

The Future of Dance and/as Work: Performing Precarity

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Abstract: This article explores how and to what extent precarity is intertwined with a contemporary dance artist's labor, life and art in the neoliberal society. Within this investigation my arguments are supported by insights from an ongoing qualitative study, including in-depth interviews and observations of working processes within the Brussels contemporary dance scene, as well as performance analyses. I hypothesize that the contemporary dance profession is a precarious one, which is reflected in the work and lives of the artists, as well as in the aesthetics and subject matter of their artistic work. In a 'performance of precarity' artists perform their own working and living conditions as their way of broaching the pressing situation, demonstrating their survival skills and exploring several ways to ensure a more sustainable creative future in dance. This article discusses three such performances: *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck, *RECESS: Dance of Light* (2016) by Michael Helland, and *Only Mine Alone* (2016) by Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević. Most significantly, these performances have in common that each addresses consequences of the neoliberal work regime and explores what can be done to shape a more sustainable future at large, and for dance in particular.

Keywords: contemporary dance, precarity, sustainability, future, work

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Biographical note: Annelies Van Assche received her Master's Degree in Performance Studies at the Ghent University (Belgium) in 2010. She has been studying the facts and figures of working in the contemporary dance sector since her placement at German choreographic center K3 | Tanzplan Hamburg in 2011. She has then worked as a production and tour manager at P.A.R.T.S., Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's school for contemporary dance in Brussels. In the summer of 2014 she left P.A.R.T.S. together with the graduates to start her research on contemporary dance artists' socio-economical position and its influence on creative processes at Ghent University in collaboration with KULeuven.

Introduction: Work without Boundaries

The work of dance consists of work without boundaries, which has a double dimension. First, the contemporary dance profession is by definition a mobile one and is increasingly becoming more transnational. Second, due to the project-oriented and immaterial nature of the profession, it is becoming more obscure to delineate where the work time ends and private life begins. This article explores how and to what extent precarity is interwoven with a contemporary dance artist's labor, life and art in the neoliberal society. Following Richard Sennett (1998) and Sergio Bologna (2006), Allvin et al. (2011) claim that the working lives of post-Fordist workers (among them contemporary dance artists) have the potential for the destruction of work as we know it. They define the new working life as a giant switchboard of 'work' and 'life', which either connects or disconnects people. They observe that people's control in their work increases, while their control over the conditions of work decreases (2011: 4-5). It is now up to the individual to establish the distinction and maintain personal limits. However, it should be noted that the new working life is not so much 'new' because of technology, but now simply exists in a greater extent and is hegemonic. In studying the working life of contemporary dance artists, I argue that we can learn a great amount about the future of dance and its practitioners.

I hypothesize that the contemporary dance profession is a precarious one, which is reflected in the work and lives of the artists, as well as in the aesthetics and subject matter of their artistic work. 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' (Berlant 2011: 192). For example, in May 2011 a symposium was held in Hamburg (Germany) under the title of 'Surviving Dance'. The event engaged artists, audiences, and institutions and was meant as a platform to discuss the working conditions in dance in the context of the completion of the funding program for dance Tanzplan Deutschland. In the program booklet, a citation was taken from a conversation between three dancers about their future perspectives. In expressing concern leading up to the event, one of the dancers said to the other: 'Hopefully I'll die before I retire.' This is a shocking phrase, to say the least, but a grim reality for most project workers. Furthermore, precarity has become an emerging aesthetic as it increasingly affects the artistic work. In a 'performance of precarity', for example, artists perform their own working and living conditions as their way of broaching the pressing situation, demonstrating their survival skills and exploring several ways to ensure a sustainable creative practice. Through advocating fair practices in the arts in public events and through performing precarity, artists are resisting mere resilience; they are doing more than 'surviving dance' in attempt to turn precarity into productivity, thus paving the way to a sustainable future, or 'deprecarization'. As theatre scholar Katharina Pewny has demonstrated, a few predominantly white and male directors or choreographers (a.o. Jochen Roller, René Pollesch) have been able to make a success story through performing their own precarity in the first decade of this century (Pewny 2011a). In recent contemporary dance performances, precarity has increasingly become the theme of artists' creations. Following Katharina Pewny, I argue that these dance artists develop tactics 'of the weak' within their genetic practice to deal with this precarity and, most importantly, to construct a more sustainable future. Michel de Certeau defines a tactic as a 'calculated action, a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision" that takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them'

(1984: 38). ‘Tactic’, as opposed to ‘strategy’, is the art of the weak and pins its hopes on a clever utilization of opportunities (Certeau 1984). Accordingly, performing precarity has become a tactic artists use to develop more sustainable future perspectives. In making the invisible work of dance visible on stage, these artists highlight the lack of recognition of dance as work. Addressing this issue helps to construct a more sustainable future in dance in a double sense: first, the issue receives increasing public attention and it thus becomes harder for political economists to ignore. Secondly, because many of the audience members can relate to the addressed issues, these performances turn out to be quite successful, which fosters a more stable trajectory for the artists. This article discusses three such contemporary dance performances of precarity: first *Meyoucycle* (2016) by Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck, second *RECESS: Dance of Light* (2016) by Michael Helland and third *Only Mine Alone* (2016) by Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević. These cases illustrate how work and life have become inseparable and how this becomes a theme on stage. Most significantly, these performances have in common that each of them addresses the consequences of the neoliberal work regime and explores what can be done to shape a more sustainable future in life at large and in contemporary dance in particular. Hence, this approach shifts the focus from studying dance works to the study of the work of dance.

Deprecarization: Resisting Resilience

Political theorist Isabell Lorey defines precarization today as a process of normalization of socio-economic insecurity (Lorey 2015:39). In general, flexible work formats and, concurrently, insecure incomes have been considered the undesirable exceptions to the rule of full-time employment and permanent contracts, yet what was once the exception increasingly becomes the norm. However, particularly within the creative professions, precarization as coercion is seconded by precarization as choice, or what Lorey circumscribed as ‘self-precarization’. Particularly in the creative professions, workers seem to be willing to sacrifice material benefits for the sake of immaterial ones such as artistic pleasure, temporal autonomy, a free work environment and opportunities for self-realization as long as they have enough to survive (Van Assche and Laermans 2016). However, following scholars such as Richard Sennett (2012: chapter 5), one might say that due to its normalization in the present-day reality, many human beings suffer the trauma of precarity. A popular notion associated with the reaction to trauma is that of ‘resilience’ (Neocleous 2013, Bracke 2016). Resilience can be defined as ‘the ability to adapt to changing conditions and prepare for, withstand, and rapidly recover from disruption’ (Risk Steering Committee 2010 in Bracke 2016:1) and relies on ‘the ability of a substance or object to bounce back and spring into prior shape’ (Bracke 2016:3). Sociologist Sarah Bracke even claims that ‘in precarious times, resilience is the new security’ (2016: 6). However, resilience does not align with security as much as with survival. Political economist Mark Neocleous puts resilience in the context of the neoliberal regime when arguing the following:

‘Good subjects will “survive and thrive in any situation”, they will “achieve balance” across the several insecure and part-time jobs they have, “overcome life’s hurdles” such as facing retirement without a pension to speak of, and just “bounce back” from whatever life throws, whether it be cuts to benefits, wage freezes or global economic meltdown.

Neoliberal citizenship is nothing if not a training in resilience as the new technology of the self (...).' (Neocleous 2013:5)

According to Neocleous, resilience has come to form the basis of '*subjectively* [his emphasis] dealing with the uncertainty and instability of contemporary capitalism' (2013:5). Nevertheless, he states the obvious when he writes that we need to do more than merely survive. Neocleous suggests that resilience has come to colonize resistance as 'it effectively undermines the capacity to resist, and therefore should itself be resisted and rejected' (Bracke 2016:19). My fieldwork in the Brussels contemporary dance scene confirms that these artists prove to be resilient subjects, because they have to be skillful in flexibility, persistence and adaptability. Additionally, due to their work-related territorial mobility, they have the capacity of losing their place and sense of belonging and building it up all over again (compare Bracke 2016:12). Above that, my case study informants demonstrate preparedness as well as an apprehension of the future, but a future projected both as disaster and recovery from disaster (compare Neocleous 2013: 4).

