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### AAD Past Project Analysis

The main research interest that I'm planning to pursue in some form for my terminal research project has to do with the world of circus. Right now, circus is booming in the performing arts world not only with a proliferation of small and medium-sized circus companies and troupes in many cities but also with circus acts being featured alongside major symphonies, operas, and Broadway shows. There are many possible routes I could go down in researching circus and I'm not quite sure which I'm going to choose, but some possible interest areas include profiling the international model of some huge circus companies like Cirque du Soleil, exploring the definition of "circus" and where it exists between dance and theatre, or evolving performance practices. There were no past AAD projects that matched up perfectly with these interests, but some could belong in similar categories.

The first project that I looked at was Johanna Lorbach's "Movement, Mixture, Music: Stimulating Effective International Cultural Interaction Through the Performing Arts" (2013). This project seemed to relate to the international aspect of circus that interests me. In her project, she asks the following question:

How might international performing arts touring and presenting, primarily a component of the performing arts industry, also be intentionally employed as a tool to serve the objectives of cultural diplomacy, to stimulate effective cross-cultural communication and encourage productive international cultural interaction, considering all of these processes through the inescapable lens of a globalizing world? (pp. 12-13).

The conceptual framework for this project centers on the idea of globalization. It explores how the performing arts industry can use international touring and

presenting to practice cultural diplomacy and bridge the gap to cross-cultural communication. All of this becomes relevant because of our ever more globalized world. Because this project manifested as a capstone, the data collection techniques consisted of literature review. The research topic as well as the sources collected were both influenced by the two supplemental courses for this capstone: Performing Arts Industry and Cross-Cultural Communication. From the topics covered in those two courses, Lorbach chose to explore the themes outlined in her conceptual framework – international touring and presenting, cultural diplomacy, and cross-cultural communication – and only mention ideas such as cultural tourism, cultural policy, and cultural representation as references. Additionally, though she used specific examples of programs or organizations to highlight a given concept, the research focused on its topics broadly, rather than how they all would manifest in one organization. She also self-identified as a “post-positivist researcher,” which means that her analysis of the literature served to provide a new perspective and add to the conversation as opposed to answering any definitive questions. Another aspect of the framework of her research was her acknowledgement that she has her own biases because she is a member of the performing arts world and that she made sure to keep her biases “closely monitored” (p.13) so they could help inform her interpretation of the research while not steering or overwhelming it.

As far as knowledge-building is concerned, this project brings up a number of thoughtful points that deserve further exploration. The idea of using international touring and presenting as a tool for cross-cultural communication is a really

interesting one along with the exploration of what can help facilitate or prevent its efficacy. Approaching this topic through the lens of globalization also made the research relevant and topical; it's something that has the pulse of a lot of current conversations in the art world. Also, the points that Lorbach brings up at the end about who is being left out, why we value culture and arts, and the importance of this multi-cultural connection are all rich ones that could each have research projects of their own. All of this makes her project one that is a substantive addition to the continuing conversation about international communication, arts, and cultural dialogue. Though I don't think it related directly to the international aspect of circus arts that interests me, this kind of paper serves as a good background for the context of the international arts world that I might observe.

This second project that I chose was Amy Rogers' "Audience Development Strategies: Cultivating a Future for Dance Audience Patronage" (2014). I chose this project because many circus performances can be seen as cousins of dance performances and some dance companies are starting to incorporate some circus elements – both media are starting to meet each other in the middle. The main question that Rogers sought to investigate was "What audience development strategies could assist in building dance audiences?" She approached this question by analyzing audience surveys from White Bird, which is a contemporary and experimental dance company in Portland, OR. Her conceptual framework began with a literature review of the history of audience development in dance companies as well as current trends and questions in audience development in the performing arts in general. She then used the foundational knowledge gained from those

readings to better analyze an in-depth case study of audience development efforts at White Bird. The case study consisted of studying the same audience survey given at three different kinds of dance performances to glean demographic and marketing information, interviews with key constituencies at White Bird, and personal experience from having worked at the organization. This research falls under the category of “social constructionism,” which basically studies the world built by humans and how they act and interact within that world.

One of Rogers’ goals in setting out in this project was to create a sort of guide for other dance organizations looking to build their audience. In that, the knowledge-building is very apparent because her project is full of graphs from the audience surveys that White Bird did along with her own analysis of the findings. This project would be very useful for dance companies because all of this data and analysis is together in one place (though it is only limited to one organization). Her conclusion after this analysis seemed to confirm what I expected: that organizations need to get to know their audiences more and craft strategies that respond to their audience’s needs. Technology is playing a huge part in this, not only in being able to survey your audience more easily but also in being able to reach out more consistently and in developing an organizational personality that audiences can respond to. If nothing else, this project offers a great model for organizations looking on how to build and analyze their own audience surveys to yield the most robust and elucidating results. Again, because the project focused more on the audience rather than the artistic product, I didn’t feel that it completely resonated

with my research interests, but it still serves as good context for the changing world of dance.

### Bibliography

Lorbach, J. (2013). *Movement, Mixture, Music: Stimulating Effective International Cultural Interaction through the Performing Arts*. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.

Rogers, A. (2014). *Audience Development Strategies: Cultivating a Future for Dance Audience Patronage* Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.