

Editors' Note

The roots of this guest-edited special issue run deep in our ongoing research that focuses on “the precarious” in the performing arts. As a way of introducing the issue’s theme of “Work With(Out) Boundaries: Dance and Precarity,” we set out by briefly outlining the genesis of the discourse on “the precarious” that has informed our understanding of the concepts of precarity and precariousness. This early discourse has prompted a much broader literature on precarity in dance and performance studies that has established the groundwork for the featured articles.

Since the recent turn of the millennium, the concepts of precarity and precariousness gained wide usage in activism, philosophy, sociology, and art theory in Western and Middle Europe. Shortly after Europe, the discourse also emerged in the United States. Within activist and sociological discourses, the notion “precarious” embraces multiple meanings. In one definition, it denotes the human and bodily vulnerability arising from unsecured working conditions in contemporary economic contexts. One influential discourse on vulnerability as a human ontology of precariousness comes from Judith Butler (2004). Drawing on an essay on ethics by Emmanuel Levinas (1986), Butler uses the concept of the precarious (or *le précaire* in French), emphasizing that the notion also indicates mutual dependence. In turn, Butler’s ideas have been referred to in theater and dance studies and in performances that deal with war and other traumatic events (see e.g., Pewny 2011). In Butler’s reading (and ethics) *le précaire* denotes the vulnerability and, consequently, the mortality of humans. It should be considered as different from the *economic* aspects of life and work but is at the same time intertwined with these: a person subjected to changes within her working and living conditions that she does not control, can be considered to be living under precarious conditions—so this is a matter of dependence, power, and powerlessness. To put it in Butler’s own words: “precariousness [is] a function of our social vulnerability and exposure that is always given some political form, and precarity [is to be seen] as differentially distributed, and so [as] one important dimension of the unequal distribution of conditions required for continued life” (Butler in Puar 2012). Closely connected to political activism and anti-globalization networks, precarious subjects have extensively produced representations of themselves and of the fictive saint San Precario on the Internet and during public demonstrations, such as the annual Mayday! protests on May 1, which started in 2001. When travelling through Europe in 2001, Lauren Berlant witnessed these protests, which had an impact on her own ideas on precarity and precariousness. Berlant compiles her ideas under the notion of “slow death” (2011, 95). As she puts it herself, “Precarization . . . [is] an ongoing process, so that we do not reduce the power of precarious to single acts or single events. Precarization allows us to think about the slow death that happens to targeted or neglected populations over time and space” (Berlant in Puar 2012).

Seen through the lens of precarity, the work of dance is a work without boundaries. First, the contemporary dance profession has become a transnational affair, with dancers often working in different countries with colleagues from different nationalities. Secondly, due to the project-oriented and immaterial nature of the profession, it is increasingly difficult to determine where work time ends and private life begins. Economist Guy Standing identifies this lack of control over time as one of the ten characteristics of the “precariat,” a (dangerous) class-in-the-making that these

contemporary dance professionals can be considered part of (Standing 2014). Standing's notion of "tertiary time" refers to all the work done outside of paid labor time, obscuring a clear division between work and leisure. Consequently, taking a time-out in this post-Fordist regime entails the risk of missing opportunities. Canadian-born dance artist Liz Kinoshita, for example, addresses these matters when singing, "I need time, without this rhyme, only 45 minutes, all to myself," in her dance production *VOLCANO* (2014). The production title refers to the multiple eruptions of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull, which initiated a mandatory mobility pause in the accelerated and mobile work regime in which freelancers are constantly traveling for work (Van Assche and Pewny 2018). Kinoshita's work suggests that the contemporary dance profession is mobile in a twofold sense: the dance artist's body is continuously moving (i.e., dancing) and constantly on the move (i.e., traveling).

