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Set in Motion: Dance Criticism and the Choreographic Apparatus

By

Kate Mattingly

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

Professor Abigail De Kosnik

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Professor SanSan Kwan

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## Abstract

Set in Motion: Dance Criticism and the Choreographic Apparatus

By

Kate Mattingly

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

Designated Emphasis in New Media

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

This dissertation examines the multiple functions of dance criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in the United States. I foreground institutional interdependencies that shape critics' practices, as well as criticism's role in approaches to dance-making, and the necessary and fraught relations between dance criticism and higher education. To challenge the pervasive image of the critic as evaluator and of criticism as definitive, *Set in Motion* focuses on conditions that produce and endorse certain forms of criticism, and in turn how this writing has gained traction. I employ the concept of a choreographic apparatus to show shifting relations amongst writers, artists, publications, readers, institutions, and audiences. Their interactions generate frameworks that influence dance's history, canon, and disciplinary formations. I propose a way of situating criticism as a form of writing that intersects with, informs, and influences both history and theory.

*Set in Motion* expands discourse on writing by examining the continuities and discontinuities in practices over the course of a century. Chapter 1 focuses on articles by John Martin in the *New York Times* the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chapter 2 analyzes how artists in the 1960s, in particular Yvonne Rainer, took hold of the choreographic apparatus to redirect discourse about their projects. In Chapter 3, I expand my analysis from methodologies to the study of educational institutions. Chapter 4 turns to the question, "where is criticism today?" and investigates how digital technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century inform and inflect our engagements with criticism.

*Set in Motion* contributes to dance studies discourses, disciplinary formation, and histories of professionalization by noticing ways in which criticism and theory function less often as opposing forces and primarily as reciprocal and interconnected partners. By recognizing the ways criticism has functioned as a fulcrum to legitimate and leverage particular approaches to dance, this project highlights artists' and critics' modes of production that generate and redesign our definitions of dance writing.

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## Introduction

In October of 2015 choreographer Joe Goode presented a performance called *Poetics of Space*. Although the event took place at the Joe Goode Annex, his studio-theater in San Francisco, there were no seats or chairs for the audience. The evening was described as an “immersive performance installation,”<sup>1</sup> and invited people to meander through make-shift rooms that featured vignettes of dancing, singing, and speaking by his company of performers. At one point I was taken outside of the building by Joe Goode, who played the evening’s narrator, or as he introduced himself to the audience, “a representative of the dead.” Instructed to walk slowly towards him, I realized that our “duet” was visible to members of the audience inside who could see our silhouettes projected on the Annex’s windows. Momentarily suspended between being a watcher and being watched, between Goode’s presence and people’s eyes on me, between seeing a performance and becoming part of the performance, I felt my heart beating faster.

*Poetics of Space* investigated how environments affect us and how they inform our emotions and memories. Influenced by Gaston Bachelard’s book *Poetics of Space*, Goode collaborated with set designer Sean Riley and lighting designer Jack Carpenter to transform his studio into a spatial, experiential wunderkammer. Nooks and crannies revealed intimate duets and trios. The subtleties and vulnerabilities of our relationships appeared in shifting contexts. The performance itself changed the ways we attend a dance concert, and the expectations we may bring about our roles as audience members. Writing about this event revealed similar negotiations amongst roles of critics, audiences, and readers.

Writing in the *San Francisco Examiner*, dance critic Leslie Katz dismissed the show, starting her review with the statement: “Despite the lofty title, there aren’t many huge revelations about the nature of space in Joe Goode Performance Group’s newest production, ‘Poetics of Space’.”<sup>2</sup> Katz complains that an earlier work by Goode, *Traveling Light*, was “a truly unique experience” and “outrageously original,” whereas *Poetics of Space* was not. Here we see criticism functioning as a kind of policing of artistic approaches: Katz prefers the theatrical effects of “huge revelations” to the subtler and more intimate negotiations of Goode’s *Poetics*. Her use of words like “original” and “unique” indicates a preference for choreography that emphasizes individual invention or innovation. The fact that none of the dancers’ names appear in the review points to an approach to choreography that assumes single authorship or individual creation instead of collaboration amongst performers and director.

In contrast to Katz’s approach, Jaime Robles writes on a website called *Repeat Performances* about *Poetics of Space*:

...it is a primary tenet of phenomenology that we move closer to a true understanding of life when we abandon stereotypical or habitual thinking. Once we have done that we can meditate on the objects of life that stand before us, sharing our consciousness and reminding us over and over that we are not alone,

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<sup>1</sup> “Poetics of Space,” vimeo.com, <https://vimeo.com/139295843>.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Katz, “Intimacy appeals in Joe Goode’s ‘Poetics of Space’,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 21, 2015, <http://www.sfexaminer.com/intimacy-appeals-in-joe-goodes-poetics-of-space/>.

and that we are part of a greater—and miraculous—universe. And it is here, to this space, that Joe Goode brings us.<sup>3</sup>

Reading these two reviews it becomes apparent that one performance can elicit markedly different responses and markedly different approaches to criticism. In these two examples, one is characterized by standards and criteria, suggesting a hierarchy of “good” and “bad” performances, and emphasizing the critic’s role as evaluator. The other investigates the context and contingency of Goode’s work, the way it is in conversation with theoretical frameworks, and how it intentionally disturbs the “habitual” or familiar.

Mining the distinctions between these two reviews reveals other differences: in the print publication—*San Francisco Examiner*—the critic’s tone is authoritative and definitive.<sup>4</sup> The review is 329 words. As a critic, Katz distances herself from the audience by writing: “About 60 audience members stand throughout the shape-shifting, hour-long presentation. At times they may follow their own path...” She seems to be observing the observers: “they” are separate from her. On the website, *Repeat Performances*, Robles begins her piece: “In the darkened space divided by long dark curtains, three of us are silently directed to duck under a scrim...” The author is situated within the event, fitting for a performance that bills itself as immersive, but also revealing in its self-reflexive stance: Robles is both amongst other people and implicated in her writing, connecting to and becoming part of the work that is presented. She writes of a character in *Poetics*: “Logan existed, like the rest of us, in space, and a narrow space of time.” Instead of the critical distance that Katz favors, and instead of the arbiter of style approach or policing of artistic practices that is visible in Katz’s writing, Robles’s approach is more akin to an engaged observer who foregrounds her situated perspective. She incorporates a reference to phenomenology because it pertains to Goode’s choice of Bachelard’s book as an inspiration for the project and also because it gives her readers a lens for understanding this intimate, interpersonal approach to performance. Is it important that this writing appears on a screen and not a printed page? Is it significant that Robles’s post is 639 words, almost twice as long as Katz’s? Are there reasons why Katz adopts such a distant, “objective” tone and Robles’s is more equivocal?

This dissertation, *Set in Motion: Dance Criticism and the Choreographic Apparatus*, examines the multiple functions of dance criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in the United States. As important as criticism has been to dance as an art form, serving as documentation, evaluation, and promotion, there has been no sustained research into the shifting positions and status of dance critics and criticism. In these chapters I investigate how contexts and contingencies inform writing styles and authors’ criteria. I seek to foreground how institutional interdependencies shape critics’ practices, how criticism both responds to and informs approaches to dance-making, and how this mode of writing has had a necessary and fraught relation with disciplinary formations of

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<sup>3</sup> Jaime Robles, “Joe Goode’s ‘The Poetics of Space,’” *Repeat Performances*, September 24, 2015, <http://www.repeatperformances.org/preview.php?catid=4&id=614>.

<sup>4</sup> For a definition of “authority effect,” see Jane Tompkins, “Me and My Shadow,” *New Literary History* Vol. 19 No. 1 (Autumn, 1987), 169-178: “This ‘authoritative’ language speaks as though the other person weren’t there. Or perhaps more accurately, it doesn’t bother to imagine who, as Hawthorne said, is listening to our talk. How can we speak personally to one another and yet not be self-centered?”



dance in higher education. Rather than naming “good” or “bad” critics, *Set in Motion* focuses on conditions that produce and endorse certain forms of criticism, and in turn how this writing gained traction during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in the United States. Indeed, I wish to challenge the pervasive image of the critic as evaluator and of criticism as definitive—to contest notions of the critic as a person who looks for fault. Instead, I highlight how criticism operates as a practice that offers methodologies for viewing performances, a form of writing that both poses and answers questions, and one that provides frameworks for audiences. Since this project focuses on writing about dance, an art form that communicates through movement and sensation, I also highlight how dance criticism both differs from and relies upon other disciplinary protocols.

My purpose is not to isolate any particular critic as exemplary or negligent but rather to explore the ways in which dance critics’ writing reveals criteria and methodologies that are endorsed by certain individual and institutional authorities. By expanding the study of criticism from a decade to a century it is possible to track differences in critics’ styles and tones as well as differences in their criteria and value systems. During my research I discovered that many scholars agree with Randy Martin, author of *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Practice*, who wrote, “The review, the most common form of dance writing, is weak as much for how it attempts to describe the object of that performed event as for what it leaves out.”<sup>5</sup> When I read this statement, I started to wonder about the conditions that defined criticism as a description of events and that endorsed these New Critical approaches, meaning close readings of individual events. For instance, a closer look at John Martin’s criticism in the 1920s reveals that he wrote a weekly column on the economics, politics, and aesthetics of dance, frequently noting their inter-relations and the need for reform. These essays appeared in the *New York Times* on Sundays, but, during the weekdays, he provided close readings of individual performances. My examination highlights why criticism moves amongst multifaceted forms and formats and how it transforms our understandings of dance history and theory.

I seek to acknowledge both the mutually supportive interactions of criticism, theory, and history, as well as the separations of these forms of writing that speak to institutional strategies of validation and legitimation. In literary studies, Gerald Graff has shown how New Critical approaches were used tactically to establish the significance of literary theory: “In general, the method of close reading was instrumental in the effort to rescue literature from the cultural triviality and marginality to which it appeared to be reduced, deliberately or unwittingly, by those who dismissed literature as a frivolous activity or else defended it in terms which seemed to demean or denature it.” Compared to literary studies, dance in the academy, often dismissed as anti-intellectual and “physical” education, has fought complex battles to gain the respect of scholars and academic departments. If literary scholars used New Criticism to produce “proofs of the ‘richness’ and multivalent complexity of the literary text,” they were also battling “the moralist or the Marxist, who in their eagerness to extract a morally or socially uplifting message from the text tended to reduce it to a simple-minded form of preaching or

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<sup>5</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 34.

propaganda.”<sup>6</sup> In a similar way, dance critics have used New Critical methods as weapons to fight for the respect and autonomy of dance as both an art form and an academic discipline. Bill Readings writes in *The University in Ruins*, “The New Critics decidedly argued against historical scholarship and positioned the artwork as essentially autonomous, capable of evoking a response without extraneous information to guide interpretation.”<sup>7</sup> Readings’s insight is compelling because it points to the role of New Criticism in offering readers “a way of reading.” As I examine in Chapter 1, John Martin’s weekday reviews in the *New York Times* anticipated these New Critical approaches: Martin offered close readings of performances that gave his readers a way of “reading” dance that did not depend on historical precedents. In other words, Martin’s writing did for dance, a relatively new art form in the United States in the 1920s, what New Criticism did for literary studies in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was a methodology that offered insights into creative projects, gave readers frameworks for engaging with dance, and served as a vehicle for legitimizing and validating dance as an art form.

### **A Choreographic Apparatus**

In each chapter I employ the concept of a “choreographic apparatus” as a method for examining interactions between critics, institutions, and readerships. The choreographic apparatus is a concept that acknowledges interdependent ecologies of performance and writing, and foregrounds the ways that their positioning affords certain outcomes. By arranging and structuring relations between people, organizations, and publications, this apparatus makes visible their interdependencies. As I examine in these chapters, a choreographic apparatus both displays and also reworks these structures and relationships.

Inspiration for this concept emerged in relation to the practices of particular artists; the artistic work of Dan Graham, Robert Morris, and Yvonne Rainer in the 1960s could be understood by placing the different events they created, articles they wrote, and roles they occupied—performers, writers, critics, essayists, and event organizers—in relation to one another. Their shifts between these roles generated a choreographic sensibility of plan and action, or placement, movement, and arrangement. Their fluctuating positions and transitions between these platforms could be described as a form of choreography that brought visibility to certain projects, particularly those that challenged aesthetic categories, that re-negotiated interactions between creators and performers, performers and audiences, producers and participants, and that transformed

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<sup>6</sup> Gerald Graff, “What Was New Criticism? Literary Interpretation and Scientific Objectivity,” *Salmagundi*, No. 27 (Summer-Fall 1974), 76-77. Graff adds, “...close analyses of structure and texture could also demonstrate to the philologists, historians, and biographers that the text possessed an independent richness of its own, apart from what it might secondarily illustrate about the history of language, literature, ideas, or social institutions, or about the life and character of the author, proving that the value of literature did not rest in its usefulness as an index to the subject-matter of other intellectual disciplines” (81).

<sup>7</sup> Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 84.

the roles of critics, observers, and presenting organizations that supported and promoted artistic work.

Defining choreography as an arrangement of movement in space as well as the notation of these arrangements, I use the term choreographic apparatus to shed light on ways in which writers have constructed certain approaches to criticism in relation to other variables (editors, readerships, publications, venues, and value systems). This apparatus is capable of redirecting discourse that surrounds both their articles and artists' performances. In other words, a choreographic understanding of space and time, movement and interaction, plan and documentation provides a lens through which to examine dance criticism.

This use of "choreographic" aligns with other metaphoric uses of the word choreography. For example, Charis Thompson uses the term "ontological choreography" in her book *Making Parents*, to refer to the "dynamic coordination of the technical, scientific, kinship, gender, emotional, legal, political, and financial aspects of ART (Assisted Reproductive Technologies) clinics." In Thompson's analysis, choreography carries a particular valence that distinguishes the coordination of these elements from undifferentiated motion or "hybrid mess."<sup>8</sup> Ontological choreography, in Thompson's research, succeeds when it generates ontological innovation.

Thompson's work is in dialogue with other socio-scientific models for coordinating performative parts and interrelationships, including actor-network theory (ANT) which foregrounds relational ties within a network and recognizes interactions of social and technical aspects, of both human and non-human actors. Abigail De Kosnik describes ANT as a "sociotechnical system," in which "nonhuman actants many not have *intentions* as humans do, but they nevertheless 'make others do things.'"<sup>9</sup> I agree with De Kosnik's formulation that ANT offers "a middle ground between techno-determinism and social constructivism" and, in my own work, I employ a choreographic apparatus to show how interactions of artists, critics, readers, articles, and institutions generated networks that influenced dance history, a dance canon, and disciplinary formations.

In "On Actor-network theory," Bruno Latour explains the use of the word "network" as a useful concept because "it has no a priori order relation; it is not tied to the axiological myth of a top and of a bottom of society; it makes absolutely no assumption whether a specific locus is macro- or micro- and does not modify the tools to study the element 'a' or the element 'b'."<sup>10</sup> For my work, the word "apparatus," as opposed to "network" affords a sense of the framing, shaping, and defining characteristics that are important to dance writing. The concept of a choreographic apparatus denotes a certain arrangement of critics and institutions, of criteria and positions, as well as artists and performances, which function both as networks as well as interlocking arrangements and instruments.

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<sup>8</sup> Charis Thompson, *Making Parents: The Ontological Choreography of Reproductive Technologies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social – an Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

In other words, a critic and her publication bring with them certain approaches and affordances: they are linked to value systems, venues, artists, creative processes, and audiences. The positioning of these elements—critic, dancer, venue, article, performance, publication, readership—is as important as their connections. It will inform examples in each chapter. For example, in Chapter 1, John Martin, exposed to Stanislavsky’s methods through the teaching of Richard Boleslavsky, acquired the tools and predilections to appreciate Martha Graham’s performances just as she was developing her craft as a modern choreographer. In addition, the status afforded by the masthead, *New York Times*, gave his writing a particular significance. Teacher, artist, and publication venue are all variables in a specific apparatus.

In art history, the word “apparatus” often carries other connotations, visible in the work of Andrea Fraser who critiques the concept of “the art apparatus” as a kind of stricture that prevents artistic autonomy. Fraser refers to the meetings of the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) as attempts to resist the “heteronomy to which artists and artworks are subject by the apparatus that supports their legitimacy and through which that legitimacy is appropriated as symbolic and economic profit.”<sup>11</sup> She calls instead for an institutional critique that recognizes its co-production of institutional subjects. Fraser writes in *Artforum*, “we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc... So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed... It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of ourselves.”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, my use of this concept highlights interconnected relations amongst artists, writers, and audiences, as well as between “institution” and “form.” By calling these placements and shifting relations an “apparatus,” I highlight the contingency, the mobility, and the framing functions of critical writing. Ultimately, rather than dividing priorities in critics’ practices between those that contribute to history and those that contribute to theory, I propose a way of situating criticism as a form of writing that intersects with, informs, and influences both dance history and dance theory. Criticism serves as a significant vehicle of transmission and circulation that has played a pivotal role in the formations of dance canons and the disciplinary formations of dance in higher education.

The word “apparatus,” however, has been applied to quite different contexts by dance scholars and theorists. In *Dancing on the Canon*, Sherril Dodds uses “apparatus” to describe a means of teaching and a system for studying embodied practices. Dodds writes, “the ‘dance instruction song’ is an *apparatus* by which social dance and ‘bodily knowledge’ is transmitted,” and “close attention to the individuals who engage in these embodied practices offers a robust *apparatus* to interrogate constructions of value.”<sup>13</sup> In these examples, the word suggests a framing mechanism that is fixed, but is portable and circulates. My use of the choreographic apparatus emphasizes how this framing

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<sup>11</sup> Andrea Fraser, “What’s Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere?” in Alexander Alberro, ed., *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 47-79.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum* (September 2005), 282.

<sup>13</sup> Sherril Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 202 (my italics).

mechanism can be reworked depending on who takes hold of it. In other words, different agents position and redefine its variables at different historical moments, and on behalf of different aesthetic goals. Important to this project, the choreographic apparatus emphasizes shifts in relations, thereby making visible the changes in critics' priorities as well as reciprocal relations amongst criticism, history, and theory. As the study of John Martin's criticism and teaching make clear, there is a close relationship between the artists he valued, the artists he wrote about extensively, and artists included in a dance canon and dance history courses today.

In her study of the canon and what is excluded, Dodds notes that a canonical history in dance is verified and perpetuated by excluding forms that are "popular." Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics in the *New York Times* used their writing about dance to shore up the importance of their preferred—and ultimately "canonical"—artists and to dismiss those practices that catered to popular or even experimental tastes, as seen in Chapter 2 when I analyze Clive Barnes' writing about the Judson concerts in the 1960s. These imbrications of dance criticism and a dance canon necessitate a closer examination of relationships between canonical histories and higher education. Academic institutions have been sites of reproduction for a dance canon, and as John Guillory writes, the university is a complex site that both reinforces and holds the potential to subvert canonical histories. Guillory states, "Changing the syllabus cannot mean in any historical context overthrowing the canon, because every construction of a syllabus institutes once again the process of canon formation."<sup>14</sup> Courses like "Dance History" activate and reinforce the study of artists deemed "canonical." A closer look at the writing of dance critics reveals little difference between the artists preferred by a critic like John Martin, and the artists included in many Dance History courses today. My deployment of the choreographic apparatus emphasizes the contingencies of these "regimes of value" as well as the potential to rework such regimes by reconfiguring the apparatus. As John Frow, a cultural theorist, writes, "the analysis of cultural texts must be set in relation to the institutionalized regimes of value that sustain them and that organize them in relations of difference and distinction."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the value ascribed to certain artists and certain artistic approaches is sustained and substantiated by academic institutions and their syllabi.

Dance criticism has an invested and complicated relationship with academic institutions, as well as with processes of value-formation for non-academic readerships. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams writes that criticism is always part and parcel of a "real situation and circumstances," and not some general or natural process that transcends class, gender, or ethnicity. Williams cautioned against associating criticism with "taste," or "judgment," and advocated for recognition of its imbrications in "active and complex relations with its whole situation and context."<sup>16</sup> The notion of choreographic apparatus draws attention to these mutable, complex, and shifting relations. In this dissertation, I examine how writers have used criticism to both reinforce dominant approaches to choreography as well as to nurture those ideas that are unfamiliar to audiences. In other

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<sup>14</sup> John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>15</sup> Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon*, 94.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 86.

words, criticism can be studied as a site of political potential because it is in conversation with artists' work as well as readers' perceptions. In her writing on theatre criticism, Diana Damian Martin states: "Performance itself offers a site in which the sensible can be re-distributed, that is, in which certain conflicts, ideas and sensibilities can be challenged and the terms of the conflict re-ordered. Criticism holds a responsibility towards the articulation of this re-distribution; in its relationship to a wider cultural and political context, criticism holds the ability to engage in a process of re-distribution of the sensible that operates discursively and aesthetically."<sup>17</sup> Diana Damian Martin's essay draws heavily on French theorist Jacques Rancière and his articulation of "the distribution of the sensible," which refers to how regimes of value become visible and reproducible.

In *The Politics of Aesthetic*, Rancière examines these relations: "aesthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships."<sup>18</sup> Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, critics have re-arranged networks and hierarchies that determined the visibility of certain artists. By placing dance criticism in relation to artists' creations, as well as in relation to the priorities of certain publications and the demands of their readerships, I seek to show how critics created discursive platforms for certain ideas and functioned as gate-keepers for particular definitions of dance. By calling these placements and relations an "apparatus," I highlight the framing and delimiting role of this mechanism.

As this project makes clear, dance criticism is not a stable or homogenous mode of engaging with artists' work, but a shifting system that generates visibility for particular artists at different historical moments. I wish to highlight how these frames produced by critics set in motion the criteria and value systems deployed by communities of discourse. I am using community here to mean social configurations in which enterprises are defined as worthwhile.<sup>19</sup> We can easily see then how these value systems are tethered to communities that designate some artists and creative processes as more valuable than others, and by extension how criticism participates in the injustices of recognition that have constituted some social actors as less than full members of a community and prevents them from participating as peers.<sup>20</sup> What's important about this apparatus is that if we expand the study of criticism from a decade to a century we see how the apparatus shifts and reworks such relationships.

To offer one example of ways in which criticism has participated in injustices of recognition, we can look at John Martin's formulation of "modern dance" as separate from "Negro dance," as well as his assumptions that a dancer's race informed their

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<sup>17</sup> Duska Radosavljevic, *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 223.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible," *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (May-June 2000). Fraser advocates for correcting injustices of recognition by counteracting an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that constitutes some social actors as less than full members of society.

abilities. For instance, Martin described the artist Pearl Primus as “among the best young dancers of the day, regardless of race.”<sup>21</sup> About the genre he called “Negro dance,” Martin assumed that it aspired to be more like “modern dance,” and wrote, “the purely objective racial approach to the art will give place to a more universal attitude in which the artist dances simply as an individual human being, allowing his racial heritage to voice itself freely through him but not to limit his range of subject and content.”<sup>22</sup> In Chapter 4, I examine Martin’s comments about Katherine Dunham’s dancing as “not designed to delve into philosophy or psychology but to externalize the impulses of a high-spirited, rhythmic, and gracious race.”<sup>23</sup> I propose that digital technologies open platforms for writers and audiences to engage with artists’ work, thereby challenging these regimes of value that frequently endorse systems of exclusion: racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ageism.

It’s important to note how these systems of exclusion extend from critics’ writing to courses that teach a canonical history. Many dance departments offer two courses in dance history, one that emphasizes a canonical history of dance in Europe and the United States, or “dance as an art form,” and another that focuses on the rest of the globe and is framed by a definition of dance as cultural expression.<sup>24</sup> Some universities call this “cultural” approach “Dance Appreciation” or “Reflections on Gender, Culture & Ethnicity in American Dance.”<sup>25</sup> This kind of curricular design reinforces Martin’s racial categorization.<sup>26</sup> As I argue in Chapter 3, the introduction of dance studies as an academic field brought much-needed attention to the privileges of white, canonical artists and how their “greatness” was propped up by disciplinary formations. In *Choreographing Copyright*, Anthea Kraut observes, “In the last few decades, critical dance studies scholars have fruitfully critiqued the taken-for-granted privilege of white modern dance

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<sup>21</sup> John Martin, “Negro Dance,” *The Story of the Dance* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1946), 145.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *Free to Dance* PBS series. Executive Producer: Anthony Chapman, more information available at: [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

<sup>24</sup> This is how “Dance History” has been taught at George Mason University’s School of Dance, George Washington University, and Old Dominion University. The “cultural” dance course is often called Dance Appreciation (George Mason), Dance and its Audience (ODU), or Understanding the Dance (George Washington). The other course is called “Dance History.”

<sup>25</sup> UC Berkeley course number TDPS 52AC, Fall 2014.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the “Reflections” syllabus stated, “Focus is on forms associated with African Americans, Indigenous Americans and Jewish Americans.” Such curricular design reinforces the hierarchy of a white, high-art, “concert” dance taught separately and distinguished from “non-canonical” forms. In the case of “Reflections,” even the non-canonical forms are evaluated according to what they provide (white) Americans, or in Martin’s phrasing, “individual” human beings. The first question of the Final Examination in “Reflections” stated: “Provide two specific examples of how dance served the interests of slave traders and slave holders (One succinct sentence each!).”

and the racial stratification that has governed the American dance landscape.”<sup>27</sup> In this dissertation I seek to emphasize how critics have shaped our views and preferences as well as how they have contributed to curricular design and value determinations. By extension, in calling attention to the systems of exclusion perpetuated by such writing, this research holds the potential to rework such regimes of value. By using the choreographic apparatus to show the interlocking networks of criticism, curricular design, and canon formation, I propose that changing such regimes of value needs to happen on multiple fronts. As Kraut makes clear in *Choreographing Copyright*, destabilizing notions of “Great Western Individual Choreographers”<sup>28</sup> is essential to bringing much-needed attention to “non-white subjects and practices previously excluded from the dance historical canon.”<sup>29</sup> Dance criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a site where “great” (white) artists were valorized while artists of color were invisibilized or misrepresented. As I argue in Chapter 4, writing about racism and other systems of exclusion proliferates on websites and through digital platforms today. It is my hope that this writing sets in motion the changes that need to happen to restructure traditional dance curricula that are built on racist and outdated formulations.

In a different disciplinary context, Ronald Judy writes about the formation of African-American Studies as its own field, explaining “the material and historical circumstances of those cultural discourses previously excluded from the university are distinct enough from those of the institutionally sanctioned knowledge to justify a unique critical discourse and practice of reading.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, university departments sanction methods for studying objects that reinforce the worth of such sites while dismissing methods that would acknowledge or value other forms or discourses. In terms of dance history, John Martin’s definitions of “great” artists were generated by the “modern” artists he preferred and valued. By extension, we can examine moments of breach in critical discourse, for example the conflicts between Katherine Dunham’s aesthetics and John Martin’s writing, or Yvonne Rainer’s performances and George Jackson’s reviews,<sup>31</sup> or Bill T. Jones’s *Still/Here* and Arlene Croce’s essay “Discussing the Undiscussable,” to analyze the gaps in a critic’s value system and the work of dancers and choreographers. In her dissertation, scholar Sima Belmar writes that choreographer Bill T. Jones “recognizes dance criticism as a form of writing history that is dependent on a unidirectional relationship between choreographers and critics, in which the choreographer makes and presents the work, the critics writes about it, and the case is closed.”<sup>32</sup> In this project I expand the study of criticism to highlight artists and platforms

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<sup>27</sup> Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright: Race, Gender, and Intellectual Property Rights in American Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 29.

<sup>28</sup> This is a reference to Copeland’s essay in Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*, 228.

<sup>29</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*, 228.

<sup>30</sup> Ronald Judy, *(Dis)forming the American Canon: African-Arab Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>31</sup> George Jackson, “Naked in its Native Beauty,” *Dance Magazine* 38 (April 1964), 37: Jackson writes about Rainer’s performance, “Why do these people want to be themselves so badly that they practice doing it in public?”

<sup>32</sup> Sima Belmar, “Easier Said Than Done: Talking Identity in Late Twentieth-Century American Concert Dance,” PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2015.



that challenge this “unidirectional relationship.” In Chapter 2 I explore how artists during the 1960s took hold of the choreographic apparatus to redirect discourse about their performances. During this period there were critics like Jill Johnston and Craig Owens who positioned themselves in alignment with artists’ work rather than above or casting judgment upon creative projects. As Owens emphasized in an interview with Anders Stephanson, “we were writing not necessarily *about* these critical and oppositional practices, but *alongside* them. There was an exchange there...”<sup>33</sup> Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, artists, critics, scholars, and institutions have been part and parcel of an apparatus that supports creative endeavors and, as a malleable form, an apparatus that holds the potential to redirect flows of discourse.

### **Literature Review: Dance Criticism as Discursive Agency**

Although dance criticism in the United States existed in newspapers and magazines prior to the employment of the first full-time dance critic, the establishment of this role signaled an important moment for—and on-going commitment to—connecting artists, audiences, and readerships. Several scholars have isolated moments in this evolution of criticism in the United States. Lynne Conner explores constitutive relationships between performances and writing, noting how dance as an art form was established at a time when both choreographers and critics searched for recognition.<sup>34</sup> In *Spreading the Gospel of the Modern Dance: Newspaper dance criticism*, Conner places their symbiotic development—dance artists along with critics—within changes in cultures, economics and politics as she focuses on the period between 1850 and 1934 in order to historicize and analyze a finite era. She describes the critic during this period as an outsider looking in on an emerging art form in the United States. Conner is motivated by a belief that there “has been very little scholarly investigation into the history of newspaper dance criticism.” She is particularly concerned by the absence of research that places critics within a broader cultural context.

*A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945-1960* by Gay Morris analyzes relationships between criticism and artists’ approaches in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, offering valuable comparisons of writing by John Martin, Edwin Denby, and John Cage.<sup>35</sup> Morris’s scholarship is important for her attention to publications dedicated to dance (*Dance Observer*, *Dance Magazine*) as well as dailies (*New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*), and her definition of dance critics as “authoritative voices of interpretation and legitimation.” *A Game for Dancers* also highlights writing by artists of the 1940s and 1950s, often published in *Dance Observer*, that for Morris demonstrates how dancers “sought to shape the reception of their work.” Like many dance scholars, Morris places Martin at Richard Boleslavsky’s Laboratory Theatre between 1924 and 1926, but research into Boleslavsky’s career reveals that Martin’s job as “executive secretary” lasted from 1923 to 1924. In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, I examine the

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<sup>33</sup> Anders Stephanson and Craig Owens, “Interview with Craig Owens,” *Social Text* No. 27 (1990), 63.

<sup>34</sup> Lynne Conner, *Spreading the Gospel of the Modern Dance: Newspaper dance criticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Gay Morris, *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945-1960* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

influence of Boleslavsky's theories on Martin's construction of "modern dance" as they share similarities in terms of both language and method.

Diane Theodores selects four American writers—Arlene Croce, Nancy Goldner, Marcia Siegel, and Deborah Jowitt—to establish a "New York School" of dance criticism in her book *First We Take Manhattan*.<sup>36</sup> Theodores writes, "These critics approached their task of criticism as a kind of political lobby. They addressed dance as a cultural phenomenon, communicating a meticulously examined subjective response to dance, collectively forging an attitude, an appetite and activeness in their seeing with which to penetrate the subject of dance as deeply as possible... they consciously pioneered notions of 'serious writing' about dance in the intellectual/journalistic spheres."<sup>37</sup> The time period of Theodores's analysis, 1965 to 1985, marks a moment when "modern" dance and "postmodern" dance vied for attention, validation, and audiences, and these critics' styles (how they wrote and what they highlighted) reflect their different relationships with artists and readerships. Theodores views their unifying characteristic as an intention to define and guard the Americanness of American dance.

Ann Daly's *Critical Gestures* is a collection of her own reviews and articles for academic journals.<sup>38</sup> Daly looks at relations between different approaches to dance criticism, posing a question in her Introduction, "why don't we have such strong critical voices [identified by Theodores] in journalism anymore?"<sup>39</sup> In this dissertation I examine why certain "voices" gained traction with readerships, noting how they expanded the work of particular artists and forms of dance. In other words there are symbiotic relationships between writing styles and choreographic styles. As I write in Chapter 4, "Digital Dance Criticism: Screens as Choreographic Apparatus," the equivocal and exploratory style of many current writers reflects and provides a conducive environment for contemporary performances being made today. Historically and currently, criticism is in conversation with particular artistic approaches and an older, more authoritarian model of criticism was affiliated with the formalist approaches of modern dance, as well as the need to substantiate dance as an art form through New Critical approaches.

Sally Banes' *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* is distinguished by its ability to apply an analytic, contextual and interpretive approach.<sup>40</sup> Her writing reflects a deepening tendency both within and outside of academia to consider the confluence of events that generate performances. Similar to Randy Martin's concept of "overreading," which proposes a way of engaging with a performance that does not bracket its influences and impact, Banes' approach uses dance to, in Randy Martin's words, "read the contours of context as well as reading through and past the dance to overcome what I perceive to be a certain scarcity in the means to imagine the prospects for fundamental change."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Diana Theodores, *First We Take Manhattan: Four American Women and the New York School of Dance Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Theodores, *First We Take Manhattan*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ann Daly, *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Daly, *Critical Gestures*, xxvi.

<sup>40</sup> Sally Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves*, 55.

Banes continually questions the social and political position of the critic and historian. She notices how previous dance writers focused predominantly on a Euro-American avant-garde movement, while her writing sheds light on the practices of b-boys and movie stars like Fred Astaire who are often excluded from canonical histories.

Each of these books focuses on a particular historical moment or author, and offers insights into individual practices of dance criticism. This dissertation widens the lens on criticism from particular decades or writers to notice the continuities and discontinuities of conditions, especially those that influence how critics write and what they highlight in the dancing they review. The definition of dance criticism offered by Randy Martin describes criticism as contributing to a “system of classification that values dance in terms of where it places choreographers and dancers in that system.”<sup>42</sup> This definition needs to be understood in an economy that uses critics as authorities who endorse, explain, and advertise artists’ performances for potential audiences. How might definitions of critical authority shift when we look at artists’ writing about their own work, or work by fellow artists, as happens in Chapter 2, “Who is a dance critic: Yvonne Rainer’s published performances”? How might Chapter 3, which addresses issues of canon formation, disciplinary formation, and cultural capital, both enrich and complicate this definition of dance criticism?

When critics define dance as ephemeral and fleeting,<sup>43</sup> their writing becomes a method of “capture” and documentation. Dance critic Deborah Jowitt, for example, believes “dancing tends to disappear.”<sup>44</sup> In contrast to this perspective, artists and technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century propose different relationships to memory and transience. Not only do choreographers today question dance’s “disappearance,” but digital recordings and live streaming make it possible to access events that happen in distant places. As I examine in this dissertation, each historical era presents technologies that intersect with the functions and circulations of dance criticism.<sup>45</sup> In Chapter 4 I quote choreographer Ralph Lemon who says, dance is “not something I am really ever losing”:

It *can* be remembered and that becomes a really lovely and poetic revelation in how I think about my relationship to ephemerality, to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See Marcia Siegel’s book, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* and her article “Virtual criticism and the dance of death,” *TDR* vol. 40 no. 2 (Summer 1996), 60-70.

<sup>44</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “The Critical Burden of History,” *Dance Research Journal* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2000), 131.

<sup>45</sup> Although the confines of this dissertation do not allow me to include the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century choreographers who used film to document and circulate their work, it is important to acknowledge how Rudolf Laban used film in Germany in the 1920s, contemporaneous with the dance criticism of John Martin in the *New York Times*. Kristina Koehler writes, “dancers, choreographers and dance theorists were among the artists and intellectuals who engaged with cinema at the beginning of the twentieth century.” For an excellent analysis of Laban’s work please see “A Dancer on Film: Rudolf Laban’s Film Theory” in *The Promise of Cinema*, edited by Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan:

<http://www.thepromiseofcinema.com/index.php/essays/#Koehler>

a dance. I remember these dances, especially the ones my body has chosen to remember... [and] that memory is different from the dance. It is generative. It is alive. Perhaps capacious. It is a space that continues to be fertile on its own. Yes there are a lot of ephemeral things I have forgotten. But the things my body chooses to remember are remembered in a very alive way.<sup>46</sup>

### **Expanding writing / Against containment**

Writing about dance and other forms of embodied experience is a necessary and complicated endeavor. Scholars working in dance studies and performance studies have analyzed modes of engagement for audiences and identified variables that influence our reception. Susan Foster's theorization of kinesthesia is particularly important to this dissertation. As the means of connecting movement and feeling, kinesthetic sense is our "sensory experience" of dance and "a predominant aspect of aesthetic experience."<sup>47</sup> Related to Foster's theories of embodied cognition, Diana Taylor's attention to the untranslatability of embodiment offers fertile ground for examining relationships between writing and dancing, between archives and repertoire.<sup>48</sup> As Taylor writes, "the problem of untranslatability, as I see it, is actually a positive one, a necessary stumbling block that reminds us that 'we'—whether in our various disciplines, or languages, or geographic locations throughout the Americas—do not simply or unproblematically understand each other. I propose that we proceed from the premise that we do not understand each other—and recognize that each effort in that direction needs to work against notions of easy access, decipherability, or translatability."<sup>49</sup> When a critic treats description as the primary element of her writing, containing and isolating what happens onstage from broader environments of creative process, artistic influences, and political intents, this may negate this untranslatability by assuming words can capture movement. The valorizing of movement description, visible in Marcia Siegel's writing, tends to diminish attention to labor and conditions that surround, support, and shape performances. When Siegel wrote about Bill T. Jones, she commented that she had "been subjected to outrageous publicity, sympathy-eliciting personal disclosures, inside information about what went into the dance."<sup>50</sup> Siegel's approach represents a critic who prioritizes actions that happen on a stage, defining dance as a precious and ephemeral moment that must be discovered, isolated, and preserved by criticism.

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<sup>46</sup> Ralph Lemon, "Questions of Practice: Choreographer Ralph Lemon on Ephemerality," The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, March 18, 2015. [http://www.pcah.us/posts/280\\_questions\\_of\\_practice\\_choreographer\\_ralph\\_lemon\\_on\\_ephemerality](http://www.pcah.us/posts/280_questions_of_practice_choreographer_ralph_lemon_on_ephemerality)

<sup>47</sup> Susan Foster, "Movement's Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance," in Tracy C. Davis, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46.

<sup>48</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Marcia Siegel, "Virtual criticism and the dance of death," *TDR* vol. 40 no. 2 (Summer, 1996), 60-70.

In contrast to critics who prefer to isolate and describe performances, dance studies scholars bring attention to the networks of conditions that influence artists. For instance, Linda Tomko's methodologies have proved exceptionally valuable to this dissertation. Tomko has written about the gender, ethnicity, and class barriers in American dance between 1890 and 1920, noting that dance as a cultural practice needs to be studied through "at least three way intersections" of the dance practice, the individual biographies of dancers, and the "complex of social, political, and economic struggles to make meaning and wield power at particular historical moments."<sup>51</sup> Tomko's book *Dancing Class* examines the decades prior to John Martin's appointment at the *New York Times*. Her careful analysis of how dancers generated value for their art-making prior to the establishment of a full time dance critic informs my understanding of the choreographic apparatus as a constellation of positions and players. Tomko's "three way intersection" acknowledges multiple forces acting upon any one historical moment of value-making. In other words, her theory of "intersections" as nodes of meaning-making resonates with my concept of a choreographic apparatus that shifts the visibility of certain practices, illuminates the contingency of meaning-making, and exposes systems of value at play during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Critics' writing and artists' performances have influenced and informed one another in ways that are symbiotic and synergistic. These interactions make visible the "terministic screens," to use Kenneth Burke's concept, that inform how language shapes experiences: "whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another."<sup>52</sup> In these chapters I consider how artists write about their own work, as well as how artists critique the critics, as seen in essays by Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris in the 1960s, and by Miguel Gutierrez,<sup>53</sup> Jane Goldberg,<sup>54</sup> Toni Bentley,<sup>55</sup> and Tere O'Connor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Throughout this dissertation, I propose that critics have not only reflected and assessed the performances of choreographers but have actually used their writing to shape and define the genres we call "modern dance," "postmodern dance," and "contemporary dance." As this dissertation argues, dance critics play a constitutive role in both challenging and reinforcing dominant aesthetics and styles, and often the artists who are written about are the ones who critics prefer. In a recent interview, Deborah Jowitt

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<sup>51</sup> Linda Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xv.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Burke "Terministic Screens," *Language as Symbolic Action* (University of California Press, 1968), 44-64.

<sup>53</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, "The Perfect Dance Critic," [miguelgutierrez.org](http://www.miguelgutierrez.org), <http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/the-perfect-dance-critic/>.

<sup>54</sup> Jane Goldberg, "Credit Where Credit is Due," [thinkingdance.net](http://thinkingdance.net), <http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2015/12/18/Credit-Where-Credit-is-Due-a-Letter-to-the-Editor-of-The-New-Yorker/>.

