

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

READ MORE

Tere O'Connor and Anna Drozdowski have written about this project from their informed and particular vantage points.

O'Connor's text draws together his own evolving rumination on "choreographic thinking" and provides animated verbal context for the reasons he accepted this invitation from Headlong Dance Theater.

Each of Drozdowski's complementary and personal statements sheds light on the shifting perspectives and embedded relationships that she had with the participants—herself among them. She slips in between the spaces of an outsider/insider relationship; she writes as she moves, working her way through the explorations that unfolded in the studio and beyond.

"They shared their findings with me
and the not-so-surprising result is
that they all wanted different things."

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING
BY TERE O'CONNOR

"This is truly an example of
needing the help of the group
to learn about yourself..."

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES
BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

"I am both telling a story
and documenting the
story that unfolded."

AN OPEN LETTER ON OBSERVING
BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

How is this useful for me?
For the group? In the world?
What is gratuitous in dance?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI:
SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

Extend the discussion?

[Try it at Home](#) or email info@headlong.org

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

In 2007, Amy Smith, Andrew Simonet, and David Brick, co-artistic directors of Headlong Dance Theater in Philadelphia, invited me to serve as a mentor for a research project they were about to begin. The three choreographers collaborate in the creation and performance of all Headlong's dances and share credit for all of the company's work. For this project they aimed to take stock, to see where they were as a group, and to look forward afresh.

I knew all three of the Headlong directors casually as artists and colleagues for many years before we started. I had admired their work, their collaboration, and their fervent mixing of life and art. I had always supposed we shared a common desire to softly bark at dance—to corner it and find out what it does. Working in this capacity with a mature group of artists, especially artists like these who are so open to a range of potential outcomes, provided me a rare experience. Exciting as it felt, the question of *three* different artists presented me a situation I had to figure out how to approach. In retrospect, I think that one of the biggest thrills of this project was how very intrigued I was by their collaboration; I was, and remain, amazed at their long-term commitment to each other, which forms an integral element of their aesthetic.

For an artist like myself working as a single author, the opportunity to work with longtime collaborative artists seemed excitingly voyeuristic. It was like peering over the neighbor's fence on a hot summer day, wearing wool pants and a turtleneck, as they frolic naked in the pool. This writing reports on our engagement to a degree, but also offers me the occasion to reflect on my own practices and examine how the qualities of choreographic thinking have affected my perception of other artistic endeavors.

Perhaps we engage in choreographic thinking to “de-language” our experience, to dismantle the standardization of behavior wrought by grammar and question it. Does grammar represent a fractal network embodying the effect of emotion on language? Does a comma signal a pause that the individual wants to take or one that the rules of language dictate? Are choreographers sculpting each second of a dance in an attempt to reclaim the freedom that language necessarily robs us of? A choreographer experiences his or her own sense of expressive structure outside of the



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

necessarily robs us of? A choreographer experiences his or her own sense of expressive structure outside of the dictates of language, yet many create and perceive dances in ways that mimic language, with an imbalanced dependence on hieroglyphic or signifying building blocks. Even choreographers who adopt a conceptual approach (which for some constitutes a significant departure from business as usual) locate a concept and then "represent" it through dance.

As a dance process blossoms into multiple areas of investigation the system of construction doesn't just entail reducing ideas down to a single definition, but rather finding ways to look at and harness the interrelatedness of all the elements. Dance leads a journey away from language, not against it, and the experience of watching a work parallels that of making it. For instance, a viewer might have the title of a dance in mind when it starts. Then, humans wriggle about onstage in ways that don't necessarily mimic the title. Immediately the spectator is detached from language as the dance urges her to engage some other sensitivity to absorb it.

Likewise in the process of creating a dance, a singular idea gets lost in a chronology of variables, different iterations of thought whose danced product takes on a life of its own. One idea leads to another, which leads to three more, and so on. One no longer asks the question. "What does it mean?" but rather "What is the nature of the coexistence of all these elements? What do they imply? Does this viral multiplication of ideas pose a problem or reveal a truth? How can I use this as process?"

To develop ways to help other artists reveal the questions underlying their own creative output, I have tried to extract the structures and systems that arise from my own process. Deep observation is key. I have spent much time in other countries where I don't speak the language and have profited greatly from watching and locating the situational communication that is interlaced with language, and I have tried to hone this observational skill.

In addition to developing another layer of perception it allows me to embody a role that I like as an artist, which is that of observer; I have always felt that calling artists "masters" was problematic. The job of seeing is where I feel much

more comfortable. Presently my primary mode for making work consists of watching, waiting, and seeing rather than

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

In addition to developing another layer of perception, choreography is closely related to the act of seeing, which is that of observer; I have always felt that calling artists "masters" was problematic. The job of seeing is where I feel much more comfortable. Presently my primary mode for making work consists of watching, waiting, and seeing rather than crafting. This approach helped me make *Rammed Earth*, my most recent work, and I brought this mode to my experience with Headlong.

I felt that a way to begin the process was for each member of the group to unearth his or her desires about where their art could take them. To this end, one of the most important tools I have discovered over time is something I call *dance meditation*, which serves as a particularly useful tool for the many times during a choreographic process when I need to come to terms with a thousand threads that have been spun. To make more integrated decisions about how to proceed, I need to focus exclusively on the dance, and give myself plenty of time to do so. So very early in the morning I sit in my chair for an hour or so, and try to re-imagine my dance. I try to get past my assumptions about choreographic development to find a deeper set of possibilities. Often at these junctures, in which many avenues of meaning have arisen, an artist may attempt to solidify the material, to solve its puzzles, or to "wrap it up." Most often these decisions are made in adherence to a habit of evaluation I call the *good/bad paradigm*.

Somewhere in our consciousness the desire to produce something "good" trumps the effort to discover a work of art that answers to no one. I developed my dance meditations to battle this tendency, and to listen to myself and trust the outer reaches of my imagination. Although the word "meditation" alludes to the spiritual (and it is, to a degree), my dance meditations are born more out of a need to think about my work as opposed to acting on it. It is impossible to perceive a temporal art form in one's mind as a fixed image, so a time-based rumination is in order.

It felt like the juncture that the Headlong artists were at in their career mirrored the same moment in a dance process. They could continue as they had with their very clearly manifested aesthetic or they could change something. I started them off by asking them to engage in this type of meditation about the state of their creativity, in order to unearth desires or uncover new portals of discovery. They shared their findings with me and the not-so-surprising result is that they all wanted different things: from wanting to make more dancing to wanting to make less; wanting to be able to

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

desires or uncover new portals of discovery. They shared their findings with me and the not-so-surprising result is that they all wanted different things, from wanting to make more dancing to wanting to make less; wanting to be able to make their own decisions; wanting to let go of certain defining elements.

Although it is difficult to imagine how these differences are mediated during the making of a work without the pain of compromise, they have carried out this process of negotiation for many years. So I thought it would be good to extricate each of them from the group; like different strains of thought in a dance, but with a person attached to it. In this way, they could discover their impulses anew. After that, I offered the artists two other simple (yet for me profoundly useful) ideas derived from my process: *purveyors of meaning* and *braiding/unbraiding*.

The coexistence of all the elements in a dance is astoundingly stimulating. Image, structure, reference, tone, shape, musicality, conceptual background, dancers' personalities, skill, venue, to name just a few, are all in play. When I first started choreographing in 1982, I spent some intense time trying to understand how meaning arose in dance, particularly in works that embraced a nonrepresentational modality. I realized that I was receiving potent but indecipherable messages from dances. The critical dance writers of the time (in New York City) were either engaged in re-explaining a dance, or on some kind of treasure hunt for tacit meanings. Many of the writers were striving to answer the question "What is postmodern dance?" an exercise in definition that didn't address my concerns.

During this time I experienced, with dropped jaw, the works of Merce Cunningham. I figured out something while watching one of his Events, in which he rearranged material from many different works to create a new performance: I noticed how often my focus shifted and how my point of view changed as well. Like a camera, I would read the actions of the dancer's bodies; then, I'd suddenly shift my view to take in the whole stage; then, I'd fall into a reverie; then, my eyes focused on a hand; then, I saw Merce Cunningham himself far away in the Armory on Park Avenue in New York City and pondered the enormous chasm between weapons and art. Through this continual switching of perceptions I fell into the weather of his dance, which had the liberating effect of dropping me into another realm. It felt "other" but

at the same time possessed the qualities of thought.
© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

fell into the weather of his dance, which had the liberating effect of dropping me into another realm. It felt "other" but at the same time possessed the qualities of thought.

