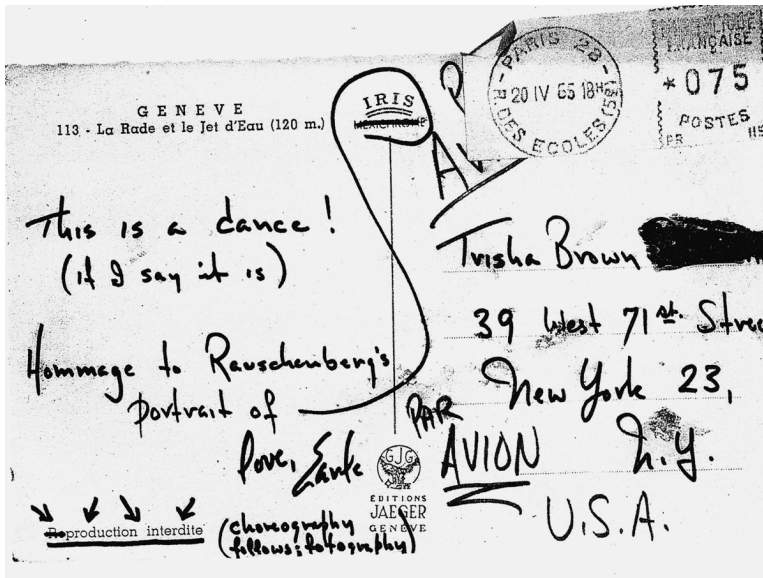
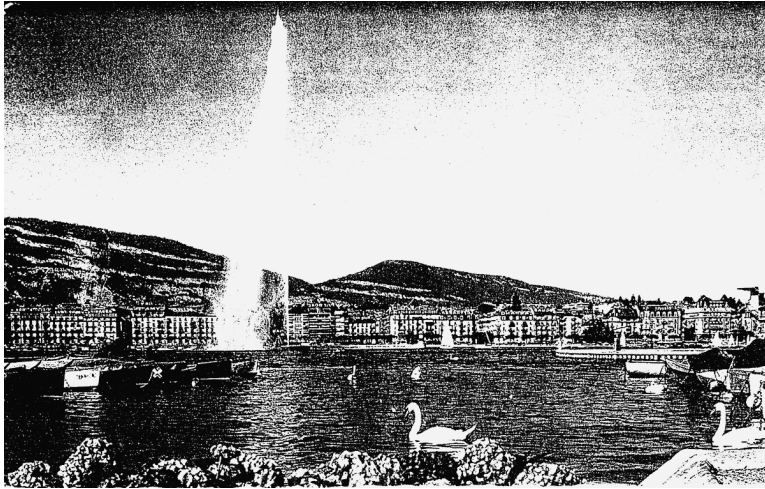


Trisha Brown's Notebooks

SUSAN ROSENBERG

In the years 1965 to 1976, Trisha Brown found herself investigating various ways in which the body could be said to *think*. This selection of documents from her private archives shows Brown doing so, working through strategies of accumulation and de-accumulation, seriality, language, and numbers in dialogue with her contemporaries in visual art.



Earle Brown. Dance Score for Trisha Brown. 1965.
All images courtesy of the Trisha Brown Archive.

"NON" a Dance/Vision for Trish and Tulip

Walter De Maria
May 1965

Walter De Maria. Dance Score for Trisha Brown:
"Non": A Dance Vision for Trisha and Tulip. 1965.

In 1965, shortly after the birth of her son, Brown, unable to dance, solicited scores from her friends. Among the responses were a postcard from Earle Brown and a typed text from Walter De Maria. Brown was delighted, declaring both card and text to be self-sufficient dances. In the days and years that followed, she came to regard these unperformed scores as an inspiration for her use of texts to generate choreographic ideas, particularly for her important choreography-as-recorded and -spoken-word score Skymap (1969). Another echo of one of the works can be found in her choice of the deliberately mysterious title Son of Gone Fishin' (1980), for which she consciously drew upon the proclaimed "purpose" of De Maria's score—"the spreading of the vision through the story telling of the people who saw it." In the case of her work, Brown explained to journalists, the title was designed to make an impression on audiences that would encounter it in reviews without seeing its performance.