In covering the topic of work with(out) boundaries in this issue, we assembled six contributions to the relatively new and small field of research on the careers and labor conditions in (contemporary) dance and stimulate its further development with input from both experienced and emerging scholars. We consider this to be an important theme, especially for *Dance Research Journal*, as it demands a cross-disciplinary approach, something the journal has always been committed to. We also believe that work with(out) boundaries affects contemporary dance artists worldwide and we therefore aim to continue the journal's international focus. The editing of this special issue is part of the research project *Choreographies of Precariousness. A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin* (2014–2018), which was funded by the Research Foundation - Flanders and conducted by Dr. Annelies Van Assche and MA Simon Leenknecht and supervised by Professor Katharina Pewny (Theater Studies, Ghent University), Professor Rudi Laermans (Sociology, KU Leuven) and Professor Christel Stalpaert (Theater Studies, Ghent University). In the frame of this research project, a conference on the topic of *Dance Now: Work with(out) Boundaries* was organized in Ghent (Belgium) in March 2017. This event was supported by Ghent University and Research Foundation - Flanders among others, which allowed us to invite international speakers from theater and dance studies as well as anthropology and sociology. The contributions by Mark Franko, Gabriele Klein, Gabriele Brandstetter, Helen Thomas, Anusha Khedar, Rudi Laermans, and Dunja Njaradi revolved around three themes: the physical and mental boundaries between work and life; mobility and transnationalism; and rituals, institutions and community. In line with the research project, and following the themes of the conference, this special issue focuses on the contemporary dance profession as one of the many professions under a regime of work without boundaries. In addition, this issue takes on a worldwide perspective and goes beyond the research project's focus on Berlin and Brussels. Typically working on a transnational and project-oriented basis, contemporary dance artists are exemplary of the so-called new working life. Following scholars such as Richard Sennett (1998) and Sergio Bologna (2006), psychologists Michael Allvin et al. compare this "new working life" to a giant switchboard that either connects people—when professional expectations and possibilities arise—or disconnects them—when uncertainty and frustration take over (2011, 4–5). They claim that the working lives of post-Fordist workers (among them contemporary dance artists) carry in them the potential to destroy work as we know it. Allvin and colleagues observe that people's control in their work increases, while their control over the conditions of work decreases. It is thus work without boundaries because it is now up to the individual to establish the distinction between work and life and maintain personal limits.

However, it should be noted that the new working life is not so much new because of technological acceleration; it has simply become ubiquitous and is therefore hegemonic. Dance artists are especially precarious owing to various reasons such as the difficult-to-define nature of their profession; the demand for transnational mobility; the predominance of project-based work and network-oriented activities; their dependence on public funding; and the dependence on the human body as a site of precariousness (Butler 2004). Although subsidy systems may once have facilitated long-term contracts for dance artists in companies, these have become scarce, even in

a dance hub such as Brussels. In her recent writings on choreographic practices, Petra Sabisch (2017) provides an extensive outline of the evolution of the socioeconomic position of dance artists in Europe since the nineties, demonstrating the particularly precarious nature of the profession. She notes that this precarious socioeconomic situation has not only been known for years, it has also catastrophically worsened (particularly in terms of income development and gender equality) (Sabisch 2017, 78). At the same time, Sabisch points to the absence of studies that distinguish the dance profession within the performing arts (2017, 60). However, at the intersection of sociology of art, culture, and labor, there are some examples of research into artistic careers and working processes. Art sociologists such as Pascal Gielen (2010) and Pierre-Michel Menger (2014) have delivered fascinating insights on being an artist in post-Fordism, while scholars from theater studies have, for example, dealt with the working conditions of theater makers (Schößler and Haunschild 2011), with the aesthetics of instability employed in performances of the precarious, or with the contemporary performer as a “model” for precarious work in neoliberalism (Pewny 2011). But within these studies, the field of contemporary dance has only received limited attention. A relatively new and still modest wave of research at the intersection of dance studies and sociology deals with this research gap by looking at art *as* work rather than at the artwork (see esp. Huseman 2009; Laermans 2015).

