

BEING CONTEMPORARY?

Reflections on the Concept of Contemporaneity

Zeitgenossenschaft, the German word for *contemporaneity* – aptly described by the Swiss literary scholar Sandro Zanetti in his 2011 essay ‘Poetische Zeitgenossenschaft’ (Poetic Contemporaneity) as a *camouflage word* that obscures what it seeks to explicate – links two essentially constitutive elements of the Dance Congress: *Zeit (time)* and *Genossenschaft (co-operative)*. For us, time, *our time* – meaning the present – with its special features, characteristics, demands and excesses forms the basis and the very precondition of the artistic, theoretical, practical and scientific events of the Dance Congress 2016. In a Call for Proposals, we asked the dance world: ‘In which time are we living?’ and ‘How does dance reflect our time?’, and received the most various answers.

Connected with this call for participation is the question of perspective: Who thinks and formulates from which point of view? Is everyone only speaking for themselves? Or is there something that unites and to which the various positions refer? Drawing on the motif of community, which is based on common grounds and the sense of being part of a group, the concept of *Genossenschaft* is taken a step further and strives for a collective goal and shared interests for the sake of which different individuals temporarily join together and organise themselves. Hence, the concept of *contemporaneity* not only describes the fact that we are living in the same time as contemporary individuals, but also raises the question of what else connects or separates us – and in which way. In philosophy, theology and pedagogy, a ‘shaping common history’, the ‘challenge of contemporary events’ or also the ‘responsibility to face the times’ are described as constitutive of *contemporaneity*. Dance, insofar as it is grasped as contemporary, is also an art form in which a large number of *contemporaries* confront both their own times and the responsibility for these times.

In this many-voiced act of positioning in one’s own times – as which the Dance Congress understands itself – the most various thematic focuses can be found:

the question of the different modes of building a community (within collective work structures as well as in the frame of political, social or aesthetic fields of conflict);

the reflection on which (new) values and norms are today binding for contemporary dance training;

the detection of hierarchical structures in which cultural and aesthetic positions and origins are integrated;

the attempts to overcome social disorientation by means of concentration and the perception of one's own body in the frame of somatic practices;

and the engagement with the canon of dance historiography and the gaps that unwritten dance history leaves behind.

The thematic focuses are deliberately not structured in clearly separated fields, but organised like a network and interwoven by cross-references. The knowledge that is to be generated and shared in the events of the Dance Congress cannot be ordered in a linear or hierarchical manner, but is meant to proliferate rhizomatically in all directions.

The practical realisation of such a dynamic culture of knowledge in the structure of the programme manifests a prerequisite of contemporaneity that can only emerge through the participation of diverse voices and different perspectives on one's own time. The fact that in this diversity of voices, points of view necessarily shift, overlap, disappear, are magnified or reduced, etc., reveals the essential feature of contemporaneity as a state of highest topicality: its unconditional dependency on a certain time and its historicity.