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Dance lessons. Exploring processes of innovation in the cultural and creative sectors by unpacking the production network of a modern dance performance

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1. Tell Your Mom You Love Your Skin

On September 23, 2021, a new modern dance piece called *Tell Your Mom You Love Your Skin* (TYMYLYS) was premiered on the occasion of the opening Amare cultural centre in The Hague. This large, eye-catching multi-functional centre finally opened after much political hassle, construction issues, and a series of lockdowns due to the pandemic. It is not just home to the Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT), but also the Royal Conservatory (both music and ballet), and the Residentie Orkest Den Haag. Emily Molnar, the artistic director of NDT, had specifically asked Alan Lucien Øyen, a Norwegian choreographer, to come up with a new, innovative dance piece to celebrate the opening of this prestigious "house for the arts, events, education and cultural encounter" (Amare, n.d.).

Below, we use the case of TYMYLYS to delve into the process of innovation in the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS). We contribute to the extant literature in two ways. First, we offer a rich description of how NDT, a world-class modern dance company, organises its production network to foster processes of innovation based on interviews, observation and desk research. We explore how NDT has organised its production network to fulfil its innovative mission. Innovation is a relational activity (Cohendet et al., 2017; Montanari et al., 2016; Pratt, 2015, 2017) and we use a modified production network approach (see Kloosterman et al., 2026) to explore how different phases are geared towards creating a modern dance piece. This also involves exploring the spatial footprint, the governance and the multi-scalar embeddedness of the network.

Second, we discuss the wider implications of using a theoretical lens that does not depart from more conventional units of analysis - artists, firms, industries, spatial clusters - but instead starts with looking at production network relations and investigating how these are tilted towards innovation. We argue that a production network approach provides a useful integrated framework for analysing innovation which suits contemporary CCS where production processes tend to be fluid and project-based and which may involve actors in different locations (Grabher, 2002; Scott, 2000). Other scholars have already pointed at the need to study the CCS in novel ways: de Bernard et al. (2021: 339) propose to "… challenge conventional units of analysis for the cultural and creative sectors, claiming these have significant limitations, and identify ecological thinking as a new and preferable approach.

To give more depth to our evaluation of our production network approach, we briefly compare this to an approach based on a relational perspective which centres on the creative artist. Fabrizio Montanari, Annachiara Scapolan and Martina Gianecchini (Montanari et al., 2016) have also looked how innovation takes place in modern dance - as far as we know the only other study on innovation in modern dance. Their focus, however, is not on how the production network of an iconic dance company fosters innovation, but instead on the shifts in embeddedness of one individual iconic choreographer, Mauro Bigonzetti, and how these relate to his innovative dance pieces. This study, then, offers a very useful counterpoint to position our approach. It, moreover, also provides a strong argument for an interactionist approach to investigate innovation in the CCS.

Given their important role in current societies (Flew & Cunningham,

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2010; Kloosterman et al., 2026; Scott, 2000), looking at processes of innovation in the CCS already makes much sense. The relevance of this case study, however, goes beyond the CCS. In much of the CCS there is ongoing quest for innovations and this offers "an exceptional opportunity for understanding innovation" more generally (Wohl, 2022, p. 7; Cohendet et al., 2017). This holds especially for modern dance where, according to Tamar Sagiv (2014: 158) "… constant experimentation and innovation are particularly crucial" and where recognition of peers and critics is key. Moreover, Sagiv (2014) firmly situates modern dance in what Bourdieu has labelled *the field of restricted cultural production* (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 115). Such a field tends to develop its own criteria for the evaluation of its products and prioritises cultural or symbolic value over commercial success (in marked contrast to a field of large-scale cultural production).

NDT perfectly fits Sagiv's description. Its mission is innovation and recognition of the field has been at the forefront from the outset. Although, evidently, ticket sales are important for NDT, generous public funding has giving it a secure basis to experiment. With this combination of a strong focus on innovation and ample resources, the NDT can be labelled as an extreme case regarding innovative environments. TYMYLYS, hence, presents a case where we can expect that crucial features of the processes of innovation will come to the fore which can provide more general lessons.

We first present our analytical framework (section 2) followed by the methodology (section 3). Next, we provide the broader context by positioning NDT and by briefly delving into modern dance and innovation in the CCS (section 4). We then unravel the production network of TYMYLYS (section 5). After that we juxtapose the relational perspective of artistic innovation in modern dance as presented by Montanari et al. (2016) with the production network approach (section 6) We conclude by discussing the wider implications of our findings – both with respect to innovation processes and the production network approach.

