

# Work with scores in the creating process

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Work with scores is one of methods to make an art piece. If a choreographer, director or simply a creator is using scores, it's easy to see and follow his/her creative process. Scores are also easy to document, explain for the rest of the artistic group. It helps not to get overwhelmed for both – creator and a performer by the whole idea or the content of the piece. It allows to investigate on a tiny part or idea. For the use of different types of scores in their creative processes I will reference to choreographers Trisha Brown and Meg Stuart, in whose artistic works I been interested already for a while. As well I will analyze and reference to my own final piece „Rooster and the color“, where as a brilliant discovery for me – scores - I used for part of my creation.

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## **Introduction**

In this essay I would like to analyze choreographing methods, focusing on scores. How scores work as a tool in choreographing process and why it is beneficial to use scores as a foundation in the creative process or even in the performance? How I applied scores for my own creative process in my final piece and what impact from other choreographers methods I used?

In this essay I will mainly refer to choreographers Trisha Brown and Meg Stuart. I will analyze some artistic pieces of the choreographers and mostly their use of score in their creating process.

I will also like to analyze some of choreographers work that I was referring too or even taking concreting creating methods and scores in my own work, like William Forsythe, Sunna Myllylachti and Heidi Vierthaler. For the definition of the score I will reference to Jonathan Burrows description and some of his examples, various uses to work with scores. As some of his examples and methods to use scores I used my final piece “Rooster and the colors” I will discuss my and his perception of the use of scores.

Both choreographers, T. Brown and M. Stuart I will connect with my own creating work and attitude, moreover discuss the similarities and difference between these two conceptual American choreographers. Here I would like to note, that I will not go through all the artistic career of the choreographers, but only explore certain pieces looking for different examples of the use of score in their creation. In my own piece, I will also focus to the work with scores, leaving behind the deeper description and analyze of the piece, other working methods throughout hole precess. Also I will not mention all the scores I used for the process, just the two ones I will compare and refer to the previous choreographers.

## **How scores work as a tool in choreographing process and why it is beneficial to use scores as a foundation in the creative process or even in the performance?**

Score, depending on the subject that it is used in can have many meanings. While analyzing it's meaning in choreography I came up with two main short descriptions that makes most sense for me: score is a set of choreographic instruction, score is a generalized direction. In the second description I skipped the word 'choreographic', even though score could be a generalized choreographic direction as well. But idea whether a score task is choreographic or not anymore in some dance pieces I would like to keep open in this essay, as well as the definition of score itself. In latter examples of Meg's Stuart use of score, the question, whether her scores are choreographic or not is very relevant. I simply come up with a term - 'body work' score her works.

Score also can be used in the creation of dance piece, but have different essentials than movements, for instance: if a score involves only talking, singing or other outcomes of voice, it could be called simply *talking or singing or voice score*.

I've chosen these two particular descriptions of the score, since I think they both can be used as successfully within the creative process. The first description I founded to be used more for a composition method, and the second more for a work with improvisation. Also first methods requires a certain body intelligence, since he/she needs embody a 'choreographic instruction'. A generalized direction is a very wide term and the use of it I don't think has any narrowing: for this type of score a mover does not need to be professional dancer, as long as his/hers body can react to 'the direction one is asked to go'.

Coming to the reasons, why is good to use scores in the creation, I myself find that it helps to make clear choreographic compositions, clear out the tasks for the performers, minimizing or getting away from the worries of the concept and content of the whole piece. It gives possibility to leave the idea of the whole for while and concentrate only on particular part, and is easy to come back too after having the material and approach it various ways. Scores gives possibility to work very concentrated on certain parts, ideas or things wanted to analyze, taking tiny part or idea appearing and enlarge it to a bigger phrase. Finally gives opportunity to make

something not connected or inspired by the main concept of the piece, but then with the option to put back the result to the whole content.

J. Burrows gives a not only classifications of scores, but as well some reasons, benefits and use in the creative process. One of them is:

“a score is one way to get an overview of time and materials. It freezes time in concrete form, allowing you to glimpse what can be hard to grasp perceptually in real-time experience. It can provide a way to sense and adjust time, allowing you to see and shift the relation of materials over longer periods.” (Burrows, J. 2010. p. 142).

Here very good example of use of score I would like to give one of the earliest works of Trisha Brown, then she started working with score's together with Simone Forti. She called it “structural improvisation using scores”(Goldberg, M. 2004. p. 35).

“The notion of score came from Simone Forti. One person points out around a room in a blind way and say – *a woman sitting in a chair is my score*. And you would break that down to what you needed for information how to choreograph: you've got the spatial information you need, behavior of the woman sitting in a chair and her activity around the chair. Basically you have got what you do, when and how.” (Kertess, K. 2004. Conversation with Kertess, K. and Brown, T) (I am not sure how to shorten this interview?)

In this performance done in 1961 the principle of score is pretty visible. The material side of score object - the chair, is stable and gives all the inspiration from itself: surface, material, color, shape, size. Furthermore actual person – a subject, that a performer can also reference too. Woman's personality, presents, her way and weight on sitting in the chair, her condition. So even if score - *woman sitting in the chair* sounds quite minimalistic, the way that composition inspired by this score would go could be pretty wide. T. Brown does not reveal to K. Kertess how did that particular improvisation was done. There for I would like to give example of her another similar performance in 1965, there score is directly involved with material and is main part of the performance. Brown did it her studio in loft in New York, so she is mentioning the surroundings their while the performance.

“I came across saying the score. I have all the spatial objects around me: wallboard, window, glass, elevator. Each time then I cross the wall I would turned around, so there were new queues for me and I responded to them. Finally I formed a rectangle.”(Interview with K. Kertess - early works)

T. Brown calls that kind of score – “structuring, or finding structure for a dance phrase from exterior surface. Organizing to reflect the spacing, setting a backup in a open space” (Kertess.K. 2004. Interview).

Here Brown actually mentions, how she comes up with a score, why and how it is useful. By using the exterior surface and concentrating it to a certain score – giving a certain rules to fellow them – she makes a performance.

### **Choreography and direction based types of scores: object and subject**

Coming back with two main descriptions of score offered in the beginning – a choreographic instruction and generalized direction, I also recognize that the work with score, as well as the outcome, can be more subject or object based. Most of the early works, with some exceptions like „Homemade“ of Brown are more object based. In her earliest process, *non dance* period and also fallowed through latter, body seemed to be objectified more as a „moving part of space“, separated body parts moving, even though subject and performing identity was not left a side in most of the pieces. In Meg’s case, subject is very important in her process. Identity and inner emotional space is constantly questioned.

As an example of clear choreographic instruction based score use in her creating process as well as example of quite objective direction work, especially score wise, I would like to analyze Trisha’s very recognizable piece – „Accumulation“.

In “Accumulation” not only the use of composing choreographic use of score is quite clear, but as well as in M. Goldberg earlier notice Brown found „each work on its own independent movement score“. The score was rather simple: having three main movements with certain amount of the repetition. (Kertess, K. 2004. p. 71)



“ I was investigating straight forward way. The only three movements were: extend, flex and rotate. I made a shape with my fist – is that okay? Then I rotate it. Then I extended while rotate. And I continue on adding movements while asking: is that okay to do?” (Kertess, K. 2004. Interview).

In this performance, the structure of score - three movements and repetitions are pretty clear 'rule'. But the questioning - *is that okay to do* is more a personal subjective approach, that probably each time depends on simply choreographers taste. This is like a next step: after finding and embodying the score, comes a choreographer's or creator's decision - weather she/he can use the result, or it needs further layering, research, complexity.

Going back to definitions and benefits of scores, score can simply be called a rule. A rule that the performer need to follow. In the example that Trisha performed in her studio in loft, rule is to follow the exterior using the body to express the perception of it. Aether it's a 'broken window' (Kertess, K. 2004 .Interview) or a surface that give certain impression to follow with ones body.

Here I would like to notice in a question, if having a certain rule, such as in a recent examples, protects a mover not to get overwhelmed?

### **Score as a protection from being overwhelmed**

A score could be a way or metaphorically the best medicine against being overwhelmed: “reading a score also acts as a distraction for the performer, providing a focus away from their own self-consciousness and fear” (Burrows, J. 2004 p. 143). Getting overwhelmed is a very constant *thing* happening to a dancer, especially in a improvisation. It though can be as positive as negative thing.

Going through Brown's early works, it seems that the moment of overwhelming is almost never happening in her pieces. It's aether her own way of minimalizing composition to the very few movements, focusing on the basics that she was working on, or giving very structural score, like “Locus” for her dancers, so the space for personal interpretation is quite

narrow and the outcome is pretty similar from the same task. Even though homemade was a complex piece involving autobiography, I dare to call Trisha's earliest work more objective, at least in case of an outcome, where the dominant thing was experiments with structure, objects and gravity, rather than emotions.

Almost the opposite could be said about Meg Stuart's artistic work.

Meg Stuart in the interviews mentioned: "I am not simply interested in how many ways single body could move, but what it could express emotionally". By following this though, it is visible in Meg Stuart's works, that her or her dancers goes deeply into emotional level, that could be called, get emotionally overwhelmed. Not to confuse and claim that this is how Stuart works, I want to underline, that certain rules and tendencies are different or even opposite from Browns. In simple words saying could be: T. Brown versus M. Stuart – clean versus messy, object versus subject. It's only very general way of summarizing their work, and there are many exceptions. T. Brown's conception of working can be called minimalistic, but then Stuart work is not followed by the opposite. By exploring what Jeroen Peeters calls micro - spheres, she makes to enter a performer deep in his inner space, that is often seen from outside, like a dancer is in a trance motion. There for I dare to consider M. Stuart minimalism in sense of analyzing and developing micro elements in her pieces. (Peeters, J. 2004)

For her creative process Stuart does not use word score. She calls it mostly task or simply exercise. Even though in this essay I would like to generalize it to a word score – as using the two main score definitions in the beginning. By exploring what does dance mean to choreographer and what is interesting to herself, Meg is focusing on exploration of each body part. "The exploration of each body part independent became a way of exploring what dance mean to me". (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 290). This sentence of Stuart does not seem to be far of T. Brown's ideas, like in series of "Accumulation", neither to William Forsythe, where in his *Improvisation Technologies* he is exploring separate body part work, few body part work or isolation. Even though the outcome of these choreographers obviously different.

## Recognizable and unrecognizable scores

According to J. Burrows, there are two main ways of classifying scores:

“First kind of score – what is written is a representation of the piece itself, a template which holds within the detail, in linear time, of what you will eventually see or hear. In the other kind of score, what is written or thought is a tool for information, image and inspiration, which acts as a source for what you will see, but those shapes may be very different from the final realization” (Burrows, J. 2004. p. )

A lot of T. Brown's works could fit the first classification of score, while Meg Stuart could represent the second category. one

Meg Stuart remembers always being interested in “deconstructing the body, in breaking it down into body parts. (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 289) For that she uses scores like: sitting, running, falling, lying, but focusing “primary on the inabilities of failure” (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 290). She avoids vaccinating her dancers' bodies with her own language, but communicates with them and lets them “infiltrate themselves into her concept by means of specific tasks like “your body is not yours”, “you are moving in two directions simultaneously” or “someone else manipulates your own body”” (Ploebst, H. 2001. p. 28). These kind of descriptions or scores, after outcome is very hard to identify for the audience. All one sees is a quality, emotion, or certain message, but the fundamental task is usually not visible. Or on the opposite, looks exaggerated. Depending on the task. So the development of the score is very personal: “the changing performers of the *Damaged Goods* integrate in Stuart's hyper – structure in a place between their own knowledge of a choreographer” (Ploebst, H. 2001. p. 28).

