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# Walking on Walls: Shifting Perspectives in a Post-Modern World

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In 'Walking on Walls,' Philip Szporer brings dance and pilgrimage into fascinating relationship. He resituates American choreographer and dancer Trisha Brown's radical approach to the human body in terms of core concepts that have shaped pilgrimage theory. Szporer proposes that pilgrimage, place, and mobility theories provide useful lenses for an innovative re-examination of Brown's pioneering dance pieces. Like pilgrimage, her ideas and contributions were enacted outside - and often in contradistinction to - the control of institutional authority.

**Key Words:** Trisha Brown, dance, dance as pilgrimage, Man Walking Down the Side of a Building, experimental dance, Mind-Body, *communitas*, pilgrimage.

## Trisha Brown: Revolutionizing Movement<sup>[1]</sup>

American dance artist Trisha Brown's radical approach to the human body in motion has consistently challenged the physical and emotional limits of dance. She has investigated a range of actions to repudiate expressive dance, actively employing day-to-day, non-heroic, anti-virtuosic modes of being, and creating robust material for public and performative venues. Since the beginning of her career more than fifty-five years ago, Brown has been transforming ideas about the making and watching of art, altering conceptions of

space, place, and the mobility of the human body. In the process, by animating our collective imaginations, she has framed her work as journey. In this article, I propose that pilgrimage, place, and mobility theories provide useful lenses for an innovative re-examination of Brown's pioneering dance pieces. And like pilgrimage, her ideas and contributions were enacted outside - and often in contradistinction to - the control of institutional authority.

In their pioneering work on pilgrimage, Victor and Edith Turner's notions of liminality and *communitas* are useful for rethinking dance as a catalyst of transformation. This is especially true of what was a 'new stage' in American modern dance, 'a seedbed'<sup>[2]</sup> for postmodern or avant-garde dance. Brown's work also resonates with John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow's categorization of the 'meaning void' of space as a place for the clash and contestation of meanings. In addition, Simon Coleman's proposals that the void acts as a blank space for the construction of a (potentially more democratic) plurality of meanings is anticipated in certain aspects of Brown's - literal - body of work. Geographer and environmental behaviour researcher David Seamon's concepts of body-ballet and place-ballet are also useful. 'Chorography,' taken from the Greek *khōros*, for place, is the study of place or space. Choreography, by contrast, comes from *khōreia*, for dance. Although the terms do not have the same root, their near homonymic quality betrays an insight: both space and place are

1. On March 18, 2017, as this article was being written, acclaimed dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown died in San Antonio, Texas, after a lengthy illness, at the age of eighty. Over the years, her creative output included over 100 choreographies and six operas. When Brown pioneered her inspired and innovative work in the 1960s she redefined the limits of what dance could be and revolutionized the field. With her art-making, this visionary discovered, as Wendy Perron notes in a tribute, 'a rigorous visual and mathematical order... [though] her relaxed body camouflaged that precision.' Following Brown's death, Deborah Jowitt wrote, 'The marvel of Trisha Brown has always been, for me, the wit and ebullience with which she tackled both new ideas and familiar art, without ever ceding her essential values.' Her company, in memoriam, announced: 'One of the most acclaimed and influential choreographers and dancers of her time, Trisha's groundbreaking work forever changed the landscape of art.' See Wendy Perron, 'Farewell to Trisha Brown,' *Dance Magazine* (March 21, 2017): np. <http://dancemagazine.com/views/farewell-trisha-brown/> and Deborah Jowitt, 'The Visionary: Trisha Brown Redefined Dance with Wit and Daring,' *The Village Voice* (March 28, 2017): np. <http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/the-visionary-trisha-brown-redefined-dance-with-wit-and-daring-9820027>

2. Sally Banes, 'The Birth of the Judson Dance Theatre: 'A Concert of Dance' at Judson Church, July 6, 1962,' *Dance Chronicle* 5/2 (1982): 167.

constructed by the often-choreographed movement human beings make through that space. In this context, Trisha Brown's innovative pieces show us a new understanding of a certain type of pilgrimage, that is, the making of space into place.<sup>[3]</sup>

On April 18, 1970, on a gritty, crammed, and narrow Wooster Street in lower Manhattan, and set against the dingy cast-iron buildings in the then-decaying SoHo district, Brown premiered her guerrilla artwork, *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. Onto the façade of a seven-story brick structure, she sent one of her dancers, hoisted by a series of ropes, perfectly perpendicular to the ground. Spectators attending the performance watched from a cobblestone courtyard.