The Audience: The people on the streets who happen to see you.
The piece is to take place completely unannounced and unadvertised. No friends nearby in any way. No persons shall film the dance.

Time Span: One half hour to one hour.

The ACTION: The action.

Trish happily, quietly smiling, gay, proudly, briskly, grandly, naturally, walks Tulip the Afgan through the town.

Through many streets without repeating her path.

- - - - -
Purpose: To bring a fantastic vision into the lives of people who are going about their business.

To create a situation which will draw forth the occasion of the spreading of the vision through the story telling of the people who saw it.

If 100 persons see the dance, each may tell 10 others; hence 1,000 may share the image.
Dinner tables.

The floating, flowered, lady, hat, dog.

PLACE: Near the center of any small town or small city, excluding university or resort communities, where it shall never happen.
In large cities, the piece may be performed in areas away from the center.

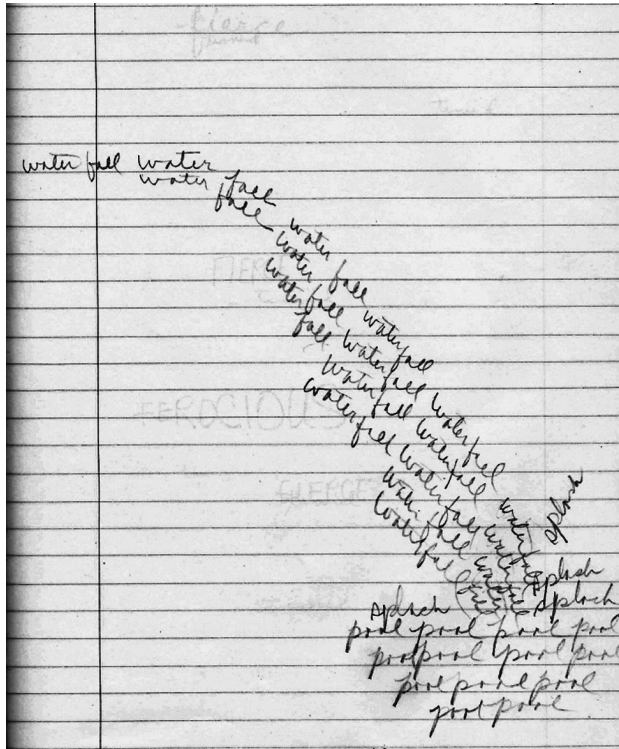
TIME: Any weekday during daylight in comfortable weather...Spring or Fall.

COSTUME: The dress and the hat.

The Hat: Trish shall wear a large "Victorian" hat. A hat with such material, lace, net, feathers or ribbons. So large as to make a parasol unnecessary.

The Dress: Should be florid, elaborate and expensive. It need not be a "costume". A calico dress would do, though it could be more elaborate. However, the dress should not outshine the hat.

The total costume should not appear theatrical, just naturally grand.



Trisha Brown. Notebook Page. 1972.

Visually, Brown's drawings of the early 1970s resonate with the work of contemporaries outside of dance, in part because she was constantly turning texts into images. This notebook page from 1972, for example, seems to be in dialogue with Robert Smithson's *A Heap of Language* (1966). In Brown's drawing, however, the page is treated as an analog for the body's ability to think in language as a way of moving in space. Her visualization of motion records her consistent fascination with gravity (the increments of "falling"), and registers nature's motions, which she likewise explored in her body itself through dramatic incidents ("splashing") or subtle humming below the surface ("pooling"). Puns and wordplay pervade Brown's notebooks of the period, appearing on many hand-drawn and written representations devised to advertise her programs.

Trisha . . . really I find myself thinking so much about your dance . . . As an approach to Time and to accumulation and to return which I find liberating and guiding . . . My visual memory of it is something that I have , and is something that I keep close to something else that I have . . . a shell my friend gave me on my birthday saying that one day I should remember its origins . IT's very old . . . maybe hundreds of years . . . almost fossil-like . I'll draw for you it's two sides .