Through Merce and his magician's hand I learned that the central component of viewing and making dance was the relationship among its elements. What sheds light on what? What do these relationships at the structural or systemic level suggest? The shift of focus from one element to another elicits a kinetic response that feels almost more potent than the kinetics of the movement. Yet it defines a kinetic field that doesn't demand an explanation, one that doesn't mimic musical structures through crescendo or metered rhythm.

Perhaps, I decided, decipherability couldn't serve as the correct lens to measure dance through. What did my job consist of, then, if not to produce monothematic essays like other modern choreographers did? It was this I had to learn: how to assess the relativity of disparate elements. I realized I had to create my own poetic science. Both at the initial phase of the choreographic process and at the final editing moment aspects of the dance competed for inclusion, and it seemed like the multiple elements of a given work were hawking their wares. Did meanings inhere in the shapes of the body or in the costumes or in the concept or somewhere else? Outside the constraints of default choreographic registers, like theme and variation for example, the areas of difference that come into being while making a dance float in the mind, undirected. They do not come with a set of organizing principles.

I have had many experiences where I was concentrating on one element, convinced that it was the point I wanted to follow, when in a moment, like discovering oil, a gush of otherness burst forth and lead me down its seductive path. I created the phrase *purveyors of meaning* to help me understand this. The idea of "purveyors" suggests strands of thought available. This concept represents my attempt to grasp the pinballing experience of time and image in a dance through poetic ideation—using my imagination to create a quantifiable system for creating categories of difference.

Once I locate these areas of difference, I tie them into knots to create different renderings born out of their nature. As a younger artist, I carried this out in very chaotic, tortured ways. I was blind to the fact that I was engaged in dance

realization until I realized that this seemingly directionless experimentation actually composed its subtext. Now I feel

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

younger artist, I carried this out in very chaotic, tortured ways. I was blind to the fact that I was engaged in dance making until I realized that this seemingly directionless experimentation actually composed its substance. Now I feel like a nice old woman slowly braiding together layers of potential meaning, then unbraiding and re-braiding them in a methodical process aimed at discovering the nature of their coexistence. This idea of braiding and unbraiding came to mind as I worked with my Headlong friends on their noble, indeterminate project of transformation. Information born of relational juxtaposition in phrasemaking can be expanded to look at the relationship of one section to another in a dance. Indeed I think this process can serve as a great way to see a body of work. What is this artistic journey getting at by the choices made?

When I am creating a dance I begin by making movement filled with lots of physical action, which quickly generates much material. This puts me in a very intuitive state that lasts for a while and then comes to a gorgeous, screeching halt; then it is time to observe. Through observation and some anemic little rearrangements of things I begin to see something. I attempt not to judge at this point. Patterns are born, patterns on the body or in space. These often prove to be inviting if unimportant elements. Formalisms appear, situational constructions that mirror the rectangularity of architecture or the openness of nature. Then there is the reference layer, which spins itself daily into a bigger and bigger ball of tumbleweed.

There is the level of the dancers' interpretations of the material, which starts to change the work and introduce the *audiencification* of the material. I am in a state of noticing, of naming, of *language-ing* the material and I am still in dialogue with narrative notions. But deeper than that, systems emerge that reveal themselves as so ineluctable that they exert their pressure on the surface of my dance, erasing any consideration for clarity of expression. The time comes when everything becomes horizontal and I make decisions based almost solely on temporal concepts: which element comes in what order, and what does it do to the elements that came before and after. Like an exploded object I've never seen, I put the dance back together based on its felt or somatic essence rather than its visual presence.

Returning to the Headlong artists, after hearing from each of them, I thought let's start there and allow this

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

Returning to the Headlong artists, after hearing from each of them, I thought let's start there and allow this choreographic method to reach into this project. Let's use the desires and tendencies from the dance mediation to take the next step. Let's unbraid the collaboration to locate differences and then re-braid it to find out more. It was like a sanctioned divorce within a marriage. They each worked alone privately on their projects, with three dancers, and it was very interesting to see the three dance products that resulted.

The difference in their output was amazing: Amy's was light-hearted and formally intricate, David's was alternately beefy and silent, and Andrew's had a kind of ironic gravitas. What if one artist had created these three little sections? I thought of how divergent the material I make for one dance often appears to me—it can feel like thirteen people made it. I do not throw away all these parts, I blend them. Editing doesn't have to mean cutting; it can mean recontextualizing the parts to arrive at a final version. Likewise with these three artists much can happen with the beautifully different ideas they have. We talked about the editing process they use and it seemed to me that reaching consensus, a familiar method of mediating differences, did not serve as the most efficacious tool for making dances.

Braiding and unbraiding. For the Headlong artists, these activities entail looking at the different elements they arrived at in relief and seeing what kind of editing system *the elements themselves* suggest. I am so excited to think of this project as an actualization of three distinct choreographic voices that come to one decision through choreographic methodology. The question isn't what is wrong with the system or who will win in the end but rather what characterizes the nature of the system? I think the world could use these concepts for conflict resolution. Instead of looking at differences of opinion look at the nature of their coexistence. Adopt concepts of flow to move forward and away from the stasis of opposition. Look for the system as opposed to its players.

I left Amy, David, and Andrew last winter (2007) and have not yet seen the results of this process. I felt very excited about what I had seen up to that point and soon I will see the next phase. They are still involved in the unbraiding, working on material individually, and I will join them again later this year (2008) to see the re-braiding begin. I thank them for offering me this window into their collaboration, and subsequently a way of reconsidering my own.

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

CHOREOGRAPHIC THINKING: BEYOND VOYEURISM, BEYOND SPOKEN LANGUAGE BY TERE O'CONNOR

Braiding and unbraiding. For the Headlong artists, these activities entail looking at the different elements they arrived at in relief and seeing what kind of editing system *the elements themselves* suggest. I am so excited to think of this project as an actualization of three distinct choreographic voices that come to one decision through choreographic methodology. The question isn't what is wrong with the system or who will win in the end but rather what characterizes the nature of the system? I think the world could use these concepts for conflict resolution. Instead of looking at differences of opinion look at the nature of their coexistence. Adopt concepts of flow to move forward and away from the stasis of opposition. Look for the system as opposed to its players.

I left Amy, David, and Andrew last winter (2007) and have not yet seen the results of this process. I felt very excited about what I had seen up to that point and soon I will see the next phase. They are still involved in the unbraiding, working on material individually, and I will join them again later this year (2008) to see the re-braiding begin. I thank them for offering me this window into their collaboration, and subsequently a way of reconsidering my own. Choreography, mentoring, and teaching have been spinning closer together in my life, creating a generative triangle of interdependence. I have witnessed the creation of many dances through various stages of development, by students and mature choreographers, and I am surprised at the ways in which my dances have become transformed as a result. They are alternative constructions created to coexist with the present social structures we live in. They contribute information from outside of our behavioral default settings.

I have made dances in which I put things together that seemed so unrelated as to be implausible yet when they are finally juxtaposed, I see their unruliness as a rule. Not a hoped-for logic but the one that is there. My view of the world has changed as a result of my work in the illusory laboratory of dance, which has made elements of living that are asymmetrical, haphazard, or convoluted easier to understand. Dances can suggest other, expansive realities and by choreographing I hope to offer something into the circle of voices. This project exemplified the ways in which my good friend choreography can teach us. In dance making, as in nature, one must be quiet and wait to absorb its blunt, unassailable truths.



READ MORE:



TERE'S BIO

ELSEWHERE:



TERE O'CONNOR DANCE



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

It-ness and Three-ness

The goals in this project seemed simple and humble—Headlong Dance Theater co-directors David Brick, Andrew Simonet, and Amy Smith wanted to recharge the way that they had been thinking about movement with the help of another canny maker of dances. They launched eagerly into discussion, dancing, and more discussion with Tere O'Connor in the fall of 2007.

Tere's gentle insistence that in order to collaborate you must first know your own voice—and feel that you can run with it—was the unexpected permission the co-directors needed. Our work became about learning new tools and language, doing so both independently and as a group, and bringing to the surface much that had been left unsaid.

Underneath new methods for choreographic creation and evaluation was a three-pronged investigation into Headlong history that raised questions about the collaborative environment. Tere's lens made audible, for me, some of the silent (and silenced) structures in the Headlong process. This is, I think, the "it-ness" of the first phase of this research: the learning of a new analytical language, the subsequent unearthing of pattern and invisible habit, and the inevitable calling into question of the co-director relationship. It was alternately a liberating and angst-filled negotiation, arrived at late in the game because working alone in an extended way had never been seriously considered before.

In the spirit of studio work, trying not to get swept away by topical information, I've written and rewritten, falling down the rabbit hole again and again with new starting and ending points. This essay attempts to follow Tere's "lines of research" rehearsal process. Instead of summarizing the tangible elements, I have tried to let the content of my writing be led by the "it-ness" of what I've seen. I aspired, as the group did, to let the work develop and demonstrate to me what it is rather than having a preconceived notion of what it would become.

No to congratulation

Upon agreeing to do this work—to be our guide, our sage—our *Terepist* was wary of opening the doors wide at the onset. We spent considerable time in rehearsal and discussion prior to the dancers joining the process. Tere



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

onset. We spent considerable time in rehearsal and discussion prior to the dancers joining the process. Tere recognized, presciently, that the artistic marriage of these three individuals, initiated in college and weathered over the past fifteen years, was so intrinsic to their idea of dance-making that they had not given themselves time to develop individual bodies of work. There hadn't been time to know what that work might look or feel like away from each other, for themselves or for their peers.

Most decisions in Headlong's artistic life have been mitigated, weighed, strategized, silenced, or advocated for in the presence of at least two other people. What if, Tere posited, we used his practice to develop our skills of analysis and evaluation as well as encourage a singular practice—and worry about putting their three pieces back together later? Tere twisted no arms; Headlong was happy to go along with his proposition. He has earned this easy reverence by staying rigorously engaged as a creator of dance past middle age when the desire for stability paralyzes many choreographers or sends them to the academy for health insurance and a regular paycheck. His incisive sense of humor, in his work and in person, didn't hurt.

Tere holds the bar high. He asks if it is possible to put away your aspirations for congratulation in making a dance. Can you stop cutting out the bits that are boring in favor of the thing that is sexy or technically demanding—all based on assumptions about what the audience will favor?

Headlong prizes making work that is rigorous but not impenetrable for audiences, both in form and content. And in the price of admission, which is often free. Audience is always considered, though not necessarily catered to, in their work. Their outreach effort is growing an audience for dance in Philadelphia by giving it away—they pass out the milk to people at First Friday and encourage those interested (or confused) to return each month. The respect between the four choreographers is mutual, though Tere could never fathom collaborating and the co-directors would have a hard time going it alone in the long run. Yet this dalliance into sole proprietorship has breathed new life into a routine way of working.

"Now let's talk about this humor thing." Tere opened at the first workshop with the whole group of ten—three co-
© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

"Now let's talk about this humor thing," Tere opened at the first workshop with the whole group of ten—three co-directors, five dancers, and me. There is a Headlong "brand" of dances recognized by their supporters—not that any look the same or share a specific movement vocabulary. Rather they all possess an ease of use on the part of the audience, coupled with a brainy and irreverent flavor that simultaneously honors and undercuts their formalist concerns. Tere asked everyone to strip that away—to not rely on the narrative or humor, the witty bit of text or desire to make something "useful" or reflective of our times.

Headlong has been applauded for using these well-worn devices that are part of their value system of creating inroads to dance for multiple viewers. Yet when all that is comfortable is out of reach you unlearn things that are deeply embedded in your behavior—creative or otherwise—and become a beginner. Tere is plain about it: the ability to wink at the audience in gesture is simply their easy out. So, he instructs, no more of it, not intentionally, and not in an effort to make things accessible. Excellence and accessibility are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Andrew notes, though, that "some people do scientific research and publish in academic journals. Other people are meant to be journalists and translate to the general public." I wonder how tensions over the value of considering the audience will unfold across this project.

Tere uses a process that strives to identify and analyze work rather than evaluate it on its merits. Fundamentally, for him, this is about structure and the art of choreography, of *constructing* dances. This means that there are not many questions, but a few big ones: What is a particular dance made of? What is going on in my dance? What is at play with the viewer? We try to validate or explain things away with language prematurely; instead, we rely on the body and trust the answers will be found there.

In the vein of art theorist John Berger, we are finding new ways of seeing, we are retraining our eyes. We invite questions, but don't try to justify retroactively what we *think* the questions are. Tere asked us to identify what is actually going on with each dance in contrast to what will be perceived through the lens of dance history. He encourages making bad or mediocre work that is true to the interests of the choreographer rather than holding onto the

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

encourages making bad or mediocre work that is true to the interests of the choreographer rather than holding onto the hottest new move. Headlong is good with these ideas; they are not hung up on looking good. Though it has been ages since they've made solo work or worked independently of dancers, they happily falls in.

Company, collaboration, capitalism

Shortly before starting this process, I told Headlong that I was convinced that they had forgotten how to get along. The generally accepted family dynamic seemed to be getting in the way as people anticipated or executed patterned behavior. Kindly, they kept paying me after this sucker-punch to their system. With some distance now, I'll revise to say that the level of comfort that the co-directors have with disagreement is higher than mine; as founding artists they are committed in a unique way. And my definition of collaboration wasn't the appropriate litmus.

The strategies David, Andrew, and Amy have developed for determining when and how to raise or respond to conflict are in service to the larger goal of continuing as a company. Their commitment to longevity and willingness to constantly negotiate their three-legged career as artists as well as friends is astounding. They actively practice resenting less and including more. In this research, my task was to try to see clearly as the most removed insider: to document. Tere's process led me past the surface to the bones holding the company together. The co-directors set out to learn new ways of working in the studio. I saw them learn about themselves.

Headlong's collaboration has weathered well due to their investment in each other and constant reimagining of how they work together over time and with each dance work. The desire to sustain a shared creative life demands a capacity to identify and invent methods for working together. Sometimes that has meant an equal distribution of time, authority, and authorship in the studio. There are many other configurations. It has also taken the shape of singular leadership when one director takes the reins of a particular work with the support of the others. Tere gave them blanket permission to separate from each other, virtually necessitating individual interest and hierarchy in an environment where such concepts have held marginal value.



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

How can each member hold equal part in the company structure, equal time for investigation, and equal access to its resources? Can you look at this distribution quantitatively or qualitatively over the course of one project? Or must you take the aggregate of a career together and amortize the results over time? Collaboration can occasionally be a four-letter word.

The number three is a complex grouping, both choreographically and in communities. If two are in agreement, one is left out. If all three are in agreement, the ecosystem functions well. Remove one leg of a stool, however, and the structure cannot bear weight. A tricycle is stable, but less quick or agile than a bike. Early on they explained to me the Seven Votes system that they occasionally used when at an impasse in making an administrative decision. In it, each director has seven points that they can award among the various opportunities or choices on the table. It is a wager; each decides their allocation based on their personal opinion and what they expect their peers to do. It is always a last resort, and one never arrived at if anyone has extraordinarily strong feelings about a particular choice.

Choosing your battles and going to battle for your choice can mean that collaboration and compromise come hand in hand. Coming to consensus doesn't always make for good logic, and certainly it isn't the most efficient option. Asking what the work needs, rather than what you need—your ego, your stomach, your choreography—leads people back on track and they are able to return less wounded; but not always. And it isn't always best to simply let the “needs” of the work drive the working relationship. Each person defends decisions, with varied degrees of grace and efficacy, always considering the potential reaction, the anticipated roadblock, and the way that the group may react. Isn't it a matter of knowing the community in which you work and them knowing you in return? Yet this knowing is a double-edged sword of expectation and anticipation.

Andrew defines blissful collaboration as one where these criteria are met:

The right moment;

The right project;

The right amount of time and resource;

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

Andrew defines blissful collaboration as one where these criteria are met:

- The right moment;
- The right project;
- The right amount of time and resource;
- The right amount of artistic satisfaction among all parties.

In the absence of these idyllic conditions, he questions whether the group should always be together, if the structure currently in place is effective, and whether this structure supports an ease in decision-making.

Andrew's desire for a structure that allows people to run with what and whom they are interested in is Amy's definition of a collective, something she is distinctly uninterested in. Their connotation is different. Amy values the opportunity to continue making dances and learning in community with David and Andrew, especially in this choreographic context. David is most excited by the opportunity to make unmitigated decisions and support the same in his colleagues. Self-admittedly, he is the co-director most known for blatantly ignoring all parameters and skipping assignments. Yet, the ease and freedom, which the work with Tere afforded him, does not supersede his desire to remain part of the "we of us."

Amy recalled for me, vividly, the early 1990s when the company first found its legs in Philadelphia and the trio both lived and worked together. The slippage between work and life was frequent; dinners in the loft could slide into ad hoc rehearsals. Those accidental opportunities have evaporated, with families and schedules and a larger crew of dancers to organize and care for. Just as they find a rhythm that seems to work, there is a new dancer, new baby, or new project that asks them to reconsider their cooperation. But cooperation is too light a word. They are not simply *operating* together; they are *laboring* as a family, committed to the long haul.

The co-directors strive to parent the new dances they are nurturing, letting them grow independently. Tere encourages advising the dances, protecting them, and keeping them safe while also letting them run wild down a path that feels



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

The co-directors strive to parent the new dances they are nurturing, letting them grow independently. Tere encourages advising the dances, protecting them, and keeping them safe while also letting them run wild down a path that feels necessary. This process has let the dances grow without deciding at the beginning what the dance should be because of something the marketing or development people might need six months out.

The current distribution system for dance in the United States fits uneasily with the artist's need for creative flexibility. Both the business of dance and creative collaboration can subvert the process that permits artistic maturity to unfold naturally. An artist's flexibility is limited by needing to know more about the work early on than is often possible. There is, eventually, the need to sell the art product to someone—even within the small economic scale in which experimental dance exists. Coupled with collaboration (our need to work together toward this goal), individual artistic practice can be effaced. We take this as part of the job; art-making does not exist in a social or economic vacuum.

Andrew needs to know what the next grant application project will be about. How can David develop effective and evocative language to pass along to a producer? Amy wonders what the dance will cost with three dancers or eight. Can these answers be made without actually knowing what the piece will be six months down the road? Tere hasn't solved these concerns; he shares them, certainly, but in this project we have shelved them as we focus on process rather than product.

Dancing in the Venn diagram

Tere asked each co-director to find a personal line of choreographic research. They moved quickly from leaning on each other to standing at the front of the room, left alone to direct the dancers. This format, or its implications, wasn't clear at the onset as we drove into the dark. There was some consternation in the rehearsal room when it became obvious that the company would continue operating as three monarchies.

The dancers on this project have been working with Headlong from as little as two to as many as twelve years. They are a crew both skilled at moving and making dances, and familiar with multiplicity in leadership. They responded to



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

are a crew both skilled at moving and making dances, and familiar with multiplicity in leadership. They responded to the shift with generosity and occasional relief: "It was nice to be able to just be a dancer," one commented. "Practicing those skills of digesting and repeating and not having to worry about the responsibility of making material was refreshing."

In this project the dancers became doppelgangers for the co-directors' brains; their participation in this process as bodies for the co-directors was paramount. The shared language and skills the dancer-group acquired resonated directly into their choreographic practices as well. They were asked to take on assignments and articulate an individual vision. Working separately, the co-directors viewed the work of their peers in a distilled form.

So intrinsic are their shared aesthetic interests and compositional preferences that I saw the co-directors occasionally unable to identify their own affinities. The dancers concur, sitting next to me in the corner: "Oh yeah, that's an Amy move." "David's really into this right now." Or "Andrew just learned how much he is about rhythm." Most often the dancers intuited these revelations before the directors understood them, too close to the eye of the storm.

The co-directors are now learning to collaborate with the dancers in a new way, exposing more of their individual selves in the process. This, in turn, allows the dancers to deepen their practice and render themselves more vulnerable in the studio. The group is small; the dancers cannot hide behind the group, nor can the directors rely on their three-ness. In this venture the effort resulted in work being named differently—Amy's Dance, for instance, not Headlong's. This small semantic difference was huge in a company that has historically shared credit for all work.

The intense individual work that Tere has triggered raises questions about ego, authorship, and comfort. Even though this work was studio based and undertaken with a thoughtful and trusting group, this inevitable vulnerability crept into the process. For Tere, this struggle should become part of the piece. Rather than avoid or ignore anything uncomfortable, it should be included as content.

We are part of a field that functions as a community nearly all of the time. We learn to dance in groups and learn to



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

We are part of a field that functions as a community nearly all of the time. We learn to dance in groups and learn to make dances in the company of other bodies and on other bodies. Few come up alone through their training, education, or experience. Yet individual struggle, competition, and striving to get ahead in dance are privileged in dance in a way that feels foreign to Headlong, who laud the successes of friends. The co-directors like each other outside of the studio, and recognize the need for social time even if they end up talking shop through most of it.

Headlong does not simply equal the sum of its three co-directors. David extends the Headlong label into the family of dancers they bring aboard for each new work. Amy most often describes the place where Headlong exists as the overlap in the Venn diagram where their individual and disparate interests reside. As Andrew puts it, "If we are each over here," he says, gesturing three times in front of him, drawing a circle around his group, "Headlong is over here," gesturing next to his head. Their challenge into the future is to avoid preemptive patterning in studio and other practices. This requires an intense flexibility, a capacity to revise an opinion and support colleagues' efforts, and an astute knowledge of how and when to advocate.

Headlong into the future

The final workshop days proved challenging as the co-directors weaved together their individual lines of research for the first time. Collaborating this late in the game is not a method they've tried before. In attempting to put aside an early consensus model, the co-directors found frustration with this new approach. Each individual is invested in his or her section and marrying the ideas is more complicated than marrying the ketchup. It is easy to concede or throw away a nascent idea when the land of agreement requires little traveling distance. It is difficult to conceive of what the collaborative moment might look like when several minutes of individual material are brought together.

Tere's techniques have been built on one person and one creative practice, which involve considerably less negotiation—even for someone who describes his process as often feeling like multiple people. With his own work, Tere is the outside eye, the auteur. He has developed tools that are of the individual. He can't possibly solve Headlong's problems, and proposes no advice or system at this juncture past the instruction to "try it." Trying is his panacea for too

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

DISLODGING DANCE PRACTICES BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

collaborative moment might look like when several minutes of individual material are brought together.

Tere's techniques have been built on one person and one creative practice, which involve considerably less negotiation—even for someone who describes his process as often feeling like multiple people. With his own work, Tere is the outside eye, the auteur. He has developed tools that are of the individual. He can't possibly solve Headlong's problems, and proposes no advice or system at this juncture past the instruction to "try it." Trying is his panacea for too much talking.

The end of studio inquiry comes far too soon for everyone; the stages of unbraiding and rebraiding haven't yet been fully explored. Tere asks what they'd like to do for the showing, and they appear a bit directionless as a threesome. Is this due to working apart, to inertia, to fear that coming back together will evoke the same collaborative pressures that have been temporarily put aside? Maybe they had hoped that at this moment they would receive more guidance from the guru, but he isn't getting involved. He chooses to remain a spectator. Slowly they crafted a plan to show and discuss elements of the process, each offering up material for the Grand Mashup with each co-director aspiring to show a disaffected attitude. Suddenly, though the space is informal, the showing has become a performance.

As the work continues into 2008 and beyond, the co-directors will return to their individual experiments, creating separately from each other for a prolonged period yet sharing the same group dancers. They'll use this experience to launch into a fourth work. The anxiety about the return to working together after so much time apart is thick. It might not work; at the least it will require more research and learning to put things back together after their personal laboratories come to a close.

This choreographic inquiry exposed the evolution of a company culture by asking a simple question: How can you do it alone? We've learned a new lexicon for making and talking about dances, but haven't yet developed the language that changes the negotiation as Headlong's work continues. Tere has given the dancers and co-directors the gift of his process, but it is the company's work to continue their three-legged race amidst an ever-changing terrain.



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO



AN OPEN LETTER
ON OBSERVING



SELECTED LOG NOTES
2007-2008

ELSEWHERE:



DOWNLOAD THIS ESSAY
AS A PDF FILE

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

AN OPEN LETTER ON OBSERVING BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

I am not a trained ethnographer. I'm also not a diary keeper, videographer, or website builder. Yet these things have been good to practice as part of collecting, culling, and keeping track of Headlong's project with Tere O'Connor. I have spent considerable time following dance communities—blending into the background, sitting in the corner, being an open shoulder. I am someone who observes much, asks questions occasionally, and takes notes unapologetically.

At Headlong my position existed as the person behind the desk who schedules and organizes and comes into the studio to eat lunch and see what the creative element is looking like in a particular week. With this project, I have been in the studio a lot, and in a position that is close but slightly outside the eye of the creative storm—the co-directors trusting that I'll adequately document and comment on what develops within. Why?

I asked myself this question often. I think the reason I entered the studio with this project was to make the experience useful: to me, for the group, and in the world. I set myself a tall order. I had expressed an interest in writing, and the co-directors were aware that I was a bit bored and, practically, it would be sad to let whatever develops go by without some attempt to catalogue it.

The audience may be marginal in this project, but the work has magnitude. The opportunity to learn about the co-directors first hand as artists, to understand the company they keep, and in the process to connect dots that had previously been floating unanchored was truly great. I saw patterns in the studio that were familiar, and power dynamics that were new.

My charge was to see; my hope was to do it well and “true.”

So there I was, in the studio in a major way, watching a research project that is small and intimate and scary for everyone—though they all put on their stiff lips and gleefully launched in with a lot of laughter. This inquiry represents fifteen years of collaboration in many forms and also a nexus of dissatisfaction (not negativity) with it that Tere read, plain as day, and insisted that they stop: stop trying to meet in the middle or get behind something or someone and instead run with the voice that was personal and being smothered at the back of each of their brains. My watching

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

AN OPEN LETTER ON OBSERVING BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

plain as day, and insisted that they stop: stop trying to meet in the middle or get behind something or someone and instead run with the voice that was personal and being smothered at the back of each of their brains. My watching continued outside of the studio too, as the work and conversation didn't stop with the scheduled work hours.