Within the contemporary dance profession the notion of resilience may go hand in hand with artists' self-precarization. Furthermore, both resilience and self-precarization possibly coincide with the notion of 'slow death' introduced by Lauren Berlant (2007:754), which is a feeling that concurs with precarization and the resulting diminution of future perspectives. Resilience can be associated with the 'on-going work of living' (Puar 2012:163) that populations increasingly have to deal with. I argue that through performing one's precarity artists are in a way resisting resilience and following Neocleous' advice; they are doing more than merely surviving in attempt to turn their precarity into productivity on the road to deprecarization. Deprecarization is a term borrowed from German sociologist Klaus Dörre, who outlined several counter-strategies against precarity in his text 'Entsicherte Arbeitsgesellschaft. Politik der Entprekarisierung' (2005). Drawing from Dörre, Katharina Pewny, employed the notion of 'Entprekarisierung' ('deprecarization') in the analysis of Jochen Roller's trilogy *Perform Performing* (2002-2004) and the positive influence his trilogy exercised on his future trajectory (2011a: 222). In her book, she sketches several genealogies of (de)precarization through the analysis of 'performances of the precarious' [her words] in European theater and by highlighting some discursive phenomena around the notion of precariousness between 2000 and 2010. She has demonstrated that several predominantly white and male directors have been able to create a successful career path for themselves through performing their own precarity. Additionally, Pewny points out that their performances were able to 'stabilize the unstable ground of precariousness, at least temporarily' (Pewny 2011b:43). However, I would argue that deprecarization does not necessarily imply acquiring a stable position at an institution, which has been often the case for these white and male directors, but rather demands a flexicurity¹ approach. As long as existential insecurity can be kept to a certain degree through establishing a flexicurity system, precarity could be positively deployed for productivity. Flexicurity would then pave an alternative way for a sustainable future. In this context, dance artist Michael Helland expresses his concern in conclusion:

'It's important to have some resiliency to this state of not-knowing. To kind of justify the sense of uncertainty that is so normal working as a freelance dancer. There's

¹ Flexicurity offers a different take on socio-economic security since it connects a high level of security with a high flexibility rate by looking past the limitations of one job (also: protean careers).

something precarious about it and if I can find a way to think about it that's also productive... (...) To find continuity between all the work that I'm doing – I wouldn't even just call it working, I would call it living at a certain point.' (Helland and Parkinson 2014:23)

Performances of Precarity (Bauer, Helland, Koruga)

It goes without saying that when labor, life and art are so intertwined, we ought to study the working and living conditions of performing artists in order to comprehend the art they are making. In line with Lauren Berlant's analysis of 'cinema of precarity' (Berlant 2011: 201), I argue that artists create 'performances of precarity' through drawing from their working and living conditions and making them visible on stage. This concept is inspired by the work of aforementioned Katharina Pewny and her analysis of 'performances of the precarious' in European theater. Additionally, Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager (2015) recently edited a new publication on performances of capitalism, crises or resistance, which could possibly include performances of precarity, in which artists perform their own working and living conditions as their way of broaching the pressing situation, demonstrating their survival skills and exploring several ways to ensure a sustainable creative practice. In this context, the editors state the following in The Drama Review-issue on performance and precarity:

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

What is described here is the alienating effect of making the profession's precarious working conditions visible on stage as a tactic or a form of resisting mere resilience. It is my aim to explore this tactic through discussing three performances of precarity; (1) *Meyoucycle*, (2) *RECESS: Dance of Light* and (3) *Only Mine Alone*.

Meyoucycle (Eleanor Bauer and Chris Peck, 2016)

Eleanor Bauer announces her latest piece as follows:

'Pronounced with a strange accent in English, the title Meyoucycle sounds like 'musical', which is to say that Meyoucycle creates something foreign to what can be identified as a musical, but with familiar ingredients.' (Bauer 2016a:14)

Like any musical production, the piece combines music, dance and text. The wordplay in the title acknowledges that any performance happens somewhere between the me's on stage and the you's in the audience. As Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued in her book 'The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics' (2008), performances symbolize the state of in-betweenness that bring about performances, because they take place through the bodily co-presence of those who perform and those who look on. That is to say that whatever the performers do affects the participating spectators and vice versa. In this respect, in the French monologue towards the end of *Meyoucycle*, the French performer Gaël Santisteva affirms that the only thing that digital technology cannot replace is the presence of an audience and their gaze. Additionally, the wordplay of *Meyoucycle* recognizes that what is being said on stage is

understood by the audience, because in a way they can relate to these issues. Just like Eleanor Bauer clarified in her first solo *ELEANOR!* (2005) that she realized very quickly that people recognized themselves in what she was saying. Thus, she pointed out that she had stopped referring to herself as the artist, but started putting the audience in the artist's position by addressing them as the artists. In this case 'deploying precarity to critique precarity' does not rely on an alienation effect as suggested by the editors of *The Drama Review*, but quite the opposite; by being explicit about her precarity in her first solo, Bauer seemed to have gained a lot from it precisely because the audiences could relate. Her solo has been in ongoing development for ten years and Eleanor Bauer is today a very successful performing artist.

