



CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gatekeepers of dance: Journalistic coverage of concert contemporary dance

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Abstract: This paper analyzes journalism's coverage of concert contemporary dance as a method of human communication, a component of cultural conversation, and a member of the greater creative exchange. It analyzes the current problems within journalism and provides suggestions as to how dance journalism can survive the upheaval in the journalism industry, which could help dance become and remain relevant to a larger pool of American society.

Subjects: Dance; Journalism; Newspapers; Newswriting and Reporting

Keywords: contemporary dance; dance journalism; culture; journalism; gatekeeping; dance

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1. Introduction

Journalists and media personnel are charged with the task of conveying the truth to the world around them. Because of the wealth of information and experiences happening, in all subjects throughout the world, only a fraction of that information gets transcribed and presented to audience members. As reporter Walter Lippmann stated in his 1922 book "Public Opinion," the media creates pictures in our heads. These pictures inform news audiences what is and is not important. "Looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself" (Lippmann, 1922). People come to know their world based upon how the news media informs them and how that information creates reality by guiding exceptions of the world. This idea is most evident in the symbiotic nature of news media and sports. According to communication scholar Robert McChesney, "Virtually every surge in the popularity of sports has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the coverage provided sport by the media" (McChesney, 1989). The growth of the NFL is the perfect example of this phenomenon. When professional football started in 1920, it had limited appeal to the American public compared to college football and professional baseball; however, with the national exposure of television broadcasts and news coverage, professional football became the most viewed sport in America (McChesney, 1989, p. 62). Even as the journalism and media worlds are shifting, and seemingly

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Dance is a powerful form of human communication, yet it does not receive much attention in journalism. Journalism itself is an industry in the midst of great change. This paper explores the role journalists and news organizations can play in covering concert contemporary dance.

declining, this notion holds true. As sports journalist Frank Deford noted in *Sports Illustrated*, one of the reasons why football is America's sport is its constant media exposure (Deford, 2012). The impact of journalism and media exposure on professional sports, especially football, puts the power and influence of media exposure on true display. Would media exposure have the same effect on dance? Dance and sports do have differences. For example, there is no clear team to rally behind and support, there is no evident competition, and companies are not championed by cities in a fashion that makes everyone related to a particular team feel like winners, and many young people grow up playing sports giving them a personal connection. The infrastructure supporting sports is radically different, but several fundamental characteristics of elite athletics and elite concert dance are the same. Both allow avenues of emotional expression and cathartic release, both are athletic, they take constant negotiation and heavily rely upon instincts that have been honed through hours of preparation and hard work, they entertain, and only highly selected groups participate in them. There is no significant difference between the two that would designate sports to a higher status. The main difference is media and journalistic support. McChesney's idea that the popularity of a sport is directly related to an increase in sports coverage is an example that is applicable to contemporary concert dance. In this light, an increase in media and journalistic exposure about dance would accompany more popularity for contemporary concert dance.

The idea that an increase in coverage would correlate with an increase in popularity for the contemporary concert dance world aligns with a 2003 Chicago audience research study (Slover Linett Strategies Inc, 2004). The study states that a lack of print and electronic literature about dance performances, the companies in the Chicago area, and the choreographic works the companies perform are major factors as to why people do not attend concert dance performances. The majority of participants, including dance audience members, general fine art cultural consumers, and members of the greater Chicago community also noted that they desired an increase in communication about dance performances and the companies that perform them. As disseminators and gatekeepers of information, journalists can provide that information.

2. Definition of terms

The research was framed with words specific to the fields of journalism and contemporary concert dance. These terms are integral. Journalism is the practice of disseminating factual information about relevant, important topics to an audience. It serves the integral function of informing the general public about the world in which they live. To deliver the information that is most pertinent and timely, journalists use gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is a theory that developed in the 1950s by David Manning White. Gatekeeping is defined as the filtration of information that results in only the most "newsworthy" being distributed to the public (Reese & Ballinger, 2001). Journalists tell readers, viewers, and listeners to associate value and relevance to predetermined, limited options of content. These options are even further filtered through the designs of newspapers, magazines, and other news outlets. Stories with more importance often lie on the front page, front cover, or are in some way featured. Gatekeeping and the practices of the conception, development, and diffusion of news it encompasses are now accepted by media sociologists and the general public as innate to the news system (Reese & Ballinger, 2001, p. 647).