2. A production network approach

Creation and innovation are not just the work of solitary geniuses. Both Becker, 1982 and Bourdieu, 1993 have emphasised the insertion of creative processes in broader contexts. Innovation does not happen in solitude but is embedded within communities (Scott, 2000; Wohl, 2022, p. 5). To grasp processes of innovation in the CCS, we, then, have to look beyond the artist and take into account these broader contexts. In this we follow de Bernard et al. (2021: 332) who advocate approaches which include a "wider range of actors, relationships and geographic scales" and which goes beyond a narrowly sectoral approach. To heed this advice, we depart from the Global Production Network (GPN) approach developed by Coe (2013) and Coe and Yeung (2015, 2019).Their approach is first and foremost "a heuristic framework for interpreting the evolving multi-scalar geographies of the global economy … It emphasizes the intra-, inter- and extra-firm networks" (Coe, 2015, p. 486).

While their main aim is to explain divergent regional economic trajectories on a global scale (Coe & Yeung, 2015, 2019), we investigate how the production network of NDT fosters innovative modern dance performances and assess the usefulness of such an approach. For this, we use the basic components of the GPN framework – phases, spatial footprint, governance and embeddedness - but in a modified way (see Kloosterman et al., 2026), which enables us to unpack the CCS in a non-siloed way.

The first basic component is carving up the production network into five, analytically distinct phases (d'Ovidio et al., 2019; Kloosterman et al., 2026). The first phase is the *Creation Phase* where new ideas are conceived such as the composing of a song or the choreography of a dance performance. The second phase is the *Production Phase* in which these ideas are materialised one way or another as tangible (e.g. fashion), digital products (e.g. a game), or as a service (e.g. a dance performance). In the third phase, the *Distribution Phase*, the products (physical or digital) have to be brought to end-users –individual customers, visitors or an audience. The fourth phase is the *Exchange Phase*. Objective criteria to assess the quality of products of the CCS are typically lacking. Instead, products are evaluated not just by the end-users, but also by critics, peers, and tastemakers. This phase forms a pivotal part of fields of restricted cultural production because this is where the cultural value is assessed and, ultimately, determined. The fifth is the *Archiving Phase*. Notably in the CCS, the preservation and storage is important as it provides a pool of historical examples that can serve as a source of inspiration and provide the elements for new combinations thereby closing the loop with the creation phase and enabling a more cyclical conceptualisation of production networks as proposed by Pratt (2008).

The second basic concept of the production network framework is that of the *spatial footprint*. All these phases may take place in specific concrete locations with their own socio-economic, cultural and institutional contexts. This holds, evidently, for the creation and the production and the distribution phase, but the other two phases are also linked to places as tastemakers in the exchange phase and gatekeepers in the archiving phase have to based somewhere.

The *mode of governance of the production network* is the third basic component. Networks have to be initiated, monitored and managed. Power is essentially relational and has to be understood in the context of the network (Coe, 2013: 488). Power can be organised in a top-down way and concentrated in a single lead actor or in a more horizontal way where various actors are collectively in charge. Importantly, powerful actors can, in principle, be located in each of the five phases.

The fourth basic component concerns *embeddedness*. Phases and activities are partly shaped by their embeddedness in specific multi-scalar, sociocultural and institutional contexts – for instance local craft traditions, labour regulations or cultural policies. Coe (2013: 488) distinguishes three types: i) societal embeddedness: "the cultural, institutional, and historical origins of the economic actor in question"; ii) network embeddedness which connotes the connections with in the production network; and iii) territorial embeddedness, which "captures how networks are 'anchored' in different places".

Below, we will use these concepts to explore the production network of TYMYLYS and how this relates to innovation.

3. Methodology

To unravel that production network, we have used an exploratory design to grasp the role of actors (de Bernard et al., 2021, p. 345). We conducted interviews with key actors – the choreographer, the artistic director, dancers, stage manager, head of the costume-making department and the head of the firm making the props for the performance (nine respondents in total). We visited NDT in Amare several times as soon as the lockdown restrictions were lifted and were shown around the premises while talking to people. We also visited the firm making the props and interviewed the managing director there. The focus in these interviews was on their role in the creation and eventual realisation of the performance. The interviews, which lasted between 45 and 120 min took place from May 2021 to November 2021. At first, only video calls were possible due to pandemic restrictions. Later on, interviews were in-person at the Amare Theater. The respondents were asked to sign an informed consent form in which the ethical procedures for academic research and the conditions for publication. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using an item list focused on their role in the production network.

