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BY EMMA-KATE GUIMOND

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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

ÉCRIRE, METTRE EN SCÈNE, RÉPÉTER ET DOCUMENTER LES
POSSIBILITÉS PERFORMATIVES DE L'IMPOSSIBLE

MÉMOIRE-CRÉATION

PRÉSENTÉ

COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE

DE LA MAÎTRISE EN ARTS VISUELS ET MÉDIATIQUES

PAR EMMA-KATE GUIMOND

NOVEMBRE 2017

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire expose les pistes de réflexion qui ont eu cours lors du processus de mise en scène et de documentation de la recherche-crédation *possible performance*.

possible performance est une performance déléguée dans laquelle les participant-e-s sont invité-e-s à s'engager dans une partition de gestes qui sont écrits pour à la fois résister à plusieurs ontologies de l'impossible et pour incarner ces ontologies personnelles, collectives, philosophiques et politiques.

Dans l'optique de faire disparaître les rôles du spectateur et du performeur, la performance se fait sans public, souhaitant ainsi l'envisager à partir du point de vue subjectif. Le rôle de la subjectivité, de l'affect et des sentiments est alors exploré à travers une performance déléguée. Plus spécifiquement, la subjectivité se manifeste par des singularités dans la performance qui finissent par restructurer et décentraliser les notions de temps, d'espace, de narration et d'attention. Pour créer un espace dans lequel chaque entité singulière peut performer à l'intérieur d'un collectif, ou « seul ensemble », il pourrait être envisagé de regrouper des participant-e-s qui, par leurs parcours professionnels respectifs, incarnent différents registres d'une gamme de performativité : de performatif à théâtral.

L'équidistance entre tout geste investi, toute signification ou image proposée définit les distances irréductibles qui existent entre de telles différences. Une étude des rôles du geste, de l'écriture, de la parole performative, de l'hospitalité, de la traduction, du « quelconque » et de la pratique permet d'examiner l'implication essentielle de l'expression des sentiments personnels d'impossibilité dans une structure de performance déléguée.

Mots-clefs : écriture performative, geste, hospitalité, idea-of-the-thing, impossibilité, performance collective, performance déléguée, possible performance, rehearsal, script, singularité, théâtre post-dramatique, théorie de la performance, vidéo

ABSTRACT

This thesis surveys the grounds of thought that have figured in the process of staging and documenting the research/creation project, *possible performance*.

possible performance is a delegated performance in which invited participants perform a script of gestures that are written to both resist and embody several ontologies of impossibility, which are personal, collective, philosophical and political. This performance is done without an audience in order to collapse the roles of audience and performer and in hopes of framing the performance from the subjective point of view. As such, the role of subjectivity, affect and feeling within delegated performance is explored. Specifically, subjectivity manifests singularities in performance that restructure and decentralize time, space, narrative and attention. A possible strategy for creating a space where these singularities can perform as part of a collective, or “alone together,” includes grouping together participants who, as a result of their respective professional histories, embody different registers on the performativity spectrum, from performative to theatrical.

The equidistance between any given gesture, meaning or image holds in place the irreducible distances between such differences. An examination of the roles of gesture, scripting, performative enunciations, hospitality, translation, “whatever” and rehearsal is used to probe the critical implications of rendering the personal feeling of impossibility into a structure for a delegated performance.

Key words: performative writing, collective performance, delegated performance, gesture, hospitality, idea-of-the-thing, impossibility, performance theory, possible performance, postdramatic theatre, rehearsal, script, singularity, video

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION IMPOSSIBILITY

“To live for a love whose goal is to share the Impossible is both a humbling project and an exceedingly ambitious one...”

Peggy Phelan (Phelen, 1993, p.148)

“How can something be impossible if you are doing it?”

Julia Thomas, a friend.

1.1 First Nauseous Thoughts

I remember my first existential dilemma very well. I was eleven. Its trace is still in my body: sitting behind a boy named Marc, looking at his head, thinking about the fact that inside was a brain. Like my own, that brain was inevitably thinking. Whatever texture characterised my experience, Marc also had an experience that was likely equal in amplitude yet entirely different from my own. There was no way I could really know what his experience was, nor could I really know him. All in one vertiginous and nauseating instant, I understood that my experience was irreducibly separate from those of others and that there was no universal way to define experience at all.

1.2 *possible performance*, the Gag

Most simply put, *possible performance*, the title of the work I will discuss, is a script for others to perform. That script is composed of what I will refer to as “the gestures” and that I will identify in italics, without quotations. For example: *You observe bones*. I use the word gesture instead of action, task or instruction because it insinuates relation. Gesture is where language and the body meet. My definition of gesture is shaped by Agamben’s “Notes on Gesture” (2000, p.49-59), as I feel his definition probes the difficult, if not impossible, relationship between the body and language:

...Because being-in-language is not something that could be said in sentences, the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure out something in language; it is always a *gag* in the proper meaning of the term, indicating first of all something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech, as well as in the sense of the actor's improvisations meant to compensate a loss of memory or an inability to speak. (p.58)

I have on many occasions revisited this concept of the gag, first wondering why Agamben doesn't make mention of the comedic nature of a gag –the way that in a gag, someone's failure becomes entertainment. I wonder about how that comedy relates to gag in the sense of hindering speech or breath. But Agamben's discussion of the gag also reminds me of the nausea that I experienced in that moment of being eleven and having my feeling of reality slip out from under me. "Gag" also reminds me of the experience I have when I can't quite seize the meaning of things. It reminds me of the nausea that I associate with impossibility.

I conceive of *possible performance* as a territory that hosts all dealings with that psycho-somatic and idiosyncratic feeling of nausea that is symptomatic of impossibility. It has resulted in a series of performances, drawings and videos, but it is my sense that all of these media manifest themselves in relation to writing; that is, the linear or nonlinear sequential processes by which events and experience can be folded into language. Writing is the means through which I both express and contend with the difficult relationships I have with language and impossibility. My writing is written through performativity, image and friendship.

The trajectory of my artistic practice has been characterized by a series of integrations, de-integrations and re-integrations of different media. In my first attempts to step out of the discipline that I am most formally trained in, out of what we might typically call dance, I combined drawings that were projected using overhead projectors with movement, actions and audio recordings. In all those elaborate performances that

entailed equally elaborate drawings, I struggled to bridge drawing and the body. The respective media seemed to do each other a disservice. I battled with how much attention and space each of them required. A drawing, for example, puts forth a very specific reality, determined by its lines, colors, the depth or flatness. A drawing represents or invents everything. The body, on the other hand, is saturated with incalculable, unintended signifiers that are both political and aesthetic. It can't help but perform itself.¹



What Kinda Face Mamma, performance, 2012.

¹ Because the body, as an idea and physical thing, is such a hotbed of discourse for countless fields, it might be important for me to discuss my own definition of the body, or the way the body is being approached within this work. In short, my/the body is a labouring body. This is meant quite literally in that the body must survive within a system of exchange and value and so it must work for money, nutrition, safety, support, recognition or any other currency. When the body works, it carries loads and it conveys them. Indeed, these loads are material but they also occur as signification loads, accumulated through personal and collective experience. Sometimes the labour of the body is to try to understand. Any which way, these labours are felt sensorially, in the nervous system.

Though a collective body is undoubtedly at work in *possible performance*, in the required labour of figuring each other out, negotiating and sharing, I would say that as far as my thinking goes, I deal more directly with multiple individual body units.



What Kinda Face Mamma or Long Walk Back to Myself, performance (view of projector), 2012.

I often think of Roger Rabbit and how alien he was in a human world, how his clumsiness might have been caused by the fact that he was simply disoriented by being a cartoon in a human reality. I like to imagine the actors when filming *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), while the star of the show can't actually be there because he is a drawing. I also think about how strange it is to have romantic feelings for a cartoon. As a child, a friend once confessed to me her love for Simba from *The Lion King* (1994). In retrospect, I think that is one of the queerest loves I have ever had the blessing of encountering. It was so other, so non-heteronormative (i.e. Simba and Danielle could never get married and have kids), and thus so impossible. It was so sincere and authentic yet also so fantastical and made-up, in the way that love often is for a child. Nevertheless, this discrepancy between differently embodied realities, expresses the epitome of the impossibility I perceive between different media.

There is nothing to say that the most minimalist, pedestrian, brutish images, or that the liveness of a body, cannot share space with the most cartoony, unrealistic, flat and decorative objects or characters. But the impossibility I encounter is that no matter how close you bring them, they remain separate, fracturing the sense of time and space

into manifold experiences. There is something unknowable about the terms that bring together the body and a cartoon. What are the ways to equally distribute space and attention amongst those media, where one media does not dominate or oppress the another?

