

Reflection paper on *Unfinished Busyness*

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CONTENT

- 1. INTRODUCTION..... 3
- 2. THE UNFOLDING OF THE PROCESS 4
 - 2.1 1ST SEMESTER: BEGINNINGS 4
 - 2.2 2ND SEMESTER: STAND STILL..... 4
 - 2.3 3RD SEMESTER: STARTING... AGAIN 5
 - 2.4 4TH SEMESTER: CRISIS & REBIRTH..... 6
- 3. REFERENCES & INSPIRATIONS..... 7
 - 3.1 EARLY REFERENCES & INSPIRATIONS 7
 - 3.2 THE EXHAUSTED 8
 - 3.3 EXHAUSTING DANCE..... 8
 - 3.4 ABOUT THAT WITHOUT MEANING 9
- 4. ARTISTIC CONTEXT..... 9
- 5. ADDITIONAL INFLUENCES FROM THE CURRICULUM 11
- 6. METHODS & PRACTICES 12
 - 6.1 STARTING AT THE BEGINNING 12
 - 6.2 ANALYSING DRAMATURGIES 12
 - 6.3 PLAYING WITH CARDS 13
- 7. PERFORMATIVITY & THE MAKE-UP OF THE PERFORMANCE..... 13
 - 7.1 THE POWER OF TRANSPARENCY 14
 - 7.2 LETTING GO OF “DANCING” 14
 - 7.3 PREPARING FOR AN ECCENTRIC STATE OF BEING..... 15
- 8. CONCLUSION 16
- 9. LIST OF REFERENCES..... 18

1. INTRODUCTION

Unfinished Busyness is my graduating performance in MA Dance from Oslo National Academy of the Arts. It is a performance that wants to talk about a number of things as opposed to one thing, a rambling monologue sparked by an interest in demystifying the artist's process. It aims to reveal the building up to the performance event, unveiling the things and thoughts the dancer goes through up until the point they actually "do the dance". In *Unfinished Busyness* I eccentrically tell the story of how it is to be a newly educated female dancer, it is part personal conversation between friends and part performed lecture; it is a confession of likes and taste, just as much as it is a result of choreographed opinions and fabrications.

Program note from March 2021

Honestly, I don't ever read the program note before a performance- I think it guides my perception too much. My thought is that if the performance doesn't spark an interest in you then the program note is probably not going to save you from your total disinterest...but if you should read this either before or after my performance, here is a way too simplified and offensively well-structured description of my performance:

*Imagine a running commentary addressed to dance
+
an unstable world
+
the feeling of a growing realisation
+
a coat of personal dreams and desires (hopefully without making the piece about me)
+
finally, some self-aware humour
=
Putli's Unfinished Busyness*

*Performer and choreographer: Putli Jasmine Baldin Hellesen
Costume design: Lærke Bang Barfod (MA1 Costume design KHiO)
Light design & visual design: Martin Myrvold
Sound design: Petter Olav Støylen Wiik & Nomadic Ambience
External supervisors: Kristin Ryg Helgebostad & Solveig Styve Holte
Internal supervisors: Torunn Robstad & Bojana Cvejic*

2. THE UNFOLDING OF THE PROCESS

In this part of the text, I will briefly talk about how the physicality, movement themes and the focuses of this process changed on its journey to the final performance, and in addition making clear which references were left out along the way. However, more extensive reasoning for these changes in interests will be given under the chapter “references & inspirations”. It is also worth mentioning that this process was heavily affected by the corona virus outbreak from 2020. The virus had started to spread in Norway by the beginning of the second semester and was still actively putting restrictions on the Norwegian society all the way up to the premiere date and beyond.

2.1 1ST SEMESTER: BEGINNINGS

From the very beginning I was intrigued with the idea of choreography as a composition, as something that can be used to organize materials in order after each other; how does the first impression that you are presented with influence and alter the ones that come after, and vice versa? I was also very occupied with the idea of being an “authentic” performer, a word I since have left out of the language I have built around the performance and swapped out with a focus on transparency. With these things in mind my first impulse was to find and create a collection of distinctively different materials, so that they could be put up against each other.

When it was time for the first feedback session with MA Dance and MA Choreography in December of 2019 I had found an interest in three different movement sequences. I had one idea of a sequence with a yoga ball, one sequence of moving and talking at the same time, and one sequence where I created a character which I could generate materials from. After the feedback session I was made aware by my peers of interests to continue exploring. Risk became the new starting point for my explorations with the yoga ball. Because of the encouraging feedback I got from my yoga ball material I also wanted to explore dancing with other kinds of objects as well. I was interested in seeing how I could be just one of the “things” moving in space, inhabiting a space with objects that could move by themselves and objects that could move by me initiating them.

