

Moving with Support: The Lives and Work of Independent Choreographers in Philadelphia

An undergraduate Honors thesis submitted to the Swarthmore College Department
of Sociology and Anthropology by

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Stylistic Note

The names of all interviewees and members of the Philadelphia dance community have been changed to guarantee the confidentiality of the information they shared with me. In quoting my interviewees, I have not cited them, as this is my original research. I added all emphases in these quotations to clarify the most relevant points for analysis. These emphases do not reflect the speaking patterns of the interviewees. All quotations from other authors are cited and the emphases appear as they do in the original text.

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Abstract

Independent choreographers pursue an unpaid vocation. Independent choreographers do not earn income from their choreography, but creating choreography is their calling and vocational identity. To support their costs of living and the expenses of creating their choreographic work, independent choreographers hold various flexible, low-paid jobs. They cope with the financial and psychological tensions of their precarious work through social support networks and a passion for their art. Though they are not paid for their choreography, choreographers maintain identities as “dance artists” through interactions with other artists. Making “work” and maintaining an artist’s identity becomes a social practice, not just a vocational practice. My research asks: How do today’s independent, contemporary choreographers find the means to accomplish their artistic work and what consequences does it have? What is the structure of the occupation and how does it relate to choreographers’ work, lives, and identities? How do choreographers perceive the purpose of their choreographic work? I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Philadelphia dance community for three months and interviewed 18 independent, contemporary choreographers to answer these questions.

Prologue

I have been taking dance classes since I was two-years-old, but I've never felt comfortable calling myself a dancer, even when others have called me a dancer. Some people's actual job is being a dancer, I thought in high school. I can't take that away from them by calling myself a dancer when it is not my job. At the end of high school, about to graduate from a performing arts program, I wondered what qualifications I would need to set for myself to feel comfortable with that label, dancer. Paid tickets, perhaps? Members of the general public had been paying money to see me and others perform in a civic ballet for close to ten years. So that must not be it. Then, perhaps, I would need to be paid for my work as a dancer, I decided. I had always volunteered to dance for the civic ballet. I could not identify as a dancer unless I was paid to dance. *That* is the definition of professional, my 18-year-old self reasoned, to be paid to dance.

Three years later, I choreographed, produced, and danced in my first professional performance as part of my research for this undergraduate sociology thesis. I did not personally receive any money for this.

“Am I a choreographer?” I wondered.

I still do not know the answer. I do not think I would understand the struggle of the identity work unpaid artists engage in unless I had experienced it myself.

During the spring of my freshman year of college, I took a course called The Arts as Social Change, taught by Professor Sharon Friedler. As part of the course, each student interned for a few hours each week at a local arts organization. Every Monday that semester, I took the train into Philadelphia and spent three hours working at Dance/USA Philadelphia. Dance/UP was a dance advocacy organization run by local dance artists that offered services, support, and a voice for dance in Philadelphia. This was my introduction to the Philadelphia dance community.

During breaks and quiet moments, I chatted with Dance/UP staff members, who all were engaged in choreography when they were not in the office. Dance/UP was eligible for more and larger grants than other dance organizations in the city because the organization was a branch of Dance/USA, a national dance advocacy nonprofit. Still, they relied on one large grant from a local funding institution. The institution had annually rewarded them this large grant and Dance/UP had come to depend on it. The staff recognized this dependency and expressed anxiety about it to me. As I was interning there, they were beginning to develop an organizational business model that would allow them to be more self-sustaining.

Later that year, in December 2014, I learned that Dance/UP would be closing in the spring. The institution providing its main financial support had not renewed Dance/UP's annual funding. The institution provided no warning or clear explanation; it's priorities had, simply, changed. In posts on Facebook, I saw the dance community reeling. That spring, Professor Jumatatu Poe invited me to a series of salons that his dance company was hosting for area artists to discuss challenges of the occupation and hopes for the dance community. I began meeting more dance artists. I listened intently to the collective struggles they discussed. The two discussions I attended circled back, again and again, to funding difficulties. I wondered why

these challenges were so established and how choreographers approached their occupation with the challenges it entailed. I wanted to learn more about choreographers' work and lives.

I decided to work on campus for eight weeks that summer and travel into Philadelphia to attend dance events when I was not working. I familiarized myself with the shows, showings, and classes of the Philadelphia dance scene. I had informal conversations with the choreographers I met, sometimes about funding challenges, sometimes about their work, and sometimes about daily life and dance shows they recommended. I observed and listened. One common thread remained clear throughout that summer: finding financial support to pursue choreography was a tremendous challenge.

I spent the last month of that summer studying abroad at an international dance festival in Vienna, Austria. I spoke to choreographers from all over the world. In our conversations, I made sure to ask what dance funding was like in the countries where they were working. All expressed an anxiety that finding funding was becoming more difficult, but of the choreographers I spoke to, choreographers from the U.S. experienced the most difficulty financially supporting their artistic work. Choreographers from Canada, Europe, and Australia expressed more hope at receiving grants and other forms of government support. It does not need to be this way for American choreographers, I thought. Why is it this way and how is the struggle for funding affecting choreography in the U.S.?

I began to explore these questions in Professor Steve Viscelli's Qualitative Methods course in the fall. I found Howard S. Becker's writing on 1950s jazz musicians in Chicago and applied his methods and findings to choreographers in Philadelphia. I attended and observed seven shows in the 2015 Philadelphia Fringe Festival and then interviewed three Philadelphia choreographers, one of whom had produced one of the shows that I had seen. Following Becker's finding that jazz musicians faced a pressure to "give in" to the desires of "squares" by altering the content of their work to appeal to outsiders for financial support, I focused my interview questions on choreographic content, the choreographic process, and perceptions of colleagues' work. Reviewing my transcriptions and field notes, I realized that the story of choreographers in Philadelphia wasn't about "giving in." There was no one to "give in" to, because, for the most part, choreographers were not being supported by those outside the occupation. They moved with support from within their own art world.

Conducting my fieldwork in Philadelphia during the summer of 2016, I learned that this is a story of support, of passion, of human connection. It is a story of coming together to pursue what, on the outside, seems impossible: an unpaid vocation. Independent choreographers in Philadelphia rarely receive outside financial support for their work, but they make it work. They make their work.

I would like to dedicate this project to all of the artists currently trying "to make it work."

Chapter 1: Introduction: Making it Work in an Unpaid Vocation

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia pursue what, on the outside, seems impossible: an unpaid vocation. Most independent choreographers identify as “dance artists,” but they are not paid for their choreographic work. To support their costs of living and the costs of making their art, choreographers hold a variety of low-paid, part-time jobs with scattered, flexible hours. This work structure allows them the time and money to make their art, which they consider to be their true work.

Initial Motivation and Questions for the Research

I began my research driven by a curiosity about the relationship between choreographers’ work and the funding structures supporting their work. I wanted to know how choreographers perceived their occupational role and how their lives and work might be influenced by potential forms of financial support. I knew from informal experiences and preliminary fieldwork in the Philadelphia dance community that independent choreographers frequently discussed their funding struggles with each other. It seemed to me that examining the potential relationships between funding and work would reveal something vital about the occupation. Though this curiosity drove me to pursue research on the occupation, I also wanted to deeply study the occupation as a whole, which previous scholars had not done. This led me to my primary research questions: (1) What is the structure of the occupation and how does it relate to choreographers’ work, lives, and identities? (2) How do today’s independent, contemporary choreographers find the means to accomplish their artistic work and what consequences does it have? (3) How do choreographers perceive the purpose of their choreographic work?

Methods

To investigate these questions, I lived in Philadelphia as an aspiring choreographer from late May 2016 to late August 2016. Like many young choreographers, I lived in West Philadelphia in a shared home with other young people as I worked multiple jobs with long, flexible hours. During the summer, I worked to choreograph and produce a show in the September 2016 Philadelphia Fringe Festival, managing both the creative and the logistical aspects of the performance. I received funding from Swarthmore College to cover the costs of my research, but producing the show involved unforeseen expenses that my grant was not able to cover. To offset these costs, I worked from home as research assistant for a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to producing the Fringe show and assisting with research, I worked full-time on my fieldwork. To spend time with friends, I invited them to attend dance events with me. Besides sleeping, cooking, and other household tasks, there was rarely a time when I was not working. By the end of the summer, like many of the young choreographers I interviewed, I was exhausted.

For the first seven weeks of the summer, I attended every contemporary dance event I was able to find – if it did not conflict with other dance events. I took field notes at these events and then transcribed them into thick descriptions as soon as possible after I returned home. These events included dance classes and workshops, improvisational dance events, rehearsals, auditions, professional development workshops and talks for artists, artistic networking events, social events, informal showings, free outdoor community performances, and formal performances. I first found these events published online in a public list of dance events at *PhiladelphiaDANCE.org*, as well as on Facebook. I also learned of events through the Fringe Festival's mailing list to Festival Artists. As I attended events, I learned about more events by

word-of-mouth. Dance artists suggested that I sign up for “the listserv,” which is an email list for dance artists that sends out daily email blasts with dance events in Philadelphia. I learned about a number of events through this email list. I also signed up for the mailing lists of choreographers, dance companies, and dance festivals in the city. Over the course of the summer, I participated in and observed 52 field sites.

I began conducting interviews after my first seven weeks of participant observations so that I would have a sense of the field before I began conversing in-depth with choreographers. I continued attending field sites after I began the interview process, though with less emphasis on attending every event possible and recording every detail of each event. In total, I interviewed 18 Philadelphia-area contemporary choreographers.¹ Most of my interviewees were white, cisgender women in their 20s and 30s. I began finding my pool of interviewees by reaching out to choreographers I had met at dance events and then emailing them to schedule an interview. My interviewees knew that I was interviewing them for my undergraduate sociology thesis on choreographers’ work and lives. Each of my interviewees recommended more choreographers for me to interview and shared their contact information with me. I emailed a total of 41 choreographers. Most were willing to be interviewed and happy to help me with my project. Only 14 choreographers never returned my email, and just one told me that she would not be able to be interviewed. Ten additional choreographers besides my 18 interviewees agreed to be interviewed, but we were not able to schedule interviews during the summer due to scheduling constraints. Choreographers lived incredibly busy lives.

Knowing that choreographers had very busy schedules, I asked them to choose when and where we would meet and told them that I would accommodate my schedule to their availability.

¹ See Appendix for detailed demographics.

I met them at casual coffee shops and cafés across the city during their breaks between jobs or on their occasional days off. Most of the time choreographers suggested meeting for tea or a light meal.² I interviewed three choreographers – whom I knew and trusted – at their homes. For choreographers with whom I had developed relationships, our interviews felt like casual conversations, albeit conversations that I directed. I often felt under the impression that the choreographers, who ranged from a couple years older than me to 29 years older than me, were imparting experiences in the field, and the wisdom that came with them, to me, a young dance artist. In casual conversation, I tried to keep my own aesthetic priorities neutral or find similarities between my interests and a choreographer’s interests, so that choreographers felt that we were on the same page within the field.

The dance field and dance in Philadelphia encompass a wide range of genres and aesthetic priorities. To narrow the subfield I studied to a specific segment of the art world, I chose to focus on contacting interviewees whose work fell within “contemporary” dance and choosing field sites related to “contemporary” dance. The exact meaning of the term “contemporary” is somewhat contested in the United States. When designing my field sites and contacting interviewees, I took it to mean dance styles stemming from modern dance, postmodern dance, ballet, and jazz that may be closely linked to one, but that do not exactly replicate a specific one of these techniques. Many choreographers and companies that I fit into the category of “contemporary” described themselves as creating “dance theater.” Many of my

² On two occasions, when I was meeting choreographers I did not know, I arrived at their chosen coffee shop early and ordered tea before finding a spot for the interview. When the choreographers arrived, upon seeing that I had ordered something, they quietly slipped into a seat at the table. At the beginning of the summer a lighting designer suggested that I tell choreographers I would buy them a cup of coffee when asking them for an interview, but I chose not to do this to avoid an imbalanced power dynamic in which interviewees felt obligated to tell me information.

interviewees also described their choreographic work as “experimental.” The term “contemporary” may be used to describe the work of current, independent avant-garde choreographers or it may be used to describe the work of more popular choreographers, who avant-garde choreographers often refer to as “commercial.” On both ends of the spectrum, contemporary choreographers create movement drawing on a combination of Western dance techniques.

For my research, I focused on studying the work and lives of independent, contemporary choreographers. I define independent choreographers as choreographers who create dance performances as independent artists, unaffiliated with external institutions. They may work for external institutions, like colleges or dance studios, but they are not paid for their choreography through these institutions. If independent choreographers choreograph for a company, it is for a company that they personally founded. These small companies are rarely able to pay their choreographers a living wage, if they are able to pay them at all.

Initial Findings

I began my research questioning how available funding structures might influence independent, contemporary choreographers’ work and lives. Midway through my fieldwork, I realized that it was the absence of available funding that lay in close relation to independent choreographers’ work, lives, and identities.

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia are not paid a livable income to choreograph. On the rare occasion that a producing institution or funder gives them money for their choreographic work, these choreographers often use the money they are paid to fund the expenses of future choreography. Most choreographers rely on self-production to show their choreography. They are responsible for organizing and paying for all of the production elements

of a show, including space, dancer stipends, set, costume, lighting and sound design and equipment, advertising, and any necessary production staff. Because most of their audience members are fellow low-income artists, independent choreographers must keep the ticket prices to their shows low. These low ticket prices do not begin to cover the expenses of choreography. It cost me \$1,500 to produce my small, volunteer-driven show in the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, and I made a little over \$100 from ticket sales on our sold-out show. This \$100 covered only the cost of renting the venue for four hours that evening.³

The number of theaters and producing institutions in Philadelphia has declined since the Recession of the late 2000s. A small number of theaters in Philadelphia offer to produce choreographers' work free of charge. They select these choreographers by application or by seeing their work in the community and reaching out to them. Many current independent choreographers dream about "being produced" by a theater, which they call a producing institution, or, in abbreviated form, a producer. If a producing institution offers to produce a choreographer's work, it will offer the choreographer, at the most basic level, the use of its performance venue, lighting equipment, and sound equipment free of charge. It will also staff the venue and provide ticketing services and some marketing. Most independent choreographers consider not having to pay these production expenses a huge boon and will be happy to have their work produced, even if they do not receive any ticketing revenue from their show. Many producers will offer to produce a choreographer's work as part of a showcase of a number of "emerging" choreographers. Young choreographers often pay a small fee when applying to be considered for the showcase. Audience members purchase tickets for these shows, but producing institutions rarely pay these emerging choreographers any part of the ticket revenue. A few of the

³ See Appendix for full expense list.

largest producing institutions will pay choreographers a lump sum, unrelated to ticket sales, if they offer to produce their work, but this sum does not generally pay choreographers a living wage for the number of hours that went into producing the show, particularly once choreographers' expenses have been deducted from the sum. For example, a large producing institution offered to produce a show that two young choreographers were creating in an extensive rehearsal process. It provided these choreographers with a venue, sound and lighting equipment, staff, ticketing, and marketing. The producer paid the two choreographers a total of \$4,000 for the show, but it cost these two choreographers \$6,000 to pay for costume design, set design, materials, and other expenses of creating the show.⁴ The stipend that producing institutions offer choreographers is rarely a living wage.

A small number of funding institutions, primarily independent foundations or local government offices, offer monetary grants for choreographers to create and produce their work. Most offer only an honorary amount of money. Some offer enough money to cover most expenses of producing a show. Very few grants will allow choreographers a stipend to create and produce their choreography, and this stipend rarely provides a living wage for the number of hours that go into creating and producing a show.

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia are not eligible for many grants, and few grants are available in comparison with the number of potential recipients. Many institutions

⁴ These two choreographers used their joint savings from paid artistic work and online, crowd-based fundraising to cover the \$6,000 it cost them to create their work. When they received the \$4,000 from their producer, they each took \$1,000 as income, and put the remaining \$2,000 in their joint bank account to put toward future artistic work. Even though they felt lucky to have "been produced," they began creating the show with \$4,000 in their joint bank account and ended the process with just \$2,000 in their joint bank account. The \$1,000 they each received as income for the project covered just over two-and-a-half hours of work per week for one year at minimum wage. Based on their performance and my interview with one of these choreographers, I know that they spent much more time than this working to create the show.

require artists to have 501(c)3 nonprofit tax-exempt status to be eligible to apply for a grant. Most independent choreographers in their 20s and 30s do not have the money, time, or expertise to be able to apply for this status. In addition, few choreographers are willing to change the priorities of their projects to fit the priorities of institutional grants. Most choreographers have given up on receiving grants and do not apply to them, explaining that it is difficult to find grants that are “a good match.” Many choreographers say that with the small chance they have of receiving a grant, it is not worth it for them to take on the significant time commitment to apply for grants.

To financially support their personal expenses and their choreographic work, while still allowing enough time to make their choreography, choreographers hold a variety of flexible, part time jobs, working long, scattered hours for relatively little pay. These jobs may include teaching dance, yoga, or Pilates, working as bartenders or baristas, or performing administrative work for businesses or arts organizations. When asked what their ideal income would be, choreographers often say that they would love to be able to make 30,000 dollars per year, but most make much less than this. All independent choreographers have, at minimum, a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Some have Bachelor of Arts degrees from small liberal arts colleges, and a smaller number have Master of Fine Arts degrees. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, the median income for individuals who are 25-years-and-older with a Bachelor’s degree in Philadelphia is 44,650 dollars per year. The choreographers I interviewed who revealed their incomes told me that they made between 11,000 and 30,000 dollars per year. They did not earn this income from their choreographic work. Because independent choreographers do not earn income from their artistic vocation, a tension between making art and making money permeates most aspects of their lives.

Analytical Questions and Method of Analysis

My preliminary findings led me to ask the following questions, which I used to analyze my data: How do independent, contemporary choreographers cope with the tensions of an unpaid vocation? Why do they continue to pursue an unpaid vocation?

I fully transcribed six interviews and coded three of them for recurring themes using the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. Referring to my two primary analytical questions, as well as my first guiding question on the structure of the occupation, I then simplified my coding scheme to code the six fully transcribed interviews for four main themes: work structure, money, social networks, and artistic philosophy. I grouped interview excerpts into these four categories to identify trends among my interviewees' references to work structure, money, social networks, and artistic philosophy. I then linked notes from my remaining 12 interviews and from my experiences in the field to my simplified coding scheme.

The work structure of the occupation reflected the preliminary findings of my fieldwork and interviews: most independent, contemporary choreographers are not paid for their choreographic work. They financially support their costs of living and the expenses of their artistic work through a variety of part-time jobs with scattered hours. After analyzing my interviews, I learned that this work structure created a tension between making art and making money that permeated all aspects of independent choreographers' lives. They coped with this tension through strong social support networks formed with their colleagues. They continued to pursue an unpaid vocation because they felt a strong calling to their artistic work. Choreography was their way of understanding their lives and communicating with others. Though they were not paid for it, choreography was their true work.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis

I further analyzed my data using theoretical frameworks drawn from Max Weber, Everett C. Hughes, Howard S. Becker, and Robin Leidner. I use these frameworks to understand why choreographers are drawn to an unpaid vocation, how they sustain the pursuit of an unpaid vocation, and how they maintain a work identity when work identity is most often recognized as an identity with paid work.

In *Science as Vocation*, Weber describes academics as experiencing a calling to their vocation. This calling is an inward drive, motivating them to continue pursuing the vocation despite its challenges (Weber 1946:134). Independent choreographers experience the same vocational calling as Weber's academics. In pursuing their shared calling and the challenges it entails, independent, contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia have formed a vocational lifestyle. Weber emphasizes the primacy of style of life in the formation of occupational status groups that are linked by life circumstances, conceptions of honor, and a communal feeling of belonging ([1951] 1994:113-121). Independent choreographers' style of life revolves around the activities of the vocation. In *The Study of Occupations* Hughes shows that each occupation is comprised of a specific bundle of activities:

Most occupations consist of a number, a bundle, of activities. Some may be bundled together because they require similar skills; others, simply because they can conveniently be done at one place, or because taken alone they do not occupy a man's full time; still others, because they are, or seem to be, natural parts of a certain role, office, or function. ([1951] 1994:30).

Each activity in a choreographer's vocation is linked to the creation of a choreographic work of art. Following Hughes, Becker recognizes that each worker involved in the creation of a work of art will have a specific "bundle of tasks" (Becker 1982:9). Each of the activities in an artistic vocation builds toward producing works of art.

