

Commodifying Identity:

The workings and consequences of hyper-subjectivity in
the neoliberal capitalist dance industry

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Abstract

This thesis researches hyper-subjectivity in contemporary dancers in Europe, and the intersection with neoliberal capitalism. It dives into the workings of the phenomenon as well as researching the cycle of precarity, emotional and affective labour it bolsters and maintains. The research expands on the commodification of dancer's identities through oscillating between flexibility and their identity and does so through a combination of auto-ethnography and qualitative interviews with contemporary dancers working in Europe.

Hyper-subjectivity is defined as a skill in which dancers oscillate between their identity and their flexibility to remain as employable as possible and meeting market demands.

The necessity to adhere to feeling rules, manage anxiety induced through precarity, and the pervasive nature of these negative feelings into the private lives of dancers since the boundaries between work and private life is blurred, require a significant amount of emotional and affective labour to deal with these consequences.

It creates a cycle in which dancers are constantly placed in a vulnerable position, because the concept of hyper-subjectivity impacts the stability in one's understanding of their own identity, making them vulnerable to unequal power dynamics. As well as imploring them to increase their investments in all aspects of their lives to remain competitive on the market.

The concept of "cruel optimism" is used as a framework for analysing the connection between the affective attachments of dancers to the promise of stability, while this promise remains out of reach, allowing for further exploitation.

Furthermore, the study reveals how the field demands and praises authenticity making is seemingly empowering, while disguising the restraints placed by neoliberal rationality that reinforce capitalist ideology. The demand to conform to capitalist values while also remaining authentic further strengthens the need for affective and emotional labour.

The need for the commodification of hyper-subjectivity intensifies the amount of emotional and affective labour, which in turn intensifies the inequalities. The inequalities then result in more need for hyper-subjectivity and thus a perpetual loop is created. The loop keeps dancers in a constant state of precarity and puts them at a risk to suffer serious mental harm.

Foreword.

Dear reader,

Here you find my thesis "commodifying identity: the workings and consequences of hyper-subjectivity in the neoliberal capitalist dance industry." The research has been done to fulfill the last requirement for my master's degree in Contemporary theatre dance, and dramaturgy and the University of Utrecht

This last piece of academic writing in my academic career has probably been the most difficult yet. Perhaps this is logical as it is the culmination of my entire 6 years of studying. To write and include such personal aspects of my life in this thesis has been confronting, at some times upsetting but mostly very exciting.

Looking back on the past months I come to the conclusion that the reason this process felt so slow, and was so messy, was because of the hugely personal and intimate aspect of the research. The confrontation with the reality in which dancers live and work was upsetting and affected me personally. However, this does not take away from the excitement of bridging the gap between my physical dance practice and my academic career. This has been my main goal for the past few years, though I had always thought that the knowledge I gained in the academic scene would feed into my physical practice, but not the other way around as much. This has made the entire process, despite being hard, a very fulfilling process.

I am extremely grateful for my supervisor Konstantina Georgelou and want to thank her for sticking with me, despite the sometimes messy and unstructured writing and overall slow process. I want to thank my dad for all the proofreading and feedback on my writing and filtering out most unnecessary comma 's. I am also grateful for all the dancers and academic peers I have talked to about my topic, who all helped me in developing my ideas and opinions surrounding this topic. A very special thank you is reserved for the dancers that were kind enough to let me interview them.

Lastly I want to thank my friends and partner, the copious cups of coffee and my cats for their support and company during this process.

I hope you enjoy reading.

Sidney Yeo
Utrecht, 29th of July 2024

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1. Introduction

The start of this research originated after a particularly gruelling Tuesday in mid-January. I found myself in the middle of a repurposed warehouse in Utrecht. The average temperature outside was around 2 degrees Celsius and the warehouse was not much warmer. I was about to start filming a commissioned concept video. I would be improvising on various spots in the warehouse, the parameters for me as a dancer were rather unclear. After a futile attempt to warm up my body in 2 degrees, we started with the first shots. Filming dance is both a blessing and a curse. You get the chance to redo scenes you are unhappy with, but on the other side, every mistake you make will be visible too. However, the issue here was the waiting times in between shots. I would cool down completely in between each take. Staying warm would take an enormous amount of effort and intense cardio, and for a shoot that ended up lasting 8 hours, that would have been a challenge.

The shoot itself was great, I got creative freedom with my movements, I got to see the footage and adjust where I saw fit, and the team was positive and cooperative. So, overall, a positive work experience in that sense. The physical conditions proved to be a challenge, however.

We had one day to shoot the material we needed, and we ended up going two- hours overtime to finish it all. This all is not new for me; I have only once experienced a shoot ending at the designated time. As a dancer I know I have to be flexible in that respect and I have learned to take overtime into account.

However, it did mean that I had 35 minutes to make my way from the shoot to my rehearsal. Because my working day did not finish when finishing this shoot. I still had a two-hour heel – rehearsal planned with a choreographer I had not worked with before.

I found myself on the bike racing home to change clothes and contemplating whether I had time to shower off the sweat and dust I had accumulated during the shoot. I simultaneously found that I was coaching myself into the mindset necessary for the rehearsal I would soon step into.

Shifting between styles of dance or movement languages can be a challenge, especially if they are not close to one another. I know from previous experiences that the energy of the style I was moving in before leaves its residue and it takes me some time to adjust to the mindset I needed for the new style. Since this was not a class but an actual rehearsal, I did not feel that it would have been professional for me to step into the rehearsal without being physically and mentally prepared for what I would be doing there. So, I had 35 minutes to get myself in the right space, physically and mentally. The rehearsal was great, the choreographer was nice, and we got a lot done in the time we had. It was time for me to go home, or so I thought.

The choreographer asked me to join her as an assistant in the class she was going to teach at the studio where we just finished rehearsing. Choreographers asking you to assist them are great opportunities to train in their style without the pressure of the job, getting free training and cultivating a social relationship with them. All these elements are tiny investments in my future as a dancer.

So, finally, after another 1,5-hour class I get to pack my bag and make my way home to have the first proper meal of my day, to shower and to go to sleep before I get up the next morning to go to my lecture.

Days like this are not uncommon for freelance dancers, especially when there is no financial security since future jobs are not yet booked or not yet confirmed. It might be the last job a dancer has for

a while, resulting in taking on extremely long workdays. They do, however, result in the development of a certain skill a dancer needs to possess in order to work, which is the ability to adapt extremely fast. A dancer needs to switch between different styles and their corresponding movement languages, as well as to the way different choreographers and different projects work.

For example, stage performances allow for few mistakes and there are no retakes and the way of working in a live performance is vastly different compared to film-based projects, for instance. These switches happen on stage, during performances, but they also happen between and around jobs.

This reminds me of a performance I did called “Just Us” by Nicholas Garlo, where I switched between contemporary dancing and heels choreography multiple times within the same piece. It started with a commercial heels solo, which then morphed into a contemporary improvisation. After that I ran backstage to throw off the heels and came back on to do a section of contemporary choreography only to then have to run backstage again, put my heels back on, and come back to do contemporary choreography in heels until the piece ended. This required me to morph together commercial styles with contemporary styles of movement, as well as oscillating between these two styles. Here I had to switch between the different modes of performing within the piece itself.

Switching between and intertwining these different movement languages in one piece is a part of what choreographer and scholar Kareth Schaffer calls ‘hyper-subjectivity’ in their thesis “Flexible Performativity: The Invisible Visible Labor of Contemporary Dancers” (2020). This oscillation is an obscured tool and skill with which dancers engage. Schaffer describes hyper-subjectivity as something which mostly happens within performances. I argue, however, that hyper-subjectivity is a skill or trait that extends further into the lives and work of dancers than initially theorised. As dance scholar Annelies van Assche points out in her book "Labor and Aesthetics in European Contemporary Dance: Dancing Precarity", the dance industry has changed drastically over the past decade reflecting the transition into our highly individualised neoliberal society (2020). The post-Fordist mode of production, that is integral to neoliberalism, heavily stimulates project-based work (van Assche and Schaffer 2023, 205). Thus, dancers move from project to project leading to rarely having stable financial income or daily structure, while also constantly running the risk of getting injured and not being able to work at all (van Assche 2020; *ibid* 2023).

This makes the work of dancers precarious. Precarious work is understood by van Assche as “work that is carried out in a variety of economic and legally insecure circumstances, such as the absence of long-term contracts and career prospects, low wages, poor working conditions, and only minimal or no social protection, among other things” (Van Assche 2020, 8). Hyper-subjectivity is related to the precarity of dancers, since it is a necessary skill for dancers to possess not only when performing, but also in securing diverse types of jobs and becoming as employable as possible to leverage as much stability as

possible.

According to Arlie Hochschild, in her work “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure,” the neoliberal capitalist society profits heavily on the emotional and affective labour brought about by the socio-economic change into a service-oriented, project-based economy (2012). These changes have not only asked for emotional flexibility during working hours, but also demand emotional flexibility in order to deal with the precarious employment.

Performance scholar Bojana Kunst’s work “*Artist at Work, the Proximity of Art and Capitalism*” serves as a base for my analysis. This combined with the works on hyper-subjectivity, flexible performativity and precarity by Kareth Schaffer and Annelies van Assche, will place my research within the context of the post-Fordist neoliberal capitalist society and how it is intertwined with the way subjectivity is impacted (2015). The influential works on affective and emotional labour by authors such as sociologist Arlie Hochschild, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant, and feminist scholar Kathi Weeks provide the context for understanding how hyper-subjectivity involves substantial amounts of affective and emotional labour within this discourse.

For this research I have interviewed five contemporary dancers who work within the European dance industry. All dancers have worked both in companies and as freelancers. Next to this I have conducted an autoethnography of my own experiences. The data from this (auto)ethnography serve as the material that can be analysed through the lens of hyper-subjectivity in neoliberal capitalism.

In this thesis, I argue that the hyper-subjectivity of dancers is the culmination of a dancer’s precarity, emotional labour and affective labour because of the workings of the neoliberal post-Fordist capitalist society. I ultimately discuss the way in which hyper-subjectivity connects to the perpetuation of power imbalances within the dance industry

This writing aims to discuss the following thesis statement:

In neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism the commodification of hyper-subjectivity is a necessary skill for dancers to utilise for their survival. However, this commodification requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour, and its workings perpetuates unequal power dynamics within the dance industry.

By drawing on my personal experience as a freelance dancer, together with the perspectives of various dancers working within the European field this thesis focuses specifically on the grounds, implications, and consequences of one of these skills, called hyper-subjectivity.

1.1 Methodology

To effectively analyse the influence and effects of hyper-subjectivity on the lives of dancers in the European context, I have chosen a mixed-methods approach which combines autoethnography, ethnography and literary review.

Autoethnography offers more insight into the personal experience of dancers and ethnography offers the experiences of other dancers to offer multiple perspectives. It is designed to analyse and place the cultural context of the dance community within the academic discourse on dance.

1.1.1 Autoethnography:

Autoethnographic research combines a set of qualitative traditions such as narrative research, autobiography, ethnography, and arts-based research (Cooper and Bruce 2022). Scholars Robin Cooper and Lilyea Bruce explain the relevance of this research method as follows “Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (ibid. 197). Autoethnography can be viewed as an approach that closes the gap in research where the researcher's own voice is not highly visible (ibid 198).

With autoethnography there is the undeniable presence of personal bias, therefore I must acknowledge my positionality, especially with research where identity and subjectivity make up one of the focus points of the research. I am a white gender-questioning and queer person working in the dance field, without a formal academic dance education. This influences various aspects such as internship possibilities and network development, which influences my job opportunities. I also study full time, which further influences my availability to train, audition, and work jobs. This background influences the way I navigate this field. However, I must also say that I am fortunate enough to have parents who can and do support me not only mentally but also financially which allows me to combine a university degree with my training and unstable income from my dance practice. I am aware that I have a certain amount of liberty to take risks and make investments in my practice that are not a given for everyone. Especially in a high investment and high-risk field like the dance field, this freedom has allowed me to create an environment for myself where I have backups and baseline stability in terms of ways to provide for myself that cannot be taken for granted.

I have approached autoethnographic research by starting with reading old journal entries from the periods over the past few years to reflect on and gain perspective on my experiences. I then engaged in reflexive journaling about a few specific experiences that I had in the past 9 months. Furthermore, I engaged in conversations with friends and family about working as a dancer that allowed me to reflect further.

The use of autoethnography provides a unique and in-depth perspective on the lived experience of

a dancer. It allows for an analysis of emotional and subjective aspects that otherwise remain obscured and therefore makes a unique contribution to the research.

1.1.2 Interviews

In order to offer a comprehensive understanding of the broader social and cultural context of working dancers, I have conducted a series of interviews with dancers working as contemporary dancers. To understand in a broader sense, though still limited in scope, how the current neoliberal capitalist society influences the hyper-subjectivity in dancers and gain more insight into the way other dancers deal with this phenomenon.

I have conducted 5 interviews with working professionals in the contemporary dance field of Europe. I have broadened the scope to include the whole of Europe, because freelance dancers in this economy work all over Europe. Most dancers choose the type of work they want to do and focus less on where this work is located, but also because of the lack of work to sustain a livelihood from work in the Netherlands alone. Participants were chosen based on their work experience, availability, and the age range was set between 24 and 34. I opted for a mixed group gender, sexuality, and ethnicity wise, to collect experiences from various perspectives with the aim to represent various voices within the dance community. The interviews touched on various themes with the main three being professional experience and economic stability, career development and marketing oneself, and identity and creativity.

Next to these interviews I also include unstructured and incidental conversations that happened while moving in and around the dance field, in classes, meetings, on jobs, train rides, and during auditions. I have attempted to log these conversations and they are added to the autoethnographic aspect of this thesis.

Interview questions

I developed 20 questions of which I used the 15 listed below. The questions were intended as conversation-starters on the themes I discuss in this research, like the precarity of the job, the ability to be flexible, identity and the (emotional) demands of working as a dancer. By allowing the participants to reflect on their experiences I generated the data that work as illustrative encounters to the theory and my firsthand experiences, as well as data that form a base for my analysis.

Not all responses to the questions are used in this research, only the answers relevant for my argumentation and analysis have been included. I opted for interviewing in a more fluid structure where I let the direction of the conversation guide which questions were asked and which were already discussed while responding to previous questions. The full transcripts of each interview are added as appendices to the document.

Questions:

1. How do you describe yourself as a dancer and/or choreographer?
2. What do you see as “the dance industry”? More specifically the contemporary dance industry?
3. Do you prefer project-based work or company-based work and why?
4. From your experience, how feasible is it to sustain a livelihood solely from professional dance? What factors influence this?
5. Could you elaborate on the aspects of your work as a dancer that often go unrecognised or uncompensated?
6. Over the years, have you observed any notable changes in the dance industry, and how do you perceive your role within these evolving dynamics?
7. In navigating your dance career, how do you prioritise making yourself marketable to potential employers?
8. Do you feel it is necessary to be able to adapt fast if so: in what way? Do you see this as an inherent quality of a dancer? In the sense of between jobs, but also on/in jobs.
9. Is there a difference between “who you are” in rehearsals and who you are during performance?
10. In my experience, dance is very intertwined with emotion and feeling and working with those emotions and feelings is a big part of the job. How do you navigate this, see this, and feel about this?
11. How do you approach the emotional demands of performing, particularly in emotionally intense pieces,
12. How do you prioritise self-care before and after such performances?
13. Considering Authenticity in dancers, do you expect this and how much space do you give for that in your pieces?
14. Do you feel a lot of pressure to create new work?
15. To be a dancer means to be able to adapt fast to different styles, places, people you work with and how you present yourself. How do you train for that, how does it influence the development of your creativity and your authenticity?

In this text the (auto)ethnographic writing is placed in a parallel narrative to the theoretical analysis. To indicate the different modality of writing, these sections of text have been italicised and indented. I have opted for this format because it mimics on a micro-level a similar kind of oscillation as the one that hyper-subjectivity for dancers brings about. Personalised writing and stories evoke different feelings and an affective atmosphere than academic writing does. By switching between these registers, I invite the reader to experience navigating these different emotional and affective atmospheres.

1.1.3 Literary review

To place my research within the academic discourse I have conducted literary research focussing on the concept of hyper-subjectivity, its place within the structure of flexible performativity, its place in the current economic climate in Europe, and the way in which affective and emotional labour play a crucial role in its workings.

My research draws on the work on the proximity of art and capitalism discussed by Bojana Kunst in (2012), the work of Kareth Schaffer and Annelies van Assche on flexible performativity (2020; 2023), and the work of scholars such as Arlie Hochschild (2012), Kathi Weeks (2007) Carolyn Veldstra (2020) and Lauren Berlant (2011) on affective and emotional labour.

The literary review allows me to situate my research within the broader academic debate and to analyse my findings through an extensive theoretical frame. It grounds my research within existing discourse while allowing for further exploration of the topic.

The results from autoethnography and the results from the interviews will be analysed through the perspective of the main concepts and themes that come forward in the literary review. I will link individual experiences and corresponding interview answers to the concept discussed with the aim of synthesising these to generate a deeper understanding of the impacts and consequences of hyper-subjectivity. Autoethnography generates personal insights, while ethnography allows me to place these insights in a broader social, economic, and cultural context, while the theory of the literary review allows me to connect these findings to the broader academic discourse. The integration of these methods allows for a multifaceted perspective.

I am aware that my personal bias plays a part in the way I conduct the interviews and how I interpret the answers, I aim to stay critical of these biases where and when they show up so I can address them.

2. Theory

This chapter provides a context for understanding the grounds on which dancers' subjectivities are affected by capitalist dynamics and the vulnerable position this puts them in.

First the chapter discusses the link between the contemporary dance scene in Europe and its neoliberal and post-Fordist structure, to the identity and hyper- subjectivity of dancers, expanding on the precarious nature of working in the dance field. Exploring the impact of the market demands on the

subjectivity of dancers, connecting the implications of hyper-subjectivity and the neoliberal capitalist society to the emotional and affective labour that this requires.

2.1 Identity

The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that the body is the physical and symbolic locus where identity can be expressed, where it is lived and where it is perceived (1962). In other words: the body and identity are inherently intertwined. Since dance concerns the body, it is logical to assume that identity is also intertwined with dance (Yeo, 2024).

Philosophers like Michel Foucault, who argues that the body is a ‘highly malleable phenomena which can be invested with various and changing forms of power’ (Foucault quoted in Shilling 2007, 79), and the sociologist Chris Shilling who writes that “the body mediates the relationship between self-identity and social identity [...]” (ibid. 82–3), it becomes apparent that the intersection at which identities are situated and the relation to the body, especially apparent in physical forms like dance, is the site where power dynamics are perpetuated and challenged. Identity, then, is not a monolithic concept but is shaped by the ongoing interactions and experiences one has. Philosopher and psychologist Bayo Akomolafe (2023) states how identity is a modern-day construct, emphasising that identity is therefore not an inherent trait but rather a social construct informed by historical and socio-political contexts. Akomolafe implies that identities are acted out, performed, and perpetuated through repetition. Identity thus, is affected by the power structures present in society. Power structures such as the patriarchy, capitalism, globalisation, and colonialism influence how identities are shaped, but also which identities are marginalised, and which can inhabit the norm (Akomolafe 2023; Crenshaw 1989). The way identities are constructed and influenced mean that identities are complex and multifaceted.

2.2 Identity and Capitalism

When looking at the current dance field in Europe, which has been characterised by neoliberal capitalism since the 1970s, it becomes clear how identity is impacted by the societal context. Post-Fordist modes of production are inherent in neoliberal capitalism and are characterised by flexible production methods, capitalising on creativity and (precarious) project-based work (Kunst 2015; Van Assche 2018). Performance scholar and philosopher Bojana Kunst writes that the proximity of art and capitalism have an impact on the production of art (ibid). Since the post-Fordist modes of production exploit human potentiality, the production of social relations and affective elements of the contemporary human being, shifting the economy towards affective work, cognitive work, and non-material work, and regarding them

as the main sources of value (Ibid, 20). In addition, Kunst writes that “the once essential qualities of life after work actually turn out to be at the core of contemporary work (ibid 101), emphasising how contemporary capitalism does not only affirm itself through the work of art but also through the artistic labour and the artist’s life.

The autonomy of dancers is impacted by this, since their work has become heavily subjected to commercial interests and market demands, as well as impacting the consumption patterns and the generation of subjectivity. This intersection of post-Fordism and the production of dance impacts subjectivity and by extension also impacts identity. Identity and subjectivity are both fundamental concepts in understanding the self and personal experience and impact each other.

Identity concerns the intersectional position of a person making up their characteristics, beliefs and roles that define both individuals and groups (Bell 2002, 211). While subjectivity is concerned with the more internal aspects, such as emotions, perspectives, and thoughts. Subjectivity influences the way in which individuals internalise and relate to their identity (ibid, 212). Both subjectivity and identity are influenced by the cultural contexts that generate the resources that are utilised to construct a social identity (ibid, 214). Therefore, when identity is impacted, subjectivity is impacted and vice versa.

The sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato writes that subjectivity has become the largest commodity produced in neoliberal capitalism, since it forms the main ingredient for all the other commodities produced (Lazzarato 2010, 89). Consequently, the production of subjectivity allows neoliberal capitalism to shape one’s identity to serve capitalist market demands, and identity thus becomes one of the essential ingredients to the production of value (Kunst 2015, 21-25). Meaning that dance artists, in order to leverage (commercial) success must also leverage their identity.

Leveraging one’s identity for market success becomes especially important when looking at the precarity in which dancers live. The post-Fordist mode of production stimulates project-based work, meaning that after each project, the dance artist is unemployed again and equates to an unstable financial income or structure (van Assche and Schaffer 2023, 205). Van Assche comments how not only financial and structural precarity affects dancers, but also their physical precarity is constantly present. The body of dancers is fragile and inconsistent and the precarity of their life is ‘redoubled by the fragility of the body to ensure performance throughout the working life,’ (Van Assche 2010, 18). The absence of these forms of security form obstacles for planning the future, resulting in the “the future continually laps[ing] into the background because one has to focus on an ever-to-reproduce present.” (ibid, 11) Van Assche also points out how living in precarity also means dealing with a social status that can be revoked at any time (ibid 11). Van Assche poignantly remarks that this has influence on the physical and psychological (and social) consequences on the precarious individual. (ibid, 11) These elements Consequently result in dancers leveraging their subjectivity, and by extension their identities, through oscillation of their subjectivity.

2.3 Hyper-Subjectivity

The precarity between asserting their identity and their flexibility to become as valuable for the work as possible, in the aim of remedying their precarity, in a concept Schaffer calls hyper-subjectivity (Schaffer 2020). Schaffer defines hyper-subjectivity as the constant shifting of performers between asserting their individual identities and surrendering to the demands of the performance. Schaffer deems this an oscillation between individual expression and self-negation (ibid). According to Schaffer, and later also van Assche, the disavowal of the self offers the space for exploration of plural subjectivities which challenges the fixed notion of (artistic) identity and self-hood (Van Assche and Schaffer 2023). Dancers, when performing, often shift between embodying the self and embodying a neutral performer whose identity is absent (ibid, 208). Van Assche and Schaffer re-name the concept of hyper-subjectivity to hyper-individuality (ibid). While still connecting it to the larger context, this term is mostly related to the oscillation that happens during a performance, for van Assche and Schaffer. Focusing on the transformative power and the ability to distort one's own identity and the identity of a group to communicate or embody different feelings, sensibilities, audience edification and "to move and be moved from deeply personal experiences and convictions" (ibid, 30).

Schaffer and van Assche conclude that hyper-individualism is a learnt skill developed through cultural hybridity and "the expert play on affect" (2023, 30). Therefore, by extension hyper-subjectivity works through the same principles. The emphasis on the instability of the self and the materiality of the body implies a potential for transformation that is to be gained from hyper-subjectivation. However, for dancers it generates a tension between making a living as a dancer and "Pursuing job opportunities predicated on unique stage presence and individual character" (ibid, 29). This suggests that there is more to hyper-subjectivity than a skill or a feature that is employed only when performing. It suggests that hyper-subjectivity also plays a role in the life and work around performing as well.

I, therefore, propose to use the term hyper-subjectivity to talk about the oscillation that happens specifically related to turning oneself into a commodity to keep up with post-Fordist demands.

The concept of hyper-subjectivity and the necessity for dancers to leverage their subjectivity influences their identity formation, where, through the constant switching between asserting their identity and their flexibility, they run the risk of creating a fragmented sense of self (Kunst 2015), as well as the necessity to deal with the constant presence of anxiety of not securing the market success necessary to survive their precarity. Looking at how Akomolafé (2023) argues that identities, being a modern-day construct and therefore open to abuse of modern-day power structures, it becomes concerning what vulnerability dance artists are subjected to through their hyper-subjectivity. On top of this, Kunst argues that the capitalisation on the artist's life and identity leads to hyperactivity to keep up with the precarious project-based working mode and strengthens the dancer's vulnerability since every aspect of their life is

fuel for the production of value. This ultimately risks leading to affective exhaustion as a result of the constant pressure to be in a perpetual state of readiness and creativity to keep up with post-Fordist production demands (Kunst 2015, 145).

This mode of governmental control is subtle and does not rely on direct confrontation. The performance theorist André Lepecki argues it illustrates the general neoliberal ideology which puts emphasis on individual choice, limiting government intervention and the mechanism of the free market in forming social and economic outcomes (Lepecki 2013, 8). While at the same time preconditioning its subjects to accept specific forms of control that consequently influence their perception of what freedom is when placed in a controlled environment (ibid). In other words, individuals are stimulated to behave according to contemporary capitalist ideology in such a way it becomes unknown to the individual that this is not a free choice.

2.4 Affective and Emotional Labour

As already mentioned before, the different aspects of hyper-subjectivity can put dancers in a vulnerable position, affecting both their physical and mental wellbeing. In order to deal with the negative consequences of having to leverage one's subjectivity to remedy their precarity, dancers employ both affective and emotional labour.

Emotional labour can be defined as the process of managing the emotions and expressions of individuals in the working space (Veldstra 2020, 2). Affective labour can be defined as the production and/or manipulation of affects and encompass a broader range of emotional and relational work which extends beyond the confines of the traditional workplace.

The boundaries between affective labour and emotional labour are blurred and affect in general is a concept hard to grasp in writing. As performance theorist Simon O'Sullivan writes "You cannot read affects, you can only experience them" (O'Sullivan 2001, 126). In the same line feminist scholar Clare Hemmings points out in *Invoking Affect* how affect transcends the body of an individual and is therefore hard to grasp (2018, 554). As the philosopher Brian Massumi argues, since affect defies the well-known way in which epistemologies work, it becomes important that to write about and investigate the unknowable "cultural theorists will have to abandon the certainty that has come to characterise the field" (ibid 554; Massumi 2002, 3).

Affective labour reaches into all areas of life where affective states can be produced or manipulated (ibid, 3). Emotional labour concerns surface level acting, displaying emotions which are not necessarily felt in that moment, and deep acting, attempting to feel the emotions that one needs to display in that moment (Hochschild). Emotional labour can generate emotional exhaustion when there is a prolonged disparity between what is felt and what must be displayed (ibid, 20). Affective labour involves

creating and managing relationships, social networks and communities and is tied to the communal bonds and shared experiences that create cultural and social capital. Thus, affective labour becomes important in the areas where emotional engagement is key to success.

Affective labour capitalises on life, leveraging the emotional and relational work of workers, but still holding expectations of this life to guarantee labour market success (Gregg, 2010. 250; Veldstra 2020, 3). As emotion can be seen as the ideological attempt to make sense of the production of affects, emotional labour becomes relevant in understanding the capacity for impact of affective labour (Ibid, 4).

Affective labour is, for Kunst, closely related to these contemporary modes of production of subjectivity since it functions as a creative, affective, and social power (2015, 60). This social power is becoming increasingly fused with the other forms of creative production (Ibid, 60-68). Dancers need to build and maintain relationships with their audiences, potential employers, and other influential people to better their career and engage in affective labour to manifest this. They are responsible for their own marketing and social media presence, networking at events and performances (also after having performed themselves), and other activities related to creating emotional connections between audiences and their work. The creative production of their art and the affective labour of managing the relationships between audiences and their art are thus intertwined.

The amount of emotional and affective engagement with their practice as a dancer, through the work in creating intersocial emotional connections and the managing and regulating emotions as part of the job, can therefore become highly indicative and influential of their opportunities and affect their (financial) stability (Hochschild 1979, 569; Kunst 2015, 19-21).

2.5 Cruel Optimism

The precarious nature of the labour of dancers and the affective labour produced and managed in the work of dancers creates an emotional dynamic that resembles Lauren Berlant's 'cruel optimism' (Veldstra 2020, 4). Cruel optimism is a concept that addresses the attachments to optimistic ideals that eventually form obstacles for the (economic) improvement of and the well-being of the individual (Berlant 2011). In other words; cruel optimism involves a desire for improvement, usually tied to economic, cultural, or social aspirations, while the conditions for the fulfilments of such desires are impossible to reach or come at an incredibly excessive cost.

Cruel optimism affects subjectivity because it shapes the individual's perception of themselves, their relationships, and their position in the world (Berlant 2011, 182). Berlant writes; "One makes affective bargains about the costliness of one's attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep one in proximity to the scenes of desire/attrition (ibid, 185). Berlant emphasises how one can be

driven by the hope of fulfilment through achieving their goals or desires, but how they are, simultaneously, worn down by the emotional effort and cost at which the affective bargaining comes.

Contemporary capitalist policies in the workplace celebrate, according to Veldstra, “constrained notions of ‘authenticity’” which “normalise and generalise a mode of cruel optimism, in which precarious workers have no choice but to at least appear – in their affective orientation – to remain attached to the systems that generate their exploitation.” (2020, 4.) According to Berlant a type of impasse is created where individuals become stuck between the potential of transformation, brought through their attachments to their desires, and the reality of the socio-economic conditions in which they live (Berlant 2011, 203-204).

Hyper-subjectivity, then, can be considered as an acute manifestation of cruel optimism. The vulnerable position of dancers in neoliberal capitalism is exacerbated by the cycle of cruel optimism, where the aspirations of dancers are impaired by the exploitative conditions of their labour. Emphasising their precarious position, which then asks for more commodification of hyper-subjectivity, and deems it a necessary skill for dancers to employ for their survival in the broadest sense of the word. While being crucial, this commodification requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour and perpetuates unequal power dynamics by.

Dancers find themselves pinched between the precarious nature of their work and the demands of the (affective) economy. This results in the necessity for emotional labour to deal with the personal costs of precarity while continuing to express and generate the positive affects that are demanded in the work environment of dancers.

To summarise, this theoretical framework offers a contextualisation for the way in which hyper-subjectivity in dancers works. Showing how dancers engage with the balancing act between flexibility and asserting their identity, being flexible but authentic enough to adapt to the market demands of neoliberal capitalism. The emotional and affective labour, thus, function as a countermeasure to the mental and physical toll of this negotiation. Cruel optimism offers a lens for analysing this negotiation and the countermeasures. This uncovers the vulnerable position in which dancers work and live and provides a base to address the impact of neoliberal capitalism on dancers.

3. Analysis

Hyper-subjectivity’s main aspects consist of flexibility, the ability to assert one’s identity and ultimately to commodify these aspects to compete on the neoliberal capitalist market (Schaffer 2020). Being able to commodify both flexibility and identity turns out to be a tricky and contradictory endeavour which can feed into personal and cultural feelings and affects of anxiety. In addition, engaging in hyper-

subjectivity causes a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour in order to deal with its consequences.

To analyse the working of hyper-subjectivity I engage with the data gleaned from the interviews as well as my firsthand experiences to offer deeper insight on the working of hyper-subjectivity and the corresponding emotional and affective labour, drawing conclusions based on integrating the distinct aspects of the proposed theory with the information collected.

3.1 Flexibility and Hyper-subjectivity

The developments of neoliberal capitalism and the necessity for dancers to be hyper-subjective reflect the different modes of flexibility a dancer must possess as one of the main aspects of hyper-subjectivity. This flexibility can be divided into two different types of flexibility: flexibility while working and doing the jobs dancers do and flexibility in dealing with the precarity of their livelihood as dancers. Both types are a necessity born out of the neoliberal capitalist society. Despite my focus being on the flexibility outside of the “job” the two inform and influence each other and are inherently connected.

3.1.1 Flexibility on the Job

I argue that hyper-subjectivity is specifically taxing on dancers because of the connection between dance and the body. The oscillating subjectivities of dancers combined with the corporeal practice of dance engages with the unstable materiality that makes up the body, emphasising the capacity for transformation and challenging the idea that the body is static and unchangeable (Ibid). This underscores the body as a site for broader ongoing negotiations, which points to the impact of dancers being both the producers and objects of their own labour, fusing their creativity and corporeality in their work and as their work (Kunst 2015, 10-17). As Lepecki states: "Dancers are valued for their creativity, flexibility, absence of material needs they can make work in spare rooms with nothing more than their bodies, often unshod, subsist on few calories, and even among performing artists deliver more for less by garnering the most meagre wages" (2012: 66). In other words, the connection between the body and identity shows how the body is a critical site for the (trans)formation of identity for dancers and highlights the fluid nature of identity within the context of dance.

Through embracing the core elements of post-Fordist means of production, such as flexibility, decentralised decision making, risk taking, and creativity, the work of dancers is often project-based and or involved with other decentralised working structures). This is further highlighted by the way in which dancers need to master different movement styles.

The control I have developed to master both heels and contemporary styles reflects the flexibility I need to have as a freelance dancer. If I were not proficient in both it would mean I would have only been able to do one of the two jobs, which means less income and less networking opportunities for me. So not only is working the double-job-day a reflection of the precarity of this line of work, but also the reflection of the necessity to be flexible. However, the reason I got offered both jobs is less dependent on my skills in these styles of dance. Of course, I need to be able to execute whatever it is that is asked of me on the job but the chance I was offered the jobs more likely had to do with my personality and looks rather than my skills. This reminds me of a conversation I had with a friend who recalled an audition she had the week prior, where dancers who were of exceptional skill were cut. It prompted her to say that it is hardly ever about your skill as a dancer once you enter the audition room, but more if you have the right personality and looks to fit in.

This echoes feminist scholar Kathi Weeks' notion that contemporary hiring processes are based on personality rather than skill, where “personal or even intimate traits of the employee are drawn into the sphere of exchange” (2007, 239). This indicates that there is more to working as a dancer than being able to dance, it requires the “right” personality. I argue specifically that it is often not the personality you have, but the personality you are able to exude. Since dance is a visual practice first (Brodie and Lobel, 2008), it means that the audience will read what it sees, implying that the way things look carry value. Therefore, I argue that looks and personality are conflated to a great extent.

For a musical short film, I was asked to learn a South Korean style of dance and I distinctly remember the director coming into the studio to have a look at how far we had progressed (me and one other girl together with one of the lead actors). She said to me “wow, I am impressed with how well you are picking up the choreography!” (for context: the other two had performed in a piece that had scenes utilising this style). It left me thinking “why did she say that I am just doing my job; picking up choreography and executing it.” It was not until a week later that I realised that I was not hired for my dance skills necessarily, but for two other reasons. 1) I was cast as a student because then they could pay me less (Read: not at all). 2) I had the right looks and energy for the part. I was cast for my so-called “resting bitch face” and my height. The girl who was my opposite was booked before I was and they needed someone who matched her energy, height and looks. Therefore, the director’s surprise at me doing my job as a dancer was indicative of the fact that I was not booked for my skills, but for the way my personality and looks matched what they were looking for.

I had to commodify both my personality and my looks to do the job. I had to lean into the personality that my looks are prone to exude. Despite not being booked for my dancing skill per se, I was still expected to pick up this new style of dancing I had never done before. These examples echo how flexibility is connected in a practical sense to the work of dancers and how it is a valued skill to possess

when working on the job. This skill is necessary because of the increase and preference for project-based work which brings about these needs for adaptability.

3.1.2 Flexibility to deal with precarity

Next to the fact that dancers need to be flexible in navigating working with new people every project, adapting to different styles of movement and types of jobs and locations of working, and problem solving while performing, they must also be flexible in the way they navigate their precarity (van Assche and Schaffer 2023). Dancers must manage their stress levels, adapt to the constant changing of schedules because of new job opportunities and jobs falling through, constantly grow and improve and adjust their practice and negotiate and compromise their boundaries, in order to work towards stability and reduce their precarious working life. This also includes being ready to work when the opportunity arises. Consequently, this generates a constant pressure to reveal and evolve their abilities as artists and entrepreneurs and means they actively engage with the neoliberal ideology of ‘self-investment’ to remain hireable. Since the distinction between life and work is unclear in the life of a dancer every aspect of this life can potentially be deemed as self-investment (Kunst 2015, 19-22) in terms of aspects such as physical health, creative inspiration, mental health, and social relations.

Niek accurately said: “Recreational time is very much connected to work, even a coffee with a friend can serve as inspiration for your creativity and thus your work.”

In my interviews both Robin and Niek mention how they recognise the demands this work can have on them and how they try to generate some distance between their work and their personal time by having a clear idea of what helps them recharge, both admitting to not having done this before and paying the price in terms of mental health.

I recall a conversation I had with a friend who stayed over at my place for a few nights because of an audition in the Netherlands she wanted to attend. She talked about how she was in the metro on the way to a party when a man came to sit next to her. He saw her lockscreen photo, which depicted her on the stage, and it prompted him to start a conversation by asking her if she was a dancer. They started talking about how he used to be a dancer, and revealed how he was the artistic director of a big dance company. All of a sudden, my friend’s ride to a party had turned into an important networking event.

Snapping in and out of work mode becomes an important form of the mental gymnastics involved in optimising the chance for stability. The commodification of mental flexibility, I argue, refers to the way dancers must be able to recognise the moments in life that can serve their career, whether it be a conversation with a stranger on the metro or a cup of coffee with a friend. Recognising the type of opportunity (network, inspiration, skill-development, recovery) and capitalising on it becomes part of the daily routine of a dancer. Consequently, since dancers are constantly working through the unclear boundaries between life and work, hyper-subjectivity pervades the realm of work and plays a significant

role in the private spheres of dancer's lives and therefore are constantly engaging with the commodification of their hyper-subjectivity.

3.1.3 Consequences of Hyper- Subjectivity

Kunst argues that, especially for dancers, the radical individualisation and homogenisation of subjectivity in neoliberal capitalism have caused creativity, imagination, and dynamism to merge with self-governance (Ibid). According to Kunst the production of life requires constant transformation and flexibility (ibid). In other words, Kunst argues that the intertwining of work and private life for artists thus requires constant adaptability because of subjectivity being at the core of the production processes. She argues that this is the crisis of subjectivity (ibid). The intensification of the individualisation process places individuals at an intersection of anxiety).

“Today the crisis of subjectivity has lost its emancipatory potential that it had in the artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s, or at least needs to rethink and implement this potential in an entirely new manner. The main reason for this powerlessness is the fact that today's human being is confronted with a brutal intensification of individualisation processes, described by Lazzarato as the production of subjectivity. Old forms of life become obsolete even before they can actually be absorbed. This opens up the way for subjectivity, which experiences its transformation through constant existential paradoxes. This makes us live in a constant state of tension, at the edge of anxiety; it is this state that causes us to increase our investments” (21-22)

In other words: the crisis of subjectivity is catalysed through the radical individualisation and homogenisation of subjectivity and has consequently lost its emancipatory potential instead which has resulted in existential paradoxes and increased anxiety, causing dancers to increase their investments because of this anxiety.

The increase in such investments, while living in a state of tension because of the crisis of subjectivity, adds on the emotional labour of dancers. They are forced to, in addition to their hyper-subjectivity, also remedy the anxiety generated by the crisis of subjectivity in their daily lives. This is evidenced in my earlier anecdote about how I chose to assist the class even though I had a gruelling day in order to invest in various elements that could progress my career.

In my interview with Robin (and Remy on the side) they both answered the way to financial stability was through seeing yourself as a multi-purpose hire. To learn other skills that can create more work. She and Remy are both involved with film and photography as well as modelling as a few of the other skills they invested in, as well as being trained in multiple different styles of dance and other performing arts genres. Robin emphasises how you must be an entrepreneur and you must search for work; it will not come to you.

As discussed before, the way private life and profession are intertwined for dancers means that this equates to an increase of investments in all aspects of our lives and with that an increase in anxieties regarding these investments. The crisis of subjectivity concerns identity and its creation (Kunst 2012, 19-25). Since dancers engage with hyper-subjectivity as a form of commodification, dancers run the risk of generating a fragmented sense of self (Ibid) I argue that consequently they need to engage in more affective labour to remedy this fragmentation. So, on top of the contradicting need for flexibility and a grasp on their identity which leaves dancers more vulnerable to abuse and leads more work in guarding those boundaries and dealing with vulnerable situations.

Since this labour is present in nearly every aspect of a dancer's life, I argue that not only is there emotional labour involved while working, but also affective labour in remedying this anxiety, since it pierces through the barrier between working life and private life. This means that this work occurs in all areas of life where not only emotional states, but also affective states are produced.

The feeling one needs to invest in oneself to possess many different skills that can generate income, reflects this anxiety. This also emphasises the current economy's ideology of the entrepreneurial self, highlighting the individual's responsibility for market success. This responsibility also generates anxiety and pressure because of the precarity of the job (Van Assche and Schaffer 2023; Van Assche 2018; Kunst 2015).

The main reason I decided to start this master's degree was to possess different skills that might make me more hireable, or at least to have something else to fall back on. However, it also constantly raises questions about who I am. Am I a dancer first, a student first, an aspiring dramaturg first? I constantly shift what I am "most" according to the space I am in.

These investments that result in the intertwining of the work and private life for dancers are a phenomenon that Berlant calls 'the promise of exchange value' which is the anticipated return in the investments of an individual (2001, 36). This creates an impasse, where dancers become wedged in between the potential for transformation and the reality of their socio-economic conditions. Becoming stuck in this paradoxical situation results in the oscillation between hope and despair, since the promise of transformation is constantly present, however never attainable. Berlant argues that "an impasse is a holding station that does not hold but opens out into anxiety, that dog-paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. An impasse is decompositional—in the unbound temporality of the lag one hopes to have been experiencing all along (otherwise it is the *end*), it marks a delay" (ibid, 434). Cultural theorist Ann Cvetkovich (2012) argues alongside Berlant that the impasse created through the promise of exchange value generates the affect of anxiety and the object of knowledge invites to understand the impasse as "a singular place that's a cluster of noncoherent but proximate attachments that can only be approached awkwardly, described around, shifted" (Berlant 2011, 434–435). Cvetkovich argues that the

impasse, besides and because of the way in which impasses are deeply connected to socioeconomic structures “suggests that things will not move forward due to circumstance—not that they can’t, but that the world is not designed to make it happen or there has been a failure of imagination” (2012, 20-21).

Therefore, the intertwining of work and private life for dancers and its consequent promise of exchange value, holds them hostage in a perpetual state of anxiety. This uncovers the socio-economic structures that hold this impasse in place.

3.2 Authenticity, Feeling rules and Hyper-Subjectivity

The fact that dancers do not only engage in a duet of surrendering and asserting oneself during performances, but during nearly every aspect of their lives, signals a departure from the relationship between dancers, their bodies and their work that used to exist. Van Assche and Schaffer argue that since the 1990s, the development of the “ideal contemporary dancer in Europe” has moved away from the hired body’s aim to eliminate differences but has instead moved towards generating uniqueness and emphasising differences (2023, 207). According to Van Assche and Schaffer this has turned into the “key to success, or at least pivotal in order to be employed.” (ibid, 207). This shift highlights the neoliberal move to individualisation in the 21st century (ibid, 206). In other words: a dancer’s employability is contingent on their *unique* subjectivity. This unique subjectivity indicates that whilst dancers must be flexible in every aspect of their being, they must at the same time, have a clear understanding of their identity and by extension their personality.

However, as mentioned before, identity is fluid in nature and affected by the changes and influences of norms and values imposed by society (Akomolafe and Manning 2023). This indicates that identity is only stable in its instability. Therefore, because the commodification of dancer’s unique subjectivity is linked to modern-day power structures which enable abuse, a certain vigilance is necessary in terms of understanding personal boundaries that need safeguarding to prevent their identity from becoming susceptible to these forms of abuse. Such boundaries are intricately linked to one’s identity and subjectivity because they are linked to one’s values, beliefs, and perspectives (Warren 1990).

This brings me to a conversation I had with a well-known choreographer and Dutch dance company director during a meeting during my internship. She mentioned how, in the past, she has had to step in during certain creation processes with external choreographers because she feared the dancers were crossing their own boundaries. She specifically said that dancers “will go for it” regardless of their boundaries.

So, despite dancers needing to know their own boundaries, knowing what those boundaries are and how to guard them proves to be a complicated task to uphold when working in the current economic structures.

While Niek and Shaquille both agree that flexibility is a great asset and one of the main pillars of a professional dancer, they also mentioned how one should still have clear boundaries. Knowing when to say no and where to draw the line is important because it makes sure you are still aligned with yourself and your own identity. They both recognise the moments where they allowed those boundaries to be overstepped and how it affected them and how this has affected them negatively.

Therefore, because of the need to be flexible while also commodifying their unique subjectivity this becomes a complicated process and navigation between upholding boundaries and being flexible to secure their stability.

It prompts me to use a physical experience I have with my body as a metaphor for the issue of flexibility and identity and why this becomes a paradox. I have always been an extremely flexible person, physically I mean, I am hyper-mobile, and my body will stretch in any direction. This sounds great, especially for a dancer. However, my main problem causing my actual physical pain and injuries and severely impacts my skills as a dancer negatively is the fact I am too flexible. My body will go to an extreme from which it cannot recover. I bend so far; my body does not have the strength to pull me back to my centre. This impacts my muscles and joints and can hurt me a lot. So, even though being flexible in movement is a great asset, too much of a good thing will become harmful.

I return to the relation between the body and identity. I argue that a similar issue can occur when becoming mentally so flexible to the point of no return, where one's adaptability and by extension their identity becomes as Kunst mentions "fragmented" (Kunst 2015, 33). This further emphasises the predicament where dancers are, in their hyper-subjectivity, more vulnerable to abuse because of the risk of identity fragmentation.

3.2.1 Feeling Rules

The risk of identity fragmentation is strengthened by the precarity of the economy which causes the established forms of identity to be interfered with and to be broken off. Through this these forms rapidly become outdated because of accelerated social, economic, and technological changes (Kunst page). As mentioned by Kunst, this accelerated breaking off and changing of established forms of identity result in a rapid change of what Hochschild calls feeling rules (2015; 1979). Hochschild argues that the social guidelines that direct the way in which we try to feel can be considered "as a set of socially shared,

albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at), rules.” (1979, 563). Feeling rules reflect patterns of social membership of either universal social groups or specific social groups (ibid 566).

According to Hochschild, rules for how we manage feelings are implicit in any ideological stance (ibid 568). Because of this, feeling rules are a space of political struggle. The work to make feeling and the frame consistent with the situation in which an individual finds itself is emotional work. This emotional work is work that individuals consistently and privately engage with in order to bridge the gaps between what one feels and what one wants to feel (ibid, 562-563).

Thus, feeling rules are a result of the preferred affects imposed by the contemporary capitalist society (ibid, 562-563). Despite being written in the early 1980s, feeling rules remain relevant as the current neoliberal capitalist economy continues to develop as a highly service-based economy, where social media has grown to an influential position. According to dance scholar Mahri Leto (2021) feeling rules have become highly influential since the rise of social media. Sharing the appropriate aspects of personal lives and displaying appropriate emotions corresponding to these happenings are indicative of the influential presence of feeling rules (ibid). Since dancers market themselves mainly through their social media, the feeling rules that are perpetuated in the digital realm become and remain relevant for dancer’s negotiation and regulation of their emotions and the corresponding affective labour.

As dancers we often need to adjust our feelings towards the feeling rule specific to our social group. In the video shoot the energy and atmosphere was supposed to be gloomy and melancholy. At that point in time this was the opposite of what I was feeling. There was a certain amount of self-coaching necessary to get me in the right headspace to be able to adhere to the expectations of the job I was doing. Similarly, in the afternoon when I entered my heels-rehearsal, a completely different energy was expected of me. Being and feeling sexy while still covered in dust and sweat from the previous job, and a certain amount of cold-induced back pain made that goal increasingly difficult. However, as a professional and to stay professional, it is my responsibility to deal with these elements and overcome them. So, what I was feeling at the moment was fatigue, pain, and a certain level of grossness. What I wanted to feel was enthusiasm, energy, and sexiness to do a respectable job as the dancer on the job as well as cultivating network connections that deem me as a cooperative, responsible, and hard-working dancer. When I reflect on the way I managed to do the emotional work to feel what I wanted to feel, what was expected of me to feel, I realise a huge contributing factor is the passion I have for dance. My passion functioned as my yellow-brick road from my anxious and precarious situation to the place where I could enjoy my work and behave as a professional dancer. Reminding myself that I am lucky to have had two jobs in one day, how much I love dancing and the fact that I get to do such diverse jobs and the excitement of working with someone new was the emotional work I had to engage in to remedy the negative feelings I had.

If I were to fail at producing these positive feelings before I started the second job, I would risk jeopardising a new network connection and work relationship. Especially since I had not worked with this choreographer before so I had no previous reputation that could excuse me. I felt the pressure to make a good impression since I know that my network will be my main supply of

dance jobs and one negative review could affect all my upcoming opportunities. This highlights how individual this experience was for me, I cannot share this work in shifting mindset with anyone else to not come across as ungrateful or unmotivated, and I am the only person responsible for this shift to happen in the first place.

Staying in the delineated zone that a feeling rule creates, in order to stay away from negative affects, means an increased pressure for emotional work to keep up and manage the rapid changes of these feeling rules (Kunst 2015, 565).

In the dance scene, there are many situations where these feeling rules are present. The best example is that of auditions. Essentially a job interview, except you do the interview at the same time as sometimes up to 150 other dancers. Having to dance under scrutiny of a group of potential employers who usually sit behind a table whispering to each other and writing furiously, next to many other dancers who are out for the same job. It is clear that these situations are not the most enjoyable, especially when the need for a job is high. However, despite the competitive comparing and judging of the other people in the room, which brings various feelings such as anxiety and self-doubt, you have to seem happy to be there. There is a certain expectation where you as a dancer must be grateful to be in this room and to get this opportunity, regardless of how gruelling the situation might be. Not being able to show such positive affects usually gets you cut. Having sat behind one of these tables and having been in countless auditions before, these expectations are real. I have seen dancers get cut because they looked extremely unhappy, while being amazing dancers, and hearing later they were just too nervous

Trying to align personal feelings with societal expectations influences the formation of identity. Weeks (2007) discusses the relationship between the labour process and the process of subjectification. She mentions that the coordination of mind and feeling extends “to the affective life of the subject, into the fabric of the personality (ibid, 240) “In Hochschild’s language, it involves not just ‘surface acting’ but ‘deep acting’ and results in “practices that have a transformative effect on the do-er” (Ibid, 241).

When shifting between two vastly distinct types of jobs the feeling rules regarding those jobs also change for me. A different type of energy is expected. But also, my position within the space is different. In the video shoot I was in charge of my own movement. Not only did I have creative liberty, but creative input was also expected from me as well. When I arrived at the rehearsal afterwards, I had to switch into a different role. One where I was not creatively in charge. Since I had not worked with this choreographer before, I had to figure out during this rehearsal how much creative input she appreciated. Some choreographers do, some do not, and then some think they do, whilst they actually don’t.

When reflecting on myself and my behaviour I recognise a difference in the way I communicate and the way I hold myself. However, I find myself mostly wondering how the others in the room see me. What their perception is and how I am coming across. I have learned to undo a lot of this

projection onto others of how they might perceive me, but I do see this as a symptom of trying to keep up with the changing social rules. Different teachers I have had, varying in age when they worked as a professional dancer, have told me different things about how to behave and what is expected of me when working. Some have told me to never adjust positions myself but ask the choreographer to do this, some have said that not doing so reflected poorly on my ability to work and think along with the choreographer. Leaving me to figure out every time I step into a new space what behaviour is expected of me. The instability of my role as a dancer does affect me personally. I used to say I was introverted, my facial expressions mirroring that most of the time. However, since I started working as a dancer my best friend noted a difference in the way I was acting. I seemed more open, more extraverted. I know I have not fully become an extravert but the reason I have seemed to become one is a direct result of the feeling rule of expressing positive affects in every room I enter as a dancer. It has entered my personality to be more extraverted in my behaviour. Yet I feel confused when someone describes me as an extravert, and deep down know that I am probably not one.

In other words, the consequent rapid change of feeling rules make it even more complicated for dancers to cultivate and maintain their grip on the flexibility of their identity. Indicating an extreme amount of emotional and affective labour to keep up with the possession of the uniqueness that is the “key to success” for dancers and in remedying the areas of precarity-induced increased anxiety and vulnerability.

3.2.2 Authenticity in Hyper-Subjectivity.

As a result of societal developments in which emotions and affects are increasingly commodified through mechanisms like hyper-subjectivity, authenticity has become a new moral value. This commodification, thus, emphasises how the need for alignment between inner feelings and outward expressions becomes crucial to adhere to this moral.

When asking all the people I interviewed how they saw the relationship between emotion and dance, they all agreed that emotion and dance are usually inseparable and when working one has to work with both. Evan points out that the way you feel will affect the way you move your body, this is true also for non-dancers, when we feel sad, we tend to hang our heads low, move slower etc. He argues that one can approach dance as a technician and have the perfect body with perfected technique and that relates to the sports side of dance, however, “emotion is based on the artistic aspect of dance. Dancers are actors of the body and because it is of the body does not mean it is without emotion.”

Also, Robin mentions how there can be a dissonance between the emotion you are expected to perform and the emotions you are feeling in the moment. You still must perform the required emotions and it is your individual responsibility to make sure you do. However, she also finds that there is great freedom inside of expressing your emotions through your movement.

They all mention that this work with emotion is also for a great deal the place where authenticity stems from. They all value authenticity in the work of a dancer and consider it an integral part of being one. Niek explains it in a straightforward way, that when he learns choreography, he will adjust the movements in a way that he describes as “colouring them,” despite the movements not being his initially. A major tool in this colouring is the use of emotions.

Notwithstanding, Hochschild critiques the policy that demands emotional work under the guise of authenticity, because it disregards the effort put into the emotional labour of aligning feelings with those outer expressions through deep acting (2007, 3). Fleming argues in the same line that the mechanism of authenticity becomes problematic in the workspace when it is used to promote freedom (2009,17). So, since authenticity is leveraged to ensure success in the workspace, the idea of ‘being yourself,’ in reality, means that one is free to be who they want to be as long as it aligns with contemporary capitalist values (Veldstra 2020, 3). Therefore, being authentic in the working field requires a skilful navigation of commodified affects and genuine feelings and thus reflect a restrained version of authenticity through the use of hyper-subjectivation.

Shaquille explains how for them, being a person of colour but also queer and non-binary, they have noticed how they “constantly check-in and see what the vibe is before I show who I am” and that they have been in situations where it was not possible for them to be themselves and they had to put on a mask to work. Insightfully they add how they then become a tool instead of a person, but they argue that this is sometimes “the reality of life as an artist.”

This displays how self-governing tactics, that result from the need to commodify subjectivity together with the corporate policy’s celebration of these limited conditions of authenticity through workplace culture and self-management tactics, stimulate constrained notions of ‘authenticity’ and consequently normalise and generalise a mode of cruel optimism. In this form of cruel optimism “precarious workers have no choice but to at least appear – in their affective orientation – to remain attached to the systems that generate their exploitation.” (Veldstra, 4).

All the dancers I have interviewed stated that they prefer freelancing over company work (which is more structured and offers stability). I cannot help but wonder if this is a result of the workings of Berlant's Cruel optimism. (I am aware that 6 dancers are a limited scope of data, however this is a shared sentiment with a lot of dancers I know).

It reflects to a certain degree a mode of neoliberal rationality wherein dancers seem to prefer freelancing based on the desire for autonomy and creative control. Lepecki (2015) argues neoliberalism governs subjects while falsely giving the idea that they are free from governmental control. "A specific and normative mode of reason, of the production of the subject, conduct of conduct, and scheme of valuation [...] intensely governing subjects it claims to free from government" (Brown in Lepecki 2015:

48-49). In other words, neoliberal rationality generates a form of governmental control through stimulating norms and behaviours that are in line with neoliberal notions of responsibility, entrepreneurship, and market competition (Lepecki 2006, 8)

These preferences for freelance work can be the result of the way in which governmental control stimulates the qualities in line with neoliberal entrepreneurship (ibid, 8). Neoliberal rationality preconditions its subjects to accept specific forms of control that consequently influence their perception of what freedom is when placed in a controlled environment (Lepecki 2013)). In other words, individuals are stimulated to behave according to contemporary capitalist ideology in such a way it becomes unknown to the individual that this is not a free choice. This then leads to dancers accepting specific forms of control that impact their perception of freedom (ibid), reflecting a desire and hope for a better career

Consequently, this again strengthens the cruel optimism existent in dancer's life, because of the way in which freelance work creates instability and perpetuates precarity. The preference for freelancing in this case reflects the tension that exists at the core of cruel optimism. Namely the tension between the promise of freedom versus the reality of the neoliberal economy and the corresponding precarity (Berlant 2011,). For precarious work like dance this results in a prescribed bundle of positive affects which generate more profit for the company or project they work for, without improving the quality of life of precarious workers like dancers. (ibid, 3).

My unwavering enthusiasm and positivity that I am compelled to showcase while dancing in precarious conditions such as the cold and dangerous ledges and fragile stairs in the video shoot in the morning, to a positive and energised disposition in a rehearsal after already having worked for 8 hours before that, highlight my affective orientation. I am a positive and energised professional dancer. However, by perpetuating the idea that dancers always need to have a positive disposition and constantly asking for their hyper-subjectivity, we keep the cycle going. So, when I show up and commodify my subjectivity to fit the feeling rules of that situation, in this case being grateful to have two jobs in one day, I am easier to work with. Thus, making the process go faster, or being able to get more out of me as a dancer either in time or knowledge. Or at least not losing time on taking breaks or making space for negative feelings. The project profits, but I work harder. Yet, I am not paid more.

Through neoliberal rationality and the mechanism of (restrained) authenticity the negative feelings stemming from precarity are reduced to a personal problem concerning attitude that must be resolved through more intense and specific emotional tailoring and considers precarity as “merely a quality of life to be endured” (Kunst 2015, 12-13). The intersection of precarity and emotional labour, which makes up the affective economy, demands internalisation of negative emotions brought by this precarity, to not challenge the status quo. So, on the one hand our feelings are viewed as something

private and unique, while on the other hand our emotions and affective states are commodified as market tools to bolster our labour power (Arruza in Veldstra 2020). This results in heightened emotional labour for dancers as they negotiate their hyper-subjective identities in the neoliberal work field where the effects of their precarious work, and lives, must be dealt with individually.

I argue that through this mechanism the creative economy can demand passion as a necessity to succeed in the job, because the personal mark of failure that dancer's risk when they are unable to internalise and resolve negative feelings and are unable to align themselves with the feeling rules of enjoyment (ibid 14).

The failure to produce the correct affects results in ostracism since one fails to reproduce sociality (Veldstra 2011) Since Michael Hardt (1999, 98) states how “the qualitative output of affective labour exceeds the definition of ‘emotion’ and refers instead to a diverse set of feelings, relationships, and qualities generated by a worker’s embodied resources and characterised by the reproduction of social ties and, ultimately, society itself.” It becomes clear how this mechanism also evokes affective labour in maintaining the social relations that are crucial in society. This allows for affective labour to capitalise on life while simultaneously holding expectations of this life (Gregg 2010, 250). Further infiltrating into a dancer’s life. The only way to remedy this is through emotional labour and in greater extent affective life.

In my interview with Robin, she specifically states how she believes that a dancer needs an enormous amount of passion for dance to deal with the demands of the job. As a dancer, to be able to dance, there is a huge physical strain as well as a mental strain. Robin says that if you do not love it, you will not work.

Therefore, if one does not produce the right effects in the areas of the job that are suboptimal, one will fail to work as a dancer. By this extent it means that if a dancer fails to be hyper-subjective, the dancer fails to produce the correct feelings and correct affects, which not only becomes a mark of personal failure, but also signifies the incapability of reproducing sociality. Specifically, the sociality of the dancing industry, and thus results in ostracism from this community, making hyper-subjectivity a crucial skill to master as a dancer, at the cost of an extreme amount of affective and emotional labour.

I ask myself the same question often, and this time I did again. On the bike in the 35-minute break between the two jobs, tired, dusty, and somehow hot and cold at the same time: “Why do I do this to myself?” I ask myself a similar question three hours later when I say yes to assist a class together with the choreographer I just rehearsed with. I do not find a clear answer other than “because I get to dance.” I suffer to get to do the thing I love. I never speak of my fatigue in the rehearsal. I only tell my roommate when I come home and start making my dinner at eleven at night. Looking back on the double job day I am not completely sure how I pulled it off. So, I am attributing it to sheer determination and passion. A little voice reminding me this is the life I asked for when I chose to become a dancer. I consider it more a price to pay to do what I love.

3.3 Power Dynamics in Dance and Hyper-Subjectivity

3.3.1 *Hyper-Subjectivity and its Implications*

As established, the dancer's body is a site of potential transformation but also the locus of vulnerability. The body is the medium for artistic expression, which means it becomes intimate and personal and thus engages directly with societal norms (Kunst 2015, 42). However, it is simultaneously also the subject of societal, ideological, and economic pressures (Ibid, 42). It becomes apparent that there are significant connections between social structures, their power dynamics, and the way in which hyper-subjectivity works and channels affective and emotional labour.

The sociologist Randall Collins (2015) points out that ideologies and norms can be utilised as weapons in conflicts between social groups, since the values and beliefs perpetuated by the dominant group dictate how individuals should feel, but also frame these values and beliefs as guidelines of how to respond, turning them into feeling rules. As feeling rules and emotional labour have a transformative effect on the doer this implies there is power in the control in dictating these feeling rules. Thus, dancers abiding to the feeling rules of both the dance community and society at large means that this process has an impact on identity formation of the dancer and perpetuates the dominant ideology at hand.

Similarly, the restrained authenticity that is promoted in neoliberal society forces dancers to privatise the negative consequences of their precarious work and lives. If dancers do not manage the emotional labour in privatising these negative emotions, they, again, risk failing to produce sociality, which puts them at risk for ostracism. The pressure to privatise these negative affects keeps the costs of precarious work and life under cover.

Ostracism, more specifically, is then a consequence of the workings of affect. As Hemmings explains, shame and disgust are primary negative affects (2006, 560). Disgust is a negative affect that is learnt through the process of socialisation and impacts how one relates to others, it forms moral and social judgement (Ibid, 560). Expressed responses of disgust towards an individual can invoke feelings of shame. Shame is evoked when individuals fail to meet the social and moral standards set, resulting in reactions of disgust around them. These reactions can consequently result in ostracism. Shame is an important affect to consider in how it is both normative and transformative (ibid 560). Normative in the way it enforces social norms and values, causing individuals to prescribe to these norms and values (ibid).

Shame is transformative in the way it causes self-reflection, change in behaviour, and causes the individual to reassess their behaviour and make changes accordingly to avoid evoking disgust in those around them. This interplay of affects like shame and disgust also highlight how power and community are connected. In the case of the dance community the negative consequences of working in this field are

privatised and must be dealt with individually at risk of evoking disgust in those around them and risking ostracism. I argue this then connects to the affects of anxiety, causing hyper-management of one's actions to try and avoid this. Berlant writes "Out of love and shame, the subjects of capital protect the fantasies of intimates by suppressing the costs of adjustment to labour's physical and affective demands"(2011, 174). This emphasises the connection between the love for the desire (dance) and the anxiety of feeling shame, and how they work together as a mechanism that keeps dancers in the same precarious position.

I sat behind the table, a clipboard with pictures and names of the dancers who were auditioning in front of me. I would spend the afternoon watching and judging whether or not these dancers would fit our company. It felt weird, almost wrong, that I was sitting here. I was so used to being on the other side of the table. During the audition we saw a girl with great qualities in her dancing, but a facial expression that reflected everything but the will to be in this room at this moment. I suspected this was the result of nerves, I can have the same "resting bitch face" when I am nervous or very concentrated. I do not blame her, auditions are awful (as described before) being in a room for hours trying to prove your worth and knowing that you are being judged.

The choreographer of the company was sitting next to me, and during the water break we discussed all the participants. We arrived at number 17, the girl looking unhappy, and she said something along the lines of "she is a great dancer, but her energy is awful. I do not want to give her a place in the company if she cannot even appreciate being here." Her voice was filled with a hint of disgust and annoyance. Even in the discussion around whether it might be because she was nervous, her perception of the girl did not change much. She did not get into the company. For me it dialled up my anxiety surrounding the risk of losing out on jobs and work and being ostracised because I would fail to remedy my own nervousness and would miss out on booking jobs and generating an image of myself as a dancer with 'negative attitude.'

The dance world is brutal in that sense. The label "hard to work with" will annihilate your chances of work for a good amount of time, since the industry is so small, and everyone knows everyone so word travels fast. A friend of mine did not get booked for jobs for two full years because of this label.

By obscuring these negative consequences, it becomes possible for dominant power structures to continue the exploitation of dancers. Allowing dancers to become ostracised if they fail to keep such negative emotions and affects private, plays into the cruel optimism of them running the risk of losing the hope to achieve their desires. Which is a problem in the precarious work field, since dancers are not protected by the labour security and their social position can easily be revoked (van Assche 2018, 10-11).

The cruel optimism that holds dancers in this position of maintaining their attachments to creating economic stability, results in the commodification of hyper-subjectivity. In order to remedy the compromised conditions of achieving stability in the face of precarity, dancers engage with more and more emotional and affective labour. Which in turn is capitalised on and not compensated. These are, as

Berlant calls them, the affective bargains that dancers make in order to stay in the proximity of their desires though never achieving them (2011, 209).

The promise of exchange value then puts dancers at an impasse, where they are stuck between the potential of transformation and the reality of their socio-economic conditions. Where dancers oscillate between hope and despair, but where the promise of transformation is constantly present however unattainable. Because the attachments are so deeply rooted in social economic structures, like stability in a neoliberal capitalist society, it stifles genuine transformation. While actually reinforcing existing inequalities and thus results in a constant cycle of unfulfilled desires (ibid, 117).

3.4 The Cycle

Dancers need to employ hyper-subjectivity as a skill necessary for managing their economically induced precarity, while this skill simultaneously works as a mechanism that keeps the unequal power-dynamics in place.

The emotional and affective labour in which dancers engage through hyper-subjectivity sustains the inequality resulting from the unequal power dynamics. In turn, this brings in more inequality through the profit it generates for bigger corporations and companies of which dancers see little in return. Consequently, this makes the work of dancers more precarious, resulting in more need for hyper-subjectivity as a skill to deal with this affective economy.

The more need there is for hyper-subjectivity, the more this secures and strengthens inequality which in turn calls for more emotional and affective work to deal with the consequences, which again asks for more hyper-subjectivity. Thus, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that sustains itself or exacerbates itself and works in a downwards spiral.

I argue that this shows the inner workings of the exploitation of cruel optimism where dancers have a relation of attachments to the possibility of stability, while the conditions remain compromised and thus unattainable. In other words, precarious workers are stuck within the socio-economic systems that generate their exploitation.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the concept of hyper-subjectivity and researched its intersection with affective and emotional labour, the contemporary capitalist society, and its corresponding precarity. I have argued for an expansion of the term hyper subjectivity to not only refer to the on-stage switching but to include the work and life of dancers and how hyper-subjectivity also involves switching or navigating flexibility as well as authenticity in all areas of the life of dancers. My focus, therefore, has mostly been on the workings of hyper-subjectivity off-stage.

I have performed an autoethnographic research which was combined with interviews with other working dancers in Europe, to use as a lens through which I analysed the concept of hyper-subjectivity and its implications.

The commodification of hyper-subjectivity is a crucial skill for dancers to survive in the landscape of neoliberal capitalist society. Hyper-subjectivity allows dancers to navigate their career but requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour and this dynamic consequently perpetuates unequal power dynamics within the field.

This conclusion discusses the thesis statement: *In neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism the commodification of hyper-subjectivity is a necessary skill for dancers to utilise for their survival. However, this commodification requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour, and its workings perpetuates unequal power dynamics within the dance industry.*

The commodification of the identity and emotional and affective states of dancers has, through the phenomenon of hyper-subjectivity, become integral to their professional success. As a result, the radical individualisation and homogenisation of subjectivity has merged self-governance with creativity, imagination, and dynamism. Kunst argues that consequently the work and private life of dancers has become inseparable and demands constant adaptability which places subjectivity at the core of production processes. This commodification of their hyper-subjectivity therefore demands a constant investment in themselves in all aspects of their life, to compete in the market. Kunst argues that this results in the crisis of subjectivity and generates endless paradoxes and inflates anxiety, by placing dancers in a constant state of tension where they feel the need to increase their investments to remedy this anxiety.

Hyper-subjectivity and its commodification are thus inherently tied to emotional and affective labour. In the dance industry the emotional labour involves managing one's emotions to adhere to the feeling rules and requirements of the work and to a larger extent in society. Affective labour expands this to encompass the production and manipulation of affective states which influence relationships resulting in a multifaceted and pervasive form of labour.

The emotional labour of dancers is most noticeable in the demands for positive and enthusiastic demeanours, despite stressful or precarious situations. The pressure to adhere to the feeling rules within

the dance industry, and society in general, influence identity and its formation, and allows for dominant ideologies and power structures to prevail. There is an increased pressure for more emotional work to keep up with the accelerated changes of feeling rules. Adhering to these feeling rules involve not only surface acting but also deep acting, which has a “transformative effect on the doer” and influences their identity. Since this process happens at a high speed, I argue that this causes dancers to have less clarity on their boundaries and increases the potential for unchecked vulnerability for dancers. Therefore, there is a vast amount of emotional labour necessary to keep up with their identity and its changes, as well as remedying their increased anxieties. This further finds its impact in the affective labour that moves beyond the management of emotions but includes the cultivation of social networks and mitigates negative affects such as shame and disgust. The constant negotiation with affective labour further impacts the sense of self of dancers and requires a significant amount of emotional labour to remedy these consequences and stay in proximity to stability.

The capitalisation on emotions and affects by the current capitalist structure through the demand for the commodification of unique identities through the mechanism of feeling rules, has created a new moral value of authenticity. However, this is a restrained form of authenticity since it only celebrates authentic feelings that are in line with the post-Fordist neoliberal capitalist ideologies. The need to commodify one’s subjectivity together with the economy’s celebration of (restrained forms of) authenticity have generalised a form of cruel optimism, where precarious workers are pressured to appear affectively attached to the systems that generate their own exploitation. Meaning that if a dancer is unsuccessful in producing the correct affects and feelings, this is deemed a personal failure.

Furthermore, failure to adhere to the feeling rules created by people in positions of power in the dance industry, such as choreographers, company directors and funding committees can therefore make or break careers. The affective and emotional labour required to adhere to these rules also keep them in their place, perpetuating the unequal power structures and hierarchies.

The demand from the industry for dedication and passion exacerbates these inequalities. When dancers fail to internalise and solve their negative feelings or failure to align with the feeling rules can result in affects such as disgust and shame. Through this, dancers run the risk of becoming ostracised and can severely impact their careers. Because these negative feelings are internalised, they also become obscured, making it increasingly difficult to recognise the systemic nature of the dynamic and makes it hard to resist these inequalities.

In conclusion, the perpetual demand for emotional and affective labour impacts dancers profoundly. It blurs the lines between professional and private life and simultaneously makes them vulnerable. The industry’s demand to adhere to feeling rules reinforces the unequal power dynamics and increases precarity for dancers, whilst they internalise consequences of structural imbalances as personal failure. The cycle described involves constant self-investment, anxiety and precarity which highlights the

concept of cruel optimism, in which dancers remain attached to the hope and promise for stability while being exploited by the structures that “offer” it.

As I have spent a copious amount of time analysing this phenomenon while simultaneously living inside of it. I am fond of the skill that is hyper-subjectivity, and it brings me pleasure to be able to adapt and oscillate in my own subjectivity, in the use of my body and in the way I communicate. However, though I feel hyper-subjectivity can be a great skill, I argue that becoming too hyper-subjective or too flexible puts you at risk of losing yourself.

For me it echoes a similar principle that exists in the practice of dance. The more in control you are of your body, the more freedom you have to move. The clearer your identity is, also in its fluidity, the more flexible you can be. However, again similar to the body, if you bend too far and do not have the power to bring yourself back, you hurt yourself physically in the process. If you are not strong enough in your understanding of your identity, you can stretch it too far and hurt yourself mentally.

In the way our neoliberal capitalist society operates now, there is not much space to nurture the relationship one has with one's own identity, the precarity and anxiety make it too unstable. Consequently, this means as dancers, we are at a constant high-risk of hurting ourselves and being hurt by others, which I feel is detrimental to the field and dance in general.

This research has shown the impact hyper-subjectivity in the neoliberal capitalist society has on dancers. The potential for negative consequences is high and they largely remain unaddressed in the field. The dance field would benefit from further research into the consequences of hyper-subjectivity and the strategies that can be developed to counter the negative aspects of this phenomenon.

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Appendices: Interview Transcripts

Interview Shaquille George

Sidney

Do you prefer project-based work or company-based work? And why?

Shaquille

Oh wow, this one's a difficult one actually. Never actually thought about it, but I think my answer might contradict itself a little bit.

I've done both a lot. I would prefer to say project-based work because I feel like then I have a bit more freedom to do what I feel is necessary for myself as an artist, and you don't have that restriction of company-based work, but ironically enough, where I am in my life right now, I do want to work towards the fact of probably create a company at a certain moment, but if I just have to... see it how it is now, I'd prefer to do project-based work. I feel like company work in itself has a lot of restrictions.

It does bring a lot of financial freedom in a certain sense because you don't have to worry constantly about finding new projects constantly, which is something that I'm dealing with right now as well, but company work, depending again of course on which kind of company you work with, becomes very boring, I feel. I don't feel like you grow at a certain moment because you have that safety net, so that's meaning you don't challenge yourself anymore,

Sidney

What are the aspects of your work as a dancer that go either unrecognized or uncompensated?

Shaquille

Well, I will not name certain people, but I did a lot of work as an intern already while I was already at a certain level of a professional dancers, and what I mean by that is certain companies or choreographers would hire me because they know what my value was as a mover and a creator.

And I was able to do that, but they never really told me or gave me the compensation for the amount of work and effort and time that I gave to them within their work, to the point that made me doubt my own skills as a mover and a creator.

I'm going to grab one example. For example, I knew this choreographer that already came in my internship period, created a piece, then asked me to come to his place of residence to create another piece. So I was able to do that.

And he did so much work with this man, but my name was never on the title of the piece. Not once. Not even mentioned, co-created, never.

It was just Dancer Shaquille, which really made me salty, but me as an intern thought, oh, it's an opportunity. I'll just take it. It doesn't matter.

But then fast forward three years later, became his assistant, never got the actual title of assistant, but still did the amount of work of an assistant.

Meaning early nights of early mornings, talking about the piece early of late nights, talking about the piece, all that effort, all that work, never got recognition for that.

Sidney

And in terms of the emotional work that you do,

Whenever you perform heavy emotional pieces or during a research period, either with yourself or with a choreographer, do you feel that that work is recognized?

Shquille

You mean the quality of or the layers of emotion that I bring within the piece? Yeah. Yes, I think so. It depends, of course, on the work.

I've never done it before. I've heard a random feedback recently that I don't have enough emotion, which excuse me?? That comment was a very interesting comment to me, it kind of baffled me. I was like, well, I've never heard this in my whole career as a dancer. Like I've always heard, my stage presence is amazing.

I can make people feel something. That's the whole reason why I started to dive deeper into my practice of emotiflux. But, um, yeah. I think. Four. Yeah.

The most part, yes. People definitely appreciate the quality of emotion that I bring into pieces.

Sidney

Do you feel it's necessary to adapt fast as a dancer in every aspect, like either in auditions, during jobs, in your personal life?

Shaquille

Hmm. Yes. But it also depends on the person. Yeah. I think there are things that I feel like you shouldn't accept or adapt to. You should make a change.

Um, for example, if you feel like you are not being appreciated, if there are toxic working environments, I don't think you should adapt to that.

I think you should change and completely be like, hmm, not my cup of tea. Bye.

You should stand up for yourself in that case, but I feel like there's a weird balance between.

What you learn in school as a performer and artist is that the choreographer is God, so to speak. There's a sense of hierarchy, but I do feel like you need to also stand up for yourself when things are not well, but that's on the negative aspect.

In a positive way, yes, I feel like you should constantly be able to fluctuate and adapt, especially for example, I'm just going to randomly grab an example of when you're doing run throughs or technicals.

Yeah. Things are going to change.

Your material is going to change maybe at that moment in time and you need to be able to adapt and learn quickly. And yes, it's shitty, but that is part of our career. You know, sometimes the choreographer sees something and they just want to adjust it

real quick or try it out the day of maybe even, and you should be able to adapt with it and just go with the flow sometimes.

Sidney

Dance in my experience is very intertwined with emotion, um, and working with those emotions and feelings are like a big part of this work. How do you navigate this? How do you work with it? Take care of yourself.

Shaquille

I think it's, um, easier for myself when I need to dive into somebody else's concept and story because then I am not really, I'd maybe not fully experience what the choreographer is trying to convey, but at the same time to truly dive deep and give an authentic feeling, you must find a way to connect with your own story. Um, and I think it's, it's really, it's really important to have your own type of story and your own type of emotion to really like to translate that emotional value to it, to actually make it real.

Um, and I think something that I've learned through the years, because I found that very difficult, that I always took my work with me at home. Um, I've tried my best to tell myself when I step in the studio, whatever's in the studio and it doesn't serve me in a positive manner, stays in the studio.

Um, and this is something that I've tried my best to make it real.

do constantly because the constant fluctuation of emotion is very taxing and very draining for the mind, body and soul and especially with my own practice it is imperative that I really take care of my mind, body and soul. Because as dancers we usually only focus on stretching and cooling down the body, but we need to also focus on the internal because there's a lot going on, things that could be triggers or traumas or things that you didn't even think was a problem become an issue because you took your work home.

So, I for myself personally I still need to be a little bit strict and with myself in my own practice to constantly remind myself you need to start your meditation, protect your energy and then afterwards close it off, leave it in the space if it doesn't serve you.

If epiphanies come or feelings of gratitude or whatever the case may be if it's in a positive sense take that with you.

Sidney

you already answered just now um last question how do you see your identity I don't want to say change but how does it how does your identity adapt to the different places that you work?

Shaquille

answer I don't want to sound like a hippie but I am I'm an energy person so being that I'm a person of color but also queer non-binary person of color I found it very interesting to see especially if I look back on how I was how I constantly changed and how I'm changing and how I'm changing and I'm going to try to really see what the vibe is before I fully show who I am as a person and there are some situations that I've never really shown who I am as a person because I felt like the safe space wasn't safe enough for me to truly be my authentic self that's meaning I kind of put on a mask so I can then do what I need to do and then the job just becomes a job and it doesn't really feel like I'm able to express what I need to express and be a person but I just become rather I become a tool and that feels very shitty, but that sometimes it's the reality that we live in as artists

Sidney
Great, thank you

Interview Evan Schwarz

Sidney

Yeah, the first question is just like who are you as a dancer, like a short bio, like what you did.

Evan Schwarz

Sure. So my name is Evan Schwartz. I'm originally from Los Angeles, California.

I grew up really exploring the, I guess, commercial scene, I would say. So I did dance competitions as a kid. I was in that whole world. But then I also went to a performing arts high school where I got more modern training, like ballet technique.

I mean, I was still, I was never in one of those, how do you say it, studios that was only show.

It was a big aspect of my education was also training and technique. So then, yeah, I went to high school, which I gained a whole nother perspective on the dance scene.

Meanwhile, during my high school, I thought I was going to be a ballet dancer. I thought I was going to do Broadway. I thought I was going to do the L.A. commercial hip hop scene. I really had not decided which direction I was going.

After I graduated, I went to Juilliard in New York City and there I got a further development and understanding of more concert based dance.

And that sort of propelled my career in that direction. I still kept my eyes open, let's say, to other possibilities.

When I finished school, I had a contract in Switzerland.

I was in discussions with a New York based choreographer and I had also made it very far in a Broadway dance audition. So I was still like, what's my direction?

I ended up choosing commercial, sorry, concert dance. I moved to Switzerland and I was in Ballet Bern for three years.

And then I went to the National Dance Company Wales in the U.K. And then I started freelancing.

So, yeah, my career really went through this place of staying in the concert world, but fluctuating between.

It's really technical based pieces because I could do that based on my training, but also more movement and quality style work as well.

And I just retired. And now I'm an artistic director for Henny Jurriens Studio.

Sidney

What you touched upon just a little bit just now. But what do you consider the dance industry?

Evan Schwarz

Well, I think the dance industry has so many different levels. Not levels. That's not the right word. So many different outlets. There's the commercial dance scene. There's the concert dance scene.

The musical dance scene. The underground dance scene. The postmodernism. I mean, there are so many different forms of dance nowadays and they're all valid and it's just where you feel you fit within it.

And you can reach across the aisle to other aspects or other forms.

So just because you're a dancer who does video shoots doesn't mean you can't also be taking ballet in the morning. So I think there's a lot of opportunity to explore the variety of the dance industry.

Sidney

Do you prefer project-based work or company-based work and why?

Evan Schwarz

I personally prefer project-based work. I had done company work for years, and then I decided with myself to make the change to project-based just because I found at that point in my career, I was getting bored.

Being in the same room, being with the same people, doing the same type of work over and over again. I think there's a level of safety within it, which is wonderful.

And for artists who want to do that, I think it's completely fine and valid and go do your company. It just wasn't what I wanted after years.

I think there's excitement in meeting new people, in going to different places, and also pushing your body to explore different ideas that you don't normally do.

I mean, if you're in a company, even if it's just under one choreographer, you're working with that one person.

If it's a repertoire-based company, yes, you're exploring it a little bit, different ways of moving. But you're working with that one person. But you're still under the umbrella of this is what our company is.

And honestly, I did some projects that I never would have imagined doing as a freelance dancer. So I personally skew more that direction.

Sidney

In your experience and your view, how feasible is it to sustain a livelihood based solely on that?

Evan Schwarz

It's tough, but not impossible. I think it also depends on where you are in life and what you want.

It's known that dancers' salaries are lower than that of other fields. And fields outside of the arts, but also fields inside of the arts.

A dancer will do a job, and an actor will do a job. The actor will get paid much more money. The singer will get paid much more money. So that is tough. And mentally, that's also tough to deal with. That being said... You can be working in a company. You have your security. You have a 13-month salary. You get paid holiday. So it's sustainable. Also up until a certain point.

Because it is also a dance career, it can't last until you're a lot older. But for the most part, it does end at a certain point.

Not everybody gets into Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, and has a lifetime contract until they're 60. You know.

And then on the other side, if you're working projects, there's... In some senses, it can be really helpful. If you're very lucky with your career, you don't really need a place to live. Because projects will give you per diems, pay for your accommodation. Just sort of take care of all the other aspects while paying you a salary. But that's also a bit of a headspace, to give up on your home. Yeah.

So generally, my idea is... It's tough. It's doable. But not forever.

Sidney

Can you elaborate on the work of dancers that goes either unrecognized or uncompensated.

Evan Schwarz

I'm an avid, firm believer you should never be working uncompensated.

We already put so much effort and so much of our life into our career. And to not be paid for it is unjust. Ridiculous. And... Yeah. I've had instances where people have offered me such minimally paid or no paid jobs. And I turn it down.

But I also know sometimes there are younger dancers who take it for experience. Which is tough.

Because you do need the experience.

But also, by accepting these jobs, you keep the cycle going of unpaid art. Or just unpaid work. So, yeah. That's something I'm a really strong believer on. Getting paid what you deserve. And I think, let's say you're a younger dancer. And they offer you to work for free. I think there's always a place that you can negotiate from. And it's also for you to look at the project or the proposal. And see what you gain from it. Okay, maybe you won't work for free. But you're willing to work for less money.

But you need to get all the PR and video material for free.

So, I think... There's always somewhere that dancers can go to negotiate these things. But I also think it's important to cut the cycle.

Sidney

And in terms of work for the body and also mentally?

Evan Schwarz

I also think a lot of... Well, I'm not gonna say a lot. But I think some choreographers take advantage of a dancer's trauma, let's say.

And they utilize it themselves for their work.

So, I guess, capitalizing on top of the dancers that... Who knows if they're paying at this point or not. And it's wrong. I don't know.

Unless it's part of a process, and it's guided, and it is taken care of. If you're gonna make a piece about death, and you select dancers who all had their mother pass away....

Then you have to also provide a safe space for them to be in that trauma, but also help them with that trauma.

Not just capitalizing off of their identity, or their ideas, and their trauma, for lack of better words. So, I think that's important as well.

And dancers should get recognized if they choreograph. Yeah, that's a big one. It should say, "in collaboration with the dancers".

And I've had numerous conversations with people, and fought for that. Even if it's the most minuscule thing to say, in collaboration with dancers or artists.

But it's important to know that you didn't make this all yourself.

Sidney

Because its like “Where's my name?”

Evan

Exactly. Where's all the work? Because also, you're developing your career. And if you could say, If you could say, hey, I was part of making this.

And there's proof, It can also help you move forward in your career as a dancer, beginning maker, wherever you are.

I think that's a big topic of intellectual property.

Sidney

Navigating, if you look back on your specific dance career, how did you market yourself towards potential employers? Which I guess is even more relevant, looking at all your freelance jobs and being in different casting processes.

Evan Schwarz

Yeah. Making myself marketable.

I think to have a successful career within freelance is to utilize Social media.

Whether you're doing projects here or there or not, you have to play the game. You have to put videos up, photos.

I worked with a choreographer who, when we were looking for new dancers, he would immediately go to their Instagram. Yeah. And if you didn't have an Instagram, he was hesitant to hire you.

It's a fine line, especially as a freelancer. You have to be your own scheduler, your own marketer, your own agent.

You are selling yourself. You are the product. And you have to go up to people and you have to be a business person as well, a salesman.

Walking up to a choreographer you like and say, “hey, I'm interested in this”, you're marketing yourself. You're selling... I was going to say your body. Let's not say that. But yeah, you're selling the idea of you as a dancer to someone else who's going to get

to utilize your body, you, your mind, whatever aspects you're going to bring to the creation. So a lot has changed over the years within that. Now we have, yeah, social media that a lot of people use.

Because I think back in the day it was really just if they see you, then that's how they know you.

Sidney

Yeah. It's tough to keep up. It changes so fast.

Evan Schwarz

Exactly. And this is... I mean, before I joined Henny Jurriens Studio, they had...

Spring Plank program and they were educating artists or young dancers just finishing school on different aspects or different ways to enter the work field and the professional scene. And I think, yeah, the schools have their way of teaching, which is 100% valid and they

have their methods of what they have in their curriculum and also the time that they're allowed to take. But now there's also so much more that's been developed over the years and it's changed and it continues to change, especially at the rate that it is going now. That's why it was a great program, in my opinion, to give these new members of the community just like an extra step to help them in meeting people, making connections, new tools for... In the hopes of... In the hopes of finding success in the profession.

Sidney

Do you feel like... Do you feel it's necessary as a dancer to be able to adapt fast and in what way?

Evan Schwarz

Yes.

Sidney

And do you see this as an inherent quality of a dancer?

Evan Schwarz

I think it's an inherent quality of a *good* dancer. I don't want to be shady, but I think adaptability is so important within our art form.

How, we had discussed before, if you pigeonhole yourself into one form, one style, one idea, that's all you can do. Yeah. And there are so many different levels to that of a dancer.

So I think adaptability is incredibly important and not to like toss my hair or anything, the hair that I have left. But it's something that I really prided myself on, that I could jump into a more commercial class. I could go to a heels class. I could then go to ballet class.

And that's really based off of my upbringing and education through the different forms of dance that I have. So that, I think it's, yeah, it's incredibly important. And not even physically, but also mentally adapting.

From one rehearsal to a class or adapting, you know, it's the simplest form. You get a correction. You have to be able to adapt.

You can't just have your idea of what's right and what's wrong if your role or job at that point is to adapt to somebody else's movement or views or qualities.

So, yeah, it's really up there for me as a top thing.

Sidney

So in my experience, dance is very intertwined with emotion and feeling. And this is considered a big part of the job.. How did Slash do that? How do you feel about it?

Evan Schwarz

I don't know if I necessarily have a feeling about it, but it's a completely intertwined dance and emotion.

It doesn't have to be, but you know, you can be a technician, you can literally just have the perfect dance body and do eight pirouettes, and that's magnificent on its own. But the thing about dance, and that relates to the sport aspect of dance, but there's

also the artistic aspect of dance, and that's where you have to be moved. You have to feel emotion. You have to understand emotion and be able to portray it.

