

AN INSIDE LOOK AT A PROFESSIONAL MODERN DANCE COMPANY

by

Marissa MacMillan

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences and collective activity of participants in the art world of Bodies in Motion, a local modern dance organization from Hartford, Chilton. This qualitative research uses Becker's (1982) framework for studying social organizations, in conjunction with Unruh's (1979) theory of social worlds and social types, to understand how participants create and maintain the functioning of their social world. The research followed a symbolic interactionist, theoretical approach, where data was collected through interviews and participant-observation. Through these techniques, eleven participants were asked about their experience with Bodies in Motion and the art sphere within Hartford. The research found that Becker's framework and Unruh's social types can help to determine the dynamics of social worlds.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The performance as a final product of a production can be generally viewed by the audience as a work of art. It can be thought that “a successful dance concert invariably leaves the audience with the feeling of having had a significant experience, whether emotionally moving, visually stimulating, kinesthetically exciting, or simply clever and entertaining” (Schlaich and DuPont 1988, 5). What the audience typically does not see, however, is all of the collective activity that happens to create the final product. Every person in an art world that is involved with the work, is a part of its functioning. This includes everyone from the people who create the materials, and the people who are involved in creating the final vision, to the audience members who are interested in, and help keep alive, art worlds. Becker (1982) examines how art comes to be produced through networks of cooperative activity and conventions in the work “Art Worlds”. The following research will apply this framework toward the study of a single art world, Bodies in Motion, a local modern dance organization. The research will also incorporate Unruh’s (1979) theory of social worlds and the types of participants within them into the analysis. This study seeks to explore how participants of Bodies in Motion meaningfully interact to create and maintain the functioning of their art world, as well as what kind of variation might be seen in Bodies in Motion across participants in relation to their social type.

## II. THEORY

### A. Art Worlds

In “Art Worlds” (1982), Becker discusses how art can be examined sociologically as collective activity. Each chapter of the book reflects a topic that can be examined in any currently functioning art world. Becker explains how the framework he proposes can be used to study social organization in general,

... by looking for networks responsible for producing specific events, the overlaps among such cooperative networks, the way participants use conventions to coordinate their activities, how existing conventions simultaneously make coordinated action possible and limit the forms it can take, and how the development of new forms of acquiring resources makes change possible (Becker 1982, 371).

Using Becker’s (1982) framework for art worlds, certain topics will serve as a basis for understanding the social organization and functioning of the art world of Bodies in Motion.

These topics include: collective activity, conventions, resources, distribution, aesthetics, the role of the state, editing, the artist’s orientation to the art world, art and craft, change in art worlds, and reputation.

The following elaboration on the topics listed above will briefly explain how each fits into the study of art worlds. *Collective activity* is necessary for the functioning of every art world, it includes divisions of labour and cooperation among the network of participants. *Conventions*, or certain ways of doing things, are also necessary for cooperation and efficiency among participants of art worlds. Every art world is influenced by its access to *resources*, whether they are material or personnel resources that contribute to the overall functioning of the art world. If, and how, work gets *distributed* is very important in whether or not the work gets to be seen and appreciated. Theories and values around *aesthetics* contribute to which art is thought to be worthy of appreciation. How *the state* chooses which art to support, and which to neglect,

is crucial to the functioning of art worlds. *Editorial choices* made by every participant within an art world contribute to the overall outcome of the work. The artist's *orientation* to the art world, be it professional or other, can determine how seriously they are taken by the rest of the art world. What differentiates *art* from craft, is that artists bring something else to the work beyond craft skill. *Change* is always happening in art worlds, with subtlety or in the form of revolutions. New art worlds may also be born and some seem to disappear altogether. *Reputations* may appear to be given to great work done by great people, however it is the product of collective activity that ultimately shapes the final work. The research seeks to use this framework to understand how the art of dance comes to be produced through networks of cooperative activity and conventional knowledge within the dance art world. Using these basic components as a guide, the research will hopefully shed light on how these components help shape and maintain the art world of Bodies in Motion.

## B. Characteristics and Types of Participation in Social Worlds

Unruh's (1979) theory of social worlds and the types of participants within them was used in conjunction with Becker's framework. This was done to help understand how, depending on the participant's orientation to the dance art world, that they interact and make sense of it. Unruh describes a social world as "an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events, and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants" (Unruh 1979, 115). The dance art world contains actors, organizations, events and practices. It is a broad social world on its own, that contains smaller social worlds within. One of those smaller social worlds is the world of Bodies in Motion. The types of participation that Unruh discusses are as follows: strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders. Strangers are those who may have ideas about a social world, but participation in the

social world is unintentional and short-lived. They are characterized by their naiveté, disorientation, superficiality, and detachment towards a social world. Tourists are those who seek out social worlds for a unique experience. The main characteristics of tourists are curiosity of the unknown, drive to experience the “essence” of the social world, transient relationships, and entertainment seeking. Regulars are the “nucleus” of the social world (Unruh 1979, 119). They are characterized by their habituation, integration, familiarity, and attachment to a social world. Insiders may “know the intimate details and workings of a social world” (Unruh 1979, 120). Unruh states that they may be the owners or organizers. They are characterized by their sense of identity with their social world, creation of the social world, intimate relationships within the world, and recruitment of other participants for the functioning of the social world. These social types can be found in any social world. However, they are not always easily identifiable or categorized. This research will seek to examine how participants within the art world of Bodies in Motion may be influenced by their orientation to the social world.

