

**FAILING PERCEPTIONS:
POLICY, PRODUCTION, AND U.S. DANCE MAKERS**

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Policy Prologue

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

“Choreographers create original dances and develop new interpretations of existing dances. They work in theaters, dance schools, dance and movie studios, and at fashion shows and are involved in auditioning performers for dance parts.”

Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,
Department of Labor. (2011) Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing office, p.1.

Every two years, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) publishes *The Occupational Outlook Handbook*, a career information source that provides benchmark statistics on vocational trends to assist citizens in making decisions about their future work lives. The handbook categorizes occupations in an A-Z index. Each listing defines occupational expectations for a given vocation by detailing required training and education, median earnings, working conditions, and projected job earnings over the next decade. Where dance labor is concerned, the 2010-2011 handbook

collapses professional dancers and choreographers into a single career category—a trend that emerges frequently in U.S. policy reporting—and narrows the framework for evaluation to U.S. dance artists that report earning full-time wages in commercial or theatrical performance contexts. The occupational outlook for U.S. dancers and choreographers, thus measured by “industry” standards, is characteristically dire. The 2010-11 report foresees just a six percent growth in available employment during the 2008-2018 decade, a prognosis that marks a slower-than-average statistic compared to all occupations.¹

To be fair, the BLS indices are not well known for issuing particularly nuanced descriptions of the U.S. labor force. Handbook descriptions generally read like vocational “Cliffs-notes,” quick-and-dirty reference guides that conflate employment categorization and that forge unidirectional pathways to career “success” within and beyond arts-related fields.² By measuring outlooks through guidelines that insist on full-time, single source earnings, the BLS narrative completely forecloses the possibility that choreographers regularly maneuver between cultural sectors. The short discussion that accompanies the data further relegates dance-based employment by citing aging and loss of physical dexterity as factors contributing to the short career shelf life of U.S. dance artists. According to the narrative,

¹ U.S. Department of Labor Statistics. Occupational Outlook Handbook, p. 2.

² Music professionals are particularly overcrowded into a the index labeled, “musicians, singers, and related workers”, which focuses largely on unionized singers and instrumental performers at the expense of directors and composers, who are lumped together in the BLS index. Composer data is chronicled in just six sentences over the entire three-page report. See: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Outlook Handbook (2010-2011) Musicians, Singers and Related Workers. (Last accessed, June 8, 2011) <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos095.htm>

“Many dancers stop performing by their late thirties, but some remain in the field as choreographers, dance teachers, or artistic directors.”³

The “but” in the previous sentence is significant. This preposition underscores the report’s tendency to stratify choreography and dance education as “fall back” career options, “twilight” professions for people who—presumably due to old age and/or bodily injury—lack the capacity to acquire full-time, single-source careers in the dance performance “industry”. While the ageist and able-ist assumptions surrounding dance-based labor deserve much closer attention than I can give them here, I have introduced the BLS narrative as a “prologue” in order to underline the need to reframe dance making as a more cross-cutting field of cultural production than the current archive tends to suggest. U.S. dance makers, in my view, require a different kind of introduction.

My critique is not original, and the idea to challenge narrow perceptions of dance labor at the level of U.S. policy is hardly a new problem. In 1993, a sixteen-member research team enlisted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published a 93-page monograph aimed at establishing a more complex policy platform for choreographic production in U.S. culture. This historical report, entitled *Dancemakers*, sought to establish benchmark statistics on dance labor within four major urban areas: New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. Despite the narrowness of the report’s scope, the NEA *Dancemakers* narrative significantly complicates the state of dance production portrayed by the BLS and underlines the historical under-resourcing of choreographers as a problem for U.S. federal arts policy.

³ Ibid., p. 2.

Policy Prologue (Redux)

The National Endowment for the Arts

Today's choreographer, the synergistic sum of her/his myriad roles, is best described, as one survey respondent explained, as: a dance maker, director, dancer, teacher, business manager, press agent, grant writer, fund raiser, psychiatrist, secretary, and a...quick study in anything else that has to get done!

National Endowment for the Arts. (1993) *Dancemakers*. Research Division Report #28. Washington D.C.: Government printing office, p. 77.

