

**100 YEARS OF THE AMERICAN MODERN DANCE COMPANY:  
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MODERN DANCE IN THE UNITED STATES  
AS PRESENTED IN THE  
SINGLE-CHOREOGRAPHER AND REPERTORY ARTISTIC MODELS**

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“Doomsayers of the dance world: stand by;  
any art form is greater than a single individual, be it choreographer or superstar.  
We are in an interlude waiting for the next boom. In the end is the beginning.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, "Thoughts on the Once and Future Dance Boom," *New York Times*, January 05, 2005, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/06/arts/dance/06danc.html>.

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## **Abstract**

Ellen Stokes Shadle, “**100 Years of the American Modern Dance Company: The Institutionalization of Modern Dance in the United States as presented in the Single-Choreographer and Repertory Artistic Models**” MA University at Buffalo, 2015

This final project examines the two primary organizing artistic models of modern dance companies in the United States: the single-choreographer model and repertory model. It discusses the transitional point of American modern dance companies that may be transitioning from single-choreographer to repertory models. The purpose of this topic is to put a spotlight on an underserved area of American modern dance, specifically on the artistic platforms for modern dance companies. The nature of American modern dance companies along with relevant history of the art form and its institutionalization collectively provide the spotlight pursued. Not all dance companies are created equal with respect to genre – i.e., ballet, modern, experimental, as well as organizational intent. Through secondary sources, and data collection, this research attempts to articulate those distinctions however nuanced or obvious. Questions explored include, but are not exclusive to: Are there structural components that are unique to the single-artist or repertory company, respectively? Do single-choreographer companies rely on a different system of resources or practices than repertory companies to create and present work? Is the single-artist model one of choice, or is it necessitated by circumstances? The conclusions provided by the discussion seeks to elucidate aspects that are relevant for both who those are founding and those who are operating a modern dance company in making more informed decisions about developing an artistic vision and executing it.

## Introduction

One hundred years is a milestone warranting celebration and reflection, and assessment and projection. 2015 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American modern dance company. With the emergence of modern dance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1915 marked the beginning of the institutionalization of modern dance with the first documented modern dance company in the United States. The institution of the dance company set the stage for the role that everything from funding and granting agencies to universities and governmental programs would have on the evolution and operation of modern dance not only as an art form, but as a business. Structures would be designed, apparatuses would be built to integrate modern dance into the cultural landscape and participate in the political economy of American society.

Much has been written, researched, and debated about modern dance in the United States as an art form with respect to its choreographers and the work they create. Whether it is what the art form represents or embraces, or what it rejects<sup>2</sup>; whether it debates if choreographers are creating work that is worthy of the art form's spirit or intentions, there is plenty of discussion to be found.<sup>3</sup> In addition, an abundance of information can be found about modern dance's audiences – i.e., where they are, who they are; how to get them, how to keep them<sup>4</sup>. However, conversation surrounding the role and the impact of the specific artistic platform, i.e. organizational form, of a modern dance company is lacking. This discussion serves to provide

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2 Beth Soll, *Will Modern Dance Survive?: Lessons to Be Learned from the Pioneers and Unsung Visionaries of Modern Dance* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2002).

3 Craig Bromberg, "A DANCE SERIES FOSTERS DEBATE," *New York Times*, July 10, 1982, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/11/movies/a-dance-series-fosters-debate.html>.

4 "How Dance Audiences Engage: Summary Report from a National Survey of Dance Audiences," – *National Survey of Dance Audiences*, 2011, accessed May 2, 2015, [http://www2.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/DanceUSA\\_EDA\\_HowDanceAudiencesEngage.pdf](http://www2.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/DanceUSA_EDA_HowDanceAudiencesEngage.pdf).

insight to the artistic model of a modern dance company within the larger institutionalization of the art form.

Admittedly, institutionalization and modern dance are not inherently compatible concepts. As a socially-conscious art movement modern dance's philosophical sensibilities effectively rejected notions of commodification or the institutionalization of art. Nonetheless, both were occurring almost concurrently alongside the emergence of the art form itself. The same social, political, and economic apparatuses that have informed modern dance in the United States artistically, have also informed the path it has taken organizationally. An artist creating substantive work, but lacking a conduit or means with which to connect his/her work to audiences, exists only in a vacuum. With that, this discussion also intends to demonstrate the significance of the modern dance company as an institution being on par with not only the choreographer creating work, but also the work itself.

The number of choreographers aspiring to create work and connect with audiences today has exploded exponentially since modern dance's infancy at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century facilitated by a documented dance company boom that saw a 146% increase in dance companies between 1961 and 1964 alone.<sup>5</sup> Today, the numbers of aspiring choreographers and dance company founders continue to grow accompanied by ever greater competition for visibility and resources in a climate that is diminishingly hospitable to such ambitions. The venerable Martha Graham never faced the competition among peers for a place either in the marketplace or on the artistic landscape that today's choreographers do. The incomparable Twyla Tharp did not fight for funding in the same manner present-day artists do receiving a \$10,000 grant (almost \$58,000

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5 Leila Sussmann, "Anatomy of the Dance Company Boom, 1958-1980," *Dance Research Journal* 16, no. 2 (1984): 24, accessed February 15, 2015, doi: 10.2307/1478719.

in 2014 dollars<sup>6</sup>) from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) by forwarding a hand-written note that reads, “I make dances, not applications. Send the money.”<sup>7</sup> Odds are good that Alvin Ailey never imagined his dance company one day being a \$35 million titan surpassing anyone’s conceivable thresholds of what was operationally possible for a modern dance company in the United States. Today, choreographers select from or create any number of options to provide agency to their efforts. From adopting a home within academia, to independently freelancing and exploring the possibilities in media, or testing the boundaries of theater and performance, my discussion will focus on unpacking two of those options: the single-choreographer, and repertory modern dance company.

It should be noted that choreographers are under no obligation to formalize an organized company structure in order to create and present their work to audiences, or as a means to their livelihood. Acknowledging that fact, those choreographers who choose not to pursue the development of a formal organizational structure will not be a featured component of this discussion. This also applies to choreographers/company founders who may be operating under fiscal sponsorship even if they employ a company moniker that is associated with their professional activities. The National Council on Nonprofits (NCN) offers a description of a fiscal sponsor as “a nonprofit organization that provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to help build the capacity of charitable projects.”<sup>8</sup> To put the NCN’s description into layman’s terms, fiscal sponsorship is the arrangement between a person/project legally *borrowing*, if you will, another organization’s non-profit status in order

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<sup>6</sup> "The Inflation Calculator," The Inflation Calculator, accessed March 08, 2015, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>.

<sup>7</sup> Twyla Tharp, *Push Comes to Shove* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 150.

<sup>8</sup> "Fiscal-sponsorship-nonprofits," National Council of Nonprofits, accessed February 18, 2015, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/fiscal-sponsorship-nonprofits>.

to allow that person/project to effectively operate as a not-for-profit organization for the duration of that project. In particular, fiscal sponsorship provides said person/project with the legal ability to raise funds and for their contributors to legally take a tax-deduction for their support under the section 170(c) of the United States' tax code, a.k.a., the Charitable Contribution Tax Deduction.<sup>9</sup> While excluding this segment of the professional dance community from this discussion discounts a considerable representation of dance makers, only artists and companies that are or have been registered 501(c)(3) entities will serve as pertinent to the discussion. As clarification, all artists whether self-identified as independent freelancers or legally-recognized company founders/directors are beholden to others to disseminate their work. Any choreographer is compelled to involve a venue (and its staff, and policies and procedures), or a presenter, or producer to connect his/her work to audiences.

The majority of dance company founders continue to be choreographers. Subsequently, the majority of dance companies are founded on a single-choreographer artistic platform. This means that the work being created, performed, and presented by the company is of the founder exclusively. Why the single-choreographer/choreographer-founder model remains the artistic platform of choice for dance companies is a unique question to modern dance particularly because the single-artist model does not stand out in any other discipline in the performing arts. It is a plausibly accurate observation that single-playwright theater companies, or single-composer symphonies are not a standard blueprint to the theater and music communities, respectively. Unless a theater company has devoted a particular season to a single playwright (i.e. Signature Theater Company, New York City<sup>10</sup>), audiences typically expect a theater

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<sup>9</sup> "Charitable Contribution Deductions," Internal Revenue Service, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.irs.gov/Charities-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Charitable-Contribution-Deductions>.

<sup>10</sup> "About," Signature Theatre, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.signaturetheatre.org/about/index.aspx>.

company to present the work of multiple playwrights. Further, playwrights are not predictably the typical theater company founder. One could counter that there are theater companies devoted to exclusively presenting the works of one playwright, such as Shakespeare or Shaw, but today, even the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of the oldest and most revered Shakespeare theater companies presents the work of other playwrights.<sup>11</sup> Similarly and to take a local example, the Shaw festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake has also each expanded its mandate to present work by playwrights other than Shaw.<sup>12</sup> Analogously in music, a symphony is not likely to present the work of a single composer over an entire season of concerts. And no one expects to go to the (fictitious) Beethoven Symphony Orchestra where only the work of Beethoven is performed. Composers are also not characteristically associated with being symphony founders.

Notably, choreographers face unique resource challenges that composers or playwrights do not. The performing arts are labor intensive and consequently expensive given the human resources necessary to create and produce it. This is especially true for dance since dancers are an integral part of the creation process. A playwright does not need actors in order to write a script. A composer does not need musicians in order to compose a symphony. A playwright or composer can create his/her work, copyright it, sell it, and license its use for performance before a single actor or musician needs to be hired. This is an unlikely scenario for dance. Undeniably, there are proverbial apples and oranges, and exceptions-to-the-rule present here, but this comparison is to provide context only.

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11 "Royal Shakespeare Company," Wikipedia, accessed March 18, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal\\_Shakespeare\\_Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Shakespeare_Company).

12 "Mandate," Shaw Festival Theatre Great Theatre in the Heart of Niagara Wine Country, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.shawfest.com/about-the-shaw/mandate-and-history/>.

Those choreographers who do choose the route of formally and legally organizing a dance company, and structuring their creative efforts into an operating entity, are not founding a dance company to go into business, per se, or become an employer. Becoming an employer is just one side effect to founding a dance company. Rather, choreographers are seeking a vehicle with which to create and present their work, and connect with audiences and funders. Suffice it to say that there are pros and cons to founding a dance company that are far from absolute: what might be a pro to one person may be a con to another. And if a choreographer can find audiences, secure funding, or book engagements, without organizing, why go to the trouble?

Founding a modern dance company in the United States presents a compelling paradox. To one choreographer, the process involved in securing a 501(c)(3) registration can be perceived to be nothing more than a long, bureaucratic procedure clogged up with paperwork and lots of waiting. The time and energy, not to mention necessary legal expenses devoted to the registration process can be perceived to be better invested in the studio creating. Another choreographer may perceive that organizing the creation and presentation of his/her work into a company structure is simply a more effective way to progress their efforts in the long run. S/he may feel as though there are good odds for a return on that investment of their human and financial resources to file.

One reason that founding a dance company can appear attractive to a choreographer is the prospect of access to funding. Despite the opportunities to fundraise for projects that fiscal sponsorships provide a choreographer, those funds are typically restricted to the scope and expenses of any given project. For example, fiscal sponsorships do not permit the building of general operating support for ongoing year-round activities. While there are foundational and governmental agencies that have lifted their eligibility restrictions surrounding fiscal

sponsorship, many continue to accept applications or solicitations only from artists who are registered as 501(c)(3) organizations.

To then establish a company's artistic platform, the clearest explanation for the single-choreographer model is simple convention: the single-artist model is the original model for American modern dance companies and reflective of the art form's values of autonomy and individualism. The origins of the present-day modern dance company in the United States can be traced to none other than the art form's most indelible figure, Martha Graham, and the company that continues to bear her namesake will be profiled closely. There are predecessors to Graham, of course. The first documented modern dance company was founded in 1915 by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, *Denishawn*, but there are conflicting accounts as to whether *Denishawn* was the training academy, or the performing company. Since enrollment in the school was a prerequisite to becoming a company member, it's mostly a matter of whether the two can or should be parsed from each other.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a figure such as Isadora Duncan whose work also predates Martha Graham, never had that work organized into any operational structure until 1980 some 53 years after her death.<sup>14</sup> While Graham is considered the second generation of modern dance artistically, she represents the very first generation of modern dance organizationally – “company zero”, if you will. It is relevant to emphasize that even at the time the Martha Graham Dance Company was formally organized, the need or desire to institutionalize American modern dance was very fluid. Because the art form was in its infancy the very quantity of modern dance was such that organization was far from essential or relevant.

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13 "Pionéererne I Den Moderne Dans," Pionéererne I Den Moderne Dans, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.danse-historie.dk/sider/denishawn.html>.

14 "GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses," GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses, [isadora-duncan-foundation-contemporary-dance](http://www.guidestar.org/), accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

The convention of the single-choreographer platform is also accompanied by the systemic need it serves. This systemic need is best illustrated by its juxtaposition to the system used by the ballet community. Ballet's 16<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic origins<sup>15</sup> and correlating operational structure precede the rise of late-19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois society in the United States<sup>16</sup> out of which modern dance emerged. Essentially, the system that modern dance employs to present new choreographic voices is to express and represent those voices through the creation of new companies. Conversely, the system employed in ballet companies to produce the next generation of choreographers is to procure him within the existing ranks of the company.<sup>17</sup> An illustration of this scenario is the example of Justin Peck, a soloist with the New York City Ballet (NYCB) who aspires to establish himself as a new choreographic voice in ballet.<sup>18</sup> Notably, the most important resource for a choreographer, the dancer, is provided to the choreographer by the ballet company for whom he is creating work. Unless or until a modern dance choreographer has established him/herself as a recognizable and valued presence in the community and earns commissions from existing companies, there is no external apparatus to provide that fundamental resource of dancers and that onus falls to the choreographer him/herself.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the lack of resources, the single-choreographer artistic model also serves a choreographer's need for control – i.e., artistic control, operational control, etc. There is a posture of autonomy in founding a dance company, a primal sense of leaving footprints

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15 Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010).

16 Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the Bourgeoisie, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

17 Luke Jennings, "Sexism in Dance: Where Are All the Female Choreographers?," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2013, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/apr/28/women-choreographers-glass-ceiling>.

18 Robin Pobegrin, "The Camera Is On: Now Go Create," *New York Times* (New York), February 1, 2015.

19 Soll, 349-50.

impossible to duplicate, leaving a testimony that cannot be uttered by another. This idealistic rationale is also central to modern dance's overall dogma. This call for control echoes back to the example of playwrights or composers who do not seem to be preoccupied with this notion of control to the point where the founders of theater companies are dominated by playwrights, or classical musical groups are founded by composers. It is worth noting, however, that the control a playwright or composer has over the creation of his/her work is such that s/he doesn't need any other parties to create. That is a creative self-sufficiency that modern dance does not possess. Then operationally, a choreographer can also be considered to be controlled by the apparatus of a 501(c)(3) entity – i.e., his/her funders, board of directors or trustees, staff; presenters, just to name a few stakeholders. In addition, a choreographer can feel controlled by his/her dancers, dependent upon their availability as many are juggling multiple projects in order to not only make ends meet, but to also maintain and increase their own visibility and value to other choreographers to stay as marketable as possible. Ultimately, the notion of control fluctuates along a spectrum of construal depending upon the context or circumstances, but it remains a relevant issue for modern dance choreographers who found their own companies.

Until the 1990's, the rise of major modern dance companies in the United States was concurrent with the rise of the choreographic voices who founded and directed those companies. Of course, audiences have changed, and technology has affected every aspect of society. And while nothing in modern dance has remained static since its inception, including the very notion of the dance company, things are changing even faster now as the community loses its founding voices. Tracing the narrative of the modern dance movement and its intersection with its cultural institutionalization provides a context with which to assess the impact of a modern dance

company's choice of artistic model. The repertory model is explored as both a circumstance of the single-artist platform as well as its relationship to coexist with it.

Chapter 1 provides the milieu of the institutionalization of modern dance in the United States from an independent art form to its integration into the education system, the federal government and, of course, the dance company, itself. Chapters 2 provides additional insight to the questions surrounding the single-choreographer and repertory models with case studies profiling Twyla Tharp's entities representing the single-choreographer model; The Martha Graham Dance Company as an example of single-choreographer organizations transitioning to a repertory platform; and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater as a paragon of the repertory model. The Conclusion provides the discussion an assessment and projection of what the presented evidence may mean for the American modern dance company going forward. Admittedly, given both the personal and simply subjective nature of the arts, inclusive of American modern dance, there is a certain degree of opinion, speculation, and projection regardless of any facts, figures, and data presented.

## **Chapter 1: A History of Modern Dance in the United States and its Institutionalization**

### **Part I – Reviewing the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Modern dance in the United States has always struggled. This is a sentiment that has been repeated for over a hundred years. But exactly how has it struggled? From pioneering visionaries creating groundbreaking work to the dancers performing that work with unparalleled expression and execution, modern dance in the United States has not struggled artistically. Rather, modern dance in the United States has struggled to find a place in the social, political, and economic landscape where it can thrive as a contributing element to the entire fabric of American culture. With that, understanding the institutionalization of the art form includes looking at the larger political economy and marketplace of the United States' capitalism as the backdrop against which modern dance is obliged to function.

With modern dance as the art form in question, the modern dance company acts as a vehicle for not only facilitating the creation of that art, but also as a cog in the system in which to sell the art. Consequently, this also means that the institutionalization of modern dance in the United States accompanies the commodification of it, and that process of commodification has been far from a smooth evolution. There have always been both ideological and practical conflicts between art and commerce and “the tension between individual expressiveness and group action – often stood as an obstacle in institutionalizing the [modern dance] movement.”<sup>20</sup> With respect to that tension, commodification is typically a conflictual process that frames the development of organized modern dance particularly for the artists creating the work. Nonetheless, if there is a transaction that has exchanged money for a good (dance piece) or

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<sup>20</sup> Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 105.

service (performance), then that good or service is a commodity. If a ticket has been sold to gain access to the good or service, again, that good or service is a commodity. In the context of Marx's theory, dance as a commodity can be assessed by measuring the value of the raw materials (human labor) employed to create and perform a piece of dance.<sup>21</sup> It can also be evaluated through its relationship to the value of other commodities for which it could be exchanged such as the money that purchased the ticket mentioned. Admittedly, since the human labor in this case is not being consumed in the same manner we use our computer or a car, applying Marx's theory to dance can be thorny.

In all practicality, the institution of a dance company that is founded in order to disseminate a choreographer's work is charged with communicating the market value of the work to the public so as to attract and secure audiences. On the surface, this allows the choreographer to only focus on creating substantial artistic value. However it also contributes to maintaining the image of the artist not subject to the market. In this respect the artist can be said to still belong to the artisanal paradigm specific for the precapitalist era, where "the object was to avoid the market and its sullyng entanglements, or at least to appear to do so...Selling was selling out."<sup>22</sup> Yet, the modern dance company also becomes the economic engine that enables the choreographer to continue creating work, pay dancers and a staff, etc. A choreographer may be driven by the endogenous value in the work s/he creates, but rewarded with a monetary consideration of perceived exogenous value in the form of grants, commissions, or even its commercial value in ticket sales. The price of the ticket is not necessarily a reflection of the value of the work. The market does not determine value, it only reflects it. The market is to

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21 Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1.* (London: Penguin Classics: 1990), 125–177.

22 William Deresiewicz, "The Death of the Artist—and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur," *The Atlantic*, December 28, 2014, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-death-of-the-artist-and-the-birth-of-the-creative-entrepreneur/383497/>.

translate into audiences; and the tickets that audiences buy are to translate into the value of the work.

Of course, before there were modern dance companies, there was modern dance. Modern dance's emergence in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a movement about ideals. Author, Beth Soll, offers an account of modern dance's history on which the discussion that follows draws upon. Soll speaks of modern dance's forerunners such as Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, who saw dance as being about serving a "higher spiritual purpose...[and e]ven today, most modern dance artists are committed to the idealistic belief that each person has a unique and extraordinary way of moving, and that therefore all people can dance and should dance if they wish to be spiritually and physically healthy."<sup>23</sup> This philosophy was reflective of the changing social and political climate of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States as the newly formed middle class was emerging.<sup>24</sup>

However, while early modern dance's efforts in the United States were authentic and unpretentious, they were also circumstantially insular since "Americans were still profoundly unsophisticated about art dance."<sup>25</sup> The notion of dance for dance's sake was not immediately comprehensible to audiences. The precedent for dance that had been set was that dance existed in relationship to something else – i.e., as entertainment, to musical theater, etc. Dance did not simply exist in relationship to itself. Nonetheless, modern dance's liberating and inclusive sensibilities contrasted the established tenets of ballet that included strict conformity, embedded codification in its movement vocabulary, and a decidedly hierarchical system to companies'

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23 Soll, 80.

24 Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the Bourgeoisie, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

25 Soll, 84.

structures. This alternatively individualistic approach of modern dance serves common perceptions that modern dance was a purely an artistic rebellion to ballet's way of creating art. Modern dance was to be a democratization of dance.

This cultural democratization of modern dance could be said to have created a space for the growth of women's social and political capital, if we draw an analogy to Bourdieu's theories on cultural capital.<sup>26</sup> In *When She Danced*, author Elizabeth Kendall asserts that modern dance was less of an artistic reaction against ballet, and was more of a response to gender-inequality denoting modern dance as a feminist movement. "Physical culture and art came into vogue at the same time, in the 1890's, and occupied women in a country where women had more money, more space to be individuals than any other country at any other time. In fact, 'the physical' and 'the artistic' were the two realms where American women's new capacities for self-expression were exercised. Dancing was the synthesis of those two realms."<sup>27</sup> These manifestations accompanied other assertions of women's voices like the suffrage movement occurring at the same time.<sup>28</sup> The "ballet girls", as they are remembered, that included Duncan and Denis, represented "strong-minded, original young women who were not happy in a corps de ballet of spectacle... They were of their time, a time they saw the birth of a new social being, the Modern American Woman."<sup>29</sup> It could be argued that modern dance as a feminist movement as Kendall describes, set the stage for ensuing social transformations. In other words, modern dance signaled the changes that took place with social and political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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26 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

27 Soll, 8.

28 Beckert, 320.

29 Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced: The Birth of American Art-Dance* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 7-8.



## **Modern dance's institutionalization of the 1920s and 30s**

The organization of modern dance in the 1920s and 30s is best articulated by its integration into the labor movement that defined this period. “[M]odern dancers’ confrontational stance against ballet encompassed a class attack against elitism in the arts.”<sup>30</sup> Those who had previously been excluded from access to economic, social, and political power, had a new voice with the emergence of the middle class and those voices “dominated the drama of production, culture, ideas, and politics.”<sup>31</sup> Martha Graham was one of the voices that “led the way in choreographing and dancing political statements and prodded other modern dancers to be responsive to the realities of employment, funding of the arts, class struggles, and the need for social change.”<sup>32</sup> Graham’s influence was accompanied by other contemporaries such as Helen Tamiris and Anna Sokolow.<sup>33</sup>

Factory workers and dancers of this period identified with each other’s issues, and dancers sought to represent those common struggles. “In the late 1920s and 1930s radical political organizations embraced dance in the effort to use culture and art to serve working-class battles for better wages, conditions, and recognition...[M]ost modern dancers advocated the rights of workers in showing the inequality of hierarchical factory systems, the divisions in society it fostered, and the dehumanizing effects of routinized labor.”<sup>34</sup> This was demonstrated in the work choreographers were creating, and the labor organizations with which they might

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30 Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 105.

31 Beckert, 3.

32 Foulkes, 106.

33 Ibid.

34 Foulkes, 109.

affiliate. Modern dancers were invested in the rights of workers both for the laborers' sakes for whom they lobbied as well as their own interests as a group to contribute to society.

A changing political climate in the mid-1930s saw the first distancing of modern dance from political and social causes to become a cause for its own sake. The once Workers' Dance League became the New Dance League and "[t]he new organization centered more narrowly around dance. No longer was political ideology the defining, agreed-upon principle, with dance as a means toward a political end. Now the line was being subtly shifted to make dance itself a primary priority."<sup>35</sup> Modern dance aspired to be recognized as a freestanding entity and its legitimacy not reliant upon outside groups or movements.

### **Modern dance's institutionalization of the 1940s and 1950s**

Modern dance in the 1940s and 1950s "was becoming an established art form that was no longer merely regarded as an avant-garde aberration."<sup>36</sup> This is not to suggest that modern dance was becoming mainstream or popular entertainment in the United States. Rather, it was being recognized as a legitimate creative expression with craft, substance, and integrity. Artistically, "...the beliefs that dance should communicate emotional experiences or that dances should not be based on codified movement were contested in the late forties and early fifties by... choreographers... whose Modernist stance resulted in a focus on the elements of dance rather than the expressive aspects of movement"<sup>37</sup> Modern dance was proving to be the art form whose definition would be that it was not beholden to the constraints of a definition.

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35 Foulkes, 118.

36 "Modern Dance," - New World Encyclopedia, accessed April 10, 2015, [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Modern\\_dance](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Modern_dance).

37 Soll, 492.

Men dominated the landscape artistically during the 1940s and 1950s with the choreographic voices of Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and José Limón rising as presences. Each made substantial and compelling contributions, but those contributions were unique and divergent from one another as well. This reinforced the emphasis on individualistic pursuits that modern dance's forebearers had uplifted. "By the 1950s 'new' dance was firmly cast as American, and the revolutionary call of the 1930s was framed as an artistic rebellion 'by individuals against schools of dance and dance conventions' rather than against schools of political thought. The vision of working-class art, of movement forms inextricably joined to social and political reality, was considered at best an embarrassment and at worst a form of treason."<sup>38</sup> Any tenet of modern dance – i.e., individualism, independence, non-conformity, etc., could be interpreted in more than one way. What casting-off tradition meant for one person artistically, could mean something else socially. What defying convention looked like artistically, could look like something else organizationally. Modern dance began to break away from its genesis and stage perhaps its first artistic and social reinvention.

Organizationally, the structure and operation of a modern dance company in the United States was taking an observable shape and setting conventions. The modern dance company as we know it today as a functioning not-for-profit entity recognized by the IRS with 501(c)(3) registration, was established. While the United States tax code had recognized tax-exempt charitable organizations since 1894 and introduced the charitable contribution tax deduction with the Revenue Act of 1917, cultural organizations such as a modern dance company did not necessarily fulfill the description of a tax-exempt entity. "The Revenue Code of 1954 introduced

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38 Soll, 153.

a number of changes to the tax-exempt organization tax law.”<sup>39</sup> In particular was the section 501(c) that actually described organizations. There are 29 organizational types that are eligible for 501(c) status and the modern dance company has historically fulfilled the requirements for 501(c)(3) registration: “those [organizations] that are considered public charities, private foundations or private operating foundations.”<sup>40</sup> However, dance companies were not necessarily rushing to secure 501(c)(3) status in response the change in the 1954 tax code. For example, The Limón Company founding is dated at 1946/7<sup>41</sup>, while a 501(c)(3) ruling year is dated at 1986.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Merce Cunningham debuted his work in 1944, founded his company in 1953, with records indicating a 501(c)(3) registration in 1966.

Along with the Revenue Act of 1954, another step in the institutionalization of modern dance was its increased presence in the university system.

By the 1950s American modern dance was an art receiving support from colleges and universities nationwide...[A]cademic institutions replaced the old networks of unions and immigrant recreational clubs that had been central to the dissemination of techniques and information about dance in the 1930s. Universities and colleges were now providing teaching jobs for dancers, a constant stream of new students, and opportunities for performance...[T]he academic establishment was now central to the health of modern dance, and the dancers who established themselves most prominently and securely within

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39 Paul Arnsberger, *A History of the Tax-exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: S.n., 2008), 20, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/tehistory.pdf>.

40 "What Is a 501(c)(3)?," Foundation Group, October 17, 2011, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.501c3.org/what-is-a-501c3/>.

41 June Dunbar, *José Limón: The Artist Re-viewed* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 2.

42 An inquiry to the José Limón Dance Foundation regarding what sort of legal structure or organized apparatus The Limón Company operated in the forty years in between was not returned.

the new system of educational and academic patronage were those who had been least concerned with political activism in the 1930s.<sup>43</sup>

Author Ellen Graff's thoughts articulate the dual political lives modern dance was compelled to adopt. One life was an outspoken liberal advocating for the greater good. The other was a compliant conservative focusing on his/her own survival. The relationship between modern dance and the university has never waned since its surge in the 1950s. It was and is a comparatively safe haven for modern dance compared to the untethered nature of working outside of academia. But it was also a conformity into a firmly established institution: the United States' educational system. The university remains an element of modern dance's institutionalization, embracing and fostering modern dance's intellectual value.

The 1950s also saw the first representation of governmental involvement when in 1954 "President Dwight D. Eisenhower saw the performing arts not only as an important aspect of American life, but also as a powerful tool in the creation of world peace. He mandated the first public policy and government support for showcasing American dance, music, and theater companies to the rest of the world."<sup>44</sup> As the first governmental program aimed at arts and culture, in many ways this program was, indeed, the predecessor to the National Endowment of the Arts. Known as The President's Emergency Fund for International Affairs<sup>45</sup> (the Fund) and administered through ANTA (the American National Theater and Academy), dance benefitted from this support from the government as it provided resources and opportunities to create and

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43 Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 170-71.

44 Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 7.

45 Ibid, 11.

perform and José Limón's company was the first recipient in dance.<sup>46</sup> The Fund also epitomized an inherently fraught relationship between government and the arts.<sup>47</sup> Congress "found it hard to comprehend what a dance company was, how it toured, what it needed, and why so many tax dollars were necessary to keep it going."<sup>48</sup> There are certainly elements within Eisenhower's program that promoted art for art's sake, but the politically anti-Communist climate was of palpable influence and the larger agenda of the Fund was bookended to serve as a dissemination of cultural diplomacy to spread democracy.<sup>49</sup>

### **Modern dance's institutionalization of the 1960s and 1970s**

American modern dance goes, boom, as "[p]rofessional dance companies...numbered 37 in 1965 and 157 in 1975."<sup>50</sup> In other words, the 1960s and 1970s were a turning point in modern dance along with the entities and vehicles that were disseminating modern dance to audiences. Modern dance's artistic identity reflected the decades' progressive and provocative political and social climate. "During the sixties there was a more emphatic reaction against many of the... principles and practices of early modern dance artists...[M]any choreographers of the [decade] used dance as a medium for expressing ideas about dance itself...[and] challenged the idea that dance had to be aesthetic and stylized in its basis..."<sup>51</sup> The art form's persona had transformed from its movement reflecting spiritual ideals and civic affiliations and was embracing the notion

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46 Ibid. 23.

47 Ibid. 133.

48 Ibid. 26-7.

49 Prevots, 18.

50 John Munger, *Dancing with Dollars in the Millennium - A Ten-Year Summary of Trends*, report (Dance Magazine and Dance/USA, 2001), 4.

51 Soll, 492.

of codified movement vocabularies, even if it was a vocabulary codified and practiced by a single person.

Artistically, women and artists of color piloted modern dance during this period. Artists such as Trisha Brown and Alvin Ailey became distinct voices in the United States, and probably best known to the landscape was the introduction of the inimitable Twyla Tharp. Tharp, whose ventures will be profiled intently in the following chapter, demonstrates what an artist marrying her art to its disseminating vehicles looks like. Companies including Cleo Parker Robinson Dance (1975), Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (1968) also emerged onto the landscape and endure today.

Organizationally, a visible institutionalizing of modern dance during this period came with the creation of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), a federal program for the arts founded under the Johnson administration in 1965.<sup>52</sup> While modern dance continued to have a decidedly anti-establishment artistic sensibility, the NEA played a central role in a decidedly institutional sensibility for modern dance. “The institutionalization of dance companies [was] promoted with the idea of making them financially viable and administratively sound. To that end, the Endowment began providing funds for professional management in 1973.”<sup>53</sup> It cannot be overstated that the institutionalization surrounding modern dance was not focused on how to make it profitable, per se. A balanced budget was not synonymous with profit. Instead, it was a recognition of the larger economic context in which modern dance was to coexist. As had always

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52 Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham, "National Endowment for the Arts," 2009, 172, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-history-1965-2008.pdf>.

53 Jan Ellen Van Dyke, *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World*, UMI, 1989, 50, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303726441?accountid=14169>.

been the case, modern dance was driven to adopt systems and measures of other segments in American culture.

In the 1960s and 1970s...an American dance tradition-complete with companies, presenters, individual choreographers, well-trained dancers, teachers, schools, and all the other jobs and institutions associated with the field-was established...In some ways, the demands of the funding agencies have shaped the inner-workings of the dance world. Cynics say that companies have been formed, boards appointed, development directors hired, tours arranged, even styles built to satisfy the various panels. An artificial network of bureaucracy has been the legacy of the dance boom, they claim. Seen from another perspective, the funding agencies have stimulated and administratively strengthened a field notoriously weak in organization and short on dollars.<sup>54</sup>

Whether one embraces or rejects the interjection of the federal government into modern dance, it is undeniable that funding and visibility made possible by the NEA allowed modern dance to thrive under its involvement. "In 1966, the Endowment awarded its first-ever individual fellowships, totaling \$93,000, to choreographers Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, José Limón, Alwin Nikolais, Anna Sokolow, and Paul Taylor...In the Endowment's first two years...dance grants totaled more than \$750,000."<sup>55</sup> That \$93,000 in 1966 would be just short of \$660,000, almost \$95,000 for each choreographer in 2014 dollars for a single year's award of funding. "From 1970 to 1976 the [NEA's] Dance Program's total budget

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54 Gayle Kassing, *History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007), 234

55 Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham, "National Endowment for the Arts," 2009, 174, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-history-1965-2008.pdf>.

grew 40 percent a year. NEA support of dance increased from twenty grants in 1972 to one hundred grants in 1982.”<sup>56</sup>

Two significant dance programs administered by the NEA included Dance in America, the public broadcasting television series, and the Dance Touring Program (DTP).<sup>57</sup> The DTP operated with a \$25,000 budget for fiscal year 1967-68 and in just ten years grew to a budget of \$1.4 million - close to \$5.4 million in 2014 dollars for a single program.<sup>58</sup> To compare, in 2014 the NEA devoted \$2.5 million in total to dance. However beneficial to modern dance or effectively the NEA conducted its activities, there were heated debates and ongoing internal politics. For example, some funding through the DTP listed an eligibility requirement being a company possessing “reliable management”<sup>59</sup> in order to apply. Was reliable management assessed by the perceived efficacy of the individuals doing the managing? Or was it measured simply by a line item on an annual budget? Whatever the construal, such imprecise criteria introduced a shift from funding the creation of art to funding an organization’s administrative life. It was a common perception that placing value on the work of the organization over the creation of art was a sure way to sacrifice art being created altogether. This raised the question as to what kind of atmosphere was emerging in which to create. Did an organization operating with a budget surplus translate into producing artistic excellence?

### **Modern dance’s institutionalization in the 1980s and 1990s**

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56 Sally Banes, *Before, Between, and Beyond: Three Decades of Dance Writing* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 106.

57 Kassing, 234.

58 Jan Ellen Van Dyke, *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World*, UMI, 1989, 54, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303726441?accountid=14169>.

59 Jan Ellen Van Dyke, *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World*, UMI, 1989, 51, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303726441?accountid=14169>.

The story of modern dance during the 1980s and 1990s could be considered one of stagnation with its organizational advancement halted in its tracks by the political and economic climate that surrounded it. Artistically, at least, it showed no signs of slowing down. The trends in modern dance in the 1980s were about “[experimenting] with crossover to other genres such as theater and performance art...”<sup>60</sup> By the 1990s, modern dance saw “a rise in the number and visibility of ‘culturally specific’ companies producing dance of, but and for people of color and origins...”<sup>61</sup> New voices were as plentiful as ever: Mark Morris (Mark Morris Dance Group), Stephen Petronio (Stephen Petronio Company), Bill T. Jones (/Arnie Zane Dance Company), Ron Brown (Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE), Susan Marshall (Susan Marshall & Company), Doug Varone (Doug Varone & Dancers), Moses Pendleton (Momix), Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson (Complexions Contemporary Ballet; originally COMPLEXIONS: A Concept in Dance). These voices and their companies endure today.

As mentioned, however, organizationally modern dance companies were feeling the effects of the economic and political storm brewing. The climate was becoming inhospitable to modern dance particularly in comparison to the generousities seen during previous decades. The United States was experiencing a recession contributing to a famine in funding sources and a conservative political ideology taking hold that was calling for the reassessment of public monies being dedicated to artistic endeavors.<sup>62</sup> The economy of the 1980s and 90s could not support the

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60 Munger, 4.

61 Ibid.

62 Cynthia Koch, "The NEA and NEH Funding Crisis," The NEA and NEH Funding Crisis, The 995 Funding Controversy, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/ptkoch.html>.

politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The Dance Program at the NEA suffered its first cut in fiscal year 1981.<sup>63</sup> The Dance Touring Program, specifically, was concluded in 1984.<sup>64</sup>

As the 1981-82 season got underway, economics and creative inertia appeared to have overtaken the avant-garde. After nearly two decades of development, the postmodern dancers, whom we have most associated with protest, resistance to tradition, the smashing of old form and the devising of new one, are now veterans, possessors of companies and reputations, of managers and disciples and literary apologists...If not precisely popular, the so-called postmoderns have gained access to the culture's most official modes of recognition - the news media, the opera house, and public subsidy - a condition that never was enjoyed by this country's first generation of dance revolutionaries.<sup>65</sup>

Agencies like the NEA "built and educated audiences that in turn created a need for more, bigger, and better dance companies, more dance teachers, more dance on television, more dance books, more service organizations, and on and on. Created-the past tense. The irony is that once the demand and supplies were in place, the bottom fell out of the market."<sup>66</sup> Modern dance became of a victim of circumstance exacerbated by the resources and attitudes from which artists had benefitted during the 1960s and 1970s.

Despite there being no shortage of emerging choreographic voices and companies being founded, there was an inertia in the 1980s and 1990s because of how difficult it was to become

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63 Banes, 105.

64 Jan Ellen Van Dyke, *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World*, UMI, 1989, 57, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303726441?accountid=14169>.

65 Marcia B. Siegel, *The Tail of the Dragon: New Dance, 1976-1982* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 178.

66 Banes, 105.

heard as an artist and visible as a company. Increasingly, the combination of resources and opportunity that had once been provided or offered by others were now becoming the responsibility of the choreographer him/herself.<sup>67</sup> As the millennium approached, there were signs that the artist and his/her voice were not what were distinctive in modern dance, but rather the genres and subgenres in dance that were being situated under the aesthetic umbrella of modern dance. Survival had always been a battle, but now it was a war and modern dance was about to face the fights of its life. Reconciling the commodification of modern dance would be a minor inconvenience compared to the prospects of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “In Marx’s day [the] desire was [the] ability to be traded for other commodities; today that value is derived from its association to a brand, an identity, a spectacle.”<sup>68</sup>

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67 Munger, 5.

68 Vasilios Avramidis, "Damien Hirst and the Commodification of Art," Damien Hirst and the Commodification of Art, February 26, 2012, accessed May 02, 2015, [http://www.academia.edu/2610497/Damien\\_Hirst\\_and\\_the\\_Commodification\\_of\\_Art](http://www.academia.edu/2610497/Damien_Hirst_and_the_Commodification_of_Art).

## Part II – Examining the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Andy Horwitz's insight that "as art was institutionalized, so, inevitably, was the artist. The genius became the professional"<sup>69</sup> epitomizes the state to which the modern dance arrived by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In other words, the first decade and a half of 21<sup>st</sup> century modern dance in the United States is no less of an evolution from its genesis than any other period. But evolution is not the same as innovation and there are those that would argue modern dance is at a tipping point both artistically and institutionally. Artistically, for some the notion of modern dance embodies anything that is not ballet such as the arrival of hip-hop as a respected genre by groups like Rennie Harris Puremovement (Philadelphia); the popularity of circus or aerially-based work such as UpSwing (San Francisco) and Cirque De Soleil<sup>70</sup>; and the increased recognition of ethnic or folk-based forms including Ragalama Dance (Minneapolis). For others, the term modern is one to be applied selectively to work that represents or invokes the work of the founders and pioneers of the art form.<sup>71</sup> Still, for others, it is an antiquated term altogether that has no application in what is happening artistically in dance anywhere anymore.<sup>72</sup>

Organizationally, there are the old guards, such as the NEA and the university system, to pursue as sources of support for one's work. However, neither are necessarily standbys upon which artists can rely. While not supported by any dedicated studies or formal reports, there is a purporting that "given the glut of MFA graduates and the trend away from hiring tenure-track

69 Andy Horwitz, "The Untenable Economics of Dancing," Culturebot, March 27, 2014, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.culturebot.org/2014/03/27/the-untenable-economics-of-dancing/>.

70 "Unique Opportunities For Dancers: The Marriage of Dance and Circus Arts," Student Resources, September 09, 2014, accessed May 02, 2015, <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/dance-and-circus-arts/>.

71 Alexandra Tomalonis, "Modern Dance: Its Death and Regeneration — FROM THE GREEN ROOM: Dance/USA's E-Journal," Dance/USA, January 3, 2012, accessed May 11, 2015, [www.danceusa.org/http://www2.danceusa.org/ejournal/post.cfm?entry=modern-dance-its-death-and-regeneration](http://www2.danceusa.org/ejournal/post.cfm?entry=modern-dance-its-death-and-regeneration).

72 Victoria Looseleaf, "In This Issue," Dance Magazine, December 2012, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.dancemagazine.com/issues/December-2012/Modern-vs-Contemporary>.

faculty, [a university position] becomes a dicey proposition at best.”<sup>73</sup> The NEA’s funding for dance organizations in 2014 was just over \$2.5 million dollars to 88 institutions scattered nationally from performing companies to service organizations. The majority of the awards ranged from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Additionally, the size of awards reflected the size of the company or organization: smaller companies got smaller awards, larger companies received larger awards.<sup>74</sup> While anecdotal conjecture, these awards would not suggest that they are made on the basis of the actual work being conducted and perceived value of that work. Rather, it would suggest that awards are relative to infrastructure needs for general operating.

Regardless of artistic sensibilities, current dance makers in responding to the economic, political, and social climate in which they create “have come to realize that, in order to get funding, they have to prove that they have, from a business point of view, a coherent sense of purpose, and that they can bring in the crowds.”<sup>75</sup> In addition, the advent of video, new technologies and the internet have certainly created new resources and outlets for creating and presenting dance. As mentioned, the incarnation of branding has prioritized marketing a product’s image and message over the actual product. “[W]hile the art itself may have been exchanged for other goods, the artist himself was not treated as a commodity. The art of the past may have served a purpose, it may have contained a mediated message, but it was still a product, and it was the product that was valued, not its brand identity.”<sup>76</sup> The product – in this context, the

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73 "How the MFA Glut Is a Disservice to Students, Teachers, and Writers," *Electric Literature*, March 03, 2015, accessed May 04, 2015, <http://electricliterature.com/how-the-mfa-glut-is-a-disservice-to-students-teachers-and-writers/>.

74 "National Endowment for the Arts - December 2014 Grant Announcement," December 2014, 23, accessed April 12, 2015, [http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/Fall\\_2014\\_Art\\_Works\\_Grants\\_by\\_Discipline\\_FINAL.pdf](http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/Fall_2014_Art_Works_Grants_by_Discipline_FINAL.pdf).

75 Soll, 474.

76 Vasilios Avramidis, "Damien Hirst and the Commodification of Art," *Damien Hirst and the Commodification of Art*, February 26, 2012, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.academia.edu>.

actual dance created and performed – its use or integrity, was secondary to a choreographer’s or company’s image or message.<sup>77</sup> The actual product is still to be consumed through a company’s live performances, but the company’s image and message would hopefully drive audiences to those live performances.

In response to current realities professional service organizations such as Dance/NYC, Dance/USA, Dancers Group (San Francisco), The Field, and Fractured Atlas, have emerged as essential weapons in dance communities’ arsenals in supporting artists’ attempt to coexist in a consumer culture and cope with the ever-increasing competition for the public’s time, money, and attention. In addition to fiscal sponsorship services, they often fill the gap of other administrative resources that artists may lack in assembling the necessary combination of visibility, activity, and support; needs that would otherwise be served by the apparatus of a dance company. Service organizations also cater to both the entrepreneurial spirit that dominates 21<sup>st</sup> century culture and the anti-establishment values of modernism. They allow artists to function as organized entities without actually having to commit to being one legally.

Interestingly, there is a dichotomy between the unavoidable realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century while clinging to the abundance of the 1960s and 1970s. That which worked about how dance was created, funded and presented in the 1960s and 1970s persists in theory and wishful-thinking. Those strategies and sensibilities are hard to let go of despite the apparatus behind them having long been dismantled. At the same time, however, artists are resourcefully manipulating the new systems that are emerging. What results is a duel between not so much the past and the present, but history and reality.

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<sup>77</sup> Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York, NY: Picador, 2000), 21.

[T]he notion of the artist as a solitary genius...is decades out of date. So out of date, in fact, that the model that replaced it is itself is already out of date...[I]t was already obsolescent more than a half a century ago. After World War II in particular, and in America especially, art...became institutionalized. We were the new superpower; we wanted to be a cultural superpower as well. We founded museums, opera houses, ballet companies, all in unprecedented numbers; the so-called culture boom. Arts councils, funding bodies, educational programs, residencies, magazines, awards – an entire bureaucratic apparatus.<sup>78</sup>

These sentiments help summarize where modern dance started and where it finds itself today. Modern dance does not exist within a vacuum of the arts, let alone within a vacuum of its larger environment. It is an on-going battle between what is within a dance company's control and what is out of it. Nonetheless, every year thousands of choreographers present their first professional work to a public audience. And every year, some portion of those will take the steps to incorporate into a 501(c)(3) organization.

### **The present-day modern dance company**

Certainly, the modern dance company of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States is a product of the institutionalization of the art form that has preceded it. Organizationally, it is a relationship between its internal artistic identity and its external operational face. It is the relationship between creation and presentation. Artistically, modern dance is intrinsically ephemeral. No dance piece exists beyond its respective performance. "Dance is the art with no history. When a

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78 William Deresiewicz, "The Death of the Artist—and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur," *The Atlantic*, December 28, 2014, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-death-of-the-artist-and-the-birth-of-the-creative-entrepreneur/383497/>.

step has happened, it leaves no trace.”<sup>79</sup> From re-stagings, to dance notation languages such as Labanotation, and video documentation, there are myriad strategies to preserve dance works and their performances. Despite this ephemerality, a dance company is charged with supporting both the creation and viability of the life of a choreographer’s inventions. This requires finding the places where ephemerality and sustainability intersect.

On the one hand, birthing a modern dance company is not unlike any entrepreneurial venture. There are late nights, weekends, and personal income being devoted to the goal of translating his/her service or product into a self-sustaining operation. Where entrepreneurial ventures diverge is when the service you’re providing is a performance, and your product is a piece of dance. Under those conditions lies the industry standard of a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation rather than a commercial enterprise. When a choreographer decides to found a company so as to have a vehicle with which to create and present his/her work, the choreographer often self-appoints and self-titles him/herself artistic director. As the title suggests, the responsibility of the artistic director is to determine and steer the artistic vision of the company, but it is safe to assert that at this stage said artistic director is also the company’s manager, development director, marketing director, set designer, and press representative. So, before a dance company wears the status of a 501(c)(3) with any actual administrative structures, or governance, there exists a certain oxymoron between station and activities.

Michael Kaiser, well-known for his presidency of The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and his various books on arts management, described the process of a dance company being formed in his book, *Leading Roles: 50 Questions Every Arts Board Should Ask*. Kaiser bears witness to the launching a dance company and narrows his account to two vital factors:

<sup>79</sup> Alastair Macaulay, "Choreographic Climate Change," *New York Times*, January 02, 2010, accessed March 11, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/arts/dance/03choreography.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/arts/dance/03choreography.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

talent and money. Most artists begin with no acclaim and even fewer resources. In Kaiser's words,

“[Choreographers] typically save up for one initial project, frequently with the support of family and friends. The project goes well, everyone offers positive feedback (except perhaps the critics, who may pay no attention whatsoever)...Then reality sets in. All the funds were used for the first project...The fortunate few who can attract a strong board, make an impression on critics and audiences, begin to receive support from foundations and corporations (usually through board contacts...)”<sup>80</sup>

Author Beth Soll provides similar sentiments from a more empirical perspective:

“The typical modern dance choreographer has overwhelming responsibilities. She must choreograph and perform the dances, educate her dancers and collaborators, design and make costumes, direct the crew, raise funds, negotiate contracts, deal with board members, audience members, funding agencies, and critics, etc.”<sup>81</sup>

Kaiser and Soll vividly illustrate two sides of the same coin. They both address the same issues, but from opposite vantage points. Kaiser has never been a choreographer, nor the founder of a dance company. Despite how familiar or empathetic he may be to the process of a choreographer in creating work, his role has been in optimizing the relationship of the choreographer's or artistic director's efforts to the proverbial machinery that gets the work product to audiences. However hands-on and invested he may be, Kaiser ultimately plays an observational role to the challenges and obstacles that choreographers face in launching their career. In contrast, Soll, a

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80 Michael M. Kaiser, *Leading Roles: 50 Questions Every Arts Board Should Ask* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 4

81 Soll, 348-9.

seasoned dance maker and educator, brings an experiential role to the same issues. She knows firsthand the obstacles and staggering odds facing choreographers who take the step towards founding, forming, organizing, and growing a company. While Kaiser emphasizes the role of the administrative tools and apparatus necessary, Soll focuses on the impact funding has on not only securing that administrative capital, but creative capital as well. This is because without creative resources, administrative resources are moot. Much of the fits and starts that accompany a choreographer's efforts to propel his/her vision into a day-to-day operating business is initially funded by the clichéd day-jobs from waiting tables to nannying. If the company gains momentum, the day-job rarely disappears, but is repurposed into teaching in professional studios, or conducting university residencies, etc.

It cannot be overstated how little about founding a modern dance company in the United States is a business decision of any kind. To reiterate, the company structure is less about being a vehicle with which to finance the choreographer's efforts, but a vehicle for the public to have a reference point, a context of the artist. Developing a modern dance company in the United States is not like following the linear steps of a recipe. While all the ingredients are necessary to be fully cooked, exactly when they're incorporated into the mix and how they're applied can occur in a variety of sequences and paces. The following three case studies will provide specific examples and scenarios to this discussion as well as useful comparisons between the single-choreographer and repertory model. The accounts provided in each study are far from complete histories and chronologies. However, no facts, events, or data have been excluded that would affect the conclusions produced in any of the profiles explored.

## Chapter 2: Case Studies

### 1. **CASE - Twyla Tharp, Single-Choreographer Model in American Modern Dance Companies**

As identified, the single-choreographer artistic model in modern dance companies in the United States is the original artistic platform and continues to be ubiquitous to company structures. That fact means there are myriad companies which could be profiled to provide a representation of the single-choreographer model. Companies that are still emerging, or artists that are evolving through mid-career development are all encountering similar and familiar issues, but succession and legacy become the organizational benchmarks for maturing or veteran companies to address. Subsequently, it is established companies that best fit such criteria and narrow the pool considerably. With that, Twyla Tharp tells a revealing tale of the single-choreographer model simply because she's had so much practice at it. Over the course of her 50-year career, she has operated no less than six different entities and incarnations through which to create and/or present her work:<sup>82</sup> Twyla Tharp Dance, Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation, Twyla Tharp Enterprises, Twyla Tharp and Company, Twyla Tharp and Dancers, and finally, Tharp!

Mimicking the precedent that had been set by those before her, Twyla Tharp's first dance company, Twyla Tharp and Company, dates to October 29, 1966, with the public debut of Tharp's work.<sup>83</sup> With this inaugural performance Tharp emerged during the documented "dance boom" of the 1960s and 70s when

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82 Marcia B. Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).

83 Ibid, 2.

...America experienced a period of unprecedented interest in the arts...Dance was routinely being mentioned alongside the other arts for the first time. Companies and schools that had never before developed strong institutional means for survival now became more stable...The obvious course for any artist was to establish oneself as a nonprofit business and enter the subsidized world. In the case of a choreographer with a company to pay, studio space to rent, creative collaborators and managers to be enlisted...this transition was mandatory...<sup>84</sup>

Marcia Siegel clearly articulates here not only the context in which Tharp found herself professionally, but the operational conventions that had become standard for founding a performing arts company. By the 1970s, the 501(c)(3) business model was well established as the expected structure for virtually any cultural organization to take including modern dance companies. While Tharp harbored a resentment for formal organizing, she also knew the forces against which she railed were bigger than herself and she really had two choices: 1) fight against the establishment, or 2) make dances. A composite of what she volunteers indicates that she chose the latter.<sup>85</sup> She is self-described as being very pragmatic and recognized funding as fundamental. She viewed it neither as optional nor did she consider it a betrayal of one's artistic values.<sup>86</sup> Quite simply, without funding her efforts were moot.<sup>87</sup>

Tharp's establishment of a formal 501(c)(3) structure to serve her creative needs was just the beginning of a career and decades of conflict over doing business versus creating and

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84 Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, 53.

85 Twyla Tharp, *Push Comes to Shove* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 113.

86 Ibid, 169.

87 Ibid, 186

developing dances. Early in her career, Tharp saw the limitations of maintaining a company structure. Siegel writes,

Tharp was chronically ambivalent about maintaining a permanent company of her own... [S]he saw herself being drawn into the seemingly unbreakable loop that bound the whole American dance business. Touring would pay the dancers but interfere with making new choreography. Touring meant keeping a repertory of old pieces that presenters could sell their audience and that the company could put up in the new theaters with little rehearsal. Performing on the road and maintaining the repertory while at home ate up hours and held creativity at bay. Tharp thought this was self-defeating and maybe even immoral... Tharp kept trying to circumvent the system she found corrosive and demeaning.<sup>88</sup>

Despite Tharp's dilemmas surrounding operating and directing a dance company, and the very real circumstances and challenges that contributed to those dilemmas, her work and the company thrived during the generosity of the "dance boom". Funding was generous and accessible. So despite Tharp's personal quandaries, the systemic challenges to securing funding were at a one-time low. "[Tharp] thought she could beat the system...She hoped television and videotape, being more tangible and mass-accessible commodities, would buy her way out the loop"<sup>89</sup> Tharp's sentiments of frustration and resentment of the system in place were certainly shared by many choreographers, but Tharp has been vocal about rebuking that system. Despite the fact that television opportunities were available and Tharp took advantage whenever possible, her view of technology would be an aspiration only as television and videotape did not buy

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<sup>88</sup> Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, 81.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 88.

Tharp's or any other artist's way out of "the loop" in any practical way. Even with the emergence of the web, social media and all its platforms, "the loop" still remains.

Nonetheless, the welcome resources provided the opportunity for Tharp's creative voice and company to be developed. Rhoda Grauer was hired in 1974 to manage Tharp's company. "Grauer put the company on fifty-two week salary, unprecedented in modern dance, inventing how to do it without excessive touring. She raised money, worked out contracts and bookings, and traveled with the company for important dates."<sup>90</sup> By the mid-1980s, however, things were reaching a critical mass. At the very least, funding sources were beginning to dwindle. The United States' economy was facing a recession and a conservative political agenda was gaining momentum. Working in her favor, Tharp had achieved celebrity status that rivaled Hollywood actors and could be perceived to pick and choose her projects.<sup>91</sup> "Tharp's activities during the early 1980s were so prolific that the business became increasingly complicated. The Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation handled the company business, booked tours, and raised money for projects. Twyla Tharp Enterprises was the corporate entity under which Tharp negotiated her independent work-movies, choreographing commissions and other outside assignments."<sup>92</sup>

However, Tharp's projects were subject to the paradox of lucrative ventures. The project she wanted to direct and nurture most, her own company, was the most challenging to realize as it faced the most resistance financially and logistically. As much as Tharp valued and profited from the many commissions, films, even Broadway opportunities that contributed to her success and celebrity, none of those platforms included a built-in laboratory or incubator to connect with

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90 Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, 100

91 Barbara Rowes, "With Pop Music, Quirky Moves and Antic Imagination, Twyla Tharp Keeps the Dance World on Its Toes," People.com, April 04, 1977, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20067607,00.html>.

92 Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, 162.

the dancers and movement that served her artistic agenda the way having her own company did. The complexity of not only the multiple platforms Tharp employed, but also how each greatly affected the human beings charged with implementing and realizing their objectives was taking its toll. The dancers, in particular, felt disengaged from the substance of their work and its inventor. And Tharp's works was nothing without her dancers.<sup>93</sup> Although Tharp had her dancers on a 52-week contract, that doesn't mean those weekly/yearly salaries were of a living wage and "...the troupe had been spending up to seven months on tour each of the last three years to meet its \$2.5 million budget."<sup>94</sup> Tharp had reached her threshold. In 1988, it was announced that she would be disbanding her company of 23 years.

Miss Tharp said that there was 'no deficit' in her own company but that its \$2.5 million budget had been met only with 'weeks of fund-raising, booking tours and administration that didn't give me the time I need in the studio.' Tharp states, 'Unless a situation has a lot of potential for change and development, I don't think it's very interesting beyond a one-shot deal, which is one of the problems with the whole modern-dance structure... when fund-raising becomes your primary job, then you have to take some steps.'<sup>95</sup>

Tharp's sentiments illustrate the difference between making sneakers or watches and making dances. Dance is not a widget and however many ways the two can operate similarly to each other, the ways in which they differ in funding the eventual work product is what ultimately separates them. The *New York Times* reported, "Miss Tharp will retain the parent nonprofit foundation behind her present company in order to work outside [American] Ballet Theater in

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93 Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, 205.

94 Diane Solway, "Twyla Tharp: Turning Sharp Corners," *New York Times*, January 1, 1989, accessed April 8, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/01/arts/twyla-tharp-turning-sharp-corners.h](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/01/arts/twyla-tharp-turning-sharp-corners.html)

95 Ibid.

film and television projects with any dancers she chooses.”<sup>96</sup> At that time, American Ballet Theater (ABT) was being led artistically by Mikhail Baryshnikov and he had extended to Tharp the offer to assume the position of artistic associate and resident choreographer with ABT. This was not a proposal out of the blue as Tharp had previously created and set work on ABT previously. She was no stranger to the company.

Although Tharp would be free of financial and administrative encumbrances of running her own company, she now faced a situation where she’d be “working with a major company not devoted solely to her artistic agenda.”<sup>97</sup> Baryshnikov admitted in an interview with the *New York Times*, “I’m concerned about the way Twyla will adjust emotionally to the situation after all those years of being the boss and doing whatever she wanted [artistically]...Here there is a different structure. She’ll have to share programs with different choreographers, and we’ll have to figure out how she will use the company. I cannot allow a division within the company. Her dancers are my dancers and vice versa.”<sup>98</sup> Twyla would be forced to abdicate a level of both artistic and organizational control she’d possessed, regardless of the trade-offs it had also produced.

Unfortunately, both Baryshnikov’s tenure in a leadership position at ABT and Tharp’s role with the company was a short-lived solution to a complex situation. While Tharp valued the opportunities the ABT position could afford her, administrative politics that accompanied Baryshnikov’s departure were more than she was willing to endure. In response to her departure

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96 Anna Kisselgoff, "Tharp and Six Dancers To Join Ballet Theater," *New York Times*, July 01, 1988, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

97 Anna Kisselgoff, "Tharp and Six Dancers To Join Ballet Theater," *New York Times*, July 01, 1988, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

98 Diane Solway, "Twyla Tharp: Turning Sharp Corners," *New York Times*, January 1, 1989, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

from ABT, in January of 1992, Tharp formed the next incarnation of Twyla Tharp and Dancers (TTD). It was admittedly, not intended to be permanent company. All the same, it was yet another organizational vehicle by which Tharp was to be able to create, control, and steer. TTD booked a two-week inaugural season at New York's City Center that year.<sup>99</sup>

In 1996, Tharp surfaced with yet another incarnation, Tharp!. Like its predecessor, it was also not intended to be a permanent company. In contrast to Twyla Tharp and Dancers, the Tharp! tour was not going to be a not-for-profit venture, accruing the requisite grants and tax-deductible donations from individuals. Rather it was going to be a self-sustaining project that would be covered by the revenue collected from ticket sales.<sup>100</sup> “[V]arious euphemisms were applied to it: for-profit, income-earning, self-sufficient.”<sup>101</sup> It was also unprecedented and, subsequently, quite a gamble.

‘Tharp!’ [was]...not dependent on the grants and donations that keep most dance troupes alive; the idea is that it will be self-sustaining, that it will pay its own way through ticket sales. None of the dancers are on union contracts, there are no star salaries... Given the ongoing decreases in arts funding and what she calls the financial impossibility of running a full-time company, Tharp sees a project like this as a practical alternative. ‘The fact that this is a completely earned-income company, I think, is something very important to be doing in the dance world right now,’ she says.<sup>102</sup>

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99 Anna Kisselgoff, "Review/Dance; Twyla Tharp's New Company Makes Debut," *New York Times*, January 29, 1992, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/30/arts/review-dance-twyla-tharp-s-new-company-makes-debut.html>.

100 Jordan Levin, "Still Getting Her Kicks," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1996, accessed April 08, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1996-09-22/entertainment/ca-46297\\_1\\_twyla-tharp](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-09-22/entertainment/ca-46297_1_twyla-tharp).

101 Siegel, *Howling near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, 255.

102 Jordan Levin, "Still Getting Her Kicks," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1996, accessed April 08, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1996-09-22/entertainment/ca-46297\\_1\\_twyla-tharp](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-09-22/entertainment/ca-46297_1_twyla-tharp).

Tharp was right. If Tharp! proved profitable by means of ticket revenue alone, this could be a game-changer for modern dance companies. Every existing perception of the arts not being self-sufficient ventures would be debunked. Documentation was not found to verify whether the objective for the project to sustain itself with ticket sales was realized. However, the very absence of American modern dance companies having adopted this revenue model since the Tharp! tour suggests that it was not successful in that objective.

Four years later in 2000, Tharp again returns to the organizational drawing board. She can't stay away from dance, creating dance, and most of all the autonomy that having her own company provides her. As hostile as the cultural and economic climate has become to dance, Tharp still sees its relevance and impact. "[American] Ballet Theater and [New York City Ballet], companies for which she recently choreographed two premieres, were once small creative troupes with a family atmosphere. And as Ms. Tharp found out, exercising control over your own dance company is very different from sharing dancers and limited rehearsals in ballet companies with some 40 works to prepare... 'I need to be grounded in my own company,' Ms. Tharp said... The fact that she chose to dissolve the modern-dance troupe she founded in 1965 because of financial and administrative burdens now seems beside the point."<sup>103</sup> Fortunately, as still a celebrated public figure, Tharp retained personal relevance and impact to give credence to her agenda and garner support.

Interestingly enough, Tharp gives voice to the repertory model and the precedent set by ballet companies as both laboratories for creating works and museums for gathering them in safekeeping: "I'm founding the company so that the focus now will be on my work," she said.

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103 Anna Kisselgoff, "After 12 Years in 'Exile' Tharp Shifts Gears Again; A Pioneer of Choreographic Collisions Introduces a New Troupe and New Thinking," *New York Times*, July 05, 2000, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.ny-times.com>.

‘But I am interested in an American repertory company. It would provide a foundation for 20<sup>th</sup>-century works to be grounded as other works are in the ballet companies. Do I see this as a priority? No. Do I see this as a responsibility? Yes.’<sup>104</sup> On the one hand, Tharp expresses how important realizing the objective of focusing on her own efforts is to her and, on the other hand she expresses an understanding of how the art form is bigger than her individual voice. She recognizes the tension between those two goals and that both cannot be honored to her satisfaction concurrently.

Twyla Tharp represents the two sides of the same coin regarding the single-choreographer platform. On one side of that coin, she is the proverbial poster child of the notion how necessary the single-choreographer modern dance company is, yet how impractical it is to sustain one. Tharp’s multiple foundings and disbandings illustrate the feasibility factor of a single-choreographer American modern dance company whether disbanding for financial, administrative, or artistic reasons. She’s employed six different entities and whether by choice or by circumstance none of them have endured. But Tharp also demonstrates the need the single-choreographer platform serves since she keeps coming back to that model time after time.

On the other side of that coin, however resentful Tharp may be of how modern dance is institutionalized within the system of United States’ economics and culture, she is also an incurable optimistic to continue reinventing herself. She demonstrates the compelling nature of dance and creating dance and that despite all the adversity it faces, it cannot be denied.

Admittedly, Tharp has the luxury of a body of work, repute, and celebrity with which to found and disband companies seemingly at will. Most choreographers/single-choreographer company

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104 Anna Kisselgoff, "After 12 Years in 'Exile' Tharp Shifts Gears Again; A Pioneer of Choreographic Collisions Introduces a New Troupe and New Thinking," *New York Times*, July 05, 2000, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.ny-times.com>.

founders/directors do not have the luxury to choose to organize a company and disband capriciously. Most are at the mercy of the financial circumstances surrounding them.

Among the many incarnations of Tharp's ventures, there is no financial documentation to be obtained outside of the original entity of the Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation (TTDF) with a ruling date of 1971 for its 501(c)(3) status. The TTDF maintains its standing despite showing little activity in the recent past. Current 990s show that there are significant assets, but cash flow is virtually non-existent. The foundation's officers are listed as Ms. Tharp as President of the foundation and Jesse Huot, her son, as Vice President. While financial activity to the foundation prior to 2011 was not accessed for this discussion, in 2011 Huot was given a salary of \$25,000. Tharp took no salary.<sup>105</sup> Tharp celebrates her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary making dances this year and will embark on 15-city tour to mark the milestone.<sup>106</sup> The tour will bring the foundation out of hibernation as the organizational and financial conduit to the ensuing tour. With this anniversary tour, Twyla Tharp reinvents her efforts for a seventh time and her story continues.

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105 "GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses," GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses, Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

106 "Twyla Tharp Celebrates 50th Anniversary Starting 4/13 at Barnard," BroadwayWorld.com, April 1, 2015, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Twyla-Tharp-Celebrates-50th-Anniversary-Starting-413-at-Hunter-College-20150401#>.

## **II. CASE – The Martha Graham Dance Company, Companies transitioning from Single-Choreographer to Repertory Artistic Model**

In many ways, the Martha Graham Dance Company (MGDC) paved the way for modern dance companies in the United States and how they operate both artistically and organizationally. Graham's company made modern dance in the United States a business and serves as a contextual touchstone for the operational structure of modern dance companies. While the MGDC predates Tharp's work, the MGDC speaks to the complexity facing modern dance companies founded by single-choreographer visions now transitioning to a repertory model. The lens of this discussion focused on the organizational format warrants profiling Graham's company in succession to Tharp. Until Graham's death in 1991, the company was defined by Martha, the artist, and her work. Quite simply, the company, the artist, and the work were indistinguishable. While a death is often associated with endings, Martha's death also marked the beginning of modern dance in United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today the company is still trying to find its voice without Graham in the age of branding as it makes an artistic transition.

The MGDC is representative of a current trend of founder-based/single-choreographer dance companies adapting to repertory models. As mentioned, the Limón Dance Company formally transitioned some forty years ago as a response to the death of its founder. But it's a move that even younger companies still being actively directed by their founders are making such as Parsons Dance Company (founder/artistic director, David Parsons)<sup>107</sup>, and Steven Petronio Dance Company (founder/artistic director, Stephen Petronio).<sup>108</sup> The MGDC's

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107 "Parsons Dance | Parsons Dance," Parsons Dance RSS, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.parsonsdance.org/about/parsons-dance/>.

108 Brian Seibert, "New Members for a Dance 'Family'" *New York Times*, August 20, 2014, accessed May 3, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/arts/dance/petronio-company-to-perform-other-choreographers-works.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/arts/dance/petronio-company-to-perform-other-choreographers-works.html?_r=0).

transition is perhaps of greatest impact given not only because of the iconic and legendary status of its founder, but also the circumstances that likely contributed to the decision to restructure artistically. In addition, the overwhelming public opinion is that the MGDC needs to make a successful transition to survive.<sup>109</sup> To understand the company's transition, an account of how the company found itself at such a point is useful.

The MGDC debuted in 1926 with modern dance in the United States decidedly still in its infancy. "In order to support herself during this period, [Graham] took teaching positions (teaching dance) at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY and the John Murray Anderson School in NYC. On April 18, 1926, her company, featuring students from Eastman, debuted in New York City."<sup>110</sup> Like others, the MGDC's founding is referenced by her first public presentation of her work. For the next decade or so, "[t]o raise funds, [Graham] danced at the opening of Radio City Music Hall, modeled furs and later gave classes in which she taught movement to such actors as Bette Davis and Gregory Peck"<sup>111</sup> Graham also relied on generous loans to finance her performance.

Unlike the 501(c)(3) structure that is standard among present-day dance companies, the MGDC was first formally organized into a formally operational structure in 1943 as a Limited Partnership. There were changes made in the 1943 tax law that provided "a way to 'finance most theatrical enterprises'".<sup>112</sup> Remember that this is prior to the Revenue Act of 1954 that ushered in

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109 Marina Harss, "After the Deluge, It's Back to the Stage," *New York Times*, March 08, 2014, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

110 "Chapter 3: The Modern Dancers," University of Pittsburgh, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.pitt.edu/~gillis/dance/martha.html>.

111 All Materials For This Sails Guide Have Been Respectfully Produced In and Collaboration With The Martha Graham Center Of Contemporary Dance, *Virginia Arts Festival*, 6. <http://marthagraham.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/MarthaGraham2005.pdf>.

112 Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49.

the era of the 501(c)(3). Martha herself never engaged in any formal fundraising personally. Rather, it was in 1942 that Erick Hawkins (Graham's dancer, partner, and husband) who took the initiative in formally and systematically securing funds for Graham's work. He was responsible for organizing a group of patrons that resulted in the "Plans for the Formation of a Limited Partnership for Financing Martha Graham and Dance Company."<sup>113</sup> The cultural climate of the 1940s was one in which Graham embodied both rebellion to the status quo, yet was also well-received in popular culture. In the second decade of Graham's cultural rise, she became a celebrity among Hollywood and political circles, and the company thrived. Graham shrewdly capitalized on the use of her image to promote her artistic agendas<sup>114</sup>. In perhaps an early version of "branding", Graham willingly exploited her public image to promote her artistic ambitions. Our understanding of, say, Nike is more than just the sneakers they sell. It is the images of sports and fitness that we associate with their collective products.<sup>115</sup> Similarly the public's understanding of Graham was more than just her pieces, but the image of her as an artist, personality, and celebrity behind the company's repertoire helped drive audiences to performances.

Twenty-seven years after its founding the MGDC filed for 501(c)(3) registration in 1953<sup>116</sup>. The company continued to dominate the growing modern dance landscape through the 1950s. Despite the hospitable cultural and economic climate for dance companies, the arrival of the 1960s was accompanied by the first signs of organizational wear and tear due to personal

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113 Franko, 49.

114 Franko, 73

115 Klein, 15.

116 "GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses," GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses, Martha Graham Dance Foundation, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

wear and tear on its founder. While “[h]er company, although maturing in age, never looked better”<sup>117</sup>, the same could not be said for Graham, herself. “By 1962, the effects of aging and alcoholism on Grahams’ choreography and dancing were inescapable.”<sup>118</sup> Graham, then 67, famously condemned the aging process and its cruel fate a dancer faced. In 1969 with Graham now 74, LeRoy Leatherman, executive director of the company forwarded a correspondence to a board member expressing that Graham’s alcoholism would be the ruin of the company.<sup>119</sup>

The MGDC continued to make news throughout the 1970s and 80s with the press focusing its coverage on the company’s artistic achievements of each new season. However, by the late 1980s, given the personal challenges Graham had faced along with her advancing age, unavoidable questions surrounding her legacy and the future of the company began to surface. *New York Times* columnist, Jennifer Dunning, closely followed the path of the MGDC. In the fall of 1987, she commented on the issues facing a company in imminent transition, writing,

American dance has changed since the days with Miss Graham – as well as Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor – who presided over small companies that existed on shoestring budgets and one-night stands...The shoestrings are gilded now and the seasons have grown, along with the costs of producing dance. To survive, dance had to become a business. Intimate groups of mostly kindred souls have become large, less personal companies of performers...Change, as [Linda] Hodes, a former company dancer, observed, is inevitable. ‘Of course, the company has changed in 60 years,’ she said. ‘Why wouldn’t it change in the next 60? It grows, and feeds on that growth. The

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117 Franko, 176.

118 Franko, 176.

119 Ibid.

technique can go on. It is like a language. And a language will not die if it is spoken.’  
Miss Graham...has been training people for years to create a structure for the future...’I  
don’t want this to be a possessive, one-person thing,’ Miss Graham said in discussing that  
future.<sup>120</sup>

Dunning’s article certainly addresses both the artistic and operational issues at hand. What’s  
absent in Hodes’ sentiments is any anticipation of stark realities of the growth of which she  
speaks. The meaningful insight with which we are provided is Graham’s envisioning of her  
company housing the work of choreographers other than herself. Admittedly, this sentiment of  
Graham’s that she desired an artistic expansion in the company beyond her own voice is an  
outlier. It was not a subject that Graham was being asked about specifically, let alone upon  
which to expound or clarify. Three years later, the company had made little progress towards  
this purported objective. By 1990, the company faced a \$1.8 million budget deficit and was  
exploring licensing and endorsement opportunities as possible means to close the budget gap.  
Putting efforts towards an artistic transition were not practical. Dunning writes,

At the age of 96, [Graham] is stepping boldly into a new world with her company, a  
world very different from the one that existed when the troupe came into being 63 years  
ago. Now there are marketing techniques and fund-raising ventures that were only  
recently unthinkable in dance...Negotiations are underway to market a line of Martha  
Graham clothes, dancewear and accessories next year in Japan, where Miss Graham’s

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120 Jennifer Dunning, "How Graham Manages In a New Era of Dance," *New York Times*, October 18, 1987, accessed April 01, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/19/arts/how-graham-manages-in-a-new-era-of-dance.html>.

work is very popular...There are also negotiations with five European and American ballet companies the licensing of dances by Miss Graham...<sup>121</sup>

Modern dance was not immune to the consumer-driven sensibility and glamour of corporate America. After 60 years, while Graham had always had a certain savviness to coexist with the hegemonic forces by which she was surrounded, such machinations were becoming more complex than the company could compete with. Graham would pass in 1991 and the company was suddenly confronting all the questions that perhaps wishful-thinking had kept in a distant future. The bequeathing of Graham's estate to her legal heir, and company artistic director, Ron Protas, set off a chain of events that would cripple the company. This was due, in part, to Protas himself who many saw as having ingratiated his way into a vulnerable woman's life and life's work with no experience or credentials to do so. Jennifer Dunning:

Mr. Protas came under her spell in 1969, when he approached her as a young amateur photographer of theater stars. A Brooklynite who had abandoned his law studies at Columbia University, Mr. Protas had no experience running a dance company. But a few years later, Graham – sick and feeling abandoned by some of her dancers, Mr. Protas said – asked for his help in reshaping the company. By the end of her life she had come to depend on him and he on her...<sup>122</sup>

Protas had been willed Graham's estate, but

In her will, Miss Graham also requested that [Protas] consult with friends and colleagues over the use of rights and interests in dances...and the use of the Graham name. Major

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121 Jennifer Dunning, "Martha Graham Troupe Goes Modern on Money," *New York Times*, June 11, 1990, accessed April 04, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/06/12/arts/martha-graham-troupe-goes-modern-on-money.html>.

122 Jennifer Dunning, "The Graham Company Faces Life Without Martha," *New York Times*, October 6, 1991, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

Asset: The Name...The estate does not include the Martha Graham Dance Center on East 63<sup>rd</sup> St. or the Graham school...’It’s really speculative...She left very few liquid assets. She did not have any stocks or bonds. She did not own any real estate. She didn’t even have a bank account. Her major asset is her legacy, the ballets, her name.’<sup>123</sup>

Resentment of Protas was so strong among Graham associates and devotees that it was difficult for even the press to provide pure journalistic neutrality in reporting the unfolding events. By the fall of 1991, just months after Graham’s death, there were conflicting views about what the next move for the MGDC would look like without its founder. Dunning underscores the transition to a repertory model as financially necessary for the survival of the company.

With no more works to come from Graham, the company is reaching out to choreographers like Jerome Robbins and Paul Taylor...Spurred by economic difficulties of the sort facing most arts groups today, the company is also considering requests from troupes around the world to stage Graham’s work. ... ‘The company needs to change because the business is changing,’ [Linda] Hodes said, ‘not only because of Martha’s death...This hasn’t happened 10 times before. We don’t have examples... There has always been this question about what happens to a ballet or modern dance company when its creator dies. And this question has not been answered yet.’<sup>124</sup>

Hodes echoes her earlier sentiments to the *New York Times* about change and it is clear that the hypothetical changes are now exigent. Interestingly though, the question Hodes refers to had, indeed, been answered before. The Limón Company (TLC) had faced – and answered – this very

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123 Jennifer Dunning, "Graham Leaves Her Estate To Head of Dance Company," *New York Times*, June 25, 1991, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/26/arts/graham-leaves-her-estate-to-head-of-dance-company.html>.

124 Jennifer Dunning, "The Graham Company Faces Life Without Martha," *New York Times*, October 6, 1991, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

question with founder, José Limón's death in 1972. And TLC answered that question the same way the MGDC seemed to be poised to answer it by introducing a repertory platform.

Unfortunately, the public was not proving to be very patient with the fate of what would become of the MGDC now that its founder was gone.

By 1994, the company was \$4 million in debt and facing a labor dispute. The MGDC had operated under AGMA – American Guild of Musical Artists – union contracts, but the dancers had been working without a ratified contract since June of 1993. One issue that had yet to be resolved was the company guaranteeing the members a minimum number of weeks of employment for a calendar or fiscal year. Keep in mind, a guaranteed number of weeks of employment by no means guarantees earning a living wage from any contract resolutions. In the proposed contracts, principal dancers were to receive \$735 per week for 20 weeks of guaranteed employment, about \$11.50/hour in 2014 dollars<sup>125</sup>. This situation was eventually resolved adequately to move out of the headlines, only to be replaced by additional challenges.

“In 1998, the company sold its major asset, its longtime headquarters on East 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, to pay off a \$2.4 million deficit...Plans to move back into headquarters in a new building on the East 63<sup>rd</sup> Street site were recently canceled because the company had not been able to raise the \$150,000 necessary to convert the raw space into studios and offices.”<sup>126</sup>

Finally, in late spring of 2000, the school and the company that Graham had founded would formally close due to insufficient funding. This was accompanied by the removal of Ron Protas as artistic director after almost a decade of dislike and disdain for him and his

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<sup>125</sup> "The Inflation Calculator," The Inflation Calculator, accessed March 08, 2015, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>.

<sup>126</sup> Jennifer Dunning, "Performances Are Suspended In Dance Group Graham Started," *New York Times*, May 25, 2000, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/26/nyregion/performances-are-suspended-in-dance-group-graham-started.html>.

management of the company.<sup>127</sup> What would follow was a three-year protracted court case that would bring to bear latent and unaddressed, yet vital issues of copyright, ownership, and intellectual property that affected all choreographers, dance companies, and presenting organizations. At issue were the rights to perform Graham's work and use Graham's name. To editorialize, Protas claimed ownership of Graham's pieces and effectively held them hostage from the company. The MGDC ultimately prevailed in the lawsuit. However, suffice it to say, the actual ruling can affect choreographers and presenting organizations incompatibly.

In 2002, the company was reinstated and resumed performance activities upon succeeding in the court case.<sup>128</sup> The MGDC forged ahead but not without additional struggles. The company again faced leadership conflicts during the mid-aughts when the ousting of Artistic Directors Christine Dakin and Terese Capucilli made waves with the appointment of Judith Eilber into the position. The baffled voices expressed in the press regarding Eilber's appointment are equally as baffling. As early as 2000, in the thick of the company's legal battles with Protas, Eilber was already being courted to assume artistic leadership from Protas once he was safely out of the picture.<sup>129</sup> It was simply a matter of time: when, not if.

There are myriad lessons to learn from the MGDC's trajectory. But where the chronology of the MGDC brings the company is to the land and era of branding. Who and what is the MGDC without Graham? How much of Graham is left in the company that is emerging today? Where is Graham to be found in the company ten years from now? To those who have

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127 Andrea Peters, "World Socialist Web Site," Financial Problems Close the Martha Graham Dance Center in New York City -, June 17, 2000, accessed April 01, 2015, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2000/06/grah-j17.html>.

128 Jennifer Dunning, "Graham Company Leaps Back to Life; But After a Favorable Court Ruling, Questions Linger About Choreographers' Legacies," *New York Times*, September 2, 2002, accessed May 3, 2015, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

129 Jennifer Dunning, "Performances Are Suspended In Dance Group Graham Started," *New York Times*, May 25, 2000, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

been with the company in any number of capacities for decades, the answer is easy to satisfy, but what about new audiences? What about new generations of dancers who may know Graham only as a figure in his/her dance history classes and on the marquis of a theater?

While the artistic director is agency to the life of the company, the moniker of the company is agency to the brand of the company. Consider a potential ticket buyer who only associates Martha Graham with the Martha Graham Dance Company and is not a fan of Graham's work. That same ticket buyer is, however, interested in new voices in dance. The caveat is that if the ticket buyer does not associate the MGDC with new voices, s/he is not going to put the MGDC on his/her radar to even consider attending a performance. The consequence is that the MGDC has not captured this ticket buyer and anyone with whom s/he may have attended a performance and, subsequently, has lost that source of revenue. In all fairness, this is not an issue unique to the MGDC, but the MGDC will, like many times before, be setting the precedent of what it looks like for an established single-choreographer dance company to transition to a repertory platform. Those who follow will learn from the MGDC's successes and failures with respect to its artistic model.

### **III. CASE – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Repertory Model in American Modern Dance**

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) provides a persuasive testimonial of the repertory artistic model for modern dance companies in the United States. In 2015 there is no institutional or operational comparison. It is the oldest repertory modern dance company with respect to employing an artistic platform that was the design and intent of its choreographer-founder. AAADT's closest organizational relative would likely be considered Hubbard Street Dance Chicago (HSDC) founded in 1977 by Lou Conte in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>130</sup> AAADT is the largest operating American modern dance company with an operating budget exceeding \$35 million. A budget of this size is rivaled only by long-standing established companies in the classical ballet idiom the likes of New York City Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, etc. In modern dance, while HSDC is successful measured against any financial or organizational benchmark, it trails a distant second with a \$5 million operating budget.

Of note to the subject of the repertory platform would be Repertory Dance Theatre (RDT) in Salt Lake City, Utah, that was founded as the result of an initiative of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1966. "Prompted by the influential Utah modern dance educator, Virginia Tanner, the Rockefeller Foundation envisioned a small company that would function leaderless, an 'artistic democracy' performing revivals of landmark dances as well as new works."<sup>131</sup> Virginia Tanner had an existing relationship with the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) having received its support for previous dance education ventures. This may explain why such an unlikely place

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130 "Company History," Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, accessed May 03, 2015, [http://www.hubbardstreetdance.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=proditem&id=79%3Acompany-history](http://www.hubbardstreetdance.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=proditem&id=79%3Acompany-history).

131 Marcia Siegel, "Modern times," *Dance Magazine*, February 2006, 43.

such as Salt Lake City might have been selected a location to found a modern dance company.<sup>132</sup> Artistically, “Repertory Dance Theatre was conceived as a permanent company committed not to any single artist’s dreams but to modern dance as a whole. A collective enterprise with no particular stylistic territory to protect or promote, RDT set out to explore what a living archive might look like.”<sup>133</sup> Among the Rockefeller Foundation’s directives, the initiative provided seed money to be intentionally phased out over ten years. Along with the RF’s initial infusion of capital, RDT phased out its artistic democracy when in 1977 it elected its first official artistic leadership. Today its organizational structure is virtually identical to that of other modern dance companies.

Coincidentally two years prior in 1964, José Limón who had been directing his own company since 1946, was offered the opportunity to serve as Artistic Director for the newly formed American Dance Theater (ADT), a venture of the recently launched Lincoln Center.<sup>134</sup> In 1967, ADT received \$1,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation towards the “establishment of a permanent company”.<sup>135</sup> As emphasized by historiographer, June Dunbar “[ADT] was the first major attempt at an American modern dance repertory company to house the classics of modern dance and commission new works. But the dance field was not ready for such a phenomenon and the project folded after two years.”<sup>136</sup> With the current wave of established single-

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132 *The Rockefeller Annual Report for 1966*, report, 139, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/uploads/files/4966894d-0356-40e4-bd6e-6ae65aad504c-1966.pdf>.

133 Marcia Siegel, "Modern times," *Dance Magazine*, February 2006, 43.

134 [http://ums.org/assets/Jose\\_Limon\\_Study\\_Guide\\_.pdf](http://ums.org/assets/Jose_Limon_Study_Guide_.pdf), page 24

135 *The Rockefeller Annual Report for 1967*, report, 246, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/uploads/files/3608ab28-f24e-4012-9b8a-1b2384b82a42-1967.pdf>.

136 June Dunbar, *José Limón: The Artist Re-viewed* (Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Harwood Academic, 2000), 5.

choreographer modern dance companies in the United States presently transitioning to a repertory model, this venture was an idea ahead of its time as though it could see into the future.

BODYTRAFFIC (Los Angeles), as one of the newest repertory companies founded in 2007, could prove a credible indicator of the potential strength and relevance of the repertory artistic model. In 2008, its inaugural budget hovered just around \$50,000. BODYTRAFFIC has since increased its budget an average of \$50,000 with each successive season now operating with a \$250,000 budget.<sup>137</sup> It cannot be overstated that any measured financial growth or success of a dance company is an amalgamation of so many factors, internal and external; maneuverable and mitigatable, or unmanageable and pure circumstance. Nonetheless, BODYTRAFFIC is a testimony to the operational possibilities that could be attributable to the repertory model. I would argue that one of AAADT's organizational legacies was setting the precedent and laying the groundwork for those possibilities. AAADT's narrative and longevity provides a clear lens into the repertory artistic model.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was founded by Alvin Ailey. Its founding date is established as 1958, the year of Alvin's first work performed in New York City at the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association), what is now the 92<sup>nd</sup> St. Y.<sup>138</sup> The unrivaled achievements of AAADT started out just as humbly as any other dance company and has certainly faced the all-too common organizational adversities including possible extinction. Like all dance company founders, Ailey did not found a dance company to go into business, but pursued the realization of an artistic agenda. Unlike other choreographers/dance company founders, Ailey was emerging

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137 "GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses," GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses, BODYTRAFFIC, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

138 "92Y Historical Timeline," 92Y, accessed May 03, 2015, [http://www.92y.org/92StreetY/media/MEDIA/Interactive/Timeline\\_New/92YTimeline\\_Main.html](http://www.92y.org/92StreetY/media/MEDIA/Interactive/Timeline_New/92YTimeline_Main.html).

during the height of the civil rights movement in the United States which provides additional context to his company's evolution.<sup>139</sup> Also unlike other founders, it was always Ailey's hopes and plans for his company to operate on a repertory platform, not serve as a "showcase for his dances".<sup>140</sup> Ailey's intentions for a repertory company reflected a value system about dance that differed from those who favored the single-choreographer model. Artistically, Ailey's signature and enduring work, "Revelations" (1960) received immediate critical and commercial success and put AAADT on the cultural map in the United States. These successes reinforced the value system by which Ailey functioned artistically. Financially, for the first ten years of the company, AAADT survived operationally largely on the generosity of individuals. Its 501(c)(3) registration holds a ruling date of 1968<sup>141</sup> and it wasn't until the company formalized its activities with its not-for-profit filing that it was subsequently eligible for public monies and foundational support.<sup>142</sup>

The 1970's were a period of both growth and stability for AAADT fortuitously coordinating with the documented "dance boom". The company received support from the NEA and Rockefeller Foundation to build its infrastructure – i.e., establishing its Board and administrative staff. 1971 brought another critical and commercial hit for AAADT with Ailey's "Cry". It immediately became another signature work for the company and its performer,

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139 Deborah Obalil, *Dancin' to Freedom: A Historical Analysis of the Rise of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater*, Illinois Wesleyan University, Digital Commons @ IWU, 1995, 9, accessed February 15, 2015, [http://digital-commons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=history\\_honproj](http://digital-commons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=history_honproj).

140 Allan Ulrich, "Ailey, Taylor Dance Companies Surviving, Thriving," SFGate, March 25, 2011, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Ailey-Taylor-dance-companies-surviving-thriving-2388096.php>.

141 "GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses," GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers and Businesses, Alvin Ailey American Dance Foundation, Inc., accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

142 "Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Inc. History," History of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Inc. – Funding Universe, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/alvin-ailey-dance-foundation-inc-history/>.

founding member Judith Jamison. By 1974, AAADT had outgrown itself and Ailey II was formed in response to the growing need for additional outlets within the company.<sup>143</sup> Ailey's pioneering of this "second company" platform, as it is known, would be reproduced by the Paul Taylor Dance Company (PTDC) with the PTDC's launch of Taylor II in 1993<sup>144</sup>, and Hubbard Street 2 in 1997.<sup>145</sup> Within the dance community, these second companies can be useful "feeder companies" and stepping stones to earn entrance into the main companies (not unlike minor league farm teams in professional sports). AAADT's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1978 exhibited undeniable organizational progress that included the implementation of a school, two student-level companies, and multiple choreography commissions extended to Ailey to set work on other companies.<sup>146</sup>

Colliding with the changing political and economic climate towards the arts, the 1980's were the beginning of a challenge for AAADT's survival. The 1980s began with Ailey enduring an emotional breakdown that was accompanied by an arrest and ended with his death. The health of the organization seemed to be mirroring the health of its leader. In 1989, Ailey died at the age of 58 with the company he founded just passing its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and facing a \$1 million deficit. The loss of Ailey had both artistic and organizational impact. Any company whose founder no longer contributes to realizing the creative vision of the company whether as artistic director, or choreographer, is no longer about that person's personal creative voice, but

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143 "Alvin Ailey," American Dance Theater, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.alvinailey.org/about/people>.

144 "Taylor 2 - PTAMD," Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.ptamd.org/artists-dances/taylor-2/>.

145 "Company History," Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, accessed May 03, 2015, [http://www.hubbardstreetdance.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=proditem&id=79%3Acompany-history](http://www.hubbardstreetdance.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=proditem&id=79%3Acompany-history).

146 "Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Inc. History," History of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Inc. – Funding Universe, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/alvin-aley-dance-foundation-inc-history/>.

about the legacy is his/her voice. How would AAADT's mission be realized without Ailey? Who would insure the substance, intentions, and integrity in the school, rehearsals and touring?

A significant factor working in AAADT's favor was Ailey's purposeful blueprint for a repertory platform to his company. This blueprint meant that there were works already present in the AAADT repertoire by artists other than Ailey upon his death. The role of Artistic Director was entrusted to, secured, and assumed three weeks after his death by Judith Jamison.<sup>147</sup>

Since so many modern dance companies are single choreographer companies, they do not have the ability to sustain themselves easily when their founder passes away. The organization needs an entirely new mission and that is not easy to accommodate. (The exception that proves the rule is the AAADT. Alvin never intended his company to depend solely on his works. He encouraged many other choreographers to make work for his company; this made the transition to new artistic leadership far easier.<sup>148</sup>

As AAADT entered the 1990s, it was again secure artistically, but remained tenuous operationally. "The company had a deficit of more than \$1.5 million and was suffering from the typical effects of cash shortages: missed payrolls, low morale, and ineffective fund-raising."<sup>149</sup> The 1990s would become a decade of re-birth for AAADT. Fortunately, the company was enjoying consistent support from audiences and remained popular with the public. However, the existing debt jeopardized the survival of the company and left the future a looming question.

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147 Susan Reiter, "Heir to the Legacy : Dance: Judith Jamison Has Successfully Guided the Alvin Ailey Troupe through Rough times since His Death in 1989. It Begins a Five-day Engagement at UCLA Tonight.," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1993, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com>.

148 Michael Kaiser, "Why I Worry About Modern Dance," *The Huffington Post*, September 17, 2009, accessed April 8, 2015, [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com).

149 Michael M. Kaiser, *The Art of the Turnaround: Creating and Maintaining Healthy Arts Organizations* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2008), 32.

Jamison acutely understood the dual – and dueling - roles she needed to play between the organizational and artistic operations of the company, and fully embraced them necessarily.<sup>150</sup> Leading a dedicated team that included Jamison to restructure AAADT to solvency was Michael Kaiser. Prior to Kaiser’s intervention, presumably by the governance of AAADT, the disbanding of the second company and folding the school were prospects considered to solving its financial woes.<sup>151</sup> The consensus among the staff and the Board was that cutting programs and services was the solution. Kaiser disagreed with this approach and while not expressly documented or credited in much of the press that accompanied AAADT’s situation during this period, he played an integral role in its revitalization. The broad strokes of the medicine he administered focused “on increasing revenue, building the artistic program, and marketing...aggressively.”<sup>152</sup> He also revamped the obligations and benchmarks of the AAADT Board that included a more substantial role in leading-by-example in providing and securing support for the company. In addition, he stressed reviewing the mission of AAADT which helped shape and send a clear message “about the merits of the organization and what it stood for.”<sup>153</sup> Kaiser had the advantage of being an outsider who did not have the emotional investment in AAADT that long-standing staff or Board members might. His position of being an outsider enabled him to look at and act more objectively to the situation. His approach included maintaining if not expanding programming, and challenging the Board to rethink its roles and responsibilities, not only those of governance

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150 Susan Reiter, "Heir to the Legacy : Dance: Judith Jamison Has Successfully Guided the Alvin Ailey Troupe through Rough times since His Death in 1989. It Begins a Five-day Engagement at UCLA Tonight.," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1993, accessed May 03, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com>

151 Kaiser, *The Art of the Turnaround*, 34.

152 Ibid, 38.

153 Ibid, 45.

behind-the-scenes, but as the front lines to resources and support. Kaiser's was a three-year commitment to the company from 1990-1993.<sup>154</sup>

AAADT emerged from Kaiser's intervention operationally robust and continued to heal from its loss of Ailey. By 1994, no longer in crisis mode and focused on the fixing of things, the organization's new-found stability provided it with the luxury to start building new things – quite literally. Like other dance organizations, AAADT had always struggled with the issue of adequate physical space in which to train and study. Having been freed of its budget deficit and now operating on a solvent \$8.5 million budget, attention was being given to a dedicated space for AAADT's programs and operations.<sup>155</sup> With the requisite resources and management, AAADT again demonstrated organizational leadership in the professional dance community expanding its educational operations beyond the studio and into the university. In 1998, AAADT again pioneered a direction previously unheard of entering into a partnership with Fordham College at Lincoln Center to offer students an undergraduate degree in dance earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) upon graduation. Because of the notoriously short lifespan of most professional dance careers, a college education is often either sacrificed or postponed for the opportunity to dance professionally. The Ailey-Fordham program aimed to change that through emphasizing the long-term view of dancers' lives after retiring with a strong liberal arts component.<sup>156</sup>

In 2001, it was announced that a \$47.5 million facility located at Ninth Avenue and 55<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan would be the new home of AAADT. In seven years, AAADT's operating

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154 Ibid, 32-60.

155 Jennifer Dunning, "Strong as Nails (And Soft Of Heart)," *New York Times*, December 03, 1994, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/04/arts/dance-strong-as-nails-and-soft-of-heart.html>.

156 Jennifer Dunning, "A Balanced Degree For Dancers, At Fordham," *New York Times*, August 04, 1997, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/05/arts/a-balanced-degree-for-dancers-at-fordham.html>.

budget had grown to \$13 million, an increase of \$4.5 million since 1994 - averaging close to \$650,000 in additional revenue each fiscal year. The company's school and training programs maintained 3,500 students and was growing about 10 percent annually. AAADT would need all 71,000 square feet slated in its design.<sup>157</sup> While an impressive accomplishment for any arts organization, even a long-standing, established classical ballet company, these were plans and dollar amounts never fathomed in the modern dance community. The press credited that "[t]he Ailey company's success at raising funds is due in part to its special cachet. Ailey always insisted on having a multicultural group of dancers, even as his works celebrated his own African-American heritage. So the Ailey has always been both an ethnic institution and a colorblind one."<sup>158</sup> This is certainly an accurate portrayal, but the crux goes deeper than that. After all, by 2004, any number of modern dance companies could claim a multicultural representation in their dancers and broad emphases within their repertoires. For AAADT, it was a special brew of inclusion, intent, and legacy distinctive from other companies. It wasn't just that AAADT celebrated diversity, but that it was expressly a mission-driven element to the company and a 45-year legacy to accompany that. No other company could claim that combination of components and it made all the difference. The impact of the value system that Ailey had established at the company's inception continued to resonate decades later.

The new building of AAADT opened in late 2004 with a 77,000 square foot facility that allowed it to expand its programming to offer classes to the general public, as well as a physical therapy room complete with a "whirlpool, barre, Pilates exercise equipment and a treadmill."<sup>159</sup>

In 2008, showing no signs of slowing down, AAADT celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

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<sup>157</sup> Doreen Carvajal, "Big Grant Proposed for Ailey Home," *New York Times*, April 25, 2001, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/26/nyregion/big-grant-proposed-for-ailey-home.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Roslyn Sulcas, "Tapping Into Deep Pockets," *New York Times*, November 27, 2004, accessed April 08, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/28/arts/dance/28sulc.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/28/arts/dance/28sulc.html?_r=1&).

company Ailey founded. Astounding accomplishments like this were opportune reminders of the impact and contribution a cultural organization had made and that every effort should be made to insure its continued involvement. Unlike most institutions, AAADT's landmark event was a true celebration: its \$50 million anniversary endowment drive had already been reached by the time the actual anniversary had occurred.

The biggest news that accompanied AAADT's 50-year achievement otherwise, was Jamison's announcement that she would step down as Artistic Director in 2011.<sup>160</sup> At the time of her announcement, AAADT's operating budget had grown to \$24 million and not operated with a deficit since Kaiser's intervention.<sup>161</sup> In spring of 2010, choreographer Robert Battle was named as Jamison's successor<sup>162</sup>. With a reported 2012 budget of \$34.5 million, AAADT's success is a prototype of what is achievable for American modern dance institutions.

It cannot be overstated that the unparalleled success of AAADT artistically, organizationally, socially, or culturally was far from guaranteed. Things could easily have gone the other way for AAADT and Alvin Ailey could've become a figure relegated to dance history courses in universities. However, AAADT's accomplishments secure the notion that modern dance in the United States can be institutionalized in the same ways opera or ballet has been. That ability to institutionalize similarly to other disciplines is not to make a judgement about whether that is of benefit or a detriment since opera and ballet have certainly experienced their

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159 Robin Pogrebin, "Ailey's Creative New Digs With Room for Comfort," *New York Times*, November 07, 2004, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/08/arts/dance/08aile.html>.

160 Jennifer Dunning, "For Ailey Troupe, at 50, a Street and an 18-Month Tribute," *New York Times*, March 26, 2008, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/27/arts/dance/27aile.html>.

161 Jennifer Dunning, "Judith Jamison to Retire in 2011," *New York Times*, February 28, 2008, accessed April 08, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/29/arts/dance/29Danc.html>.

162 Daniel J. Wakin, "Alvin Ailey Company Names a New Leader," *New York Times*, April 28, 2010, accessed April 08, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/29/arts/dance/29plan.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/29/arts/dance/29plan.html?_r=0).

own institutional challenges. Rather, it is to simply observe what kind of impact can be made with tremendous resources and a respected brand.

AAADT has successfully embraced and capitalized on the present-day concept and need for branding. The Ailey brand is far from Ailey exclusively, the man, the artist. It is “Revelations”; it is “Cry”; the repertoire, the choreographers who have contributed to that repertoire, the dancers with their consummate technique and abilities, and the overriding value system that Ailey instilled at the inception of the company. Even the building is part of the Ailey brand with the 55<sup>th</sup> Street facility a permanent billboard for Ailey and modern dance. It is not a cramped, make-shift space hidden away on a 5<sup>th</sup> floor walk-up on a narrow cross street, but visible and accessible and from the expanse of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue. From its humble beginnings and the all-too-common story of decades of shoestring budgets, deficit crises, and less than adequate spaces to rehearse or train, AAADT has been re-invented as a factory, if you will, of dense and intricate engineering and machinery. Factory may be far from an elegant term to employ, and the machines are, indeed, human, not automated, but the depth and breadth of AAADT’s operations allows it to manufacture dance, dancers, and the programs and services it makes available.

There are few constants in modern dance and many ever-changing variables. Different people, a different cultural climate, different professional sensibilities and this story could have played out much differently. But what resonates loudly is the indication that modern dance and the structure through which it is disseminated is bigger than the voice of any one artist. AAADT serves as a beacon of not only what’s possible for American modern dance, but what the struggles and hurdles may look like to get there. Of all the crises and obstacles AAADT has endured and overcome, it has always relied upon its artistic platform and the artistic product formed via that platform. In showing us the role the repertory model has played in AAADT’s

evolution, there are indications as to how it may indeed play a significant role in the next generation of modern dance companies in the United States.

## Conclusions

**“The golden age is always the one that has passed.”<sup>163</sup>**

We are hamstrung by the fact that the nature, health, and future of modern dance companies in the United States cannot be separated from any discussion of modern dance as an art form. While they may not share a symbiosis for their survival, they are not mutually exclusive from each other either. The discussion of this relationship suggests that after 100 years of the institution of the modern dance company, the single-choreographer artistic model is a double-edged sword. It is, to use an expression, a necessary-evil, but unsustainable artistically and financially. Not only is the modern dance community looking for the next Martha Graham, but it is looking for the next Martha Graham Dance Company.

Brian Seibert of the *New York Times* recently claimed, “There are people in the dance world who believe that single-choreographer companies are on their way out”.<sup>164</sup> Seibert’s statement implicitly communicates the significance that the single-choreographer model has held. The single-choreographer platform would have had to have been “in” to be considered to be on its “way out”. There are logistical limitations to that model that help explain its unsustainability artistically, financially, and organizationally. Further, those limitations often accompany each other all as causes and effects of each other.

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163 Anna Kisselgoff, "Thoughts on the Once and Future Dance Boom," *New York Times*, January 05, 2005, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/06/arts/dance/06danc.html>.

164 Brian Seibert, "New Members for a Dance 'Family'" *New York Times*, August 20, 2014, accessed May 3, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/arts/dance/petronio-company-to-perform-other-choreographers-works.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/arts/dance/petronio-company-to-perform-other-choreographers-works.html?_r=0).

There is an expression in the art community that “there can never be too much art, but there can be too many galleries.”<sup>165</sup> If we make an analogy, while there can never be too much dance, perhaps there can be too many dance companies. The more choreographers who are founding dance companies as a vehicle for their work, the more entities there are competing for limited audiences and resources. The norm for many companies is “minimal staffs, four to ten dancers, they tour as much as they can, and for the most part they lack financial security and institutional grounding.”<sup>166</sup> Single-choreographer companies are also limited to the very life of the choreographer. Once the founder/choreographer has died, the creation of that person’s work ceases. If that person’s work is the reason for the company, then there is no longer any need for the company. If there is no need for the company, audiences and funding will not be attracted to support it.

So, what are the messages surrounding 100 years of institutionalization of modern dance in the United States? A popular message is that the company model is gone. Siebert for instance asks, “Is it even possible for a choreographer to break through like [Paul Taylor or Merce Cunningham] anymore, regardless of talent...?”<sup>167</sup> He continues to say: “If someone were to ask me to identify the greatest choreographer to come after [Mark] Morris, I wouldn’t know what to answer. The company model is certainly fraying.”<sup>168</sup> Fellow *Times* colleague, Roslyn Sulcas adds, “The company model has almost gone, which changes the way that choreographers work...”<sup>169</sup> These are equally provocative statements suggesting that the modern dance company

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165 Judith Dobryzinski, "How Many Museums Is Too Many?," Real Clear Arts, May 27, 2014, accessed May 04, 2015, <http://www.artsjournal.com/realcleararts/2014/05/how-many-museums-is-too-many.html>.

166 Munger, 13.

167 Alastair Macauley, comp., "A Critic's Conversation: Modern Dance Madness," *New York Times*, April 3, 2012.

168 Ibid.

169 Ibid.

is not serving the purpose it once did. But how is it “fraying”? How is it “almost gone”? For both, Seibert and Sulcas, their legitimate argument is if a choreographer can’t break through artistically, s/he can’t break through organizationally either.

While the commodification of a choreographer’s work (with respect to the funding that supports his/her efforts) is ultimately the determining factor of which companies survive and which don’t regardless of the merits of any choreographer’s work, it is interesting to hear the perspectives that connect the decline of the dance company to an artistic deficiency, rather than a financial one. There is no escaping from the reliance upon scarce, but vital funding to sustain the institutions that can nurture choreographers and connect their work to audiences.

“Is it, then, that brilliant, big-thinking minds such as Taylor, Morris and Jones just haven't come along lately? Perhaps, but consider another question: Is genius born -- or paid for? Surely the romantic notion of art emerging whatever the circumstances, whatever the scarcities, is outdated. The reality is, art exists in a marketplace, and it's hard to argue that artists can, with any consistency, make great works on a large public scale without financial support.”<sup>170</sup> These thoughts from Sarah Kaufman of the *Washington Post* refer to the commodification of art that modern dance has struggled with from its inception. When modern dance began to organize as a community, the institutions that emerged to support that community were not necessarily intent on commodifying dance, but perhaps that is an unintended, yet inevitable consequence. Can the extent of the single-choreographer model’s artistic limitations be accurately projected until the loss of modern dance’s founding voices began to substantially accumulate? Would this not be like trying to forecast a tornado a year in advance? There are anticipated elements on the horizon

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170 Sarah Kaufman, "Assessing the Future of Modern Dance, a Fragile American Art Form," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2010.

and known quantities are approaching, but the intensity of a tornado if it occurs, or the chances that it will pass over altogether cannot be predicted. In other words, now that the founding voices of modern dance in United States are exiting, not only is the impact of the single-choreographer platform becoming more visible, but so are the latitudes of the repertory model. Kaufman offers

...[C]onsider Alvin Ailey American Dance Theat[er], whose healthy [2010] \$25 million budget dwarfs any other modern-dance troupe (as well as a lot of ballet companies). The difference is, Ailey is a repertory company, performing the works of many artists...which is a big reason why it is so successful. At an Ailey show, if you don't like the style of one choreographer, you don't have to stomach a whole evening of it. Could the Ailey model save modern dance?<sup>171</sup>

Kaufman offers unequivocally that the secret to AAADT's organizational success is to be credited to its artistic model employing a repertory platform. She holds AAADT up as a standard for other American modern dance companies to emulate.

Writer Marina Harss echoes some of Kaufman's sentiments: "At the other end of the spectrum [of artistic structure] lies Alvin Ailey, which despite providing a home for Ailey's works, is really a repertory company. In order to survive in this age of short attention spans, companies need to commission new works. This has become the model, one followed also by Graham, and, to a lesser extent, by Limón".<sup>172</sup> Harss' remarks imply that modern dance companies are repertory companies because they have to be. While I don't disagree with Harss' view,

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171 Sarah Kaufman, "Assessing the Future of Modern Dance, a Fragile American Art Form," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2010.

172 Marina Harss, "What Is the Future for Modern-Dance Companies?," *The New Yorker*, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/future-modern-dance-companies-paul-taylor>.

her suggestion that repertory companies survive better needs to be put in perspective. That is, Ailey's intention was always for his company to employ a repertory platform artistically. Subsequently, AAADT has had a comparatively natural and unforced evolution artistically; in contrast to the cumbersome transformation of the Martha Graham Dance Company to a repertory platform. No strategy is absolute because artistic practices and their organizational platforms do not live in a vacuum, but are affected by a complexity of social, economic and cultural factors that shape the conditions for their production. This complexity poses questions, such as: How repeatable are the organizational and operational accomplishments of AAADT? Is there room for more dance organizations as big and broad and deep as AAADT?

Interestingly, Harss refers to The Limón Company (TLC) as a postscript, rather than accurately acknowledging TLC accomplishments. That is, the intentions of Limón and TLC's achievement of being the first American modern dance company to successfully transition to a robust repertory artistic model after the founder's death. To that end, the dance community's sensibilities regarding repertory companies are perhaps just catching up to where the TLC found itself 35 years ago. Carla Maxwell, Artistic Director of TLC explains

In 1946, when Limón had formed his own company, he had asked Doris Humphrey to be the Artistic Director...and share in the...creation of new work. This was already precedent-breaking for that time because forming a modern dance company was considered a solo endeavor. One was responsible for everything: all the choreography, the training of the dancers and performing as well. So from the beginning, Limón created the concept of a repertory company...In 1965 Jose's broadness and generosity of vision was recognized when he was asked to be the Artistic Director for the short-lived American Dance Theater – the first major attempt at an American modern dance

repertory company to house the classics of modern dance and commission new works.

But the dance field was not ready for such a phenomenon and the project folded after two years...<sup>173</sup>

Like Ailey, Limón saw American modern dance as something bigger than himself and his creative voice. He was invested in the success of the art form as a whole, not just his personal contribution to it.<sup>174</sup> Questions about how modern dance in the United States should address company succession and artistic legacy have increased in number and frequency and pace with modern dance's pioneers aging and passing. At the time of Limón's passing however, this was not a topic among the dance community by artists or administrators. Maxwell emphasizes:

The climate in the dance community was such that no one believed that a company, and in particular a modern dance company, could continue after the death of its founder...

This was the environment in which we found ourselves in 1972. No ground work had been laid for this major transition in the life of The Limón Company, not by the dance community, not within the structure and organization of Limón's foundation, and not by José himself. There were no prototypes to emulate and no belief that we could ever succeed if we decided to try.<sup>175</sup>

However, the conversation now, like never before, is about the role of the artist versus the role of the company and their compatibility or incongruity with each other. Does the company structure work for or against the artistic objectives of the choreographer? Does the company structure work for or against the health of modern dance as an integral cultural voice? There are

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173 June Dunbar, *José Limón: The Artist Re-viewed* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), pg. #.Jose Limón: 5.

174 Dunbar, 6.

175 Dunbar, 3.

plenty of opinions surrounding possible answers to these questions. *Washington Post*, columnist, Sarah Kaufman's view is that:

Taylor is the only dancemaker who pulls in that kind of audience anymore in the modern-dance world. Look at this indigenous but fragile American art form, and you see fundamental change. There's been a downsizing, a redefining, a splintering into countless small niches. As a result, its very future feels precarious. No one with broad-based stature and a track record of creating marketable and enduring work is poised to take over from the pillars of the field. With the deaths of Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham, with Twyla Tharp having disbanded her troupe years ago to work for ballet companies and Broadway, the major players in modern dance -- as defined by the scope of their activities and the sizes of their audience, budget and touring calendar -- number exactly two.

There's Taylor, who turns 80 in July, and Mark Morris, 54.<sup>176</sup>

Thus, choreographers under the age of 50 face tremendous skepticism from the dance establishment. While there is resignation surrounding the dance community lacking an artist with the impact of Graham, or a company with an impact like AAADT, that resignation is nonetheless indicative of the presence of the expectation that there should be such an artist. Dance director of the National Endowment for the Arts Douglas Sonntag's question in response to the declining popularity of single artist companies seems pertinent: "Have we nurtured anyone to replace these people?"<sup>177</sup> His question would suggest that the current and next generation of choreographers and companies are not fulfilling those expectations, but that is not

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<sup>176</sup> Sarah Kaufman, "Assessing the Future of Modern Dance, a Fragile American Art Form," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2010.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

just a question of artistic merit, but also the responsibility to provide systemic conditions with which to support professional development.

Just like other fields and industries, modern dance is now a global marketplace and American choreographers are competing not only with each other, but other international voices on the cultural landscape. There are creative voices in modern dance that are generating interest, excitement, and buzz, but how things buzzed in 2015, is different from how they buzzed 50 and 100 years ago. It could be argued that there are mediocre dance companies who are experiencing commercial success because of their outlets or management<sup>178</sup>, while there are companies who are creating perhaps groundbreaking work but struggle for visibility because they lack a secure infrastructure in order to facilitate similar exposure and reception.<sup>179</sup> Does this reflect the demise of the artistic significance of a choreographer's unique creative voice, or simply the systemic evolution of the business of modern dance?

There is tremendous complexity to fully understanding the precarious coordination of elements that need to align in order for a choreographer's work to rise from the bottom and find air among the large crowds not just of dance, but any cultural activity from which audiences have to choose. This should not be conflated as advocating against an aspiring choreographer to pursue things despite such odds. Rather, it is a call to the patrons, supporters, sponsors, and untapped audience members to play a part in changing those odds. The onus is not only on choreographers to create compelling work and give audiences a reason to part with their living rooms, and dollars, but also the theater-going public to take the initiative to seek an artist and his/her work out.

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178 "Creative Team," Creative Team, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.shapingsoundco.com/creativeteam>.

179 *To Fail and Fail Big: A Study of Mid-Career Artists, Success, and Failure*, report (New York: Field, NY).

“The truth is that the artists – dancers choreographers and dance companies – came first and that [funding] agencies acted in response to the art form, filling a need and demand.”<sup>180</sup>

Cultural mechanisms and apparatuses responded to a perceived need and demand of what the public wanted to consume. If there is a growing sensibility that the single-choreographer legacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup>, then what organizational structures are relevant and what will be the artistic models of those organizational structures? Is it a modern dance community where the single-artist company model is the exception and the repertory model the rule?

There is understandable focus on what and who has already been lost and the dance community continues to lose. There is understandable hopelessness that the cultural sensibilities and political economy are greater than what one segment of culture can overcome. This is a quandary from which the arts cannot cleverly market or brand their way out. Even more so, this uncertainty is also not something to be patient with and quietly wait to pass like an annoying winter cold. But there is also consensus of the arts’ intrinsic value, regard for them, and benefits from them to see that somehow they do not disappear. The survival and success of American modern dance are a sum of their economic, social, and political parts and on any given year, decade, or centennial. The challenge is to identify what is pivotal to getting through to that next year, decade, or centennial.

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180 Anna Kisselgoff, "Thoughts on the Once and Future Dance Boom," *New York Times*, January 05, 2005, accessed May 02, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/06/arts/dance/06danc.html>.

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