
By

Christine (Christy) Bolingbroke

A Thesis submitted to the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Performance Curation

Middletown, Connecticut April 2017
Copyright © 2017 Christine Bolingbroke
THESIS ABSTRACT


By Christine (Christy) Bolingbroke

Master of Arts, Performance Curation
Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance
Wesleyan University, April 2017

By studying a cohort of promising interventions in the American dance field over the past two decades, I will examine current practices and innovative initiatives rooted in curatorial practice that address the challenges of making and distributing dance. This research, straddling the artistic and the administrative, mines the ecological roles of artists, presenters, and funders across dance. Upon collecting anecdotal data and observations through personal interviews and research, I will cross-reference it against the New England Foundation for the Arts’ field-wide survey on the twentieth anniversary of the National Dance Project. This work explores the current condition of how dance is made and distributed in this country; highlights how and where its players interact; and inquires if we understand and truly see the goals we are trying to achieve, the problems we are trying to resolve.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

II. Programming versus Curating ............................................................................ 14

III. Economy versus Ecology .................................................................................... 19

IV. Dance Ecology Interventions & Case Studies (1996-2016) ......................... 37

- New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project (Boston, MA)
- Maggie Allexee National Center for Choreography (Tallahassee, FL)
- Trey McIntyre Project (Boise, ID)
- BODYTRAFFIC (Los Angeles, CA)
- Emily Johnson / Catalyst Dance (Minneapolis, MN)
- Danspace Project (New York, NY)
- Hope Mohr Dance (San Francisco, CA)
- White Bird (Portland, OR)
- TITAS Presents (Dallas, TX)
- Doris E. Duke Charitable Foundation (Washington, DC)
- Dance/USA – Engaging Dance Audiences (Washington, DC)
- The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (New York, NY)

V. Economic Challenges with Ecological Solutions ............................................. 60

VI. Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 80

VII. Bibliography ...................................................................................................... 88

- References & Works Cited
- Personal Interviews

VIII. Appendices ....................................................................................................... 94

- Appendix A: Chronological Timeline of Pertinent Events & Happenings (1996-2016)
- Appendix B: Questions from Informal Survey to Dance Presenters in 2013
- Appendix C: Geographic Distribution of National Dance Project Grants (1996-2016)
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Project Narrative

In August 2010, I met Rob Bailis at the Tanzmesse, a bi-annual convening and curated marketplace of dance from all over the world, in Dusseldorf, Germany. That meeting would lead to a turning point in my career. At that time, Bailis was the Director of ODC Theater in San Francisco, CA. The almost forty-year-old organization had just completed a capital renovation on their primary performance venue at the time and he encouraged me to stay in touch as he might be hiring. Fast forward four months later and I relocated from New York City to the Bay Area to accept a role as his right hand in the newly reopened theater. Then he told me that working at the scale of ODC Theater was a special type of presenting. I did not know how to interpret his statement. I thought presenting was all about programming: choosing artists to perform on your stage.

Although programming is one of the most publicly visible parts of being a presenting venue, it is actually a very small portion of the work. The operating environment—both within the organization and externally—defines the type of programming you do. Negotiating between these requires a curatorial point of view to work within your surrounding context. The act of curation is less about presenting a handful of performances, and more about acting as a bridge between artists and audience, connecting artists with each other and non-dance makers or dance civilians in the community.

ODC was uniquely positioned to engage in this type of curatorial practice. Because of its size and position in the Bay Area community, ODC Theater fulfills a pivotal role in the

---

1 Part of a dance presenting, producing, and educating organization. For more information, refer to www.odc.dance.
dance ecology of the region. Having engaged in a capital fundraising campaign with a civic commitment to be accessible and open to the local community of choreographers, dancers, and audiences, the venue mediates its programming between the national and the local level, straddling the presentation of finished work and cultivating the development of many artistic voices. Always an artist-led organization, ODC has long been a collective and incubator for individual voices. Its intimate venue (171 seats) has limited earned revenue potential and consequently limited funds for artist fees, but this scale and the institutional history affords the opportunity to privilege process, the making of dance, as much as product, the asset or event to which tickets are sold.

When I took on the leadership of ODC Theater in September 2011, I also inherited Bailis’ history of supporting emerging artists. Hosting a cohort of artists-in-residence for a longitudinal commitment of three years, Bailis and ODC Theater had catalyzed the incorporation of new dance companies like KUNST-STOFF and LEVYdance that went on to build out their own spaces in the Bay Area. ODC had incubated and partnered with new artist-led annual platforms like Sean Dorsey Dance’s FRESH MEAT and the African and African-American Performing Arts Coalition’s Black Choreographers’ Festival that continue to this day. There was a spirit of generosity infused in the support of these artists that flourished on their own and paid that service to the field forward.

Yet even in this generative environment, several systemic problems in the field remained and new ones were surfacing as the operating environment for dance in the Bay Area continued to evolve. With the rare exception of the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, funding opportunities were not growing. And with more dance artists emerging each year, the competition for these limited resources had become fierce. Although the Bay Area was
becoming a dense dance community with over four hundred incorporated nonprofit and/or project-based dance makers or companies, it still did not capture a great percentage of national funding.

I approached these challenges from a curatorial point of view, taking into consideration the type of work I wanted to present and where I wanted to place ODC Theater in the national ecology. I decided to shift support from birthing more companies and project-based artists into the world to supporting existing mid-career artists and companies. These artists had been making work for at least five years, but typically averaged fifteen years of experience. Some were still project-based and fiscally sponsored, questioning whether or not they should incorporate as 501(c)3 organizations; others had already institutionalized. All of them were still struggling to find administrative capacity to mirror their artistic vision in the local environment. Despite their economic positions and status in the dance field, I believed artistically they could make a national impact.

I leaned into this role as artistic midwife for every grant that I wrote for direct support of ODC Theater programming; I worked on two others for individual artists, writing letters of support or co-sponsoring a project that required a committed venue. This work cost very little other than human equity, but spoke volumes in terms of demonstrating organizational support for smaller companies and individual artists who otherwise lacked administrative capacity. The grant writing process generated empathy between the artists and myself, the presenter. Further, these funding opportunities for new work creation and touring expanded my own strategic thinking when honing a curatorial point of view and conquering the pragmatic challenges of programming. I now better understood Bailis’ statement that

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{2} 501(c)3 organizations are tax-exempt under the Internal Revenue Code, also known as non-profit organizations.} \]
working from ODC Theater’s platform was a special kind of presenting. ODC Theater, with its intimate size, would never cover all of its expenses with ticket revenue, regardless of what was on stage. It had a different measurement of success, more intangible and civic minded than purely quantitative and economic in situating the Bay Area as a beacon for dance on the West Coast. In order to effectively program within this context, the curatorial work was about fostering relationships with artists and finding ways beyond the transaction of presenting to work with them, whether that meant working on a grant together, helping them identify their own individual donors, or to think and dream with them long-term, beyond just the next project.

My experience at ODC Theater contrasted sharply, however, with the larger dance ecology; this became most apparent to me at regional and national convenings with other presenters. I noticed that with the larger venues up and down the West Coast and across the nation, the conversation about programming was less curatorial and more transactional. These types of organizations have a much more expansive platform that certainly supports as many artists as possible, but they are also trying to cover a larger overhead and their operational expenses with earned revenue. Thus, they tend to focus around a short list of the same dance makers and companies year after year and continue to emphasize the economic challenges of presenting dance without getting to the meat of the problems and opportunities working with and supporting dance artists. The transactional nature of the relationship between artist and presenter was emphasized by complaints around receiving technical riders and marketing materials in a timely manner without wondering or understanding why these problems were arising. Rarely did I engage with a presenter who was intimately familiar with creation grants and funding opportunities from the artist’s perspective. Lacking that
experience, the presenter may not understand how little the artist is paying themselves, their
dancers, and/or that their administrator only works five to ten hours a week because that is all
the artist can afford.

As the field of dance makers ages out of the 20th century model of visionary leader-
driven companies, and with more project-based work without as much administrative
infrastructure on the rise, presenters need to evolve how they operate and engage with artists.
They cannot expect today’s artists to simply emulate an operation model that worked for
their predecessors in a wholly different set of economic, geographic and creative
circumstances. Since process-based approaches to presenting and curatorial practice are not
the institutional norm, dance makers and presenters harm themselves by perpetuating the
same hamster wheel cycle of making and performing dance, privileging the nonprofit
incorporated model and striving to achieve outdated measurements of success that are no
longer viable.

Project Description

How do programming and curation differ? What opportunities in either practice vary
depending on the size and type of organization? How might the decisions of funders—
directly or indirectly—have curatorial implications that shape the field of dance? Where
does a paradigm shift still need to happen? These are the questions that drive this thesis. In
the simplest of terms, dance makers create and supply the work. Presenters distribute the
work, acting as a bridge to audiences. And funders financially support the work’s creation
and/or its presentation.3 Thus, I take a focused look at these primary players in the

---

3 For the purpose of this thesis, ecological players discussed will focus on artists, presenters, and funders as
the primary makers, distributors, and facilitators of dance and how they may embrace curatorial practice in
each of their respective work. Audience is certainly a necessary group to receive and engage with dance, but
will be addressed as a secondary player and brought up judiciously.
professional dance ecology in the United States, highlighting the evolution of interactions among them. This thesis will then examine curatorial practice interventions along each of these axes in the creation, support, and presentation of dance over the past twenty years. By studying a cohort of promising interventions in the American dance field over the previous two decades, this research straddles the artistic and the administrative, mining the ecological roles of artists, presenters, and funders across dance.

Collecting anecdotal data and observations through personal interviews and research, and cross-referencing it against the New England Foundation for the Arts’ field-wide survey on the twentieth anniversary of the National Dance Project, this work (1) explores the current condition of how dance is made and distributed in this country, (2) highlights how and where its players interact, and (3) delineates the goals dance ecology players are trying to achieve, whether or not they strive for the same goals, and the obstacles that often obstruct them. Finally, in approaching the analysis of information and anecdotes gathered, I draw on my own experience and vantage points—artist, presenter, and now hybrid service-to-the-field organization as curator—to distinguish my observations and research. In looking back at my work with ODC Theater, how might it scale to organizations of all sizes, informed by other case studies from the past two decades? This thesis concludes with insights and suggestions towards adopting curatorial practice in all operational aspects beyond the act of programming.

My research and time frame covers the twenty-year lifespan of the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) and the National Dance Project (NDP) as a parallel. NEFA is a public foundation cultivating and promoting the performing arts in New England and

---

4 Author is currently the founding/executive artistic director of the second national choreography center in the country. For more information, see www.nccakron.org.
beyond. NDP is administered as one of NEFA’s programs and was originally initiated as a temporary solution to address the loss in individual artist funding from the NEA in the mid-1990s (Miller). Twenty years later, it has become a normalized and integral part of dance making and distribution in the United States. Along the way, NDP, like ODC Theater, evolved into a special version of its role: a funder that mediates between the regional and the national with artists at the center of its efforts. To continue shaping the future of dance in this country, what curatorial practices can we identify and adopt from such examples instead of preserving operational models that make us dance in place?

**Theoretical Framework**

My intent is to examine where there is interdependence between the players in dance making—artists, presenters, and funders—and to challenge the current operating models and business standards. Interactions are difficult to identify. Not only are they often invisible, but they are also dynamic rather than static relationships. In my approach to these relationships, I deploy an approach based on systems thinking, inspired by Gary Bartlett’s paper from The International Conference on Thinking in 2001. According to Bartlett, analytical thinking focuses on the parts or elements of a situation, while the less common synthetic thinking focuses on how those parts or elements work together. Systemic thinking capitalizes on both forms to gain situation-wide or systemic insights into complex situations; the fundamental assumption being that everything interacts with, affects and is affected by, the things around it (Bartlett 2-3). Applying this theoretical framework to the dance ecology will disrupt the traditional categorical thinking by type of organization or player—artists, presenters, and funders—with a more holistic approach. How an artist will make their next work or a presenting venue will balance its budget embraces the analytical. Taking that into account,
while also applying synthetic thinking to consider how key players interact with one another, will highlight systemic pain points. This focus on relationships and interactions is the basic definition of an ecology, whereas an economy focuses on the financial measurements and monetary transactions. The arts field (including dance) is often interchangeably referenced as an arts ecology and arts economy. When pushing to embrace curatorial practice in all business operations and shift the paradigm from just meeting financial benchmarks, it is important to understand the distinction between ecology and economy. I will discuss this point further in chapter three.

**Literature Review**

Most existing literature around dance creation and arts business practices gives scholarly attention to the singular story of an artist or nonprofit incorporated organization, but does not examine them holistically. Materials are written with either artists and academics as the intended audience, or arts administrators. In some cases, like 1993’s *Poor Dancers Almanac*, administrative practices are touted as a survival guide for choreographers. However, this is a rare example of material that encapsulate both parts of the operation. There is some acknowledged interaction between the artistic and administrative as in Michael Kaiser and Bret Egan’s *The Cycle*, but the intention is limited to encouraging administrative leaders to ask for long-term artistic plans. Literature on the dance ecology tends to be historical and asset-driven: which works were made when, who performed them and where. There may be additional choreographic threads traced to delineate an artist’s trajectory, but *how* the work got made outside the studio, how resources were culled together, and the relationships that helped realize them are rarely discussed.
A key finding in the existing literature is the historic and continued difficulty in negotiating relationships to generate an infrastructure in support of the dance making process and touring of new work. A 1989 study commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and published in 1993, surveyed U.S. dance makers—individual choreographers with or without companies of their own—about the challenges of creating their own new work. Three of the top five concerns centered around opaque relationships with, and decision-making practices among, dance funders and presenters (Netzer and Parker 50-53). Almost thirty years later, artists still grapple with these challenges today. This repeating theme of the need to cultivate relationships with other organizations and be dependent on certain individuals with power who determine whether or not an artist’s work gets developed, led me to realize that all players are interdependent. Presenters need artists to make work so they have something to put on their stages. Artists need presenters to help their dance work get seen. Even if artists present themselves, they are still reliant on venues managed by others. Both artists and presenters rely on the contributed income and support from funders to realize their respective projects around dance, whether together or separately. But they often operate within their own vacuum, striving to meet business standards that may not align with their specific needs and competing for many of the same resources.

At the time of the NEA study, the standard operating model among dance organizations was nonprofit incorporation. Since then, recommended practices have lead new dance makers to emulate their predecessors and perpetuate the existing business standard: a dance company model. In addition to fostering a focused artistic director’s point of view through its repertory, a dance company model measures success by how many dancers are employed and the weeks of work that can be guaranteed to them. A dance company may or
may not have their own physical facility, but maintaining such a model in either case requires
significant overhead to sustain it: administrative staff, a board, a donor base, and internal
support systems to execute the daily life of a full-time company.\(^5\)

For most of the 20\(^{th}\) century, the literature has continued to perpetuate a traditional,
single-choreographer company modality. For example, in a 2014 dissertation, Maryland-
based dance artist Adrienne Clancy examined sustainable models of dance making from the
singular perspective of the artist. Her observations mostly concern a requisite type of
leadership style that encompasses strong communication, entrepreneurialism, and
adaptability (Clancy vi-vii). Her case studies center on mostly institutionalized organizations
in dance: Dance Place as presenting venue in Washington, DC, Liz Lerman and her longtime
company The Dance Exchange, and three individual artists who sustain their companies and
a creative practice while working in university environments.

All of Clancy’s examples privilege perpetuating a company model as the primary
mode for a choreographer to make dances. The single heroic artist figure enables a company
structure to grow around it, increasing the level of aloofness and the distance between the
artist and audience with no one to answer to but \emph{himself}.\(^6\) In the 21\(^{st}\) century, not only are
company structures questionable in terms of their viability, but a labor transformation is
taking place and rather than be held up on a pedestal only for entertainment purposes,
contemporary artists are more accessible and necessary than ever as artistic activists who

---

\(^5\) Relative to a project-based choreographer/company that may offer artists five to eight weeks of work (not necessarily consecutive in a year), a full-time, incorporated dance company may guarantee contracts of thirty to fifty weeks a year.

\(^6\) “Even in contemporary dance, historically a territory marked out by choreographic pioneers such as Martha Graham and Pina Bausch, men are much more prominent than women.” (Jennings, Luke. “Sexism in Dance: Where are all the female choreographers?” \emph{The Guardian}, 28 Apr 2013.) With the exception of U.S. female artists who ran their own eponymous companies and achieved a level of national notoriety like Graham, Trisha Brown, and Twyla Tharp, the ‘heroic artist’ figure in this country has been historically male even though women are the dance labor majority. But gender equity will not be a primary point of discussion in this thesis.
create work as a reflection of social justice and civic issues (Borwick and Schaffer Bacon 30-31). In addition, more and more artists are operating on a project basis, unable to sustain a full-time company or its incorporated infrastructure (*Moving* 48). Artists may be individual dance makers operating with a pick-up group of dancers or with a company. Dancers are expected to be nimble and generative during the creation process rather than investing themselves solely in a codified technique and the vision of a single artist. As a result, they likely work with more than one choreographer or company and may also make their own work on the side (Kaiser 42-43).

Since that NEA study, Ivan Sygoda, longtime dance advocate, administrator and co-founder of Pentacle,\(^7\) noted in a personal interview that the field has also seen a growth in professional arts administration degrees and programs. These programs train future administrators in sound business practices, such as not making the mistake of double-entry bookkeeping but fail to help the administrator find their own voice to talk about the art industry. Leaders such as Michael Kaiser, founder and chair of the DeVos Institute for Arts Management, promotes business practices with a proven track record for mid-size and large arts organizations, but says practices *still* capitalize on the assumption of a nonprofit incorporated business model as a template that others across the field are expected to follow. This approach is not necessarily translatable to artists and companies with less administrative capacity. I am an advocate for professional behaviors and systems in the business of producing and presenting dance, but suggest that applying a standard template of operation does not listen to the artistic voice or leave much room for creative alternatives to better

---

\(^7\) Since 1976, Pentacle has served as not-for-profit management support organization for small and mid-sized companies and project-based artists working in dance and theater. For more information, refer to www.pentacle.org.
serve the artist and the art form. Instead, the nonprofit incorporated business model creates an entrenched effort around analytical thinking and a narrow focus on the economic challenges within the performing arts. Administrative growth should match artistic evolution.

As this review suggests, the current literature reinforces an outdated paradigm that ignores current generational and geographic realities as well as today’s economic challenges in sustaining an artistic endeavor. Rather than offer a single alternative model for consideration, I believe curatorial practice can shift the paradigm to put ecological players into conversation and collaborative action around what they really want to achieve. I believe that by embodying curatorial practice to identify questions bigger than just creating or presenting the next work, we can find alternative opportunities.

Conclusions and Chapter Overviews

My tenure at a smaller venue like ODC Theater afforded me a unique vantage point to observe and participate a novel approach to the relationship between artist and presenter. Meanwhile, in convening with presenters working across the nation, I saw that in the larger ecology, the two groups are at best working in isolation, and at worst at cross purposes, competing for the same limited resources and funding. As the number of project-based artists (versus incorporated dance companies) continues to rise, larger presenting venues also need to adapt their operational practices to better engage and support project-based artists as the new norm. Such evolution raises the need for specific awareness and examination of the difference between programming and curation, economy and ecology, and adopting curatorial practice across all business operations regardless of the type of dance organization or role in the field.
The following chapters will explore these topics in detail, scaffolding toward curatorial suggestions for the future of the dance field. In chapter two, I will outline the difference between curation and programming, to more deeply define curatorial practice and lay the groundwork for its adoption across the work of the key players in the dance ecology. In chapter three, I will discuss the difference between economy and ecology from the perspective of artists and presenters in order to set up a shared framework to consider the case studies in chapter four. These case studies explore curatorial interventions from artists, presenters and funding organizations from the past two decades who have changed or challenged standard business operations in light of the shifting national climate and economy of making dance. Some are presenters who collaborated with artists to co-curate while others are new presenters who bucked the norm by choosing to focus solely on presenting dance. Several case studies feature artists who grapple with establishing themselves and creating their work around the prevailing dance company model in a way truer to their artistic vision. And some case studies highlight funders who have disrupted presenter and/or artist standard practices with grant opportunities and awards outside the traditional general operating support or new work/project support. Chapter five will consider ecological solutions to economic challenges to consider what is possible if we embrace curatorial practice and prioritize strategic questions to reframe our problems. My conclusion will provide a summary of major events in dance and arts funding that have led us to where we are today, as well as some recommended lessons from the case studies cited as interventions. These recommendations highlight how players across the dance ecology can embrace curatorial practice regardless of their role to design a new dance ecology for the twenty-first century.
CHAPTER 2
PROGRAMMING VERSUS CURATION

The introduction to this thesis raised the idea of programming versus curation as a distinction between a focus on assets: supporting a singular dance piece by a choreographer or the performance on the stage, versus an approach that supports the artists and/or an artistic vision in between gigs or has a more long-term focus. The following chapter elaborates on ideas and opinions about programming and curation, drawing primarily from film, visual art, and related arts fields where they have been best defined. The two terms are often used to connote each other, but each represents a different approach to who or what is seen in artistic presentation. Presenters and artists as curators/self-presenters are typically at the forefront of this discussion; less considered is how funders are programming or curating through their grant making. Delineating between programming and curation will advance the thesis argument to apply curatorial practices holistically and set up the next chapter’s conversation distinguishing dance economy versus ecology.

Curator, writer and film historian Mark Nash offers, “‘Programming’ is now rather an old-fashioned term… ‘Curating’ has only recently entered the film-programming vocabulary, but in fact I think the two terms— ‘programming’ and ‘curating’—can sit quite happily together” (Marincola 143). He goes on to explain that curating relates to the organization of an exhibition, while a program would be some sort of supplemental film or activity. Although I agree that programming and curating may sit happily together, almost symbiotic in nature, their relationship in time-based performance is a little different than Nash perceives in his work in the field of film. In the performing arts, we refer to an entire evening as a program. That program may have one or several dance works on it. There is an organization
of works or a curation that goes into a performance program for a single evening as well as an entire season that may span several weeks or months.

In dance, presenters also often use the two terms interchangeably, however, there are key differences between them. Programming prioritizes business economics: a predetermined number of artists and performances to sell a projected number of tickets and earn revenue to make up for shortfall in contributed revenue or unsubsidized difference in expenses. Curating prioritizes the artistic vision: caring for the less quantifiable relationship between artist and audience before, during, and after the final product of performance. For example, each attendee at the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP)\(^8\) marketplace every January in New York City, receives a calendar tool in his or her registration packet. This is a typical approach to programming: a chronological, linear view, filling slots with artists based on availability and/or genre categories to build out a subscription season. This is not to say that careful thought was not also given to the selection of artists, but rather highlights the nature of this approach. Providing this calendar tool year after year reinforces the buying and selling emphasis: the nature of shopping as a programmer in the marketplace, rather than fostering a curiosity in presenters and an open-ended approach to building relationships with artists.

In contrast, Hans Ulrich Obrist emphasizes in *Ways of Curating*, that the act of curating relates to connecting cultures, bringing the elements into proximity to each other, making junctions, pollinating culture, and mapmaking that opens new routes of thinking (2). While some programmers may identify with Obrist, stating that is the vision or intention behind their work, programming tools like the APAP calendar prioritize the more pragmatic

---

\(^8\) As of January 2017, APAP became the Association of Performing Arts Professionals, no longer prioritizing ‘presenters’ in its name.
considerations. Coming from the visual arts field, Obrist notes that entering into a critical consciousness with the curation of artists is to enter into a dialogue, versus passively watching and categorizing artists (4). Curating goes beyond simply making a choice and filling one’s datebook. Programming must take pragmatic factors into account like available funding to contract artists and dates at the venue. Curating looks at lasting impacts on an artist’s trajectory and the presenter’s role in that journey, as well as the audience served by the experiences built over time with a single artist or the selection of artists each season.

Along these lines, art critic and historian Terry Smith defines curating “as caring for the culture, above all by enabling its artistic or creative transformers to pursue their work” (20). This does not mean that curatorial practice is entirely devoid of some of the more logistical concerns of programming. Through the course of presenter interviews for this thesis, several interviewees acknowledged that in their own practice, the real care or guidance with the artist or audience, the curatorial behavior, does not kick in until the choice to program an artist has been made (Young). Grappling with similar financial challenges just like artists, the predominant practice among dance presenters puts the logistical concerns around programming first before focusing on the curation. Thus, there are a handful of pragmatic variables that inform the programming decision, “the necessity of having to forge an exhibition [season] in the crucible of practical contingencies” (Smith 36). If a presenter does not own their own venue, the timing and availability of space must coincide with the artist’s availability. If an artist does not keep a full-time cast or company, the desired projects may have limited availability as well. Presenters may or may not have an opportunity fund to subsidize artistic risk, but in either case, they likely have to do additional fundraising to
realize the engagement. These logistical concerns drive programming decisions and often make real curatorial practice secondary for many presenters.

An additional consideration in curation is the local history or archive it creates. Programmers would certainly argue that their seasons generate an archive, but in regard to curating, Obrist articulates that, “Collection-making . . . is a method of producing knowledge” (39). This is larger than merely the events that make up any one season, but pertains to the longitudinal trajectory of single artists and audience engagement in dance within a specific community. In the visual artists, this could be permanent collections or traveling exhibitions at museums. In the performing arts, and specifically dance, collection-making could refer to any given season or the gradual aggregation of presenting seasons. So, with each choice a presenter makes, whether to bring an artist back to their community or introduce someone new, he or she is impacting the community’s working knowledge of dance and shaping a sort living archive of the dance landscape. While presenters program their seasons and the impact may be to similar effect, curation implies it is done with more thought and consideration than the logistical concerns.

In philanthropy, curatorial practice is not often overtly considered. Whereas presenters can be perceived as individual decision makers who program/curate, funding decisions are often by some sort of committee or by even more opaque means. Committees can be comprised of any combination of program officers, board members, and/or peer review panelists. Funders may call their work programming, but they do not refer to it as curating. Yet, like programming and curation by presenters, funding decisions determine which artists receive resources to make work, which also results in whose work will be realized and whose ideas may never get seen. This assessment of programming versus
curatorial work, as it relates to funding, may have a clearer distinction in visual art than in performance. Terry Smith suggests that a visual arts curator is the “crucial handmaiden” for art to circulate and be publicly seen by the world-at-large, but not necessarily to foster the art’s creation (43). The creation practice in visual art tends to be more individual, with the artist making the work in the hopes that an individual patron or museum will then acquire it. However, in performing arts programming, presenters offer commission funds to support the creation of new dance works in addition to committing to program it on their stage.

As these many examples suggest, both funders and presenters are ostensibly producing knowledge as the result of their programs and investments in artists. However, programming ultimately prioritizes economic-based decisions and curating is the more ecological framework for action and decision-making. Unpacking the distinction between programming and curation shows that while their short-term outcomes are the same on the surface, each approach has a different driving factor behind its intention. Moving forward, the thesis argument to embody curatorial practices will continue to push for an understanding of this difference between programming and curation, and by extension in the next chapter, the distinction between a dance economy and a dance ecology.
CHAPTER 3
ECOLOGY VERSUS ECOLOGY

Introduction

Like programming and curating, the dance field often uses economy and ecology interchangeably, yet, each term connotes distinct activities in the dance field and creates different frames of discussion around how dance gets made and seen. Economy privileges the financial transactions and monetary values applied to dance. An economic narrative detailing the financial benefits of the arts has gained increasing traction as a justification of art’s worth, with advocates like Americans for the Arts\(^9\) regularly serving up statistics about art as an economic driver on local and national levels. Arts administrators have had to take an economic lens to art making to try to demonstrate its value to politicians and local stakeholders seeking to restrict arts funding because of philosophical and cultural differences. However, this economic imperative as justification for dance’s existence offers a narrow view of its overall worth for and within communities. Choices based solely on this economic valuation may inevitably lead to a shallow conversation: “it’s too expensive to produce…to present…to tour.”

Ecology, from the Greek for house or environment, on the other hand, communicates a more nuanced system of value that allows for analysis of the interactions between organisms and the environment in which they operate. With the realities of power dynamics, resources, and decision-making at play, financial transactions are certainly part of these ecological interactions. My goal, however, is to give equal weight to less apparent, but equally valuable interactions, like those involved in curatorial practice. In a dance ecology,

---

\(^9\) The arts field as economic stimulus is one of AFTA’s primary arguments. For more information refer to www.americansforthearts.org.
primary players include: artists (choreographers and dancers), presenters (independent curators and venues), and funders (focusing on institutional foundations in this conversation). There are additional players that, for the purpose of this initial discussion, are more secondary, but no less important. This list extends to individual arts administrators (for example, a marketing manager for an organization or a freelance producer), artistic collaborators (lighting designers, composers, etc.), booking agents/managers, and dance audiences. Secondary players often exist and/or are impacted by the work of primary players, but here, we will foreground the actions of and operational relationships between artists, presenters, and funders. In the simplest of terms, dance makers create and supply the work. Presenters distribute the work, acting as a bridge to audiences. And funders financially support the work’s creation and/or its presentation. As such, this chapter presents an in depth look at the interplay of these relationships and the obstacles within the ecology from the perspective of each of these major stakeholders.

**Overview of the Existing Ecology**

When marrying business with art, the dance field has already adopted a series of explicit (and implicit) standard operating practices based on a dance company model: an organizing series of parameters of how to make work, and how to operate within economic restrictions. For example, a new choreographer, perhaps from his or her days as a dancer, is familiar with the traditional dance company model and strives to replicate it. If he or she wants to perform the work, the standard and inevitable decision is to tour. Any touring is incumbent upon a presenter choosing the choreographer and his or her dance company as well as their latest project. Throughout this process, the artist and the presenter both need contributed income because the respective earned income alone, artist performance fees and
ticket sales, will not cover expenses. Thus, intentionally or not, the funders’ decision-making timelines, which usually follow a fiscal year,\(^{10}\) set the pace for all of these other considerations. Presenters announce eight-to-ten month seasons that generally align with an academic calendar, and artists have fallen into the habit of making work that aligns with these presenting and funding cycles.

Perhaps this cycle is rooted in the emulative form of dance itself. Often in the studio, a dancer may look at their teacher, the choreographer, or themselves in the mirror and copy or adapt a shape or movement onto their bodies first, adding verbal language to describe or recall it second. Particularly in European forms or traditional European-based technique, dancers are rarely encouraged to question, but rather to do as they are shown. We have done the same thing with business models. Artists set out to make work and establish dance companies in a similar fashion, emulating what they know from their own experience coming up through the field and/or what they see when they look around at other artists’ success. With government funding opportunities at the local and national levels on the rise at the middle of the last century, nonprofit incorporation was the pervasive action among dance makers as the artistic drivers in the ecology. I am not convinced, however, that all dance makers wanted to become institutional organizations or that that structure is universally effective. Nonprofit incorporation brings with it a series of institutional burdens like operating overhead and board management. Today, newer artists have identified the pitfalls of incorporation and are beginning to make work within a very different context. Presenters have not, for the most part, evolved outside the nonprofit incorporation model and still struggle to engage with artists in the same way, whether the artists are incorporated or not.

\(^{10}\) July 1 – June 30 is the more common calendar for the nonprofit organization’s fiscal year.
Dance makers. Fifty-two years after the NEA was founded, artists have options for how to build and employ an infrastructure to support their vision. Currently, the two primary modes of operation are 1) incorporating as a 501(c)3 or being fiscally sponsored by another 501(c)3, and 2) running on a project basis. Many government and private foundations require that grantees maintain nonprofit incorporated tax status in order to be eligible for funding. Grant requirements aside, the primary tension between these two choices is centered on operating capacity, but with two different interpretations. An incorporated artist with his or her own organization theoretically has greater bandwidth to: cultivate and solicit a patron base as individual donors, hire dancers and provide longer contracts, own and operate their own bricks and mortar, and rely on a larger, consistent administrative staff. The incorporated artist (and his or her staff) also must work to maintain a board of directors and fundraise to continue the creation of new work. Fiscally sponsored artists working project to project may enjoy a more spacious creative process, however, they lack the operating capacity and resources to build any momentum or long-term, strategic thinking. There is no cash reserve or line of credit. In addition to making work project to project, they are also operating grant to grant. And when grants do not come in, there is no individual donor base to pivot to for support. Historically, there have been more opportunities and activities requiring nonprofit incorporation, but that is on the cusp of changing. For example, San Francisco artists have been eligible to receive significant, local government and foundation funding as fiscally sponsored projects.11

11 For more information, refer to Grants for the Arts/SF at www.sfgfta.org.
Figure 1, is from the 2016 NEFA 20th anniversary report, which asked respondents, “Which models/structures do you currently use to create your work? (Moving 74)” The resulting graph demonstrates the many ways dance makers create work.

**FIG. 1. Models/Structures for Creating Dance Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Type</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat or to a great extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Work on Repertory Companies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo Artist</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Work on Students</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Model</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Collaborations With Co-Creators</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-Based</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NEFA, “Moving Dance Forward,” Figure 19, p 48

The results from the survey reflect the ecological overview by emphasizing the most extreme answer options: “Not at all” and “Somewhat or to a great extent.” Today’s dance makers are moving away from incorporating and/or adopting a traditional company model to make their work. In turn, this means today’s dance makers also have less operating capacity to do the work in between pieces such as grant writing, fundraising, communication and building relationships with other ecological players.

One final consideration in the funding of new dance work is foundation philanthropy. With relatively nominal government support for the arts in this country and the generosity of
individuals, foundation philanthropy is a leading player in the support of new dance work creation today. Unfortunately, the competition is high and there are often many more artist applications than available funds. Between 1992-2012, a 50% increase in the total number of incorporated not-for-profit organizations has been reported (Borwick and Schaffer Bacon 23). Although not all of these are dance groups, this means any foundation grant opportunities with open application processes may review hundreds of proposals, only a fraction of which will be funded. At a national dance field convening hosted by Dance/USA during the Association of Performing Arts Presenters in 2015, Jamie Bennett, formerly of the New York City’s Department of Cultural Affairs and later the NEA, remarked there are three considerations in any given application process, and artists can only control one of them. Those three things are the funder’s giving priorities as related to the amount of money available, the other competing proposals, and the quality of one’s own proposal. Ideally, artists would have a dynamic and diverse revenue structure so they are less dependent on foundation decisions where they have so little control over their future.

Depending on whether artists are an incorporated institution or operating on a project-basis determines their operating capacity and how these different revenue streams come together. Artists are generally reliant on foundation support for the creation of new work, on government support if they have a large enough or institutionalized operation that can justify the receipt of tax dollars and service to the general public beyond making new work, on individual patrons to help bridge the gap between general operating and artistic expenses, and

---

12 Author was in attendance at convening and heard Bennett speak firsthand.
13 Among the different types of funders, corporate philanthropy makes charitable gifts as cause-related marketing for greater visibility in a community or with a target audience served by the arts organization. Government funding, sourced from taxpayer dollars, must demonstrate broad public service usually emphasizing the number of people served by a project or program. Private and public foundations are donor directed funds that may support a specific social issue and/or art form at the donor’s discretion.
on earned revenue from presenters who serve in the role as dance distributors partially subsidizing an artist’s tour. Nonprofit incorporated artists and dance companies have access to additional funding opportunities compared to project-based artists. However, the incorporated business model carries with it additional administrative overhead and the need to raise more funding to maintain such staff and the necessary operating capacity.

Presenters and funders may also perpetuate the assumed need for the incorporated business model. Some funding opportunities require nonprofit incorporation under their guidelines and eligibility requirements. As more project-based artists interact with presenters and funders, it is not the tax status that is a requirement, but rather the presumption of a similar operating capacity to manage successfully booked gig or the grant award. For example, in addition to requiring incorporated 501(c)3 status or a fiscal sponsor to ensure grantee eligibility, some funders have a matching requirement to their grant awards. To meet this match expectation, the artist will have to raise additional funds through contributed or earned revenue streams. Raising additional funds usually requires additional staff or that the artist take time away from his or her creative practice to do the fundraising. In the example of the presenter and artist relationship, in addition to creating, rehearsing, and communicating the work’s technical needs, the artist must read contracts, provide marketing materials, and be responsive to any additional requests from the presenter. None of these requests are outside the realm of reason, but once again require additional staffing support or consultants (i.e. booking agents/managers) if the artist cannot take these responsibilities on themselves. In theory, additional staff or freelance consultants can expand an artist’s operating capacity. But it is a tenuous house of cards with the resources to employ such people (even on a part-time basis) dependent on project support from foundations.
There is a field-wide perception that dance touring is down or has flat lined. Even in NEFA’s *Moving Dance Forward* report, when surveying both dance makers and presenters against the available data, the authors can only state their “findings provided mixed evidence” (22). The National Dance Project (NDP) initiative under NEFA will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter among the case studies for this thesis. With regard to touring trends across the dance ecology, NDP grantees have been able to secure both an average and a median of about six tour engagements per funded production across the entirety of NDP’s twenty-year activity period (*Moving* 4). However, even after the Culture Wars\(^{14}\) and dramatic cuts in arts funding by the end of the 20th century, touring is still upheld as a goal and economic driver within the ecology. Yet in addition to the lack of growth in touring opportunities are uncontrollable economic variables like the rising costs of doing business (i.e. cost of living, travel, and accommodations) that strain general operating for each ecological player and the relationships between them. Plus, there are the hidden costs of the time and money invested by artists and companies to seek out and secure tour bookings. An informal survey of dance presenters in 2013 revealed that on average, they only present five dance events a year.\(^{15}\) Further, there are many more dance makers and companies in the field than those getting seen on these stages. Pursuing dance touring opportunities can be cost-prohibitive concerning time and money for little return. No matter how big or small the organization, particularly among artists and presenters, the dance field is precariously balanced financially. Hanging on to the idea of touring as a definition of success and/or a

\(^{14}\) Referring to the ongoing conflict since the early 1990s between traditional, conservative and progressive, liberal values as they play out in political elections and government funding. For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_war.

\(^{15}\) Author was the creator of this survey. Results were not published, but discussed as part of a panel during the 2013 Annual Dance/USA Conference in Philadelphia, PA. For reference, a full list of the survey questions administered is available in Appendix B.
viable option can paint us into a corner and possibly squeeze the very breath we need to create right out of us. Never mind artistic risk, in this climate, the real risk seems to be for an artist or a presenter to subvert the traditional format or to simply take a more generous creative process period without any sort of financial back up.

**Presenters and venues.** As referenced in the thesis introduction, a 1993 Dance Maker Survey commissioned and published by the NEA revealed five top concerns of dance makers, and that only two of those concerns were actually related to making art work. The other three were some variation on the funding process. To paraphrase the survey results and my ongoing conversations with these artists: respondents are unclear how presenters select artists, why funders are not supporting their work, and how networking is supposed to help with these issues. With a better understanding of the ecological interactions between artists, presenters, and funders, let us revisit the 2013 informal survey. The survey was distributed electronically to regional and national professional membership networks of presenters: the Dance/USA Presenters Council; California Presenters (which includes Vancouver, B.C. to Arizona), National Performance Network, Midwest Presenters and New England Presenters. Its results showed an average of five dance events presented in a given season, although there were certainly outliers such as festival presenters like Jacob’s Pillow, American Dance Festival, and Bates Dance Festival that do eight to ten weeks of performances each summer.

The majority of presenter respondents answered they are not currently supporting local or regional artists from in and around their community. The average venue size among dance presenters was almost evenly tied between 51-100 seats and 101-999 seats, although this varied most by region, with smaller venues concentrated in the New England area and the West Coast hosting predominantly larger venues. And when asked for a total average
annual budget—inclusive of travel, housing and performance fees—there were some additional outliers with larger venues and high six-figure budgets, but the survey sample’s average budget for presenting dance was in the $51,000-100,000 range total.\textsuperscript{16} Assuming all performance and travel/housing fees are equal, average artist fees for the event as a whole (whether for a solo show or a larger company, but meant to cover all touring members of a production) are somewhere between $10,000-20,000 per dance engagement.\textsuperscript{17}

To expand on the economics of this case study, a smaller presenter with 300 seats would have to sell out a single show at $67/ticket in order to break even on the higher end of the average artist fee; that does not cover any other presentation-related expenses (i.e. marketing, technical labor, etc.). The demand for concert dance is not that high, so to maximize their investment in bringing a choreographer’s work and/or dance company to their market, the presenter might ask for two performances. Often then, presenters will opt to present two shows at a lower percentage of capacity, spreading their odds of enticing the public to spend a night at the theater and amortizing their presentational expenses over two nights. Now ticket buyers have two date options, the presenter has more inventory to move, and may even be able to offer a more affordable ticket if price point is a determining factor within his or her community.

The larger the venue, the more well-known the dance artist booked, and at greater fees. If a presenter books a dance company with a higher than average fee ($75K, for example) in a 1,100-seat house, he or she would have to sell out a single show at 100% capacity and $68 per ticket on average. In this case, the presenter may not be able to afford a

\textsuperscript{16} This budgetary number is not inclusive of presenter’s additional expenses associated with the engagement, such as venue rental, production labor, and marketing. It also does not reflect presenter’s indirect overhead and general operations.

\textsuperscript{17} See Appendix B for a complete list of survey questions.
two-show run because of higher union labor costs associated with the larger venue. Ticket sales rarely come in that clean, so there would still need to be a higher premium ticket price as well as a section of lower-priced tickets to average out at that rate and address price point sensitivity. With the proverbial eggs in a single basket—and such a large basket at that—today’s presenters are generally risk-adverse. Larger projects usually include concert dance celebrities or choreographers and companies with name recognition. Given the dearth of dance journalism and avenues for newer companies or choreographers to gain this public recognition, this tends to privilege established artists and companies who rose to fame and incorporated in the late 20th century context. Newer artists on the rise only in the last fifteen years are at a disadvantage due to these factors and their economic consequences.

With such economic proscriptions on presenting dance, venues of this size are ecologically affecting the artistic product that gets made. If the market is trying to fill such large stages, certain work or casting believed to draw the necessary audiences requires work of a certain scale/aesthetic be produced. Larger companies (with larger overhead and travel needs) best fill the stages of this size, but these productions are counterintuitive to saving on costs or increasing net income. It is also important to note the general perception is that there are fewer venues presenting dance today than in the last century.18

Alternatively, in particularly dire economic times, like during the 2008 recession, presenters were able to book larger, more institutionalized (incorporated) artists at lower fees. Incorporated dance companies had to make good on their contracts with dance artists. They could either pay their dancers to stay home and just rehearse more, or take a touring gig that would only cover their housing and travel fees. Many opted for the latter because at least the

18 The dearth of dance-only presenters today relative to thirty to forty years ago came up anecdotally in several interviews, but it could not be found definitively recorded or published publicly anywhere.
work was still getting seen and the artists could potentially garner the intangible benefits of touring as well as maintaining a diversified (if not balanced) revenue portfolio. These conditions continued to privilege the touring and promotion of more known artists. The added problem with newer artists operating on a project-basis is that they often request higher fees than their level of accomplishment would suggest because they do not employ dancers (and incur those expenses) until they secure the gig. In short, while they appear to have lower overhead expenses, they need more income whenever invitations or opportunities arise because they only generate those expenses per engagement.

Even in the best of times, the cultural marketplace will not bear high-priced tickets to most concert dance shows and ticket revenue barely breaks even on the artist fees. These economic pressures further impact the workings of the dance ecology and the attendant decision making within it. Like artists, presenters are equally reliant on foundations to subsidize their programs and expenses. In the scenario laid out above, presenter and artist are reliant on each other. Yet, they are also in competition with one another for financial support from funders.

**Funders.** With ostensibly the greatest wealth and individual prerogative, foundations are the perceived power brokers of the dance ecology. Foundations have boards and program officers that steward the present while simultaneously planning for the continued legacy of giving in the future. However, these are also the challenges and parameters within which they have to operate. Limited by a set percentage of their invested corpus each year, the amount of money available for dance (and all charitable giving) is susceptible to market forces. When the Great Recession hit in 2008, many foundations had to re-evaluate or cut back on their
grant making. This meant that existing grantees were held at a certain base level giving with no new artists invited into the pool, further stifling the growth of newer artists.

Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams hold that grant makers’ initiatives should be “grounded in actual conditions and aspirations of the field” (204). Such a charge is the definition of working curatorially, but Goldbard/Adams go on to acknowledge some limitations to this approach, that “a few highly visible national foundations have been involved in supporting the field at key points for time-limited initiatives…driven more by the funder’s internal culture and priorities than by systematic investigation of the field” (204). One promising example of a funding organization working in this way is the Doris E. Duke Charitable Foundation. Founded in 1996 and following the wishes and interests of its namesake, the Duke Foundation’s support of modern dance has been broad, including “Artistic Creation & Distribution; Support for Organizations; National Sector Building; and Unrestricted Support for Artists.”19 In 2012-13, the Duke Foundation launched a few special initiatives with artists at the forefront of the program and/or challenging potential grantees to tackle sector-wide problems. These efforts are still relatively recent and their impacts only coming to bear, but these grants will be discussed as part of the curatorial intervention case studies in the next chapter.

Diane Ragsdale, formerly of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, would also agree with Goldbard/Adams. In a personal interview I conducted with Ragsdale, she commented that foundations must take their lead from the artists and grantees they serve, but still sometimes thematic grant making comes into play. A foundation may have a greater vantage point on the ecology because they can identify trends in the grant proposals they receive and

---

the reports they create. For example, The Mellon Foundation had been supporting single-choreographer companies for over twenty years. These artists had achieved a point of maturation artistically and administratively, but lacked any sort of documentation or archive that would represent their accomplishments and contributions to the art form’s development. This observation was made out of a cohort of single-choreographer companies, organized by Mellon and facilitated by the Nonprofit Finance Fund. Mellon addressed this blind spot with lead giving around archival work in dance.

I will discuss curatorial interventions including shifts in philanthropic priorities like this in the next chapter, but the Mellon funding for archival work is a tricky subject. It has had both a positive and potentially negative impact. It is a curatorial intervention to observe and respond to trends and oversights among its grantees. But was the archival work initiated by the artist? If the choice to utilize this funding had been at their discretion, I imagine some would have funneled it towards their next new work while others would have continued to build their archival practice. Part of the results from the work with the Nonprofit Finance Fund was that among the leading single choreographer companies participating; there was no operating paradigm to be a model of success for all others. These dance companies had established themselves in the previous century and grown organically around their artistic director/choreographers. When offered the opportunity to capitalize on funding for archival purposes, they were already in a complex relationship with the funder. If they said no to archiving, would their other funding have been at stake?

**Audience: As it relates to the economy & the ecology.** Let us look at economy and ecology in another way. Instead of considering how dance works are created and distributed from a funding perspective, who are the players that go to the theater to see dance and how
do they impact on the economy and ecology? Artists, presenters, and funders are focused on sustaining and/or growing dance audiences from their own vantage point. The audience factor justifies a systemic thinking approach to the dance field because while the audience may not be a primary ecological player in the making and distributing of dance, they do have economic ramifications. In their book and trademarked process, *The Cycle*, Michael Kaiser and Brett Egan promote “great art, well marketed” as a model for success in cultural nonprofit organizations. Their premise is that quality art work accompanied by effective marketing will draw larger audiences that the organization can then cultivate as new ‘family’ members (Kaiser and Egan 164-181). Some of these family members may then become individual donors. With more individual donors to complement contributed support from government and foundation donors, the organization can produce or present more art. When implemented, the approach in *The Cycle* optimally serves institutionalized groups or organizations versus individual artists who work on a project-basis. Further, the model presumes there is a consistent staff to exercise the prescribed processes regardless of the company’s size. Presenters and artists are essentially vying to cultivate these audiences – sometimes together, sometimes in competition with each other. Presenters may successfully bring this secondary player along and graduate them to individual donor or board member positions. However, unless they are a strong self-presenter, artists are generally unaware of who these audiences are, especially on tour, often because of practiced distance or a proprietary approach to sharing such information. If you ask an artist, “Who’s your audience?”, they likely cannot tell you because the presenter is the intermediary between the artist and audience, and that information is often treated as proprietary (Mattocks). And yet,
even if artists do have access to this information, it is unlikely that they would have the staff capacity and systems to act on it.

When considering the audience as any part of the arts ecology, it is also important to remember that this audience may extend beyond the realm of dance. Some presenters at major universities and performing arts centers continue to perpetuate genre specific subscription series and similar monolithic thinking about dance. Dance artists, on the other hand, are increasingly working inter-disciplinarily. This raises opportunities to cross-pollinate audiences. For example, choreographic projects have long featured live music and original scores. This may appeal to music and dance buyers. This could be said about dance and theater, dance and film, etc. Often, it is up to the artist to advocate to the presenter for such cross-pollination. And if the presenter does not have these other genre audience pockets, this creates both an opportunity and a potential weakness for the presenter who must now identify capacity or additional resources to capitalize on this affinity group.

**Conclusions**

The discussion in this chapter highlights the complicated relationships among the key players in the dance ecology. As noted, although in theory they are working in support of one another, economic models often overlook the fact that artists and presenters are in competition with each other for some of the same limited resources. Some funders grant to choreographic centers, presenters with residency programs, and service organizations so they may in turn, re-grant to or hire dance makers they believe in, thus delegating the curatorial decision to players on the ground, rather than those at a remove. Ragsdale acknowledged it is difficult for a funder to feel informed enough to predict what or who might be next on the arts landscape and as such, empowering another curatorial platform is the best way to spread
resources. Inside the ecology, decision making about who gets to be seen or who gets funded still feels opaque, but there is some trust in the curatorial decisions that have been made and the people who make them.

The nonprofit model is currently in flux. The 2008 recession significantly impacted foundation support, and some of the larger major organizations that were invested in the market are still reeling (Kaiser 32). Some traditional funding streams have disappeared, while new funding avenues have surfaced. So, while we have more nonprofit organizations and a growing number of artists making work in all kinds of modalities, ticket subscriptions continue to trend downward (Kaiser 22-25). From 2008-14, dance audiences in New York City have decreased by 20% (State of NYC Dance 17). NYC audiences are relevant as a nationwide gauge because it is one of the densest U.S. markets in terms of the number of dance makers and companies in residence as well as potential audience members relative to population size.

Overall, the performing arts, dance especially, remains one of the most economically tenuous fields because of its very labor-intensive nature (Borwick and Schaffer Bacon 22). Contrary to other fields that involve production (i.e. car manufacturing), it is more difficult to streamline dance production because of the dependence on human labor. Dance makers require people in order to realize their artistic vision, outside of making a solo performance for themselves. The economic structures for each individual ecological player are also fragile, and in their shaky state the players often find themselves at odds rather than working in collaboration toward a common goal. In his blog article, “The Nonprofit Hunger Games, and what we must do to end them,” Le Vu points out the result of this simultaneous growth in the number of nonprofit organizations of all kinds and the decline of resources is that
“instead of banding together to find solutions, many think of it as a zero-sum reality and so we hunker down and focus on our own organizations’ solvency” (Nonprofitwithballs.com). I believe that when players in this ecology are so focused on seeking resources to fulfill the system the already operate within, it forestalls innovation, keeping artists, presenters and funders locked in a system that no longer seems to serve their needs in the 21st century.

Despite the challenges impacting all parts of the ecology, several emerging and established dance players have embarked on alternative paths or formats in the past two decades. In the next chapter, I highlight these curatorial interventions to demonstrate where they have bucked standard operating models becoming new examples in the field and/or continue to challenge the status quo.
CHAPTER 4

DANCE ECOLOGY INTERVENTIONS & CASE STUDIES (1996-2016)

Introduction

In light of the current challenges facing the 21st century dance ecology, the following chapter explores a series of dance making interventions: actions or events that counter business as usual. These case studies provide a wide range of examples where an ecological player has had the courage to take an alternative approach. In some cases, the player chose to follow an instinct or new opportunity unique to their artistic vision. In others, intervention has evolved as a response to a problem, addressing a need or a shortfall in the field or in the wider culture. The two decades considered within this thesis were shaped by major world events like the attacks of September 11th and the 2008 recession. Nonprofits continue to feel the ripple effect of these events years later. Because of the precarious balance between public funds and philanthropy that supports concert dance, organizations are susceptible to how those revenue sources fare during economic upheaval. The intervening opportunity is to lead and launch an initiative head on to address the aftermath.

Surprisingly enough, intervention may also be the result of a lack of experience or institutional knowledge: the ingrained behaviors and practices that years of experience develop. Consider Malcolm Gladwell’s *David and Goliath* where he relays the story of an immigrant father, Vivek Ranadivé, and how he tackled coaching his twelve-year-old daughter’s junior basketball team. Not having grown up with the game in India, and certainly not having played it himself, Ranadivé thought there was some sort of unspoken conspiracy as he watched Team A score and rather than immediately try again for the ball, relinquish over half the court, and hustle down to the other end to defend their basket. This conventional
play then allowed Team B to regroup and concentrate on trying to score: a seemingly tacit agreement where both teams can make offense and scoring the priority. With his daughter’s team of inexperienced athletes and self-described science kids, Ranadivé bucked the burden of convention and played a more aggressive zone defense, forcing others to change how they play the game. He coached the players to try to keep the other team from making it across the half court line, pushing their opponents to work harder just to get within scoring range (Gladwell 17-18). Such behavior is an intervention in the way the game is played and the ethos around it. Rather than trying to develop more conventional athleticism—an area where these young women were already coming up short—Ranadivé identified a different way to develop an advantage. Such intrusions are risky, however in dance, such a response can mean the difference between operating in the red or black at a moment when the traditional model no longer serves the dance ecology.

**Case Studies**

The following case studies represent innovation and intervention from each primary player perspective of the ecological model: dance makers, presenters and funders. In different ways, these case studies embrace curatorial practice in their response to artistic vision or need; they demonstrate interventions in prevailing operational norms such as: geographic location, presenting/touring scale, empowering artists, and/or a meaningful grant making shift that challenges how the recipient will operate. Whereas most dance journalism usually focuses on the end product—previews and reviews of the work on stage—these stories reveal the strategic threads that make the work possible. Each case study includes a brief description of the artist or organization’s activity since 1996, especially highlighting the intervening initiatives. Because of the lack of public documentation, the research for these case studies
was done through personal interviews as well as my observations and informal conversations from working directly and collegially with several of the parties. Final selection of the case studies included is meant to provide a diverse sampling not only of perspectives, but initiative size and geographic reach. Finally, the order of case studies is set against NEFA’s National Dance Project (NDP) as the defining intervening program that sets the research period and framework for my thesis. NDP along with the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography are discussed first as standalone, brand-new initiatives or institution-types in the field. This is followed by the remaining interventions, loosely organized by ecological player: artists, presenters, and funders. Sub headings are used in the organization of the case studies to identify the dominant type of intervention. Within those categories there are some blurred lines and crossover between categories—in keeping with the ecological and intertwined view this thesis takes on the dance field—as the intervening idea often addresses more than one type of intervention or player.  

**NEFA’s National Dance Project: Creation & touring support.** In 1996, the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) established the National Dance Project (NDP) under Sam Miller’s direction. The nation had just gone through the American Culture Wars, which decimated NEA budgets for individual artists and touring. Miller recalled NDP was originally meant as an immediate response to the times, with an expectation that federal funding for the arts would rebound to once again support new work creation and touring (Miller). Twenty years later that has not been the case. But after the initial intervention, NDP continued to adapt to the needs of the field, making significant and ongoing impacts across

---

20 For a chronological listing of activities related to these case studies that shows the potential overlap between them, refer to Appendix A.
the dance ecology. The primary award, the Production and Touring Award, supports an artist directly with creation funds for a new work and incentivizes touring with subsidies for presenters to curate the work. If curatorial means caring for artists and acting as a bridge between artist and audience, the number of artists served and audiences reached through these grants in the past twenty years certainly justifies NDP as a curator: “342 different artists/companies, 787 different presenters, and 619 different dance works…to aggregate audiences of over 2.7 million” (Moving 15).

Under Miller’s initial leadership, NEFA set an example in the hopes that others would replicate these efforts in their own regions (Miller). The Regional Dance Development Initiative (RDDI) is a one such example. Disrupting the product-oriented touring ideology, RDDI invited regional cohorts of dance artists for a ten-day dance lab designed to help them articulate their practice and strengthen partnerships between artists and presenters. RDDI labs have taken place in Minnesota, New England, the San Francisco Bay Area, Portland, Seattle, and Chicago. In addition to identifying a critical mass of dance makers in an area, there must also be buy-in from local or regional funders to support the lab itself. Through this exchange of work and ideas, RDDI also connects artists to presenters beyond the transactional booking arrangement; RDDI fosters conversation about the dance maker’s work and how to locate it in the marketplace (Steinwald). As a half-step to product development and professional development for artists, the program was an intervention in itself, but the added benefit of shifting the relationship and power dynamic between artists and presenters to a more generative art making space also presents new possibilities for the dance ecology.

Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography: Brand new ecological player.

In 2004, the first national center for choreography was realized at Florida State University in
Tallahassee. Named the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC), it was the first of its kind in the United States.\(^2\) Rather than a presenter curating public performance or a funder administering operating or creation support to artists and dance companies, MANCC aggregates resources like time, space, and money and hosts creative residencies for artists and dance companies. Like some of the other case studies, its location in Florida is an intervention in the geography of the dance ecology, which privileges the East Coast. But more notably, its creation was an intervention in itself, establishing a new player type in the dance ecology. Certainly, it holds curatorial responsibility within the field, but it is not a presenter or public platform concerned with selling enough tickets to cover expenses. MANCC is dedicated to offering developmental residencies for choreographers. The Founding Executive/Artistic Director, Jennifer Calienes, was at its helm from 2004-2014. Calienes recalled that there was an intuitive focus from her previous five years working at NEFA’s NDP to support a “legacy tier of artists” whose clear vision and track record entitled them to one level of support. Simultaneously, MANCC also culled a peer-nominated platform for more emerging voices at a lesser level of support, but on a multi-year commitment (Calienes). In a given year, one legacy artist and five to six emerging artists could be hosted at MANCC. For its fifth anniversary, a National Forum convened in Tallahassee with almost one hundred people present. Artists, educators, curators, residency centers, and funders discussed how to support the development of new work. The very introduction and existence of a national center for choreography adds to the dance ecology. Further, MANCC’s focus on the development of new work aside from presenting it provides

\(^2\) National choreography centers are regular practice in Europe, with notably nineteen in France alone. In the U.S. dance organizations and institutions like artists and presenters may offer choreographic residencies or similar services on top of their core programs. As an organization dedicated to supporting the choreographic process as its leading priority, MANCC is the first of its kind. See www.mancc.org for more information.
a highly-specialized conversation thread in the ecology that artists, funders, and presenters have chosen to incorporate into their ongoing work. MANCC has expanded support for dance makers and the creative process while also playing tastemaker and thought leader for dance in the United States.

**Trey McIntyre Project: Geographic location.** Beginning in 1990, Trey McIntyre started choreographing on commission for major ballet companies. By the turn of the 21st century, he had completed over 100 dance works and had already been named resident choreographer at several major and regional ballet companies. In 2004, McIntyre developed an ongoing group of dancers who convened in the summers at the White Oak Plantation when many companies were in the off-season of their dancer contracts. In 2008, vision and opportunity coincided with the launch of the Trey McIntyre Project. When McIntyre relocated to Boise, ID to establish the group, several dance leaders remarked that the young group was crazy not to choose one of the more established dance cities. TMP had even politely declined seven-figure grant offers in some of those cities to move to Boise (Schert). This geographic intervention alone made a statement that raised attention and interest from across the field; it was widely speculated that the group would fail solely based on their choice of location. However, Boise provided TMP more latitude to explore and develop themselves as an organization than a dense market with greater competition for resources. As a renaissance artist, McIntyre had a broader, comprehensive vision that needed that room. All the promotional deliverables were an extension of McIntyre’s artistic voice. He designed and developed TMP promotional materials and its website in addition to creating the work, and the community avidly accepted the brand.
While establishing themselves as “rock stars” in their home community, TMP also achieved great success on the road, touring to twenty cities annually. John Michael Schert doubled as both dancer and executive director. Mirroring McIntyre’s commitment to both the art on stage and in the marketing, Schert cultivated and managed board members, fundraising, and in-house booking opportunities. An artist taking on administrative responsibilities is not per se an intervention; in some shape or form, all dance makers are balancing the artistic and the administrative. However, the clear set of artistic and entrepreneurial values being equally represented in the artwork and business administration provided a strong base allowing TMP to buck dance field conventions. And this particular approach underscored a curatorial practice and philosophy that moved beyond the product-based practice of the field, the hamster wheel of just making the next work. Within their operations, TMP was self-informed and could be self-critical. They often stopped programs that no longer resonated with the core values or the artists’ interests even if they were continuing to generate revenue.

Making Boise their home base ultimately freed TMP from the East Coast-centric prevailing notions of how dance is made. Reflecting in hindsight in a personal interview for this thesis, Schert offered that perhaps it was most significant that TMP never considered itself a dance company. Company implies various connotations: regular dancer contracts for a certain number of weeks, a board, an institutional budget. TMP had all of those things, but by not calling themselves a company, there was an artistic intention and freedom to operate beyond the traditional artistic deliverables of a dance company. This freedom opened them up to employ the creative process in unexpected places: to move beyond the classical dance end-products such as a theatrical performance and to tap their dancers to exert their artistry in
non-traditional engagements. For example, TMP dancers were artists in residence in local hospitals and nursing homes. TMP further rocked the dance ecology when they decided to disband the touring group of dancers at a high point. Some could not understand how they could turn down such success. Others presumed that the experiment had failed on other fronts. I offer that this action is a courageous one and potentially a new trend; showing a generational shift among dance makers. Since the field is evolving and professionalizing, we continue to cultivate better-informed dance makers, dancers, and arts administrators. For a young start-up like TMP to say, “that’s enough for now. We’re interested in doing something else…” portends that future players can also avoid the trappings of long-term institutional burden and structures that no longer serve the greater artistic purpose. TMP still carries an artistic mission including new work commissions of other companies as well as photography and film featuring McIntyre’s choreography. It just does not produce new dance works with a full-time company of dancers or seek performance touring any more.

**BODYTRAFFIC: Geographic location & artist-led commissioning.** Los Angeles-based BODYTRAFFIC is a repertory company led by two female dancers, Tina Finkelman-Berkett and Lillian Rose Barbeito. Los Angeles is a dance community fraught with challenges and questions of credibility—as far from the East Coast center of established dance as possible in the continental United States. Geographic sprawl in its own region divides artists and venues, and the looming commercial forces of film and television are often perceived as being in direct artistic conflict with concert dance. An ongoing challenge to Los Angeles has been the unwritten qualifier that really “good” dance cities have a professional ballet company. New York City has two, Houston, Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, DC all have one major ballet company. These
organizations are traditionally viewed as validating the existence of a “serious” arts community. Finkelman-Berkett and Barbeito both trained and graduated from programs in New York City (Barnard College and Juilliard, respectively) but relocated to southern California after graduation. Meeting for the first time in a local ballet class, the two women recognized an immediate kinship in one another. Rather than start a dance company to make their own work, they created BODYTRAFFIC to commission others and make performance opportunities happen for themselves. In addition to operating outside of a traditionally celebrated dance market, the self-agency these dancers exercised to essentially curate and select the choreographers with whom they would work is an intervention in the typical dance ecology. Many other companies commission new work, but they usually have an artistic director who primarily choreographs his (or her, but usually his) own work. BODYTRAFFIC commissions two to three new works a year and tours to ten to twenty cities annually. They still face the standard economic challenges of dance company operation and sustainability—identifying talent, retaining dancers with enough weeks of work, and securing reliable funding—but their artistic achievements have changed how new work is created and distributed. Many of their commissioned choreographers are emerging artists like Kyle Abraham, who was named a MacArthur genius grant recipient on the eve of his BODYTRAFFIC work’s preview, or international choreographers like Barak Marshall or Richard Siegal who did not then have touring companies of their own. BODYTRAFFIC is not only a dancer-led generator and commissioner of new work, but also an artist-led distributor. In a short amount of time, they have created sixteen new dance works. This is quite an accomplishment for an incorporated company that does not rely on its artistic directors for new work, does not have its own physical facility, or sustain a full-time
company year-round. Approaching their tenth anniversary, BODYTRAFFIC continues to weather internal transition. Barbeito has retired from performing, but retains an artistic leadership role, and the company is currently questioning if they can sustain their current operating format or need to evolve.

**Emily Johnson: Geographic location & creation/touring scale.** Emily Johnson challenges the scale of presenting and touring. She is now based in New York City, but operated out of Minneapolis for the bulk of the period discussed in this thesis. A Native American or self-described indigenous artist with an iterative process drawn from her heritage, she regularly challenges conventions in concert performance with her work on stage and her interactions with presenting venues. In the NEFA “Moving Dance Forward” report and survey, one of Johnson’s presenting partners was quoted as noting, “six weeks with Emily changes the [organizational] culture...” (32). In *The Thank-You Bar*, she transformed venues across the country from traditional prosceniums with hundreds of seats to intimate venues. Johnson and a musician performed around an audience of thirty-five people seated in the center of the stage. As a master storyteller, Johnson structured the entire work as an invitation to engage seemingly one-on-one with her. She asked viewers to hold a piece of her “igloo” (a small box lit from within) and to gather around as if transported to a campfire while she wove a tale about the blackfish ensconced in a children’s tide pool of leaves. *Niicugni* asked community members to skin salmon and create fish-skin lanterns that would be part of the set design. It also included a local movement choir joining Johnson and Aretha Aoki on stage.

*SHORE*, as the culminating piece of the trilogy, completely evolved the artist/audience relationship. Performed in four parts over a week’s time, *SHORE* included a
reading of local writers curated by Johnson, a service activity performed by the artists and community members, a performance that started outside and traveled to a theatrical venue, and a potluck feast. I was a presenter on the first and third pieces of the trilogy, thus I personally experienced the performances and witnessed Johnson’s radical re-imagination of dance firsthand. From language to describe the event, to how we built relationships with targeted communities, to the positioning of audience not just as ticket buyers, but as participants, the performance innovated on the level of venue scale, presenter as host, and performer relationship to audience. Particularly with SHORE, the presentation and promotion of the “non-performative” events—reading, service, and feast—were not merely performance add-ons. Community outreach and engagement is often considered a value-added program to the shows. At Johnson’s insistence, the messaging promoted the sum of all activities—each as an invitation—without privileging one over the other. In hindsight, I can acknowledge that the performance itself was the least important piece of the experience. The very idea flips the dance ecology and touring model on its head. True exchange and engagement in the community also created a flat approach in defining audiences. Whereas show ticket buyers must pay to play, community outreach is usually undertaken as a form of altruism: targeting “at-risk” groups who may or may not see the actual show. Johnson’s work does not privilege those who can buy a ticket, but rather seeks to invite and engage at all levels. Finally, the multiple types of events and scale in size also challenges the traditional economic definitions of success.

The content and format of Johnson’s work is non-conventional for dance touring, and the overall scope of a trilogy challenged the norms in dance making. Grant making and presenting lifecycles, such as they are, tend to operate on an annual basis; this often forces
artists to plug in by offering one new work a year without any breathing room or space for reflection in between. Johnson’s piece, in contrast, was in development for over six years. The other operational shift with her approach is that because of the need to be an iterative process on the ground and potentially deep reach into the community, it also bucks the economy of touring. Rather than hit twenty to thirty cities in a year with single performance run-outs, presence in and among the community allowed Johnson to connect with thought leaders and converse one-on-one. Truly successful installations of SHORE were realized through Johnson’s physical relocation to the community for weeks or even months at a time. This may not be financially viable for many artists or presenters in terms of time or money. However, her approach to performance and experience-making challenges presenters to ask themselves of their own capacity to support and promote work that is not “plug and play.”

**Danspace Project: Artist-led curation/commission.** On a smaller, but no less integral, scale, the last decade has seen more artist-led curatorial projects. Artists have always been a driving force in the dance ecology—first with ideas and new work, and inevitably with their own human equity to make it work. Once again, Terry Smith offers that curators are artists, “making one’s thinking a conscious factor in the visitor’s experience” at museums (128). One such innovator, Judy Hussie-Taylor, assumed the helm of Danspace Project out of St. Mark’s Church in New York City in 2008. The Platform series was one of her first initiatives, and is now eight years along. Through Platform, she collaborates with artists to curate a series of events varying in shape and scale; these vary in length from one week to several months, and in conception from works-in-progress to finished works. Additional activities range from panel discussions to a published catalogue of writing around dance.
In conversation with Hussie-Taylor, she remarked that she did not think she was disrupting the dance ecology on a national level, but rather trying to shift the status quo within New York City. Artists there could reliably count on performing for a weekend in one of a handful of venues once, maybe twice a year. Her intervening question expanded around how the traditional commissioning opportunity could evolve in a meaningful way. The creative process revealed how artists could be empowered to curate large programmatic platforms for their own work and/or their peers. Perhaps it was without intent, but I have to think it inspired other artists across the nation.\textsuperscript{22}

**Hope Mohr Dance: Geographic location & artist-led curation.** Having worked with the likes of Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, Hope Mohr started her own eponymous company when she moved back to San Francisco’s Bay Area in 2005. One of Hope Mohr Dance’s primary initiatives is The Bridge Project. Beginning in 2010, The Bridge Project has approached curating as a form of community organizing with the interactive goals being: “to create an intellectual commons for and among artists, to promote alliances among artists and to facilitate relationships among artists and activists in the struggle towards equity” (Mohr). Mohr established this curatorial platform because, in her words, “There were a number of artists that I felt that their work was important and I wanted people in the Bay Area to be exposed to the kind of artists that wouldn't be at Zellerbach\textsuperscript{23}...that was one of the first inspirations is just seeing a gap in the presenting ecology for artists that weren't operating under the traditional big dance company model.”

\textsuperscript{22} See Appendix A for a chronological listing of events and happenings related to these curatorial interventions and the two decades discussed in this thesis in order to also observe areas of overlap and possible influence of each other’s thinking.

\textsuperscript{23} Zellerbach is an 1,800 seat hall on the University of California, Berkeley campus.
The Bridge Project also offers a platform for Mohr’s own work to be seen, but in conversation with the artists she invites out to share the program. An early iteration introduced a former Childs colleague, Dusan Tynek, to San Francisco. Susan Rethorst was invited out and restaged *Behold Bold Sam Dog* with a handful of local choreographers, some of whom had rarely performed and even more rarely performed alongside one another. This curated group of female dance makers found themselves in one of Mohr’s seminal works under her direction. In another project, Mohr examined feminism through post-modern dance with an evening of Anna Halprin and Simone Forti performing solos of their own, Mohr performing a solo by Childs, and then offered a new work from Mohr performed by Peiling Kao. And most recently, Mohr commissioned ten new artists from all disciplines to recreate their own version of a seminal Trisha Brown solo, *Locus*. What started as an invitation to artists she knew and/or was somehow inspired by, has grown into a catalyst for dialogue among Bay Area audiences and artists. The event commissions (and employs) local makers, and provides exposure for those artists and those from elsewhere to be seen in the Bay Area. The intervention here is the self-agency for artists to realize curatorial projects that interest them and, by extension, use those projects as an ongoing research tool in their own dance making. Contrary to Hussie-Taylor’s empowering artists to curate at Danspace Project, Mohr initiates the projects and brings artists to presenting venues.

**White Bird: Dance-only presenter & geographic location.** In 1997, White Bird launched as a dance presenter in Portland, OR. Walter Jaffe and Paul King were looking for a new place to live after seventeen years in New York City. Although long time dance subscribers and supporters for the likes of New York City Ballet and Paul Taylor Dance Company (PTDC), neither had a background or work history in dance. Almost by chance,
they stumbled upon the Western Arts Alliance booking conference in Portland that year. And just prior to Jaffe and King’s arrival, statewide budget cuts in education extended to the Contemporary Dance Season, which had been presented by nearby Portland State University for ten years. Thus, PTDC was putting together a West Coast tour with a glaring geographic hole between Washington and California. PTDC’s Executive Director, John Tomlinson, encouraged Jaffe and King to present the company in Portland. The two responded to Tomlinson, "What's present? We have no idea what you're talking about." Their recollection of Tomlinson’s response was, "Oh, you just rent a hall and you do some marketing, sell tickets and that's it. Easy as that." While the process would prove to be more challenging than Tomlinson suggested, Jaffe and King filled Schnitzer Hall (venue capacity: 2,766) with 1,500 avid dance ticket buyers. Then, on the recommendation of another colleague, they attended a national booking conference (APAP) where they encountered the Stephen Petronio Company. They brought Petronio out to perform as part of a benefit for an AIDS organization, but at the smaller Newmark Theater of 880 seats.

These initial forays into presenting dance artists grew into a six-show season. Even now, almost twenty years later, they operate with flexibility between venues. Instead of being tied down to a single venue and fixed number of seats, they have stayed adaptable from season to season based on the artists and projects they are interested in pairing against the available spaces around Portland. Without a single fixed venue, they have been able to curate specific venues themselves to present artist’s work as appropriate to the size of the production and the potential audience. By establishing themselves as dance presenters, they also bucked another ongoing, downturned trend in the dance ecology. In the 1970s, there were thirty-six dance only presenters and festivals. As tour support for dance makers and
companies vanished with the NEA in the 1980s and 90s, those curators and venues also disappeared.\textsuperscript{17} White Bird, on the other hand, established itself as a dance only presenter on the West Coast, outside the traditionally considered marketplace for dance. Thus, White Bird embraces Johnson’s challenge of scale and TMP’s of geographic location as two defining characteristics of their work.

**TITAS Presents: Dance-only presenter.** TITAS Presents in Dallas, Texas, shifted to becoming a dance-only presenter in their 2014-2015 season. Although still a fairly recent shift, this was a necessary intervention to include as a follow-up to White Bird establishing itself as a dance-only presenter twenty years prior. TITAS is one of the only additional dance-only presenters of this scale to surface since then. Formerly a multidisciplinary presenter with a long history, TITAS is a resident organization at the AT&T Performing Arts Center (APAC). After APAC’s major capital campaign and renovation, Executive Director Charles Santos identified that TITAS had new business challenges and opportunities as a resident organization within the Center. Santos also recognized the latest demographics in Dallas: an abundance of baby boomers with disposable income. He chose to discard the other performing art series (music, theater, etc) because he recognized APAC had other partners who could contribute to those fields. And bucking all the studies and trends across the country reporting the death of subscriptions, he focused his curatorial vision and resources around a dance-only series (Wozny). This is an important intervention because of the relative dearth of dance-only presenters relative to the 1970s, especially given the common complaint that dance is the most expensive art form to support.

**Doris E. Duke Charitable Foundation: Funding individuals vs. companies.** The Doris E. Duke Charitable Foundation’s support of dance was established based on Duke’s
personal legacy of giving during her lifetime. Her early interest in jazz, Islamic art, and modern dance created the philanthropic focus that the foundation follows today. When Ben Cameron arrived at the foundation in 2006, he recalls receiving three mandates, “One was they wanted us to be national in scope. Secondly, they wanted us to be... equitable, the idea being you didn't get a leg up just because I'd seen your work or because you could afford the plane ticket to get to me. Everybody should have the opportunity to make their case. The third was they wanted the Arts program staff to be no more than three people.” Cameron quickly identified re-granting programs like NDP out of necessity because there was an estimated 10,000 applicants (including jazz, dance and theater) that could have been eligible to apply. Cameron acknowledges, “NDP was a logistic solution for me, at least, that way we were able to serve the field in a responsive way and responsible way…to really get money out to important choreographers and dance companies.”

Cameron also worked with the new foundation president Ed Henry (a former dancer) and the DDCF Board to adapt significant leadership giving in other areas of the foundation’s portfolio, leading to the creation of the Performing Artist and Impact awards. In an October 2011 letter on DDCF’s website, Cameron, as Program Director for the Arts, announced the Duke Performing Arts Initiative as “a true investment in the individuals who drive their fields forward…and how we can become more thoughtful about artists’ immediate and long-term needs.” The structure of the initiative was in three parts: Artist Awards ($275,000 over three to five years), Impact Awards ($80,000 over two to three years), and Building Demand for the Arts grants to institutions. For the Artist Awards, an anonymous panel would harvest awardees from a pool of past DDCF grantees who had already received national support for at least three different projects in the preceding decade. This was not meant to be a lifetime
achievement award but an offer of financial freedom or stability. In a personal interview, Cameron questioned, “With so many artists approaching their later years, financially unprepared for retirement, have we been derelict in not supporting longer-term artist life needs and more aggressively helping artists prepare for this phase of life?” In the early award cohorts of this five-year initiative, more senior individual artists were supported. This was much needed support for 20th century artists who had not built up and perpetuated a nonprofit institution around their work.

In contrast, the Impact Awards were meant to acknowledge new and yet-to-be-celebrated creators, and whereas Performing Arts Awards were granted directly to the individual, Impact Awards were by organization application locating an individual artist within their institution. Impact Award candidates may or may not have also received previous national recognition and DDCF support. In his interview, Cameron explained that the artist could have indirectly received support from DDCF through any one of their re-granting programs like NDP or the Engaging Dance Audiences grant administered by Dance/USA. An anonymous panel made nominations and twenty recipients were selected each year. The cohort of grantees in the preceding year then became the nominators for the following round. At the outset, it was also delineated that an Impact grantee could then be named for a Performing Artist Award, but the earlier award amount would be taken into account and the total amount awarded would not exceed $275,000 aggregate. To date, only one dance artist has been named in both categories.24

The key intervention from the Performing Artist award is the long-term investment in helping the grantee administer the award with the flexibility to best support his or her needs.

24 Dianne McIntyre was named a 2015 DDCF Impact Artist and a 2016 DDCF Performing Artist Awardee.
The cohort was introduced to experts in financial planning and given the possibility of structuring the payment any way they wanted. Many of the grantees awarded in 2012 and 2013 are just starting to activate those funds and realize their plans almost five years later. One Performing Artist grantee, Ralph Lemon, remarked in an email interview, “I don’t think of the award as a curatorial intervention. A major (but temporary) economical intervention, yes. A (three year) certain safety net for my creative leaps of faith. The temporary quotient is of course problematic. The appearance and then emphatic absence of this kind of major support, safety net. Potentially dangerous. Perhaps severely dangerous. What comes next in its absence, more, a little more from elsewhere or nothing more...? A recovery. It is not however a starting over. It is an interesting aftermath, this post-award time and space.” Perhaps Lemon does not consider it curatorial because awardees were not required (actually encouraged not) to assign their grant funds to making a new piece. However, curatorial practice does not always have to result in a finished product but rather care for the artist’s trajectory. It is my opinion that Duke’s shift to support the individual versus the dance company is a curatorial intervention addressing the individual artist’s economic challenges.

**Dance/USA—Engaging Dance Audiences: Funding audience engagement.**

Engaging Dance Audiences (EDA) is a Duke-funded re-granting initiative through Dance/USA, a national service organization for the field. EDA awards both individual artists and presenting institutions with the general mission to support audience engagement or audience building efforts. Now in its fourth round, the lasting effect of EDA grant making is that it pushes the development of engagement activities with dance audiences beyond the passive add-ons to performance. EDA strives to identify and support activities that cultivate dance fans one-on-one and in a deeper way than a pre- or post-performance lecture. EDA
Project Manager Suzanne Callahan shared how EDA noticed that in the program’s early years, pre-or post-performance discussions were the rising norm. Thus, later cohorts have been asked to stretch beyond these activities to create new methodologies and activities to engage with dance audiences. The knowledge produced from this collection of engagement grant/experiments is then collected and made available to the field in an online “cook book.”

Funded projects have ranged from: developing collaborative curriculums with local colleges and non-dance departments, hosting a post-show Speakeasy environment to generate informal social interaction and discussion, and making the creative process visible in public spaces like libraries or neighborhood pools. In addition to pushing artists and organizations to try new ideas around audience engagement, the structure of the grant offers core operating support in addition to the program funding. EDA is curatorial in its close collaboration with the artistic vision, but some ecological players have struggled to identify with this definition of audience engagement as experimentation. The more established dance companies and institutions wanted to secure the funding towards something they were already doing. Although this was not forbidden in the grant guidelines, proceeding down that path the applicant was usually set up to fail because they could only see within their current organizational operating framework rather than stretch outside. The other challenge with this initiative is its short-term infusion of resources. Once the funding concludes, whether or not the grantee has the operating capacity to continue the experiment or normalize the program is in question.

**The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: Decentralizing Funding as Curating.** The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation also has a long history of supporting dance; within the past

---

decade, they have challenged themselves to expand how they think about dance grant making. By the end of the 20th century, a portfolio of single choreographer companies had been established and were granted general program support on an annual basis. The gift amounts were not modest, but they were less than six figures. A dance maker could submit a letter of inquiry, but not many more were granted an opportunity to apply. Some still found a way to break through, but funding was primarily limited to these legacy dance makers. Diane Ragsdale joined the Mellon Foundation in 2004 as a Program Associate. Previously the Managing Director at On the Boards Theater in Seattle, Washington, she had become increasingly aware of the level of power and influence that funders held. Thus, she brought firsthand experience from the other side of the table that Mellon did not support presenters. Presenters at that point were perceived as more commercial entities, with large university or performing arts centers that would book blockbuster Broadway touring to subsidize other concert performances. Upon becoming the Director of Theater and Dance initiatives in 2006, Ragsdale worked from within Mellon to shift thinking. The foundation undertook an assessment with the Nonprofit Finance Fund, looking at the single choreographer companies that had been supported over time. Those artists had reached a maturation point, and while they had been receiving general program support from the Mellon Foundation for many years, they were not necessarily in an improved financial position. The report sparked observations around the blind spots in many dance makers’ structures. Particularly, artists had amassed a large portfolio of work, but formal archive and documentation practices were missing. For these artists who were often operating from fiscal year to year, an operational cash reserve was also in short supply. Ragsdale acknowledged that in addition to Mellon’s history of giving, they sometimes saw opportunities where they could intervene to support
specific initiatives no one else could. She further realized that there was a ripple effect to Mellon’s grant making. Any commitment from the foundation would likely be followed up by another funder and/or would initiate a new trend or at the very least a conversation shift in philanthropy. There was a shift then from general program support for these single choreographer companies to significant (up to six-figure) multi-year commitments that now includes archival work, seeding a cash reserve, and realizing alternative revenue streams (Ragsdale).

The foundation recognized that there was still a challenge around how to identify new artists to support from the abundance of emerging voices in dance across the country. It was at this point that the foundation began to fund artist residencies for specific dance presenters to support their existing curatorial practices. The manifestation for this support varied from venue to venue. Activities included (but were not limited to) space residencies for creation, technical residencies for high-level production rehearsals, dramaturgy and writing about dance and general commission funds. This dispersal of funding to centers that supported the creative process as well as the final product in dance was a major intervention from the funding side of the dance ecology. The concept of how to support dance became broader across the country. Rather than perpetuating the traditional dance company model, the Mellon Foundation’s new initiatives also empowered the more project-based artists and put them in a different relationship with presenters and venues.

Conclusions

This chapter has presented a wide range of curatorial interventions from multiple working perspectives within the dance ecology. NEFA’s NDP initiative has been the most significant and lasting intervention in the dance ecology having begun to address the need for
creation support and touring in 1996 and then continuing to evolve and adapt parallel to the
dance ecology’s dynamism. Between 1996-2016, the first choreography center of its kind
was established (MANCC); artists were then better empowered to commission and curate
themselves (Danspace Project’s PLATFORMS, Hope Mohr Dance, BODYTRAFFIC).
Largely through NDP support, artists working in differing scales and from widespread
geographic locations have been able to thrive on their own artistic terms (Trey McIntyre,
Emily Johnson), two new dance-only presenters flourished (White Bird, TITAS), artists and
organizations experimented with audience engagement shifting their focus from just the
product to relationship-building with potential dance viewers (EDA), and new funding efforts
to reach more artists geographically and as individuals were made (Mellon, Duke). Inspired
by these interventions, the next chapter will outline a process of questioning to shift the
operating environment as these case studies have done in order to embrace curatorial practice
across the dance ecology.
CHAPTER 5
ECONOMIC CHALLENGES WITH ECOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS:
QUESTIONING AS CURATORIAL PRACTICE

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed a wide variety of interventions embracing curatorial practice in the last two decades. However, many of these artists, companies, organizations, and funders will continue to face challenges as they move their work forward in the 21st century dance ecology. With any experimentation, success and failure are equally possible. The dance ecology operates from such a position of scarcity and is susceptible to several variables outside its control (9/11, The Great Recession). Because of this precarious balance of public funds and philanthropy that supports concert dance, artist and organization funding can vary depending on how those revenue sources fare during economic upheaval. The intervening opportunity is to lead and launch an initiative head on to address the aftermath. The other option is to hunker down in survival mode, weather the challenges and hold out, wishing for a return to the status quo. Remember Ranadivé and his young daughter’s basketball team. Rather than try to develop more conventional athleticism, Ranadivé identified a different way to develop an advantage. One of the key lessons he also showed this junior basketball team is simple, but effective: know thyself. Before jumping into a challenge, who are you? What is your operating environment? Beyond your own strengths and weaknesses, how do you measure up against your competition? And using that information, what will your challenges as well as opportunities be within the prevailing systems? As players throughout the dance ecology think through how to progress in the
current and future environment, it may be useful to think through the kinds of questions we employ and the answers we think we are working toward.

**Frameworks for Questioning**

Several dance makers and practitioners at work today can provide fruitful models for questioning as a form of reflective praxis. Deborah Hay, an experimental dance maker and founding members of Judson Dance Theater, debuted a solo performance entitled *Turn Your F^*king Head* in 2012. Hay later explained the premise for the piece in a performance lecture titled *Reorganizing Ourselves*. She noted that a choreographer or dancer may walk into a studio or rehearsal space for the first time and ask, “Which way is ‘front’?” By beginning with that question, Hay argued, the answer creates a paradigm of a fait accompli and prevents any additional questioning or discovery. In this chapter, I will refer to that type of question as “front questions.” In contrast, her advice to the artist is to “turn your f^*king head” in order to really see the room, every corner, every opportunity, in order to make an informed decision or determine the next question. Hay advocates a practice of questioning, not necessarily to hear answers, but as a process of learning. What would help artists to really see the ecology before asserting their place in it? What questions should they be asking?

Choreographer Liz Lerman advocates a similar practice of questioning in her book *Hiking the Horizontal*. Referencing her collaborations with scientists, she relays, “Make enough architecture or ‘local rules’…and then create the prototype, then fix and improve, then test, then perform, then fix, then restructure, then make new rules. Then test, then let some fall away, then make space for the new, then test” (146). Creatively, Lerman is perhaps

---

26 *Turn Your F^*king Head* is also a book and a documentary published by Routledge, 8 Oct 2015.
27 Author witness the San Francisco iteration of *Reorganizing Ourselves* performance lecture in Nov 2015.
best known for designing and articulating the Critical Response methodology\textsuperscript{28} rooted in a similar practice of fix and improve with an element of careful listening that is most used in performance feedback. What if dance administrators, presenters, and funders openly incorporated Lerman’s Critical Response or an approach similar to her work with scientists in their own business practices, curation, and programming?

Both Hay and Lerman use questioning to advise artists how to design their creative environment for more effective and generative interactions. Yet, how can dance makers extend this mode of questioning beyond the studio to the marketplace and business of making dance? Blurring these boundary lines is at the heart of embracing curatorial practice regardless whether your job title is “the curator” or not. Both in the studio and in the office (home office, institutional office, coffee shop, or otherwise) language has to be developed and tested before a target audience. Dance makers work in movement and choreography. Administrators (of any organization/ ecological play type) work to try to translate dance into written language. The target audience between artists and administrators may range from potential ticket buyer/viewer to booking colleague or funder. Sometimes they are trying to reach the same audience with their respective work. Especially in such an operating environment would it not be helpful to have their two practices mirror each other to better represent the artwork? In addition to being inspired by artistic process, in this chapter, I offer a similar approach of questioning to bridge between the models in the previous chapter and concrete suggestions for bringing curatorial practice into arts administration.

Front Questions in the Dance Ecology

A careful analysis of the case studies in the previous chapter reveals that these assumptive front questions are the dance ecology’s own stumbling blocks. From the presenting perspective, what was once an intervention in the dance ecology is now becoming normalized and many of the case studies discussed are facing questions around next steps. For example, White Bird, now on the other side of its 20th anniversary, is approaching a plateau as it continues to offer season after season. After having established a foothold in a community and cultivating an audience for dance, how can presenters like White Bird maintain their vision? How do they evolve? Walter Jaffe and Paul King are asking these questions around succession planning and White Bird’s future. But they are now a part of the national dance ecology, an anchor on the West Coast. With ecological players depending on White Bird and other dance presenters’ health and vitality as curatorial performance platforms, the rest of the field projects its own front questions and expectations boxing them in. As a whole, presenters also often operate on presumptions about local dance makers or community-based artists as being somehow inferior compared to national and international touring artists.

From a funding perspective, a front presumption is the grant making requirement that an artist must be part of an incorporated nonprofit organization in order to realize a dance project. The Duke Performing Artist Awards were not only financially meaningful and groundbreaking because of their scale, but also because they were awarded to individuals. Furthermore, the grant awards were disruptive to standard grant making practices and curatorial in nature to care for the artists as individuals who had complete discretion with how they wanted to allocate their funds. In hindsight, former Program Director Ben Cameron
remarked that the artistic collaborations that resulted from the awardee convenings were an unexpected benefit. Although not at all the original intent, the grant making afforded time and proximity for these artists and those interactions led to future artworks and productions. What if more funders examined their grant making history and intentions through a curatorial lens? Could they somehow collaborate with the individual artists to expand operating capacity rather than perpetuate the incorporated dance company model? I feel funders and presenters want to engage with the emerging project-based artists who are making exciting new work, but the expectation that they operate like a traditional dance company is the prevailing front question that prevents some artists from being truly seen or understood.

Here is where expanding beyond analytic thinking could produce more curatorial possibilities. A systemic thinking approach shifts the focus to consider pain points for each of the primary ecological players—artists, presenters, and funders—with an eye toward where these parties interact and their common goals, such as developing an audience or building more public will for dance. Rather than focus on the same economic-driven goals and outcomes (i.e. touring), this perspective could allow for a consideration of a larger shared purpose: to advance the dance field in a way yet unknown.

**Motivational & Economic Challenges**

Further, recent qualitative and quantitative studies indicate that players across the ecology have outgrown many of these goals and their attendant, primarily economic, front questions. Artists desire to share their work with more audiences, citing that the earned revenue is not the sole driver to secure engagements. But at the same time, artists are

---

29 This phrase references the work ArtsMidwest and the Metropolitan Group have embarked on to build public will for arts and culture; reframing the message about how Americans engage with creative expression and the arts. For more information, refer to https://www.artsmidwest.org/programs/building-public-will.
operating more and more on a project basis which means they have less infrastructure to support the financial and staff needs of touring. Presenters continue to rely on touring as a supply stream for artists and indicate that selling tickets is not one of the lead reasons for presenting dance. For the full spectrum of dance makers’ motivations for touring and presenters’ motivations to present dance, refer to Figures 2 (below) and 3 (on the next page), reproduced directly from the *Moving Dance Forward* study (25-26).

**FIG. 2. Dance makers' Motivations for Touring**

![Motivations Bar Chart]

A - It allows the work to reach new and wider audiences
B - It increases my visibility, which helps me secure future opportunities and funding
C - It enables me to deepen the impact my work has
D - It allows the work to have a longer life
E - It allows dancers/collaborators to reach deeper levels of artistry with the material
F - Economic—to earn income for my dancers/collaborators
G - Economic—to earn income for me

*Source: “Moving Dance Forward,” Figure 5, p 25*

*Notes: 2016 Survey. N=422 respondents. The answer choice with the largest score is the most preferred choice. N/A responses do not factor into the score.*
A - To advance my organization/venue’s mission
B - A commitment to dance as an art form
C - To connect audiences to diverse cultures and art forms
D - To inspire audiences or connect them to beauty
E - To support our venue/organization’s distinct identity and/or brand
F - Relationships with local community and/or educational dance entities
G - To connect audiences to ideas and issues that dance artists explore (social justice, environmental, political, etc.)
H - Our physical space was purchased, constructed, renovated and/or expanded to present dance
I - To meet audience demand
J - A commitment to specific dance artists/companies
K - To defray our venue/organization’s operating costs

Source: “Moving Dance Forward,” Figure 6, p 26
Notes: 2016 Survey. N=244 respondents. Based on a 3-point scale: Not important (0), Moderately important (1), Very important (2).

However, when asked how they make their decisions more directly in a 2013 informal survey, (Appendix B, question 10) responding presenters indicated that price to book an artist was the number one determining factor. Many presenters tend to program
within a limited roster of artists within the economic parameters and systems we have built up. This could be due to either their own economic challenges, like venue size and operating overhead, or because the fees they can offer artists do not cover the bare minimum required of a project-based artist for a single run-out. However, the decision to continue to rely on national touring artists carries a host of additional economic variables, like the added cost of housing and travel. What more could presenters achieve in their programming and curation if they did not only look to New York City and internationally around the globe to bring dance artists to their communities? Could they expand their seasons by one or two more regional artists for the price of a national/international touring artist? Especially if presenters do not have their own buildings, they do not physically exist in the minds of their communities outside of the handful of performance engagements they program throughout the year. Could presenters somehow employ regional dance artists to partner with them year-round in between and outside of the regularly curated season to raise awareness of their organization and the visibility of dance in their community?

Geographic Challenges

This same economic system continues to paint New York City at the center of the dance field. NDP has a history of diverse geographic range with its support, but the creation and production grants have been strongest to artists based in New York City, specifically Brooklyn. Appendix D shows a map of the geographic spread of NDP support between 2008-2017. The green circles indicate areas of production support and yellow circles indicate areas of presentation support among NDP awards within the last ten years. Larger circles indicate more support, while smaller circles minimum support. The reprinted table from the Moving Dance Forward report (Appendix C) seems to show a broad swath of support across the
country with numeric representation by region, but a visual depiction better reveals where there are hot spots of production (creation) and presentation (touring). If an area is only or predominantly yellow it is likely importing dance from elsewhere in the country, most likely New York City.

A magnified cross section of the map featuring the New York / New England region (Figure 4) shows that the Production grants (creation funds going directly to artists) and the Presentation grants (going to venues to host them) are almost equal. We can deduce that the majority of those Presentation grants are for hosting artists from the surrounding area because of the strong showing these same artists make in the Production category.


*Geographic Spread: Production versus Presentation Support*

*New York City / New England Cross-Section View*

*Source: Personal Research, www.nefa.org*

*Notes: This map is an enhanced cross-section of the densest region of support – New England / New York City – converted into a pie chart to demonstrate the ratio of Presentation to Production awards. Yellow indicates the number of Presentation awards to Presenters, and green indicates the number of Production awards to Artists in that region.*
Turning back to the map of the continental United States in Appendix D, when you see predominantly yellow circles, they are also likely importing those same New York City-area artists to their communities, even with the NDP subsidy, usually at a greater expense than any possibly closer artists.

Although NDP Production and Presentation Support is almost equal in the New York City area, the reality is that there are robust dance communities across the United States; several micro-communities outside of the New York City area host both dance makers and presenting venues. In addition to incorporating dance makers’ approach to problem solving through questioning with the likes of Hay and Lerman, I also offer the relational philosophy of literary critic and cultural commenter Édouard Glissant. Originally from Martinique, Glissant wrote about identity and speaking to the pluralistic sense of his own identity by referencing the archipelago or group of Caribbean islands. In Island Movements: Thinking with the Archipelago, writer Jonathan Pugh references Glissant and introduces a framework focusing on “a world of islands instead of a few islands in the world” (9). To apply this idea of archipelagic thought to dance in the U.S., could we focus our lens to consider a world of dance islands instead of just the behemoth dance island of Manhattan?

Beyond New York City, the map in Appendix D tells us where there are other dance maker and/or presenter clusters. There are strong showings of NDP support already in Seattle, northern and southern California, and Minneapolis, and there are seeds ready to respond if we create more support around dance in Miami, FL, and Chicago, IL. Among the micro-interventions cited above, BODYTRAFFIC, Trey McIntyre Project, Emily Johnson, White Bird, and MANCC all demonstrate the potential for fostering dance outside of New
York City. Part of NEFA’s movement to invest in NDP presentation and touring support, as
well as the RDDI program, has already begun to seed regional thinking around dance,
decentralizing the ecology from New York City and strengthening it elsewhere. As
referenced in the previous section of this chapter, greater awareness of dance making outside
of New York City could not only provide more cost-effective options and artistic partners,
but make regular interaction and collaboration with dance artists more viable, creating
opportunity to embrace curatorial practice outside of the programming decision-making.