The *Dancemakers* monograph, at the time of its publication, sought to contribute to a lack of policy research and literature on U.S. choreographers by surveying roughly seven-hundred dance makers about their employment practices, funding opportunities, and general vocational needs.⁴ The above epigraph underscores the kinds of extra-aesthetic roles that emerged as the research team—comprised of artists, presenters, sociologists, administrators, and arts advocates—sought to distinguish challenges facing artists working in live dance production from those working in more reproducible art forms. Lamenting dance's precarity as a high-labor aesthetic and administrative enterprise, the report authors signal several other key problems that dance poses to numbers-based forms of "industry" analysis. The report narrative spotlights dance's high labor ratio and relatively low level of reproducibility as factors that, they suggest, contribute to dance's historical struggle to sustain a stable economic and infrastructural

⁴ National Endowment for the Arts. *Dancemakers*. Research Division, Report #28. (1993). Washington D.C.: U.S. Government printing office, p. 2.

base in the U.S. cultural economy. Surveyed dance makers report additional external obstacles, such as the lack of adequate outlets to present choreographic work, the absence of basic amenities such as health insurance, and the diminished advancement opportunities for choreographers within an increasingly segmented U.S. market.⁵

It is within this prescription for expanded economic and institutional mediation that the NEA performs a swift and problematic reversal of power that submerges more prolonged debate around the vocational dexterity of U.S. dance makers. The market vulnerabilities that surface in the *Dancemakers* problematically situate choreographers as a powerlessness “profession-at-risk” based on the reported lack of singular or stable infrastructure. The research team’s call for philanthropic intervention identifies the following list of “core needs”, including:

“Locating funds, stabilizing income, securing monetary and “in-kind” contributions, securing grant-writing and networking skills, and fostering meaningful constituent relationships or otherwise developing coalitions that link dance and the arts to plans to revive the economy.”⁶

The choice to represent market participation and economic revival as “core needs” of U.S. choreographers here is significant. By introducing vocational dexterity as a distinguishing trait among dance makers and then trading this discussion for a call for expanded institutional intervention, I suggest that the NEA begins a problematic shift away from dance’s fundamentally unstable and interdependent character and towards issues of its own institutional survival. In one move, the “industry” driven economism the

⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

⁶ Ibid, p. 76.

NEA frame all but collapses the cross-sector maneuverability of choreographers into a narrative of stalled professional development. By, thus, re-casting choreographers as a market liability, the *Dancemakers* research team posits a need for the meditative arm of consecrating institutions like the NEA to intervene in order to help choreographers to:

“...get at basic concerns and life conditions of choreographers who make dances as a professional pursuit that can be regarded as having some dignity.”⁷

What began as a well-intentioned effort to credit choreographers with multiple authorities beyond stagecraft and artistic technique concludes as an institutional call to improve the “dignity” of dance makers through NEA intervention. Viewing this narrative shift with some historical hindsight, the research team’s decision to sideline debate around the vocational maneuverability of U.S. dance makers can be read as an effort to preserve the NEA’s symbolic status during a precarious historical moment for individual artists. Writing in the wake so-called “culture wars”, when individual artist funding was being threatened by moral accusations from conservative groups, the panel’s choice to represent dance makers as vacillating cultural workers-in-need seems imminently tethered to the survival of state arts subsidy in this particular historical moment.⁸ While parsing the NEA’s historical relationship to individual dance artists is quite another project, the *Dancemakers* monograph offers a more complicated policy introduction to the work of choreographers. One that, its authors suggest, might serve as opening

⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

⁸ For a policy rebuttal that takes up the shift from “creative” to “delivery” systems of policy measurement, see: Bedoya, Roberto. “U.S. Cultural Policy: its politics of participation, its creative potential”. National Presenters Network white paper, 2004.

prologue for future policy inquiry. The fact remains: some twenty years after its publication, *Dancemakers* remains the only choreographer-focused monograph commissioned in the history of the U.S. federal arts Endowment. What was intended to catalyze research and to jump-start debate around dance production was completely dropped, dead in the water, with zero push back at the policy level.