In 2002, dance scholar Mark Franko was probably one of the first to address the convergence between dance and work with the release of his book *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (2002), which offers new tools for dance scholars to study the relation of politics to aesthetics. Randy Martin is one of the first scholars to discuss the notion of precarity in relation to the dance field, stating that “precarity, ephemerality, instability are frequently voiced as lamentations by dancers, presenters, and audiences alike. Dancers too struggle to make a living; presentation venues strain against diminished support; audiences contend with escalating ticket prices” (2012, 64). Following up on Franko and Martin, the study of dance artists’ professional practices can tell us much about where contemporary economy is heading. In researching the careers of South-Asian dancers, for example, Anusha Kedhar has shown how contemporary dance in a transnational context can be “the bodily performance of flexible citizenship” (2014, 37).

We hypothesize that traces of these boundaryless working conditions can be found in the performances of dance artists today. Lauren Berlant refers in this respect to the “new precarious public sphere, which occurs not only in the debates on how to rework insecurity, but which is also an emerging aesthetic” (2011, 192). As Gabriele Klein and Bojana Kunst write in their introduction to the special issue of *Performance Research: On Labour and Performance*, “artistic performance practice has always been tightly intertwined with the exploration of and experimentation with modes of working, collaborating and producing artistic work” (Klein and Kunst 2012, 1). To explore the topic of precarity and dance as work with(out) boundaries, we have gathered six articles that result from trans- or interdisciplinary research with strong dance study elements (combining, for example, dance studies, sociology, and/or anthropology).

All the articles in this issue deal with specific questions that are crucial in understanding the conditions of work with(out) boundaries in dance and their impact on the aesthetics employed by dance artists. The first three articles in this special issue address contemporary dance as work without boundaries in its literal sense. The first three authors explore the geopolitical boundaries that run across the contemporary dance profession dominated by workers of international origin often active in a mobile environment. While Gabriele Klein explores the work of Germaine Acogny in Dakar in Senegal, Natalie Zervou guides us through the streets of Athens in Greece and Juan Ignacio Vallejos introduces us to the working context of contemporary dance in Buenos Aires in Argentina. While Klein’s article takes on a perspective on the global art market at large, Zervou and Vallejos zoom in on the notion of precarity.

Gabriele Klein's article discusses how dance styles and customs are translated to other contexts and what the role of post-, de-, or neocolonial processes in this translational labor is. Her article departs from the idea that aesthetic and cultural translation is exposed to the paradox of identity and difference and that this paradox is particularly evident in artistic performance practices such as dance and choreography. Klein focuses on the artistic work of choreographer and dancer Germaine Acogny (Senegal) when addressing artistic translation practices under postcolonial conditions in the global art market of contemporary dance. Her article vividly illustrates how ambiguous, hybrid, and fragmented the cultural and aesthetic translation process is. In addition, Klein demonstrates how the global art market shapes the artistic strategies of translation and how aesthetic productivity lies in the impossibility of translating cultural experience artistically.

In the second article, Natalie Zervou introduces us to several contemporary dance practices in Athens at the dawn of the European refugee crisis and in the middle of the ongoing sociopolitical and financial crisis in Greece itself. In this context, Greek choreographers started creating dance works that engaged immigrants and refugees, usually employing improvisation as a tool for bridging the disparity between the professional dancers and what she terms the "untrained" participants. In her article, she questions the ethics and aesthetics of these methodological approaches used for staging encounters between natives and migrants through dance. In particular, Zervou considers the significance of improvisation as potentially perpetuating hierarchical inequalities in the framework of Western concert dance, while she also highlights the ways that such artistic endeavors end up presenting immigrants and refugees as "Others."