Slowly, I started to forego the drawings and replaced them with photos that I had taken or photos from the Internet. Eventually, I started to struggle with performing in relation to a projection on a wall surface. I felt that the projection as a backdrop was dictating what my body could do while also forcing the audience to view from a specific position. I opted for monitors in order incorporate them into my actions. Finally, I got tired of having to locate and manage such technologies, not to mention the aesthetic references that they brought with them. In my recent performances I have adopted printed images that I show to the audience in a very matter of fact way or that I simply place against the wall.



I Feel Sick 5, performance, 2013.



Don't Decide Dance, performance, 2016.

What I see in this trajectory is a shift from the fantastical, artificial or spectacular to the real or the authentic. As I shed materials in order to move towards an investigation of performance's ground zero, I am left with my body. I perform more but paradoxically, my ability to sense myself within the work seems less palpable. With *possible performance* I have tried to come to grips with what I see as this fickle or tenuous relationship between different types of images or different mediums; by extension, different realities and different ways of performing. Strangely, as part of that process, I have removed myself from the performance and from the image altogether.

1.3 Personal, Formal and Political

The project of impossibility, the desire to explore its realm is, before anything, a personal one. It is personal because it is riddled with subjective anxieties. It is an existential project and "exceedingly ambitious" as Phelan notes (Phelan, 1993, p.148) It is a reaction to this perceived irreducibility between media, but also to the more general anxiety caused by wanting to understand what is not understandable, the obsession with meaning, when in effect, that obsession –going over and over- causes

a dissolution of meaning. Finally, it is a reaction to the sociopolitical circumstance of hegemonic capitalism in a globalised world. It is a means to deal with a frustration that has no outlet and that is at a loss in a future with no resources. Worse than that, is the inescapable reality in which everything we perform is consumed as capital to fuel that system. (I will not be going into depth with regards to this last aspect but I am certain that it is irrevocable and always there.) If these personal feelings did not exist, this project would not exist.

I would like to underline that one way the personal becomes political is when subjective feelings are given form. It is moreover political when that form is attributed with a value and placed in relation to other things or people. Personal feelings, sentiments and perceptions emerge as form, through language, verbal, visual or otherwise. Out of this process of formalisation, emerges the political. Here, I use the term “political” to sum up how things are positioned and to express the tensions and powers that tenuously hold each actor in their place. It is more obtuse and omnipresent than an articulated political act. There is a tremendous potential for form to act politically without directly naming war, policy, government, current and historical affairs or any number of other issues, which might more typically describe the realm of politics.

Impossibility is supplanted in each of these processes –personal, formal, political- but it is held in place by possibility. Impossibility is about limitations: what you cannot do, where you cannot go, what choices are not at your disposal. Possibility is impossibility’s ultimate limitation because it is a thing impossibility cannot be. Whereas possibility is manifold, impossibility is irreducible.

1.4 Side by Side

Later, in eleventh grade math class, I was a good student who could efficiently calculate the answers using the provided formulas. That was no problem. I was, however, made distraught by the apparent incongruity between the formulas and the way they expressed themselves visually, as graphs. The abstraction was nauseating. I asked the teacher, "Why do the graphs appear the way they do? What is it about the numbers that make the graph do what it does?" The teacher, a tall woman with square shoulders and square glasses, replied "I don't ask you why are you the way you are. You just are." The leap from the impossible abstraction of trigonometry to my personhood was tremendous. It seemed ludicrous, defensive and lazy of her to reply this way. But in retrospect I understand that that leap was one of affect. It had no other logic besides feeling. She was placing two impossibilities side by side and appropriately, those impossibilities involved personhood, form and meaning. It was simultaneity without relation.

1.5 Simultaneity as Resistance

As it might become clear in the text that is to follow, a constant in this realm of impossibility is my own inability to say one thing at a time. This does not arise from a belief that "everything is One" or that "it's all connected". Rather, it is that many different things act simultaneously, separately. Later, I will flesh out the notion of *alone together* as it pertains to how space and time is distributed within a performance but for now, *alone together* is also a useful way for thinking through the ways simultaneity functions within *possible performance*, as well as the way concepts do or do not connect.

Simultaneity is also an act of refusal: it means refusing to say one thing and refusing to be efficient in that (capitalist) way. It is deviant in its deviation from a thesis. In that way, I consider this memoir to be an extension of the work itself. My hope is that this memoir will not serve solely as a theoretical analysis of the work, but as a written

embodiment that will re-perform the impossibility of distinguishing the status of a given form. Furthermore, I hope it will re-perform the possibilities generated when that impossibility is not resolved by over-simplistic terms.

1.6 Impossibility's Many Bodies

The following is a list of impossibilities with which I contend in *possible performance*. They are not all the same, ontologically. Some are simply synonyms. Some are lived, socially or personally. Some are philosophical. Many deal with the anxiety that surfaces in the face of the loss of meaning:

A future without resources
 The course of illness in the body
 The irreducible space between beings
 The irreducibility between human experience and thingness
 The inability to really understand the meaning of things
 The impossibility to know, absolutely
 Loss
 The past
 Futurity
 Overwhelming difficulty
 Inability / disability
 Abjection
 Inability to choose
 No choices
 Democracy
 Equity of agency
 Inability to say
 Formlessness
 Illegibility
 Illegitimacy
 Representation
 Translation
 Futility
 Absurdity

The body, in performance, creates possibility by virtue of the fact that the body has to do something. To re-quote Julia Thomas: “How can something be impossible if you are doing it?”

The best example of this is the gesture *you push into the wall*. It is impossible to push the wall but it is possible to push into it. What are all the other tiny movements that occur whilst failing to push the wall? How do the feet slide? The body fold? *What is the gag?* This gesture is only impossible insofar as language does not yet have the means to distinguish, to name, to understand, to seize what might be taking place. The impossible gesture of pushing a wall, looks for itself, for what it could possibly be. Impossibility is a not yet legible possibility.

The gestures are impossible in as many ways as impossibility has expressed itself in the above list. The most concrete example is a gesture that produces movement² but that can never be accomplished; for example, *You try to jump but also try not to jump*. Next, is a gesture that is very easy to accomplish but that does not appear to have a purpose. Such gestures make it impossible to forge an understanding of their meaning. One can understand this through the gesture *You dip your hands in brown bags and you repeat*. There are also gestures that create a difficult, visceral feeling in the body, as in the case of *You tape the wig to the wall*. This type of gesture is layered with possible significance but deviates by remaining insignificant. It is strange, *étrange* and unknowable.

² If the body is a working body, then it might also be appropriate that I see movement as a type of exhaust put out by the body. Exhaust, in the sense of tiring but also in the sense of a barely material discharge, like that put out by a car. It is both excess and empty of signification but an inescapable effect of the body doing whatever work it does. It can be invisible or gross. And, the recovery from exhaust begets more movement.

Though I have only scratched a very particular surface of what impossibility is or what it might mean, I am attempting to list the ways in which impossibility can be embodied. In so doing, I am confronted with such questions as: What is impossibility or how does it perform? What are its performative possibilities? How might I stage these possibilities?

CHAPTER II: MISE EN SITUATION

In the following section, I will go through the details of how I write, stage and document *possible performance*. These details will be mostly technical or logistical but because each detail is embedded with an intention, it is difficult to keep the logistical and the theoretical compartmentalized.

possible performance involves a mise en situation in which I invite a group of people to perform a list or script of written gestures that come from my personal performance repertoire³. The term mise en situation is meant to acknowledge the place of both theatrical staging (i.e. mise en scène) and the situationists' constructed situations. The first carries with it connotations of artificiality, while the second manifests authenticities. Mise en situation could also be understood more openly as an example, to roleplay a “what if...”; it is something into which one may insert oneself in order to inquire about potential outcomes, a sort of rehearsal to try to gauge and prepare for the future.

I consider the invitation emails I send to the performers as the beginning of the performance. Here is an example:

³ In my solo performance practice, I often reuse certain actions, combining them in different ways or sequences. They are re-performed in the way that a company or choreographer's repertoire is; hence the word repertoire. All of the gestures on the list were developed from 2012-2016 in the following performances: *I feel sick 1-8*, (2012-13); *Something We Consumed because We were Bored and in so Dying, Digestion: Liquidation, (« she »)*, (2014); *Haunted Happening, Untitled Performance with Dough, Lumps and Other Bumps, Untitled Performance with Dough 2*, (2015); *Unnameable gestures, don't decide dance* (2016).

7/31/15

Dear minds and bodies,

I hope very much that this letter finds you in the thick of summer's warm looseness: looseness as disjunction, bordering on broken, held together by the most loyal fibers. Maybe even looseness and useless: as in, micro acts of resistance.

Did you know Thomas Edison named his children Dot and Dash? People as punctuation. The collective as writing.

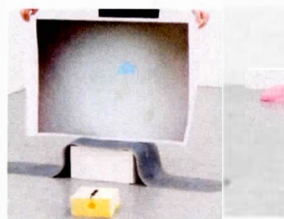
But also, what is austerity? What is austerity of movement? Austerity in performativity? And is it linked with the impossibility (difficulty) of resistance? The sage's path involves austerity. She gives up everything in exchange for inner silence (?). What is the link between her and the economic budget? Were all the objects we ever bought secretly plotting this impossibility against us?