Taken together, this pair of policy prologues continually sidelines the multi-directional character of choreographic practice by resorting to numbers-driven barometers and prescriptions. Borrowing language from corporate philanthropic discourses, the NEA *Dancemakers* report, like the more recent BLS handbook, ultimately paints the disadvantaged economic position of choreographers as a sign of faltering productivity. Whereas the 2010-11 BLS index connects the economically disadvantaged state of dance art to sporadic gaps of total unemployment, the NEA monograph links the occupational deficits of choreographers to issues of falling legislative appropriations and to the erosion of funding for the arts, in general. Neither of these reports entertains the possibility that the tactical maneuvering of U.S. dance makers might require alternative choreographic logics. To further contextualize the gravitational pull of this dual policy abjection on the practical level, I will pause to (re)introduce dance to production discourse through personal example.

FIRST INTERMISSION

SNAPSHOT #1: Artistic Director, 501c-3 non-profit arts organization (1997-2007) (annual salaried employment)

*Danceworks, Inc. 501c-3 non-profit arts organization, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

*Duties include: Producing three evening-length concert events and up to five touring engagements per year for the Danceworks Performance Company (ten-member modern dance collective performing original experimental dance works). Producing the Danceworks Summer Dance Series (six weekends of dance performances featuring local and out-of-town artists working across disciplines). Serving as organizational liaison for theater rentals and special events in the organization's in house black box theater. Overseeing all performance-related marketing and publicity. Creating annual budgets for all performance projects. Contracting all guest artists and designers. Working with the organizational staff and board of directors on long-term planning and resource development for the performance leg of this non-profit arts organization (est. 1992). Participating in local, regional, and national arts advocacy on organization's behalf.

* Annual Salary (FY2006) \$22,500. Weekly workload hours: 40-60. Weekly salary (52 weeks): \$432.69. Hourly wage: \$7.21.

Day in the Life: Monday August 14, 2006

10am-12noon: *Mixed Six* Rehearsal

(Studio rehearsal, Danceworks end-of-summer cabaret series)

...

12:45-2pm:

Lunch meeting with Community Outreach Director Milwaukee Ballet

(Brainstorm possibilities for collaboration)

...

230pm-6pm: *Art 2 Art* tech rehearsal@ Danceworks

(Mentoring choreographer-collaborator performance project)

...

6-7pm: Box Office Staff Training@ Danceworks

(Oversee box office staff training with new personnel)

...

7-10pm Production Administration

(Prepare report and materials for next day board retreat)

Reflection

Choreography is a social practice. The professional values of U.S. choreographers are plural and cross-cutting. Any policy research that insists on presenting dance making as a singular career-in-a-vacuum or that weighs career achievement strictly on economic terms denies the social, cultural, and symbolic functions of choreographic production in U.S. culture. Snapshots of my work as an experimental choreographer will appear throughout this analysis to further disrupt the perception that the values conditioned by dance making flow in singular directions. My own practice traces the infinite gaps in the maps that route the process of making dances in U.S. culture. Dance making is a struggle, but naming this struggle offers strange relief.

As a choreographer, I have grown accustomed to sweating out circumstances of production in real time. As a choreographer-turned-academic-hopeful, I am compelled to understand the historical and theoretical underpinnings of these failed policy perceptions as problems of ossification. Dance demands a more dynamic playing field. I am still learning to write through these problems, and I am still learning to stomach the

taste of my own words. Through these multiple prologues, introductions, and critical interruptions, I invite you to push with me, to further pressure and unsettle existing standards. Through this collective effort, we might re-boot debate around dance making as a radically unstable and interdependent enterprise. We might resuscitate dance making as a fantastic problem for production discourse. We might deliver dance past its attempted expiration dates. These moves are mighty, and they are urgent. Many dance makers are currently escaping the historical record.

INTRODUCING THEORIES OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

To unpack the conceptual roots of totalizing and stratifying standards of evaluation, like those that plague U.S. policy reporting on dance, my next three subsections examine prevalent theories of cultural production that shape discourse across the humanities. First, I take up the “industry” framework suggested by Frankfurt School critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944). After rehearsing their “industry” argument and reinforcing the limitations of the “industry” framework using visual example that is embedded in the text, I maintain that the anti-capitalist strain of their argument, while historically significant, forces all cultural laborers to perform as a nameless, faceless, mass. To loosen the capitalist chokehold on cultural producers, I then turn to the “industries” corrective offered by French media theorist Bernard Miège (1989). Miège’s effort to pluralize production amidst the technological advancements of the mid-20th century meaningfully expands the number of labor processes at play while problematically fixing producers into hierarchical roles that are based largely on

