

# { DIY dancer }

## Dd Critical Conversation: Inside and Outside Perspectives on Dusan Tynek's *Stereopsis* at BAM

By Candice Thompson  
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*I sat down with my longtime friend and colleague Emily Gayeski to discuss Dusan Tynek's *Stereopsis*, which premiered last week at BAM Fisher Space, to compare notes on how my experience of viewing the show meshed or differed from Gayeski's experience of dancing in it.*

**CT:** *Stereopsis* was quite an intense three act performance. So I can't help but begin with, how does your body feel today?

**EG:** Actually, fine. Of course my legs are tired, specifically calves and hips and I've noticed my diaphragm being a bit more cramped than ever before—I guess from the vocalizing and cardiovascular demand of the show. The last night, after the show, I had this amazing charlie horse in my right hamstring like I've never had before. Overall though, it's been interesting to feel all of those sort of asymmetrical chronic pains dissolve into a more even sense of cumulative strength (and fatigue). I would say I actually feel better than I would at the end of a vacation...because during this time I absolutely had to attend to my body more.



Photo by Julieta Cervantes

**CT:** Did you have any specific routine between ballets?

**EG:** I started going to class more about a month before the show which is when our rehearsals became more frequent and intense. It was just becoming impossible to rehearse well without having taken class whenever I could. I also knew I needed to build my stamina as well as the strength in my feet and lower legs to withstand the show and avoid injury. The other thing that made a huge difference in the last month was rolling out at night. I'd roll out my hips, calves and feet which would take up to an hour almost every night, and ice anything that felt inflamed. It's horribly boring to do it long enough for it to be effective but I didn't hobble out of bed like Patrick Corbin in that Paul Taylor *Dancemaker* film when I did it. I am now a real believer in it.

**CT:** *Base Pairs* was danced to a ticking metronome and the velvety voice of Lucinda Childs reciting a poem by Cynthia Poluntanovich. And while the poem had a storyline and very evocative lines such as "intimacy wears us down," the dancing was quite formal and abstract full of sharp windmill arm movements and partnering that seemed to slice through the atmosphere. Did you ever get carried away by the emotions of the poem or were you moved simply by keeping time?

**EG:** Honestly, no. We rehearsed so much to just the metronome and the amount of concentration for us to maintain our phrasing (it's all in 3's) was so intense that there simply wasn't mental space to get carried away by emotions. Of course, the words of Cynthia's poem come through the concentration, but at least for me, I'm so focused on my partner, or watching whomever is onstage to be sure we enter on the correct timing, or spacing that I cannot let the words dictate me. We are so bound by the structure of the meter that I can only find the humanity in the intensity of looking into the faces of my fellow dancers. The amount of focus this requires is so great, particularly through nerves and the sort of unusual crossovers "in the wings" of BAM.



Photo by Julieta Cervantes

**CT:** *Romanesco Suite* was my favorite work as it seemed to be the most playful and free of the three dances presented. All of the elements, from the Amazonian soundscape to the dappled light to the casual shorts and tshirts to the acrobatics and moving body sculptures combined to form a complete world for me; a world in

which any obstacle can be surmounted and humans move in concert with each other like a pack of animals. Did you feel more human or animal in this work?

**EG:** That's interesting because again, the amount of focus it required felt very human... I was thinking quite a bit, partially as a result of only having about a week of running it under our belts as we were still finishing it the week before. But now that you mention it, I recall having a sense of the hair on the back of my neck, so to speak, prickling up or an antenna-like sense of awareness as our cues were either visual or vocal...bursting into action after some stillness (a treat!).

**CT:** Was working this way—without music and following visual and vocal cues of when to move—new for you?

**EG:** Working without music was new. Of course we're always watching each other with music as well but without it, if someone is late, the group will opt for the music (unless it's a matter of safety), as that is driving the design of the choreography, but in this case, the design was in the patterns and relationships.

**CT:** In what other ways has Tynek's approach to dance making differed from other choreographers you have worked with?

**EG:** Dusan never tells us much beyond the initial concept, leaving phrasing interpretations/symbolism up to us. He almost always works in chronological order so that the piece slowly accumulates over time and somehow, I don't know how at times, he has the whole design predetermined in his head when he comes into rehearsal. He is able to keep track of all the layered parts which in the case of *Romanesco* was crazy to me because it's such a 3-D puzzle of moving dancers! It was so much fun to perform.

**CT:** And finally *Stereopsis* pulled out all the stops as it called on the dancers to be warriors and vocalize “ha” and “aah” among other words while executing Tynek's highly aerobic movement phrases. Was it difficult to coordinate the two? or did the vocalizations give you strength?



Photo by Julieta Cervantes

**EG:** At first, yes, it was definitely another layer to coordinate and it took us all a little time to figure out “is this a huh? or a hm? here?” or is the kiss-kiss sound happen on the 2,3 or the beats between? But by the time the show came around I definitely drew strength from it. Yes, it was physically difficult as it became more aerobic but I also became more aware of my breath...I simply had to breathe in order to make sound and not mind the audience hearing it, particularly in such an intimate setting. I thought I would be more nervous to vocalize but it was actually very freeing and interesting for me to figure out the difference between being empowered by it without a kind of indulgent aggression..at least I hope I accomplished that.

**CT:** Indulgent aggression—that is such an intriguing phrase. In my notebook, I wrote down “warriors” and “primeval.” The aggression of the dancers felt functional and integral to the piece. It was certainly the darkest of all the dances presented.

**EG:** Yea, I guess that could be a loaded term ‘indulgent aggression’ and I realize my coining of it is comes from my own personal feelings and response to performances I’ve taken in. I agree that in the belly and the end of *Stereopsis* the aggressive vocal sounds were functional as they were directed more in the circle amongst the group or as part of a kind of sound “score.” But I think because I had to walk out straight downstage alone and say “HUH!” directly at the crowd, I wanted to make it less of “grr..I’m strong and I might seem a little crazy and angry but you’re and watching me so too bad! HUH!” That kind of choice inevitably puts up a barrier between performers and audience; I was focused on a way to be strong and aggressive but relatable.

**CT:** Yes, that is a tight rope. But Tynek’s performance of the poem came off more than a little indulgent, with the reverb effect on the microphone and slinky movements. It made me wonder if I was missing something...if it helpful on the inside to hear his somewhat satanic vocalization...what kind of emotional tone did it set for you?

**EG:** As for Dusan’s monologue, I loved it. We sort of giggled the first time we saw him do it because we had no idea! I think it was such a weird and unexpected shift from the rest of the show. He took a risk in doing it and I think he knew that. The whole dance is loosely (in my mind) based on the story of the Cyclops in Homer’s *Odyssey*. It set this mythological tone, kind of otherworldly and spooky. He was so committed that his performance (and the lighting) helped all of us get into Greek chorus mode. I mean Greek tragedies are ridiculously overdramatic too!

**CT:** Touche!

Candice Thompson is a Brooklyn-based artist and writer. Prior to dancing with the Milwaukee Ballet Company and ad hoc Ballet, she trained with Kee Juan Han at the School of Ballet Arizona and NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. She founded LOLAstretch Dancewear in 2000 and has designed costumes for a variety of theater and dance companies across the country. She is currently pursuing a masters degree in Literary Nonfiction at Columbia University’s Creative Writing Program.