Dancers are actors of the body. Just because it's of the body doesn't mean you take away any emotion. So, yeah. I think it's incredibly important.

I don't think everybody understands that it is. But yeah, for me, one can't go without the other.

To be a successful dance artist, you know, because if you think, okay, rhythmic gymnastics, it's a sport and there's an artistry to it, but there's no emotion. So that's, I think, on the flip side.

Sidney

How do you navigate this while, I don't know, rehearsing for something or being on stage?

Evan Schwarz

I think it's different rehearsal versus stage. Stage there could be a character or a feeling attached to your movement and that you have to understand as an artist.

You have to know why you're moving this way. Otherwise, you're not going to be able to do it.

And that's what you're trying to say to an audience of however many people.

What do you want them to get from your movement? Do you want them to feel happy when you move?

Do you want them to feel nervous because your character, your feeling, the dance, whatever, the choreography gears you towards that direction?

So that's with performance.

And then also with rehearsals or training. Yeah. And taking a ballet class, if you are upset or sad, it affects your movement.

If you're happy, you're going to jump higher. You're going to feel more confident in how you're moving and how you're presenting.

So yeah, two very different ideas on the same topic of emotion, connection, and movements.

Sidney

This adaptability we spoke about before. How does it influence the development of your own authenticity and own creativity? Well, if it did.

Evan Schwarz

Yeah. It's tough. You touched upon it before. This idea of being adaptable, but also having to be yourself.

That's the question essentially. Yeah. And it's. Difficult.

I don't want to say this.

That that is a constant. Question of mine throughout auditions. Let's say. Because. It depends how your brain works.

Does your brain say. Adapting is. Doing exactly what they're saying. To a T being the quote unquote perfect dancer.

Or is adapting. Bringing yourself into the work and showing them maybe something new. So that has honestly like throughout auditions.

I've explored both options and there's no right. There's no wrong. It literally. Sits upon who's. At the front of the room. And one person can want to see you as an individual.

And everyone can want to see you as a dancer that is X, Y, Z. So I think, I think there's no right. Answer to it.

It could go either way. And I think it's important to understand that.

It's really important within an audition or within certain cases to if you have the capacity to decide i'm gonna be this dancer or i'm gonna go this direction to understand what's being desired in an effort to get the job you can also just say hey i'm gonna do me and that's completely fair and i always say whether you get a job or not you have to be authentically yourself yeah and you shouldn't uh be upset if you don't get a job based because you're breaking you they might want you and they might not want you yeah it's just it's what it is.

Sidney

how have you over the years observed the changes in the dance industry?

Evan Schwarz

Um well tik tok happened..

No it's it's interesting actually because tik tok has influenced a lot of uh dance nowadays um yeah it depends which route you want to go through if you go through the commercial route this this forward projection camera dancing is something that's really affected that industry and also the type of dancing that is happening even in music videos like top-notch dance music videos they're trying to make something that's accessible to be recreated on tik tok which i'm like oh we're talking about it but it is it's this phenomenon of it has really shifted the dance scene at least the commercial dance scene. Also the contemporary dance scene because you also have these contemporary companies that are now exploring technology in different ways and hiring tik tok dancers to be with their concert commercial uh concert contemporary dancers so that's also this juxtaposition now there's because it's such a huge platform and it's gained so much uh viewership and it helps so much with marketing people have jumped off the bandwagon and i think that's had a big impact on the industry and so um yeah it's really it's really important to know that big shift in let's say musical commercial and contemporary.

it's also interesting because we've gotten so much more into a trick society yeah within dance and that is both in ballet and in contemporary and in commercial there's so much tricking happening.. trick trick trick trick.. which is great right but yeah but what what does it say and i feel like it doesn't say anything and you have a lot of young dancers who have the idea that because they can do all of this they're this perfect amazing super dancer which also what they can do with their body.

Amazing like don't put me next to you, but do you also understand the intricacies of selling a piece, of a spatial awareness of all these other aspects actually that are so important to be a dancer to be a performer to also have like the understanding of uh movement quality or or just like you have someone who could do fouettes and they could do all these things but that they actually can't even do a rond de jambe they don't understand the coordination so yeah in that sense it's also very interesting this generation of tricksters.

Yes i sound like such an old person no but i mean i also see it and i was in it for for a while same i mean i also i grew up doing like studying gymnastics and acrobatics for my dance i had solos where i was doing uh an aerial and i did actually i had to do an aerial

one point of my professional career.

Wow. Yeah. Yeah,

I think I had to do some kind of back handspring at one point, and I was like, but that was also, like, a super commercial musical kind of situation, so I was like, okay, yeah, it's a spectacular moment, I get it.

You want the audience to go, wow.

Interview Niek Wagenaar

Sidney

Ja, de eerste vraag is gewoon wie ben je, wat doe je?

Niek Wagenaar

Wie ben ik en wat doe ik? Ik ben Niek. Ik ben Niek Wagenaar. Ik ben 24 jaar oud. En ik ben een danser en dansmaker, based in Amsterdam. Kind of.. Sometimes. My practice is based in Amsterdam.

En ik heb in Amsterdam op school gezeten. Urban contemporary department. En tijdens mijn opleiding vier derde jaar.

Halfweg, derde jaar, ben ik bij Hofesh begonnen. In Londen. Hofesh Schechter company. En daar dans ik nog steeds. Project based.

Ondertussen heb ik hier in Nederland mijn eigen praktijk als maker. En daar gaat mijn meeste tijd en energie eigenlijk naar toe.

In mijn werk vind ik de eenheid van lichaam, imagination en soul en personality en al die dingen heel belangrijk. De totaliteit van het zijn eigenlijk. Dat dat allemaal getraind en aanstaat.

Ik werk vaak met vrij existentiële dingen. Grotere thema's, die ik dan heel persoonlijk of intiem probeer te maken. Zodat het voor een breder publiek relatable is. Omdat het eigenlijk altijd aansluit op hele universele gevoelens.

Hoe die fysiek kunnen worden gemaakt in de taal. En daarmee dan een voorstelling maken. Die best wel van A tot Z zijn.

Dus dat er best wel een soort logische, duidelijke verhaallijn in zit. Waarin de personages of de dansers een ontwikkeling doormaken.

Waarvan ik dan hoop dat het publiek uiteindelijk challenged om te gaan reflecteren over hun eigen identiteit en ontwikkeling. En bla bla bla.... En gevoelens bla bla bla.... Je snapt hem, denk ik...

Sidney

Wat is in jouw ogen de Dans industrie?

Niek Wagenaar

Ja, eigenlijk een soort van het samenhangsel van alle radertjes. Die allemaal met, I mean for contemporary dance, daar heb ik het misschien niet meer over.

Maar het is natuurlijk breder. Die allemaal samenwerken om dans te produceren, analyseren, researchen. Van eigenlijk alle verschillende facetten die komen kijken bij het produceren van dans.

Sidney

Do you prefer project based work or company based work?

Niek Wagenaar

Oeh, grappig. Ik heb hier echt net super veel over gepraat. Ik heb een soort workshop erover gegeven van "what's the difference". Ik hou wel meer van freelancen, denk ik.

Omdat ik het fijn vind om centraal te staan. In mijn eigen ontwikkeling. En dat ik daar mezelf kan sturen wat ik nodig heb.

En ik ben ook iemand die best wel houdt van veel prikkels, en dat elke dag anders is.

En dat, je anders misschien in de sleur terecht komt.

Als maker is het ook gewoon fijn om project-based te werken, denk ik. Ik heb gewoon niet de middelen om een groep aan dansers financieel te kunnen ondersteunen voor een heel jaar. Helaas. Wel, de dream, daar wil ik wel echt heel graag heen uiteindelijk. Maarja...

Sidney

Ja, in jouw ervaring, hoe makkelijk is het om te kunnen leven van dans?

Niek Wagenaar

Het gaat wel. Maar ik moet zeggen, het komt omdat ik ook wel lucky ben met dat ik veel les kan geven.

Ik heb op zich wel een mooie balans tussen lesgeven en maken en projecten doen met andere makers.

De meeste tijd zit gewoon echt in het voorbereiden en de productie van mijn eigen voorstellingen. Waar ik mezelf niet voor betaal. Want daar heb ik geen geld voor,

en daar gaat het echt wel het allergrootste deel van mijn tijd naartoe.

Als ik geld verdien als maker, dan betaal ik mezelf alleen voor in de studio,

En dat verdient op zich tot nu toe wel oké. Maar dat staat natuurlijk niet in verhouding met de hoeveelheid voorbereidingstijd die ik eigenlijk daadwerkelijk erin steek.

En als ik voor gezelschap dans, is het eigenlijk ook een beetje te weinig altijd. Maar gaat dat ook nog wel? Maar ik kan bijvoorbeeld geen pensioen ophalen. Wat ook oké is, ik ben 24. Maar, haha, maar ik vraag me wel af wanneer dat wel gaat gebeuren.

En het enige wat echt winstgevend is, en een verhouding heeft van hoe weinig ik daarvoor doe en hoeveel geld ik uiteindelijk uithaal, is lesgeven. Omdat ik gewoon als maker zo'n doorlopende praktijk heb. Dat ik altijd wel iets relevants te geven heb waardoor ik niet heel veel hoeft voor te bereiden. Dus in a way is het werk wat ik stop in het researchen van mijn makerschap, is direct ook, heeft een output in het lesgeven waardoor ik best wel, waardoor ik wel voel dat het een goed lijntje is daar, zeg maar.

Ehm, maar ja, teaching is wel echt de enige manier waarop ik mezelf kan betalen.

En ik heb nu ook echt zeven maanden geen project ofzo, dus.

Sidney

Ja, hoe denk je over het werk van dansers wat niet gezien wordt, al dan niet gecompenseerd wordt? al het schaduwwerk?

Niek Wagenaar

Nou, ik denk wel dat je als kunstenaar een 24-7 job hebt. Omdat je, in a way, ik vind het altijd lastig om hiervoor te lobbyen, want het is ook niet een vrije keus, maar ik heb het idee dat alles wat ik ervaar en doe en wat er gebeurt, dat dat allemaal deel is van mijn werk.

Omdat je werk zo erg draait om je identiteit en om jouw frame of reference. Zowel als dat werk.

Dat zelfs een kopje koffie drinken met een vriendin bijna al werk kan zijn. Omdat je daarin iets ervaart, wat vervolgens weer voeding kan zijn, vanuit de, ja, voeding voor je kunstenaarschap kan zijn.

Dat klinkt altijd een beetje als een zwakke lobby, vind ik. Ik ben lekker koffie aan het drinken, dus ik ben nu aan het werk. Maar ik, ja, zelfs uitgaan of zo, dat kan zo'n grond van inspiratie zijn, dat het bijna werk is. Ik hoef er niet per se betaald voor te worden, maar ik denk wel dat als je het vergelijkt met wat meer doorsnee banen, dat dat veel meer als uitlaatklep dient en minder als input voor je werk. En bij ons denk ik dat dat veel meer connected is.

En inderdaad, als je als maker geen producer hebt, zoals ik, dan ben je ook een productie leider waar je niet voor betaalt.

Ik ben een PR-manager waar ik niet voor word betaald. Ik ben Human Resources. Ik ben financieel verantwoordelijk voor het hele project. Zakelijk leider.

Zakelijk leider, artistiek leider, choreograaf. Ik dans zelf vaak mee in mijn voorstellingen. Ik ben casting director.

Ik ben, ja, snap je?

Er zijn allemaal banen waar je niet voor wordt betaald.

Ook Reistijd is vaak niet goed.

Of, ehm...Als je bijvoorbeeld op maandag begint met een baan in het buitenland, dan moet je natuurlijk die zondag al vrij hebben om daar heen te komen. Daar word je niet betaald voor, zeg maar. Of... Als je als danser in een gezelschap danst en dat gezelschap besluit een film te gaan maken, dan krijg je geen buy-out.

Dan staat er in mijn contract gewoon dat elk beeldmateriaal dat wordt gebruikt binnen de context van het gezelschap, is eigendom van het gezelschap.

Als er een trailer wordt gemaakt of als er een film, een short film wordt gemaakt, dan is het werk wat erin zit is alleen de werkdagen, maar niet een buy-out.

Terwijl het werk wel wordt gescreend op festivals en daar verdienen ze wel geld aan. Ja.

Sidney

Dat is lastig wel.

Niek Wagenaar

Nog een leuke studie: Rechten in dans. Dat is echt Pandora's box...

Ja, ook elke keer als je in shape moet blijven tussen projecten door.

Can someone pay me to do a yoga course please?

Nou ja, maar Ja, ik ben wel aan het werk.

Sidney

Je kan dat je het ook kan vergelijken dat mensen hun team naar bepaalde trainingen en zo sturen.

Niek Wagenaar

Ja. Daar worden ze ook gewoon betaald. Klopt. Ja. En dansers niet. Dansers niet, dat is aan mijn eigen kosten.

Nou, ik vind het ook gewoon heel grappig dat in de CAO er een aparte salarisschaal moet zijn voor dansers. Waarom wij het minder verdienen dan acteurs, dat snap ik niet.

Dat snap ik echt niet. Nee. We kunnen minder lang werken zelf, dus we moeten meer verdienen. Want als we dertig zijn, is ons lichaam kapot.

Sidney

Precies. Ja, ik heb nog maar vijf jaar lang werk.

Niek Wagenaar

Eigenlijk ook iets waar je voor moet worden betaald. Dat je eigenlijk maar heel erg beperkt gebruikt te gebruiken bent.

Sidney

En aan de andere kant, als dat ervoor zorgt dat bijvoorbeeld een maker zoals jij dan zegt van, ja maar oké, dan kan ik deze danser gewoon niet boeken. Dan krijg je eigenlijk nog meer disbalans.

Niek Wagenaar

Nog meer kloof eigenlijk. Ja, dat is gewoon heel communistisch. Alles gewoon hetzelfde. Iedereen krijgt 150 altijd je hele leven.

Niek Wagenaar

Ja, maar dan komen jonge mensen... Mensen ook in de problemen, want dan neem je altijd meer ervaring dan zo. Ja. Nu kan ik, nu denk ik soms dat ik ga met een stagiair werken, want ik heb geen geld.

Sidney

Precies.

Niek Wagenaar

Anders kan ik niet met een stagiair werken.

Sidney

Ja, totdat je dus bepaalde choreografen krijgt die alleen maar met stagiairs werken, omdat die goedkoper zijn.

Niek Wagenaar

En dat is gewoon jammer, want dan is er ook geen doorgroeien meer, want dan ben je daar leuk als stagiair en dan het jaar daarna mag je weer oprotten. Want dan ben je opeens twintig keer zo duur.

Sidney

Hoe market je jezelf voor future employers of mensen die een stuk willen programmeren of wel gewoon om te werken als danser.

Niek Wagenaar

Instagram, I'm not good at it, but yeah.

Ik probeer wel altijd een soort van te zoeken naar "my unique selling point" in a way, zeg maar.

Wat is de toon die bij mij past? Dus ik probeer mezelf niet te verloochenen als ik mezelf verkoop op die manier.

Maar ik probeer wel zichtbaar te zijn. Ik probeer als danser te zorgen dat de mensen bij wie ik op het lijstje wil staan, dat ik op het lijstje sta.

Dus dat ik naar de voorstellingen kom, dat ik een appje stuur als ik dat gepast vind om te zijn. Dat ik zeg, ik zou best een keer met je willen werken.

Dat ik weet wat ze aan het doen zijn, waar ze voor staan, waar ze naar op zoek zijn. Dat ik naar hun lessen kom als ze lessen geven.

Zichtbaar, ik zorg gewoon zichtbaar ben.

Stel ze maken een keer een lijstje van "met wie wil ik nog een keer werken", dat ik er potentieel op kom te staan. Dat ze me niet vergeten.

Wel aardig blijven en begripvol blijven maar wel een beetje opdringen. Je niet verstoppen. Het komt niet naar je toe zeg maar. Nee precies.

Dat heb ik wel geleerd. Ja. Je moet er wel zelf achteraan. Je moet er wel zelf wat voor noemen.

Sidney

Als danser maar ook als maker, sta je veel in verschillende werkomgevingen. In hoeverre is het een noodzaak om jezelf snel te kunnen aanpassen in echt de breedste zin van het woord?

Niek Wagenaar

Ja flexibiliteit is gewoon heel belangrijk. Als danser kan er gewoon heel veel veranderen en dat moet je niet te veel persoonlijk nemen, vooral merk ik. Het werk is gewoon belangrijker dan jij als danser.

En daarin moet je gewoon heel flexibel blijven. Als maker al helemaal.

Ja tuurlijk. Omdat je best wel vaak, vooral als jonge maker. Op eens, op een plek staat waarbij het speelveld zes zo klein is als wat ze zeiden. Dat de vloer heel erg glad is dus dat je schoenen aan moet. Dat je in het bos speelt en dat het op eens de hele week aan het regenen is.

Locatietheater, ook heel flexibel. Voor een halflege zaal, dat er drie mensen in de zaal zitten, en de dag erna is het een volle zaal. Dus dan is je performance weer heel anders en in de hele context van hoe zo'n stuk op het toneel staat.

Ook als danser kan altijd van alles fout gaan, met het licht en het geluid.

En ja, ook denk ik in je tijden is het ook best wel flexibel dat je opeens toch een andere starttijd hebt, of dat er iets fout is gegaan en dat je de dag erna een uur eerder moet komen dan het schema stond.

It always says subject to change and it will always change.

Of dat opeens een dag uitvalt, of dat er een dag bij komt, of dat de première wordt verplaatst met een jaar.

Of... Ja, van alles.

Het is gewoon heel belangrijk, maar dat maakt ons ook creatieve mensen of zo. Je hebt het gewoon nodig. Flexibiliteit en creativiteit.

Sidney

Dans is in mijn ogen heel verbonden met emotie en hoe je je voelt, en daardoor wordt werken met die emotie een best wel groot onderdeel van de baan. Hoe navigeer je dit? Of hoe ga je daarmee om?

Niek Wagenaar

Ja, ik denk dat ik in mijn werk... Heel veel werk vanuit emotie.

En vanuit een referentiekader van experiences en sensaties en gevoelens.

En hoe die fysiek worden maar ook echt je zijn kunnen overnemen. Ehm...

Maar ik probeer het ook op zo'n manier bijna technisch te benaderen dat je het ook weer los kan laten.

Dat je op het moment dat je dat moet aanwakkeren, het bijna een soort spiergeheugen is. Weet dat Anne Suurendonk dat ook veel doet, Ik heb dat ook met haar veel gedaan.

En dat vond ik ook heel interessant. Ik denk dat ik het daarom zelf ook belangrijk ben gaan vinden.

En ik ben ook best een sensitief persoon. Het kan er ook best van zijn dat ik echt sta te janken omdat zo'n gevoel dan binnenkomt in een repetitie. Maar tien minuten later is het gewoon weer oké. Ja, En het kan ook echt een uitlaatklep zijn. Maar ik probeer het ook weer niet zo belangrijk te maken dat het bijna iets psychologisch wordt...

Zeg maar, it's not a psychologische sessie. It's our job.

Ik zoek ik het ook niet op als uitlaatklep van die emotie. Ik zoek het meer op als een technische benadering. En het... Ja. Wat ik net zei, een soort van spiergeheugen of...

Gevoels-geheugen. Dat het ook elke dag anders kan zijn. Ik denk niet dat je elke dag op dezelfde manier bij je emoties komt. Dus die verschillende hoeken te hebben.

Acteer je jezelf ernaartoe? Kom je juist vanuit stilstand in vervoering, zeg maar? Komt het uit iets fysieks?

Dat je zo hard knijpt dat je er iets bij voelt? Of... Ik denk dat het allemaal valid is. Als je maar dat gevoel kan bereiken. Of het wat met je doet, weet ik niet. Ik denk dat het je misschien wel emotioneel intelligenter maakt. Ik weet niet per se of het me dwars zit.

In mijn bestaan. Ik denk over het algemeen dat ik best wel dankbaar ben voor het feit dat ik dans. En dat ik heel erg hou van dansers, omdat mensen gewoon emotioneel toegankelijk zijn.

En... Makkelijk bij hun gevoel kunnen en daarom ook empathischer zijn. Vriendelijker zijn. Meer begrip hebben voor elkaar.

Ik zie het niet per se... Je hebt natuurlijk ook dat beeld van de... "Tortured artist" ofzo. Die helemaal alles vervolgens door emoties ziet.

Maar ik heb eigenlijk het idee dat het juist voor mij, hoe expressionistischer je dans is... hoe meer het een manier van channeling wordt. Dat ik, doordat ik het in mijn werk zo veel beoefen, kan ik er in het dagelijks leven denk ik ook beter mee omgaan.

Sidney

Ja, weer terug naar de adaptability en dat dat snel moeten kunnen.

Hoe train je daarvoor? Hoe beïnvloedt het je creativiteit en je eigen identiteit?

Niek Wagenaar

Gewenning. Loslaten. Het is niet echt trainen, hè. Maar... Ja, maar loslaten moet je trainen, toch? Het is heel veel loslaten.

Je bent niet in controle over sommige dingen. Maar ik denk dat het ook wel een deel gewoon in je persoonlijkheid zit, hoor. Sommige mensen zijn gewoon makkelijker, flexibel.

Ik denk gewoon best wel vaak als er een probleem is, nou, we gaan het oplossen. En dan daarna komt pas de emotie bij mij, zeg maar.

Heel veel mensen krijgen heel veel emotie bij het oplossen van een probleem. Dus dan is dat heel moeilijk. Maar als het is opgelost, dan zijn ze prima.

There's a problem. Let's fix it. En als het dan kut is, dan denk ik daarna, fucking kut. Maar...Ja.

Maar ik los het wel eerst op.

Ja, en gewoon, ja, wel gewend aan worden. Het ook zien om je heen en hoe goed het werkt. En het wordt ook echt beloond als je flexibel bent.

Mensen zijn altijd heel dankbaar als je gewoon meebeweegt. Maar ook wel leren wat je eigen grenzen erin zijn. Want je hoeft niet alleen maar flexibel te zijn. Af en toe kan iets anders ook voor jou flexibeler zijn dan ze in eerste instantie laten blijken.

Dus ook op je strepen gaan staan. Meebewegen, maar within reason.

Ja, ik denk dat het ook weer te maken heeft met een beetje in controle van je emotie blijven eigenlijk. Dus dat je niet in paniek schiet of verdrietig wordt omdat, oh nee, de vloer is vies. Ofzo. Ja.

Ik kan me best voorstellen, als je dat niet zelf voor je zag ofzo. Ja, Frustratie. Ik denk dat die constant handig is. Ook handig als je een productie leider hebt.

Ja. Ja, het heeft wel iets te maken met ook stevig in je schoenen staan, denk ik. Gewoon in je waarde zijn. En ook als danser inderdaad. Als er iets verandert, als je opeens last minute toch achteraan wordt gezet ofzo, dat dat dan niet je hele ego crackt ofzo.

Sidney

Hoe in the lovely, chaotic life van een danser vind je tijd en ruimte voor selfcare?

Niek Wagenaar

Ja, ik probeer ook echt wel elke week een soort van twee dagen vrij te nemen. Probeer.

En als dat echt niet lukt, dan probeer ik mezelf op een ander moment de dag vrij te geven zeg maar. Ehm, zodat mijn work-life balance wel een soort van intact blijft, en zodat ik ook productief kan blijven

werken. En zodat ik niet weer... Ja. ...een burn-out heb. Want dat heb ik wel een tijd niet gedaan. En dat had wel echt effect op mijn mentale gezondheid.

En ik merk ook dat dan bijvoorbeeld als ik wel stress ervaar, dat ik dan

de neiging heb van "Ik ga nu al die mails beantwoorden" in plaats van rust neem. Ja. Dat ik nu gewoon eerst opschrijf wat ik allemaal moet doen. En dat ik dan even probeer in te zien dat het oké is dat ik niet alles vandaag doe.

Dat ik ook niet op iemand binnen vijf minuten hoeft te reageren. Precies. Maar dat het gewoon op het lijstje komt van dingen die moeten gebeuren.

Ehm, je hebt, weet ik veel, veertig uur in de week tijd. Ja. En dat is wanneer je werkt. Ja. En alles wat daarin afkomt is mooi en alles wat niet afkomt, dat komt gewoon niet af.

Want daar hebben we gewoon niet genoeg werk voor of tijd voor. En dat is ook oké.

Voor mij is het ook wel belangrijk dat ik genoeg doe aan bijvoorbeeld physical fitness. Dus dat ik gewoon, als ik een week alleen maar achter mijn laptop werk, dat ik gewoon

wel eens elke dag of een aantal keer per week sport, pilates, yoga. Dat helpt me gewoon heel erg om mijn hoofd leeg te maken en gewoon even puur op wat anders te focussen.

Ehm... Of, ja, ook dansen, even echt terug het lichaam in.

Sociaal leven houden is echt selfcare voor mij. Dat ik niet werk zo belangrijk maak dat ik geen tijd meer heb om mensen te zien.

Maar ook genoeg alone time heb. Het is allemaal heel moeilijk, want het past niet in een werkweek van 40 uur.

Maar ik probeer het wel... Ik probeer het wel echt steeds belangrijker te maken.

Ja, het is mijn alles, dansen. Het is mijn hele passie en ik werk 24-7, omdat ik ook geniet.

Maar ik geniet het nog meer als ik daarbuiten nog een leven heb en als ik mezelf genoeg rust geef en aardiger naar mezelf ben en mezelf even coulant ben naar mezelf als dat ik naar iedereen om me heen ben.

Ik ben heel ambitieus. Capricorn Moon.

Sidney

It will do that to you.

Niek Wagenaar

It will do these thing to you. Maar... Dat is niet altijd een goed iets. Dus ik probeer te leren om wat zachter te zijn daarin naar mezelf. Ambitie en workaholism.

Linde zegt altijd "Workaholism is a block, not a building block."

Dus ja, dat is voor mij wel self-care. Dat ik je daar ingrenzen aan geef. Ja. Dat ik daar ook mee kan werken.

En ook niet boos op mezelf zijn als ik dan een keer echt te ver ga met uitgaan ofzo. Weet je wel. Dat ik dan echt een heftige weekend heb gehad ofzo. Ja.

En dat ik dan denk, oh dat was leuk, maar het is echt dom want ik moet de hele week beuken. Maar dat ik dan denk, oh ja, maar ik had het dus nodig en anders zou ik het niet gedaan.

En koken, ik hou heel erg van koken, het geeft me zoveel... Het is voor mij ook echt een andere manier om mijn creativiteit te channelen, zeg maar.

Dus ik merk dat als ik dan in de supermarkt sta en ik heb een lange dag gehad, dat ik dan alsnog maar weer zo van creatief iets voel. Bubbelen, daar krijg ik energie van. En dan denk ik ook, ik ga dit proberen te maken of zo. "Dat lijkt me echt leuk. Ik ga olijven frituren." Fucking lekker. En dan voelt dat weer als een soort van creatieve energie of zo. Dus dat is ook voor mij echt zelf-care. Ik kan daardoor echt blijven bestaan.

Ook als ik heel lange repetitieweken heb.

De meeste mensen gaan dan een soort van... shrivel up in their room en slapen en zo. En I sacrifice so much sleep to be able to have good food and social life.

Dat laat me zoveel meer op. En dan ben ik zoveel meer bruikbaar in zo'n repetitiedag. Anders dan ben ik daar alleen maar aan het werk. En dan doe ik mijn werk wel goed hoor.

Maar zonder passie en zonder levens juice. Zonder dat je het leuk vindt. Ja, ik vind het wel leuk, maar het is gewoon... Het mist dan toch een soort van richness of zo.

En ik sta dan gewoon twee uur in de keuken. Ik heb ook altijd een idee om op Netflix te kijken. Wat voor sommige mensen ook een manier voor opladen is.

Sidney

Hoe werk je met de identiteit van de dansers die je voor je hebt? Ze zeggen toch vaak in audities van "je moet nu de choreo doen, maar laat ook jezelf zien". Maar wat is dat?

Niek Wagenaar

Ja, ik zeg altijd "whatever you do, don't change the counts". Don't randomly start doing different arms of zo. Hell no. Timing, niks aan veranderen.

Al die dingen die een soort van dans technisch eigenlijk zijn, veranderen niet. Maar je kan wel inkleuren. Je kan het ene geel maken en het andere paars. Dat zal dat alles gewoon.

Grijs, grijs, grijs, grijs, grijs. Dat je net in je dynamiek speelt of in wat je voelt. Ik denk dat daar heel veel bij mij ook in zit. Ik werk heel veel met imagery en met metaforen.

En daarin als voor jou, zeg maar, dit is — [Beweegt hand over hoofd in een cirkel]--- "ik poets een babyhoofdje". Is dat: ik poets een babyhoofdje. Maar als dit voor jou is: "Ik knip mijn haren af." Dan kan dat. En dat geeft gewoon net een andere kleur aan je beweging. En dat maakt het eigen. En hoe ik, ook als het wel specifiek is, dit moet een babyhoofdje zijn.

Dan is het beeld wat ik erbij heb, wat ik voor me zie, niet wat jij erbij voor je ziet. En ik denk dat dat al zoveel ruimte geeft aan invulling. En dat ervaren, ik denk dat een toeschouwer of ik als maker dat echt ervaar.

Ik denk dat gewoon de eigen fantasie gebruiken, dat daar heel veel persoonlijkheid, ruimte voor persoonlijkheid in zit.

En ook gewoon niet te timide zijn of zo. Dat je ook durft keuzes daarin te maken. En soms maken mensen ook te veel keuzes.

En dan denk ik "je moet wel naar me luisteren". Ik ben heel, en mijn werk is heel specifiek. En ik wil het heel graag op één manier.

En daarin werk ik wel echt met dansers die echt een identiteit hebben. Maar dan vind ik het heel belangrijk dat het eigenlijk een soort gegeven is. Dus dat ik niet dansers heb die het heel goed doen. Maar dat ik moet gaan trekken aan een soort van eigen invulling.

Ik heb liever dansers die heel erg hun eigen mens zijn, en daar ook voor durven te staan. En dat zie je wanneer ze bewegen. Je ziet dat ze iets beleven. Je ziet dat ze iets ervaren.

En dan is het mijn baan om te zorgen dat dat in de juiste vorm is. Dat dat niet een ongeleid projectiel is. Dat het samen past. Dat het op een 5-7-8 past.

Dus ik heb liever inderdaad echt individuen die zichzelf durven te geven op die manier aan het werk.

En dat ik nog even fysiek wat moet sleutelen. Dan mensen die het fysiek echt perfect doen. Maar dat ik denk, je kan, je ervaart niks. En hoe, ja dat is ook lastig. Dat niet durft of zo.

Of toch niet er voor open staat. Of nog zo erg moeite hebt met überhaupt tellen of zo. Dat je niet nog de second mind hebt. Of dat is het misschien wel: die de extra ruimte hebben om ook te ervaren. Ja, vraagt veel. Vraagt veel van je.

Maar daarin pas je jezelf dus ook aan. Dus eerst hou je jezelf een beetje weg. Dan ben je gewoon puur het lichaam. En daarna geef je weer meer van jezelf. En meer van je emotie.

En uiteindelijk gaat het, voor mij altijd wel om de vertaalslag naar het publiek. Maar dat is ook iets persoonlijks. Want er is ook heel veel vormloos gekronkel.

Wat alleen maar gaat over het ervaren van de danser. En dat is ook valid, maar bij mij gaat het echt altijd om eat er uiteindelijk bij het publiek terechtkomt.

Vormloos gekronkel, dat is echt gemeen van mij.

Sidney

Je hebt het heel goed omschreven hoor, en dat is ook smaak.

Niek Wagenaar

Is ook smaak. Precies. En ook smaak valt niet te testen. Maar mijn smaak is beter.

Sidney

Maar ik vind mijn smaak wel het beste.

Niek Wagenaar

Dat zeg ik dan altijd.

Sidney

Ja.

Interview Robin Croes, met aanvulling van Remy Tilburg

Sldney

De eerste vraag is, wie ben jij als danser?

Als ik gewoon meer als bio zeg maar, wat heb je gedaan, hoe zie je jezelf?

Robin Croes

Ik ben afgestudeerd op de Fontys dans Academie richting... Jazz Urban, dat was het toen dertijd. Dat was toentertijd al een beetje die mix, mix richting, dus niet de rigide contemporary, dus daar heb ik voor gekozen. Daar ben ik op afgestudeerd en toen ben ik in een gezelschap gaan werken die die mix ook opzochten.

Dus de urban contemporary, wat natuurlijk die enorme groei heeft doorgemaakt.

Gewerkt voor een gezelschap in Budapest, met Anne Suurendonk bij AYA in Rotterdam en bij Isabel Beernaert in België.

Toen vond ik het wel welletjes en toen ben ik gaan freelancen en toen ben ik mijn identiteit verder gaan ontwikkelen. Omdat ik merkte dat, ja, dat is wel een vraag, wie ben jij, wat heb jij te leveren?

En ik merkte dat ik me niet compleet kon identificeren met de gezelschappen in Nederland toentertijd.

Dus toen ben ik het zelf gaan doen, toen ben ik gaan freelancen en ik een beetje van alles wat gaan doen, dus ook commercieel werk gaan doen en dat heb ik doorgetrokken tot en met nu. En dan heb ik mijn eigen platform waar ik focus op de ontwikkeling van identiteit.

En mijn eigen identiteit, binnen in dat platform. En qua werk doe ik dus verschillende dingen, artistiek, theater, maar ook dingen van tv en modellen werk.

Sidney

Wat zie jij als de dansindustrie? Wat zie jij als de dansindustrie? Wat hoort bij de dansindustrie voor jou? De Nederlandse dansindustrie? De Europese dansindustrie?

Robin Croes

Nou, dat is inmiddels best wel veel veranderd vind ik.

Voorheen was de dans industrie de dance industrie. Als je dan dans wat op een podium hoort of dan wel dans als in commercieel, maar dan denk ik ook meteen aan de club en street style's. Maar dat was nog wel heel erg op hun plek gebaseerd.

En nu voel ik wel dat er een enorme shift is ontstaan. Dat dans multi-inzetbaar is.

Dus het wordt meer gebruikt ook voor brands, commercials, maar ook performances die los staan van kunst.

Dus het is ook meer voor bedrijfs dingen. Dus het wordt meer gelinkt.

Sidney

Even vraag ik iets, want ik heb er echt heel veel. Je zei het net al een beetje, maar wat vind je chiller? Project based of company based?

Als in misschien omgevormd meer heel veel verschillende opdrachten of eigenlijk wel iets wat een beetje in dezelfde richting zit?

Robin Croes

Toch wel verschillende opdrachten. En natuurlijk moet ik ook wel eerlijk zijn dat een bepaalde safety en veiligheid en structuur fijn is. We hebben als mens wel iets van structuur nodig. Maar als je compleet alleen maar op een plek zit. Dan heb ik dat dus meegemaakt.

Dan ben ik niet geprikkeld genoeg. Dus daarom vind ik het wel fijn om verschillende dingen te doen. Juist om het vak ook zo sprankelend te houden.

Sidney

**Zijn er onderdelen van het werk van een danser die in jouw ogen niet gezien worden?
Niet voor wat gecompenseerd als in financieel gezien bijvoorbeeld?**

Robin Croes

Ja, absoluut. Zeker.

Omdat ik dus als freelancer werk is er echt geen vangnet.

Dat heb ik al meegemaakt. Een aantal jaar geleden lag ik er eigenlijk uit. En toen ben ik naar de gemeente gegaan en er was eigenlijk niks. Ik kon niet eens een uitkering aanvragen. Omdat,

Ja, dat bestaat niet. Dat bestaat gewoon nog niet. Er is gewoon inderdaad geen vangnet financieel gezien. Dus daarin vind ik wel echt dat het een gemiste kans is.

Maar toen je mij de vraag net stelde over wat er niet gezien wordt, denk ik veel aan onderbetaling. Dat gaat nu wel beter maar is nog steeds niet goed.

Dus... Ik denk dat we daar wel op weg naar zijn (Fair Pay). Er is wel een stijgende lijn in.

Maar ja, nog steeds is daar wel financieel gezien te weinig kijk op of zo. Wat dans eigenlijk inhoudt. Hoe zwaar het is. Hoeveel werk er in zit. Maar ook gewoon...

Ja, er is ook niet echt een soort van basis of zo. Hoe noem je dat? Een vakbond.

Hebben ze dat willen opzetten, maar dat is nooit gelukt.

Volgens mij is dat in België wel, toch Remy?

Remy Tilburg (van de andere kant van de studio)

Ja. Nou, in ieder geval sowieso in Frankrijk wel.

Robin Croes

Ja, en natuurlijk... Het is natuurlijk een veel gevoeliger beroep als freelancer. Want je hoeft maar je hand te breken en het kan al heel dilemma zijn.

Want een paar maanden geleden was ik ziek voor een week. Ik had echt veel dingen staan en toen kon ik die opdrachten niet doen en werd ik niet betaald.

En daar reken je wel op. Ja, en het kan er zelfs zijn dat dat die hele week, dat dat je enige inkomen was voor de hele maand. Want dat is het nou juist met freelancen. De ene week heb je wel iets en de andere week heb je niks.

Remy Tilburg

Maar in Frankrijk is dat wel heel goed geregeld.

Daar verdien je sowieso geld. Ook als je dus niet werkt. Daar is een soort van pot waar je dus... Dat werkt ook wel anders. Dus het is ook niet met freelancing geloof ik.

Dus dat weet ik wel, dat het in Frankrijk... Want dat wordt nog beter. Dus het kan wel. Het kan zeker, ja. Daar wordt het gewoon serieuzer genomen. Ja, dat is sowieso een ding toch? Dan het weer serieuzer nemen.

Sidney

Als je kijkt naar jouw carrière en hoe je dus van project naar project gaat. Hoe zorg je ervoor dat je zo marketable mogelijk bent?

Robin Croes

Dat mensen het interessant vinden om jou te boeken voor opdrachten? Ja. Ik denk dat dat wel een keuze is van mij.

Mijn manier is wel dat ik me juist zo erg probeer een soort van eilandje te proberen te creëren.

Waardoor de mensen die met mij werken, die echt met mij willenwerken.

Maar dat is een manier. Dat is niet dé manier.

Daardoor zorgt het ervoor dat je misschien wat specifieke opdrachten krijgt. Maar dat zijn dan wel de mensen die echt met je willen werken. Je kan natuurlijk ook een all-round contemporary danser zijn en dan ben je natuurlijk makkelijker inzetbaar. Dan ben ik misschien wat minder. Maar ik vind wel dat de jobs die ik dan doe, wel dubbel zo leuk zijn.

Ja, en vervolgens social media is echt wel je beste vriend. Ja.

En heel veel networking.

En dat is tegenwoordig natuurlijk voornamelijk door social media. Maar ook inderdaad gewoon praten met een netwerk. Een beetje wat het altijd al wel is geweest.

Maar wat daar dan bij is gekomen is dan het sociale. Het sociale netwerk. Hoe je je eigen brand eigenlijk kan maken. Hoe je je eigen brand kan ontwikkelen.

Wat ook natuurlijk weer steeds moeilijker wordt. Want iedereen begint nu zijn eigen brand te ontwikkelen. Ja, precies. Zie je dat wel als een soort van onderdeel van... Misschien voor jou specifiek.

Dat je echt denkt van oké, ik zou nu een moodboard kunnen maken, en dat ben ik.

Je eigen signature.

Sidney

Heb je het gevoel dat het... Nodig is in de dance industrie om je snel aan te kunnen passen? En op welke manier?

Robin Croes

Ja, ik denk het wel. Zeker voor jonge dansers. Denk ik wel dat het echt... Omdat het allemaal veel sneller gaat dan vroeger.

De ontwikkelingen zijn zo snel. Mensen worden steeds beter en sneller, en je moet overal bij zijn.

Dus die gehaaidheid en die haast is er wel. Maar ik zou dan wel zeggen als tip om daar juist tegen in te gaan. Dat is ook wat Remy en ik eigenlijk altijd doen, dus wij willen nooit rennen voor dingen.

Wat natuurlijk lastig is als je je rekeningen wel moet betalen. Maar de kracht is wel om een beetje die balans te zoeken. Om juist niet achter dingen aan te rennen. Omdat je dan forever achter dingen blijft aan rennen.

Op een gegeven moment moeten dingen ook naar je toe komen.

Sidney

En als je kijkt naar verschillende soorten opdrachten. Hoe pas jij je aan? Hoe ben jij anders? Als je bijvoorbeeld op een commercial shoot staat. Versus een stuk wat je doet op het podium.

Robin Croes

Niet super veel verschil.

Maar als ik echt geboekt word. Echt op zo'n commerciële set. Waar ik dus ook niet te maken heb bijvoorbeeld met een choreograaf, die mij daarin begeleidt.

Dan ben ik wel oppervlakkiger. Omdat je het bijna in babytaal of zo soms moet uitleggen.

Maar ik probeer wel echt te streven om mezelf te blijven. En te streven om dat beeld. Wat ik van mezelf wil laten doorstromen. Om dat vast te blijven houden.

Alleen dat is gewoon soms heel moeilijk.

Dus dan moet je jezelf wel aanpassen.

Naar een vereenvoudigde versie. Een tweedimensionale versie. En soms word je daar echt ingedrukt.

Wij zijn ook wel eens bijvoorbeeld voor een opdracht aangenomen.

Waar wij werden gevraagd om ons (Duo: Robin & Remy).

En vervolgens moesten wij ons compleet aanpassen. Aan hetgeen wat al bestond, en dan ben je wel in conflict. Want je wilt super erg vasthouden aan je eigen brand. Maar je merkt eigenlijk dat het niet wordt geaccepteerd.

Sidney

Hoe zoek jij jezelf binnen die verschillende soorten opdrachten, Als je weet dat ze eraan komen. En hoe ontwikkel je creativiteit en authenticiteit daarbinnen?

Robin Croes

Ja, ik probeer dat dus eigenlijk toch wel altijd als één geheel te zien. Dus daardoor blijft die training wel altijd hetzelfde.

Wat ik wel merk is als ik dan bijvoorbeeld meer commercieel werk heb gedaan.

Dat ik dan wel een periode daarna weer heel veel de studio in ga om gewoon alleen met mezelf. En dan sluit ik mezelf hier op en dan ga ik verder trainen.

Omdat je het anders ook inderdaad een beetje kunt kwijtraken.

Denk ik ook vooral als je nog beginnend bent.

Maar zeg maar de fysieke training blijft wel hetzelfde.
 Met taal moet je soms de focus misschien wat duidelijker verleggen.
 Van oké ik heb nu heel veel oppervlakkige dingen gedaan, dus ik ga dan nu even weer concentreren op mezelf.
 En als ik eenmaal de opdracht heb dan is het vrij duidelijk. Maar daarvoor als ik bijvoorbeeld castings moet doen of met iets of iemand moet gaan werken.
 Dan doe ik wel een beetje research naar met wie ik dan ga werken. En hoe ik me dan toch op een of andere manier in mijn jasje kan aanpassen. Aan iemand anders fysiek.
 Om dus ook meer kansen te maken op het werk. Dus niet om puur blanco in te gaan. Van nou pik me maar. Omwille van mij. Ik doe altijd wel een beetje research naar het brand of naar hoe het gaat.
 Die eindeloze zoektocht van Hoe je dus multi-inzetbaar bent.

Sidney

**In mijn ervaring is dans heel erg gewikkeld met emotie. En van mij persoonlijk kan ik die twee ook niet van elkaar. Ik kan niet zonder gevoel dansen. En daardoor wordt dat best wel een groot onderdeel van het werk van een danser. Met je emoties werken.
 Hoe doe je dit? Zie je dit? Navigeer je dit?**

Robin Croes

Ja dat ligt natuurlijk wel een beetje aan welke situatie ik ben. Soms kun je die emoties niet loslaten. Als het dus meer commercieel is dan heb ik wel echt gemerkt. Ik heb daar ook het afgelopen jaar met bepaalde jobs wel last van gehad dat ik me dan op een bepaalde manier voelde, maar dat je dan echt dat aan de kant moet schuiven. Omdat er dan van jou verwacht wordt dat jij gewoon delivered.

Dus dan probeer ik dat soort van wel uit te zetten.
 Met artistiek werk is dat misschien wat makkelijker om het toe te laten. Omdat je het ook meer bespreekbaar kunt maken met de mensen met wie je werkt. Omdat. Ja die begrijpen je dan toch iets beter. Ik denk dat het daar in die wereld ook wat toegankelijker is.
 Om je gevoelens te bespreken.

Maar laten we ermee werken zeg maar. Dus op die manier navigeer ik dat. Dus ik tast af met wie ik werk en dan beoordeel ik van kan ik dit nu toelaten of niet. En als je het kunt toelaten kan het heel bevrijdend zijn, omdat het je misschien ook doet vergeten.

Ik heb het al heel veel slecht emotioneel. Het kan natuurlijk ook leuk emotioneel zijn. Maar ja.
 En als dat dus niet kan. Dan kan dat dus ook heel kut aanvoelen. Omdat je dus voelt van ja. Ik moet iets doen met mijn lichaam. En dat is natuurlijk fysiek dus ook.
 En het gaat om mij. Maar eigenlijk voel ik me heel rot en dan is dat best wel een struggle.
 Als iemand je dan ook nog bekritiseert over iets. Dan voelt het ook super persoonlijk natuurlijk.

Speaker A

Kan je dat van elkaar afzetten? Dat als jij kritiek krijgt, Op wat je doet als danser on the job?

Robin Croes

Versus kritiek op jou als persoon. Ja. Ook ligt aan de momenten. Soms sta je wat sterker in je schoenen. En dan kun je dat. Een beetje ook van beheerd krijgen.
Dat je denkt van ja. Let it go, maar ja. Tuurlijk, in wezen is het altijd wel persoonlijk.
En doet het altijd wel iets. En dat is ook. En maakt het dat ook. Ja soms moeilijk.
Ook dat gevoel natuurlijk. Dat je. Continu met jezelf bezig moet zijn. Jezelf beeld.
Je hebt zo'n uber focus op jezelf. Mentaal maar ook fysiek natuurlijk. Hoe je eruit ziet.
Dat doet dan ook weer mee.
Ja. Veel meer dan dat je op ander werk bijvoorbeeld zou doen.

Sidney

Een stuk wat best wel zwaar is om te dansen. Misschien hoeft het niet per se fysiek te zijn. Kan ook emotioneel gezien zijn. Of beide. Hoe. Praktiseer je dan self-care. Ervoor of erna. Als in. Zit daar bewustzijn achter?

Robin Croes

Ehm. Ik denk wat voor mij heel erg belangrijk is, en wat voor mij heel erg werkt is, dat er altijd een thuis is.
En dat is dan mijn veilige plek. En dat ik ook me daaraan vast kan knopen. Dus dat ik ervoor zorg dat er daarna altijd de ruimte is om thuis te komen. En met thuiskomen bedoel ik dan letterlijk thuiskomen. Maar ook mentaal thuiskomen. Dus dat je echt los kunt laten. Je weer veilig voelt.
Ik hecht daar sowieso heel erg mee aan die safety. En rust ook wel. Ik kan ook niet te veel.
Ik weet van mezelf dat ik niet te veel kan doen.
Want dan raak ik overprikkeld. En dan vind ik het leven überhaupt niet meer leuk. Ja. Dus ik weet dat ik daar heel erg mee moet opletten. Dat dat een val ook wel is. Voor mij.
Ik moet dat best wel goed organiseren. Dat daar pauzes in zitten.
Eigenlijk ook. Same. Vorm. Fysiek. Alleen daar. Daar kun je dan wat makkelijker overheen stappen. Lost zichzelf wel op.

Sidney

Voel je wel die druk om veel te doen, veel te produceren, of te creëren, of te werken?

Robin Croes

Ja. Ja. Je hebt toch wel het gevoel dat als je te lang stilstaat. Dat je dan niet relevant meer bent. Maar. Datt is dan nog meer naar de buitenwereld.
Ja. Dat is dan meer naar de buitenwereld toe.
Maar meer ook voor mezelf voelt het dan alsof ik stilsta.
Dus alsof mijn leven stilstaat.
Dus ja. Ik voel wel die druk van de maatschappij. Maar dat ben ik natuurlijk zelf.

Ja. En de ene keer laat ik dat te veel toe. Ehm. Die druk die ik mezelf opleg. En soms kan ik het ook best wel goed relativieren.

Sidney

How feasible. Is it to sustain a livelihood vaan alleen professioneel dansen?

Robin Croes

Het is niet absoluut niet makkelijk. Je moet het echt willen. Ja. Dat heb ik in de jaren wel. Gezien bij mezelf en de mensen om me heen. Want anders, dan, lukt het niet.

Ja. Ehm. En de factoren die daarvan belangrijk zijn. Is natuurlijk.

Ook een beetje geluk. Jezelf niet per se alleen zien als een danser, maar wat voor mij heel erg werkt en voor ons (+ Remy) heel erg heeft gewerkt is jezelf meer zien als een artiest. Dus dat je multi inzetbaar bent en jezelf niet beperkt tot alleen danser, waardoor je dus ook meer werk creëert voor jezelf. En misschien nog wel een ding is dat looks er ook wel echt toe doen.

Misschien ook wel een ding. Dat looks. Er ook wel toe doen.

Je hebt toch wel meer profijt als je er representatief uitziet en ook jezelf dus verbreedt tot niet alleen danser in een theater setting. Dus ook opzoek gaat naar werk met artiesten of voor commercials of met fashion. En daar bovenop nog iets te hebben wat jou speciaal maakt. En ook gewoon wilskracht, motivatie en ondernemend zijn.

Ondernemend zijn is misschien wel het allerbelangrijkst. Omdat je het gewoon allemaal zelf moet doen. Het werk komt niet naar je toe, je moet echt zelf zoeken. Dus als danser moet je die ondernemende kwaliteit ook absoluut hebben, om kansen te kunnen zien en te kunnen pakken. Te wachten tot iemand met een opdracht naar jou komt, of eindelijk naar audities blijft gaan die niet voor jou zijn weggelegd. Dat moet je kunnen inschatten.

Sidney

Heb je een voorbeeld?

Robin Croes

Ja. Nou ja. Mijn ervaring bij Isabel Beernaert.. Heb ik daar ooit over verteld?

Sidney

Nee niet echt

Ik heb wel het een en ander gehoord.

Robin Croes

Ja. Dat. Dat was een van mijn eerste ervaringen. Als professional. Dat was mijn eerste ervaring. Als professional.

Ja. Misschien meer. Dat ik daarover kan vertellen. Dat ik daar. Heel veel van heb geleerd. Dat dat.

Inderdaad. Dit was. Dat was gewoon. Echt. Aanpassen. Tot op het bot zeg maar. Gewoon. Je hele leven

vormen. Naar hoe iemand anders het beeld voor zich ziet. Tot aan mijn priveleven. Ik heb toen wel ondervonden dat ik dat zelf niet zo wil doen.

Dat dat gewoon mega zwaar en uitputtend is en dat dit ook een punt was dat ik ook wilde stoppen met dansen. Toen ben ik ook een tijdje gestopt.

Toen heeft mijn wilskracht het toch overgenomen. En dan is mijn mening nog steeds, eens een danser altijd een danser. Je kunt dans loslaten maar het laat jou nooit meer los.

Ehm. Dus ja. Dan ben ik dan toch maar weer doorgegaan.

Maar ik neem dat wel nog altijd wel mee. Dat is wel een soort van basis van mijn eigen werk. Dat ik.

Ehm. Alles wat ik zelf heb meegemaakt met choreografen, of docenten, of opdrachtgevers. Ik ben daar best wel gevoelig voor en ook specifiek hoe ik daar anders in wil zijn.

En ik vind het ook hypocriet als ik het zelf dan hetzelfde ga doen. Dus ik ben er dan ook vaak best wel streng op. We zijn daar best wel streng op.

Dat. Tuurlijk soms voelt het wel dat je ook dat wilt doen zoals je voorgangers het hebben gedaan. Omdat dat makkelijker is. Maar dan gaan we toch voor die andere weg. Om het verschil te maken.

Dat moet gewoon veel meer begrip hebben. En liefdevoller zijn. Dat vind ik echt heel belangrijk. Ja. Het lijkt me dat je dan. Dat je het meeste kan halen uit mensen.

Want vroeger werd er gedacht dat je dus heel hard moet zijn en streng moet zijn om het beste uit iemand te halen. Maar daar geloof ik niet in.

Ik geloof wel, nou de hele IID is daarop gebaseerd een veilige sfeer te creëren. Waardoor mensen zich fijn voelen.

Rustig voelen. En uit daar kunnen onderzoeken. En beter kunnen worden. En dat betekent niet dat je nooit iemand kunt attenderen op iets maar de manier waarop, is denk ik heel erg belangrijk.

Interview: Emma Evelein

Sidney

Let's start. Nou, mijn eerste vraag is, wie ben jij?

Wie ben je als danser, als maker? In de zin, hoe zie jij jezelf? hoe zou je jezelf omschrijven?

Emma Evelein

Ik zou mezelf omschrijven als iemand die bezig is met bewegingen en visueel.

En dat uitzicht dan op verschillende velden.

Dus dat uitzicht op film, op theater, op lesgeven en andere vormen van creëren, denk ik, en overbrengen.

En, ja, er is zoveel wat ik erover kan zeggen, maar dat zou het overkoepelende zijn, denk ik.

Nou, ik ben begonnen met dansen toen ik vier was. Of, ja, eigenlijk wel eerder, maar goed, dat dan, ja.

En ik heb mezelf lang vooral kort ontwikkeld in vooral urban contemporary dans. Ik heb ballet gedaan mijn hele leven.

En ook urban style. Zoals hiphop en streetdance. En daarnaast ben ik ook opgeleid in het maken van theater, in acteren en zang.

Ja, vanuit school al. Dus ook tijdens de middelbare school. En ik heb daarna veel overgenomen van zowel het Israeli contemporary dansveld, als het urban contemporary dans.

En ook heel veel over contemporary van het veld in Nederland en Europa, zou ik kunnen zeggen.

Na mijn korte company leven, ben ik vrij snel gaan creëren.

Omdat het niet echt iets voor mij was. Ik ben meer een creatie persoon.

Ik dans ook, omdat ik gewoon vanuit mijn interesse in creatie, niet vanuit mijn interesse als danser zijnde.

En ik zou zeggen, thema-wise gaat het heel veel over verbinding, relatie, tijd, expressie en oprecht zijn, denk ik. Tegenover het leven. Ja.

En dat uitzicht allemaal net wat anders, gebaseerd op waar ik voor werk. Als in de bovengenoemde verschillende velden.

En daarnaast ben ik geïnteresseerd in community. Dus daarom geef ik ook les. Ik vind het fijn om in contact te staan met andere dansers, met waar zij doorheen gaan.

Mijn kunst is niet per se alleen maar op internet. Ik ben ego-gebaseerd. Ik vind het belangrijk om te kunnen delen, om samen te kunnen bouwen.

En als ik dat ook niet echt kan doen, dan zie ik ook niet heel veel nut in het maken van kunst, denk ik.

Dus ik ben wat dat betreft misschien anders dan sommige mensen die gewoon heel veel werk produceren.

Vooral heel veel naar zichzelf kijken. Ik ben er niet zo heel erg geïnteresseerd in. Ja.

Ik vind het belangrijk dat ik tijd heb om te ontwikkelen, dat ik ruimte heb om te ontwikkelen. En dat ik niet te veel aangeraakt word door andere mensen of door andere stijlen.

Sidney

Wat is voor jou de dansindustrie? Of specifiek misschien meer de contemporary dansindustrie?

Emma Evelein

Hoe ik het zie?

Ik denk dat het een dansveld is waar er bepaalde grondregels zijn voor de mensen die

theater maken en misschien ook veel. Maar waar er tegelijkertijd heel veel ruimte is om in het nu te zijn.

Dus waar ruimte is om te ontwikkelen, om dingen, nieuwe dingen uit te proberen.

En ik denk dat het af en toe voor mij persoonlijk echt nergens slaat. Als we te ver raken van... Ja waarom we dit eigenlijk doen. En te ver raken vanuit... Ver weg raken van onze persoonlijke ervaring en eigenlijk gewoon dat kwetsbare, dat oprechte waar ik veel waarde aan hecht.

Maar ik zie het ook als een plek waar hele mooie dingen kunnen ontstaan. Juist omdat het geen regels heeft. Je ziet dat de streetstyle en de ballet heeft een hele mooie regels.

En dat is een hele diepe geschiedenis. En contemporary ook. Maar omdat het zo veranderlijk is, is er heel veel ruimte om nieuwe dingen te ondervinden.

En soms nemen we dat iets te letterlijk, dan wordt het voor mij iets te conceptueel.

Maar er ontstaan ook hele mooie dingen waar ik me heel erg geïnspireerd door kan raken. Dus zo zou ik het over het algemeen omschrijven.

En er zijn wel dingen van de streetstyle community wat ik liever zou zien. Ik zou iets meer samenwerking willen zien en support van artiest tot artiest.

Want contemporary is, als het gaat om omgang in community, nijgt toch iets meer naar het ballet. En dat vind ik jammer.

Daarom vind ik het fijn om mezelf te omgeven in ook urban communities. Daarom vind ik het leuk om af en toe te jureren of er wat of battles bij te wonen. Dat soort dingen.

Want dat inspireert mij ook weer.

Sidney

Vind je het als danser een benodigheid om jezelf snel te kunnen aanpassen? Aan van alles en nog wat?

Emma Evelein

Ja, in mijn, in mijn particulate case zeker. Want ik zit in hele verschillende velden.

Dus ik sta af en toe op een commercial. En dan af en toe weer op een artistieke film set. En dan weer lesgeven en dan weer choreografen voor companies, voor theater.

In het theater of op locatie. En allemaal hebben een andere approach nodig. Een andere, een ingang.

Dus ik ook maar, dus niet alleen in het choreografen zelf, maar ook in mijn vorm van communicatie.

Met, met alle verhalen is het totaal anders. Want het doel is namelijk heel anders.

Met theater heb je veel meer te maken met een direct publiek die je moet aantrekken. Om naar theater te komen. Om iets te maken dat als ze ook al, zitten ze ook alleen maar op één plek.

En ze veranderen niet van point of view als observer. Dat ze nog steeds het gevoel hebben dat ze een hele show kunnen meemaken. Met film heb je veel meer te maken met editing.

Dus je kan letterlijk het publiek van plek naar plek verschuiven. Dat, daar ligt mijn voorliefde ook. Ik hou ervan om dat te kunnen domineren.

Dus wat dat betreft komt film ook iets natuurlijker naar mij toe. En met commercial heb je puur te maken met branding. Dus je bent eigenlijk meer bezig met het overtuigen van een regisseur, van een klant dat de choreografie goed is. dat vind ik af en toe ook best wel leuk om dat te doen. Want het is, het is weer een andere vorm van kunst maken. Je kunst overbrengen. Maar ook, ook de snelheid waarin je dingen moet maken. Of de tijd die je neemt voor een bepaalde scène. Of een bepaalde narratief die je creëert. Verschilt de taal. Verschilt de taal.

En zelfs de, de bewegingstaal die ik bijvoorbeeld meeneem om les te geven is weer totaal anders. Dan bepaalde scènes die ik creëer voor film of voor theater.

Omdat het allemaal heeft te maken met purpose. En het heeft allemaal te maken met tijd. En het heeft allemaal te maken met een bepaald resultaat. En dat resultaat is voor elke vorm totaal anders. En ik denk dat het slim is.

Tenminste als je wilt doen wat ik doe. Om te begrijpen dat daar dus verschillende Emma's of verschillende vormen van jezelf voor nodig zijn.

En hoe je dat doet. En hoe je een oog houdt wel op de kunst. En dat het consistent is, daar zit werk in. Maar dat is ook uiteindelijk de reward. En ik snap dat het soms vanaf de buitenkant ingewikkeld is. Als je ziet dat iemand heel veel verschillende soorten dingen doet.

Tegelijkertijd denk ik dat het nu bijna een necessity is. Omdat de wereld zit niet meer alleen maar in theater. Of alleen maar in de cinema.

Of alleen maar, je ziet het ook aan muzikartiesten. Die gaan van optredens naar muziekvideo's. Naar branding. Dat is ook een beetje de tijd van nu.

En ik denk wel dat als je dat niet wilt, dat het niet hoeft. Je kan ook gewoon naar een company. Of je kan ook alleen maar regisseren. Maar als je dat leuk vindt is het mogelijk. Maar je moet daarin wel kunnen aanpassen. Want het is gewoon compleet anders.

Sidney

En misschien hieraan gerelateerd. In het zoeken naar werk. Ja. Hoe maak je jezelf marketable?

En zorg je dat mensen Jou willen kiezen voor whatever job it might be.

Emma Evelein

Ja, kijk. Er zijn natuurlijk heel veel praktische dingen die ik zou kunnen zeggen. Bijvoorbeeld naar audities gaan, sociale media, netwerken. Misschien persoonlijk mensen rechtstreeks benaderen. Maar om heel eerlijk te zijn. Ik zit nu in ieder geval in een fase waarvan ik het gevoel heb dat het allemaal vanuit binnenkomt.

Dat als je werkt aan jezelf als persoon. En aan hoe je de dingen ziet. En dat vervolgens kan uitwerken in wat je doet.

Dat de juiste mensen waarmee je uiteindelijk wil gaan werken. Dat die vanzelf aanhaken. Omdat je een bepaalde energie in het universum gooit.

En hoe gearticuleerde die is. Hoe makkelijker het voor mensen is om jou te matchen. Met de dingen die jij wil doen. En als dat dus ook oprecht aansluit aan wie jij bent. Dan ga je dus vanzelf dingen doen die bij jou passen.

Daar geloof ik in. Ik ben echt gaan groeien vanaf mijn 24ste. En ik heb toen altijd heel erg vastgehouden aan wat ik tof vind om te doen. En mensen zijn dat gaan herkennen.

Dus ik heb daar een beetje op kunnen gaan flowen. Dat mensen vanzelf naar mij toe komen. Ik denk dat je hier goed bij past. Ik denk dat je daar goed bij past.

Ik hoefde mezelf niet meer te presenteren. Op een gegeven moment. Zodat ik maar doorging met dat wat ik het tofste vind.

Ik moet zeggen de uitdaging zit hem in nu. Nu ik grotere dingen ga doen.

En steeds meer mensen er iets over te zeggen hebben. En steeds meer publiek groter wordt. De companies groter worden. De budgetten groter worden.

De commercials waar ik op sta groter worden. Om dan aan jezelf vast te houden. Om dan zorgen dat mensen nog steeds blijven herkennen dat jij het bent.

En dat je dus niet in een soort van veilige stream valt. Dat je gaat doen wat mensen zeggen dat je moet doen. Of dat je gaat kijken naar hoe andere mensen het doen.

En ik denk dat daar zit voor mij nu de grootste uitdaging in.

Ehm. En het is een moeilijke balans. Want aan de ene kant wil je jezelf in acht splitten. En zorgen dat je overal goed in kan werken.

En aan de andere kant wil je eigenlijk gewoon dat je je naam maakt precies voor dat wat je bent. En dat mensen dan vooral aansluiten. En dat is dan een kleinere groep.

Maar dat mensen dan vooral of creators aansluiten die goed met jou zou kunnen werken. Wat het midden van die balans is ik heb geen idee.

Het enige wat ik weet is dat ik er kennis over heb. Maar het blijft altijd een struggle. Je denkt altijd van wat is het volgende?

En is er een volgende?

Stopt het niet gewoon voor mij?

Is er niet gewoon iets anders wat ik moet doen bijvoorbeeld? Die gedachten zullen altijd een beetje blijven. Het is altijd angstig. Maar ik denk angstig zijn en je vastklampen aan dingen dat is nooit goed.

Ik denk dat het altijd goed is om een beetje mee te gaan met dat wat het leven je biedt. Want mensen die constant blijven proberen en constant blijven pushen. Daar word je uiteindelijk niet gelukkig van.

Want uiteindelijk het enige wat we willen is dat we de inner child voeden met onze dromen.

En ik denk dat als adult heb je de verantwoordelijkheid om die droom in een vorm te voegen die je ook echt gelukkig maakt.

Want ik denk dat we heel veel weten over onszelf als we jonger zijn.

Wat ons gelukkig maakt. Maar niet alles.

Sidney

Ik had laatst een workshop en toen moest ik terugdenken aan de dingen die me inspireerden toen ik zo was. En ik dacht wow ik was helemaal de helft van deze dingen vergeten omdat ik er nooit bij stil sta. Dat is crazy.

En dat ik sinds ik daar weer aan denk dat ik ook hele andere keuzes maak in wat ik ga doen en wat ik leuk vind om te doen. Soms is het goed om even stil te staan. Wat was het nou uiteindelijk wat mij...

Emma Evelein

Dat is ook waarom ik hierheen ben verhuisd. Want ik denk eigenlijk de twee redenen waarom ik verliefd ben geworden op dit. Dit hele ding.

Is ten eerste community. Omdat ik dansers samen zag. En ik wilde een onderdeel zijn van die groep, en ten tweede music video's. Muziek, beweging en beeld samen zeg maar.

En daarom ben ik dans gaan doen. En vanwege dans ben ik choreograaf. En vanwege choreografie ben ik een choreograaf voor theater. Bijvoorbeeld. Maar het was niet per se een doel om te gaan choreograferen voor theater.

En ook al vind ik het heel leuk om te doen. En heel fijn. Ik denk toch dat ik meer in de filmhoek moet gaan. En daarom ben ik hier ook heen verhuisd. Want hier is de film veel groter dan Nederland. Ja. Niet dat het heel goed gaat hoor. Want ik werk alleen maar in het buitenland. Ik ben hier zo. en ik zie al die productiemaatschappijen, en ik zit gewoon zo een beetje te wachten. Maar ik ga dit weekend ze allemaal aanschrijven. Gewoon laten weten dat ik hier ben. Showbill meesturen en zo. En dan hopen voor het beste. Ja, soms is dat alles wat je nodig hebt hoor. Ja, maar. Maar ja, tot nu toe is het niet helemaal volgens plan gegaan. Maar ja, misschien wel.

Sidney

zoals ik net al zei, maar, artistiek werk is heel vaak gewoon heel erg dicht, of het zit heel dicht bij emotie dus ook in creatie en werken met dansers, al dan niet zelf dansen, is het een groot onderdeel. En dat is natuurlijk waar dansen een beetje anders is dan je 9 to 5 office job. Dat dat, zeg maar, dat werken met je emoties dus daadwerkelijk een onderdeel is van je baan. Ja. Hoe zie jij dat?

Emma Evelein

Ik denk dat, ja, dat het compleet is verworven met je eigen emotie.
Ik denk ook als het niet zo is, dat het, dat je een bepaalde particele vorm hebt van je eigen kunst.
Eh, ik kan me niet echt een voorbeeld bedenken. Ja, ik weet misschien wel een voorbeeld, maar ja, dat wil ik niet echt noemen. Maar je hebt, je hebt een voorbeeld.
Je hebt, je hebt choreografen, die werken meer via een methode. Ja.
Eh, en dan kan het natuurlijk zijn dat het niet, maar dat neem ik het nog steeds hoor. Ja, ik denk dat het zeker verworven is met, met je eigen emoties.
Eh, maar ik denk wel dat, dat, dat je op een gegeven moment, eh, je eigen emoties neemt en dat in een narratief plaatst en daarmee gaat werken.
Eh, want ik denk als het te persoonlijk is de hele tijd, dan zit je er te, te, te diep op.
Ik denk dat je als choreograaf bijvoorbeeld, of als artiest, eh, moet je jezelf gebruiken, want het is belangrijk om te laten zien in je kunst hoe je de wereld ziet en waar je naar op zoek bent, of een vraagstuk of iets. Maar je moet ook je eigen regisseur kunnen zijn. Dus je moet er ook een stap vanaf kunnen doen en zien van, hé, werkt dit eigenlijk? Weet je wel?
Eh, die twee verantwoordelijkheden draag je. Dus ja, maar ik denk als je echt een professional artiest bent, dan, dan is dat nodig.
Je moet ook er een stap naar achter kunnen zetten en denken van, oké, dat werkt niet, dat werkt wel. Ook al is het een heel gegeven moment voor mij, eh, in de hele boog of, weet je wel.
Want ik denk als je alleen maar creëert vanuit je eigen, want je moet toch, je moet toch een A naar B kunnen creëren voor een artiest. Voor een publiek. Dat is nou eenmaal je, je baan. Het is niet alleen maar therapie, weet je wel.
Je moet ook narratief creëren. Dus ik denk allebei.

Sidney

**Ja. nu hoeft je geen set antwoord op te hebben, maar hoe doe je dat?
Dat, aan de ene kant wel bezig zijn met je emoties, maar ook die stap naar achter kunnen zetten?**

Emma Evelein

Ja, ik, ik denk cause and effect. Ik denk, ik, ik bereid heel veel voor altijd voor mijn creatieve processen, dus ik kom

wel binnen met een bepaald idee. En dan denk ik, als je dat, als je dat met je rond, als je het geëdit hebt en je hebt het gekneet en het gaat in een bepaalde richting op, dat je dan een stel meer achter kan zetten en zegt van hé, maar werkt dit eigenlijk?

En als het niet zo is, dat je het gewoon ook weer kan weggoaien, bijvoorbeeld. En dat is, dat is dus belangrijk, dat je niet te emotioneel attached raakt.

Want toen ik begon met, ja, toen ik begon met choreograferen was ik heel erg emotioneel attached aan, aan dingen. En als je er dan niet in past, of niet in kan. Ja. En dan was het moeilijk.

Terwijl je moet het persoonlijk en businesswise zien. Dus ik denk dat het te maken heeft met cause and effect. Dus je begint met persoonlijk bereiden. En dan als, als het een emotioneel vorm krijgt, dat je dan een stap naar achter doet.

En dan kijken van, oké, maar waar past het? En past het überhaupt?

Sidney

Ik weet niet, over de helemaal andere kant op te gaan. Maar op het moment dat je bijvoorbeeld performt of iets van je werk neerzet. Ja. Vraagt dat iets van je emotioneel gezien?

Hoe doe je de self-care voor, after, during dat hele proces?

Op het moment dat je het begint te laten zien?

Emma Evelein

Ik voel me echt totaal, ik voel me echt een soort van kloppend hartje met een klein sushi rijstvliesje eromheen. Ja, ik weet niet.

Ik heb totaal geen beschermingsmechanismen als het aankomt of dat soort dingen.

Uhm, ik zou het liefst gewoon zo'n bril en een hoed opdoen en een heel groot pak of zo. Ja, ik weet niet.

Nee, ik, uhm, ik vind het super, super zwaar. Ja.

Uhm, als dingen uitkomen. Met alle premières's ben ik echt een soort van nervous wreck.

Maar ik denk ook niet dat het kan of zo. Ik denk, weet je, het is het meest kwetsbare moment van een artiest en misschien hoort dat er gewoon bij en dan moet je dat gewoon nemen.

Ik ben persoonlijk veel te sensitief of te gevoelig om dat soort dingen te kunnen navigeren denk ik.

Sidney

Op het moment dat je dus weet van oké ik ga, I don't know, commercial shooten en dat heeft deze approach nodig, of dit doe ik en dat heeft deze approach nodig.

Hoe dat je maakproces of je werkproces creatief beïnvloedt?

Ja, het beïnvloedt het wel creatief, maar het beïnvloedt niet de core. Zeg maar ik probeer nog steeds of ik doe nog steeds mijn eigen narratief. Alleen ik, ik giet het in de vorm waar die gevraagd is. Als ik totaal wordt gevraagd om dus ook buiten die core te stappen dan raak ik verward. En dan kan ik het dus

ook niet zeg maar. Ik ben niet niet iemand die op maat dingetjes, toontjes maakt zeg maar. Ik moet... Je moet daar echt ruimte voor hebben. Ik denk ook dat ik daarom niet gevraagd word voor bepaalde... Als het te commercieel is bijvoorbeeld. Dan word ik ook gewoon niet gevraagd.

En dat snap ik en daar ben ik heel erg blij om. Hetzelfde geldt voor als een theater te ballet of te klassiek of te... Dan word ik ook denk ik niet gevraagd.

En dat snap ik. En dat is denk ik wel goed. Ook al zou ik het niet erg vinden... Om mezelf uit te lagen met dat soort plekken.

Maar ik pas dit core van mijn dans in ieder geval niet aan. Nee, ik kan dat niet anders denk ik. Het komt er gewoon uit zoals het eruit komt. En dat is van mij. Ik heb ook geen methode of ik heb ook geen regels waar ik in creëer.

Dus het enige waar ik op terugval is mijn eigen creativiteit. En dat is ook het enige wat ik kan bieden. En ik heb de intelligentie om het aan te passen. Omdat ik al heel lang in verschillende velden... Werk.

Maar dat is wel waar het om neerkomt.

Sidney

Wat is in jouw ogen het werk van dansers en makers... Wat niet gezien wordt, al dan niet gecompenseerd wordt?

Nou ten eerste de enorme mentale beschikbaarheid. De doorzettingsvermogen en de kracht.

Het volhouden. Het financieel uitdagende aspect ervan.

Ik vind eigenlijk 90% van dansers zijn dat niet gezien en niet gecompenseerd wordt.

Ik snap nog steeds niet waarom dansers zo niet serieus worden genomen vergeleken met andere mensen.

Zoals muzikanten en acteurs. Dat snap ik oprecht niet. Ik snap het echt niet.

Terwijl atleten, als die op set zijn, dan wel. Zeg maar.

Maar ja... Ehm... Het laatste is gewoon dat... Mensen dansen zelf ook.

Als ze uitgaan naar de club dan dansen ze zelf ook. Dan denken ze van oh jij doet het professioneel. Oh wat een leuk leven. En daardoor wordt het minder serieus genomen. Terwijl... Dat is natuurlijk een totale misconceptie.

En ik denk dat dansers af en toe ook wel iets meer mogen uitspreken dat het dus niet zo werkt. Ehm...

Maar ja, alles wat ik hiervoor genoemd heb.

De mentale onzekerheid ook. Het heel veel ervoor moeten over hebben. Dus ik denk waar heel veel mensen in veel beroepen 100% geven. Dat wij 150% moeten geven om dingen te laten werken. En dat we steeds weer moeten heruitvinden hoe het werkt. Omdat de...

Hoe dans gezien wordt en hoe het zich uitmaakt op het veld verandert de hele tijd. Het is constant veranderlijk. En dat we daarop inspelen dat is ook zo'n ding.

Sidney

Ja specifiek vanuit het perspectief van choreografen en werken met dansers. Ja. Ehm... Waar plaats jullie de identiteit van de danser?

Ja. Ik plaats het heel hoog. Ehm...

Omdat ik denk dat wie een danser is, is de kracht die je moet gebruiken als choreograaf. Je hebt heel veel choreografen die zien lichamen gewoon als lichamen.

En wie de danser is, wordt anoniem. En dat kan, daar is niets mis mee. Dat is ook een beetje wat onderdeel is van de natuur van een danser denk ik. In die rol.

Maar ik denk dat het de kracht is. Omdat uiteindelijk dansers zijn personen en die hebben iets te zeggen. En die hebben een identiteit en die hebben hun gedachtes.

En ik denk als je dat niet op het toneel laat zien dan mis je iets. Het is niet altijd mogelijk. Het hangt een beetje van je stuk af.

In hoeverre de expressie van een individuele danser kan rijken. Er is heel veel werk met groepscompositie. En het visueel daarvan is natuurlijk moeilijk als iedereen weer totaal anders is.

Maar ik persoonlijk hou er wel van. Omdat ik heel veel hou van community. En ik neem de individu heel... Heel zwaar.

Dus ik cast mensen daar ook op. En... Eigenlijk het is een conditie van mij om een danser te casten voor iets.

Want ik weet met de dingen die ik maak is dat belangrijk. Dat kan niet missen.

Het kan zijn dat de identiteit van de danser die ik gebruik kan ook een perceptie van mezelf zijn. Dat ik ze in een bepaalde rol cast omdat ik dat in hun herken. En het heeft niet altijd te maken met wie zij echt zijn.

Maar dat heeft ook te maken met dat ik vertrouwen op de transformatie van een danser. En dat ze een acteerkwaliteit over zichzelf hebben. Ook al zie ik dat al in de natuur van ze.

Bijvoorbeeld Lucid Dreaming heb ik heel erg gepasseerd op wie mensen al waren. Voor mij. En dat heeft deels te maken met mij. Maar het heeft ook zeker deels te maken met hun. Dus ja, ik zou zeggen heel erg belangrijk. Het weegt zwaar. En het is heel erg gewenst.

Sidney

Laatste vraag. Voel je heel veel druk om nieuw werk te creëren? Of veel te doen? Ja, maar vooral vanuit mezelf?

Emma Evelein

Ik heb altijd het gevoel gehad dat ik werd gevraagd voor dingen omdat ik hard werk. En dat mensen weten dat ik op kamp op mij kan kunnen bouwen. En dat ik getalenteerd ben.

En ik heb altijd het gevoel dat als ik dan bijvoorbeeld rust neem. Of minder werk creëer. Dat ik dan ook minder gevraagd zou worden omdat ik niet meer word beloond. Voor hard werk.

Terwijl dat is iets waar ik aan moet werken. Want ik ben nu meer gestabiliseerd. En ik ben ouder dan dat ik was toen ik begon. Dus uhm...

En niet alleen ouder, gewoon ook in een andere levensfase. Dus het is meer van old habits die hard. Maar ik voel het niet perse vanuit de buitenwereld.

Ik heb niet het gevoel dat mensen me zullen vergeten. Of dat mensen het niet meer tof zullen vinden als ik een tijdje niks doe. Dat gevoel heb ik niet perse.

Want ik heb het gevoel dat ik met de buitenwereld, quote unquote, het universum een goede relatie heb gelegd. Dat mensen over het algemeen die van mij gehoord hebben. Die weten ongeveer wat ik precies ben. En dat ik het niet doe.

Omdat het in de baby schoenen al vrij uitgesproken was. Wat ik deed. Tenminste, dan kijk ik jou ook even aan.

Heb je dat gevoel dat het vrij consistent is geweest. Als in de narratief, zeg maar. Ja. Dus dat gevoel heb ik ook wel.

Het is niet van ik ben nu totaal anders. En mensen moeten weten wat ik nu... Ik denk dat er een groei in zit elke keer. Maar het is wel... Mensen kunnen wel vertrouwen op mijn naam. Om het zomaar te zeggen.

1. Introduction

The start of this research originated after a particularly gruelling Tuesday in mid-January. I found myself in the middle of a repurposed warehouse in Utrecht. The average temperature outside was around 2 degrees Celsius and the warehouse was not much warmer. I was about to start filming a commissioned concept video. I would be improvising on various spots in the warehouse, the parameters for me as a dancer were rather unclear. After a futile attempt to warm up my body in 2 degrees, we started with the first shots. Filming dance is both a blessing and a curse. You get the chance to redo scenes you are unhappy with, but on the other side, every mistake you make will be visible too. However, the issue here was the waiting times in between shots. I would cool down completely in between each take. Staying warm would take an enormous amount of effort and intense cardio, and for a shoot that ended up lasting 8 hours, that would have been a challenge.

The shoot itself was great, I got creative freedom with my movements, I got to see the footage and adjust where I saw fit, and the team was positive and cooperative. So, overall, a positive work experience in that sense. The physical conditions proved to be a challenge, however.

We had one day to shoot the material we needed, and we ended up going two- hours overtime to finish it all. This all is not new for me; I have only once experienced a shoot ending at the designated time. As a dancer I know I have to be flexible in that respect and I have learned to take overtime into account.

However, it did mean that I had 35 minutes to make my way from the shoot to my rehearsal. Because my working day did not finish when finishing this shoot. I still had a two-hour heel – rehearsal planned with a choreographer I had not worked with before.

I found myself on the bike racing home to change clothes and contemplating whether I had time to shower off the sweat and dust I had accumulated during the shoot. I simultaneously found that I was coaching myself into the mindset necessary for the rehearsal I would soon step into.

Shifting between styles of dance or movement languages can be a challenge, especially if they are not close to one another. I know from previous experiences that the energy of the style I was moving in before leaves its residue and it takes me some time to adjust to the mindset I needed for the new style. Since this was not a class but an actual rehearsal, I did not feel that it would have been professional for me to step into the rehearsal without being physically and mentally prepared for what I would be doing there. So, I had 35 minutes to get myself in the right space, physically and mentally. The rehearsal was great, the choreographer was nice, and we got a lot done in the time we had. It was time for me to go home, or so I thought.

The choreographer asked me to join her as an assistant in the class she was going to teach at the studio where we just finished rehearsing. Choreographers asking you to assist them are great opportunities to train in their style without the pressure of the job, getting free training and cultivating a social relationship with them. All these elements are tiny investments in my future as a dancer.

So, finally, after another 1,5-hour class I get to pack my bag and make my way home to have the

first proper meal of my day, to shower and to go to sleep before I get up the next morning to go to my lecture.

Days like this are not uncommon for freelance dancers, especially when there is no financial security since future jobs are not yet booked or not yet confirmed. It might be the last job a dancer has for a while, resulting in taking on extremely long workdays. They do, however, result in the development of a certain skill a dancer needs to possess in order to work, which is the ability to adapt extremely fast. A dancer needs to switch between different styles and their corresponding movement languages, as well as to the way different choreographers and different projects work.

For example, stage performances allow for few mistakes and there are no retakes and the way of working in a live performance is vastly different compared to film-based projects, for instance. These switches happen on stage, during performances, but they also happen between and around jobs.

This reminds me of a performance I did called “Just Us” by Nicholas Garlo, where I switched between contemporary dancing and heels choreography multiple times within the same piece. It started with a commercial heels solo, which then morphed into a contemporary improvisation. After that I ran backstage to throw off the heels and came back on to do a section of contemporary choreography only to then have to run backstage again, put my heels back on, and come back to do contemporary choreography in heels until the piece ended. This required me to morph together commercial styles with contemporary styles of movement, as well as oscillating between these two styles. Here I had to switch between the different modes of performing within the piece itself.

Switching between and intertwining these different movement languages in one piece is a part of what choreographer and scholar Kareth Schaffer calls ‘hyper-subjectivity’ in their thesis “Flexible Performativity: The Invisible Visible Labor of Contemporary Dancers” (2020). This oscillation is an obscured tool and skill with which dancers engage. Schaffer describes hyper-subjectivity as something which mostly happens within performances. I argue, however, that hyper-subjectivity is a skill or trait that extends further into the lives and work of dancers than initially theorised. As dance scholar Annelies van Assche points out in her book "Labor and Aesthetics in European Contemporary Dance: Dancing Precarity", the dance industry has changed drastically over the past decade reflecting the transition into our highly individualised neoliberal society (2020). The post-Fordist mode of production, that is integral to neoliberalism, heavily stimulates project-based work (van Assche and Schaffer 2023, 205). Thus, dancers move from project to project leading to rarely having stable financial income or daily structure, while also constantly running the risk of getting injured and not being able to work at all (van Assche 2020; *ibid* 2023).

This makes the work of dancers precarious. Precarious work is understood by van Assche as “work that is carried out in a variety of economic and legally insecure circumstances, such as the absence of long-term contracts and career prospects, low wages, poor working conditions, and only minimal or no social protection, among other things” (Van Assche 2020, 8). Hyper-subjectivity is related to the precarity of dancers, since it is a necessary skill for dancers to possess not only when performing, but also in securing diverse types of jobs and becoming as employable as possible to leverage as much stability as possible.

According to Arlie Hochschild, in her work “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure,” the neoliberal capitalist society profits heavily on the emotional and affective labour brought about by the socio-economic change into a service-oriented, project-based economy (2012). These changes have not only asked for emotional flexibility during working hours, but also demand emotional flexibility in order to deal with the precarious employment.

Performance scholar Bojana Kunst’s work “*Artist at Work, the Proximity of Art and Capitalism*” serves as a base for my analysis. This combined with the works on hyper-subjectivity, flexible performativity and precarity by Kareth Schaffer and Annelies van Assche, will place my research within the context of the post-Fordist neoliberal capitalist society and how it is intertwined with the way subjectivity is impacted (2015). The influential works on affective and emotional labour by authors such as sociologist Arlie Hochschild, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant, and feminist scholar Kathi Weeks provide the context for understanding how hyper-subjectivity involves substantial amounts of affective and emotional labour within this discourse.

For this research I have interviewed five contemporary dancers who work within the European dance industry. All dancers have worked both in companies and as freelancers. Next to this I have conducted an autoethnography of my own experiences. The data from this (auto)ethnography serve as the material that can be analysed through the lens of hyper-subjectivity in neoliberal capitalism.

In this thesis, I argue that the hyper-subjectivity of dancers is the culmination of a dancer’s precarity, emotional labour and affective labour because of the workings of the neoliberal post-Fordist capitalist society. I ultimately discuss the way in which hyper-subjectivity connects to the perpetuation of power imbalances within the dance industry

This writing aims to discuss the following thesis statement:

In neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism the commodification of hyper-subjectivity is a necessary skill for dancers to utilise for their survival. However, this commodification requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour, and its workings perpetuates unequal power dynamics within the dance industry.

By drawing on my personal experience as a freelance dancer, together with the perspectives of various dancers working within the European field this thesis focuses specifically on the grounds, implications, and consequences of one of these skills, called hyper-subjectivity.

1.1 Methodology

To effectively analyse the influence and effects of hyper-subjectivity on the lives of dancers in the European context, I have chosen a mixed-methods approach which combines autoethnography, ethnography and literary review.

Autoethnography offers more insight into the personal experience of dancers and ethnography offers the experiences of other dancers to offer multiple perspectives. It is designed to analyse and place the cultural context of the dance community within the academic discourse on dance.

1.1.1 Autoethnography:

Autoethnographic research combines a set of qualitative traditions such as narrative research, autobiography, ethnography, and arts-based research (Cooper and Bruce 2022). Scholars Robin Cooper and Lilyea Bruce explain the relevance of this research method as follows “Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (ibid. 197). Autoethnography can be viewed as an approach that closes the gap in research where the researcher's own voice is not highly visible (ibid 198).

With autoethnography there is the undeniable presence of personal bias, therefore I must acknowledge my positionality, especially with research where identity and subjectivity make up one of the focus points of the research. I am a white gender-questioning and queer person working in the dance field, without a formal academic dance education. This influences various aspects such as internship possibilities and network development, which influences my job opportunities. I also study full time, which further influences my availability to train, audition, and work jobs. This background influences the way I navigate this field. However, I must also say that I am fortunate enough to have parents who can and do support me not only mentally but also financially which allows me to combine a university degree with my training and unstable income from my dance practice. I am aware that I have a certain amount of liberty to take risks and make investments in my practice that are not a given for everyone. Especially in a high investment and high-risk field like the dance field, this freedom has allowed me to create an environment for myself where I have backups and baseline stability in terms of ways to provide for myself that cannot be taken for granted.

I have approached autoethnographic research by starting with reading old journal entries from the periods over the past few years to reflect on and gain perspective on my experiences. I then engaged in reflexive journaling about a few specific experiences that I had in the past 9 months. Furthermore, I engaged in conversations with friends and family about working as a dancer that allowed me to reflect further.

The use of autoethnography provides a unique and in-depth perspective on the lived experience of a dancer. It allows for an analysis of emotional and subjective aspects that otherwise remain obscured and therefore makes a unique contribution to the research.

1.1.2 Interviews

In order to offer a comprehensive understanding of the broader social and cultural context of working dancers, I have conducted a series of interviews with dancers working as contemporary dancers. To understand in a broader sense, though still limited in scope, how the current neoliberal capitalist society influences the hyper-subjectivity in dancers and gain more insight into the way other dancers deal with this phenomenon.

I have conducted 5 interviews with working professionals in the contemporary dance field of Europe. I have broadened the scope to include the whole of Europe, because freelance dancers in this economy work all over Europe. Most dancers choose the type of work they want to do and focus less on where this work is located, but also because of the lack of work to sustain a livelihood from work in the Netherlands alone. Participants were chosen based on their work experience, availability, and the age range was set between 24 and 34. I opted for a mixed group gender, sexuality, and ethnicity wise, to collect experiences from various perspectives with the aim to represent various voices within the dance community. The interviews touched on various themes with the main three being professional experience and economic stability, career development and marketing oneself, and identity and creativity.

Next to these interviews I also include unstructured and incidental conversations that happened while moving in and around the dance field, in classes, meetings, on jobs, train rides, and during auditions. I have attempted to log these conversations and they are added to the autoethnographic aspect of this thesis.

Interview questions

I developed 20 questions of which I used the 15 listed below. The questions were intended as conversation-starters on the themes I discuss in this research, like the precarity of the job, the ability to be flexible, identity and the (emotional) demands of working as a dancer. By allowing the participants to reflect on their experiences I generated the data that work as illustrative encounters to the theory and my

firsthand experiences, as well as data that form a base for my analysis.

Not all responses to the questions are used in this research, only the answers relevant for my argumentation and analysis have been included. I opted for interviewing in a more fluid structure where I let the direction of the conversation guide which questions were asked and which were already discussed while responding to previous questions. The full transcripts of each interview are added as appendices to the document.

Questions:

1. How do you describe yourself as a dancer and/or choreographer?
2. What do you see as “the dance industry”? More specifically the contemporary dance industry?
3. Do you prefer project-based work or company-based work and why?
4. From your experience, how feasible is it to sustain a livelihood solely from professional dance? What factors influence this?
5. Could you elaborate on the aspects of your work as a dancer that often go unrecognised or uncompensated?
6. Over the years, have you observed any notable changes in the dance industry, and how do you perceive your role within these evolving dynamics?
7. In navigating your dance career, how do you prioritise making yourself marketable to potential employers?
8. Do you feel it is necessary to be able to adapt fast if so: in what way? Do you see this as an inherent quality of a dancer? In the sense of between jobs, but also on/in jobs.
9. Is there a difference between “who you are” in rehearsals and who you are during performance?
10. In my experience, dance is very intertwined with emotion and feeling and working with those emotions and feelings is a big part of the job. How do you navigate this, see this, and feel about this?
11. How do you approach the emotional demands of performing, particularly in emotionally intense pieces,
12. How do you prioritise self-care before and after such performances?
13. Considering Authenticity in dancers, do you expect this and how much space do you give for that in your pieces?
14. Do you feel a lot of pressure to create new work?
15. To be a dancer means to be able to adapt fast to different styles, places, people you work with and how you present yourself. How do you train for that, how does it influence the development of your creativity and your authenticity?

In this text the (auto)ethnographic writing is placed in a parallel narrative to the theoretical analysis. To indicate the different modality of writing, these sections of text have been italicised and indented. I have opted for this format because it mimics on a micro-level a similar kind of oscillation as the one that hyper-subjectivity for dancers brings about. Personalised writing and stories evoke different feelings and an affective atmosphere than academic writing does. By switching between these registers, I invite the reader to experience navigating these different emotional and affective atmospheres.

1.1.3 Literary review

To place my research within the academic discourse I have conducted literary research focussing on the concept of hyper-subjectivity, its place within the structure of flexible performativity, its place in the current economic climate in Europe, and the way in which affective and emotional labour play a crucial role in its workings.

My research draws on the work on the proximity of art and capitalism discussed by Bojana Kunst in (2012), the work of Kareth Schaffer and Annelies van Assche on flexible performativity (2020; 2023), and the work of scholars such as Arlie Hochschild (2012), Kathi Weeks (2007) Carolyn Veldstra (2020) and Lauren Berlant (2011) on affective and emotional labour.

The literary review allows me to situate my research within the broader academic debate and to analyse my findings through an extensive theoretical frame. It grounds my research within existing discourse while allowing for further exploration of the topic.

The results from autoethnography and the results from the interviews will be analysed through the perspective of the main concepts and themes that come forward in the literary review. I will link individual experiences and corresponding interview answers to the concept discussed with the aim of synthesising these to generate a deeper understanding of the impacts and consequences of hyper-subjectivity. Autoethnography generates personal insights, while ethnography allows me to place these insights in a broader social, economic, and cultural context, while the theory of the literary review allows me to connect these findings to the broader academic discourse. The integration of these methods allows for a multifaceted perspective.

I am aware that my personal bias plays a part in the way I conduct the interviews and how I interpret the answers, I aim to stay critical of these biases where and when they show up so I can address them.

2. Theory

This chapter provides a context for understanding the grounds on which dancers' subjectivities are affected by capitalist dynamics and the vulnerable position this puts them in.

First the chapter discusses the link between the contemporary dance scene in Europe and its neoliberal and post-Fordist structure, to the identity and hyper-subjectivity of dancers, expanding on the precarious nature of working in the dance field. Exploring the impact of the market demands on the subjectivity of dancers, connecting the implications of hyper-subjectivity and the neoliberal capitalist society to the emotional and affective labour that this requires.

2.1 Identity

The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that the body is the physical and symbolic locus where identity can be expressed, where it is lived and where it is perceived (1962). In other words: the body and identity are inherently intertwined. Since dance concerns the body, it is logical to assume that identity is also intertwined with dance (Yeo, 2024).

Philosophers like Michel Foucault, who argues that the body is a 'highly malleable phenomena which can be invested with various and changing forms of power' (Foucault quoted in Shilling 2007, 79), and the sociologist Chris Shilling who writes that "the body mediates the relationship between self-identity and social identity [...]" (ibid. 82–3), it becomes apparent that the intersection at which identities are situated and the relation to the body, especially apparent in physical forms like dance, is the site where power dynamics are perpetuated and challenged. Identity, then, is not a monolithic concept but is shaped by the ongoing interactions and experiences one has. Philosopher and psychologist Bayo Akomolafe (2023) states how identity is a modern-day construct, emphasising that identity is therefore not an inherent trait but rather a social construct informed by historical and socio-political contexts. Akomolafe implies that identities are acted out, performed, and perpetuated through repetition. Identity thus, is affected by the power structures present in society. Power structures such as the patriarchy, capitalism, globalisation, and colonialism influence how identities are shaped, but also which identities are marginalised, and which can inhabit the norm (Akomolafe 2023; Crenshaw 1989).

The way identities are constructed and influenced mean that identities are complex and multifaceted.

2.2 Identity and Capitalism

When looking at the current dance field in Europe, which has been characterised by neoliberal capitalism since the 1970s, it becomes clear how identity is impacted by the societal context. Post-Fordist modes of production are inherent in neoliberal capitalism and are characterised by flexible production methods, capitalising on creativity and (precarious) project-based work (Kunst 2015; Van Assche 2018). Performance scholar and philosopher Bojana Kunst writes that the proximity of art and capitalism have an impact on the production of art (ibid). Since the post-Fordist modes of production exploit human potentiality, the production of social relations and affective elements of the contemporary human being, shifting the economy towards affective work, cognitive work, and non-material work, and regarding them as the main sources of value (Ibid, 20). In addition, Kunst writes that “the once essential qualities of life after work actually turn out to be at the core of contemporary work (ibid 101), emphasising how contemporary capitalism does not only affirm itself through the work of art but also through the artistic labour and the artist’s life.

The autonomy of dancers is impacted by this, since their work has become heavily subjected to commercial interests and market demands, as well as impacting the consumption patterns and the generation of subjectivity. This intersection of post-Fordism and the production of dance impacts subjectivity and by extension also impacts identity. Identity and subjectivity are both fundamental concepts in understanding the self and personal experience and impact each other.

Identity concerns the intersectional position of a person making up their characteristics, beliefs and roles that define both individuals and groups (Bell 2002, 211). While subjectivity is concerned with the more internal aspects, such as emotions, perspectives, and thoughts. Subjectivity influences the way in which individuals internalise and relate to their identity (ibid, 212). Both subjectivity and identity are influenced by the cultural contexts that generate the resources that are utilised to construct a social identity (ibid, 214). Therefore, when identity is impacted, subjectivity is impacted and vice versa.

The sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato writes that subjectivity has become the largest commodity produced in neoliberal capitalism, since it forms the main ingredient for all the other commodities produced (Lazzarato 2010, 89). Consequently, the production of subjectivity allows neoliberal capitalism to shape one’s identity to serve capitalist market demands, and identity thus becomes one of the essential ingredients to the production of value (Kunst 2015, 21-25). Meaning that dance artists, in order to leverage (commercial) success must also leverage their identity.

Leveraging one’s identity for market success becomes especially important when looking at the precarity in which dancers live. The post-Fordist mode of production stimulates project-based work, meaning that after each project, the dance artist is unemployed again and equates to an unstable financial

income or structure (van Assche and Schaffer 2023, 205). Van Assche comments how not only financial and structural precarity affects dancers, but also their physical precarity is constantly present. The body of dancers is fragile and inconsistent and the precarity of their life is ‘redoubled by the fragility of the body to ensure performance throughout the working life,’ (Van Assche 2010, 18). The absence of these forms of security form obstacles for planning the future, resulting in the “the future continually laps[ing] into the background because one has to focus on an ever-to-reproduce present.” (ibid, 11) Van Assche also points out how living in precarity also means dealing with a social status that can be revoked at any time (ibid 11). Van Assche poignantly remarks that this has influence on the physical and psychological (and social) consequences on the precarious individual. (ibid, 11) These elements Consequently result in dancers leveraging their subjectivity, and by extension their identities, through oscillation of their subjectivity.

2.3 Hyper-Subjectivity

The precarity between asserting their identity and their flexibility to become as valuable for the work as possible, in the aim of remedying their precarity, in a concept Schaffer calls hyper-subjectivity (Schaffer 2020). Schaffer defines hyper-subjectivity as the constant shifting of performers between asserting their individual identities and surrendering to the demands of the performance. Schaffer deems this an oscillation between individual expression and self-negation (ibid). According to Schaffer, and later also van Assche, the disavowal of the self offers the space for exploration of plural subjectivities which challenges the fixed notion of (artistic) identity and self-hood (Van Assche and Schaffer 2023). Dancers, when performing, often shift between embodying the self and embodying a neutral performer whose identity is absent (ibid, 208). Van Assche and Schaffer re-name the concept of hyper-subjectivity to hyper-individuality (ibid). While still connecting it to the larger context, this term is mostly related to the oscillation that happens during a performance, for van Assche and Schaffer. Focusing on the transformative power and the ability to distort one’s own identity and the identity of a group to communicate or embody different feelings, sensibilities, audience edification and “to move and be moved from deeply personal experiences and convictions” (ibid, 30).

Schaffer and van Assche conclude that hyper-individualism is a learnt skill developed through cultural hybridity and “the expert play on affect” (2023, 30). Therefore, by extension hyper-subjectivity works through the same principles. The emphasis on the instability of the self and the materiality of the body implies a potential for transformation that is to be gained from hyper-subjectivation. However, for dancers it generates a tension between making a living as a dancer and “Pursuing job opportunities predicated on unique stage presence and individual character” (ibid, 29). This suggests that there is more

to hyper-subjectivity than a skill or a feature that is employed only when performing. It suggests that hyper-subjectivity also plays a role in the life and work around performing as well.

I, therefore, propose to use the term hyper-subjectivity to talk about the oscillation that happens specifically related to turning oneself into a commodity to keep up with post-Fordist demands.

The concept of hyper-subjectivity and the necessity for dancers to leverage their subjectivity influences their identity formation, where, through the constant switching between asserting their identity and their flexibility, they run the risk of creating a fragmented sense of self (Kunst 2015), as well as the necessity to deal with the constant presence of anxiety of not securing the market success necessary to survive their precarity. Looking at how Akomolafé (2023) argues that identities, being a modern-day construct and therefore open to abuse of modern-day power structures, it becomes concerning what vulnerability dance artists are subjected to through their hyper-subjectivity. On top of this, Kunst argues that the capitalisation on the artist's life and identity leads to hyperactivity to keep up with the precarious project-based working mode and strengthens the dancer's vulnerability since every aspect of their life is fuel for the production of value. This ultimately risks leading to affective exhaustion as a result of the constant pressure to be in a perpetual state of readiness and creativity to keep up with post-Fordist production demands (Kunst 2015, 145).

This mode of governmental control is subtle and does not rely on direct confrontation. The performance theorist André Lepecki argues it illustrates the general neoliberal ideology which puts emphasis on individual choice, limiting government intervention and the mechanism of the free market in forming social and economic outcomes (Lepecki 2013, 8). While at the same time preconditioning its subjects to accept specific forms of control that consequently influence their perception of what freedom is when placed in a controlled environment (*ibid*). In other words, individuals are stimulated to behave according to contemporary capitalist ideology in such a way it becomes unknown to the individual that this is not a free choice.

2.4 Affective and Emotional Labour

As already mentioned before, the different aspects of hyper-subjectivity can put dancers in a vulnerable position, affecting both their physical and mental wellbeing. In order to deal with the negative consequences of having to leverage one's subjectivity to remedy their precarity, dancers employ both affective and emotional labour.

Emotional labour can be defined as the process of managing the emotions and expressions of individuals in the working space (Veldstra 2020, 2). Affective labour can be defined as the production

and/or manipulation of affects and encompass a broader range of emotional and relational work which extends beyond the confines of the traditional workplace.

The boundaries between affective labour and emotional labour are blurred and affect in general is a concept hard to grasp in writing. As performance theorist Simon O'Sullivan writes "You cannot read affects, you can only experience them" (O'Sullivan 2001, 126). In the same line feminist scholar Clare Hemmings points out in *Invoking Affect* how affect transcends the body of an individual and is therefore hard to grasp (2018, 554). As the philosopher Brian Massumi argues, since affect defies the well-known way in which epistemologies work, it becomes important that to write about and investigate the unknowable "cultural theorists will have to abandon the certainty that has come to characterise the field" (ibid 554; Massumi 2002, 3).

Affective labour reaches into all areas of life where affective states can be produced or manipulated (ibid, 3). Emotional labour concerns surface level acting, displaying emotions which are not necessarily felt in that moment, and deep acting, attempting to feel the emotions that one needs to display in that moment (Hochschild). Emotional labour can generate emotional exhaustion when there is a prolonged disparity between what is felt and what must be displayed (ibid, 20). Affective labour involves creating and managing relationships, social networks and communities and is tied to the communal bonds and shared experiences that create cultural and social capital. Thus, affective labour becomes important in the areas where emotional engagement is key to success.

Affective labour capitalises on life, leveraging the emotional and relational work of workers, but still holding expectations of this life to guarantee labour market success (Gregg, 2010. 250; Veldstra 2020, 3). As emotion can be seen as the ideological attempt to make sense of the production of affects, emotional labour becomes relevant in understanding the capacity for impact of affective labour (Ibid, 4).

Affective labour is, for Kunst, closely related to these contemporary modes of production of subjectivity since it functions as a creative, affective, and social power (2015, 60). This social power is becoming increasingly fused with the other forms of creative production (Ibid, 60-68). Dancers need to build and maintain relationships with their audiences, potential employers, and other influential people to better their career and engage in affective labour to manifest this. They are responsible for their own marketing and social media presence, networking at events and performances (also after having performed themselves), and other activities related to creating emotional connections between audiences and their work. The creative production of their art and the affective labour of managing the relationships between audiences and their art are thus intertwined.

The amount of emotional and affective engagement with their practice as a dancer, through the work in creating intersocial emotional connections and the managing and regulating emotions as part of

the job, can therefore become highly indicative and influential of their opportunities and affect their (financial) stability (Hochschild 1979, 569; Kunst 2015, 19-21).

2.5 Cruel Optimism

The precarious nature of the labour of dancers and the affective labour produced and managed in the work of dancers creates an emotional dynamic that resembles Lauren Berlant's 'cruel optimism' (Veldstra 2020, 4). Cruel optimism is a concept that addresses the attachments to optimistic ideals that eventually form obstacles for the (economic) improvement of and the well-being of the individual (Berlant 2011). In other words; cruel optimism involves a desire for improvement, usually tied to economic, cultural, or social aspirations, while the conditions for the fulfilments of such desires are impossible to reach or come at an incredibly excessive cost.

Cruel optimism affects subjectivity because it shapes the individual's perception of themselves, their relationships, and their position in the world (Berlant 2011, 182). Berlant writes; "One makes affective bargains about the costliness of one's attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep one in proximity to the scenes of desire/attrition (ibid, 185). Berlant emphasises how one can be driven by the hope of fulfilment through achieving their goals or desires, but how they are, simultaneously, worn down by the emotional effort and cost at which the affective bargaining comes.

Contemporary capitalist policies in the workplace celebrate, according to Veldstra, "constrained notions of 'authenticity'" which "normalise and generalise a mode of cruel optimism, in which precarious workers have no choice but to at least appear – in their affective orientation – to remain attached to the systems that generate their exploitation." (2020, 4.) According to Berlant a type of impasse is created where individuals become stuck between the potential of transformation, brought through their attachments to their desires, and the reality of the socio-economic conditions in which they live (Berlant 2011, 203-204).

Hyper-subjectivity, then, can be considered as an acute manifestation of cruel optimism. The vulnerable position of dancers in neoliberal capitalism is exacerbated by the cycle of cruel optimism, where the aspirations of dancers are impaired by the exploitative conditions of their labour. Emphasising their precarious position, which then asks for more commodification of hyper-subjectivity, and deems it a necessary skill for dancers to employ for their survival in the broadest sense of the word. While being crucial, this commodification requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour and perpetuates unequal power dynamics by.

Dancers find themselves pinched between the precarious nature of their work and the demands of the (affective) economy. This results in the necessity for emotional labour to deal with the personal costs

of precarity while continuing to express and generate the positive affects that are demanded in the work environment of dancers.

To summarise, this theoretical framework offers a contextualisation for the way in which hyper-subjectivity in dancers works. Showing how dancers engage with the balancing act between flexibility and asserting their identity, being flexible but authentic enough to adapt to the market demands of neoliberal capitalism. The emotional and affective labour, thus, function as a countermeasure to the mental and physical toll of this negotiation. Cruel optimism offers a lens for analysing this negotiation and the countermeasures. This uncovers the vulnerable position in which dancers work and live and provides a base to address the impact of neoliberal capitalism on dancers.

3. Analysis

Hyper-subjectivity's main aspects consist of flexibility, the ability to assert one's identity and ultimately to commodify these aspects to compete on the neoliberal capitalist market (Schaffer 2020). Being able to commodify both flexibility and identity turns out to be a tricky and contradictory endeavour which can feed into personal and cultural feelings and affects of anxiety. In addition, engaging in hyper-subjectivity causes a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour in order to deal with its consequences.

To analyse the working of hyper-subjectivity I engage with the data gleaned from the interviews as well as my firsthand experiences to offer deeper insight on the working of hyper-subjectivity and the corresponding emotional and affective labour, drawing conclusions based on integrating the distinct aspects of the proposed theory with the information collected.

3.1 Flexibility and Hyper-subjectivity

The developments of neoliberal capitalism and the necessity for dancers to be hyper-subjective reflect the different modes of flexibility a dancer must possess as one of the main aspects of hyper-subjectivity. This flexibility can be divided into two different types of flexibility: flexibility while working and doing the jobs dancers do and flexibility in dealing with the precarity of their livelihood as dancers. Both types are a necessity born out of the neoliberal capitalist society. Despite my focus being on the flexibility outside of the "job" the two inform and influence each other and are inherently connected.

3.1.1 *Flexibility on the Job*

I argue that hyper-subjectivity is specifically taxing on dancers because of the connection between dance and the body. The oscillating subjectivities of dancers combined with the corporeal practice of dance engages with the unstable materiality that makes up the body, emphasising the capacity for transformation and challenging the idea that the body is static and unchangeable (Ibid). This underscores the body as a site for broader ongoing negotiations, which points to the impact of dancers being both the producers and objects of their own labour, fusing their creativity and corporeality in their work and as their work (Kunst 2015, 10-17). As Lepecki states: "Dancers are valued for their creativity, flexibility, absence of material needs they can make work in spare rooms with nothing more than their bodies, often unshod, subsist on few calories, and even among performing artists deliver more for less by garnering the most meagre wages" (2012: 66). In other words, the connection between the body and

identity shows how the body is a critical site for the (trans)formation of identity for dancers and highlights the fluid nature of identity within the context of dance.

Through embracing the core elements of post-Fordist means of production, such as flexibility, decentralised decision making, risk taking, and creativity, the work of dancers is often project- based and or involved with other decentralised working structures). This is further highlighted by the way in which dancers need to master different movement styles.

The control I have developed to master both heels and contemporary styles reflects the flexibility I need to have as a freelance dancer. If I were not proficient in both it would mean I would have only been able to do one of the two jobs, which means less income and less networking opportunities for me. So not only is working the double-job-day a reflection of the precarity of this line of work, but also the reflection of the necessity to be flexible. However, the reason I got offered both jobs is less dependent on my skills in these styles of dance. Of course, I need to be able to execute whatever it is that is asked of me on the job but the chance I was offered the jobs more likely had to do with my personality and looks rather than my skills. This reminds me of a conversation I had with a friend who recalled an audition she had the week prior, where dancers who were of exceptional skill were cut. It prompted her to say that it is hardly ever about your skill as a dancer once you enter the audition room, but more if you have the right personality and looks to fit in.

This echoes feminist scholar Kathi Weeks' notion that contemporary hiring processes are based on personality rather than skill, where “personal or even intimate traits of the employee are drawn into the sphere of exchange” (2007, 239). This indicates that there is more to working as a dancer than being able to dance, it requires the “right” personality. I argue specifically that it is often not the personality you have, but the personality you are able to exude. Since dance is a visual practice first (Brodie and Lobel, 2008), it means that the audience will read what it sees, implying that the way things look carry value. Therefore, I argue that looks and personality are conflated to a great extent.

For a musical short film, I was asked to learn a South Korean style of dance and I distinctly remember the director coming into the studio to have a look at how far we had progressed (me and one other girl together with one of the lead actors). She said to me “wow, I am impressed with how well you are picking up the choreography!” (for context: the other two had performed in a piece that had scenes utilising this style). It left me thinking “why did she say that I am just doing my job; picking up choreography and executing it.” It was not until a week later that I realised that I was not hired for my dance skills necessarily, but for two other reasons. 1) I was cast as a student because then they could pay me less (Read: not at all). 2) I had the right looks and energy for the part. I was cast for my so-called “resting bitch face” and my height. The girl

who was my opposite was booked before I was and they needed someone who matched her energy, height and looks. Therefore, the director's surprise at me doing my job as a dancer was indicative of the fact that I was not booked for my skills, but for the way my personality and looks matched what they were looking for.

I had to commodify both my personality and my looks to do the job. I had to lean into the personality that my looks are prone to exude. Despite not being booked for my dancing skill per se, I was still expected to pick up this new style of dancing I had never done before. These examples echo how flexibility is connected in a practical sense to the work of dancers and how it is a valued skill to possess when working on the job. This skill is necessary because of the increase and preference for project-based work which brings about these needs for adaptability.

3.1.2 Flexibility to deal with precarity

Next to the fact that dancers need to be flexible in navigating working with new people every project, adapting to different styles of movement and types of jobs and locations of working, and problem solving while performing, they must also be flexible in the way they navigate their precarity (van Assche and Schaffer 2023). Dancers must manage their stress levels, adapt to the constant changing of schedules because of new job opportunities and jobs falling through, constantly grow and improve and adjust their practice and negotiate and compromise their boundaries, in order to work towards stability and reduce their precarious working life. This also includes being ready to work when the opportunity arises. Consequently, this generates a constant pressure to reveal and evolve their abilities as artists and entrepreneurs and means they actively engage with the neoliberal ideology of 'self-investment' to remain hireable. Since the distinction between life and work is unclear in the life of a dancer every aspect of this life can potentially be deemed as self-investment (Kunst 2015, 19-22) in terms of aspects such as physical health, creative inspiration, mental health, and social relations.

Niek accurately said: "Recreational time is very much connected to work, even a coffee with a friend can serve as inspiration for your creativity and thus your work."

In my interviews both Robin and Niek mention how they recognise the demands this work can have on them and how they try to generate some distance between their work and their personal time by having a clear idea of what helps them recharge, both admitting to not having done this before and paying the price in terms of mental health.

I recall a conversation I had with a friend who stayed over at my place for a few nights because of an audition in the Netherlands she wanted to attend. She talked about how she was in the metro on the way to a party when a man came to sit next to her. He saw her lockscreen photo, which depicted her on the stage, and it prompted him to start a conversation by asking her if she

was a dancer. They started talking about how he used to be a dancer, and revealed how he was the artistic director of a big dance company. All of a sudden, my friend's ride to a party had turned into an important networking event.

Snapping in and out of work mode becomes an important form of the mental gymnastics involved in optimising the chance for stability. The commodification of mental flexibility, I argue, refers to the way dancers must be able to recognise the moments in life that can serve their career, whether it be a conversation with a stranger on the metro or a cup of coffee with a friend. Recognising the type of opportunity (network, inspiration, skill-development, recovery) and capitalising on it becomes part of the daily routine of a dancer. Consequently, since dancers are constantly working through the unclear boundaries between life and work, hyper-subjectivity pervades the realm of work and plays a significant role in the private spheres of dancer's lives and therefore are constantly engaging with the commodification of their hyper-subjectivity.

3.1.3 Consequences of Hyper- Subjectivity

Kunst argues that, especially for dancers, the radical individualisation and homogenisation of subjectivity in neoliberal capitalism have caused creativity, imagination, and dynamism to merge with self-governance (Ibid). According to Kunst the production of life requires constant transformation and flexibility (ibid). In other words, Kunst argues that the intertwining of work and private life for artists thus requires constant adaptability because of subjectivity being at the core of the production processes. She argues that this is the crisis of subjectivity (ibid). The intensification of the individualisation process places individuals at an intersection of anxiety).

“Today the crisis of subjectivity has lost its emancipatory potential that it had in the artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s, or at least needs to rethink and implement this potential in an entirely new manner. The main reason for this powerlessness is the fact that today's human being is confronted with a brutal intensification of individualisation processes, described by Lazzarato as the production of subjectivity. Old forms of life become obsolete even before they can actually be absorbed. This opens up the way for subjectivity, which experiences its transformation through constant existential paradoxes. This makes us live in a constant state of tension, at the edge of anxiety; it is this state that causes us to increase our investments” (21-22)

In other words: the crisis of subjectivity is catalysed through the radical individualisation and homogenisation of subjectivity and has consequently lost its emancipatory potential instead which has resulted in existential paradoxes and increased anxiety, causing dancers to increase their investments because of this anxiety.

The increase in such investments, while living in a state of tension because of the crisis of subjectivity, adds on the emotional labour of dancers. They are forced to, in addition to their hyper-subjectivity, also remedy the anxiety generated by the crisis of subjectivity in their daily lives. This is evidenced in my earlier anecdote about how I chose to assist the class even though I had a gruelling day in order to invest in various elements that could progress my career.

In my interview with Robin (and Remy on the side) they both answered the way to financial stability was through seeing yourself as a multi-purpose hire. To learn other skills that can create more work. She and Remy are both involved with film and photography as well as modelling as a few of the other skills they invested in, as well as being trained in multiple different styles of dance and other performing arts genres. Robin emphasises how you must be an entrepreneur and you must search for work; it will not come to you.

As discussed before, the way private life and profession are intertwined for dancers means that this equates to an increase of investments in all aspects of our lives and with that an increase in anxieties regarding these investments. The crisis of subjectivity concerns identity and its creation (Kunst 2012, 19-25). Since dancers engage with hyper-subjectivity as a form of commodification, dancers run the risk of generating a fragmented sense of self (Ibid) I argue that consequently they need to engage in more affective labour to remedy this fragmentation. So, on top of the contradicting need for flexibility and a grasp on their identity which leaves dancers more vulnerable to abuse and leads more work in guarding those boundaries and dealing with vulnerable situations.

Since this labour is present in nearly every aspect of a dancer's life, I argue that not only is there emotional labour involved while working, but also affective labour in remedying this anxiety, since it pierces through the barrier between working life and private life. This means that this work occurs in all areas of life where not only emotional states, but also affective states are produced.

The feeling one needs to invest in oneself to possess many different skills that can generate income, reflects this anxiety. This also emphasises the current economy's ideology of the entrepreneurial self, highlighting the individual's responsibility for market success. This responsibility also generates anxiety and pressure because of the precarity of the job (Van Assche and Schaffer 2023; Van Assche 2018; Kunst 2015).

The main reason I decided to start this master's degree was to possess different skills that might make me more hireable, or at least to have something else to fall back on. However, it also constantly raises questions about who I am. Am I a dancer first, a student first, an aspiring dramaturg first? I constantly shift what I am "most" according to the space I am in.

These investments that result in the intertwining of the work and private life for dancers are a phenomenon that Berlant calls ‘the promise of exchange value’ which is the anticipated return in the investments of an individual (2001, 36). This creates an impasse, where dancers become wedged in between the potential for transformation and the reality of their socio-economic conditions. Becoming stuck in this paradoxical situation results in the oscillation between hope and despair, since the promise of transformation is constantly present, however never attainable. Berlant argues that “an impasse is a holding station that does not hold but opens out into anxiety, that dog- paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. An impasse is decompositional—in the unbound temporality of the lag one hopes to have been experiencing all along (otherwise it is the *end*), it marks a delay” (ibid, 434). Cultural theorist Ann Cvetkovich (2012) argues alongside Berlant that the impasse created through the promise of exchange value generates the affect of anxiety and the object of knowledge invites to understand the impasse as “a singular place that’s a cluster of noncoherent but proximate attachments that can only be approached awkwardly, described around, shifted” (Berlant 2011, 434–435). Cvetkovich argues that the impasse, besides and because of the way in which impasses are deeply connected to socioeconomic structures “suggests that things will not move forward due to circumstance—not that they can’t, but that the world is not designed to make it happen or there has been a failure of imagination” (2012, 20-21).

Therefore, the intertwining of work and private life for dancers and its consequent promise of exchange value, holds them hostage in a perpetual state of anxiety. This uncovers the socio-economic structures that hold this impasse in place.

3.2 Authenticity, Feeling rules and Hyper-Subjectivity

The fact that dancers do not only engage in a duet of surrendering and asserting oneself during performances, but during nearly every aspect of their lives, signals a departure from the relationship between dancers, their bodies and their work that used to exist. Van Assche and Schaffer argue that since the 1990s, the development of the “ideal contemporary dancer in Europe” has moved away from the hired body’s aim to eliminate differences but has instead moved towards generating uniqueness and emphasising differences (2023, 207). According to Van Assche and Schaffer this has turned into the “key to success, or at least pivotal in order to be employed.” (ibid, 207). This shift highlights the neoliberal move to individualisation in the 21st century (ibid, 206). In other words: a dancer’s employability is contingent on their *unique* subjectivity. This unique subjectivity indicates that whilst dancers must be flexible in every aspect of their being, they must at the same time, have a clear understanding of their

identity and by extension their personality.

However, as mentioned before, identity is fluid in nature and affected by the changes and influences of norms and values imposed by society (Akomolafe and Manning 2023). This indicates that identity is only stable in its instability. Therefore, because the commodification of dancer's unique subjectivity is linked to modern-day power structures which enable abuse, a certain vigilance is necessary in terms of understanding personal boundaries that need safeguarding to prevent their identity from becoming susceptible to these forms of abuse. Such boundaries are intricately linked to one's identity and subjectivity because they are linked to one's values, beliefs, and perspectives (Warren 1990).

This brings me to a conversation I had with a well-known choreographer and Dutch dance company director during a meeting during my internship. She mentioned how, in the past, she has had to step in during certain creation processes with external choreographers because she feared the dancers were crossing their own boundaries. She specifically said that dancers "will go for it" regardless of their boundaries.

So, despite dancers needing to know their own boundaries, knowing what those boundaries are and how to guard them proves to be a complicated task to uphold when working in the current economic structures.

While Niek and Shaquille both agree that flexibility is a great asset and one of the main pillars of a professional dancer, they also mentioned how one should still have clear boundaries. Knowing when to say no and where to draw the line is important because it makes sure you are still aligned with yourself and your own identity. They both recognise the moments where they allowed those boundaries to be overstepped and how it affected them and how this has affected them negatively.

Therefore, because of the need to be flexible while also commodifying their unique subjectivity this becomes a complicated process and navigation between upholding boundaries and being flexible to secure their stability.

It prompts me to use a physical experience I have with my body as a metaphor for the issue of flexibility and identity and why this becomes a paradox. I have always been an extremely flexible person, physically I mean, I am hyper-mobile, and my body will stretch in any direction. This sounds great, especially for a dancer. However, my main problem causing my actual physical pain and injuries and severely impacts my skills as a dancer negatively is the fact I am too flexible. My body will go to an extreme from which it cannot recover. I bend so far; my body does not have the strength to pull me back to my centre. This

impacts my muscles and joints and can hurt me a lot. So, even though being flexible in movement is a great asset, too much of a good thing will become harmful.

I return to the relation between the body and identity. I argue that a similar issue can occur when becoming mentally so flexible to the point of no return, where one's adaptability and by extension their identity becomes as Kunst mentions "fragmented" (Kunst 2015, 33). This further emphasises the predicament where dancers are, in their hyper-subjectivity, more vulnerable to abuse because of the risk of identity fragmentation.

3.2.1 Feeling Rules

The risk of identity fragmentation is strengthened by the precarity of the economy which causes the established forms of identity to be interfered with and to be broken off. Through this these forms rapidly become outdated because of accelerated social, economic, and technological changes (Kunst page). As mentioned by Kunst, this accelerated breaking off and changing of established forms of identity result in a rapid change of what Hochschild calls feeling rules (2015; 1979). Hochschild argues that the social guidelines that direct the way in which we try to feel can be considered "as a set of socially shared, albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at), rules." (1979, 563). Feeling rules reflect patterns of social membership of either universal social groups or specific social groups (ibid 566).

According to Hochschild, rules for how we manage feelings are implicit in any ideological stance (ibid 568). Because of this, feeling rules are a space of political struggle. The work to make feeling and the frame consistent with the situation in which an individual finds itself is emotional work. This emotional work is work that individuals consistently and privately engage with in order to bridge the gaps between what one feels and what one wants to feel (ibid, 562-563).

Thus, feeling rules are a result of the preferred affects imposed by the contemporary capitalist society (ibid, 562-563). Despite being written in the early 1980s, feeling rules remain relevant as the current neoliberal capitalist economy continues to develop as a highly service-based economy, where social media has grown to an influential position. According to dance scholar Mahri Leto (2021) feeling rules have become highly influential since the rise of social media. Sharing the appropriate aspects of personal lives and displaying appropriate emotions corresponding to these happenings are indicative of the influential presence of feeling rules (ibid). Since dancers market themselves mainly through their social media, the feeling rules that are perpetuated in the digital realm become and remain relevant for dancer's negotiation and regulation of their emotions and the corresponding affective labour.

As dancers we often need to adjust our feelings towards the feeling rule specific to our social group. In the video shoot the energy and atmosphere was supposed to be gloomy and melancholy. At that point in time this was the opposite of what I was feeling. There was a certain amount of self-coaching necessary to get me in the right headspace to be able to adhere to the expectations of the job I was doing. Similarly, in the afternoon when I entered my heels-rehearsal, a completely different energy was expected of me. Being and feeling sexy while still covered in dust and sweat from the previous job, and a certain amount of cold-induced back pain made that goal increasingly difficult. However, as a professional and to stay professional, it is my responsibility to deal with these elements and overcome them. So, what I was feeling at the moment was fatigue, pain, and a certain level of grossness. What I wanted to feel was enthusiasm, energy, and sexiness to do a respectable job as the dancer on the job as well as cultivating network connections that deem me as a cooperative, responsible, and hard-working dancer. When I reflect on the way I managed to do the emotional work to feel what I wanted to feel, what was expected of me to feel, I realise a huge contributing factor is the passion I have for dance. My passion functioned as my yellow-brick road from my anxious and precarious situation to the place where I could enjoy my work and behave as a professional dancer. Reminding myself that I am lucky to have had two jobs in one day, how much I love dancing and the fact that I get to do such diverse jobs and the excitement of working with someone new was the emotional work I had to engage in to remedy the negative feelings I had.

If I were to fail at producing these positive feelings before I started the second job, I would risk jeopardising a new network connection and work relationship. Especially since I had not worked with this choreographer before so I had no previous reputation that could excuse me. I felt the pressure to make a good impression since I know that my network will be my main supply of dance jobs and one negative review could affect all my upcoming opportunities. This highlights how individual this experience was for me, I cannot share this work in shifting mindset with anyone else to not come across as ungrateful or unmotivated, and I am the only person responsible for this shift to happen in the first place.

Staying in the delineated zone that a feeling rule creates, in order to stay away from negative affects, means an increased pressure for emotional work to keep up and manage the rapid changes of these feeling rules (Kunst 2015, 565).

In the dance scene, there are many situations where these feeling rules are present. The best example is that of auditions. Essentially a job interview, except you do the interview at the same time as sometimes up to 150 other dancers. Having to dance under scrutiny of a group of potential employers who usually sit behind a table whispering to each other and writing furiously, next to many other dancers who are out for the same job. It is clear that these situations are not the most enjoyable, especially when the need for a job is high. However, despite the competitive comparing and judging of the other people in the room, which brings various feelings such as anxiety and self-doubt, you have to seem happy to be there. There is a certain expectation where you as a dancer must be grateful to be in this room and to get this

opportunity, regardless of how gruelling the situation might be. Not being able to show such positive affects usually gets you cut. Having sat behind one of these tables and having been in countless auditions before, these expectations are real. I have seen dancers get cut because they looked extremely unhappy, while being amazing dancers, and hearing later they were just too nervous

Trying to align personal feelings with societal expectations influences the formation of identity. Weeks (2007) discusses the relationship between the labour process and the process of subjectification. She mentions that the coordination of mind and feeling extends “to the affective life of the subject, into the fabric of the personality (ibid, 240) “In Hochschild’s language, it involves not just ‘surface acting’ but ‘deep acting’ and results in “practices that have a transformative effect on the do-er” (Ibid, 241).

When shifting between two vastly distinct types of jobs the feeling rules regarding those jobs also change for me. A different type of energy is expected. But also, my position within the space is different. In the video shoot I was in charge of my own movement. Not only did I have creative liberty, but creative input was also expected from me as well. When I arrived at the rehearsal afterwards, I had to switch into a different role. One where I was not creatively in charge. Since I had not worked with this choreographer before, I had to figure out during this rehearsal how much creative input she appreciated. Some choreographers do, some do not, and then some think they do, whilst they actually don’t.

When reflecting on myself and my behaviour I recognise a difference in the way I communicate and the way I hold myself. However, I find myself mostly wondering how the others in the room see me. What their perception is and how I am coming across. I have learned to undo a lot of this projection onto others of how they might perceive me, but I do see this as a symptom of trying to keep up with the changing social rules. Different teachers I have had, varying in age when they worked as a professional dancer, have told me different things about how to behave and what is expected of me when working. Some have told me to never adjust positions myself but ask the choreographer to do this, some have said that not doing so reflected poorly on my ability to work and think along with the choreographer. Leaving me to figure out every time I step into a new space what behaviour is expected of me. The instability of my role as a dancer does affect me personally. I used to say I was introverted, my facial expressions mirroring that most of the time. However, since I started working as a dancer my best friend noted a difference in the way I was acting. I seemed more open, more extraverted. I know I have not fully become an extravert but the reason I have seemed to become one is a direct result of the feeling rule of expressing positive affects in every room I enter as a dancer. It has entered my personality to be more extraverted in my behaviour. Yet I feel confused when someone describes me as an extravert, and deep down know that I am probably not one.

In other words, the consequent rapid change of feeling rules make it even more complicated for dancers to cultivate and maintain their grip on the flexibility of their identity. Indicating an extreme amount of emotional and affective labour to keep up with the possession of the uniqueness that is the “key to success” for dancers and in remedying the areas of precarity-induced increased anxiety and vulnerability.

3.2.2 Authenticity in Hyper-Subjectivity.

As a result of societal developments in which emotions and affects are increasingly commodified through mechanisms like hyper-subjectivity, authenticity has become a new moral value. This commodification, thus, emphasises how the need for alignment between inner feelings and outward expressions becomes crucial to adhere to this moral.

When asking all the people I interviewed how they saw the relationship between emotion and dance, they all agreed that emotion and dance are usually inseparable and when working one has to work with both. Evan points out that the way you feel will affect the way you move your body, this is true also for non-dancers, when we feel sad, we tend to hang our heads low, move slower etc. He argues that one can approach dance as a technician and have the perfect body with perfected technique and that relates to the sports side of dance, however, “emotion is based on the artistic aspect of dance. Dancers are actors of the body and because it is of the body does not mean it is without emotion.”

Also, Robin mentions how there can be a dissonance between the emotion you are expected to perform and the emotions you are feeling in the moment. You still must perform the required emotions and it is your individual responsibility to make sure you do. However, she also finds that there is great freedom inside of expressing your emotions through your movement.

They all mention that this work with emotion is also for a great deal the place where authenticity stems from. They all value authenticity in the work of a dancer and consider it an integral part of being one. Niek explains it in a straightforward way, that when he learns choreography, he will adjust the movements in a way that he describes as “colouring them,” despite the movements not being his initially. A major tool in this colouring is the use of emotions.

Notwithstanding, Hochschild critiques the policy that demands emotional work under the guise of authenticity, because it disregards the effort put into the emotional labour of aligning feelings with those outer expressions through deep acting (2007, 3). Fleming argues in the same line that the mechanism of authenticity becomes problematic in the workspace when it is used to promote freedom (2009, 17). So, since authenticity is leveraged to ensure success in the workspace, the idea of ‘being yourself,’ in reality, means that one is free to be who they want to be as long as it aligns with contemporary capitalist values

(Veldstra 2020, 3). Therefore, being authentic in the working field requires a skilful navigation of commodified affects and genuine feelings and thus reflect a restrained version of authenticity through the use of hyper-subjectivation.

Shaquille explains how for them, being a person of colour but also queer and non-binary, they have noticed how they “constantly check-in and see what the vibe is before I show who I am” and that they have been in situations where it was not possible for them to be themselves and they had to put on a mask to work. Insightfully they add how they then become a tool instead of a person, but they argue that this is sometimes “the reality of life as an artist.”

This displays how self-governing tactics, that result from the need to commodify subjectivity together with the corporate policy’s celebration of these limited conditions of authenticity through workplace culture and self-management tactics, stimulate constrained notions of ‘authenticity’ and consequently normalise and generalise a mode of cruel optimism. In this form of cruel optimism “precarious workers have no choice but to at least appear – in their affective orientation – to remain attached to the systems that generate their exploitation.” (Veldstra, 4).

All the dancers I have interviewed stated that they prefer freelancing over company work (which is more structured and offers stability). I cannot help but wonder if this is a result of the workings of Berlant's Cruel optimism. (I am aware that 6 dancers are a limited scope of data, however this is a shared sentiment with a lot of dancers I know).

It reflects to a certain degree a mode of neoliberal rationality wherein dancers seem to prefer freelancing based on the desire for autonomy and creative control. Lepecki (2015) argues neoliberalism governs subjects while falsely giving the idea that they are free from governmental control. "A specific and normative mode of reason, of the production of the subject, conduct of conduct, and scheme of valuation [...] intensely governing subjects it claims to free from government" (Brown in Lepecki 2015: 48-49). In other words, neoliberal rationality generates a form of governmental control through stimulating norms and behaviours that are in line with neoliberal notions of responsibility, entrepreneurship, and market competition (Lepecki 2006, 8)

These preferences for freelance work can be the result of the way in which governmental control stimulates the qualities in line with neoliberal entrepreneurship (ibid, 8). Neoliberal rationality preconditions its subjects to accept specific forms of control that consequently influence their perception of what freedom is when placed in a controlled environment (Lepecki 2013)). In other words, individuals are stimulated to behave according to contemporary capitalist ideology in such a way it becomes unknown to the individual that this is not a free choice. This then leads to dancers accepting specific

forms of control that impact their perception of freedom (ibid), reflecting a desire and hope for a better career

Consequently, this again strengthens the cruel optimism existent in dancer's life, because of the way in which freelance work creates instability and perpetuates precarity. The preference for freelancing in this case reflects the tension that exists at the core of cruel optimism. Namely the tension between the promise of freedom versus the reality of the neoliberal economy and the corresponding precarity (Berlant 2011,). For precarious work like dance this results in a prescribed bundle of positive affects which generate more profit for the company or project they work for, without improving the quality of life of precarious workers like dancers. (ibid, 3).

My unwavering enthusiasm and positivity that I am compelled to showcase while dancing in precarious conditions such as the cold and dangerous ledges and fragile stairs in the video shoot in the morning, to a positive and energised disposition in a rehearsal after already having worked for 8 hours before that, highlight my affective orientation. I am a positive and energised professional dancer. However, by perpetuating the idea that dancers always need to have a positive disposition and constantly asking for their hyper-subjectivity, we keep the cycle going. So, when I show up and commodify my subjectivity to fit the feeling rules of that situation, in this case being grateful to have two jobs in one day, I am easier to work with. Thus, making the process go faster, or being able to get more out of me as a dancer either in time or knowledge. Or at least not losing time on taking breaks or making space for negative feelings. The project profits, but I work harder. Yet, I am not paid more.

Through neoliberal rationality and the mechanism of (restrained) authenticity the negative feelings stemming from precarity are reduced to a personal problem concerning attitude that must be resolved through more intense and specific emotional tailoring and considers precarity as “merely a quality of life to be endured” (Kunst 2015, 12-13). The intersection of precarity and emotional labour, which makes up the affective economy, demands internalisation of negative emotions brought by this precarity, to not challenge the status quo. So, on the one hand our feelings are viewed as something private and unique, while on the other hand our emotions and affective states are commodified as market tools to bolster our labour power (Arruza in Veldstra 2020). This results in heightened emotional labour for dancers as they negotiate their hyper-subjective identities in the neoliberal work field where the effects of their precarious work, and lives, must be dealt with individually.

I argue that through this mechanism the creative economy can demand passion as a necessity to succeed in the job, because the personal mark of failure that dancer's risk when they are unable to internalise and resolve negative feelings and are unable to align themselves with the feeling rules of enjoyment (ibid 14).

The failure to produce the correct affects results in ostracism since one fails to reproduce sociality (Veldstra 2011) Since Michael Hardt (1999, 98) states how “the qualitative output of affective labour exceeds the definition of ‘emotion’ and refers instead to a diverse set of feelings, relationships, and qualities generated by a worker’s embodied resources and characterised by the reproduction of social ties and, ultimately, society itself.” It becomes clear how this mechanism also evokes affective labour in maintaining the social relations that are crucial in society. This allows for affective labour to capitalise on life while simultaneously holding expectations of this life (Gregg 2010, 250). Further infiltrating into a dancer’s life. The only way to remedy this is through emotional labour and in greater extent affective life.

In my interview with Robin, she specifically states how she believes that a dancer needs an enormous amount of passion for dance to deal with the demands of the job. As a dancer, to be able to dance, there is a huge physical strain as well as a mental strain. Robin says that if you do not love it, you will not work.

Therefore, if one does not produce the right effects in the areas of the job that are suboptimal, one will fail to work as a dancer. By this extent it means that if a dancer fails to be hyper-subjective, the dancer fails to produce the correct feelings and correct affects, which not only becomes a mark of personal failure, but also signifies the incapability of reproducing sociality. Specifically, the sociality of the dancing industry, and thus results in ostracism from this community, making hyper-subjectivity a crucial skill to master as a dancer, at the cost of an extreme amount of affective and emotional labour.

I ask myself the same question often, and this time I did again. On the bike in the 35-minute break between the two jobs, tired, dusty, and somehow hot and cold at the same time: “Why do I do this to myself?” I ask myself a similar question three hours later when I say yes to assist a class together with the choreographer I just rehearsed with. I do not find a clear answer other than “because I get to dance.” I suffer to get to do the thing I love. I never speak of my fatigue in the rehearsal. I only tell my roommate when I come home and start making my dinner at eleven at night. Looking back on the double job day I am not completely sure how I pulled it off. So, I am attributing it to sheer determination and passion. A little voice reminding me this is the life I asked for when I chose to become a dancer. I consider it more a price to pay to do what I love.

3.3 Power Dynamics in Dance and Hyper-Subjectivity

3.3.1 Hyper-Subjectivity and its Implications

As established, the dancer’s body is a site of potential transformation but also the locus of vulnerability. The body is the medium for artistic expression, which means it becomes intimate and

personal and thus engages directly with societal norms (Kunst 2015, 42). However, it is simultaneously also the subject of societal, ideological, and economic pressures (Ibid, 42). It becomes apparent that there are significant connections between social structures, their power dynamics, and the way in which hyper-subjectivity works and channels affective and emotional labour.

The sociologist Randall Collins (2015) points out that ideologies and norms can be utilised as weapons in conflicts between social groups, since the values and beliefs perpetuated by the dominant group dictate how individuals should feel, but also frame these values and beliefs as guidelines of how to respond, turning them into feeling rules. As feeling rules and emotional labour have a transformative effect on the doer this implies there is power in the control in dictating these feeling rules. Thus, dancers abiding to the feeling rules of both the dance community and society at large means that this process has an impact on identity formation of the dancer and perpetuates the dominant ideology at hand.

Similarly, the restrained authenticity that is promoted in neoliberal society forces dancers to privatise the negative consequences of their precarious work and lives. If dancers do not manage the emotional labour in privatising these negative emotions, they, again, risk failing to produce sociality, which puts them at risk for ostracism. The pressure to privatise these negative affects keeps the costs of precarious work and life under cover.

Ostracism, more specifically, is then a consequence of the workings of affect. As Hemmings explains, shame and disgust are primary negative affects (2006, 560). Disgust is a negative affect that is learnt through the process of socialisation and impacts how one relates to others, it forms moral and social judgement (Ibid, 560). Expressed responses of disgust towards an individual can invoke feelings of shame. Shame is evoked when individuals fail to meet the social and moral standards set, resulting in reactions of disgust around them. These reactions can consequently result in ostracism. Shame is an important affect to consider in how it is both normative and transformative (ibid 560). Normative in the way it enforces social norms and values, causing individuals to prescribe to these norms and values (ibid).

Shame is transformative in the way it causes self-reflection, change in behaviour, and causes the individual to reassess their behaviour and make changes accordingly to avoid evoking disgust in those around them. This interplay of affects like shame and disgust also highlight how power and community are connected. In the case of the dance community the negative consequences of working in this field are privatised and must be dealt with individually at risk of evoking disgust in those around them and risking ostracism. I argue this then connects to the affects of anxiety, causing hyper-management of one's actions to try and avoid this. Berlant writes "Out of love and shame, the subjects of capital protect the fantasies of intimates by suppressing the costs of adjustment to labour's physical and affective demands"(2011, 174).

This emphasises the connection between the love for the desire (dance) and the anxiety of feeling shame, and how they work together as a mechanism that keeps dancers in the same precarious position.

I sat behind the table, a clipboard with pictures and names of the dancers who were auditioning in front of me. I would spend the afternoon watching and judging whether or not these dancers would fit our company. It felt weird, almost wrong, that I was sitting here. I was so used to being on the other side of the table. During the audition we saw a girl with great qualities in her dancing, but a facial expression that reflected everything but the will to be in this room at this moment. I suspected this was the result of nerves, I can have the same “resting bitch face” when I am nervous or very concentrated. I do not blame her, auditions are awful (as described before) being in a room for hours trying to prove your worth and knowing that you are being judged.

The choreographer of the company was sitting next to me, and during the water break we discussed all the participants. We arrived at number 17, the girl looking unhappy, and she said something along the lines of “she is a great dancer, but her energy is awful. I do not want to give her a place in the company if she cannot even appreciate being here.” Her voice was filled with a hint of disgust and annoyance. Even in the discussion around whether it might be because she was nervous, her perception of the girl did not change much. She did not get into the company. For me it dialled up my anxiety surrounding the risk of losing out on jobs and work and being ostracised because I would fail to remedy my own nervousness and would miss out on booking jobs and generating an image of myself as a dancer with ‘negative attitude.’

The dance world is brutal in that sense. The label “hard to work with” will annihilate your chances of work for a good amount of time, since the industry is so small, and everyone knows everyone so word travels fast. A friend of mine did not get booked for jobs for two full years because of this label.

By obscuring these negative consequences, it becomes possible for dominant power structures to continue the exploitation of dancers. Allowing dancers to become ostracised if they fail to keep such negative emotions and affects private, plays into the cruel optimism of them running the risk of losing the hope to achieve their desires. Which is a problem in the precarious work field, since dancers are not protected by the labour security and their social position can easily be revoked (van Assche 2018, 10-11).

The cruel optimism that holds dancers in this position of maintaining their attachments to creating economic stability, results in the commodification of hyper-subjectivity. In order to remedy the compromised conditions of achieving stability in the face of precarity, dancers engage with more and more emotional and affective labour. Which in turn is capitalised on and not compensated. These are, as Berlant calls them, the affective bargains that dancers make in order to stay in the proximity of their desires though never achieving them (2011, 209).

The promise of exchange value then puts dancers at an impasse, where they are stuck between the potential of transformation and the reality of their socio-economic conditions. Where dancers oscillate between hope and despair, but where the promise of transformation is constantly present however unattainable. Because the attachments are so deeply rooted in social economic structures, like stability in a neoliberal capitalist society, it stifles genuine transformation. While actually reinforcing existing inequalities and thus results in a constant cycle of unfulfilled desires (ibid, 117).

3.4 The Cycle

Dancers need to employ hyper-subjectivity as a skill necessary for managing their economically induced precarity, while this skill simultaneously works as a mechanism that keeps the unequal power-dynamics in place.

The emotional and affective labour in which dancers engage through hyper-subjectivity sustains the inequality resulting from the unequal power dynamics. In turn, this brings in more inequality through the profit it generates for bigger corporations and companies of which dancers see little in return. Consequently, this makes the work of dancers more precarious, resulting in more need for hyper-subjectivity as a skill to deal with this affective economy.

The more need there is for hyper-subjectivity, the more this secures and strengthens inequality which in turn calls for more emotional and affective work to deal with the consequences, which again asks for more hyper-subjectivity. Thus, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that sustains itself or exacerbates itself and works in a downwards spiral.

I argue that this shows the inner workings of the exploitation of cruel optimism where dancers have a relation of attachments to the possibility of stability, while the conditions remain compromised and thus unattainable. In other words, precarious workers are stuck within the socio-economic systems that generate their exploitation.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the concept of hyper-subjectivity and researched its intersection with affective and emotional labour, the contemporary capitalist society, and its corresponding precarity. I have argued for an expansion of the term hyper subjectivity to not only refer to the on-stage switching but to include the work and life of dancers and how hyper-subjectivity also involves switching or navigating flexibility as well as authenticity in all areas of the life of dancers. My focus, therefore, has mostly been on the workings of hyper-subjectivity off-stage.

I have performed an autoethnographic research which was combined with interviews with other working dancers in Europe, to use as a lens through which I analysed the concept of hyper-subjectivity and its implications.

The commodification of hyper-subjectivity is a crucial skill for dancers to survive in the landscape of neoliberal capitalist society. Hyper-subjectivity allows dancers to navigate their career but requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour and this dynamic consequently perpetuates unequal power dynamics within the field.

This conclusion discusses the thesis statement: *In neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism the commodification of hyper-subjectivity is a necessary skill for dancers to utilise for their survival. However, this commodification requires a substantial amount of emotional and affective labour, and its workings perpetuates unequal power dynamics within the dance industry.*

The commodification of the identity and emotional and affective states of dancers has, through the phenomenon of hyper-subjectivity, become integral to their professional success. As a result, the radical individualisation and homogenisation of subjectivity has merged self-governance with creativity, imagination, and dynamism. Kunst argues that consequently the work and private life of dancers has become inseparable and demands constant adaptability which places subjectivity at the core of production processes. This commodification of their hyper-subjectivity therefore demands a constant investment in themselves in all aspects of their life, to compete in the market. Kunst argues that this results in the crisis of subjectivity and generates endless paradoxes and inflates anxiety, by placing dancers in a constant state of tension where they feel the need to increase their investments to remedy this anxiety.

Hyper-subjectivity and its commodification are thus inherently tied to emotional and affective labour. In the dance industry the emotional labour involves managing one's emotions to adhere to the feeling rules and requirements of the work and to a larger extent in society. Affective labour expands this to encompass the production and manipulation of affective states which influence relationships resulting in a multifaceted and pervasive form of labour.

The emotional labour of dancers is most noticeable in the demands for positive and enthusiastic demeanours, despite stressful or precarious situations. The pressure to adhere to the feeling rules within the dance industry, and society in general, influence identity and its formation, and allows for dominant ideologies and power structures to prevail. There is an increased pressure for more emotional work to keep up with the accelerated changes of feeling rules. Adhering to these feeling rules involve not only surface acting but also deep acting, which has a “transformative effect on the doer” and influences their identity. Since this process happens at a high speed, I argue that this causes dancers to have less clarity on their boundaries and increases the potential for unchecked vulnerability for dancers. Therefore, there is a vast amount of emotional labour necessary to keep up with their identity and its changes, as well as remedying their increased anxieties. This further finds its impact in the affective labour that moves beyond the management of emotions but includes the cultivation of social networks and mitigates negative affects such as shame and disgust. The constant negotiation with affective labour further impacts the sense of self of dancers and requires a significant amount of emotional labour to remedy these consequences and stay in proximity to stability.

The capitalisation on emotions and affects by the current capitalist structure through the demand for the commodification of unique identities through the mechanism of feeling rules, has created a new moral value of authenticity. However, this is a restrained form of authenticity since it only celebrates authentic feelings that are in line with the post-Fordist neoliberal capitalist ideologies. The need to commodify one’s subjectivity together with the economy’s celebration of (restrained forms of) authenticity have generalised a form of cruel optimism, where precarious workers are pressured to appear affectively attached to the systems that generate their own exploitation. Meaning that if a dancer is unsuccessful in producing the correct affects and feelings, this is deemed a personal failure.

Furthermore, failure to adhere to the feeling rules created by people in positions of power in the dance industry, such as choreographers, company directors and funding committees can therefore make or break careers. The affective and emotional labour required to adhere to these rules also keep them in their place, perpetuating the unequal power structures and hierarchies.

The demand from the industry for dedication and passion exacerbates these inequalities. When dancers fail to internalise and solve their negative feelings or failure to align with the feeling rules can result in affects such as disgust and shame. Through this, dancers run the risk of becoming ostracised and can severely impact their careers. Because these negative feelings are internalised, they also become obscured, making it increasingly difficult to recognise the systemic nature of the dynamic and makes it hard to resist these inequalities.

In conclusion, the perpetual demand for emotional and affective labour impacts dancers

profoundly. It blurs the lines between professional and private life and simultaneously makes them vulnerable. The industry's demand to adhere to feeling rules reinforces the unequal power dynamics and increases precarity for dancers, whilst they internalise consequences of structural imbalances as personal failure. The cycle described involves constant self-investment, anxiety and precarity which highlights the concept of cruel optimism, in which dancers remain attached to the hope and promise for stability while being exploited by the structures that "offer" it.

As I have spent a copious amount of time analysing this phenomenon while simultaneously living inside of it. I am fond of the skill that is hyper-subjectivity, and it brings me pleasure to be able to adapt and oscillate in my own subjectivity, in the use of my body and in the way I communicate. However, though I feel hyper-subjectivity can be a great skill, I argue that becoming too hyper-subjective or too flexible puts you at risk of losing yourself.

For me it echoes a similar principle that exists in the practice of dance. The more in control you are of your body, the more freedom you have to move. The clearer your identity is, also in its fluidity, the more flexible you can be. However, again similar to the body, if you bend too far and do not have the power to bring yourself back, you hurt yourself physically in the process. If you are not strong enough in your understanding of your identity, you can stretch it too far and hurt yourself mentally.

In the way our neoliberal capitalist society operates now, there is not much space to nurture the relationship one has with one's own identity, the precarity and anxiety make it too unstable. Consequently, this means as dancers, we are at a constant high-risk of hurting ourselves and being hurt by others, which I feel is detrimental to the field and dance in general.

This research has shown the impact hyper-subjectivity in the neoliberal capitalist society has on dancers. The potential for negative consequences is high and they largely remain unaddressed in the field. The dance field would benefit from further research into the consequences of hyper-subjectivity and the strategies that can be developed to counter the negative aspects of this phenomenon.

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