

GATEKEEPERS OF DANCE

by

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INTRODUCTION

As a freshman I had a dream that I would positively impact the world of dance. I was going to come to college to get better training. I was going to leave and dance professionally for a huge company. I was going to write about dance through reviews, profiles and event stories. Then I was going to become a senator and advocate for more arts funding, arts education, and dance in the schools. This dream stemmed from my desires to positively change the lives of the people around me and combine my two passions—dance and journalism—to create a steady path for my future. I saw departmental honors research as an opportunity to deepen my relationship with both fields and contribute to both the dance and journalism fields as I pursue my vision of ensuring that dance remains culturally relevant for not only me and my future career but for all dance enthusiasts, teachers and practitioners. This research started with the aforementioned goal and a fear that dance was starting to occupy a more minute fragment of American culture. Through conversations with people and in classes, I perceived that dance was a larger part of the American culture in the past. Big or well-known names, like the George Balanchine who defected from Russia, transcended the world of dance and existed in both the concert dance world and in mainstream popular culture. The sexual revolution of the 1960s increased people's comfort with their bodies and urged individuals to indulge in corporeal exploration. Now American culture does not have these characteristics that enabled dance to thrive. I posited journalism could be the new element that curbs the decline in concert dance's cultural relevance and attendance, despite traditional journalism's own faltering position in society, because of journalism's purpose and responsibility.

Journalists and media personnel are charged with the task of conveying the truth to the world around them. Because of the wealth of information and experiences happening, in all subjects, throughout the world only a fraction of that information gets transcribed and presented to audience members. As reporter Walter Lippmann stated in his 1922 book “Public Opinion,” the media creates pictures in our heads. These pictures inform news audiences what is and is not important. As Lippman writes, “Looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself” (Lippman, 4). People come to know their world based upon how the news media informs them and how that information creates reality by guiding perceptions of the world. This idea is most evident in the symbiotic nature of news media and sports. According to communication historian Robert McChesney, “Virtually every surge in the popularity of sports has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the coverage provided sport by the media” (McChesney, 49). The growth of the NFL is the perfect example of this phenomenon. When professional football started in August of 1920, it had limited appeal to the American public compared to college football and professional baseball; however, with the national exposure of video broadcasts and news media, professional football became the most viewed sport in America within a decade (McChesney, 62). Even as the journalism and media worlds are shifting, and seemingly declining, this notion holds true. As sports journalist Frank Deford noted in a Sports Illustrated opinion column, one of the reasons why football is America’s sport is the constant media exposure it has (Deford). The impact of journalism and media exposure on professional sports, especially football,

puts the power and influence of media exposure on true display. I posit that the media exposure would have the same effect on dance. Dance and sports do have major differences. For example, there is no clear team to rally behind and support, there is no evident competition, and companies are not championed by cities in a fashion that makes everyone related to a particular team feel like winners. The infrastructure supporting sports is radically different, but several fundamental characteristics of elite athletics and elite concert dance are the same. Both crafts allow avenues of emotional expression and cathartic release, both are athletic, they take constant negotiation and heavily rely upon instincts that have been honed through hours of preparation and hard work, they entertain, and only highly selected groups participate in them. To me, there is no significant difference between the two that would designate sports to a higher status. The only difference that I can see is media and journalistic support. Because of this, I imagined that McChesney's idea that each rise in the popularity of sports is directly related to an increase in sports coverage is just an example and should, in theory, be suitable to apply to contemporary concert dance. In this light, an increase in media and journalistic exposure about dance would accompany more popularity for contemporary concert dance.

The idea that an increase in coverage would correlate with an increase in popularity for the contemporary concert dance world aligns with a 2003 Chicago survey by Slover Linett Strategies Inc., an audience research firm whose goal is to help arts, culture and science organizations to connect with a larger amount of people (Slover Linett 16). The study states that a lack of both print and electronic literature about dance performances, the companies in the Chicago area, and the choreographic works the

companies perform, are major factors as to why people do not attend concert dance performances. The majority of participants, including dance audience members, general fine art cultural consumers, and members of the greater Chicago community, also noted that they desired an increase in communication about dance performances and the companies that perform them. If these results are at all representative of the American outlook on dance, people want more information about dance. As disseminators and gatekeepers of information, journalists can provide that information.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

I framed the research with words specific to the fields of journalism and contemporary concert dance. These terms are integral to understanding the presented information. Journalism is the practice of disseminating factual information about relevant, important topics to an audience. It serves the integral function of informing the general public about the world in which they live. To deliver the information that is most pertinent and timely, journalists use gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is a theory that developed in the 1950s by David Manning White. Gatekeeping is defined as the filtration of information that results in only the most “newsworthy” is distributed to the public (Ballinger 645) Journalists tell readers, viewers, and listeners to associate value and relevance to predetermined, limited options of content. These options are even further filtered through the designs of newspapers, magazines, and other news outlets. Stories with more importance often lie on the front page, front cover, or are in some way featured. Gatekeeping and the practices of the conception, development and diffusion of news it encompasses are now accepted by media sociologists and the general public as innate to the news system (Ballinger 647).

Journalists traditionally use gatekeeping to narrow hard news stories, which are news stories dealing with serious events and topics, they plan to distribute. Gatekeeping is necessary for dance criticism. Dance criticism is the analysis of anything perceived as, or intended to be, dance; therefore, dance criticism is inclusive of performance art and physical theater—two fields of performance that combine dance with elements of theater, speech, scenic design and studio art. Although this analysis is formed by judgment and is inherently informed by a critic’s subjective view of the artistic work and the medium in which it is presented, criticism is a form of news dissemination. Dance criticism does not only inform about a particular dance or company. It also promotes dance through the presence and consistency of writing about dance and its ability to advocate for dance’s legitimacy as an art form and cultural informant. I will discuss and analyze this in more detail later in the paper.

This paper will distinguish between commercial and concert dance. Commercial dance is any dance that belongs to the faction of popular art. Popular art is any commercialized, mainstream products created on artistic mediums—such as film and music—that are produced for the primary purpose of external support and capitalistic gain. French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book *Democracy in America*, predicted that such art would arise from a democratic system that allowed commoners to both create and consume art. De Tocqueville writes, “[In democracies] the productions of artists are more numerous, but the merit of each production is diminished. No longer able to soar to what is great, they cultivate what is pretty and elegant; and appearance is more attended to than reality” (de Tocqueville, 535). Concert dance subscribes to the field of fine art. Fine Art includes literature, music, and other mediums of creation used to either

divulge something about one's aesthetic and expression or intended to advance its artistic medium through challenging or promoting previously existing ideas. According to theater scholar and critic Robert Brustein, the continual decline of support for fine art events by arts patrons is possibly caused by an incursion of popular art (Brustein). I have seen this happening with dance with commercial shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Dance Moms* and *Bunheads*.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS:

I limited my search for subjects to interview to four cities: Seattle, Chicago, New York, and Cleveland. I chose this group of cities for two principal reasons. First, dance practitioners, educators, and professionals respect these cities as hubs for dance. Second, these cities all are home to at least one of the top 25 newspapers in America. New York is the home to the *New York Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *Daily News of New York*. The city also serves as a base for others such as the *Wall Street Journal*. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, these papers stand at three, five, seven and one respectively as the top circulated newspapers in America (Associated Press). The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* ranks as the 19th most circulated newspaper. The *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* are the ninth and 11th top papers and the Seattle Times has a history of ranking in the top 25 newspapers in terms of circulation (Associated Press). I traveled to these places for face-to-face interviews to approach my fear about dance's potential declining stature in society, work to understand that fear, and work to not only absolve that fear but use it as a tool for personal growth. I needed this journey to answer one chief question: Is contemporary concert dance relevant? I interviewed 25 practicing dance artists and dance journalists and soon found that my question was too big and impossible

to adequately answer, so I narrowed my idea of relevant, for dance, to three things. Dance is relevant when it serves as a method of human communication. Dance is relevant when it serves as a component of cultural conversation. Dance is relevant when it is a member of the greater creative exchange.

I have elected to include the views of two active dance artists in the field and three dance journalists currently writing about the field. The individuals all have prominent voices in either their local community or the national dance community as an artist or writer. These individuals also represent a broad range of views about the roles of journalism in relation to dance. I selected for this study include Zachary Whittenburg, former Hubbard Street Dance Chicago dancer, freelance writer and former *Time Out Chicago* dance editor; Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun-Times* dance and theater critic; Laura Molzahn, *Chicago Reader* former performing and visual arts editor, freelance writer; Donald Byrd, Spectrum Dance Theater artistic director; Brendan Kiley, *Stranger* arts writer.

I have chosen to limit the scope of this study to the field of contemporary concert dance. Contemporary concert dance is a living breathing genre of dance. It is difficult to define because it is not confined to a traditional, set view or method of movement. Instead of ascribing to one ideology of movement, contemporary dance draws from the larger vocabulary of dance and can have influences ranging from classical modern, classical ballet, post-modern, jazz, hip-hop, and a multitude of other dance forms both indigenous to the United States of America and abroad. Contemporary dance not only encompasses these different movements, it can combine them in a sinuous fashion to achieve the emotional, aesthetic, and musical feature inherent to dance. Artists perform

contemporary concert for audiences in a proscenium setting or in nontraditional venues. Contemporary concert dance, unlike commercial dance, has the primary focus of exploring and advancing the art form of dance. Choreographers in this genre view dance as a meritocracy, where the collective creative skill of the choreographer and the individuals he/she works with dictate the connection of the piece. Concert dance values the integrity of its art form more than the reaction by and connection with the audience, thus concert dance suffers. I chose contemporary concert dance to study, for I hoped to better understand how concert dance balances its integrity with its need to avoid isolating audience members and community support.

METHOD

During the summer of 2012, I interviewed the five people in this study. I spoke with them and heard their stories—about their hopes for the dance world, the journalism world, and the dance journalism that lives where these worlds intersect. After recording our conversations and transcribing their thoughts and reflections, I pulled out trigger words that reflected the common ideas present in each interview. For the purpose of this research I selected one negative trigger—do people use—and one positive trigger—education. “Do people use” is short for the question, “Do people use newspapers and other news media?” This holds significance because it demonstrates to me that many people from both the journalism field and the dance field question the impact that dance writing actually has on attendance. This questioning comes from the overarching belief that the general public does not truly use newspapers or, at least, read sections that are not featured headlines, sports stories, or celebrity stories. “Education” also holds importance to the conversation about journalism’s role in the communication of contemporary

concert dance. Journalism must convey truthful knowledge informed by diverse pools of information. If consumers of journalistic media do not understand the information presented, journalists must provide a context and educate their audience about the field the journalists writes about. Dance journalism can go beyond educating audiences about performance viewing opportunities. Dance journalism can educate audiences about what makes up strong, well-composed, and well performed contemporary concert dance.

THESIS

Dance journalism must exist to promote the integrity and relevance of the art form of dance to preserve dance's role in culture and dance journalism's security as a field.

STATE OF JOURNALISM

American journalism is in the middle of upheaval as new media introduced in the 21st century—specifically democratized news outlets such as social media sites, blogs, and sites like reddit.com—has altered the traditional journalistic business models where newspaper sales and advertiser support funded the industry. According to Zachary Whittenburg, a freelance writer for Dance Media publications throughout the nation and the former Dance Editor of Timeout Chicago, “Today, the journalism industry--even for the most well established and the most culturally mainstream tent pole organization for providing news, cultural coverage and criticism for the general public nationally [and] internationally—is up in the air as far as what’s going on. Long existing newspapers in major urban markets in America are gone. They are disappearing and are continuing to disappear” (Whittenberg). This constant atrophy of traditional journalism has created

several problems. In a talk with the University of Virginia Law School in 2008, former NPR executive Ken Stern listed the following as major problems.

First, the economic structure of the paper industry is no longer stable. In his talk, Stern stated, “The heart and soul of newspaper economics used to be the classified ads, or the job ad. We had only one thought in mind: put an ad in the Washington Post. Today we would have only one thought in mind: put an ad on Craigslist” (Stern qtd. by UVA). Because the internet has detracted from traditional journalism’s primary means to amass income, more than 10,000 journalists around the country have lost their jobs in the past 10 years (Stern paraphrased by UVA). Also, in response to this economic collapse of newspapers and the traditional journalism model, newspaper organizations have heavily reduced circulation. Since print news is still how the majority of newspapers make money, smaller circulation results in less revenue and resources. Fewer resources minimize journalists’ ability to produce strong, original content. Weaker stories disengage audiences and restart the cyclical process by causing the circulation to fall (UVA). Whittenberg echoed these ideas in his interview when he stated, “Dance writing, dance journalism, all writing, all periodical writing, fast writing that exists on any subject is in a very tenuous place right now. It’s in a gray area of transition from old models that are faltering and new models that are still emerging or taking shape and, for different, reasons people will paint a portrait or suggest a shape for that transitional period in different ways. But I think that all writing that used to exist in magazines, that used to exist in newspapers—that kind of work—doesn’t have a new home” (Whittenberg).

For arts journalism, not only is there no new home but the old home is shrinking quickly. According to the key findings of “Reporting the Arts II,” a study conducted by the National Arts Journalism Program, “Newspapers as a whole are shrinking so a stable position in a declining environment translates to less coverage than it did five years ago” (NAJP 11). All traditional news journalism is decreasing; however, the impact of the shrinkage of newspapers on art is greater as art is not and has never truly been a “stable position” in the journalistic world. Within the past five years, the size of arts sections in nearly 50 percent of the newspapers studied by the NAJP was “cut back severely.” Another 40 percent were “cut back moderately.” Also, nearly all newspapers studied by the NAPJ reduced their article sizes. In many cases, news organizations trimmed article spaces by values up to 20 percent (NAPJ 11). In a field that many who I interviewed cited as having limited print space, averaging less than 500 words, a decrease in article size has a large impact.

With this knowledge of the shifting state of journalism, faltering circulation and the popularity of new avenues that appropriate and disseminate “news” and information, Seattle-based choreographer and Spectrum Dance Theater Artistic Director Donald Byrd asked in his interview, “Do people even use newspapers?” His question has validity. According to Pew Research Center, a think tank organization that analyzes news, information and ideas that shape the American purview, the percentage of individuals who read a daily print newspaper has declined from 54% to 38% from 2004 to 2012 (Pew 2012). To combat that decline, popular news organizations have focused their energies on celebrity news coverage. Coverage of these celebrities is often cheaper and easier since the information comes from other news organizations (Miller, 2008). Former Chicago

Reader editor and longtime freelance writer Laura Molzahn also theorizes that celebrity news is easy to consume by audiences who struggle with being challenged. Molzahn noticed that in present day culture, many people are selfish and self-focused. In her interview she spoke of today's societal trends and stated, "There's kind of an unwillingness to go beyond yourself and look outside yourself" (Molzahn). She also suggested that celebrity news is a manner in which to capitalize on the popular audience's self-centeredness. "The celebrity culture...is a way of identifying with celebrities and living vicariously through them" (Molzahn). Although she said it bothers her, she noted that it makes sense in society's trend to not have to think and exude too much effort challenging oneself. With the stress on the importance of the self, the celebrity culture reduces the need for human connection. Contemporary concert dance facilitates human connection, so without that as a factor of society dance too falls out of public importance.

Molzahn's assessment aligns with national news trends. During the first week of June 2007, Paris Hilton became one of the top covered national news stories when four percent of national news coverage circulated around her admission to, exit from, and readmission to jail. According to the PEW Research Center for the People & the Press, 34 percent of Americans said they followed the story very closely (Pew, 2007). The vast amount of media coverage and follow of this incidence was not an anomaly. Earlier, in February of 2007, Anna Nicole Smith's death commanded 24 percent of the total news coverage in America the two days immediately following the incident (Pew, 2007). The scandals of Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, and Kim Kardashian, and deaths of Steve Irwin, Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson drew equal, if not more, media attention than the Smith's death (PEW, 2009). Regardless of intention, media attention towards

celebrities has prevented fields without celebrities, like contemporary concert dance, from having a stable standing in journalism's age of restructure and reconstruction (Miller, 2008). The coverage of celebrity news may be the best temporary solution for selling papers but it does not uphold the first amendment's promise of informing the cultural and political sectors of American society with free press to secure democracy. Therefore, this ubiquitous coverage of celebrities prevents journalism from achieving its true purpose.

Molzahn went further to attribute the lack of success of dance writing to the lack of celebrities in the dance world. There are few members of the contemporary world that are considered overwhelmingly prominent and visible outside of the dance world. In general, dance no longer has celebrities and, in America, celebrity news facilitates the flow of the media. Sports, she noted, has such a vast infrastructure and support system because it is riddled with celebrities. This influence from sports and celebrity culture is reactionary and not precatory. According to Molzahn, "These changes are coming not arbitrarily from newspapers or media but from the culture. What happens at newspapers is a result from the culture" (Molzahn). Newspapers are trying to survive, so they conform to societal interests in order to sell advertisements, maintain circulation and stay relevant in the technological age. Editorial staffs and journalists' quests to find content that will enable their professional survival have led them away from dance, for they have gauged that their audiences are not interested in contemporary concert dance. Without the written contributions of journalists, trained and trusted individuals who have traditionally served and still do serve as molders of the cultural discourse, dance does not have the opportunity to be a component of cultural conversation.

Although news organizations are intentional about selecting news stories based upon societal interest, as with celebrity news coverage, editors and writers do have the power to inject information about what they deem as relevant, pressing information into the cultural conversation. According to Brendan Kiley, a Seattle based writer for the *Stranger*, “The relative lack of writing about dance, not just in Seattle but around the country relative to other issues or artistic mediums, I don’t think it’s a conspiracy of the gatekeepers to keep [people] from knowing about dance. There’s a certain level of interest in a thing, whether it’s a sports team or a dance company or whatever, and I think that by and large newspapers try to reflect that and deal with that. On the other hand, obviously, newspapers can inject new ideas into the public discourse by writing about things that people aren’t talking about or aren’t aware of and give that [subject] a lift... with the caveat that there’s no guarantee that that conversion is going to happen” (Kiley). Although news organizations have the power, and potentially the responsibility, to thrust new content into to the American cultural conversation, there is no guarantee that the written content will influence people to appreciate contemporary concert dance or see performances in the genre. The psychological theory of priming, however, indicates that the media can influence an audience’s receptiveness to a concept, idea or standard by providing an avenue for both the public discussion and the understanding of an issue. According to a recent article in the International Communication Associations’ *Journal of Communication* , priming occurs when “news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments...Both effects are based on memory-based models of information processing. These models assume that people form attitudes based on the considerations

that are most salient (i.e., most accessible) when they make decisions” (Scheufele & Tewksbury 11). When applied to the news as a whole, priming suggests that people make decisions about the actions they take or the items they are interested in by the constant presence of materials on a subject. The constant presence of something makes that something seem salient. I, for example, can attribute the success of the Oscars or the NFL’s Super Bowl to priming. The amount of space and time dedicated by newspapers to those events alerts audiences that these activities are occurring and are worthy of an investment of time and money. With the constant reminder and awareness about the event, people are much more inclined to tune in to the event, see the event live or be receptive to events leading up to or similar to the Oscars and the Super Bowl. This includes movies and football games. Chicago writer Hedy Weiss suggested that although there is no surety that an injection of ideas into the news stream would guarantee a rise in appreciation of a craft, they did recognize an increase in writing about sports during crucial times throughout history has guided the institution of sports to be highly prominent and successful (Weiss). She and Molzahn both contribute this success of sports and the push to have sports stories so widely extant in newspapers to the dominance of male figures in the field (Weiss; Molzahn). In the newsroom for daily newspapers, women make up 36.92 percent of the full-time staff (American Society of News Editors). For the 10 most widely circulated newspapers in America, only one’s executive editor is a woman. That is *The New York Times*, one of the few newspapers in the country dedicated to constantly contributing to the cultural conversation about dance through writing and with a staff of full time dance writers and critics (Kiley).