### C. Symbolic Interaction and Ethnography

A qualitative approach to research will allow participants who are being studied to share their lived experience and what is important to them, in their terms (van den Hoonaard 2012, 2-3). The objective is to do this through ethnography. Travers (2008) states that ideally in ethnographic fieldwork “the ethnographer should be able to observe a wide range of activities, but also ask questions to draw out how practitioners understand their routine activities” (Travers 2008, 4). The researcher can then tie their own individual ideas and observations together with how participants understand activities, once they complete the data collection process. The theoretical perspective to be used will be symbolic interaction. Symbolic interactionism is defined as “a theoretical perspective that assumes that research participants understand their



everyday lives and seeks to discover how meanings are shared and created through social interaction” (van den Hoonaard 2012, 198). This research will seek to explore how participants in the art world of Bodies in Motion understand their everyday lives and how they share and create meaning in their collective activities that contribute to the functioning of their art world.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review consisted of examining previous literature available that looks at art worlds, ethnography and symbolic interaction studies. The majority of the literature on dance was found to consist of advocacy for dance in education, dance for potential health benefits, and anthropological studies of dance in cultures outside of the western world. Research involving the dance art world appears to be lacking following multiple lengthy searches. This section will discuss the following commonalities found in the literature: market issues surrounding the distribution of art, changes in art worlds, differentiation of professionals from others, sense of identity, self-expression, belonging, and shared experience in both social and art worlds.

#### A. Art Worlds

Herd (2013) suggests further research on the functioning of the performance art worlds of Australia. He argues more research needs to be completed to better understand how artists are employed and marketed in organizations. Herd notes that there are many statistics collected on the employment of artists in Australia, but there has not been much information connecting them to organizations and the market for art. He argues that “the arts can be considered as an institutional field constituted as a series of markets. In these markets there are relations of exchange between various agents” (Herd 2013, 383). Herd proposes a framework to study the relationship between performance art and the markets. Another study that emphasizes the role of the market for performance art is Germain-Thomas’s (2013) research on the subsidized contemporary dance market in France. Germain-Thomas gives a brief background on the importance of dance in France art culture, and notes that contemporary dance, though supported by the state, is still facing difficulty with distribution through intermediaries. Through interviews with various participants in France’s art world of contemporary dance and document analysis,

Germain-Thomas finds that the implementation of a market analysis is necessary to help change the way contemporary dance is developing. He argues that it is not developing properly as the financial support provided by the state and co-producers have to be shared among a growing amount of companies that compete for distribution. He calls this an issue of supply and demand. Germain-Thomas also notes that the artistic innovation of contemporary dance can take time for audiences to adapt to and appreciate this style of dance. Distribution systems know this, and it might contribute to how contemporary dance is scheduled.

An article by Kolb (2013) looks at trends in contemporary dance, and how performance and dance is changing. Kolb discusses how western art, dance specifically, has followed political and economic changes and shifted to “participatory, collaborative, and what are termed immersive modes of performance” (Kolb 2013, 31). She notes that participatory performance is not a recent phenomenon, and in the 60’s and 70’s it even helped to create change during social movements. What Kolb argues is that compared to then, the current participatory performance art is a product of the ideologies it once challenged.

## B. Symbolic Interaction and Ethnography

Blackstone’s (2009) study on the conventions associated with music uses social construction and symbolic interaction to “study the interrelationship of human agency and social structures, and account for the changing meanings and practices of Tarantismo across the ages” (Blackstone 2009, 189). Blackstone builds upon the theory of conventions created by Becker (1982), arguing that historical context is also important in studying the Tarantismo art world in Southern Italian music. Change, and acceptance of this type of music in the professional industry, is not just because of conventions within the music, but also because of how it has symbolically changed over time. Another study that discusses what it means to be a professional in the music industry

is Aldredge's (2006) ethnographic study of musicians and open-mic night held weekly at a bar in New York. Aldredge discusses amateur musicians who may learn through watching others perform at an open-mic bar, possibly entering into the professional field themselves eventually. Many of those he studied work full-time jobs outside of the music scene, participating in the open-mic night after work. Potter (2008) also discussed what it means to be a professional in an ethnographic study where she was a participant-observer at a professional contemporary dance training school. Potter studied the heightened sense of kinaesthesia, or sense of motion, that along with the sense of heat and touch is an important part of being a professional contemporary dancer in Britain. Kotarba, Fackler, and Nowotny (2009) use an interactionist approach to study three emerging Latino music scenes. The concept of scene examines the everyday cultural world of Latino music that provides a sense of self, identity, and nationality (Kotarba, Fackler, and Nowotny 2009, 311). The concept of idioculture examines how interactional groups create and maintain local culture through knowledge, values, and customs (Kotarba, Facker, and Nowotny 2009, 311). The concept of place examines how idioculture can create a place of past, present, and the possible (Kotarba, Fackler, and Nowotny 2009, 311). Using ethnography, the authors find in each emerging music scene, a sense of self, identity, belonging, and shared experience. A study by Paulson (2011) is another ethnography where participants find a sense of self, identity, belonging, and shared experience. This time, through circle dance and Scottish country dance, they also find psychological and social benefits from participation. Paulson sought to explore how cultures of dance can construct experiences of health and growing older (Paulson 2011, 152). The researcher used narrative interviews and observation. Narrative interviews are unique as they allow the participant to explain how they view the culture of their dance and recall events and memories associated with it (Paulson 2011, 152).