An art world is comprised of each of the people involved in making a work of art and setting its aesthetic priorities (Becker 1982:34). Becker writes that art worlds form in the routinization of the cooperative “patterns of collective activity” necessary to produce a work of art (Becker 1982:1). In studying art worlds, Becker did not focus on the art itself that was produced, but rather on “art as the work some people do” (1982:ix). Like Becker, I have applied the sociology of occupations to artistic work (1982:xi). Becker used this application to more deeply understand art worlds and their systematic implications across art disciplines (1982:x). I have drawn on Becker’s approach to specifically zoom in on the patterns of cooperation among independent choreographers in Philadelphia. The activities, relationships, and institutions in these choreographers’ art worlds touch all aspects of their lives. Because independent choreographers are pursuing an unpaid vocation, their art world is infused with the tensions caused by trying to both make art and make money.

In addition to causing financial tension, pursuing an unpaid vocation causes tension in identity. In *Work and Self*, Hughes stresses that, “work is one of the most important parts of [a person’s] social identity” ([1951] 1994:57). By work, Hughes is referring to paid work. Independent choreographers do not base their identities on the paid jobs they take as financial support, but rather on their unpaid vocational calling.

In light of current precarious work structures, Leidner draws on work and identity scholarship, beginning with Durkheim, Weber, and Marx and spanning to as recent as 2006, to reconsider Hughes’s emphasis on the centrality of work identity in the formation of social identity (2006:424). In this reconsideration, Leidner emphasizes recent changes in the organization of work that are linked to broader changes in societal organization and culture (2006:425,429). Instead of belonging to a community that determines one’s identity, “people

must choose who to be,” she writes (2006:429). Leidner draws on contemporary theorists to question whether recent increases in work instability will go hand in hand with the destabilization of work identity. “Are other kinds of work-based identities available?” she asks (2006:452). In her recent research, Robin Leidner found that stage actors in Philadelphia and New York sustained stable work identities despite pursuing a precarious, often unpaid, vocation. To maintain their identities as actors, stage actors engage in identity work through their interactions with other actors and through their conception of self (2016:29).

In her understanding of identity work, Leidner draws on David A. Snow and Leon Anderson’s definition of identity work as, “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (1987:1348). When each activity of a precarious or unpaid vocation is carried out in a way that maintains workers’ vocational identity, pursuing the vocation becomes a method of identity work.

By supporting each other in their vocational activities, members of an art world, maintain artistic identities. Becker explains that artists work together to develop a sense of worth in their artistic work:

...the interaction of all the involved parties produces a shared sense of the worth of what they collectively produce. Their mutual appreciation of the conventions they are, and the support they mutually afford one another, convince them that what they are doing is worth doing. If they act under the definition of “art,” their interaction convinces them that what they produce are valid works of art (1982:39).

In each of their interactions within an art world, artists uphold the worth of their collective actions. In doing so, they also uphold the worth of their identities as artists.

Independent choreographers are drawn to their unpaid vocation through an inwardly driven calling, and in pursuing their unpaid vocation, they develop a unique style of life (Weber 1946:134, Weber [1946] 1994:113-121). This style of life interacts with their vocation’s “bundle

of activities” (Hughes [1951] 1994:30). Each of these activities builds toward producing a choreographic work of art, and each artist carrying out these activities is a member of the art world. The art world is comprised of social support networks that enable choreographers to continue pursuing choreographic work, despite the tensions of an unpaid vocation.

Choreographers maintain artistic identities by infusing identity work into the interactions and activities of their art world. By supporting each other, choreographers support the worth of their choreography and their identities as choreographers (Becker 1982, Leidner 2016).

Overview of the Work

Choreographers cope with the financial and psychological tensions of an unpaid vocation through social support networks and a passionate calling for their art. Independent, contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia rarely earn income from their choreographic work. In Chapter 3, I show that in order to financially support both themselves and their art, independent choreographers often work multiple part-time jobs with scattered hours. Their schedules are busy, taking them across the city for numerous occupational obligations within the course of one day. The flexibility in their schedules allows them to block off time to rehearse with other artists. This is when they make their work.

In Chapter 5, I discuss that though few independent choreographers are paid for it, making the work is their passion, their primary vocational practice. They are driven toward creativity, toward movement, toward expression and sharing. With their work, they connect with others. With flexibility comes financial uncertainty, but flexibility is the path toward making the work. A tension between making art and making money permeates all aspects of independent choreographers’ lives.

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia face this struggle together. Working in the Philadelphia “dance scene” connects choreographers to a “dance community.” Chapter 4 analyzes the intricacies of the social support networks within independent, contemporary choreographers’ art worlds. These choreographers work and live together in cooperative spaces, they dance for each other with little or no pay, they connect each other to job opportunities, and they see each others’ shows. They give each other emotional support and host open discussions and salons to collectively imagine strategies for living with the challenges they all face. They make it work.

Independent choreographers have been making it work since they began creating modern choreography in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The following chapter traces the unpaid vocation from the late 1800s through the 1980s as independent choreographers have established a style of life around the methods of alternative support necessary to pursue their artistic work. At very few times during the 20th century have independent modern, postmodern, or contemporary choreographers in the U.S. been able to make a living through choreography alone. Throughout the 20th century, independent choreographer have relied on paid jobs to financially support their costs of life and the expenses of creating choreography. Driven by their artistic calling, they have developed strong social support networks within their art world that have allowed them to sustain a precarious vocation for over a hundred years.

Chapter 2: Making the Work: Independent Choreographers in the 20th Century United States

Since the beginning of the 20th century independent choreographers working in the United States have found creative ways to make a living while also pursuing their art. Hughes emphasizes that the activities and functions of an occupation are “historical products” that are grouped and allocated to specific occupations in “a fundamental social process” ([1951] 1994:33). Pursuing choreography as an independent artist has been established as an unpaid vocation over the course of the 20th century. During brief periods, independent choreographers have been able to earn money from touring their choreography or receiving monetary grants to create their choreography, but, for the most part, independent modern, postmodern, and contemporary choreographers have relied on paid jobs to financially support their art and their costs of living. Over more than a hundred years, choreographers have developed a “bundle of activities” within their artistic vocation that includes not only creating art, but also acting as members of social support networks and pursuing flexible paid employment in addition to choreography. Independent choreographers’ aesthetic priorities have shifted over time, but the tension between making art and making money has remained a constant struggle of the vocation. This chapter traces the development of independent choreographers’ unpaid vocation alongside the changing forms of the tension between making art and making money.

Until the late 19th century, much of high-art theatrical dance in the United States was derived from dance forms originally created for stages in Europe (Ruyter 1979:3-15). For the most part, this dance was performed on theatrical stages and supported through commercial means. The U.S. public was familiar with two main forms of dance – ballet and show dancing

(McDonagh 1970:10). This began to change at the turn of the 20th century with the work of independent choreographers.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Loie Fuller began adapting historically low-art popular entertainment performance practices to fit the high-art stage of theatrical dance performance (Banes 1980:1). She used elements of vaudeville to create a spectacle of twirling skirts and colored lights. Fuller primarily performed her work in Europe, where she earned social and commercial success (McDonagh 1970:14, Reynolds and McCormick 2003:10). Fuller's work began to bring non-balletic dance outside the context of vaudeville performance, which was geared more toward popular entertainment than toward artistic presentation. Though the form of her work broke from show dance, Fuller "reveled in [commercial theater] and its technical effects" (McDonagh 1970:18). Fuller focused on the form of images created in a performance and shied away from virtuosic technique and emotional expression (Banes 1980:2). Fuller developed a unique technique and organized a dance troupe and school in Europe, but "left no viable school or followers to carry on her methods" (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:9).

Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis followed Fuller as the next American choreographers to create non-balletic, high-art theatrical dance in the United States. Duncan began showing her own work in 1897 and St. Denis followed in 1904 (Ruyter 1979:57). Though the two choreographers differed in the philosophical approaches to their work, the structures of their careers shared similarities (Ruyter 1979:58). Both Duncan's and St. Denis's work was inspired by American Delsartism, which was a method of physicalizing expression popular among educated members of the middle- and upper-classes in the late 19th century United States (Ruyter 1979:17-18). This inspiration connected them to upper- and middle-class audience members, who began to respect their choreographic work. They both, however, experienced their initial

independent success in Germany. Duncan spent most of her career in Europe, performing in the U.S. on occasion. St. Denis performed in Europe between 1906 and 1909, but after gaining a European reputation, she built a successful career in the United States (Ruyter 1979:64-65), while Duncan chose to remain in Europe.

Like Fuller, Duncan and St. Denis both had roots in vaudeville and theatrical performance. Unlike Fuller, they each chose to deviate from the genre's technical form in their own choreography. They both formed schools and companies founded in their respective techniques. Duncan's movement ideologies were not "easily transmitted except in her own enthusiastic presence" (McDonagh 1970:14). She prioritized art-making first and then figured out how to make a living – most frequently, by asking patrons for support. St. Denis, on the other hand, worked to integrate her technique and choreography into a commercial model, in which revenue from teaching and vaudeville entertainment supported her artistic work.

Though wealthy "society patrons" supported both Duncan's and St. Denis's first independent work (Ruyter 1979:57), the two developed different relationships to financial support, both stemming from a tension between making art and making money. Duncan, disillusioned by the commercial dance theater work available on Broadway in New York City, first supported herself by performing in the home salons of wealthy society women (McDonagh 1970:11-13). Duncan prioritized making her art over making money. She often found herself broke (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:10), and relied on patronage for financial support:

Duncan begged money from society ladies and from rich lovers, and she ran out on debts whenever she found it convenient. In contrast, St. Denis and Shawn consciously worked for every penny they used. Their standards were much more acceptable in America than were Duncan's (Ruyter 1979:70).

St. Denis initially relied on patrons and jobs in vaudeville for financial support, but eventually gained commercial success through her company and school, Denishawn (McDonagh 1970:21).

Denishawn's touring and teaching provided St. Denis with a precarious source of income, but ultimately alienated many of her students and company members with its prioritization of generating money to support St. Denis's choreographic work.

St. Denis's U.S. career revolved around Denishawn, which she used to fund and promote her work. St. Denis's appropriation of non-Western dance and her outspoken connection to spirituality appealed to the middle-class American public. Her work had just the right combination of intrigue, morality, and entertainment to garner the widespread appeal that sparked Denishawn's success:

For a dance to become established in this country, two things were necessary: to interest the American public in it and to overcome the moral prejudice against it. It had to be both attractive and "nice." Then, a cycle had to be initiated in which more people would see dance and like it, more would study it, and more would choose it as a career—thus creating more performers who would in turn introduce it to more people and continue the cycle. Ruth St. Denis launched such a cycle. (Ruyter 1979:66)

St. Denis initiated this cycle in American modern dance through the school and company she founded with Ted Shawn. Dancer Ted Shawn first saw St. Denis's work in 1910. It left an impression on him. In 1914 Shawn reached out to St. Denis and they began working together. In 1915, they formed a company, Denishawn, which toured the U.S. vaudeville circuit and eventually made it to high-art stages around the world. St. Denis and Shawn relied on revenue from the company's commercial touring routes and on the Denishawn School to support their artistic endeavors (Van Dyke 1992:5). The Denishawn School trained many members of the next generation of American modern choreographers. Unlike Fuller and Duncan, St. Denis was able "to produce a line of succession" through the legacy of the Denishawn School (McDonagh 1970:14, 21-22). By teaching and touring their work, St. Denis and Shawn established national recognition of modern dance (Ruyter 1979:67).

Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman studied at Denishawn and then left to work as independent artists before establishing their own companies. One reason that Humphrey and Weidman left Denishawn was the tension they felt from the capitalization of commercial entertainment as a means of supporting Denishawn's artistic endeavors (Van Dyke 1992:5). The modernists leaving Denishawn rejected its "crowd-pleasing artifice" and, "(for the most part) the financial security that vaudeville and the Broadway musical theater might offer" in favor of the pursuit of "the authentic spirit of dance" (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:142).

Sacrificing relative comfort, they felt called to choreography as a way of life:

Modern dance was a state of mind as much as it was an art of expressive movement. Choreographers tended to think of themselves as vessels or instruments of the dance as a social force. They embraced the personal hardships this stance entailed with even more fervor than their German forerunners, willingly giving over their lives to their artistic preoccupations, and they expected no less of the people working for them, in whom they inspired an almost adoring loyalty and unswerving allegiance to their point of view. This led to insularity and cultism, which sometimes spilled over into audiences as well. To be a member of that inner circle, the performing group, meant pitching in to do the chores that made performances possible: creating publicity, sewing costumes, building and painting scenery, driving a bus—all while holding down jobs that left evenings and weekends free for classes and rehearsals. Such commitment and idealism were basically positive factors that flowed into the substance and texture of the choreography that emerged. Dancers were convinced that what they were doing was important, and neither shabby surroundings nor tiny audiences diminished their sense of mission (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:142-143).

The modernists cemented this artistic commitment and way of life – begun by Isadora Duncan and earlier German expressionists – for a century of independent choreographers to follow. In their rejection of Denishawn's commercial success, they created a culture around coping with the tension of both making art and making money. An art world in which all members "pitched in" to complete the activities of creating a performance for little or no pay became the norm. To be able to accomplish these tasks, it became necessary for choreographers to take on scattered, part-time paid jobs that would allow them time for all of the activities of choreography. In these activities, choreographers interacted to maintain their sense of occupational worth.

Independent choreographers across the country experienced a precarious lifestyle balancing making art and making money. In 1922, teenage Lester Horton decided to pursue a career in dance after seeing a performance by Denishawn at a tour stop in his Indiana hometown (Warren 1977:8). Horton began his studies at a local dance school before joining a touring company led by a former member of Denishawn, Forrest Thornburg, in 1925 (Prevots 2012:1, Warren 1977:10). After the tour, Horton moved to Indianapolis where he worked multiple part-time jobs to support himself and pay for further training in ballet. He began to work in performance and impressed a patron who decided to pay his tuition at the John Herron Art Institute and support him through school. In 1927, Horton moved to Chicago where he worked part-time paid jobs to support himself as he began to choreograph (Warren 1977:10-20). Horton then moved to California, where social networks of fellow artists supported both his paid and artistic work (Warren 1977:21-23).

Horton choreographed and performed independently before founding his own company in 1932 in Los Angeles (McDonagh 1976:81). His first works focused on presenting aspects of and stories from Native American culture (McDonagh 1976:81). Horton developed his own technique, and in 1948 opened a dance school and theater in a warehouse in West Hollywood. Dance Theater both trained dancers and produced frequent performances with relatively low-cost tickets (Prevots 2012:3). Horton financially supported the company through commercial work in Hollywood (Warren 1977:149). Horton experienced intense stress from the tensions of both making artistic work and finding ways of financially supporting it. He died of a heart attack in 1953 at age 47 (Warren 1977:190).

When Graham left Denishawn in 1923, she first worked in dance entertainment before beginning to show her own choreography (McDonagh 1970:24-25). Graham's work focused on

expression and narrative. Like Duncan, St. Denis, and Shawn, Graham founded her own company and school. She also developed a modern dance technique founded in specific movement principles. She utilized this technique in her choreography and taught it in her school. Like St. Denis and Shawn, Graham used revenue generated from her school to pay the costs of producing her choreographic work, eventually receiving grants, fellowships, and patronage.

Unlike St. Denis and Shawn, Graham prioritized making art over making money. Though Graham was financially supported by patrons and relative commercial success, she “still endured severe financial difficulties” (Van Dyke 1992:10). These financial difficulties were especially challenging during the Depression:

“Since there was no possible way of solving the problem, Graham worked out a way to ignore it. She simply refused to consider money in any serious way to what she was doing. Her attitude was that if one devoted oneself to modern dance for the money, then one was in it for the wrong reason. She gave her dancers whatever payment she could, but she relied on personal loyalty, not a paycheck, as the cement to keep her organization together. That attitude never changed in her mind. To discuss money was to betray art, and later in her career, when substantial sums were available for her company, she still refused to consider money of any importance. Her simple view was: Crusaders don’t expect paychecks.” (McDonagh 1973:88-89)

Many independent choreographers in Philadelphia today have a similarly fraught relationship with money. Some choreographers choose not to think about money except when necessary while for others money is an almost constant worry. This stems from a tension between both making art and making money. Though independent choreographers in Philadelphia wish they could be paid to create choreography full time, they accept that they will not likely earn income from their choreographic work, so they create alternative methods of support. Sometimes this involves not paying their collaborators or themselves and instead relying on social ties to support their artistic work. To support themselves, contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia hold a variety of low-paid jobs with flexible hours.

During the Depression, dancers and choreographers often lived in poverty and relied on other jobs or on wealthy patrons for financial support. Choreographers worked part-time at their paid jobs and were not often able to keep these jobs during company tours. When not in rehearsal or working, dancers and choreographers were expected to keep up with a variety of other commitments. Between these activities and rehearsals, choreographers' paid work needed to be flexible (Van Dyke 1992:7). Dance artists only sometimes received pay to perform, and if they did it was very little. They hoped to develop unions, but they realized that the field was not able to generate enough revenue for unionization. As Van Dyke explains:

“As the field developed throughout the 1930s, dance artists hoped to unionize and gain a living wage. Slowly, however, it became clear that individualism and social relevance, which were keystones of the new aesthetic, would not draw the general audience in large enough numbers to avoid seasonal financial deficits. Modern dance gained respect and attention as an art during the decade, but the income it generated would not, on the whole, support a union pay scale” (1992:8).

Like contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia, modernist choreographers of the 1930s realized that their audiences were too small and too connected to the dance community for them to be able to make revenue from ticket sales. In both eras, choreographers held additional paid jobs and relied on support from social networks to be able to continue pursuing choreography. None of the choreographers I spoke to expressed any thoughts of unionization.⁵

In the 1940s and 1950s, unionized Graham company dancers “were paid for performance and for two weeks of rehearsal before each yearly New York season” (Van Dyke 1992:9). Dancers received salaries for tours, but used part of these salaries to pay for company housing. They held other jobs and danced for other choreographers when not rehearsing with Graham. Newer independent choreographers were not unionized and paid dancers only for performances.

⁵ The Martha Graham company did eventually unionize with the American Guild of Musical Artists. It is still a member of this union, along with major ballet companies and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (The American Guild of Musical Artists 2016:7).

Even when dancing for Graham, unionized dancers would sacrifice pay to allow the work to meet its artistic goals (Van Dyke 1992:9-10).

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia must often choose between making payments necessary to produce the choreography – most importantly, space – and making payments to dancers. Because the community is close and so many dancers are looking for performance exposure, dancers are willing to dance for little or no pay, often with the expectation that the choreographer will do the same for them, if needed. Like Graham and other modern choreographers, contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia are often only able to pay dancers a performance stipend. The stipend may come from money choreographers earn in their other jobs, and is often an honorary amount that does not pay a living wage for the hours dancers spend in rehearsal. Like dancers and choreographers of the Depression era, dancers and choreographers in Philadelphia today are willing to sacrifice pay in order to do the work.

Federal and local monetary grants for choreography began to gain prevalence in the wake of the Depression. According to Jan Van Dyke, in the 1940s, “the concept of a grant had yet to be developed. Choreographers depended heavily on private patronage and volunteers” (1992:10). In the 1950s this began to change:

Starting in the 1950s, many artists in the older modern tradition had begun to enjoy the endorsement and patronage of universities and arts organizations along with intermittent support from the State Department, which sent them to various parts of the world as “cultural ambassadors.” As such, Graham, Limón, Ailey, and others could be seen as “establishment” figures (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:392).

This began the expansion of governmental and institutional support for dance, which grew until it began to wane in the late 20th century. During the summer of 2016, most of my interviewees had given up hope that they would receive a grant if they applied to one, and, as a result, had stopped applying. Eligible choreographers in need of grant money far outnumbered the number grants and amount of grant money available to independent choreographers in the city, they told

me. Independent choreographers in Philadelphia did, however, continue to rely on university support for teaching jobs and occasional commissions to share work or set work on students. This tradition of university support began in the early 20th century.

Universities and colleges began to form collaborations with modern choreographers the late 1920s as the study of dance grew in higher education. This relationship continues today. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm gained recognition and monetary support in the 1930s by teaching dance at Bennington College (Thomas 1995:111). The Bennington program helped establish the American University dance system and also contributed to the legitimization of modern dance in U.S. society (Thomas 1995:113-114). Ruyter calls universities and colleges “the most important patrons of modern dance,” because they employ professional dancers and choreographers, train dance students, and sponsor performances (1979:126). Many choreographers in Philadelphia today rely on this support from local institutions of higher education.