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

This paper will distinguish between commercial and concert dance. Commercial dance is any dance that belongs to the faction of popular art. Popular art is any commercialized, mainstream products created on artistic mediums—such as film and music—that are produced for the primary purpose of external support and capitalistic gain. French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book *Democracy in America*, predicted that such art would arise from a democratic system that allowed commoners to both create and consume art. De Tocqueville writes, “[In democracies] the productions of artists are more numerous, but the merit of each production is diminished. No longer able to soar to what is great, they cultivate what is pretty and elegant; and appearance is more attended to than reality” (de Tocqueville, 1899). Concert dance is in the field of fine art. Fine art includes literature, music, and other creations used to either divulge something about one’s esthetic and expression or intended to advance its artistic medium through challenging or promoting previously existing ideas. According to theater scholar and critic Robert Brustein, the continual decline of support for fine art events by arts patrons could be caused by an incursion of popular art (Brustein, 1997). This is seen in commercial shows such as “So You Think You Can Dance,” “Dance Moms,” and “Bunheads.”

3. Research questions

RQ1: Can an increase in journalistic coverage of contemporary concert dance increase the popularity of dance?

RQ2: How can journalists effectively cover contemporary concert dance?

4. Scope

The search for subjects to interview was limited to four cities: Seattle, Chicago, New York, and Cleveland, where 25 practicing dance artists and dance journalists were interviewed. These cities were chosen for two principal reasons. First, dance practitioners, educators, and professionals respect these cities as hubs for dance. Second, these cities all are home to at least one of the top 25 newspapers in America. New York is the home to *The New York Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *Daily News* of New York. The city also serves as a base for others such as *The Wall Street Journal*. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, these papers stand at three, five, seven, and one, respectively, as the top circulated newspapers in America (Associated Press, 2012). *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* ranks as the 19th most circulated newspaper. The *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* are the ninth and 11th top papers and the *Seattle Times* has a history of ranking in the top 25 newspapers in terms of circulation (Associated Press, 2012).

The scope of this study is limited to the field of contemporary concert dance, which is a living, breathing genre of dance. It is difficult to define because it is not confined to a traditional, set view or method of movement. Instead of ascribing to one ideology of movement, contemporary dance draws from the larger vocabulary of dance and can have influences ranging from classical modern, classical ballet, postmodern, jazz, hip hop, and a multitude of other dance forms from the United States and abroad. Contemporary dance encompasses these movements and can combine them in a sinuous fashion to achieve the emotional, esthetic, and musical feature inherent to dance. Artists perform contemporary concert for audiences in a proscenium setting or in non-traditional venues. Contemporary concert dance, unlike commercial dance, has the primary focus of exploring and advancing the art form of dance. Choreographers in this genre view dance as a meritocracy, where the collective creative skill of the choreographer and the individuals he/she works with dictate the connection of the piece. Concert dance values the integrity of its art form more than the reaction by and connection with the audience, thus concert dance suffers.

5. Method

During the summer of 2012, 25 people were interviewed for this study. After recording the conversations, trigger words were pulled that reflected the common ideas in each interview. For the purpose of this research, one negative trigger—do people use—and one positive trigger—education—were used. “Do people use” is short for the question, “Do people use newspapers and other news media?”

This holds significance because it demonstrates that many people from both the journalism field and the dance field question the impact that dance writing actually has on attendance. This questioning comes from the overarching belief that the general public does not truly use newspapers or, at least, read sections that are not featured headlines, sports stories, or celebrity stories. “Education” also holds importance to the conversation about journalism’s role in the communication of contemporary concert dance. Journalism must convey truthful knowledge informed by diverse pools of information. If consumers of journalistic media do not understand the information presented, journalists must provide a context and educate their audience about the field journalists write about. Dance journalism can go beyond educating audiences about performance viewing opportunities. Dance journalism can educate audiences about what makes up strong, well-composed, and well-performed contemporary concert dance.

6. Findings—journalism

American journalism is in the middle of upheaval as new media introduced in the 21st century—specifically democratized news outlets such as social media sites, blogs, and sites like reddit.com—has altered the traditional journalistic business models where newspaper sales and advertiser support funded the industry, and the industry has undergone significant consolidation in ownership through a series of mergers and acquisitions. According to Zachary Whittenburg, a freelance writer for Dance Media publications throughout the nation and the former dance editor of *Timeout Chicago*, “Today, the journalism industry—even for the most well established and the most culturally mainstream tent pole organization for providing news, cultural coverage and criticism for the general public nationally [and] internationally—is up in the air as far as what’s going on. Long existing newspapers in major urban markets in America are gone. They are disappearing and are continuing to disappear” (Whittenburg, 2012). This constant atrophy of traditional journalism has created several problems. In a talk with the University of Virginia Law School in 2008, former NPR executive Ken Stern listed the following as major problems. First, the economic structure of the news industry is no longer stable. In his talk, Stern stated, “The heart and soul of newspaper economics used to be the classified ads, or the job ad. We had only one thought in mind: put an ad in *The Washington Post*. Today we would have only one thought in mind: put an ad on Craigslist” (University of Virginia, 2008). Because the Internet has detracted from traditional journalism’s primary income, more than 10,000 journalists around the country lost their jobs in a decade (University of Virginia, 2008). Also, in response to this economic collapse of newspapers and the traditional journalism model, newspaper organizations have heavily reduced circulation. Since print news is still how the majority of newspapers make money, smaller circulation results in less revenue and resources. Fewer resources minimize journalists’ ability to produce strong, original content. Weaker stories disengage audiences and restart the cyclical process by causing the circulation to fall (University of Virginia, 2008). Whittenburg echoed these ideas in his interview when he stated, “Dance writing, dance journalism, all writing, all periodical writing, fast writing that exists on any subject is in a very tenuous place right now. It’s in a gray area of transition from old models that are faltering and new models that are still emerging or taking shape and, for different, reasons people will paint a portrait or suggest a shape for that transitional period in different ways. But I think that all writing that used to exist in magazines, that used to exist in newspapers—that kind of work—doesn’t have a new home” (Whittenburg, 2012).

For arts journalism, not only is there no new home but the old home is shrinking quickly. According to a study conducted by the National Arts Journalism Program, “Newspapers as a whole are shrinking so a stable position in a declining environment translates to less coverage than it did five years ago” (Szánto et al., 2004). Traditional journalism is contracting; however, the impact of the shrinkage of newspapers on art is greater as art is not and has never truly been a “stable position” in the journalistic world. The size of arts sections in nearly 50% of the newspapers studied by the NAJP was “cut back severely.” Another 40% were “cut back moderately.” Also, nearly all newspapers studied by the NAJP reduced their article sizes. In many cases, news organizations trimmed article spaces by up to 20% (Szánto et al., 2004, p. 11). In a field that many interviewed cited as having limited print space, averaging less than 500 words, a decrease in article size has a large impact.

With this knowledge of the shifting state of journalism, faltering circulation and the popularity of new avenues that appropriate and disseminate “news” and information, Seattle-based choreographer and Spectrum Dance Theater Artistic Director Donald Byrd asked in his interview, “Do people even use newspapers?” (Byrd, 2012). His question has validity. According to Pew Research Center, the percentage of individuals who read a daily print newspaper declined from 54% in 2004 to 38% in 2012 (Pew Research Center Publications, 2012). To combat that decline, popular news organizations have focused their energies on celebrity news coverage. Coverage of these celebrities is often cheaper and easier since the information comes from other news organizations (Miller, 2008). Former Chicago Reader editor and long-time freelance writer Laura Molzahn also theorizes that celebrity news is easy to consume by audiences who struggle with being challenged. Molzahn noticed that in present day culture, many people are selfish and self-focused. In her interview, she spoke of today’s societal trends and stated, “There’s kind of an unwillingness to go beyond yourself and look outside yourself” (Molzahn, 2012). She also suggested that celebrity news is a manner in which to capitalize on the popular audience’s self-centeredness. “The celebrity culture ... is a way of identifying with celebrities and living vicariously through them” (Molzahn, 2012). Although she said it bothers her, she noted that it makes sense in society’s trend to not have to think and exude too much effort challenging oneself. With the stress on the importance of the self, the celebrity culture reduces the need for human connection. Contemporary concert dance facilitates human connection, so without that as a factor of society dance too falls out of public importance.