<sup>55</sup> Toni Bentley, "Book Review: 'The Art of Grace' by Sarah L. Kaufman," *New York Times*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/books/review/the-art-of-grace-by-sarah-l-kaufman.html>.

reflected during our conversation, “You are limited to how much you can publish, especially if you are not a critic for a daily paper with an editor who gives you a lot of space each day to write. When you write for a weekly paper, and not even every week of the year, you are not going to see something you are going to hate. What’s the point? There are interesting artists out there and I would rather see someone whose work I appreciate, or who is making an auspicious debut.”<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to this tendency to attend to the known and “auspicious,” Rebecca Solnit advocates for a “counter-criticism” that “seeks to expand the work of art, by connecting it, opening up its meanings, inviting in the possibilities. A great work of criticism can liberate a work of art, to be seen fully, to remain alive, to engage in a conversation that will not ever end but will instead keep feeding the imagination. Not against interpretation, but against confinement, against the killing of the spirit.”<sup>57</sup> This formulation recognizes how an artwork itself is a critical act, and critics make connections between this artwork and the contexts and contingencies it exposes. Such writing is not only valuable to our engagements with art but also foregrounds the ways that critics’ words are one of multiple interpretations and perspectives. Such writing takes into consideration the dialogic nature of dance performances. As Erika Fischer-Lichte writes in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, performance events are “autopoietic feedback loops” meaning they involve ongoing interactions of performers and audiences to create self-producing operations.<sup>58</sup> When a critic writes as if their response is representative of this tangle of interactions, or as if it is more important than other viewers’ perspectives, criticism eradicates the expansive nature of performance itself.

### **Outline and Stakes of Project**

Each chapter of this dissertation explores generative relationships between critical models and forms of dance, in particular “modern dance,” “postmodern dance,” and “contemporary” performances. In Chapter 1 I investigate John Martin’s writing and the emergence of modern dance, in Chapter 2 I explore Yvonne Rainer’s published projects and a genre that has been labeled postmodern dance. In Chapter 3 I look closely at how educational institutions have both partnered with and distanced themselves from dance critics, and then I examine how these relationships have influenced disciplinary formations of dance in higher education. In Chapter 4 I explore how contemporary performances are part of a digital sphere that engages with ideas, philosophies, and aesthetics from a broad range of critics, theorists, and practitioners. During each of these historical moments, criticism becomes the venue for producing the criteria and frameworks for audiences and students to engage with choreographers and performances. When we don’t examine dance criticism, and analyze the assumptions embedded in critics’ writing, we cannot see how their preferences influence which artists we value, which artistic approaches are deemed “original,” and which performances are considered “masterpieces.” If we look closely at the writing style of a critic like John Martin we also

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<sup>56</sup> Deborah Jowitt, personal conversation, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Rebecca Solnit, “Woolf’s Darkness,” *New Yorker*, April 24, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

see how his preferences for the formalist approaches of artists like Martha Graham coincided with his own writing style that was forthright, self-assured and emphatic.

Equally important, each chapter investigates different publications and venues that host and support dance criticism. In Chapter 1 I focus on Martin's articles for the *New York Times* as well as his lectures on modern dance; in Chapter 2 I examine magazines and journals Yvonne Rainer used to circulate her ideas about dance, noting how she and other artists during the 1960s used their writing to activate a re-ordering of critical frameworks; in Chapter 3 I examine dance curricula and academic publications; in Chapter 4 I examine websites and digital platforms. Each of these sites brings with them specific criteria and value systems, as newspapers, journals, websites, and magazines cater to specific readerships and advertisers. These material conditions cannot be separated from the articles by critics and their distinct approaches. In a recent study of changes in income at the *New York Times*, a chart showed that sources of revenue have shifted dramatically: in 2000, 70% of the paper's income came from print advertising and 23% of their revenue came from print subscriptions. In 2015, 28% of revenue came from print advertising, 42% came from print subscriptions, and 12% came from digital subscriptions.<sup>59</sup> In fact the Times' "biggest" success over the last decade has been its digital subscriptions, which did not exist in 2000: in 2017, "more than 1.5 million people pay more than \$200 million every year for a subscription." Digital technologies expand the number of publications and platforms we access every day, contributing to what has been labeled "news fatigue." As Christopher Mele wrote in the *New York Times* in February of 2017: "the news ecosystem had changed drastically over the past five years, accelerating the sense of information overload."<sup>60</sup> As a result, some dance critics turn to slick, assessment-driven writing in attempts to capture readers' attention, since people have many options and distractions. As Mele writes, "negativity is emphasized to keep customers engaged," and this writing style is exemplified by Katz's piece on Joe Goode's *Poetics of Space* as well as Alistair Macaulay's writing in the *New York Times* that I analyze in Chapter 4.

Given the many complaints about dance critics today, I often find myself answering the question, "why is dance criticism necessary?" I sometimes answer by telling a story of writing for the Arts & Leisure section of the *New York Times* between 1998 and 2001. This was a period when I often attended performances in tiny venues that accommodated audiences of about 150 and ran for a few nights, reaching a total audience of maybe three to four hundred people. The readership of the *Sunday Times* then was approximately a million people,<sup>61</sup> and even if 5 to 10 percent<sup>62</sup> of those people were

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<sup>59</sup> Gabriel Snyder, "The *New York Times* Claws its Way into the Future," *Wired*, February 12, 2017. <https://www.wired.com/2017/02/new-york-times-digital-journalism/>

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Mele, "Fatigued by the News?" *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/us/news-media-social-media-information-overload.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/us/news-media-social-media-information-overload.html?_r=0)

<sup>61</sup> Readership in 2005 was 1.7 million based on the Sunday edition having 1.7 million paying subscribers: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/09/opinion/turning-the-tables-what-the-times-news-staff-thinks-of-you.html>

<sup>62</sup> <http://nytmediakit.com/newspaper>.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/najp/publications/researchreports/Nationals.pdf>

reading the Arts section, this was an “audience” of 50,000 to 100,000 readers. There were no venues in New York that accommodated this large of an audience for a dance event (the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden is 19,500), nor were the choreographers I followed designing for this size of a theater. The characteristics that were present in works I admired, such as Beppie Blankert’s *Dubbelspoor*, were intimacy, unpredictability, and mystery. By featuring these choreographers’ work, the *Times* served a key role of connecting and communicating artists’ ideas to readers who were curious about dance and performance, and who were also potential ticket buyers, since Sunday pieces preceded the performances.<sup>63</sup> Such an approach to writing runs counter to the notion of criticism as following or “reviewing” performances, or the notion of a critic as “fault-finder.”

A crucial function of dance writing, historically and currently, is its capacity to offer methodologies and vocabularies through which we encounter performances. Within the pages of the *Times*, articles are written for an “erudite” readership<sup>64</sup> and situate dancers’ performances in broader landscapes of the arts and design. When we perceive this function of criticism as directed towards potential audiences, we can also understand why constitutive relationships between critics and choreographers have been so important, such as between John Martin and Martha Graham or Jill Johnston and Yvonne Rainer. In other words, there are generative formations between criticism’s support and artists’ acclaim. Many successful choreographers have had a critic in their corner as a champion and advocate: George Balanchine and Edwin Denby, Mark Morris and Joan Acocella, Trisha Brown and Deborah Jowitt, and Sarah Michelson and Gia Kourlas.

My own training as a dancer informed my writing for the *Times*, the *Village Voice*, and *Dance* magazine. I had studied at the Washington School of Ballet for a decade and completed a master’s of fine arts degree in dance at NYU in 1996. The sense of camaraderie, interdependence, and self-knowledge that this training generated was rarely depicted in articles that portrayed dancers as cutthroat, self-absorbed, or vicious, an early lesson in recognizing how journalism can promote extremist scenarios and sensationalist approaches. Performing also taught me that what we feel when we dance and what we communicate with our audiences are often disconnected. Not only are we built differently as people with distinct facilities, limitations, and associations, we also feel choreography differently: dancing moves us in idiosyncratic ways.<sup>65</sup> I noticed early on that the

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<sup>63</sup> Some critics avoid this type of writing because it displaces their authority as “reviewers” and their access to tickets to performances: see Marcia Siegel’s statement, “All critics are expected to be lackeys for the profession, flacks rather than commentators, conveyors of what we’re told the artist wants to convey instead of what we see in the art for ourselves.” Marcia Siegel, “Virtual Criticism and the Dance of Death,” Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, eds., *The Ends of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 256.

<sup>64</sup> “erudite” is how the *Times* defines its readership

<sup>65</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives*, 60. De Kosnik puts forward a similar argument, showing the ways technologies suggest scripts (like choreography suggests sequences) that are then enacted differently by each actor’s body, producing a similar disconnect between individual bodies and technologies’ capacities: “That is, there is never a precise, one-to-one correspondence between a technology’s virtual aspects, encoded by its designers, and the technology’s actual functioning, as performed by users.”



particularities of our sensations as performers, and the images audiences saw as kinetic messages, were rarely coordinated, revealing both the gaps between a dancer's experience of an event and its reception, as well as the varied expectations audiences brought into theaters. Rather than dismiss these tensions, I have found that exposing the gaps and conflicts in our reception of performances is a fertile place of “not knowing” that can generate new ways of seeing.

Returning to that moment at the Joe Goode Annex in October 2015 during his performance *Poetics of Space*: that was a site of “not knowing,” of being immersed in an experience that emphasized its indeterminacy and multisensory engagement. Dance is unique among the art forms in its multimodality, its capacity to engage us through kinetic, kinesthetic, acoustic, visual, and tactile modes. The multifaceted nature of dance makes it a rich catalyst for conversations about how we engage with worlds around us, and what we see and feel. The first dance critic to win a Pulitzer Prize, Alan Kriegsman, noted that criticism holds the potential to contribute to dialogue surrounding a work, or the “hum” as Kriegsman it.<sup>66</sup> These conversations are not unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century—although “comment” sections and social media make them more readily visible—and they productively dismantle a notion of critics as a “we” writing about “them.” This attitude was perpetuated by Marcia Siegel who wrote frequently about “we” as a group of white, American, concert-dance critics: “We in this country have almost no knowledge of dance as ritual, dance as a spiritual lesson, dance as a historical memory, dance as a means of communal celebration—or at least our arts pages don’t recognize them.”<sup>67</sup> Such a presumptive statement not only exposes a latent racism and classism (who is this “we”?) but also strangely separates critics’ advocacy for inclusive and equitable coverage from the articles that appear on arts pages.

When scholar M.J. Thompson recommended writing “from a place of not knowing” during a public conversation with Bill T. Jones, she was challenging a definition of critics as authorities, referees, or spokespersons.<sup>68</sup> She implicitly contested Siegel’s notion that “our job as critics is to communicate on behalf of those performers.”<sup>69</sup> Thompson was also contesting a notion of criticism emblemized by Matthew Arnold’s oft-quoted statement, “a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best which has been thought and said in the world.”<sup>70</sup> When critics like Arlene Croce sought to protect and propagate certain forms of dance, they resuscitated a reductive

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<sup>66</sup> Alan Kriegsman described the critic’s role as “contributing to the ‘hum’ surrounding a work.” Quoted in Deborah Jowitz, *The Dance in Mind* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1985), ix.

<sup>67</sup> Marcia Siegel, “Bridging the Critical Distance,” *Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 189. “Western critics have hierarchies... Going from the bottom up, we esteem social dancing, pop dancing, jazz dancing, theatrical dancing, and concert dancing, ballet. Classical ballet seems accepted as the crowning achievement of dance art...”

<sup>68</sup> Michelle Dent and M.J. Thompson, “Bill T. Jones: Moving, Writing, Speaking,” *TDR* Vol. 49 No. 2 (Summer 2005), 54.

<sup>69</sup> Siegel, “Bridging Critical Distance,” 192.

<sup>70</sup> Matthew Arnold, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1900), 77.

Arnoldian framework, but the irony of Arnold's definition is that it included the social directive "to learn," as well as "to propagate." In the 1920s, John Martin expanded audiences for a new, "modern" approach to dance by using his articles as modes of education and promotion. Whereas Martin sought to foster what was then unfamiliar and emerging, there are few dance critics employed by mainstream publications today who consistently engage with experimental or lesser-known artists on a consistent basis. This is due not only to the decisions of critics, editors, and publications, but also to the challenges of writing about forms that are new and unfamiliar. Gaps between familiar and marginalized forms of dance, and the rates at which they circulate through discourse, contribute to confusions around a variety of labels, including words like "ritual" and "communal" as well as other dance terms such as "modern" and "contemporary."

If my personal investment in criticism contributes to my hopeful stance on the role it has played, and continues to play, I also seek to respond to definitions of dance criticism in academic writing that emphasize its shortcomings and deficiencies. In many instances, dance criticism and academic writing have been treated as each other's foils. To invoke one of many examples, Andre Lepecki uses critics' writing—Anna Kisselgoff in the "Introduction" and Marcia Siegel in the "Conclusion"—as perspectives to challenge and oppose in his book *Exhausting Dance*. However, we might also notice that Lepecki's dance scholarship seems to depend upon dance criticism; his argument depends upon the texts he both cites and challenges. Ultimately, I hope this dissertation project contributes to discourses of dance studies, to disciplinary formation, and to histories of professionalization by noticing ways in which dance and writing, criticism and theory, operate less often as binary or opposing forces and more often as reciprocal and interconnected partners. By recognizing the ways criticism has functioned as a fulcrum to legitimate and leverage particular approaches to dance, this project highlights modes of production—both by artists and by critics—that generate and re-fashion our definitions of dance criticism.

## Chapter 1: What is dance criticism?

### John Martin's impact on disciplinary expectations

Regarded as a seminal figure in dance criticism in the United States, John Martin is frequently positioned as a writer who conceived of dance as a distinct and autonomous art form.<sup>71</sup> He is both celebrated and critiqued for establishing the critical autonomy of dance: Margaret Lloyd describes him as “practically an institution in himself... the most frequently quoted dance critic inside the USA,”<sup>72</sup> while Susan Foster notes that he was as an “apologist” for modern dance, and Andre Lepecki writes, “The strict alignment of dance with movement that John Martin celebrated is but the logical outcome of his modernist ideology.”<sup>73</sup> During the first 20 years in his position as a critic for the *New York Times*, he wrote approximately 2,500 words a week in articles that left lasting impact on how artists were framed and discussed, as well as how their performances were received and supported. Given the duration and consistency of his writing, he would seem to be the figure Randy Martin had in mind when he outlines the pitfalls of dance criticism as a practice of “underreading,” with its “emphasis on a purely descriptive language” and its tendency to detach “text from context.”<sup>74</sup>

A closer look at John Martin's columns from the late 1920s to the early 1930s reveals that his articles functioned as a highly-tuned and sophisticated choreographic apparatus, a system for shedding light on structures of support for dance-makers as well as mechanisms for building audiences for an emerging art form. In this chapter, I highlight the complex and equivocal arrangements that shaped John Martin's criticism and the influences of his training in theatre on his writing about dance. Against a notion of a critic as a reviewer or fault-finder, I find John Martin deeply invested in articulating the “new direction” of artists in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and his articles occupied strategic places as bridges and buffers between choreographers and “desensitized” audiences. Between 1927 and 1932, his columns developed in a climate of gestation and dissensus, as Martha Graham, Mary Wigman, Doris Humphrey, and Helen Tamaris introduced new vocabularies and approaches to performance. Within this landscape, Martin's criticism functioned as a lens and portal for engaging spectators, providing a theoretical platform that analyzed how dance communicates meaning. If, as Gerald Graff notes, “What [T.S.] Eliot called ‘criticism’ is what we have come to call ‘theory’—the

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<sup>71</sup> Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, “Dance Criticism,” *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 427. Carl Van Vechten is cited as the “father of dance criticism” and Martin as “the next important figure to emerge.”

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Lloyd, *Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1949), 312-313.

<sup>73</sup> Andre Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

<sup>74</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 55-59.

self-consciousness generated when consensus breaks down,”<sup>75</sup> we might also find an unexpected ‘theoretical’ tendency in Martin’s writing. Dissent is often the condition of theoretical self-awareness, and it was in this climate of self-consciousness that Martin’s theories of dance emerged.

Through his articles and lectures, Martin was not only surveying a field and offering frameworks for audiences, but also advocating for choreographers who pressed against traditions and formulating underlying principles that shaped their aesthetics. Prior to his appointment as the dance critic for the *New York Times*, Martin had worked with a disciple of an artist who pressed against theatrical traditions, Konstantin Stanislavsky: Martin served as executive director of Richard Boleslavsky’s Laboratory Theatre.<sup>76</sup> In a biography of Boleslavsky by J.W. Roberts, Martin is described as the “Executive Secretary” hired in 1923<sup>77</sup> when the Laboratory Theatre opened in a small apartment at 40 East 60<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan.<sup>78</sup> What had made Boleslavsky well-known to the New York acting communities was a series of lectures delivered in January of 1923 at the Princess Theatre that outlined Stanislavsky’s work and methods. These would become known as the “first enunciation of Stanislavsky’s ideas publicly presented to an American audience by an artist who had trained and acted at the Art Theatre [in Moscow].”<sup>79</sup> The enormous popularity of these lectures led to Boleslavsky being invited to set up a training program and theatre in New York funded by Herbert and Miriam Kimball Stockton.

Several years after working for Boleslavsky, Martin joined the *New York Times* in 1927, when Olin Downes decided to relinquish some of his duties as both the dance and music critic. As Lynne Conner writes, this was a professional world that had yet to establish full-time positions for critics; instead, in the 1920s, there was “the long-standing habit of haphazard dance coverage in which a variety of writers (usually assistant music critics) were sent out to write about dance concerts.”<sup>80</sup> Downes’s appointment as a dance *and* music critic reflected the secondary status of dance coverage among publications as well as a common association of aesthetic criteria for one discipline aligning with the other. Martin himself looked back on this hierarchical alignment of dance and music, politely noting, “In many respects, the dance is more closely related to drama than to

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<sup>75</sup> Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 253.

<sup>76</sup> John Martin was not the first full-time critic in the United States: Lucile Marsh was hired by the *New York World*, “the first city daily to hire an independent dance writer,” in September, 1927 (Conner 100). Martin was hired by the *Times* as a freelance dance columnist in November 1927 and given a full-time staff position in 1928. At the *Times*, Carl Van Vechten had written regular dance reviews (printed on the music pages of the *Times*) from 1909 to 1913. For more information on Van Vechten, please see Conner, chapter 3 “Music into Dance.”

<sup>77</sup> Jack Anderson has this date as 1924 in his introduction to John Martin’s *The Dance in Theory*.

<sup>78</sup> J.W. Roberts, *Richard Boleslavsky: His Life and Work in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1981), 118.

<sup>79</sup> Roberts, *Richard Boleslavsky*, 106.

<sup>80</sup> Lynne Conner, *Spreading the Gospel of Modern Dance* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 56.

music, though especially since the days of Isadora Duncan, emphasis has been otherwise directed.”<sup>81</sup> Martin set himself the task of directing attention differently.

In this chapter, I argue that John Martin’s connection to theatre informed and influenced the development of his theories about dance, demonstrating that there is a cross-disciplinary history in the establishment of dance’s disciplinarity. Regarded as a spokesperson for particular choreographers,<sup>82</sup> Martin coined the label “modern dance” and offered readers methods for viewing this approach to choreography and performance. In this chapter, I examine how Martin’s formulations of successful criteria for modern dance reflected an interdisciplinary approach that borrowed from theatre. His theories of dance closely aligned with Boleslavsky’s and Stanislavsky’s approaches to acting, and his seminal articulation of “kinesthetic sympathy”<sup>83</sup> can be traced to Boleslavsky’s concept of an “invisible bond” that links performers and audiences. Gay Morris writes that both Martin’s and Edwin Denby’s significance as dance critics comes from their attempt “to cut away those elements that were dependent on other art forms.”<sup>84</sup> In contrast, I suggest that Martin incorporates and intertwines theories of theatre and dance, thereby upending modernist dance discourse’s ideological purity. Martin emerges instead as an interdisciplinary writer, culling ideas from theatre and bringing them into “dance appreciation,” a phrase he used in his articles. Martin not only used his writing to encourage audiences to engage with new forms of dance, but also to challenge assumptions about the social autonomy of art in general.

Martin’s criticism occupied multifaceted roles: as a lens through which audiences could engage with emerging movement vocabularies, as a platform to make public the artists’ economic hardships, and as a site for his theoretical analysis of dance as “kinesthetic sympathy.” This multifaceted approach supported Martin’s quest to bolster this fledgling art-form and to give dance theoretical importance and recognition, a quest that was so successful that—at the time of his retirement in 1962—he received a letter of congratulations from The White House and an invitation from Clark Kerr to teach at the University of California.

A common misconception about Martin is that he was the first full-time dance critic in the United States:<sup>85</sup> this role was in fact occupied by Lucile Marsh, hired by the *New York World* in September of 1927, and followed closely by Mary F. Watkins, who began writing about dance in October of 1927 at the *New York Herald Tribune*. What made Martin’s writing significant is that the *New York Times*, unlike other dailies, survived the financial crisis of these years, and its circulation steadily increased, adding

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<sup>81</sup> John Martin, *The Dance in Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1965), 53.

<sup>82</sup> Susan Foster uses the descriptor “dance critic and apologist for the new modern dance” for Martin in *Choreographing Empathy* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 44.

<sup>83</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Freeing Movement,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1932, X12.

<sup>84</sup> Gay Morris, “Modernism’s Role in the Theory of John Martin and Edwin Denby,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter, 2004), 180.

<sup>85</sup> This error is frequently repeated, most recently in *The Atlantic* (August 2015), “The Death of the American Dance Critic” by Madison Mainwaring: “The U.S got its first dance-exclusive critic in 1927, when John Martin joined the staff of *The New York Times*.”

to its writers' security and reputations.<sup>86</sup> Martin remained the dance critic and dance editor of the *New York Times* for 35 years.<sup>87</sup> At the start of his tenure with the *Times*, Martin was developing his style during years when the roles of professional dance critics and choreographers were under scrutiny and evaluation; his writing both produced and responded to the structures, systems, and protocols of changing professional contexts. His articles during his first five years with the *Times*, between 1927 and 1932,<sup>88</sup> show how criticism functioned as a platform for audiences, offering frameworks for viewing emerging artistic forms. Martin also used the platform of print journalism to offer theoretical analyses and institutional critique, thereby extending the role of the critic from judge or evaluator of aesthetic criteria to a reporter and theorist of dance.

As John Martin's articles in the late 1920s make clear, a newspaper critic can occupy a place of theorization, contextualization, and validation. If Randy Martin accurately describes a kind of "underreading" in criticism during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it's useful to notice how the systems and priorities that shape criticism shift with changes in artists' work, editors' demands, readerships, and publications' circulations. This is the working of a choreographic apparatus. Historically as well as currently, there are examples of criticism that serve different and varied functions, yet there's a trend in dance studies to castigate a mainstream critic for "failing" to achieve certain types of writing. As Mark Franko writes:

...despite Martin's continued influence on the way we think about historical modern dance he failed to produce a critical account of dance modernism.

More important, his failure created an artificial split between history and theory which is only now beginning to be recuperated by dance studies.<sup>89</sup>

Martin's career as a critic, especially in the late 1920s and 1930s, is distinguished by his ongoing commitment to developing explanatory frameworks for emerging dance artists like Martha Graham, and drawing from the theories of Stanislavsky and Boleslavsky to accomplish this. It's important to recognize how this writing has afforded us views of both histories and theories, even though this writing may not adopt the style or methodologies of academic writing. In the constrained time, space, and "clarity"

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<sup>86</sup> Conner, *Spreading the Gospel*, 109: "Although the Times suffered advertising cutbacks in the early 1930s... By 1934 it had the most powerful advertising potential in the city."

<sup>87</sup> Upon his retirement he was sent a note of congratulation from the White House, thanking him for "the long years during which you have watched with discernment and appreciation the changing world of dance" and for his contributions to "this significant area of the cultural life" (letter dated July 11, 1962), signed by August Heckscher, Special Consultant on the Arts, "John Martin Correspondence" New York Public Library.

<sup>88</sup> By 1934 the summer program at Bennington was established, indicating recognition of these choreographers and the impact of Martin's endorsement of these artists. Bennington institutionalized their approach in the form of an educational curriculum. Martin taught courses in dance criticism and set up a classroom like a newsroom with typewriters and cubicles.

<sup>89</sup> Mark Franko, "History/theory – criticism/practice," in Susan Foster, ed., *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1996), 30.

parameters in which mainstream critics operate, Martin's writing is distinct: an academic working within a publication schedule of months (journals) not days or even hours (newspapers) operates at a different pace, which offers different perspectives. Yet Franko criticizes this clarity of Martin's writing as not only capitulating to journalistic priorities, but also damaging the ineffability of dancing itself:

...the demand for clarity is nothing other than the commercial trade-off in which sublimely unrepeatable form is reported on as a commodity whose consumption will perform what Martin promises. Dance will reproduce itself as commodified experience for other spectators. The theoretical need for mimesis thus stems not merely from a truncated solution to an interpretive problem but is actually commanded by the economies of newspaper journalism. In this sense, too, the criticism represents an inevitable compromise for practice.<sup>90</sup>

This critique seems to ignore both the parameters (editors, readers, and artists) that determined and influenced Martin's work, and the frameworks it offered. Indeed, Franko holds Martin personally responsible: "A particularly nasty brand of paternalism but also a virulent anti-intellectual bias can both be traced back to Martin's writing."<sup>91</sup> To state that John Martin "ultimately fell short of a foundational opportunity to articulate a formalist dance criticism,"<sup>92</sup> overlooks the role Martin played in generating frameworks for new forms of dance, and in describing the economic conditions for artists and linking an understanding of their performances to notions of kinesthesia, so that readers could develop an appreciation of this emerging style.

One of Martin's earliest columns in the *Times* presents this distinct form of criticism. In a Sunday column dated November 27, 1927, he began by attributing America's "amazing growth of art consciousness" to the dancers and performances that had emerged in the previous two decades.<sup>93</sup> He cites Isadora Duncan and her "revolutionary genius" as possibly "sufficient explanation" for this burgeoning, then offers a synopsis of recent and upcoming performances, giving each event or artist a paragraph of about 75 words. The emphasis throughout is on the conditions that nurture dancers: Martin writes that artists need "critical attention," and that "audiences must be built" for these performances. In reviewing one show by the Marmein sisters he notes, "the best part was that audiences liked it."<sup>94</sup> The column ends with an announcement of a dancer named Hasoutra who will be touring to India to perform in a "repertoire of American and English musical comedies."

The contents of this Sunday column reveal the role of the dance critic as a surveyor of a field, not an expert on one style or a spokesperson for a particular event. Indeed, Martin shifts from complimenting Duncan's performances to praising ballet stars to admiring the work of former vaudeville dancers, the Marmein sisters, then acknowledging Hasoutra's appearances in musical theatre. As he developed his Sunday

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<sup>90</sup> Franko, "History/theory," 41-42.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> J.M., "The Dance: Growth of the Movie Theatre Ballet," *New York Times*, November 27, 1927.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

columns, Martin perceived his role as one of an engaged observer, seeking causes and effects of trends and approaches, and paying particular attention to conditions that nurtured these artists. His Sunday articles focused more on ecosystems, theories, and venues than on the evaluation or description of individual performances. This writing neither prioritized a “good/bad” assessment of artists nor focused primarily on individual performances.<sup>95</sup> Instead he offered lenses through which to engage forms of dance and through which to understand structures of support for artists.

In 1927, there were no bylines that identified John Martin as the author of these pieces, rather the initials “J.M.” appeared at the end of some of his articles. “John Martin” first appeared as a byline in 1928. It is not clear if readers were familiar with Martin in 1927 and if it was possible to identify him by initials alone, or if these articles were treated as news items with emphasis on contents more than author’s identity.<sup>96</sup> There also was inconsistency in the titles of his columns: at times Martin’s Sunday article began with “The Dance:” and other weeks without this identification.<sup>97</sup> The primary through-line of these early columns, from 1927 to 1932, was the emphasis Martin placed on material conditions more than aesthetic evaluation of dance events. On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1927, Martin wrote, “No single factor so mitigates against the success of our dancers as the uncertainty of the average stage management.” Decrying the conditions of Sunday concerts that forced dancers to work in venues where they had little control over technical needs, Martin frequently noted and involved himself in debates about “favorable auspices”<sup>98</sup> for dancers and audiences.

Solutions to these pressing needs were found in audience development and economic security, which, according to Martin, were intertwined. In 1930 he wrote, “What the dance needs most is a wider audience. Without it, the financial situation is insoluble...”<sup>99</sup> Martin’s advocacy focused on finding financial stability for these artists, and this was a recurring theme in his articles. A year after his first column, he titled his Sunday, November 11, 1928 article: “The Dance: A Need of Trained Audiences, Intelligent Appreciation Required for a Growing Art.” The use of “Art” is important here: aligning dance with creative endeavors, as opposed to commercial pursuits, reinforced

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<sup>95</sup> In Chapter 3 I expand on the ways dance studies “introduces” a form of writing in distinction to “journalistic criticism” while critics like Deborah Jowitt introduce forms of dance criticism that are opposed to “journalistic criticism” (*First We Take Manhattan* and personal interview). Martin’s writing complicates both of these uses of the term.

<sup>96</sup> In 1928 there are more examples of Sunday columns without a byline or initials: see “The Dance,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1928.

<sup>97</sup> November 27, December 4, and December 11, 1927 all begin “The Dance: ...” December 18 begins “Art of Jedermann.” It is not clear if the changes in titles were due to space constraints. All of the articles focused on choreography, dancers, and their performances.

<sup>98</sup> J.M., “The Dance,” *New York Times*, March 18 1928: “...organizations must be formed that will provide the opportunity for the mature artist to show his work frequently and under favorable auspices; that will enable ballets and ensembles to be developed in which the young artist will learn the discipline of the theatre along with the technique of his art.”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*



the need for cultivated engagement (and criticism). In other words, Martin actively associated dance with culture and expression more than entertainment and spectacle. Even the genre “concert dance” was an attempt to align dancers with musicians and singers, not with entertainers. In *Stepping Left* Ellen Graff writes, “The Concert Dancers’ League argued that dancers should not be considered entertainers, but rather as concert artists, like musicians or singers, who were permitted to perform on Sundays.”<sup>100</sup> Martin’s criticism and the genre “concert dance” emerged symbiotically, and he used his writing to expand followers for this art form. In 1931, the need for educated audiences was still urgent: “the professional dancer cannot expect to build a career which is satisfactory either artistically or financially if he makes his appeal only to a small and exclusive circle of technicians. He needs large audiences and wide sympathy...”<sup>101</sup> Martin’s writing continually emphasized this “training” or acculturation of audiences. Indeed, his focus on audiences’ roles in supporting and assisting choreographers can be traced to his employment with the American Laboratory Theatre.

Martin’s position with Boleslavsky’s organization shaped two important contributions to his dance criticism: first the relationship between dance and theatre, specifically, Stanislavky’s methods through Boleslavsky’s teaching, and second, a firsthand understanding of the urgency of economic support for artists pursuing creative ventures in New York in the 1920s.<sup>102</sup> Exposed to what a current generation would call the precarity of organizations like the American Lab, Martin was sympathetic to choreographers’ needs for economic stability and support. He frequently used his column space to outline the challenges artists faced, and his Sunday articles were sites for polemics on economic structures and ecosystems. For example, his Sunday article in February of 1929 suggests, “the theatre could share its audience with the dance and still notice no great loss.”<sup>103</sup> In June of 1929, the title of his article announces “Making the Art Pay: Some Proposals for Insuring Adequate Support to Classical Dancing,” and his text traces ecologies of relationships between artists and institutions for “classical,” meaning concert, dancers.<sup>104</sup> In August of 1929, he wrote about “the major problems of the dance” and identified them as “concerned with economics rather than art.”<sup>105</sup> In September of 1929, he titled his article: “The Dance: a Year of Promise” with the subtitle “Severe Economic and Artistic Tests to be met this season.”

Martin used his columns to establish his own authority as a trusted and competent

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<sup>100</sup> Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>101</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Popularity of Folk Forms,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1931, X3.

<sup>102</sup> Conversations with Mel Gordon frequently focused on how Boleslavsky’s organization was in dire straights economically, in a constant struggle for financial stability

<sup>103</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Its Progress,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1929, 112.

<sup>104</sup> John Martin, “Making the Art Pay,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1929, X7. Martin writes: classical “is used (or rather misused) simply as an antonym for ‘popular dancing’.”

<sup>105</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Fostering the Art’s Progress,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1929, X7.

surveyor of a cultural landscape. For example, his September 1929 article opened the dance season with projections about what may happen, and his May of 1930 article announced that his predictions had come true. He wrote, “The dance season, which will come to an end next week with Louise Revere Morris’s recital, has proved to be very much what the prognostications of a year ago indicated that it would be, namely a period of organization and intensification.”<sup>106</sup> As the only dance critic for the *Times* during these years, Martin’s views were not challenged in print by other dance writers, and the tone of his writing, if supportive and encouraging, was also authoritative. For example, he recommends that artists invest in certain projects, as seen in his August 18, 1929 column when he writes:

There is no doubt that an association of concert dancers formed to devote itself to the economic problems chiefly if not exclusively its own would seem to be a highly desirable consummation.<sup>107</sup>

In such writing Martin’s criticism is not functioning as evaluation or assessment of artistic practices but rather attempts to shore up support for a fledging art form. Similarly, the assertive tone of Martin’s statements can be traced to his need to counter the doubters and naysayers. He frequently noted their skepticism or dismissal of dance as “art.” On March 23, 1930, his column began:

At a recent performance given by two of the best-known dancers that the modern movement has produced a man in the audience, evidently not wholly en rapport with what he saw, was overheard to remark to his companion that ‘of course the dance is a very low form of art; in fact it is not really an art at all,’ an opinion in which his companion apparently acquiesced.<sup>108</sup>

Martin describes such comments as “representative of a considerable number of theatregoers” and “justifiable” because the “bulk” of the dancing that people attend is “second-rate performance” and not art.<sup>109</sup> By identifying and championing those dancers and choreographers he considered exceptional, Martin was staking claim to dance as an art form. His forthright tone is used to convince readers of the worthiness of concert dance.

By taking such a decisive view on the future of dance, Martin attracted both critics and admirers. His personal correspondence shows that he kept numerous letters from readers who disagreed with and from those who thanked him for his points of view.<sup>110</sup> Martha Graham herself was one of his readers: “Dear John... I believe you have a passionate vision of what the dance can be... I may not always find it possible to agree

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<sup>106</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: A Retrospect of the Season,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1930, 129.

<sup>107</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Fostering the Art’s Progress,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1929.

<sup>108</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: An Art Form,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1930, X8.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> This is an important point because the letters to the editor and “comments” sections in digital formats change the status of the critic. For examples of letters to Martin, see letters from “the Director of the Roxy Theater,” July 31, 1929: “... you were erroneous in your assumption...” and a “Dear John” letter from Martha Graham, as well correspondence from Lincoln Kirstein, Michel Fokine, Ruth St. Denis, and Léonide Massine.

with you, but I trust you completely and I believe in you.” In this correspondence, a dancer and choreographer recognizes Martin’s role in articulating a field and “vision,” and simultaneously acknowledges how their perspectives can create friction. Martin is seen as a trusted and valued interlocutor.

In contrast to Randy Martin’s notion of criticism that “isolates[s] what is internal to a dance from its own exterior,” John Martin’s Sunday columns functioned as commentary on and analysis of social, political, and financial situations.<sup>111</sup> He identified factors that deterred access to opportunities for artists and advocated for their financial support and “economic cooperation.”<sup>112</sup> In February of 1930 he stated explicitly: “With their resources pooled—not alone their financial resources, of course, which are comparatively inconsiderable—it is not inconceivable that some such organization as the Dance Repertory Theatre should become lessee of a theatre for its own especial needs.”<sup>113</sup> When Randy Martin introduced his theory of critics’ “underreading” that “promotes the isolation of what is, in practice, interdependent,”<sup>114</sup> he seemed to be describing a practice of reviewing that bracketed performances from surrounding environments and systems of support. Contrary to under-nuanced histories of his career, John Martin’s columns exposed such interdependent practices; he was invested in both aesthetic appreciation and advocacy for sustainable conditions, in particular he urged dancers to collectively develop venues that fostered their productions. In his hands, dance criticism was a methodology for engaging with artistic work as well as a venue that disclosed and analyzed economic needs and priorities.

### **Threading dance through theatre: John Martin, Richard Boleslavsky, and Konstantin Stanislavsky**

John Martin used his platform as a critic to introduce readers to the tenets of Stanislavsky’s system, which he had honed through his work with Richard Boleslavsky, and these tenets informed his criteria for choreographic expression and audience engagement. A central principle of Stanislavsky’s system was an actor’s use of “affective memory” or “emotional memory”<sup>115</sup> to generate “authentic emotion.”<sup>116</sup> In *The Dance in Theory* Martin adapts these principles to his definition of dance practices: he writes, “communicative movement suitable for dance can only be drawn from what might be termed his motor memory of emotion, he must learn how to call upon his emotional associations and translate them into action directly from life experience.”<sup>117</sup> Martin acknowledged Stanislavsky’s importance when he wrote in the 1930s that “exactly the same fundamental problem” that stalls a dancer’s creative process similarly affects actors. Martin credits Stanislavsky and his Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) with “revolutionizing”

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<sup>111</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves*, 59. In Chapter 3 I expand on distinctions between criticism and theory that are neither stable nor so clear-cut.

<sup>112</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: United Effort,” *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1930, 114.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves*, 55.

<sup>115</sup> Cynthia Marsh, “Konstantin Stanislavsky,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>116</sup> Mel Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 14.

<sup>117</sup> Martin, *Dance*, 56.

actors' performances.<sup>118</sup>

Selma Jeanne Cohen, a notable scholar who worked across disciplinary boundaries of dance and theatre, earlier argued that Martin's work in theatre influenced his writing about dance.<sup>119</sup> Cohen's analysis emphasizes the stylistic similarities between Stanislavsky's ideas and Martin's writing about modern dance; I excavate this connection to show how Martin's articles functioned as an apparatus that linked disparate ideas to generate support and visibility for artists. In particular, Martin wrote about relationships between dancing and acting: he published "Isadora and Basic Dance," on performances by Isadora Duncan and their incorporation of Stanislavsky's concept of memory-acting.<sup>120</sup> Stanislavsky's theories were important not only because they gave Martin language and concepts that described modern dance and its tenets, but also because they fortified the credibility of this emerging art form. Martin noted that dancing and acting "are in essence only one art in different guises,"<sup>121</sup> and "the contemporary trend of the dance toward the theater can find orderly principles for its procedure in Isadora's lyric precedent." By associating dance with theatre, Martin carved a place for these choreographers as valuable contributors to the arts in America.

In his study of Boleslavsky's teaching in America, Mel Gordon notes that Boleslavsky appeared in New York at a time when "America's artistic development was still undefined, flexible, and compliant to uncharted trends."<sup>122</sup> In the 1920s, modern dance, much like Stanislavsky's theatre, was unfamiliar and experimental. Gordon describes Boleslavsky as looking and sounding "like the prophet of an emergent religion,"<sup>123</sup> and Boleslavsky's productions in America were distinguished by their "dance-like movement and unified ensemble displays."<sup>124</sup> When Martin began reviewing performances by choreographers in the 1920s, he recognized commonalities between dance and theatre, in particular Martha Graham's expressive movement and her ensemble choreography found resonances with Boleslavsky's productions. At this time, Martin was both developing a vocabulary for artistic expression, and searching for dance forms that provided him with objects to elaborate his theories.

An essential component of Stanislavsky's pedagogy was his "fusion of the actor's self with the role" which necessitated "immense self-control, concentration, and discipline, and a willingness to believe in the truth of what is being created at the expense of a conscious awareness of its theatricality."<sup>125</sup> Boleslavsky emphasized these ideas in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Selma Jean Cohen writes: "After a brief career in acting and service in the U.S. Army, Martin worked as director and press agent for various theater enterprises, becoming especially interested in the work of the Russian actor, director, and drama teacher Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938), a concern that was to have a considerable influence on his attitude toward dance."

<sup>120</sup> Lloyd, *Borzoi Book*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> John Martin, "Isadora and Basic Dance." <http://isadoraduncan.orchesis-portal.org/index.php/martin-john-isadora-duncan-and-basic-dance-an-outline-for-dancers>

<sup>122</sup> Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America*, 20.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Gordon, *Stanislavsky*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Marsh, "Stanislavsky."

his teaching, articulating their importance in his Princess Theatre lectures in 1923. It is worth considering these texts at length in order to suss out their unexpected relevance to modern dance in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The lectures began with Boleslavsky's exhortation, "Man can not live without Art! At first it sounds like an aphorism, but you'll soon see my point." His statement points to the urgency and drive that propelled MAT actors. Boleslavsky spoke in 1923 about particular forms of concentration and energy demanded by Stanislavsky's productions:

The spiritual concentration is the energy produced by the entire human physiological and psychological apparatus, concentrated on one definite single problem. A hunting dog, pursuing game, spends all his energy in dashing rapidly back and forth in order to discover his prey. The very moment the hound comes upon the scent he stops as if petrified. He commands all his feelings and energy to stand still and concentrates on one single thought: to trap the animal and to leap upon it at the proper moment. At this moment the entire muscular and spiritual energy of the dog is concentrated on three senses: seeing, hearing and smelling. All that hinders him in the way of the complete and utmost functioning of these feelings is removed and forgotten. You can see it particularly by his muscles; the tail is dropped, the lifted paw hangs in the air as though broken, all the muscles of his body are relaxed and do not deprive him of even a single particle of his energy that is concentrated on nothing but these three senses. This is an example of ideal concentration of one's primary feelings.<sup>126</sup>

This focus on spiritual and emotional energies articulated through physical and kinetic bodies finds resonance with modern dance history. Martha Graham was known for her descriptions of life forces and spiritual energies. What Boleslavsky terms "primary feelings" reappear in Graham's description of contraction and release:

Energy is the thing that sustains the world and the universe. It animates the world and everything in it. I recognized early in my life that there was this kind of energy, some animating spark, or whatever you choose to call it... It begins with breath.<sup>127</sup>

Susan Foster foregrounds Graham's emphasis on sources of movement when she describes Graham's technique as generating "the expressive self." For Graham, Foster writes, "The goal of dance, to represent in archetypal form the deep conflicts of the human psyche, can be realized only through a rigorous training program... the body functions as a perfect index of the self's feelings."<sup>128</sup> Like Boleslavsky, Graham made clear a dancer's total devotion to the art-form, writing in her autobiography *Blood*

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<sup>126</sup> Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 107-108.

