

Road map to my research

Why this research?

I want to find out how it is exactly that I work. In order to create a toolbox or method for people like me who create in the doing. I noticed that this way of starting a creation is something I use more often, and that through the doing a performance is created. Sometimes this is a process that takes two years and even after performing several years the act still changes. I am well aware that describing my working methods as 'I'm just messing around' is absolutely not true, but I also was not able to give a clear view of my approach to creation.

My starting point for the performance was creating an object, in function of performing aerial acrobatics in the street, without the limitations of a static structure. My artistic value is that art should be accessible for all audience and that is why I want to create for performing outdoors, on the street.

I used the creation of a performance for the final project to answer my research question: 'how to let meaning arise through the practice of creation, using 'the other' by listening to reflections and reactions during the creation process. I wanted to see what would happen if I did not communicate my drive or an initial idea for creating this piece and take in consideration everything the spectator communicates with me, verbal and nonverbal.

What are the results?

I did not create a method for others, although I think that my findings can help others to find support into understanding what their own methods are. During the research I found 4 sections that stood out for my way of creating, and I used the idea of '4 sides of a triangle' to describe my findings.

1. I researched what influences my piece besides myself: the performers, the audience, the object and the space where the most important influences. Audience feedback help me to see what I present, they are a mirror and show me what kind of dramaturgy they experience and they communicated the importance of the structure as the protagonist in the piece.

2. 'why' I create the way I do: My values were mostly clear to me, but it is important to be able to communicate them. Accessibility for all, both performers and audience, transfer to the audience a need to belong, to be part of this play. Transfer a feeling of interdependence and trust and making a soft but big impact. The manifesto was opening my eyes to my struggle with words and how it stops me from asking for funding. It is not that I think that my work is not worthwhile, but I am reluctant to use words that don't fit to describe what I make, just because these are the words that fit the criteria for funding.

3. what methodologies did I use: practice or discovery led research, I found out I need a dialogue to think and I also record and so I use 'second brain' to rethink what I see do and hear. In choreographing the piece I used multidisciplinary collaging, meaning that connecting juggling, funambulism, balancing objects and staff manipulation in transforming from one score to the other is an act of collaging. Doing performative research I can use all the influences described above and learn from the performance outcome by merging objectivity and subjectivity in a combination of disseminating and doing.

4. What I do when I make a choreography is: facilitating a warm and playful atmosphere, I listen well and communicate clear decisions, I make intuitive choices and I trust the process. I am a facilitator who facilitates a process in which there is the right situation to create what I want to make. All the findings, the influences, the why, the what and the methodologies are somehow my decisions. I know who I want to create for, where I want the performance to happen and what is important to me to transfer to the audience. I know what I stand for and therefore in co-creation it is possible that I make decisions that are good for the group and maybe less good for the performance.

What moves me as a choreographer for circus, dance and community-arts is making accessible performances that touches on the feeling that (extremely) difficult physical actions somehow appear to be possible and not out of reach. Imagining that you can do this too, is the good feeling the performance transfers to the audience.

How did I reach that?

To be able to research my methods I did not communicate my drive or an initial idea for creating this piece and took in consideration everything the spectator communicates with me, verbal and nonverbal. By answering the question why I made certain decisions, I found out that intuition is one of the drives, together with my values and by observing what influences me I was able to find meaning in the piece

After finalizing the object, we had 10 creation/ rehearsal sessions and 4 presentations with audience; two public rehearsals and 2 real try-out performances. Every time I had questions for the audience and sometimes also for the performers. I recorded the presentations and the feedback and I also asked 4 people to interview me about my process from different angles. One of the performers, one audience member, one peer student and I did a 'makers dialogue' (a method from HKU to research how artists create) with 3 other colleagues from the outdoor performers scene. By closely monitoring, reflective writing, and listening to hours of taped conversations I came to the 4 main findings of my research, using the '4 sides as a method of ordering them'.

What do they tell me?

From the audience I learned that the object could be the protagonist of the piece and that I can learn from what they experience as my 'dramaturgs', but that every person has his own fantasy and interpretations so its up to me where I want to connect to. My performers are a mirror, they communicate a clear an physical effect to my assignments and attitude. I need to know and read them so I can help them to perform the way I want them to do. I need to be patient and trust the process to be able to let it happen. This was very difficult for me but it helped me to really see what was already there and work with the given abilities. From my peers in the street theatre scene I learned that not knowing what it is you are making, does not mean that it is thoughtless or that there is no deep philosophical or political value in what you do, it just takes a longer time to reveal the meaning that is inside.

Using 'second-brain' helped me to understand better the questions form my teachers, the feedback from my artistic coach and to listen to the things I say. My peers from Comma told me that in dialogue I very clearly communicate what it is that I do and what I stand for.

Where does this lead me to?

I found it difficult to validate what I do as 'art'. In the first year I was told to be more egocentric, and I think that this is a big learning point. I rabble against egocentrism and writing about my work and what drives me as art, feels like bragging. The people I want to create with and for, often don't like the use of complicated words, and I am asked to write as if I would apply for funding. I want to stay true to my values and in the same time I now see that financial support could help to make a bigger investment in time and so develop a richer outcome. For now I want to start performing with what we have and in the meantime continue with the once a month training to enrich the piece for next year. I plan to apply for finding to do a residency and see what this can bring me. There were two bookers in the audience of the performance on the 24th, and they show interest in the piece. There for I think this creation was successful. I also plan to transform the outcome into a mobile performance, like in the

start but then not with a big circle show but some small stops and animate the audience along the way. This summer I also go back to my roots as socially engaged artist, by using this structure to create a performance for festival 'de circusbende' with deaf and hearing children. I will create a silent parade so the audience can 'hear' what it feels like to be deaf.

What references were used and why are they so important?

The books I read on practice led research to find out more about my methods, made me realize that they were all about working in the studio. I needed to learn more about working directly in front of an audience, therefore it was not just practice based, but also performative research. In the articles I read by Jochem Naafs, Bart van Rosmalen & Falck Hubner about artistic research they state that the (artistic) practice is the driving force in finding the form of the research, researchers are makers who physically live through the performance. The here-and-now is the 'place' where the research, the research methodology and (partly) valorisation take place. There is co-authorship of all present, it's a public process with a feedback loop between all attendees. This is important because it underlines how I researched how I can make a performance while using all the influences I get in the process of making.

-play; I read a lot about play, (see my reference list) because this is one of my creation methods. Some forms of play are difficult to define, in 'man play and games' by Roger Caillois there is a classification into game and play on the one hand and competition, chance, simulation and vertigo on the other hand. Understanding which methods of play I use, helped me. I realize that in teaching I use much more the ludo didactics, (game methodology) and in creation I use more play. Play is more difficult to define because it is less regulated, and for instance, 'whirling' like children do, create a sense of excitement and light feeling in your head but you cannot pigeonhole this because it is a sensation.

-reading Thinking Through Circus by Lievens B.. (2019) made me understand that the physical practice of circus is not just performing a trick, it is a way to think through the body. In public space we communicate by 'crafting' what it is that we want to share and perform. Circus tricks are propositions and thoughtful articulations of a relation between the body and the world, and between performance and spectator. I felt I had to defend doing circus and I stopped doing that. One of my friends who saw the try-out, came to me and said: yes circus is more than a red nose, it was wonderful exciting and warms the heart.

-Talking to Pia Meuten and visiting Panama pictures, Viewpoints, with a lecture and after talk about the way the performance was created helped to see what I make in a different light. I took over the working method of filming and use it to select the parts that I liked, I also start with an object as a starting point with the artists and I realise now that this object does represent a vision. It creates opportunities to interact and embody the feeling the artist represents, just like the décor in viewpoints was a physical representation of the architecture that gives us viewpoints. The difference is that pia starts with the idea of the viewpoints and I can only afterwards recognize my motivations.