My preference in the beginning was to be an embedded as well as embodied ethnographer—to get into the action in both a physical and practical way. It became clear early on, however, that this simply was not an option. Partly because my history with Headlong is specific and relearning a relationship takes time. But my hope in this regard was even more so unattainable because this work is so fragile. The cameras and notebooks and occasional visitors at rehearsal were a lot to acclimate to—even in a company generally comfortable with and transparent about their process.

In preparing to write, I've reviewed all of the footage and listened to the tapes and conducted many interviews. I've tried to find a comfortable position within the project and with some distance away from it as well. I am both telling a story and documenting the story as it unfolded. Tere's insistence that dance exists as its own art form, without the need for language as translation, sits heavily on my shoulder. Is it even possible to encapsulate a year of moving and thinking in words?

I've labeled all of the media clips with titles, some functional and some descriptive. This choice was made despite our conversations as a group about the limitations of entering into viewing dance through a verbal portal, and how language disproportionately influences what you see. In Tere's world the clips might have been plainly indexed with numbers to reinforce his position that you see what you see. I couldn't resist, however: in Headlong's world things are often named. But I've done so mostly by taking words from the directors in describing particular portions of their dances.

They asked me along for the ride and I found a cozy spot from which to keep track of what happened as they—the co-directors—and we—the dancers and I—jumped into *Terepy* together. I aspired toward invisibility, but became a normal part of the research environment—not quite a fly on the wall but not a mosquito either. I've tried to cultivate an

understanding that isn't myopic. This means, of course, that I experience my participation predominantly on intellectual

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

AN OPEN LETTER ON OBSERVING BY ANNA DROZDOWSKI

conversations as a group about the limitations of entering into viewing dance through a verbal portal, and how language disproportionately influences what you see. In Tere's world the clips might have been plainly indexed with numbers to reinforce his position that you see what you see. I couldn't resist, however: in Headlong's world things are often named. But I've done so mostly by taking words from the directors in describing particular portions of their dances.

They asked me along for the ride and I found a cozy spot from which to keep track of what happened as they—the co-directors—and we—the dancers and I—jumped into *Terepy* together. I aspired toward invisibility, but became a normal part of the research environment—not quite a fly on the wall but not a mosquito either. I've tried to cultivate an understanding that isn't myopic. This means, of course, that I experience my participation predominantly on intellectual and emotional levels—different from a physical understanding of their process, even as I aspire toward kinesthetic sympathy.

The more I learn about cultural anthropology the easier it is to consider the culture that develops around the thoughts and practices of specific dance genres. This type of spectator dramaturgy can be considered a bedfellow of the observer's paradox. What you have is my retelling of an experience that is multiple and many-dimensional and different from experiencing still images or video. Despite this inevitable humanity (a humanity always embraced at Headlong) I have been the viewer with the widest angle on this project.

Tere began with the quickly liberating process of asking each part of the three-legged beast to run independently. They ran amok, and first needed to find lost legs and learn how to use them again in the absence of a carefully crafted relational ecosystem. And they learned to like this separation. And this worried them, to find such joy alone in a company where togetherness is privileged. As they continue to work, both together and separately, I'll wait to see what happens with the Tere Cyclops and the Headlong Hydra.

Anna Drozdowski



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

14 September 2007, directors' conversation

We are sitting in Andrew's kitchen in September, eating Indian food and getting distracted by his dog, his baby, and my futzing with the audio recorder, an unexpected and goofy guest at the table. Without much mystery or pomp and circumstance, our first conversation with Tere begins as each of the co-directors shares their hopes about this process. The train of thought circles and divides and spirals back around itself, bouncing from the work that each company has shown as part of the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival to old colleagues, thoughts about our community and an ease about this mentoring process that feels as if it could go anywhere and that doesn't yet feel scary.

Tere describes his attempts at having an editing process that isn't a stopping place or simply one that removes all the "bad" stuff and favors the thing that might get you a Bessie. He is candid about his own participation in this process, citing *Edward Scissorhands* and cancer in the same breath while explaining how the politics of keeping/cutting out in dance represent the way that our culture privileges the good, the young, the healthy and sexy. We nod in agreement; this is a man who is speaking our language and unhurriedly indicating that our values are shared artistically and socially. If only he were a vegetarian we would adopt him immediately into our tribe.

The co-directors sketch for him what nearly two decades of working together feels like: "In our collaboration we often name the baby early," says Andrew, "it is a practical stop-gap measure and a way of getting us all on the same page or at least running in the same direction. But that often means that sections or concepts that aren't topical or directly related to what we've decided to work on get axed early in the process without time to develop."

Everyone is speaking quickly, getting their words in around the edges. We're inspired to find someone who shares an excitement and deep love for experimental performance and has made a sustainable life in the field. Endurance impresses the co-directors, who have been struggling with the way their community is changing due to the pressures of lives, children, less funding, and the ticking clock counting down their remaining dance lives as performers and choreographers. The four dancemakers speak of their careers in a serious way without abandoning the lighthearted

luxury of cracking jokes while doling out assignments—the first of which is to start a regular dance meditation by

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

choreographers. The four dancemakers speak of their careers in a serious way without abandoning the lighthearted luxury of cracking jokes while doling out assignments—the first of which is to start a regular dance meditation by moving our brains rather than our muscles.

15 September 2007

How is this useful for me? For the group? In the world? This first set of questions is my own.

What is gratuitous in dance? I'm stuck on this second question, as the word came up a lot for the group.

20 September 2007

Tere's second assignment for the co-directors is to create a written manifesto, or at least a "blah blah blah" to introduce themselves and also think through the things on their mind. I make a snarky sidenote in my book about deadlines and follow-through and Headlong's desire to most often go their own way. But they have invited this guru. Our "Terepist" is not an assigned consultant or mediator, though he offers a lifeboat of new questions and experience in creative sustenance that has come at the right time.

No one is surprised when David's assignment goes undone on paper; he has a lot of barriers to writing that prevent it from being the nice opportunity that Amy feels it is. He is unapologetic and unpunished, however, as our curriculum is one of discovery and not of assessment. Without a unifying theme, a narrative arc, or starting point to steady the course these three are navigating their newfound creative independence.

When couples are asked what they most want in their time away from work, the radio tells me today that the most frequent response is "separate vacations" (according to such enlightened sources as *GQ* and *Cosmo*). Headlong has never considered this seriously and Tere's suggestion of self-work came as a surprise.

26 September 2007

Choreography is an art form that is distinct and separate from dancing. So simple. So easy. So exactly right. As a choreographer/dancer you are both the creative force and the material that executes that force. This is the Painter/Tube

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

Choreography is an art form that is distinct and separate from dancing. So simple. So easy. So exactly right. As a choreographer/dancer you are both the creative force and the material that executes that force. This is the Painter/Tube of Paint analogy.

20 October 2007

Each has made a dance that is quintessentially their own in terms of gesture & timing, yet all share the ability for a movement to retroactively influence the previously viewed events. It seems best to sit together, to get through this thing as a threesome rather than alone.

21 October 2007

Confessions of TOC: "I hate the mommy. No, I hate the body." Hmm. Followed by a list of themes that make an interesting title: Frozen Demon Ghost Baby in the Box.

29 October 2007

I'm uncomfortable when asked into the group's short, collective dance-meditation. It seems forced and superficial (though new for the dancers) since I've adopted the practice after Tere proposed it last month as a solo practice. My capacity/desire to be in or out of the physical experience in the room is based not on what my comfort level is, but what feels most interesting/germane/true to the spirit of the project. I think?

2 November 2007, First Friday

Headlong puts its process into the public realm once a month at First Friday. Our audience, accustomed to the unexpected, comes into a situation where the explanation of the work is as important as the doing/dancing of it. It was the first time that the dancers saw what they might be getting into on the bodies of the co-directors, and the first time that they tried to demonstrate what they knew by translating it. There were a good deal of "Tere says..." and "if Tere were here..." statements that tried to frame the experiments but seemed oddly evangelical instead. By attempting to articulate to the audience Headlong was trying to clarify their own understanding. Articulation is the second step of listening—there is quotable O'Connor for all time. When he arrived for the second performance, the awe and

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

listening—there is quotable O'Connor for all time. When he arrived for the second performance, the awe and appreciation that had been showered on him throughout the evening was met with rock-star applause.

3 November 2007, rehearsal with co-directors

It's kind of like breaking up, says Tere of making a dance. The idea grows inside of you for three months and you see it coming before it happens. He continues to use really saturated and easily held metaphors (and gives me the impression that his old Italian lover has not yet run the course) throughout the day. The co-directors haven't had such a luxury of time alone (or as a threesome) in the studio for a long time—the idea of creative meeting often erased by the practicality of getting something “up.” This means that creative conversations get pushed into rehearsal time, which isn't often enough time to breathe.

These are established artists, in terms of time and awards and practices in the field. Yet they've chosen to reinvest in their making process. Tere has become a guru—the first to offer up any new methods of making or talking about work in a decade.

4 November 2007, first day with dancers

Lisa Kraus comes for the afternoon, a dance tourist. She is a mover of her body and her pen and a history shared with all the players in the room. It is too soon, though; the room suddenly has an energy that feels examined rather than internal and exploratory. She approaches me in the break and inquires as to why I've been so quiet. “Easy,” I say. “My position here is observer. Participation in a limited way. I try to give them the space that they need to do this work and that often means in my absence verbally or physically.” Though my ideal method of documenting would have been to take part as a full participant, this very personal work already suffers from our presence as witnesses to it. (Have you ever invited a critical audience to couples therapy?)

When I decide to videotape the sleepy group for a few minutes during warm-up, they were nonplussed and I got a fast lesson in Laura Mulvey's male gaze. My pen is less threatening than the Hi-8.



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

When I decide to videotape the group for a few minutes during warm up they were nonplussed and I got a real lesson in Laura Mulvey's male gaze. My pen is less threatening than the Hi-8.

When asked about "starting points" (that awful buzzword that is bandied about as often as "best practices" or "organic movement"), Tere snorts a bit, so far past this need to justify his scientific and bodily inquiry with a theme or inspiration for marketing purposes. Yet this is a conversation oft had in this peer group—you gotta start somewhere right, and who better to ask than the granddaddy of experimental performance? Tere attempts to start from nothing, knowing, of course, as we all do, that this is a near impossibility. Nichole shows the material that the group started with. Though, as Tere says, we could have bought it on eBay and it would have made little difference.

Tere confesses that he is on a silent fight to rid the world of theme and variation, calling this easily watchable/easily laudable device the "Dormant herpes virus of the dance world. I call it sameness revisited... other people call it variation." For someone so easy with the art of language and its improvisational craft, I am struck by how his dance work is so calculated and his conversation carefree. Maybe I'm just missing the care taken in the latter. He has been perfecting his theory as a dancemaker and talker for longer than some in the room have been alive.

6 November 2007

This is work that must be arrived at after some journey and struggle. In doing it we take the long way with Tere into his ideas about dance research and vocabulary. The group learns together how to change their language and the mutual confusion, struggle and doubt galvanizes their desire to succeed in describing what they see rather than interpreting what they liked. This feedback technique also minimizes the auto-criticism often associated with showing work to peers. Conversely, it is really difficult to do this work when you are both maker and performer. You can't step outside of it, and so learn how to look/see by using the works of others as a mirror and cut your analytical teeth on someone else's dance.

12 November 2007

David and Andrew rehearse with their duos in the same space. Each is practicing their skills of observation. Andrew



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

12 November 2007

David and Andrew rehearse with their duos in the same space. Each is practicing their skills of observation. Andrew asks the dancers to make blind duets, so that he can see while they must feel. David being particularly directive, tells rather than asks for suggestions in his slow burn of a dance.

Tere talks about film a lot. About its capacity to detach from a narrative sense. As dance-watchers we are confused and almost angered by this on occasion; in film so much more is acceptable as nonlinear.

18 November 2007

Dancing is thinking, we know this and try to develop tools to demonstrate and practice it. We can talk later. We can dance in response and as response and think-think about it (without our bodies, and only with our brains) later. For a company that spends a lot of time in discussion before coming to a decision, shifting the focus away from facile language and to conversing physically was a great and provocative challenge. Content emerges by continuing down paths of most interest rather than built by ticking off the list of ideas that you've created before stepping into the studio.

26 November 2007

We practice identifying the it-ness in each of the iterations that come rolling out from the rehearsal rooms. The "ah-ha" comes, however, when we practice this process on a stationary object by looking at the wall and telling Tere what we see. Verticality, negative space, a three-ness, parallels are tossed out as possibilities. It is easy for us to identify architecture that is static and harder to shrug off the paint color of a dance to see the foundation it is built upon. It is a technique that works really well when you're watching something that you "don't like." Rather than lamenting your \$20 ticket, try to see what is happening underneath the ugly costumes or awful music. Can you locate what is happening structurally or identify a politic embedded beneath the topical information that is a superficial accessory to the bones of the dance?

1 December 2007

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

1 December 2007

"Theatre can be [a] functional form of idealism," is Tere's response to a question about the pressures of getting the work in front of an audience (from grants to marketing) without having to be all things to all people. He wonders, out loud and loudly, about the need for artists to do community outreach, stating: "My art is my outreach; why do I have to buy into your rules based on how you got your funding that says that I now have to be an educator and dumb it down to a 35 minute assembly in Wichita?" Storytime with Tere on this day tells us a tale of giving back the grant money, saying "Thanks but no" to a funder with more agenda than he feels comfortable with. I wonder how Andrew would feel about this, a man who has raised more than a million dollars for Headlong, but he is not here. For the ease of scheduling, and the ever-present budgetary consideration, each has worked with two dancers, independently. David and Amy both absorbed one of Andrew's performers into their line of research during his paternity leave. His absence has been felt as the tricycle rolls along with only two wheels; the machine sounds different.

2 December 2007

David latches onto my attempts at documenting the sessions in a way that isn't just textual. He is confused and maligned by my desire to audio record on occasion, to pick up the video camera when I see fit—not as an archivist, and not to be comprehensive in my coverage. I understand his desire to have a record of this work—for the sake of the company and the dance community—but I lack the ability to explain my approach in a way that is clear and effective.

I taped one of the recent sessions, and now it has become a critical record. Amy wants me to continue running the camera, telling Andrew that "this is what I'm here for." I am unwilling to appease by watching through the lens when I'd rather watch in real time. There is confusion about my role as documenter among all of us, and this is heightened when I try to document as I see fit.

4 December 2007, Rehearsals

These things are on my mind a lot:



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

4 December 2007, Rehearsals

These things are on my mind a lot:

Research as practice—learning through doing and continued doing rather than talking so damn much about it. The physical vs. the theoretical—with the physical you feel it; at best you hear the theory.

As a critic or critical writer the ongoing debate about writing about what you can/can't do (physically) or have ever done. Should (or does) this apply to this process? I know what sweaty smells like.

As a hibernating dancemaker I watch to see if these processes make sense to me.

Training and retraining my eye—practicing watching. Learning how to use my notebook—rather than not being able to put it down.

Tere's work is like weightlifting—not for your imagination but for your analytical plain-brain.

7 December 2007, First Friday

The audience was confused at the November performances—the introductions felt wrapped up in too much insider language. In performance, however, they were relieved to see that Headlong still looked like the goofy kid that lived up the block.

8 December 2007

By now the confusion about what is *actually* happening is gloriously apparent (if only to me, somewhat at a distance from the swirl from my perch in the corner). Each day the workshop was punctuated by at least half of the room needing to ask one or multiple clarifying questions. “Is that what you wanted?” “Are we doing it right?” “What, what do you want us to do?” Often preceded or followed by an attempt at repeating the instruction in order to fully comprehend it, the dancers and directors were met with less response than they were generally comfortable with.

They yearn to get it right and Tere, in his tight-lipped way wanted them to learn by doing. His brevity and enigmatic

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

They yearn to get it right and Tere, in his tight-lipped way wanted them to learn by doing. His brevity and enigmatic instruction was simply a provocation—a reminder that the body contains the knowledge that we need. And our need to rationalize and explain is a side effect of living in a culture that privileges living from the neck up. There are many ways to use language; the non-use of language is a decided use of it—and this is difficult for nerdy and articulate perennial students of dance.

The co-directors continued to delve into the element of their dances that demanded their attention, creating new and different versions and iterations that remain separate and fused together, as per Tere's requests. He helps us with another hilarious and obvious example: "*Swan Lake* isn't about swans," Tere proclaims, daring us to defy the title. "It is about classicism and line and crotches and *échappés* and technique, but it really doesn't matter that they're wearing those stupid headpieces." And he is right. In identifying, easily, the bones of the classical ballet canon we begin to differentiate between the surface material and what lies beneath.

9 December 2007

Andrew vetoes my attempt to take photographs—he is recently back into the process, trying to catch up and feeling behind and un-ready. I haven't figured out how to push or how to explain—even something as simple as a picture says more than my words can: back to the pencil I go, having to trust my eyes and hope they do too. On this day, the day of performance (that isn't a "performance" but just a "showing" ...semantics be damned) the needle spikes easily.

