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An Object, Screaming

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Dance Theatre)

by

Ana Paulina Colmenares González

Committee in charge:

Liam Clancy, Chair

Eric Geiger

Yolande Snaith

2020

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

DEDICATION

To Matías

EPIGRAPH

“Whoever wishes may accompany me: the road is long, it’s painful but it’s lived.”

Clarice Lispector

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Thank you Clarice, for holding my hand.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

An Object, Screaming

by

Ana Paulina Colmenares González

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Dance Theatre)
University of California San Diego, 2020
Professor Liam Clancy, Chair

This piece is a collaborative and experimental dance performance that originates in an ongoing reflection on the epistemic and spiritual nature of the creative act. By reflecting on the interplay between form, background and distortion, this work presents itself as a fragmented and porous field of information that in essence remains attached to contradiction. The object is the thing that gets constructed and approached diligently, but the object is fluid and alive. The scream is the epiphanic poetic claim. The piece attempts to articulate aesthetic experiences of the ineffable and thus approximate complexity, contemplative presence and pristine affect. The work was presented in February 2020 at the Adele Shank Theater. This document stands as a layered recollection and reflection on the creative and collaborative process that took place through the making of this work. And as a culmination of my graduate studies at University of California, San Diego.

1. Background

The fundamental aim of my artistic research is to probe into authentic affective states beyond linguistic and intellectual articulation. I'm not really interested in everyday life, story telling or representation—I'm interested in the "states" that can be attained through movement and imagination when everyday consistency collapses. The direct experiences that call into question the very reality of things is my true object of interest. And I'm convinced that the investigation of movement, through improvisation and dance making, is the most effective way of disclosing the field of micro-perceptions and affects that lie behind our everyday certainties.

I'm interested in exploring dance potential to articulate aesthetic and affective experiences of the ineffable, and thus approximate embodied philosophy, mysticism and contemplation. I care about what remains beyond articulation, and I conceive the performative experience as a space of risk and stake that unveils what typically remains inaccessible to us: a gentle visit, a constant invitation to question paradigms and absolutist notions of self and reality. I'm interested in affective, bodily, time and spatial affects that emerge from the frequentation of mystery through movement.

For me, art and dance are not mere activities, but rather life's very impetus. They are experiences that, by defying the instrumentality of everyday life, paradoxically reaffirm it. The study and reflection on the contemporary movement practices and the creative process and its various ramifications, conducted in tandem with actual production, have been one of the hallmarks of my work.

Clarice Lispector

I consider myself a disciple of Clarice Lispector, an epiphanic Brazilian writer of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry and one of the most relevant female authors of the XX century. Also a simple mother and housewife. My ongoing research focuses on the possible interactions between her poetical philosophy, movement improvisational practices, contemporary dance making and contemplative traditions. My personal history and artistic research have been shaped by Clarice's life and works of which I have been an avid reader for twenty years. She is a permanent reference to my life and my creative process and my affinity towards her goes beyond intellectual reasoning. I prefer not to say more about Clarice. She is one of those things that should not be spoken of: language cannot confine her. She is only to be experienced. And more.

Dzogchen Buddhism or the Great Perfection

“Meanwhile, atop the naked table, the screaming slice of red watermelon. I am grateful to my eyes that are still so frightened. I shall yet see many things. To be honest, even without watermelon, a naked table is also a sight to see.”

Clarice Lispector

“This dualistic structure, together with the disturbing emotions are the forces that drive us from one samsaric experience to another. Yet all the while, there is still the basic nature, which is not made out of anything whatsoever. It is totally unconstructed and empty, and at the same time it is aware it has the quality of being able to cognize. It is a naked experience. This indivisible unity of being empty and cognizant is our original ground that is never lost”.

My mother has been a serious buddhist practitioner for more than twenty years. Buddhism is a direct influence in my artistic work, particularly it's notion of emptiness as absence of intrinsic nature, and the practice of Open Awareness, that calls for direct, uncategorized experience.

Motherhood

“My children, for whom I do this work, if not gladly, then without regret. My children, who make it possible for me to bitch tirelessly about motherhood while still feeling, deeply, to the very tips of my toes and possibly even further, that this motherhood thing is the most beautiful – the most hazily, gauzily, barefoot-in-a-field-of-daisies romantic – thing in the world.

And if I'm clutching a bottle of tequila and an Ativan prescription while spinning through that field of daisies... well, as I said: it's complicated. Wonderfully, terribly, delightfully so.”

Catherine Connors, Her Bad Mother

What if motherhood could be framed as a valuable site for artistic exploration rather than an invisible and trivial labour? I don't mean the aboutness of motherhood, I mean the work of motherhood. The interrupted and fragmented quality of action and thought, the unconditional love and care, the repetition and the ritual, the being in several linguistic places at the same time; the diligence. The exhaustion and the reaching of one's own limits, hence the continuous stretching of range and motion; the incessant change. The infinite layers and

textures of an experience of such complexity where our happiness is fueled and afforded by our fear and our exhaustion and vice versa. I am well aware that the roads I have travelled in the last years wouldn't have been possible if I haven't become a single mother. Yet being a single mother has made this journey particularly complex for me. The object restricts but allows the scream. There is no scream if there is no object. The motherhood condition has been the inception and site of origin of this artistic work and research.

Improvisation

Movement improvisation is the heart of this process and the heart of my ongoing creative research. It is not the only mode of making work that I turn to for generating or for accessing, but it is certainly the most important one for me. It has been a pleasure to have had the opportunity to dive into this practice in such a committed and rigorous way during my years at UCSD. I have to say this has been one of the most gratifying aspects of it all.