Let us park our cars experimentally. Let all our statements be experimental.

I am coming around again to incite you to join me in my impossible experiments, my project called "possible performance." I only ask that you be there for the duration of the individual session and let me know if you are coming. Again: The project is called "possible performance" and it is a performance of impossibilities: the impossibility of really understanding words and things and others –even those you love. (It is about the impossibility of love.) The impossibility to be present and represented. The impossibility of both the past and the future. Of mourning and hegemony. Delineating the realm of this impossibility through abject, illegible, and formless gestures, how can the performing body breach the impossibility of its own ontology, which maybe is the distance between itself and the spectator? How can we multiply possibilities?

They will all be at UQAM, in a studio at the Judith-Jasmin.

Dates and times: Monday August 10: 1-4 pm, Tuesday August 11: 2-5 pm, Wednesday, August 12: 12-3 pm, Thursday August 13: 1-4 pm, Friday August 14: 1-4



If you have any questions -logistical or existential- don't hesitate to ask.

*All my love,
Emma-Kate*

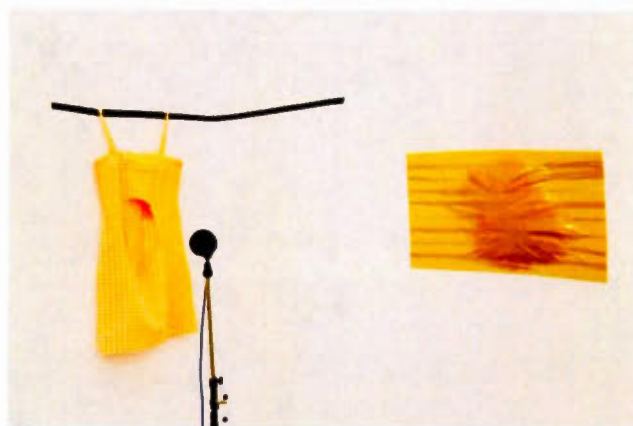
This email and similar ones are worded spaces where I expose my thoughts and sentiments of the moment and attempt to connect them to the broader motivations involved in making performance. I can afford the personal tone of these emails because the people I invite are my friends and acquaintances. As a result of this fact and because my community is largely built around my investments in performance, some of these individuals are non performers, but most are performers. Invariably, they practice different types of performance. They are dancers, actors, performance artists, puppeteers, wrestlers and drag performers who have attained variable degrees of professionalism.

These sessions happen in a studio in which I have prepared an installation that is made up of objects, sculptures, drawings and pictures. Many of these items are practical. They are there because they are named in the script: a wig, some tape, the clay, some pictures, the “slab.”⁴ Some elements are decorative in the sense that they are not necessary but that they fill out the visual composition of the space: prints, stacks of cloth, dresses, plastic and wooden boards. Nonetheless, they are available to the performers to use, if they wish. In these performances, I try to create visual environments that extend out of my drawings. They are cartoonish, imperfect and candy-colored. The installation is the stage where the performers perform and engage with the script.

⁴ The “slab” is the grey silicone object that is visible in many images.



November 27, digital drawing, 2016



possible performance, (installation view), 2015

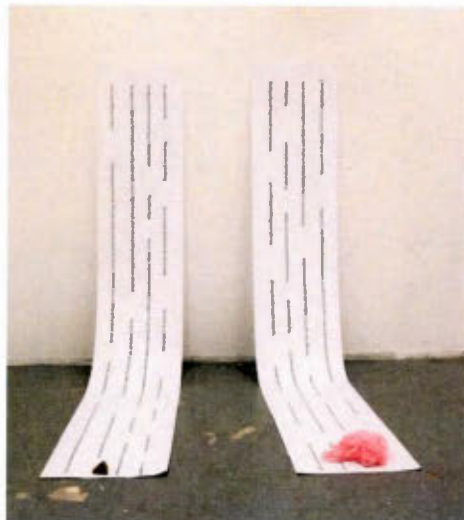


possible performance, (installation view), 2015

The script is a list of over 30 gestures. It changes slightly every time and is made available to the performers either through a printed list or a teleprompter. I allow them to choose a costume from a collection of found clothing. These costumes are curated so that the colors and textures will play a compositional role in the image that will later be produced from the video documentation.



Teleprompter used to remind performers what the gestures are. (2016)



Printed list of gestures. (2015)

The performance begins at a fixed hour and lasts for an undetermined amount of time. It takes place without an audience. It is documented using video. In most instances I have filmed the sessions using a hand-held camera, which allows me to enter into the space and action. This allows for both close-ups and an added dimension of movement. It decentralizes the spatial plan. On some occasions, I used two cameras on tripods. I remained stationary but panned the cameras so that the frame of visions crossed over one another, and so that I could still have that added dimension of movement.



A video still from *possible performance: Adam, Alexander, Ellen, Frances, Juliana, Kamissa, Lina, steven & Stephen*, video, 2017. Performers (from left to right): steven girard, Ellen Furey, Stephen Quinlan, Frances Adair McKenzie, Alexandre Nunes.

Before the performance begins, I go through the gestures in case the performers have any questions but I underline that they are invited to execute the gestures as they see fit. The gestures are written to be open-ended enough to allow for independent decision making. There are, however, some choreographic details inserted into the gestures, such as “and you repeat.”

The performance starts with 60 seconds of doing nothing in order to mark a difference between everyday time-and-space and the performance. The performers count those seconds themselves, often leading to multiple senses of when that time is up. The participants are not required to be active for the entirety of the performance. I tell them they are free to do as little or as many of the gestures they want to. Alternatively, I invite them to watch the others, thereby confusing roles of performer and spectator.

Distraction, boredom or inattentiveness are invited and are common. This challenges the general expectation that a performer be “present” and that the audience be attentive.



A video still from the beginning of *possible performance: Adam, Alexander, Ellen, Frances, Juliana, Kamissa, Lina, steven & Stephen*, video, 2017. Performers (from left to right): Lina Moreno, Adam Kinner, Stephen Quinlan (twice), Juliana Moreno, Alexandre Nunes, Ellen Furey, Kamissa Koita.

I do ask, however, that the performers stay within the space until an undiscussed but mutual agreement is made that the performance is over. Often, it is difficult for the performers to discern when the performance is over and generally, the performance tails off instead of having a clear ending. Without having stated it expressly, I think it's understood that I also invite them to abandon the implicit contract if, for whatever reason, it was felt necessary. Indeed, the performers sometimes ignore the constraints, either by doing two gestures at once, doing actions with objects that are not on the list or simply by not following some detail written into the gesture.



Video still from *possible performance: other forms of sympathy*, 2015. Performer: Winnie Ho

The gestures are written in the second tense in order for the reader or performer to visualize themselves doing it. My hope is that in the case that they are read by someone who is not taking part in the performance, the gestures will nonetheless elicit an imagined performance. Moreover, I do not wish for potential performers to perform with a sense that they are anybody or an object, but rather that they are who they are. I see the “you” as a binding agreement that keeps the performer accountable by keeping them sensitized, by keeping it personal.

In general, the session begins with sparse and carefully calculated actions. The performers do not typically address each other’s presence. Eventually, as they start to take ownership of the performance or as they begin to feel fed up with constraints, they become louder, communicate with each other freely and take more liberties with their interpretations of the gestures. The objects that make up the installation and that begin neatly arranged become disordered. This has been my own observation but has also been expressed by the participants.

In terms of strategies for feedback, I have created report forms but came to prefer discussions, which I have also filmed. The work *Untitled Therapy* (2015) is an elaborate strategy to get feedback on the experience of the performers in which I invite them to a group therapy session.



Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle and Jacqueline Van de Geer in conversation, following a *possible performance* session. (2016)

After each session is completed, I go through the footage by pulling screenshots. That process helps me get a firmer sense of what *possible performance* looks like. Often, when I look at the footage I feel estranged and do not know what to do next. Still images help me see in a way I am more accustomed to seeing.

Over the course of my research I experimented with many ways of handling the video footage. I have made many, quick edits and no edits. I have created moving frames that follow the performers and created drawings to lay overtop of the images. In retrospect, it seems that in all these cases, I have been testing the limits of both the artifice and authenticity offered by the work.