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to conduct this research is ethnography through the role of participant-observer. This is because I am a member of the Director of Bodies in Motion's adult modern dance class at affiliated studio Hartford Dance Academy, and an active audience member at Bodies in Motion productions. The theory to be used is symbolic interaction. In order to gather an understanding of how the dance art world of Bodies in Motion functions, the everyday lives of those who create and share meaning within that art world must be understood as they see it.

Following approval of the study by the Research Ethics Board, access was given by the Director of Bodies in Motion. Data was collected by observing and participating in the Director of Bodies in Motion's adult modern dance class. In addition, regular meetings with the Director were held to discuss what was actually happening in the production process, as well as conducting semi-structured interviews with participants who were available to discuss their experience. Semi-structured interviews took place to allow for participants to answer open-ended questions that may help gather data pertaining to the objective of the research. These questions were "to allow people to explain their experiences, attitudes, feelings, and definitions of the situation in their own terms" (van den Hoonaard 2012, 78). For example, participants were asked "What do you like about modern dance"? Guiding interview questions were based on the research questions related to the topics in Becker's (1982) framework discussed above. It was explained to participants that the aim of the research is to gather an understanding of the social dynamics of local modern dance company, Bodies in Motion. The following questions helped to guide the research:

- What does the division of labour look like in the dance art world of Bodies in Motion? Who qualifies as an artist and why?
- What kinds of conventions or “ways of doing things” exist in the dance art world of Bodies in Motion?
- What are some resources needed for a typical Bodies in Motion production? How are they acquired?
- What type of support does Bodies in Motion receive, if any?
- What characteristics of modern dance are appreciated by critics and audiences?
- Is Bodies in Motion supported by the government, or neglected? What about other local dance/art?
- What type of orientation to the art world does the Director of Bodies in Motion have? Does this limit their opportunities within the local art sphere?
- How did the director of Bodies in Motion begin her journey into starting her organization and why?
- What kind of reputation does Bodies in Motion have locally? Outside of the local context?

### *Sample and Data Collection*

The sample for this research was gathered using a convenience method. The objective was to acquire as many participants involved in the functioning of the dance art world of Bodies In Motion as possible. After being granted permission from the Artistic Director, an explanation of the research and an invitation to participate was posted on the Bodies in Motion Facebook page. This method provided five opportunities for semi-structured interviews to take place. The response to the posting was particularly small. It was noted that some valuable participants are out-of-town, or have particularly busy schedules. For that reason, a list of possible participants were provided by the Director, and were personally emailed (see Appendix C). After the research was explained and a consent form was provided, those who were emailed were invited to participate in the research and answer interview questions via a word document. This method gathered another six participants. There were eleven participants in total. Research participants

consisted of the Artistic Director/choreographer herself, the owner of the affiliated company at which I take class (who is also a choreographer), dancers, audience members, and a local artist. These people are either somehow involved in the functioning of the dance company, or involved in the local art sphere. Following data collection, interview transcriptions and field notes were examined for common patterns, themes, significant statements, and key words that relate to the topics in Becker's "Art Worlds". Feedback available on Bodies in Motion's website from people who been to productions was also examined.

## V. DATA ANALYSIS (ETHNOGRAPHY)

### A. Art Worlds

Artistic Director and choreographer of Bodies in Motion Lorelai felt that dance was just something she had to pursue. Starting a little later in life, she trained hard and took classes in large cities including New York. At one point, she knew the next step in her career was to become a choreographer. After moving to Hartford and discovering that it had zero modern dance, Lorelai began teaching at Hartford Dance Academy and created her own professional modern dance organization, Bodies in Motion. The following research findings seek to shed light on how Becker's (1982) framework can be used to study the social dynamics of various social organizations, such as Bodies in Motion.

#### *Collective Activity*

All art requires a certain amount of work to be done before it is complete. Depending on the type of art, the amount of people and type of work involved varies. For Bodies in Motion, and other performance-based organizations, there are many people involved and many tasks to be completed. As Bodies in Motion is a project-based organization, planning begins at least one year in advance. For larger companies, it can be many years of planning to keep a regular schedule.

Marketing and promotion was found to be an ongoing task throughout the planning process, with volunteers helping to gather sponsors and donations to assist with the costs of the production. The director and choreographer of Bodies in Motion was constantly working on grant applications in order to get funding for the production. The grant writing process is not an individual activity, the following people were involved in the completion of those tasks: the director, people writing letters of recommendation, and people helping to check over the



application to ensure it is completed properly. During this time, the Director was also in contact with local artists for a possible artistic collaboration, and poster design.

Production day is the epitome of collective activity. When asked “who is all involved with a typical Bodies in Motion production?” many participants stated the following list of people as being involved in the division of labour: Artistic Director/Choreographer, a stage manager, dancers, technical staff (lighting, sounds, props, and costuming), videographer, people front of house, and reception staff (caterers and servers). It was also noted that while many people are helping with all of these activities, it is often the director herself that does a lot of the work. One dancer from affiliated studio Hartford Dance Academy, Amelia, said the following about a typical Bodies in Motion production: “then there would even be the people who do lighting and sound stuff, which is sometimes Lorelai herself. A lot of the time it’s herself”. When asked about cooperation and conflict within the cooperative activity, many participants stated that there is always cooperation necessary for production to go smoothly. Lorelai the Director and choreographer said the following when asked if there are ever any conflicts:

Yes, always. Sometimes between the technical crew, the choreographer may need a sort of lighting. It can be between the choreographer and the dancers. There is a time crunch, and a higher level of stress. In the end, everyone wants the performance to go well, everyone comes together. They’re looking for the same thing.

Many participants stated that the production process is “collaborative”, and that all people involved must work together. Former Bodies in Motion dancer Megan discussed how cooperation may come easily as many dancers have trained at the affiliated dance studio Hartford Dance Academy in the past, and have likely worked together before. She also stated that because they have trained there, they have worked with Lorelai in the past and know her

“unique creative process”. This suggests that while challenges are inevitable, it is typically not so disruptive that the production process is compromised.

### *Conventions*

Becker states “conventions known to all well-socialized members of a society make possible some of the most basic and important forms of cooperation characteristic of an art world” (Becker 1982, 46). That is, certain ways of going about things in an art world are well-known enough to the general population, helping the art world to run with relative ease and efficiency. For the dance art world, this can be something as simple as knowing to be quiet when a performance is about to begin.

It was discovered while *Bodies in Motion* was in the process of planning the next show, if someone does not follow a convention it can cause a minor blip in the activities. When Lorelai was looking to book a venue for the show, a local art space was tentatively booked. Lorelai went to go and visit the space to ensure it would be suitable for the show. When she got there, it was found that the space contained carpet throughout. Most people, not just those within the dance art world, would know that dancers cannot dance on carpet. This caused a temporary snag until another space was booked.

Certain conventions can also be known only to those who operate within an art world. They may require experience or training to become familiar with. Taking Lorelai’s adult modern class at Hartford Dance Academy as a beginner, these dance world conventions were very noticeable. When it came time during class to execute a particular movement, like a tendu in first position, without seeing Lorelai or other students doing it first, I was completely baffled with what she was asking. Luckily Lorelai was patient and thorough with her explanations of the movement. Conventional knowledge about these movements are taught to those who are training in dance.

Without knowledge of these movements, trying to choreograph a dance would be difficult and frustrating for all involved. Dancer at Hartford Dance Academy, Amelia noted the usefulness of conventional knowledge when practicing with live music in the following statement:

Collaborations between musicians, like for timing and tempo and stuff for music, that's a huge deal, like to a dancer. Cause if the music is faster or slower, it can throw off a lot of things. Cause if it's a certain tempo, and you're doing three turns and you slow it down, you might have time to do four. If you speed it up, you might only have time to do two. So stuff like that.

### *Resources and Distribution*

Becker discusses both materials and personnel as resources in "Art Worlds". It is one thing to refer to physical items like materials as resources, but it is difficult to describe a talented individual as such. What is meant by a talented individual being from a "resource pool", is that the individual has specific training and expertise in a field so that it distinguishes them from those outside of the resource pool. Of course there will always be slight variation, for example with dancers who could all have very different training.

Most materials for a show are gathered by Lorelai herself. Some materials like props come from simple easy to acquire everyday items, such as oranges. Other items needed for a show, like pointe shoes, require specific production for the dance art world. These shoes are easy enough to acquire locally, and many professional or student dancers likely already possess them. It was also noted by Hartford Dance Academy dancer Amelia that often a modern dance piece may use no footwear at all, and that is something she really appreciates about the style.

Connections Lorelai has made in the local art sphere have been helpful in generously providing resources. For example, a local artist has made, and will be making, costuming for the show.

Bodies in Motion dancer Carmen stated "costume designers have come together, to see the

pieces, and make the costumes work with the dancers”. This is important, because the costume designers can see the dancers and the performance, and create costumes that fit the vision that Lorelai has.

Personnel as resources for an organization like Bodies in Motion, would be the dancers featured in the productions, and even the technical staff. There are many local dance studios, but it was found that what is unique about Bodies in Motion is that it showcases some of the best talent. Hartford Dance Academy dancer Amelia stated that what she thinks distinguishes Bodies in Motion as professional is that Lorelai’s shows “are not just everybody, like not everybody has to be in the show. It’s like ‘here’s the good people’ and ‘I’m going to showcase the best of talent, the best of dance’”. Students from the affiliated studio that Lorelai teaches at, Hartford Dance Academy can be considered part of the resource pool. They have had technical training, and that is something Lorelai has stated that she values in a dancer. It was found that some of these dancers have gone on to train professionally and still return to be a part of Bodies in Motion productions.

Distribution of work for Bodies in Motion would be how the productions are made available to be seen and appreciated. For Bodies in Motion, this is usually done over a period of two days following months of preparation. Making a production available requires a space, staff working front of house, ticket sales, and an agreed upon schedule. Some of these requirements can be costly, and Bodies in Motion relies on funding from grants, sponsorship, donations, and volunteers to make a production happen.

## *Aesthetics and Critics*

Becker argues that there has to be a distinction between what is classified as art and what is not. Not everything can be considered art. Dance has long been considered an art form. It can evoke an emotional response through movement. When asked what they like about modern dance, both dancers and choreographers stated that they like the “expression” it can provide, and the “freedom in the movement” compared to classical dance. Many participants also stated that what they like about modern dance is that it is “unconventional” and “pushes boundaries”.

Audience member, Rose, stated the following when asked what she likes about modern dance:

Well, it’s different. Everybody takes something different away from it, not everybody gets the same thing out of it. I enjoy watching people dance in general, even though I might not be great at it myself. I’m not very coordinated, but I appreciate it, and like the strength that goes in to it.

There was a consensus in what many participants like about Bodies in Motion productions in particular. They stated that they like the “variation” in the pieces, and that there “is something for everyone” to enjoy at a typical Bodies in Motion show. On the topic of variation, also discussed were ages, body types, and skill level of the dancers. Volunteer and audience member Samantha stated that what make Bodies in Motion unique is that “it’s professional and prestigious dance in Hartford. It’s inclusive for everyone across interests and classes. It’s artistic, not ‘highbrow’ for the sake of it like the Chilton Ballet”.

Modern dance, however, does face some criticism. Generally, among participants there was a consensus that modern dance faces criticism because “people don’t know how to interpret it” or that it gets “misunderstood”. Bodies in Motion dancer Julia provides an overview of criticism for modern dance through the ages in the following statement:

Over time modern dance has received criticism from a variety of sources. Historically, it was criticized for the risk it took in pushing the boundaries of what dance can be. In today's contemporary era, it also receives criticism from artists for its older tendencies. It really depends on how much work the critic has been able to see in their life, as that will alter a person's perception on what they are watching, and whether they take it in as something different or something from the past.

One participant, audience member Kirk, stated that when it comes to modern dance "I really want an overview to read before the performance, because life is too short for me to try and figure out what was going through the choreographer's head when they were setting the piece". So while Kirk appreciates dance and attends productions, he wants to know about the concepts behind the work before watching. Lorelai has mentioned that she likes letting people interpret the work as they see it, and always likes hearing about what others think.

### *Support and the State*

Becker notes that what is worthy of the title of art is often influenced by institutions and organizations. This can be seen locally with the amount of support given by arts organizations. Following a general consensus among participants that local art does not receive enough funding, Lorelai stated the following about how Bodies in Motion could be better supported:

More funding. Other companies are getting more funding. They're a larger group of people, and they have a larger board and clout within the city. However, they're substandard. Yet supported. What does that mean? What does that mean for art?

This brings attention to an issue that Bodies in Motion volunteer and audience member Samantha had mentioned. She states that art faces issues with "authenticity" and said "when places like a local arts organization grants funding it is also placing a 'stamp of approval' on that organization. It does not always consider artistry or the 'authentic' integrity of the organization". It was also noted by the owner of the affiliated studio Hartford Dance Academy, Shirley, that the type of funding available for Bodies in Motion and other dance organizations in the city is not

necessarily the type of funding that they really need. She noted that funding from the city and arts organizations is given on a mostly project-based schedule. For example, Shirley draws attention to the lack of operational funding available in the following quote:

I think everybody, you could probably ask every organization in town ‘what would you like to have money for, if you could have money for anything?’ people would say operating costs. Just regular old, I need to pay my rent, I need to pay my phone bill, I wish I had a secretary, like that kind of thing. But the city only gives project funding, which is great except then you’re spending money to do a project that maybe otherwise you wouldn’t have done...

Receiving only project-based funding can hinder the creative process and affect the editorial choices of the artist who is creating the work. This is important, because an artist who may not want to do a project at this time may make the choice to do so, as it is unknown when the next opportunity will arise. This type of financial funding through project-based grants also provides no guarantee of actually receiving funding, and sometimes when it is granted it is not nearly enough to cover the costs involved. This is why some artists also rely on self-support to make their work a reality. Lorelai states that what is important is funding *quality* art:

The important thing is funding quality art. There’s need to support dance, but not EVERY dance. Why would you want to put everyone on the same playing field? Like interpretive/expressive dance, it can be all the same all the time, with no technique.

Monetary support from arts organizations and the city is not the only kind of support available. As notes by former Bodies in Motion dancer Jenna, there is also moral support from the local community. Lorelai stated that this type of feedback and support is ultimately what encourages her to keep going and continue to create pieces put together Bodies in Motion productions.

### *Bodies in Motion as a Professional Organization*

Becker discusses how the opportunities of artists are influenced by their orientation to their art world. Professionals are those who adhere to the conventions of their art world. Becker argues that mavericks are those who challenge the conventions of the art world, and often find their art world constraining. These artists may lose opportunities due to their orientation to the art world. So who is it that presents new and interesting work? Professionals do, as they still create new and different work that is within the boundaries of the art world. Mavericks can too, and they can sometimes become integrated into the professional art world if their unconventional work becomes accepted. This is something early modern dance undoubtedly faced when branching out from classical ballet.

Many participants stated that what makes Bodies in Motion a professional company is that the Artistic Director and choreographer, Lorelai, works with professional dancers for the productions. It was also stated by many participants that the way the organization is run, is done so in a very professional manner. Volunteer and audience member for Bodies in Motion, Samantha, stated that what makes Bodies in Motion a professional organization is “having an artistic vision, and the ability to carry out that artistic vision”. Long-time student and professional dancer with Bodies in Motion Julia had the following to say about what makes Bodies in Motion a professional organization:

Bodies in Motion creates work and productions on a regular basis, and supplies opportunities for established, emerging, and student dancers alike. It is also a home for a working choreographer with an artistic vision, and promotes artistic development in a small city.

Who qualifies as the artist in Bodies in Motion productions is apparent from participant responses. The artistic vision that participants discuss is that of Lorelai herself. The production process is carrying out that artistic vision. This statement from owner of affiliated studio



Hartford Dance Academy and choreographer, Shirley, about cooperation in the art world of Bodies in Motion expands on how Lorelai holds the position of artist:

I don't know that they all have to necessarily cooperate with each other, but they all have to cooperate with Lorelai. For instance, the person doing the sound might not have had to cooperate with the person creating the costumes, but Lorelai would be always, the sun in the solar system! All the planets don't need to revolve around each other, but they need to know where the sun is.

### *Change*

Becker argues that change is continuously happening in art worlds. He calls change that is so minimal that it goes unnoticed “drift”, and change that causes trouble in cooperative activity “revolutions”. When modern dance began to emerge, it caused trouble within the dance art world, as people had to learn to adapt to new conventions that were different from classical ballet. When that was happening, the dance art world can be thought of as having gone through a revolution.

Local artist Chloe who is involved within the Hartford art sphere, stated that in general, people have “become less fussy” and “more inclusive” when it comes to art. Former dancer with Bodies in Motion, Jenna echoes this when she notes that dance is a reflection of society in the following statement:

Time has also allowed for the fusion of culture and styles. It has allowed for boundaries to be pushed and new norms to be accepted. While some audiences gravitate to more traditional styles and stories- say, The Nutcracker by national ballet companies- others are more open minded to just about anything based on the modern times we live in, where younger generations are very accepting of difference.

Other participants had similar responses, acknowledging that dance has become more “multi-dimensional” and that it “reaches into different disciplines”. This raises the issue about

authenticity once again. What happens when aspects of art get lost or distinctions become blurred? For Lorelai, when technique gets lost is when the artistry of dance is compromised. She stated that modern dance “used to be a substantial sort of artistic work, but has lost a lot” because it “now is less about technique and more conceptually based about the individual”. Bodies in Motion dancer Carmen feels similarly, and finds this is partly because television shows have commercialized dance. She states that “before these shows became popular dance was still in the basics, people cared about technique and style and now all they want is flips and turns”.

Participants stated that what makes Bodies in Motion unique is Lorelai’s creativity and perspective. Lorelai stated that she likes her work to have a “timeless” quality to it, so “it still makes sense today”. She has work that was first choreographed for a student, and that same piece has since been performed by the same dancer recently as a professional. Choreographer and owner of Hartford Dance Academy, Shirley, also noted that Lorelai’s pieces change through the years. She states that some performances “have changed a lot, changed with the dancers, and changed with Lorelai’s outlook”. Hartford Dance Academy dancer Amelia feels similarly, she notes that Lorelai’s work is always evolving and growing with time and with who is involved. She stated the following:

I think it’s like an organic process. Because it just happens, it’s just what is necessary. But I think that is the really neat thing, you’re not expected to fit this cookie-cutter mold of this is what it is. And I appreciate that of Lorelai as a choreographer.

### *Reputation*

Becker argues that art worlds “routinely make and unmake reputations – of works, artists, genres and media” (Becker 1982, 352). He notes that reputations can be based on a work, artist,

genre, or media alone. But, in the end it is the collective activity of everyone involved in the art world that helps create, maintain, or dissolve reputations.

Bodies in Motion was found to have a very positive reputation. Many participants said that the work is “beautiful” and that of “quality”. When asked how Bodies in Motion compares to other local professional dance companies in the city, many participants stated that there are not any, or that they were unsure if any exist. Bodies in Motion dancer Carmen stated “I don’t believe there is anything else in Hartford to even compare to”. Other participants noted that there is one other professional company, but that they do not hire as many professional dancers as Bodies in Motion. There are also many positive reviews listed on Bodies in Motion’s website from previous productions, which compare the quality of work that Bodies in Motion produces with that of very well-known companies from larger cities.

In the broader context, many participants noted that Bodies in Motion is not very well known outside of the local sphere. Choreographer and owner of Hartford Dance Academy, Shirley, stated:

It’s certainly not that there’s no national reputation, but I think that only certain people are aware, and I think there would be a lot of people in the dance community and beyond that just wouldn’t know that it exists, which it exists. Which is sad, because it’s a really interesting company.

She suggests that a strong marketing team could help promote Lorelai’s work across the country, and that this could perhaps be the next step for Bodies in Motion. Former Bodies in Motion dancer Jenna has a similar perspective, she suggested the following:

I don’t think Bodies in Motion is alone in looking to grants for support. Therefore, I think more support needs to come in the form of artists looking to work with Bodies in Motion, which would strengthen the pitch for grants and would strengthen the turn-out at performances. Additionally, I think Bodies in Motion could work on marketing itself to broaden its reach, even just throughout eastern Canada, for a larger network to count on.

## B. Social Worlds and Social Types

The following section of the research uses Unruh's typology of social participants within social worlds to examine how they may be found within Bodies in Motion. Unruh notes that these social types are generalized and trans-situational (Unruh 1979, 115), so assigning social world participants to these categories is not clear-cut nor is it necessarily accurate. Unruh notes that this typology may be helpful in exploring why people interact with social worlds the way that they do.

### *Insiders*

Unruh describes insiders as possibly being “the owners and operators of certain settings, groups or organizations which serve as meeting places for social world activities” (Unruh 1979, 120). He also states that these people know the intimate details and workings of the social world. For Bodies in Motion, the Artistic Director and Choreographer Lorelai, as well as Choreographer and owner of Hartford Dance Academy Shirley may be considered the insiders of their social worlds. Other integral members that could be considered as such could be long-term supporters or dancers who have intimate knowledge of the social world. For insiders, their sense of identity strongly includes their social world. For Lorelai and Shirley, this is their livelihood and career. Unruh states that insiders “seek to control, direct, and create social world experience for others” (Unruh 1979, 121). Former Bodies in Motion dancer Jenna stated that “Bodies in Motion continues to look for ways to work with professional dancers to create new works and contribute to culture”. This creation of new work and contribution to culture is creating the social world experience for others. Intimacy is another characteristic that insiders share in their social worlds. The warmth participants had when speaking of Lorelai during interviews is testimony to this. The last characteristic for insiders listed by Unruh is recruitment. For Lorelai and Bodies in Motion, so much time and effort

goes into the promotion of productions. This allows for possible participants of the social world of Bodies in Motion to be recruited as audience members, future performers, board members, and sponsors.

### *Regulars*

Unruh states that regulars have long been the focus of many ethnographies. For Bodies in Motion, many of the regular audience members who support the organization, as well as students and potential future performers from Hartford Dance Academy could be considered regulars in this social world. It should be noted as well that members of the social worlds of both Bodies in Motion and Hartford Dance Academy are likely overlapping. There is overlap because Lorelai teaches at Hartford Dance Academy and has had students perform in productions. Regulars are characterized by their habituation to the art world. It was stated by Hartford Dance Academy dancer Amelia that “it almost has its own community” and “there’s one group of people who go to everything”. This emphasizes how the regulars have ongoing participation in the social world of Bodies in Motion. Integration as a characteristic of regulars can be seen in how those in the social world may feel at home and will make “adjustments” if something is going awry. For example, for Bodies in Motion, perhaps if an audience member was being disruptive during a show a regular would take it upon themselves to adjust the situation. Familiarity is also a characteristic associated with being a regular in a social world. Regular audience members that attend every show or students that attend class together are going to be familiar with one another. The last characteristic associated with being a regular in a social world is attachment. Unruh describes this as a “certain amount of commitment to the continuation of that social world’s activities’ (Unruh 1979, 120). For

Bodies in Motion regulars, this could be through regular support by attending shows, volunteering, or even making donations toward future productions.

### *Tourists*

Tourists in social worlds are those who are looking for the “essence” or “certain kind of experience” (Unruh 1979, 118) from that social world. Tourists are characterized by curiosity and their drive to become orientated to the social world. For Bodies in Motion, this could be audience members that go to a show for the first time just to try and see what modern dance is all about, but still looking for a particular kind of emotion or situation. For example, former Bodies in Motion dancer Jenna states that modern dance can be “confusing and potentially uncomfortable”. Hartford Dance Academy dancer Amelia also notes that sometimes modern dance can tackle controversial issues. If a person goes to a show expecting to see something completely taboo they may be disappointed. Relationships for tourists in social worlds are transient. These people tend to move on to another social world looking for new sources of entertainment. Perhaps in Hartford, they would try the local theatre company next.

### *Strangers*

Unruh states that strangers “approach a social world with an attitude of objectivity and detached indifference” (Unruh 1979, 116). For Bodies in Motion, this may be people outside of the dance world that have ideas and attitudes toward modern dance without really knowing anything about it. Strangers are characterized by naiveté, disorientation, superficiality, and detachment. It should be noted, that as there were not any complete strangers to modern dance participating in this research that this commentary about strangers is purely speculation. Naiveté related to Bodies in Motion could perhaps be seen in those who have witnessed a

children's recital, and then mistakenly compared a child's jazz routine to modern dance. Disorientation can happen when someone outside of the social world enters it for the first time. This is something experienced personally upon the first day of modern class at Hartford Dance Academy. Not knowing anything about modern dance while trying to participate in a modern dance class was a bit confusing. Strangers are further characterized as such by their superficial relationships. Many strangers may not want to become integrated into the social world, and prefer to remain detached. Unruh states that this detachment allows strangers to "acquire unique experiences and impressions of social worlds which differ radically from those of regular participants" (Unruh 1979, 118).

## VI. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When discussing strangers as a social type listed above, it is painfully obvious that a big limitation within this research is the lack of participants from outside the dance art world of Bodies in Motion. Local artist Chloe who participated in this research had taken dance when she was a child, where she was in a performing ensemble. She is a stranger to the Bodies in Motion art world, but not to the wider modern dance world. The rest of the participants are all familiar with Bodies in Motion productions, and Lorelai herself. It would be beneficial in future research to ask people outside of the art world what they think about Bodies in Motion, and topics surrounding art in the City of Hartford. Hartford Dance Academy dancer Amelia noted that she does not think other dance studios in the city are encouraging of their students seeing other dance. She stated that Shirley and Lorelai have always urged their students to see as much dance as possible. With this in mind, asking staff and students at other studios in the city of Hartford about Bodies in Motion and the local art sphere could prove to be useful. Former Bodies in Motion dancer Jenna, also suggested asking the people of Hartford what they would like to see as far as dance goes in the city. It should also be noted that the timeline for this project did not line up with the timeline for Bodies in Motion's next production. Had the length of the project been extended, observation of the creative process such as rehearsals, as well as watching the goings on during the days leading up to the production could have been beneficial.



## VII. CONCLUSION

Following the lack of research on art worlds using Becker's (1982) suggested framework for studying social organizations, this research provides an exploratory attempt at examining how participants of Bodies in Motion create and maintain the functioning of their art world. Looking at how the participants experience and make sense of their art world as suggested by the topics listed by Becker, has helped to answer the questions that guided the research discussed earlier. Applying Becker's framework to this ethnographic study of a local art world has shed light on how the final product comes into fruition from the collective action of a group of individuals. Used in conjunction with Becker's framework, Unruh's (1979) theory on social worlds and the types of participants in them help to understand why some participants are more closely involved in the goings on of Bodies in Motion than others. It also sheds light on why some people may not be involved in the social world of Bodies in Motion at all. Of course, to find out why the art world of Bodies in Motion and the social types within function the way they do, further research and analysis is necessary.

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Appendix A: Participant's Consent Form (observation)

I have listened to the description of the research project “An Inside Look at a Professional Dance Company” that is being undertaken by Marissa MacMillan for her Bachelor of Arts honours research at the University of New Brunswick. As explained to me by her, I understand the purpose of the project. With regards to the observation and recording of information gathered, I understand the following:

- Only the student researcher or her supervisor will have access to this information
- All identifying information will be kept confidential
- Pseudonyms (a change of name) will be used for all people, places and organizations
- The research data will be held with the student researcher's supervisor for one year after the termination of the project and will then be destroyed
- My participation in this project is voluntary
- I may withdraw my participation from this project at any time
- The information will only be used for the purpose of this research project
- I may request and receive a final copy of the report

I hereby consent to be observed and recorded to assist in this research, and to have this data be used in the student researcher's Honours Thesis. If I have any comments, suggestions, or concerns I may contact Dr. Burns at 648 5651. For more information, please contact the Dr. Lisa Best, Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick – Saint John at lbest@unb.ca or by phone at 848-1168.

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Participant's Signature

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Participant's Name

Appendix B: Participant's Consent Form (interview)

I have listened to the description of the research project "An Inside Look at a Professional Dance Company" that is being undertaken by Marissa MacMillan for her Bachelor of Arts honours research at the University of New Brunswick. As explained to me by her, I understand the purpose of the project. With regards to my participation in an interview and/or audio recording, I understand the following:

- My responses will be kept confidential
- Pseudonyms (a change of name) will be used for all people, places and organizations
- Only the student researcher or her supervisor will have access to this information
- The research data will be held with the student researcher's supervisor for one year after the termination of the project and will then be destroyed
- My participation is voluntary
- I am only obliged to provide information of my choosing
- The information will only be used for the purpose of this research project
- I may choose to be interviewed without the use of an audio recorder
- I may terminate the interview at any time
- I may request and receive a final copy of the report

I hereby consent to be interviewed to assist in this research, and to have my interview comments be used in the student researcher's Honours Thesis. If I have any comments, suggestions, or concerns I may contact Dr. Burns at 648 5651. For more information, please contact the Dr. Lisa Best, Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick – Saint John at lbest@unb.ca or by phone at 848-1168.

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Participant's Signature

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Participant's Name

## Appendix C: Email to Potential Participants

\*Please note that pseudonyms have been used here to protect the confidentiality of participants. In the actual email, the real names and places were used.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Marissa MacMillan, I am a sociology student at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John and I am doing a project on Bodies in Motion (BIM) for my Honours Thesis. The Artistic Director, Lorelai, has suggested I email you and see if you would be interested in answering some questions about (BIM).

First, here is a summary of the research project:

The proposed research will be: An Inside Look at a Professional Modern Dance Company.

This is an ethnographic study which looks to understand this professional modern dance organization from Hartford, Chilton. The research method I will use is qualitative and will follow a symbolic interactionist, theoretical approach. As the methodology is qualitative, the research must remain flexible and accommodating to achieve the best possible understanding of BIM's dance world. I am a student at the affiliated company's modern dance class that is taught by the Director of BIM, Lorelai. The research will use the participant-observer approach. Following acquiring consent, the data will be collected using observation and interviewing methods. The research participants can be those who are involved with the functioning of the dance company, (i.e., Artistic Director, board members, dancers, audience members, supporters, etc.).

The framework for the research is based on Howard Becker's "Art Worlds" (1982). The research seeks to use this framework to understand how the art of dance comes to be produced through networks of cooperative activity and conventional knowledge within the dance art world.

In an attempt to gather more information before the end of the month when I will be analyzing the data, I am sending a consent form and the questions I would ask in an interview through email. This is so everyone can have a chance to fill them out at their convenience. Please know that participation in the project is voluntary, and responses will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will also be used for all people and places.

If you are interested in participating in the project, please sign the provided consent form and fill out whatever you can on the list of questions attached.

Sincerely,

Marissa MacMillan