

# Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art\*

SUSAN ROSENBERG

Four decades separate Trisha Brown's reincarnation of her legendary work *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art in the fall of 2010 from its premiere in Manhattan's SoHo district.<sup>1</sup> Always refusing—until recently—the countless invitations to reprise this well-known but almost-never-seen choreographic performance, Brown has met the curiosity of interviewers with a modest statement disavowing authorship: “I don't even know who that woman was, it has been such a long time.”<sup>2</sup>

A founding participant in Robert Dunn's legendary dance-composition workshop (1961–63) and pioneering member of Judson Dance Theater (1962–64), Trisha Brown has had a career that is unprecedented in its traversals of the fields of choreography, visual art, and opera. Given Brown's repeated acts of artistic self-invention, she has had many reasons and occasions to problematize the relationship of her work's present to its past, and when looking back, she has always demonstrated skepticism about the possibility of a work's “authentic” revival.<sup>3</sup> From her oeuvre of approximately one hundred choreographies, Brown has tended the legacy of *Man Walking* with particular care. Typical of her acute sensitivity to her work's institutional determination, to movement's temporality, and to choreography's history, she subtly reinvented *Man Walking* in 2010 in a manner similar to her treatment of other signature solo works and performances: contravening the iconic singularity of the 1970 original, the 2010 version of *Man Walking* was executed by two different performers: Stephen Petronio, a choreogra-

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1. Presentations of *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* at the Whitney Museum of American Art (September 30–October 3, 2010) were the first in New York since the work's premiere on April 18 and 19, 1970. Brown had twice reprised this work: at Tate Modern in 2006 and at the Walker Art Center in 2007.

2. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, April 15, 2008. See also Andrew Princz, “Is Off the Grid Still Off the Grid?,” *On the Globe*, May 26, 2010, [ontheglobe.com/trisha-brown](http://ontheglobe.com/trisha-brown) (accessed May 6, 2012).

3. The subject of Brown's approach to reprising early choreographies cannot be addressed here, though it should be noted that her decisions stand in contrast to the rigorous and exacting methods that govern the preservation and presentation of her choreographic repertory.



*Trisha Brown. Man Walking Down  
the Side of a Building. 1970.  
Photograph by Carol Goodden.*

pher and former Trisha Brown Company member, and choreographer Elizabeth Streb, its first woman performer.<sup>4</sup>

Examining Brown's painstaking and self-critical process of redefining choreography as a *visual art*, this essay focuses on distinctions in her work between choreography and gesture, gesture and movement, movement and dancing. In light of the constructs and contexts of these distinctions, Brown's reluctance to represent *Man Walking* makes sense: a demonstration of walking as representation, the 1970 concert was a unique performance—different from others before and those that followed. This groundbreaking investigation of movement's intentionality and choreographic originality occurred in a precisely articulated relationship to a now unrecoverable institutional and historical territory: in what she called a "crack" between dance and visual art, which recent museum presentations of *Man Walking* narrow, but do not entirely foreclose.<sup>5</sup>

Conceived as a simple walk down the surface of a seven-floor loft building, from rooftop to ground, *Man Walking* originally premiered as part of a self-produced, site-specific concert of four works titled "Dances in and Around 80 Wooster Street." Witnessed by approximately forty people and recorded on film, these events attracted sufficient attention that she was invited to exhibit at the Whitney Museum the following year. There Brown presented "Another Fearless Dance Concert," including a new work, *Walking on the Wall*. At the Whitney in 2010, it too was reprised for the first time, executed in the location of its first appearance: on the second-floor, in a space denuded of art objects.

*Man Walking* debuted during an economic recession in a relatively desolate district of the city that was home to a vanishing manufacturing industry and an influx of artist-residents. Realized with basic mountaineering equipment that Brown purchased at Tent and Trailer's Chamber Street store, the performance depended on two belayers situated on the roof of Brown's residence—one of George Maciunas's earliest Fluxhouse Cooperatives.<sup>6</sup> Manipulating a simple rope-and-pulley system, the belayers enabled the walker to release his weight into their hands and—as the film documentation of *Man Walking* reveals—realize a reasonably accurate reproduction of the act of walking, executed in a new orientation to gravity's inexorable logic: with the body shifted ninety degrees and pitched in space, and the

4. Petronio, a member of the Trisha Brown Company from 1979 to 1986 and its first male dancer, founded Stephen Petronio Company in 1984. In 1982 he performed *Man Walking* in Avignon, France. Streb founded STREB Extreme Action Company in 1985 and established S.L.A.M. (Streb Lab for Action Mechanics) in 2003.

5. See Camille Hardy, "Pushing Post-Modern Art into Orbit," *Dance Magazine* (March 1985), pp. 63–66; Branden W. Joseph articulated the significance of this "crack" in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2008), pp. 83–84, where he writes, "for the generation of artists in Cage's wake . . . the issue was not one of seeking to restore the validity of medium-based or disciplinary distinctions . . . the very idea of producing an 'advanced' work seemed to imply precisely that question of a work's status—the disciplinary, institutional place of the work of art or music . . . almost necessarily had to come into play."

6. 80 Wooster Street was one of the first Fluxhouse Cooperatives, and Fluxus founder George Maciunas lived in the building's basement.

walker's back held straight as he promenaded, relatively effortlessly, while perpendicular to the building surface and parallel to the ground.

Orchestrated on the north façade of Marcel Breuer's significantly taller Whitney building in 2010, *Man Walking* started at a point on the roof just west and skyward of the street-level loading dock, an institutional threshold of everyday life and art. To witness *Man Walking* was to experience a treacherous, possibly life-threatening act. In 2010, as the crowd of approximately 150 gathered at the northwest corner of Madison Avenue and 75th Street, the fear was palpable. Rigging equipment, visible on the Whitney's rooftop, included a metal scaffold resembling the kind used for competitive ski-jump events. At each performance, the walker stood beneath this structure and then cantilevered forward into space, suspended from a harness placed at the hips, and then remained briefly still, with the soles of the feet barely touching the point where the building's façade joined its roof.<sup>7</sup> Petronio described "reaching [his] head into space and lengthening his body, to create tension against the building, while trying to hold onto space at the molecular level, even as the body [was] telling [him], *This should not be happening—don't do this.*"<sup>8</sup> To those witnessing this event, an uncanny experience of anxiety-as-repetition arrived in advance of and continued throughout the performance.<sup>9</sup> Absent a referent (besides potential viewings of the 1970 film of *Man Walking*) a sonic memory filled the void: sports announcer Jim McKay's voice inviting audiences to witness "the constant variety of sport . . . the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat," a soundtrack that accompanied televised images of the crashing, terrifying fall of skier Vinko Bogataj, recorded in March 1970 but played during the next decade as a repeating image loop in advertisements for ABC's Wide World of Sports.

In contrast to the apparent naturalness of the 1970 performance, the 2010 performance was labored and stuttering; but as Brown originally intended, walking was showcased as a complex physical artifice. Elizabeth Streb explained, "I felt like an idiot savant: like 'I don't remember how to walk. I don't remember how to walk.'"<sup>10</sup> The performances echoed a drawing in a sketchbook by Edgar Degas then on display at the Morgan Library, thirty blocks south of the Whitney: in a preparatory study for *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando* (1879), a woman is suspended, like a caught fish, from a high-wire gripped in her mouth. Degas's rendering of the human body made strange by its appearance in a circus act

7. In interviews with the author, Elizabeth Streb (November 11, 2010) and Stephen Petronio (November 24, 2010) both mentioned this clearly articulated moment as an intentional element of the choreography.

8. Stephen Petronio, interview with the author, November 24, 2010.

9. *Man Walking* provides a counterexample to the anti-spectacular vision of contemporary dance articulated by Yvonne Rainer in "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Amidst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," in *Minimal Art, Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 263–73.

10. Elizabeth Streb, interview with the author, November 11, 2010. For Streb's discussion of "myths of movement," see her essay "Pop-Action," *Performing Arts Journal* 18, no. 2 (May 1996), pp. 72–76.



*Edgar Degas. Sketch  
for Miss La La at  
the Cirque  
Fernando. 1879.*

includes a detailed drawing of the apparatus of the performer's suspension: a wooden plaque hollowed to hold her teeth's bite and attached to a simple hook, the mechanism of her upward lift towards the circus tent's heights. Similarly, *Man Walking* (2010) revealed not only movement through space but also the apparatus that made such movement possible. The walker was lifted while trying to exert her or his weight to walk downward, producing a succession of actions and cognitive decisions whose deployment—by gravity, by the belayers, and by the performer—was visible to the audience.