economic profitability. In this section, I conclude that, aside from the highly stratified domain of western classical ballet, few live dance production profiles uphold the kinds of ossified positions that Miège is proposing. My final theoretical approach unpacks the choreographic logics of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) "field" theory of cultural production, The Bourdieuzian "field" promotes production as a radically indeterminate domain of cultural practice fuelled by both economic and non-economic values. His flexible concept provides some much needed wiggle room for dance makers, artistic producers who frequently traverse cultural sectors and enact multiple roles during the production process. By unpacking the structural limitations inherent in these influential theories, I hope to draw the production inheritance of U.S. dance makers into sharper view. From there I resume my career snapshots to further interrupt and accumulate my argument against standardizing perceptions of dance making in U.S. culture.

Theory #1: The Culture "Industry": Choreographic Conformity

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's 1944 (1991) text *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* presents the concept of culture as an "industry" in a now-notorious polemic that underscores the grave degree to which cultural production has been co-opted by capitalism in Germany and Western Europe during the first three decades of the 20th century. As a seminal text of the Frankfurt School, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* articulates the authors' trenchant suspicion around the co-optative forces of fascism and industrialization and their debilitating effects on artists and cultural producers. Their ambivalence about the power of culture to circumvent these

dominating forces informs their conclusion that capitalist modes of production have collapsed all cultural production into one monolithic “industry”. Adorno and Horkheimer maintain the violently singular character of the culture “industry”—violent because of its total and all consuming character—as a commodity-producing machine that serves the sole purpose of reproducing mechanized and homogenized works for mass consumption.

As an engine of production, the “industry” is mobilized by uniform collective action of cultural producers. Workers, in this schema, are radically de-individualized by the mechanisms of capitalism. There is zero room in their theory for practical variation on the part of producers. To help body-forth their idea of cultural production as an evaporative totality, I have edited together the following choreographic example of the kind of instrumentalizing scenario that the “industry” theory suggests.

(Click hyperlink to view video or copy/paste the following URL into your Internet browser: <https://vimeo.com/70364998>)

Unison choreography is highlighted here to suggest the kind of collective servitude that Adorno and Horkheimer posit among cultural producers under capitalism. Such uniform action and representation has historically served to spectacularize and propagandize a wide array of determinisms (nation, ability, Oprah, femininity, criminality, reform, and T-Mobile cell phone plans, as this except demonstrates). By Adorno and Horkheimer’s “industry” logics all roads to cultural production lead to the standardized mechanisms of the market. While their anti-capitalist polemic unmasks the ideological inheritance of capitalist modes of production and its tightening hold on cultural producers during this historical moment, their “industry” structure collapses all arts

practice into false conformity. For a more complex theoretical scenario, I now turn to French media theorist Bernard Miège's (1989) response to these "industry" polemics.

Theory #2: The Culture "Industries": Hierarchization and Stratification

As a corrective to the apocalyptic unison staged by Adorno and Horkheimer, Bernard Miège's (1989) text, *The Capitalization of Cultural Production* attempts to differentiate the complex combinations of productive and unproductive labor that characterize capitalist cultural production without collapsing production into economic determinism.⁹ His "industries" framework positions commodification and the increasing valorization of capital as a threat to cultural innovation, but not its defeat. Throughout the text, Miège maintains that the speed of technological advances guarantees a degree of maneuverability and heterogeneity among producers through the constant subversion of old or outmoded forms. By avowing innovation, expansion and specialization to emerge and generate new forms, Miège's "industries" concept charts a generative theory that allows products and producers to count on more nuanced terms.

As an organizational structure, Miège's "industries" theory pluralizes and then divides cultural producers into stratified sectors. He organizes producers into four categories, including pre-capitalist production, small commercial production, production controlled by the State, and production that is dependent upon sponsorship or patronage. By fixing these production profiles, Miège forces producers to fit into strictly "non-commercial, "non-reproducible" and "non-productive" categories, a move that

⁹ Miège, Bernard. (1989) *The Capitalization of Cultural Production*. London: Journeyman Press, p. 25

forecloses the possibility that artists work between commercial, non-profit, and informal production markets. At close range, the bulk of Miège's analysis centers on producers capable of driving "industries" toward market expansion.¹⁰ For all of the complexity that the "industries" theory of production offers, the economism underpinning his categorization reinforces the economic determinism of culture configured as an "industry" in the singular.