The use of score gives to Meg Stuart's performances unrecognizable quality. Score like strongly wanting to fly or pulling one's body apart. The task or score in M. Stuart's case can come also from the search of for instance “being weighted”. About the performance “Appetite” made in 1998 made together with Ann Hamilton, Stuart tells:

“We were curious to find out what it is that makes a person feel weighted – their history, family, memories, fears. From this question we started to work on the opposite idea of

weightlessness. The lightness was absorbed in the process and became an atmosphere for the whole piece. Everything that did not fall into this world was executed. Searching for lightness became a physical task".(Belder, de S. 2002. p. 290.)

In this piece "Appetite" the score to search for lightness became the base of the piece. Similarly like in most of Brow's early works. Here we can recognized the first way of classification from J. Burrows. Even though, the score hardly could be totally recognized through all the piece.

As Trisha Brown having scores as her creative foundation, Meg Stuart has 'tasks': "A crucial issue in my work is the idea of physical task. A choreographic idea works for me if I can hook on to a physical task that has different layers of meaning". (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 290). Finally talking about internal and external spaces, Meg Stuart seems to be focusing on the inner experience of a performer or as she likes to call "physical states" or "emotional states" (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 291). Therefore is more possible in to appear involuntary movement, which Meg is mostly fascinated. (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 290). This involuntary movements relates to the question of what is dance for Meg Stuart. "In "Visitors only" Stuart in this way able to arrive at a surprising self – observation figures that divide nature of the subject to the extreme: the performers 'hunt' themselves not recognizing their arms and legs; their own body is a foreign element" (Peeters, J. 2004. p. 64).

In early sixties Trisha Brown asks her self similar questions, there for she goes out completely from the 'dance' and goes to anti – dance, the research of gravity by just coming back to walking, searching it in different ways, like "Man walking down the side of the building" (1971) or "Woman Walking Down a Ladder" (1973), ) "Floor of the forest" (1970) "Leaning duets" (1970), and many more. However Brown's research in those pieces is mostly objective. There is no emotional research there. However talking about the "Homemade" to Klaus Kertess she mentions how a lot of her work is directly connected with her childhood memories. For some other of the works she uses text from her memory and strongly mixes with other scores: "Skymap" (1979), "Accumulation with talking plus watermotor".

It's hard to say, whether Meg's methods of working are more internally based, and Brown's early works are more about shape and movement, externally based. In Trisha's works there are a lot of examples and phases where she questions her memory, identity and movement culture. As well as Meg Stuart mentions that "through the skin and the sense of touch the body

is an interior and exterior, a container and a contained". (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 290). So even though, Meg's pieces seemed more subject based, then Browns, but they both represents internal and external spaces .

Coming back to Burrows one of the advantages of the score is a distraction for the performer, providing a focus away from their own self-consciousness and fear. Stuart says constantly looking for key that helps for the performer to get in the certain emotional state and get away from their own self – consciousness. (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 291). Here Stuart mentions couple of those keys, that ones are more abstract, others more recognizable: "I want to fly, I want to be invisible, I want to enter in someone else skin" (Belder, de S. 2002. p. 291).

Coming back to more traditional scores, that is more a choreographic instruction then a generalized direction, I would like to finish with two complex pieces Trisha Brown "Accumulation with talking plus watermotor" (1979) and "Locus" (1975)

"Accumulation with talking plus watermotor" shows a very clear advantage of mixing the scores. In the piece it's visible how she mixes movement with text in a very complex way. (Dvd 1 Accumulation with talking plus watermotor (11:42)) To get this effect, Brown mixes the text score with to other score. She simply names it in the headline of the performance. In her brochures on can see, how she cuts the text with different numbers, that gives impression of cut and past and mix way of composing (Teicher. 2004. *Addison gallery of American art*. p. 84-85). The outcome is a complex piece, that one might notice the different impacts of scores, but could not follow the primary structure.

As the certain text with number in Trisha's brochures, it's visible artist used to document pieces r use writing and drawing for her creating methods. By documenting score , is possible and easy to mix them at first on paper, then latter on stage. It gives possibility to repeated the same task again. Performer can go easily to the previous improvisation or the concrete compositional task by remembering the score. The score is a frame for and to not get lost in the creative process, as well as not get overwhelmed by the big amount of movements, movement qualities one can be able to proceed. Finally it is a simply a 'diary' for the choreography. By reading it, the composition can be repeated, depending on a score, similar or even exact way.

In “ Lotus” T. Brown has “integrated language with three dimensional kinesphere of space that surrounds a dancer's body”. She designed an imaginary cube for each performer to inhabit, with points on it labeled with numbers corresponding to letters of the alphabet. “Dancers' gestures literally spelled out sentences from a statement written by Brown as a professional autobiography, which would never be decipherable to the spectator without viewing corresponding choreographic drawings”(Goldberg, M. 2004. p. 38).

Here in “Lotus” working with certain amount of people, by showing and explaining the score, Brown managed to make a complex choreographic composition for five people. Coming back to benefits and reasons to use scores, we see that a clear choreographic frame is easier to explain to one's colleague, then and certain movement composition inspired by associations, or a concept of the whole piece. Score is easy to explain and even though the outcome can be pretty different depending on a person that does it, the score helps to keep the same essentials of the idea.

**How did I applied scores for my own creative process in my final solo piece “Rooster and the colors”and what impact from other choreographers methods I used?**

The piece “Rooster and the colors”,that took part in Iceland academy of arts theatre 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of February. The piece I dear to classify as a dance theatre piece, since it involved not only choreography but also speaking and singing, basic acting elements. It was performed by seven performers, five female dancers and two male acting students. The piece was twenty seven minutes long.

From the very beginning I decided to do an interpretation of an old Russian animation that was actually called “Rooster and the colors”. I had a goal to literally transfer the cartoon to a theatre space.

To transfer the ideas and material to the performers, I applied different angles and used many layers, such as: psychological, social, theatrical, choreographic, aesthetics and finally magical fantasy world. I was involving them all and mixing together. So the magical world would be mixed up together with the reality world, with all their contexts.

Leaving all the other layers behind, in this essay I will focus to the choreographic part. How I came up with the material for the piece and how I used different scores for that. I will give examples of few scores I used.

To get away from the hole content of the piece, I concentrated on the simple tasks: how to make colors move, how the 'rooster' express their characters through movement.

For the 'colors' characters, girls had to make a series of scores, that I mixed together and called it simply “phrase work”. Phrase work was mainly mix of two big scores, that were also mixed separately. First of them 'cut and past' score I originally learned form choreographer Sunna Myllylächti, that she learned from Michele Anne de May, who started “Rosas” together with Anna Teresa de Keersmaker. They have both worked with this phrase method.

In the concrete method, there is one phrase, that is aether composed by a dancer or given by the choreographer. After the dancer has to do 4 variations: reverse, turning version, jumping version and miniature. The phrase in the beginning needs to be very precise for further variations. After words the mover is supposed to cut the phrase and each version in five parts. Mixing those parts together dancer finally have a complex phrase.

For the basic phrase I used the other method that I simply named “name score”. This score I learned from Heidi. Vierthaler. Heidi was a dancers in W. Forsythe's company and have mastered his composing methods.

Name phrase is a simple composition method using one's personal name. First name mostly. in this case, name is already one a part score, creative tool. Another part consist from a certain body limitation, that H. Vierthaler calls dislocating body parts or in other words – movement isolation.

The dancer is asked to make a movement phrase using his/her name and letters in the name as inspirational point or tool while isolating body parts - moving one body part at the time.

The name phrase composition can have a lot of body parts involved, complex and dynamic. It is up to the creator. If a mover really masters the method, he/she can do it very quickly, one body part following the other, so it gets interesting flow. The method of isolating body parts originally comes from famous choreographer, dance analytic and inventor of what he calls improvisation technologies William Forsythe.