Molzahn’s assessment aligns with national news trends. During the first week of June 2007, Paris Hilton became one of the top covered national news stories when four percent of national news coverage circulated around her admission to, exit from, and readmission to jail. According to Pew, 34% of Americans said they followed the story very closely (Pew Research Center Publications, 2007a). The vast amount of media coverage was not an anomaly. Earlier, in February 2007, Anna Nicole Smith’s death commanded 24% of the total news coverage in America the two days immediately following her death (Pew Research Center Publications, 2007b). The scandals of Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, and Kim Kardashian, and deaths of Steve Irwin, Heath Ledger, and Michael Jackson drew equal, if not more, media attention than Smith’s death (Pew Research Center Publications, 2009). Regardless of intention, media attention toward celebrities has prevented fields without celebrities, like contemporary concert dance, from having a stable standing in journalism’s age of restructure and reconstruction (Miller, 2008). The coverage of celebrity news may be the best temporary solution for selling papers.

Molzahn attributed the lack of success of dance writing to the lack of celebrities in the dance world. There are few members of the contemporary concert dance world that are considered overwhelmingly prominent and visible outside of the dance world. In general, dance no longer has celebrities and, in America, celebrity news facilitates the flow of the media. Sports, she noted, has such a vast infrastructure and support system because it is riddled with celebrities. This influence from sports and celebrity culture is reactionary and not precatory. According to Molzahn, “These changes are coming not arbitrarily from newspapers or media but from the culture. What happens at newspapers is a result from the culture” (Molzahn, 2012). Newspapers are trying to survive, so they conform to societal interests in order to sell advertisements, maintain circulation, and stay relevant in the technological age. Editorial staffs and journalists’ quests to find content that will enable their professional survival have led them away from dance, for they have gauged that their audiences are not interested in contemporary concert dance. Without the written contributions of journalists, trained and trusted individuals who have traditionally served and still do serve as molders of the cultural discourse, dance does not have the opportunity to be a component of cultural conversation.

Although news organizations are intentional about selecting news stories based upon societal interest, as with celebrity news coverage, editors and writers do have the power to inject information about what they deem as relevant, pressing information into the cultural conversation. According to Brendan Kiley, a Seattle-based writer for the *Stranger*, “The relative lack of writing about dance, not just in Seattle, but around the country relative to other issues or artistic mediums, I don’t think it’s a

conspiracy of the gatekeepers to keep [people] from knowing about dance. There's a certain level of interest in a thing, whether it's a sports team or a dance company or whatever, and I think that by and large newspapers try to reflect that and deal with that. On the other hand, obviously, newspapers can inject new ideas into the public discourse by writing about things that people aren't talking about or aren't aware of and give that [subject] a lift ... with the caveat that there's no guarantee that that conversion is going to happen" (Kiley, 2012). Although news organizations have the power, and potentially the responsibility, to thrust new content into to the American cultural conversation, there is no guarantee that the content will influence people to appreciate contemporary concert dance or see performances in the genre. The psychological theory of priming, however, indicates that the media can influence an audience's receptiveness to a concept, idea, or standard by providing an avenue for both the public discussion and the understanding of an issue. Priming occurs when "news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments...Both effects are based on memory-based models of information processing. These models assume that people form attitudes based on the considerations that are most salient (i.e. most accessible) when they make decisions" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). When applied to the news as a whole, priming suggests that people make decisions about the actions they take or the items they are interested in by the constant presence of materials on a subject. The constant presence of something makes that something seem salient. For example, the success of the Oscars or the NFL's Super Bowl can be attributed to priming. The amount of space and time dedicated by newspapers to those events alerts audiences that these activities are occurring and are worthy of an investment of time and money. With the constant reminder and awareness about the event, people are much more inclined to tune in to the event, see the event live or be receptive to events leading up to or similar to the Oscars and the Super Bowl. This includes movies and football games. Chicago writer Hedy Weiss suggested that although there is no guarantee that an injection of ideas into the news stream would mean a rise in appreciation of a craft, she did recognize an increase in writing about sports during crucial times throughout history has guided the institution of sports to be highly prominent and successful (Weiss, 2012). She and Molzahn both contribute the success of sports and the push to have sports stories widely in newspapers to the dominance of male figures in the field (Molzahn, 2012; Weiss, 2012). In newspaper newsrooms, women make up 36.92% of the full-time staff (American Society of News Editors, 2013). For the 10 most widely circulated newspapers in America, none have a woman as the top editor.

