The Brussels Dance Swarm on the Move: Precarious Bodies (not) at Home

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I. Discourses on Precariousness and Precarity

By highlighting some discursive phenomena on precariousness between 2000 and 2010, we will sketch out the theoretical framework that underlies the ongoing research project *Choreographies of Precariousness. A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin*.[1] Firstly, we will zoom in on terminologies of the precarious and its relations to the issue of precarity; secondly, we will discuss activist works and the Brussels dance community.

‚Precariousness' was conceived as a concept in (artistic) activism, philosophy, sociology and art theory since the turn of the millennium in Western and Central Europe.[2] The term ‚precarious', as it has been developed in activist and sociological discourses, includes several aspects.[3] It embraces human vulnerability arising from unsecured working conditions within current economic developments, as well as bodily vulnerability. In 2004, Judith Butler published an influential discourse on vulnerability as a human ontology of precariousness.[4] Precarity or ‚le précaire' in French – Butler borrowed this concept from an essay on ethics by Emmanuel Lévinas – denotes in Butler's reading (and ethics) the vulnerability and, consequently, the mortality of humans. It should be considered as different from the socio-economic aspects of life and work, but is at the same 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".[5]

Despite all their political, social and economic differences, the „multiple loci of Europe"[6] still provide comparatively wealthy and secure contexts of living for those who hold a European passport. However, the economic shift from Fordism to post-Fordism from the seventies onwards resulted in a still ongoing destabilization or precarization of living and working conditions. We thus start from the hypothesis that since the early nineties, precarity is a new norm that has moved from the peripheries of (European) societies to their centre.[7] Consequently, people living under precarious conditions have started to discuss their living and working situations in publications, through visual media, on the Internet, and at public gatherings from the late nineties onwards. They rapidly spread from France to other European countries such as Germany, Spain, and Italy. In 2003, the German-Swiss theorist and artist collective Kleines postfordistisches Drama released the video *Kamera läuft!* (*Camera Rolling!*, 2003)*,* in which the collective stages casting situations with performers who read texts on precarious work. Looking for an alternative to the union-led strike that took place in Madrid in 2003, a Spanish feminist network launched the video *Precarias a la Deriva* (2005) on the precarious lives of both migrant and Spanish women in 2004. Both videos create visual identities that make the working and living methods of their producers visible, and they perform a „narration of the self", which, as Richard Sennett claims, is a strategy for coping with the insecurities of the new capitalism.[8] Closely related 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 at public demonstrations, including the *Mayday!* protests on the first of May of each year, from 2001 onwards.[9]

These protests inspired Lauren Berlant, when she was travelling through Europe in 2001, for her ideas on precarity and precariousness, which she now terms „slow death". As Berlant has said herself: „precaritization […] [is] an ongoing process, so that we do not reduce the power of precarious to single acts or single events. Precaritization allows us to think about the slow death that happens to targeted or neglected populations over time and space".[10]

Starting from these observations, we conclude that despite the transnational similarities between the precarious working and living conditions in many European and other Western contexts, there are some differences to be noted: performances of precarity in German-speaking

countries, such as the video *Kamera läuft!*, mainly focus on the problems of time management, on the constant pressure to be creative and on the lack of institutional resources. The pressing issues featured in French, Italian and Spanish contexts are, among others, lack of money, acute poverty and the instable situation of migrants and other sans-papiers: they are examples of precarity and its effects on human beings, namely increasing precariousness, or, put differently: physical and psychic vulnerability. Understood in this way, we can interpret activist works on precariousness as dealing with certain social differences within Europe and the broad range of meanings of the concept of precariousness.[11] In Belgium, the arrival of the economic crisis and a shared interest in dance as work has also indorsed performances of precarity in the performing arts, in which dance, due to the fact that it is characterized by movement and thus by mobility, plays a pioneering role.

II. The Brussels Dance Community: A Port of Connection

In the introduction of the edition of *Dance Research Journal* on „Global/Mobile: Re-orienting Dance and Migration Studies", Paul Scolieri describes the dance world as a nomadic one, constituted by a mobile set of performers, choreographers, teachers and audiences in search of economic prosperity, political asylum, religious freedom, and/or artistic liberty. He suggests that choreography, which can be defined as the arrangement of bodily movement in time and space, might operate as the ultimate critical lens for comprehending experiences of migration.[12] In this regard, sociologist Delphine Hesters refers to the notion of „globalisation from below" when describing the Brussels dance community as fundamentally grounded in connected migrants or guest workers.[13] The mobility of the dance artists towards Brussels is driven by work opportunities and their stay in Brussels is often initially temporary with the sole purpose of work.[14] Interestingly, we note that these guest workers are usually welcomed in Belgium because of the added value they may offer, whereas their socio-economic position as artists often remains precarious.

