



Nederlandse  
Dansdagen

Batterijstraat 48  
6211 SJ Maastricht  
nederlandsedansdagen.nl  
#dansmetmij

## The State of Dutch Dance 2023

### 1. Conny Jansen

#### BALANCE

The search for a balance in the dance field where everyone can find their place is a delicate process and remains a constant consideration of how we can shape this dynamic field with each other and the world around us.

With a new arts plan on the horizon, the pressure increases and it is difficult not to dive into your own survival strategy. Soon attention, time and financial resources are consumed by fulfilling all the tasks imposed on us by the environment, politics and our own ambitions.

Within that capricious force field, do we have enough mental space to do research so that we can delve into other scenarios?

Do we feel safe enough to take risks, to experiment, to create opportunities for each other? Can we start the conversation with each other, really listen to the other if it means maybe changing something ourselves?

Despite the daily hectic pace, we need to keep immersing ourselves in each other before we reduce each other to one characteristic to judge and classify into a category, a group, based on that. Before we think in terms like us and them.

In creative workhouses, young and experienced artists can come together, meet each other, looking for answers. Sometimes alone, sometimes in dialogue with each other.

We need a dance field where the search for one's own identity does not increase the contrasts but, on the contrary, brings depth by getting to know the other and the other. Where the 'either' thinking is transformed into 'and' thinking: urban and modern, experimental and traditional, young and experienced. Where sustainable investment in the future is made through meeting, coaching and passing on knowledge.

In short, a professional and safe environment in which dancers and makers can develop into the artists they have the potential to be.

Where together we ensure a strong and sustainable future for our arts sector, where diversity and individuality prevail and where we continue to enrich society with our stories.

### 2. Lisa Reinheimer

"What we practice physically becomes our skill mentally."

This is a now famous quote by choreographer Connor Schumacher. He is referring to our soft skills. When we dance together, we observed in the European research project Empowering Dance, we train an enormous range of soft skills. Active listening, creativity, information processing, recognizing emotions and self-confidence, to name a few. So the more we move together, the more we practice these skills.

In 2020, I concluded my State of the Dance with "Keep moving together." After all, moving together produces a different conversation. We literally communicate with each other in a different way (yes, who am I telling this to, anyway? Professionals, sure, but who probably don't move enough themselves). Dancing and moving together makes us more empathetic, more insightful and



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understanding of each other, of the other. Crucial also for working from trust.

As Conny also outlines, with the new arts plan in sight, we are again inclined to lose sight of the other. To 'suddenly' prioritize values that we are actually trying to change in our daily practice. Our trust also comes under pressure again as a result. That trust is not just based on a system or framework, it is emphatically also a personal experience and exchange.

What we practice physically becomes our skill mentally.

I trust my body.

I trust your body.

I trust the space between our bodies and I trust our encounter.

We trust in the process.

We trust change through our movement.

### 3. Jasper van Luijk

A state is often a positioning, a moment in time in which we reflect. This piece of this shared state, however, is a call.

Four years ago I also made a call, a call to myself and all of us to take responsibility together for the future of our field, to develop and share our craft. Sharing it with each other, with new generations of creators, and with the audiences who can thus grow with us. That audience is an essential part of the chain. Our chain must be lubricated and maintained, audiences must be fed new voices and stories. If we don't maintain our chain together, it falls further apart.

We often say that we need to collaborate more, that we need to shape the field together. Yet that collaboration often gets no further than a project, an arrangement with a fund, a joint presentation, a residency for a young maker. They are drops in the ocean, drops with the best of intentions, but still.

I hereby call upon you to work together in a radical, more consequential way. Let's find each other in taking concrete action:

- Establish a broadly represented think tank that will spend the next three years researching and actively driving cooperation between all bodies in the field. And that actively communicates this process and result in time with the field and stakeholders. Make a joint budget available for this.
- Don't just sell your own work. Make room in your future programs for young talent: for example, in pre-programs, introductions and follow-up talks and joint public programs. At the moment, the general public, which is also certainly outside the Randstad, is almost not included in the developments of new generations, new voices and perspectives.
- Set up a broad dance promotion campaign supported by all links in the chain. We all benefit from more attention and audience for our profession.

We need a big offensive to which everyone contributes; makers, dancers, companies, funds, commercial parties, broadcasters, you name it. In order to come out stronger and more united, to get people enthusiastic about a bigger story that we are all telling together, based on our shared passion for dance and everything you can move and experience with your body.



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#### **4. Ann Van den Broek**

##### **space for structure / structure for space**

Whether you make pure dance, explore the relationship to theater or create socially engaged work and whether you do so as a young maker, as a solo artist, as a small or large company: we all operate from a strong intrinsic motivation to tell a story from hope, idealism and fantasy. This is the core of artistry, the essence around which every artist revolves.

At the same time, we see that the structures and conditions by which we shape the arts arise from very different motivations and perspectives. There is a far-reaching pragmatism in the sector, things are often solved on a business basis. People look primarily at the end result of art. But not only the performance is valuable, also or actually especially the processes around it are important. And those processes can be different for every organization, every production and every choreographer. There is no one formula for a dance company.

In other words, the frameworks imposed from the outside have a restrictive rather than clarifying effect. Creators' room for movement is restricted. The labels are stifling.

Of course we need a good narrative to give dance a place in society, and we also need a structure to which we can relate. A structure where the focus is on the creative process and less on the end result. A structure that gives room for deepening. A structure founded on respect for autonomy and trust in the motivation of artists. A structure that is not imposed from the outside, but springs from the essence of artistic work. From the core of artistry.

#### **5. Kristin de Groot**

##### **let's slow down**

Delay is the reduction of information density or the extension of the passage of time.

What is striking in the field is that everyone is always busy, busier, busiest and that no one really has, takes, or can take time. We work hard, produce to our heart's content, tick off policy agenda items and lose sight of the space art actually needs. At the same time, we lose touch with what interpersonal action needs. And that, although research has shown how powerful dance can play a role in developing the soft skills that make us human.

Let's slow down and question the frameworks. To reflect, to experiment, to learn from each other and to produce less. Let's slow down to scrutinize burning issues. How do we make room for a new generation. How do we make room for a generation that is long overdue for a place, but encountered too many closed doors or a seat already taken. What are our blind spots. Can money be distributed differently. Let's slow down, to create space for the continued development of the art, the artist and the field. Maybe even to pause and recalibrate; for yourself, for others and each other. Let's begin to slow down by not having a dance debate and getting lost in words that don't resonate, but by meeting physically. Let's place our bodies in space and take the time to feel and experience with each other what dance is capable of, no matter what dance tradition you are moving from. Let's slow down to charge the trust in each other, to understand each other better, to expand our vision. Let's slow down in order to stay in full motion.



## 6. Annette Embrechts

When I voiced the first State of Dance seven years ago, I started from my favorite childhood character Tika the Wizzard, the daughter of Tita the Wizzard. Perhaps familiar: a jolly girl with long blond braids, who had the magical gift when something didn't go the way she wanted, she could stop everything and everyone with a clap of her hands. Thus she created time and space to avert danger and rearrange things to her liking. With another clap of her hands, she then set everything in motion again.

Listening to the words of my five predecessors, that 2016 hand-clapping Tika the Wizzard seems more needed than ever. Things are still not going the way the dance world wants and needs, it seems, when I hear Conny, Jasper, Ann and Kristin ask for more room to move for dance. Space for the process, not just the result (says Ann Van de Broeck), space to slow down, to experiment, to produce less (asks Kristin de Groot), space to work together seriously and structurally (stresses Jasper van Luijk), space for a professional and safe environment in which dancers and makers can develop into the artists they are (says Conny Janssen).

That this safe environment in the dance world is by no means as self-evident as is often suggested becomes clear in the dance report *Shadow dancing*, published in May of this year. I am surprised that this report goes unmentioned by my predecessors. You can think a lot of things about it, for example about the breadth of the dance sector on which this report makes statements, but we cannot ignore it. The dance sector has to take it seriously. Keeping the conclusions silent will not protect anyone.

According to Lisa Reinheimer, if the space called for by the previous speakers were to be created, we should, above all, dance together. Physical movement makes for better mental tools, more empathy, more insight, more understanding of each other, as she learned from choreographer and dancer Connor Schumacher.

For the time being, despite this potential of dance, there appears to be rather a lack of empathy and understanding for each other, in the Netherlands and yet also in dance. Not only is collaboration difficult to get off the ground, Jasper argues, but the conversation, the debate, is also more and more often bogged down in we-they. Conny warns: "We shouldn't increase the contrasts. Don't try to think in we-they terms.' Yet that happens more often than not. Black versus white, creators versus critics. I must therefore briefly recall the much-discussed shit incident in Germany. For now, the aftermath produces mostly losers. Because anger, panic and rigidly held positions get in the way of good conversations. Instead of a "connected community," as the Nederlandse Dansdagen writes about the Netherlands on its website, the Netherlands has unfortunately become a divided community. Let's at least not fight each other even more in dance. We don't need yet another think tank for solidarity. Those who keep fighting each other in the streets, automatically become easier victims," I said seven years ago in my State of Dutch Dance.

The call for more space is understandable, now that the quadrennial chair dance of the short-lived arts plan is coming up again. A chair dance with still too few chairs. Legs are too shaky. There's too little wiggle room in the system; the system is too tight in the saddle. Those who sit at the knobs, who can silence the music and determine which seat is fought over, are themselves immobile or bound hand and foot. As Ann Van den Broek says, "The frameworks imposed from the outside have a restrictive rather than clarifying effect. The room for movement of makers is restricted. The labels are stifling.' In this too, too little seems to have changed. Quote from The State of Dutch Dance 2016: "The legitimacy for art and support for art subsidies are shrinking rather than increasing. The word 'intrinsic value' was already a Fremdkörper in politics, but now seems to be a forgotten word from a



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foreign language altogether. So no, emphasizing 'the intrinsic value' of dance, the beauty, the aesthetics, the experience, the dynamics, the empathy, however important all of these are, does not seem to get us there. We are simply not understood."

The Netherlands still speaks a different language. Politics is dominated by corporate thinking. The Netherlands is run like a business. In that light, the call for more leeway for dance sounds slightly naive. With all the housing, climate, poverty, energy and nitrogen problems facing the Netherlands, the call for more room to move for dance is easily drowned out. 'Dance is a niche,' I was recently told by the arts chief at the Volkskrant when I tried to fight for a spot next to theater, cabaret and musical.

Of course, it is at least as naïve to think that we can work magic with the magic hands of Tika the Wizzard, to stop everything for a moment and only get it moving again once things are fixed. But when Kristin talks about "making way for a new generation," we must also dare to talk about who is running the hall of chairs, who is turning the knobs and who is silencing the music. Only by collectively standing up, making a firm fist and getting moving, chairs will fall over and free up space on the dance floor.

## 7. Alida Dors

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Silence will not protect you, me or us....

I ask you only these questions:

Do you intend to contribute to the enrichment of our sector? The we in the making?

What have you been able to accomplish in the past season?

Did you ask for help? Did you receive it? From whom?

Satisfied with the result?

Was this a one-time activity, or did it become part of your vision?

Are there any lessons learned?

With whom will you share them?

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This is a movement