TRISHA BROWN

The Evolution of a Choreographer

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# Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Trisha Brown's Historical Background 4

The Sixties Revolution 4

Early Influences on Brown's Choreography 8

The Judson Dance Theater 11

Movement Studies Through the Sixties 15

The Improvisational Grand Union 23

Structuring the Seventies 27

Collaboration in the Eighties 38

Into the Last Decade of the 20th Century 42

Timeline of Choreography 49

Website Info. and Performance Schedule 52

Bibliography 55
"There's one thing for sure about Trisha Brown. There's nothing for sure—forever!"
(Durham, NC News and Observer)

For the last forty years, Trisha Brown has been driven by a love for experimentation, creating dance works of startling originality and astonishing beauty, for audiences all over the world. She has played a vital role in shaping contemporary choreography through rigorous, formal structures and vocabulary which mark an approach that is explored to its farthest limits; one in which the unexpected is expected to occur.

That style has shifted and changed through structural rigor, verbal wit, problem solving strategies, improvisational structures, deadpan physical humor, logical structure systems, unusual spaces, audience interaction, syncopated rhythms, and her own movement style that is vigorous, fluid, multi-focal and flexible. From her involvement with experimental groups such as the Judson Dance Theater and the Grand Union, to her own professional company, Brown's choreography has gone through four distinct phases that correspond to the past four decades. From the social revolt of the Sixties to the turn of the
century's complex strategies and infrastructures, Trisha Brown has been a forerunner of invention. This world famous icon of Post Modern dance and recipient of the coveted MacArthur Foundation's "genius" award is still dancing and producing new work today.

The evolution of Brown's choreography clearly represents the social change from 1960 to the present. She has typically created work in cycles of three dances, exploring movement that incorporated everything from sophisticated architecture to the simplicity of a thumb gesture. Her work has walked down buildings, lied on floating rafts and has been projected right from her own back via a strapped-on film projector. As she began exploring choreography in the Sixties, her style was communal, pedestrian and minimalistic. It carried the idea that movement should be reduced to its most sparse level. With the social attention to industry in the Seventies, Brown turned her focus to mechanical gesture and structural-logic systems. Complex mathematical and conceptual systems created a foundation for her work until 1979, when she made a dramatic shift in her choreographic inspiration. At this time, the Trisha Brown Dance Company had gone from being an innovative downtown dance group to a world renown performance company in just ten years.

The following decade of social affluence found Brown in a series of richly embellished theatrical productions and large-scale collaborations with other visual artists and musicians. Her stylistic movement aesthetic had also shifted into a realm where technical training was a necessity and the silky, fluid quality of her movement still plays a large part in her choreography today. Through the last ten years of the century, Brown paralleled the explosion of technology with an amalgamation of modern invention and historical narrative. Her creations for Bizet's *Carmen*, Moteverdi's *L'Ofeo*, as well as her most recent tribute
to the improvisational allowances of jazz music, illustrate her continuous search for experimentation and
the need to constantly expand her limitations.

TRISHA BROWN’S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The activities of youth often set a precedent for who one becomes or what one pursues in life, and such is
true for this contemporary and multi-award winning choreographer, Trisha Brown. She was born on
November 25, 1936 and grew up in the pristine forested area of Aberdeen, Washington. She was an
athletic child who loved playing football and climbing trees. Her early years were steeped in tap dance and
acrobatics, with many childhood recitals and performances. Her first dance teacher, Marion Hageage,
"organized [her] bony knees and adolescent mind through tap, ballet, and acrobatics which developed into
jazz routines in high school assemblies" (Brown, 78).

Ms. Brown went to Mills College in Oakland and studied the Martha Graham technique and a more
improvisational approach to dance with Anna Halprin. At the Connecticut College summer sessions she
worked with Jose Limon, Louis Horst, and Merce Cunningham. After graduating from Mills College with a
Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts, she was hired to set up a dance department at Reed College in Portland,
Oregon in 1958. It was a huge project to develop a department from scratch, but she stayed there for two
years. She exhausted conventional teaching methods after the first few months and then became involved
with improvisational teachings that were much more stimulating and complimentary to her and her style.

THE SIXTIES REVOLUTION
.... And the Sixties had begun. It was clearly a time of both revolt and celebration; a period full of self-discovery and acceptance. There was a search for happiness through the disillusion of war. Between the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War, communities, especially student-based, had formed ideas of protest against governmental decisions. "The Vietnam War made visible to many the breach between high-minded rhetoric and self-serving action. Volunteers in the Peace Corps, established by John F. Kennedy in 1961, found that competitiveness was not a universal value, that technology, efficiency and happiness did not always go hand in hand" (Jowitt, 312).

The idea of liberation took a huge stand and art began to move away from the narrative story and merge with concepts of contemporary life. The anti-conservatism caused by the Cold War heighten the state of experimentation in many art mediums. The Sixties was a time of constant experimentation, "of anarchy channeled into ebullient creative statements" (Jowitt, 309). The dances made during this time were abundant and full of protest. Though many are documented, few were salvaged. Having made their point once, there was no need, nor interest in maintaining a repertory.

Alan Titus explained on Live from Off Center, "After the pirouette and the contraction, where could dance go next? Naturally, each new generation disinherits the past. The time came to thumb noses, to spit in the eye of high art." The specifics of the dance focus were more clearly defined through what they rejected and basically all mediums rejected the norm. John Rockwell referred to this state as "Blank Art". What unified the artwork was that they were simple.

The artists who created them used limited means to produce work that was open, lucid and clear. Other terms, minimalism, conceptualism, have been applied to one art or another. But little has been written about what so much of the art has in common; "blankness" is in fact one of the crucial determinants of the contemporary sensibility. (Rockwell)
This art work refused commodity as an art form, rejecting superhuman bodies, spectacle and familiar narratives, replacing them with everyday people, compositional form and impulsive reaction/improvisation. The artists questioned the boundaries between life and art, with a focus on inter-media performance. They joined forces in refusing or parodying sexual display and projected contemporary views of an irreverence for the boundaries of gender history. Lastly, the rejection of hierarchy was one of the most clearly illustrated characters of the Sixties dancers. The performance groups had not one leader, but many collaborators on choreography. They all danced in each other’s work and abandoned the tyranny of rules and technical ideals in attempt to democratize dance and its ingredients.

The celebration came in the frame of acceptance. In the medium of dance and live performance, this acceptance was proved through the transformation of the typical body type. It became frequent and encouraged to see larger-bodied dancers as well as performers with atypical body shapes and proportions. They believed in elevating the ordinary into the extra-ordinary and letting the persons on the street experience what it was to be art and a part of performance. Many, including dance critic and historian, Deborah Jowitt, attributed this new image of the dancer’s body to the fact that there were many brilliant non-dancers, throughout the performances of the Sixties and Seventies. The new controversial, body image of the dancer was actually in perfect sync with the revolting generation of fresh dancers.

Popular styles of modern dance from the 30’s and 40’s had actually copied the exuberant qualities of the ballet by presenting the dancer as a tragic hero or suffering victim. The difference for the new generation of dancers was that they wanted to really “feel” their performances as opposed to act or pantomime emotional quality. The dance leaders felt that this quality of performance had been given its attention and
unique shape and form to contribute to dance and it was time to get past the clichés and on to a more human response towards movement material. So mental, was the work, that a dancer's body and mind might actually get in the way of the choreographic vision and statement. "James Waring's dancers could be mysterious or glamorous, but they were always likely to seem eccentric as well. Merce Cunningham's dancers played no roles, displayed no high emotions, appeared as alert and unselfconscious as animals." (Jowitt, 311). Though it is not to say that some amount of polish was not desirable, the general tendencies were toward a dancer being "rough and ready", as Jowitt recalled, and "technique to them meant the skill to do what you wanted to do as simply and convincingly as possible- whether that was standing on one leg, or howling."

Despite the fact that making art more like life did not necessarily make it more desirable or accessible, all was accepted and workable- clumsiness, stoutness, even weakness. But anything thing that glamorized the body was avoided completely. Costumes began to be of lesser and lesser importance. An overall "workman" quality was applied to costuming. Anything allowing for mobility and efficiency was preferred. Coveralls became very popular. Blossoming flower children made a "...bright-colored mockery of the idea of what was 'right' to wear" (Jowitt, 312). This concept, though slower to take shape with the trained dancers, established itself in rehearsal, studio classes, as well as in performance. The cultural unrest of the time led artists to find the most comfortable way of presenting choreography. If it was cold out, thermal underwear might be appropriate. If, prior to performing, one had come from a coffee shop, maybe a simple dress was to be worn. Shoes and socks were always an option.

