



# Hybrid Dance Artists: A Counterstrategy against Precarity

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*Image: Rehearsal of Pulse, picture by Tinka Hoogterp, edited by Kim Hoogterp*

‘The dancer dances in a constant dependence on the world in which  
the dance is being made.’

*Bojana Kunst*

## *Abstract*

This thesis defends the following statement: *In the current socio-economic environment of professional dance in the Netherlands, the hybridity of the professional practice of dance artists can be understood as an instrument for deprecarisation.* Within this thesis the ontology and practice of hybridity is scrutinised and defined. Additionally, the precarious state of dance labour is analysed. The research methods at the core of this thesis consist of both literature review and ethnographic fieldwork. The ethnographic fieldwork consists of 12 interviews, four (informal) conversations, and a survey spread in the field of dance. The literature review draws on concepts and ideas of precarity and hybridity from the fields of dance studies, the arts, social studies, and zoological studies. Following thoughts on precarity by Annelies van Assche (2018) Bojana Kunst (2015a; 2015b; 2017), Dunja Njaradi (2014), Isabell Lorey (2015), and Susan Leigh Foster's notion of 'bodies for hire' (1997, 255), the precarious position of dance labour is analysed. This precarious state originates from the profession's both immaterial and highly physical character, as well as the lack of attention and support for the wide variety of skills, tasks and expertise dance artists need in order to sustain their practice. Following Camiel van Winkel, Pascal Gielen, and Koos Zwaan's definition of a hybrid (visual) artist (2012), as well as definitions from the fields of zoology and sociology, the *hybrid* professional dance practice is defined. A hybrid dance practice fits the following three conditions: a) *inherently different elements have merged and are equally present*, b) *binary distinctions are not perceivable*, and c) *the borders of the practice reach beyond the limits of one profession, context, or area.* Following case studies, four types of hybridity are identified as *contextual*, *artistic*, *skillset*, or *border* hybridity. An outline of the disadvantages and advantages of hybridity shows that hybridity increases a practice's resilience and sustainability, thus improving working conditions and allowing the artist to use a variety of skills within it. Following a discussion of Klaus Dörre's idea of deprecarisation (2005) and Van Assche's notion of 'flexicurity' (2017, 240), hybridity is introduced as a strategy that fosters the inclusion of different practices into one professional practice. Finally, three examples from the field, demonstrate hybridity's ability to serve as a counterstrategy against precarity. This hybridity needs to be fostered by societal actors. Furthermore, the dance profession needs to be recognised for its far-reaching value within society.

## *Foreword*

The origin of this thesis lies within a conversation with artistic director Kristin de Groot on the current precarious state of freelance dancers in the Netherlands and a more personal wish to understand my identity as a dance artist. The catalysing force for the continuation of this research in the form of an MA thesis came from the encouragement of my supervisor Laura Karreman. As you may read between the written lines of this thesis, the discussed matter comes from a deep love for the dance profession and a deep-rooted desire to trigger a change within society regarding the position of dance artists. It is indeed the 'heart work' Karreman and Marijn de Langen refer to (2020).

During the process of writing this thesis, the dance field was brought to a standstill on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Following the same rise-and-fall motion as the pandemic itself, the dance field is slowly regaining mobility and strength. This pandemic will unquestionably impact the performing arts in the future. I hope that the counterstrategy articulated within this thesis will serve as a way to stabilise those who choose this field as a profession.

My gratitude goes out to Laura Karreman, for her supervision, support and interest in my research from its initial start. I thank Kristin de Groot for providing the time and space to conduct an important part of the fieldwork within the walls of Dansateliers in Rotterdam. I thank Joseph, Connor, Kim, Marta, Jagoda, Ingrid, Sigrid, Andreas, Andrea, Valentina, Aida, Alina, and Makiko for sharing their thoughts and experiences. I could not have done it without you. A special thanks goes to the ladies of the Saturday and Sunday nights: Naomi, Kareth, Polina, Arianne and Mai, for the uplifting Zoom calls and encouraging words. I thank my peers of the MA Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy for the inspiring discussions. I have deep gratitude for Naomi, Kareth, and Maud for proofreading and providing valuable feedback. I am grateful for the unconditional support I receive from my parents Anneke and Marti Hoogterp, my dear siblings Elmar, Tinka, and Yoram, and my dear friends. Finally, I thank Davide for his lightness, encouragement, support and clear mind.

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## *Introduction*

‘Ever since I am a dancer. People keep telling me: Waaaaaaaaaaaauw! It must be amazing to do what you do: just dancing ... .’ Ryan Djojokarso.<sup>1</sup>

Djojokarso's words during Tabea Martin's *Duet for Two Dancers* resulted with laughter from the audience. Most understood the sarcasm in Djojokarso's voice; dancers nowadays do a lot more than just dancing.

To be able to sustain their practice, a considerable number of dance artists in the Netherlands need to engage in a wide variety of practices and tasks that do not seem to belong to the field of ‘contemporary dance’.<sup>2</sup> This polyvalent aspect is both encouraged and looked down upon by the field: hybrid or multidisciplinary art is rewarded, while engaging in more than one professional practice is seen as failing to maintain a full-time dance practice. Only some of the dance artists who refer to themselves or their practice as ‘hybrid’, seem to succeed in navigating the intricate socio-economic environment of the Netherlands.

Despite its negative connotations – like precarious working conditions and an ‘impurity’ of the work – hybridity has the potential to increase the sustainability and adaptability of the dance profession. As the field will remain in need of ways to do this, within this thesis I will demonstrate how this potentiality can be seen and utilised. Moreover, I propose to define hybridity as a strategy that enables the dance artist to move away from precarity: deprecarisation.

In order to do this, I define what hybridity *is* and how it relates to the working conditions within the field of dance in the Netherlands. Subsequently, I discuss what hybridity can *do* as a tool and as a strategy against precarisation. Based on 12 case studies, this research demonstrates how hybridity can increase the sustainability of professional dance practices. Furthermore, defining the hybridity of professional dance practices will provide society with a deeper understanding of the complexity and potentiality of danced labour. I argue that incorporating

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<sup>1</sup> *Duet for Two Dancers*, by Tabea Martin, as seen on the 07-06-2019 during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dansateliers held at Theater Rotterdam in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘contemporary dance’ has been contested and critiqued due to the fact that there is not just one description of what contemporary dance is or can be. It is even described by Bojana Cvejić as a vague and undetermined concept that solely exists to distinguish between the production of dance nowadays from western dance styles like ballet or academic dance, non-western dance styles or forms of non-artistic usage such as dance therapy (2015, 5). Despite this critique, this is still the term dance artists use to identify their professional dance practice.

hybridity as a counterstrategic tool can lead to the profession's deprecarisation and re-evaluation.

As described by Annelies van Assche, the term deprecarisation is borrowed from Klaus Dörre, a sociologist who outlines several counterstrategies against precarity (Van Assche 2017, 240). Following Dörre's idea of deprecarisation, theatre scholar Katharina Pewny discusses how some dance artists (mainly male) have managed to have a successful career through performing their precarity (2011). Van Assche adds to this discussion by arguing that deprecarisation does not require a stable position at an institution, but rather a 'flexicurity' approach that could lead to a more sustainable future (2017, 240). In this approach, sustainability can be reached by engaging in more than one job. The hybridity approach I am discussing in this thesis goes even a step further. Rather than combining different jobs, my notion of hybridity involves the inclusion and absorption of skills, knowledge, and expertise from other areas into one professional practice.

In this thesis, I incorporate Dörre's idea of deprecarisation and Van Assche's thoughts on the deprecarisation of dance work to clarify how hybridisation can increase the sustainability of the dance artist's professional practice. Hybridity in a professional practice can, through uniqueness, adaptability and flexibility, help to strengthen the sustainability of the profession and to move it away from precarity.

Danced labour finds itself in an unstable and precarious position and the dance field of the Netherlands is in constant transformation. Changes in governmental funding and support have a direct influence on the working conditions of dance artists, their self-image, and the amount of respect they receive from society. Bringing the dance profession towards less precarious working conditions needs to incorporate a re-assessment of what value dance and dance labour can potentially have for society.

Over the past seven or eight years, I have become increasingly aware of the difference between the way in which the professional practice of dance artists is perceived outside the field of dance in the Netherlands, and what it actually consists of. The perception of the profession has not transformed as much as the professional practice itself. Part of this transformation is present in the relation between choreographer and dancer. This change was already observed during the 90s when 'credits were not as obvious as five years before' (Talk 14, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, a choreographer is no longer solely somebody who tells dancers what

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<sup>3</sup> 'Credits of dance performances before the 90s were something similar to this is the choreographer, and these are the dancers. From the second half of the 90s, it became: this is the choreographer and creation in collaboration with the dancers.' (Talk 14, 2019)

movement to make. Dancers are no longer mere executors of an artistic idea or choreography they do not have any ownership of. The linear hierarchy between choreographer and dancer has in a considerable number of cases, transformed into a more horizontal one.

In addition, dance artists are increasingly working on a freelance basis. In the Netherlands, this is partly caused by a decrease in dance companies able to provide stable contracts within the contemporary dance field since the subsidy cuts in 2012. Recent debates during *Moving Futures Festival* in 2019 demonstrated concern regarding the state of the precarious working conditions of dance artists in the Netherlands (Dansmakers n.d.).<sup>4</sup> Affected by the subsidy cuts in 2012 (Pim van den Dool 2012), threatened by more cuts in the near future (Joke Beeckmans 2019), and an uncertain existence post-pandemic,<sup>5</sup> the professional dance field in the Netherlands is preparing itself for an uncertain future. By analysing the profession's hybridity, I offer a more thorough understanding of the complexity of the professional practice of dance artists that provides new ways to increase the sustainability of the profession.

### *Thesis Statement*

The precarity, instability, and irregularity often seen in freelance practices forces dance artists to move their practice beyond the borders of their field, profession, or even education. In some cases, the professional practice can best be described as hybrid. But what does it mean to describe dance as a 'hybrid' professional practice?

Hybridity is often discussed with regard to the mixing, merging, or 'fusing' of dance styles or diversity in the cultural backgrounds of dance artists (Olaf Kuhlke and Adam M. Pine 2014, vii-ix). Other associations with hybridity in dance are linked to the art form's complexity or impurity as it originates from other art forms (Jerrold Levinson 1984, 8). Within the field of dance, 'hybrid' is a rather popular buzzword as it suggests progression, transformation, and innovation.<sup>6</sup> It is something dance artists want to be defined by. All these ideas, associations, and definitions exist within the field of dance. However, the notion of hybridity that I am

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<sup>4</sup> Concerned by the financial vulnerability and insecurity of the profession since the subsidy cuts in 2012, dance professionals, theatre programmers and representatives from institutions looked for new ways to produce, programme and guide dance artists towards a more sustainable practice during the *Moving Futures* festival in 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Referring to the corona pandemic in 2020 which is - at the time of writing - actively affecting the dance field in the Netherlands due to the regulations imposed by the government: including the temporary closure of theatre, venues and dance studios.

<sup>6</sup> A survey on hybridity within dance practices was spread by the author within the field of dance in the Netherlands in 2019. This survey was part of the preliminary study for this thesis. From the 40 respondents, 87,5% answered 'yes' to the question of if they see their own practice as hybrid. When asked why their practice can be defined as hybrid, only three of the 40 professional practices could actually be defined as such (full survey results are available on request).



defining in this research is not focussed on the mixed nature of the art form, the dancers' cultural backgrounds, or innovative artistic ideas, but on the professional practice of the dance artists.

In the field of visual arts in the Netherlands, research has already been conducted on the hybridity of the professional practice of visual artists (Camiel van Winkel, Pascal Gielen, and Koos Zwaan 2012). Even though several scholars have discussed hybridity with regard to dance styles or cultural backgrounds in performance (Kuhlke and Pine 2014, vii-ix), there is a general lack of similar studies on the hybridity of the dance profession.

Next to defining hybridity within professional dance practices, the effect of hybridity on the working conditions of dance artists is examined within this thesis. According to the artistic advisor of a dance academy in Tilburg, the Netherlands, there is a connection between the increase in freelance dance artists in the Netherlands and the increase in dance artists who combine practices (Talk 13, 2019). The emergence of hybridity within the field of dance alongside the significant increase in freelance workforces among dance artists suggests that the two phenomena are related. Hybridity seems to function as a survival strategy.

With the hypothesis that hybridity has the potential to bring a professional dance practice towards deprecarisation, following current socio-economic changes and case studies of professional dance practices, this thesis defends the following statement: *In the current socio-economic environment of professional dance in the Netherlands, the hybridity of the professional practice of dance artists can be understood as an instrument for deprecarisation.*

### *Methodology*

The field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands is the area where my research takes place. For this purpose, I will describe the field from my in-and-out perspective as both dance artist and dance scholar. As I have been working as a dance artist within the dance field of the Netherlands since 2012, my discussion of dance work cannot exclude my personal experiences and insights. Moreover, it is these experiences and my more recent academic experience that led to the creation of this thesis. Thus, the field of dance is researched from *within* my professional dance practice and from *outside* by the distance and overview provided by academic research.

As the subject of this thesis moves between the areas of ontology and practice – concerning ways of understanding what hybridity *is* and what it can *do* – the research methods at its core consist of both literature study and ethnographic fieldwork.

The ethnographic fieldwork has centred on 12 case studies that examine the professional practices of dance artists who are active on a freelance or contract basis within the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands. In order to create a group of case studies that included various voices, the case studies were selected based on the dance artist's work experience and the stability of their practice.<sup>7</sup> With the aim of understanding the nature of their professional practice and to capture their personal experiences of their working conditions, I conducted a total of 12 qualitative interviews with the artists (see appendix p. 48-49). During the interviews, I followed the unstructured method described by Bonnie Brennen, in which open-ended conversations focus on the complex thoughts and experiences of the interviewees (2017, 28-29). Guided by a list of topics and questions, I conducted interviews with dance artists by visiting, diving into, or touching upon subjects such as the hybridity of their professional practice, their working conditions, their private life, and the socio-economic environment of the dance field in the Netherlands.

The interviews were analysed following Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan's use of the terms: *polyvalency*, *polyactivity*, *pluriactivity*, and *hybrid* (2012, 9-10).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the interviews were colour-coded according to the category – polyvalent, polyactive, pluriactive or hybrid – to which the individual artist's professional practice belonged. Additionally, the interviews were studied for factors that indicated something about *why* or *how* a practice belongs to any of these categories. These factors were of aid in defining what hybridity *is*, *what* different variations of hybridity exist, and *how* a practice becomes hybrid within contemporary dance.

Alongside the planned interviews with the selected case studies, incidental conversations with colleague dance artists, artistic advisors, or directors serve as extension of my fieldwork, as does a survey on hybridity I spread in the field. In order to collect the thoughts and ideas discussed in the field, I made notes in a logbook during my research. As the informal conversations occurred naturally during auditions, rehearsals, or performance days over the course of one year, I had the opportunity to listen to the thoughts and concerns of dance artists

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<sup>7</sup> The 12 dance artists active in the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands included those just graduated/ supported (2), experienced/ supported (3), experienced/ structurally supported (2), mature/ supported (1), experienced/ unsupported (1), mature/ unsupported (1) and experienced/ employed (2). See appendix 48-49.

<sup>8</sup> Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan use Marie-Christine Bureau, Marc Perreoud and Roberta Shapiro's distinction between *polyvalency* (fulfilling different tasks within one practice), *polyactivity* (fulfilling different professions in different social-cultural fields), *pluriactivity* (fulfilling several activities within one field) and added the term 'hybrid' or 'hybridity' to describe a professional practice that goes further: a professional practice in which the visual artist combines autonomous and applied forms of art and in which the division between autonomous and applied forms of art is completely or partially faded from the perception of the artists and their surroundings (2012, 9-10).

surrounding the subjects discussed in my thesis outside the comfort of a planned and recorded interview. This enabled me to gather more unpolished thoughts; answers that are less affected by the formal environment created during an interview.

The survey was spread online within the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands in 2019 with the aim to understand how dance artists relate to the subject of hybridity in relation to their professional dance practice. A vast majority of the 40 respondents graduated between 2007 and 2018 and are still active with the field of dance in the Netherlands. Even though the results of this survey are not the main focus here, they have informed this thesis and continuously provide a wide range of thoughts from the field (Survey 17, 2019).

For the literature study, I drew on concepts and ideas of precarity and hybridity from the fields of the arts, dance studies, social studies, and zoology. In this context I first briefly provide a few notes surrounding danced labour and then examine the two main concepts within this thesis: precarity and hybridity.

In order to clarify the work of dance artists, I first discuss ‘what dancers really do’ using an Assche’s notion of *flexibility* (2018, 244) and the fading binary distinction between dancer and choreographer (Jennifer Roche 2015, 114). Furthermore, the polyvalent and boundless character of dance work is discussed following Karl Marx’s notion of ‘immaterial labour’ (Ian Buchanan 2010, 251-252), and descriptions of dance artists as ‘unnecessary labour’ (Bojana Kunst 2017, 119), ‘living labour’ (Dunja Njaradi 2014, 262), ‘multi-skilled “total” workers’ (idem, 261) and ‘being an amateur in everything’ (Van Assche 2018, 243). Next, precarity is discussed following Isabell Lorey’s idea of life being just as precarious and dispersed as the labour (2015, 9), the highly physical aspect of danced work as described by Susan Leigh Foster’s definition of ‘bodies for hire’ (1997, 255), and the uncertain capacity of the body to recover (Van Assche 2018, 319).

After this, hybridity is discussed in two ways. First, I define what hybridity *is* by proposing a multi-layered definition of a hybrid professional dance practice. This definition is inspired by the definition of the hybrid visual artist according to Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan (2012), as well as Brian Stross’ and Levinson’s publications on cultural hybridity (1999; 1984). The case studies, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, offer an understanding of the ways in which a professional practice can become hybrid and exemplify the four types of hybridity introduced in this thesis. Second, I discuss what hybridity can *do* as a tool. Advantages and disadvantages are discussed to understand how hybridity functions within professional dance practices. Furthermore, I argue for hybridity’s potential as a counterstrategy against precarity. With this

suggestion, I contribute to a discussion currently occurring within the field of dance: how can the position of dance artists within a post-pandemic society be stabilised?

### *Structure*

In Chapter 1 the state of dance labour is discussed according to current debates in academics and the field of dance in the Netherlands. Drawing on publications by Rudi Laermans (2015) and Van Assche (2017, 2018), as well as articles reflecting on the recent subsidy cuts in the Netherlands, the socio-economic environment of the field of dance in the Netherlands is described. Misconceptions surrounding dance as professional practice are discussed following thoughts on danced labour by Njaradi (2014), Foster (1997), Maaïke Bleeker (2014) and Roche (2015). Furthermore, precarity within danced labour is discussed alongside thoughts by Kunst (2015a, 2015b, 2017), Van Assche (2017, 2018), Lorey (2015), André Lepecki (2006), and Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider (2012). Building on Van Assche's thoughts on deprecarisation through 'flexicurity' (2017, 240), I argue that deprecarisation can be accomplished through hybridity.

Chapter 2 provides a definition of a hybrid dance practice following existing definitions from the academic field and professional practices from the dance field of the Netherlands. Hybridity is examined by tracing its use in the fields of sociology (Joanne Wallis et al. 2018; Stross 1999; Yasmin Gunaratnam 2014), dance (Bleeker 2014; Sally Doughty and Marie Fitzpatrick 2016; Kuhlke and Pine 2014; Fleur Summers and Angela Clarke 2015; Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović 2010), and visual arts (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan 2012; Levinson 1984). Following the question of what hybridity *is*, hybridity will be discussed as a tool in the field of sociology with the notions of Wallis et al. (2018), M. Anne Brown (2018), Jenny H. Peterson (2012), and Gunaratnam (2014) in order to understand what hybridity can *do*, for and in relation to dance labour. A definition of hybridity within professional dance practice will be introduced following Bleeker's understanding of 'bodies of ideas' (2014, 72), the case studies and earlier discussed definitions of hybridity in the field of biology, sociology, and the arts.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the question: 'What influences the hybridisation of a professional dance practice?' Based on the case studies, four different types of hybridity will be discussed that exemplify the ways in which professional dance practices can hybridise. Resistance against hybridity is discussed through the works of Summers and Clarke (2015), Jamie Simpson Steele (2018), Alison E. Leonard (2016), Doughty and Fitzpatrick (2016),

Wallis et al. (2018), and Roche (2015), and through conversations with dancers in the field (Informal conversations 15, 16, 2019). A critical account of the advantages and disadvantages of hybridity for the working conditions of dance artists in the Netherlands will shed light on the diverse workings of hybridity in the field of dance.

In Chapter 4 the following question will be scrutinised: ‘What are the effects of hybridity on the working conditions of the professional practice of dance artists and the value these artists have in society?’ A discussion of three best practices from the field will demonstrate hybridity’s ability to serve as an instrument for deprecarisation. Building on Van Assche’s notion of ‘flexicurity’ (2017, 240) and Dörre’s understanding of deprecarisation (2005) hybridity will be introduced as counterstrategy against precarity. Furthermore, a discussion of the self-image and status of the dance artist in society in relation to hybridity will serve as a reflection of the long-term effect of hybridisation within the field of dance.

I propose that when hybrid dance artists find ways towards less precarious working conditions, the effect of deprecarisation resonates with an outward movement towards society. Therefore, deprecarisation – through hybridity – can positively influence the position of dance artists within society. For this to happen, society needs to find more ways to foster hybridity within the professional practices of dance artists.

## *1. Dance Labour in the Netherlands*

In this chapter, the current state of the working conditions of dance artists in the Netherlands is discussed, followed by an examination of academic debates on dance labour. The current state of dance labour in the Netherlands shows the need for a strategy against precarious working conditions. Furthermore, it highlights the reason why dance artists are already moving their practice beyond the field of dance. For this purpose, the socio-economic environment of the field of dance in the Netherlands is described following publications by Laermans (2015), Van Assche (2017, 2018) and recent reflective articles on the subsidy cuts in the Netherlands. Furthermore, aspects of dance labour are discussed including thoughts by Njaradi (2014), Foster (1997), Bleeker (2014), and Roche (2015). In the final section of this chapter, the precarisation of the professional practice of dance artists is outlined through a discussion of Kunst (2015a, 2015b, 2017), Lepecki (2006), and Ridout and Schneider (2012).

### *1.1 The Field of Dance in the Netherlands: Current Debates*

The contemporary dance field of the Netherlands has a lot of similarities with the dance fields of Brussels and Berlin as described and analysed by Van Assche in her doctoral dissertation (2018). Due to the transnational, mobile, and project-based character of the work (Van Assche 2017, 237), freelance dancers from Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and Amsterdam frequently travel between these cities in search of job opportunities and network possibilities.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the field of these cities consists, for a considerable amount, of dancers who originate from, were educated in, or temporarily reside in one of these cities (Laermans 2015, 289). Dancers may consciously choose to relocate to a different city, even if there is no job waiting for them.

Even though the Netherlands has a rich history of contemporary dance, the dance field of the Netherlands – formerly considered prolific – is now struggling with scarcity in regards to paid dance work. Since the subsidy cuts of 2012, only 48 of the 118 institutions for the performing arts in the Netherlands have kept their structural funding, 80 institutions received intermittent subsidies, and over 60% of the requests for funding have been denied (Van den Dool 2012). Competing with theatre, cabaret, opera, and ballet, the non-structurally funded contemporary dance companies and choreographers are in a constant race for what remains of

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<sup>9</sup> In the Netherlands, most dancers base themselves in Amsterdam because of the density of its network and the possibility to attend professional training and auditions for projects. It is good to note that cities like Rotterdam, Tilburg, Utrecht, Arnhem and The Hague also have an active professional dance community.

the budget. In addition to this, according to artistic leaders and advisors, the number of dancers who are ‘constantly on the move’ and the dancers who work on a freelance basis has increased since these subsidy cuts (Talks 13, 14, 2019).

Some of the dance artists I interviewed for this research, in describing the current situation in the Netherlands, note that ‘there is less money for dance and with this, there are fewer companies and fewer jobs in only dancing’ (Interview 4, 2019) and ‘the conditions are worse’ (Interview 9, 2020). The field is even described as ‘pushing out of its seams’, because ‘more and more people pursue “being a dancer” while more and more opportunities and spaces are taken away’ (Interview 2, 2019). In other words: in order to ‘survive’ professionally, dance artists need to expand their practice beyond the area of dance or take up jobs in other fields to cover basic needs. The latter is a symptom of precarity within the field of dance.