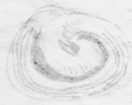
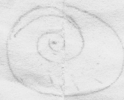


It's quite flat . . . like a meditation .
I used to stretch both hands to the future .
Now I've been stretching one hand to the future and one to the past , and my house seems to be building up a lot stronger .
I think of you , friend . Simone

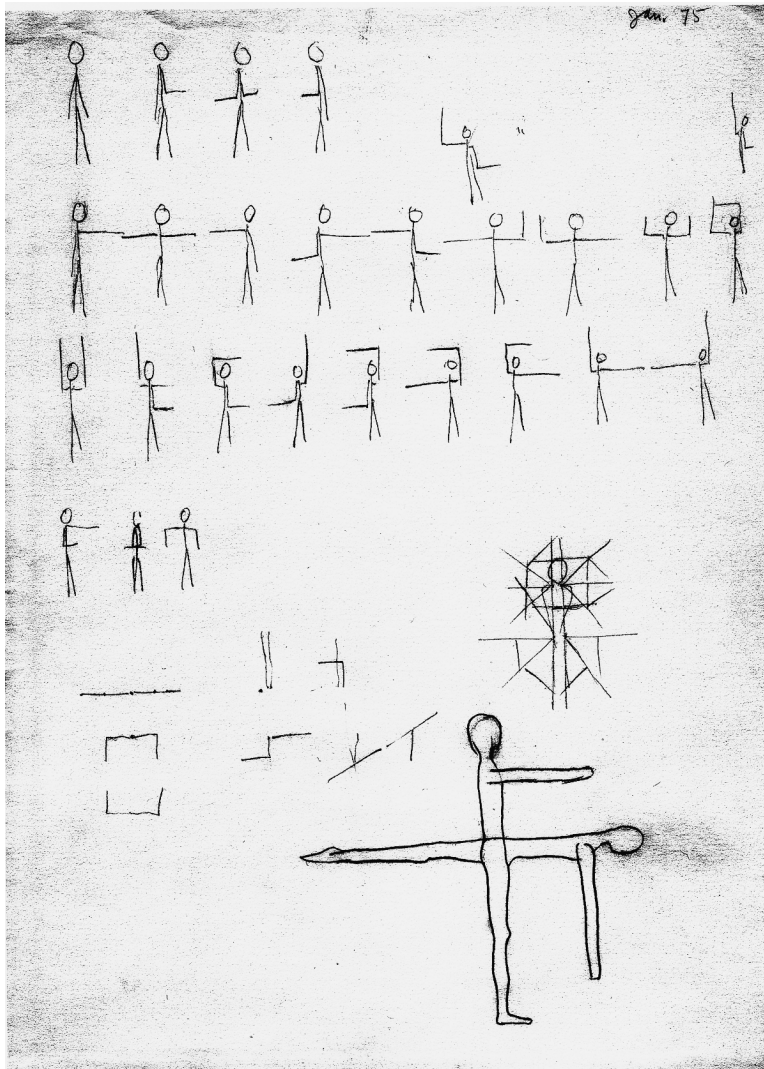
Simone Forti. Letter to Trisha Brown. 1972.

Many of the artifacts in the Brown archive relate to Brown's signature work *Accumulation* (1971), an important milestone on the way to some of her best-known later choreographies. In 1972, choreographer-dancer Simone Forti sent a letter to Trisha Brown after witnessing Brown's performance of a version of the piece at Fabio Sargentini's *Galerie L'Attico* in Rome. In the letter, Forti remarks on a practice that at the time was growing in importance in Brown's work, the cultivation of "origins." In *Accumulation*, this takes the form of the cyclical, repetitive re-origination of gesture in an additive sequence of 1, 1-2, 1-2-3. Brown's performance at *L'Attico* was longer than usual, a fact that appears to have heightened Forti's awareness of *Accumulation*'s "cycles returning and returning enforcing the existing channels," that is to say, of the depth of Brown's writing or rewriting of the body's natural pathways. "Bend," "stretch," "rotate"—this is *Accumulation*'s vocabulary.

I should tell you more about my image of your dance. I see it very much as a forming crystal. The cycles returning and returning, enforcing the existing channels, and adding at any spot in the cycle. It strikes me as a co-ordination of yin force and yang force which is very new to me and which seems like a very good way to build.

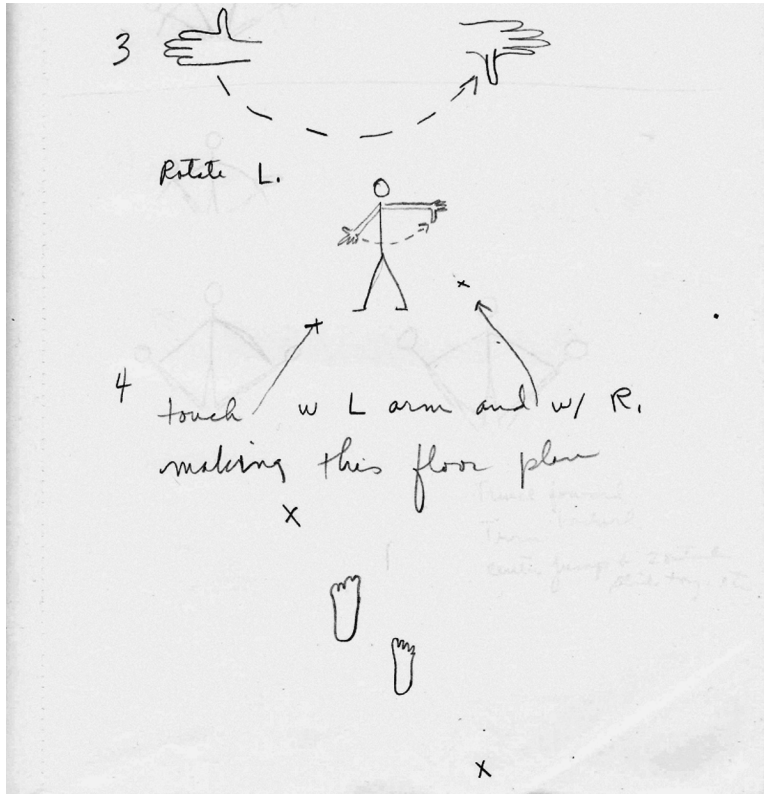


Oops! I don't have your address! Well, write to me.



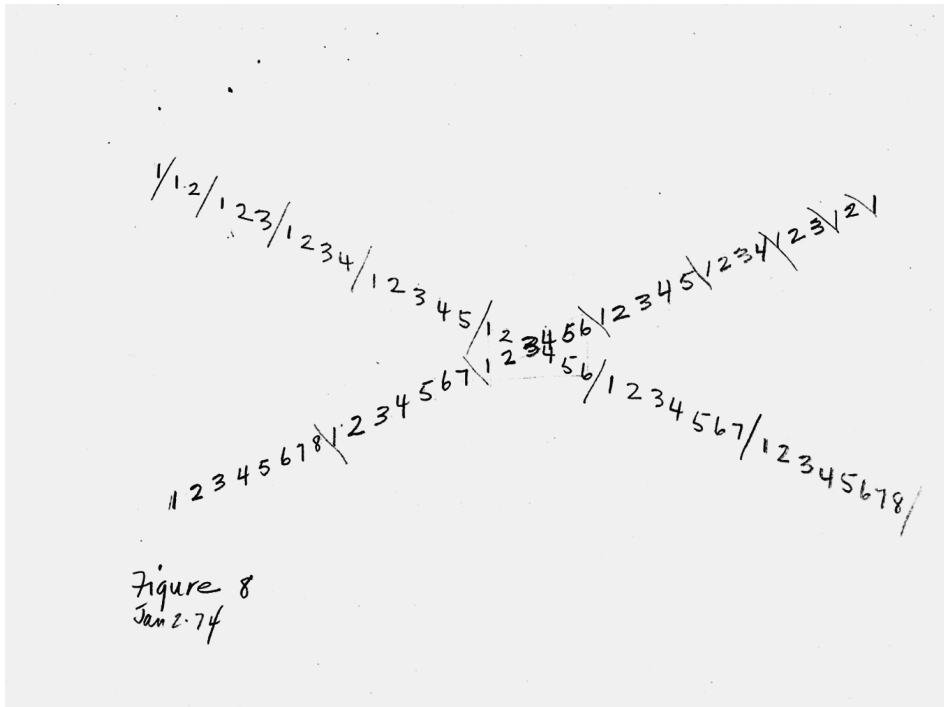
Brown. Untitled. 1975.

In this drawing, Brown traces out some of Accumulation's conceptual and physical conclusions, mapping possibilities for the body's geometric relationship to an implied cube's angles. This conceit led to Locus (1975). Here, the two large overlapping figures (one standing vertical, the other bent at the waist, parallel to the ground) are rendered with Rudolf Laban's round "kinesphere"—the body's immediate spatial surround or reach—in mind. The diagram of vortices extending from the body's angles into space represents Brown's adaptation of Oskar Schlemmer's format for visualizing this relationship. That Locus is informed by Brown's interest in proportion is confirmed by inscriptions on the original sketchbook cover for its finished large-scale independent scores, her best-known and most-exhibited drawings. On it she wrote the authors' names and the title of the first book to accurately survey—and measure—ancient Greek architecture, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's Antiquities of Athens (1762–1816).



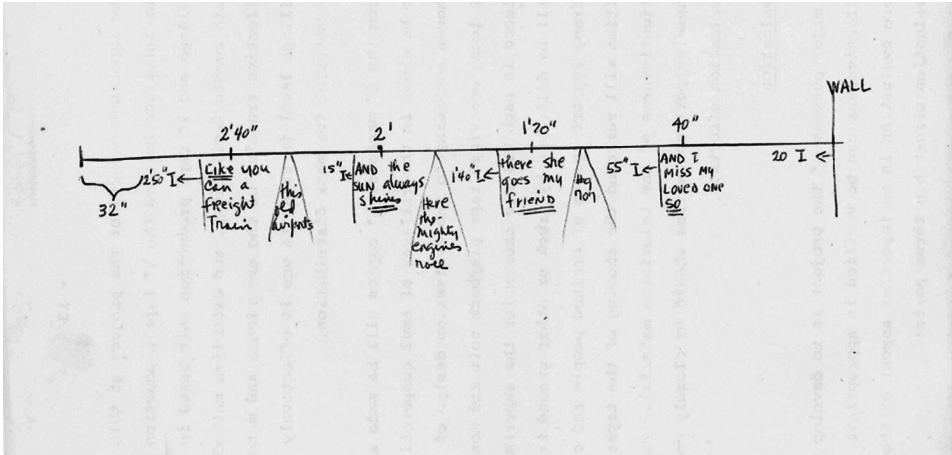
Brown. Notebook page. 1973.

This particularly enigmatic drawing, belonging to the Accumulation series, is singular in notating several gestural components of that piece's choreography, recording its first and last hand movements: the wrist's primary rotations in space (Accumulation's originating move), as well as the final, sign-like physical indication for the performers to stop. The schematic floor plan indicates this work's minimal movement through space: the choreography instead makes its circuit through the body as it signs instructions back to itself. Though Brown never made a complete score showing the relationship of Accumulation's gestures to its choreography, she made the hand and wrist movements from the piece a motif much later, in finished drawings from the 1980s and '90s rendered in a sensitive linear style quite different from this cartoony illustration.



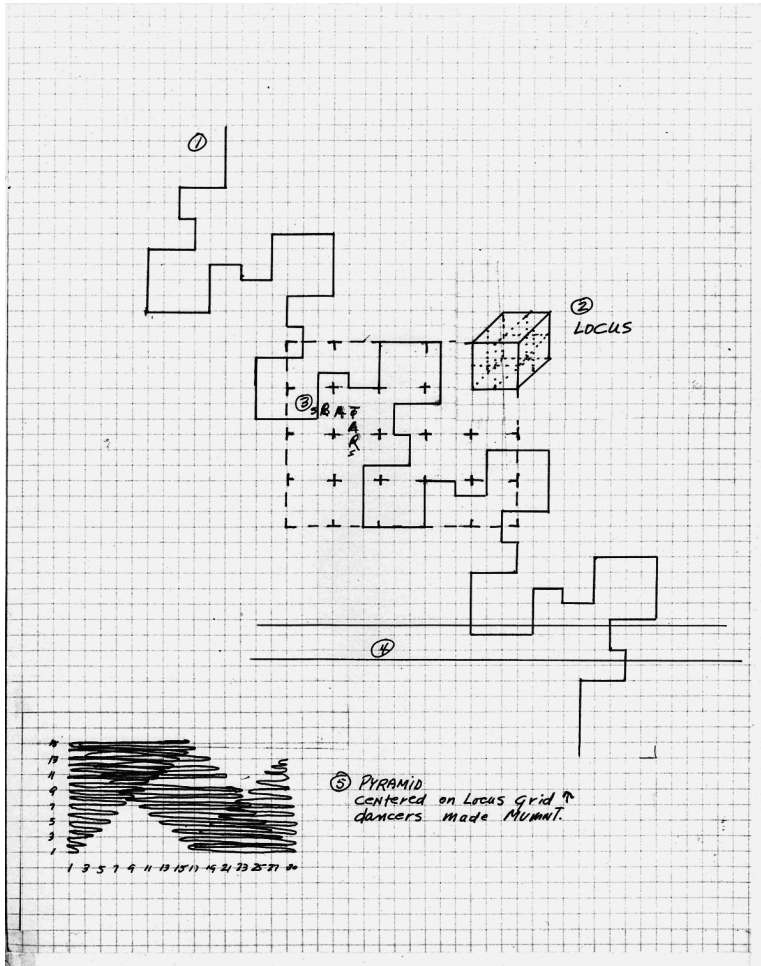
Brown. Notebook page. 1974.

In some sketches, the diabolical complexity of Brown's work—and her ongoing application of Cagean time structures to generate choreography and drawing—can be seen with particular vividness. For example, her musico-choreographic score for Figure 8 (1974), which Brown envisioned as a “time crossing.” Rendered in the period's visual lingua franca, the drawing records the counts (one accumulating and ascending, the other diminishing and descending) that Brown devised for dancers to perform on two sides of the body. The “crossing,” pictured in the diagram as a diagonal, occurs in performance in the form of the center-crossing of each dancer's body. The movements, pictured in the document as numbered counts, are accumulated with the right arm, and deaccumulated with the left in simple gestures: rounded arms extend to the sides of the body and rise, arcing towards the center of the head, touched by the fingers. It is from here that, as in *Accumulation*, gesture originates. The elegance of this visual representation, and of the performance, is in contrast to the choreography's severe kinesthetic and cognitive challenges.



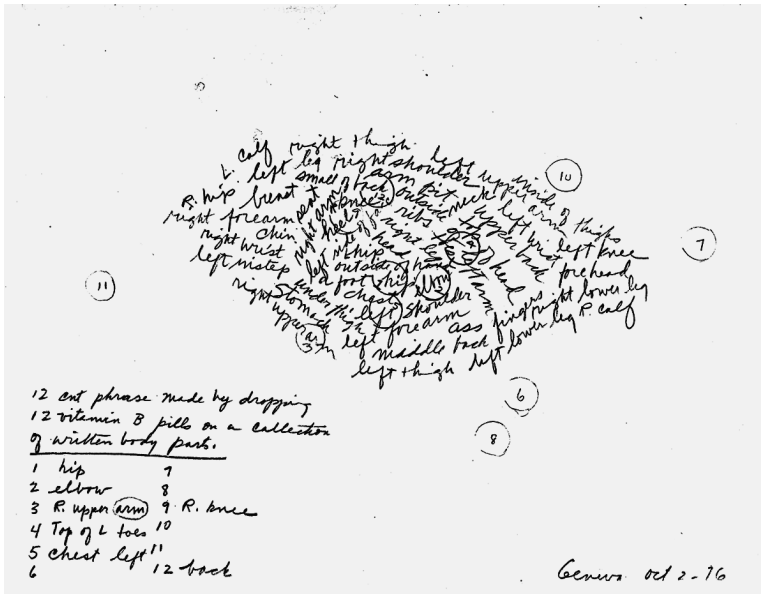
Brown. Notebook page. 1976.

The musical-architectural device that underlies much of Brown's choreography can be seen in this drawing for *Spanish Dance* (1973) made in 1976. In it she visualizes the inner workings of one of her best-known and most frequently performed works. Contrasting with an earlier stick-figure drawing of the score, this document shows the dancers' initial, fixed positions in space, correlated with the time codes for its musical accompaniment (above) and the lyrics—Bob Dylan's 1970 recording of Gordon Lightfoot's "Early Morning Rain" (1966)—below. An arrow at the right wall indicates the choreography's travel in space as the first dancer (40"), hips swaying and arms slowly rising in front of the face, flamenco-style, bumps into—and picks up—the next still dancer ("there she goes my friend"). The reverberating motions of each body eventually carry the entire mobile cluster to the left wall of the proscenium arch (or gallery), so that the dancers pile up on one another and the work stops. The mapping of duration in relation to architecture—originating in *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970)—assumes enhanced complexity since movement and space must be correlated with a second determining time structure: recorded music.



Brown. Untitled (Pyramid
Centered on Locus Grid). 1975.

Brown's final accumulating-deaccumulating choreography is represented among the documents in a sketch for Pyramid (1975). An accumulation of "thirty dance actions," its successive repetitions erase the choreography: as performers reach the middle point, they return to drop the first gesture, rewind and dance up to move sixteen, dropping the second gesture, continuing until nothing remains. The document represents Pyramid as being centered on "the Locus grid," which may reflect an unrealized idea on Brown's part to insert one dance into another, as she did with her subsequent Line Up (1976), the components of which are additively complicated. The drawing's multiple cubes represent the four-part variations on the original Locus score: in the last indeterminate section, the four dancers each choose the floor plan, facings, and sequence.



Brown. Notebook page. 1976.

A tribute to the persistent influence of Robert Dunn's teaching and John Cage's ideas on Brown's choreography, *Untitled (Bodyparts)* (1975) visualizes indeterminacy and chance. The drawing contains instructions for scoring a dance—"a 12-count phrase made by dropping 12 Vitamin B pills on a collection of written body parts"—and thus only documents the first step towards generating a choreography which she never made. The strange overlaps, where letters and numbers meet in the circles to obliterate one another, visualize the interpenetrating systems through which Brown marked the body with ideas—and perhaps how she experienced her body as a site where informational codes were scrambled and reinvented before their physical externalization in dance.



Banner with Babette Mangolte's photograph of Roof Piece. 1976.

In 1976, Brown and her company were among hundreds of American artists "airlifted" to West Berlin for a festival organized by René Block. Dancer Wendy Perron recalled spotting Samuel Beckett in a hotel hallway, and company members Elizabeth Garren and Judith Ragir remembered their Akademie der Kunst program inciting loud arguments in the audience. The exterior of the performance site was hung with a banner featuring Babette Mangolte's now-iconic photograph of Brown's Roof Piece (1973), on which Brown had mapped the SoHo lofts of artists featured in Block's exhibition. Brown's extensive list of people, addresses, and phone numbers resembles Harald Szeemann's list of New York artists' addresses in the catalogue for When Attitudes Become Form (1969). Block conceived the Berlin festival in celebration of the bicentennial of the United States, a gesture he saw as resistant to official American culture because it showcased pioneers of New York's downtown avant-garde: Trisha Brown and her friends.



*Trisha Brown. Trillium. 1962.
Photograph by Al Giese.*