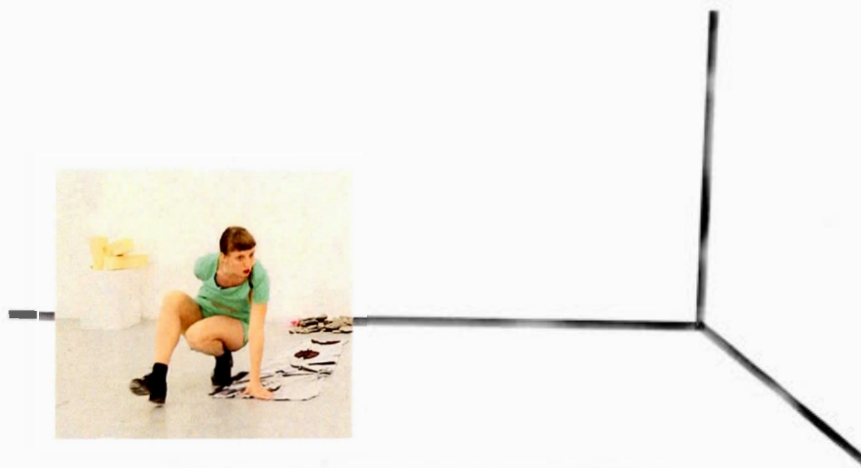
other forms of sympathy, still from video, 2015.
Performers (from left to right): Winnie Ho, Julie Laurin



T.V feet worm, collage made from digital drawing and video still, 2016.

To date, I have done nine sessions, ranging from one to nine participants. I have explored alternate structures, on occasion inserting extra constraints such as asking the performers to repeat one gesture for the entire duration of the event or asking them to put objects back in their original location. I have on some occasions explored the possibility of inserting myself into the performances but resolved not to. I do feel however, that it is important to keep the traces of these explorations. Exposing stages of the development also exposes the many attempts to deal with impossibility. The video *other forms of sympathy* (2015) documents one such occasion where I performed

one gesture, *You don't decide how to move*, for the duration of four hours, while others were welcome to enter and leave the performance at whatever time they chose. On the whole, there has never been a moment where I knew exactly what I was looking for in the performances or what I wanted them to look like. Because I have always tried to conserve that condition of uncertainty, this approach is integral to the broader methodology of this research.



Myself in other forms of sympathy, still from video, 2015.

Besides being a *mise en situation*, *possible performance* is choreographic. Although this is not the scope through which I commonly conceive of the work, on occasion it has been relevant to do so. I would define choreography, most broadly, as the arrangement of time and space whose principal medium has traditionally been the human body in movement. But the substratum of this is that choreography is a particular kind of relationship. The way choreography comes to organize events has everything to do with the type of relationship the choreographer has to the performers, that the performers, if there are many, have between them, and finally, that the performers have to the audience. That relationship is colored by the question of who gets to make what choices and this defines the basic parameters of form and freedom

that sculpt the event. The role of relationship and its possible permutations will figure quite strongly, over the course of my reflections on *possible performance*.

CHAPTER III

THINKING ABOUT DELEGATED PERFORMANCE

3.1 Complicating Authenticity and Artifice

Though there is a long history of hiring actors or dancers to fulfill the vision of the director or the choreographer, what Claire Bishop calls delegated performance (Bishop, 2012, p. 219-239) is defined as a work in which the artist hands over a certain amount of control by “outsourcing” the performance to others. The artist provides a structure, a context and some indications but what unfolds is up to the performers in real time and is felt in real ways. This, juxtaposed with the *mise en scène* nature of such works, generates tensions between the artificial and the authentic. In spite of a certain “return to the real” within these performances, it is also clear that certain staging mechanisms have been deployed.

The act of “staging” connotes artificiality as it points to the theatrical, the representational and the dramatic. But the questions I have asked myself over the course of my research have been: can we define “staging” as the act of creating a space for an authentic event or simpler yet, a situation to take place? Can the stage be a thought of as mechanism that prompts that event or situation? (Hence *mise en situation* as opposed to *mise en scène*.)

Usually, delegated performances employ non-professionals or amateurs, who unlike an actor or dancer, are not formally trained in bringing to life the vision of the artist. Because the socioeconomic or ethnic identity is made visible through the authenticity of the non-professional performer, identity and subjectivity become part of the material makeup of the work. The non-professional performers perform themselves, thereby signifying themselves, their history and their status. The identity of the performers, the specific ways identity plays out and the unknowable, subjective experience that a

performer has of the event, all act as the raw material to make up the work. The subject or the person is instrumentalized for an aim of the artist.

The body based performances that emerged in the sixties and seventies, from artists such as Gina Pane, Carolee Schneeman or Adrian Piper, also took up subjectivity as material. Hannah Wilke, for example, used herself as her own subject and art object. She instrumentalized the fact that she was an attractive woman. That it was her own prerogative to represent herself, disrupted the habitual experience of viewing. She turned what might be deemed as vanity or narcissism into a critique of the expectations held of her as a beautiful woman artist to perform in a certain way and to possess beauty without power.⁵

Delegated performance's employment of subjectivity differs from those earlier works by also miming the economic strategies of production in a globalized economy, i.e. outsourcing labour to foreign countries, outsourcing marketing to call centers, etc. The subject performed is a collective subject in the sense that the subject performs within a relational economy.

With *possible performance* I sought to have others perform themselves in hopes that the difference in their personhood would bring new aesthetic qualities to the embodiment of the script. What they performed, however, was both themselves and themselves in relation to each other. What any individual does will alter the value of what anybody else does. Inside the constructed space of the *mise en situation*, there is an economy. It is fueled by the authenticity of the individuals and every choice they make about how to exist within the performance. The performers deal with the situation, build bonds, share resources and also watch others do the same. They are

⁵ Here, my understanding of the role of the subject-as-object in early feminist performance art or body art is heavily informed by the writings of Amelia Jones in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998). Chapter 4, specifically, discusses Hannah Wilke's work.

trying to figure out what their role should or could be. They are determining their position.



A video still from *possible performance: Adriana, Lina & Stephen*, 2015. Performers (from left to right): Stephen Quinlan, Adriana Disman, Lina Moreno.

As with many delegated performances, *possible performance*, through its staging of the real, also stages alienation because that real is not total. From within the performance, the self that is encouraged to be performed, can be experienced as alien to the artifice of the work's structure: the gestures are strange and imposed, the costumes are unfamiliar and not from their own wardrobe, and performers are asked to "show a picture" but that picture is not one they would have chosen. While the performers perform themselves and are given significant freedom to interpret the script, they are doing so within the constraint of a very aesthetic set of parameters and objectives, born from my own and *owned* idiosyncrasies. In many ways it re-enacts the ethically questionable power dynamics at hand in outsourcing and delegation, with its systems of value and divisions of labour. That said, what really interests me is the sort of impossible knot within delegated performance, implicating all of these elements

of artificiality, authenticity, power, identity, agency and objectification. What makes this more complicated is the question of how to possibly move the body through this knotted paradigm.

At the same time, the performance of self is experienced authentically and in real, unmediated time as some sort of quasi-therapeutic process of self-discovery. In a questionnaire handed out to participants, I ask “Is this therapeutic?” to which people have generally replied affirmatively. They might gain a sense of freedom from the opportunity to act in non-normative ways or they might feel a sense of relief from being told what to do. They might get something from the bond that tends to form between the participants. Importantly, some participants have expressed that in some ways it is a performance of their friendship to me, of the bond of trust we have. In *Untitled therapy* (2015), Arkadi says “je dirais le mot ‘confiance’ qui raisonne pour exprimer la sensation avec laquelle je me suis retrouver pour dire oui au projet.”⁶ Or, speaking to the degree that a felt sense of personal fulfillment is accompanied by the construction of a new economy, Julia says, “It changed what labour could mean for me. It was about legitimacy. It felt like we were inventing a new type of legitimate labour.”⁷ Alternatively, Jacqueline states, “I thought it was a very liberating and freeing experience.”⁸

Whether or not I have pinned down what it is that the participants get out of the experience, their choice to be there is their own, as are their actions. For those who return for multiple *possible performance* sessions, there is something bringing them back. Those reasons seem to relate directly to many of the questions that I myself have about the work: How is self experienced in performance? What do I gain or give when performing? Or, when watching? What are some feelings that I can experience that I

⁶ Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle in *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

⁷ Julia Thomas in *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

⁸ Jacqueline Van de Geer in *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

have not experienced before? How am I with others? What are the conditions that give rise to my experience of self and others? The participants are interested in working through those questions in embodied ways and all the more so, because their friend (myself) has asked them to.



Video still from *performance: other forms of sympathy*, 2015. Performer: Jacqueline Van de Geer.

Given capitalism's tendency to capitalise on the worker's and western culture's general desire to become "self-fulfilled" through self-direction⁹, these two approaches to a performance of self and subjectivity are not exclusive. We see authenticity and the subject's feelings folded into the artificiality of a *mise en scène* (or in the case of *possible performance*, a *mise en situation*). You can sense that something is scripted and yet you can't quite tell what because they seem to be making real decisions.

⁹ For a discussion on this topic, see chapter one of André Lepecki's *Singularities : Dance in the Age of Performance* (2016) or Kai Van Eikels's article *What Parts of Us Can Do with Parts of Each Other (and When) : Some parts of this text* (2011).

For example, in a debrief following the session on May 14, 2016, Lina discusses how she had the clay on her back but that Stephen was approaching her and showing her the tape he had chewed. She felt pulled between her obligation to the gesture she was doing (*You stack clay on your back and stand there bearing its weight for some time*) and a sense of obligation to respond to what Stephen was doing.

Such examples, where we see the performer pulled between what they perceive as the constructed constraints of the performance and the choices they are authentically pulled towards, demonstrate that the degree to which *possible performance* is “authentic” or “artificial” can only be identified as a point in the movement created by the tension between those conditions. In this way, *possible performance* is interested in confounding performativity and theatricality. The distribution of time, space and narrative normally associated with a performance or storytelling have a place but they are decentered into more ambiguous, complicated and fluid structures. Heroism, climax, linearity and moral-of-the-story are extracted from the fabric of theatricality.

When Alexandre dramatically disrupts silence by stabbing the foam (*You stab the foam*) with deliberate rigour, the eventfulness peaks. But it is not a narrative climax. Nothing follows suit. He is not a villain or a hero for more than a split, undetectable second. My sense is that for the split, undetectable moment there was a fabricated sense of self (for him) or subject (for people watching) that emerged. This emergence might be experienced as narrative; as a type of story we recognize from elsewhere in a film or play. But it immediately collapses into the real situation of negotiating between himself and the others.

3.2 Subjectivity, Feelings and the Political

“Tu as besoin de voir. Et moi, j’ai besoin de sentir.”

– Arkadi Lavoie Lachapelle, *possible performance performer*

I bring up these two approaches to understanding the performance of self, subject and subjectivity because it would seem that while the therapeutic aspect promotes a “good feeling,” the enactment of outsourcing and its ethically questionable distribution of power (i.e. me telling others what to do so that others can eventually watch them) leaves some with uneasy feelings.¹⁰ Besides prompting frictions between the objecthood versus the subjecthood of the work, this also calls into question how the political manifests within the work, and by extension, raises the question of what makes for a politically affective work.

Does staging a problematic situation re-perform and thus reinforce what is inherently problematic about it? What is affirmative? What is subversive? What is critique? What is being distributed? Who gets to speak and who gets to watch? Can delegated performance function as a subversive affirmation and influence political action by effectively messing with the “enjoyment in looking” (Bishop, 2009, p. 5)?

There is a continuity between the uneasy feelings manifested through a delegated performance and the difficult feelings embedded in the *possible performance* gestures themselves. Gestures like *You repeat the words “why am I not there with you”* or *You try to make a circle with potentially invisible others in the room, without speaking* speak very clearly of feelings of longing and yearning for relation, while a gesture like *You tape a rock to your foot* speaks more symbolically of an impossibility to take action. *You let yourself die* probably gives rise to the most difficult, conflicting

¹⁰ Claire Bishop discusses uneasy feelings and “bad affect” with regards to the works of Santiago Sierra and Simon Schlingensief in her interview with Julia Austin *Trauma, Antagonism and the bodies of others: a dialogue on delegated performance* (pg 5-6).

feelings. As the author of the gestures, those difficult feelings have their origin in my own subjectivity.

Uneasy feelings, complicated feelings, unidentifiable feelings, difficult feelings and feelings of impossibility seem to be what I have been performing in my solo performances for many years now. Long before *possible performance* I worked on a series of performances called *I feel sick* (2012-2013) that dealt specifically with nausea. In a way that is similar to Hannah Wilke's work, as previously discussed, I was using my subjectivity as object, depending on my body to convey more than I was able to intend (though evidently, the historical and contextual placements of my performances are vastly different and bring up different significations than those of Hannah Wilke's). Placing feeling at the center of a performance situation, I explored how that subjectivity was linked with the circumstances out of which they took shape and how it acted politically, i.e. how it acted on others and how it contributed to a larger landscape of representation. I wondered: how does feeling represent itself? How does it insert itself into an economy of exchanging agencies? Or, how does it get inserted? How was I accumulating or losing power in performing it? My tentative answer to these questions is that feeling, especially when it is not the kind of feeling that is easily defined, destabilises through vulnerability. In some strange way, vulnerability is a currency of power. It prompts an immediate renegotiation of the value and roles that hold the economy of the performance event in place.

My commitment to these questions can also be seen in *Untitled therapy* (2015), where I take *possible performance* to a psychotherapist. I wanted to understand the gestures I had written into the performance and my volition to invite others to do the performance. I had a private session with the therapist to talk about these kinds of questions and feelings. Then, I wanted to provide a space for the participants to work out their own feelings towards the performance, so I initiated a group session. I wanted to acknowledge the role of emotions in the work by making it the material of the work

itself. Indeed, the therapy session proved to be a space where the participants could talk in detail about their experience in the performance and about how certain gestures made them feel. Over the course of that process, I came to feel less guilty about creating a situation where I tell other people what do because the participants reiterate how much they gain from the strangeness of that experience.



Untitled therapy, video still, 2015.

Performers (from left to right): Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle, Lina Moreno, Jacqueline van de Geer, Stephen Quinlan, Julia Thomas

Thus uneasy feelings seem to tie together two theoretical-practical projects I have been working through: firstly, the politics of affect; secondly, the politics of performance and spectating. The terms subject, self, subjectivity, feeling and affect are not interchangeable terms. But they are related in ways where I cannot say one without also implying at least one other. All of these terms address different interlocking aspects of perception and positioning, the former having everything to do with the individual's felt experience, the latter having everything to do with the political (Rancière, 2009, p.13).

There is a difference between making work about politics and making work politically (Jürs-Munby, Carroll & Giles, 2013 cite Deck, 2011, p.14). Building on that, I would like to argue that the putting forth of subjectivity and feelings as valuable and exchangeable is a means of making work politically. It declares, “this is worth something”. What happens to an economy when something that doesn’t come with a clear value is still part of that economy? What space can it occupy? At this point in the research, it is impossible for me to answer those questions. I don’t think the declaration, “this is worth something” changes much. But it does exist. What I do know is that the act of delegating gestures that were previously part of personal repertoire is inherently political because it invites and cultivates new modes of relating. It is a gesture of trying to understand gesture. When I ask someone else to talk about the balloon (*You tell us about the balloon*) it is because I cannot talk about it in any other way than the way I do. When Arkadi talks about the balloon, I understand more about the possibilities of that gesture.



Myself performing *You dip your hands in brown bags and you repeat*, 2015.



Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle performing *You dip your hands in brown bags and you repeat*, 2016.

possible performance is an invisible performance of feeling, whereby the most intimate way for me to show someone a performance is to have them do it themselves. And, the most loving way to do so -love being the governing factor in our friendly relationship- is not to tell them what to look at, how to see or what my

subjective experience is. Rather, it is to let them have their own subjective experience of it. Ultimately, it is impossible for me to avoid having more agency than the participants when I am the one delegating. As much as I try to decentralize the structure of the performance, I remain the author. But through this specific process of relating, the terms of that agency can take different shapes.

3.3 Professionalism and Amateurism

The interplay of feeling, self and politics might be clarified through further inquiry into the form of performance or the question of what is performed. Specifically, I would like to explore the correlation between the professional and the amateur, because employing amateur performers is often itemized as a criterion for delegated performance and for staging the real. Though *possible performance* mostly employs people who have experience in performance, it is useful to consider in more detail the difference between the amateur and the professional and the specific process of how the amateur presumably performs their authentic sociopolitical selves.

One main difference between a professional and an amateur is that a professional performer is trained to perform the *idea of a thing*. That is, they are able to actualise physically and often precisely what the artist envisions. Imagine a professional ballet dancer doing a pirouette... double, triple, quadruple, quintuple... Now, imagine an amateur doing a pirouette... What is the effect?

It is possible that in the ballet dancer you see the pirouette itself, that you lend yourself to the wonder and magic of a human body flying out of itself into a twirling enigma. Meanwhile, in the amateur you might very well see the amateur-ness. In

the amateur's pirouette, you see the *impossibility of the idea* of the pirouette.¹¹ You see failure but you also see an attempt. Besides a failed pirouette, the amateur performs an embodied exploration of the possibility of a pirouette.

Which one is more authentic? Which is more complicated? Which one says more about the conditions in which the pirouette is performed? How might you characterize the space between you and the amateur versus you and the ballerina? Which one makes you more aware of yourself? To which do you more closely relate and why?

I cannot say that one is more authentic than the other. Both happen in time and space, which to me, is the qualifier for being real or authentic. But the *feeling* of asking the question, "is this authentic?" can articulate the experience of a performance. When people say "the performance really moved me," I think they are describing a felt experience of asking such questions. Moreover, those questions are made more visible through the amateur but they are always there, regardless of the material performed.

In the professional's pirouette, the irreducible distance is between the sign and the signified, between the body and the image of the body, between the authentic and the constructed. That distance is difficult to locate because the idea of the pirouette mutes the *particular* ballerina, *this* ballerina. The universal overrides the singular. The pirouette denies its own impossibility and alienates the body that performs it.

¹¹ It is true that there is a possibility that the amateur could eventually master the pirouette. But the limitations are so great that I feel it would be a misplaced hope. Each individual iteration of the pirouette will be failed until one day, maybe, there is a "perfect" one. Regardless, pirouettes are not something everyone can do. For some it is truly impossible. Recognizing a lack of equity, unveiling the myth that anything is possible is a "real" I can aspire to.

When Yvonne Rainer said “No to virtuosity” as part of her *No Manifesto* (1965), maybe she was resisting the dictatorial nature of a performed idea-of-the-thing?¹²

I would like to suggest that beyond theatricality and the illusionary tactics of the spectacle, it is the performance of the idea-of-the-thing that is at the root of the artificiality that is associated with theatre. Conversely, it is the idea-of-the-thing, which performance attempts to render authentic by making its construct more transparent. The historically constant effort of theatre to become ‘real’ or more authentic might very well be, as Agamben puts it, the expression of a gesture that looks for itself in language (2000, p.58). What I am calling the idea-of-the-thing could also be worded as “fixed meaning” or as language itself. Language defines the body but holds it at a distance. The body looks for itself in the thing that defines it.

This desire of theatre to be ‘real’ starts to articulate relationships between language and body, between representation and presence. In *L’Informe* George Bataille writes: “A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words but their tasks.” (1929/1985, p. 31). Here, the word (or the idea-of-the-thing) expresses the way in which language alters what the body does: ‘Apple’ does not mean ‘apple’ but rather, is the command to ‘be apple as is defined’.

Here, the word “task” is very crucial: Often, dance and performance will be characterized as “task-based”. In this approach to composition, the performer’s goal is to perform nothing other than the task. If the task is “lift your arm,” it is done so in a straight-forward manner and without added expression. Some tasks, like “move from your liver” are less direct. These tasks are difficult to qualify or trace as such. Nonetheless, the performer attempts to adhere to what they understand as “move from your liver”. What interests me most, is the question of where does the task

¹² Undoubtedly, “no to virtuosity” is also about the accessibility or non-accessibility of dance.

come from? The author? Society? Self? Moreover, what is its aim? And why does task-based performance have to be so austere, so bare minimum? What is the unintended performance that comes with the task? Can I pry open the task so that “apple” doesn’t mean “be apple as defined,” but rather “be apple and anything else you pick up along the way”?

Undeniably, the performers in *possible performance* will often refer to the gestures as tasks because that is the code most familiar to them. That is, it is a way to understand and to contextualise the event. The body performs that of which it can conceive.

Significantly, we also read in the body what we are able to conceive. This might be why traditional theatre leans on the closed circuit of representation, where the body does not signify its fleshy self and where actions can be pre-understood. Delegated performance, amateur performance and *possible performance* are all methods by which that circuit of representation is opened up through a process where the body signifies itself and produces unsecured meanings.

Brecht’s work with amateurs in his learning-plays (*Lehrstücke*) is closely linked to Bishop’s idea of how the amateur iterates authenticity within delegated performance. Kai Van Eikels explains that, for Brecht, the profession of acting “devises the competence to represent, imitate, ironize, and hence render amiable every other work profile because it incorporates from a professional activity only what is key to perform the performing” (2011, p.4). For Brecht, who approached this ontology of performance through a Marxist framework, the professional actor’s ability to render the performance of all other professions totalized divisions of labor by transcending the play’s narrative out of reality. This totalization *universalized* or *essentialized* those professions and those divisions. Universalization or essentialization are other effects of what I am calling the idea-of-a-thing. They purge the performer of their specificity and render the

context in which they perform invisible by making broad defining strokes about the subject being performed. They group separate entities, that act differently but simultaneously, into a universal condition or definition.¹³ And, as Bataille suggests, definitions do have the capacity to dictate action.

When performance is thus embodied, the audience watches the actors but both parties are doing the labour of performing (performing acting or performing spectatorship). They are both alienated from the means of production, which is to say the actual conditions that give rise to the performance. The political and social situation can not affect because it is lifted out of it's own circumstances.

By engaging amateurs with professions other than that of performers, the divisions of labour are felt by the audience because the narrative or idea is not universalised by the performer. Instead, they remain who they are. Much like the amateur doing a pirouette, the conditions of the performance are felt. Instead of definitions, there is information not yet securely interpreted and both parties are active in that interpretation. The distance between spectator and performer is not one of alienation, but is based on a contemplative space. Later I will talk about equidistance as it relates to Deleuze's "any-instance-whatever" and to Agamben's "whatever singularity", but I would like to point out that in Brecht's concept of *Lehsstücke*, there is also a type of equidistance to the content of the performance, from both the spectator and the amateur performer, made visible by the impossibility of the idea-of-the-thing. As such, the impossibility is held in common by both the audience and the performers.

¹³ I associate this universalization with the "all is one" mentality.

3.4 Professionals Performing Unprofessionally

If delegated performance seeks out amateur performers so that an impossibility might be made visible, what could it mean that I sought out professional performers to perform *possible performance*? Does the fact that the participants are experienced performers mean that they are performing my idea-of-the-thing? Or, is there a way for professionals to do their work unprofessionally? What methodology is needed to do so? And, can an amateur performance done by professionals serve to further confuse the terms of artificial and authentic, in order to give a more articulated experience of the performance?

First, I would like to suggest that by not having an idea-of-the-thing; that is, in refusing to know in any determinative kind of way what the work is about or what it is to look like, I might have made it impossible, in spite of the professionals' virtuositities, to render the idea-of-the-thing. *possible performance* is an embodied exploration of what the idea-of-a-thing could be. The idea-of-the-thing is still in a state of gestural informational bits that do not signify but are there nonetheless.

Specifically, participants have little or no idea how I will use the video material (because neither do I when I film it) and so have little or no reference for how they appear. On several occasions, participants described their experience in terms of "looking for the performance". Lina, for example, describes trying to locate a feeling of performing that was not mimeses or acting, but rather more "performance art,"¹⁴ more natural. Stephen describes an anxiety or anticipation while looking for the tasks he could execute the best "performatively" but that he eventually surrenders to pure exploration.¹⁵ Arkadi on the other hand, describes seeing herself through my eyes, looking to see what someone else looks like doing something I've

¹⁴ Lina Moreno, *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

¹⁵ Stephen Quinlan, *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

done before.¹⁶ Here, the image the performers have of themselves is functioning like the word. In all these cases, there seems to be an image the participants are looking to perform but that they can't quite locate or that doesn't quite make sense.

Secondly, I would like to suggest that by inviting people with different performance backgrounds or different proximities to performativity or theatricality, their differences in approach are made bold while also blurring what can be perceived as the authentic to artificial spectrum. For example, those who come from a theatre background will have more of a tendency to dramatize a gesture, while those who come from a performance art background will treat the materiality of the gesture in a non dramatic embodiment. Some people want to animate objects while others prefer to test their materiality. Through the contrast of these choices we can see the tools of performance, which are consciously or subconsciously employed based on a specific training that is often deeply ingrained in the body. These choices, though they reflect upon that which the participant has been exposed to, also reflect upon the individual, their tendencies and their subjective point of view. Again, we see their subjectivity and their sociopolitical selves just as we would with an amateur. Those conditions are made visible. We see the attempt to apply available resources and the impossibility to succeed –not because they have failed to perform the idea-of-the-thing but because the diversity of approaches inhibits the circuit of representation from closing. These modes of performativity reveal a spectrum which spans from unaware, to banal, to task-based, to actionist, to expressionistic, to spectacular and to dramatic. Like Roger Rabbit in the “real world”, these modes enact different realities, demonstrating how the space between each is irreducible but how each is equally valuable.

Third, by employing professional performers to perform themselves, I think that the work reveals itself to be a discourse on performance. *possible performance* inherits

¹⁶ Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle, *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

the participant's performance profession as it's materiality, and in so doing, it discloses something about what is inside of the theatrical and performative mechanism. Like traditional theatre, it has a script as well as a set and by employing professional performers it comments on the performative within itself.

Finally, returning to the question of affect, what we see when an amateur performs something as technical as a pirouette is awkwardness, effort and ultimately, labour. These qualities are nonetheless present in the professional performing an ambiguous idea. And, as Eleanor Massie suggests, this labour is appropriately an affective labour (2015); that is, it is a labour fuelled by a desire (a longing and with any luck, a pleasure) to do it well for someone with whom there is a non-professional relationship. In this case, the participants of *possible performance* are attempting to perform well for their friends. It is for some kind of love.



A video still from *possible performance: Jacqueline & Arkadi*, 2016. Performer: Jacqueline Van de Geer

CHAPTER IV

WHERE IS WRITING?