With modern dance companies touring, establishing schools, and working with colleges and universities, modern dance had become better known in the United States by the 1930s. Government agencies and private foundations began supporting dance. “Small but significant dance projects were funded by the federal government under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the late 1930s,” writes dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter (1979:126). In 1935, in response to the Great Depression, President Roosevelt’s five billion dollar relief program led to the establishment of the WPA. Harry Hopkins directed the WPA, which allowed people who could not find work in the private sector to apply to the WPA to be placed in a job. Hopkins included the arts as an employment sphere, and emphasized that artists should be employed in their respective fields to enhance arts accessibility in the country. Dance became a project under

the Federal Project Number One. Modern dance choreographer Helen Tamiris led this process and then chaired the Dance Association. The project had a \$155,00 budget “over six months to employ 185 dancers and to mount eight productions” (Thomas 1995:120-121). The Dance Project faced problems, was not able to accomplish the above goals, and merged as a unit of the New York Theatre Project in 1937 after Congress voted to cut the budget of the WPA’s Federal Theater (Thomas 1995:122-123). While it existed, the WPA’s Dance Project contributed to the development of U.S. modern dance by supporting choreographic productions, collaborations between choreographers and composers, and experimentations in solo work (Thomas 1995:125). In 1943, after unemployment eased in the wake of World War II, President Roosevelt ended the WPA (Zeigler 1994:8). After this, the federal government offered only minor financial support for the arts until the National Endowment for the Arts was established in the early 1960s (Zeigler 1994:8-9).

Katherine Dunham became the director of the WPA’s Chicago Federal Dance Theater in 1938 (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:341). Dunham is a unique and revolutionary figure in American modern dance history in that she worked both as choreographer and dancer *and* as an academic anthropologist – as a Black woman whose career began in the 1930s. The WPA funded her choreographic and anthropological work in the late 1930s (Beckford 1979:42-43). In the mid-1930s she was awarded a Rosenwald grant to perform fieldwork studying dance in Caribbean countries, with a particular focus on Haiti (Aschenbrenner 2002:44-45). She applied the findings of her research both to her anthropological work and to the development of her modern dance technique.

Dunham first studied dance at the high school she attended in the Chicago suburb where she was raised (Aschenbrenner 2002:13). She moved to Chicago in 1928 to attend the University

of Chicago, where she would earn Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in Anthropology. Dunham continued studying dance and performing, soon beginning to teach dance (Aschenbrenner 2002:25-26). Just as in Philadelphia today, finding space to teach and choreograph was difficult, but it was even more difficult for Dunham as a Black woman. She tried to form a Black dance company, but without funding or commissions the company disbanded. Dunham struggled to gain acceptance as Black dancer and choreographer, as African-Americans were excluded from performing ballet and other white-dominated techniques considered "European." Dunham began developing her own modern dance technique to combat this exclusion (Aschenbrenner 2002:25-28).

Upon returning from her research in the Caribbean, Dunham decided to prioritize her career as a dancer and choreographer over her career as an academic. She struggled to find the space and money to start a dance company and school. Dunham was able to earn some income by publishing her anthropological writing, both through the WPA and through *Esquire* magazine (Aschenbrenner 2002:105-113). In addition to conducting original research as one of the first dance anthropologists in the U.S., Dunham danced and choreographed on Broadway and in Hollywood. With these three paid pursuits, Dunham was able to support herself as a choreographer. In addition to her groundbreaking choreographic work, this feat makes Dunham's career particularly unique.

The students of Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, Dunham, and Horton formed their own techniques, schools, and companies. Despite the increase in choreographers, Sally Banes writes that, "The late 1940s and early '50s were not creative years in modern dance" (1980:5). She attributes this to, "the death of the WPA Federal Dance Project, the Second World War, and then the cultural conservatism of the Cold war years..." (Banes 1980:5). According to McDonagh, the

institutionalization of modern dance that led to its success in the 1930s and 1940s stifled it in the 1950s:

“The modern dance world had struggled for recognition through the thirties and forties and had achieved what it set out to do, but there was no one in sight who seemed capable of significantly extending the body of work that had been created. The wars for academic and performing respectability had been won by institutionalizing modern dance also had stultified its choreographic spontaneity” (1970:32).

In opposition to Banes’s and McDonagh’s views, Van Dyke interprets the 1950s as a time of maturation for the company dancers who had studied with the modernists, in which this next generation of dancers established their own choreographic careers. These choreographers refined techniques, theatrical styles, and expressive movement and in the process built respectability for the field (Van Dyke 1992:10-11).

Merce Cunningham studied and performed with Graham for six years before leaving the company in 1945 to focus on his own choreography (McDonagh 1970:55, Banes 1980:5). Unlike the previous generation of choreographers, who focused primarily on expressive movement and narrative, Cunningham took a formalist approach to choreography. Cunningham focused on the “presence” of the “pure movement” of choreography rather than on the meaning the movement might be used to convey (McDonagh 1976:281, 1970:54). His choreographic work was neither attached to music nor to story (McDonagh 1970:54). He began collaborating with John Cage in 1942, and his choreographic principles were closely aligned with Cage’s compositional principles (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:355, Banes 1980:6). The dance world initially responded to Cunningham’s work with hostility and shock (Van Dyke 1992:11, McDonagh 1970:52).

Cunningham financially supported his initial work as an independent choreographer by performing at universities and by teaching. After leaving Graham’s company, Cunningham drove around the U.S. with Cage, touring to colleges and universities where they gave “joint

concerts of solo dances and piano music” (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:357). Reynolds and McCormick write that this is how the two earned a living and supported their artistic work:

“This activity, combined with teaching, provided their main income, from which they financed yearly concerts of solo and group works in New York. In biographical notes Cunningham speaks with some bitterness of the rudeness of uncomprehending audiences, his meager finances, and the discomfort of living and working in unheated lofts during this period.” (2003:357)

Like contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia, Cunningham used his income from teaching and university work to fund the performances of his choreographic work. He also used his home as an alternative dance space, living in a New York studio-loft where he taught and gave concerts (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:357). Independent choreographers in Philadelphia today employ these same strategies to survive and make art.

University support was instrumental in the launch of Cunningham’s choreographic career. Black Mountain College invited Cage and Cunningham to perform in 1947. The “experimental, nonaccredited institution” was not able to pay them at the time, but invited them back to teach during the summer of 1948 (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:358). Cunningham officially founded his company, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, in 1953 at Black Mountain College (Merce Cunningham Trust 2017). He borrowed money to form a group of seven artists, including himself and Cage, and perform for one week at a small, off-Broadway theater.

The community surrounding the Merce Cunningham Dance Company shares similarities with the contemporary Philadelphia dance community. Like the audiences of independent choreographers in Philadelphia, Cunningham’s audiences consisted of artists and intellectuals interested in similar work. Cunningham and Cage developed a following of dancers, reminiscent of followings of their choreographic predecessors. Like contemporary Philadelphia dancers, these dancers supported themselves by teaching or by holding part-time jobs. When they were

not doing paid work, they took classes and rehearsed for performances. They toured and performed at colleges several months per year, but Cunningham was rarely able to pay them for these tours after covering their food and transportation costs (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:361-36). By the mid-1960s Cunningham's U.S. audiences remained small, though he was well known among the international avant-garde (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:368). He opened the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York City in 1971 (Merce Cunningham Trust 2017). Though his work often contained pedestrian roots, Cunningham adhered to rigorous technique, which he developed, taught, and used in his choreography. The next generation of choreographers formed an art world that expanded the pedestrian and formalist elements of Cunningham's work, while placing less emphasis on codified technique (Banes 1980:7).

On the West Coast, Anna Halprin created a dance community surrounding her home dance studio and the movement philosophy she taught there. Halprin studied dance at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and at the Bennington College summer dance program before moving to Cambridge in 1942, then to New York, and finally, to California. Throughout her life, Halprin has supported herself by teaching dance. (Ross 2007:24-35, 47-48, 52-54, Reynolds and McCormick 2003:396). In California she began organizing Happening performances in 1955. These performances were rooted in improvisational structures and performed in unconventional, found locations (Reynolds and McCormick 2003:396). Like Philadelphia choreographers today, Halprin relied on shared studio space to create her work in the 1940s. In 1954, her husband, an architect, built an outdoor dance deck at their home (Ross 2007:79). Ninety-six year old Halprin continues to teach dance classes and workshops on this deck (Anna Halprin Site 2016). Having an in-home studio cut down on Halprin's space rental expenses and allowed her to spend more time at home caring for her young children (Ross

2007:103). Halprin gathered dancers and artists at her home studio to teach, create, and show her work. This eased the tension of making art and making money. One of my interviewees, a mother of young children, used this same strategy – living, teaching, choreographing, and showing work in her apartment.

Communities began to form among the groups of dancers working together under choreographers like Halprin and Cunningham, within the shared spaces they created. These communities formed a national art world around postmodern dance. Banes writes: “[Young choreographers] were members of an artistic community, partly by virtue of the situations at Halprin’s workshops and Cunningham’s studio in the Living Theater building, two places where rich exchanges of ideas and actions blossomed” (1980:9). These young choreographers began collaborating with each other and with other artists in the community. They created work, philosophies, and practices in response to what they learned from their choreographic mentors (Banes 1980:8-10).

The philosophies and practices of this community of young choreographers led to the development of postmodern dance, the main precursor of contemporary dance in Philadelphia today. Robert Dunn, a music composer who had studied with Cage, taught a dance composition class at Cunningham’s studio in 1960 and 1961. His approach to creating work excited many of the young choreographers in attendance. He taught the workshop for a second year, with even more young artists in attendance. At the end of this second year, these artists – choreographers, composers, and visual artists – decided to show the work developed at Dunn’s workshops (Banes 1980:10-11, Van Dyke 1992:12,13). They did not have funding to formally produce their work, so they invited friends and fellow artists to Judson Church in Greenwich Village to see it (Van Dyke 1992:13). The artists presenting work were excited both about the experimental nature of

what was being presented and about the possibility of producing work cheaply and cooperatively (Van Dyke 1992:12-13). These two interests are still held strongly by most independent contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia.

Like many independent choreographers in Philadelphia, the Judson artists rejected both movement hierarchies and institutional hierarchies. Unlike their predecessors, the Judson Church choreographers eschewed a codified dance technique (Van Dyke 1992:15). Like Cunningham, they prioritized form over meaning, but they put even more of an emphasis on pedestrian movement. The Judson artists of Dunn's workshop rejected the institutionalized, hierarchical company model, opting instead for fluid membership and "decisions by consensus." Members of space cooperatives in Philadelphia continue to hold these values.

Dancers and choreographers in the Judson era faced a relatively poor economic situation that continued choreographers' ongoing tension to balance both making art and making money. This tension intensified with Judson choreographers' liberal, egalitarian beliefs, beliefs that are sustained by many members of the dance community in Philadelphia today. As Van Dyke writes: "Although the rise of humanistic values in the 1960s served to demystify the master artist of early days, dancers maintained a devotion to the art, a sense of calling, and, for the most part, expected to teach or work at odd jobs in order to continue dancing and choreographing" (1992:16). She adds that the tension between making money and making art is what caused the divide of the original group of Judson artists. The most well known members of the group began to be offered paid performances. This caused competition to begin replacing consensus. "As long as no one had been paid," explains Van Dyke, "the lack of money was not a problem..." (1992:16-17). The Judson dancers began to solidify a cultural norm among choreographers that it was acceptable, perhaps preferable, to not be paid for the work of one's artistic calling and

instead to scrape together an income from a variety of part-time jobs. Though financial support for independent choreographers grew in the latter half of the 20th century with the rise of federal arts funding, the cultural acceptance of an unpaid artistic vocation remained, and the tension between making art and making money continued to persist. The first generation of Judson choreographers had mostly left New York for paid opportunities by 1965, but young dancers continued to flood to Judson. What came to be known as the Judson Church Dance Theater lasted through the 1970s (Banes 1980:14). The norms established during the Judson era continue to impact the movement styles, culture, and support methods of contemporary choreographers.

The use of the Judson Church as a space to create and perform strengthened the trend of choreographers' use of alternative spaces to create and show choreography as a method to reduce space rental expenses (Van Dyke 1992:16). Independent choreographers in Philadelphia rely on inexpensive shared studio space in repurposed warehouses to make and show their work. The popularization of alternative performance spaces following the Judson era would allow more independent choreographers and small companies to create and produce work. This has contributed to the relatively large numbers of independent choreographers and small companies across the U.S. today (Van Dyke 1992:16).

The rise of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) also contributed to the increase in working choreographers. In 1965, Congress passed a bill to establish the NEA, and President Johnson signed it into law (Zeigler 1994:16-17). This was the first wide-scale federal funding of the arts since the closing of the Works Progress Administration in 1943 (Zeigler 1994: 8-13, Van Dyke 1992:24). Between the end of the WPA and the start of the NEA, arts sectors relied on private patronage and volunteerism for support (Van Dyke 1992:24-25). According to the NEA's own published history, "Arts Endowment support began to make it possible for dancers,

choreographers, and administrators to work full-time on their craft” (Sonntag 2009:172). Of course, this possibility was only an option for choreographers who were able to receive funding from the NEA or the state arts agencies it supported. Choreographers who were not able to receive funding continued pursuing paid employment to financially support their work. The NEA’s self-written history continues: “The agency’s financial support helped ignite what many termed the ‘dance boom,’ a period of unequalled growth in American concert dance that lasted from the mid-1960s through the late-1980s” (Sonntag 2009:173). The “boom” of choreographers in the latter 20th century was also ignited by the growth of dance education in the university system and by the logistical fact that each generation of choreographers taught a larger generation of young choreographers. Despite its limitations and short-lived strength, the NEA helped expand the field of dance, both with its fiscal support, as well as with its symbolic support. The establishment of federal funding for the arts demonstrated that the federal government cared about the arts (Zeigler 1994:17).

Dance scholar Jan Van Dyke argues that during its rise the NEA shaped the field of modern dance. Writing in the early 1990s, she explains:

For modern dance... it is widely accepted that the major funding influence has been the NEA. Its subsidy of sponsoring organizations, either directly or through state arts councils, its promotion of touring and management, and the catalytic effect it has had on other funding agencies, have all had profound influence on the development and visibility of modern dance nationwide. The field has gradually become decentralized, touring has become a way of life for modern dance companies, and not-for-profit corporate status has become the organizational model across the field, with community-based boards of directors and professional management the rule (1992: 24).

With the establishment of the NEA, many dance companies underwent organizational restructuring in order to better fit the model for NEA support (Van Dyke 1992:26-28). In the 1960s and 1970s, more and more individual choreographers began organizing their work into the nonprofit company structure that had been adopted by other performing arts earlier in the 20th

century. Nonprofit companies were more likely to receive monetary grants sponsored by the NEA (Van Dyke 1992:28-31, DiMaggio 1992:43,45). “While there is still poverty among individual artists today in modern dance,” Van Dyke writes in 1992, “and many operations still center on the efforts of a single person, chances are now, even the most solitary individuals have access to a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation through which they can be eligible for funding” (31). Of the 18 Philadelphia choreographers I interviewed, only four produced their work through their own nonprofit companies. Very few of the remaining 14 applied for funding through outside community nonprofits – in fact, most of my interviewees had given up hope on receiving monetary grants and were not applying for funding.

Ruyter comments in 1979 that though U.S. dance was economically weak, it was “valued and respected” because U.S. institutions supported it (126). “Audiences are at an all-time high and dancers and choreographers have a respected place in American society,” she concludes with optimism (1979:127). When I interviewed independent choreographers in Philadelphia during the summer of 2016, they did not feel this same hope. Instead they expressed anxiety at the lack of institutional support for dance in recent years.

In the early 1980s, NEA funding for the arts began to dramatically decline, especially for independent, experimental artists. In 1981, the Reagan Administration began to challenge the value of the National Endowment for the Arts (Bauerlein 2009: 69). “The Reagan administration assaulted the NEA within two weeks of the inauguration in February 1981,” writes Zeigler:

Looking for budget cuts to trim the 1982 deficit, the OMB proposed a 50 percent cut in NEA appropriations, to \$88 million in FY 1982, and growing to only \$92 million in FY 1985 (a drastic drop from the projected \$306 million authorized in 1980). Behind the administration’s draconian proposal was a very strong feeling that arts funding should come not from government but from the private sector (1994:46-47).

Expecting resistance to the proposed cuts, Regan formed a Task Force on the Arts and Humanities to advise on the matter. The Task Force produced a report that “played a major part

in rebuilding support for the Endowment; it helped to restore the balance.” The NEA budget was still cut, but by 10 percent, not by 50 percent (Zeigler 1994: 47-49). Still, from 1981 to 1982, 15-million dollars were cut from the NEA’s appropriations budget, which had been steadily increasing since the NEA’s founding in 1965 (National Endowment for the Arts: 2016). The relative plenty of federal arts funding enabled by the NEA would prove to be short-lived.⁶

The NEA’s funding continued to decline in the late 1980s.⁷ The NEA appropriations budget reached its highest level in 1992, at \$175,954,680. The budget dropped over 78-million dollars between 1992 and 2000 in the wake of the conflict of the early 90s. Though it has risen since then, it is not back at its levels from the early 1990s (National Endowment for the Arts: 2016). The choreographers I interviewed in 2016 did not feel the funding effects of the NEA as

⁶ The NEA’s appropriations budget rose and then dropped, falling in 2000 to just \$97,627,600. In 1981 real-dollars, this is a drop of over 100-million dollars from the 1981 budget. The NEA’s appropriations budget has risen since then, but is not yet at its 1981 level. Today’s budget, \$147,949,000, is still close to 100-million 1981 real-dollars less than the 1981 budget.

⁷ In 1989, President George Bush appointed John Frohnmayer to chair the NEA. Frohnmayer had little experience in the arts or in politics, in comparison to former NEA chairs. In Zeigler’s words, “In Frohnmayer, the Endowment got a chair who was a foreigner in America’s primary arts and an innocent in the ways of Washington: two gaps that would spell doom in the crisis” (1994:68-69). The instability of the NEA was further exacerbated that year by the NEA’s indirect funding of artists Andres Serrano and Robert Maplethorp (Kammen 2000:114). The Southeastern Center Contemporary Art, funded in part by the NEA, awarded Serrano a grant and sponsored a national tour of his work. One of the pieces in the tour, *Piss Christ*, enraged some southern viewers who began organizing a public campaign against the NEA’s funding of the work that culminated in protest letters sent to the NEA by members of both the Senate and the House. That same year, the Washington Corcoran Gallery canceled a photography exhibition by Robert Mapelthorp that had been organized by Philadelphia’s Institute of Contemporary Art with an NEA grant. Aware of the controversy in Congress, the Corcoran did not want to risk losing funding by showing images of naked bodies that some viewers might consider pornographic. By the end of 1989, the NEA’s funding had not been cut, but Congress passed stipulations for future funding of the institutions that had supported Serrano and Maplethorp (Zeigler 1994:69-79). Frohnmayer, the chair of the NEA, added a “loyalty oath” to the grant papers of NEA grant recipients. For artists to receive a grant, they would need to sign an agreement stating that they would not produce “obscene” work with NEA funding. Neither artists nor the religious right were happy with this outcome (Zeigler 1994:106-107). The oath was ruled unconstitutional in 1991 (Zeigler 1994:117). In 1990, Congress reauthorized the NEA for three more years, easing fears that the NEA would be closed (Zeigler 1994:129).

strongly as the choreographers of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. As a result, the tension between making art and making money manifests differently for independent choreographers in Philadelphia today than it did for many independent choreographers of these decades, particularly those of the 1980s.

Van Dyke writes that modern dance of the 1980s was affected by the same consumerism impacting wider culture. High-value costuming and production elements accompanied athletic movement (1992:17). Choreography moved away from pure formalism and returned to meaning-driven movement (1992:18). Banes explains that this return to meaning was made by the younger generation of choreographers in response to their postmodern predecessors (1987:xxiv). Virtuoso movement became a form of technical meaning (Banes 1987:xxvii). Choreographers used language and narrative to facilitate the expression of meaning in choreographic works (Banes 1987:xxix). Once again, music and dance become closely linked in performance (Banes 1987:xxxiii). Choreographers, particularly the growing number of choreographers of color, made stronger political statements with their work. Banes links each of these forms of meaning-making in 1980s modern dance to “an anti-elitist impulse” prioritizing audience accessibility (Banes 1987:xxxv).

Van Dyke contends that the economics of fiscal support drove the aesthetics and organizational structure of modern dance in the 1980s. “In fact,” she writes, “economics seems to be the dominant value system in dance, determining what is done, how to train for it, who will do it, and how it will be produced. The conflicting pulls of entertainment and art have presented an increasingly difficult choice for dance artists.” (1992:19). U.S. choreographers have felt a tension between making art and making money since beginning independent work in the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century. With increased access to monitored federal funding and the influence

of a pleasure-driven, consumerist culture, Van Dyke argues that this tension was particularly extreme for choreographers of the 1980s. After the Judson era, the production of choreography adapted to fit a market-driven culture:

The development of commercial culture created a vacuum, a worldwide market with which the loosely organized field of modern dancers could not easily cope. An organizing force was needed, a means of bringing dance into that market. With the founding of the Endowment in 1965, just at the end of the Judson era, the field acquired such a force, which set about shaping the profession organizationally, geographically, economically, and not incidentally, aesthetically (Van Dyke 1992:20).

The National Endowment for the Arts, Van Dyke claims, adapted choreography for the market with its structural funding requirements. To be eligible to receive funding from the NEA, choreographers needed to prove that their work was financially viable (Van Dyke 1992:135). Choreographers changed organization and content of their work to fit the market, transforming dance to commodity (Van Dyke 1992:133-137).

This commodification of choreography pointed out by Van Dyke held true only for choreographers interested in receiving funding from the NEA. Many postmodern choreographers continued the aesthetic and structural traditions of the Judson era. My oldest interviewee, Rebecca, who was 50, came to Philadelphia in the late 1980s. She told me that when she first came to Philadelphia she began working multiple, scattered part time jobs to support herself and her work. Though Rebecca was awarded residencies at city institutions that gave her free rehearsal and performance space, she paid all other expenses, including stipends for her dancers, out of pocket. Today Rebecca has her own nonprofit company that is funded by private donations and small-scale, local grants. During good years the company is able to pay her a small salary for her choreography, but Rebecca still operates with the do-it-yourself mentality she used to get by as a young choreographer in the 1980s. When giving advice to younger choreographer, Rebecca has passed on this mentality: make it work.

Independent choreographers have been “making it work” since they began pursuing the vocation at the turn of the 20th century. The tension of making art and making money has existed for independent choreographers since the founding of the vocation. They have developed a number of methods for coping with this tension over the years. On occasion, a choreographer has been able to earn income for her choreography, but, for the most part, independent choreographers have held a variety of flexible, paid jobs to financially support both their costs of living and the expenses of their choreographic work. The next chapter shows the structure of this unpaid vocation for independent choreographers in Philadelphia today.

Chapter 3:
Making Art/Making Money: Structuring a Division of Time, Space, and Energy

I woke up at 7:00am on the day of our dress and tech rehearsal with a 101-degree fever. Over the last week, I had spent about 30 hours – unpaid – working on getting things together for the Fringe show, in addition to being a full time student. That day I would get the set and student performers to the space, run our final rehearsal (our only full-cast rehearsal), finalize costumes, run the technical rehearsal, work with the musician to set the music score, run dress rehearsal, and get everything back to campus. And perform. I wouldn't leave the space until after sundown that night, and wouldn't get home until after stopping at an urgent care clinic to receive treatment for the conjunctivitis I had developed in both of my eyes over the course of the day.

Independent, contemporary choreographers' vocation encompasses a wide range of activities. The "bundle of activities" within their vocation includes not only their choreographic work, but also their paid jobs (Hughes [1951] 1994:30). A common attribute of the choreographers I interviewed was that they all were incredibly busy. I met them in coffee shops and living rooms across the city during their windows of time between jobs and rehearsals, in their downtime transitioning from one set of jobs to the next, or on a rare day off. Many of them had more free time than usual because it was the summer, the Philly dance scene's "slow" season – though I attended 52 events over the course of three months and still did not manage to catch everything that was happening. On a daily basis, independent choreographers needed to balance preparing choreography, rehearsing, working multiple paid jobs, performing, attending other choreographers' performances, and socializing with other artists for support. In order to attend all vocational obligations, choreographers needed to maintain flexible schedules. Flexible schedules allowed them to find time and space to rehearse with other busy dance artists, which was one of the main priorities of pursuing the vocation.⁸ Choreographers structured their lives

⁸ I was also lucky that my own work was flexible. Because I set my own hours, I was able to accommodate the windows when choreographers were available to talk. I was also able to allow the time to travel between interviews. Most choreographers traveled the city by bicycle (or by car

and daily schedules in order to be able to both make their art and financially support themselves. They divided their time and energy between making art and making money. Finding balance between these two necessary tasks was the main tension of this unpaid vocation. Independent choreographers often lived on the precarious ledge just between not having enough money to support their lives and not having enough energy to continue choreographing.

I knew from informal conversations and careful listening at dance events that choreographers were busy.⁹ I did not expect the extent of the business that I learned about in our longer conversations. I met my first interviewee at a beautiful third-story, walk-up apartment that she shared with her husband in Queen Village.¹⁰ I had met Mia the previous summer in a voice and movement workshop taught by an established Philadelphia choreographer, Rebecca, in which we were the only two participants. This summer I had been taking the weekly contemporary technique class that Mia taught at a space in South Philadelphia. When I arrived at her apartment for our interview, she was in the midst of packing to move. She and her husband would be leaving Philadelphia at the end of the summer so that she could attend a Master of Fine Art's program in dance.¹¹ Mia was 29-years-old and they had no children. Like almost all of the choreographers I interviewed, she was white and raised in a middle class family.

during bad weather), and many of the locations they chose to meet were not easily accessible by public transportation.

⁹ I conducted seven weeks of participant observations before I began interviewing choreographers.

¹⁰ When I entered, sunlight spilled from spacious windows onto light wood floors. While I settled onto a soft couch, she disappeared behind one of many doors to get glasses of water. This set-up felt unusual to me, so I later looked up her husband's occupation on Facebook. He was a research and development analyst with a graduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Another independent choreographer lived in this same building and told me that she had taken out loans in order to maintain her lifestyle.

¹¹ The previous week I had sat in on another choreographer's rehearsal, and in moments of rest between dancing Kayla, the choreographer, and her dancers talked about adjunct lecturing at a local university and the potential benefits of pursuing and M.F.A in order to be paid a higher

As we talked, I began to have trouble keeping track of all of the jobs and types of work Mia mentioned. Earlier she had described her income from Pilates as “decent money.” She used that money to support herself, but she also discussed teaching dance, “making work,” and dancing for other choreographers. I expected this busyness from previous, informal conversations with independent choreographers, so I had questions prepared:

EJ: So can you tell me about, like, all of the different things that you're doing?

I: All the different things I'm doing? Like, life?

EJ: Yeah.

I: I'm not going to say, like, today because it's a weird time but like six months ago, like before everything started shifting [with preparation for the move for graduate school]. Let's see, so well one thing is I teach classes so it obviously one technique class a week but I also teach five Pilates classes then I teach about 15 to 17 clients a week; *so somewhere around 23 to 26 hours per week, no, probably 28 or 9 because of bartering sessions, too hours of teaching. It's a lot of teaching...* Also in the past year [I] have set work at West Chester University, so I was out there with those students. And then James and I spent the whole year setting work at Georgian Court University. *And I make, obviously, work.* So [collaborator name] and I rehearse together pretty much weekly, for like pretty regularly, and I rehearse on my own for my own stuff more or less weekly and I performed this year for Kayla and for Geoffrey. So that's those things feel like there's more. That's, yeah, that's probably it. Like, I mean, there's more. There is also, like, just kind of company stuff, like the company stuff. So like, you're always, like, doing grants or you're doing reports you're trying to organize, like we did a ton of performing. So like in the spring in the fall we performed like six times, like twice in northern Jersey and then Baltimore and then we toured North Carolina in April. And then, like, you know, so we were kind of, like, all over the place. Yeah. *So yeah, performing for, like, people. Keeping the [company name] stuff like going. And then the universities and then Pilates and then classes and the dance class.* And then also like I'm a human being and I'm married. And I have a life and also, like, have to like be around and, you know, hang out with my friends and husband and yeah. I read. You know. Life. That's happening.

Mia was performing for other choreographers, performing her own work, rehearsing, running her company, choreographing, teaching at universities, teaching a community dance class for professionals, and teaching 28 or 29 hours of Pilates each week. She also spent time with friends, maintained a relationship with her husband, and regularly read and swam. When not engaged in

salary. Kayla lamented that she could not just move, like Mia did, because she had two children and a family. She also marveled at how lucky Mia was to get a scholarship that fully funded her M.F.A.; most choreographers needed to pay full tuition for an M.F.A. that would give them only a marginal salary increase after between two and three years post-graduate education.

all of this, she pursued her primary vocation, finding time to choreograph between all of the other jobs and tasks that gave her the financial and social support to be able to choreograph. “And I make, obviously,” she told me, “work.” Her choreography was her primary work. She placed this above everything else to the extent that she assumed I knew it was something she did and almost did not mention it. Yet, she needed to find the time and energy to fit choreographing in with all of her other obligations. These obligations enabled her to pursue her vocation, but in fulfilling them, Mia expended time and energy that she could have used to choreograph. Her calling was to choreograph, not to spend 29 hours per week teaching Pilates, but teaching Pilates was her primary form of financial support. Teaching Pilates took her time and energy away from choreographing, but she needed to teach Pilates to be able to choreograph. Mia and my other interviewees negotiated their daily lives between the calling to make art and the necessity of making money.

After Mia described her hectic schedule to me, I asked a follow-up question to confirm which obligations were a part of financially supporting her daily life and which were part of supporting her art:

EJ: Are you able to make a living through dance?

I: No! Absolutely not. James does, sort of. No. I never have even come close to being able to do that. Probably the most I've made is like, like last year, probably, maybe like eight grand, but that was, like, the most. And honestly, and so often that money goes right back into the company, so it's, like, it's sort of like you made eight grand, but it just cycles back through.

EJ: Is that from grants?

I: Yeah so the universities played pretty well, and then, yeah, we got we are supported by the city the state and the Fells Foundation so between those we do okay. And then we do fundraising when we need to for a larger project. So yeah.

Mia considered choreographing, managing her company, and teaching dance at universities and to local professionals all parts of her artistic career, but she emphatically told me that she did not earn a living from this dance-related work. The money she earned from teaching professional

dance classes was marginal. She did not earn income from choreographing or from managing her company – in fact, she used the money she earned from teaching at universities to financially support her company. Most of the choreographers I interviewed used money from paid jobs to financially support their choreography. Unlike all other choreographers in their 20s and early 30s whom I interviewed, Mia had a dance company with nonprofit, tax-exempt status. Older choreographers with whom she had worked advised her to legally incorporate her company as a 501(c)3 nonprofit. Many young choreographers had their own companies, but they did not have the resources or knowledge to legally incorporate their companies to be nonprofits. Unlike most of the young choreographers I spoke to, Mia also regularly applied for grants with hope of receiving them, and she had enough financial support for her company to hire a part-time administrative assistant as needed and regularly produce performances. The nonprofit company structure offered Mia significant support, but it did not allow her to earn income from her choreography. Instead she balanced the obligations of her artistic career with teaching Pilates for 29 hours per week so that she could support herself and support her choreography. When I spoke to her, she felt drained by maintaining this precarious balance. At 29, after living like this for seven years, Mia decided that she needed to change how she was structuring her life. One reason she chose to leave Philadelphia to pursue an M.F.A. was so that she would be able to focus full-time on choreography.

Menger, Throsby, Florida and Baumol and Bowen, argue that workers in creative sectors rationally schedule their work in flexible ways to enhance the creativity necessary for their occupation (Baumol and Bowen 1966, Florida [2002]2012, Menger 2014, Throsby 2001). This holds true to an extent for choreographers, but for the most part, this choice is not rational, it is a necessity. Because independent choreographers do not earn income from creating choreography

– and have not earned income from creating choreography in the United States since the turn of the 20th century – they must financially support themselves by working other jobs. Working a “nine-to-five” does not allow independent choreographers the time and energy needed to choreograph and produce their work. Holding multiple jobs with scattered, flexible hours enables them to schedule time, find space, and set aside energy to choreograph. When I asked Mia for general advice about joining the Philly dance community, she emphasized that Philadelphia was great because of its low cost of living and then told me:

I would be very careful about the work that you commit yourself to in terms of, like, paid hourly, whatever work you end up doing. Like because that will dictate what opportunities you are able to take. So like if you commit yourself to a nine-to-five then that's where you are, you know what I mean, like, that's where you are. If you can find something more flexible than that's great.

The stress of balancing one's time and energy to cover both paid and unpaid work does not allow choreographers to be more creative than they would be if they were able to dedicate themselves full-time to their choreography. If anything, this stress detracts from their creative energy. Mia described “paid hourly, whatever work you end up doing” as something that would detract from my potential choreographic career if I did not carefully schedule it in a flexible way that would allow me to pursue vocational opportunities for dance and choreography. This paid work would be a “whatever” to do to make money to support my *true work*: choreography. The way Mia phrased this advice made me feel like a “nine-to-five” was not a choice if I wanted to pursue a choreographic vocation. This was emphasized by the fact that I did not meet any independent choreographers working a nine-to-five over the course of the summer.

Because independent choreographers have a cultural tradition of working unconventional hours, they expect to meet with each other for rehearsals, classes, and other events during times when many people are working. I conducted most of my interviews during the week, mostly in the late morning and afternoon. I held one interview on a Saturday because my interviewee was

teaching dance at a summer camp during the week. It sometimes felt like we lived in an alternate world, with the weekends busy with work events, slow days on Mondays, and time on weekdays to talk over coffee or tea in the late morning or early afternoon. Because this world did not have set work hours and because so many activities comprised different aspects of work, I felt as if I was constantly working.

Because independent choreographers are not paid for their choreographic work, all activities in their lives contribute to sustaining their unpaid vocation. These activities are bundled by necessity; to be an independent choreographer, one must also dance, teach, pursue multiple low-paid, part-time jobs, and adopt a particular style of life that relies more on social support than on material support. Independent choreographers often see everything they do as allowing them to pursue a career in choreography. When I asked one choreographer how many hours per week she worked, she told me that she was never not working. She saw all aspects of her life, even eating, sleeping, and travel, as part of her vocation. “The various activities which make up an occupation are, of course, given varying values both by the people inside and by others,” Hughes notes, “Sometimes the name of the occupation expresses an emphasis upon one rather than other activities...” ([1951] 1994:31). The name of choreographers’ vocation is based in the activity of choreography; however, choreographers spend just as much, if not more, time on the bundle of activities that allow them to dedicate time to choreography. Choreographers see choreography as their primary calling, and emphasize choreography as their occupational identity. Sensing skepticism from those outside the occupation, they often tell strangers that they are “dance artists.” Using this terminology, they are able to justify including teaching dance or other forms of movement, like yoga and Pilates, as part of the bundle of activities within their occupation. Though they identify as choreographers, they emphasize this identity for themselves

in terms of emotional dedication and drive, rather than in terms of temporal dedication.

Choreographers do not spend most of their time in the dance studio choreographing, but all of their other activities enable them to choreograph.

Between jobs, choreographers described their hectic schedules to me. I met one choreographer for a late lunch at a casual café in Old City after she finished teaching a dance class to teenagers in a summer program. She was late because one student accidentally hit another student while practicing partnering work and Molly needed to help with a minor injury. I'd met Molly at a number of dance events, as we had a mutual friend, and I had been taking her weekly professional technique class that summer, as well as the previous summer. After we sat down at a table outside, I asked her what she had been working on recently. She first summarized her recent choreographic work, and then began telling me about her other jobs:

...So choreographically that's happening and I'm also changing careers a little bit in terms of where I teach. So I am moving into a coordinator role at the University of the Arts. I'm taking on more responsibility there... So that will be new because I will have an administrative position at a university. And then I'm continuing teaching there, and I've been really focused on the teaching. So for the last couple years I've been putting a lot of energy into just, like what I really love [is] technique class... And I guess the other wheel I have spinning is that I am a Franklin method educator ... So Franklin method is teaching, teaching embodiments through imagery and a lot of that is anatomical because a lot of the practices [are] to help, to get you to move closer to your body's design rather to rather than to your habits. So for me I use that a lot in my making and also my teaching a separate somatic practice, too. So yeah. That's what I got going on that's probably like the shortest version of that answer I can offer you right now.

I: If someone, like random, was talking to you in line while you're waiting for your food what would you say to them about what you do? If they were just like, oh what do you do?

SM: I normally say I am a dance artist who focuses on education and performance. I feel like that's a good way to sum it all up.

Molly's first work was her choreography, and when asked to summarize her work to a stranger she identified as a "dance artist." Molly made money from teaching dance, but she was not paid to choreograph. In fact, like my other young interviewees, she used income from her paid jobs to cover the expenses of her choreography. She told me that in addition to her work

choreographing, teaching dance technique, teaching Franklin method, and doing university administration, she also picked up hours working for a friend who was a florist. She supported herself with five different teaching jobs, and she used the flexible income from her florist work when she needed additional money to pay dancers performing in her choreography. She explained:

EJ: How do you support yourself?

I: Teaching. So it'll be a little different next year, but last year I taught at University of the Arts, Temple, Philadelphia Dance Academy, Koresh Dance School, and was the assistant director for the dance ensemble at Drexel University.

EJ: Wow. That's a lot of things.

I: That's a lot of things! That's a lot of things. And then I worked for a florist very part time, just like when she needs the help and then *I've been trying to conceptualize, like even though I don't get paid for it, I tried to be like and then I'm making the work, like trying to keep that so it doesn't like go on the back burner so last year I felt like I had 7 jobs.*

Like Mia and many of my other interviewees, Molly was not paid to choreograph. She had to find the time and energy for “making the work” when she was not working for one of her six paid jobs. Molly worked to identify choreography as one of her many jobs. She did this so that she would prioritize fitting her choreographic work into her busy schedule. Molly continued to choreograph to stay true to her vocational calling.

Choreographing, which independent choreographers considered their true work, was one of their many jobs. They pursued an unpaid vocation. This created a tension in their lives between making art and making money. Using their creativity as a necessary skill, they divided their resources – including time and energy – between these two essential activities. Sarah, choreographer in her mid-20s, told me about the stress of finding this balance:

I'm a teacher pretty much full-time when it all adds up. So I had a lot of recitals but then I also had my showing at the end of June so I was working on a million duets during the spring. And then mixed in with stuff for [a company I dance for] more regularly. We have a Fringe show that she had started preparing for like over the year, because we're not really rehearsing for that right now. But that will start up again in August, the Fringe show rehearsals and then I'm also dancing for Colleen and those rehearsals are scattered throughout the summer and that's the end of the Fringe season and then I'm working for

Meg, just doing a one night Fringe show for her.... And then this week I've been auditioning for Kun-Yang Lin every morning he has like class workshop auditions. The past couple weeks I've mostly been trying to figure out my schedule for the fall during my free time since I'm rearranging a lot of my teaching schedule. I used to work for an hour each program for the past three years and I decided to let that go because I was this past year I taught every single day and didn't have a day off from teaching. I would very often only have one class but still then the whole day kind of wrapped up in it so I knew I wanted to let go of something and that as much as I loved it and as much as I care about that program decided to let that go because it was taking so much energy and stress away from all the other things and I felt like I wasn't a good teacher anymore because I was just so burnt out. *I experienced burnout a lot this year.* A lot of the past couple weeks has been rejuvenating during down time and then figuring out how to leave more time for myself for creating and just time to recalibrate. So I've been interviewing at another studio where I'm going to start teaching to kind of replace the money I won't be making from the other program anymore, but it's mainly because they will be giving me free rehearsal space because that pays off a lot more quickly. So I've been coordinating with two different studios and Muhlenberg College where I'm also a teacher to, like, make sure all of it can fit together.

In order to allow herself the resources to be able to create her work, this choreographer learned to carefully choose and balance her income-generating jobs. She, and many choreographers like her, were more likely to take on low-paid, scattered gigs if they believed the part-time jobs would further their artistic careers. This meant dancing for little pay if it would lead to exposure or build relationships, and choosing teaching jobs that came with additional benefits, like space. Choreographers were also more likely to choose secondary, income-generating to which they felt some predisposition and which connected to their artistic work in some way. These jobs most often included teaching dance to children, teaching yoga, teaching Pilates, or doing administrative work for other choreographers.

