

MoBBallet Dance Writers Convening: Examining the Role, Responsibility and Relevance in a Shifting Landscape

MoBBallet

Addressing the Ecosystem 360 °



MoBBallet (Memoirs of Blacks in Ballet), founded, and directed by Theresa Ruth Howard, was established in 2015. MoBBallet is a digital archive dedicated to the contributions of Blacks in ballet whose histories and legacies have been muted, if documented at all. MoBBallet is a free resource to ensure that this valuable information is accessible for educators, scholars, students, journalists, and dance lovers of all ages. Howard has applied a 360° approach to transforming the field of ballet and is a recognized change agent and leader in its cultural reform, diversity, equity, and inclusion, from the training pipeline to the boardroom.

Pathways to Performance Choreographic Program (PTP) is an initiative of MoBBallet that identifies and cultivates Black choreographers whose primary language is ballet, and those working in the idiom, to ensure the ballet field does not pigeonhole them into subcategories like "modern" and "contemporary." As a part of an exciting collaboration of support, PTP made its performance debut in the Eisenhower Theater at the Kennedy Center July 2–3, 2024. This was preceded by a two-week choreographic residency with

Black Canadian choreographer Jennifer Archibald, for the creation of a new work on 13 international, Black-identifying ballet dancers.

As part of this presentation, Howard, with the support of the Kennedy Center, curated a number of wrap-around events including masterclasses and conversations with local dance instructors. Howard took the opportunity to reinvigorate the IDEA work in the field as it seems to be on the wane. As an extension of her 2017 Dance Magazine [Op-Ed: Why We Need To Confront Bias in Dance Criticism](#), she proposed a convening of dance writers.

The MobBallet Dance Writers Conference: Examining the Role, Responsibility and Relevance in the Evolving Ecosystem of the Field was held June 30–July 2 at the Kennedy Center's REACH Center for Social Impact. The conference was supported by Critical Minded, an initiative to invest in cultural critics of Color co-founded by The Nathan Cummings Foundation and The Ford Foundation. This two-day convening invited dance writers and editors into an dialogic, investigative process to interrogate the role and responsibility of dance writers within an ecosystem that is rapidly changing, as well as their relevance to that industry as staff-writing positions are eradicated, social media influencers hold maximum sway, and low writing fees make it impossible to make a living.

In an era when we are acutely aware of social-science systemic racism, we are also aware that journalism and scholarship are institutions that are a part of the machinery. It has been substantiated that systematic racism and its ideology have shaped history and the lens through which it is recorded—through perception, editing, and omission. Within the social ecosystem, scribes, be they journalists, critics, or scholars, are among the most powerful actors. Philip L. Graham, former President and Publisher of the Washington Post, famously said, “Journalists write the rough draft of history.” With a flick of their pens, they hold the power to affirm or challenge hierarchical value systems. They can weave a mythology of greatness or diminish it through reduction. Within the arts, specifically in dance, this power dynamic acts as a main artery in the field, as critical writings are the factors considered by funders, presenters, donors, and patrons.

Howard's personal observations about the industry were another catalyst for the gathering. She observed that when reading criticism of music, art, design, or literature, the writers' love and respect for the craft is palatable. One can sense it through what feels like a true desire to contextualize the work, and historical reference or comparison are often used to substantiate the writer's point of view. What is most palpable is their love of the form. Often when reading dance critique, there is no authentic sense of joy

for the form, let alone curiosity. It can read like a chore and at its worst is acerbic without provocation

The MoBBallet Dance Writers Convening: Examining the Role, Responsibilities, and Relevance in the Changing Landscape was open to dance critics, journalists, professors, scholars, and editors from diverse outlets and mediums. This provided an opportunity to hear a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences about the current state of the field from a multiplicity of voices. The gathering was designed to be a space of education, reflection, ideation and support, allowing participants to discover for themselves where the socialization of white supremacy lay within them and how they (often by default) participate and maintain it when writing through a lens of bias.

The convening was designed to be a first step towards creating ways to help the craft of dance writing (journalism, critique, scholarship) evolve to better capture, contextualize, and serve the ecosystem of dance.

Objectives and Goals

The two-day convening focused on the following goals:

1. **Education on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism (IDEA):** Providing comprehensive training to ensure that participants understand and integrate these principles into their work.
2. **Tools for Identifying Biases:** Equipping participants with the skills to recognize systemic, cultural, and implicit biases in dance writing and criticism.
3. **Aligning Dance Writing with Evolving Perspectives:** Encouraging dance writers to adapt their lens to incorporate IDEA values, thereby fostering a more inclusive and representative narrative within the dance community.
4. **Developing New Criteria for Dance Critique:** Establishing criteria that reflect the evolving landscape of the dance field.
5. **Fostering Dialogue and Community:** Encouraging ongoing conversations among dance writers to maintain the discipline's relevance and vitality.

Key Activities and Discussions

Participants were encouraged to reflect on several critical areas:

- **Role and Relevance of Dance Writers:** Exploring the responsibilities and influence of dance writers in a shifting landscape, including personal and public perceptions.
- **Implicit Bias and Cultural Competence:** Defining and recognizing implicit biases, personal lenses, and cultural competence in dance writing.

- **Historical and Cultural Context:** Emphasizing the importance of context in dance critique.
- **Valuing Diverse Voices:** Highlighting the significance of diverse perspectives in enhancing the richness of dance narratives.
- **Impact Conversations:** Engaging with choreographers and presenters to understand the real-world implications of dance writing.

Participants and Representation

The convening attracted a diverse cohort of 12 participants from various backgrounds, including professors, scholars, and editors. DWC offered a dedicated space, time, and safety to a group of writers and editors to take a moment to contemplate the question of “relevance” in the state of waning journalism and the rise of the social media influencer. If writers themselves cannot effectively lobby for their own existence, or adapt to the changing landscape, then who will? The convening was an opportunity to collaboratively reimagine the role of the dance writer in a robust and healthy dance ecosystem.

ELIMINATING FINANCIAL BARRIERS AND EXCUSES

The resistance to the work of Antiracism and DEI presents in a multitude of forms. Where direct repudiation is deemed politically incorrect, the most palatable and most difficult excuse to refute is that of time and money. The sponsorship of Critical Minded allowed MoBBallet to eradicate the latter, enabling MoBBallet to tangibly activate its initiative in addressing journalism, critical commentary, and critique within the dance sector. Subsidizing participants' travel and lodging, in addition to providing meals and complimentary tickets to the Pathways to Performance program at the Eisenhower Theater, enabled writers, most of whom are freelancers, to choose to attend. Without such support, an in-person convening would not have been possible.

WHO WAS INVITED AND HOW

Howard's design and facilitation style builds trust and creates a sense of intimacy and safety. Participants are able to express their authentic selves, feelings, and opinions which allow discussions to pierce the heart of the matter. It requires everyone to be seen, heard and acknowledged, hence smaller groups are more conducive to this deep-dive approach. Howard understood the importance of addressing the industry hierarchy, hence she decided that writers *and* editors should be invited as they are top tier gatekeepers deciding who gets covered, literally having the last word.

With limited space and funds, MoBBallet and host Kennedy Center culled a list of publications, editors, and writers (print, digital, academic, podcasts) in their respective

networks for the first wave of invitations. After that initial round, the invitation was sent out broadly via email and posted to MoBBallet's social media accounts.

DIVERSITY IN DIALOGUE



Attendee Affiliated Publications: The New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times, Boston Globe, LA Dance Chronicle, Fjord Review, thINKingDANCE, Pointe Magazine/DanceMedia, Dance Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, Danspace Journal, Culturebot, The AMP and personal Substacks. Members of our cohort included professors at Barnard College, CalArts, and, Black Dance Stories, Brooklyn Academy of Music.

