

# Dancer Research Career Services Department

EXCELLENCE. FLEXIBILITY. SOCIAL NETWORKING. PROFESSIONALISM.

DANCER RESEARCH CAREER SERVICES DEPARTMENT IS HERE TO HELP YOU GET AHEAD IN THE DANCE WORLD.

## Dancer Research Career Services Department: How to Write Artist Statements for Dancers

Artist statements are an essential part of any dancer's career. Being able to succinctly and captivatingly describe your dance or choreographic practice is crucial to applying for grants, performance festivals, residencies and even teaching positions. The Performance Journal invited me to help launch my newly inaugurated Dancer Research Career Services Department by offering various templates for dancers to use when writing their artist statements:

### THE LIQUID BODY/SOFT BODY/LUCID BODY Dancer Statement:

**STEP 1:** First talk about a very specific PRINCIPLE that your methodology is based upon, SUCH AS:

- A) Scientific studies of water flow patterns?
- B) The expression of the fluid system in the human body?
- C) An expansion of the conventional paradigms in regards to human biomechanics?

**STEP 2:** Now expand that very specific principle to broader sets of application (i.e. from the micro to the macro), SUCH AS:

- A) Developing a healthier body-mind connection that invites movement perception to be explored under a new light?
- B) Potential to support the improvement of motor skills and heightened sensitivity?
- C) A state where all impulses are activated and vitality flows through the complex structure of the body?

**STEP 3:** Talk about how your methodology fulfills something lacking in traditional methodology, how it corrects some fundamental mistaken assumption in "mainstream" movement methodologies that portrays you as the *only person* who "sees the light," a messiah with a science-like all-my-followers-who-have-abandoned-the-mainstream-dance-system-will-form-a-cult-around-me evangelism.

### THE "PUSH-THE-PHYSICAL-BOUNDARIES" DANCER STATEMENT:

**STEP 1:** Talk about how your work "pushes physical and emotional boundaries," how your mode of working questions the notion of performance beyond personal assumptions and established modalities.

**STEP 2:** Emphasize a "mutually heightened performance experience" and the "spirit of real risk-taking."

**STEP 3:** Remember to talk about your work's "signature quirkiness and athleticism that leave audiences dazzled."

**STEP 4:** Don't forget the part about your work's "spectacular displays of gladiatorial strength."

### THE "POETIC VULNERABILITY"/FRAGILE BEAUTY DANCER STATEMENT:

**STEP 1:** Talk about how your work moves from the "real to the surreal, intimate to the theatrical, the impalpable to the intangible."

**STEP 2:** Use phrases like "poetic masterwork," "sultry raging essence" and an "intoxicating blend of irresistible movement."

**STEP 3:** Remind us that "the most startling power of performance often lies in its exquisite vulnerability."

### THE "JOURNEY" DANCER ARTIST STATEMENT:

**STEP 1:** Talk about how you will "ravish the eye...telling stories both complicated and mysterious."

**STEP 2:** Talk about how you will "take the spectator on an unexpected and inspiring journey through unknown worlds."

**STEP 3:** Talk about how your piece is meant to pay homage to all \_\_\_\_\_ [INSERT SOCIAL GROUP] and can be seen as a *journey* from degradation to pride, defiance and survival.

### THE PHENOMENOLOGY DANCER STATEMENT:

**STEP 1:** Talk about how your movement explores concepts of form that arise from sense perceptions and sensation as awareness of changing conditions.

**STEP 2: URGENT:** Bring in Merleau-Ponty's intersubjective or dialectical conception of consciousness as propounded in *Phenomenology of Perception*, citing his theory about how the body exists in an interstitial space between the binaries of "subject" and "object," ambiguously existing as both.

**STEP 3:** Use words/phrases like "transitive states," "peripatetic," and "externalization of the interior."

**STEP 4:** Talk about how the ultimate goal is an immersion in responsive visual and auditory environments, to deliver real-time compositional strategies and deal with the conundrum of being in time and space.

### THE "SHOW YOUR MULTICULTURAL ESSENCE" DANCER STATEMENT (OR HOW TO BECOME THE OBAMA OF THE DANCE WORLD)

**STEP 1:** Talk about how your work is a "genre-bending exploration of race, gender, sexuality, culture and history."

**STEP 2:** As one of a small number of People of Color in contemporary dance, you will be seen as a "magic talisman." Use your dance to enlighten the white folk about what it "really means" to be Black/Asian/Latino so that it simultaneously:

- A) Uses white conventions of "elegance" and "virtuosity" and is rooted in a "white" lexicon of dance moves (descending from ballet and modern) so they can identify with it and are not threatened by you (similar to how Senator Harry Reid praised Obama's viability as a potential presidential candidate because he had no trace of "negro dialect").
- B) Concocts a version of "Blackness/Asian-ness" that is titillating and easily consumable so that it simultaneously allows whites to allay their guilt that "they don't know more ethnic people" and gives them the sense that they are experiencing something "completely different" while actually not being very different from everything they have seen before.