Not only do men make up a majority of the newsroom, they comprise a large amount of news audiences. "Men are 50% of the potential audience, and I think there are a lot of men who don't like dance or think they don't like dance. I do think that one underlying cause, not the only cause, might be homophobia. Because our culture is homophobic, it doesn't deal well with men and emotion being kind of in the same room" (Molzahn, 2012). She suggests that male audiences and gatekeepers are afraid that they could be seen as gay by continuously endorsing an art form perceived to align with feminine or gay values. Although men have a general predilection to appreciate and give emphasis to physical acts, according to Molzahn, men condemn dance for its emotional investment, which is perceived by many as feminine or gay (Molzahn, 2012). This influences dance's downfall in male-dominated newsrooms and prevents dance from entering the greater conversation about what are viable methods for embracing physicality and challenging creativity.

Traditionally, and even more so now, with the increased visibility of gay and transgender culture, Americans have had a social stigma against men acting and thinking in an atypical, effeminate manner. According to acclaimed medicine and sexuality historian Vern Leroy Bullough and his wife, sociologist Bonnie Bullough, "The level of societal stigma for cross-gender behaviors varies widely; behavior that is acceptable in one culture is punished in others. Europe and the United States have a rather strict dimorphic gender pattern, so, as we have seen, cross-gender behaviors in the west have been stigmatized and punished in various ways" (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). Dance conflicts with America's pattern that gender has to be separated into two distinctly different categories. Although dance exemplifies cognitive ability and athletic prowess, it emphasizes grace, beauty, emotional connectivity, and other conventionally female qualities.

Dance historian Ramsay Burt, an expert on the permeation and perception of masculinity in dance, suggests that a lack of acuity about dance as a craft is the chief cause of the male censure surrounding dance's legitimacy. He writes, "Increasingly since the 19th century, it has been considered appropriate for men not to appear soft and not to appear emotionally expressive. An individual who does not conform to these behavioral norms, and cannot claim to be a genius, has been in danger of being considered not to be a proper man" (Burt, 2007). Since dance is not viewed as a "reputable means of artistic self, let alone a means through which male genius manifests itself," males have difficulty identifying with the craft. Dance does not make sense to American society's gender paradigm, so dancers are considered soft in spite of the physical and mental strength required to dance (Burt, 2007, p. 19). This lack of knowledge about the physicality required to do dance, and its inherent standing as feminine or gay in male-dominated newsrooms, prevents dance coverage. This obstacle to coverage prevents dance not only from having contact with others, but it blocks the passage of news flow and infringes upon journalism's ability to enable dance to inform culture.

7. Do people even read the news?

To answer Donald Byrd's question, plenty of people are reading the news. According to Pew, 40% of Americans under 30 read daily news and 62% of adults 30 and older read daily news in both print and electronic platforms (Beaujon, 2012). Regardless, because people are reading, newspapers need to negotiate how to incorporate articles that are not controlled solely by the public's desire to consume celebrity news and/or the national convention to adhere to the patriarchal paradigm of news institutions where masculinity informs gatekeeping. News organizations have the power and responsibility to inject information into the news stream and influence both the cultural climate and intellectual reserve of society. These injections are what fulfill the Society of Professional Journalist's decree that "enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2008). Culture informs news. News must also inform culture.

8. Findings—education and advocacy

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

For Weiss, education of audiences about a specific dance performance experience is integral to dance writing. Weiss said "My view about all criticism is that its first goal is to make you feel as if you were at the performance because I think that you can for the academic aspects...read about that. You can study that. There is the excitement of being in the audience and most people don't get to go: where it's for culture reasons, whether it's for financial reasons, [or] whether it's for time. So the only experience—the vicarious experience—is reading about it" (Weiss, 2012). By educating audiences about the performance experience, she hopes that she can persuade audiences who strongly considered attending a performance or just stumbled upon her writing to begin their own discourse about dance and go to the next available dance concert.

Whittenberg (2012) also mentioned education as a necessary tool in dance writing; however, he sees education through writing as a means to teach cultural enthusiasts that dance is a legitimate language of the body and should be accepted as vernacular. Before writing, Whittenburg danced professionally with Pacific Northwest Ballet, Hubbard Street Chicago, and in other companies that allowed him to perform in more than 100 cities. His emphasis and ability to legitimize dance through writing comes from his bodily connection and personal understanding of dance. He lived it,

understands it as an art form and language and can therefore communicate it, not only an articulate matter, but a fair and artistic one, as well.

Whittenburg hopes “dance writing rises to this challenge and really think of itself as, what Jennifer Dunning calls, ‘the translation of poetry from one language to another’ ... What are going to be the best locations for a reader to have a sense, without being there sitting next to me in the theater, for them to understand what’s going on [and] for them to understand why it matters ... as art, as a method of human communication, as a component of cultural conversation, and as a member of what I like to call the greater creative conversation. It’s very important to me that I advocate for the membership of dance to be at the table of conversations about what’s going on creatively today” (Whittenberg, 2012). By educating audiences about dance and fighting for its stature in society, Whittenburg advocates for dance, yet he communicates that this advocacy is neither cheerleading nor free public relations for dance companies. Whittenburg stated, “There’s advocacy and there’s critical writing and I don’t think they have to be separate endeavors. I think that they can be joined. I think that they can happen simultaneously, but I would hesitate to say that dance journalism as an industry has much to gain by collectively considering itself a service organization. There are service organizations for dance. There are apparatuses existing for dance marketing. Dance journalists have a different job” (Whittenberg, 2012). This job is not to serve as a PR organization but to advocate for the existence of both dance and dance journalism. If dance writers were to act in the role of public relations companies, they would dilute the potential strength of dance in a community by not challenging artists to be better, reduce audience’s desire to see dance by not helping raise the level of work in the community, and take away from a journalist’s integrity.

Kiley stated a similar opinion: “Artists sometimes are under the misapprehension that the critic works only for them. That is not true. The critic is the audience’s advocate” (Kiley, 2012). Kiley went further to suggest that advocacy for the art form of dance often involves “negative” criticism, for that criticism is instrumental in preserving the quality of the dance works created. “It is the job of a good critic to call out things that aren’t working. If you give everything a gold star, that’s actually really bad for the art form because if I don’t really go to dance and I think, ‘I want to go to the dance show’ and I go to the dance show and the dance show is terrible in some way ... and then every critic is being so respectful and so nice and handling it with kid gloves. Then that person thinks, ‘Oh well that’s what dance is and everyone likes it and that’s what dance is, so I’m never going to dance again...I think there’s real bird’s eye view, big picture value in negative criticism some times. Even though it hurts at the moment, in the long run it might actually be for the best” (Kiley, 2012). Kiley’s assertion that handling all creations under the subgenre of dance with a precious mindset is destructive to the art form holds a large deal of validity. A critic’s role is to provide honest and fair criticism about an artwork—not always nice, praise-oriented feedback—to help advance the artwork and advocate for the field of dance, dance writing and for the audiences proper investment in the arts. Journalists and critics with the mindset of being “nice” and cheerleading for a dance company instead of truly assessing dance based upon its merit can potentially dilute the public perception of the value of all dance. Advocacy has to be presented through strong critical writing that may, at times, seem negative. Without this advocacy, dance cannot be a viable component of cultural conversation. If dance is no longer relevant to the cultural conversation, dance journalism no longer has a purpose.

Although some dance professionals are under the false impression that dance writers’ purpose is to reveal stories about companies and serve as free advertisement and public relations, other dancers feel that the best way to educate an audience is through their own direct influence. Donald Byrd stated that it is not just the journalists’ role to spread awareness about companies. He stated that as Artistic Director of Spectrum it is his responsibility to educate audiences by curating dance that falls under the genre of fine art and coaching them to let their cultural palette ingest, appreciate, and hopefully enjoy contemporary concert dance. In order for people to appreciate contemporary concert dance, Byrd argues that cultural arbiters like him have to be resilient and create authentic, high-quality dance so that work can help educate audiences of what quality fine art contemporary concert dance is (Byrd, 2012). In his interview, Byrd stated, “There is this thing called education. I like

to think of dance, the kind of dance that I'm interested in, as a kind of fine wine. People do not necessarily appreciate fine wine on your first tasting because your palette can't distinguish what it is that makes it fine. You have to learn what that is ... The job is not to pander to what people think they already like. We know that people like McDonald's. That doesn't mean that McDonald's is good. It just means that they know what it is. It's fast. It's easy ... I have the responsibility to help people figure out what the difference is between a filet mignon and a Big Mac. I'm not going to serve up the other stuff. I'm going to serve up the quality stuff and help people understand to appreciate it" (Byrd, 2012). To help people understand and appreciate his work, Byrd does not solely rely on traditional dance writers. He believes that the education of audiences about specific dance works and of dance's validity as a genre of art and culture should be democratized so that exposure can come from all sources (Byrd, 2012). The sources should not just be the journalists but should include the voices of the blogosphere and, more important, the artists themselves.

As an artistic director, Byrd places a lot of pressure on himself to do the journalist's functions of priming and educating audiences. He writes: "An artistic director's job in the community is to help people understand what it is that they are experiencing, what is being put in front of them. Whether you like it or not is beside the point. The thing is that you can appreciate what the quality of it is" (Byrd, 2012). The appreciation of the quality, not the specific work is what is most important to him. If someone can understand why something is good, he or she will be more likely to try it again even if his or her first interaction was not the best, just like with wine or filet mignon.

Weiss also noted that journalists are not the only individuals with the opportunity and responsibility to permeate information about dance through society. She thinks the education of audiences about dance, its purpose, its events and its contributions to the cultural conversation, has to present itself in the form of systemic exposure. When asked about educating and growing an audience she said, "I think it's television exposure, it's free tickets, it's journalism, it's a mayor [Rahm Emanuel] who talks about dance. It's the presence, just seeing billboards and advertising" (Weiss, 2012). The search for diverse methods to introduce dance into the cultural conversation, including the above-mentioned methods and the democratization of news dissemination is crucial to the success of dance.

9. Conclusion

For dance to become relevant and for dance journalism to become a legitimate faction of journalism, journalists have to do what they do in the successful journalistic fields of entertainment and sports news. They must appropriately inject ideas instead of just being controlled by social interest. As alluded to in the first amendment of the constitution and boldly stated in the preamble of the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, it is both a journalist's power and responsibility to inject ideas into the news flow to inform both the cultural and political sectors of society. They must advocate for the field at hand through writing that is as honest and accurate as possible given the state of bias that surrounds criticism. They must provide a cultural context for readers and engage audiences through education. Education has to be more than just a communication of ideas, events, and people. Education has to also come in the form of translation. We are all trained to communicate through words in school but not through our bodies. Dance writers translate the movements of the body into words accessible to nearly all, like a foreign language class teaches to translate Spanish into English. This is crucial, for it allows dance to serve as a method of communication. Without this translation, dance would not be accessible to a large amount of American society.

Zach Whittenburg, who served as a dancer and writer, has successfully combined these things in both his writing and his preliminary mindset before creating the text for a news story. Being a former dancer, he has a fundamental connection and sensitivity to the field as a whole that non-dancers cannot fully have. He loves dance as both a practitioner and scholar. He loves writing as both a practitioner and scholar. He writes with appropriate scrutiny for he wants the best for both the dance and journalism worlds and not the best for a particular dance institution. He incorporates new ideas into his stories as much as possible to reinforce the idea that contemporary concert dance is current and relevant. He translates dance to words in a manner that does the language of the body justice

because he is a native speaker of the body's first language: dance. Maybe more dance journalists need to have previously been dancers who are educated and articulate enough to communicate their passion through words. This is a crucial step in changing the culture of helping dance journalism gain legitimacy so that it can continue to exist as a field and support the relevance of dance. The news organization paradigm also has to shift away from male-dominated, celebrity-centric newsrooms to newsrooms that are balanced in both personnel and content generation. Last, there has to be a clear understanding of advocacy. Dance journalists have to know the difference between cheerleading and advocacy, and advocate effectively, to not only fight for the field of dance, but the genre of dance journalism. This advocacy is crucial for it will help dance journalism stay active and alive during journalism's current reconstruction while simultaneously enabling dance to serve as a method of human communication, a component of cultural conversation and a member of the greater creative exchange so dance can become relevant to a larger sector of society.

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