

Rebecca Hilton

What What We Do Does

Written, spoken, and recorded by Rebecca Hilton. Presented on May 16, 2017 at the Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA) in the context of Dance Remains, a Writings On Dance and MUMA initiative curated by Sally Gardner and Elizabeth Dempster.

Hello everyone. I'm recording this in Dubai Airport, on my computer. Which seems somehow relevant to this evening's provocation "to explore evidence of dance's constant relocation throughout the twentieth century" and to "explore the relationships between historical works and their locations" (Monash 2017).

At first, I thought I'd try to make a video, or maybe a slide show with a disembodied voice. But neither a moving image, nor a still image with a disembodied voice felt right in relation to my thoughts regarding dance, history and location. So, rather than showing and speaking to an image, I'm going to speak and attempt to generate an image. We'll darken the room, you could sit with closed eyes, or lie on the floor, whatever best suits you. It will take about six minutes or so. I'm going to do some "thick description," as the social anthropologists say (see Leeds-Hurwitz 2015).

I'll give you a little time to get organised. "People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does." It's an elegant re-articulation of a Foucault idea from Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's book *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1983, 187). I'll read it again. "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does."

Linseed oil, the smell of linseed oil. Russell Dumas, Lucy Guerin and I have spent hours, even days, rubbing it into the floor of Russell's brand new studio in McConnell St, Newtown. The studio is on the second floor. It is a large rectangular space—all wood, windows, exposed brick and white walls. Russell is in the kitchen at the far end of the studio boiling the kettle. His futon and the bathroom are also up at that end of the studio. He lives here, which seems very glamorous to me. He is facing into the room, rocking his weight from foot

to foot, licking his fingers having just eaten a delicacy, which later he will insist we all try. It's usually something sweet. And sticky. The sun is pouring into the room through the large windows that run along both of the long walls. Half way down the studio, Lucy is sitting with her back against the wall. Her legs are stretched straight out in front of her. She has very large feet for a small person. She looks like Glenda Jackson but more beautiful. I'm lying on my right side in a bright rectangle of light, in the corner closest to the front door. I have a new short haircut, which I'm self-conscious about. I'm leaning my head on my hand and we are, all three, watching the American dancer Lisa Kraus dance *Locus* in the middle of the space.

Lisa Kraus is not tall. She is very strong, sturdy even. She's super grounded but also sort of bouncy and spongy. She has very tightly curled brown hair, blue eyes and a large-ish nose and mouth. She has a straightforwardness that makes me want to move to New York, she's confident, even brash. She is bending, reaching, softening, falling, pushing, pointing, shrugging, swaying, slicing, throwing, balancing, spiralling, catching, pressing, hanging, coiling, attacking, rocking, springing, caressing, she's dancing *Locus* a choreography by Trisha Brown.¹ As she addresses the space immediately surrounding her, it seems to become more visible to me, or is it that she is becoming more visible in the space. Whichever it is, my perception of the space around her is being affected, transformed by the quality of her moving. She is bold and precise. It's a kind of precision I haven't encountered before. A precision that is referencing the scale, the weight, the textures, the sensations of her own body, not some other ideal body, some aspirational body that she doesn't, that she won't ever have. This is not the way dancing usually feels to me—confirmation of everything I can't do, an exercise in self-hatred—this is dancing with a sense of adventure and pleasure, dancing as an experience that seems to continuously produce things that delight and surprise her.

Locus has no 'front' and Lisa herself isn't putting on any 'front'. She is doing the dancing without pretending anything, without representing anything other than the doing of the dance. I'm learning the steps, the shapes, the timings, the directions, the qualities from her. But I'm also learning of things I will only be able to name many years later—ideas of experiential authorship, interpretation, subjectivity, embodied thought, aesthetics, things I now call DANCERNESS.

Russell calls out for her to stop because the tea is ready and Lisa's *Locus* transforms, without ceremony, without ending, into a walk toward the kitchen and we four gather and sit together, drinking tea and eating sticky treats in the sunny, linseed-y space. And after that Lucy and I start to learn *Locus*. For real. I was 20, Lucy was 23 and Russell was about 39. He'd invited Lisa Kraus to come to Australia to his studio to teach us *Locus*—a choreography made by Trisha Brown in her studio in NYC in 1975.

Trisha Brown taught Lisa Kraus *Locus*. Russell had danced with Trisha and by bringing Lisa here, he is deepening, diversifying, our access to that lineage, that knowledge. In this context, *Locus* is not a performance—it's culture. In giving me and Lucy access to that knowledge, providing us with the opportunity to embody it, Russell was working on building a culture here. He was working on the future. Our future. The form's future. Such epic generosity and I really had no idea.

Sitting here, reading this into the 21st century's version of the studio—the computer—in a transit lounge in an airport, I'm wondering how much more relocated dance can get? "People know what they do, frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does."

Notes

1. The Trisha Brown Dance Company has published an excerpt of *Locus* here: <https://vimeo.com/210477955>. The Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault has published a video of Lisa Krauss dancing *Locus* in 1981 here: <https://vimeo.com/156594348>

Works Cited

- Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Paul Rabinow. 1983. *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault. 2015. "Première archive vidéographique de spectacle à Tangente/ Tangente's first video archive – Locus." *Vimeo* <https://vimeo.com/156594348>
- Leeds-Hurwitz, Wendy. 2015. "Thick Description." In *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, edited by Karen Tracy, Cornelia Ilie, and Todd Sandel, n. pag. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. doi: [10.1002/9781118611463](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463)
- Monash University Museum of Art. 2017. "Dance Remains." Monash University <https://www.monash.edu/muma/events/2017/dance-remains>
- Trisha Brown Dance Company. 2017. "Locus Excerpt." *Vimeo* <https://vimeo.com/210477955>

REBECCA HILTON (1964-) is an Australian artist based in Stockholm. Her practice incorporates dancing, performing, choreographing, teaching, conversing and writing. Over three and a half decades she has contributed to the work of an array of artists including Russell Dumas, Stephen Petronio, Mathew Barney, Michael Clark, Tere O'Connor, Jennifer Monson, John Jasperse, Lucy Guerin, Tino Sehgal, Xavier Le Roy, Scarlet Yu, Chrysa Parkinson, among others. Rebecca uses embodied practices and choreographic systems to explore concepts and manifestations of GROUPNESS. Her research environments include, but are not limited to, dance companies, universities, arts festivals, community based organisations, friendship circles and family groups. Rebecca is a Professor (Choreography) in the research area SITE EVENT ENCOUNTER at the Stockholm University of the Arts.

© 2017 Rebecca Hilton



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).