To be fair, Miège's text contends very little with live dance or performance. His inquiry is primarily focused on the complex vocational relationships between music producers, brokers, managers, technicians, musicians, and advertising intermediaries since the mid 20th century in the U.S. and Western Europe. While a thorough comparison between music and dance production goes beyond the scope of my inquiry, one particular model of Europeanized live dance production manages to achieve a production foothold within the "industries" perspective. The hierarchical logics of the classical ballet company, still an influential part of the Euro-centric inheritance of U.S. dance makers, remains uniquely stratified in terms of highly-specialized "principal dancers" that assume leading roles, "soloists" that play secondary parts, and members of the "corps de ballet" perform less autonomous aspects of production. Such rank-and-file organization, made visible in the embedded hyperlink below, reinforces the choreographic hierarchies that are imposed by Miège's "industries" schematic.

(Click hyperlink to view video or copy/paste the following URL into your Internet browser: <http://www.nycballet.com/Dancers/Dancers-by-Rank.aspx>)

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

The talented dance makers that work for the New York City Ballet notwithstanding, Miège's corrective generally forecloses the multi-directionality of dance production by forcing dance makers into fixed roles and responsibilities. Nowhere in the "industries" framework can Miège hope to account, for example, for the high number of meditative roles reported by the surveyed choreographers in the NEA monograph. To introduce an alternative view of cultural production that promotes a more pluralistic set of practices, values, and relationships, I now turn to the work of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu.

Theory #3: The Cultural "Field": a Dynamic Space of Practical Possibility

Pierre Bourdieu's 1993 text, *The Field of Cultural Production* provides choreographers with some much-needed space to move and adjust to the indeterminate practical operations involved with making dance work in U.S. culture. Unlike the reductive or fixing logics of the above "industry" models, Bourdieu stages cultural production as a practical, tactical arena of bodily negotiation, a "field" of struggle shaped by its inhabitants. The "field", in his view, regularly splinters—as Miège's "industries" do—into sectors, which Bourdieu refers to as "sub-fields". But, unlike Miège's static categories, Bourdieu's sub-fields function as dynamic and historically contingent spaces that are impossible to reproduce. Such glorious irreproducibility offers a significant advantage to cultural producers who regularly jockey between *positions* (which Bourdieu defines as the substrata of potential power positions) and *position-takings* (which he defines as the practical effort to preserve, obtain, or overthrow existing

positions or create new ones).¹¹ By championing the practical adaptability of cultural producers as a constitutive force in the cultural “field”, Bourdieu unsettles the presumed fixity of the worker as a “principal” or specialized laborer while also permitting interaction between sub-fields, such as commercial and non-commercial domains of production. By permissioning plural and oppositional vocabularies, spatial arrangements, and temporal logics, Bourdieu sets in motion a highly generative space of production that is “waiting to be made rather than ready-made.”¹² His theory offers many options and directions for U.S. dance makers, whose routes to production frequently undergo sudden deviations in response to shifting external conditions and internal dispositions.¹³

In addition to clearing some much-needed room to move, Bourdieu’s “field” paradigm rejects the economic determinism of “industries” frameworks by conceptualizing capital in economic and non-economic terms. He carefully delineates the impacts of *economic capital*, which he frames as the most basic form of capital, made up of material possessions, money and property, *symbolic capital*, which he takes to refer to the status of an individual or group whose voice/s are recognized as the most legitimate and whose views and assertions are taken most seriously, *cultural capital*, which he defines as the cultivated practices that indicate belonging among a particular social group or class, and *social capital*, which Bourdieu takes to include the resources that derive from participation in networks and mutually supportive relationships between homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.¹⁴ Taken together, this interplay between

¹¹ Bourdieu, P. *The Field of Cultural Production*. (1993). (R. Johnson, Trans.) U.K.: Columbia University Press. P. 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁴ These definitions of Bourdieu’s capital logics paraphrase the framework provided by sociologist Catherine Campbell, whose work mobilizes Bourdieu’s framework to explain contradictory micro-social and macro-cultural practices delimiting the impact of health interventions in Summertown, South Africa.

symbolic, economic, social, and cultural capital avows an array of vocational motivations and effectively de-centers economic accumulation as the chief metric for career “success”.