From the onset there was concern (given the overall makeup of the field) that there might be a lack of representation, therefore specific invitations were made to writers and scholars of Color. The final cohort of 12 had representation across the spectrum of diversity. The cohort was intergenerational, with broad representation of identity (racial, gender, sexual, class, education) and locality (East and West coast). Importantly they contributed to diverse forms of publications or media outlets (print, digital, academic, podcast). Some of the outlets they contribute to are: The New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle Times, Boston Globe, LA Dance Chronicle, Fjord Review, thINKingDANCE, Pointe Magazine, Dance Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, Danspace Journal, Culturebot, The AMP and personal Substacks. Members of our cohort included professors at Barnard College, CalArts, Black Dance Stories, and Brooklyn Academy of Music.

It is important to note that the cohort not only represented some of the most historical and weighted print publications, but also included “scrappy” influential digital outlets.

Finally, the cohort was intergenerational, which was integral when examining the role and relevance of dance writing since the form is rapidly evolving.

CONVENING DESIGN

- **Session 1: The Power of the Pen - Role & Responsibility (Group Discussion)**
- **Session 2: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism (IDEA) - Level Setting**
 - Group discussion on identifying personal lenses, biases, and the default perspective of whiteness.
- **Session 3: Continuing IDEA Discussions**
- **Session 4: SLINGSHOT Workshop by Gregory King**
- **Session 5: Conversations on Impact with Choreographers and Presenters**
- **Closing: Designing Best Practices for Addressing Bias**

In designing the convening, Howard wanted to assure a level playing field, and not assume that all attendees had participated in IDEA training. Taking that into consideration, the progression of sessions followed her From Here To Diversity IDEA Bootcamp, which is a part of her Embodying IDEA curriculum. The majority of the cohort had engaged in some form of training (10 out of 12). This could be attributed to the aforementioned need for “day jobs,” many of which are with organizations and institutions that require such training (i.e. academia). It is important to note that freelance writers without such moorings might not have such education. Although most [publications have a professional "code of ethics"](#) and the "canons of journalism" which incorporate “common elements including the principles of [truthfulness](#), [accuracy](#) and fact-based communications, independence, objectivity, [impartiality](#), fairness, respect for others and public [accountability](#), as these apply to the gathering, editing and dissemination of newsworthy information to the public,” and “tone, word usage, conflict of interest, fact checking, etc.”¹ However, these codes are derived from and utilized through the subjective lens of systemic racism, hence the level of racial and cultural competence, and sensitivity rely on the values of the evaluator.

Howard’s technique presents the foundational tenets of IDEA training through the filter of the artform. This helps to dispel the mythology that art is immune to systemic racism; rather it reflects and perpetuates societal norms borne from systemic racism. By naming

¹ Wikipedia. “Journalism ethics and standards - Wikipedia.” *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, Wikipedia, 4 September 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalism_ethics_and_standards. Accessed 4 September 2024.

institutionalized racism as a foundation of European and American culture and recognizing that all subcultures (art, education, business) share the same DNA and are similarly affected, we highlight the investigation of social identity, the inherent intersection of privilege, and the formation of implicit and explicit biases. The process allows participants to humanize themselves with empathy and compassion, which in turn enables them to extend that same humanization to their subjects.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WRITER'S LENS AND SHIFTING IT- BIAS IN WRITING

Anchoring the conversation around the elements of IDEA revealed how the cycle of socialization, the foundation of which is white supremacy, has developed the lens of racial, cultural, and genre bias (implicit and explicit). This lens dictates social norms and standards, including those of correctness, belonging. It impacts and is applied to all aspects of life, including art, and creates its hierarchy, standards of excellence, the racialization of the body, including which bodies should be doing certain forms. The building of the personal identity and identifying one's privileges allowed participants to begin to pinpoint and subsequently establish where their own implicit biases rest and how they have been (by default) holding up the system.

