

PROJECT 3: ASSIGNMENT X3



Still Life with a Fruit Dish, 1936, Georges Braque



Still from Trisha Brown Dance Company

PROJECT 3: ASSIGNMENT X3 READINGS/RESEARCH

References:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (TBD)

At least one video of the work of: Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, Simone Forti, Anna Halprin, Trisha Brown

Here are five excerpts from The Hidden Dimension with corresponding questions below each one. Please read each excerpt at least twice, then respond to each question with one paragraph on a separate document. Each paragraph must be fully rewritten at least once, not just for the sake of proofreading but for clarity and depth. Each paragraph should be between a quarter page and a half a page.

Below each question (in parenthesis) I've put my own thoughts on how Yoga might relate to the quote and question; you do not have to respond to these parenthetical thoughts but they are there if you'd like to.

1. "In spite of the fact that cultural systems pattern behavior in radically different ways, they are deeply rooted in biology and physiology. Man is an organism with a wonderful and extraordinary past. He is distinguished from the other animals by virtue of the fact that he has elaborated what I have termed extensions of his organism. By developing his extensions, man has been able to improve or specialize various functions. The computer is an extension of part of the brain, the telephone extends the voice, the wheel extends the legs and feet. Language extends experience in time and space while writing extends language. Man has elaborated his extensions to such a degree that we are apt to forget that his humanness is rooted in his animal nature. The anthropologist Weston La Barre has pointed out that man has shifted evolution from his body to his extensions and in so doing has tremendously accelerated the evolutionary process." (pp.3-4)
 - a. **Question:** What does the term "extension" mean to you and how does that differ or align with how Hall describes the term above? To your mind is an extension always technology? How do our extensions accelerate evolution?
 - b. *(In yoga and dance the word "extension" is used very differently and often involves peripersonal space, because in those practices it is the body itself that is the instrument or technology. Extension is how far we extend into space or imagine ourselves to extend into space. Above all, extension goes in two directions- inward and outward- and it is the union of these opposing forces that aligns us in and with space.)*
2. "The shift from reliance on the nose to reliance on the eye as a result of environmental pressures has completely redefined the human situation. Man's ability to plan has been made possible because the eye takes in a larger

PROJECT 3: ASSIGNMENT X3

sweep; it codes vastly more complex data and thus encourages thinking in the abstract. Smell, on the other hand, while deeply emotional and sensually satisfying, pushes man in just the opposite direction. Man's evolution has been marked by the development of the "distance receptors"—sight and hearing. Thus he has been able to develop the arts which employ these two senses to the virtual exclusion of all the others. Poetry, painting, music, sculpture, architecture, the dance depend primarily though not exclusively on eyes and ears. So do the communications systems which man has set up. In later chapters, we shall see how the differing emphasis laid on sight, hearing, and smell by cultures which man has developed has led to greatly differing perceptions of space and the relations of individuals in space." (p.40)

- a. **Question:** Here is an excerpt on how vision and sound overwhelm all of our perceptual intake. What are the limits of understanding space through vision? Now, with screens in our pockets, visual exchange dominates our perceptual world even more than when Hall wrote this. What is it like to design with smell or touch in mind as much as visual organization?
 - b. *(In yoga we are often asked to turn all of our senses inward and see what happens when we use them to organize the space of the body as opposed to the space of the world around us)*
3. "Touch and visual spatial experiences are so interwoven that the two cannot be separated. Think for a moment how young children and infants reach, grasp, fondle, and mouth everything, and how many years are required to train children to subordinate the world of touch to the visual world. Commenting on space perception, the artist Braque distinguished between visual and tactile space thus: "tactile" space separates the viewer from objects while "visual" space separates objects from each other. Emphasizing the difference between these two types of space and their relations to the experience of space, he said that "scientific" perspective is nothing but an eye-fooling trick—a bad trick—which makes it impossible for the artist to convey the full experience of space. (p.60)
 - a. **Question:** What does Braque mean by, "tactile" space separates the viewer from objects while "visual" space separates objects from each other"?
 - b. *(Yoga can help to sensitize one to themselves and in turn the world. One turns their perception inward in order to hone and refine it so that when it's turned outward one's sense of others and their peripersonal dimension is also refined. Also, remember that the skin is the largest organ in your body.)*
 4. "In Chapter VII we saw that man's sense of space and distance is not static, that it has very little to do with the single viewpoint linear perspective developed by the Renaissance artists and still taught in most schools of art and architecture. Instead, man senses distance as other animals do. His perception of space is dynamic because it is related to action—what can be done in a given space—rather than what is seen by passive viewing. The general failure to grasp the significance of the many elements that contribute to man's sense of space may be due to two mistaken notions: (1) that for every effect there is a single and identifiable cause; and (2) that man's boundary begins and ends with his skin. If we can rid ourselves of the need for a single explanation, and if we can think of man as surrounded by a series of expanding and contracting fields which provide information of many kinds, we shall begin to see him in an entirely different light. We can then begin to learn about human behavior, including personality types. Not only are there introverts and extroverts, authoritarian and egalitarian, Apollonian and Dionysian types and all the other shades and grades of personality, but each one of us has a number of learned situational personalities. The simplest form of the situational personality is that associated with responses to intimate, personal, social, and public transactions. Some individuals never develop the public phase of their personalities and, therefore, cannot fill public spaces; they make very poor speakers or moderators. As many psychiatrists know, other people have trouble with the intimate and personal zones and cannot endure closeness to others." (pp.114-115)
 - a. **Question:** How does thinking of space as verb-based and filled with potential action change the way one designs? If one keeps in mind a bubble of actions around each individual as one designs, space is always already dynamic and circulating. Hall asks, "How is a room different from the time you walk in and look at it to after you have walked around" and filled it with action?
 - b. *(In yoga and dance one aims for all "the rooms" of the body- from toe joint to upper back- to be available for action so that energy can circulate freely)*

PROJECT 3: ASSIGNMENT X3

Below is an additional quote which might inform answers 4 or 5, having to do with what happens when peripersonal space and the space of action surrounding each body is utterly negated:

"If one looks at human beings in the way that the early slave traders did, conceiving of their space requirements simply in terms of the limits of the body, one pays very little attention to the effects of crowding. If, however, one sees man surrounded by a series of invisible bubbles which have measurable dimensions, architecture can be seen in a new light. It is then possible to conceive that people can be cramped by the spaces in which they have to live and work. They may even find themselves forced into behavior, relationships, or emotional outlets that are overly stressful. Like gravity, the influence of two bodies on each other is inversely proportional not only to the square of the distance but possibly even the cube of the distance between them. When stress increases, sensitivity to crowding rises—people get more on edge—so that more and more space is required as less and less is available." (p.129)

5. "In America, the conventional idea of the space needed by office employees is restricted to the actual space required to do the job. Anything beyond the minimum requirement is usually regarded as a "frill." The concept that there may be additional requirements is resisted, at least in part because of the American's mistrust of subjective feelings as a source of data. We can measure with a tape whether or not a man can reach something, but we must apply an entirely different set of standards to judge the validity of an individual's feeling of being cramped. (p.52) "Crowded subways and buses may bring strangers into what would ordinarily be classed as intimate spatial relations, but subway riders have defensive devices which take the real intimacy out of intimate space in public conveyances. The basic tactic is to be as immobile as possible and, when part of the trunk or extremities touches another person, withdraw if possible. If this is not possible, the muscles in the affected areas are kept tense. For members of the non-contact group, it is taboo to relax and enjoy bodily contact with strangers! In crowded elevators the hands are kept at the side or used to steady the body by grasping a railing. The eyes are fixed on infinity and are not brought to bear on anyone for more than a passing glance." (p.118)
 - a. **Question: What kind of architectural space makes you feel cramped and can you analyze why? What are some design tactics that counter crowding and cramping and create a greater sense of freedom? In a separate but similar vein, have you spent habitual time in cramped spaces and how have they altered how you hold your body?**
 - b. *(In yoga we often use a mat which designates your room of space, the idea is in fact that space is a state of mind and that there is a way to stand on a crowded subway and always have enough space...Does Hall underestimate the potential for making space within one's body as a source of freedom?)*

For class consideration only:

"Man and his extensions constitute one interrelated system. It is a mistake of the greatest magnitude to act as though man were one thing and his house or his cities, his technology or his language were something else. Because of the interrelationship between man and his extensions, it behooves us to pay much more attention to what kinds of extensions we create, not only for ourselves but for others for whom they may be ill suited. The relationship of man to his extensions is simply a continuation and a specialized form of the relationship of organisms in general to their environment. However, when an organ or process becomes extended, evolution speeds up at such a rate that it is possible for the extension to take over. This is what we see in our cities and in automation. This is what Norbert Wiener was talking about when he foresaw dangers in the computer, a specialized extension of part of man's brain. Because extensions are numb (and often dumb, as well), it is necessary to build feedback (research) into them so that we can know what is happening, particularly in regard to extensions that mold or substitute for the natural environment. This feedback must be strengthened both in our cities and in our conduct of interethnic relations. The ethnic crisis, the urban crisis, and the education crisis are interrelated. If viewed comprehensively all three can be seen as different facets of a larger crisis, a natural outgrowth of man's having developed a new dimension—the cultural dimension—most of which is hidden from view. The question is, How long can man afford to consciously ignore his own dimension? (pp. 188-189)

To your mind, is the cultural dimension defined by our extensions alone? Are these extensions "numb"?

("Numb" might be Yoga's greatest enemy)