

Selection of Master Project Journal

2nd try-out - Choreomaniac seeds (November-December 2024)

12th of November

*Today I realised I have very little time between the tryout and the next performance.
Change recited text.*

13th of November

*While reviewing the pages of the book *Choreomania* (Gotman, 2018), I paused at a phrase in the preface:*

“All of these issues find a place in the fissures of this book, which [...] uncovers a whole history of thinking about the forms — choreographies— of unrest”.

The explorations on form within a performance are the explorations on its choreographies!

“Jerky and seemingly inelegant movements”

16th of November

Today in my movement session I tried many different movements. Some were very open and explored the extremes of mobility. Some others were about closing, or opening up in a small space, trying to explore vulnerability.

17th of November

Meeting for performance on 27th together with Ron and Pietro

- *put audience in circle before the conversation*
- *Do I really want the audience seating?*

18th of November

I think that during my voice improvisations, I could ask the audience to join with me in the singing of a melody that I improvised.

19th of November

Renee meeting- During the performance there were different positions where things took place. "Could you please move to the place where what you saw..." had a meaningful impact.

How to show anger with silence? This is something I would like to work on a lot. This clearly came from feedback from the last performance.

I'm struggling with the text: I know I want to change it, change the tone, but I'm not being able to find the way to do it.

No chairs and no cushions! Pietro's comment.

20th of November - Rehearsal with Nicco

Suggestion for feedback conversation:

"Okay, this is part of the performance, now we are going to do an experiment, we're going to try something that you probably haven't done before in a performance. Feel free to join"

Focus much more in ways of suggesting, inviting, rather than directly asking.

Major changes towards the 27th: probably better shortening Scriabin and enlarging the improvisation with movement; changing the recited text so that it's a bit more poetic and there's much more space in between phrases for improvisation.

21st of November

In a conversation with Pietro, I was sharing the doubts I was having and my struggles with expressing anger. My thoughts for the past days have been revolving around exploring anger not with loud sound, tense harmonies, difficult rhythms or bodily unrest, but exploring it through silence, through rest. I can also see how this resembles Alexandra's approach of exploring struggles of communication through deafness. Then Pietro recalled the performance/exercise I did last year for the course Performance and Communication: I was in my '8-Day Performance' and I did not talk at all. He remembered it as a very angry and assaulting experience. He said that with my body language and eye-contact, I was almost angry at them. I could play much more with eye-contact and stillness, silence, in the performance.

Conversation: Pietro suggested making a collective dialogue when everything had finished, just because then the audience has time to digest what has happened and the feedback that you receive is a bit more focused.

23rd of November

During the rehearsal with Nicco, I commented on the fact that improvising with movement on the last performance was quite tricky because I was not comfortable with the audience being so close to me. I started walking and played with the speed or using the whole space, but did not dare to go to the floor and move as I had practiced. I also realized that being on the floor wow the audience is standing up would be a very interesting experience for both me and the audience, as it is normally quite the opposite: the audience sits down, and the performers are on a higher stage (and status) than them.

I'm struggling a lot to create a different text. I don't feel the text should have the same tone because the context is different already. The recited text last time felt adequate right in the moment where it was being performed, but right now I feel that the message should be a different one. Also, I would like to add more hyperproductivity general concerns, not only base it on Valencia's situation. Maybe a mood board for text work? I will try tomorrow.

After seeing how visually helpful it was to have a moodboard with Nick during his process, I will definitely do one for the one in January. Visually I have quite a clear image of how it will look because the performance next week will be very similar to the try-out I already did on the 6th.

25th of November

I'm reading again "Llibre de meravelles" by Vicent Andrés Estellés (1971), one of the most renown Valencian poets. Cant de Vicent (pg. 58) is very related to Valencia and many verses have a big impact:

- *"Pense que ha arribat l'hora del teu cant a València. / Temies el moment. Confessa-t'ho: temies. / Temies el moment del teu cant a València."*
- *"Ah, València, València! / El naixement d'un fill, el poal ple de sang."*

The poem “Per exemple” (pg. 78) talks about the post-war, about this liminal space which is both loving and grieving. This reminded me quite a lot of the situation in Valencia right now. However, I’m thinking that the tone of my text should be a bit different, including also elements which are more general or specific towards hyperproductivity.

The poem “Crit i nit” (pg 83) is much more powerful and is very appropriate for what has happened. It talks about how, during the war, no one told a mother that his son had died. They waited until the war was over and then they just said he disappeared.

What if the performance interrupts the tea moment and I start with Scriabin, then flow to movement and then texts?

Rehearsal with Nicco

Last chords of nocturne: improvise with the chords!!! Mezzoforte with crescendo and then pp. This solves the problem of having to wait so long until the electronics appear.

26th of November

In the movement session of today, I practiced without music and imagining as many people as I could, so movements had to be very restrained within space. I used the word anger and vulnerability.

I have been thinking still about the order of the performance. Is it better to start with movement or with the piano?

In the second movement session of today, I practiced again with no sound but this time I put obstacles all around the room to practice in a much more limited space, just in case there is a lot of people around in the performance and I am again surprised by the small space between me and the audience.

Still don’t know what to do with the text. What about taking away the last paragraph and adding onto that?

—

(Music improvisation when I finish Scriabin and I say this:)

“This is still part of the performance

We are going to try out something that you might not have experienced before in a performance. I encourage you to join collectively.

Maybe, during this performance there was a moment where you felt surprised or intrigued. Take a moment to remember the feeling. How was your breath? Where in the space did it happen? Could you please move to that place?

Look at the people around you. Why do you think they are there? What surprised them? What intrigued them? Introduce yourself to the people that are close to you and share -if you want- the reason why you're standing there.

[...]

Now could we all come in a circle? (I would love to have a circle! Wouldn't it be nice if we formed a circle? Something similar, re-think). Two things can happen now. It is very useful for me if you share your thoughts. We can have a conversation in which we can share your thoughts on the performance. If you don't feel like it, you can also enjoy the silence. Feel free to choose your favourite option".

28th of November

Yesterday was the performance.

I still didn't have the chance to get the recording of the performance back and see it again, but I remember having some thoughts while improvising: moving and fusing it with the singing and the playing. What if I try to implement the movement also throughout the classical piece? What if part of the reconstruction of the piece is a reinterpretation with movement and voice?

29th of November

I received very valuable feedback from the audience, but also Sanne Bakker and Sophie Schiettekatte wrote back to me after the performance to share their thoughts. Sophie wrote:

"Hi Silvia! This is Sophie. Thank you so much again for your captivating performance yesterday. It really moved me. In many directions! I promised to write to you with some feedback on your performance. So here are some of my thoughts and reflections :)

I think I already mentioned something about it yesterday, that I felt like the spoken words were a bit too much for me. As a legal academic, I'm a big believer in the power of words, but I do think you can use them more effectively,

depending on what you want to convey of course. Since you said it's a work in progress, I think it could be interesting to look at the text and narrow it down to one (or a few) core message(s). And use repetition to convey them. I feel like you have so many important things to say but an audience has limited ability to focus, and I couldn't take everything in.

I was very moved by the beginning of your performance when you were curled up and how you moved from there to an expression of anger. Very powerful! I could relate to that. And the performance and then the music felt like a transformation of that pain and anger, and I found that incredibly beautiful.

For me, the interactive part was more challenging, which is perhaps what you intended? But I'm not sure. I think I felt dragged emotionally in different directions where I was maybe not ready to go and would have perhaps preferred to hone in on less variety of emotional aspects. With this I mean that first there was pain and anger, despair, indignation. And then you seemed to want to create community and a collective movement, to seek connection. So, on the one hand I felt confronted with shock and the next moment I was invited in. I was unsure if I was on the receiving end of an activist plea, as the other who needs convincing and confronting, or whether I was part of the activist movement. I felt an inherent contradiction there. Like at one point you are making me uncomfortable and the next you want me to follow you. I noticed with myself that I found that difficult. I think in your text you make this transition, but it was difficult to follow it completely. I think it would probably work better in a longer performance where the audience has the time to move through the different emotional stages and process everything. I would come experience it!

But hearing your inspiration and how personal it is I think I also understand the mix of emotions. And I feel privileged to witness your expression of it in such a beautiful way. So perhaps the mix of emotions I felt are in fact a good representation of your process and that's super powerful.

Anyway, sorry for these exceedingly long messages. I can get a bit carried away...

I hope it makes a bit of sense, and it is helpful somehow!"

I found her reflections super helpful. I think it is true that the text could be narrowed down so that I can also use words in a more expressive way by playing with repetition. I also feel improvising with the core messages could make it feel more as a one thing. More connected, more spacious. Furthermore, I feel that the inherent contradiction she talks about when confronting the audience but, at the same time, inviting them to join in a collective movement is very helpful. I had not planned on doing so, because it was improvised, but then when reflecting, I thought that it was a product of my emotional shifts during the performance, but the audience might have not had enough time to digest it. I will take it into account for the next one.

This was the feedback received by Sanne. The following is a transcription of four WhatsApp audio messages I received from her after the performance:

"Hello, Silvia! I just wanted to say (I didn't talk with you after the performance because I had to go and get a harp) that I really, really enjoyed your performance. I thought it was incredibly, incredibly brave. In a way, you connected with the audience. But also, you were the one leading us, also when we started to walk around in the circle, and you really touched me with the playing as well. And I think what touched me was you as a performer in a particular moment: I've never been touched by the one performing, like, literally touched. And I think that's such an interesting boundary, because then eye contact is also still, in a sense, distant. So, I really like that you incorporated that, and also with the way you touched everyone, with the soft touch, but also the way you talked about it later, I had the feeling you also were very into that moment, and I think that really came through.

What I was thinking about afterwards is that what I find sometimes difficult with musicians who incorporate different, let's say genres or ways of presenting it, is that it's still very, let's say straight. [wind interferences, another audio clarifies the point, and I include it immediately after] Okay, I think the point [...] was about how sometimes the connection between the "extra thing" and the "playing thing" is a bit separated. For example, I remember a performance I did during

the performance and communication subject from Renee in the Masters, where I stated the poem before I started to play, and then the transition from one to the other is something to be really careful about. And what I really liked is how you so smoothly incorporated the playing with the performance aspect of the thing you did. [...] What I really liked about the way you presented this thing is that it didn't feel as if you were the concert pianist starting to play a piece; because of the way you presented this piece with the electronics, and the way you introduced it at the beginning.

The only thing I would then say is maybe -but that's, it's like a very, very tiny thing- is the way how you're going to sit on the chair; and if you have to move the chair afterwards before you play, because that was the only moment where I thought: "Okay, so now she's going to play". And I think if you [...] could make that even more prepared, for example, that your chair is perfectly right already, or let it even be more connected. Because I remember I did a performance and communication class with Renee last year, and it was also really something that I had some sort of introduction, which I wanted to let it flow seamlessly into the music. But as I sat down behind the harp and I fixed a stand a bit, or I had to fix the chair, that really broke the attention span.

I think it's super, super cool what you're doing, and also how you played it. Yeah, I was really inspired as well, as other people said. You've really done a great job. And I'm very curious when you're going to try it out more, what then eventually will change about the work, or what you will keep the same. So, are you going to change some things after today? Or that you thought: this, I want to do differently; or this, I want to try out. Let me know. I'm super interested in your process of getting to it as it is now. What was different from the first time you did it last time? Did you change a lot of things from that? What's the process you're going through? Super interesting. How you made your own way of this creative performance space and challenge the audience and yeah, really nice.

Oh, and I also had just one more thought. And I think that adds a bit to -I don't know who the woman was, but she was sitting next to me in the circle at the end- and she said something like that she wanted to make her own choices. She felt -

I'm not really sure the words she was using, but anyways- I think there's still-. For example, in the moment where you take our hands and leave us in a circle, but there's still a moment in others, like, ah, other people are doing this, so I also need to do it. Well, in my opinion, it may be very interesting to still think about it: "okay, what can I maybe add onto that?". Is it your idea that the audience will really have the freedom to sit somewhere, to stand somewhere, to move, or are you still the one that is taking control of everything in the actions of the audience?"

This last comment was also very helpful because it made me reflect on how interactions landed on the audience. It is true that I wanted to encourage specific movements in the audience, and maybe a bit more freedom would allow people to decide for themselves. However, as the concert space is traditionally reserved for a passive interaction, I get the feeling that the audience would not open so much or dare to move if not "forced" to it. Maybe there's a way of getting them to spontaneously make them want to do so. This made me think about the Suzuki method and how getting their parents to play makes kids naturally curious and eager to play, to participate.

The reflection on my bodily presence and transitions is very nice to hear. It is true that I had to fix my stool once during the performance because I was slipping from it, I was about to fall because when moving and improvising, the stool was moving backwards. Maybe next time I can make sure it's fixed, and if it happens to slide a bit, I can make sure to move the stool in a performative way, including it as part of the necessary actions in the performance.

It is also nice to know that the literal touching during the movement improvisations was something that had a big impact. During the audience conversation after the three performances, people had quite different experiences on this. I remember some said it felt very confronting, and some said it was very powerful and comforting. Actually, this is something that I had not planned on doing. I improvised it on the spot and felt it as a necessary action after the exchange of glances with all the members of the audience.

11th of December

Meeting with Sanne Bakker.

When talking to her about the differences from one performance to the other, I told her that I would change the texts, as I received very useful feedback on that. She asked me: “What text? I don’t remember”. This means that the texts are not perceived as a very important element of the performance. Next time, no text!!

She then shared the reason why she was standing at the point of the space, right in the first conversation: “I had never been touched before by the performer, and this really touched me and made me reflect on what you can do as a performer”.