#### *Seeing the Score*

Brown made her New York debut as a choreographer with *Trillium* (1962), which she first presented in the context of New York's interdisciplinary avant-garde at the Maidman Theater's Poet's Festival in March 1962, and then tested against the different eyes of the modern-dance Establishment at the American Dance Festival in New London, Connecticut, four months later. There she presented *Trillium* on a slate of new works by "young choreographers."<sup>11</sup> In light of the subsequent course of her career, Brown's early double loyalty to dance and art, and to their different audiences and institutional apparatuses, is intriguing, and the performances of *Trillium* revealed much to Brown about the ways context can be organized by an artist to affect how a work is seen and means.

With its tripartite structure, derived from that of a flower of the Pacific Northwest (Brown's birthplace), *Trillium* consists of three elemental actions—

11. *Trillium* was part of the Maidman Theater's "Poet's Festival"; its program—music by Richard Maxfield, La Monte Young, Philip Corner, and Joseph Byrd; happenings by Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman; works by George Brecht and Ray Johnson; films by Stan Vanderbeek and Nicola Cernovich; and dance by members of Robert Dunn's workshop—reflects John Cage's influence on New York's interdisciplinary avant-garde.





*Trisha Brown. c. 1964.*

stand, sit, and lie down—performed in indeterminate, improvised relationship to one another, without transitions. Her elimination of transitions echoes ideas articulated in John Cage’s “History of Experimental Music,” where he wrote, “Composers were getting rid of the glue . . . where people had felt the necessity to stick sounds together to make a continuity. . . . We felt the opposite necessity, to get rid of the glue so that sounds would be themselves.”<sup>12</sup> Yet in dance, more than in music, “erasing the glue” is an unachievable ideal: one has to *get* from A to B. Brown’s combination of pedestrian actions with indeterminate rules for their performance produced unpredictable results. As Brown cantilevered off the floor into handstands and hovered above the ground, critics discerned movement tasks: “a sitdown fall and handstands,”<sup>13</sup> or a “grow[ing], flower[ing] of its own natural accord from its first physical impulse of simply getting up and lying down,”<sup>14</sup> with “spontaneity” named as *Trillium*’s most prominent attribute. Brown’s choreographic logic, the dynamic of formalized movement tasks and indeterminate performance, went *unseen*.

Fellow dancer Steve Paxton considered *Trillium* to be emblematic of Brown’s love for dancing’s unruly ephemerality, its wildness, and its radiance. Paxton—soon to become a master of improvisational performance dedicated to dance that is “not historical. Not even a second ago”<sup>15</sup>—explained, “Trisha told me that a trillium was

12. John Cage, “History of Experimental Music,” in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, 5th ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 71.

13. Maxine Munt, “For Dancers Only . . .,” *Show Business* 7 (April 1962), p. 6.

14. Jill Johnston, “Boiler Room,” *The Village Voice*, March 29, 1962, p. 14.

15. Steve Paxton, “The Grand Union,” *TDR* 16, no. 3 (September 1972), p. 130.

a flower that she had found in the woods. . . . She said she used to pick them . . . but by the time she got home they would be wilted and faded. . . . That's what she thought about movement—it was wild, it was something that lived in the air.”<sup>16</sup>

If Paxton read *Trillium* as an elegy for the fading perfume of a wildflower, Brown was instead riveted by the problem of the flower's survival, by the quest to make evanescence endure.<sup>17</sup> *Trillium's* sound score, like its choreography, framed—through recording—vocalizations by Simone Forti, summarizing and making permanent many fleeting acts of improvisation that Brown had witnessed as a participant in Anna Halprin's dance workshop in the summer of 1960. Furthermore, *Trillium's* presentation history confirms Brown's wish to interrogate how choreography might flourish or fail according to its siting. In New York, critics applauded her work as “the high point of the evening.”<sup>18</sup> At ADF it was nearly rejected before being saved by *eminence grise* of modern dance Bessie Schonberg; Schonberg wrote of Brown's performance, “Hers was the most original *material*. Could we suggest she try and make a dance?”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately Brown convinced Schonberg that despite *Trillium's* basis in and presentation of indeterminacy, it had structure; *Trillium* was not “material” that needed shaping, but the articulation of choreography itself.<sup>20</sup> Maxine Munt, a rare reviewer of the Poet's Festival, asked whether the program's offerings were “really studio studies,” not finished works.<sup>21</sup> Between “studio” and “material,” between art and dance contexts, Brown had begun articulating a concept of choreography-as-structure, deliberately framed.

Suspicious of improvisation because it always disappears “into the ether,” Brown reacted against critics' perception of *Trillium* as impromptu and overly subjective, using different tactics to make *visible* her choreography's structure as that which remains.<sup>22</sup> In March 1966, in the third and last work she presented at Judson Church, *A String: Homemade, Motor, Inside*, she situated choreographic durability and concreteness in relation to visible frames. The first of three parts, *Homemade* contrasted a live, performed choreography with its cinematic recording and projection. *Motor* contrasted live motion with vehicular, mechanized motion

16. Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 121.

17. Brown's use of a concrete image and an object to structure *Trillium* recalls Robert Whitman's emphasis on the creation of temporal objects in his happenings. See Robert Whitman, “A Statement,” in *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, ed. Michael Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965), pp. 135–36. As a metaphor for her choreography and its contextualization, the trillium flower embodies Brown's wish to frame and to make enduring the ineffability of dance.

18. Munt, “For Dancers Only . . .,” p. 6.

19. Undated note from Bessie Schonberg to American Dance Festival director Jeannette Schlottman, American Dance Festival Archives, Durham, N.C. Thank you to Dean Jeffrey.

20. *Trillium's* musical accompaniment by Forti's sound score demonstrates Brown's receptivity to the Cage-influenced music of La Monte Young and Terry Riley, both of whom participated in Anna Halprin's summer workshop (1960). Brown has said the score was another reason for *Trillium's* initial rejection by ADF jurors.

21. Munt, “For Dancers Only . . .,” p. 6.

22. Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin, Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 148. Brown's definition of improvisational dance as “that which disappears” is a foundational concept against which she articulated choreography's contrasting potential to remain.

(that of a motor scooter), while *Inside* articulated choreography's determination by the materiality of the studio's architectural frame. In this last part, Brown used the surface of her studio's interior walls to generate and organize movement. The concept dates to Brown's practice of improvisation shortly after her 1961 arrival in New York, when, together with Simone Forti, she commandeered an unauthorized space on Great Jones Street as a studio, a kind of illicit action that her friend Gordon Matta-Clark made an art form in its own right.<sup>23</sup> Brown recalled, "Simone would point blindly into the space and then follow out the end of her finger. From whatever there was, she would derive a set of rules about time and space that were complete enough to proceed with an improvisation."<sup>24</sup>

As Don McDonagh reported in *Artforum* in 1972, the method looked back to Brown's experience studying improvisation in Halprin's 1960 summer workshop: "[Halprin] began to work toward a type of dance activity that would draw upon its environment. . . . It was improvisation in which the resistance of materials . . . dictated the activity that the dancers would devise."<sup>25</sup> Founder of the San Francisco Dancer's Workshop in 1955, Halprin promulgated teachings that were unique in their emphasis on improvisation, which the modern dance Establishment considered taboo.<sup>26</sup> Practiced on Halprin's famous outdoor dance deck—located in the shadow of California's Mount Tamalpais and designed by her husband, architect Lawrence Halprin—movement-making was enacted in real space and time. A student of Walter Gropius, Lawrence identified his structure as a "plane" that was elevated and suspended in space, and Anna Halprin emphasized that this space was not that of the "static cube, confined by right angles, with a front, back, sides and top—a box within which to move."<sup>27</sup> When Brown transplanted Halprin's improvisational model to New York, however, it was precisely in reference to the static cube that she originated her choreography and on which its presentation depended. Brown embraced the urban context of New York to pursue those inexorable closed systems.

Presenting *Inside* at Judson Church, she transplanted a method of improvisation from the outdoors and nature to an interior; placing the audience's seats around her in a rectilinear configuration, she reproduced the studio's original framing context within the public performance. Her siting of a choreographic work anticipated visual artists' mobilization of the frame as inseparable from their works' operations, as exemplified in Sol Lewitt's *Wall Floor Piece (Three Squares)* (1966), Bruce Nauman's *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)*

23. In 1963, 9 Great Jones Street became an art gallery overseen by Robert Whitman and Walter de Maria.

24. Marianne Goldberg, *Reconstructing Trisha Brown: Dances and Performances Pieces, 1960–1975* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1990), p. 44.

25. Don McDonagh, "Notes on Recent Dance," *Artforum* 11 (December 1972), p. 50.

26. On many occasions, Brown described late-1950s perceptions of improvisation by paraphrasing Louis Horst: "if . . . you just turn the lights out and go gah-gah in circles that would be therapy or catharsis or your happy hour." See Brown, "Trisha Brown," in *Contemporary Dance*, ed. Anne Livet (New York: Abbeville Press, 1978), p. 44.

27. See Lawrence and Anna Halprin, "Dance Deck in the Woods," *Impulse* (1956), pp. 23–24.



(1967–68), or Mel Bochner's *Measurement Room* (1969). In Lewitt's work, three identical square structures are placed in a corner—one on the floor and the others side by side on two perpendicular walls: together they suggest a cubic volume, one that reiterates a room's interior architecture. Bochner's *Measurement Piece* makes a gallery's surfaces and volume its content. Lining the gallery's walls with black tape that includes each wall's numerical measurement, Bochner established—as did Lewitt and Brown—a dialogue between the viewer and the actuality of the material structure she or he inhabits.

Brown, considering *Inside juvenilia*, published an abbreviated score for it in 1978: a simple rectangle with directional arrows tracing, clockwise, its interior perimeter, accompanied by a description in which she recalled “mov[ing] along the edge of the room, facing out, on the knee caps of the audience, who were placed in a rectangular seating formation, duplicating the interior of my studio. I was marking the edge of the space, leaving the center of the room empty, the movement, completely specific to me, abstract to the audience.”<sup>28</sup> The ascendance of the grid and cube as infinitely expandable and repeatable formats of self-generating structural repetition in visual art echo *Inside*, which marks the inception of Brown's structuring of choreography in relation to geometric determinants—planar, cubic, and grid-based—both actual/material and imagined.<sup>29</sup> Its arrival coincides with the rise of proto-conceptual and minimal models of visual art in which “the structure, location, and materials of the intervention, at the very moment of their conception, are completely determined by their future destination.”<sup>30</sup>

*Homemade*, in contrast, ensured Brown the permanent memory that *Inside* could not provide by making the cinematic frame a visual, material, and conceptual grounding for choreography's appearance. Brown derived *Homemade*'s score from memory: a succession of pedestrian behaviors of personal significance that she instructed herself to perform “live”—not imitative “physical feats,” but as representations of thought, demonstrating the mind's connection to the body.<sup>31</sup> With a recording of the performance, *Homemade* simultaneously offered its audience an example of choreographic memory inscribed on film.<sup>32</sup> With Brown sporting a film projector on her back, her movement sent the film around Judson Church's interior walls, incorporating both the architectural site and audience into its performance.

If *Trillium*'s combination of task and indeterminate structure was inadequate to framing or visibly marking the *choreographic* as separate from the danced, *Homemade*'s cinematic framing of remembered, re-presented task behaviors made possible their comparison to the live performance—visual evidence enabling the

28. Brown, “Trisha Brown,” in *Contemporary Dance*, p. 44.

29. See Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979), pp. 50–64.

30. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (Winter 1990), p. 135.

31. In Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer, “A Conversation About ‘Glacial Decoy,’” *October* 10 (Fall 1979), p. 32, Brown said, “The image, the memory, must occur in performance at precisely the same moment as the action derived from it. Without thinking, there are just physical feats.”

32. The film of *Homemade* was shot by Robert Whitman.

differentiation of choreographed gestures and their pictorialized counterpart, that of choreography's visual logic, from the inevitable, subtle variations occurring in each of its performances. Film, through close-up shots, also made it possible for audiences to see *Homemade's* intimate, miniature gestures, performed at the actual scale of the everyday.

The film of *Homemade* metonymically announced choreography as existing through representation: live and on film.<sup>33</sup> This self-referential loop demonstrated an infra-slim distinction between choreography and each of its reproductions, showing choreography—as distinct from dance—as *always* reproduced in relation to the concept, if not the actuality, of a permanent model.<sup>34</sup> Never fully fixed, choreography occurs and recurs in an approximate relation to an absence—ever approaching but never arriving at fixity, different each time (and in time). Just as Brown insisted on memorizing the *structure* of the work—the vignettes of personal memory that she sourced “live” as everyday behaviors—the device of simultaneously presenting a performance and its record on film made *visible* the measurement of one reproduction against another. Choreography, through its doubled representation, is shown as a live reproduction of the body's memory, as a reproduction of executed physical memory captured on film and in terms of an “original” performance, an ephemeral event that is always choreography's unique reproduction. Positing choreography as a marriage of performance and filmed reproduction, *Homemade* questioned performance-art theory's binaristic separation of live performance from its documentation, producing a heightened experience of *choreography* as visually precise and recognizable in form, as a singular, temporally specific live iteration whose cinematic record documents an individual performance and an enduring visual score.

In *Homemade*, memory, physical articulation, reproduction, and visual recognition collaborated within a circumscribed set of performative preconditions. The cinematic frame delineates a permanence to which choreography aspires but can only ever partially achieve: for choreography is irrevocably an absence.<sup>35</sup> Showcasing each movement's ephemerality in performance, Brown paradoxically reinforces the priority given to choreography's relatively unchanging logic, her

33. Paula Caspão, “Stroboscopic Stutter on the Not-Yet-Captured Ontological Condition of Limit Attractions,” *TDR* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2007), p. 147, questions Peggy Phelan's view of documentation as “a direct consequence of direct witnessing . . . leading to infinite circuits of representations of representations, from which the ‘real’ live-performance is . . . absolutely absent as such.” *Homemade's* documentation-as-performance interrogates the originary status of “live witness” and the choreographic “real.”

34. Brown's articulation of choreography's appearance as always reproduced contradicts the much-quoted statement of Peggy Phelan that “performance in a strict ontological sense is non-reproductive,” a valorization of live art's renunciation of the commodity, recapitulating initial responses to conceptual art in the 1960s. See “The Ontology of Performance: Representation Without Reproduction,” in Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.

35. In *Being Watched*, Carrie Lambert-Beatty questions the segregation of performance and document, arguing that the “distinction between action and image, performance and photograph” did not hold in Judson. See Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), p.72.

work's conceptual center. Rather than being destined to immediately disappear, each individual, ephemeral performance of choreography encircles the concept of choreography's durability. *Homemade* solidifies this concept of choreography's permanence and performance's originality in its apparatus: the film is a required element of the dance, and the dance, a required element of the film: the choreography can only be performed by one unique/original dancer: in relationship to a unique film.<sup>36</sup>

### *Dance Machines*

Questions of the body's memory, and the mind's a priori concept of movement—of walking—inform *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. For this work, Brown rigged the body like a prepared piano and sent it on a vertical walk down the façade of a seven-story building at 80 Wooster Street.<sup>37</sup> Celebrated as a work in which Brown reoriented the body's relationship to gravity to alter the viewer's phenomenological experience of the everyday, *Man Walking* is a work of art demonstrating choreography to be visual and visible in relation to conditions of duration, material structure, and task.<sup>38</sup>

Rather than showcasing pedestrian behavior and dispensing with choreography, *Man Walking* reveals everyday life's choreography, its forms. *Man Walking* joins the logic of John Cage's concepts of indeterminacy and theater, making choreography's constituent parts visually transparent as structure and duration.<sup>39</sup> In this it is similar to Cage's "4'33", where the structure of time and task, the opening and closing of the piano keyboard's cover, articulates music as a time structure framing sound material. *Man Walking* makes duration indeterminate in relation to (architectural) structure, equating time with the physical distance required for the task—walking—to unfold. Proposing a simple answer to the choreographic problems of duration, traveling pattern, and "narrative," the piece enlists gravity as the

36. The inseparable dynamic of repetition and originality in *Homemade*, and its significance as a unique artwork, became especially recognizable when Brown presented this work on a program reprising works of Judson Dance Theater that Mikhail Baryshnikov organized, *Past/Forward* (2000). For this event, Brown set *Homemade*'s choreography anew on Baryshnikov and commissioned Babette Mangolte to film him performing the dance, a necessary requirement to re-present it.