<sup>127</sup> Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 46.

<sup>128</sup> Susan Foster, "Dancing Bodies," *Meaning in Motion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 246. Foster writes "For Martha Graham, the dancing body must possess the strength, flexibility, and endurance necessary to provide the expressive self with a fully responsive instrument. The goal of dance, to represent in archetypal form the deep conflicts of the human psyche, can be realized only through a rigorous training program... the body functions as a perfect index of the self's feelings."

*Memory*, “People have asked me why I chose to be a dancer. I did not choose. I was chosen to be a dancer, and with that, you live all your life.”<sup>129</sup> If Boleslavsky was the charismatic “prophet” of an emerging form of theatre, Graham was a crusader for a new form of dance that found supportive platforms in the criticism of John Martin.

In his writing, Martin reinforced the link between physical and emotional clarity as emblematic of successful art-making:

Good art speaks directly from the creator’s emotions to our own, provided that our native response mechanisms are in working condition, and this kind of contact constitutes the only real experience of art.<sup>130</sup>

Martin found in performances by Graham and Mary Wigman choreographies that spoke to his priorities in art-making, and these performances also provided him with objects to expand his approaches to dance writing. His use of terms like “mechanisms” points to his efforts to provide legitimating, “scientific” vocabulary for this unfamiliar and expressive art form. Writing about Isadora’s use of the word “soul” to describe a motor impulse, Martin noted, “less imaginative men have called [this] the autonomic system.”<sup>131</sup>

In *The Dance in Theory*, he complimented artists like Graham and Wigman: “Mere freedom from established routine, however, does not automatically produce greatness of personal style, and it is still some inexplicable balance of factors that results in a Mary Wigman or a Martha Graham.”<sup>132</sup> The “inexplicable balance of factors” that produced such artistry could refer to the artist’s vision and creativity as well as this critic’s favorable writing that endorsed and legitimated her performances. Scholars have written extensively on the constitutive relationships between Martin’s writing and Graham’s performances, noting how his reviews provided a distinct platform that both buttressed her work against “philistines”<sup>133</sup> and situated her artistry within the modern aesthetic.<sup>134</sup> As early as April of 1928, in an unsigned review most likely by Martin,

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<sup>129</sup> Graham, *Blood Memory*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> John Martin, *Introduction to the Dance* (Hightstown: Dance Horizons, 1975), 14. Martin’s quote continues, “The proviso, however, is a fairly large one, for the response mechanisms of a great many of us have become pretty well clogged up with extraneous theories and the rust of disuse. Since theories are largely matters of words, words are perhaps the best possible means for exploding them. Thus a verbal attempt to clarify the spectator’s approach to the dance becomes largely a clearing away of the underbrush of erroneous theory so that the free channels may function.”

<sup>131</sup> John Martin, “Isadora and Basic Dance.” <http://isadoraduncan.orchesis-portal.org/index.php/martin-john-isadora-duncan-and-basic-dance-an-outline-for-dancers>

<sup>132</sup> Martin, *Dance in Theory*, 79.

<sup>133</sup> Aaron Copland said of the late 1920s, “We were on our own, and something of the exhilaration of being on one’s own accompanied our every action. This self-reliant attitude was intensified by the open resistance to new music that was typical in the period after First World War... The fun of the fight against the musical philistines, the sorties and strategies, the converts won, and the hot arguments with dull-witted critics partly explain the particular excitements of that period.” Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 106.

<sup>134</sup> In 1927 John Martin described dance as a budding American form. Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003),

Graham was complimented for being a consistently noteworthy artist: “Martha Graham proved once again that she is a dancer extraordinary.”<sup>135</sup>

As Martin supported her performances, he was also establishing a place for her “modern dance” in a landscape where such approaches—both his approach as a critic and her approach as a dancer—were not known or recognized. In contrast to scholars who position Martin as an “apologist” for modern dance, it would be more accurate to call him a generator for this approach since it was Martin who christened its existence. He was well aware of the opposition of audiences and institutions to a form that was viewed as “inevitably strange and unpopular in the days of its ascent,”<sup>136</sup> and was equally aware of criticism’s potential to endorse and legitimate experimental practices. In a hierarchy of artistic disciplines, music and theatre often share more elevated places, historically and currently, than dance, and by using theatre comparisons and vocabulary, Martin sought to legitimate dance practices in the 1920s and 1930s. There were also stylistic resonances in performances by Graham that focused on “sterner, sparser stuff”<sup>137</sup> and Boleslavsky’s aesthetics, especially his direction of *The Wreck of the Good Hope* (1913). This is not to suggest that Graham or Boleslavsky imitated or even influenced one another, but rather that Martin’s criticism was part of a shared discursive arena that foregrounded certain aesthetic elements and linked artists across disciplines.

In his work as a director, Boleslavsky emphasized clarity and efficiency, as seen in this description of a performance of *The Wreck of the Good Hope*:

All actions and emotions were deliberately stripped to their essentials and an effort was made to express them with the clarity, the pristine power, and the inexorably changing rhythms of the sea itself. For the sake of this clarity, Boleslavsky demanded that each performance be stripped of anything that did not immediately convey the soul of the character.<sup>138</sup>

Although influenced by the teachings of Stanislavsky, Boleslavsky forged a path that differed from his teacher’s. Roberts explains:

Boleslavsky’s approach to the staging of his premiere production was no doubt indebted to his two teachers [Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko]. Well before Boleslavsky’s production of *The Good Hope*, Stanislavsky had sought to penetrate the psychology of characters and to bring actors to the living inner reality of the roles; he also had attempted to strip the actors’ gestures and outer means of expression to their essential minimum in such productions as *The Life of Man* and *The Drama of Life*, productions which Boleslavsky greatly admired, though Stanislavsky himself was displeased with them.<sup>139</sup>

John Martin describes Graham’s aesthetic using a similar vocabulary:

...when she had ultimately found her own style, it was in every respect the

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143. “It was in large measure due to John Martin, the dance editor and critic at the New York Times for thirty-five years that modern movement took the line of development that it did.”

<sup>135</sup> No signature, “Final Graham Recital,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1928, 20.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> John Martin, *America Dancing* (New York: Dodge Publishing Company, 1936), 139.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>139</sup> Roberts, *Richard Boleslavsky*, 37.

direct opposite of this [Denishawn's style]. The adjectives that were now applied to her were "stark" and "gymnastic" for she had stripped away everything but the essentials, not only on stage paraphernalia but of movement itself... Her purpose is to evoke a heightened sensation of life, not merely to present its surface.<sup>140</sup>

Not only are there similarities in the choice of words—"stripped," "efficient," "stark"—there are also comparisons to be made between Graham and Boleslavsky rejecting an earlier approach to performance and advocating for new paths, new directions: Graham rejects Denishawn's ornate, pictorial qualities while Boleslavsky aims for an essential minimalism that even exceeds Stanislavsky's preferences.

The influence of Boleslavsky's ideas on Martin's writing is visible not only in the criteria Martin used to evaluate dance artists and his preferences for productions that were marked by austerity,<sup>141</sup> but also in his emphasis on the constitutive roles of audience members. In *The Dance in Theory* Martin defines the success of a performance according to the response of its audience. He differentiates art from play by writing that art is "an outgoing activity. It demands response or the expectation of response." Martin defines the success of a poet's, musician's, actor's or dancer's work through the response it elicits: "the work itself, once created, will give back to those who see or hear it something of what he has put into it. From this vision, he derives his satisfaction..." In his Princess Theatre lectures, Boleslavsky described a similarly constitutive relationship between actors and audiences:

...I wish to say a few words about that particular relationship between actors and the public during the performance. It is like what the French call "un cercle vicieux" (a vicious circle). The better the actor incarnates his part and "lives it," the more responsive grows the audience and vice versa, -- the more intense and enthusiastic is the public, the more inspired becomes the actor in his performance. A mysterious invisible bond is created linking the audience with the stage, and as a result we get a truly inspired and creative performance.<sup>142</sup>

A significant term in Boleslavsky's quote is the "invisible bond" connecting actors and audiences: he states that this connection, this "particular relationship," determines the success—the creativity and inspiration—of a performance. Not only do Martin and Boleslavsky highlight the key role played by audiences at theatrical events, but Boleslavsky's ideas contribute generatively to one of the key interventions of Martin's criticism and theories of dance: the notion of "kinesthetic sympathy" which he later describes as "inner mimicry." Kinesthetic sensations are the lynchpin between Martin's criticism and dance theory, meaning they are criteria he uses to evaluate performances and the basis for his process of meaning-making through dance.

Martin introduces this term in his *Times* article on April 8, 1928, when he states the "new" dance approaches dancing as "a visual art whose only connection with emotion is in the reaction it produces in the onlooker." Martin then rephrases this idea to

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<sup>140</sup> John Martin, *Story of the Dance* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1946), 132.

<sup>141</sup> Gay Morris describes Graham's early performances as "notable for their austerity." *A Game for Dancers* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>142</sup> Boleslavsky, *Acting*, 79.



emphasize both the connection with the audience and the distancing of dance from any dependence on acoustic accompaniment:

It bends its efforts wholly to the production of direct kinesthetic sensations and therefore cannot utilize music in any form without crippling its own purpose.<sup>143</sup>

Over the next decade, Martin would repeat, refine, and hone characteristics of this essential link between dancers and audiences. In his Sunday column on April 24, 1932, Martin wrote:

Since much of the reaction of dance performances depends upon kinesthetic sympathy, upon the vicarious experience of muscular activity, and since the ordinary audience is not highly developed in response of this kind, it stands to reason that only movement of considerable vigor is productive of results.<sup>144</sup>

Martin's concern about "the ordinary audience" indicated that kinesthetic sensitivity was not popular or guaranteed. For this reason, artists tended toward "movement of considerable vigor" as efforts to sensitize these less cultivated spectators, and through his columns and lectures, Martin sought to heighten spectators' sensitivity to these sensations.

Martin's emphasis on "kinesthetic transfer" appears in the lecture notes for his talks at The New School in 1933, where he remarked that, when the transfer occurred, he felt as if he was "in the groove," and when it did not:

There were instances from time to time however when that eagerly awaited kinesthetic transfer refused to occur, and I left the theatre in a haze. When I got to the office (the deadline was 11 o'clock) all I could do was write a forced and fumbling something-or-other in distress and take it to the copy desk.

Martin not only equated this "kinesthetic transfer" with the mark of a successful performance but also noted how receptivity to this transfer was unevenly distributed.

### **Dance criticism as dance theory**

Examining Martin's Sunday columns in the late 1920s reveals the priority he placed on audiences' kinesthesia, more than on dancers' movement, and he used his articles and lectures to provide methodologies for engaging with this new form, "modern dance." Reflecting on his career from the vantage point of the late 1960s, Martin stated, "I felt that it was my business . . . to build an audience for this art."<sup>145</sup> The statement acknowledges his place as an interpreter and deliberator around an art form that initially prompted confused, and sometimes antagonistic, reaction. Recalling a different disciplinary context, we might consider Gerald Graff's argument that dissensus is often the condition of theoretical self-awareness.<sup>146</sup> Martin's columns, especially those that provided analyses of meaning-making and examinations of contexts conducive to artistic production, were theoretical offerings written in the midst of dissensus, introducing new frameworks and "new directions" for audiences engaging with dance. At this time, dance

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<sup>143</sup> John Martin, "Over America the Dance Wave Sweeps," *New York Times*, April 8, 1928, SM3.

<sup>144</sup> John Martin, "The Dance: Freeing Movement," *New York Times*, April 24, 1932, X12.

<sup>145</sup> John Martin, *Reflections of John Joseph Martin* (UCLA 1967) in Siobhan Burke's "Notes": <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cjas/dancenotes.html>

<sup>146</sup> Graff, *Professing Literature*, 253.

in university settings was situated in physical education departments, and its curricula aligned dance education with movement exploration. Martin's writing was operating to cultivate audiences as well as to articulate a place for dance as an art form and site of knowledge production. As a frequent lecturer on university campuses, Martin also clearly considered it his "business" to speak to university students, often criticizing approaches that sublimated the sensory significance of dance in favor of literary explanations.

Notably, kinesthetic sensations were the essential elements that differentiated Martin's writing from the "incubus of literary-mindedness."<sup>147</sup> Through his columns, he articulated a theory of dance, which was a tactic to both establish a place for the art form as a contemporary, meaning-making activity and to challenge academic methodologies that prioritized logocentricism. He used books such as *America Dancing* to deepen his analysis of kinesthetic transfer, to trace a history of dance in the United States, and to identify detrimental effects of "academic" approaches to the arts. In the chapter entitled "How Not to Look at Dance" in *America Dancing*, Martin wrote about the dominance of the written word and "out of it has grown an incubus of literary-mindedness that has fastened upon our thinking. Nothing has meaning until it is translated into words..." Martin is not only introducing a theory of dance but also critiquing the "banal literary details" that dominate academic analysis, thereby dissenting with and re-negotiating the terms of such analysis.<sup>148</sup>

Throughout his chapter "Heresy of an American Art," Martin pits his theories of dance against "the academic mind" that manufactures arbitrary and unrealistic ideas. The academician is "a walking encyclopedia of technical practices from year one... But of any genuine perceptive response to a work of art he is as incapable as his eye-glasses."<sup>149</sup> This distinction between the academic who is removed from current approaches to art-making and the critic, Martin, who is invested in new artists and emerging forms, positions criticism as non-academic, meaning it is concerned with current performances and trends, and especially responses that are felt emotionally not linguistically. Clearly, there is a professional and economic apparatus under-girding this move. The anti-academic stance was a product of and a reaction to Martin's engagement as a university lecturer throughout his career, including his acceptance of a position from the president of the University of California, Clark Kerr, to teach at the University of California, Los Angeles, when he retired. Writing from within his own choreographic apparatus, his disapproval of academic writing was simultaneously a re-validation of the professional role of the dance critic, a writer who offers a more relevant, engaged, and contemporary perspective. In an interesting reversal of what Randy Martin observed as critics' "underreading" of dance—and theorists' ability to "overread"—John Martin argued that just such a habit could be found in academic writing. By contrast, his newspaper columns were proto-sites of contemporary theoretical discourse, providing frameworks for a new theory of dance grounded in kinesthesia. If we now associate kinesthetic theory with the purview of writers in the academy, it is important to recognize John Martin's theoretical gestures in his newspaper columns, as well as to contextualize definitions of

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<sup>147</sup> Martin, *America Dancing*, 88.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

“academic” and “journalistic” to particular historical moments, to particular formations of a choreographic apparatus.

In his survey of journalistic writing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Randy Martin observes a separation between criticism and what would become “dance studies,” an academic field that generates theoretical approaches. However, earlier histories reveal a great deal of mixture and mobility in what qualifies as “theory,” as well as variation in which profession can be found practicing our contemporary understanding of it. Instead of separating performance and theory, John Martin sought to foreground epistemological aspects of dancing, namely its ability to foster insight and knowledge through kinesthesia, and he used the word “theory” to refer to artists’ methods. In 1928, he wrote about Isadora Duncan’s “theories” as her “method which she taught to her pupils.”<sup>150</sup> In *America Dancing* he adds, “creativity was the heart and soul of Isadora’s theory of technique.”<sup>151</sup> Predating Foster’s formulations of a theorizing body, Martin described Duncan’s body as an “instrument for the expression of emotional concepts.”

His Sunday columns were explorations of connections between dancing, acting, and the value of artistic expression more than assessments of individual artists or events. For example, in a 1928 article on dance and technology, he presented kinesthesia as the concept that separates dance on stage from dance on screens:

The performance of a dance, as of any other form of theatrical art, demands the presence of an audience. The painter and the poet can work in solitude and present their finished products to audiences who can in turn enjoy them in solitude. Not so with the theatre artist. He must create (and re-create with every performance) in the presence of his audience, for he is to a large extent dependent upon the mental and emotional reactions of that audience to give him fuel for his fire... A dance exhibited on a film, therefore, is adjusted to the audience, if any, which is present when the film is made, and not to the thousands of different audiences before which it might be unreeled...<sup>152</sup>

As this example makes clear, Martin frequently expanded the lens on dance from concert events to the cultural landscape of the late 1920s and early 1930s. His priority was to survey the field, its attributes, and its potential. “Underreading” was arguably the practice Martin wanted to counter.

In October of 1929, he posed the question, “Is there such a thing as modern dance?” followed by the answer: “When we speak of the modern dance, then, what we generally mean is the unfulfilled romantic theory.”<sup>153</sup> If romanticism untethered movement from rules or restrictions, modern dance extended this pursuit: expressing inner states through external forms. Martin writes, “When we shall have attained free movement we shall have attained the fullest meaning of the romantic method, and not before... It is in the work of Bess Mensendieck [a pioneer of movement therapy] that the

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<sup>150</sup> John Martin, “Isadora Duncan Danced like a ‘Puritanical Pagan’,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1928, 62.

<sup>151</sup> Martin, *America Dancing*, 141.

<sup>152</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Presentation on the Screen,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1928, 95.

<sup>153</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: Emphasis on Modernism,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1929, X11.

romantic – or if you will, the modern – dance theory finds its completion.”<sup>154</sup> This valorizing of liberating movement seems to bring Martin’s theories of modern dance in close alignment with Margaret H’Doubler’s theories of dance education, and H’Doubler established the first dance degree in the United States the year before Martin began writing for the *Times*. For H’Doubler, the primary aim of dance education was the development of a student’s creative power.<sup>155</sup> Like Martin, she despised “spectacular” dance and the rote imitation of steps, and endorsed a definition of dance as “translation of movement from emotional experience to external form.”<sup>156</sup> As H’Doubler initiated profound changes in dance curricula, Martin made significant contributions to dance theory, treating his newspaper readership like students who were invested in learning dance history and theory.

In his August 31, 1930 column, Martin expanded his concept of modern dance when he explained its resistance to using melodies as decoration or embellishment: “the modern method does not tolerate such subterfuge, for it tries to be honest, simple and economical of means...”<sup>157</sup> To illustrate his point, Martin used a performance by Graham, “Fragments: Tragedy and Comedy.” Martin wrote, “One of the very best dances of the contemporary American repertoire... is based on the same theory of elementary melody...”<sup>158</sup> The word “theory” is used interchangeably as “explanation” and “method.” In 1932, Martin wrote that Doris Humphrey will present her “theory of dance technique and demonstrate it” at a lecture called “The Contemporary Dance: Its Mechanics and Art.”<sup>159</sup> What stands out in these examples is Martin’s awareness of the need for justification and substantiation: that approaches by Graham and Humphrey needed support and legitimation, and the word “theory” linked their pedagogy to intellectual fields.

Martin’s criticism of academia is most clearly articulated in *America Dancing* when he writes:

It is simply another manifestation of the academic mind with its delight in separating art from life that while man himself is held to be affected by his environment, his art is not... the academic theory places all aesthetic truth within the walls of a handful of museums and condemns the younger artists to perpetual careers as copyists.<sup>160</sup>

Martin criticizes the academy for valorizing older and more traditional approaches to art-making while at the same time endorsing a narrative or interpretation-driven theory of reception. He states that under the academicians’ theories, the arts are “subjected to literary translation” while their emotional resonance is ignored.<sup>161</sup> He was interested in

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

<sup>156</sup> Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 45.

<sup>157</sup> John Martin, *New York Times*, August 31, 1930.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: New Plans of the Dance Centre Group,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1932, X2.

<sup>160</sup> Martin, *America Dancing*, 24-25.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 89.

dance that served to awaken emotional perceptions rather than “spectacular” dance which was created for surface display and entertainment.

These shifts in Martin’s position, from a dance critic developing theories of dance to a critic of academia who is pointing out its shortcomings, are the workings of a choreographic apparatus. It is both a system we generate to bring value and prominence to certain ideas, as well as a system that structures our own encounters with professional environments. Martin’s investment in dance as expression, in its ability to convey a particular feeling or mood, reveals his indebtedness to Stanislavsky’s principles of theatre as a means of understanding modern dance. This alignment between dance and theatre informs and influences his criteria when watching choreographers’ performances. It is also an idea he mobilizes to articulate his disgruntlement with what was, at the time, “academic” writing about the arts. Martin was not only establishing a place for modern dance through his columns and lectures, he was also commenting on professional environments that legitimate certain practices and methodologies. In other words the somewhat specious attributions of “journalist” and “academic” were being projected by both academics and journalists, and, as this dissertation makes evident, this acrimony appears in different forms throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Modern dance and its platforms**

Martin defined dance as “expressional movement,”<sup>162</sup> a definition that stands in contrast to choreographers who perceived dance as illustration of music or athletic display, such as Balanchine’s ballets, or as kinetic design, as seen in Oskar Schlemmer’s *Triadic Ballet*. During his first months of writing Sunday columns for the *Times*, nearly every article fosters connections between dance and theatre or acting. Here are two examples:

December 4, 1927: “Certainly the high water mark of the dancing season thus far is reached in the Reinhardt production of ‘A Midsummer’s Night Dream’... from the aspect of physical movement it is positively exciting... one is hard put to decide whether this is a company of actors dancing or a company of dancers acting. Unfortunately for us in this country we draw a sharp line between the two fields...”<sup>163</sup>

December 18, 1927: “In the early part of the play the simple rhythmic movements of the actors, the unaffected groupings and such forthright formalizations as Herman Thimig’s walk, fitted admirably with the rhymed tetrameters of the text. But with the banquet scene all this faded away. A group of servants, who should have been, above all things else, precise in movement, first shattered the picture...”<sup>164</sup>

When reviews appeared about the aesthetics of dancers like Graham that were “extraordinary,” they were consistently complimented for the use of expression and “effectiveness in the projection of inner mood.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Martin, *America Dancing*, 133.

<sup>163</sup> John Martin, “The Dance at the Century,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1927.

<sup>164</sup> John Martin, *New York Times*, December 18, 1927.

<sup>165</sup> No author. “Final Graham Recital,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1928, 20.

During the first decades of Graham's career, her choreography shifted from her early interest in moods and characters, as seen in *Heretic* and *Frontier*, to depicting more specific characters and narratives, as seen in *Appalachian Spring* and *Night Journey*. These portrayals emanated from an interest in expression and theatre, interests that aligned with Martin's preference for dancing that communicated specific emotions and human relationships. In her analysis of Martin's criticism, Gay Morris writes, "Martin supported a dance of psychological essences, and as such favored modern dance, epitomized in the work of Martha Graham."<sup>166</sup> This preference was not widespread among dance audiences; Martin's theories came from a space of dissensus and as an attempt to manage the shifting variables of modern dance's choreographic apparatus.

Martin's writing about Graham stands in stark contrast to other critics' reviews, such as Norman Nairn's. More than a decade after Martin endorsed her performances, critic Norman Nairn began his 1945 review in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*: "Martha Graham and her dance company came to the Eastman last night and left a large audience completely bewildered by her first two offerings, 'Appalachian Spring' and 'Deaths and Entrances'."<sup>167</sup> Nairn's article triggered an assortment of letters to the editor that were both supportive and critical of his perspectives. They disclose how Martin's support of Graham did not guarantee the accessibility of her work. Nairn's review continued: "If there was one person in the whole auditorium who understood what it was all about, diligent search failed to unearth that person."<sup>168</sup> If Martin perceived Graham as a potent communicator and choreographer, Nairn's review reveals that her performances were esoteric if not alienating to others.

Nairn admits in the review that he knows "absolutely nothing about this kind of art—if it be such, and presumably it is—nor could I find anybody who considered it anything but futile."<sup>169</sup> Dance literacy was still so scarce—and the profession of dance criticism still so nascent—that a newspaper assigned someone who knows "nothing" about modern dance to review the performance, a program that included Graham's *Appalachian Spring*, which had its premiere at the Library of Congress months before.<sup>170</sup> As if to prove Martin's argument about a lack of kinesthetic sensitization or kinesthetic receptivity being unevenly distributed, Nairn writes, "this seemingly pointless and endless stuff, however artistically done, doesn't register. It was the first time in all the years I've been covering concerts and recitals that people in numbers walked out on a performance."<sup>171</sup> The differences between Martin's and other critics' writing reveal that Martin's theories and definitions were distinct and exclusive: almost 20 years after he started writing for the *Times*, modern dance was still the purview of a small coterie of

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<sup>166</sup> Gay Morris, "Modernism's Role in the Theory of John Martin and Edwin Denby," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter, 2004), 168-184.

<sup>167</sup> Norman Nairn, "Graham Dancers Prove Puzzle at Eastman," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, January 30, 1945. <http://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200153524.0>

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> *Appalachian Spring* premiered October 30, 1944.

<sup>171</sup> Norman Nairn, "Graham Dancers Prove Puzzle at Eastman," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, January 30, 1945. <http://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200153524.0>

artists and audiences. The frameworks he developed in his columns, his introduction of theories like kinesthetic transfer, contributed to the vital if gradual building of audiences for modern dance. Reflecting on Nairn's writing makes it possible to see why Martin dedicated more column space towards his development of dance patrons than toward reviews of dance performances, and Martin's method for expanding audiences was to point to alignments of dance and theatre.

Martin repeated these comparisons often, beginning his August 24, 1930 column: "As dance tends more and more toward the theatre, the necessity becomes increasingly apparent for a new and more careful evaluation of that type of artistic unit which has come to be known as the dance group."<sup>172</sup> Martin suggests that choreographers resist structures that keep dancers "underpaid" and that treat programs like "school recitals," and towards an organization similar to "a producer of a play." He notes that choreographic language is not synonymous with bodily movement—"The creative dancer... knows movement as neither in nor of the body, any more than voice is in or of the throat"<sup>173</sup>—and suggests that a transference of communication or meaning distinguishes choreography from bodily actions.

Given readers' lack of familiarity with dance performances, especially modern dance, Martin structured his columns to grow audiences. His weekday "reviews" were short, about 4 to 5 paragraphs or 40 lines, focused on one event, and often unsigned. His Sunday columns were longer and more multifaceted investigations into trends and frameworks. In his Lecture Notes, Martin described the need for this longer Sunday column:

On one well-remembered occasion, however, as I walked back to my own desk, suddenly the light broke and I realized in a flash what I had actually seen. *What saved me in those days however was that I wrote a regular column of my own in the Sunday edition and then I could make amends of one sort or another.*<sup>174</sup>

An excellent example of this type of expansion is the Monday, January 30, 1928 review of a Sunday concert by Tamiris, unsigned and approximately 40 lines (less than 300 words), then the Sunday, February 5, 1928 column entitled, "The Dance: Tamiris' Art." If the Monday column is a cursory summary of the recital's pieces and efficacy, the Sunday column analyzes Tamiris's "poise, her muscular strength, her balance and control."<sup>175</sup> Martin's need to "make amends" in these Sunday columns was especially important given the limited time he had to produce weekday reviews: concerts typically happened on Sunday in Manhattan in the late 1920s, and his weekday reviews were published on Mondays. These short reviews typically contained names of pieces, dancers, and composers. There was little description of movement vocabulary, choreography or historical background.

In his books, Martin dedicated more space to choreographic analysis and movement description than he did in his Sunday columns. In *America Dancing*, for

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<sup>172</sup> John Martin, "The Dance: Group and Artist," *New York Times*, August 24, 1930, X7.

<sup>173</sup> John Martin, "The Dance: A Year of Promise," *New York Times*, Sept. 22, 1929, X11.

<sup>174</sup> The John Martin papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. Italics added.

<sup>175</sup> Unsigned, "The Dance: Tamiris' Art" *New York Times*, February 5, 1928, 111.

instance, Martin gives lengthy descriptions of performances by Martha Graham. For example, about her performance of “Heretic” he writes:

Most of the group’s movement is potential rather than actual, its postures and mass attitudes of hostility and intolerance constituting the major part of its function. The solo figure moves with more freedom, but still within a constricted compass. The total effect, however, is anything but static; on the contrary it is tremendously dynamic.<sup>176</sup>

In these phrases, he is offering an analysis of how choreography conveys moods and feelings, and in ways that are far more detailed than his weekday reviews. There’s a symbiotic relationship between the short, forthright phrases in Martin’s sentences and the stark, angular shapes in Graham’s choreography. The repetition in his sentence structures—“The solo figure.... The total effect...” —evokes the reiteration in the dancers’ choreography: they return again and again to a specific phrase, a distinct beginning, when the corps stands in a curved line, crossing their arms, lifting their heels, and dropping them defiantly.<sup>177</sup> Martin’s austere writing finds a symbiotic subject in Graham’s choreography and her dancing finds a generative platform in Martin’s astute observations of her artistry.

Another example of Martin’s choreographic analysis in *America Dancing* is his description of Graham’s “Dithyrambic,” which he describes as “a solo dance which took eleven minutes to perform and made prodigious technical demands:”

A linear type of composition with little or no thematic development, it consisted of a sequence of inherently unrelated elements held together in a steady dynamic crescendo which was itself the composition’s only tangible formalizing force.<sup>178</sup>

If his weekday columns were constrained by word count and filing times (the reviews were usually published within 12 hours of the show’s close), Martin’s books became platforms for expanding and describing choreographic methods. In other words, Martin’s newspaper criticism, meaning his weekday and Sunday columns, was far more focused on economic structures that supported artists and methods for building audiences than they were on individual performances or descriptions of choreographic methods. Martin explicitly stated this mission to provide “news,” not dance criticism, in an interview with Walter Terry: “if you work at a newspaper, your first responsibility is news... We are writing to the reader of the paper who is also a potential follower of the dance performances in New York.”<sup>179</sup> Growing these followers for particular artists was the mission of Martin’s criticism.

He extended this mission from his columns to his lectures at the New School, making visible his commitment to a “dance appreciation.” In the late 1920s, he wrote despairingly about the availability of courses in appreciation for music, painting, and poetry, and the fact that “so far no one has undertaken to give a course in dance

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<sup>176</sup> John Martin, *America Dancing*, 194.

<sup>177</sup> For an excerpt of *Heretic* performed by Graham showing her choreography’s angular shapes and repeated phrases, please see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaoBLxSEIJE>

<sup>178</sup> Martin, *America Dancing*, 198.

<sup>179</sup> Walter Terry, “Interview of John Martin,” *Dance Magazine* (January 1956), 36.



appreciation.”<sup>180</sup> For Martin, such a course was essential because it could break the habit of translating dance into “literary language.” Martin defines dance as an art form that functions not to fill the senses, but rather to “reach through them that less definable mental stratum where perception takes the place of thinking.”

Although he introduced the term “modern dance” as early as 1929 in his column “The Dance: The Emphasis in Modernism,” most of writing in the *Times* was focused on giving readers frameworks for viewing this new approach to choreography, not describing or evaluating the choreographers’ performances. His New School lectures in the early 1930s also focused on the role of audiences more than movements of the dancers. In his lecture notes, he wrote about “essentials” for dance patrons:

When you check your hat in the cloakroom, you must make sure that you have left your brain inside it. And this is no joke. To bring controversial preconceptions into the theatre with you would be to block the very channels of communication. Openness is the first essential of experience.<sup>181</sup>

Again underscoring the uneven distribution of kinesthetic transfer among audiences, he made the gendered distinction in his lecture notes:

If you are male, be sure that you make yourself female for the occasion, that is open yourself eagerly to “insemination” by what is delivered to you across the footlights. If you are already female, revel in the fact that you have no adjustments to make...<sup>182</sup>

If the essentialism in such gender categories needs to be examined, the distinctions also point to Martin’s awareness of the unevenness of kinesthetic transfer: he described how it changed according to gender, education, and experiences.

In *The Dance in Theory*, Martin stated his intentions explicitly when he urged audiences to stay alert to “that tendency in any period which first senses and makes tangible the new direction of its time before they have become an accepted part of daily life. It is that trend which runs counter to the inertias of the day, whatever they may be, and is prophetic of the next level of artistic awareness.”<sup>183</sup> His decision to retire in 1962 was not coincidental: it marked the first year of dance concerts at Judson Church and a radical shift away from definitions of dance as giving external form to inner feelings. If his tenure at the *Times* coincided with a burgeoning of dance as expressive movement, this was largely because his writing built audiences for this approach and brought attention to the importance of economic support for the arts. His writing is difficult to reconcile with the landscape today: when criticism in the *Times* consists of short, descriptive evaluations of a performance on weekdays, or longer features on an individual artist’s personal celebrity on Sundays.

Martin was a steadfast teacher and invested in promoting his theories of dance. Four years after Martin was appointed dance critic at the *New York Times*, he delivered a

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<sup>180</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: A Need of Trained Audiences,” *New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1928, 145.

<sup>181</sup> The John Martin papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Martin, *The Dance in Theory*, 96.

series of lectures at the New School that became source material for his book *The Modern Dance*, published in 1933, the same year Boleslavsky published *Acting: The First Six Lessons*.<sup>184</sup> In both form and content, Martin adopted tactics similar to Boleslavsky's methods: he recognized the value of lecture and printed formats for introducing aesthetic ideas, as he incorporated concepts from Boleslavsky's and Stanislavsky's theories. He understood the significance of professional contexts that structure our systems and shape the criteria we bring to performances. He both recognized the oversights of academic approaches, and infiltrated those environments as a faculty member to change our critical frameworks. He occupied the roles of critic, teacher, and lecturer, visible in the consistent and ongoing labor of his writing, traveling, and talking engagements. His deployment of this apparatus informed the frameworks audiences used to engage with modern dance and also shifted the methodologies of academic studies.

As I examine in Chapter 3 on curricular design, Martin's theories and books have heavily influenced the teaching of dance history courses. In a somewhat ironic twist, both Boleslavsky and Martin insisted on the short-lived relevance of their teachings, and both acknowledged that art forms continually evolve. Boleslavsky sought to fuse "psychological truthfulness in acting with theatricality of scenic expression." Roberts continues in his biography of Boleslavsky:

This impulse was expressed in his selective forms of acting and scenery, and his laying bare of the forms themselves. This impulse, inherently experimental and improvisatory in spirit, ultimately led Boleslavsky to assert: "Old, tried forms and methods must never be relied upon... Whether the play is new or newly revived, a new approach must always be sought for it."<sup>185</sup>

In a similar vein, Martin insisted that a term like modernism was inherently "unsatisfactory" for it was not "descriptive." Martin wrote in 1939, "modernism in the large sense is that tendency in any period which first senses and makes tangible the new direction of its time before they have become an accepted part of daily life."<sup>186</sup>

Both Graham and Boleslavsky pursued a form of performance that revealed, in Boleslavsky's words, "a living inner reality." Graham described her choreographic intentions as replacing "a dance of 'appearance'" with "a dance of 'being'."<sup>187</sup> Both Graham and Wigman attracted fervent audiences, similar to the cult-like followings generated by the visit of Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) to New York in 1923. Roberts writes, "For a great many young American actors, the Art Theatre's performances were a revelation of what could be achieved in the realm of theatre art."<sup>188</sup> Critics responded with glowing reviews, "deeply impressed by three facets of the MAT's playing: 'their excellent ensemble; the utter naturalness and lifelike quality of their productions; and the

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<sup>184</sup> Jean Reti-Forbes, "The Olin Downes Papers," *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 21 No. 2, (Summer 1967), 168. Olin Downes also delivered a series of lectures between 1933 and 1935 at the Brooklyn Institute of Art and Sciences that are documented in this article.

<sup>185</sup> Roberts, *Boleslavsky*, 75.

<sup>186</sup> Martin, *Dance in Theory*, 96.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>188</sup> Roberts, *Boleslavsky*, 106.

fact that they seemed to be living their roles instead of performing them.”<sup>189</sup> This “lifelike quality” is another version of Graham’s “being” instead of “appearing.”

For Martin, our interactions with environments were seemingly infinite opportunities to engage our emotions and feelings. In *The Dance in Theory*, he wrote that our contact with objects and events includes “an awakening of our feelings... We live in a contact stream of emotional reactions, greeting every object, every situation with favor or disfavor in varying degrees, reviving memories of past experiences over the same neuromuscular paths.”<sup>190</sup> In the setting of a dance performance, these feedback loops are activated by perceptions of others. Martin perceives spectators at theatrical events as “participants:”

...though to all outward appearances we shall be sitting quietly in our chairs, we shall nevertheless be dancing synthetically with all our musculature. Naturally these motor responses are registered by our movement-sense receptors, and awaken appropriate emotional associations akin to those which animated the dancer in the first place. It is the dancer’s whole function to lead us into imitating his actions with our faculty for inner mimicry in order that we may experience his feelings.<sup>191</sup>

Boleslavsky’s “invisible bond” plants the seeds for Martin’s concept of “inner mimicry.” In both, the link between performers and audiences is felt viscerally, binding events on stages to sensations in spectators. Boleslavsky adds that this “bond” is subjective and variable: “witnessing the same show twice in succession you may be entranced by it once and dissatisfied and bored with it the next time.”<sup>192</sup> For Martin, writing in the 1930s, inner mimicry was a pathway to understanding the impact of dance performances on audiences.

Gay Morris describes Martin as “an outspoken advocate for modern dance, positioning it at the forefront of American high-art dance.”<sup>193</sup> Just as Boleslavsky sought to convince audiences and actors of the importance of Stanislavsky’s system, Martin promoted a particular way of seeing choreography and performance.<sup>194</sup> His articulation of modern dance as a “rebellion” and a “new era” was a tactic to encourage audiences to bring different definitions of “dance” (not as ballet or as musical theatre) to the performances. Martin described Graham, Humphrey, and Weidman as ushering in a revolution, “A new era in the dance was coming into being—the most prolific, the most richly creative, the most widespread era the dance has ever enjoyed in America.”<sup>195</sup> Graham generated similar pronouncements in 1930 when she wrote, “It is not to establish

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Martin, *Dance in Theory*, 17.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>192</sup> Boleslavsky, *Acting*, 79.

<sup>193</sup> Morris, *Game for Dancers*, 65.

<sup>194</sup> Mel Gordon writes that initially Stanislavsky was hesitant to send MAT to New York: “American audiences and critics were thought to be insular and unsophisticated. The foreign companies that drew the largest masses in Manhattan tended to mount outsized spectacles or sexy farces.” Mel Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America*, 19.

<sup>195</sup> John Martin, *The Dance*, 113.

something American that we are striving, but to create a form and expression that will have for us integrity and creative force.”<sup>196</sup>

The influence of Bolshoi's theories and the Moscow Art Theatre remained a crucial part of Martin's theories well into the 1960s, when he arrived at the University of California, Los Angeles, and was called upon to create a dance syllabus. In a folder of his notes at the New York Public Library, on a fragile sheet of paper, there is a typed-up plan that begins:

Following the precedent of the Moscow Art Theatre and other European producing organizations, two producing units, to be known as First Studio and the Second Studio [will be created] for exceptionally talented students enrolled in the professional training course of the Department of Dance. Whatever his concerns about “literary” or academic writing about dance, he seems to be imagining a university that might provide an apparatus for developing new choreography—as well as “dance in theory.”

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<sup>196</sup> Oliver M. Sayler, *Revolt in the Arts* (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1930), 253.

Chapter 2:

**Who is a dance critic: Yvonne Rainer's published performances**

To whom,  
No subject  
No image  
No taste  
No object  
No beauty  
No message  
No talent  
No technique (no why)  
No idea  
No intention  
No art  
No object  
No feeling  
No black  
No white (no *and*).<sup>197</sup>

John Cage, 1953

NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star-image no to the heroic no to the antiheroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.<sup>198</sup>

Yvonne Rainer, 1965

The connections between these two passages might be immediately apparent on the surface, even if the historical connection between the artists who wrote them is less clear. In fact, it probably seems a stretch to link these writings by John Cage and Yvonne Rainer, not only because they are separated by 12 years, and printed in different publications, but also because they were written by and about artists working in different disciplines. Cage's "To whom" was published in the *New York Herald Tribune* on

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<sup>197</sup> John Cage's statement, distributed as a handout in the gallery, quoted in its entirety in Emily Genauer, "Art and Artists: Musings on Miscellany," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 27, 1953, sec. 4, p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 people and 12 mattresses called Parts of Some Sextets, performed at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York in March 1965," *TDR* (Winter 1965), republished in Mariellen R. Sandford's *Happenings and Other Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

December 27, 1953 in a column about Robert Rauschenberg's all-white paintings at the Stable Galley. Rainer's lines, known as the "NO Manifesto," are one paragraph from her 11-page essay published in *Tulane Drama Review* that reflected on her performance called *Parts of Some Sextets*. What connects these passages by Cage and Rainer is that they were written by artists as a tactic for reconfiguring discourse and for generating frameworks through which to view creative practices. If the previous chapter demonstrated how a choreographic apparatus allows us to see a critic like John Martin reconfiguring discourses of dance, theatre, and visibility for emerging artists, this chapter elucidates an artist's approach to mobilizing discursive agency. The choreographic apparatus is not a specific tool but an always-present system. Different agents take hold, manipulate, and redefine its variables at different historical moments, and on behalf of different aesthetic goals. In Rainer's hands, the apparatus was both a structuring form and an artistic practice that made its workings visible as it redesigned particular criteria and ideas. Rainer, influenced by artists' practices in other disciplines, used her essays and reviews to shift critical authority and to spark new forms of dance criticism. Her writing not only generated frameworks for audiences to engage different approaches to dance and performance but also challenged approaches akin to New Critical readings that Martin had developed in his daily reviews. They also challenged his associations of dancing with acting and theatrical expression.