Juan Ignacio Vallejos presents us with the geopolitical context of contemporary dance in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In his article, he analyzes three artistic acts from the contemporary dance community in Buenos Aires that "subvert precariousness," to use his words. Firstly, Vallejos explores the participation of dancers in political groups that demand improvement of their working conditions. Subsequently, he examines how Marina Sarmiento's investigation of dance history stages a precarious body as an archive that deals with aesthetic colonialism. And lastly, he discusses the emergence of an aesthetics of precariousness in Fabian Gandini's work, which foregrounds artistic ethics. His principle argument asserts that working conditions, history, and aesthetics represent three dimensions of contemporary dance practice that operate simultaneously and determine the precariousness in the Argentinian dance community.

The exploration of the metaphorical boundaries to dance as work runs as a common thread through the next three articles. Jose Reynoso, Hetty Blades, and Anne Schuh examine the inclusive meaning of "work" in contemporary dance, yet they all depart from a different perspective. While Reynoso and Blades respectively write from a US and a UK perspective and focus largely on the Anglo-Saxon context, Schuh's field of inquiry is the international contemporary dance scene in Berlin.

Jose Reynoso's article is the first in this series of three and analyzes ways in which *dance* as labor and *artist* as a specific subjectivity relate to the material conditions of their production. He discusses dance as work within the specific environment shaped by neoliberal notions of freedom, ideologies of liberal democracy, and the logic of global capitalism. Specifically, he has studied a number of contemporary dance practices that embody these values by striving to be more egalitarian. He insightfully explores the notions of capital, ownership, collaboration, and credit in his examination of works by Yvonne Rainer, Xavier Le Roy, and Tino Sehgal. In doing so, he particularly emphasizes the tension between collaborative practices in dance making and the modes of producing and distributing the financial, symbolic, and cultural forms of capital by investigating how they resist and/or reproduce exploitative aspects of capitalism.

This principle point at issue in Hetty Blades's article revolves around ontological concerns of dance as work. Blades's article considers the relationship between the outputs of projects in a precarious

working context and the ontology of choreographic “works.” She draws on Frédéric Pouillaude’s conception of choreographic works to form her own conceptualization of “work-sketches,” a term she borrowed from choreographer Hamish MacPherson. The notion comprises all outputs of artistic projects that are on the way to becoming a work, and/or are works which have not yet been performed more than once, both of which in turn are positions inevitably shaped by the socio-economic context of the artists who produce them. In addition, Blades reflects on the correlation between immaterial labor and the notion of choreographic work, thinking through the commodity form of these work-sketches and examining the relationship between the ontology of dance work and dance’s socioeconomic context.

Finally, Anne Schuh explores the notion of work without boundaries in concentrating on contemporary dance artists’ practices in an insightful attempt to grasp the notion of a dance practice, or a “personal performance practice,” and its relation to dance as work. In her understanding, such a practice refers to a regular activity popular among contemporary dance artists that differs from training and production. Against the backdrop of contemporary neoliberal working conditions, Schuh’s article analyzes this concept of practice by applying the ambivalent notion of support, in order to show how a personal performance practice makes the daily work of dance visible. In doing so, she exposes shifts in style and in the aesthetics of dancing. Schuh’s article studies the dance artists’ everyday work, which she wonderfully illustrates with a discussion of Berlin-based contemporary dance artist Diego Agulló’s practice.

To close this special issue, we have invited Jane Desmond who offers us some concluding thoughts in her afterword. She has wonderfully summarized some threads that run through the issue, and simultaneously her words raise several new questions about dance and precarity.

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Annelies Van Assche obtained a joint doctoral degree in Performance Studies and Social Sciences in 2018. In her FWO-funded research on Dancing Precarity, she studied the working and living conditions of contemporary dance artists in Brussels and Berlin. She was production manager at contemporary dance school P.A.R.T.S. from 2011 until 2014. Since 2014, she has been connected with research groups S:PAM (Ghent University) and CeSO (KU Leuven). She has published in *Performance Research* and *Research in Dance Education* among others.

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