

Towards a greater appreciation of contemporary dance by young people

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Abstract

Contemporary dance needs to pull in a bigger younger audience. However in order to appreciate this medium cognitive processes are needed of a high aesthetic level. These are processes only partially developed in young teenagers and even adults, according to aesthetic developmental theorists. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory suggests some of these types of intelligence may be useful for the appreciation of contemporary dance. Parental background and aesthetic education also affect cultural participation. The appropriate use of learning theories can contribute towards creating good educational programmes for dance. Changes in lifestyle may also be affecting attendance to contemporary dance performances, raising questions as to whether and how contemporary dance needs to adapt to the tastes of younger people. Finally some examples of projects aimed at young people are analysed.

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Context

I work as a creative dance teacher with a modern dance training at a large Jeugtheaterschool. My students are children and teenagers, ranging from 10 to 18 years old. Over the 15 years that I have been teaching at this type of school I have noticed that young adolescent students often resist learning about contemporary dance technique. Moreover, when shown contemporary dance dvd's in the dance class their reactions betray their bafflement : it seems as though contemporary dance is a language that is not easily accessible even to those students who are familiar with dance (in the form of street- and hip hop dance). Attending a contemporary dance performance I am struck by the high proportion of older people sitting in the audience. I am left pondering about why the younger generation of teenagers and young adults (aged up to 30) is not really interested in contemporary dance. It is this issue, and the questions it raises, that I would like to explore in this paper.

General problem statement

My main question is : Why is there so little interest in contemporary dance among young people and what can be done about it ?

Related questions

Related to the general problem statement are a number of other issues that I would like to explore :

- What are the characteristics of contemporary dance ?
- Which cognitive processes are needed in order to appreciate this form of dance?
- Do young people have the aesthetic skills to understand contemporary dance ?
- What bearing does parental background play in stimulating cultural participation ?
- Can art education help to encourage cultural participation ?
- What are the implications of learning theories for the acquisition of cultural competence ?
- How is the lifestyle of young people affecting their choice of cultural participation ?
- What does this all mean for the future of contemporary dance ?
- Which projects are currently on the market to encourage young people to see contemporary dance ?

Relevance

Professional dance performance in Holland relies heavily on governmental grants. The NDT receives 5,5 million euros, a sum the government is looking to decrease, and of course there are many more professional dance companies in Holland, all vying for grants. Scapino Ballet Rotterdam received almost two and a half million euros from the Raad voor Cultuur for the period 2009-2012. Introdans almost 2,7 million, Noord Nederland Dans 1,2 million and Holland Dance Festival just under half a million (*Basis Infrastructuur* pub. Raad voor Cultuur). However present times are becoming ever more stringent, both financially and politically for the arts. If dance companies are to survive they will have to make sure audience attendance remains strong.

In fact it appears that the performing arts are doing well. A survey of attendance rates over the whole country conducted by the SCP in 2009 (*Cultuur bewonderaars & beoefenaars* by Broek, A. van der, Haan, J. de & Huysmans, F.) has revealed that attendance rates to the performing arts have been rising from 48% in 1995 to 55% in 2007. However if one looks more closely (pp 119-120) one realises that this is mainly because of the growing popularity of cabaret and pop concerts (cabaret increasing from 11% to 15% and pop concerts from 25% to 34%). Ballet for example only rose from 4% to 5%. As confirmation of this, a review of audience participation in Drenthe in 2008 revealed that only 9% of sold tickets had been for a dance performance, as opposed to cabaret, drama and musicals, for which 30%, 36% and 29% of the tickets had been sold ("Cultuur voor Iedereen!?", E. Lange, 2009, p14). For dance this is a worrying state of affairs, and there is possibly more to be concerned about. If one examines the age groups attending the performance arts one notes that cabaret relies on the age group 20 -34 year olds for its relatively high attendance rates, and pop concerts on the age group 20 - 50 year olds. Ballet (the only style of dance ever mentioned by van den Broek, de Haan & Huysmans) on the other hand presents a mixed picture, depending as it does on the age group 50 – 64 year olds and on teenagers ("Cultuur bewonderaars & beoefenaars", 2009, p121) The rise in attendance rates to ballet of 1% is partly due to an increase in visits amongst the teenager population. As for attendance rates to "modern" dance, research carried out in Holland by TNS NIPO in 2007 (*Marktbeschrijving podiumkunsten 2007*, p 7) revealed that young people aged between 12 and 29 are almost three times more likely to see an urban dance performance (8%) than a modern dance one (3%). (It should be noted that the terms "ballet" and "modern" are not used in their most specific meanings but rather as general terms, "ballet" referring to ballet and contemporary dance, and "modern" to contemporary dance only.)

Of course it is reassuring to note that the small rise in attendance rates to "ballet" is largely dependent on the population of teenagers. Dance companies are well advised to look after their youth attendance, for the youth of today will become the future generation of ticket-holders. So why has this rise in attendance rates amongst teenagers occurred ? Does this rise imply that dance is indeed beginning to pull in young audiences ? On the other hand why is contemporary dance (labelled "modern") less popular than urban dance amongst the youth of today ? Before drawing any conclusions on this matter let us first consider what contemporary dance actually means.

What are the characteristics of dance, and in particular contemporary dance ?

If one clicks onto the website of Julidans (Website www.julidans.nl June 2010) one is presented with an eclectic mix of choreographers using a hotch-potch of styles to create their own vision of dance, all categorised under the heading “hedendaagse dans” or “contemporary dance”. They range from the sophisticated elegance of Akram Khan to the theatrical eccentricity of Marie Chouinard. Indeed, Valerie Preston-Dunlop in her book “Dance Words” (1998, p 18) defines it thus : “Used in Britain to describe a dance genre which includes the techniques of the American and German modern dancers (e.g. Graham, Cunningham, Leeder) and developments of the modern dance, Post-modernism, avant-garde dance, and the New Dance of British choreographers who use release-based techniques. “

According to Bergman (“Dans in samenhang”, 2003) dance (let us include contemporary dance here since it is a part of the general term “dance”) can be divided into three categories : abstract, associative and narrative. All three share the simultaneous creation of spatial, temporal and dynamic illusion. All three also carry a symbolic or metaphorical meaning, created by the spatial, temporal and dynamic structures of the dance, as well as by the shapes of the dancer’s body. Bergman’s first category, that of abstract dance is “gericht op pure beweging” (p 14). Associative dance she describes thus : “bewegingssymbolen [worden] gebruikt die verwijzen naar ervaringen die buiten de dans liggen, zoals gevoelens, ideeën en gebeurtenissen” (p 15). Her third category, narrative dance, she describes as being similar to associative dance, “maar is er daarnaast nog sprake van een verhaallijn, met een begin, een ontwikkeling en een slot en zijn er personages die dingen meemaken.” (p 15)

In “Leren van en over Dans” (1995) Bergman points out that looking at dance is not a passive event. It involves a number of processes :

- an understanding of spatial, temporal and dynamic illusion
- an understanding of the symbols and signs embedded in the dance
- the capacity to empathise with the dance and dancers : this entails a degree of kinaesthetic awareness ; the ability to identify with the dancers or project personal emotions onto them ; and the ability to experience the dance as an aesthetic event.

The question that arises is whether teenagers and young people are capable of using these processes. That is an area that I would like to explore under the next heading.

How does the intellectual and aesthetic development of teenagers and young people affect the way they look at contemporary dance ?

As I have just pointed out a contemporary dance choreography is an intricate process. Are young people indeed capable of understanding this difficult art medium? How *do* they experience a contemporary dance piece ? In order to consider these points let us examine the cognitive development of a teenager and young person (source : *Stadia in de muzikale en artistieke ontwikkeling* by Koopman, 2005).

According to the cognitive developmental psychologist Piaget the brain naturally matures so that by the time a child is 11 years old it is no longer limited to observing concrete results, but can devise and test its own hypotheses. By the age of 15 or 16 these hypotheses which the young person is capable of formulating have become abstract. Aesthetic developmental psychologists have supported Piaget in his theory about the brain's maturation towards abstract thinking. Gardner (1981) and Hargreaves and Galton (1992) have suggested 5-stage aesthetic developmental theories in which Piaget's observations are mirrored. Swanwick and Tillman (1988, 1994, 2002), researching musical compositional skills, have surmised a 4-stage theory for the development of musical understanding. According to their theory a child's attention shifts between the ages of 10 and 15 from the expressive possibilities of music to its formal compositional possibilities. In this period teenagers first experiment with contrast, variation and other structural principles, after which they integrate this newly discovered knowledge into their own homogenous style. Beyond the age of 15 they embark onto a more thoughtful appreciation of music. Parsons (1987) studied children's and young people's judgements of paintings and devised a model similar in many ways to that of Swanwick and Tillman. Parsons' theory comprises five stages (one more stage than that of Swanwick and Tillman), namely an intuitive sensual stage ; a representational realistic stage ; an expressive stage ; a formal stage concerned with such elements as shape, style, texture, spatial and line use ; and a reflective and relatively objective stage.

What is striking about these studies is that they all trace a movement from concrete towards abstract thinking, passing along the way through a series of cumulative age-related stages. Where they sometimes profoundly differ from each other is in the ages that are associated with these stages. Both Swanwick and Tillman, and Parsons, observe an expressive stage during which emotion is of prime importance. However Swanwick and Tillman associate this stage with 4 – 9 year olds, whereas Parsons, studying university populations, reports it amongst undergraduates. The ability to appreciate compositional principles, observed by Swanwick and Tillman between the ages of 10 and 15, is discovered by Parsons only amongst graduates and lecturers ! How to explain these age differences ? One explanation might lie in the definitions accorded to apparently similarly labelled stages. Koopman (2005) points out that Parsons' definitions of the expressive and form-oriented stages comprise more reflection on the part of the person being studied than the definitions of Swanwick and Tillman. However there is another explanation : these stages may be reached at different ages according to the artistic medium involved. Indeed, Winner (1982, 1984, source : *Determinanten van leren over kunst* by Haanstra, 1995) has concluded that sensitivity to form and style first matures in the field of music, then in those of the fine arts and dance, and finally in the areas of film, theatre and literature. His explanation for this variance is that narrative, most strongly present in

the latter three areas, distracts the aesthetically less developed person from the stylistic elements of a work. Goodman (1967, source : *Leren van en over dans* by Vera Bergman) has pointed out that the narrative art forms of film, theatre and literature use denotational symbols (referring to reality), whereas music employs expressive symbols (referring to emotions). In her book "Danskunst nader bekeken" (1994) Bergman considers aesthetic developmental theory as applied to the field of dance. She concludes that around the age of eleven a child passes from the expressive stage to the formal stage. The child is no longer merely interested in the emotional aspects of the dance, but begins to fathom the metaphorical meaning of the dance as well as its configurational design. Around the age of 16 teenagers pass into the highest or choreologic stage, as they discover their own criteria for assessing dance.

One might well conclude then that older teenagers and young adults are intellectually equipped to understand contemporary dance. However a true appreciation of abstract form may never be developed, even beyond the age of 16. Both Swanwick and Tillman, and Parsons, have indicated that most people do not reach the highest stage of aesthetic development, but remain in stage three, that which values expression. Research by Housen (1987, source : *Determinanten van leren over kunst* by Haanstra, 1995) has also revealed that most people do not achieve the highest phase of aesthetic development, but stay at an interpretive stage. Van der Tas (1993, source as above), researching the attitudes of an adult public to theatre plays and exhibitions, discovered that people were more interested in their own emotional involvement than in the aesthetic worth of the plays and exhibitions. This study lends support to Housen's findings, although one should place the research by van der Tas in the context of Winner's research ; Winner had surmised that narration was distracting an audience from the formal elements of an artwork. All in all then, research suggest that since most people will never mature aesthetically enough to appreciate the formal structures of a dance piece, the abstract compositional elements of the piece as well as its symbolic and metaphorical meaning will probably be overlooked by them. However as I have indicated earlier, these structures are an integral part of contemporary dance. No wonder audiences are not flocking to see contemporary dance !

It is indeed tantalising to hang a lack of interest in contemporary dance on an undeveloped aesthetic sensitivity. However not everyone accepts the surmise of a step-like age-related model of aesthetic development. In the article "Stadia in de muzikale en artistieke ontwikkeling" (2005) Koopman suggests that a young person's aesthetic understanding develops in a much more untidy and complicated way than one might imagine when reading aesthetic developmental theories. Gardner (1990) goes so far as to claim that the artistic products of young children show a creativity and richness not seen in later youth. Breeuwsma ("Pleidooi voor doelmatigheid zonder doel", 2005) criticises developmental theorists for being too intellectual, for looking at child development from an adult's perspective and for judging it according to the characteristics present in adult art. Moreover Breeuwsma accuses researchers of being too goal-orientated during the studies, and of thereby missing the broader picture of how a child develops. He also criticises the methodology during the research which he claims works against the young people being examined. One is left wondering how trustworthy research into stage theories of aesthetic development really are.

An understanding of how a person learns to appreciate the arts, and in particular dance, is further enriched by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence forms. Gardner (2006) suggests the existence of 9 types of intelligence, all of which are developed to a lesser or greater extent in the average person : linguistic, logical mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic and existential ("Multiple intelligences" pp 8-21). In her book "Dans in Samenhang" (2003) Vera Bergman relates these forms of intelligence to ways of understanding dance performances :

- linguistic intelligence appreciates the story-line of a dance piece.
- logical mathematical intelligence appreciates the structural build-up of a dance piece and understands the functional choice of set, costumes and lighting.
- spatial intelligence appreciates the visual aspects of a dance piece, and attaches meaning to those aspects.
- musical intelligence appreciates the phrasing of movements as well as their rhythmical quality, and values the interplay between music and dance.
- bodily kinaesthetic intelligence appreciates the movement qualities in the dance and imagines the kinaesthetic experiences of the dancers.
- interpersonal intelligence appreciates the manner of interaction between the dancers and empathises with the dance's characters as well as the dancers themselves.
- intrapersonal intelligence appreciates discovering its own meaning in the dance piece.
- naturalistic intelligence appreciates the artefact as opposed to the fiction of the dance.
- existential intelligence appreciates the dance piece for its societal and historical context.

For an understanding of dance Bergman cites in particular the importance of four of the types of intelligence : logical mathematical, visual spatial, musical rhythmical and physical kinaesthetic.

In short, research indicates that most people are not capable of appreciating the full potential of a dance piece, but the reasons for this are not clear. Whether our aesthetic competence matures in a steady and cumulative fashion (aesthetic development theory) or whether it depends on the evolution of various forms of intelligence (Gardner) has to be further investigated. It does however raise a new dilemma : how can one help develop aesthetic competence in young people ? Could educational programmes be an answer ? I shall be examining the contribution of education to the development of aesthetic competence under the next heading.

How does education affect cultural competence and cultural participation ?

Earlier on I noted that there has been an increase in attendance rates to ballet amongst the teenager population. This raises the possibility that the introduction of CKV1 classes in 1999-2000 is stimulating interest in dance. Indeed it is not unimaginable that attempts to acquaint adolescent audiences with the components of dance is having a positive effect on their enjoyment of contemporary dance. A study by Ganzenboom et al (2003, in *Momentopnames CKV1* by Damen et al pp 56-57) has examined the possibility that CKV1 classes are influencing cultural participation in a positive way. It concluded that young people who attended CKV1 classes also attended cultural activities of a more involved nature than those who did not. However this effect noted by the study disappeared after a few years, which has led the researchers to wonder if it occurred mainly as a result of the obligations of homework and exams that the subject of CKV1 brings with it. Van Hoorn, Haanstra and De Groot (1998, in *Jaren van onderscheid* by Nagel & de Haan p 98) have theorized with their “instructional model” that the longer a student’s school career takes the more likely the student will be involved in school cultural events, and that this in turn increases the student’s cultural competence. The number of cultural outings organised by a school is greater if the student’s education is at havo/vwo rather than vmbo level. Their theory is linking the frequency of cultural outings to the level of cultural competence. If we accept this theory, then we can also conclude that when a parent takes their child out on cultural outings the child’s cultural competence also grows.

Nagel and Ganzenboom (2008) researched the influence of both secondary education and parental background on cultural participation amongst young people. In a longitudinal study they compared the cultural participation of these young people at the age of 14 with their siblings and schoolmates, and later between the ages of 25 and 38, again with siblings and (former) schoolmates. They found a correlation in cultural participation between these young people and their siblings as well as a correlation between the young people and their schoolmates. However, the correlation to siblings was three times greater than to schoolmates. Nagel and Ganzenboom interpreted these results as indicating that both parental background and schooling influence cultural participation, but that the effect of parental background is much greater. In other words a young person growing up in a family that attends cultural events is likely later as a young adult to display similar cultural behaviour. The school education they receive plays a much smaller role. These results support previous findings reported by Bourdieu and Darbel (1991) who had also concluded that differences in parental background overshadow school effects (in *Effecten van ouders en school op cultuurparticipatie in de periode van adolescentie tot jongvolwassenheid* by Nagel & Ganzenboom) .

The question arises as to why parental background appears to be much more crucial an influence on cultural participation than schooling. Perhaps we can look to Bourdieu and Darbel (1991, in *Effecten van ouders en school op cultuurparticipatie in de periode van adolescentie tot jongvolwassenheid* by Nagel & Ganzenboom pp 69-89) : “School education tends to encourage the conscious relearning of schemes of thought, perception or expression which already have been mastered subconsciously, by explicitly formulating the principles of the underlying grammar, such as the laws of harmony, of counterpoint, or the rules of pictorial composition,

and by providing the verbal and conceptual material necessary to express differences which are initially only experienced intuitively." Notice the word "already" in this quotation : it denotes the importance of previously acquired learning at a subconscious level. In this quote Bourdieu and Darbel are offering a clue to the large influence family background has on cultural participation. Parents provide a vital role by enabling a young person to learn intuitively, family life being a source of knowledge and training ("een bron van kennis en oefening" to quote Ganzenboom and De Graaf, 1991, in *Effecten van ouders en school op cultuurparticipatie in de periode van adolescentie tot jongvolwassenheid* by Nagel & Ganzenboom p 99). This intuitive learning is a foundation upon which instruction at school can build to reinforce and develop further learning.

But how is this process working ? (Here reference is made to the source : *Determinanten van leren over kunst* by Haanstra, 1995.) Zajonc (1968) claims that the more a person is exposed to particular stimuli the more the person will value those stimuli (the "mere exposure effect" p 16). Zusne (1986) is more stringent. According to his "cognitive consonance theory" a person derives pleasure from the degree of similarity between an art work and the cognitive model or ideal s/he holds. He states : "The aesthetic experience is the experience of cognitive reinforcement that occurs upon the realization that the art work approximates or fits the model held for it currently by the experiencing individual." (p 17) If one applies this theory to dance performances then one can conclude that viewing a dance form such as contemporary dance arouses pleasant feelings in a person if the dance form concurs reasonably with an internalized ideal. Shape and form as well as subject matter, says Zusne, are characteristics found in art works that can be assimilated into a cognitive ideal, enabling a pleasurable aesthetic experience. However Berlyne claims that it is not a harmonious experience a person seeks, but an optimal level of arousal. According to his "arousal theory" (1971, 1974) we experience pleasure both when stimulation is mildly increased as well as when it is diminished after reaching an unpleasantly high level. The degree of complexity, unfamiliarity, ambiguity or unexpectedness experienced by a person will determine the degree of stimulation that a person derives. The degree of stimulation experienced however varies from person to person and on the circumstances. An example might be that of an intelligent ballet student watching a performance of The Nutcracker. This ballet student is not likely to experience the same degree of stimulation as a person of low intelligence who has never been to a dance performance before. As Nagel and De Haan (2003) phrase it : "Personen met meer dan gemiddelde informatie verwerkingscapaciteit (culturele competentie) zullen dit optimum ervaren bij een complexer aanbod dan personen met minder capaciteiten."

What are the implications of such learning theories for the acquisition of cultural competence ? Both Zusne and Berlyne agree that very little previous exposure to a stimulus results in a low level of interest in the stimulus. Zajonc's theory tallies with this point of view. Zusne's theory further implies that new information can gradually be integrated into the body of knowledge already acquired. Assimilation occurs if the new art work is not too dissimilar to that already familiar. In other words if a student is introduced gradually to new forms of art, the student is more likely to be able to process them. Berlyne's theory warns that "overstimulation" can work counter to the effect desired, as can "understimulation". In the first case students confronted with over-challenging educational programmes may be "switched off" rather than "turned"

on. In the latter case they will quite simply be bored. If one applies these different theories to dance educational programmes one might suppose that lack of familiarity with the language of contemporary dance will make it more difficult for a student to understand or decode this type of dance. A step-by-step approach explaining contemporary dance and tailored to the student's level would seem to be the answer. But is it ? D.H.Hargreaves (1995) has suggested that such programmes are doomed to failure because the students are not motivated to learn. Sudden surprising confrontations with art ("mini-traumas" p 47) are more likely to result in a sense of commitment by young people to the art form. This commitment then releases the desire to explore and research the art form further. He advises that before students are exposed to these traumatic "conversive" experiences they first participate in an authentic educational programme so as to make the students more receptive to the "trauma".

How do young people's lifestyle affect their interest in dance performances ?

Under the last heading we examined the influence of parental background and educational level on cultural participation. Now I shall turn my attention to the influence of lifestyle and find out how that affects the cultural tastes of young people. In particular I shall examine the context of a contemporary dance performance. Should it be adapted to suit the tastes of young people and if so, how ?

Our society is changing. According to the sociologist De Swaan (1979) people are becoming more adept at negotiating with each other. Indeed the economist and art sociologist Abbing in his book "Van hoge kunst naar nieuwe kunst:" notes that children learn nowadays that it is good to show their feelings and that negotiating about rules is allowed. As he puts it, "Het leren verantwoordelijke keuzes te maken is in de plaats gekomen van het leren gehoorzamen." (p 77) This shift in expectations is reflected in the classroom. New teaching styles introduced into schools demand a more active participation from students, challenging them to choose, research and plan their subject matters themselves. The shift can also be observed in the arts according to Abbing : "Bij het popconcert worden de lichamelijke en emotionele impulsen niet voortdurend ingehouden en is er meer communicatie tussen musici en publiek, en ook tussen de bezoekers onderling. Het publiek participeert." (p 73). He warns however that this "informal" interaction between public and performers is taking root in high art only relatively slowly. Our society is changing in other ways too, adds Abbing. As a result of new technology young people have become more adept at multi-tasking. Their average attention span has decreased, but their ability to filter information has greatly improved. Boschma and Groen (2006, in *Van hoge naar nieuwe kunst* by Abbing, 2009.) have concluded that the younger generation (15 – 25 year olds) is cleverer, faster and more sociable. This fast society, says Abbing, is not used to sitting still, not in the classroom and not at home. "Thuis wordt er minder lang doorgelezen en de DVD-film wordt herhaaldelijk stil gezet."

The effects of these changes on high art are damaging. Boschma and Groen (2006) confirm what the SCP figures (quoted above under relevance) tell us : young people don't have much affinity with high art. Large theatres are associated with authoritarian and paternalistic behaviour. "Het stilzitten is in lichamelijke zin een probleem, maar het veel grotere probleem is toch het moeten stilzitten, waarbij dan ook nog eens allerlei andere opgeschreven regels bijkomen." (p 80). Or to quote Van Baasbank (2000), former programmer of the Julidans festival : "We want everything to be short, we soon find something ...longwinded." (in *Dancing Dutch* ed Versteeg, 2000 p to be found). Unlike pop concerts and cabaret which encourage interaction between public and performer, dance performances do not allow for negotiation or participation by audiences. The question now arises, how can high art (I am including contemporary dance here) find a young audience, what do young audiences like? Abbing : "Het sociale gedrag is gericht op intimiteit. Er wordt veel tijd besteed aan het opbouwen en onderhouden van vriendengroepjes." (p 89). When large groups come together it is often for a combination of sport and art. Unlike in high art participation is considered important, there is space for everyone to contribute, with little value accorded to the differentiation between professional and amateur.

Already in 2000 Simon Dove, festival director of the Springdance Festival at the time, said : "The manner in which we organize culture has to change. Compare it with

Internet, which is a permanent work in progress. Perhaps one should spend six weeks with an artist on an island, or two hours with dancers in the dark or two minutes with provocative skate-dancers in a supermarket. The whole city has to become the dance stage of the future.” (source : *Dancing Dutch* ed Versteeg, 2000, as are all other quotations by Baasbank, Dove, Embrechts, Hofman and Spreekseel.) In other words it is not just a matter of getting rid of the “black box” of the theatre venue, seen as an increasingly dead space “neutralising” the performance at hand (words spoken by Leo Spreekseel, artistic director of the CaDance Festival). The very experience of going to see dance has to change. People who flock to see popular dance spectacles at the RAI or Ahoy “seek a collectively shared mass experience” to quote Spreekseel again. That is why, according to him, people fight for tickets for large-scale productions. Should dance then go so far as to allow itself to become an extension of pop culture ? Pieter Hofman, director of guest programming at the Muziektheater in Amsterdam, maybe predictably does not agree: “Dance should guard against becoming an extension of pop culture. The context in a theatre should remain differentiated from that of a dance event...Dance has to keep its special status. Perhaps for once you have to accept a smaller audience.”

Unfortunately the warning signs are there. Knulst in his review of the performance arts (“Podia in een tijdperk van afstandsbediening”, 1995) noted the crumbling support for them especially in the cities. Well-to-do educated citizens on which the performance arts rely are moving out of the cities, whilst single people and immigrants, less inclined to attend performances, are moving in. In addition, time is becoming a scarce commodity for the middle-classes as dual earnership becomes the trend. Like Abbing and Van Baasbank, Knulst has also commented on the growing importance of fleeting sensational experiences. In 2000 the SCP drew up three scenarios forecasting cultural climate trends over 30 years’ time (Van den Broek and De Haan, 2000). They range from the grim to the optimistic :

1. The marginalisation of culture : in this forecast the traditional performance arts have been relegated to a subsidised niche, enjoyed by a small cultural elite. Large-scale commercialised entertainment is dominating the cultural scene, linked to the media and new forms of music theatre and visual imagery This scenario supports the possible scenario envisaged by Van den Berg back in 1989 : “Artistiek getalenteerde jongeren voelen zich er niet door aangesproken en worden er niet in opgenomen, wat resteert is reservatekunst, waarin vooral de grote klassieken worden gekoesterd. Jongeren met artistieke ambities vinden niet daar maar in de vrijetijdsindustrie inspiratie, erkenning en emplooi.”
2. Cultural consolidation : in this forecast the performing arts have had to adapt to popular tastes in order to survive, carving out a market for themselves by exploiting the exotic and the many organised festivals. New cultural centres have sprung up in the form of “cultiplexes” in which people can both socialize and attend performances, and in a climate that no longer separates high and low art.
3. Rediscovery of culture : in this forecast cultural centres have successfully exploited the public’s dissatisfaction with commercialised culture, attracting the younger generations by specialising in diversity. Thus traditional, popular and innovative forms of art are all addressed in cultiplexes to be found on the outskirts of cities.

Which projects can be recommended to encourage young people to see contemporary dance ?

There are various ways in which one can encourage young people to attend dance performances. This paper will concentrate on two ways, both related to areas dealt with under the previous headings (the psychology, education and lifestyle of young people). The first possibility is to teach young people to become culturally competent. The second possibility is to adapt the context and content of contemporary dance performances so as to suit the youth market. Both of these strategies are currently being exercised. This section considers a few outstanding projects which use one or other of these two strategies. It concentrates on that of education first.

Educational programmes are all the rage. Every self-respecting dance group has drawn up a list of workshops that they can offer a school prior to a dance performance. As part of the CKV1 offensive to encourage the cultural competence of young people, schools have been distributing cultural tokens to their pupils, thereby obliging the students to see performances that they may have no inclination to see. This has resulted in some unpleasant experiences, with large groups of pupils misbehaving during some dance performances. The intention to bring students to see dance is laudable, but what can be done to avoid these initiatives backfiring ?

In 2005 Stichting Storm, the organisation behind the Tweekt Festival in Utrecht, invited vmbo students to the festival, packaging the outing into an event in which the students themselves were the stars : "De vmbo-leerlingen werden tijdens het festival als VIP ontvangen en behandeld. Tweekt rolde letterlijk de rode loper uit, zorgde voor champagne, bitterballen, speciale toegangspassen, een fotograaf en een cameraploeg." (p 29). This idea of providing VIP treatment to pupils can be adapted in different ways. At the Nederlands Dans Theater students are taken before the performance behind the scenes of the theatre and into the dancers' dressing-rooms or the costume workshop where they may touch the materials and try on a selected item. They are also invited to see the dancers rehearse in the flesh. Another approach is that of Dance Works Rotterdam which organises interactive two-part dance workshops ahead of the performances. In the first half of the workshop the dancers introduce themselves to the pupils and demonstrate dance fragments from their current performance. They then allow the pupils themselves to take on the role of choreographer and play around with these fragments : "Vervolgens bepalen de leerlingen de ordening van deze fragmenten, de uitvoerenden, de plaats in de ruimte, het tempo en zelfs de muziek...De talloze (on)mogelijkheden worden zichtbaar en bieden de leerlingen inzicht in het maakproces." (p 28). In the second half of the workshop the pupils are coached by dance teachers to make and dance their own phrases which they subsequently also perform for the professional dancers.

There are a number of elements that are striking about these educational programmes. For a start the pupils are treated with respect. In the case of Tweekt it is a means of diffusing the tension amongst the pupils for having been obliged to come. In the last two projects pupils are also introduced to the dancers. As a consequence the dancers become "echte persoonlijkheden", to quote Chantal Storchi, educational worker at the NDT. "Door met ze [the dancers] te kunnen praten en ze van dichtbij aan het werk te zien kunnen ze [the pupils] meeleven met deze personen en hun dans." (p 28). This is important when one considers the claim that

most people only reach the aesthetic developmental stage of expression and interpretation (Housen, 1987; Parsons, 1987; Swanwick and Tillman, 1988, 1994, 2002 in *Stadia in de muzikale en artistieke ontwikkeling* by Koopman, 2005).). This connection that the pupils make with the dancers may help in their understanding and interpretation of the dance performance when they see it later. Another interesting feature is the backstage tour provided to the pupils, helping to make the context in which the performance is taking place more real. Of course this backstage tour of set and costumes also arouses the curiosity of the young people about the performance they will be seeing. In addition, Dance Works Rotterdam, like many dance companies, offers an active workshop, but what is special here is that it is interactive, involving the continuous participation of both pupils and dancers. Furthermore, the workshop incorporates a degree of reflection since pupils are encouraged to play with formal choreographic choices. This is actually a demanding exercise, requiring a relatively abstract way of looking at dance. It is interesting to consider these educational programmes in the light of Hargreaves' "traumatic" theory. By using a number of strategies as listed above, the students are gradually coaxed into a receptive state. The next stage, exposing the pupils to the performance, probably implies confronting the young people with a "traumatic" experience – if the performance has a high enough quality.

The other strategy for encouraging young people to attend dance performances is that of adapting the context and content of dance performances to suit the youth market. Pieter Hofman, director of guest programming at the Muziektheater in Amsterdam, raised his concerns about doing so back in 2000. His concerns were echoed by Twaalfhoven in 2003 who wrote: "Makers van jeugddansvoorstellingen moeten zich meer richten op de kunst intrinsieke aspecten van hun werk. Jeugddansmakers maken vaak de fout jongeren te veel tegemoet te komen op gebied van interesse met betrekking tot vorm en inhoud van de voorstelling. Het gebruikmaken van populaire cultuuruitingen om een bepaalde jeugdige doelgroep te bereiken is niet onjuist. Het tegemoet komen van jongeren op interesse gebied werkt vaak positief. De fout wordt gemaakt wanneer men in deze fase blijft hangen. Dan wordt jongeren enkel cultuur voorgeschoteld die ze al kennen. De bedoeling is juist hun kennis te laten maken met kunst. Om dit te bereiken moeten makers populaire cultuur uitingen oprekken naar meer hoogwaardige kunst begrippen."

With this warning in mind let us savour the wonderfully fresh ideas of Nita Liem's company "Don't Hit Mama", described by Anita Twaalfhoven ("Op het snijvlak van clubdansen en theatre", 2007). She does away with the separation of podium and audience, turning the space into the more informal and private space of a living-room with sofas, a space that transforms itself in the course of the evening into a swinging dance club. Liem : "Het publiek loopt bij binnenkomst meestal verbaasd rond : het is een voorstelling maar er zijn geen stoelen. Het feest is al zonder hen begonnen en een "host" vertelt hun wat de bedoeling is : "Let's get this party started!" Langzamerhand raken ze dan in de gebeurtenissen betrokken. Soms kijken ze alleen, soms dansen ze mee en gaan ze helemaal op in de gebeurtenissen om hen heen." (p 21). Her dancers are professionals, blending modern dance with tap, flamenco, salsa or hiphop. She also uses "guides", people who help get the "party" going, pulling the audience into the narrative of the performance. It is intriguing to spot the ideas of Abbing ("Van hoge kunst naar nieuwe kunst", 2009) being put into practice in these performances. The intimate atmosphere of the performance space,

the public's freedom to roam around during the performance, the active participation of the audience, the blending of amateur and professional in the dance, are all elements that are found as recommendations in "Van hoge naar nieuwe kunst" by Abbing (described earlier). Twaalfhoven also points to the narrative in the performance. This may be an important way of involving the audience in the performance, seeing as most people are apt to look for an interpretive understanding of the arts (Housen, 1987 in *Determinanten van leren over kunst* by Haanstra, 1995).

Conclusion

The fact that contemporary dance needs to draw in a younger audience is undeniable. A bigger audience would also be commendable, if contemporary dance is not to be relegated to an even smaller, elite niche in times to come. So it is that the contemporary dance world has to take action. It can choose to exert pressure by providing workshops, and attempt to persuade younger generations of its worth. And it can allow pressure to be exerted upon it, and adapt so as to draw in this younger audience.

People of a higher educational level attend more cultural events and they pass this activity onto their children. Cultural activity encourages cultural competence which in turn encourages cultural activity. But what of the children whose parents are not well-educated? This is the area in which the dance world can exert pressure, but it should do so wisely. Familiarising students with dance sounds in principle like a good idea, but Berlyne warns about the pitfalls that may be lurking: stimuli that are both too simple and too difficult do not hold a person's interest. Educational workers and teachers should bear this in mind and draw up programmes specifically tailored to their target group. Hargreaves also has recommendations: he suggests students be prepared with authentic programmes that enable these students to become receptive to information. Only at this point are they then confronted with the mini-trauma of a contemporary dance performance. Educational programmes can also bear in mind the aesthetic and developmental phase of students, challenging them with tasks that are appropriate to their stage of development. It is true that education has a smaller impact on a student than parental background, but its effects are measurable and should not be underrated.

As I mentioned earlier contemporary dance can also choose to adapt to the pressures around it. In fact the term "contemporary dance" carries within it a touching irony. "Contemporary" means of today. What is relevant to today will probably not be relevant in twenty or thirty years' time, at least not to the future younger generation. "Contemporary" implies adaptation. Indeed it seems perfectly clear that contemporary dance will have to transform itself in order to retain an audience. But to what extent should contemporary dance be prepared to change? Pieter Hofman speaks of the importance of "hoogwaardige kunst", so what criteria determine the quality of dance? The dilemma is crystallized in the work of Nita Liem: one can point to the work of the company "Don't Hit Mama" as an example of innovative ideas but criticise Liem for going too far. It is a fair criticism to point out that Liem's work can no longer be deemed contemporary dance because she is compromising the form with popular dance styles and a narrative. Nevertheless I do believe that she is showing programmers and choreographers a new way of making dance performance that is relevant to the tastes of a young audience. Of course there are other ways of making contemporary dance relevant. Spreksel speaks about bringing autobiography and social issues into dance. Embrechts comments on how the body can become the "bearer of identity", citing Jérôme Bel as an example, a choreographer with a large following amongst the younger generation. (Sources: *Dancing Dutch* ed Versteeg, 2000) However there is no point choreographers shutting themselves up in their ivory towers, clinging rigidly to old ways of doing. The contemporary dance world has no choice but to take stock of this new generation – and adapt.

Since the scenarios (*Cultuur tussen competentie en competitie*. Broek and de Haan, 2000) were drawn up examining the possible future of culture participation in 2030 ten years have gone by. In the meantime municipalities have been working hard to draw young people back into attending the arts. One example is the organisation of the “culturele zondag” in Utrecht which seeks to offer theatre and dance in innovative and surprising ways. Indeed the changes taking place in society can offer opportunities for contemporary dance. As a society we attach greater value to visual imagery (as opposed to language) than we used to, we have prolonged the period of childhood and adolescence, and we are re-evaluating our appreciation of collective events (Knulst, 1995). The challenge for programmers and choreographers alike is to exploit these changes without sacrificing the quality of the performances. As Annette Embrechts so succinctly put it, summing up the mood amongst programmers in 2000: “Something has to happen.” The contemporary world should embrace this “something” and live up to its name. Contemporary implies forever adapting.

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