Regional funders like the Knight Foundation, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, and
McKnight Foundation have also begun to meaningfully invest in the growth and capacity of
dance artists within their home communities, all outside of New York City. Grant awards
for major project support, as well as life-changing awards for professional or human capacity
building, have helped foster more dance artists and companies in San Francisco and
Minnesota. Notably, these grants come with little restrictions and give autonomy to the artist
to spend the money according to their needs and time frame. Although national dance
funders like the Mellon or Duke Foundations already support NEFA efforts around regional
thinking, they still carry primarily East Coast-centric funding histories when directly
supporting artists and companies. Any efforts reaching beyond the East Coast are not a
leading priority, but rather an ancillary result as part of re-granting awards to presenters with
residency initiatives, NDP, and through Dance/USA’s Engaging Dance Audiences.

Presenters and funders do look to each other for recommendations, and although not openly
provable, one can deduce unseen connections between trends in curation. For economic

---

30 The Knight Foundation in eight cities across the U.S. where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once
published newspapers. A list of cities can be found on the foundation’s website: www.knightfoundation.org.
The Kenneth Rainin Foundation supports dance in the Bay Area. The McKnight Foundation supports dance in
Minnesota.
and/or interpersonal reasons, seasons will show some of the same artists on presenters’ stages and in grant announcements. Instead of offering open applications to the field as a singular national identity and then awarding mostly New York City or East Coast artists, more focused dance grant making is needed like that of NEFA’s RDDI program, the Rainin, and McKnight Foundations to strengthen dance in other creatively fertile and artist-affordable living regions.

**Generational Challenges**

While the focus of new initiatives in the last two decades have been more curatorial in nature, they have also exacerbated other pain points in the dance ecology when considering artists by generation. As mentioned in the case studies, The Mellon Foundation began funding presenters and institutions that offered choreographic/creation residencies versus single choreographer companies under Diane Ragsdale’s leadership. The Duke Performing Artist Awards focused on supporting individuals instead of their companies, with the Impact Awards, and individual artists partnering with institutions. The shift to supporting more artists directly is curatorial thinking, but highlights how broad and flat the pool of dance makers is vying for a limited number of funds. Generationally speaking, we have 20\textsuperscript{th} century artists who have achieved some level of artistic success before the end of last century, and 21\textsuperscript{st} century artists who could have been making work before 2000, but only began receiving accolades and major grant awards in the last decade. The problem with anonymous, peer-nominated panel practice as indicated above is that it tends to favor 20\textsuperscript{th} century artists. For the most part it is those artists’ contemporaries who have done the nominating up until this point. In economic terms, we have a greater supply of artists all competing for the same resources. How does this generational factor inform curatorial or
economic thinking? Even among NDP-supported projects counted in the last decade, Figure 5 shows the ebb of support spread between 20th century and 21st century artists.


*Generational Spread: Number of Grants Awarded to 20th C. versus 21st C. Artists*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Personal Research, www.nefa.org*

*Notes: Top row shows the year the grant was awarded although project development and touring may have stretched over several years. Middle row in blue represents funding for projects created by 20th-century artists as defined in the thesis narrative. Bottom row in orange represents funding for projects created by 21st century artists as defined in the thesis narrative.*

In 2008, the ratio of support was almost ten to one. Over the next five years, the average ratio of support for 20th century to 21st century artists was almost three to one. For the first time in 2014, more 21st century artists received NDP support than their artistic forebears with a ratio of three to five. Since that watershed moment, whether it was a coming of age for these emerging artists and/or a reflection of the curatorial rubric of the selection committee, grant awards have been almost evenly split between the two generational groups of artists. However, this may reflect less about an equity in funding newer vs older artists, and more that these 21st century artists have built up the equal footing with their 20th century peers in terms of reputation and recognition. But how are funders addressing the older artists that are still vibrant and vying for the same funding opportunities as these younger artists coming into their own?

Returning to national initiatives running parallel to this period of NDP grant making, the Mellon Foundation awarded multi-year grants to presenters and centers offering creative residencies whose curatorial rubric was not explicitly so, but often supported more emerging (aka 21st century) artists. The Duke Performing Artist Awards were on an anonymous
nomination basis where nominees were culled from a book of artists who had received a certain number of major accolades: Guggenheim, MacArthur, etc (Cameron). This decision to cull down the possible number of nominees already privileged the more established (aka 20th century artists) who had been making work longer and were more likely to have received such recognition. There was a possibility that the Duke Impact Artist awardees could graduate to the Performing Artist Award pool, and some did achieve such migration. Whether or not many of those same emerging, 21st century artists had been cultivated as part of the Mellon-funded choreographic centers only to mature and be recognized by the Duke grants is not directly provable. But in looking at the same time period, one can extrapolate individual artist anecdotes and trajectories like that of Emily Johnson as a 21st century artist who did matriculate through all of these grant awards.

**Audience Challenges**

Another national funding initiative that aggravates an ecological pain point for dance is the Engaging Dance Audiences effort. This micro-intervention was meant to address the lack of growth in dance audiences attributed to declining arts education in public schools. However, it also raised additional questions around whose responsibility is it to cultivate an audience for dance: presenters, as the delivery platforms for dance within their communities, or dance makers, as the artistic vision and source material. Both groups have been recipients

---

31 Cameron was very candid about how the nominations and panel review took place during his interview. The original Duke Performing Artist Award initiative announcement included the anonymous nomination component. What was not clear was how the list of potential nominees had been culled down first. As a private foundation, this was Duke’s prerogative. Long-time artists were likely frustrated and did not understand why they had not been recognized or nominated by their peers, reiterating the opacity around decision-making. On the other hand, the Impact Award was a more open application process. The choice to source past grantees who had received multiple support was a pragmatic as well as a curatorial choice. With such a dense as well as broad field like dance, Duke showed a level of trust in previous grant making decision. In Cameron’s interview and others, it was pointed out that presenters and funders are always working within the context of their own institutional history, reifying or challenging it.
of EDA support. The experimentation with audience engagement has been a useful opportunity for both artist sand presenters, but the question of operating capacity and how to sustain such a program with or without EDA support is an ongoing pain point.

**Economic Challenges with Ecological Solutions Case Study: ODC Theater & RAWdance Co-Commission Double Exposure**

Having detailed the questions and considerations facing various facets of the dance ecology, I will use the end of the chapter to detail one of the last projects I worked on at ODC Theater, a co-commission with RAWdance in *Double Exposure*. This example models some of the interventions possible in these questions of geography, generation and audience, as well as the possibilities in foregrounding questioning as an integral part of the process itself. Taken together with the case studies in the previous chapter and the continuing questions raised here, this discussion of *Double Exposure* will lay the final groundwork for the recommendations I pose in my conclusion. *Double Exposure*, performed by RAWdance, a San Francisco-based company, was a one-night only performance exhibition showcasing both the singular artistic viewpoint, as a performance vehicle, and a platform to consider different choreographic voices side-by-side.

RAWdance co-artistic directors Ryan T. Smith and Wendy Rein, who choreograph as a duo, wanted to interrupt their own creative process to learn about themselves and their collaborative relationship as it has evolved over the past nineteen years. The premise of *Double Exposure* was an evening-length piece in development over four years where Smith and Rein invited twelve other choreographers or choreographic pairs (like themselves) based on the West Coast to create short duets all to be performed by Smith and Rein. Normally the choreographers of their own company work, Smith and Rein flipped the relationship placing
themselves inside the creative process of others. All the duets were performed in a single
evening like a living museum exhibition capturing a moment in contemporary dance from the
West Coast perspective. This experience offered me a rare opportunity as a presenter too.
Limited by the economics of presenting as detailed earlier, ODC Theater usually averaged
five to seven projects a year. From data mining our own ticket buyer lists, we knew that only
five percent of our audiences saw more than one show in a season. The audience trends were
to simply follow artists they knew. With Double Exposure, I was able to share the work of
twelve choreographers in a single evening and thus expand the audience’s exposure to dance artists.32

Together, Smith, Rein, and I envisioned Double Exposure as a performative museum-
exhibit. Thus, the project introduced questions around curation as well as authorship as our
vision and the choreographic work of the invited choreographers mutually informed and
enriched one another. The selection of twelve artists for this commission took on many
shapes through conversation. How far should the geographic spread be? Should the selection
be gender-balanced? What would generational balance look like? And then, the best-laid
plans might show a numeric balance across lenses and frameworks, but raised aesthetic
questions in terms of what would be the best combination? Although artistic decisions and
the final production was ultimately Smith and Rein’s decision, they included me on a regular
basis, particularly in discussing how wide a net should be cast when considering dance
genres. Ultimately we adopted a selection rubric committed to a broad swath of
contemporary dance rooted on the West Coast. We strove to reach a diverse balance of

32 For the purpose of this thesis discussion, the narrative focuses on demonstrating the curatorial interactions
between RAWdance and ODC Theater. More in-depth information on each commissioned choreographer in
addition to interviews and examples of collaborative documentation from this process is available at
established artists and up-and-comers, single choreographers and choreographic duos, male and female, aesthetic and ethnically diverse contemporary dance choreographers for commissioning consideration, but set the local rules (per Lerman’s terminology) and confines for artist consideration to the West Coast.

Choreographers were asked to create two to five minute pieces for Smith and Rein to perform as a duet within the context of an evening of duets strung together. The choreographers responded differently to the time-limit challenge, reflecting a host of approaches shaped by the questions they brought to the table. For example, Joe Goode’s approach questioned if anything substantive can even be accomplished in two minutes. David Roussève asked “what can dance do?” Amy Seiwert found a piece of music within the time length, but specifically created no end and no beginning since she knew it needed to be malleable and able to fit between other pieces. Holly Johnston showcased highly physical partnering, diving over and under each other. Kate Wallich delivered an equally abstract but studied, nonchalant movement relationship, like two satellites circling around each other. Ann Carlson depicted an oddly patriotic birth-to-death narrative through her movement.

Translating some visual arts tropes from the white cube to the black box, Smith and Rein used video projection on an onyx background above an exposed brick wall as a written didactic at the top of each duet. Sometimes for lengthier explanations, they broke through the theatrical fourth wall and spoke directly to the audience as they moved scenic pieces—semi-opaque screens comprised of wardrobe racks on wheels wrapped in black saran wrap—framing the stage. For added variety as well as functional purposes during particularly difficult costume changes, the performers projected pre-recorded, interstitial videos, as they described it during the performance their “video selves in relation to their live selves”, with
added commentary from their perspective on the project and additional context for the viewer. These performative footnotes via video are like Roussève’s juxtaposition of live performance with film to shape the movement’s impact. For one interlude, they exposed a more playful side and entertained with a mash-up of karaoke pop songs. These human moments where they spoke as people, not performers (or maybe performers performing themselves as people), disclosed the inner workings of the performance and directly engaged with the audience. As dance leaders in the Bay Area community, Smith and Rein already had a following with dance students and novices. They had incorporated their off-stage approachability within the evening’s flow to keep the audience engaged in them as people as well as the art work in which they performed.

Smith and Rein were curators as well in organizing how the duets would be performed. In this meta-curation situation, the artists recognized the responsibility of their choices when placing duets side-by-side and the order in which they would be experienced. Doubling as performers, Smith and Rein were also nimble vessels embodying the material from each choreographer and conveying that information to the viewer. Because of their intimate experience with the material, the organization of the evening revealed how they listened and took dramaturgical direction from some of the works. But who is ultimately the author here: the maker, the performer, or the curator? With so many contributors at varying levels, there is no singular answer, but instead a continuous dialogue and feedback loop strengthening the total organization of the evening and the audience’s experience.

With such an expanded curatorial prism, the audience response to *Double Exposure* also deviated from the usual binary “I liked it / didn’t like it” scenario of a single artist evening. From informal conversations with audience members immediately after the show
and weeks after in passing around the ODC campus, I identified that viewers usually zeroed in on or recalled a few specific duets—those that resonated or stirred something within—prompting them to ask, ‘how about some more?’ Anecdotally, each conversation with an audience member highlighted a different duet or choreographer. The feedback loop we cultivated created a palindrome of sorts. RAWdance and I looked at several artists up and down the West Coast in the beginning. Twelve choreographers were commissioned and their work performed by Smith and Rein. As shown in our individual conversations with audience members, upon viewing *Double Exposure*, audience members showed an interest in the larger dance landscape, sparking questions such as: Who else is out there making dance? What does more of that dance genre look like?

General NEA program support helped realize the presentation of this performance exhibition along with five days of technical residency, creative space and labor in an operating theater subsidized as part of a multi-year grant from the Mellon Foundation. ODC Theater had the available underutilized studios to offer forty hours of early creative space for each commissioned choreographer. RAWdance opted to stretch the technical residency out across six months rather than work in five consecutive days, and the choreographers also operated on their own timetables: some required less than forty hours in the studio, some needed more. Together we created a flexible environment and set of circumstances where Smith and Rein could then proceed to invite others in, to create, to reflect on their own, return to the work and adapt it accordingly over the course of time.

In addition to supporting the artistic process, the ongoing conversations between the artists and the organization allowed for expanded administrative capacity as well. ODC Theater’s Writer-in-Residence contributed a questionnaire for all commissioned
choreographers to fill out. Three different photographers shot the project throughout its creative process: one from the presenter and two at the artist’s direction. Smith and Rein were available for general ODC Theater fundraising and events, and even sat down with the marketing department long before informational materials were due. The nature of the relationship offered more opportunities to discuss the work with potential ticket buyers. The benefit of these transactions and transparency were reflected in sales: three performances reached revenue goals two weeks out, leading to the last-minute addition of a fourth show. All four shows sold out by the end of the run.

The relationships among presenter, artist and audience went beyond the transactional and co-curatorial and beyond what is currently imaginable in the dance field at large. Perhaps the most ironic evidence of this is the difficulty we had in securing grants for the project. One grant panel response to our proposal noted that, the “level of support between artist and presenter was not believable.” In taking a curatorial and collaborative approach to Double Exposure across the dance ecology, we had grown beyond standard institutional practices and were realizing new modes of working together. Artists and presenters collaborated rather than competed with each other to see the project to fruition. Double Exposure was, perhaps, a micro-intervention, applying ecological solutions to our individual economic challenges. But for a major shift to take place in the dance ecology, more thought leaders and decision-makers need to embrace such practices adapted to the specifics of their own needs and visions.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

General Conclusions

The drastic cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts in the mid-1990s were a pivotal moment and opportunity for new actions in the performing arts, specifically in dance ecology. As a true creative leader, Samuel Miller saw the necessity to intervene, showing you really can “never waste a good crisis” (Napier 29). New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project (NDP) served as an initial bridge to continue creation and touring activity as the field knew it. It soon became an example for curatorial practice among other players, listening and responding to the needs of artists, not just perpetuating standard and outdated practices. Ultimately, transformative acts, not transactions, define curatorial practice. They are already in play within the dance ecology, but NDP cannot do this work alone. Who or what will be next?

Other case studies detailed within this represent small, incremental changes; they demonstrate curatorial thinking with the learning potential to push dance ecology in line with the needs and logistics of 21st century dance making. Self-organizing artists like the Trey McIntyre Project in Boise, and Emily Johnson in Minneapolis, challenged the ideas of dance-centric markets and scalable applications of dance outside of the traditional theater and operating on their own terms. White Bird set up as a dance-only presenter in Portland, Oregon, capitalizing on the lower overhead and flexibility of operating without a fixed venue to establish themselves as a major West Coast advocate for dance. Presenting and commissioning initiatives like PLATFORMS at Danspace Project in New York City, Hope Mohr Dance’s Bridge Project in San Francisco, or BODYTRAFFIC in Los Angeles,
empowered artists to curate themselves, their peers and/or the context for their work to be seen. The Doris E. Duke Foundation Performing Artist Awards granted major funds beyond general operations for a company to individual artists. Engaging Dance Audiences—another initiative supported by the Duke Foundation—seeded research and experimentation in audience engagement outside of value-added pro-forma activities. In contrast to NDP, not all of these interventions have lasted as permanent fixtures, nor have their practices become normalized. Some have voluntarily closed, occupying only at a specific moment in the ecology’s chronology. Others are at a pivotal point of their own right now. Can their intervening light continue to shine bright before it becomes subsumed by the weight of the traditional market economy?

Specifically in dance, there is concern among professional arts administrators that there will not be enough contributed money to keep the field as visible and potent as it was around the heroic singular artist modality in the 20th century (Kaiser 42-43). Operating on a project-basis challenges conventional business practices, but this could be capitalized on to open up new models for collaboration. Project-based artists in collaboration with more institutionalized presenting venues could retain their autonomy and process while benefitting from the greater capacity those organizations can afford. Money and financial resources will continue to be in short supply for both presenters and artists. What if these two players changed the nature of their interaction to think beyond the season ahead, and instead worked over multiple years to grow a family of supporters together? A prevailing assumption is that artists should not have to think about the economics or artistic enterprise of making and distributing their work and that there is a natural divide between the creative process and the

33 A chronological listing of pertinent events, the case study interventions discussed, and related artistic happenings is available in Appendix A.
business side of the arts (Borwick and Schaffer Bacon 30-31). But perhaps we have just have not been asking the right questions of artists or of curators and our organizations in the field.

**Recommendations for a 21st Century Dance Ecology**

If an arts institution is thought of as a body, what would it look like for the collective organization to **embolden** curatorial practice? The role of the curator as an individual is still invested with public decision-making power, but that sole individual is not the only one responsible or able to employ curatorial practice. Can the institution of dance, as a field, collectively embody curatorial practice? What might it look like to set aside standard practices and more consciously employ curatorial practices regardless of one’s role in the field? What follows are possible opportunities for curatorial thinking to strengthen or advance the dance ecology. In this context, the idea of advancing the dance ecology is meant to shift the paradigm to include alternative forms of ecological interactions to be deeper, more expansive, and transformative.

**Professionalize the field of arts administration 2.0.** A number of programs in arts administration were launched at universities over the past two decades. Universities are themselves standardized institutions and proscriptive in their sharing of information. But for the vision and passion of individual faculty members to make these transformative rather than transactional experiences, the ethos and practices they share should be curatorial in their approach. Administrators, whether full-time employees or freelance creative producers, should be able to engage with and relate to art making and the creative process, not just package the finished product. The administrator-artist relationship needs to be flexible. In addition to developing a working knowledge of the dance they are programming, curators should also be able to communicate with artists in a less regulatory way about what artists
need in order to do their work. This may require re-thinking the administrator-artist relationship and the kinds of questions that define their interactions. Rather than continuing with the same mindset and answering the same front questions over and over, what are we really looking to accomplish? This might mean fewer touring gigs, but it may solve other problems like educating audiences and engaging them to a deeper degree or realizing alternative opportunities for the dance maker’s work to get seen.

**Be self-aware and act on it.** Ecological dance players must operate from a place of critiquing their own work and their vantage point in the field. They must consider their operating environment—its strengths and its shortcomings—and view it as an opportunity by asking more questions rather than trying to emulate other presenters or artists’ version of success. Members of the dance field across the country compare themselves to others, specifically to those in New York City, and can carry a chip on their shoulders about what they do not have or possess in their own environment. I had a moment of epiphany when speaking with Judy Hussie-Taylor about her PLATFORMS series at Danspace Project. I asked her how PLATFORMS served the dance field outside of New York City. She explained that that was not the goal of the program. Instead she and Danspace Project were trying to disrupt the cyclical commission habit in the local ecology of NYC where artists were bouncing between the same venues from year to year without much distinction. There is such a density of artists, presenters, and funders in New York City, other markets have accepted or assumed it is the center of the dance ecology. However, the NYC ecology operates insularly with just as few artists getting out as those who wish to get in. Regional ecologies should continue to be porous with artists sharing or comparing work when they can, but local ecologies outside of New England or the East Coast are not coming up as short
as they may be perceiving themselves. Rather than dwell on the seeming disadvantages, how can we turn them into advantages?

**Think with the archipelago.** Touring will always be some measure of success for dance makers, but there is a limited supply of venues relative to the great number of dance companies and artists who want to share their work. We can dance in art galleries and in alternative spaces, but we need to think about alternative methods of distributing dance beyond squeezing the handful of dance-only presenters left or asking artists to financially extend themselves from coast-to-coast. Presenters can be real culture connectors in their communities. In reference to being self-aware up above and acting on it, what is keeping presenters as white castles on the hill or islands within their own community? What front questions must they let go in order to shift the economic and curatorial paradigm keeping artists from New York and abroad at the center of the ecology? What new dance communities might arise with new inspiring dance makers or funders? In its anniversary report *Moving Dance Forward*, NEFA stated an interest in cultivating more repeat NDP presentation grantees. Let us take that as a mandate to start and continue to focus outside the usual major cities—the islands of dance—and consider the entire world of dance islands.

**Exercise the power you have and expand capacity for others.** Ecological players can do more to advocate for each other, especially between artists and presenters and audiences and funders. If your organization has space or staff, an artist may be able to capitalize on it in the process of making work. If a presenter is trying to engage with audiences, can they hire an artist—local or otherwise—to do that work outside of a traditional performance gig? It should be regular practice for artists and presenters to write
letters of support for each other, cultivate individual donors together, and think longitudinally.

**Build more public will for dance.** The work of audience development has been fragmented in the dance ecology because it has been the proprietary expectation that such cultivation will lead to more individual donors for a single artist or organization. Instead, we need to embed curatorial practice among our work with audiences and promote dance as an art form to create lasting and invested audiences. This entails shaping the invitation for viewers to listen, to engage, and to personalize their experience with dance. Artists can be better partners to presenters in communicating a stronger message about dance. In addition to the business mechanisms of their work, arts administrators from any department in an organization (as well as independent producers) can embrace curatorial practice using their newfound vocabulary to relate to the work (see above in Professionalize the field of arts administration 2.0) and create more compelling materials. All ecological players can make the value of dance more palpable for audiences, but not if they remain isolated from one another.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The research for my thesis raised another pain point in the dance ecology. We do not regularly discuss or publicly document the interdependence and relations between the primary ecological players. It is most common practice to celebrate individual accomplishments or major funding initiatives rather than follow the connective threads between them in order to assess the how things came to be. Future application or research around this work may be more focused study and surveying of specific regional dance ecologies. This could include not just the primary players but also secondary players such as
audiences; the field would be greatly advanced through a better understanding of dance audiences by individual region and in comparison. Deeper data mining to trace how key relationships have transformed various 21st century artist’s trajectories (compared to 20th century artists who emerged in a different time) would help to extend this research. In particular, it would be useful to examine trends in how overlapping support from presenters and funders has fostered dance in particular hotspot regions. Another area of potential research could be a closer examination and holistic evaluation of project-based artists as a group to better understand their challenges and needs from other ecological players to enhance their operating capacity. More practice in synthetic thinking and research could better address the burgeoning issues in the field around equity in programming and funding including more balanced support between female and male artists and/or artists of color. Remember Liz Lerman’s creative meets scientific approach paraphrased here: Make the rules. Create the prototype. Fix and improve. Test. Perform. Fix. Make new rules. Test. Let some fall away. Make space for the new. Rather than perpetuate our singular struggles and successes, ask new questions.

My own experience at ODC Theater is not meant to be held up as a perfect model, but as a longitudinal case study in itself encapsulating the suggestions above and how I discovered my curatorial practice. Somehow in the five years I was there, I navigated a dense and thriving dance community like the Bay Area, worked to provide a national context for those regional artists, grappled with operating far outside the assumed epicenter of the dance ecology, and empowered administrators within my organization to work alongside artists to find points of intersection in their work towards a common goal. This is less a codified set of practices to be emulated than a spirit of inquisitiveness to be adapted to each new set of
circumstances. It is a call to players across the ecology to emphasize and redefine the *curious* in *curatorial*. 
BIBLIOGRAPHY

References and Works Cited


Clancy, A. N. Sustainable models of dance making developed and developing within the 20th and 21st centuries, PhD Dissertation, Texas Woman’s University, 2014.


personal journal.


Vu, Le. “The Nonprofit Hunger Games, and what we must do to end them.”


**Personal Interviews**


Founding Executive / Artistic Director of Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography

Callahan, Suzanne. 28 Feb. 2017. Phone.

Program Manager, Dance/USA’s Engaging Dance Audiences
Cameron, Ben. 16 Feb. 2017. Phone.

Former Arts Program Director, Doris E. Duke Charitable Foundation

Hussie-Taylor, Judy. 28 Nov. 2016. In-person.

Executive Director & Chief Curator, Danspace Project


Co-Founders, White Bird


Program Director, McKnight Fellowships for Dancers and Choreographers


Independent choreographer and Duke Performing Artist Award recipient


Independent creative producer and Executive Director, BIG Dance Theater

Miller, Samuel. 9 Dec. 2016. Phone.

Former President for New England Foundation for the Arts and Founder of NEFA’s National Dance Project and Founder/Director of the Institute of Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University


Choreographer & Curator as Artistic Director, Hope Mohr Dance


Former arts program officer at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation


Former Executive Director & Dancer for the Trey McInytre Project

Independent Curator & Consultant who has also participated in or coordinated all NEFA Regional Dance Development Initiatives


Founding Director of Pentacle, a management support organization for small to mid-size dance artists and organizations

Young, Pamela. 20 Dec. 2016. Phone.

DANCECleveland Executive Director and Founding Board Chair for the National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron
APPENDIX A

Chronological Timeline of Pertinent Events and Happenings

Source: Personal interviews and relevant websites

1995 – New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) prototyped the New England Dance Project with a focus on supporting dance makers and companies to present in the region.

1996 – NEFA recognized the need for such an initiative on a national level and established the National Dance Project (NDP).

1996 – Doris E. Duke Charitable Foundation is established.

1996 – Walter Jaffe and Paul King move to Portland, OR.

1997 – Duke issues its first grant awards in support of dance.

1997 – White Bird (Jaffe and King) present their first engagement, the Paul Taylor Dance Company.

2001 – Attacks of September 11th.

2001 – Charles Santos takes the helm of TITAS Presents as a multi-disciplinary presenter in Dallas, TX.

2003 – First work by Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance premieres in Minneapolis, MN.

2004 – Trey McIntyre begins gathering dancers at the White Oak Plantation in Florida to make work in the off-season of their respective companies, incorporates as a 501(c)3 at the end of the year.

2004 – Maggie Allesee endows a national choreographic center at Florida State University. The Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) is the first of its kind in the U.S., solely dedicated to supporting artists in their creative process and development of new work versus presenting the finished product and selling tickets to see it.

2004 – Diane Ragsdale joins the team at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

2005 – Hope Mohr Dance is founded in San Francisco, CA.

2006 – Ben Cameron becomes Performing Arts Program Director at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

2007 – Lillian Barbeito Rose and Tina Finkelman Berkett found a repertory company named BODYTRAFFIC in Los Angeles, CA.


2008 – Judy Hussie-Taylor moves to take the helm of Danspace Project in New York, NY.

2008 – Trey McIntyre Project grows to become a year-round company of dancers and locates itself in Boise, ID.
Chronological Timeline of Events Pertinent to Thesis (cont’d)

2009 – Danspace Project announces PLATFORMS curating initiative.

2009 – Dance/USA launches the Engaging Dance Audiences re-granting program with a multi-year support, from application to project completion (Round One: 2009-11).

2009 – Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance premieres *The Thank-You Bar*.

2010 – Hope Mohr Dance launches The Bridge Project.

2010 – Danspace Project / PLATFORMS presents *Back to New York City* (curated by Juliette Mapp); *certain difficulties, certain joy* (curated by Trajal Harrell); and *i get lost* (curated by Ralph Lemon).

2011 – Duke Foundation announces Performing Artist Award and Impact Award Initiatives for the next three years.

2011 – Danspace Project / PLATFORMS presents *Susan Rethorst RETRO (intro) SPECTIVE* (curated by Melinda Ring); *BODY MADNESS* (co-curated by Hussie-Taylor and David Parker).

2012 – Danspace Project / PLATFORMS presents *Judson Now* (curated by Hussie-Taylor) and *Parallels* (curated by Ishmael Houston-Jones).

2012 – Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance premieres *Niicugni*, the second work in a trilogy.

2012 – Dance/USA Engaging Dance Audiences (Round Two: 2012-14).

2013 – Hope Mohr Dance partners with ODC Theater for The Bridge Project with Susan Rethorst.

2014 – Trey McIntyre Project disbands as a year-round company of dancers and shifts to become Trey McIntyre Projects moving between performance mediums.

2014 – Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance premieres *SHORE*, the third work in a trilogy.

2014 – Carla Peterson takes the helm from Founding Executive / Artistic Director Jennifer Calienes at MANCC.


2014 – Danspace Project / PLATFORMS presents *Diary of an Image by DD Dorvillier* (curated by Jenn Joy).

2014 – Hope Mohr Dance partners with the Joe Goode Annex for The Bridge Project with Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Lucinda Childs.

2014 – TITAS Presents in Dallas, TX shifts to becoming a dance-only presenter, possibly the largest of its kind since White Bird established itself in 1996.
Chronological Timeline of Events Pertinent to Thesis (cont’d)

2015 – Danspace Project / PLATFORMS presents *Dancers, Buildings and People in the Streets* (curated by Claudia La Rocco).

2015 – Hope Mohr Dance partners with CounterPULSE for The Bridge Project with Jeanine Durning and Deborah Hay.

2015 – A second National Center for Choreography (NCCAkron) is established in partnership with The University of Akron in Ohio. The Knight Foundation commits $5 million to get it started.

2016 – Danspace Project / PLATFORMS presents *A BODY IN PLACES* (co-curated by Hussie-Taylor and Lydia Bell with Eiko Otake).


2016 – Hope Mohr Dance partners with Yerba Buena Center for the Arts for The Bridge Project with ten artists of various disciplines responding to Trisha Brown’s *Locus*.

2016 – Christy Bolingbroke is named the Founding Executive/Artistic Director of NCCAkron.
APPENDIX B

Questions from Informal Survey to Dance Presenters in 2013
Source: Personal Research, original survey administrator

1. How many dance artists do you consider when putting together a yearly season?
   a. 1-10
   b. 11-20
   c. 21-40
   d. 41-60
   e. 61+

2. How many dance artists do you actually book in a season?
   a. 1-5
   b. 6-10
   c. 11-15
   d. 16-20
   e. 21+

3. What is the seating capacity of your venue? (if you program in more than one, indicate average number of seats)
   a. <50
   b. 51-100
   c. 101-500
   d. 501-999
   e. 1,000+

4. What is your average performance fee for a dance artist (inclusive of travel and housing)?
   a. >$5K
   b. $5K-10K
   c. $11K-20K
   d. $21K-30K
   e. $31K-50K
   f. $50K+

5. On average, what is your total budget for artist fees in a given season – inclusive of direct travel and housing, but exclusive of any general operating, marketing and/or overhead costs?
   a. >$50K
   b. $51K-100K
   c. $101K-250K
   d. $251K-500K
   e. $501K-750K
   f. $750K+
Questions from Informal Survey to Dance Presenters in 2013
(cont’d)

6. When considering dance artists, do you try to achieve aesthetic diversity? – i.e. ballet, contemporary, culturally specific dance, etc.
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. When considering dance artists, do you have room and/or try to achieve diversity of scale or production-type? i.e. works-in-progress, cabaret-appropriate works in smaller spaces, high-production evening-length works, mixed repertory programs
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Are you presenting dance shows in non-traditional spaces like public parks, bars, personal homes, etc?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. When considering dance artists, do you strive for a balance between “local” artists and touring artists?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. Please indicate up to three top considerations (of the list below) when booking a dance artist for your season.
    a. Price
    b. Press / Recognition in the Field / Sellability
    c. Specific Program / Artistry
    d. Long-term Relationship with the Artist
    e. Residency Offerings / Points of Contact with Community
## APPENDIX C

### Geographic Distribution of NDP Grants (1996-2016)

*Source: “Moving Dance Forward,” Table 9, page 40*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Core Artists: Production &amp; Touring (%)</th>
<th>All Grants (other than Presentation) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International / Puerto Rico</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid America</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-rural</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top States</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core Artists: Production &amp; Touring (%)</td>
<td>All Grants (other than Presentation) (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes: NDP organization records. Distributions by rural-status and state exclude international artists. Does not include FY17 (June 2016) Production Grant recipients.*
APPENDIX D
Source: Personal Research, www.nefa.org

Notes: This map only reflects awards in the continental United States. Yellow circles indicate the number of Presentation awards to Presenters in that region. Green circles indicate the number of Production awards to Artists in that region. Presentation awards are at the discretionary work of the artists to secure commitments from Presenters and assign subsidies.