### THE "SELF" DANCER STATEMENT

**STEP 1:** Talk about how your dance is always related to SELF-exploration, SELF-realization, SELF-referential, your constructions of SELF-image, challenging your SELF-expectations, fostering SELF-understanding. For every 3 nouns and 2 verbs you should insert the word "SELF."

**STEP 2:** Talk more about how your dance helps you to learn about, understand and come to terms with your "SELF."

**STEP 3:** Repeat steps one and two.

**STEP 4:** Repeat step three.

**STEP 5:** Come from a sheltered upper middle-class background that is all about how women need a SAFE SPACE to find out who they are and explore their SELF.

**STEP 6:** Despite having a very limited range of life experience, having a homogenous set of people you have been exposed to all your life and very little risk you have ever taken in your life (be it artistic, intellectual or political risk), ALWAYS SET AS THE HIGHEST GOAL that you feel you are in a SAFE SPACE.

**STEP 7:** Talk about how it is very important that performance be a SAFE SPACE to explore the performer's vulnerabilities and fragilities, the constant protection of the SAFE ZONE to protect the ever-valuable and all-important SELF.

### THE "PROCESS" DANCER STATEMENT

**STEP 1:** Talk about how you are "ALL ABOUT PROCESS," never "PRODUCT."

**STEP 2:** Take issue with theatrical conventions such as the notion of completion, the need to exhibit something and the audience's attitude of passive reception.

**STEP 3:** Talk about how in your work, there is NO distinction between rehearsal and performance; rather, it is the ongoing struggle between process and production that creates the tension that is such a vital element in your work.

**STEP 4:** Talk about how dance's purpose is to free itself from the overbearing grip of the choreographer's vision of rightful movement, re-imagining dance as an un-writable subject and aligning the relationship of choreographer and dancer into one of equal members in a dialogue.

### THE QUOTIDIAN DANCER STATEMENT:

**STEP 1:** Talk about how you transform everyday simple actions like sliding down the stairs, walking on eggshells or using a fork into complex and unsettling statements about self, society and culture.

**STEP 2:** Talk about how art and life are always "a work in progress," each commenting on the other to bring about change in both arenas.

**STEP 3:** Refer to the "postmodern lineage" that rejects modern dance's grandiosity, angst and emphasis on interiority to instead focus on the everyday that led to the democratization of dance movement lexicon.

**STEP 4:** Throw in Sally Banes references.

### THE LIMINAL DANCER STATEMENT:

**STEP 1:** Talk about how your performance is all about accessing liminal states where identity has dissolved, disorientation ensues and normal modes of social action have been suspended that allow you to transpose knowledge to other surfaces.

**STEP 2:** Talk about ritual, ecstasy, mania, "the haunting," the trickster, the phantom limb and the marginalized parts of the consciousness.

**STEP 3:** Talk about how your dance aspires to create a "liminal spatial medium" that exists in the interplay of sensation, perception and psyche between the dancer and the viewing audience without fixing these positions into pre-determined roles.

**THE SITE-SPECIFIC DANCER STATEMENT**

**HOT! HOT! HOT!**

**NOTE:** If you choose to be a site-specific choreographer/dancer, you have a chance to reach BLOCKBUSTER STATUS and become a cultural icon known outside of the limited, small world of dance. Follow these directions *carefully*:

**STEP 1:** (most important): Pick a high-profile super-famous location to be the site of your dance (a famous train station, a famous architect's building, a grandiose bridge and anything else that will enhance the staging of SPECTACLE — never pick anything anonymous or unknown as your site — NOBODY WILL COME!)

**STEP 2:** Make the production of the work very complex (involving large numbers of people, permits from different city authorities, different historical valences overlapping and colliding upon one site) — this complexity will excite the non-dance audience and reassure them they must be seeing “art.”

**STEP 3:** Yet make the actual ideas of the performance

itself (as opposed to the production) very simple, if not non-existent. THIS WILL ENSURE YOUR BLOCKBUSTER STATUS.

**STEP 4:** CONGRATULATIONS! You have now learned to occupy this ineffable difficult-to-attain cul-de-sac where your work has the superficial appearance of being complex enough (due to the complex production process) to be “high art,” but upon closer examination actually has no ideas behind it (site-specific dance being the *ideal* conduit for this achievement)! Now that you have mastered this subtle compromise of being complex enough to be high art, but still conceptually simplistic enough to be digestible to a broad audience, THIS WILL ASSURE YOUR PAYCHECK AS A LUCRATIVE CHOREOGRAPHER FOR MANY YEARS TO COME!

**THE MULTIMEDIA/TECHNO-FETISHIST DANCER STATEMENT**

**STEP 1:** Use a tiresome technological device such as motion capture, electronic muscle stimulators connected to the internet, a gesture-controlled array of lights woven into a glove that allows the user to create multicolored patterns in the air or robotics.

**STEP 2:** FOLLOWING THE SAME PRINCIPLE as with site-specific dance and its complex production, make sure you stuff your dance performance with so much complex technological gadgetry that it covers up the fact that you have no ideas (or rather, your idea for the performance is your infatuation with technology and your belief that technology is so magical that with it, one does not need to have any ideas behind one's performance.)

**STEP 3:** On the other hand, you can't get that far having absolutely no ideas. So sprinkle some words in your dancer statement about the post-human, the cyborg body, Donna Haraway, Virilio's theory on speed, the virtual realm creating prosthetic limbs, the digitalization of the body, the prosthetic body or giving birth to “Second Life.”

\*\*\*\*\*ALERT\*\*\*\*\*

HEY ALL YOU FEMALE PERFORMANCE ARTISTS, IF YOU RUN OUT OF IDEAS (for your performance), JUST SHOW YOUR TITS!!! SHOWING YOUR TITS ALWAYS MAKES UP FOR THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE NO IDEAS!! REMEMBER THE GOLDEN RULE: ONE “TIT-SHOWING” IS WORTH THREE CONCEPTUAL MOTIFS — JUST FOLLOW THE GRAPH:

# FORMULA FOR SUCCESSFUL DANCE PERFORMANCE:

<b>3 minutes of showing your tits</b>	<b>IS EQUIVALENT TO</b>	<b>30 minutes of narrative about identity, mortality, loss &amp; love</b>
<b>10 minutes of showing your tits</b>	<b>IS EQUIVALENT TO</b>	<b>40 minutes of problematizing the traditional relationship between spectator &amp; on-screen fetish object</b>
<b>20 minutes of showing your tits</b> <b>**BONUS**</b>	<b>IS EQUIVALENT TO</b>	<b>45 minutes of dance about bodies, light, movement, stillness, time, shape, volume, surface, breath, sound, &amp; labor</b>
<b>30 minutes of showing your tits</b>	<b>IS EQUIVALENT TO</b>	<b>50 minutes of movement showing the dialogue between meaning &amp; form to be dynamic and mercurial</b>
<b>40 minute TIT CARNIVAL</b> <b>(multiple dancers running around showing tits indiscriminately)</b>	<b>IS EQUIVALENT TO</b>	<b>1 hour of creating a “fluid spatial medium” that examines the interplay of sensation, perception &amp; psyche between dancer and audience</b>

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# THE “STILL-EMERGING-AFTER-ALL-THESE YEARS” SURVIVAL KIT

STILL EMERGING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS Survival Guide **Question & Answer Session**

**DANCER QUESTION:** I did ADF and Bates over 15 years ago, I applied to the MAP Fund grant 4 times and went to all their information sessions (never even got offered an interview), every time Movement Research has a call for “Open Performance” I do something; but no matter how hard I try, after all this time and hard work, I can't seem to get out of the “Emerging Choreographer” Ghetto. What can I do?

**ANSWER:** START A CULT. Using the guidelines for the first template (Lucid Body/Liquid Body/Soft Body), come up with some methodology (or ideology) that “bucks the system,” that claims to go against everything the mainstream dance world is founded upon (i.e. their ideologies of how to structure movement, their views of what constitutes performance, etc.). Get a group of followers (i.e. young vulnerable prey, dancers whose bullshit detector has not been developed yet) to start to form an entourage around you, over which you can be



their Cult Leader; then start to “make noise” in criticizing what is wrong with the mainstream dance system and your rejection of the mainstream system (this is how you can distinguish yourself from the “slush pile”). Within 5 years the mainstream art system will start running to you and inviting you to conferences and performances, because they love iconoclasts, rebels and an outsider point of view!

**FOOTNOTE 1:** Throughout this piece, I have outlined many options for dancers and choreographers who have no ideas, but still want to make it in the avante-garde NYC dance world. The best methods I can recommend for those who have no ideas but still want to be a choreographer is: showing your tits, using technology and doing “blockbuster” site specific dance.

**FOOTNOTE 2:** None of the Dancer Statement Templates are mutually exclusive. All dancers/ choreographers should feel free to *combine various statements* together: for instance, “Show Your Multicultural Essence” dancer statement along with “Poetic Vulnerability” dancer statement is a popular combination. The site-specific dancer statement could probably be combined with the multimedia/techno-fetishist statement. In fact, if one is *really* short on ideas, one could conceivably combine showing your tits, doing blockbuster site-specific dance *and* burying your work under a lot of technology as a three-prong strategy to cover up the fact that you have no ideas.

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Andrea Liu is Artistic Director of the Fellowship Program for visual/performing artists called “Counterhegemony: Art in a Social Context.” Its first iteration is in Winter 2014 at Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius.