

CHOREOGRAPHING DIFFERENCE: BODIES THAT DRAW

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"Dancing on the
edge is the only
place to be."

Trisha Brown

Below and p. 198, 201, 204-5: Trisha Brown, *It's a Draw/ Live Feed*, 2003, Performance at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, March 16, 2003, Courtesy of The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Photo: Kelly & Massa Photography

p. 195: Tony Orrico, *Penwald: 4: unison symmetry standing*, Courtesy of Art Stations: Stary Browar, Poznań.



One of the most renowned and inspirational choreographers and dancers of our time, Trisha Brown revolutionised the landscape of art and dance forever. More than a choreographer, Brown dismantled the boundaries between dance and art, enabling for a more encompassing definition of performance drawing. "I do the same thing in drawing as I do in dance", she has said, "I'm not sure which came first." Using the body as a system, she probed the relationship between drawing as process and drawing as product throughout her career.

In 2003, on a sheet of paper carpeting a vast expanse of floor, Brown improvised a series of large-scale drawings with charcoal, pastel and paper. The entire performance was presented to the audience as a live feed video. *It's a Draw/ Live Feed* as it was called, epitomised Brown's performative work. The drawings are mostly composed of the residual markings of movement, not static prints, translating into signs for where her body once was.

Although the artist passed away in 2007, her legacy and her influence on both the dance and artistic worlds remains unmatched. Echoes of her practice can be found in the work of Tony Orrico. A former dancer at Trisha Brown Company and now a performance artist based in New York, Orrico generates work which meditates on the physicality of the body. Drawing's ability to capture and express



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movement in both a representational and abstract sense makes it an attractive tool for dancers and artists alike. His performances can comprise drawing for up to four continuous hours in a mesmerising display of physical stamina where his body is the nucleus from which all things originate.

Tony Orrico *TALKS BODIES, CIRCLES AND SPACE*

Alice Finney in
conversation with
Tony Orrico

Below, read about Orrico's transition from dancer to visual artist, the relationship between thinking and doing and how we can seek to find liberation in the most uncompromising of structures.

Is your drawing a byproduct of the performance or is the performance merely a way of reaching the end result?

I think about this all the time. I try to keep accountability for the action and the product of the action. I try to acknowledge their difference and the separation between them while maintaining the elements of the performative offering – i.e. knowing that there's an audience. I think about the parameters, the imagery inside of a body doing this event and I separate that from the product. I think separately about the aesthetic of what has been made and what the new relationship/viewership of that is – a gallery space or however it is being presented. They are very reminiscent of each other but that they are not mutually dependent. I try to ensure that the drawings alone have a strong reference to the spatial capacity of a body. When you stand next to one, it's the same size as you but also it's beyond you as a viewer. You can feel the density and the lines and you know that a body, not a machine made it.

You can feel the energy that emanates from them, suggesting that someone has been moving and making them.

Yes and you can see smudging and other impressions from the body. The image itself is not a body but it has such an anatomical presence. The shape and contour of it remind me of our nervous system and networks in the body and the brain.

I read about your collaboration with Michigan Technological University in 2014 where sensors were attached to your brain and body. Can you explain a bit more about the project?

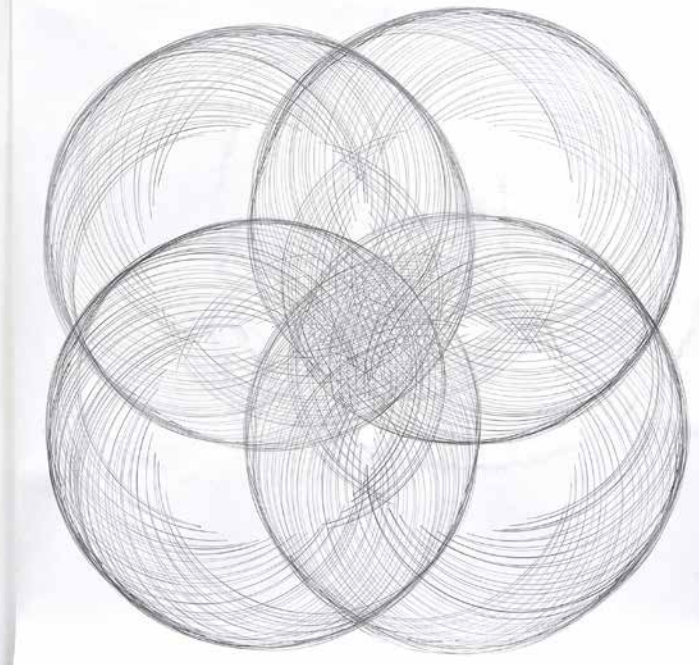
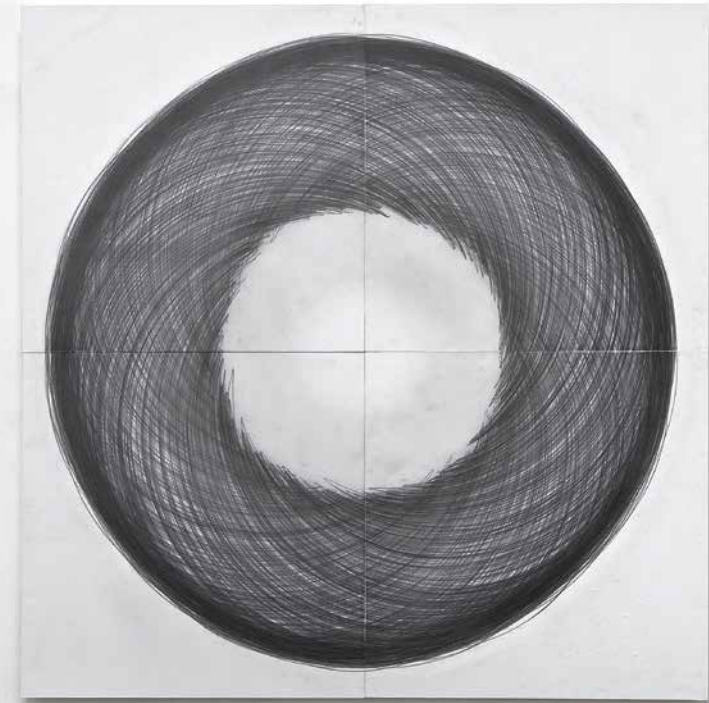
It was a failed experiment but it was really interesting. I was excited because it was going to be the first time I collected data from my movement practice. They dressed me in this uniform and attached coordinate markings to my body. We were using infrared to capture motion. I spent around two hours in that space virtually drawing and then that data was collected but there were lots of gaps. I think my body was blocking motion sensors. They also connected sensors to my brain and were collecting data but something else failed with that.

Oh no.

I know. The best thing that came from it was the immediate graphics the scientist had created during some of my iconic pieces such as my knee circle. A spirograph-like drawing was projected in real time and dimensionalised in the screen. That was really cool. I wondered how that system through my body, I might be able to work more sculpturally.

I am interested in the binary between technology and the body and how out of this you can find artistic expression. For me, this is what is really beautiful about working with systems. In anything that is systemic or inside of a construct, we can try to find our freedom or liberation. Especially from a body perspective. I like to challenge myself to find where the inverse

Penwald: 1: 1 circle (studio impression 1, 4 panels) 2011. Courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery
Penwald: 7: 4 3/4 turns left (studio impression 1) 2011. Courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery



escape is through movement. I wanted to work backwards and find the intention and what motivates a line spatially and to try to use that and build everything around it. To make the arrival the dominant statement. We have so much material and possibility that we can make anything. But to have it come from intention and the body and integrity is so hard.

For sure. I was reading about Soja's Thirdspace theory where you combine the physical space with the mental to create a new creative dimension. This is very much what you seem to be describing now.

I'll look into it.

Was the transition from dancer to visual artist a natural progression? Had you been



thinking about doing this kind of artwork when you were a dancer?

I knew that I wanted to stop dancing but I also knew that I wanted to make movement-based work. I was already a painter, albeit a very untrained one, when I came upon dance. I worked a lot with abstraction but not a lot of intention or clarity in what I was doing. When I started dancing I was 18 and being inside the studio brought so much to life for me and for my painting. I started to feel like I was navigating through lines and experiential painting. It led very naturally into making work that was process-based in relation to dancing. Then I worked for two really amazing dance-makers who had visual art practices: Shen Wei and Trisha Brown. Both are such big influences on me. I also worked with Marina Abramović and it brought so much clarity to the performative space that I was already working in. In a nice way, I stumbled upon this. It was through improvisation that I made my first body circle. I was living in a tiny apartment in Brooklyn, New York. I moved all of my furniture from the living room to the kitchen and rolled out some paper and I remember that feeling in my body and thinking that this is something really important. It was a really simple discovery that reminded me of Trisha's early work – of unlocking or opening doors to new possibility. It then became the basis of all my early work.

How much of your work is improvised now? Is there a balance between improvisation and repetition?

In all of my work, there's a very live spontaneity. It's reactive – reacting to information from the body that I'm sourcing through my senses: sight, ears, sensation. If it's improvised, it's usually contained by a measurement in the body, for example, if I'm standing at the wall and drawing within the span of my arms and filling that space. But the resulting image is very predictable and repeatable and becomes iconic of that system. I think about Trisha and *It's A Draw*, and my experience of it is that it's very improvised – she's in real time discovering potential with drawing. My approach is somewhat opposite; I'm creating a structure where the events are very determined and predictable and the liveliness is the endurance of it.

Tony Orrico, *Penwald: 8: 12 by 12 on knees* (MUNAL, Mexico City, MX) 2012
Photo by Berna J. Klein Rios

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And then the result is the "predictable end".

You could see anything in my series and say, "Oh that's that drawing." In Trisha's work, everything is unique.

Can you answer Trisha Brown's oft-quoted question: Do movement and my thinking have an intimate connection?

I love a good question, especially from someone so familiar. Oh yes. the relationship between mind and body is what I'm attracted to. It's the essence of life. As body practitioners, we can go so deep into that world just like Trisha. I'm so attracted to her eye because she's so detailed and specific. The study and regeneration of her material centres a lot on the thinking behind the doing. In every little, idiosyncratic movement you can identify where the focus, the release, the balance and the centre of the body are. I think it's extremely intimate

and I think that as artists and as people we can bring so much attention to it. Geometrically you can identify the lines and lengths of the body are corresponding to space. I've coined the phrase, "everything but the action itself" and I think it really applies to both her work and mine. The action is the deliverance but there's so much everything else besides it – the homeostasis, the awareness, everything else countering the deliverance of an action. That all-encompassing awareness is so important. I love to identify all the spaces in between.

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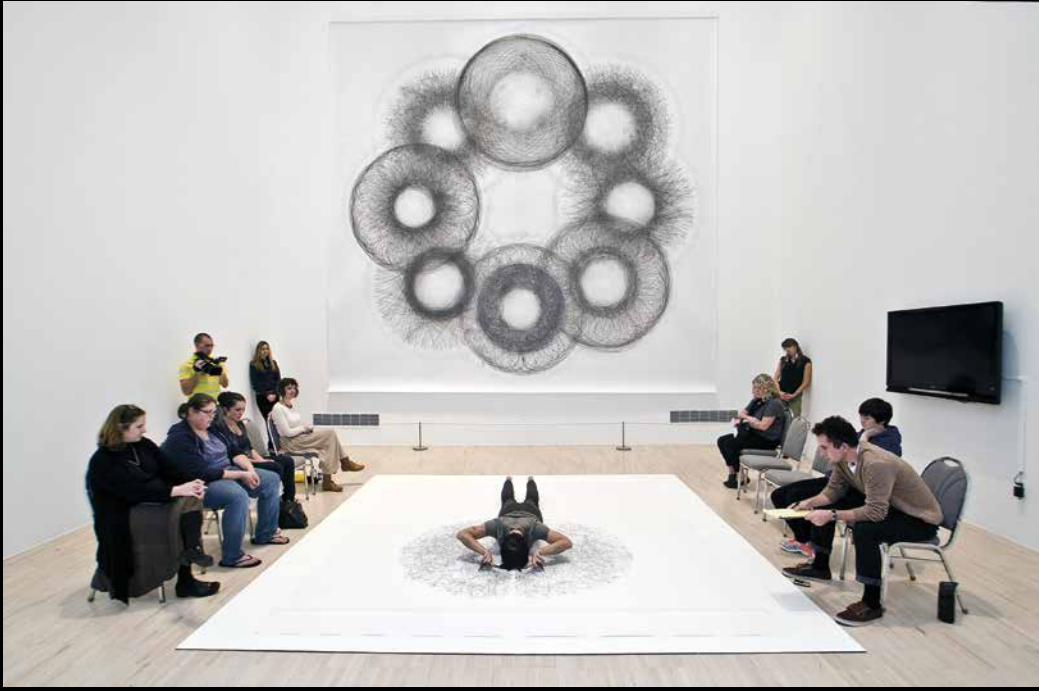
Tony Orrico, *Supporting a continued gesture towards expanding sanctuary*, 2019, Courtesy signs and symbols

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right: Tony Orrico, *A continued gesture towards us*, Courtesy signs and symbols
Trisha Brown, *It's a Draw/Live Feed*, 2008, Performance at Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman



Tony Orrico, [foreground] *Penwald*, 12: *prone to stand* (UB Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY) 2012, [background] *Penwald*: 2: 8 circles: 8 gestures, LP'11, CCCB, Barcelona, 2011

Trisha Brown, *It's a Draw/Live Feed*, 2008. Performance at Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman

