

Reflection, "*It's Very Dramatic*"
Master's in dance, Oslo National Academy of the Arts



Photo: Yaniv Cohen

*The full version of the piece is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEMKPQI4Iwo>

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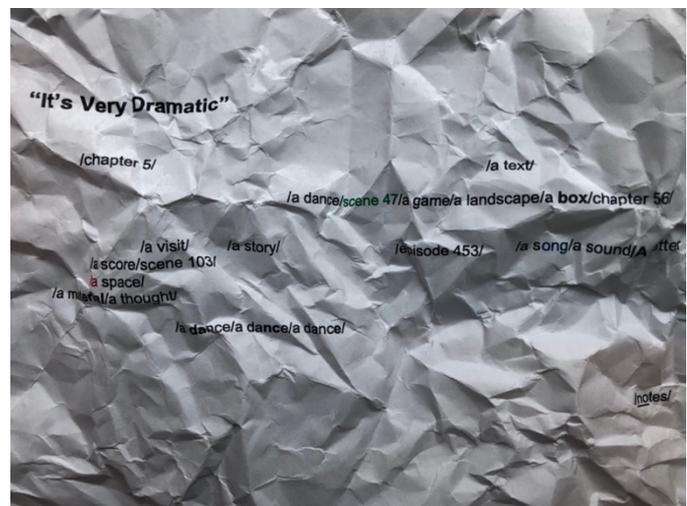
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Hello:

My main motivation for taking this MA has been to figure out what kind of work I desire to create. I have primarily been performing in other people’s works. Which is something I love to do. I have been privileged to be part of many democratic artistic processes as a co-creating performer. Nevertheless, a question has still been lingering; *What kind of work do I want to make and how can I facilitate a process that enables me to do so?* My final MA project is a result of that question and hopefully a new chapter, paragraph or perhaps an episode in my artistic practice.

In this reflection paper I will account for the creative process as well as the final performance “*It’s Very Dramatic*”. I’m going to elaborate on which influences and entry points have been relevant in the process, how I worked with those and which methods I applied. With reference to notions of ironic sincerity and play, I’m going to attempt to situate the performance in a cultural and artistic context. Finally, I am going to speculate on the future of the piece. What questions remain and what I gained from the creative process as well as the experience of performing the piece. I have divided the paper into different sections for clarity for the reader. However, a lot of the themes and sections overlap in content, perhaps a bit like a landscape.

The paper is interspersed by different interviews. The interviews address several agents or aspects of the project and thus are a supplement to the drier information driven texts that surrounds them.



Program text.

Circling in, maps and memories:

When I was about seven years old, I realised I was able to explore a space physically by cartwheeling wherever I went. I enjoyed the attention I got from teachers, my parents, and random bystanders but I also felt quite awkward about it. I did not cartwheel to get attention, but the attention added an element of show that confronted me with the impact my physical explorations had on my surroundings. It was performative and non-performative at the same time.

I remember being introduced to Brecht and the *Verfremdungseffekt* in my high school drama class almost 20 years ago. I was immediately excited about the concept of underlining the *unreality* of the theater space. The alienation effect made me curious. It represented a notion of play to me much more than what my teacher taught me about how it was to make the audience critical and aware of what was presented to them.

Almost eight years ago I had a very severe concussion. My eyesight suffered significantly from the accident, and I spend a lot of time training it to get back on my feet. To get better I had to do eye strengthening exercises that trained my depth vision utilizing an app while wearing 3D glasses. Right eye red, left eye green. The realization that my depth vision was highly impaired came from someone else telling me. I felt horrible, but I didn't realize that the world had become flatter, so to speak. During the time I spend heavily concussed my world became very small. I spend most of my time alone paying attention to little details in my home. How my selection of bags hung in a perfect, yet random composition on the wall by my bed, for an example. I got almost obsessed with tidying up, placing all my items perpendicularly on the table. When I did leave the house, I entered a world that continued moving while my life was standing still. I lived in a distorted world where walking on the streets felt like being at a rock concert at maximum volume. All social contact and conversation felt like speaking from a bubble. I was off, they were on. They were in, I was out.

Whenever watching a performance, I always pay special attention to the moment when the performance is over and the performer stops performing, or more accurately put: the moment the performer stops performing the performance and starts performing taking the applause instead. That shift in the gaze, the polite smile, the efficient running in and out of stage. It is so beautifully awkward to me.

I remember watching myself in the mirror while bawling my eyes out, during a very depressed time in my mid 20's. I completely lost my sense of humor. I felt very sorry for myself, but I still found the time to place myself in front of a mirror to watch myself cry. Red puffy eyes, tears running down my face, stuffy nose. It was very dramatic and, as of now, very comical.

Interview with the piece:

- What are you?

I'm a performance. I'm not quite sure in which context I belong, if I'm a dance piece for example? Or perhaps something with theatre... There are a lot of words for sure, maybe a choreographic comedy show? - I don't think I'm fun enough for that. I do hope I'm not a physical theatre performance. I don't think I need to decide what I am though. Identity is hard to grasp anyway, but speculating is fun. I like to think that I'm a playground. A place that my maker created to allow herself to do all the things she never got to do. She would have liked to be an actor. Sometimes she calls herself that, other times she doesn't dare to. Both because of a respect for the craft and her lack of educational credentials in that field – but also just out of fluctuating levels of self-confidence on the matter.

- What would you say that you are about?

Mm... I'm about... I'm about drama approached in a rather dry way. I'm about the situation or condition for a theatrical event. A group of people are looking at another group of people, or in this case, primarily one person and about how you can play with that contract and fiction. The mix of scenes and realities is ultimately an attempt to underline the complexity of the world, and to not conclude anything but instead throwing a ball up in the air, seeing where it lands, and ask: how does life look from that angle? I'm also about connecting the dots. I propose different categories and jump between them – most likely the audience will connect the dots. In that sense I'm only half of the work, I don't exist without a recipient.

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Well, I'm quite colorful visually, so I'm very instagrammable you could say. I'm also fairly easy to tour in terms of scenography. I think that there are a lot of aspects in me that could be worked on further, but I also exist in the entirety of what I am now.

- What is your target audience?

I don't have one. Although, I'm not made for kids or young audiences. It might look like that at a first glance though. Maybe I'm a children's piece for adults?

- What kind of experience would you like to convey in your audience?

A kind of nearness, I think. A sense of having spent some time together for a little while. My maker is perpetually scared of being boring on stage, so I do hope I was entertaining. I think you get further if you manage to keep the attention of the audience.

- What are your plans for the future?

I'm planning to stay alive. I wonder if I could be extended to a longer piece, or at least worked on further. I think there is a lot more research to be done on the subject of drama. Going further into the actual function of drama. Both on a societal level and in terms of how drama operates in the body. I could also imagine having more performers, someone lying dead on stage for 15 minutes for an example (what a great gig!), and what about the rest of the team, where is number nine and 11?

The topography of the process:

"Intuitive is not vague, it's quite precise", a quote from a lecture with Prof. Theodor Barth, in the beginning of the third semester.

I have allowed myself to lean on my intuition and to take it seriously in this creation. Letting doubt be a curious question rather than a stop sign. I've shaped the piece from the inside, working very little with recording and watching myself. A certain logic and structure have come through trust in myself and in the material - something which has felt very liberating, and which fueled my creativity. Many ideas and concepts have been present already from the first research period in the first semester; A desire to perform in very close proximity to the audience, working very actively with my gaze, a gravitation towards nostalgia and irony and a need to create a clearly defined spatial frame for an example. I haven't shifted perspective completely, instead, the piece has naturally altered and transformed along the way.

The first visual image I had in the beginning of the MA was a stage filled with artificial grass. I was drawn to the imitation of nature while being so obviously fake. It aligns with my interest in the theater space – a space so obviously not real, where we play pretend. To me theater only works if we acknowledge that fact, though. I easily get distracted and attempts to make me identify with what I'm watching have a disengaging effect on me as an audience member. A question that has been with me from early on is *what it could potentially generate to create choreographic material from situations and relations rather than for an example a bodily sensation or a score?* During the presentation after the research showing in the first semester, I named my love/hate relationship to drama as an entry point and observation. That notion has stayed with me throughout the entire education. That entry point also underlines my profile as a performer who is somewhere in between dance and theater. I will elaborate on that aspect in the section *Why I hate and love drama, thoughts between dance and theater/dancing and acting* on page 14. The idea of a spectrum of drama, that you could modulate up and down and to make that a springboard for creating choreographic material, became a guiding principle throughout the process. The title and the light box were also part of that first showing. Naming things, like that, was a soft beginning into working with text.

Another initial interest has been to create a piece that was challenging to perform. Something that would be impossible to do on autopilot and that would actively work with the relation to the audience. A research question that has been very significant for me is *How can I destabilize myself as a performer, without destabilizing the piece?* A piece that represents the essence of that for me is *Inging*¹ by Jeanine Durning. What I created bears seemingly no resemblance to *Inging*. However, that piece stands for me as a perfect example of a choreographic work, based on text, that insists on material that is impossible to do on autopilot. Jeanine talks non-stop for over 40 minutes in an improvised monologue. This performance kept me on my toes when I watched it as an audience member, and as a performer who, in another context tried out her method, it created the feeling of existing at the same time with the audience. In *Inging* there is only now. I did not create a piece that functions like that, but it has been an important reference and admiration from the get-go to make something that has a very direct, straight forward relation to the audience and that insists on listening to the resonance and echo of the meeting between performer and audience. Simultaneously with that