During the performance, the man (Joseph Schlichter, Brown's then-husband), was strapped into a standard mountaineering harness,<sup>[4]</sup> leaning impossibly forward over the threshold of the edifice until he reached a 90-degree angle to the building. He then calmly walked down its side, his body absolutely parallel to the ground. An assistant on the roof slowly let out the rope that held him.<sup>[5]</sup> In this unfashionable, out-of-the-way urban space, the effect made the dancer appear as though he were out for a mundane pedestrian stroll, except that he was headed straight down, at a death-defying angle. The simplicity of gesture and tension in Brown's work from this period (in this case 'the paradox of one action working against another . . . gravity working one way on the body . . . a naturally walking person in another way'<sup>[6]</sup>) altered the paradigm of what dance and performative mobility could be.

Brown explained her intention for the event,

*If you eliminate all those eccentric possibilities that the choreographic imagination can conjure and just have a person walk down an aisle, then you see movement as activity.*<sup>[7]</sup>

Clearly this was not merely a bravura performance; that wasn't the goal. In the experimental environment of the time, Brown's practice was imbued with a dangerous lawlessness.<sup>[8]</sup>

The natural human activity of walking in foreign spaces, in unnatural settings, or walking lengthy distances, is intimately linked to transformative experience. Pilgrimage itself raises the question of how walkers shape their action, including strategizing the degree of control, the zone of knowingness, and the mental state of readiness needed for the passage. In her artistic experimentation, Brown satisfied the impulse to find answers to wider questions of transcendence and trajectory.

Brown conceived of the seemingly death-defying stroll in *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* as creating a radically liminal space. Embracing and at the same time suspending perceptions of the ordinary and familiar action of walking was at the heart of this art piece. This new work was structured as a sustained action that emphasized body volume, balance, direction, and sustained focus. It was anti-balletic, and as such emblematic of the New York downtown dance scene of the time and of the postmodern choreographers who actively contested the function of theatrical dance. The project was propelled not by the usual structures of dance composition, but by the inventive quality of Brown's work, and the risky way in which she created an enigmatic and singular zone of in-between, transitory, engagement of space.

In that SoHo moment, Brown was defying gravity in her own spectacular way, less than a year after Neil Armstrong's memorable first human step on the surface of the moon, well before Michael Jackson made history with his own moonwalk, and prior to French aerial artist Philippe Petit tilting our heads as he stepped onto a high wire between the towers of the World Trade Center. Historically, these radical events question the very nature of entering into the void, into a limbo-like space. The powerful meaning of Brown's

3. See David Seamon's mention of body-ballet as the making of space into place (David Seamon, 'Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place Ballets,' in *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (ed. David Seamon and Ann Buttimer; London: Croom Helm, 1980), 148–165.) Movement imbues a place with meaning. In the present special journal issue, see also the article, 'Written by the Body,' by Jenn Cianca on the ways in which pilgrimage helped to create the very sacred places that were then visited.

4. Maurice Berger, 'Gravity's Rainbow,' in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961–2011* (ed. Hendel Teicher; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 17.

5. The poster for the subsequent performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art, on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 30 and 31, 1971, is titled (all in lower case) 'another fearless dance concert.' This also points to the fact that Brown's audience extended beyond the intimate circle of adventurous dance and performance practitioners.

6. A quote from an interview with Trisha Brown, in *Contemporary Dance* (ed. Anne Livet; New York: Abbeville, 1978), 51.

7. Trisha Brown's description in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961–2011* (ed. Hendel Teicher; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 306.

8. Artists did not have insurance policies to cover a work-related fall from the side of a building.

performance emerges from a mastery that acknowledges gravity and the restraints required to embark on the journey, as well as opening to new understandings of the ways in which the experience and engagement on the part of the dancers and the choreographer, and ultimately the spectator, mediate artistic and cultural hybridity and visual perception. In her process, she encoded meaning through concept-driven changes in emotional expression, visual perception, and physical embodiment. Hers was, at the time of the first execution of *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, a strange and exhilarating journey, unlike anything most people had encountered in dance.

Brown moved to New York from the West Coast in 1961. Within a year, she, along with dancer Yvonne Rainer, among others, would help found a seminal and radically democratic community of artists. This collective came out of musician Robert Dunn's experimental class in choreography and was inspired by the philosophical thinking of composer John Cage. In the summer of 1962, a group of these students began to use the Judson Memorial Church's sanctuary room in Greenwich Village, where a progressive minister who ran the church offered them a space in which to mine ideas, amass their resources, hone their skills, and present evenings of short works.<sup>[9]</sup> There, the Judson Dance Theater (1962–1964) was born, and became the locus for transformation in avant-garde choreography. The loosely organized collective's first concert was full of spirited ideas, approaches, and strategies; it was a moment of pushing the boundaries of cultural expression, involving twenty-three dances by fourteen choreographers. The artists each challenged and transcended the norms of the day, and the audience was a 'woolly downtown in-crowd whose wild enthusiasm and educated interest were not least of what composed the revolution.'<sup>[10]</sup>

The Judson group shared an anarchic commitment to upending the governing rules of concert dance, and breaking with the conformity of the traditions that came before.<sup>[11]</sup> They were united not just by the

collective ethic of the 1960s, a kind of *communitas*<sup>[12]</sup> in revolt, but by a firm stance that the new dance had to decisively shake off both the strictures of classical ballet and the fixity of prevailing discourses surrounding the codified, closed world of modern dance.<sup>[13]</sup>

Innovative, experimental dance in the 1960s and 1970s was part of that movement in art that stressed the conceptual, that is, the importance of ideas. The artists of the Judson and the post-Judson era grounded their work in the ordinary, the bodily, the pedestrian; they differentiated themselves by making spare, minimalist, austere actions speak. 'Pedestrian' was an important word for this revolutionary new dance.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Dance as Pilgrimage

At the same time that walking was making new meaning in dance, we see the rise of contemporary walking pilgrimage, event running, and other forms of intentional human-powered mobility. In her article in this issue, Janice Poltrick-Donato notes the rise of popular running culture in the early 1970s. In dance, at precisely this moment, artists like Brown espoused 'digging into themselves and into reality,'<sup>[15]</sup> facilitating discourse about pluralism and democracy in a changing society where everything was up for grabs. Indeed, Mikhail Baryshnikov<sup>[16]</sup> responded to the 'human immediacy of their work,'<sup>[17]</sup> saying, 'I was inside their story, whether I wanted to be or not.'<sup>[18]</sup> Their discrepant actions were offering a new kind of

9. In human geography and mobility studies, 'space' and 'place' have different technical meanings. 'Space' becomes 'place' only when it is imbued with meaning via human practice.

10. Jill Johnston, 'Baryshnikov Dancing Judson,' in *Reading Dance* (ed. Robert Gottlieb; New York: Pantheon, 2008), 262.

11. Pilgrimage has long been identified - and criticized - for being outside the normal structures, and strictures, of society, in much the same way.

12. *Communitas* in the sense of the group dynamics and shared intentions, of people coming together for the journey, is implicit to understanding the significance of the urban pilgrimage that Brown conceived of in altering the dance experience: the primacy of the individual on the path of transformation, as well as the complementary spectatorship and the kinesthetic empathy fostered in regard to the performer in passage and their moment of transcendence. The experience of destabilization and distortion, even fear, lived by the performer in the doing, and the spectator in watching the display of physical endurance, defines this work and links it to core issues in theorizing the pilgrimage implicit in Brown's art.
13. The modern dance world that dominated the time had become institutionalized through artists like Martha Graham, who held very tight reins.
14. Johnston, 'Baryshnikov Dancing Judson,' 263.
15. Mikhail Baryshnikov, 'Foreword,' in *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s* (ed. Sally Banes; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), xi.
16. In 2001, seven seminal Judson choreographers were featured in a touring show put together by Mikhail Baryshnikov and his White Oak Dance Project.
17. Baryshnikov, 'Foreword,' ix.
18. Baryshnikov, 'Foreword,' ix.



engagement with the world, and suddenly, innovative perspectives proliferated. Writer and critic Deborah Jowitt notes that choreographers like Brown and her peers were 'adventurous in their use of large public spaces.'<sup>[19]</sup> It was the artists' connection with the world that mattered, mediating the 'street' in all of its uncharted possibilities: on sidewalks, in interior loft spaces, in lobbies, on rooftops, in parks, and in found spaces. Inspired by the energy of her adopted city and of the times, Brown's early works used spaces of transition and marginality as subject matter. In this way, she radically transformed ideas about the making and watching of art, of place, and of the human body, and pushed against the limits of choreography by displacing the locations and the ways in which the public views performance.

The commitment to public performance art was part of the reformatory artistic camaraderie of the times. The Lower Manhattan district, or Downtown Manhattan, was populated with a heterogeneous community of painters, filmmakers, designers, avant-garde composers, choreographers, and experimental theatre-makers versed in each other's work. Collaborative interdisciplinarity and reciprocity flowed naturally in their practice. They socialized, helped with, and often performed in one another's works. They were the outsiders - as Brown has stated, 'No one under forty was invited into a [legitimate] theatre.'<sup>[20]</sup> They rebelled by contesting convention. They rejected physical virtuosity for its own sake, demonstrating anti-spectacle, anti-star image, anti-expression and anti-narrative engagement, and employing tasks, chance procedure, and pedestrian movement and daily activity (sometimes performed by non-dancers), in an effort to shed inhibitions and bring dance closer to life around them. Jill Johnston notes, 'Boring was tremendously exciting in the revolution.'<sup>[21]</sup>

The artists of the period discarded elements they felt only added artifice to staged dance by using common spaces and objects, including their own bodies, in new performative ways. Street or rehearsal clothes replaced costuming, and stage props and traditional scenic elements were eliminated. Still, the absence of dance technique and of other signs of performative skill divided audiences. Jowitt writes, 'Their approach excited some spectators, such as artists who saw their

own concerns echoed. It horrified others - especially those members of the dance establishment who mistook the belligerently alternative approach for a state of siege.'<sup>[22]</sup> Art and reality co-mingled and incubated, and the new work hatched by this defiant generation 'jolted the spectator's eye,'<sup>[23]</sup> in effect breaking the traditional audience response and expectation of seeing and appreciating dance on a Western proscenium stage.<sup>[24]</sup>

In 1971 Brown created *Walking on the Wall*, first performed at the Whitney Museum of American Art.<sup>[25]</sup> It was originally performed as an indoor work, her troupe suspended horizontally by harnesses, rigged on cables, and attached to tracks on the ceiling. Each was on a rope of slightly different length; therefore, as the dancers calmly enacted the aerial walk or loped rhythmically along the wall, they had to negotiate their crossings.<sup>[26]</sup> The dancers created a *communitas*-like experience in the audience, their movements an illusion 'so strong that you could swear you were looking out a window and down the sidewalk. It was very trippy, as though everyone in the room was having the same hallucination.'<sup>[27]</sup>

Motifs of horizontality and leaning reappear often in Brown's early works. Writing for *Vogue* magazine, Ted Loos notes: 'It's about not trying to fight gravity and momentum, but using them in the dance.'<sup>[28]</sup> Brown has further said the core source impulses for her choreography, highlighting flux and mobility, came 'from falling and its opposite, and all the in-betweens.'<sup>[29]</sup> The choreographer has been called 'the consummate daredevil'<sup>[30]</sup> for creating this tension in her work. For Brown, '(t)he body had currency,'<sup>[31]</sup> and

19. Deborah Jowitt, 'Monk and King: The Sixties Kids,' *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s*, 130.

20. Philip Bither, 'From Falling and Its Opposite, and All the In-Betweens,' accessed March 20, 2013. <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2013/philip-bither-trisha-brown>

21. Johnston, 'Baryshnikov Dancing Judson,' 263.

22. Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 309.

