THE YALE DANCE THEATER JOURNAL

Contributors:

Eva Albalghiti (DC ’17)
Caroline Andersson (MC ’15)
Lila Ann Dodge (AFST MA ’14)
Madeline Duff (PC ’14)
Molly Haig (DC ’14)
Indrani Krishnan-Lukomsi (JE ’15)
Karlanna Lewis (LAW/SOM ’15)
Jessica Miller (CC ’15)
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Aren Vastola (BK ’14)
Emily Coates
Douglas Crimp
Iréne Hultman
and Sandra Aberkains
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Karlanna Lewis, Naomi Roselaar, and Holly Taylor

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About Yale Dance Theater
Yale Dance Theater (YDT) is a faculty-led extracurricular initiative that enables Yale students to work with professional artists on the reconstruction of existing choreography and/or development of new work. YDT is conceived as a practice-based research initiative that allows students to investigate choreographic ideas and their historical context through a rigorous, semester-long rehearsal process, resulting in a final public performance.

As part of the research, YDT dancers regularly post blog entries about their experience. In the final phase of the project, we draw on these writings to develop a print journal. YDT’s mission is to track and contribute to current discourses in dance through an inquiry distinctly grounded in physical experience.

Faculty Director
Emily Coates

YDT Student Coordinators
Karlanna Lewis, Naomi Roselaar, and Holly Taylor

YDT’s spring 2014 project is sponsored by the Dance Studies Curriculum, Theater Studies, and Alliance for Dance at Yale and funded by the Arts Discretionary Fund in Yale College.

An exhibition of original photographs from YDT’s 2014 project on Trisha Brown will be on display in the Pierson College Gallery Space through May 2015.

For more information on YDT and current projects visit us at: http://ydt.commons.yale.edu/
Jessica Miller and Naomi Roselaar in excerpts of Newark (1987)
Traveling Left and Then Cutting Right:  
Trisha Brown Writing

Emily Coates

The second annual issue of the Yale Dance Theater Journal celebrates writing created in response to the award-winning choreography of Trisha Brown. Working prolifically from 1960-2012, Brown developed an aesthetic that maps vivid mental, emotional, and physical images in movement. Her choreographic scores draw on science, music, literature, and the visual arts, as well as kinesthetic images generated by her body's own conscious and unconscious thought. With the blessing of the Trisha Brown Dance Company (TBDC) and expertise of Iréne Hultman, a former TBDC rehearsal director, in the spring of 2014 Yale Dance Theater investigated the progression of Brown's aesthetic over time. Hultman staged on the Yale Dance Theater dancers select Early Works (1973-74), and excerpts of Newark (1987), which Brown created in collaboration with Donald Judd. We explored the context in which these dances were presented by installing her Early Works at the Yale University Art Gallery and performing Newark on a proscenium stage.

Led by editors Karlanna Lewis, Holly Taylor, and Naomi Roselaar, this print journal compiles different types of writing about Brown's choreography and the YDT project. The dancers' writing—originally published on our online blog—represents creative and critical responses to the work, composed in the heat of the encounter. We have divided their writing into three sections: first encounters with Brown's movement, the experience of dancing her work in an art gallery, and reflections on the impact of her aesthetic on the dancers' understanding of art and dance. Introductory essays by the editors, written six months later, reflect more deeply on aspects of these themes.

Also included are writings by three guest contributors involved in the project. Renowned art critic and historian Douglas Crimp gave opening remarks at our final performance and has generously permitted us to reprint that essay here. Iréne Hultman's experience teaching Brown's work to new generations of dancers is captured in an interview with the editors. Sandra Aberkains, who was dispatched to Yale by the Dance Notation Bureau to begin the tricky and necessary process of notating Brown's choreography, offers comments and a sample of her dance notation.

Linking writing to dancing, as we do in this journal, is not a new idea. Many of the postmodern choreographers that emerged with Brown in the 1960s integrated writing into their artistic practices. Dance remained Brown's primary medium of expression, along with her bent for visual art, in the form of her drawing practice. When she did turn to wordsmithery, her style mirrored her choreography in its stubborn insistence on working against the norm. See this description of her thought process:
“I may perform an everyday gesture so that the audience does not know whether I have stopped dancing or not and, carrying that irony further, I seek to disrupt their expectations by setting up an action to travel left and then cut right at the last moment unless I imagine they have caught on to me, in which case I might stand still.”  

Thankfully for our purposes, Brown never stood still for very long. Intended to be dipped into at the reader’s discretion, as opposed to read chronologically, the writing here cannot replace the live experience of her roving, exploratory choreography. For that, we hope you will GO OUT AND SEE IT LIVE! Instead, think of this journal as a different kind of artistic product—another form in which the impact of Brown’s groundbreaking choreography can be felt, in the next generation of dance artist-thinkers emerging from Yale.

Trisha Brown’s first dance, which she called a structured improvisation, was made in 1961. After dancing with Judson Dance Theater, making her famous “equipment dances” such as *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), using downtown New York City as her stage in *Leaning Duets* (1970) and *Roof Piece* (1971), and forming her dance company in the early 1970s, Brown made her first work for the proscenium stage in 1979. That work, *Glacial Decoy*, was first presented at the theater of an art museum, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. This is a telling fact: Brown has always had particularly strong connections to the art world. *Glacial Decoy*’s set and costumes were by Robert Rauschenberg, a lifelong friend and Brown’s most frequent visual-artist collaborator. Rauschenberg collaborated with Brown on some of her finest works, including in addition to *Glacial Decoy*, *Set and Reset* (1983) *Astral Convertible* (1989), *Foray Forêt* (1990) and *If You Couldn’t See Me* (1994). Brown said of Rauschenberg that he was her unofficial artistic director for many years; he was well prepared for the task, having been Merce Cunningham’s official artistic director from 1953 to 1964.

It would seem appropriate to think of the partnership of Brown and Rauschenberg beginning with *Glacial Decoy* as typifying Brown’s collaborations with artists, including Donald Judd, who devised the set, costumes, and sound concept for *Newark* (1987). Judd had in fact been the artist collaborator on Brown’s second proscenium work, *Son of Gone Fishin’* (1981). But it’s hard to imagine two artists of greater aesthetic divergence than Rauschenberg and Judd. Think of a Rauschenberg combine like *Monogram*, which consists of a taxidermy angora goat standing on a painted and collaged wooden platform, its shaggy-haired body encircled by an automobile tire and its nose splattered with paint. Compare this with Donald Judd’s evenly spaced plywood or aluminum boxes, with, perhaps, in the bottom of each, a bright red Plexiglas plane to confound its illusion of depth. Now translate this difference to the stage. For *Set and Reset*, Rauschenberg designed a complicated contraption that ascended and then hovered above the stage, a combination of cubical and pyramidal screens on which were projected four different films, each with its own sound competing with Laurie Anderson’s music for the piece, *Long Time, No See*. In addition, Rauschenberg replaced the traditional dense fabric side legs of the stage with see-through scrim, which made the dancer’s off-stage activity visible to the audience. The costumes were made of diaphanous white fabric printed with photographs of gritty urban scenes.

By contrast, for *Newark* Judd devised a series of simple drops that divide the stage into narrower or deeper performance areas as one replaces another, each in a distinctive color: cadmium light red, burnt sienna, cadmium yellow, deep blue, cadmium red. The sound, realized by Peter Zummo, is a series of steady electronic tones punc-
tuated by silences. Judd’s costumes are simple gray unitards.

Here’s what Brown says about these two collaborators: Regarding Rauschenberg:

I was a lightening rod for Bob’s theatrical projections. He described them to me as they occurred to him, often calling in the middle of the night. I would, in turn, picture the descriptions proffered, and in some cases choreograph with the spatial notion of the set he described to me in mind. Inevitably, each new design would be replaced by another, in an elegant procession of visual ideas, until he saw a rehearsal of the piece. At this point, galvanized by what he had assimilated through more systems than just sight, the final design would become manifest.  

Contrast this with what Brown says about Judd’s differently colored stage drops for Newark:

They split the stage into sections forming four corridors, which could alternately block and reveal the dance. Don devised three separate mathematical systems to determine what drops, in what order, would come in where and for how long.... I had unwittingly allowed Judd to usurp the choreographer’s territory of space and time. He could cut off a dancer flung high in an arc, or confine us to a narrow strip on the downstage light line, five feet deep and forty wide.... The Newark set did impose tough dialogues and severe internal limitations, but it also delivered a spatial and temporal score that forced invention and resulted in one of the most striking pieces in our repertory. 

One thing this comparison shows is Brown’s willingness to have her choreographic ideas stretched by her artist collaborators, who included, it should also be said, a number of women: Fujiko Nakaya, Nancy Graves, and Elizabeth Murray among them. This is true, too, for Brown’s work with musicians. Her first dance set to music was Son of Gone Fishin’, whose music, Atalanta, was composed by Robert Ashley. Atalanta would eventually become Ashley’s three-part opera, and not surprisingly, given her cross-disciplinary inclinations, Brown herself eventually directed operas. Her production of Monteverdi’s Orfeo is widely acclaimed as a masterpiece.

From what I’ve said so far, you might be thinking: Trisha Brown has collaborated well, even brilliantly, with major artists. But isn’t that true of a great many twentieth-century choreographers? Think of Michel Fokine’s work with Igor Stranvisky, Leon Baskt, and

2. Ibid., 292-93.
Alexander Benois; or Martha Graham’s many fruitful collaborations with Isamu No- guchi; or Merce Cunningham’s generative partnership with John Cage. But Brown’s connections with the visual arts go especially deep. Brown inhabited a milieu in the early years of SoHo in which painters, sculptors, performance artists, film- and videomakers, and musicians formed the audience for and participated in one another’s work. Brown performed in Robert Whitman’s happenings and in turn Whitman made the film for Brown’s Homemade (1966), in which she strapped to her back a 16mm film projector that showed her dancing the dance she was simultaneously performing. For Brown’s Planes (1968) Jud Yalkut made a film of disorienting aerial views projected onto a vertical plane with concealed holes that allowed the dancers to move around it, seemingly defying gravity. Sculptor Richard Nonas and performance artist Jared Bark helped Brown adapt mountain-climbing equipment for Man Walking Down the Side of a Building. Brown herself make the...what shall I call it?—sculpture? installation? jungle gym?—that was the performance area for Floor of the Forest (1970). For Skymap (1969) Brown didn’t dance but recorded a text that prodded the audience, lying on the floor, to imagine an eccentric map of the United States projected on the ceiling. “Now I have to give you some words,” said Brown’s recorded voice, “so that you can carry out the project of making a map. Don’t get lost in the content. Stick to your task and be kind to the Midwest.” An audience lying on the floor? The dance a spoken text? It was, after all, the late 1960s, the moment of conceptual art, when visual artists replaced paintings and sculptures with texts—with definitions, philosophical speculations, instructions. Brown followed suit, but with her special brand of wit added to the mix. Brown made what she called “cycles” of dances: “I take a compositional subject that intrigues me,” she wrote, “work on it for over two or three pieces until I have my answers, and then move on.”

One of these cycles she called “mathematical.” The accumulations and structured pieces from the 1970s belong to the mathematical cycle.

It’s worth recalling, too, that Brown is an accomplished draughtsman as well as a great dancer and choreographer; her work as a visual artist has been the subject of major exhibitions at the Drawing Center in New York City and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Among the drawings shown in those exhibitions are early ones that resemble minimal or conceptual artworks but are in fact scores or instructions or notations for dances. Probably the most famous of them are the various drawings for Locus (1975). They show a cube with numbers on its periphery. The numbers correspond to the letters of the alphabet, with 1 being a, 2, b, and so forth. Brown used a biographical program note, which begins, “Trisha Brown was born in Aberdeen, Washington, in 1936. She received her B.A....” The letters determine a sequence of numbers on the sides of the cube. Brown described how this became a dance: “I made four sections each three minutes long that move through, touch, look at, jump over, or do something about each point in the series, either one point at a time or clustered. There is spatial repetition but not gestural. The dance does not observe front. It revolves....” The description goes on, but I think you get the point that Brown
invented an arbitrary system, dizzying in its complexity, that would determine the choreography of the dance. What she wanted was what she called pure movement. “Pure movement is,” in her words, “movement that has no other connotations. It is not functional or pantomimic. Mechanical body actions like bending, straightening, or rotating would qualify as pure movement providing the context was neutral.” Neu-trality, arbitrary rules and systems: these were compositional procedures that Brown shared with her fellow visual artists, perhaps foremost among them Donald Judd. Judd famously wrote of the compositional procedure of minimal sculpture as “just one thing after another.” What better description of Accumulation? A gesture is performed, then repeated six or seven times; a second gesture is added and those two are repeated; another is added, and another, until finally there is an accumulation of gestures involving the entire body. It is, as Judd said, “just one thing after another.” Sometimes, as in Accumulations and Sticks and Spanish Dance, you can figure out the rules of the game. But figuring out the rules isn’t the point. The point is the dance that the rules result in, and as with the difference of one Judd box from another, we derive pleasure and knowledge from looking at these things that we could never have imagined from the rules alone.

Fanny Knapp Allen Professor of Art History at the University of Rochester, Crimp is the author of On the Museum’s Ruins, 1993; Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics, 2002; and “Our Kind of Movie”: The Films of Andy Warhol, 2012.

3. Ibid., 291.
5. This text appears on the drawing Untitled (Locus), 1976, illustrated in Trisha Brown: So that the Audience Does Not Know whether I Have Stopped Dancing, ed. Peter Eleey (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008): 64.
Lila Ann Dodge and Aren Vastola in excerpts of Newark (1987)
FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH TRISHA BROWN
Issa Saunders, Christine Shaw, Molly Haig, and Lila Ann Dodge in Spanish Dance (1973)
Reasons for Moving, Reasons for Writing: Introducing the Second Annual YDT Journal

Karlanna Lewis

One movement leads to the next. The next movement leads to the writing. One writing leads to the next.

Trisha Brown, the iconic postmodernist choreographer of the 1970s and 1980s New York scene, rejected a choreographic method based on pleasing pictures and shapes. Trisha sought reasons for moving—reasons, that to the dancer, felt as natural as water taking the shape of a vessel into which the choreographer poured us. Although at first Trisha’s movement was unfamiliar to those whose training was in ballet or Graham-based modern techniques, we soon realized that we moved from one step to the next by our own innate force. Because how could we move any other way?

Our charge, in composing the second annual Yale Dance Theater Journal, has been to recreate the currents of a network of rivers and tributaries. We have been water, pouring ourselves into Trisha’s fluid vision, and at times imprinting the banks with the shape of our paths (these imprints are our writings). Our task, as editors, as been to retrace the shape of water, to chart the course of these rivers so that you, as readers, might also feel the undeniable pull of the streams feeding Trisha’s ocean.

Compared to more classical forms, Trisha’s movement often has a more pedestrian quality, and for that reason it seems more natural. Classical ballet may be a hydro-powered dam—it’s amazing what water can become with great human effort—but Trisha’s movement is the quiet stream. Only when you get right up to the water, maybe running your hands through its ripples or letting its babbling ripple you, do you recognize its power.

Under the guidance of Iréne Hultman, one of Trisha’s original protégés, we accumulated. We accumulated subtle gestures in Trisha’s Accumulation, but that’s not all we gathered. We collected writings. We picked up leaves and branches from every tree, small pieces of every dancer shed into the ocean of Trisha’s work, as we went. And when it was all over, these relics of us, touched by Trisha Brown, we dropped onto the banks of this Journal.

At one rehearsal Iréne told me I was the wild card. She told me Trisha always had one dancer who was the wild card, a dancer who did not quite match up with any other dancer, a dancer who was the tributary departing in a new direction. But we all were sent in a new direction by Trisha’s overpowering ocean.
We will not be the last dancers to dance her Newark or her Early Works, and many after us will find their own reasons for moving. But when you look at this driftwood, the grooves of our words recorded forever on its face—the driftwood that wasn’t trying to be anything, only to be—we hope you too may feel Trisha’s ocean on your toes, that you too may be touched forever, that you too may become what you always were.
I'm writing in the thick of winter in New Haven, CT, where the inimitable dancers of Yale Dance Theater (YDT) are immersed in our spring 2014 project on the Choreography of Trisha Brown. We face leftover snow banks, slushy pools of dark water at every street corner, invisible ice on the sidewalks and abnormally cold temperatures. Inside, with enough effort, heat is produced and the rehearsals begin, led by our fearless Trisha Brown Dance Company rehearsal director, Iréne Hultman.

Mentioning such peripheral detail as the weather that YDT dancers confront getting to and from the studio may seem irrelevant, but it feels important to describe the environment that surrounds these rehearsals when working with a choreographic style like Brown's, which demands attention to real, felt forces. Moving around in New Haven’s wintry landscape heightens the awareness to the physical forces that act upon the body—an effect very similar to learning Brown’s choreography.

One aspect of the movement research in Yale Dance Theater’s project on Trisha Brown explores the intersection of natural forces—non-human forces—in synchronicity with human choice. Working with the actual weight of the leg, the arm’s momentum, or a sense of falling that actually falls, before it catches. How choreography assumes form in Trisha Brown’s work can be a mystery even to the one dancing, for it’s not derived through the deliberate shape making of classical ballet, or the muscled, energetic attack of many modern dance techniques. The more you attack her movement, the more it evades your grasp. Brown’s forms come into existence through profound acceptance of the relationship between one’s body and the physical forces acting upon it. The basic outline of a movement may have a corollary in classical technique - something like an arabesque shows up, for example, in her 1979 piece, Glacial Decoy, which I performed in 1998 as a member of White Oak Dance Project. But the way a dancer reaches that intention-filled “position,” or perhaps a better word is mechanics, is entirely different.

What you will read in the blog that follows is a series of experiments—the dancers’ collective play with words and ideas, an effort to find corollaries (or divergences) to Brown’s aesthetic in writing. This blog is a space for the dancers of YDT to ruminate on the process they’re going through, and in doing so to permit Trisha Brown’s style to inspire language. It’s a raw space filled with fragments of collective thinking—a place in which the dancers’ writing ponders, tracks, and illuminates compelling aspects of the work.
An Abundance of Patience
Eva Albaghiti
February 12, 2014

These first few rehearsals have been exceptionally frustrating. As a ballet dancer, I’m used to dance being frustrating. I’m intimately familiar with the persistent feelings of annoyance and inadequacy that come with always pushing for perfection. When I dance ballet, the frustration is in my muscles—I tell myself to turn out further or lift my leg higher and I can’t. I know exactly what I want from my body, and my body says “no.”

But Trisha Brown’s choreography is frustrating in a way I’ve never encountered before. It sneaks up on me. And it comes in waves. The first wave comes when we’re first learning the choreography, and it hits me square in the mind. It pushes back on my mind when all my mind wants to do is move forward through the choreography. The movements seem so simple and so intuitively arranged, but for some reason my brain seems to actively block me from recalling them. “That’s alright,” I tell myself, “it’s a completely new style; soon you’ll catch on.” And I do. Slowly but surely, I make sense in my head of the movements. I discover, or I think I discover, that it’s really not different from learning any other new style. There’s a delay of twenty repetitions, give or take, but after I’ve done a phrase enough times I do really feel like I know it. The frustration subsides for a time and I’m proud of myself.

But then, when I least expect it, it comes back. I’ve angered it with my arrogance and it’s here to put me in my place. It usually strikes during a drop, or a fall—anything where I’m supposed to be letting go—and then suddenly I’m stuck. There’s an extraordinarily awkward, private moment I have that marks my transition from “dancing” to “not dancing.” I don’t feel like a performer anymore; I’ve locked myself out of that headspace. I just feel silly. “Why,” I ask, “can’t I just let myself fall?” Or that’s what I think I’m asking.

It’s taken me a while to realize that what I’m really asking is, “why can’t I make myself fall?” And the answer to that is just that my body is smarter than I am, and it won’t let me make it fall. I can know the choreography and I can do it again and again, but I’ll always feel imprisoned in it as long as my mind is trying to call the shots.

The only answer is that the mind has to back off. I think that’s what Iréne meant when she told us on our very first day that we had to say “yes.” The dancing starts in the mind, since that’s where the learning happens, but it can’t stay there. It’s not about performing—I keep getting locked out of performer mode because I’m not supposed to be in there in the first place. What it is about, I guess, is being in the movement and feeling it with the whole body, and only by really being in the movement can we feel free again.

I’m trying to move towards this way of working, but I’m worried that the act of trying is just another way of forcing something that can’t be forced. My entire understanding of dance to this point has been based on effort. Dance is something where you internalize “the right thing” in your head and then you work really hard to make your body do it. This approach is completely foreign to me, and getting out of my old mindset is a frustrating process—frustrating because it seems effort won’t get me; it only digs me deeper in. But if effort isn’t the answer, then perhaps the answer is simply time and patience. And we have time, and I have an abundance of patience.
Bullet Points on Trisha Brown
Caroline Andersson
February 13, 2014

What feels nice
- I'm not supposed to think of “poses” or “steps” in this choreography because everything is a continuous chain reaction and nothing really is a still image. However, when I memorize the sequences some motions seem more like “rest” to me than “go,” and therefore please forgive me when I characterize this as a pose. We're not static for this.

One figure feels very nice. We have our legs apart in a large second position, one leg is bent, and our arms are spread out in a diagonal, perpendicular to our straight leg and our torso. It comes up several times in the phrases we do, and it feels like home.
- I like the pony step where we step on bent legs and half toe as if we have hooves.
- Several times we are on our knees and elbows on the ground, and usually our head is down. This is a great position because I am a little bit upside down, but I don’t feel like I’m falling. Which brings me to...

What doesn’t feel nice
- Falling
- Having a straight back while bent over is difficult to feel, especially without mirrors. My spine is twisted in several different directions despite years of wearing a brace, and usually what I feel and how my spine looks are quite different.
- Similarly, rolling through my spine to lift my legs up in the air has given me a large bruise on one side of my spine. Is it better to roll off-center along the side of my spine, or fall on my back in a big block? Experiments continue.
- Oh, also falling.
- Did I mention falling?

What is confusing
- What is the best technique for balancing on your shoulder? It is a precarious spot.
- Do I point my foot in any spots?
- Can I stop holding my head in a stiff position?

Analogies and images we’ve used
- Furniture
- Graham
- Goats and ponies
- Country dance girls
- Sheets of metal moving past each other
- Running men!
- Boats
- Orbits
Bermuda Triangles in my body. (the crease of the wrists, the far side of the throat, the base of the tail.)

Give me thirty minutes more to warm up and it’s not that I’d chart them absolutely to the Enlightenment but I’d come to some kind of accord with them. Coexistence, maybe. It doesn’t mean I have to believe them, but I can graciously hear them out and offer palatable bits of wisdom when we find ourselves implicated in the same grocery checkout line. It’s like a country with feisty semi-autonomous territories within it wheedled from outright civil war and into some kind of collective coherence precisely by being left accorded their non-homogeneity, their block-headed alterity voire aesthetic incompatibility with the rest. I permit them to articulate as they will, as long as agreeably within bounds. In fact, my hearing them out is strategic: I begin to ‘understand’ their point of view. This, is information: it is data, it is polling, it is qualitative research—depending on my level and nature of patience today, and of course the speed of the checker. I begin to see their stakes in this or that policy change, their high-strung weaknesses and over-active strengths, their ir/rationailities, their resources, and just how far any of these can be pushed to the edge of either catastrophe or spontaneous regenerative restructuration. And all these reconnaissances come back to Headquarters, to serve the development, unity and progress (oh, but there are other options for these triadic slogans of moral might … : fraternité, industrie, vigilance, rigueur, tolérance… would it make a difference?) of my vision of the whole. Unfortunately my vision of the whole is pocked by these incomprehensible hold-outs of ignorance. Ignorant because I am ignorant. Patience, I repeat, as my sham-mantra: remember the lessons learned by imperialism; resist the spectacular urge to push your heavy tanks on through. I may offer them compassionate yet market-suited aid for their general and specific development. Am I liable to begin to buy into my own rhetoric of mutual respect? Can I trust the aesthetic ramifications of these opacities in perspective and essential lack of control? Or can I accomplish my conviction that only I am in the position to see all as it is and must be, by gradually convincing the eyes of the storms of my Bermuda Triangles to see my way?
YDT dancers in Group Primary Accumulation (1973)
The Art of Falling
Jessica Miller
February 15, 2014

One of the most intriguing things that I have been discovering in the work of Trisha Brown is the “psychology” behind the movements. In these early rehearsals, grasping the choreography has been very difficult for me. I’ve realized part of this is due to the lack of music during rehearsals. Before working on these pieces, I’d never realized how much I use music as a pathway through the dance. I follow the rhythm, the progression of the melody, the shifts in tempo. The way that we have been introduced to Trisha Brown’s work, thrown into the mix of movement, has been a completely new experience, physically and psychologically. There is nothing to hold onto or hide behind. Rather, the choreography requires the utmost presence and attention to the physical body. Simultaneously, the choreography is in constant flux and endlessly specific to each dancer. I find myself constructing images in my mind that inspire the movements, naming certain sections of the dances we are learning. Certain movements correlate to deep colors and shapes, others to more ambiguous fluid images of nature or machinery. I find myself paying attention to my breath more, the angle of my head in relation to space as opposed to the angle of my head in relation to how the audience will see it. I find myself noticing the small space at the back of my neck, often cramped. The shape of the entire body is more important than the line(s) that the audience will see. In this work, each dancer interprets the movement uniquely. There is uniformity yet originality. This approach allows for an incredible sense of discovery and freedom, but only after one embraces experiencing each movement as opposed to “doing” the movement.

I became aware of this psychological leap that I was going to have to take when we began working on the Falls within the piece. I kept thinking that I would “fall” when I felt ready, when I understood the dance and the choreography. But this is not how Trisha Brown’s work exists. Hesitancy chokes the movement. The piece evolves as you move through it. No movement or step is single, it is a small part of an entire process/evolution of movement. I don’t think there is perfect way to do Trisha’s work. Or maybe there is, but perfection and “seeming” are much less important than existing fully in the movement. Presence. I have only just discovered the tip of the iceberg, I am sure. But this discovery is endlessly exciting to me. Dance is not rigid, it is a constant process of discovery. You must embrace the movement, the falls and the surprises in order to exist within the dance.
Less a Body
Karlanna Lewis
February 15, 2014

When we began Trisha Brown’s work, my first experience was observing. I was an injured dancer, watching movements so natural at the same time as feeling alien to myself—a half-human, half-robot, with a bionic leg that did nothing to foster smooth motion. This early experience, together with the return to myself that began after I was able to dance Trisha’s work (a return noticed even by non-dancing classmates) and Iréne’s insightful guidance and efflorescent energy, inspired the following poem.

Less a Body

Bodiless body of a bawdy girl, less or more or in between here—beside the lesser
giant who is always sleeping—and Anytown, Florida, halfway between nobody and Yeehaw

Junction, USA. What if one day, to save space, the human race shed shoulder, elbow,
knee, hip, until all we were was heads? Homo craniums—bodies, only in name, lest you

forget who we were, when we danced, outside our bodies and most of all our heads, where

every lesson pivoted on the elbow, an axis for a moment, a plumb, dropping its line

until the knee buckled and we followed our hefty feet, nowhere, but we kept going, only

because if we stopped, we collapsed, fell back into ourselves or the sleeper shook away this dream.
“When dancing Trisha Brown, I feel like an unmoored ship. Words tether me. The segments, “step”-less, feel like variation, like waves almost drowning but also washing in something fresh and new. I fear the uncharted. Iréne said today that we need to let go. Not everything can be controlled. I am all about control. I don’t “like” falling. I get scared. What will happen? I fear the worst. And I’m listening to myself writing this now thinking, “Wow, she sounds like a piece of work!”

This is a vulnerable time, anyway. Normally, I find comfort in the regimen of choreography. This happens next, then this. Just like that, yes. This step then that step. I expect. I anticipate. I know the 1-2-3 after 5-6-7-8. This is a vulnerable time, as I approach unmooring from a four-year home. Why do we have to leave places, worlds inhabited, docks explored? I suppose life will always be that way, ebb like this, but it doesn’t prevent my instinct to tie myself to something, anything — hold on, wait for me I’m not ready! Teachers usually tell me to attack more. Maybe these are images for clinging to — the active ones. No more currents I can’t control. I can’t even remember most of the sequences from today, if I am being honest. Let’s try giving them an identity. Let’s take the jump sequence: ”thank you” “soar” “left right horse plod” “tai chi ferris wheel.” Is this garble? Sea foam regurgitated? I don’t remember what comes before or after. The words are already helping. Several times today the music surged up and reoriented, swayed me back to focus. Attack. Chart a new course. There’s a song lyric: “You’ve got to learn how to fall before you learn to fly.” “Grand Canyon” — that stuck. So did “orbit.” My roommate says I shower at the (almost) same time every morning. “You’re pretty regular,” she said, with some splash of intrigue. I must find the grace in falling, in an embrace of the unfamiliar. The experiences that mattered, where I was taught, where I taught, where I learned, weren’t easy but those are the ones, as Iréne said, when I became my own teacher somehow. Those were the unpredictable places of change. Hmm. Places of change. I’m afraid I’m steeped in one of those now. The future spirals in every moment. Time to tai chi ferris wheel through them.”
the ironsmith
Indrani Krishnan-Lukomski
February 16, 2014

In response to YDT’s work with Trisha Brown’s choreography, the following impressions dance with NEWARK and EARLY WORKS.

There is a highway that races through my house. It broke through my door and cut my table in two. I watched as plastic bags entwined in my hair. And the truck lights glared with such speed, they dry the tears. My lips are still sweet.