My interview with Judith Wendel, dramaturg by Conny Janssen Danst gave me more insight in what a dramaturg does and how I could use a dramaturgical mind. To my question if she would like to do the dramaturgy of a circus performance Judith answered that she is not interested in making a plotline that connects several acts together but working with the thematic line of circus, which is about going beyond what is humanly possible, overcoming the fear of death, the immense confidence you must have in yourself, in the other and in the material. Yes I would, it says something about what life is. This connects totally with my feeling about making circus performances and in my conversations with Merel

Heering, my artistic coach it was complicated to find out what kind of dramaturgy I would need; not traditional but more social. I think there is a lot more to learn about dramaturgy for dance, circus & community arts, and I will continue to look for that.

-seeing 'Le voyage' by Collective XY very recently, again made me realise that the impact you can make on accidental passers-by and when you perform in unexpected places can be huge. When I attended a lecture at Rotterdam Circusstad I found out it is not just an act they learn and perform, they invest their time to be a whole week in one area where they prepare what they plan to do, they perform and write ideas for the choreography for the next day. They spend at least 10 hours a day to create the best piece for the aria, its people and the physical setting. This is a huge investment that asks the artist to be deeply bound with each other and the audience. I find this very inspiring and an example of where my future work can go.

'Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance' *Samuel Johnson*

What is your conclusion, how do you look back and what references keep coming back and why.

My conclusion is that there is no set method for this way of working and figuring out my own way is a very good format for understanding one's own methods. I can recommend everyone to give this a try. Experiential learning, together and in front of an audience, reflecting with and through the performative actions is liberating. Preparation is a key word and gives the opportunity to reflect and gain insights from the experience. Filming and recording can help remember as a second brain. Because I started with an apparatus, an object instead of a subject, the story (if there is one) has to arise from the doing.

The way I work is not linear and therefore sometimes difficult to follow, even for myself. This research allowed me to trust this process and I said I will know what the performance is about after the premiere. Even though I think that the performance is free for interpretation and I don't want to put a story in the audience minds, I did find my own meaning in the play, I now see the piece as a sacrificial ritual to spread out good feelings, a smile that starts in a very small square and spreads out like a raindrop in a pond, as a world changing ritual starting on a very small scale.

What examples and film do you use and why?

I use the film of the try-out with young boys who physically engage with what they see to show the impact of the performance that I want to reach, like being amazed, inspired to join and show joy.

I use the 4th side as an example of explaining what circus is, other than its physical, social and artistic side. Campfire as metaphor for Circle show, 'While performing in public space, the audience become part of the play. Because they are there, they feed the fire inside the circle (circus). The artists/the play inside the circle share their warmth with the outside. You can literally warm yourself as an audience by their 'fire'. This exchange between spectator and audience (the 4th side) is the reason why I create. I see it is a very vulnerable possibility to create a better world'

I use the audience reflections to show that they do have an influence on the creation and I use the conversation I had with 4 makers for outside theatre in the 'makersdialogue' to show that more makers in my field work similar to the way I do, and sometimes it takes time to develop the piece after the premiere. It keeps on evolving and if that is a good thing, your act/performance can exist for many years. Sometimes we discover the deeper meaning that is hidden inside years later.

I used a live exposition in order to show and let the audience experience what interdependence means. In the exposition I showed that everything I do is somehow intertwined, dialogue thinking, creating Infront of an audience, facilitating, showing interdependence, making visual impact with a soft touch. By giving a live example of all the things that happen when I create something at the same time. Also make what I do tangible, feel the bamboo and experience what I do.

After word:

Just as my research, this roadmap is not a straight line from A to B, but I hope it gives you enough insights in my way of working as it did for me. A road is not a straight line, it is created by many things you come across, like rivers, and hills, influences by nature and humans. By finishing this research there is a whole (new) world to discover. From now on, I might see every new project that comes on my path as 'research'

Marjolein