37. Brown's "rigging" of the body compares to Richard Serra's techniques for "rigging"—and what he has called "choreographing"—the dangerously gravity-bound materials of early sculptures such as *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* (1969).

38. The year Brown arrived in New York, 1961, the film *West Side Story* made fireescaped façades of tenement buildings the backdrop for Jerome Robbins's choreography; Robbins himself was filmed dancing on a rooftop. On January 20, 1969, the Beatles gave their last (impromptu) performance as a group, on the roof of Apple Records headquarters, in London. Roger Copeland compared Brown's reorientation of gravity in *Walking on the Wall* (1971, Whitney Museum) to Fred Astaire's perambulations around a room's interior in *The Royal Wedding*, in Copeland, "The Post-modern Choreography of Trisha Brown," *New York Times*, January 4, 1976, p. D-1.

39. My reading of Trisha Brown's trajectory through Cage's ideas is indebted to Branden W. Joseph's *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2008).

inevitable machine of choreography in a “work of art [that] is finished when the particular movement or task is completed.”<sup>40</sup>

*Man Walking* demonstrates how the most natural of human acts is contextually determined by gravity. Realized less than one year after Neil Armstrong’s historic, televised walk across the moon’s surface on July 11, 1969, Brown’s work resonated with popular interest in the imagery of anti-gravity situations revealing the human body’s experience of its weight, spatial coordinates, and physical capabilities as contingent, as *un-natural*.<sup>41</sup> Arriving at this work through a prolonged process of testing gravity’s role in choreography itself, Brown received news of her works’ resemblance to space-exploration research in a 1976 letter sent by the editor of *Astronautics and Aeronautics*, who suggested Brown visit NASA’s Langley, Virginia, headquarters to observe experiments simulating zero-gravity conditions in an actual, scientific—not artistic—laboratory context.<sup>42</sup>

A work of art literally presented “off the wall,”<sup>43</sup> *Man Walking* condenses and transforms a vast legacy of postwar American art, from Jackson Pollock’s reorientation of painting from horizontality to verticality to Robert Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (1955), in which an everyday object, usually deployed horizontally, is transformed by a ninety-degree shift to become an autonomous art object. In Brown’s “dance machine,” gravity is a device that introduces formal inevitability to the behavior of choreographic materials, not unlike Jasper Johns’s “painting machine,” *Device Circle* (1959). As in Johns’s work, where the trace of a wooden ruler’s movement across the work’s surface tells the story of its indexical relationship to the painting/object’s realization, Brown’s use of the device/task “to walk” plus vertical surface plus gravity (the inevitable motor of motion) produces an object-like dance. Like Rauschenberg’s combines, such as *Canyon* (1959), Brown’s work operates in the gap between art and life, between architectural frame and suspended volume. Her use of an overlooked urban site recalls Allan Kaprow’s use of sites as environments, such as *Yard* (1961), but, as in the plane of Halprin’s dance deck, makes a surface its frame. Finally, her use of gravity recalls Simone Forti’s *Slant Board* (1961) and Rauschenberg’s *Elgin Tie* (1964).<sup>44</sup> In Forti’s work, ropes, attached to a wooden board mounted at a forty-five-degree angle to the wall, provided the concept and means for a task: dancers’ repeated performance of walking against gravity. *Elgin Tie*, presented at the Moderna

40. Copeland, “The Post-modern Choreography of Trisha Brown.”

41. Brown’s fascination with gravity as a determinant of the body’s behavior and motor of choreography extends back to *Lighfall* (1963) and continues in *Falling Duets* (1968), *Planes* (1969), and *Leaning Duets I* (1970) and *II* (1971).

42. Prompted by a 1976 *New York Times* article that mentioned Brown’s “wall-walking experiments,” the journal’s editor, John Newbauer, also included an article by Rudolf F. Hoelker and Nolan J. Braud, “Charting Apollo Flights,” showing a suited astronaut suspended at a ninety-degree angle to a gridded wall. Newbauer thought it “might help you with your new dancing ideas for walking on the wall.” Letter dated January 29, 1976, sent by John Newbauer’s secretary, Eleanor L. Gray, to Trisha Brown c/o Anna Kisselgoff at the *New York Times*; Trisha Brown Archives.

43. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, February 2, 2007.

44. Forti’s *Slant Board*, in turn, looks back to Anna Halprin’s *People on a Slant* (1953); presented outdoors in San Francisco, the work required performers to walk up a steep hill while keeping their bodies straight. See Ross, *Anna Halprin*, pp. 126–27.



*Robert Rauschenberg. Elgin Tie. 1964.  
Photograph: Stig T. Larson. Courtesy of  
the Estate of Robert Rauschenberg.*





*Poster for "Dances  
in and Around 80  
Wooster Street."  
1970. Photograph  
by Carol Goodden.*

Museet, Stockholm, featured Rauschenberg descending by a rope from the ceiling lights in one of the museum's galleries, which took him, as he performed various tasks, to the gallery's floor. Brown's 1970 use of 80 Wooster Street's façade and interior, as well as the street outside, extended a legacy of Fluxus "street events" presented in SoHo in the mid-1960s.<sup>45</sup>

*Man Walking* defied expectations as to the nature of the sites where dance was presented, and also challenged assumptions associated with the Judson Dance

45. Brown's *Leaning Duets I* (1970) was performed by ten dancers on Wooster Street as part of the April 1970 program "Dances in and Around 80 Wooster Street." On Fluxus street performances in SoHo, see, for example, Thomas Kellein, *George Maciunas: The Dream of Fluxus: An Artist's Biography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), pp. 87–97.

Theater, which posited everyday movement as both a critique of dance virtuosity and as a new movement lexicon. Steve Paxton said Judson aimed “to eliminate the look of learned movement.”<sup>46</sup> Brown’s dance contests the ordinariness of walking; once unleashed from gravity’s conventions, walking is neither an unquestioned medium of locomotion nor the imperfect recreation of a physical memory nor a signifier of the non-virtuosic dancing body. It is a strenuous act of illusion, of material, conceptual, and linguistic artifice. Brown described this work as a dance machine that “tells you 1) when to start 2) where you go and 3) where you finish”: it is a machine that remakes walking as form.<sup>47</sup>

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Performed two years after the remotely located Castelli Warehouse exhibition of post-minimalist sculpture and within months of Richard Serra’s first site-specific urban sculpture, *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram Right Angles Reversed*,<sup>48</sup> *Man Walking*—through the logic of indeterminacy—redefined choreography as site-specific, self-contained, and sculptural, and also delivered choreography to the threshold of Conceptual art. That Brown located her work in a “crack” between the sculptural and choreographic object, is confirmed by a little-known work, *The Stream*, presented in October 1970, six months after “Dances in and Around 80 Wooster Street,” at Astrofest, an outdoor festival in Union Square Park.<sup>49</sup> In *The Stream*, Brown experimented with performance in the absence of dancers: the work consisted of a thirty-four-foot-long trough-like wooden structure with two slanting sides, joined by a flat floor on which Brown placed approximately forty baking pans of different sizes and shapes, all filled with water.<sup>50</sup> *The Stream* invited audiences to “wad[e] through the water or step around pans as if from stone to stone in an actual stream, avoiding water, or racing up and down, climbing on the [construction’s] sides,” a dangerous activity, given the construction’s tilting walls, the precariously placed pans of water, and gravity.<sup>51</sup>

An uncharacteristically literal work, *The Stream* provided viewers with an opportunity to reexperience one of Brown’s lasting physical memories from childhood: the

46. Steve Paxton, “Brown in the New Body,” in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961–2001*, ed. Hendl Teicher (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 57.

47. See Corrine Diserens, introduction to *Trisha Brown: Danse, précis de liberté* (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, 1998), p. 10. Brown’s description resonates with Sol Lewitt’s 1967 definition of Conceptual art: “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes art.” Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), p. 79.

48. Castelli’s warehouse was on 108th Street, and Serra’s sculpture was sited at the intersection of 183rd Street and Webster Avenue in the Bronx.

49. Astrofest’s theme was the signs of the zodiac and included works by Phil Corner, Ann Danoff, Sari Dienes, Joan Jonas, Phil Noblock, and others. *The Stream* was sited in the park’s southwest corner.

50. *The Stream* was reprised for the first time since 1970 in the exhibition *Move: Choreographing You*, October 13, 2010–January 9, 2011, at the Hayward Gallery, London.

51. Undated notes, Trisha Brown Archives.

subtle weight-shifting and balance required to play amidst streams and rocks, an image to which she often returns in conjuring sources for her natural-movement language.<sup>52</sup> Parallels between *The Stream*, and Bruce Nauman's *Performance Corridor* (1969)—a sculpture Nauman conceived to remove himself from his works' performance, inciting audience participation—are significant: the Whitney's 1969 *Anti-Illusion, Procedures/ Materials* exhibition, where *Performance Corridor* appeared, indirectly ushered Brown's work into the museum. Her April 1970 calendar records contact with the Whitney—the invitation to appear in its *Composer's Showcase* series, a program newly energized by four “extended time pieces” presented by Richard Serra (with Philip Glass), Bruce Nauman, Steve Reich, and Michael Snow and Keith Sonnier, as part of the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition.<sup>53</sup>



Brown. *The Stream*. 1970.  
Courtesy of Trisha Brown.

Brown's path from 80 Wooster Street to the Whitney Museum was anticipated by the logic of *Man Walking*, and the new interest in temporality on the part of museums underpinned her Whitney Museum program, “Another Fearless Dance Concert.”<sup>54</sup> In this context, Brown reconfigured the piece as *Walking on the Wall* (1971). Seven dancers, suspended from the grid of the Whitney's ceiling, walked across two perpendicular gallery walls. Without the determining limit provided by architecture, this activity was not object-like: instead, walking is defamiliarized as a group process enacted across two surfaces of an implied open cube.

*Skymap* (1969), among the works that Brown presented at the Whitney program, pursued to its conclusion the concept of dance in the absence of performance, reflecting a convergence of ideas around the scoring of art, emanating from John

52. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, April 4, 2007.

53. In a memo about these planned “non-events,” Stephen Weil emphasized that performances were not to be publicized as entertainment, and that curator Marcia Tucker had coined the name “extended-time piece” to describe work by Richard Serra with music by Philip Glass, Bruce Nauman, Steve Reich, Michael Snow, and Keith Sonnier. Whitney Museum Archives.

54. The temporal dimension of sculptural acts and sculpture's relationship to the durational and operational logic of “live art” were key to *Anti-Illusion, Procedures/Materials*, as catalogue essays by Marcia Tucker and James Monte record. These concepts also informed the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Spaces* (1970), organized by Jennifer Licht.

Cage.<sup>55</sup> The work looked back to Brown's May 1963 performance at the Yam festival, at Smolin Gallery, during which she presented *2 Improvisations on the Nuclei for Simone by Jackson Mac Low*. In the spring of 1965, Brown wrote "to several people and asked them to give me, send me scores for dances."<sup>56</sup> Of those she received, Brown performed none, considering the proposals themselves to be the dances, visions related to that of Henry Flynt's "Concept Art," "an art of which the material is concepts . . . and a kind of art in which the material is language."<sup>57</sup> Aligning a linguistic proposition with an impossible task—the realization of choreography on a room's ceiling—Brown recorded her verbalization of *Skymap*'s written score, enabling the choreography's performance in the absence of the artist or a performing body.<sup>58</sup>

In *Skymap*, Brown's calm, clinical voice instructed audiences to envision, and mentally enact, words being moved, tossed, and placed on the gallery's sixth wall. Contemporaneous to Richard Serra's 1967–68 list of instructive verbs and Vito Acconci's sound piece *Running Tape* (1969), *Skymap*'s deadpan narrative journey resonates with Robert Smithson's voice-recorded slide tour, *Hotel Pallenque* (1969). However, *Skymap* identifies the audience as its performers—anticipating sculptural works devised to spur interactive engagement between audiences and objects, as in Franz Erhard Walther's *First Work Set* (1970) and Robert Morris's 1971 Tate Gallery exhibition, *Bodyspacemotionthings*. More simply than in *Homemade*, a technology of reproduction—sound recording—enables the endurance of *Skymap* as a work of art, whose re-presentation is not complicated by the problem of gesture's reproduction.<sup>59</sup>

In May 1971, six weeks after the Whitney program, Brown presented an investigation of choreography as defined by relationships between vision, physical memory, and movement's realization. She established dancers as the fixed points to which choreography traveled across nine rooftops, from her residence at 53 Wooster Street to Robert Rauschenberg's 381 Lafayette Street studio.<sup>60</sup> Brown introduced

55. A further inspiration for *Skymap* was the score sent from Geneva by composer Earle Brown: on a postcard he wrote, "This is a dance (if I say it is), Hommage [sic] to Rauschenberg's Portrait of Iris"—a message invoking Rauschenberg's 1961 homage to Marcel Duchamp, shown at Iris Clert gallery, Paris. The work was a telegram stating, "this is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so/Robert Rauschenberg." Trisha Brown Archive.

56. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, May 31, 2009.

57. Henry Flynt, "Essay: Concept Art (Provisional Version)" in *An Anthology*, ed. La Monte Young (New York: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963), n.p. Brown did not appear in *An Anthology*, though she had performed in the program organized by La Monte Young at Yoko Ono's loft. For discussion of the "unperformed score," see Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the Event Score," *October* 95 (Winter 2001), pp. 54–89.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

59. A thirty-four-year gap separates the presentation of *Skymap* at the Walker Art Center in 1974 and its reprisal there in 2008. It was shown more recently at Dia Art Foundation in 2010.

60. Unfolding in the real time and non-illusionistic space of the spectator's partial vision, *Roof Piece* possesses a scale that challenges the rigidly monocular perceptual experience of "seeing dance" on the proscenium stage, an undemocratic setting that organizes viewing positions in relation to a single ideal location. *Roof Piece* responds to Cage's critique of the proscenium stage, which he said, [assumes] "people will see it if they all look in one direction. . . . But our experience nowadays is not so focused at one point. We live in, and are more and more aware of living in, the space around us. Current developments in theater are changing architecture from the Renaissance notion to something else that relates to our lives." See John Cage, Michael Kirby, and Richard Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 51. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty has pointed out, conditions of spatial dispersal were realized by Allan Kaprow's Happenings; see *Being Watched*, p. 34.

simple, “semaphoric” gestures: the dancers were instructed to reproduce the movements they *saw*, relaying each gesture to one another; midway through the performance the last dancer switched places with the first, initiating a new movement phrase and completing the circle of gesture’s travel. Reviewers compared the process to the child’s game “telephone,” aptly describing choreography’s timeworn model of person-to-person transmission.<sup>61</sup>

The choreographic construct for *Roof Piece* is similar to that articulated through the relationship of filmed dance and live performance in *Homemade* and of physical action and linguistic construct in *Man Walking*. But *Roof Piece* transforms the choreographer into an instigator of movements that are broadcast, received, and actualized through idiosyncrasies of each dancer’s vision and body.<sup>62</sup> Each “transmission” of fleeting gestural material reveals the imperfect translation of perception into physical response. Space and vision interfere to alter movement’s neurological, kinesthetic reception, demonstrating the indeterminate relationship governing *Roof Piece*’s choreographic concept and its performance.<sup>63</sup>

Designed to reveal movements as visual, cognitive, and physical facts, *Roof Piece* radically democratizes the artist’s signature choreographic mark, introducing it as always already subject to the failure of intentionality, inherent to choreography’s utterance, which “produce[s] effects beyond [the author’s] presence.”<sup>64</sup> A visually apparent spatial rupture separates the initial choreographic mark from its subsequent iterations.<sup>65</sup> This perceptible gap defines choreography as imperfectly repeated, as a “machine that is in turn productive, and [which the choreographer’s] future disappearance, in principle, will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting.”<sup>66</sup> *Roof Piece* distinguishes the body’s materialization of movement from choreography; abstract and evanescent, gesture erodes in the work’s performance, demonstrating the necessity and priority of *vision* and conscious imitation in choreography’s transmission, and contesting the idea of choreography’s survival as fixed forms that are memorized and repeated. Brown called *Roof Piece*’s gestures “semaphoric”: what she had in mind was the system of visual signals used by on-the-ground air-traffic con-

61. Though Brown first presented *Roof Piece* in 1971, its documentation dates to the 1973 presentation of the work, also in SoHo. Brown wrote about *Roof Piece*’s “semaphore like” gestures in “Three Pieces,” *TDR* 19, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 26.

62. In an unacknowledged appropriation of *Roof Piece*’s concept, Christian Jankowski’s *Rooftop Routine* (2007) substituted a commercial movement (hula hooping) for dance, an example of Trisha Brown’s enduring influence on contemporary art, but also of the precariousness of choreography’s artistic legacies.

63. See Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, p. 78.

64. Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 312.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 316: “This force of rupture is due to the spacing which constitutes the written sign: the spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain (the always open possibility of its extraction and grafting), but also from all the forms of a present referent (past or to come in the modified form of the present past or to come) that is objective or subjective. This spacing is not the simple negativity of a lack, but the emergence of the mark.”

66. *Ibid.*, p. 315.



trollers, a *language* for communicating visual information in alphabet-like code across large distances.

The dancers' gestures were bound by a language of movement, but it was one in which entropy reigned. For in *Roof Piece* choreography is movement's *eliminator*.<sup>67</sup> Demonstrating a basic concern of Judson Dance—the critique of a standard movement—*Roof Piece* defines choreography as a structurally contained empirical investigation, a machine to sculpt movement with the materials of vision, space, and time. Inverting her discipline's principles, in which the body traverses space by performing remembered, fixed movements, Brown has her dancers remain still and choreography travel in *Roof Piece*. Only movement's most visibly discernible qualities survive the choreography's conceptual effect: an incremental, successive subtraction, which, if performed ad infinitum, would bring gesture to the point of almost completely shedding itself, leaving each dancer in a state of near-stillness. *Roof Piece* problematizes this ontological construct in performance theory, which equates performance itself with (intrinsic) "self-annihilation."<sup>68</sup> Her exploration of gesture's annihilation—as a concept—is deployed to serve the concept of choreography's durability and to underscore the inviolable relationship between choreography and sight.

Artistically, *Roof Piece* returned Brown to a ground zero. She has said, "I didn't know what to do after I had cleansed myself of all dynamic artifice with my limbs."<sup>69</sup> At this point she said, "I made the decision to go back to the studio. I needed to know what was an acceptable gesture after Judson."<sup>70</sup> She now faced choreographic problems for which indeterminacy, in seamlessly marrying movement's generation, duration, and execution to choreography's logic, had provided a rationale in the form of visual answers. Movement's arbitrariness

67. In this way it shared with Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* (October 15, 1969) the privileging of an entropic motor. *Asphalt Rundown* was commissioned by L'Attico Gallery, in Rome, where Brown had performed in June 1969 and would perform in the early 1970s.

68. Rebecca Schneider questions "the equation of performance with disappearance as reiterating performance as self-annihilating" in "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 2, no. 6 (2001), p. 101. *Roof Piece* demonstrates self-erasure and disappearance as choreographic concepts, introducing the varied, deliberate ways in which a performance's disappearance is consciously intended, rather than being an intrinsic property of a live performed artwork or of the "medium" itself, as Peggy Phelan first argued in "The Ontology of Performance." Phelan identifies disappearance as an *essential* condition of performance art (as opposed to theater), and equates this disappearance with political resistance to the commodity, the gaze, and power. See "Choreography as Apparatus of Capture," *TDR* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 120–23; and "Inscribing Dance," in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. André Lepecki (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), pp. 124–39. Lepecki identifies movement with dissolution and imperceptibility, and choreography as its textual enfolding. Brown's work challenges these rigid categories: in *Roof Piece*, improvised movement and choreographic structure are perceptibly distinct; their differential relation to one another is defined by (and defines) the choreographic as an absence made visible through representation-as-reproduction.

69. Trisha Brown, interview with Klaus Kertess, *Artpix Notebooks: Trisha Brown: Early Works, 1966–1979* (2004), DVD.

70. Ann Murphy, "Trisha Brown in Conversation with Joan Acocella, Wheeler Auditorium, University of California, Berkeley, February 24, 2004," *Dance View Times* 3, no. 10 (March 7, 2005); [danceviewtimes.com/2005/Winter/10/brownlec.htm](http://danceviewtimes.com/2005/Winter/10/brownlec.htm) (accessed August, 1, 2010).

dogged her: until *Roof Piece* Brown had insisted that gesture's motivation be perceptible, with its intentionality presented as the inevitable result of choreographic structure—neither self-originated nor self-chosen. Reflecting on this dilemma in 1973, she explained, “You know there are a thousand choices—I mean why is this better than that? . . . I'd like to make as few arbitrary decisions as possible.”<sup>71</sup> The following year, she clarified, “To make a movement, to make a dance, to choose a gesture . . . I have to have a reason to do it. It's just as simple as that. . . . I can't do something that has no logic to it. That's who I am.”<sup>72</sup>

Plagued by the body's “inefficiency as an object for making art,”<sup>73</sup> Brown identified her search for an “acceptable gesture” with the search for “pure movement.” From this concept—and hours of trials in the studio—she arrived at an abstract, nonreferential, physical sign-system that was grounded in the body's kinesthetic logic. This system was realized according to three elemental, natural pathways of the joint's motion: “bend,” “stretch,” and “rotate.” No longer concerned with revealing the body's “core” possibilities, Brown's movements instead demonstrate gesture as a language, a structured system of differences, each manifested as a self-contained, unique sign purified only of reference and convention.<sup>74</sup>

Brown's solo *Accumulation* (1971) delineates physical gesture through a logical, reductive analysis of the body's anatomical functioning and an additive organization. Movements originate and then gradually extend throughout the body, incrementally animating individual joints: thumb and wrist, wrist and elbow, elbow and shoulder, etc. Gestures materialize in an accumulating mathematical sequence (1, 1+2, 1+2+3 . . .), with each iteration contributing to the effect of choreography as visibly constructed, gesture by gesture, before the audience's eyes, and repetition making gesture available to vision as well as memory. Previously reliant on external, actual structures as movement's generator, Brown now *internalized* structure as a mathematical system, a method similar to the non-relational conditions of Donald Judd's specific objects and Sol Lewitt's seriality. Implicit in *Accumulation's* movements is gesture's articulation according to a geometrical relationship between the body and the cubic, spatial construct of its studio surround, a context that these works' presentation history confirms. Between 1973 and 1976, *Accumulation* (1971) and two other accumulating choreographies “behaved” like portable art objects, being exhibited internationally in visual-art settings. Dan Graham's comment on the context generated and occupied by Minimal art applies to Brown's *Accumulation*: “both the architectural container and the work contained within it were meant to be seen as non-illusionist, neutral and objectively factual—that is, as simply material.”<sup>75</sup>

71. Effie Stephano, “Moving Structures: Effie Stephano Interviews Trisha Brown, Carol Goodden, Carmen Beuchat, and Sylvia Whitman,” *Art and Artists* 8, no. 1 (1974), p. 17.

72. Allen Robertson, “Trisha Brown,” *Minnesota Daily*, November 15, 1974, p. 27.

73. Trisha Brown, unpublished journal entry, 1971, p. 90. Trisha Brown Archive.

74. Rosalind Krauss addressed the relevance of indexicality for a consideration of dance-as-representation and sign in discussing Deborah Hay's work in “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2,” *October* 3 (Fall 1977), pp. 58–59.

75. Dan Graham, “My Works for Magazine Pages: ‘A History of Conceptual Art,’” (1965–1969), in *Dan Graham*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Antoni Tàpies Foundation, 1998), pp. 61–62.

After presenting a fifty-five-minute-long, extended-duration performance of *Accumulation* at L'Attico Gallery in Rome in June 1972, Brown explicitly identified *Accumulation* with visual art models, writing in *Avalanche*, "The construction of the piece tends to make it object-like."<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the duration of *Accumulation* was set by its soundtrack, The Grateful Dead's "Uncle John's Band." When Brown ends the work, bringing her right index finger, extended, to the center of the left palm, (a move reminiscent of American Sign Language's indication for "stop"), her gesture suggests the circuit of movement's travel from its origination by the artist through the body and back to itself.

Making repeatability and repetition artistic issues in dance, *Accumulation* announces choreographic originality as modernist repetition, representing choreographic intentionality in each of its gesture's iterations. Brown's ambition to define the originality of a gesture through abstraction, and to put in place a structure for repeated originality, positions her, as a choreographic artist, in relation to visual art's standards, standards of modernism and its critique.<sup>77</sup>

With *Primary Accumulation* (1972) and *Group Primary Accumulation* (1973), Brown extended her movement vocabulary to include everyday, "natural" behaviors made slightly abstract, revealing pedestrian movements—such as brushing the hair behind the ear with one's fingers—as conventionalized, already choreographed. She said, "Since I use natural movement the audience doesn't know if I have stopped dancing or if I am just pushing my hair back."<sup>78</sup> These *Accumulation* pieces, two solos and one quartet, traveled to the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (December 1972) and to Sonnabend Gallery, New York (March 1973). Despite saying that "I'm not interested in taking a work which was made in a studio and performed in an interior space and placing it outside,"<sup>79</sup> Brown, given the opportunity to present work outdoors in New York's Spring Dance Concert in May 1973 remade the *Primary Accumulation* (1972) solo as *Group Primary Accumulation* (1973) to accentuate what she called the works' "object-like" character: she introduced two male performers, who were assigned the job of lifting and repositioning the dancers as their gestures continued unarrested.

