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Dance Review | Trisha Brown Dance Company

## Graceful Movements in a Fog, or Just an Illusion

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Trisha Brown has always been interested in the boundaries of vision. In her early work, in the late '60s and '70s, she famously suspended dancers off the sides of buildings, obliging spectators to observe from odd angles below. In later pieces, like "Set and Reset" and "Foray Forêt," dancers — or parts of their bodies — would pop unpredictably out of the wings, suggesting that the world of the onstage dance extended well beyond what we could see.



In 1994 Ms. Brown created a piece with a title that referred explicitly to these issues of perception. "If you couldn't see me" was an abstractly autobiographical solo, danced by Ms. Brown with her back almost entirely to the audience. On Wednesday that work, together with the 1980 "Opal Loop/Cloud Installation #72503" — another dance about perception and illusion — was performed by The Trisha Brown Dance Company at The Baryshnikov

Arts Center.

Ms. Brown no longer performs (although when she took a graceful deep bow at the end, it looked as if dancing would have been no trouble), and the solo was performed by the tall and elegant Leah Morrison.

Although Ms. Brown's slippery, disembodied style is utterly clear in Ms. Morrison's movement, the dancer's limbs stretch and extend with a more balletic line as she swings her long legs, curves her arms, rotates a hip, jumps unpredictably sideways. (That's just one instant.) Almost always facing away from the audience, she occasionally moves through a profile view; Ms. Morrison does a full turn once, but it's too quick to see her face.

The obligation to remain pointing one way is related to another preoccupation in Ms. Brown's work: tasks, and the way unemotional execution can accrue emotional resonance. That's true here, as Ms. Morrison occasionally pauses, an arm overhead, a hip angled to one side, a figure of mystery bathed in reddish light (by Spencer Brown and Robert Rauschenberg; the score of humming, overlapping electronic chords and the dancer's low-backed white dress were also created by Rauschenberg).

The puzzle of what exactly we are watching onstage when we see a performer — the real person? the embodiment of the dance? a role being played? — and the hunger that Ms.

Brown creates in the viewer for full vision, are given alluring form in “If you couldn’t see me.”

“Opal Loop,” too, suggests that dance is evanescent and its interpreters ultimately unknowable. The work is famous for its “cloud sculpture,” a shimmering mist created by Fujiko Nakaya through machines that shoot a dense fog of water droplets into the air. The effect is breathtaking at the outset, as the four dancers (Nicholas Strafaccia, Laurel Tentindo, Samuel von Wentz and Tamara Riewe) are revealed silhouetted against the luminous haze.

But the dance — at first appearing as random, tangling skeins of unpredictable motion — takes on its own fascination, as you begin to notice the ways Ms. Brown offers a small theme (a low, skittering jump; a swinging arm) picked up by each dancer in turn, their movements aligning briefly, then breaking into independent dance thought.

Toward the end, the bodies are blurred by, sometimes lost in, the fog. Dance, Ms. Brown seems to suggest, lives only in the moment of vision. But those hazy, obscured views suggest the imperfect ways we see, and the way we remember too.

Photo Credit: Andrea Mohin/*The New York Times*: The Trisha Brown Dance Company performing Ms. Brown's "Opal Loop/Cloud Installation #72503" at the Baryshnikov Arts Center.