SECOND INTERMISSION

SNAPSHOT #2:

Adjunct Faculty, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Dance Department

(semester-based employment)

*Duties include: planning class syllabus for beginning modern dance and beginning jazz dance technique for undergraduate non-dance majors, practical implementation of bi-weekly class content, collaboration with musical accompanist, ongoing assessment of students' written and practical work, attendance at departmental meetings and functions relative to course requirements.

*Duration of Employment: 40% (adjunct faculty appointment, senior lecturer position)

*Annual salary (fall and spring semester): \$13,176.00

*Based on \$1647.00 per credit x 4 credits = \$6588/semester. Weekly workload hours: 7.0. Weekly salary (15 week semester): \$439.20. Hourly salary: \$62.74.

SNAPSHOT #3:

Teaching Artist, K-12 public school (residency-based)

* Duties include: development and implementation of high school modern dance and choreography curriculum, bi-weekly practical engagement with up to 18 students at the

See: Campbell, Catherine. (2003) *Letting them Die: why HIV/AIDS prevention programs fail*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 190-191.

Milwaukee High School for the Arts, administrative meetings and attendance at departmental events, ongoing evaluation with resident faculty and student population.

*Annual salary (fall-spring academic calendar): \$900.00, based on per-class flat fee of \$50.00. Weekly workload hours: 3.0. Hourly salary (18 week semester): \$16.66.

SNAPSHOT #4:

Freelance choreography/First Stage Children's Theater (project-based employment)

* Duties include: pre-production planning with stage director, artistic collaborators, and production personnel, pre-rehearsal choreographic preparation and artist scheduling with production stage manager, practical engagement in weekly rehearsals, attendance at ongoing production meetings, technical rehearsals, and opening night performance.

* Salary (single project): Flat fee of \$2500. 12 hours rehearsal per week x 4 weeks. 40 hours pre-production preparation. 20 hours' production week technical rehearsal, for 108 total hours. Weekly salary: \$625.00. Hourly salary: \$23.14.

Day in the Life: Monday September 18th, 2006

9am-1030am Teach Beginning Modern I (adjunct teaching)

...

12-130pm Danceworks Brush up Rehearsal *Café Music* quartet

(Company rehearsal for school outreach performance)

...

2-335pm Teach Advanced Modern

(11th and 12th graders @ Milwaukee HS of the Arts)

...

4pm-4:15pm (Danceworks admin) Wisconsin Arts Board submit eGrant

(Danceworks Concert Season funding proposal due)

...

430-830pm *Bunnicula* (freelance choreography rehearsal)

First Stage Children's Theatre/Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Reflection

Snapshots #2, #3, and #4 evidence the concurrent markets, populations, and values that I encountered in the “field” through my work as a cross-sector dance maker in Milwaukee, Wisconsin during FY2006. In the course of one day, I moved alongside beginning adult dancers at a university, youth dancers at a public high school, twelve professional modern dancers and a cohort of union actors contracted to perform in a children’s musical about a vampire rabbit.

These zigzag maneuvers robustly reinforce the futility of “standardizing” logics. The Bourdieuzian “field” is already in progress. What Bourdieu’s fluid theoretical schema offers to U.S. dance makers is a constitutive practical domain where cultural producers simply cannot depend upon past privilege for future success. By embedding dance examples including snapshots of my own practice alongside these views, I hope to incite debate about how dance is not more or less, just differently organized that existing production and policy perceptions seem to suggest.

THIRD INTERMISSION

SNAPSHOT #5

Teaching artist, community-based dance residencies (project-based employment)

*Sample residency model: Danceworks Intergenerational Multi-Arts Project

*Duties include: Collaborative pre-residency curricular development, implementing dance curriculum with students from area K-12 public schools, facilitating dance exchanges between students and older adults in local healthcare facilities and community centers, ongoing programmatic reflection, evaluation, and follow up with project partners and participants.

*Salary (project-based, residency fee): \$1300 for 13-week residency. Weekly workload/hours: 4 (2 hourly classes/week plus 2 hours preparation, project partner debrief, and assessment). Weekly salary: \$100. Hourly salary: \$25.00.