After mixing these two scores together, meaning having mane phrase a foundation phrase and then making variations, cutting and gluing together, dancers had each complex choreographic combination. After words those 'naked' compositions got the layers of dynamics, moreover layer of color, and characters while adding other creating methods.

By using these two scores I successfully had a lot of material to work from, develop and involve into the content of the piece. Even though the score is a pretty mathematical tool in this case, that initiates to work with 'dry' movement material, I notice it turned out to be very creative, expressive and somehow personal way of working. The three dancers working from the same score came up with very different material that fitted their characters and opened different moods and personalities. By going out of main concept of the piece and concentrating only on choreographic and physical side, I could come with a lot of various material to use, that performers during the process could easily adjust, develop to the characters or hole the performance.

Another example of score I borrowed straight from J. Burrows, that I called “Imaginary dance”. Short description of the score is, that one imagines the dance he/she dance for a certain time, then writes down and then gives the writing to the another person. In this process, the score was done by two female dancers, but embodied by two male acting students.

I've chosen to it this way in order to see, how imaginary dance of professional dancers, can be performed by non dancers.

For the surprise of hole group, the task turned out to be very successfully. By reading the exact material written, movers cam up with very clean movements. Interpreted by them, it neither seemed as something actor could compose nor as something a 'dancer' could make. There came what I call 'in between' quality that I was happily satisfied.

These two score I could I find similar in some principals to T. Brown's two pieces “Locus” and “Accumulation with talking plus watermotor”.

Before adding all the other layers, development and involving in the hole content, I could have the benefit of choreographic 'skeleton' that I could metaphorically latter put on meet skin and finally clothes. Moreover, I could 'run away', and give the possibility to do the same for the performers, from the concept and narrative of the piece. For the working process and the



energy of the group, it helps not to get lost or overwhelmed by the main idea, but rather work gradually, and every time came back to the material created, by documenting.

Working with scores turned out to be very productive and I think brought a big potential in the whole creating process.

## **Conclusion**

Scores no doubt works as a tool in choreographic or simply creative process. It can vary from giving the structure to the piece as in Trisha's Brown work or an unchangeable quality, as in Meg Stuart's case. Having a different input to the piece, scores definitely gives certain bases that creators latter can develop. A certain skeleton. In my piece, the scores were mostly the basic structures fulfilling only some layers of the piece, but by mixing and developing them, I could reach much further. I used both object and subject based types of scores, that gave a big impute to whole creation and mostly kept the process going without getting lost and overwhelmed.

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- Kertess Klaus. Story about no story. p. 71 – 80

Brown Trisha. *Skymap*, 1996. p. 81 – 83, *Accumulation with talking plus watermotor*, 1979 p. 84 – 85, *Locus*, 1975. p. 87.

## DVD format

Brown Trisha. 2004. Early works. 1966 – 1979. ARTPX Notebooks.

dvd one: *Brown Trisha. Early works 1966 – 1979.* (should I mention all the works in dvd?)

- *Homemade* , 1996 (04:42)
- *Man walking down the side of a building* , 1970 (02:47)
- *Floor of the forest* , 1970 (06:04)
- *Leaning duets* , 1970 (02:00)
- *Walking on the wall* , 1971 (04:49)
- *Accumulation* , 1971 (05:34)
- *Primary accumulation* , 1972 (06:21)
- *Group primary accumulation* , 1973 (08:29)
- *Locus* , 1975 (14:04)
- *Watermotor* , 1978 (07:55)
- *Accumulation with talking plus watermotor* , 1979 (11:42)

dvd two: *A conversation with Trisha Brown and Klaus Kertess.* (1: 10: 00. )

Stuart Meg. 2003. *Archival shooting visitors only.* Filmed and edited – Avoort Aliocha Van der.

(concept and direction - Stuart Meg)