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LwroxNftiA&t=2s>

notion and in great contrast to it, a lot of the material I created during the first year leaned towards something quite fixed and sturdy. I was working with manga inspired eyes painted on top of my eyelids², which essentially meant a lot of work with closed eyes. I still find that idea very interesting – navigating through an entire piece with closed eyes, but it also created a boundary that wasn't necessarily helpful to the kind of performance I was aspiring to create. I was very attached to the idea of these eyes throughout the entire first year. In the third semester research period they suddenly became irrelevant. The piece had taken a turn and it was clear that the kind of mask that the eyes created belonged to research more than to the actual performance. However, I think the final piece still pendulates between something very set or fixed and something slightly open-ended.

Something that influenced the piece highly is the *The Writing As An Artist* paper, we wrote in the beginning of the third semester, supervised and facilitated by Prof. Bojana Cvejic, Prof. Theodor Bart and Prof. Mike Sperlinger. I named the paper *Stories Written In Different Places And Spaces*, to create a spectrum of something very concrete (places) and something more undefined, perhaps even ephemeral (spaces). I explored writing in different genres or headlines; *A text, Impersonal Stories, Scattered Poetry, Something About a performance, An interview, A void* and *Notes* each being a chapter on its own. The different texts vary in content but they all circle around notions of memories, fictionalized autobiographical material, synesthesia, melancholy, and dance as a kind of agent. Prior to the research showing in the third semester, I applied the way I structured my paper to my physical material. The cuts between different genres and sections gave access to playing with extremes as well as a very practical and direct communication with the audience. It introduced an element of on/off, performing/non-performing and a play with reality and fiction which opened the research. A structure I felt I could indulge in and have fun with.

The feedback sessions we had in each semester were very important to me. It gave me a lot of different perspectives on what I was doing, but most of all it gave me a feeling that what I was presenting to my classmates and teachers had an impact. The material, naturally, became more real when meeting an audience and I experienced a certain energetic atmosphere in the conversations about it that helped me trust my ideas even more. After the research showing in the third semester, I received a very generous email from one of my internal advisors **Janne-Camilla Lyster**, which meant a lot to me. Her way of describing what she saw resonated a lot with my intentions, but in a much clearer language than I could formulate. This is an extract of that email:

"The dynamic space/time creates the sense of something unknown, entering as a flavour of something known – dette tror jeg var et sitat fra din presentasjon, som ga fullstendig mening fra et publikumsståsted. Opplevelsen av layers of fiction; underbygget av inndelingen i chapters and scenes – replikker og brokker sår fiksjonelle frø i tilskuerene. Meta-nivåer; guiding us, preparing us, preparing herself. Preparation and the partial as material weaving a new known. Auteur-perspektivet. "Precision broken by new precision". Kinestetisk respons hos meg som publikummer Sitatet: "doing dishes makes me think about death» sitter tilbake I kropp/hukommelse; det eksistensielle i det konkrete, som også har en revne av humor i seg."

Working from ambiguity and intended confusion has been a focus point. However, it somehow got lost somewhere in the process when I had more and more material to show. My other internal advisor **Bojana Cvejic** reminded me of that after a session with her approximately five weeks before the

² See appendix image #1.

premiere. I had gone into execution mode; *there’s this, and this and this...* and lost the hesitation in the material. That was an important reminder - to hang back in the material, rather than pushing the piece forward. I think the progression in the piece lies in leaning into the enigma, playing with the suspense and the multiple possibilities. That is something I would like to go much further into. It holds a paradox, as the piece is very choreographed. I want to explore that more – it relates back to the destabilizing element in the performance.

The soundscape for the performance is created by musician and composer **Petter Wiik**. The starting point for the collaboration became a showing at the *Artistic Research Week* at KHiO in January 2023. We had one short rehearsal prior to the showing improvising together, based on the conversations we had. The soundscape in the end of the performance is primarily the recording from the showing in January. Starting the collaboration with a small presentation felt very fruitful. Meeting an audience with completely improvised material opened an image as to what this kind of universe could be, which feedbacked the process a lot. With the piece progressing I had some quite clear ideas of what kind of sound I needed. Ideas I presented to Petter and that he came with a suggestion on. As a large part of the piece is based on sound effects entering and exiting, we searched for ways of how the sound could underline or counter the physical material.

Actor, **Theresa Carlsen**, visited my rehearsals and showings several times throughout the process. We primarily focused on the *Days of Our Lives* text, the letter, and the outburst of rage, as they were the texts that suggested fiction and a more acted approach. Theresa suggested different ways of working with the texts, different kinds of resistance and ways of thinking about the material and its subtext.

The idea of having guest performers came in during the second semester research. I worked with **Marlene, Sang and Emilie** from my class, on a kind of choir where we multiplied the sounds, we made³. My initial idea was to start the piece as a group piece, and then be left behind by the other performers. Hopefully manifesting a sense of loneliness and melancholy by being left behind. As the process progressed that element fell out but the concept of having a guest remained. I invited **Anton Skaaning Thomsen** into the process a few weeks before the premiere. I wanted to disturb the piece and add an element of surprise and perhaps distortion by introducing another performer - same but different. Hopefully, hinting to a bigger picture, a team, a continuation. I started out by teaching Anton the phrase we’re dancing together. I was confronted with my difficulties with making and following counts. Anton was very patient with all my confusion and basically set the counts to the choreography. In the end we disregarded them because I didn’t have the headspace to be on top of them, but having worked together on precision made it quite easy to follow each other. My initial plan was that Anton would leave the stage when we finished the phrase and that I would finish the piece alone. The idea to swap it around came from Ph.D. fellow at KHiO Manuel Pelmus who watched a run the Friday before the premiere. I really liked that suggestion and thought it created a sense of extending the piece as well as removing me a bit from the role as the protagonist. Luckily Anton was up for the switch.

The light is designed by **Eirik Lie Hegre**. Early in the process Eirik was also consulting me on which colors to choose for the scenography, in terms of what kind of color shifts would be possible to create with lights. After having spent all the time we had for setting lights I realized that I had

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GOC9MTJ82k>

been focusing on underlining all the shifts in the performance with the lights. We had to rewind and delete a lot of Q's. The underlining element is still very present in the piece, and I also find it important at times, but we managed to shift the focus a bit.

My external supervisor **Kristin Ryg Helgebostad** has been an important conversation partner and anchor during the process. I started our sessions with showing her material and from there we would talk about the work, bounce off ideas, share sources. Kristin met me and the project in a very open, generous, and enthusiastic way. She would start from what she experienced or saw and from there we had long conversations about possible references, associations and what and how the material manifested. I don't know that she gave me any explicit advice during the process, instead she was a very supportive and attentive observer who thought along with me. Something important she caringly reminded me of right before the premiere, when I was making last minute changes in the lights and time was short, was that this is my project and that I'm allowed to insist on getting it "right". Kristin shared an important reference with me at our first meeting - the notion of metamodernism. It is not something I have researched deeply throughout the process, instead it functioned as a backdrop of what I was working on, a context I could mirror my interests in. I will get back to metamodernism in the section, *With reference to* on page 15.

Methods and ways of operating and organizing:

To begin with I found it important to structure my rehearsals quite meticulously, not something you can necessarily call a method, but however a quite important factor in framing the actual work and how I facilitate myself in the studio. I've had some not-so-great experiences working alone in the past and I wanted to bypass the loneliness and potential crises of working alone by firstly being very generous with myself in the work. Meaning eliminating the self-bashing, critical voice that makes it very hard to even produce any kind of material and instead work from what excites me. A notion of play, pleasure and fun became central during my rehearsals and how I related to my material in general. To help myself stick to the tasks I gave myself in the studio, I wrote down an exact time plan for each rehearsal including timelines for how long I would stay in each practice/exercise/task. Essentially a tool to get out of the perfectionist-procrastination loop.

I named two practices that I stuck to, especially in the first half of the rehearsal period, when the piece still hadn't taken a clear shape yet. Those are:

- **3D Movement Grid:**

It's a physical practice in which I attempt to let every movement matter, staying in contact with the input and output of the movement. I imagine that my body as well as the space is covered in a green 3D grid⁴. Every movement is placed in a specific mathematical coordinate in the space, as if animated by a computer program. This practice also became a practice in staying with what is there, a constant letting go and an awareness of the term *News of a Difference* – a term I came across at a workshop in *Viewpoints* with SITI Company some years back. News of a Difference is an awareness of change, always asking yourself what is

⁴ See appendix image #2&3.

now (and new) and now and now, which I find helpful in staying perceptive and alert to/in the moment.

I combined this practice with a task we got from Prof. Jonas Kure Buer. He was missing accurate descriptions of movement in the texts we wrote for his class and challenged us to write a movement description with as much detail as possible. I found it interesting that the choreography lived on paper before it became embodied, and it also matched the mixed references and genres in the piece. The 3D Movement Grid + choreography from script is what I introduce as a *dance about time and space* in the final piece. I choose the somewhat corny and episodic piano music to emphasize both a distance and proximity to the physical material. It ironizes the melancholy of the music but also utilizes it to move forward. The dance does not fulfill the promise of virtuosity that might be expected of a *dance*. Instead, it uses the aboutness of theater, while also referencing a somewhat generic way of describing dance.

- **Karaoke practice:**

A simple practice where I sing along and move to songs. I made a playlist with songs I know well enough to sing along to. Then I improvise, letting the music as well as the lyrics move me. The practice allows me to access dramatic emotions through, for an example corny love song, and was helpful in practicing letting out the voice and indulging in drama. The improvisations became a way of entering a fiction, while continuously staying in a playful and very physical language. The best songs for Karaoke practice have proven to be *Unbreak My Heart*, by Toni Braxton and *Toxic*, by Britney Spears. My plan with the practice was to film myself and learn the material but muting the voice (but keeping the lip movement) - like a muted lip-sync. The material didn't make it to the piece, but Anton has a short moment of it in the final scene. He's (silently) singing *Running Up That Hill*, by Kate Bush.

An overall method I operate with in creation is the *Viewpoints* method, originally named by dancer and choreographer Mary Overlie, later reworked, and reformulated by directors Ann Bogart and Tina Landau. In my experience, *Viewpoints* functions as a lens, an awareness, or a point of view from where I observe the work and myself in it as well as the choices I make. I have primarily studied the nine viewpoints formulated by Ann Bogart and Tina Landau.⁵ Those are: architecture, topography, spatial relationships, gesture, shape, tempo, duration, repetition, and kinesthetic response. I mention Viewpoints not because I actively sat down in rehearsal thinking today, I am going to be working with for an example space, but because the way I made choices during the creation process was highly influenced by this way of analyzing and composing material. The *Viewpoints* method helps me map out material and look at it from different parameters. Something that would have been ideal to apply as well are the vocal *Viewpoints*; Pitch, Dynamic, Acceleration/Deceleration, Timbre and Silence. I don't have much experience with the vocal *Viewpoints* but going further with the piece I imagine they will be very relevant to work with, to create a bigger spectrum of the voice and accessing bigger shifts in the material.

⁵ *The Viewpoints Book*

Since December 2022 I've taken voice classes in *voice journeys* with prof. **Marius Holth** in addition to and as a supplement to my own rehearsals. Oda from my class and I joined forces and spend some of our budget from our MA project on the classes. Marius works very associative and gives a lot of images to what he hears. Each class we started with sharing where we are at in our process. Naming which questions and challenges were most present week to week was a very valuable check in on the process. Having to formulate my interests to an outside person who hasn't seen my work during the last 1,5 year was a very good way to specify and clarify them.

In the *voice journeys* Marius accompanied me on the piano. We chose a theme or an image to investigate through the voice (and body). The work gave me a chance to dive into my research from a different angle, another way of unfolding the material and themes. It became a way of associating with the process. Seeing as I worked a lot with text and the voice in my project it was natural to take voice classes but what the classes influenced the most was in how they opened a physical and imaginative space. In the *voice journeys* I have visited a circus, been searching for my mother, a lot of clowning, attempting to be sincere and failed massively, worked on my interest in ambivalent and ambiguous states, singing the soap opera text in a jazzy and sincere version - taking all its characters seriously and spent a lot of time trying to get out of my own way, not falling into my habit of canceling or annulling everything I do, unless I actively choose to, that is. The voice classes functioned as a track next to my own rehearsals, something that was highly informative to my work but also existed on their own account, while always giving me energy and excitement about my project.

In general, **the texts**, in the piece have been written quite intuitively. There are four different types of texts in the piece:

The **inaudible text** that starts the piece is an improvised introduction to the piece. I'm fascinated with people who speak too low in public settings, something I have encountered a lot in Norway actually. The concept of giving information to a room full of people without speaking louder than you would do in an intimate conversation is very comical to me. It appears to cancel out the action of speaking itself, it's a clash, or a glitch – action and context don't align. I've noticed that often when a person asks someone to speak up, they answer *yes!* and then continue in the same volume. I love that mismatch. Personally, I have had, and still do sometimes, a lot of difficulties speaking in groups, so I completely understand and empathize with the difficulty. I found the inaudible introduction to be a good starting point as it gave me momentum to play with. Additionally, it also allowed me to take my time to really look at the audience, establishing a *there are you and here I am* - kind of connection *and we are going to spend some time together now*. Retrospectively, I see that that is an element I carry with me after years of working with children's theatre - a focus on establishing contact with the audience from the very beginning. In many cases to make sure they aren't scared. In the case of this piece, I play with that connection instead, allowing myself to be difficult to read and perhaps slightly unaccountable.

The **instructional and guiding texts** came about quite practically by asking myself; *what kind of information do I need to give the audience to move forward and explain the condition of a particular scene?* The texts have been reformulated and rewritten throughout the process. They are created with a focus on addressing the audience very directly, which made it easier to have a clear direction when performing them.

The text I perform while walking backwards on the diagonal originates from the TV series *Days of Our Lives*. I transformed the text by recording myself while listening to audio from a YouTube compilation from the series, while attempting to replicate that audio as soon as I heard it. Afterwards I transcribed the recorded text including all the mistakes and nonsense I had said. This created a slightly distorted text that I then learned by heart. I made small adjustments in the text afterwards. I deleted some names and changed the gender in some instances to make it a little less stereotypical. **The letter** is written with the intention of presenting big dramatic feelings while also annulling them. To include both ends on the spectrum of drama in one sentence. During a feedback showing in our class, Marta mentioned that the scene with the letter created a stage within the stage or a play within the play. I'm interested in that aspect; it aligns with a notion of zooming in and out, expanding and minimizing the stage.

A notion of bricolage has been very present in the creation, almost like a shopping list; I need a bit of drama, a dance, a letter, chapters, episodes, scenes etc. - and those *found objects* combined will create an entirety, a universe and the audience will, hopefully, help me fill in the gaps.

Interview with the project log:

- Could you share some of what was written in you on Thursday in week four, 2023?

"The habit I have (and choice!) of always shifting a bit – distorting the starting point. I start and then I shift. An image – and then a shifted image. The distortion reminds me of a comment from Janne-Camilla. And then falling what is it about falling? It goes straight into a core interest of being dramatic and dry at the same time. It's a known form – the outline of the body, like in a crime TV show".

- How about on Monday in week five, 2023?

"What is or what could be an unapologetic, non-ironic personal sad story?

Scene 22: what are we going to do about capitalism?

Scene 56: The poetry of geometry.

On Thursday that same week in a rehearsal between 13 and 16 o'clock, an interview with the piece:

- *What are you about?*
- *I'm about how drama is both true and false, like life.*
- *What does that mean?*
- *I think it means that life is very dramatic, because what else would it be, you know? But it's also a lot of "rugbrød", but we tend to feel that the drama is the real life, that's what we remember, but really most of life is an ordinary Tuesday, for most people at least.*
- *What does that kind of theme look like in a performance?*
- *Who knows at this point...? I'm interested in creating melancholy by jump-cutting between scenes, perhaps it can create a feeling of absence in the spectator... I'm interested in absence because it can be so present in drama, the drama that cannot hold... The melancholy lies in the contrast, in the shifts, in the counterpoint – you used to be here, now you are not...*
- Could you say something about your content in week 1, 2023?
"I'd rather not..."

- Okay... How about Tuesday in week 12?

"Game: 3 skridt, PufPang, 6,5 tælling, Dingeling, 5 skridt, Idé, Vand, Horror 8, Kat på 9 kat 2, Disney, Lyd, Dør., Knirke fra start knirk: 12, skud på 13. skud, Nogen går, Zombie".

- Thank you for your time.

Performative strategies, play and the gaze as a contact point:

My God! Can theater finally come down to the irreducible fact that one group of people is looking at another group!?

Yvonne Rainer, 1969.⁶

I use my gaze very actively while performing. I like to think of the gaze as a camera lens, and through that camera I can invite in the audience. Sharing with them what I notice and pay attention to from stage - guiding their attention through my attention. In line with that I would like to quote Deborah Hay from the workshop we had with her at KHiO: "*How I perceive is the dance*". I think this piece relates much more to that notion than to its actual physical material. I have been more occupied with ways of performing than with movement research in this creation, and probably am in general.

Actively utilizing the gaze also represents a sense of play to me. I use playing as a performative strategy to build up conditions. It's a play with expectations and preconceived ideas of what a dance performance is. I engage in different games of expectations:

- I say what I am going to - then I do it.
- I say what I'm going to do - then I do something else.
- I proclaim what something means by providing them with the subtext, actively removing the *theater magic* by being frank about what and why.
- I ask the audience to finish an image via their imagination. Actively asking for their participation.

There is an excessiveness but also an impossibility and a silliness, meanwhile, being serious about the play. It oscillates between meaning-making, a sense of logic and a free fall.

I think these strategies can be compared to children's play – we are here together, let's play; *you'll be the cat, I'll be the dog, and then there's a lion and we are tired and it's raining...* But what does this notion of play provide as a performative strategy? I think I use it to emphasize and highlight the relation to the audience. I make promises and then I betray them by doing something else. I wanted to create a piece that is transparent about its manipulation and to use that to expand the piece, the playing field.

Why I hate and love drama, thoughts between dance and theater/dancing and acting:

I think a lot of my repulsion to drama comes from watching film and theater where the performers feel so much that I as an audience member end up feeling nothing. This excessive energy creates a sense of numbness in me and adds an ick factor. I took to the genre of soap opera because it indulges in drama and thrives on it. It displays very banal emotions and conflicts and sometimes even crosses over into magic realism. To me soap operas are the essence of flat excessive drama, like a pill of capitalized emotions - easy to swallow but then you get very nauseous. I think this is the easy explanation for why I hate drama. But I suspect it's deeper than that. I wonder why I just can't stomach it. Perhaps because I never got to really go there as a performer?

⁶ *Being Watched* – Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s.

A lot of my training as a dancer has a quite dry approach, relating to function and anatomy. I’m not kidding myself though, I know it’s highly stylized and formalized as well. There’s a lot of dance training that emphasizes a very articulate and expressive body with a completely dead face, it’s such a contrast. I both appreciate and... hate it. Maybe there’s a love and hate to dance intertwined in all this as well? I always found something missing for me in dance. I turned to theater to look for that something. I didn’t find it there, but I found something in the in-between-space. I’m attracted to theater with a choreographic aspect and dance with a relational aspect - I am aware of the generalizations imbedded in that statement. I’m very attracted to displaying emotional states and my love for drama partially comes from a need to experience strong emotions and to access text as a form of expression. Life is very dramatic, and I love the cathartic feeling of a dramatic cry – or accessing that through playing. Narrative theater tends to confuse me just as much as the dead face in contemporary dance.

I spend many years trying to become an actor the traditional way. I graduated very young from a dance education, now it was time to get into acting school. I did a lot of courses, auditioned for the national acting school in Denmark several times while also trying to kickstart a professional life in the dance field. I worked in many dance productions that incorporated text and sometimes in theater productions that needed a dancer who could also work with text. This schism has been representing a grief in me. Not a real actor - and a dancer who got very distracted by her wish to be somewhere else.

During the process of creating, *It’s Very Dramatic* I realized that the frames I set up for myself in this production points to a place I want to work from – a place that doesn’t discriminate between dance and theater. Where I can work from a hybrid. I am not actually that busy with which genre this piece belongs to, crossover disciplines are everywhere. From a personal and professional perspective, it has been paramount for me to create from that in-between-space. Coming back to the notion of play, a way to look at it could be that I gave myself permission to play an actor on stage to practice identifying with that *role* together with my professional identity, and home base, as a dancer.

With references to:

I see the stage as a possibility to create a mini universe. A place where you can invite an audience into a carefully constructed space, which displays the many decisions that have been made about material, text, movement etc. A fiction that, of course also reflects and mirrors the “real” world. When creating it helps me to define the space meticulously. I also explored that in the material I created for the admission for the master’s in dance⁷. I share that work in this paper, because it’s easy to trace some affiliations between that and my final MA project.

During my research for *It’s Very Dramatic* I came across the visual artist and film maker Joseph Cornell (1903-1974). Joseph Cornell created miniature boxes of found objects, like little worlds⁸. His name has given name to *The Cornell Box*⁹, which is a 3D test model. In creating the scenography, I

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgg_p684WRw

⁸ See appendix image #4&5

⁹ See appendix image #6&7

was very inspired by *The Cornell Box*, and its playful framing of a space. The green and the blue colors are chosen as a reference to blue and green screens used in film productions to apply visual effects in post-production. A limited space with multiple possibilities. The colors can also easily be associated to cartoons. They help frame the different and continuously shifting worlds; *I can be here, and here, and here....* Like a (slow) *Bugs Bunny*. I wanted the clearly defined space to be a door to an imaginary space that could support the imaginations I propose verbally. Two other visual references that have been present are these works by the sculptural art duo *Elmgren & Dragset*¹⁰. The very strong situations in the works facilitated by the compositional and choreographic clarity makes a strong impression on me. They are so dramatic and so dry. I experience it as an aftermath, the drama resonating in the space. From my understanding they could be categorized as metamodern. They seem inherently ironic in their construction but it's more than that. In an interview¹¹ Timotheus Vermeulen, one of the authors of the book *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism*, a book that derived from the webzine *Notes on metamodernism*¹² from 2009-2016, describes metamodernism as a current mood in a Western context. The skepticism that could be mentioned as a characteristic of postmodernism is no longer what seem to be at play, we need another more sufficient term to describe the time we live in: "*Metamodernism oscillates between what we may call – but what of course cannot be reduced to – postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections: between irony and enthusiasm, between sarcasm and sincerity, between eclecticism and purity, between deconstruction and construction and so forth.*"¹³. I latched onto the idea of ironic sincerity while researching on metamodernism. To me, it resonates with keeping a sincere contact to the audience while presenting ambiguous material. I am both very serious about the work I'm presenting and acknowledge and thrive on the absurdity of the situation. There is an oscillation between the clarity (in the space, in the clear instructions) and in the ambiguity within material that points in different directions, between the fictional and the *real*. "*Just because it's fake doesn't mean I don't feel it*" as the main character Hannah Horvath says in the TV series *Girls*. Playing with juxtapositions and scale or a spectrum helps me setting up a dynamic performative situation, a playing field. I suppose the choreographer Jonathan Burrows would call that counterpoint: "*Counterpoint can also give you a momentary way to observe what you've done from a different perspective: what is happening when and against what, and in how that connection might help the viewer, or not, follow what's happening and not get bored*".¹⁴

When watching performance with a humorous tendency, I realize how the work tends to lose my attention when it doesn't take itself seriously. I'm interested in work that can host multitudes and to play with expansion by weaving in and out of defined frames. I've been occupied with ironic sensibilities in performing arts for a long time. I register it in myself as a performer both as a habit that I sometimes need to be weary of but also something I'm drawn to. In one of the last sessions with Kristin she talked about the irony in the piece as divided in three: 1) *Saying what you are going to do* 2) *Adding a look, that indicates a certain opposition, a resistance* 3) *Actually doing it*. I appreciate this expanded or broader sense of irony. I relate that to what scholar Linda Huchon

¹⁰ See appendix image #8&9

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQz1YZJY5e4>

¹² <https://www.metamodernism.com>

¹³ *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism*; p. 27.

¹⁴ *A Choreographer's Handbook*, p. 140.

writes in the *Irony's Edge*: "*Irony rarely involves a simple decoding of a single inverted message (...) it is more often a semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meanings - and doing so with some evaluative edge*".¹⁵

¹⁵ *Irony's Edge* - p. 85

Interview with a performer from within a performance:

- Do you have a favorite moment in the performance?

I particularly enjoy the scene where I ask the audience to imagine a pop song, while I play dead. It's early in the piece and I think that scene is important in clarifying the frame for the performance. The shift in the voice comments on the low voice introduction in the beginning and it feels very liberating to address the audience properly, letting them in on the game.

- What do you enjoy the least?

I don't like taking applause. It might sound like humble bragging, it's a self-absorbed answer for sure, sorry about that. I've been running the show and now it's no longer entirely on my terms anymore? Ironically enough I feel awkward about the attention, I'll work on that.

- What's it like to share the stage when Anton enters?

Well, he is very good company! I look forward to it - the extra energy and sharing the responsibility. It feels a bit like someone crashing my trip, entering my show. It feels healthy...

- Where is drama situated in the body?

It moves between the gut and the breath and in the loaded space between people.

- What are you?

I'm half circus horse and half house mouse. I think I'd rather be a good performer than a good dancer... Not that you can just differentiate like that. A good dancer is a good performer I think, otherwise what is there to see? Hmm I'm not sure if I agree with what I'm saying here. Dance is not only performative. Is anything not performative though? I hope so...

- What is it about zooming in and out?

*It's just a simple exercise or thought experiment to remind yourself of how relative an experience is and to underline the theatre space, a *Verfremdung* effect in birds view, you could say. It's also an awareness of the complexity we live in I guess... Within a few seconds I can worry about the climate catastrophe and what to wear tomorrow.*

Reminders:

I have a very strong wish to perform this piece again. The last show at KHiO felt more like a beginning than an ending. I imagine two trajectories, which certainly do not exclude one another. Firstly, there is the piece how it is now and a wish to give it a further life, applying to perform it at festivals for an example. Secondly, and that is perhaps the one that excites me the most, a need to continue working with these performative strategies as well as the theme. I was struggling a lot with keeping it close to 30 minutes, which was the designated length (plus/minus) and it would be really nice to not be limited by that frame.

I want to go further into some of the questions that have already been guiding the process I’ve had; *What does drama on a scale look like?* and *how to destabilize myself as a performer without destabilizing the performance*. Those questions have functioned as catalyst in the process. However, I don’t think they have been answered or dived fully into. I would like to add a stronger reading practice next to working on the piece and to dive more into theory. I imagine I start with gaining more knowledge on Brecht. Another question that has been present is how to involve the audience more. Playing with moving back and forth between audience participation. I also wonder what would happen if I would peel off the colorful scenography and lean solely on the imaginative space we can create together, between audience and performer. I really appreciated working with Anton. It was such a relief to remove myself a bit from the piece, suddenly having another voice in the room. The piece is such a *me-show*, I’m having a lot of fun with that, but I would be curious to work with more performers in the future.

Lastly, when thinking about what remains, I think about the body, the physical material. Dance is a kind of home to me, I like to travel, but I do want to continue to also insist on dance and physicality.

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