SNAPSHOT #6

Studio Teaching, Danceworks 50+ Initiative (semester-based employment)

*Lead Faculty, Danceworks 50+ Initiative (hourly teaching varies, 12-week semesters)

*Duties include: Teaching weekly one-hour dance technique classes in modern, jazz for dance students who are 50 years and older.

*Salary (hourly rate: \$40/hour. Weekly hours: 3 (2 teaching, 1 prep). Hourly salary: \$26.66.

*Day in the Life: Thursday, October 26th, 2006

9am-10am Intergenerational Multi Arts Project (IMAP)

(Residency kickoff performance @ Aurora Adult Day Center)

...

11-12pm Danceworks administration

IMAP teacher training brainstorm with Danceworks senior staff

...

12-1pm teach 50+ jazz dance class at Danceworks

...

1-220pm teach UW-Milwaukee Beginning Jazz I

...

430-6pm teach advanced modern/company class at Danceworks

...

630-8pm Danceworks Performance Company (DPC)

Rehearse for November concert series (*Catch as Catch Can*)

...

8-10pm Danceworks Performance Company (DPC)

Rehearse for January concert series (*Bolero*-Luc Vanier, rehearsal director)

Final Reflection (Trajectory)

Dance making in the “industry” (circa 1996)

I'm not sure that it matters, but ten years before snapshots #5 and #6 were "taken" I earned my one and only "full-time" performance gig as a dancing waitress at Ed Debevic's Restaurant, a 1950's style diner in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin. During periods of employment ("shifts"), I joined a cohort of waiter-performers, who would intermittently depart from food service responsibilities to dance for paying customers. We jumped on tables, countertops, and the catwalks of the restaurant to pseudo-spontaneously "shake a tail feather" to songs from the 1950s and 1960s. During my two years of "industry" employment, I choreographed a total of five original table-dances that I taught to my fellow co-workers. These dances premiered nightly for thousands of restaurant patrons over the course of my tenure at Ed Debevic's. I earned an annual salary of roughly \$25,000 and full health benefits for this work. My work at Ed Debevic's remains the highest "single-source" performance job of my professional career.

Dance making in limbo (circa 2007)

I'm not sure that it matters, but one year after my FY2006 "snapshots", I decided to move from the Midwest to Los Angeles, where I began my current stint as a choreographer-turned-academic hopeful at UCLA. I spent the bulk of this year under-employed and seeking freelance teaching, choreography, and performance work in a new city. Subsequently, I lived entirely off of the income generated from the sale of my home in Milwaukee. This period of extreme under-employment somewhat fortuitously secured my in-state residency requirement in the state of California and my financial need as I prepared to enter graduate school in 2008.

Dance making in the academy (2009-2012)

I'm not sure that it matters, but in 2008 I won an academic "game show". I applied for and was selected to receive the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship administered by the U.S. Department of Education. This need and merit-based funding supported my graduate research in choreography, culture, and performance at the University of California, Los Angeles. During this period of dance making, I completed my master's degree in choreography (2009-2012) and began my current trajectory as a doctoral student in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance. My work was supported annually by the U.S. Department of Education, including full tuition remission and a \$30,000 paycheck from the U.S. federal government. Upon reflection, it is now clear that the Javits Fellowship materialized due to the combined forces of my (2007) underemployment and my audacious promise to alleviate the mystery and oversimplification of dance labor in U.S. cultural policy and production discourse.

Choreographic Traversals (2013-present)

I'm not sure that it matters, but just last week I taught one of my "waiting tables" dances to a group of eight U.S. military veterans at the Los Angeles Ambulatory Care Center in downtown Los Angeles, where I currently run a dance program for veterans living with PTSD and severe mental illness. As "chair-dancers," we had to modify some of the moves in order to accommodate the ambulatory concerns of the group, but the impacts were pretty much the same. This current dance-making project is a collaborative effort between psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, therapists, staff, and veterans who participated in the military theatres of Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to my contractual obligations to the U.S. Department

of Veterans Affairs—the institution that currently supports my dance making—many of the details of my salary, curriculum, and or the work, itself remain confidential. Since our weekly dances are not my story to tell, I won't conclude this reflection, but I will say this: our dances are small, but I'm fairly certain that they matter, in ways that are currently escaping the historical record.

Policy Epilogue: Hope for the Field

At the risk of prolonging any more false-starts or policy stutters, I will book-end my discussion by examining a policy study that attempts to qualify the myriad contexts, practices, and supports that drive 21st century artistic production in U.S. culture. This foundational report, entitled, *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists* was published in 2003 by the Urban Institute (UI), a Washington D.C. based social policy think tank. While only skeletally focused on dance production, the UI narrative, nonetheless, meaningfully extends policy inquiry far beyond the conventional policy focus on monetary compensation and product reproducibility.¹⁵ Commissioned by the Ford Foundation and 37 additional funders in the aftermath of the dissolution of individual grants from the NEA and NEH during mid 1990s, the UI research team, lead by Maria-Rosario Jackson, highlights national gaps in policy, infrastructure, and public perception surrounding the labor and value of art making. *Investing in Creativity* builds its case for the multiple and complex roles that artists play in society through an

¹⁵ Jackson, M.R., Kabwasa-Green, F., Swenson, D., Herranz, J., Ferryman, K., Atlas, C., Walner, Rosenstein, C.E. (2003). *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists*. The Urban Institute, Washington D.C. p. 88. (last accessed July 7, 2013). <http://www.urban.org/publications/411311.html>

impressive body of fieldwork and analysis.¹⁶ The data models, in many ways, the kind of dynamic perception of cultural production that I have spent the better part of this chapter defending.

Unlike the NEA and BLS policy “prologues” that open this chapter, the UI monograph recognizes the expanding need for artists to engage with multiple disciplines, populations and markets as a condition of 21st century cultural production. In the report’s opening section, the authors note the particular challenge of landing on an agreed-upon definition of “artist” as a factor stalling a more inclusive cultural policy paradigm. While refusing to be defeated by the decentralized character of art making, the research team recognizes that the multi-disciplinarity and maneuverability reported by artists in the field provides a clear roadblock for strictly quantitative analysis.¹⁷ A paragraph that speaks to the dynamic employment patterns of artists highlights the multi-directional aspects of arts labor, not unlike the work of NEA *Dancemakers* team, a decade earlier. Yet, unlike the NEA project, the UI report corroborates the vocational resourcefulness of artists without assigning vocational dexterity a pejorative status. This passage is worth quoting, at length:

“Among the artists we interviewed were an actor working in nonprofit theater and supporting himself with film and television gigs in the commercial sector; and a visual artist who was also the head of a major art school. We interviewed a media artist and co-founder of an artist-focused organization serving other media artists; she teaches part-time and struggles to finish her first feature-length film. We also interviewed a poet/writer capturing the Vietnamese-American experience while working with both

¹⁶ Jackson, et al, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

Asian-American community organizations and an Asian Studies department at a local university, a muralist working with inner-city youth and supporting herself through public art commissions and teaching; a traditional East Indian dancer, currently living off fellowship money and occasionally working as an office temp; an avant-garde trombonist and composer dedicated not only to making his music but also to creating an audience for it and active in teaching newer musicians in the genre; and a percussionist playing full-time with a major symphony orchestra.”¹⁸

The UI team, operating at a concerted distance from the so-called “culture wars” that plagued the NEA panel, entertains a critical question that I will use to conclude my analysis: how might the qualitative and collaborative aspects of these cross-sector cultural workers be measured and debated at the policy level? Interestingly, the UI report aims this question squarely at the Bureau of Labor Statistics by charging the BLS with failing to collect representative samples in their labor reporting and assigning faulty rubrics that define professional artistic labor exclusively in terms of earned wages.¹⁹ The UI research team concludes that such “standardization” all but obliterates the work of artists who choose to remain unaffiliated with formal organizations or whose work otherwise flies under the policy radar. By recognizing the diverse career trajectories of U.S. artists and avowing the contradictory pathways that define their labor, *Investing In Creativity* all but explodes “industry” logics. Without promising a single standard of measurement, the UI team carefully suggests that policy-makers “count” what kinds of cultural practices “count” by looking in more than one sector at once. As a cross-sector

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

dance maker, I have to admit that this promise of a more pluralistic debate at the level of cultural policy and production makes me sweat, a little. Here's hoping that it matters.

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