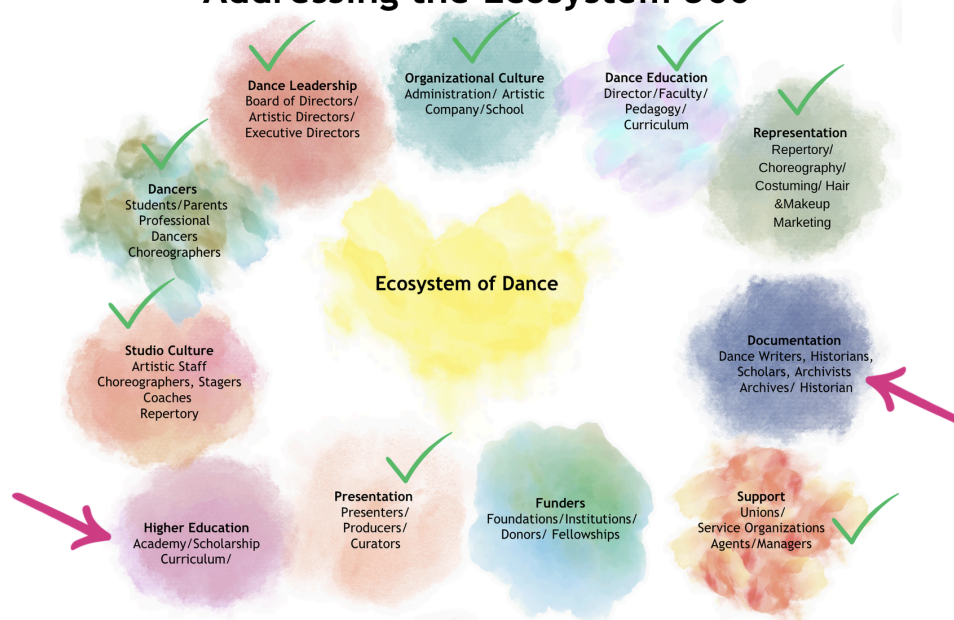
Howard's approach centers humanity, vulnerability and empathy. At the start of the session she stated, "Spaces are only as safe as the people in them make them." When this personal confrontation with one's own identity was brought to the fore, the cohort as a collective was ready to hold the space. Establishing a consensus about the lens' existence and how it warps things was vital to getting the group on the same page for the conversations that followed. The naming and claiming of identity and privilege opened the portal for participants to meditate on how their value systems were constructed, and with that awareness they could begin to analyze how that shaped the way they viewed artists, movement vocabulary, concepts, music choices, bodies, etc. They could begin to interrogate their belief and value systems, checking for implicit bias. Awareness of one's lens was the first tool placed in their toolbox.

Howard asked a question that would become a guiding principle of convening:

*"Is it possible for dance writers to have a Hippocratic Oath of some sort?
First, do no harm?"*

MoBBallet

Addressing the Ecosystem 360 °



A powerful throughline not only named the mechanisms of the “Power of the Pen,” but the effects (personal and professional) on the artists and, in turn, the ecosystem. With the pen, editors and writers draw the gates that render some worthy (of coverage and critique) and others not; they illuminate, diminish, anoint, or dismiss. Dance writings act as affirmation, validation, and consideration. In the system, it is currency that is recognized and accepted by funders, potential donors, and presenters alike. Dance writing is the analog version of social media: If it’s not on the ‘gram did it really happen? If no one covered it does it really matter? What was most confounding was that most of our cohort did not seem to fully comprehend the power of the/their written word. Perhaps this could be attributed to the overwhelming sense of disempowerment and lack of agency they felt universally. The sources of this malcontent emerged as themes which could be identified as the underpinning for the current state of crisis.

THEMES

Abysmal writing fees

- Lack of staff positions with livable wages and benefits.
- The inability to make a living as a dance writer, creating the necessity to have a “day job” which limits time to write.

The opening dialogue around the convening's thesis might have revealed the root issues that are plaguing dance writing. As opportunities, spaces, and fees dwindle, so does the tenability of writing as a profession. Passion will not pay bills. Not surprisingly, the structure and culture of dance writing mirrors that of dance itself, with passion expected to offset low pay, as well as a lack of agency. It tracks that 99% of our cohort were former dancers, for whom this is a field norm. In the old paradigm of dance culture, there is an actual human cost to “loving” dance and dedicating your life to it; the willingness to pay for it is the measure of your dedication. Although the writing profession might appear to be a step up, erudite, and “mature,” in fact what this gathering revealed is that writers are also the low man on the totem, looking dancers square in the eye.

That maturity reference is the caveat. When real life (bills, children, health issues, aging parents) demands a real salary, many find the responsible choice has resulted in some of our best writers leaving the field, or contemplating leaving it, and writing less frequently due lack of availability or time (a result of having full-time jobs). Editors in the cohort affirmed that this has impacted work quality. Low fees makes it difficult, if not impossible, to attract seasoned writers, hence editors are reliant on novices who lack the experience and gravitas to write with authority and depth. Although legacy papers do offer higher rates, the scarcity of full-time staff positions still makes stability difficult. None of our cohort worked as writers “full time.” All had dance-adjacent “day jobs” (in higher education, arts organizations or theaters), which offered better pay, consistent hours, and benefits, while allowing space to continue their desire to write.

A chief goal of the convening was to help participants identify their own lens, which is constructed from one's identity, privilege, biases. One's point of view is intrinsically connected to one's point of entry. Academically, dance criticism is based on description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, which is subjection. A work's interpretation can vary wildly given one's personal, emotional state or life condition. After members of the cohort shared their human conditions—and the impact that the state of the field has on their personal lives—one has to wonder if, and how, that finds exit through the pen.

Isolation and lack of community and fellowship they experienced as writers.

The conference was highly successful in creating a safe space to share such feelings, providing a sense of community, and igniting a sense of empowerment by offering tools to activate their agency in the space they hold and control (i.e., the angles they choose, interview practices, checking for bias and blind spots). Additionally, the convening offered tools for participants to act as a catalyst for change in the spaces they do not. Their alacrity at the thought that change was indeed possible was one of the desired outcomes of this endeavor. It is amazing how a small measure of support and nurturing

(in this case a two-day convening) could be so revitalizing. There was a palpable sense of comfort and relief to simply be able to verbalize their experiences in a safe space with people who shared the same experience.

Feelings of disempowerment and a lack of agency.

- The lack of communication with editors
 - The inability to dialogue about artists and stories they feel are important to tell.
 - Perceived conflicts of interests prevent coverage of artists.
 - Lack of editorial or organizational support, resources, time.
 - Personal connections in the field creates conflicts of interest which in turn become barriers to the (informed) coverage of artists.
 - Writers of Color being pigeonholed in assignments and whitewashed in editing.

Other ways they experience disempowerment and lack of agency is through the choice of who gets covered. This also illustrates the fact that the “power” of the pen does not belong to the hand that holds it, but rather in the system that guides it. Albeit the impact on the artists and industry is real. The hierarchy and value system held by publications and editors can be exclusionary and narrow, and writers, especially freelancers, have little sway. They pitch or are offered assignments and seldom have the opportunity or invitation to engage in equitable discourse about who and what should be covered. A writer’s values and perspectives, if divergent, can simply be eschewed and dismissed.

Defining a clear interpretation of “conflict of interest” is difficult, if not impossible, even in major metropolises. The dance sector is a very small one and develops relationships and associations if you are an active citizen of the field. In theory writers should not cover people they know, or have a personal relationship or connection with, however when the writers are often former dancers and hold other positions in the field, developing relationships is unavoidable.

When having knowledge of artists due to a connection is deemed prohibitive to pitching and covering them, it has a narrowing effect. Assigning someone less learned to write about them can also be problematic. Additionally, it assumes a writer’s inability to be objective, and that full disclosure of said relationship would not be sufficient enough to avoid recusal.

In truth, “conflict of interest” is applied inequitably and with egregious bias, exceptions are made for both writers *and* artists with legacy, lineage and favor. While personal conflicts are untenable, there are instances where writers who have no (visible)

association with a company, choreographer, or artist, but have explicit bias (pro or con) towards them, are regularly allowed to cover them.

Should bias be considered a conflict of interest?

There were Black-identifying writers in the cohort with the mission to make certain that Black artists of the diaspora are covered with cultural insight. The choice was spurred by the knowledge that the aperture of most publications and editors are not expensive enough to consider or include them as a norm. Their connection could be deemed a “conflict of interest” in some spaces. Conversely, some writers of color spoke of being pigeonholed to covering artists of the same race when writing for predominately white outlets, while others see their purpose to exclusively cover artists of color to make certain it is done respectfully and through a learned lens. This is felt to be reductive of their overall expertise and tokenizing.