A video still from *possible performance: Arkadi*, 2016. Performer: Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle

4.1 People Scripting Immediately

In *The Death of the Author*, Barthes offers some useful ways for thinking through delegated performance, authorship and authenticity. He underlines how, in modernity, a reorganisation of the temporality of the narrative dislodges the author from the work and places the meaning-making in the hands of the reader. That is, instead of the author preceding the text or being the premise of the work, the text is enunciated in the here and now: “the scripter is born simultaneously with the text” (Barthes, 1968/2006, p.43). Writing is no longer an act of representation, notation or depiction that indexes the authors creative choices. Instead, it is emptied and has no other content than that the act of its enunciation.¹⁷

¹⁷ This is, of course, directly related to Austin’s explication of the speech act, but I am choosing to focus Barthes’s writing because it is more closely applicable to authorship with regards to the field of arts.

Not coincidentally, Barthes' read this same immediacy in Brecht's epic theatre. Of Brecht, Barthes writes that he "held the sign out for the spectator, allowing them to transform it back into meaning –not the meaning of the sign, but the thing itself." (Squiers, 2012, p.127). The action signifies exactly what it is in a temporality that is immediate.

possible performance, as a delegated performance, approaches a similar removal of the author. I do not precede the text by having a vision that performers achieve. My removal is both physical in that I am not in the performance and figurative in that I pull myself out of writing by handing it over to the performers. Although neither extraction is ever total, it is my sense that I, the author, write the text of the gestures but that they become a script when they are performed.¹⁸

Likewise, this process of pulling myself out of the performance has contributed to the fact that there is no narrative, nothing represented and no moral.¹⁹ As I have stated, it is a series of events but has no resolution in the way of a narrative. The singularity of such events petition differently negotiated types understanding that are intersubjective. This writing could never be scripted by a sole author. And, because that singularity is so dependent on the performer and on the subjectivity they perform, it is the people themselves that articulate this writing. When an event is not absolved into a preconceived mythology or language, what are some other possible ways to form common understandings? In such cases, what is a different possible definition of "understanding"?

¹⁸ I chose the word "script" and not "score" because it means to write. More than that, the word "script," in the theatrical sense, is short for *manuscript*, which is writing done by hand. Though a script is to be performed, there is nothing in the word "script" that suggests anything besides the gesture of writing. However, it is this presence of the hand that marks that writing as inherently gestural and thus performative.

¹⁹ *possible performance* contains symbolism but it is displaced and unintended, moving through visceral experiences that might be recognizable but not solidified.

Case example: *You show us something*.

The performer selects an object of their choice to show. The terms of what it means to show is decided by them. Some display a thing (object or action) for a potentially unobserving audience. Some approach others to talk about the object. When they do, meaning is not conjured from the sign of the thing, but the thing in it's actual context and the act of it being shown. When Juliana shows us the tape and says, "this is some tape," we do not understand why she is doing that. If we did, that understanding would have to be constituted by some form of communication that either precedes or follows the event. But we understand that *that* is what she is doing. Somewhere in our thought process we might understand that tape symbolises things like binding, covering or construction, but without a unified narrative in which to situate the tape, the act/object is specifically exactly what it is. Juliana enunciates that writing through a socio-temporal structure, which unlike dramatic narrative²⁰, is immediate.

In *possible performance* the terms of the performance are indeed written by the players as they perform. The (partial) removal of myself, the author, opens up the possibility of pluralizing the content. I write the words but I do not write the performance.

4.2 Hospitality and Bad Translations

If, in fact, I was not the author of *possible performance*, what would I be? Artist? Choreographer? Director? Designer? Instigator? Giver? Taker? I consider the broader project of *possible performance* as a performative gesture and as I have stated, my working definition of gesture is sculpted from Agamben's *Notes on*

²⁰By dramatic narrative, I am pointing mainly to any variety of narrative arcs with beginnings, middles and ends. Squiers positions Aristotle's dramatic narrative as the root of such narratives and Brecht's dramaturgy as the inventor of an altogether different type of narrative; namely, one that is not whole (Squiers, 2012, p.99).

Gesture. In this text, Agamben asserts that to gesture relates more appropriately to supporting, as opposed to acting (as the actor does) or making (as the poet does): “What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather that something is being endured and supported” (2000, p.56).

If to gesture is to carry and support, one might be lead to other related terms, such as: *to manage* (interestingly, *gestion*, in French –the root of gesture still figuring) *to accommodate*, *to entertain* (also appropriate, considering the context of a performance) and finally, *to host*. For me this final synonym has figured most prominently and importantly. If I am not the author, then I am the host.

I see hosting as a prospectively feminist and futurist type of authorship: It is decentralized in every sense. Instead of saying something in particular, it invites the Other voice and donates a space for that possibility. But it is not without its complications.

In *Of Hospitality* Derrida underlines that the question of hospitality is “the question of the question” (2000, p.29). That is, does the host ask the foreigner to provide their name, i.e. their subject? Does hosting imply a reciprocal relationship, where a space is provided to the foreigner at some cost? Is that space provisional and dependant on the foreigner translating themselves into the language of the host? Or, is true hosting an absolute hospitality of absolute other: unconditional hospitality? And, with regards to *possible performance*, to which degree do I give freely to the performers a choice to be absolute other? Have I asked them their name, so to speak? Does asking them to perform their subjectivity mean that I am inadvertently asking them to pronounce themselves? What does that imply? These questions are at the crux of this performance but also potentially apply the larger realms of choreography, theatre and any situation where there is an artist and an actor.

To be clear, the script is not made up of neutral gestures (arguably, 'neutral' simply describes what or who is in power). Though at times they can have a task-like nature, these gestures are riddled with my subjectivity. A feeling of "performing Emma-Kate" has been expressed by several participants. This feeling might come as a result of a mentally imprinted imagery of me performing. It might also be the idiosyncratic nature of the gestures. Either way, the performers -the foreigners- translate themselves into the language of *possible performance*. The removal of the author is an impossibility and so is absolute hospitality.

I think of all times where, in editing, I have cut out the actions of the performers. I think of all the times that I have dressed the performers. I think of how in *Untitled therapy*, I mute the performers, awkwardly providing subtitles instead. It seems for every step I take to make *possible performance* democratic there seems to be some hegemonic force pushing me towards being *authoritative* and that this proves to be one of the ways in which impossibility is embedded in the project.

As an aside, I also think about all my questionable translations from English to French, all the times over the course of my studies at UQAM my classmates debated over whether a translation was sayable or not, their responses most often depending on the degree to which they felt propriety over the rules of the language versus being open to lending the language to difference. My sense is that when I translate, there is a strangeness intervening on the French, not necessarily born from the fact that English is my first language but from my broader (mis)understanding of how language can or cannot work. Indeed, in a French speaking university I have always felt hosted but the point of this anecdote is to ask: with what strangeness do the idiosyncrasies of performers of *possible performance* intervene upon the script? What am I, the host, deeming as sayable or not sayable? To what degree do I feel propriety, authority and authorship over the rules that govern *possible performance*?

The negotiation of these terms, which are embedded in every creative choice, are what have driven this work but also riddled it with impossibilities.

And finally, I consider the words of Adam Kinner, a performer, who in an email to me wrote, "I kept thinking of the gestures (instructions) as practices that you have developed. Which made our cursory interaction with them almost abject - like comments on those practices, even violent ones." I think that, much like the ambiguity of the performing/spectating binary, the determination of the host/foreigner is in a constant process of repositioning. What if we also think of the performer's body as a host? Have they asked me my name? Have they solicited my subject in their translation? Issues around subjectivity seem to re-emerge with these questions.

I would like to cross reference these ideas with Walter Benjamin's *The Translator's Task* (1923/1997), in which he discusses how the work of the translator is not to convey the exact objective information that an original text delivers because a piece of writing always conveys more than that. Splintering the objective from the real, Benjamin also suggests that there can be no objective knowing when reflecting on the real. If this notion is transposed onto the flesh and immediacy of a person acting -because the person and the act are undeniably real- it accumulates a special significance: a person cannot be known, objectively and an objective translation of that person's performance is futile and impossible. Furthermore, a bad translator could potentially convey the wrong information while relaying the eminent energy carried by the original. So what is being translated is not the information but rather the degree to which the text is translatable at all. What a translator conveys then, is the translatability of the text. In this case, the performers perform the performability or non-performability of the performance. Maybe the performers of *possible performance* are bad translators. They do not render exactly the thing or again, the

idea-of-the-thing. Rather, their performance is a statement on its possibility versus its impossibility.

Finally, for what it is worth, in the editing of the video footage that documents *possible performance*, I have provided the names of the performers. I have done so in ways which surpass the standard credits that proceed a film, or the names of dancers in a program –though I am certainly establishing a visual discourse with those tropes. Instead, their names have become part of the titles of the work. For example, *possible performance: Jacqueline & Arkadi* (2016). Alternatively, in *possible performance: Adam, Alexander, Ellen, Frances, Juliana, Kamissa, Lina, steven & Stephen* (2017). I embed their first names into the video on the first occasion where that performer figures prominently enough that the viewer would understand that that is their name.

