

# Modes of Production

— Performing Arts in Transition

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## TITLE

Represent Your Brand

How to Manage a Contemporary Dance Career in Europe

## ABSTRACT

A transdisciplinary study in Brussels and Berlin on the labor conditions of contemporary dance artists (2014 – 2018) proceeded from the hypothesis that the precarious conditions acutely affect both the life and artistic work of an artist. The empirical findings, both quantitative and qualitative, uncovered several mechanisms at play between macro- and meso-structures (public funding institutions and performing arts venues) and micro-agents (autonomously working contemporary dance artists) in the continental European dance sector. The study proposed that dance artists maneuver in a largely symbolic economy with a social production system. The vast majority of autonomously working dance artists in Europe remain dependent on a variety of institutions and gatekeepers. The success of contemporary dance involves among other things the accumulation of what Pierre Bourdieu termed social and symbolic capital (1986). Developing these forms of capital comes hand in hand with *identity work*, within which the notion of personal branding plays an important role. I propose that in the uncovered symbolic economy, there is not much space for true artistic risk taking. Autonomous artists are not so free to experiment with something that deviates excessively from the *promise or brand they represent* as this entails an increase in economic risk potentially losing support and audience. For my contribution, I will return to these findings but also probe a formerly Brussels-based dance artist who is currently based in Portugal about his experience of working in the European dance sector for 15 years. In the open interviews held in 2021 in the aftermath of the global pandemic, we tackle some general issues regarding the modes of production. In particular, we shall concentrate on the struggles he had to overcome as a young Latin American maker trying to create and sell his work in the European contemporary dance sector.

## BIOGRAPHY

Annelies Van Assche obtained a joint doctoral degree in Art Studies and Social Sciences in 2018 at Ghent University and KU Leuven. 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). Her research interests entail contemporary dance and performance in the European context, especially through the lens of the sociology of labor and cultural production.

She co-edited a special issue of *Dance Research Journal* on *Work (with)out Boundaries: Dance and Precarity* (2019) with Katharina Pewny, Simon Leenknecht and Rebekah Kowal, and her work has been published in high-ranked journals as *Performance Research*, *Research in Dance Education*, *Dance Research* and *The Drama Review*. She has a book publication entitled *Labor and Aesthetics in European Contemporary Dance. Dancing Precarity* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2020). She is on the editorial board of the academic journal *Documenta* (since 2018) and member of the board of directors of the Flemish cultural magazine *Rekto:Verso* (since 2020). She is a founding member of CoDa | Cultures of Dance - Research Network for Dance Studies, a scientific research community supported by Research Foundation Flanders (FWO).