23. Jowitt, *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s*, 130.

24. Brown's work would move to the traditional proscenium in the 1980s, but it lost none of its rebelliousness.

25. The Whitney event was entitled 'another fearless dance concert.'

26. Bither, 'From Falling and Its Opposite.'

27. Wendy Perron, 'One Route from Ballet to Postmodern,' in *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s*, 145.

28. Ted Loos, 'Trisha Brown: Walking on the Walls of the Whitney Museum' in <http://www.vogue.com/874070/trisha-brown-walking-on-the-walls-of-the-whitney-museum/>

29. Bither, 'From Falling and Its Opposite.'

30. Yvonne Rainer, 'A Fond Memoir with Sundry Reflections on a Friend and Her Art,' in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961-2011* (ed. Hendel Teicher; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 47.

31. Steve Paxton, 'Brown in the New Body,' in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961-2011* (ed. Hendel Teicher; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 60.

her dance pieces ‘fore-grounded the body.’<sup>[32]</sup> In *Democracy’s Body*, a study of the Judson dance ensemble, Sally Banes notes that dancers at the beginning of the 1960s were full players in the choreographic process, and as remarked upon earlier, were ‘trying to free themselves from the restrictions and rules of what they perceived as an older, more rigid generation.’<sup>[33]</sup>

Brown’s first grouping of non-Judson-related projects, later termed her ‘equipment cycle,’ again used various props or simple mechanisms (pulleys, harnesses, supports, and ropes) both to celebrate and to confront gravity.<sup>[34]</sup> In this series of pieces she put bodies in extreme situations, and played with duration of movement and the laws of physics. At times she offered clear instructions (such as, ‘Give me some more [weight], or take a little’<sup>[35]</sup>), at other times participants would enter and exit as they wished, or the audience was free to move around the action. No narrative or metaphor was intended beyond a minimalist distillation of human body movement forms, but there was rigorous conceptual inquiry specific to each of Brown’s works in this cycle.<sup>[36]</sup>

On November 12, 2010, dancer and extreme action choreographer Elizabeth Streb<sup>[37]</sup> performed on the façade of the Whitney<sup>[38]</sup> an historic re-creation of Brown’s iconic equipment piece, *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. While there had been few performances of this work, none had at this juncture been done by a woman.<sup>[39]</sup> Streb was slowly lowered until she was perpendicular to the wall. She began the walk.

*The tension was evident, both in the taut equipment that kept Streb from falling and in the visible effort of the performer as she struggled to keep herself fully upright while moving forward and downward. Within minutes she had reached the sidewalk platform and, as Brown rushed up to embrace Streb, the crowd cheered.*<sup>[40]</sup>

In a video interview, Streb describes her enhanced internal emotional state and discusses the intangibles of the visceral and transitory experience of the physical ‘walk.’ She recalls that Brown’s original premise was to tackle ‘just the idea of changing gravity to 90 degrees, and staying parallel and walking down.’<sup>[41]</sup> Streb acknowledges the extreme nature of Brown’s approach to movement in 1970, and the way in which the latter asked questions about movement, locality and identity.

*There’s something Trisha noticed about the dance world, and movement, and what’s possible in terms of forces, the use of gravity, and where your ground is, what your base of support is, and how you behave when you get into a completely foreign physical situation spatially.*<sup>[42]</sup>

As one might when setting out on pilgrimage, Streb wondered if her body was up to the challenge. She trained extensively in the gym, doing sit-ups and back extensions. But nothing prepared her for the mechanics of the piece (that is, the struggle to stay on the wall with her feet, perfectly horizontal to the ground, once she went over the top of the building). She spoke about how physically demanding the walk was.

*My balance was so precarious that I was on the head of a pin. Everything I did dislodged that balance. Every time you lift a foot, you’re changing your center. So I started to swing, one way then the other way . . . which isn’t good. When the rope gets longer, your pendulum gets more extreme, side to side, and it got going in and out . . . all this ambient motion. You keep*

32. Paxton, ‘Brown in the New Body,’ 57.

33. Sally Banes, *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 20.

34. Bither, ‘From Falling and Its Opposite.’

35. Choreographic notes, 2001, in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961–2011*, 306.

36. Deborah Jowitt, ‘Dance,’ *The Village Voice* (April 8, 1971): 37.

37. Streb and her Streb Extreme Action Company work out of a studio-factory called Streb Lab for Action Mechanics (SLAM), in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

38. The Whitney Museum held this performance as part of an exhibition, ‘Off the Wall: Part 2 - Seven Works by Trisha Brown,’ honouring the Trisha Brown Dance Company’s fortieth anniversary, between September 30–October 3, 2010.

39. Streb cites Brown’s challenges of the conventions of contemporary dance as the inspiration for her own extreme action choreography. ‘Elizabeth Streb discusses Trisha Brown’s ‘Man Walking Down the Side of a Building,’ YouTube video, 3:49, posted by ‘Whitney Focus,’ December 13, 2010.

40. Whitney Education intern Alix Finkelstein’s recount of the Streb walk. Alix Finkelstein, ‘Elizabeth Streb Performs *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, Nov 12, 2010,’ Whitney Museum of American Art, accessed Nov. 12, 2010, <http://whitney.org/Education/EducationBlog/StrebPerformsBrown>

41. Streb. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?x-yt-cl=84503534&x-yt-ts=1421914688&v=9kxWm31jh3Q>

42. Ibid.

*thinking, 'Well, I'll get used to this. I'll remember yesterday and do better today.' Each walk that I took, there was nothing that became familiar increasingly. It deconstructed the walk for me in ways that I never expected it to. I think that until you frame out purely physical conditions and alter them [then] you're not really telling the truth about movement because you are already in a balance situation.*<sup>[43]</sup>

This concept of what Streb calls 'the truth about movement' provides a nexus for the connection of these specific performances (and of pilgrimage as the intentionally dislocated movement of the body) to the quotidian movement that characterizes our everyday. Brown's genius lay at least in part in the disruption of the quotidian, and in this, the highlighting of what is usually ignored. These performances disrupt the 'body - subject,'<sup>[44]</sup> that is, the inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviours, but to do so in an habitual, mechanical, and usually involuntary way. We walk down a street - and unless that street is perpendicular to gravity - we do not need consciously to tell our bodies what to do.

Another interpreter / pilgrim, Amelia Rudolf, who had trained both as a climber and dancer, performed the work, re-titled *WoMan Walking Down the Side of A Building*, at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in April 2013. She comments on the recreation of the work, with its quasi-spiritual experience of being unbalanced and undergoing a change of spatial perspectives:

*When I performed the piece, (which I did three times), it felt like I was casting a spell and was part of it. The piece takes place in silence and involves 'simply' walking down the building. Each slight weight shift becomes monumental. My goal was to have it look like a person just walking, albeit in slow motion and on a building.*<sup>[45]</sup>

There is much more at play here than a narrative expressed in the usual choreographic structure of beginning, middle, and end. What is embedded in this seminal work, and others in Brown's oeuvre, are illusory and paradoxical movement patterns, the challenging of acts invested with body memory (and the audience's perception of those acts). They undertake a meticulous exploration that is more than just executing complicated movement sequences in an identifiable place or space, or considering a basic choreographic structure and the ways in which movement is organised and shaped to create a dance. Brown's visceral idea engages the emotions stored in the muscles, and riffs on the ramifications of the imaginary, accessing those streams of inspiration activated through gesture.