The city of Brussels attracts many international dance artists as it offers prominent training possibilities (P.A.R.T.S., a.pass, etc.), hosts several established companies (Rosas, Ultima Vez, etc.) and has a vibrant dance scene in general that emerged from the Flemish Dance Wave in the 1980s. Furthermore, Belgium has established a social status for artists that facilitates social security for project-hopping artists through enabling the application of the employee status in a freelance work regime. Lastly, Flanders and Brussels provide research-based workspaces for dance artists without the obligation to produce, as well as infrastructures for collaboration, connecting individuals

with their colleagues, while still allowing them to work independently. The Belgian capital is therefore recurrently called the European Mecca of contemporary dance.[15] Brussels is what urban studies and cultural industries experts define as a creative city,[16] which stands for a city that functions as a magnetic field for creative workers, who, as if they were migratory birds can perch there and use it as a base for their further flights.[17] Berlin and New York, among others, analogously act as such a base.[18] A common question asked among contemporary dance artists therefore enquires into where their peers are based rather than where they live. In the introduction of her book *Dancing Communities,* Judith Hamera claims that „dancers make cities as friends, as partners, as corps and, in so doing, remake themselves, their audiences, and each other every day, day after day".[19]

The contemporary dance scene of Brussels is often portrayed as a mobile dance community or a network of interconnected milieus and exchange.[20] According to Sara Ahmed in her text „Home and Away", the notion of community usually suggests a certain fixity, but in this particular case of community-forming, the sense of fixity is provided „by sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home".[21] This fixity concerns a shared experience of what is not there, namely home, family and friends. Few members of the Brussels dance community were born and raised in the capital, which implies that the community is rather an imagined one, founded on transnational mobility. In line with Benedict Anderson's exposé on imagined communities, the contemporary dance scene of Brussels is imagined as a community, because the community exists in the minds of its members: although they will never know or meet all of their peers, each of them has an image of their communion in their minds.[22] At the time Anderson first wrote his exposé, he observed that print-capitalism had enabled growing numbers of people to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways.[23] The present-day digital era allows people to connect even more effortlessly and consequently constitutes virtual and mobile communities, such as the Brussels dance community. Accordingly, visual artist John Di Stefano calls attention to the twentieth-century perpetual loss of home that stems from an increasingly transnational, mobile and media-saturated world.[24] Brussels thus becomes an in-between or transit space.

In a survey conducted between April and August 2015 on the working conditions in the contemporary dance scene in Brussels, respondents were asked about the reasons or motivations for living in Brussels.[25] The answers are altogether similar, depicting work opportunities and a thriving artistic scene as main motives for moving to Brussels and staying in the city.

Belgium's capital is more than often portrayed as a strategic place to be due to its position as a cosmopolitan city. One respondent writes the following:

> For the dance field Brussels offers a lot as it is at least a cross point for many makers and performers in Europe and the world. Not necessarily performing, but at least passing by. The artistic diversity in Brussels for dance is exceptional. The geographical situation of Brussels is also interesting and the fact that it is (still) an affordable capital for our incomes.[26]

Another respondent similarly describes Brussels as a relatively hospitable environment for international artists, but instead of a home, the capital rather offers an attractive base for those constantly on the move:

> Also Brussels was very welcoming for me compared to Paris […] and was bloody cheap compared to another capital around. On top, it offered a very good geographical place, which is important as a dancer because we are always on the move: Brussels is quite central in western Europe and only 1 to 3 hours by train away from Paris, London, Amsterdam.[27]

In her text *Becoming Room, Becoming Mac*, Brussels-based dance artist Eleanor Bauer points out that an artist's autonomy and productivity now require having „a Mac of one's own", instead of „A Room of One's Own" as Virginia Woolf would have it. In post-Fordist times, not a room for solitude but rather a port of connection is essential. Artists are continually producing and selling themselves within transnational networks facilitated by digital technologies. Thus, we conclude that like any creative worker occupied with performing immaterial labour, artists need to remain plugged in anywhere at any time. Consequently, their physical presence in the Belgian capital becomes less vital and is increasingly replaced by a virtual presence. Yet, contemporary dance artists remain reliant on a personal network of contacts for creating job opportunities, which continues to demand a certain level of physical presence in the field. In this respect, art sociologist Pascal Gielen reports that in order to stay in the scene, a contemporary dance artist needs to be seen in the scene.[28]

Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel de Certeau distinguishes between spaces and places in his renowned *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Where a place indicates stability and is as a consequence something static, a space is composed of intersections of mobile elements and is actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it.[29] From this perspective, a network, which acts as a space rather than as a place, can perhaps grasp the essence of the Brussels dance community more effectively. Nonetheless, networks by definition do not have a centre (such as in Brussels) and a

‚community' therefore best describes what it concerns here. Conclusively, the Brussels dance community is a community acting as a constantly changing network of individual contemporary dance artists, who have Brussels as their virtual and/or physical base in common.