The underpass goes under my bed, where I will never walk. I know that the lady with a crooked eye is waiting on the other side. The red light hangs above my mirror and they say it was a vote. The Plymouth pushed the chair against the tub. There is a highway that divides the city in which I live. Small letters that once spelt Urban Planning, oozing rust over the ravine in our backyards.

In the middle of my town, there is a green. Sometimes the old man walks around it and on other days he will cross it. But just where the aisles run. He might stop at the intersection of its forking paths. There is no mud on his shoes nor are there footprints in the cement.

There are gates to lock us in and keep you out. Every morning when the bells ring thrice I will cross five streets, and I then will take the diagonal across the central green. I won’t walk on the grass and I might stop at the intersection but I will never take the underpass because I cannot stand to see her eyes.

I cannot write straight but I can follow the grades on this paper. “A corporation is a legal entity that has been incorporated either directly through legislation, established by law.” There are circles through which to leap and diagonals to cross. I was married in front of a fire truck’s historic memorial the day I received your green card. And codes to follow. Triangles that remind me how you are my brother and red papers that give me a name. There are frames and levels. They said I would have a window instead of bars, and they taught me about disciplines and citizenship. Lines, liabilities, employees and neighbors. Incorporated entities and shareholders. Highways that divide, and freedoms. And ink slowly throbbed in the cotton as the judge cleared his throat. The ruler cut into the map as they drew a line, and so were nation states. There is an engine that runs and I do not know if it is the oil or your faith that keeps it turning. Millions call themselves my sons and daughters. I will smile and sue you. A rolled social contract, I lit it and suck until the devil adjusts his speed. I listened with intensity but a drop pearls drown my thigh. I am a mother, I am a home, an enemy and an ally. Water ran, unstoppable and determined; the mother slept and the fighter died. Every river flows and all children grow. Good citizens obey the law and grandfathers will pass. The sky is blue and I will pay my rent this month. The waters will rise but there will be nothing but a big hole. I turned and coiled as the threads struck to my limbs. A beast was turning spinning me into the web. We’ll wear corrective lenses.

But if you cut a thread and then it all falls apart. Then I’ll see the light: just when a million particles dance in the glaze.

There are invisible monsters that creep in the hallways of your logic. And they will keep you walking straight where shadows never catch up. I know because Nietzsche told me, “You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star.” There are no powers in balance. If I reach the levee before counting to three then I might see them cede. Under these bricks there is nothing to follow, billions of sand crusts that could never stand still for you to sum. Lights in a street and men walking one after another. Stopping at the red light, nodding. Disappearing into splashes of hand writings in a constitution. The henna on my hands are the patterns of dried leaves and city maps. A gigantic movie-set in which everything converges to feed your eyes. I dream I am a stage designer, so all I could do is draw what I know and never what I see. I would try to build a house where no matter is out of place, where no dust dances in the sunlight. Because that is what you taught me when you defined the division of labour and Plato’s forms. Sometimes I will draw on my window, and pretend that trees have baubles and globalization is a tangible interdependence of economic and cultural activities. There is no self-determination. There is the allegiance that buckles my knees and ties my hands, a cry that I cannot plea. I have heard of deathbed confessions. And that there is a cycle in which eternal darkness is the logical consequence of a life’s meanderings. Miss Bathsheba, she told me as I blew on my last match: “any day now the fabric of the universe is coming unraveled. The entire universe will get bursted, cause everything depends on fitting together just right.” I will be at the heart of the storm.

The ceiling will cave. Our percentages and ratios will implode and there, between the moment when the tide emerges and when it will submerge, it will be as if I were staring up at the nights canopy of stars, as a collapsing canvas. Or maybe it is I who will fall upward into the sky. We leaned in and a soft drop of the heart, a break in the knee dislodged the globe. It rolled slowly and crushed through thorns as I watched it sway, like a pendulum rocking and slipping between the mockery and solemnity of a judge’s sentence.

It is a steel globe that our eyes perforated with a mil-
lion bullets, flying out from my pores and hitting its surface like shattered mirrors, thrown across the stage. My arms stretch slowly around the surface. From the tips of my left hand to those of my right hand. I am grasping the edge of the frame and wrenching at the strings around my pulse. My arms are sore. Drunken and sprawled on the surface of a steel orb, the shards are coming at my outspread limbs. Peering through a thousand holes. The cloth is so damaged I am surprised it does not crumble, as those old elastic bands that collapse around the waist.

Only then, when form is performed and deformed - through a million fractures will whim leak and reform. Until thy fall though, I will reach far out with my left hand and far right with the other.

As I stand there embracing the steel globe, the fabric stretches across my chest and form a tense bow around the surface. It's waiting to be released for the form to be destroyed. I will try to stop and maintain the position, to keep my arms from snapping back together and around my ribs. But the steel and the joker gave me his "wild card". This steel globe that I must embrace scattered sunspots into my eyes, now all I can think is that anytime soon the fabric of the world will come unraveled.

The Furies threw powders of crushed glass into my eyes and took my hips at the crease, pulled me closer. I held my breath and my chest became heavier so that under an excess of weight the ball sighed and fell out of its socket. I pressed on to see the world drop. The foil drifted through space as if it were gliding on slick tar ball. In harmonious universes, rotations and shifts never coincide: There are a million freckles on her chin, but your lashes must beat against her skin. I keep watching pressing my eye against the coated surface, through the short-circuit's peephole: there sunspots, freckles and world systems turn to crackling embers that surge and recede as a million beating hearts. The ground is gone caused to sway and there, on the tip of a wrist dipping towards the soil as if preparing to dive; there, a metal maker makes universes out of steel sheets. From the blacksmith's tuyère a saturated drop of weld metal runs into a globe.

The blacksmith's arm is strong but the crease in his wrist is gentle. He lets the warm steel flow into a glowing droplet. My steel globe is bloated, swollen with weight and contained matter. From underneath I watched. As the forger's wrist breaks and swirls, the metal floods through the pipe and into his treasure's gorge. An expanding bubble that distends and adapts as a magnifying glass: similar to that ominous drop that precedes the deluge. Waiting and resting as augurs do: defying. Just before the ceiling caved I saw a distorted and grimacing world reflected in my blacksmith's bulb of smolders and matter. It fell into my arms just before my cheek slides on sweat and dirt.

I fell. I think the world was too heavy or maybe I was imbalanced, did I throw it or cut the thread on which it was dangling. But it is rolling now, and I could not tell you for sure if I stayed here with my weight still sinking into the ground, or if I am spinning out across the studio as a twister. With only a center and no shape, both the hurricane and its eye in which all is still and gently hovering amidst the commotion. The tear will pour, then it will collapse and shatter into a million steel drops. In an explosion there will always by an intrinsic random variable. A million fragments refract each other, but if only I had known to look from one into the other, layers of systems over anarchy until there is no matter in place and all is out of line.

And I could not tell if the drop would splurge over my upturned face, or if it was I who leaped and dipped inside in the same way colliding sheets of steel collapse into a single reflection. Then shall the universe implode.

I no longer need to think about anything, not even about the suspended particles that dance in the cyclone's eye. I will climax where the storm tears my limbs apart and there at its center I can finally float—regurgitated from the Archimedean balcony and spurted into the writhing pits of chaos. Flowers curl; they do not wilt, but curl.
Three Things
Aren Vastola
February 18, 2014

1) Yes:

“First you have to say “yes” deep inside...from a guttural place”

Iréne spoke these words during one of our first rehearsals, and the directive has stuck with me. I had the opportunity to learn bits of Trisha Brown’s choreography last year through Iréne’s Dance Theater class—Glacial Decoy, Set and Reset, Locus, and Foray Forêt. When I first encountered the inexorable flow and seamless fluidity of Brown’s choreography, I used the following metaphor to describe my experience:

“I sense there is a flow to the choreography that I must find in reverse. I feel at first like I am swimming upstream and feeling the current against my skin, and for brief moments I can let go of the struggle and float.”

Giving in to the current and saying “yes” seem like two ways of getting at the same underlying principle. But what am I agreeing to when I say “yes”? As we continue to learn Newark, I have become interested in natural movement and what exactly that means. Now, by “natural” I do not mean the psycho-spiritual approach to movement undertaken by early modern dance choreographers, but something much more bare bones: a way of moving in concordance with the body’s kinetic chains wherein everything feels organic. As Iréne has said before, if it doesn’t feel right, then it’s not right. My question is this—is developing efficient movement a process of accumulation (additive) or a process of paring down and unlearning (subtractive)? Or perhaps it’s not something to slap a binary onto.

As we work on the choreography, we focus a great deal on somatic work. We become attuned to the weight of our heels on the floor, the crease of our hip sockets, the weight shift, and I feel each precisely angled gesture. I see a specificity of shape that is tactile; I feel each movement—a kind of kinesthetic synesthesia. In Newark, I see a specificity of shape that is tactile; I feel each weight shift, and I feel each precisely angled gesture. Watching the “Cranwell” phrase, I feel the satisfaction of each logical kinetic chain as I see it unfold—the tantalizing energy of a phrase that you can really sink your teeth into.

From this experience comes another question: What is ease? Nothing could be easier than gravity. From a physical standpoint, a fall requires no effort, just mass and acceleration due to gravity. But falling is one of the hardest things in this material. The inevitability of physical laws becomes more complex when we interact with them while dancing—the vast majority of our lives are spent resisting gravity and maintaining upright orientation. When I fall or flip upside-down, I become so much more aware of my body’s “object-ness.” My own weight causes me to topple, or fall uncontrollably. If “yes” is commitment without looking back, then I need to start understanding what I’m looking towards. Through this process, I am beginning to reeducate my body.

2) Seeing/Looking...Feeling/______:

“Really look!” “It’s visual rhythm.”

“Irenee has mentioned sight numerous times, referring to both the appearance of the dancer’s geometry in space and the dancer’s gaze. We watch video of rehearsal footage, trying to absorb the qualities of a phrase. More than most choreography I see, there is something really kinetically luscious about just watching Brown’s choreography—a kind of kinesthetic synesthesia. In Newark, I see a specificity of shape that is tactile; I feel each weight shift, and I feel each precisely angled gesture. Watching the “Cranwell” phrase, I feel the satisfaction of each logical kinetic chain as I see it unfold—the tantalizing energy of a phrase that you can really sink your teeth into.

I feel the phrase differently when watching it than when doing it. While dancing is much more consuming, both experiences hit me somewhere visceral. As I watch, I feel a powerful desire to emulate the movement. When rehearsing a phrase, if I finally achieve the flow of a movement, I feel like I’ve known it always. Maybe it’s the body’s knowledge coming back to me. I’m trying to understand the interplay between these sensory modes. The best way I can describe the work is by offering the contrast between seeing and looking as a metaphor. Looking is seeing with a kind of directive action; it is both an act of direction and an intake of sensory information at the same time. I need a parallel verb to contrast with feeling—feeling as an act of direction rather than just the intake of sensory information. I think this sense is what I am pursuing.

This push-and-pull sense is what makes a smart dancer, I think. Until now, I have entered ballet class ready to engage my “ballet body”—abdominals pulled up,
hip rotators engaged, chest lifted, etc. It was an act of
direction that overwhelmed sensory information. The
same process doesn’t work for Trisha Brown’s material.
I warm up my joints and try to engage my core, but
I can’t tap into any preset body that will allow me to
execute any phrase we learn. I must take each step on
its own terms, its own mechanics, and its own logic. It
is a balance between knowing what to do with my body
and knowing what my body is doing.

I’ve identified some other concerns—recreation vs. re-
sonance, and direction vs. detail. Recreation of a move-
ment is form-based and exclusively judged on a visual
basis—the approximation of a movement from video or
observation. Resonance is the mechanics and flow of
form, the correct impulses and initiations that allow the
body’s responsiveness to propel it through forms.

Direction is the uninhibited “yes” that takes the body
with it, a full commitment to direction in space. Detail
is the small somatic prompts or mechanical correc-
tions that help us discover the intricacies of the phrase,
which build up into its entirety. Both are indispensible,
and I’m trying to cultivate both. In doing so, I feel like
I am trying to be the driver and the passenger of a car
(while also being the car itself).

3) Translation: Walkthrough of a Phrase

I see colors as I inscribe a circle. Shifting from cor-
tor to side, I am a statue of skin. A line extends from
Point Toe to Point Head, a ray I call the spine. Then I
pick something up backwards, a crumpling retraction.
I feel the space behind me, and the space in front of
me. The elbow leads. There’s a shift of axis, a shift of
plane, like water but more planar—a planar sloshing as
the elbows change their direction. As water flows from
two to three dimensions— that is where this movement
occurs.

The left knee is a pivot point. The elbows settle into a
little mountain, and my spine erupts through it. As the
distance increases, a leg on a hinge changes the whole
orientation. I follow it like a chain on an anchor, com-
pressed into a hieroglyph. Then come shifting sheets
of metal, and the space is full of light. How would my
body refract and reflect so that each shift of angle tells
me something new about myself in space?

A midline abruptly appears, an incidental axis, and then
it vanishes. My eyes follow a dragonfly on the surface
of the water. I fall into smoothness—how a collapsible
flower would fall in a very sudden autumn to listen to
the warmth of the ground. I become a leaf.

Now, I am on a microscope slide. My limbs become
their own organisms spreading across the glass. As the
cell begins division, the nucleus spins and everything
remembers togetherness. The span of evolution takes
place in milliseconds, and I am on my feet—a two-
legged creature. A brief flirt with gravity and I’m back
on the ground.

On the floor again, hips push up and pull back in a lit-
tle snail of a spiral, then burst from the shell to build a
little house on a toppling hill. The leg shoots back and
the arm forward, a split second of freestyle swimming,
then calm. Now I feel like an elevator, looking out the
window. Now it’s something towering, a dinosaur, per-
haps. There is a little puff of air and the arms make an
uneven windmill connected by my sternum. Again, it’s
the surface of the water, but now with lag time. I un-
furl through, and then fall in reverse of how I grew. The
head buoys on the neck, nodding in agreement with an
inevitable gravity. Fall.
Heading in the Right Direction
Molly Haig
February 19, 2014

A lot of posts so far have been about the mental experience of learning Trisha Brown’s choreography. While I agree that this is important, I’ve been having some enlightening experiences that have (arguably) less to do with what goes on inside the head, and more to do with the physical head itself. Many of the corrections Irène has given me have come as slight touches to my back and neck as I lean over: gentle reminders to let my head go. I’m usually surprised to realize that although my body feels completely drooped over, tension remains in my neck, clamping my head tightly in place.

Last Saturday during warm-up, we practiced walking around the room, then suddenly letting our heads drop down. Our bodies followed hot on the heels of our heads (…) as we melted to a crouch, then buckled sideways and trailed smoothly to the ground, still chasing our heads. In that exercise, I felt my head’s weight in a new way.

Although I struggle with the concept, when I do manage to loosen my neck and free my head, Trisha’s choreography feels better. For example, a sequence near the beginning of one phrase (arabesque, twist, throw right hand to left foot, sweep left hand, lift right foot, sweep left hand…) feels much more fluid and natural if I can let my head go with the rest of my body.

My favorite application of the gravity/head relationship was introduced two weeks ago when Nick and Irène explained how to fall backwards from our two feet to our bottoms without bending our knees. The single most useful piece of advice about this potential plop was to drop our heads down towards our laps as we fell. This sounds counterintuitive—how can dropping our heads prevent us from falling down hard? I’m still not exactly sure, but somehow it works. Falling down becomes this magical moment; I try something that seems risky and counterintuitive, but it turns out well every time.

The best parallel I can think of is the feeling of doing a “back line-up” in diving: if you lean backwards off of a three-meter diving board while staying stiff like a board, although you’ll feel helpless in free fall, you will inevitably rotate just enough to land cleanly, head-first in the pool below. Like leaning backwards off a high diving board, Trisha’s head-drop and fall from standing to sitting is delightfully and surprisingly painless.

I’m going to try to be more conscious of my head from now on. My default is to hold on tight, but I know that sometimes I need to let my head fall in Trisha’s choreography; when I do, the movement feels better. Perhaps, after all, this has as much to do with what goes on inside my head as it does with my head’s physical weight. Holding on is easy; for now, dropping my head requires more thought.
Madeline Duff, Eva Albalghiti, Caroline Andersson, and Karlanna Lewis in *Spanish Dance* (1973)
If the body were a double-decker bus, we'd be that coveted front seat on the top floor: as far forward and with the same – but elevated – visual perspective as the driver. But that seat lacks the steering wheel, and thus the power to chose a direction; like we, the knees, can't do much more than follow the feet. We don't typically have the power to choose the body's trajectory.

Trisha Brown's choreography however, lets us lead. When the body is thrown in the air, a quick impulse, a break on either side of us dictates the direction and controls the body's landing. We are finally driving the bus, not just riding along.

Bending is our specialty. Usually, we bend and the body lowers above us simultaneously. But with Trisha's work, we get to branch out, and our folding powers power shapes and movement. Somehow she makes us less a set of gears and more a machine.

That's not to say we don't support the body in Trisha's choreography. We balance the spine, the feet, the pelvis, and the arms. And we often collaborate with the shoulders when working with the floor. The shoulders and we see each other from afar most of the day. Walking to class or eating breakfast simply doesn't require the two (well really four) of us to have more than a long-distance relationship. But to fulfill Trisha's shapes, we must communicate directly as we pass the weight of the body between us.

With the elbows, it's not that we work in collaboration so much as we often mirror them. To be honest, although they can reproduce our angles and extend our lines, they simply don't do as much of the heavy lifting. Literally.

We do have to be careful making shapes though. It's easy to over or under form the 90-degree angles, and arguments often break out between our front and back over whose angle should be perfectly right. But it's mindless banter, because the outside wins according to Trisha. And she is always right.

Although for most day-to-day movement we work in tandem, Trisha's choreography tests our ability to function separately, completing entirely contrasting tasks simultaneously. It's a funny feeling, not always cooperating in perfect symmetry.
Hearing Trisha’s Rhythm
Holly Taylor
February 27, 2014

It’s like you are rubber. You are rubber and you stretch and snap and bounce on your bones. Like you’re a superball thrown hard against a wall, and you spring unpredictably all around the room, and each time you hit you thump, you bump, you thud. That’s Trisha’s movement. A surprising and strong (and unpredictable?) rhythm. The movement is impossible to separate from the rhythm it creates, the thumps are inherent, in fact they are integral. For the dancer, they are essential to understanding the quality of the movement. You say bahlh-DUM-dum-dum to yourself and suddenly you realize that you haven’t been holding the breath long enough, haven’t been melting down low enough. Now you are informed, your movement is suddenly more deep, honest, thorough, believable. It’s less scraping the surface, because you know when to bounce and when to stretch and when to bend, and not just intellectually either: your body understands as well. Especially because a lot of Trisha’s movement divides itself sequentially - you’d never get the proper feel for the whole movement if you couldn’t find the rhythm of the knees pulling forward and the head following and the arms swinging. This is the reason why the rhythm is essential for the viewer, the audience member, who is not moving and must experience the choreography secondhand: without rhythm, everything Trisha would just be an undistinguishable simultaneousness. The moves can only slide together so pleasingly because of the subtle pauses, the subtle changes in weight through your heels, the subtle thumps of your superball body against the ground; rhythm absent, you’d see a stream of unending movement, as if you were hearing a sentence from another language. Trisha is that other language. And the ba-DUM-dum-dum-DUM rhythms are the only tool the audience has to make meaning of the foreign terms.
Presence
Christine Shaw
March 2, 2014

So as some sort of artist headed into the “real” world in just a few short months I have spent a whole load of time thinking about just what it is I want to do with my life when I leave the comforts of Yale. I am foremost trained as an actress, then a playwright. I grew up dancing (albeit bizarrely in the competition dance world in a small town in Georgia) and now choreograph and dance a whole lot. I’ve done devised mime work and maybe am interested in professional European clown work. And luckily Yale tolerates my 300 interests and has let me play around but I keep getting worried about just how I will choose! It seemed for a while that what type of work I headed towards would be so important but as I have been really refining my craft in different genres over the past few months I have come to realize something that seems to apply across disciplines – an ability to stay present.

I have a very frightening but phenomenal voice teacher who has been yelling at me for months about staying present and in the room. “Receive, receive the notes!” She always yells at me. And recently I have noticed how similar this is to things Irène yells at us as we dance. “See the floor, see the piano, be here and now, be present!” There is a real sense of presence and receptiveness that is necessary to Trisha’s work as I have been finding is necessary in my voice lessons. And when I really think about it – I talk about this in playwriting too. Playwriting teachers always talk about hearing your characters, just letting them speak and receiving the material rather than constructing it.

Thus I have really started to notice this interesting prominence of the idea of presence across all my artistic work. As much as these genres I work with differ – my musical theater can often seem rather distant from the work of Trisha Brown – they are all connected by the idea of presence.

I think I often try to place my finger on what makes something good art, be it a play, a dance or really any work – and I am thinking more and more that really great works that move us are united by this idea of being present and receiving our surroundings. We often think of art as a creative process but this word “create” makes it seem almost as if we are imposing ourselves, really piecing together something, when I am starting to think that really good work just comes out of people ready to receive and filter their surroundings through their bodies. Of course this can produce things of huge variety still - we all receive things differently so there will still be loads of possibilities – but I can see an amazing awareness and receptiveness in all the artists I admire and in the moments that I feel myself succeed at work. The best moments in this process have not been the ones that I hit some position sharply and perfectly but the moments when I was really aware and awake in my body and felt, to my core, the rhythm of some moment or the body-logic of a fall.

Today was the first day I think I was able to find myself fully present in Trisha’s work – Irène had us focus on a lightness and I think this help me pull myself out of such an internal focus and really notice and receive my surroundings. Growing up in competition dance I know I have super showy external habits left over from that work and thus often my response is to shut down and go super far in the other direction – I just stop looking outwards at all in an attempt to tone myself down. But focus on lightness changed the whole work for me today. It was amazing what a difference this made. I was totally exhausted by the end in a way I had not been from just the physical – I had really mentally entered new space that connected me to the work. It was so liberating and so exhausting.

And I think this is something that really great artists do no matter the genre of the work. Great dancers and choreographers like Trisha have an ability to be present inside their bodies, playwrights are hyper-present with human interactions, singers with the sounds of notes, actors with the moment on stage. I think I am coming to realize that no matter what I head towards, as long as I can stay present in my work it will turn out well! Thank goodness I am starting to find my presence in Trisha’s work and I hope to continue to find moments where I am just there, present in our little third floor studio, present with the work and with my surroundings, really taking it all in.
INTERVIEW

with Iréne Hultman

Rehearsal director Iréne Hultman served as YDT’s fundamental avenue into Trisha Brown’s choreography. From 1983-1988, Iréne was a member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company, where she later worked as rehearsal director (2006-2009). Her guidance as an expert in her field, as well as a facilitator of discovery and as a peer during the staging process, has allowed YDT growth of an exquisite, articulate nature. Additionally, as a link between original material and its newest dancers, Iréne was uniquely positioned to shape Trisha Brown’s legacy. Journal editors Karlanna Lewis, Naomi Roselaar, and Holly Taylor interviewed Iréne about her experience, the transcription of which is below.

Q  Holly: Could you give us an overview of your involvement with Trisha Brown and her company - how you started with her, your work with her, and your more recent roles - and the effect the project has had on your relationship with Brown’s work and your legacy in the company?

A  I started with the TBDC in 1983. Previously, I had been exposed to her work through another Swedish dancer, Nina Lundborg who created one of the original roles in Glacial Decoy (1979). I also had been exposed to a workshop of Locus (1975) in 1976 that had affected me deeply. Trisha Brown’s poly-directional style and research attitude suited me. The combination of mind and body, so to speak, and the ways that she intertwined the conceptual and the physical intrigued and excited me. In 1983, she was working on Set and Reset, which catapulted TBDC into touring the big stages, therefore I consider myself as a kind of bridge: I arrived right when she moved from a smaller to a bigger company. It was an exciting time of both acceptance and non-acceptance from the dance community. Her abstract style, almost improvisational at first sight, often induced in the more conservative dance audience a feeling that this dance was “less” that it was not art. That fact instilled in me a very strong feeling of determination, almost as a missionary, to make the Trisha Brown phenomenon accepted and known. Simply put – I believed in her work. I still do. I now consider it a great privilege and a very important one to stage her work, and to introduce her repertory to the next generation of dancers and audiences. My teaching for Yale Dance Theater falls into that category. The time spent with the YDT dancers was very special. Not only did they learn, unbeknownst to them, one of Trisha Brown’s most difficult pieces; they understood it. For me, the deeper learning—where the body reflects the mind, and vice versa—can only happen through experience. But as a dancer, you have to be open to that development. And the YDT dancers were open. However much they may have struggled and questioned throughout the process, they learned. I was very impressed.
Q  Naomi: When we visited New York Live Arts last April to take a workshop and attend a performance of the Trisha Brown Dance Company, you originally said you wouldn’t dance, but then at our insistence, you participated fully. Similarly, was there anything throughout the rehearsal process that changed as a response to working with YDT?

A  In terms of NYLA, it was a total seduction. The YDT dancers’ excitement and friendly insistence coupled with my own desire to dance and love of Trisha’s work took over. To participate in the class together with the YDT dancers felt like a completion of what we all had researched during our semester together. It became very special. We truly shared moments and movements.

When it comes to changes I made during the rehearsal process, what stands out the most is our warm-up procedure. Depending on the time of day or day of the week, and the alertness or need I felt from the dancers, I changed the warm-up method. I continually modified it in order to give the dancers a certain experience, a certain letting go, a new procedure in order for them to fully comprehend and experience the combination of quotidian awareness and supreme technical expertise required to execute Trisha’s movements.

Q  Karlanna: What was the most difficult part about teaching Trisha Brown’s choreography to dancers who had not had much, if any, previous experience dancing in her style? On the flip side, what was the most fun part about sharing her legacy with a group of Trisha Brown neophytes?

A  Anything that is new has a certain difficulty to it. I was very excited to teach Trisha Brown’s Newark (1987), even though it is considered to be one of her most difficult dances to learn. How difficult a learning process is reflects, in my experience, the teacher’s ability to communicate the ideas effectively. In this case, I was interested both in the YDT dancers’ ability to grasp the material, and my own ability to transmit it. Would I be able to transmit properly and functionally Trisha Brown’s complexities within this timeframe? It gave me great pleasure to observe the dancers’ discovery of Trisha’s poly-directional movement, and with that their increasingly multifaceted technical awareness, and to see them immerse themselves in the process.

I don’t think I could name one thing in particular that was most fun – the whole process was intriguing and interesting. Trisha Brown has a logic and a rational embedded in her movement. I was so impressed with the dancers’ understanding of these conceptual levels of her work; without that understanding, it would have been much harder for them to reach the corporeal understanding. Then, to transmit and trust the body and its movement, and to learn from one’s own body, is a matter of time and repetition. My hope is that the YDT dancers’ experience with Trisha’s ideas will push the understanding between dance and academia further. All of the projects that Yale Dance Theater taken on have been important, in this regard, not only this one.
Not everyone will dance professionally, but through the YDT-Trisha Brown project and my other teaching, I also hope to develop supporters and funders of the arts. Yale is such an important venue for the future of dance. With their many talents and capabilities, Yale students have the capacity to impact the future of the arts in this country. The legacy of Trisha Brown and the legacy of YDT are now connected, and I hope —more to come.

Iréne Hultman was born in Sweden and is currently based in New York City. Hultman was a member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company from 1983-1988, where she also worked as rehearsal director 2006-2009. She was the Artistic Director of Iréne Hultman Dance 1988 – 2001, touring nationally and internationally.
TRISHA IN THE GALLERY
A few weeks before our official culminating performance, YDT donned our whites and brought Trisha’s *Early Works* to the floors of the Yale University Art Gallery. The *Early Works* are more shape-movement-body experiments than finished choreographies. They are tries, attempts: different every time. This gives the body freedom to explore the shape-movements fearlessly, unrestrained by the ideals of perfection and performance. This practice-like nature of the *Early Works* threw the Gallery’s art collection into sharp relief. *Spanish Dance*, for example, in which dancers, connected front to back by their swaying pelvises, march forward and raise their arms into an almost romantic appropriation of a flamenco pose—*Spanish Dance* was performed in the Ancient Greek sculpture hall, among art pieces that had been “finished” for thousands of years. With each iteration of *Spanish Dance*, each new combination of bodies fitting intimately together, each new flick or curve of the wrist overhead, the marble figures of the hall began to absorb a dynamic quality. Somber-faced busts and armless, billowing statues no longer seemed “finished,” singly determined, or unchangeable. Instead, their appearances evolved, as choreography evolves each time a dancer rehearses, to assume new meanings, new beauties, new intricacies each time we looked at them; it was as if the sculptures, too, were exploring, having been released from the tension of performance, of being “finished.”

This rippling aura of exploration, of trial and error and error and error, is perhaps the most salient take-away from Trisha’s *Early Works*. Will the Leaning Duets successfully cross the gallery floor, or will they disintegrate before the Rothko painting, as a trial of shared balance gives way to an error in shared balance? Will the wooden stick maintain its linear relationship to the patio’s concrete dimensions as the dancers move beneath it? (Irène told us off-handedly that the stick experiment always failed, but would we find a new way of failing?) Will the sculpture in the garden look different to you the next time you see it, without dancers in white stepping deliberately around it in the gravel?

Nothing is ever finished or perfected. There is always more to discover, about a movement, a shape, a sculpture; about one’s body, about one’s environment; about a painting that they say has not “changed” in fifty years. Dancing Trisha in the Gallery opened the portal to this malleable, constructive, collective pursuit of art.
YDT dancers in Early Works (1973-74)
(from notes 2.19.14)

What I am understanding as the fundamental problematic of Trisha Brown’s work with negative space – as approached through YDT’s study of Newark and Early Work of course – is that the dancer’s body is interlocutor of the negativity formed by its very imposition or intervention on or into environment.

The movement is not purely functional (functional in what sense, moreover; since when was dance functional? Since when did we discard functionalism?). It gives an aesthetic ‘idea’ or ‘image’ of functionality – but this is a functionality abstracted from its object. In this sense the choreography is not ‘realist’ nor even ‘pedestrian’ – even though it remains, ontologically, not unrelated to “task based” choreographic schemes of the early 1960s Judson Church explorations. It is a search for “pure” movement, without possibly being able to achieve such a thing. “Pure” movement as physicality refined, abstracted of the muscular and affective anguish of the everyday as of the great “modern” concert dancers.

But neither is this choreography a-referential: and this is its brilliance, the sly sass that the choreography incorporates, the nuggets of popular culture, ‘other’ practices and people, and gendered socio-historic gesture that it slips in suavely, style shucked of style. There is style here, reborn with the ultimate commendation of appearing ‘natural.’ Naturalness and neutrality – a close, slippery relation. Neutrality – as position? As disposition?

But back (briefly) to negativity: negative space is produced in-the-same-instance of the dancer’s interlocution. The forms of this choreography – so sublimely clean, linear, geometrically lucid – are produced precisely in, where, the dancer-body is not. The dancer’s questioning sensing of “negativity” is what makes it’s non-presence so visible.
Movement as Nature, Movement as Sculpture
Jessica Miller
April 13, 2014

As we moved through the gallery spaces, indoors and outdoors, I became aware of a shift taking place in how I perceived the movement in relation to its physical space. It's interesting to me that, while dance is theoretically one of the more three-dimensional art forms - bodies moving through physical space - the experiences that I've had viewing dance as an audience member have almost always been limited to a two-dimensional frame - the proscenium or the screen. In that way, movement becomes related to a photograph or painting. Dance becomes a series of images, with each image having the potential for perfection. But with Trisha Brown's work, there is a heightened awareness of the space - depth, height, onstage, offstage. And because of this acknowledgement that the dance will breathe and transform within the physical space, I think a greater freedom for the movement can be achieved. Rather than the movement being a series of images, it becomes a journey through the space. The movement, its intention and effect, is transformed repeatedly.

When we were performing *Spanish Dance* in the art gallery, I was struck by how sculptural the movement was. Surrounding us were ancient replicas of the human form - the torso, the face, the body - in marble and mosaic. In front of us, a piece created in the 1970s was brought to life. The small, repetitive movements of *Spanish Dance* seemed to magnify the human body. I became aware of the specificity of each step. I was deeply struck by each dancer's attention to her fellow dancers. *Spanish Dance* became a piece about heightened listening, an ode to the unspoken language of the body - movement. In some way, all dance is an ode to the human body, just like the sculptures and mosaics surrounding us, illuminating the poetry of the human form.

When we moved the work outside, I noticed how the movement fit into the environment. The movement worked with the environment. The performance quality of the work seemed to fade. There a recognition of the dance as pure movement in the work of Trisha Brown. I think that acknowledgement allows this work to be intensely affected by its environment, no matter what the environment is. I could imagine Trisha Brown's work being performed in an abandoned factory, or in the ocean at dusk, or in middle of the desert in the heat. All of these locations would inspire new relationships between the dance and the environment. This is one of the most powerful things about Trisha Brown's work for me - the potential for transformation. The work is never finished, but evolving based upon where it is performed, who is performing it and who is watching it. Nuances are uncovered and illuminated. The experience of performing throughout the art gallery has proved to me how alive her work is and how it has the power and capability to inspire a new sense of presence in the dancers and the audience.
The Wrist Accumulates:
The First of Three (Untold) Acts
Karlanna Lewis
April 13, 2014

Iron wrist arcing, short hand tracing the quarter hour—unwind. Soft iron wrist arcing, short hand tracing, long hand tracing—unwind. Soft iron wrists, short hand tracing, long hand tracing, short hand for the halo around a girl's ear, forged from fire—unwind. Hot iron wrists, second hand, minute hand, after-breath halo around the ear, down, not your turn, stay—unwind. Iron wrist tracing, short hand, tracing, long hand, tracing the halo hovering above the ear of the girl, and stay, turn yourself inside out and upside in to lift—unwind. Iron wrist arcing, tracing short, tracing long, bunny around the ear tree, nothing for you now, so dig, step without stepping—unwind. Iron wrist traces small, traces double, traces the halo a firefly leaves around the right ear, wait here, scoop, wait a footy moment, second moment, expose overlapping smiles as if the black-box photographer moved too soon—unwind. Iron wrists, short tracing, long tracing, firefly halo tracing, then fading, opening to catch water, then turning back empty-handed, out of the act for a breath then a hula, you are not here—unwind. Soft iron tracing a wrist, tracing a farther wrist to envelop, not too close, the iridescent ear, and away, and curling, uncurling, playing dead fish, hula fool, you're not here, you're a puppet rising on a string—unwind.
Christine Shaw and Jessica Miller in *Early Works* (1973-74)
Trisha in the Gallery:  
A Study of Studies  
Holly Taylor  
April 13, 2014

It felt like we belonged there. Like we had been born there doing Early Works and the museum always had barefoot college students balancing sticks on their heads, wearing white. Natural is the wrong word of course - all art is fabricated, all art is contrived, all art is made, created, and that is its genius - maybe easy? We eased into the space, in between all of the created art, did our created dance, and we fit. We fit easily.

There's something about the sanctity of an art gallery that compels people to keep hushed. Some say they just don't want to disturb other patrons but really, if you were alone in an art gallery, would you be your normal, clunky, noisy self? Would you even speak at all? And there's something about the professionalism of a dance piece that shuts you up too - the dancers don't talk, they dance, and you don't talk, you watch. Therein lies the beauty, I think, of Trisha in the Gallery: here was a place for sanctity, for professionalism, for purity in the dancers wearing white. And we dropped our sticks on the ground so they smacked and everyone jumped. We shook our hips to Bob Dylan in the Ancient Artifacts room. We laughed falling out of the leaning duets, or puffed in frustration. We grass stained our knees, got gallery floor dust all over our backs. We squinted our eyes in the sun. We tried things that we never had in rehearsal. We Spanished our way into a tree. Where was the sanctity? The professionalism? The purity?

It was in the ease. The belonging. Trisha's movement studies belonged in the rooms with the art to be studied. The art was finished and we were dynamic, shifting our weights, synching our steps, adjusting our timing. The art was created and we were creating, recreating, rediscovering, feeling through the art again, revisiting it, like those visiting the gallery a second, third, sixteenth time. Art is new every time you see it - it is dynamic, it shifts, it synchs, it adjusts to your gaze. And the sanctity, the professionalism, the purity, is actually the awe that comes with realizing that all these things - the paintings, the sculptures, the dancers, the movements - are all studies, sketches, constantly reconfiguring before your eyes, and beautifully so. All art is a study, it stumbles like a leaning duet, it disconnects and refinds itself like sticks in a line, it balances on top of a dancer's head as she walks, and beautifully so; and beautifully so.
I attacked Trisha Brown like a ballerina. This made the first few weeks of rehearsal exceptionally frustrating. Since ballet was the only style of dance I had substantial training in, I equated “dance” with ballet technique—if I’m not turning out and stretching through my legs and pulling up in my core, I thought, I must not be dancing. So I would look for moments in Trisha’s choreography that felt a little like ballet—“my leg is behind me, it’s basically an arabesque”—and latch onto them, letting the rest fall by the wayside. But treating Trisha Brown like modified ballet prevented me from both understanding it and feeling like I was dancing.

“The rhythm is in the construction.”—Iréne

One of the things I struggled with most was the lack of music. I think that in the best ballets, you are the music. This is what I always loved about Balanchine. Serenade has no story; there is only music and dancers, and beautiful as they both are on their own, it is their perfect union that makes the piece so extraordinary. I couldn’t comprehend how you could have dance without music.

But what I came to realize was that it was really the rhythm I missed, and this work does have rhythm—it’s just internal instead of external. If you want to make the right shapes, you need your bodies to interact at precisely the right time. The rhythm is even more a part of the choreography than it is in ballet: rather than fitting the movements to the rhythm, the rhythm is uniquely generated by the movements. Trisha Brown has taken what is most glorious about ballet and made it not only explicit, but absolutely essential. If you’re doing the right thing, you make a picture in both space and time, and you cannot make one without the other.

“Just be you—you are enough.”—Iréne

It wasn’t until the art gallery that I felt like a performer. This made the first few weeks of rehearsal exceptionally frustrating. Since ballet was the only style of dance I had substantial training in, I equated “dance” with ballet technique—if I’m not turning out and stretching through my legs and pulling up in my core, I thought, I must not be dancing. So I would look for moments in Trisha’s choreography that felt a little like ballet—“my leg is behind me, it’s basically an arabesque”—and latch onto them, letting the rest fall by the wayside. But treating Trisha Brown like modified ballet prevented me from both understanding it and feeling like I was dancing.

“The rhythm is in the construction.”—Iréne

The quote above was spoken by one of the museum security guards during a performance of Spanish Dance. I don’t know if Trisha or any of us associate that image with Spanish Dance, but it’s a beautiful one and I’m sure it gave that man some small new thing to marvel at.

Verbal communication is one of the most amazing things to me in the world. It’s a little ridiculous that we have sequences of electrical signals in our heads that we perceive as an infinite array of abstract ideas, and that we can take these signals and flap around meaty bits in our throats to form sound waves that, when they strike the eardrums of another person, can reliably produce electrical sequences in their brain that they perceive as the very same abstract ideas. I always worried that language was the only thing that could do that, but this man’s testimony proves me wrong, and I am so glad. Of course, dance as we know it is not language—we don’t have it standardized and refined so that we can express ideas with much precision. But the fact that it’s different doesn’t make it any less real or amazing as a form of communication. There’s something authentically beautiful about the fact that you can take six bodies and have them shuffle around to a Bob Dylan song and someone will say, “this reminds me of X.” What I saw at the art gallery, and also as a spectator at the TBDC’s performance, was that dance does speak. Loudly. Dance may not say the same thing to everyone, but what it can say is powerful. I have to praise Trisha Brown for using the communicative power of dance to its fullest potential.

“I see understanding.”—Emily Coates

I’m sorry if this sounds cliché, but it fills me with joy to think that our dancing can really touch people. I’ve always thought that good dance is a dialogue. Actually, “dialogue” is misleading, because there are really more than two players talking. The dancer’s mind and body talk to each other, and the whole dancer talks to the other whole dancers, and if the dancers are very good then they can bring the audience into the conversation, too.

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“I see understanding.”—Emily Coates

I’m saying a lot of wonderful things about Trisha’s work, so you must have figured out that I got out of my ballet-induced stagnation. I think what did it was realizing...
that what I love about ballet is what I love about dance in general; the technique and style is inconsequential. It's as if I'm standing on a mountain now, looking back at the valley that is ballet, and realizing that the land around me is riddled many separate valleys, as far as the eye can see. Countless different forms of dance, reaching out beyond the horizon, and yet they all share something. Now I feel like I can still be a ballerina, but I'm something more, too. Like ballet once did, Trisha Brown is seeping into my blood, the “understanding” of the movement permeating every sinew and bone. I know I have but scratched the surface on this immense body of work, but I feel accomplished just for having attained this new perspective. Now that I have internalized this minimal understanding—of both how Trisha's work is dance and how it is different from other dance—the real learning can begin.
New Space
Naomi Roselaar
April 14, 2014

The movement:
The shapes felt more organic in a space that already held objects and art. We as figures felt less artificial. More natural.

The audience:
The most intriguing part of performing was the audience’s relationship with us. It was a bystander audience. They arrived at the gallery with no obligation to watch our movement and no expectations for our performance. And that made it so easy to perform. Eliminating commitment and money created an entirely different dynamic between the performers and spectators. Instead of required anticipation brought on by sitting behind a curtain before a traditional performance, our instantaneous audiences had the freedom to stay or leave and were truly curious about our movement.

Practicing movement studies, Sticks in particular, in the studio is tedious and I’m focused on getting it right, moving – or not moving - my limbs to make the pattern of movement happen. But performing with this type of spectator, one with a predetermined, genuine interest for art, and one with continuous freedom to engage or disengage, allowed for an entirely different thought process.

In front of this spontaneous, flowing audience in the open environment of the gallery I wasn’t so separated. The distinct parts of the shapes created by the sticks, my body, and the other dancers previously needed to be melded and pieced together. Instead, in the gallery, the people and the sticks felt stronger and closer, like a single structure.

The floor:
In the studio, Group Primary Accumulation was about perfecting the sequence of gestures, having the mental stamina to not lose count, and staying in line with the other dancers. In the gallery, everything changed because I lost my senses. Performing on the terrace meant feeling the floor much more than in the studio. The scratchy surface of the outdoor tile intensified my awareness of even the slightest movement against the ground. The deep etches between tiles made kinesthetic spacing easier. But direct exposure to the sun meant I was blind. Only during 4, 13-15, and 28-30 could I quickly catch a bright glimpse of the dancers around me and attempt to relieve my forced reliance on aural cues. More than anything else, when performing Group Primary Accumulation in the lobby of the gallery, I focused on the security camera above me and thought about the permanent recording of our experience from some security office in a remote part of the building. I liked the idea that even a security guard reviewing the tape could at any moment experience our live art.
Molly Haig and Karlanna Lewis in *Early Works* (1973-74)
We Were Watercolor.
Molly Haig
April 15, 2014

It felt strange to dance in the art gallery alongside art that had remained still for many years, and would remain still for years to come. As a dancer, I felt more conscious of how alive I was, and how much my body moved. I felt like both a collaborator (fitting myself into the art on display, adding a new idea to the space) and a foreigner to the museum (I was new to being a piece of art: I was just visiting, just trying it out, unlike the sculptures who resided there permanently).

A crowd gathered around us as we performed “Accumulation” below a Rothko painting. I wondered what drew them to us, when there were so many other things to look at in the museum. Why watch the dancers instead of sculptures? I think movement arrests the viewer’s attention in a different way. If you glance away from a painting or sculpture, it will still be there when you look back. But if you glance away from dance, you’ll miss something. Dancers are alive, and each second gives different information. I suppose you could have a similar experience of discovery when studying a painting, but while the discovery might take time, the discovery would not be bound to specific time, as it is with dance…so the audience watched us dance, even though we were surrounded by static masterpieces.

Here is another way I’ve been thinking about the art gallery: placing Trisha’s choreography at the art gallery sets her alongside Rothko and ancient sculptors. But where does it place her dancers? It aligns us with stone, or paint. We are the materials that the artist molds. Using humans as your paint seems like a big risk. Humans don’t dry like paint on canvas, or hold shape like stone sculptures. We forget, smile, stumble, and think for ourselves. Dance is a collaboration. If dancers really were paint, we would be some magical brand of self-propelling, never-drying watercolor on a wet surface—sometimes moving where the artist wants us to, sometimes getting mixed up, changing shape or color, creating something new.
Becoming Art
Issa Saunders
April 16, 2014

Walking around the gallery barefooted. Feeling the varying textures of the different spaces on my skin. I don't think I have ever felt such a close connection to exhibited art. By allowing my flesh to become that of the walks and floors of the gallery I felt like art. We were all art. We were not distractions from the pieces but instead a moving installation at one and the same with the static pieces of art around us. Even the act of being spectated felt completely natural. Performing the early works in the gallery space was absolutely nothing like the jitter inducing act of performing onstage. I felt such an intimate connection with the other dancers and the space.

The feeling of becoming one with art was most organic at the beginning when it was completely novel. By the 6th or 7th repetition of some of the early works things took on a slightly more practice performance feel. But in the beginning it was just for us. It was about feeling the artistry in the simplicity of the movements.

The most connected I felt to other dancers was in Leaning Duets. In those weight-sharing moments, my entire world narrowed to the bond between myself and the dancer next to me. Connected speaking, connecting breathing, connected leaning. It was an incredibly beautiful shared experience.

I felt a similar connection during Group Primary Accumulation. But instead of my world being narrowed to just the existence of the dancers, it felt as if we were all consumed by the art. We became embedded into the very floor of the gallery. Moving in synch. Driven and directed by the art.

Some bits were frustrating although all seemed to just work better than we had ever experienced in the studio. It was the first time the work was adequately and completely contextualized. It was the first time everything felt natural. Part of me wishes we'd performed Newark in the gallery as well. I wonder if it would have made that piece feel as natural and as ours as the early works.
OPEN REHEARSAL
OF TRISHA BROWN’S EARLY WORKS (1973-74)

Saturday, April 5, 2014
Drop by anytime between 12:30pm-3:30pm

Yale Dance Theater
Yale University Art Gallery
1111 Chapel Street
New Haven, Connecticut

YDT’s spring 2014 project is sponsored by the Arts Discretionary Fund in Yale College in cooperation with the Dance Studies curriculum, Theatre Studies, and Alliance for Dance at Yale.

Visit the Yale Dance Theater Blog:
http://ydt.commons.yale.edu
Under the direction of Yale Dance Theater (YDT) faculty director Emily Coates and former Trisha Brown Dance Company dancer and rehearsal director Irène Hultman, YDT students rehearse several of Trisha Brown's early works in various spaces in the Gallery today. Enjoy the museum and happen upon a dance rehearsal.

This rehearsal is in preparation for YDT’s final showing on April 16 at the Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School Theater. For tickets, visit yaledramacoalition.org.

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Since 1961, Trisha Brown has created over 100 dance works, receiving numerous awards and fellowships, including the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship “Genius Award” and the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize. After graduating from Mills College in Oakland, California, Brown moved to New York City, where her movement investigations have found the extraordinary in the everyday and have challenged existing perceptions of what constitutes performance.

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Sandra Aberkains' notation for *Spanish Dance*, choreography by Trisha Brown
Sandra Aberkalns, a Dance Notation Bureau Senior Staff Notator, attended each rehearsal in order to transcribe the choreography into Labanotation, a system by which to record movement. She explained that she took down the movement, as we learned it from Iréne, through a combination of markings and words, and then revised and refined her markings during future rehearsals. Although Labanotation is unrecognizable to dancers who have not formally learned the notation system, Sandra interpreted her work and allowed the notation to serve as a reference for the dancers in our review process. Eventually, her notes will enter the archive of dance notation and become a permanent record of Trisha's choreography.

The Dance Notation Bureau would like to thank the Trisha Brown Dance Company, Iréne Hultman, Emily Coates, and Yale Dance Theater for their help in making this historic Labanotation project a reality. Coordination between so many entities is not always easy, but when all the pieces fall into place magic happens. This partnership has resulted in the first-time notation capture of three of Trisha Brown’s iconic works, Newark (excerpts), Group Primary Accumulation, and Spanish Dance.

Regardless of the number of works I have notated, I still vacillate between excitement and trepidation as I gather the tools of my trade for that first rehearsal—I always have too many questions and not enough answers. Inevitably, the notation-capture of any choreographic work begins as a journey into the unknown, which, over time, evolves into the known with a deep understanding of the work. Well after the dancers have finished their final performances, I will continue working on the score, shaping it to conform to international standards. The finished manuscript will not only document the steps but also the motivations, intentions, and dynamics that make this work unique—crucial information that cannot be gleaned from visual or printed media such as newspaper articles or reviews.

I’ve been asked, “What was it like to notate Brown’s work?” The analogy of “peeling the onion” comes to mind. I needed to delve through layers of choreographic information and dancers’ interpretations to discern the core or internal structure of the work, so that I could reconstruct the external structure bringing the process full circle. Additionally, for me, and I believe for the dancers as well, especially in Newark the progression was as important as the destination. It was a pleasure meeting and working with Iréne Hultman as well as all of the dedicated dancers who participated in this project. It was a challenge for us all and we are all the better for it.

Sandra Aberkalns is a Senior Staff Notator with the Dance Notation Bureau.
FINAL REFLECTIONS
YDT dancers with Iréne Hultman
I was drawn to YDT not just for the in-depth concentration on learning choreography, but also for the constant exploration of the dialogue between dance and writing. In addition to providing space for dancers themselves to write about dance, writing expands a live art form into something tangible, something that can be preserved.

The question of how to preserve Trisha Brown’s choreography is particularly compelling, because instead of developing from a standard technique, it was created organically, directly from Trisha’s body. Iréné was very specific about teaching the way Trisha originally taught, through silent repetition of movement until verbal questions became a necessary last resort. And when Nick, a current company member, came to help demonstrate parts of Cranwell full out, he worked in the same fashion. The movement, however, wasn’t the same. Overall Iréné’s Cranwell was Cranwell and Nick’s Cranwell was Cranwell, but the two versions differed in the multiple idiosyncratic transitions and subtle timing variations throughout the phrase. Dancing Cranwell with the minute augmentations wasn’t difficult, and the differences would have been imperceptible to most audience members. However, even the slightest change worked against the progress Sandra, the Dance Notation Bureau Staff Notator working with YDT, had made on recording the Trisha Brown choreography. At each rehearsal, she learned the choreography with us and converted Trisha’s movement into a written language. As we wrote reflections about the choreography after rehearsals, Sandra transcribed the movement in the present. She explained to us that she recorded the precise movement, style, and atmosphere of Trisha Brown’s choreography using a notation developed for dance in general, supplementing it only when necessary with new markings if no existing notation sufficed to capture the exact choreography.

One rehearsal, it wasn’t Sandra sitting in the notator’s chair. Instead, her colleague, another small, graceful woman, occupied Sandra’s corner of the room, tucked between the mirror and the grand piano. With her neck curved toward Sandra’s familiar binder of esoteric symbols, she marked slowly through the entire Cranwell phrase, dancing with incredible ease the exact movements we had spent weeks rehearsing. What we learned kinesthetically through repetition over the course of a month, she, in moments, read from paper onto her body in an expert display of Labanotation literacy. Watching her, I realized that although the writing we focused on throughout the semester was in English words, destined for the blog and for this journal, learning along side a notator also meant that someone was writing and creating Laban symbols for the choreography every time we moved. Instead of commentary or interpretation, this writing is a form of wordless and bodiless dance. Observing the notation process, I thought it might be cheating to learn the choreography, traditionally taught through driving repetition from dancer to dancer, by quick-
ly reading off symbols detailing the movement. Observing the notators, I thought it restrictive to preserve choreography in a manner unreadable to most dancers. But most of all I found it fitting that even transcribed into a language, Trisha Brown’s choreography could be preserved without words.
I was walking out of the Yale Art Gallery into the sunshine, carrying a bundle of ten-foot long sticks, when I suddenly knew what I was going to write about. During those three hours in the gallery space, I unknowingly began to understand something. After the performance, I realized that the conceptual gap I previously wedged between Brown’s early works and her later choreography had narrowed considerably. For three hours I felt like I was able to enter Brown’s artistic world and glimpse the concepts and questions that resided there. Discovering this mindset bridged the decades; I found in the Early Works an altogether unexpected congruity with the choreography we’ve been rehearsing for weeks. Like the faces of our audience pressed against the glass of the gallery windows, from the outside I can only see things. From the inside, I feel them. In feeling, in doing, there resides an understanding of the artist that cannot be uncovered from the outside. To-day I came to terms with this realization, and from the inside I’ve begun to discover foundations that underlie both the Early Works and Newark (New Work).

Above all, there is patience. Without patience, there can be no discovery. Patience is an allowance to work through things, rather than towards things. Patience relieves the anxiety of “getting it,” the goal-directed anticipation that clouds my efforts with frustration. By accepting patience, repetition and simplicity become first bearable, then pleasurable. I am patient with the weight of my body as my arm drops, feeling its directionality and momentum. When accustomed to instantaneity, patience feels like “no.” But now, willingness unto openness, responsiveness, and patience is a resounding, “yes.”

In my last blog post, I focused a good deal on the notions of activity and passivity, and how this choreography throws the specious binary into flux. Patience is the implication of waiting, of passivity, and implying non-action—a deferral of action. In this choreography, however, I find an active patience; much like active feeling, the phenomenological vocabulary of the choreography does not fall into two easy categories. Experiencing can be “agentive” (consciousness directed towards phenomena), and directing can be “passive” (saying yes to physical force), so the two blur together inextricably. Implicit to the distinction is the tacit assumption that agency is closed and passivity is open. Given the deeply experiential nature of YDT’s work, I want to pause and consider consciousness as a topic of discussion.

I will cursorily sketch out some of the main philosophical ideas relevant to consciousness, and later on see how my own experiences depart from or align with them. Consciousness forms the foundation of phenomenology, and learning choreography is often an experiment in consciousness. Edmund Husserl’s original phenomenology relies on the consciousness as intentionality, emphasizing the subject’s intentional direction awareness of objects. From this, objective conclusions can be drawn about first-person experience and its relationship to knowledge. Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty propose a more dialogical process, in which the subject is contextualized in the greater world of objects and consciousness cannot be reduced to its knowable components, focusing more on being than knowing. Whereas Husserl focused mainly on the mind, Merleau-Ponty’s idea corporeity proposed that the body is always inherent in lived experience.

Buddhist philosophies of mind and body, particularly mind-body theorist Yasuo Yuasa’s thought, bypass the Cartesian mind-body dualism/spiritual/material idealism altogether, an alternative to the metaphysical basis of Western philosophies of consciousness. There are several reasons why I think Yuasa’s philosophies are particularly suitable for dance:

1) The basis of non-dualism avoids the need for material/spiritual, subjective/objective, and theoretical/practical distinctions.
2) Consciousness is not static in an innate form. Rather, the body-mind can train latent consciousness through cultivation (including physical practice).
3) Physical practice, by virtue of non-dualism, develops the undifferentiated body-mind.

Keeping in mind Yuasa’s ideas, my experience studying this choreography has been a journey
from the feeling of mind encountering body as two separate entities to a sense of unity working united, facilitating focus and responsiveness. To bring the discussion back to the gallery, while performing I discovered that the philosophy of patience serves as a way to train consciousness, which carries over into Brown's dances. My goal is to provide a phenomenological analysis of how they are the same.

Lying on the ground of the art gallery sculpture courtyard, cool stone and leaves under my back, I wait for the cue to lift my stick and proceed to lift it up and slide underneath it. In *Sticks* five dancers slide under their sticks to the other side, sit up, swing their leg over to straddle the stick, change their grip, and then sit back down on the original side to slide back underneath it. Sounds simple, right? The catch is that the dancers have to keep the ends of their sticks in contact the entire time. If the connection breaks, the dancers must fix it before moving on.

The horizontal sticks can be maddening. My hands cramp as I painstakingly try to meet the end of the stick in front of me, shaking all the while. A single break in the line has a domino effect, requiring us all to regroup. The exercise can be taxing, but it also brought about an amazing realization. At the gallery, it struck me that the stick game ends exactly as it begins. The point is not just getting it done; it's the moments of sheer satisfaction when the sticks stay together, and the exhilarating concentration of working as a group. *Sticks* requires us to move together and sense one another's actions in a concrete, tangible way. We are not putting out our magical antennae to pick up on each other's "energy." It truly is a fantastic exercise in learning to overcome frustration and come into responsive awareness.

Our excerpt of Newark is just like the sticks. Where I am affects Christine's entrance, which affects Holly when she comes to push us; we keep the points connected just like the sticks. I must reach center to sweep my arm over Christine, and then join Caroline before weaving through Lila and Naomi. *Newark* and the sticks from *Early Works* may seem disparate, but they share a similar underlying choreographic ethos. The early studies are exercises in consciousness—of a group, of one's actions, of a task—and the same kind of consciousness extends to later stage work. This discovery, accessed from inside the material, felt like a breakthrough for me in understanding Trisha Brown as an artist.

Another Early Work in the gallery, *Group Primary Accumulation*, requires similar patience. Four dancers lying in a line perform a sequence of 30 movements as an accumulation (1; 1,2; 1,2,3 and so forth), and then repeat the sequence 3 additional times in its entirety.

I was astounded when I added up the discrete movements; we do the first movement 30 times, the second 29 times, the third 28 times, and so on. Then we repeat every movement an additional three times. The sum was 555 individual movements! Like John Cage's observation about repetition, the sequence initially took my mind through frustration and boredom, but ultimately became elucidating and beautiful. It's a gorgeous piece to watch, and time felt slower, more measured, when we performed it in the gallery.

More notably, while the repetitions become engrained until they are almost automatic, I never feel that my execution is complacent. Each movement, though fairly even in time and energy, takes on its own flavor and color; I feel like I get to know them. Their idiosyncrasy, I realized forms the basis of where I find emotion in the Trisha Brown material. While my mind is devoid of any prescribed emotionality, there is something compelling and ambiguously narrative in the gestural movements of *Newark*. Movements are treated individually, almost as if with great care, in their details—a step forward on the right, a gentle break at wrist, another step, the hand approaches the foot (like a little boat).

*Accumulation* is also a reflection on the "naturalness" of movement. Discussing the experience of Trisha Brown's choreography, words like "ease," "flow," and "efficiency" often arise. Returning to Yuasa, perhaps the phenomenon of flow is more of a practiced consciousness than an inherent state of things. Perhaps the experience of ease is actually a process of building kinetic chain reactions into the body, as well as a process of discovering objective movement efficiency from an anatomical vantage point.
What makes a string of disparate motions more or less “connected?” At the beginning of a phrase in Newark, we shoot our right arm into a diagonal arabesque, and then twist the plane of the body to face the wall, collapsing the back leg and dropping the arm in a single smooth unfolding. When I felt I could tap into that series of kinesthetic chain reactions, it felt like a discovery. *Group Primary Accumulation*, however, made me entertain the thought that perhaps flow is in part created as well. It’s tempting to speak of the movement as if it comes from a natural place, but the range of human movement is much broader than one kind of choreography. *Group Primary Accumulation* develops a feeling of natural flow, even though the movements themselves discrete. In the Newark material, arriving at the smooth kinesthetic fascia is as much a process of ACCUMULATION as it is an innate musculoskeletal fact. It is an accumulation of information as we negotiate with physical forces—a building up as much as a paring down.

