answers and concepts that I seek are grounded in the concrete data only they can provide. Thus, I strove to develop

²⁸ Hence, it was necessary to select informants who were eloquent speakers, which is generally not a problem among performing artists. However, this is also perhaps one of the pitfalls of this approach, because I am actually measuring my informants' cognitive skills to express themselves.

theories through interpreting the qualitative data obtained. In accordance to the grounded theory method developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (2008), I continuously compared my findings through analytical induction: I gradually developed theories on the basis of systematically obtained and analyzed research data. This was a process in which I tried to make a circular movement between empiricism and theory according to the analytical induction: from observations, logbooks and interview material, to abstract and general concepts, to confirmatory and contradictory data that were continually tested and compared. As I conducted several interviews with the same informants over a timespan, I was able to probe the developed theories continuously. Additionally, I examined my developed theories in the different performances (of informants and non-informants), or in casual conversations with other players in the field in both the Brussels and Berlin contexts. Hence, one could say I conducted follow-up interviews to revise my concepts and conclusions until I had reached theoretical saturation. This also explains why I conducted longer or more interviews with some informants and not with others (although this in part is also due to their availability). While with the quantitative survey, I wanted to collect strictly recorded data to create a status quo (which served as a starting point and on the basis of which I could select my research subjects), the essence of the qualitative approach was the continual interweaving of my data collection and theory development.

While *verstehen* goes hand in hand with interpretation, it remains necessary to keep a certain distance to reflect and analyze adequately. However, this was at times more difficult than at others: while my familiarity with the field of inquiry was certainly a favorable asset within this research, I befriended several informants, which could potentially hamper my objectivity. Moreover, some informants have pointed out that our conversations had started to become close to therapeutic sessions for them. While these are typical effects of ethnographic fieldwork, I was aware that as a researcher I had to remain cautious as to avoid moral conflicts and to remain as objective as possible, which I was able to do through the systematic treatment of the interview material via the coding program NVivo.

In the process of analyzing the abundance of qualitative data I had collected, I decided to transcribe each interview myself, because, knowing the context, I understood best what was being said. In addition, it is good practice to recollect material for the next interview and the analysis becomes more efficient by keeping key words. Indeed, analyzing data already happens during the transcribing process, if not already before.²⁹ I analyzed my transcribed data and fieldnotes systematically through open coding (Strauss

²⁹ The transcriptions were proofread and edited by Simon Leenknecht before coding. For the most part, this was simply a matter of saving time. An external editor would be able to devote more time to identify difficult understandable words. Additionally, filtering out typing errors and assuring consistency in spelling was important to do text queries and coding in NVivo based on recurring words.

and Corbin 1990), which in practice means that I have used NVivo to find a structure in my content, to organize my data according to concepts, to refine concepts and visualize the similarities and differences between Brussels and Berlin. I have used the more complex tools from NVivo sparingly, however Annex 5 and Annex 8 respectively provide an overview of several charts and my coding scheme. Especially the memos I created and attached to concepts and subconcepts while coding were useful for developing theories in the qualitative data analysis.

Most importantly, I wanted to capture knowledge through the lens of my informants (from a micro perspective) and therefore I opted for a quite extensive inclusion of direct quotations from the informants, while I provided the contextual analysis of these accounts (in line with Geertz's 'thick descriptions', 1973). In agreement with my informants, they were able to proofread any direct quotations before publication as to ensure their anonymity. In rare cases, an informant's original quote has been reworked slightly upon request, though not changing its meaning. For the same purpose, I decided to translate any quotations that were not in English, after which I had them certified by the involved informants. I wanted to prevent that my word choice for the translation contained too much interpretation. I received consent for all translated quotations, hence, to avoid recognizability of the informants, the translated quotations are not marked in the text nor did I include the initial quote in the original language. Lastly, throughout the book, I occasionally make use of my informants' folk terms adopting these as analytical terms, meaning that I use the wording of an informant to refer to a concept I differentiated and which reoccurs in other cases. In these instances, quotation marks always accompany the folk terms. Thus, any quotation marks used throughout this book that are not followed by references to a source indicate cited material from the qualitative study.

Finally, and perhaps most unconventionally, I have explored the research questions within the ethnographic fieldwork through the analysis of several performances of precarity in which the precarious nature of artistic work has been made visible on stage in content and/or in form. From a dance studies perspective, in order to fully grasp the working conditions in contemporary dance through the lens of its practitioners, it is necessary to explore the artistic output in which contemporary dance artists in these two fields of inquiry publicly address their socio-economic position and precarious working conditions, next to conducting the quantitative and qualitative study. It should be noted that I perceive the discussed performances also as case studies belonging to the fieldwork.³⁰ At length, I discuss *VOLCANO* (2014) by Liz Kinoshita, *Only Mine Alone* (2016) by

³⁰ This somewhat ties in with Norman K. Denzin's ideas, who argues in his influential book *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (1996) that postmodern ethnography is the moral discourse of the contemporary world and that ethnographers can and should explore new sorts of experiential texts - such as performance-based text, literary journalism, and narratives of the self - to form a new ethics of inquiry.

Igor Koruga (in collaboration with Ana Dubljević), *Crisis Karaoke* (2016) by Jeremy Wade, *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer (in collaboration with Chris Peck), and *RECESS: Dance of Light* (2016) by Michael Helland. In addition, several other and perhaps more widely-known performances are referred to throughout this book to illuminate particular points, however these will not be discussed in their entirety nor worked out in detail. It merits mention that the performances I discuss in depth within this book came into being in one of the two fields of inquiry, which is not necessarily the case for all performances I refer to. The artists involved in these mentioned performances are autonomous artists who work or have worked project-based in the Brussels or Berlin context and therefore they may or may not be also anonymous informants.³¹ Finally, I also succinctly examine a number of creative processes that stem from my case study fieldwork and consequentially, the artists and their artwork remain unidentified.

To close, I would like to highlight once more the limitations of this research due to the mentioned sampling bias for both the quantitative and qualitative study, in which the sample of participants was based on self-definition and self-selection. Additionally, it merits mention again that the qualitative data remained somewhat restricted as I was not sufficiently able to examine precisely how precarity informs artistic decision-making processes and collaboration *within* a studio situation due to the minimal observation opportunities for studio work. As mentioned, if there were working periods in a studio at all and if these were for the purpose of creating one's own work, then I was lucky if this work took place in Brussels, Berlin, or within a reasonable distance from these two cities. While my data provide some insights into this question, the findings do remain restricted and further research would certainly provide a better-informed understanding of how the working conditions affect what happens in a studio. Finally, I should acknowledge another noteworthy limitation which relates to the #metoo-movement against sexual harassment that emerged towards the end of my fieldwork. Issues related to inequality and sexual harassment or discrimination were not addressed explicitly within this study even though these are important issues when investigating working conditions, especially since they are often connected with the grey zones where acquiring jobs more often than not happens via networking and social relationships. However, these issues also relate to differences in income levels and power abuse in the work environment – which are topics that have been brought up, though not directly addressing sexism.³²

³¹ It should clarify that while Igor Koruga's *Only Mine Alone* premiered in Belgrade and was for a large part created in Belgrade, Koruga was part of the Berlin dance scene up to 2016 and much of the production was influenced by his experience in that scene – as I will explain later in this book. I also discuss his earlier work, which he created constantly moving between Germany and Serbia.

³² In Belgium, a #weto support group was founded for the contemporary dance scene specifically and resulted in the anti-sexism campaign under the label of Engagement. Nonetheless, these issues have not explicitly come

However, bearing in mind these limitations, this study provides first and foremost an explorative, in-depth qualitative, and interpretive image of what constitutes a precarious life as a contemporary dance artist.

up throughout the fieldwork, neither did I probe my informants about these issue in particular. I could speculate that this partly has to do with the fact that there is still much shame when it comes to addressing sexual harassment histories, as also Isle Ghekiere, who started the #weto support group and Engagement campaign, notes. For more information, consult her article “#WeToo: What dancers talk about when they talk about sexism” in *Rekto:Verso* (November 2017).

Image 3: image from *VOLCANO* (2014) by Liz Kinoshita. © Photo by Giannina Ottiker



Part 1

Lifestyle and Survival Artists

Chapter 3

‘Lifestyle Artists’

3.1 A bohemian work ethic: being an artist as a life form

In urban studies, the position of *living like an artist* is often referred to as a bohemian lifestyle, or what expert Richard Lloyd termed a ‘bohemian ethic’ in his book *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (2010). Lloyd defines Neo-Bohemia as a distinctive sort of urban district and an associated style of life similar to 1920’s Paris, but which has a bigger effect on the economy and urban landscape nowadays. He claims that the activities of artists provide benefits to local economies far beyond what can be measured by formal art markets (Lloyd 2010, 15). In fact, Lloyd follows creative industry expert Richard Florida who celebrated the creative class for furthering the economy (Florida 2005), but refines that creative workers, especially artists, matter a great deal in today’s urban economy indeed, though not primarily as producers of art, rather as what nowadays would be termed as influencers and gentrifiers.¹ In this context, Lloyd

¹ Gentrification is the process of upgrading urban areas or neighborhoods facilitated by the influx of wealthier (typically middle-class) people, often thus dislocating poorer residents, or to put it differently: the precarious intellectuals drive the more precarious away. Therefore, gentrification often carries a negative connotation. Yet, the process usually results in an increasing attractiveness of the area, because early gentrifiers – the first to develop an interest in a certain depreciated city part – are able to creatively improve the neighborhoods. Artists with poor incomes or other *bohemians* may belong to those early gentrifiers that settle in these neighborhoods. In the process of gentrification, they may for example open gallery spaces or studios on vacant industrial sites, or upstart trendy coffee houses, co-working spaces, or co-housing, because renting a property in these still deprived areas is very affordable and demand is rising as the gentrifiers increase in numbers. In turn, real estate development businesses and local governments start investing more in the gentrified areas, which causes tourist attraction and economic development. Examples of gentrified areas are New York’s Williamsburg and similarly named (is this a coincidence?) Wilhelmsburg in Hamburg, as well as Berlin’s now very popular Schillerkiez next to the Tempelhofer Feld – the airfield-turned-into-park.

demonstrates in his book that both the idea of Bohemia and its associated spatial practices have proven durable and portable in cities throughout Europe and the US, but he stresses that Bohemia has morphed into something else, which urban sociologist Sharon Zukin defined as the ‘appeal of the artist’s lifestyle to segments of the middle class’ (Lloyd 2010, 114; Zukin 1989, 82). In this context, McRobbie notes that the romance linked to ‘working like an artist’ is translated at an institutional level and it therefore functions as a self-monitoring and self-regulating mechanism. Drawing on Deleuze (1987), she describes this romance as a line of flight: it entails ‘the desire to escape a lifetime of routine work [...] and the wish to lead a self-directed life in regard to work and career’ (McRobbie 2016, 38). McRobbie has conducted and analyzed several interviews with artists talking about their working lives, which support this thesis. She notes that the enthusiasm of her interviewees is informed by the awareness of not undertaking dull routine or unrewarding jobs. A leap into precarious professions, such as theater, art or fashion, becomes even more appealing, because they literally have nothing to lose (if the alternative is a dull unrewarding job) (McRobbie 2016, 76). Indeed, also Lloyd makes this important observation when he notes that ‘the insecurity and relative deprivation of the artist’s lifestyle is often described as an advantage over the staid existence of buttoned-down professionals, and in this way artists signal the superiority of their existence over both the poor and the privileged’ (Lloyd 2010, 121).

A durable feature of the artist’s lifestyle has been the willingness to endure high levels of insecurity and material scarcity, therefore, as also Lloyd claims, it is useful to study artists as workforces (rather than tortured geniuses). Yet, Lloyd notes that the opportunities for artists to make a living have improved, because a significant minority pursue *la vie bohème* into their thirties and beyond. As a matter of fact, my cases demonstrate quite the opposite: most of my informants are well into their thirties, several even in their forties, and they still pursue a ‘poor-but-sexy’ neo-bohemian lifestyle²: my youngest informant was 28 at the start of the fieldwork and the oldest 47 years old. Due to the high level of physicality and the dependence on the body, dancers or performers tend to be relatively young indeed. Also, dancers and performers are often obliged to *retire* at a relatively early age because of injuries. It is therefore not surprising that within my quantitative study, those only performing are inclined to be younger than those choreographing, teaching, or directing rehearsals. The latter occupations indeed allow dance artists to practice their profession at an older age. Nonetheless, most respondents combine performing with another main occupation. My survey data show that the majority of the respondents are younger than forty. However, they are on average well into their thirties. Notably, the average age in Berlin lies between 37 and 38 years old,

² The quote ‘poor-but-sexy’ was coined by the Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit as the new city slogan in the early 2000’s depicting Berlin as a cool, subcultural capital of Germany and Europe. See also: Stahl 2014b.

whereas the Brussels-based respondents are on average a little younger (between 34 and 35 years old). Thus, my empirical data exposed that my sample population of dance artists seems to be in line with what performing artist Harald Funke and sociologist Markus Schroer term a prolonged life phase of *post-adolescence* (1998, 236). In their text on *Lebensstilökonomie (Lifestyle Economy)*, the authors observe this prolonged life phase among the young generation of well-educated middle-class workers in general and note that this does not refer to decadence amongst youthful bohemia seeking self-realization, but that this is a new situation that occurs due to the increasingly difficult access to long-term socially secure jobs in post-Fordism. Well beyond their thirties, this young generation still works temporary and short-term jobs. They experience difficulties translating their high cultural capital into economic capital, especially since education is often no longer a qualification criterion. It thus concerns an increasingly imposed life phase of prolonged post-adolescence.³ The authors label this life phase as the ‘nightmare of the eternal youth’ (‘Alptraum ewiger Jugend’) (Funke and Schroer 1998, 235), yet I would argue that this is not an accurate description per se – especially since the authors stress it is not only imposed, but also a self-chosen path. Indeed, the question whether this is either coercion (induced by the state or market) or a (voluntary made) choice should be reassessed, thus the authors plead for a *sowohl-als-auch*-perspective: it does not concern one or the other, but both. The prolonged life phase is to an extent indeed enforced onto the young workforce, but at the same time many, in particular artists and creative professionals, value the relatively autonomous lifestyle, which makes them – at least partly – willing to lead a precarious but creative life. The meager monthly average incomes indicated by the respondents in the survey outlined in the previous chapter testify that at least most survey respondents pursue *la vie bohème* even into their late thirties and beyond. This is especially convincing in combination with the reported high satisfaction level about the intrinsic qualities of the profession in the respective cities. A case study informant terms it ‘an extended youth [...] in which freedom trumps income’. This is yet another aspect of the aforementioned self-precarization, however, Lloyd makes a good point when he writes that ‘starving artists do not really starve and they often manage social lives far more lively than their earning would indicate’ (Lloyd 2010, 160). Indeed, one informant illustrates this when she admits the following:

I’m spending a lot more on life than 350 euros. It’s inflation, but it’s also lifestyle. This is what I mean: I’m thirty and I’m not going to *angst* over having drinks, or going out to dinner, or going to the movies... I *angsted* over this when I was 18 and

³ Similarly, Angela McRobbie discerns this re-making of the boundaries when she writes about ‘stretching out the contours of youthfulness’ (McRobbie 2016, 28).

people should *angst* over that when they're 18. But, at a certain point it's like: "no, this is my life and I need to do this".

Interestingly, my quantitative findings reveal that artistic pleasure, lifelong learning, and self-development are the most indicated by both the survey respondents in Brussels and Berlin when asked to rank their top three motives for being active within the field of contemporary dance. The respondents thus seem to compensate the shortage of material benefits with other currencies. As I discussed in the introduction to this book, self-precarization is driven by a supposed immaterial income, or intrinsic satisfaction, such as the benefits of a relatively autonomous life that they are able to lead and which is first and foremost dedicated to artistic preoccupations and chances for self-realization. As Lloyd puts it: 'the bohemian relationship to material security is complicated, not least by the personal insistence that this life was "chosen"' (Lloyd 2010, 160). Indeed, as I pointed out before, an artist is socially acceptable because of the *voluntary* adoption of relative poverty in exchange for an increase in autonomy and creativity. The qualitative fieldwork confirms the just sketched picture based on my quantitative findings: artists often endure their working and living conditions out of a strong belief in their own autonomy and the value of self-realization. Hence, they often see their profession not in terms of a job but rather as a lifestyle. However, the lifestyle-motive seems to tie in with the realistically evaluated hope to have some artistic impact and gain a minimum of recognition. In the words of a case study informant:

I'm a lifestyle artist, and that to me is a huge form of remuneration. I'm not willing to sacrifice that for another career. So maybe I could have a different career where I make more money, but I wouldn't. [...] But I think it's often something about feeling like you're part of this little pocket of history. You know, dance history. It's something you can be and write, and it's also cool to be participating in a story that is unfolding. You can be a part of this story. I don't know of another field that I could work in that is this great, that I could really feel like I could make a significant contribution? You know, and even with that, maybe I'm probably not going to go down in history, but if there's a tangibility to this community... And for me that is super awesome, and I wouldn't want to give that up for anything. And I think if I were to shift careers, I would have to sacrifice a lot of that. It might even damage my marriage.

In this respect, Doris Eikhof and Axel Haunschild (2006) argue on the basis of semi-structured interviews with theater artists that they have to bridge a gap between artistic work and the economic need for self-management, and that a bohemian lifestyle based on a devotion to art for art's sake in fact supports them in doing so. However, I would argue, the notion of a bohemian lifestyle is perhaps too strong a term since it implies the rejection of economically driven behavior. As also my fieldwork confirms, self-promotion and self-management are an actual necessity to survive as an artist. Additionally, as I will

discuss more in-depth further in this chapter, several informants testify they have taken up jobs merely to be able to pay next month's rent. For example, several respondents have worked on commissions, whereas they would rather be making their own work. It should be noted, however, that at the same time most informants indicate that they rarely engage with people they do not find artistically interesting in some way. Nevertheless, a devotion to art for art's sake is quite rare. Lloyd therefore concludes that it is in fact better to talk about a 'bohemian ethic', which is best adapted to the new realities (2010, 236). Rather than looking at artists as a resistant subculture, Lloyd became compelled to think of artists as useful labor (2010, 240). Although artists' lives may seem intrinsically connected with *the bohemian*, this is overall a surface-effect: I would argue that it is in fact work (rather than art) that dominates my informants' lives these days. Hence, I follow Lloyd with a nuanced approach and choose to speak of a *bohemian work ethic* prevalent among the contemporary dance artists within my fieldwork. This notion for that matter refutes the idea of a 'lifestyle artist', the folk term I opted as a title for this section, since it includes two paradoxical notions: perhaps a true bohemian lifestyle is the ideal artists can hope for, but as this book demonstrates, the reality actually demands much work, such as endless networking, a great deal of self-promotion, and a good dose of systematic self-management. Nonetheless, the notion of bohemian can still be applied to the work ethic in reference to artists' self-precarization, where contemporary dance artists are to a certain extent still willing to sacrifice material income for the sake of immaterial income, or what Kalleberg describes as subjective and intrinsic job rewards (2011). The values and motives for making art in contemporary capitalism have remained the same as back in nineteenth-century bohemianism: artistic pleasure, temporal autonomy, lifelong learning prospects, a relatively free work environment, opportunities for self-development, and self-realization, among other things (see Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017). Indeed, except for the supposed *haute Bohème*, many bohemian artists were believed to live in a type of voluntary poverty or self-precarization: they pursued a simple way of living devoted to their art.

In *Economics of Creativity: Art and Achievement under Uncertainty* (2014), Pierre-Michel Menger's research questions explore why people might be attracted to professions in which success is very uncertain and in which it is probable that one will earn less than what individuals with equivalent characteristics in other professions would earn. He concludes that taking this risk is encouraged by the hope of gaining social and psychological gratifications, by the prospect of autonomous working conditions and the absence of dull and routine work. This type of immaterial (or psychic, as he terms it) income and intrinsic motivation compensates for money and is typical for a vocation. In his qualitative study of contemporary dance artists in France, Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet establishes the discourse on dance as a vocation, or in other words, as an autodidactic lifestyle on the frontier of amateurism and professionalism based on mobility and precarity, which is simultaneously material, affective and corporeal (Sorignet 2010, 27).

In fact, Sorignet implicitly describes the notion of a bohemian work ethic, emphasizing that contemporary dance artists construct a habitus, where work time and private life are closely intertwined, or perhaps better, one in which life and work even depend on one another. Instead of a material richness, dance artists strive for enrichment and this in the form of self-development. Whereas Sorignet uses the discourse on vocation as the driving motor of dance professionals, I opt to divert from the divine connotation of the calling and to proceed using then notion of a bohemian work ethic, particularly since a career in contemporary dance comes hand in hand with a common work ethic shared by all my informants, which includes the bohemian ethic. As I will show, the idea of autonomy, captured by the notion of bohemian, is a false or imagined autonomy because in reality the contemporary dance artist is confronted with a work pressure that is deeply interwoven with life. As Berlin-based contemporary dance artist Jeremy Wade points out in an interview with Diego Agulló: ‘Everyone knows that freelance doesn’t make you free’ (Agulló 2016). The notion of bohemian work ethic includes the choice for an autonomous lifestyle as an artist, but simultaneously, also the ambiguous acknowledgement that this comes hand in hand with actual work to ensure one’s survival in the art world. Perhaps alarmingly, one could conclude that *work* slowly drains the *bohemian* because, paradoxically, autonomy seems to come with more obligations. In what follows, I discuss several essential aspects that reveal this paradox and determine this common bohemian work ethic.

3.2 ‘Human time’

When one’s life is devoted to art, it seems redundant to separate labor time from private life. In this context, also these notions are gradually becoming zombie concepts, which are constructs or ideas from a bygone era; they are dead but alive and continue to exist however they have lost meaning or do not refer to the social reality anymore (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In an attempt to distinguish work from leisure time, a case study informant opts to speak of ‘human time’. In what follows, I apply this folk term to refer to those activities that are not directly work-related but are part of their bohemian work ethic: as we will see, many of the activities in fact tend to feed the artistic work and cannot be discussed as completely separate entities. Among the activities listed under ‘human time’, almost all informants are intensely occupied with yoga, Pilates or fitness. Several informants daily devote time to meditate. Most of them have established their own yoga routines or a teaching practice. One informant even refers to ‘going to the gym’ as part of her ‘structured lifestyle’. These activities are part of ‘maintaining a health

identity', as she points out. Interestingly, mostly the Berlin-based informants maintain a dance practice, or at least have attended dance classes in the period of my fieldwork. One informant explained she was trying out several contemporary ballet classes, partly in preparation for an upcoming performance, partly because she had time for it. Another informant explains that maintaining a dance practice is very important, because you are surrounded by peers and by people who are passionate in the same area. She stresses that it is not only just maintaining the body, but it actually is maintaining a practice: 'it's not just to stay in shape, to be ready for the next work. It's also keeping the dialogue and the creative questioning in yourself.' Ideally, when she is not doing her own work, she would like to have four hours of studio time per day, during which she would work with herself. It thus becomes evident that the relationship between 'maintaining a health identity' and work is rather complex. Several informants seem to want to stay fit for pleasure and for work:

I like training. I feel good and I also want to stay fit just for my own personal sake. I also know that I want to be as prepared as possible if something comes up. You know, I can sit and wait for something to come, but I want to be as prepared as possible. Also, in the meantime, I just want to focus on feeling as good as I can. So, I just keep training. [...] I think even if I stopped dancing and I start working at some other job completely, and even when it's hard, I'd probably keep the yoga up. So it doesn't seem like work, but it does seem necessary and a part of this.

In a similar vein, another informant explains that he needs to keep up with training on a daily basis indeed: 'If I do have work, like rehearsals or performances, then I don't bother with working out. If I take more than two days, in which I'm not moving, that's when I start to be injured or in pain. So I really need to just do stuff every day.' A third informant points out that practicing yoga is in fact like 'tuning your instrument': it is a warm-up for work, but also simply preparing your body to start the day. Indeed, these informants address the upkeep of their body capital.

Other activities listed under 'human time' are related to social engagement and include volunteer work with refugees, environmental concerns, political activity, and going to performances. When asked what books the informants were reading, they rarely replied with novel titles, but mentioned for example *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, *The Soul at Work* by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, or Torkel Klingberg's *The Overflowing Brain: Information Overload and the Limits of Working Memory*. Not only do these titles testify to what occupied my informants at the time of my fieldwork, but they also attest to the cultural capital they possess. One informant explained that she was taking some time off reading Claude Lévi-Strauss, yet simultaneously, the ethnographic book is part of the preliminary research for a project on throat singing that she is envisaging. Aside from these activities, informants have mentioned activities related to passing time, such as exploring the city (especially when on tour), walking in the park, or having a coffee. Many

informants agree that going to performances is often inspiring: ‘when I see things, it’s inspiring. I might not even like it, not at all, but often, it’s inspiring. And sometimes, just to see people dance, it reminds me of the joy, or of why I choose this.’ Accordingly, I asked my informants whether they consider going to performances as part of their work, which appeared to be a difficult question to answer without ambiguity. One informant claimed it has to be part of the work, whereas others remained less explicit. Going to performances is mostly considered a vital aspect of being an artist, but most informants do not feel they need to be paid for it. One informant explains: ‘somehow, it feels part of a bigger thing that involves the work, because it’s related to our work. It inspires work. It interests me in relation to what I do. It doesn’t feel like work.’ Another informant agrees:

I consider it integral to my experience as a dance artist. I mean, work, no, I wouldn’t need to be paid for it. But, I think it’s super important to see work and I just enjoy it very much. I think it’s the only way to know what people are up to, so part of it is just in terms of inspiration and excitement for the form.

However, the latter informant continues and points out there is also a practical part of networking that takes place before and after: ‘hearing about auditions and opportunities, a lot of this happens in that pre- or post-show drink situation. And I think it’s just important to be visible in this community and to show up’. The former informant realizes that this is indeed also part of the game, but he finds it easier to just walk home. He says that he knows it is not the best thing for his career, but networking does not come so easily to him. Another informant admits she often attends events that are organized bottom-up to stay updated about who is doing what, but especially since these events happen in important meeting places. She continues to explain that this is often strenuous, because sometimes nothing really happens in these places. She adds that it can be a statement not to go. I will discuss the ins and outs of networking and the dynamics of exposure in the contemporary dance scene in part II of this book.

With respect to ‘human time’, pursuing a hobby has been rarely brought up and the hobbies mentioned (actually using the word ‘hobby’) remain in the realm of the arts, such as photography or playing the drums. Several informants who told me they made music as a hobby ended up using it in a direct or indirect manner in their performances. One informant even wondered out loud how playing in a band (that is on the verge of a professional breakthrough) would inform her work as a dance artist in the future. Another informant testifies that when drum playing became part of her life, it changed the way she listened to music and the musicality of her movement. She took much from it into her world of dance, because the primal rhythms worked very inspirational for her. She wants to share that intuitive knowledge with her students and audience. Hence, these examples confirm that the distinction between work and non-work activities is simply not relevant as it is particularly noteworthy that many of the activities listed above – if not all – more often than not feed the artistic work, to the extent, even, that yoga and

related practices have greatly informed the next solo project of an informant. To give an example, I quote from her logbook:

I worked every day on Kriya, mantra, yoga and especially tried out new things based on the website of Sattva Connect. I took this yoga in L.A. and my fascination for text, sound and movement and the desire to start working with these aspects emerged there. So, every day I have been looking for my personal warrior goddess mantra and questioned how I explore, find, and create her and what she has to do in the piece. After eight days of working, I concluded that she can be different each day and thus ultimately can alternate each performance. This conclusion is liberating and feels right, but I also have my favorites. The ones that I preferred, I recorded in the studio, but I am allowed to invent new versions. This is also true when I think about my costume. I would like the costume to change per performance. However, that is rather a provisional option at the moment, certainly not conclusive. I should examine what conditions the costume must meet in combination with the mantra and the text, which will be fixed.

In a related vein, Xavier Le Roy's much-discussed *Product of Other Circumstances* (2009) questions the line between art and hobby. In a letter, Boris Charmatz reminded Le Roy that he once claimed he could master Butoh in only two hours. Le Roy did not seem to remember he once asserted so, but accepted the challenge. For a small event about Butoh dance curated by Charmatz, Le Roy was asked to create something starting from the claim he made. In his performance, he recounts this experience, which essentially consisted of doing research in his spare time. While the performance started with the statement that anybody could learn a dance technique using a variety of resources, it seemed to have ended with a different claim, evoking questions about art and/as work and exposing the informality of the profession. What does it mean for the professional status of art when artists make art in their 'human time'? Does the notion of having a hobby even make sense for artists? Or, perhaps most significantly, can a true artist even distinguish between work time and non-work time?

3.3 The interweaving

All the same, it should be noted that most informants attempt to separate work from life by keeping up a somewhat regular schedule. Several informants, especially the Brussels-

based ones⁴, did not log their weekends, unless they were on tour, because weekends are downtime, whether or not devoted to family life. At least as much as possible: one informant admits that that is not always true as she often answers emails and such. As a matter of fact, the interweaving of work time and private life is greatly facilitated by not having a separate email address for work and personal affairs. Additionally, informants have testified that nowadays, professional conversations often happen via the Facebook Messenger. But, as the informant stresses, her phone switches to 'do-not-disturb' at ten o'clock in evening, so she is unable to answer emails and messages after that time. She continues to explain that she has to do that or she ends up working all the time. She needs to really know when she is working and when not, especially when she is working from home. A Berlin-based informant explains that he does not have that 'luxury', commenting: 'I don't have evenings, I don't have weekends.' He enhances further:

There's something about the unstructured nature of the work that actually can cause a lot of extra work, or a lot of extra mental stress for me, because I'm in charge of managing my own time, managing my own self, managing every little minor detail from my kind of physical activities, to what I eat, to a kind of meditation practice, that will help me focus more. I consider all of these this, because in the end, I have a massive amount of work and I want to be clear and productive and I also want to make a work-life balance, and I would say a lot of energy goes to trying to manage all of those things to actually have a work-life balance.

Most significantly, another Berlin-based respondent explains that the actual work – the creative work – is always interwoven with life, because it is always on her mind. The rest, the administrative and organizational work, does not even register as work. In her words:

It's also something that percolates. It's something you think about all the time, because you went away from rehearsal thinking "mmh this is not working? What is not working? And what would work instead?" [...] It probably takes me ten minutes to really focus on it and to put some ideas down on paper, but that's actually the work and it makes me feel good, because I made something artistically and all this rest is just management. [...] I think if I would like to be emotionally validated as an artist, I actually would have to be working in a studio.

This is perhaps yet another reason to explain why the notion of artistic practice has gained so much currency over the last years, as previously mentioned. Indeed, 'having a practice' revolves around a durational activity, one that is interwoven with life, which is

⁴ I can only speculate why this is true for especially the Brussels-based respondents: perhaps the Brussels-based respondents simply expressed and stressed this point more than the Berlin-based respondents? Or it could be related to a more general attitude prevalent in the respective cities?

more sustainable than a temporary project. In this respect, one informant explains that she does not separate her practice from life at all. She recounts:

I work as a freelancer, so I have long periods that I don't get paid, but I work, because I practice things. I work for myself, I go to the studio and I work. Or I work on the computer. I think for many people the word "work" is related to getting paid for it, but I don't see it that way.

It is very strange for her to separate work, practice and life, because if she practices something as a value in life, why would she not touch upon that in her artistic practice? Her recent collaborative process demonstrates what she is trying to say: she clarifies to me that she is not actually working on a piece, but rather on a practice that she does together with her friend. Indeed, they somehow organized the practice in a way to present it and share it with an audience. However, the performance date was kind of a motivation to work on the practice now, even though it will always be kept alive. The prospect of a presentation pushes the duo and gives them something specific to work toward. But the practice itself, as she explains, is very much about simply being present in what you do and about what is currently happening in their personal lives. It is important that they meet and talk about it, but there is not a real necessity to practice physically. In the fragment below, she clarifies why they can be in a long-distance working process:

Even though we're going to use the body, or use dance as a form for doing this, there will not be so much specificity in the aesthetic that really demands very precise physical work. We need to think more about what the content is behind the movement we want to bring. So, in a way the movement doesn't really matter, even though that's a funny thing to say. We will bring deeper values and ideas that we want to present in movement, but that are not attached to specific movement. So we don't talk so much about the choreographic side of it, but we share a lot of things that are part of our lives. I think this is actually it. This is what we would like to bring into the performance. It's not about the specific movements that we do, but it's about our lives and our relationships and our questions and learning processes. [...] My drive is much more in what is happening now [the practice] and not what is going to happen [the presentation].

3.4 'Personal-professional confusion'

Next to the interweaving of 'human time' and work, my qualitative data reflect a 'personal-professional confusion' in terms of (social) relationships. It is not unusual that

an artist's love life even becomes entangled in work: for example, a new love interest had won an informant's heart because he helped her with editing a text for a piece she was making and eventually ended up running the subtitles in a performance series because her manager had suffered a burnout right after the première. It was, in her words, 'full-on personal-professional confusion'. Naturally, it was intellectual partnership and feeling understood artistically that did the trick. She points out that this interweaving of work and life is so familiar and that it should not be talked about in a 'victim-y' way as if it is a problem. She does not understand what the novelty of it is. Indeed, just like the interweaving of work and life is not specific to dance artists alone, this confusion is also very common in other sectors as this relates to social homogamy. Nonetheless, the extent of personal-professional confusion within the small dance communities of Brussels and Berlin is very remarkable and refutes the argument that 'poor dance artists' are inclined to live off their partner's wages. The professional-personal confusion must therefore also be understood in the context of precarity; because within my fieldwork socio-economic precarity often affects two people, who sometimes also raise children together.

In the dance world, friends are often colleagues are often lovers, which blurs the line between the professional and private sphere, especially since professional practices such as maintaining a professional network take place in a context that also functions as an extra-professional meeting place - for example, in coffee houses and bars (see also Hesters 2004). An informant confesses:

I'm kind of a nerd; I don't have any friends that aren't colleagues. I really don't know many people that I don't know through work, but I also work with really great people. [...] So much of the work that I do, and also the way that I come across the work that I do, is really driven by social relationship.

Indeed, as I will discuss in more detail in part II, new professional collaborations often develop from social relationships. However, even if working with *frolleagues* may sound appealing at first glance, the personal-professional confusion can have its downsides. When one of my informants was offered a residency in Paris, the conditions had been changed over the course of the following months. She had been moved to a smaller studio and a week of support for accommodation had been cut. On top of that, her application for co-production funding was rejected. However, the residency was confirmed and she wanted to pursue it, assuming that at least her expenses would be covered, as had been the case with other residencies. Nevertheless, she discovered very late that that was in fact not part of the deal: 'maybe I was naïve. And that's what I learned: I should've checked what is in this contract and what isn't.' She had played it safe and had bought the flights and trains with her own means early in advance. Nonetheless, she accepted the deteriorated conditions because she was thrilled she had finally managed to get a residency in Paris and saw it as a future investment: 'that's a fantastic opportunity. This will be launching my career further! I can't let go of this opportunity. But, the deal was

shit...’ She told everyone involved, most of them friends, about the space restrictions, but did not inform them about the lack of food expenses (per diems or any other form of compensation for daily expenses) and accommodation for the second week, thinking she could find a solution herself. Thus, after accepting poor conditions, she points out that the second mistake she made was the lack of transparency. She basically confronted her team with the facts a week prior to starting the residency. One of her dancers/friends told her that had she known the facts before, she probably would have decided differently about her involvement: she knew she would not earn any money, but thought at least she would not leave with a loss. My informant realizes she dealt with the situation poorly because she was determined not to pass up the opportunity that would possibly further her career. She admits she was ‘blinded by the prestige of the institution, so much so that I didn’t want to talk to anyone about my difficulties and just wanted to fix it all by myself.’ Nonetheless, the experience has been very instructive in terms of engaging friends in work situations and working toward fair practices. After a conversation over coffee with one of the friends involved in the residency, she concludes:

I realized I risked a lot. I risked a good, a well-working collegial relationship, and also friendships, and that hurts a lot. If someone says that they would not engage in friendship activities anymore with you, that’s very painful.

In turn, another informant confided that she was experiencing relationship troubles due to bureaucratic stress from working in the same field. They are often working on projects together and when that is not the case, they habitually help one another out with management, administration and dramaturgy. Yet, simultaneously, that is also a problem:

We just actually had really intense talks about that because my partner can work the whole day. Not that he can, but he likes it: when he gets an email, he will answer it immediately. Like in the next second. If he doesn’t do that, he gets stressed. I don’t want that, because I don’t want to answer emails my whole day long. And then we have an issue, because we do everything together at the moment, so actually he needs my “OK” on things sometimes and then he gets nervous when I’m not giving my “OK” immediately. So this is an issue. Secondly, it is also an issue that he’s always answering fast, because I feel like I don’t have time to digest something and everything is already done, which is great for some things, because I don’t have to do it, but for others... When it’s about opinion and stuff, I need a bit more space. [...] That’s why we came up with: “hey ok, let’s try for a time that we have organizational time and we have also time without – we shut down our email and our phone, and maybe also messenger”.

The couple thus agreed to do two hours of office work on the computer each morning, in the kitchen – not in the living room – in order to avoid stress and long days in front of the computer.

Furthermore, it is needless to say that transnational or long-distance relationships are difficult to maintain. To be with her partner is ‘99% of the reason’ why one of my informants goes back to her home country at all. She explains that she has been trying to make more reasons for her to be there, because going back all the time just for the sake of being together is not sustainable for her or the relationship. In this boundaryless work regime, both the entanglement and the transnationality of work and life affect partnerships and especially parenthood. Parents have to juggle their schedules to organize themselves around their children. This usually means that weekends, mornings and evenings revolve as much as possible around family life. Most informants with children explain how they manage to take their child(ren) with them when travelling for work, which is doable until the child reaches the age of compulsory attendance at school. Most couples seem to be able to cope with the organizational burden because most partners equally work in the arts field and can thus relate. However, one informant, whose partner is not a professional artist, expresses particular concern, as they seem to be fighting more. In terms of organization when someone is travelling, her partner is ‘very lastminute.com’, but simultaneously ‘he understands that’s the life’. Nonetheless, she expands that planning is more frustrating in a day-to-day schedule in the base city. She has been offered a studio space free of charge, in which she can actually work on a rather regular basis. However, she points out that it means that she is not being paid to work, which her partner might use as an argument to put pressure on her to organize herself more around their child. Because she is not paid, she has to take their child to school and fetch her in the afternoon, which means that in the end she does not have much working time at all. For example, if she starts working at ten, it will be noon by the time she finishes the warm-up. Then it is time to eat before she can continue, but she has to be ready to leave the studio again at quarter past three to fetch their child from school. In order to avoid this, she can count on a network of support from friends, who are willing to pick up their child from school.

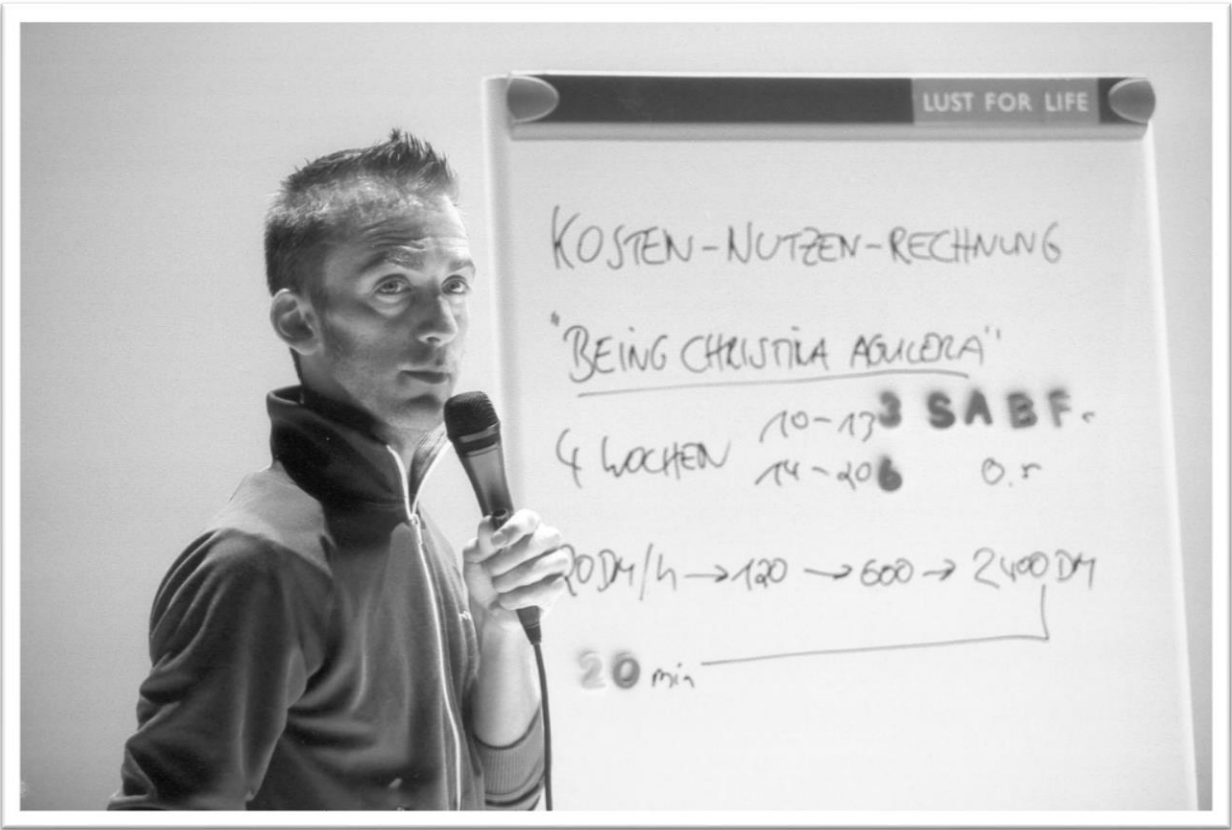
Another case study informant recounts a three-week residency period, in which the collaborating artists attempted to include the newborn child in the creative process and showings:

It is such a different rhythm and we’re not used to that. Normally we stick together all the time and we do everything together. This was different. And the showing: we were like The Kelly Family with the baby always on the arm, singing. People liked it and he’s also very sweet to look at, but for the parents it felt a bit exposed: “we don’t want to expose our child as a performer”.

This latter example allows me to introduce the second chapter of this first book part, in which I approach the other side of the coin: perhaps rather than lifestyle artists, my informants prove to be survival artists pursuing a bohemian work ethic. In the latter example, my informant reveals that a newborn baby was included in residency and the

accompanying showings even though the parents were not comfortable with the exposure. This raises the question to what extent this was an artistic choice or rather a pragmatic solution where all artists involved were behind also artistically? How are artistic choices informed by more pragmatic questions of survival? How do contemporary dance artists deploy their skills of creativity and innovation to ensure their own survival in the contemporary dance profession? These are the questions explored under the title of “Survival Artists”.

Image 4: image from *No Money, No Love* (2002) by Jochen Roller. © Photo by Simon Friedemann



Chapter 4

Survival Artists

4.1 ‘Tactics of the weak’

In May 2011, a symposium was organized by curator and dance artist Angela Guerreiro in the choreographic center K3|Tanzplan Hamburg in Germany entitled *Surviving Dance – Kunst/Wirtschaft/Politik*. The event engaged artists, audiences and institutions and was intended to be a platform for a discussion of the working conditions in dance in the context of the completion of the funding program Tanzplan Deutschland.¹ In the program booklet, a quote was taken from a conversation between three dancers about their future prospects. Expressing concern leading up to the event, one of the dancers said to the other: ‘Hopefully I’ll die before I retire’ (Guerreiro 2011a, n.p.). This is a shocking statement to say the least, but testifies to the grim reality that faces most project workers. In this context the phrase does not refer to one’s passion in work, but rather to the unpleasant prospect of a future without a pension due to the precarious nature of the project-based profession. In her recent chapter on choreographic practices, Petra Sabisch provides an extensive outline of the evolution of the socio-economic position of dance artists in Germany (and Europe) since the 1990’s, which demonstrates the particularly precarious nature of the profession. She notes that even though this precarious socio-economic situation has been known about for years, it has worsened catastrophically (in particular in terms of income development and gender equality) (Sabisch 2016, 78). Based on former studies on the different populations of artists and income composition

¹ Tanzplan Deutschland was a funding initiative of the German Federal Cultural Foundation that ran from 2005 until 2010. In that period, the project’s goal was, as formulated on the website, ‘to provide dance in Germany with more recognition and establish it as a [sic] art form of equal value along with opera and theater in the public perception and in the perception of those responsible for cultural policy’ (Tanzplan Deutschland, accessed September 6, 2018).

analyses, art sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger observes that less than ten per cent of artists are able to live exclusively off their art (2014, 124). Furthermore, art sociologist Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet describes the contemporary dance profession as particularly precarious since merely one out of ten contemporary dance artists was remunerated on a full-time and permanent basis in France at the time of his research (2010, 18).

In Brussels, where contemporary dance artists commonly work with short employment contracts, my survey findings reveal that the median of average monthly net income lies within 1,000 to 1,250 euros net. Artists in Germany generally work self-employed, therefore I asked the Berlin-based respondents to estimate the average year income divided by twelve without deducting insurance costs. The Berlin-based respondents indicated an average gross monthly income between 750 and 1,000 euros (median). Additionally, 62% of the Berlin-respondents are remunerated for maximally half of their actual working hours, whereas in Brussels this is only true for 46% of the respondents. This statistic is reflected in the meager incomes my findings exposed.² Indeed, the Berlin data reveal lower incomes than Brussels, especially since the Berlin-based respondents still need to pay rather high contributions to their mandatory insurances (plus taxes). Additionally, it must be kept in mind that the respondents were asked to estimate their average monthly income, which does not exclusively have to come from salaried work, but is essentially a multiple income not necessarily stemming from artistic activities alone. I additionally note that sociologist Hans Abbing observes that artists are not so poor if you look at all their income and not exclusively the income stemming from artistic activities, but my survey findings would thus argue against this.³ Lastly, these estimated incomes in both cases certainly seem meager in the light of the high education level (in both cases, the majority of the sample has a degree in higher

² More specifically in relation to the idea of *surviving dance* and the poverty threshold, my findings reveal that at least one-fifth of my respondents in Brussels earned less than the living wage of 833.71 euros for a single person living alone at the time of my survey and 12% of them gained even less than 555.81 euros, the individual minimum for someone living together. Moreover, 30% of respondents earned less than the Belgian minimum unemployment allowance of 972.14 euros in 2015. In Berlin, the unemployment allowance ALG II is tailored to the official minimum subsistence level. From 2017 onwards, the regulations provide a monthly basic rate of 409 euros for individuals and 368 euros for members of a shared household. In addition to the regular services, the appropriate costs for health insurance, accommodation and heating are taken over. Hence, I may assume that at least one-quarter of my respondents in Berlin earned less than the subsistence minimum at the time of my survey in 2016, i.e. 24% earned less than 750 euros monthly (which is 409 euros for singles or 368 euros with partner of necessities, health insurance and a very low rent price). According to these calculations, thus at least one-fifth of my respondents in Brussels and one-quarter of my respondents in Berlin seem to be below the poverty line. Consult both reports (Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017) for more details on these figures.

³ Moreover, when speaking of an estimated *average* monthly income, it must be taken into account that one may earn 500 euros in month X and 1,500 euros in month Y. Unfortunately, this aspect of potential precarity coming with an unstable, unpredictable income remains invisible in the given monthly average incomes.

education; 81% in Brussels and 92% in Berlin). As my survey findings reveal, the biggest issue seems to be the absence of fair payment for the delivered work effort. Yet, the question remains whether the contemporary dance artists actually consider themselves poor. Thus, my survey respondents were asked about the average monthly net income they actually need. Quite strikingly, more than half of all respondents in Brussels as well as in Berlin state that they need only a monthly 1,250 euros net or less. Still, the Berlin-based informants do need to cover their rather high insurance costs for self-employment with the 1,250 euros they claim they need. Moreover, as indicated before, dance artists have to invest in their bodies in order to remain employable. However, it seems as if most respondents have learned to cover all these costs with their rather limited income and to survive with it: they say that they do not really need much more than they actually earn. To put it differently: next to being dance artists, they also appear to be survival artists.⁴ Probably a combination of factors is at play here, such as the factual accommodation to their material situation, thus also avoiding feelings of relative deprivation (i.e. knowing that there are not many genuine chances to improve their situation substantially, or realizing that the situation is likely to become more challenging, especially physically, as they age); the choice for a relatively non-consumerist lifestyle (yet without ‘angst over having drinks’ as an informant mentioned above); and – perhaps most importantly – the compensation of a relatively low income by a professional activity one really likes and that implicates in an often direct, non-estranging mode one’s self and personal capacities (compare Abbing 2008). Precisely the latter motive underlies the logic of self-precarization discussed in the introduction. In turn, an informant points out that he does not need much to live, if living means surviving. However, he realizes that those two verbs do not mean the same thing. My use of the term survival artists implies that these artists are creative about surviving in an art world that is structurally precarious and grounded in a freelance and funding system that, as Hans Abbing claims, keeps them poor (2008).⁵ These artists endure, outlast and persevere despite the economic challenges affecting their work and lives. They carry on to practice the profession adopting clever and creative tactics.

⁴ It should be noted that I use the term survival artist in a more figurative sense here and I will continue using it further in this book as such. I am aware that the term survival comes with manifold connotations. The notion of survival artists points to choosing an *other* life in which material matters less than immaterial values and to finding creative solutions to making ends meet, yet bearing in mind that the majority of the respondents still remain above the poverty line and are for the most part white, middle-class and European citizens. Simultaneously, by using this metaphor, I do not implicitly suggest that the common consumption-oriented materialistic lifestyle is standard.

⁵ I will discuss this statement in more detail in the next chapter, when I outline and analyze the project funding system, the residency system and the freelancing systems in both Brussels and Berlin and examine how the workings of these systems affect the life and work of my informants.

My fieldwork uncovered several survival tactics. My informants demonstrated resilience in their development of a sustainable practice in a variety of ways. Following Katharina Pewny (2011a), I argue that dance artists develop tactics ‘of the weak’ within their practice to deal with precarity and, most importantly, to construct a more sustainable future. I understand tactics as defined by Michel de Certeau, as a ‘calculated action, a maneuver “within the enemy’s field of vision” that takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them’ (1984, 38). ‘Tactic’, as opposed to ‘strategy’, is the art of the weak and pins its hopes on a clever utilization of the opportunities (De Certeau 1984, 37-38).⁶ Performing precarity, as discussed in the introduction, shows to be a significant and effective tactic and advocating fair practices in the arts in public events (such as the mentioned symposium) remains an important and on-going approach for debate. However, my findings on the needed income suggest that money is not an end but a means: following David Throsby (1994), Abbing points out that a survival constraint exists among artists, which can be interpreted as a minimum income zone, an area in which money rapidly loses its importance. As soon as artists reach this minimum level, they quickly lose interest in earning more money and prefer to spend more time making art (2008, 85). This chapter deals with the survival tactics that artists have developed in a system that keeps them poor and how this survival mode has affected the lives and work of my informants.

4.2 Internal subsidization

In spite of the bohemian work ethic, artists working on project-basis are sometimes obliged to tap into other incomes in order to provide and make a living (see also Menger 2002, 4; Abbing 2008, 143). In an outline of the dance landscape in Flanders, Flemish writer and critic Pieter T’Jonck observes that many Brussels-based dance artists have to manage with project-based and therefore conditional funding, which engenders a precarious position. Interestingly, T’Jonck notes that this precarious position is not necessarily unattractive for artists, for example, because this enables them to work autonomously on their own projects. Nevertheless, the question remains how long one can endure such an unstable work life (T’Jonck 2013, 22). The situation is not any different in Berlin, where

⁶ One may wonder here who ‘the enemy’ in this case exactly is. And is there only one enemy or are multiple enemies? While the quotation addresses an issue of power difference, I use the term more generically as the art of the weak, pointing to the everyday tactics given the precarious working conditions.

performing artists are in the same manner reliant on project-based funding. In addition, artists can receive support from co-producers and residency spaces, however this commonly happens on the condition that project subsidy has been awarded. Since artists cannot count on receiving project funding, they have to hedge against income insecurity through betting on several horses and multiple jobholding. McRobbie points out that the held jobs in this project-based regime often carry a 'nebulous status, existing somewhere between the old profession, the once secure jobs in the public sector [...] and career pathways in the corporate world' (2016, 43). Typically, they co-exist with low-status day jobs or side jobs necessary to pay rent and living costs (such as bartending). Indeed, also the artists must sometimes find other work to subsidize the pursuit of their art; ideally it would concern work that is consistent with the lifestyle.

My informants have mentioned undertaking side jobs such as teaching yoga or Pilates. It should be noted that yoga and Pilates reoccur quite often as an essential part of the cases' lifestyles, as I demonstrated earlier in the first chapter of this part. It is therefore not surprising that this has become a side job for many informants. An informant clarifies that holding a side job teaching yoga does not actually serve as an internal subsidization, which refers to form of cross-financing when income stemming from one activity is used to finance a loss-making activity within the same enterprise (see Hesters 2004; Abbing 2008). She explains that in order to earn 30 euros per class, she needs to charge 80 euros to the yoga studio. She works with 'day contracts', which are managed through an alternative management bureau that charges a small percentage. On top of that, taxes need to be deducted. In the end, she receives about 30 euros for a class, which officially lasts for one hour, but actually takes up much more of her time: she arrives an hour beforehand to check whether the studio is clean and warm, she welcomes the students and asks them, for example, if someone has any physical problems she has to take into account while teaching. She is not obliged to do so, but sees it integral to being a teacher. After class, she showers, puts away the yoga mats and checks up on her students whether they have questions about the exercises. She easily stays 30 to 45 minutes longer. Additionally, the yoga studio is rather far away, which demands a commute. In total, she thus receives a mere 30 euros for being away for four hours doing intense (hot yoga) and specialized work. She adds that she is even lucky she has found a yoga studio that can pay this price, because also that is not something that should be taken for granted. As a matter of fact, when she became entitled to receive unemployment benefits under the artist status which gave her the right to deny non-artistic jobs, the Brussels job center recommended her not to pursue the teaching anymore as it was not beneficial at all. Yet, she continues to teach yoga because she loves the job. In addition, it has provided her with other jobs in the past (such as, teaching yoga at a student's workplace or events, for example). And most importantly, she can take free yoga classes at the studio, which she sees as an ideal training for certain rehearsals or performances. She concludes that even

though the payment may be meager, she enjoys the advantage of taking free classes as a very pleasant exchange.

Correspondingly, the Berlin job center discouraged another informant from continuing her activities as a translator in the sense that they insist that the income from translations should not support her artistic practice. However, internal subsidization is the main reason to do translation work in the first place: 'I do translations, so I can support my choreography. So, for example, the money that I earn translating for [a choreographic center] went straight into the rent of my dancers. That's why, otherwise I wouldn't be translating, or at least not with this kind of urgency.' In her case, it is obvious that both jobs, translating and choreographing, are not financially viable when looking at them separately, but they are when putting the two together.

In a similar vein, another Berlin-based informant demonstrates internal subsidization tactics through multiple jobholding. Working the rather dull job selling tickets at the register of theater venues and art festivals, checking them at the entrance, or assigning seats to the spectators pays off for her in a variety of ways. She explains that she usually receives festival passes which enable her to attend many festivals, also in other artistic fields, that she would usually not attend as she would not have the means to pay for all the events. She sees this as an extralegal benefit, or even a reward, for doing an uncreative and unrewarding job in the art field. The internal subsidization in this case is manifold: first of all, she receives an income from her employer, which allows her to pursue her art. Additionally, it concerns an employment situation, which means that she enjoys several benefits and securities that she would have to provide herself if she would be merely self-employed. For example, her employer covers her health insurance and the contributions she is responsible for are therefore much lower than if she would be paying into the self-employed insurances. Thirdly, she is able to go to several performances and installations in the venues and during the festivals without having to pay for them. In her case, cross-financing does apply: in her creative process which I was able to follow through (participatory) observation, none of the involved people were remunerated. They were able to use studio spaces from Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz (HZT), as some of the performers were still students there and could therefore easily book studio space free of charge. In fact, the school allows alumni to book free studio space last minute as well. They were not working with a set or props, so there was no budgetary investment necessary. The sound engineer provided his own equipment and each performer provided costumes, usually something they had laying around. They had been given two performance dates in a small venue in Berlin. The only form of support they received from the venue was 50% from the ticket sales. Yet, this form of payment exposes the precarious working conditions since payment is not guaranteed and depends on a highly unsure turnout. More often than not, the returns from ticket sales are usually split with the venue and among those involved in the production, as was also the case here. Hence, in this case only a negligible fee remained for each performer of a six-person production

with two performance dates in a venue with scarcely 30 seats.⁷ As she does not receive funding for her art, the project is thus cross-financed with her income from her side activity. However, when I point this out to her, she prefers to see it differently: her side job rather finances her life.

Besides these jobs, artists take up service sector jobs as temporary stops on the way to something else on the premise that these jobs will support their *real work* as a cultural producer (McRobbie 2016, 182). These jobs (in hip bars and coffee shops for example) usually belong to what urban sociologist Sharon Zukin has termed ‘critical infrastructure’ (1993, 214): well-educated and young workers hold service sector jobs, typically in gastronomy, for which they are either un- or overqualified. Yet, following Zukin, I propose that these jobs enable artists to put their social and cultural capital to use through play, acting as critical mediators and facilitators in the social, cultural, and economic neighborhood-transformations connected to gentrification processes (Zukin 1993, 179–216). Especially coffee house or bartending jobs are often preferred because they allow flexible work schedules and the maintenance of social relationships. However, Hesters points out that bartending work is in fact often not so evident to combine with a career in dance, since working in bars and restaurants requires night shifts and can be strenuous for the body. Moreover, the ideal-typical international dance artist is often handicapped on the non-artistic job market because of language difficulties, the lack of the required diploma, constant transnational mobility, and the necessity of a work permit to name only a few. (Hesters 2004, 129-130). In this respect, an informant explains that bartending work is not ideal for two reasons: first, he does not like the rhythm of evening work, because he wants to wake up early and practice. Indeed, he would make more money, but he would not be able to get up early and take the dance classes he could then finally afford. Secondly, he points out that the constant mobility interferes with commitment. Even if bartending jobs are more flexible than others, you cannot expect an employer to engage someone who will be away for a month. Conversely, he has developed an interesting tactic to generate income rapidly and efficiently through bartending a full month each summer in a Scandinavian country, where he can earn much more money than anywhere else in Europe because the minimum wage is high and most employers tend to pay even more.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the informants generally are not willing to take up just any kind of side job – because, as Menger points out, when these jobs are non-

⁷ A side-note from my fieldnotes when I attended the premiere seems appropriate to quote here: ‘Spectators are entitled to choose how much they want to pay for this performance, ranging from 8 to 15 euros. I decide to pay 10 euros, knowing that the ticket sales go to the performers I didn’t want to pay 8 euros, but 15 euros is a bit too much for such a small space. However, I should’ve probably paid 15 euros, as I was very aware that there will not be much left when they split the ticket sales among all performers’.

artistic, multiple jobholding will lead to alienation (2014, 125). In most cases, as pointed out in the above, the side jobs are in one way or another related to the cultural capital they possess.⁸ For example, the Berlin job center has proposed several jobs for multilingual babysitting to one informant, who refuses to accept this offer because she sees it as the positive, white form of prostitution: ‘Because I’m female, I either open my legs or I hold a baby in my arms.’ On top of that, she did not want to see herself as a highly educated choreographer with four degrees doing babysitting, adding that ‘as soon as the baby has its nap, I’ll just kill myself. It’s just a question of honor, dignity.’ Indeed, most side jobs are in some way rewarding and in line with one’s artistic practice: for example, several informants take on translating jobs now and then, but these are usually conforming with the sector, such as translating program booklet texts, project funding applications, an institution’s website information, or a production’s evening leaflet. One informant testifies: ‘proofreading is boring, so I throw in the actual conceptual comments for free, because that’s how I can continue doing it.’ She finds it difficult to improve punctuation when the argument does not make sense for her. Therefore, she only translates for people who know she is not a professional translator, but who ask her anyway.

Perhaps the most conventional example of a performance of precarity exemplifying internal subsidization is the trilogy *Perform Performing* from German choreographer Jochen Roller. The trilogy dates from more than a decade ago but is still extremely pertinent. German-speaking scholars such as Gabriele Klein (2012) and Katharina Pewny (2011a) have discussed these three performances extensively in the context of precarious labor. At the time, Roller dared to address the urgent question whether dance can be described as labor. In the first part of the trilogy, *No Money, No Love* (2002)⁹, Roller performed the precarious living conditions of a freelance artist who can only afford to dance thanks to many other jobs. His dance movements were derived from the movement vocabulary of his multiple jobholding, such as folding t-shirts at H&M and closing envelopes by licking. His movement material demonstrates how cross-financing or internal subsidization shapes the aesthetics of his artistic work. In so doing, he expressed that a dance artist can perform other professions offstage as well as onstage:

When I don’t work as a dancer, I do other jobs. And I don’t get these jobs by applying for them as a dancer. For this, I must create another profession identity. So I move,

⁸ A couple of informants have held ‘day jobs’ doing data entry or bookkeeping, however these jobs happened while they were living in the US and thus before they moved to Brussels or Berlin. And even in those cases, the data dealt with were usually related to the performing arts field.

⁹ The second part, *Art Gigolo* (2003), and third part, *That’s The Way I like it* (2004), of the trilogy question the social relevance of the art of dance in neoliberal societies with. It is interesting to note the analogy between Roller’s gigolo-reference and the use of the prostitute metaphor by Bauer, which I pointed out in the previous chapter.

speak and dress differently. That's exactly what I do when I am onstage and work as a dancer. (Roller 2009, paragraph 1)

In a fragment from the performance, which Roller named "Being Christina Aguilera", he describes the ratio of self-exploitation, or self-precarization, when working multiple artistic as well as non-artistic jobs as a freelancer. He warns his audience that one should always consider beforehand whether the work effort has a proportional relationship to the use you get from it. He explains during the performance that when he was working on his 20-minute solo "Being Christina Aguilera", he rehearsed in the mornings from 10 am until 1 pm for one month, while in the afternoons he was employed at a record company from 2 pm until 8 pm. By means of some visuals, he continues that he thus had to work six hours in order to be able to rehearse three hours. He earned ten euros per hour in the record company, which is equal to 60 euros per day and 1,200 euros per month. Since his solo was only 20 minutes long, this means that he had to earn 1,200 euros to produce 20 minutes. Through using simple mathematics, a white board, and markers in different colors, he calculates that each minute of this solo cost him 60 euros. Consequently, one day of work in the record company, allowed him to create one minute of the solo. Roller then ends this anecdote by dancing one minute of that solo for us. This fragment distinctly demonstrates artists' self-precarization and exploitation, but it also shows how internal subsidization affects what is performed onstage. This particular performance of precarity makes the internal subsidization visible on stage and reveals this as a survival tactic.

The above-made outline on internal subsidization illustrates that in the art world, money is thus not an end but a means. Appropriately, Hans Abbing observed that artists (as well as others employed in the arts) in fact 'give large amounts of money to the arts by funneling income from second jobs, allowances, or inheritances into the arts' (Abbing 2008, 46).

4.3 'Heart jobs' and 'wallet jobs'

I just want to do the things I like, rather than engage in things I only half-like.

In the preceding section, I have set out how internal subsidization through multiple jobholding is a survival tactic, yet I only discussed non-artistic activities. Nevertheless, I will continue discussing internal subsidization as a survival tactic through multiple jobholding within the categories of artistic and para-artistic labor. Following Menger

(2014), para-artistic activities, such as teaching dance or mentoring, relate to the artistic practice whereas non-artistic activities, such as bartending or babysitting, are generally unrelated. Artistic labor includes creating, rehearsing and performing on the one hand as well as directly related preparatory and administrative work on the other.¹⁰ As I pointed out before, within the creative-productive activities, contemporary dance artists tend to swap the position of performer and choreographer. Sometimes dance artists work as a performer in a company or within someone else's project, other times they create their own projects and yet occasionally they might be doing both simultaneously. An informant states that in these situations, he distinguishes 'heart jobs' and 'wallet jobs'. He chooses to do the 'wallet jobs' in order to be able to do the 'heart jobs', yet, that does not necessarily mean that he does not like the 'wallet jobs' per se. However, for these 'wallet jobs', he is highly motivated by the money, which is not the case with 'heart jobs'. Typically, one's own project is classified under 'heart jobs' while commissions tend to be 'wallet jobs'. Nonetheless, the situations are often more complex.

One informant is concurrently working on four commissions, which means that he creates dance productions with the dancers from a company or institution that hires him as a choreographer. He welcomes these commissions; because they generate income and they buy him time to figure out his future plan for his own projects. The commissions are indeed 'wallet jobs' in the context of survival tactics, but simultaneously, they serve as a resourceful tactic to keep the creative practice going. He explains that he usually tries to help the dancers that work with him on a more regular basis by bringing them along as an assistant or a guest dancer. In some cases, his dancers get a fee in return, and in other cases, they are unpaid but able to work further on the practice. Whereas the former case reveals a tactic for employability, the latter exposes one for sustainability. For example, he created a piece with a high number of people on stage with a lot of choreographic material in 2015. Touring the piece actually requires a part-time company of people who are together regularly to work on this material, but he does not have the infrastructure or means for this. Above that, the involved performers are based in different countries and he is unable to pay for rehearsal time. Therefore, he has to make rehearsals as short as possible and they tend to retake the show far too fast, which is a problem when the choreographic material is so detailed. Thus, if he can bring one or two dancers to join his commissions from time to time, not only does this keep them employed (when paid), but most significantly, it keeps the creative practice going. He applies these survival tactics in his teaching practice as well:

¹⁰ This is already argued against by some informants who do not see any production/administrative work, even if it is directly related to an artistic project, as part of their artistic work and they would rather have someone else take care of that.

For example, I'll be teaching for five weeks. At the same time, I have my project that needs to be maintained. Both dancers I'm working with for the project will be taking the class and that enables me to keep the artistic process going. They don't get paid for that, unfortunately. However, I also had them teach the material to the students at the Kunsthumaniora in Brussels, which was paid. So like this, we're constantly finding ways to keep people employed but at the same time keep them working on the material, and keep them in the universe. There are ways to be very creative about keeping the process going, which actually, even if we had money all the time, I would still want to pursue. Now it comes from a survival aspect, but it actually greatly benefits the work. [...] You become clever at finding ways to keep everybody employed and at the same time keep the artistic process growing and the practice going. And that is a skill that I think is also getting lost these days.

In fact, there is yet another dimension to this concrete example, because the informant's partner is actually one of the regular dancers within his practice. He has been involved so long that he is now starting to master many things, which is why he is usually an assistant in the creation process. He can help get dancers quicker to the point, which is crucial when working with limited rehearsal time. Both partners, in personal-professional confusion, show to be dependent on one another: firstly, as an assistant, my informant's partner supports the creation of a sustainable practice and contributes to a more efficient creation process. Secondly, as an employer, my informant constantly finds ways to help his partner make a living.

4.4 Teaching dance, a sustainable practice

One might think teaching classes and workshops in contemporary dance falls under the category of 'wallet jobs'. Nonetheless, in some cases I would argue that teaching is certainly a 'heart job' as it is part of one's artistic practice just as much, if not even more, as creating and performing. In Belgium, teaching dance is not considered an artistic activity (and therefore does not count when applying for or trying to maintain the artist status). Yet within dance and choreography, it is rather uncommon to consider teaching activities as non-artistic since dance artists often draw from the methods, tools and material created during a workshop, a master class or even an audition for their own creations or daily practice. Moreover, certain dance classes in educational programs have the specific goal of creating a piece with the students that may be performed for audiences. Or as an informant comments:

Even if I'm doing a choreography on the students, it's artistic – I mean, teaching dance is artistic work too, but if it's a choreography, let's agree, it's a purely artistic endeavor. However, because it's coming from a school this does not count [...]? Some of the pieces I made, for instance for P.A.R.T.S., were in the final tour. They were actually touring with this work. It was really not at all just a pedagogical situation.

A Berlin-based informant explicitly disagrees with the prevalent disavowal of teaching as an artistic activity:

Teaching is a very big part of my practice. I mean, this is one of the major ways I share my art and my research. In a way, it's just a different platform than presenting something on stage. But I mean, it is really the same: we could be talking about the same ideas and principles. [...] I feel like I'm dealing with the same subject and I'm sharing my research just sometimes it would be on stage, and sometimes it would be in the studio face to face. And I feel nowadays, it's more relevant to me to share it in that [teaching] platform, because it allows me more of a dialogue. It allows me actually to affect people more. When creating a piece and putting it on stage, it's not really in your hands anymore, whether it will affect somebody or not. The teaching situation gives you more control to really affect somebody.

Thus, her words identify the power of teaching as a more direct manner to deliver her ideas to a public. Whenever she has a free period in Berlin, she will rent a studio and organize a workshop for her regular group of students. Before she started doing that, she was mostly teaching for people who invited her. However, she wanted to be more in control over the people participating and, eventually, self-organizing turned out to be more profitable as well. This group of close students had expressed a kind of commitment towards her practice; therefore, she even initiated an online teaching practice with this group. About a dozen students receive a fixed program that they need to follow. The time frame varies for each one of them and is adapted to their level and choice of intensity. The online sessions should be viewed as a supplement to the on-going meetings in the studio. However, because she is not in Berlin regularly, she prefers to keep up consistent communication with people she knows and who are interested in this kind of long-term process. After half a year, she could already see the progress they had made, because the program is designed for each student and the feedback is very personal. For example, the students have to send in videos following instructions once a week, which she then reviews and comments on. It does not concern live sessions, but a back-and-forth communication service, for which the students pay a monthly instalment. In so doing, she has created a sustainable tactic to keep the creative process going in a double sense: it gives her financial gain on the one hand, and financial freedom on the other hand, because she can work this way wherever she is (even if it takes a bit of time every day). Moreover, she has created a sustainable teaching practice outside of her self-organized

sessions. She has established a network of good teaching partners, in line with her interest to return to the places where she already works and where she can meet the same people on a regular basis. This enables her to make enough money, which in turn allows her to sometimes reject job offers that she does not find artistically interesting. Most significantly perhaps, having a regular group of students also facilitates trying out new ideas and material and see how it works in a small group. For example, when she had a teaching gig abroad coming up, during which she would have to teach a group of 160 people, she tested her teaching plan out on her regular students. She discovered her planning was completely miscalculated, for example, because nobody was able to understand a certain task and execute it in the given time.

In a similar vein, another informant's teaching practice started out as a way to make money when he was 19 years old and it immediately became a manner to train himself. Later, his teaching practice was really flowing into and out of the artistic practice. Now, he recounts, both practices are almost inextricable from each other. His teaching became a 'heart job', although it is still a survival tactic in a double sense: firstly, and most obviously, it is a sustainable way to earn a somewhat stable and reliable income, and secondly, it has become a tactic to maintain his creative practice without structural support. Much like the former case, his teaching practice is interwoven in his artistic practice. He explains that the training he teaches is quite stylistic, but more importantly, it is about creating a general knowledge that is applicable to many possible sources and outcomes. In the fragment below, he illustrates why he encourages his dancers to join his classes and how that benefits both him and them:

I start to weave in things in my pedagogy, which lends itself choreographically. And then I even will try out new material teaching it to students. The more that I teach it; the more I get clear about it. So then when I actually have to teach it and use it in rehearsal, I'm very clear about what I'm doing. I've taken it through this process of pedagogy in order to arrive to something artistic. It will be used for another purpose. There are a million ways like this that the class feeds into something else. [...] I find that that's also why I try to get the dancers that I'm working with in rehearsal to take part in these classes as much as I can. That is a way that they can keep working on honing their skills when they get into the work.

All in all, it is not surprising that using a teaching practice to experiment with concepts or material has become a survival tactic. In fact, this fragment reveals several subtactics. Firstly, the informant employs the available means (in this case infrastructure and student dancers) for the purpose of pedagogy on the one hand and for the purpose of generating material and/or testing out material for the artistic work on the other hand. Secondly, the informant engages the people involved in his artistic work to pursue training through participating in his classes and simultaneously the informant maintains a training practice himself. These are clever and tenable tactics to enforce when a

choreographer does not have the budget to pay wages to dancers for an ample amount of rehearsal time, or when studio space is scarce and expensive and the dancers have to travel from abroad or have conflicting schedules. Still, in some cases it may not seem so fair from the dancer's point of view. From a bottom-up perspective, students seem to be paying for a workshop, in which they work on material that will be eventually presented by other dancers, who will – hopefully – get a performance fee for it and who will also get the credit for it. Another informant points out that in comparable situations, the choreographer receives a fee for working indirectly and ingeniously on a creation and in the meantime the dancers involved are left unpaid. In that context, he felt ambiguous when he was invited to participate in a one-week audition workshop (which to him is already a vague definition of what it is). He was expected to travel to Paris, cover his own accommodation and expenses and take the one-week workshop for free without guarantee that he would even make it to the team. He recounts:

Sometimes you pay to do a workshop, sometimes you get paid to do a workshop, and sometimes you get support. If I went to Paris to work for a whole week with people there; working, researching, auditioning, but also creating material for the choreographer and giving her ideas that she might use... If we don't get paid for that, sometimes that feels strange.

The informant makes an important point: whereas these types of workshops are promoted as a lifelong learning opportunity, or an investment that potentially increases a dance artist's professional capital, the choreographer is benefitting from it in an exploitative manner. It actually concerns a week of creative process, in which dance artists play upon their individuality and creativity for which the choreographer does not need to pay any wages. Indeed, dancers are giving away material free of charge, because in contemporary dance creations, dancers are actually co-creators and a fair payment should reflect this.

4.5 Active performer

As I briefly mentioned before, it often seems to be the case that 'wallet jobs' coincide with performing for others while 'heart jobs' refer to working on one's own project, however in this section I will explore if this statement perhaps requires some refinement. One of my cases appears to confirm this somewhat black-and-white statement: an informant explains how she combines her own work with being an active performer for several renowned artists (especially from the Berlin scene), who have established an oeuvre that

tours regularly. She reveals that the wages are good, but not especially high. They are good because she is being remunerated for the participation in 'longer-term' projects, such as gallery performances or residencies and the payment thus covers longer periods of work. When asked if she considers paying her own work with her own money, she explains how she funnels her income from performing for others directly into the creation of her own work:

That's how I did my first production. It's crazy to me how much you can do on very very little money, but I do it and just budget it. I'm going to [a large city abroad] with [an established artist] and that money is going to go towards paying my dancers. [...] But I think at this pace, I want to emancipate myself from [the established artist] a bit. It just feels weird to always have this sort of thing that you feel very much obliged to do because of the money [laughs]. And it's really hard work and they don't respect that! For example, our transportation leaves on Monday, but we're starting on a Thursday. So we'll arrive on Tuesday to hang out on Wednesday and to start the piece on Thursday. However, Monday to Wednesday are not paid and there are no per diems.

She first declined their proposal, because she was given the opportunity to teach a workshop and perform a solo on those travel days. Even though the payment for that would be a 'depressing' 300 euros, she would much rather be doing her own work instead of travelling far away for someone else. She saw an opportunity and grabbed it. She decided to pay for her own plane ticket to arrive on Thursday and go straight into the performance. She comments: 'I've done this piece for years, I don't need to rehearse it! There is no reason I need to be there days in advance.' She does not understand why they cannot pay at least per diems for those extra days. The artist she was working for is part of the international art circuit, surely, if they cannot cover these costs, who can? However, instead of sticking with her 'no', she knuckled under because ultimately it would have been an unwise financial decision not to take the job (even when paying her own plane ticket - which eventually was taken care of by the organization). Nonetheless, she is now thinking about discontinuing the work: 'I don't want to go to these places, I want to be at home and I want to be doing my work. These are money jobs.' However, it is not as simple as that. She loves her colleagues in the cast and they have been through a lot together. She even says that it is 'the closest thing to community I have', but simultaneously she does not like 'this feeling of being beholden somehow'. Her dilemma is a multifaceted matter of collegiality, fair practices, feeling rewarded and financial tactics.

Nevertheless, several of my informants perform for others and testify that performing in someone else's work can certainly be a 'heart job'. In these cases, the informants held jobs as 'active performers'. This notion should be understood in the context when Rudi Laermans notes that

the movement associated with the label “conceptual dance” succeeded in putting into perspective the star system through a sustained practice of shifting collaborations on a project-by-project basis. This implied a clean break with the traditional company hierarchy and the labour division between the author-choreographer and the mainly executive dancers who have no decisive say in the generation of material or the final choreography. (Laermans 2015, 212)

In his book, he illustrates that many contemporary dance works are results of a semi-directive collaboration between a choreographer and what I term active performers. ‘The responsibilities of performers today are much bigger than they were’, an informant comments, adding that ‘in all the work that I do, the performers make the piece’. Most informants seek out this type of performing jobs. In a conversation about taking the step from performer to choreographer, an informant explains that she has always looked for people whose work is greatly informed by the performer, so she could actively contribute by means of improvisation and own input, not only in movement, but also in bringing a certain character or atmosphere to the part. She stresses that in those cases, it is important for the work and the collaboration to bring your own background. The only difference with being a choreographer is that you, as an active performer, do not carry the end responsibility of making the decision of what stays in and what is left out. In this semi-directive mode of collaboration,¹¹ you do not have to apply for the subsidies, write the dossiers, or talk to the programmers. It is easier, she continues, but simultaneously, it is also more difficult because as an active performer, you give away personal things and someone else is credited for it. She explains that credit is not such a problem, but it is just a pity when the choreographer makes other choices than she would have. In the end, together with an ‘itch’ to create, the latter was perhaps the reason to venture becoming a choreographer. Analogously, another informant recounts the following:

It’s very activating for the performer to become author of the work. So I’m glad to be able to work primarily with artists who really want to hear what I have to say. [...] You know, that’s something I’m interested in right now: to make sure that everyone who’s in the performance space is like activated and activating, like these two in relationship. For me, that’s the only way to really conceive continuing to make work.

Indeed, active performers are not only actively co-creating the work, but more often than not they also activate the audience in the performances, through engaging them and interacting with them. The latter is exemplified in the works of Xavier Le Roy or Tino Sehgal among others, particularly in the works happening in the gallery or public space. ‘Activating the space’, as the informant puts it, requires the skill of flexible

¹¹ For more insight into the semi-directive mode of collaboration, please consult Laermans 2013 and 2015.

performativity, which I will discuss in more detail in the chapter on “The Flexible” in part II of this book. Nonetheless, another informant questions whether the practice of engaging active performers is a righteous one:

Maybe that’s also a way of dealing with all these people who want to make dance and don’t have their own platforms? But it’s also a really insidious way and we see this happening so much in Berlin. [My solo], for example, was commissioned by another artist. It’s a really strange trickled-down effect where the artist is the curator. [...] I still work with them in a hierarchical way. They don’t want to see it that way, but I see it that way. [...] It’s a weird refusal of taking responsibility for the fact that they’re people who’re getting the money and it’s their idea and they own that.

She concludes that she actually thinks engaging active performers is a ‘generous gesture’, but it is implemented in an odd manner.

One case demonstrates how such a ‘heart job’ performing for others can become a ‘wallet job’ as he felt trapped in a situation where he needed to stay in because of the money. He clarifies that when moving to Europe, he was amazed by the functioning arts economy that allows you to support yourself. The model he worked in before was very different: ‘if you have a day job, you don’t take dance work that you don’t love or that doesn’t feel necessary somehow’. Two of his first experiences working as a dance artist in Europe did not turn out to be so enjoyable. In spite of the functioning arts economy, he encountered the rather ‘dangerous possibility of taking a job that you don’t really love, or aren’t driven primarily by the love, or the interest in the work’. Essentially, according to the informant, he took the jobs for the wrong reasons. He did not have a day job like in his home country. Therefore, he needed to work as a dance artist to earn a living. In fact, his family reunification visa did not allow him to work any other job in Europe. He could work as a dance artist remaining a freelancer working abroad and paying taxes in his home country: ‘I’m stuck with dance work, but that’s also the blessing and the curse’. He was offered a well-paid contract for a creation and a tour. The choreographer had already several cities lined up, so the offer was appealing. However, the choreographer had rejected him during a previous audition in a rather condescending manner because his personality (read: sexuality) was not a good fit for the work. Although this bothered him and made him wonder why the choreographer had approached him again, he took the job. He recounts the horrifying conditions of the creation process, including a lack of leadership and abusive power dynamics. He recounts these dangers of living labor: ‘especially with dance, where you really are in the business of exploiting people. Like that’s what you do: you use people to make art and those people agreed to be objectified as a performer, so it’s like part of the deal.’ Still, he was worried about quitting, because he had also seen what happens to people when they try to quit: the reputed choreographer’s words spread quickly. My informant explicitly stresses that he does not

like talking about these experiences, but it is necessary. He has learned that he needs to be more careful about who he works with and he needs to be better informed on how the group is shaped, what is expected of him and why he was chosen to be part of the group. However, he admits, at the time he needed that job because it was the only employment on his calendar. Thereafter, he went through a similar experience that woke him up: 'I was like this naïve little contemporary dancer who's like: "my work is organic and it's with my friends" and realizing that I needed to wake up and understand the context I was working in and adapt.' He recognized that he needed to protect himself better and also stand up for himself. Thus, what could have been 'heart jobs' turned out to be 'wallet jobs' indeed, because he needed to stick with both projects. Perhaps the silver lining of the anecdote lies in his newfound understanding of what his aesthetic is and is not by trial and error.

4.6 The barter system: a 'tit-for-tat economy'

In the previous subchapters, I have outlined several tenable tactics to keep the creative practice going. Most interestingly, I have illustrated how an informant has the dancers he works with regularly join his classes, which substitute unaffordable rehearsal time in a studio. Even though the informant cannot usually pay them for class participation, at least he can keep the dialogue going. In other instances, he asks his dancers to teach his material to other (student) dancers, which is a generous offer that keeps them employed. In fact, he explains that many of his creative solutions for survival stem from the barter system, in which goods or services are directly exchanged for other goods or services without using a medium, such as money. Bartering is commonly used in times of monetary crisis and therefore the exchange is usually direct. In his words:

I don't have an infrastructure to train my dancers and have them around me all the time [like in a company]. I work with pick-up dancers that work with me when there's a project and when there isn't one, we don't work together. But, ways that I can sometimes barter with them – give them exchange for rehearsing – I can give them class. They can come and study with me. Or, when I go somewhere [for a commission], I take an assistant. It becomes also a way to further the artistic work, that it's not even just about the content of the material but about the action of actually getting to work together with each other. So you finally have ways of not only creating work for the people you want to work with – which makes it more possible for them to continue to work with you – but to also create space and time to continue investigating together.

For example, the informant has three commissions on the agenda and is thinking of bringing a different dancer each time. He adds: 'I try through our work, because I cannot usually pay what I would like to pay, so whenever I can bring somebody with me when there is a better budget, I decided to do it.' Yet, this is not the only way he employs the barter system; he has actually established an alternative economy of his own while being in 'survival mode'. He explains that he has made a deal with someone who can live in his apartment rent-free if she will do some work for him on a regular basis in return. That way, he has found an extra assistant to help with administration and tour management, who is also a good photographer and videographer. In survival mode, you have to be 'more creative to make things happen', as my informant concludes. In fact, it started when he had a dog, but he was traveling all the time. When a young dancer had approached him with a housing problem, he offered his guest room. The dancer in need did not have to pay rent, but was expected to take care of the animal and the house when he was abroad. A few years later, he took in someone in a similar situation. While the latter guest was still living in the apartment during my fieldwork, the dog was no longer alive. The informant clarifies: 'It's not helping me out with rent. Luckily my rent is low enough that I can usually cover it, which is why I stay.' Another informant correspondingly takes in people when she is abroad to look after her dog. As her partner has a steady full-time job, he cannot walk the dog every few hours when she is abroad. Therefore, she offers their guest room for free on the condition that the guests take care of the animal. Her partner is not very pleased about this arrangement, because he would prefer not to have strangers in his house, but it is the best solution they worked out together. Therefore, they seek artists who plan on being in the house most of the time, for example, writing an application or researching. That way, she also helps out the artistic community, because people are always looking for affordable housing in Berlin.

Interestingly, bartering is a much-discussed subject in anthropology. It has been a primary ingredient of an informal economy and the desired side-effect of bartering is the creation of social cohesion or what anthropologists venture to term 'solidarity'. The concept of bartering, for example, is discussed in the context of the history of debt by anthropologist David Graeber (2011), who posits that our standard account of monetary history is precisely backwards as we did not begin with barter, discover money, and eventually developed crediting systems. Inversely, the idea of credit and the concept of debt (in the sense of 'owing something in return') came first (Graeber 2011, 40). An informant pointed out that the informal economy within contemporary dance is in fact a 'tit-for-tat economy'. While the saying actually means *equivalent retaliation* and refers to a rather violent payback, instead the informant alludes to the more peaceful interpretation of *reciprocal altruism*. Altruism is defined as an act of helping another individual while incurring a certain cost for it. Biologist Robert Trivers proposed in 1971 that it might be favorable to incur this cost if there is a chance of later being in a reverse situation where the helped individual may perform an altruistic act toward the helper in return. In other

words: when doing someone a favor, you may expect a favor in return. This has come up numerous times when I asked my informants whether they were paid for small jobs, such as translating or proofreading for a peer. One informant replied to this question: 'She owes me a favor and I wanted that favor to be that she came to be an outside eye for the performances, but then she wasn't available. So she still owes me a favor.' Indeed, the repayment can be in many different ways and does not necessarily have to be the same service. This can also lead to the aforementioned personal-professional confusion, as an informant hinted at: 'I don't do anything that's not paid. I mean, I edit my partner's applications sometimes. That's not paid, but he pays in other ways: [laughs] "alright, I'll edit the application if you clean the bathroom" or "you make dinner and I'll edit your application".' In a similar vein, an American-born informant explains the very common tit-for-tat tactic of 'fiscal sponsoring'. In New York, many artists apply the tactic of active non-profit fiscal sponsoring that enables raising contributions that would be tax-deductible. He adds that the latter is only a small incentive, because most people are giving away twenty dollars so 'they aren't doing it for the tax write-off, they're doing it to support their friends'. When people sponsor the projects of their peers with a small sum of money, they expect to receive it back when they need it for their project. As a final example, one of my informants is very experienced in bartering. In her creative process, she hopes to find a scaffold company by offering to make them a promo video in return for installing and using a scaffold free of charge. Additionally, she would mention the company as a partner on the flyer. She clarifies that this tactic has worked in the past when renting a lifting ramp. In fact, she explains that you can get a lot done for free when you are a good networker. During their last creative process, they were able to use a dance floor free of charge. They lost three days cleaning it, but as a tactic they kept one leftover roll in the original state. They cleaned the other rolls splendidly in the hope that the dance company would appreciate the difference as to that they would be willing to do it again.

In these outlined economies, the symbolic exchange seems to come with the expectation of counter-gift. Accordingly, in the introduction to his important study on *The Gift. The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, French anthropologist Marcel Mauss leads with the slogan: 'The gift, and especially the obligation to return it' (2002, 1). His famous work dating back to the 1950's discusses symbolic or gift exchanges, which involve a threefold obligation; first of giving, then of expecting acceptance, and lastly, of closing the cycle with a counter-gift as to avoid debt, which, in fact, re-initiates the cycle. Mauss observes this behavior in all groups with archaic exchange economies, which for that matter affirms Graeber's claim that the notions of debt and credit stem from before the monetary system. Interestingly, in some of Mauss' cases, the continuous cycle of gift and counter-gift is accompanied by the imperative to surpass each gift with a 'pricier' counter-gift. As we see from the examples of my informants, this type of symbolic exchange economy lives on in late modernity. However, in David Cheal's gift economy

(1988), goods or services are given without an explicit agreement for direct exchange or future rewards, which essentially contrasts with a barter economy (in which goods or services are exchanged). Thus, it could be argued perhaps that some acts belong to such an altruistic gift economy rather than the barter system which operates reciprocally. In my fieldwork, for example, several informants have offered their time to be an outside eye in someone else's process on a voluntary basis, not expecting anything in return. Yet, even if my informants did not mention it explicitly, the lifelong learning prospects and opportunities for self-development that accompany the voluntary and selfless offer promise to be rewarding and therefore self-fulfilling, which is much in line with Pierre Bourdieu's ideas that an artistic work 'always consists partly of *working on oneself* as an artist' (Bourdieu 1993, 109). Hence, there is always a compensatory intrinsic motivation present. Additionally, while some gift economies might be more binding than others, there is always the premise of a safety net to fall back on, even if one does not expect anything immediate in return. Hence, the discussed barter system seems to function as a primary security system, and, lest we forget, with an important side-effect of inciting social cohesion and solidarity.

4.7 Buffers, cushions and networks of support

As survival artists, my informants have indeed created their personal safety nets to protect themselves. The first and most recurring safety net is the dependence on and support from one's partner, especially in terms of covering rent and household costs. Also Menger pinpoints the contribution of spouses to a household as a crucial resource for survival as much as multiple jobholding (2014, 125). Nonetheless, it should definitely be kept in mind that almost all partners of my informants also work in the arts. Some are more established artists; some are less. Some work in dance as well; some in other disciplines. Only two informants have a partner working outside of the artistic field, yet both partners do pursue artistic hobbies and share an artistic interest to some degree. Only one informant does not have a steady partner. It is noteworthy that most partners seem to contribute a little more to the household, usually by covering a bigger part of the monthly rent. However, even though the financial help is often small, it is psychologically difficult. The informants have made agreements with their partners when it comes to paying the rent: some pay a smaller share of the rent price proportional to the income difference, others postpone paying their share to their partners until they have sufficient income. One informant is literally living as a tenant in a flat owned by his partner. That means that he can be late with rent sometimes and it is not a problem. He calls 'being

good friends with your landlady' his safety net. Indeed, it is crucial to have such a safety net in a situation of instable income or income insecurity. One informant testifies that not being fully financially independent is not sustainable for him, but at the same time he realizes that he is in this situation because of his partnership, i.e. he made the move to Belgium because his partner had established a successful career in Europe. In that sense, he also recognizes that the dependence on his partner is somehow reasonable, yet he finds it unfortunate because his industriousness is obscured by his financial dependence. He comments:

I actually don't get to pay my rent very much. In that, I depend more on my partner in order to help balance things out. There will be times of the year where I'm like "I'm sorry dude, but that's just not possible". So, I think that part still kind of determines what it is to be thirty – almost thirty-five: "waw, I can't even pay my rent, that is so pathetic." [...] The thing is: it is *financially* sustainable. It's fine. We don't have a problem financially. Things are actually quite good, but I think it's more like in terms of how I really think it should be: I feel that I do work hard enough and I'm good at what I do, so I should be able to contribute at least half to all the household expenses. [...] You can see I'm fine, I'm doing enough and I'm solvent, but if I had full access to the system here in Belgium, I would be able to have a little bit more pride in my financial situation, in terms of not feeling less than a full contributor in my home. So strangely it's a financial issue, but it has a more of a psychological, and more of an ethical, influence.

Another informant in a similar situation points out that it is important psychologically that she can pay a fair share to the household. In an ideal world, she would prefer to split everything equally, but she realizes that it is in fact not so unusual that her partner contributes more to their fixed costs, because he also earns much more and has a stable income. She admits:

For example, since he went abroad, I have subsisted on pasta and that was a money thing. [...] It's not a situation that I view as ideal, because, I'm not that type of woman. [...] This is also important psychologically that it's not more than a 50-euro discount [on the monthly fixed costs]. But this is the discount of us being able to live together. I mean, and he also earns like five times more money than I do.

Yet, she worries that people think her partner fully provides for the both of them, especially because they have a nice apartment with a guest room that they can afford not to sublet. In turn, she confesses that she often thinks that about other people in the field as well, especially when dancers have children. Nevertheless, my fieldwork revealed that it is often the case that both partners help one another survive. One informant explains that there were moments when her income took care of the both of them and there were other moments when the situation was reversed. She explains that she would not be where she is right now in her career if she did not have her partner to rely on.

I have to admit, as my partner does a lot of commercial stuff, he gets paid much more than me. So he's kind of the one bringing home the bacon [...] After I graduated, doing these kind of un(der)paid projects, I could not have done that without him. He had been working a lot and could take care of rent. So, I also had the luxury of being able to actually sit down and do all the writing [for my first professional project], for example. I spent a lot of time writing the application. I think I wouldn't have been able to do that, unless... because of him. [...] If I wouldn't be with him, I would maybe have gone to a lot of auditions trying to get a dancer job, but I'm more interested in doing my own stuff and I think I like that more. If it wouldn't be for him, I would be stressed, doing auditions, trying to get jobs, and even working at the café or something. I don't have to do that.

In turn, she explains he was also lucky being with her when he just graduated. It took him a year to get his first job and during that time she had done an advertisement for an American company for which she received a buyout bonus. That bonus took care of them for a while. Thus, the financial dependency is often not only one-way traffic.

Of course, an artist's safety net does not merely consist of one's partner, but more often than not one's parents or other relatives form a network of support. Several informants testified that they very rarely ask their parents to help them out financially: in some cases, it is simply not a custom to do so after a certain age, whereas in other cases it concerns indirect financial support, such as helping out with babysitting or dogsitting. Parental support usually occurs in the form of an interest-free and unconditional loan, yet in one case, an informant's parent decided to donate a small sum of money to support his daughter's project. The donated 300 euros were redirected to cover the accommodation for one of the dancers who had flown in for a creative process. In fact, the choreographer's parents are always a little involved in their daughter's projects when they happen in the region where they live. Her mother welcomes dancers to stay in her house when necessary. The informant explains that with the years her parents are slowly starting to understand what being a choreographer actually entails. She has never been so talkative about her profession and her parents were always very occupied with work. Now that they are both retired, they have more time to really follow what she is doing and they started to support her actively. Nonetheless, this type of support could lead to personal-professional confusion, because free accommodation in the house of a choreographer's parents does not actually come across as very professional. Even if it means free housing and food, it is perhaps too much entangled in the private sphere.

An informant recounts that she relied on her father's help to find a flat to rent in Berlin. As a freelance artist, it is a challenge to rent an apartment in the city, because many landlords will select a candidate that can prove a stable income over a freelancer. The informant explains that it took a long time to find a place in Berlin, because they were competing against couples who in theory represent a much stronger financial unity than two female freelancers who are just friends because couples are supposedly more inclined

to support each other. The reason they found a place was actually because the owner is a tango dancer himself and was actively trying to get more dancers into the building. She enhances that she even vouched for her flatmate-to-be towards her father, so that he would pay the deposit for the both of them. In her words:

I turned thirty and suddenly I had to go to my parents “can you pay me the flat?” The financial burden of getting a flat in Germany is just so much higher in comparison to England, for example. Suddenly you need to have 3,000 euros on the side.

This exemplifies class privilege, since most of my informants were born into white, western and mostly financially stable middle-class families and they can fall back on their support if need be. For a large part, the artistic precariat, or the precarious intellectuals, thus indeed seem to be a remade fraction of the middle class in line with Bologna (2006) and McRobbie (2016). In fact, this informant recently joked with her father that if he wanted to make her happy, he should buy her a flat in Berlin. He did not think it was such a bad idea and is actually considering it. If she wants to be serious about it, it is her job now to look for an apartment. However, she explains that she feels ambiguous about the proposal:

I don't have the desire to own. It's not something that thrills me. But I do see the need to protect myself. I am an artist and I don't have much support. My safety net is very, very thin. It's difficult: it's not money I earned, it's money that someone else has earned. I had lots of discussions with good friends and one said: listen, I would call it generational solidarity. [...] You have to see the bigger picture, rather than seeing that daddy helps you out, which is not really true, because daddy's money is not daddy's money: it's great-grandmother's money.' But still, I don't want to own. I don't want to necessarily be bound to a place. Maybe Berlin is not the place where I will spend the rest of my life. Chances are that I will move again. So 1) the problem of ownership, 2) the problem of sedentariness, and 3) the moral problem receiving money that I didn't earn myself. I had a look at these three points and tried to tackle them, because against these three points was the financial reality of an artist in 2017 with maybe not a high prospect of making a huge living in the near future. So, I kind of came around with the idea: it is a viable option.

She is currently thinking of an ethically viable model to sublet the apartment when she happens to move away. She has put this question on her agenda for the next year. In the long haul, she would like to make sure she is not one of the gentrifiers. She pitched the idea to a dance institution and they have shown interest in becoming her stable tenants, should she purchase an apartment. When she thought about it, she realized that owning an apartment would also be her way out of the Berlin job center, which would make her much more independent in her life choices. She resigned herself to the idea that her father's money is sitting around now and it is probably of more use now than when she

will finally inherit. Conversely, other informants have stressed that inheriting from their home-owning parents is in fact their retirement plan, which really points to a safety net that consists of certain class privileges. In a related vein, one informant explains that how he sees his situation through a lens of positivity really improves his tactics for survival, because he knows he will survive in one way or another: 'if I live to be seventy, I'll probably figure out some way to do it. I will probably not have very much money, but my brother is a neurosurgeon...' This testifies again of the prolonged postadolescent phase and the relation to class privilege: even if he only jokes, he knows he can rely on his family and he might have to at some point in his life.

Aside from one's family, several informants observe that their professional relationships form a significant and sustainable network of support. For example, one informant explains how he has an on-going relationship with a certain number of people that he likes to work with over and over again. It is not exactly the same as being a choreographer working with a fixed company, but he feels as though this gives him a sense of security:

It's strange because the field is so small and of course friendships and work relationships develop over the years and they become also important on a professional level. I think it's also totally okay to rely on this, because I feel often this is a bit my security net in a way. I feel if this doesn't work out, then maybe this does.

He points out that creating a personal safety net is the main reason for him to network and go to the premieres of his peers. Such networks of support are also knit in personal-professional confusion.

Furthermore, it should be noted that many informants barely have any savings. The descriptive reports on the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists in Brussels (Van Assche and Laermans 2016) and Berlin (Van Assche and Laermans 2017) reveal that the Brussels-based dancers seemed to have a better prospect in terms of pension than the Berlin-based dancers. This is mainly so because the Belgian system enables dance artists to work as employees with short-employment contracts. Therefore, they are usually entitled to unemployment benefits, especially when artists have access to the artist-status-system. This ensures that Brussels-based artists are likely to build up pension even in the periods when they are not under contract but when receiving unemployment benefits. In Berlin, the situation is different because artists commonly work on a self-employed basis and therefore have to provide their own pension. A minimum contribution to the statutory pension fund is calculated according to one's yearly income. However, the lack of pension insurance (when not in the system of the Künstlersozialkasse or KSK) and the rather meager contributions to the pension fund (deduced from the low incomes when in the KSK-system) are of particular concern, since this results in poverty at an older age. Germany has even established a word for this,

Altersarmut, which indicates that it is a highly debated issue in the country.¹² During the fieldwork, some informants explicitly mentioned trying to create a cushion of savings, but unfortunately their savings usually remain rather temporary. An informant summarizes the key problem: ‘I’m trying to create some space. I’m trying to create a bit of a cushion to get me out of the grips of this precarious thing, but it’s not so easy. Partly because I’m not a financial genius and also, when I’m in the thick of working, the last thing I think about is my finances.’ One informant recounts that she has a buffer so she does not ‘freak-freak out’. In order to protect herself, she organizes herself in a way that she can live three months in advance of herself. That means that when she is in the first quarter of the year, she is earning money to spend in the second quarter. This informant makes a yearly budget of fixed costs, thus she always knows exactly how much she needs per quarter. In that manner she aims to avoid financial crises like people who live month-to-month, because she always has several months to get back on track. She calculated that she needed 950 euros net to cover her monthly costs (such as the insurance contributions via KSK, rent and ancillary costs, extra insurances such as for the household, the dog and travels, a German *Bahncard*). This number includes about 350 euros for life necessities, which she terms her ‘discretionary spending account’. If she wants to save, she calculated that she needed to earn 1,100 euros net per month. She has set her own savings goal at 2,000 euros a year, a goal she was able to reach every year. She explains that she also has an emergency fund, which is about 3,000 euros. Yet, she corrects herself and confesses that it should be 3,000 but at the moment of our conversation she was desperately trying to restock that buffer. As she is self-produced, she sees it as an imaginary production fund. For example, if she would get a research grant, it would refill the production fund. Yet, she highlights that she will do the research whether the money is there or not. When I point out to her that organizing herself in that way is a survival skill, she comments that even though it is not subversive at all, it does give her leverage indeed: ‘I have quite a bit of savings and it’s really all my savings. [...] I turn things down that I don’t want to do and I have done this because I have money.’ At first sight, organizing yourself in such manner seems obvious and not so unusual for any type of freelance work. Still, it should be noted that she is one of the only informants with a well-thought-out financial management system.

In a similar vein, several informants create a cushion through finding payroll as a survival tactic.¹³ Ideally, they seek the type of payroll that allows the informants to

¹² Consult for example the recent article on *Altersarmut*: Götz, “Sie kochen Kohlrabiblätter aus und heizen nur ein Zimmer”, *Die Zeit*, February 7, 2018, accessed February 14, 2018.

¹³ While it could be argued that there might be an age effect involved here, I did not necessarily observe these tactics as present among especially the older informants. For example, this tactic was not explicitly addressed by those informants who have children, rather by those informants who have experienced heavy loads of work-

continue working on their own practice. The most recurring tactic is without doubt entering a PhD program or holding a researching position at a university or dance school. A PhD in the arts offers a longer-term perspective and a minimum of four years of income security. Thus, not only does it generate more security, it is also attractive because it allows an artist to focus on one project without all too many distractions. However, an informant testifies that entering a PhD program is one of the tactics he is desperately using to get a base income as a way out of his precarious situation. But simultaneously, figuring out how and where to apply for a paid position also keeps him from actually working and thus ends up creating more precarity. Another informant weighed the pros and cons of starting a PhD in the arts throughout the period of fieldwork. We lengthily discussed her motives and doubts. Ultimately, she decided to combat her 'precaritized mind' and chose to apply. She needed to have a break from the current work regime in the Brussels dance scene and, most importantly, she would finally 'get paid to think instead of think how to get paid'. In the third part of this book, this tactic is further discussed in-depth in the final chapter on "Slowing Down". Relatedly, my fieldwork exposed holding a (part-time) job teaching in a dance school as a tactic to create firmer ground to stand on. Contemporary dance schools such as HZT and P.A.R.T.S. commonly work with guest teachers, who give master classes and workshops in which theory and practice often interweave. These particular teaching jobs remain consistent with a dance artist's own practice and might become tenable forms of establishing a stable income stream. This also counts for long-term mentorship commitments in comparable educational programs. One informant put much effort in applying for such an eight-hour teaching job, because the particular job would generate a base income and at the same time it would allow him to keep working on his own practice. However, he explained that the best of the best artist-thinkers were applying for this job, even though it only paid meagerly. When he heard that that was the case, he expresses his disappointment in the system:

It's not enough money. I mean, when does some kind of seniority or accumulation of experience and knowledge and the simple vitality that it takes to obtain that position come with a slight amount of reward? If you get this job, it's an honor, but to pay someone that amount of money, I find daunting. Daunting! And to imagine the responsibility that it will hold.

He clearly has mixed feelings about the job. On the one hand, he finds the base income that the job would provide too low for the position, while on the other hand, he is attracted by the support of the institution and framework in which he has to present his

related stress and burnout. Thus, the survival tactic of finding payroll within my case study does not seem to be directly related to age, nor to issues such as parenthood or investing in real estate.

research for eight months on a weekly basis: 'it's like being under a blanket for five years. I think it's a lot of work, but it is a kind of structured safety net.' All in all, the tactic of finding some kind of payroll aims for a better future perspective.

Aside from finding payroll and establishing emergency funds, my informants have shown to apply various minor financial tactics for survival. In Berlin, it seems to be quite common to exploit the student status and remain forever student as to avoid precarity. The inscription at a university is free and as a student you do not have to pay into the health insurances. Additionally, you are entitled to a mandatory *Semesterticket* for public transportation in Berlin. The price of this ticket depends on the university, but generally includes a major discount. One informant notes that many Berliners, not just the artists, are inclined to apply this tactic. Hence, Berlin knows many postadolescents (see Funke and Schroer 1998) 'who can just stretch that phase forever', as an informant puts it. 'I have the feeling that that is a reason for a lot of people to stick around and don't finish their studies. It's just a normality.' As I indicated earlier, Berlin is an attractive city of choice for survival due to its cheap rent. Several informants confirm that they could not live the way they live without their affordable living space. Additionally, two informants point out that the low costs of living facilitate taking certain risks workwise. In other words: affordable living space seems to keep precarity alive. Though, concurrently many informants note that Berlin is at a turning point and rent prices are rising rapidly these days due to a lack of housing and gentrification among other things.¹⁴ Another widely used financial tactic in Berlin is subletting. While this is also common in Brussels, especially in Berlin it proves to be beneficial as some people manage to make some money off of it, because affordable accommodation is very much in demand in Berlin. There is also a certain pressure to sublet all the time when going away, because it generates an income that might supplement the meager fees received for being away. It is thus a way to boost your artistic income. An informant points out that the pressure to sublet is really a shame, because she would like to offer her apartment to friends free of charge. However, she realizes it is just not possible because the financial burden is too large. Other financial tactics mentioned are saving money on per diems (day allowances to cover expenses when abroad), public transportation fare evasion, and deducting expenses (such as public transportation fare, day allowances, performance tickets, etcetera) from one's taxes. In

¹⁴ It should be noted here that many informants pointed out that the situation of cheap housing in Berlin is certainly changing. I experienced this myself when living in Berlin for a year during my fieldwork. This is affirmed in the media, see for example, a recent article in *Berliner Zeitung* on rent and real estate rises ("Studie: Berlin könnte eine der teuersten Städte werden", January 15, 2018, accessed September 3, 2018). However, several informants explicitly mentioned that while they still have an older rent contract – several from more than ten years ago – their rent price is indeed still cheap. The problem is that, with all people coming and going, acquiring a new rent contract comes with a high cost. As a consequence, few people want to leave their apartment, which means that they are inclined to sublet continually. Therefore, not many flats come back on the rent market, which makes it difficult to find a reasonably price flat in Berlin.

addition, a Berlin-based informant considers whether she would be able to afford a yearly ticket for public transportation. Since this ticket is transferable, she could easily find people who would buy it from her whenever she did not need it. That way, she imagines that it could become an unofficial income stream.

4.8 Tactical pieces and ‘precarity solos’

I have addressed several individual survival tactics in this chapter, which demonstrate that the contemporary dance artists in my fieldwork show themselves resilient towards the prevailing precarity in their profession. They hope for the best and prepare for the worst. That is perhaps the most important skill to put in a dance artist’s survival kit. An informant illustrates this attitude when he recounts: ‘I always feel like life is ready to throw a curveball. Right when I think it’s about to be really easy, there’s some twist. I don’t want to perpetuate that kind of destiny, but I’m also kind of like keeping my eye on it.’ Nonetheless, this outlined survival mode affects not only the lives but also the artistic work of my informants. As Shannon Jackson puts it: ‘questions of aesthetic autonomy gain an acute urgency when we consider what it means to sustain not only the life of art but also the lives of artists’ (2011, 16). In a similar vein, I wonder what happens to a dance piece when a choreographer is given only one or two days to put a production back together after a long break for the purpose of performing it only once again? What happens to a creation when it is developed from very limited rehearsal time in short periods planned months apart from one another? And: what happens to the people involved? ‘Survival makes you really creative’, an informant points out, ‘but what we’re trying to change now is that this survival mode made it that we weren’t enjoying what we were doing. It was too hard and I can say that the last process, I didn’t really enjoy that.’ Many informants feel like they are ‘treading water’ as not to drown. An informant suspects that many people from the scene are, just like her, waiting for the next step when it is entirely unclear what that next step is. Perhaps, she thinks, many will eventually peel away and only some will actually manage to become something. Another informant realizes that he is in the midst of this ‘limbo state’ where ‘survival is neither dead nor alive, it’s trying to stay alive’:

I realize that the limbo-state, the state between two states, is the one that takes the most energy. And what’s happening now in culture a lot is that you stay in survival mode for so long and that expends such an amazing amount of energy that it’s almost inevitable that you’re going to burn out at some point, because you just can’t keep up for years. It’s always the state that you say: I’ll go through this so I get there,

and then “there” keeps moving. So you just stay in this perpetual state of panic. And this is just not healthy on any level.

The informant thus gives an honest account of how he is continually treading water and how it affects his mental state. Evidently, I will come back to this state of mind in the chapter on “Burning Out” in part III of this book, but to conclude this chapter I would like to focus on the effects of the survival mode on what is seen onstage. As my fieldwork revealed, many informants are simply making their way treading water and this also has its costs on the artistic work. An informant testifies:

It’s really a big question I have: how do I continue doing this when I can only be in survival mode once we’ve had the creation. Because without the kind of company that can book gigs... We try, but to book gigs back to back so you have a period of three weeks where everybody’s in the piece, it’s problematic. [...] So you’re constantly cutting corners and trying to figure out ways to do stuff. And I think our work still looks good for this, but the problem is: I think what I’m doing is so specific and what happens is that audiences will not understand that they’re not seeing what they’re supposed to see, because it looks professional and it looks good. It looks ready? They’ll just misunderstand and think it’s something that it’s not.

The informant’s testimony suggests that the prevailing survival mode jeopardizes the quality of art. He admits that he has in fact never made a piece that looks like what he thinks it should look like and the root of the problem does not lie with his dancers. For example, his most recent group piece has quite a number of people on stage with a lot of choreographic material. It actually requires a part-time company of people who are together regularly to work on this material, but he does not have the infrastructure for this. In addition, most dancers involved have to come in from abroad, yet he is unable to pay for rehearsal time. Therefore, he is forced to make rehearsals as short as possible.

Not only is the quality of a piece affected by the working conditions in which it was made and in which it continues to have a life, but the prevailing survival mode also greatly affect the aesthetics of the artistic work. A noteworthy consequence of the survival mode is the creation of tactical pieces. If you want your piece to have a life after its premiere, producing a highly marketable dance piece is key. This tactic ensures that an artist remains visible in the scene and adds sustainability in a climate of ‘projective temporality’ (Kunst 2015a). The following examples illustrate how the financial limitations often shape the performance. As a reference point, a recent trio created by an informant is a textbook example of a tactical piece. A festival was supposed to present his previous work, but they could not afford it because it was a large group piece with a musician and a big set. Because the informant does not receive structural subsidies, he has to charge exactly what it costs to do the show. However, the festival insisted on having the informant in the program and asked if he could make a small work-in-progress instead. Customarily, my informant agreed because he needed to fill his agenda and his wallet. Within two

weeks, he ended up making an evening-length piece together with two dancers, which was received very well by the festival and its audience. He thus decided to make the trio part of his repertoire, which gave him the ability to disembarass himself from the difficult situation of subsidy cuts and lack of money. He had made something that avoided the funding system, with relatively little stress on the organizational level. 'The trio became a strategy', he explains, 'hopefully it provides work and keeps our face in the market and buys us time.' However, what suffers from this mode of working is the process. He had made the piece in two weeks and received a small co-production budget to finish it completely. Still, he remarks that he would work outside of the funding system all the time if possible: 'it gives you much more artistic freedom and ways to spend your money on art rather than on bookkeeping.' Aesthetically, the trio is also tactical, as my informant clarifies: 'we're trying to sell it relatively cheap, so it is hard to say "no" to. Also, now we have a range of projects: there are four projects at the moment that we can sell in different price categories.' The aspects that make the trio easy to sell are quite straightforward: there is no set and very little preparation is required. He mentions he already had two sets sitting in storage, which costs him money. On top of that, transporting large sets, even if it is just a different color dance floor for example, makes it difficult and more expensive to tour. Another informant found himself in a similar situation when he was touring a duet. Setting up a special dance floor mostly took all of their preparation time in the venue, which meant that two hours before the performance, they had to go from zero to 100 per cent. The informant describes these circumstances as hard, especially when knowing that the venue only programmed one performance. The informant comments further:

For the nature of this piece, it's really not easy. I think the situation, in many cases how it is now, it's also the responsibility of the artist to say like "okay I know the situation and I accept the situation like it is. How can I make it the best for me?" and if that means "no stage design" than there will be no stage design, for example. It is a matter of deciding where to put the focus on.

The former informant has applied this tactic and has created a piece that can be set and performed on the same day, should that be necessary. That takes away extra hotel and venue costs among other things. In comparison, for a previous trio, they need at least a day to be in the theater to build the set. In addition, because they do not perform regularly enough, there is always a period during which everyone is basically working for free to put the show back up. Most venues are usually not so generous as to give you much rehearsal time in one of their spaces, let alone pay the performers for this time. In contrast, the movement material of the new trio is of a less precise and a more improvisatory nature, which requires less preparation. Additionally, another aspect that allows the former informant's trio to be sold at a cheaper price is the fact that the involved dancers are all based in the same city. 'Luckily', he says, 'I'm happy with the

people! But it's a pity that I meet a lot of people who are great, and that I'd love to work with, but I don't see any possibility to bring them to Brussels right now. This would cost a lot of money and a lot of extra administration work that is hard for a small organization like us to handle.' A final aspect, one that my informant did not mention, is the fact that he himself, as a choreographer, is also performing in the piece. This is trending in precarious times because when the choreographer is also a performer it reduces the performance fee by one person's salary. Indeed, the contemporary dance profession is grounded in living labor, thus, the less people involved, the cheaper a creative process gets – and by extension also the performance. Therefore, we also see more performances including volunteers or amateurs who are generally unpaid or who receive a small day allowance and are thus much cheaper assets.¹⁵

Interestingly, more and more people are combining their occupation as choreographer and performer in the same production, even though choreographers have expressed their preference of being merely 'on the outside'.¹⁶ Informants observe that being outside and paying yourself as a choreographer has simply become too expensive. This is also the reason why we see so many solos on stage. Theoretically, the creation of a solo requires a smaller budget than group pieces do, because dance is living labor.¹⁷ On top of that, a solo is certainly highly marketable, because they tend to be cheap. A programmer could probably fill a week with myriad solos for the price of one group piece. Indeed, as also an informant points out, the meager budgets and high competition for subsidies more often than not lead to an abundance of solos created and presented. She adds that these solos are most likely performed by the choreographer, with a costume made by the choreographer or found in a thrift shop.

In my fieldwork, three informants testify how their group piece does not sell because it is too expensive, which is something I return to in more detail in part III of this book when I discuss projects burning out. The reasons are similar: first of all, the pieces take time to install because they have many different technical or musical components, and second of all, it is not easily sellable because in all three cases there are quite a number of people involved. For example, one piece has several live musicians onstage, and the other piece had several technicians backstage operating an installation. An informant comments: 'they [programmers] only want solos or duets from emerging artists because the labor costs are much lower and therefore the risks are lower. The selling price can be

¹⁵ To name a few: Jan Martens' *Common People* (2016), Daniel Linehan's *Vita Activa* (2013), or David Hernandez's *CROWD* (2016).

¹⁶ During my fieldwork, merely one out of fourteen informants was working on a production of her own as a choreographer only. This was possible because she received a fair amount of funding from several international funds.

¹⁷ I write 'theoretically', because a solo can be created in collaboration with several outsiders, such as a sound designer, a set designer, a costume designer, a light designer, a live musician, etc.

cheap.’ Because her group piece does not seem to sell, the informant has decided to create a technically simple solo for her next project. She will work merely with dance, text and one loop station. According to her, the main advantage is that she only needs herself, which means that she can work on it at any time. ‘If the solo remains simple’, she explains, ‘finding rehearsal space is already a lot easier’. Studying a text, developing and reworking it, do not necessarily require a studio space, or at least not a technical one. However, my informant does prefer to work in a studio; but it can be anything where she can be alone. Another advantage is that a technically simple solo facilitates performing it:

If you only have a loop station and a microphone, you can perform almost anywhere. [...] It is easier to sell, to transport and to perform especially. For me, it is mainly the latter. I do not have to be in popular demand, but I do want to perform! I find it so regrettable that my last piece is not performed more. Okay, it is not a pioneering work and it will not be the best piece of the new century, but there is something about it. I can really stand behind it. And it is worthy of being seen! A piece really starts growing and blooming when it’s performed.

Interestingly, the text she is working on is written by her husband and deals with the question of artistry: what is the value of art? Why are artists valuable for society? The chosen topic seems to reflect the frustration she expresses throughout the interview series with regard to the general myopia prevalent in society: artists are lazy. Hence, she aims to demystify the work of artists through constantly altering her position in the debate to the extremes. Since culture and art are all too often viewed as a luxury, she finds it important to shed some light on the working conditions of artists and to be clear that it is not all wine and caviar. Eventually, she envisages that the words and her attitude sometimes would confirm and endorse this myth; while in other instances they would debunk it. She explains that she hopes to find a balance in that structure, which would provoke people to let go of the myth that artists are just lazy and feeding off of taxpayer money. As a side-note, again here one could wonder why this would be effective, as most of the public works in the arts anyway and are therefore already informed and probably agree with the fact that artists are not lazy. Yet, she points out that even within the sector, she feels as though hard work is not recognized or appreciated. Thus, she finds it important to address this frustration and the supposed audience is therefore also the right public to address this.

‘Choosing to work on a solo’, she admits, ‘does have something to do with money.’ She continues:

I know that I will invest less of my own savings than last time. I mean, after a while, you will be broke. I can’t keep doing that. So yes, the small budgets given definitely affect artistic decisions. For example, I have a project in mind, but I am not working it out because I know it’s utopic. I have had this project in mind for years, but the budget for that would have to be incredibly high. So, I don’t even start thinking

about it. In terms of costs for equipment, it would be simply impossible. No way I will ever get funding for that.

My fieldwork has revealed that having ‘a solo in your pocket’ has become a survival tactic for several informants.¹⁸ One informant notes that while juggling different jobs and projects, ‘you really have to have something that you can just pull out of your hat and there’s nothing like that besides an hour-long site-responsive solo’. Such a solo is also about resilience, as a nuanced approach to sustainability, he expounds: ‘it can expand and contract as the given production circumstances or opportunities require, rather than being sustained in a fixed and replicable form’. His own precarity solo has few requirements and is therefore easily marketable: it can be performed anywhere, ideally not even in a theater space, there is a minimal set, simple light and sound cues, and ultimately only one person requires a salary. Finally, a solo is also better when one’s income comes from ticket sales, as I pointed out earlier.

Another informant equally has a site-responsive and resilient solo in his pocket, which he has performed about 25 to 30 times since its creation. He explains that he sometimes pulls this solo out of his pocket when he gets a chance. For example, during a residency in the Middle-East, a festival took place. He approached the organizers with his solo, which he could perform in the festival without needing a lot of preparation time. The most recent performance of his sustainable solo dated back a few months before we talked. He was invited to perform in Latin-America, but last minute his sound technician could not join anymore. For the type of solo he was performing, it was not crucial for the sound technician to be there. He simply taught the few cues to a local technician. This turned out to be quite beneficial for him, as he did not have to split the fee between him and his sound technician in the end. He recounts that he experiences not being dependent on the specificity of the theater stage really as a plus in touring and diffusion. Interestingly, also the subject matter of his solo deals with space, which lends itself well to becoming very adaptable and site-responsive aesthetically. When he first created the solo, he was working around the uneasiness of the body toward certain spatial situations. He explains that he investigated the notion of resonance: what happens when you are alone in a space? When you do something and wait for an answer, but there is no response? Or there is only the possibility that there might be a response following? This theme lends itself well to a site-responsive solo, or vice versa. For a small project in Berlin, he was years later asked to join an open-air dance marathon. One part of the marathon was what he terms a ‘forest of solos’, during which nine people would perform a solo. As the space is rather large and open, the public can walk through the solos. For this event, he decided to perform an adaptation of the solo material. Since the event has an

¹⁸ Five out of fourteen informants have explicitly mentioned having such a solo ‘in their pocket’. On top of that, one informant was making a ‘precarity solo’ during the fieldwork.

exhibition character, he would principally deal with the different relationship to space when people would constantly pass by. Telling me his plans, he realizes that his solo is 'still active', which partly has to do with its adaptability on the one hand and the ongoing fascination with the topic of space. He recounts:

Also because it's dealing with spacing or space, it's really something that still kind of keeps on going in the sense that I like the adaptability to different spaces. I did it also in very small spaces and also pretty large. So there's this part that I also enjoy a lot, like coming to a space and checking it out – because there's a thing I do something to the wall and there's a chair, but then: where do I come from? Where do I go? So that's because each theater is different so there's always this thinking about spacing that I really like if it's always a little bit different, or it kind of deals with the place it's happening in.

Thus, this informant's solo is still active for a twofold reason: first, the solo's theme continues to fascinate him and is still very relevant today, and secondly, the solo's aesthetics can be easily adapted to different spatial and even social situations, which is partly due to the theme of exploring spatiality. In this respect, I ought to mention Eleanor Bauer's solo on precarity *ELEANOR!*, which I discussed in the introduction. As she explained in the 2008 performance in Montpellier: 'now that I don't relate to these issues of survival and recognition with the same urgency as I did four years ago, I'm going to stop performing the piece.' Even though performing *ELEANOR!* had become redundant due to the increasing success of the performance, she continued to perform the piece for about a decade. Indeed, the years after its premiere, Bauer was not performing the piece for free anymore. However, her solo managed to tour around for almost a decade and as she was being paid to do so. In response, her solo evolved, developed and extended. Yet, the 12-minute dance phrase makes the performance sustainable. The phrase, created in the conditions that demanded the making of *ELEANOR!*, remains intact in the ever-developing piece and can thus be considered 'a historical document of the exigent conditions that necessitated its creation' ("*ELEANOR!*" 2005, accessed January 21, 2018, paragraph 3). *ELEANOR!* was in ongoing development for ten years with a last performance in 2014 for the time being. Bauer is today a very successful performing artist, who alongside her own projects, also teaches, mentors, and collaborates with other established choreographers such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Xavier Leroy, and Boris Charmatz. One of the reasons her production could have such a long life, was because it was site-responsive and resilient in a similar way as the precarity solos discussed above. As I mentioned before, her solo evolved throughout the years because she adapted to the changing circumstances. And, most importantly, because the theme of self-exploitation in exchange for exposure and recognition remained relevant, the frequently revised versions continued touring around with success.

4.9 Solo-tude?

Nevertheless, several informants refuse to bow down to making a precarity solo. One informant observes how successful dance artists manage to get by because ‘they are doing duets and solos. And then they work for bigger, more established companies, getting some money, going away, doing solos.’ Yet, she refuses to work this way: ‘I don’t want to do a solo just because the financial setup forces me to!’ She explains that this topic has been an on-going discussion, especially in the Berlin dance scene as various people have complained that all they see is ‘precarity solos’. Yet, she has always fought for more people onstage even though every person is a ‘running dollar sign’. Moreover, another informant believes that making solos is just like treading water: ‘the artists are staying in one place, just rehashing certain ideas’. She cannot pay her dancers well with the received budgets, nor can she pay herself – yet she refuses to make a precarity solo. She is happy she can work with people who are willing to work for what she can pay, while she is aware of the extent of exploitation and self-precarization from her side. Notably, aside from self-precarization, we could thus also speak of a prevalent mutual precarization when dance artists exploit each other driven by forms of income other than monetary. As a last example, after making many solos, yet another informant realized he is simply more fascinated by the mechanisms of collaboration and he decided he did not want to be a soloist anymore. This also resulted, among other things, in a quartet that deals with the impossibilities of collaboration and inharmonious working together.

However, it should be noted that this *climate of solos* is essentially an environment of solitude. The competitive funding system and the entrepreneurial trend engender loneliness and individualism. Consequently, a true sense of a community of ‘working and living together’ seems to disappear. Even when artists are working together openly in public spaces, such as coffee houses or co-working spaces, everyone is hiding behind a MacBook sending self-promoting emails into the virtual world. As the former examples reveal, presenting a ‘precarity solo’ is a very solitary endeavor. As Ramsay Burt points out, a solo used to be part of the ensemble, usually with the rest of the ‘chorus’ or ‘troop’ watching the soloist on stage from the side. The audience came to see the virtuosic soloist, or the prima ballerina, and not so much because of the reputation of the choreographer (Burt 2016, 117). Today, the choreographer is often the soloist, alone on stage, alone on tour, and alone in the market. In my fieldwork, for example, I observed a first run onstage two days before the first show. Going through my fieldnotes, I stumble upon an outside eye who observes that my informant is so often all alone, doing everything that could or should be done by someone else. In the morning of my observation, my informant was writing the program text instead of warming up. In the afternoon, the performers are ready to start the run, but no one is there to help them out with technicalities even though my informant had confirmed the rehearsal time to the institution. The technician

already went home nonetheless, again, and – by doing so – affirming the sense of loneliness experienced by independent artists. My informant figures out how to work the sound monitors onstage losing time playing with countless buttons on the sound board and making phone calls to the technician that abandoned them. Only three people are watching the run, including myself. In the meantime, my informant is receiving numerous messages asking her for a free ticket to the show. In the break, my informant goes up to the ticketing to inquire about the guest list. She has so many things on her to-do-list other than rehearsing, which should be the priority at this point. This observation exposes that if there is an institutional awareness of artists' precarity, then this is not translated into their behavior towards artists. This disjointedness on the mesolevel is especially visible in this case: the institution seems to pass on an even larger non-artistic burden to the artist, while they surely have full-time staff to take up these mentioned tasks? My fieldwork reveals that a large part of this feeling of solitude and individualism is enforced by the neoliberal production modes of flexible accumulation in general and the project-based work regime in particular. As the next part of this book on the fast, mobile and flexible *modi operandi* in the contemporary dance scene will illustrate, it is essentially an individual and threefold chase to make it as an artist.

Image 5: image from *Streamlined* (2014) by Igor Koruga. © Photo by Tomislav Sporiš



Part 2

The Fast, the Mobile and the Flexible

Chapter 5

The Fast

Sociologist Hartmut Rosa posits that modernization is not only a multileveled process in time, but also signifies a structural (and cultural highly significant) transformation of time structures and horizons, which he captures by the concept of ‘social acceleration’ (2003, 4). According to Rosa, social acceleration comprises three spheres, including technological acceleration, acceleration of social change, and acceleration of pace of life. Behind these dimensions there are *external key-accelerators*, which Rosa terms the economic motor (capitalism), the cultural motor (cultural ideals of modernity such as the fulfilled life), and the structural motor (functional differentiation). Whereas the phenomena related to technological acceleration can be described as acceleration processes *within* society, he stresses that the phenomena of acceleration of social change could be classified as acceleration *of* society itself (Rosa 2003, 7). For example, before classical modernity, a son inherited his father’s occupation, while in classical modernity, occupational structures tended to change within generations as sons and daughters were free to choose their own profession, however, this profession usually lasted a lifetime. In late modernity, occupations no longer extend over the whole work-life, which means that jobs today change at a higher rate than generations (Rosa 2003, 8). Paradoxically, technological acceleration – which logically ought to decrease the time needed to carry out everyday processes of (re)production, communication and transport – seems to have caused an increase in the scarcity of time instead of slowing down the pace of life. As also my fieldwork findings affirm, many people ‘feel hurried and under time pressure’ (Rosa 2003, 9). Indeed, we seem to do more in less time: for example, instead of enjoying the increase of *free* time enabled by technological acceleration, we seem to be reducing breaks and doing more things simultaneously developing precariatized minds. Rosa gives the very familiar example of people cooking while watching TV and making a phone call at the same time – in a word: multitasking. An acceleration society, as Rosa puts it, therefore only applies to a society ‘if, and only if, technological acceleration and the growing

scarcity of time (i.e. an acceleration of the “pace of life”) occur simultaneously’ (Rosa 2003, 10).

Contemporary dance artists maneuver in this acceleratory society between projects and operate in a post-Fordist and neoliberal economy of work. In her text “Notes on the Politicality of Contemporary Dance” (2013), Ana Vujanović writes that ‘speaking from a macro-perspective, the contemporary international dance scene mostly works according to the principles of the tertiary sector of neo-liberal capitalism, and therefore functions as a training ground of post-industrial economy’ (191). She emphasizes that contemporary dance artists celebrate these modes of production – especially the aspects Andrea Ellmeier (2003) equally has put forward, such as ‘nomadism, flexibility, multi-tasking personalities, collaboration, and endless networking’ (Vujanović 2013, 191). However, Vujanović underlines that this celebration is paradoxical, because ‘these modes are responsible for turning artists’ lives into an increasingly precarious existence’ (2013, 191). Most importantly, she adds that the celebration of these production modes makes dance artists politically opportunistic because they in fact become complicit with neoliberal ideology. Indeed, the contemporary dance artist thus becomes the poster child for Ellmeier’s new creative workforce. Yet, I question whether these modes of work are truly celebrated by contemporary dance artists: the aspect of endless networking does not exactly sound like something that is applauded by dance artists per se, especially since endless carries the rather negative connotation of seemingly without an end or tiresomely long or ceaseless. For example, a case study informant from Brussels agrees that doing what you want is a privilege, though he adds that ‘what comes with it is a nightmare’. He explains that being a freelancer in fact means that one is ‘perpetually unemployed’:

You are always looking for the next job, and even when you have many jobs, you’re still unemployed. It’s exhausting, but there’s also something fantastic about it. I kind of enjoy it, or at least I used to enjoy more, that I’m able to plan my entire year. I decide what I do and when I do it and that’s rare in this world.

An informant from Berlin seems to confirm this paradox in his own words, thus revealing that both Berlin and Brussels are essentially two sides of the same coin:

The benefit of structuring your own time as a freelancer really has its prices to pay. I think some people see it as a choice, but I don’t necessarily think it’s a choice, actually. It’s just an aspect of what I do. I fell into this field of contemporary dance and it doesn’t have the kind of same system of support that classic dance or theater has, and in that sense, why should I have to pay through this kind of hyper-exploitation? I think the pleasures and sorrows of work are becoming more and more clear in 2017. We know what this freelance means; we know the price that we pay.

Hence, a first glimpse into my data reveals that the relationship to these modes of working is more complex than a simple celebration. I begin to explore this paradox by introducing the oeuvre of Serbian-born contemporary dance artist Igor Koruga, which will help to understand the multifaceted state of affairs.

5.1 Chasing your own tail

After he graduated from a Master in anthropology and ethnology at the University of Belgrade (Serbia), Igor Koruga studied MA Solo/Dance/Authorship (SODA) at the Universität der Künste (UdK) and Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz (HZT) in Berlin. Even though Koruga stayed in Berlin after finishing his dance education, his relationship with the city was similar to that of many international dance artists: he was travelling in and out all the time, especially commuting between Berlin and Belgrade. Since 2006, he has collaborated with Station – Service for Contemporary Dance in Belgrade. Koruga’s work discusses the social status of artists in the field of contemporary dance and conditions of temporality as the basis for both work and life. Koruga’s earlier work demonstrates that his research focuses primarily on the working and living conditions of neoliberal citizens, especially artists. For example, the collaborative project *Temporaries* (2012) – which is a neologism for *temporary employees* – questions the conditions for the production of art and knowledge by discussing notions such as temporality, flexibility and self-realization with the audience. This performance event was created in collaboration with five other Belgrade-based dance artists, namely Ana Dubljević, Dušan Bročić, Jovana Rakić Kiselčić, Marko Milić, and Ljiljana Tasić and was staged as a picnic during which the audience members are offered to play a game of charades¹. The spectators were asked to guess terms related to the prevailing working conditions in the performing arts and these were then translated into short performance actions. Once the first group has guessed the right notion, the second half gets an overview of descriptions of short performance actions. They have to decide unanimously which performance action fits best to the guessed term. If they come to common ground, the action will be performed. The notions as well as the performance actions show references to the neoliberal art market. In one of the acts, the performers execute unstable movements as though they are falling continually and trying to keep each other up. This movement material is performed against the background of the sounds of the

¹ The observations here are based on a performance in Weld, Stockholm, in December 2013.

Road Runner being chased by Wile E. Coyote and seems to stand for a feeling that corresponds to the notion of 'slow death' introduced by Lauren Berlant (2007, 754): a feeling that coincides with precarization and the resulting diminution of future prospects. The notion of 'slow death' can refer to the (typically physical) wearing out of a population in a way that is comparable to the common phenomenon of the burnout in an individual. Like the coyote, neoliberal subjects experience a sensation of not really getting anywhere, because they have myriad things to do at the same time. In Koruga's work, the reference to Wile E. Coyote's chase stands for the ever-unsuccessful attempt to achieve something. In an interview with anthropologist Dunja Njaradi, Koruga explained this exhaustive nature of his life as a freelancer referring to dance theorist Bojana Cvejić who had illustrated the situation using the example of this cartoon character. He tells Njaradi: 'it makes me wonder what exactly am I chasing after? What am I fighting for?' (Njaradi 2014a, 186) In response to this unsuccessful chase, the executed movement material also demonstrates how the performers are trying to keep each other from falling, which is in turn, a beautiful portrayal of collective care and solidarity.

The performance of *Temporaries* then shifts to a discussion with the audience when Koruga announces the following: 'Actually, what I really want to talk about are the working conditions of our jobs and the ways how they shape our lives, and also the possible ways of reshaping those conditions.' Interestingly, Koruga speaks in the performance about 'our' jobs and 'our' lives as though he takes for granted that the audience members could relate to these issues. Koruga draws on examples from his own life, explaining that his work basically consists of being at home sitting in front of his computer, specifying that the concept of home already confuses him since this usually refers to a friend's sofa or a temporary sublet. At his computer, he continues, he is mostly reading and writing applications for funding. While he does this, he also tries to hang out in social networks, at art festivals, in venues, and with producers. Furthermore, he explains that he travels a lot, which is the principal reason for always being single or in a long-distance relationship and why it scares him to think about having children. In *Temporaries*, he states that 'it comes down to this everlasting accelerating loop of chasing a promising future that might never come', which again is reminiscent of Wile E. Coyote charging after the Road Runner, while everyone knows he will never catch it. By summing up these examples, Koruga actually allows me to highlight several key issues: he begins by pointing out the constant mobility and consequential feeling of homelessness. He then addresses the constant chase after funding and the accessory chase after programmers (or endless networking) and lastly, he refers to the influences of these on his private life and future prospects.

Interestingly, all these issues reappear in Koruga's solo *Streamlined* (2014) two years later, indicating that not much has changed in that time. In this solo, Koruga runs on a treadmill for sixty minutes while speaking in public and literally selling himself. Thereafter, the metaphorical accelerating loop mentioned in *Temporaries* materializes in

the form of the continuously accelerating treadmill on which Koruga is performing his solo in *Streamlined*: instead of having future prospects, artists live in a perpetual present – or what Pascal Gielen has termed ‘bottomless instantaneity’ in his essay on “A Chronotopy of Post-Fordist Labor” (2014, 196). But, as Koruga explains, as long as he is running on the treadmill, his working conditions are in fact in *good shape* since he is performing and thus earning a living. The loop also stands for the awareness that, paradoxically, when trying to practice politics through art – in ‘deploying precarity to critique precarity’ (Ridout and Schneider 2012, 9) – Koruga becomes an accomplice of the socio-economic and political system he tries to criticize or protest against. Indeed, Koruga’s words exemplify Vujanović’s statement cited at the start of this chapter that dance artists have become complicit with neoliberal ideology. What looks like a form of emancipation or resistance is in fact opportunistic: Koruga realizes he is practicing exactly that which he is preaching against and profiting from the system he criticizes. Analogously, an informant wonders what effect of resistance publicly addressing your own precarity might have, when ‘everybody who came to the show probably already agrees with you’:

It [resistance] is somehow in my work, but for me, just the fact that I get to make the work is already a statement, so I don’t know if I need to be political in the actual work that I am making, because anyway then I think that you’re preaching to the choir. Everybody who came to the show probably already agrees with you. It’s an interesting thing, when people find a way to manipulate it, so that they are actually benefitting from the same thing they’re criticizing.

In a similar regard, Ramsay Burt points out in his book on *Ungoverning Dance* that certain performances ungovern, meaning that they reveal the hidden relations of power that produce precarious lives through dance on the one hand, or they perform an alternative society on the other hand, and these are political acts (2016, 233). As I discussed in the introduction, most performances of precarity ungovern dance, yet what Koruga and the informant expose here is that it is often problematic to truly ungovern because in doing so one is in fact submissive to neoliberalism’s ideals. Burt provides an excellent example when he discusses the emancipatory performance *Fake it!* (2007) by Janez Janša during the Exodus Festival in Ljubljana, in which excerpts of canonical works from recent dance history were restaged in response to radical budget cuts that impeded the inclusion of these types of work in the festival. In so doing, the dance artists ungoverned dance successfully by redistributing and sharing a common without economic gains as the event could be attended free of charge. This provokes a true emancipatory statement as the artists are not benefitting financially from the system they criticize, yet simultaneously this can be seen an act of self-precarization, which in turn is in line with the neoliberal model.

The discourse on neoliberal subjectivity embedded in Koruga's work is a fruitful field to introduce the modes of production common to contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin. In the project-based performing arts sector, many artists never seem to make ends meet despite being resourceful and motivated. In an acceleratory society, the artist's chase has three dimensions. Firstly, project-based artists are continually *chasing funding* in order to pursue their art making, in the first place, and to earn a living, in the second place. Additionally, artists are *chasing programmers*, who facilitate the chase after funding; because the ball is in their court to offer studio space, to provide co-production budgets, and to present creations. My fieldwork has exposed the often vain efforts artists make in *endless networking* and self-promotion. Lastly, project work goes hand in hand with paperwork and much time is spent *chasing papers* concerning administration, finances, legality, or unemployment benefits. In what follows, I dissect this threefold chase in depth based on my empirical study and in so doing I aim to provide an empirically grounded description of the acceleratory work regime in which contemporary dance artists maneuver between projects. I will conclude that the threefold chase eventually concerns a fair amount of chasing one's own tail. While this idiom suggests that contemporary dance artists individually undertake exhaustive and often futile actions – usually without making much progress – I uncover a certain sense of solidary individualization that unites them.

5.2 Chasing funding

I don't really want to put my ambitions so connected to funding - that's also really fucked up in my opinion - but at the same time how are you supposed to get any type of stability living in this city doing this work, if you don't set out to do exactly that?

5.2.1 Direct funding: the project

In the previous part, I have extensively discussed forms of internal subsidization, but I have only briefly addressed the multifaceted external subsidization on which the contemporary dance sectors in Brussels and Berlin rely. The art world operates for a large part in the gift sphere. In Brussels and Berlin, artists are dependent on public funding that finances their projects. Public subsidies for the performing arts mainly support the artist in the creation of artistic products, which are typically in the form of live performances.

Subsidies can be structural or conditional. In both cities, several workspaces, production houses, dance companies, venues and other institutions can apply for two- to four-year structural funding. Since structural subsidy growth has come to a halt in 2006 in Belgium, most independent artists have come to rely on project-based subsidies (T'Jonck 2013, 21). In the independent arts scene in Germany, subsidies are commonly project-based, because structural support goes to state- and city-regulated theaters, dance companies and institutions. In Berlin, an artist can apply for project funding via the Hauptstadtkulturfonds (HKF), the Berlin Senate or Fonds Darstellende Künste. Most of the subsidies for the performing arts sector in Brussels come from the Flemish Government, but Brussels and the French-speaking region also provide subsidies. Aside from structural and project-based funding, artists can apply for several grants (research grant, project development grant, etc.) in both Brussels and Berlin – yet it should be kept in mind that even though grants are generally tax-free, they often do not count for calculating one's pension. Next to direct funding, independent artists in Brussels and Berlin can count on various forms of indirect funding. Production houses, residency spaces or venues with structural support often have a co-production budget available for a small number of artists. Many have developed their own systems of support, but generally when co-producing a creation a few weeks of studio space is offered and this is occasionally combined with a sum of money to support a specific production. In fact, in Brussels (and in extension in Flanders and to a much lesser extent in Wallonia) the residency system has proven to be quite generous: more often than not the use of a studio is given to the artists free of charge, sometimes including technical support, accommodation and meals. This is not the case in Berlin, for example, where rehearsal space tends to be merely discounted in case of co-production. An informant explains that even though she is supported by a co-producing institution, half of the weekly rent for the studio is still due in the assumption that the co-produced artist will be able to cover this charge with a budget coming from public funding. In Belgium, another very particular form of indirect funding exists known as the artist status, which can be regarded, and also be in practice appropriated by individuals, as the equivalent of a basic income for artists. Yet, as I will discuss further in this chapter, while this social security advantage is generally applauded by artists and has proven to reduce precarity, the relationship towards this form of indirect funding is rather complex and there is still room for improvement.

As T'Jonck points out in his outline of the Flemish dance landscape, conditional funding (in the form of project-based subsidies) engenders a precarious position that is not necessarily unattractive for artists, because it allows them to experiment and collaborate. Even with the extra support provided by workspaces, production houses or alternative management bureaus, the situation remains precarious because the future of these institutions is only short-term guaranteed (T'Jonck 2013, 22). However, I would like to refer back to the etymology of the term *precarious* in the sense that it denotes a lack of power or control because one is dependent on a higher authority. Thus, there is a three-

dimensional sense of uncertainty when applying for funding: you do not know *if* you will receive a subsidy, *how much* money you will be granted, and *when* the sum will arrive. In this regard, I also want to stress that project-based funding in the arts above all engenders a precarious position because one is dependent on financial support that is temporary and conditional.

First and foremost, project-based work in the arts is always accompanied by precarity, since artists invest time and work effort – and often also their own money – when applying for project funding without the guarantee they will receive it. In order to receive financial support, artists have to write funding applications in which they describe the concept of their new project, their intentions, their working schedule and needed budget. Already at the very beginning, when asking for funding, the question arises whether others will be interested at all in the proposal. The words of an informant illustrate this form of mental precarity:

To write a dossier, there's so much research that you have to do, and you have to have meetings with people. You know, it takes at least a month to be able to write a good dossier, just to apply for money, and you don't have the guarantee that you are going to get it or not at all.

This uncertainty is intensified by the possibly futile work effort: indeed, the workload writing an application should not be underestimated. To begin with, an artist has to find the right funding entity that matches the envisaged project and their professional capital. Public funding institutions are inclined to grant larger sums of money to professional artists who have established a certain visibility in the scene. If this is not the case, the artist considers whether public funding is the best way to go.² If the artist is at the start of their career, they can explore the different options available, such as the *Einstiegsförderung* in Berlin for example. Thus, artists first need to inform themselves on the different types of funding at their disposal and what the conditions for application entail, which is a very time-consuming undertaking as an informant points out:

I spent nights and nights and nights going through the national foundation index – Deutsche Stiftungsindex – just hours and hours of clicking myself through for ages, kind of filtering it down for culture, just reading what they all have on offer and who applied in the past and what the criteria were.

More often than not, my informants have applied for several funds simultaneously, because it seemed more realistic to them to receive several smaller sums from different institutions (in different locations). This tactic of betting on several horses – which I will

² While smaller (private) foundations that support artistic projects are scarce in Belgium, contemporary dance artists in Germany seem to have more options outside the public funding system.

return to further in this chapter – produces an even heavier workload because artists have to complete different funding applications for each foundation, which cannot simply be solved by copy-pasting. It is thus also a question of weighing your options. Several informants admitted that they have not bothered to apply for project subsidies because they estimate their odds to be rather slim for various reasons, but their awareness of the absence of visibility on the Brussels or Berlin stages seems to be a recurring predicament. A Berlin-based informant clarifies that she has not applied for project subsidies yet, because she is aware that – quite paradoxically – artists only truly qualify when they have already accomplished quite a bit. Simultaneously, she realizes that it means that she is working on many projects in which she invests more money and time than whatever she will gain from it (in monetary rewards). She has dealt with countless rejections when applying for residency budgets, festivals or research grants, therefore she knows that the time is not ripe to apply for public funding yet.³

Furthermore, another thing to take into account is the application deadline. In terms of timing, it is important to be well-informed about when the applications are due, when the decisions are made, and when the budget will eventually arrive – or in order words: when can one start working? If the artist has found the right funding institution and subsidy type and the application deadline suits their schedule, only then can the artist start to write. Typically, writing a dossier is a twofold effort in the sense that an artist has to describe the artistic concept and the business plan (which deals with the budget, but also includes a rehearsal schedule and collaborations). Formulating an artistic concept is a time-consuming and a sometimes-vexatious effort, as an informant testifies below. I should point out that this informant is an established dance artist, who has received much funding in the past. Despite his exposure and seniority in the scene, he had received a number of funding rejections in the recent past before venturing on a new application:

I just spent ten incredibly intense days writing an application and that has no rhyme or reason at all other than: I'm sleeping four hours a night and I'm drinking massive amounts of coffee, and I'm reading and I'm organizing and I'm writing and I'm going through drafts, ... So, it was really kind of a marathon of work. I think for me – because I'm freelance – I procrastinate. I have to solve a particular problem with a concept, or with a piece of writing and what might look like procrastination is me taking space and time to figure out the solution to this problem. How am I

³ It should be noted that all this is not an unusual way of working as compared to other (freelance) professions, also in other sectors. Architects, for example, have to pitch their projects to clients and funders. As another example, constantly applying for funding is not an uncommon working mode within academia, although it should be kept in mind that the applied funding within academia tends to cover much longer periods of full-time paid work.

going to frame the proposal? What is the piece going to be like in the future? So, it takes me a long time to figure that out.

It has been pointed out to me that the discourse deployed in applications is becoming more of a sales pitch. An artistic concept has become a unique selling point. An informant terms it ‘a sort of classical language of making applications’ and jokes that ‘at least I don’t have to put a logo on my t-shirt’. Another informant criticizes that as a consequence there is a false interest in concepts prevailing in the sector. She sees it as problematic because many applicants import an idea or theory that is not fully grasped into the studio, as long as it is *en vogue* and includes certain buzzwords (especially popular are *queer* and *feminist*). In her words:

People make jokes about Deleuze being the legitimating name-to-drop, or is it already “passé”? And then these stages where philosophy is a trend, instead of dance and performance scores. And then after you basically have earned the money, and have the visibility, the discussion is over.

In the end, probably no one will evaluate whether the new creation matches the artistic concept as documented in the application. Nevertheless, an informant reveals that this application discourse is a disguised trap that might influence your project, because perhaps the discourse you submit as a sales pitch is not exactly what you want to do but you end up practicing what you preach – or to quote one of Igor Koruga’s performance titles: practicing what you ‘pitch’.

However, not only the artistic concept needs to convince the decision-makers, the artist also ought to have scheduled sufficient and realistic rehearsal time (usually in the form of residencies). If the cooperating residency spaces additionally offer a co-production or residency budget, that certainly makes the artist’s case stronger because it reduces the financial burden of the fund one is applying for. Acquiring this type of support is a chase of its own and will be discussed under “Chasing Programmers” further in this chapter.

Calculating a budget is a less evident task than formulating an artistic concept. Generally, artists appeal to a bookkeeper or producer to take on this task, and when they cannot afford professional assistance, they at least turn to someone with more financial experience for advice. In order to avoid self-precarization, and informant acknowledges that she really needs someone who manages her budget:

I realized we’re not accountants and we need someone who is in charge of that. A third party who we’re not necessarily emotionally attached to and who enjoys a certain authority in his or her field. [...] Many calculations went wrong and it was a good lesson for me that these things should be dealt with by people whose trade it is, first of all, and whose fee it is not. Because it is very hard to deal with a budget, where your fee is in. So you have an engagement, because this is your life money there, that you have to deal with in this budget.

This concise outline on the project funding system reveals that writing such an application is a very time-consuming endeavor, especially when bearing in mind that artists tend to have myriad other things on their plate and applying for funding is far from the only to-do-item on their list. In their precariatized minds, fully concentrating on submitting a compelling application is sometimes very challenging. An informant recounts:

These three other projects are becoming a bit overwhelming and stressful to manage. Plus, I have to pay all this money and I don't know when I will get money next time, and it is not enough for all my work effort.

In that respect, an informant explains that the writing process for her last application was horrifying, because the deadline overlapped with a residency. Thus, she decided to ask a friend and former-collaborator to write it instead. She was available and willing to do so. After more than a decade of professional work experience, it was the first time she asked someone to do this, but she stresses that many dance artists work this way in Berlin, especially the non-German speakers. In turn, it was also the first time her peer wrote the application for someone other than herself. My informant explains that she confided in her peer as they had been working together intensively in the recent past. She notes that evidently, should she be granted the subsidy, she would pay her friend for the service.⁴ However, what seemed to be a solid arrangement, turned out to be a disaster:

The application itself, my god, it was too much for me, concentrating on the residency and the different rhythm with my collaborator's newborn child. I could not concentrate on writing. [...] I should have finished it before the residency, but I couldn't. [...] So, I decided to ask a friend if she wanted to write it for me. First time I asked. [...] But then she had her boyfriend for a visit and she could not write for three days. In the end, the last evening before the deadline, she sent us a version of the long application and it was okay but really nothing to submit. So, my partner and I, in this night, we were writing like crazy. Well, my partner was, because I couldn't. I was so nervous that I could not concentrate. [...] This is also something: we had loads of public showings during the residency and I think the day before we had our last public showing, like the final showing, we had to do this night of horror. We didn't sleep.

Her testimony reveals multifarious obstacles: first, procrastination lead it to become a very last-minute endeavor, which coincided with the end of a residency period. Secondly, my informant enhanced that she experiences difficulties to formulate what she finds

⁴ Seeing that my informant points out that many people work similarly when writing a funding application in Berlin, it seems that this course of events may be quite common – at least in Berlin – and therefore not just a matter of an unprofessional work ethic.

interesting in her proposal, hence the procrastination. This was not only due to her precariatized mind: she explained that she also finds it difficult to have a very elaborated fantasy about her project before going into the studio. This is also her principle point of critique towards the project funding system: 'I would like to have the opportunity to not write a huge application, but to write: I need a space and I want to go inside and something will happen'. Generally, my informants know what they want to work on in the studio, but some seem to experience difficulties articulating their ideas in written language on an application form before they have had time in a studio to do at least some of the research. Nonetheless, not being able to communicate one's artistic concerns reduces one's chances to receive project subsidies and also hampers the writing process for the middle person. Finally, my informant handed in a very rushed application and performed a final showing anxious and deprived of sleep. However, the sleepless night was not in vain, because ultimately, she was granted the subsidy.

5.2.2 Too low or too late

In general, applicants are informed by the subsidy commission a few months later whether their project has been granted subsidies or not. If the feedback is positive on the artistic as well as on the business level, the applicant is commonly rewarded a budget. It should be noted here that at least in Belgium, the high number of artists applying for funding in relation to the scarce means has instigated the rejection of several artists who received a *very positive* on the artistic level and a *positive* on the business level in the subsidy round of 2016: indeed, only the projects that were granted two *very positives* stand a chance, which means that the bar is set very high. As a matter of fact, the bar for projects and grants in Belgium is even higher than for structural support, which is a somewhat paradoxical situation (Janssens and Leenknecht 2017, paragraph 8).

