

On the Edges of Music: Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset* and *Twelve Ton Rose*¹

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Allen Fogelsanger

It's not about how it feels to me, it's about *wouldn't this be interesting, wouldn't it be beautiful, wouldn't it be curious if they did this?*²

In the realm of American concert dance, the discussion of dance and music interactions tends to focus on opposites: George Balanchine's ballets to music by Igor Stravinsky versus Merce Cunningham's dances with music of John Cage. In Balanchine's works, which accord with ballet tradition, dance and music are closely related;³ in Cunningham's works, dance and music are independent entities existing simultaneously.⁴ Exploring the area delineated by these two approaches, Trisha Brown's dances evince an eclectic relationship to music that is neither as close as Balanchine's nor as independent as Cunningham's. This essay examines the relationship between dance and music in two of her works: *Set and Reset* (1983), to which composer Laurie Anderson set *Long Time No See*; and *Twelve Ton Rose* (1996), a choreographic treatment of two pieces by Anton Webern.

Cracks in an Eggshell

Trisha Brown's name and choreography do not generally bring to mind musical accompaniment, yet in the last dozen years she has choreographed to Claudio Monteverdi (the opera *L'Orfeo*), Johann Sebastian Bach, Franz Schubert (*Winterreise*), John Cage, Salvatore Sciarianno, jazz by Dave Douglas, and movement-interactive sound by Curtis Bahn.⁵ The delay in her reputation's acquiring an association with music stems from her earlier long tenure making dances in silence. Brown first attracted notice as part of a group of young choreographers, the Judson Dance Theater, exploring the limits of modern dance in Manhattan's Judson Memorial Church in the early 1960s. Developing out of a dance composition course taught by Merce Cunningham accompanist Robert Ellis Dunn, building on ideas of John Cage, the Judson Dance Theater notably rebelled against prevailing practices of dance making, including traditional uses of music.⁶ While Brown has reincorporated music and other accustomed features into her dances,

certain elements of a personal choreographic style continue relatively unchanged.⁷ From the beginning Brown's work has been characterized by a vocabulary that includes unusual, quirky, slippery and improvisational-like movement, set within oftentimes severely restrictive formal schemes. She or her dancers have walked on the sides of buildings,⁸ used the thumb as a primary motif maker,⁹ and engaged in intricate partnering and lifts.¹⁰ Her compositional frameworks have included sequential accumulation (*aababcabcd...*),¹¹ indeterminate works such as one in which one dancer may instruct another on what material to dance,¹² and a piece in which the dancer always has her back to the audience.¹³ Brown's dances are simultaneously cerebral and sensual, challenging and yet full of dry witty humor. As Joyce Morgenroth observes, "her loose-limbed, sequential movements play elusively against her formal explorations."¹⁴

Before 1979, Brown presented her work outside, in museums, or in other non-conventional spaces, largely without music. But then, as Marcia Siegel remarks, "Trisha Brown entered the dance business,"¹⁵ moving to proscenium stages with lighting, scenery, costumes—and music. In new circumstances Brown further developed her movement ideas, which Siegel notes resulted in "a movement style that others could share. Inevitably, it was based on her own highly articulate, fluid dancing."¹⁶ This fluidity perhaps reaches its apogee in *Set and Reset*, a work of continuous motion and amazing interchanges. Each dancer's bouncy, agitated flow of motion feeds into configurations that form and re-form seemingly at random. One of a series of dances that Brown calls her "Unstable Molecular Structure" cycle,¹⁷ *Set and Reset* shows off remarkable partnering, seemingly facile yet sprinkled with lifts requiring perfect coordination.¹⁸ As noted by Arlene Croce, "People would be yanked out of the air as they leaped, or their momentum would be suddenly stopped by a catcher who hadn't noticeably prepared the catch."¹⁹

The arbitrariness of the startling moments contributes to the surprise and wonder that a viewer feels watching the dance, yet it also runs the risk of making *Set and Reset* difficult to grasp. Thomas McEvelley notices that, "There is little sense of beginning, middle, or end, few if any implications of drama."²⁰ The shape of the piece slips from comprehension, even though the moment-to-moment details of the choreography are a constant joy. But beneath the surface there is a structure. Brown

made a very long phrase that circumnavigated the outside edge of the stage, serving as a conveyor belt to deliver duets, trios, and solos into the center of the

stage. All of the dancers were taught the phrase and given the following set of five instructions: 1. Keep it simple. (The clarity issue.) 2. Play with visibility and invisibility. (The privacy issue.) 3. If you don't know what to do, get in line. (Helping out with downtime.) 4. Stay on the outside edge of the stage. (The spatial issue.) 5. Act on instinct. (The wild card.)²¹

Brown based the dance on her dancers' structured extemporizations, creating it out of the collisions and combinations of her fundamental material. Choreographing consisted of the company incrementally advancing the work through short improvisations, each in turn being set and used as the starting point for the next, in an iterative process of assemblage.²² Each dancer had permission to perform any part of Brown's elemental phrase at any time, which contributed to movement recurring throughout the dance.²³ Marianne Goldberg clarifies that "[d]uos, trios, or the entire group initiate phrases that others pick up across stage, then echo or alter unexpectedly, none more central than the other."²⁴ Brown's underlining of phrases by unisons and symmetries makes more perceptible the supple, swingy movement that streams by almost too quickly to be captured by the eye. The resulting subgroupings, such as a unison duet that is part of a trio, help modify and articulate larger groupings of dancers, and create changing pairings that complicate the already unsettled formations on the dance floor. Thus, as McEvelley puts it, "Movements fragment and cross."²⁵ Goldberg describes *Set and Reset* as "composed with an allover, field like composition and no single stage focus."²⁶

Like a late Jackson Pollock painting, *Set and Reset* rewards viewers with an immediate experience of gratifying and lively intensity, but the question remains as to whether we can resolve the mass of action into a picture we can understand, or are satisfied with enjoying its overall effect. The solos, duets, trios, and so on up to sextets, which overlap to varying degrees, last anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes. Sometimes many pass by in quick succession, and sometimes one will last for a while but collide or join with an extra dancer or ensemble. Goldberg argues that the "sections of changing dynamic quality [are] so condensed in time that they [are] enveloped within the monotone of passing activity."²⁷ But Brown sees "marked changes within the dance"²⁸ and repeated viewings bear her out. Her fluctuating configurations effect a compositional structure like a cracked eggshell; the temporal sections diverge widely in size—some very small, some quite large—and they may combine together to

form regions even though there are tiny cracks between them. Additionally, the cracks themselves fluctuate in depth, some being small fractures while others are almost completely broken.

Layered Fragments

The music *Long Time No See* spans almost twenty minutes with an ever-clanging fire bell blended into a modulating mixture of other elements. A seventeen-and-a-half beat percussion loop consisting of synthesized snare and bass drums is occasionally supported by electric bass and keyboard reinforcement. Noises such as cracks, bells, breaking dishes, buzzes, hisses, and beeps pervade the music's textures. And melodic fragments for assorted synthesizer settings and Anderson's distorted voice wander throughout the piece. As the loops are not immediately apparent and the harmony remains static and nonfunctional, it is the diverse combinations of layered elements that distinguish one section of the music from another. The music's shape reflects that of the dance, forming another broken eggshell. This is not surprising given that the music was made to fit the dance.

Anderson worked closely with Brown in composing the music.²⁹ Brown says that

I would send a tape to Laurie every three or four days when we completed a section of the dance. She would put it on her monitor in her sound studio and watch it while she worked with different mixes. She wrote the music with a very tight fit to the detail of the dance, down to a gesture of the wrist, a hand flipping over, a subtlety of a larger movement. There are certain basic things that we agreed upon—that the music does not have to underwrite the dance. If you see it you don't have to hear it too.³⁰

Notice that Brown does not consider a “tight fit” to imply a one to one correspondence between what we see and what we hear. Instead the connections are as ephemeral as the dance and in constant flux. Brown allows that cross-relations between music and dance may be hand in glove, “or not”:

A clang is constant throughout, so is the lyric ‘Long Time No See,’ along with instrumentation and sound effects that fit the dance like a gauntlet to a hand, or not. There are wry correspondences between music and dance, the sound of plates breaking at the moment dancers collide, an embellished reference to the impact, but also to the phrase itself, which was fragmented by the uncanny overlay of gesture and improvisational high jinks now memorized.³¹

Here Brown maps out three sorts of material in the music: that which is constant, that which corresponds directly with simultaneous dance material, and that which refers to the dance movement through having similar qualities such as being fragmented. The music also transforms over time in relation to the progression of the dance, and it is these transformations which gradually emerge upon a closer look at Anderson’s work.

We start with the pulse itself. Almost all reviewers comment on the music's incessant bell ringing away at 232 bpm: “the annoying but hypnotic sound of Laurie Anderson's alarm-bell and Beulah-the-buzzer and newsreel voice-over score,”³² “Anderson's tape loop repeats its insistent dinner-gonging. The compound effect could be maddening but instead it's trance-inducing,”³³ “[t]he ragalike music, its beat marked by the clanging of a fire bell, added to the urgency and breathlessness of the dancing.”³⁴ The clanging begins less than ten seconds after the music starts and continues to the very end. The pulse is too fast for most of us to take as the primary beat; instead it feels like a duple beat at 116 bpm, which is what “beat” will refer to throughout this paper. But is there any higher level metrical organization to the music?

In the quotes above, one reviewer, Jenny Gilbert, calls the music a “tape loop” and she is to some extent correct. There is a seventeen-and-a-half-beat percussion cycle that is present through most of the piece; additionally there is sometimes an equally long bass-and-keyboard-accompaniment cycle. (The keyboard rhythm part always appears with the bass line so that they act as a single unit.) When both the percussion cycle and the bass-and-accompaniment cycle are playing they are always in phase with each other the same way, never placed such that the first beat of one occurs with anything other than the first beat of the other (Example 1). These cycles combine into thirty-five-beat cycles³⁵ that divide audibly (if one listens carefully and counts) most of the work. Furthermore, the thirty-five-beat division extends temporally beyond the areas where the percussion cycle or bass-and-accompaniment cycle are audible to the beginning of the

work (where the opening vocal phrase “Long Time No See” ends on the first downbeat of a cycle) and to the end of the work (where the bell clangs its last duple on, once again, the downbeat of a cycle). The thirty-five-beat cycles fail only twice: a small stretch appears late in the piece from 16:52 to 17:17 where one cycle seems to be pulled apart with twelve additional beats placed inside, and a major break occurs a third of the way through the work, from 6:55 to 8:28, where the thirty-five-beat cycles disappear, replaced by more traditional eight-beat cycles. Thus the cycles divide the dance into four parts: the first part defined by the presence of thirty-five-beat cycles, the second by the presence of eight-beat cycles, the third coinciding with thirty-five-beat cycles again, and after a twelve-beat hitch, the fourth based again on the last run of thirty-five-beat cycles.

Example 1: 35-beat percussion and bass cycle

However, it is doubtful that any audience member is aware of this, except perhaps for noticing a change in texture in part two, for Anderson disguises this rhythmic structure in numerous ways. Musical events often are placed slightly off the pulse, sometimes making the pulse difficult to hear. Additionally, the beat (consisting of two pulses) is ambiguous with regard to which pulse is the downbeat and which the upbeat. The seventeen-and-a-half beat percussion cycles operating in a duple beat context of course tend to favor equally both pulses within a beat. That one pulse is slightly more emphasized than the other is only determinable over a long stretch of music by the occasional entrances of material that place more weight on one pulse than the other. However, from 3:12 to 5:03, the fire bell provides the only sense of pulse, and to determine the beat one has little choice other than to follow one’s feeling that it is far easier to hear the beat being *here* rather than *there*. Elsewhere the fire bell may slightly emphasize the upbeat rather than the downbeat, but other simultaneous material overrides this emphasis and provides reason for hearing the bell as accenting the offbeat.

Even at the level of the cycles themselves there is no or little stress on the beginning or any other point of the cycles. The 35-beat percussion cycle contains almost half a dozen beats of

silence in the middle of each seventeen-and-a-half beat sub cycle, and the length of the pattern and its prolonged rests inhibit the discovery of its regularity. Furthermore Anderson begins her melodies above the percussion at myriad points in the cycle so that little sense of return occurs as the cycle repeats. Hence no feeling of meter is ever established, except in the part of the music with the eight-beat cycle, part two above. The bass-and-accompaniment cycle is similarly ambiguous with the bass seemingly falling on f or g almost randomly and the duration and odd count of the cycle being enough to obscure its consistency unless someone listens for it.

Ultimately it is not the cycle organization that shapes the music, but the music's density and its relationship with the dance. The density is determined by layering, which itself draws the music and dance together. As McEvelley notes, "Anderson's work (*Long Time No See*) shared a certain conceptual ground with Brown's choreography in its structure of layered fragments..."³⁶

Fragments of what? On top of the basic elements of clang, bass drum, snare, bass, and keyboard, are additional ones that roughly divide into three categories that blend into each other: extra percussion; recorded, distorted, or synthesized sounds; and melodic bits and pieces. In the first category are cracks, bumps, woodblocks, bells, and sounds such as dishes falling or breaking and crashes and collisions of glass-like and metallic objects. In the second category are buzzes, winds, things rolling, engines, guitar strings, synthesized hisses, the warning beeps of vehicles backing up, and barely (if that) understood voices. Many of these sounds repeat regularly for a few seconds but usually in loop durations unrelated to the seventeen-and-a-half-beat percussion cycle. Perhaps the most prominent such loop occurs for more than a minute and a half at the end of the work; distorted shouts of what sounds like "Hello! ... Hurryup! ... H---!" repeat approximately every 16 and a quarter beats, a typical instance of material that doesn't fall exactly onto the basic pulse but is temporally "smudged."

The "sounds" category, especially its vocal subcategory, merges into the "melodies" category (the third category above) in that some of the "melodies" consist of distorted and repeated speech, perhaps best exemplified by the title phrase, "Long Time No See." Anderson commences *Long Time No See* by speaking the phrase with a high-degree of sing-songiness, i.e. pitch-content, and she immediately starts distorting it simply through fragmentation and repetition. She also distorts the individual words by raising or lowering their frequencies (electronically) such that they may be used as melodic pitches. Other examples of modified spoken material include samples of processed vocals that sound like "in-in-ino" and "a-mor."

Not all the melodies are voice-based; in fact, most sound like fairly typical keyboard synthesizer settings. The melodic fragments in a given section are limited in range, sometimes to as few as four notes, and vary through small changes in rhythm and permutations of note order (see Example 2). These fragments help define sections of the music through timbre. There is the full bass synth melody, the reedy parallel thirds melody, the panpipes section, and the high fluty fragments.

Example 2a: synth melody 5:30-5:48

Indeed, this mixing of disparate scales is another instance of the assembling and disbanding of materials that provides temporal shape to the music. Instead of the loop cycles, or the harmony, it is the dissimilar combinations of these layered elements that allow one section of music to stand out from another. While the dance fractures into ensembles of dancers, the music breaks up into ensembles of sounds, loops, and melodic fragments. The music and dance divide into parts in their individual ways (see Table 1), but they come together at a number of key points, at least in the most widely available video recording, *Set and Reset: Version I*.³⁷

Fault Lines

Consider again the broken eggshell as model for how *Set and Reset* is put together. What constitutes the pieces of the eggshell? For both dance and music, it is the extremes of density and duration that stand out. Most noticeable are sextets and solos, full music and empty music, and dancer groupings and sound layers of extended duration. But sections such as these may be reached through incremental steps, so that they are difficult to define as sections differentiated from the sections around them. However, there are key points where dance and music make relatively large changes in tandem, creating not so much sections of the work, but fault lines where the eggshell is cracked most deeply.

The musical layer that most contributes to the fault lines is the bass with keyboard accompaniment. When present, it gives the music rhythmic “oomph” that can either energize the visual scene or overpower more subtle rhythm in the dance. Anderson uses this layer three times in the dance, and each time it interacts with the choreography differently. In the first case, the bass line's presence coincides with the temporal edges of a sextet from 5:14 to 5:48. This sextet appears immediately after a long duet that starts at 3:11, two minutes of unison and symmetry occasionally paired with a third dancer in counterpoint. The succession from duet to sextet noticeably transforms the texture of the dance. Preparing this change, the music grows relatively quickly; a number of sound layers rapidly pile up in the fifteen seconds preceding the sextet, culminating in the introduction of the bass and keyboard accompaniment. The end of the danced sextet mirrors the beginning; musical layers disappear as a succeeding trio replaces the foregoing material. Anderson is here matching visual density with musical density, creating a well-defined time region of the dance, a whole piece of the eggshell.

Table 1

Comparison of Structural Designs of Music and Dance in
 Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset, Version 1*
 Music: Laurie Anderson's *Long Time No See*

Min	Music	Dance
0	"Long Time No See" melody ("LTNS")	Sextet 0:00-1:08
1	and low synth melody alternate to 3:01,	various ensembles
2	dings start at 0:08, percussion 0:19-3:12	
3	"Ino" and panpipes start at 3:11 and	Duet 3:12-5:11
4	low synth returns at 4:01, percussion returns at 5:03	
5	bass and keyboard rhythm from 5:14 to 5:48	Sextet 5:14-5:48
6	all but percussion ends at 5:48, percussion continues to 6:48	various ensembles
7	8-count cycles 6:55-8:28, and	
8	woodblocks 7:56-8:40	Duet 7:22-10:13
9	bass+kybrd 8:28-10:11 percussion starts 8:42 melodies/vocals 9:15-10:09	
10	percussion continues with various melodies including	various ensembles
11	Mixolydian parallel third at 12:36 and	
12	"LTNS" 13:36-14:21	"line" sextet 12:22-13:49
13		...decays into quartet 13:49-14:21
14	bass+keyboard begins 14:24 bass+kybrd and 3rds end at 14:50	Trio 14:24-16:11
15	percussion continues to 16:54, high synth melody 15:46-16:39, "inohoot" fragment 16:45-16:49	Solo 16:20-17:00
16	no percussion + "LTNS" 17:03-17:05	
17	percussion 17:12-18:30	various ensembles
18	joined by parallel thirds + "LTNS"	
19	"Hello", dings end 19:23	end 19:23

Prepared somewhat differently and almost entirely via the music, a second climax results not in an emphasized section but in an emphasized break. There is a very long unison dance duet that ends just past the midpoint of *Set and Reset*. Beginning at 7:22 in the middle of the quietest music section with no musical support, the dance duet—over the course of three minutes—stubbornly continues along unperturbed by what amounts to a long musical crescendo as sound layers, including the bass and keyboard accompaniment, accumulate and vary. But most of these layers suddenly disappear just as the duet ends at 10:12, thus exposing and amplifying the rift between two regions of the dance. This rift is further marked by a striking dancer collision that repeats near the very end of the dance, generating an additional structural link.

One more interesting fault line occurs at 14:24 near the three-quarters point of *Set and Reset*. It is the entrance of the longest trio in the dance, succeeding the compositional decay of a sextet where the dancers repeatedly return to a line, center stage and perpendicular to the audience. This “line” sextet has a clear beginning at 12:22 that the music does not acknowledge, and during its two-minute duration the music gathers, not quickly as in the first example, but like the case of the second example where the music slowly thickens over the sextet's course. The trio's entrance creates a choreographic boundary and coincides with the entrance of the music's important bass layer (and its rhythmic accentuation) just as a melody disappears. Here the *entrance* of the bass marks the fault line, while the previous example's accentuation derived from its exit. The trio itself is a prominent movement section that maintains a relatively constant character, but the music drops out thirty seconds into it. So while music and dance do not maintain a constant matrimony during either the sextet or the trio, their joint, abrupt modifications propose a fault line that makes visible the regions on either side. It is because music and dance do *not* generally shift in concert that such coordination becomes significant.

With a cracked eggshell there is no point at which analysis naturally stops. One can always find shallower and shallower breaks, smaller and smaller sections. But this metaphor captures an important aspect of *Set and Reset*: there is not a clear hierarchy of relationships but instead a fragmented continuum of structural levels, each barely distinguishable from its neighbors. However, the situation is somewhat different in *Twelve Ton Rose* because the cracks in the musical plane are sometimes complete: there are separate movements disconnected by silence.

Complementing the Music

Like its music, the dance *Twelve Ton Rose* presents an austere experience far removed from the kinetic environments of *Long Time No See* and *Set and Reset*. Brown choreographed the twenty-five minute *Twelve Ton Rose* to Webern's *Five Movements for string quartet*, Op. 5; and to the three-movement *String Quartet*, Op. 28.³⁸ It must be said that Webern's music is problematical for many listeners because of its dissonance and atonality.³⁹ But a sympathetic response, at least regarding Op. 5, is offered by music theorist Robert Morgan, who writes, "The individual movements [...] each a tiny jewel unlike anything heard before, are intimate expressions of pure lyricism, fleeting musical visions."⁴⁰ The dynamic extremes and energy of the first and third movements are hard for a choreographer to ignore, but the other movements are slow, quiet, and meditative. As for the ascetic and serial Op. 28, in a good performance⁴¹ the tempo changes, rubato, and dynamics give the listener a sense that the music is constantly pausing and re-gathering its energy, and with great intonation even the harshest dissonances attain a sweetness that calls attention to the sounds themselves, bringing Webern very close to entering the world of John Cage and Morton Feldman.

Brown's choreography offers an enigmatic fleetingness not unlike that of Op. 5. As described by Deborah Jowitt, "Brown matches Webern's minimalism--the bursts of sound embedded in silence--with her own form of austerity. Rarely are more than a few dancers onstage at the same time. Sometimes they hover at the edges or step into view, accomplish something, and disappear. They walk, regroup, wait. In a line they rush across the stage, absorbing or disgorging individuals."⁴² Edith Boxberger attributes to Brown the comment that "this music sounds like the way I think when I'm creating movement. ... It's unexpected, it has a dissonance that wavers, is unpredictable."⁴³ Even so, the movement and music are not in parallel (see Table 2 for a basic map). The dance⁴⁴ is divided into movement sections which are not always coextensive with music sections, and movement dynamics are usually contrasting with or unrelated to musical dynamics.

For example, the opening dance section describes a long arc of activity, as one by one dancers periodically enter and exit, their numbers gradually advancing and then slowly receding to nothing. The arc covers most of the first two music movements, and Brown choreographs right through the silence between them, emphasizing the silence by opposing it to a maximal

number of dancers on stage. And while in Op. 5/i the intense music confronts Brown's relatively quiet choreography, the subtle, second musical movement faces more active, lively dancing.

Later on, the choreography to the muted Op. 5/v is often a churning canon. At one point the stage divides into two groups which seem to be reverse trios symmetric about the center point of the stage, and the choreography embodies an almost kaleidoscopic geometry, or, given that the dancers are all in red, an opening and closing rose.⁴⁵ This "rose" sequence corresponds to the only loud point of Op. 5/v.⁴⁶ All this dense, pulsating activity occurs against slow, hushed music.

The symmetry of Brown's choreography in Op. 5/v anticipates the multi-level symmetries grounded in the twelve tone row⁴⁷ of Webern's Op. 28 music, and though Brown does not use serial procedures to choreograph, she pays homage to Webern's serial technique in the pun of her title, *Twelve Ton Rose*. Furthermore, Brown shares certain affinities with Webern's compositional practice. Composer Elliott Carter remarks that "[i]n many cases the row seems to be a kind of secret formula barely audible in the music."⁴⁸ This is exactly what Brown turns to in Op. 28/i: a secret formula to complement the music note by note. Invisibly entwined with the music, the dance quartet during this movement perfectly reciprocates the interplay of rhythm among the musicians. Deborah Jowitt reports that the dancers, "sharing the same steps but each keyed to a different instrument, move only when their instrument falls silent;"⁴⁹ Brown says they move "in the negative spaces of the music."⁵⁰ As she recalls when interviewed by Edith Boxberger, "In opus 28 I made the attempt of executing a phrase alternating with the vocal line. The result is a rigorous involvement with the music that one can't see because to a certain extent it takes place in the shadow of the music."⁵¹

One last example of complementarity is in Op. 28/ii. Divided into three long phrases, each of which corresponds to one section of the music's ABA form, the woman's solo in Op. 28/ii counters the unstable clock-like rhythm in the music with smooth alternations between extreme slowness and speed in the movement. In each section the dance phrase tends to start slowly with continuous acceleration, then gradually slows down to near stillness, though there may be hiccups along the way.

Brown's preference seems to be to contrast with the music, to make invisible and displaced connections, and furthermore to play around the edges of the music, an idea worth exploring in a little more detail, looking at both *Set and Reset* and *Twelve Ton Rose*.

Table 2

Comparison of Structural Designs of Music and Dance in
 Trisha Brown's *Twelve Ton Rose*
 Music: Anton Webern's Op. 5 and Op. 28

Op	Dance
5/i	begins in darkness, audience first sees a duet, dancers enter and exit, but numbers tend to increase to...
	sextet
5/ii	sextet continues, eventually reduces to a duet, stage empty for part of bar 11, finishes with female trio in black
	trio continues, man in red enters
5/iii	man in red solo with women still
	reverse of previous silence
5/iv	trio continues, becomes solo, then duet, finally solo, additional dancers in red appear obscured by wings at bar 12
	last women in black exits, four dancers in red enter
5/v	quartet soon joined by two more in red, sextet continues for almost the entire movement, two dancers briefly exit during bars 22-24, then sextet continues
	transition ends with three men in red and one woman in black in line stage left
28/i	quartet
	transition for quartet to exit and woman in black to enter
28/ii	solo
	soloist swept off by line of dancers, line reenters
28/iii	line drops off and picks up groups of dancers, namely a duet, a trio, and a trio, with each line transition increasing in swirling complexity... ...until swirling off.

Playing with Edges

Before Brown began presenting her work on proscenium stages, she put dances in unconventional spaces; since then she has often put dances unconventionally in conventional spaces, extending the area that the audience must survey. Marianne Goldberg points out that “Brown often places crucial choreography at the stage margins;” and that in *Set and Reset* “Brown plays with the edge of the stage, finding innumerable ways to undermine it as a frame.”⁵² In a live performance of *Set and Reset* the dancers extend the stage whenever they exit because the curtains are translucent—they are still seen by the audience and continue to perform partially concealed.

Likewise, in *Twelve Ton Rose* Brown also subverts the borders of the stage, playing with the wings so they cut motion and bodies partially from audience perspective. Brown half-hides nearly still dancers by placing them so they are dissected by a wing, and she choreographs dancers entering from or exiting to the wings while in unison with a dancer already on or staying on stage—Brown thus implies that the movement continues out of view.

And Brown challenges the constraints of music as well as the constraints of space, questioning the traditional framing property of music. A live performance of *Set and Reset* includes what seems like a separate preceding film projected on a Robert Rauschenberg sculpture. Arlene Croce quips, “[O]ne saw a technologically impressive video installation by Rauschenberg and then one saw a pleasant concert of dance.”⁵³ As Brown describes it, Rauschenberg's structure rises and “[a]n amber light picks up Diane [Madden] 'Walking on the (backstage) Wall,' handheld by four dancers with outstretched arms, her feet to the brick, the crown of her head to the audience.”⁵⁴ It is only after this that the major part of the dance, to Anderson's music, begins; the work *Set and Reset* begins long before the music *Long Time No See* does.

Brown reverses the situation in *Twelve Ton Rose*, starting the music in darkness and not bringing up the lights on the (already moving) dancers until twenty-five seconds later. But Brown retrieves that time from the music by filling all of the silences with dance. As mentioned above, Brown packs choreography into the gap between Op. 5/i and Op. 5/ii. Then, as the dance moves to Op. 5/iii, Brown completely turns the tables on the music and uses the dance to temporally and physically frame the music's third movement as follows. Op. 5/ii ends with three

women dancing in silence; when a man runs on stage they move to the periphery and take still shapes as Op. 5/iii begins. The women are still for the duration of the quick and short Op. 5/iii while the man dances, surprisingly, to the music. Afterwards they move in retrograde back to their previous positions and the man backs off the stage. Op. 5/iii has been symmetrically book ended in time by a movement phrase and its retrograde. The male dancer and his music have been surrounded in space by the female dancers of the silences.

In later inter-movement silences Brown sets up what she calls a “windshield wiper” motif for the last movement.⁵⁵ Dancers are not arranged in lines in *Twelve Ton Rose* until very briefly during Op. 5/v. Then they begin and end Op. 28/i in lines perpendicular to the audience. Finally, after the end of Op. 28/ii the soloist begins to walk off, and is literally swept off her feet by a line of dancers running across stage from right to left. The dancers walk back on to begin the third movement in line, and now the line becomes an important theme in Op. 28/iii, no longer perpendicular to the audience but rotating and rushing around the stage.

At the end of Op. 28, the choreography continues for a few seconds after the music ends. One last time a musical edge is a site for elaboration. Where in *Set and Reset* the fine network of eggshell cracks defined jointly by dance and music helps articulate what Goldberg calls “the monotone of passing activity,”⁵⁶ in *Twelve Ton Rose* the deep and gaping musical edges function in an opposing manner, providing a simple block foundation which Brown complicates, thus increasing the intricacy of the framework that the music provides the dance.

Space for Play

Brown's manipulation of musical edges, her tendency to complement the music, as well as her choices of music in the first place, all bring up the question of how music and dance work together in general. It is possible to place the functioning of music with dance into musicologist Leonard Meyer's psychological framework for music analysis. When we listen to music, we are evaluating how sounds are related and building a model in our minds of what the music is.⁵⁷ The structure of information in the music, which is created by constraints, correlations, and redundancies, heavily influences our evaluation process.⁵⁸ When we recognize a connection, a stylistic marker like a cadence, or an extra-musical reference, we add this information to our mental model and adjust the model to reflect our new understanding. Furthermore, we

extrapolate, seeing implications in our model and forming expectations about upcoming music. Music that creates expectations or goals—where one event implies a succeeding event—is called “linear”⁵⁹ or “teleological.”⁶⁰ One example of linearity is the way in which the leading tone implies the tonic in tonal music. Another example is how in the second time through a repeated section of music there is an implication that the section will likely be repeated to its conclusion. In both examples, composers may fulfill or frustrate expectations.

According to music theorist Jonathan D. Kramer, music where linearity has broken down is called “vertical.”⁶¹ In vertical music listeners abandon their constant evaluation of relationships and can only listen to the sensuousness of sound. Linearity may break down because we are unable to hear many relationships between musical events (as in John Cage's music), or it may break down because the relationships are so predictable that we take them for granted (as can happen in the music of Philip Glass). In the first case, we have aleatoric music: minimal redundancy and randomness. In the second case, we have minimalist music: maximal redundancy and predictability. Most music has both linear and vertical qualities.⁶²

Linearity tends to supersede verticality; this occurs in combinations of text and music, as in opera and song. As Meyer observes, “[T]exts with a narrative message tend to be coupled with highly redundant music so that the story can be easily followed [...] conversely, when music is of prime importance, verbal information tends to be redundant.”⁶³ Similarly, Brown pairs vertical music with complex dance so that the dance can be easily followed.

Certainly *Long Time No See* is highly redundant music, with little or no sense of temporal progression. Its sound layering projects a sense of rising and falling, but the resultant changing density and quality of texture is perhaps the only dimension of this music that occasionally sounds like a goal-oriented movement. Thus *Long Time No See* is more vertical than linear.⁶⁴ Brown appreciates exactly the openness of Anderson's design, saying that “[i]t is possible to be rhythmically complex within that ground base.”⁶⁵

As for the Webern, Op. 5 is highly gestural with phrases chiseled strongly by rhythm, dynamics, and texture. But the five movements differ in degree of linearity; while the first and third movements drive towards their conclusions, the other movements settle in contemplation, contributing much more to mood and atmosphere than to a sense of forward motion, and thus taking on the quality of vertical music. As a result, they provide Brown as much space “to be rhythmically complex” as *Long Time No See*, and her treatment of Op. 5 reflects this. While she

somewhat avoids the first movement, sneaking the dance in behind it, and adopts the traditional framework of the dancer dancing to the music for the third movement, Brown places her most dynamic dancing in the second, fourth, and fifth movements.

Op. 28 is perhaps most interesting of all, because appreciating almost any serial organization demands, at minimum, extremely close attention on the listener's part. But Webern further challenges one's ability to hear his rows through the use of contrapuntal techniques that complicate the ear's analytical endeavor. Michael Russ argues that Webern "constructs canons that may be difficult [...] to perceive" by obscuring them "through changes in contour, texture and instrumental pointillism."⁶⁶ By hiding the secret formula, the Rosetta stone, the composer intimates that one can appreciate his music without necessarily understanding it. For such a listener, no syntactical information from the serial procedures is available, and a perception of randomness is avoided only through apprehending how the dynamics shape each movement. Moreover, as Meyer argues, even if one were to grasp each and every nuance of Webern's scores, his stylistic approach "weakens the listener's sense of goal-directed motion" and has a "tendency toward non-functionalism."⁶⁷ Thus in any event, Op. 28 has at most a weak linearity. Like the slow Op. 5 movements, the Op. 28 movements by no means bar Brown from shaping time as she sees fit. While the choreography tracks the rhythmic contours of the music in the first movement, it detours from them in the second and third.

In *Set and Reset* and *Twelve Ton Rose* Brown uses music with a prominent vertical dimension: minimalist music, slow atmospheric music, and dense polyphonic serial music.⁶⁸ Calling such music decorative acknowledges how it functions with dance when the audience's attention is directed to the visual. The question of whether or not the music's underlying structures can or should be perceived can likewise be asked of Brown's choreography.⁶⁹ As Goldberg points out, "[i]n Brown's earlier work, the audience's job seems to be to decipher the rules of the [choreographic] score. In her later work the scores are so complex they are almost impossible to discern."⁷⁰

The complexity of Brown's scores is matched by the complexity of her relationship with music. Like Balanchine, Brown works primarily with structure; she does not usually work with pulse.⁷¹ Her parallel structures more often complement the music than harmonize with it. As in Cunningham's works, music provides emotional space and duration; the dancers generally do not dance to the music. Brown, however, often acknowledges the music by playing around its edges,

moving fleetingly with and against it. Balanchine and Cunningham maintain a kind of pureness in their treatment of music: the former integrates dance and music as much as possible; the latter renders them as distinct as possible. Brown eclectically varies and blends her creative methods, situating herself between these two twentieth-century innovators, drawing from both and placing them in conversation.

¹ I am grateful to Kathleya Afanador and Joyce Morgenroth for their comments and suggestions in the preparation of this essay, also to Simon Morrison and his editorial assistant for their help in rewriting it for publication.

² Trisha Brown (interviewed by Hendel Teicher), "Dancing and Drawing," in *Trisha Brown: Danse, précis de liberté* (Musées de Marseille - Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998), 22. The emphasis is in the original text.

³ For a detailed overview of Balanchine's use of music, see Stephanie Jordan, *Moving Music: Dialogues with Music in Twentieth-Century Ballet* (London: Dance Books, 2000), 105-85. See also Paul Hodgins, *Relationships between Score and Choreography in Twentieth-Century Dance: Music, Movement and Metaphor* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); and Roger Copeland, "Backlash against Balanchine," *Choreography and Dance* 3:3 (1993): 3-12.

⁴ "[M]ovement and sound [exist] independently of one another; choreography and music [are] both performed in the same space and time, but without affecting (or even acknowledging) one another" (Roger Copeland, "Merce Cunningham and the Politics of Perception" [1979], in *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 310). See the same author's *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 145-64.

⁵ The dances are Monteverdi: *Canto/Pianto* (1997) and *L'Orfeo* (1998), Bach: *M.O.* (1995), Schubert: *Winterreise* (2002), Cage: *Present Tense* (2003), Sciarinno: *Luci Mie Traditrici* (2001) and *Geometry of Quiet* (2002), Douglas: *El Trilogy* (1999-2000), Bahn: *how long does the subject linger on the edge of the volume...* (2005). An overview of all the pieces choreographed through 2001 may be found in the beautifully presented *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961-2001*, ed. Hendel Teicher (Andover: Addison Gallery of American Art/Phillips Academy, 2002). On *Winterreise* and *Geometry of Quiet* see Jenny Gilbert, "From Silence to Schubert," *Dance Now* 12:4 (Winter 2003/04): 44-45, and Marcia B. Siegel, "Making Chaos Visible," *The Hudson Review* 56:1 (Spring 2003): 146-147; for additional perceptive comments on *Winterreise* see Ramsey Burt, "Against Expectations: Trisha Brown and the Avant-Garde," *Dance Research Journal* 37:1 (Summer 2005): 12. On *Present Tense* and *how long does the subject linger on the edge of the volume...* (as well as *Geometry of Quiet*) see Nancy Dalva, "Slip Sliding Away," www.danceviewtimes.com/2005/Spring/02/brown.htm. Curtis Bahn's notes on his "soundworld" for Brown are posted at http://ame.asu.edu/motion/research7_bahn.html.

⁶ On the aims of the rebellion see Yvonne Rainer's "NO Manifesto" in "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called 'Parts of Some Sextets' Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March 1965," *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (Winter 1965): 178. The most comprehensive source for information about the work created at Judson Church is Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

⁷ On Brown's work before she showed on proscenium stages see Siegel, "Making Chaos Visible," 140-144.

⁸ *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970).

⁹ *Accumulation* (1971).

¹⁰ "In *Lateral Pass* (1985), *Newark* (1987), and *Astral Convertible* (1989) ... [t]he entire group became a mechanism to heave individuals airborne, so that partnering became a sort of acrobatic cantilevering as bodies hurled, thrust, swung, and rebounded, building and dispersing architectural forms, constantly changing plane, direction, and dimension" (Marianne Goldberg, "Trisha Brown," in *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, ed. Martha Bremser [London: Routledge, 1999], 40).

¹¹ *Accumulation*.

¹² *Sololos* (1976).

¹³ *If You Couldn't See Me* (1994).

¹⁴ Joyce Morgenroth, *Speaking of Dance: Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 58.

¹⁵ Siegel, "Making Chaos Visible," 144. Brown's move to the theater is chronicled also in Hendel Teicher, "Dance and Art in Dialogue: Introduction to Trisha Brown's Choreographies 1979-2001," in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 90-91.

¹⁶ Siegel, "Making Chaos Visible," 144.

¹⁷ Brown, "How to Make a Modern Dance When the Sky's the Limit," in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 291.

¹⁸ This is somewhat at odds with Brown's description: "It's what you see when you look through a microscope, with atoms moving around in a frenzy and bumping into each other and dropping dead" (Ann Murphy, "Cycles: Trisha Brown in conversation with critic Joan Acocella," www.danceviewtimes.com/2005/Winter/10/brownlec.htm).

¹⁹ Arlene Croce, *Sight Lines* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 147.

²⁰ Thomas McEvelley, "Freeing Dance from the Web," *Artforum* 22:5 (1984): 56.

²¹ Brown, "How to Make a Modern Dance When the Sky's the Limit," 291. Jack Anderson confirms that "[t]he dancers were repeatedly drawn from the wings toward stage centre. But whenever patterns began to crystallize, everyone dispersed again" ("New York Newsletter," *Dancing Times* 74:879 [December 1983]: 207).

²² Brown, in Morgenroth, *Speaking of Dance*, 61.

²³ Brown, in Marianne Goldberg, "Trisha Brown: All of the Person's Person Arriving," *The Drama Review* 30:1 (Spring 1986): 164.

²⁴ Goldberg, "Trisha Brown, U.S. Dance, and Visual Arts: Composing Structure," in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 43.

²⁵ McEvelley, "Freeing Dance from the Web," 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Gilbert's description is somewhat similar: "the stage is held in a kind of perpetuum mobile as the dance focus gradually shifts around the outer edge of the stage" ("From Silence to Schubert," 45).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁸ Quoted by Goldberg, "Trisha Brown: All of the Person's Person Arriving," 164.

²⁹ "I came to rehearsals to watch the early versions of the piece and everybody was falling--fast, slow motion, at odd angles, in sweeping moves. Falling has always interested me on many levels, but I had never tried to make music that fell. As I experimented with this Trisha gave me

constant feedback but not in words, but through her body language” (Laurie Anderson quoted in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 128). Some of Anderson’s *Long Time No See* recurs in her song “Gravity’s Angel,” which appears on her 1984 album *Mister Heartbreak* and her 1986 film *Home of the Brave*. Anderson notes that “‘Gravity’s Angel’ was originally composed for Brown, who told me there was a lot of falling in her dance, so I wrote the music as a series of falling lines” (“Hi, We Need \$1 Million for a Film,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 1986, Section H, p. 1).

³⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 164.

³¹ Brown, “How to Make a Modern Dance,” 292.

³² Paul Parish, “Shy Genius,” www.danceviewtimes.com/2005/Winter/10/brown.htm.

³³ Gilbert, “From Silence to Schubert,” 45.

³⁴ Croce, *Sight Lines*, 147.

³⁵ In “Gravity’s Angel” (see fn. 29) the 17.5-beat cycle is perhaps more important than the 35-beat cycle, given that the refrain (“Send it up/Watch it rise/See it fall/Gravity’s rainbow”) repeats after 17.5 beats. In *Long Time No See* the 35-beat cycle is a more natural unit of analysis.

³⁶ McEvelley, “Freeing Dance from the Web,” 55.

³⁷ *Set and Reset: Version I*, filmed by James Byrne and produced by Susan Dowling (WGBH New Television Workshop and Trisha Brown Company, 1985). The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts holds archival recordings of the October 21, 1983 and October 5, 1996 performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The first performance can be found on *Trisha Brown Company*, the second on *Trisha Brown at 25: Post Modern and Beyond*, Program A. The dance lasts 19:23 in *Set and Reset: Version I*; in the 1983 recording, the dancers exit at 18:41 of the music; in the 1996 recording, they exit at 18:33 as the music fades out.

³⁸ The work at first included a middle section choreographed to Webern’s *Four Pieces for Violin and Piano*, Op. 7. According to the Trisha Brown Company’s former Executive Director LaRue Allen, the section “was dropped for dance rather than music reasons. Trisha felt the piece was tighter without it. But we have performed the duet as a stand-alone piece on occasion when we needed something quick and informal” (June 19, 2000 e-mail to the author).

³⁹ “[Webern’s] music evidently seems to frighten people; at all events it does not make things easy for them. It has not become familiar, or at least not self-evident, even to experienced interpreters. Above all, it is hardly loved--and the blame for this cannot lie only with the fact that it is mostly performed badly and without understanding. It seems only to give genuine pleasure to a very few, and often not even then as music but more as an elitist occasion. Access to this music is therefore certainly not easy” (Regina Busch, “On the Horizontal and Vertical Presentation of Musical Ideas and on Musical Space [I],” *Tempo* 154 [September 1985]: 2-3).

⁴⁰ Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 81. His remarks concern Opp. 5-11.

⁴¹ *Anton Webern: Complete Works - Juilliard String Quartet, London Symphony Orchestra, Pierre Boulez, and Others* (Sony Classical SM3K 45845, 1991, originally CBS Records, 1978).

⁴² Deborah Jowitt, “Without a Net,” *The Village Voice*, October 22, 1996, p. 93.

⁴³ Brown (as interviewed by Edith Boxberger), “The Body Is Not Only Objectivity,” *Ballett International*, February 1997, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Trisha Brown Company, *Twelve Ton Rose*, Brooklyn Academy of Music, October 3, 1996. See the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts archival recording *Trisha Brown at 25: Post Modern and Beyond*, Program B.

⁴⁵ Through most of the dance the women wear black and the men wear red; in the sextet section of Op. 5/v, however, the women also wear red.

⁴⁶ The loudest moment in Op. 5/v comes in m. 19. The “rose” sequence is quietly “pre-echoed” three measures before.

⁴⁷ The row forming the basis for Op. 28 is 0-11-2-1-5-6-3-4-8-7-10-9. The first and the third four-note segments of this row comprise the same intervals; the second four-note segment is an inversion of the third four-note segment. A complete row analysis of Op. 28 is provided by Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 215-22 and 256-61. On Webern’s philosophy of using classical forms, see Regina Busch’s three-part essay “On the Horizontal and Vertical Presentation of Musical Ideas and on Musical Space” *Tempo* 154 (September 1985): 2-10; *Tempo* 156 (March 1986), 7-15; and *Tempo* 157 (June 1986): 21-26.

⁴⁸ Elliott Carter, “To Be a Composer in America” (1953/94), in *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995*, ed. Jonathan W. Bernard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 207.

⁴⁹ Deborah Jowitt, “Stepping Out with Anton Webern,” *Dance Magazine* 70:10 (October 1996): 61.

⁵⁰ Jowitt, “Stepping Out with Anton Webern,” 61.

⁵¹ Brown (as interviewed by Boxberger), “The Body Is Not Only Objectivity,” 25.

⁵² Goldberg, “Trisha Brown, U.S. Dance, and Visual Arts,” 42.

⁵³ Croce, *Sight Lines*, 146.

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 128; see also Brown, “Collaboration: Life and Death in the Aesthetic Zone,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1999), 268-74.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Barbara Adams, “Breaking the Silence,” *The Ithaca Times*, September 23-29, 1999, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Goldberg, “Trisha Brown: All of the Person’s Person Arriving,” 158.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Leonard B. Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ See, for example, James R. Pomerantz and Gregory R. Lockhead, “Perception of Structure: An Overview,” in *The Perception of Structure: Essays in Honor of Wendell R. Garner*, ed. Gregory R. Lockhead and James R. Pomerantz (Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association, 1991).

⁵⁹ See Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988).

⁶⁰ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 71-72.

⁶¹ Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies*, 375-397.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 389.

⁶³ Leonard B. Meyer, “A Universe of Universals” (1998), in *The Spheres of Music: A Gathering of Essays* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 293. Meyer also challenges the assumption “that the ‘natural’ function of music is to parallel and ‘reflect’ the narrative meaning of the text.” Cage and Cunningham challenge this same assumption as it applies to music and dance.

⁶⁴ *Long Time No See* could be deemed an example of what Daniel Albright (*Untwisting the Serpent*, 56-62) calls “eye music.”

⁶⁵ Quoted in Goldberg, “Trisha Brown: All of the Person’s Person Arriving,” 164.

⁶⁶ Michael Russ, review of *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern* by Kathryn Bailey, *Music & Letters* 73:4 (November 1992): 630.

⁶⁷ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 243-44.

⁶⁸ For examples of other choreographers who use minimalist music, see David Koblitiz, “Minimalist Music for Maximum Choreography,” *Dance Magazine* 59:2 (February 1985): 52-55.

⁶⁹ On the listener’s perception of serial music, see Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 267-69.

⁷⁰ Goldberg, “Trisha Brown: All of the Person’s Person Arriving,” 154. Meyer (*Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 269) likewise argues that the structure of a serial work can sometimes be perceived.

⁷¹ On Balanchine’s use of pulse, see Jordan, *Moving Music: Dialogues with Music in Twentieth-Century Ballet*, 112-27.