In short, flow, as a conscious activity, can be cultivated, not simply found as an inherent or objective quality in the movement. As an exercise in consciousness, *Group Primary Accumulation*, like sticks, grounded me in my environment. My memories of the sequence are especially vivid: I remember how my head pressed into the stone terrace on #24, and the way Maddie’s toes pointed in my peripheral vision on #11, the only time I could open my eyes due to the bright sunlight on that day.

Again, patience for process fosters an ability to experience actively. If I interrogate the purpose of the movement, or even focus excessively on how it feels, my responsiveness is impeded. Repetition breeds the kind of mindlessness that is, paradoxically, utter mindfulness. The key to understanding this is tweaking the definition of mindful and mindless activities. Mindfulness, referring to analysis in the humanities, is more often continuous critical engagement. Repetition of an arbitrary series of movements may not seem like active engagement (i.e. mindless), but that level of familiarity is necessary to access information about the choreography. In this way, YDT’s research process aligns more with the laboratory approach of science experiments that are repeated to gain information.

The way I have been trained to think often makes repetitive or painstaking tasks extremely boring. As a student, a critical voice in my head often asks, “What’s the point? What’s the point?” and this is reified all the time. I am sure that I am not alone in feeling this way.

All too often, I see ideas as things to be discovered, not cultivated. Even as a dancer, I often link mindfulness with stillness. Trisha Brown’s choreography is challenging me, challenging me to see that the world is movement, and nothing has to be still for me to truly understand it. The world will not slow down for me to find focus, so my focus readjusts. Consciousness is a dance—sweeping arms, flinging legs, dives into gravity, losing my balance and finding it again, and again, and again.
Eva Albalghiti, Holly Taylor, Caroline Andersson, and Aren Vastola in excerpts of Newark (1987)
I haven't been posting much on the blog. For a long time this semester, I felt frustrated and disconnected with the choreography. I love dance and expression, but I couldn't find the motivation for our rehearsal process. I started to lose energy after only half of the three-hour rehearsals. I felt exasperated by repeating one movement over and over. I stood and watched the rest of the company a lot during these rehearsals because I couldn't figure out what I was supposed to do with my own body, what I should practice, and what I needed to listen to. I felt inadequate and unhappy, because everybody else seemed to get it. They were practicing small parts over and over and asking questions while I just swam in and out of a dance I couldn't feel for.

I also had a hard time connecting to the movement. It seemed so arbitrary to me: why would it be important to hold my hand in this particular angle? If we moved slightly differently, the dance didn't seem like it would be substantially changed. Why did Trisha Brown choose these movements? What made them important? I was so frustrated I nearly stopped taking part in the project. The only thing keeping me involved was that I loved Iréne and since she loved the dancing so much I knew I didn't want to let her down and I didn't want to give up looking for a reason for me to like it too.

I started to feel excited when we switched our focus to the Early Works for the YUAG showing. Moving my head down a stick was something I could understand. I had a goal, and I had rules. I worked until I felt comfortable with it. I liked the Spanish dance. I was excited about performing in the Art Gallery, and on the day of the performance I felt inspired by the beauty around me. I felt suddenly like I was truly part of the company, instead of the girl who didn't have a dancer's body, who didn't love dance as much as she should, who didn't work hard enough, standing in the back of the studio watching other dancers flow in Trisha Brown's choreography.

After the YUAG showing, I started thinking about my judgment that the choreography was arbitrary. What made the steps in this more progressive style of dance more arbitrary than, say, the choreography of a ballet variation? Why did I spend so much time worrying about copying the other dancers and practicing the way they did? I already know that I learn best by watching and analyzing for a long time before placing the dance on my body. I realized I knew the dance just as well as the rest of the company. I realized nobody cared if I wasn't the size of a ballerina. I realized I could perform the choreography from the inside out, enjoying and admiring how my limbs move and my muscles pull instead of trying to shove my body into the images I had seen of the teachers and dancers in the Newark video.

After a semester of weariness and dissatisfaction, I was most happy to find that I was proud of this performance. I have a close friend who loves modern dance, and as I danced I knew she was in the audience loving what we were doing, and I knew I connected to the dance because I connected to the other dancers and to myself. The movement finally clicked the week before the performance, and tonight as I started Cranwell with Naomi I felt wonderful and strong.
Poemage to Trisha Brown
Karlanna Lewis
April 25, 2014

Now that our Trisha Brown adventure has wrapped up, I look at my own tumultuous period dancing her work—from being injured, to healing, to re-injury, to some healing again—and notice how my physicality has colored my experience. Below are two poems, the first from a more personal perspective as a dancer dancing at less than full capacity, and the second inspired by and retracing the imagery I found dancing Newark.

Before the Rainmaker

Back to this, where I’m not girl or robot but only another casualty in Bolivia’s water war. They cut off my foot again, and a small price to pay—they laughed. For what? For the chance to balance a ten-foot pole on my head in a dance, or not a dance, but a game—hold on, we called, hold on, we echoed—now move.

Tales Beneath the Newark Surf

The car makes a three-point-turn while the guard raises the flag—the tide rises high but we toss a beach ball to a seagull who catches only the spraying ocean and the horseshoe crab scuttling just ahead of his tail. Swordfish, table, lazy Susan—what we become today, when either a game of leapfrog or the strong wind turning the sail threatens to capsize us, and either way the storm spits us overboard, but we are our own buoys, reeling into land, reviving our salty lips with honey water before we fly a kite that always tangles in its own tail. Put the kite away now, Jimmy, the dog barks, staking out his hole and chasing away his intruding tail. The dog rolls into a slow-speed squirrel chase as if death were no different than a sticks and hoops game. I am napping in the sun again, on my other cheek now, until I spot a skipper rock—but a skipping boy announces himself king of our sandcastle, the king, who is but a little man, racing to the tide then backing away again—too icy for sand-scarred toes. The sundial keeps moving past white-hot sand so we duck from the rays, while the dolphin spins out, flipping for a fish and disappearing underwater where they buried me—under sand, water and myself. Shake the sand away and back-dive—I’m holding my breath and jumping up for air on my water wings. Flamingoes are my favorite birds—the head in the neck, peaking side to side and stretching for a sneak attack to scoop a fish and stretching to swallow him, tired from eating, the flamingo shakes off slick water, her quick webbed foot-ball-change. If I flew I would be as long as time, but my knees are knobbly. Remember when they marched in the monkeys—monkeys in propeller hats, who were almost little men, except for their forever-long tails.
Working on Trisha Brown's choreography this semester has been revelatory. As a result, I've become more interested in exploring the connection between the mind and the body. Earlier in the process, I often felt discouraged by my seeming inability to pick up and retain the material. I couldn't grasp the language of this work. My brain sought to "understand" the choreography in an intellectual way. I was trying to uncover the movement journey of the pieces. So often, I felt that my brain understood the dances logically but my body couldn't digest the flow of the dances. Part of me wishes I could restart this process right now, having realized that "understanding" Trisha Brown's work is much more of a process than I anticipated. Understanding Trisha Brown's work comes from continuously, routinely moving the pieces, turning off the brain after a while and trusting that the work has become a part of the body.

During the final performance I remember being incredibly aware of what I was doing, trying to think about where I was going and what the next movement was. I felt distanced from the freedom that performance can inspire. When I tried to think about what I was doing, I lost the journey of the piece. In other moments, I noticed that I was focused entirely on listening to the other dancers - their breath, their impulses, the feet across the dance floor. There was a certain release or alleviation of performance pressure in those moments. I had faith that I understood how to continue moving through the piece and that I didn't need to intellectualize the process. I didn't need to touch the movement, but rather allowed it to carry me. Throughout the semester, I've learned how much I try to control movement and thoughts during a performance. But by releasing this control, a potential for a new relationship with performance is created. Rather than controlling and perfecting, one can focus on the small messages of the body. Listening to my body, as well as the bodies of my fellow performers, uncovered a new sense of communication for me, a communication that could be the springboard for the dance itself rather than just a means to create an image or stay in time. Trisha Brown's work is incredibly precise, yet so much of it requires the dancer to relinquish control. This is an act not often practiced in the modern day. I wish I had understood this sooner. I wish I could continue to explore this work by relinquishing control and following the movement.
More Real than True: Grabbing Hold of the Very Slippery

Eva Albalghiti

May 9, 2014

My previous blog posts have been, I think, about pretty concrete things, or at least inspired by pretty concrete things. Specifically, I’ve explored the ways in which Trisha Brown’s work is different from or similar to ballet, as well as how these differences and similarities make me feel as a dancer. Maybe it’s because I’m a scientist at heart, but a lot of talk about feelings makes me uneasy. To me, feelings have always seemed slippery and confusing and seldom substantial enough to be worth writing about.

Well, this project encourages us to step outside our comfort zones, so in this post, I’ll attempt to tackle something even slipperier. This post isn’t just about a set of feelings that I noticed I felt. Instead, it’s about how studying Trisha Brown fundamentally changed the way I feel.

Some of my fellow YDTers may have heard me say this, but I don’t know when I developed so much patience for art. I guess most people would say it’s a college thing. For most of my life, my only response to modern art was “I don’t get it.” In fact, not understanding it and not liking it was almost a point of pride. To me, the scientist, the universe was unfathomable enough as is. We can try to puzzle out tiny pieces of it, but zooming out to the big picture always reveals a contradiction. Even “facts” are not really true; they’re just beliefs that haven’t yet been proven false. So why, I wondered, given all this maddening uncertainty, should I accept the validity of this thing called “interpretation?” Interpretation, the very existence of which posits that some beliefs don’t have to be true or false, that sometimes proof isn’t required or even possible, and that things with no intrinsic, universal purpose somehow still matter. Interpretation, the thing humans invented to make ourselves feel better, like we can really escape the binary nature of reality and somehow gain an advantage over the universe.

I don’t believe any of the above anymore. Something bizarre happened to me over the past semester: I get art now. “Get” is the wrong word, because I think that part of “getting” it is acknowledging that nobody can ever “get” it. Art is un-gettable. I feel that reality now, and it’s a different feeling from the one I used to feel when I said, “I don’t get it.” Maybe I’m wrong and there really are people who do get art, but what I know for sure is that it doesn’t matter if I get it; you don’t have to get it for it to be important. And how do I know that? Feelings.

I can look at a Rothko now and be legitimately interested. Entertained, even. If I saw a milk carton on display in a gallery, I’d know in my mind that it was just a stupid milk carton, but I would still say, “Oh, that’s really neat, because it’s in a gallery.” If the me from one year ago could hear me now, she’d think I was on drugs. I know it was definitely Trisha Brown’s work that trained me to experience this new level of meaning, but I doubt I can adequately explain how it happened. My best theory is that anytime someone is focused on the same small thing for long enough, the mind gets bored, and meaning is created. You see something new, because what else are you supposed to see? We crave novelty; the mind rebels at stagnation. Calling something “art” lends us patience, gives us a reason to focus on that thing until it becomes meaningful. I hesitated to write that, because implying that anything can be art might be taken as an insult to art. But if that’s not the definition of art, what is? Art doesn’t have to be effortful or deliberate. I think that Trisha Brown’s work happens to be extremely effortful and deliberate, but that’s not what makes it art. It’s art because it can make us feel a level of fascination we logically shouldn’t feel.

Ah, but the idea that the brain arbitrarily creates meaning seems to trivialize the whole experience of art, says the scientist in me. But again, I’m convinced it’s not trivial because it doesn’t feel trivial. It affects me, and so it affects the universe. It matters. There’s a phrase we used in my English class, “more true than real.” A cursory summary of that discussion: sometimes authors bend the rules of their own universe, creating something that’s not “real,” in order to tell us something that rings “true.” My experience with Trisha Brown has been almost the reverse of this. Trisha Brown’s work is art, and so there’s nothing “true” or “false” about it. It wasn’t there until she created it. It didn’t matter until she said it did. I’ve worried several times that the fascination I feel with it isn’t grounded in anything, that I just made it up to feel like I did something worthwhile, that it’s not true. But what I absolutely cannot deny is that it’s real. To me, it’s become powerful and significant. In a very real way, it affects how I feel in the moment. And more than that, Trisha Brown’s work has affected the way I feel in general. For that, I guess I can only offer a general, “thank you.”
What I like best about *Newark*, and *Early Works*, about Trisha's choreography in general, is its acceptance of the body. Any body. Any size, any shape, any training. She takes strong, multidirectional bodies and equalizes them, unifies them - her choreography does not discriminate. This in some ways forces you to rediscover your own body as you learn her phrases. In *Newark*, it's not the shape the body makes that produces the desired movement; it's the directionality, the moving through space, the intention that creates the phrase (and often does result in a shape). But this approach takes a huge pressure off the body doing the moving; everyone can move, while not everyone, depending on their body, can replicate a shape. Throughout rehearsal, Iréne told us to pay attention to how our personal body related to the choreography: some people need to take a bigger step here to cover the same distance, some need a wider base because they balance differently, see Geoffrey on the tapes, he places his arm here while Lance keeps his closer to the body - for Iréne, it was about adjusting the movement so it fit our body, not the other way around. Which was honestly such a relief after coming from a more restrictive, shape-oriented ballet background.

In fact for me, coming from a period of not dancing, of realizing and understanding my not-ballet body and what it could do, the relief that *Newark* provided really allowed me to invest in the movement itself, invest in the exploration. One of the most common pitfalls in ballet is the mistaking of strength or control for containment, for keeping energy inward - young dancers forget to breathe during adagio, because they are so focused on tensing every muscle in their body. Trisha does not let you fall into that trap; her control is in the lack of control, the letting go, the freeing up of the body. Your energy is directed, it has arcs and lines through space, and you are to follow its trajectory, release it from yourself. When you free up the energy, the impetus, the springlike source, you free up your body too. In warm up, Iréne would emphasize this same sort of freeing up, releasing connective tension, feeling your body in the space of the room, or in the space another created. We would bounce and shake and feel our limbs, our wrists and hips, our necks, essentially free in their joints. We got loose. And that was what Trisha's movement required: a looseness, a willingness to lack control, a body that expelled energy, that didn't get hung up on fitting shapes. You really did have to re-find your body, and convince it that this was something it didn't have to worry about, this was something it could just do. It could just move, regardless of its bone struc-
Naomi: It makes sense!
Aren: What makes sense...?
Naomi: The cuts, and the way they work and Newark in general!
Aren: ok...
Naomi: Well I’ve been studying proteins in biology and that’s exactly what these Newark cuts are!
Aren: oh ok...
Naomi: Well the way the edits and phrases are structured mimics the intricate protein conformations!
Aren: Right...
Naomi: It works because –

It’s all the same:
Proteins are made up of amino acids at the most elementary level. Strung together, they make long, still very basic forms called alpha helices and beta sheets. The alpha helices wind and curve, while the beta sheets fold in a more rigid pattern. The tertiary structure of proteins forms from the combining, intertwining, and overlapping of individual alpha helices and beta sheets to create specific conformations. The final protein is a compilation of many linked tertiary structures that together fulfill a specific task as a single unit.