Sexual differences had previously inhibited choreography, and since men and women were basically the
instead of the differences. Don McDonagh stated in *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance*, “There was a common ground that each had two legs and two arms and one thinking head, so that if dances were made for arms and legs and not female arms and male legs, then certain natural similarities would have a chance to make themselves felt.” Nudity was used to neutralize gender issues. As male to female relationships were being dealt with on an “everyday situation” level, gender was seldom an issue within the choreography. Too often, clothing was used, or couldn't help, exaggerating aesthetically pleasing body parts and therefore nudity, took away the mystery and defused the sexual issue. As Yvonne Rainer remembered, it was an “unenhanced physicality”, a sway in idealism, leaning toward a utopian democracy in art.

EARLY INFLUENCES ON BROWN’S CHOREOGRAPHY

In San Francisco in 1960 Brown took a summer workshop with Ann Halprin, a dancer and teacher, who at that time was interested in exploring the problems raised by improvisation and tasks. Anna Halprin, originally from New York, studied the classical modern techniques of Graham and Humphrey-Weidman. After marriage, she moved to San Francisco, joined a former Graham dancer, Welland Lanthrop and together they opened the Halprin-Lanthrop studio. At that time, Halprin moved toward creative exploration which became the force of her teaching, with the goal of opening the public’s eye to creative possibilities. She eliminated the need for technical training and a cultivated dance vocabulary by avoiding all displays of virtuosity in her work. The emphasis was on a more human (rather than god-like) scale for the dancer. Her technique illustrated that the development of a specialized body was not the only way to obtain the expressive range or vocabulary of movement necessary for dance. The compositional devises that she focused on were: improvisation, incorporation of problem solving, decentralizing of stage space, giving full
rhythmic value to muscular weight of a movement and the cool manner of execution—later coined as “deadpan”. These performer-qualities took off with the experimental Sixties dancers.

The last two, important concepts that Halprin introduced to Brown were pedestrian movement and chance structures. Pedestrian movements aided in stripping self-consciousness and self absorption. The use of chance in compositional structure, child’s games and everyday tasks gave the dancers (trained or not) things to accomplish as choreography. It was purposeful and easy to complete. Dance Historian, Sally Banes believed that presenting a dance as a task to be completed was perhaps the ultimate act of artistic honesty. Halprin also began experimenting with nudity on stage to de-emphasize the sexuality of the body. Early experiments with nude dancers actually caused her legal harassment.

At Halprin’s studio, Brown worked with Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Robert Morris, and others. Simoni Forti remembered Trisha Brown with this task-oriented incident that became true to the Brown style of pushing the limits.

She was holding a broom in her hand. She thrust it out straight ahead, without letting go of the handle. And she thrust it out with such force that the momentum carried her whole body through the air. I still have the image of that broom and Trisha right out in space, traveling in a straight line three feet off the ground.

Brown also accredits the teachers at American Dance Festival, including Louis Horst, with much of her dance training and inspiration.

After having concluded summer studies and schooling in California, Brown moved to New York in 1961. She worked through improvisation with Forti and Dick Levine, using simple organization structures that provided a common ground for exploration. They began working with each other to create
'Violet Contact'. The rules were that you could use any variation of running up on, hitting against or dashing out of the way of your partner. Brown recalled:

> For me, it was a very exciting thing to do, because at that time in improvisation the contact between the dancers was confused. Why do you touch another person? What does it mean? How do you do it, when do you do it? All those questions that were never clarified in class. I remember clusters of people climbing all over each other disregarding the psycho-sexual content. The range of choices in contact that I was familiar with up to that point did not include violence, anger or squishing someone. Bad movements had bad emotions. And so when we got involved in improvisation with Violent Contact, it cleared the air, completed the picture.

Around this same time Brown started taking composition class with Robert Dunn at the Cunningham Studio. It was in Dunn’s class that she came to the compositional realizations that would guide her life’s work. As brilliant and interesting as her dancing was, she clearly had the mind of a choreographer. At the time, the Cunningham studio was a hub for the latest fashions in artistic exploration.

Merce Cunningham, also born in Washington, attended the Cornish School of Fine Arts. He also studied at summer sessions at Mills College, first with Lester Horton and then with the faculty of Bennington College. There, he met Martha Graham, was invited to move to New York and was the second man to join her company. Upon his withdrawal from the Graham company, he and John Cage formed an artistic alliance in the theory of chance structures. Cage, along with Dunn had been experimenting with the fact that any noise could figure into a musical composition. Two key issues that Cage met through his work were first, to ignore or cross the lines that differentiated various art forms from each other and second, to match the materials and processes of art with those of daily life. Cunningham’s choreographic concerns at this time were similar in establishing creative freedom:

1) Any movement can be material for dance  
2) Any procedure can be a valid compositional method  
3) Any part or parts of the body can be used (subject to natural limitations)  
4) Music, costumes, decor, lighting and dancing have their own separate logics and identities
6) **Any space might be danced in**  
7) **Dancing can be about anything— but its fundamentally and primarily about the human body and its movements— starting with standing.**

With these concepts in place, the Cunningham studio became the foundation of contemporary, experimental art in the Sixties.

(As a side note, by formalizing and codifying his own technique he maintained the attitude that his dancers were to be highly trained in order to execute his difficult movement. This concept was one that was not in accordance with the Cagean theories or the experimental dance groups, as the implored that any human body or movement should be an ingredient for dance, if any noise can be the basis of a musical composition. None-the-less, her remained supportive of their endeavors.)

**THE JUDSON DANCE THEATER**

Cage asked Dunn to teach a series of four choreography workshops at the Cunningham studio on Fourteenth Street, in the fall of 1960. He relied on his knowledge of dance and the current practices in other fields of art. Cunningham donated the studio, free of charge. Each class was about two and a half hours and there were approximately 10-12 classes per workshop, with a total fee of $12-15 per student. It was a common practice that students returning for later workshops were exempt from payment.

Musician, Robert Dunn had participated in John Cage’s classes at the New School and was married to Cunningham dancer, Judith Dunn. Like Cage, Dunn studied Zen Buddhism, with the idea that the nature of a person, material or situation must be allowed to be what it is. His close association with Cage led him to initiate this statement. “I was led to the project of constantly extending perceptive boundaries and contexts. From Heidgger, Sartre, Far Eastern Buddhism, and Taoism, in some personal amalgam, I had the notion in teaching of making a ‘clearing’, a sort of ‘space of nothing’ in which things could appear and grow in their nature” (Dunn, p.11). There was a strong attention drawn to creating combinations of sound events for dance as well as a huge emphasis on productivity through compositional techniques. “The word ‘choreography’ is specific to dance, and its theatrical accompaniments. ‘Composition’ has often sounded
like a rather academized assimilation to other arts, particularly music and literature. I have always been into the business of getting people on to making ‘dances’, not studies.” (Dunn, p.10) Brown recalled the classroom structure,

Students were inventing forms rather than using the traditional theme and development or narrative, and the discussion that followed applied non-evaluative criticism to the movement itself and the choreographic structure as well as investigating the disbaring between the two simultaneous experiences- what the artist was making and what the audience saw. This procedure illuminated the inter-workings of the dance and minimized value judgments of the choreographer, which for me, meant permission- permission to go ahead and do what I wanted to do or had to do.

The students in a collection from Robert Dunn’s composition class gave their first recital at the Judson Memorial Church, in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village, on July 6th, 1962. This concert was three and a half hours long with works by fourteen choreographers from Dunn’s Class. It was reviewed by Allan Hayes of the New York Times and was a large success with an immediate following. This group of dancer/choreographers became known as the Judson Dance Theatre. They were never really and organized entity, but a collective group interested in experimental ideas. Part of the immediate success was in the fact that many from the dance society hated the work and found it to be, as Jowitt claimed it, “a belligerently alternative approach for a stage siege”. The value and worth of dance skill and technique was obviously being put to question. In the light of the social revolt, the younger generation of dancers immediately embraced these new ideas and allowances.

Trisha identified with Dunn’s method of analyzing the student works; his emphasis on the invention of forms, and his use of non-evaluative criticism. Hence, this allowance helped her begin her exploration of breaking boundaries with movement. She said of these early years in New York City,
the classes that I took from Robert Dunn when I got to New York, we were applying John Cage’s concepts of chance to dance composition and it suddenly connected for me. I had a sense of myself as separate from all the other people in the world and that gave me a concept of how one might make art. And, I use the word purposely, as it applied to all disciplines. My training was dance and choreography, but my connection was to form and content, as for any artist, and once I understood that, it was a matter of time before I could flesh it out.

The Judson era changed the image of the dancer from an "idealized image" to an "individualized image". Critics never grew tired of pointing out their rebellion. The first rebellion in dance was against the sweet beauty of the ballet and all it’s conventions. The early modern dance front-runners focused on having a unique voice in dance movement, but it was still representational. These dances by Graham, Humphrey and St. Denis were still “about something”: heroines, worship, feelings, landscapes of the heart. Judson’s “Post Modern dance” was entitled such to differentiate it from the modern dance of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and other originators of modern dance and their protégé.

Trisha Brown was not listed as a choreographer with the Judson Dance Theater until January 1963, at concert #4. By the mid 1960’s she had established herself as one of the foremost choreographers of the, now legendary, Judson Dance Theater. Despite the oversight of credit, her first dance performed at the Judson, was Trillium in 1962, and her rules were that, “I could stand, sit or lie down, and ended up levitating. In this dance I did not notify myself of my intentions in advance of the performance”. The next year she performed a duet with Steve Paxton based on material like ‘perching’ and ‘stillness’ from an earlier work, entitled Lightfall. Next came Part of a Target in 1963, in which she struck a ballet fourth position, said “Oh, no!” and fell over, as slowly as possible.

After the first Judson dance Theater concert went up, the Dunn class continued for the next few years. James Waring took over the teaching for a while, and in the spring of 1964, Dunn taught the last series of
this unparalleled choreography class at the Judith Dunn Studio. The newcomers to the class in that year were, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs, Phoebe Neville, Sally Gross and Robert Morris. After the intense involvement with the Judson Church bunch, Dunn received a graduate degree at Rudger's University in research procedures and information sciences and then worked at the New York Public Library for over six years.

As it was never a very cohesive group, despite the friendships and alliances that the collective formed, the Judson Dance Theater disbanded in 1964 and five distinctly new, individual choreographers emerged from the lot: Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Lucinda Childs, Deborah Hay and Trisha Brown.

Yvonne Rainer originally pursued acting in her native San Francisco. She moved to New York and began studying at the Graham and Cunningham studios, as well as ballet, but was mostly fascinated with the work of John Cage. Steve Paxton's dance interests began in gymnastics and developed into intense training at the Cunningham studio. A stellar Cunningham dancer, Paxton had an electric presence on stage, but was not able to satisfy his choreographic visions while working with Mr. Cunningham. His radical removal from dance tradition caused controversy as he drove most of his focus into developing Contact Improvisation from human play and the exchange of weight and trust. As a form of communication through the surface of the body, he began slowly experiencing a new awareness of movement and this consciousness extended to every aspect of his daily life.

Lucinda Childs was a dance major at Sarah Lawrence College and graduated in 1962. She then studied at ABT and the Cunningham and studios before becoming a founding member of the Judson Dance
study for her Masters’ Degree in education and Alexander Technique. Finally, Deborah Hay grew up in Brooklyn and danced with the Limon Company at Connecticut College before touring with the Merce Cunningham Company. The most famous of her works were her circle dances, that could be performed by non-dancers, of which she wrote a book.

Trisha Brown was thriving past the collapse of the Judson Dance Theater. Her intense level of hard work, combined with her instinctual intelligence provided her with the edge that she needed to maintain her commitment to creativity. A permanent studio was all she needed to ensure the rehearsal of her work. She was able to appraise the real-estate market like a pro and after realizing that rents were climbing, she bought a building in the SoHo district and turned it into an artists’ co-operative. Located on Broadway her loft was both home and laboratory. The street-level door bells read the names of David Gordon/Valda Setterfield, Douglas Dunn, Lucinda Childs and on the top floor, Trisha Brown. Her Studio was spare and spacious, with hard wood, polished floors and a mess of video equipment.

MOVEMENT STUDIES THROUGH THE SIXTIES

For Trisha Brown, reducing movement to its most sparcce and minimal, was the primary concern. She wanted to address movement in its purest form and context. Presenting gesture in a non-idealized manner lead to new possibilities. Non-representational movement (or movement without specific meaning) was executed in a business-like fashion and self-acceptance was widely valued, especially through Dunn’s critiques. It became only important to find what it was that she could do as a unique individual; reaching her own personal limitations and edges. Trisha never directly confronted the image of the dancer as separate from the dance. The goal was clarity and not necessarily beauty. Therefore, the end result for
She learned to create structured improvisations, setting boundaries and limitations to work from or against. Ordinary movements were presented in extra-ordinary circumstances and looked for naturally forcible actions and reactions to solo and duet work. Other characteristic of Brown's investigation at this time were, fly away movements, stillness, the physical act of falling, images of flight, task performances (for performers and for the audience), and the use of external equipment to take movement to a different plane or quality.

The following three pieces of choreography illustrate the choreographic stage where Trisha Brown remained from 1962-1971. These pieces perfectly coincided with the social revolt in that they presented everyday people, dancing movement with impulsive reactions, completely void of any spectacle or narrative.

A 'string' of three dances comprised the piece performed by Brown in 1966 entitled, A String. It was made of up of Motor from 1965, Homemade from 1965, and Inside from 1966. Motor was originally performed in a parking lot in Ann Arbor, Michigan for the Once Again Festival and was a duet with Brown on a skateboard and an unrehearsed driver in a Volkswagen, whose headlights provided the light. At the Judson performance of A String, the Volkswagen was replaced by a motor scooter. The theme of this being a metaphor of dream-like flight and pursuit; of imminent pleasure and or danger as she was pursued by the motor, starting and stopping.

Homemade was a series of movements taken from real movement (measuring a box, casting a fishing line,
Trisha Brown, Set in Flight.
projector on her back and while performing *Homemade*, she cast images of herself performing the dance (without a movie projector on her back), around the performing area, and again, metaphorically set herself in flight.

*Inside* used the interior of Brown’s loft studio as a score. She used the hardware, light fixtures, woodwork, and various objects stored around the edges as instructions for movement. The dance was set and performed at the Judson, with the audience set in a rectangle, recreating the wall of the studio. She said, "I remember being surprised when my right foot would be activated by a valve sticking out of the wall. I would not have selected the distribution of movement across my body on my own"). Brown moved around the periphery of the performance space directly in front of the audience’s knees and looked them right in the eye. It was in direct contrast to many dancers who purposely avoided looking at any one person by looking beyond and above the audience so as to appear as though they were seeing everyone. In this, she decided to confront the audience eye to eye, not dramatically or confrontational, but rather just making an observation of each. This was the precursor to her study in interactive performance.

Brown’s *Yellowbelly*, questioned the boundaries between life and art by questioning the line between audience and performer. *Yellowbelly* was an improvisational piece in 1969 that used a type of confrontation with the audience to determine the outcome of the piece. Brown asked the audience to heckle her by calling out “Yellowbelly!”

*The audience was too sweet so I stopped them and asked them to be really nasty. They did. I tried to do whatever came to my mind in response to the name-calling. When I stopped to bow (after what I considered a respectable amount of time) they screamed, “Yellowbelly!” at me, so I continued until somehow we both stopped.*
This piece demonstrated confrontation between the performer and the audience. It challenged the performer and her fears and the audience and its expectations and inhibitions. The real subject of the dance is a study of the interaction and what it causes. First, the question: Will the audience agree to participate by expressing a reaction that is not necessarily how they feel about it? And secondly: Will the dancer forget the next phase of movement following the audience interaction? These were interactive questions that interested her throughout her lifetime.

The audience manipulation continued through Trisha Brown's next several dances, which she grouped together as the 'Equipment Pieces'.

I suppose some New Yorkers thought they weren't dances, which likely they weren't. But the fact that I was a choreographer and dealing with choreographic elements lead me to believe that they fit somewhere into our dance world... that period lasted about five years. And then it was over, and so was the argument. (Brown, '81)

It was in 1968 that Brown began to construct dances that came to be known as Equipment Pieces. These dances used various external support systems like ropes, pulleys, tracks, cables, mountain-climbing gear and a giant pegboard, in order to pit the illusion of natural movement against the forces of weight and gravity. By changing settings and directions, "the set does with ropes and pulleys what I do automatically with the body's bones and levers" (Brown, '78).