III. A Swarm of Pure Potential, Moving from the Margin

Dance historian Frédéric Pouillaude defines the scene (i.e. the „scène" in the original French) as „nothing else but a structure of contemporaneity and therefore a structure of temporality".[30] In the following discussion, we will demonstrate that the contemporary dance scene, in which the Brussels dance community is embedded, is indeed such a structure of temporality. In order to do so, we will elaborate on the concept of murmuring introduced by Pascal Gielen and the term multitude as defined by political and social theorists Paolo Virno,[31] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[32]

In the first paragraph of Pascal Gielen's *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, the author dissects the term ‚murmuring' and distinguishes the definition of the notion as it was established by Michel Foucault from Michel de Certeau's interpretation of it. For Foucault the murmuring is meaningless, pre- and post-linguistic and an opening-up of more possibilities and associations with the ‚bios' of life. For de Certeau, by contrast, it is rather a buzz of creativity belonging to a collective that is hard to define. According to Foucault, the notion implies pure potential, whereas de Certeau reads it as a swarm coming from the margin and constantly on the move. In our point of view, the contemporary dance artist is thus part of the murmuring at the intersection of Foucault's and de Certeau's definitions: a swarm of pure potential that is constantly on the move. Another important notion determines the title of Gielen's book, i.e. the multitude. We start from the following observations by leading theorists dealing with the notion of multitude in the post-Fordist regime, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the one hand and Paolo Virno on the other, all three of them inspired by Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Virno emphasizes the fact that the multitude is a by-product of the post-Fordist production process. The multitude is hybrid, fluid, in constant flux and de-territorialised.[33] An important characteristic of the multitude, according to Virno, is a permanent sense of not-feeling-at-home, since a virtual mobility enables the multitude to race around the world and be everywhere at once.[34] When he portrays a space in constant flux, we can make a connection with de Certeau's murmuring as a swarm constantly on the move and his notion of space that is composed of intersections of mobile elements and is actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. From these observations, we derive that actors in the artistic multitude

become physically as well as mentally mobile. Working hours are not flexible but fluid, which causes a severe hybridization of spheres: in this regime, the private and working sphere overlap.

In documenting the essence of the Brussels dance community Nasr Hafez, an Egyptian writer residing in Brussels, introduces the notion of the ‚Cosmoproletariat‘, with the transnational artist as its most representative member. The neologism is closely connected with the ‚artistic precariat‘, but highlights the mobility of the nomadic subjects that populate the Cosmoprolis, or the swarm on the move. The opening quote from Douglas Wheems's *Tales from Airportzitty* announces the topic of Hafez's essay in an outstanding manner: „we have entered the world of perpetual transition, the unbearable mobility of being on the move, beyond anchorage. Places are not loci of residence, but the portals of traversal".[35] Thus, we reason that Brussels is indeed a portal of traversal inhabited by a dance swarm on the move.

In the same vein, in a 2008 report for the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers entitled *Dancers Keep Moving: International Careers and Transition* (further referred to as the IOTPD report) dancers are indeed depicted as pioneers of the transnational labour market since their „double mobility (across borders and across careers) constitutes a case that may very well be taken as a model for mobility and employability of workers in general".[36] What differs today from the nomadic lifestyle of dance artists in the past is that the work is nowadays produced in various locations across the globe in periods of residency, whereas the mobile lives of dance artists in the past were a consequence of touring finished productions. Since travelling has become much faster and more efficient than before, dance artists do not have to rely solely on resources from their base country, but find infrastructure and co-production budgets across the borders. Additionally, it should be noted that not only is the living body of the dancer indispensable for conducting the work, also the language of dance crosses linguistic and national borders.

IV. „Being Propelled": Liz Kinoshita´s *VOLCANO*

The Brussels dance community as swarm on the move is characterized by a double dimension of mobility other than the one indicated by the IOTDP report: the dance artist's body is continuously moving (i.e. dancing) and constantly on the move (i.e. travelling).

Living a nomadic lifestyle from 2012 until 2013, Canadian-born dance artist Liz Kinoshita realized that all she wanted was a home to call her own.[37] She commented that it is not too difficult to call Brussels your home because as a dancer „in Brussels you know you are not alone in the not-belonging"

(personal interview).[38] Kinoshita's words are in line with John Di Stefano's postulation that ‚being at home' today rather refers to „how people get along with each other, how they understand and are understood by others, which establishes a sense of belonging".[39] For contemporary dance artists based in Brussels, ‚being at home' and ‚being on the move' may be interchangeable. The constant travelling has become part of a dance artist's everyday existence. This, among other facets, is an issue that forms the basis of Kinoshita's latest production *VOLCANO* (2014).

   Kinoshita moved to Europe from Canada in 2002 and attended P.A.R.T.S., the contemporary dance school of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in Brussels, between 2004 and 2008. After numerous collaborations and projects, including her work with celebrated contemporary artist Tino Sehgal, Kinoshita created the dance production *VOLCANO* together with Clinton Stringer, Salka Ardal Rosengren and Justin F. Kennedy. The multiple outbursts of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull in April 2010 brought the air traffic over Europe to a standstill. This mandatory mobility pause, enforced by a natural disaster, forms the basis for the dance production – hence the title. *VOLCANO* is entirely constructed out of songs and dance in a style close to musical or cabaret from the thirties and fifties, with movement material unmistakeably inspired by tap dance. The narrative part of the performance solely consists of self-composed songs, possibly suggesting social criticism in the manner in which Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill projected social criticism through songs. The theme to the songs is borderless mobility; the lyrics render a constant travelling and a sense of urgency, which is part of the work as a dance artist. Residencies, projects or teaching opportunities send dancers abroad. The resulting mobility and flexibility are two principal aspects of the post-Fordist regime, in which insecure working formats have become the norm.[40] In this context, Isabell Lorey defines precarization today as a process of normalization of socio-economic insecurity.[41] For a long time, flexible work formats, and concurrently, an insecure income, were considered the unwanted exceptions to the rule of full-time employment and permanent contracts; yet within the prevailing neoliberal context, what was once the exception is increasingly becoming standard. Nevertheless, Lorey claims that these processes can be productive, because new forms of life and new social relationships are continuously being developed and reinvented:

> Precarization is more than insecure jobs, more than the lack of security given by waged employment. By way of insecurity and danger it embraces the whole of existence, the body, modes of subjectivation. It is a threat and coercion, even while it

opens up new possibilities of living and working.[42]

The above-mentioned elements of this post-Fordist regime are not only projected through the self-composed songs in the performance. Also the aesthetics of the dance production represent the topic, partly through well-defined movement images and partly through an abstract dance vocabulary. Many movement sequences provide an explicit demonstration of mobility and the accelerated time regime in post-Fordism. For example, the dancers repeatedly run with circular arm movements in the first half of the performance while „I am being propelled" echoes in one of the choruses – the dancer's body becoming a propeller. Moreover, the accelerated time regime is also represented in the fast pace of the tap dancing sequences, or when the performers run up the walls of the venue. However, in the second half of the performance, the pace noticeably slows down when the four dancers lie on the ground as if exercising stretching movements that remind of yoga practices, which play a significant role in a dance artist's lifestyle. Here, the restriction on air traffic and the resulting deceleration are represented.

V. Overwriting *VOLCANO*: The Suitcase as a Home?

Beside the recognizable movement elements, tap dance and musical aesthetics from the thirties until the fifties constitute the dance vocabulary. These style choices cannot be explained from the context of the volcanic eruption. To reflect on these, we draw on the model of overwriting, which was developed in the late nineties by dance scholar Randy Martin for the analysis of non-narrative dance performances. The method was established to make the contexts of dance in a performance visible by understanding a performance as a text. However, Martin does not concentrate on those signifiers that are unambiguously decipherable, but rather on the contexts of dance performances that are not clearly identifiable. In referring to his activity as ‚reading‘, Martin's argument is in line with many other scholars that understand dance as text and therefore practice dance studies in the form of reading dance. In this respect, we propose to reappoint the method to ‚overwriting‘.[43] In the development of his method, Martin followed Roland Barthes, who stated that texts are not subordinate to one author as the sole meaningful authority but arise from countless (known and unknown) sources, and are open and ambiguous. Texts, and thus also artistic performances, can often not be reduced to linear narration due to their relatedness to context, ambiguity and openness, „all of which comes down to saying that for the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure".[44] This conveys that what is non-narrative in the text, is the very referentiality of what lies outside it.

Accordingly, the seemingly arbitrary aesthetic elements in the dance production *VOLCANO* explore social contexts and institutional developments within the contemporary dance scene that remain hidden at first glance.

The dancers use a wide range of contemporary and modern dance techniques and styles: they sing, they dance, they dance while singing and sing while dancing, giving the audience a demonstration of their range of competences and skills. Liz Kinoshita defended her choice for tap dance in an interview as follows:

> In *VOLCANO*, the way we do the tap dance, for instance: none of us really masters it but we can do it well enough. So we can as performers develop a new skill and optimize this skill. Most of us have already more than one career and skills, and this takes us to the same feeling of the 30's 40's where performers often charmed their way along, although they mostly were refined experts in their skills.[45]

The requirement of multi-skilled knowhow reflected through the dance vocabulary and the willingness to be mobile and flexible expressed through the song lyrics indicate the two dimensions of creative work set by the current post-Fordist project-oriented regime. The choice of tap dance in combination with musical from the thirties until the fifties adds to this theme: performers were bound to travel to Hollywood if they wanted to make a name for themselves, since tap dance and musical film flourished in those years and the boom in the American film industry at the time centred in Hollywood. Musical and tap dance artists were suddenly obliged to perform for camera and develop a whole range of new skills. Through demonstrating the various tap dance rhythms throughout tap dance history, Kinoshita addresses the different work rhythms humanity has gone through over time and the flexible work rhythms creative workers deal with on a daily basis. All these elements illustrate the importance of mobile flexibility and flexible mobility in the post-Fordist regime. The song fragment from *VOLCANO* quoted below depicts this as follows:

> I need time, without this rhyme,
> only 45 minutes, all to myself…
> I guess I feel a little, threatened when I'm caught,
> without the time to thoroughly think out a thought, […]
> I run from pillar to post, constantly,
> In this day and age, waking up isn't easy,
> I wish that moments in the shower would suffice
> So don't say there's 24 hours, in a single day,
> When I want just 45 minutes my way.

This particular song titled „45 Minutes" explores the notion of temporality.

The lyrics explicitly address the lack of control over time, which is according to economist Guy Standing one of the ten features of the precariat. His concept of tertiary time comprises all work done outside of paid labour time, which causes the division between work and leisure time to fade away.[46] The latter indicates that the 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 ‚precariatized 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. In this context, Slovenian philosopher Bojana Kunst remarks that it appears as though the way post-Fordist creative labourers work (i.e. in the collaborative sharing of language and thought) puts us into a state of constant mobility, flexibility and precariousness.[47] The song „45 Minutes“ describes a typical post-Fordist phenomenon: artists are constantly producing and selling themselves, because they can work anywhere and anytime. However, if „45 Minutes“ suggests that an artist barely has 45 minutes a day for him/herself, then to what extent is there any time left for self-reflection or self-realization, both of which are significant motives that commonly drive performing artists?[48] If an artist is constantly on the move, what are the repercussions for artistic freedom and autonomy? In her recent publication *Artist at Work. Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, Kunst states that in the project-oriented work regime, the project entails work as well as self-realisation, but that the nature of this self-realisation is nonetheless contradictory. She writes that „we work so much that we never again have time for ourselves and others; due to the amount of work and the intensity of our self-realisation, we can actually burn out in life“.[49] In that respect, the suspension created by the volcanic eruption allowed to gain back control over time for a moment and created time for self-reflection. When the Icelandic volcano erupted in April 2010, Liz Kinoshita found herself to be among the many traffic victims. She was at work in Oslo during the incident and had to return to Brussels to perform, by ferry instead of by plane. The postponement of the trip and the additional stress had an incredible impact on the choreographer. It should be noted that by now, Kinoshita has worked with Tino Sehgal for several years. Sehgal, who is known to travel as ecologically as possible whatever the cost, does not allow his collaborators to fly when feasible. This in fact means that Kinoshita is now quite used to taking long train rides in her career as an artist. Yet, she continues to be impressed by the long travel times that are in sharp contrast to the fast rhythm of the performing artist. Most importantly, this deceleration of time allows the necessary time to digest. Hence, when the pace of the performance slows down towards the end of *VOLCANO*, one of

the artists sings the following:

> The eruption suspended our lives, time, and space,
> A moment suspended in a reflective place,
> Revelations and thoughts we do not usually face.

The image that accompanies the distribution of the production *VOLCANO* highlights a suitcase. While singing „a suitcase is all I need" the performer implies that the suitcase represents a dance artist's temporary home. Contemporary dance artists take their mobile and symbolic home along with them as they travel to dance. Much like the suitcase, the image of the airport suggests the temporality of home. Visual artist John Di Stefano explains his choice for the image of an airport when questioning the notion of home in the context of transnationalism in his video *HUB* (2002) as follows:

> [N]otions of identity and belonging become articulated through mobility, within the dialectical interplay between global processes and local environments. The airport also suggests that home be understood as temporally constructed. Due to the instability and impermanence of their physical home, some displaced persons have come to think of time itself as a more stable and dependable means of creating a space of belonging. In lieu of shared physical space, a shared temporality among displaced persons moving through various physical spaces provides a means of boundary-setting and a maintenance device whose form may persist while its content varies contextually.[50]

In a similar manner, the members of the Brussels dance community experience this shared temporality while remaining mobile, which generates a feeling of belonging to a community. *VOLCANO* provides the audience with an explicit image of the life and work as a contemporary dance artist in the Brussels dance community on many different levels. The dancing bodies of the community are constantly on the move and thus never at home in the traditional sense of the word. It is rather a changing network of relations and a shared temporality that constitutes their home.

VI. The Dance Performance as Home of the Vulnerable Body

So far, we have discussed two aesthetic aspects of *VOLCANO*: first, it represents the mechanisms of precarious living, such as the high tempo or the arm movements that imitate a propeller; and, secondly, the presence of contexts of labour in seemingly unrelated parts of the staging, for example the necessity of being an expert on every style or aspect of performance. Now we shall answer the question if and how the body and the home – or the body as home – appear in the performance. It is needless to say that the body is central to dance. More specifically: because of its heightened vulnerability,

the dancing body is the stage of economic precarity and, at the same time, of ontological precariousness (in the sense of Butler's early works).

The nomadic subject[51] inhabiting Hafez's Cosmoprolis rarely experiences a feeling of being at home, since its body, on the one hand, must remain fit and, on the other hand, constantly needs to adjust to changing environments. In her article on „Cosmopolitan Bodies", sociologist Jennie Germann Molz concludes that the cosmopolitan characteristics of flexibility and adaptability are, among other things, not merely cultural dispositions but embodied performances of fitness and fitting in. Not only must a body be physically fit to travel, it must embody tolerance and openness towards the world: it needs to adapt itself in order to integrate in new surroundings.[52] In this regard, Liz Kinoshita remarked that she considers herself lucky to travel as a dancer, because she is so aware of her body and knows the best environments for her body (personal interview). Yet, the long journeys on trains and airplanes, during which artists tend to continue working on their MacBook, are ergonomically harmful for numerous body parts. A dancer needs to take care of and invest in this body due to the particularity of the profession. The reality of having to repeatedly sleep in a different bed (best case scenario!) seems to disregard this constraint. The considerable amount of transnational mobility a dance artist is confronted with thus appears somewhat contradictory to the mentioned statement of Kinoshita. A respondent in the questionnaire comments as follows:

> What bothers me most is that even within the field our needs are not fully understood. The dancer does not get enough medical support (even though they are as involved with their bodies as professional athletes). It costs money to take care of a body. We often have very intense schedules. We have to juggle different jobs. I don't feel recognition for all this work by the people in the field: theatres, choreographers, and production agencies. Their priority is selling and they don't have energy left to invest in the dancer. This is very frustrating.[53]

In line with the above testimony, art sociologist Rudi Laermans observes that a substantial share of non-remunerated work is performed by dance artists (e.g. in the preparation of a subsidy application) and that, while unemployed, a dance artist is required to continuously invest in his/her body (e.g. through frequently attending technique classes) in order to stay fit or, in his words, to „remain employable".[54] A dance artist is in fact the material of the work, which tends to be disregarded in the performing arts world, which continuously presents itself as immaterial.[55]

But what happens when the body of the dancer no longer meets the imposed standards or when it is injured or sick? During the staging of *VOLCANO* in Ghent in April 2015, the dancer Clinton Stringer performed

with his arm in a sling due to a shoulder injury – or at least a very convincing simulation of a shoulder injury.[56] What space does this situation create on the stage, and what did his apparent injury mean for the ‚body (not) at home'?

As we outlined earlier, Judith Butler's theory of the ontology of precariousness influenced a whole discourse on the vulnerability of the body. This discourse has also found its way in the philosophical branch of performance studies and art history. Gesa Ziemer developed an aesthetics of vulnerability, in which she assembles texts and images in a filmic way, in order to destabilize and disorient the spectator and to undermine the presumptions underlying her/his gaze. Ziemer creates, for example, a ‚meeting at eye level' that foregrounds the precarious situation of each body („eine Begegnung auf Augenhöhe [die die] Anerkennung der prekären Situation eines jeden Körpers voraus setzen").[57] Does *VOLCANO*, through staging an injured dancer, create a similar situation in which the precarious situation of the body is acknowledged?

In this performance, Clinton Stringer, with his arm in a sling, performs a very double position on the stage of the moving swarm. Stringer takes part in a collective choreography, in which movements are synchronously performed. In these parts of the performance, the other three dancers sometimes lend Stringer their arms by embracing and holding him when they, for example, dance in a row. This way, they integrate him in the group and the performance, thereby making *VOLCANO* a home in the definition by Sara Ahmed.[58] Ahmed investigates which institutional mechanisms, particularly with regard to ‚whiteness', hinder or halt the freedom of action and movement of people. If we apply Ahmed's ideas to the vulnerable body, which runs the risk of being no longer able to participate and is stopped in its movements, then *VOLCANO* is inclusive, insofar as it integrates the injured body and grants this body a greater freedom of movement on the stage. Stringer's body appears as both wounded and fit: in the parts where he dances alongside the others, he is seemingly able to perfectly follow the choreography, despite his injured shoulder. The injury is therefore supported not only by his fellow dancers but also by his clearly trained, muscled body.

In contrast to other performances in which dance is represented as training and work, Kinoshita and the other three dancers show in *VOLCANO* the earlier mentioned abstract stretching exercises that resemble yoga. Stringer also participates in these onstage stretching exercises. This dramaturgical process of slowing down corresponds to the need of a dancer to have ‚45 minutes for him/herself', as we have shown above. In other scenes, Stringer sits at the edge of the stage, bringing the perspective of the spectator onstage. Here, his immobility resembles the immobility of air traffic during a volcanic

eruption, because his arm – which has been described as propeller – is then at rest. Now, the seated and observing position of the spectator is performed onstage, creating an opportunity for the audience to identify with the dancers. The Brussels dance community as moving swarm, whose movements encompass both immobility and mobility, is brought closer. The precarious body, in the sense of a body that is not so much ontologically vulnerable (Butler) but a body that was already physically injured and is shown as an injured body, is successfully included in the performance. In this sense, the dancing body can function as a home, even if it is precarious: it is still included in the network of relations that constitutes the murmuring multitude. Like a suitcase, the dancing body travels with the dancer everywhere he or she goes. Thus, the relaxation techniques and stretching exercises for maintaining a fit and healthy body are a constitutive part of the Brussels dance community.

VII. Conclusion

In order to define the Brussels dance community, which consists of all contemporary dance artists based in Brussels, we draw on the previous arguments to conclude that the community resembles a swarm of potential that is constantly on the move. The community is a mobile and virtual one, since physical presence has become less of a constraint for the inclusion in the community. In this digital age, it is possible to be seen on the scene while not being physically present in the scene. The production *VOLCANO* explores the working lives of performing artists behind the ‚scenes‘ but within this ‚scene‘, or better: ‚community’. The performance portrays their working and living conditions in the community, to which three of the four performers belong.[59] In this respect, Kinoshita refers to the piece as a „backstage musical“: a musical about the work and lives of its own performers continually on the move.[60] Therefore, the members of the Brussels dance community suffer a permanent sense of not-feeling-at-home or a shared temporality. If Brussels is not home to these performers, but rather a place to be based, then their suitcase may be considered their home. In line with cultural studies and literature expert Angelika Bammer, their home is a „mobile symbolic habitat, a performative way of life and of doing things in which one makes one’s home while in movement“.[61] A home can thus temporarily emerge in a suitcase or materialises itself onstage in contemporary dance performances such as *VOLCANO*, as demonstrated by the analysis. Thus, having this in common, the contemporary dance artists of Brussels form a mobile community. Anthropologist Dunja Njaradi suggests that „no matter how dancers construct and understand what and where their

home is, it always depends on the (im)possibility of leaving it, of crossing borders that are symbolic and real".[62] Even if a home can emerge in a suitcase or on stage abroad, it is unavoidable that geopolitical borders affect dance artists' professional lives in this mobile work regime. Her respondent, Serbian Berlin-based dance artist Igor Koruga, tells her that the independent arts scene in Berlin does in fact not exist. He defends his statement by adding that „people are always in circulation and passing through, because everybody is always on the move in search for employment".[63] Similar to Igor's Berlin, Brussels is a port of connection, a temporary base of a constantly changing network of individual contemporary dance artists, who form a mobile and virtual community of potential colleagues. The Brussels dance community is thus a precarious one, filled with dancing bodies that are not-at-home but constantly on the move and moving within a changing network of relations that constitutes their home.

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[1]   This article was written as part of the FWO-funded research project *Choreographies of Precariousness. A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin* that is conducted by PhD student Annelies van Assche and supervised by Prof. Katharina Pewny (Ghent University), Prof. Rudi Laermans (KU Leuven) and Prof. Christel Stalpaert (Ghent University). The subtitle of this article "Precarious Bodies (Not) at Home" is inspired by the wording "The Body (not) at Home", which was the title of a workshop organized by Sofie Wennerscheid and Niels Penke, at Ghent University on 01.04.2015.

[2]   It should be noted that we discuss the notions of precarity and precariousness in the context of the socio-economic situation of the post-Fordist workers in Europe, which must be distinguished from the socio-economic and socio-political precarity of denizens, such as refugees, gypsies and other minorities, and precarious work in agrarian societies.

[3]   Katharina Pewny, *Das Drama des Prekären. Über die Wiederkehr der Ethik in Theater und Performance*, Bielefeld 2011, S. 38-62.

4   Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, New York 2004.

5   Lauren Berlant et al., „Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović", in: *The Drama Review* 56.4 (2012), S. 196.

6   Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000, S. 17.

7   Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, New York 2015; Sergio Bologna, *Die Zerstörung der Mittelschichten. Thesen zur neuen Selbständigkeit*, Graz 2006.

8   Richard Sennett, *Der flexible Mensch. Die Kultur des neuen Kapitalismus*, Berlin 1998, S. 180.

9   This is explored at length in Katharina Pewny, *Das Drama des Prekären*, which is the first study on performance and precarity in German speaking countries in a European context and which preceded the research project *Choreographies of Precariousness*.

10   Lauren Berlant et al., „Precarity Talk", S. 178.

11   Katharina Pewny, *Das Drama des Prekären*, S. 297-301.

12   Paul Scolieri, „Global/mobile: Re-orienting dance and migration studies", in: *Dance Research Journal* 40.2 (2008), S. v-xx.

13   Delphine Hesters, „The Facts and Fixions of B-longing", on: Sarma B-Chronicles, http://b-kronieken.be/index.php?type=publication_delphine&lng=nl, 15 May 2007, accessed 30 May 2016, S. 3.

14   Annelies Van Assche and Rudi Laermans, *Contemporary Dance Artists in Brussels: A Descriptive Report on Their Socio-economic Position*, on: Studies in Performing Arts Ghent University website, https://www.ugent.be/lw/kunstwetenschappen/en/research-groups/spam/news-events/news/first-report-dance-brussels.htm, 2016, S. 14.

15   Delphine Hesters, „The Facts and Fixions of B-longing", S. 4; Vlaams Theaterinstituut, *Kanaries in de koolmijn. Masterplan voor dans in Vlaanderen en Brussel*, Brussels 2007, S. 9.

16   Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class,* New York 2005; Andy C. Pratt, „Creative Cities: the Cultural Industries and the Creative Class", in: *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 90.2 (2008), S. 107-117.

17   Delphine Hesters, „The Facts and Fixions of B-longing", S. 3-4.

18   It should be kept in mind that Berlin and New York may function as a pole for artists for various different reasons than Brussels. It is our aim to explore this further within the comprehensive research project *Choreographies of Precariousness*.

19   Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in the Global City*, Basingstoke 2007, S. 1.

20   Eleanor Bauer, „Becoming Room, Becoming Mac: New Artistic Identities in the Transnational Brussels Dance Community", on: *Sarma B-Chronicles*, http://b-kronieken.be/index.php?type=research_eleanor&lng=nl, 2007, accessed 30 May 2016.

21   Sara Ahmed, „Home and away narratives of migration and estrangement", in: *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2.3 (1999), S. 337.

22   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London/New York 1991, S. 6.

23   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, S. 36.

24   John Di Stefano, „Moving Images of Home", in: *Art Journal* 61.4 (2002), S. 39.

25   As part of the research project *Choreographies of Precariousness*, the results from the questionnaire on the working conditions of contemporary dance artists in Brussels were released in Annelies Van Assche and Rudi Laermans, *Contemporary Dance Artists in Brussels: A Descriptive Report on Their Socio-economic Position*, which can be consulted on https://www.ugent.be/lw/kunstwetenschappen/en/research-groups/spam/news-events/news/first-report-dance-brussels.htm.

26   Annelies Van Assche and Rudi Laermans, *Contemporary Dance Artists in Brussels*, S. 14.

27   Annelies Van Assche and Rudi Laermans, *Contemporary Dance Artists in Brussels*, S. 14.

28   Pascal Gielen, „The Art Scene. A Clever Working Model for Economic Exploitation?", in: *A Precarious Existence. Vulnerability in the Public Domain*. Issue of *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain* 17 (2009), S. 15.

29   Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley 1984, S. 117.

30   Frédéric Pouillaude, „Scène and Contemporaneity", in: *TDR/The Drama Review* 51.2 (2007), S. 127.

31   Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, Los Angeles 2004.

32   Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, London 2005.

33   Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism.* Amsterdam 2009, S. 3.

34   Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*, S. 7.

35   Nasr Hafez, „Welcome to the Cosmoproletariat", in: *Janus* 21 (2007), S. 45.

36   Teunis IJdens et al., *Dancers Keep Moving: International Careers and Transition: Research Report*, Tilburg 2008, S. 15.

37   The choreographer explained that she was staying with friends in 2012 while travelling for work (touring, residencies and rehearsals abroad). Around May, she moved her belongings to a basement atelier in another friend's building and paid the owner a small fee before she went abroad again. She even slept in a tent while in residency, but this was part of the working process. In autumn, she stayed rent-free at the upstairs loft bed of another friend's house and she would visit her belongings in the basement atelier, sifting through them when necessary. After she visited her family in Toronto over Christmas, she found a shared apartment early 2013. She bought her own place in 2014.

38   Kinoshita later commented on her words that she does feel that she belongs in Brussels and that Brussels is a place where a dancer is definitely not alone in not-being-Belgian, which makes it easy to feel at home.

39   John Di Stefano, „Moving Images of Home", S. 38.

40   Sergio Bologna, *Die Zerstörung der Mittelschichten.*

41   Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, S. 39.

42   Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, S. 1.

43   Katharina Pewny, *Das Drama des Prekären*, S. 121-133.

44   Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*, Durham/London 1998, S. 85.

45   Rita Natalio, „Talking about Volcanoes: Interview with Liz Kinoshita", on: *[DNA] Departures and Arrivals website*, http://departuresandarrivals.eu/en/texts/interviews/talking-about-volcanos---interview-with-liz-kinoshita-203, 2015, accessed 26 August 2015.

46 Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens,* London 2014, S. 22.
47 Bojana Kunst, *ARTIST AT WORK: Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, Winchester 2015, S. 79.
48 See especially Bojana Kunst, *ARTIST AT WORK* and Rudi Laermans, *Moving Together: Making and Theorizing Contemporary Dance*, Amsterdam 2015.
49 Bojana Kunst, *ARTIST AT WORK,* S. 169.
50 John Di Stefano, „Moving Images of Home", S. 41.
51 We acknowledge that Rosi Braidotti is certainly one of the principle thinkers on the nomadic subject. For the purpose of this article, however, we choose not to include her theory. Nonetheless, she provides an interesting perspective for another discussion (see *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York 1994).
52 Jennie Germann Molz, „Cosmopolitan Bodies: Fit to Travel and Travelling to Fit", in: *Body & Society* 12.3 (2006), S. 8.
53 Annelies Van Assche and Rudi Laermans, *Contemporary Dance Artists in Brussels*, S. 14.
54 Rudi Laermans, *Moving Together*, S. 290.
55 Immaterial labour is a term introduced and developed by Italian autonomists like Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Negri, describing labour in which production does not result in material goods but is what Bojana Kunst describes as production of subjectivity. Typically, the performing arts are a result of immaterial labour, although the materiality of the bodies and the objects onstage tend to be neglected (for further discussion, see Bojana Kunst, *ARTIST AT WORK* and Rudi Laermans, *Moving Together*).
56 We should note that it did concern an actual injury. However, we argue that even if the shoulder injury is experienced as very real from the performer's perspective, this is not so evidently perceived by the audience: the injury might as well be a theatrical representation of authenticity within the context of the contemporary theatre of the real (see especially Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real*, Basingstoke 2013).
57 Gesa Ziemer, *Verletzbare Orte. Entwurf einer praktischen Ästhetik*, on: Institut für Theorie, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste/Diaphanes website, https://publishup.uni-potsdam.de/files/655/ziemer.pdf, 2005, accessed 30 May 2016.
58 Sara Ahmed, „A Phenomenology of Whiteness", in: *Feminist Theory* 8 (2007), S. 159 and 162.
59 The fourth performer, Justin F. Kennedy, is based in Berlin, which can likewise be defined as a creative capital.
60 Liz Kinoshita and Annelies Van Assche, personal interview, 21 October 2015.
61 David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, New York 2002, S. 47.
62 Dunja Njaradi, *Backstage Economies: Labour and Masculinities in Contemporary European Dance,* Chester 2014, S. 39.
63 Dunja Njaradi, *Backstage Economies: Labour and Masculinities in Contemporary European Dance,* Chester 2014, S. 175.