All in all, when the commission grants you a subsidy, several obstacles might occur: it is likely that the rewarded budget is less than what was applied for or that the ascribed sum of money arrives with delay. In some cases, part of the sum due is only granted after completion of the project when the final report has been approved. Generally, the project subsidy is intended to cover the production costs; meaning the costs necessary for creating a piece, such as payment for equipment, costumes, technique, set and props, travel, promotional material, accommodation, studio rental (if applicable), and most importantly, the fees of the involved people. Some of these costs may be covered by the co-producing institution, typically, in these cases it concerns costs for promotional material (flyers, trailer, posters) and assistance with publicity and communication. However, this system can be problematic as the listed conditions inflict more precarity and provoke self-precariatization, as exemplified by several case study informants. Firstly,

owing to the absence of management skills, there is a propensity among artists to estimate scanty budgets – probably so to increase their odds of being granted the budget. One informant seems to be aware of this form of self-precarization, when she admits the following: ‘I think I downplayed it. I think I made the typical performing artist-mistake: I brought it down to 12,000 euros for everything. But they accepted the whole sum!’ This informant admits to keeping her budget low by rounding it off to the minimum. In a similar vein, another informant put herself in her project budget for three months of fulltime work for the recommended fee of 2,000 euros per month.⁵ However, she explains to me that these three months would actually be spread over a period of six months and she will probably be working the whole six months (in-between the residencies) on the project. In our interview, she realizes that it means she will be left with a mere 1,000 euros per month, so she will have to do other jobs too to up her income. She realizes she made the mistake of downplaying it as we are talking:

So, my god, I think I did everything wrong. And now I was thinking, shit, I for sure did wrong that I’m working actually... Not that I’m working six months, but I mean, I think I will be occupied kind of and then I get 1,000 per month. I mean if I think that I do not have something in between, so I earn money. But maybe I’m used to that?

Hence, it seems difficult to translate the work effort when in a project to a monthly fee: the actual working hours cannot be reduced to measuring the working hours in the studio, because there is a lot of *homework* in between. However, as my informants’ testimonies expose, this is often not taken into account. Or, perhaps artists do not dare to ask for more than these *detectible* working hours, because they are afraid this would lower their chances of receiving a subsidy?

Secondly, chances are that when the commission does grant you a subsidy, the given amount is lower than what requested due to the excess of applicants. In this case, the applicant has a choice to make: when the assigned budget is not enough to actually realize the project you had in mind, either you pull some strings and try to do it anyway as planned, or you adapt your project to the new budget (by eliminating certain costs). A third option is to reject the subsidy, which seldomly happens. My fieldwork reveals that artists often tend to fall into the trap of persistence rather than adapting their projects accordingly. Whereas the former reveals artists’ self-precarization in favor of artistic freedom, the latter demonstrates that the working conditions influence the artistic decisions. As an example of adapting a project to a lower budget, an informant explains

⁵ As I discuss further under “Chasing Papers”, in Berlin, the authorities try to avoid this downplaying by recommending minimum standard fees for each application, whereas in Brussels, contracts ought to be made according to the minimum wages as listed on the Collective Labor Agreement for Performing Arts. While the Berlin minima are merely recommendations, the Brussels minima are mandatory.

how she decided to work with less dancers and perform in the piece herself instead. This decision eliminated two salaries yet simultaneously obstructing the choreographer's external focus. Additionally, she limited herself to one set of costumes, which required immediate cleaning in case of consecutive performances. As a result, several costumes showed defects that were left unrepaired. Furthermore, commitments have often been made before the subsidy decisions are announced. To exclude an already informally involved dancer from the process for budgetary purposes means that this dancer is now without a job s/he had counted on. This situation of persisting with an insufficient budget also induces socio-economic precarity, because several informants confess having invested a fair amount out of pocket as a form of internal subsidization.

My fieldwork has exposed several forms of (self-)precarization when artists persist with a deficient budget. One informant points out that when she was working with a tight budget, merely 5% of her working time was devoted to the creative process, because the rest was spent on production work: from cleaning a donated dancefloor, to requesting quotes for scaffoldings, to cycling around the city to flyer, to setting up a webpage, and so on. She confesses in hindsight that they were far too ambitious when they decided to do too much with too little means:

We were really reaching for the stars with our budget. This budget was actually 40% of the intended budget. We had another bid with another national fund, but that fell through. But we had the money from one fund, so we thought "okay, well what can we do with this, we want to do something with it", and it was a huge mistake to do so much.

Since the contemporary dance profession is grounded in living labor, in tendency, the phrase *time is money* applies. The requirement of living labor time makes dance a very expensive form of art. As a consequence, a lacking budget usually leads to a reduced time budget working with people in the studio: rehearsal times are cut and become shorter and more intensive. In what follows, I will elaborate on what exactly this reduction and intensification of work time may entail and what the impact on the outcome of a creative process can be.

First of all, a deficient budget usually comes down to a heavier load of (often unpaid) *homework* for the choreographer in the evenings of or in-between rehearsals due to a lack of work time in the studio. For example, one of my informants continues to work on movement material in the home office and explains he uses video recordings to resume rehearsal work at home:

I can't afford to have as much time as we would like to have rehearsing, stuff that you might normally have to figure out moving dancers around the space, I do it on [video]. I think a lot of people do this. I have a little bit of a system for myself that I know what I need to film so I can work at night.

As another example, an informant recounts her experience during her last process with very intense rehearsal periods that had long breaks in-between in the search for more funding:

We had a lot of pauses between work, which was great for thinking, but basically what it means is when we did work, things would have to progress so quickly within those two weeks because there was so little continuity. I was not sleeping, because I would just do homework basically. [...] There was definitely a division of labor: the writing stuff was going to be at home, the dancing stuff was going to be in the studio. It had to be a very efficient use of space and time. [...] I didn't have time to experiment in the studio.

In this case, the homework entailed, as she recounts, 'spending as much time in the evening as I did in the studio, listening to things, watching things, taking notes, rewriting scores and editing monologues, coming back, trying again, email some bullshit from the production side, which are plenty, in terms of planning or whatever'. Most significantly, and also worryingly, reducing time in a studio signifies less time to experiment – as the informant's words reveal. Does this suggest that the reduction of studio time may lead artists to recycle their leftovers from previous processes? To simply produce a variation of a familiar theme? To stay in their comfort zones? To tread water, as my informant put it, by 'staying in one place, just rehashing certain ideas'? Or to make standardized *fast food* dance productions or even produce incomplete work? As a result of lacking budgets, one informant currently has three unfinished projects she is seeking to complete. She has been unable to finalize the projects because she did not have the means to pay the involved dancers for their time. The fragment below illustrates how she is chasing after funding to 'buy more time' so she can finally show the finished pieces to interested programmers. Indeed, in the exceptional economy of the arts, to quote Hans Abbing's book (2008) once more, artists look for money in order to be able to work and not vice versa: more money thus means more time to work. In other words: money in the arts is not an end but a means. She explains that this chase is sometimes a very frustrating vicious circle:

I'm running after the money to finish it. Last week, I got a funding rejection again. The problem probably is that he rejected it again, because he didn't find my co-operators strong enough. But the bigger institutions are always like "show us your work first". Obviously, they don't just blindly give you money, they have to see your work. I would love to give them the opportunity to see my work, but in order for that to happen I need money to produce it!

Moreover, it merits mention that downsizing and intensifying studio time may cause injuries when dance artists refraining from warming up properly to save time.

It should be noted that the intention of granting lower budgets than requested is an exploitative one. Decision-makers are well aware that artists are intrinsically and

immaterially motivated: chances are they will be creative with their budget to make it work 'because they're artists and they can improvise and they're creative with the little that they have', as an informant notes, enhancing that 'there's this reliance on creativity being also deployed in the practical side of the project, not only in the substantial side of the project, the core of it'. In some cases, artists rely on their collaborators' will to work un(der)paid, yet not many choreographers – at least among my informants – are so keen on having to ask that question. In an attempt to offer fair fees, choreographers tend to sacrifice their own fees or savings. An informant testifies:

I can pay everyone who's a part of it 600 euros and actually I can't really pay that [laughs]. I want to pay people something. So, we're only going to be rehearsing half days. [...] I will pay them. At this point, let's see how much I have to pay in taxes, but it's not like I don't possess savings. I'm pretty neurotic about saving money, because exactly for these moments.

Furthermore, much of the internal subsidization happens undocumented. An informant explains how she reported 1,500 euros that she would invest herself into the project, but ended up investing a supplemental 2,500 euros 'off the record' on expenses, costumes, and services. She concludes: 'I actually invested my own salary directly back into the piece and lived off of my savings. Or I donated my savings to the piece...' Internal subsidization to compensate the lack of external subsidization is one way how the project-based funding system keeps artists poor. The following testimony supports this statement:

We did not get so much funding and I ended up making a really ambitious project that I really deeply love, but in the end, I fucking paid for it. I was so poor for months after. And it was poor planning. It was maybe being irresponsible, but in some ways, the creative process is not an inventory in a supermarket, you know. It's not a one-line-conceptual piece, but it's a very dynamic thing where you're solving problems and you're trying to be efficient and you're trying to be cost-effective, but... I'm a little bit messier, but I guess that's part of my process.

Furthermore, the granted subsidy may also arrive late, which is another systemic issue that places artists in a precarious position. An informant notes that 'the money always comes after you already had to make investments'. Even when these expenses could possibly be reimbursed down the line, many artists do not possess the means to advance money for equipment, travel or their collaborator's fees. An informant recounts that she advanced a train ticket for her colleague, because he was planning on booking a seat on the less comfortable and much slower bus because he could not afford to purchase a more expensive train ticket. The theater had asked the performers to book their travels themselves but they would be reimbursed upon receipt after their performance. In order to avoid a long bus journey, she lent him money – which could have been avoided if the venue or the choreographer would have taken care of these production costs in advance. In that respect, another informant points out that this problem also occurs when applying

for travel grants: 'if you get it, they never give you the money before you go. You always have to advance the money. So basically, I have to ask everybody involved if they would be willing to pay for their own ticket for now, and hopefully we'll get the travel grant.'

In a similar vein, artists are spending their savings on equipment and research while they wait for funding. An informant clarifies that it does not make sense to wait until the money is there, because you do not want to enter the studio without equipment. You need to arrive fully prepared and equipped because the studio time is already scarce. An informant's logbook during a work process revealed that she was making purchases on her credit card for the production as she was impatiently waiting for her artist fee. She had to rely on credit to make logistic expenses for the production, but also for her private life. Most importantly, commitments are made with people involved in the project and they are equally dependent on the timely arrival of the subsidy:

As freelance artists we're not only dependent on kind of getting the money, but we're also dependent on the dream that the money is going to actually come in time. That is really crazy! When you're pretty much hand-to-mouth, when you're in a situation where you don't have savings and then the funding is three months late. Well, you were planning on starting this project with four people at such and such a date and it doesn't arrive. So not only can you not eat, but you are responsible for four other people and that's pretty crazy.

The dancers involved in a project often have busy schedules and the rehearsals cannot simply be postponed. The studio space is also booked, so postponing is not an option anyway. This usually means that they will simply have to wait for their fees until the subsidy arrives, however, my fieldwork has revealed that this is an imperiling situation since many artists count on these fees for that month's rent payment – to name only one example.

However, part of the mission of the many alternative management bureaus, production houses, art centers, workspaces, and independent producers is to assist artists in applying for funding and the accompanying bureaucracy. In Brussels (and Flanders), artists often rely on the productional support of institutions, whereas in Berlin, this support is commonly provided by independent producers. As a result, we have seen that contemporary dance artists from the questionnaire in Brussels can spend more time on creative-productive work activities (within artistic labor) than the respondents from Berlin. Informants note that these institutions and producers customarily offer financial assistance, such as working out the budget for the funding applications, management and accountancy during the project and while on tour. However, it is rather uncommon that support is offered for other activities, such as diffusion, rehearsal scheduling, and so on. While this type of support is much appreciated by the informants, it should be noted that only few artists have access to this assistance. The artists in both cities certainly outnumber the institutions and producers. More indirect funding would thus relieve

artists from these bureaucratic burdens by allowing these supportive institutions to grow and to multiply. The only drawback is that artists become more dependent, however that does not seem to outweigh the benefits.

5.2.3 Tactics of resilience

Aside from the outlined difficulties that come hand in hand with low and late subsidies, several informants have revealed other impediments of the project funding system. All in all, the system seems to jeopardize artistic freedom. For example, an informant pointed out that the focus on producing instead of the liberty to experiment is actually a threat for the artistic quality of what we see onstage:

What I find very hard about all these applications is that you need to pretty much know everything before you even started to do anything. I don't feel so connected to that. [...] You have to have a premiere and it has to become something. It has to be presented and then you ask for a certain amount of money and usually you don't really get what you wanted. In case you get something, you get less. So, everything is very tight and what I heard is that they kind of realized that the quality of the pieces is going time because there is no research time, there is just production.

As another example, two informants have signaled that the meager subsidies led them to opt for a solo project instead of realizing their dream project. As one informant testifies:

I got pretty good funding here in the city. It's actually not enough to make the dream-thing that I want, because I always wanted to make a group piece out of that [other project] and I sculpted it all out, but there's not enough money, so now I'm making another solo. [...] We'll see, maybe I refuse [laughs].

It is fascinating to note how this informant jokes that he might refuse to let the budget dictate his artistic choices. In fact, my fieldwork has exposed several instances, in which artists show resilience to the pitfalls of the project funding system. As I pointed out in the introduction, resilience can be defined as 'the ability to adapt to changing conditions and prepare for, withstand, and rapidly recover from disruption' (Risk Steering Committee 2010, as quoted in Bracke 2016, 52). I hypothesized that contemporary dance artists adopt their transferable skills of creativity and flexibility to minimize risks and hedge themselves against existential precariousness thus bending neoliberalism's demands to their advantage as an individual and everyday tactic. However, I also proposed that these could possibly be tactics of resilience to the exploitative demands of neoliberalism by not letting the system dictate how, when and where to work for example: autonomous artists employ their own creativity to withstand the prevailing working conditions and to survive in the performing arts field – which is exactly what neoliberalism in fact wants them to do.

Several informants seem to oppose being governed in such a manner: ‘Of course I’m doing research, but I’m doing research whether the money is there or not, unfortunately’, an informant attests. In this respect, the following fragment illustrates an informant’s refusal to succumb to the project funding system and the neoliberal art market:

It’s maybe easy to say from the place I am in, because I don’t feel like I’m chasing after the money or something. Of course, it will be nice to get funding for a project, but if I will tell myself *when* I have the money, I will do a project, then I will maybe never do a project, you know? So, I think, you just do something and everything just organizes itself around it, because there is no other way, you know. Nothing will ever be like ready for that moment of “okay, now I have everything, I can start”.

This informant realizes that the situation becomes more complicated when more people are involved in the project – especially when they are not also your friends. She is currently working with a friend in mutual agreement: it is very clear that they are working together without a budget because they want to do it that way. However, it should be noted that this form of evading the system is only possible because the informant could in fact afford it. My informant explains that she does not feel like she has to chase after money: ‘in terms of money, I don’t let it manage the way I do things’. Most importantly, she feels freer when ‘it’s for free’, because she is convinced she cannot count on conditional funding and she can have her project more in her own hands when working outside the system. Additionally, she believes that artistic research today has become ‘so poor, because you don’t allow yourself to waste time on it’. Therefore, as a tactic resilience in favor of autonomy in her most recent creative process, she stresses:

I was really trying to not let [money] distract me. I mean, of course I had the thought of like “wow, this is the most expensive conversation we ever had”, because we were sitting in that studio and talking for two hours, and we could sit in a café and pay much less.

However, refusing to play the subsidy lottery is not the same thing as resisting the system: as I pointed out in the introductory chapter, it should be kept in mind that true resistance to the forces of precarity and the neoliberal art market seems somewhat unattainable because continuing to make art even as a form of resistance is precisely what neoliberalism wants. It could be argued accordingly that negating the forces of the project funding system is a form of (self-)exploitation, yet simultaneously it is a tactic of resilience in favor of autonomy: this informant explicitly strives to be independent from funding institutions and to not let money dictate her artistic work.

As a last example, a Brussels-based informant is hesitant to apply for project subsidies again especially due to its ‘projective temporality’ (Kunst 2015a). This is especially so, since she is interested in working on a project outside the dance field, which implies that she will need to inform herself all over again about the different funding institutions and

residency possibilities. In her experience, she needs to start about two years in advance if she wants to work with governmental support. And in the meantime, she still needs to earn a living, which means that she continues working for other people's projects, which in turn generates a precariatized mind. As a consequence, she cannot concentrate full-time on writing her project subsidy application. The process is still a puzzle to her. As a tactic, she decided to search for a tiny studio space that she could use to work on the installation on a regular basis. All she needed is a room with electricity. She is prepared to pay a small amount of rent for the studio. Having this form of continuity allows her to work on the installation any time she wants. If programmers are interested to see her work, she does not need to organize a showing in a residency space, but she can simply invite them to her studio. Simultaneously, she could be working on her next solo in that studio, at least in the beginning phase. This way, she could avoid the chase for funding and studio space. While this resilient tactic diverts the system, it remains yet to be seen whether it proves to be effective or not.

Hence, several of the examples above reveal an inclination to 'do it anyway' regardless of the budget, which in turn is a form self-precariatization. Simultaneously, this shows to be a form of emancipation, or autonomy, in the sense that these informants attempt not to let the money prescribe the artistic process. Indeed, project subsidies have an insidious quality: they tend to govern dance and in doing so, they impede artistic freedom and the artist's autonomy. These testimonies essentially uncover that accepting but simultaneously trying to resist the project funding system is thus a form of *ungoverning dance* – to follow Ramsay Burt's thesis. In his book, Burt points out that the subtle control of the institutionalized dance world is in line with the shift from Foucault's disciplinary regime to a control society (2016, 16). The new mechanisms of control over artistic projects, give a false sense of freedom as many of my previous examples demonstrate, and as a consequence, a number of artists show resistance to the institutionalization. However, it is almost unattainable to completely resist because you cannot entirely escape the capitalist market if you want to survive in the performing arts world. As illustrated by the words of Xavier Le Roy in his celebrated and widely-discussed *Product of Circumstances* (1999):

This small success, recognition, and attention were slightly changing my way of thinking. I lost a certain kind of independence. I slowly noticed that the systems for dance production had created a format that influenced and, sometimes to a large degree, determined how a dance piece should be. I think that to a large extent dance producers and programmers essentially follow the rules of the global economy. I had integrated the economical dynamics of dance production because I wanted to be able to make a living with what I had decided to do. But, even though I was very careful not to bow to that particular logic, and tried to resist, I was not always completely convinced by my decisions. (Le Roy, accessed September 24, 2018, under "10.")

5.2.4 ‘Betting on several horses’

In the chase after money, contemporary dance artists seem to manage their risks. When applying for project funding, they often bet on several horses. This survival tactic recurs throughout my fieldwork. In most cases, artists take their chances and apply for a number of international funds. As a Berlin-based informant explains:

People try to find funding also elsewhere, because it's most of the time not enough to find it only within Berlin. Or, it's too competitive and there are small odds, so people try to find it elsewhere also.

It appears so that dance artists are inclined to play out where they come from or where they studied, to increase their chances on receiving funding. A German-born informant comments that it can actually be in one's advantage to be a non-German artists living in Berlin, because that way you have your birth country as a back-up for funding. He notes that 'sometimes coming from Germany and working in Berlin can be a harder thing, because you don't have a second country in the back with the good funding'. Another Berlin-based informant agrees that it is really a benefit to have a second or third country to have a connection with in terms of risk-management:

I probably made a bad decision not going to P.A.R.T.S., because I would've had Belgium. I probably also made a bad decision never having gone and lived for a year in my home country as an adult, in terms of the network, in terms of funding possibilities. A lot of people I know, they exist because they can acquire funding in multiple countries and they can acquire funding in multiple countries because they get funding from other countries.

In turn, according to a certain city marketing logic, places also play out the artist's popularity for their own sake. Cities (and sometimes also countries) have an interest to brand the promising and established artists they fund, because they represent the locale's identity.⁶ Nonetheless, while working transnationally and betting on several horses is a necessary and effective survival tactic, ultimately, it should be noted that having an artistic *parcours* set out in one city is also a valuable criterion for funding, because it creates a type of sustainable scene and not one that is constantly changing.

⁶ I could name Meg Stuart and her company Damaged Goods as an example of this complex game. Meg Stuart came from New York to Belgium, where she established her company Damaged Goods in 1994. However, since the new millennium, she has also settled in Berlin, where she was in residency at the Berliner Volksbühne between 2005 and 2010 and where currently most rehearsals take place. She therefore 'has one foot firmly in Germany' (T'Jonck 2013, 17). However, her company remains based in Brussels and the largest part of their subsidies comes from the Flemish Government, but the work process is for the most part located in Berlin. Additionally, most of her current dancers are Berlin-based, as are some of the staff. This situation has caused both Brussels and Berlin to consider Meg Stuart one of their own (see also Janssens 2007; Tanzbüro Berlin 2013).

In the context of betting on several horses, an informant confided in me that she plans to form an association abroad in order to apply for structural support. She has acknowledged that her chances are very small in Berlin and has thus thought out a tactic to create a more sustainable career:

I want to set up an association in France, because I really want to make sure I actually have regular funding. I now have a personal business coach who will help me being a Franco-German choreographer. Next strategies: I am still looking for a treasurer, which is a real problem. I have found a president, but now I need a treasurer. I have a couple of people who would like to be part of the association, but wouldn't like to take on that role.

She realizes that it will take some time to get sufficient seniority as an association to be actually legible for funding, but she is patient. She refers to her plan as an act of emancipation and clarifies: 'I know that the system in Germany is not ideal for me. It doesn't support me. Plus, I live in Berlin, which is very precarious place for performance anyway. I try to be smart about it.' While writing this book, I received a newsletter from my informant saying that she has successfully established her association in France.

However, there are definitely dangers attached to betting on several, often international, horses. The necessity to ask several funding institutions for a small budget each actually entails more work and more insecurity. If an artist applies for two sums that would cover the production costs if they are both granted, what happens if one institution does not grant you the money applied for? Generally, there are several ways to go: if the sum granted by the other institution is not enough to actually realize the project you had in mind, the artist either tries to do it anyway making debt, or adapts the piece accordingly, or declines the budget. There is always the possibility that the other institution decides not to grant you the sum either, because their policy is to provide support only if another institution also supports you. An informant reported that much can go wrong in these transnational constructions indeed, when she explained that she ended up with something between one-eighth and one-quarter of the required budget for a new creation.

5.2.5 Indirect funding: the Belgian artist status

In addition to the generosity of the public funding system, Belgium has established another form of indirect – or personal – funding known as the artist status (*kunstenaarsstatuut* in Dutch, *statute d'artiste* in French), which I have only very briefly outlined in the description of my field of inquiry. Since it was established on July 1, 2003, the artist status in Belgium has enabled the application of the employee status in a work regime of multiple jobholding and flexible contracts. Although it is often regarded to be so, the artist status is in fact not a separate category within the Belgian social security

regime (with distinct social security contributions and a particular protection). It rather fits the artist into the existing employment statuses. It comes with employee benefits, but the coverage of periods of non-employment through unemployment allowances is the most significant one, since it creates a situation in which one has a stable income. It is especially this aspect of the artist status that can be considered a form of indirect funding, or ‘personal subsidies’ as Delphine Hesters calls it, as it is in practice appropriated by individuals as such (2004, 130). In France, a somewhat similar system of indirect subsidization exists, widely known under the name of *intermittent system* (*intermittence* in French), which accounts for unemployment insurance. As Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet points out: ‘Benefitting of this regime [of unemployment insurance for entertainment workers] constitutes a form of temporary protection against the precarization processes and facilitates to remain in the profession while it is difficult to find a job’ (2010, 104).⁷

Comparably, the artist status effectively attempts to offer a socio-economic protection that is customized to the corresponding sector by taking into account the predominance of short employment relationships and uncontracted work in-between. As the data on the total of working hours and the number of remunerated working hours in *figures B and C* (Annex 1) and my informants’ logbooks suggest, most artists keep on practicing their profession in a situation of non-employment, especially since dancers and performers have to continue training and choreographers or creators have to keep applying for funding. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that the artist status is actually a social security notion and should preferably be considered as a particular kind of flexicurity provision. As an informant puts it: ‘it is a flexicurity thing more than a birth right’. From a flexicurity point of view, the well-known question whether creativity flourishes within the context of long-term contracts or is rather served by a high level of employment and project mobility through flexible agreements comes down to finding a balance between flexibility and protection (Forrier 2007). I should note that I do not employ the term flexicurity in the strict economic definition of this notion, rather I make use of the flexicurity notion in referring to the idea of connecting a high level of social security with a high flexibility rate by looking past the limitations of one job (the idea of protean careers). The flexicurity approach goes hand in hand with the enhancement of employability, or the ability to obtain and maintain employment through the mastering of new skills or competences (see also Auer 2010). The work-centeredness of a flexicurity approach evidently contrasts with the notion of a living wage or basic income, and reflects better the way many artists with access to the status actually deal with it. An

⁷ Own translation from the original French quote: ‘Bénéficiaire de ce régime [d’assurance chômage des intermittents du spectacle] constitue une forme de protection temporaire contre les processus de précarisation et permet de se maintenir dans le métier alors que l’on a du mal à y trouver un emploi’ (Sorignet 2010, 104).

informant explains how she sees the artist status as different from an unconditional basic income:

In a broad sense, I'm an advocate for a basic income theoretically: all people deserve to have a roof over their head and etcetera. But what is effective about the *statute d'artiste*, as a supposed basic [income], is that you do have a minimum number of contracts you have to have in order to keep it, and I think that makes a lot of sense. When I'm at the unemployment office and I'm dropping off my blue card and I see people who drop in an empty card, it's totally normal and they just saunter off. You're like "okay, that's the kind of thing that the right wing is going to complain about", you know: freeloaders, people just living off the system and taking advantage of taxpayer money. So, I think this idea that you do have to work enough to earn it allows you the time to seek the work you like and to also get yourself into the working system and to make contacts. It's a good incentive, I think.

However, it should not be overlooked that access to the artist status comes with more than mere income security. It provides all statutory securities of employees: for example, even when unemployed, one continues to build up pension rights.

In Brussels, more than half of the respondents (53%) have access to the artist status, which means that a large number of the queried dance artists do not enjoy this benefit. As *figure H* in Annex 1 demonstrates, the respondents who benefit from it are on average older and have already been working for several years, which partly has to do with the specific requirements to acquire this status - such as the proof of a sufficient income from artistic work.⁸ More than half of those without access to the artist status belong to the youngest age category. The financial effectiveness of the artist status is quite striking: *figure I* shows that respondents without access to the status predominantly belong to the lowest average monthly net income categories.⁹ Almost half of them earn a maximum of 1,000 euros per month net, with one-third gaining only up to 750 euros per month, of which half even earn a maximum of 500 euros. In comparison, only 16% of those with access to the artists status earn less than or equal to 1,000 euros net per month. These quantitative findings are represented in the reflections of several case study informants that stress that the artist status allows them to keep their practice going while not under contract. As one states:

⁸ The artist status can be obtained when someone performing artistic labor can prove that she or he has worked a specified number of days or earned a stipulated amount of job wages over a certain period of time. A job wage (in Dutch *taakloon*, in French *un salaire à la tâche*) is a payment method as an artistic employee where the agreed wage is not directly related to the number of hours worked. In other words, someone is paid to create and/or perform something, but it does not matter how long the job takes.

⁹ It should be noted that this probably also has to do with the fact that the artists benefiting from the status are generally older and have more work experience (and thus can enjoy the benefit of seniority in the calculation of their salary), which, in turn, is due to the strict requirements to access the status.

Without this [artist status] you get rid of the possibility to think and write and plan, and it's a form of payment for doing the unpaid work. Without it we would all have to work in bars, which would kill the intellectual and critical potential. I mean, when would we have time to think?!

In a similar regard, one of my informants recounts that she gained access to the artist status a few months before we first met. When I asked her, if she has noticed a difference in her work pattern, she admits that she seems to be teaching less yoga in the evenings when she has been rehearsing during the day. Positively, she notes that she enjoys her work more. She explains that her work and life have become more qualitative, because she is not combatting exhaustion.

Conclusively, the data and analysis of the artist status reveal that the artist status may effectively reduce socio-economic precarity through the income stability and the statutory securities it actually provides, and thus effectuates upward social mobility (see Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017 for more details). The upward effect of the artist status becomes more evident when comparing to the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists in Berlin, who generally work as self-employed freelancers. As my results reveal, their average incomes are lower and at the same time their insurance costs are higher, for example causing several respondents not to have a pension insurance at all even though it is mandatory (Van Assche and Laermans 2017). Overall, the artist status thus may reduce precarious working conditions through the flexicurity it actually provides. However, the findings uncover some problem areas within the regime: these numbers indicate that the artist status is important in improving the socio-economic situation in the profession, but at the same time the status is relatively exclusive and very conditional as it only seems to benefit half of the queried dance artists and as also the findings on age and years of work experience confirm. As an informant puts it, it thus seems to be 'benefitting people who need it less.' In order to enhance the socio-economic position of Brussels-based dance artists, the symbolic respect the profession receives should be better translated into financial compensation. Furthermore, in light of a multifaceted work-centered approach in the social regulation of artistic labor, the system of the artist status should be principally considered as a social 'elevator'. Young or aspiring artists would probably benefit from this safety net the most in the beginning of their careers and thus the accessibility to the artist status must be simplified in order to further reduce socio-economic precarity among artists in general and among dance artists in particular. However, the artist status seems to become increasingly restricted every year. For example, in 2014, the system was revised and since then excluded arts professionals such as technicians, dramaturges, art teachers or rehearsal directors. Instead of enabling this provision for all project-based workers, the authorities have taken a step backwards with this decision. An informant expresses her concern:

If the whole system is project-based, why would a technician have a full-time job? Yes, there are full-time jobs in theaters for technicians, like there are full-time jobs for curators, but there's also plenty of project-based work. Mostly project-based for this. More technicians freelance probably than there are working in theaters full-time. [...] Or dramaturges. They excluded these roles probably because it's the kind of thing an opera-house has full-time, but how many houses have a dramaturge full-time? Maybe the largest ones?

Furthermore, the benefits and securities that go hand in hand with this status should also be better adapted to the particularities of each artistic profession, such as the great extent of transnational mobility among contemporary dance artists: much of the work abroad does not count in order to access or maintain the artist status - not to mention the accompanying issues with tax declarations and pension rights in other countries. Thus, the trajectory of an artist is not recognized as it is for most: a collection of short-employment contracts with periods of uncontracted work in-between. On the one hand, the artist status reflects an awareness of this reality, but on the other hand, many rules and regulations still lag behind. An artist can, for example, not rely on unemployment allowances for rehearsal days for which s/he is not being paid, because, technically, the artist is not available for the labor market on those days. Nonetheless, I have witnessed several occasions, in which performing artists were asked to rehearse unpaid and rely on their artist status privileges instead. Or, more often than not, performing artists chose not to declare half rehearsal days, or at least those that would pay less than the unemployment allowance would.¹⁰ As another example, an informant explicitly mentions that the requirements to access the regime in fact do not acknowledge how the field of contemporary dance functions:

It's quite a privilege, so it shouldn't be that easy. But, it also needs to reflect the current environment and also within the field, because [proving] that many days and that much money, it's really hard for a lot of people to get into now [given] the way the scene operates and works.

Moreover, as I have briefly noted before in the previous chapter, teaching dance is not considered an artistic activity and therefore does not count when applying for or trying to maintain the artist status. All in all, the model of the artist status has the potential to serve all freelance and project-based workers. An informant agrees:

I think the notion of the statute should be extended to include different types of precarious workers for who their searching for work is a necessary part of their not-being-under-contract. Because that's how it is described: "searching for

¹⁰ This is also a downside of the flexicurity system pointed out by Sorignet as being 'à la limite de la légalité' (2010, 108).

work”. But that’s also not what we’re doing, we’re not just searching for work, we’re also making the work possible. First, invent, coming up with the ideas, having meetings and workshops and whatever kind of things.

Indeed, the artist status thus seems to act as a flexicurity system within the Belgian context offering artists a financial safety net during the periods in-between projects through granting allowances that pay for the unpaid work. In view of solidarity with other fractions of the precariat, opening up this model beyond the arts could possibly become a strategy for structural enhancement on the macro level. However, its benefits would probably still remain restricted to Anne and Marine Rambach’s precarious intellectuals (2001) due to the structural gap between the educated precarious workers who operate in a highly competitive market with opportunities for success and the other fractions that are made up of precarious workers who are generally structurally trapped in a precarious position without much future prospects of progress.

To close the chase for funding, I conclude that the results from both the quantitative and qualitative studies of the contemporary dance scenes definitely illustrate that the involved artists are socio-economically precarious, particularly because the post-Fordist economy of flexible accumulation that structures their labor conditions comes with a project-based work regime characterized by in-between periods of non-work – or rather of non-paid work. In these periods, many dance artists do research in preparation of a new project or write a funding application among other things. Neoliberal cultural policies have adapted to and even (co-)created this project-network economy, not the least through favoring short-term project subsidies granted on a competitive basis over long-term structural subsidies that take into account a broad pallet of qualitative and future-oriented criteria.¹¹ Forms of direct and indirect funding, as also Abbing emphasizes, do not make artists less poor. On the contrary, public funding actually prompts more poor artists, because artists tend to adapt to the available means. Therefore, poverty in the arts is structural: it is ‘built into the arts’ (Abbing 2008, 130). He refines this statement by adding that at least this is true for a large group of artists, because ‘the average artist who earns more than the minimum income level is mainly interested in non-monetary rewards, but is not totally immune to extra financial income’ (Abbing 2008, 131). In addition, he notes that subsidization is in fact nothing but misinformation, which in turn makes the arts seem even more attractive. Newcomers are often unaware of the precarious socio-economic position of artists, because they are not prepared and informed through education on the one hand, nor does the older generation come out and speak up, on the other hand; because they tend to hide their disappointment and present a ‘too rosy a picture regarding money, status, and private

¹¹ For more information, compare Hesmondhaigh 2015 and McGuigan 2016 on neoliberalism and cultural policymaking.

satisfaction' as Abbing proposes (2008, 120). An informant's testimony actually reveals that she was blinded by her educational environment in such a manner. She explains that when she was a student, she would easily criticize people who would be talking to programmers all the time because she saw that as 'selling out'. However, when she entered the professional art world, she realized that she too had to put food on the table and she did not want to do that working in a café. She knew she had to take part in the chase. Abbing observes that this kind of misinformation and blindness will lead to more poor artists and thus more poverty in the arts. Abbing thus concludes quite provocatively that the best policy to reduce poverty in the arts is to reduce external subsidization (2008, 139). However, especially the findings on the Belgian artist status illustrate the importance of the way a social security regime may positively infer with the socio-economic precarity linked with the neoliberalization of artistic fields, which makes me wonder: should we subsidize more indirectly instead?

5.3 Chasing programmers

Any ideas of actual research process and practice are nearly invisible and impossible to sustain, because you're always selling an idea, prowling into the future and then chasing after and fulfilling the promises you make.

The search for funding, and thus work opportunities, is accompanied by maintaining a network of professional contacts and such an inter-organizational career demands new competences in order to sustain itself. It is therefore crucial to devote at least some attention to the persistent chase after programmers, which requires networking skills, personal branding and self-promotion abilities, and the development and application of tactics in communication. In order to understand this chase, I ought to put these network-oriented work activities in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's discourse on the "Different Forms of Capital" (1986). In his influential article originally published in 1983, Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of capital, among which economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Whereas economic capital refers to capital directly convertible to money (in this case: an artist's monetary income), cultural capital is only convertible into economic capital on certain conditions. According to Bourdieu, one's cultural capital exists in an embodied state (i.e. acquired or inherited knowledge), an objectified state (i.e. possession of cultural goods) and an institutionalized state (i.e. educational qualifications or credentials). Lastly, social capital is made up of social connections and may therefore be conditionally transformable into economic capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as

‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (1986, 247). In his account, he seems to emphasize how social capital may be used to create or reproduce inequality making the powerful only stronger. In light of illuminating the tactics of the weak, I choose to explore how contemporary dance artists utilize and develop their social capital for exploiting work opportunities and thus indirectly leading to upward social mobility. Interestingly, Bourdieu notes that social capital always functions as symbolic capital, meaning the represented capital that is ‘apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition’ (1986, 255). Following Bourdieu, authors such as Abbing (2008), Laermans (2015) and Hesters (2004) agree that the symbolic capital of (performing) artists refers to the public recognition or their *good reputation* as professional and therefore genuine (performing) artists. As Laermans points out, an artist receives public recognition ‘from already consecrated peers or others – read: from important critics, established curators, “serious” collectors, and the like – who have the legitimate power to ascribe value’ (2015, 251).

It thus becomes evident that within my exposition of the chase after programmers, I will primarily focus on dance artists’ social capital and symbolic capital. These are two internal forms of capital, which signifies that they are accumulated during the trajectory as a professional dance artist and are reinvested within that career path. This implies in a way that the accumulated capital is especially valuable within the field of the performing arts and not so much outside of this field. However, as also Hesters points out, together with the accumulated professional capital¹², these are the three success factors for increasing one’s work opportunities which may lead a boundaryless career to become less boundaryless (2004, 117). In what follows, I first address the identity work that comes hand in hand with developing social and symbolic capital, which requires skills and competences in personal branding and self-promotion. Thereafter, I elaborate on the networking endeavors that my fieldwork exposes, which I identify as extended courtships, especially with programmers, employing a very apposite folk term launched by one of my informants. I will then expand on several paradoxes and communication tactics that my fieldwork uncovers within the selling process. Finally, I will close by highlighting once more the importance of social and symbolic capital exemplified by several observations that demonstrate how work opportunities evolve from social relationships.

¹² To put it simply, professional capital refers to one’s curriculum vitae including work experience from learning by doing, or: corporal capital and presence onstage.

5.3.1 Personal branding and self-promotion

Within the notion of identity work, I distinguish between the discourse on personal branding and self-development. While I consider both as unpaid work activities in the social factory, I approach personal branding as an activity directed towards an audience (in the sense of selling oneself) whereas self-development, in my view, is identity work directed towards the workers themselves. In line with Bourdieu who posits that ‘artistic work always consists partly of *working on oneself* as an artist’ (1993, 109), particularly the chapter on “Lifestyle Artists” reveals that contemporary dance artists are driven by the opportunities for lifelong learning and associated self-realization. I will proceed now by focusing on the activities that fall under the notion of personal branding, which Alessandro Gandini has situated within *The Reputation Economy* (2016). In his book, he considers reputation as the social capital of the digital society (in particular in the freelance economy) and conceives reputation as ‘an asset that is instrumental to entertain economic transactions, is associated to each knowledge worker’s market position, and upon which depends the capacity to get jobs across a multi-dimensional personal network of professional contacts’ (Gandini 2016, 27).¹³ In their paper on “Personal Branding and Identity Norms in the Popular Business Press”, organization studies scholars Steven Vallas and Emily Cummins have assembled the discursive trends in popular business literature on the enterprising self and personal branding. Interestingly, their nGram search¹⁴ on the search terms *selling yourself* and *personal branding* reveals that especially the use of the term *personal branding* in English-language books boomed after the turn of the century and does not seem to decline (Vallas and Cummings 2015, 304). The authors suggest that the notion of personal branding became popular in the late 1990’s, particularly through the publication *The Brand Called You* by Tom Peters who coined the term ‘Me, Inc.’, encouraging readers to conceive themselves as the bosses of their own enterprises (1997, 83). As an informant points out, networking, especially in the sense of selling one’s work and self-marketing, is an ‘art of its own’. It is not her biggest quality, she admits, but something she intends to work on. In this respect, Vallas and Cummings do point out that the literature on personal branding provides readers with an ‘array of *dramaturgical* [my emphasis] techniques intended to enhance the performative skill’ thus framing personal branding as an art or theatrical play (2015,

¹³ Interestingly, he posits that reputation is now increasingly tangible, visible and even measurable (through algorithms). However, this relatively new form of visible reputation generated through social media cannot be equated with the symbolic capital performing artists gain through the recognition by peers.

¹⁴ The authors employed Google’s nGram platform to track the trajectory of the discourse on *personal branding*. The graph resulting from the search displays the frequency with which specific keywords appear in the corpus of millions of books published in English over a certain time period (see Michel et al. 2011).

305). Several informants explicitly mention they are not very good in networking, but they perceive it as part of the work.

In my semi-structured interviews, I never directly mention the discourse on personal branding, yet several informants spontaneously address the type of identity work they engage in, either in criticizing the demand of self-marketing or by embracing it whilst revealing their tactics. It should be noted that most informants try to avoid it as much as possible, because they are uncomfortable with the idea that the success of their products has more to do with their identity as artists rather than with the quality of their work. In this respect, an informant deplores that as a freelance artist she has to become her own brand with a unique selling point:

The idea with freelance stuff that you become the brand and everybody's always like what's special? What do you offer? Or what's your novelty? [...] This idea that you – you! – become the thing that you're selling. [...] This self-branding becomes the work everyone's doing. I was thinking how fucking pressing that is if you want to be experimental. You have no market, or whatever, to be truly experimental.

The informant makes an important observation here, when she points to the prevalent focus on the *who* instead of the *what*, which leaves little room to experiment in the performing arts field for a twofold reason: first of all, an artist has to know much in advance, much before diving into a studio, what they will create in order to receive support for making and presenting their work. However, it should always be kept in mind that the artist sells a promise but cannot sell that promise unless they have established the reputation of being a promising artist. In this regard, Gandini refers to the notion of trust as a significant success factor. Following Niklas Luhmann, he points out that 'trust becomes a device to reduce risks' and that, in turn, reputation 'essentially operates as a regulatory principle to reduce risk attached to entertaining economic transactions' among what he defines as quasi-strangers (Gandini 2016, 37). An artist's reputation – or *brand* – thus functions as an immaterial currency or 'a guarantee for the delivery of quality work' (Gandini 2006, 38).¹⁵ What the informant seems to suggest is that one needs to stick to one's brand and leave a degree of predictability in the work so programmers

¹⁵ This is in line with what Pascal Gielen terms a 'reference logic' (2003, 95), which refers to seeking social confirmation of artistic quality before proceeding with the selection. This confirmation serves as a guarantee for quality and can be found in the artist's trajectory: former international tours, co-producing venues, and supporting workspaces all certify the belief of others in the artist's work. Within this reference logic, a programmer or a subsidy commission can thus assume that a new project will probably deliver similar quality and will probably be financially viable. While innovation and originality are obviously significant factors in these decision-making processes, reference to the (Flemish) context seems crucial, as Pascal Gielen (2003) but also Delphine Hesters (2004) note in their studies of the Flemish contemporary dance scene. In other words, artists ought to sell decision-makers a verifiable promise, because if they cannot uphold this contextual anchorage they will not stand much chance in the chase after funding and programmers.

and audiences know what to expect. In doing so, programmers measure their risks when they make the investment in someone's work. Unfortunately, this implies that there is not much space for the artist to test, play and experiment with something that deviates excessively from their oeuvre. Therefore, the fact that various productions by the same artist often look alike, may not only be due to the lack of time to experiment in the studio – as I suggested earlier on – but may have something to do with the fear of diverging too much from the brand they represent, afraid they will lose their audience or support? In a similar vein, also Delphine Hesters notes that 'a choreographer who wants to increase his/her chances for subsidies from the Flemish Government can therefore better stay true to his own artistic identity - although he may not diverge too much from what is present in the field, but in reference to dance, he ought to remain original and not copy' (2004, 48).¹⁶ Secondly, and most importantly, my informant sees the inability to separate the artist's identity from the artistic work (including the knowledge, process, methods and experience of the work) as highly problematic, as she comments, 'because nobody actually cares about ideas, they care about who had the ideas. I wouldn't be able to make work if I change my name every time I made a piece.' In line with studies focusing on artistic labor, such as Rudi Laermans' *Moving Together* (2015) and Bojana Kunst's *Artist at Work* (2015a), the informant criticizes the fetishist gaze on art. However, where Laermans and Kunst combat aesthetic fetishism – which only looks at the artwork as a product – by focusing on art as work, the informant enhances that the emphasis on the artist's identity is a troublesome form of fetishization that advertises the artist as a genius or a unique brand. In this regard, an African-born informant, who has been living in Europe for somewhat twenty years, is currently struggling with figuring out how she feels comfortable branding herself. We conducted a Skype-interview while she was on a three-week residency, which she was invited to as part of a creative exchange lab on the one hand, but also as part of an 'African consortium' on the other. The African consortium consists of producers that promote work between African and American artists. The informant noted that the three African-born artists participating the creative exchange lab, including herself, were at times isolated from the group to participate in the (networking) meetings of the African consortium. In the interview during the residency, my informant observes that many artists with African roots seem to play out their 'blackness' in order to receive support and sell their work. However, she expresses her concern in our talk and remains hesitant about deploying her identity in that manner to sell her artwork. She explains: 'I'm at the cusp of really deciding how I want to do it,

¹⁶ My own translation from the original Dutch: 'Een choreograaf die zijn kansen op subsidies van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap wil verhogen, kan dus maar beter trouw blijven aan zijn eigen artistieke identiteit - al mag die niet te veel afwijken van wat in het veld aanwezig is, maar in zijn referentie aan de dans, moet hij origineel blijven en niet kopiëren' (Hesters 2004, 48).

because I feel like: what is valid? Should I present myself as an African? Or should I present myself as European?' She continues our conversation explaining how her peer revealed to her that she has become good at selling herself to producers, because she has learned how to talk to them. However, her peer enhanced that even though she is grateful for the support, she wonders if she is supported exactly because she is black and African-European. My informant's account reveals that she does not know how she feels about black people playing out this background in order to sell themselves?¹⁷ There is an interesting dialectic at play: artists promote and sell themselves in fashionable terms formulated by (the expectations of) others. Since my informant has no support herself, she questions if she should use this as a tactic. However, questions about identity are always very personal to her and she does not want it to conflate with her artwork: 'being colored in Europe has impacted my life', she adds, 'because I'm not black enough, but I'm not white'. She has worked as a dancer for many established choreographers and noticed that 'after a while, you just become a dancer'. However, now that she focuses more on making her own work, these questions on identity step to the forefront:

I question what is valid in terms of my work. I have experience where I performed my work in Africa and people tell me it's too Eurocentric or producers say it's too personal. Or they love it but they say it's not for the audience. So, I'm questioning what kind of work I want to make in this sense. The minute I take somebody else into my work, then the piece becomes "white" or Eurocentric, but, if I put myself in the work alone - that's what everybody used to want, because I'm African... So, I'm trying to figure out how I'm trying to sell myself.

During my fieldwork, another informant recounts a case where he felt that he was branded in a way that he was not comfortable with, even though he had given his consent initially. In hindsight, the publicity of the new creation seemed to be branding him and not his piece, which was problematic because it concerned a collaborative piece. The production house had taken a quote from a newspaper about his identity as an artist, with the purpose of attracting a different audience. Even though my informant feels that their tactic was effective in attracting a new public, he disapproves how he was labeled as a maker, to the extent that people would come with stereotypical expectations about him as an artist, obstructing the potential of the work, which was first and foremost a collaborative effort.

In other words, the problem of playing out unique selling points relates to the uncomfortable issue of selling out. As I previously noted, an informant points out that

¹⁷ In a related vein, several informants have mentioned the struggle with the popular branding trends such as *queer artists* and *feminist work* to the extent that in so many cases these notions are simply meaningless buzzwords with the purpose of self-marketing. However, it should be noted that skin color is always visible and queerness or feminism not per se.

while she was in school, she would ‘easily criticize people who would be talking to programmers all the time’, especially when they would try to sell their work even before they would start making it. However, soon after she graduated, she realized she had to play along that game or she would not make it as a professional artist. In her words: ‘but then I come into the world and I have to eat tomorrow and I don’t want to be working in a café for ten hours a day and then do my art in the evening.’ Still, she admits, she cannot shake the feeling of being a sell-out, talking more often to programmers than to fellow artists. As another example, one of my informants recently started making her own work in addition to performing in the work of others. In one of our interviews, I inquire into her behavior in the foyer after a show that she danced for someone else. In response, she admits she now seems to talk to programmers more frequently. She comments:

As a dancer, in the past, I would have said “hello” to them, but I am one of the troop and in the end, I end up with the other dancers, with your group, with your colleagues. Now, it is more of an intention for me to talk with programmers, to really have contact with them. I even made business cards.

She enhances that it is certainly not evident to do so when you are in fact in the foyer to represent someone else’s work. She does not enjoy feeling like an invader, instead she prefers to talk about the performance the programmer just experienced. She will not force a conversation about her own work, because it is too artificial to do so. Instead, she reveals, she will simply introduce herself and mention she is also making her own work: ‘if a question pops up about my own work, then I will surely grab that opportunity. But I will not force it, because that would feel odd.’

The importance of being ‘seen in the scene’ (2009, 15), as Pascal Gielen puts it, is not diminished by digital technologies as face-to-face contact still appears to be the most effective tactic for self-promotion within my empirical study. If an artist for one reason or another is not able to be seen on stage, they can remain visible through social performance, such as chatting to peers and programmers in the foyer. Remaining ‘seen in the scene’ physically (and not merely virtually) proves to be especially effective when trying to sell your work as a new maker as face-to-face meetings with programmers establish a relation of trust. At the start of her first creation, an informant was taken aback about the fact that none of the programmers she contacted would answer her email asking for a meeting to talk about her work. She found it quite disrespectful, but decided to wait a week before she would send a reminder. At first, she thought it was frustrating that another week had passed and she still had not received any replies. She soon learned that it was simply the way the scene operates. She resigned herself to the slow process of *courtship* and persisted. Now that she managed to have several meetings and personal conversations, she notices that she receives responses more rapidly, adding that ‘sometimes the answer is negative, sometimes positive, but at least it generates a form of

communication'.¹⁸ Indeed, all of my informants deplore that many programmers are reluctant to respond to emails of any kind. While this is no doubt a quite common course of events in other fields as well, I want to stress the extent of unanswered emails brought up during my fieldwork and the accompanying frustration prevalent among my informants, which brings me back to the aforementioned issue at the mesolevel: programmers fail to translate their acknowledgement of how artists work into practice. In my fieldnotes, I noted accordingly:

He tells me a story about his dancer-friend who once got a business card from a programmer who said literally “and I do reply emails”, which in the end he didn’t do. “It feels like artists are not being taken seriously. They could at least reply shortly that they’re not interested”, he says. “There’s not a lot of care”.

As another example, one informant had been trying to reach out to a programmer about her new project in the period of my fieldwork, but was repeatedly left unanswered. The programmer finally responded to an email only after she had explicitly introduced herself as one of the dancers from a piece that recently featured in his venue, dropping the choreographer’s name. Consequently, this example demonstrates the criticized nonresponse of programmers and reveals simultaneously how being ‘seen in the scene’ remains crucial for gaining ground.

Additionally, my informant’s testimony exposes that, especially as a new maker, also namedropping has proved to be a helpful tactic, perhaps not necessarily for selling a work, but for arranging meetings and receiving residencies. In fact, namedropping is related to symbolic, social and professional capital: a new maker may acquire recognition through benefitting from the reputation of the people or institutions they have worked with or for. These reputable people or institutions, as Bourdieu puts it, invest their prestige ‘acting as a “symbolic banker” who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated’ (1993, 77). In that respect, the crediting and facilitating role of the Brussels-based international dance school P.A.R.T.S. may not be underestimated. Since 1995, the contemporary dance school founded by renowned choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker has generated a network of ex-students and teachers in Brussels, which facilitates one’s inclusion in the contemporary dance scene. As also Hesters points out, the school’s aura spills over onto its ex-students and those who have studied at P.A.R.T.S. are automatically included in the P.A.R.T.S.-network (2004, 108). Pragmatically, this means that they have a better access to various kinds of resources and job opportunities. For example, P.A.R.T.S.-graduates can enjoy the advantage of having already performed

¹⁸ To the extent that some informants reveal to undertake (or have undertaken in the past) travels abroad just for the purpose of networking, i.e. introducing oneself in meetings with programmers. In my view, this is especially troubling in an age of environmental issues and with accessible forms of alternative, virtual meeting opportunities.

in most of the important art centers in Flanders (and in the past also in Europe) in a pedagogical context, thus having familiarized themselves with the centers and their staff. In Berlin, Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz (HZT), the contemporary dance school founded as a pilot project with the support of Tanzplan Deutschland, an initiative from the Kulturstiftung des Bundes, acts as a symbolic banker probably to a slightly lesser degree than P.A.R.T.S.¹⁹ Since 2006, the school has generated a relatively small network of ex-students in Berlin, which may facilitate the inclusion in the contemporary dance scene. In this regard, Berlin-based informants speak about 'HZT-inbreed' and have indicated that, for example, subsidy chances rise significantly when an applicant has attended HZT or that HZT-alumni have free access to HZT-studios for rehearsals. In her study, Hesters points out that the reputation of a choreographer (or a school) opens doors, but may well close doors too: social, professional and symbolic capital also generate certain expectations, which may not always work in one's advantage. In Hesters' research (2004), which dates back over a decade ago, it has become clear that a past in one of the large dance companies in Brussels offers the best guarantees for the development of a dance career and the accumulation of legitimate capital. She points out that social capital can be found in the circuit of both projects and companies, while professional capital is mainly acquired in the larger companies that function as 'symbolic bankers'. In my fieldwork, however, especially working for reputed artists in the gallery and performance art world has proven to be effective in furthering one's career path rather than having been part of an established dance company. As an informant recounts:

Not only was it great to work for three or four months – that's also how I made a lot of the last money that made it possible for me to launch my move to Europe [...], but this is also about visibility and caliber, where working with an artist with a very strong famous name becomes an important thing. And I think a lot of these names that show up in museums, just have more cachet. They speak more loudly on your résumé and people know when you do these kinds of things. More, I think more so, maybe because they're less frequent or something, that it becomes a stronger calling card. I get much more name recognition from the work I've done in museums than from the work I've done in theatre. [...]. I haven't thought that much about it, but I know it's been good for me [laughs] and I've never had performance jobs that gave me the sense of stability, besides these exhibition-based works.

Perhaps one of the explanations for why performance artists engaged in live exhibitions and gallery work seem to hold more resonance, is because that type of work

¹⁹ Lesser because the initiative is newer and they take less students.

reconsolidates the resources and creates a longer block of locality and exposure as these exhibitions generally run for a longer period of time?²⁰

All in all, most informants seem to be aware of their symbolic bankers and also play out their accumulated capital in their chase after money and support. However, as an informant points out, 'you feel a little bit like you're trying to convince everybody and find their approval'. Self-promotion and promoting one's work have become conflated in the performing arts sector. In line with Alice Marwick's findings, promotion – especially digital promotion – seems to have much more to do with marketing the self rather than with informing the network or the public. In her book *Status Update* (2015), she studies how access to and participation in social media involves tactical self-promotion, which is not so much about making information public but rather about publicizing it. Several informants indicated that they are sick and tired of sending 'emails into a void', to use another folk term. Moreover, an informant comments that if programmers do reply at all, she is fed up with hearing the same excuses, such as the fact that they are too busy and they will get back to it later. She believes it is their job to communicate with artists and she feels currently that any dialogue is lacking. Many informants point out that especially in the diffusion of their work, they would rather have someone else to take up that task. However, as an informant indicates, 'it seems to be more effective when the email comes from me personally', which demonstrates that personal connections remain significant assets in the reputation economy.

Still, if all this 'sending emails into the void' is so time-consuming, one may wonder why people do not simply call and get somebody on the line? While that may seem more efficient and effective at first glance, an informant points out that that is in fact not true because mailing is more efficient as a first introduction because it gives rise to google and consult a CV, a dossier, or videos, etc. However, setting up such an introductory mail should be considered tactically. An informant explains how she considers carefully which sentence would strike most attention and should come first, or whether she should add a picture in text or as an attachment or at all, because sometimes the number of megabytes does not allow the email to go through certain spam filters. Her account below demonstrates how she puzzles with setting up such an email to approach new programmers:

They are not going to open the attachment directly, so you have to think about it, how do you deal with that? And sometimes I revisit it and I think that is strategically not the best way, because they have no point of recognition or attraction. And that one sentence is beautiful, but it's the fifth sentence. They must have read so far before they open your attachment. So maybe I should start with that sentence and

²⁰ I did not probe my informants sufficiently in order to be able to answer this question, but it would certainly be an interesting hypothesis to start a new research from.

then put a photo in it. So that is new to me, that is something that I have never done before. And those are things that you also learn by doing: that best sentence must come first, so that they read on, that photo must be there in order to open that file...
I am a dancer and choreographer, this is not my job!

My informants use terms such as ‘persisting but not stalking’, ‘pushing through’ and ‘keep fighting’ to describe their email courtships with programmers. They claim to stay polite, but perseveringly and assertively so. The vocabulary employed by my informants reveals that self-promoting and chasing programmers is also connected to demonstrating resilience; to abide and to withstand their constant failure to respond, referrals and rejections.

5.3.2 ‘Weird extended courtships’

Firstly, I should note here that my description of the chase after programmers is a very asymmetric version of it and the whole picture actually requires the inclusion of the programmers’ voice. In his 2003 book on artistic selections in contemporary dance and visual arts, Pascal Gielen investigates how artists are commonly selected by venue programmers and festival curators. Through a qualitative study querying a fair number of respondents, among which many programmers, within the Flemish contemporary dance and visual arts scene, he has developed a model of four logics that clarifies on which ground these selections commonly occur. He distinguishes a logic of content from a logic of context, which may occur in a singular or collective regime, and concludes that artistic selections can rely on different logics at once and can take place within more than one regime (Gielen 2003, 226-227). In tendency, contemporary dance programmers generally seem to act according to the collective logic of (the Flemish) context, while visual arts curators mostly act within a singular regime to a much lesser extent within a Flemish context alone (Gielen 2003, 226). From a bottom-up perspective, contemporary dance artists could probably benefit from Gielen’s study by turning the acquired knowledge of these logics into branding and selling tactics. However, in addition, much can be learned looking at the micro-level: how do contemporary dance artists experience and perceive their ‘endless networking’ endeavors? The peculiar relationship contemporary dance artists seem to have with programmers, co-producers, artistic directors and the like is all about (net)working their way through the system, or in the words of my informants: ‘kind of stalking’, ‘making yourself visible’ and ‘insist on meetings’. These ‘weird extended courtships’, as an informant refers to the slow processes of chasing money, programmers and support in general, are not only essential when trying to sell a piece, but already much before an artist even starts to make a piece (when trying to get residencies and applying for subsidies). These processes go far beyond ‘sending emails into a void’. It concerns a slow, ongoing, dynamic and interactive process of networking, which is

acknowledged as part of the work as a contemporary dance artist by all informants. References to this process range from 'showing one's face' to 'cultivating relationships and seeing how many concrete things I can get out of it'. Networking, or maintaining courtships, is generally not popular among my informants, moreover, many additionally claim they are not very good at it, as exemplified by the following quote:

In general, it's not my strong side. It's something very exhausting for me, I don't really believe in it. I receive all these emails all the time and all these invitations on Facebook of meetings for artists to learn how to network and how to make contacts, and how to sell your piece, and how to explain why your work is... I'm so not interested in that and I'm so not interested in convincing somebody that they should see my work, which is also one of the reasons why I don't create so much now. I also don't feel so inspired to do it, because of that. Because 80% of the time you need to be busy with other things, which is very discouraging.

Correspondingly, the following quote reveals parallel thoughts on the time-consuming and unpleasant undertaking of maintaining courtships:

I am also trying to research, but it takes a lot of time, because you have to know which website to go to, you have to know who to talk to, you have to schmooze a lot, which drives me up the wall, because I don't know how to network myself.

Even though the informants are mostly not very fond of networking activities, they do feel as though they should convince themselves to do it more often as they notice that fellow dance artists who master networking skills tend to really benefit from it. Hence, several informants admitted they force themselves to stay after performances, to the extent that it almost feels like an obligation. It should be noted here that also these work activities come with a certain cost: first of all, even as an artist, you have to pay for every performance you attend – with the rare exception that you might be on the guest list for a show.²¹ Secondly, when an artist stays in the foyer for drinks after the show to do the networking part, this implies buying yourself and perhaps your new established contacts a drink. However, it is an expense my informants are happy to make, because it is exactly in these meeting locales 'where a deal is made, in the bar after the show'. To put it simply: social capital may be informally converted into economic and professional capital in common meeting places. Nonetheless, several informants would rather quietly go home after the show than rub elbows. In fact, many informants admit they experience difficulties in being direct in the communication towards a programmer on such

²¹ Indeed, several informants have pointed out that they tend to pay the majority of performance tickets out of pocket, because in recent years, invitations have become scarce. It should additionally be noted that even though for Berlin-based informants performance tickets may count as an expense on their tax declarations, for Brussels-based artists – who generally work with short employment contracts – this is not the case.

occasions. In fact, these locales are only where the ‘weird extended courtship’ is set in motion, as an informant observes: ‘of course, you can collect quite some phone numbers and email addresses in short-notice, but I think the work is after, when you have to reconnect and be like: I met you there and there and I wanted to send you this and this.’ Indeed, meeting programmers is more about presenting yourself, or even your brand, and not actually about the work you (want to) do. Enter: email. In order to start the dialogue about what an artist wants to work on and what kind of support the artist is looking for, the artist now needs to write his established contacts (as well as any contacts the artist has not been able to meet personally yet) in order to set up a meeting. It is this part of the courtship that is most frustrating for the artist, because – as all my informants agree – ‘you cannot contact anybody once, you don’t get any answers’. An informant enhances: ‘it’s got to be: you write an email, you wait three days, you write an email “did you get my mail?” “Can I call you?” “Can we meet?” It’s gotten worse than ever. It’s a fulltime job.’ Especially the Brussels-based informants express their frustration: there is consensus with regard to the nonresponse of programmers insofar that they understand that programmers probably receive countless similar emails on a daily basis and they just have to wait their turn. However, even with this in mind, reaching out repeatedly in ‘weird extended courtship’ is a time-consuming, frustrating and often unrewarding effort. One informant comments while sighing that ‘it’s just boring. It’s a joke almost. Here I go again: I’m going to spend hours throwing noise into a hole. It’s a joke, but I do it, because you have to’. Another enhances:

Most of the time people don’t respond to your damn emails, because of course they’re also getting emails from a lot of people, or you’re not like hot on the market or whatever. So, what I’m doing now, I’m just sending my video out to every Tom, Dick and Harry and if I get a response, it’s cool. But most of the time...

The informants are aware that they should remain polite and that they need to find a balance as to not engage in behavior on the edge of stalking, which could be compared to the endeavors of a door salesman. Accordingly, an informant recounts she has been knocking on doors for two years until some finally opened. Hence, ‘weird extended courtships’, as the informant who coined the term puts it, entail making slow progress in getting things going. He concludes after several pleasurable but ultimately unproductive meetings that it seems as though he needs to ‘just do the work myself and let the programmer come see it – which sounds a lot like New York-style to me’. With this conclusion, the informant uncovers a paradox, a vicious circle, that seems to reappear in several cases within my fieldwork: in order to sell a work, programmers would like to see the work first, however, an artist cannot show the work unless someone is willing to buy the work.

5.3.3 The programming paradoxes

Another tactic to remain 'seen in the scene' if you do not have a finished piece to show, is to invite peers and programmers to public or private try-outs and work-in-progress showings, partly for the sake of exposure. An informant who has applied this tactic comments that visibility is a fundamental currency: 'I need to show something this year [in my base city], because otherwise people are going to forget that I exist, especially now that I'm travelling so much.' However, it is challenging to show something without support, in terms of infrastructure and budget for paying everyone involved. A major paradox underlies the programming process, because programmers are often inclined to support or feature a creation in their program only after they have seen it live. Chasing programmers to sell a promise, or even a finished production, thus becomes a fruitless effort as the artists often find themselves in a vicious circle. Several informants have expressed their frustration, as proves the following statement: 'That's my practice, six hours a day, just emailing programmers who either don't answer or answer that they'll watch my video and get back to me. Or tell me: "when I can see the piece live?" And I'm like: "you can't, because no one has programmed it".' Another informant refers to this particular chase as a 'cat-and-mouse game, or a serpent biting its tail'. She understands the logic behind programmers not willing to blindly invest in people's work, but in the mean time she has three unfinished projects she wants to realize, for which she just needs a little more financial backing:

The last days I was very upset about it, because I was thinking it is so ridiculous that situation that I'm in. Like there is this kind of budding project, one is close to being in a piece-format and everyone wants to see it, but no one wants to give money. Or they don't give me money because other ones don't give me money.

This cat-and-mouse game is especially unnerving, when the artist is constantly encouraged by programmers who ask to see a trailer or teaser film of a production. Thereafter, artists get the sense of gaining ground, when asked for the full version of a recorded work. Nonetheless, as many of my informants testify, that is usually where progress is put on hold, either because that is the point where the back-and-forth communication stops, or a reply of the following nature comes next: 'But actually I need to see the work live because I can't experience it through the video'. One informant additionally comments that it 'is completely comprehensible':

Because it's a live performance that we're talking about. It's obvious that somebody wants to experience the work live before they program it, so of course that makes sense, but it also kind of deflects the sense of momentum that I thought we had where before she tells me that she just needed to see a video of it.

Eventually, it comes to down finding a programmer who is willing to take a risk, which is especially challenging when you have not yet established a name for yourself. This is, for example, the case of three informants who have been performing for many years, but are trying to sell their own work for the first time. For emerging artists, this process seems to be facilitated when they have a symbolic banker to back them up, for example, in the case of my informants coming from P.A.R.T.S., who carry the aura of the reputed school which gives programmers a better idea of what to expect and is something they can promote to their audience. Two beginning makers within my fieldwork had very different experiences in trying to sell their work. While one informant finds it very difficult to sell a concept another informant feels it is much easier to pitch a new creation than selling a finished production. The former informant acknowledges that it is for programmers difficult to decide which risks to take, especially with new makers. In times where budgets are curtailed, it is obvious that programmers are not inclined to take many risks. She believes she made the mistake of not starting out with a couple of solos, because people can see development in an artist's work which creates certain expectations. Additionally, there is much less risk involved in programming a solo, because the performance fee is much lower than for a group piece, as I discussed under "Survival Artists". However, the difference in my informants' experiences may be grounded in the backup of a symbolic banker: as a P.A.R.T.S.-graduate, the latter informant has managed to establish many connections already well before applying for subsidies. She was able to sell her new creation as a promise, because P.A.R.T.S.-graduates are recognized as promising artists by programmers as well as audiences, which reduces the budgetary risk.²² Nonetheless, my informant's testimony also reveals another explanation:

So I've been emailing people a lot about [my finished piece], again and again. I just email three times, not more, but three times. So I've been doing that and I'm like "okay, they don't answer". Then I email about the new piece and I write in the headline "new creation". Then I write a bit about the concept and I have a little brochure about it. Then I *always* get a response.'

Her statement above suggests that perhaps next to the benefit of having a symbolic banker at hand, applying ingenious communication tactics when reaching out to programmers can be effective, in this case, by explicitly putting the words 'new creation' in the headline.

²² At least until recently: the symbolic credit of P.A.R.T.S. seems to be slowly decreasing due to the revision of their Training Cycle, which now seems to focus on the dancing qualities of young students overlooking their choreographing potential, and the redefinition of the Research Cycle, which now has become completely separated from the (outflow of the) Training Cycle.

5.3.4 Communication tactics

I'm reading more emails, less theory

While I have extensively discussed several key issues related to personal branding and self-marketing in the context of the contemporary dance sector that follows the logics of the network-oriented and project-based work regime, I failed to clearly distinguish other promotional activities that consume an artist's time, especially the publicity related to a specific project. My informants have listed some of the most effective ways to promote one's work, such as maintaining a website (sometimes a different website for each project), sending out newsletters, posting – often self-edited – teaser films or trailers on Vimeo. The following excerpt from a logbook one informant kept during an entire production process illustrates the extent of publicity involved in the production:

[My collaborator] starts designing the flyers and posters together with the photographer and videographer. I give feedback. [...] The flyers and posters go to print. Lots of hassle with the printing company. They don't work on time, delay with the delivery. [...] I post pictures of the rehearsal on Facebook and I hope we can find someone extra. [...] Sunday [...], the ticketing plug-in of the website works now, the website is complete. [...] I update my promotion spreadsheet: all the addresses to leave flyers at. The press that is to contact. The list of radio shows. The magazine's deadlines. The names of special people. [...] The flyers are there. [My collaborator] and I start flyering, six hours on my bike cycling from theater to theater, bar to bar, places of interested, the circus school....

Reading through the logbook, I was astonished by the amount of time devoted to things other than art-making itself, which is something my informant seemed to be very much aware of herself as she observes in her logbook that 'in as much as I know that we need to promote ourselves in advance, well before the production even started, I worry about the fact that we will boast and brag about a dance piece that neither [my collaborator] nor I have created, yet'. Without support from a producer or production house, self-promotion and publicity are very time-consuming undertakings. As also an informant testifies when he refers to an email announcement he had sent out about an upcoming show and workshop:

It takes me so long to send something like that, because I'm very obsessive about getting it perfect. I mean, you received the email. Sure, it was very short, but that took me two-and-a-half hours. Also updating my bio and posting it on the different platforms where it's posted.

In the work logbooks as well as in the interviews 'checking, reading and sending emails' takes a prominent place in the daily schedule. When counting all matches for words with 'mail' as a stem using the NVivo Query Text Search, the fourteen informants within my

field study have mentioned 'mail*' 286 times in the interviews and 54 times in their logbooks.²³ Put otherwise: the stemmed words for 'mail*' take up 1.7% of the interview transcriptions and 3.04% of the logbook text (see *figure J* in Annex 5). At one point during my fieldwork, I asked my informants to count the emails they received and sent during one week. However, this turned out to be an impossible task. And informant comments: 'It was quite hard to count, because it's often a back-and-forth'. Additionally, due to the intermingling of private and work emails, some email traffic was difficult to categorize under either. For example, an informant asked if invitations to other people's work count as work emails? Additionally, the number of sent and received emails seems to vary extremely from week to week, also depending on whether or not the informant was on tour or intensely involved in rehearsals. I therefore did not find this a viable reference and relied mainly on my informants' accounts on how they experience this computer work on a daily basis. Accordingly, I was able to probe my respondents when we went through their work logbooks during the open interviews.

In what follows, I will discuss several communication tactics my fieldwork has uncovered. The first and perhaps most important tactic I distinguish is related to timing. Several informants reveal that they have learned to tactically time their Facebook posts as well as their emails and phone calls to programmers. Many observe that they can never seem to reach anyone, because programmers always appear to be occupied, in particular around the time when subsidy results are out or when the seasonal program brochures are due. For example, one informant was happy she had finally reached a particular programmer, but as the decisions on structural subsidies had come out that day, the programmer was aggravated and disregarded her. She soon realized her timing had been bad. She has now learned that good timing to reach a programmer could for example be right before the summer, when program brochure and application deadlines have been met and the season is almost over. Yet, it should be noted that when dealing with 'projective temporality' (Kunst 2015a) timing is crucial: if you cannot make an appointment, your project is continually suspended. Accordingly, an informant explained that she could not make it to an appointment due to a last-minute job, however as the programmer was fully booked until she would be abroad for work, she had to wait months to meet with him personally. Timing may also be crucial in sending specific emails or invitations, as an informant reveals:

They [programmers] got 5,000 other mails the same day... What's good sometimes is that I don't sleep very early, so I'll send it right before I go to bed, knowing that

²³ It should be noted that not all informants provided a logbook in a Word or PDF document, six had (photographs of) written logbooks which I could not include in the query.

it's going to be on the top of the list when they come in in the morning. Stuff like this, you start making strategies because it's crazy.

Soon after revealing this emailing tactic, he admits to study the 'science of posting on Facebook', meaning that he is 'preparing posts on Facebook, doing lots of research on when is a good moment to post, when are people at home'. He explains further that he started to notice that when you administer a Facebook page, much information becomes accessible through algorithms on, for example, how many people your post has reached. Hence, studying the information available, he discovered the best timings for posting publicity on his Facebook page ('this would be better if I posted it on a Monday evening at this time'). Virtual exposure, or being seen in the digital scene, has proven to be beneficial for this informant, as he reveals to have received many commissions based on his videos posted on his Vimeo page (which had 1,500 followers around the time we spoke). He perceives managing visual promo in that manner as a tactic to 'take the power back from producers in [his] own career by being [his] own publicist'. However, promoting oneself and one's events on social media does not always come easy, as the following informant describes:

It's not so easy, choosing pictures for regular posting. Because there are people that are very good at it: they daily have a range of works already in a way of how to frame this for Facebook. [...] But, do you present something from the rehearsals for example? Or something around the work? Or do you present a picture of the work saying "soon it's going to happen". Because for sure there are people that, for example, present like a chain of pictures, let's say, and the last sentence around the work, on a regular basis, which do keep people more attentive on the thing. The big enterprises have people that do only this: thinking about what would be a strategy? [...] For this, I'm also too lazy in a way, or not really capable of spending much time or doing it like a master plan. But if you would really go into it, to really think about that, because it's algorithms. Anyway, it's an exciting topic, because I think also the amount of likes has to do with the algorithms, so I think people who post more also get more presence and visibility and therefore more likes and so on...

Indeed, as the outline above reveals, successful visual promotion requires time and tactics on when and what to post and how to frame a post. However, the effect of visual promotion should not be underestimated: in many cases, a picture seems to hold more resonance than the written word. In that regard, an informant explains why she invested her time and money in an eye-catching press dossier, because handing programmers a dossier shows them that there is a genuine work effort behind a tangible thing, which – she hopes – makes it more difficult to discount too quickly. For that same reason, she invested in business cards as a communication tactic: namely, having something physical at hand as a reminder, including her contact data, for the sake of visual promotion and keeping the dialogue going.

Another related communication tactic is concerned with selecting and inviting people to a showing or a show. Inviting programmers to tryouts and premieres – which is *an sich* a challenging task because the timing to do so overlaps with the final and most intensive weeks of the creative process – is, again, a very time-consuming task. My informant illustrates this as a tactical selection process:

I have this old Hotmail-account and I'm very bad with technical stuff. I have, I don't know, 1,500 email addresses, but some of them are old. So it's also about the selection: who is really somewhere else and there's no need to invite them? But also, it's really like picking and sending. Somehow, I can only send twenty or thirty mails, so I have to do it again and again and again. So this is really why it's eating a lot of time. Then it's also about personal invitation, to sometimes remember who did you meet in that occasion?

Another informant equally partakes in – in her words - 'strategic inviting':

I knew that the person invited would not come but wanted to be kept informed. [...] It's a matter of courtesy, like I value you, I would like you to be here, I know that you won't be here, but I would like you to know that I want to maintain that business relationship. And I want you to know that I'm busy with what we talked about when we met.

However, this slow and often frustrating process of reaching out to 'buyers' may block the creative work. After having gone through a two-year process of 'weird extended courtships' chasing funding and programmers, no one she had contacted made it to the show. Therefore, my informant's piece has burnt out right after its premiere.

5.3.5 Sharks and Vultures

In the contemporary dance scene, the social realm is thus fundamental for distributing jobs as well as sustaining one's own projects. Crucial in the scene's functioning is that everybody informs everybody about who will be doing what in the near future, thereby contributing to a shared database of job opportunities or available performers. Interestingly, while the most common way to acquire a contemporary dance job in the past involved auditions, this does not seem to be true anymore today. In one of my informants' experiences, much of the work he has come across was due to being in the right place at the right time. In his case, auditions have only proven valuable for finding work in an indirect manner: he has heard and overheard about other job opportunities while auditioning for jobs he did not get. Even though he has almost never managed to get the job he was auditioning for, he reveals that he has received several jobs indirectly. His words illustrate the social dynamics at play when grabbing job opportunities:

I just hear them talking about it and I don't ask any questions because I don't want to seem like a vulture. But this has happened before, where I just hear in private talking and I end up working for them. [...] I'm a shark and I'm like "oh my gosh, here's an opportunity that I want to be a part of, how do I get to be a part of this?" You know, just my relationship with auditions is kind of not one of high expectations, but really about getting a list of opportunities that are floating around and kind of just being out there and talking to people and hanging out with friends and you hearing these things...

However, he stresses that he is aware that he has to be careful about using this tactic of the weak, because when repeatedly grabbing opportunities in this manner, one quickly gains the rather undesirable reputation of being 'a shark' or 'a vulture':

Sometimes, you have to be proactive, and other times, you just need to listen and be receptive, because you can't push too hard on these things. You don't want to be seen as a shark. But, that is a little bit what it is: you have to be cool about it and balanced, and I think, ultimately, be interested and engaged in following your direction, rather than seeming a bit desperate, scared and a panicking person.

Many of my informants spoke similarly about advancing themselves through social engagement, which proves that networking is not to be underestimated in the project-based work regime. All my informants have provided several examples of how they have acquired residencies, collaborations, dance jobs, or performance dates among other things via personal connections: 'it's just funny, how it really is about jobs circling'. In a profession in which the usual indicators for qualifications and skill, such as educational degrees, are not as operative as in other professions, an artist's social network, reputation, and recognition by peers, become extremely valuable for an artist's employability. As Menger puts it: 'since the fastest and most economical tool for evaluating skills is the exchange of information through personal networks, the trust an artist inspires in his employers or in colleagues willing to recommend him will become a reputation collectively guaranteed by the members of the constituted network' (2014, 137-138). In line with Menger's logic, recommendations from fellow artists can further an artist's career, even if not available for the specific job the artist is recommended for. One of my informants recounts that his peer recommended him when she had to decline a job while she was aware that he would not be able to take the job either as they were involved in the same project at the time. He explains how he appreciated the gesture, saying that at least now 'it's in the ether'.

Most of the examples in this section reveal that many modes of immaterial labor are in fact of a relational nature, which is something also Paolo Virno has pointed out (2004, 85). Hence, these findings demonstrate that it is not merely about being seen in the scene, they also exemplify what Sergio Bologna (2006) defined as relational labor, when discussing how those working in precarious conditions, often as self-employed, are

obliged to look for new market opportunities and to make these productive through their simultaneous participation in both local and global networks. As I briefly noted in the introduction to this book, the initiation and cultivation of relations is one of the resources characterizing precarious activities, since social relationships function as the essential condition for the selling of own products or services (Bologna 2006, 13; Pewny 2011a, 69). I follow Katharina Pewny when she claims that Bologna's ideas are therefore very relevant for understanding the situation of precarious workers in the performing arts, since their careers primarily consist of this type of labor: e.g. the mediation of contact persons in institutions (networking) and the production of ideas or concepts that often do not bring immediate gains in the economic sense (Pewny 2011a, 69). Some informants explicitly mention that a meeting seems to be successful exactly when they did not specifically ask for anything. However, these meetings are 'weird extended courtships' as progress may take years. An informant explains that it first takes a while to 'figure out a groove' in terms of networking, adding: 'I have never been really good at talking to producers or I didn't do it in the right way. I offended people, or they thought I was too needy, too pushy.' An informant admits he does sometimes ask for things, but he does it sparingly and only when he has established a social relationship with a choreographer. He defines this relationship as having had at least a drink or personal conversation before he comes to a point where he could possibly ask for a job, or show interest in a certain job.

Hence, the social functioning of a dance scene, demonstrated by the qualitative findings above, confirms Elisabeth Currid's empirically underpinned conclusion on the New York creative scene at the beginning of the new century that 'it is the social clustering that may matter the most' as it 'propels the innovation and dispersing of new knowledge' (2007a, 110-111). As also Currid recognizes herself, her findings have implications for other locales and knowledge-based industries. Within the field of contemporary dance, the scenes in Brussels and Berlin act as such a 'social production system' characterized by hypersocialization, where 'the social is an important production system for disseminating ideas, valorizing goods and services, and distributing jobs' (Currid 2007a, 110-111).²⁴ Not only do cultural producers rely heavily on their social lives to advance their careers and generate value for their goods, they also cross-fertilize by collaborating and validate other people's work by 'peer reviewing' it (Currid 2007a, 110-111). Following Currid, I apply the notion of peer review as borrowed from academics, to

²⁴ Interestingly, the clustered production system formed by social mechanisms in the art and culture sector, as Currid reveals, in fact supports the positive answer to the question whether culture is worth funding. As her study shows, in the context of gentrification processes for example, such a clustered production system informed by social mechanisms is certainly meaningful for urban economy (especially in terms of urban planning, economic development, and policymaking based on the understanding of the workings of art and culture as a production system).

refer to the activities of peers, fellow artists as well as other players in the field, that valorize the work processes and artistic products within the contemporary dance scene. Currid equally uses the term referring to how cultural producers of all types evaluate each other's products informally, outside of the formal networking system. As an informant testifies to be part of this 'social production system' characterized by hypersocialization:

So much of the work I do, and also the way that I come across the work that I do, is really driven by social relationship. Cultivating the opportunities and how to generate a full calendar: a lot of it comes from uncovering connections, affinities and relationships with people and their work.

In the context of chasing programmers, the social dynamics at play within the 'weird extended courtships' with programmers in particular – be it of residency programs or performance venues – proves to be fundamental in advancing contemporary dance artists' careers. Programmers are gatekeepers who control and provide the artists' access to support, in terms of infrastructure and production budget. Needless to say that the informality of this type of social production system does not come without threats. As also Currid observes, the power and subjective nature of the social mechanisms at play, may corrupt the creative process. One of her interviewees noted that 'the pressure to please gatekeepers sometimes tainted creativity, creating a tension between what the artist wanted to work on and what would please the gatekeeper' (Currid 2007a, 8).

5.4 Chasing papers

I understand we have it good here, but I also don't want us to be lazy with it. It's a little bit difficult here and a little bit inefficient and bureaucracy and politics are always present as in a negotiation of how we share time and space together.

5.4.1 **Bureaucrazy: freelancing systems in comparison**

In terms of social security, Belgium and Germany have quite distinctive freelancing systems in the independent arts sector. In Belgium, artists commonly work with short employment contracts, whereas artists in Germany generally work self-employed. Unlike in the liberal professions, such as architects, lawyers, or journalists, regulations for minimum standard fees do not exist for performing artists in Germany. The delegation meeting of the Bundesverband Freie Darstellende Künste (German Association of

Independent Performing Arts), which includes representatives from all sixteen federal states, unanimously adopted a declaration and recommendation for a minimum standard fee for freelance performing artists (in theater and dance) at their meeting in Hamburg on October 14, 2015. However, it must be stressed that this concerns a recommendation, or a guideline, rather than a legal obligation. LAFT – Landesverband Freie Darstellende Künste Berlin e.V. (Berlin State Association for the Independent Performing Arts e.V.) – posted this recommendation on their website, clarifying on which basis the minimum standard fee was calculated. In Berlin, this message is shown at the end of each funding application form. Although this started in Berlin, the Bundesverband Freie Darstellende Künste now also recommends this for the other federal states, as the recommended fee has recently been increased. At the time of administering the survey in 2016, the association stated the following:

In the preparation of subsidy applications for both public and private funding at state and federal level, LAFT Berlin recommends the calculation of fees on the basis of a minimum standard fee. This should amount to 2,000 euros gross (for artists insured through the KSK), 2,500 euros gross (for artists not insured through the KSK) per month for full employment. In addition to the rehearsal and presentation period, the LAFT recommends taking into account research as well as preparation and follow-up times. (LAFT Berlin 2015, accessed November 1, 2016)²⁵

The recommended minimum is based on the qualification of the freelance artist's activities according to the minimum wage of the nationwide standard contract for performing arts (Normalvertrag Bühne, in short: NV Bühne) for commonly long-term employees of theaters with public funding that belong to the Deutscher Bühnenverein (the German Stage Association). At the time of calculating the suggested minimum standard fee, the NV Bühne minimum wage amounted to a monthly 1,600 euros (gross for employees), which is valid for a range of professions within the field. However, since the remuneration of freelance artists is not an employment relationship (including the employer's social contributions) and payment is not on a long-term basis, the additional costs for insurance and expenses as well as the necessary preparation and follow-up of an

²⁵ It should be pointed out that these numbers have been increased on June 1, 2017. Quotation translated from the original German: 'Bei der Erstellung von Förderanträgen sowohl bei öffentlichen wie auch privaten Förderern auf Landes- und Bundesebene empfiehlt der LAFT Berlin die Berechnung von Honoraren auf Basis einer Honoraruntergrenze. Diese sollte 2000,00 Euro Brutto (für Theaterschaffende, die über die KSK versichert sind), 2500,00 Euro Brutto (für Theaterschaffende, die nicht über die KSK versichert sind), pro Monat bei Vollbeschäftigung betragen. Der LAFT empfiehlt neben des Proben-, und Vorstellungszeitraums auch Recherche sowie Vor- und Nachbereitungszeiten zu Berücksichtigen' (LAFT Berlin 2015, accessed November 1, 2016).

artistic project were taken into account within the fee recommendation.²⁶ For project-based workers, the fee base is calculated according to the length of the collaboration. Starting from a 40-hour working week in full-time engagement, an hourly rate of 12.50 euros gross (for KSK-members) or 15.60 euros gross (for non-KSK-members) was recommended at the time of my fieldwork. However, it seems unreasonable to translate these fees into hourly fees for short-term freelance engagement, as many work-related activities – such as networking, preparation, travel, research, and practice – are difficult to calculate in hours, while it is rather the effort that should be taken into account. As the minimum wage according to the NV Bühne has been increasing since its implementation – since January 1, 2017, it amounts up to 1,850 euros gross (1,765 euros in 2016) – the suggested minimum fee by LAFT therefore ought to be adapted accordingly. The recommended minimum fees have indeed been reconsidered for the first time and as from June 1, 2017 LAFT Berlin recommends an increase of the fee to 2,300 euros per month for freelance artists with insurance obligation through the KSK and to 2,660 euros per month for freelance artists for whom social security is not possible through the KSK.

In comparison, in the Flemish and Brussels-Capital Region in Belgium, it is a legal liability for employers to follow the official wage scales of the Collective Labor Agreement for Performing Arts (hereafter referred to as the CLA for Performing Arts).²⁷ The minimum wage scales are always determined per sector. The CLA for Performing Arts acknowledges the project-based and short-term nature of the work through offering adapted wage scales for employment contracts less than four months. The gross minimum wages for contracts shorter than four months are a bit higher as they include legal benefits, which the long-term employed receive throughout the year. In the performing arts sector in Belgium, the term freelance work thus relates to project work on the basis of short-term employment contracts with employers. Most artists who work autonomously manage their short employment contracts via alternative management bureaus (e.g. Caravan Production), workspaces (e.g. Pianofabriek), or pay roll agencies

²⁶ However, the recommendation by LAFT does not mention time for training, research or networking (understood as the acquisition of further projects or residencies). It is important to also take into account that there are always periods between residencies or rehearsal times within a project that are usually not paid, even if people continue working on the project on another level. Examples are travel days, days abroad with no scheduled rehearsals, Skype-meetings, etc. Within the context of employment, these periods are usually covered. In this respect, the recommended standard fee still seems rather low.

²⁷ The website of the Sociaal Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten (the Performing Arts Social Fund: podiumkunsten.be) offers the latest updates of the wage scales within the CLA Performing Arts. It should be noted that it is therefore not mandatory to follow these wage scales in French Community of Belgium. An informant who is also working in the French-speaking part in Belgium, explains that conditions are more precarious there: she never gets paid travel days when working for the French side, nor do they pay her according to certain minimum wage scales and seniority (such as the CLA on the Flemish side).

(e.g. SMartBE). By contrast, artists working under the self-employed status are rare in Flanders and Brussels, although this can occur among stage, sound and light technicians in the arts.

Theoretically, all performing artists and creators belong to salary group A of the wages scales; however, wage scale C always counts as a minimum scale for the employees with a job description under group A working for employers receiving a low working subsidy. I therefore use wage scale C when referring to the minimum income.²⁸ Particularly the obligation to pay an employee according to seniority significantly contributes to the recognition of an artist's work in the form of a pay raise. At the time of administering the Brussels survey in 2015, a career starter received a minimum of 1,766.25 euros gross, according to the minimum wage scales for employees with an employment contract of four months or more. After five years of working experience the income increases with about 8% and with 28% after 15 years. Interestingly, when I point out to an informant that the wage scales are actually minimum wage scales, she comments: 'when we do receive the right wage according to our seniority, we think we're getting the maximum!' It merits mention that the seniority steps stop after 28 years, which seems to affirm the short duration of a career in the performing arts. Furthermore, in the Flemish and Brussels-Capital Region, artists build up proper contracts according to the CLA wage scales, but employers can still easily use these wage scales in their advantage. For example, in a project-oriented work regime dominated by short-employment contracts, different paths can be taken in order to calculate the number of years of work experience. Either an employer adds up all short contracts – which is rather disadvantageous for the employed dance artist – or the employer simply calculates in calendar years – which is, besides being more advantageous, just a matter of fairness since work experience in the arts can also enhance when one is not under contract. It should be noted that the benefit of seniority is typically connected to the years of work experience for the same employer or organization. Usually a higher salary according to fixed wage scales is linked to a higher seniority, but other benefits are also possible, such as receiving more holidays. It is needless to say that in the entrepreneurial, project-based work regime income is not inclined to grow automatically with age. The mere fact that LAFT recommends a minimum standard artist fee in Berlin regardless of age or work experience proves that the notion of seniority has become redundant and therefore a zombie concept.

Additionally, both Belgium and Germany have established interesting schemes that specifically support artists. The artist status in Belgium, which I outlined earlier as a form of indirect and personal funding, enables the application of the employee status in a freelance work regime; the coverage of periods of non-employment through steady

²⁸ See Annex 6 for more details on the wage scales as they were at the time of administering the survey in Brussels in 2015.

unemployment allowances is the most important benefit of this regime, since it creates a situation of stable income between short-term contracts. This kind of safety net is crucial, especially since most artists keep on practicing their profession in a situation of non-employment. However, as I pointed out, only half of the respondents in Brussels have access to this status. In comparison, self-employed artists in Berlin can apply for membership at the Künstlersozialkasse (further referred to as KSK), which coordinates the transfer of contributions for its members to the health insurance of the members' choice and to statutory pension and long-term care insurances. With the implementation of the Artist's Social Insurance Act (KSVG, or Künstlersozialversicherungsgesetz) in 1983, it ensures that independent artists and publicists enjoy similar protection in statutory social insurance as employees. The members only have to pay half of the contributions due and the KSK covers the other half from a federal subsidy (20%) and social contributions from businesses (30%) that use art and publicity. The monthly contribution paid by an artist or publicist to the KSK depends on the amount of income from work activities. If this is under the marginal limit of 3,900 euros annually and the member is not a career starter, the artist or publicist cannot make use of the KSK. If an independent artist or publicist does not achieve at least a prospective annual income higher than the statutory limit, they are free from insurance obligations in terms of statutory health, long-term care or pension insurance. The state has provided for special protection for those who are beginning to develop their career: under the KSVG, starters are also insured for the statutory pension, the health insurance and the long-term care insurance, even if they are not expected to exceed the required minimum income. The first three years after the first recording of an independent artistic or publishing activity are considered as the start of the profession. The state funds self-employed (freelance) artists and publicists with artist social insurance, because this occupational group is usually more confronted with insecurity than other self-employed workers. As the website points out, this is not only a socio-political but also a cultural-political achievement: with this arrangement, the creative task of artists and publicists is recognized as important to society (Künstlersozialkasse 2018, accessed March 26, 2018).

The expected work income to be reported to the KSK is the basis for calculating the monthly contributions to the statutory pension, health and care insurance.²⁹ This income corresponds to the profit from the self-employed artist's or publicist's income as determined by the general rules for the determination of income tax in the income tax law. Since the health insurance service is in fact not dependent on the amount of contribution by the insured person, but is equal for everybody, artists may tend to report a lower income to the KSK in order to save on insurance costs. This might happen despite of the fact that a higher contribution to the pension insurance, which leads to a higher

²⁹ Minimum and maximum contributions exist. For details on the calculations, consult Annex 2.

pension, would benefit them and prevent poverty amongst the elderly. In comparison, as the calculations in Annex 2 reveal, a self-employed artist who is registered at the KSK and declares 1,500 euros per month, pays 109.50 euros for health insurance, whereas someone who is not registered at the KSK would pay 391.59 euros (with children) or 397.17 euros (without) per month. In this case, the KSK-insured person has to pay less than one-third of what the regular self-employed person has to pay. Lastly, it should be noted that self-employed artists and publicists are discharged from paying health insurance on what they earn as freelancer if they combine self-employment with employment that provides more than half of the total income. Therefore, it should be stressed that this example is valid for self-employed artists and publicists who do not also work as employees or who do not earn more when employed.

As my survey findings reveal, one-fifth of the survey respondents in Berlin are not registered at the KSK, of which the majority do not tend to have pension insurance at all. The KSK may reduce the high costs in social security associated with self-employment in Germany, yet this system does not reduce socio-economic precarity in a significant way (as opposed to the Belgian artist status system, which provides what I have termed *flexicurity*). For example, for self-employed artists and publicists, who are compulsorily insured according to the KSVG, the entitlement to sick pay (*Krankengeld*) is provided starting from the seventh week of incapacity to work. For the first six weeks of work incapability, a self-employed person cannot be paid an allowance. However, the period between the start of incapability and the claim to benefits (from the seventh week) is often difficult to bridge for many self-employed artists. Therefore, in addition to this basic requirement, the state has opened a possibility for the self-employed to achieve an earlier start of the payment of sick pay in the event of work incapability. For this purpose, the statutory health insurance funds provide the option of arranging these entitlements on the condition of additional payments. These extra contributions are payable directly to the health insurance company and cannot be arranged through the KSK. To be entitled to early sick pay, the independent artist or publicist needs to fulfill an extra direct payment to the health insurance, without KSK contributing to this. This merits mention as contemporary dance artists are highly dependent on their bodies and injuries may prevent them from paid jobs for several weeks. As another example, unlike the Belgian artist status, members of the KSK are not entitled to unemployment benefits between their work contracts. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, performing artists in Belgium with access to this status use their customized unemployment allowances as alternative sources of income between their short-employment contracts. In Germany, the KSK does not offer such benefit for performing artists, however, they could possibly apply for the German living wage. Unemployment Benefit II (ALG II), also known as the Hartz IV (or the fourth law for modern services on the labor market), is a basic service for jobseekers that is provided by the municipal job centers in Germany. An applicant seeking assistance from ALG II needs to be capable of working, be in financial distress, and their

situation needs to present a risk to the subsistence minimum. As of January 1, 2017, the Hartz IV regulation amounts to 409 euros per month, which is intended to cover individual, monthly necessities. For members of a shared household (tellingly termed a *Bedarfgemeinschaft*), the amount has increased from 364 to 368 euros. When the applicant has children, Hartz IV provides between 237 and 311 euros extra per child (depending on the age). In addition to the regular services, the appropriate costs for accommodation and heating as well as health insurance are taken over.³⁰ Prior to approval, a review of the adequacy of these housing costs is made with regard to the individual circumstances, the living surface and the local rent level. If the cost of living is not deemed appropriate, one is obliged to reduce it, eventually by moving to a smaller or cheaper accommodation.³¹

In principle, full employment does not exclude the right to Hartz IV benefits. Provided that the amount of the income from an employment is not sufficient to ensure one's family life and one's livelihood, one can remain eligible for these services (in German called *aufstocken*). In theory, anyone with an own income can apply for ALG II. If the added income does not meet the requirements for the entire household (*Bedarfgemeinschaft*), one is entitled to an increasing (*aufstockendes*) Hartz IV in addition to one's income. This rule is independent from the number of weekly working hours. This is different from the system of Unemployment Benefit I (ALG I), in which one is no longer classified as unemployed when working more than 15 hours per week. It is important to note that Hartz IV is available for those with an employee status as well as for those with self-employment (freelance) status.³² Hence, freelance artists in Germany are often reliant on Hartz IV benefits. In contrast to ALG I, Hartz IV (ALG II) offers an *indefinite* benefit that ensures the basic protection of jobseekers and workers insofar as they cannot cover their livelihood with income or other assistance. Lastly, receivers of Hartz IV who are unemployed (and not *Aufstocker*) must accept *any* job offered by the job center – which is

³⁰ Applicants can calculate their Hartz IV benefits on the corresponding website: www.hartziv.org.

³¹ Hartz IV recipients regularly face problems since many cities and municipalities work with outdated rent levels. Therefore, the benefit for paying the rent is often insufficient, as it does not consider interim increases in rental prices. At the same time, Germany is faced with an increasing scarcity of socially acceptable housing due to gentrification – as I mentioned earlier in this book – especially in large cities like Berlin. See for example, a recent article in *Berliner Zeitung* on rent and real estate rises (“Studie: Berlin könnte eine der teuersten Städte werden”, January 15, 2018, accessed September 3, 2018).

³² This is not the case for the ALG I, which is a benefit of the German unemployment insurance paid upon the occurrence of unemployment, usually for up to one year and calculated on the basis of a percentage of last year's salary. Whereas employers usually deduct unemployment insurance from an employee's salary, self-employed freelance workers do not tend to pay unemployment insurance and are thus not entitled to this benefit. When a person has been employed before and has received ALG I for at least one day before self-employment, it is possible to apply for a voluntary continued unemployment insurance when freelancing (Freiwillige Weiterversicherung). However, as many dance artists have never been employed for the required time, this is often not an option for them.

not the case in Belgium, where unemployed artists with the artist status may refuse non-artistic jobs.

It should be noted that many artists are simply not well-informed about their rights and entitlements, and as also informants observe, they have only scant knowledge of existing policies and of what the government offers to protect artists' rights. A Brussels-based informant notes, for example, that the awareness of the official wage scales according to the CLA seems to be related to one's access to the artist status. With regard to the artist status, she contends that it in fact does not protect artists in a more general way since it still thinks in terms of employment situations and not work situations at large. It recognizes unemployment as part of the career, thus it should offer protection based on work and not on employment. This ought to be kept in mind, especially because artists are autonomous workers functioning between institutions rather than within. Notably, the artist status system is not really coupled to the question of fair practices and this concern has also been (publicly) addressed elsewhere, for instance at the press conference of the Flemish Actors Guild in Antwerp on 1 February 2016 (BELGA, "Acteursgilde slaakt noodkreet over sociale wetgeving", *De Standaard*, February 1, 2016, accessed March 26, 2018). With regard to artists' nescience, a Berlin-based informant reveals that she only recently discovered that she has been declaring a much higher amount of net income than applicable to several authorities, because she did not realize that in Germany the net income not only refers to *after taxes*, but also excludes all mandatory insurance costs. In a similar vein, I had to inform another Berlin-based informant that the recommended minimum standard for artist fees in Berlin had been recently increased and that she could therefore put a much higher fee into her budget for the project application she was working on when we talked.

As a consequence of the outlined bureaucratic freelancing systems for artists in both countries as well as the public funding systems dominated by project subsidies, contemporary dance artists have to deal with a fair amount of paperwork. In this respect, an informant also points out he would not want to be full-time employed because he needs the time in-between contracts to organize the various employment situations. Chasing those papers is time-consuming and that is especially frustrating when the paperwork is not directly related to a creative project. An informant comments:

I'm doing so much administration, it's not my *forte*, it's not the thing I love. I have to do it in a language I'm not super comfortable in, you know, for technical things. [...] The bureaucracy in Belgium is so time consuming that you end up just doing this.

With regard to the stacks of paperwork that come hand in hand with being an independent contemporary dance artist, for example when sustaining unemployment benefits, he poses the question of productivity: 'Is it really worth it?' In a similar vein,

another informant doubts if certain engagements are really worth the effort if they require a disproportionate amount of paperwork:

Nobody wants to go work somewhere if it takes so much paperwork. I went to teach [...] for one week and I had to do hours of paperwork. I just don't want to go there anymore. It was really such a hassle. [...] It was really annoying and the experience itself was not that fulfilling, so it wasn't worth it.

As is the case for all types of freelance work, the informants agreed that invoicing and emailing is definitely part of the work, even if this happens in personal-professional confusion. When you do not have a separate email address for work, administration is a composite of private and work-related paperwork. In several occasions and especially in Berlin (where artists work as self-employed freelancers), I entered an informant's apartment making my way through stacks of paperwork covering the living room floor. When I inquired an informant about it, he explains that he was doing his taxes: 'so I put them in piles and try to claim various expenses so that I can get some deductions from my taxes. It's a yearly ritual'. While many freelance and self-employed workers are confronted with this type of bureaucracy, especially the bureaucratic authorities' cluelessness about and their lack of acknowledgement of how contemporary dance professionals work autonomously seems to be at the cause of a deep and chronic sense frustration among many of my informants.

5.4.2 Dole control and 'hacky ways'

Contemporary dance artists have to chase paperwork persistently to keep enjoying their benefits to the extent that being unemployed becomes a job itself. In line with Foucault's control society, my fieldwork exposes the justification and validation of their work activities that artists have to provide constantly to the social welfare organs. In this regard, several informants have expressed their concern about relentless and demoralizing dole control they undergo, especially those informants who rely on the artist status benefits in Brussels and the Hartz IV benefits in Berlin.

With regard to the Belgian bureaucracy, I probed my informants in Brussels about the pros and cons of the artist status and we discussed them extensively. One informant clarifies that he has had access to the regime for many years, but he hardly makes use of it, because he is fortunate enough to have plenty of work contracts. When there is a gap in-between, he has usually saved up enough to bridge the gap until the next contract. All in all, he is happy to have the artist status as a back-up as it gives a sense of a safety net that creates at least some support for the precarious nature of what he does. Even though he formulates the resolution to rely on the artist status more in the future as he is 'trying

to learn to make a more livable planning', he explains why he has been trying to avoid using this benefit in the following fragment:

As many people have also abused the system, we now have to go through big efforts in order to not get kicked out of the system. I have heard of people having to create dossiers every nine months to prove they are looking for work and that have to attend many meetings during which they get the feeling of being interrogated. What is difficult is that you are actually never really *not* working, you are just not always being paid for what you do and there is never enough time to do it all. Therefore, all the hours I spend chasing extra paperwork take away time for creating or finding my next job. Still, I can understand that they need to be strict to avoid abuse, so I am not sure how this can be solved. Lastly, once you are in the system, there are no short cuts. I am not talking about illegal shortcuts but as an artist you have to color outside the lines sometimes. Not all that we do fits in the formulas that are understood by the administration. Once you are in the system, you have to prove everything you spend and how you spend all your time. You end up having to be creative about how to justify your unemployment benefits and this is both time consuming, difficult and demoralizing.

In fact, several of my Brussels-based informants often exposed an ambiguous stance with regard to the artist status. Those informants who do not yet have access to the status are not necessarily in a hurry to apply. On the one hand, they seem aware that the requirements they have to meet are not feasible for them in the career phase they were in during the qualitative study. On the other hand, some informants actually prefer to declare their taxes in their respective countries since this offers them the freedom to work outside any system and thus, for example, to not declare earnings when being underpaid. Numerous are also the complaints about the demanding paperwork for accessing and maintaining the artist status, which is a quite rigid system with few shortcuts. As the informant in the fragment above explains, he usually ends up having to be creative in trying to justify what he does and that this is both time-consuming and demoralizing.

The fragment uncovers several downsides of the regime, of which the aspect of control and misunderstanding are denounced foremost. The local body responsible for unemployment insurance (RVA or ONEM in Belgium, Job Center in Germany) summons artists entitled to benefits to prove that they have been sufficiently looking for work opportunities. However, the performing arts sector has its own modalities of work: most dance artists are busy making and creating performances or are asked to participate in a project. Hence, finding employment and searching for work have less to do with looking and applying for jobs, but rather with activating possibilities for funding and residencies on the one hand and entertaining a broad professional network and the corresponding possibilities for collaboration on a project basis on the other. This is not easily traceable, yet artists are asked to make a dossier providing evidence that they have been searching

for work in the past year – as the informant explains. Such a dossier usually consists of a collection of all short-term employment contracts, a printed calendar for each month and all work-related email communication. However, in a transnational and network-oriented work environment, a deal is often made over the phone or during Skype sessions, in the foyer after a performance, over a cup of coffee, etc. This entails that, technically, these conversations ought to be documented afterwards, for example, in an email repeating what has been said over the phone, so that the authorities can look into the efforts of seeking work. In line with my informant's words, another Brussels-based informant notes that making this kind of dossier requires a lot of time, almost as much as preparing an application for project funding and recounts that she had to clarify these time lines to the local advisor who was reviewing her case. Despite her work and time effort composing a dossier for him she pointed out to me that the advisor spent less than half an hour on her case and he did not even read any of the emails she provided. Additionally, she will be summoned again nine months later and will then have to go through the process all over, which will continue to happen unless she finds full-time employment with a long-term contract or several consecutive contracts. Put differently: the artist status often seems to come along with an administrative overload and bureaucratic demands that ignore that artists work on a project basis and therefore use their time in-between contracts to prepare new projects and finish old ones. Indeed, being unemployed thus becomes a job itself.

In a similar vein, a Berlin-based informant points out that undergoing these appointments to prove and justify your work activities is especially disheartening, because the controlling advisor usually is clueless about the workings of the performing arts sector. She illustrates the general myopia from the authorities' side in the following statement:

It's very hard to stomach when my advisor says that. Last time I met her, she said: don't forget that other people go, get up early in the morning and have children and earn money, so you can have benefits. [...] I have to listen to that kind of speech and be kind of vilified for my professional choices and be kind of considered a parasite of society by someone who actually has no clue what I'm doing.

My informant continues to explain how her advisor tries to have an appointment every three months to follow up on the informant's work activities. However, my informant always comes up with good reasons not to attend, because she finds it 'psychologically and mentally highly stressful and very demoralizing'. Instead, she sends her advisor about one email per month to keep her updated and she decided to invite the advisor to her showing. The latter tactic proved to be effective in a double sense: firstly, in so doing, the advisor stays up-to-date about the work and secondly, it is an attempt to combat the myopia and nescience present at the job center by informing the advisor about the workings of the contemporary dance profession.

In one occasion, my informant was asked to return 700 euros, because she had earned more than the projected income she had declared to the job center. Unexpected side jobs had come in over the course of the past six months and these had upped her income. As a consequence, she had been given more benefits than she was entitled to, which she had to reimburse to the job center. In this respect, she points out a significant issue when dependent on benefits:

Basically, as soon as you earn money, you have to make sure you don't spend it. It's kind of ridiculous, because you're kept in an artificial precarity all the time. So these 700 euros [that I had to give back], that was actually translation work and I can't use that money. It's money I earned for the job center. I have to give it back. So I'm actually thinking of withholding that information now. I think I will declare it with the local tax authorities and not through the job center.

However, sending a prognosis with projected earnings is difficult for contemporary dance artists because much of the future work (and therefore possible income) is usually still up in the air. She therefore keeps a list of the possible earnings, but is very careful about informing the job center.

Indeed, as these testimonies reveal, once you are in the system, you are constantly followed-up upon. In order to avoid this type of monitoring, which I term *dole control*, a Brussels-based informant is considering exiting the flexicurity that the artist status provides and become self-employed instead. She finds the constant follow-up and justification of her activities very disheartening and she would rather become independent even if that makes her less secure. In her words:

I really hate the fact that we have to prove ourselves to a system. Being independent, you just pay your taxes at the end of the year. And as artists, you can declare a lot of things, from make-up to computer. But still, you pay taxes. I don't know, it's still at the top of my head, to do that. But then, I really have to try my best to make my work more.

Additionally, becoming independent would allow more room to 'color outside the lines' as an informant puts it. In the words of Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet: dealing with the chase after papers sometimes happens *à la limite de la légalité* (or in English: 'on the edge of legality', see: Sorignet 2010, 108). In the *Study on Impediments to Mobility in the EU Live Performance Sector and on Possible Solutions* (2007), Richard Poláček indicated that one of the major impediments for independent performing artists working within Europe are the multiple tax declarations mobile workers have to deal with. Even if double tax agreements exist in Europe, several informants observe that no one really seems to know how these agreements work. It is an exhausting and frustrating chase to figure out what the correct approach is, especially in a mobile and transnational work environment. Hence, my fieldwork reveals that many informants seem to 'color outside the lines sometimes' when

declaring taxes by withholding certain earnings.³³ Since these withheld earnings usually consist of small amounts in different countries and contexts, an informant explains that she is not eager to declare all of her incomes, as she knows she will see ‘less than a quarter of that money’. She enhances: ‘So you’re always stuck in this predicament where you need money but you don’t know what you should declare and what you shouldn’t declare, or what’s the best system to do it. Because, at the end of the month, you’re still stuck with nothing’. She explains that she at least declares the minimum number of contracts in order to keep her benefits, but confides in me that when she has a job outside Europe, that tends to be something she will not declare because she would just lose too much on taxes in her country of residence. In that respect, an informant uses the folk term ‘a hacky way’ to refer to the fact that so many rules and regulations in a mobile work environment are unclear and complex that one often cannot but ‘color outside the lines’. This informant is certainly not the only one who has mentioned during the fieldwork to have continued paying taxes in the home country to make things less complex. Many artists are simply making their way through the systems.

In his study, Poláček (2007) lists all the frameworks – read: social security systems – for independent performing artists working within Europe in view of a harmonized European solution that would make it simpler for arts professionals to be mobile and work in various countries. The high degree of border mobility among international contemporary dance artists, actually increases economic insecurity because the differences between national social security systems in European (and even more so in non-European) countries still cause problems of accessibility and portability of rights (such as retirement pension or support for career change). Poláček addresses the three main issues: first, the possession of a work and/or residence permit (or visa); secondly, the lacking coordination between the different social security systems; and finally, the necessity of various or double tax declarations (Poláček 2007, 8). In other words: the different work economies in the contexts that my informants work in, cause manifold problems requiring paperwork. Several Berlin-based informants have implied that working together with a Brussels-based dance artist has become too expensive, since they manage their short-employment contracts via payroll agencies and alternative management bureaus. A Berlin-based informant points out one would have to pay Brussels-based artists twice as much as Berlin-based ones and ‘they will still earn less’. The freelancing systems for artists are simply not compatible. Another Berlin-based informant agrees and explains it as follows:

³³ This is no doubt very common among all types of freelance workers, however, contemporary dance artists are especially mobile and the issue of incompatible freelancing systems throughout Europe (and beyond) therefore merits at least some attention.

I find it also interesting in general working as a freelancer in Europe, it's so fucking difficult. Like this one project is between three countries and the performances are six people from almost all different countries. It's such a problem to find a way to pay us all without paying a huge amount of *Ausländersteuer!* [Foreigner tax³⁴] [...] My partner, for another project he did in the Netherlands, had to pay so many taxes back because they wrote him a letter half a year later. Then you think twice if you want to work someone from Belgium or the Netherlands, because you cannot afford to pay this money. And you can also not put it on the people, because they also have to give a lot of money to the state, or this institution.

Furthermore, next to dance artists' transnational mobility, also the intricacy of money flows in a subsidy-based work regime complicates tax declarations. As I hinted at earlier, the question of equal pay becomes tricky in transnational work relationships and dividing artist fees from a subsidy is a complex task. An informant points out that it especially becomes problematic when there is no structure around the (transnational) work relationship. One person cannot accept the whole sum of money and then divide it among the collaborators, because the whole sum would then count as this person's own income even if it is distributed afterwards. These money flows would cause confusion on the tax declaration, as she explains: 'if the check is on my name, and people send invoices to me, how do I explain that on the tax declaration?' In a similar vein, reconstructing the money flow for the job center, is an equally complex and time-consuming effort. An informant explains how she has a system to highlight the chronological points in her bank statements that are relevant to a production budget. However, when the granted budget arrives with a time delay, the money flow becomes even more intricate, as the following statement illustrates:

[The funding institution] hadn't transferred me the money yet due to bureaucracy, so the usual. So I asked a friend to book the flights for me. It was like 600 euros, I didn't have that money to do it by myself. The job center wanted me to have a bank statement from that friend that shows that actually these flights had been bought and then I had to basically reconstruct the whole money flow.

As a consequence, she usually keeps certain earnings for herself, such as for example when she is supported for food and other expenses, especially when the proofs come in another language. These are meager sums of money and not worth the effort of tracing back the money flow and translating the proofs.

The contemporary dance artist's transnational mobility does not only obscure tax declarations, but as Poláček stresses, it causes first and foremost difficulties with legality in terms of the possession of a work and/or residence permit (or visa). A non-European

³⁴ For more info, consult www.touring-artists.info/en/taxes/income-tax/auslaendersteuer-foreigner-tax.

informant points out that the doors in Belgium seem really closed to non-Europeans, because they do not offer artist visas like Germany does. In order to live and work in Belgium on a longer-term basis, a non-European has to provide a permanent or at least a year-long employment contract – which is almost impossible to get as a contemporary dance artist, as I indicated more than once in this book. As Hesters points out, Brussels therefore hosts a fair amount of dance artists living illegally in the country without any social protection, for example, because they decide to stay in Brussels after their tourist visa expired (Hesters 2004, 68). Nonetheless, the non-European informant in question explains that he arrived in Belgium on a family reunification visa, which allowed him to live in Belgium with his spouse. However, in the first five years, he was not allowed to work in Belgium. In turn, he was equally not entitled to receive unemployment benefits either. Hence, in order to survive the first five years, he recounts that he mainly worked as a self-employed freelancer in Europe, generally outside of Belgium, filing his taxes in his home country.

Since many contemporary dance artists initially do not intend to stay in one place *per se*, because they are not sure where the next job will bring them, several neglect to register and apply for residency permits in due course. However, as one of my cases illustrates, neglecting to do so, leaves you without social protection, which may come to harm you. My informant recounts that he failed to renew the inscription for his identity card. He had moved in with his partner, but did not change his address officially. In the meantime, his old address became invalid, since other residents had registered there. Since he was without an official address in Belgium, he did not have health insurance at the time, which, according to Murphy's law, is the best timing for a shoulder injury. As a result, he could not rely on health insurance to cover his medical costs.

As a final example, a non-European informant, who has regular teaching jobs across the globe, has experienced several visa-related issues. During my fieldwork, she was figuring out how to obtain a visa for the United States. She found out she needed to have an interview at an American embassy in order to acquire the visa. However, before she can do the interview, she needs to receive several documents that will be posted to her after she submits the online application form. However, since she will be travelling for work and not be coming back for two months straight, she does not know where she should have them send the documents to. Luckily, she could have the interview at any American embassy, but it is unclear when and where the documents will arrive and, thereafter, when and where she should make the appointment for the interview. This example essentially demonstrates the administrative strains of a mobile work regime. One informant even confided in me that she is earnestly considering to marry a Serbian friend, which would greatly facilitate her friend's transnational mobility. In a similar regard, in my work experience in the dance sector, I have come across several hasty cohabitations and questionable marriages among contemporary dance artists for legality purposes.

5.5 Creative fire alarm

You can't simply make a good product, it doesn't work. There is so much more involved and that remains so concealed. So much invisible work and work that so many people have absolutely no idea about. Especially those people who say that the artists are freeloaders, they have no idea how much time it takes to get something done, to make something and get it all going.

Contemporary dance artists do not chase mere administrative paperwork, but they are occupied with myriad other tasks more directly related to the production of live performances. These managerial and entrepreneurial tasks all fall under the comprehensive term of production work. According to the survey results, these tasks principally consist of applying for funding (60% in Brussels, 71% in Berlin), administration and production (52% in Brussels and 73% in Berlin), costumes, set and props (39% in Brussels, 49% in Berlin), promotion and communication (26% in Brussels and 44% in Berlin), etc. An informant terms these as 'pragmatic uninteresting problems' and comments that 'you just spend 80% of your time and energy trying to figure out how you're going to construct the work and finance it and schedule it.' Much of the production work is time-consuming: my informants pinpoint a range of tasks going from organizational responsibilities such as booking flights and train tickets, communication and budgeting to more substantive tasks directly related to the creative work such as looking at rehearsal videos, writing program texts and inviting people to a showing. The transnational mobility within the work processes generates additional production work. An informant recounts, for example, that she was working with vegetables in a project. However, they did not grow those specific vegetables in the country she was premiering in and the only imported ones available were leafless. Nonetheless, the leaves were crucial for the piece. Thus, she had to arrange a shipment of vegetables with leaves specifically for the purpose of rehearsing and performing the piece. In a similar vein, transporting a set each time you have to change the location of your residency brings along extra production work – it merits mention here that the majority of my informants did not possess a car, let alone a driver's license.

In a collaborative project, administrative and production work also raises the question of end responsibility: who takes responsibility for these production tasks? Is it a shared effort or is someone assigned to take that responsibility? And if the latter is the case, does the person dealing with production receive a higher artist fee? Several informants have signaled they would like to engage an external production assistant. While some informants do receive help from a producer or an institution, it has been pointed out to me that it usually concerns financial support (such as making up the budget for the funding application and accountancy). In most cases, planning and communication are

still the artist's responsibility. Producers or production houses assist in making the production happen, but many informants have indicated that they do not offer support with keeping the production alive. Hence, many informants emphasized the lack of support in diffusion.

The passage from logbook A (Annex 7) from a production process reveals the range of production tasks within a process. In this particular process, much time was spent on finding volunteers to participate in the project; promotion work such as setting up a website and flyering; technical work such as cleaning the dance floor, informing on quotes for scaffolding, and setting up the tribune; event management such as installing the venue with a bar and DJ-booth, and ordering wine; providing food for the volunteers; among many other things. When she presents the logbook to me, she comments that the time budget for creation ended up being a mere 5% of the work, which she finds 'absolutely shocking'. In a similar vein, several informants signaled that they barely have time left to actually work on making art. Hence, the outlined threefold chase becomes alarming when it threatens to obscure creative work.

Needless to say that contemporary dance artists are first and foremost still physically or corporeally oriented. In that respect, another informant reveals that she would love to concentrate more on the creative part and especially misses the engagement with purely physical work to compensate the organizational tasks; and this to the extent that she is experiencing symptoms of stress, such as headaches and a twitching eye. She says:

Actually I'm working the whole time on being not stressed, how to reduce it. Or breathing: I'm going to Kundalini yoga to breathe, not to train, but to breathe and to relax. I really miss a training actually. I really miss digging into...

In a similar vein, several informants asserted that they often do not 'feel like an artist' as a consequence of the threefold chase. For example, when I point out to an informant that, in my opinion, her week has been quite productive, she disagrees. In response, I call attention to the numerous different types of work she has documented in her logbook. Tellingly, her reaction exposes that in her definition, accomplishing production tasks is not related to genuine productivity. She comments:

I think if I would like to be emotionally validated as an artist, I actually would have to be working in a studio. Like all of this doesn't register for me as work, which is weird. Exactly the sort of things like "how do I come up with that solo?" *That's* the work. I think about it all the time. It probably takes me ten minutes, when I really focus on it, to put some ideas down on paper. But that's actually the work and it makes me feel good, because I made something artistically and all this rest is just management.

Based on my findings, I thus detect a type of permanent colonization of the artistic by the non-artistic in the project-based modus operandi within contemporary dance. This is not

the case, for example, within dance companies where artistic collaboration (between dancer and choreographer) is ‘organizationally purified from everything economic by transferring this “impurity” to a purely managerial body’, as Laermans puts it (2015, 307). Contemporary dance artists who work project-based generally rarely experience this purification and if they do come to this via arrangements with workspaces or alternative management bureaus, this purification remains only partial. Furthermore, within the economic – or what my informant refers to as ‘just management’ – part of the non-artistic work is directly connected with the artistic (such as working on a production budget or scheduling rehearsals and performances), which should be distinguished with the administrative and organizational burden of the work environment and its complexity due to the transnational mobility and neoliberal and project-based work regime (such as applying for work permits or dealing with issues about benefits or taxes). Alarmingly, the resulting lack of time for creative-productive work in the studio puts a strain on the artistic work and brings forth artistic limitations. This *creative fire alarm* is also reflected in the results from my quantitative study: on average, 47% of the entire work time budget of the Brussels-based respondents is spent on creative-productive activities, which is almost two-thirds of their artistic time budget (comprising creative-productive work and the other administrative-organizational tasks related to artistic activities, see *figure A.1*). In Berlin, a mere 30% of the entire time budget for work can be devoted to creative and productive activities on average, which is a bit over half of the artistic time budget (see *figure A.2*). And lest we forget, this does not mean that they are being paid for their time working on these creative-productive activities within their artistic labor time.

Lastly, the threefold chase is essentially a very individualistic chase. An informant notes that she feels like she is writing and handing in dossiers constantly, which she finds a very ‘individually-focused’ endeavor. She would rather spend her time on something else that would benefit the dance community rather than chase her own tail. An informant finds it ‘really a problem for the scene that everybody is out there just doing whatever necessary to survive’, because that generally means there is no time left for selfless community projects. It is simply unfortunate, as many informants acknowledge, that participating in the community is far from priority. In that regard, several informants have expressed feelings of loneliness. Particularly the self-promoting undertakings that conflate the artist’s identity with their products are criticized among my informants. As an informant observes: ‘you’re just busy making pieces and there is no time for each other. People spend less and less time just helping someone out in a studio and what definitely doesn’t happen anymore is sharing practices and tools.’ Another informant admits that she sometimes feels very selfish, because ‘it’s everyone on their own out there’. In my fieldwork, however, I have observed several instances in which artists do make a ‘very selfless effort’ of solidarity, for example, by keeping up a voluntary artist-run practice, maintaining a weekly support group about (sexual) harassment and power abuse in the field, self-organizing and curating a festival, or establishing a working

group³⁵ to find better socio-economic security for artists among other things. Nonetheless, an informant expresses her craving for more meeting and sharing by means of discourse, which explains why she is currently more interested in teaching workshops, especially with a pool of regular students, rather than making and selling art products. She comments: 'let's not be pretentious to think that we can talk about everything through dance, because we cannot'. I see this viewpoint very much reflected in her pedagogy, when I observe during one of her workshops. I note that she always has the students do the movement exercise after which she really makes time to talk about the exercise. In so doing, the talking part commonly takes much more time than the exercise itself.

It could be argued that passionate, or unalienating work, is inherently individualistic because one seeks self-realization, self-development or self-fulfillment – which is quite in line with the standard middle-class liberal ideals that made a breakthrough in Western society in the nineteenth century.³⁶ In that logic, a sense of community – or rather sociality – can never truly exist in a field such as the contemporary dance field, because career paths revolve around personal development. Returning to my conclusion of part I that uncovered a disappearing sense of community due to the individualism enforced by the neoliberal and project-based work regime, I would rather counter this argument and refine that the intrinsic drive for self-development is in my view present in so many professions, if not in all, and may at least partly be grounded in the participation in an artistic community. Sorignet points out that dance careers are not merely hyperindividualistic, but simultaneously, they are communal (2010, 279). Drawing on John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1978, originally published in 1971), Menger agrees with Sorignet: 'each individual succeeds in fulfilling himself only by participating in a community in which the Self is realized in the activities of many selves' (Menger 2014, 98). In that respect, one informant explains that he does not perceive the individual chase after money necessarily as 'a capitalist thing', but prefers to see it as 'a sense of community' accepting that sometimes you get funding and sometimes someone else gets funding and you support them also. Rather than speaking about competition, several informants describe a somewhat paradoxical form of 'solidary individualization' within the scene. The lack of (a sense of) community expressed by my informants is rather due

³⁵ While writing this thesis, the efforts of this particular working group developed into Round Table Dance Berlin, which is a participatory process to develop the dance scene in Berlin. It was initiated by politicians by injecting 100,000 euros into the process. See also: roundtabledance.wordpress.com.

³⁶ However, the ideals of individual freedom and autonomy seem to have reached their limits in current neoliberalism, because people have become suspicious of the use of that individual freedom, as a result of which it is increasingly being subjected to predetermined formats and procedures (for interesting thoughts on liberalism and neoliberalism in the creative industries, see Pascal Gielen's essay on *Creativiteit en andere Fundamentalismen*, 2013c, especially 71-76).

to the systemic consequences outlined in this chapter as a threefold chase. The mutual competitiveness that accompanies the threefold chase is thus rather overlooked by my informants, instead they see the effects of the neoliberal and project-based work environment and their administrative nuisances as stimulating individualization and hampering sociality: ultimately, it does concern a fair amount of chasing one's own tail. This idiom suggests that contemporary dance artists individually undertake exhaustive and often futile actions, usually without making much progress. They are masters in chasing down: they haste and they hustle. They are making their way as they travel from one place to another – sometimes they feel all alone, but they are all in the same boat. The next chapter will explore these travels and addresses the mobility of contemporary dance artists in time and space.

Image 6: image from *10 Journeys to a Place where Nothing happens** (2013) by Maïke Lond. © Photo by Rania Moslam and Grits Ragelis



Chapter 6

The Mobile

6.1 Mobility in time and space

The project-based work regime comes with several systemic consequences, of which the high degree of transnational mobility is perhaps the leading one. As Pieter T'Jonck summarizes in his outline of the dance landscape in Flanders:

The practical consequences of a system in which a large number of creators rely on project-based support mean that these artists are constantly on the road, from one producer to another, from one residency to another. This form of self-exploitation takes hallucinatory forms. Artists who live literally out of a suitcase. In this respect Flanders is not alone; this situation also exists elsewhere. These sacrifices often bear no relation whatsoever to their output in terms of performance or development opportunities. They remain extremely limited. (T'Jonck 2013, 22-23)

In the introduction to the edition of *Dance Research Journal on Global/Mobile: Re-orienting Dance and Migration Studies*, Paul Scolieri describes the dance world as a nomadic one, formed of a mobile set of performers, choreographers, teachers and audiences in search of economic prosperity, political asylum, religious freedom, and/or artistic liberty (Scolieri 2008, v-xx). Spatial, often transnational, mobility is an often-neglected aspect of bohemia, which permits me to refer back to the bohemian ethic apparent among contemporary dance artists as discussed in the chapter on “Lifestyle Artists”. Richard Lloyd (2010), for example, argues that the scarcity of direct economic returns within the bohemian ethic does not make the arts unimportant to the local economy, because art and the artist’s bohemian work ethic are organizational principles that give coherence to the local urban scene. However, he fails to mention that while this urban process in which artists are shaping the city’s social landscape indeed might occur, at the same time an increasing transnational mobility among artists takes place, at least among my sample of contemporary dance artists, who work in an entrepreneurial regime in which work

processes have shifted from the factory to society (Hardt and Negri 2000; Gill and Pratt 2008). In a project-based regime, contemporary dance artists do not merely rely on resources from their base country or city, but find infrastructure and co-production budgets across the borders. Sociologist Delphine Hesters points out that the nomadic character of the bohemian who travels wherever their artistic pursuits lead them is especially present when contemporary dance artists rely on residencies for the creation of their work (2004, 67).

It should be noted that the spatial mobility of contemporary dance artists is headed in two directions that ought to be distinguished. Firstly, as mentioned in the field of inquiry, both Brussels and Berlin are targeted by many international dance artists as an – often temporary – base. In this regard, Hesters refers to the notion of ‘globalization from below’ when describing contemporary dance artists as connected migrants or guest workers (2006, 3). My quantitative and qualitative findings indeed confirm that the mobility of international dance artists towards Brussels and Berlin is driven by work opportunities and their stay in the city is often initially temporary with the sole purpose of work (see Van Assche and Laermans 2016 and 2017).¹ However, while both capitals are considered interesting loci to be based in at least temporarily, these same international dance artists continue to travel outbound following work opportunities returning to their base between travels. Secondly, thus, the work of project-based contemporary dance artists is nowadays produced in various locations (in periods of residency), which engenders a deterritorialization or decoupling of the conception, the production and the presentation of a work. Additionally, following Roland Robertson (1995) on ‘glocalization’, Rudi Laermans categorizes the production, distribution and reception of contemporary dance as ‘glocal’ affairs that are ‘at once global and local, inter- or transnational and situated in particular regions, cities and venues’ (2015, 286). Especially when looking at contemporary dance in European context, transnational relationships interweave with local contexts but are sometimes difficult to decipher. In what follows, I make an effort to decipher the causes and effects of dance artists’ spatial and temporal mobility, especially how these difficult-to-distinguish causes and effects intermingle with their lives and artistic work. In this chapter, I first discuss the mobility prompted by the residency system as one of the most frequently used *modi operandi* within the contemporary dance profession. Furthermore, I will describe the several recurrent issues

¹ Interestingly, it should be mentioned that guest workers, like contemporary dance artists, are often welcomed in creative cities, because of the added value they may offer – which I discussed in the previous chapter – whereas their socio-economic position as artists often remains precarious. Within my fieldwork, this city marketing logic, exploiting culture to place a city on the map, was particularly exposed in the two-day festival *RADIKAL: Dance from Brussels* which was organized in November 2017 in Berlin’s Radialsystem V. This festival was an initiative of the Minister in charge of the Promotion of Brussels at the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and was implemented by *visit.brussels* in collaboration with the four main performance venues in Belgium’s capital.

when away from the home base and the most pressing consequences on the lives and work of contemporary dance artists.

6.2 Indirect funding: the residency

No one manages to work in Berlin for an entire year.

In the chase for funding, a particular transnational and temporal mobility is set in motion when contemporary dance artists start looking for alternative resources across borders, such as infrastructure and possible co-productions. To introduce this complex relationship between (in)direct funding and mobility, I want to refer to Estonian artist Maike Lond, who has reported on her efforts to look for alternative funding in her piece *10 journeys to a place where nothing happens** (2013)². Her aim was to cooperate financially with the private sector in order to gain financial independence from funding institutions. Her search for money turned into a performance lecture, in which she states at the beginning:

I've done some good stuff throughout the years, but it doesn't show on my bank account. It doesn't show on my non-existent social securities. It doesn't show on my living conditions nor on my wristwatch, which I still cannot afford.

Subsequently, she explains that she is in fact 'status inconsistent'. *Status inconsistency* is concept introduced by Gerhard Lenski in the 1950's (1954). It concerns a condition that occurs when someone simultaneously has relatively high and low status characteristics. For example, when there is a lack of correlation between different measures of statuses such as wealth (meager and instable incomes) and educational level (high degrees), which is mostly the case in the performing arts, as also my survey findings revealed. In her performance, Lond in fact uncovers that the precarious position of performing artists is generally marked by such status inconsistency. Maike Lond terms it a 'schizophrenic division': 'on the one hand we have a high status in society – we are somewhat needed, we have a public voice – but on the other hand our income is low, unstable and insecure and our production (work) has no clearly defined market value.' Drawing on Lenski, who predicted that status inconsistent people will favor political actions directed against groups with higher status ranks and status consistent groups, Lond hypothesizes that that

² The observations here are based on a performance in the Dirty Deal Teatro in Riga on September 11, 2013.

is might be the reason why artists do what they do and question the way they do it. She finally adds that medical research has shown that people with status inconsistency have a higher risk for heart disease and depression. Hence, Lond started her mission for financial security, independent from the funding institutions that keep her poor. Interestingly, the title of her performance lecture ends in an asterisk as it is borrowed from a performative installation by the Finnish artistic duo Juha Valkeapää and Taito Hoffrén. Their ten journeys captured the *coziness* of being a bohemian artist traveling around in a van. In response, Lond wanted to show the other side of the coin, the impossibility of being an artist constantly chasing money.³ For example, in the second journey, she transforms into a dog in an attempt to sell herself in exchange for money, much like a Eleanor Bauer's 'post-Fordist art prostitute' portrayed in a humorous act of self-critique in her solo *ELEANOR!*. The result of her ten journeys is perhaps an anti-climax: while she did receive recognition as an artist, this esteem was never translated into monetary support. Her performance lecture thus depicts the impossibility of being an artist. She visualizes the overall absurdity in a video fragment almost at the end of the performance. We hear Lond playing the banjo as the camera slowly zooms out. We gradually notice she is in fact playing the banjo in the street as the camera captures a few passers-by. The last shot reveals that she is as a matter of fact playing the banjo in front of the entrance door of the Estonian Ministry of Culture. Thereafter, she clarifies that the latter tactic has proven the most effective, as she was able to collect the most private funding. She made on average 15 euros per hour and amusingly adds that it even was international funding. Yet, it turned out to be very difficult to pursue, because it was hard and cold and she did not know who she was anymore. While doing it, she realized she missed structural support and could no longer ignore she needed the 'so-hated institutions and organizations'.

Thus, dependent on the subsidy system, artists need to put a great amount of (unremunerated) work effort in acquiring subsidies or other support through looking for partners, residencies, co-productions, programmers and many more. What Lond was looking for were forms of alternative, or indirect, funding. In what follows, I describe and discuss the most important form of indirect funding for dance artists in Brussels and Berlin, and by extension in Europe, which is known as the residency system.

In order to be able to work efficiently, even in the research phase, many informants highlight the necessity of having a studio space – a place of focus on the project and avoid the personal-professional confusing of the 'home office'. One informant even stresses that the only work she validates as work is what happens between the four walls of a studio. In his exposé on the residency-based artist entitled "Travelling, Fleeing, Passing" (2006), Berlin-based choreographer Martin Nachbar outlines the basics of the residency system:

³ For more information on Valkeapää and Hoffrén's performance, see: tenjourneys.aania.fi/index.html.

Producers from around the world offer living and work spaces, and sometimes financial backing too, for choreographers to be able to work there. The latter travel from one place to the next, follow their work, and thus become travellers who not only distance themselves from the world in order to create, but turn travelling into a condition, in order to keep their heads above water financially. (Nachbar 2006, paragraph 3)

In this fragment, his words refer to the aforementioned metaphorical act of treading water in the context of survival. In this respect, he additionally notes further in his text that ‘today I can hardly imagine living, or rather surviving, without travelling. I am a choreographer’ (Nachbar 2006, paragraph 4). Since many artists are confronted with meager budgets, residencies often serve as a form of indirect funding that compensates the lack of direct funding thus producing the ‘economic necessity for the choreographer to be elsewhere’ (Nachbar 2006, paragraph 9). Since one city alone does not have enough means at its disposal to support the number of artists living and working there, networks of transnational exchange are woven. Nonetheless, as Nachbar points out, however exciting the being-elsewhere may be, it is ‘hardly evoked in the works created in residence’ (2006, paragraph 10). Consequently, Nachbar wonders how and to what extent this traveling can actually serve art and, in turn, what the cities gain from the repeated visits of numerous international artists. In a collaboration with Jochen Roller, *Mnemonic Nonstop* (2005), they dealt with this question using the process of finding one’s way around new surroundings, of being on the road, and of passing through foreign cities as a theme. Employing an adapted *dérive*-technique⁴, which was developed by Guy Debord in 1956, Roller and Nachbar mapped the unknown places and turned them into semi-domestic places thus not ignoring the specific locality of each residency. Indeed, when a residency is not bound to its location – which is mostly the case – then the mandatory transnational mobility becomes absurd and even irrelevant. Nachbar lists the many side-effects of (transnational) residencies and in so doing he puts the purpose of residencies into perspective. He names the downsides such as: ‘the environmental tax on air travel; jet lag; lack of sleep; long distance relations which sometimes end following temporary separations; considerable eating expenses since one generally eats out’ (2006, paragraph 13). As an alternative, Nachbar proposes to rethink the concept of residency by, for

⁴ In his essay on the “Theory of the *Dérive*” (1956), Debord clarifies that *dérive* is one of the basic situationist practices involving ‘playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects’ (Debord and Knabb 1956, paragraph 1). Different than in a journey or even a stroll, in *dérive*, a person or a group of people ‘drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there’ (Debord and Knabb 1956, paragraph 2). Hence, the adapted *dérive*-technique used in *Mnemonic Nonstop* (2005) is a skill or an artistic tactic.

example, developing formats of studio exchange between the institutions enabling artists to work closer to home. An informant shares Nachbar's points of critique and comments:

I don't know if it's that people want that nomadic lifestyle, or that's just they've accepted that. I think it's fucking environmentally insane. It's really stupid to be jetting probably a group of fifty dance artists through Europe, so that they can make their work. I don't believe in the amount of international exposure and/or experience that you're supposed to gain from this type of residency program. I think we should be supercritical of that in the light of neoliberal economics. Every city should probably just think about pushing its own artists.

Like the informant, Nachbar questions whether 'a (lengthy) stay overseas' is necessary for the purpose of uninterrupted work. The transnational mobility is often linked to the chase for funding, yet other practical considerations may influence the choice of residencies. In the fragment below, one of my informants describes his most recent process, which consisted of several residencies abroad. His account exposes a variety of motives for the inclusion of each residency space:

First of all, we had this wish to also work in Israel, where [my collaborator] lives and works. She works together with a place in a suburb of [a large city in the Middle East]. It's a residency spot for dancers and choreographers just founded three years ago. And [my collaborator] was associated to that place, so this was clear that this place comes in. Also as the situation in [the country], also for the arts, is pretty difficult in terms of production, so what they could give was a residency. So, then it was already clear that for four weeks in the process we would be there, but the production budget mostly has to come from Germany.

So, the other residency we organized was in [a Scandinavian country], because in the beginning of our process, I was still based there, because of my girlfriend. That's why I wanted to be as much as possible over there. So, that's why we rented a rehearsal space in [a city in that country] from the Berlin money and we met there. Then another residency was in [a Germany city], which was kind of not an official residency, but [my collaborator] was teaching there. So, she did the morning classes and then they gave us a studio for free for one week. So, from our production budget we paid accommodation and then we had rehearsal space for free.

Then [my collaborator] was linked artistically to [a venue] in [a second city in Germany] where she was already developing works before. So she also wanted to invest in that connection and we did an application there as well and in that sense, it was also in our interest to be there for a part of our working process. So, we did two parts, like one week in summer and ten days before the premiere now in February.

Then, another part of the budget was coming from the place where I come from, which is the county where [a third Germany city] is in. They have a cultural foundation and regularly support my work, let's say, not on a large level, but there's

always a little bit coming from there. But finally, we didn't do any residency there, but we will perform there.

And then the largest part of the budget was coming from Berlin, but actually we worked only two and a half weeks in Berlin for all of the process. In that sense, the process has been really in many different places, but it's also funny, because it talks also about the economic puzzling that you have to do also with different places you want to build up relationships too.

As the fragment reveals, the creative process of this project was dispersed in space and time: not only were the rehearsals scattered over six locations, but the working blocks were also spread over time. As a consequence, there is a lot of in-between time, which is used for 'homework' or for other projects on the artist's agenda. Interestingly, my informant's project itself dealt with spatiality and especially focused on being physically and virtually near or distant in the digital era, which ironically reflects the workings of a transnational collaboration, not only including residencies in several different locations across borders but also involving many Skype-sessions in-between. Their process explored questions of intimacy and relationships in times of video calls and low budget flights, such as 'do we need proximity to feel intimacy?' Or: 'why do we feel connected with people far away but yet simultaneously distance ourselves from our immediate surroundings?' The collaborative project especially dealt with the growing absurdity of people's relationship with 'being near' and the twisted sense of distance in the globalized world. Most interestingly, as a tool to explore these relationships of proximity and distance, the collaborators combine experimentation with voice and body to emphasize the analog way of working together in contemporary dance, especially in collaboration. My informant recounts that despite of the unavoidable virtual meetings, 'nothing can replace the physical way of working together. [...] Even if you think about digital society's way of communicating with each other, still the way of working together is actually super analog.' His words here affirm the necessity of having a studio space for the creative work process. In contrast, it is fascinating to juxtapose another informant's creation process, which was set up specifically in a manner which did not require physically being together during most of the process, but consisted of working individually on movement exercises at distance and talking about it via digital technologies.

In terms of time, a typical residency period lasts two to three weeks in one location. It is almost impossible for an artist to organize consecutive residencies, so there is always an 'empty time' in-between that breaks up the process, as an informant testifies:

We had to travel a lot between places. You realize that each space has its own aura. It all has its own kind of spirit and the sense of being in there. And they are really different. So, it takes often a bit time to get used to each space and you're almost kind of starting again while you enter a new space. Not again from scratch, but you always feel like you have a beginning: this is the first day of the new residency.

Nonetheless, the informant admits that the change of location may have a positive influence on the creative process as each location brings about a fresher take on things. However, whether travelling overseas is really necessary for this purpose remains questionable. In fact, several informants welcome these breaks on the one hand, for reflection and production work, while simultaneously denouncing this system for being inefficient, especially when working with a large set or a vision board, as the following informant notes:

We had a lot of props, so already that was hard to carry. And we always want to have a lot of stuff on the walls, for example, we have a graph and we have all these Post-its with all these ideas and we're always thinking how they are linked and what should be there. [...] It's a whole day just to put in your stuff and put everything up on the wall again. And that's already a day lost every time we move between residencies and which is work that could be avoided.

As a result of this temporality and mobility, an informant observes that more and more adaptable pieces feature at least the Belgian stages. In the passage below, she describes how she had the luxury of being in a theater space for one month prior to the premiere:

We were always going between places and it was really hard to imagine how it can actually be on stage. Then, we had a month before the premiere in the theater space that we premiered in, so there the piece really came together. What we showed before, we were really not happy with, because we only had one week in the black box. You cannot, in only one week, put up the scenography and lights and actually have a feeling of what it looks like as well as how it feels to run it. And that's why I think, in Brussels, you see a lot of very adaptable pieces, because then they can easily tour.

Furthermore, she uncovers another hazard within the residency system in the sense that there is often not enough time to actually finish the piece before the premiere:

I think it's a bit a problem already that you only do two weeks at one place and then you always have to switch in-between residencies instead of just getting three months at one space. What worries me is that so many artists only seem to be able to work for six weeks or something, which is very little to make a piece.

As a consequence of the project funding and residency system, she feels that next to very adaptable pieces, she often sees unfinished pieces premiering on the European stages and these pieces are only truly completed when continuing the work on tour. In fact, the phrase 'we need more time' reappears recurrently throughout my interview data.

6.3 Uninterrupted work

When it comes to a residency, Nachbar points out that ‘the main aspect, i.e. uninterrupted work, is in fact always guaranteed’ (2006, paragraph 7). However, several of my informants indicated that this is not entirely true. In line with the gift sphere, the generous gesture of offering a residency often coincides with the expectation that the artist gives something in return that links them to the location. In the account below, one informant describes how in her experience the lengthy residency she was in during my fieldwork went hand in hand with far too many obligations that hampered the promise of uninterrupted work. For example, the start of the residency program included a three-week workshop with children that resulted in a creation. Even though it was a challenging-but-rewarding experience, it was an unusual beginning as she recounts:

You are not that free. Because a residency, for me, actually is: you have space, you have time, you have a flat, go and relax and try out. And it was really difficult. The start was already putting stress and responsibility, and also the creation of a thing that is shown... [Laughs uncomfortably] So, it didn’t start out so great.

After those three weeks, my informant and her collaborators were exhausted: not only was it the first time working with children, there was also the constant pressure to create a piece. It should also be noted that this three-week workshop needed quite some preparation, which thus took place before the start of the residency program. After those first three weeks, the team already needed a break. My informant commented that there were countless other obligations through which the program attempted to establish more links between the residency and the local communities as to give a greater purpose to the locality of the residency yet simultaneously disregarding the focus on uninterrupted work. As an example, they were supposed to participate in the work-in-progress showings open for the local dance scene and audience and adapt their schedule accordingly. Hence, my informant constantly felt a lack of unconditional freedom, which she actually expects during a residency. She continues to explain that they had to deal with meetings, schedules, and organizational emails about the residency on a daily basis, which in turn gave her the impression that everything was complicated. She goes on:

You are coming into the space with “oooh, everything is complicated: we have to answer these emails, we have to organize a key, we have to look over the budget”. There’s no time for research... It’s very bad. And one the other hand, they want to make it good and I think they think it’s a really great place to be, but it’s not working out. I mean there is not so much freedom as you would think there would be in a residency.

In hindsight, she feels that less than half of the residency time was spent on the creative process. The many *have-tos* in this passage demonstrate the sense of imposed duty towards the institution she experienced during the creation period.

An informant points out that one particular residency experience was specifically dissatisfying when comparing it to other residency programs. The environment did not feel hospitable to her, as there was much distrust in the residents. At first, they were not allowed to leave their props and costumes in the storage space, because it seemed like they could not be trusted with a key. However, simultaneously, they were required to leave the studio clean and empty on the days that evening dance classes were scheduled in the studio in question. Indeed, when I am about to watch a run of their show, I observe that one of the performers and the sound technician are setting up the space with an amp, floor lights and some props that they had to fetch elsewhere in the building. My informant comments:

The most difficult I find is that you are not able to leave stuff because they have classes. You always have to clean, you have to bring your stuff in the morning, you have to clean it in the evening and maybe in-between you might have to change a room.

Commitments such as these equally undermine the guarantee of uninterrupted work: how can one work uninterruptedly when the studio is only available between certain times and when you, on top of that, are required to break down your material and set it back up each time?

6.4 Unconditional work

While most residencies are research-based and without an obligation to produce anything, simultaneously they tend often to include a public moment of showing the material worked on during the residency. These moments usually take place at the end of the residency period and are referred to as work-in-progress showings. This presentation is generally not mandatory, but it is oftentimes expected and several informants feel obliged to do so as a thank-you-gesture to the hospitable institution, which is also something Nachbar points out. One informant explains that ‘sometimes you want to show to the people that invite you that you’re productive’. Hence, a peculiar dynamic is at work, where the artist is offered the gift of unconditional and uninterrupted work, but concurrently, the artist feels responsible to return the favor and fulfill the tacit expectations of the generous institution.

Nevertheless, sometimes these expectations are not so tacit at all, but part of the package deal. Several residency programs explicitly demand the inclusion of (a series of) public showings, as was, for example, the case during the disappointing lengthy residency I already discussed. Sometimes the expected showings and their timings can become problematic because, first of all, they impede uninterrupted and unconditional work, but secondly, they expose sensitive or fragile material that is perhaps not ready to be presented. Indeed, a fixed presentation moment comes with a certain pressure to produce something with a deadline, which paradoxically goes against the entire concept of the residency-without-obligation-to-produce. In a project, a pressure to work towards a larger deadline already exists and it is anyway a challenge to do so within these short rehearsal periods. Imposing fixed moments of showing only increases that pressure and undermines the freedom to work uninterrupted and unconditionally. In that regard, an informant recounts that during a two-week residency period, during which they were offered to work on a new concept with an open-door policy, they were expected to present the created material formally at several occasions. She explains that this was a particular difficult task, because they had started from scratch and thus they had very little to present during the first week. Since there was an open-door policy, they had expected that guests would just hop in to watch them while at work, as if they were a live exhibition. However, it turned out that they were actually expected to present what they were working on, which is really a challenge when you are at the beginning of a new research, as the informant reveals: 'it was really a bit too much for having a residency and doing something from zero'. However, they did not oppose to these public moments per se, except that they preferred to announce these moments as an open studio where guests could look around, ask questions and see the work in progress rather than as a showing. In turn, this type of exposure put pressure on the artists, because they felt that guests were expecting much more than what they could offer and it felt delicate to have very fragile work-in-progress exposed in such a formal way.

It should be pointed out, however, that these showings in most cases happen by the artist's demand if there is a wish for feedback or a necessity to test out material in front of an audience. It can be useful to discuss the material with external eyes that compensate the absence of – for example – a dramaturge who is able to travel along with the artists:

Many people asked us “why are you doing so many showings, don't you feel like it's taking you out of the process?” Because always getting different feedback, you have to be also really strong in knowing what you want to produce and not just take any feedback. Often someone comments on the costume when we were just wearing training clothes because we're in mid-process. That's not really something to take in. But for us it was good to do showings all the time, because I really feel that when creating material, while you're in the studio, you're too involved in it, so you don't really know what it actually is until you present it. Having an outside eye to show it to always gives you a new reflection on the work that you just made. So for me,

doing a showing and then taking some time off, talking about it, forgetting it a bit, and then coming back to it, for me that's really good. But, it's true, I would love to have a dramaturge who follows through the whole process. I think it's maybe also sometimes a question of budget.

Comparably, an informant points out that the feedback from an open audience is sometimes too overwhelming because everyone comes from a specific background and their feedback is hard to place at times. Instead, he prefers to organize private showings to which he only invites people he knows – also to avoid that people just come to see the show for free, which he does not mind as it can be very helpful to have an audience but it simultaneously undermines the efficacy of the discussion afterwards. This was the reason why the informant organized two private showings during a residency before showing something publicly. He admits that having a public showing at the end of the residency was in fact more of a returned favor towards the institution:

I say it's always a negotiation, because we're collaborating with the place and we'll also appear in their program, so we wanted also that we are kind of present there and that they also can have something from our residency in a way.

It should be noted that it is somewhat contradictory to hold feedback sessions after a (public) showing at the end of a residency, because there is no time left to process that feedback unless you have a consecutive residency period scheduled. It could be argued that the feedback can be digested in the 'empty time' in-between residency periods, however, that is usually not a time when the whole team can reflect and discuss together.⁵ In one of my in-depth interviews, another informant ponders the idea to put a showing in the middle of the residency as a solution to this flaw and realizes that that would probably be the most effective way to deal with a showing:

There's always working throughout the residency towards the showing, but generally it would be much better to put it in the middle, I think. And then to do the day off right after and then restart. I think like this would be the most effective how to deal with it.

Showing something in the middle of a residency would also encourage a different way of working, because in the second week the artist is not working towards a short-term outcome, or at least there is no immediate pressure of having to show something. In this manner, it can be avoided that the artist is merely working on preparing a showing during the residency.

⁵ In this respect, an informant comments that concrete productivity in her experience, only happens when there is a formal frame around it, such as a residency. As a very pragmatic example, she reveals that her collective only manages to implement website updates during a residency.

Lastly, towards the end of the process, a showing or try-out is the opportune moment to present your work-in-progress to programmers – the only challenge is to get them to come. One informant recounted a residency program where the residents were pushed to spend a few days with programmers. At first, she found it quite ‘daunting’, but in the end, she appreciated the opportunity to spend time with programmers getting to know them better. On the other hand, an informant points out that showing your work to programmers at an early stage in your research can put an artist in a vulnerable position: when an artist is still searching and experimenting, the result is far from visible. She realizes that people sometimes have difficulties to assess how a work develops and progresses and she feels that sometimes people too quickly form an opinion about a project or simply write it off there and then.

6.5 The good, the bad, and the residency

A Brussels-based informant has pointed out that interrupted and conditional working schedules such as those mentioned above are one of the many reasons she lives and works in Brussels even though her funding at the time came entirely from her home country. In her home country, as the informant explains, the actual working conditions in a theater space are sub-standard. Working hours are limited from the morning until 4 pm. and one has to do everything by oneself in a ludicrous way: ‘In the morning, you would have to put down the dance floor and take it off at the end of the day. [...] If we were using anything such as light, we always had to take it down. And we had a fixed set, so we had to take it down every day, if we wanted to use it’. Nonetheless, she can see the positive side of working in this manner when she fleetingly remarks that ‘it’s good, because you learn also how to hang up the lights’. However, the informant prefers to work in Brussels and, by extension in Flanders, because of the more generous, multi-faceted technical, administrative and supplementary financial support offered by workspaces and co-producing art centers, where uninterrupted work is generally guaranteed. In fact, the informant terms it ‘a really nice hacky way’ of combining direct funding from her home country with the advantages of tactically using the infrastructure subsidized by the Flemish Government. In her words:

So we got a lot of money to do this piece [from my home country]. But then we worked in residencies here [in Brussels], which was for free and often residency budgets also, and technicians, and everything. So we worked here, and we got the best of both.

In that respect, my informant speaks about the residency spaces in Belgium as ‘luxurious’ and she feels ‘really spoilt’. In Brussels (and by extension in Flanders and to a much lesser extent in Wallonia), the residency system has proven to be quite generous: the use of a studio is mostly awarded to the artists free of charge, oftentimes including technical support, accommodation, meals and occasionally even a working budget (for example, for expenses or props). These spaces are able to operate as such because they receive structural support from the Flemish Government, which functions as a form of indirect funding for artists. In fact, the majority of Brussels-based respondents have or have had also agreements with venues, gallery spaces or other more alternative studios to use a studio space free of charge. This was seldom the case in Berlin, except for the free studio space one of my informants was entitled to as a graduate of HZT. Even when co-producing, studio space tends to be merely discounted in Berlin, as an informant explains. In Berlin, residencies with free studio space seem to happen to a lesser extent, but informants rather pay for alternative or even more underground studio spaces. Studio space is usually quite expensive, but some Berlin-based informants seem to have found interesting deals in their neighborhoods, especially for working on a solo practice. Contemporary dance artists are expected to pay the charge for studio space either out of pocket or with a working budget they have received elsewhere, for example via a project subsidy. One of my Berlin-based informants finds it a privilege that she has found a very affordable studio in the end of her street, where she can go whenever she wants. She wonders how other people can properly work, when studio space is so expensive and therefore so limited in time: ‘the artistic research is so poor, because you don’t allow yourself to waste time on it’.

Especially the abundance of all-round residency spaces in Flanders and Brussels is applauded by most Brussels-based informants. Even though they might have to travel outside Brussels to work in a studio, the distances in Flanders are generally quite workable and artists can often commute between Brussels and the residency space, if they wish to do so. Many Brussels-based informants have compared the generosity of the Belgian infrastructure in terms of studio space to the situation in their home country or previous base city, where one either has to pay for (usually unsubsidized) studio spaces at an hourly or daily rate, or one only has restricted access to the spaces between certain hours. The most recurrent assets of the Belgian residencies spaces are definitely the fact that they are free; that they mostly provide healthy meals at least once a day; that they are clean, well-equipped and usually have a proper heating system; and, finally that most of them have decent sleeping arrangements, friendly and helpful staff, and provide technical support. Particularly the hospitality and the genuine interest in the work of the resident artists is much appreciated. Problems are usually dealt with as soon as possible, for example, should the heating appear to be defect, should the floor seem dirty, or should the Wi-Fi not work at the start of a working day. Most Brussels-based informants do not really complain about the infrastructure provided within the Flanders

context, but quite the contrary. Nevertheless, I have noted several instances in my fieldnotes that reveal some issues especially in terms of infrastructure during residencies in both Brussels and Berlin. As I was observing parts of a creative process, I noted that there was a studio underneath the residency space. In my fieldnotes, I commented that I imagine there might be some noise issues (originating from both directions), which was later confirmed by my informant. In other observations, I noted that the studio heating did not function properly (too cold, too hot, too noisy) or there was no functioning Wi-Fi or drinkable water available, which was in some cases due to the fact that the space was not meant as a studio space for dance per se. These observations are much in line with what the following informant notes:

I think that most institutions that have worked with dance for some time, they are usually pretty good at recognizing the needs of most contemporary dancers when it comes to space, and maybe space to warm up, temperature, floor requirements and things like that. But, I worked in – and I've seen it happen over and over – certain galleries or museums that are, I guess, less used to dealing with actual people. There, you often have to fight to maybe just have a changing room.

In those latter cases within my fieldwork, a dance Marley was not always present, or was sometimes put on a concrete or brick floor instead of a wooden sprung floor. In one alternative theater space, for example, the performers did not have a bathroom backstage, which meant that they had to cross the stage and go through the foyer to use the bathroom outside before the show. In another space, I saw the wind blowing through the plastic that covered some broken windows and the tribune platform was reached by a very questionable staircase. There was even a net attached above for the purpose of securing the crumbling ceiling. However, in this latter case it should be noted that this space was to be renovated into a proper dance studio the next year though it remained in use in the meantime. As a last example, during a studio observation, when I arrived at 11:20 a.m., my informant had not been able to do her warm-up, because the staff had still been cleaning the studio space before and upon my arrival the floor was still wet. While it is of course a good thing that the dance floor is cleaned in the morning, still precious time was lost and later that same day my informant still encountered a splinter in her foot.

All in all, in some studio spaces, my informants were left alone, which on the one hand allowed them to work uninterruptedly, but on the other, they had to solve technical problems themselves at times. In other studio spaces, I have witnessed people coming and going thus disrupting the creative process on a constant basis, typically with questions related to production work and logistics (e.g. how many vegetarians will be eating? How many people are on the guest list? Can these pupils have a look into the studio? What is tomorrow's schedule?) Either case was experienced as positive at times and negative at other times. Needless to say that these observations are very telling about the working

conditions in the field. It goes without saying that one always prefers a certain studio space over another and much also depends on the phase the creative process is in at the moment of the residency. When applying for a residency space, one thus needs to consider which spaces fit best to the research phase, since one does not necessarily require a black box space with a light grid in the beginning phase, for example. Overall, it should be stressed that in contrast to what perhaps might look like a list of complaints about the infrastructure and services of certain residency spaces, particular studio spaces – especially within Flanders but also a small number within Germany – are perceived as especially welcoming and informants describe these as very hospitable environments, certainly so when healthy meals are provided free of charge, technical assistance is at one's disposal and the staff is involved and shows an interest in the artistic work by providing feedback and regularly interacting with the artists.

A more general problem inherent to the residency system relates to the combination of the (transnational) residencies with family life - which I have already discussed at length under "Personal-Professional Confusion". As a point of critique, Nachbar puts forward that many dance residency spaces are not equipped and prepared for family life and argues that they ought to provide child care and better lodgings (2006, paragraph 15). Indeed, dance residencies can put a strain on one's private life and vice versa. Whereas working on a creation in a dance company context involves something close to a nine-to-five schedule for a longer period of time in the same location (the company's studio), dance residencies are usually only two to three weeks long and tend to be dispersed in time and location. One informant explains that he currently manages to combine residencies with family life quite well, because his two daughters are not yet of school-age. His mother lives in the region, so whenever he is away for work, his partner stays with her mother-in-law who helps out with the newborn child. In other instances, his partner visits her own mother abroad accompanied by the children. In turn, he does the same when his partner is away for work. Under these circumstances, having a personal network of support proves to be crucial to keep the work going. He adds that lengthier residency periods, however, are unfeasible in the life phase he is in. Another informant recounts a residency, during which a collaborator had brought her newborn along. Even though the newborn was very welcome in the group, the new situation required some adjustment: they did not share an apartment, but my informant mentioned she was woken up by the newborn early in the mornings anyway. Furthermore, the regular breastfeeding undermined the prospect of uninterrupted work. The collaborator could only join the process again once her baby was finally back asleep. The informant comments:

In the end, if we were lucky, we had maybe all together one and a half hours per day all working together. It is such a different rhythm and we're not used to that. Normally, we stick all the time together and we do everything together.

In terms of infrastructure, accommodation facilities are sometimes poor as they are generally not equipped for housing a family. If the residency space does not have facilities of its own, they often provide a guest apartment in the city – preferable close to the space. However, as the long commute documented in logbook B in Annex 7 reveals, this was not the case. Indeed, in some cases, the residents need to find a sublet flat themselves. Usually, a network of contacts in several cities comes in handy here. Most of the time, residents end up staying in another dance artist’s apartment, who is in turn away for work. All in all, my informants shared a variety of good and bad experiences with regard to the housing situation during a residency. The unpleasant experiences predominantly include the situations in which residents have to share housing and encounter an invasion of their privacy. This was especially true for the last-minute couch-surfing situations due to unexpected budget cuts, as I mentioned under “Chasing Funding”. Another informant explained that he was sleeping in the living room, while his light designer slept in the bed room. Since they know each other very well, he did not feel uncomfortable in that situation, but the situation was not ideal because of clashing biorhythms. In tendency, most informants do not seem to mind these sleeping circumstances when in residency and working closely together anyway. They often see it as part of the residency experience. Nonetheless, sharing a room is a different thing when on tour. In those cases, the informants really want a good night sleep and some private time for themselves.

6.6 A precarity trap?

The biggest flaw of the residency system is perhaps that residencies do not always come with a wage. In those instances, residencies tend to become somewhat of a precarity trap: while the artists feel lucky to be able to work and not having to invest in it, they are not paid for their time. It is indeed so that several residencies typically provide a production budget, however, my fieldwork has revealed that this budget is often not enough to cover artist fees. As I pointed out before, choreographers tend to sacrifice their own fees in order to pay their dancers during the residency. But more often than not, there is usually no budget for salaries at all unless the artist has been granted a subsidy. Working unpaid in residencies is a precarity trap, because the lack of income undermines building up pension rights and keeps one from earning a living. Nevertheless, artists often do not see it as a trap, because they are happy to work without having to pay into it. In this respect, an informant refers to a past residency program she participated in for the purpose of artistic exchange. The exchange program was part of a larger event, which was sponsored by several multinational corporations. In her experience, the two-week program was

actually quite ‘a lot of work for no money’ and she comments that ‘when you then put our weird little exchange with no money in that context, it’s totally outrageous. What the fuck, if [a multinational corporation] is our sponsor, then why aren’t we getting paid?’ Inversely, another informant recounts an exchange program with similar goals, but in her case, everything was paid for, including a generous fee. She remarked that it was a very enlightening and life-changing experience and she particularly appreciated the acknowledgement of the organization to pay artists for their time.

It merits mention that the voice of those who run the residency spaces and programs is missing in my asymmetric account. Additionally, I do not have any quantitative data on the ratio of *good* and *bad* residency spaces or programs within Brussels (or Belgium) and Berlin (or Germany). Given my open research focus and cooperative paradigm, a certain bias is to be assumed: I suspect that I often heard more accounts about the negative aspects and flaws of the residency system, or at least in more detail than the positive aspects. My methodology does not allow the inclusion of the narrative or vision of those running the residency spaces and programs, which is a limitation that should be kept in mind when coming to a conclusion. Nonetheless, these findings do seem to reveal several flaws of the residency system that can be generalized as well as a number of specific flaws that are linked to particular residency programs or spaces. Specific residency programs appear to have certain expectations that impede the promise of uninterrupted work and the general research-oriented character of a residency, for example when they come with obligations to show or limited access to the studio space. The more general flaws of the residency system include the scattering of creation periods in the studio over time and space, which often seems to result not only in very adaptable pieces, but also in unfinished pieces premiering on European stages. Several informants and survey respondents seemed to agree that in both Brussels and Berlin you can say you work in dance and it is accepted and recognized as professional work, at least from an institutional perspective. The signatures of manifold institutions on the fair practice codes certainly affirm this (such as for example the Belgian initiatives Engagement and the *Handvest voor de podiumkunstenaar* or *Charter for the stage artist*). However, my fieldwork has also exposed that this acknowledgement still remains too theoretical at times and is not in practice appropriated. On the mesolevel, the acknowledgement of how artists work is thus not always reflected into the institutional behavior towards the artists and their working modes. In several of the mentioned examples, the cooperating institutions do not seem to translate their promise of uninterrupted work into reality. In conclusion, as Hesters also observes, contemporary dance careers thus develop largely between and not within institutions (2004, 84). This type of career management requires an insurmountable amount of organization and planning that leaves only little time for research and experiment. An informant pinpoints the lack of spontaneity as a major drawback of the residency system due to its temporality. Most significantly, this general lack of time for creative work, regulated in limited time blocks, undermines the quality

of the dance pieces we see on European stages. The dance field becomes fragmented: a variety of semi-finished dance productions are created in bits and pieces. In turn, the conjoining mobility puts the artist's quality of life in jeopardy. In Nachbar's words: 'Since the novelty of travelling and of being-elsewhere has worn off and working abroad has become a habit, then the side effects come to the fore and signs of fatigue appear' (2006, paragraph 13).

6.7 On the road

In the project-based work regime in which contemporary dance artists work on multiple projects simultaneously on an individual basis as well as in collaboration, it is unrealistic to merely focus on your project in residency. Even when uninterrupted work is guaranteed in the studio, a combination of factors interferes: collaborating artists might have other commitments and their schedules might overlap. The spatial and temporal mobility of contemporary dance artists working in residency (production) and on tour (presentation) yield more general consequences. An informant points out that she was having trouble scheduling rehearsals because several collaborating dancers were constantly on tour with other projects. This mobility would sometimes lead to unreasonable working schedules: in one case a dancer had to catch a plane right after the rehearsal on Friday. On Saturday, she performed abroad in a festival. She was invited to dinner after the performance, which ran late. She went back to her hotel around 1 a.m. to catch a taxi to the airport only a few hours later at 4:30 a.m. She went straight back to rehearsal on Sunday – which was rescheduled to the weekend because several dancers had missed a rehearsal day the week before due to performances. In a similar vein, during a studio observation, I witnessed a dancer joining the rehearsals after lunch coming straight from the airport after two performances abroad without allowing some time for a warm-up. As a last example, logbook B in Annex 7 also exposes that the informant appears to be involved in another project for which she needed to rehearse during the weekend while in residency. She documented two rehearsal days for a different project, a replacement, which took place only about a week before the end of her ongoing residency and upcoming premiere. She was thus working non-stop in the final stages of a residency. Fortunately, the 'overtime' was compensated with a day off on Monday, during which her collaborators worked on the material without her. As the logbook excerpt reveals, my informant was suffering a precariatized mind: aside from the obligations towards the residency program, the production work and the replacement rehearsals for the other project, she also seemed to be working on the design of a new album cover for the band she is involved in. The deadline for this new cover design

seemed to coincide with the end of the residency period. As a result, she started her mornings and finished her evenings with countless emails; to the extent that she often forgot to have a proper breakfast. She documented several times that she had to grab breakfast on her commute to the studio, and noted in her log: 'taking bus, train, UBahn, bus to the theater and grabbing breakfast and lunch at the train station on the way and think that this is a quite expensive way of living'. In fact, her logbook also uncovers the unhealthy eating pattern that goes hand in hand with an intensive schedule, such as grabbing a quick falafel for the road. On her day off, she logs going grocery shopping and cooking vegetables. She emphasizes the word *vegetables* with two exclamation marks. When I point this out to her, she comments:

I was really looking forward to have, first of all, time to buy something to not come too late that everything is closed, and then to take time for cooking vegetables. [...] We were actually feeding us with falafel and canteen food, which was not too bad, but still. And also, I mean, not only cooking something nice, but also cooking and having friends, like, having time to eat.

Aside from eating healthy food, her schedule and precariatized mind did not allow her to take the time to properly eat a meal with friends. In fact, several other informants have documented grabbing meals on the road. A Berlin-based informant detects, when logging her days, that she does not have a fixed eating pattern at all. The size of the city combined with a tight schedule juggling a side job and rehearsals require always having a Tupperware container at hand, as she pointed out in one of the interviews. While many people with busy schedules probably recognize these unhealthy eating patterns, I ought to point out that these observations are important to take into account since contemporary dance artists are essentially working with their bodies as their instruments and it is therefore crucial to remain fit and healthy to be employable. Having to grab a falafel on the road does not seem to conform with the professional demand of staying fit and healthy.

Furthermore, a fortunate coincidence allowed me to compare the very similar accounts of two informants who were involved in the same piece that toured around in Europe: while they both were very disappointed with the poor conditions of one hosting venue, they both felt so much more respected by another hosting venue 'because they really know how to treat artists' - as one of the informants puts it. In the particularly welcoming location, not only were the performers accommodated in a nice hotel near the theater with access to healthy food at a reduced price, most importantly, they were also invited to dinner and all the performers involved had regular exchange with the programmer who showed a genuine interest in the work and the performers. As one of both informants recounts:

They have a regular hotel where the artists stay so you're close to the theater and then they're visiting us in rehearsal, they're there, engaged, just to watch and be

interested in what we're doing, advocating for us with the tech crew, coming up to dinner with us every night, and this is an opposition to a few weeks later [...]. Totally opposite experience [laughs] where we have to just take a bus and then a train on our own, there's no festival or venue-regular thing where they meet you at the airport or anything like that. It's scavenger-style-do-it-yourself, which is okay, but then we end up staying in some crappy hotel in the wrong side of town.

The informant enhances that, most disappointingly, when he went to the venue to introduce himself and ask for directions to the stage during this 'opposite experience', the venue's director and his assistant did not show much interest in his person. He recounts: 'this is not welcoming, I feel like I'm an intruder and also the director doesn't even take the time to take his face off of the computer in order to acknowledge me...' On top of all things, there was no food provided after the show and they ended up eating jalapeño peppers and nachos in a bar and 'they were the crappiest version of both of those foods' the informant claims he has ever had. These are two contradicting but very telling experiences of how artists are treated on the premises of institutions while on tour.

6.8 Liquid dance communities

Contemporary dance artists are thus often on the road travelling to residencies creating new pieces or they tour around to perform existing piece in a number of locations across Europe and perhaps beyond. However, the mobility of contemporary dance artists is also driven by numerous training or teaching opportunities abroad (e.g. the popular *Impulstanz* Festival in Vienna each summer). As we have seen, this constant mobility has an impact on the artistic work in the sense that we see many adaptable and sometimes unfinished pieces on the European stages, but how does this constant mobility affect the lives of contemporary dance artists? As a more banal example, several informants have expressed their concern of not being able to keep pets, maintain plants or sustain a hobby that requires not easily transportable equipment such as drum playing. When I probe one informant on how she deals with her dog while abroad for work, she explains that she usually makes a detour via her parents' place (in a neighboring country!) who look after the dog while she is away. Nonetheless, the following accounts, most of them by Berlin-based informants, reveal more concerning consequences of contemporary dance artists' mobility in time and space especially on their social life and sense of community in the dance capitals.

During my fieldwork, I caught one of my Brussels-based informants on the one day he was home between travels for different jobs as a performer, as the laundry drying all over

the apartment gave away. In a similar vein, I met one of my Berlin-based informants in a café next to the local laundry mat, because her washing machine had broken down when she needed to do her laundry urgently between two work trips. She had literally just emptied her suitcase from a residency and was leaving again for the next one the day after we met. She tells me that she regrets that she cannot commit to any physical training, because she is constantly traveling for work. Additionally, she forgot she had in fact already scheduled a meeting with someone else, which her partner attended instead so she would have a chance to talk with me. In my fieldnotes, I documented these off-tape observations as signs of stress due to her mobile working life. On another occasion, we touched on a similar topic:

Finally, after one week, I have been able to unpack my suitcase. It was too much of everything. Once I just could not pack my suitcase again. I was really stressed at that point. I was on the edge and I had my suitcase open in front of me, because I knew I had to travel the next day. It was open and it was just not possible. I could not put anything in. Maybe because I knew I had to leave again and organize again: a new thing starting, leaving home again, like all of this.

In fact, her suitcase from two weeks before this conversation was still left unpacked in the house. 'But I put it behind the door', she quickly comments when she admits this to me, 'I put it somewhere where I don't have to see it.' Consequently, she remarks that she lacks the feeling of home. Ultimately, the constant mobility and having to pack, unpack and repack a suitcase engenders a form of alienation. In her case, the alienation has two dimensions: on the one hand, she feels alienated from the creative and physical work and, on the other, alienated from home and a social life. Even though she has lived in Berlin her whole life, when people ask her where she lives, she tells them that currently she merely has a flat in Berlin. She explains:

This is my answer, because I don't feel like I'm living in Berlin. Also: friends. It's really difficult. And that's what I miss so much: to have a bunch of friends you can meet and hang out with in the park, have a beer, play cards... Because most of my friends are performers and they are never there and if they're there, I'm not.

During my fieldwork, another Berlin-based informant was continually on the road hopping from teaching gig to teaching gig, to the extent that she was barely in town and available for an interview. As a matter of fact, she was flying from one place to another, barely passing Berlin at all (which was partly due to a long-distance relationship). Berlin is a temporary base for her; a place where she spends her time off and on between work commitments abroad. As she puts it: 'you come and go, come and go, and there's not really enough time to make roots somehow. So I feel like I'm just passing by'. As a consequence of her constant mobility, she feels like a passer-by without any commitments in Berlin. Even though she loves the city, she struggles with finding a reason to stay: one the one

hand, she enjoys the freedom of not having any obligations in the city, but on the other hand she dislikes the feeling that her presence in the city seems meaningless. In a similar vein, a survey respondent believes that ‘Berlin is the city where everything happens and nothing happens. Berlin has a lot to teach about oneself, there is a lot of learnings to have here but is also a city that doesn’t push for more’. These examples uncover an unfortunate consequence of contemporary dance artists’ mobility: whereas the threefold chase connected to the public funding system and cultural policies engenders a sense of loneliness in the field as the previous chapters conclude, the temporal and spatial mobility is at the root of a feeling of loneliness and homelessness in the base city. Firstly, the informants describe the absence of a genuine social life; whereas one informant pinpointed to the fact that there is no time for a social life using the example of cooking dinner with friends, another informant explicitly expresses the feeling of not having many – if any – true friends in the city at all.

Therefore, if one can speak about a *dance community* in Brussels and Berlin, it is one that is mobile, ephemeral, fluid, virtual and nothing-but-stable. According to Sara Ahmed in her text “Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement”, the notion of community usually suggests a certain fixity, but in this particular case of community-forming among international dance artists, the sense of fixity is provided ‘by sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home’ (Ahmed 1999, 337). This fixity concerns a shared experience of what is absent, namely home, family, and friends. Indeed, few members of these dance communities were born and raised in the capitals, which implies that the communities are rather imagined ones, founded on transnational mobility. In line with Benedict Anderson’s exposé on imagined communities, a dance community is imagined as a community, because the community exists in the minds of its members: although they will never know or meet all of their peers, each of them has an image of their community in their minds (Anderson 1991, 6). When Anderson defined the concept of community rather abstractly as a mental process, he also observed that print-capitalism had enabled growing numbers of people to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways (1991, 36): people can *feel connected* to each other even though they are (physically) distant. Following up on this observation, I would add that the present-day digital era allows people to connect even more effortlessly and consequently to form not only mobile but also virtual communities, such as the Brussels and Berlin dance communities. These dance capitals thus become in-between or transit spaces hosting an imagined dance community, which have a rather fleeting character and are grounded in temporary unions. Contemporary dance artists who have reflected on their work environments too depict them as essentially mobile and virtual dance communities. In her text “Becoming Room, Becoming Mac”, Brussels-based performing artist Eleanor Bauer points out that an artist’s autonomy and productivity now require having ‘a Mac of one’s own’, instead of ‘A Room of One’s Own’ as Virginia Woolf would have it (Bauer 2007, under “On Perspective”). In post-Fordist times, not a room for solitude but rather a port

of connection is essential because artists are continually producing and selling themselves within transnational networks facilitated by digital technologies. Like any creative worker occupied with performing immaterial labor, artists need to remain plugged in everywhere all the time. Consequently, their physical presence in the city becomes actually less vital and is increasingly replaced by a virtual presence. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that contemporary dance artists actually do remain reliant on a personal network of contacts for creating job opportunities, which continues to demand a certain level of physical presence in the field, as we have seen especially in the chapter “Chasing Programmers”.

In a somewhat similar vein, Berlin-based contemporary artist Diego Agulló observes that in the Berlin dance community, ‘there is a problem of continuity: people are not in Berlin all the time and the level of personal engagement and reliability is always relative’ (2017, paragraph 5). Agulló has been interviewing up to thirty dance professionals trying to capture contemporary dance in Berlin through their lens. In his inquiry into the notion of the Berlin dance scene, many dance professionals seem to be unable to delineate it: even if such a scene exists at all, it is certainly not a static one, since its context and content are constantly changing. Berlin rather carries a creative promise or potential that seems to be never realized but always in-the-making and the contemporary dance community therefore seems to be constantly becoming, rather than being. The problems of visibility and continuity in these mobile and virtual dance communities seem to be oxymora. I am aware that the notion of community is highly theorized and carries many different meanings. Therefore, I choose to draw on Zygmunt Bauman’s writings on *Liquid Modernity* to grasp the fleeting nature of what I refer to as imagined dance community. Using the concept of liquidity metaphorically to describe the contemporary dance communities in Brussels and Berlin, helps to understand the essential mobility of their members and their virtual presence. As Bauman writes in his introduction:

Fluids travel easily. They “flow”, “spill”, “run out”, “splash”, “pour over”, “leak”, “flood”, “spray”, “drip”, “seep”, “ooze”; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped - they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still. (Bauman 2000, 2)

Thus, the dance communities can be viewed as ‘liquid’ or ‘light communities’ following Bauman’s writing:

The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of “lightness”. There are liquids which, cubic inch for cubic inch, are heavier than many solids, but we are inclined nonetheless to visualize them all as lighter, less “weighty” than everything solid. We associate “lightness” or “weightlessness” with mobility and inconstancy: we know from practice that the lighter we travel the easier and faster we move. (Bauman 2000, 2)

In that regard, sociologists Jan Willem Duyvendak and Menno Hurenkamp's writings on 'light communities' (*lichte gemeenschappen* in Dutch) help us further to comprehend the essence of these dance communities. The authors understand light communities, as opposed to heavy communities, as (temporary) groupings, which an individual member is free to leave without severe penalties (Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2008, 3). Drawing on Robert Wuthnow (1998), they depart from the idea that people do not radically individualize themselves, but they rather increasingly organize themselves informally in temporary alliances (Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2008, 3). Light communities are essentially a product of individualism, freedom of choice and flexibility, especially since the individual freedom of movement – the choice to leave the community – is key to being light. Yet, to a certain extent, light or liquid communities do come with predictable homogeneity in terms of their members' views and behavior. In summary, based on my findings on the temporal and spatial mobility of contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin, I would define both dance communities as constantly changing networks of individual contemporary dance artists, who form a light or liquid community of potential colleagues in solidary individualization as they hustle from one place to another, yet all in the same boat. In a globalized society, transnationally mobile contemporary dance artists thus seem to establish a *glocal* web of residency spaces and co-production venues across Europe and beyond, which is an at once locally embedded and transnationally functioning professional network. In an acceleratory regime, its formation can be seen as a survival tactic in search for external subsidization, however it is sometimes difficult to decipher whether the established glocal network is at the cause of or rather the effect of contemporary dance artists' mobility. Analogously, it remains a challenge to detect to what extent their mobility is cause or effect of a more widespread and general precarization in a project-based and neoliberal work regime. Therefore, in addition to the focus on all things fast and mobile, the next chapter continues to untangle the causes and effects of neoliberal modes of production on the living and working conditions of contemporary dance artists through focusing on all things flexible – a 'magic word' and one of the 'key notions in the organization of economic life today' as dramaturge Marianne Van Kerkhoven once put it (2009, 8).

Intermezzo A: *45 Minutes*, song text from *VOLCANO* (2014) by Liz Kinoshita, Clinton Stringer, Salka Ardal Rosengren and Justin F. Kennedy

In this day and age, waking up isn't easy,
My Mac is my cage, I am constantly on stage,
Here, look at me, I'm in Kazakhstan,
Here, look there, I'm in Uzbekistan,
Always something new, who cares if it's true,
Just show that you were there,
And the people will care for you,
But all I want, no tram nor Instagram,
No book face in this endless look race,
I need time, without this rhyme,
only 45 minutes, all to myself...

I guess I feel a little, threatened when I'm caught,
Without the time to thoroughly think out a thought,
Here or there,
Time to get started on my to-read bookshelf
So many things that I'd like to do,
I can't find time to simply concentrate on you
Or me and therein my dear, the rub does lie,
I run from pillar to post, constantly,
In this day and age, waking up isn't easy,
I wish that moments in the shower would suffice
So don't say there's 24 hours, in a single day,
When I want just 45 minutes my way

Chapter 7

The Flexible

7.1 Flexible accumulation

In 1998, economist Richard Sennett already noted in his *The Corrosion of Character* that workers in late capitalism have to be especially flexible, which eventually will take a toll on the social and private lives of these workers and their character (1998, 10). In his *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno describes the qualities of immaterial workers as ‘mobile and detached, adaptable, curious, opportunistic and cynical, also toward institutions; they are inventive and share knowledge through communication and language; they are mostly de-politicized, also disobedient’ (2004, 17). Importantly, he enhances further in his book that the principal requirements of dependent workers today are

to be accustomed to mobility, to be able to keep up with the most sudden conversions, to be able to adapt to various enterprises, to be flexible in switching from one set of rules to another, to have an aptitude for a kind of linguistic interaction as banalized as it is unilateral, to be familiar with managing among a limited amount of possible alternatives. (Virno 2004, 85)

These requirements are the result of ‘a socialization that has its center of gravity *outside of the workplace*’ (emphasis in original), meaning that much of the professional and symbolic capital is acquired in the precarious pre-contract (or in-between contracts) stage (Virno 2004, 85). The requirements of contemporary dependent workers summed up by Virno are certainly reminiscent of the features of cultural entrepreneurs typified by Ellmeier (2003) in the beginning of this book. In other words, dependent workers are increasingly adopting characteristics of independent workers in the post-Fordist work regime. Post-Fordist and neoliberal workers, dependent as well as independent, can thus be identified as resilient subjects, who have to be skillful in flexibility, persistence and adaptability, as I have stated in the introduction to this book. It is important to

acknowledge these parallels since contemporary dance artists tend to work between institutions rather than within – as I have stressed several times – and the competences and requirements to uphold such an inter-organizational career drift between independent and dependent work (which is in fact reflected in the different employment status the profession of contemporary dance artist holds in Belgium and Germany). Additionally, the equivalent requirements illustrate why studying independent workers, such as contemporary dance artists, and their coping tactics in the new millennium may teach us a few things about the future of work. However, whereas the notion of persistence has been tackled in the threefold chase, it remains somewhat unclear what the neoliberal requirements of flexibility and adaptability entail. What is the difference between these features, how do they apply to contemporary dance artists and how are these notions related to resilience and survival in the contemporary dance profession? Since the contemporary dance artist principally works in the project-based work regime, I depart from Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello to explore these questions. The authors of *The New Spirit of Capitalism* posit that

in the Project-oriented Cité, a “great one” must be adaptable and flexible. He or she is polyvalent, able to move from one activity, or the use of one tool, to another. A “great one” is also active and autonomous. He or she will take risks, make contact with new people, open up new possibilities, seek out useful sources of information, and thus avoid repetition. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 169)

In what follows, I will discuss the faculties of respectively polyvalence, flexibility and adaptability as seen through the lens of contemporary dance.

Dance scholar Anusha Kedhar insightfully discusses the body’s need to meet the demands of late capitalism in illustrating the flexibility, hyperflexibility and inflexibility of South Asian dancers in the United Kingdom (Kedhar 2014). Although her study focuses on a particular group of immigrant dancers, many of her findings can be applied to contemporary dance artists (and performing arts workers) in general. Kedhar argues that contemporary capitalism and the post-Fordist work regime have created not just flexible citizens but flexible bodies (2014, 24). She understands flexibility as a

broad range of practices that includes, among other corporeal tactics, a dancer’s physical ability to stretch her limbs or bend her spine backward to meet the demands of a particular work or choreographer, her ability to negotiate, and her ability to pick up multiple movement vocabularies and deploy them strategically to increase her marketability and broaden her employment options. (Kedhar 2014, 24)

In other words, a dance artist’s body ought to be polyvalent, flexible and adaptable on the one hand, but also their entire set of pragmatic transferable skills needs to be marked by polyvalence, flexibility and adaptability on the other hand and this in order to remain employable. It thus becomes evident that these three qualities overlap and interweave

constantly. In what follows, I first attempt to discuss these notions as separate entities in relation to the contemporary dance profession drawing on my fieldwork, to bring them back together as an amalgamation that shapes the project-based worker in contemporary dance.

7.1.1 Polyvalent: ‘Being an amateur in everything’

Firstly, project-based workers need to prove they can quickly teach themselves new skills and multiple competences. We have seen that contemporary dance artists need to be able to multitask on the one hand, and these tasks require multiple (entrepreneurial) skills on the other. Especially when consulting the logbooks, in which my informants documented their activities in rehearsal periods and between creations, the extent of multiple jobholding and multitasking becomes apparent. In the excerpt from an informant’s logbook (B) in Annex 7, we saw that she was working on two projects simultaneously. In the final week of the premiere of her first project, she already started rehearsals to replace someone in another project. My informant had agreed months before to do so, unaware at that time that the dates would overlap her premiere week. Her detailed account of the emails about other concurrent project she dealt with that week exposes the multiple tasks she was undertaking in terms of communication, public relations, editing and layout decisions, planning and scheduling, self-management, production work and other logistics, to name only a few. In the context of boundaryless work, one of my informants comments that logging his work activities as I had asked was quite a challenging task, precisely because he tends to multitask: much of his ‘human time’ is interwoven with work sometimes to a lesser or sometimes to a greater extent. To begin with, this interweaving is facilitated by a lack of having a separate work email address, but it surely goes miles beyond. This particular informant points out that whatever he does is loosely connected to eventually something that he might work with:

In those periods [without concrete work such as a rehearsal or a teaching assignment], the interweaving of work and life becomes even more complex, because I’m always multitasking. If I’m cooking, for instance, I have my weights and my barbells in the kitchen, and I might be checking emails at the same time, or listening to music I want to use. I’m constantly combining too many things, which I’m also trying to do less, because I think that’s another reason why my brain is in overdrive. But, it switches from period to period. I mean, when I’m teaching at 9:30 on a regular basis, this schedule changes a lot.

This particular informant quite precisely describes what Guy Standing has termed a ‘precariatized mind’ (2014a) when he formulates his multitasking activities and the self-diagnosed consequences on his state of mind. He acknowledges that he is ‘somebody

who's all the time eating information, because [his] brain doesn't turn off'. Thus, when asked how many hours he works on average per day, he replies:

Twenty-four! Of course, I'm still sleeping sometimes, but I work almost all day, every day. [...] Actually, there is no average week. It really switches according to what we are working on at the moment. When there's a concrete rehearsal period, project or teaching assignment, this dictates what's happening around it. My instinct is to fill up empty periods, as I did recently, because I've got to make money.

He continues that he is currently trying to learn that he does not need to pack every second in his calendar, but at the same time, he realizes that he is not very good at refraining from doing so as he starts to panic the minute he sees a gap. Interestingly, as another example, one of my informants consciously adopts her multitasking skills within her practice and teaching:

I think it's a topic that I was attracted to, this kind of multitasking coordination, overload of information, so it's also something that comes through my technical work, I think. It's dealing a lot with how to juggle a lot of pieces of information in the same time. This is something that I work with a lot, and how to use the body as a tool to develop the brain.

Besides the manifold skills revealed through the threefold chase, such as networking, management, communication, and planning, my informants have shown to be skillful in multimedia work, such as editing videos, projection, writing and recording music, setting up a website and even computer coding. Naturally, my informants do not always excel in all the listed skills, but they are mostly aware that they master them enough to mention them on a CV, as one notes: 'I wouldn't say I'm an expert, but I'm okay in it'. Relatedly, Angela McRobbie points out that whereas the idea of life-long learning in the past was to encourage one's critical thinking, nowadays this notion seems to have shifted and refers to a greater extent to the post-Fordist requirement to continually increase one's skillset in order to remain employable (2016, 5). She remarks that 'being a specialist rather than a multi-skilled "creative" is becoming a thing of the past' (McRobbie 2016, 27).

However, multi-skilling has a double dimension within the contemporary dance profession: having a baggage of multiple skills is not only required in performing the tasks related to being an independent project worker, but it also applies on a corporeal level. Contemporary dance artists are life-long learners to the fullest, who develop pragmatic transferable skills as well as dance-specific skills throughout their trajectory. On a physical level, that means that contemporary dance artists need to show that they have learned a variety of techniques and skills – which Delphine Hesters calls body capital (drawing on Pierre Bourdieu) – and that they can adapt their movement language to a choreographer's vision. Additionally, Hesters also points out that the learning process of the body is infinite, because the possible 'dance languages' in contemporary dance are

inexhaustible and the confrontation with other bodies, spaces and artistic starting points always creates new challenges and this not the least because the own physical constitution of one's body is constantly subject to change (2004, 96). In the 1990's, Susan Leigh Foster suggested that independent choreographers, whose aesthetic visions stem from the American 1960's-period in which choreographic investigation challenged the boundaries between dance and everyday movement, 'require a new kind of body, competent in many styles', which she calls a 'hired body' (Foster 1997, 253). In her text on "Dancing Bodies", she observed that against the backdrop of the neoliberal economy and the post-Fordist labor market, choreographers started to experiment with eclectic vocabularies and new interdisciplinary genres of performance. Foster proposes that this experimentation has circumvented the distinctiveness of the dance body: instead of developing new and unique dance techniques, independent choreographers 'encourage[d] dancers to train in several existing techniques without adopting the aesthetic vision of any' (1997, 253). Also their socio-economic position of being an independent worker lead them to be occupied with entrepreneurship rather than with developing new dance techniques.

In a similar context, in the title of their edited volume *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (2008), Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol coin the term of 'body eclectic' to describe the shift away from learning a specific technique based on a particular dance vocabulary towards an eclectic approach, which seems to go hand in hand with the economic shift from company structures to independent choreographers in a project-based and freelance work regime. As I have discussed, this regime engendered a high degree of mobility between countries, institutions, choreographers and thus also between dance techniques, styles or forms. The decline in specializing in a specific choreographic technique, such as for example Merce Cunningham's technique or the Graham technique, is interwoven with the rise of alternative movement approaches in the United States of the 1960's, which made their way to Europe in the early 1980's. As I pointed out before, in the Judson Dance Theater, the perception of dance stems from the focus on movement with a pedestrian quality, which may date even further back, from the falling and rolling movements introduced in American modern dance. The core idea of contemporary dance is that the choreographer can have access to any kind of material and that s/he recharges the material with artistic substance, with or without a reference to the context from which it transpires. This freedom to explore and experiment causes an eclecticism in training, which is much in line with the neoliberal ideals of life-long learning and self-development. A contemporary dance artist is therefore usually equipped with a baggage of manifold movement techniques, commonly labelled under the umbrella term of *somatics* (which may include Body-Mind Centering, Feldenkrais technique, Alexander Technique, Klein Technique, among other things), which are not based on a movement vocabulary but rather on principles and instructions. They encompass all explorative bodywork, known as movement research, with the purpose to

discover the potential of the body (as perceived from within). Other principle-based training methods that shape the multiskilled contemporary dance artist are, among other things, the collaborative approaches of Contact Improvisation (founded by Steve Paxton) or Flying Low and Passing Through (as developed by David Zambrano). In addition, many contemporary dance artists today are still trained classically to a lesser or greater extent: the contemporary dance school P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels has a morning ballet class on their weekly training schedule, which testifies to the importance of the balance, strength, body control, and flexibility a background in ballet provides. As Joshua Monten puts it in his text “Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed... Eclecticism in Postmodern Dance”:

Generations of modern dancers have forged and left behind their personal choreographic styles; “new” dance styles like capoeira and butoh regularly arrive from abroad and are added to the melting pot of metropolitan dance-making; subcultural movement forms like break-dancing or square-dancing are periodically rediscovered and popularized; [...]. Choreographers feel free to draw on all of these sources or scavenge for new materials in ever more varied locales, from sports and martial arts, to social dances, B-movies, animal documentaries, and the vernacular movements of everyday life. (Monten 2008, 52)

Indeed, a polyvalent contemporary dance artist is also able to draw on other fields requiring bodywork, such as sports or martial arts, but also from other artistic disciplines such as visual arts, music and literature.

In a 2013 lecture exploring the body as an archive in the work of the dance collective SlovaKs, dance scholar Christel Stalpaert has deployed the term ‘embodied acculturation’ to refer to the accumulation of different cultural identities (as opposed to the process of integration). In this context, the body as an archive displays an ‘assemblage of dance techniques, each of them connected with personal memories and notions of cultural identity and memory’ (Stalpaert 2013, n.p.). On the stage, eclectic and therefore polyvalent bodies marked by flexible (and indeed also cultural) accumulation display a very diverse set of dance and performance skills, while simultaneously, as Stalpaert puts it, ‘embracing all styles available in their corporeal (dance) archive’ (2013, n.p.). In the context of life-long learning and self-development, this corporeal (dance) archive – or body capital – is ever-expanding. We thus see resilient bodies onstage; bodies that continuously learn and unlearn. These bodies are adaptable in order to secure survival in the contemporary dance profession; they are able to cope with a heterogeneous catalogue of various techniques, skills, styles and forms; they are able to respond to the dynamic demands of the volatile labor market of contemporary dance. However, polyvalence also refers to the corporeal potential many contemporary dance artists want to explore in the development of movement material. Whereas the mentioned authors still think in terms of the traditional choreographer-performer relationship, dance artists in the project-

based contemporary dance sector rather swap this position continuously and develop movement material in collaboration, thus abandoning notions such as technique or style, but developing new dance languages. Apart from the somewhat imposed flexibility as suggested by the authors, there certainly exists a desired flexibility of developing something together through collaboration.

Having a unique stage presence and individual character are key to success in contemporary dance today. Rather than fitting perfectly in a certain idiom, the multidisciplinary knowledge and the personal movement style of the performer is most essential. Indeed, one informant actually sees being somewhat of ‘an amateur in everything’ as one of his strengths and thus as a unique selling point:

Working as a professional dance artist, I’ve always preferred to think of myself as an amateur. I try to be a little bit good at everything, at many kinds of movement, but I am not really an expert in any one thing except for being myself.

This multiskilledness or polyvalence is certainly not only a demand of the labor and art market, but also a desired form of self-expression and self-development, which might explain at least partly why several contemporary dance artists join dance companies merely temporarily by choice – or why many seem to leave dance companies notwithstanding the income security and opportunities to deepen their qualities as a dancer, which is a question also Hesters explores in her thesis (2004, 141). While dance companies generally offer an in-depth focus on movement material, project-based work broadens that scope through the multiple collaboration possibilities that give rise to polyvalence, which many informants very much enjoy. Contrariwise, my oldest informant, who is leaning towards the age of fifty, comments that he regrets the current trend of de-specialization prevalent in the contemporary dance scene:

I do fear sometimes, because I’m a big fan of specialists, that we’re training generations of generalists. I mean, if you only had general doctors, you’d be in a lot of trouble, you know? So I find this a bit of a weakness and why I try to get more and more as specific as I can with people who want to go there. But it is definitely a thing that’s really important to my artistic practice in many ways, just in how it feeds into the exploration of the body.

However, he comments further that since he does not have an infrastructure or a fixed company to work with, it is difficult to really mold specialists. He is forced to work with ‘pick-up dancers’ instead, which brings me to the next quality of being flexible, or what Kedhar defines as being a ‘permanently on-call’ labor force (2014, 31).

7.1.2 Flexible: ‘Permanently on-call’

While the term flexible applies to something that can be bent or folded without breaking, I continue to use the term referring the skill of bending or folding one’s schedule to the circumstances. Besides the requirement to have an at once multicompetent and polyvalent body, Kedhar (2014) points out that South Asian dancers need to be able to conform to and thrive under increasingly temporary and unpredictable work regimes in contemporary capitalism. Within the performing arts, this ‘hyperflexibility’ – as Kedhar calls it (2014, 26) – implies that artists are often hired last-minute on a temporary basis, even though some might need to travel from abroad (visa arrangements, for example, usually take longer than a two-day’s notice, which is an obstacle for contemporary artists who work transnationally), which, again, adds another dimension to their precarious situation. As Belgian performing artist Diederik Peeters puts it in his text *Bespiegelingen van een Sprinkhaan* [*Reflections of a Grasshopper*]: ‘my first answer to any question is that I am “available”’ (2011, paragraph 6).¹ This constant state of readiness typifies Kedhar’s permanently on-call labor force. In trying to schedule the interviews with my informants, I was equally affected by their hyperflexibility. I was often asked to reschedule appointments and in turn had to become hyperflexible myself, if I wished to get any interviews at all.

As an example, as I was discussing my informant’s travel schedule during one of interview session, I realized I somewhat accidentally caught him on the one day he was home between travels. His laundry was drying all over the apartment. He explains that several last-minute gigs had come up since we had scheduled the interview date. He initially had several performances planned in the UK and would return back to Brussels to fly to a wedding ceremony in his home country about a week later. In the meantime, he was invited to participate in an audition-workshop in Ireland with a choreographer he was intrigued by, but not (yet) entirely convinced he would like to collaborate with. However, the audition date somewhat conflicted with the planned UK performances, as the audition would start the morning after the last performance. He decided to grab the opportunity, which meant that he had an early-morning flight to take on the audition day. Nonetheless, the best scenario to catch that flight, required him to take the last bus to Heathrow airport after his final performance and spend the (short) night there, to fly to Ireland early in the morning and go straight into the audition. Additionally, another last-minute opportunity had come up, which required him to fly to Venice only a day after he had arrived back in Brussels after the audition workshop in Ireland. He was asked, only two weeks in advance, whether he would be available for a performing job he had

¹ Translated from the original Dutch: ‘Op om het even welke vraag is mijn eerste antwoord dat ik “beschikbaar” ben’ (Peeters 2011, paragraph 6).

done before. He was eager to accept the offer, but he had already booked a flight to his home country to attend a wedding, which was happening – again – the day after the Venice performance. Eventually, he grabbed the opportunity, because, as he puts it: ‘in the end there is a possibility of maybe there will be more jobs from the performance, but it’s not sure at all’. After the performance, he flew to Heathrow airport – again – to spend an uncomfortable night in the departure hall. He transferred to another flight early in the morning, which allowed him to attend the wedding party (though missing the ceremony). Nonetheless, he did not regret his decision: ‘so in the end, I made kind of a compromise and it felt quite good, because sometimes I also think I can find myself being too comfortable and sometimes I have to risk things a bit, I’ve got to push a bit, open the doors and see what’s behind.’ Interestingly, another informant demonstrates a similar attitude: ‘there’s times when I’m thinking: “What in three months? I’m fucked”...’. In terms of planning, this informant points out that as an artist it is important to have some resilience to the state of not-knowing. He enhances: ‘I think more of it as an excitement and curiosity, rather than any kind of panic. It doesn’t feel precarious, it feels like living’. Additionally, his experience has taught him that an empty agenda may fill itself all too quickly sometimes – which is something several other informants have pointed out. ‘When it rains, it pours’ is a recurrent expression used by informants to describe working in the contemporary dance profession, as an informant exemplifies:

It’s a very frequent expression for me and my friends, when we talk about working in this work, because it’s almost always that you’re free for long periods of time and then suddenly, you get two calls for the same dates, it’s almost always three. It’s so weird.

Inversely, another informant explains that knowing that she has a full agenda, and therefore no flexibility, for the next six months to come, is ‘very hard’: ‘that’s why it’s so important for me to keep some holes here and there for some spontaneous stuff.’

7.1.3 Adaptable: survival of the fittest

The term ‘adaptable’ points to the capability of being easily modified to suit other conditions, which is related to evolutionary theory and the survival of the fittest (in the sense of adapting the best to the surroundings). As sociologist Jennie Germann Molz points out, the flexibility and adaptability of ‘cosmopolitan bodies’ are, among other things, not merely cultural dispositions but embodied performances of fitness and fitting in. Not only must a body be physically fit to travel, it has to embody tolerance and openness as well towards the world: it needs to adapt itself in order to integrate in new surroundings (Molz 2006, 6). I will discuss adaptability also in the double sense, on a

corporeal and on a pragmatic level, within the contemporary dance profession, starting from the distinction between adaptation and adaptability as set out by Ibert and Schmidt, who recently studied the survival tactics of twenty-three German musical actors (2014). Similar to the contemporary dance profession, the musical business in Germany is a highly dynamic creative labor market, in which people follow jobs rather than jobs following people (as posed by Ibert and Schmidt). Both job markets are marked by fierce competition, especially for women, due to an oversupply and a stagnating (or even shrinking) market. The authors posit that their case study epitomizes extreme and widespread features of volatile and precarious labor markets (Ibert and Schmidt 2014, 7). I distinguish many parallels between their case of musical actors and my own case of contemporary dance artists. Similar to contemporary dance artists, musical actors offer their embodied selves as living labor, hence developing their own identity as part of their employability. Due to the threatening oversupply of workforce, musical actors as well as contemporary dance artists need to play out their unique selling points, which are constantly molded to the demand. As I discussed, contemporary dance artists are equally confronted with temporary contracts and adopting a multi-local mobility pattern, which both undermine the performing artists' social security. Similar to contemporary dance, the musical genre combines several performing arts (such as singing, dancing and acting), which – as the authors stress – causes a delicate combination of occupational health risks overall increasing physical vulnerability in the long haul (Ibert and Schmidt 2014, 6), which I will certainly come back to in third part of this book. In their paper on “Adaptation and Adaptability in Volatile Labor Markets”, Ibert and Schmidt conclude that career starters in the German musical business show a willingness to conform to market requirements in order to be able to react to labor market demands, adopting a telescopic identity. By this, they mean that neophytes in the musical business develop professional capital by accumulating different work experiences and therefore adapting themselves to market requirements, particularly focused on one image oriented towards a distant future of becoming a successful musical actor. The authors term this ‘adaptation’ (Ibert and Schmidt 2014, 12). More advanced musical actors, on the contrary, concentrate more on their own talent in order to create market demand and they have developed prismatic identities, which offer the possibility of being simultaneously present in several related labor markets (such as dramatic actor, singer, dancer, trainer, coach) through adapting and thus multiplying their professional identities to jobs also outside (or adjacent to) the field (by streamlining their CVs according to different requirements). In a later career stage, musical actors thus shift their ‘resilience strategies’ – as the authors term these – from adaptation to adaptability (Ibert and Schmidt 2014, 19). Indeed, I have already discussed that survival tactics of ‘individual resilience’ within my field study are omnipresent, not necessarily shifting with age or work experience. I would argue that within contemporary dance, tactics of adaptation and adaptability generally coincide. In this respect, I could bring up Jochen Roller’s piece *No Money, No Love* (2002) once more, in

which he uses his strengths as a performing artist in other fields as I discussed in under “Internal Subsidization”. His message suggests that a dance artist can perform other professions offstage as well as onstage, while simultaneously his dance movements were derived from the movement vocabulary of his multiple jobholding. In a similar manner, my informants have shown to use their strengths as artists in their side-jobs as translators, for example, by not merely translating text but additionally offering substantive comments in reference to the content.

On a corporeal level, a project-based contemporary dance artist firstly adapts to a certain movement vocabulary (e.g. a choreographer’s aesthetic, or what Hesters calls a ‘dance language’, see 2004, 96) and is able to adopt many styles, techniques or forms though simultaneously maintaining a unique stage personality. In this case, contemporary dance artists adapt to or even co-create a dance language. Contemporary dance artists are susceptible to physical precarity since they are never certain that their individual style – even if it proves one is knowledgeable about various techniques – will be appreciated by a choreographer, or whether their bodies are adaptable enough to meet the specific requirements of a new dance job. Within the neoliberal regime of flexible artistic accumulation, dancers must in fact continuously learn and unlearn. They must have well-trained bodies, but these very same bodies should be flexible enough to temporarily place on hold a particular technique in order to incorporate a new one, thus constantly de- and restructuring one’s dancing habitus and subjectivity, as Rudi Laermans puts it (2015, 318–319). In a new collaboration, contemporary dance artists adapt to the novel and exciting environment, exploring new horizons, in cooperation with each other. The potential of the collaboration, be it semi-directive, is grounded in the unknown, as also Laermans puts it: it is grounded in the hope to discover a variety of new performative possibilities or to at least sharpen the already acquired skills (2015, 316). Lastly, in terms of adaptability, Kedhar points out that the English Arts Council has imposed particular dual demands on South Asian dancers and other ethnic minority artists: they have to be flexible in order to maneuver between ‘diversity’ and ‘innovation’ (2014, 33). However, this affects any performing artist applying for project-funding, because the evaluators expect artists to surprise them, yet at the same time they must remain consistent within the context of their oeuvre and its parameters: too much innovation and experiment may chase the faithful audience away, as we have seen in “Chasing Programmers”.

Secondly, and more pragmatically, the contemporary dance artist is also able to adapt dance productions to the system’s demands, as I have demonstrated to some extent under the header “Tactical Pieces and Precarity Solos”. In addition, contemporary dance artists often need to be willing to adapt a finished production to a programmer’s demands, to a venue’s budget, or to a certain stage or setting. I classify these pieces as resilient, because they are able to stay alive due to their ability of being molded to external demands. Significantly, Ibert and Schmidt point out that resilience addresses ‘the ability to protect the threatened entity from possible harms in order to secure its survival’ (2014, 2). The

entity in this case is a contemporary dance production. Its survival is threatened when, for example, a programmer suddenly informs the artists about changing conditions: e.g. the stage is smaller than expected, rehearsal time or technical setup is cut short, there is no budget to pay all performers involved, etcetera. Finished productions are resilient when they are able to adapt quickly to these changed conditions and they therefore survive. Resilient pieces are adaptable in the twofold sense of the word as defined by Ibert and Schmidt: 'Adaptability includes the paradoxical task of being prepared for unforeseen, rapid and pervasive changes' and 'takes the possibility of creatively adjusting the environment to the system's needs' (2014, 5).

In the context of resilient pieces, an informant recounts how her partner was first asked to change a piece to the conditions of a specific festival stage. The stage would be smaller than required, so would the budget. Furthermore, the festival organizers kept on changing the performances dates. Finally, when he had managed to adapt the piece to the festival's conditions, the organizers informed them that they could not afford to program the piece after all. As she recounts:

Now that he organized with all the performers and stuff, now they said "oh shit, we cannot afford it, I'm sorry". And beforehand they phoned: "Hey, tomorrow I need a text and I need this and please we have to talk now about your content and if we can somehow bring it on stage from this size". And then you make ahead and you organize and you think. "Can you do it with five performers, not with seven?" and you think about that. All of this work you do, and then in the end they say: "ah, but we only have 200 euros for each". It's like... can we first talk about that?! Can we first talk about money and then see if... because there's something hard that I don't know... I don't understand this! I also really don't want this anymore. I think it's good to make a point there, or to really say "okay, I will make ahead on how I can change the piece to your circumstances, could you send me in the next week a proposal for honorary and money?" Something like that.

My informant goes on to explain that a similar course of events happened on a different occasion:

Now the woman doing the finances [of another festival] wrote: 'okay, we have now everything ready for the contract' and it looks like this: we don't have three days of rehearsals, but two. And not seven people can come, but five. So you cannot stay that long, you cannot rehearse, it's not the amount of people you work with and the money is less than expected.

Hence, these two examples reveal that not only the work effort of adapting the piece to a smaller space with less performers, but also the back-and-forth communication between all performers concerning their schedules happened in vain. Indeed, it seems that in this specific case, the festival organizers overlooked that commitments with people have been made. The involved dancers had already been asked several times to change their

schedules, by demand of the festival, and they had always made efforts to make themselves available on the suggested dates – even though most of them also had other commitments, such as rehearsals, planned around the same period. Informing them that ultimately the performance would not take place after demanding quite an amount of flexibility, in terms of time and space, and after the willingness to meet these demands, is simply disrespectful. Another informant equally expresses this concern, saying that there is a ‘social dimension that I deplore being missing with [my collaborator], that you have this kind of whole infrastructure of social contacts that you have to deal with and be kind of careful about’. Hence, flexibility is sometimes a disguised precarity trap, or as Ulrich Bröckling puts it: ‘no amount of effort guarantees security’ (2016, 36).

In conclusion, it appears as though contemporary dance pieces need to meet the same criteria as professional contemporary dance artists working in a project-based neoliberal economy and post-Fordist labor market. In short, they need to be able to be performed anywhere at any time under whatever conditions in order to be sustainable. Several of my informants’ pieces that turned out to be successful – meaning that they have been performed quite a few times over the course of the years and are still ‘active’ (as an informant puts it) – are usually the ones that are adaptable to different spaces, audiences and situations. Notably, most of these pieces are solos and to a lesser extent also duets, as I have covered under the header of “Precarity Solos”.

7.2 Flexible performativity

As I have outlined earlier in this book, contemporary dance is not a unifying style and the ideal-type contemporary dance artist could be characterized by three principle features: a great adaptability, a personal movement style, and a unique presence on stage. Berlin-based contemporary dance artist Kareth Schaffer refers to the combination of these three aspects as ‘flexible performativity’ in a presentation in HZT called “An Awkward Split: Calculating vs. Flexible Performativity exemplified by ‘Walking in Circles’ and ‘Mudwrestling for Meg’” (2013).² I continue to use this coined term as it refers to the particular skill that dancers today have to master, which encompasses the adaptability to perform in accordance to the demands or expectations of a certain choreographer, but also in response to certain audiences, locations and situations. When coining the term ‘flexible performativity’, Schaffer explains that the notion feeds into many questions on

² The presentation was held at HZT in Berlin on February 4, 2013 as part of the final exam of module 11. Schaffer uses the term ‘flexible performativity’ in her practice and jargon on a daily basis.

working conditions and how these conditions affect artistic work, which makes it a crucial notion within my research. In her analysis of flexible performativity as a skill, Schaffer juxtaposes the notions of calculating performativity and flexible performativity. In her view, what she terms ‘calculating performativity’ entails the movement material and the structures viewed as independent of the performers (Schaffer 2013). This movement material could be taught to anyone and is not based on a specific person performing the movements. Thus, calculating performativity characterizes a controlled piece which happens in a controlled space (typically the theater space), which causes the audience to have a controlled experience. Thus, we see a nameless, replaceable and often mute dancer on stage. Furthermore, as Schaffer adds, as this type of dance is interested in precision, there is relatively narrow perspective for variation, or deviation, from what the structure is. Therefore, people see a working body on stage. Hence, this type of performativity takes quite an amount of (labor) time before the performance, because memorizing and mastering fixed material leads to a long production time. Furthermore, Schaffer emphasizes that calculating performativity usually requires a long rehearsal time in order to set the material, while this, somewhat disproportionately, results in only a couple of performances (2013).

However, the current trend of performing in exhibition spaces, which stems from performance art and was popularized by artists such as Marina Abramović and Tino Sehgal, for example seems to require a different type of performativity.³ Nonetheless, it should be noted that many variations can be distinguished among the performances that happen in museum settings: Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker’s *Work/Travail/Arbeid* (2015) is certainly not of the same type as Xavier Le Roy’s “*Retrospective*” (2012), for example. Whereas the first is a set choreography in a museum space, the second is grounded in social interaction and exchange with the museum visitors and thus belongs to the type of performance that deals with social practices. Such an exhibition performance is generally interactive: people usually do not simply watch, but are somehow engaged with it. The performativity at play is a flexible performativity, because it requires the skill to respond to certain situations and audiences. Thus, flexible performativity characterizes often multidisciplinary pieces with flexible structures, which mostly take place outside a black box. Performances relying on flexible performativity may take only a couple of weeks of rehearsal time (usually involving a multitude of performers) and a couple of months of performances taking place almost every day. Interestingly, while the work of performing is more exposed in these pieces, the labor behind it becomes more invisible. Flexible performativity highlights the individual character of the performer, which obscures the

³ Nonetheless, it should be noted that both flexible performativity and performing in exhibition spaces may have appeared around the same time, it remains a question until today which one requires the other, as also Schaffer has pointed out.

recognition of their work as it is difficult to define what makes an interesting subjectivity. As Schaffer pointed out in her presentation, it is very evident to identify the labor that goes into a ballet performance, which requires calculating performativity, since ballet is very structured and there is a common knowledge on how to acquire the technique and how many years it takes to master it. However, because flexible performativity often looks like ‘hanging out in front of people’ – to use Schaffer’s own words – it is unclear what the labor involved is as the required skills are much more intangible (Schaffer 2013). For example, the following account of an informant illustrates how he works with flexible performativity in one of his pieces:

I developed a format [...] It’s more of an animated space. I will construct a kind of social situation or living room... So it’s not working with prepared physical material but more moderating the situation as if it... - maybe having some things prepared, like spatial constellations, music, and to kind of connect people and to kind of work, to create a specific situation, ... My way of performing is rather like a part of the situation or a way of how to host people.

Notably, flexible performativity is not the same as de-specialization, because it *is* a skill; it is navigating a range of performative skills, including the ability to speak well in front of people and basically to respond to certain situations and audiences in a variety of ways. It is the ability to be at the same time polyvalent, flexible and adaptable.⁴ In fact, most of the jobs one of my informants has done required him to master the skill of flexible performativity. His account below defines this quality quite fittingly:

I’m kind of a very weirdly specific performer and not a blank-... I’m not a tabularasa-kind-of-guy. Not that anyone else really is, but I’m less than any other dancers I know. Working as a professional dance artist, I’ve always preferred to think of myself as an amateur. I try to be a little bit good at everything, at many kinds of movement, but I am not really an expert in any one thing except for being myself. Fortunately, I’m able to find work that, I believe, is more about this complete package, harnessing my full person, or that requires me to check multiple boxes in terms of modes of expression and capacity for embodiment. I love to maintain the impossible fantasy of being a chameleon.

The concept of flexible performativity thus testifies that we see these three requirements of neoliberal work reflected in the performativity at play in the creation process and on stage. Hence, one could conclude that a project-based contemporary dance artist needs

⁴ In other words, calculating performativity seems to reflect a Fordist concept, while flexible performativity rather entails post-Fordist ideas. The latter notion covers a much broader spectrum in terms of skill and describes a social phenomenon that we also see in other artistic disciplines, in academia, and basically in society in late capitalism at large.

to be an expert in being an amateur in everything. In addition, flexible performativity is not the same as de-specialization, because – as an informant also points out – many established choreographers who work with this type of performativity still select those dancers who have excellent dance skills, meaning that they still value technique but demand ‘unlearning everything you’ve learned’. Or as an informant jokingly puts it: ‘if you’re unable to put this type of subjectivity at the disposal of artists, you’re not going to get a job, because this ability to do dance steps in a certain way, there are three dance jobs in the world and all of them are in Belgium.’ Schaffer notes that calculating performativity has come to belong to a dance of the past and that currently flexible performativity is also omnipresent in dance education. While flexible performativity as a skill is thus primarily required during a work process, in the development of material in collaboration with others and in function of specific tasks, this performativity influences what happens on stage. In that context, my informant enhances: ‘it coincides with this move to the gallery, or the general interest in other spaces, but also a general interest in things that are non-dance art forms, singing and talking, because that’s a playing body’. My informant also recognizes this interest in her own work, as she comments that she wants to work with ‘people who can do much more than dance’:

I need people who want to do other things than dance, also want to take other responsibilities in the production, who want to think and talk and learn and crack jokes on the stage and build something and act and sing and I want people who go wide.

Fascinatingly, her interest to work with ‘amateurs in everything’ is very much in line with the neoliberal demand of being a multiskilled worker able to adapt quickly to new situations and to take up many challenges. Simply put: what is contemporary about contemporary dance is therefore that the fast, the mobile and the flexible way of working mirror the production modes of contemporary capitalism.⁵ In that context, contemporary dance artist Chrysa Parkinson explains how she continuously had to switch between different projects to survive in the contemporary dance profession ever since the start of her career. She reveals that the versatility, when moving between different choreographic approaches and methodologies, was something she began to respect. Thus, she began to use the word ‘practice’ to identify the acquirement of certain skills and putting other skills on hold, especially when learning a skill and to keep finding it in other situations (Evans 2010, paragraph 4). Another term that helped her deal with her work within a neoliberal and post-Fordist work regime, was the concept of ‘plasticity’,

⁵ Yet, simultaneously contemporary dance artists are inclined to resist these production modes, though by trying to resist they also comply with neoliberalism, which I have pointed out in the beginning of this chapter.

which she discovered through the writings of Catherine Malabou.⁶ In a documented conversation with contemporary dance artist Michael Helland, she explains that the concept of ‘plasticity’ has helped her with ‘the problem of the neoliberal temporary, versatile, flexible workplace’ because it also suggests resistance. Indeed, the word ‘plastic’ is usually applied when referring to substances soft enough to be molded yet capable of hardening into the desired fixed form. In Parkinson’s words:

With plasticity you can take form and give form, whereas something flexible just continues to fold and stretch and fold and stretch and it doesn’t push out, it doesn’t resist, it doesn’t have buoyancy or lift. Whether it’s because I was brought up by artists or whether it’s because I’m a privileged white lady or whether it’s because I met people who told me very early on, ‘You’re an artist,’ or maybe it’s because I’m not that talented as a dancer – but I know I resist stuff. (Parkinson and Helland 2014, 25)

She explains that she resists, because she does not do just everything anyone tells her to do. She enhances that being an active performer in contemporary dance is only sustainable when on the one hand one has the ‘willingness to engage and “take the shape”’, but on the other hand, also ‘the knowledge that you are resistant and resilient’, because without that resistance, Parkinson assumes that she would have been hurt early on (Parkinson and Helland 2014, 26).

7.3 The fast, the mobile, and the flexible in *VOLCANO*

In what follows, I will discuss more in-depth how the *the fast*, *the mobile* and *the flexible* can be reflected in dance performance. I have carefully selected *VOLCANO* (2014) by Brussels-based contemporary dance artist Liz Kinoshita as a case for this purpose since the production is characterized by these three dimensions of movement. Most interestingly, in content and form, *VOLCANO* deals with many of the demands set by the neoliberal and post-Fordist work regime, which (may) contribute to socio-economic precarity.⁷

Kinoshita moved to Europe from Canada in 2002 and attended P.A.R.T.S., the contemporary dance school of Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker in Brussels, between 2004 and 2008. After numerous collaborations and projects, including her work with celebrated contemporary artists Tino Sehgal and ZOO/Thomas Hauert, Kinoshita created the dance

⁶ Consult Malabou and Butler (2011) for a link between ‘plasticity’ and ‘performativity’, for example.

⁷ My analysis of this performance in this book is reworked from an earlier and more restricted version published in *Forum Modernes Theater* jointly written with Katharina Pewny (2018, 117-132).

production *VOLCANO* together with Clinton Stringer, Salka Ardal Rosengren, and Justin F. Kennedy. The multiple eruptions of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull in April 2010 brought air traffic over Europe to a standstill. This mandatory pause in mobility, enforced by a natural disaster, forms the basis for the dance production – hence the title. *VOLCANO* is entirely constructed out of songs and dance in a style close to musical or cabaret from the 1930's to the 1950's, with movement material clearly inspired by tap dance. The narrative part of the performance consists solely of self-composed songs, possibly suggesting social criticism in the manner of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. The theme of these songs is borderless mobility as the lyrics depict constant traveling and a sense of urgency, which is part of the work as a dance artist.

As I have discussed in this chapter, residencies, projects, or teaching opportunities send dancers abroad on a regular basis. The resulting velocity captured in this book under “The Fast”, mobility as described under “The Mobile”, and flexible accumulation as outlined under “The Flexible” are three principal features of the post-Fordist work regime and of late modernity in general. Therefore, I will examine this production in form and content in relation to sociologist Hartmut Rosa’s concept of social acceleration (2003 and 2013), which I have introduced in the part on “The Fast”. In *VOLCANO*, the concept of social acceleration is not only projected by the self-composed songs in the performance, but the aesthetics of the dance production also represent the topic, partly through well-defined movement images and partly through an abstract dance vocabulary. Many movement sequences seem to provide an explicit demonstration of mobility and the accelerated time regime in post-Fordism, for example, when the dancers sing ‘I am being propelled’ the very start of the performance and they later run around with circular arm movements. Moreover, the accelerated time regime is also represented in the fast pace of the tap-dancing sequences, or when the performers run up the walls of the venue. However, interestingly, in the second half of the performance, the pace noticeably slows down when the four dancers lie on the ground as if doing stretching movements imaginably reminiscent of yoga practice, which, as we have seen, plays a significant role in a dance artist’s lifestyle. Here, the restriction on air traffic and the resulting deceleration are represented. In this regard, the journal *Mobilities* published a special edition in 2011 devoted to thinking through the effects of the eruption from Eyjafjallajökull under the title of *Stranded: An Eruption of Disruption*, thus addressing the deceleration of time and space. In the introduction, the editors note that the event caused a ‘blip in the constant flows that constitute globalized mobile lives’ (Birtchnell and Büscher 2011, 1), which in its aftermath revealed the entire economic dependence on flight mobilities and simultaneously ‘forced many shifts in thinking about place, time and social relations’ (Wilkie 2015, 153). In the context of the discourse on social acceleration, Rosa (2003) distinguishes five forms of deceleration and inertia. Whereas the first two forms denote the limits of acceleration (natural and anthropological limits, such as the speed of perception, or acceleration limits within forgotten tribes and excluded groups

such as the Amish), the third form encompasses an (unintended) effect of acceleration. In this category slowing down happens when incidents impose (dysfunctional and pathological) forms of deceleration. As we will see in the next chapter, such incidents are not necessarily of external nature, such as the volcanic eruption or an accident causing a traffic jam, but more often than not they affect the body in a more direct way, in the form of disease or injury. Furthermore, the fourth and fifth categories identify, among other things, intentional forms of (social) deceleration which enable conditions for further acceleration (such as the yoga retreat), which I will certainly return to in the next chapter as well. Nonetheless, in relation to the further analysis of *VOLCANO*, I will draw on Rosa's third form of deceleration, or 'slow-down as an unintended consequence of acceleration' (2003, 15).

Beside the recognizable movement elements of acceleration, tap dance and musical aesthetics from the 1930's to the 1950's constitute the dance vocabulary. These style choices cannot be explained by the context of the volcanic eruption. To reflect on these, I follow Katharina Pewny (2011a) by drawing on the model of overwriting, which was developed in the late nineties by dance scholar Randy Martin for the analysis of non-narrative dance performances (1998). The method was established to make the contexts of dance in a performance visible by understanding a performance as a text. However, Martin does not concentrate on signifiers that are unambiguously decipherable but rather on the contexts of dance performances that are not clearly identifiable. In referring to his activity as 'reading', Martin's argument is in line with many other scholars that understand dance as a text and therefore practice dance studies in the form of reading dance.⁸ In this respect, Pewny proposes to reappoint the method of 'overwriting' (2011a, 121-133). The seemingly arbitrary aesthetic elements in the dance production, therefore, explore social contexts and institutional developments within the contemporary dance scene that remain hidden at first glance. For example, the dancers use a wide range of contemporary and modern dance techniques and styles: they sing, they dance, they dance while singing and sing while dancing, giving the audience a demonstration of their range of expertise and skills. Liz Kinoshita defended her choice of tap dance in an interview as follows:

In *VOLCANO*, the way we do the tap dance, for instance: none of us really masters it but we can do it well enough. So we can as performers develop a new skill and optimize this skill. Most of us have already more than one career and skills, and this

⁸ Pewny also points out that in the development of his method, Martin followed Roland Barthes, who stated that texts are not subordinate to one author as the sole meaningful authority but arise from countless (known and unknown) sources, and are open and ambiguous. Texts, and thus also artistic performances, can often not be reduced to linear narration due to their relatedness to context, ambiguity and openness, 'all of which comes down to saying that for the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure'. This conveys that what is non-narrative in the text is the very referentiality of what lies outside it (Martin 1998, 85).

takes us to the same feeling of the 30's 40's where performers often charmed their way along, although they mostly were refined experts in their skills. (Natalio 2015, paragraph 5)

Hence, what we seem to see on stage, is the exploration of the dancers' corporeal archives. The dancers do not perform genuine tap dance, but they are able to develop that skill 'well enough', as the choreographer puts it (Natalio 2015, paragraph 5). Their eclectic and resilient bodies for that matter testify of the complex interweaving of their multiple careers and skills. These bodies are polyvalent, flexible and adaptable in order to secure survival in the contemporary dance profession. Performing the tap dance motives and cabaret elements 'well enough' demonstrates that they are able to cope with a heterogeneous catalogue of various techniques, skills, styles and forms and are therefore more than capable to respond to the dynamic demands of the volatile labor market of contemporary dance. The requirement of multi-skilled knowhow reflected in this dance vocabulary and the willingness to be mobile and flexible expressed through the song lyrics represent the three dimensions of the fast, the mobile, and the flexible. The choice of tap dance in combination with 1930's-to-1950's-style musical songs adds to this theme: performers had to travel to Hollywood if they wanted to make a name for themselves, since tap dance and musical film flourished in those years and the boom in the American film industry was centered in Hollywood at that time. Many of these same performers had had careers on the vaudeville circuit, which is a veritable machine of entertainment, including around the clock work and travel. In Hollywood, musical and tap dance artists were suddenly obliged to perform for the camera and develop a whole range of new skills. Furthermore, by demonstrating the various tap dance rhythms throughout tap dance history, Kinoshita addresses the different work rhythms humanity has gone through over time and the flexible work rhythms creative workers deal with on a daily basis. Their tap-dancing bodies demonstrate that they are able to keep up with the social acceleration. Accordingly, all these elements illustrate the importance of mobile flexibility and flexible mobility in the post-Fordist regime. A song fragment from *VOLCANO* explores the notion of social acceleration as follows:

I need time, without this rhyme,
only 45 minutes, all to myself..
I guess I feel a little, threatened when I'm caught,
without the time to thoroughly think out a thought, [...]
I run from pillar to post, constantly,
In this day and age, waking up isn't easy,
I wish that moments in the shower would suffice
So don't say there's 24 hours, in a single day,
When I want just 45 minutes my way. (Kinoshita 2014, n.p.)

The lyrics of this particular song entitled *45 Minutes* explicitly address the lack of control over time, which is, according to economist Guy Standing, one of the ten features of the precariat, as I have mentioned in the introduction. His concept of tertiary time comprises all work done outside of paid labor time, which causes the division between work and leisure time to fade away (Standing 2014a, 22). This indicates that the accelerated work regime certainly is dominated by work without mental or physical boundaries. Hence, people suffer a permanent stand-by feeling or a ‘precariatized mind’, which he defines as a feeling of having far too much to do at all times and the sense that taking time out would entail the risk of missing opportunities. Indeed, this feeling corresponds to Rosa’s observation that many people ‘feel hurried and under time pressure’ (2003, 9). In this context, Slovenian philosopher Bojana Kunst remarks that it appears as though the way post-Fordist creative laborers work (i.e. in the collaborative sharing of language and thought) puts us into a state of constant mobility, flexibility, and precariousness (Kunst 2015a, 79). Thus, the song *45 Minutes* describes a typical post-Fordist phenomenon: people can work anywhere and anytime.