2.2 2ND SEMESTER: STAND STILL

By the time the corona virus put my school into lockdown, my process had not developed very much since the feedback session. And from this point and to the end of the semester, I was not allowed to be in the studio at all.

In March and April of 2020, we had a workshop with Solveig Styve Holte where we were supposed to create a performance together with her that would result in a showing, but instead it ended up being about how to have an individual praxis outdoors. We went outdoors for an hour every day, filmed ourselves doing our tasks and came together afterwards to talk about our experiences over Zoom. To me, the talking about and trying to verbally explain our experiences in and around dance became more important than the actual research of movements. It felt like mastering a new skill, building, and finding a language that could nourish and grow my ideas. However, during the workshop I also found a brief interest in

slowness, and when the workshop ended, I continued to work with slowness in relation to objects for a short while.

This early in the corona virus pandemic there was also a lot of hope that things would open up, and we could resume our “normal” lives in not too long. Even though I was very frustrated about losing studio time, I did not necessarily feel that much of a pressure to come up with or produce new materials for our second feedback session in May 2020. Instead, I took a deep dive into my video folders of videos that I had taken during the first semester when I was working in studio. My idea was to try to clarify, in words, what I was trying to research in this process, really. On this quest I also found an audition tape that I had made the summer before starting my MA studies. In the video I throw myself around in a very physical and violent manner, and I thought that this could serve as an extension on the theme of risk that I had established when working with the yoga ball in the first semester. However, this sort of tiring movement material was never revisited again later, and in the final performance my movements are mainly pedestrian. On a more productive note, this feedback session was actually the point where I was made aware and excited about the possibility of me being the “puppet master” of the performance. One of the feedbacks I received read: “as a sound- and lightboard, I wonder if I would have the pleasure of being operated by yourself”. From this point on I worked with the intention that I would be the one to operate the performance.

Furthermore, I also used this time to research and deep dive into the oeuvre of the Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero. I was intrigued by the way that she incorporated objects and props into the messy chaos that her choreographies *The Fall of an Ego, Until the Moment when God is Destroyed by the Extreme Exercise of Beauty* and *We Are Going to Miss Everything We Don't Need* all embrace.

After delivering my first project description in June 2020, Bojana Cvejic suggested that I should read the chapter “The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation” in philosopher Brian Massumi’s book *Parables for the Virtual; Movement, Affect, Sensation*.¹ Cvejic suggested this in relation to my earlier interest in making objects move, but as the process went along, I left this focus behind. Instead, I went on to think about how I could use objects, or scenography rather, as a means to build up the anticipation for something/ “an event” to happen.

2.3 3RD SEMESTER: STARTING... AGAIN

When the third semester kicked off it had been a long time since I had been in a studio, and when I came back, I felt the need to re-focus my interests and find ways of working that did not feel too heavy or serious. Through Cvejic’s theory lectures I had been introduced to many choreographers and I found a huge interest in both Eleanor Bauer and Jonathan Burrows, mainly for the way that they both incorporate humour and lightness into their process as well as performances. As a starting point for my research this semester I stole Bauer’s idea from her 2011 lecture performance *walk+talk*, where she had been invited to Kaaistudio's Brussels to talk about her work as an artist. In the lecture performance Bauer spread paper sheets with

¹ Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*.

different themes and ideas around on the floor and the walls of the stage, and then elaborated on these keywords both physically and verbally. Inspired by this performance, I made my own paper sheets with themes and ideas that I felt were relevant to my process, I made sheets with verbal tasks, for example talking about how “being a choreographer is like being a thief” or trying to “make sense of Lepecki”, and sheets with physical tasks, for example “repetition” or “beginning, middle part, ending”. In the beginning I did the tasks separately and after a while I started to mix verbal and physical tasks.

By the time *Lunch in Progress*, which was an open showing at school of what we in MA Dance were working on, and the third feedback session in October 2020 rolled around, I was still actively working with the paper sheets and now referred to them as my “playing cards”. Through the feedback from my colleagues, it was clear that what worked were aspects like the running commentary to dance, self-aware humour and light take on difficult concepts. With humour as a new tool for working I continued to research, expand, and alter my playing cards further.

Due to my interest in Bauer’s lecture performance, I became increasingly interested in lecture performances in general. I saw it as a medium which contained a fascinating mixture of the personal and the performed self. In relation to this interest Cvejic sent me a link to a lecture performance by choreographer Juan Dominguez from Tanznacht 2016. Dominguez’s performance had me mesmerized by the way that he subtly tapped into different types of performativities while having a casual talk with the audience.

2.4 4TH SEMESTER: CRISIS & REBIRTH

In pitching the performance to my light designer Martin Myrvold in January 2021 the performance finally started to feel like it had its own character, a life of its own and an artistic language that it could rest in. Myrvold was excited about the casual feel of the performance, and for a while we even looked into how we could use a studio as the performance stage instead of a black box. However, in the end the performance found its home in a black box after all, because I felt like a small studio would only make the audience uncomfortable regarding the risk of contamination.

During the third semester I asked Holte to be my supervisor, because of the good working flow that I felt we had during her earlier workshop, and she accepted. However, up until this point we had only been in studio together a handful of times because of the corona virus restrictions, which made it difficult for her because she lived in a different town. When finally showing her my physical work in a studio session in January 2021, my whole performance seemed to crumble in front of me. I had a lot of elements hanging in the air and no threads that connected them. I was still working with my playing cards, but I had become too dependent on them to make any new steps forward. In addition, it seemed like me and Holte at this point in time had different understandings and expectations of how to work with the physical aspects of this performance; I had not communicated clearly enough to Holte during our zoom meetings, that I was indeed moving away from making a performance that looked like “dance”. The reason for this was because, even though this idea had started to come to the surface of my thoughts, I was still holding on to this “preference” towards

movements and had not fully let go of it yet, I knew I was interested in lecture performances but I was not able to verbalize exactly why yet.

When Kristin Ryg Helgebostad became my new supervisor in the beginning of February 2021 it felt like the process was given new life. Helgebostad had a completely new set of references for me, which helped broaden my perspective. When she sent me Miguel Gutierrez's performance *Heavens What Have I Done*, it felt like my performance finally found its form, or rather a big sister to aspire to be like. I left the playing cards behind and began constructing this rambling monologue that was heavily inspired by Gutierrez's performance. At large me and Helgebostad found a great interest in discussing what we referred to as "the power of transparency", which is at large what comes to fruition when you choose to put the ordinary up on stage. I will discuss this further in one of the later chapters called "performativity & the make-up of the performance".

Finally, it is worth mentioning that working with sound and costume also greatly affected the structure of the finished performance. The collaboration processes I had with Lærke Bang Barfod (costume designer) and Petter Wiik (sound composer) both started by the end of the third semester and therefore became quite time restricted, which forced us to make quick decisions. By the end of the collaborations, I felt like we accidentally had made something that was opposite to the rest of the performance material somehow. Therefore, Wiik's sounds, and the costume ended up at the end of the performance, almost creating its own performance within the performance.

3. REFERENCES & INSPIRATIONS

When it comes to the references and inspirations connected to this performance, I would like to say that there are many, but in this chapter, I will mainly discuss the written references. However, the written reference *A Choreographers Handbook* by Jonathan Burrows, which was a big part of my process, will not be discussed in this chapter. Because of the more active relation I had with this book in the studio it will instead be referenced to in the chapter "methods & practises", and also be elaborated even further under the chapter "performativity & the make-up of the performance".

3.1 EARLY REFERENCES & INSPIRATIONS

One of the earliest references that I remember thinking I had to somehow be in dialogue with was Bojana Kunst's chapter "The Visibility of Work" in her book *Artist at Work; Proximity of Art and Capitalism*. The way that Kunst revealed the artists work, thoughts and contradictions put words to so many of the things I had felt, but could not verbalize; and therefore, somehow also had not been able to fully recognize. Reading the chapter felt like looking behind the curtain of the facade that is the dancer. It reminded me of a performance I had seen in 2015 performed by Carte Blanche (The Norwegian National Company of Contemporary Dance) called *A Drop of Sweat* by theatre director Lina Majdalanie which then was part of a triple bill called *Birthmark*. In *A Drop of Sweat* the dancers talked about things like how their underwear always went up their butt crack when dancing a certain sequence and elaborated on

different ways in which they could ruin the performance for the rest of the company. I guess I have had an interest in demystifying the processes that go on within the dance artist for a while.

3.2 THE EXHAUSTED

Gilles Deleuze's text *The Exhausted* and Peter Pål Pelbart's chapter "Exhaustion, Madness, Outside" in his book *Cartography of Exhaustion: Nihilism Inside Out*, was also important in relation to the way I was questioning dance; why the need to create movements when other things were in fact being created within my process instead? Deleuze's notion on the exhausted is not to be confused with the tired. You get tired from work and productivity and then you rest, before you work again and become tired once more. Pelbart writes that tiredness: "comes when we realize the possibles that inhabit us, choosing and obeying certain objectives more than others, realizing certain projects, following clear preferences".² Exhaustion, however, does not follow these types of clear preferences and has nothing to do with work or productivity. The exhausted has as Deleuze puts it:

"renounced all need, preference, goal or signification. Only the exhausted is sufficiently disinterested, sufficiently scrupulous. Indeed, he is obliged to replace projects with tables and programs denuded of sense. What matters for him is the order in which to do what he must, and, following which combinations, be able to do two things at once--when it is again necessary--for nothing".³

In reading this last quote I realized I had been in the role of the tired, following the clear preferences towards movements and of what I thought a choreographic process was "supposed" to look like; and not in fact exhausting all that it possibly could look like. I was also intrigued by this idea that the exhausted does things that are "necessary-- for nothing". I had developed this growing feeling that my performance had to have an important meaning behind it somehow, feeling this pressure of it having to be serious because of the serious tone that came along with the corona virus. This, however, was another one of my "preferences". Deleuze points out that the exhausted is not in fact passive as a result of the lack of preference, but "sufficiently disinterested" in preference. This notion made me think that maybe dance is not as important to me as composition, maybe dance can come secondary to simply a performance, maybe my preference towards dance as movements was more harmful than fruitful to my process.

3.3 EXHAUSTING DANCE

In the same way that Deleuze aims to push language to its limits, André Lepecki also talks about pushing dance to its limits in his book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. Deleuze claims that his Language III is still in relation with language but rises above it and instead; "operates through silence".⁴ *Silence* acts as the counterpoint for *language*, in the same way that Lepecki says that *stillness* is the counterpoint for *dance*.

² Pelbart, *Cartography of Exhaustion*, trans. Lencastre, 105.

³ Deleuze, *The Exhausted*, trans. Uhlmann, 5.

⁴ Deleuze, *The Exhausted*, trans. Uhlmann, 12.

Lepecki problematizes the way that modernity has bound dance to movements, how the identity of dance is being interpreted as synonymous to a *being-in-flow*, and how when contemporary choreographers have tried moving away from this it is either being perceived as a betrayal of dance, a ‘hiccup’ or a trend that will pass, or simply just not dance at all. In my final semester, I can see that these thoughts had been planted in my subconsciousness, and I was starting to heavily question my own needs and desires to make movement, because it was in fact starting to hinder me from moving forward in my process. Making the types of movements that I wanted required studio time, which constantly got compromised due to the corona virus. I started feeling like making movements would be disingenuous to the process that I was having, because the process I was having consisted more of talking about dance, than actually doing “the dancing”. I rehearsed every day how to talk about my interests, my concerns, my problems. I rehearsed how to make myself clear and build a language that supported, embraced, and created a life for the process.

3.4 ABOUT THAT WITHOUT MEANING

Another crucial reference is the book *Om det utan mening*, which in English translates to “about that without meaning”, by Kurt Johannessen. It is a tiny little book of illustrations and explanations about that which is without meaning, which I received by my first supervisor Holte. This book makes it clear that that which is without meaning is not the same as that which is meaningless, for that without meaning holds a potentiality that one day could turn into meaning. I think this book further inspired me to stick to my guts and continue with my interests even though they were not quite formed around any meaning yet, because the meaning of my performance did not show up until the last two weeks prior to the premiere. It is also a book that is quite intuitive in its progression and sort of answers the questions it asks itself in a very simple but clear way, while it at the same time is filled with digressions. These aspects of the book inspired me in my efforts at creating a sort of rambling and effortlessly feeling monologue. The book also had a clear trajectory; it sort of inhabited this feeling that it was going to guide you from one place to another, safely take you from A to B, and then leave you be. These aspects are also relevant to my performance in the sense that I through the process became increasingly interested in building a performance that happened for, alongside and with the audience.

4. ARTISTIC CONTEXT

When creating my performance, I took great inspiration from many performances and in this paragraph, I will discuss how five performances in particular helped shape and structure my performance.

Firstly, I would like to highlight Eleanor Bauer’s performance *walk+talk*, which I briefly mentioned earlier in this text for its use of paper sheets. Bauer’s performance was instantly intriguing to me because as an audience I felt like I could follow and understand her logic, the reason being that she had these paper sheets on stage which functioned as physical markers of her progression through the piece. In my performance you can see this idea of physical progression reflected in the way that I slowly but surely rig the scenography while

monologuing. Burrows' performance *Rewriting* from 2019 comes to play as an extension of this idea. In *Rewriting* Burrows has a stack of cards which he constantly places and replaces in what becomes known pattern after a while, while at the same time having a monologue going. I perceived Burrows handling of the cards as a calming and disarming factor, as a sort of counteracting element to his direct speech towards the audience. Helgebostad and I talked about how doing and talking is a quite natural thing, like when one makes dinner with someone. Both *walk+talk* and *Rewriting* are performances where the audience is being loaded with a lot of verbal information and must find their way through it and make their own connections and selections for what to remember. I wanted to take the pressure off the audience in the same way that Bauer and Burrows did with their props, because I realized that expecting the audience to follow every word of my monologue would be too much to ask.

Secondly, it is worth mentioning Juan Dominguez's performance *Between What Is No Longer and What Is Not Yet* from Tanznacht 2016. In this performance Dominguez is sat on a chair facing the audience wearing a t-shirt with the words "JUAN WHAT?" printed on it. Dominguez talks to the audience and tells them about himself and some of his friends. At certain points throughout the performance, you notice that he takes long performative pauses and makes gestures as if they are choreographed to what he is saying. This sort of way that he tapped into different levels of performativity, leaving the audience not quite sure if he is performing something rehearsed or talking freely around a topic, tickled my brain. In my performance I also worked with different layers of performativity, making some of the things I talked about truths and others made up thoughts, making some of the stories deeply personal and others quite superficial and phoney. Trying to present these things in the same eccentric manner pushed me as a performer.

Thirdly, I must acknowledge the performance named *Half n Half* featuring the performers Andrew Morrish and Peter Trotman from 2015. In the first part of the performance Australian performance improviser Morrish is taking on a solo where he among other things directly addresses the audience and criticizes his own performative habits as they occur. The sort of self-aware humour that Morrish exudes, is for me a clear inspiration in my own performance.

And finally, I must mention Miguel Gutierrez's performance *Heavens What Have I Done* from 2010, because the impact this performance had on my process was immense. The ease in which Gutierrez manages his continuous monologue, his directing of the audience, his preparation of the stage space, his dancing and even singing are truly impressive. *Heavens What Have I Done* is: "a rambling monologue addressing the artists' ascension to success, the hypocrisies of an unstable world, artistic critiques, and dreams and desires of a more personal nature".⁵ This sort of cross referenced, tidy chaos and seemingly unfiltered and honest thoughts on dance felt like a template I could utilize that held almost no restrictions regarding the merging together of many different topics.

⁵ Black box teater Oslo 1985, "Miguel Gutierrez (USA); HEAVENS WHAT HAVE I DONE; 22. sep. –23. sep. 2011".

5. ADDITIONAL INFLUENCES FROM THE CURRICULUM

In addition to the written references and the performances discussed in the previous chapters, my performance was also influenced by some of the people that I have met due to the workshops that were organized as a part of our MA curriculum.

As well as Holte's workshop which I mentioned in the chapter "the unfolding of the process", one of the earliest influences was Morrish, which I briefly introduced in the foregoing chapter. The workshop we had with Morrish in October 2019 really stuck with me through the two years, and I have taken great pleasure in researching some of his performances throughout my process. Morrish cherished humour as a part of his process and would for example start his dance classes by individually stating: "you're my favourite, don't tell any of the others", to every dancer in the room. He also had a way of simplifying the making or the creation of movements, which I really appreciated. One of the methods I have put to good use is the idea that everything has a beginning, a middle part and an ending, every movement, word, performance, and text. This helped me greatly when I for most of the process worked without a meaning or connection to a clear theme. Furthermore, Morrish insisted on performance and made us watch each other and be each other's audience frequently. To him dancing alone in your bedroom or in the studio, was somewhat irrelevant to his work, because it did not hold a sense of performativity. Watching my classmates pull ideas out of thin air was something I found fascinating and this sort of feeling that something is being created in front of you, is something I tried to replicate in my performance.

In January 2020 we were scheduled to have individual improvisation sessions with dance artist Terje Tjøme Mossige. Part of Mossige's praxis is that he takes walks, quite fast-paced walks, before he enters the studio. The idea is to counteract the daunting void of nothingness that the studio holds and bring with you the impressions from the outside world into the studio and work from there. This sort of way of preparing before working by taking in other impressions or putting yourself in certain elevated mood or speed, is something I later incorporated into my own process. Just how I did this will be further elaborated in the chapter "performativity & the make-up of the performance".

Lastly, I would like to include the workshop we had with Burrows over zoom in January 2021. As a starting point for the workshop Burrows was interested in the questions and concerns that we had around choreography at the time. I got to discuss a topic of my concern and get Burrows' as well as my classmates feedback. I talked about how to title a performance when it is about many things and still growing. Burrows suggested that I should go into studio working with one title one day and another title another day, and in this way make out if the title felt right. This method I directly applied to my process. The evolution of the title from that point goes: *The Solo Piece – The Piece with the Colourful Costume – The Piece Where Nothing Impressive Happens – The Piece Where Nothing Grand Happens – A Dance in Four Parts – A Dance with Different Parts – The Piece With the Playing Cards – Could be this or Something Else, Doesn't Matter – Nobody's Business – Unfinished Business – Unfinished Busyness.*

6. METHODS & PRACTICES

Having had a process that left a lot of things behind on its way to finding its performed form, I inevitably also dipped my toes into an array of different approaches along the way. When creating the material for my finished performance I can see that this has been mirrored through my methods and practises in the sense that I have approached making and composing from a couple clearly different angles.

6.1 STARTING AT THE BEGINNING

As banal as it might sound, starting from the beginning when creating has been a major key factor in my process, from all the way back to the first feedback session where I presented three different ideas after each other to the final weeks before the premiere; this is a method I found myself using through all the elements that make-up the performance. It was applied to the building of the monologue, the scenography, the “dance” sequence that happens at the end, the light design, and the making of both sound and costume.

This method is as straight forward as it seems and to exemplify, I am going to pull forward the sound making process for the “dance” sequence that ends my performance. When Wiik and I met in studio, I brought with me a yoga ball and he brought with him his demos and a mixing board. I was exploring movements with the yoga ball to a couple pre picked demos and Wiik was watching me and in this way able to get to know the tendencies within my movement patterns. From there we quite quickly started to build a dramaturgy in the soundtrack by starting at the beginning and working our way through to the end. The idea is to start in one place, see where it takes you and then go back to the beginning when you have no more thoughts. It is essentially a lot about trusting what comes easily to you and always working with the question: what is the next right move? In *A Choreographers Handbook* Burrows writes: “I like starting at the beginning because I like how one thing leads to another”.⁶ I share this perspective with Burrows. Starting at the beginning was a way of constructing choreography that allowed me to feel the impact of changes and just exactly how everything is changed by what it stands next to.

6.2 ANALYSING DRAMATURGIES

Being inspired by the performances that I have mentioned earlier in this text, I often times tried to dissect and pinpoint elements of those performances that I thought worked and what type of effects or ambiances those elements created. An example of this could be that I thought the way the performers, in all of the performances, looked at the audience while speaking to them worked, because it helped break down the fourth wall and create for a more unpretentious meeting. Another example could be that I thought Morrish’s range in speaking volume worked, because it created a nice balance between an aloof conversation and a very focused one.

⁶ Burrows, *A Choreographers Handbook*, 3.

Onwards, I think that analysing dramaturgies was very helpful in creating the monologue material specifically. I felt that all the performances had been successful in using humour to their advantage, and because of this I wanted to use them as a guide for my monologue. I would listen to the performers ways of speaking and taking pauses, their ways of gesticulating, their ways of starting a sentence, their ways of telling a story, their word choices, their ways of making sense of a situation etc. I would listen to them speak and try to imagine: what are the questions that the performers are answering here? And then proceed to answer those questions in my own way. For example, the reason why I in one part of the performance talk about the room I am in and my experiences from that room, is because Bauer had talked about what an empty studio room feeds to the creative process. From there my question became; what is my relationship with this room?

In addition, I would sometimes even steal small phrases from other performers. I for example stole “I’m ready to do the dancing bit now” from Morrish and “this sense of zero” from Gutierrez. However, it is my impression that stealing is also a part of creating and can even be useful as long as you know that you are in fact stealing. I chose to insert these phrases into the monologue, so that it also could contain other ideas than my own; small details that made it possible for me to also play with sayings and opinions that were not necessarily mine.

6.3 PLAYING WITH CARDS

As I have mentioned earlier, during my third semester I started using my playing cards as a method for inspiring movements and spoken language. In retrospect, I think it functioned more so as a way of discovering language and thoughts that I had within me, than creating movement material. Having one card give me a physical task and another give me a verbal one at the same time, allowed me to distract myself to the point where the words could rise to the surface quite freely and effortlessly. Putting a lot of weight behind the words was never the intention, and something that I actively tried to counteract in the finished performance by overloading the monologue with words so that they hopefully would drown each other out. After a while the playing cards turned into cue cards for the script, and in that had somewhat of a more functional purpose. On the other hand, working with the cue cards in my hands also inspired different ways of gesticulating as well as how I would place myself in space. I recognize this method as quite holistic in its approach, because in playing with cards I actively tried to find ways for simultaneously creating movements and words.

7. PERFORMATIVITY & THE MAKE-UP OF THE PERFORMANCE

Moving away from my methods and practises for generating material, I also had to find out how and in which ways I could perform my findings. Burrows suggests many a definition of choreography and I would like to pull forward one that resonates with my experience through this process: “Choreography is a way to set up a performance that takes care of some of the responsibility for what happens, enough that the performer is free to perform”.⁷ For me it was

⁷ Burrows, *A Choreographers Handbook*, 105.

important to create a performance where the elements in it held an integrity of their own, enabling me as a performer to feel that I was just one of many things happening on stage. As a result of this I would say that the primary focus was to make the monologue and the scenography relieve me of some of the responsibility for what happened, so that I could get into my eccentric stage persona.

7.1 THE POWER OF TRANSPARENCY

Ultimately the performativity of the performance as a whole was developed through an interest in transparency. I wanted to create a performance where the meeting with the audience would feel like a meeting between friends as opposed to strangers. On audience Burrows writes:

“It is, of course, possible to use the situation of the unreality of a theatrical stage to become something extraordinary. This is one of the greatest pleasures of performing or watching performance – to be invited to suspend doubt. It is also and equally valid and desirable, though, to choose sometimes for the ordinary. The audience like to see themselves up there. It is a pleasure equal to that of witnessing magic”.⁸

My way of bringing the ordinary to the stage was not only through the pedestrian nature of my movements, but also through a transparent meeting with the audience. Among other things, I wanted to reveal the illusion of the black box by taking the audience along the journey from a relatively empty stage to a fully lit and scenography filled stage. The idea was to sort of make them aware of the journey from ordinary to extraordinary, in hopes to build up an anticipation for a main event to happen and then when you reach it be met with its sort of uneventful nature and realize that the main event has already happened.

Onwards I attempted at working against the idea of the artist as a genius or a stranger in the monologue. The way in which I managed to do so was to bring down the tone of the monologue to a conversational level. I incorporated thoughts, worries, problems, questions, and naïve wishes in order to appear relatable. As a result of this the monologue was overloaded by verbal information, contradictions, and digressions, playing with what lays in the background and what lays in the foreground, interweaving things that are important and things that are not. Hopefully, this let the audience know on a subconscious level that there are no riddles to solve or hidden truths you need to be on the alert to catch; it is just a stupid monologue.

7.2 LETTING GO OF “DANCING”

As a result of my interest in exploring spoken language, I slowly let go of “dancing” and opted for more pedestrian movements. These movements were mostly generated as a biproduct from the rigging of the scenography. The main motivation for moving in space became “practical”, or as “practical” as choreographed movements can be. In rigging the different tools different movement qualities came to be. For example, carrying the weights that would serve as anchors for the huge stage curtain that was hoist up into the roof,

⁸ Burrows, *A Choreographers Handbook*, 160.

produced strenuous movements while rolling out a dance mat by kicking it with my feet, produced more light and aloof movements. In the final performance the parts dedicated to practical movements ended up taking up around 21 minutes, which made them quite dominant in the half and hour-long performance. All in all, I would say that giving the practicality of the rigging so much space in the performance helped take the pressure of me as a performer somehow. Essentially, the movements that are created inherently within the scenography by me rigging it, movements like the stage curtain being lifted from the floor and up into the ceiling, are the only other things that predominantly happen and evolves visually on stage. Because of this I think the building of the scenography managed to have a life of its own, which made this a performance where you can view and experience the dramaturgy of the scenography and the dramaturgy of the monologue as two parallel happenings, as parallel dramaturgies with their own integrities.

However, even though most of the movements were motivated by practicality, the “dancing” part at the end was not. Here the movements had more of a theatricality to them or more of an unpracticality to them. Nevertheless, these movements were still created as a result of the scenography on stage, as well as being motivated by the up-tempo sound track that Wiik created for the performance. This part of the performance starts with me doing a catwalk, which was created due to a dance mat that resembles a catwalk when lit up. From there a yogaball is incorporated in the catwalk and later it turns into a more intimate duet between me and the yoga ball. And finally, I grab one of the light spots that are placed on the floor and start lighting up parts of the scenography.

Despite the clear separation between practical and unpractical movements, there is a point in the performance where I intentionally insert some choreographed movements into the practical rigging movements. This happens, funnily enough, when I start talking about all the “pretending” one must do as a dancer. This sort of insertion is something I wish I had gone a bit further with. It would have been a natural progression to choreograph more movement themes where it would be harder to detect the movements as either or unpractical, and in this more intentionally made use of the scale between the two poles.

7.3 PREPARING FOR AN ECCENTRIC STATE OF BEING

On exploration Burrows writes:

“Am I exploring writing this book? Or am I writing this book? I don’t want what I’m doing to be just a test, a practice run for something that will happen later. I want it to happen now.

So I’d like to make a new principle, to add to my list of principles for trying to write this book.

The new principle is this: ‘no exploration, only work’.

This doesn’t, of course, mean that I won’t explore things”.⁹

⁹ Burrows, *A Choreographers Handbook*, 29.

The need for a principle like this is something that I relate to. In working with the monologue material for my performance there was no clear separation of when I was exploring and when I was performing. I would say that the material required me to be in an eccentric performative state continuously, largely due to the humorous tone of the performance and the direct relation to the audience. Therefore, for me to work and not just explore, as Burrows puts it, I gradually came up a “preparation ritual” that would allow for me to do so.

First, I would put on some music in order to fill the room and try to counteract the feeling of being alone. The music mostly consisted of what I would explain as energetic feel-good songs. Singing the lyrics out loud while alternating between power walks and power stands, became a way to claim the space and affirm for myself the power that I held over it. After this I would sit down in the middle of the room, addressing the pretend audience, and start reading out loud from Burrow’s book. *A Choreographers Handbook* is written in a down to earth and non-pretentious sort of manner, Burrows has essentially written a book following the same logic for how he would choreograph a piece. Reading the book out loud worked in one way as a practise for speaking and an inspiration for the monologue material, but more importantly it functioned as a sort of calming presence and almost as a mentoring unit. Burrows leads with the philosophy that whatever choice you are making is not necessarily wrong, but that you should be aware that this in fact is the choice you are making, and that this is just one in many choices that you could have made. For me this created a feeling of safety and that I was supported through my choices somehow. This was important because it allowed me to distance *me* from *the performed me*. Many of the things that the performed persona is saying are quite contradictory, thoughts just in the starting phase, or even naïve perceptions that I myself can not necessarily stand behind. Starting to think of these things as choices for the performance rather than as a reflection of my opinions was an important turning point, which encouraged me to pursue these fabricated opinions further. Performing this ritual allowed me to reach an eccentric state of being, where I could feel like I had a surplus of energy and direct access to see the humour in things. A state of being where I could trust that my voice would fill the room, and where my body felt comfortable and at home in the space. This sort of eccentric confidence also allowed me to access a type of impulsivity or decision-making pattern that was different enough for me to feel like it was not me that was making the decisions, but rather this eccentric character.

In retrospect, I would say this turned out to be one of the biggest challenges in working with my performance. Insisting on being in a humorous and light mood when things are very serious around you was not always easy but has become a way of working that I highly appreciate today. The method I used is, of course, just one way in reaching an eccentric state of being and If I had more time, I would love to test out other ways in reaching this state.

8. CONCLUSION

As I look back at this process, I see that most of my intentions from the beginning of the process have in fact found their way into the final performance in the end. However, these early intentions were clearly in lack of a language that could elevate them from the idea stage, and understanding how to build a language that would support this performance has been one

of the greatest learning experiences throughout this process. For the future I wish to bring with me this language as well as the knowledge I have acquired on transparency into new processes. The performance is called *Unfinished Busyness* which strongly indicates that there might be some unfinished business left to resolve, aspects and elements of the performance that might want to have a second and third life. However, I think that the interests that I was exploring within this performance are just some of my interests, and they can therefore not be seen as a prediction for how I will be working in every process from now on.

Moreover, I am left reflecting upon how the global pandemic affected the relationship I had with my collaborators. I think having to surround myself with the same small circle of people when working forced me to truly collaborate; simply choosing a person or persons to work with and trusting them fully. People can not do any more than what they can do, and everyone has a limit to where they can go artistically. For me collaboration is about recognizing these limits in myself and others, and then work with that instead of against it. In fact, I think that the last couple of days before the premiere was the most fruitful time in the process. We would have run throughs where it was only me, the light designer, the stage manager, and the costume designer (unfortunately not the sound designer who was on a leave of absence at the time); and they would all give me feedback in areas outside of their discipline. It felt like we were doing the run throughs for each other, for the expansion of our creativity, and simply for the sake of art. Arriving at this sort of togetherness is something that I see as a great success.

In conclusion I would like to make a note of one last burrowsian mantra which says: “It’s only a stupid dance”.¹⁰ Stupid, however, does not mean unimportant; one says that there are no stupid questions, which suggests that the quest for knowledge also includes failure. There is a certain risk, inherent in asking stupid questions or making stupid dances, that you must deal with in order to learn something new. Even though these risks can be uncomfortable, and I wish that it would not feel like I was putting my whole career at stake every time I set foot on a stage, I find comfort in the fact that I at least feel like I have something to risk.

¹⁰ Burrows, *A Choreographers Handbook*, 29.

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