This showing is important, but different than the import of First Friday that happened just two days ago (in the same space with the same performers) with a tailored program and different vibe. Doing this work vs. the product of doing it is apparent. It is one thing to do the research and another thing to show it in performative context outside of the studio. Even this friendly, knowledgeable, and generously curious public represents an audience. The conversation is lively and invested, despite the general unease of putting this work in front of the public.

David and I squabble over how he has strong-armed Byron into taping two days of work by being a demanding, if

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

David and I squabble over how he has strong-armed Byron into taping two days of work by being a demanding, if friendly, bully for the sake of documenting these critical moments. This moment, where I am now a part of the manner in which undermining is the shortest course to getting one's way, tells me buckets about how Headlong works.

As the directors begin smashing things together, with Tere playing gracious and gentle referee, it becomes clear to me in re-watching the video the process by which people get a word in edgewise. Without the noise of dancer feedback (in this situation they are only pieces on the chessboard—enacting their planned positions and rapid-firing between dances) the co-director voices, interruptions, interjections, jockeying, and near-cemented mannerisms are clear. David “just wants to have a good time” and can’t get on board with an idea until he is “satisfied with it.” Amy’s brow continues to furrow and she agrees to get behind anything for the sake of the ticking clock, which makes her nervous. The end of our time with Tere looms in the near future. Andrew backs away, needing to manage his expectations in the room and with his limited engagement with this work. David is elected time captain and Amy says that she is happy to not feel anxiety about it—though this is a thin veil for a long-known collaborative stopping point within the company.

The group jokes, both amicably and tersely, about patterned behavior and their relationship existing longer than any of their personal romantic partnerships. Tere waits patiently, adds levity and learns anew how complex this cohort is. The dancers busy themselves; they’ve been around this collaborative block before and know not to get in the way of their divorced parents.

10 December 2007, post-showing

We are very far past the texts and courses on composition that everyone in the room has been through (performers and audience alike). We aren’t doing exercises in time or space or diagonal strength—we are attempting to unlearn all of these crutches that dance has leaned on for so long. Patterns that have enabled large groups of spandex-clad amazons to gain fame through what could be considered a manipulation of space in the same way that a marching band carves out the turf at half-time. No one present is sitting up straighter to discuss techniques for “cleaning” a section of a



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

to gain some insight into what could be considered a manipulation of space in the same way that a weaving band carved out the turf at half-time. No one present is sitting up straighter to discuss techniques for “cleaning” a section of a dance. We try to identify what we see and blow the powder on the invisible structures onstage and (for me) in this company.

I wonder if we are doing this in a way that directly reflects the values held in high regard by our nation, if going deeper into an individual interest in art is selfish and silly and not reflective of the intrinsic value held by Headlong to make work that means something to many someones. That value is most strongly Andrew's, though shared by all. Credit is shared by the co-directors—for all work, ideas, failures, and successes. There exists a collective responsibility for the decisions of any one individual.

What does it say of the radical politics of working together in a society that is built on pulling yourself up by your own boot-straps rather than asking for help from community?

10 December 2007, post debrief

I scheduled time with the company to check in about the project—wanted to give them and me some space to really wrestle with it. Our meeting turned into a celebratory brunch. This informal company time is valuable, just not the space for evaluation and reflection that I hope for.

15 February 2008, Amy trio rehearsal

Amy just kept going. She didn't want to stop in December and though her collaborators aren't continuing she has more questions to ask. In rehearsal there is an unfamiliar play happening where she is conducting from the chair at the front and they are doing as she says, when she wants. This structure is not uncommon most places, but out of place here.

16 February 2008, *Dirt Snap*

The dance is not slow. It requires some patience on the part of the viewer, and sits strangely amidst the mixed bill of ballet and contact improv. Nichole and Kate are quick, but don't quite understand the work that David has been doing with his core group for the past few months. Devynn and Zani easily find the zone.

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

with his core group for the past few months. Devynn and Zani easily find the zone.

20 April 2008, Dance Theater Camp workshop

Andrew and Kate took this work and turned it into a two-day workshop for dance and theater artists in Philadelphia—to see if it translated and to extend the reach of this work into the community. It worked, and well, and helped them both to develop more language around the subject. The new participants had many of the same hang-ups as the original group. (Was that too interpretive? Wait...what is the instruction? Am I doing it right?) Maury Walton asked whether it was important that she like the work she was watching or making. Andrew's response was sage wisdom to the group: "I think right now, it is important that we know it. And we can learn whether we like it later on. We can go into that thing, that confusion, that struggle, and make the piece about that very topic if that is the kernel that is most interesting to you. Hold onto it, then work with it and discover it anew."

5 July 2008, post-video interviews with co-directors

As the company's resident skeptic, Andrew acknowledges the great importance of this work though he is furthest from the aesthetic of Tere's work. "Tere's work is a refined cuisine that some people love, respect and admire, but it is an acquired taste. But it's not me, or my Philadelphia. So it has given me doors and permission, but I like work that makes light and human presence. I wonder how I get that back into this process without abandoning these tools?"

Andrew privileges the process no less than David who "loves to geek out on this sort of shit." He continued working on his line of research, expanding from a trio to a piece for five dancers for the Bryn Mawr faculty concert. David's desire for focus and immersion fed into this process. He fell down the rabbit hole into a world where bodies serve as corporal landscape and stillness is interrupted and retroactively influenced by movements that come much later. It gave him the latitude and luxury to make decisions as he saw fit and in short order.

Amy, too, continued working in the studio with a few dancers. It was important to her creative life to not let this process wither in response to increased administrative duties for HPI [Headlong Performance Institute, a study-away program

Headlong runs for college students interested in hybrid performance], and also paramount for her to feel comfortable at

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

with in response to increased administrative duties for HPI [Headlong Performance Institute, a study-away program Headlong runs for college students interested in hybrid performance], and also paramount for her to feel comfortable at the front of the studio alone while making choices that felt unfamiliar and not laced with narrative. She seemed most lonely without her boys around and without being able to label, in her pragmatic way, what she was working on. Her slow and steady approach is often at odds with David who prefers to pull all-nighters.

8 July 2008, Tere interview

As Tere tosses the keys down from the fourth floor of his tiny studio in the meatpacking district, I feel part of some strange *West Side Story* time warp. His interview is long in coming, and I am not sure who is more uncomfortable—he in front of the camera or me with my thin list of questions and surprising degree of starry eyes. Sitting in the home of this totally approachable downtown dance icon he jokes with the cameraman about the last movie he saw at the Film Forum. I spill the mint tea, which he has insisted I have, on my shirt and sit myself in the meditation chair, suddenly feeling at ease that I can ask whatever I want.

4 August 2008

I've watched the videos and clips so many, many, many times. Byron and I have been clipping and pulling, choosing in and out points and crafting such a story. It feels today like reality television—where I get to point the thing in the direction that seems most important to me. Sometimes this is mundane and boring; that feels fine. But when it appears rife with struggle or drama it feels like sensationalizing rather than simply documenting.

20 September 2008

The translation of Tere's work into a broader community, one making dance and theater and things in between, feels relevant and good as a method of talking about performance. As part of the Headlong Performance Institute the simple clarification: "Don't tell me what you liked, tell me what you saw," has changed the conversation for the students. Each one is trying to use tools of analysis over tools of evaluation. Some are more successful than others, depending on their confidence in themselves and in their work and on how much they're depending on authoritative feedback. They are

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

WHO ARE THEY?

ANNA DROZDOWSKI: SELECTED LOG NOTES 2007-2008

slow and steady approach is often at odds with David who prefers to pull all-nighters.

8 July 2008, Tere interview

As Tere tosses the keys down from the fourth floor of his tiny studio in the meatpacking district, I feel part of some strange *West Side Story* time warp. His interview is long in coming, and I am not sure who is more uncomfortable—he in front of the camera or me with my thin list of questions and surprising degree of starry eyes. Sitting in the home of this totally approachable downtown dance icon he jokes with the cameraman about the last movie he saw at the Film Forum. I spill the mint tea, which he has insisted I have, on my shirt and sit myself in the meditation chair, suddenly feeling at ease that I can ask whatever I want.

4 August 2008

I've watched the videos and clips so many, many, many times. Byron and I have been clipping and pulling, choosing in and out points and crafting such a story. It feels today like reality television—where I get to point the thing in the direction that seems most important to me. Sometimes this is mundane and boring; that feels fine. But when it appears rife with struggle or drama it feels like sensationalizing rather than simply documenting.

20 September 2008

The translation of Tere's work into a broader community, one making dance and theater and things in between, feels relevant and good as a method of talking about performance. As part of the Headlong Performance Institute the simple clarification: "Don't tell me what you liked, tell me what you saw," has changed the conversation for the students. Each one is trying to use tools of analysis over tools of evaluation. Some are more successful than others, depending on their confidence in themselves and in their work and on how much they're depending on authoritative feedback. They are learning how to make dances as individuals and as collaborators, learning which of these feels best or easiest or closest to how they naturally want to work. Andrew is jazzed about these skills, and learning how to translate them—and even more so learning when they are appropriate. As a whole, they are more humble already and less interested in being congratulated.



READ MORE:



ANNA'S BIO

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

FILTER:

PERSON: **ALL** AMY ANDREW DAVID TERE

TYPE: **ALL** VIDEO AUDIO

10 LESS DEMOCRACY	20 FREAKS	30 COMP 501	40 WHY TERE, WHY NOW
50 WHY PROJECT	60 WHY PROJECT	70 WHY PROJECT	80 DANCE MEDITATION
90 FIRST ASSIGNMENT	100 LINES OF RESEARCH	110 AMY / DAVID SOLOS MERGED	120 ANDREW / DAVID SOLOS MERGED
130 GOOD-BAD PARADIGM	140 INDIVIDUAL REHEARSALS	150 WHY TERE, WHY NOW	160 AMY SOLO
170 EDITING-ITNESS	180 ITNESS AND BEYOND	190 CONVERSATION	200 STARTING POINTS
210 DAVID SOLO REHEARSAL	220 ASSUMPTIONS MADE	230 AMY SOLO REHEARSAL	240 ANDREW SOLO REHEARSAL
250 CHOREOGRAPHY	260 INTRO TO FIRST FRIDAY	270 PUBLIC TEREPEY	280 DANCER RESEARCH
290 ANDREW SOLO VERSION A	300 STRUCTURE-TOPICAL	310 ANDREW SOLO VERSION B	320 AMY INTRO
330 WHY HEADLONG?	340 AMY DIAGONAL TRIO	350 ANDREW TRIO	360 EDITING AND CAPITALISM
370 ALL OF ME	380 ALL OF ME VERSION 2	390 DANCER INTRODUCTIONS	400 PURVEYORS OF MEANING

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

FILTER:

PERSON: **ALL** AMY ANDREW DAVID TERE

TYPE: **ALL** VIDEO AUDIO

 410 DANCER WARMUP FIRST DAY	 420 DANCERS WORKING	 430 COLLABORATION CONVERSATION	 440 COMPANY-COLLABORATION
 450 SUDOKU	 460 WHY TERE, WHY NOW	 470 DAVID TRIO (PRE-DIRT SNAP)	 480 VELOCITY CONVERSATION
 490 JOYS OF PROCESS	 500 CONVERSATION	 510 ANDREW EARLY DUET	 520 ITNESS
 530 DAVID TALKS MASHUP	 540 AMY FALLING MASHUP	 550 EDITING	 560 ANDREW MASHUP
 570 CHOREOGRAPHY & POWDER	 580 DAVID TALKS MASHUP II	 590 INTRO TO SHOWING	 600 A JOURNEY AWAY
 610 GRAND MASH UP 3 LINES 3 DIRECTORS	 620 POST MASH UP DISCUSSION	 630 ON PROCESS	 640 ORIGINAL TERE MOVEMENT PHRASE / NICHOLE
 650 DISCUSSION ON GRAMMAR / TOPICAL	 660 DISCUSSION ON POLITICS / VALUES	 670 QUIBBLE?	 680 TOC'S IDEAS ABOUT CHOREOGRAPHY
 690 ITNESS- ONGOINGNISSIFICATION	 700 DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH, PERFORMANCE, PRESSURE	 710 ALLOW RESEARCH TO BE THE PIECE	 720 ONGOINGNISSIFICATION
 730 ANNA DOCUMENTING	 740 ONGOINGNISSIFICATION	 750 DAVID THANKS	 760 AMY GOGGLE PHRASE
 770 AMY TRIO	 780 MOST LIBERATING	 790 AMY REHEARSAL	 800 AMY GOGGLE TRIO

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

FILTER:

PERSON: **ALL** AMY ANDREW DAVID TERE

TYPE: **ALL** VIDEO AUDIO

490 JOYS OF PROCESS	500 CONVERSATION	510 ANDREW EARLY DUET	520 ITNESS
530 DAVID TALKS MASHUP	540 AMY FALLING MASHUP	550 EDITING	560 ANDREW MASHUP
570 CHOREOGRAPHY & POWDER	580 DAVID TALKS MASHUP II	590 INTRO TO SHOWING	600 A JOURNEY AWAY
610 GRAND MASH UP 3 LINES 3 DIRECTORS	620 POST MASH UP DISCUSSION	630 ON PROCESS	640 ORIGINAL TERE MOVEMENT PHRASE / NICHOLE
650 DISCUSSION ON GRAMMAR / TOPICAL	660 DISCUSSION ON POLITICS / VALUES	670 QUIBBLE?	680 TOC'S IDEAS ABOUT CHOREOGRAPHY
690 ITNESS- ONGOINGNISSIFICATION	700 DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH, PERFORMANCE, PRESSURE	710 ALLOW RESEARCH TO BE THE PIECE	720 ONGOINGNISSIFICATION
730 ANNA DOCUMENTING	740 ONGOINGNISSIFICATION	750 DAVID THANKS	760 AMY GOGGLE PHRASE
770 AMY TRIO	780 MOST LIBERATING	790 AMY REHEARSAL	800 AMY GOGGLE TRIO
810 ITNESS	820 DIRT SNAP BMC CONCERT	830 WHAT-HOW TO DOCUMENT	840 REALLY DIRECTED
850 WHAT HAS STUCK	860 TERE TOOLBOX	870 INVESTIGATION HIGHWAY	

© 2009 THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE | CREDITS & CONTACT

BRAIDING / UNBRAIDING / REBRAIDING

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER EXAMINES ARTISTIC PROCESS IN COLLABORATION WITH TERE O'CONNOR

WHAT IS THIS?
WHO ARE THEY?
READ MORE
SEE MORE

CREDITS

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER

CO-DIRECTORS:

Amy Smith, Andrew Simonet, David Brick

COMPANY DRAMATURG:

Mark Lord

COMPANY MANAGER:

Debbie Shapiro

UNBRAIDING PROJECT TEAM

ARTISTIC ADVISOR:

Tere O'Connor

DANCERS:

Nichole Canuso, Niki Cousineau, Devynn Emory,
Jaamil Kosoko, Kate Watson-Wallace, Christina Zani

DOCUMENTOR PHASE I:

Anna Drozdowski

VIDEOGRAPHER:

Byron Karabatsos

The workbook *Braiding/Unbraiding/Rebraiding: Headlong Dance Theater Examines Artistic Process in Collaboration with Tere O'Connor* has been produced by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage through Dance Advance with additional support through Philadelphia Cultural Management Initiative and the Marketing Innovation Program.

Additional Support for Headlong Dance Theater's creative project *Braiding/Unbraiding/Rebraiding* was provided, in part, by The Independence Foundation, The Samuel Fels Foundation, the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival & Philly Fringe, The National Endowment for the Arts, and The Lucky Star Foundation.

PROJECT COORDINATOR FOR HEADLONG DANCE THEATER:
Anna Drozdowski, www.annadrozdowski.com

VIDEOS & PHOTOGRAPHY (EXCEPT WHERE NOTED):
Byron Karabatsos, www.byronkarabatsos.com

WORKBOOK IMPLEMENTATION & DESIGN:
Andy Owens, www.nadesignlab.com

CONTACT

HEADLONG DANCE THEATER

1170 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19146
215 545 9195
info@headlong.org

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE

42 Horatio Street, #9
New York, NY 10014
212 989 5007
info@tereconnordance.org

THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE

1608 Walnut Street, 18th floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
267 350 4900
www.pcah.us

The
Pew Center
for Arts
& Heritage

About

As both a grantmaker and hub for knowledge-sharing, The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage is dedicated to fostering a vibrant and diverse cultural ecology. We invest in ambitious and substantive work that showcases our region’s artistic vitality and enhances public life. We also engage in a robust exchange of ideas on evolving artistic and interpretive practices with an international network of creators and cultural leaders.

Our “Questions of Practice” series presents ongoing dialogue about issues critical to artistic practice today. We produce an extensive collection of interviews with and essays by noted field leaders and thinkers, as well as in-depth publications that grow out of our experience as cultural grantmakers.

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage
1608 Walnut Street, 18th Fl
Philadelphia, PA 19103

pewcenterarts.org

Copyright © 2010
The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage