

No to No:

Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, and the “No” Manifesto

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This past April, I attended a wonderful program at the Brooklyn Academy of Music that included a work entitled *O Zlozony/O Composite*, choreographed for the Paris Opera Ballet in 2004. Auriéle Dupont danced on pointe, her perfect turns and balances supported by Manuel Legris's and Nicolas Le Riche's masculine strength. The three performers wore flowing white costumes, flitted across a mesmerizing starry sky backdrop, and used dramatic lifts, shapes, and partnering to inhabit an operatic score by Laurie Anderson.¹ This pas de trois was graceful, fluid, enchanting, and beautiful—what one would expect from a performance by world-class dancers on the BAM Opera House stage.

Strangely enough, this piece was choreographed by Trisha Brown, an artist who initially became famous in the 1960s as a founding member of the Judson Dance Theater, the movement that established postmodern dance.² Judson choreographers openly questioned the use of sets, costumes, musical accompaniment, highly technical movement, and the proscenium stage—aesthetics closely associated with ballet and historical modern dance. Forty years after the Judson revolution, *O Zlozony/O Composite* utilizes all of these once proscribed elements, causing one to question Brown's artistic standpoint.

¹ Deborah Jowitt, "Trisha Brown Rounds Up Four Decades of Choreography at BAM," *The Village Voice*, 5 May 2009, 33.

² Sally Banes, "Judson Dance Theater," *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 633.

Trisha Brown is not the only postmodern choreographer whose recent work resembles traditional theatrical dance. In fact, BAM's Next Wave series presents works by many avant-garde and postmodern choreographers, which may easily seem incongruous, since these works typically differ from standard opera house productions. Movement performed on a large proscenium stage requires theatricality and physical legibility to project to the farthest reaches of the house. Consequently, postmodern artists such as Brown have pushed themselves into the mainstream.³

Another Judson artist who has employed ballet and older modern dance conventions is Lucinda Childs. This summer, her company, Lucinda Childs Dance, performed *Dance* (1979) at the Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College. Although Childs had created this piece three decades ago, it was designed for the proscenium stage: it had an original score by Philip Glass, a video by Sol Lewitt projected onto an immense transparent scrim at the edge of the stage, and complicated phrases performed by trained dancers. Despite its "minimalism"⁴ (the discourse to which this piece is usually assigned), *Dance* appears to accept what Childs had ostensibly rejected at Judson.

Because the Judson Dance Theater rejected the formal properties of ballet and historical modern dance, Brown and Childs could be viewed as "sell-outs" for returning to conventions they had once discarded. In order to judge the intentions of these choreographers, however, one must ask whether there was ever an official code for the

³ Ann Daly, "BAM and Beyond: The Postmoderns Get Balleticized," in *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 186.

⁴ Judy Burns, "Lucinda Childs," in *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, ed. Martha Bremser (London: Routledge, 1999), 59.

work produced at Judson in the first place. If there was, then how closely did the Judson choreographers adhere to its rules?

Sally Banes says that Judson's credo was a statement written by Yvonne Rainer, the group's leading figure, in 1965:

No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.⁵

Banes explains that this "No Manifesto" was Rainer's "strategy for demystifying dance and making it objective. It was a strategy of denial."⁶ Similarly, Ramsay Burt writes in his monograph on the Judson Dance Theater, "This statement reveals the impact that avant-garde strategies were having on ways of thinking about the dancing body and its relationship to contemporary culture."⁷ Both of these explanations suggest that the No Manifesto played a leading role in defining the artistic approach of the Judson choreographers. If this were the case, one could argue that Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs had originally embraced and later betrayed the manifesto, replacing each "No" with a "Yes."

Although their work may have evolved over the past four decades, Brown and Childs remain avant-garde innovators. The problem is that Banes and Burt attribute too much weight to Rainer's assertion. In her memoirs, published in 2006, Rainer explains that she wrote this statement as a response to a single "dry, plodding work" in which she participated. She declares, "[The No Manifesto] was never meant to be prescriptive for

⁵ Yvonne Rainer, "Some Restrospective Notes," *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (Winter 1965): 168-178; quoted in Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Postmodern Dance*. 2d ed. (Middletown, C.T.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 43.

⁶ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 43.

⁷ Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 32.

all time for all choreographers, but rather, to do what the time honored tradition of the manifesto always intended manifestos to do: clear the air at a particular cultural and historical moment.”⁸ Thus, it is possible that Rainer never intended to impose a particular aesthetic or strategy. In fact, I have not come across a single instance in which Brown and Childs mention the No Manifesto in relation to their work.

Rather than wholly rejecting the practices that Rainer stressed, Brown and Childs independently reinvented traditional aspects of theatrical dance to the point that their work ultimately came to resemble forms of ballet and historical modern dance. In this sense, Brown and Childs cannot be accused of retreating to what they had become famous for refusing, because neither of them had said “No!” in the first place. This paper will argue that from the days of the Judson Dance Theater until today, neither Brown nor Childs has ever repudiated the aesthetics of ballet and modern dance that Rainer emphasized in the No Manifesto.

In addition to admitting that the No Manifesto was not meant to offer a seminal set of principles for Judson choreographers, Rainer has further undermined its value by acknowledging its contingent nature. As noted earlier, Rainer wrote the statement solely as a response to her negative experience with Dick Higgins’s 1964 opera, *Hruslk*.⁹ In a documentary about postmodern dance created in 1980, she said, “[The No Manifesto] was ‘No!’ to anything I didn’t like at the time... ‘No to moving or being moved was one of them, whatever that means,”¹⁰ demonstrating that her rebellion was merely a

⁸ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts: A Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 264.

⁹ Rainer, *Feelings*, 261.