In September 1973, Sonnabend presented Brown's work in the exhibition *L'Art Actuel* at the Musée Galliera in Paris,<sup>80</sup> followed by performances in Milan (1973) and Rome (1974). The Walker Art Center presented the most extensive museum exhibition of Brown's works to that point: in November, 1974, her work was presented in

76. Trisha Brown, in *Avalanche* 5 (Summer 1972), p. 3.

77. Much as Barnett Newman's *Onement* paintings announce the intentionality of his original signature gesture and its ongoing repetition, *Accumulation* marks Brown's representation of intentionality in physical gesture and through repetition. See Ann Temkin, "Barnett Newman on Exhibition," *Barnett Newman*, ed. Ann Temkin (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002).

78. Susan Richardson, "Brown Creates Dance Forms," *Spartan Daily: San Jose State University*, October 24, 1975, p. 7.

79. Stephano, "Moving Structures," p. 20.

80. This exhibition included work by Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Mel Bochner, Christian Boltanski, Jim Dine, Simone Forti, Gilbert and George, Joan Jonas, Alain Kirili, Janis Kounellis, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Charlemagne Palestine, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Richard Serra, William Wegman, and Robert Whitman.

the museum's galleries, its theater, and outdoors, where *Group Primary Accumulation (Raft Version)* was performed on floating rafts in Loring Park lagoon, its unison timing and the spatial relationships among the dancers subject to erosion by environmental conditions of wind, rain, and the water's currents. Questions about the commodity status of dematerialized art circulated widely in the media but never mentioned dance, even though works by Brown and others were presented in the same galleries that were then featuring Conceptual art and live performance.<sup>81</sup>

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With *Untitled (Locus)* (1975), associations between Brown's choreography and conceptualism in visual art reached a crescendo. Based on a visual and verbal score that Brown discussed with critics, *Locus's* choreography maps an imaginary three-dimensional cube with twenty-six numbers, each corresponding to a place held by a letter of the alphabet (with a neutral, twenty-seventh point at the center). Brown drew, numbered, and lettered the cube; then she wrote a simple biographical statement, matching each letter to its corresponding numerical digit. The choreography performs this autobiographical phrase, with each movement touching an alpha-numeric point in space. Contrasting with Merce Cunningham's vision of choreographic space as without fixed points, *Locus* travels to fixed points according to an impersonal, structural procedure. It is more complexly three-dimensional than *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*.<sup>82</sup> *Locus* spatializes and makes repeatable a sequential narrative of origination, rewriting biography as a structural system of graphic/textual scoring and non-subjective iterations.<sup>83</sup>

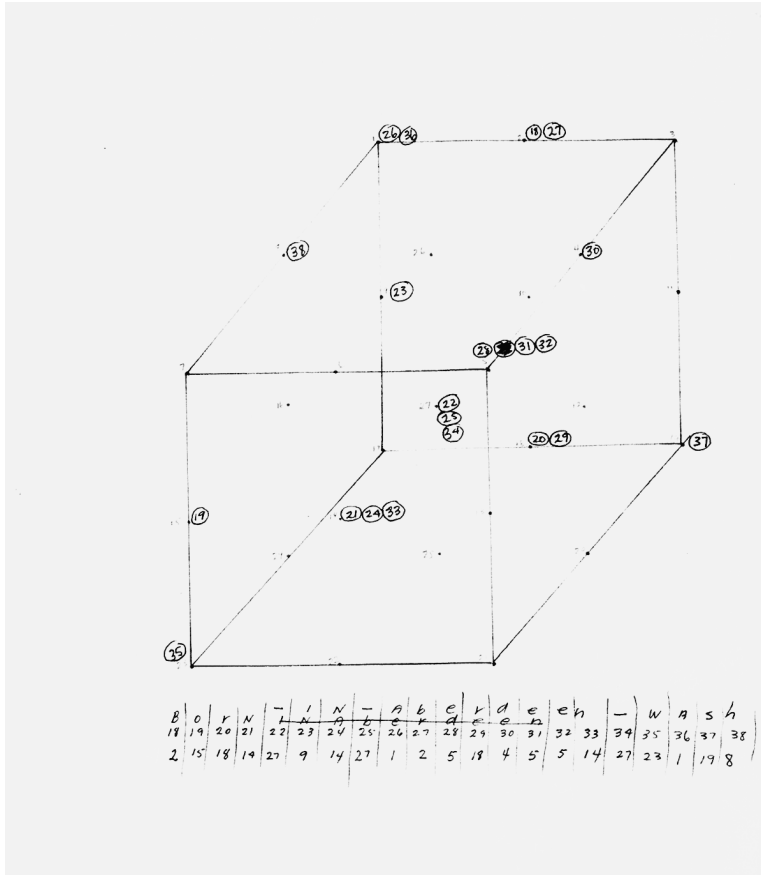
*Locus's* tasks, moves made to touch points on the cube from 'T' to 'R' to 'I', etc., are a machine for moving through space and generating a vocabulary of gesture whose logic is grounded in that of *Accumulation*. The work's geometrical construct was technically difficult and required trained dancers to perform it. As Brown explained to her audiences, the Gestalt of the cube, its words and sentences and drawn score, elevated the significance of its geometric structure and systematic task instructions over its language of movement. Although *Locus's* drawn/written scores specify, in written descriptions, the individual movements for touching each point in space, Brown never discussed these instructions or *Locus's* vocabulary: she emphasized *Locus* as a visual construction. Consistent with her previous methods, she provided no rules for transitions between movements in performance, introducing indeterminacy into the *Locus* score and also producing unforeseen movement that Brown recognized and called *dancing*.

Part fabrication model, part document, and part independent artwork, the

81. See, for example, Roy Bongartz, "Question: How Do You Buy a Work of Art Like This?," *New York Times*, August 11, 1974.

82. *Locus* transforms Rudolf Laban's notational mapping of the body's harmonious movement through space—his concept of the "kinesphere"—into an indeterminate choreographic format and form.

83. See Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979), pp. 50–64; and Eve Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (March 2006), pp. 115–35.



Brown. Untitled (Locus). 1975.  
 Courtesy of Trisha Brown.

*Locus* scores visualize choreography as architectural construction, related in function and appearance to sculptors' drawings, at once logical and rational and yet impenetrably personal, obsessive and mysterious, qualities that Sol Lewitt named as defining features of Conceptual art.<sup>84</sup> If the *Locus* drawings confirm the importance of the *visual* in Brown's choreographic art, they also raise questions about the primacy of the visual over the physical and choreographic, for the drawings provide an enigmatic record of Brown's choreographic ideas. As *Locus* aged, the cognitive challenge of iterating its score merged with the conventional dance practices of physical memory and movement's memorization. Brown came to see *Locus*'s kinesthetic and

84. On Brown's graphic work, see Susan Rosenberg, "Trisha Brown: The Signs of Gesture," *Trisha Brown: Drawing on Land and Air*, exhibition brochure (Tampa: Contemporary Art Museum, University of South Florida, 2007); and Philip Blither and Peter Eleey, *So the Audience Doesn't Know If I've Stopped Dancing* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008).



rhythmic execution as a dance on its own terms: “Of course I don’t think you can say, ‘Oh I get it, there’s a cube, 27 points,’ but the planes, the corners, the angles of the dance are much more visible. I think of it as a song.”<sup>85</sup> Because of “the neutrality of it,” “No bells and whistles, just ongoing,” she described *Locus* as the closest approximate to her “barre”—an exercise for warming up the mind and the body.<sup>86</sup> The last of her entirely studio-determined choreography, *Locus*’s system and vocabulary have remained the “DNA” for many of Brown’s later works.

In the unpredictable *dancing* that emerged at the interstices of *Locus*’s score, in the transitions between its verbal and visual systems of movement, Brown discovered her subsequent direction. In 1978, she conceived *Water Motor* without reference to the white cube’s logic and without the desire to make its choreography perceptible to vision; instead she explored “the intelligence of the unknown, of the body moving in an unknown place.”<sup>87</sup> *Water Motor* blurs distinctions between movement and choreography, announcing the erasure of choreographic structure, which is submerged and overwritten by dancing. With this shift in priorities from the visually choreographic to the danced, Brown reserved her ideas and structures as problems for critics and audiences to discern, even going so far as to say that her wish to provide language to explain her work had been a *reason* for making structured dances all along: that a dance was merely the means to generate a concept that could be explained in words: “It’s one reason I made dances that had systems,” she said, “because the conversation ends when you have nothing.”<sup>88</sup> She remained silent about the complex procedures used to make *Water Motor*, a layered amalgam of text, task instructions, and an expanding physical vocabulary—including her use of movement to generate movement. *Water Motor*’s choreography now exceeded Brown’s desire to describe or fix it in a verbal or visual score, just as her dancing of *Water Motor*’s choreography eludes vision’s capture.<sup>89</sup>

In *Water Motor*, Brown initiates movement impulses internally and in different body parts, sending the body, its momentum, in contradictory directions. The opening movement—with three limbs raised off the floor and one down—is a consistent motif, as is the maintenance of continuous, rapid motion through the body’s consistent overreaching of its pivot points, which otherwise secure equilibrium and balance. In what Brown called the “cut back,” the body interferes with the natural logic of its own momentum. The term also referenced the historical context of Ronald Reagan’s economic policies and their impact on the arts, what she later described as “the difficulty of life as a dancer, its precariousness and the threat of funding constantly being cut out from under you,” conditions influencing her decision to abandon visual-art contexts in favor of the proscenium stage in 1979.<sup>90</sup>

85. Jean Nuchtern, “Accumulating Trisha Brown,” *The SoHo Weekly News* (January 8, 1976), p. 24. Trisha Brown Dance Company Archive.

86. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, April 17, 2007.

87. Brown and Rainer, “A Conversation About ‘Glacial Decoy,’” p. 30.

88. Trisha Brown, Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, October 1978. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives.

89. For a more extensive treatment of *Water Motor*, see Susan Rosenberg, “Trisha Brown’s *Water Motor*: Forever, Now, and Again,” *TDR* 56 (Spring 2012), pp. 150–57.

90. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, February 24, 2008.

In Brown's performance of *Water Motor*, dancing registers in vision's foreground. Indeed, Babette Mangolte subtitled her film *Water Motor* as "Performed and Choreographed by Trisha Brown," calling attention to Brown's newly reversed priorities: the film colludes with Brown's idea of *Water Motor* as a choreography devised to represent the idea of improvisation by privileging the live performance of dancing (over choreography) to show the originality of Brown's movement as organized in a permanent repeatable form. Mangolte's film, which includes two different "takes" of Brown's performance of *Water Motor*—one in real time and one in slow motion—indeed shows it to be a precisely structured choreographic work.

As representation of dancing, *Water Motor* anticipates Brown's embrace of the proscenium stage with *Glacial Decoy's* 1979 premiere. This significant moment in Brown's career, the shift of her institutional affiliation from visual art to the theater—the institutional frame identified with and defining dance, and where she has continued to present her choreographies for more than thirty years—is recorded in the pages of *October*. In 1979, the fall issue featured a portfolio of twenty-three photographs of Brown's work by Mangolte, a retrospective of Brown's most significant choreographies to date, and seven new photographs of *Glacial Decoy*, the last of them printed on the magazine's left page, adjacent to Daniel Buren's essay "The Function of the Studio."<sup>91</sup>

In the relationship of one photograph to another, and in the discursive space between Mangolte's images and Buren's text, it is possible to see, convulsed as an absence, the "crack" between choreography and visual art that Brown's work inhabited in the 1970s, and to which her work of the 1970s is being returned today. A carefully sequenced visual essay, Mangolte's portfolio implicitly aligns Brown's work and artistic development with Buren's ideas, locating Brown's sustained investigation of choreography's contexts in terms of visual art's pressing concerns. Buren analyzes the dynamic between the studio, where art originates, and the museum, its destined site of presentation. Mangolte's photographs feature Brown's work against alternately white and black backgrounds. Every page spread or page includes a shot of each choreography as performed in, determined by, and identified with the white-walled context of the studio (fulfilling Buren's idea that a work's conceptualization in the studio must take into account the site of its institutional presentation) *and* as performed against the black grounds of theatrical settings (the context Brown had only recently adopted for her works' presentation).

Read against Buren's text, Mangolte's portfolio visualizes the gap Buren delineates, between the space of an artwork's origination in the studio and its distance from that setting through its appearance in the theater, a context that fundamentally alters it.<sup>92</sup> Mangolte marks *Water Motor* as the turning point in Brown's trajectory

91. Babette Mangolte, "A Portfolio of Photographs of Trisha Brown's Work," *October* 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 38–50. Mangolte's portfolio begins with *Accumulation* (1971), Brown's first studio-determined choreography, which premiered the same year Buren wrote "The Function of the Studio."

92. When Brown made the proscenium stage her works' "home," she presented choreographies conceived for the "white box" in theaters, typically as the first act on programs featuring new repertory produced for the proscenium; this format continued through the early 1990s, though she had performed works from the 1970s in European theaters before 1979. Since 2002, Brown's "Early Works" have increasingly been presented in museum settings.

from studio to stage: only this work is represented in photographs capturing the exact same movement as performed in the studio (white) and the theater (black): images of *Water Motor* performed onstage also face the first *Glacial Decoy* image.

In “The Function of the Studio,” Buren argues that “when the work is in place, it does not take place (for the public), while it takes place (for the public) only when not in place, that is, in the museum.”<sup>93</sup> Mangolte’s images show how in Brown’s case, the word “theater” should be substituted for “museum”: by exiting visual art to adopt the proscenium as the site of her works’ presentation, Brown escaped the “crack” of invisibility, the unmarked space between dance and art where, because her choreography eluded the art market, she was alerted to its imperiled relationship to its audience.<sup>94</sup> If “The Function of the Studio,” then, seems to perform a requiem for Brown’s choreography as visual-art made for visual art settings, Buren’s text is also a lens through which to see Brown’s approach to the proscenium stage in terms of her critique of its conventions, as continuous with her engagement with visual art’s contexts and ideas and as a rupture with, not capitulation to, the stage.<sup>95</sup>

Over the last decade, international museums have returned to this historical moment, re-presenting Trisha Brown’s early works of the 1970s in the institutional context for which they were originally conceived. Paradoxically, as Brown’s work returns to the crack between choreography and visual art and recovers visibility in visual-art contexts, the specter of the commodity haunts museums’ project to present and collect live art, for questions of choreographic remains, performance remains, dance remains—of executed intentionality and its preservation—haunt Brown’s work amidst the vitality of its current resurgence. Brown’s choreography of the 1970s mapped the institutional space of the museum abstractly with the body, to structure and to visualize its field as a discursive space available to live art. Today the return of her work to museums brings with it the challenge of choreography’s enduring artistic significance—and the possibility for its permanence, a concept her work set in motion in precisely articulated increments, moment to moment.

93. Daniel Buren, “The Function of the Studio,” *October* 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 53–54.

94. Brown’s explanation of her conundrum occurred on many occasions after 1972. In Marianne Goldberg, “All the Person’s Person Arriving,” *TDR* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 169–70, Brown was quoted as saying, “Dance depends on an audience. . . . There is a system, a network, a language for the touring and support of dance in the world. This network operates on the proscenium stage. If you choose to work outside of that you have built into it a problem of communication with the sponsor and with the uninitiated audience. In Judson days there was no NEA or corporate support. I stopped walking on walls and doing those site-specific pieces that involved equipment because there was no support for it, and I couldn’t afford it. For economic reasons I redirected the thrust of my career. Someone has to change, either the system or the artist. Eating and resting are accepted modes of behavior—one can’t change that. If one goes to the proscenium stage, is that by nature selling out? I changed medium. I didn’t change integrity.”

95. Though this subject cannot be addressed here, Brown’s treatment of the proscenium remained founded in an acknowledgement of its particular material and institutional conventions, and thus extended from her investigations of the visual, material, architectural, and institutional logic of the white box. Craig Owens presented this argument in “The Pro-Scenic Event,” *Art in America* (December 1981), pp. 128–33.