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CRITICS

DANCE REVIEW

A Migration Across a Stage And Through a Building

By JOHN ROCKWELL

This will have to be more of a road marker than a review. Unfortunately, the road is coming to an end. This week's performances of Jennifer Monson's "Bird Brain" events, titled "Flight of Mind," which began on Monday night at the Dance Theater Workshop, represent the culmination of at least the New York portion of this five-year project, although there may be a tour and more environmental forays.

The series began in 2000 with pigeons on a Brooklyn roof and has continued intermittently with outdoor performances and workshops and panels and research trips to follow the migratory patterns of birds and other animals. It has also led to the founding of iLand, which stands for Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance.

This week's program consists of Jennifer Monson's "Bird Brain" which continues through Saturday at the Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street, Chelsea. (212) 924-0077 or www.dtw.org.

Bird Brain Dance Theater Workshop

an exploratory tour through the Dance Theater Workshop building, complete with young dancers, followed by an hourlong performance on the main stage — reached through the basement and up some stairs and through a small jungle of potted greenery (or yellowery, given its desiccated look), some of which spilled into the seats. Plus a post-performance discussion.

But about 45 minutes into the main performance Ms. Monson's quartet suddenly became a trio, and the missing dancer, Eleanor Hullahan, did not appear to acknowledge the audience's applause. Just before her departure the dancers had been interacting with thin but large sheets of plywood. In the course of their exertions each piece flopped down on a dancer, and Ms. Hullahan broke a toe. Another dancer was scheduled to replace her last night, but who will perform her part for the rest of the week remained unclear yesterday.

Since Ms. Monson uses a lot of improvisation in her work, perhaps the



Michael Nagle for The New York Times
Katy Pyle, right, and Jennifer Monson holding sheets of plywood in Ms. Monson's "Flight of Mind" at Dance Theater Workshop.

remaining three adapted handily and nothing much was missed. But the presence of the full quartet for the whole piece would surely have affected one's reaction. The dancers, as trio or quartet, moved mostly as a group, performing vignettes and tasks. There were numerous props — broken-up Styrofoam, a coat rack — creating a scattering of litter by the end, no doubt a commentary on environmental despoliation.

But Ms. Monson's evident fascination with nature and its beasts and

migratory patterns translates only intermittently to the dancing. The actual movement vocabulary seemed lacking in distinctiveness, a few recurrent pivoting movements with stiff arms or legs aside. The ambience was attractive and original, the music often haunting and the spirit good. How it would have played out with a full complement of performers, however, I cannot say.

The three remaining dancers were Alex Escalante, Katy Pyle and Ms. Monson herself.