Not only do men make up a majority of the newsroom, they comprise a large amount of news audiences. Molzahn stated, “Men are fifty percent of the potential audience, and I think there are a lot of men who don’t like dance or think they don’t like dance. I do think that one underlying cause, not the only cause, might be homophobia. Because our culture is homophobic, it doesn’t deal well with men and emotion being kind of in the same room” (Molzahn). She continues by suggesting that male audiences and gatekeepers are afraid that they could be seen as gay by continuously endorsing an art form perceived to align with feminine or gay values and actions. Although men have a general predilection to appreciate and give emphasis to physical acts, according to Molzahn men condemn dance for its emotional investment, which is perceived by many as feminine or gay (Molzahn). This influences dance’s downfall in male-dominated newsrooms and prevents dance from entering the greater conversation about what are viable methods for embracing physicality and challenging creativity.

Traditionally, and even more so now with the increased visibility of gay and transgender culture, Americans have had a social stigma against men acting and thinking in an atypical, effeminate manner. According to acclaimed medicine and sexuality historian, Vern Leroy Bullough, and his wife, sociologist Bonnie Bullough, in their co-authored book *Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender*, “The level of societal stigma for cross-gender behaviors varies widely; behavior that is acceptable in one culture is punished in others. Europe and the United States have a rather strict dimorphic gender pattern, so, as we have seen, cross-gender behaviors in the west have been stigmatized and punished in various ways” (Bullough, 313). Dance conflicts with America’s pattern that gender has to be separated into two distinctly different categories. Although dance exemplifies

cognitive ability and athletic prowess, it emphasizes grace, beauty, emotional connectivity and other conventionally female qualities.

Dance historian Ramsay Burt, an expert on the permeation and perception of masculinity in dance, suggests that a lack of acuity about dance as a craft is the chief cause of the male censure surrounding dance's legitimacy. He writes, "Increasingly since the 19th century, it has been considered appropriate for men not to appear soft and not to appear emotionally expressive. An individual who does not conform to these behavioral norms, and cannot claim to be a genius, has been in danger of being considered not to be a proper man" (Burt, 22). Since dance is not viewed as a "reputable means of artistic self, let alone a means through which male genius manifests itself," males have difficulty identifying with the craft. Dance does not make sense to American society's gender paradigm, so dancers are considered soft in spite of the physical and mental strength required to dance (Burt, 19). This lack of knowledge about the physicality required to do dance, and its inherent standing as feminine or gay in male-dominated newsrooms, prevents dance coverage. This obstacle to coverage prevents dance not only from having contact with others., but it blocks the passage of news flow and infringes upon journalism's ability to enable dance to inform culture.

DO PEOPLE EVEN READ THE NEWS

To answer Donald Byrd's question, plenty of people are reading the news. According to Pew, 40 percent of Americans under 30 read daily news and 62% of adults thirty and older read daily news on both print and electronic platforms (Beaujon). Regardless, because people are reading, newspapers need to negotiate how to incorporate

articles that are not controlled solely by the public's desire to consume celebrity news and/or the national convention to adhere to the patriarchal paradigm of news institutions where masculinity informs gatekeeping. News organizations have the power and responsibility to inject information into the news stream and influence both the cultural climate and intellectual reserve of society. These injections are what fulfill the Society of Professional Journalist's decree that "enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy" (SPJ Code of Ethics). Culture informs news. News must also inform culture.

EDUCATION & ADVOCACY

In addition to navigating the collapse of the traditional news model and working through the barriers of masculinity and celebrity culture to gain exposure through the printing of stories, dance news stories have to educate audiences about two chief things: what the specific company, dance, choreographer or other dance component the article is about, what dance is and what good dance is. This education occurs through many lenses, most noticeably exposure and advocacy, and describes the practice of relaying the information on a specific field or subject. Education for the context of this research does not have to be systematic as in a school setting. There is validity in education from all sources. The "enlightenment" that newspapers charge journalists with is a form of education because it relays information about a particular field to people who do not have any or all of the knowledge needed to fully understand the subject.

For Weiss, education of audiences about a specific dance performance experience is integral to dance writing. Weiss said, "My view about all criticism is that its first goal

is to make you feel as if you were at the performance because I think that you can for the academic aspects...read about that. You can study that. There is the excitement of being in the audience and most people don't get to go: where it's for culture reasons, whether it's for financial reasons, [or] whether it's for time. So the only experience—the vicarious experience—is reading about it” (Weiss). By educating audiences about the performance experience, she hopes that she can persuade audiences who strongly considered attending a performance or just stumbled upon her writing to begin their own discourse about dance and go to the next available dance concert.

Whittenburg too mentioned education as a necessary tool in dance writing; however, he sees education through writing as a means to teach cultural enthusiasts that dance is a legitimate language of the body and should be accepted as vernacular. Before writing, Whittenburg danced professionally with Pacific Northwest Ballet, Hubbard Street Chicago and in other companies that allowed him to personally delve into contemporary work for performance opportunities in more than 100 cities. His emphasis and ability to legitimize dance through writing comes from his bodily connection and personal understanding of dance. He lived it, understands it as an art form and language and can therefore communicate it not only an articulate matter but a fair and artistic one as well. Whittenburg hopes “dance writing rises to this challenge and really think of itself as, what Jennifer Dunning calls, ‘the translation of poetry from one language to another’...What are going to be the best locations for a reader to have a sense, without being there sitting next to me in the theater, for them to understand what's going on [and] for them to understand why it matters...as art, as a method of human communication, as a component of cultural conversation, and as a member of what I like to call the greater

creative conversation. It's very important to me that I advocate for the membership of dance to be at the table of conversations about what's going on creatively today" (Whittenburg). By educating audiences about dance and fighting for its stature in society Whittenburg advocates for dance, yet he communicates that this advocacy is neither cheerleading nor free public relations for dance companies. Whittenburg stated, "There's advocacy and there's critical writing and I don't think they have to be separate endeavors. I think that they can be joined. I think that they can happen simultaneously, but I would hesitate to say that dance journalism as an industry has much to gain by collectively considering itself a service organization. There are service organizations for dance. There are apparatuses existing for dance marketing. Dance journalists have a different job" (Whittenburg). This job is not to serve as a PR organization but advocate for the existence of both the dance field and the dance journalism world. If dance writers were to act in the role of public relations companies, they would dilute the potential strength of dance in a community by not challenging artists to be better, reduce audience's desire to see dance by not helping raise the level of work in the community, and take away from a journalist's reliability.

Kiley also stated a similar opinion: "Artists sometimes are under the misapprehension that the critic works only for them. That is not true. The critic is the audience's advocate" (Kiley). Kiley went further to suggest that advocacy for the art form of dance often involves "negative" criticism, for that criticism is instrumental in preserving the quality of the dance works created. "It is the job of a good critic to call out things that aren't working. If you give everything a gold star, that's actually really bad for the art form because if I don't really go to dance and I think, 'I want to go to the dance

show' and I go to the dance show and the dance show is terrible in some way...and then every critic is being so respectful and so nice and handling it with kid gloves. Then that person thinks, 'Oh well that's what dance is and everyone likes it and that's what dance is, so I'm never going to dance again...I think there's real bird's eye view, big picture value in negative criticism some times. Even though it hurts at the moment, in the long run it might actually be for the best" (Kiley). Kiley's assertion that handling all creations under the subgenre of dance with a precious mindset is destructive to the art form holds a large deal of validity. A critic's role is to provide honest and fair criticism about an artwork—not always nice, praise-oriented feedback—to help advance the artwork and advocate for the field of dance, dance writing and for the audiences proper investment in the arts. Journalists and critics with the mindset of being “nice” and cheerleading for a dance company instead of truly assessing dance based upon its merit can potentially dilute the public perception of the value of all dance. Advocacy has to be presented through strong critical writing that may, at times, seem negative. Without this advocacy, dance cannot be able to be a viable component of cultural conversation. If dance is no longer relevant to the cultural conversation, dance journalism no longer has a purpose.

Although some dance professionals are under the false impression that dance writers' purpose is to reveal stories about companies and serve as free advertisement and public relations, other dancers feel that the best way to educate an audience is through their own direct influence. Donald Byrd stated that it is not just the journalists' role to spread awareness about companies. He stated that as Artistic Director of Spectrum it is his responsibility to educate audiences by curating dance that falls under the genre of fine art and coaching them to let their cultural palette ingest, appreciate and hopefully enjoy

contemporary concert dance. In order for people to appreciate contemporary concert dance, Byrd argues that cultural arbiters like himself have to be resilient and create authentic, high quality dance so that work can help educate audiences of what quality fine art contemporary concert dance is (Byrd). In his interview Byrd stated, “There is this thing called education. I like to think of dance, the kind of dance that I’m interested in, as a kind of fine wine. People do not necessarily appreciate fine wine on your first tasting because your palette can’t distinguish what it is that makes it fine. You have to learn what that is... The job is not to pander to what people think they already like. We know that people like McDonald’s. That doesn’t mean that McDonald’s is good. It just means that they know what it is. It’s fast. It’s easy... I have the responsibility to help people figure out what the difference is between a filet mignon and a Big Mac. I’m not going to serve up the other stuff. I’m going to serve up the quality stuff and help people understand to appreciate it” (Byrd). To help people understand and appreciate his work, Byrd does not solely rely on traditional dance writers. He believes that the education of audiences about specific dance works and of dance’s validity as a genre of art and culture should be democratized so that exposure can come from all sources (Byrd). The sources should not just be the journalists but should include the voices of the blogosphere and, more important, the artists themselves.

As an artistic director, Byrd places a lot of pressure on himself to do the journalist’s functions of priming and educating audiences. He writes: “An artistic director’s job in the community is to help people understand what it is that they are experiencing, what is being put in front of them. Whether you like it or not is beside the point. The thing is that you can appreciate what the quality of it is” (Byrd). The

appreciation of the quality, not the specific work is what is most important to him. If someone can understand why something is good, he or she will be more likely to try it again even if his or her first interaction was not the best, just like with wine or filet mignon.

Weiss also noted that journalists are not the only individuals with the opportunity and responsibility to permeate information about dance through society. She thinks the education of audiences about dance, its purpose, its events and its contributions to the cultural conversation, has to present itself in the form of systemic exposure. When asked about educating and growing an audience she said, “I think it’s television exposure, it’s free tickets, it’s journalism, it’s a mayor [Rahm Emanuel] who talks about dance. It’s the presence, just seeing billboards and advertising” (Weiss). The search for diverse methods to introduce dance into the cultural conversation, including the abovementioned methods and the democratization of news dissemination is crucial to the success of dance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, for dance to become relevant and for dance journalism to become a legitimate faction of journalism, journalists have to do what they do in the successful journalistic fields of entertainment and sports news. They must appropriately inject ideas instead of just being controlled by social interest. As alluded to in the first amendment of the constitution and boldly stated in the preamble of the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, it is both a journalist’s power and responsibility to inject ideas into the news flow to inform both the cultural and political sectors of society. They must advocate for the field at hand through writing that is as honest and accurate as possible

given the state of bias that surrounds criticism. They must provide a cultural context for readers and engage audiences through education. Education has to be more than just a communication of ideas, events and people. Education has to also come in the form of translation. We are all trained to communicate through words in school but not through our bodies. Dance writers translate the movements of the body into words accessible to nearly all, like a foreign language class teaches to translate Spanish into English. This is crucial, for it allows dance to serve as a method of communication. Without this translation dance would not be accessible to a large amount of American society.

I have seen one writer actively do all of these things. Zach Whittenburg, who served as a dancer and writer, has successfully combined these things in both his writing and his preliminary mindset before creating the text for a news story. Being a former dancer he has a fundamental connection and sensitivity to the field as a whole that non-dancers cannot fully have. He loves dance as both a practitioner and scholar. He loves writing as both a practitioner and scholar. He writes with appropriate scrutiny for he wants the best for both the dance and journalism worlds and not the best for a particular dance institution. He incorporates new ideas into his stories as much as possible to reinforce the idea that contemporary concert dance is current and relevant. He translates dance to words in a manner that does the language of the body justice because he is a native speaker of the body's first language: dance. Maybe more dance journalists need to have previously been dancers who are educated and articulate enough to communicate their passion through words. This is a crucial step in changing the culture of helping dance journalism gain legitimacy so that it can continue to exist as a field and support the relevance of dance. The news organization paradigm also has to shift away from male-

dominated, celebrity centric newsrooms to newsrooms that are balanced in both personnel and content generation. There last has to be a clear understanding of advocacy. Dance journalists have to know the difference between cheerleading and advocacy, and advocate effectively to not only fight for the field of dance but the genre of dance journalism. This advocacy is crucial for it will help dance journalism stay active and alive during journalism's current reconstruction while simultaneously enabling dance to serve as a method of human communication, a component of cultural conversation and a member of the greater creative exchange so dance can become relevant to a larger sector of society.

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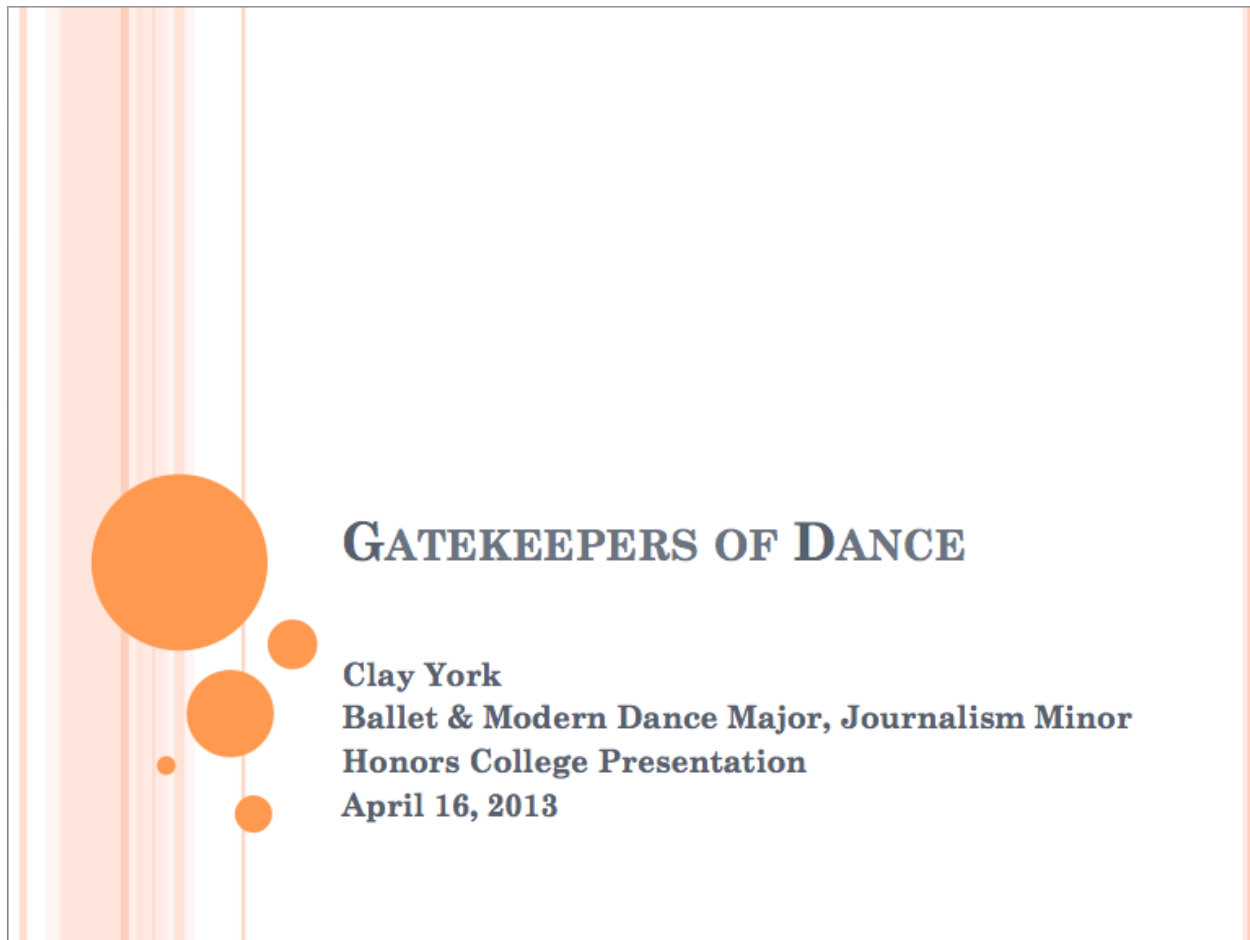
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I would like to start my thesis presentation not with facts but a confession. I am SCARED out of my mind. I am scared for my future and my peers' future...specifically the ones pursuing the fields of my passions journalism and dance.

Through my own personal research outside of this project and my conversations with people, I have gathered two major things: Society as a whole does not care about concert contemporary dance and the journalism world is in upheaval to a point that today's model for the business of journalism will not be recognizable tomorrow. This scares me.

Instead of cowering in my fear, I worked to do something about it. This led me to my research project.

I WENT ON A TRIP TO...



Cleveland, OH



Seattle, Washington



New York, NY



Chicago, IL



I saved up hundreds of dollars of my own money to embark on a journey around the country to the dance hubs of Cleveland, New York, Seattle and Chicago. I used this trip to face my fear about dance's potential declining stature in society, work to understand that fear, and work to not only absolve that fear but use it as a tool for personal growth. I needed this journey to find sanity and answer one chief question: Is contemporary concert dance even worth me pursuing the field? Is it relevant? I interviewed 26 practicing dance artists and dance journalists and soon found that my question was too big and impossible to adequately answer, so I boiled my idea of relevant to three things.

DANCE IS RELEVANT WHEN:

- It serves as a method of human communication.
- It serves as a component of cultural conversation
- It is a member of the greater creative exchange.