However, if *45 Minutes* suggests that a contemporary dance artist barely has 45 minutes a day for him/herself, then to what extent is there any time left for self-reflection or self-realization, both of which are significant motives that commonly drive performing artists? (see esp.: Kunst 2015a; Laermans 2015) If an artist is constantly on the move, what are the repercussions for artistic freedom and autonomy? In my reading of *VOLCANO*, these are some of the questions that the performance explores. There only appears to be time to slow down and take it all in during a volcanic eruption that forces the air traffic to a standstill and that disables us from moving too fast. In that respect, the suspension created by the volcanic eruption allowed us to regain control over time for a moment and thus created time for self-reflection. When the Icelandic volcano erupted in April 2010, Liz Kinoshita was one of the many people whose travel plans were affected. She was at work in Oslo during the incident and had to return to Brussels to perform by ferry instead of by plane. Interestingly, it merits mention that Kinoshita has worked with Tino Sehgal for several years. Sehgal, who is known to travel as ecologically responsible as possible whatever the cost, does not allow his collaborators to fly when feasible. This in fact means that Kinoshita is now quite used to taking long train rides in her career as an artist. Nevertheless, the choreographer continues to be impressed by the long travel times that are in sharp contrast to the fast everyday rhythm of the performing artist. In April 2010, the altered trip via the much slower ferry had an impact on the choreographer and worked as a subject to tie together several thoughts about time and space and the mobile work regime they were part of as freelancers. Importantly, this deceleration allowed the necessary time to digest and calmly project. Hence, when the pace of the performance slows down towards the end of *VOLCANO*, one of the artists sings the following:

The eruption suspended our lives, time, and space,

A moment suspended in a reflective place,
Revelations and thoughts we do not usually face. (Kinoshita 2014, n.p.)

The slow-down, represented in the lyrics as well as in the pace, was an unintended consequence of acceleration. Since technological acceleration allows us to travel faster and more efficiently, we feel like time is suspended when technology fails. In this regard, Kunst points out the following:

When something does not function (the body, a machine, a car, a computer, a vending machine), the duration literally intervenes into the subject that witnesses this halt. It seems as though our inner sense of time was appropriated by the non-functioning machine; the subject suddenly feels that he/she has been dispossessed – and needs to slow down and wait. This slowing down and waiting is frequently felt in contemporary culture when the dispositives that regulate and organize our flexible subjectivities no longer work: for example, the protocols of moving through the city, social networks, airports, motorways, mobile phones. These kinds of halts in motion or slow-downs have a direct influence on the body as they appropriate the temporality of the subject, organized as endless flexibility, simultaneity and adaptability in today's times. In moments like this, we say that we are stuck, with little else to do but hang in there and become powerless observers of our own chronological time. (Kunst 2015a, 122)

This dysfunctional form of deceleration is also something Eleanor Bauer points to when she describes her mobility as 'when my entire artistic career feels like it is on hold when my laptop is in the repair center, making me realize that the new requirement for an artist's autonomy and productivity is no longer A Room of One's Own as Virginia Woolf would have it, but a Mac of one's own - a port for interconnection rather than a space for solitude' (Bauer 2007, under "On Perspective"). While such moments, like in traffic jams or endless train rides usually feel like wasted time, Kinoshita felt as though she had gained back control over time, which she put to use for reflection. Accordingly, 'revelations and thoughts we do not usually face' suggests that we seem to forget to make time for reflection in this accelerated time regime.

Nonetheless, in the context of the fast, the mobile and the flexible yet another aspect of mobility is dealt with in *VOLCANO*. As the constant traveling has become part of a contemporary dance artist's everyday existence, the notion of *home* – or rather Paolo Virno's notion of 'not-feeling-at-home' (2004, 34-40) – in the accelerated time seems to be questioned in the production.⁹ Living a nomadic lifestyle from 2012 to 2013, Canadian-

⁹ My brief discussion of the notion of *home* within mobile dance communities and within this specific performance is inspired by a workshop organized by Sofie Wennerscheid and Niels Penke at Ghent University on April 1, 2015 entitled: *The Body (not) at Home*.

born Liz Kinoshita realized that all she wanted was a home to call her own.¹⁰ In an unpublished interview with the author on October 21, 2015, Kinoshita commented that it is not too difficult to call Brussels her home because as a dancer ‘in Brussels you know you are not alone’. Kinoshita’s words are in line with visual artist John Di Stefano’s postulation that ‘being at home’ today instead refers to ‘how people get along with each other, how they understand and are understood by others, which establishes a sense of belonging’ (Di Stefano 2002, 38). Interestingly, an image of two suitcases accompanies the promotion of the production *VOLCANO*. While singing ‘a suitcase is all I need’, one of the performers implies that the suitcase represents a dance artist’s temporary home. Hence, contemporary dance artists take their mobile and symbolic home along with them when they travel to dance. Much like the suitcase, the image of the airport, a symbol of technological acceleration, suggests the temporality of home in an accelerated time regime. Di Stefano explains his choice of the image of an airport when questioning the notion of home in the context of transnationalism in his video *HUB* (2002) as follows:

[N]otions of identity and belonging become articulated through mobility, within the dialectical interplay between global processes and local environments. The airport also suggests that home be understood as temporally constructed. Due to the instability and impermanence of their physical home, some displaced persons have come to think of time itself as a more stable and dependable means of creating a space of belonging. In lieu of shared physical space, a shared temporality among displaced persons moving through various physical spaces provides a means of boundary-setting and a maintenance device whose form may persist while its content varies contextually. (Di Stefano 2002, 41)

In a similar manner, contemporary dance artists seem to experience this shared temporality while remaining mobile, which generates a feeling of belonging to a community. *VOLCANO* thus provides the audience with an explicit image of the life and work of a contemporary dance artist on many different levels. The dancing bodies of a dance community are constantly on the move and thus never at home in the traditional sense of the word. Instead a changing network of relations and a shared temporality constitute their home. The production explores the working lives of performing artists behind the ‘scenes’ and portrays the working and living conditions in a dance

¹⁰ The choreographer explained that she was staying with friends in 2012 while travelling for work (touring, residencies, and rehearsals abroad). Around May, she moved her belongings into a basement atelier in another friend’s building and paid the owner a small fee before she went abroad again. She even slept in a tent while in residency, but this was part of the working process. In autumn, she stayed rent-free in the upstairs loft bed of another friend’s house and she would visit her belongings in the basement atelier, sifting through them when necessary. After she visited her family in Toronto over Christmas, she found a shared apartment in early 2013. She bought her own place in 2014.

community.¹¹ In this vein, Kinoshita refers to the piece as a ‘backstage musical’: a musical about the work and lives of its own performers continually on the move (as stated in the unpublished interview on October 21, 2015). One of the song lyrics ‘we are OK’ (Kinoshita 2014, n.p.) in fact expresses that the idea of *VOLCANO* is not so much to whine and complain about the fast, the mobile and the flexible circumstances of the performing arts world, but rather to dig deeper into the shared experience and the communal feelings of temporality. In line with Angelika Bammer’s thoughts, their home is a ‘mobile symbolic habitat, a performative way of life and of doing things in which one makes one’s home while in movement’ (Morley 2002, 47). A home can thus temporarily emerge in a suitcase or materializes onstage in contemporary dance performances. Ultimately, *VOLCANO* is also a celebration of performing, hence its energizing vibe. The production explores the shared common of being part of a dance community. The conditions outlined in this book part are thus not merely reflected in *VOLCANO*; instead, the performance also spreads a message of solidarity towards the dance community itself. The performers feel united through the fast, the mobile, and the flexible, which engender a mode of life they also very much enjoy.

7.4 Temporary dance artists?

Since the neoliberal work regime, the project-funding system, and the residency system demand freelance dance artists to be fast, mobile and flexible in this way, some questions may be raised: if the fast, the mobile and the flexible *modi operandi* mean that there is only time to reflect in the shower – so to speak – then to what extent can an artist enjoy the artistic freedom to explore, research, and process? If a threefold chase after money, programmers and papers is increasingly becoming part of the work process, what does this mean for an artist’s autonomy? In this context, David Harvey defines neoliberalism as ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that the human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (2007, 3). In the same vein, cultural sociologist Ulrich Bröckling has provided a very useful study on *The Entrepreneurial Self*, in which he examines this particular model of subjectivation as a program for governing and self-governing,

¹¹ Interestingly, three of the four performers belong to the Brussels dance community, while the fourth performer, Justin F. Kennedy, is based in Berlin.

emphasizing that ‘people have freedom forced upon them’ (2016, xiv). He explores the question how the Entrepreneurial Self operates and what kind of effect it has on the formation of subjectivity.

Particularly when addressing themes such as ‘wasting time’, ‘feeling productive’, or ‘deserving a holiday’, my case study informants illustrate their conformity to being an Entrepreneurial Self in an accelerated time regime. As Bröckling puts it: ‘the constant fear of not having done the right thing or not enough of it, the feeling of insufficiency, is as much a part of the entrepreneurial self as mercantile skill or the courage to take risks’ (2016, 36). Especially the need to feel productive recurs throughout the interviews when discussing the documented work activities. One informant comments as she is looking for her to-do-list: ‘It just sounds like I haven’t been doing anything and I feel like I have been working all the time. [...] [laughs] I want to prove that I am an active person’. And another informant admits that she makes everything work, because otherwise she feels like she is not doing anything and exemplifies: ‘probably I did not know what to do, so I decided to read the article, you know, trying to be productive all the time’. Feeling productive seems to be a coping tool to self-justify the validity of one’s work. The pressure among my informants to optimize their productivity and potential is high, as an informant – at the time without a job – illustrates: ‘Sometimes, it can be the pressure, when I have all this time off, that I have to be as productive as possible, you know, make something happen, have a practice or keep practicing something, or keep studying something’. Several informants express feelings of guilt when discussing the notions of wasting time and procrastination. In line with the ‘projective temporality’ Kunst describes in her book *Artist at Work* (2015a, 154–158), which is particularly marked by the combination of the fear of not having sufficient work in the future and the concomitant pressure to work too hard in the present, time is not on your side when one is a precarious project worker. These excessive demands of being an autonomous worker doing everything fast, mobile and flexible and the interweaving of paid and unpaid tasks, often lead to a fragmented sense of time, which may result in overburdening, or a feeling of constantly having too much to do, which I have referred to as Standing’s precariatized mind. In that vein, contemporary dance artists are often merely temporary dance artists, who, between their temporary projects, are taking up many other job descriptions for which, in established dance companies for instance, commonly trained personnel is hired (such as administration and accountancy, production and tour management, promotion and communication, costumes and set) while, among still other things, preparing for the next project and finalizing the previous. In line with Kunst’s thesis that ‘contemporary work is strongly marked by transformation and flexibility’, which ‘does not actually open up new possibilities though, but frequently results in even more rigid and exploitative working conditions, in which every moment (including those of inactivity) is dedicated to seizing work better’ (2015a, 183), my findings reveal a constant pressure to do more, such as in the excerpt below for example:

To be honest, the last two years, because it was going so well, I kind of coasted and that was a mistake. Or that wasn't a mistake, I just couldn't do more. I legit couldn't and of course, now, I'm like: you should've done more, you should've found ways to network more and invite more people to your pieces etcetera.

Indeed, we stumble upon a paradox of how more autonomy in fact produces more work, as also Kunst points out in her conclusion: artistic work is 'at the core of the twisted ideological relationship between work and freedom; cynically, the work that comes across as the freest is the work that is completely fused with life. The work considered free is the kind whose level of dedication and intensity leaves no further room for life' (2015a, 190). Therefore, a common joke in Germany suggests that freelancers are called *Selbständige* because they work constantly (*ständig* in German), while it actually refers to one's autonomy (it literally means *being self-standing*) (see also Bröckling 2016, 36). To close part II of this book, these findings allow me to uncover yet again an interesting absurdity much in line with the paradoxical notion of the bohemian work ethic, which I discussed in part I. Surely, artists are occupied with their self-realization while they are rushing around the globe to work, working on several things at the same time, however, *VOLCANO* seems to warn us that there is barely any time left for self-reflection. In that respect, Kunst observes that the nature of self-realization in the project-based work regime is contradictory when she writes that 'we work so much that we never again have time for ourselves and others; due to the amount of work and the intensity of our self-realization, we can actually burn out in life' (2015a, 169). Thus, it seems appropriate and necessary to address the physical and psychological consequences of doing everything fast, mobile and flexible in part III of this book on "Burning Out and Slowing Down".

Interviewer: Good, I think that was good for today.

Informant: [pretends taking notes and mimics the interviewer] "[Informant] is depressed. I think she needs holidays" [both laugh and decide to have a beer in the park]. Let's see if [my partner] is still there, I hope he will be. I hope that he will be fine, because he kept saying "but you need to write [your application] today..."

Image 7: screenshot from *Crisis Karaoke* (2016) by Jeremy Wade



Part 3

Burning out and Slowing Down

Chapter 8

Burning out

This part of the book discusses the effects of the fast, mobile and flexible *modus operandi* in the project-based work regime within the neoliberal art market on contemporary dance artists in the first place and their artistic work in the second place. I distinguish different levels of precarity that affect contemporary dance artists other than the already addressed socio-economic precarity. While I focus first on physical precarity and the vulnerable body of a contemporary dance artist, I quickly move forward to quite a unique form of mental precarity prevalent in the arts – unique, because the core of *precarity in the arts* seems to be grounded in the fact that an artist is never certain whether their work will be appreciated by a choreographer, a peer, a programmer, a critic, or an audience and whether the quality of their work is ever good enough to be considered a genuine artist. The plural character of precarity in the arts in the accelerated work regime results in a twofold deceleration of burning out and slowing down. As a consequence of the threefold chase outlined in the previous book part, I observe that not only do several informants struggle with burnout (or have suffered burnouts in the past), so do projects. Thus, after addressing the artist burnout in depth, I make a small detour tackling the problems in diffusing dance productions and keeping projects alive. Furthermore, to avoid burning out or in response to overburdening, my fieldwork has exposed several tactics of slowing down, which I address in the second chapter of this book part. Most interestingly, my fieldwork has revealed that contemporary dance artists also publicly address these plural forms of precarity and their penalties on one's physical or mental state within their artistic work. Essentially, this book part is perhaps the pinnacle of my research, where the usefulness of interweaving the disciplines of sociology and dance studies becomes most evident. Therefore, I have developed a healthy fusion of my fieldwork findings throughout these two chapters by conjoining my anonymous qualitative data and analyzing these alongside a number of performances of precarity I encountered during my fieldwork. One could say that the discussed performances in this chapter represent a momentum of artistic precarity: despite the plural forms of precarity

and the associated burnouts and slowdowns reflected in the variety of these performances, performing precarity eventually seems to be a force that keeps these artists moving.

8.1 Physical precarity: the vulnerable body

I push through, dancer style, push it, push it.

Aside from the fact that contemporary dance artists are susceptible to physical precarity due to the constant de- and restructuring of one's dancing habitus and subjectivity (see Laermans 2015, 318-319), they are foremost vulnerable since the body is central to dance. Drawing on Judith Butler, one could say that the dancing body is the stage of economic precarity and, simultaneously, of ontological precariousness due to its heightened vulnerability (2004). As I discussed, dance artists are never certain that their individual style, though knowledgeable about various techniques, will be appreciated by a choreographer, or whether their bodies are adaptable enough to meet the specific requirements of a new dance job. However, in this section, I want to address that physical precarity for that matter always accompanies the contemporary dance profession as the body of the dancer may suddenly no longer be able to meet the imposed standards when it is ageing, injured or ill.¹ Indeed, in contrast to the discussed flexibility and hyperflexibility, as also Anusha Kedhar argues, transnational dance artists experience a great amount of inflexibility in the post-Fordist work regime when their bodies are immobilized through injury or through immigration and citizenship restrictions (2014, 34) and, I would add, through burnout and depression. Due to the dependency on the body in order to professionally practice dance, contemporary dance artists experience precarity on a physical level when they run out of time or money to maintain their bodies, which are indeed their primary form of capital in which they have to continually invest. As said, even while unemployed, dance artists are required to continuously invest in their bodies to remain employable, because dance artists are the material of the work. Significantly, the physical constitution of a dance artist's body is constantly subject to change as the body is ageing (Hesters 2004, 96), therefore, a dance artist is always precarious because s/he has no knowledge about or say in when the body stops functioning. As an informant reveals: 'my body is not recovering as fast as it used to, and

¹ For more on ageing and art in neo-liberal times and consumerist culture, see also Stalpaert 2012.

those two kids, they surely contributed to that. So my injuries last longer and my body needs more rest.’ However, this was certainly not the main reason for my informant to start focusing more on choreography. She does admit that it is one of the many motivations to keep pursuing that path, because, as a choreographer, you can work around your own bodily limits.

Concerningly, as contemporary dance artists are often working on several projects simultaneously and traveling from one place to another, they also tend to postpone appointments with the doctor. In addition, healthcare situations are often complex for transnational workers, which, again invites one not to listen to the body’s signals. One of my informants was confronted with the impact of her professional life as a freelancing dance artist on her health and vice versa. While she had suffered a lung infection before the start of my fieldwork, she fell ill repeatedly during. When we first met, she explains that she was diagnosed with the infection after she had postponed making an appointment with her doctor due to obligations abroad (and difficulties with her health insurance which required her to be treated in Germany) but also due to a lack of time (or in other words: other responsibilities were her priority). However, she realized she should have listened to her body:

I thought, okay, I have to be really careful, because the freelancing life is tough and I have to make sure to look after myself. And I learned again that, in these two weeks, when I was feeling so poorly, I should’ve seen a doctor immediately. I should not have been waiting.

She stresses that she felt the urge to work on her body again after being ill, because she did not want her health to hold her back professionally. However, she explains that she felt guilty about having to quit a workshop due to illness because the workshop was grounded in partnering and group work, thus other people relied on her participation. Yet, simultaneously, she was aware that she had to listen to her body and that she definitely should not infect everyone else. In a similar vein, artists may decide there is no money for physiotherapy or to continue training (between projects) to keep the body fit and ready to perform.

Another case study informant testifies that ‘getting sick really throws a wrench into the freelance thing, because it just basically means that you need to work more. You rest, but it doesn’t mean that you really rest. When you’re well, you really have to work your ass off to catch up.’ According to Hartmut Rosa, in this scenario, slowing down happens when incidents impose (dysfunctional and pathological) forms of deceleration. These incidents are not necessarily of external nature, like the addressed volcanic eruption, but may affect the body in the form of disease or injury. However, this ‘slow-down as an unintended consequence of acceleration’ (Rosa 2003, 15) for that matter causes a more intense acceleration afterwards possibly leading to a vicious cycle.

In the context of physical precarity, the long journeys on trains and airplanes, during which artists continue working on their MacBooks, are also ergonomically harmful for numerous body parts. The reality of having to repeatedly sleep in a different bed (best case scenario!) seems to disregard the constraint of maintaining a fit and healthy body. An informant comments that on tour with a dance company, she was hosted by a very hospitable venue. However, since there were quite a number of people involved in the production, the hosting organization had to put the dancers in a hotel complex. While everyone had a separate bedroom – which was much appreciated by the dancers – unfortunately, these were equipped with very bad mattresses on the beds. My informant was certainly not the only dancer complaining about the issue. She recounts that in the morning she needed to lie on the floor for half an hour on her back to recover.

Although performing artists, and dance artists in particular (as Sorignet 2010 also observes), are generally very aware of the body's needs, they know how to avoid and/or identify pain, and they have established their own routines to remain fit, the reality of project-based and transnational work comes to threaten their efforts. I have observed dancers throwing themselves on concrete floors or working in spaces with very questionable heating systems, both of which may induce dance injuries. For example, a logbook entry exposes the following:

The factory hall is freezing. We dance wearing three layers of clothing. It's like working in the fridge of a slaughterhouse. Very challenging, because you end up not wanting to move at all, but I must.

Furthermore, tight budgets cause rehearsal times to be short, intense and irregular, which may bring about more injuries too, because warmups might be skipped, for example. As an informant also testified, dancing irregularly is probably one of the principal causes of dance injuries: 'if I take more than two days, in which I'm not moving, that's when I start to be injured or in pain.' A respondent in the Brussels questionnaire comments as follows:

What bothers me most is that even within the field our needs are not fully understood. The dancer does not get enough medical support (even though they are as involved with their bodies as professional athletes). It costs money to take care of a body. We often have very intense schedules. We have to juggle different jobs. I don't feel recognition for all this work by the people in the field: theatres, choreographers, and production agencies. Their priority is selling and they don't have energy left to invest in the dancer. This is very frustrating.

In that respect, a case study informant's narrative affirms that sometimes even choreographers, indeed, do not recognize dance as living labor. My informant had reached her bodily limits when she started rehearsing to replace a dancer in an existing production. Even though she had written the choreographer from the start that she

would not be able to jump, she ended up jumping anyway, which resulted in an injury and the piece required to be adjusted accordingly. When I probe my informant how the visit to the physiotherapist after the injury was dealt with in terms of insurance, she responds that ‘they paid the taxi’.² Comparably, another case study informant recounts two experiences, during which he felt trapped in a situation of power abuse where he needed to stay in because of the money. As a result, he suffered three different injuries during the same creative process and accompanying performances. He recounts:

I really feel like I was allowing... I was trashing myself. I was not happy and the injuries that happened during the work, came from me basically doing too much too hard and not caring. [...] When I look back at the larger experience, I think that these injuries were also an extension of the kind of damage I was experiencing on a non-physical level.

Particularly this last testimony seems to be in line with Lauren Berlant’s notion of ‘slow death’, which refers to the typically physical wearing out of a population. In her book *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant describes ‘slow death’ as a phenomenon that coincides with precarization and the resulting diminution of future prospects under late capitalism. In the development of the concept of ‘slow death’, she takes David Harvey’s observation that ‘under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work’ (Berlant 2011, 95) as a point of departure and proposes to consider the domain of ordinary living: ‘slow death’ is a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life. In addition, it is a *chronic* condition that can most likely never be cured, only managed, especially in commoditized places. As Berlant describes, people seem to be wearing themselves out by excessive consumption as a coping mechanism for enduring precarization. In her chapter on ‘slow death’, she develops her theory exploring the obesity case in the US as an illustration. Nonetheless, besides the consumption of cheap processed food, other examples include smoking, drinking, or shopping (Berlant 2007, 765). In a similar vein, I propose, burnout seems to be indicative of today’s slow death: we are increasingly consuming the time we do not have. The physical wearing out of today’s population is marked by a burning out of energy, which occurs in the first instance on a mental level, but materializes when damaging the body, for example, as the latter informant’s words above illustrate when he says he was trashing himself.³

² In fact, a dancer-friend knew the physiotherapist and arranged a lastminute visit. The physiotherapist was willing to treat her free of charge, but she would not let him. She was satisfied with the treatment and was so delighted she could come in so lastminute, she offered him 50 euros. While he suggested she would pay 25 euros instead, she insisted on giving him 50 euros out of pocket. For the next performance, the organization she was working with was willing to pay for another physiotherapy session in the next city, however they were unable to make an appointment. ‘At least they tried’, she concludes.

³ I will come back to define the condition of *burnout* more thoroughly further in this section.

Furthermore, these examples demonstrate that in precarious times, contemporary dance artists may potentially endanger their bodies, which are in fact their work instruments, because they feel they have no other option. The informants kept on dancing with injuries for myriad reasons, going from 'not disappointing the choreographer' to 'getting the payment they need'. These accounts reveal that this is partly due to a lack of recognizing dance as living labor on the mesolevel: the choreographer or associated organization did not invest enough in the maintenance of the dancer's body. Nonetheless, simultaneously, on the microlevel, this seems to be partly due to the dancer's willingness to let the body be exploited. I would identify these situations as precarity traps, in which dance artists feel they have no other choice. Also Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet points to this potential danger that in precarious working conditions, contemporary dance artists are inclined to go beyond their limits, psychologically as well as physically (2010, 127). He lists several reasons in his study, which seem to all come down to a more general feeling of fear, such as the fear of getting fired from a project, or of not getting rehired for the next production (or even of getting blacklisted). These fears appear to be related to one's future prospects and employability. However, there is certainly another fear at play when Sorignet points to the fear of having to interrupt the group dynamics (which is reminiscent of what my informant felt when she had to step away from the workshop due to illness but feeling guilty for doing so). This fear is grounded in missing out on the joy of collaborating as well as the sense of responsibility one may feel towards the other members of the group (Sorignet 2010, 127).

Moreover, aside from the vulnerable body subject to ageing, injury and illness, age and work experience seem to play an important part in one's position in the dance scene. Several informants have indicated that they seem to find themselves in 'a mid-career gap' or a 'weird hole between the new and the big' where they feel they are not supported because on the one hand, they are not fresh and emerging enough that a programmer, venue or funder could take the credit for their discovery, and on the other hand, they are not established enough to stand a chance for structural funding. Hence, young and emerging artists are not only interesting for the art market because they are cheaper due to their lack of seniority and willingness to invest in their future. Also, and perhaps more importantly, they have a unique selling point and supporters can take the credit for their emerging success. Some informants have indicated that this form of ageism indeed often plays a role in deciding who gets funding for their projects or who gets selected for a residency or a role. A thirty-year old informant explains that she does not even read audition notices anymore, because 'they're probably not looking for me and it's really just

also this realization that dance is for the young man'.⁴ As I am dumbfounded that she would not consider herself young anymore, she reacts: 'I have the feeling that either way in Berlin, thirty is still young, but maybe not if you're auditioning to be a dancer in a piece, like Sasha Waltz.' Hence, the more you age, the more you cannot but focus on creating your own work? However, in order to do so a mid-career artist needs to find the funding and support, which brings us back to the problem that 'the most ignored artists are the ones in mid-career'.⁵

To close this section on physical precarity, I would like to return to the dance production *VOLCANO* once more, which I have extensively discussed in the previous chapter. I observed that during a performance in Ghent in April 2015, dancer Clinton Stringer performed with his arm in a sling due to a shoulder injury. This seems to have created a situation in which the precarious body is acknowledged by staging an injured dancer. Most interestingly, this situation simultaneously reveals two sides of the same coin: on the one hand, this staging shows that the performer can dance successfully with an injury, especially when supported by his colleagues, because the dancer's body is a trained body. However, on the other hand, it exposes the performer's self-precarization as he is willing to perform while injured or as he felt he did not have another choice: perhaps he did not want to disappoint the other performers by cancelling the show? Perhaps they could not afford to cancel the show? Perhaps they chose to stage the injured body as a critique on production-oriented society and exploitation? Whatever the reason may be, it is especially interesting to devote at least some attention to how the choreographer and her collaborators have dealt with integrating the injured dancer into the performance. As much of the movement material is based on tap dance movements, the injured dancer is able to take part of the synchronous choreography when they move together tapdancing as a collective. At times, the other performers lend a subtle hand to support Stringer. In these instances, the injured dancer is quite literally supported by his peers, which may also symbolize the mutual encouragement, solidarity, and sense of community prevailing among the performers. Stringer's body is injured but fit: he appears to be perfectly capable of following the choreography despite his shoulder injury. In contrast to other performances in which dance is represented as training and work (especially in classical ballet), the body is exposed as vulnerable but simultaneously as highly competent to thrive under precarious conditions. However, at other times during the performance, the bodily limit is exposed when the injured dancer remains at rest

⁴ I should note that the female informant's specific referral to the male gender in the quotation may possibly imply that the odds for fresh-out-of-school male dancers are much higher in auditions than for mid-career female dancers.

⁵ The informant's words proclaiming mid-career artists as the most ignored ones in terms of receiving project funding bring a speculative bias forward: this frustration could possibly be one of the reasons why most of my survey respondents were in their mid- and late thirties.

while the other performers continue to dance, for example, in a scene where Stringer sits at the edge of the stage observing his fellow performers at work. This particular choreographic choice brings the perspective of the spectator onstage, and, most interestingly, corresponds to the dramaturgical process of slowing down instead of the slow death (see also Van Assche and Pewny 2018). However, while this action may represent the injured dancer who knows his limits and slows down when necessary, yet, it simultaneously contrasts this idea, because even when injured the dancer does not rest: while resting onstage, he is still *performing* and thus *working* (and thus being paid). Therefore, this particular staging actually exposes the self-precarization prevalent among contemporary dance artists, much in line with my fieldwork findings: the injured dancer does not *really* slow down. Stringer is engaged in – even trapped by – precarity as he keeps dancing while injured, be it out of group pressure, sense of responsibility, or pure love for the job. While the former reasons may perfectly explain the precarity trap, I would like to stress that the latter reason should definitely not be neglected, as also an informant’s account reveals after she panicked about her schedule:

‘I need holidays!!’ [Pretends to cry] [...] So I was like: what are my priorities? I was like: health, maybe, at a point I have to see... Of course, I could say, I don’t do this. But I need to earn money and also, *I love performing!* [my emphasis]

8.2 Mental precarity: the vulnerable mind

Especially within the arts, precarious workers are also confronted with a very particular form of mental precarity. As I briefly touched upon in the previous chapters, self-promotion has caused many artists to question their own qualities as an artist. When confronted with countless unanswered emails to programmers or artistic directors, it is just normal to cast doubt upon the qualities of one’s piece, or even of oneself. Art sociologist Pascal Gielen has observed that the panic after such non-response is symptomatic of today’s rampant ‘mental precarity’, adding that ‘the fact that you are trading your own creativity and authenticity is making it difficult to accept that you [as an artist] are replaceable’ (Griffioen and Gielen 2016, under “Wat dit voor de kunstenaar

betekent”).⁶ As a result of market competitiveness ‘in a post-Fordist economy of temporary employment contracts, fleeting assignments and projects in rapid succession’, as Gielen comments elsewhere, ‘everyone is replaceable, which generates a constant dread of potential futility’ (2013a, 200-201). This form of mental precarity first and foremost ties in with the fact that, to paraphrase the title of Pierre-Michel Menger’s book, ‘the economics of creativity’ equal ‘art and achievement under uncertainty’ (2014). As sociologist Rudi Laermans puts it:

The persisting uncertainty is essentially double-sided: artists make risky investments in both a competitive art world and themselves. [...] The majority of artists indeed face a precarious future because contemporary art worlds are structurally unstable: trends come and go, creating aesthetic turbulence and abrupt market swings. Artists need the social recognition that they are doing something valuable in order to feel more secure, yet this collective esteem is not always obtained and, if so, mostly provisional. (Laermans 2015, 357-358)

Many reasons can explain this sought-after social recognition or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993). Several of my informants suspect they have received little support in Belgium because they have principally been performing (mainly outside Belgium) and therefore lack the necessary *brand awareness* to promote themselves as choreographers. For example, one informant testifies to the difficulties to network her way through different workspaces and venues in order to acquire studio time and performance dates. So far, she has not been able to sell her piece because most programmers were not able to make it to the premiere. However, still another factor may be relevant: since the informant only made the step to the position of choreographer after twenty years of performing, she simply is not young enough anymore to be presented as an emerging artist. As people do not know her name, no one dares to take the risk of supporting her, even if some of the dancers she has been working with have meanwhile established a name for themselves. The informant mentions that this lack of symbolic capital and social recognition has caused her to question her own qualities as an artist. Hence, aside from the psychic pressures that come with income insecurity, there also exists a very peculiar mental precarity that ties in with the uncertainties surrounding the social and symbolic recognition of the artist and their artwork in competitive creative fields. As Laermans sums it up quite straightforwardly, ‘most of the contemporary artists are structurally insecure, both about their own artistic practice or individual talent as well as about the

⁶ Translated from the Dutch original: ‘Het feit dat je je eigen creativiteit en authenticiteit verhandelt, maakt het moeilijk te verkroppen dat je vervangbaar bent’ (Griffioen and Gielen 2016, under “Wat dit voor de kunstenaar betekent”).

recognition of those by the art world' (2004, 14).⁷ In other words, there is a lack of solid parameters to maintain one's occupational identity. This artistic precarity not only emerges at the end of a work process. Already at the very beginning, when asking for funding, the question arises whether others will be interested at all in the proposal. Or in the words of another informant:

To write a dossier, there's so much research that you have to do, and you have to have meetings with people. You know, it takes at least a month to be able to write a good dossier, just to apply for money, and you don't have the guarantee that you are going to get it or not at all.

Project-based work in the arts is always accompanied by mental precarity, since artists invest time and work effort – and often also their own money – when applying for project-funding without the guarantee they will receive it. Thus, the projective temporality increasingly causes creative workers to let the present slip away, because of the promise that their projects will succeed in the near future. More and more, artists are living in the future, but this sharply contrasts with the fact that their socio-economic precarity prevents them from having secure future prospects on (or in) the long run. Another informant explains that the 'whole evaluative process of an application is overwhelming' because:

You're really exposing yourself and you're putting yourself in front of this kind of rigorous, cold [laughs], qualitative-quantitative analysis and it is just anxiety-ridden-producing for me.

Therefore, this informant enhances that he piles up more projects, 'because of the fear of not getting the funding'. Indeed, yet another unsuccessful run for project subsidies may not only lead to self-doubt and questioning one's qualities as an artist, but the mental precarity accompanying rejections for support may cause anxiety, stress, and eventually even burnout or depression.

8.3 *Crisis Karaoke*

In the following section, I expand the latter observation and dig deeper into the feeling of anxiety triggered by the mental precarity accompanying rejection by examining a

⁷ Original in Dutch: 'Het gros van de hedendaagse kunstenaars is structureel onzeker, zowel over het eigen kunstenaarschap of individuele talent als over de erkenning daarvan door de kunstwereld' (Laermans 2004, 14).

video performance I came across during my fieldwork in Berlin. On February 28, 2016, Berlin-based choreographer Jeremy Wade opened the 3AM event with a manipulated video recording from one of his therapy sessions. 3AM is a trimonthly multidisciplinary event that brings together artists and audience from Berlin. Each time, new artists are invited to organize the format and curate the event whichever way they see fit. The curatorial theme of this specific event was that of abandonment: the audience was to ‘witness works that have been abandoned by their makers, by curators, by the passage of time, or other stories’ (“28 February 2016. Abandonment”, February 28, 2016, accessed on September 17, 2018, paragraph 1). The event aimed to question how artists produce work and what criteria or value they apply to their (or someone else’s) decision-making processes. In short, the theme of the event was that of leftovers: what would otherwise have gone to waste, is recycled, revalued and reinvested. For the occasion, Wade saw it fit and deemed it necessary to present a manipulated video recording of one of his most recent therapy sessions, of course with consent from his therapist. In the self-reflective video performance, Wade ingeniously employs irony and humor as a form of social protest much in line with Donna Haraway’s call for irony as a rhetorical strategy and a political method, which she formulated in 1985 in her *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (1990) and which she at that time wanted to see more honored in socialist feminism specifically:

Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humor and serious play. (Haraway 1990, 190-191)

In her influential essay, Haraway employs the image of a cyborg as ‘a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’ (1990, 191). In a similar vein, Wade’s video performance, which he later entitled *Crisis Karaoke*, seems to represent the social reality of precarity and rejection as well as a fictional possibility space much in line with Haraway’s idea that ‘liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility’. As I will conclude, while *Crisis Karaoke* at first sight may appear as a performance of panic and hopelessness actually turns out to be a critical work about hope and solidarity.

As the video performance commences, it quickly becomes obvious for the spectator that the recorded therapy session is not staged, but we are watching actual footage from Wade’s private life.⁸ The opening credits are not so much credits, but they are a letter of permission from Wade’s therapist to show excerpts from his video recording of their

⁸ Interestingly, even if the footage is experienced as very real, it might as well be a theatrical representation of authenticity within the context of the contemporary theater of the real (see especially Carol Martin 2013).

twenty-first therapy session on January 19, 2016. Most significantly, the therapist states in the consent letter that he agrees on this because he believes ‘in the bigger purpose of introducing our culture to our shared human vulnerability in this artistic context’. The therapist declares in writing that ‘it is my belief that the factual omnipresence of human vulnerability is all too often hidden in today’s mainstream culture, thereby making people feel ashamed of their own vulnerability by creating the illusion that vulnerability does not exist in others’. Thereafter, he closes his letter by warning Wade that presenting this sensitive material may be counter-therapeutic as ‘he will use an authentic part of himself to turn into a performance thereby blurring lines between his inner private self and his public role as an artist’.

In the first shots, Wade sits down and opens the session by telling his therapist that he did not receive the project funding at Hauptstadt Kultur Fonds (Berlin) that he had applied for. At the very onset, he mentions that the rejection means that it might be the last time he will be able to come to a therapy session for the next few months: ‘So I just wanted to put it out there that this is my last session with you for a while, as much as I would like to continue, I don’t know how I’m gonna make the ends meet.’ These words are reminiscent of my earlier observation that artists may decide there is no money for physiotherapy or training, among other things. Wade suggests likewise that he might not be able to afford further therapy sessions, because the future income he had hoped for was declined by the subsidy decisionmakers. Thereafter, during the remainder of the therapy session, Wade experiences an extreme anxiety attack in response to this rejection and shows himself at his most vulnerable. Wade explains to his therapist that he has always been aware of the risks, but after writing four applications for funding and not receiving any, he feels like he is losing his dignity. His words here seem to confirm that next to socio-economic precarity, most of the contemporary artists are structurally insecure (see also Laermans 2004). Work in the arts is always accompanied by precarity when investing time and work effort in applying for project funding without the guarantee of receiving it. In that regard, Wade clarifies to his therapist that even though he works hard, it does not seem to be panning out the way he thought it would. He enhances that at least when he gets the funding, he gains back the time and effort, because he is able to do the research in return. However, he acknowledges he is neither sad nor helpless, but frustrated: ‘my life is deeply unmanageable. I’m doing my best, but it’s not enough somehow.’ Simultaneously, Wade reveals that he also cannot help but to feel like an ‘asshole’ – to use his words – because he seems to rely on an illusion that what he is doing is working, but that he still cannot support himself:

I want to be able to support myself, I want to be able to manage my bills. I’m turning forty in April. And at the same time, I don’t want to give up my work, but I don’t know what else to do somehow. And I feel even guilty of being here [in therapy] somehow. I’m happy to invest money in it – it’s a good thing – but then I’m crying

of not being able to support myself... It's just embarrassing. I'm embarrassed. I want a sense of dignity. I want to be able to take care after myself.

Further in the session, Wade declares that he just does not have the energy or will anymore to re-plan his life. Instead, he wants to move forward: 'I just don't want to invest the time in a delusion, I want a fucking solution.' While he is saying these words, he is crying and showing himself at his most vulnerable. Thereafter, he admits that he 'doesn't have the balls of packing his shit, moving somewhere and studying nursing or something'. In fact, he does not actually want to give up his work, instead he just wants a sustainable career as an artist. Thus, he seems to be angry at the system that keeps him precarious.

Nonetheless, right before he really becomes anxious during the therapy session, Wade has manipulated the video recording by subtly adding a buildup of melodramatic music up until the point where he tells his therapist that so many people keep encouraging him to hang in there while he keeps asking himself 'for what?' In editing the video recording, Wade has looped these two words a few times after which they fade into a catchy song by El Perro Del Mar called *Party*. This manipulation certainly breaks the tension and suspense that was being built up: tears seem to make room for laughter. The viewers are being encouraged to sing along and karaoke subtitles appear throughout the song. When the song ends, the session simply continues as Wade tells his therapist he does not feel very good and he lays himself down on the couch. At this point, Wade has also looped his heavy breathing, thus simulating hyperventilation. The words 'inhale' and 'exhale' appear on the screen, blinking fanatically for a while. His therapist composedly clarifies to Wade that he is experiencing an anxiety attack and gives Wade advice as to how he can calm himself down. He is told to breathe through a straw slowly. The spectator is asked to participate in an act of solidarity: each spectator is offered a straw and the words 'please take a straw' appear on screen. For a couple of minutes, we see a much calmer Wade in silence on the therapist's couch with the straw still in his mouth. The silence is interrupted by Wade himself, who is now exhaling deeply making meditative sounds with his voice. Encouraged by his therapist, Wade continues with the comforting voice exercises. After he has regained composure, he asks his therapist if he can eat some chocolate, which he is happy to share with his therapist. Finally, the session ends in chitchat about chocolate. The final credits start running, stating that 'this is work in progress by Jeremy Wade'. Omitting the article wittingly seems to suggest that Wade's well-being is work that is continuously in progress. Later, Wade renamed the video *Crisis Karaoke* and edited it further by manipulating the last section of small talk about chocolate and making it into a song. In fact, every word in the video performance is subtitled inviting the spectator to sing along with the entire crisis karaoke.

Confronted with this footage, the spectator seems to be put in a voyeuristic position, watching someone's private self so publicly exposed. However, in line with Bojana Kunst's discourse on visibility as a crucial characteristic of contemporary artistic work, Wade's video blurs, or dissolves, the lines between work, art and life. Kunst makes the important

observation that ‘today, the vanishing dividing line between life and work, placed by many twentieth-century artists at the core of their emancipation tendencies is also at the center of the capitalist processes of life exploitation’ (2015, 138). In fact, *Crisis Karaoke* is simultaneously a representation and a form of processing: firstly, Wade reveals a very personal part of himself processing his work and life as psychotherapeutic sessions are based on regular personal interactions to help a person overcome issues related to life and aims to improve this individual’s well-being. Thus, psychotherapy is a process, a way of dealing with life’s obstacles. In this particular session, Wade is processing rejection, which has direct impact on his socio-economic security as well as on his private self. In this process, he suffers an extreme anxiety attack, which his therapist is helping him through. In a similar vein, Gielen refers to this type of panic after rejection (directly by funding institutions, as is the case here, or indirectly by non-response from programmers, which Gielen addresses specifically) as symptomatic of the rampant mental precarity of today, because trading your own creativity and authenticity makes it difficult to accept your replaceability (Griffioen and Gielen 2016, under “Wat dit voor de kunstenaar betekent”). Indeed, needless to say that it is difficult to process such rejection, because it is ultimately yourself that you are selling. Secondly, Wade shares this vulnerable footage with an audience framed in an art context (and thus as a fiction) and in doing so, he makes his own vulnerability visible thus exposing and recognizing human precariousness as a public feeling and an ontological condition. Within the discourse on public feelings, Ann Cvetkovich argues that feeling bad constitutes the lived experience of neoliberal capitalism. Among other things, mental precarity is thus a widespread and a very common structure of feeling, but too often perceived as an individual issue (2012). In her book *Depression: a Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich observes a commodification of the depression, which is accompanied by the focus on individual diagnosis and treatment of an individual disease, instead of considering the social causes of depression and the social transformations that might address it. Instead, she proposes, in line with theorists such as Franco Berardi or Rudi Laermans, that depression is a product of a sick culture and we should address this condition publicly as a collective feeling. This proposition ties in with Judith Butler’s use of the notion precariousness, which according to her is always an aspect of life and must remain so (Butler 2004; 2009). This ontological definition of precariousness is based on the necessity to recognize this inevitable uncertainty of being as a shared condition of human life: the maintenance of life is never guaranteed and therefore uncertain. The condition that makes life possible, according to Butler, is precisely that what makes life precarious.⁹ Drawing on this, *Crisis Karaoke* seems to suggest that especially this dependence on funding makes contemporary artists precarious and, in turn, makes a career in the arts unsustainable. In fact, in exposing his vulnerability publicly, Wade contributes to the growing awareness of the precarious socio-economic position of artists by not presenting ‘too rosy a picture regarding

⁹ Her ideas are derived from Levinas’ vision on precariousness, who claims that the human body is precarious because it is exposed to the Other, to temptation, to destruction, etc. Human life is precarious because it depends on the life of the Other and vice versa (see also Pewny 2011, 24).

money, status and private satisfaction' (to quote Hans Abbing once more, see 2008, 120). Instead, he exposes the lack of symbolic recognition for his work effort (by rejecting his funding applications), which causes him to doubt his qualities as an artist. Furthermore, Wade is exploiting his authentic emotions turning them into a work of art and concurrently, the relational and emotional labor of the process is turned into a performance. While sharing this precarity may contribute to the process of overcoming, it may well be – as his therapist put it – counter-therapeutic because he uses 'an authentic part of himself to turn into a performance thereby blurring lines between his inner private self and his public role as an artist'. However, through manipulating the recording using tactical frivolity and humor as a restorative device, he actually subverts his at-first-sight personal conflict in an act of solidarity making it public and participatory.

8.4 An 'epidemic of panic'

This particular video performance is fruitful soil to discuss the feelings of anxiety, panic, burnout and depression that also my informants were not immune to. At first sight *Crisis Karaoke* addresses the anxiety and panic that accompany socio-economic precarity, however as we will see later, after a storm also comes a calm. In *Precarious Rhapsody*, Franco Berardi observes that an 'epidemic of panic' is spreading 'in the fabric of everyday life' (2009a, 39). Berardi poses that panic is 'ever more frequently denounced as a painful and worrying symptom, the physical sensation of no longer succeeding in governing one's own body, an acceleration of the heart rate, a shortness of breath that can lead to fainting and paralysis' (2009a, 36). His description perfectly matches the visible symptoms Wade is encountering during his therapy session: he is clearly suffering an anxiety attack when processing another rejected subsidy application, which confronts him once more with the proximity of his life and his labor. The dependency on funding puts him in a very vulnerable position, which Berardi identifies as a 'condition of apparent freedom' in his insightful book *The Soul at Work*: 'the neoliberal values presented in the 1980's and 1990's as vectors of independence and self-entrepreneurship, revealed themselves to be manifestations of a new form of slavery producing social insecurity and most of all a psychological catastrophe' (2009b, 192). Berardi's words are definitely reminiscent of what Jan Ritsema contended recently, as I quoted in the beginning of this book: 'instead of slaving for somebody else, many more people will become their own slaves' (2015, paragraph 4). Indeed, due to the lack of control over time in the neoliberal work regime (as Guy Standing 2014a puts it), many people are confronted with a false sense of liberty. As Wade himself states in an interview with Diego Agulló: 'Everyone knows that freelance

doesn't make you free' (Agulló 2016). In that respect, Byung-Chul Han tellingly writes in the introduction to his book that 'psychic maladies such as depression and burnout express a profound crisis of freedom'. And he continues:

They represent pathological signs that freedom is now switching over into manifold forms of compulsion. Although the achievement-subject deems itself free, in reality it is a slave. In so far as it willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an *absolute slave*. (Han 2017, 2)

In a related vein, Berardi explains this 'regime of slavery' as follows:

When we move into the sphere of info-labor there is no longer a need to have bought a person for eight hours a day indefinitely. Capital no longer recruits people, but buys packets of time, separated from their interchangeable and occasional bearers. Depersonalized time has become the real agent of the process of valorization, and depersonalized time has no rights, nor any demands. (Berardi 2009a, 32)

Hence, he concludes: 'the person is free, sure. But his time is enslaved' (Berardi 2009a, 33).¹⁰ The bohemian work ethic, which is grounded in individual responsibility and autonomy from the late 1960's onwards, stands for having 'the soul at work' – to quote Berardi's book title (2009b). The soul at work means that the immaterial factory asks to place our very souls at its disposal (meaning our intelligence, sensibility, creativity and language), while industrial factories forced the body to leave the soul outside of the assembly line (Berardi 2009b, 192). Berardi's work exposes that today 'the dark side of the soul has finally surfaced after looming for a decade in the shadow of the much touted victory and the promised eternity of capitalism' (2009b, 207). In a similar vein, Ulrich Bröckling notes that entrepreneurial selves 'just get worn out pure and simple' because of the demands of this individual responsibility and autonomy (2016, 201). The overall feeling that seems to correspond best to Wade's revelations in the therapy session seems to be the feeling of insufficiency that I have called attention to at the very ending of part II of this book, referring to the words of Bröckling who identified 'the constant fear of not having done the right thing or not enough of it' as part of the entrepreneurial self (2016, 36). A closer look at the video performance, for that matter, reveals the 'new feeling of insufficiency' that epitomizes the entrepreneurial self, which, according to Bröckling, is 'chronic' and which may lead to burnout and depression:

The depression-causing inability to fulfil the demands emerges as the flipside of the promise of happiness held out by the proclaimers of the entrepreneurial spirit. By

¹⁰ For more info on the Western 'enslaving' notion of time, or how modernist time is entangled with a particular ethics of labor, see also Stalpaert 2017 and 2018.

directing the frustration at the state of insufficiency at themselves, the entrepreneurial aspirants are forced to affirm the tyranny of total self-responsibility. (Bröckling 2016, 36)

This feeling of insufficiency relates to one's potentiality, which as a principle represents 'the human subject as capable of becoming always *more* than what one is' on the one hand, and 'work as a process of freeing up, liberating and mobilizing the subject's inner qualities always ready to be actualized' on the other hand (Costea, Amiridis and Crump 2012, 31). In their study on practices of employability within UK universities, Bogdan Costea, Kostas Amiridis and Norman Crump argue that due to the principle of potentiality at heart of the recruitment of (ideal) future workers, there exists an 'ethos of work which de-recognizes human limits, makes a false promise of absolute freedom, and thus becomes a tragic proposition from the individual' (2012, 25). Following Georg Simmel, the authors highlight a tension within individual life between its own ideal of full self-realization and the permanent insufficiency of its actual achievements, which means that within the context of labor, there is a current emphasis on one's individual potentiality which stimulates an orientation towards work as an opportunity for self-realization. The danger, which also the authors underline, lies in the fact that work is seen as the place for the actualization of ones potentialities: if every individual ought to see themselves as always capable of more, then one is predetermined to engage in 'a tragic self-seeking journey always bound up with a looming prospect of failure to meet such expectations' (Costea, Amiridis and Crump 2012, 35), which is something also Byung-Chul Han (2017) points out in his short but provocative book on neoliberal *psychopolitics* and the contemporary crisis of freedom. Exactly this seems to be at the core of the feeling of insufficiency that Wade encountered when processing the rejection for project funding application during the therapy session: 'I'm doing my best, but it's not enough somehow'. Sharing these feelings of insufficiency publicly reveals, once more, the paradox underlying the bohemian work ethic – or what Bojana Kunst terms 'the twisted ideological relationship between work and freedom' (2015a, 190): more autonomy produces more work. An informant puts it as follows:

When you don't have boundaries for work, that's what makes you always feel, like the pressure inside of you, that you should or could be working. When you should or could start or finish is just a matter of how ambitious you are, how motivated you are or how competitive you are.

The unrewarded work efforts, especially those summed-up in the threefold chase, bring about a feeling of insufficiency, which may lead to stress, anxiety, exhaustion and eventually burnout or depression. There comes an inevitable point where the fast, the mobile and the flexible may hit an impasse.

Depression occurs, as Berardi argues, when 'the speed and complexity of the flows of information overwhelm the capacities of the "social brain" to manage these flows,

inducing a panic that concludes, shortly thereafter, with a depressive plunge' (2009b, 10). To return to Hartmut Rosa's notion of acceleration: burnout and depression are part of the dysfunctional and pathological forms of deceleration, which are unintended consequences of the accelerated time regime. As Berardi notes, a constant attentive stress and a reduction of the time available for affectivity are two tendencies, inseparably linked, that provoke an effect of devastation on the individual psyche. Interestingly, he distinguishes two different meanings of the word depression. While the first meaning refers to a special kind of mental suffering, the second circumscribes 'a general shape of the global crisis that is darkening the historical horizon of our time' (2009b, 207). Burnouts and depressions are too often treated as individual pathologies, which is reflected in the boom of medications to cushion the symptoms. However, as also Berardi and Bröckling pose, drugs are no solution because they merely cushion the symptoms, whereas the problem is structural. Analogously, Laermans points out that 'burnout and depressions are dealt with as illnesses treatable with medication and not regarded as personal symptoms of a social reality gone awry' (2018, 103). He addresses the notion of 'manic depression' as a 'widespread common structure of feeling and should be represented and discussed as such: as the psychic mood of the precarious post-Fordist multitude, as an emotional expression of the way neoliberal governmentality captures the self' (Laermans 2018, 103-104). Indeed, Laermans is much in line with Berardi who concludes that depression is the 'collateral damage of the soul at work' (2009b, 209), which conforms to Cvetkovic's (2012) thesis that feeling bad constitutes the lived experience of neoliberal capitalism and is therefore structural rather than personal: a collective depression of society.

Nonetheless, and most importantly, *Crisis Karaoke* contains a noteworthy dose of humor: indeed, 'crisis' is counterweighed by the 'karaoke' part. The footage of the therapy session is manipulated by Wade himself at the point where the material climaxes and almost becomes too dramatic due to the musical build-up in the soundtrack. Wade shrewdly breaks the tension with the catchy beginning tunes of a pop song called *Party* by El Perro Del Mar and karaoke subtitles encourage the viewer to sing along. On top of that, Wade seemed to have carefully selected a particularly catchy song about party-going – which may suggest a certain banality, superficiality or even naïveté at first glance, although when listening closely to the lyrics, the song addresses a sense of loneliness covered up by the catchy tunes. Precisely this use of manipulation, using comic irony as a device, makes the video into a performance with an activist character. Also at the end, in a reworked version of the video performance, Wade manipulated the closing chitchat about chocolate turning it into a song. Interestingly, chocolate tends to contain chemicals and substances that can produce feelings of happiness and certain chemicals may even act like anti-depressants in combination with other chemicals present in the brain. While the topics of both songs at first may seem mundane, they do seem to add to the theme of depression. Still, what interests me most, is Wade's use of comic irony in the otherwise

rather dark video performance. As Berardi argues in his *The Soul at Work*, 'if depression, exhaustion and addiction are the dark side of the entrepreneurial self, irony is its compensatory other' (2009b, 202). He continues:

The ironist is well aware of the laws governing the market and the inherently paradoxical demands it makes. She knows what is being imposed upon her and she says it, pushing the facts of the matter to their illogical conclusion, exposing as absurd what she cannot otherwise change. (Berardi 2009b, 202)

By creating this ironic distance, through the manipulation of the footage turning crisis into karaoke, Wade recognizes his own idiocies: he is not alone in this struggle because he is one of the many selves exploited by the accelerated work regime and neoliberal economy in late capitalism. Drawing on Haraway, *Crisis Karaoke* can thus be interpreted as a self-reflecting video performance using irony as a form of social protest and employing karaoke in an act of solidarity to help people come together in their precarity. Essentially, Wade seems to share a message of hope exposing panic but turning it into laughter. In turn, also for Wade himself, making and presenting *Crisis Karaoke* in this context has been a process of working through the violent paradoxes of the present as a line of flight. And as the final credit note implies, this remains a work in progress, and hopefully not a counter-therapeutic one.

Wade's first showing of *Crisis Karaoke* during the 3AM event was not without effect. One of the informants in my fieldwork told me in our introductory talk that she had been to the 3AM event and that hearing these words coming from a choreographer like Jeremy Wade, who she considers as established and as having made a name for himself in Berlin, was a somewhat shocking experience. The way she talked about the video showing, appalled and with disbelief, made it very clear that witnessing Wade at his most vulnerable had left quite an impression on her. Moreover, she enhanced that the video performance caused her to reflect on her own working path: if things are tough on him, then what does that mean for her future prospects? Thus, revealing his vulnerability in this manner may be an actual statement: there is clearly something wrong if artists who in most eyes have 'made it' can barely make ends meet. Presenting his anxiety attack so publicly can be interpreted as a call for more sustainable career paths, particularly in the arts. Not only does Wade shatter the prevailing taboo around psychotherapy, he also deliberately breaks with keeping up appearances; even though he is considered an established and successful contemporary dance artist, his performance video demonstrates that he still has difficulties making ends meet. In exposing the mechanisms of how precarity is built into the project-funded art world and how this takes a toll on his life, he seeks a more structural solution to sustain an artistic career. His performance contains a message of hope and solidarity towards the dance community in particular, but also towards society at large: people ought to care more for each other. Wade shares his individual conflicts publicly, but he also actively engages his audience to work

through the negative feelings together, thus acknowledging that these are in fact not individual issues. Instead, these are structural problems that can and should be dealt with on a collective level. As Wade released his performance video at a 3AM event, which is a self-organized, open-access and free tri-monthly platform that unites the performing arts community of Berlin, it is needless to say that many of the artists present could relate to Wade's feelings thus affirming their collectivity. Sharing these feelings in that particular public sphere is a potential starting point towards civil actions from within the dance community, such as creating alternative economies and support systems based on the idea of solidarity and collective care, which can pave the way to more sustainable career paths. Conclusively, in the context of performing precarity, by exposing his socio-economic precarity and ontological precariousness in a performative, humorous and self-reflective manner, Wade uses his strength as an artist to break the silence. Simultaneously he copes with the trauma of precarity in this act of resilience through – in the words of Mark Neocleous – '*subjectively* [his emphasis] dealing with the uncertainty and instability of contemporary capitalism' (2013, 5) and, I should add, through sharing this process publicly.

8.5 The artist burnout: 'manic depression'

During my fieldwork, several informants have expressed feelings of anxiety, stress and panic related to the threefold chase and their precariatized minds. Additionally, as I also briefly addressed at the end of the last chapter, several informants have addressed the feeling of self-doubt, insufficiency, exhaustion, and burnout. I ought to point out that several informants have mentioned – although cautiously – that they have been on the verge of depression and have been considering taking medication, although they all had avoided that thus far and were for the most part uncomfortable talking about it on the record. Burnout, in contrast, was a more accessible subject – presumably because today burnout is more and more publicly and openly recognized as an (often work-related) medical condition. However, it remains often unclear to the general public what precisely distinguishes the medical conditions of burnout and depression. Overburdening is the most common cause of absence from work due to work-related stress. According to The Human Link, a Belgian center for a preventive approach to psychological well-being, one in four people among the workforce go through a period of overburdening. Overburdening happens when tension about work and accompanying complaints come to a point where the worker cannot function at work anymore, thus the correlation with work-related stress is often quite obvious in case of overburdening. Often the worker is

only temporarily unable to work: most people are fully recovered after a substantial break from work (eight weeks to six months). The complaints range from exhaustion, insomnia, restlessness, tension, difficulties to concentrate, petulance, and psychosomatic complaints such as headaches tied in with feelings of impotence, loss of control, worrying and difficulties functioning in the social sphere. Most importantly, as *The Human Link* proposes, the worker needs to be able to recognize the problems in the work situation and actively seek solutions in order to overcome overburdening. Hence, recovering also partly happens within the work sphere (Daeseleire 2006, 38). Burnout, instead, is the final stage of a lengthy process of overburdening, especially prevalent among professions in which is dealt with what Sergio Bologna (2006) terms relational labor and among people who are very involved with work and exceptionally motivated by work. Commonly, burnout strikes people who start work with high expectations and drive, which makes them vulnerable to disappointment: there comes a point, when they realize that they give more than they can take. As we have seen in this book, contemporary dance artists generally match this description. Drawing on this, I thus define burnout as final stage of a lingering process of chronic overburdening. The worker has probably dealt with overburdening passively (by keeping distance, or relativizing the situation), but in a similar vein as Berlant's process of 'slow death', the worker has endured this situation and has gone on with working and living – or in her words, reproducing life – for too long. As Berlant puts it:

For what defines this pressing situation [of precarization] is the problem of living in the ongoing now of it. The enduring present that is at once overpresent and enigmatic requires finding one's footing in new manners of being in it. The haunting question is how much of one's creativity and hypervigilant energy the situation will absorb before it destroys its subjects or finds a way to appear as merely a steady hum of livable crisis ordinariness. (Berlant 2011, 196)

As a result of chronic overburdening, the worker is unable to recuperate during breaks and starts to experience feelings of extreme exhaustion which brings them to the question indicative of burnout: 'can I still and do I still want to keep doing this?' Along with severe symptoms of overburdening, according to *The Human Link*, the three most important characteristics of burnout are: emotional exhaustion, demotivation and aversion towards work, and a feeling of professional failure (Daeseleire 2006, 41). While burnout is a final stage of a process, it is not unresolvable: not only rest will help, but the worker needs to process first what happened and seek alternatives to continue. Hence, resumption of work is only possible when complaints have decreased and when you have accepted your condition and you are open to deal with the situation. In an accelerated work regime, however, post-Fordist workers tend to skip several steps to keep up with the race to success, which may cause burnouts to reoccur. Lastly, depression generally knows a variety of causes, but it may occur as a result of stressful events. However,

essentially, unlike burnout, depression is often not limited to the work situation but influences all domains of life. Next to this significant difference, the most notable distinctions between depression and burnout are the occurrence of a negative perspective on things and dark thoughts about death accompanying depression, which do not generally occur when experiencing burnout. Instead, burnouts go hand in hand with worries about the work situation and future. In addition, burnouts are generally less accompanied by feelings of guilt, self-blame and dejection than depression.

Five out of all fourteen informants have addressed the topic of burnout spontaneously and have expressed explicitly that they have either suffered burnouts in the past or that they were on the verge of a burnout during the period of my fieldwork. Nonetheless, and most importantly, some informants noted that it was still difficult for them to actually acknowledge their mental health situation as such, because – as an informant put it – ‘you only technically have a burnout when you go to a doctor and they can prescribe you not to go to work, but it’s not relevant unless you have a full-time job’. In my text query, scanning through all interviews, all but one informant have mentioned ‘anxiety’ or ‘stress’ (stemmed words for *anxi** and *stress**), ten in fourteen informants have mentioned ‘exhaustion’ or ‘tiredness’ (stemmed words for *exhaust** and *tired*), and eight have mentioned ‘depression’ (stemmed words for *depress**). All in all, figure K.1. in Annex 5 shows a table of the percentages of text coded within the node burnout per informant. Most interestingly, as I conducted longitudinal fieldwork, covering a period of six to nine months, I was able to follow the evolution of the mental state of my informants (especially the five who tackled the topic extensively) throughout this time period. The notion of ‘manic depression’ seems to describe best the parallel evolution three of my case study informants went through in this period. All three informants seemed to have hit their nadir halfway throughout the fieldwork, but this evolved into a much brighter and more optimistic state towards the end of the fieldwork – which at least partly has to do with the seasonal change as both winters in Brussels and Berlin had been extremely long, dark and rainy. When I point to this evolution I observed in one of my interview series, my informant comments:

Interviewer: There is just this lighter feeling in the room.

Informant: That’s so nice! I also feel like there’s a lighter feeling. Well, it’s not without struggle, and it really can fluctuate on a day-to-day basis, but yes, the work is keeping me busy and inspired and connected, and this little life of mine is happening.

Elsewhere in the same interview, my informant mentions being grateful and, with a very optimistic tone, that it is in fact all a matter of ‘maintaining my dignity in the precarity’. He concludes: ‘this is my life, right now, it’s actually pretty good. It’s pretty complex, it’s pretty diverse [...] it’s so fucking fulfilling.’ In a similar vein, another informant reacts to my observation:

Interviewer: You seem more motivated, or brighter than the last time.

Informant: It's a common, I mean, I recognize that from other years as well. There are kind of heavier, darker periods: less work, I fall into a kind of slight depression, you know, the thoughts, hard to focus... Then maybe Spring comes, more work comes, then it gets exciting again. [...] And I don't know, I just come to trust that there's a plan for me. I think I have come to just accept that if I continue with dance, or if I leave dance – if I leave it for just a moment – like it's okay. I think I will go where I need to go. So, I just try to have that faith... in life.

With respect to these observed evolutions, I would like to return to Laermans' contribution to the topic of burnout and depression in neoliberalism, who posits that we are dealing with individual and collective *manic* depressions caused by the neoliberal ideal: 'whereas mania is the rather negated positive side of the reigning structure of feeling, its complementary dark side is much more talked about, not the least because during the last decades a steadily growing number of people have been diagnosed as depressive' (2018, 100). In his use of the notion of manic depression, Laermans does not draw on the clinical definition of the condition, but uses it as a metaphor for a 'widespread common structure of feeling' or the 'psychic mood of the precarious post-Fordist multitude' and I continue to use the notion as such (2018, 105-106). In my fieldnotes, I have described my informants' psychic moods going from 'dark' to much 'lighter' or 'brighter' periods in which they rediscover the joy of being an artist. Indeed, the previous part on "the Fast, the Mobile and the Flexible" revealed that many of my informants feel 'always hurried and agitated, uptight and nervous, so that stress becomes a regular and in fact often vital ingredient of one's psychic economy' (Laermans 2018, 4). I would add that *manic* is perhaps a crucial addition to the notion of today's depression as it seems to relate to what Berlant (2011) has referred to as cruel optimism: as soon as the freedom of self-responsibility and autonomy is unmasked as apparent freedom, the euphoria burns out. As Laermans insightfully writes: 'in essence, the self becomes depressive due to the weariness of being oneself, particularly when the surrounding conditions regularly subvert, complicate, or obstruct the process of acting in a truly personal way' (2018, 101). Especially when confronted with insufficiency, insecure future prospects, and 'the uncanny unity of the difference between self-exploitation and self-realization', the fast/mobile/flexible dance artists decelerate, physically as well as mentally, as my fieldwork has shown. In the fragment below, one of my case study informants, struggling with burnout, bluntly depicts the 'precaritized mind' and his difficulties to stay away for at least some time from the demands of projective temporality:

My instinct is to fill up empty periods, because I've got to make money. This time, however, I said "no" and decided I was just going to be at home, because I'm really on the verge of a burnout. Instead, I postponed some things to be at home and to work on my body, because I was actually having some physical problems. I was

starting to feel like I was falling apart. I was like, okay, before we actually fall apart for once, let's like go ahead and say "basta!" and do it before we like end up in physiotherapy with a back that's blocked.

This testimony is reminiscent of several of Franco Berardi's observations on precarious labor (2009a and 2009b) and also of what Lauren Berlant terms 'slow death' (2007): the fact that an increasing number of people are wearing out, typically physically, but also mentally. As said, my informant tries to change his way of working because of signs of a burnout, because being in survival mode – as he admitted – caused him to no longer enjoy what he was doing. In line with Berlant's notion of 'slow death' (2007, 754), this informant indicated being in a 'limbo state' at one point during my fieldwork where 'survival is neither dead nor alive, it's trying to stay alive', which is reminiscent of the Road Runner being chased by Wile E. Coyote who never seems to get anywhere. In my informant's words: 'It's always the state that you say: I'll go through this so I get there, and then "there" keeps moving. So you just stay in this perpetual state of panic. And this is just not healthy on any level'.

Other informants had recurrent illnesses related to their immune systems throughout the period of fieldwork. It merits mention that these illnesses generally coincided with the darker periods in their career paths. For one informant, for example, they coincided with a vexatious collaboration gone awry while for the other these recurrent illnesses coincided with a period of consecutive rejections in terms of subsidy and job applications combined with a futile quest for a PhD program:

Right now, I'm very much concerned with productivity, self-enhancement as a possible hopeful procedure that I might survive somewhere in the future. All this shit just takes me out of the present basically. All of this shit just takes me away from that dream. Maybe it's reality catching up with me: I'm forty. But it becomes that much more intense when you actually don't win all the efforts that you have done over the years. All of this kind of overcompensating [...] [knowing] that all of these efforts might not add up to a sum that makes you equivalent to be an artist studying in the university, even? No? Ten or fifteen years of awards, of funding, of professional reviews, of engaging within a community of artists, and I wouldn't qualify to study for an artistic PhD?

More and more, project work has caused artists to live in the future letting the present slip away, but this sharply contrasts with the fact that their socio-economic precarity prevents them from having secure future prospects in the long run – which is in fact one of the many issues dealt with in *Crisis Karaoke*. This particular thick description reveals manifold issues: besides projective temporality, the informant describes the lack of career progress and prospects. This informant especially addresses the outspoken difficulty of being confronted with insufficiency as he would still not qualify for a PhD program after a decade of building up credentials in the arts sector. Hence, importantly, as this fragment

reveals, many of the disadvantages of precarious career prospects are not compensated by symbolic recognition thus resulting in a feeling of insufficiency.

In fact, my fieldwork reveals a particular interplay between a presbyopic and myopic perspective among contemporary dance artists with regard to their future: artists experience a peculiar form of presbyopia in which they have a twisted sense of future prospects. Firstly, Milenko Popovic and Kruna Ratkovic have studied what they term 'oversupply of labor' and other peculiarities of the arts labor market and hypothesize that the oversupply of artists is due actually to a 'special kind of presbyopia that is inherent to young people' (2013, 18). Following Ruth Towse (2006), they explain that young people tend to enter the artistic labor market too frequently because they overestimate their talent and likelihood of their future success (remember also Hans Abbing's rosy picture?). In this regard, their use of presbyopia equally points to the artists' twisted prospects in the long run. Secondly, I argue, that while contemporary dance artists are farsighted in the sense that they are constantly working towards future projects, they are simultaneously blind to the long-term effects of working in a system that keeps them poor. In contrast to Popovic and Ratkovic, I suggest instead that a special kind of myopia reigns among artists, not the least because they feel like they have nothing to lose – if an unrewarding but full-time job is the alternative (see also McRobbie 2016). One of my informants illustrates this interplay between the presbyopic and myopic prospects in the following statement: 'all those kind of life questions that you never actually ask yourself because you are always in survival mode. You're just happy to make it to the end of the season and hope that you still have work the season after, so asking these long-term plans is a bit weird.' Hence, the future my informant here acknowledges is a merely a nearby future and it feels too precarious to make any long-term plans. Future worries, precarity and burning out seem to come hand in hand, as one of my youngest (!) informants testifies:

I guess also I get tired of the precarity, of the instability. Especially maybe the last year, like the period where it's been really kind of heavy for me, with like depression, or sadness. I get tired of that. I don't want to be in that situation again. [...] It kind of draws the motivation away. I'm now more motivated to have stability or safety and feeling good and it seems like I can't find it so easily in this kind of lifestyle. So then I was kind of looking at 'okay maybe I need to live another lifestyle and do something that supports that.

It is only to be expected that a certain evolution comes with age: only after a couple of years in the precarious labor market, one starts to notice the negative sides such as the difficulty to save money and to upkeep a steady relationship. If these negative sides are not compensated by symbolic recognition or capital, the bad simply does not outweigh the good anymore.

Interestingly, a new creation by one of my informants dealt with the theme of fear. Particularly in one part of the creation, the theme of fear tied in with future worries related to the precarious socio-economic position of (performing) artists. In an improvisation during the creative process – which I was able to observe – one of the performers starts a monologue with the words ‘I have not been doing so well lately. I have been living ahead of myself.’ She continues to moan more dramatically: ‘and now everything hurts. I’m so weak. I’m not getting anything done. And I’m getting tired too. But it always has to go on.’ The introducing words quite straightforwardly depict the projective temporality causing the performer to burn out gradually (in slow death). In what follows, she addresses socio-economic as well as mental precarity related to being an artist. While phrases like ‘my life is constantly negotiable’, ‘everything is meaningful, but at the same time it does not matter what I do’ and ‘I did study, even abroad. I have certificates to prove it’ refer to the mental precarity artists are constantly dealing with, other lines like ‘my head is totally empty and so is my checking account’ hint to the socio-economic precarity prevalent among freelance artists like her.¹¹ While improvising, another performer suggests to add ‘this is a place where I can say these things’, suggesting that in the theater space, the audience can relate to these issues and will therefore understand the fear and future worries she is addressing. Interestingly, similar to Wade’s video performance, the monologue seems to contribute to the growing awareness of the (socio-economic) precarity specific to the performing arts sector by exposing vulnerability and publicly addressing it instead of – as Abbing put it – painting ‘too rosy a picture’ (2008, 120). In that regard, the performer addresses the fact that ‘no one has told me that it would be this way. No one has prepared me for this’ in the improvisation. In the Berlin survey, especially the future worry of *Altersarmut* – poverty at an older age due to the lack of pension – is alarming.¹² This is a structural problem on top of the physical precarity of ageing I addressed in the beginning of this chapter. Poverty at an older age is indicated by 44% of the Berlin-based respondents as the top future worry. Additionally, the *Report Darstellende Künste* addresses the issue of *Altersarmut* among performing artists in Germany who are bound to work under an antisocial system marked by self-exploitation (Jeschonnek, Fonds Darstellende Künste e.V. and Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.V. 2010, 21). As I addressed previously, the current trend of self-employment and temporary employment in the German performing arts sector make artists’ pension provision even more difficult. Due to the hybrid, project-oriented and transnationally mobile nature of the profession, dance artists barely accumulate rights such as the entitlement to a decent retirement fee at older age. Furthermore, the more

¹¹ All these improvised phrases are quoted from my fieldnotes and translated from the original language used during the creation process.

¹² It should be noted here that I did not pose the question of ranking one’s future worries in the Brussels survey, therefore I cannot make any comparative analysis here.

recent Hans-Böckler-Stiftung-report specifically mentions the dance profession as an example, stating that due to the high physical strain, dancers have to leave the professional life quite early. The menacing poverty at an old age is therefore a bad state of affairs, which with the current trend toward self-employment and temporary employment shall affect an increasing number of artists (Norz 2016, 23). One of my informants addresses his fear of ending up with nothing quite explicitly:

One of my greatest fears about working as a dance artist is that I'm going to age out and have nothing and end up in the gutter and, basically, be too old and not attractive enough in any sense of that word to start a new career.

All in all, several of the contemporary dance artists within my fieldwork seem to have been burning out due to a combination of factors. In part, it seems to be due to insecure future prospects and the projective temporality causing constant uncertainty, instability and unsustainability. Furthermore, both the deregulation set by neoliberalism and the demoralizing control cause more (often unpaid) work. The acceleration of life rhythms addressed by Rosa (doing more in less time) which causes a precariatized mind – the fragmentation of one's attention and constant multitasking – may lead to a very individual chase after our own tails and the dissolving boundaries between work and life. Overall, self-realization appears to constantly conflate with self-precariatization. All of these are factors contributing to a deceleration or a (collective) burnout, as an informant puts it:

Now collapse and burnout seem to be part of the equation of being productive, actually. It's just factored in, you know? [...] For me, one of the factors of burnout is this constant relationship to untenability that kind of takes its toll.

This deceleration or even standstill – be it physical or mental – is what Jason Smith refers to as the 'soul on strike'. Smith starts the preface he wrote for Franco Berardi's *The Soul at Work* with these three words (2009b, 9). Interestingly, drawing on Peggy De Prins, Laermans similarly refers to burnout as 'the new striking' in his text on "Neoliberalism's Dominant Structure of Feeling" (2018), pointing to the fact that neoliberal workers now lay down work in an individual manner. However, the 'soul on strike' is ashamed over its inability to work and to be productive, and its incapacity to realize capacities. He refers to this feeling of insufficiency as 'depression, version 2.1: the feeling that nothing is possible because of the weight of the possible' (Laermans 2018, 102).

8.6 The project burnout: diffusion's delusion

In the performing arts sector, burnouts, for that matter, not only affect the artists, but my fieldwork has exposed several cases in which projects are burning out.¹³ After the premiere, a performance customarily goes on tour to different venues in different cities and countries. However, this happens less and less because the subsidy system sponsors making art rather than selling it. According to Abbing, subsidies actually encourage artists to orient their activities towards the government instead of the market, which is, as one of my informants pointed out, an important argument to pay artists as governmental workers or civil servants. In this respect, Abbing observes that subsidies thus actually make artists lose interest in selling (2008, 124). An informant points out that 'if you're lucky, you might have a long creation period of two or three months', but then the consecutive performance dates become 'dots in the landscape'. As a consequence, there is a problem in diffusion: a lot of work is produced with subsidies, yet very little is presented. This is yet again one of Abbing's arguments that the system keeps artists poor. The lack of diffusion of performances has been highly debated in the media as well. For example, in the Flemish magazine for arts and culture *rekto:verso*, performing arts critic Wouter Hillaert observes that in recent years, the classical diffusion model of the performing arts has been under much pressure. In his extensive article on this issue, he gives voice to various programmers and production managers from Flanders and Brussels. A variety of drawbacks are summed up, such as the decreasing financial resources, the strict evaluation of financial records, more risk management, and oversupply among other things. The figures are striking: in 2015, theater companies performed an average of nine shows less than in 2010. Hillaert closed his account with a significant question: 'how does one make diffusion a substantive story as not to end up in the alienating situation that what is performed is entirely independent of how and where it is presented'?¹⁴ (2017, under "System error?") An informant expresses her concern in this respect: 'I feel like exactly because [title creation] can't go anywhere, you become working so hard at making it go somewhere, that your job becomes a question of statistics [and not of] artistic content.' Additionally, she explains how it is also such an expensive

¹³ And my fieldwork as well as my work experience in the performing arts sector has also received hints of a burnout epidemic among the supportive and administrative side within the sector too, however, I chose not to address this further in this book. See also the article in *Knack* by Bart Caron, "Massale burn-out dreigt in culturele sector, maar Gatz hoopt dat het zal koelen zonder blazen" ('Massive burn-out threatens the cultural sector, but Gatz hopes it will spontaneously fade away'), May 9, 2017, accessed July 2, 2018.

¹⁴ Own translation from the original Dutch: 'Hoe maken we van spreiding weer een inhoudelijk verhaal, zodat je niet in de vervreemdende situatie terechtkomt dat wat je speelt, totaal los staat van hoe en waar je het presenteert?' (Hillaert 2017, under "System error?")

endeavor to take up a piece and tour it again a few years after its realization. She observes that 'it's insane that a piece that cost 29,000 euros to make costs 13,000 to like do it again twice. And it's really not with that much: it's with five days of rehearsal.'

Similar to how other production sectors face issues of sustainability, it is thus concerning that a fair amount of disposable art is produced in the performing arts sector. In the words of an informant: 'it is a massive waste of money to make a performance that is shown four times!' Essentially, the diffusion problem can be at least partly explained because the responsibility is too often on the artist's shoulders. On the one hand, the diffusion part of a production often seems obscured by the next project that is already on the horizon. Artists simultaneously prepare for the next project and finalize the previous and as a consequence there is no time for letting a project lead a life after its realization. On the other hand, in the midst of creation, artists tend to have preoccupations other than inviting presenters to attend try-outs and showings. Thinking about diffusion is probably the last thing on an artist's mind mid-process. As a consequence, more and more finalized projects suffer from a burnout: it has become more of a challenge for a piece 'to have a life' beyond its premiere, as an informant terms it. Yet, as also Flemish art critic Pieter T'Jonck points out, this has little to do with artistic quality or public appeal of the work, but instead it is a systemic problem (2013, 23). As artists usually do not have their own resources, network, competences and time to sell their work on an extensive national and international scale, they are dependent on production managers or institutions who can take up this task. Even if they have the means to engage this type of support, as said, selling is often not a priority for these institutions. Moreover, it is also often easier when the sales pitch comes from the choreographer herself or himself.

Lastly, as also an informant notes, diffusion is often very discouraging, when no one seems to show interest in staging your piece. It was especially disappointing that the contacted programmers refrained from attending the premiere they were invited to for prospection. Later, when she was finally able to make arrangements to meet a programmer and talk about her piece, the programmer did not show up. Fortunately, the programmer was understanding and rescheduled the meeting to the next day. However, while my informant originally intended to sell her finished piece, the meeting resulted in scheduling a residency for creating a new work instead – which she was happy to take. Thus, instead of diffusing her finished piece, the programmer was more inclined to support the making of a new creation. Nonetheless, she was unable to sell her finished piece. While she was not ready to 'put her baby to bed', gradually the futile efforts of chasing down programmers and making the sales pitch over and over again were putting a huge strain on her; in the meantime, she still had to make ends meet and thus she continued performing for others, teaching yoga, and working on a new creation. When I last spoke my informant, she thought it was such a shame that her performance was only staged once and was bound to disappear (after putting so much work effort and personal savings in it). Most importantly, she remains convinced the work can sell – she still

believes in the quality of the piece – and regrets the prospect of her piece not going to be seen by others, as her words reveal:

I do not have to be in popular demand, but I do want to perform! I find it so regrettable that my last piece is not performed more. Okay, it is not a pioneering work and it will not be the best piece of the new century, but there is something about it. I can really stand behind it. And it is worthy of being seen! A piece really starts growing and blooming when it's performed.

Regrettably, throughout my fieldwork I have witnessed her project burning out. Nonetheless, it should be noted that most informants whose projects seemed to have burnt out after the premiere – including the latter – do not necessarily start to question their own credibility or the quality of their pieces. Another informant testifies:

[Title creation] never went anywhere and that was two years of my life. And it was a good piece and I'm not well enough known to merit touring such an expensive piece and/or I'm bad at selling things, and/or, I don't know, maybe it was a bad piece? But somehow, I just really don't believe that. I wouldn't be making dance if I thought that what I did wasn't good.

My informants mostly regret that their production simply disappears into oblivion, which, again, ties in with questions of sustainability. This, however, may cause self-doubt on the long run: if their work is not seen by others, then what is it exactly that are they working for? If their projects do not have an afterlife after their premiere, what is the urgency of their artworks? Is the threefold chase really worth the reward of making the piece, if chances are high that it remains merely a mayfly?

8.7 'Only mine alone'?

Contemporary dance artists are clearly not the only entrepreneurial selves experiencing the psychopathogenic effects of neoliberalism 'on the individual and collective soul' (Berardi 2009b, 186)', as this seems to be a structure of feeling dominating the entire population under neoliberalism. However, this deceleration of the body and soul seems to be increasingly dealt with within dance performances and it is especially interesting to study this deceleration and standstill from a choreographic perspective. To do so, I selected a contemporary dance performance from Igor Koruga's repertoire that stood out to me during this research project. Koruga was not based in Berlin anymore for the creative process of this piece, however, I derived from personal conversations with Koruga that this piece was strongly influenced by his working life as a freelance

performing artist in Berlin and the physical and mental state which caused him to leave Berlin behind. When I asked Koruga if he could explain why he had left Berlin after having studied there and another three years of working as a freelance performing artist, he answers that his reasons were threefold: firstly, Koruga suffers from a medical condition called primary immunodeficiency, which is an innate immunological disorder in which a part of the body's immune system is missing or does not function normally. Patients ought to receive an intravenous immunoglobulin replacement therapy (derived from human blood) each month. Therefore, as a PID patient his well-being is generally weaker in comparison to a healthy person, which affects him on a psychological as well as a physical level. Before he left Berlin, he was diagnosed with a disbalance in his digestive system in combination with anxiety and exhaustion on top of his chronic medical condition. Secondly, he was travelling a lot for work, but also to get a monthly medical treatment in his home country, which he was not entitled to in Berlin as a non-EU citizen, even though he had health insurance. Thirdly, during that time, he was also dealing with issues to prolong his working visa and he realized that he would only be able to stay if he would become a member of a dance company which would increase his income. He wrote to me that 'all the work that I have done as a choreographer, performer or dramaturge was not enough' and that he remembered asking himself in the immigration office: 'for whose happiness am I doing all this work? Am I happy? Was there a point in doing it all? How can I continue to develop myself as an artist and yet save my health?' (quoted from personal communication on March 22, 2018) He told me that he decided to go back to Belgrade and rest for at least a month, but he never returned to live in Berlin. With this context and these questions in mind, I took a second look at the production *Only Mine Alone* (2016), which he jointly created with Ana Dubljević.

Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević offer a response to the accelerated time regime of neoliberalism with their performance *Only Mine Alone* (2016), which represents the invisibility of negative emotions in the neoliberal public sphere. My earlier introduction to Koruga's work in part II of this book was necessary to demonstrate that his performance practice can be a fruitful resource for a discussion on the topic of performing precarity in neoliberal society. His most recent collaboration with Ana Dubljević, *Only Mine Alone*, examines the relationship between supposedly negative emotions and neoliberalism – principally those emotions that our society marks as undesirable, such as depression and burnout – and how these impede an efficient system of production. Most importantly, the motivation for this project came from a personal experience, during which Koruga himself suffered a major burnout caused by 'a very intense and nomadic life [he] had to live due to [his] professional status of "young emerging artist"' (Natalio 2016, paragraph 4). He explained in an interview that, at the time, he was constantly travelling and engaging in different artistic projects in order to survive as an artist, but that this became so exhausting that he came to a point where he had to accept that he could not function anymore. It should be noted here that this

interview was, ironically, held over Skype while he was stuck in traffic in a bus back home after work abroad. Furthermore, *Only Mine Alone* finds its theoretical ground in the work of scholar Ann Cvetkovich, particularly in her book *Depression: a Public Feeling* (2012), which I have already referred to in this chapter. In this book, Cvetkovich argues that feeling bad constitutes the lived experience of neoliberal capitalism. Depression is not only approached as a medical condition, but also as a socio-cultural and economic symptom caused by the neoliberal demand of an efficient and productive approach to life. This condition is too often perceived as an individual issue, and it is essential that neoliberal society acknowledges its responsibility.¹⁵ If precarization today is a process of normalization of socio-economic insecurity imposed by the neoliberal regime (Lorey 2015, 39), then depression is a consequence that society generally does not take responsibility for. As I have discussed, in a flexible work regime marked by precarization, people are bound to encounter negative emotions (related to insufficiency and anxiety). Cvetkovich argues that the consequential depressions and burnouts are public feelings and that the recognition of these feelings at the collective level is a potential starting point for the creation of new forms of unity, solidarity and socio-political operation. These arguments are alluded to in the following lines at the start of the performance:

If we can come to know each other through our depression, then perhaps we can use it to make forms of sociability that not only move us forward past our moments of impasse but understand impasse itself to be a state that has productive potential. (Cvetkovich 2012, 23)

During the performance¹⁶, Koruga and Dubljević find themselves in an orange box. They are hitting their heads on the sides of the box. They position themselves on hands and knees, trying to escape the box. They keep hitting the sides but repeatedly fail to escape. This particular movement material seems to convey the point that people are often 'boxed-in' by traditional ideas and concepts. The box is a dead-end, or what Cvetkovich understands as an impasse. The performers seem to be in a precarious situation from which there is no escape: their movements are unstable as they fall down exploring their way out of this deadlock. Their bodies seem to be fighting to escape, to express something or, indeed to think 'outside the box'. As the light starts failing, language begins to accompany the movement material. Koruga explains that through the use of 'language choreography' in *Only Mine Alone*, they apply choreography to other levels of reality than merely the body. Starting from theory, they analyzed the subject matter through creative writing, to which they then added a layer of corporeality (Natalio 2016). Both performers

¹⁵ I should note that Cvetkovich's ideas do not relate to freelance workers per se, but to people in all kinds of work situations (including tenured jobs). After all, she writes about depression in the academic world.

¹⁶ The observations here are based on a performance in the Bitez Teatar in Belgrade, on April 28, 2016.

ask questions without giving each other answers. Perhaps the questions are not addressed to one another, but to the audience? The language choreography starts with a simple 'How are you?' Instead of a common response expressing a feeling, this question is followed by a number of leading questions asking why people feel a certain way: 'Is it because you don't work? Is it because you have a lot of work? Is it because you have no money? Is it because you don't have the time?' When the possible reasons are exhausted, the performers offer a series of words or short sentences related to the negative consequences of neoliberalism in alphabetical order. The audience can distinguish 'anxiety', 'failed plans', 'procrastination', 'stress', 'reflexive impotence', 'precariat', and 'who am I?', among other phrases (Koruga and Dubljević 2016, n.p.).¹⁷ The message they try to share 'outside the box' is that negative emotions are a consequence of neoliberalism and thus part of a cultural and social structure. Finally, they manage to get out of the box. The words and short sentences are spread over the dance floor and distributed to the audience on post-it notes in an act seemingly intended to symbolize the sharing of these emotions and functioning as a step toward recognition of the negative feelings imposed by the neoliberal regime in which we all live and work. In my reading of *Only Mine Alone*, Koruga and Dubljević imply that these feelings are not only theirs alone and call for collective care and solidarity. The act of sharing feelings on post-it notes with the spectators, may refer to the strong need for humanity to take care of each other. Whereas Isabell Lorey states that productivity emerges from new forms and new social relationships that are continuously being developed and reinvented during these neoliberal processes (2010, 5), Koruga and Dubljević, following Cvetkovich, suggest that this is only possible when depression receives recognition as a public feeling and when humanity takes its responsibility for the lives of others (see also Butler 2004).

Koruga's entire repertoire seems to critique precarity by deploying it as a theme and inspiration. However, the performances of precarity go far beyond self-reflection and tie in with Cvetkovich's proposal that public feelings contain productive potential: they could be a potential starting point for the creation of new forms of unity by recognizing precarity and the negative feelings engendered by the precarious working conditions at the collective level through performing them (Cvetkovich 2012). In this collaboration with Dubljević, Koruga speaks to what is perhaps the most important tactic for sustainability in the performing arts, namely collective care and solidarity. For example, Koruga himself is a member of the bottom-up initiative of the contemporary dance and performing arts community in Serbia called Station – Service for Contemporary Dance established in 2005. Since 2007, the initiative operates in the independent cultural center

¹⁷ Although the original performance was in Serbian, I have studied the recording with English subtitles and I have received the translated performance text for this purpose too.

Magacin in Belgrade, which includes offices for several organizations as well as a self-organized studio and gallery space available via an open calendar tool for everyone who needs it in Belgrade, thus integrating the ideas of collective care and sustainability.¹⁸ The initiative aims to strengthen the independent arts community and strives for its recognition by cultural policy makers, state institutions, cultural operators, educational policy makers, Balkan and European partners and funding bodies, as well as by broader audience.¹⁹ Its mission reflects the idea that we can only pave the way for a sustainable future when we feel more responsible for each other, which is a message that forms a thread through Koruga's repertoire.²⁰ It is up to artists – and humanity in general – to sustain each other, because individually dealing with our precarity will not change the overall conditions. *Only Mine Alone* is therefore a performance that shows resistance to precarity: a sustainable future can be made possible by thinking outside the box, beyond the individual, and collectively fighting precarity.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the city of Belgrade was supposed to renovate the space before the organizations would settle in. However, as this did not happen, the organizations chose not to sign a contract when they moved in. Therefore, the cultural center remains in a precarious situation as the organizations are frequently pressured to leave so the space can be used for commercial purposes. For more information, consult the website of Magacin: <https://magacin2015.wordpress.com/about-us>.

¹⁹ For more information, consult the website of Station – Service for Contemporary Dance: www.dancestation.org/station.

²⁰ However, it should be noted here that sometimes, it is this feeling of responsibility that prevents a dance artist to listen to their body's symptoms to slow down, as was the case for example with one informant who postponed to withdraw from a workshop when ill because of the partnering activities.

Image 8: image from *Only Mine Alone* (2016) by Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević. © Photo by Vladimir Opsenica



Chapter 9

Slowing Down

*I've experienced these moments of deep, deep burnout
and I try to avoid it, the best of my ability.*

9.1 Exodus to academia?

Perhaps the most conspicuous survival tactic is to slow down and to put our fast, mobile and flexible selves at rest. Along with theorists like Bojana Kunst or Hans Abbing, Franco Berardi observes that we have been working too much during the last five centuries:

Society does not need more work, more jobs, more competition. On the contrary: we need a massive reduction in work-time, a prodigious liberation of life from the social factory, in order to reweave the fabric of the social relation. (Berardi 2009b, 213)

In *Precarious Rhapsody*, Berardi asks 'what strategies will the collective organism follow in order to escape this fabric of unhappiness? Is a strategy of deceleration, of the reduction of complexity possible and able to be hypothesized?' (2009a, 43) In response to our precariatized minds, Kunst calls for doing less for the sake of art and enabling life, because only then can we create a more sustainable future: 'do less, precisely when confronted with the demand to do more' (2015a, 193). Indeed, as also Berardi puts it, we increasingly feel 'that we have run out of time; that we must accelerate. And we feel simultaneously that acceleration leads to a loss of life, of pleasure and of understanding' (Berardi 2009a, 46). Well-known dramaturge Marianne Van Kerkhoven once claimed that the 'fight against velocity, against the pressure to produce, the fight for time that can and may be spoiled, for time in which research without an aim and deadline can take place, is probably one of the most important battles the arts have to fight today' (2009, 8). During

my fieldwork, one of my informants decided to combat her precariatized mind and chose to apply for a four-year PhD program to have a break from the current work regime in the dance scene. The program would offer a context to work with a very *different* product-orientation. In fact, this is the very same informant who decided to move to Europe because she had enough of the rhythm of production and the lack of critical discourse in her home country. After more than a decade in Europe, her reasons today for committing to a PhD are quite reminiscent of her reasons for swapping her home country for Europe in the first place. She explains that in the last years, the rhythm of the project-based work regime and the type of evaluation, appreciation and validation it brings along have exhausted her:

With this project-based-reinventing-from-zero-every-time, it's just crazy. There's no continuity, there's no support. I just don't have an idea. I would need a break and some inspiration to do it again or someone to offer me some interesting situation to work inside of, because it doesn't look very sunny starting over, asking co-producers, applying for funding... Plus, the funding is going down. It's just not a very motivating prospect; it's not a very exciting future, to just do that again, and again, and again, and again. Indefinitely.

I have been able to follow up her decision-making process counterbalancing the reasons to apply or not to apply. 'It's time for a change of tempo', she explains. A PhD would offer her an alternative autonomy and a sense of stability and security that she feels is lacking in the project-funded contemporary dance sector in Europe, because she has come to realize that the idea of autonomy, which attracted her to move base a decade ago, was to a certain extent imagined. Most importantly, she would finally 'get paid to think instead of think how to get paid'. Meanwhile, her reasons for not applying were to a large extent pragmatic: the timing of the application deadline did not allow her to complete a high-quality application on top of the workload of her upcoming premiere. Moreover, participating in the program, would mean she would have to move base – again – and her visibility in the dance sector would be reduced significantly. On a more substantive level, she admitted being afraid of being committed to a project or idea for such a long duration – because she had never been in that situation before. She also worried about feeling isolated from the world, casting aside the social dimension of working in the dance sector. Well-known dramaturge Marianne Van Kerkhoven is therefore 'very suspicious about this rapprochement that takes place in the high schools of arts. Artists suddenly longing to develop an academic career are questionable' (2009, 9). In her text on "European Dramaturgy in the 21st Century", she proposes that for the majority of artists, pursuing a PhD in the arts is merely a matter of taking away the symptoms of precarity instead of the cause because the PhD path is also part of the neoliberal regime of flexible

accumulation.¹ Eventually, the different approach to the evaluation of work in academia was the deciding factor for my informant. In dance, the final evaluation, as she recounts, ‘feels cheap’:

It really feels like you’re not being evaluated for the quality of your work and the quality of your ideas and your responsibility towards your ideas and towards the field. It doesn’t matter how much integrity you’ve worked with, in the end, if it’s not a hit, nobody cares. And I could not do this anymore.

She deplores that there is barely any conversation after the piece has made it to the stage and a PhD would offer a context for critical discourse before, during and after an artwork is made. The process-based orientation and the more dialoguing evaluation of the academic world seem much more appealing to her: ‘I felt like I was getting lazy intellectually. I’d been reading less and less, I’d been working more and more. Reading more emails, less theory.’ Although other factors were at play as well: a PhD would offer a stable income. However, she does wonder what would happen to her artistic practice if she would commit to a PhD program and have income security: ‘I don’t think I would stop [making work]. I think I would just make less.’ She concludes that ‘a PhD would give me the luxury to say “no” and probably a bit of responsibility to say “no” and to focus on the thing that I’m doing.’ A PhD would thus offer her more content in terms of artistic concerns and critical discourse around art making, in other words: a more sustainable opportunity for self-realization. The income security and stability accompanying a PhD position allow a slowdown and a possible – at least temporary – way out of the precarious rat race in the project-funded dance sector. The prospect of at least four years of payroll is thus an appealing but not the only factor underlying this career choice.

Several other informants have indicated considering applying for a paid PhD program (and to a lesser extent finding a paid position at an art university) as a tactic of deprecarization. One particular informant, preoccupied with the idea, struggled with finding a paid PhD program that he would qualify for. Similar to the former informant, on the one hand, a PhD would create a base income that would – at least temporary – shield him from precarity, while on the other it would provide him with an interesting framework where he can share and present his research on a regular basis. In other words, he wanted to pursue the PhD path partly to be able to focus in-depth on one project and partly for having some income security and stability, both for a much longer time span than what is common in the contemporary dance sector. However, the quest to find the right program, he explains, ‘ends up creating more precarity, because I’m not

¹ Burnout is a severe problem in academia too: academic scholars are paid to think indeed, but they often lack the time to truly do so because of administrative burdens and academic obligations. Ann Cvetkovich, who addresses depression in the academic world in her book *Depression: a Public Feeling* (2012), is actually talking about her own depression as an academic with a position at a university.

working on my own work. I'm doing some extra-curricular thing that takes so much time.' Towards the end of my fieldwork, my informant decided that a PhD would not be a good solution and it would not make his life any easier: 'it won't create any kind of ground, or substance, or basis. No way. It will make it more precarious. It will bring this whole other added stress.' He concluded that the search for a program that would accept him was giving him more anxiety and he hinted that he was pursuing that path perhaps not for the right reasons but out of future worries and fears. Unlike the former informant, the latter did not find an escape in academia worth pursuing – he must have realized that it simply would mean suspended precarity because afterwards, he would be right back where he left off. Other than looking for stability, security, and more sustainability, these two examples, nonetheless, are interesting cases of seeking to slow down before they burn out. Slowing down, decelerating and doing less, has come up frequently during my fieldwork. Although slowing down is often perceived as a tactic of resistance to the demands of the contemporary dance sector and the neoliberal market, for the remainder of this chapter, I seek to explore this perception of deceleration and wonder if it can genuinely serve as such: in slowing down, do contemporary dance artists – and all people for that matter – truly resist the forces of neoliberalism?

9.2 Recharging and refueling

To draw on Kinoshita's *VOLCANO* once more, I now return briefly to the much slower second part of the performance. While the slowdown caused by the volcanic eruption was an unintended form of deceleration, the movement material also seems to show hints of intentional forms of slowdown. When the dancers in *VOLCANO* perform the slow stretch-like movements, I interpret these as what Hartmut Rosa calls 'accelerating forms of deceleration', which – perhaps ironically so – enable conditions for further acceleration. By this, he means that these downtimes are moments in which people take a time out 'for the purpose of allowing a more successful participation in acceleratory social systems afterwards' (Rosa 2003, 16), which basically comes down to slowing down in order to increase one's productivity. Rosa himself points to the popular yoga retreat as an example; people intentionally book these retreats to rest and refuel. Slowing down as to avoid burning out has surely proven to be a tactic among several of my informants. Not only do the majority daily practice meditation and/or yoga individually in the mornings, several informants go to yoga or Pilates class regularly, as I have indicated previously. Paradoxically, several informants revealed to work 'actively on slowing down', because they see it as something they ought to fit in their schedule and work on. As an informant

recounts: 'So I spent a lot of time to work less and put more energy towards love, friends, family, social life, dating... trying to make myself available, make space for that in my life'. Or as another informant puts it: 'I'm working the whole time on being not-stressed, like how to reduce – or breathing, going to kundalini yoga to breathe; not to train but to breathe and to relax'. However, yoga practice often turns out to be an accelerating form of deceleration, especially since one informant points to the importance of yoga to tune one's instrument and thus as a means to increase one's productivity.² In stating so, the informant is aware that the body and mind are not only a dancer's instrument, but that of every human being: yoga is an important daily routine for her so she can start her day, regardless of whether or not there will be dancing that day. As Rosa puts it: 'on the individual level, we find such accelerating forms of deceleration where people take "time out" in monasteries or take part in yoga courses which promise "a rest from the race" – for the purpose of allowing a more successful participation in acceleratory social systems afterwards' (Rosa 2003, 16). In that regard, one informant, who had been struggling with a precariatized mind and symptoms of burnout, went on a ten-day meditation retreat during my fieldwork. About 100 people participated during this period of silent meditation. He sat from 4:30 a.m. until 9:30 p.m. and did not speak to anyone nor look at anyone (except the teacher). My informant explains:

It's really getting off the grid. You're not allowed to look on your phone, you're not allowed to read a book. [...] Because I've been on other meditation retreats that were not even as close, not even nearly as strict as this, but the structure is brilliant because it really gives you the space and time to just slow down. [...] And I came back feeling fresh - I hurt my back a little bit - but ready to work; feeling like I had accomplished the thing that I actually want to accomplish on vacation, which is relaxation – but that doesn't always happen you know. Sometimes you end up coming back and you're a little bit more wired. I felt much more aware when I came back

He concludes that he should be doing that kind of retreat at least three times a year: 'it's easy and it's incredibly affordable.' A retreat is a concept with many side wings and brings along several questions: what exactly are we withdrawing from? A retreat is often a process of withdrawal from something difficult or dangerous. Do we attempt to withdraw from neoliberal society when it has become too difficult and dangerous to endure? Do we withdraw from our own precariatized minds when it has become too difficult and dangerous to deal with the ongoing work of living? If a retreat is essentially a collective withdrawal, can we retreat individually? While my informant has been practicing

² It should be noted that it also depends on how one understands *productivity*, be it in the quantitative sense (i.e. the amount of work to be done) or the qualitative sense (i.e. the quality of the work you want to deliver from a kind of self-fulfilling devotion).

meditation on a daily basis, the ten-day collective retreat allowed him to properly slowdown and, yet again, he returned refueled with regained energy to work and a desire to be productive. Recharging one's batteries, regaining energy and refueling oneself seem to go hand in hand with going off the grid and unplugging oneself, as also the following account demonstrates:

I'm going to shut everything down. I bought a bike and we bought some rollerblades and I've just been kind of riding my bike and just not looking at emails and anything for like two weeks, trying to unplug. So it feels a bit better.

In a similar vein, some informants have taken time off by going on holiday, however, simultaneously, as a result of slowing down and going off the grid, they came back with more energy and enthusiasm to work, as exemplifies the following account:

[Going on vacation] is like *such* a part of my artistic process. [...] Really, I'm going to talk to my tax advisor: I want to write this off. Because, quite frankly, three weeks in Mexico, I came back feeling better – which, you know, I'm a dancer... [Laughs] I actually literally need to feel physically good, otherwise I can't do my job. And I just got a lot more ideas. [...] I totally came back in much more of a work mode.

9.3 'It's time for RECESS'

It certainly deserves some attention to examine how the ideas of retreating, recharging and refueling are dealt with in contemporary dance performances. During my fieldwork, I stumbled upon the publicity tagline for Brussels-based contemporary dance artist Michael Helland's solo, *RECESS: Dance of Light* (2016), which announces that 'it's time for recess: recharge your batteries and combat the symptoms of neoliberal fatigue' (as mentioned on the website of the Abrons Arts Center on June 15, 2016). Helland offers his audience a theatrical spa experience: an hour with him to slow down in response to the accelerated time regime of post-Fordism. In the context of this chapter, it proves interesting to examine this dance performance in more detail³.

Helland performs a ribbon dance as the audience members walk into the space. He is wearing a bathrobe and slippers. As the spectators take their seats, Helland starts interacting with them while continuing the ribbon dance. He explains how he has created his props himself. He then welcomes his audience more formally with a short monologue introducing *RECESS* as the 'Ritual Experience Concept Event Spa Show'. Throughout the

³ The observations here are based on a performance in Abrons Arts Center in New York, on June 6, 2016.

performance, Helland establishes a very particular relationship with his audience by directly engaging them. When he talks, he acknowledges that there is a 'we' in the space. Helland is certainly quick to react to anything happening in the audience: his performance is site-responsive, as he seems to adapt his prepared words as well as his stance to the situation. After the interactive ribbon dance and the introductory monologue, the audience is offered twenty-five minutes of *Dance of Light* meditation that closes with a ritual-like communal experience, set in an artificial sunlight. Helland's *Dance of Light* is centered upon a minimalist serpentine dance inspired by pioneer of modern dance Loie Fuller, in which Helland creates live sculptures that are reminiscent of icons in history in general, and dance history in particular, using a simple piece of white fabric. The sculptural movements executed by Helland are performed in a very slow and concentrated manner. Helland has drastically decelerated the brisk energy of Loie Fuller's serpentine dance. This way, the *Dance of Light* becomes a meditation for him and he offers it as such to his audience, accompanied by a dreamy spa soundscape in the background. He refers to his dance as a task-based performance that requires a lot of awareness. Rather than re-enacting Fuller's acclaimed work, Helland appears to evoke important works by historical icons in art and dance history. The live sculptures may be subtle references to iconic dances such as Martha Graham's Lamentation or oriental veil dancing, or connote images from art history such as the white canvas or the Greek deity, thus demonstrating art's durability over time. In so doing, Helland seems to point to the sustainability and significance of art, which has had a very long and rich history. His movement material and aesthetics are reduced to a kind of minimalism for the sake of slowing down. In my reading of Helland's decelerated live sculptures, history has proven that it is important to sustain art in our society as one of its functions is to allow people to reflect, digest and slow down the hustle and bustle of life.⁴ In an indirect manner, *RECESS: Dance of Light* seems to address the lack of control over time and the accompanying feeling of a precariatized mind (Standing 2014a). As people experience a common fear of missing out in our accelerated regime of persistent productivity, we find ourselves increasingly in 'a state of constant mobility, flexibility and precariousness' and in response, Helland seems to inquire into 'doing less' (see also Kunst 2015a, 79 and 193). In this respect, the deceleration created by the ceremonial hour allows gaining back control over time and, accordingly, produces the necessary time to slow down, digest and reflect. It is quite literally an hour-long recess or break from the accelerated regime. However, quite ironically, there is also a deadline to slowing down as Helland makes his audiences

⁴ Quite interestingly, William Kentridge's multimedia installation *the Refusal of Time* (2012) also draws on Loie Fuller's serpentine dance in relationship to questions of time. The re-enactment by dancer Dada Masilo is reversed, which disrupts the linear, chronological conception of time and art history – or dance history in particular. For an insightful reading of this re-enactment, please consult Christel Stalpaert's writing on Kentridge's work (Stalpaert 2017).

poignantly aware: 'I think we should stop and do something else before we run out of time'. Interestingly, as a side-note, this project is unusual for Helland, since he generally does not tend to make his own work and this project could thus be perceived as a recess from his turbulent life of performing with, and for, other people.

After the *Dance of Light* section, Helland offers his audience a short Gurdjieff movement workshop and invites them to perform an exercise together. As Helland explains, G.I. Gurdjieff had collected a series of allegedly sacred choreographies that he taught to his students as part of a study of the ancient knowledge of the self. Helland then invites his audience to join him onstage.⁵ During an artificial sunset, he asks his audience to create a circle and repeatedly count down from three to one. Meanwhile, Helland performs a Gurdjieff movement wearing only a wig and a skin-colored thong. This action seems to create a greater sense of 'we' in the space and, in combination with the drumbeats it seems to become a ritualistic communal experience. Lastly, Helland announces that the light will soon complete its cycle and he invites everyone to enjoy the last minute of the sunset as an ending. This shared experience, particularly by engaging the audience actively and collectively in the second half of the performance, seems to convey that neoliberal fatigue – as reads the publicity tagline – is a public feeling and we are all overdue for a slowdown.

There are two noteworthy aspects that make *RECESS: Dance of Light* a performance of precarity in its aesthetic form. First, during the ceremonial hour, Helland demonstrates his multiple skills, which – as I indicated repeatedly – are a requirement for dance artists in the post-Fordist regime. In his monologue, he already mentions that he considers himself to be a champion in multitasking. He presents himself as 'an amateur in everything'. Correspondingly, Helland gives his audience a demonstration of his range of competences and skills through the dance vocabulary he applies. This involved re-enacting iconic dances, teaching Gurdjieff movements to himself and fashioning his own ribbon sticks for self-taught ribbon dancing. Secondly, *RECESS: Dance of Light* presents an exemplary tactic for dealing with socio-economic precarity and to develop a more sustainable practice: as an hour-long solo it has few requirements and is therefore easily marketable. The solo can be performed anywhere, ideally not even in a theater space: there is a minimal set, simple light and sound cues and ultimately only one person requires a salary because there is no need to engage technicians to accompany Helland when touring. A high-quality video of the performance can also be found online so programmers know in advance what they are going to get. Helland envisions *RECESS* as

⁵ I write *invite* here because paradoxically, the compulsive nature of participatory art seemingly runs against the slowing down discourse: perhaps the audience does not feel like doing anything that evening except to sit down and enjoy the show. Very much aware of this paradox, Helland does not wish to impose duties on the audience, but he simply *invites* people to join though simultaneously giving the spectators the impression that they should not feel obliged to do so.

eventually becoming a long-term installation, but in the meantime, he has a precarity solo in his pocket – which, as said, proves to be a resilient survival tactic in the contemporary dance world, because his solo can ‘expand and contract as the given production circumstances or opportunities require’, as an informant puts it.

However, in content, rather than performing precarity, *RECESS: Dance of Light* proposes a restorative time away from neoliberal reality in response to our precariatized minds. Perhaps more accurately, it is therefore a performance of resilience in the face of precarity. At the same time, nonetheless, the performance proves to be a tactic for sustainability and deprecariatization: only if we – not as individuals, but as a collective – allow ourselves the time to slow down, are we able to create a more sustainable future.

Returning to Hartmut Rosa, however, alarmingly, these decelerations are more often than not meant to recharge one’s battery, so we have the energy to accelerate and be more productive afterwards, which is also what Helland’s publicity tagline proposes. As Lynn Berger puts it quite precisely in an essay for *De Correspondent*:

That is of course the great irony of the rechargeable man: he has to recharge himself in time, in order to avoid a burnout, to be able to commit himself even longer, harder and better for a system that just exhausts. We want more energy to be able to produce and consume more of what costs us energy.⁶ (Berger 2017, under “Wat we dus beter kunnen doen”)

Indeed, as an informant puts it: ‘self-care gets folded into an idea of our capacity to work’. Thus, recharging one’s batteries, regaining energy and refueling oneself have also become very hot commodities as testify the countless yoga retreat offers in my own mailbox and on my Facebook News Feed. As long as this hour-long *RECESS* requires a theater ticket, his restorative time away from the demands of neoliberalism is for sale. That is precisely why Helland envisions a long-term installation, which would ideally be freely accessible, to truly escape the forces of neoliberalism, at least for an hour.⁷

Exactly therein lies the double paradox of slowing down as a tactic of resistance against the forces of neoliberalism: ultimately, slowing down does not turn out to be subversive because firstly, it proves to be rather an accelerating form of deceleration so as to increase our productivity, and secondly, slowing down has become commodified itself. This conclusion seems to be a rather cruel one: does there really seem to be no escape from the forces of neoliberalism?

⁶ Own translation from the original Dutch: ‘Want dat is natuurlijk de grote ironie van de oplaadbare mens: hij dient zich tijdig op te laden, om zo een burn-out af te wenden, om zich zo nog langer, harder en beter in te kunnen zetten voor een systeem dat hem juist zo uitput. We willen meer energie om meer te kunnen produceren en consumeren van datgene wat ons energie kost’ (Berger 2017, under “Wat we dus beter kunnen doen”).

⁷ During my research project, I have participated in two try-outs of such an installation on two different locations in Belgium.

9.4 ‘There is no escape’

Another contemporary dance performance I came across during my fieldwork addresses precisely this paradox, uncovering the cruel optimism of Helland’s *RECESS*. The transdisciplinary performance *Meyoucycle* is the eagerly awaited result of a collaboration between choreographer and performer Eleanor Bauer and musician Chris Peck. It is performed by Brussels-based contemporary dance artists Eleanor Bauer, Inga Huld Hákonardóttir, Tarek Halaby, Gaël Santisteva, together with the Ictus music ensemble. This performance proves to be a fascinating case study in form and content in performing precarity. The story that *Meyoucycle* tells is a dark one: in the near future, a quartet of poetic terrorists and emotional hackers dwell in a dark web (Bauer and Peck 2016a). We see four characters onstage, although they are difficult to distinguish as they are barely visible in the dark and continually change appearances. As the stage lights up slowly, we notice several musicians in the back. Just like the dancers, they remain anonymous as they hide their faces behind masks. The four performers are good with words: the poetic lyrics of their acts – spoken, whispered, sung or shouted – give an account of cyberspace and cybertime. In the back, a giant moon is projected. The dark universe created onstage brightens as the moon follows its cycle. It seems important that these characters, spreading their words of wisdom via digital technologies, remain unidentified. They are hackers: in order for them to maintain freedom of expression they have to dispose of their identities and drop into anonymity. They do so by continuously transforming themselves using wigs, masks and costume changes, dwelling in the dark. Their use of white masks is reminiscent of the masks worn by the hackers in the Anonymous movement during their media appearances. The message seems clear: it is communication itself that counts – not the *who* that is communicating.

Eleanor Bauer announces her most ambitious piece so far as follows: ‘Pronounced with a strange accent in English, the title *Meyoucycle* sounds like “musical”, which is to say that *Meyoucycle* creates something foreign to what can be identified as a musical, but with familiar ingredients’ (Bauer and Peck 2016a, 14). Like any musical production, the piece combines music, dance, and text. The wordplay in the title acknowledges that any performance happens somewhere between the *mes* onstage and the *yous* in the audience. As Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued, performances symbolize the state of in-betweenness that performances bring about because they take place through the bodily co-presence of those who perform and those who observe (2008, 38). That is to say that whatever the performers do affects the participating spectators and vice versa. In this respect, in the

French monologue towards the end of *Meyoucycle*, the performer Gaël Santisteva affirms that the only thing that digital technology cannot replace is the presence of an audience and their gaze. Additionally, the wordplay of *Meyoucycle* recognizes that what is being said onstage is understood by the audience, because they can relate to these issues. The form of *Meyoucycle* is an eclectic combination of different performance and music genres, demonstrating the wide range of skills and competences these performers possess, and which are expected of dance artists in contemporary capitalism as I discussed in the previous book part. The performers constantly shift physical appearance and different forms of speech and in so doing, refuse to participate in the industry of self-promotion and personal branding by remaining anonymous.⁸ They are clearly multitaskers in a universe in which one needs to prove one's ability to adapt quickly, teach oneself new skills and be a resilient 'chameleon' with multiple competences. Multilingualism is subtly integrated into the performance and indicates that these performers are highly skilled and well-educated intellectuals and citizens of the world. A song entitled *Several Days Later* shifts smoothly from English into Icelandic. Amusingly, this Icelandic text is not translated in the subtitles projected on the screen; rather the text is projected in Icelandic, which is of no use for (the majority of) the audience. The three non-Icelandic performers have learned how to sing these lyrics in a language that is foreign to them. The form of the piece thus alludes to contemporary globalized capitalism and the subjectivities that it generates.

The content of the story meanwhile, is more obviously related to the precarious and every-day context in which the performance is taking place. First, during the opening monologue, Tarek Halaby paints a straightforward picture of the post-Fordist lack of control over time (Standing 2014a) and social acceleration (Rosa 2003 and 2013). As the audience enters the space, Halaby is standing offstage in front of the first row in the dark. The blue light from his smartphone is the only light source illuminating his face. He recounts:

You know, I wish I would read more books. But I don't read enough because I'm always at the theatre, seeing shows. I feel like I should see more performances, like, it's my professional obligation, but honestly, I prefer films. But I don't have enough time for all the films I want to see because they're so long, you know, like two hours for a film is a big time commitment, and I need to be spending more time on my own work, like, making my own pieces. But I don't have enough time for my art, because I'm always at the gym – sculpting the piece of art that is my body [...].”⁹
(Bauer and Peck 2016b, 1)

⁸ Remember the informant who said 'nobody actually cares about ideas, they care about who had the ideas. I wouldn't be able to make work if I change my name every time I made a piece.'?

⁹ For a much longer fragment, see intermezzo B after this chapter.

It is no surprise that this monologue is titled “So Much To Do”. These words describe a precariatized mind, and many people would no doubt recognize themselves in them. Halaby is multitasking: he is scrolling and swiping on his smartphone as he is complaining about the lack of time for all the things he wants to do. This act is a subtle reference to the attention economy in which workers are increasingly incapable of maintaining concentrated attention to one object or task due to overstimulation (Davenport and Beck 2001).

In a similar vein, another noteworthy element from *Meyoucycle* is the recurrent reference to social media and the emotions induced by what Rosa has termed ‘technological acceleration’. In the past, Bauer has pointed out that an artist’s autonomy and productivity ‘require having ‘a Mac of one’s own’, instead of ‘A Room of One’s Own’ as Virginia Woolf would have it’ (Bauer 2007, under “On Perspective”). In post-Fordist times, a port of connection becomes essential to work as people are continually producing and selling themselves through the medium of digital technologies. But, *Meyoucycle* questions what kind of identity is created through this virtual presence. The performers are trying to avoid the identity market that is characteristic of contemporary capitalism by remaining anonymous chameleons as they declare: ‘we are anonymous, but we do not forget, because we remember to change’. *Meyoucycle* seems to pose supplementary questions in the context of ‘technological acceleration’ (Rosa 2003), the attention economy (Davenport and Beck 2001) and reputation economy (Gandini 2016), which I have discussed under the notions of the Fast, the Mobile, and the Flexible in the previous book part: is it really the case that we are losing time when scrolling on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram? Or, are we in fact contributing to knowledge production through these activities? Is it not the case that these platforms make money out of shaping our identities? In this digital age, it seems as though we are permanently performing immaterial labor through the ‘collaborative sharing of language and thought’ (Kunst 2015a, 79) and permanently performing (a version of) ourselves. In this context, *Meyoucycle* appears to deal with the impossibility of separating life from work in contemporary capitalism: everything is commodified.

While I skip over the analysis of several songs, monologues and dances, in my reading, the overarching message of *Meyoucycle* seems to be that, no matter how much we try to resist the forces of neoliberalism seeking all kinds of freedoms, ultimately, there is no escaping them. While it was a relief for one of my informants that a retreat included a withdrawal from any stimuli (no phone, no computer, no books, no conversation), yet, it should be noted that he paid into this ten-day group withdrawal. The adaptive and transformative tools people invent in order to evade capture by contemporary capitalism are precisely those that capitalism sells to them: we pay into our own self-expression on a daily basis, performing our identities via social network platforms making the founders of this digital technology richer with every click. And when we refuse to do so, by unplugging and going off the grid, we buy ourselves time to slow down (in the spa or on

retreat) only for the purpose to accelerate again. As Bröckling puts it quite insightfully in the introduction to his *The Entrepreneurial Self*: ‘it became apparent how market mechanisms either absorb or marginalize opposing tendencies, recasting non-conformism itself as a measure of successful conformity to the entrepreneurial self’ (2016, xviii). Thus, also remaining anonymous, as an act of resistance, does not seem to be a viable solution, or at least, this sentiment is reflected in the words that remain projected on a karaoke screen at the closing of the performance: ‘in the end, [...] there is no escape’ (Bauer and Peck 2016b, 26).

Meyoucycle seems to respond to Berardi’s question, querying the strategies the collective organism will follow ‘in order to escape this fabric of unhappiness’ (2009a, 43). Interestingly, while the issues of technological acceleration, identity, and commodification address our Western society in late capitalism at large, they are certainly reminiscent of the conflation of artwork and identity discussed in the previous chapter in the context of personal branding and self-promotion. This allows me to return to Bauer’s first precarity solo *ELEANOR!*, which as I argued is exactly that: a self-critical but humorous critique of the inseparability of self-promotion and artwork. More than a decade later, Bauer imagines a world with true freedom of expression but seems to have come to the conclusion that the freedom neoliberalism stands for is merely apparent and there is no escape from this: no matter how much one tries to avoid succumbing to the forces of neoliberalism, by remaining anonymous or by commoning, for example, there is no use in doing so, because resisting neoliberal economy and technological acceleration equals conforming to it. Ultimately, in my interpretation of *Meyoucycle*, Bauer and Peck seem to suggest quite pessimistically that we are stuck in a cycle – or an impasse – from which there is no escape. Quite interestingly, the image of the cycle returns in Igor Koruga’s *Streamlined* (the treadmill) as well as in Michael Helland’s *RECESS: Dance of Light* (the sun’s cycle) and takes the shape of an impasse in Koruga’s *Only Mine Alone* (the box). The loop, cycle or impasse may stand for these paradoxes: when resisting the demands of neoliberalism, we actually conform to it. Similarly, when deploying precarity to critique precarity, we become accomplices of the system we criticize.

However, it certainly merits mention that the dark tone of the piece is somewhat compensated by the use of black comedy and irony throughout the performance. Especially in the last section, comedy is applied in a remarkably similar manner as in Jeremy Wade’s *Crisis Karaoke*. Indeed, also *Meyoucycle* ends with an ironic karaoke song, implying that the issues *Meyoucycle* brings forward in fact concern us all; the *mes* onstage and the *yous* in the audience. The collective act of finishing together as a ‘we’ singing the words ‘in the end, [...] there is no escape’ appears to symbolize the universality of the problems dealt with. Simultaneously, I must add, I distinguish a hint of positivity in this particular style choice in line with the message of hope and solidarity Koruga and Dubljević seemed to share in *Only Mine Alone*: if we come to realize that we are not alone in this struggle, we can start to overcome this impasse and break the cycle. This is

precisely what Cvetkovich implies when she proposes to discuss forms of activism that address the negative feelings rather than banish them and to fully embrace practices of processing these feelings within politics: the political dimension of public feelings is grounded in the collective and only by making these feelings public they can be recognized as collective (2012, 110). Resisting the demands of neoliberalism will not cure the pathological wounds as long as these resistances remain at the individual level. However, collectively saying ‘no’ to the demands set by the post-Fordist work regime and the neoliberal economy in general – and art market in particular – might be better course of treatment. In that regard, Rudi Laermans asserts that

Within the neoliberal regime of flexible accumulation, criticality perhaps first and foremost amounts to the, however momentary, interruption of the (self-) capitalizing of expressive individualism through collective gestures that refuse economic productivity and affirm impotence. (Laermans 2015, 332)

Also Ulrich Bröckling at first proposes ‘laziness (or idleness)’ as a model of a practice of de-subjectification fit to elide the Entrepreneurial Self (2016, 203), however – and most importantly – ‘doing nothing has itself become a marketable commodity’ (2016, 204). Slowing down is losing its subversive edge, because it has come to be highly commodified and ultimately serves the purpose of accelerating more efficiently afterward.

Intermezzo B: monologue “So Much To Do”, excerpt from the performance text from *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck. Text by Eleanor Bauer.

You know, I wish I would read more books. But I don't read enough because I'm always at the theater, seeing shows. I feel like I should see more performances, like, it's my professional obligation, but honestly, I prefer films. But I don't have enough time for all the films I want to see because they're so long, you know, like 2 hours for a film is a big time commitment, and I need to be spending more time on my own work, like, making my own pieces. But I don't have enough time for my art, because I'm always at the gym – sculpting the piece of art that is my body – but I don't even work out enough at the gym because every time I get in that depressing hole of a room I ask myself, “why on earth am I not outside?” Of course I'd rather exercise outside. But I don't spend enough time outside because I'm always stuck inside, working on my house. I can't even get the housework done because I get lonely working in my house all day, so I just end up calling my friends. I don't see my friends enough because they always want to go out, and I prefer to cook at home. You know, it's healthier, and cheaper, and like, I should cook more in general. I'd love to be a better cook, but I never leave enough time to cook because I always work on my computer until I'm starving and then don't have the patience to cook. And I don't even finish the work I'm trying to do online, because I always get sucked into Facebook. It's so addictive! I can just scroll and scroll and scroll, and get more and more and more! But I can't even keep up with all my friends on Facebook because I'm always distracted by twitter, and I don't keep up with all the people I follow on twitter because I'm even more distracted by Instagram cuz like, it's 2016, and I'm a sucker for images. But when I'm looking at all these beautiful people and places on Instagram, I get the feeling that I should be more in touch with the world out there, not just in pictures, but IN the world, like I need to read the news!

(if audience is still entering, inset here) But I don't read enough news because I'm always trying to read more books! (and loop back to top. When audience has entered, skip this line and continue onward)

So I get super obsessed with news and I'll have like 100 tabs open on my browser with different news sources, and then I get totally anxious about all the huge problems of the world I can't fix and I need to feel better, so I relax by watching my favorite TV series, which is not a waste of time. I know everyone says this, but some of the best writing today is on television. I don't know even know if that's true, actually, because I always end up falling asleep watching TV series, and I don't start watching them sooner, because I'm always trying to finish answering all my emails before bed, but like, “finishing” emails, is like, the contemporary Myth of Sisyphus! THEY JUST KEEP COMING. It's endless! And the truly sick part is, the faster I answer them, the faster they come. It's a total loselose situation. And then I think, what am I even DOING sitting here in front of this screen, like is any of this communication actually doing anything? Who am I even talking to? Where are the faces, the voices, the human beings? Where are we? Who am I? What is this life? Sitting in front of a screen for hours? Is this how you make things happen today? In real life? Where is real life? [continues]

Conclusion

Precarity's Plural Character

Precarity in the arts is structural, or as Hans Abbing puts it, it is 'built into the arts': Artists are dependent on forms of direct and indirect funding, which are conditional and temporary, and which also Abbing emphasizes, do not make artists less poor (2008, 130). On the contrary, the current project funding system actually seems to prompt more poor artists, because artists tend to adapt to the available means – and, I should add, because at least within my fieldwork, self-precarization is widespread. The majority of artists face a precarious future because contemporary art worlds are as Laermans puts it 'structurally unstable: trends come and go, creating aesthetic turbulence, abrupt market swings' (2015, 357-358) and, as we have seen under the *Project Burnout*, diffusion has become deeply problematic. Additionally, as he sums up quite straightforwardly: next to their socio-economic precarity, 'most of the contemporary artists are structurally insecure, both about their own artistic practice or individual talent as well as about the recognition by the art world' (2004, 14). For contemporary dance artists, this structural precarity within the artistic field is 'redoubled by the fragility of the body to ensure performance throughout the working life', as Pierre-Emmanuel Sorignet points out (2010, 18). Physical precarity for that matter always accompanies the contemporary dance profession as the body of the dancer may suddenly no longer be able to meet the imposed standards when it is ageing, injured or ill: a dance artist is always precarious because s/he has no knowledge about or say in when the body stops functioning. Support systems for artists, such as the artist status in Belgium and the KSK in Germany may reduce precarity, however there is much room for improvement. From a macroperspective, especially the quantitative study illustrated the importance of the way a social security regime may positively infer with the socio-economic precarity linked with the neoliberalization of artistic fields, because it acts within the Belgian context as what I have labelled under a flexicurity system, offering artists a financial safety net during the periods in between projects through the granting of financial assistance. My findings revealed that the artist status is relatively exclusive and very conditional as only 53% of the survey respondents

have access to it and they are on average older and have more work experience. It seems particularly unjust that the access to the artist status is almost unattainable for young or aspiring artists, who would probably benefit from this safety net the most in the beginning of their careers. This ties in with the strict requirements to access the artist status, which are almost impossible to meet at the start of a career in contemporary dance. It should be noted that the KSK does offer exceptions for career starters. In the same line, the accessibility to the artist status ought to be simplified in order to further reduce socio-economic precarity among artists in general and among dance artists in particular, however the opposite seems to happen. I concluded that the trajectory of a project-based artist is in fact not recognized as it is for most: a collection of short-employment contracts with periods of uncontracted work in-between.

Quite a number of survey respondents have spontaneously commented that even though the dance profession is respected as a full-fledged one in Brussels and Berlin, this esteem does not translate into proper working conditions. Constantly having to be creative in trying to justify what one does is both time-consuming and demoralizing, as an informant put it. Indeed, several informants and survey respondents seemed to agree that in both Brussels and Berlin you can say you work in dance and it is accepted and recognized as professional work, at least from an institutional perspective. The signatures of manifold institutions on the fair practice codes certainly affirm this (such as for example the Belgian initiatives Engagement and the *Charter for the stage artist*). However, my fieldwork has also exposed that this acknowledgement still remains too theoretical at times and is not in practice appropriated. On the meso level, the subsidized dance institutions, such as residency spaces or art centers offer generous technical, administrative and – most importantly – infrastructural support that has proven to be quite vital and which is also much appreciated by the informants. However, in practice some of the institutions do not entirely seem to act according to their general acknowledgement of the workings of the contemporary dance profession. In several of the mentioned examples, the cooperating institutions offering residency programs do not seem to translate their promise of uninterrupted work into reality.¹

Lastly, from a microperspective, precarization seems to go hand in hand with self-precarization (Lorey 2006), at least among the dance artists in my fieldwork. Contemporary dance artists – yet this might be the case in most creative professions – seem to be willing to accept economic risks, an on average low income, or many unpaid working hours out of their valuation of more subjective job rewards such as autonomy, the intrinsic pleasures coming with *being creative*, and opportunities for self-realization

¹ It should be noted that also choreographers in the institutionalized context do not always seem to act according to their general acknowledgement of dance as (living) labor, for instance when they do not calculate warmup time within the working hours.

and self-development. Hence, the in general (very) positive appreciation of their professional practice is not significantly related to their income level. The value of self-development helps to understand this widespread self-precarization among the queried contemporary dance artists. The desire to grow and to express the self seems to be at the core of the willingness to work un(der)paid: several case study informants are quite happy to work together un(der)paid, because they want to explore the potential of the collaboration that promises to provide immaterial income. Next to the pursued values and motives such as self-development, self-realization, and personal growth (through collaboration), pure artistic pleasure and the possibility to work autonomously have shown to make my informants very willing to self-precarize. To put it bluntly: also economically poor dance artists are artistically rich ones. However, particularly the qualitative part of my study highlights specific aspects of precarity and self-precarization going beyond the socio-economic and that seemed to be of a more subjective nature. Those working in precarious conditions feel a constant time and task pressure that inherently follows from the temporality characterizing the project-based regime. The result is the specific kind of mental precarity coming with daily renewed deadlines and the pressure to entertain an ever-expanding network of social contacts in order to promote one's work and to secure work and other opportunities. The looming fact that an artist's talent or artistic work might not be socially recognized may well induce self-doubt. Hence, my research has exposed precarity's plural character.

Collective care

Marianne Van Kerkhoven sums things up quite forcefully:

The fight against velocity, against the pressure to produce, the fight for time that can and may be spoiled, for time in which research without an aim and deadline can take place, is probably one of the most important battles the arts have to fight today. But there are more things to fight for. Apart from the economic pressure there is also the political pressure in the form of increasingly omnipresent social control, of the increasing number of rules, the increasing amount of bureaucracy. (Van Kerkhoven 2009, 8)

In the context of these fights, my research has shown that contemporary dance artists are increasingly finding innovative ways, or tactics, to secure their future and the future of dance and join forces to share knowledge and thought or to share practices of collaboration and self-organization. This study has documented a variety of survival tactics, however these were mostly tactics of *individual* resilience. I have witnessed only

few collective tactics that could lead to structural change. In the last chapter, I concluded that also slowing down collectively is losing its subversive edge, because it has come to be highly commodified and ultimately serves the purpose of accelerating more efficiently afterward. Instead, as an anonymous artist from London concludes, ‘we need to start shifting towards an ecology of collective care’. This anonymous artist from London, acting like a poetic hacker – much like the characters in *Meyoucycle* – posted an open letter on YouTube in March 2016 under the name of Precarious Resistance, entitled *Dancing Precarity. An Open Letter, a Spam, a Resistance*. At one point, the video shows footage of the freefalling Felix Baumgartner going through the sound barrier, while the artist reads the following:

The unstable artist is already falling. They have been falling for a long time, so there is the impression that they are floating. They aren’t still. They don’t know how long they have to wait before being pushed forwards or falling into violent oblivion again. They have no ground. They are groundless.

As a solution, the anonymous artist seems to propose that true resistance to this groundlessness is perhaps to be found in collective care and solidarity. The unfair and precarious working conditions contemporary dance artists specifically deal with are thus tied in with a more general point at issue affecting our society in late capitalism at large. Since the responsibility now lies on the shoulders of the neoliberal and post-Fordist worker, the power to say ‘no’ to unfair conditions is rooted in the collective. As Lynn Berger puts it:

Instead of competing in this society in which we constantly have to perform, we could also oppose the logic of that society - for example, by saying “no” collectively to some of its demands, and “no” to the idea that everything, even our rest, sleep and walks, can and should be of optimal service. (Berger 2017, paragraph 7)²

Yet, saying ‘no’ collectively is extremely challenging in the contemporary dance sector, because many artists are still willing to work despite of the precarious conditions; at least within my fieldwork, self-precarization is widespread. As the findings demonstrate, resisting the forces of neoliberalism and the demands set by the project-based contemporary dance sector individually will not change the conditions. Judith Butler’s famous statement that ‘the body is and is not mine’ (2004, 21) underlines this collective responsibility for the lives of one another and thus also shows the importance of collective care. Today, there is certainly urgency among the artists, or a readiness, to

² Own translation from the original Dutch: ‘In plaats van meedraaien in de prestatie maatschappij zouden we ons ook tegen de logica van die maatschappij kunnen verzetten – bijvoorbeeld door collectief “nee” te zeggen tegen sommige van haar eisen, en “nee” tegen het idee dat alles, zelfs onze rust, slaap en wandelingen, in dienst kan en moet staan van optimale prestaties’ (Berger 2017, paragraph 7).

confront the problem of precarity in the profession – as testify the performances discussed in this book. Well aware that confronting precarity through performing it and thus commodifying it ties in with neoliberal ideals, these performances are also potential starting points for the creation of new forms of unity. Most importantly, belonging to a dance community means that one is not alone in this struggle.

However, the threefold chase after funding, programmers, and papers is essentially a very individualistic chase as it comes down to chasing your own tail. Particularly the self-promoting undertakings that conflate the artist's identity with their products are criticized among my informants. Whereas the threefold chase connected to the competitive public funding system and cultural policies engenders a sense of loneliness in the field, the temporal and spatial mobility seems to be at the root of a feeling of loneliness and homelessness in the base city. On the one hand, this is not surprising since artistic career paths generally revolve around personal development. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the intrinsic drive for self-realization and self-development may at least partly be grounded in the participation in an artistic community. In his book on *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* (2011), Arne Kalleberg makes the somewhat philosophical distinction between objective and subjective job rewards. Among the subjective job rewards, he notes that there are not only the intrinsic rewards such as the 'degree of meaning, challenge and interest that people obtain from their jobs', which are likely to vary considerably from one person to the next (Kalleberg 2011, 9). However, he also points to the perceptions of the quality of co-worker relationships, which in the context of my study would be the contemporary dance communities of Brussels and Berlin. Indeed, as also Pierre-Michel Menger stresses 'each individual succeeds in fulfilling himself only by participating in a community in which the Self is realized in the activities of many selves' (2014, 98). Hence, the artist is essentially a social type, but the time and space dynamics coupled with autonomous work and short-term project work are accompanied by a very individualized outlook.

Seen through the lens of *commoning*, the barter system could possibly offer a more structural form of resilience aside from the discussed individual tactics for survival. On a more collective level, tactics of sharing practices, exchanging means, and self-organization could possibly offer more structural forms of protection. In the context of contemporary dance, such commoning practices date back to when the Judson Church gave birth to contemporary dance in the 1960's. The artists associated with the Judson Dance Theater all started out as precarious workers collaborating and sharing means to create and show their work. Later, when contemporary dance was introduced in Belgium with the Flemish Dance Wave of the early eighties, very diverse independent artists struggled their way to the top. We now know Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Jan Lauwers as very established and internationally active artists, but they once started in extremely insecure conditions sharing means and infrastructure through self-organization. In that regard, I have witnessed informants who exchange studio space with

each other. For example, one of my informants can make use of a studio on a regular basis, even while she is not working on a specific creation. When she heard a peer was urgently in need of a studio space to rehearse for an upcoming performance, she lent him the space for a couple of days. In the 1970's and 1980's, artists like Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Jan Lauwers were part of *vzw Schaamte*, coordinated by Hugo De Greef, who worked out a system of financial solidarity within the organization. When one artist would bring in the money while on tour, another artist could use that money to cover the production costs for a new creation. The roles would be reversed at other instances (Gielen 1999). In a related vein, I have overheard many conversations in which dance artists imagine a system where one dance artist's gain (such as receiving subsidies) would facilitate the work of others too. One informant explicitly mentioned imagining an emergency fund for dance artists in the city generated by every dance artist who receives project funding and who donates a share of the funding to the emergency fund for those who did not manage to receive funding for their projects. In a similar vein, another informant imagined a pension fund generated in such a manner.

In the context of creating a sharing economy, I came across an open-source platform for lateral exchange within my fieldwork initiated under the name *Nobody's Business*. The format consists of the self-organization of week-long sessions of sharing practices and knowledge within local dance communities on several locations. Sessions have taken place in Brussels and Berlin, but also elsewhere. In so doing, the initiative aims to support each other and the general development of the performing arts field through fostering the proliferation of information outside of the economies of dance workshops, dance classes and the creation of dance productions. In their mission statement the founders write: 'Nobody's Business is "Nobody's", as a deliberate negation of the individualism that contemporary neoliberal and hyper-capitalist economic realities impose upon our lives' (*Nobody's Business*, accessed September 26, 2018, paragraph 2). In line with most commoning practices, participation is open and free of charge. In fact, the initiators even imagine granting the participants with a fee. Sometimes they manage to get funding to organize these weeks, which usually covers expenses. This particular commoning initiative has thus set up an alternative exchange system in favor of solidarity and collective care. In the future, the initiators hope to expand their format across other disciplines.

Unfortunately, my research has not uncovered many such collective tactics and commoning practices, which seems to confirm the predominance of individual trajectories and the mentioned lack of community generated by the project-based funding system that copies neoliberalism's competitive model. Towards the end of my research, however, I did come across at least some commoning practices in the performing arts sectors of Brussels and Berlin. In Brussels, a group of artists under the name *State of the Arts (SOTA)* organized a camp to collectively write and edit a *Fair Arts Almanac* for the year 2019, meant as a practical guide for working, instituting and policy

making in the arts. In Berlin, I joined an informally organized monthly discussion group to explore better working conditions in the dance scene and to find ways to actually implement these conditions within Berlin's cultural policy. After the period of my fieldwork, this discussion group had evolved into the Round Table for Dance Berlin 2018, which the initiators define as a participatory process for the development of dance in Berlin. During the working sessions, representatives of Berlin's cultural policy, the Senate Culture Administration and the Berlin dance scene came together to discuss how to improve the working conditions in the dance scene. Additional open-access working groups discuss specific issues in-depth. At the end of 2018, the process will come to a close by writing policy recommendations for implementing better conditions. In that context, the working group *Money and more* has launched a trial application for a Dancer's Fee, which is a proposed funding instrument that is intended to cover aspects of artistic work that the current funding system does not support. In other words, it is complementary to the already existing system and provides individual dance artists with income for the otherwise unpaid work, thus proposing alternatives to current policies. In line with Pascal Gielen and Philipp Dietachmair's *The Art of Civil Action* (2017), these initiatives exemplify commoning practices that intervene in the civil sphere in which saying becomes doing.

Nonetheless, true collective care ought to go beyond specific artistic disciplines, as exemplify the bottom-up initiatives by performing artists, such as the mentioned platform of Nobody's Business, the 3AM event in Berlin, the established Fair Arts Almanac for 2019 in Flanders, and the many fair practices codes, charters, and manifestos that circulated the last few years in the arts sectors of several European countries (such as Engagement in Belgium, the *Fair Practice Code* in the Netherlands, or the *Artist Pledge* in Germany). In fact, true collective care should preferably unite people beyond profession or social class. The meanwhile many manifestations of political or critical art focusing on the precarious often already have a collective nature as witness the projects of Precarias a la Deriva in Spain, the Italian Chain Workers or the London-based Precarious Workers Brigade. Artists and other creative workers also try to unite among themselves and with other fractions of the precariat during the EuroMayDayParades and featured events, such as Hart Boven Hard demonstrations in Belgium. However, the creation of somewhat durable connections remains difficult: the protest against precarity itself has a precarious nature. Not unlike the contested working conditions, protest is often volatile and temporary, even fugitive. This has much to do with the fact that the projective temporality typical of the contemporary dance artists' precarious labor structurally overburdens them, or as BAVO's book title proposes, they are just 'too active to act' (BAVO 2010). Furthermore, precarization is intrinsically linked to the neoliberal regime of flexible accumulation, whose logics of marketization and hyper-competition create a hyper-individualistic climate. The solid link between precarization and neoliberal policies creates an environment in which solidarity becomes less and less probable.

It could be argued that passionate or unalienating work is inherently individualistic because one seeks self-realization, self-development, or self-fulfillment. Indeed, in contemporary dance, as also Delphine Hesters points out, not the development of dance itself seems to be paramount, instead self-development is. However, as my research reveals, this individualization is, paradoxically, quite solidary. In uncovering the fast, mobile and flexible *modi operandi*, and particularly the mechanisms of the project funding and residency systems, the contemporary dance world reveals itself at first sight as highly competitive. However, the informants do not recognize that sense of competition so much, but emphasize instead that they regret the individual course that they have to take. After all, self-development is not at the expense of another, but is often accompanied by another as it happens foremost within an artistic community, within temporary artistic collaborations, within creation processes. Drawing on Taylor (1994), Hesters explains that to strive for the ideal of authenticity in self-realization and self-development means that one believes not only in the value of one's own singular self, but also in that of the other and that one cannot grow at the expense of another. If everyone is a unique self, they can never be each other's competitor. Hence when a peer, or what I have termed *frolleague*, is chosen for a job or is granted subsidies, contemporary dance artists often acknowledge that the peer is suitable for that job because s/he gives something that no one else can give (Hesters 2004, 150). Hesters' conclusion is remarkably reminiscent of my informant's words describing that he perceives the individual chase after funding not necessarily as a 'capitalist thing', but that he prefers to see it as 'a sense of community' accepting that sometimes you get funding and sometimes someone else gets funding and you support them also. The individualization is thus seen as solidary and not competitive; more and more so not only in words, but also in actions.

Questions of quality

Interestingly, at the end of her thesis Hesters wonders what the impact of the individualized trajectories can be not only on contemporary dance artists, but also on dance itself (2004, 153), which is a question that formed the thread throughout the book. 'Survival makes you really creative', an informant points out, 'but what we're trying to change now is that this survival mode made it that we weren't enjoying what we were doing. It was too hard and I can say that the last process, I didn't really enjoy that.' The quality of the artist's life and the quality of the artistic product decline, and the immaterial compensations (such as recognition and artistic pleasure) and intrinsic motivations (such as self-development) of the artists fade away. More and more burnouts surface in a field that is structurally precarious and in which precarity has a plural

character (see for example Purnelle 2017 or Idema 2018). If that seems to be the case, then a burning question remains: why do contemporary dance artists continue exercising the profession?

In his 1970 book *Exit, voice and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*, economist Albert Hirschman introduces the very useful concepts of loyalty, exit and voice that allow me to form a final thought on this question. While exit and voice are two possible responses to a decline in product quality, Hirschman explores the concept of loyalty questioning whether it makes exit scenarios less likely and instead makes way for voice to express discontent. He defines voice as any form of protest:

Any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion. (Hirschman 1970, 30)

In that context, I should point out that I have only examined what happens within the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin, by studying those contemporary dance artists who have remained *loyal* to their profession. I have addressed those who raised *voice* in protest to several unfair practices and the precarious working conditions of the profession. Especially their voice in the discussed performances of precarity received my attention. As a result of chronic overburdening, contemporary dance artists come to the one question indicative of burnout: ‘can I still and do I still want to keep doing this?’ While burnout is a final stage of a process, it is not unresolvable and therefore not necessarily a reason for exit: a burnt-out dance artist needs to process what happened, seek alternatives to continue, and resume work by accepting the condition. The discussed performances of precarity in the last part of the book attest to the willingness to remain loyal yet with an openness to deal with the situation and to voice the concerns. Furthermore, I have uncovered several tactics of survival in order to remain loyal, but I have also witnessed my informants’ voices in actively creating counter-alternatives in collective organizations. However, I have not studied those who chose to *exit*. These questions still remain: how many contemporary dance artists endure these conditions and how long do they remain loyal? I can only speculate that when product and life quality decline and the exchange rate between material and immaterial currencies becomes weaker, there might indeed be an exit. Looking at the survey findings, I can suspect this happens indeed: merely a few survey respondents are over fifty and the oldest fieldwork informant was 48 at the start of the study. Nonetheless, I predict contemporary dance artists generally remain loyal as long as the values that drive contemporary dance artists compensate the plural forms of precarity. Nevertheless, I think the time has come that they are raising their voices more often and much louder each time, and most importantly, their voice is becoming increasingly collective.

In terms of product quality, as we have seen, my research has uncovered that survival tactics in the fast, mobile and flexible work environment lead to the production of tactical pieces, an excess of precarity solos, and more adaptable and resilient pieces. Contemporary dance productions are highly marketable when they, for example, do not include a large set that is difficult and expensive to transport, thus saving on time and people to set up the stage and break it down. Even bringing along a different colored dancefloor can quickly become an expensive endeavor. A tactical piece usually does not require much technical support that cannot be carried out by the local technician. Ideally, the performers are ready to perform after warm-up and spacing, thus reducing hotel, venue and labor costs. However, if there is no money (and thus no time and space) for a consistent rehearsal schedule like in a dance company, this often may not be the case. Therefore, a tactical piece usually contains movement material that requires less preparation, such as highly adaptable choreographies of a more improvisatory nature. Creating a tactical piece ensures that an artist remains visible in the scene and adds sustainability in a climate of projective temporality. In that respect, I have noted that in precarious times, the choreographer is often also a performer in their work as that situation reduces the labor costs and performance fee, and this because the contemporary dance profession is grounded in living labor: the less people involved, the cheaper a creative process and performance become. Informants observe that the preferred situation of being 'on the outside' and paying oneself as a choreographer has simply become too expensive, which is also one of the reasons why we see so many solos on stage. My fieldwork has revealed that having 'a solo in your pocket' has become a survival tactic for several informants.

In addition, finished productions have proven to be resilient when they can be adapted to a programmer's demands, to a venue's budget, or to a certain stage or setting. Such pieces are able to stay alive due to their ability of being molded to external demands and they can adapt quickly to changed conditions. However, the dispersed timings and locations of the creative process in these fast, mobile and flexible production modes also may result in the realization of semi-finished pieces, that become refined and finalized while on tour. The lack of time in the studio to experiment may cause artists to stay in their comfort zones rehashing former material into new pieces. In response, we have seen that one informant for example developed a work mode that requires less rehearsal time in a studio, since the creative process was essentially based on a back-and-forth communication over Skype.

As a consequence of the fast, mobile and flexible production modes in contemporary dance, I observed that not only do several informants struggle with burnout (or have suffered burnouts in the past), so do projects. Under the header of the project burnout, I discuss that we encounter more disposable dance productions that disappear after their premiere, which can be at least partly explained because the responsibility for diffusion is too often on the artist's shoulders. The project burnout has little to do with artistic

quality or public appeal of the work, but instead it is a systemic problem, as Pieter T'Jonck also notes (2013, 23). The diffusion problem ties in with questions of sustainability: if the work is not seen by others but remains a mayfly, then what are we working for? In that respect, the current trend of performing contemporary dance in exhibition spaces may be partly clarified in response to the project burnout, because it promises longer exposure and thus more sustainability inherent to exhibitions, simultaneously reaching out to a broader audience? This is certainly a question that opens up further research paths to explore.

Nonetheless, and most importantly, I certainly do not want to claim that these tactical and adaptable contemporary dance productions are necessarily declined in quality. On the contrary, as several of the performance examples in this book reveal, some of these are very powerful, provocative and ingenious works of art. Especially in the last part of this book, we have seen the many self-reflective performances that use humor and irony as a restorative and activist device. Many of the discussed performances of precarity, such as the works of Eleanor Bauer, Igor Koruga, Liz Kinoshita, Jeremy Wade, and Michael Helland not only criticize the explored conditions, but they contain hopeful messages of solidarity. Artists are indeed more than capable of producing high-quality art under precarious circumstances, however, this realization should by no means be abused on the mesoeconomic or macroeconomic level. We should never forget what Dieter Lesage once wrote, 'it is a great excuse not to pay you for all the things you do' (2006, 34).

On shortcomings and future paths

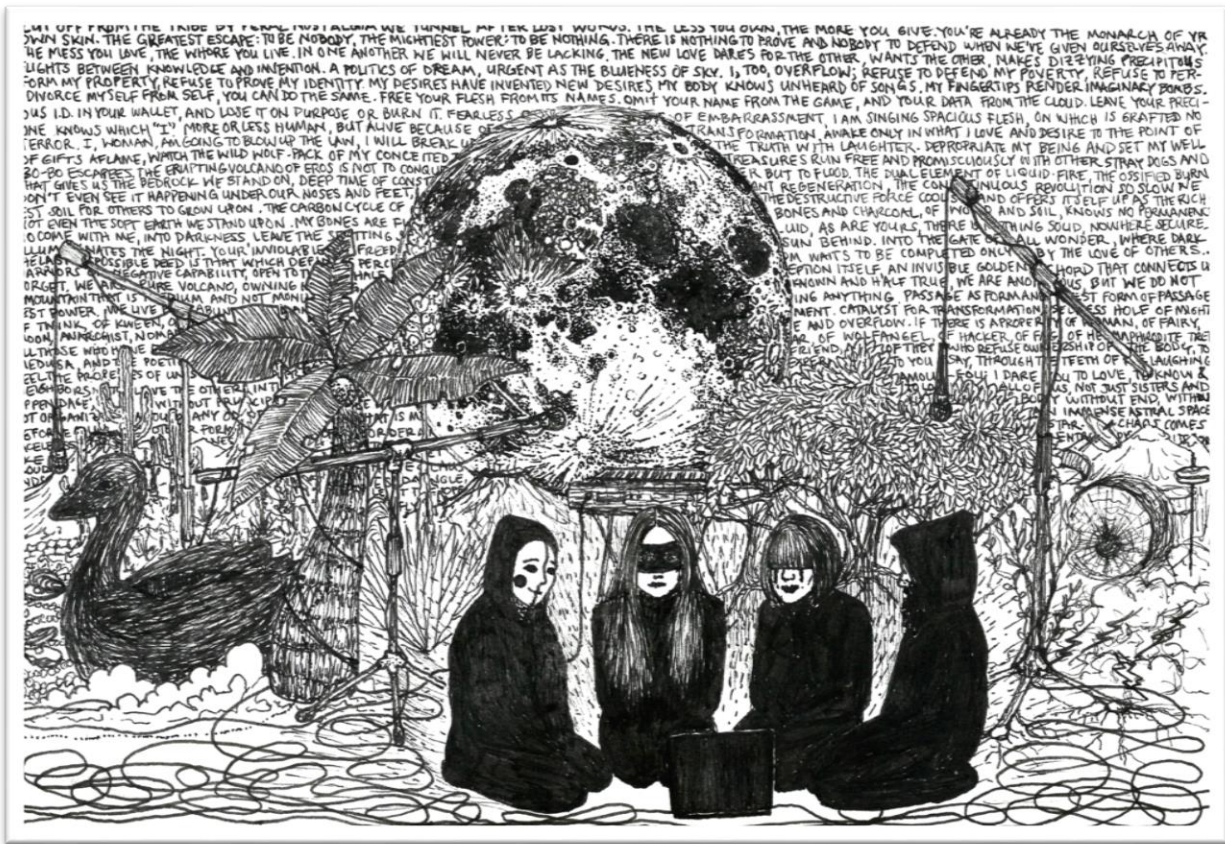
In the qualitative study, I had to rely on the testimonies of my informants, so that a large part of the research material naturally belongs to the common knowledge of the field of inquiry. As a researcher, I thus told a story that in fact is not so much news and often taken for granted at least within the dance sectors in Brussels and Berlin. The added value of this book is that it scientifically reports the way the dance sector operates from a microperspective and provides a dance scholarly and sociological interpretation of its mechanisms by coupling the qualitative data (interview material, observations, logbooks) and the dance performances to theoretical insights. This book is an attempt to uncover the sometimes contradicting mechanisms related to neoliberal capitalism and the project-oriented labor and art market that determine the working and living conditions of contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin. In the second place, it examines how these working and living conditions affect the work process and outcome. The findings reveal some of the good and some of the bad, but are certainly insufficient and

incomplete. I have not consulted the voice of those who exited, nor did I include the perspective of the people working on the supportive and managerial side of the contemporary dance sector. In addition, my observations in the studio did not provide me with sufficient material to make proper conclusions on how precarity is intertwined within creative and collaborative working processes in the studio. In hindsight, I have not sufficiently managed to explore to what extent precarity is entangled with motives, such as the desire to avoid working within hierarchically structured dance companies or to engage in projects that allow democratic forms of decision-making. My research certainly fell short in documenting how precarity directly interferes with (collaboratively) making contemporary dance within the studio space, which is something I initially expected to examine more thoroughly. Quite a number of questions remain: how does precarity influence collaborative work processes in the studio, and also vice versa, how does artistic collaboration affect precarity, creativity and innovation? Where is the boundary between collaboration and exploitation? When do co-working relationships block and does precarity play a role in this? In addition to self-precarization, to what extent can we also speak of a mutual or collegial precarization? To what extent can commoning practices and sharing economies foster creativity and innovation? Can these collective tactics effectively develop into structural solutions, or do they remain forms of resilience and survival?