¹⁰ *Beyond the Mainstream*, prod. Merrill Brockway and Carl Charlson, dir. Merrill Brockway. 1 hr., WNET/Films Inc., 1980, videocassette.

temporary phase. Additionally, Rainer wrote that during her “No” period, she had been working with choreographer James Waring and did not care for certain aspects of his work, such as camp and balleticism, although she came to appreciate them later.¹¹ Again, Rainer discloses that the No Manifesto was a personal, passing expression.

While Rainer had wanted to shun earlier dance traditions, she was still interested in dance as “public...artistic production.”¹² In the early 1960s, she and other dancers in Robert Dunn’s composition class discovered methods of experimentation that “resisted institutionalization” by addressing different “rules” of dance¹³ and applying the composer John Cage’s chance techniques to movement.¹⁴ Their goal was to find an avant-garde alternative to the overly dramatic, literary, emotional, and esoteric aspects of ballet and modern dance.¹⁵ On July 6, 1962 fourteen choreographers presented “A Concert of Dance” at the Judson Memorial Church, the first performance of Judson Dance Theater. By the time the organization dissolved in 1964, it had presented over two hundred works.¹⁶ By setting pieces on untrained dancers, incorporating everyday movement, improvising, and performing in nontraditional spaces, the Judson choreographers radically challenged spectators to ponder the meaning of “dance.” The postmodern dance movement “proposed that a dance was not a dance because of its content, but because of its context—i.e., simply because it was framed as a dance.”¹⁷

¹¹ Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961-1973* (Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), 6.

¹² Burt, 90.

¹³ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 14.

¹⁴ Banes, “Judson Dance Theater,” 633.

¹⁵ Banes, *Terpsichore*, xvi.

¹⁶ Banes, “Judson Dance Theater,” 633.

¹⁷ Banes, *Terpsichore*, xix.

Whether or not the Judson artists subscribed to the No Manifesto, its precepts encouraged an authentic investigative process. In discussing the manifesto's influence, Banes asks and responds, "What was left for the choreographer or dancer?...Something that perhaps could only be fully realized in the imagination, the reduction of dance to its essentials."¹⁸ To redefine movement and performance anew, Judson choreographers had to start at the beginning, an approach that continued to influence them long after Judson disbanded in 1964.¹⁹ Rainer herself produced works, including *Trio A* (1966), which clearly represented Judson's position. Burt describes Rainer's pieces of the 1960s as indicative of "an avant-garde approach to ways of devising movement vocabularies and choreographic structures, which, in turn, prompted Rainer and her fellow dancers to find new ways of performing them."²⁰ Through the process of artistic experimentation, rather than by using the No Manifesto as a framework, the Judson choreographers, especially Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, crafted original reinterpretations of older dance constructs.

Trisha Brown was one of the original founders of Judson Dance Theater. She earned a degree in dance from Mills College, where her training was predominantly in modern dance. She then attended the American Dance Festival, where she became inspired by composition courses with Louis Horst, Anna Halprin, and Robert Dunn. In the early 1960s Brown's work was built upon the notion of natural forces, which she explored through improvisation, investigations of gravity, human interactions, and goal-driven tasks. After 1968, Brown further aimed to "create the illusion of natural

¹⁸ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 44.

¹⁹ *Beyond the Mainstream*.

²⁰ Burt, 32.

movement in situations that changed the relation of the performers to weight and gravity” by composing pieces for unusual terrains and using climbing equipment.²¹ The Trisha Brown Company, still active today, was formed in 1970, and in 1979 it began presenting large-scale productions in vast theater spaces with sets, costumes, music, and lighting designed by prominent artists.²²

Lucinda Childs also played a part in the founding of Judson Dance Theater. Early on she trained in ballet and piano; later she studied modern dance with Helen Tamiris, Judith Dunn, Bessie Schönberg, and Merce Cunningham, and eventually graduated from Sarah Lawrence College with a degree in dance. Her choreography has focused on repetition and varying points of view, but in the early years she was also intent on generating non-dance movement through interactions with mundane objects and nontraditional spaces. In her Judson-era works, Childs often incorporated spoken monologues into her choreography, but by 1973 she had dropped the use of text and props. That year Childs formed her own company, and, like Brown, proceeded to create theatrical works for proscenium stages in collaboration with renowned visual and musical artists.²³

Undoubtedly, the more recent performances by the Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs companies appear very different from their Judson-era works in terms of choreography, production, vocabulary, and movement quality. Banes illustrates the transformations that these choreographers have undergone as the following: “Brown has become increasingly concerned with the fleetingness of dance; Childs with ingraining

²¹ Sally Banes, “Brown, Trisha,” *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 543.

²² Cynthia Roses-Thema, “Brown, Trisha,” *International Dictionary of Modern Dance* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1998), 75.

²³ Fiona Marcotty, “Childs, Lucinda,” *International Dictionary of Modern Dance* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1998), 114-18.

patterns into the spectator's field of vision until the dance seems to emerge as a permanent object that occupies or even defines space."²⁴ Although Brown has liquefied dance over time while Childs has solidified it, neither of these changes has required an adjustment of position from "No" to "Yes" in response to Rainer's manifesto.

One can certainly argue that Brown and Childs did not actually reject most of the conventions identified by Rainer in the No Manifesto, because there is significant overlap among Rainer's thirteen "no" statements. The No Manifesto may be categorized into three fundamental groups:

- I. No to spectacle, No to virtuosity, No to transformations and magic and make-believe.
- II. No to the heroic, No to the anti-heroic, No to trash imagery, No to style, No to camp, No to eccentricity.
- III. No to glamour and transcendence of the star image, No to involvement of performer or spectator, No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer, No to moving or being moved.

To support my contention that Brown and Childs have ignored the No Manifesto since the start of their careers, I will discuss their choreography in relation to each category of "no's," focusing on works created at Judson and up to the late 1970s.

I. No to spectacle, No to virtuosity, No to transformations and magic and make-believe.

²⁴ Sally Banes, "From the Judson to BAM: Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs," *On the Next Wave* 1, no. 2 (1983): 7.

Spectacle, virtuosity, and magic tricks all exist for the purpose of entertainment. A “spectacle” is a comprehensive, striking show,²⁵ and “virtuosity” refers to tremendous technical skill.²⁶ Thus, displays of virtuosity, transformations, magic, and make-believe can be spectacles in themselves or can be contained within a greater spectacle.

Traditional ballet and modern dance spectacles offered elaborate set and costume designs, sophisticated musical scores, special effects, and physical bravura on proscenium stages. The Judson choreographers experimented with new methods of performance—they replaced the proscenium stage with unorthodox performance spaces, substituted ordinary movement for expert dancing, and did away with archetypal costumes, music, and magic tricks.

Judson choreographers like Brown and Childs reinvented traditional ballet and modern dance spectacles by challenging spectators to question if what they were watching was dance. One way they achieved this was by replacing the proscenium stage with unconventional performance spaces—New York City streets, galleries, lofts, parking lots, plazas, church sanctuaries, and rooftops. The Judson artists proved that any type of work in any kind of venue could be “framed” as an “aesthetic event,”²⁷ thus redefining the obtrusive theatrical spectacle.

Childs’s *Street Dance* (1964) illustrates this notion. Here, the audience peered out of a fifth-floor loft window on Canal Street to observe Childs and another dancer, moving on the street below. An audio recording of Childs’s voice directed spectators toward various signage, window displays, and Chinatown activity as physically pointed out by

²⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Banes, “From Judson to BAM,” 7.

the two dancers.²⁸ In her discussion of *Street Dance*, Carrie Lambert-Beatty explains, “Childs had used the windows to frame the street as art; it was only the ‘literally privileged’ view from above that made the performance recognizable as such. To the passerby, the dance was ‘invisible.’”²⁹ The “privileged” spectators of *Street Dance* had the opportunity to watch a revolutionary dance performance—one that no one else could even tell was happening. Although this idea of perspective was new in the realm of dance performance, Judson works such as *Street Dance* surely struck and entertained viewers to the extent that they became spectacles in themselves.

Brown and Childs continued to comment on the proscenium stage after the demise of Judson. Between 1968 and 1975 Brown created a series of works called “Equipment Pieces,” in which dancers used climbing equipment to traverse indoor and outdoor terrains in defiance of the laws of gravity. In *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), for example, a performer walked parallel to the ground along the side of a seven-story Soho building.³⁰ Although it was not presented upon a proscenium stage, this extraordinary performance proved to be a spectacle to those who witnessed it.

Even as Brown and Childs began displaying their work in genuine theaters in the late 1970s, they continued to recreate the limitations of the proscenium stage. Once their works were placed in the proscenium frame, they did not abandon their unique conceptions of spectacle that they had formed earlier. Don McDonagh says, “The theater setting...was re-invigorated by choreographers who were willing to use its evocative

²⁸ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁰ Marianne Goldberg, “Trisha Brown,” In *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, ed. Martha Bremser (London: Routledge, 1999), 38.

space but not always its rigid linear conventions.”³¹ Brown and Childs remained avant-garde in their creations for the proscenium stage.

In *Glacial Decoy* (1979), Brown played with the idea of the proscenium as an infinite space by allowing the choreography to continue backstage.³² Similarly, for *Set and Reset* (1983) she used transparent curtains as stage wings to eliminate the discrepancy between onstage and offstage, questioning the proscenium’s framing capacity.³³ Childs was less conspicuous than Brown in redefining the traditional stage space. Judy Burns discusses how Childs’s choreography for *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) “transformed” the proscenium through the “use of ensemble; spare, angular vocabulary; rigorous attention to spatial placement and scale; repetition and shifts in point of view; and, most importantly, her emphasis on the diagonal.”³⁴ She used the stage space to protract a multitude of choreographic options. Whether on a busy street or on the BAM opera house stage, neither Brown nor Childs said, “No to spectacle.”

Ballet and modern dance spectacles performed in large theaters were enhanced by elaborate sets, costumes, and musical scores. Brown and Childs did not reject these elements, but redefined them. Although their decisions about stage design, costumes, and musical accompaniment were not what audiences were accustomed to, Brown and Childs nonetheless supported artistic collaboration. In fact, the programs for the third and fourth Judson concerts in 1962 included credits for lighting by William Linich, musical

³¹ Jean Morrison Brown, Naomi Mindlin, and Charles H. Woodford, ed., *The Vision of Modern Dance: In the Words of Its Creators*. 2d ed. (Hightstown, N.J.: Princeton Book Company, 1998), 201.

³² Hendel Teicher, ed., *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue* (Andover, M.A.: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 2002), 96.

³³ Banes, “From Judson to BAM;” Marianne Goldberg, “All of the Person’s Person Arriving,” *The Drama Review* 30, no. 1 (1986): 152.

³⁴ Burns, 60.

direction by Phillip Corner, and “costume consulting” by Ruth Emerson.³⁵ Because of their use of original sets, costumes, and music it is evident that Brown and Childs did not try to eradicate a sense of spectacle from their work.

Alternative performance spaces functioned as creative scenery, especially because site-specific choreography often celebrated Manhattan’s diverse architecture and vibrant life.³⁶ Even a bare white gallery wall made for appealing décor, as in Brown’s *Walking on the Wall* (1971) and Childs’s *Calico Mingling* (1973). Later, for the proscenium stage, Brown and Childs called upon contemporary artists largely ignored by ballet and modern dance companies. Brown collaborated with prominent visual artists, Robert Rauschenberg, Nancy Graves, and Fujiko Nakaya, while Childs worked with Sol Lewitt, Frank Gehry, and others on unique designs that continued to reinvent those of typical dance productions.

In response to traditional ballet or modern dance attire such as tutus, pointe shoes, hugging bodices, and long skirts, Judson works were usually performed in everyday street clothing and sneakers. By “valuing the ordinary lives of ordinary people,”³⁷ this costume choice won the audience’s attention. Sometimes Judson dancers did not wear anything at all, as in *Word Words* (1963). Critic Jill Johnston considers this decision “a comment on the standard modern dance costume, the leotard and tights which are suggestive of nudity.”³⁸ Such an obtrusive comment on an older dance custom redefines costuming, rather than rejecting it altogether. The Judson approach to costuming offered

³⁵ Sally Banes, *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962-1964* (Ann Arbor, M.I.: UMI Research Press, 1983), 82.

³⁶ Goldberg, “Trisha Brown,” 38.

³⁷ Banes, *Reinventing Dance in the 1960’s*, 18.

³⁸ Banes, *Democracy’s Body*, 90.

a human performance aesthetic that amused spectators, thus contributing to a larger spectacle.

Along with elaborate sets and costumes, ballet and modern dance spectacles were nearly always performed to musical accompaniment. By contrast, many Judson pieces were performed in silence, or had unusual scores such as live voice, recorded sound, or speech. Although these forms of accompaniment significantly diverged from the dance norm, Judson artists still considered music (or the lack thereof) germane to their work.

Lucinda Childs was among the first at Judson to ask Philip Corner, Judson's musical director, to compose a score for her. Her solo, *Pastime* (1963), was set to three variations of water faucet "spray and gurgling" sounds that Corner had created without using the movement as a basis for the score.³⁹ *Geranium* (1965) was set to a tape recording of a football game broadcast, along with Childs's own commentary.⁴⁰ Childs's most recognizable musical collaborations were with Philip Glass on *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) and *Dance* in 1979, but long before then she had informally established a quiet connection between music and movement in her dances through complex counting systems and mathematical organizations.⁴¹ In *Carnation* (1964) Childs slowly played with hair rollers, sponges, and a colander in silence. Her actions included placing the colander on her head and over her face, and fitting a pile of sponges in her mouth to reveal a duck-like appearance. About *Carnation*, Burt claims, "[A]lthough the piece was performed without any music, the structure was musical, following the three movements

³⁹ Ibid., 98-9.

⁴⁰ Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me*, (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1998), 93.

⁴¹ *Making Dances: Seven Postmodern Choreographers*, prod. and dir. Michael Blackwood, 1 hr. 29 min., Michael Blackwood Productions, 2000, videocassette.

of classical European sonata form.”⁴² Later, Childs used minimalist scores by Glass, John Adams, and others to create a musical parallel to her choreography.⁴³

Brown also collaborated with Corner on her first work, *Trillium* (1962), and afterward discovered a choreographic sense of musicality in her silent pieces. By the 1970s and 1980s her works were strong enough to stand alone, but she turned to the compositions of Robert Ashley, Laurie Anderson, and others to illuminate them.⁴⁴ This was quite different from the common practice of setting movement to specific music. By revolutionizing the relationship between music and dance, Brown and Childs indicated their loyalty to spectacle.

Although Rainer separated spectacle from “transformations and magic and make-believe,” magic, or special effects, is closely associated with music, set design, and costuming as components of grand theatrical spectacles. In commenting on magic tricks, Judson choreographers displayed illusions of their own. For instance, Brown is largely responsible for redefining the notion of magic in performance. In *Trillium* (1962) she alternated between the simple actions of sitting, standing, and lying down, but ended up levitating.⁴⁵ Later, her equipment pieces blatantly exposed the harnesses that the dancers wore, in order to oppose the universal rule that “a magician never reveals her secret.” However, disclosing the mechanics of the “tricks” behind her equipment pieces did not keep Brown from achieving gravity-defying illusions.⁴⁶

⁴² Burt, 107.

⁴³ Burns, 60.

⁴⁴ Lise Brunel, Guy Delahaye, and Babette Mangolte, *Trisha Brown* (Paris: Editions Bougé, 1987), 64.

⁴⁵ Banes, *Democracy's Body*, 121.

⁴⁶ Goldberg, “All of the Person's Person Arriving,” 152.

Although less obviously, Childs's choreography exuded a sense of "the uncanny" as well. Throughout her career she developed methods of "doubling," what Susan Sontag defined as "splitting the performer into two versions, the action into two levels, which proceed simultaneously." When Childs added visual effects to her works she achieved more complex, eerie forms of doubling. In *Dance* (1979), for instance, the dancers onstage were mirrored by their ghostly, larger-than-life images projected onto a transparent scrim. This supernatural effect was groundbreaking; Susan Sontag explained, "The film both documents and dematerializes (spiritualizes) the reality of dancing."⁴⁷ Both Brown and Childs, then, said "yes" to transformations, magic, and make-believe from the beginning, albeit treating them in a new way.

Although Judson choreographers rejected virtuosic movement, they did not neglect the idea of skill— even if their choreography incorporated "pedestrian" movement and ordinary actions that could be executed by non-dancers. Judson pioneers were trained in ballet and modern dance, so doing away with technique altogether did not come easily to them. In an interview, Childs described the dilemma between reforming dance and building upon her experience; "I wanted to find a way to utilize a portion of technique I'd been trained in while retaining certain conditions I'd set for myself as regards performance pieces....I was thrown back on myself more and more to bridge the gap between training and performance activity."⁴⁸ Here, Childs admits retaining a certain level of technical skill in her work, defining her goal as redefining rather than rejecting traditional virtuosity. Sontag writes, "Childs does not feed balletic movements and

⁴⁷ Susan Sontag, "For *Available Light*: A Brief Lexicon," *Art in America*, December 1983, 102.

⁴⁸ Daryl Chin, "Talking with Lucinda Childs," *Dance Scope* 13 (Winter-Spring 1979): 74.

positions into an eclectic mix but wholly transforms and reinterprets them,”⁴⁹ attributing an avant-garde twist to time-honored dance practice.

Since the 1960s, Brown and Childs have increasingly drawn on ballet vocabulary, although some, including Childs herself, have argued that “the dancers are only momentarily arrested in these positions, or they merely pass through the end point of a position in the process of going on to the next one.”⁵⁰ Yet, the term “virtuosity” holds deeper meaning. Rainer identified virtuosity as the inconsistent distribution of energy in movement. For example, the climax of a grand jeté results from significant energy expenditure.⁵¹ The work that Brown and Childs created at Judson maintained, by contrast, a steady flow of energy. However, for anyone, especially trained dancers, it is more difficult to exert energy steadily than to release it irregularly. Rainer herself said that the simple action of lifting a thumb was as challenging to the Judson dancers as it was to non-dancers.⁵² Judson pieces often included sections of complete stillness. If John Cage could establish silence as a virtuosic form of music, then the Judson choreographers could surely support stillness as a virtuosic form of dance.⁵³ It is unnatural to stay entirely still for long periods of time or to have complete control of one’s energy distribution while moving. Thus, pedestrian movement can actually require the physical skill of trained dancers in some ways.

Brown’s early works utilized pedestrian movement, but called for technical sophistication. In her experiments with gravity such as *Trillium* and *Man Walking Down*

⁴⁹ Sontag, “For *Available Light*,” 100.

⁵⁰ Lucinda Childs, “Lucinda Childs,” in *Further Steps: Fifteen Choreographers on Modern Dance*, ed. by Connie Kreemer (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 103; Sontag, “For *Available Light*,” 108; Brunel, 47-8; Goldberg, “All of the Person’s Person Arriving,” 155.

⁵¹ Rainer, *Work*, 67-8.

⁵² Rainer, *Work*, 9.

⁵³ Lambert-Beatty, 47.

the Side of a Building, Brown figured out how to naturally reorient the body in response to unnatural changes in orientation.⁵⁴ Similarly, Childs confessed to a desire for kinesthetic precision when she performed a handstand in *Carnation*.⁵⁵ Because Brown and Childs had redefined the uses of technical training early on, they were prepared to place their postmodern work on ballet dancers decades later.

At Judson, however, virtuosity exceeded physical proficiency. Both dancers and non-dancers alike displayed “spectacular stage personalities” in performance.⁵⁶ While Judson choreographers worked with some formal technique, “one of the group’s lasting contributions was to put the line between dance and ordinary behavior under erasure.”⁵⁷ They incorporated everyday actions such as eating, talking, and grooming into their choreography. Whether technically skilled or not, the Judson dancer knew how to infuse the mundane with a performative quality. As ballet training had enabled traditional dancers to project their presence to the last row of the balcony,⁵⁸ choreographers like Brown and Childs were “interested in using nondance material in a way that still carried the formal weight of theatrical dance work.”⁵⁹ What Judson dancers performed was not as significant as *how* they performed it. They crafted a new concept of virtuosity, to which they exclaimed, “Yes, yes, yes!”

Although the works that Brown and Childs have produced since the late 1970s are reminiscent of traditional ballet and modern dance performances, they are rooted in

⁵⁴ Banes, “From Judson to BAM,” 4; -----, *Democracy’s Body*, 121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁶ Rainer, *Work*, 6

⁵⁷ Lambert-Beatty, 42.

⁵⁸ Daly, 186.

⁵⁹ Marcotty, 117.

Judson inventions. Their aesthetics may have shifted in some ways, but Brown and Childs have accepted spectacle, magic, and virtuosity from the beginning.

II. No to the heroic, No to the anti-heroic, No to trash imagery, No to style, No to camp, No to eccentricity

The previous section dealt with dance performance on a visual level. This next section explores the expression of content in theatrical performance. In her No Manifesto, Rainer expressed a distaste for overstated meaning— one can't help but consider her denial of the heroic, anti-heroic, and trash imagery a direct response to Martha Graham's signature dramatics, closely identified with her "Greek" works such as *Night Journey* (1947) and *Clytemnestra* (1958). "No to camp" and "no to eccentricity" were probably a reaction to the fantastic narratives in James Waring's works such as *The Wanderers* (1952) and *The Prisoners* (1953).⁶⁰ At first glance Brown and Childs may seem to have sided with Rainer in her rebellion against dramatics and stylistic idiosyncrasies, but closer observation suggests otherwise.

First of all, in refusing to take on existing movement and performance "styles," Rainer ultimately established a style of her own, one identified with postmodern dance. Based on Rainer's *Trio A* (1966), Banes defined the general style of postmodern dance as "factual (matter-of-fact, direct, nonillusionistic), unexaggerated, unemphatic. Neither weight, nor time, nor space factors are noticeably stylized or emphasized. The one factor that is obviously altered and manipulated is the flow of movement."⁶¹ Though this style differs markedly from those of Graham, José Limón, and other modern dancers, it is

⁶⁰ David Vaughan, "Waring, James," *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 362.

⁶¹ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 46-7.

definitely a style. Thus, the claim by Banes and others that the Judson choreographers abolished style altogether is clearly problematic. Not only did Brown and Childs participate in the invention of the postmodern dance style at Judson and after, but they also developed personal styles.

Childs is commonly grouped with the era's minimalist artists, namely because she has consistently showcased basic movement vocabulary. However, beneath the surface her choreography is exceptionally intricate.⁶² Her steps fluctuate according to differing perspectives, and she generously uses repetition and doubling in order to intensify the phrasing.⁶³ Childs has kept the matter-of-fact quality from Judson, but combined it with the high energy and "lyrical solemnity" of traditional dance.⁶⁴ In a recent interview Childs called her work "quasi-ballet," because she has used balletic movement for its versatility, without attributing much importance to the particular steps.⁶⁵ With the intention of avoiding a signature style, Childs has created her own.

Brown, too, has created her own style. At Judson she favored a method of "structured improvisation" in which dancers improvised within fixed boundaries, such as content or timing.⁶⁶ Usually the dancers would memorize these "structurally improvised" phrases to convey a feel of spontaneity in performance.⁶⁷ Ultimately, the suppleness and softness of these semi-chance pieces created the foundation for a new dance grammar.⁶⁸ In fact, Brown has invented a dance style dubbed by some critics the "Brownian Theory

⁶² Iris Fanger, "Lucinda Childs and *Parcours*: Celebrating a Quarter Century of the Route Less Taken," *Dance Magazine*, October 2000, 68.

⁶³ Burns, 59.

⁶⁴ Sontag, "For *Available Light*," 108.

⁶⁵ Joseph Houseal, "Lucinda Childs: Counting Out the Bomb," *Ballet Review* 36 (2008): 41-2.

⁶⁶ Brunel et. al., 22

⁶⁷ Teicher, 39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 45.

of Motion” based on her “technique of...much upper torso movement and fluid thrown-away steps.”⁶⁹ This “Brownian” style stems from the fact that Brown’s choreography has revamped accepted dance forms to the point that it “defies categorization.”⁷⁰ According to Banes, three central features make up Brown’s style: “Unaltered pedestrian movements; ‘pure’ movement of the joints and limbs; and gestures that have personal meaning to Brown but not the audience.”⁷¹ Today, some of Brown’s work, especially when performed by ballet-trained dancers, certainly has a balletic appearance. However, as Manuel Légris of the Paris Opera Ballet notes, “The release of Trisha’s movement is completely different from what we learn in classical training.”⁷² In the past forty years, Brown has gradually developed a movement style all her own.

Another aspect of Brown’s style is its struggle for the appearance of utmost naturalness. One may wonder: How can one be natural if one *tries* to be natural? Thus, Brown (and Childs, for that matter) accepted eccentricity, despite Rainer’s goal of neutrality. The Judson choreographers were revolutionary in their search for the supremely ordinary. This examination, however, deliberately made ordinary actions and tasks feel foreign.⁷³ Spectators were not used to attending performances of people in street clothes (or in the nude) eating or reciting abstract monologues. Even today, nearly fifty years after the founding of Judson, we consider postmodern dance to be unusual. Postmodern performance often ventures quite far from dance forms that Western culture deems “normal.” Brown carried the idea of performing the mundane to the next level.

⁶⁹ Roses-Thema, 75.

⁷⁰ Banes, “Brown, Trisha,” 545.

⁷¹ Banes, *Terpsichore*, 89.

⁷² Lisa Kraus, “Flying in a New Galaxy: Trisha Brown at the Paris Opera Ballet,” *Dance Magazine*, April 2005, 38.

⁷³ Banes, *Democracy’s Body*, 105.

She has acknowledged that her movement is too natural to be natural,⁷⁴ explaining, “I don’t like gesture which pulls you into the real world again, because that is a reality we already know.”⁷⁵ By redefining everyday situations, Brown managed to make the ordinary eccentric.

Childs demonstrated eccentricity in her choreography as well, especially when using props. In response to *Carnation*, for instance, Jill Johnston wrote, “Childs stayed close to the facts of the objects, at the same time making a zany abstraction out of their realistic possibilities.”⁷⁶ Although Childs incorporated ordinary items such as curlers, sponges, and a colander, she manipulated them so that the products no longer seemed familiar. While it is easy to believe that everyday objects and actions epitomize normalcy, the Judson artists proved that what is most standard can become strange. Additionally, this extreme amplification of what is regular indicates that Brown and Childs did not say “no to camp,” because, as Sontag states in her definitive essay on the subject, “[Camp] is the love of the exaggerated, the ‘off,’ of things-being-what-they-are-not.”⁷⁷ By overstating the natural or the pedestrian, Brown and Childs said “yes” to both eccentricity and camp.

Thus far, the discussion of style has focused on the appearances of Brown’s and Childs’s choreography. But style also encompasses the expression of content. Although Rainer proclaimed, “No to trash imagery, no to the heroic, and no to the anti-heroic,” Brown and Childs said yes to all. Rainer developed these “no’s” in response to overtly

⁷⁴ Sally Banes, ed., *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything was Possible* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 148.

⁷⁵ Peggy Jarrell Kaplan, *Portraits of Choreographers* (New York: R. Feldman Fine Arts, 1988), 23.

⁷⁶ Jill Johnston, “Modern Dance,” in *The New American Arts*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Collier Books, 1965), 162-93, quoted in Burt, 106.

⁷⁷ Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), 279.

emotional modern dance. Martha Graham's works of the postwar period were rooted in theatrical narratives, filled with heroic characters (such as Jocasta and Clytemnestra), accompanied by symbolic Noguchi designs, and expressed in "modern" musical scores. Brown and Childs surely did not follow in Graham's footsteps, but they did not outright deny these performance practices either.

"Trash imagery" can be interpreted as the apparent representation of content. Brown and Childs have never tried to tell a story or evoke a specific emotional response—on the contrary, they have purposefully made their choreography quite abstract and seemingly free of narrative. However, in this process they have redefined "trash imagery." While Brown and Childs have not depicted fantasy, romance, or death, their choreography has always been conceptually based in performance experimentation and questions about movement.⁷⁸ Chance procedures, improvisational possibilities, Cagean games, mathematical scores, and problems of physics and physicality have driven and continue in part to drive their creative processes. In this way, their avant-garde choreography is not wholly "abstract." Yet, because their work has not been as accessible as modern dance narratives, it has been incorrectly assumed to be devoid of content altogether. This is far from true. Take Brown's *Rulegame 5* (1964) as an example. She explained the instructions of this piece as follows:

In this dance five performers proceed along seven paths demarcated by seven rows of masking tape laid down in an area of 21 by 21 feet. Starting erect, each performer must lower his/her height so that when they reach the seventh path they are at their lowest possible height (possibly on their stomachs). This adjustment should be made at equal intervals on a scale of one to seven. The performer may pass another performer parallel to

⁷⁸ Jean-Morrison Brown, et. al., 184.

themselves only if he/she is crouched lower than those players on the “up” side and higher than those on the “down” side.⁷⁹

Brown’s vision for *Rulegame 5* was revolutionary in concept, and greatly differed from older theatrical plotlines. What made it reminiscent of narrative, though, was that the specific directions were given verbally during the performance. It was typical for Judson dancers to communicate their creative processes in performance to achieve the feel of a “work-in-progress” rather than a formal recital. In the same way that Graham overtly expressed her inner struggles through melodramatic acting, gestures, and stories, Brown and others offered explicit explanations of their complex choreographic systems.

At the same time, Brown and Childs said “yes” to both the heroic and the anti-heroic. Childs once stated, “I always found it very difficult to comprehend emotionalism, the tragic heroes and heroines, all that angst and overwrought narrative: I always thought I’d rather see actors do that.”⁸⁰ Here, Childs refers to the “heroic” in terms of tragedy and theatricality. To avoid the heroic, Rainer said in her manifesto, one must also avoid the anti-heroic—and ideally discover a balance between the two. Thus, to evade the heroic and the anti-heroic, Brown and Childs forged new images of the hero and the anti-hero.

As discussed earlier, Judson welcomed non-dancers in performance. Their ultra-pedestrian movement emitted an air of awkwardness, contrary to the studied composure of trained ballet or modern dancers. These “experimental dancers” wholly embodied the anti-heroic.⁸¹ Brown and Childs further redefined the anti-hero as they redefined the hero. In order to undermine Graham’s heroics, they did away with her theatricality. However, Brown and Childs frequently performed as soloists at Judson and afterward. Even once

⁷⁹ Teicher, 300.

⁸⁰ Chin, 74.

⁸¹ Burt, 93.

they had formed their own companies in the 1970s, they continued to choreograph solos for themselves. In this sense, they established themselves as heroes by convention, even though their solos typically exemplified ordinary motion or hardly differed from the movement of the other dancers. By using their pivotal solos to channel ordinariness and uniformity, Brown and Childs concurrently embraced the anti-heroic. In their effort to redefine the conventional heroic figure of modern dance, Brown and Childs ended up incorporating both heroic and anti-heroic features into their own works.

Clearly, it was not easy to reject style, camp, eccentricity, trash imagery, the heroic, and the anti-heroic as thoroughly as Rainer had advised. Brown and Childs largely failed at eliminating the traditional dance practices singled out by Rainer in the *No Manifesto*. Evidently, certain aspects of performance could not be fully laid aside.

III. No to glamour and transcendence of the star image, No to involvement of performer or spectator, No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer, No to moving or being moved.

By redefining the traditional relationship between audience and performer, Brown and Childs led spectators to become emotionally involved in their work. These choreographers experimented with point of view in order to make the ephemeral permanent and transform theatrical hierarchy.

As discussed above, Judson choreographers revised many performance conventions. The postmodern shift in presentational context, as demonstrated by Childs's *Street Dance*, proved quite stimulating to spectators accustomed to staring at a stage from their assigned seats. Lambert-Beatty explained that *Street Dance* was

primarily “about watching.” It was “an important account of Judson dance that stresse[d] its makers’ pervasive interest in the act of spectatorship itself.”⁸² *Street Dance* was not the only Judson work to transform the spectator’s experience. In her first Judson solo, *Pastime* (1963), Childs moved in a stretch-jersey bag (a comment on Alwin Nikolais and Martha Graham) in profile and facing backward.⁸³ Later, Childs explored contrasting points of view more intently by juxtaposing practically identical phrases. Such subtle choreographic differences invited individual viewers to draw their own connections within the sequencing—or, as Childs called it, “drifting between prediction and speculation.”⁸⁴ The changes in patterns also posed a disparity between spectator and performer, because while the dancer is aware of “the adjustment she is abiding by, the spectator is not.”⁸⁵

By repeating a stream of extremely similar phrases, Childs impressed the choreography on the minds of her audience, thus enhancing its attachment to the work. The Judson choreographers attempted to solidify the fleetingness of dance by means of repetition, stillness, and simultaneous film projection. These methods allowed viewers “to hold the just-past in mind long enough to make connections across the ephemeral art form’s temporal unfurling,” and thus elicited personal emotional responses.⁸⁶

Brown was especially concerned with engaging performers and spectators alike, whether or not they understood her intentions.⁸⁷ One way she achieved this was by

⁸² Nick Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* (London: Palgrave and St. Martin’s Press, 1974), 108, quoted in Lambert-Beatty, 37.

⁸³ Banes, Sally, “Childs, Lucinda,” *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119; Banes, “From Judson to BAM,” 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁶ Lambert-Beatty, 56.

⁸⁷ *Making Dances*.

choreographing with every viewer in mind—by covering the entire “stage” space and offering equal visibility to all.⁸⁸ For *Inside* (1965), she took this performer-spectator relationship to the next level by arranging the chairs in an “inward-facing square” and dancing up against the viewers, as if they were the walls of her studio.⁸⁹ Additionally, in *Yellowbelly* (1969) Brown urged the audience to boo her, and “egged them on to shout louder.”⁹⁰ Without a doubt, this reinterpretation of the separation between performer and spectator was a “yes” to “involvement” and “moving or being moved.”

Perhaps there is some confusion about what Rainer meant by “moving or being moved” in the first place. After all, as mentioned before, Rainer once confessed that she was not sure about the meaning of this statement herself. It is easy to understand the phrase “being moved” as becoming emotionally or kinesthetically engaged (the effect Martha Graham wanted to have on her spectators). However, when one smiles or laughs in reaction to a situation, one has been “moved” as well. Viewed in this light, Brown and Childs definitely touched their audiences. In *Carnation*, for example, Childs humored viewers by commenting on melodramatic performance. First, she made eye contact with the audience, and then she began to cry. While the spectators were sympathizing with her, she suddenly resumed her deadpan expression, revealing that she was merely acting.⁹¹ Childs had a significant impact on her audience, because she manipulated their emotions in an unexpected way. For audiences who attended postmodern dance concerts in the 1960s, emotional responses ranged from pleasure to anxiety, perplexity to disturbance. They were moved in more ways than one.

⁸⁸ Goldberg, “All of the Person’s Person Arriving,” 168.

⁸⁹ Burt, 75.

⁹⁰ Banes, “Brown, Trisha,” 543.

⁹¹ Burt, 107-8.

Part of the emotional effect that Brown and Childs had on their viewers arose from the fact that these two women were charismatic performers. Although Rainer had ruled out glamour or seduction in performance, they simply could not help it. Especially as soloists, they enraptured audiences. While the Judson choreographers attempted to redefine the star image of older dance forms, Brown and Childs— like Rainer herself— emerged as stars. Steve Paxton, another Judson founder, reflected upon Childs’s failed efforts to be submissive in *Pastime*; “[S]he was another glazed performer, but on her it looked fantastic, maybe because she had a mannequin’s face, and no one is used to their impassiveness. Her face simply projected in some way.”⁹² It was Childs’s intentions for a negative presence that made her so captivating as a soloist.⁹³ Not only was she strikingly poised and beautiful, but her voice was alluring as well. On *Street Dance*, Douglas Dunn noted, “This dance remains one of the most mysteriously beautiful events I have seen, perhaps because of the distance and glass-separated soundlessness in which we experienced Lucinda’s miniaturized physical presence, in the same moment with immediacy of her somewhat flattened but sensuous voice on the tape in the room with us.”⁹⁴ Many of Childs’s pieces included monologues, so her speaking roles often contributed to the seductiveness of her performing presence. In *Einstein on the Beach*, she captured audiences the moment she recited her first line. Although she has dropped the use of monologues, her most recent solos, such as *White Raven* (2001) and *Largo*

⁹² Banes, *Democracy’s Body*, 99.

⁹³ Sontag, “For Available Light,” 110.

⁹⁴ Banes, *Democracy’s Body*, 208-9.

(2001) portray the natural star quality that Childs still possesses four decades after her Judson career.⁹⁵

Brown, too, has been a star since her days at Judson. In a review of Brown's first work, *Trillium* (1962), Jill Johnston deemed her "a radiant performer."⁹⁶ In this case, performance quality was mostly based on presence, since Brown's actions consisted primarily of lying down and getting up. Afterward, most of Brown's seductiveness came from her unique body and quality of movement. When performing her solos, she exhibited unusual muscular activity, and tended to "[deflect] the viewer's focus with sequences of movements that ricocheted before ever having been firmly established."⁹⁷ Her dancing was refreshingly quick, complex, and striking. About *If You Couldn't See Me* (1994) (for which Brown wore a dress with a very low cut back), Burt states, "What made performances of this solo seem so intimate was the way the powerfully physical quality of Brown's dancing, revealed through the workings of her back, lured and took over the spectator's attention."⁹⁸ Even at the age of 58, Brown was still able to seduce an audience. In *Accumulation with Talking Plus Watermotor* (1979), Brown combined two earlier pieces; *Accumulation* (1971), in which she matter-of-factly recited an anecdote in between steps, and *Watermotor* (1978), a fast-paced, space-encompassing solo. The confluence of these two works made for a single display of Brown's brilliant stage presence and remarkable movement skill. She simply could not escape her position as a star.

⁹⁵ *Lucinda Childs: A Film*, prod. and dir. Patrick Bensard, 52 min., Lieurac Productions, 2006, videocassette; Lucinda Childs Dance Company, performance at the Joyce Theater, New York, October 11, 2009.

⁹⁶ Banes, *Democracy's Body*, 121.

⁹⁷ Goldberg, "All of the Person's Person Arriving," 155.

⁹⁸ Burt, 162.

While Childs possessed enormous physical beauty and was always immaculately groomed, Brown had a very different look. She was not elegant, and her hair was usually unkempt. However, both women created star presences within their work by mesmerizing spectators with their utterly forceful personas. Brown and Childs completed their opposition to the No Manifesto by saying, “yes to involvement of performer and spectator,” “yes to moving and being moved,” and “yes to the glamour and transcendence of the star image.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is evidence for the claim that Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs did not repudiate the precepts mentioned in Yvonne Rainer’s No Manifesto at any point in their careers. Just because their choreography since the late 1970s appears in certain ways to resemble ballet and modern dance, it does not mean that they returned to the practices that they had set out to abolish. It is even possible that Brown and Childs did not know of the No Manifesto until Banes published it in *Terpsichore in Sneakers* in 1977. Thus, it is unfair and even incorrect to blame Brown and Childs for abandoning principles that they had never intentionally embraced. Further, by breaking down Rainer’s statement into three main categories it becomes clear that even during the Judson years, Brown and Childs actually said “yes” to most of Rainer’s “no’s.” As choreographers, they proved able to revise older dance conventions, reinvigorating them and investing them with new content and forms.

The questionable relationship between Judson Dance Theater and the No Manifesto demonstrates that the written word can be powerful enough to theorize an

entire aesthetic practice, even when that practice contradicts the theory. Banes has managed to keep Rainer and the No Manifesto at the forefront of postmodern dance, though Rainer herself did not always abide by the No Manifesto in her own practice. The Judson choreographers made vital contributions to the worlds of dance and art through pure, creative experimentation. Despite Banes's assertion, Rainer's No Manifesto was considerably less than an all-embracing credo for Judson Dance Theater.

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