The story that *Meyoucycle* tells is a dark one in the near future, in which a quartet of poetic terrorists and emotional hackers dwell in a dark web (Bauer 2016a). In order for them to maintain freedom of expression they dispose of their identities, drop into anonymity and continuously transform themselves by the recurrent use of wigs, masks and costume changes. *Meyoucycle* is the eagerly awaited result of collaboration between performing artist Eleanor Bauer and musician Chris Peck². In the context of performing precarity, this performance proves to be a fascinating case study in form and content. In form, *Meyoucycle* is an eclectic combination of different performance and music genres, demonstrating the wide range of skills and competences these performers possess, which is only to be expected in contemporary capitalism. The performers constantly shift physical appearance and different forms of speech and in doing so refuse to participate in the industry of self-expression by remaining anonymous. They are clearly multitaskers in a universe in which you need to prove you can adapt yourself quickly, teach yourself new skills and be a chameleon with multiple personalities and competences. The multilingualism subtly integrated in the performance attests that these performers are highly skilled and well-educated intellectuals and citizens of the world: a song titled 'Several Days Later' smoothly develops further in Icelandic. Humorously, this Icelandic text is not translated on the projection screen running the subtitles, however, it remains projected in Icelandic, which is of no use for (the majority of) the audience. The three non-Icelandic performers have learned how to sing these lyrics in a language that is very foreign to them. In form, the piece thus hints to contemporary capitalism and the subjectivities that it generates.

In content, the story becomes much more obviously related to the context of performing precarity. First, the opening monologue performed by Tarek Halaby paints a pretty straightforward picture of the post-Fordist lack of control over time, which according to economist Guy Standing is one of the ten features of the contemporary precariat. His concept of tertiary time comprises all work done outside of paid labor time, which causes the division between work and leisure time to fade away (Standing 2014: 22). The latter indicates that the neoliberal work regime is dominated by work without mental or physical boundaries. Hence, the people of the precariat suffer a permanent stand-by feeling or a 'precaritized mind', which he defines as a feeling of having far too much to do at all times and the sense that taking a time-out would entail the risk of missing opportunities (2014: 22-23). As the audience enters the space, Halaby is standing off-stage in front of the first row in the dark. The blue light from his iPhone is

² *Meyoucycle* is performed by Eleanor Bauer, Inga Huld Hákonardóttir, Tarek Halaby, Gaël Santisteva together with the Ictus Ensemble.

the only light source illuminating his face. He recounts:

‘You know, I wish I would read more books. But I don’t read enough because I’m always at the theater, seeing shows. I feel like I should see more performances, like, it’s my professional obligation, but honestly, I prefer films. But I don’t have enough time for all the films I want to see because they’re so long, you know, like two hours for a film is a big time commitment, and I need to be spending more time on my own work, like, making my own pieces. But I don’t have enough time for my art, because I’m always at the gym – sculpting the piece of art that is my body – but I don’t even work out enough at the gym because every time I get in that depressing hole of a room I ask myself, “why on earth am I not outside?”’ (Bauer 2016b:1)

It does not come as a surprise that this monologue is titled ‘So Much To Do’. Not only do these words bluntly depict a precariatized mind, but also many people could probably recognize themselves in them.

Another noteworthy element from *Meyoucycle* is the recurrent reference to social media and the emotions induced by technological capitalism. In her text ‘Becoming Room, Becoming Mac’ (2007), Bauer points out that an artist’s autonomy and productivity require having ‘a Mac of one’s own’, instead of ‘A Room of One’s Own’ as Virginia Woolf would have it (Bauer 2007:1). In post-Fordist times, not so much a place for solitude, but rather a port of connection becomes essential to work: people are continually producing and selling themselves facilitated by digital technologies. However, what kind of identity is created through this virtual presence? It is this kind of identity market imposed by capitalism that the performers are trying to avoid by remaining anonymous chameleons. But are we losing time scrolling on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, or while we do this, are we occupied with knowledge production? Are these platforms not incessantly feeding our inspiration? In this regime, it seems as though we are permanently performing immaterial labor through the ‘collaborative sharing of language and thought’ (Kunst 2015: 79). In this context, *Meyoucycle* deals with the impossibility of separating life from work in contemporary capitalism, or is perhaps already beyond that discussion since the piece suggests that capitalism is trying to sell ‘life’ back to people in a market that runs on self-expression and creating identities.

Interestingly, *Meyoucycle* is pertinent to Eleanor Bauer’s own living and working conditions: her life and work are so entangled in each other that her art becomes infected. When consulting her activity log³ from the period leading up to the premiere, I observed that she did not even seem to sleep anymore. She commented that her priority was to do the piece:

‘I worked three years on this thing. This was really like a possession. This was very romantic in terms of being possessed by things. It was not reasonable. It was not scheduled like that. It was not a plan to do it like that. It was one of those rare times. It’s been a while, but I used to feel like that when I was twenty all the time. You know, in college between 18 and 25: this feeling of being driven by an idea that keeps you up at night and nothing, nothing, is more important than figuring it out or its realization. It’s an obsessive feeling of making a thing. This creativity, obsessive compulsion.’ (Bauer 2016c)

³ Eleanor Bauer is a key informant within my fieldwork in the Brussels contemporary dance scene. In this context, I had asked her to keep a log of her activities, coincidentally in the period leading up to the premiere.

It took her three years because she didn't have the support to work on it sufficiently with her collaborators, so she kept shortening and spacing out rehearsal periods while she tried to gather the resources to make the piece. This resulted in very sleepless rehearsal periods and a lot of additional work in-between. Moreover, even her love life became entangled in her work: a new love interest had won her heart because he helped her with editing a monologue for the piece and eventually ended up running the subtitles in the performance because her manager got a burnout right after the première. It was 'full-on personal-professional confusion', which was so familiar to her (Bauer 2016c). In conclusion, these are all consequences of contemporary capitalism and symptoms of the neoliberal work regime and *Meyoucycle* concludes that as much as we can try, there is no escape from them. The adaptive and transformative tools people invent in order to evade capture by contemporary capitalism are precisely those that capitalism sells to us. Finally, that is what remains projected on a karaoke screen closing the performance before the blackout: 'in the end, (...) there is no escape'. The near future of these poetic terrorists eventually does not look very different from our lives today.

RECESS: Dance of Light (Michael Helland, 2016)

The publicity tagline for dance artist Michael Helland's most recent solo *RECESS: Dance of Light* announces that 'it's time for recess: recharge your batteries and combat the symptoms of neoliberal fatigue' (Abrons Arts Center). In a ceremonial hour Helland proposes a theatrical spa experience and offers his audience an hour with him to slow down in response to the accelerated time regime in post-Fordism. The hour begins with a short monologue introducing RECESS as the Ritual Experience Concept Event Spa Show. The audience is engaged with a 25-minute dance of light meditation, closed by a ritual-like communal experience set in an artificial sunlight. Helland's dance of light is centered upon a minimalist serpentine dance inspired by Loie Fuller, in which by making use of a simple white fabric, Helland creates live sculpture images that are reminiscent of icons in history in general and dance history in particular. In doing so, mind and body meet in mutual concentration. In order to not get twisted and choked up in the sheet, the sculptural movements executed by Helland are performed in a very slow and concentrated manner. He refers to it as a task-based performance that requires a lot of awareness. This way the dance of light becomes a meditation for him and he offers it as such to his audience, accompanied by dreamy spa music in the background. His movement material and the solo's aesthetics are reduced to minimalism, or in his words: 'nothing fast, nothing loud' (personal interview 16.06.2016) and all for the sake of slowing down. However, unavoidably there is also a deadline on slowing down. He makes his audience poignantly aware of this when stating: 'I think we should stop and do something else before we run out of time'.

In an indirect manner, *RECESS: Dance of Light* addresses the lack of control over time and the accompanying feeling of precariatized mind (Standing 2014). People experience a common fear of missing out in an accelerated regime of permanent performance (Lesage 2012). In this context, Bojana Kunst remarks that this puts us into a state of constant mobility, flexibility and precariousness (Kunst 2015: 79). In response, *RECESS: Dance of Light* inquires into the extent of time left for self-reflection or self-realization, both of which are significant motives that commonly drive performing artists (e.g. Kunst 2015, Laermans 2015). In that respect, the deceleration created by the ceremonial hour allows gaining back control over time and

accordingly produces the necessary time to slow down, digest and reflect. Furthermore, this project is unusual for Helland, since he generally does not tend to make his own work. He perceives this project literally as a recess from his crazy life performing with and for other people (personal interview 27.07.2016).

