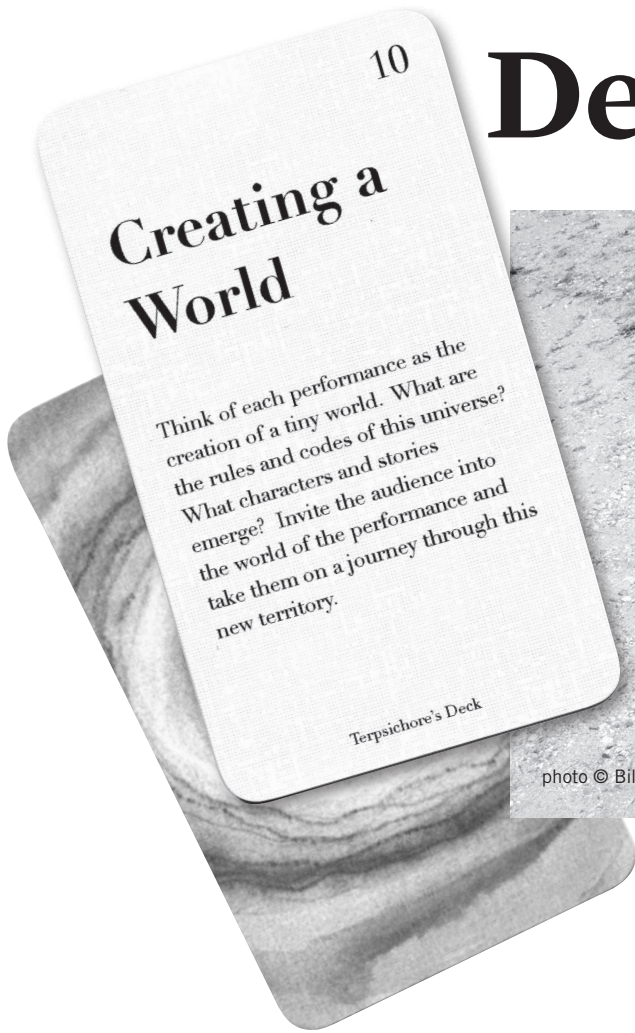


Terpsichore's Deck



distilled choreographic inspirations

by Eliza Larson

[Above] Eliza Larson, Otter Creek State Park, NH, August 2013.
Card images from Terpsichore's Deck. Artwork and text © Eliza Larson

Create a design book—something that will inspire you.* These were the directions that inspired me to create Terpsichore's Deck. I was in the middle of the last semester of my graduate program in dance; the assignment was to write down the design principles and ideas that had resonated with us throughout the semester and turn them into a book of some sort. Rather than make a written version that I would never use, I wanted to create something that I actually loved, something both personal and useful. Instead of a book to flip through, I wanted something that I could engage with in the studio, something filled with significance and meaning.

I knew right away that I wanted to create a deck of cards. I had received my first tarot cards from my mother for my 12th birthday. Many years later, the winter that my mother got sick and I moved in to take care of her, part of our daily routine was pulling an inspirational card from her Angel Deck. And the Motherpeace cards I inherited after her passing were a solace during grad school—a way to focus and process the whirlwind of information, events, and emotions. Creating my own deck of cards became a way for me to combine the choreographic principles I love with my favorite tool for reflection.

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Maren Larson Falck in Nancy Demuth's Dance Kinetics class, Marblehead, MA, 2008.

Rather than for divine inspiration or divination, these cards are designed for crafting and creating art. In this deck are my favorite choreographic textbook ideas and a checklist for my creative process. They are a reflection of the information I've received from my teachers and colleagues over the years. Each card is a source of inspiration—starting points to create from, as well as touchstones to come back to.

Terpsichore's Deck both inspires and instructs. The cards can be read in order and explored as a choreographic text. As a systematic way to teach principles of composition and choreography, the cards move from the external to the internal. They begin with broader aspects of performance making: What is the venue? What is the flavor or tone of the piece? What are the spatial pathways of the performers? The cards move into movement and vocabulary principles, such as duration, stillness, abstraction, and asymmetry. They finish with a subtle look at elements of performativity and the energetic expression of the performer.

More than just an instructional tool, the deck is meant to be playful, a way to explore and experiment with different elements of performance and performance making. They can be a ready-at-hand method to use in chance choreography, inspiration for choreographic or improvisational scores, or a divining tool to figure out what to focus on next. I like to use them as a directive for instant performances—for example, choosing three and using them as my score. How might I turn Proximity, Limits, and Gaze into a cohesive performance? These cards are a distillation of choreographic elements that inspire and inform my work as an artist. My hope is that they will inspire you, too.



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For more information or to purchase a deck, please visit www.terpsichoresdeck.com.

** The inspiration for Terpsichore's Deck came from an assignment for Choreography and Design, a graduate seminar led by Chris Aiken at Smith College in the spring of 2013. Special thanks to Chris Aiken; Angie Hauser; and classmates Shaina Cantino, Sara Coffin, Melissa Edwards, Mat Elder, Safi Harriott, Kelly Silliman, and Cat Wagner.*

*[Above] photo © Patricia Sullivan
artwork © Eliza Larson*

Gaze

50

...tional with your gaze.
...re you looking as you
...Do you keep your eyes on
...to you make eye contact
...the space? See your
...and acknowledge
...our eyes be
...ise your
...e's

Spatial Journey

28

How does the space change from the beginning to the end of a performance? What is the journey of the space? Make a drawing of always and notice the space of

Scale

13

What is the scale of your performance? Make a dance that's too big for the space. Perform for the moon. Make a performance that is small enough to do in the shower. Make a dance that's too tiny to be seen. Have the audience view the performance through a telescope and manipulate the scale of what they see.

Terpsichore's Deck

Limits

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Duration

What is the duration or length of a physical action? What about a moment in performance? Play with duration. How long can you hold an idea or gesture for longer than you are comfortable. Try 100 new ideas in one minute. Experiment with how long you can stay with an idea in your performance. Use the same approach to movement. Play with extremes of duration and discomfort of a duration