I have come to conceive and understand improvisation as a contemplative practice of conscious interaction with the world and as a field of everything. Where everything is possible. Where through indagatory and successive endless choice, action and renounce we reach an epiphanic state in which the essential joy of being alive and the true non dualistic nature of the mind becomes actualized potential. A state where the concrete and the elusive converge, and what we don't know becomes familiar, becomes possibility and intuition. No separation between impression and expression. Through improvisation I have come to completely trust the body and it's epistemic nature; and I have come to know, to really know,

in the way that you can only know through embodied experience; that reality is layered. That there are a lot of ways of being in the world. This is a virtuosic realization.

“I suggest that improvisation can be defined as an act of reaching an ideal state, in which impression (sensorial, physical, corporal) can immediately become expression (symbolic and artistic), so that (utopically) there is no separation between what is seen and what is painted, what is said and what is written, what rumbles and what is heard.”

“Writing by Ear”: Clarice Lispector, Machado de Assis, and Guimarães Rosa and the Mimesis of Improvisation Marília Librandi-Rocha. Translated by Camille Sutton.

I really value open improvisation as a practice, however, *An Object, Screaming* was created mainly out of several different improvisational scores.

A Score:

A set of conditions or range of possibilities that determinate the choreographic outcome

or

Choices to make in relationship to other people's choices

or

Something to explore

or

A terrain

or

A plan

or

A series of instructions

or

“A prop, a ruse, a pretense which, while giving me the illusion of ‘knowing’ in my dancing, allows me to not know. “

Olivia Millard

or

...

2. Sources

Francis Bacon

Twentieth-century visual artist Francis Bacon's paintings became an extremely important reference for this creative and collaborative process. I find his works fascinating and intriguing; impossible to name or define and I would not presume to understand it so I would not say much. On a visceral level, the aspect of these paintings that from the very start of my encounter became relevant to me, was continuous interplay between form, background and distortion. Focusing on this aspect was also a very effective starting point of conversation and discussion with all of the designers and in time developed into a common language and a conducive ground for collaboration.

During the construction process I took some time to dive into the life and idiosyncrasies of this strange and fascinating artist by watching several interviews and documentaries. Without expecting it or purposely searching for it, I found his creative discourse resonant with my own inclinations and a deeper connection and interest emerged. If the idea of the scream was not extracted from Bacon's screaming popes, it certainly reinforced it as I came across with them. The screaming mouth and the distorted, pulled and twisted body became a key component of the logic of this work.

To have such a powerful visual reference, obscure and mysterious but at the same time, so itself, really set the tone for what we all wanted to accomplish with the work. Towards the end of the process this reference was everywhere, the experience felt flooded by Francis Bacon imagery.

Begginings

I shall need courage to do what I'm about to do: speak. And risk the enormous surprise I shall feel at the poverty of the spoken thing. As soon as it's out of my mouth, I'll have to add: that's not it, that's not it!

Clarice Lispector

The notion of the choreographic event or the performative act conceived as an object first came to me during Eric Geiger's Dance Making Processes seminar in the winter of 2019. Inspired by the work and process of choreographer Neil Greenberg, we spent our class time learning videotaped improvisations from other bodies and working in developing a referenced choreographic system with the intention to honor its original structure and form even though what we were attempting to recreate was completely formless (in the conventional sense of the word). But repetition, rigor and commitment reveals form and pattern. That contradiction got me engaged with the practice immediately. I remember there was some resistance in the room around the task even at moments my own due to the tedious nature of a tasks such as these, but at the same time, personally I found the process of learning improvised non codified movement from other bodies and building a -thing- that held within it a desire to remain loyal to the source object but that inevitably arrived to a very different place each time, strange awkward and fascinating. We were turning something that was once pure and alive: spontaneous and fluid, into something "objective." We were noticing how this "objective" thing eventually found its way back to that aliveness and

fluidity. And all through failure -thank god for failure-. In essence this was an impossible task and endeavor. I could feel the breath and pulse of this awkward and contradictory object.

To approach the dance as an object was liberating to me. I began to dream and imagining the possibility of this living breathing thing with parts. I felt freedom and soothing in the detachment. This experience led me to become interested in attending Neil Greenberg MELT workshop at Movement Research in New York City, for whom this kind of practice of learning videotaped movement improvisation is an ongoing aspect of his creative process. I wanted to know more. This workshop was a very rich experience and further developed my intuitions about the inquiries that lead to this process.

First Note:

What do I want?

That it speaks for itself. That it is built with craft and care. That is poetic. That is true. That is something. That is lived.

Some Whys

But at least there's the work and all of it's miraculous otherworldly possibilities. We get to unveil what has never been and we dare it to exist with the light touch of our pinky finger. The afforded risk attempts to heal our deepest wounds...

During the summer of 2019 I also attended artist Miguel Gutierrez *Making Work* workshop. I found myself appreciating Miguel's convictions about what work is and all of his straightforward ways. From the very first minute of our first day, before any introduction was given we were already working. No way around it. He took me immediately away from the comfort of my grad school musings and wanderings and removed all of my excuses. Somewhere through graduate school I have begun to question whether or not I needed to make work anymore or: What is work? How was making work different from what I was already doing? It seems that making work is about working. It is about diving in and committing to it every step of the way. During this workshop I realized that as much as I loved the practice, just the practice, per se, and the conversation, and the writing, and the search. For me, it has always been about the work. And that is mainly what I still want to be doing. That is my ultimate motivation. That is the context holding the practice together. It had become clear that it was time to turn my intentions back and stronger than ever towards work, rigor and accountability. I felt lucky to have had the experience of taking my practice to an unfamiliar context that summer. I believe it got me ready for the beginning of this process.

Miguel said:

The anxiety you feel when you are making the piece is actually what the piece is about.

I must confess, the buddhist in me dreams of someday making work that is completely devoid of content, but this statement from Miguel gave me some peace. The issue is the how, I know that if I'm at peace with the how, if the how speaks to who I am and what I believe in then I don't care too much (only enough) about the outcome. This is an

aboutness that doesn't deal with representation or obfuscation but with uncovering, allowing and realizing. This is the scream.

If culture in fact, is impossible to deconstruct then I was going to embrace it. Over the years it has been very tempting to attempt to surrender to my reductivist tendencies. But I don't want to pretend I can reduce myself, or at least I am not going to pretend yet because that would mean that I know. That I have no more questions. And I don't want to know.

I don't know...

I am interested in the object and in the thing itself, but I am also a mess. I am full of desire, yearning, craving, expectation and disappointment. But just like in open awareness meditation practice, the existence of the concept doesn't deny the possibility of the pristine and unattached true nature of the mind. Both things exist simultaneously. This is when I decided that I was going to give myself permission to include everything, to allow everything. Maybe in this way, whatever objectivity we would reach or touch would exist based on the grounds of sincerity.

At the end of each session during this workshop Miguel asked us to answer the following questions, which then he shared for us to have. This was a useful tool to have during the process of making An Object, Screaming. It helped me figuring out what I was doing and how I was feeling about it. To locate key moments and just in general to become more aware of my process, of its constant transformation and of what I was experiencing as I was going through it. Hoping this acknowledgement could guide me. I shared some of the questions with the performers as well. We are the work.

Eric said,

Asking questions is how we keep our practice alive.

Miguel Gutierrez Questions:

1. *How did you work on your minute performance?*
2. *From this extract a list of the methods/tools that you used to make your performance. (You may not have thought of them as methods/tools at the time)*
3. *Looking at this performance as your research material, what would you say that you are working on? What are the elements (formal/conceptual) that you are working with in your performance? Are these new or familiar?*
4. *What was going through your head as you made your piece, related or unrelated to the process of making? Did this affect your piece? If so, how?*
5. *Was there anything that you did not allow yourself to do or say and why?*
6. *What conditions did you create for yourself in order to make your two minute performance?*
7. *How did you feel while you were performing? How does that relate to the content of what you performed?*
8. *How would you continue?*

From my Notes

All painting is an accident. But it's also not an accident, because one must select what part of the accident one chooses to preserve.

Francis Bacon

How can an object scream?

by being as itself as it can?

Yes.

...

"You could say that I have no inspiration, that I only need to work"

Francis Bacon

Beginning is always the most intimidating part, I find myself reading David Bayles and Ted Orland's *Art and Fear* a lot during this stage of the process. I am trying to gather the courage to dive in without knowing. Because I really know very few things. I have tried to come up with specific ideas to deliver to the scenic designer but I cannot. I feel he is just going to have to dive in with me.

The creative process can sometimes feel only as a space of dialogue and negotiation with one's own attachment and expectations. There is no <ready state> available for taking a plunge into what life chooses to reveal on a particular moment and place.

Long deep breath

Jump

Things to have in mind as I attempt to access process:

There has to be a corporeal/embodied investigation

Movement as whole body experience

Liam said,

Something is already happening, you don't have to do anything.

Liam said,

Seeing the actual struggle not the representation of the struggle.

For those first rehearsals I made a commitment to make at least a little dance every day. To make something that we could actually use and to not get lost in exploration. Particularly for timing purposes. From the beginning the process had a fragmented quality, it was all scattered. I had some rehearsals with Tristan and Brianna, some just with Marcos, some with Marcos and Tristan some with just Tristan. Several different conversations with different designers. Different people, different studio spaces.

Putting all of these “unrelated” things together was a challenge and an exciting adventure.

Some questions:

What is worth attempting?

What is really worth attempting?

What is absolutely necessary to attempt?

What is not?

What if I do what is not first, could that bring me back to what it
is?

Some Hows

Having experienced this I feel the need of that

Keep being in conversation with the thing

What do you want now dance?

How does it act on me?

From Liam,

What does it let me know?

Everything belongs

From Eric,

Let's queer it up.

Should I avoid precision and accuracy?

Thought is not useful without action

Actions before thought

What if thinking is doing?

Making is thinking

Making is enough

Calm down!

Dancers focus on the experiencing body it should come

from within

Dancers honor the form

3. Elements

The Shades

The room where we started rehearsing had shades. As the dancers were immersed in an improvisation score close to the shades I invited them to use them and to go behind them. We discussed the possibility of recreating this or something like this for our scenic design. Samuel, the scenic designer attended one rehearsal and saw what was already happening. He was interested, he took it and developed it.

My Buddhist mother said:

There is no time to lose, we are holograms.

Can I question what is real and what is just point of view?

Funny how at the end I could see very clearly how the shades facilitated the idea of background, form, and distortion. And everything else. Even now I don't presume to know what the shades did or did not do. But they were there, so we used them. Now I feel that the possibility of their presence was always latent.

The Projections

During the practice of our Francis Bacon score where the dancers began by looking at some of his paintings in the books, we discussed the possibility of having echoes of these images as projections for the dancers' inspiration. Samuel, the scenic designer, was good at projections. The material that the shades were made of were conducive. Samuel and I met to explore different possibilities within that idea. The projector was available.

Language

Language appears as an object that is moved around and placed at different locations at different moments throughout the work. Words not only convey meaning, (I prefer it when they don't), but they propose texture in space. I really like words. I'm interested in what they suggest and what they obscure. I love to use words as sound, as vibration, as layer. I don't really like words for saying, but they take me closer to what is beyond them. Closer to what they cannot reach, which is what I ultimately care about. I tried to remain unpretentious about my use of language for this work. I tiptoed around this interest of mine, because I take it very seriously. This is a thing that I would like to research much more deeply for future work. A choreography of language

Rebecca asked:

Why words? What does words say that dance cannot?

I don't think words are in the work to say things that dance cannot. We tend to think that everytime words appear they are meant to be heard and understood, that something wants to be said. Could it be the other way around? That words appear to deviate, to redirect, to obscure? What about the space between words? Or what about the tone in which words are said? Or the moments in which words appear? Or all the words that are not being said? Or the words that are there but we fail to hear?

I feel that by placing dance and words together I'm just offering different pathways to access mystery. I think when it comes to accessing, dance is much more effective. But words suggest. They allow me to mess with meaning and I find this very amusing. The one thing I know for sure is that I'm not using language as an attempt to ground the audience or the performers, nor for it's meaning. I don't do it too well perhaps. I'm still trying to figure it out for myself. I'm interested in expansive, wider and inarticulable meaning. Perhaps language and dance together could potentialize the possibility for reaching that kind of meaning.

Liam said,

The word tree just gives you access to treeness.

But it doesn't turn you into a tree

The Gum

I started chewing gum because I read it could be useful for stomach acid, one of my multiples aids during my grad school years. Then I went to NYC and I did a little performance at Miguel Gutierrez workshop that involved chewing gum in all fours and

talking about bad habits. Then I remembered a story from Clarice called *Love* in which the event of a blind man chewing gum sets the main character, an ordinary housewife, unwillingly and terrified into a philosophical embodied transfiguration. Then, in the music video from *Veneno*, the song from Tristan's solo, the main singer is chewing gum in a very engaging way. So. There was gum. Maybe, -only possibly-, as a symbol of deconstruction or transmutation. Or maybe just as an "other" element that provides density to certain moments of the work and to the performers experience.

The Rose

Tristan wanted a rose. Sometimes he just wants things. Sometimes I just need to give them to him.

The Benches

From the beginning it was clear for me that I wanted work with a different spatial and audience configuration. I've never had the opportunity to do this before and I really wanted it. The work called for a certain intimacy. Yet, when we moved the armchairs the space felt limiting, we wanted more space and a different kind of closeness. Samuel attended a rehearsal and saw Marcos doing his language solo sitting at a studio bench. He liked it, he/we went for it. I enjoyed the benches.

The Books

We used to use the books for didactic purposes, we used to go through the Francis Bacon paintings on the books to get soaked into this reference before running the work and I had planned to get rid of the books after a while. But Marcos grew attached to them so we kept them near him. He never said it though. I just noticed.

Notes about process:

Sequencing events now. The structure of the work seems to be emerging through the relationship and accumulation of all these different scores and experiences, of all of these people coming together.

Sometimes I worry that I'm succumbing to the demands of the work, I have to constantly rethink my motivation, reinforce it, and I have to constantly release it as well. Soften it, otherwise it makes me crazy. Authorship is another belief that we work hard to deconstruct.

Is it wrong if I allow the work to completely run me over? I want to let it...

I notice the resistance that occurs when I imply that I'm trying to move away from making a distinction between set movement and improvisation. There is the expectation that set movement moments are to be immaculate and impermeable, and that improvisation is to be formless. This is problematic for me now. I feel that distinction is no longer useful for me as a dance maker. I tried to use every possible mode of working, of generating. Marcos knows this. Working with Tristan and Brianna was challenging in this sense but it was also

very informing when I decided to approach it as a pedagogical practice. They are both so young and both have theatrical backgrounds and affinities and all these conventional notions of what and how dance is and should be, deeply ingrained. This made me really worked hard at articulating in a way that they could relate and understand. This was a rich process for me. I felt I was trying to set them free and they were awesomely willing.

Liam said,

“That the thing you are making is conversation with the thing that’s already there.”

Having the opportunity to work in this way was wonderful. I feel every bit of the work is a mixture of things that happened on a particular day and of all of the conditions that were present and available. Dance is like that, is of the moment, of the place, of the people. We collaborated with things that I made, things that I offered, things that were possible, things that were impossible, time limitations, things that others offered, things that just happened, things that were already there. As a mother I really value this way of working. It just makes it possible for me to work no matter the situations or conditions. There is always something that I can do or work on if I invite a true collaboration with circumstances.

The Performers

[...] this strange and wonderful thing we are making just founded on our common agreement of being together and exploring what this togetherness can unveil. It’s getting really hard to remember how once upon a time I felt I needed something more.

Marcos Duran

Marcos and I have been on this journey together, we are friends and we have mutual respect for each other. He is a very skilled and experienced performer so working with him was easy. I felt supported by his presence in this process and had a lot of trust in him. I tried to honor and respect the fact that he was going through his own process as well. At times it was a tricky position to be in. To work with a performer who was parallelly very much involved in another process, which was obviously his priority. But I felt we managed to navigate this situation well. I knew that when the time came he would get fully involved. He did a lot for the work and I'm really thankful for that.

Tristan Samson

Tristan is again one of those things that should not be talked about that much. He is just too beautiful and I don't want to ruin that. Meeting him and working with him was one of the best things that happened to me in San Diego and one of the most joyful experiences of my life. I have learned so much through this relationship that we've developed and the work we have done together since winterWorks 2019. I have no words. I am truly grateful for him.

Tristan's journal entry:

"Umm to be quite honest I do not even remember what we really did on Monday and I did not go to class on Wednesday, so instead I am just going to talk some two cents of Paulina's dance thesis, Rebecca, because tbh I am having post show feels as closing night was also my birthday, so it really hit me emotionally because it was ending a wonderful experience towards something I felt very passionate about, as well as reminding me that my time at UC San Diego draws near. Paulina has a special place in my heart because

winterworks 2019 was my first mainstage production at UCSD (as well as being apart of Eric's piece, he also has a special place in my heart!) Ever since winterworks2019 auditions, the minute Paulina gave us a glimpse of what she would be working on for the production, I knew I wanted to be taken under her wing. It was kind of nerve wrecking when we had our first day of rehearsals because all who audition chooses which dancemaker/choreographer they wanted to be apart of on the spot, and at the time Marcos and Paulina had rehearsal M/W at the same time. When we dispersed, almost everyone went with Marcos to the other studio, while me and another remained. That was kinda intimidating because that meant our space and the work was going to be very intimate. However, that whole quarter was perhaps one of the best experiences in university that I would cherish because Paulina was very generous with her work, as this was actually my first time experiencing a collaborative process from beginning to end. Being able to witness her approach was very unusually different and stimulating for me, as well as having a discussion with her as to why she wanted to become a dancemaker really encouraged to take the mantle of being her "knight" and carry out her duties to the best of my ability. Towards the end of the process and winter quarter, she took a liking of me and asked me if I would like to be a part of her thesis, in which I accepted wholeheartedly.

Now fast forward to this school year. Working with her felt nostalgic as it felt similar to her winterWORKS piece, Nada, but this time there was more structure, form, and fluid rigidity. I would even be surprised when she included some set choreography! Haha. Rebecca, I could tell you so many experiences of this piece...but if I would choose something to share, I think my solo would be a good one to talk about. So I discovered the song, Un Veneno by C. Tangana, through a friend of mine during the summer, in which I fell in love

with the rhythm and tune of it, despite not knowing what the words meant because I do not speak Spanish. Because of how intoxicatingly addicting the song was, I wanted to share this with Paulina. Paulina actually really loved the music to the point that when we had our first rehearsal during fall quarter, she too felt the song was very addicting and that it felt essential to be a part from her thesis. During one of our rehearsals, she played this song and asked me to dance to this song...which I did and then asked me after what I felt when dancing to this song. The song evokes a very dangerous vibe to me, and I imagined this character I created to be dancing to the audience realizing that time is running out as a he is being hunted by a personification of death. As death gets closer, the character seeks aid from the audience. However, the character could only emit that through movement and the rose that the character tosses to the audience is actually a plea/scream of help. Towards the music change, the character realizes that death draws closer and as a last resort dances his heart out in hopes the audience realizes the dire situation. When the music goes back to normal, it seems like the character has escaped death. Paulina was quite surprised with my response because it is somewhat similar when translating the song to English. She then said "Okay, Tristan, this is in the work...and this is your solo." I felt deeply honored and the "knight" in me knew I had to make this the best performance I could do, so each rehearsal whenever we would play with this I would always give my 110%. Eventually she also wanted me to continue the length of my solo, but this time in silence after the song and she again asked me if there is anything that evokes me in this moment, which actually did. Although it seems like the character escaped death, in reality this "escape" is actually through the conscious mind as he had actually died. Only when the conscious mind realizes that he is dead does the conscious slowly die to the ground, hence the breathing solo after the song solo. She felt the response was very powerful, which is how that part of her piece came to be! I am just so smitten by

Paulina, I love that woman so much. I am quite sad it is over, but I know we will continue to work/collaborated together in the future. Sorry if I did not follow the journal response guidelines for last week. I will do better!

xo, Tristan”

Brianna

Working with Brianna was a refreshing experience. I didn't know her at all so there was no history between us and I really enjoyed discovering her, being pleasingly and constantly surprised by her willingness and her talent and technical skills for which she almost seemed unaware. She really valued the opportunity to learn and experience and tried very hard to figure out the work and the material for herself. She has a rich and populated interior world and a very big heart. It was a pleasure to work with her and I know this process was meaningful to her too.

Paulina

I am dealing with my own ambivalence

I surround

I am observing. I am listening and guiding the work into being

I am an active witness or a hand to hold

A note about the collaboration with Sound Designer Andrew Lynch:

Andrew Lynch was another key element in the making of this work. I was lucky to work with such a kind and talented sound designer who was completely open to collaboration. I basically told him what I was working and how I was working. Then he just started showing up to rehearsals and exploring with his different instruments. He entered the process at the end of the fall quarter and by then I had already made choices about music. I gave him the music tracks and together we began to build a sound score based on my structure. Our collaboration was very fluid and trusting.

Notes

“Oh but reach silence, what a huge effort of voice.”

Clarice Lispector

How to remain here? In this place where things seem so far away from their inescapable fate of reaching meaning. Things are still just things. No success, no failure, only latency; only the facing of an ocean of possibilities that lead nowhere...

4. Concepts

or value system of the work

These are the core values of the process, the work and of my ongoing creative research. To have these four concepts are dots to hold on to was very important for me. They prevented me from getting lost and they facilitated communication with the designers and the performers.

Complexity

Characterises the behaviour of a system or model whose components interact in multiple ways and follow local rules, meaning there is no reasonable higher instruction to define the various possible interactions.

The term is generally used to characterize something with many parts where those parts interact with each other in multiple ways, culminating in a higher order of emergence greater than the sum of its parts.

Contradiction

Things that are not likely to appear together because the presence of one attempts to deny the other.

Ambiguity

Not clear; inexactness: not explicitly defined (open) unstable.

Awkwardness

Inconvenient embarrassing causing difficulty. hard to deal with

Notes

I think of everything that we have had to go through just to reach that final primordial breath, to be able to afford just lying on the floor grasping for air...

Brianna asked:

What am I looking at?

You are looking around, you are looking at what there is. You are looking at and acknowledging everything that surrounds you.

I like when the dancers ask questions, it makes me feel they are really trying to find their way through this thing. I felt my answers were not as clear or as definitive as they might have expected. I always try to leave doors open and also to leave room for the exact opposite answer to be true.

Note:

I have a problem with theatricality, I've always had. I like to be a moving body that at moments has a name, I hate representing or expressing, I can only be myself. But I must confess there is something about artifice that I'm beginning to be very attracted to. As long as it's in conversation with it's opposite. As long as it is a conscious choice and we all know that we are playing that game. As long as we all know that is artifice. As long as it doesn't say:

This is what it is. This is what it means. This is what is important about this thing. If that happens then for me it's dead. Not much to do after that.

At some point during the process

Tristan is being

Marcos is doing

Brianna is pretending

Am I hiding?

Audience/ Viewer

"You who are reading me please help me be born"

Clarice Lispector

After the process of my winterWorks 2019 piece called *NADA*, I really started to think hard about what the witness implied to me, or even questioning the whole value of the performative situation. I came up with this and I never questioned it again:

Performance is a place of ultimate risk

Audience puts things at stake

I want their attention, that is all I'm asking for them and that is a lot. I don't want to guide them or manipulate them. I don't want to hide anything, I don't even want to hide that I'm hiding. I want them to see the stitches of the work. I want them to be close enough. Let's see the making revealed. I liked the crew coming in to fix the shades, because they get to see the stitches. And then is true.

How do I situate myself in front of an audience?

Eric said,

Do we have the right to expect the work to give us what we need and what we expect?

Where is our accountability as audience?

From an email I wrote to Tristan trying to calm his anxiety about audience leaving:

“I think it is great that you are considering the audience so much and how to keep them interested but at the same time I don't want you to feel that you need to do this all the time. I want to be respectful of the viewer's willingness, attention and presence, and I want to acknowledge them (working on the hows); but at the same time, it's important to have in mind that we are not entertainers and that we are asking something from them too. And I think that is fine. We are not condescending. I think our job is to offer what we believe in and to be as honest as possible. So I would suggest that you release that motivation just a

little bit and just don't feel that you carry all the responsibility for the audience not leaving or not getting bored.”

Samuel Keamy-Minor, the Scenic Designer asked me:

If every audience member is going to see something different then, What is the shared experience? This question troubled me at first. I felt that I needed to answer it. I didn't. I was not conceiving a shared experience beyond being in the same room at the same time. What I was making was not something deliverable that I could offer as one single experience. And yet I believe there were a lot of shared experiences during the performance.

Email Conversation with Scenic Designer about the configuration of audience, shades and space:

“Hello Samuel, thank you so much. This looks great to me. I feel very inclined to work with this kind of configuration. I was thinking about what we talked about on our last meeting and came across this concept of metastability that has been used in some theoretical analysis of the use of space in Paolo's Sorrentino's movie “The Great Beauty”. Metastability as a type of equilibrium no longer situated at the level of stability, but implying the transformations operating in a system which has not exhausted its potential difference. So if we are deciding whether the object is stable or unstable I think metastable would be the most accurate way to conceive it.

I've also been thinking about the giraffe and about how the object can appear immovable and its presence definitive but the truth is it doesn't really exist, it's mere presence it's a trick. It's apparent stability holds within it the potential for disappearance.

All this is too bla bla bla bla, so please feel free to ignore me.

Best,

Paulina.”

Samuel's Response:

“WOW!

I think metastability is a great way to codify a lot of the discussions we have been having. Could you send me more of what you're reading about it? I also see the connection to the giraffe with that phrase.

I think our fractured spatial arrangement is starting to put us in a place where we're well set up to explore potential differences. I wonder if part of how this space will function is that as a performer develops a stable relationship with one audience section, they are undermining the stability of the connection with the others? It also makes me think of the Bacon paintings, where the subjects are "contained" within geometries, which is maybe an expression of stability. But they are also blurred and distorted and organic, which is maybe their instability within that frame?

This is all fabulous!

--skm.”

Random notes about rigor

I want to be rigorous out of respect for the form.

How do we invite rigor into what we are doing?

What is rigor in this context of openness and responsiveness?

...because being alive asks for something

Without knowing, to go on until the end?

I am thinking about craft

Craft: to make an object

I am making an object

a breathing and pulsating object

Self as object?

This is exactly it. That is the structure: the conditions, the environment, the definition of space. The form is here to contain everything that will emerge. It will hold it together. It should be strong enough to support everything else.

going back- going through back doors- organize to do one thing and then do the other- do the complete opposite of what you are doing- make room- leave room- stay in that first attempt to move the head- don't go all the way-resist-redirect

....

5. Meaning

“It is what it is, it is nothing else.”

Francis Bacon

“They gave me a name and alienated me from myself.”

Clarice Lispector

“May whoever knows the truth come forward. And speak. We shall listen contritely.”

Clarice Lispector

What are you saying Paulina?

That a thing is many things

I would like to take an impossible perspective. To make a thing that could not exist in any other context, moment or place. An impossible, illusory thing that for a moment becomes fiercely real.

What is reality? What exists? What does it do? Why is there something rather than nothing?

Liam said,

How long can you go without saying this is what it means?

Out of everything that is the most important thing to me

The journey of making this work has been unintendedly a journey of dealing with my own awkward, flawed and formless nature. Lately I've been trying to throw myself out at the constrictive roads of sense making. Finding it impossible. Tearing myself apart in the process.

And today I had a thought: Why does the work have to be different than me? Am I shaping reality? Or am I accepting it? Attempting to access it. Perhaps failing incessantly. Each step of the way. If the subject matter of my life is failure and nonsense. If I no longer have the energy to pretend otherwise

Can acceptance and self compassion lead to transformation?

Or even

What is wrong with being wrong?

Where does being wrong and embracing it can take us?

There is a right way to do things ("first world" inference...). It is definitely not my way.

Fuck!

This thing is alive

It keeps moving, reveling, revenging, hiding, obscuring, demanding

How can I help it become itself?

It has always been the other way around for me but it is just now that I'm learning to articulate it. That meaning doesn't come first and that abstraction is not the obfuscation of solidity but rather a portal to transcendence; a suggestive gesture that opens a doorway leading to the undeliverable, the unsubstantial; the unattainable hence inexhaustible possibility for meaning.

something-everything-nothing

nothing-something-everything

The embodiment of emptiness...

A thing is many things

AND NOT A SINGLE ONE OF THEM

Eric said,

These things don't go together!!!

(I know we are both grateful that they don't)

Neil said,

Not the concept of the chair but this chair. I recognize it but haven't seen it before.

Let's embrace the no sense—I could really use a break from intelligibility. That is why I don't read or watch news and I'm not the most socially involved and responsible person. I can't stand facts. I only care about what is underneath

Marcos said,

“For me, ‘An Object, Screaming’ is an exploration of presence and responsiveness within the surreal and enigmatic realm of Paulina Colmenares. Her direction is quite mysterious, and above all it is loving, watchful, gracious, and without imposition. Dancing with Tristan Samson is electrifying, and Brianna Maloney has reminded me about the freedom of joy.”

Notes for the Dance and the Dancers

- Dynamic shifts
- Allow Relationship to emerge and explore it deeper
- Don't take too long to arrive (playing with timing and sequencing)
- Do not act- Do not pretend- Access
- Insist on Francis Bacon (the distortion, the pulling and twisting of the body)
- The specific thing is happening at that specific moment and nothing else (I know this is impossible to achieve. The dancers will try and they will fail but through their attempt whatever else arises would be something that is really asking to be there)

Once in the theater

A few moments before the dress rehearsal, Marcos asked me: Who am I? Can you give a character? (No I can't I wont!) Out of kindness I found myself saying: You are someone who knows something that we don't. You are a visitor. And you are also just Marcos, wearing this costume, in this particular place, in this particular moment, in this particular situation. One crew member who was listening to our conversation gave Marcos a much more concrete answer: I think you are a sexual predator chasing Brianna and Tristan who are young and just starting to discover their sexual identity. We laughed uncontrollably. Marcos chose to go in all these possible three directions. He was a visitor, he was a sexual predator, and he was just Marcos.

After the winter break I noticed I was certain that through all my search and the holidays somehow I had allowed the form to slip away or at least it felt that way. What

followed was some rigorous crafting and rethinking and revising of every little moment of the work just one week and a half before entering the theater.

Once we enter the theater:

And now, let's forget about everything we have said and done, and with what we have, let's just deal with the reality of the situation that we are actually in.

And so we did. We began by dealing with the shades, just dealing with them, being annoyed by their presence even. Those first spacing rehearsals I was kind of angry at the shades, for being there. And then I accepted them, made peace with them and found my way through. Then everything else began to happen.

Both Samuel and Jacob were very active and engaged in helping us figuring out what we were going to do with them. I am thankful for that.

Last email to the designers before entering the space:

“Hello everyone, Im sending you a list of “words” of the structuring of the piece, I hope it helps in developing a common language. I highlighted three “ dramatic moments”, one at the beginning one at the middle one at the end.”

Last email from Samuel Keamy Minor before going into spacing:

“Hey All,

I wanted to shoot off a quick response to this beautifully worded outline.

I'm really struck by the separation into 3's. These three "dramatic moments". The three sections separated by moments of breath. I think about the triptych form that Bacon worked in often. I wonder if these three sections might each want their own flavor. Like three different books in a novel? Maybe its about 3 different color palates (though that seems simplistic). I think finding the way to make these sections feel distinctive might be a helpful way to break up the piece.

Cant wait to see you all in spacing tomorrow!

--skm”

6. Structure

Intro

Hello. I know you are here

Paulina Mini

I could be activating the space

Marcos Language

Marcos language was written during the whole process. It was a random sheet of paper, I used to write a line everyday before rehearsal.

Marcos Solo

Marcos solo is completely choreographed, but it was permeable and porous. Marcos kept transforming it until the last performance.

Tristan Mini

We arrive at this material through catch and keep of my own open score improvisation. Tristan's score was to repeat each movement twice each time in a different way.

Brianna Mini

Brianna's score was to try to honor the original form and spatial trajectory of her movement. She had a tendency of taking too long to arrive here, so we came up with three or four dots that she could thread together to keep her from getting lost.

1st Duet (T/B)

Tristan and Brianna repeat their minis but now they are doing at the same time, and the movement becomes relational, the original material is now open to transformation.

Floor Trajectory/Contact Bit

Tristan and Brianna through dynamic shift travel across the space through the floor. Their heads meet and they have a few moments in contact, playing with their weight and spinning again each other. Then they leave.

White Noise

The score for Tristan was to delicately pet or pamper himself and to remove his shirt, and then to put it back on, and then to remove it again.

Brianna's score turned out to be related to her trying to make sense of the space around her, and deconstructing and repeating the set phrase that we came up with.

Marcos remains in stillness and meditation

Script Score

In this score dancers allow themselves to go to some other place. The score grew out of a list of instructions of ambiguous action and place. We wanted to reach the state through imagination.

Some things that used to happen here: Tristan sings a little bit. He dances Hip Hop. Brianna embraces Marcos, Marcos pulls Tristan's hair. Brianna shakes. Tristan has a theatrical dramatic moment, etc.

Marcos score was a little bit different:

Marcos lifts his right leg and licks his arm, his head circles a couple of times. He throws his arms over and over again, he takes it all in, he lifts a huge weight and carries it through. His weight is unequally distributed. His torso and head drops. It weighs him down into the ground, he resists, it feels like he is being suffocated by sand. His eyes lift looking at us. He stands, he is rotating, his arms sway, and now he spins, he grabs his shoulders and takes a big leap into the air arms wide open, he hugs brianna and wants to pull Tristan's hair. He moves like he moves. He reaches something from above, he craves and carves throwing the wáter on his face. His hands mimic the rhythm of air. He continually shifts direction. His right arm is up. His head is saying yes and no.

Modeling/ Twirling/ Crawling

This just happened. Tristan and Brianna walk through the runway, then they twirl, then they spin and they resist, they fall, they recover and they crawl,

Waiting Score/ Marcos moving

It was stillness and then it was waiting. Waiting is more ambiguous and holds more space, stillness is just stillness. Tristan and Brianna just wait. Marcos score was a list of actions: circle arms, circle head, open chest and fall, he repeated and developed.

Swallows Score (T/B)

Tristan and Brianna have a unison movement phrase, then they break into expansive, potent and erratic movement. This score is to release, to not hold back and to really allow sound to inform the movement and to take over. The second part of the score, after a pause and a surge, becomes relational. This time they are against each other and they resist.

Breathing

Bacon Score

This score is directly informed by Francis Bacon's paintings.

Second Duet

This is the first score that we made. Marcos and Tristan are chewing gum facing the audience. everything goes from there. This one felt very awkward.

Soft language

Marcos and Tristan go into a soft spoken stream of consciousness and singing.

Jumping

Marcos and Tristan learned this jumping phrase from a video of me dancing, they do it twice, and then they do their own version of the thing.

Mirror

Marcos is behind Tristan and he emulates his sutil movements. You could see the echoing and the transforming.

Instruction Score

A set of twisters like silly instructions.

Together Score

We resist the mind tendency to grasp, to say This is...

We resisted a lot in this one.

This score was about being together, touching, exploring levels, pushing, pulling and looking away from each other. One day during rehearsal Tristan was sick so we explored the together score without touching, avoiding contact. This was so engaging. The final score transformed into a mixture of both situations, together touching and not touching, pulling and pushing, looking away. During the performance this became something completely different in which Marcos on closing night as Tristan and Marcos approached Andrew's space we had a moment.

Brianna is singing.

Slapping

We did a "catch and keep" practice of gestural movement in place movement, hands face gesture while standing. I did a lot of touching and slapping of my own body. I suggested

the dancers performed this movement facing each other. Later Andrew found it interesting to record and reproduce these sounds. I loved the result.

Brianna Language / Marcos Moving

Brianna holds her head down while the rest of her body sinks inevitably, she stands, takes four steps forward and her shoulders begin to move uncontrollably until she opens her arms in opposition and her right knee takes her. She feels her heart melting, opening and driving her movement. She kisses and touches the floor in devotion and surrenders herself to the inexorability of her own weight. She stops. She stands again. Her left arm swings, Her eyes are wide open. She looks around. She waits. Now she is creating the space around her. She sings and spins and moves through everything and everyone.

I wrote:

Brianna reads while she stands and Marcos moves. Marcos's movement does not match Brianna's words. Marcos is not Brianna. Or, Marcos has the invitation to resist the meaning of the words.

Veneno (Tristan solo)

I was with Tristan today, he said he is being chased and persecuted. I fell into a deep silent abyss. I love him so much. Ever since our first process together I felt seen and protected by him. He is so beautiful. So honest. So genuine. Any world that doesn't agree with him is wrong. I finally got it today. I feel thankful for him. He gives me hope.

The extravagance of the Veneno moment. This was a moment where we all came together to see, to witness this strange and sublime thing.

Tristan wanted to dance two songs and I said:

“I think with these things, you have to be careful not to overdo it because it can easily lose its power. I think in this sense the contradiction of silence and the rhythms of your own body, exhaustion and insistence following the song, which is a more recognizable symbol could be a much more powerful statement.”

Breathing

First Brush Score

In a documentary about Francis Bacon, he talks about a few of his paintings having a random brush and how he used to do this once the painting was done, kind of like a nostalgic gesture. When you are painting a wall that first brush has a freshness and an aliveness and then it gets lost within the whole composition. I felt inspired. I was going to enter the space and I was going to offer the dancers a secret improvisation score. Each time would be a different one. Now I'm thinking that it could have been interesting to have the audience listen to that proposition. Perhaps. How we tend to underestimate the audience. Later during tech this score became more about the making a cocoon shape with the shades as I accepted the scenic designer suggestions. It seemed that it was a good moment to explore this configuration. The moment wasn't as open as I first imagined, but it was my secret and the dancers attempting to make sense of the space they were in.

Eyes in whole body

Screaming mouth/ Hands/ Crave

Arms wide open; Nothing- Something- Everything

Shape Score

First it was stillness and then it was waiting. With these shapes we cross the room and the shades transversally. Depending on audience placement some people would see the dancers drifting away and some people would see them moving closer. Then they rolled as fast as they could back to where they started in complete disregard, as if the shades were nothing, just an illusion.

Word Score

I just gave the dancers this sequence of actions.

Up- down- open- close- flexion- extensión- reach- fall-jump- succumb- shake- pull- push- rub- scream- throw- grab someone- breath- 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 (a free eight count of movement) - wait 12 counts- surge/travel while doing it again -arrive wait 20 counts- do it again in place- surge/travel while doing it again.

Whispering Score

The dancers had the instruction of exploring stream of consciousness language, beginning with whispering and allowing the volume of the voice to increase, sometimes if they felt like it they would scream. The words were mostly unintelligible, they overlapped,

but one day I heard tristan said he was starving and was going to have a koreann barbecue after the show. Another day he was saying how much he loved wine and that he drank wine before the show. I loved the coming in and out of artifice that listening to these words provided. It was true. We were performing, this was a show, and there was a before and an after.

End

I would open a door, and the dancers would follow me to exit the space. This happened on the last dress rehearsal

This is how I want to exist

Here, but not only here.

This but not only this.

After

My graduate school journey has been one of most complex and most meaningful experiences of my life. On a cellular level I am not the same person. My body, my mind have been reshaped.

I believe that the process of becoming aware of our whys and hows and of where we choose to place value in our practice is the most important aspect of our paths as artists. Something that is worth investing in. Amongst many other things, this is what grad school has meant for me.

A minimal artistic statement

I move. I think. I observe. I listen; I show up. I'm a mother, I approach the practice with care and respect. I want to guide the work into learning to speak for itself. I make dances. I aim high. I fail a lot. I'll keep trying.

Towards the end of this process I noticed that the question: What is worth making? was paralyzing. I am an overthinker. I think a better question for me would be:

Was it worth making?

This time around my answer is a screaming YES.

And we scream

because we've earned the right...

We'll see what happens next.

7. Reading List

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