Choreographers, like the ones quoted above, tried to structure their scattered work in beneficial ways, but were often left with hectic schedules that made it challenging for them to conceptualize how many hours per week they were working and create a sustainable work/life balance that left them with the time and energy to create choreography. After I asked Sarah how many hours per week she was working, she, like most of the choreographers I spoke to, admitted that she did not know:

EJ: How many hours per week do you think you're working?

I: I probably have a very poor estimate of, like my sense of what even just my definition of what that means is confusing because if you're talking like work where I'm being paid hourly it's probably not that much necessarily, like hours in the classroom that I'm paid for, for example. But in reality if you count all the prep that goes into teaching and then rehearsals which most of mine, some of them, are paid hourly and some of them are lump sum at the end. Then that varies week to week. That could be. What it comes down to it I'm working whatever would be considered a full-time gig. So what is that like 40 hours, I would imagine? But on a week where like I don't have a single extra rehearsal or something and I'm only teaching it's probably like I think it's like 10 hours in the classroom, but there's so much other stuff that goes with it.

Sarah balanced multiple teaching jobs, rehearsing for other choreographers, and making her own choreographic work. All of these jobs required preparation, and she earned income from only some of them. Even her income-generating jobs were comprised of both paid and unpaid labor. This caused keeping track of her hours to be a difficult – or impossible – task that was characteristic of all of the choreographers I interviewed. Another choreographer, Christy, explained this dilemma:

[I work] everyday. Saturday and Sunday I teach yoga so everyday, but maybe that's wrong. Maybe if I really looked at it, it would be, I'm on the move that many hours. I'm like, definitely on the move that many hours. Maybe my like work, the actual work I'm asked to do would be less. Like maybe I only work four hours per day, but getting to these places, preparing for teaching dance classes, preparing for my rehearsals with Patty, this is your work. I'm only here to work so that's what I'm doing.

“Work” had a variety of meanings for choreographers. They used the term to refer to the work they did to prepare for their jobs, they used it to refer to their paid work, and they used it to refer to their artistic work – occasionally, in the case of being paid to dance for other choreographers, these usages overlapped. Most importantly, choreographers’ “work” was the artistic product of all these activities, the choreography that they were able to produce as a result of this lifestyle in which it often felt as though they were constantly working. All of this together was “doing the work.”

I began each interview by asking, “So tell me about what you're working on right now.”

Choreographers did not answer this question with a unified approach. Independent

choreographers' ultimate goal was to be able to produce their choreographic work, but to do this, they also had to work to earn money, to work to find space, and to work to assure they had the energy to continue creating and "hustling." They developed strategies for creatively dividing their time and energy between making money and making choreographic work, because to make their work, they needed to make money. This was the primary tension of independent contemporary choreographers' unpaid vocation.

the support necessary to continue coping with the tensions they all face making money and making art. Choreographers not only rely on other members of their art world for professional support, they also rely on their friends and colleagues for emotional and practical support. Being an independent choreographer becomes a style of life. Independent choreographers often share living and working spaces, friends, social activities, and outlooks on life.

In a Weberian sense, independent choreographers form an occupational status group with a distinct style of life that enables them to pursue the vocation. Weber identifies members of a status group as sharing “every typical component of the life fate of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honor” ([1946] 1994:117). Occupational status groups are characterized by “social honor” coming from, “the special style of life which may be determined by [the occupational group]” ([1946] 1994:121). Independent choreographers’ “style of life” characterizes group members. This holds especially true because independent choreographers do not view their group as containing a hierarchy. Receiving or not receiving funding, or sharing or not sharing resources, does not place a choreographer at a higher or lower position within the group. Rather, “status honor,” is distributed among members with demonstrated honest dedication to their passion. All members of the occupational group possess this honest artistic dedication. Even if independent choreographers disagree with their colleagues’ artistic choices, they respect each other for putting in the time and energy to “doing the work” of choreography. Choreographers’ honest artistic dedication may vary project to project, but independent choreographers see just pursuing the unpaid vocation as a sign of this dedication.

Weber acknowledges that, “status honor need not necessarily be linked with a ‘class situation.’ On the contrary, it normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer

property” ([1946] 1994:117). In independent choreographers’ occupational status group, status honor is not linked to property. Independent choreographers know that their colleagues are not being paid for their work. In fact, which Weber notes as possible among certain status groups, choreographers “consider almost any kind of overt participation in economic acquisition as absolutely stigmatizing” ([1946] 1994:120). Independent choreographers value honor, in this case honest artistic dedication, over income. The more time choreographers spend choreographing, the less money they will make. Their colleagues recognize and respect this, while also understanding that they all need to pay the bills. Their unique style of life, based in social support networks, stems from this recognition. Many independent choreographers hold anti-capitalist values in combination with pursuing an unpaid vocation. They want to be able to financially support their choreography, but they do not want more money for themselves than they see as necessary. Part of this philosophy is identity-work in defense of their vocation, as they do not have the time or energy to make more than frugal amounts while also making artistic work. Though they are a conscious class and community, independent choreographers do not take action against the capitalist class to fight to bring monetary value to their work in broader society, as a Marxist interpretation might suggest. Instead, they resist dominant economic and cultural structures that they do not believe support their vocation by adopting an alternative style of life (Foucault:1982).¹² By supporting each other and sharing resources, they develop ways to live and work in which they do not need large amounts of monetary or material resources. These ways of living and working are all parts of independent choreographer’s vocation, comprising the bundle of activities within their art world.

¹² Following Foucault’s conception of power and resistance in *The Subject and Power*, independent choreographers perpetually resist a dominant capitalist culture by living an alternative lifestyle that allows them to pursue their work.

Members of a status group normally constitute a community capable of “communal action,” or, “that action which is oriented to the feeling of the actors that they belong together” ([1946] 1994:115, 117). Independent choreographers in the “Philly dance scene” form a community, even referring to themselves as the city’s “dance community.” Beyond shared economic interests and indications of status, choreographers feel a sense of togetherness, linked by the pursuit of a common passion, a passion that they perceive to be misunderstood by those outside of the community. Choreographers come together to strategize, not how to change the externally imposed constraints on their vocation, but how to develop mechanisms of coping within these constraints. They host “salons” and workshops to discuss how to produce and fund their work without changing their work’s artistic “mission.” Choreographers form a cohesive group through shared economic interests and social experiences, but, more than this, they form a community with a feeling of belonging together, a shared passion for their work, and a commitment to their way of life.

Independent choreographers support each other’s work through interactions in strong social networks. Their friends and partners are most often other choreographers and artists. They frequently live with these artist friends in cooperative housing situations in which occupants of a house or apartment split domestic responsibilities. This also gives choreographers the opportunity to have frequent empathetic emotional support from other artists when the tensions of their vocation become particularly difficult. A young choreographer told me about her experience coming into the Philly dance scene and feeling welcome. She emphasized the importance of living inexpensively with artist friends, telling me: “I also think that finding cheap rent right away was huge and like living with other artists and knowing that I was not alone in trying to be an artist here.” Finding affordable rent in Philadelphia right after college and living

with other artists made a positive impact in the artistic career of this choreographer and for most other choreographers whom I interviewed. As choreographers aged and developed established partnerships, they were less likely to live in houses full of young artists. Still, their partners were frequently other artists. They agreed to live frugal lifestyles together so that they could support their art. Rebecca, a fifty-year-old white, female choreographer explained her living situation to me as she told me about what a good year was like for her in terms of income:

If I can make \$30,000, 30 to 40, that's good. I mean I keep my costs very low. We both do, Tom and I, he's a painter. And this is kind of his house studio. And we just keep our expenses really low so we can do our work. And I think we both do that, like around \$30,000, that's good.

This choreographer and her partner supported each other by pooling their resources so that they could both maintain artistic lifestyles and vocations. Though their un-air-conditioned row home was small and not near grocery stores or public transportation, it was beautifully decorated and maintained. The main floor of the row house contained a living room area with compact couches, a dining and work table, and a kitchen. They owned two cats, and because I was allergic, this choreographer kindly wiped down the dining table where she was working before we sat down to begin the interview. I noticed that she used Meyer Organics cleaning spray, which is slightly more expensive than other cleaning products. They kept expenses low, but, together, maintained a comfortable lifestyle. They did not have children, so they were able to prioritize their resources to support themselves and their art.

Kayla, a white, female choreographer in her 30s, explained to me how she had balanced being a mother of two while continuing to pursue choreography as a vocation. She and her husband, a musician and composer who has a doctoral degree, lived in a four-story walk-up apartment in a restored Kensington industrial warehouse. Their living room doubled as a rehearsal and performance space, for which they had a 501(c)3 nonprofit tax-exempt status. I

first met this choreographer through a mutual acquaintance and sat in on one of her ongoing rehearsals. I then began taking a three-week class series that she taught two times per week in her living room studio. I interviewed her one night after class. It had been a hot July day and the air was thick in the un-air-conditioned dance space. She created makeshift air-conditioning by placing ice resting on cheesecloth-covered bowls in front of fans around the dance floor. After class we went behind a curtain separating the dance floor from a private space. This air-conditioned open area seemed to serve as an office, den, and bedroom for her and her husband. A wall separated this area from their children's rooms. We settled down to talk, occasionally interrupted by her children or the squeaks of their two pet ferrets.

EJ: Has it been hard to balance being a mom and making work in Philly?

I: Yes. But I'm almost like, like I've been pretty strategic about that. Like during both of my pregnancies I laid the groundwork for my next projects and booked gigs for six months so that I -- maybe it would be more like eight months or something -- but like I was going into childbirth knowing that I was going to have a show eight months later. So then after I had the baby and like rested for six weeks or three months or whatever I like brought the little baby into the studio and like gradually started making stuff and then like brought dancers in and then made sure that I made a piece right away. And for me that was really helpful in terms of like a strategic move to make sure that I was going to get back into the studio right away. And other than that it's just like, you know, it's hard to juggle. *It's mainly about me and Don dividing our time and having constant schedule meetings and like making a lot of sacrifices for each other.* You know, Don has had the kids like everyday all summer because I'm working and I'm trying to rehearse as well for Dust, and so it's a lot sacrifices on his part. And then there's the question of like when do we shift back into like him being able to work on his stuff and you know childcare and all that.

This choreographer and her husband, who both primarily worked from home, alternated childcare responsibilities so that they each would have time to focus on their work. This was particularly difficult for them during the summer, when the children were not in school. Even during the school year, this choreographer was not able to work as many paid hours per week as she had before her pregnancies. Her oldest child was eight years old, and in the coming fall she would be working 21 paid hours per week and a total of 34-36 hours per week-- "not including my mom job," she added. It seemed that her cooperative partnership was essential for her to be

able to make work, make money, and raise her children.¹³ Having a rehearsal and performance space in her home also helped Kayla balance being a mom and continuing her work. She was able to schedule flexible rehearsal times, and, if necessary, keep her children in the space with her as she worked. Space is one of the most essential and most expensive resources that choreographers need to be able to create their work. Having a studio in her apartment was an extremely valuable resource for this choreographer.

Choreographers have developed three main strategies for obtaining affordable rehearsal space if they are not able to receive grants or residencies: creating spaces in their homes or opening studios, doing work-study or working for studios, or becoming members at space cooperatives. They often use a combination of these strategies in order to have enough rehearsal time in studio spaces to create work. Philadelphia choreographers become members of cooperative studio spaces by paying a monthly fee, providing labor for the space, or a combination of both. Artists-in-residence of a cooperative space often forms sub-communities in which they see and give feedback on each others' work-in-progress and organize shared-bill shows with each other. When I asked Rebecca, the 50-year-old choreographer, what advice she would have for someone interested in "stepping into the Philly dance scene" to "make work," she told me what she would tell her students:

I have always just really encouraged them to, you know, just based on my experience, just find a way to make it work. Go make it work. And test, test, test, does this work? Can I do this? Test. All you can do that. Okay. So just okay that's my general like supporting people. To follow that appetite they have and desire. And then I have met a lot of people when they first move to Philly and then I just give them a "Great!" *And I*

¹³ I met a choreographer friend of hers, Maya, who was a single mother at one of the classes. Maya was about to travel to a choreographic residency in Europe so that her family in Europe would be able to take care of her young son while she focused on making her work. In Philadelphia, Maya went long spans of time without dancing. With Kayla and another space cooperative around the corner, Maya was in the process of creating a choreographic residency for new mothers facing the same challenges she faced – primarily finding the time and space to be able to create work.

try to connect them with Mascher Space or you know the dance calendar and things that are happening and all the studios and all of the classes that are happening at the studios and the new ones, the Iron Factory and the Shebang and Chi Movement Arts or whatever... So what is my advice? My advice is to meet people, to get in the mix. And don't give up.

In her advice to aspiring choreographers, Rebecca emphasized the importance of meeting other independent choreographers in the dance community. The first strategy she listed for doing this was to connect to Mascher Space, Philadelphia's performance space cooperative with the largest number of members. She told me that she tells young choreographers to begin making work, to find a way to make it work, and to not give up. A large component of "making it work" is maintaining social connections to other choreographers in the dance community.

An occupation is part of a "work situation" of interactions and relationships "that are social as well as technical" (Hughes [1951] 1994:33). These interactions and relationships allow independent choreographers to pursue their unpaid artistic vocation. Because choreographers are not paid for the primary activity of their vocation, they depend on non-material resources to live and work. The strength of these non-material resources stems from the strength of the interactions and relationships they have in their occupational group. Independent choreographers form social networks through the institutions and relationships that are a part of their occupation. These social networks support independent choreographers professionally, emotionally, and financially as they work to produce their choreography.

Howard S. Becker calls the social support networks characteristic of artistic occupations art worlds. "Art worlds," Becker defines, "consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art" (1982:34). Each member of an art world carries out a bundle of activities that leads to the production of a work of art (1982:9). Independent choreographers form an art world as they work

together to support each other in accomplishing the tasks necessary to pursue their unpaid vocation.

Choreographers engage in numerous activities outside of creating choreography because an art world involves so many more activities than the creation of a work of art. Becker identifies eight crucial activities performed by members of an art world to produce a work of art: (1) idea generation, (2) idea execution, (3) material and equipment manufacture and distribution, (4) general support, (5) response and appreciation, (6) rationale creation and maintenance, (7) training, and (8) adherence to the rules of a civic order (1982:2-5). Specifically, choreographers: (1) create ideas for choreography, (2) execute these ideas by setting choreography on dancers, (3) rely on others or create the materials necessary for choreography – most importantly space, (4) exchange emotional and financial support with other choreographers, (5) view other choreographers' work in hope of reciprocation, (6) engage in social interactions with other choreographers to maintain artistic identities, (7) train or teach at local dance institutions in the Philadelphia area, often both at different life stages, and (8) adhere to political and moral ideologies, maintaining a liberal framework and never taking advantage of other choreographers. Independent choreographers in Philadelphia work together to address these tasks as each choreographer creates and produces her work. Choreographers divide and allocate the activities necessary for a project (Becker 1982:7,13). They often perform these tasks for each other, exchanging money, labor, or resources. A choreographer may be choreographing for herself, dancing for another choreographer, and doing administrative or technical work for a yet another choreographer.

Choreographers form art worlds for themselves, reaching out and building relationships with each other. These relationships offer the necessary support that allows choreographers to

accomplish the tasks of the vocation. In addition to working for each other, choreographers emotionally and financially support each other, connect each other with job opportunities, and offer each other resources. Independent choreographers may be independent in the fact that they are not supported by a formally established organization with a salary-line, but within their art worlds, they are anything but independent. The lack of stability independent choreographers face makes it challenging for them to accomplish all of tasks in creating a choreographic work, but their art world supports them in negotiating this process. Independent choreographers take on many tasks outside of choreography, they depend on other choreographers to perform tasks that they are not able to accomplish, and they find flexible ways to make their work with limited resources. Becker acknowledges that, “If one or another of these activities [of art-making] does not get done, the work will occur in some other way” (1982:5). Artists are creative. They make the work happen, even when resources and conditions are not ideal. Artists’ abilities to adapt their art worlds, their roles, and their work enable them to survive (1982:6).

Independent choreographers do not only rely on other members of their art world to accomplish the many tasks required to produce a choreographed performance; they rely on members of their art world to be able to live as artists. For this reason, the bundle of tasks independent choreographers are responsible for in their art world goes beyond the activities that Becker identified. In addition to the activities detailed above, independent choreographers form a complex social world with each other. Professional relationships often double as personal relationships. Independent choreographers do not only work together, they also often live together and socialize with each other outside of work. These arrangements may not directly contribute to the production of a specific choreographic work (though they sometimes do,

particularly if collaborating artists live together), but they support they offer enables choreographers to continue pursuing a precarious, unpaid vocation.

Even if independent choreographers are not members of the same space cooperative, they give each other professional and emotional support. Choreographers who are friends with each other will often dance for each other for free with the expectation of reciprocation. They form sub-networks of related artists that also often form groups of friends. On Facebook I see dance artists who dance for each other also attending each others' birthday and holiday celebrations, as well as participating in the same political actions. Sarah told me about her collaborators:

I had 6 people I was choreographing on, most of whom were friends I had made it through [a company I had danced for]. And we ended up performing that at three or four different venues in different variations that fall after I graduated and then I think soon after that I made a solo for Inhale Performance Series. And I started, just this past year I made, I produced a Fringe show with Elizabeth and Marguerite. And Elizabeth and I collaborated really intensively for like all of the spring leading up to that fall –spring, summer, and fall. So we made several duets together but also danced for each other... I paid for a membership at [a shared studio space], which is pretty cheap for a studio space. I split that with Elizabeth.

This choreographer not only produced a show with Elizabeth, she also danced for Elizabeth, Elizabeth danced for her, and she and Elizabeth shared a monthly membership fee at a cooperative rehearsal and performance space. This choreographer was also good friends with many of her collaborators and dancers. She met many of her friends, collaborators, and dancers by dancing for other choreographers. Choreographers may also make these connections through attending classes, shows, workshops, discussions, and social events.

Bartering exchanges may be more formal, with the reciprocation of labor explicitly stated. Because space for making work is so valuable, choreographers will often do an unpaid work-study or offer free services for a dance studio in exchange for free space. When I asked Sarah how she supported or funded her work, she told me she managed it “mostly out of pocket or in sneaky ways.” These “sneaky ways” involved exchanges with other artists and art

institutions, including work-study. “I’ve had work-study jobs at different studios, at Headlong and at the Whole Shebang,” Sarah explained to me, “where I, like, clean or check people into class in order to get studio time, so that alleviates costs of space rental. Sarah told me that if she and her dancers were in the area, she sometimes used the studio space at her former college, where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in dance and now served as an adjunct professor. On the other end of the deal, choreographers working at studios happily offered their friends studio space in exchange for services.

My first interviewee, Mia, taught weekly professional contemporary classes at a studio in South Philadelphia, which I attended each week they were offered over the summer. Unlike most artists I saw using the space, she did not seem to be affiliated with the institution. Until the end of the summer, in the late weeks of July before she left for graduate school – when attendance surged to about 10 students per class – attendance at these classes was quite low, at about two to three students per class. Unlike other classes I took, she did not cancel class if only one or two students came for the class. She also offered a sliding scale for class payment, between eight and 12 dollars per class. I knew from looking into renting this space for my show in the Fringe Festival that class rental rates for this space were \$20 per hour. This meant that if only two students attended and each paid 12 dollars for the 90-minute class, that Mia would only be making four dollars from the class if she was paying the full rental rate. Knowing choreographers’ limited time and resources, this did not make sense to me – with class time, preparation, and travel her hourly wage for teaching two students would come to under two dollars per hour. Choreographers taught professional-level classes primarily to connect to members of the dance community, not to make money, but they would not offer these classes unless they were compensated for their time. In interviewing Erin, a choreographer and friend of

Mia who worked for the studio, I learned that Erin was offering Mia free space at the studio in exchange for Pilates lessons. “That class she was teaching at Headlong,” she told me as we sat down in the South Philly coffee shop where I had also interviewed Sarah, “I was trading her space in exchange for a Pilates private before the class. So it was like, the best thing in the world...” Erin and her collaborator were also able to use free space at the studio – but because of their affiliation with the institution. Both were in their mid-20s and had already experienced relative success as choreographers in the city, being produced at FringeArts and offered residencies and performance opportunities out of town. Erin told me that their access to space positively impacted their work.

Members of the art world may also offer other artists and choreographers space and services for reduced rates, with the acknowledgement that they are all part of the same struggle. I submitted a 275 dollar payment to FringeArts in mid-March to register to produce a show as part of the 2016 Philadelphia Neighborhood Fringe Festival. I received a 75 dollar discount for registering early.¹⁴ As part of my registration, I agreed to submit the logistical information about my show – including the space where it would be performed – by the beginning of June. I reached out to a number of spaces with little response. It was difficult to find a space that was affordable within my limited budget, would meet the artistic requirements for my project, and was available for the correct dates. On April 22, the FringeArts Festival Coordinator gave me and other artists access to a Google spreadsheet for sharing resources. In this spreadsheet artists and institutions listed what they needed and what they were able to give in exchange for services or money. Desperate and hopeful, I listed that I was looking for an inexpensive space with

¹⁴ I also qualified for a other discounts – a current student discount and first time Fringe Festival artist discount – but only one was able to be applied, which was not advertised before I registered.

mirrors or white walls. On May 20, I received an email from the current Programs Coordinator at University City Arts League, a community arts institution and performance venue in West Philadelphia. Performance space rental for the number of hours I would need the space for the performance was normally 200 dollars, but because I was a Fringe artist, they would charge me only 100 dollars, and also give me a discounted rehearsal rental rate. The space was a small dance studio with unfinished wooden floors, but it had white walls and mirrors, and came with access to as many folding metal chairs as I could find in the building, eliminating the cost of chair rental. The program coordinator was a graduate of a college in a consortium that included my college and was happy to support a fellow artist, as well as affiliate her institution with the 2016 Fringe Festival. I was able to fit 45 slightly rusted, folding metal chairs into the studio, with barely enough space to dance. The September show sold out. Almost all of the audience members had connections to the artists involved in the project.

Sometimes engaging in methods of support becomes an obligation for members of the dance community. The clearest example of this social and professional obligation is setting aside the time and money to see other artists' shows. Choreographers notice when certain artists do or do not "come out" to see their work. Because independent choreographers are so busy, taking the time to see another artist's show is a sign that of support as a friend and colleague. This act also demonstrates a commitment to supporting the work of other artists – after all, going to see a show often requires purchasing a ticket or at least setting aside time that could otherwise be spent creating work or earning income. Beyond this, part of choreographers' passion for creating their work is sharing it, and this is not possible without audience members. By seeing each other's work, choreographers support each other's passion, as audiences are mostly comprised of fellow choreographers and artists.

I asked Sarah about typical audiences at performances in Philadelphia:

...But generally because I like seeing the new things and supporting my friends who tend to be more so emerging artists I feel like I end up at smaller more intimate venues with mostly other people who are generously interested in supporting one another.

EJ: What have your own audiences been like and do you think you have an ideal audience for your work?

I: My own audiences have been small but really intimate and I think mostly very connected to the work and in the long run I think I care more about depth than about numbers...

When I asked about typical shows, Sarah spoke of her experiences seeing work of her friends, who she described as “emerging artists.” With many other performances being shown in the city, this choreographer, like other young choreographers, chose to use her resources to support her friends. She acknowledged that the audiences of her shows also primarily consisted of other artists connected to the work, but said she was interested in depth of her small and intimate audiences. I had attended four of this choreographer’s performances in the last year, and though I worried I was following her too closely, she appreciated my support. I had first seen this choreographer’s work in a mixed-bill Fringe show the previous fall. She shared this show with two friends and collaborators, one of whom danced for a company that owned a space in South Philadelphia. She and her collaborators produced the performance at this space. The audience of this shared Fringe show was larger than those of her other shows and had a greater mix of artists and non-artists. I had also seen this choreographer’s work in three performances over the summer. Two of the performances were part of mixed-bill showcases of emerging artists. The third was a free, informal showing that she produced herself to get feedback on her work. Almost all of the audience members at these three summer shows were friends, family, or colleagues of the artists involved in the performances. When I attended shows like these, I often felt like I was crashing a party – fellow audiences members would ask me how I knew the person organizing the performance. This was particularly true at informal shows produced by choreographers in

their early- to mid-20s where attendees were 20-somethings who were friends or friends-of-friends of the choreographers. Sarah, like other young choreographers, noticed this phenomenon and slightly resented the lack of attendance by older choreographers, which she saw a lack of social support:

...and then another thing that's interesting to think about is how choreographers in the city are somewhat tiered by age and experience, like I have a very large group of friends who are all definite 20-somethings like myself included and then there's like this other tier and those are the 30-somethings and then there's like a smaller group that's over 40 and either has a big company that's established or is just like still kickin' it. And I have questions about why it has to be that way and why can't you 30-somethings reach out to the 20-somethings more. Do they feel like we have to fight for ourselves, like we have to go through what they did? I think that's stupid. *I mean you are in a lot from struggling, but why struggle more than is necessary, when like supporting another artist is supporting yourself.* It's not competition. If someone's willing to go see their work and then be more educated about seeing art in general then they're more willing and able to go see yours.

Sarah saw all choreographers, particularly those in their 20s and 30s, as engaged in a collective struggle. When they did not support each other, she saw it as a social snub as much as a vocational snub. Members of her “group of friends” saw each others’ shows, but she did not see “the 30-somethings” or the choreographers “over 40” as offering the same level of support. From interviewing “the 30-somethings” and the two choreographers “over 40,” I learned that they did not see their lack of attendance at younger choreographer’s show as a snub. They were excited that younger artists were creating work. With their busy schedules, however, they prioritized seeing the work of their own friends, who were in the same age group because they had graduated college and begun producing work in the city together at around the same time.

My first interviewee, who was 29, felt isolated from both choreographers in their 20s and choreographers in their 30s. She graduated from a Philadelphia-area college in the midst of the Recession, when, she told me, many resources in the city, including grants, spaces, producing institutions, and residencies, were disappearing just as she was ready to be supported by them.

She said that she was the only person from her dance program's graduating class who was still making work, and that in the Philly dance scene she was one of two 29-year-olds making work.

This was one reason for her feelings of isolation. The other main reason for her feeling of isolation was that she felt other members of the Philadelphia dance community did not appreciate her work:

...And I really tried to make an effort. Definitely the first three or four years I was here I went to go see everybody's stuff all the time to like really take in all the work that was happening and that never felt reciprocated to me like it just, so often. And I, and this is made up too, you know, I was really, kind of a low self-esteem problem with myself and my dancing so this is also probably some self stories about why people think -- they have schedules and lives and things. But it just was really. My work has never really been supported by the dance community so. And again for the exact reasons I think people think it's pandering and I think they think it's obvious. And I don't think it's either of those things. And people who come to see it don't seem to think it's either of those things but I think from their perspective, they're having these like hyperintellectual conceptual explorations that are very nice to write grants about and get a lot of money, but nobody likes them, like regular people have no relationship to them, like except if you're already really in the avant-garde art land...

This choreographer tried to support other choreographers in the dance community by going to see their shows, but she felt that this type of support was not reciprocated toward her work. She saw other choreographers' lack of attendance at her shows as a sign that members of the dance community did not support her in a social or professional way. This caused her to feel isolated within the Philadelphia dance community. She felt that her choreography did not fit into popular choreographic cannons in the city, and therefore, was not appreciated by other choreographers.¹⁵

¹⁵ She thought that this was another reason that her work was not well funded, but when I spoke to choreographers making "hyperintellectual" work in "avant-garde land" I learned that they faced the same, if not greater, financial struggles. The choreographers in this "camp" of the Philadelphia dance community had support from other low-income artists, but Mia had support upper-middle class followers who were likely to make significant donations to her company. Of the choreographers I interviewed, both the experimental choreographers and the choreographers making more accessible work were unlikely to receive grants.

Mia ultimately made the decision to leave the Philadelphia dance scene to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in choreography. One of her three main reasons for leaving the city was that she did not feel connected to the Philadelphia dance community. She explained to me:

...Although Philadelphia is an awesome dance city and there is so much dance here, I, the kind of dance that I make, is very singular. *And so I do not have a creative community, or like a few choreographers that I, like, feel connected to - as colleagues.* I have a lot of great choreographers who are awesome people who I really like but we don't, um, they don't really think, I don't think that they really like my work very much, which totally fine, but I just feel, like, a little bit of an outsider in terms of, like, my aesthetic, and my interests ... So I was looking for that, as well. I wanted that...

As discussed earlier, this choreographer's other main reasons for deciding to pursue an M.F.A. were the financial and psychological pressures she faced teaching Pilates 29 hours per week while managing her dance company and continuing to choreograph. Independent choreographers are better able to cope with the struggles of their vocation if they are part of support networks of like-minded artists who are at similar stages in their lives. Though Mia had friends who were choreographers, she was not able to become a part of such a support network. When I spoke with her as she was packing to leave, she was not hopeful about wanting to return to the city after graduating with her M.F.A.¹⁶

Other choreographers I interviewed considered leaving the city at times when they felt least connected to the dance community. Rebecca, who has been making work in Philadelphia for over thirty years, considered leaving the city when many of her peers left:

In the 80s/90s there was a big exodus, for me, in terms of you know modern, contemporary, postmodern dance or whatever in, it felt like this to me, in the early 90s, it just seemed like people kind of left and the core community went like this [makes a sweeping gesture with her hands] and for my community and I just, it was, *I thought of maybe leaving Philly and but I stayed, stuck it out.*

¹⁶ She has continued to produce work in Philadelphia since leaving in order to maintain her loyal following of primarily non-artist supporters, whom she contacts through her company mailing list.

Though this time was difficult for her, this choreographer was ultimately glad that she stayed in Philadelphia and continued creating choreography. She is now a well-respected, established member of the dance community. “Now I have such long term connections with people,” she added later in the interview, “I mean I value that so much.”

Attending each other’s shows is not the only way choreographers show support for each other’s work; they also support each other’s work by giving each other advice, by donating money to each other’s fundraising campaigns, and by writing about each other’s shows in online publications. Independent choreographers become members of the Philadelphia dance community by meeting and talking to other choreographers who offer them advice and connect them to the Philly dance scene. Young choreographers coming into Philadelphia may join space cooperatives, live with other artists, take dance classes and workshops, attend shows, and eventually dance for other choreographers as they begin to make connections and build networks within the dance community. These social networks offer invaluable emotional support for new choreographers learning to balance their scattered, low-paid jobs with finding the time and resources to create their choreography. Without a support network, choreographers may choose to leave the city or stop making work. Choreographers’ support networks offer them the physical, emotional, cultural, and financial resources necessary to pursue the vocation

When they support each other, members of the dance community feel that they are engaged in a collective vocational struggle. As discussed earlier, a significant form of support is the offering or exchange of space and labor. Independent choreographers also exchange advice and emotional support with each other, particularly because they are often working, socializing, and living together. When the tensions of the vocation become particularly bad, choreographers know that they are not alone; they are able to turn to other members of the dance community

who are facing the same tensions and difficulties. If choreographers in their 30s and 40s become close to choreographers in their 20s, these older choreographers may give younger choreographers advice for coping with future tensions of the vocation.

When my first interviewee, Mia, began making work in Philadelphia, she often worked with choreographers who were a few years older than her. These older choreographers encouraged her to start a dance company with a 501(c)3 tax exempt status so that she would be eligible for more sources of funding. Mia was my only interviewee in her 20s who managed a company with a nonprofit status. Of my 18 interviewees, only four choreographers managed nonprofit companies. The remaining three choreographers with nonprofit companies were 37 years old, 49 years old, and 50 years old, respectively. Mia was happy that she has organized her company to have a 501(c)3 status, as she was eligible for more funding. She likely would not have done this if she had not had the guidance and support of older choreographers. The 14 choreographers I interviewed who did not have nonprofit companies told me that the logistics of starting and managing a company with a 501(c)3 status would ultimately require more time and work than the potential benefits it might allow them.

Older choreographers also give younger choreographers advice about connecting to the dance community, balancing paid and creative work, filing taxes, and approaching motherhood while engaged in a precarious, low-paid vocation. Independent choreographers in the same age group do not offer each other this same type of advice, but with their frequent interactions they offer each other emotional support. Independent choreographers in their 20s are often close friends with other choreographers and artists in their 20s; likewise, independent choreographers in their 30s are often close friends with other choreographers and artists in their 30s. Choreographers in the same friend group spend time with each other both for creative work and

for social activities. Creating and socializing may overlap, particularly if collaborators live together. Choreographers in these friend groups may feel particularly obligated to show other forms of support, like attending each others' shows, though these forms of support are expected to some extent by all members of the dance community.

Choreographers in the dance community engage in two very clear forms of financial support: connecting each other to income-generating jobs and donating to each other's crowdfunding campaigns. Molly told me that she worked for a friend who was a florist when she needed to earn money to pay dancers for rehearsing and performing her choreographic work. SM30sWF connected a dance artist in her early 20s, Claire, who had just moved to the city with this florist. Claire did not dance for Molly, but she took Molly's weekly contemporary technique class, where I met her. Claire had been in Philadelphia for about a year. She slept on the extra couch or bed of a relative who lived near the city, took paid jobs when she could, and was beginning to dance for more and more choreographers. I saw recently she co-choreographed a work being presented in a shared-bill showing presented on March 18, 2017. I saw Claire perform in the works of a number of emerging choreographers at multiple showings over the summer. When I ran into her at one show, I asked her if she would be interested in being in my Fringe show. She was interested in working with me, but she was already performing in another show that weekend during Fringe season. She did want to come to one of my open rehearsals, but texted me the morning of the rehearsal to tell me that she had to take an emergency shift in her job working for a florist. I later saw in a picture on Facebook that this was the same florist who was a friend of Molly. This florist also employed other independent choreographers.

More established choreographers may also directly hire younger independent choreographers for administrative work. Rebecca's company hired a part-time administrative

assistant for a couple hours per week. When one of my interviewees decided that she did not want to continue working in this position, Rebecca hired another one of my interviewees for the position. Mia also hired a dance artist as a part-time administrative assistant. Directors of studio spaces, who were often independent choreographers, offered younger choreographers pay, studio space, or both for help managing the logistics of running a studio.

Early in my interview with Erin, when I asked her what she was working on, she told me that she had recently been depressed because she and her collaborator had just finished a show and that she had been unemployed for about a month after leaving her job at a studio space in South Philadelphia. I asked her what her job had been. She explained to me that after graduating from the post-baccalaureate program at this studio space in South Philadelphia, she volunteered to intern at the space because she felt that she had not done enough work for her work-study commitment during the semester. During her internship she was asked to take on the part-time, paid position of Operations Manager. Erin told me how this became her main paid job:

...So I was just kind of interning with them and then the man who used to run that business sold the building and was like I need somebody to run it. And they were like – his name was Nolan and he used to dance for Headlong and he owned the building for a long time and he made the studios and everything – and he was like, hey Headlong, I'm leaving, like you guys have to take over or else I don't, it's not going to be here anymore. And everybody was like, we don't want to do it, but maybe Erin will do it, and I was like, okay. So I pretty much just made up that whole job, and it was good because I made income and I paid myself for my job out of that money, so they weren't losing money by hiring me or anything. Yeah so that was my job for a long time, and then I just felt like moving on. Time for something new. *And like the relationships were getting kind of complicated. I mean this is like an interesting thing about the Philadelphia dance community. It just, like, my experience of it, revolves around that building, cause I went school there and I met everybody there and those people were my teachers and then also they were my employers but then also they were my friends and I used the space for free all of the time and, you know, it, being able to use the space like that drastically influenced how fast Isabella and I were able to make work. And, cause, and we live so close to it, you know...*

After Erin left this position, the studio hired another young artist who had recently graduated from a post-baccalaureate physical theater program in the city. Erin went back to the job briefly

to train this replacement before moving on to other paid jobs. Erin was both hired for this job and left this job because of her connection to the directors of the studio. The directors were not only her teachers and employers; they were also her friends. She had similarly complex relationships with other members of the studio community. Though the job provided her with a reliable source of income, about \$1,000 per month, it put pressure on her relationships with members of her support network:

...It was just, like too much all of the time, like double, triple kinds of relationships, and I get the feeling that that happens often in arts communities, because everybody needs to be more than one thing, and I was just kind of like, I think I need jobs where I'm not working inside of this community, also. Especially because my relationships with Headlong are so important to me, and I feel like it was crushing those relationships, and they already feel better.

Erin ultimately valued her relationships with other members of this community more than the job's reliable source of income. She chose to leave the job to find other sources of paid work to better preserve this part of her social support network. Established choreographers financially supported Erin by hiring her, but Erin prioritized maintaining other forms of support in these relationships.

In addition to helping each other find paid employment or directly hiring choreographers for administrative work, independent choreographers – both established and young – financially support each other's work by donating to each other's crowdfunding campaigns. Choreographers did not speak at length about crowdfunding in our interviews, but most mentioned that they had tried a crowdfunding campaign or were considering organizing one. Erin mentioned to me that she and her collaborator had used Indiegogos to support their work and that they had fundraised \$2,000 for their most recent show. I found their campaign on Indiegogo and saw that many of their 52 campaign contributors were other choreographers and artists involved in the

Philadelphia dance community. Artists' donations ranged from ten dollars to 100 dollars.¹⁷

Choreographers publicize their fundraising campaigns to their friends on Facebook, and some send out links to their campaigns by email. Kayla told me how she had grown the network of supporters in her email list:

...I started collecting people's emails addresses and I would send out my own personal little email every once in awhile to let people know about shows and stuff and that grew into now what is our email list. And with the space we have a sign-up – shoot, I forgot to get everyone to sign up in class, I've got to do that next week – but anyway, and so through having this space the number of people we have been able to access through our email list and through our annual campaign letter that we send out has grown hugely, like we have 1,200 people on our email list now and that all just started from like my little thing that's grown and grown over the years and now with stuff like Kickstarter and Hatchfund people, I think, are a little more used to artists asking more regularly for money to support their work...

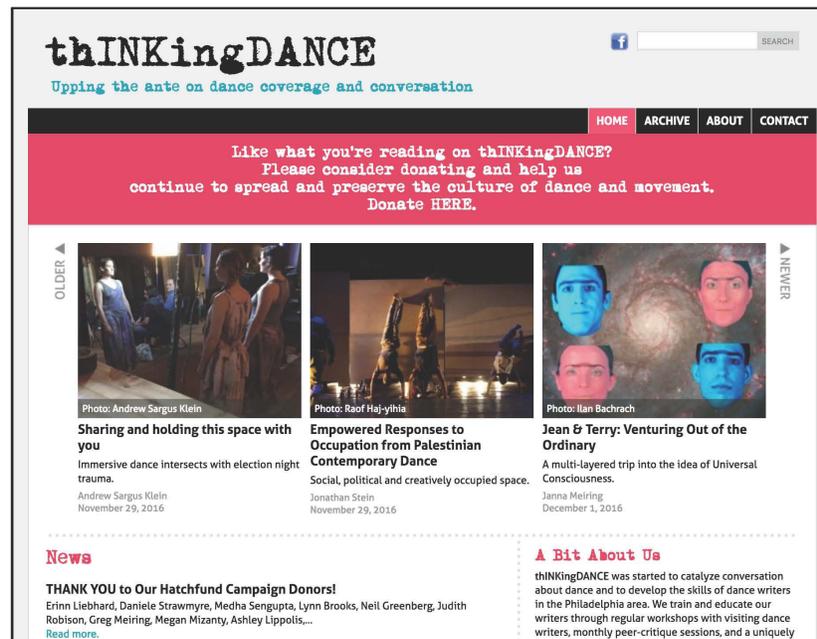
The space that Kayla directed with her husband and collaborator organizes an annual fundraising campaign at the end of each year. They began doing more traditional fundraising and have come to use online crowdfunding platforms, to which Kayla thought many people were growing accustomed. In their 2016 campaign, they raised over 5,000 dollars. Twenty-eight supporters made donations online, ranging from 25 dollars to 100 dollars. Two independent choreographers with relatively low incomes made undisclosed donations to the campaign. Both of these choreographers had danced for the company.¹⁸ Other members of the dance community also donated to Kayla's fundraising campaign.

Kayla used a similar strategy in organizing the 2016 annual campaign for *thINKingDANCE*, an online artist-run dance publication that she directed at the time of our interview. In early November I received a personal email from Kayla asking me to donate to *thINKingDANCE*'s five-year anniversary. A couple days later, *thINKingDANCE* sent out an

¹⁷ I also saw that Erin's collaborators' mother donated \$300 to the campaign. Erin told me that they paid her collaborator's sister a generous artist's fee for doing costume design for the show.

¹⁸ It is my guess that their donations were under 25 dollars.

email to its entire mailing list asking for donations. Within a week, I received a letter in the mail asking for a donation. It contained a handwritten note from the writer and theater artist who reviewed my show. I put this on my desk as a reminder to donate to the HatchFund or send a check. At the end of the month, I received two more emails asking for donations. When I logged onto the *thINKingDANCE* website, a banner at the top of the page asked me to donate. During



During their fundraising campaign, the thINKingDANCE website asked all viewers to make a donation to the artist-run online publication.

this time the *thINKingDANCE* Facebook page published multiple posts asking for donations.

What made me feel most obligated to donate, however, was the personal email from Kayla, the short, handwritten note from my show's reviewer, and my hope to write a short article about my research for the *thINKingDANCE* website. When I decided to donate ten dollars to the campaign, it felt like a social and professional obligation. At the end of November when I logged onto the HatchFund page to donate, I saw that the campaign was still over a thousand dollars away from its target goal. I read the fine print of the website and saw that if a campaign did not reach its

target goal it would not receive any of its donations. To be safe, I decided to mail my donation as a check. A few days later *thINKingDANCE* posted on Facebook that they had reached their goal and published an article on their website thanking their donors. I wondered how they had raised so much money in just a few days. The article on the website listed just under 90 donors, out of 98 listed on the HatchFund page.¹⁹

Writing for *thINKingDANCE*, or, less frequently, for the Philadelphia Dance Journal or other online publications, is another way that members of the Philadelphia dance community support each other's work and help fellow choreographers gain cultural capital in the community. Two theater artists with links to the Philadelphia dance community wrote reviews of my Fringe show for two different online publications, *thINKingDANCE* and *DC Metro Theater Arts*. The reviewer for *DC Metro Theater Arts* had graduated from my college in 2015, we had multiple mutual friends, and we had taken a few dance classes together. He wrote a thoughtful and positive review for my show, giving me four-and-a-half out of five stars on the *DC Metro Theater Arts Website*. I did not know the reviewer writing for *thINKingDANCE*, which he noted in an article on the online publication *Curate This*, a blog that he co-founded with another Philadelphia artist. In this article in which he listed and described the 25 shows he would be seeing during Philadelphia's three-week "Fringe season," he wrote of mine:

A total toss of the dice on this one. I know nothing about Erica Janko except that she describes herself as "a movement artist who researches social phenomena through performance," a kind of personal statement which might mean everything or nothing. (Ferraro 2016)

¹⁹ I noticed that though the check I sent had been cashed, my name was not listed. I do not know if that is because I sent a check or because my donation was under 25 dollars. Most of the donors listed in the article on the *thINKingDANCE* website were members of the Philadelphia dance community, and many were writers for *thINKingDANCE*. I also noticed that many donors were family members of writers and choreographers.

I was the only artist whom he described with such uncertainty. In his review of my show, his opinion of the performance was unclear, but he described the performance with creativity and thoughtfulness. His review on *thINKingDANCE* made me feel more included in the community, and I remembered this when I received his handwritten note on the letter from *thINKingDANCE* asking me to donate.

Leaving the Philadelphia dance community after three months felt abrupt; in Kayla's email to me asking for donations on behalf of *thINKingDANCE*, she began, "I hope you are well! We haven't crossed paths in a while...are you still at Swarthmore? Still in Philly?" One of my interviewees invites me to monthly workshops hosted by her dance collective, none of which I have been able to attend. After the semester started, I was no longer able to dance with the sub-community of dancers taking Molly's weekly professional contemporary dance class. I heard about the processes for creating performances that I was never able to see. I don't know how two of the dancers in my show, who had recently graduated and were trying to "break in" to the Philly dance scene, are doing in their endeavors to dance, choreograph, and make a living. I do know that they are making connections in the dance community. I know that they are living with other artists and dancing for other choreographers, perhaps for small stipends, like the one I was able to offer, for recognition, or in a social exchange. I see them advertising showings of their work in unusual space, spaces that they are able to access through social connections. Through Facebook, I see them building connections with other young artists in similar situations. These connections are the Philadelphia dance community. Independent choreographers in Philadelphia do not just create a "dance scene" for the consumption of their art; they work collectively in a community to make their work. Together, they make it work.

Chapter 5: Why Pursue an Unpaid Vocation? Artistic Philosophy and Work Identity

I'm seated in the audience, waiting for the performance to begin. Two white women in their 30s or 40s enter the row I'm sitting in and scoot past me to sit one seat away from me. A silvery-blonde-haired, white woman recognizes these two women and comes into our aisle to say hello. She sits in the empty seat between me and the two women. The two women greet her in an exchange that goes as approximately as follows in captured snippets:

Woman 2: How are you?

Woman 1: Bill called and I didn't get funding. I'm not going to ask for feedback this time, I can't, I just can't.

Woman 2: That all sucks.

Woman 3 suggests that Woman 1 asks to have the feedback mailed to her in a letter. Woman 1 agrees that that's a good idea and also has thought that someone else could collect the feedback and keep it from her until she is ready to read it.

Woman 1: So you asked how am I, and that is the answer to that question. Mulling over letting go. No let it burst my bubble of delusion.

Woman 2: I would say resolve.

Woman 1: So yeah that's how I am. Sorry to bring negativity.

Woman 2: No, thanks for being honest.

Woman 3: I'm so disillusioned. The way people's egos... The hoops you have to jump through to make your application. That takes hours away from your work.

Woman 1: They had me lower my artist fee for myself. It's not supposed to go above \$6,000.

Woman 2: That's really insane.

Woman 1: I had it at eight. They said it should be more proportional.

Woman 2: Are you fucking kidding me? That makes me want to smack someone in the face.

Woman 1: The marketing person got four grand.

Woman 2: The marketing person, who you're hiring for the project. That's ridiculous.

Woman 3: We need to be creative... And we're already doing that cause we're in our 30s and 40s making the work. We're making the creative economy of the city.

Social support networks comprise the tools that allow independent choreographers to pursue a precarious, unpaid vocation, while choreographers' passion for their art motivates them to continue working through difficult times. They feel called to choreograph, and this calling drives them forward. Choreographers' passionate calling for creating art often stems from the desire to share a human connection with others. They experience this connection not only during a performance, but also through rehearsing with other dancers and participating in the social

support networks of their art world. Identity work permeates each activity choreographers perform within their art world. As they support each other to make their work, they make and maintain identities as artists.

Work and Identity in an Unconventional Art World

Choreographers who work and socialize together – and who may have met while training at the same Philadelphia-area institution – often develop similar aesthetic interests (Becker 1982:25). These interests may differ from the interests of broader public audiences who often do not have as much experience with dance. “The same people [in an art world],” Becker writes, “often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants” (1982:34-35). The conventions of the art world are “embodied in common practice” (Becker 1982:34). Through their repeated cooperative work and social interactions, independent choreographers have shaped the conventions of their art world, both in terms of way of life and in terms of aesthetic.

Many independent choreographers describe their work as “experimental.” Because it does not fit within widely accepted conventions for dance, few existing institutions will produce and pay choreographers for their work. This has led choreographers to form “subsidiary, nonstandard distribution channels” that cater to “adventurous ... audiences” (Becker 1982:28). Most independent choreographers self-produce their work in spaces created and run by other independent artists. Most audience members at the shows of independent choreographers are fellow choreographers and artists, with a smattering of non-artists friends and intellectual aficionados of avant-garde art. These audiences share an understanding of the choreographic genre’s conventions with choreographers who created the work, so that, together, they derive

meaning from the performance experience (Becker 1982:30). Because not many people outside of independent choreographers' social art world understand the conventions of the choreography independent choreographers make, independent choreographers' audiences and sources of are often limited to those within the art world. The art world is welcoming, but to enter one needs to be drawn to it and have an understanding and openness to adopting its conventions and styles of life. The limited size of the art world limits the extent of support for artists within it. For financial support, they must often reach outside the art world for paid work.

Becker sees that the pursuit of nonstandard conventions often goes hand in hand with occupational challenge. Independent, contemporary choreographers do not abide by the "commercial" conventions held by the relatively small number of national choreographers hired to choreograph for television shows or for large-scale ballet companies whose performances are viewed by thousands of audience members. Independent choreographers do not receive the large audience numbers or stable salaries and benefits that come with these conventions. The aesthetic preferences that independent choreographers follow differ from those of the mainstream culture, and their art world remains somewhat insular. As Becker acknowledges:

In general, breaking with existing conventions and their manifestations in social structure and material artifacts increases artists' trouble and decreases the circulation of their work, but at the same time increases their freedom to choose unconventional alternatives and to depart substantially from customary practice. If that is true, we can understand any work as the product of a choice between conventional ease and success and unconventional trouble and lack of recognition (1982:34).

This choice is not quite as simple as Becker puts it here, but the relationship between the breaking of convention and the increase of trouble and decrease of work circulation holds true for independent choreographers in Philadelphia. For these choreographers, their primary trouble is that they do not earn income from their nonstandard artistic work. They follow their interests and are recognized and respected by their community, but do not receive this same recognition

from the general public. This lack of recognition is related to independent choreographers' unpaid vocation. Independent choreographers are not paid for their choreography because their work is not consumed or recognized outside of their art world and their art world does not have enough monetary resources to offer them stable pay. This leads independent choreographers to engage in a number of activities outside of choreography to be able secure financial support. This decreases the time choreographers are able to spend choreographing, which further lessens their recognition as choreographers in the public eye. As choreographers interact within the strong social support networks of their art world, they engage in identity work to maintain an artistic identity in the face of little time to spend on choreography and little recognition for their work outside of their community.

Becker explains that members of broader society identify an "artist" as the person who engages in the artistic work. They identify those engaging in the support activities necessary to produce a work of art as "support personnel," seeing these activities as, "a matter of craft, business acumen, or some other ability less rare, less characteristic of art, less necessary to the work's success, less worthy of respect" (1982:16-17). Independent choreographers in Philadelphia respect and support each other's work, both for its artistic merit and for the effort that their colleagues put into making it happen. Because they are engaged in the work of producing a performance, they recognize support activities as work. They also recognize the dedication of time to paid jobs as work, because they know it is necessary to be able to continue creating choreography. When interacting with strangers and those outside of the contemporary or experimental dance art world, choreographers struggle to gain respect for their vocation and the acknowledgement that they should be paid for all of their work. Continuing to pursue the vocation without pay continues the cycle of forms of support work within the art world not being

recognized by the general public, but in creating alternatives modes of support, independent choreographers resist a capitalist culture they see as not recognizing or respecting the work they do.

Though the conventions independent choreographers share may set them apart from the general public, a distinct boundary does not exist between an art world and broader society. Art worlds, “are parts of a larger social organization. So, even though everyone involved understands and respects the distinctions which keep them separate, a sociological analysis should take account of how they are not so separate after all,” Becker writes (1982:36). Independent choreographers interact with many institutions and people that are not directly connected to their art world. Much of what characterizes the struggle of current independent choreographers in Philadelphia is the lack of institutional funding and support for their work. Many independent choreographers feel that their work does not meet the funding priorities of these large institutions. The priorities of these institutions are likely linked to values in broader society. The institutions symbolize a larger societal rejection of independent choreographers’ nonstandard work. Because independent choreographers see the chance of receiving a grant as low in comparison to the amount of time and work it would require to apply for a grant, they do not apply for institutional funding. Instead they rely on their own funds and on support from their art world. Choreographers often sell tickets for their shows, but ticket prices do not cover production costs, let alone leave money to pay the choreographers creating the show.²⁰ Choreographers cannot charge high ticket prices for their work because most of the audience members seeing their work are other low-income artists. After all, their colleagues are also pursuing unpaid vocations.

²⁰ See Appendix.

In their artistic work, choreographers do not feel a pressure to “give in” to the demands of audience members, as jazz musicians do in Becker’s *Outsiders* (1966:79-100). Because the conventions of their art world are nonstandard in relation to mainstream culture, choreographers often form their own audiences. They watch each other’s work and honor each other for the effort and passion that went into creating that work. The community honors passion above pay. Members of the general public rarely enter most independent choreographers’ artistic spaces. The choreographers I interviewed who attracted “non-dance” audiences worried that other choreographers thought that their work was “pandering” and felt isolated from the artistic community. “In some occupations,” Hughes writes, “the most crucial relations are those with one’s fellow-workers” ([1951] 1994:65). Most independent choreographers are less concerned with what those outside the art world think of their work and more concerned with their colleagues’ thoughts. In discussions with colleagues about choreography and the multiple forms of work that go into making it, independent choreographers maintain their identities as artists. Systems of outside support often do not seem to value their choreographic work, but choreographers work together to develop alternative modes of support. These take shape in their work structure, their art world, and their style of life.

How does one maintain a work identity when she does not earn income from the work of her occupation but from other jobs? Or, as Becker asks, “How little of the core activity can a person do and still claim to be an artist?” (1982:19). On a given day, choreographers may spend more time pursuing paid employment than in the studio creating their work, though both of these activities are part of their occupation. Choreographers affirm their artistic identities within the culture of their vocation. They develop this culture through the relationships and interactions

they form in their art world as they perform the tasks necessary for the occupation. Robin

Leidner explains that work significance and work identity often stem from occupational culture:

The significance of particular kinds of work for identity frequently comes not only from the experiences of doing the work but also from participation in an occupational culture. Such cultures develop around the set of tasks and forms of knowledge within the purview of given groups of workers... all [occupational cultures] are subject to change or even extinction based on technical and organizational innovations and shifting configurations of power. Participation in an occupational culture frequently involves an explicit reframing of self-identity as well as development of a new collective identification (2006:436).

By participating in their occupational culture and the social interactions it entails, independent choreographers maintain artistic identities. They may not generate significance from their paid, disparate jobs, but linked by their common pursuit of choreography, independent choreographers build a collective identity as a community of artists. Their passion unites them and, together, they push forward in pursuit of an unpaid vocation. Their culture justifies their choice to identify with work that does not allow them to make a living.

Independent choreographers develop alternative modes of support to live and work in a society that does not seem to recognize the work they are called to do. They are not paid for it, but choreography is their vocation. Independent choreographers must find the “political and economic freedom” to pursue their work and then justify this pursuit to maintain an artistic identity. Choreographers pursue this identity work as a collective activity that permeates interactions within their art world. Identity work is infused into each activity they perform for their vocation.

An Artistic Calling

Choreographers are drawn to the physicality of dance, the intellectual challenge of putting together a dance piece, and the social nature of rehearsing and performing. They experience dancing and choreographing as modes of expression and communication.

Choreographers create meaning for themselves, dancers, and audience members during the process of creating a choreographic work. They are drawn to a physicalized, creative way of experiencing their lives, and they feel called to share these experiences through performance.

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia feel a calling to practice their vocation. It is an unpaid vocation, but they must pursue despite its challenges. Choreography is how they express themselves to collaborators, colleagues, and audiences. They experience their lives with a choreographic imagination, using choreography as a mode with which to process daily life. In *Science as Vocation*, Max Weber discusses the lives of academics in the early 20th century. Like choreographers, these academics made meager earnings, adopting hectic lifestyles in which they needed to teach in addition to pursuing their scholarly work in order to financially support their costs of living. “Hence, academic life is a mad hazard,” Weber writes:

If the young scholar asks for my advice with regard to habilitation, the responsibility of encouraging him can hardly be borne... But one must ask every other man: Do you in all conscience believe that you can stand seeing mediocrity after mediocrity, year after year, climb beyond you, without becoming embittered and without coming to grief? Naturally, one always receives the answer: ‘Of course, I live always for my “calling.”’ Yet, I have found that only a few men could endure this situation without coming to grief. (Weber 1946:134).

Weber further describes this drive forward despite poor structural conditions as an “*inward* calling for science” (Weber 1946:134). Independent choreographers feel an inward calling for choreography. Their occupation is unpaid, but choreographers, particularly young choreographers, are driven to pursue it, choosing to cope with its tensions rather than give up choreography (at least until later in adulthood). To cope with these tensions, choreographers adopt a unique style of life, forming a distinct occupational status group.

Independent choreographers worked to identify with an intellectually respected vocation, even though their broader society did not support this respect with economic or discursive value

by paying or praising independent choreographers for their work.²¹ Becker writes that artists within an art world produce a “shared sense of worth” of their art and the work they do to create it through their interactions with each other (1982:39). By appreciating each other’s work, choreographers sustain a shared sense of worth for their choreography and for themselves as choreographers. Many activities besides choreography contribute to the production of a choreographic work, and all of these activities are part of “doing the work.” Choreographers maintain their occupational identity as artists through their interactions with other choreographers and through their philosophic approach to their work.

Making and Sustaining a Work Identity in an Unpaid Vocation

Choreographers value the rehearsal process as a way to build connections with other dance artists. The value they place on this process strengthens their social support networks. Molly told me that because she does not like working in the studio alone she began sending out open invitations for other dance artists to come into the studio and work with her. She was a member of a shared space cooperative, which facilitated her in the sharing of this invitation. Many of the participants who attended these open rehearsals ended up dancing in her piece. Opening up her rehearsal space allowed her to build relationships with these dancers and helped her find performers for her work. An additional benefit for her, though she did not mention it, was that she did not have to pay these dancers for the time they spent in her exploratory open rehearsals.²² The networking and economic benefits were not the aims of Molly’s choice to hold

²¹ Many of my interviewees told me that they would not tell strangers outside the dance community that they were dancers because many strangers thought that dancers were “strippers.”

²² Molly completely self-funded her work and told me that she paid her dancers a stipend instead of by the hour. This was extremely helpful advice for me as I figured out how to pay professional dancers for rehearsing and performing my Fringe show while staying within my limited budget. I also borrowed this open rehearsal model to find dancers without the stress of holding an official audition.

open rehearsals. What drove this choice was her desire to share what she experienced in her rehearsals with others. She elaborated on this need for communication with others when I asked her why she choreographed:

I: So why do you make work?

SM: ... *As a maker there is something that I'm just learning about sharing. I guess for me sharing this imagined reality. I'm starting to see how relevant it is. Because for me because I've always been like of course I'm just daydreaming into this other space and that's cool like not everybody has access to leaving the thing that's really concrete reality and the day today. So I'm like okay I think that that making work is my way of reminding people that there's open doors to go through. You know, things are not always as they seem or that we have the ability to say that we can do them differently and I feel like that leads me to the other answer which I don't. I think I don't know. It's like for me about humanity. And that's why because there's been so many things that I'm interested I like feel like I could have gone into more visual art worlds maybe at some point when I was younger, you know what I mean. But then I was like, no, I don't want to be in the studio by myself. Like what I learn when you have to communicate without speaking to other bodies. Like I so easily can create, frame that in a way, or I can be like yeah that's life too. And as an educator that's like one of my superhero powers, is being able to frame it in a way that's like how do we interact in this space what are we getting from the space and how do we see that as an option to be in the world outside the studio. I feel like I can be pretty good at that. I don't know if I'd be as good at that if I were like a politician or something. You know what I mean. I feel like this gives me the space, maybe to interact with audiences with different communities with the people who walk in the room and want to dance. Yeah. That's why!*

Molly experienced choreography as a form of communication that does not rely on verbal language, and instead focuses on the body. Her rehearsals for her recent work were so geared toward this physicalized expression that she felt the need to be with others to fully experience and communicate her art-making process. She experiences the creation of a community when she enters a room with others to dance and choreograph. She feels this in performance, as well. Her choreography connected her to the audiences who see her work and allowed them to interact. What drove her to make and show work was a desire to share, a desire to connect with other humans.

Molly wanted to share her choreographic imagination of the world and her daily experiences. For many choreographers, this choreographic imagination is their way of being in

the world. Most, like Molly, have danced from a young age. This is what they know and they want to share it with others. Molly also related this to her paid work teaching dance technique at local schools and universities. She described the way she was able to relate her choreographic imagination to daily life as a “superpower” that allowed her to communicate with her students. Molly was driven to express the human connection she experienced in choreography. This human connection manifested in her rehearsals, performances, and teaching jobs. Other choreographers strived for human connection in their work in similar ways.

Kayla derived the most satisfaction from her choreography in the social aspects of creating her work, both in the rehearsal process and in the sharing of her work in performance. When I asked her why she choreographed, she told me that it was not just the intellectual challenge and physicality of creating choreography that excited her, but the social aspects of creating work with other people:

EJ: Why do you choreograph?

I: Whoa.

EJ: I always feel weird asking that one.

I: Yeah, that’s a hard one. Well. Um. I think I’m really hm. Oh man. I really enjoy the conceptual nature of choreography. And so this is for me where the whole dancer/choreographers stuff comes in, right, so one of my favorite parts about choreographing is the on my own like in the notebook kind of mapping stuff out and making plans and it’s almost like one thing that I really love about it is like fitting the puzzle together.

EJ: (laughs) I love that too.

I: Yes. Like I feel like choreography is like a lot about like logistics and like the logic of how different parts fit together and the pleasure of working with material and watching it develop and, sometimes, like how like you get to a stuck place and you just put an arbitrary decision on top, and something miraculous happens. So like having those moments of like pushing against something and then breaking it open and getting to a next place. And I think that that’s really true with any creative practice, right, and so for me, it’s like why is it dance and not something else is because of my background. And because I get a real deep pleasure out of moving and physically moving my body and engaging with concepts of performance presence and so all of those things are triggers for me and then when I’m in the studio with dancers I can geek out on the conceptual paradigms that those things live within. So it’s not just about the like the logic stuff and the puzzle stuff is really satisfying to me but *without the physical connectedness and the human social aspect of it, it feels dead*. And so I feel like that’s why. Those two things come together it’s not, just, like I could work out the puzzle on paper, *but it’s not satisfying until there’s physical beings in the room*. And it’s not just about their shapes

but it's about like all the psychology that's going on in how they inhabit those bodies and how those bodies relate to each other in the space.

Because of her background in dance, Kayla, like many of my other interviewees, was drawn to choreography as a mode of creative expression. What makes the art form come alive for her was the social interaction she has during the creative process. Like Molly, Kayla valued having other people in the room with her, to connect with as she makes her work. She also valued getting feedback on her work throughout the choreographic process, hosting informal showings in her home studio as she worked on creating a new piece. An important part of this process for her was the formation of the communities of performers and audience members at these showings and the experiences that they have together. After Kayla explained to me why she choreographed, I asked her to describe her choreographic work to me:

EJ: So you told me about your current work. Can you tell me about your work in general, like how would you describe it?

I: I describe it as, well, first and foremost, experimental. Which for me means that you don't know what's going to happen when you get into the studio, right, you go into the studio with questions... *When I say that it's process-based, like I really very much do mean a commitment to the kind of communities and experiences that are happening when a group of people come together to engage in creative inquiry as opposed to just like getting something done and finished to reveal to the audience that's like removed from the experts on stage. You know what I mean, like it's very much about a relational thing.*

Kayla valued human connection not only in the rehearsals with her dancers but also in small- and large-scale performances of her work. Many choreographers I interviewed valued the sub-communities created during the rehearsals and performances of their work.

When I asked Sarah to tell me a bit about her work, she began telling me that she valued approaching her work with “unconventional” methods, but concluded by explaining that a main motivation for her choreography was to bring people together and build communities with her work:

I also think that underneath it all a lot of the reason I choreograph is to build a community for myself to live in and to bring people together and foster self-discovery or

relationships in a way that is expressive and creative and playful and that manifests in really intimate ways.

Like Molly, Sarah was drawn to the communities created both in her choreographic process and in the performance of her work. Sarah was part of a group of young artists that supported each others' work by dancing for each other, seeing each other's shows, and participating in social activities with each other. Sarah was actively engaged in this creating this type of community around her work. She was also interested in sharing the relationships, discovery, and creative imagining that she experiences in the choreographic process with the audience members that she brings together for a performance. When I specifically asked Sarah why she choreographed, she added that she "thrived" on the challenge of being a leader, further explaining the motivation of her leadership:

But generally I've always been someone who's keeping tabs of everyone in the room and like I care a lot about the group atmosphere and I feel like as a choreographer if I'm doing anything it's creating a world and *if I can create a world that I want people to be part of or experience then that is extremely satisfying to me*. Whereas, as opposed to if I just wanted to be a dancer I would always be jumping into other people's worlds and I feel like I have at least enough to say that I can create my own. And I have friends who I've talked to recently who are like I don't really want to choreograph, I just don't feel like I have anything to say, and *I don't really believe that anybody doesn't have something to say*. It's kind of like when people go to see a show and they are like I didn't get it or I don't know how to talk about it, *like you had an experience*. Like you can't avoid that. So there must be something. And I don't think like, *I think choreography is taking it a step further to try and label whatever that experience was and translate it and make, create a new one that can be somewhat replicated maybe*. Or the essence of it can be.

Again, like Molly, Sarah saw herself as creating worlds with her work. These worlds were rooted in her choreographic way of experiencing life. The worlds she created with her choreography were expressive. She believed that choreography is a way of expressing what one has to say. What one has to say is rooted in experience. Choreography, then, is labeling and translating experience in order to create a new experience to share with audiences during performance.

Mia found the most valuable human connection in the performance of her choreography. She emphasized performing as people and for people in her work. She thought that this made her work different from other choreography in Philadelphia:

I'm really only interested in dancing where I get to be a person while I'm dancing and so like focus and connection with whoever I'm dancing, with the audience. I just am not so interested in the abstracted stuff as much As a performer or as a maker, which is a clear choice.

Mia was less interested in the somatic processes of creating her work the way Molly was, and more interested in how her movement connected with the audiences for whom she was performing. She was still interested in the relationships with her fellow performers, but in more clearly defined ways. She felt that the “accessibility” and athletic “physicality” of her company’s work distanced her from other choreographers in the dance community. “...the mission of our work is to make highly physical, explorations of everyday people's lives and lived experiences in a way that is accessible to audiences who may not have seen dance before,” she told me. Though she approached choreography in a different way from many other independent choreographers, the main purpose of her work was still rooted in human connection. When I asked her how she chose the mission of her company, she began telling me about her personal draw to choreography:

I think dancing is so great. I've always loved dancing. Ever since I was very, very small and it was not my – my parents are great at artistic exposure, but they're both professors in fields that are not remotely related to dance, so it's not like they were like, “We want a dancer daughter!” you know? When I was choreographing when I was, like, a baby, I was like three years old and I was, like, putting on shows, you know, like why? Why did I do that? Nobody told me to. So, I've always loved that and it makes me really frustrated – So my husband is not a dancer and we have lots of arts friends but also lots of non-arts friends, and I'm, you know, over and over, this idea of like, why dance, what's valuable about it?

Like Molly, Mia had early exposure to dance and has gravitated toward choreography as a mode of expression from a young age. It frustrated her that non-artist friends and family did not fully understand the value of this mode of expression in the same way that she experienced it. This

frustration further motivated her to pursue human connection with her performed choreography. She wanted to make her choreography accessible so that “non-dance” audience members would both appreciate the value of dance and connect to her work:

I'm like, making dances and I'm, like, trying to get people to come to these dances, and, like, how do we create dances that give people that mirror neuron firing excitement in their bodies that's part of what I think is really powerful and cool about dance is the virtuosity of it, right? But, how do we also do that in a way that doesn't feel so hyper-in-grouped that it's, like, “Oh my god those beautiful dancers, let's just put them up on a pedestal,” right? Because they're also people, right? Like, who, poop and, like, have to fix food the next morning and do their laundry and, like, you know, like they're just human beings. They aren't very elite human beings, cause they don't have a lot of money, so it's like really they're not so different, but they also have this skill set, so how do we bridge that gap, basically.

Mia was deeply motivated to draw connections between the lived experiences of the dancers in her work and the lived experiences of the audience members seeing her work. This drove her to make work that she thought would be accessible for “non-dance” audiences.

Sarah had a similar desire to make “accessible” work. Her motivation for this desire was a need to share and express herself to audiences:

EJ: What is accessibility to you and why do you think you want to your work to be accessible?

I: ... I think I would want it to be accessible because I do like deep down have an urge to share whatever it is that I want to share and that involves accessibility

Like Mia, Sarah valued performing as a person, in a way that was not removed from the people in the audience. For her, this was connected to her desire to share through choreography:

I'm interested in a certain amount of personal sharing and being myself on stage and even if I'm acting or playing a role there's still a level of like self that is being shared and that takes a lot of investigation.

When seeing others' work, Sarah told me that she felt most disappointed when, “I have watched a dancer for like an hour and feel like I know nothing new about them from when it started.” Sarah not only wanted to connect to others with her own work, she also wanted to connect to others when experiencing the work of other choreographers. My interviewees experienced

choreography as a mode of expression. Their passion to share this expression and connect to other people is what drove them to make their work.

Rebecca distilled her understanding of choreography to a simple sentence: “I mean choreography to me is movement, space, place, time, and relationship and how do things relate to each other.” These elements do not just represent some of the fundamentals of dance-making that may be taught in a choreography class, they also represented Rebecca’s choreographic process. The coming together of, “movement, space, place, time, and relationship,” related both to the arrangement of dancers in a performance and to the specific situation experienced at any given rehearsal. Rebecca worked in a collaborative way with her dancers. She told me that she choreographed as a mode of expression to experience with others in a dialogue:

EJ: Why do you choreograph?

I: Um. (laughs)

EJ: (laughs) Usually I lead up to it but...

I: *I choreograph because I feel it is my voice, a vehicle. It's the vehicle for expressing something and for creating meaning and interacting with audience, which is talking to, you know. I mean I just love it. I just love movement, sound, place, I just love. I mean I think movement is the core of all, of everything. There's no question about it... [My work] allows me to be more receptive, and that I can, it's this dialogue between what's happening and then my input and then oh! And then look what's happening in response to my input. And that dialogue I just I thrive on. And I think it taps into a different way of experiencing ourselves and our environment that's not, not as much about language. And I work that way with dancers. It's very collaborative. I just love that, give them something, or even let them improvise in a space and then I can respond and then they respond.*

Choreography was Rebecca’s voice. It was her way of expressing herself and communicating with dancers and audience members. Like Molly, Rebecca believes in dance as a mode of experiencing life and communicating with others that goes beyond spoken language. For these choreographers, creating and producing choreography is not just a vocation, it is how they experience being in the world and share their experiences with others. It is how they connect to other people. They feel called to strive for this physical form of human connection. This passion drives them forward through the tensions of pursuing an unpaid vocation. In late March 2017, I

attended an informal performance by Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers at Swarthmore College. After the performance and following discussion, Kun-Yang Lin, Philadelphia choreographer, left the audience with two words about his drive to create work: love and humanity.

**Conclusion:
Making a Work Identity when Work is Precarious**

In December 2014, the dance community in Philadelphia was rocked by a sudden loss of one of its central organizations after a local funding institution did not renew the organization's annual monetary grant. Through my peripheral connections to the dance community, I saw the impact that this loss of outside funding seemed to have on choreographers. I became curious about the potential relationship between choreographers' work and outside funding sources. Through my research, I learned that this relationship currently does not play a large role in independent choreographers' work, because they rarely attain outside funding for their choreography, and if they do, they accept that support will be temporary. What more significantly impacts choreographers' work and lives is the lack of support outside the dance community for their artistic work. Independent, contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia have come to depend on strong social support networks within their art world to be able to do the work for their unpaid vocation.

Most independent, contemporary choreographers are not paid for their choreographic work, but they feel that they were called to choreograph. Choreography is their mode of expression, their way of connecting with others. Making the work is choreographers' way of making sense of the world around them.

Independent choreographers' lives are precariously structured around making work and making money. If they spend too much time and energy making money, then they are not able to do the work for their artistic calling. Likewise, if they tip the balance in the opposite direction and devote too much time to pursuing their artistic work, they will not be able to pay the bills that allow them to pursue choreography. Independent, contemporary choreographers in

Philadelphia participate in strong social support networks within their art world to deal with the tensions of an unpaid vocation.

The choreographic vocation is one of many forms of low-paid, precarious work, but the circumstances of the vocation cause choreographers to identify more with their occupational status group than with their economic class (Weber [1946] 1994:113-121). Most of the choreographers I interviewed were raised in middle- or upper-middle-class families that served as a safety net if their balance between making choreographic work and making money became too risky. Though their incomes were low, all of my interviewees were college-educated and used their social support networks to maintain comfortable lifestyles, even when the tensions of the vocation became particularly difficult.

Independent choreographers worked multiple part-time, low-paid jobs with scattered hours to financially support their costs of living and the expenses of their choreographic work. For the most part, these choreographers did not identify with their paid jobs. Instead, independent choreographers' primary work identity aligned with the meaningful, but unpaid, work of their vocational calling. This finding builds on scholarship in the sociology of work, because it shows that workers may form a work identity based on meaningful work and not based on income-generating work. Choreography has not yet been specifically studied from the perspective of the sociology of work. Though recent scholars, like Leidner, have studied artistic occupations (Lingo and Tepper 2013), none have looked so closely at choreography as a vocation. My research on the social networks within the Philadelphia dance community builds on Becker's *Art Worlds* by zooming in on the social world of independent, contemporary choreographers in Philadelphia. By investigating this particular art world, I have found that work

identity is not always linked to paid work. For some occupations, meaningful work may be more significant in workers' development of work identity and sense of self.

In *Work and Self*, Everett C. Hughes emphasizes the primacy of work identity in the construction of a social identity:

“...a man's work is one of the most important parts of his social identity, of his self, and indeed, of his fate, in the one life he has to live, for there is something almost irrevocable about choice of occupation as there is choice of a mate” ([1951] 1994: 57-58).

By “work,” Hughes is referring to paid work that remains stable over the course of a lifetime. The work forming the basis of independent choreographers' work identity is neither paid nor stable. Despite this, independent choreographers identify with their choreographic work.

As Leidner notes, much has changed in workplace structure since Hughes published *Work and Self* in 1951 (Leidner 2006). How do the growing number of workers holding multiple, part-time jobs to make a living maintain a work identity? Most independent choreographers passionately identify with their vocation, not with the part-time work they use to pay the bills. A choreographer will identify as a dance artist, not as a receptionist or yoga instructor. Choreographers accomplish this by engaging in identity work within their artistic communities to maintain identities as artists as they carry out the activities of their artistic vocation.

Studying stage actors in New York and Philadelphia, Leidner found that actors' work identities remained stable despite their precarious employment. Unlike independent choreographers, stage actors' artistic work depended upon being hired or chosen for a production, even if that production did not pay them for their work. While independent choreographers are almost constantly working on their next artistic project, stage actors often go periods without any artistic work – or the identity-affirming social interactions in rehearsal or performance that accompany it. Despite this challenge, stage actors maintain core identities as actors (Leidner 2016). Leidner summarizes:

[Stage actors] prize their identity as actors, probably to a greater extent than most people's occupational identities matter to them, and they love the work they want to do. But they very often struggle to sustain work identities without actually having the work, especially paid work, to support that self-understanding. They must do considerable identity work to uphold their sense of self and to persuade others to accord them the status they claim. They maintain role distance from paying jobs that would suggest a counter identity. They try to protect themselves from other people's disparagement, incredulity, or ignorance. They immerse themselves in activities and networks that help sustain faith that they are indeed theater artists. And over time, they redefine success in ways that seem more attainable (2016:29).

Independent choreographers in Philadelphia engage in a similar type of identity work, though their work-based identity is rarely challenged by long periods without artistic work. Independent choreographers do not need to be hired – and, for the most part, *will not* be hired – to be able to choreograph. The main challenge to their identity is that they do not earn income from their choreography. Like stage actors who rarely make a living from acting, choreography is independent choreographers' core work, but not their means of financial support (Leidner 2016:11). For both stage actors and independent choreographers, success often looks like being able to continue pursuing the vocation through its financial and psychological challenges.

Independent choreographers do not identify with their paid employment because they do not see it as the vocation that they are called to do. They choose a work identity based on the unpaid work they do for their calling, not based on the paid work they do to make money. Their work is their choreographic work and all of the activities necessary to produce it. Independent choreographers generally do not identify with the short-term jobs they use to make a living.

Leidner asks: "If available work opportunities are increasingly precarious and short-term, can the same be said for identities?" (Leidner 2006: 455). For independent choreographers who have long been working in a precarious structure, the answer to this question is no. Their paid work is precarious, but their work identity remains stably rooted in their passion for

choreography. For precariously employed workers without a motivating passion, this may not be the case.

In their introductory article of a special issue of *Work and Occupations* on artistic careers, Elizabeth L. Lingo and Steven J. Tepper point out that past studies show that, “artistic workers often serve as canaries in the mine, foreshadowing larger trends in employment and careers” and, “studying how artists cope with uncertainty and the factors that influence their success should be relevant for understanding these broader social and economic trends facing today’s (and tomorrow’s) work force” (Lingo and Tepper 2013: 340). If choreographers do not identify with their scattered, part-time jobs, what might that mean for the identities of other workers engaged in a similar smattering of paid jobs but not pursuing a vocation in choreography? Will precariously employed workers begin to identify more with the meaningful aspects of their lives than with their multiple forms of unstable, paid employment? With recent changes in work structure, more and more workers are holding multiple, part-time service and on-demand jobs, or “gigs,” to make ends meet. The mechanisms of coping with this employment structure that independent choreographers have developed over the last hundred years may teach us how other workers may be able to confront the financial and psychological tensions of precarious work. Choreographers’ coping mechanisms may also show us that their way of managing vocational tensions through networks and passion may not be possible for other workers. Without a calling driving them forward and a privileged background giving them the confidence and ability to push onwards in their art world, would independent choreographers survive?

Knowing the difficulty of the vocation, a question that I had coming into this research was whether or not independent choreographers’ vocation was sustainable. Shortly into my

research, I was surprised to find that, yes; independent choreographers will likely continue to pursue the vocation. As my interviewees told me and as I saw in the dance community, creative, passionate artists will always find a way to make it work. The question is, then, for whom is this vocation sustainable? Who has access to pursuing an unpaid, artistic vocation? Most of the independent choreographers I met were young, white, educated, and raised in middle class families. A few choreographers had children or were pregnant and described to me the challenges and strategies of pursuing parenthood simultaneously with an unpaid vocation. As a vocation, choreographers recognized that there were many more choreographers working in their 20s and 30s than in older age brackets. Some young choreographers even recognized that their participation in the vocation would be temporary until its challenges proved to be too much, seeing the option to pursue further education to transition careers. Are the decisions of current choreographers in their 20s and 30s to forgo money in the pursuit their passion a sign of an extension of young adulthood, particularly for white, middle class young adults? Further research in the sociology of work is necessary to explore answers to these questions, and what they might imply for artists and other precariously employed workers.

Moving with support from within their art world, independent choreographers in Philadelphia passionately follow their calling, creating identities around a shared desire to connect through dance. Through choreography, they make a community, and, as a community, they make work.

Appendix

List of interviewees:

1. Mia – White female, 29
(Small nonprofit company)
2. Molly – White female, mid 30s
(Shared company not nonprofit)
3. Kayla – White female late 30s
(Nonprofit performance space in home that she works under as a choreographer, Mother)
4. Sarah – White female, early 20s
(Independent choreographer)
5. Christy – White female, early 30s
(Independent choreographer)
6. White male, late 40s
(Larger budget nonprofit company)
7. Rebecca – White female, 50
(Small nonprofit company)
8. White female, early 20s
(Runs an informal collective that is not yet showing work)
9. White female, mid 20s
(Dancer, Sometimes choreographs but does not produce)
10. Latina female, early 20s
11. White male, mid 20s
12. White female, early 30s
13. White female, early 30s
(Pregnant)
14. White female, mid 30s
15. Erin – White female, early 20s
(Creates all of her work with a collaborating choreographer)
16. White female, mid 30s
17. White female, mid 30s
(Just moved to New York but is still showing work and maintaining connections in Philadelphia)
18. Black female, early 20s
(Currently out of the city temporarily to dance in a touring show)

Approximate Age Distribution:

Early 20s: 5
 Mid 20s: 2
 Late 20s: 1
 Early 30s: 3
 Mid 30s: 4
 Late 30s: 1
 49/50: 2

Gender Distribution:

Male: 2

Female: 16

Racial Distribution:

White: 16

Black: 1

Latina: 1

Organizational Structure and Education:

Small nonprofit company: 2

Salaried nonprofit company: 2

Group name, no nonprofit status: 6

Bachelor's degree or BFA: 18

M.F.A.: 1

Fringe Festival Budget for The Performers

Item	Expense
Fringe entry fee	\$275.00
Performance Insurance fee	\$128.00
Performance space rental	\$100.00
Rehearsal space rental (7 2-hour rehearsals \$30 each)	\$232.50
Performer stipend (2 at \$200 each)	\$400.00
Website fee	\$92.00
Projectors	\$0.00 (In kind)
Transportation	\$127.00
Marketing	\$0.00 (In kind)
Reception snacks	\$100.00
Ticket Revenue	(\$186.39)
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$1,268.11

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