There are two other noteworthy dimensions that make *RECESS: Dance of Light* into a performance of precarity. First, during the ceremonial hour Helland demonstrates his multi-skilled knowhow, which is a requirement set by post-Fordist regime. In his monologue, he already mentions that he considers himself to be a champion multitasker. He has expressed repeatedly that he is a bit of an amateur in everything:

‘Working as a professional dance artist I’ve always preferred to think of myself as an amateur. I try to be a little bit good at everything, at many kinds of movement, but I am not really an expert in any one thing except for being myself. Fortunately, I’m able to find work that, I believe, is more about this complete package, harnessing my full person, or that requires me to check multiple boxes in terms of modes of expression and capacity for embodiment. I love to maintain the impossible fantasy of being a chameleon.’ (personal interview 25.04.2016)

Correspondingly, Helland gives his audience a demonstration of his range of competences and skills in the dance vocabulary drawing from (dance) history for the live sculptures, teaching himself Gurdjieff movements and artisanally making his ribbon sticks for ribbon dancing.

Second, *RECESS: Dance of Light* in aesthetics is an exemplary tactic for dealing with precarity to develop a more sustainable practice: it concerns an hour-long solo with few requirements and is therefore easily marketable. The solo can be performed anywhere, preferably not even in a theater space: there is a minimal set, light and sound cues are simple, and eventually only one person requires a salary. Additionally, a high quality video can be found online, so people know what they are going to get. Eventually, Helland envisions *RECESS* as a long-form installation, but he notes that in the meantime, ‘you really have to have something that you can just pull out of your hat and there's nothing like that besides an hour-long site-responsive solo’⁴ (personal interview 16.06.2016). Conclusively, perhaps rather than performing precarity, *RECESS: Dance of Light* proposes a restorative time away from neoliberal reality in response to our precariatized minds, but at the same time proves to be a tactic for sustainability and deprecariatization. Helland’s message is loud and clear: only if we allow ourselves the time to slow down, we are able to create a more sustainable future.

Only Mine Alone (Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević, 2016)

Another response to the accelerated time regime of neoliberalism comes from Igor Koruga and Ana Dubljević. However, rather than offering a positive and restorative experience of slowing down, their performance of *Only Mine Alone* (2016) interprets the invisibility of negative emotions in the neoliberal public sphere.

⁴ Helland commented additionally that this also relates to resilience, as a nuanced approach to sustainability, wherein his project can expand and contract to the given production circumstances or opportunities, rather than being truly sustained in a replicable form (personal communication 21.10.2016)

Koruga's work interests are closely connected to the issues presented in this article. His past academic experience in anthropology sparked his interest in social phenomena and how neoliberal society relates to these issues in a particular way (Natalio 2016). His work discusses the social status of artists in the field of contemporary dance and conditions of temporality as the basis for work and life. Igor's earlier work and collaborations demonstrate that his research focuses primarily on the working and living conditions of neoliberal citizen, especially artists. In a former creation Koruga addresses the issue of the continuous self-promotion an artist is unavoidably confronted with. In *Streamlined* (2014) Koruga finds himself running on a treadmill for 60 minutes speaking in public and literally selling his entire self. Moreover, the collaborative project *Temporaries*⁵ (2012) questioned the conditions for art and knowledge production in discussing notions such as temporality, flexibility and self-realization with the audience. This performance event was staged as a picnic during which the audience members are offered to play a game of charades, guessing terms related to the working conditions in the performing arts. Once the first group has guessed the right notion, the second half gets an overview of descriptions of short performance actions. They have to decide unanimously which performance action fits best to the guessed term. If they come to a common ground, the action will be performed. These performance actions show references to the neoliberal art market. For example, similar to *RECESS: Dance of Light*, one performance action offers a meditation as a moment for slowing down. In another performance action, the performers execute unstable movements as though they are falling continually and trying to keep each other up. This movement material is performed on the sounds of the roadrunner being chased by Wile E. Coyote. This short action interprets a feeling that possibly corresponds to the notion of 'slow death' mentioned above (Berlant 2007:754): like the coyote, neoliberal subjects are constantly on the move, but they experience a sensation of not really getting anywhere, because they have myriad things to do at the same time. The idiom 'slow death' can refer to the wearing out of a population, typically physically, comparable to the common burnout. This action demonstrates how the performers are trying to keep each other from falling, which is a beautiful portrayal of the collective care that is so necessary in our society. Furthermore, it should be noted that the performance event then shifts to an audience discussion when Koruga announces the following: 'Actually, what I really want to talk about are the working conditions of our jobs and the ways how they shape our lives, and also the possible ways of reshaping those conditions.' Interestingly, Koruga speaks about *our* jobs and *our* lives as though he takes for granted that the audience members could relate to these issues. Koruga takes his life as an example stating that his work basically consists of being at home sitting in front of his computer, specifying that the issue of 'home' already confuses him since this usually refers to a friend's sofa or a temporary sublet. At his computer, he continues, he is mostly reading and writing applications for funding. This is a challenge, because the work consists mainly of trying to adapt his ideas to the ideas of art committees. Additionally, while he does this, he also tries to hang out in social networks, on art festivals, in venues, and with producers. Furthermore, he explains that he travels a lot, which is the principal reason for always being single or in a long distance relationship and why it scares him to think about having children. Interestingly, these are all issues that reappear two years later

⁵ It should be noted that 'temporaries' is a neologism for 'temporary employees'; a working condition artists commonly find themselves in. This performance event was created in collaboration with five other Belgrade-based dance artists, i.e. Ana Dubljević, Dušan Bročić, Jovana Rakić Kiselčić, Marko Milić and Ljiljana Tasić.

in his solo *Streamlined*, which as such indicates that not much has changed in those years. In *Temporaries*, before he asks the audience to share their experiences, he notes that ‘it comes down to this everlasting accelerating loop of chasing a promising future that might never come’, which again reminds of the Wile E. Coyote chasing the roadrunner, who everyone knows he will never catch. Thereafter, in *Streamlined*, this metaphorical accelerating loop materializes in the form of the continuously accelerating treadmill Koruga is performing his solo on: instead of having future perspectives artists suffer present perpetuation.

This introduction to Koruga’s earlier work was necessary to demonstrate that his performance practice can be a fruitful field to discuss the topic of performing precarity, which seems to come hand in hand with the neoliberal work regime. His most recent collaboration with Ana Dubljević, *Only Mine Alone*, examines the relationship between the supposed negative emotions and neoliberalism – principally those emotions that our society marks as undesirable, such as depression and burnout – and how these impede an efficient system of production. Most importantly, the motivation for this project came from a personal experience, during which Koruga himself suffered a major burnout caused by ‘a very intense and nomadic life [he] had to live due to [his] professional status of “young emerging artist”’ (Natalio 2016). He explained in an interview that, at the time, he was traveling constantly to engage in different artistic projects in order to survive as an artist, to a point where he had to accept that he could not function anymore. It should be noted here that, ironically, this interview was held over Skype while he was stuck in traffic in a bus back home after work. Furthermore, *Only Mine Alone* finds its theoretical ground in the works of scholar Ann Cvetkovich, particularly in her publication ‘Depression: A Public Feeling’ (2012). In this book, Cvetkovich argues that feeling bad constitutes the lived experience of neoliberal capitalism. Depression is not approached only as a medical condition, but as a sociocultural and economic symptom caused by the neoliberal demand of an efficient and productive approach to life. The condition is too often perceived as an individual issue; however, it is essential that the government acknowledges its responsibility. If precarization today is a process of normalization of socio-economic insecurity imposed by the neoliberal government (Lorey 2015: 39), then depression is a consequence that this government generally does not take responsibility for. In a flexible work regime marked by precarization, people are bound to get confronted with negative emotions. Cvetkovich argues that depressions and burnouts are public feelings and that recognition of these feelings at the collective level is a potential starting point for the creation of new forms of unity, solidarity and socio-political operation:

‘If we can come to know each other through our depression, then perhaps we can use it to make forms of sociability that not only move us forward past our moments of impasse but understand impasse itself to be a state that has productive potential.’ (Cvetkovich 2012:23)

In *Only Mine Alone* Koruga and Dubljević affirm that these feelings are not only theirs alone as they call for collective care. They express a strong need for humanity to take care of each other, because only then can neoliberal processes be productive. Where Isabell Lorey states that productivity emerges from new forms and new social relationships that are continuously being developed and reinvented during these neoliberal processes (2010:5), Koruga and Dubljević, following Cvetkovich, argue that this is only possible when depression receives recognition as a

public feeling and when humanity takes its responsibility for the lives of others (see also: Butler 2004).

In his dance practice, Koruga applies choreography as a tool to enhance a critical analytical perspective of social phenomena. Through the use of ‘language choreography’ in *Only Mine Alone*, Koruga and Dubljević apply choreography to other levels of reality than merely to the body. Starting from theory, he analyzed the subject matter through creative writing to which he then added a layer of the body (Natalio 2016). In the performance, Koruga and Dubljević find themselves in an orange box slightly hitting their heads to the sides of the box. Their bodies are fighting to express the idea that negative emotions are a consequence of neoliberalism and thus part of a cultural and social structure. They position themselves on hands and knees trying to escape out of the box. They keep hitting the sides of the box on repeat failing to escape. When also the light starts failing, language accompanies the movement material. Both performers ask questions without giving each other answers. Perhaps the questions are not addressed to one another, but to the audience? The language choreography starts with a simple ‘How are you?’. Instead of a common response with a feeling, this question is followed by a number of leading questions asking why people feel a certain way: ‘Is it because you don’t work? Is it because you have a lot of work? Is it because you are always tired? Is it because you have no money? Is it because you don’t have the time?’ When the possible reasons are exhausted, the performers offer a series of words or short sentences related to the negative consequences of neoliberalism in alphabetical order. The audience can distinguish ‘anxiety’, ‘failed plans’, ‘procrastination’, ‘stress’, ‘reflexive impotence’, ‘I miss my house’, ‘precariat’, and ‘who am I?’ among other phrases. Finally, they manage to get out of the box. The words and short sentences continue now on post-its that are spread out over the dance floor and distributed to the audience. The latter is an act of sharing these emotions and a step toward recognition of these negative feelings imposed by the neoliberal regime we all live and work in.

Not only is *Only Mine Alone* a sublime example of performing precarity, but Igor Koruga’s entire repertoire⁶ proves to exist of performances of precarity that deal with the issues that determine his labor, his art and his life. All the more, these performances demonstrate how labor, life and art are perpetually intertwined and critique precarity by deploying it. With his most recent performance, Koruga bespeaks perhaps the most important tactic for sustainability in the performing arts, which is collective care. He expresses his belief that we can pave the way for a sustainable future only when we feel more responsible for each other and if we could create a greater sense of community in what we constantly refer to as an artistic community. It is up to artists – and humanity in general - to sustain each other, because individually dealing with our precarity will not change the overall conditions.

Call for Collective Care

An anonymous artist from London posted an open letter on YouTube in March 2016 under the name of Precarious Resistance and titled ‘Dancing Precarity: An Open Letter, A Spam, A Resistance’. At one point, the video shows the footage of the freefalling Felix Baumgartner

⁶ It should be noted that Koruga’s pieces have been produced in collaboration with Station Service for Contemporary Dance in Belgrade.

going through the sound barrier, while the artist reads the following:

‘The unstable artist is already falling. They have been falling for a long time, so there is the impression that they are floating. They aren’t still. They don’t know how long they have to wait before being pushed forwards or falling into violent oblivion again. They have no ground. They are groundless. They know that this is actuality and reality.’ (Precarious Resistance 2016)

The anonymous artist concludes that ‘we need to start shifting towards an ecology of collective care’ (Precarious Resistance, 16.03.2016). Since the responsibility now lies on the shoulder of the worker, the power to say ‘no’ to unfair conditions is rooted in the collective. However, this is extremely challenging, because many artists are still willing to work despite of the precarious conditions due to the extent of self-precarization. In the infamous open letter from a dancer who refused to participate in Marina Abramovic’s MOCA performance, Sarah Wookey condemned the particular working conditions by stating that it obscured ‘a situation of injustice in which both artist and institution have proven irresponsible in their unwillingness to recognize that art is not immune to ethical standards’ (2011). Individually saying ‘no’ will not change the conditions. Judith Butler’s famous statement that ‘the body is and is not mine’ (2004:21) underlines the collective responsibility for the lives of one another and thus calls for collective care. Today, there is certainly urgency among the artists, or a readiness, to confront the problem of precarity in the profession; therefore artists tend to join forces to share knowledge and thought, or to share practices of collaboration and self-organization.

In conclusion, belonging to a dance community means that one is not alone in this struggle: artists are increasingly resisting precarity through self-organization and collective care. New artist-run initiatives are popping up everywhere in creative cities such as Brussels, New York and Berlin. Above that, numerous debates on fair practices in the arts centralize fair wages, for example by proposing solutions such as fair certificates for art venues. Advocating fair practices in the arts is trending, especially the recognition of material and immaterial labor related to it. Where Bauer and Peck cynically suggest that rather than having future perspectives, we are stuck in a cycle from which there is no escape, both Helland and Koruga offer a tactic for constructing a more sustainable future in this neoliberal work regime. On the hand, Helland points to the importance of slowing down, and on the other, Koruga stresses the need for collective care and community. Thus, contemporary dance artists are increasingly finding innovative ways, or tactics, to secure their future and the future of dance. More and more artists are resisting resilience and turning precarization into productivity. Most importantly perhaps, the study of the artistic working life provides deeper insight in the neoliberal political economy of today and prepares us for where society is heading. Conclusively, since this new working life is hegemonic, it is up to humanity in general to redefine work.

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