Writers of Color only want the same “yes, and” afforded their white counterparts who are permitted to write outside their race and assumed capable of writing beyond their expertise of genre. Pulling on that thread, the dampening or whitewashing of the voice of Color was also cited as an issue. Whether under the guise of having the work align with the publication's [Anglo] voice, or being seen as “fat” to be trimmed or falling outside of the comprehension of [white] readers. The stripping of racial and cultural references, nuance and insights defeats the purpose of engaging writers of Color. While standard-bearing publications are more fixed in their rules of engagement, younger outlets are more facile, having the ability to test the elasticity of the rules that support exclusion and exclusivity.

In this space of safety, it could also be acknowledged that in a field as small as dance there are less than three degrees of separation. What constitutes a conflict of interest depends on the editor, the artist and the writer. Often “conflict of interest” could be used as a convenient excuse to deny coverage.

CONFRONTING IMPACT

The cohort's non-white writers bore a different level of responsibility than their white counterparts, and, conversely, were acutely aware of the value, and impact, of dance writing as currency. Likewise, they are privy to the deleterious effects of racially, culturally biased, or ignorant coverage on companies and artists, especially those who are emerging.

Session 5, *Conversations on Impact with Choreographers and Presenters*, underscored the power and responsibility of dance writers. Choreographers Donald Byrd and Jennifer Archibald highlighted the tangible impact of dance writing on artists' careers,

particularly for those reliant on positive reviews for visas and funding. Presenters Pam Tatge (Executive and Artistic Director of Jacob's Pillow) and Jane Raleigh (Director of Dance Programming at the Kennedy Center) conveyed how reviews and features influence booking and sales of programming. This was the watershed moment in the convening that exposed the human impact of what it is written.

EXCERPTS:

Donald Byrd (Choreographer): "The relationship between dance writers, choreographers, and presenters is contentious. As an emerging choreographer, I hoped the dance writer would tell me the insights they got from experiencing the work. I hoped that it would bolster me and keep me intellectually enthused. One writer shared that they aren't writing for the artist, they're writing for the readers. I used to have lots of grievances about dance writers. I'm stimulated by dance writing that is challenging and has weight. I want you to see and make an effort to understand where I'm coming from."

Jennifer Archibald (Choreographer) "When reporters call me, they don't speak about my process in the studio. There are things that are really missing in how audiences read about the work. I don't need everyone to like my work, but I need you to understand what it is that we're trying to do and how we're trying to impact the field. It's a struggle of seeming like we're putting all of the Black choreographers in the same boat. "

- **Pamela Tatge:** (Executive and Artistic Director of Jacob's Pillow) "When we read the reviews, many of these folks aren't approaching this from a curious place. How can you grapple with your discomfort and turn it into curiosity? Reviews have less of an impact because they have become more personal and less curious in general. Feature writing is something that presenters seek and can focus more on social, economic, and cultural context of the work. Writing matters because it stands as record, and it's damaging when it's castigatory. It is a marker of time. Informed, thoughtful coverage is tantamount."

- **Jane Raleigh** ((Director of Dance Programming at the Kennedy Center): "There's an expectation from artists to have their work reviewed at the Kennedy Center—to have their work reviewed there specifically to mark that specific moment in time. International artists have to have reviews for their visa applications to legitimize their work. We need to have coverage for experiences that are not performances, and it's challenging to pitch coverage for residencies and things of that nature."

- **Writer:** "...as a choreographer, what do you want people to remember about you?"

- **Jennifer Archibald:** "I can cross many aesthetics. People have pigeonholed me into only one style. I pulled myself from the commercial world. I want to talk about history and who people are outside of their skin color. I'm afraid to say things because I don't want them to be written about. I've created a lot of neutral pieces in the ballet industry. I have to make sure I'm being rehired by the next white artistic director. I have to choose how Black I'll make the work. I've been on an O1 visa for 20 years. The ballet companies are paying my checks. I have to make work that

ensures that I'll be on bills with other reputable choreographers. I have to make a piece with integrity and stay true to my work. I'm trying to make work that shows that movement can speak."

- **Donald Byrd:** "I listen to the writers that have seen my work over time. I can read them in the same way that they can read me and my work. I think many choreographers desire having relationships with writers. Everything that is written about you will then have context. You will have openness and willingness about what the artist is trying to say. The relational aspect is very important."
- **Theresa Ruth Howard:** "Are we trying to make the ecosystem healthier? In this context, what would be our individual approach to making sure that the ecosystem gets healthier. We just heard that some artists have to be calculated because they might not get another chance."
- **Writer:** "The folks who are doing damage should be disempowered. There should be more public discourse about the people doing the most damage and they should be named."
- **Donald Byrd:** "How much does our identity play into how we see and receive things?"
- **Writer:** "We should create a book of values for ourselves."

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The convening achieved several significant outcomes:

- **Creation of a Safe Space:** Participants expressed feelings of disempowerment and a lack of agency, compounded by isolation and a lack of community. The convening provided a safe space for open discussion, fostering a sense of community and support.
- **Empowerment and Agency:** Writers were encouraged to recognize their power and influence within the dance writing ecosystem, offering tools to address biases and blind spots and act as catalysts for change.
- **IDEA Training Integration:** Utilizing IDEA principles, the convening aimed to dispel myths about art's immunity to systemic racism and reflect on art's role in perpetuating societal norms.

Writers' responses

- I will ask how the artist wants to be presented. "Is there anything that you want me to know about writing about you? How would you like to be portrayed?"
- I will embrace discomfort with curiosity.
- I will do ample research about the artist, their background, and their work without making conclusions, passing judgments, or viewing their work from a static lens.
- I will consider the nuance of the art. What is the artist *trying* to do? Did they do that?

- I will willingly acknowledge my blind spots as it relates to the work being presented within my review.
- I will ask subjects, “Is there anything you want people to know about you or your work?”
- I will be vocal to editors about the priorities for my writing.
- I will ask the editor(s) questions about the edits they offer.
- I will seek not to arrive at an answer about the work but to ask more thoughtful, intentional questions.
- I will allow myself to be mentored (from artists, other writers, the presenter, editors).
- I will share my writing with other writers before sending it to an editor. Allow yourself to be teachable.
- I will question who I am centering in the writing that I do.
- I will do no harm.
- I will navigate the anxiety and vulnerability of putting my work out there!
- I will have joy in the moment of writing.
- I will be a storyteller.
- I will continue to practice the craft and technique of writing.
- I will give myself more freedom.
- Expertise: Experience, maturity, and rigor. What is the value of telling someone else’s story?
- I will meet artists, attend rehearsals, see the process, and have conversations about how the work is perceived.

Editor: Asking questions [to artists] about their work (i.e., what are you trying to say). Taking more time before assigning and during the editing process—slowing down and asking more questions. Practicing the joy of writing. Recruiting new voices-

Facilitator’s offer to Editor: Getting clear about your journalistic intentions towards the field and artists. Creating a criteria or standard to reporting, questions they can ask themselves as they are writing or preparing to interview that would potentially root out implicit bias.

We were only able to scratch the surface; however, we are clearer on the pain points and can actively design the next convening to address them. Because of the diversity in our cohort, we were able to gather the experiences and perspectives from the field and hear the barriers in specific spaces, from the standard-bearing print newspaper with restrictive structures, to the scrappy digital start-up that is adventurous but lacks infrastructure and resources. The issues of staff writers and their editors differ minimally from those of freelancers relative to content and compensation.

We discovered that there is an interesting disconnect between the writer and their impact on the artists in the field. There was a very cursory acknowledgement of the power of a review (good or bad); however, being confronted with the human impact quickly connected them to how much effect their work has on the ecosystem. This centered the “responsibility” aspect of the convening. Although we might have walked away with more questions than answers, what was cultivated was an authentic curiosity to seek solutions instead of dwelling on the problems. We learned that if you build it, those who are meant to start a movement will come; if you plant the seeds, something will sprout up...

[A Chance to Dream](#) Marcie Sillman (Substacks)

[Reframing the Narrative](#) Rachel Howard Fjord Review