Dance is relevant when:

It serves as a method of human communication.

It serves as a component of cultural conversation

It is a member of the greater creative exchange.

After further research and reflection, I saw these things not happening systemically in society. Dance IS losing its relevance. I began to look at why this has happened and brainstormed how this could change. I immediately thought journalism could be this source of change, for its impact on making other fields relevant in society. I firmly believed that despite the current downsizing and article reduction that journalism is facing, it could right the industry of dance. Even now, it is still helping sports and celebrities thrive and stay relevant in society. I posit this can happen for dance.

Dance journalism must exist to promote the integrity and relevance of the art form of dance and the profession of dance journalism to preserve dance's role in culture and dance journalism's security as a field.



Dance journalism must exist to promote the integrity and relevance of the art form of dance to preserve dance's role in culture and dance journalism's security as a field.

INTERVIEWEES



Brendan Kiley,
Seattle's *The Stranger*



Zachary Whittenburg,
Former dancer/Freelance
Writer



Laura Molzhan,
Chicago Reader



Donald Byrd,
Artistic Director *Spectrum
Dance Theater*



Hedy Weiss,
Chicago Sun-Times

I narrowed my interview analysis to 5 individuals for their complimentary and contrasting suggestions about how dance journalism as a field can serve dance in a manner functional for both dance and journalism. These individuals are Brendan Kiley of Seattle's *The Stranger*, Zachary Whittenburg a former dancer for Nederlands Dans Theater and a freelance writer, Laura Molzhan the arts and performance editor for the *Chicago Reader*, Donald Byrd the artistic director of Spectrum Dance Theater and Hedy Weiss the theater and dance critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

THE STATE OF JOURNALISM

“Dance writing, dance journalism, all writing, all periodical writing, fast writing that exists on any subject is in a very tenuous place right now. It’s in a gray area of transition from old models that are faltering and new models that are still emerging or taking shape ... But I think that all writing that used to exist in magazines, that used to exist in newspapers—that kind of work—doesn’t have a new home.”

Zach Whittenburg



When speaking to the individuals, they all spoke towards the current state of journalism. According to Zach Whittenburg, “Dance writing, dance journalism, all writing, all periodical writing, fast writing that exists on any subject is in a very tenuous place right now. It’s in a gray area of transition from old models that are faltering and new models that are still emerging or taking shape ... But I think that all writing that used to exist in magazines, that used to exist in newspapers—that kind of work—doesn’t have a new home.”

This idea of writing losing its home was echoed by former NPR executive Ken Burns in a speech at University of Virginia. He stated that more than 10,000 journalists have lost jobs over the last 10 years and attributed that to extreme cuts to news organizations and newspapers. In a study by Columbia University’s National Arts Journalism Program, 50% of the papers they studied cut back “severely” on their

newspapers. In addition to universal cuts to papers, arts sections—which include dance, theater, music, movies and other art mediums—are having article spaces cut by more than 20% since the turn of the century.

I suggest that to preserve dance journalism and thus have it continue serve to promote the relevance of dance, there has to be a large shift in the aforementioned journalistic paradigm.

#1: CHANGING THE JOURNALISTIC PARADIGM

The current paradigm is fueled by a multitude of systemic issues. There is not a diverse pool of journalists. Men make up 63% of the newsroom and a majority of those men are Caucasian. There is not enough coverage due to cuts, so wire services like Reuters and Associated Press produce the majority of the nation's news content. The most pressing issue, above all else is that articles are written based upon social interest and not upon the democratic ideal of enlightening audiences by seeking and spreading the truth.

THE CURRENT PARADIGM

- **Articles are written based upon social interest and not based upon the news values of journalism**
 - News about celebrities and celebrity culture plug the newshole
 - These injections are what fulfill the Society of Professional Journalist's decree that "enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy." (SPJ Code of Ethics)



This is because the business of journalism is just that... a business. The old business model of journalism doesn't work in the technological age. The sale of classifieds, newspapers and advertisement space to fuel paper production has been replaced by craigslist and monster. Further, newspapers have not found another way to appropriately introduce paywalls and get funding for their papers. Instead, news organizations have to rely upon people buying physical, print newspapers. Therefore, editors and journalists turn to celebrity news. It is cheaper to cover and people are interested and fascinated by celebrity culture. Journalists see this as a hope for selling newspapers. This has been a trend since the late 2000s. According to the journalistic think tank PEW, Anna Nicole Smith's Death was 24% of the total news coverage for two days of American News. Also, 34% of news readers said that Paris Hilton was the story

they followed most closely for a week when she was sent to and from jail. These are not anomalies. Similar celeb events such as deaths and scandals command media attention in the same manner. This information may be the best current solution for selling papers but it does not uphold the first amendment's promise of informing the cultural and political sectors of American society with free press to secure democracy. Therefore, journalism loses its true purpose.

To uphold journalism's purpose, journalists cannot just give people what they want to remain popular. They must, instead, inject ideas important to society to enlighten audiences. These injections are what fulfill the Society of Professional Journalist's decree that "enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy."

INJECTING IDEAS

“The relative lack of writing about dance, not just in Seattle but around the country relative to other issues or artistic mediums, I don’t think it’s a conspiracy of the gatekeepers to keep [people] from knowing about dance. There’s a certain level of interest in a thing, whether it’s a sports team or a dance company or whatever, and I think that by and large newspapers try to reflect that and deal with that. On the other hand, obviously, newspapers can inject new ideas into the public discourse by writing about things that people aren’t talking about or aren’t aware of and give that [subject] a lift... with the caveat that there’s no guarantee that that conversion is going to happen.”

Brendan Kiley



According to Brendan Kiley, “The relative lack of writing about dance, not just in Seattle but around the country relative to other issues or artistic mediums, I don’t think it’s a conspiracy of the gatekeepers to keep [people] from knowing about dance. There’s a certain level of interest in a thing, whether it’s a sports team or a dance company or whatever, and I think that by and large newspapers try to reflect that and deal with that. On the other hand, obviously, newspapers can inject new ideas into the public discourse by writing about things that people aren’t talking about or aren’t aware of and give that [subject] a lift... with the caveat that there’s no guarantee that that conversion is going to happen.”

THE POWER AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF JOURNALISM

- Editors and writers **do** have the power to inject information about what they deem as relevant, pressing information into the cultural conversation.
 - Priming is effective.
 - National media and news exposure helped professional football and other sports gain prominence



Editors and writers **do** have the power to inject information about what they deem as relevant, pressing information into the cultural conversation. Dance journalists in particular need to inject information and do it often, because to elevate dance in a community people have to be receptive to dance. Injecting ideas and doing it often can result in priming. Priming, the idea that exposure to something influences receptiveness and understanding to it later, is what allows sports to thrive. According to communication scholar Robert McChesney, “Virtually every surge in the popularity of sports has been accompanied by a dramatic increase of coverage provided to the sport by the media.” When professional football started, it had limited appeal compared to baseball and college football; however, due to the grand amount of exposure of pro football through the news, it became the most viewed sport in America after a decade. If dance journalists

and arts editors work to inject dance stories and inject them often, this priming should occur with dance. This will facilitate dance's journey into the cultural conversation and give dance more validity as a profession, thus legitimizing the need for adequate coverage.

My next suggestion for dance writing to support dance's relevance and concretize the legitimacy of the dance field is advocacy.

#2 WRITERS MUST ADVOCATE WITHOUT CHEERLEADING.



Dance writers must support the field of dance and invite others to support dance without cheerleading, which is enthusiastically and positively supporting a dance company or a dance work despite its merit. Although seemingly positive, cheerleading is negative because it minimizes the reliability of the writer and attenuates the standard of dance in that specific writer's community. This is one misapprehension of dance journalism.

MISAPPREHENSIONS WITH ADVOCACY

“Artists sometimes are under the misapprehension that the critic works only for them. That is not true... It is the job of a good critic to call out things that aren’t working... It can be really destructive, I think, to a form...like dance to be handling it with kid gloves all the time, because that gives audiences the wrong impression about what they should expect, what they can expect, and what they should want from an art form.”

Brendan Kiley



According to Brendan Kiley, “Artists sometimes are under the misapprehension that the critic works only for them. That is not true... It is the job of a good critic to call out things that aren’t working... It can be really destructive, I think, to a form...like dance to be handling it with kid gloves all the time, because that gives audiences the wrong impression about what they should expect, what they can expect, and what they should want from an art form.” Dance writing has two chief priorities in terms of advocacy.

FOR WHO AND WHAT DO WRITERS ADVOCATE?

- A writer's job to advocate for the following:
 - Dance writing
 - The art form of dance



It must advocate dance and it must advocate dance writing. Dance journalism has nothing to gain by being a service or PR organization. This, in contrast, dilutes the potential strength of dance in a community by not challenging artists to be better, reduces audience's desire to see dance by not helping raise the level of work in the community, and takes away from a journalist's reliability. Advocacy has to be presented through strong critical writing that may, at times, seem negative. Without this advocacy, dance cannot be able to be a viable component of cultural conversation. If dance is no longer relevant to the cultural conversation, dance journalism no longer has a purpose.

My last suggestion to legitimize the field of dance journalism so that it withstands journalism's upheaval is for dance journalism to have a solidified purpose. This purpose must expand beyond thrusting dance to relevance.

#3 INTENTIONALLY EDUCATING AUDIENCES



Its purpose has to be to intentionally educate audiences so that readers are engaged and enriched. According to Donald Byrd education is helping audiences distinguish between fine art dance and commercial, low art dance while teaching them why they should enjoy fine art dance.

BIG MAC VS. FILET MIGNON

“The job is not to pander to what people think they already like. We know that people like McDonald’s. That doesn’t mean that McDonald’s is good. It just means that they know what it is. It’s fast. It’s easy... I have the responsibility to help people figure out what the difference is between a filet mignon and a Big Mac. I’m not going to serve up the other stuff. I’m going to serve up the quality stuff and help people understand to appreciate it.”

Donald Byrd



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EDUCATION

- How do dance writers educate?
 - They serve as cultural tastemakers.
 - They educate audiences about what concert dance is and sets standards for high quality dance.
 - They inform about concepts, ideas and events.
 - They translate.



To expand on this analogy, dance writers are cultural tastemakers. They educate audiences about what concert dance is and what makes high quality dance by setting those standards. They educate on a factual basis by informing about events, concepts and ideas. Last they educates through translation. We are all trained to communicate through words in school but not through our bodies. Dance writers translate the movements of the body into words accessible to nearly all, like a foreign language class teaches to translate Spanish into English. This is crucial, for it allows dance to serve as a method of communication. Without this translation dance would not be accessible to a large amount of American society.

RECAP OF SUGGESTIONS TO HELP DANCE JOURNALISM FIND LEGITIMACY WHILE SUPPORTING DANCE'S RELEVANCE

- The journalistic paradigm has to change.
 - Journalists need to appropriately use their power of injection.
- Dance journalists need to advocate for both dance and dance journalism.
- Dance journalism has to serve as a legitimate tool for educating audiences.



In conclusion, for dance to become relevant and for dance journalism to become a legitimate faction of journalism, journalists have to do what they do in the successful journalistic fields of entertainment and sports news. They must appropriately inject ideas instead of just being controlled by social interest. They must advocate for the field at hand through honest and accurate writing. They must provide a cultural context for readers and engage audiences through education. I have seen one writer actively do all three of these things. Zach Whittenburg, who I mentioned earlier, has successfully combined these things in both his writing and his preliminary mindset before creating the text for a news story. Being a former dancer he has a fundamental connection and sensitivity to the field as a whole that non dancers cannot fully have. He loves dance as both a practitioner and scholar. He loves writing as both a practitioner and scholar. He

writes with appropriate scrutiny for he wants the best for both the dance and journalism worlds and not the best for a particular dance institution. He incorporates new ideas into his stories as much as possible to reinforce the idea that contemporary concert dance is current and relevant. He translates dance to words in a manner that does the language of the body justice because he is a native speaker of that language...which is dance. Maybe more dance journalists need to have previously been dancers who are educated and articulate enough to carry their passions. I firmly believe this and my other suggestions will help dance journalism stay active and alive during journalism's current reconstruction while simultaneously enabling dance to serve as a method of human communication, a component of cultural conversation and a member of the greater creative exchange so dance can become relevant to a larger sector of society.

THANK
YOU!



Thank you and good morning.

GATEKEEPERS OF DANCE: Junior Honors Literature Review

By

Clay York

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in
The Department of Communications
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

December 14, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

DANCE'S PLACE IN THE HIERARCHY OF THE JOURNALISTIC AGENDA

The internet has grown as the primary source of entertainment in American society. Although the practice of commuting to both movie theaters and live theaters is not on the brink of extinction, art and entertainment patrons are choosing to stay at home with the comforts of their own television, cellular phone, computer, and tablet screen. According to USA Today, Netflix subscribers streamed more than 1 billion hours of online video in the month of June alone in 2012 (Liedtke, 2012). This finding echoes and supports findings by the National Endowment for the Arts, the U.S. government's chief agency for supporting the arts and gauging their impact, regarding audience trends in its fifth and most recent Survey for the Public Participation in the Arts. According to the NEA, 47 million adults prefer to watch and to listen to music, theater, dance, and other live arts performances online (Trescott, 2009). Art conceived and performed in concert halls still hold a fraction of clout in the entertainment and culture world, for people are viewing and listening to the performances an average of once a week. The viewing habits of audiences, however, are transforming. Audiences now use technology and the internet to view art instead of going directly to concert halls and other art venues, which, I posit, would better support the growth and success of dance and other live arts.

According to University of Chicago senior research scientists, Nick Rabkin and E.C. Hedberg, the growth of live arts has created its own lack of relevance and downfall. The study states, "The paying audience for the arts grew quickly after World War II and unleashed a wave of institutional development and growth...a pattern that continued for

decades” (Hedberg, 25). As society has grown and technology has advanced, the cultural paradigm that held live arts, such as orchestral performances, theater, and concert dance, as a staple of life has eroded. Now society has movies, television, Youtube, iTunes and other platforms on which dance is made accessible, there is no longer a cultural and entertainment void in society that can be filled by these concerts (Trescott, 2009). Further, the options for entertainment have expanded. Sports are more popular than ever and celebrity obsession provides constant information and drama for anticipating watchers. I theorize that low art is gaining sovereignty and is becoming the primary outlet for the entertainment of the masses. Low art, as I define it, is popularized, commercialized products created on artistic mediums—such as film and music—that are produced for the primary purpose of external support and capitalistic gain. French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book *Democracy in America*, predicted that such art would arise from a democratic system where art was both created and consumed by the commoner. Tocqueville writes, “[In democracies] the productions of artists are more numerous, but the merit of each production is diminished. No longer able to soar to what is great, they cultivate what is pretty and elegant; and appearance is more attended to than reality” (Tocqueville, 535). The popularization of the aforementioned low art has inversely affected the distribution and success of high art. High art, as I define, is literature, music, and other mediums of creation used to either divulge something about one’s aesthetic and expression or intended to advance its artistic medium through challenging or promoting previously existing ideas. According to theater scholar and critic Robert Brustein, the continual decline of support for high art events by arts patrons is possibly caused by an incursion of low art. In Brustein’s entertainment review for New

Republic titled “The Decline of High culture,” he wrote, “American culture, in [Tocqueville’s] view, might be flooded with insignificant forms of expressions, genuine works of art being rare and often unacknowledged; and artistic standards would be determined not by the intrinsic quality of art by the extrinsic audience size” (Brustein, 29). This new standard for art and the subsequent emphasis for external appreciation has become normalized in society and proliferated through a lack of media attention to “genuine” works of high art.

A depreciation of performance art culture, specifically dance, is gradually growing. According to the NEA’s 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 10.2 percent of adults attended ballet and other dance performances. “Other dance,” as explained in the survey, “refers to dance other than ballet, including modern, folk, and tap” (NEA, 2004). In contrast, only 7 percent of adults said they went to a ballet or other dance performance in 2008 (NEA, 2009). This figure does not reflect the total attendance of dance performances. Instead it reflects the amount of people who attended at least one dance performance in the respective years. This decrease does not necessarily correlate with a decline in attendance. People may attend multiple performances. It does however echo a Chicago study during 2003 where, according to Chicago-based audience research corporation Slover Linett Strategies Inc., dance attendees saw an average of 4.6 dance performances a year (Slover, 2004, p. 16). With both sets of the above data in mind, it can be seen that there has been a decrease in the breadth of dance concert attendees. Although the Slover Linett Strategies Inc. study is not conclusive of all cities in the United States of America, I use Chicago as a microcosm of the American metropolis; for there is precedent stating that Chicago is an adequate representation of America’s urban

cities through Robert Sampson's research of "the Neighborhood Effect" (Sweeney, 2012). Fewer adults invested money and energy to see live dance performances. Although American adults may still value concert dance, they are not participating in a fashion that leads them to visibly support the concert dance industry concert attendance.

A glance at the current snapshots of the media's agenda would show that the structure journalists utilize to expose issues of high importance and represent a variety of news fields fail to encompass dance as well. According to the "Reporting the Arts II" research study conducted by the National Arts Journalism Program, the state of arts journalism is dire. "Newspapers as a whole are shrinking," the study states in its key findings, "so a stable position in a declining environment translates to less coverage than it did five years ago" (NAJP, 2004). All traditional news journalism is decreasing; however, the impact of the shrinkage of newspapers on art is greater for art is not and has never truly been a "stable position" in the journalistic world. Within the past five years, the size of arts sections in nearly 50 percent of the newspapers studied by the NAJP was "cut back severely." Another forty percent were "cut back moderately." Also, nearly all newspapers studied by the NAPJ reduced their article sizes in values spanning up to 20 percent (NAPJ, 2004). This intentional and circumstantial decrease of news covering concert dance performances might have depreciated the value of dance in society.

HOW NEWS INFORMS VALUE

There are a plethora of common societal influences that sway an individual to delegate value. Value, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary, is the relative worth or importance something possesses to activities or items. Journalists place value upon

stories to determine which stories should be reported upon, and which stories should be ignored. Journalists and media personnel inherently sieve information and thus never deliver the entirety of the choices to news consumers before they decide what news should receive priority. Information that navigates its way past the filtration system is virtually always information that has novelty, timeliness, and people of prominence.

For the dance world, it is hard for new stories and reviews to consistently adhere to the format stipulations established by the presence of the aforementioned news values. Well-known Modern dance companies, the ones bearing the names of individuals like Alvin Ailey, Martha Graham, Lar Lubovitch and others, receive grants to reproduce classics or pieces that are embedded in their repertory. Lubovitch, for example, received an NEA grant in 2011 to reconstruct his 1975 work “North Star” (Sagolla, 2011). Novelty is difficult to come by, from the eye of the journalist, for the commission of a new work or the reconstruction of an old work is common practice in the dance world. It is also difficult for news about dance to fulfill the journalistic criteria of timeliness. As former *Village Voice* writer Elizabeth Zimmer alludes to in her article, “The Crisis in Criticism: The Economy, the Internet and the Death of Dance Writing,” concerts are often for one or two nights. By the time a critic has the opportunity to write a piece reflecting upon a dance performance and get that hypothetical work edited, the concert may be over or nearing its conclusion (Zimmer, 2009). Last there are few individuals within the high culture, modern concert dance world that are considered overwhelmingly prominent and visible outside of the dance world. Concert modern dance no longer has celebrities and in America, celebrity news controls the flow of the media.

GATEKEEPING

Both fortunately and unfortunately, people gather what is happening in the world because they have been exposed to it by the media. Because of the wealth of information and experiences happening throughout the world, only a dearth of that information gets transcribed and presented to audience members. This information not only informs what we know of the world. It defines the world in which we live in. As reporter Walter Lippmann stated in his 1922 book “Public Opinion,” the media creates pictures in our heads. These pictures inform news audiences what is and is not important in the world. As Lippman writes, “Looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself” (Lippman, 4). People come to know their world based upon what the news media tells them is going on in the world. This idea is most evident in the symbiotic nature between news media and sports. According to communication historian Robert McChesney, “Virtually every surge in the popularity of sports has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the coverage provided sport by the media” (McChesney, 49). The NFL is the perfect example of this phenomenon. Compared to college football and professional baseball, professional football had a limited attractiveness to the American public; however, with the national exposure that video broadcasts and news media garnered, professional football became the most viewed sport in America within a decade (McChesney, 62). Even as the journalism and media worlds are shifting, and seemingly declining, this notion holds true.

This leads to gate keeping, a theory that developed in the 1950s by David Manning White. Gatekeeping is defined as the filtration of information where only the most “newsworthy” is distributed to the public. Journalists tell readers, viewers, and listeners to associate value and relevance to predetermined, limited options of content. These options are even further filtered through the designs of newspapers, magazines, and other news outlets, where stories with more importance often lie on the front page, front cover, or are in some way featured. Gatekeeping, and the practices of the conception, development and diffusion of news that it encompasses, is now accepted by media sociologists and the general public as innate to the news system. Before the democratization of news by the internet, gatekeeping was rarely challenged, for it is fundamental to the success and function of American society’s current news system. Now, with the heightened blogosphere and sites like reddit.com, traditional gatekeeping is receiving more friction and being seen as a means to an end and not the ultimate manner in which news is disseminated. Despite its functionality, “we can no longer assume that news is an unproblematic reflection of societal events, helping maintain the entire system in equilibrium,” (Ballinger, 647). This ideal will never be accomplished because the preconceived notions of what is news—information that appeals to what news outlets arbitrarily deem as human interest, shows conflict and progress, or is novel, timely, current, in some form proximal (whether on the city, state or domestic level)—strictly dictate how editors and writers for news publications distinguish what information is newsworthy. These preconceptions prevent balance from occurring in the news and rarely give news organizations the freedom to accept and to disseminate a variety of news information.

GATEKEEPING RECONCILED

Although devised to guarantee that the information most integral to the welfare of American society permeates through the nation, gatekeeping has turned into a practice of appropriating news stories to popular culture events and celebrity coverage and limiting the presence of high culture activities in both reporting and society. Even public radio news syndicate NPR, which boasts a mission of working “in partnership with member stations to create a more informed public—one challenged and invigorated by a deeper understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and cultures,” restructured its arts and culture division on *All Things Considered* so that both the programming and the content would reflect the public’s desire to hear more information about popular music, entertainment, and art (NPR). *All Things Considered* was formerly home of strictly high culture news surrounding opera, theater, orchestra, and concert dance (Magee, 48).

Media personnel have used gate keeping and their overall inclination toward the news values of prominence to thrust celebrity news coverage to the forefront. Prominence shapes the news whole so much that every movement of certain celebrity’s lives makes news. During the first week of June in 2007, Paris Hilton became one of the top covered national news stories when four percent of national news coverage circulated around her submission to, exit from, and resubmission to jail. According to the PEW Research Center for the People & the Press, 34 percent of Americans said they followed the story very closely (Pew, 2007). The vast amount of media coverage and follow of this incidence was not an anomaly. Earlier, in February of 2007, Anna Nicole Smith’s death commanded 24 percent of the total news coverage in America the two days immediately following the incident (Pew, 2007). The scandals of Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, and

Kim Kardashian, and deaths of Steve Irwin, Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson drew equal, if not more, media attention (PEW, 2009). Coverage of these celebrities is often cheaper and easier since the information comes from other news organizations.

Regardless of intention, this has knocked dance and other fields, such as international news, out of the public eye (Miller, 2008). This needs to be reconciled by both parties, members of journalistic organizations such as reporters and critics as well as members of the dance world such as dancers, dance administrators and dance patrons, so that dance can take the helm of both cultural informant and aesthetic ambassador to America.

According to the abovementioned Slover Linett Strategies Inc. study, the majority of the study's participants mentioned that they do not attend concert dance performances because there is a lack of information about performances and a lack of information about the specific companies and their works. Dance audience members, general high art cultural consumers, and members of the greater Chicago community consistently noted that they desired an increase of communication about dance performances and the companies that perform them. If these results are microcosmic of the American outlook on dance, there is a desire for dance to enter the public agenda and become relevant again. There has to be a way that journalism can promote, or at the least, bring awareness to dance so that concert dance, not the commercialized dance seen on *So You Think You Can Dance* or *America's Best Dance Crew*, can enter the American zeitgeist again.

THE PROJECT

During the summer of 2012, I embarked on a trip around the country for my project to understand gatekeeping by exploring how journalism could bring cultural awareness to the dance world and its participants. I also wanted to know how dance

participants could help in this process, and whether they used alternative sources of information to reach audience members. The primary research goal of this project originally was to try to determine the relevance of concert dance in several major cities across the United States through qualitative analysis by interviewing individuals involved in spreading information about dance, either as members of the media or participants of dance. Relevant, for the purpose of this research, was multifaceted. Dance is relevant through its presentation if it is able to be transcribed or interpreted by an audience. Dance also seemed relevant through perception, for perception is often greater than reality. If journalists choose to allow information regarding dance companies, artists, and performances to trickle past the gates used to filter what information seeps into the news stream, the art form of concert dance will begin to grow. If articles and event stories about concert dance surface ubiquitously in the news world, people may visibly invest in concert dance through time, energy and attendance, causing concert dance to become relevant to society.

During the summer, I spent two months conducting on-site visits to Saratoga Springs, NY; New York, NY; Cleveland, Ohio; Chicago, IL; and Seattle, WA. I went to these places because I wanted to investigate the dance community and its relationship to media in different locations across the country. Each of these locations had a vigorous dance community. However, the locations were chosen because they had different sizes of their dance community, from larger cultural atmospheres, such as NY and Chicago, to smaller dance communities, such as Seattle and Cleveland. My journey to Saratoga Springs was chosen as an entry point for my research gathering on New York City. In Saratoga Springs, I studied modern dance, improvisation and choreographic creation at

the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company Summer Dance Workshop at Skidmore University. Being with the company each day, however, allowed me to investigate how they perceive journalism and the mass media's influence to be affecting both their immediate worlds of being and the dance world as a whole. This trip and the other on-sight visits were crucial, because I had the chance to conduct and to film interviews with prominent individuals from both the journalistic and dance communities. My discussions with these well-versed and acutely intelligent writers and artists ranged on a continuum from how to gauge concert dance's relevance in society to what is "good" or functional dance writing.

I interviewed nearly 40 experts combined from the two fields; however, these interviews expanded more upon the role journalism in the dance world and how journalist's ability to control what ideas are communicated to mass audiences can help dance gain relevance in society. I also used my interviews to begin to investigate how the dance community circumvented the media to help with exposure of dance and concert dance through blogs, Youtube, and online publications affected how dance is perceived by the greater community of dance patrons, non-patrons, and participants. To answer these questions, I interviewed legends in the arts journalism community, including former Village Voice writer and author Elizabeth Zimmer, Chicago Sun-Times writer Hedy Weiss, and Dance Magazine Editor-in-Chief Wendy Perron. I also spoke with journalists integral in keeping the dance journalist presence vibrant through online publication and blogging, despite the shrinkage in print pages. These people included Cleveland Plain Dealer writer Don Rosenburg, Seattle freelancer Sandra Kurtz, and many others. In the dance community, I interviewed both veteran artists and creators, such as Associate

Artistic Director of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company Janet and Spectrum Dance Theater Artistic Director Donald Byrd, and newer choreographers and Artistic Directors on the dance scene, such as Luna Negra's Gustavo Ramirez Sansano and Zoe Scofield.

I incorporated such a diverse breadth of people in both dance and journalism so that I could have a wide-cast pool of answers to the questions: Is dance relevant? How does traditional news media inform that relevance through their control of the news flow? Has the decline and shrinkage in traditional print news media adversely affected dance's perception and relevance to the masses? Does traditional news media still have a significant role with the development of new media? And does the manner in which a journalist write about dance affect the promotion of the art form? All of these questions were important for me to determine my chief research question: can journalism, through criticism and news stories about dance, help mainstream American society appreciate the concert modern dance world support it through attendance?

To begin to answer this question, I took several steps. First, I worked to transcribe each interview I conducted. This required recording the interviews on video over the summer and investing hours daily to watch the videos and record the diction of the interviewees verbatim. I transcribed these interviews for two reasons. First, the transcriptions would allow me to easily compare and contrast opinions and facts from each of the parties so I can search for commonalities and solutions to the problems I posed above. Second, the transcriptions will allow for easy quoting in the research section of my thesis.

The second major step I took to analyze the information I gathered was reflection. During the beginning of the fall 2012 semester, I listed the near 40 people I had interviewed over the span of the summer and wrote the first two or three things I could recall from the interview. After doing that, my advisor and I sifted through that information and highlighted key words and ideas, both negative and positive, that seemed present in a majority or plurality of the articles. These words and ideas included the following:

Negative (About dance and/or dance writing)

- Short-lived
- Stigma
- Less value
- Cynicism/ skepticism
- Irrelevant
- Less media attention
- Less government funding
- Luxury
- Sports
- Movie
- Do people use
- Sensationalism
- Publications for dancers

Positive (about dance and/or dance writing)

- Culturally significant
- Use internet
- Educate audience
- So You Think You Can Dance & other programs
- Filter through for audience
- Makes sense
- Healthy Platform
- Communicate
- Outreach
- Spread Awareness

Although seemingly random, these words served as trigger for ideas crucial in my research. For example, “do people use” is significant because it demonstrates to me that many people from both the journalism field and the dance field question the impact that dance writing actually has on attendance. This questioning comes from an overwhelming lack of faith that the general public do not truly use newspapers or, at least, read sections that are not featured headlines, sports stories, or celebrity stories. These words and phrases were integral in collecting my thoughts and helping me see what were common themes from my interviews. My analysis of the information that I gathered from both this process and the transcription process helped facilitate the creation of my thesis argument, which reads as follows:

Although concert dance is perceived as an esoteric, narrow-cast art form and is thus often dismissed as luxury by both its audiences and journalists writing about

the craft, it is integral to informing and understanding the cultural climate of our society in both the past and the present. Because of this, dance journalism needs to continue to exist in the ever changing world of traditional news media and must exist to promote the integrity and relevance of the art form.

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COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chicago

Matt de la Pena

Matt de la Pena is the current Dance Editor for *Time Out Chicago*. An avid dance enthusiast, de la Pena has served as a development intern for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and a summer education assistant for both The Washington School of Ballet and American Ballet Theater.

Philip Elson

Philip Elson, originally from Fort Worth, TX, is a dance artist engaging with various arenas of dance research and performance including live performance, dance for camera, site-specific work, and experimental collaboration. He holds a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Dance from The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago. Philip has been a member of The Seldoms since 2008.

Carrie Hanson

Carrie Hanson is a dance artist and educator who has resided in Chicago since 1991. Ms. Hanson was named one of “25 to Watch” in 2012 by *Dance Magazine*. She founded her company, The Seldoms, in 2001 and has since created over twenty-five new works for the company. She is certified in Laban Movement Analysis and earned a BFA from TCU and an MA in Dance Studies from Laban London.

Laura Molzahn*

Laura Molzahn is a critic who has written about Chicago dance since 1987 for the *Chicago Reader*, *Dance Magazine*, and (recently) the *Chicago Tribune*. She has a PhD in English from Northwestern University and was the performing and visual arts editor at the *Reader* for 22 years.

Cara Sabin

Cara currently dances with The Seldoms. She received a BFA from The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago. She has had the opportunity to perform works at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., at Lincoln Center's Out of Doors Festival and locally as a guest with Lucky Plush and Margaret Morris. She continues to work with Chicago political organizations and in arts administration in the city.

Gustavo Ramirez Sansano

Sansano started dancing young in his hometown of San Fulgencio, near Spain's southeastern coast. At eight, he began attending a regional dance school in nearby Almoradi, and by 16 he was studying contemporary dance and flamenco at Barcelona's Institut del Teatre. His performance credits include stints with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Nederlands Dans Theater. He took over Luna Negra Dance Theater in 2010 and has served as artistic director until he resigned in April 2013.

Hedy Weiss*

A New York native, Weiss attended Hunter College and graduated with a degree in English literature and art history. In 1980, she relocated to Chicago and worked as an assistant professor at DePaul's theater school until 1984. At that time, she started her post as the Theater and Dance critic for the Chicago Sun-Times and has remained in that position for the past 19 years.

Zachary Whittenburg*

Zachary Whittenburg joined Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet in 1998. His dance career continued with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, BJM Danse Montréal and other project-based work. Starting as a writer for Flavorpill, Zach now writes for publications such as Dance Magazine, Dance Teacher, Dance Spirit, Pointe, and Time Out Chicago. He previously served as the dance editor for time out Chicago for a brief stint.

Cleveland

John Kappes

Formerly just an arts writer, John Kappes serves as the arts and entertainment editor of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, one of the nation's top-circulated newspapers.

Don Rosenberg

After studying music at Yale, Don Rosenberg became the classical music critic and writer for first the Akron Beacon Journal and eventually The Plain Dealer in 1992. He has since expanded to cover the majority of arts culture events including theater and dance.

Beth Rutkowski

Rutkowski serves as General Manager for Cleveland-based GroundWorks Dance Theater. Before starting for GroundWorks in 2011, Ms. Rutkowski served as the managing director of the Tri-C JazzFest Cleveland from 2005 to 2011 and the Director of Education at The Beck Center for the Arts from 2001 to 2005. She received her Masters of Business Administration from the University of Louisville.

David Shimotakahara

David Shimotakahara is the founder and artistic director of GroundWorks. In 2002 David was named one of “25 to Watch” by *Dance Magazine*. Before starting his own company, he a principal dancer and rehearsal assistant for Ohio Ballet.

Mary Verdi-Fletcher

Verdi-Fletcher is the first professional wheel chair dancer in the United States. Although she was born with spinal bifida and confined to a wheel chair at an early age, she had always wanted to dance. In 1980 she

founded Dancing Wheels, America's first ability integrated dance ensemble. 33 years later, she still serves as its artistic director.

New York

Ursula Eagly

An Indiana native, Ursula Eagly graduated Princeton in 1999 with an award for excellence in dance and theater. Since graduation, she has been creating and performing throughout New York City. Also, in 2012 she became the editor-in-chief of Movement Research Performance Journal.

Wendy Perron

An alumna from Bennington College, Perron has had an extensive dance career filled with performance, pedagogy, choreography and writing. She danced with the Trisha Brown Dance Company for three years and now serves as the editor-in-chief of *Dance Magazine*.

Janet Wong

Janet Wong is the associate artistic director of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Trained in Hong Kong and London, she met Bill T. Jones while a member of the Berlin Ballet. Ms. Wong became rehearsal director of the company in 1996 and associate artistic director in August 2006.

Elizabeth Zimmer

An alumna from Bennington College, Zimmer has written a large sum of articles and reviews about dance for publications such as *Dance Magazine* and *Village Voice*.

Seattle

Donald Byrd*

Byrd became artistic director of Seattle's Spectrum Dance Theater in December 2002. Before that he was artistic director of New York based Donald Byrd/The Group. He has created works for his own groups as well as the Alvin Ailey Company, the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, and Philadelphia Dance Company (Philadanco), Pacific Northwest Ballet and The Joffrey Ballet. In 2006, he received a TONY nomination for his choreography for *The Color Purple*.

Monique Courcy

Monique studied dance at the University of Washington and is working towards her Masters of Fine Arts in Arts Leadership from Seattle University. She now works for nonprofit performance curator On The Boards as media manager.

Iyun Harrison

Harrison is the artistic director and founder of Seattle-based company Ashani Dances. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Juilliard School and Masters of Fine Arts degree from Hollins

University/American Dance Festival. He has danced professionally with Dance Theatre of Harlem, Ballet Hispanico, and Ailey II.

Brendan Kiley*

Kiley cover dance for Seattle's alternative newspaper *The Stranger*. In addition to his work for the stranger, his writing has appeared in *Newsweek* and the *Boston Globe*. He attended the University of Washington and the University of Chicago.

Sandra Kurtz

Kurtz teaches and writes about dance in Seattle, WA. She has written for *Seattle Weekly*, *Dance Magazine*, *Pointe* and other publications. She received degrees in theater, dance criticism, and movement analysis from Reed College, Sarah Lawrence College, and the Laban Institute of Movement Studies respectively. She's served on the board of the Dance Critics Association.

Tonya Lockyer

Lockyer is the executive director of Velocity Dance Center, Seattle's premier art center dedicated to contemporary dance and performance. Lockyer has been a dancer and dance educator for more than 20 years. In addition to overseeing Velocity, she teaches dance at Cornish College of the Arts.

Jessica Massart

Massart currently serve as the communications director for On the Boards. She oversees the press and public relations for On the Boards and also assists with OntheBoards.tv—a site that supplies HD films of contemporary performance to global audiences. Before that, she served as the company manager for zoejuniper.

Zoe Scoefield

Scoefield is the co-artistic director of dance and performance art company zoejuniper. She studied ballet and modern dance at Walnut Hill School for the Performing Arts in Boston. She has danced with Prometheus Dance and Bill James among other choreographers in Toronto, Boston and Seattle. Scofield has received a Princess Grace Foundation Choreography Award.

* Asterisks denote the individuals whose voices and ideas were present in the final senior honors thesis paper.

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes journalism's role in aiding and promoting concert contemporary dance so it can serve as a method of human communication, a component of cultural conversation and a member of the greater creative exchange. It analyzes the current problems with the journalism paradigm and provides suggestions as to how dance journalism can survive the journalism world's current upheaval to help dance become and remain relevant to a larger pool of American society.