Furthermore, we visited the firm where the props were made and we were present both at the final rehearsal and the premiere of TYMYLYS at Amare. We also conducted a second interview with the artistic director to look back on the realisation of TYMYLYS. To position NDT as a dance company constantly aimed at innovation we used publications of NDT. Notably the programmes for 2021/22 and 2022/23, the yearly report for 22/23, and Nederlands Dans Theater 60, 2019, a historical overview.

4. Innovation is the tradition

NDT is seen as one of the best and most innovative modern dance companies in the world. Sanyo Roy (2018) in The Guardian (2018), praised NDT and its "superb troupe of dancers". Sirin, 2023 wrote in the *Dance Art Journal* that NDT "… is dance in extremis … I have put Nederlands Dans Theater on a pedestal ever since I discovered them on YouTube as a dance-mad teenager". According to the choreographer of TYMYLYS, Alan Lucien Øyen, NDT has the "best people in business" (interview with Alan Lucien Øyen).

Charlie Skuy, NDT1 dancer:

> They [NDT] are just known as a place that kind of excels all other places in terms of innovative, exciting, contemporary dance and new choreographies. Growing up, I was watching all the videos and all the content, as an online window into the company. It seemed like whoever was exciting in the dance world had been creating at NDT. So I thought this is the highest place to go.

Right from its start in 1959, the mission of NDT has been innovation. (*Nederlands Dans Theater 60*, 2019: 14). Notably founder and long-time managing director Carel Birnie (1961-1991) was crucial in creating this environment: "the company's character which he regarded as being like a laboratory: not driven by money but by the incentive to create 'new things'" (*Nederlands Dans Theater 60*, 2019: 50), thereby making it a prime example of a Bourdieuan field of restricted cultural production. This reputation was further cemented and expanded by a string of world famous resident choreographers: Hans van Manen, Jiří Kylián, Sol Leòn and Paul Lightfoot who all could benefit from this environment conducive to experiment.

The evolution from a bunch of rebels wanting to change the Dutch dance world to one of the largest and most renowned modern dance companies in the world, can also be seen as a process of social, economic and cultural globalisation. When NDT started, management, choreographers, dancers, and crew were all Dutch. After 1970, NDT became increasingly more international regarding artistic directors, choreographers, dancers and tour locations. Of the group of 28 NDT1 dancers, only three are from the EU member states and just two of them from the Netherlands (NDT, 2023). This cosmopolitan mix of artists also implies more global cultural influences.

> In my youth, when I came to work at NDT, in '89 for the first time. They [dancers] would lie in a sleeping bag in the alley close to NDT, just to audition the next day … From far and wide, from all over the world, people come to NDT.

Erik Blom, Head of technical department

Founder Carel Birnie was also crucial in obtaining structural funding from the government and the municipality of The Hague already in 1961. This strong reliance on public funding is anything but rare in modern dance. As a restricted field of cultural production it is almost by definition niche-oriented: "Modern dance is not, and probably never has been, a broadly familiar art" (Sussmann, 1998, p. 57) and "… from its beginning, an art for a circumscribed status group" (ibid., 61). Classic ballet can rarely survive on the market (Towse, 2010, p. 96) and this holds even more so for large modern dance companies. They are less likely to fall back on 'old warhorses' (e.g. Swan Lake or the Nutcracker) to generate a reliable stream of income (ibid, 97), given their experimental orientation.

This solid financial base has provided a secure basis for NDT for over forty years enabling a growth of the company in terms of personnel, facilities, and, crucially, its own theatre (as of 2021 the Amare building). In 2021, NDT employed 58 dancers, some twenty persons working in sound, light, and stage set-up as well as seven persons working in the costume department and about 110 in (NDT, 2021, p. 57; NDT, 2022). Being active in a restricted filed of cultural production, hence, does not preclude a sizeable scale and NDT can be qualified as both a niche-oriented and large-scale cultural amenity which can cater to large international audiences (Kloosterman, 2014, p. 2417).

Secure funding has enabled NDT to prioritise cultural value above economic value, and, in doing so, to take risks. This, however, does not mean that attendance is completely irrelevant. As Heilbrun and Gray (1993: 110) have argued the "… motivation of a performing arts enterprise in the not-for-profit sector can be described as follows: over an appropriate period of time, the firm tries to maximize attendance, while presenting a repertoire that meets its own quality standards, subject to the constraint that revenues from the box office plus other sources must be sufficient to cover costs." In the case of NDT, these quality standards are evidently couched in terms of innovation.