The Trisha Brown’s choreography is made up of moving shapes at the most elementary level. Strung together, they make long, still very basic sequences called First Phrase and Cranwell. The First Phrase travels and flies, while Cranwell is much more held and sculpted. The “edits” of Trisha Brown’s choreography form from the combining, intertwined, and overlapping of individual segments of the First Phrase and Cranwell to create specific interactions. The final work, Newark, is a compilation of many linked edits that together express a specific concept as a single unit.
Jessica Miller, Naomi Roselaar, Lila Ann Dodge, and Molly Haig in excerpts from Newark (1987)
Fluctuation-Driven Flocking Movement in Three Dimensions and Scale-Free Correlation
by Indrani Krishnan-Lukomski
May 11, 2014

Fluctuation-Driven Flocking Movement in Three Dimensions and Scale-Free Correlation.
(when starlings flock together, dancing through the sky- we call it a murmuration.)
I have found that a full life is contained in every performance of Trisha Brown’s pieces... An entire existence in a drop. A society in history, in a single motion. A century’s worth of time in one dance.
A murmuration blow by the evening wind.
Here is on emerging within those moments.

Once the architect told me as she traced, about time. The lines she drew into the papers were the tip of points in a room full of mirrors. She told me that when you want to know,

Under the arc, where silently they surround you:
Go and look for time- straight in the eye.
their heads floating in dust and the bright white stone.

I knew that place. I had watched my refracted body in those mirrors, loose limbs-
I had laid on the floor and turned in a circle while time looped around me - and until everything collapsed

into a single plane. She picked up the sheet and looked at it for a long while, I stared into the glass, in the center, as my chest heaved. Sometimes at night.

I stare ahead. Waiting, stretching my ear until I hear it, time ticking down time, trickling down- slowly and softly.
The cold, the hard wood, the street noises. Humming, screaming tears into me. React. React. react. react. react. react. only react. always react.
When. will time let me go. When will time let me be, the evening wind in Newark.
The evening wind that moves murmurations

pulsating,
twisting and swirling
relentlessly throbbing
but time

behind my back,
is what moves me forward
to be in movement.
time is moving/movement?
when will time no longer be the mover that moves me.
if movement could be anywhere else than in time,
what is time?
where is time.
outside
She shook her head, lips pursed. Late, to be late, lateness, delay, belated, tardiness, slow, behind, too late. Gone. Blown. Fluttered.
Digression. While I follow this feeling, feel I follow. This crease in the wrist. Wait for me, while I follow this crease, down into the earth, flowing through currents... wait for me while I wander here. Blown. Fluttered and delayed by the evening wind that moves murmurations

A thin glass and below, heads and limbs walking down the streets, here nothing. Thousands of miles away. Intertext. Look into time as a material, a quality. Is time slow, is time fast, is time palpable, is time read in the sky or on your wrist with a tic and a tac. Time
as the reminder: I hadn't grown in her limbs and she hadn't shaped my mind. And how I hadn't stretched on the wooden floor of her New York apartment. Summer breeze, waxed woods, streets noises. time paused? I longed for it, I arched my back for it, I wrote in a book for it, I stayed up at night for it, I went to her and fell on the floor always looking for it. I cried because I didn't know where her evening wind comes from, the one that blows my arms in circles, when, it is, time, for Newark.
The one that moves murmurations.

When I saw you I wanted to tell you, I have walked that path. My stare was a cold wind blowing. A wind so dreadful it dries all life, a sweeping gaze that fixes and solidifies. I wanted to collapse history without giving you the time, the time to walk in my steps. I wanted to show you and guide you. I wanted to tell you how it must be done. To take you by the hand and count, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 1, 2, 3, 4 and trace my legs along with yours on 2, on 4 place your hands. I wanted to save you. To put you in a bed of cotton, where you couldn't throw yourself onto the ground, break your bones, break your smile, break your breath, break the rhythm, break the pace. And leave time shattered, heaving in the architect’s laugh and a room full of mirrors.

At its heart someone is staring right back at me. They are all, bystanders, watchers, dancers. We were in a glass dome. And where was time? But yet again that
might be because we were staring at the blazing sun, and I am standing between the two of you.

In April time, murmurations moved like a sunset, like hips rocking from side to side and feet dragging. A sun that is stuck somewhere. The moment when a cloud drifts by the midday heat. I won't know, at what time the sun set that day. But I know when it set. I watched as they came and went, as they stood there in the same mark, not knowing that it had all started and ended a million times before them. I watched as trumpets rose to the sky and hips twitched. And the same old wind blew from their limbs to mine. It was like dominos, collapsing into each other until there was no more perspective and everything stood together, flat and exhausted by the endless repetition. I had never been there.

It was so different to anything I know, but everything for which I had longed. Everything was light and heavy -altogether heaving. But we continued to watch ahead. Where museums are glass domes for time to come and die, pushed up against a wall. Relentlessly urged by that same motion in the painter's hand, move by the same evening wind? the one that moves murmurations. Between soaking in all fleshly things and hitting against the end of history. The paint still seeps through the cloth, moving further, further gorging the clean white.

But that time we did not see.

Because we repeat day after day. We rehearse second after second, the grand choreography of which we were told, you can be the creator.

The architect lead me through the Dome and Time out in the cold, blew on our faces as a huge sweeping force so dreadful it dried up all life, froze and ossified, summed up. leaving two little children and the names we give them.

Chasing the evening wind away and dispersing murmurations.

Everything is collapsed. When I talk about you, when I talk about her, when I talk about him. Every step has been covered, and what will come has already been decided. I listened for time as it made its way, in its own time, in its own way.

But past labels she brought me,

and showed me the hidden life of all things that succumb/
not to time.
molting
decaying

living
emerging
pulsating,
twisting and swirling
relentlessly
throbbing

I saw the ink that silently continues to make its way, flowing into the wood, fusing, shimmering, in and out, spreading and curling.

never ending always
moving even when time lied.

The evening wind that is not slow but heavy. The one that drags its feet and rolls on its side, inhaling at dusk.

Was rising from my soles. When the trumpets rose. Was rising in the Dome. When our hips swayed .

Waiting for the time without realizing that all the while millions of birds drenched through my skin through my blood through every breath of air

our time is hard and regular, it is dry and efficient.

and the name rolled in my tongue over and over.

You live in time said Kant.

I spit right back at him.

Time is the basic quality of existence and how we exist in time is fundamental to understanding further existential reflections I spit right back at him.

I left my old frame and emerged into a dome filled with mirrors -where nothing comes to an end except time pushed up against the window.

Free falling where there is no gravity, in the Dome where time comes to die and marble eyes revolve in circles, in thin air. That intangible moment of light stillness and intensity all at the same time. It is the hours when the sun prepares to set. We left our valuables in the changing rooms. I won't know at what time the light turned that day. But I know when. It fell when the girl finally slipped her eyes shut beneath the wave. When hips twitched and feet dragged on marble. When the man held his hand out. When I lay on my side. When the mother threw her scarf back over her shoulder and when the lustful teenager
turned the corn on the cob, sold it for a penny. When I was pushed up against the edge, where history ends and below, heads and limbs were walking down the streets, here nothing. At last, thousands of miles away with the murmuration— I am blown in the evening wind.

what is timeless?
where time is not.
Within
Time, when everything collapses into a single plane. The death of perspective comes with every desperation, and it all ends the same way. Pushed up against the wall. Blood drops trickling down with paint, smothered across the canvas.

And yet here, where time and I came to die, it is where I met the architect and her evening wind. At last I am moved by the evening wind that moves murmurations.

Where all the while, pigments continued to move through the fibers. Slowly crawling, where History is blind and men are forgetters. Infinitely seeping, expanding, twisting, growing, coiling and intertwining, becoming.
End as Start
Issa Saunders
May 11, 2014

Dancing to express and dancing to feel. The former is about the relationships between one and the external while the latter is about the internal relationships of which one is composed. Experiencing and experimenting with the work of Trisha Brown deepened my awareness of these two modes of dancing. Sometimes they work perfectly together. By nature of feeling one is expressing. Perhaps that is the best type of dance. Sometimes, however, when the need to express comes before one is able to adequately engage in the act of feeling there is a disconnect.

The work of Trisha Brown is meant to be felt. The beauty of it is the inherent logic of the movements. Beautiful and striking movements are begotten by an appreciation of the wonder of the body as it is. Her work centers entirely on kinesthesia. It's honest and therefore powerful.

I started off feeling. Experiencing and wallowing in the logic and sheer naturalness of the movement. Trisha's building videos showed her doing a similar thing. She was feeling an idea over and over, each time producing a clearer image.

I wish we had more time. I could have gone on with the feeling for much longer. Feeling without worrying about what I was expressing. The semester was short. The need to express and show came before the feeling had matured. The showing was my least favorite part of the experience. Feeling and expressing were still in the process of congealing into one powerful dance. Anxiety about expressing obstructed the process and broke the two. I wanted nothing more than to go back to feeling and allow for connection with expressing to ripen so that I could try again. The showing, however, signaled the end of the project. And it was so incredibly sad.

A heightened awareness of the duality of expressing and feeling was the most valuable aspect of this project for me. Although I did not achieve it in my own body during this work, I understood it. I know what it is supposed to feel like. I will seek this feeling for the rest of my dancing life.
Yale Dance Theater 2014
The Choreography of Trisha Brown

With introductory remarks by Douglas Crimp

Lecture/Demonstration
April 16, 2014 at 8 pm
Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
177 College Street, New Haven, CT

This evening’s program includes movement material from the following works:

Newark (Niweorce) (1987)
Group Primary Accumulation (1973)
Spanish Dance (1973)

Choreography by Trisha Brown
Rehearsal direction by Iréne Hultman
NEWARK sound design by Donald Judd with Peter Zummo
original set and costumes by Donald Judd
SPANISH DANCE music: “Early Morning Rain,” written by Gordon Lightfoot and performed by Bob Dylan.

Yale Dance Theater

Eva Albalghiti (DC ‘17), Caroline Andersson (MC ‘15), Lila Ann Dodge (AFST MA ‘14), Madeline Duff (PC ‘14), Molly Haig (DC ‘14), Indrani Krishnan-Lukomsi (JE ‘15), Karlanna Lewis, (LAW/SOM ‘15), Jessica Miller (CC ‘15), Naomi Roselaar (TD ‘17), Issa Saunders (ES ‘15), Christine Shaw (CC ‘14), Holly Taylor (DC ‘17), Aren Vastola (BK ‘14)

Faculty Director: Emily Coates
YDT Coordinators: Aren Vastola and Karlanna Lewis
YDT Producer: Molly Gibbons

Lighting designer: Tom Delgado
Costume designer: Luz Lopez
Graphic designer: Grace Robinson-Leo
Sound engineer: Xinyuan Chen
House manager: Alyssa Best

This Lecture/Demonstration concludes Yale Dance Theater’s semester-long investigation into Trisha Brown’s paradigm-shifting choreography. YDT’s spring 2014 project focuses on Brown’s links to the visual art world, including her presentations in gallery spaces and collaboration with artist Donald Judd. Over the course of the rehearsal process, the dancers document their research on the YDT blog. For more information on the project and to read the dancers’ writing visit: http://ydtp.commons.yale.edu/.
YDT’s spring 2014 project is sponsored by the Arts Discretionary Fund in Yale College in cooperation with the Dance Studies curriculum, Theater Studies, and Alliance for Dance at Yale.

We would like to extend special thanks to Susan Cahan, Penelope Laurans, Nina Glickson, Tom Delgado, Nathan Roberts, Kathryn Krier, Justin Deland and the UP staff, Michael Marsland, Matthew Regan, Pam Patterson, Susan Hart, Alexa Schlieker, May Brantley, Marc Robinson and the faculty of Theater Studies, Kelly Wuzzardo, Jock Reynolds, Pamela Franks, Molleen Theodore, Amy Dowe and the staff of the Yale University Art Gallery, Carolyn Lucas, Diane Madden, Carrie Brown and the Trisha Brown Dance Company.

About the Artist

After graduating from Mills College in Oakland, California, studying with Anna Halprin and teaching at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, Trisha Brown moved to New York City in 1961. Instantly immersed in what was to become the post-modern phenomena of Judson Dance Theater, her movement investigations found the extraordinary in the everyday and challenged existing perceptions of what constitutes performance. In this “hot-bed of dance revolution,” Brown, along with like-minded artists, pushed the limits of choreography thereby changing modern dance forever.

Trisha Brown has created over 100 dance works since 1961, and was the first woman choreographer to receive the coveted MacArthur Foundation Fellowship “Genius Award.” She has been awarded many other honors including five fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, two John Simon Guggenheim Fellowships, Brandeis University’s Creative Arts Medal in Dance, and she has been named a Veuve Clicquot Grand Dame. In 1988, Brown was named Chevalier dans l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres by the government of France. In January 2000, she was promoted to Officier and in 2004, she was again elevated, this time to the level of Commandeur. She was a 1994 recipient of the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award and, at the invitation of President Bill Clinton, served on the National Council on the Arts from 1994 to 1997. In 1999, Brown received the New York State Governor’s Arts Award and, in 2003, was honored with the National Medal of Arts. In 2011, Brown was honored with the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for making an “outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind’s enjoyment and understanding of life.”
THE

CHOREOGRAPHY

OF

BROWN

Yale Dance Theater

Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
177 College Street
New Haven, Connecticut

YDT's spring 2014 project is sponsored by the Arts Discretionary Fund in Yale College in cooperation with the Dance Studies curriculum, Theater Studies, and Alliance for Dance at Yale.

For tickets and more information:
yaledramacoalition.org

Wednesday, April 16, 2014 at 8pm
Introductory remarks by Douglas Crimp

"Newark (Niawewance)" (1987)
and "Early Works" (1973-74)

Final Showing!

TRISHA

[Image 36x151 to 490x756]
Acknowledgements

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About Yale Dance Theater
Yale Dance Theater (YDT) is a faculty-led extracurricular initiative that enables Yale students to work with professional artists on the reconstruction of existing choreography and/or development of new work. YDT is conceived as a practice-based research initiative that allows students to investigate choreographic ideas and their historical context through a rigorous, semester-long rehearsal process, resulting in a final public performance.

As part of the research, YDT dancers regularly post blog entries about their experience. In the final phase of the project, we draw on these writings to develop a print journal. YDT’s mission is to track and contribute to current discourses in dance through an inquiry distinctly grounded in physical experience.

Faculty Director
Emily Coates
YDT Student Coordinators
Karlanna Lewis, Naomi Roselaar, and Holly Taylor

YDT’s spring 2014 project is funded by the Arts Discretionary Fund in Yale College and sponsored by the Dance Studies Curriculum, Theater Studies, and Alliance for Dance at Yale. A CPA from Pierson College has generously funded this second issue of The Yale Dance Theater Journal.