Much has already been written on dance criticism during this period between the 1950s and 1970s. Most notably, scholars have focused attention on Jill Johnston, a vital figure in these discursive transformations, whose writing has been described as "probably the most significant experiment in American Dance criticism."<sup>199</sup> Johnston insisted on a different mode of dance writing, moving from a style associated with New Criticism to one that anticipated the critical moves of autoethnography and New Historicism within cultural studies critique. Johnston positioned her voice self-reflexively within her writing, drawing from her positionality as a performer and participant-observer inside other artists' works. While this self-reflexive positioning became a signature element of experimental academic writing in the 1980s, its blurring of boundaries between critics, audiences, and artists was nurtured much earlier within the context of *The Village Voice* in the 1960s. A choreographic apparatus allows us to see how the maneuvering amongst roles of critic/performer/observer was inextricably linked to the permissiveness of Johnson's editors—the status of *The Village Voice* as a "radical, editorially open-ended, congenial to outrageous ideas"<sup>200</sup> weekly—and the impact of her criticism on this weekly itself.

Complementing this refiguring of critical authority, however, is a story of the role that writing played in Yvonne Rainer's articulation of her artistic references and priorities. Historians often trace the shifts in her career from the disciplines of dance to film, but during the 1960s she was collaborating with and participating in projects by

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<sup>199</sup> Ann Daly, *Critical Gestures: Writing on Dance and Culture* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002): xxxvii.

<sup>200</sup> Jill Johnston "A criticism of outrage," in Wendy Perron, ed., *Judson Dance Theater: 1962-1966* (Bennington: Bennington College, 1981). The Voice was 4 years old when Johnston started writing for the paper in 1959 and averaged 13 pages an issue. "It had no funds to pay anyone," Johnston recalls.

artists known for their work in sculpture, music, and painting. These relationships brought Rainer into contact with methods that not only informed her choreography and performances, but also exposed her to writing approaches that altered both her career and the field of dance writing. Rainer explored different writing formats (reviews, essays, manifestos) alongside peers and collaborators like Robert Morris, Donald Judd, and Dan Graham who were also revising an artist's place within the discursive landscape of the 1960s.

In the period between 1965 and 1975, Rainer occupied a variety of roles (artist, writer, reviewer, essayist, and event organizer), and her fluctuating positions and movement between these spaces could be described as a form of choreography that made possible the placement and visibility of certain projects. Defining choreography as an arrangement of movement in space as well as the notation of these arrangements, this chapter seeks to show how the term choreography can shed light on ways in which Rainer constructed concepts and redirected discourse that surrounded her projects. In other words, a choreographic understanding of space and time, movement and interaction, plan and documentation provides a lens through which to examine her written projects. She, along with other artists in the 1960s, challenged aesthetic categories, rethought interactions between creator and performer, performer and audience, producer and participant, and transformed the roles of critics, observers, and presenting organizations that supported and promoted artistic work.

The application of this choreographic apparatus offers political potential. As Jacques Rancière outlines in *The Politics of Aesthetics*: “aesthetics refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships.”<sup>201</sup> A choreographic apparatus recognizes the shifting roles of artists and creates a framework through which to view their projects and their audiences, re-arranging networks and hierarchies that determine their visibility and promote their status as art. By placing the artists' writing within the choreographic apparatus, I do not mean to reproduce an intentional fallacy<sup>202</sup> that assumes the meaning intended by the artist takes precedence over its reception. Rather I seek to place these writings as creative acts. Essays, objects, articles, and performances co-exist in relation to one another as well as in conversation with reviews and ideas of critics and theorists. Ultimately, rather than dividing priorities in artistic practices between those that take up institutional critique and those that challenge formal considerations, this chapter proposes a way of reframing artists' projects to recognize how concepts such as “institution” or “form” intersect with one another. Activating a choreographic apparatus by writing about artistic practices gave

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<sup>201</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Distribution of the Sensible,” *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004): 10.

<sup>202</sup> An important principle of New Criticism, this term was first used by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in their essay “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946 rev. 1954): “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.” The phrase “intentional fallacy” means “a fallacy about intent.”

Rainer a way of elucidating her priorities, a type of discursive agency that challenged mainstream critics who dismissed her performances and the work of other Judson artists.

One of the hubs of artistic experimentation, cross-disciplinary exploration, and creations that challenged definitions of art, dance, and performance in the 1960s was Judson Dance Theater. Emanating from Robert Dunn's composition class, which took place in the Cunningham Studio situated in the same building that housed The Living Theater, Judson Dance Theater was a collective of artists who questioned who could be a dancer and what defined a dance. Dunn's first class, held in the fall of 1960, included Rainer, Paulus Berenson, Marni Mahaffay, Simone (Forti) Morris, and Steve Paxton. Showings of their projects took place in 1961 at the Cunningham Studio.<sup>203</sup> In May of 1961 La Monte Young organized concerts at Yoko Ono's loft where Forti showed "5 Dance constructions + some other things" and arranged the loft more like a gallery than a proscenium setting. Dunn resumed the course in the fall of 1961. It again included Rainer and Paxton, plus Trisha Brown, Ruth Emerson, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Al Kurchin, Dick Levine, Grtchen MacLane, John Herbert McDowell, Joseph Schlichter, Carol Scothorn, and Elaine Summers.<sup>204</sup> In *Democracy's Body*, Sally Banes notes that David Gordon and Valda Setterfield attended occasionally, and other artists, working in a range of disciplines, visited to observe: Robert Rauschenberg, Jill Johnston, Gene Friedman, Robert Morris, Remy Charlip, David Vaughan, Ray Johnson and Peter Schumann.

In January of 1962 Rainer presented the first concert of her own choreography in an evening shared with Fred Herko: "All of the dances at the Maidman [Playhouse on West 42<sup>nd</sup> street], both Freddie's and mine, received devastating reviews."<sup>205</sup> This did not deter the artists. In spring of 1962 they sought a venue for a showing of works from Dunn's class by auditioning for the annual "Young Choreographers" concert at 92<sup>nd</sup> street Y.<sup>206</sup> Rainer, Paxton, and Emerson auditioned and were rejected. Rainer suggested Judson Memorial Church to her peers since she had seen plays by the Judson Poet's Theater performed in the sanctuary. Rainer, Paxton, and Emerson auditioned for Al Carmines, one of Judson's ministers, and were all accepted. The date of July 6, 1962 marked the first dance concert at Judson Church. Rainer adds: "Al would later say that he didn't understand what he was looking at but sensed it was important."<sup>207</sup>

For Rainer and her compatriots, the decision to situate their concerts at an atypical venue was a way of exposing and redirecting the choreographic apparatus: by removing their work from a location that carried a history of traditional dance concerts and from a venue that was arranged as a proscenium environment, these artists introduced an innovative space, literally and figuratively, for the redefining of dance and art. More importantly for this argument at this period in art history, the exposure of a choreographic apparatus was an avowed part of the art form. Their effort was explicitly to create a venue that made visible the assumptions, relationships, framework, and modes of

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<sup>203</sup> Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983): 17.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>205</sup> Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 221.

<sup>206</sup> This was an important dance venue for modern dance concerts: the place where Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* had its first performance in 1960.

<sup>207</sup> Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, 222.



interaction that defined “dance.” Such a space was a necessary act to advance this process of redefinition. Allen Hughes, a rare mainstream critic who supported the work, wrote in the *New York Times* on July 7, 1962 “In Greenwich Village last night, about a dozen young people got together to give a dance concert at the Judson Memorial Church. There was hardly anything conventional about it...”<sup>208</sup> The review ends with “Uninstructed followers of the conventional would more than likely have the evening an exercise in madness, but it wasn’t. Perhaps it would have been more accurate to call it a concert of ‘movement’ rather than of ‘dance.’ But by any name it was a thought-provoking adventure...”<sup>209</sup> Amid the exchange and dissensus of Judson, new dance theory would emerge.

Confusion about what to label these dancers surrounded their performances and contributed to Rainer’s investment in writing about her and her peers’ projects. Labels that describe categories of dance have always been, and continue to be, contentious. After all, all dance forms have been, at one time, “contemporary.” When this word is used to denote aesthetic criteria rather than temporal placement, its definition depends on where artists and audiences are situated. As was made obvious in John Martin’s naming of a category called “modern dance,” most often a label for a dance genre depends on the viewer’s awareness of and preference for certain forms of dance, or vagaries within these forms. A label serves to promote, to explain, and to differentiate artists from one another. When Sally Banes was writing *Terpsichore in Sneakers* between 1973 and 1978, she recalls, “‘post-modern’ was rarely used to categorize the kind of dance I was writing about.”<sup>210</sup> The label was ubiquitous by 1980, and today there are university courses in “post-modern dance.”

Across the disciplines, labels and categories are useful and problematic. Few of the major artists grouped under Minimalism self-identified as minimalists. Is it possible to categorize creative work without limiting its intentions? A choreographic apparatus offers a way of viewing these projects as well as their through-lines across forms and media that bypasses the boxes of categories. Each of the artists examined in this chapter invested in writing about their priorities—Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, and Dan Graham. And each addressed the confusion of labels and naming; as such, their associations with one another were both fruitful and complicated.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Allen Hughes, “Dance Program Seen at Church,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1962, p. 9.

<sup>209</sup> Allen Hughes, “Dance Program,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1962. It is important to note that Hughes, unlike John Martin, was a music critic before and after he wrote about dance in the *Times* from 1961 to 1965. If Martin’s alignments of dance with theater predisposed him to appreciate choreography by Wigman and Graham, Hughes’s interest in music gave him different frameworks for engaging with dance and a curiosity about a wide spectrum of styles and artists. <https://movementresearch.org/publications/critical-correspondence/judson-church-its-dance-critics-by-george-jackson>

<sup>210</sup> Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), xi.

<sup>211</sup> At one AWC meeting held at the Museum of Modern Art, women protested the lack of female artists included in exhibition, and the sparse inclusions of women were the artists like Rainer who were “attached to male artists.” Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, 341.

While critics and theorists continue to serve as authoritarian voices in the discussion of artistic practices, this chapter mines the artists' roles in self-definition during the 1960s, and how their writing activated a re-ordering of critical frameworks. To the degree that it positions social actors as active agents in an interdependent network, the concept of a choreographic apparatus may be particularly useful to dance studies; to give discursive agency to choreographers counters a commonly held view that dancers are not adept at written communication. Felicia McCarren writes:

...dancers get written out of the cultural history they themselves were writing, and that was written about them, in part because they are not principally writers.<sup>212</sup>

Contrary to this principal assumption, Rainer was not only writing about her own work, but also reviewing that of her peers and activating interdisciplinary collaborations. Her essays provided a way of framing her performances: they supported and explained her artistic propositions and the range of artistic genealogies that influenced her.

Rainer's discursive tactic countered the reviews of mainstream dance critics such as Clive Barnes, George Jackson, and Don McDonagh who dismissed her work in the 1960s.<sup>213</sup> Consider one well-known example from 1966 when Barnes was the main dance critic for the *New York Times*;<sup>214</sup> this review was entitled "Dance: Village Disaster":

Disaster struck the Judson Church in Washington Square last night. Correction: total nothingness struck the Judson Church in Washington Square last night, struck it with the squelchy ignominy of a tomato against a pointless target.<sup>215</sup>

Scholars like Michael Kirby have used this review to show the "avant-garde is almost always measured by traditional standards."<sup>216</sup> But Barnes's writing also exposes a choreographic apparatus that aligns his criticism and his affiliations with the *New York Times*, which had, through John Martin's tenure as its dance critic, promoted the aesthetics of "modern dance." The aesthetics of Judson artists like Rainer, Steve Paxton, and David Gordon introduced new parameters, not only for reviewing dance, but also for seeing dance. Rainer's investment in writing about her work exposed the friction between her priorities and criteria and those espoused by Barnes. Rainer's writing was particularly important to dance artists because dance criticism, as seen in John Martin's role at the *Times*, has played (and continues to play) a pivotal role in expanding audiences and generating funding opportunities.

In 1969 when the Billy Rose Theater presented choreographers supported by the Ford Foundation, Barnes continued his critical campaign against this new work:

...it would be hypocritical to deny that in so small a field as dance, the *Times* critic – by virtue of his position – does possess a power over and above any

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<sup>212</sup> Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machines* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003) 7.

<sup>213</sup> George Jackson, "Naked in its Native Beauty," *Dance Magazine* 38, April 1964, 37: "Why do these people want to be themselves so badly that they practice doing it in public?"; Don McDonagh in *New York Times* April 12, 1968: Rainer's concerns were "personal and of value only to herself." Also Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched*, 8.

<sup>214</sup> John Martin retired in 1962.

<sup>215</sup> Clive Barnes, "Dance: Village Disaster," *New York Times*, January 11, 1966.

<sup>216</sup> Michael Kirby, *A Formalist Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 69.

influence he may command.... For the most part this season has so far been a triumphant success – the exceptions in my view were the appearances of Meredith Monk and Yvonne Rainer... I maintain that the appearances of Miss Monk and Miss Rainer at the Billy Rose Theater brought the art of modern dance into public disrepute and should never have been shown under such auspices.<sup>217</sup>

The principles by which Barnes's use of the phrase "triumphant success" both implied and perpetuated certain aesthetic conventions; furthermore, the act of naming success implied and perpetuated Barnes's power in making such distinctions. He decided who subscribed to his definition of "the art of modern dance," and who did not. In *Critical Moves*, Randy Martin refers to this role of a critic marking boundaries as a kind of policing.<sup>218</sup> Against what Barnes describes as flourishing "success," Rainer and Monk are positioned as exceptions who taint the art form.

Barnes continues by naming the four programmers of the performance, Harvey Lichtenstein, Charles Reinhart, Richard Barr, and Norman Singer, adding "none of them had seen a performance by Yvonne Rainer, and I understand the only one who had seen Meredith Monk's work was Reinhardt, who is her manager." Barnes was asked for suggestions of artists for Spoleto and suggested Rainer, noting in this review:

I did indeed suggest that Miss Rainer was among the more talented.

Unhappily that opinion was based on just a couple of her own solos; she has now regressed into non-dance and self-indulgence....<sup>219</sup>

Words like "regressed" and "self-indulgence" indicate a critic's role in policing and maintaining aesthetic standards. For Barnes and the *Times*, this meant protecting modern dance from "indulgences" like postmodernism. As I explore in this chapter, Rainer's articles often outlined differences between modern dance and her work. These were efforts to provide alternative frameworks for audiences, frameworks that were missing in mainstream criticism, frameworks that challenged traditional systems of evaluation, and frameworks that would, as we retroactively know, take hold and provide a discursive apparatus for more dancers to experiment in decades to come.

The entwinements of a critic's writing and the institutional apparatus of funding and commissions for artists are made blatantly clear at the end of Barnes's review:

Does this mean that only the proven should get money? Yes. Such a policy means not only that the money will go where it will do the most good, but also that it will provide incentive for the unproven artist to prove himself [*sic*].<sup>220</sup>

Barnes advises that only established choreographers receive support. His stance marks a distinct contrast with John Martin who, decades earlier, used his columns in the *Times* in the late 1920s and early 1930s to provide frameworks and methods for engaging with emerging artists. When Rainer wrote articles about how to view her performances, she was providing analysis for readers who disagreed with such statements by Barnes, and who were interested in exploring the priorities and motivations of these new artists.

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<sup>217</sup> Clive Barnes "Critic's Concern - And Ford's," *New York Times*, March 2, 1969: D35.

<sup>218</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves*, 79: "Criticism is an authority that can police the boundary between the aesthetic and the political economy of art, often coded as the divide between art and life."

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

Rainer's articles appeared in arts magazines and academic journals, and these printed projects offered platforms to reposition and differently frame her work.<sup>221</sup> In *Tulane Drama Review (TDR)*, she published "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 people and 12 mattresses called Parts of Some Sextets, performed at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York in March 1965" which explained the process of creating her piece entitled *Parts of Some Sextets*.<sup>222</sup> In the article, Rainer emphasized the significance of Morris's *Check*, created in 1964 at Stockholm's Moderna Museet, as inspiration for this work. She described *Check* as "simple, undistinctive activities made momentous through their inaccessibility." She wrote:

The impact of *Check* had become a strong reference point. I wanted to make a piece that had the same effect, but I wanted the whole situation to take place directly in front of an audience. In other words, something completely visible at all times, but also very difficult to follow and get involved with... I resorted to two devices that I have used consistently since my earliest dances: repetition and interruption. In the context of this new piece, both factors were to produce a 'chunky' continuity, repetition making the eye jump back and forth in time and possibly establishing more strongly the difference in the movement material – especially in the dancey stuff.<sup>223</sup>

Words like "completely visible" and "'chunky' continuity" set up a contrast between Rainer's priorities and the use of illusion and effortless flow in modern dance. Her desire to make her work "very difficult to follow" contrasts with a modern dance choreographer's desire for engagement and "kinesthetic transfer," to use John Martin's phrase.

As she looks for comparables and a language for defining an artistic shift, Rainer decides, not only to contrast her work with modern dance, but to deploy the language of other art forms; she aligns her project with that of a sculptor, Robert Morris, created for a museum. For Rainer the optic possibilities of particular venues and ways of approaching movement were important to the realization of her choreographic work, and she was concerned with both the composition of her dance and the audiences' reception of her work. Her cast included herself, Paxton, Morris, Rauschenberg, plus Lucinda Childs, Judith Dunn, Sally Gross, Deborah Hay, Tony Holder, and Joseph Schlichter (who was Trisha Brown's husband; Brown could not join the piece because she was pregnant). Rainer describes her challenge, as she works amid aesthetic forms and styles:

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<sup>221</sup> Important to note the infrastructure of newspapers like the *Times* and *Voice* that separates disciplines into "dance" "music" "visual art" and "theatre," and their respective critics (and disciplinary boundaries), reinforce these separations. Rainer's work existed between visual art and dance and her decision to publish in visual art magazines is significant.

<sup>222</sup> Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 people and 12 mattresses called Parts of Some Sextets, performed at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York in March 1965," *TDR* (Winter 1965), republished in Mariellen R. Sandford's *Happenings* (New York: Routledge), 160-167.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

how to move in the spaces between theatrical bloat with its burden of dramatic psychological meaning and the imagery and atmospheric effects of the nondramatic, nonverbal theatre (i.e. dancing and some Happenings)... I like to think that *Parts of Some Sextets* worked somewhere in these spaces...<sup>224</sup>

The literal spaces of performance were as central to these events as the discursive spaces they inhabited: the sanctuary and gymnasium where performances took place in Judson Church were not traditional proscenium settings. Folding chairs were arranged in make-shift arrangements. The floor of the stage was the same level as the floor on which the audience sat in chairs. The walls were not black, but more similar to the white walls of a museum or gallery.

When Rainer wrote that she aimed for a space “between,” and was not interested in the “burden of dramatic psychological meaning,” she was explicitly distancing her work from the expressive forms of modern dance championed by John Martin and, by this point in dance history, many other dance critics. She stated this directly in the *TDR* essay by marking her position in relation to other artists and disciplines. She wrote that she was defining “the rules and boundaries of my own artistic game at the moment;”<sup>225</sup> notably, the assertion of her position within the “game” of a changing choreographic apparatus preceded her famous artistic statement:

No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star-image no to the heroic no to the antiheroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.<sup>226</sup>

These phrases became known as Rainer’s “No Manifesto,” even if manifesto was not a term that she used to describe it.<sup>227</sup> For her, it was part of an analytical article that explored how she created *Parts of Some Sextets* and ways to see, discuss, and disseminate ideas about performance. Other pieces included in this issue of *TDR* were an interview of John Cage by Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, an interview of Ann Halprin<sup>228</sup> by Rainer, Robert Morris’s “Notes on Dance,” Claes Oldenburg’s “Fotodeath,” La Monte Young’s “Lecture 1960,” and Jackson MacLow’s “Verdurous Sanguinaria: Act 1,” among others.

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<sup>224</sup> Yvonne Rainer, “Some Retrospective Notes,” 166-167.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> For an excellent analysis of political and artistic manifestoes see Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution. Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006): “...the manifesto is a form of literary agency, a new form of political articulation that develops in partial defiance of real existing circumstances even as it seeks to enlist history as an ally in its own project... the manifesto as a genre nevertheless generates a history” (32).

<sup>228</sup> Halprin used “Ann” (not “Anna”) until “the 1970s, after surviving cancer, when she changed her name from Ann to Anna—closer to her Hebrew name of Hannah.” Source: Janice Ross, “Anna Halprin,” *Dance Treasures*.

[http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/halprin\\_essay\\_ross.pdf](http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/halprin_essay_ross.pdf)

From a 21<sup>st</sup> century vantage point, this aggregation of artists' writing now appears as a canonical textbook by dancers, sculptors, and musicians who would come to define interdisciplinary art experiment as the next decade unfolded: almost every piece would have a life of its own. These essays and interviews were circulated, reproduced, and included in numerous syllabi of art and performance courses, sometimes without full awareness of the context of this multi-artist coalition. This issue of *TDR* foregrounds both the cross-disciplinary collaborations amongst these artists as well as their awareness of the value of writing and publication. *TDR* was a venue that not only redirected discourse around these artists' projects but also positioned these authors as spokespersons for their disciplines.

Rainer's essays, and even her essay's biographies, contributed significantly to the construction of frameworks, foregrounding and obfuscating certain relationships. One can watch a shift in self-positioning across a brief three-year period. Consider how the 1965 *TDR* issue described Rainer's biography:

Yvonne Rainer studied with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Ann Halprin. She first performed her own dances at the Living Theatre in New York and has appeared frequently here and in Europe.<sup>229</sup>

In 1968, when Gregory Battcock's *Minimal Art* was published, Rainer's author biography was quite different. She no longer included any mention of Martha Graham or Merce Cunningham, or even references to studying dance. "Yvonne Rainer is one of the major figures of the highly experimental and influential Judson Dance Theatre in New York. In this essay based on her dance in five parts called *The Mind is a Muscle...*"<sup>230</sup> This later version of her biography ends with a description of her most recent choreography in the series called "Nine Evenings: Theatre and Engineering" at the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory in New York. By historicizing her own work and that of other artists, Rainer adjusted the frameworks through which her performances were analyzed and shifted the discourse that surrounded their work. Even the changes in her biography, namely who is recorded as influencing her career, allow for different criteria and aesthetic goals to come to the fore.

Rainer published in a variety of formats during these years, including *Arts* magazine and *Artforum*. These articles situated Rainer's approach to dance within a visual art context and aligned her performances with the scale and parameters of visual art, that is, those working within a gallery space more than a proscenium stage. By shifting emphasis away from a dancer's feats and toward the viewer's role in meaning-making, Rainer was changing conventional characteristics of dance and dance criticism, re-arranging conventional positions within an inherited choreographic apparatus in order to elucidate new choreographies of her own. By inserting herself into the role of an author writing about performances, she was occupying the place of a dance critic and challenged the critic's status as expert, authority, or spokesperson.

Rainer not only wrote about her own work but also about the exhibitions and performances of her peers. That act of critical generosity recursively legitimated her own experiments, producing a system of exchange in which artists simultaneously propelled each other. Rainer's writing produced the context that she wanted to occupy. She appeared as the author of an article in *Arts* magazine's April 1967 issue. Entitled "Don't

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<sup>229</sup> *TDR* (Winter 1965), 247.

<sup>230</sup> Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 263.

Give the Game Away,” Rainer’s article began:

There are certain things that make one tolerant, even appreciative, of other things; you might call them redemptive qualities, without which otherwise objectionable things would be of little interest. I have in mind this book I’m reading No Anticipation Allowed by Frederick Castle, but the statement can be taken without much manipulation into other areas... Anyway, the clarity in the Castle book redeems its discursiveness.<sup>231</sup>

Rainer’s tone oscillates between introspection and justification, exploring her own interests while explaining the distinct characteristics of new creative works. She discusses Andy Warhol’s film *Chelsea Girls* along with novels, and Morris’ sculptures:

It occupies space differently than other sculpture. One might say that sculpture didn’t take up room until this sculpture. It doesn’t ‘aspire’; it squats. It looks the same from every aspect. You know you won’t see anything different if you go to the other side, but you go to the other side. You know immediately what you are seeing but you don’t quite believe that another vantage point won’t give you a more complete, more definitive, or even altered, view of it. It doesn’t. It displaces an amount of atmosphere equal to its own volume... The dominance of mass over matter. We take up space together. I am reminded of something I wrote when I was high on LSD: “The exquisite containment of my body. I can’t say it’s euphoria or ecstasy... but yet still I have this strange sense of limits – physical limits – and it seems such an exquisite knowledge. Perfect containment...”<sup>232</sup>

Notably, Rainer introduced a choreographic language into unfamiliar contexts, ensuring that the conversation between dance and visual art was a two-way street; in describing Morris’s sculpture as squatting while displacing and dominating space, she attributes movement to these inanimate objects. By juxtaposing these action verbs and these sedentary artworks, Rainer is educating her reader in how to approach and engage with these unusual forms. Her articles highlighted the ways this sculpture demanded a different type encounter and an awareness of the space of the object itself, collected by kinesthetically engaging with its form.<sup>233</sup> She added:

...one is drawn into a sense of complicity to borrow a phrase of Robbe-Grillet. “Man looks at the world,” says Robbe Grillet. “And the world does not look back at him...” Have I created theater objects that don’t look back at the audience and if so how is that possible where human performance is involved?<sup>234</sup>

Rainer’s article not only exposes the cross-fertilization of artists as she cites examples from film, sculpture, and literature that furthered her concepts of performer/audience interaction, but also reveals how artists were intimately aware of another’s endeavors and creations. Rainer, like John Cage, Dan Graham, and Robert Morris, invested in written projects as ways of changing how audiences participated in their performances as well. Cage, for example, wrote an essay for *Dance Observer* in the 1940s, called “Grace and

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<sup>231</sup> Yvonne Rainer, “Don’t Give the Game Away,” *Arts Magazine*, April 1967.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>233</sup> Rainer refers to Morris as her husband at one point in the article. In her autobiography, *Feelings are Facts*, Rainer explains “Although we never legally married I presented myself as Bob’s wife when the need arose” (312).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Clarity” in which he explained components of the “best works” of performance:

Grace is not used here to mean prettiness; it is used to mean the play with and against the clarity of the rhythmic structure. The two are always present together in the best works of the time arts, endlessly, and life-givingly, opposed to each other.<sup>235</sup>

Cage in the 1940s, like Rainer in the 1960s, recognized the importance of using essays and reviews to define and clarify artistic experiments, inviting viewers to appreciate methods that broke from conventional approaches to dance and choreography.<sup>236</sup>

Rainer’s writing makes explicit the scope of her intervention and the significance of disciplines of film and the visual arts in her designs of performances. She was also keenly aware of the constitutive as well as evaluative functions of dance criticism. She noted the power of critics in her autobiography *Feelings are Facts*, when she explained the impact of reading dance criticism in the 1950s and its role in her preferences for Martha Graham’s performances, “The Graham aesthetic dominated both the critical scene and my inchoate sensibilities.”<sup>237</sup> She also noted how this aesthetic was used as a standard-bearer for critics who judged artists according to how closely they emulated Graham’s priorities:

I was overwhelmed by her *Clytemnestra*, *Cave of the Heart*, other dances that I saw around this time at a Broadway theater. The apparent absence of emotion in Cunningham’s work, in addition to the disjunction between Cage’s music and choreography stuck in the craw of critics, who made pejorative comparisons with other modern dance that utilized recognizable—and by now conventional—gestures to express feeling.<sup>238</sup>

Until 1962, the year of John Martin’s retirement, his criteria and his definition of dance as expressive movement were paramount in dance criticism. Rainer’s own writing practices developed alongside shifts in both performance and criticism, influencing and shaping both of these fields. She used both performances and publications to introduce different ways of defining dance and to rework relationships between artists and critics.

In this chapter’s epigraph, John Cage’s statement “To whom” exemplifies a similar maneuvering of the choreographic apparatus. It was written to accompany Robert Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* and there are similarities between the works by Rauschenberg and Rainer. Rainer’s performances subverted traditional interactions between viewers and dancers just as Rauschenberg’s paintings called attention to multiplicities of responses painting can provoke. Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* were first displayed in 1952 at Black Mountain College as part of *Theatre Piece No. 1*, an event organized by Cage and involving music, spoken word, visual art, dance, and projections created by Merce Cunningham, Charles Olsen, M.C. Williams, and David

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<sup>235</sup> John Cage, “Grace and Clarity,” *Dance Observer* Vol. 11 No. 9 (November 1944), 108.

<sup>236</sup> More on this topic of critical support Cage received for his compositions in the 1940s can be found in Suzanne Robinson, “A Ping, Qualified by a Thud: Music Criticism in Manhattan and the Case of Cage (1943–58),” *Journal of the Society for American Music* Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 2007) 79-139.

<sup>237</sup> Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, 170.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*



Tudor, among others. In this performance, the paintings functioned as screens on which projections were shown. As Jonathan Katz writes in his chapter, “The Politics of Indifference,” these paintings “are indecidable because as absolute negations there is nothing here, nothing to decide. In this sense they are absolutely indifferent, but that indifference in turn could, as was in fact the case, spark a wholesale reevaluation of hegemonic art practices.”<sup>239</sup> Rather than presenting an image or depiction, Rauschenberg’s painting presents “nothing.” This juxtaposition of “indifference” and display is not only a challenge to art practice but also to art history, art criticism, and value systems that prioritize technique and expression. The paintings foreground the role of observers in construing value and responses, and it was this absence of “subject... image... object... technique...” that Cage found inspiring. They were, in fact, sources of freedom because their “emptiness” allowed for a place without attachment or “intention” or “feeling.”

Presented in a different disciplinary context, Rainer’s *Trio A* similarly subverted positions of power and critical authority. Her work explored perceptions of movement by spectators, and was a fundamental intervention in dance’s definition, working against notions of physical virtuosity and display, and highlighting how dance complicates perception. In Rainer words:

My *Trio A* dealt with the “seeing” difficulty by dint of its continual and unremitting revelation of gestural detail that did not repeat itself, thereby focusing on the fact that the material could not be easily encompassed.<sup>240</sup>

*Trio A* is often considered Rainer’s signature work, not only because of the theory it embodies but also because it is the most widely disseminated choreographic work from this year. It first appeared at Judson Church as a trio performed simultaneously but not in unison by Rainer, Gordon, and Paxton. Rainer used this project to activate discussion amongst artists and to position her works in generative formats: in 1968 she published “A Quasi-Survey of some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A”<sup>241</sup> in Gregory Battcock’s *Minimal Art*. The article aligned her choreography with minimal sculpture, creating a list of traits of minimal objects and dances. By situating her work in relation to other disciplines, Rainer both challenged the analysis of critic Barbara Rose, who suggested connections between minimal sculpture and the choreography of Merce Cunningham, and also aligned her creations with works by Robert Morris and other minimal sculptors.

Rose’s article for *Art in America*, published in 1965, and reprinted in Battcock’s *Minimal Art*, stated, “At this point I want to talk about sensibility rather than style, because the artists I’m discussing, who are all roughly just under or just over thirty, are

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<sup>239</sup> Jonathan Katz, *Difference/Indifference: Musings on Postmodernism, Marcel Duchamp, and John Cage* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishing, 1998), 64-66.

<sup>240</sup> Yvonne Rainer, “A Quasi-Survey of some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A” in Gregory Battcock’s *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968) 272.

<sup>241</sup> A title that is strangely similar in its analytic approach to Dan Graham’s title “Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discreet Cell of ’66”

more related in terms of a common sensibility than in terms of a common style.”<sup>242</sup> Whereas Rose describes Cunningham as having “helped to shape the new sensibility,” Rainer uses her own work to demonstrate similarities with minimal sculpture. The two main aspects that differentiate her work from that of modern dancers like Graham are 1. “artifice of performance has been reevaluated,” and 2. “display of technical virtuosity and the display of the dancer’s specialized body no longer make any sense.”<sup>243</sup> By foregrounding these two elements, Rainer is distancing her work from characteristics of both Graham’s and Cunningham’s performances. Rainer makes clear the motivations and interests that propelled her creation by explaining each of her decisions concerning execution, phrasing, and repetition. She is particularly interested in how dance is received, meaning how observations among the audience do not necessarily correspond with the image on stage:

A vivid illustration of this is my *Trio A*: Upon completion two of us are always dripping with sweat while the third is dry. The correct conclusion to draw is not that the dry one is expending less energy, but that the dry-one is a “non sweater.”<sup>244</sup>

Rainer, like Cage and Rauschenberg, meticulously investigated the assumptions made in the process of engaging with art and performances, and sought to dismantle the dependency of artists on traditions, on audiences, and on affirmation. Rainer and Cage exposed the misconceptions made about their work as frequently as they introduced new frames for viewing projects.

By rearranging a choreographic apparatus, Rainer provided both a framework through which to recognize similarities across disciplines. She also created a vehicle for situating her work as both performer and author, and in so doing, made the assumptions behind these distinctions visible. In other words, activating a choreographic apparatus by writing about artistic practices gave Rainer a way of elucidating the distinctions of her experiments, distinctions that challenged the criteria of mainstream critics like Clive Barnes, George Jackson, and Don McDonough who dismissed Rainer and other artists. Her writing practices make visible the networks of relations that shaped critical authority, namely critics’ imbrications with publications that carried their own histories of aesthetic criteria and judgments, like the *Times* and modern dance. Rainer specifically noted the ways disciplinary barometers influenced critical reception in the early 1970s.

In 1973 Rainer wrote a “Letter to the Editor” of *Artforum* that began, “I am confronted by how writers with an art-historical orientation get closer to issues with which I think my work is concerned than those who write about my work from dance or theater traditions.”<sup>245</sup> She goes on to analyze a review by Lizzie Borden of her own performance, admitting that critics, including herself, can become pedantic: “Borden’s piece also reveals, if somewhat obliquely, certain ploys that characterize ‘tough’ art

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<sup>242</sup> Barbara Rose, “ABC Art” in Gregory Battcock ed., *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 280.

<sup>243</sup> Yvonne Rainer, “A Quasi-Survey of some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A” in Gregory Battcock’s *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968) 267.

<sup>244</sup> Yvonne Rainer, “A Quasi-Survey,” 266.

<sup>245</sup> Yvonne Rainer, “Letters,” *Artforum* (September 1973), 10.

criticism... though it is not so flagrantly moralistic as some I've read (and written).” Rainer recognized the status that writing and criticism gave her and was aware of its ability to position her as an artist of merit. She inserted herself in a well-known tussle between Michael Fried and his critique of Morris, with whom Rainer had been working (and living). Rainer understood herself in relation to both the critical worlds of Minimalist sculpture as well as the critical world of dance. Once again, she placed her work in the spaces “between.” Instead of between theatrical bloat and nonverbal theater, she highlighted the tension between narrative components and narrative construction.

Writing about Borden’s review, Rainer objects to the critic’s use of the word “narrative,” and states explicitly her intervention, “I am using narrative components and materials in sequences that are not always narratively connected.” Towards the end of the letter she directly addresses the critical apparatus that forecloses certain methods or formats: “Isn’t it high time to reexamine certain polarities that continue—perhaps needlessly—to raise high moral hackles?”<sup>246</sup> Rainer was keenly aware of the destructive impact of critics’ biases on artists’ projects and, along with Robert Morris and Dan Graham, worked through print and performance formats to shift critics’ frameworks and their status as authorities. Her activation of a choreographic apparatus shifted discursive agency from critic to artist as shapers of aesthetic criteria and assessment.

Morris’s sculptures and essays, Dan Graham’s published projects and performances, and Rainer’s essays and choreography were adaptive responses. They tested the thresholds of their disciplines, and experimented with different ways of engaging viewers and expanding their artistic milieu. Their writing not only directed attention away from assessments by Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, and Clive Barnes, but also reconfigured what “criticism” could mean for dance as an art form. No longer an assessment of dancers’ “technique” or “expression,” Rainer’s articles were an alignment of dance and visual arts theory as well as platforms to present modes of choreography and performance. Rainer and Morris provided readers with tools for engaging unfamiliar forms of art. The curator and art historian James Meyer, now the deputy director and chief curator of the Dia Art Foundation, notes how unusual it was to find this depth and rigor in writing by artists in publications like *Artforum* in the 1960s:

The extraordinarily in-depth formal analyses of “Notes on Sculpture” must have come as something of a surprise to the readers of *Artforum*. Not only did the essay bring an unprecedented rigor to Morris’ writing, it supplanted the short review or *Zeitgeist* piece of early minimal criticism, as well as Judd’s rather piecemeal essays, a literature of more definitive aspiration... “Notes on Sculpture” was clearly an attempt, on Morris’s part, to stake a place for himself – a position of authority or distinction within an increasingly competitive arena. Judd was the particular figure against whom he defined himself. Judd, the leading spokesman for the new art, had condescendingly described Morris’ work as “minimal.” It was high time to return the favor.<sup>247</sup>

Articles by artists became arenas of critical sparring, as Meyer explains in this description of tension between Judd and Morris, and the mobility and circulations of magazines

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 154.

allowed for widespread dissemination of such “victories.” One of the outcomes of “Notes on Sculpture” was that it enhanced Morris’s visibility in the art world: his works were exhibited, reviewed, and collected by prominent figures. Morris was amongst the first of many minimal art purchased by the Italian industrialist Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo.<sup>248</sup> Meyer continues:

Morris’ entrance into this formalist arena posed a far greater challenge to these critics than his earlier, playful gestures, which could easily be dismissed as dada provocations... ‘Notes on Sculpture’ suggested that the most advanced sculpture was Morris’s. It was a brilliant move: by the end of the year, one critic could confidently assert that ‘so-called Minimalistic sculpture, essentially a reduction of form to three-dimensional geometricized shapes, is largely an outgrowth of propositions advanced by Morris.’<sup>249</sup>

Morris’s interventions make evident that writing by artists not only served to promote their own work and that of their peers, but also to present substantive forms of analysis.

As print media and the art apparatus intersected, art magazines and galleries activated cycles of promotion and dissemination that enhanced an artist’s status in the art world. Dan Graham’s project *Homes for America* (1966) shed light on these reciprocal cycles of circulation and legitimation. Graham, who managed the John Daniels Gallery in New York between 1964 and 1965, said about his project:

I learned that if a work of art wasn’t written about and reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of ‘art.’ It seemed that in order to be defined as having value – that is, value as ‘art’ – a work had only to be exhibited in a gallery and then to be written about and reproduced as a photograph in an art magazine. Then this record of the no-longer-extant installation, along with more accretions of information after the fact, that became the basis for the art work’s fame, and to a large extent its economic value.<sup>250</sup>

Benjamin Buchloh describes Graham’s *Homes* as a work that “programmatically emphasized structural contingency and contextuality, addressing crucial questions of presentation and distribution, of audience and authorship.”<sup>251</sup> Although this is a description of Graham’s article and his arrangement of photographs and text for the December 1966 issue of *Arts* magazine, Buchloh’s analysis reveals another way of

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<sup>248</sup> Leanne Carroll, “The Artist as Critic: A Parodic Reading of Robert Morris’ Writing and Minimalist Sculpture,” *University of Toronto Art Journal* Vol. 1 (2008), 6. Carroll writes: “Morris’s sculptures were displayed in exhibitions, reviewed extensively, and reproduced in his own art critical essays. He won First Prize at the 1967 Guggenheim International Exhibition, and from 1969 to 1971 presented solo exhibitions at Washington’s Corcoran Gallery, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Whitney, and the Tate.”

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> Dan Graham, “My work for magazine pages: a history of conceptual art,” published in *Rock My Religion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). Originally published in 1985 in the exhibit catalogue for *Dan Graham*, curated by Gary Dufour, Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1985.

<sup>251</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* Vol. 55 (Winter, 1990), 123.

framing artist-published projects: all three artists, Rainer, Morris, and Graham, recognized the imbrications of circulation and value systems, and redirected criteria surrounding their work. Buchloh noted that Graham's *Homes for America* was a challenge to roles of artist and critic, a project that called attention to methods of presentation and dissemination, and a turn toward eliminating "the difference between the architectural space of the gallery and the space of the catalogue and the art magazine."<sup>252</sup> Rainer's writing posed similar challenges to Barnes's criteria as a dance expert, and the mobility of her writing (in contrast to her performances) allowed her treatises to have lasting impacts on both dancers and dance historians.

Artists' writing was not always laudatory of their peers' creations. When Robert Morris reviewed David Gordon's choreographic work called "Walks and Digressions" for the *Village Voice*, he criticized Gordon's lack of depth and rigor. Gordon describes the impact of Morris' writing as "devastating."<sup>253</sup> At that time, Gordon was not as adept in activating an apparatus that could shift his work's reception or mobilize scandal for personal benefit. Gordon recalls that the audience at the performance "booed, hissed, clapped, stamped their feet, and walked out across the performance space while I was working." He wrote in the March 1975 issue of *TDR*:

I wasn't clever enough to understand or use the possible notoriety attached to that performance (after all obviously no one was bored) in a positive career move... When the audience and my peers turned on me, I picked up my marbles and went home. I just decided to stop making work.<sup>254</sup>

When Gordon returned to choreography, it was Rainer who activated this shift: she took a trip to India and asked Gordon to work with a group of people she had been teaching "so they would stay together until she returned."<sup>255</sup> In 1971 Gordon created *Sleep Walking* and in 1972 *The Matter*, a work that has been compared to a sculptural installation and emphasized a complicity between performers and audience.

Gordon described his performers as "a landscape of gentle voices and barely moving bodies."<sup>256</sup> Gordon says he "meant not so much to preserve the ordinary as to intensify it, to reveal and alter eccentricities inherent in human beings... the impossibility of perfect uniformity when using live people was as important as the uniformity attempted."<sup>257</sup> The project demanded a particular complicity between performer and observer that recalls Rainer's analysis of Robert Morris's sculpture and Robbe Grillet's writing: "Man looks at the world, and the world does not look back at him."<sup>258</sup> Karen Smith, a performer in the piece at the Cunningham Studio, said that spectators and performers were "indistinguishable from each other except for an occasional nude body."<sup>259</sup> Gordon's performance activates modes of engagement similar to Morris's *L Beams*: in "Notes on Sculpture," Morris states "awareness of oneself existing in the same

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>253</sup> David Gordon, "It's About Time," *TDR* Vol. 19 No. 1 (March 1975), 48.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>256</sup> David Gordon, "It's about Time," *TDR* Vol. 19 No. 1 (March 1975), 45.

<sup>257</sup> Karen Smith, "The Matter," *TDR* Vol. 16 No. 3 (September 1972), 126.

<sup>258</sup> Rainer, "Don't Give the Game Away," *Arts Magazine* (April 1967).

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 117.

space as the work is stronger than in previous work.”<sup>260</sup> For Gordon and Smith, in *The Matter*, the narrowing of distinctions between actions of spectators and performers heightened this awareness of co-existing.<sup>261</sup>

Like Rainer’s *Trio A*, *The Matter* emphasized a human scale. Rainer remembered that her performances elicited the same frequent question: “why are they so dead-set on being themselves?”<sup>262</sup> In Rainer’s words: for too long in dance performance, “the god-like, the ecstatic, the heroic, and the regal” had all trumped “the mortal, the pedestrian, the quotidian, the athletic.”<sup>263</sup> Her assessment recalls her description of Morris’s sculptures squatting in space, no longer mythic or lofty figurines. Similar to the photos of suburbia taken by Graham and circulated in *Homes for America*, *The Matter* isolates minute actions, and, by performing these still interludes, the cast of 40 calls attention to the intricacies and poetry embedded in the everyday. This performance evokes another quote by Morris from “Notes on Sculpture:” “Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience.”<sup>264</sup> The close proximity of audience to performer in *The Matter* emphasized a gallery installation environment rather than a proscenium setting. Smith recalls: “spectators could peer through the limbs of performers close to them to examine a group of people in the opposite corner of the room. A position or movement changes with the angle from which it is seen.”<sup>265</sup> Her reflection mirrors an experience with Morris’s sculpture that highlighted the uniqueness of differing vantage points. There were no privileged or hierarchical places for spectators at *The Matter*, but rather a level playing field and choices made by spectators about where to place their gaze generated different versions of this polyvalent performance.

The influence of methods and ideas from sculptors and visual artists on choreographers and performances during the 1960s and 1970s is well known. What is often overlooked is how actively Rainer invested in written projects to explain and justify her choreography and performances. Viewing her movement between these roles of dancer, critic, essayist, and organizer as choreographic shows the design and logic behind her shifts in position. They also reveal the ongoing interdependencies of criticism, aesthetic criteria, artists’ projects, and frameworks for audiences.

### **Conclusion: Adjusting the apparatus**

The choreographic apparatus used by Rainer functioned as a defining and enabling system. The objects, performances, essays, and reviews created by John Cage, Dan Graham, Yvonne Rainer, and Robert Morris motivated audiences and readers to notice the positioning, perceptions, and expectations that surrounded their projects. Both their published and performed projects actively commented on restrictions of an art apparatus: when Judson dancers made a theater out of a church they called attention to

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<sup>260</sup> Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture” *Artforum* (February and October, 1966) reprinted in *Minimal Art*, 232.

<sup>261</sup> Photos of *The Matter*: [http://davidgordon.nyc/script/70%E2%80%99s-archiveography-script-part-1#THE MATTER](http://davidgordon.nyc/script/70%E2%80%99s-archiveography-script-part-1#THE%20MATTER)

<sup>262</sup> Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, 243.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” 228.

<sup>265</sup> Smith, “The Matter,” 127.

their exclusion from traditional venues. When Morris shifted the hierarchy of viewer and object by integrating the viewer's experience into his sculpture, he highlighted ways in which institutions and critics imposed expectations on artist's creations. Writers were equally aware of these shifting roles, as critic and theorist of postmodern art Craig Owens reflected in an interview, "we were writing not necessarily *about* these critical and oppositional practices, but *alongside* them."<sup>266</sup>

Rainer challenged the role of the critic as the key-holder who unlocks meaning in creative work by writing her own essays and reviews. Each of these artists assumed positions within a network of relations. They were savvy about the opportunities to shift, frame, organize, and record ideas and perspectives. Unlike the momentary performance, a published article (or published project) is cultural capital that regenerates itself: reproduced, disseminated, and revisited. In 2006 an interviewer said to Dan Graham: "the capital of the written word and of the publishing never ends. The prestige keeps on coming and coming... Any time there's a Sol LeWitt big show or lecture, there's Dan Graham's text about Sol LeWitt; any time there is a discussion of Conceptual Art there's *Homes for America*." Graham's response: "I have to say I got out of the field immediately. I didn't capitalize on it because I didn't want to be a Conceptual artist."<sup>267</sup> Graham adds: "I really believe in artists writing. I thought that was very, very important."<sup>268</sup> In these two sentences Graham acknowledges both the prominence of published assessments in shaping histories and also the necessity of artists as authors and critics.

A choreographic apparatus introduces a way of making visible the arrangement of writers, criteria, publications and venues that shape the ways audiences view artistic projects at particular historical moments. While a choreographic apparatus structures all art and dance movements in history, this was a period where artists were more self-reflexive about its structuring potential. In the downtown experiments of Judson, the choreographic apparatus was not only something that determined artists' movement, but also something that they sought to move. The choreographic apparatus was, for many during this period, a self-conscious medium of artistic practice. In the 1960s, when artists like Rainer, Robert Morris and Dan Graham engaged in writing practices that redistributed the frameworks surrounding their artwork, they were activating and reorganizing these ways of seeing. In an interview Rancière states: "The politics of works of art plays itself out to a larger extent – in a global and diffuse manner – in the reconfiguration of worlds of experience based on which police consensus or political dissensus are defined." Shifting the visibility of their projects, jostling a landscape that had become ossified by a particular hierarchy of relations, Rainer introduced a form of dissensus that gave voice to different histories and opportunities.<sup>269</sup> Herein lies the

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<sup>266</sup> Anders Stephanson and Craig Owens, "Interview with Craig Owens," *Social Text* No. 27 (1990), 63.

<sup>267</sup> Bennett Simpson, ed., *Dan Graham: Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 283.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> It's important to note how recent publications foreground artists' voices. One current example: Andre Lepecki introduces his Whitechapel Gallery *Dance* issue with, "it seemed important to move immediately to the voices of contemporary choreographers

political potential of the choreographic apparatus. It offers the possibility of rewriting histories and opens, in Rancière's words:

... an entire field of play where their modes of individuation and their means of linking sequences contribute to liberating political possibilities by undoing the formatting of reality produced by state-controlled media, by undoing the relations between the visible, the sayable and the thinkable.<sup>270</sup>

By shifting perspectives and places as she dismantled and rebuilt networks, Rainer redesigned a choreographic apparatus that shed light not only on her own projects, but also on the priorities, structures, and strictures that order our ways of seeing.

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and dancers. As they position what dance is for each of them, they also demonstrate how dance is not only a kinetics, not only an aesthetics, but also a sophisticated and precise theoretical machine" (22).

<sup>270</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Politicized Art" in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 65.



## Chapter 3:

### **Dance Criticism after Dance Studies: Curricular Design as a Critical Framework**

When the National Dance Educators Organization (NDEO) presented its national conference at the Hyatt Regency in Crystal City in October of 2016, the conference rooms became studios and the lobby was momentarily transformed into a sprawling stage.<sup>271</sup> For five days the hotel was a massive dance center with 10 meeting spaces for dance classes and panels, as well as a display space for posters about Dance Appreciation and Experiential Anatomy courses. Conference attire tended towards leggings and t-shirts instead of the more formal outfits seen at conferences hosted by the Society of Dance History Scholars or Congress on Research in Dance.<sup>272</sup> While this could be considered a superficial element, namely what people were wearing, it was in fact symptomatic of different aims within dance organizations and dance departments today: is the emphasis on practice-based classes or published scholarship? How does a curriculum balance courses taught in studios and those in lecture halls? In what ways are approaches to dance history and theory integrated with technique and composition courses? Since the 1920s, dance in academia has negotiated relationships between embodied and discursive research, and has been haunted by a Cartesian mind/body split, evident in its genealogies and categorization: is it physical education or mental education?<sup>273</sup> Do courses happen in a gym or academic classrooms? Does choreography count as “scholarly research”? Can a performance be recognized for academic advancement the same way a publication can? If dance departments recognize the MFA as a terminal degree how are faculty staying abreast of doctoral research and engaging in interdisciplinary conversations? What are the questions and keywords that percolate through different dance conferences and discussions of curricular design?

At NDEO in 2016 some of these keywords were “empathy,” namely in what ways can dance classes foster empathy, and “marginalized,” as in dance is often marginalized

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<sup>271</sup> NDEO is a member-driven organization that advocates for dance education, drafts national standards, hosts conferences, and publishes peer-reviewed journals. Members are educators, artists, administrators, students, and professionals. The majority of members are in higher education. Other sectors represented include private schools of dance, pre-K to 12 education, professional preparation programs, performing arts organizations and academies, professional dance companies, and community programs. For more information visit [ndeo.org](http://ndeo.org)

<sup>272</sup> These organizations were founded within 35 years of each other: COD in 1964 at NYU (originally called Committee on Research in Dance), SDHS in 1978, and NDEO in 1998.

<sup>273</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, “Trends in Performance,” New England Presenters’ Conference (May 2013): “I could tell you that in those European contexts there is still a persistent and pernicious Cartesian mind/body division that places ‘idea-driven’ work over ‘movement-based’ work. We don’t have the time to unpack this problem but I think this is the result of a longstanding tension in philosophy about mind and body.” Full lecture: <http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/trends-in-performance/>

in schools and university departments that offer degrees in a variety of artistic practices, such as music, theatre, and visual arts. Several panels offered nuts and bolts ideas about how to design and nurture a dance major while others were experiential presentations, such as how to elucidate Hawkins technique or how to introduce folk dancing to different populations. One particularly bracing panel connected to the topic of this dissertation and critiqued writing about jazz dance in mainstream publications, especially those articles that disclose the racism, classism, and ageism in today's dance journalism. Panelist Melanie George then examined how this writing impacts undergraduate education. Another presentation, by Gerald Casel, a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, examined the false "neutrality" of feedback systems like Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process. His abstract had been accepted into NDEO's conference, but was rejected from the SDHS/CORD conference that took place a month later. Zooming out from individual panels, discussions, and workshops to a broader view of NDEO's agenda, the working of a choreographic apparatus becomes visible, one that situates and integrates artistic fluencies, feedback systems, class syllabi, and dance criticism. It also becomes evident that NDEO grapples with issues that are dominant in classrooms and curricula, while other academic conferences (Dance Studies Association which merged SDHS and CORD) focus more on research methods and theoretical interventions.<sup>274</sup> By widening the lens on the disciplinary formations of dance departments, and looking specifically at how courses in history and theory became part of university settings, it is possible to excavate a longer genealogy that predates and informs the organization of dance departments today. Rather than dividing priorities in dance education between those that take up embodied practices and those that investigate literature on dance and research methods, this chapter proposes a way of reframing curricular design to notice how dance practices, theories, and criticism intersect with and inform one another, currently and historically.

The first "dance history" course offered to university students was taught by a dance critic and took place at The Bennington School of the Dance, located in Vermont. Often described as a unique center for creative work, pedagogy, and collaboration, The Bennington School of Dance was directed by Martha Hill and played a key role in separating dance from utilitarian purposes, as seen in the contemporaneous Federal Dance Project (1936-39). Bennington College was separate from the School of the Dance, although they shared the same "physical plant" and some of the same faculty, as well as a strong commitment to John Dewey's educational philosophies.<sup>275</sup>

Beginning in 1934, the dance critic for the New York Times, John Martin, taught dancers at Bennington how to write reviews and also gave lectures in "dance history and critical theory." Sali Ann Kriegsman describes his class as "very likely the first course of its kind in America."<sup>276</sup> Here we see a dance critic facilitating the accreditation of dance

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<sup>274</sup> The president of NDEO, Rick Southerland, describes the organization as "the leading dance entity that lobbies for dance arts education policy and is the bearer of the field standards in teaching and learning dance as an art form in education across this great country and the world."

<sup>275</sup> Sali Ann Kriegsman, *Modern Dance in America: the Bennington Years* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), xii.

<sup>276</sup> Kriegsman, *Modern Dance*, 12.

in educational settings, and during his Bennington summers, Martin defined what was then being made as “modern dance” and used his articles, lectures, and performances by artists like Martha Graham to buttress his theories. His formulations reflect his close associations with core faculty members: Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm, and composer Louis Horst. Martin described his teaching as “barely one step ahead of the class,” meaning the students and faculty who were creating the dance forms and approaches to performing that he historicized and theorized. In addition to teaching at Bennington during its summer programs from 1934 to 1937, Martin was also presenting lectures on modern dance at The New School in New York City.

This close association of artists’ work and a critic’s support brings a nuanced view to relations between criticism and dance, exposing the reciprocal flows amongst criticism, choreography, and institutional settings. Concurrent with Martin’s building bridges between academic and artistic worlds, Margaret H’Doubler was creating a new university degree in dance at the University of Wisconsin. In a document entitled “Curricular Plan for the First Specialized Major in Dancing,” dated 1926, H’Doubler includes classes in Art History, Music History, and the Theory of Dance, along with courses in Kinesiology, Dance Composition, and Supervised Teaching. There were no courses offered in dance history or criticism, and as Janice Ross explains in *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education*, such classes “would have occasioned the full-scale regard of dance as an art form.”<sup>277</sup> H’Doubler was not a dancer or a performer but an educator whose background was in biology and who believed dance was a way “to prepare students to live creative, productive lives in society, a society they could hope to change someday.”<sup>278</sup> Her distancing of dancing from performing strategically aligned dance with inquiry and research instead of display and repetition. The degree conferred to students of H’Doubler was a bachelor of science in “Physical Education.”

Placing Martin’s and H’Doubler’s interventions in relation to one another as well as in alignment with artists who were challenging definitions of dance, the maneuvering of a choreographic apparatus becomes visible: in contrast to a notion of “coincidence,” Martin and H’Doubler were keenly aware of the frameworks and protocols that worked reciprocally to give dance credibility and accreditation. In *A History of Dance in American Higher Education*, Thomas Hagood writes, “in a striking coincidence, just as dance was coming to recognition as a major study at the University of Wisconsin in April of 1926 modern dance appeared as an emergent art form on a concert stage in New York City.” It’s important to remember that what actually appeared on New York stages in 1926 were the first performances by Graham that carried remnants of her training at Denishawn. Articles by Martin that named and characterized “modern dance” did not appear until 1929, and were expanded in 1930. What Hagood observes astutely is that these parallel developments shared a symbiotic relationship: the more respect dance garnered through Martin’s columns and his insistence on “dance appreciation,” the more H’Doubler could forge new respect for dance as a path to knowledge and understanding in institutional settings. It is not happenstance that modern dance became “the most

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<sup>277</sup> Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and re Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 212.

<sup>278</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 213.

pervasive stylistic influence on dance in the American University,<sup>279</sup> but rather the result of these committed teachers, writers, and administrators who fought for the importance of dance in academia, and sought ways to bolster institutional support by writing and lecturing about its tenets.<sup>280</sup>

### **Dancing curricula**

A university curriculum could be considered a site of maintenance and reproduction. By extension, a dance curriculum in higher education is a site that reveals a faculty's valuing of aesthetic preferences, techniques, histories, theories, and—on a very basic level—what it means to dance. In his book *Curriculum: A history of the American undergraduate course of study*, Frederick Rudolph defines a curriculum as “the arena in which the dimensions of American culture have been measured, an environment for certifying an elite at one time and for facilitating the mobility of an emerging class at another. It has been one of those places where we told ourselves who we are.”<sup>281</sup> For H'Doubler, dancers were creative artists. In the decade between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s at the University of Wisconsin, H'Doubler established a refined approach to dance pedagogy.<sup>282</sup> Although her classes were housed in the physical education department (students needed a lot of space and showers),<sup>283</sup> the primary aim of her teaching was the development of a student's artistry and imagination, not physical strength or flexibility.

It is significant that H'Doubler introduced these methodologies into higher education just as John Martin was establishing the definitions and frameworks through

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<sup>279</sup> Thomas K. Hagood, *A History of Dance in American Higher Education* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 103.

<sup>280</sup> Scholar Clare Croft provides a similar analysis in *Dancers as Diplomats* (Oxford University Press, 2015): “While dance historians often tell the story of twentieth-century dance as one of individual genius—from George Balanchine to Martha Graham—what is less commented on is that these artists enjoyed tremendous institutional support, much of it from these newly created public sources. In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, the State Department supported almost every American dance company that now constitutes the twentieth-century dance canon” (15).

<sup>281</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (Hoboken: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), 1.

<sup>282</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 70. Gertrude Colby established a dance curriculum in 1913 at Speyer School of Teachers College, Columbia University, but this curriculum focused on teaching “Natural Dancing.”

<sup>283</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 174. “With few exceptions dance education has been incorporated in physical education throughout our schools. One leader in physical education has remarked that the only reason for this phenomenon, in the beginning, was that the physical education departments had showers and floor space needed for dance... For the most part however physical education departments have shied away from dance as from the plague; and the most adroit salesmanship has been needed to convince them of its worth and attainability for them...,” said Marian Van Tuyl. Studying dance was defined as “training in movement technique, rhythmic form, basic compositional experiences as well as fundamental understanding of and experience in folk and recreational materials.”

which to understand modern dance in the *New York Times*.<sup>284</sup> Like Martin, H'Doubler despised “spectacular” dance and the rote imitation of steps. She endorsed a definition of dance as “translation of movement from emotional experience into external form.”<sup>285</sup> In an oral history recorded in 1972, H'Doubler states that in the years preceding her curriculum for dance in higher education, “Everywhere I went most of what they were teaching was ballet.” Similar to Martin’s role in christening modern dance, H'Doubler introduced a way of teaching dance that distinguished it from ballet technique, sports, athletics, and acrobatics.

While an oppositional or hierarchical relationship amongst practitioners, critics, and theorists has shadowed this refiguration, I seek to situate dance curricula within their distinct contexts of institutions, professional networks, and interlocutors. Taking a cue from Shannon Jackson’s suggestion that “it seems important for performance studies scholars and affiliates to situate our subfields, our methods, our textualist impulses, our mystified materialisms, and our most cherished insights within a complicated institutional genealogy,”<sup>286</sup> I focus on the continuous and discontinuous relations amongst criticism, history, and theory, as well as the disciplinary blindspots and inertias<sup>287</sup> that have influenced and shaped ways of writing about dance. In Jackson’s analysis of theatre in higher education, she writes that the intellectual environments that nurtured scholars of drama and cultural studies bore a “vexed if interdependent” relationship to one another.<sup>288</sup> The goal of this chapter is to reveal how and why fields of dance studies, dance history, and dance criticism present similarly intertwined and at times contentious relationships.

A question that propels this chapter is: could it be possible to rethink functions and relations of dance critics and theorists by attending to longer genealogies as well as their different readerships? In other disciplinary contexts scholars have examined the conditions that influenced certain canons and methodologies, namely John Guillory (*Cultural Capital*) Gerald Graff (*Professing Literature*), and Shannon Jackson (*Professing Performance*). Writing specifically about dance, Thomas Hagood (*A History of Dance in American Higher Education*) and Jens Giersdorf (“Dance Studies in the International Academy: Genealogy of a Disciplinary Formation”) have analyzed relationships between dance curricula and higher education. Inspired by their questions and scholarship, I explore three historical moments in this chapter: first the obstacles and opportunities that influenced dance writing and dance departments prior to 1986, and then, the publication of Susan Foster’s *Reading Dancing*, a seminal work by one of the leading theorists of dance studies. The chapter concludes with an examination of dance criticism after the founding of dance studies departments in the United States. Once

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<sup>284</sup> 1926 is also the year that Rudolf Laban introduced “choreology,” meaning the scholarly study of dance, into his curriculum for the Choreographic Institute. See Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg, *Dance and the Performative, A Choreological Perspective* (London: Verve Publishing, 2002), 1.

<sup>285</sup> Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 45.

<sup>286</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 108.

<sup>287</sup> Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 105.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

again, I adapt the concept of a choreographic apparatus to describe these relations amongst critics, theorists, and academic institutions, as well as negotiations and maneuvering between departments of dance and physical education, dance history and dance studies, and dance theory and dance criticism. If the writing by John Martin and Yvonne Rainer examined in Chapters 1 and 2 offered ways of making visible the educational and methodological components of critics' and artists' reviews—each trying to give readers more traction and vocabulary for understanding what they were encountering and encouraging people to explore emerging forms with them—this chapter examines educational institutions themselves. A choreographic apparatus makes visible relations between dance and other disciplines, in particular physical education, music, art history, and theatre. It also situates dance in higher education alongside other institutional settings: dance presenters, critics, audiences, and funders.

### **Establishing academic parity**

H'Doubler, Martha Hill (New York University),<sup>289</sup> Mary P. O'Donnell (Teachers College), and Ruth Murray (Wayne University) promoted dance in education through their membership in the American Physical Education Association. They instigated the creation of a National Section on Dancing, the first national organization for dance educators in schools and colleges, between 1930 and 1932.<sup>290</sup> Hagood writes that, “the struggle for academic parity, and mutual respect between physical education and dance, began in earnest in 1930s, and in many ways continues to this day.”<sup>291</sup> The National Section on Dancing considered moving from the Physical Education Division of APEA to the Recreation Division, as tensions between dancing as physical virtuosity and as creative expression came to the fore. In 1940, H'Doubler published her book, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, clearly revealing where she stood in these debates and lifting the bar for dance pedagogy. H'Doubler sought to “intellectualize dance in a scientific manner,” and Hagood describes her approach as demanding “a consistent discipline of mind and conceptual creativity.”<sup>292</sup> Her teaching expanded an insular approach to movement, one that taught shapes and patterns in a self-referential way, to make connections between movement principles, scientific study, and relationships between

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<sup>289</sup> Martha Hill appears throughout these decades of establishing dance programs. “Beginning in 1930, when she became director of dance at New York University (a position she held for the next twenty-one years), Hill devoted her career to making a place for dance in higher education. From 1932 to 1951 she chaired the department of dance at Bennington College and with Mary Josephine Shelley founded the summer school and festival that brought hundreds of aspiring dancers to the campus during the 1930s. In 1948 she became the founding director of the American Dance Festival at the Connecticut College Summer School of Dance. Three years later she founded the Juilliard School's Dance Division, which she directed until 1985. Under her inspired leadership, it became a national training ground for dance luminaries such as Paul Taylor, Martha Clarke, Dudley Williams, and Pina Bausch.” *Dance Heritage Coalition*: <http://www.danceheritage.org/hill.html>

<sup>290</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 156.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

patterns and rhythms, which were then explored empirically by students. Hagood adds, “unfortunately most dance educators were not as intellectually disciplined or as scientifically curious as H’Doubler.”<sup>293</sup> Influenced by the teachings of John Dewey and William Heard Kirkpatrick, H’Doubler had studied with them at Columbia University in the 1916-17 academic year.<sup>294</sup> In particular, Dewey’s “admonitions about the evils of mind-and-body dichotomies in education”<sup>295</sup> left a strong imprint. H’Doubler was “notorious for never demonstrating for her students, for teaching in a manner absolutely antithetical to the follow-along dance methods.” Dance in higher education is indebted to her ability to recognize the ontological and epistemological importance of studying movement, intellectually and empirically. In other words, H’Doubler clearly saw the value of dance as a source of knowledge and meaning-making.

The differences between John Martin’s and H’Doubler’s approaches to dance are as significant as their common ground. Both focused on the “kinesthetic sense” of dance that made it distinct from other forms of communication and art-making. For H’Doubler, this kinesthetic sense integrated “inner and outer experience,” encouraging students to link mental and physical activity.<sup>296</sup> Janice Ross describes H’Doubler’s intervention for dance in higher education as one that knit together “educational theory and classroom practice.”<sup>297</sup> H’Doubler and Martin contributed to environments that fused aesthetic, intellectual, and kinetic learning and that established the importance of dance in higher education. What distinguished their teaching was their attitude towards dance as process or as product. For H’Doubler dancing was an empirical practice rooted in scientific inquiry that disclosed forms of knowledge. For Martin, dance was a performing art that continually evolved and demanded its own criteria and modes of analysis. H’Doubler intentionally distanced dance from associations with a theatre form to avoid the sublimation of dance into steps or choreography to be performed. H’Doubler aligned dance with scientific analysis, emphasizing how dancers experiment, learn, and formulate ideas through embodied studies. This was a strategy of legitimation, aligning dance with scientific, “hard” discovery, rather than the “frivolity of art.”

Martin’s emphasis on performances and criticism differed from H’Doubler’s focus on dance and pedagogy. Martin used his writing to generate a conducive environment for artists who were creating “modern dance,” and used his lectures to advocate for a place for dance in university settings. Martin’s criticism and lectures brought choreographers like Graham distinction as “recognized artists” of American modern dance.<sup>298</sup> In his own article about Bennington in the *New York Times*, Martin compared the summer dance center to the German dance congresses that brought together

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<sup>293</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 147.

<sup>294</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 124.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>298</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 110. “By 1930, the recognized artists of American modern dance were all based in New York and Martin was reviewing their work.” I earlier argued on a slightly different track, noting that the bracketing of criticism as “reviews” or simple “records” of artistic events is a widespread practice.

leading practitioners, teachers, and choreographers.<sup>299</sup> Martin added, “it does not direct its efforts toward merely teaching certain individuals something they did not know before, but rather toward building a sounder more vital art.” Recognizing the importance of institutional settings for building audiences and validation for modern dance, Martin encouraged dancers to “hone their extemporaneous speaking skills while defending their points of view,” and artists’ lecture demonstrations were part of both Bennington summers and Martin’s classes at the New School in the 1930s. Martin was invested in supporting dance students and linking academic and professional environments: in 1936, when he taught his class on criticism at Bennington, the *Dance Observer* printed reviews by Martin’s students.<sup>300</sup>

Martin’s publications of *The Modern Dance* (1933) and *Introduction to the Dance* (1939) contributed to the validation of modern dance as a subject of study in higher education. These books became resources for teaching courses in “dance history,” and Martin’s criteria for defining dance continue to inform the organization of history classes today.<sup>301</sup> Physical education teachers found the “modern” movement easy to imitate and “replicating it lent a certain artistic credibility to the visions and intentions of physical educators who were interested in an arts-based dance experience for their students.”<sup>302</sup> In 1935 Lincoln Kirstein published *A Short History of Theatrical Dancing*, creating a genealogy from primitive rituals to current choreographers that reinforced the importance of dance in the United States as a respected art form and cultural expression. Yet it is also important to keep in mind that that change was slow: Anna Halprin recalls, “In 1938, when I graduated from high school, only two schools in the United States offered a dance major”<sup>303</sup> (Mills College established their dance program that year, in 1938). Halprin’s first choice was Bennington, but she was not accepted and became a student of H’Doubler’s.

Between 1926 and 1966, the number of universities that offered courses in dance expanded and the curricular goals established by H’Doubler were transformed. Within this span of 40 years, dance in higher education transitioned from introducing a new major inside physical education departments, to introducing a conservatory model that valorized dance as a domain of technique, performance, and recitals. H’Doubler anticipated and regretted this shift, writing in 1925:

It is impossible to go far with any activity, around which so many preconceived ideas and expectations have gathered as the dance, without having to face the demands and expectations of the people outside. These take their most harassing form in the expectation of some public performance or recital in which the students may display their skill and grace to an admiring circle of friends and relatives.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Kriegsman, *Modern Dance*, 12.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>301</sup> In my “Introduction” and later in this chapter, I explain connections between Martin’s categories of dance and commonly used Dance History textbooks like *No Fixed Points*

<sup>302</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 104.

<sup>303</sup> Anna Halprin, “A Reminiscence,” *Moving Lessons*, xv.

<sup>304</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 211. Quoting Margaret H’Doubler, *Dance and its Place in Education* (1925).



H'Doubler points to the tension between dance as a performance activity and dance as research: the former was influenced by practicing artists who taught repertory and modeled departments as mini-companies with annual performances, and the latter, following H'Doubler's steps, dedicated to the epistemological and process-driven values of dancing itself.

By the 1950s dance in higher education was intimately linked to a genre called modern dance: it had been circulated through performances and writing by critics like Martin and did not demand the physical exceptionalism<sup>305</sup> or spectacular feats of ballet. It had become a codified movement language, available in techniques named for certain designers (Graham, Humphrey, Holm) and focused on the expression of phrases more than physical postures. The teaching of these techniques emphasized replication and mastery more than exploration or embodied research. Throughout these decades, growing resistance to dance classes in academia came from both skeptical physical education teachers concerned with dance's qualitative rather than quantitative elements and dance artists themselves who rejected the "intellectualism" of academic study. In 1970 Agnes De Mille reported to the United States Congress that dance in universities was "largely fraudulent," adding "the best way to have anyone learn about an art is to expose them to good examples."<sup>306</sup> In other words, dancers who wanted professional careers were encouraged to bypass higher education, to audition for major companies, and to absorb the teachings of artists outside of university settings because college classes were inadequate for such a career. Evident in De Mille's statement is the idea that dance departments are attempting to produce professional performers. In contrast, H'Doubler's curriculum emphasized creative pedagogy, research, and improvisation.

This disconnect can be traced to a shift in curricular priorities from courses designed for physical education departments (exploring movement experiences) to courses created to align with music and fine arts programs. Curricula in these affiliated departments sought to produce artists and emphasized canonical histories and end-of-the-year reviews in the form of concerts or exhibitions. Following this emphasis, teachers were brought in from professional dance companies to instruct undergraduates in codified techniques. In a 1966 issue of *Dance* magazine, Olga Maynard quotes a professional dancer who says, "Colleges hire professional dancers to teach and perform but what is known as 'college dance' is a dilettante cult, not dance training... College dance is a form of arts appreciation. This is not professional training."<sup>307</sup> *Dance* magazine covered both sides of this argument in 1966 through a series of articles entitled "College Controversy," that revealed discrepancies between dancers' goals inside and outside of academia, and featured the curriculum of Eugene Loring at the University of California Irvine.

Throughout this series, dancers' comments suggest "an aggressive anti-intellectualism,"<sup>308</sup> traceable to a Cartesian divide that separated body and mind or

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<sup>305</sup> Ballet demands attributes like external rotation of the hips, flexibility in the feet, spine and legs, as well as specific bodily proportions and stamina in order to produce "effortless" movement.

<sup>306</sup> "Agnes De Mille Speaks to Congress on the State of the Arts," *Dance Magazine* (May 1970), 82.

<sup>307</sup> Olga Maynard, "College Controversy," *Dance Magazine* (September 1966), 62.

<sup>308</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 198.

physical and intellectual studies. Loring explains, “The purpose of every dance class is first to stretch, second to strengthen, third to define line and form, and fourth to coordinate.”<sup>309</sup> The priority is placed on developing “a totally professional approach to education,” and the Dean of Fine Arts at UCI, Dr. Clayton Garrison, was considered “revolutionary” for separating “the arts from the humanities.”<sup>310</sup> A student pursuing acting at UCI is quoted in *Dance* magazine saying, “I am required to take the dance courses and a music course which will serve me as an actor, but not science courses which are useless to me, yet would consume time and energy.”<sup>311</sup> This conservatory model, designed to produce performers, equates dancing with an athletic and technical activity: dancers are assessed by how well they “stretch,” “strengthen,” “define line,” and “coordinate.”

Lacking the archives and discourse that supported art-forms like painting, music, and theatre, dance in the academy occupied a liminal place between studios and lecture halls. Since dance as a discipline was a relatively new concept, many universities hired dance faculty who rarely had any university degrees much less doctorates. Loring, for instance, never attended college. Questions about whether art can be taught and if creativity is “teachable” have been at the center of curricular design for many disciplines. As Howard Singerman writes in *Art Subjects*, “On campus, art cannot be a calling or vocation. To be included among the disciplines, art must give up its definition as craft or technique... At the same time, it cannot be purely inspirational or simply expressive... art in the university must constitute itself as a department and a discipline, separate from public ‘lay’ practices and equal to other studies on campus.”<sup>312</sup> Dance departments often used faculty affiliations with acclaimed professional companies to bolster its presence in academic environments. For example, the University of California, Berkeley hired David Wood, who had served as a dancer and rehearsal director for the Martha Graham Dance Company, to establish its dance program in 1968. Concurrent with this curriculum, Wood created a touring company of students called Bay Area Repertory Dance. Unlike the curriculum designed by H’Doubler that emphasized movement exploration, departments now emphasized performances, tours, and mastery of codified techniques. University dance departments not only provided employment and salaries for professional dancers, they also functioned as “structuring sites,” a phrase Singerman uses to explain how higher education influences the ways artists and arts world are “mapped and reproduced.”<sup>313</sup>

During the 1960s dance departments became archives and reproduction-sites for existing techniques, practiced by students who sought to “study” dance as performers rather than create or analyze methods of dancing. In a 1966 article on dance curricula, Olga Maynard quoted a professional dancer who said, “College is usually a waste of time

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<sup>309</sup> Maynard, “College Controversy,” *Dance Magazine* (September 1966), 64.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Maynard, *Dance Magazine* (September 1966), 65.

<sup>312</sup> Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>313</sup> Singerman writes, “Certainly the university has worked to shape a certain vision of art as a discipline; it has not caused but it has helped to model and select and enable.” (210).

and energy for potential dancers.”<sup>314</sup> The connections between the study of dance and the practices of a critic, historian, or pedagogue that John Martin promoted in the 1930s seem to have disappeared during the decades that followed Martin’s teaching at Bennington and The New School.

This history shows that there is a real difference between the presence of a dance program in a physical education department and dance departments that follow a conservatory approach. While the motivation to move dance away from physical education stemmed from a desire to emphasize alignments between dance and other art forms, the positioning of dance next to these disciplines reduced the embodied research and creative pedagogy that had been so conducive to its study as physical education. At the NDEO conference in 2016, many of the panels on dance in university settings emphasized the marginalized status and siloing of dance from other art forms and departments. In positioning itself alongside music, theatre, and visual arts, dance has often struggled to find the financial and administrative support that other disciplines attract. For some departments, performances have been a way to align dance with other art forms such as music with its students’ concerts, or the fine arts and end-of-the-year exhibitions. For dance departments in the 1960s and 1970s, studio courses that emphasized technique, composition, and performance were more prominent than dance theory seminars or discursive analysis: choreographer and author Susan Rethorst, who graduated from Bennington College in 1974, recalls that theory classes were “non-existent,” and her “brilliant” teacher Judith Dunn entitled an article, “We Don’t Talk About It, We Engage In It” for the January, 1974 issue of *Eddy*.<sup>315</sup> Janice Ross writes about these tensions between embodied and discursive research: “Dance has never been fully at home in the humanities in higher education, however, because until recently it lacked the historical and theoretical scholarship that other art forms have long possessed.”<sup>316</sup>

Without the formal analysis and theoretical scholarship that existed in other art forms, dance curricula tended to emphasize performance-based courses and to include two historical offerings: “canonical dance” and “cultural dance.” This is visible in the 1977 draft by the Council of Dance Administrators (CODA) called the “Standards for Dance Major Curricula.”<sup>317</sup> CODA recommended that undergraduate curriculum now include five elements: 1. Courses; 2. Four years of ballet or modern dance technique; 3. A minimum of 2 years of choreography; 4. Performance experience; and 5. A 4-year program. In a section listing required courses, CODA recommended: “Technique, Choreography, Dance Notation, History of Dance, Philosophy of Dance, Music for Dance, Anatomy/Kinesiology, Dance of other Cultures, and Dance Theater Production/Design.” Here we see “History of Dance” presenting a predominantly white, Euro-American lineage of canonical artists (usually ballet and modern dance, as seen in books by Martin and Kirstein), and “Dance of other Cultures” focusing on artists of color and non-canonical forms. The composition of recommended courses reveals that emphasis was placed on educating students to perform more than research or write about

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<sup>314</sup> Maynard, *Dance Magazine*, 62.

<sup>315</sup> Susan Rethorst, *A Choreographic Mind* (Helsinki: University of the Arts, 2015), 64.

<sup>316</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 206.

<sup>317</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 341.

dance practices. Studio teachers “are or have been practicing artists,” while faculty, “especially core faculty,” pursue creative and/or scholarly work, with the note, “Creative activity must be accepted as equivalent to scholarly writing and experimental research.”<sup>318</sup>

This disjuncture between dance artists and academics, between research that is embodied and research that is “scholarly writing,” has generated long-standing divisions. With the acceptance of “creative activity” as equivalent to published research, dance faculty have become less engaged in the theoretical discourse and literature reviews that percolate through other disciplines, departments, and publications. For example, at George Mason, George Washington and Old Dominion Universities, three institutions where I have taught over the last decade, Dance History courses teach a chronological listing of predominately white artists that begins either with the court of King Louis XIV or “American Dance Pioneers,” Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis.<sup>319</sup> Alongside practice-based classes, dance history courses have come to serve a three-fold function: to reinforce the tenets of modern dance, to provide the legitimating vehicle of a canon, and to emphasize formalist evaluations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, books written by John Martin (such as *Introduction to the Dance*) and Lincoln Kirstein (*Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*) served as the courses’ textbooks. Susan Manning describes these authors as “standard sources for the postwar history of American dance,”<sup>320</sup> and their approaches served to validate the study of dance in university settings. As Linda Tomko writes in *Dancing Class*:

Given such problems of evidence as a condition of the field, it is perhaps not surprising that many scholarly accounts of dancing have focused intently on sustaining a record of evanescent dance practices, concentrating on the ‘internal history’ of the art. Closely related to this focus has been the conceptualization of dance as an autonomous field, one which holds its questions and answers within itself and for which a surround of ‘context’ supplies a complementary, not fundamental, way of comprehending dance artists and activity. This point of view is imminently visible in canonical works of twentieth century modern dance and ballet history alike. It partakes of a ‘modernist’ view of art making articulated in the early decades of this century, and it has had the effect of positioning theatrical dance as ‘high art’ and as a subject for rarefied tastes. It has also had the effect of marginalizing theatrical dance as a subject of academic inquiry, distancing dance from theorizations about how societies operate and change over time.<sup>321</sup>

In hindsight, this self-marginalizing was both a tactic to secure the autonomy of dance and, arguably, a detriment to the discipline, in that it bracketed its study from relationships with other fields and methodologies. The “problems of evidence” also limited the development of dance history and theory. Although there have been attempts

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<sup>318</sup> Hagood, *A History of Dance*, 342.

<sup>319</sup> For example, the syllabus from Spring 2016 for Dance History at Old Dominion University begins with “Court Dance/Early Ballet,” and then moves through the chapters of *No Fixed Points* with each chapter occupying one week of the semester.

<sup>320</sup> Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 265.

<sup>321</sup> Linda Tomko, *Dancing Class* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xiii-xiv.

to analyze and notate dance, Laban Movement Analysis and Labanotation being the most prevalent, they sublimate the definition of dance to the execution of steps or to the clarity of its shapes and directions. These systems attempt to make “universal” movements and patterns that are culturally specific and gendered. In other words, equating dance with a system of notation often erases identities of dancers themselves, and assumes that dance practices can be reduced to a series of steps, phrases, and descriptors that are commonly available to study and re-enact.

Shannon Jackson writes in *Professing Performance*, that such formalist approaches and “new criticism” served as legitimating vehicles: “the text-focused, genius-tracking methods of new criticism made for easy syllabification and efficient lecturing,” especially amongst heterogeneous populations of students. Applying this lens to dance curricula makes visible how formalist<sup>322</sup> approaches have been a path toward validating dance as an art form. These approaches also worked for dance faculty who wanted to present a chronological history of “genius” artists to students in university settings who really wanted to “dance, not think about dance,” as the 1966 “College Controversy” article made clear.

A parallel could be drawn between dance history with its categories of artists, and literary studies’ use of categories, as established by Northrop Frye. Shannon Jackson writes:

[Frye] developed an elaborate system of categories in which to place each instance of literary production. Frye’s taxonomies thus were a mid-century equivalent of the genus/species laboratories of literary philology. It differed however in that it expelled any history other than literary history: Literary works were made out of other literary works, not out of any material external to the literary system itself... Frye’s genre criticism thus had the satisfying character of scientific and historical paradigms, while, at the same time, severely limiting the content and character of history it brought to bear.

In John Martin’s *The Dance* (1946), there is a similar aggregating of topics and authors. The book is divided into five parts according to types of dance—Basic Dance, Dance for the Sake of the Dancer, Dance as Spectacle, Dance as a Means of Communication, and Dance in the Technological Era, then each of these types is composed of artists, dance forms, or groups of artists. For example, “Dance as Means of Communication” is composed of the modern dance canon: Isadora Duncan, Denishawn, Mary Wigman, Hanya Holm, “Second Generation,” Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Martha

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<sup>322</sup> In his statement against dance criticism by Joan Acocella, choreographer Tere O’Connor called this formalist criticism “literalist,” adding critics “do not know how to read dances created outside the restricted confines of the narrative or musical frameworks from past centuries.” It’s apt that his word choice echoes Fried’s term in his essays about Robert Morris and Donald Judd, while O’Connor revives decades-old tensions between critics and artists. O’Connor advocates a different kind of criticism, namely writing that does not replace, translate or sublimate dancing and its specific modes of engagement and communication. O’Connor’s artist statement begins, “My dance is not a translation of a secretive meaning, it is a way of engaging in time...”

Graham, Helen Tamiris, “Third Generation,” and “Negro Dance.”<sup>323</sup> The “scientific” pedagogy that H’Doubler endorsed in her movement classes has a parallel here in the “scientific and historical paradigms,” to borrow Jackson’s phrase, of Martin’s classifications, and they found traction in academic environments that gravitated towards their “satisfying” coherence.

Many textbooks used today in history courses, such as Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick’s *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century*, replicate these categories and genus/species genealogies, in part because dance history courses have been used as paths to endorse “master” artists and validate the art of dance in university settings. By emphasizing a canon of artists or people who “turned a page of history,” as Reynolds and McCormick write in their “Introduction,” these texts fortify the respectability of dance through the study of a canon.<sup>324</sup> Reynolds and McCormick’s *No Fixed Points*, published in 2003, reiterates Martin’s listing of categories and groupings of artists, ending with a chapter called “Dance in the Movies,”<sup>325</sup> that once again separates “high art” from “popular entrainment.” In 2011, Roger Copeland published “The Death of a Choreographer,” which includes his list of “Great Western Individual Choreographers” (all white), as well as a thinly veiled lament that the field of dance studies has opened our definitions of dance to more artists of color and practices previously excluded from the canon. He describes this predicament as an either/or situation with a “growing emphasis on traditional and popular culture [that] evolves into a zero-sum game that is played at the *expense* of individual Western choreographic ‘authors.’”<sup>326</sup> Copeland’s stance reveals how a canon gains capital through its reproduction, and university courses that teach a canonical history often adhere to his belief that it’s more important to know the “great” (white) choreographers than understand how dance has been historicized, or why the canon excludes so many artists of color and embodied practices.

U.C. Riverside is home to one of the few dance departments that no longer teaches a canonical dance history: Anthea Kraut, chair of the department, says the curriculum changed when she arrived in 2003: “We made the revisions in the fall of 2003, and I believe they took effect in the 2004-05 academic year.”<sup>327</sup> Kraut writes in *Choreographing Copyright* that her attempts to “expose the constructedness of choreographic authorship” poses threats to writers like Copeland because such exposure destabilizes a canonical history with its unidirectional progression and promotion of individual genius.<sup>328</sup> Kraut cites Susan Foster’s *Reading Dancing* as one of the

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<sup>323</sup> John Martin, “Table of Contents,” *The Story of the Dance* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1946).

<sup>324</sup> In university settings, dance often lags behind the disciplines of music, art, and theatre in terms of resources, bibliographies, and budget lines.

<sup>325</sup> Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>326</sup> Roger Copeland, “The Death of the Choreographer” in Alexandra Kolb, ed., *Dance and Politics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 55. Emphasis in original

<sup>327</sup> Personal conversation with Kraut at Stanford University, March 2016.

<sup>328</sup> Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 227-228.

“foundational texts in the field,” and notes its importance in shifting from a focus on choreographic intent to “‘the codes and conventions’ of a choreographic work.”<sup>329</sup>

In her 2006 Introduction to *Ecstasy and the Demon*, Susan Manning defines a “new dance studies” as: “a movement within the Anglo-American academy that began in the mid-1980s with the aim of bringing dance scholarship into conversation with theoretical trends across the humanities and social sciences.” By incorporating poststructuralist and feminist theories, dance scholars aligned their research with changes that were happening in other fields. In his article on disciplinary formations of dance studies, Jens Giersdorf writes that the Riverside doctoral program moved the department “away from the mission of training dancers, choreographers and dance pedagogues, thus establishing itself as a purely academic endeavor focusing on ‘research and writing about dance.’”<sup>330</sup> This shift is a turning point in the disciplinary formations of dance in the academy.

### **From a discipline to interdisciplinary studies**

If the work of writers, teachers, and administrators during the first half of the twentieth century positioned dance in the academy as a discipline, the work of academics since 1986 has tended to position dance scholarship as affiliated with literary, poststructuralist, and feminist theory. In other words, by expanding rather than isolating its studies, dance was shown to be relevant to other academic disciplines and an integral part of higher education. This interdisciplinary shift happened in the wake of artists and critics such as Yvonne Rainer and Jill Johnston who, as noted earlier, during the 1960s and 1970s blurred boundaries between disciplines of dance, art, and theatre, and moved dance writing away from new critical close reading. It is useful to remember that artists like Rainer also blurred boundaries between academic and commercial publications as her essays and interviews appeared in an academic journal, the *Tulane Drama Review*, as well as *Arts* magazine and *Artforum*. Placing the objects and approaches of critics, artists, and academics in relation to one another reveals how the intertwined practices of criticism, creative processes, and curricula inform and shape the field. As universities are institutional sites that generate artistic fluencies and approaches to art-making, they are part of a choreographic apparatus that frames the work of artists and influences the writing of critics. Between the mid-1980s through the 1990s, dance scholars actively shifted this apparatus to focus on connections between dance studies, poststructuralism, and feminist theory. In doing so they mitigated dependencies on new critical approaches or “canon criticism.”<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*, 226-227.

<sup>330</sup> Jens Giersdorf, “Dance Studies in the International Academy,” *Dance Research Journal* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Summer 2009), 36. Quote comes from an internal document to establish the Ph.D. at Riverside, written in 1991. “Proposal for a Ph.D. in Dance History and Theory at UCR.”

<sup>331</sup> “Canon criticism,” defined by Ann Daly, is “an approach that centers around the ideology and practice of connoisseurship.” A canonical critic uses writing to reproduce a set of standards regarded as “universal and eternal, and hence, objective.” In other words, a canon critic seeks to evaluate artistic works according to achievement of classical standards, to perpetuation of high art values, and to protection of the canon itself. Daly,

In the chapter “Culture and performance” of *Professing Performance*, Jackson describes how a division between a “new” performance studies and “old” dramatic arts had the effect of “retroactively construing the scholarly project of ‘drama’ as traditional and as metonymically aligned with all that cultural studies is not.” As dance studies consolidated as a field, one might wonder if a similar tendency prevailed. Was there a danger of homogenizing a wide variety of dance writing practices associated with dance history and criticism as “traditional,” old, and outdated? In other words, did dance studies define itself oppositionally, as unlike modes of discourse associated with dance historians and critics? Employing a concept of a choreographic apparatus makes it possible to see how these shifts in writing styles, subject matter, and methodologies were activated as responses to one another, attempts to distance and to distinguish, as well as to differentiate priorities amongst writers and readerships.

One resonant site of disciplinary differentiation can be found in Manning’s “Introduction” to her 1993 Introduction to *Ecstasy and the Demon*, a key work of scholarship within the formation of dance studies methodology: “I introduce methods not usually found in dance studies. These methods can be grouped under the rubric ‘ideological critique,’ a general term for approaches that understand art as social production rather than as a set of transcendent values.”<sup>332</sup> When Manning describes methods “not usually found in dance studies,” she is referring to the need to expose criteria and ideology that support and inform aesthetic judgment and criticism. That reference aligns with Susan Foster’s premise in *Reading Dance* where she notes a similar absence: a critic’s inability to propose any “hypothesis” concerning an event’s “significance.” Both dance studies scholars use a similar practice of disciplinary differentiation, isolating and defining past practices in order to argue for new methodological moves in “dance studies” and its disciplinary formation.

Poststructuralist and feminist theory gave dance scholars frameworks that exposed the subjectivity of canonical approaches that endorsed the “universal, eternal, and objective.” Stephanie Jordan notes that this change in methodologies occurred in both music and dance studies; “dance scholarship as a whole (most of it focusing on twentieth- and twenty-first-century dance within Western culture), experienced theoretical and methodological shifts similar to those in music. It shifted rapidly toward interrogation of the interrelations between dance and culture, readily absorbing, like musicology, the influences of semiotics, postmodernism, post structuralism, and feminism (Thomas 1996, 65–67).”<sup>333</sup> Susan Foster’s *Reading Dancing* (1986) is a site that marks a professional shift, noteworthy for this analysis in the way it propelled, and is

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*Critical Gestures* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), xxxiii. John Guillory writes in *Cultural Capital*, “an individual’s judgment that a work is great does nothing in itself to preserve that work, unless that judgment is made in a certain institutional context, a setting in which it is possible to ensure the reproduction of the work, its continual reintroduction to generations of readers.” In this case, the “greatness” of artists in the dance canon was maintained through dance criticism, history books, dance curricula, and writers like Copeland.

<sup>332</sup> Manning, *Ecstasy and Demon*, 10.

<sup>333</sup> Stephanie Jordan, “Choreomusical Conversations: Facing a Double Challenge,” *Dance Research Journal* (July 2011): 43-64.



propelled by, a choreographic apparatus. Foster's work demarcates a different frame through which to engage performances by bringing theoretical discourse into dance studies, and informs methods for teaching choreographic events and analyzing performances. In this less-history-more-theory approach, Foster draws from her studies with Hayden White at the University of California, Santa Cruz and distances her work from history courses that teach a chronology of landmark performances. White's attention to how histories construct meanings and ideologies, in particular how "historical narrative systems" produce meaning, is important to understanding Foster's intervention. Her decision to move away from a listing of "great" artists in order to call attention to how choreography communicates meaning, widening the lens from individual steps or performances, to concert dance as systems of communication, marked a definitive shift.

First I will consider the reception of *Reading Dancing* and Foster's methodology, especially the discourse used to situate it, critique it, or argue for its significance. Deborah Jowitt's assessed the book as "an important catalyst in encouraging scholars to relate dancing to other narratives,"<sup>334</sup> meanwhile, Marcia Siegel's accused Foster of playing "tiddly-winks with sources, derivations and observable data."<sup>335</sup> Reviews of the book appeared in *TDR* in 1988 and included two analyses of Foster's writing, one by "a dance critic" (Siegel) and the other by performance theorist Philip Auslander. These two very different reviews reveal gaps in methodologies used by a critic and a theorist: Auslander places the book in a broader landscape of discourse on postmodernism, most notably theories of Frederic Jameson and Hal Foster. Siegel compares Foster's writing to her own. In an introduction by *TDR*'s editor to these reviews, the editor stated that Foster's work was significant due to its presence in a field "where aversion to theory is widespread and longstanding." Indeed, Foster's framework incorporates theories of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Hayden White to provide a system for analyzing how dance generates meaning. In so doing, her methods deviated from both new criticism and traditional dance history; she did not focus on isolated readings of individual artists nor did she propose a chronology of canonical dance artists. The introduction to *Reading Dancing* described four ways to interpret choreography: as resemblance, replication, reflection, and imitation.<sup>336</sup>

These systems of analysis moved dance studies away from describing "genius" artists to noting how dance operates in constructing meanings and knowledges. By incorporating theories of Barthes, Foucault, and White, Foster positioned dance as a theoretical and intellectual site of inquiry, adopting the frameworks of ideological critique that were being developed in the eighties at programs in critical and cultural theory, including the History of Consciousness at UCSC where Foster had earned her Ph.D. As such, this tactic of legitimation was as powerful and effective as the creation of a dance canon 50 years earlier. Aligning dance studies with poststructuralism granted dance a distinct respectability and traction within contemporaneous academic discourse

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<sup>334</sup> Deborah Jowitt, "The Critical Burden of History," *Dance Research Journal* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2000), 133.

<sup>335</sup> Marcia Siegel, "The Truth about Apples and Oranges," *TDR* Vol. 32 No. 4 (Winter 1988), 29.

<sup>336</sup> Susan Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 65.

of the period, and for dance studies these theories complicated approaches to dance history that were driven by ethnocentric criteria, canonical narratives, or linear chronologies.

Foster's intervention did not take hold unilaterally in dance departments. In fact Foster encountered some of the same resistance and criticism that H'Doubler fought against 60 years earlier, when she moved dance pedagogy away from replicating feats and insisted on the importance of a scientific and theoretical approach. Foster stated her intervention explicitly in Chapter 1 when she wrote that her "purpose" in *Reading Dancing* was "not to deliver precise historical accounts of specific pieces but to articulate a theory of representation that can encompass a variety of approaches to dance composition."<sup>337</sup> Nevertheless, alongside its ground-breaking contributions, *Reading Dancing* also perpetuated the habits of critics and canonical histories that preceded its publication. For example, *Reading Dancing* highlights four white artists—Deborah Hay, George Balanchine, Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham—which promotes a false sense of diversity when Foster describes this group as "eclectic" or coming from "different traditions." Aesthetically, these four artists pursued different ways of choreographing, but all four operated within funding, creation, and presenting structures that validated notions of dance as an art form created by white artists and substantiated by white critics.

This separation of choreography from an artist's identity, or from social, economic, and political conditions of production, places Foster's work in alignment with writing by critics and historians who sought to nurture a sense of "the artist as a singular visionary."<sup>338</sup> In *Choreographing Copyright*, Anthea Kraut argues that these framings appear as shifts in production, distribution, and consumption challenge distinctions between artistic and commercial sectors, and serve to reassert differences between "high art" and popular entertainment. For Foster, focusing on concert dance aligned her work with respected artists of canonical histories, thereby reinforcing a place for dance theory in the academy, while introducing methodologies from literary theory to study choreography. To distinguish a spot for this new dance theorist, Foster wrote in *Reading Dancing* that "dancers often cultivate a sanctimonious mutism" and that "20<sup>th</sup> century choreographers have, in general, preferred not to talk about their dances."<sup>339</sup> Such pronouncements mask the many articles, manifestos, and interviews written and conducted by artists. At the same time, these kinds of statements elevate the status of the academic as she steps into a field that it's in need of words and theories.

Herein lies the important work of Foster's book: by aligning dance with literary theory, she brought dance writing into discourses that it had not been acquainted with, and these discourses brought to dance an interdisciplinary system for understanding how embodied practices generate value and meaning. Dance studies made its own strategic use of interdisciplinary analysis as a path to validation. Foster's incorporation of poststructuralism carved a place for dance in higher education, exposed the frameworks that had surrounded dance evaluation, and distinguished her writing from that of a critic by attending to differences in theories of representation. Like H'Doubler who aligned

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<sup>337</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, 3.

<sup>338</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*, 65.

<sup>339</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, xvi.

dance with scientific inquiry in her own time, Foster supported her theories about dance by drawing on the legitimating frameworks of her time. If, as dance scholar Sima Belmar writes, “Foster focused on choreography as a practice of writing that inscribes both the space of dancing and the body of the dancer,” she did so by adapting the critical theories of the body and textuality that were circulating at the time. She thereby, as Belmar writes, “laid the groundwork for theories of the dancer’s agency through a metaphoric and material association between choreography and writing. The dancing body inscribes and is not merely inscribed on. The dancing body is ‘a bodily writing’.”<sup>340</sup> Foster’s strategy operated on two levels: first it brought dance into conversation with other academic disciplines and theoretical scholarship, and second it expanded the lens on dance performances from individual artists to choreographic projects as meaning making processes. This was a crucial step towards separating dance studies from chronological narratives of canonical history.

### **From evaluation to theorization**

With this intervention, Foster moved dance writing away from evaluation and towards theorization. Her writing avoids a pitfall of dance criticism that focuses on judging individual steps or a dancer’s technique, and instead explores how movement communicates. In doing so she dismantles hierarchies between ballet, modern, and postmodern dance, placing all three approaches to choreography on a level field and analyzing works by Balanchine alongside those of Graham and Hay. She went as far as to describe Hay as offering an “unanticipated analogue to Renaissance performances,”<sup>341</sup> because both Hay and court productions avoided “virtuoso skills.”<sup>342</sup> This kind of ahistorical comparison—Renaissance production lack “virtuosos” because performers weren’t professional dancers—may have provoked a critic like Siegel, but it provided a system for noting alignments between previously unconnected “choreographic projects.”<sup>343</sup>

By inserting examinations of performances of the 1970s and 1980s—Deborah Hay, Grand Union, Meredith Monk, and Twyla Tharp—Foster introduced scholarly analyses of the works of living artists, much like John Martin had done 50 years earlier in his teaching at Bennington. If scholars in the academy traditionally chronicled historical events, leaving critics outside of university walls writing about what was “new” or

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<sup>340</sup> Sima Belmar, “Easier Said Than Done: Talking Identity in Late Twentieth-Century American Concert Dance” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2015), iv.

<sup>341</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, 121.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 118: “virtuoso skills” were absent from Renaissance performances and Foster compares this to Deborah Hay’s choice to use pedestrian or non-spectacular actions. For the Renaissance dancer this was not a conscious choice but a function of performers’ lack of training. For Hay to intentionally use movement that lacks feats of prowess or physical virtuosity is a different decision, making Foster’s theory that there’s an “unanticipated analogue” between these different approaches questionable. Similarly, her comparison of Judson artists and Balanchine seems forced: “like the neoclassical choreographers, objectivist choreographers make dances in which the appearance of the dance is its meaning... The dances are about what they look like.”

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

current, *Reading Dancing* claimed the work of current artists as sites for theorizing. Foster thereby explicitly and implicitly advocated for higher education to shift its attention to current dance-making practices. Foster defines her position in her “Preface” that states, “Unlike some critics who would argue that ballet is the only enduring Western concern dance form and who see modern dance as a moment of rebellious experimentation lacking in consequence because of its failure to produce a lexicon, I see the tradition’s strength and vitality in its eclectic range of styles, vocabularies and syntaxes.” Her Barthesian theorization of performances by Grand Union and Meredith Monk as a kind of “writing dancing” elevates their importance in academic settings, while simultaneously replacing a critic’s superficial writing—“historical perspective or an aesthetic judgment”<sup>344</sup>—with a more rigorous analysis. By developing theories of “writing dancing,” Foster spoke, not only to those in the field of dance, but also to those in the humanities and social sciences more generally, legitimating dance by showing its capacity to invite critical theorizing and to sustain exciting interdisciplinary analyses.<sup>345</sup> Foster responds to a critic who writes that Monk’s performances seem to defy classification, by writing, “if Monk’s work is not dance, what is? Like any major innovation, her pieces redefine the boundaries of the medium of dance...”<sup>346</sup> Rather than responding to what exists, Foster advocated for scholarship that points to dance’s theoretical significance as she offered deeper contextual analysis.<sup>347</sup> As Foster writes, Monk’s productions are valuable because they show “how meaning in dance is made.”<sup>348</sup>

In his 1997 essay “Dance Ethnography and the Limits of Representation,” Randy Martin points to the blindspots of both dance criticism and Foster’s approach in *Reading Dancing*. Writing about *Reading Dancing* Randy Martin stated, “In effect, by beginning with the autonomy of a given artist’s discursive practice, the emergent character of the work and hence its historical character is left unaccounted for. She evades the relationship of the work to the broader interdiscursive field within which all choreographic projects collide.”<sup>349</sup> Rather than mark a break with critics’ practices, *Reading Dancing* thus incorporates new critical approaches of isolating an event from its broader political and economic context.

If equating “reading” and “writing” with experiences of dance brought legibility to dance studies within higher education, it also generated resistance from artists and critics who perceived dancing as sensory, indeterminate, multimodal, and at times resistant to meaning-making. In Chapter 1, Foster provides a chart that shows how four

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<sup>344</sup> “At best, criticism is able to provide a historical perspective or an aesthetic judgment for what is otherwise too fragile or fleeting for comment.” Foster, *Reading Dancing*, xvi.

<sup>345</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, xxi: “*Reading Dancing* gestures towards an interdisciplinary domain where writing and dancing sign in the direction of one another.”

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>347</sup> I attempt to acknowledge contextual differences here between a journalist/critic who must produce a review for limited column space (and time) and an academic writer who has more of both (time and space) to formulate connections and theories.

<sup>348</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, 225.

<sup>349</sup> Randy Martin, “Dance Ethnography and the Limits of Representation,” in Jane Desmond, ed., *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 331.

choreographers, Hay, Balanchine, Graham, and Cunningham, used particular strategies like “communion, celebration, communication, and collaboration,” respectively, and these strategies produced a certain reaction on the “viewer.” For Hay, who sought “communion” in her art, the viewer’s response was “Accord.” For Balanchine who sought “celebration,” the viewer’s response was “Exhilaration.” For Graham who sought “communication,” the viewer’s response was “Empathy.” For Cunningham who sought “collaboration,” the viewer’s response was “Attentiveness.”<sup>350</sup> Throughout *Reading Dancing*, Foster suggests a unanimous spectatorship or an audience who sees and interprets messages in unison. When she writes about a performance choreographed by Balanchine, Foster states, “The dancers’ confident appeal as they synthesize visual design, musical phrasing, and kinesthetic prowess captivates the audience and sustains their enjoyment.”<sup>351</sup> The same inclination occurs when she describes audiences for Martha Graham and Deborah Hay: “Whereas viewers leave Graham’s dances with a sense of emotional validation and perhaps a momentary resolution to the ongoing tension between individual and social concerns, they come away from Hay’s dances with a congenial sense of their placement in the social and physical landscape.”<sup>352</sup> On the topic of Grand Union Foster writes, “Despite their unmanageable length, their unwieldy form, and their self-indulgence, the Grand Union’s dances endeared themselves to their viewers.”<sup>353</sup> Even though Foster had to rely on these generalizing characterizations of the spectator in order to elaborate this varied theory of spectatorship, these observations seem to replicate the practices of a critic like Clive Barnes who equates an individual’s response with a universal one.<sup>354</sup>

Alongside path-breaking approaches, *Reading Dancing* also adopted the oversights of prior methods: namely there are tendencies to distance a dancer’s identity—ethnicity, sexuality, identity markers—from the artist’s “choreographic projects.” Foster writes, “dance could simply be about human bodies moving and nothing more.”<sup>355</sup> What makes dance analysis and close readings of a performance different from other disciplines, like music and visual arts, is that the material of dancing is not sound or paint but human movement. Our bodies carry markers and gestures that inform and inflect an observer’s reception. To erase a person’s identity from their dancing is to ignore a major component of how movement communicates: dancing is not only “gestures and shapes” but also a person who is making these gestures and shapes. Instead of attending to these bodily differences, Foster writes about “the body” as a universal body in “Reading Choreography:”

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<sup>350</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, 43.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>354</sup> For example see Clive Barnes on Yvonne Rainer, or more recently Allan Ulrich on Gerald Casel:

<http://www.sfgate.com/performance/article/Casel-s-Splinters-fractures-at-ODC-6709481.php>

<sup>355</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, xiv.

The reader of dances must learn to see and feel rhythm in movement, to comprehend the three-dimensionality of the body, to sense its anatomical capabilities and its relation to gravity, to identify the gestures and shapes made by the body, and even to reidentify them when they are performed by different dancers.<sup>356</sup>

This kind of analysis aligns with movement systems that attempt to dissect and assess kinetic arrangements apart from people who are performing them or a dance's culture. Similar to Laban and Bartenieff, Foster devises a scientific approach that bifurcates culture from movement, that assigns a blank slate to the moving body and sublimates context, history, visual design, and setting. Foster perpetuates John Martin's approach of separating genres according to racial differences when Foster writes that her system pertains only to "Western concert dance tradition, not to dances of other cultures."<sup>357</sup> Within this "Western" concert dance tradition many forms existed in 1986 that are not acknowledged by Foster, such as Katherine Dunham's and Alvin Ailey's incorporation of Africanist aesthetics.<sup>358</sup> As Anthea Kraut writes in *Choreographing Copyright*, published in 2016, "In the last few decades, critical dance studies scholars have fruitfully critiqued the taken-for-granted privilege of white modern dance and the racial stratification that has governed the American dance landscape."<sup>359</sup> As I examine in Chapter 4, this critique is informed by a shift in the choreographic apparatus when digital technologies increase attention and access to under-represented voices in dance criticism and dance studies.

### **Critical breach: Arlene Croce and mainstream criticism**

It would be difficult to analyze dance criticism in the United States without devoting part of this dissertation to Arlene Croce's essay that was published in the *New Yorker* in December of 1994 and entitled "Discussing the Undiscussable." This essay, written about a performance that Croce had not seen by Bill T. Jones—called *Still/Here* and performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music—sparked a "near-cataclysmic"<sup>360</sup> response. Croce had been the dance critic at the *New Yorker* since 1973 and would retire in 1998, and prior to her appointment at the *New Yorker*, she founded *Ballet Review* in 1965. Her aesthetic preferences were for formal, Apollonian works such as ballets by George Balanchine and choreography by established companies like those of Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp.<sup>361</sup> In "Discussing" she describes her preferences as a critic: "I've learned to avoid dancers with obvious

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<sup>356</sup> Foster, *Reading Dancing*, 58.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>358</sup> For scholarship on Africanist aesthetics please see Robert Farris Thompson, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Thomas DeFrantz, and Anthea Kraut.

<sup>359</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright*, 29.

<sup>360</sup> Maurice Berger, "Introduction," *The Crisis of Criticism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 2. Berger writes, "Croce's essay provoked a near-cataclysmic response: the *New Yorker* was flooded with letters, pro and con. Columns and letters appeared in magazines and newspapers across the country..."

<sup>361</sup> Marc Raymond Strauss, *The Dance Criticism of Arlene Croce* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 8: Strauss notes that of Croce's 113 reviews not written about ballet, almost half, 45, cover these 4 troupes.

problems—overweight dancers... old dancers, dancers with sickled feet, or dancers with physical deformities.”<sup>362</sup>

When the *New Yorker* published “Discussing the Undiscussable,” there were letters to the editor published in the *New York Times*, including one by Susan Sontag, as well as an article about Croce’s stance by Joyce Carol Oates, published in the Arts & Leisure section of the *New York Times*. Homi Bhabha wrote an essay for *Artforum International Magazine*, wherein he describes Croce’s decision to write about a performance she did not attend as an “ideological maneuver” to further her political agenda. Most respondents focused on debates around identity politics and formalist evaluation, similar to the debates between new criticism and dance theory that were being explored in higher education. For example, Oates described Croce’s phrase “victim art,” as “a cruel and reductive label.”<sup>363</sup> Oates called for recognition of the fact that criticism evolves and Croce’s criteria were no longer relevant: “There can be, despite the conservative battle cry of ‘standards,’ no criticism for all time, nor even for much time.”<sup>364</sup>

In her own writing Croce fretted about the disposability of a critic—“I do not remember a time when the critic has seemed more expandable than now”—and what is often overlooked in the essay is Croce’s attack on the “new” dance studies.<sup>365</sup> She writes in “Discussing,” that the root cause of this “politicized” dance is support networks that recognize the “democratic and egalitarian aspects of nonformal movement.”<sup>366</sup> Croce includes scholars in these support systems: “Academics, teaching newly accredited dance history courses also laid heavy stress on these aspects.”<sup>367</sup> Croce sets up critics in opposition to these scholars when she writes that the “primary task” of a critic is “evaluation.”<sup>368</sup> In other words, Croce viewed the mission of academics as one of expanding the lenses on dance history and questioning the production of a canon, and this was an assault on her formalist criteria and emphasis on aesthetic evaluation. Aligning Jones’s aesthetics with minoritarian discourses, Croce writes that he was ensnared by the “invidious logic at work, in the campaigns of the multiculturalists, the moral guardians, and the minority groups.” At the same time that Croce calls Jones’s performance a “kind of dance that was against criticism,” she also places this work in the realm of “academics.” Here the split between an “old” dance history and “new” dance studies exposes gaps in critical methodologies and priorities, as well as the demands of performances that require different forms of criticism.

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<sup>362</sup> Arlene Croce, “Discussing the Undiscussable,” *Writing in the Dark: Dancing in The New Yorker* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000), 710.

<sup>363</sup> Joyce Carol Oates, “Confronting Head on the Face of the Afflicted,” *New York Times*, Feb. 19, 1995.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>365</sup> “overlooked” because even in the *New Yorker*’s summary of the essay there is no mention of this intervention:

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/12/26/discussing-the-undiscussable>

<sup>366</sup> Croce, “Discussing the Undiscussable,” *Writing in the Dark*, 714.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

The response to Croce's essay created a seminal debate in the history of dance and dance criticism; it was a site that exposed friction between choreographers' priorities and canon criticism with its new critical tenets. Croce's writing belonged to a genre that treated criticism as a "disinterested endeavor"<sup>369</sup> and emphasized an "impartial distance" from which a critic could offer evaluation of an artist's aesthetic. A member of a class of criticism that sought the "universal" and "transcendent" qualities of dance, Croce produced essays that were excellent examples of canon criticism, drawing a border between performance and context that Randy Martin addresses in *Critical Moves*: "Criticism is an authority that can police the boundary between the aesthetic and the political economy of art, often coded as the divide between art and life."<sup>370</sup> This act of critical policing depends on distance. Sima Belmar examines this assumed dependence when she writes, "The dance critic is granted authority predicated on distance (mostly by lay people who value journalistic objectivity and merciless judgment)."<sup>371</sup> John Rockwell, former editor of Arts & Leisure at the *New York Times*, affirms this view: "Even if [critics] think they're deeply involved in the birth of a work, they have to be seeing it from the outside—and not just as the audience's representative; the very nature of the perception of artwork places one at a distance from the creator, or indeed anybody else watching the artwork. To pretend otherwise is kind of futile."<sup>372</sup> This framing of a critic's role as evaluator implies an ability to judge and discern objectively, hence the anxiety about distance as a form of impartiality. When choreographers like Jones insist that dance is always imbricated in negotiations of race, sexuality, and axes of identity—when Jones asked, "Can you look with two sets of eyes? Do you see the sexual preference of the person, the race of the person, the gender of the person, and then can you see what they're doing?"<sup>373</sup>—he was calling attention to the inadequacies of "distanced" viewing or assessment. His performances have exposed the variability and failures of comprehension, and he has spoken directly to audiences about what had been naturalized. Jones said after Croce's essay was published, "I think it's impossible to perform any ritualized activity in a public sphere that is politically neutral... Merce [Cunningham] claims that it's politically neutral. It's not. Trisha [Brown] who is a teacher to me, who I love, thinks it's politically neutral. It's not."<sup>374</sup> Jones indicates that Croce's formalist criteria are part of a conservative politics that seeks to separate identity from a person's movement as well as suggest that all artists enter a creative landscape with equal resources and conditions. When a critic's reviews promote a sense of "neutrality" and

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<sup>369</sup> Matthew Arnold, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1900), 77. "Criticism is a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."

<sup>370</sup> Randy Martin, *Critical Moves*

<sup>371</sup> Sima Belmar, "Out of Order: Disobedient Dance Criticism," *In Dance*, October 1, 2009. <http://dancersgroup.org/2009/10/out-of-order-disobedient-dance-criticism/>

<sup>372</sup> John Rockwell quoted in Deborah Jowitt, "Getting it" *Village Voice*, February 21, 2006. <http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/getting-it-7136449>

<sup>373</sup> Michelle Dent and MJ Thompson, "Bill T. Jones: Moving, Writing, Speaking," *TDR* Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 2005), 55.

<sup>374</sup> Dent and Thompson, "Bill T. Jones," 53.



impartiality, covering events with a commitment to “objective” reporting, both the limits and possibilities of dance criticism are revealed.

This breach between a critic’s methods and an artist’s priorities provoked discussions about the need for new kinds of criticism. In 2002 there was a public conversation with Jones at NYU, moderated by scholars MJ Thompson and Michelle Dent. Again, the university setting served as a structuring site for an examination of relations between criticism and academic departments. Thompson, who was an Assistant Professor of Dance at Marymount Manhattan College at the time and is now on the faculty of Concordia University, described the current state of dance criticism in mainstream publications as “tenuous,” “standoffish,” and “even uninformed.”<sup>375</sup> Bill T. Jones offered his analysis when he explained that the aspect of Croce’s criticism that offended him was her presumptuousness: “what I hated about it was this ability to take the moral high ground as a guardian of culture and never has to own up to your eye, which are not universal eyes, but particular eyes.”<sup>376</sup>

Dance scholar Larry Lavender joined this analysis of relations between criticism and academic writing through his article in *Dance Research Journal*, “Post-Historical Dance Criticism.” Lavender examines a distinction between critics’ functions as differences between “aesthetic” and “institutional” authority. Lavender supports a form of writing that enhances perception and appreciation of a work of art, what Foster terms an “exploratory framework,” what others have called “advocacy,” and what Lavender terms foregrounding a critic’s “aesthetic authority.” Addressing Croce’s essay, “Discussing the Undiscussable,” Lavender writes that “Croce tried to assert institutional authority over Bill T. Jones; she had not seen his dance so she had no claims to aesthetic authority.”<sup>377</sup> Lavender’s use of the term “authority” resonates with a critic’s role in connecting audiences, publicists, funders, and presenters who make decisions about performances to attend and support.

A critic’s view is a determining factor in the vitality of a cultural landscape, and certain institutions like the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, and the *New Yorker* have played powerful roles in shaping these landscapes in the United States and internationally. Lavender writes that institutional authority can obfuscate aesthetic authority, which, in Lavender’s words, is “bad for art because to privilege institutional authority over aesthetic authority is to admit, finally, that art is just another market commodity and criticism just an elaborate form of advertising.”<sup>378</sup> Lavender is advocating for a type of writing that positions artists and readers in conversation with one another and as a form of dialogue, rather than a critic who is an evaluator deciding what readers should value or purchase. To borrow John Martin’s term for criticism as a form of “dance appreciation,” Lavender advocates for writing that functions as an interface or catalyst to “expand the work of art,” as Rebecca Solnit writes. Akin to Lavender’s “aesthetic authority,” the concept of “counter-criticism,” theorized by Solnit, seeks a form of writing that enhances an artist’s work “by connecting it, opening up its meanings, inviting in the possibilities.”

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<sup>375</sup> Dent and Thompson, “Bill T. Jones,” 48.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>377</sup> Larry Lavender, “Post-Historical Dance Criticism,” *Dance Research Journal* 32/2 (Winter 2000/01), 102.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

Lavender's coining of these terms offers a way of conceiving how John Martin, decades earlier, used his "aesthetic authority" in his position as a critic and dance history teacher to offer frameworks for viewing new work by Graham and other "modern" artists. In other words, during the 1920s and 1930s John Martin, unlike Arlene Croce in 1994, used his criticism to stay attuned to new forms of dance that resonated with ideas percolating through experimental theatre. His writing was a methodology for seeing, an act of "aesthetic inquiry," in Lavender's words. Lavender's formulations foreground the contact that critics have with wide readerships and how this contact shapes their writing styles and priorities. Lavender's article complicates assumptions that some scholars make about "trickle-down" systems, namely academics' methodologies anticipate those of critics in a "trickle-down from academia to the work of more mainstream writers,"<sup>379</sup> as Maurice Berger, a professor and curator at the University of Maryland, writes in *The Crisis of Criticism*. Berger explores how criticism is not a "monolithic enterprise," and the material conditions imposed on writing practices—"histories, priorities, goals, audiences, and schedules"<sup>380</sup>—inflect the differences amongst academic journal articles, newspaper pieces, and magazine essays. Croce's essay, "Discussing the Undiscussable" is the first article that follows Berger's introduction in *The Crisis of Criticism* and he notes that it offers evidence of "the perilous state of criticism itself."<sup>381</sup>

Berger and other scholars have analyzed how the market economy impacted a shift in critical authority: success for avant-garde visual artists of the 1960s and 1970s entwined with their association with critics and curators, while in the 1980s and 1990s, acclaim was driven by "a small coterie of powerful dealers and collectors."<sup>382</sup> In *High Price*, Isabelle Graw confirms this position, writing that by the 1990s "collectors and their buying habits influence the processes of value creation much more than critics do."<sup>383</sup> As a form that moves both outside of and adjacent to visual art circles, dance operates in a different economy with few if any "collectors" determining success for artists in the 1980s and 1990s; instead critics, funders, and presenters have had the major influence on dance careers and artists' acclaim. However, with increasing pressure placed on writers to produce attention-grabbing and "news-worthy" pieces in the 1980s and 1990s, in order to drive up sales, to expand circulations, and to increase advertising dollars, the dance critic's "aesthetic authority" is arguably compromised. Editors often insist that articles present information that's "newsy," using language and references that are graspable and well-known, particularly when an artist is less established.<sup>384</sup> The role

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<sup>379</sup> Berger, *Crisis in Criticism*, 5.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>383</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 123.

<sup>384</sup> "Newsy" comes from a conversation with Leslie Katz, arts editor at the *San Francisco Examiner*, who told me my use of words that were three syllables was too exclusive for *San Francisco Examiner* readers. She told me she needed "newsy," meaning quick and easily digested pieces on dance. We see a similar use of slick but unsubstantiated writing in Elizabeth Zimmer's 2016 article in the *Village Voice* on Carmen de Lavallade, "More or less the Misty Copeland of the Fifties," when there is little in common between the

John Martin played for “emerging” artists of the 1920s seems increasingly difficult for contemporary dance critics.

Berger notes that “timeliness is a fact of economic life” for newspapers and magazines, and for dance writers these constraints are especially heightened, one of the professional contingencies that make a critic’s writing practices different from those of scholars’ and theorists’. Dance criticism is rarely published concurrently with performances (which often appear in a season of one, two or three nights), and cannot provide incentive for readers to attend a season the way theatre, film, and arts criticism might. A dance critic faces a task of both describing events for readers unfamiliar with performances, and enticing readers to become interested in and curious about these artists. Sally Sommer, who received her doctorate from NYU in 1979 and wrote for *Tulane Drama Review* in the 1970s, as well as for mainstream newspapers, has spoken about the different priorities in academic and non-academic publications, using her own experience of having her writing “shredded” by an editor when she moved from academic prose to journalistic pieces.

Sommer recalls, “in that first piece that got shredded I *was* giving them context, I was giving them history, I was giving them blow-by-blow important sequencing, which signifies the deeper meanings of the dance. That’s fine for a [university] journal. But it’s not fine for a journalist. I had to learn how to write quickly, get right to the point and make the thing come alive. That’s very different than talking about dance.”<sup>385</sup> Sommer points to priorities of dance writing within the academy and within journalistic contexts. She explains the different priorities of a journalist-critic:

You’ve got to grab the reader in the first two sentences and if you don’t you’re dead, particularly if you’re writing for Brooklyn audiences in the 1970s. It had to have a kind of vivacity that journal writing, I dare say, never has. The intention and the readership is 100% different. [With a newspaper] you’re writing for people who will never see the dance, and will perhaps read the review just because it’s in front of them. Maybe 1% of the people who read your review actually have seen the dance, or, maybe want to see the dance. The rest of them are just cold readers. The fewest number of readers are the dance readers.”<sup>386</sup>

Sommer taught courses in dance history and criticism from 1979 to 2001, and her insights into the practices and purposes of criticism and scholarly writing shed light on their commonalities and differentiations. Most notably, the twofold functions of criticism, to both entice and to inform readers, distinguish it from academic writing that serves different roles: to analyze, to theorize, and to place ideas in broader discourses of history

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two dancers beyond a racial category: <http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/carmen-de-lavallade-looks-back-on-an-extraordinary-career-8652151>. In Chapter 4 I include recent examples from the *New York Times* by Alastair Macaulay and Claudia La Rocco and the *Washington Post*’s Sarah Kaufman, writers who exemplify the slick, assessment-based writing of mainstream critics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>385</sup> “Sally Sommer in conversation with Abigail Levine,” *Movement Research*, April 8, 2014. <https://movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/srs-edit-SallySommerinterview4814FINAL.pdf>

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

and the arts for readers familiar with theoretical references and literature reviews.

Another distinguishing factor between newspaper writing and academic articles is the professional practices of mainstream writers who may attend four to five performances a week and publish as many as two or three times in a week. This prolific quality is part of their role in providing “evidence” of performances that lack other kinds of recording. This relationship between criticism and evidence, or information about past events, reveals why criticism and history share an interdependent partnership. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen write, “All too often, today’s criticism becomes tomorrow’s history.”<sup>387</sup> If such a statement indicates the significance of reviews for dance historians, it also exposes how critics’ criteria shape who and what appears in dance histories, as well as the role a critic plays in changing perceptions of dance as an art form. When Croce started writing about ballet for the *New Yorker* in the 1970s, a staff member compared this to “being serious about candy,”<sup>388</sup> and over the next 25 years, by continually describing and promoting performances by Balanchine and other choreographers, Croce’s writing changed these perspectives.

As Thomas DeFrantz writes in his Introduction to *Dancing Many Drums* “Dance history is created by the documents historians assemble.”<sup>389</sup> For many history courses and textbooks, these documents have been reviews, which accounts in part for the priority dance critics have placed on movement description. This emphasis on description contributes to Randy Martin’s concept of “underreading,” since a critic’s system of evaluation as well as the material conditions of a performance—its funding mechanisms, the choreographer’s creative process, the venue, and demographics of an audience and their responses—are often excluded. Dance studies emerged as antidote to practices that ignored context and contingencies, and academics undertook ideological examinations in their writing about artists, performances, and their reception. In contrast, many critics in non-academic publications continue to approach their reviews as sites to describe a performance. Not only are their readers searching for accessible language, but their editors serve as gatekeepers who assign pieces to critics who can quickly produce articles that are “newsy” and accessible.

Deborah Jowitt, former critic for the *Village Voice* and professor at NYU, tells a story of her editor at the *Village Voice*, Diane Fisher, asking her “Isn’t dance primarily about movement?”<sup>390</sup> Jowitt answered, “Yes.” Fisher said, “Why don’t you write about *that*?” Jowitt’s next review began:

Some dancers tuck into movement as if it were a Thanksgiving dinner, but not Toby Armour. Like a wading bird, she picks her way through shallows, listening, looking, wiggling her fingers and toes into the space, delicately turning in a leg from time to time, energy level no higher than

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<sup>387</sup> Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 426.

<sup>388</sup> Robert Greskovic recently repeated this anecdote in Mainwaring’s “Death of the American Dance Critic,” *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2015.

<sup>389</sup> Thomas DeFrantz, “African American Dance: Complex History,” *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African-American Dance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>390</sup> Deborah Jowitt, personal conversation, December 2, 2015.

that needed to perform the movement. Jowitt tells me about this piece, “You can tell I took this very much to heart, and Fisher said, ‘Good. Good. That’s what I meant.’” As an editor Fisher had a distinct interest in descriptions of dancing, yet this effort to capture or chronicle movement at times had the adverse effect of sublimating the incomprehensibility and nuances of performances, especially dance performances, to written translations. Analyzing dance criticism through an apparatus that includes editors’ priorities, artists’ aesthetics, readers’ preferences, and writers’ perspectives gives a more nuanced view of how and why dance writing evolves in mainstream publications.

### Artists’ Response

The choreographic apparatus affords a view of the imbrications and complicities that influence criticism. In spite of pronouncements of distance and objectivity, critics and choreographers share intertwined genealogies. Ruptures in critical authority, such as the 1994 essay by Croce about the work of Jones, are signals that writing styles and artists’ productions can grate against one another more than generate productive insights or dialogue. Between 2002 and 2005 another shift in critical authority occurred as artists like Miguel Guiterrez and Tere O’Connor developed performances that resisted criteria of writers like the *New York Times* critics Anna Kisselgoff and Alistair Macaulay, as well as *New Yorker* critic Joan Acocella. Kisselgoff and Macaulay were targets of “The Perfect Dance Critic,” a manifesto written by Guiterrez in 2002. Published in *Movement Research Performance Journal* #25, this manifesto cited the need for critics to write “in a way that is contemporaneous with the time we are living in. The perfect dance critic knows when it’s time to quit, change careers or retire.”<sup>391</sup> Three years later, in 2005, O’Connor wrote “The Literalists,” intended to be a Letter to the Editor at the *New Yorker* (it was not published and ended up in email inboxes and on websites) following Joan Acocella’s article “Mystery Theatre: Downtown Surrealists.”<sup>392</sup> O’Connor pointed to the problematic tendencies of critical writing:

These critics [in particular Acocella] do not know how to read dances... they don’t do the work of finding out what is actually going on in the minds of the artists or what are the contexts in which these works are created. They have reduced dance criticism to an explanatory, superficial, retelling of events.<sup>393</sup>

O’Connor and Gutierrez highlight the gap between critics’ preferences and modes of engagement in contemporary performance. Their performances shed light on discourses of dance studies that emphasize choreographic thinking, kinesthetic engagement, and intersubjective encounters. Gutierrez and O’Connor foreground differences between

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<sup>391</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, “The Perfect Dance Critic,” *Movement Research Journal* #25 (Fall 2002). <http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/the-perfect-dance-critic/>

<sup>392</sup> Joan Acocella, “Mystery Theater,” *New Yorker*, August 8, 2005. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/08/08/mystery-theatre>

<sup>393</sup> Tere O’Connor, “The Literalists.” A “letter to the editor” that circulated by email and was posted on *Dance Insider*, 2005. [http://www.danceinsider.com/f2005/f1014\\_2.html](http://www.danceinsider.com/f2005/f1014_2.html)

movement and writing, in a clear shift away from using a critic's description or "underreading" to explain or legitimate choreographic practices.

In 2013 Gutierrez wrote, "I work with dance, action, text, voice, sound and light. I am interested in how the interaction between the elements of performance on stage – the bodies, the actions, the environment, the space, the sound, the lighting – create a modality of comprehension that is choreographic, spatial and intuitive by nature... not necessarily detached from language but perhaps detached from the rational supremacy that language often imposes."<sup>394</sup> While he questions the translation of movement into words, Gutierrez also highlights the positionality of critics. In Gutierrez's manifesto, he writes, "The perfect dance critic discusses the implications of the different cultural representations of gender, race, sexual orientation or class in the work. The perfect dance critic acknowledges his own cultural position when addressing these issues, and how that cultural position may shape his feelings or responses."<sup>395</sup> Gutierrez's manifesto suggests that a dance critic adopt the frameworks of cultural studies scholarship, a request that implicitly pointed to the racism and classism of formalist approaches as seen in Croce's "Discussing the Undiscussable."<sup>396</sup> Since axes of identity and privilege shape our viewing behaviors, Gutierrez proposed that critics use methodologies that gained traction in academic discourse between the mid-1980s and 1990s. Motivated in part by Kimberle Crenshaw's theories of intersectionality, this approach to positionality remained largely outside of dance critics' writing and their editors' interests. Here we see the "structuring site" of the university, to use Singerman's concept, influencing the performances and ideas of choreographers and dancers, but absent from the articles and reviews written by mainstream dance critics.

I have examined how Jill Johnston and Yvonne Rainer brought tenets of new historicism as well as cultural studies lenses into their writing in the 1960s and 1970s, but these approaches took place on pages of alternative papers and academic journals (the *Village Voice*, *TDR*, and *Art News*, not the *New York Times* or the *New Yorker*). As a result, we see that there are interesting perspectives allowed to develop in dance studies and within higher education that aren't "allowed" to happen in the pages of many contemporary venues of cultural criticism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Generally speaking, dance critics and mainstream publications have continued to promote notions of distance and impartiality, using criticism as a system of evaluation and a site of "underreading." These disjunctures between a critic's methods and an artist's priorities came to the fore in a 2006 piece written by Deborah Jowitt for the *Village Voice* about the artist Tere O'Connor. Aptly titled "Getting It," Jowitt's article began with a description of the "shocks" that O'Connor's writing about criticism sent through the dance community.<sup>397</sup> She describes the "long-smoldering conflict between what critics think they're doing and what artists wish they'd do."<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, "Trends in Performance," New England Presenters' Conference, May 2013. <http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/trends-in-performance/>

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Deborah Jowitt, "Getting It," *Village Voice*, February 21, 2006. <http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/getting-it-7136449>

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

Although Jowitt defines criticism as a contributor to discourse and conversations—she aspires to “add to that hum by stimulating thought, and perhaps dissent”<sup>399</sup>—she prefers for conversations to happen after her review is published, not prior.<sup>400</sup> O’Connor, on the other hand, requests that a critic converse with an artist prior to writing a review. Jowitt claims she cannot write “exactly” like the artist intended, and that it’s a unique opportunity to have the time and column space to write a “feature” not a review.<sup>401</sup> In Jowitt’s words, “It’s impossible for anyone to write of an artist’s work exactly as the artist might, nor would the attempt necessarily produce interesting prose.”<sup>402</sup> O’Connor reminds her that dance is “something ambiguous and mysterious that some people call enigmatic.”<sup>403</sup> As O’Connor identifies the frictions produced between a definition of criticism that prioritizes “comprehensibility,”<sup>404</sup> and dancing’s emphasis on ambiguity, Jowitt sees her role as one of observing and reporting, at a distance and drawing on her expertise as a writer. O’Connor questions this legibility, noting, “Clarity is something we establish to make society work and capitalism work, but we’re actually in full ambiguity all the time. Some people who are totally new to dance say my work affects them and they don’t know why.”<sup>405</sup> Jowitt’s stance seems to exemplify what Ann Daly noted about the disruption of “critical distance” as a disruption of “critical authority.” In Daly’s words, “Considering the way insiders look at their own dances requires a shift in the critic’s position: she is no longer judge but rather interpreter.”<sup>406</sup> The exchange between O’Connor and Jowitt exposes a panoply of positions: artists seeking modes of writing that honor their creative priorities, critics seeking clarity and accessibility for readers, and a clear example of what Randy Martin describes as criticism’s “underreading,” a mode of writing that negates the conditions of production and reception that inform meaning-making.

## Conclusion

What is essential to keep in mind is that dance productions are not alone in encountering conditions that limit their capacities and circulations: dance criticism is also a site that’s subjected to restrictions of page counts and attention spans. Dance articles and reviews appear proportionate to the amount of advertising space in a section. If a dance section in the *Village Voice* constituted a page or page and a half of paper between 1996 and 2006, backed by ads bought by theaters and dance companies, the film section

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<sup>399</sup> Deborah Jowitt, *The Dance in Mind* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1985), ix.

<sup>400</sup> Alan Kriegsman described the critic’s role as “contributing to the ‘hum’ surrounding a work.”

<sup>401</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “Getting It,” *Village Voice*, February 21, 2006.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, *What is Dance?*, 425: “The challenge facing the dance critic is threefold: the enormously difficult task of seeing movement clearly in the first place; then, the almost equally challenging task of remembering what he [sic] sees; and finally the nearly impossible task of describing what he has seen in a manner that will be comprehensible to the reader...”

<sup>405</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “Getting It,” *Village Voice*, February 21, 2006.

<sup>406</sup> Ann Daly, *Critical Gestures*, xxxi.

included six or seven pages of articles, supported by advertisements financed by major studios. In contrast, academic journals often present specialized topics, and are read by “tiny, highly informed, and partisan audiences.”<sup>407</sup> If a professional critic measures the success of a piece in the quality of dialogue and quantity of readers it engages, academic writing is often in conversation with particular theories or methodologies, and generates value for the writer’s job application or tenure evaluation.<sup>408</sup> These different audiences shape the tone of the writing.

Deborah Jowitt noted that dance scholarship emerged in the 1990s with a particular forthrightness: “The introduction that says or implies, ‘No one before me has ever had these thoughts’ (especially if not entirely true); the setting up of straw men to demolish...”<sup>409</sup> She cites a difference between writing by critics who begin with the empirical evidence (a performance) and writing by theorists who “begin with a hypothesis, apply it to a dance phenomenon, then ignore or suppress evidence that contradicts it.”<sup>410</sup> Similarly, Isabelle Ginot critiques a tendency that emerged in a “new” dance studies to use performances as examples or illustrations of “particular cultural theories,” thereby freezing the performance as an object or static entity, and sublimating its mutability and polyvalence to a specific interpretation or theoretical idea.

If Jowitt appreciates the more complex mapping of events by academics in dance studies, she also observes a writing style that can obfuscate comprehension. Berger states, “Many critical theorists reject writerly coherence as a matter of principle.” Jowitt asks more directly, “Why should scholarly writing wish to distance itself from comprehension?” Here the accessibility demanded of a critic’s writing (by readers and by editors) is juxtaposed with the exclusivity of academic terminology. The circulation of academic texts amongst scholars contributes to this distancing of mainstream criticism (with its demands for legibility) from academic writing (with its priorities of depth and rigor). Since the establishment of dance studies as a doctoral program in the 1990s these disproportionate relations between accessibility and analysis in mainstream and academic criticism have grown wider.

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<sup>407</sup> Berger, *Crisis in Criticism*, 5.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. On Wayne Koestenbaum: “Many academics, he observes, write criticism not for the love of writing or the desire to explore new styles and situations, but to impress colleagues and tenure committees.”

<sup>409</sup> Jowitt, “Critical Burden of History,” 134.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.* Jowitt’s insights are similar to literary critic Helen Vendler who observes, “an aesthetic critic is naturally concerned with the generic and formal aspects of an artwork, its implicit poetics, its internal structures of relation, its intellectual argument, and its expressive means, but such a critic wants also to deduce and describe the internal factors motivating the invention of such idiosyncratic forms... During my years of teaching, some members of the profession became unfriendly to aesthetic criticism, finding it either naïve or essentialist. They also became unfriendly to lyric poetry itself: lyrics were too short to be good texts for deconstructive purposes, and novels and plays appeared to be more suitable sites for the information retrieval about social conditions on which a politicized criticism depends.” *The ocean the bird and the scholar* (Harvard University Press, 2015).



Today, in 2016, there are only two full-time dance critics in the United States, and they are known for their support and appreciation of the most widely accessible dance forms, namely ballet companies (Alastair Macaulay) and artists like Mark Morris (Sarah Kaufman). If John Martin's writing in the 1920s and 1930s endorsed an emerging artistic form, Macaulay's and Kaufman's writing supports well-funded choreography that appears in large venues.<sup>411</sup> Their articles tend toward quick, superficial, opinion-driven glosses on established artists and performances; these selected events in turn influence their writing styles. Today there are no dance critics writing for mainstream publications who attend, in a consistent and ongoing manner, to either the economic conditions of dance production or the methods of meaning making and sensory engagement that vary among choreographers and companies. There are many who aspire to formalist, new critical approaches, and who are encouraged to do so by editors who want short, "newsy" bites on dance.

This chapter was written with the priority of attending to longer genealogies of dance criticism, dance history, and dance studies to notice their points of intersection as well as their discontinuities in practices, methodologies, and contexts. Rather than erect a wall between critics and academics it could be useful to notice both their interdependent relations and the distinct settings that have produced their writings and styles. Moving forward, the question becomes: how do we create a context for mutual respect for these different forms of writing and self-awareness of their interdependences?

O'Connor's request for writers and artists to engage in conversations indicates how the language of critics transforms alongside and in relation to artists' performances. When considering a longer genealogy of criticism, such constitutive relationships between critics and artists become evident: John Martin was in conversation with Graham at Bennington and appreciated the starkness and clarity of her works, in part because he wrote in a style that was stark and clear; Jill Johnston introduced a more subjective and self-reflexive style that resonated with performances by artists like Yvonne Rainer. As artists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century redefine performance today, they question approaches to criticism that are no longer relevant or applicable. When reviews function to promote and represent an artist's work, they are cultural capital, valuable for the access and opportunities they can set in motion. When a critic's criteria or writing style misconstrues and misrepresents an artist's work this creates friction between the roles of critic and artist. Gutierrez's and O'Connor's writing exposed needs for alternative critical modes, and both artists sparked extensive conversations about the purposes of dance criticism, debates that are constructively examined and reexamined periodically.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> I am using this "large venue" term to indicate events at Lincoln Center, Cal Performances, or The Kennedy Center, instead of the emerging artists at tiny theaters or in small studios.

<sup>412</sup> One example of this re-examining is Mathew Sandoval's: "...O'Connor's lament about both Acocella's review in particular and the larger nature of dance criticism in general has got me questioning just what purpose dance criticism and dance reviews serve. At a base level I suppose that it has something to do with allowing newspaper and/or magazine readers to feel as if they were the audience at the actual dance performance—a kind of recorded history. In other circles of the performing arts, reviews

Reviews can offer glimpses or snapshots, a simulation of a feeling of the performance, but as O'Connor tells Jowitt: what happened is not as important as *how* it happened. O'Connor is referring to the "stop-action" moment when a critic isolates a step, a lift, or an action from a broader context. Jowitt disagrees, telling him that by "describing a particular event in a dance, if done well, helps reinforce an analytic or evaluative point; a 'for instance' may convey the flavor of a work." Again this exchange reveals the tension between a critic's priority of communicating movement "clearly," of contributing to a historical record of events transpired, of starting a conversation, and an artist's interest in modes of communication, questions they provoke, and the "clarity" they resist. A decade into the 21st century, roles of artists, critics, and academics are increasingly blurred as a generation of choreographers who came to prominence in the 1990s—Tere O'Connor, David Dorfman, William Forsythe, Joe Goode, Rennie Harris, John Jasperse, Bebe Miller, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar—have been appointed to academic positions.<sup>413</sup> Concurrently, digital technologies reorganize the speed, access, and circulation of platforms for writing by critics, artists, and audiences. This confluence of events is the topic of the following chapter, "Where is dance criticism?"

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are used to secure a paying audience for the run of the event (assuming they are good reviews). For dance, on the other hand, reviews generally appear *after* a performance has closed and resurface in press packets. Seen in this way, reviews and criticism are reserved for the choreographer's promotional materials and grant applications (again, assuming they are good reviews). But perhaps, in the end, such reviews, this one included, begin a conversation—one not meant for press packets and promotional materials, but for that intimate exchange between writer and reader, dancer and audience member, choreographer and critic." <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2006/05/dance/tere-oconnor-bringing-up-baby>

<sup>413</sup> O'Connor is a Center for Advanced Studies Professor of Dance at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Dorfman is at Connecticut College, Goode is at U.C. Berkeley, Forsythe is at USC, Harris is at the University of Colorado, Boulder as Artist-in-Residence, Jasperse is at Sarah Lawrence, Miller is at OSU, and Zollar is at FSU.

## Digital Dance Criticism: Screens as Choreographic Apparatus

When *The Atlantic* published “The Death of the American Dance Critic” in August of 2015, author Madison Mainwaring wrote that dance coverage in the mainstream press has been “decimated” over the last 20 years. Mainwaring cited the fact that there are “only two full-time dance critics in the country,”<sup>414</sup> as evidence of this crisis. A closer look at the history of dance criticism in the United States reveals that there were two full-time dance critics during many decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in the 1930s (John Martin and Margaret Lloyd) and the 1950s (John Martin and Walter Terry) even when dance as an art-form was blossoming. Moreover, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a proliferation of awareness and discourse about dance through websites, television shows, blogs, and programming events that necessitate a closer examination of both what constitutes criticism today and the venues through which it is accessed. In the wake of concern about how digital technology is eroding the profession of dance criticism, this chapter takes a critical look at such claims and their contexts.

Ignoring momentarily the oversights in Mainwaring’s article—she refers to John Martin as the United States’ first dance critic, calls New York the “dance capital” of the United States, and ignores the role of websites as platforms for dance criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—the focus of her analysis seems to be two-fold: not only is dance criticism dead, but there is a surge of articles about dance by non-dance writers. Mainwaring’s opening paragraphs describe how Misty Copeland has become a “household name,” and “hardly any of the countless stories published about Copeland have been written by dance critics—a dying breed of writers uniquely capable of offering informed commentary on the singular talents she brings to the stage.” In one sentence, Mainwaring adopts a limiting definition of dance criticism as commentary on individual events or artists and dismisses the regeneration for this “dying breed” of writers.

The significance of Mainwaring’s article lies in these foreclosures: it is symptomatic of a putative split between criticism in print publications and digital modes of engagement offered by websites, blogs, and videos. Mining these distinctions between dance writing on pages and screens, as well as dancing on stages and dancing on screens, exposes other hierarchies: dancing on stages is privileged by a dance canon and history textbooks and dancing on screens is often relegated to descriptors like “popular dance,” “commercial dance,” or “entertainment.”<sup>415</sup> As digital technologies have amplified access to dance on screens, flows between screens and stages, as well as forms of criticism by well-known critics, bloggers, and fans, become increasingly blurred in the

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<sup>414</sup> Madison Mainwaring, “The Death of the American Dance Critic,” *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/american-dance-critic/399908/>

<sup>415</sup> When Oxford University Press published its *Handbook to Dance and the Popular Screen* in 2014 the book was marketed as “a powerful corrective to the lack of accessible scholarship on dance in the popular screen.”

21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>416</sup> Mainwaring’s article perpetuates a definition of criticism as an act of reporting on performances, a system of evaluation and fault-finding focused on a performer’s “technical, lyrical, and theatrical abilities,”<sup>417</sup> and practiced by “an expert pair of eyes.” She’s not alone in lamenting the loss of these “experts” or describing dance criticism as an endangered species.

In 2009 former dance editor of *The Village Voice*, Elizabeth Zimmer, published “The Crisis in Criticism: The Economy, the Internet and the Death of Dance Writing” in the Bay Area publication *In Dance*. In this essay, Zimmer announces, “The current collapse of print media is disastrous for the arts, especially experimental, low-budget work.” Her views have been echoed and repeated, as seen in *The Atlantic*. Given that there has been no sustained research that traces the functions of dance criticism in the United States in historical, cultural, and economic terms during the 20th and 21st centuries, it is hard to evaluate what has, in fact, collapsed.<sup>418</sup> This chapter places these pronouncements of doom and demise alongside two projects that redirect dance discourse, allowing us to see the generative role of dance criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and effectively challenging binaries between stage and screen, as well as archive and repertoire.

Conversations about dance criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are inflected by the presence of digital technologies and platforms, and awareness of these technologies and the types of participation they elicit is essential for conversations about discourse and its circulations.<sup>419</sup> In an interview with Henry Jenkins, new media scholar Zizi Papacharissi states:

There are events, and there are stories that are told about events. Most events we are not able to experience directly, so we have always relied on

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<sup>416</sup> This blurring is exemplified by press departments that previously used well-established critics for pull-quotes in brochure marketing and now use websites and bloggers as sources for material. Shows like “So You Think You Can Dance” and “Dancing with the Stars” turn fans into “critics” who select the best performers.

<sup>417</sup> Mainwaring, “Death of the American Dance Critic.”

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/american-dance-critic/399908/>

<sup>418</sup> Mainwaring’s article performs an interesting flip of history: whereas John Martin used his *New York Times* columns to elevate respect for dance as an art form and educate readers in his theory of “kinesthetic transfer,” Mainwaring quotes critics who associate dance with seductive allure and easily accessible ideas. For instance, Elizabeth Zimmer is quoted as saying her editor didn’t want her to use the word choreographer in the *Village Voice* because it was inaccessible, and Marina Harss of the *Times* says, “how do you get clicks? By using the dancer’s body as a sort of lure, and it leaves people thinking that’s what dance is—this sexy body.”

<sup>419</sup> This speaks to a broader conversation about roles of print and digital platforms summarized here: “In 2005, according to the Newspaper Association of America, US newspapers generated \$47.4 billion in print revenue. That number has dropped every year since, and, in many, precipitously. By 2014, US print revenue had declined to \$16.4 billion, marking a 66 percent drop over nine years. In that same time period, digital revenue for US newspapers increased only from \$2 billion to \$3.5 billion.” From: [http://www.cjr.org/analysis/local\\_news\\_newspaper\\_print\\_business\\_model.php](http://www.cjr.org/analysis/local_news_newspaper_print_business_model.php)

the storytelling oralities and technologies of an era to learn about them. What happens when we become contributors to these narratives, or stories, rather than simple consumers, is that we become involved in the developing story about an event; how it is presented, how it is framed, how it is internalized, and how it is potentially historicized.<sup>420</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s these “stories” about dance performances were recorded by John Martin in his articles, and circulated in newspapers and lectures, the “technologies” of the era. In the 1960s, Yvonne Rainer contributed her “stories” as articles that shifted frameworks through which performances were seen. The 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies of websites and digital platforms make it possible to accelerate the speed and to expand the scope of writers’ communications, as well as to mitigate barriers to participation in dance discourse. In the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as print publications decreased their page space for dance coverage,<sup>421</sup> websites and theaters introduced platforms for documenting, discussing, and sharing conversations about performances.<sup>422</sup> These technologies also influence the types of performances that are being recorded and circulated. As new media scholar Abigail De Kosnik writes in *Rogue Archives*: “a society’s technologies for storing and retrieving its memories influence and inform how and what individuals recollect.”<sup>423</sup>

In this chapter I focus on the imbrications of a genre I am calling “contemporary performance,” and two websites, thINKingDANCE in Philadelphia (<http://thinkingdance.net/>) and OtB TV (<http://www.ontheboards.tv/>) in Seattle. Both engage documentation, criticism, and discourse, providing conducive environments and critical frameworks for these artists’ audiences. In other words, these sites recognize and support new forms of dance as well as criticism. They also move the center of dance and dance criticism away from New York City as they reconfigure definitions of dance writing. If the work of John Martin, Yvonne Rainer, Arlene Croce, and Deborah Jowitt examined in preceding chapters focused on artists and events in New York City, this chapter brings attention to performances and criticism emanating from Philadelphia and Seattle. This geographic shift coincides with shifts in artists’ creative practices and critics’ approaches to writing.

Against a notion of a critic’s words and dancer’s performance existing in a “unidirectional relationship,” with the critic having the “last word,”<sup>424</sup> these digital

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<sup>420</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Affective Publics and Social Media: An Interview with Zizi Papacharissi (Part One),” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, January 19, 2015. <http://henryjenkins.org/2015/01/affective-publics-and-social-media-an-interview-with-zizi-papacharissi-part-one.html>

<sup>421</sup> *Village Voice*, *San Francisco Examiner*, and *Time Out* are examples

<sup>422</sup> Brenda Dixon Gottschild cites pre-performance discussions as sites of discourse: “I’ve been invited to hold pre-performance conversations with Liz Santoro, Gus Solomons and Valda Setterfield, and Jaamil Kosoko and [Honji] Wang/[Sébastien] Ramirez at *Tanz im August* this summer in Berlin.” <http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2016/06/25/Arrows-at-Racism-in-Dance-and-Beyond-Brenda-Dixon-Gottschild->

<sup>423</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 28.

<sup>424</sup> Wendy Perron, “Beware the ego of critics,” *Village Voice*, April 9, 1991: “The

platforms expand participants in these conversations as well as the flows of exchange. For instance, on November 20, 2014, thINKingDANCE published Lisa Kraus's article about Steve Paxton's work at Dia:Beacon, and Paxton responded in December, a response that was published on the site and followed by Kraus's reply. These formats highlight the ways in which criticism is dialogic, meaning that critics' words set in motion conversations and ideas, today as in the 1920s. "Letters to the Editor" have been replaced by "Comments," "Likes," and "Tweets." Articles and manifestos circulate in the digital sphere with speeds that were inconceivable when reviews were assembled in "composing rooms," as they were in the 1920s and 1930s, then printed and published on paper.

Created in 2011, thINKingDANCE (TD) expands practices of criticism from commentary on individual events to engagement with structures, issues, and voices that serve Philadelphia's artists and readers. The project description for thINKingDANCE, created by Lisa Kraus and Anna Drozdowski, states, "Many of us are practitioners ourselves, writing about our colleagues and our world. We pledge to write from a place of inquisitiveness and fundamental respect for each artist." Writers for TD have included "a principal at Pennsylvania Ballet, prominent dance educators, currently publishing dance writers, and relative novices at writing who are knowledgeable about dance. Together we have provided much-needed coverage for less-mainstream events that have been under-the-radar because of the recent decline in newspaper arts coverage." thINKingDANCE is both a response to older critical practices and catalyst for engaging new forms of discourse. Rather than separate academic scholarship from dance criticism, Lynn Matluck Brooks, a frequent contributor to the site, has headed the Dance Program at Franklin & Marshall College since 1984. Her recent post, an interview of scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild, interweaves priorities in dance both within and outside of higher education. During the interview, Gottschild reflects on the racial stratification in the American dance landscape, "When I started out, to even say 'Africanist aesthetic' in the same breath as 'Balanchine' was taboo. People are now reading those chapters from my books; that is a sea change in how dance departments are visioning dance research."<sup>425</sup> By calling attention to exclusionary practices that separated canonical and non-canonical artists, or that made "concert dance" the purview of white artists, TD intervenes in discourses of both disciplinary formation and dance criticism.

OtB TV was created by the Seattle-based presenting organization On the Boards, and invests in productions by contemporary artists by offering a distinct design: it brings full-length performances to a wide public by filming with high-definition cameras, editing collaboratively with the artists, and delivering performances online. Proceeds from the site's subscriptions are split between On the Boards and the artists. As of 2017, over 92 higher education institutions in the United States, Europe, and Australia have purchased content for their campuses, including Princeton, Yale, Ohio University, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of Amsterdam, and OtB TV has reached

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critic always has the last word."

<sup>425</sup> Lynn Matluck Brooks, "Arrows at Racism in Dance and Beyond," *thINKingDANCE*, June 25, 2016. <http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2016/06/25/Arrows-at-Racism-in-Dance-and-Beyond-Brenda-Dixon-Gottschild->

audiences in over 152 countries.<sup>426</sup> OtB TV describes successes of the project in terms of pedagogical value, audience engagement, and archival purposes. I add to this list that OtB TV also reconfigures dance criticism by supplanting criticism's role in description and documentation and introducing a format that merges presentation and circulation. Together thINKingDANCE and OtB TV offer two models that make evident the imbrications of contemporary performance with new modes of discourse, highlighting again how criticism is as much a productive force as it is a reflection and commentary on current artistic approaches.

### **Contemporary performance and a digital sphere**

TD and OtB TV focus on performances that are described as “boundary-pushing,” “concept-driven,” “embodied inquiry,” and “contemporary,” and these performances shape both the form and content of the sites themselves. In other words, a choreographic apparatus that positions contemporary performance, digital technologies, and dance critics in relation to one another makes visible modes of response that defy simple classification. While audience response has always been a part of the choreographic apparatus, social media technologies make this component of the apparatus more visible, and potentially part and parcel of the performance itself. The dialogic capacities of social media technologies, meaning abilities to see, engage, and respond to comments and tweets, motivates a rethinking of the status and role of a dance critic as well as modes of engagement fostered in performance today. In the TD interview of Brenda Dixon Gottschild, she calls attention to this shift away from a “modern” or “postmodern” aesthetic and notes the importance of Philadelphia as city that's conducive to dancers and experimentation. Gottschild says there's “a basic change in the ways dances are constructed, which is definitely not according to a ‘modern dance model’—Graham, Wigman, Cunningham, or whoever. There's a basic conceptual and even kinesthetic difference to how dance is perceived now, and Philadelphia is part of that movement.”<sup>427</sup>

In a similar fashion, OtB TV in Seattle expands approaches to performance and to criticism, and informs contemporary performance and discourse in multiple ways. It exists in a gap between performance and documentation, between what Diana Taylor has theorized as “repertoire,” meaning “all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge,”<sup>428</sup> and “archive,” as in the “supposedly enduring materials.”<sup>429</sup> If a function of dance criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was to document and “record” in word-form events that took place in theaters, OtB TV gives access to full-length performances, recorded in a theater and edited by the artists, thereby offering digital alternatives and archives. Moreover, OtB TV is dedicated to artists who are often grouped under the aesthetic label “contemporary,” meaning their performances and processes disassociate their work from modern or postmodern dance. Instead of

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<sup>426</sup> Data from <http://www.ontheboards.tv/about#.VkOfymSrTUQ>

<sup>427</sup> Lynn Matluck Brooks, “Arrows at Racism.”

<http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2016/06/25/Arrows-at-Racism-in-Dance-and-Beyond-Brenda-Dixon-Gottschild->

<sup>428</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>429</sup> Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, 19.

emphasizing formal designs and choreographed phrases, contemporary performances often investigate the slippages between images and feelings, as well as between what is felt and what is remembered. When artists edit their performances for online circulation through OtB TV, they consider a viewer's kinesthetic response as important as the event's documentation. For example, Zoe Scofield, one of the Seattle artists who has performed at On the Boards and created a film of her performance *A Crack in Everything*, said during our interview that the use of close-up became an important tool for giving viewers contact or closeness with the experience of the performance. She distinguished close-up in dance as different from theater because it involves a full-body but close range shot, different from theater's close-up on a facial expression or hand gesture. She said a question that was present in the process was creating a film that was not about showing "This is what happened," but rather giving the viewer a kinesthetic impression described as, "This is what I felt."<sup>430</sup>

Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* examines the characteristics of sensory experiences—"this is what I felt"—as embodied practices and contrasts these experiences with archival materials that can be stored and circulated—articles, books, videotapes, and DVDs, for instance. Taylor posits the need for methodologies in Performance Studies that account for interrelationships of these practices and materials, and uses the concept of the "scenario" to include embodied practices and gestures alongside texts and recordings. She defines scenarios as "meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes."<sup>431</sup> The choreographic apparatus is akin to a scenario in that it places performances, reviews, theoretical discourse, digital technologies, and audience response in relation to one another. Unlike a "scenario," an apparatus offers a framing mechanism for artists and audiences, and these frameworks are especially valuable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In her recent article "Save As...: Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies," Taylor states:

The shift from the archive to the digital has moved us away from the institutional, the confined, the long-term of Foucault's disciplinary society to the controlled society outlined by Deleuze: free-floating, short-term, rapidly changing... The politics of the archive are not the politics of the digital: what counts as embodied knowledge has also morphed...<sup>432</sup>

Taylor deftly exposes the ways that digital technologies disrupt hegemonic discourses: if archival memory was the purview of the dominant—"Those who controlled writing... gained an inordinate amount of power"<sup>433</sup>—digital circulations pose challenges to both access and authority. With YouTube, for example, uploaders can post videos and comment on what is viewed, shifting access to performances' presentation and dissemination.

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<sup>430</sup> Zoe Scofield, personal conversation, November 3, 2012.

<sup>431</sup> Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire*, 28.

<sup>432</sup> Diana Taylor, "Save As..." lecture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGurF1Rfj0U> (35 to 38 minutes). Also published here: <http://imaginingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Foreseeable-Futures-10-Taylor.pdf>

<sup>433</sup> Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, 18.



Taylor states that these technologies “have only heightened appreciation of embodiment,” which refers to both the ways that these technologies require human activation—and by extension the potential for reconfiguring archives and canons—as well as the ways that dancing and other embodied practices circulate with newfound ease and accessibility on platforms like vimeo, Facebook, and YouTube.<sup>434</sup> Where I find that digital technologies complicate more than “heighten” appreciation of embodiment is in our reception and interpretation of screen-based modes of engagement. To offer one example: some of the most popular flash mobs on YouTube exhibit physical virtuosity in the form of complex movement phrases or tightly-honed unison, turning these events into promotions for athletic prowess and coordination, and heightening audiences’ interest in these spectacular displays. In contrast, in contemporary performance, artists like Jérôme Bel, Faustin Linyekula, and Nora Chipaumire are far less interested in spectacular or athletic forms of choreography, and more concerned with subtler relations between movement, sensory engagement, association, and meaning-making. Are digital technologies actually “heightening” appreciation for these alternative forms of embodiment?

One answer to this question is yes: OtB TV brings attention to these contemporary artists and their nuanced ways of crafting performances and engaging audiences. As of 2016 OtB TV had presented 41 films of performances, with seven more planned for the 2016-17 season, and features the work of 42 artists.<sup>435</sup> Performances are filmed in Seattle as well as in Portland (at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art), in Austin (at Fusebox Festival), and New York (at PS 122). Both sites, TD and OtB TV, are based outside of the purported “dance capital” of New York, and call attention to ways in which artistic communities in different geographic locations nurture varied ideas and approaches. Performances by contemporary artists often foreground a simultaneous revealing and disarticulation from existing formats and protocols, not in order to be different or provocative, although there is frequently a sense of dissensus. Contemporary approaches expose the limits of existing modes of production and engagement, and differences in genres of artistic work can be driven by geographic as well as cultural conditions. For instance, the title of Miguel Gutierrez’s *Age & Beauty Part 3* included the subtitle “*You can make whatever the fuck you want but you’ll only tour solos,*” thereby calling attention to political economies of making, presenting, and touring performances. Another example of these imbrications can be found in Gutierrez’s FUCKMEGUNTERBRUSGUNTERBRUSMEFUCK, which Gutierrez performed at Mumok in Vienna, Austria in 2015, and the monologue and score of this performance is available online.<sup>436</sup> Contemporary performances often emphasize interdependent relations between structures of support and creative processes, and are in conversation with

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<sup>434</sup> Taylor’s quote from her lecture, “Save As”: “Digital technologies have only heightened the appreciation of embodiment. Perhaps the current rush to ‘archive’ has less to do with place-thing-practice and more with trying to save and preserve a sense of self as we face the uncertain future, emphasizing our agency in the selection and meaning-making process that we feel threatens to outpace us.”

<sup>435</sup> On the Boards website: <http://www.ontheboards.tv/about>

<sup>436</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, “FUCKMEGUNTERBRUSGUNTERBRUSMEFUCK,” 2015, <http://www.miguelgutierrez.org/words/fuckmegunterbrus/>

political and economic issues affecting artists in communities where they reside.

These geographic differences become visible through dance criticism, when lacunae between an artist's modes of working and a critic's criteria become visible. For instance, this disconnection is apparent when a critic in one city writes about the work of dancers and performers from another region. This happened in 2012, when Claudia La Rocco wrote about Bay Area choreographer Laura Arrington in the *New York Times*. La Rocco began her review with a description of her disappointment:

"You don't have to judge anything." A suggestion like this inevitably invites its opposite. This is perhaps especially true when it's offered to a room dominated by opinionated New York artists, as it was on Thursday night when the San Francisco choreographer Laura Arrington introduced the New York premiere of "Hot Wings" to kick off performances at the American Realness festival. Ms. Arrington spoke these words as she invited her audience to lie on the stage of the Abrons Arts Center's Experimental Theater, which she darkened while leading the room through yogalike breathing exercises, backed by the 1980s pop song "Up Where We Belong." Things did not improve from here.<sup>437</sup>

Examining critics' responses to artists' performances opens ways of identifying the value systems that drive their writing: La Rocco is a critic who has firm criteria for what belongs in New York and what does not. She cannot engage with Arrington's work because the notion that an audience member does not need to "judge" displaces her role as a *New York Times* critic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely a person who assesses and evaluates. There is no effort made to contextualize or explore the conditions that motivated Arrington's performance, yet La Rocco is quick to admonish Arrington for not working "hard enough." La Rocco writes:

...the idea seemed to be that, as smart cultural consumers, viewers can make of such vapid concoctions a thoughtful commentary on some aspect of our contemporary society. And, yes, audiences shouldn't be passive receivers. But there is little impetus to work hard when it seems that the people you're watching haven't worked nearly hard enough.<sup>438</sup>

Another *New York Times* critic, Alastair Macaulay, uses a similar tone when he dictates what choreographers *should* do. For example, in a review of Tere O'Connor's performance in 2012, Macaulay writes:

...How do the movements add up as theatrical experience? Here's where Mr. O'Connor's choreography is least sure... how does one sequence connect to another? How do the very appealing ideas cohere in memory?

For Macaulay, O'Connor's work falls short of being a "theatrical experience" because it lacks necessary connections between sequences and a unifying coherence, attributes that Macaulay admires in choreographers like Mark Morris (included in this review as "a great choreographer"). There's no mention of the fact that O'Connor is not interested in

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<sup>437</sup> Claudia La Rocco, "Feminine Truth Pursued in Breathing Exercises," *New York Times*, January 6, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/07/arts/dance/laura-arringtons-hot-wings-at-abrons-arts-center-review.html>

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

pursuing or displaying such characteristics. A description of O'Connor's film on OtB TV, *Bleed*, more accurately captures O'Connor's "lifelong obsession with the vast possibilities of human movement to create a brand-new choreographic language." His works are playful, meticulous, and unexpected. A reviewer of *Bleed* on OtB's website describes the performance as "a quiet riot of dance composition."

In both direct and indirect ways these sites, thINKingDANCE and OtB TV, displace the dominance of New York critics and New York mastheads in the evaluations of dancers and performances by providing forms of archival material that can be used to challenge and reconsider critics' points of view. TD in particular has responded to oversights in writing by mainstream critics. In December of 2015 TD posted a letter by Jane Goldberg that analyzes Joan Acocella's *New Yorker* review of a book on tap by Brian Siebert. Goldberg notes the multiple misrepresentations in Acocella's writing as well as the blatant conflict of interest (Acocella was Siebert's mentor and served as his reference for jobs) that Acocella does not mention in her review of his book.<sup>439</sup> Goldberg's post inspired 25 comments, written by professors, dancers, and audience members, and almost all complimentary, about the importance of ethics, research, and contextualization in criticism.

In both contemporary performance and 21<sup>st</sup> century writing, there's an emphasis on discourse and dialogue, spoken and embodied. Events merge performance and theory, calling attention to our systems for organizing ideas, as seen vividly in *Untitled Feminist Show* by Young Jean Lee with choreographer Faye Driscoll, and the performative lectures by Deborah Hay and Alva Noë called *Reorganizing Ourselves*. Relevant to this research, Noë emphasizes the role of choreography in reorganizing worldviews, comparing choreography to philosophy:

Both philosophy and choreography take their start from the fact that we are organized but we are not authors of our organization... They are practices (not activities)—methods of research—aiming at illuminating the ways we find ourselves organized, and so, also, the ways we might organize ourselves... they expose the concealed ways we are organized by the things we do.<sup>440</sup>

Noë seems to be describing a choreographic apparatus, a shifting system that sheds light and exposes criteria we use to engage and analyze our relationships with the world. The goal of this chapter is to show how contemporary performances are part and parcel of a digital sphere that engages with ideas, philosophies, and aesthetics from a broad range of critics, theorists, and practitioners. This is the choreographic apparatus that generates frameworks for current artists. Much as previous critical models were coincident with the rise of forms like modern dance, the digital sphere is coincident with the rise of their contemporary aesthetics.

It's useful to keep in mind that each chapter has explored generative relationships between a particular approach to performance-making and the writing that has supported and framed these ideas: in Chapter 1 it was John Martin and modern dance, in Chapter 2

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<sup>439</sup> Jane Goldberg, "Credit where credit is due," *thINKingDANCE*, December 18, 2015. <http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2015/12/18/Credit-Where-Credit-is-Due-a-Letter-to-the-Editor-of-The-New-Yorker/>

<sup>440</sup> Alva Noë, *Reorganizing Ourselves*, Joe Goode Annex, Nov. 7 2015. Published in Alva Noë, *Strange Tools* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2015), 17-18.

it was Yvonne Rainer and postmodern dance. In Chapter 3 I examined the “vexed if interdependent” relationships between dance studies and dance criticism, and in this chapter I bring together contemporary artists, critics, digital technologies, and scholars to show how this choreographic apparatus provides the criteria and frameworks that journalism once provided and does no longer or very rarely.<sup>441</sup> Both this genre of performance and these sites bring attention to how audiences/readers engage with embodied and discursive platforms, and this engagement is crucial to why these performances function as a kind of embodied epistemology. By emphasizing relations between theory and practice, between structure and improvisation, between context and research, these artists introduce a new way of framing artist-audience relations. Sites like TD respond in kind, stating in its description that it seeks authors of a variety of critical formats, “including reviews, features, interviews, think pieces and, hopefully, as-yet-undiscovered forms.” These sites emerged as artists presented performances that could be described as “not yet discovered forms,” events that focused more on process than product, more on states of being than steps, and more on theories integrated with practice than displays of physical or technical virtuosity. Posts on TD and films on OtB TV function like scaffolding that provides material to shore up support for contemporary artists engaged in questions of research, performance, and audience engagement.

Choreographer Jérôme Bel explains the intersections of critical theory and contemporary dance when he describes his desire to document and make available his work:

The publishing project devoted to all of Jérôme Bel's work comes from the wish to amplify and deepen this theoretical work, motivated by the necessity to produce a reflexive discourse in the field of dance which seems patchy when compared with that concerned with the visual arts, for example. Jérôme Bel has questioned contemporary dance by undermining the expectations of the public who are invited to look differently at the space of choreographic presentations and what happens within it.<sup>442</sup>

In his online archives, Bel presents a description of his well-known work *The Show Must Go On*:

Jérôme Bel: When touring these performances I realized one of the most important elements was the audience.

Interviewer Yvane Chapuis: It is a constitutive element of a dance performance,

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<sup>441</sup> I am using “contemporary” as a label for a certain genre of performance. The word carries many meanings in dance history: when Martha Graham established her school in 1926, it was called the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance, and would become the longest continuously operating school of dance in America. Six decades later, as ballet choreographers experimented with fragmentation, deconstruction, and postmodern aesthetics (for instance, William Forsythe, Karole Armitage, Alonzo King, Jiri Kylian, Mats Ek), their approach became known as “contemporary ballet.” Today, on shows like “So You Think You Can Dance,” a style that is similar to lyrical has been called “contemporary.” As a performance genre, “contemporary” in dance performance signals a disavowal of modern dance, as well as resistance to criteria that shaped this form (clarity, line, expression, theatricality).

<sup>442</sup> Jerome Bel, <http://WWW.CATALOGUERAISONNE-JEROMEBEL.COM/>

of every work of art in fact.

Bel: Exactly our friend Marcel Duchamp spoke of that... We who are on stage don't know any more than the spectators. I think that in *The Show Must Go On* the spectators are activated because I reach out to them... Whereas before I didn't even consider them. Some people love *The Show Must Go On*, others hate it.... It's slightly unconscious because I realize I'm not convinced of it.

Chapuis: One thing I liked a lot in *The Show Must Go On* – and which is a criteria for me in evaluating artwork - is the role given to the person looking at it. And in the “Show” different elements during the performance give us space...

Bel: ...The rule that applies is that of Western theatre. The contract with the spectator is that of Western theatre. I am in the dark, I'm watching you and I am quiet. When it's over I may boo or not applaud or leave... However what is certain is that what is at stake is the audience.<sup>443</sup>

As artists emphasize engagement with their audiences, websites like thINKingDANCE encourage readers to post comments and OtB TV consistently includes shots of its audiences in its recordings.

For example, in Crystal Pite's *Dark Matters* on OtB TV, the heads of audience members are included in the frame so that a screen-viewer feels as if they are sitting in the auditorium with these spectators. The rustling of programs, bursts of laughter, and applause coming from the theatre's audience are clearly audible in the recording. Such details enhance the feeling of performance as autopoietic feedback loop, a self-producing exchange that is occurring between watchers and performers. As Erika Fischer-Lichte writes in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, “a feedback loop transforms borders into thresholds,” meaning the loop generates a liminal place that can provide entry to unseen places, rather than a border that divides performer and spectator. In the case of Pite's *Dark Matters*, the performance is a liminal space that poses questions about invisible forces and free will, about the differences between destruction and creation. Pite's cast includes dancers, puppeteers, and a marionette that blur distinctions between animate and inanimate materials. The editing of the OtB TV recording emphasizes the blurring of these roles, the animacy of inanimate objects, by focusing on particular details of the production as well as the intensity of the audience's responses.<sup>444</sup>

Another method for involving audiences in contemporary performances happens when artists dismantle walls like a proscenium divide or choreographers use perambulatory formats rather than auditorium seating. These interventions, often adopted to increase performer-audience intimacy or co-present connections, find a parallel in dance criticism that emphasizes audiences' response and offers ways for readers to comment. Recent shows that have adopted these installation-like formats include Joe Goode's *Poetics of Space* (2015), Amara Tabor-Smith's *EarthBodyHOME* presented at ODC in 2015, and David Zambrano's *Soul Project*, made in 2006 and presented in 2012 at San Francisco's YBCA. Zambrano, born in Venezuela and now based in Europe, said

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 205. “The aesthetics of the performative allows for an art of passage.”

about his performers after the show: “We are a social-centric society. The whole group is the leader. A dancer takes any center and the audience has to come to them.”<sup>445</sup> The performance took place in an empty but massive studio with the audience flowing from place to place around solo performers, like magnets surrounding individuals. If the experience of wandering through a performance-installation is personal and volitional, as it was for me when I attended Zambrano’s performance at YBCA, how can this experience be transferred into a recording or a review?

When *Soul Project* was presented in Philadelphia in 2015, TD writers reconfigured the “unidirectional” flow of criticism by expanding voices in conversations about the performance. In a format called “Write Back Atcha” TD hosts writing events post-performance and gives audiences prompts that elicit descriptions and “letters” to the performance. In the “Write Back Atcha” that followed Zambrano’s *Soul Project*<sup>446</sup> writers posted:

Karl Surkan: “Experiencing David Zambrano’s *Soul Project* is a bit like going to church—the kind of church where something rapturous, sweeping, transformative, and spiritual is happening...”

Anonymous: “Dear Soul Project, I find you exhausting. Your flailing, thrashing, grinding, grimacing, pumping, primping, and peacocking just makes me want to look away. To escape. To find something softer. I love your music, sure...who doesn’t? But I need more from you. Your overwhelming energy, rather than enticing me, ends up pushing me away and I just end up feeling uncared for. I really tried to love you...”<sup>447</sup>

This format reconfigures the role of criticism from an authoritarian voice or expert opinion to a gathering of differing perspectives placed side by side, and visible next to one another. As contemporary performance itself is often an exchange that is indeterminate and varies from site to site, person to person, so these formats inform and reflect the polyvalence of these modes of engagement. With its emphasis on expanding voices and formats, TD makes space for more dialogic and inquisitive approaches to dance reviews. Even in more “traditional” (individual author) posts, there are frequently comments from readers and other TD writers.

This conversational relationship between authors and readers highlights multidirectional flows and disrupts the notion of a critic as authoritarian opinion or expert, as seen in prior models of criticism and examples in this chapter by Claudia La Rocco and Alastair Macaulay. As the mainstream press competes with websites and blogs for readers’ attention, newspaper critics gravitate towards slick, assessment-based styles designed to capture readers with short attention spans. This tone is evident in the dance criticism of La Rocco and Macaulay as well as Sarah Kaufman in *The Washington Post*. Kaufman covered “Voices of Strength,” a program presented at The Kennedy Center in October of 2012, wherein female artists broke down walls between performers and

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<sup>445</sup> David Zambrano, spoken at YBCA, April 28, 2012.

<sup>446</sup> “Letter to the Whirl,” *thINKingDANCE*, September 22, 2015.

<http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2015/09/22/Letter-to-the-Whirl-The-Crowd-Circles-Round>

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

audiences. Performers addressed the audience directly and literally sat in the house seats as Nadia Beugré, an Ivory Coast-based dancer and choreographer, did at the beginning of her solo, *Quartiers Libres*. Similarly, in *Correspondences* by Haitian Kettly Noel and South African Nelisiwe Xaba, the dancers spoke with, walked through, and interacted with people seated in the theater. Their creations were hybrids of voices, movements, and sets, slipping between dance-theater, modern and post-modern dance. In *The Washington Post*, Kaufman, responded by writing:

In both pieces, the emotional tension was only fitfully maintained, and they cried out for a director's discerning eye.<sup>448</sup>

Kaufman sees her role as critic as one of evaluator, referee, or judge, a person who discerns what fits her criteria of dance.<sup>449</sup> In Kaufman's case, these criteria are the tenets of modern dance, regardless of an artist's priorities, history, or politics.<sup>450</sup> As contemporary artists present work that defies the rubrics of modern and post-modern dance, a new choreographic apparatus emerges that brings together websites, critics, audiences, and frameworks for engaging with their performances.

As evident in these examples of Zambrano, Beugré, Noel, and Xaba, contemporary artists adopt multiple tactics to investigate and reconfigure relationships between audiences and performers. Another tactic often used in contemporary performances is the preamble or introduction that prepares an audience to engage with the work. This is evident in performances by Congolese artist Faustin Linyekula, as well as Miguel Gutierrez, based in New York, and Keith Hennessey, based in San Francisco. Across these geographic distances, there are similar priorities in artists' projects, namely merging theory and performance as well as questioning the frameworks we bring to engagements with dance.

Linyekula begins his show, *Le Cargo*, with a preamble to the audience: "I'm a storyteller," he says. He tells us that he has been performing for over 10 years in this field he calls "contemporary dance" and critiques the "very romantic" notion of dance that is "outside geography, outside history, outside politics, outside this space we always have to negotiate between the living and the dead." He merges text and movement, improvised and choreographed, to reveal different facets of time and space. His performances generated and were supported by a choreographic apparatus that recognized their

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<sup>448</sup> Sarah Kaufman, "Voices of Strength," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater\\_dance/voices-of-strength-allows-african-women-to-express-themselves-in-movement/2012/10/05/b3115e92-0f20-11e2-bd1a-b868e65d57eb\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/voices-of-strength-allows-african-women-to-express-themselves-in-movement/2012/10/05/b3115e92-0f20-11e2-bd1a-b868e65d57eb_story.html)

<sup>449</sup> In her review of Kaufman's book *The Art of Grace*, Toni Bentley describes Kaufman's approach as one of "an arbiter of grace." See Bentley, "Book Review: 'The Art of Grace' by Sarah L. Kaufman," *New York Times*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/books/review/the-art-of-grace-by-sarah-l-kaufman.html>

<sup>450</sup> Kaufman defines her stance as a critic as a universalizing voice about "the body": "Dance is, at its very essence, the movement of the human body which we all inhabit." from "Death of the American Dance Critic," *The Atlantic*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/american-dance-critic/399908/>

significance and promoted frameworks for engaging with his productions. Linyekula's description of an analysis that is "outside geography, outside history, outside politics, outside this space we always have to negotiate," recalls Randy Martin's notion of underreading or critics' tendency to isolate events on stage as separate from political economies or capitals' circulations. Linyekula critiques the new critical modes of writing that emphasize close reading without engaging the value systems and cultural histories that drive and influence artists' work. Contemporary performances are part and parcel of a digital sphere that engages with ideas, philosophies, and aesthetics from a broad range of critics, theorists, and practitioners. Much as previous critical models were coincident with the rise of forms like modern dance, the digital sphere is coincident with the rise of their aesthetics.

Contemporary artists often refuse to subscribe to methods and formulas preserved and promoted by canonical dance history courses. Keith Hennessy began a recent solo with a preamble that described ways in which such courses exclude and marginalize particular people and cultures. Hennessy expands these ideas in a *Time Out* interview:

Now when I teach dance history, which is one of my many identities, I try to unsettle an American nationalist history of modern dance... in the history of dance how it's taught—if you take a modern dance history class, you won't be shown any ballet unless your teacher's super hip and maybe shows a [William] Forsythe piece and is like, "Here's modern ballet" or something like that.<sup>451</sup>

Hennessy's solo emphasizes how the bracketing of dance history as American "modern dance" history, one that excludes ballet as well as many artists of color and non-canonical forms, erases the political potential of dancing to resist and question exclusionary tactics. He sees a necessary relationship emerge between how dance is taught and historicized in academic settings and how contemporary artists present work that challenges these histories and ideologies. He uses his solo as a site to engage and disengage with these pedagogical practices, and this disarticulation is a key element of contemporary performance. It also signals the reworking of a choreographic apparatus that brings together postcolonial theory, dance studies, and contemporary performances to shed light on the structures and strictures that order our ways of seeing.<sup>452</sup>

Contemporary artists blur boundaries between making, performing, teaching, and writing about their practices, as seen in Hennessey's multiple roles, as well as in the last chapter when Miguel Gutierrez addressed the role of dance critics in his manifesto, "The Perfect Dance Critic." Gutierrez also invests in bringing his audiences into the theoretical discourse that inspires and enriches his performances. Gutierrez began his performance of *Age & Beauty Part 1: Mid-Career Artist/Suicide Note or &:-/at CounterPulse*, wearing his fuchsia pink floral bathing suit, standing on the stage, and speaking to us about the importance of queer theory, in particular, Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* and José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, as work that had influenced the development of

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<sup>451</sup> Gia Kourlas, "Dancer Keith Hennessy takes on The Rite of Spring," *Time Out*, December 22, 2014. <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/dance/keith-hennessy-takes-on-the-rite-of-spring>

<sup>452</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Politicized Art," *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 65.



this piece. He added that it didn't matter if there were people in the audience who did not know about those books. He ended his "prologue" with a quote from a letter of William Blake dating from 1803, "I have a thousand and ten thousand things to say to you. My heart is full of futurity."

These prologues or preambles are part of the choreographic apparatus that frames the work of contemporary artists and aligns their performances with theories and platforms that are in conversation with their artistic practices. As Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris made visible in the 1960s, artists as spokespersons for their work are not a new concept. Nevertheless, the use of a prologue or verbal encounter that provides a lens for the performance sheds light on practices of dance criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: if there is a dwindling of dance critics who engage with contemporary artists in mainstream publications, it becomes more important for these artists to engage their audiences directly. Like the pre-show lecture or artist's prologue, the post-show discussion between an artist and moderator (who are often critics, scholars, or dance writers), presents another form of criticism, one that emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between commentary and creative work, a blurring of lines between where the artist's work ends and the "criticism" begins. Such critical discourse that informs and surrounds contemporary performances is an interface that exists between archive and repertoire, between stages and screens, and is part of an apparatus that sheds light on artists' interests and alignments.

These preambles and discussions are vital because another element that distinguishes dance criticism from writing in other fields is the siloing effect that separates theory (mostly the purview of advanced degree programs) from history (mostly the purview of undergraduate courses) and criticism (seen mostly on blogs and in a few mainstream publications). When artists like Lineykula, Gutierrez, and Hennessy step forward and link these realms they also call attention to how divided they have become outside of contemporary performance. Maurice Berger writes in his 1998 introduction to *The Crisis in Criticism*, "If earlier in this century, critics—journalistic, specialized, or academic—have frequently played a vital, even public, role in influencing the shape, texture and direction of American culture, their value and relevance is growing increasingly tenuous in many sectors of mainstream American cultural life."<sup>453</sup> When artists and moderators call attention to how theory and history inform a work, they merge these academic and journalistic roles of criticism, offering frameworks that previously were provided in articles about performances.

There is a similar activation of the choreographic apparatus used to shed light on artists' priorities when a choreographer identifies or names their distinct approach. This tactic was deployed by contemporary artist Amara Tabor-Smith, based in Oakland, who called attention to systems of exclusion and oppression by naming and defining her creative approach "conjure art."<sup>454</sup> By identifying what she values, she implicitly points out what has been invisibilized by modern dance aesthetics:

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<sup>453</sup> Maurice Berger, *The Crisis of Criticism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>454</sup> Amara Tabor-Smith, "The Practice of Conjure Art," *In Dance*, September 1, 2015. <http://dancersgroup.org/2015/09/speak-practice-conjure-art-making-earthbodyhome/>

The work of the conjure artist explores traditional spiritual myths, images and/or practices from a contemporary or experimental art perspective. Conjure artists believe in the forces of nature such as ancestor spirits, gods and/or deities found in indigenous cultures and recognize these energies as the guiding forces in their art practice.<sup>455</sup>

This definition, with its emphasis on collective creations, traditions, and “ancestor spirits,” exposes and resists the “individual innovation” and “autonomy” that modern dancers (and critics) prioritized. Brenda Dixon Gottschild speaks of combating racism by acknowledging precedents and sources, especially by artists of color, in her TD interview. Erika Fischer Lichte writes that “Western art” has frequently defined itself in opposition to “the traditional notion that non-Western art lacks the concept of autonomy.” To cite another example of these systems of exclusion, Roger Copeland’s essay “The Death of the Choreographer” (2011) bemoans the attention given to “collectively created” works at the expense of “dances whose ‘authorship’ can be attributed to unique Western individuals:”

...the growing emphasis on traditional and popular cultures evolves into a zero-sum game that is played at the *expense* of individual Western choreographic ‘authors.’<sup>456</sup>

In contrast to Copeland’s assessment that indigenous cultures and epistemologies do not belong with great “individual” artists, Tabor-Smith foregrounds the value of interdependence and interconnection. Her projects, which draw from her spiritual practice as a priest in the Yoruba/Lukumi tradition known as *Ifa*, disrupt a teleological ordering of dance history as the purview of individual, white artists’ perpetual innovation or inventing.

In her 2015 performance *EarthBodyHOME*, Tabor-Smith incorporates an installation-like format to mitigate barriers between performers and spectators. She, like Abby Crain, another Oakland-based artist, David Zambrano, and Joe Goode, uses these perambulatory formats to highlight the importance of sensory connections, intimacy (meaning close proximity of performers and audiences), and indeterminacy (meaning audiences choose their pathways and perspectives and also can shift the shape and tone of an event). Tabor-Smith described her 2013 project *He Moved Swiftly but Gently Down the Not Too Crowded Street*, as “a 5-hour traveling dance-theatre-performance to conjure a legacy.” As evidence of the ways contemporary artists shed light on local priorities, this event honored the life and work of choreographer Ed Mock, a black, gay artist whose untimely death from AIDS in the 1980s left a lasting impression on many Bay Area dancers, including Tabor-Smith. *He Moved Swiftly*... included more than 35 performers

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid. I use this example because it is one of the few labels for dance that’s not about being in the present or current time but rather speaks to aesthetic priorities the way “Impressionism” or “Surrealism” does in art history. I think the scarcity of terms and confusion about categories for dance-artists is evidence of a lack of sustained, substantive writing about dance compared to other disciplines.

<sup>456</sup> Roger Copeland, “The Death of the Choreographer” in Alexandra Kolb, ed., *Dance and Politics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 55.

and investigated questions of “legacy, lineage and collective memory.”<sup>457</sup> Such performances bear striking resemblance to modes of engagement in a digital sphere, where we move volitionally across platforms and windows: Tabor-Smith encouraged her audiences, “Be guided through the full performance or drop in any time.” Events by contemporary artists heighten our awareness of how we are situated amongst groups of people, the choices we make to interact and move in similar and different directions, and how we process our engagements in distinct ways.

Contemporary artist Faye Driscoll similarly pushes against conventional modes of presenting performances to generate projects that hold “revolutionary” potential. Driscoll writes in her artist’s statement:

I am a choreographer who strives to investigate new forms of theatrical experience aimed to provoke feeling, stimulate the senses and activate the mind. I work with movement in ways that wouldn’t typically be called dance: the action of a violent mob, the play of persona, and states of consciousness. I am interested in expanding ideas of what dance is and creating work that is both entertaining and socially engaged. I believe, in this time of over-stimulation and numb entertainment, that live performance can be revolutionary.<sup>458</sup>

This statement with its emphasis on movement that “wouldn’t typically be called dance,” foregrounds how Driscoll resists accepted definitions of technique and choreography. Her performance *Thank You for Coming: Attendance* was recorded in 2015 and posted on OtB TV on January 15, 2016. Like other performances on the site that foreground indeterminacy and collective states of being, *Thank You for Coming* is a series that, in Driscoll’s words, asks, “How do we perceive ourselves as participants in the co-creation of our reality, and through performance can we collectively create a new vision of society?”<sup>459</sup> In contrast to the support she has received from OtB TV, Driscoll has encountered dismissals in the mainstream press. Her 2016 performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music provoked *New York Times* dance critic Brian Siebert to start his review: “Will Faye Driscoll ever grow up?” Siebert ends his article with this summation of the performance, “...It’s not much of a revelation, but the silence is revelatory: It helps you see Ms. Driscoll’s misused prowess.”<sup>460</sup> Again, the slick, assessment-based writing of the mainstream press in the 21<sup>st</sup> century contrasts with the more extended, in-depth engagement we have to contemporary performance through sites like OtB TV.

TD and OtB TV may be best understood as interfaces between performances and audiences, between artists and readerships, that recognize alternative modes of creation and engagement, and make it possible to see how dance criticism operates in both spatial

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<sup>457</sup> Amara Tabor-Smith, *He Moved Swiftly Down the Not Too Crowded Street*.

[http://dancersgroup.org/onsite\\_smith/](http://dancersgroup.org/onsite_smith/)

<sup>458</sup> Faye Driscoll, Artist Statement. <http://www.fayedriscoll.com/bio.html>

<sup>459</sup> Faye Driscoll, “Thank You for Coming: Attendance,” *On the Boards TV*.

<http://www.ontheboards.tv/performances/thank-you-coming-attendance#about>

<sup>460</sup> Brian Siebert, “Faye Driscoll’s ‘Play’ Channels a Howl,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/18/arts/dance/review-faye-driscolls-play-channels-a-howl-into-fun-and-games.html>

and temporal realms. They provide material that opens ways of engaging with contemporary artists as well as understanding the theories and discourse that surrounds these events. This is especially important given the fact that a difference between dance criticism and writing about other art forms is the time-span of an artist's season. If gallery exhibits or theater performances remain open/accessible for weeks if not months, a choreographer's work is usually seen for a couple of days, as was the case for Gutierrez's weekend at CounterPulse or Keith Hennessey's show at The Omni. Dance critics have always grappled with "structuring" encounters for readers when the likelihood of a reader seeing the work is slim to none. A digital format brings longevity to and expands circulations for critical engagement that dance writing had not had before. It also increases access to discursive platforms, the speed with which posts can be created and circulated, and opportunities to engage with artists who are based outside of New York City.

The process for creating the films on OtB TV starts with collaboration between live performances, most of which are selected by Lane Czaplinski, artistic director of On the Boards, to appear during OtB's programming season, and a professional film company such as Thinklab, a Seattle-based independent production company. The film company uses at least four cameras, a sound operator and approximately three months of editing to produce each film. Matt Daniels, Thinklab's CEO and founder, meets with artists and together they discuss what's essential to capture at close range and how the knowledge of a camera crew might affect the performers. Czaplinski says the recordings do not interfere with patrons of his season: "People are so accustomed to having cameras in their everyday lives, we've had no complaints... If anything, the cameras in the theater seem to jack up the energy level. Still, we take several measures to ensure the cameras aren't intrusive. We don't allow the cameras to be higher than a seated person's head; we make the operator use foil or a hood over the blue screen of the camera; and we kill approximately 30 seats around the cameras so people aren't right behind the operators."<sup>461</sup>

Each performance costs between \$10,000 and 12,000 for on-site films (at On the Boards) and \$15,000 for off-site (at PS 122, FuseBox, and Portland Institute for Contemporary Arts). Czaplinski adds: "More extensive editing pushes the budget into the higher range... These figures don't include our own staff time, maintaining our website or the content delivery network used to distribute the actual videos." As a dance history teacher I became interested in the films as a way of discussing current trends in performance. Textbooks such as *No Fixed Points* by Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, which is a commonly used history textbook, is more than a decade old. No film on OtB TV is more than five years old. I see the immediacy of this medium—access to a production in its entirety, with surrounding texts and interviews—as holding the potential to transform the study of dance history from a listing of "great" white artists, as seen in Copeland's essay, to an engagement with current practices and contemporary performances.

OtB TV is not the first to provide this kind of access: the Metropolitan Opera and New York City Ballet have generated high definition broadcasts in recent years, and in Europe, Sadler's Wells on Screen provides full length performances on DVD. One

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<sup>461</sup> Lane Czaplinski, conversation with the author, October 2012.

example of a recent film by Sadler's Wells is *zero degrees* a collaboration between Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Akram Khan with Nitin Sawhney and Antony Gormley. Filmed live at Sadler's Wells in October 2007, this DVD includes additional interviews with the artists. What makes OtB TV distinct in the emphasis on collaboration between the staff of On the Boards, professional film companies, and artists performing during OtB seasons. In other words, OtB TV involves the performance's creators as part of the design and editing team. This differentiates the project from other forms of representation and documentation, such as photographs and reviews, which dominate dance history archives. Historically, dance archives have provided clues about shapes, costumes, floor patterns, movement designs, and impressions. For those who teach courses in dance history and contemporary performance this can be both a generative site of discussion, namely examining relations between history and written or tangible records, and also a frustrating limitation. As a critic's review circulated as representative of a production, the artist was dismissed from the conversation. To give one vivid example from the documentary *Free to Dance* that aired in 2001, dance journalist Zita Allen reads part of a review of Katherine Dunham written by John Martin. Martin describes Dunham's work as: "It's not designed to delve into philosophy or psychology but to externalize the impulses of a high-spirited, rhythmic, and gracious race."<sup>462</sup> Allen says "I asked Katherine about her feelings about John Martin's take and she said in this lady-like, subdued way, 'He was trying to be helpful.'" Allen adds "The man's not trying to be malicious, he just doesn't get it."<sup>463</sup>

OtB TV provides a way to engage with artists' work on their terms: it inhabits a liminal place between presentation and circulation, thereby complicating distinctions between archive and repertoire that Diana Taylor attends to in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*. In her chapter called "Acts of Transfer," Taylor writes:

Instead of focusing on patterns of cultural expression in terms of texts and narratives, we might think about them as scenarios that do not reduce gestures and embodied practices to narrative description. This shift necessarily alters what academic disciplines regard as appropriate canons, and might extend the traditional disciplinary boundaries to include practices previously thought of outside of their purview.<sup>464</sup>

Taylor recognizes that digital technologies challenge these categories of repertoire as embodied cognition and archive as traditional documents.<sup>465</sup> Between the three there are not static binaries but active processes, interrelated, and coterminous systems.

Archives, repertoires, and digital technologies simultaneously participate in creation, storage, and transmission, and digital technologies raise new questions around sociality, memory, preservation, and access. In Taylor's words, "although the digital will not replace print culture any more than print replaced embodied practices, the ways in which it affects, alters, and expands our current ways of being and knowing have not

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<sup>462</sup> *Free to Dance* PBS series. Executive Producer: Anthony Chapman, more information available at: [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 16.

<sup>465</sup> Diana Taylor, "Save As..." lecture: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGurF1Rfj0U> specifically minutes 35 to 38

completely come into focus.” OtB TV offers such a site of resistance, disrupting the hegemony of older approaches to criticism that are characterized by judgments and assessments. As seen in this chapter’s examples by La Rocco, Macaulay, and Kaufman, wherein a critic translated, recorded, or judged events, this approach to dance writing relegated the artist to a status of silent observer or bystander. It was what scholar Sima Belmar has described as a “unidirectional relationship.”<sup>466</sup>

Taylor’s theorization of the digital, as existing in relationship to both the repertoire and the archive, is useful for situating OtB TV in between documentation and performance. The films of OtB TV are neither the performance nor its documentation, neither belonging to the repertoire or the archive to use Taylor’s categories. OtB TV is not a simulation project but a platform for discourse and discussion, as evidenced by the numerous higher education institutions that use its films to engage with contemporary performances. OtB TV belongs to a genre called screendance that creates, to use Douglas Rosenberg’s definition, “an entirely new hybrid form, a dismantling of tradition that rejects and challenges the mainstream.”<sup>467</sup> The films exist on the threshold of performance and documentation as a kind of “performation” or liminal object that is neither performance/embodied practice nor replication/archival material.

Given the many artists based outside of New York who are featured on the OtB TV site, it becomes clear that New York is not the only destination for dancers and choreographers today. As examples in this chapter make clear, there is growing interest in artists based outside of the United States, in Europe, Central America, and Africa, as made clear by the programming at On the Boards, the Kennedy Center, and YBCA. These artists investigate and challenge ways in which audiences “see” dance and the systems that support and promote these events. As contemporary artists make work that occupies a liminal place between dance, theater, performance, and visual art installation, contemporary performance makes good on the possibilities for interdisciplinary connection latent in the university and that many programs only now are actively advancing. The projects of contemporary artists bridge the disciplines of dance, theatre, art, and music. An academic field that has proven to be especially useful for analyzing and engaging with contemporary performance is New Media studies.

### **Theoretical lenses**

New media theorists have brought attention to methods for analyzing the circulation of performances, in particular the distinctions between our modes of engagement with stages and screens. Rita Raley’s analysis of tactical media, Henry Jenkins’s definitions of spreadable media, and Abigail De Kosnik’s theory of “rogue archives” add insights to this examination of criticism and flows between digital technologies, archival material, and canon formation. Their scholarship makes it possible to see how and why the roles of dance critics are changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: critics’ practices operate within an apparatus that reflects and informs today’s intersections of embodiment, engagement, and mediation.

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<sup>466</sup> Sima Belmar, “Easier Said Than Done: Talking Identity in Late Twentieth Century American Concert Dance,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2015).

<sup>467</sup> Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12.

Flows amongst stage, street, and screen engagements are neither smooth nor predictable, and these vacillations make the development of frameworks for analyzing mediation and circulation more significant, and perhaps more urgent. Theorist Rita Raley proposes several crucial approaches in *Tactical Media*. She moves away from methodologies that frame protest or resistance as imposing a “definitive message,” and toward methodologies that highlight projects’ capacity to “provoke and to reveal, to defamiliarize and to critique.”<sup>468</sup> An essential contribution of Raley’s theories is her ability to foreground outcomes of these events and platforms that “remain uncertain and unpredictable.” This approach stands in contrast to dance writing that treats audience response in monolithic ways, that employs a critic’s response as representative of an audience’s reaction, or that privileges choreographers who make unambiguous or widely accessible productions. By highlighting the multiplicity of ways in which a performance, website, or game triggers varied outcomes, Raley provides a framework that emphasizes reception together with presentation, intention as well as circulation, experiential and epistemological as well as ontological propositions. She writes:

To conceive of tactical media in terms of performance is to point to a fluidity of its actants, to emphasize its ephemerality, and to shift the weight of emphasis slightly to the audience, which does not simply complete the signifying field of the work but records a memory of the performance.<sup>469</sup>

Particularly important here is Raley’s emphasis on the generative possibilities of ephemerality: it recognizes the importance of “the momentary evasion” and “the creation of temporary autonomous zones”<sup>470</sup> that offer spaces for dissent and subversion. By deploying a performance language to describe media circulation, Raley allows us to extend the “choreography” of the choreographic apparatus to the digital field.

Raley’s attention to ephemerality resonates with a definition of dance that seeks to account for dance’s transitory modes of engagement as well as its lasting impacts, its presence separate from performance. In other words, seeing dance events activates traces of performances, felt as sensations and memories. In a recent interview, Ralph Lemon, an artist featured on OtB TV, admits that he has been thinking of “momentary-ness” and ephemerality in more complex ways. Rather than define dance through its impermanence, Lemon says, “it’s not something I am really ever losing”:

It *can* be remembered and that becomes a really lovely and poetic revelation in how I think about my relationship to ephemerality, to a dance. I remember these dances, especially the ones my body has chosen to remember... [and] that memory is different from the dance. It is generative. It is alive. Perhaps capacious. It is a space that continues to be fertile on its own. Yes there are a lot of ephemeral things I have forgotten. But the things my body chooses to remember are remembered in a very alive way.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Rita Raley, *Tactical Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 7.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>471</sup> Ralph Lemon, “Questions of Practice: Choreographer Ralph Lemon on Ephemerality,” The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, March 18, 2015.

[http://www.pcah.us/posts/280\\_questions\\_of\\_practice\\_choreographer\\_ralph\\_lemon\\_on\\_ephemerality](http://www.pcah.us/posts/280_questions_of_practice_choreographer_ralph_lemon_on_ephemerality)

In this explanation of dance's simultaneity, of its absence and its presence, Lemon suggests that dance engages multiple temporal domains: it is both momentary and remembered.

If contemporary artists introduce different ways of conceiving of and making performances, how do critics, venues, funders, teachers, and audiences connect with what is current and relevant in local, national, and international settings? OtB TV contributes to our awareness of contemporary performance by engaging with this aesthetic that disrupts more traditional modes of choreography and presentation. What distinguishes the project from other forms of recording or documentation is its attention to the transfer of live acts to two-dimensional screens. After launching OtB TV in January of 2010, On the Boards reported a year later that there were 18,769 visitors to their site, more than 175 single downloads or streamed performances and close to 100 individual subscriptions. I propose that OtB TV not only alters access to contemporary practices, but also, more broadly speaking, exemplifies how technology redefines both performance and criticism today. If three essential functions of criticism in the 1920s was expanding audiences for dance, generating tangible records—articles about dance—that could circulate, and giving readerships frameworks for engagement, OtB TV accomplishes all of these as it offers ways of educating audiences and providing archival material.

Czaplinski explains that OtB TV exists in synergistic relation to the live events and has in no way reduced attendance at his theater. In fact he says the opposite is true: “The more there is online, the more we create enthusiasm for what we do.”<sup>472</sup> He adds that he doesn't have surveys that track attendance according to sources but his gut response is that the project increases attendance and for this he has anecdotal evidence: “One of our most popular videos is *Dark Matters* by Crystal Pite. Several streams and downloads of that piece have been purchased in Seattle after the project's engagement at OtB approximately two years ago. This speaks to the importance of post-show engagement in terms of study and collectability. Last week [October 23-25, 2012], we presented three overly sold out performances of Crystal's newest work, *The Tempest Replica*. I don't believe the enthusiasm for her work has ever been higher. This isn't just because of OtB.tv—we've brought her here 4 times over 8 years—but providing additional access via tv doesn't seem to hurt and it probably helps.”<sup>473</sup>

### **An uncertain future**

Alongside the benefits of such access provided by the films of OtB TV, numerous questions emerge about this mode of engagement. If we recognize that these recordings offer approximations of the experience of watching performances in a theater, there are three crucial variables that need to be considered: First, what happens to the kinesthetic transfer between performers and audiences when we are watching screen figures and lacking sensory connections like smell or touch? In a recent performance by Teatro Linea de Sombra called *Amarillo*, the stage was full of sand and one of the actors was smoking cigarettes. This kind of sensory experience—especially scent and texture—is hard if not impossible to communicate through the filmed version recorded for OtB TV in 2012. A second variable is the sociality of audience-experiences, in particular the feeling of being

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<sup>472</sup> Lane Czaplinski, email correspondence with author, October 2012.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.



part of a group that is both witness to and participants in a creative process. What happens when we are a solitary viewer, frequently interrupted by a phone call or task? What does “solitary viewing” do to our relationships with live acts as moments of creation? Sabine Breitwieser, former chief curator of media and performance art at MOMA in New York, explained the popularity of performance art in museums today: “If you experience a live act, you have a moment of engagement. The moment of creation collapses. The artist gets control of the presentation of the art delivery and reception of the work because they’re taking place at the same time — the creation and the reception.”<sup>474</sup> Lane Czaplinski responds to this difference between stage and screen engagement by maintaining their differences. When I asked him if OtB TV encourages audiences to see dance in co-present venues, and attend “live” events, he answered, “the online platform increases interest in live acts.”<sup>475</sup> In this chapter I have attempted to show that flows occur in multiple directions between technologies we use to communicate and performances by contemporary artists. In other words, sites like OtB TV and thINKingDANCE encourage modes of engagement that predispose us to these performances and deepen our appreciation of this genre I am calling contemporary performance.

Nevertheless, our reception of these films is influenced by the size of a screen used to view a recording and the distractions we encounter once we are outside of the theater. I call this third variable, “the site-specificity of screens”: how is the personal computer as site different from massive screens in theaters or university classrooms? How are these recordings received when they are viewed on a handheld device like a phone? In spite of these variables and potential drawbacks, I maintain that as documentation, OtB TV’s recordings are invaluable. A film’s ability to be paused, re-wound, re-viewed without damaging the material is crucial for scholars and for research. OtB TV has received many appreciative responses:

I wish to God OtB TV existed in 1990 when I was trying to find a place for myself in the arts world and develop an aesthetic. If I were running an arts administration or MFA program of any kind I would make such broadcasts/channels mandatory viewing. When I was in graduate school one of my professors screened a film of Laurie Anderson’s UNITED STATES LIVE. I had not yet seen Laurie Anderson live. It prompted me to buy a ticket to her next concert, in Lawrence, Kansas. That, too, was a seminal experience for me... They [digital broadcasts] play a crucial role in helping artists (more easily or quickly) build a larger global audience, be ‘in dialogue with’ other artists, and have greater impact.<sup>476</sup>

Does being “in dialogue” constitute a form of criticism? These films, like the writings of artists in the 1960s, shift critical discourse by giving audiences different frameworks for

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<sup>474</sup> Robin Pogrebin, “Once on Fringe, Performance Art is Embraced,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/arts/artsspecial/performance-art-is-increasingly-a-mainstream-museum-staple.html>

<sup>475</sup> Lane Czaplinski, email correspondence, October 2012.

<sup>476</sup> Diane Ragsdale, “On my Soapbox: Digitization of Live Performance,” *Jumper*, February 21, 2012. <http://www.artsjournal.com/jumper/2012/02/on-my-soapbox-digitization-of-live-performance/>

viewing contemporary performance and by motivating discussion of the aesthetics and theories that drive creative projects. Ultimately they hold the potential to reconfigure a dance canon and shed light on those artists and practices that have been invisibilized by prior approaches to dance criticism.

Each chapter of this dissertation has brought attention to the interdependence of certain modes of critical discourse and the artistic practices that they foster and support. In this chapter I posit that the websites TD and OtB TV contribute to this analysis by providing a form of criticism that is more visibly dialogic, interactive, kinetic, and kinesthetic. OtB TV and the digital technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century make it possible to access performances in digital formats more easily than in prior decades. As these recordings and site like TD open conversations about the roles and aesthetics of dance today, they also introduce a new set of players and a new puzzle of issues that need to be examined to understand the possibilities and pitfalls of such forms of criticism.

If OtB TV provides some of the vital elements of dance criticism—growing potential audiences for dance and deepening discourse that surrounds artistic work—it also gives tremendous power to the curator or director who selects which performances are recorded. In other words, if we recognize that, historically and currently, dance critics wielded authority in terms of documenting performances and promoting certain artists, is the role of a critic now being replaced by this curator? If much of dance history from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today was written by dance critics—Gautier, Denby, Martin, Croce, Johnston—how does digital technology and a program like OtB TV turn the curator—Lane Czaplinski—into history’s determining force? And if there is an element of indeterminacy in the performances, or as Jan Fabre says his performances change as much as 30% between shows and “the performance is finished when I do the last performance, the last show,” how does this one film, this one object become representative of a piece that is in continual process?

New media scholars such as Henry Jenkins are particularly adept at attending to the relationships between histories, archives, and embodied practices that inform communication today. In *Spreadable Media* Jenkins defines these interactions as a “complex set of co-relationships” and notes, “Twenty-plus years ago, the dance community made conscious efforts to recover the Lindy Hop and other swing dances historical neglect.”<sup>477</sup> Jenkins writes:

As YouTube became a prominent site for sharing video content, clips—from both old and contemporary musical numbers alike—spread online. While traditional collector cultures have been governed by preservationist impulses, these new retro subcultures are often more generative, more imaginative, and more playful in the ways that they recontextualize and reimagine the residual.<sup>478</sup>

“Traditional collector cultures” suggest Taylor’s notion of archival practices that store and preserve “enduring” material and require special access. The authors of *Spreadable Media* contrast these with embodied practices that “recontextualize and reimagine.” These negotiations highlight the interplay of archive and repertoire while also showing how canons are more closely aligned with embodied practices than archival practices.

In her article “Canon and Archive,” Aleida Assmann distinguishes between

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<sup>477</sup> Jenkins, *Spreadable Media*, 100.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

“working memory” (canon) and “reference memory” (archive) adding that “working memory stores and reproduces the cultural capital of a society.” She calls “canonization” the rigorous process of selection that secures for certain artifacts a lasting place in the cultural working memory of a society.<sup>479</sup> This rigorous process is not only about storage (archive) but also active embodiment (repertoire). Both OtB TV and TD refute a definition of criticism as commentary, opinion, or evaluation and attend to its productive dimensions, complicating the separations of presentation, documentation, and circulation, and encouraging a more mutable and polyvalent form of critical discourse.

These capacities influence the reproduction of a canon and how courses in dance history are taught. Greater access to current and historical performances makes it possible to observe and analyze different approaches to choreography, mitigating reliance on a critic’s or historian’s positioning of “great” artists or on their criteria of “should and should not’s.” This access makes it possible for faculty and students to examine how a dance canon has been constructed and to study those artists and practices that have been excluded. As Abigail De Kosnik writes in *Rogue Archives*, “users of an Internet archive may ‘activate’ whichever of the materials they wish, constructing their own personal canons based on the materials that they use... The definitions of ‘canon’ and ‘archive’ so firmly established in the era of print have changed dramatically in a digital regime.”<sup>480</sup> Such a reorganization of objects, archival material, and critical frameworks is the working of a choreographic apparatus, shifting our perspectives and acknowledging interdependent ecologies of performance and writing, repertoire and archive, a dance canon and dance criticism.

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<sup>479</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2010): 100. Assmann continues: “The word [canonization] means ‘sanctification’; to endow texts, persons, artifacts, and monuments with a sanctified status is to set them off from the rest as charged with the highest meaning and value. Selection presupposes decisions and power struggles; ascription of value endows these objects with an aura and a sacrosanct status; duration in cultural memory is the central aim of the procedure.”

<sup>480</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives*, 66-71.

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