However, the comparison of the fields of inquiry, which both share a similar project-based funding system but in which artists work under a different employment status, contributes to new insights that can also be valuable for the sector itself. As an alternative to granting individual project subsidies that are temporary and conditional, using subsidies more indirectly in the arts might be an interesting path to explore in order to make artistic careers more sustainable; for example, by supporting the workspaces, production houses, and residency spaces more so that they, in turn, can support the artists more in terms of administration, management, production, accountancy, and diffusion. On the one hand, self-precarization could at least partly be avoided by making these institutions responsible for the guarantee of the fair payment for artists (instead of putting this responsibility on the shoulders of the artists), while on the other hand, this would make artists of course more dependent. The implementation of a flexicurity system that can serve all freelance and project-based workers – based on the example of the artists status regime – could be another form of advancing indirect funding to look into. Definitely, these paths to explore demand further research in order to find out whether these propositions would contribute effectively to reduce precarity and to create more sustainable working conditions in the performing arts. Do these suggestions exist already in other cities and if so, how do they affect the work and lives of contemporary dance artists in those fields? In addition, it would be crucial to make comparisons with creative cities that do not have a generous project subsidy system, especially those without the advantage of cheap living conditions that often keep precarity alive, such as London or

New York City. In view of collective care, it would be worth comparing with other project-oriented sectors, such as academia (just to mention the one sector in which this book came into being). I think this is the place to finally conclude that 'I need more time' is therefore not only a recurrent phrase among my informants, but it definitely applies here too.

Image 9: drawing from *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck. © Drawing by Eleanor Bauer



English Summary

In her influential article on “Cultural Entrepreneurialism: On the changing Relationship between the Arts, Culture and Employment” (2003), Andrea Ellmeier observes that in the post-Fordist work regime, artists, along with all creative workers, have become entrepreneurial individuals who work anywhere and anytime in exchange for low wages or immaterial income. In that context, Isabell Lorey introduces the idea that precarization can be defined as a process of normalization of socio-economic insecurity (2006). However, governmental precarization as coercion induced by the state and the market is complemented by ‘self-precarization’, because creative workers in particular seem to be willing to sacrifice material benefits for the sake of immaterial ones (Lorey 2006, 198).

In line with the description of ‘the new spirit of capitalism’ by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005), the artist performs immaterial labor on a flexible basis within the context of temporary projects, a situation that also demands persistent networking in order to ascertain future work opportunities. Various scholars, including Paolo Virno (2004), Katharina Pewny (2011a), Pascal Gielen and Paul de Bruyne (2012), and Bojana Kunst (2015a), have even nominated the performing artist as the paradigmatic example of the creative workforce occupied with immaterial and transnational project work. In 2002, dance scholar Mark Franko was probably one of the first to address the convergence between dance and work with the release of his book *The Work of Dance. Labor, Movement and Identity in the 1930s* (2002), which offers new tools for dance scholars to study the relation of politics to aesthetics. Following up on Franko, I have explored in this dissertation what is particular about contemporary dance artists today and their relation to work and how it ties in with more general issues of the project-based labor market and neoliberal society at large.

As the works of Pewny (2011a) and Kunst (2015a) demonstrate, the socio-economic position of artists and the working conditions in the (performing) arts and in late modernity in general, have increasingly become the theme of contemporary (dance) performances. I proceed from the hypothesis that precarity is reflected in the work and lives of the artists as well as in the aesthetics and subject matter of their artistic work. Within this frame, I examine the extent of precarity within the contemporary dance

scenes of both Brussels and Berlin, which can be seen as creative capitals (Florida 2005; Pratt 2008), attracting a high number of contemporary dance artists from elsewhere in Europe, the US, and beyond. However, I encountered a noticeable lack of research on the values, motivations and tactics involved in contemporary dance artists' trajectories. We do not know to what extent precarity is intertwined with motives, such as the desire to avoid working within hierarchically structured dance companies or to engage in projects that allow democratic forms of decision-making. Therefore, this transdisciplinary study primarily questions if and in what ways the socio-economic position of contemporary dance artists affects the working process and the end product. How are contemporary dance artists, who work in a project-based regime in which they are largely dependent on conditional funding for financial and infrastructural support and who therefore work in-between institutions rather than within, physically and mentally affected by these working conditions? Or in other words: to what extent is precarity in its plural forms (socio-economic, mental, physical, etc.) intertwined with working on art?

The methodological approach within this study combines research skills and methods from both performance and dance studies and the social sciences. Firstly, I constructed a theoretical fundament through the profound literary study of recent theories on post-Fordism, neoliberalism and precarious labor. In addition, drawing on several conventional methods from the social sciences, I conducted a quantitative study in order to get a more empirically grounded status quo on the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin as a starting point for my research. The contemporary dance profession seen through the lens of the 94 Brussels-based and the 63 Berlin-based survey respondents is marked by a multifaceted socio-economic precarity.

In the next phase of my research, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork in both cities to explore more in-depth the multidimensional precarity and more complex issues the survey findings revealed. In order to do this properly, I spent one year observing, participating, and following seven case study informants in the Brussels contemporary dance scene. Thereafter, I moved to Berlin to do exactly the same. In terms of ethical considerations, I decided from the start that all informants within my fieldwork would remain anonymous. As part of the fieldwork, I conducted longitudinal semi-structured in-depth interviews with the fourteen case study informants over the course of two years. Additionally, I undertook participant observations in the studio while my informants were working on their own creative processes and asked my informants to keep a logbook in which they documented at least a week of work activities. Furthermore, from a dance studies perspective, in order to fully grasp the working conditions in contemporary dance through the lens of its practitioners, it was necessary to explore the artistic output in which contemporary dance artists in these two fields of inquiry publicly address their socio-economic position and precarious working conditions, and this as key part of the fieldwork. This dissertation thus also discusses the emerging aesthetic of precariousness in which the precarious nature of artistic work has been made visible on stage.

In the first part of the dissertation, I juxtaposed the notions of lifestyle artists and survival artists, which at first sight seem opposite terms. In the chapter on “Lifestyle Artists”, I argue that a *bohemian work ethic* prevails among the contemporary dance artists within my fieldwork. The concept itself is oxymoronic as it consists of a combination of self-contradictory elements, including a bohemian lifestyle versus a strenuous work ethic. A career in contemporary dance thus seems to come hand in hand with a common work ethic shared by all informants. However, the idea of autonomy captured by the notion of bohemian, is oftentimes an imagined autonomy because in reality the contemporary dance artist is confronted with a work pressure that is deeply interwoven with life. In the next chapter on “Survival Artists”, I discuss that within the bohemian work ethic artists have developed a variety of survival tactics so they can carry on to practice their profession despite the economic challenges affecting their work and lives. Especially the outline on the different forms of internal subsidization illustrates that in the art world, money is thus not an end but a means. All in all, I have addressed several survival tactics that demonstrate that the contemporary dance artists in my fieldwork show themselves resilient towards the prevailing precarity in their profession. However, the outlined survival mode impacts not only the lives but also the artistic work of my informants. A noteworthy consequence of the survival mode is the creation of tactical pieces and precarity solos, which ensure more sustainability in a climate of projective temporality.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on the causes and effects of the fast, mobile and flexible *modi operandi* in the contemporary dance scenes in Brussels and Berlin. The first chapter on “The Fast” deals with a threefold chase after funding, programmers, and papers. Project-based funding engenders a precarious position that is not necessarily unattractive for artists, because it allows them to experiment and collaborate (see also T’Jonck 2013, 22). However, there is a three-dimensional sense of uncertainty when applying for funding: you do not know *if* you will receive a subsidy, *how much* money you will be granted, and *when* the sum will arrive. The search for funding, and thus work opportunities, is accompanied by maintaining a network of professional contacts. A career in contemporary dance in Brussels and Berlin develops between institutions, which demands networking skills, self-promotion abilities, and the development of tactics in communication in order to sustain itself. I explore how contemporary dance artists utilize and develop their social capital for exploiting work opportunities in the second chase after programmers. The third chase deals with the bureaucracy that comes hand in hand with autonomous work. As a consequence of the bureaucratic freelancing systems for artists in both Belgium and Germany as well as the public funding systems dominated by project subsidies, contemporary dance artists have to deal with a fair amount of paperwork. In uncovering the mechanisms of the project-funding and freelancing systems in Brussels and Berlin, I detect a type of permanent colonization of the artistic by the non-artistic.

In the chapter on “The Mobile”, I discuss the mobility of contemporary dance artists, especially in uncovering the mechanism of the residency system on which most project-based contemporary dance artists have come to rely. On the one hand, the dance field becomes fragmented as a number of adaptable and semi-finished dance productions are created in bits and pieces and, on the other hand, after a few years in this work rhythm the conjoining mobility seems to put a huge strain on the contemporary dance artist’s quality of life. In the next chapter on “The Flexible”, I focus on the faculties of respectively polyvalence, flexibility, and adaptability as seen through the lens of contemporary dance. At length, I discuss the 2014 dance performance of *VOLCANO* by Liz Kinoshita, which illustrates how the threefold dimension of *the fast*, *the mobile* and *the flexible* can be reflected in dance performance.

The third part of the dissertation is essentially the pinnacle of my research, fusing the anonymous qualitative data with the *performances of precarity* I encountered during my fieldwork. In these performances of precarity, contemporary dance artists publicly address the plural forms of precarity and their penalties on one’s physical or mental state within their artistic work. In the chapter on “Burning Out”, I distinguish physical and mental forms of precarity that affect contemporary dance artists other than the already addressed socio-economic precarity. I argue that the plural character of artistic precarity in the accelerated work regime oftentimes results in a twofold deceleration of burning out and slowing down. As a consequence of the fast, mobile and flexible production modes in contemporary dance, I observe that not only do several informants struggle with burnout (or have suffered burnouts in the past), so do projects. Furthermore, I analyze in-depth the contemporary dance performance *Only Mine Alone* (2016) by Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević and Jeremy Wade’s video performance *Crisis Karaoke* (2016). To avoid burning out or in response to overburdening, my fieldwork exposes several tactics of deceleration, which I address in the second chapter on “Slowing Down”. I unveil the double paradox of slowing down as a tactic of resistance against the forces of neoliberalism: ultimately, slowing down does not turn out to be subversive, because firstly it proves to be rather an accelerating form of deceleration so as to increase our productivity, and secondly, slowing down has become commodified itself. In this chapter, I analyze the solo *RECESS: Dance of Light* (2016) by Michael Helland, and the dance performance *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck, which both address the consequences of the neoliberal work regime and explore what can be done to shape a more sustainable future in life in general and in contemporary dance in particular.

Finally, I conclude that the unfair and precarious working conditions that contemporary dance artists specifically deal with are thus tied in with a more general point at issue affecting our society in late capitalism at large.

Dutch Summary

In haar invloedrijke artikel over “Cultural Entrepreneurialism: On the changing Relationship between the Arts, Culture and Employment” (“Cultureel entrepreneurialisme: Over de veranderende relatie tussen kunst, cultuur en werk”, 2003) merkt Andrea Ellmeier op dat kunstenaars in het post-Fordistische werkregime, samen met alle creatieve werknemers, ondernemende individuen zijn geworden die overal en altijd werken in ruil voor lage lonen of immaterieel inkomen. In die context introduceert Isabell Lorey het idee dat precarisering kan worden gedefinieerd als een proces van normalisatie van sociaaleconomische onzekerheid (2006). De gouvernementele precarisering als dwang teweeggebracht door de staat en de markt wordt echter bijgestaan door *zelf-precarisering*, omdat creatieve werknemers in het bijzonder bereid lijken materiële voordelen op te offeren voor immateriële (Lorey 2006, 198).

Volgens ‘de nieuwe geest van het kapitalisme’ (*The New Spirit Of Capitalism*) besproken door Luc Boltanski en Ève Chiapello (2005), voert de kunstenaar immateriële arbeid uit op flexibele basis in het kader van tijdelijke projecten, een situatie die ook permanente netwerking vereist om toekomstige kansen op werk te waarborgen. Verschillende wetenschappers, waaronder Paolo Virno (2004), Katharina Pewny (2011a), Pascal Gielen en Paul de Bruyne (2012), en Bojana Kunst (2015a), hebben zelfs de podiumkunstenaar genomineerd als het prototype van het creatieve werken waarin immaterieel en transnationaal projectwerk overheerst. In 2002 was de danswetenschapper Mark Franko waarschijnlijk een van de eersten die de convergentie tussen dans en werk bestudeerde met de release van zijn boek *The Work of Dance. Labor, Movement and Identity in the 1930s (Het werk van dans. Arbeid, beweging en identiteit in de jaren 1930, 2002)*, dat danswetenschappers nieuwe hulpmiddelen biedt om de relatie tussen politiek en esthetiek te bestuderen. Naar het voorbeeld van Franko, heb ik in dit proefschrift onderzocht wat bijzonder is aan hedendaagse danskunstenaars en hun relatie tot werk en hoe dit aansluit bij meer globale kwesties van de projectmatige arbeidsmarkt en de neoliberale samenleving in het algemeen.

Zoals de werken van Pewny (2011a) en Kunst (2015a) aantonen, zijn de sociaaleconomische positie van kunstenaars en de arbeidsomstandigheden in de

(podium-) kunsten (en in de late moderniteit in het algemeen) steeds meer het thema geworden van hedendaagse (dans)opvoeringen. Ik vertrek daarom van de hypothese dat precariteit wordt weerspiegeld in het werk en het leven van de kunstenaars, evenals in de esthetiek en het onderwerp van hun artistieke producten. Binnen dit kader onderzoek ik de mate van precariteit binnen de hedendaagse dansscènes van zowel Brussel als Berlijn, die kunnen worden gezien als creatieve hoofdsteden (Florida 2005; Pratt 2008) die een groot aantal hedendaagse danskunstenaars aantrekken van elders in Europa, de VS en verder. Ik ondervond echter een merkbaar gebrek aan onderzoek naar de waarden, motivaties en tactieken die betrokken zijn bij de trajecten van hedendaagse danskunstenaars. We weten niet in hoeverre precariteit verweven is met motieven, zoals de wens om werk binnen hiërarchisch gestructureerde dansgezelschappen te mijden of om deel te nemen aan projecten die een democratische aanpak van besluitvorming mogelijk maken. Daarom wordt in deze transdisciplinaire studie vooral bevraagd of en op welke manier de sociaaleconomische positie van hedendaagse danskunstenaars impact heeft op het werkproces en het eindproduct. Hoe zijn hedendaagse danskunstenaars, die werken in een projectmatig regime waarin ze grotendeels afhankelijk zijn van tijdelijke en voorwaardelijke financiële en infrastructurele steun en die daarom tussen instellingen werken in plaats van binnenin, fysiek en mentaal beïnvloed door deze arbeidsomstandigheden? Of met andere woorden: in welke mate is precariteit in zijn pluralisvorm (sociaaleconomisch, mentaal, fysiek etc.) verweven met het werken aan kunst?

De methodologische benadering binnen dit onderzoek combineert onderzoeksvaardigheden en -methoden van zowel theater- als danswetenschappen en de sociale wetenschappen. Ten eerste heb ik een theoretisch fundament opgebouwd door de diepgaande literatuurstudie van recente theorieën over post-Fordisme, neoliberalisme en precare arbeid. Daarnaast heb ik op basis van verschillende conventionele methoden uit de sociale wetenschappen een kwantitatieve studie uitgevoerd om een meer empirisch gefundeerde status-quo te krijgen met betrekking tot de hedendaagse dansscènes van Brussel en Berlijn als startpunt voor mijn onderzoek. Het hedendaagse dansberoep dat bekeken door de lens van de 94 in Brussel en de 63 in Berlijn gevestigde respondenten, wordt gekenmerkt door een veelzijdige sociaaleconomische precariteit.

In de volgende fase van mijn onderzoek ondernam ik etnografisch veldwerk in beide steden om dieper in te gaan op de multidimensionale precariteit en de meer complexe problemen die de onderzoeksresultaten van de enquêtes aan het licht brachten. Ik heb een jaar lang zeven case-studyinformanten in de Brusselse hedendaagse dansscène gevolgd en bestudeerd. Daarna ben ik naar Berlijn verhuisd om precies hetzelfde te doen. Uit ethische overwegingen heb ik vanaf het begin besloten dat alle informanten in mijn veldwerk anoniem zouden blijven. Als onderdeel van het veldwerk heb ik in de loop van twee jaar tijd longitudinale semigestructureerde diepte-interviews gehouden met de veertien case study-informanten. Daarnaast ondernam ik participatieve observaties in de

studio terwijl mijn informanten aan hun eigen creatieve processen werkten en vroeg ik mijn informanten een logboek bij te houden waarin ze minstens een week aan werkactiviteiten documenteerden. Om de werkomstandigheden in beide hedendaagse dansscènes volledig te begrijpen door de lens van haar beoefenaars, was het bovendien noodzakelijk om vanuit een danswetenschappelijk perspectief de artistieke output te onderzoeken waarin hedendaagse danskunstenaars hun sociaaleconomische positie en onzekere arbeidsomstandigheden zelf belichten, en dit als een essentieel onderdeel van het veldwerk. Dit proefschrift bespreekt dus ook de opkomende esthetiek van onzekerheid waarin het precaire karakter van het artistieke werk zichtbaar is gemaakt op het podium.

In het eerste deel van de doctoraatscriptie, heb ik de op het eerste gezicht tegengestelde noties van *Lifestyle artists* en *Survival artists* (levensstijlkunstenaars en overlevingskunstenaars) naast elkaar geplaatst. In het hoofdstuk over “Lifestyle Artists”, betoog ik dat een *bohémien-arbeidsethos* (*bohemian work ethic*) de boventoon voert onder de hedendaagse danskunstenaars binnen mijn veldwerk. Het concept zelf is een oxymoron omdat het bestaat uit een combinatie van tegenstrijdige elementen, waaronder een de levensstijl van een bohémien versus een inspannende werkethiek. Een carrière in de hedendaagse dans lijkt dus gepaard te gaan met een gemeenschappelijke werkethiek die door alle informanten wordt gedeeld. Het idee van autonomie (vastgelegd door het begrip bohémien), is echter vaak een ingebeelde autonomie omdat de hedendaagse danskunstenaar in werkelijkheid geconfronteerd wordt met een werkdruk die diep verweven is met het leven. In het volgende hoofdstuk over “Survival Artists”, bespreek ik dat binnen die bohémien-arbeidsethos kunstenaars verscheidene overlevingstactieken hebben ontwikkeld, zodat ze hun beroep kunnen blijven uitoefenen ondanks de economische uitdagingen die hun werk en leven beïnvloeden. Vooral de bespreking van de verschillende vormen van interne subsidiëring illustreert dat geld in de kunstwereld dus geen doel maar een middel is. Globaal genomen heb ik verschillende overlevingstactieken aangehaald die aantonen dat de hedendaagse danskunstenaars in mijn veldwerk zich veerkrachtig tonen tegenover de heersende onzekerheid in hun beroep. De besproken overlevingsmodus heeft echter niet alleen invloed op de levens, maar ook op het artistieke werk van de informanten. Een opmerkelijk gevolg ervan is het creëren van tactische stukken en precariteitssolo’s, die meer duurzaamheid garanderen in een klimaat van projectieve tijdelijkheid (*projective temporality*).

Het tweede deel van het proefschrift richt zich op de oorzaken en effecten van de snelle, mobiele en flexibele modi-operandi in de hedendaagse dansscènes in Brussel en Berlijn. Het eerste hoofdstuk over “The Fast” gaat over een drievoudige achtereenvolgende financiering, programmatoeren en papieren. Projectmatige subsidiëring brengt een precaire positie met zich mee die niet noodzakelijk onaantrekkelijk is voor kunstenaars, omdat het hen in staat stelt te experimenteren en samen te werken (zie ook T’Jonck 2013, 22). Er is echter een driedelige onzekerheid bij het aanvragen van financiering: je weet

niet of je een subsidie ontvangt, hoeveel geld je wordt toegekend en wanneer de som zal aankomen. Het zoeken naar financiering, en dus naar werkmogelijkheden, gaat gepaard met het onderhouden van een netwerk van professionele contacten. Een carrière in hedendaagse dans in Brussel en Berlijn ontwikkelt zich dus tussen instellingen, die netwerkvaardigheden, bekwaamheid in zelfpromotie en de ontwikkeling van tactieken in communicatie vereist om zichzelf in stand te houden. In de tweede achtervolgving van programmatoren onderzoek ik hoe hedendaagse danskunstenaars hun sociaal kapitaal gebruiken en ontwikkelen voor het benutten van werkmogelijkheden. De derde achtervolgving gaat over de bureaucratie die gepaard gaat met autonoom werk. Als gevolg van de bureaucratische freelancesystemen voor kunstenaars in zowel België als Duitsland en de publieke subsidiestelsels gedomineerd door projectsubsidies, hebben hedendaagse danskunstenaars vaak te maken met een hoop papierwerk. Bij het ontrafelen van de mechanismen van de projectfinanciering en freelancingsystemen in Brussel en Berlijn ontdek ik een soort permanente kolonisatie van het artistieke door het niet-artistieke.

In het hoofdstuk over “The Mobile” bespreek ik de mobiliteit van hedendaagse danskunstenaars, vooral in het ontleden van het mechanisme van het residentiesysteem waarop de meeste projectmatig werkende hedendaagse danskunstenaars zijn aangewezen. Enerzijds wordt het dansveld gefragmenteerd doordat aanpasbare en half-afgewerkte dansproducties in stukjes en beetjes worden gecreëerd, en anderzijds lijkt de samenvloeiende mobiliteit een enorme druk op de kwaliteit van het leven van de hedendaagse danskunstenaar uit te oefenen na een paar jaar in dit werkritme. In het volgende hoofdstuk over “The Flexible”, concentreer ik me op de troeven van respectievelijk polyvalentie, flexibiliteit en aanpassingsvermogen door de lens van hedendaagse dans. Tenslotte bespreek ik de dansvoorstelling uit 2014 van *VOLCANO* door Liz Kinoshita, die illustreert hoe de drievoudige dimensie van *het snelle, het mobiele en het flexibele* kan worden weerspiegeld in een dansvoorstelling.

Het derde deel van de doctoraatscriptie is in wezen het hoogtepunt van mijn onderzoek, waarbij ik de anonieme kwalitatieve data combineer met de voorstellingen van precariteit (*performances of precarity*) die ik tijdens mijn veldwerk aantrof. In deze dansvoorstellingen behandelen hedendaagse danskunstenaars binnen hun artistieke werk publiekelijk de meervoudige vormen van precariteit en hun effecten op de fysieke of mentale toestand. In het hoofdstuk over “Burning Out” onderscheid ik fysieke en mentale vormen van precariteit die hedendaagse danskunstenaars beïnvloeden naast dan de reeds aangehaalde sociaaleconomische precariteit. Ik beargumenteer dat het meervoudig karakter van artistieke precariteit in het zogenaamde versnelde werkregime vaak resulteert in een tweevoudige vertraging van uitbranden en afremmen. Als een gevolg van de snelle, mobiele en flexibele productiewijzen in hedendaagse dans, merk ik dat niet alleen meerdere informanten worstelen met burn-out (of in het verleden last hebben gehad van burn-outs), maar dat geldt ook voor projecten. Verder analyseer ik de hedendaagse dansvoorstelling *Only Mine Alone* (2016) van Igor Koruga en Ana Dubljević en

Jeremy Wades video performance *Crisis Karaoke* (2016). Als reactie op overbelasting of om uitbranden te voorkomen, legt mijn veldwerk verschillende tactieken van vertraging bloot, die ik in het tweede hoofdstuk over “Slowing Down” bespreek. Ik onthul de dubbele paradox van vertraging als een tactiek van verzet tegen de krachten van het neoliberalisme: uiteindelijk blijkt vertragen niet subversief te zijn, omdat het ten eerste eerder een versnellende vorm van vertraging blijkt te zijn bedoeld om onze productiviteit te verhogen, en ten tweede is het vertragen zelf koopwaar geworden. In dit hoofdstuk analyseer ik de solo *RECESS: Dance of Light* (2016) van Michael Helland, en de dansvoorstelling *Meyoucycle* (2016) van Eleanor Bauer en Chris Peck, die beide de gevolgen van het neoliberale werkregime bespreken en onderzoeken wat men zou kunnen doen om een duurzamere toekomst in het leven in het algemeen en in de hedendaagse dans in het bijzonder vorm te geven.

Tot slot concludeer ik dat de oneerlijke en onzekere arbeidsomstandigheden waarmee hedendaagse danskunstenaars te maken hebben, aldus samenhangen met een meer algemene problematiek die van invloed is op onze maatschappij in het late kapitalisme in het algemeen.

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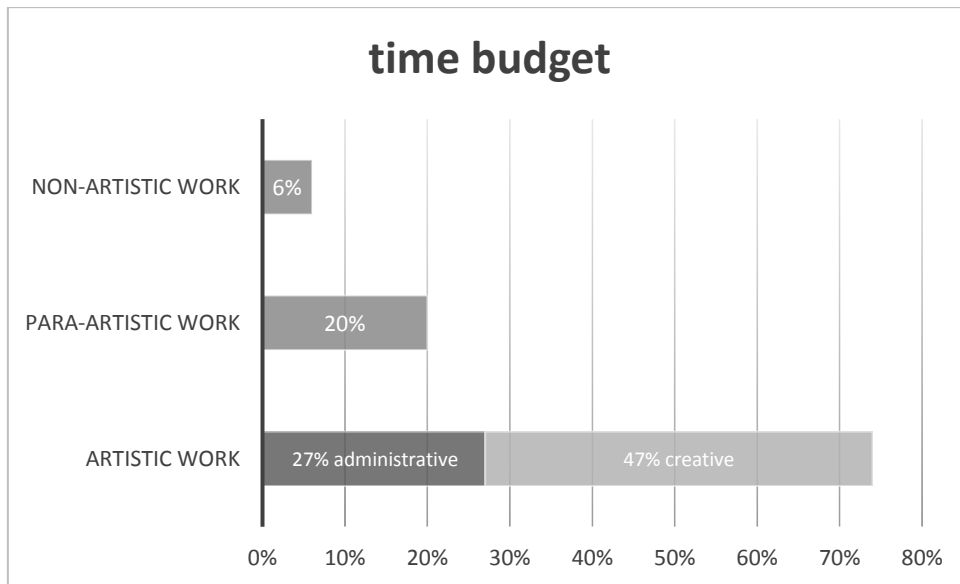
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Annexes

Annex 1: tables

Figure A: Average percentage of time spent on artistic, para-artistic and non-artistic work

A.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)



A.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 63)

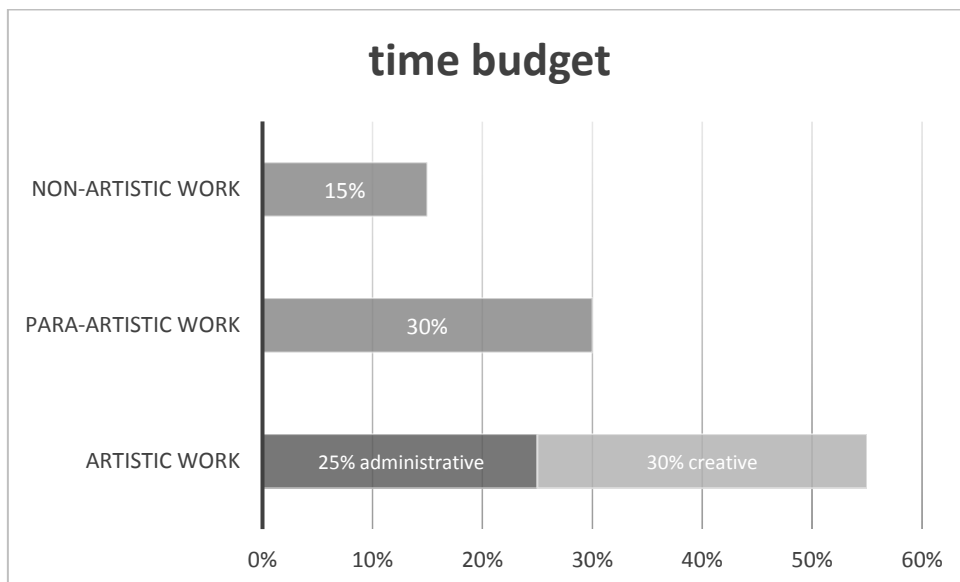


Figure B: Total of working hours (paid and unpaid) per week

B.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Working hours	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 10 hours	5.3	5.3
11-20 hours	3.2	8.5
21-30 hours	14.9	23.4
31-40 hours	28.7	52.1
41-50 hours	23.4	75.5
51-60 hours	17	92.6
61-70 hours	3.2	95.7
71-80 hours	2.1	97.9
81-90 hours	1.1	98.9
> 90 hours	1.1	100
Total	100	

Mean = 43 total working hours

B.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 62, one invalid)

Working hours	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 10 hours	4.8	4.8
11-20 hours	4.8	9.7
21-30 hours	16.1	25.8
31-40 hours	25.8	51.6
41-50 hours	29.0	80.6
51-60 hours	12.9	93.5
61-70 hours	3.2	96.8
71-80 hours	1.6	98.4
81-90 hours	0.0	98.4
> 90 hours	1.6	100
Total	100	

Mean = 42 total working hours

Figure C: Total of remunerated working hours per week

C.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Working hours	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 10 hours	26.6	26.6
11-20 hours	20.2	46.8
21-30 hours	21.3	68.1
31-40 hours	27.7	95.7
41-50 hours	2.1	97.9
51-60 hours	2.1	100
Total	100	

Mean = 24 paid working hours

C.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 61, two invalid)

Working hours	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 10 hours	23.0	23.0
11-20 hours	42.6	65.6
21-30 hours	26.2	91.8
31-40 hours	8.2	100
Total	100	

Mean = 19 paid working hours

Figure D: Average monthly income

D.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Average monthly <i>net</i> income	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 500 euros	11.7	11.7
500–750 euros	9.6	21.3
750–1,000 euros	8.5	29.8
1,000–1,250 euros	25.5	55.3
1,250–1,500 euros	20.2	75.5
1,500–1,750 euros	9.6	85.1
1,750–2,000 euros	7.4	92.6
2,000–2,250 euros	3.2	95.7
2,250–2,500 euros	4.3	100
Total	100	

Median = 1,000–1,250 euros net per month

D.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 63)

Average monthly <i>gross</i> income	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 500 euros	9.5	9.5
500–750 euros	14.3	23.8
750–1,000 euros	30.2	54.0
1,000–1,250 euros	14.3	68.3
1,250–1,500 euros	12.7	81.0
1,500–1,750 euros	7.9	88.9
1,750–2,000 euros	3.2	92.1
2,000–2,250 euros	3.2	95.2
2,250–2,500 euros	1.6	96.8
2,500–2,750 euros	3.2	100
Total	100	

Median = 750–1,000 euros gross per month

Figure E: Cross tabulation of average monthly income categories with age categories, with mention of the approximate significance

E.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Average monthly net income	21-30 years old	31-40 years old	41-50 years old	≥ 51 years old	Total
≤ 1,000 euros	53.1%	23.3%	12.5%		30.9%
1,000-1,250 euros	28.1%	30.2%	6.3%		24.5%
1,250-1,500 euros	9.4%	16.3%	56.3%		20.2%
≥ 1,500 euros	9.4%	30.2%	25.0%	100%	24.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximate significance: 0.000

E.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 63)

Average monthly gross income	21-30 years old	31-40 years old	41-50 years old	≥ 51 years old	Total
≤ 750 euros	33.3%	26.7%	20.0%		23.8%
750-1,000 euros	33.3%	31.4%	33.3%		30.2%
1,000-1,500 euros	11.1%	20.0%	46.7%	50.0%	27.0%
≥ 1,500 euros	22.2%	22.9%		50.0%	19.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximate significance: 0.195

Figure F: Categories of average monthly income, needed and deemed appropriate

F.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Income categories	Average monthly net income	Average monthly income needed	Average monthly income deemed appropriate
≤ 1,000 euros	29.8%	20.2%	5.3%
1,000–1,250 euros	25.5%	33.0%	6.4%
1,250–1,500 euros	20.2%	22.3%	9.6%
≥ 1,500 euros	24.5%	24.5%	78.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%

F.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 63)

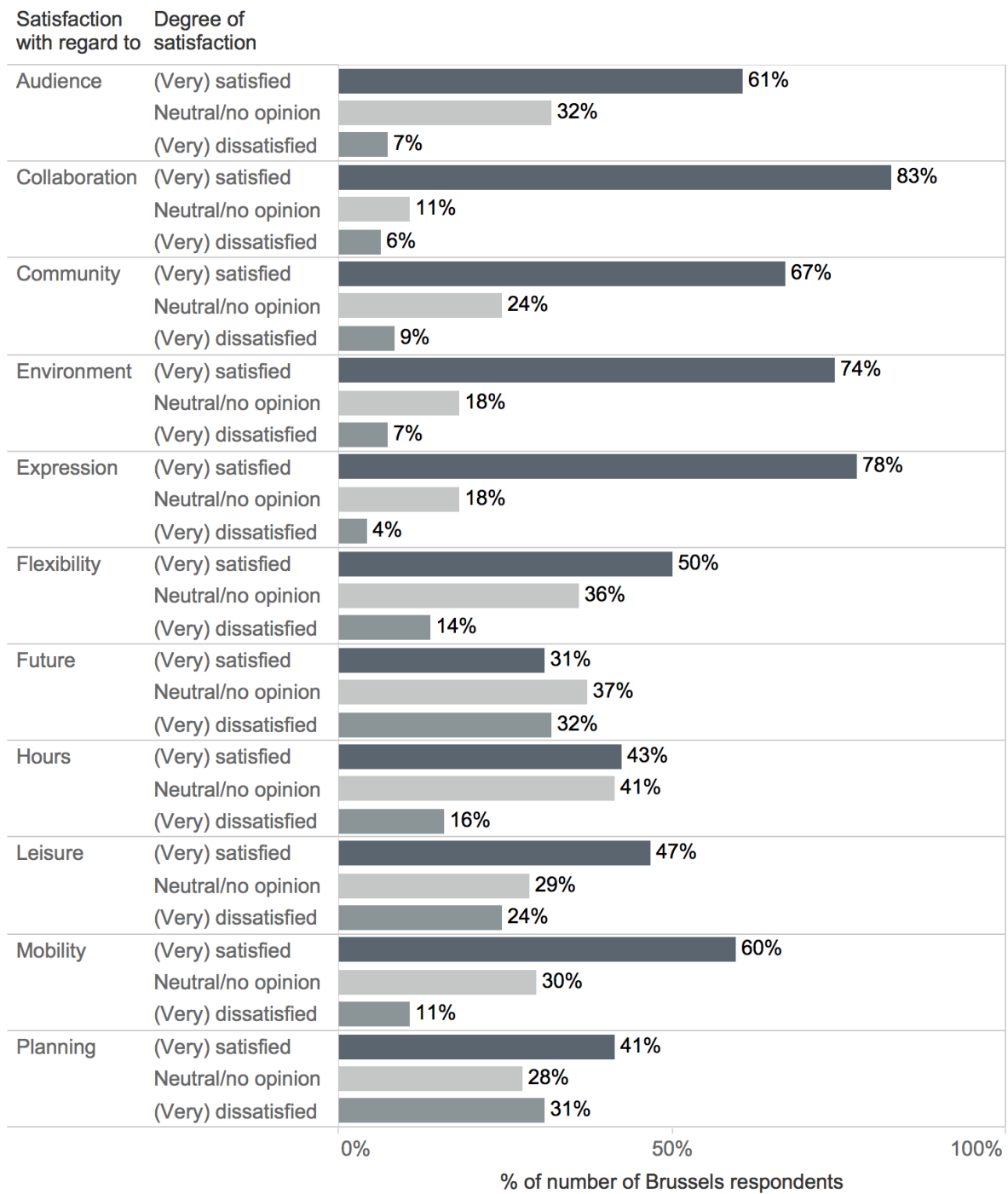
Income categories	Average monthly gross income	Average monthly income needed	Average monthly income deemed appropriate
≤ 750 euros	23.8%	6.3%	0.0%
750–1,000 euros	30.2%	31.7%	3.2%
1,000–1,500 euros	27.0%	33.4%	17.4%
≥ 1,500 euros	19.0%	28.6%	79.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

F.3. Comparison between Brussels-based (n=74) and Berlin-based (n=50) respondents that deem an income of 1,500 euros or more appropriate

Income categories ≥ 1,500 euros in detail	Average monthly income deemed appropriate	
	Brussels	Berlin
1,500–1,750 euros	22.3%	17.5%
1,750–2,000 euros	24.5%	12.7%
2,000–2,250 euros	19.1%	20.6%
2,250–2,500 euros	6.4%	11.1%
2,500–2,750 euros	6.4%	1.6%
2,750–3,000 euros		6.3%
≥ 3,000 euros		9.5%
Total	78.7%	79.4%

Figure G: Satisfaction levels

G.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)



G.2. Berlin-based respondents (n = 63)

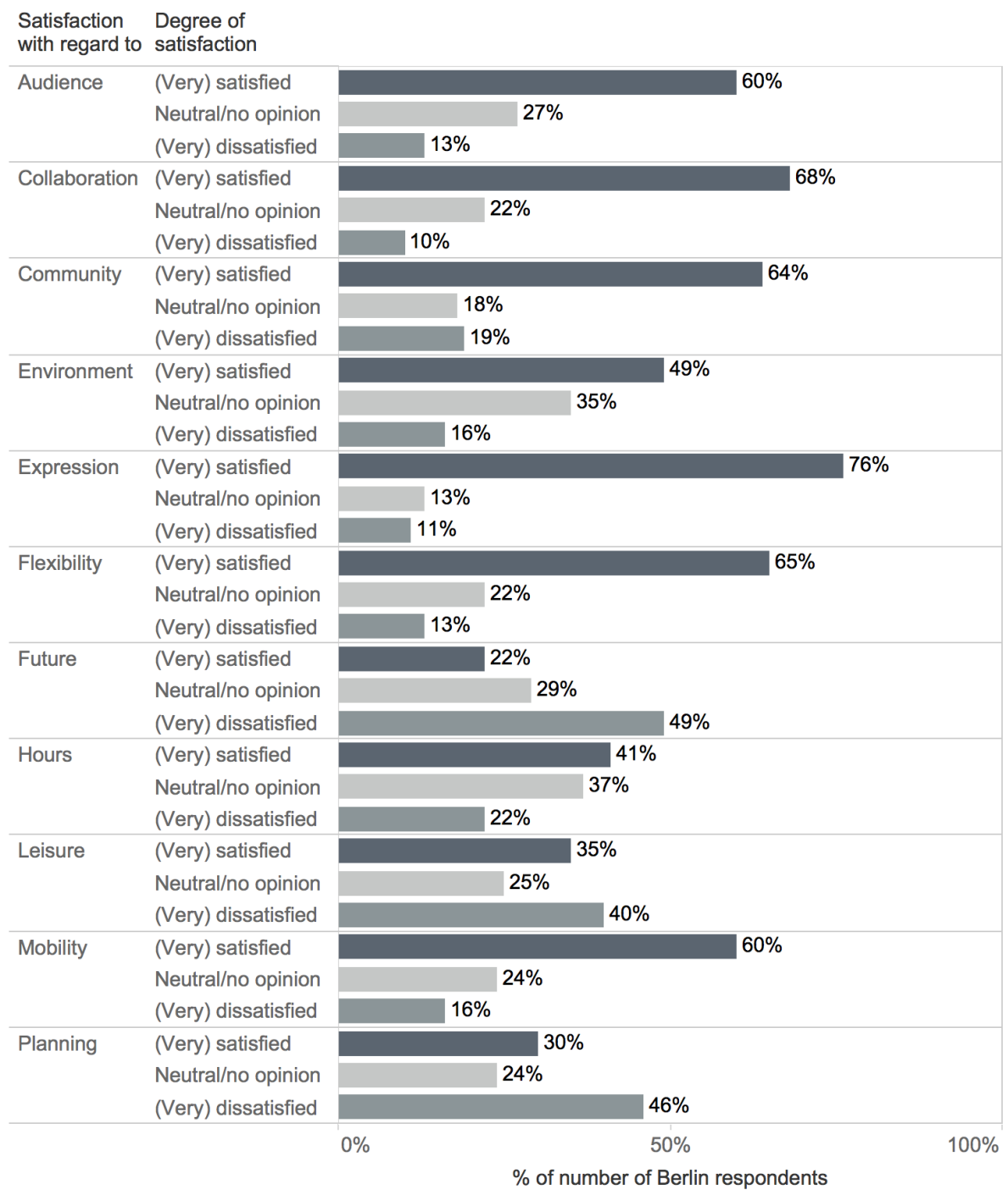


Figure H: Cross tabulation of age categories and the artist status

H.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Age categories	Without artist status	With artist status	Total
21–30 years	54.5%	16.0%	34.0%
31–40 years	34.1%	56.0%	45.7%
41–50 years	6.8%	26.0%	17.0%
Older than 50	4.5%	2.0%	3.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Approximate significance: 0.000

Figure I: Cross tabulation of average monthly income categories and the artist status

I.1. Brussels-based respondents (n = 94)

Average monthly net income	Without artist status	With artist status	Total
≤ 1,000 euros	45.5%	16.0%	29.8%
1,000–1,250 euros	15.9%	34.0%	25.5%
1,250–1,500 euros	11.4%	28.0%	20.2%
≥ 1,500 euros	27.3%	22.0%	24.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Approximate significance: 0.004

Annex 2: the Artist's Social Fund - Künstlersozialkasse

The Künstlersozialkasse is a division of the accident insurance Federation and Railways (Bund und Bahn) in Germany. With the implementation of the Artist's Social Insurance Act (KSVG, or Künstlersozialversicherungsgesetz) in 1983, it ensures that independent artists and publicists enjoy similar protection in statutory social insurance as employees. It is not a service provider, but it coordinates the transfer of contributions for its members to a health insurance of the members' choice and to statutory pension and social care insurance. Self-employed artists and publicists are entitled to the entire statutory service catalogue, but they must pay only half of the contributions due. The KSK covers the other half from a federal subsidy (20%) and social contributions from businesses (30%) that use art and publicity. The monthly contribution paid by an artist or publicist to the KSK depends on the amount of their income from work activities. If this is not above the marginal limit of 3,900.00 euros annually and if they are not career starters, the artist or publicist cannot make use of the KSK. Under the KSVG, starters are also insured for the statutory pension, the health insurance and the long-term care insurance, even if they are not expected to exceed the required minimum income. The first three years after the first recording of an independent artistic or publishing activity are considered as the start of the profession.

It must be stressed that the KSK is not an insurance itself and therefore not responsible for the implementation of pension, health insurance and long-term care insurance. It only reports the insured artists and publicists and forwards the *basic* contributions to the responsible institutions. Thus, in a way it takes over the task of an employer. More information can be found on their website: www.kuenstlersozialkasse.de.

Example of the calculations for contributions:

Minimum and maximum contributions exist within the KSK-system (which do not apply for career-starters). In 2017, the total lowest contribution for insurances: 72.9 euros (with child) or 74.14 euros (without child)

In 2017, the monthly contributions in the case of an expected year income of 10,000.00 euros, consisted of the following:

- Pension insurance according to the contribution rate of 18.70%
Share of the KSK-insured artist is 9.35% (50% of the rate)
Pension insurance contribution of the KSK-insured artist = 9.35% of 10,000.00
= 935.00 euros per year or 77.91 euros per month

- Health insurance according to the contribution rate of 14.60%
Share of the KSK-insured artists is 7.30% (50% of the rate)
Health insurance contribution of the KSK-insured artist = 7.30% of 10,000.00
= 730.00 euros per year or 60.83 euros per month

Note that extra costs for additional services of the artist's choice can apply (and which have to be covered by the artist alone), e.g. for early sick pay

- Care insurance according to the contribution rate of 2.55% (as a parent) or 2.80% (as a childless adult)
Share of the KSK-insured artist is 1.275% (or +0.25% without children)
Care insurance contribution of the KSK-insured artist = 1.275% (or 1.525%) of 10,000.00
= 127.50 (or 152.20) euros per year or 10.63 (12.71) euros per month

This results in a total of 149.37 euros per month for a self-employed artist with a child, and 151.45 euros per month for a self-employed artist without a child in the case of an expected year income of 10,000.00 euros.

Since the health insurance service is in fact not dependent on the amount of contribution by the insured person, but is equal for everybody, artists and publicists may tend to report a lower income to the KSK in order to save on insurance costs. This might happen despite of the fact that a higher contribution to the pension insurance, which leads to a higher pension, would benefit them and prevent poverty amongst the elderly.

If the self-employed artist or publicist is not a member of the KSK and the monthly income is:

- between 0.00 and 1,487.50 euros, they pay 223.00 euros per month
- between 1,487.50 and 2,231.25 euros, they pay 391.59 (with children) or 397.17 euros (without children)
- between 2,231.25 and 4,350.00 euros, they pay 17.55% (with children) or 17.80% (without children) of the declared income
- above 4,350.00 euros, they pay 763.43 (with children) or 774.30 euros (without children)

Following the calculations above, we may thus conclude that someone who is registered at the KSK and declares 1,500.00 euros per month (18,000.00 euros per year) therefore pays 109.50 euros for health insurance, whereas someone who is not registered at the KSK would pay 391,59 euros (with children) or 397,17 euros (without) per month. In this case,

the KSK-insured person has to pay less than one-third of what the regular self-employed person has to pay.

However, it should be noted that self-employed artists and publicists are discharged from paying health insurance on what they earn as freelancer if they combine self-employment with employment that provides more than half of the total income. Therefore, it should be stressed that this example is valid for self-employed artists and publicists who do not also work as employees or who do not earn more when employed.

Annex 3: informed consent

Title of the research project:

Choreographies of Precariousness. A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin

Name + e-mail address of the researcher:

Annelies Van Assche, Annelies.VanAssche@Ugent.be

Methodology of the research:

Longitudinal in-depth open interviews and participatory observation

Duration of the fieldwork:

max. 9 months

Please tick all that apply:

- I understand what is expected of me during this study
- I know that I will participate in the following experiments or test:
 - monthly in-depth open interviews on my working and living conditions as a professional contemporary dance artist based in Brussels or Berlin
 - observation of my creative process and working and living conditions in general
- I know that certain risk or discomforts could be connected to my participation
 - certain level of involvement in my work and living spheres
- I, and others, may benefit from this research in the following manner:
 - potential better living and working conditions for contemporary dance artists
 - other:
- My participation in this study is voluntary.
- The results of this research can be used for scientific purposes and may be published.
- My name will not be published, anonymity and confidentiality of the data are ensured at each stage of the investigation. Although I am aware of the possibility that some of my peers may recognize me in some of the statements published, even though these statements remain anonymous.
- I reserve the right to end my participation to the study at any time and I am aware that this may not produce any disadvantages for me
- For any questions, complaints, further follow-up, I know that after my participation I can contact:
 - Research Centers: CeSo KULeuven & S:PAM UGent

Annelies Van Assche

Ghent University, Performing Arts & Media, Department of Art Studies,
Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 41, Technicum 4/2, 9000 Ghent
Annelies.VanAssche@Ugent.be

I have read the above information and understand and have received answers to all my questions concerning this study. I agree to participate.

Date:

Name and signature participant

Name and signature researcher

Annex 4: overview of interviews and fieldnotes

Overview of interviews with informants in Brussels and Berlin

Brussels

- Informant A:
 - 25/3/2016: introductory conversation at the informant's residence in Brussels (unrecorded)
 - 20/5/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h49m (transcribed)
 - 30/8/2016: interview at Passage à Niveau in Brussels, 1h14m (transcribed)
- Informant B:
 - 25/4/2016: interview at Yuka Coffee House in Brussels, 1h38m (transcribed)
 - 13/7/2016: interview at Yuka Coffee House in Brussels, 1h18m (transcribed)
 - 20/9/2016: interview at HOME Café in Berlin, 1h53m (transcribed)
- Informant C:
 - 3/3/2016: introductory conversation at Café Or in Brussels (unrecorded)
 - 27/4/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h28m (transcribed)
 - 1/6/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h39m (transcribed)
 - 13/7/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h2m (transcribed)
- Informant D:
 - 17/3/2016: introductory conversation at Bar Beton in Brussels (unrecorded)
 - 20/5/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 2h21m (transcribed)
 - 23/6/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h51m (transcribed)
 - 25/8/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h5m (transcribed)
 - 23/12/2016: conversation at the informant's residence in Brussels, while watching footage of a residency (unrecorded)
- Informant E:
 - 25/3/2016: introductory conversation at Café Or in Brussels (unrecorded)
 - 25/4/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 2h18m (transcribed)
 - 16/6/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h49m (transcribed)

- 27/7/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h54m (transcribed)
- Informant F:
 - 25/3/2016: introductory conversation at the informant's residence in Brussels (unrecorded)
 - 14/6/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h53m (transcribed)
 - 21/9/2016: interview via Skype, 1h17m (transcribed)
- Informant G:
 - 2/3/2016: introductory conversation at Bar Stan in Leuven (unrecorded)
 - 27/4/2016: interview at De School van Gaasbeek in Lennik, 1h53m (transcribed)
 - 1/6/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 58m (transcribed)
 - 13/7/2016: interview at the informant's residence in Brussels, 1h15m (transcribed)

Berlin

- Informant A:
 - 4/1/2017: introductory conversation at K3|Tanzplan Hamburg, 55m (transcribed)
 - 24/3/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h30m (transcribed)
 - 7/6/2017: interview at Café Goldberg in Berlin, 1h15m (transcribed)
- Informant B:
 - 25/1/2017: introductory conversation at Hackbarth's in Berlin (unrecorded)
 - 8/3/2017: interview at 19grams in Berlin, 1h47m (transcribed)
 - 30/3/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 44m (transcribed)
 - 21/6/2017: interview at Oslo Kaffebar in Berlin, 1h46m (transcribed)
- Informant C:
 - 21/12/2016: introductory conversation at Café Szimpla in Berlin (unrecorded)
 - 1/2/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h27m (transcribed)
 - 28/3/2017: interview at Café Fleury in Berlin, 1h26m (transcribed)
 - 10/6/2017: interview at Café Dujardin in Berlin, 55m (transcribed)
- Informant D:
 - 5/12/2016: introductory conversation at Café Fleury in Berlin (unrecorded)
 - 27/1/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h22m (transcribed)
 - 3/3/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h25m (transcribed)
 - 29/6/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h4m (transcribed)

- Informant E:
 - 6/1/2017: introductory conversation at the informant's residence in Berlin (unrecorded)
 - 13/2/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h59m (transcribed)
 - 25/4/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 2h20m (transcribed)
 - 21/6/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h59m (transcribed)
- Informant F:
 - 8/1/2017: introductory conversation at Clärchen's Ballhaus in Berlin (unrecorded)
 - 27/1/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h46m (transcribed)
 - 3/3/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h44m (transcribed)
 - 2/5/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h57m (transcribed)
- Informant G:
 - 15/12/2016: introductory conversation at Café Frau Hönig in Berlin (unrecorded)
 - 12/2/2017: interview at Silo Coffee in Berlin, 1h35m (transcribed)
 - 25/3/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 59m (transcribed)
 - 13/6/2017: interview at the informant's residence in Berlin, 1h9m (transcribed)

Overview of fieldnotes on activities of informants in Brussels and Berlin

Brussels

- Notes informant A
 - 6/6/2016: observation of a rehearsal for an existing performance by the informant in Brussels
 - 2/11/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Berlin
- Notes informant B
 - 27/5/2016: attendance of a performance created by the informant in Brussels
- Notes informant C
- Notes informant D
 - 19/4/2016: attendance of a performance in which the informant performed in Leuven
 - 22/5/2016: attendance of a performance in which the informant performed in Antwerp
 - 3/11/2017: attendance of a performance in which the informant performed in Berlin

- Notes informant E
 - 19/4/2016: attendance of a performance in which the informant performed in Leuven
 - 22/5/2016: attendance of a performance in which the informant performed in Antwerp
 - 26/6/2016: watching video footage of a performance by the informant
 - 16/11/2016: studio observation of a residency of the informant in Antwerp
 - 17/11/2016: studio observation of a residency of the informant in Antwerp
 - 18/11/2016: studio observation of a residency of the informant in Antwerp
 - 14/9/2017: attendance of a try-out by the informant in Brussels
- Notes informant F
 - 30/5/2016: studio observation of the informant's rehearsal of an existing performance in Brussels
 - 6/6/2016: observation of the informant's replacement rehearsal for an existing performance in Brussels
 - 30/8/2016: the meeting with the informant was canceled
 - 6/12/2016: studio observation of a rehearsal of an existing performance by the informant in Brussels
 - 7/12/2016: studio observation of a rehearsal of an existing performance by the informant in Brussels
- Notes informant G
 - 27/4/2016: studio observation of a residency of the informant outside of Brussels
 - 31/8/2017: studio observation of a residency of the informant in Leuven
 - 4/11/2017: a conversation with a collaborator of the informant in Berlin

Berlin

- Notes informant A
 - 4/11/2016: attendance of a solo performance of the informant in Berlin
 - 4/1/2017: studio observation of a residency of the informant in Hamburg
 - 5/1/2017: studio observation of a residency of the informant in Hamburg
 - 19/1/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Hamburg
 - 30/3/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant Hamburg
 - 20/5/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Berlin
 - 24/6/2017: informal meeting at the interviewer's residence in Berlin
- Notes informant B
 - 21/2/2017: studio observation of a try-out of a new creation by the informer in Berlin
 - 23/2/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Berlin
- Notes informant C
 - 23/1/2017: studio observation of an early creative process by the informant in Berlin
 - 16/2/2017: informant cancels observation in Berlin
 - 22/3/2017: studio observation of a try-out of a new creation by the informant in Berlin

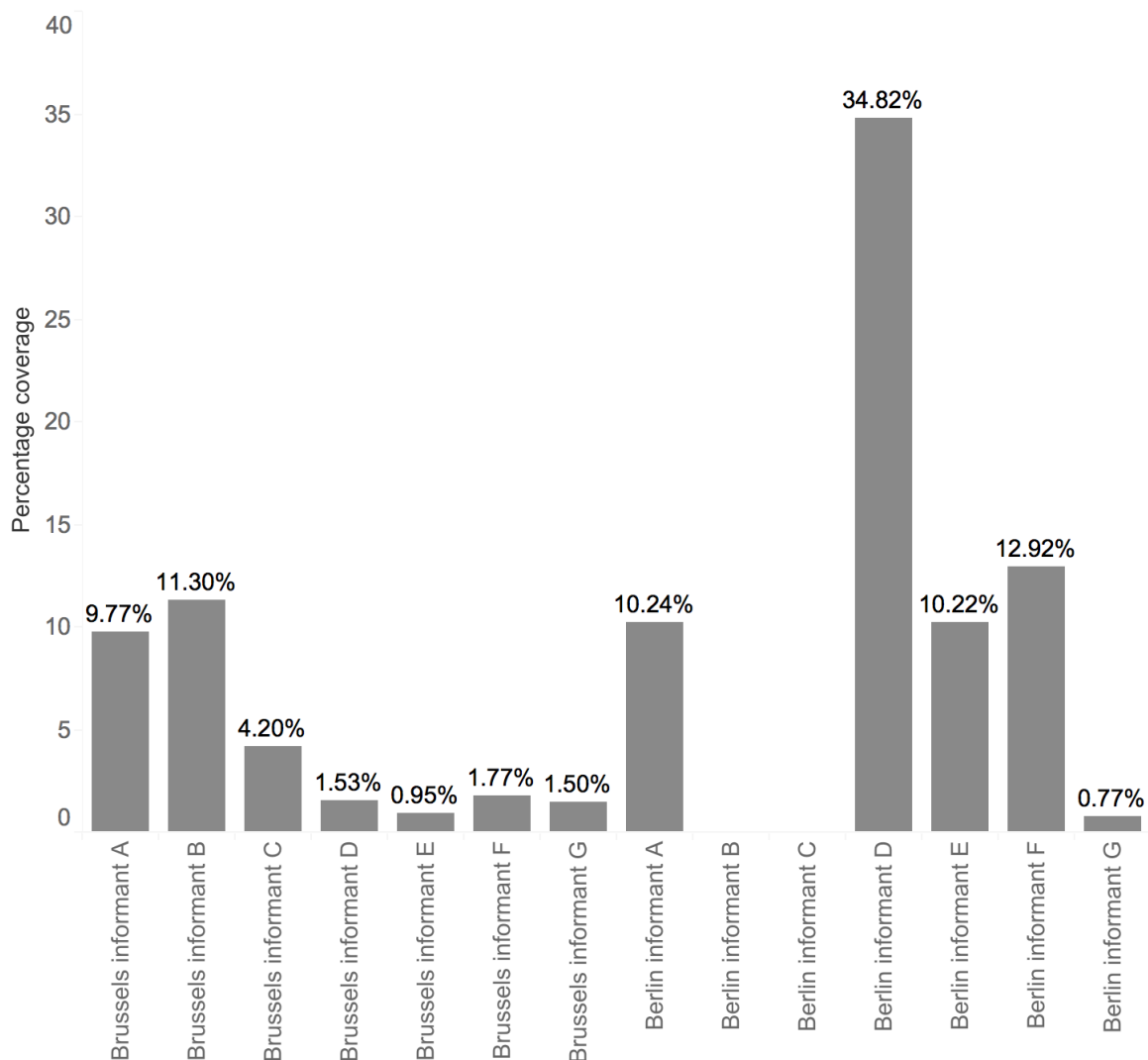
- 24/3/2017: attendance of a performance by the performer in Berlin
- 10/6/2017: attendance of a performance together with the informant in Berlin
- Notes informant D
 - 22/9/2016: watching a video interview with the informant
 - 11/12/2016: watching video footage of a performance by the informant
 - 19/3/2017: attendance of a lecture by the informant in Ghent
 - 25/3/2017: attendance of an informal meeting at the informant's residence in Berlin
- Notes informant E
 - 31/1/2017: studio observation of a rehearsal for an existing performance by the informant in Berlin
 - 6/2/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Berlin
 - 5/11/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Berlin
- Notes informant F
 - 6/2/2017: watching video footage of a video statement by the informant
 - 29/3/2017: studio observation of a work-in-progress showing by the informant in Berlin
- Notes informant G
 - 12/1/2017: studio observation of a workshop by the informant in Berlin
 - 10/6/2017: attendance of a performance by the informant in Berlin

Annex 5: Nvivo coding tables and charts

Figure J: Nvivo Query - Text Search matches for 'mail*' per informant

Informant	Source	Coding References	Percentage coverage
Berlin Informant A	Interviews	16	0.12%
	Logbook	1	0.07%
Berlin Informant B	Interviews	4	0.05%
	Logbook	2	0.29%
Berlin Informant C	Interviews	21	0.14%
	Logbook	-	-
Berlin Informant D	Interviews	3	0.02%
	Logbook	-	-
Berlin Informant E	Interviews	0	0.00%
	Logbook	-	-
Berlin Informant F	Interviews	6	0.04%
	Logbook	1	0.02%
Berlin Informant G	Interviews	4	0.03%
	Logbook	-	-
Brussels Informant A	Interviews	23	0.12%
	Logbook	10	1.98%
Brussels Informant B	Interviews	16	0.08%
	Logbook	11	0.04%
Brussels Informant C	Interviews	19	0.16%
	Logbook	1	0.04%
Brussels Informant D	Interviews	75	0.37%
	Logbook	27	0.55%
Brussels Informant E	Interviews	15	0.07%
	Logbook	-	-
Brussels Informant F	Interviews	19	0.10%
	Logbook	-	-
Brussels Informant G	Interviews	65	0.40%
	Logbook	1	0.05%
Total:	Interviews	286	1.70%
	Logbook	54	3.04%

Figure K.1.: percentage coded within 'burnout' per informant



Examples:

- This chart demonstrates that almost 35% of all the source text coded under the node 'burnout' stem from Berlin Informant D.
- This chart shows that 69% of the source text coded under the node 'burnout' stems from informants from the fieldwork in Berlin.
- This chart reveals that two Berlin-based informants never addressed signs of 'burnout' in the source text, because none of the interview material was coded under the node 'burnout'.

Figure K.2. and figure K.3. on the next page provide these percentages when separating the Brussels-based informants from the Berlin-based informants.

Figure K.2.: percentage coded within 'burnout' per Brussels informant

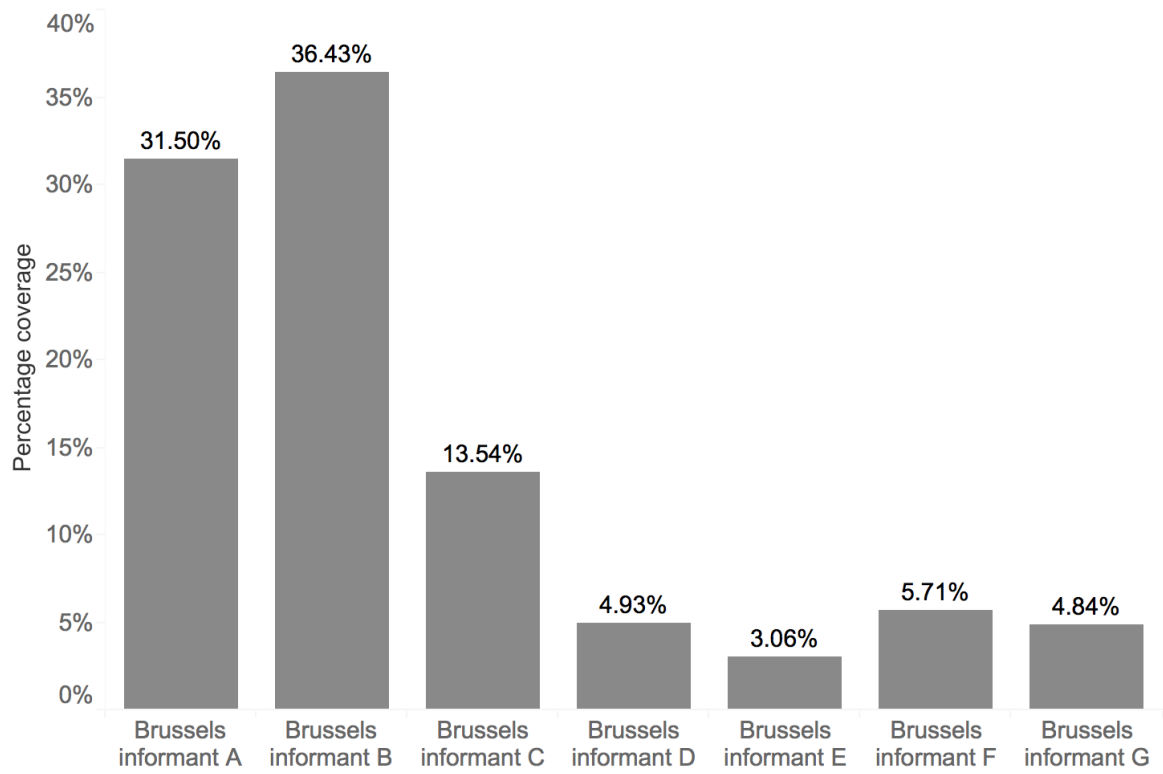
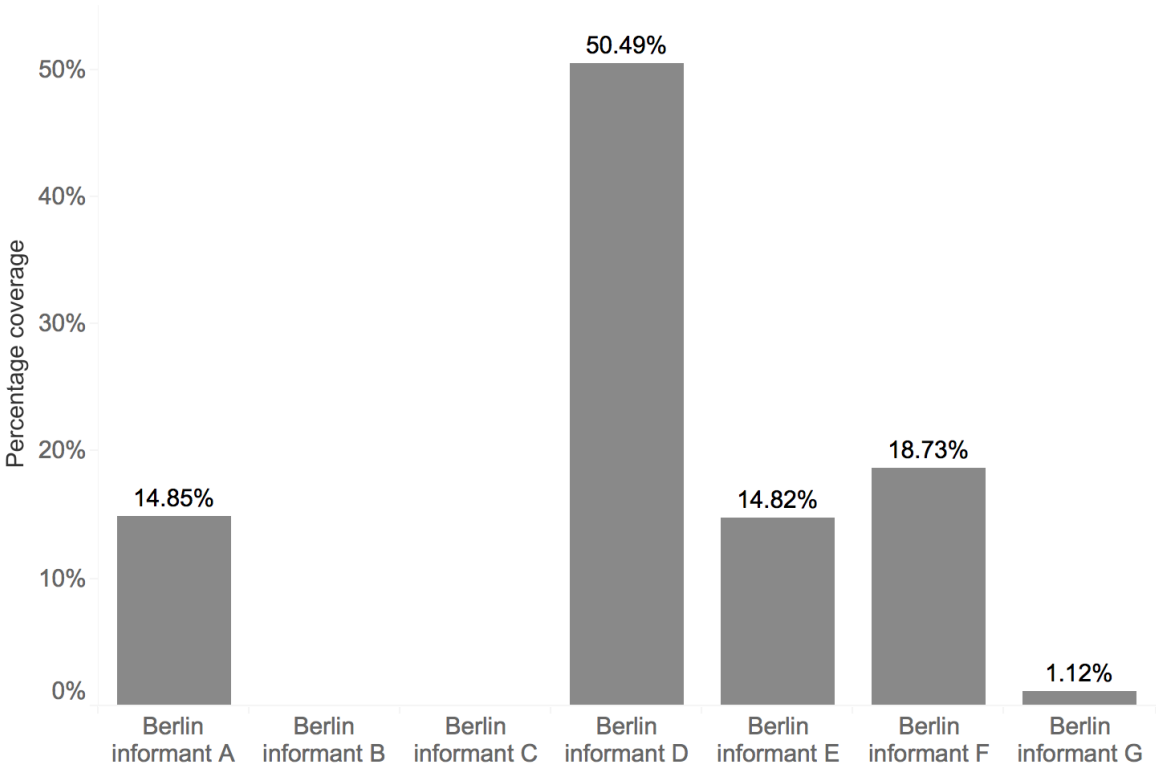


Figure K.3.: percentage coded within 'burnout' per Berlin informant



Annex 6: minimum wage scales in the collective labor agreement for performing arts

Minimum wage scales in Belgium are always determined by sector and we can therefore not compare to a general minimum wage scale for Belgium. The Collective Labor Agreement (CLA) for Performing Arts determines minimum wages for performing arts employees when employed in the Flemish or Brussels-Capital Region. This annex provides supplementary information on the minimum wage scales according to the CLA for Performing Arts at the time of administering the survey in Brussels in 2015. The website of the Performing Arts Social Fund (www.podiumkunsten.be) offers the latest update of the wage scales within the CLA Performing Arts. The CLA does acknowledge the project-based and short-term nature of the work through offering adapted wage scales for contracts less than four months. The gross minimum wages in short-term contracts are somewhat higher as they include legal benefits determined by the government, which the long-term employed receive throughout the year (such as Christmas bonuses and holiday fees).

When consulting the overview of salary groups for the Performing Arts, theoretically all performing artists and creators belong to Group A. However, Wage scale C always counts as a minimum scale for the employees with a job description under group A working for employers receiving a low subsidy. At the time of the survey, the subsidy had to be lower than 301,852 euros indexed (260,000 euros initially). Therefore, when referring to the minimum income for performing artists, one should compare to wage scale C. The gross-net calculator by SD Worx converts the gross minimum salary of wage scale C of 1,766.25 gross for a career starter at the time of the survey to a net salary fitting the following profile: single and living alone, no children, employee, full-time, 38-hours-per-week-contract, no extra benefits. The minimum wage according to the CLA Performing Arts results in a monthly net income of 1,460.04 euros. This minimum wage only increases modestly with seniority.

In comparison, the living wage for a single person living alone was 833,71 euros net and 555.81 euros for people living together at the time of administering the survey. Furthermore, the unemployment allowances according to RVA/ONEM for the first three months of unemployment varied between 972,14 euros net (min) and 1,623.44 euros net (max) with a difference in evolution and withholding tax whether single and living together.

Annex 7: logbook excerpts

Logbook A

Wednesday Dance Marley delivery from [dance company]. [Name] comes at 1pm with his car to meet [my collaborator] and me. [...] We spend eight hours cleaning the dance floor. We roll out all five rolls and the degree of filthiness is breathtaking. We borrow a cleaning machine, I buy a sponge disk, we buy bottles of cleaning cream. I am on my knees scrubbing the black scratches off the surface. [Name] mops behind me.

Thursday [My collaborator] sets up the server space for the production website. My job to theme it and fill it with contents. Another eight hours of dance floor cleaning. [...] I keep annoying [my collaborator] to contact [the office of cultural affairs]. I have 2 euros in my account and I have to make purchases for the production, from costumes to food for the extras, let alone food for myself. [My collaborator] is on it, but complains that he has to forward me money out of his own pocket to help me. He makes a money transfer of 500 euros out of his own pocket into my account as an advance on my artist fee. Why is he so annoyed? I receive benefits from the Job Center, I don't have any funds to live off in the meantime. He knows that. It is not as if I had chosen it this way. Why does he complain? He really does not make it a pleasant thing, borrowing money. As if it was my fault. So I keep haggling him to sort it out with the [the office of cultural affairs]. I worry for my full artist fee. And I worry that - with the change of administrator in charge of our project - there will be excuses to "loose" our file and our claim for production support. I am very cautious. We start engaging ourselves financially, and I want the security that we will not run into debt and a lot of trouble.

Friday Another eight hours of dance floor cleaning. Lots of happiness as we can see the work progress. We have dinner, we laugh to tears. Good spirits overall.

Saturday Day off, my mother's birthday gathering.

Sunday Meeting at 7pm with [name]. Arrangement of the party. [Name] is a calm, matter-of-factly kind of guy. Calming to know that he will take over some part of the second show day's organization. I keep harassing [my collaborator] about the [office of cultural affairs].

Tuesday [Name] has a day off. I work on the website. It takes ages to find and style the right theme. [My collaborator] installs an online ticketing plug-in. Troubleshooting of theme and plug-in. Flyer design. We launch the website. In as much as I know that we need to promote ourselves in advance, well before the production even started, I worry about the fact that we will boast and brag about a dance piece that neither [my collaborator] nor I have created, yet.

Logbook B

Thursday

7:30 clock rings

During breakfast:

- writing email to [presenter] to talk about showing [piece] in Tel Aviv. Canceling the 12th of January, but agree to make it later with more support.
- writing email to [choreographer] to answer her email about the weekend rehearsals.
- checking album cover information from pressing plant to communicate it to [graphic designer]
- reading emails from our label
- reading email from [choreographer] about a proposal to be choreographic assistance for a youth project in February/March
- preparing rehearsal

9:00 leaving for rehearsals.

Taking bus, SBahn, UBahn and another bus.

10:00 Rehearsals

- watching video from day before
- discuss costumes, etc.
- reading email from [residency responsible] about evening program info
- working with sound designer

14:00 lunch break all together

Taking a 10-min walk outside

15:00 rehearsals

18:30 quick shower, quick falafel

20:00 to the theater, watching a piece from [theater maker] with the whole crew.

Discussion with costume designer afterwards about next week and what has to be done

23:00 home

short talk with my flatmate

1:00 reading a great book and sleeping

Friday

6:00 clock rings

- Breakfast

Gathering all information for album

cover and sending it to designer in Iceland

9:30 leaving for rehearsals

10:30 rehearsals

- talking about the day before and what we want to do now

- talking about what has to be organized and splitting the work

- writing email to costume designer

- writing to dramaturge and asking him if he could do the program text

- answering residency program mails

12:00 actual start of rehearsals: warming up

12:30 rehearsing scenes

14:00 lunch break

15:00 rehearsals continue starting with organization, trying to understand why a prop we bought a month ago did not arrive.

16:30 talk with [light designer] about light setup for tech on Monday

17:20 have to stop rehearsal because [collaborator] has to catch the train

'till 19:00 cleaning and emptying the space off our stuff because someone else will come into the space after us

'till 20:30 talking with [band members] about the album organization and writing to the cover designer. Sending him all the information while having dinner.

22:00 arriving home + talking to my flatmates

24:00 lying in bed

Some exchange with the album cover designer, because he lives in Iceland and time is different there

2:00 sleeping

Saturday

8:00 waking up

- talking to my boyfriend on the phone for an hour
- reading news

9:30 leaving for rehearsals for a production in March with [choreographer].

- I have to learn a role.
- too late for having breakfast home.
- grabbing a coffee and bread on the way.

11:00 - 16:30 rehearsal start

- learning the piece and movement material and text from the performer whose part I will take over
- half an hour break in-between

17:00 in the residency studio

- changing cloths
- writing this diary

19:00 home and cooking

21:00 Party at home starts

22:00 first cover proposals are coming in from the graphic designer + discussing the covers with friends

23:00 - 2:00 in bed creating some new covers for the album myself

Sunday

8:00 alarm waking up

'till 9:15 having new ideas for the cover, creating them and sending them to [band members]

9:30 leaving the house

- taking bus, train, UBahn, bus to the theater
- grabbing breakfast and lunch at the train station on the way and think that this is a quite expensive way of living

10:30 preparing tea and changing clothes.

- I have a feeling I get sick and take vitamins.

11:00 - 16:40 rehearsals with [choreographer]

- half an hour lunch in between

16:40 writing diary

17:00 shower and leaving for home

Meeting [collaborator] for chatting and hanging out, digesting band and rehearsal stuff

2:00 good night

Monday

This is my free day!! My collaborators are rehearsing, but I take a day off to recover.

11:00 waking up without clock

- lying in bed for an hour
- reading a book and checking some emails

12:00 having breakfast with my flatmate who also has a day off

- showing him video ideas for [band]
- talking about weekend rehearsals

14:00 cleaning my room

- unpacking my suit case because I did not manage for one week to do that. So now I feel more home.

15:00 Going for a walk outside

- thinking about costumes
- buying some make up and costume stuff
- shopping for food, getting home, hanging out

18:00 cooking dinner: vegetables!!!

19:00 going to a friend's place, hanging out
bed time... I forgot when

Annex 8: NVivo coding schemes Brussels and Berlin