### Changing the Mind-Body of the Audience

Observers of dance are participants. They are, in some sense, 'virtually dancing along,'<sup>[46]</sup> feeling a discernable perceptual shift as they gaze in excitement or exhaustion, in a sensual field of distortion and fantasy the art has created. In the case of Brown's work, observers enter a visionary state of being as well. As professor of dance Edward Warburton posits, to watch dance is to have a 'feeling of' the movement, simulating sensations of the dance.<sup>[47]</sup> There are always many interpretations of a dance piece, and many ways of making meaning in dance. The kinaesthetic empathy enhanced in a work like *Man Walking Down the Side of A Building* suggests that, even while sitting still or standing watching, dancers (and others) can feel they are participating in the movements they observe. Viewers of the piece are on a transformative journey via their somatic empathy. From a spectator's perspective, viewers can imagine the strength and the demands of the dance, but they will also, almost certainly, understand or learn something about, or become aware of, their own physical limitations. The ways in which Brown played with space and movement, disorienting and transforming both dancer and viewer, laid bare the possibilities of bodies moving in space, and therefore raised challenging questions about reality and meaning.

43. Ibid.

44. For the concept of the body as the primary epistemological locus, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes* (transl. Alphonso Lingis; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

45. Amelia Rudolf, '(Wo)Man Walking Down the Side of a Building – A Success,' Bandaloop (blog), April 10, 2013, <http://bandaloop.org/2013/04/10/woman-walking-down-the-side-of-a-building-a-success/>

46. Ivar G. Hagendoorn, 'Some Speculative Hypotheses About the Nature and Perception of Dance and Choreography,' *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11/3–4 (2003): 95.

47. Edward Warburton, 'Of Meanings and Movements: Re-Languaging Embodiment in Dance Phenomenology and Cognition,' *Dance Research Journal* 43/2 (Winter 2011): 74.

## Conclusion: Space and Place from the Perspective of Altered Mobility

Contemporary pilgrimages often bring expectations of 'finding oneself' in some way.<sup>[48]</sup> Walking pilgrimage especially embodies a soul-searching quest for connection with a larger reality, with life-changing spiritual fulfillment or enlightenment. The experience of the spectator in dance events, as with the pilgrim, is at first destabilizing and then re-orienting. A work like *Man Walking Down the Side of A Building*, in its challenging of convention, directs our attention to this often-missed liminality of experience. It prompts questions about the mysterious nature of unknown space, and the potential for physical and mental strength and endurance. Brown forces dialogue about the navigation of the ambiguous path between the recognizable and the unexpected. The audience attending Brown's *in situ* work shares a common space with the dancers, rendering it a place of emancipatory aesthetic meaning. They may not speak about the 'spiritual' journey as such, but what's created and shared amongst onlookers is worth noting: an empathetic and caring relationship forged with the attuned body picking its irrational way down the side of a commonplace urban building.

The sense of group dynamics and collective intentions operative in *communitas*<sup>[49]</sup> are a useful window onto the significance of this moment in dance history,

wherein Brown's performance is a virtual urban pilgrimage. She emphasized the importance of the individual on the path of transformation, as well as a complementary relationship and kinaesthetic empathy between audience and performers, fostering their shared passage toward a moment of transcendence. Classically, consummation of the pilgrim journey at its shrine may be marked by an experience of destabilization and reorientation. Brown's work accomplishes both by means of its play with gravity, perspective, and movement. Her performance 'space' was thus broken apart and re-constituted into a virtual pilgrim 'place.' This experience of distortion, even fear, lived by the performer in the doing, and by the spectator in the watching, link risk and physical endurance to feelings of awe, in the communal experience of this extraordinary work.

There is a galvanizing bond formed between those looking upward and the performer in the descent - both are 'there,' albeit experiencing different modes of awareness and understanding. The action of removing oneself from daily routine - whether on the traditional pilgrimage route or by being placed in Brown's cartography - responds to people's urge to 'find themselves.' A relationship is forged between movement and memory, aspiration and ecstasy, for both traditional pilgrims and participants in *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*.

48. *Something Grand*, DVD, directed by Matthew Anderson (Montreal: [www.somethinggrand.ca](http://www.somethinggrand.ca), 2012).

49. See Victor and Edith Turner's seminal work on the experience of 'fellow feeling' engendered among pilgrims sharing a path.



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