Innovation in the arts is difficult if not impossible to measure (Jones et al., 2016; Whol, 2022). "Broadly defined, innovation in the arts is a unique concept of innovation" in the view of Jason White (2022: 14). This elusiveness also implies that there is no standard metric for comparing the quality of the incommensurable objects (Whol, 2022). How do we assess the innovative value of aesthetic aspects that are inherently subjective? At which moment can we decide that the introduction of something new was indeed a successful innovation? The history of art is littered with examples of performances, design, music, paintings, films and books, which were initially strongly criticised, but at a later stage were hailed as innovative masterpieces (White, 2022). Still, it makes sense to think in Schumpeterian terms of introducing new combinations which may amount to a significantly higher level of non-conformity (Brandellero & Kloosterman, 2010, p. 65; Leslie & Rantisi, 2017; Wohl, 2022). Specific segments of audiences, notably modern dance fans, demand innovative art (DiMaggio & Stenberg, 1985; Sussmann, 1998).

The essence of modern dance, then, is taking risks. According to Leila Sussmann (1998: 61) " modern dance "… has no 'academy', no movement vocabulary common to all choreographers. It has sought to be an avant-gardist art, constantly pushing at the boundaries of what dance might be. Each choreographer tries to 'make it new'". Sagiv et al. (2020:41-42) quote a choreographer who captures this very neatly: "the meaning of innovation is that I will not create dance that completely follows the rules of the canon. I rather follow the instructions and give them my own interpretation in order to create a new exciting choreography". This newness can come from many sides as modern dance is usually more of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art combining moves, sound, light, costumes, stories, and stage settings (Sagiv, 2014; Sagiv et al., 2020; Sagiv Yekeshel, 2020). Other art forms (e.g. new music styles) and new technologies (e.g. the use of screens, laser beam lights) may thus provide the elements for innovative combinations.

The tradition of innovation at NDT illustrates that two crucial conditions have to be met for innovative modern dance. First, the funding of the company should allow experiments and risk taking. Second, the management of the company should create an encouraging and inspirational atmosphere. Conditions, however, do not generate innovation by themselves. Change agents – choreographers and dancers – have to fill the stage with something new.

5. The production network unravelled

5.1. Creation phase

To come up with new, innovative dance pieces, NDT asks choreographers from the outside to work with them. She or he (still mostly the latter) brings her or his own creative team, which then will be temporarily plugged into its existing organisation. While the dancers, the management, the supporting staff, and much of the in-house lighting and sound crew and the stage production stay the same, the choreographers and their teams (typically consisting of a costume designer, a set designer, light designer, and a rehearsal director) come and go. When the contract with the choreographer is signed, there are few constraints - the strictest is, arguably, the 'tourability': the requirement that the props

should all fit within one standard shipping container so they can be taken on (intercontinental) tours. There are, obviously, also budget constraints regarding the costs of the props and the costumes, but are apparently to a certain extent negotiable.

> We've had several discussions about it. Should you provide more guidelines yourself? On the other hand, it also limits creative freedom. So within certain frameworks, they are actually free to do as they please, including the choice of the number of dancers they work with, the music they use, and the type of set design.
>
> Linda de Boer, Manager Planning & Touring

> Is it a big deal if we don't stick to the budget? No, eventually not. After all, it's about the creative product, right? Do we care how much it cost? The performance is sacred; the creation is what matters. Money shouldn't be the determining factor. We'll have to figure out the financial aspect later. You can question, of course, whether a dancer needs to wear a dress costing € 30,000 euros. But you shouldn't ask that question within this context. Yes, if you start asking that question, then maybe working in art isn't for you.
>
> Erik Blom, Head of technical department

This large span of artistic freedom was also given to Alan Lucien Øyen, a highly acclaimed writer, choreographer and director. He wants to provoke with new conceptions regarding both dance and theatre (http://www.winterguests.com/about/alan). His creation process always involves some form of co-creation, engaging with the artists, dancers and actors to write the eventual story.

Emily Molnar already knew Øyen from her previous jobs and she trusted him to come up with a new modern dance piece that would live up to the standards and reputation of NDT. This trust was apparently so high that Alan Lucien Øyen "just about a week ago …, gave us the first draft" - (introductory presentation by Emily Molnar on the evening of the premiere). More in general, Øyen, felt that he was given "carte blanche". He considered himself to be "super fortunate" to be able to work with "highly trained dancers" whose "skill set is very high" (interview Alan Lucien Øyen). He wanted for his debut project with NDT "… to challenge the dancers to work with acting, to explore words through writing, as well as engage physically with text through their own movements" (NDT, 2024).

In creating a modern dance piece, there is a continuum running from co-creation between the choreographer and dancers to a choreography more or less solely scripted by the choreographer. In the first case, the preparatory phase is an integral part of the creation (and discovery) process, whereas in the latter, the dancers first and foremost have to learn the moves and are not so much subjects as (moving) objects. TYMYLYS was clearly on the side of co-creation as Øyen deliberately aims at processes of interaction aiming at "an open narrative" and "looking for a storyline with the dancers". This was especially evident when dancers were asked to contribute their own storylines to the spoken word parts of the piece - one of the more innovative, theatrical elements in TYMYLYS. Innovation, therefore, was partly emerging on the spot from the process organised and monitored by Øyen.

> Emily wanted a process that was going to be unique in the sense that the dancers were going to be collaborating in a way where they could really bring their artistic agency, their artistic input and their very own creation and really have ownership over what they were doing. And in this process it came down to the dancers having a lot of input into what they were doing and to have to take responsibility for what they were deciding to research, deciding to create.
>
> Scott Fowler, dancer NDT1

> I think also just a part of the job is that you should be able to shift what you contribute to different types of choreographers or else you never align with their ideas. So but Alan was especially present because he was not giving a lot of feedback or structure or framework from his end on what he'd like to see.
>
> Charlie Skuy, dancer NDT1

5.2. Production

Production and creation, notably in the case of TYMYLYS, are hard to separate. During the final rehearsal we could observe how pieces of the puzzle of the performance were coming together in a dialogue between the choreographer, his crew, the NDT technical staff and, of course, the dancers. In this process, final decisions with respect to light, sound, stage setting were made. The light and sound systems are already there in Amare, but costumes and props are an integral and unique part of a performance. Regarding this infrastructure and the other items needed for the performance, there is an overriding concern with quality and an eye for detail. Both in-house and outside suppliers, hence, have to be able to meet these requirements, but they also have to understand the aesthetics which the choreographer and the stage and costume designers want to project. They have to be part of more permanent social networks like Becker's *art worlds* (1982) or *artistic communities* where they "… share knowledge on an informal basis. They respect the social norms of their community that drive their behaviour and beliefs. Within a given community knowledge is continuously exchanged and can circulate through the existence of a local language understandable by the members only" (Cohendet & Simon, 2007, p. 591; also Scott, 2000; Cohendet et al., 2017).

This belonging to a community sharing a vocabulary was reflected by the costume makers. A ballet or dance costume involves very specialised skills as the requirements regarding fit (all costumes are bespoke), stretch, colours, and, of course, appearance. This typically takes place in-house by the NDT costume department which includes both the 'making wardrobe', which incorporates the making of the costume during pre-production; and the 'running wardrobe', which takes care of the maintenance and continuity of costumes during a series of performances. When a capacity shortage arises, the making of the costumes is outsourced to a trusted dedicated supplier specialising in ballet and dance costumes. Making the costumes in-house, however, has another advantage: the costume makers can be actively involved in the broader process of creation. Joke Visser (former head of costume workshop) reflected on working together with Jiri Kylian: "A great mutual appreciation arose between and I had the honor to supplement his ideas with my own creativity" (*Nederlands Dans Theater 60*, 2019: 107).

The maker of the props of TYMYLYS, Kloosterboer Decor BV also felt being part of an art world or artistic community. Kloosterboer specialises in design and construction of objects for the CCS (Kloosterboer website). The firm is housed in three large construction halls and located in Purmerend, a town to the north of Amsterdam where space is much cheaper and skilled craftsmen and craftswomen are much easier to find than in Amsterdam. Communication with NDT is cordial, based on a shared vocabulary and long-term relationship of mutual understanding and trust: "Trust is the most important, if you betray that trust the client is gone … the price is less important than a more permanent relationship" according to Jan Zijp, managing director of Kloosterboer (interview Jan Zijp). He added that they "go with the image" projected by the designer and thus are very much aware of the importance of the symbolic value.

Like the costumes, the making of props can be a demanding task being often unique elements meeting special requirements with respect to material, appearance, reflection, weight, robustness, and 'tourability'. Only a few firms in the Netherlands are able to meet these standards. In the case of TYMYLYS, Kloosterboer constructed the large wooden rectangles (made from Polish pine on special request of the stage designer), which hang above the stage.

5.3. Distribution

Drawing a clear boundary between the creation and production and also between the latter and the distribution phase is rather hard. A modern dance piece is created, rehearsed (or produced) and eventually performed in front of an audience (or distributed) at the premiere. If successful, NDT goes on tour performing that piece in other places and then, in a sense, the piece is being (re)produced every time when it is performed. Like the first time, each performance requires the coming together of different actors and elements (costumes, lighting and sound systems, props) in one place at one time. It is the phase in which the ideas from the choreographer's mind are realised. It is also the phase in which NDT is very much in control. As Caves (2000, p. 8) noted "[t]he performing arts and creative activities involving complex teams – the motley-crew property – require close temporal coordination of their activities" and this is exactly what NDT does.

5.4. Exchange

The exchange phase is crucial in the CCS as this where to a large extent the cultural value is being assessed by critics and peers who have intimate knowledge of the field and its vocabulary (Becker, 1982; Velthuis, 2003). This holds even more so for restricted fields of cultural production as these critics and peers have, according to Bourdieu (1993: 121), "… the power to grant cultural consecration" and confer legitimacy to the whole endeavour. Consequently, innovations "typically emerge in social milieus, art worlds or complex fields that comprise not just the creative workers, but also tastemakers and connectors who are able to assess the new product" (Brandellero & Kloosterman, 2010, p. 67).

TYMYLYS was reviewed by critics of the main Dutch newspapers who specialise in dance and by a critic of the Theaterkrant. These reviews were not, on the whole, very positive. Only Wendy Lubberding of the Theaterkrant (https://www.theaterkrant.nl/tag/alan-lucien-oyen/) valued the prominent role of spoken word as an innovative element in modern dance (e.g. Lubberding, 2021). Other reviewers were more critical. Annette Embrechts (2021) wrote in *de Volkskrant* that TYMYLYS was upstaged by the performance before the break (*Bedroom Folk* by Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar). Wiel, 2021 in the *NRC* thought that ". a serious pruning would benefit the piece"), whereas Jong, 2021 in *Het Parool* saw a "lack of focus".

These reviewers evaluated the *product* – the performance itself. However, artistic director Emily Molnar, looking back nearly two years after the premiere, still appreciated the experimental aspect of TYMYLYS: "… a liberating practice which pushed us in a new way" (interview Emily Molnar).

5.5. Archiving

The preservation of modern dance pieces is rather more difficult than, say, that of music, films or books. Still, archiving is of crucial importance for NDT. First, because NDT may want to evaluate and reflect on a performance. Second, NDT may want to tap into its rich back catalogue and perform a piece again (often in combination with a new one). Third, after being premiered by NDT, many pieces are performed by other dance companies. Fourth, these may also function as a source of inspiration and lay the foundation for new pieces. Archiving in the case of modern dance means first and foremost filming. NDT, accordingly, has a large collection of videos of performances. Hans Knill (former artistic director): "All ballets and events were recorded. International tours, general rehearsals, premieres, receptions – you name it. The fact that dancers can watch the old tapes when rehearsing a ballet is very interesting as it connects a current generation of dancers to the original cast" (Nederlands Dans Theater 60, 2019: 76). TYMYLYS was registered by NDT's own film crew (and the premiere was streamed live to an international audience).

5.6. Spatial footprint of the network

The Amare building in The Hague is the node in the network from where the project is funded, coordinated, monitored, controlled, distributed, and archived. The key elements themselves were either locally supplied (the NDT facilities, costume makers and technical crew), nationally (the props and the tour logistics), but also from abroad with a choreographer, stage designer, costume designer and sound engineer from Norway and a light designer from Israel. In addition, most of the dancers are also from abroad, though living in and around The Hague. The spatial footprint of the innovation process with its reliance on co-creation is highly concentrated as these suppliers of strategic inputs have to get together in a face-to-face setting.

We thus observe a concrete place-based community comprising world-class dancers and support staff based in The Hague. This community also serves as an active hub of "social reproduction in which cultural competencies are maintained and circulated" (Scott, 2000, p. 33). NDT is also a magnet for talented dancers from across the globe, does world tours, and hires choreographers from elsewhere. The spatial footprint shows a dynamic interplay between a diverse set of highly localised unique assets in The Hague and an international field of choreographers, dancers, tastemakers, and modern dance audiences thereby proving that a restricted field of cultural production can also be global.

5.7. The mode of governance of the network

In terms of the mode of governance, NDT is without any doubt the key actor in the network choosing the choreographer at the start of the creation process and subsequently providing the key components of the performance (including the NDT brand). To fulfil its mission of innovation, it aims to make as much room as possible for the choreographer and the team: the "carte blanche" that Øyen mentioned. Bringing in choreographers from the outside creates ruptures and fosters experimentation. Apart from this fenced-off creation bubble, NDT pulls the strings in the production, distribution, and archiving phase. The exchange phase, in which the cultural value is assessed by critics and peers, however, is largely beyond largely that control.

5.8. Multi-scalar embeddedness

Like all activities, modern dance does not take place in some kind of void, but is embedded in multi-scalar contexts. We distinguish three levels.

Societal embeddedness refers to the cultural, institutional, and historical origins of the actor. NDT was explicitly set up as a modern dance company focused on experimentation. The founders were very much part of a broader movement of cultural innovation in the Netherlands the late 1950s and 60s which also comprised painters, writers and visual artists (Nederlands Dans Theater 60, 2019). NDT has been able to institutionalise its mission to innovate thanks to the extensive and structural public funding from the state and the city of The Hague. In 2021, NDT got about two thirds of its total income € 15 million through funding by the national government € 7.4 million) and the city of The Hague (€ 2.6 million), NDT, 2021). The public funding for NDT is still explicitly based on its innovative drive (Raad van cultuur). The substantial funding also enables NDT to offer relative favourable working conditions – and attract top-class dancers - in a sector where precarity and non-standard labour contracts are often the rule. Dancers and support staff are paid according to Dutch national collective agreements.

The second level is that of *social network embeddedness*. NDT is embedded in an art world which links specialised suppliers, critics, sponsors, and tastemakers. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a modern dance performance requires the integration of many art forms but also the willingness of other participants to prioritise cultural value: "Since its founding moment NDT has been part of interweaving circles of artists,

dancers, musician, painters, designers, architects who inspired choreographers, and vice versa, as well as collaborations with them to create the pieces on stage" (Nederlands Dans Theater 60, 2019: 181). On a more global level, NDT is part of an international artistic field of modern dance comprising of choreographers, dancers, critics and audiences and which also link venues in many (often global) cities. Emily Molnar and Alan Lucien Øyen, for instance, met in New York when both were working there.

The third level concerns *territorial or local embeddedness*. The umbilical cord between NDT and The Hague is evidently funding enabling NDT even to acquire its own stage and training facilities in Amare as well as long-term continuity. Like Montanari et al. (2018) found for the dance company Aterballeto in Reggio Emilia, NDT's fame and working conditions attract both talented choreographers and dancers. Paradoxically, NDT benefits from the fact that Amsterdam is the cultural capital of the Netherlands (Kloosterman, 2004) and The Hague lags (far) behind. With NDT, however, The Hague is home to at least one undisputed international flagship of high culture and this gives NDT a lot of leverage in the struggle for funding both at the local and the national level. In addition, NDT can also draw for its audiences from an extensive well-heeled, highly educated population (increasingly also expats) in The Hague and its surroundings.

6. Discussion: two perspectives on innovation in dance

Embeddedness is also at the heart of the in-depth study on artistic innovation in modern dance by Montanari et al. (2016). In their case, however, embeddedness refers first and foremost to the social network relations of the choreographer Mauro Bigonzetti. He started as a dancer with the dance company Aterballeto, but then gradually became more involved as a choreographer garnering widespread international acclaim. His sustained artistic innovation is explained by changes in his embeddedness. A key insight is that weak ties may insulate artists from "the homogenising influences of established conventions (Montanari et al., 2016, p. 799). This increases their chances to be innovative, but also increases the risks of being rejected or ignored. Strong ties, on the one hand, may hem in artists in their experimentation, but they also may give access to crucial resources (e.g. infrastructure, dancers) to realise their ideas. Sustained innovation, then, depends on "oscillation between a more 'closed' network of relationships (i.e. strong ties with few organizations) and a more 'open' network (i.e. weak ties with a large number of organizations) (Montanari et al., 2016, p. 816).

In common with our production network approach, Montanari et al. (2016) focus on a single extreme case to tease out broader lessons for processes of innovation in the CCS. They too conceive innovation as relational phenomenon which has to be understood in its embeddedness (cf. Cohendet et al., 2017; Leslie & Rantisi, 2017). They however, focus on the micro-level of the networks and agency of the artist, whereas the production network approach highlights the broader context in which the process of innovation is also embedded, its spatial footprint, and the issue of governance and power. Which conditions in the production network create opportunities for artistic innovation?

In a sense, then, one could argue that these two approaches are complementary and provide building blocks for a more comprehensive, interactionist framework for investigating processes of innovation in the CCS. This should include, on the one hand, the rich depiction of the artists, their motivations, struggles and oscillation between strong and weak ties of the relational approach, while, on the other, taking into account the broader context – from production to archiving - in which they are situated. Departing from such an interactionist approach will generate new research questions which centre on how artists are shaped by these contexts and vice versa and how this impacts on processes of innovation. This, then, will create a much broader picture of processes of innovation in the CCS, which is more explicit in spatial and organisational terms than either Becker's art worlds or Bourdieu's fields, while, moreover, still sensitive to the agency of the artists.

7. Dancing in the dark

Above we have looked at how NDT organises its production network to come up with innovative modern dance pieces. As Wohl (2022: 4) has noted "[c]ertain social network configurations enable the production of innovative creative products". The case of TYMYLYS is an extreme case in the sense that NDT has secure funding which enables a deeply ingrained drive to come up with innovative modern dance pieces. Innovation means taking the risk of failure. The reviewers were not very enthusiastic about TYMYLYS, nor did they highlight its innovativeness. Still, this case sheds light on how a production network is organised in a restricted field of cultural production aimed at creating symbolic value and not commercial success. Artistic director Emily Molnar has emphasised the importance of the experiment when creating TYMYLYS:

> "Process should be as important as the product and basically success should be driven by what was everyday life on the way to getting there … the only way for innovation to exist, is if it's actually OK to produce a work that may never have a life. … And so it's about creating a value system, I think, around an environment versus an actual end result."

This quote nicely captures how NDT does not eschew experiments, takes risks, and willingly dances in the dark. Having the financial resources to experiment is an important, but not a sufficient condition for innovation which is a key characteristic of being part of a field of restricted cultural production in the CCS (Sagiv, 2014). As Castañer and Campos (2002) argue, management plays a crucial role in the relationship between economic and artistic aspirations of the organisation. The mission of innovative modern dance is shared from the top of the management to the stage crew of NDT and, as in many other activities, permeates the whole network from creation to archiving (cf. Elfring et al., 2021).

In their study on Cirque du Soleil, Leslie and Rantisi (2019: 261) showed how this outfit transitioned 'from a business model focused on aesthetic innovation to one predicated primarily on profit and shareholder returns. NDT, by contrast, was able to keep the market at bay (Brandellero & Kloosterman, 2010) and maintains its freedom to experiment. Innovation in a restricted field of cultural production, hence, hinges on a configuration of embeddedness that prioritises cultural over economic value, fosters a shared attitude for experimentation, and, of course, sufficient resources.

More in particular, NDT follows a specific strategy to stimulate experimentation by temporarily hiring the crucial creative actor, the choreographer - in the case of TYMYLYS Alan Lucien Øyen. Bringing him and his team in, avoids the flip-side of "small-world networks" with their densely clustered creative producers sharing many connections thereby hampering the emergence of new ideas (Watson, 2012). Øyen can be seen as a creative producer benefiting from "optimum marginality," in that he is "connected enough to have access to resources, field knowledge, and emotional energy" but also "disconnected enough to enjoy creative freedom from orthodox traditions" (Wohl, 2020:5). Or in the vocabulary of Montanari et al. (2016), NDT pursues an active policy of *dis-embedding* by bringing in new choreographers with their teams of lighting, props and costume designers.

The production network approach has enabled us to unpack this case of restricted cultural production and its strive for innovation in a more systematic and novel way thereby highlighting the salience of the division of labour, the spatial and organisational dimension and multi-scalar embeddedness. On another, more epistemological, level our approach has shown that not departing from the conventional notions of firm, cluster, and sector, but instead unpacking the production network and going beyond what is traditionally seen as the creative sector, can provide new insights in how the CCS function. Our approach thus addresses the plea by de Bernard et al. (2021: 339) to transcend "the narrow economic imperatives of previous research frameworks (creative city, clusters or economy) by making visible relations between many

different kinds of cultural and creative actors, often operating with distinctive (even divergent) value frameworks and value-generating processes".

The study on innovation by modern dance by Montanari et al. (2016) has shown both the merit of zooming in on the creative artists and their agency and embeddedness on a micro-level, but also how this may risk losing sight of the broader context in which they operate. Our study has highlighted how such a context can create the necessary conditions for actors to innovate. The rather radical methodological (and epistemological) openness of the production network approach easily accommodates such an integration. Targeted research questions determine how to customise the framework to fit concrete cases regarding the relationship between contexts and actors and also which more specific theoretical insights – for instance with respect to the impact of societal embeddedness or the role of outsider actors – can then be used to address the issues at hand.

This pragmatist heuristic approach can be especially useful for the CCS with its blurred boundaries between activities, labour contracts, firms, and sectors, its mavericks and misfits (Jones et al., 2016), and its drive towards creating cultural value. It may, however, also be useful when analysing other economic activities which too are becoming less and less organised along rigid Fordist categories. Modern dance may hold valuable lessons for processes of innovation elsewhere.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Robert C. Kloosterman: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Suzan van Kempen:** Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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Declaration of competing interest

none.

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