One of her first Equipment Pieces which dramatically questioned perception, was Planes. It was performed about six times between 1968 and 1971. Three dancers travelled across a giant, pegboard-like wall construction. They moved slowly using the holes for foot and hand-holds while turning upside-down and all around the surface. They were even able to rest in a suspended position. Along with the assorted
Roof Piece, the fourth equipment dance, placed several dancers on adjacent roof tops of downtown Manhattan. They, then relayed movement across the building tops for a half mile. This choreographic period was a huge hurdle,

_The hardest thing as an artist, aesthetically, has been to transfer the principles of good work and hard work, so easily understood in the visual art world, to the performance arena, which is mired in entertainment values. [My work] didn't belong to anyone. No one could buy my work in the art world, and the dance world said it wasn't dance. I was caught in a crack doing serious work in a field that wasn't ready for it._ (Brown, '85)

She repeated, this theme in the dance called Clothes Pipe in 1969. Old clothes were threaded through a rope grid suspending at eye level and two dancers communicate by dressing and undressing their way through it. They working mainly above the grid but sometimes below it, suspended in the clothes, as if in a hammock. This forced the audience to change their levels and points of view. Similar follow up pieces such as The Floor of the Forest, Other Miracles, Dance for a Dirty Room, Everybody's Grandmother's Bed, The Costume, Adam Says Checkered Sea, are also set using the transformation of an utterly mundane, almost unconscious set of movements like dressing and undressing into an extremely difficult, cumbersome feat that is comic and enlightening. The process of these everyday actions are dissected as the body's relationship to clothing is altered since both hang from the grid. Tights, for example were no longer tights, but big long tubes in which legs dangle. The clothing dictated the position of the dancer, instead of the reverse, pulling the arms and legs into unusual positions. The body became awkward as it was imprisoned by its normally passive clothing and the person was the victim of the soft and harmless objects.

Another such equipment study, done in 1969, was in a piece entitled Leaning Duets. It was first performed on the ground, with figures subject to the weight of gravity.
maintaining foot contact. Then in 1971, Brown increased the difficulty and added another objective; to maintain the balance as a single unit while both partners are off-balance, by changing the angle between the two, by means of ropes threaded through two pieces of pipe. Then, another piece of equipment, a board that fit behind the dancer’s backs and connected by ropes was used to support the weight and dispersed the stress on their spines. Brown also devised a specific language of commands, an “audible analysis of their weight state and imminent needs, like ‘Give me some!’ and ‘Too much!’ or ‘Take!’”. These were fast signal necessary for immediate results for the dancers to maintain balance and safety. Thought the question of danger and vulnerability arises in these dances, Brown explains,

I am extremely conservative on activities that I think could end in accident. I know exactly how far I can lean without falling. I know exactly how much weight I have to shift in the upper body if the lower body leaves the center and vice versa and when, in order not to fall. And I know that if I do fall, that means I add my hands in the catch. So what appears to be dangerous, technically, is not. (Brown, ’78).

An impressive alteration of perspective resulted in one of the Equipment Pieces, Walking on the Wall, done in 1971. Viewing the piece, one had the distinct feeling of being on a tall building, watching people walking back and forth on the sidewalk below. When they turn a corner on the walls, suddenly the audience gets the feeling as though they are positioned sideways, sticking their head out the window, and seeing a sideways image of an upright person below. Brown wondered with this comment. “I always feel sorry for the parts of the stage that aren’t being used. I have in the past felt sorry for the ceilings and walls. It’s perfectly good space, why doesn’t anyone use it?"

The choreographic decisions, however, in all of the Equipment Pieces including time, place, order of movements, kinds of movements, the nature of the sound or dialogue, were governed by the choice of which ‘equipment’ was being used or featured. The use of the equipment in all pieces generated language
and terms for the most minimal use of the equipment. It would be hard to imagine anyone inventing those
particular movements or languages outside of the particular situation.

In the Brown early works, when tasks or equipment structures delimited the movement in her dances, she
casually used available performers like friends, colleagues, students, trained and untrained dancers. Such
was the case in *Rulegame #5*, when she sent out five non-dancers or untrained dancers and gave them
rules to follow a particular line on the stage. The rules were simple, but there working-out was a dance.
Some dancers became trained in Brown's own techniques of mastering gravity and solving other physical
problems, simply by working with her. Of course, as the dances grew more technically demanding and
dealt with more and more pure movement, her need for trained dancers increased.

With this following, she formed her present company in 1970, and has since created an extensive repertory
known for its structural rigor and supple kineticism. There was also an intensity of collaboration between
her and her dancers in developing each work. The dedication of the company was incredible. They didn't
wait for her to give them the next charge, but rather promptly took the initiative to study their work videos at
rehearsals, and clean the ragged edges of timing or movement. They analyzed differences that would be
almost invisible to anyone else looking in. Brown would get in front of her dancers and start creating
movement and her dancers were often the ones to clarify what she had done. She asked of them, "Did
anyone see what happened to the leg?" She was always prompting them to see and tell about what they
liked about it, or why it was done a certain way. They then studied each other's versions and picked the
best one, thereby creating a sense of collaboration within the whole company. Each dancer had a sense
of responsibility for the work, as well as a sense of ownership and she did not just stand up in front and
Well, if I could bark orders as brilliant as their combined intelligence can produce, I would, but I'm not that smart. Process is very much a part of the work, and it's through that that ideas and intentions are articulated. It gives the dancers ownership of what's going on, and in that capacity they make propositions to me physically.

Brown was always one step ahead of her audiences, in their knowing and understanding of her work. Because of her structuralism her work was most admired by sculptors and there were several times that she was able to work her art into visual mediums like drawings or videos, to make it presentable at museums or Happenings. She has had several engagements at the Whitney Museum. Most recently, a film of her piece, Walking on the Wall, was presented in association with the exhibit, The American Century: 1950-2000 Art & Culture, last month (February, 2000). It was as though choreography for Brown was like creating a physical arena wherein the dancers and the audience were accepting of the "dare" to play, as there was usually risk-taking involved for both parties, as well as the testing of limitations.

THE IMPROVISATIONAL GRAND UNION

The Grand Union was a collective of dancers that performed improvisationally from 1970 to 1976. They committed to an ongoing investigation of the nature of movement and performance. Many of the group members had known each other since the Judson Dance Theater days: almost ten years. Banes stated that,

With its aspirations to collectivity, equality, and spontaneity, the Grand Union was unconventional in comparison to mainstream dance companies. During those years, American culture generally expressed themes of concern with cooperation, collective living and working situations, and attention to process over finished product. In politics and social situations as well as in the fine arts, people began to look to spontaneity and improvisatory methods to provide a life better than that which a rigidly constructed, individual-oriented, hierarchy society had created. Ultimately, the Grand Union's work was about the kinds of contact we make in the world, through language and behavior. Through conscious, reflexive performance, the group provides and aesthetically abstracted image of life in the modern world; at work, in groups, among friends, among strangers. Physical contact can be one-sided- a solo dance. Or, physical contact can be mutual- teaching, balancing, supporting, responding, collaborating on movement.
In the fall of 1970, Trisha Brown was invited to join the Grand Union group. She had been experimenting and improvising for over ten years and was friends with most of the group members. "Brown nevertheless had misgivings about sacrificing her independence as a choreographer and diverting time and attention from her own work. Brown brought not only her knowledge of improvisation, but also her concerns with structure and her intelligent humor into the Grand Union performances" (Banes, 207). David Gordon recalled that she came "testing whether she wanted to be around or not." It was a place of comfort as well as risk. Brown was perfectly placed as she agreed, "There was no way to do something wrong in the Grand Union, improvisation includes error".

This improvisational group was certainly a study in sociology. There was a freedom among the group to express all feeling and motions, even stumbling or forgetting. These "faux pas" were even expanded into material. The informal structure of the group lead to many different explorations such as 1) Situation Interpretations: doctor-patient relationships, sexual innuendoes, fragmented plots and the research of how other respond during performance. 2) The occurrence in abnormal physical configuration: flux as a quality and the manipulation of props to develop movement. And 3) The bashing of social etiquette: the fabrication of rumors, poking fun at each other and the symbolically offensive, hostile, intimate or impolite conduct. Sociologist, Erving Goffman observed this behavior as "Backstage" misconduct, "such as reciprocal first-naming, co-operative decision making, smoking, rough informal dress, sloppy sitting and standing posture... mumbling and shouting, playful aggressivity and 'kidding'... minor self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching and flatulence" and reviewed that the Grand Union was persistent in performing things on stage which normal dance behavior would not permit.
They had a sincere disinterest in all that was “flashy”. Yvonne Rainer’s revolutionary dances displayed and required very little skill, few accents, low effort, and unhurried control. Anyone could perform the piece, and each new performer, dancer or pedestrian, gave the piece and new feeling. Her dance, Trio A, was often compared to visual artist, Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain”, or toilet bowl, in that it scoffed at the ideals of classical art. Both works gave power to the unconventional and unexpected. There was plenty of interesting and challenging movement, especially during solo sections, that would lead to the assumption that one was showing off. But the feeling was never that of “look what cool stuff, I can do”, and instead “look how cool life is.” All involved were a part of the counter-culture that violated every law of classical art and the conventional stage, and got away with it. The founding members of the Grand Union, including Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Barbara Dilley, Nancy Lewis, Steve Paxton and Simone Forti, joined the ground-breaking Yvonne Rainer in the continuation of the Post Modern dance definition.

The group was commonly mistaken for Rainer’s troupe as the group had replaced her company and eliminated her role as leader. The tendency for reviewers to attribute her with the choreography and the compliments made her feel guilty and uncomfortable and prompted her to write more than one letter in public protest. Due to this common occurrence, the members were less comfortable to dance in each other’s work than they were with dancing together and Rainer began to withdraw. Rainer believed that this new group was given more glory than it deserved, as she felt, “Grand Union was the result of a total social breakdown.” Despite the interest in democracy and equality,

*There were never any votes, or anything like democratic process. When we named the group the Grand Union, I think I called a couple people. Barbara liked it, Steve was somewhere or another. No one objected, or everybody liked it. We didn’t have meetings to decide on important issues. The Grand Union was full of incompatibilities and hostilities; these were an essential part of its nature and I think that the ways in which they were worked out and acted out and enacted was one of the most fascinating things about the group.*
Gordon commented that the company's performance appearance seemed to be a happily married group in support of each other, but the infrastructure was not as cohesive as it looked. He recalled, "People even asked if we had sex with each other, when in fact, I believe we were continually uncomfortable with the work choice of each other... This got worse with time. At the beginning [when touring] we would often share rooms (two people). At the end, we all wanted singles."

Again, in the aftermath of the Grand Union, individual choreographers began to emerge, after spending the time refining and developing their own aesthetic. Constant discoveries were being made. It was a time when the world was finally realizing that it had drastically depleted its natural resources and was in an energy-crisis. Thriftiness became apparent and no effort was ever wasted, choreographically. Stringent rhythmic patterns where adhered to (particularly visible in the choreography of Laura Dean and Lucinda Childs). Effort was unparalleled through attention to pulse and repetition; creating the image of a diligent and peaceful society. With the ideas of co-operation, spontaneity, wit and daring instilled from the Grand Union forerunners, the seventies documented the fact that "dance was something that people did with their lives, and tried to do well" (Jowitt, 337).

THE STRUCTURAL SEVENTIES

Meanwhile, the Trisha Brown Company was immersed in Trisha's second choreographic phase. Conceptual and mathematical systems created the foundation for her choreography.

To just make formal decisions about moving and movement isn't enough. It's too dry. In a way, it's safe ground; geometry is pure. One can cerebral divide it forever, but that's not the whole story. So I try to put some richness of feelings, of non-verbal physical meaning into the work..... [But] I don't like to do the same thing twice, either in form or substance. (Brown, '78)
By 1971, Brown became interested in changing her venue of movement and had come to feel that she had gleaned the possibilities of control imposed by equipment and began making dances based on mathematical systems of accumulation. The deep structures of the dances were disclosed as the pieces unfolded. They were not dances composed of necessarily magnificent movements, but were rather quietly fantastic dances, giving a cool and intelligent investigation of attention and perception. The accumulations pieces, made between 1971 and 1973 for solo and group performance and performed for much of that decade, attempted to present, as clearly and neutrally as possible, pure movement without narrative or emotional content, or apparent physical logic in their sequence. They were simply physical descriptions of ideas with beauty, gesture, delicacy of timing and a study of the body as both the subject and object of research. This way of moving was fundamental to her work, even though it had been subsequently overlaid by immensely complex physical operations. These pieces, a layering of one deliberate, prosaic movement on top of another in complete silence, were heralded in Paris as “representative of postmodern dance in America”.

Pure Movement is a 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. I use pure movement, a kind of breakdown of the body’s capabilities. I also use quirky, personal gestures, things that have specific meaning to me, but probably appear abstract to others. I may perform an everyday gesture so that the audience does not know whether I have stopped dancing or not and, carrying irony further, I seek to disrupt their expectations by setting up an action to travel left and then cut right as the last moment unless I think they have caught onto me in which case I might stand still. I make plays on movement, like rhyming or echoing an earlier gesture in another part of the body at a later time and perhaps out of kilter. I turn phrases upside down, reverse them or suggest an action and then not complete it, or else over state it all together. I make radical changes in a mundane way. I use weight, balance, momentum and physical actions like falling and pushing. I say things to my company like “toss your knees over there,” or “Start the phrase and then on the second count, start it over again,” or “Do it and get off it”. I put all these movements together without transitions. I do not promote the next movement with a preceding transition and, therefore, I do not build up to something. If I do build up, I might end it with another build up. I often return to a neutral standing position between moves; it is, for me, a way of measuring where I have been and where I am going. An even pulse (without musical accompaniment) does the same thing with time. A pulse brackets a unit of time that can be measured, divided, filled up completely or partially. If I am beginning to sound like a bricklayer with a sense of humor, you are beginning to understand my work. (Brown, mid-Seventies).
Brown had formally begun to ask her audiences to journey with her, through her working process. The feeling was that of a complicated pattern, but ultimately, she was interested in them viewing the dance as a whole. "I don't like to talk about structure as a rule, because that is what people glom on to and then they don't see the dance" (Brown, '81). Mechanical gestures, unusual spaces, the clarity of movement and its physical distortion, complex aerial movements, accumulation structures, and the conglomeration of all of it, captured Brown's artistic interest. Through the early Seventies, mixing the raw improvisational work with the polished, rehearsed material became an exploration. As apparent with the Grand Union's improvisations, adding props or people to the stage could create a whole new dance. But ultimately, Brown had decided to strip back the frills again. The investigation of Pure Movement was her focused concern and using it, within highly structured systems, she choreographed two of her most highly documented works: *Accumulations* and *Locus*.

The first version of *Accumulations* was performed in 1971. It was done standing in one spot and started with a simple movement- the rotation of the right fist with the thumb extended. That gesture was repeated seven or eight times. Then, the next movement, a gesture with the left thumb, was added, and the two were repeated in sequence several times. As the piece progressed, various gestures, (a twist of the hips, a bend of the knee, a turn of the head, a step back, a lift of the leg) are strung onto the end of the accumulation, and sometimes sandwiched into earlier sections of the progression. *Accumulations* was never the same twice. First it was four and a half minutes long to the Grateful Dead's "Uncle John's Band" and then next time it was fifty-five minutes long and in silence.

*Primary Accumulations* done in 1972, was accomplished by lying on the floor and performing a string of
the whole arm, brushing the hair back off the face, turning the head to one side, lifting a knee or hip, or bringing the legs across the body, these string gestures repeated creating a smooth and rhythmic, almost hypnotic flow. Brown gave this background to the development of the piece:

My choice to be on the floor had to do with not wanting to have to deal with the fact that the legs are generally in the role of having to support the upper half of the body. They really don't have the freedom that the upper half of the body had. If I'm laying down, I've freed my legs and they can function like all the rest of the parts. I went through a period of feeling extremely vulnerable. This position conjured up quite a few feelings which had to be dealt with right from the beginning; feeling infantile, sexual, helpless, lazy. But I got over them and once I got over them I felt fine about doing the piece....I continued to work on it by going to the studio and using it somewhat like a warm-up exercise, accumulating to as far as I had gone the last time, in a very relaxed manner with no goal in mind. Just accumulating movement. I designed it for right straight above my head and I felt that the audience should definitely be on the ceiling...Whatever I had accumulated between October and March 27 was the piece.....

To add further interest, in the twenty-ninth and thirtieth gestures of the accumulation, Brown had each of the dancers rotate 45 degrees. Then the entire thirty-movement sequence is repeated four times after the accumulation is completed, so that the complete sequence is seen from four angles and the dancer rotates 360 degrees, returning to her starting point. Primary Accumulations was performed as a solo, a group piece, and, as Group Accumulations, a group piece that had two mover-dancers who carried the other dancers around, stacked them on top of one another, propped them against a wall or on benches, and in generally altered their positions which further changed the relationship between the body and the floor. To show the space versatility, Group & Primary Accumulations was performed on park benches, in art galleries, in plazas, in lofts, and even on floating rafts. Split Solo, a further advancement of Primary Accumulations, was choreographed with the movements planned for the right side of the body for one dancer and the movements for the left side by another dancer.

The things Brown was conveying, like laziness and sexuality, in the various accumulation pieces, came from the rhythm of the sequence and the methodical articulation of the body. The erogenous quality of the
dance was more of a sensuous abstraction than specific sexual gestures, and the voluptuousness becomes a by-product. It was the tension between the mathematical, formal precision of a movement idea and its physical change that was her primary concern in these accumulations. The accumulation dances were not dances composed of magnificent movement, but they are quietly fantastic dances. They were calm and interesting and intelligent observations of attention and perception presenting the body as both the subject and the object of research. Marion Sawyer in a review from BAM in 1976 stated, “[The Trisha Brown Dance Company is] Not a company to stir the blood- rather to tranquilize it. Brown’s dances are more like simple machines than like dances and you can’t very well be mad a machines”.

Again, once Brown felt she had mastered this study of keeping movement clear and meaningful in the face of motion monotony, which was sometime in 1978, she began complicating it. She started adding the telling of stories about performing the dance as she was performing it and was splicing two stories together while keeping the dance going evenly. In France, at a lecture demonstration, she began talking while in the middle of the dance and found that she could no longer keep track of the dance while talking nor could she keep track of talking while she was dancing- it became a game, and a new task to master. “Starting to dance while talking is like opening a front-loading washing machine while doing a load of typewriters,” was one of the first lines in her performance of the accumulation. Eventually the 1971 Accumulations was elongated into the 1973 version, Accumulations with Talking. And finally Brown added in movements from her new solo, Water Motor, to create the 1977 version, Accumulations with Talking plus Water Motor. Water Motor, was a miniature dance, so short (just two and a half minutes) that it took the audience by surprise as it ended, all too quickly. The quality of Water Motor gave a splatter feeling. She was constantly flinging her limbs around and let energy follow and flow through the rest of the body. Whether
not straight for long and if it was bent, it was almost formless. *Water Motor* was a dance that pried open Brown's logical systems to make room for exquisite disorder and in its stillnesses, the gestures of *Accumulations* were added, but only momentary and for recollection.

The second dance of key importance to Brown's structural phase, was *Locus*. It was first presented in its final form in the summer of 1975. With this piece Brown's style changed the simple building-block textures of the accumulation pieces to complex, quirky gestures that appeared to be emotionally expressive. In this piece she tried to accomplish two problems. The first was that she set up a mathematical and linguistic system by creating an imaginary, elongated cube fifty-four inches wide and deep, and long enough to stand in. Each of twenty-seven points on the cube corresponded to a letter in the alphabet. To that she generated a four-part score that by translating a written autobiographical statement into numbers, then into points on the cube. Twenty-seven marked the center of the cube and was the space between words in the text. (See the following diagram).

The second problem became then, to find ways for the dancers to move through, touch, look at, jump over, or somehow relate to each point in the series, either one at a time or clustered. The result is a dance that (like *Group Accumulations*) resembles a stationary object but revolves in and moves through space, similarly to her, now famous, drawings. The message in the work was this; with each letter being a point on the cube:

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TRISHA BROWN WAS BORN IN ABERDEEN WASHINGTON
IN 1936 SHE RECEIVED HER BA IN DANCE FROM MILLS COLLEGE AND LATER TAUGHT THERE SHE HAS ALSO TAUGHT AT REED
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TRISHA BROWN
The Evolution of a Choreographer

TRISHA BROWN WAS BORN
20 18 9 19 8 1 2 17 2 18 15 23 1 19 27 2 15 18 14
IN ABERDEEN, WASHINGTON
21 9 11 27 1 2 5 18 4 5 5 14 27 33 1 19 8 9 14 7 20 15 14
IN 1936, SHE RECEIVED
27 9 14 27 1 9 3 6 27 19 8 5 27 18 5 3 5 9 22 5 4 27
HER BA IN DANCE FROM
MILLS COLLEGE AND LATER
13 9 12 12 19 27 1 3 15 12 12 5 7 5 27 1 14 14 27 12 1 20 5 18
TAUGHT THERE, SHE HAS
8 20 27 20 8 5 18 5 27 19 8 5 27 8 1 19 24
TAUGHT AT REED
1 20 1 21 7 8 20 27 1 20 27 1 20 18 5 5 4 27
GET IN PORTLAND
7 5 27 9 14 27 16 15 18 20 12 1 14 4
This work was about self-containment in an imaginary cube that defined and confined the dancers space. This was a complex work, to choreograph, view and review. Although the viewer may not necessarily grasp the organizing principles, knowledge of how Locus worked was not requisite for enthusiastic response to the piece. Familiarity with movement and some understanding of how the piece was made were usually sought, by the captivated viewer. But, whether Locus was too complex, elusive or meant to be decipherable or not, the more substantial subject was her use of specific form and the nature of that form itself. It was a type of invention of a new language using body movement to explore all the possibilities. “Working with Trisha is like having a map laid out for you. She takes you through it- on that journey- and somehow dance itself is changed, able to do more” (Siobbhan Davies, British Choreographer).

Lastly, Line-Up, a landmark piece within the Brown repertory, as well as the last work within her second decade, was a history of Brown's choreographic process. Choreographed in 1976 and 1977, Brown's Line-Up, was four of her previous dances and variations on other pieces strung together in a line: Structured Pieces I-IV, Sticks, Mistitled (5” Clacker), Spanish Dance, Figure 8, a variation on Locus, and a new version of Solo Olos. In Line-Up was the continuous forming and reforming of ‘lines’ causing the dance to hover between order and disorder. In brief, the separate pieces created the whole. Line Up was an easy way to always include her older work in more modern concerts, to prove the once minimalist had not turned maximalist.

In Sticks, five women lie on their backs on the floor, forming a line head-to-toe and, using verbal communication where necessary, line up long sticks over and parallel to their bodies. Keeping all the sticks
them while switching the hand that holds the stick, and get back under from the other side. There is no unnecessary motions and the dance is finished when the prone position is reached by all. These actions are much like those that a construction worker or plumber uses everyday, giving both a humorous and pedestrian task in an aesthetic framework.

In *Mistilled*, the dancers line up as if to start a race. A tape plays the sound of a wooden stick hitting a glass every five seconds. Between sound cues, the dancers take one step, then return to the start before the clack; two steps, return to start, et cetera, until they can no longer get back to start in five seconds. Racing against time, rather than each other, they try to find the loopholes in the system, by diminishing the size of the steps on the way out and running back as fast as possible. The impossibility of the desperate attempts to beat time, the change from calm waking to frantic haste, and the sudden recognition by the spectator that the action was subject to the discipline of the time segments marked off by the sound, created a successful visual gag.

In *Spanish Dance*, the five women form a line across the room, equidistant from each other. This piece was done to Gordon Lightfoot’s “Early Morning Rain”. The last women in the line raises her arms and arches her back like a Spanish dancer. She takes tiny, shuffling steps forward, swinging her hips in time to the music. When she bumps into the next dancer, she raises her arms, and the two keep moving forward until they pick up the next dancer. Finally, all the performers are packed together and they reach the wall, ending the piece. The humor here was in the incongruity of the rough style of song and grand, flamboyant postures of the dancers and their tiny steps. As it ends, all dancers cast one shadow with ten arms, looking like the Indian god Shiva, the dancing destroyer.
Figure 8 starts as the dancers are all in single file facing the audience. With closed eyes and to the simple sound of a metronome, they perform simple repetitious arm movements using an 8-count measure. One arm is marking a descending time sequence of 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and the other arm performs the opposite, an ascending sequence from one to eight. The result was time crossing with each dancer's sense of timing and the tiny variations contrasting the utter precision of the material and tended to push the movement slightly in and out of synchronization.

Between all these pieces, and the variations of *Locus* and *Solo Olos*, the dancers form lines and disintegrate them in all possible ways and positions; sitting, standing, crouching, moving. They line up with their limbs against the floor or wall, or form columns shoulder-to-shoulder with one dancer the odd man out, separating and recombining in a myriad of ways.

In *Line-Up*, Brown makes movement puns and strange juxtapositions, often reversing meanings once they have been established. There are three types of movement that her choreographic grammar has produced: 1) Unaltered pedestrian actions, such as walking, running, falling, leaning which feature pure movement of the joints and limbs; 2) Mechanical actions like bending, straightening, or rotating would qualify as pure movement if the context was neutral; 3) Personal gestures of Brown's that may refer to memory or special meaning. Overall, her workmanlike attitude toward her material in terms of timing, arrangement of parts, and demeanor, is compared and contrasted. *Line Up* examines tensions between order and disorder, control and error, pattern and irregularity, intention and expectation, statement and variation, clarity and distortion. *Line-up* was grouped into a later series of dances and referred to as "the molecular structure series," along with *Opal Loop*, *Set and Reset*, and *Son of Gone Fishing*. "Working with
polykinesthetic, where several sequences of action are motivated simultaneously. With that has come a kind of rapture on my part to move." (Brown)

COLLABORATION IN THE EIGHTIES

Brown's approach to the Eighties was a complete 180 degree flip from her minimalist roots. Beginning with Glacier Decoy in 1979, Trisha began a series of collaboration projects. Her movement was characterized by unusual, off balance movements and supports, surprising interactions between dancers, moving sets, witty references to earlier dances, shifting correspondence to the dancers and musical/instrumental voices. The increasing complexity of her work required more articulate bodies to perform it. She could no longer use untrained dancers and she had not codified a technique of her own. Her loft studio space was no longer big enough to stage the works that she was delving into. Her work was not spiraling around trees, walking down large scale buildings or lying back on floating rafts. Now she was on a proscenium stage with all its theatrical conventions. This was a very large shift from her audiences' viewpoint.

These richly embellished theatrical productions were collaborations with artists in costumes, lighting, set design and music. Visual artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Fujiko Nakaya, Donald Judd, Nancy Graves, and musicians/composers, Robert Ashley, Laurie Anderson, Peter Zummo, and Richard Laundry met the silky, thickness of Brown's choreography with equal intrigue.

Robert Rauschenberg, a graduate of Black Mountain College was involved in many of the first Happenings, as well as Robert Dunn's composition class. He also showed choreography within the frame of the Judson Dance Theater. Collaborating first with Paul Taylor, he began relationships with
Cunningham Company, Rauschenberg created the standards for stage decor and wardrobe design. His relationship with Trisha Brown, though as friends it began much earlier, artistically commenced with lavish sets and costumes for her piece, *Glacier Decoy*. The two have remained good friends, with a strong working relationship.

In *Glacier Decoy*, Rauschenberg’s black and white photographs slid across the screens that served as a backdrop for the piece. His costumes added to the dancers’ flyaway, slippery quality with their translucent, white, swirly appearance. In another collaborative project, *Opal Loop; Cloud Installation #72513*, sculptor, Fujiko Nakaya’s fog sculpture appeared almost solid, but was constantly changing in a similar sequence as the dance itself. A series of jerking shrugs resembled reflex actions but were really repeatable dance phrases moving forward through the loft space in an liquidy, endless loop.

It was after *Set and Reset* in 1983 that Brown finally became acknowledged as a full major creative talent and stopped being characterized as just an avant-garde artist whose work was interesting but obscure. This piece captured the audience’s imagination with its slippery, kinetic movement style and catchy musical score. Only two years after Brown had used music in her work for the first time (he liked that it masked audience coughing and offered a new constituent like a stage play set), she invited Laurie Anderson to composed the catchy musical score for *Set and Reset*. Together the two created a first in the history of choreographer-composer collaboration as Anderson worked using videos of the choreographed piece to create her musical composition. Anderson, using the first two-thirds of the dance on video, captured her response to it in music, and built from there, while Brown, working independently, completed the dance.

This specifically tailored music, Brown reasoned, set the dance “not to music, but certainly with music” and
“people thought I’d ‘found’ my style, and there was a great deal of pressure to continue with the formula into the sunset”. It was hard to keep everything financially afloat in New York, but success in that area was not the most important issue for her; but exploration was. “I will always choose to evolve into an area that is new, and the collaborations and artistic exchanges that I have had outside of the United States, primarily in France, have been essential in permitting me to do just that”.

In 1984, though the Trisha Brown Company was becoming quite well known, they received only five weeks of work, mostly abroad. She was a huge hit in Europe. According to Carly Hardy, writer for Dance Magazine, at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam, “There was a stage door crush. And in Madrid, viewers stood cheering.” But in the years to follow, Brown received the attention she had been waiting for. “I’m just guessing that people began looking at the form and structure in my work and in looking, have caught up with me!” (Brown, ’85).

After Set and Reset, Brown tried very consciously to build new pre-occupations into her structures. “Up until then, the drama in my work came from the way the movement assembled and disassembled, and how far I could push the off-balance momentum.” The next phase of her work she calls the “valiant series” and it included: Lateral Pass (1985), interludes from Carmen (1986), Newark (1987) and Astral Convertible (1989). In these pieces she was trying to find a way to generate movement that didn’t come directly from her own body. She examined how men actually moved and used a series of drawings that she was making to translate geometric shapes onto their bodies. She was trying to achieve powerful and forceful movements with big arcs in space.
TRISHA BROWN
The Evolution of a Choreographer

The Trisha Brown Dance Company in Astral Convertible
Throughout her collaborative phase, Brown found ways to articulately and artistically, document her work with the help of visual artist and filmmaker, Burt Barr. He, so intricately, learned the choreography for *Set and Reset* (their first large-scale project), that he was able to not only highlight the lucid action, but capture Brown's tumbleweed effect of movement through his pedestrian, yet proficient camera work. Barr's style, as a member of Brown’s generation, was so complimentary to her work, that it seemed the choreography and the film-making went hand in hand from the start; that the piece was actually blocked specifically to allow a camera to move all over the stage at the same time. Barr and Brown also worked together on an abstract documentary film of Brown’s *Astral Convertible*, in which Barr later titled, *Aeros*.

INTO THE LAST DECADE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Since 1979, Trisha Brown had been working on large-scale theatrical collaborations with prominent artists from the visual arts and music fields, adding to an outstanding repertory of works which revitalized and reinvented traditional stage space. In 1986, and at age 50, Ms. Brown developed the choreography and performed in Bizet’s *Carmen*, as directed by Lina Wertmuller for the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, Italy. This began her interest in working with extended musical scores. Barry Laine explained that, “Trisha Brown is a kind of postmodern Peter Pan”. Her work bridged the distance that divided the unconventional/experimental fringe and the mainstream. Brown, as many before her, decided to expand on existing musical scores through a personal study of music history. Beginning with Bach, Brown had to study Baroque music structure in order to fill the stage with movement.

Once asked if working to Bach’s music changed the way she developed the dancing, she said,

> You know, I’ve been dancing to my own drummer for years, and not in a small way. The rhythmic structures of my choreography are derived from the movement itself. The timing of a phrase is so inextricably bound to the action of the phrase that one can’t, in a normal situation, separate it with Bach. With Bach, there’s something different.
all over the floor, and I’ve got no place to put my foot! I found that Bach’s music makes my hand chiseled movement geometries and my willful excursions into space look like old-fashioned modern dance! I’ve tried many, many incursions on this problem, all the way from just dance to the music. The question is, how do I set up a separate identity concurrent with this music? How do I make up dance to this music? What is my relationship to any music?

In 1995, she used her Baroque knowledge as she developed M.O., her choreography to Bach’s 1747 Musical Offering. It was seen for the first time in the United States at Lincoln Center. This was only the second time she had worked with classical music, but like the composer, the choreographer was attracted to and was a master of complex structural invention.

Musical Offering was the result of Bach’s improvisations on a royal theme given to him by Frederick the Great and it included two fugues, ten canons and a trio sonata. Brown’s Lincoln Center performance used a harpsichord, flute, violin, and viola de gamba. To prepare herself for the creation of the structure of Musical Offering, she continued her Bach studies and taught herself Baroque polyphonic composition. After understanding it, she traced patterns with her fingertips on the table, she explained how in the “augmentation canon, one of two dancers, like one of Bach’s two voices, goes twice as fast as the other. Yet even though the patterns they draw on the stage mirror each other, and although the dancers exit exactly on the music, their phrases don’t land squarely on Bach’s but float along beside them like companion’s arm in arm”. Bach’s music also influenced Brown’s movement.

I listened to a lot of Bach, and I danced around to the music like—Isadora Brown! It was hilarious and embarrassing, and my dancers went right along improvising with me, trying to find what the vocabulary would be. The music is of genre that completely enveloped the movement I was making and turned it into old-fashioned modern dance; it an instant lyricism. And so I began pushing to more angular and disjunctive motion, like taking the lower half of the body from one [and the upper from another].

She opened up Bach’s reductive tonalities to create an overlay of movement that didn’t necessarily mesh precisely with the score. Motion and sound pursued a parallel course in certain sequences or engaged in
ingenious dialogue. Sometimes the music continued after the dancers left the stage and at other points movement was performed in silence. This masterful choreographic approach, along with the floating, transparent overgarments caused the piece to linger in the mind as a visual echo long after the performance.

Brown repeated themes in slightly altered fashions. Using swirling fabric behind each body added visual detail that was appropriate to the baroque musical design, and at the same time, offered a sleek, contemporary look. The choreography embellished physical shapes with details for the feet and legs, but with an angular formality, rather than fillips or curlicues. Besides the piece having geometrically beautiful images, there were witty moments blended in, as well. A seductive chase gave a sensuous tone to one exchange. Later, each dancer in a single file moves one beat later than the other, seemingly an abstract variation on Bach’s own timing eccentricities that Brown knowingly demonstrated. In spite of the stark design that Brown used, the fifty-five minute Musical Offerings left a strong impression about the continuity of humanity, reminding viewers how much remains the same, even as stylistic configurations evolve and change.

In a similar study, Brown researched the musical forms of Anton Webern and the compositional development of the “tone row” structure, originally designed by Arnold Schoenberg. In an obvious pun, Brown’s Twelve Tone Rose, was produced at BAM’s New Wave Festival in 1996 and marked the 25th anniversary of her company. For Twelve Tone Rose, she remembered, “My movement is silky, subtle and goes in all directions. It is often based on casting the body or parts of the body into a direction not necessarily normally chosen and then finding and instinctual recovery”. This seemed particularly similar,
Like Merce Cunningham, Brown had been lauded as a true original by the French well before her work became consistently appreciated at home. After her 1973 appearance at the Festival of L’Automme, Brown was invited in 1976 to the Sainte-Baume Festival and reinvited to both again in 1979. The Trisha Brown Company had performed more regularly in France than anywhere else. Most of the company’s important works were premiered in the course of French festivals: Newark (1987), *Astral Convertible* (1989), *Foray Foret* (1990), *For M.G.-The Move* (1994). She tends to be seen in Europe as very specifically American, and she still identifies herself as an American avant-gard, but may be allowed more openness by the French than the American audience. She declared, “I will always choose to move into an area that is new...I am always trying to go beyond what I have already done, in that sense, the term avant-garde is an apt description of my work” (Brown, ’96). In both European and American eyes, Brown is hailed as a choreographer. She attested her passion,


A company is made of spirit, cajoling, standards of how to work together, and of course, a budget. Keeping a company financially secure however, was not guaranteed by enthusiastic audiences and public commendations and awards. Since the early eighties she has received innumerable awards and even deemed a “genius” by the American press for receiving the prestigious McArthur Foundation Fellowship Award. Still, as the recipient of large grants from the NEA and donors like the Mellon Foundation and others, the cost of running a dance company in New York City is substantial. It took Brown some one a half to two million dollars a year to modestly outfit twelve dancers and an administrative staff of eight. Contemporary dance companies, regardless how famous the name, are obliged to be self-supporting and
the costs for a season in New York is approximately half a million dollars. Contrasted to ballet companies, which can draw from established repertoires and huge pools of dancers trained in codified techniques, the contemporary dance companies tend to be the work of their founder-choreographer, and need to be concerned with inventing new languages and movements. So these companies are dependent on the choreographer’s creation of new work and investment in dancers who move in innovative ways of main importance to the company’s continued validity. Through the years, Brown is no exception in having to keep a company on tour much of the time and to premier new works abroad. She admits that touring in the United States and abroad takes time away from working up new pieces, but it adds significant advantages to the process.

In an interview with Mikhail Baryshnikov, who she set work on and performed with in 1996, in the New York Times, (August 1999), Brown stated, “I don’t feel I can have a dud. If I don’t make good choreography, I think I’ll be dismissed.” But despite having a slight fear, Brown, through constant inspiration, has no intention of ceasing:

The intrigue of finding your way through making a new piece, the total newness of it, the unknown-ness of it, the dedication of all the people around .... It was really wonderful when my company started performing “Five Part Weather invention” as Jacob's Pillow a few weeks ago. The musicians were improvising, though certain internal things were precooked, there was a score. They're looking at the dancers going fast and hard and all this richness is coming out, and they get excited because there is a deep collaboration happening between the dancers and the musicians. A miracle.

Most recently, the Trisha Brown Company gave its first ever performance in the Eisenhower Hall, at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D. C. The new piece was the second of her three-piece jazz cycle. The first piece in the jazz cycle was performed as a work in progress at Jacob's Pillow and at the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors, in August of 1999, entitled “Five Part Weather Invention.” The spirit of the work
trumpeter-composer, Dave Douglas and artist, Terry Winters. The dancers were given "rules of conduct" that ensured the choreographic wholeness of the piece, yet allowed for them to improvise.

The goal of the process is for the dancers to reach a level of proficiency that will allow them to improvise with one another using this new movement. But the bigger challenge ahead is creating a system that will allow dancers and musicians to cross the boundaries of their respective disciplines, interact with one another, and hence redefine improvisational performance. (Brown, '00)

Many special tributes, awards, and degrees have been bestowed upon Trisha Brown through the years, for her precedent-setting choreography and dancing. Among the most prestigious are: five fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and two from the Creative Artists Public Service, Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship for choreography (1975, 1984), New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award, Brandeis University Creative Dance Award (1982), Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Oberlin College (1983), and the Award from Dance Magazine for 25 Years of Outstanding Achievement in Dance. Appointed by President Bill Clinton, Brown served on the National Council for the Arts from 1994-97, was inducted into the Academy of Arts and letters, and received an honorary degree from Mills College. She has also been the recipient of numerous awards by the French government. Her work has been documented in a number of books and journals, films, and videotapes. The Trisha Brown Legacy includes: Jeffery Axilrod, Lance Gries, Irene Hultman, Lisa Schmidt, Diane Madden, Carolyn Lucas, Gregory Lara, Shelley Senter, David Thompson, Vicky Shick, Sylvia Palacious Whitman, Eva Karczag, Lisa Kraus, Randy Warsaw, Stephen Petronio, Will Swanson. The Trisha Brown Studio is located at 211 West 61st Street on the Fourth Floor, Between Amsterdam and West End, in New York City.

“The Bottom line is that Trisha Brown has not made compromises. For that reason, she’s rightly considered a force in contemporary art. Brown’s dances have an affinity to quantum mechanics, to the uncertainty principle that projects a myriad of possibilities.” (Hurd, '85) She is a unique and gifted artist.
dancing?" To that question last summer, she replied, "Well, I danced two weeks ago, so you could say I’m in early retirement. Or I have a performance on the 13th of August, so I know that I am dancing until the 14th. With this tenuous relationship with her art form, she is uneasy, but not frightened away. For the last forty years, Trisha Brown has played a vital role in the formulation of Post Modern dance. The evolution of her choreography, as representative of the last four decades of the Twentieth Century, spanned an era of continuous invention. Through her need for experimentation, and her constant expansion of all boundaries, Brown’s choreography, with its startling beauty and originality has only grown more popular through the years. She remains an original icon of Post Modern dance in America.
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