There are fewer dance companies able to provide stable contracts and – compared to the situation before 2012 – less work for dance artists in general. Nevertheless, the number of contemporary dancers who join the field after their graduation has not decreased. According to the HBO Monitor 2016, there was a stable number of approximately 163 students per year graduating from one of the seven HBO dance academies in the Netherlands between 2012 and 2016. Only 68% of them found work as a dancer or choreographer (Raad voor Cultuur 2017). The graduates who find – or look for – dance work in the Netherlands compete with dancers from other (non-)European countries who made the journey to the Netherlands in search of work. In the field, they face the choice between finding a way to sustain their practice or giving up.

Several recent debates in the Netherlands, such as those held during *Moving Futures Festival* and the *Nederlandse Dansdagen* between 2016 - 2019, have discussed the state of dance and the sustainability of the professional practice of dance artists (Dansmakers n.d.; Fransien van der Putt 2019)<sup>10</sup>. In order to succeed in sustaining a professional practice within the field of the Netherlands, dance artists need to find new ways to finance their projects, new places to perform and new audiences to attract. In 2017, the Raad voor Cultuur already reported on the emergence of a new type of maker in the Netherlands: dance artists who work in multidisciplinary ways and consider the borders of their own identity as fluid. These dance

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<sup>10</sup> During the *Nederlandse Dansdagen* (the Dutch Dance Days) in Maastricht, choreographer Jasper van Luijk shared his concern for the state of dance in the Netherlands. The choreographer warned against the effects of yet another substantial subsidy cuts, as a result of the introduction of ‘fair practice’ as a condition at the Dutch Performing Arts Fund. ‘We fall unheard, nobody hears the blow. But in the future we will feel that blow. Is this what politicians mean by a fair policy?’ (Van der Putt 2019)

makers actively search for new collaborations, crossovers, and influences from other fields and disciplines. Form, context, place and content all depend on what the work needs. Museums, theatres, streets, lecture halls, shopping malls, open fields, and the internet are all possible places for the work to be performed. Dance battles, dance lectures or interventions are all forms in which the work can manifest itself in (Raad voor Cultuur 2017).

Even though this development leads to exciting crossovers between dance and other art forms, there is a great concern for the vulnerability of these makers. Dance artists with a flexible artistic practice who are not connected or supported by institutes like production houses, dance companies, or theatres often have a very insecure professional practice. Their practice consists of short, separate and hard-to-plan projects (idem). The lack of possibilities for insurance in case of injury, or to save for re-education for professional life after dance, highlights the precarity these freelance artists are exposed to during their work and life.

### *1.2 What Dancers Really Do: Misconceptions Surrounding Dance Labour*

The changes in the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands affect the work itself. Before I discuss precarity, a few important aspects of dance labour are highlighted in this section.

Foster has explained how, as bodies for hire, dance artists train any skill, expertise or technique that enlarges their employability in order 'to make a living at dancing' (Foster 1997, 255). For the production of dance, contemporary dance artists draw from this collection of movement techniques, materials or ideas, stored in their own or colleagues' bodies. According to Bleeker, dancers' bodies are more than hired bodies, they are 'bodies of ideas that are capable of drawing from various practices without this resulting in a superficial collage and a lack of self ...' (2014, 72).<sup>11</sup> Kareth Schaffer defines a very similar quality as 'flexible performativity' (2020, 22). The abundance of material available for the choreographer to work with, without consideration of the context the material originated from is, according to Van Assche, the core idea of contemporary dance (2018, 241). Hence, in order to be or become a dance artist, a wide variety of skills, techniques, and characteristics need to be mastered, embodied, and owned.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In 'Dancing Bodies', Foster already described dancers' bodies as bodies of ideas (1997, 235). Bleeker notes that Foster treats contemporary and ballet differently in her text: according to Foster, a connection between self and dancing does not exist in ballet (2014, 70). Furthermore, Foster fears superficiality when the dancer is trained in more than one dance technique (1997, 256).

<sup>12</sup> This adds to the complexity of defining contemporary dance. Despite the critiques, this is still the way this dance field and its dance artists define themselves and the works they create.



Dance work once – and in some cases still – consisted mainly of practices and skills directly emanating from the realm of dance. Training, choreographing, and dancing are often assumed to be the only activities of dance artists, because these more technical skills are often developed through extensive training during academy and visible through performances on stage. In reality, a dancer's activities entail much more; networking, self-managing, bookkeeping, self-marketing, video or photo editing, and website building are all crucial skills for the maintenance of a professional practice as a dance artist.

Due to a lack of attention paid to these activities during academy and deficient knowledge of the actual practice of dance artists – especially from those outside the professional field of dance, such as non-professional dancers and policymakers – these activities remain largely invisible for the outside eye. Dance artists must self-educate in areas like marketing and administration to survive financially and professionally as freelancers within the intricate socio-economic environment of the Netherlands. Dance artists, and mainly the freelancers among them, have become what Njaradi describes as multiskilled 'total' workers (2014, 261). This polyvalent aspect, described by Van Assche as 'being an amateur in everything', highlights the multitude of cognitive and non-cognitive skills required to be somehow successful as a dance artist (Van Assche 2018, 243).

Another crucial quality for maintaining a professional practice as a dance artist is flexibility. This is not solely required in the sense of the anatomic flexibility of dancers' bodies, but also in their emotional resilience and adaptability. Dancers need to adapt quickly to the requirements of the project they work for: described as 'bodies for hire' or 'flexible performativity' (Foster 1997, 255; Schaffer 2020, 22). Resilience and adaptability also help the dancer to deal with rejection and disappointment. The continuous, ever-present uncertainty *if* there will be money for a proposed project, *how much* will be granted, and *when* this money will arrive (Van Assche 2018, 3) leads many dance artists to desperation. If nothing is granted, the work already done for one or more projects, will remain unpaid labour (Njaradi 2014, 261). This requires emotional resilience on the part of the dance artists to be able to recover and regroup.

Additionally, dance artists need a very specific use of *flexibility*, used by Van Assche to refer to 'the skill to bend or fold one's schedule to the circumstances' (2018, 244). Getting jobs as a dancer often means being available, at all times. Thus, many dancers, including myself, will state that they are 'fully available' during an audition, even when in reality they are already juggling three projects within that same month. When hired, flexibility comes in to bend

schedules and working hours in such a way that a fourth project will fit. In some cases, this leaves the dance artists with only a few days off in months.

This continuous adapting in order to get work according to the needs and requirements of institutes or other dance artists asks a great deal of the dancer's physical and mental wellbeing. The constant availability and irregularity that comes from project-based work not only works against the dance artists' ability to separate work and free time, rest and health, but also against the daily required training and inspiration needed to create new work and to maintain the dancer's body.

### *1.3 Precarity in Dance Practices: Academics and the Field*

Dance is described by several scholars as immaterial labour (Kunst 2015a, 42; Njaradi 2014, 253; Van Assche 2018, 1; Jasbir Puar 2012, 167; Cvejić and Vujanović 2010, 4-7). Immaterial labour is a (neo-)Marxist concept that describes a type of labour that produces a non-material good such as a cultural product, communication, information, or knowledge (Buchanan 2010, 251-252). According to Kunst, all contemporary work belongs to this group of immaterial or nonmaterial labour that is based on exploitation and exhaustion (2015a, 113).<sup>13</sup> Due to the embodied nature of dance labour, dance is both immaterial and highly physical.

Dance work is physical and is even called 'living labour' (Njaradi 2014, 262). This aspect distinguishes the immateriality of their work from that of other immaterial workers, like painters, university lecturers or writers. The work is done with their own or others' bodies. And what is produced is a choreography, which – each time it is performed – needs to be executed by these bodies. Exhaustion, illness, or injuries are rarely considered sufficient reason to postpone or cancel a performance.

In contemporary society, artists are 'prototypes of the contemporary flexible and precarious worker' (Kunst 2015a, 137). Not because of the precarity, creativity, or problematic work-life relation that is part of their practice, but rather because dance labour is 'unnecessary' (Kunst 2017, 119). The pointless jobs that have been created by capitalism to keep us working and the labour of dance artists are both forms of labour that do not produce a material value. Interestingly enough, it is only the dance labour that is assumed to be in need of governing and accused of laziness and senseless spending (Kunst 2017, 118-120). According to Kunst, this is

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<sup>13</sup> 'The non-materiality of contemporary work, its 'spatial' independence, is based on the exploitation, or even better, the exhaustion of these generic human forces – i.e. on the appropriation of movement as one of the forces of life.' (Kunst 2015a, 113)

because the pointless job ‘conceals the fact that it is in current capitalism actually possible to do less’ while dance labour reveals it (idem). These thoughts highlight the precarious position dance labourers have within society and the need to find new ways to increase the stability and value of the profession within society.

Even though dance labour can be called precarious by its immaterial character alone, precarisation entails much more: the absence of collective social security systems for freelancers, short term jobs, individualisation, and isolation (Lorey 2015, 1). Some immaterial workers cannot sell their labour-power for a fixed length of time in exchange for a fixed salary or wage, making these workers – as Njaradi describes – more like slaves than workers (2014, 261). In general, these workers – like freelance dance artists – are underpaid compared to the amount of time they spend working, and often have to make do without additional employment benefits or health care. In addition to this, dance artists have to deal with a substantial share of non-remunerated or self-paid work. The time spent and work done for the preparation of one's own projects, as well as the training needed ‘to stay fit and remain employable’ must be paid out of the dance artists' own pocket (Laermans 2015, 290).

Similar to other immaterial workers, dance artists experience difficulties with delineating ‘where work time ends and private life begins’ (Van Assche 2017, 237). In other words, dance artists can rarely set clear boundaries between work and free time, or even between their own body and the body as an artwork. According to Njaradi, most dancers are consciously or intuitively aware of this ‘hidden catch’ (2014, 257). Nevertheless, they commit themselves to a professional practice as a dancer, in constant mobility, flexibility, and uncertainty (2014, 259).

According to Kunst, life itself is precarious and under the control of ‘economic mechanisms of protection’ (2015a, 9). Precarity seems to continue to normalise through the exploitation of flexible and non-paid work by art institutions that are meant to protect, fuel, and guide the dance field, as analysed by Kunst (2015b, 141).<sup>14</sup> This aspect highlights the dependent and vulnerable position of (dance) artists.

Precarisation has increased over the years along with other changes in the field of dance. In *Exhausting Dance* (2006), Lepecki suggests that there is an increasing emphasis on the process instead of the product of choreography within the dance field. There is also a growing interest in the inter-corporeal relations between the dance artists and the audience (idem).

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Artistic institutions like to consider themselves progressive, but many of them are only able to survive due to the exploitation of flexible and non-paid work; the organization apparatus/bureaucratic management is actually organised as a series of internships, residences and extensions of endless education.’ (Kunst 2015a, 141)

According to Njaradi, this interest is the reason why dance artists move from working on dance productions towards dance projects (2014, 256). These projects, or the project-oriented way of working mentioned by Van Assche, invite precarious working conditions due to their temporary, insecure, and low-paid character. As the field has become used to this way of working, precarisation is, as Lorey states, in a process of normalisation (Puar 2012, 172).

Laermans describes the professional practice of dance artists as a 'borderless career' that is 'not structured by a long-lasting commitment to one employer' (2015, 290). Together with its transnational, mobile, and project-oriented aspects, the profession's immaterial nature leads to a lack of boundaries in the work and life of a dance artist. According to Lorey, the life of the artist is just as precarious and dispersed as the labour (2015, 9). In general, life is vulnerable, and we are always in a state of 'being with': we co-depend on each other's vulnerable lives (Kunst 2015b, 9). The normalisation of precarity takes away this co-dependent state. It seems that when precarity is normalised, people tend to not care for each other anymore. Suffering becomes the normal state of being.

The work of dance is strenuous labour (Kunst 2017, 130). Many dancers in the field, including myself, have dragged themselves on stage with high fevers, blocked spines and injured toes (Interview 12, 2020). As absurd as this seems, the responsibility felt towards the audience, choreographer, director, curators, programmers, the funds, or even to friends who came from far to witness the performance overtakes feelings of responsibility towards one's own body. The uncertainty surrounding the bodies' capacity to recover again and again highlights the inherent physical precarity of the profession (Van Assche 2018, 319).

Fortunately, the overall precarious character of the profession does not exclude the fact that there are also dance artists who take – and have the possibility to take – responsibility and decent care for their colleagues' and/or their own bodies.<sup>15</sup> Among them are dance artists with stable contracts from structurally funded companies or institutions, but also dance artists who manage to build a sustainable autonomous practice without, or with little help of, such funded institutions. These artists seem to understand how to build their professional practice in a way that brings their career into a direct opposite of precarity. The practices of some of these artists can be defined as 'hybrid'.

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<sup>15</sup> In my own professional practice, I have worked with some dance artists who do and others who do not consider the vulnerability of the bodies of the dancers they work with. Despite precarity and scarcity in work and funding, some dance artists (choreographers and dancers) take responsibility by allowing for sufficient time to warm up, for flexibility in planning and by arranging suitable (sufficient quality of floors and climate control) locations for rehearsals.

Despite its negative connotations, precarity can also have some positive effects. According to Ridout and Schneider, precarity can help to lean ‘away from habits’, to step ‘outside comfort zones’, and to change ‘the speculative and uncertain act of critical thinking’ (2012, 9). In a broader view, this can be used to undermine or interrupt the neoliberalist mode of precarity that ‘imposes insecurity for the many in the interest of enormous wealth for the few’ (idem.). For the individual dance artist, broadening their practice and steering away from habits can result in more sustainability. According to Van Assche, ‘looking beyond the limitations of one job and connecting a high level of security with a high flexibility rate’ – described by Van Assche as *flexicurity* – can even lead to deprecarisation (2017, 240). I argue that a similar effect can be accomplished by broadening the limits of one job or performative practice beyond the field of dance. Instead of combining several professional practices or professions that unfold in largely separate realms, here one professional practice consists of a mix of practices, skills, and expertise that originate from several professional practices.

In this chapter, a discussion of current debates has shown a growing concern for the precarious and vulnerable position of dance artists in the Netherlands. This precarious position originates from the profession’s combination of an immaterial and highly physical character, and a lack of attention and support for the wide variety of skills, tasks, and expertise dance artists need to sustain their practice. While the polyvalent and boundless character of dance labour can work against the artist’s creative abilities, the inclusion of several practices or skills into one professional practice can increase its sustainability.

In order to understand how this hybridisation contributes to strengthening the sustainability of dancers’ professional trajectories, in the following chapter I will introduce a definition of a hybrid professional practice and identify and analyse existing definitions and usages of hybridity within different academic fields.

## 2. *Defining Hybridity: Hybridity within the Professional Practice of Dance Artists*

In the previous chapter, the precarious character of dance labour was analysed and the possibility for deprecarisation through hybridisation was introduced. In order to understand what hybridity *is* and how it is present within the professional practice of dance artists, I discuss definitions and ideas surrounding hybridity in the fields of dance (Bleeker 2014; Doughty and Fitzpatrick 2016; Kuhlke and Pine 2014; Summers and Clarke 2015; Cvejić and Vujanović 2010); zoology (Stross 1999; Gunaratnam 2014); sociology (Wallis et al. 2018); and the visual arts (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan 2012; Levinson 1984). Further, hybridity will also be discussed as a tool, relying on notions by Brown (2018) and Peterson (2012), to understand what hybridity can *do* in relation to a professional dance practice. Moreover, a definition of hybridity within professional dance practices is introduced, drawing on the discussed definitions as well as on the interviews with dance artists in the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands.

### 2.1 *Hybridity as Concept: Definitions of Hybridity in and beyond Dance*

Within the field of dance, several discussions on aesthetics have used the term ‘hybridity’ to describe the increase of mixed dance styles, the decrease of ‘pure’ – more traditional – dance styles, and the complex relations between dance and place (Kuhlke and Pine 2014, ix).<sup>16</sup> In other discussions, ‘hybridity refers to the polyactive practice of (dance) artists who work in several fields at the same time, such as hybrid dance artist-academics (Doughty and Fitzpatrick 2016) or teaching artists (Simpson Steele 2018; Leonard 2016). It is also used to characterise the experience of in-between-ness when combining several essential roles in life as a mother, academic, and artist (Summers and Clarke 2015); or when describing the multidisciplinary functioning of today’s visual artists (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan 2012). Even though these contributions describe the professional practice of (dance) artists, these definitions fail to provide a precise way to understand the full complexity of the professional practice of dance artists; one that goes beyond simply combining professions or dance styles. As this clear definition of a hybrid dance practice is missing in the field of dance, I will first discuss hybridity

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<sup>16</sup> In *Global Movements: Dance, Place and Hybridity*, Kuhlke and Pine investigate the ‘increasingly mixed nature of dance styles, the decline of traditional ‘pure’ dance styles, and the complex, hybrid nature of places in which dance is performed’ (2014, ix). While this work touches hybridity in dance, it is mainly highlighting the dance-style or dance itself as being or becoming hybrid and not the professional practice.

in other fields to get a better understanding of how hybridity is defined in other areas of research. For this purpose, I will shortly go back to the zoological origins of the term (Wallis et al. 2018, 1).

In the field of zoology, hybridity refers to the offspring of two inherently different animals or plants (Stross 1999, 254). More precisely, *hybrida* (or *hibrida*) are the offspring of a domestic sow and a wild boar which, through crossbreeding, demonstrate enhanced traits, also called heterosis or *hybrid vigour* (Gunaratnam 2014, 5; Stross 1999, 254-257). Simply put, a hybrid consists of inherently different elements that have merged together into a hybrid form. This zoological definition is primarily used to discuss the classification and origin of breeds of animals and plants. Even though this definition cannot be used to directly speak about hybridity within professional dance practices, it helps to understand the origin of the term I choose to describe the complex dance profession. In zoology, a hybrid denotes one that exists of a mix of different elements that have merged together and exhibit enhanced traits. Following this, I will continue to step closer to the field of dance and art by visiting some notions of hybridity within the field of social sciences first.

Like zoology, the social sciences also understand hybridity as a mix of different elements. The concept is particularly prominent in the field of sociology: it informs several studies on identity, culture, political systems and economic or power relations (Wallis et al. 2018, 1). Some definitions of hybridity within this field are very close to the zoological definition. According to Stross, a cultural hybrid can refer to a person or object that exemplifies a mix between elements coming from diverse cultures, traditions, or any unlikely sources (1999, 254). Stross also connects the zoological notion of *hybrid vigour*, to the concept of cultural hybridity (1999, 257-258).<sup>17</sup> *Hybrid vigour* in cultural hybridity could entail that cultural hybrids are more resilient or consist of more pronounced cultural elements.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to cultural hybridity, hybridity in the field of the arts refers to something that results from the merging of artistic elements or art forms that have heterogeneous origins or inherently diverse sources. This suggests that dance is inherently hybrid as it consists of different elements: music, movement, and – more and more commonly – voice. Levinson discusses the complexity of defining an art form as hybrid (1984, 5). Descriptions like, ‘hybrid

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<sup>17</sup> According to Stross, *Hybrid vigour* or heterosis is a common phenomenon to plant and animal breeders. ‘It refers to the empirically observed phenomenon of increased vigour or capacity for growth often displayed by hybrid animals and plants.’ For this description Stross draws on ideas from Herbert G. Baker (Stross 1999, 257).

<sup>18</sup> Stross defines the *hybrid vigour* or heterosis in cultural hybridity as limitless. While a ‘biological hybrid has only two possible alternatives at any given gene locus and has only a limited number of chromosomes’ there is ‘no limit on the number of traits or features that can be generated in a cultural hybrid form’ (1999, 257-258).

art forms contain various kinds of structural elements', or 'a hybrid art form can be deconstructed into two or more different art or media forms' are not sufficient, as a large amount of art can fit one or both of these descriptions, even when no hybridity is involved (Levinson 1984, 5). According to Levinson, only some art forms can be called hybrid (*idem*). His definition of a hybrid art form depends on its history: an art form is hybrid as a result of its development and origin from artistic activities that already existed, of which two or more have been combined into one new form (1984, 6). The possibility to conceptually decompose an artform into two or more artistic activities or media is not enough to define it as hybrid. Similarly, just because a professional dance practice involves many distinct skills, this is not sufficient to define such a practice as hybrid.

According to Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan, who studied the hybridity of the professional practice of visual artists in the Netherlands, hybridity goes further than *polyvalency* (fulfilling different tasks within one practice), *polyactivity* (fulfilling different professions in different social-cultural fields), and *pluriactivity* (fulfilling several activities within one field) (2012, 9). Hybridity, according to their research, is a professional practice in which the visual artist combines autonomous and applied forms of art and in which the division between the two forms has completely or partially faded from the perception of the artists and their surroundings (2012, 10).

The above-described definitions show that hybridity is used in several fields to describe the mixture or fusion of different elements into one hybrid entity. The cultural hybridity of Stross, Levinson's definition and the definition of hybridity by Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan closely approach the definition I am developing here. However, the conditions for being hybrid must be adjusted to the physical and immaterial character of dance work.

### ***Hybridity in Dance***

Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan's definition incorporates the distinction between autonomous and applied work within the visual arts. In order to understand how to define hybrid dance practices, binary distinctions – like autonomous and applied work – within dance and visual arts will be placed in relation to each other.

Notions like autonomous and applied work are regularly used in the field of visual arts. They refer to the way in which the creation of the artwork is initiated, or to the functionality of



the material object (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan 2012, 10).<sup>19</sup> In this materiality of the work lies an important difference between danced art and visual art. Even though from a materialist point of view a performance can be seen as a material artefact (Cvejić and Vujanović 2010, 4) or as a material abstraction (Kunst 2017, 131),<sup>20</sup> dance does not produce a material artefact like, in the case of visual arts, a statue or a painting which can be stored and increases in value over time (Doughty and Fitzpatrick 2016, 37). Therefore, the distinction between autonomous and applied work, as used in visual arts, needs to be adapted to become usable with regard to dance labour.

In the case of dance, this distinction could be linked to the difference between autonomous choreographic work and the application of one's dance practice for the work of others or within contexts beyond dance. However, using this binary distinction as a way to understand the hybridity of a professional dance practice is not enough to understand its full spectrum. When looking at binary distinctions in dance, distinctions between dancer-choreographer, dance and non-dance need to be taken into account as well as the distinction between applied and autonomous work.

The binary distinction between choreographer and dancer (Roche 2015, 66) – which continues to thrive in more traditionally structured dance companies – has in a considerable number of contemporary dance practices faded or even ceased to exist. In choreographic processes, the relation between choreographer and dancers appears to be more similar to collaborators. This frequently merely suggests equality and democracy (Laermans 2015, 20),<sup>21</sup> as the choreographer remains the final decisionmaker. This phenomenon is increasingly appearing in the freelance dance scene, which exists mostly outside of structurally funded dance companies who are still able to provide stable contracts and maintain a more traditional hierarchy.

Hybrid dance artists look further than traditional binary distinctions between who is the choreographer and who is the dancer. Moreover, some of these dance artists do not see or experience a difference between, nor a preference for one or the other. The same goes for the

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<sup>19</sup> In Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan's research among graduated – and still active – visual artists (1975 and 2005) in the Netherlands, the artists had various views with regard to the exact definition of autonomous work (2012, 49). This variety could be caused by the increasing social dependence artists – who make both applied and autonomous work – are affected by (idem, 50).

<sup>20</sup> Kunst mentions in 'Some Thoughts on the Labour of a Dancer' that dance has the capacity to produce material abstraction and that it is a speculation that depends on the 'temporal, spatial and embodied economy' (2017, 131).

<sup>21</sup> In *Moving Together*, Laermans describes that in the dance field of Flanders, 'collaboration' was an omnipresent buzzword present in the conversations about dance between dancers. Several connotations like equality, democracy and 'the belief that making dance together in a less hierarchical way offers all participants more effective chances for self-expression', were and still are linked to this term (2015,20).

distinction between dance and non-dance, and between autonomous and applied work. Hybrid dance artists incorporate and apply their professional practice beyond the field of dance and, for example, do not see a difference in choreographing bodily movements or objects. This is an aspect of hybridity that originates from Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan's definition of a hybrid visual arts practice. Other aspects of hybridity that will be part of the concept of hybridity as defined in this thesis (2.3) are the mixture of different elements and *hybrid vigour*. A hybrid exists of different elements that have merged together and can have enhanced traits.

## *2.2 Hybridity as Tool: How Hybridity Is Instrumentalised*

Alongside its presence as a concept, hybridity can also *do* something. In order to understand how hybridity functions as a tool in relation to dance practices, I will first discuss how hybridity is instrumentalised within disciplines like sociology and the arts, where it is growing in prominence (Wallis et al. 2018, 3).

Within sociology, hybridity is used to emphasise interactions between elements like the 'international' and the 'local' (Wallis et al. 2018, 3), to bring 'focus on struggles, entanglements, patterns of occlusion and exclusion' and to open the possibility for new ways of thinking about relations within, across, or among states (Brown 2018, 22). Hybridity can highlight and describe complex, interrelated, and sometimes vague situations or relations.

In addition to highlighting interactions, hybridity helps to 'move away from unhelpful binaries' (Peterson 2012, 12) or to 'unsettle the statist' (Wallis et al. 2018, 3). Binary distinctions between subaltern-hegemonic, international-local can be unsettled by using hybridity. While the unsettling of binary distinctions can be seen as a positive effect of hybridity, there is also critique that hybridity may 'reinscribe the problematic binaries it seeks to overcome' (Wallis et al. 2018, 5). According to Wallis et al., naming the 'in-between' or the 'mixedness' of something highlights its binary sources.

Hybridity's capacity to describe complex and interrelated phenomena shows why hybridity is suitable as a descriptive tool to define the difficult-to-perceive, invisible interrelations of the professional practice of dance artists. Despite Wallis et al.'s critique on its ability to re-inscribe binaries, overcoming the binary distinctions between dancers and choreographers – or dance makers and film editors – creates space for artists to design their practice and their work beyond the limits of one discipline. In some cases, as I will argue in the following chapters, the hybridisation of a professional practice may lead to an improvement of working conditions, or even deprecarisation.

While highlighting interactions between elements helps to describe and understand the complexity of a professional dance practice, unsettling binary distinctions enables the development of new ways of being a dance artist. In chapters 3 and 4, I will demonstrate how hybridity's ability to steer away from binary distinctions also helps professional practices to expand or move in the direction an artist needs to go. As hybridity signifies the ability to break boundaries (Gunaratnam 2014, 2) and the enhancement of traits or *hybrid vigour* (Stross 1999, 254-257), hybridity can contribute to the sustainability of the professional practice and the deprecarisation of the working conditions of dance artists.

Before elaborating on hybridity's ability to increase the sustainability of professional dance practices, in the next section I will first identify the general characteristics of a hybrid professional dance practice, building on the discussed definitions of hybridity and interviews conducted with dance artists in the field.

### *2.3 Hybridity in Professional Dance Practices: General Characteristics*

Like most hybrids – such as the zoological and cultural hybrid – a hybrid professional dance practice consists of inherently different elements that have merged together and are equally present (Stross 1999, 254). As Bleeker pointed out, this mixture does not result in superficiality, but in a variety of practices the dance artists can draw from (2014, 72). Furthermore, a hybrid professional dance practice possibly includes *hybrid vigour*: enhanced traits (Gunaratnam 2014, 5; Stross 1999, 254-257). This general definition can be developed further following the definition of hybrid visual artists (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan 2012, 10) and the previous discussion on binary distinctions in dance (see 2.1). Within a hybrid professional dance practice, binary divisions between autonomous-applied, choreographer-dancer, and dance/non-dance, are no longer distinguishable for the dance artist's own perception, or from an outside perspective.

During my fieldwork in the Netherlands, I conducted interviews with 12 dance artists (see appendix, 48-49). From these case studies, seven dance artists have a practice that includes or incorporates practices and skills from other professional practices, and/or a practice that is placed both in and beyond the area of dance. Thus a third characteristic of a hybrid professional practice is revealed: a practice that goes beyond the borders of one professional practice; beyond the area of what is seen as dance. For example, dance artists might combine professional practices within the fields of dance and film (Interview 7, 2019), within the museum, social,

and theatre context (Interview 2, 2019) or in-between the areas of music and dance (Interview 6, 2019).

I therefore propose that a dance practice is hybrid when it fits the following three conditions:

- Inherently different elements have merged and are equally present within the professional dance practice.
- Binary distinctions are not perceivable for the dance artist and their surroundings.
- The borders of the professional practice reach beyond the limits of one profession, context or area.

An example of a hybrid practice could be a professional practice that exists as a fusion of music and dance-related skills. The artist uses the skills according to the needs of the work and thinks beyond set rules of how these should be employed or placed. The distinction between these skills does not exist for this artist and is not visible in the work that is shown publicly. Additionally, this artist has a flexible idea of where the work can be performed: a theatre space or club are both equally suitable venues for the work to exist (Interview 6, 2019). In this chapter, hybridity's ability to steer away from binary distinctions, to describe complex relationships and to enhance traits has been discussed. Furthermore, a definition of hybridity within a professional dance practice has been provided. In the next chapter, influential factors *on* and *of* hybridity are discussed to understand how a dance practice may become hybrid and how this helps to increase the sustainability of the profession.

### *3. Influential Factors on the Hybridisation of Dance Practices*

As described in Chapter 1, hybridity is not a new phenomenon in the field of dance.<sup>22</sup> However, it has often not been recognised as such. During my fieldwork in the Netherlands, I found several ways in which hybridity can be present within a professional practice. For clarity, I will describe four different types of hybridity that are strongly connected to specific ways of hybridisation. Subsequently, I will examine factors that resist hybridisation based on ideas by dance and sociology scholars, like Summers and Clarke (2015), Simpson Steele (2018), Leonard (2016), Doughty and Fitzpatrick (2016), Wallis et al. (2018), and Roche (2015), as well as dance practitioners. This chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of hybridity for the working conditions of dance artists.

#### *3.1 Types of Hybridity: How a Practice Can Hybridise*

In the previous chapter, I defined the hybrid professional dance practice as a practice in which several elements have merged, in which binary distinctions are no longer distinguishable, and in which set ideas of what dance is or where dance belongs are transgressed. As mentioned in the introduction, socioeconomic shifts like the 2012 subsidy cuts for performing arts have caused an increase in freelance workforces in the field of dance in the Netherlands (Talks 13, 14, 2019). In order to find work, artists are increasingly bringing their professional practice beyond the limits of what was once – and often still is – seen as the field of dance. In some cases, this results in hybridity. While socio-economic factors have a prominent influence on the hybridisation of professional dance practices, my fieldwork shows that there are different ways in which this hybridisation occurs.

The interviews I conducted with 12 dance artists show that a degree of hybridity is present within five of the 12 professional practices.<sup>23</sup> Of the remaining seven practices, two demonstrate hybridity in the way the artists approach the combination of dance work and side jobs. While in some cases this combination results in hybridity, the practice of these two artists is not hybrid in itself. I will elaborate on this later in this section.

While the merging of inherently different elements is part of each of the five ‘hybrid’ practices, these practices have hybridised in very different ways. The interviews show that

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<sup>22</sup> Within this thesis, I aim to make the already present hybridity visible and recognisable.

<sup>23</sup> For the analysis of the hybridity of dance practices, both the more general definition of hybridity (something that exists from a merge of inherently different sources) and Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan’s definition of the hybrid visual artist, served as reference points.

hybridity reaches several layers of the professional practices of the dance artists: context, artistry, skills, and boundaries. Consequently, I have divided this notion of hybridity into four types: *contextual*, *artistic*, *skillset*, and *border* hybridity. These types will be described below by drawing on the case studies. Furthermore, the difference between the workings of these four types is visualised through drawings (fig. 1, 28). In these sketches, the circle represents the professional practice of the dance artist, the arrows represent the movement of the practice (type 1: contextual hybridity), the absorption from elements from outside (type 2: artistic hybridity), the application of skills (type 3: skillset hybridity), or the expansion of the borders of the practice (type 4: border hybridity).

### ***Type 1: Contextual Hybridity***

Some dance artists practice their artistic process and choreographic work across various contexts, in and outside the field of dance. I identify this as *contextual hybridity*. The dance artist interviewed in the second interview in 2019, serves as an example: this artist works simultaneously in the contexts of theatre, museum, and community. The hybridity within this example is present in the way the artist applies their expertise to several contexts in and outside the field of dance.<sup>24</sup> For this artist, the difference between these contexts is not important. They are ‘striving for that moment when you cannot distinguish one (context) from the other anymore’ (Interview 2, 2019). The difference between this hybrid artist’s work and other artists who work in several contexts is that they, like many hybrid artists, regard themselves as dance artists in each of their professional contexts; they do not value the work in one context over the other. The hybrid dance artist’s professional practice *moves* across and between different contexts (fig. 1, 28).

### ***Type 2: Artistic Hybridity***

Dance artists who experience a permanent openness towards the world and everything they encounter during their daily lives are examples of the second type I found: *artistic hybridity*. One of the interviewed dance artists mentioned that everything they encounter ‘just gets assimilated’ to the realm of their artistic practice (Interview 1, 2019). Several of the interviewed dance artists state that they always see themselves as dance artists, even outside the field of dance (Interviews 1, 2, 6, 2019). Their artistic practice moves along with them, stays with them

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<sup>24</sup> For the discussion of the case studies I use ‘gender neutral plural’ in order to maintain gender neutrality.

during the day, and can be influenced and inspired by anything they come in contact with (fig. 1, 28). For instance, as one of the interviewed dance artists describes:

If I learn something in the studio with other bodies about the behaviour, psychology or the state of being with others, or the state of values of humans together, then it makes its way into my everyday life. Or if I learn something like that in my everyday life, it makes its way into the performance practice (Interview 2, 2019).

This openness could entail that a dance artist develops skills that belong to other professional practices such as video editing, photoshop, or coding, as part of their professional practice and artistic process. This is an example of Njaradi's 'multi-skilled "total" workers' and Van Assche's amateurs in everything (2014, 261; 2018, 243). On a more negative note, this means that this type of hybrid dance artist is never really free from work. The dance artist in Interview 2 (2019) mentioned that 'there are definitely moments in which I wished that I had enough space to process my personal life outside the studio'. When the practice leaves little time or space to step away from the work, life and work intertwine. Inspiration can come during their sleep, in the supermarket, or during social encounters. While this lack of boundaries has the risk of leading to precarity, it can also be very nurturing and satisfying for some professional art practices. I will elaborate on this in section 3.3.

In short, *artistic hybridity* is present in dance practices in which a permanent openness for artistic inspiration is experienced and brought into practice. This openness has the risk of creating precarious conditions, but also has the potential to greatly nurture a professional practice.

### ***Type 3: Skillset Hybridity***

During the interviews, a third type of hybridity came to light. The application of dance-related skills within other professional practices defines this third type of hybridity I call *skillset hybridity*. This hybridity is present in the professional practices of dance artists who combine several jobs in and outside the dance field: for example, performing for dance companies and working in retail (Informal conversation 15, 2019).

Not all combined practices are hybrid. A considerable number of artists with combined professional practices also do not see their practice as hybrid; they see their jobs as separate activities or situations and often describe their side-job as a welcome break from the dancer's life (Informal conversation 16, 2019). Others, like the dance artists from interviews 9, 10, and 12, (2020) describe their practice as a constant state of being in-between different roles or

practices, which is very similar to how Summers and Clarke described juggling the roles of mother, dancer, and choreographer (2015).

Artists with hybrid professional practices that consist of several professional practices have something in common. These dance artists are aware that they use the skills developed through their dance practice in jobs outside the field of dance. For instance, the dance artist interviewed in Interview 8 mentioned: ‘I definitely use skills I have developed during my dance practice in my work in retail’ (2020). Years of intensive training develops the body of dancers in a unique way. Their proprioceptive abilities and their communication and social skills, gained through dance training, are very useful for any job. Dance practices in which dance-related skills are actively and consciously applied to other practices of professional practices demonstrate skillset hybridity (fig. 1, 28).

#### ***Type 4: Border Hybridity***

Some of the dance artists I spoke with have a fluid – or hybrid – idea of the borders of their profession. They are interested in practices in other fields and often have a background in several professional artistic practices like film or music (Interviews 6, 7, 2019). Over the years, these artists have moved between and through several artistic practices and eventually developed one within the field of dance, where all these practices have a place. Elements, working methods, and ways of thinking are applied from one practice to another: thus these artists speak of composing dance, choreographing music or editing choreographic movements with a cinematic eye (*idem*). This final type of hybridity involves the borders of the professional practice. This *border hybridity* is present in the practice of dance artists whose professional practice consists of an accumulation of skills, practices, and interests that originate from the artists’ former artistic and/or professional practices. A difference with *contextual hybridity* is that *border hybridity* can enlarge the practice’s area without the need to travel (fig. 1, 28).

The four types discussed above demonstrate how a professional practice can become hybrid. For clarity reasons, I will sum up the ways in which a practice can hybridise. First, a professional practice can hybridise when dance artists work within several contexts simultaneously, do not value one context over the other, and regard themselves as dance artists in all contexts. The second type is connected to a permanent openness towards the world and everything the dance artists encounter during their daily lives as influential to their dance practice. Third, a professional practice can become hybrid when skills from their dance practice



are actively and consciously used in jobs outside the field of dance. Having a fluid idea of the borders of their profession is the fourth type of the hybridity.

The types demonstrate that hybridisation can occur in a number of ways in several areas of the professional practice. Apart from the variety shown through the four different types, all hybrid forms are connected to a general condition for hybridity: dance artists need to embrace the liminality, multiplicity, and permeability of their professional practice in order for hybridisation to occur. In other words, the dance artist needs to allow their professional practice to hybridise.

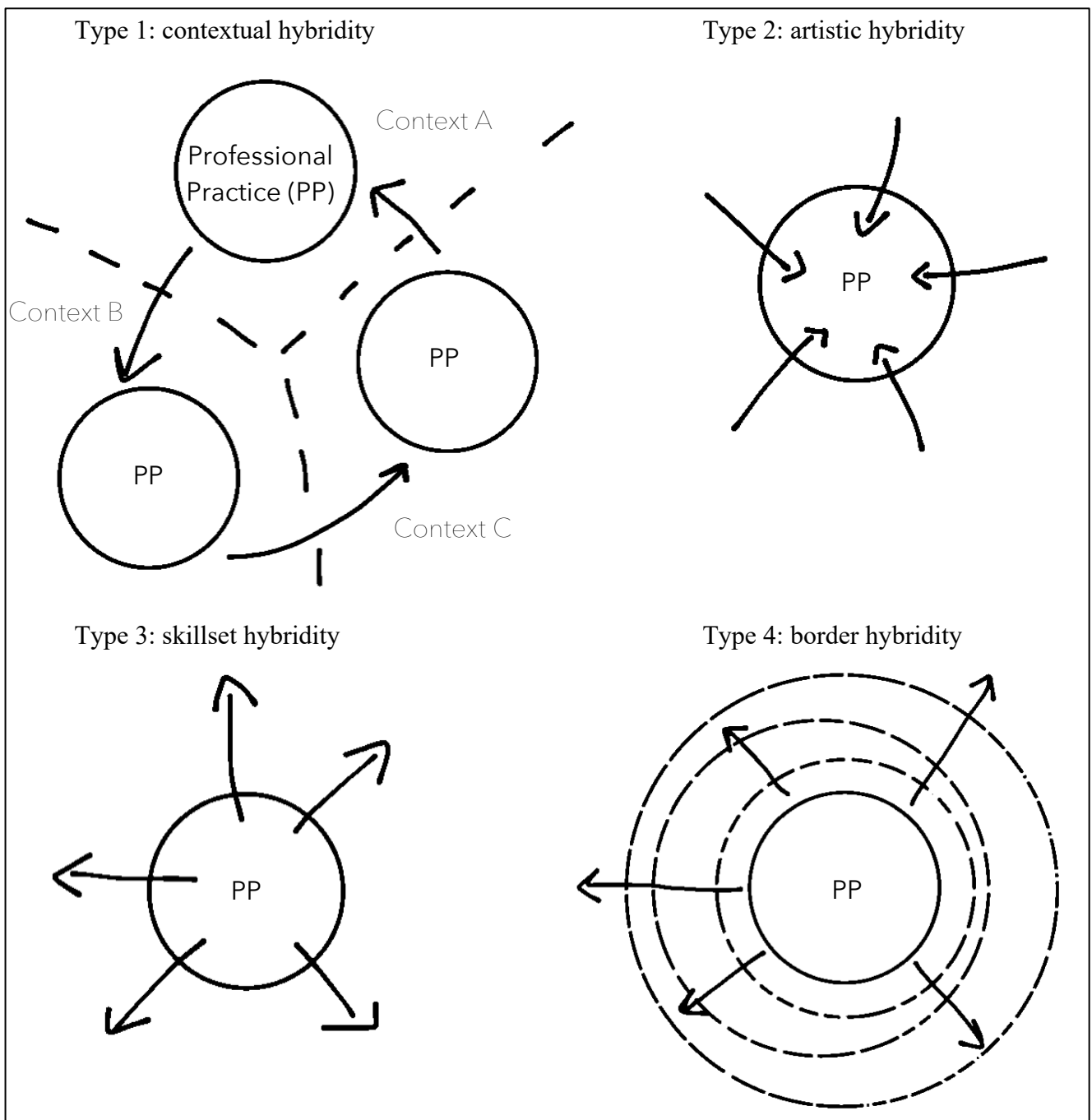


Fig. 1: types of hybridity

### *3.2 Against Hybridity: Factors That Resist Hybridisation*

While the hybridity I define in this thesis can be embraced by dance artists, it can also be resisted. In this section, I discuss factors that resist the hybridisation of a professional dance practice into one which, as defined in section 2.3, consists of a fusion of inherently different elements and goes beyond binary distinctions and the existing borders of what is seen as the dance field.

As mentioned in section 3.1, seeing different practices as separated from each other resists the hybridisation of these practices into one. In this case, artists prefer to keep the different practices they are involved in separated from each other. During conversations with dance artists, I noticed that it was the younger dance artists – dancers who just entered the professional field of dance after graduation – who mentioned this (Informal conversation 16, 2019). There seems to be a taboo among young dance artists to allow the inclusion of practices other than dance within their professional dance practice. By resisting this inclusion, hybridisation is resisted by the dance artist, and this could equally be true for more experienced or mature dance artists.

According to Summers and Clarke, some artists experience ‘in-between-ness’ with regard to their professional practice. They are always in-between the roles that dominate their lives, such as being a mother, artist, and academic (2015). Other dance artists recognise the polyactive nature of their practice, but rather than engaging in a hybrid one, choose to combine these practices as – for example – teaching artists (Simpson Steele 2018; Leonard 2016). While Doughty and Fitzpatrick recognise the possible hybridity involved when engaging professionally in both the field of dance and academics – as hybrid artist-academics – they exclude other influences, skills, and practices from outside dance or academics (2016). Holding on to binary distinctions resists hybridity as it highlights the inherently different sources the hybrid consists of (Wallis et al. 2018, 5-6). Instead of a combination of practices existing side-by-side, a hybrid professional dance practice consists of elements that have combined or intertwined in a way that makes it extremely difficult to distinguish them from each other.

Hybridity can also be resisted by remaining within the borders of one professional practice or field. Some dance artists who are able to work solely in dance as a dancer or choreographer – who eventually transition from one role to the other to gain a more empowered

role (Roche 2015, 114)<sup>25</sup> – do not engage with practices outside dance. Engaging with only one field resists hybridity as it precludes the inclusion of other practices or skills within one practice.

This does not exclude the fact that some hybrid professional practices stay well within the area of what is seen as dance. However, these dance artists remain open to influences from outside and actively ‘absorb’ elements, skills, and expertise into their dance practice. They do not resist the inclusion or absorption of elements from outside the practice of dance. When this inclusion and absorption is resisted by the dance artists, hybridity is resisted as well.

### *3.3 Hybridity and Working Conditions: How It Can and Cannot Be Beneficial*

The increase in hybrid professional dance practices brings up the question of how hybridity shapes the working conditions of dance artists in the Netherlands. In this section, possible advantages and disadvantages of hybridity are outlined.

While the merging, absorption, and inclusion of different elements and practices in one practice can lead to hybridity, it can possibly have problematic effects for the dance artist. Engaging with more than one practice or context and being open to inspiration at any time of the day can result into problems with delineating between work time and private time (see 3.1). Some dance artists feel that the work never finishes, even after they leave the studio: ‘You are always searching for new jobs and things to do. Contacting people is something you always do in your free time ...’ (Interview 4, 2019). While this aspect is inherently part of freelance professional practices, the lines between work/life, dancer/choreographer, and dance/non-dance of a hybrid professional practice have faded to such an extent that it is, in some cases, quite a challenge to understand where work stops, and private life begins. As this heightens precarity,<sup>26</sup> this difficulty can be seen as a possible disadvantage of hybridity.

Another disadvantage of hybridity can be experienced when hybrid dance artists are asked what their professional practice exists of. When asked this question, these dance artists experience difficulties with providing a compact, clear, and complete description of their practice. For example, the dance artists I spoke with described their practice as ‘consisting of different facets’, ‘usually I say I am a dancer’, ‘working in the arts in general’, ‘working inside

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<sup>25</sup> Roche describes the problematic binary distinction between choreographers and dancers as follows: ‘Within the binary relationship of choreographer as embodied mind of the work and dancer as the body, it seems more and more attractive for dancers to move into creating choreography in order to position themselves in a more empowered role. The sense that only choreographers can be self-representational means that dancers may not want to stay in the role of dancer for very long.’ (2015, 114)

<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier in Section 1.3, Van Assche noted that dance artists are exposed to difficulties with separating work time and private life, which increases precarity (2017, 237).

a hybrid that is sonic and audio-based, together with something that is dance and movement', or 'manifold' (Interviews 5, 6, 7, 2019; 9, 10, 2020). Other answers I have heard in the field of dance in the Netherlands often include a description of what the practice is not, what it is the opposite of, and what kind of tasks or works the dance artist is focused on.<sup>27</sup>

As dance artists work with and through their bodies, defining their professional practice is often connected with defining their own identity. Some dance artists always see themselves as dance artists, even in other contexts provided by side jobs or social encounters (Interviews 5, 2019; 10, 2020). Difficulties with defining their professional practice and the misconceptions surrounding their practice can result in struggles regarding their identity: am I still a dance artist when I place myself out of the field of dance? Following this thought, a dance artist with a hybrid professional practice could potentially experience more difficulties when asked to describe their practice.

While it is already difficult to explain what a contemporary dance practice exists of nowadays – as many people outside the field of dance do not come into contact with dance besides video clips or 'TikTok' challenges – hybrid dance practices are often almost impossible to explain in a short amount of time. As hybrid practices are mixes of several (artistic) practices, interests, and talents that can even take place in several contexts, there has been a lack of a widely accepted definition of these varying and complex practices.

Despite the fact that a general definition of hybrid professional dance practices is provided within this chapter, the complexity of the practice – and the difficulty to communicate about the contents of the practice – has been and may still be a reason why hybridity can be seen as a disadvantage for the dance artist (and a reason for resisting hybridity). For this resistance to weaken, the general definition of hybrid dance practices – maybe even hybrid professional practices in general – needs to become more commonly known. Ideally, when a dance artist is asked about their profession in the future, a simple answer like 'I am a hybrid dance artist', could be accepted in the same way as saying that one is a teacher, nurse, or retail worker.

Hybrid professional dance artists are often engaged with several contexts and focused on several skills and practices at the same time. Here, another potential disadvantage of hybridity comes to light. When focussed on a combination of performative practices, contexts or skills, the risk exists that some capacities that are specific for dance, such as virtuosity,

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<sup>27</sup> Some of the dance artists I spoke with during my professional practice and the fieldwork for this thesis explain what they do with descriptions like it is not like street dance, it is the opposite of ballet, I focus on dance and sound, I do something with dance and film, I work with dance.

technique, and flexibility, decrease in strength. This decrease in quality is another disadvantage of hybridity that may influence the artists' and society's openness for hybridity.

Despite its possible disadvantages, a hybrid professional practice can come with advantages that potentially improve the overall quality of work and life for the dance artist. In the light of the subsidy cuts in 2012, engaging in a more hybrid professional practice can strengthen the artist's resilience for change. As the field of dance is 'pushing out of its seams' (Interview 2, 2019) by the decrease in available work and the unchanging number of dancers who enter the field, this adaptability enables dance artists to find new places and ways for their work to take shape.

Additionally, a hybrid professional practice can improve its ability to sustain over time. Instead of drastically changing profession when the body gives up or when work becomes scarce, hybrid dance artists continuously 'update' and adapt their practice according to their environment, interests, and talents. By letting go of 'what dance should be', dance artists have the ability to sustain their practice and career for a longer period of time, or even for a lifetime.

Furthermore, adaptability and sustainability help to improve the working conditions of dance artists. As they engage in and with contexts, spaces, and practices beyond the area of dance (or theatre), they have a variety of possible choices to engage with or invest in, like the dance artist who makes work for three contexts (theatre, social, and museum) and approaches dance as a way to 'teach what it is to be human' (Interview 2, 2019). By seeing dance as a practice that benefits contexts and people from within and beyond the field of dance, this dance artist enlarges the area of their practice and betters its ability to sustain over time.

Another way to increase sustainability is the inclusion of several practices and talents into one professional practice. A considerable number of the dance artists I spoke with found ways to combine their talents and interests within one practice. For instance, this included dance artists who combine and merge the acts of composing and choreographing or dance artists who fuse artistic practices in both dance performance and music, as well as dance artists who incorporate *skillset hybridity* to apply dance-related skills for practices beyond dance.

Despite the previously discussed difficulties with explaining one's own practice and the troubled division between work and life that hybrid practices bring, being able to develop and use a variety of talents and interests is a great advantage for the dance artists, as it enables the artists to find new territories and to develop a unique practice as 'bodies of ideas', able to source from various skills (Bleeker 2014, 72). This helps the artist to stand out within the crowd of artists and to improve their value within society.

One of the dance artists I spoke with noted that ‘I ask less than what I can ask for’ (Interview 10, 2020). According to this artist, the sector has adapted to a group of dance artists who follow a similar trend: accepting insufficient fee in order to have work. Potentially, a hybrid professional practice that engages with several contexts and professional practices could increase dance artists’ and society’s awareness of precarious working conditions within the field of dance. This would help artists make demands with regard to the fees and conditions of the jobs and projects for which they are hired. This awareness also helps influential actors like art policymakers and funds to foster more sustainable practices. Furthermore, this awareness helps dance educators to prepare dance students for more sustainable (hybrid) practices. Moving beyond the field of dance enables dance artists and societal actors to become aware of the precarious state of dance labour, which in return stimulates the fostering of fair pay and improved working conditions.

This section has described the disadvantages of hybridity:

- problems with delineating between work time and private time
- problems with providing a clear and complete description of the practice
- problems with self-identification
- problems with a possible decrease in the quality of dance specific skills

and its advantages:

- increased resilience to change
- improved ability to sustain over time
- improved working conditions
- improved ability to use and develop various talents and interests within one practice
- increased awareness of precarity within the field of dance

These advantages and disadvantages of hybridity affect the overall status and working conditions of the dance artist. In the next chapter, I will focus and expand on the advantages of hybridity by demonstrating how hybridity can be used as an instrument that benefits dance labour.

#### 4. *Hybridity as Instrument: What It Can Do for Dance Labour*

In this chapter, hybridity's ability to serve as a counterstrategy against precarity will be demonstrated following a discussion of three best practices from the field of dance in the Netherlands. Subsequently, hybridity will be introduced as an instrument for deprecarisation following Van Assche's notion of 'flexicurity' and Dörre's notion of deprecarisation (2017, 240; 2005). Furthermore, hybridity's effect on the position of dance artists is discussed to understand how the artist's self-image and position in society are affected by hybridity.

##### 4.1 *Hybridity at Work: Best Practices from the Field*

In this section, I discuss hybridity's influence on the sustainability of the artist's practice and working conditions. Following three best practices from the field, hybridity's ability to serve as an instrument against precarity will be demonstrated.

##### ***Best Practice 1: choreographer/ museum, theatre, and social context***

The first best practice is the professional practice of a dance artist who has been developing choreographic work in the Netherlands since 2012. Within this artist's practice, work within the theatre context (dance productions), the museum context (performative guided tours), and the social context (guided morning raves) are included. The artist describes their own professional practice as 'beginning to have a hybrid nature of performative contexts' (Interview 2, 2019).

The hybridity – as defined in this thesis – in this professional practice is mostly caused by the way in which this artist applies their professional practice to different performative contexts like the museum, the social arena, and the theatre. In addition to this *contextual hybridity* (as defined in 3.1), the professional practice of this artist is also hybrid in the way they regard the borders of their practice (*border hybridity*), the way they apply dance-related skills and expertise beyond the field of dance (*skillset hybridity*), and their permanent openness for artistic inspiration (*artistic hybridity*).

Despite the scarcity present within the field of dance in the Netherlands with regard to funds, and the difficulty of getting programmed as an emerging dance maker, this artist has managed to sell out the majority of theatre seats during their most recent tour across the Netherlands. Additionally, they were awarded the most prestigious prize of the dance field in

the Netherlands in 2019. Even though this artist receives support from talent development institutes, dance companies, colleagues, and grants, this support alone is not enough to create a sustainable practice. This artist has built a sustainable practice through their ability to think beyond set notions of what dance is, what it is meant to do, or where it should be placed.

Despite the current crisis caused by the worldwide Covid-19 outbreak, the artist continues to develop their choreographic work and exchange with the public and social sphere by hosting and guiding movement sessions in the form of online 'morning raves' during the lock-down.<sup>28</sup> These raves inspired their latest choreographic work, which premiered online and offline in October 2020.

### ***Best Practice 2: choreographer/ film, music, and social work background***

The practice that serves as the second example belongs to a dance artist who worked in other fields like film, music, and social work before engaging in a professional dance practice in 2014. Next to their choreographic work, the artist continues to work as a producer and programmer for a film festival. The continuous search for new ways to deal with the relations between the diverse elements and disciplines they engage with is an important perspective from which the artist operates (Interview 7, 2019).

The types of hybridity present in this practice are *border hybridity* and *artistic hybridity* at work. Their journey through a diverse range of practices highlights their hybrid way of thinking with regard to the engagement to a certain practice of identity. Experiences in their career all fuel their present practice. For example, they have a cinematic way of looking at their dance work, and are unable to speak about it without filmic references (*idem.*). Additionally, elements from life, like fashion, have a significant influence on the social aspects, thoughts, or aesthetics they apply to their work. They are constantly busy with the work: they perform and test ideas when they are on the bike, they look at things through camera views, they listen to social talks. These experiences all inspire and feed the work.

Despite the fact that the interlinked character of their work can be perceived as problematic due to their inability to disconnect from their work, this interlinked character is an important catalyst for their success in the dance field. They were rewarded with several awards in the past years. The most recent one financially supports their work to go on tour through the Netherlands. The prospect of an upcoming funded tour and the stability added by their work as

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<sup>28</sup> During the national lock-down in the Netherlands in the months April, March and May 2020 due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the artist organised morning raves through Zoom. Participants could join the rave from their own homes.



a film programmer and producer, reflects the stability and sustainability this artist has reached despite the current pandemic.

### ***Best Practice 3: dance academies/ fostering hybrid practices***

The third example of a best practice is not related to a specific dance artist, but to a development among dance academies in the Netherlands. This development entails that dance academies have begun to stimulate students to develop several interests and talents while at the academy. Dance academies in the Netherlands, like Fontys in Tilburg and the Theaterschool (AHK) in Amsterdam, have recently reorganised their performing dance tracks to a more inclusive and overarching programme. At Fontys Dance Academy, the performing tracks modern/dance theatre and jazz/urban were redeveloped into the tracks Dance in Context and Urban/Contemporary. Fontys now has the aim to stimulate students to engage in more hybrid professional practices by encouraging a broader development guided by the students' personal talents, strengths, and interests (Talk 13, 2019). In the case of the Theaterschool, the Urban Contemporary track merged with the Modern Theatre Dance track into a new study programme: Expanded Contemporary Dance. Through this broader development, these students have the possibility to develop a unique and sustainable professional dance practice within the field of dance or beyond.

Academies had previously been wary of the specificity of these emerging hybrid practices. Until approximately 2012, dance academies in the Netherlands were primarily concerned with the training and development of dancers with a certain technical level and performative quality who would be able to get contracts with a dance company. A more tailored development threatened the uniformity and virtuosity required by bigger companies because the focus on other talents would take away time from physical dance training. Since the subsidy cuts in 2012 and the subsequent decrease in dance companies in the Netherlands, dance academies have been increasingly concerned with guiding students towards a unique and sustainable professional dance practice. The specificity academies were discouraging before, is now encouraged. Students have the possibility to develop new forms of dance labour, to navigate new areas of dance, or even to combine a study of psychology or social work with dance.

This new aim of dance academies does not mean students are not allowed to focus solely on their dance practice. Students can also choose to keep their focus within the field of dance. In general, these academies now have the aim to help all students to develop a practice which allows them to continue their artistic work for a considerable amount of time. Students thus

have the possibility to become aware of their personal talents, preferences, and skills. Furthermore, an academy's open attitude towards its surroundings helps the students to become aware of the reality of the professional field and their ability to have an impact on the world, early on. Dance artists can have a prominent impact on society and can be valuable for fields far beyond the field of dance. Adding to what I discussed in section 2.1; dancers *can* do more than just dancing.

#### *4.2 Hybridity as Instrument for Deprecarisation*

As discussed in Chapter 2, hybridity has the ability to steer away from binary distinctions, to break boundaries and to enhance the quality of the practice. Additionally, hybridity can lead to enhanced characteristics or traits: *hybrid vigour*. These abilities, described by scholars from the fields of sociology and biology, and the advantages of hybridity, described in the previous chapter, suggest that hybridity has the potential to increase the sustainability, adaptability, and flexibility of the professional practice of dance artists.

In the previous section, three best practices were discussed that demonstrate this ability. Hybridisation can lead to improved working conditions and, ideally, the deprecarisation of the profession, deprecarisation being a term developed by German sociologist Dörre as a counterstrategy against precarity (2005). Considering the current precarious state and uncertain future of the dance field, a certain counterstrategy against precarity would be very welcome.

A strategy that potentially leads to deprecarisation, other than the one I am proposing in this thesis, is the 'flexicurity' approach coined by Van Assche. In this approach, a high level of security is connected to a high flexibility rate by looking beyond the limits of one job (2017, 240). While both Van Assche's 'flexicurity' approach and the 'hybridity' approach I introduce in this thesis can lead to deprecarisation, they have a very different effect on professional (dance) practices. In order to understand this difference, these two approaches will be briefly compared below.

Both 'flexicurity' and 'hybridity' invite flexibility with regard to the borders of the professional dance practice and – by finding new ways and places to work – have the potential to provide more security and less precarious working conditions. Therefore, both strategies could be (co)responsible for the deprecarisation of a professional practice. However, despite the common goal of deprecarisation, hybridity entails much more than a different take on socio-economic security through 'flexicurity' as explained by Van Assche (*idem.*).

Instead of solely looking beyond the limits of one job through ‘flexicurity’, hybridity enables the artist to dissolve the limits and borders between professional practices altogether. Examples of this are best practices 1 and 2 as described in the previous section. In contrast, these borders remain unchanged with the ‘flexicurity’ approach; the dance artist will combine jobs instead of focussing on one job only. This leads to a more pluriactive or polyactive professional practice, not a hybrid one (Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan 2012, 9). With the hybridity approach, the dance artist not only *combines* different professional practices, but *includes* several practices within one hybrid professional dance practice. The hybridity approach does not separate the practices from each other but allows for interrelations and fusions between different practices.

Breaking or fading boundaries, rules, and codes that delineate where the area of dance is and what it can do asks a great deal of flexibility and courage from the dance artist. As the places where and ways in which the artist executes the artistic work are often ‘less obvious’ or ‘never done’, the artist is more often than not in an uncertain position. Despite the uncertainty that comes with entering unknown territories and the inherent uncertain position of freelance dance artists,<sup>29</sup> a hybrid professional practice is – for the artists who are open to it – a way to reach a sustainable future as a dance artist in the Netherlands.

#### *4.3 Zooming In and Out: Effects of Hybridity on the Self-Image and the Artist's Position in Society*

The practices I have described in section 4.1 demonstrate how a hybrid professional practice may stretch beyond the borders of what is seen as the area of dance. With this expansion, the artists come to influence areas outside the field of dance. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, dance labour is often misunderstood as merely dancing to entertain. By defining a professional dance practice as hybrid and by encouraging artists to enter into the hybrid space in-between their practice and their surroundings, the complex, and far-reaching potential of dance for the world comes to light.

As dance artists are experts in movement with a sensitivity to see what is in-between or absent, they could arguably give advice on questions in the areas of urban mobility, public

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<sup>29</sup> In the article ‘The Future of Dance and/as Work: Performing Precarity’ Van Assche notes that uncertainty within a freelance dance practice is something to have some resiliency against. She includes thoughts on uncertainty by dance artist Michael Helland who mentions that he is looking for ways to ‘think about it as productive and not just precarious’ and ‘it’s important to have some resiliency to the state of not-knowing. To justify the sense of uncertainty that is so normal working as a freelance dancer’. (2017, 240). Helland’s thoughts give an idea of the way freelance dancers deal with the uncertainty that is inherently part of their practice.

space, health, and corporate management. As Kunst states, dancers have inventive power and the capacity to challenge notions of organisation, perception, and dissemination of movement (2017, 134). When society starts looking beyond the limits of aesthetics and virtuosity, dance could be valued in a whole new way. For example, including dance artists in the process of developing plans or scenarios, could provide new ways of dealing with problematic situations.

This potential does not suggest all dance artists should engage in a more hybrid professional practice or apply their work in areas far from the field of dance. Rather, I encourage dance artists to follow their personal interests and talents, even if this means that their practice stretches beyond – or even leaves – the field of dance. As mentioned before in Chapter 3, the hybridisation of a professional practice depends on the individual dance artist's wish, interest, and ability to break the borders of their profession.

The four different types of hybridity defined in section 3.1 show how this concept can be present in a variety of forms within one practice. The discussion of hybridity as a counterstrategy in this last chapter reveals that hybridity has the potential to improve the working conditions of dance artists by expanding their expertise and skill beyond the field of dance. While hybridising can lead to a practice that is less focussed on dance technique, a hybrid professional practice can make immense gains in uniqueness, flexibility, adaptability, and sustainability.

Despite the possible problems with explaining the practice to others and with self-identification, hybridity has the potential to strengthen the self-image of the dance artist. Hybridity's ability to steer away from binary distinctions helps to bring the traditional vertical hierarchy between a choreographer and a dancer to a more horizontal plane. As the position of dancers is and has been seen as lower than the choreographer's position, the flattening of the line between dancer-choreographer has an immediate effect on the self-image of the dance artist. In order to gain more recognition, transitioning from dancer to choreographer is no longer the only way. Dance artists can increase the value of their professional dance practice by building a unique, sustainable, and personal practice, which in return increases their self-worth and the value they have in and outside the field of dance.

Defining what hybridity *is* and what it can *do* in relation to the professional practice of dance artists leads to the question of what is needed from society in order to improve working conditions in dance. Apart from the dance artist's creative and innovative ways to increase the value of their practice and their openness for hybridisation, societal actors like art policymakers, dance educators, and dance programmers need to give greater value to the profession of dance

artists. Instead of a profession that is merely seen as an entertaining or aesthetic experience, dance artists need to be valued for their far-reaching capacities as *experts of movement*.

For this to happen, societal actors and dance artists need to be open to engage in more hybrid professional practices. Engaging with a more polyactive, combined, or hybrid practice should be valued rather than scorned, as it stimulates sustainability and inclusion. An important role in this new valuation is set aside for the dance educators in the Netherlands as discussed in section 4.1. Next to encouraging a more hybrid education for dance artists, society must encourage (hybrid) dance artists to move beyond the field of dance to new territories. While art policymakers may adapt to the increase in hybrid dance artists who will graduate in the coming years, criteria for funding and support need to be restructured and adjusted to new shapes and forms of dance practices, especially if dance work stays dependent on external funding.

Of course, ideally sustainability includes new ways of financing a professional dance practice. Subsidies and funds are often connected to set criteria. However, hybrid dance practices move beyond set ideas of what dance is and may not meet all or any of such criteria. Hence, if the criteria for funding do not evolve along with the profession, hybrid dance practices should be financed in new ways like crowdfunding, corporate sponsors, or funds from fields other than dance. It is still unknown how an increase of hybrid dance practices will influence the field of dance, dancers' labour and their value in society. Nevertheless, the case studies and conversations in the field show that hybridity is already present in the field as a counterstrategy against precarity. Fostering hybridity within dance practices could provide dance artists with ways to increase the value of their practice in and beyond the field of dance.

## Conclusion

Within this thesis, I have explored and unpacked the reasoning behind and the implications of the following statement: *In the current socio-economic environment of professional dance in the Netherlands, the hybridity of the professional practice of dance artists can be understood as an instrument for deprecarisation.*

An analysis of 12 case studies and additional informal conversations with dance practitioners has demonstrated that hybridity is increasingly present within professional dance practices in the Netherlands. Despite its negative connotations like impurity and polyvalence, hybridity has the potential to increase the sustainability, adaptability, and societal value of professional dance practices. Dance artists are experts in movement and ‘bodies of ideas’ who are able to use various practices (Bleeker 2014, 72).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, they are valuable for fields far beyond dance like health care or architecture. Dance artists create new territories and ways for their practice to exist through three strategies: through broadening their practice, steering away from habits, and including a multitude of talents and interests within one hybrid practice.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the precarity of dance artists in the Netherlands. The recent and upcoming changes in the socio-economic environment of the Netherlands were investigated as a financial stimuli for a dance artist to look beyond the field of dance for work. Additionally, the misinterpreted practice of dance was outlined to highlight the misconceptions that surround this ever-adaptable and flexible profession. Furthermore, dance was discussed as immaterial and precarious labour that can become more sustainable through merging, mixing, and including various skills, practices, and expertise into one hybrid professional practice.

Definitions and usages of hybridity from the fields of zoology, sociology, and the arts were outlined in Chapter 2 to understand what hybridity *is* and what it can *do*. Following Van Winkel, Gielen, and Zwaan’s definition of the hybrid visual artist (combining autonomous and applied work without valuing one over the other) and other definitions from the fields of zoology, sociology, and the arts, hybridity was discussed in relation to dance labour. These definitions formed the basis for the new definition of a hybrid professional dance practice that I have proposed in this thesis. I argued that a professional dance practice is hybrid when: 1) *elements from inherently different origins have merged*, 2) *binary divisions are no longer perceivable or of importance*, 3) *the borders of the practice stretch beyond what is seen as the field of dance*.

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<sup>30</sup> Without the risk of falling into superficiality or a lack of self (Bleeker 2014, 72).

Hybridity in dance practices was discussed in Chapter 3. Based on the analysis of 12 interviews, four types of hybridity were introduced: *skillset hybridity*, *artistic hybridity*, *border hybridity*, and *contextual hybridity*. These types are affected by one important condition for hybridity: the dance artist must embrace the liminality, multiplicity, and permeability of their practice. In order to understand how a professional practice hybridises, influential factors were outlined. Hybridity can occur by working in several contexts simultaneously, by a permanent openness towards everything the dance artist encounters, by using dance skills in other jobs and by having a fluid idea of the borders of profession. Resisting factors were discussed to understand what prevents hybridity. Hybridity can be resisted by seeing practices as separate, by holding on to binary distinctions, and by remaining within the borders of one professional practice.

Furthermore, the benefits and risks of a hybrid professional practice revealed how hybridity can have a positive influence on the working conditions of a dance artist. Despite problems with separating work and life, describing one's practice, self-identification, and a decrease of dance-specific skills, hybridisation can lead to an increased resilience to change, increased sustainability, improved working conditions, increased awareness of the precarious situation of working dancers, and the ability to use a variety of talents and skills in one practice. Hybridity within professional dance practices can lead to sustainability, adaptability, flexibility, and – ultimately – deprecarisation.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that hybridity could serve as a counterstrategy against precarity. Following three best practices from the field, examples of practices that came closer to deprecarisation through hybridity were provided. Furthermore, hybridity's ability as an instrument for deprecarisation was discussed. Hybridity within a professional dance practice is indeed an instrument for deprecarisation in the current socio-economic dance world in the Netherlands. Finally, I have zoomed in and out of the self-image of the artist and the value given by society to dance to understand what is needed to increase the possibility that dance artists hybridise their practice. In addition to this, I argued that hybridisation can potentially affect the artist's position in society for the better.

I now conclude with the advice that, for hybridity to transform dance practices, the dance artists, the dance field, and several societal actors would have to be open to new forms of dance labour. This entails that hybridity needs to be accepted within the field of dance and be fostered by influential actors like dance educators and art policymakers. This would give dance practitioners the possibility to affect new areas and to include a wider variety of skills within their practice. In order to improve common knowledge of the dance profession, dance

needs to be discussed publicly as a complex and hybrid practice by influential actors. This could lead to an improved value. This revaluation could potentially better the position of dance artists within society by actualising a shift to presenting themselves as embodied experts of movement instead of virtuosic artistic entertainers.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has destabilised societies – including cultural fields worldwide – the field of dance in the Netherlands has had to adapt to new norms in order to continue. While much is still uncertain about the dance world in the Netherlands post-pandemic, hybridity can be of aid in developing a stable, sustainable, and adaptable practice that is not solely dependent on funds granted by governmental bodies. Fostering hybridisation, new educational tracks in which hybridity is stimulated, and valuing the profession's full potential are significant developments that could support the survival of professional dance practices in the challenging socio-economic environment of the Netherlands.

In the near future, research must be conducted on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the dance field in the Netherlands in order to understand how working conditions have been affected. Furthermore, hybridity within the field of dance must be evaluated over time in order to understand its true potential as a counterstrategy against precarity. I aim to be engaged with this ongoing concern through conversations on this matter within the field of dance. In order to increase this thesis's reach and effect, I will share my conclusions with relevant partners in the field, such as Dansateliers in Rotterdam, Dansmakers in Amsterdam, and Fontys Dance Academy in Tilburg.

For the realisation of this thesis, I have focussed on dance artists within the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands. Since I have been active as a dance artist within this area since 2012, this thesis entails thoughts and ideas that originate from my own experiences in and with the field of dance in the Netherlands. While this has enabled my research to dive deeper into the matters described within this thesis, it has also coloured its tone in a very personal way. As I started my career at the beginning of a period of scarcity – in 2012 – concerning dance work in the Netherlands, I am painfully aware of how easily precarity becomes normal within a professional practice.

For future research, it could be valuable to conduct a similar research on hybrid practices in the area of non-academic dance styles. Additionally, hybridity as a concept and tool could be examined within the contexts of other professional practices that are affected by precarity: such as the practices of writers, lecturers or musicians. These studies could provide other or similar ideas of what a hybrid professional practice is and how it affects its position within society.



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1. Choreographer and dancer, experienced and supported, 21-02-2019, Rotterdam
2. Choreographer, experienced and structurally supported, 15-03-2019, Rotterdam
3. Dance and circus duo, experienced and structurally supported, 15-03-2019, Rotterdam
4. Dancer and maker, experienced and unsupported, 23-04-2019, Rotterdam
5. Choreographer, experienced and supported, 06-05-2019, Amsterdam
6. Choreographer and performer, just graduated and supported, 15-05-2019, Amsterdam
7. Choreographer, just graduated and supported, 17-05-2019, Amsterdam
8. Dancer, experienced and employed by dance company, 03-03-2020, Amsterdam
9. Dancer, dance teacher and choreographer, mature and unsupported, 18-03-2020, Amsterdam, online
10. Dancer and maker, experienced and supported, 18-03-2020, Amsterdam, online
11. Dancer and dance teacher, experienced and employed, 20-03-2020, Amsterdam, online
12. Dancer, teacher and choreographer, mature and supported, 20-05-2020, Amsterdam, online

\* Please see 'Legend' below for an explanation of the terms I use here

*Talks:*

13. Artistic advisor Tilburg Dance Academy, 29-05-2019, Tilburg
14. Artistic director, Dansateliers, 08-05-2019, Rotterdam

*Informal conversations:*

15. Dancer, train travel, experienced dancer with side job, 10-05-2019, in the train between Utrecht and Amsterdam
16. Just graduated dancers, audition, just graduated dancers, break during an audition day, 24-03-2019, Amsterdam

*Survey:*

17. Results of survey spread in the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands in 2019

Legend:

*Profession:*

Dancer:	An artist who works with dance. Performs the choreography and works together with choreographer during the creation process.
Maker:	An artist who makes performances.
Choreographer:	An artist who creates choreographies.
Teacher:	An artist who teaches dance.
A dance and circus duo:	Two artists who combine practices in dance and circus.

*Experience:*

Just graduated:	Less than three years professional experience in the field.
Experienced:	More than three years professional experience in the field.
Mature:	More than 10 years professional experience in the field.

*Support:*

Not supported:	Not receiving financial and/or organisational support.
Supported:	Receiving financial and/or organisational support.
Structurally supported:	Receiving financial and/or organisational support structurally.
Employed:	Employed by a dance company, dance academy or institute for dance.