(But does the viewer see the name and understand it to be name of the performer? Or does the name come across as more of a character? A fiction? To what degree do the irrevocable artificialities of the video image compromise the authenticities?)

4.3 Whatever, Alone Together

After Bataille says, “A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words but their tasks,” he goes on to say (1928/1985):

Thus Formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. (p.31)

If the Formless gets itself squashed, is that because it doesn’t materialise, because it doesn’t take a definable shape? Does this failure to figure also mean that the formless doesn’t matter, in the sense of not having importance? Earlier, I asked how I could “pry open the task” so that a task such as “be apple in the way defined,” is

instead communicated as “be apple and anything else you pick up along the way.” I’m going to add to that: “Be whatever apple.” There is a relation between the Formless and what I will be articulating as “whatever” that is imperative because it lifts undefined matter up to a level of importance. In the following section, I would like to suggest that in the case of performance, this concept of “whatever” has the potential to redistribute attention in equitable, non-hierarchical structures.

In *The Coming Community* (1993), Agamben fleshes out a concept of what he calls “whatever singularities.” He discerns the conceptual field of whatever from the quality of indifference most often associated with the word. He articulates that the use of whatever does not suggest “it *doesn’t* matter” but rather that “it *always* matters.” “It is reclaimed from having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class [...] and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of belonging but for its being-such” (1993, p.2). Again, this idea of instantaneous writing surfaces: something is exactly as it is and it is whatever it is. Or, as Agamben puts it, “something *is* only insofar as it is *as such*” (1993, p.2). It is singular and it does not prescribe to predetermined definitions. In the context of *possible performance*, this concept reiterates how the subject, through an enunciated writing that is informed by their subjectivity, manifests singularities.

Furthermore, it reinforces Deleuze’s “whatever”. Over the course of this research, the two together have opened up a way for thinking through what this might imply formally, in the construction of a performance and the rendering of its documentation. Namely, it has triggered me to think towards an idea of collective or participatory performance that will not “squash” the multiplications of these singularities. I call this a practice of being alone together. That a subject and their writing is singular does not make them unsocial. Rather, they are social under the pretense of being of separate.

In *Cinema 1: movement-images*, Deleuze compares the movement which occurs between poses or privileged instances and the movement between immobile sections or *any-instance-whatever* (1983/1986, p.5,). In the former, an idea transcends through the form of the pose. I compare this to the idea-of-the-thing discussed in the example of the pirouette. The pose is privileged and the infinitude of its ideal surpasses what is actually there. It dominates over the other parts of the work. This might be the case if the entire performance was controlled in order to produce a desired image or message.

What *any-instance-whatever* implies is that any moment can surface as a privileged moment. Each one equally matters. There is an “equidistance” between the frames of a sequence, as they are incremented through a direct contract with time.²¹ *Any-instance-whatever* might also describe Rainer’s famous choreography *Trio-A* (1966)²², where each movement is sequenced into a temporal regularity and where not one single movement emerges as more climatic or important than another.

²¹ For Deleuze, this is produced through an “accumulation of banalities” (1983/1986, p.6), which *possible performance* does very well.

²² *Trio-A* was first performed as *The Mind is a Muscle* at the Judson Church in 1966. It has been taught to, and performed by many groups and individuals since then. It continues to be taught and performed to this day.



A video still from *possible performance: Adam, Alexander, Ellen, Frances, Juliana, Kamissa, Lina, steven & Stephen*, video, 2017. Performer: steven girard

In *possible performance*, there is also a contract and any given moment belongs to that contract. Some events emerge as more exciting but not more important. This is perhaps most clearly embodied when I do not edit the temporality of the content whatsoever. Here, we can think of the singular enunciations of the performers as the individual frames. Not one enunciation or singularity emerges as more important to the work than any other.

And, going back to Juliana, when she shows us something in the way I have identified as singular, she is separate within a shared space. She is doing something anybody has access to. But it is her doing it exactly *as such* because she does it in *whatever* singular way she does. There are infinite possibilities for all kinds of intersubjective understanding, but the singularity of the subjectivity that writes that performance means the space between her and the others is irreducible. No one can experience it in the same way that Juliana does. Others are doing other things in other singular ways, which do not necessarily find correlation, save for the fact that

they are in the same space. They are whatever instances and whatever singularities. The space between them, like the space between frames, is irreducible. This is what I have come to identify as impossible space.²³

One might also compare this to Brecht's dramaturgical approach to the story, understood as a bringing together of gestic incidents (Squiers, 2012, p.131). Gestic incidents, for Brecht, are social gestures and they are to be extracted from the narrative whole²⁴ in order to be seen for what they are. The order of isolated gestic incidents or scenes do not resolve each other and are almost arbitrary. Each points to the other but while maintaining the space across which they point. This acknowledges the impossibility of bringing those gestures together under one order and preserves their singularity.

By extension, the concept of whatever as discussed here, implies that the hero can be anyone and everyone. The climax can be wherever. Politically, this implies that power is distributed horizontally. In so doing, there is a refusal to participate in the value systems of what is deemed exciting and worth watching.

4.4 As it Pertains to Watching, or the Possibilities of Participation

When at the theatre, my attention often shifts to the audience. In such cases, I have not stopped watching the performance. I am watching an extension of the performance, a particular embodied agreement of how to be, collectively, alone but

²³ This impossible space is at the root of the gesture *You repeat the words why am I not there with you.*

²⁴ Over the course of their thesis on Brecht, Squiers expounds how, for Brecht, narrative and dramatic theatre equate to a bourgeois ideology. Agamben incites a similar concept in the chapter "without classes" in *The Coming Community*. That being said, and insofar as the topic of bourgeois ideology is related to narrative and singularity, it is also completely implicated in the resistance I am staging against codified norms for performing language. It is however, beyond the scope of this memoir to address.

together. I enjoy seeing other people nodding off, whispering to their friends or otherwise not paying attention.

Related to the assumption that a more authentic art is a more political art is the assumption that the audience ought to be active and participating. I do not believe that a participatory performance is inherently more capable of bringing political shifts. In fact, I would argue that many times such strategies are limited, that in order to indiscriminately bring people to participate, the participants must be treated collectively as any-bodies. It is therefore assumed that everyone's emancipation is the same. This neglects the question and function of singularity as previously discussed. Theatre has been indispensable for thousands of years because it allows people to narrate their own engagement, not because it enables the disengagement of audiences. However, in order to alter the expectations of what is deemed a valuable performance, the expectations we have of an audience must also change. I am interested in inviting the audience to perform watching differently.

Clearly, *possible performance* (the unedited video specifically) can be taxing to watch because we are used to being entertained, and we are typically bound to the idea that a gesture be invested with a certain potency, that time unfold at a certain pace or rhythm. *possible performance* is working around these elements differently. So like the performers (who are also watchers), I invite the viewers of the video documentation to become distracted. I encourage them to conserve their singularity, their aloneness, that they do not need to lend themselves completely to what they are watching and that their gaze is afforded mobility. These choices are founded on wanting to let the viewer decide how to look and on the premise that I have no clue what their emancipation looks like. Just like the performers, the viewers are not a group of any-bodies. They are whatever they are, but they are some-bodies.

I mentioned early on that very often there is an expectation that performers, or ourselves as performers, be “present”. I have always resisted the expectation of being present because there is actually no way to ascertain such a state. I am skeptical of the underlying hierarchies at work that are based on one’s capacity to invest the precious resource of attention to the performance. These hierarchies punish those who don’t, for whatever reason, have access to that capacity. Presence, seems to me, to be inscribed with the infinite and the ideal that we expect out of the ballerina and her pirouette. It falsely delimits us from what resources are realistically available, from what the actual context and circumstances are. So, the idea that either the performer or audience must be “present” is for me a fundamental supposition that is worth interrogating.

Kai Van Eikels proposes a shift in understanding participation from “the expressions of *being part*” to “*parts of me*” (2011, p.11). There is no oneness or totality to be part of, but rather a grouping of singularities. The group, including the performers and the spectators, participate not in a “representational entity” but in “*organisational effects*” (Eikels, 2011, p.11). One such effect, as Eikels suggests, is that the audience performs this togetherness synchronistically. That is, they are each doing something different, but they are doing it together. I would like to also suggest simultaneity as a possible way of being together in the face of the impossibility of being a total unit. Etymologically, simultaneous is made up of *simuli* (as in, similar) and abstractly borrows its ending from *spontaneous* (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2017): Spontaneously, similar. The word “spontaneous” implies decentralisation insofar as it is undirected, while “similar” inherently also means different (otherwise the word “same” might then be employed).

While some participate in the space by contemplating the philosophical implications of the work, others feel moved by certain forms or color, while still others might contemplate their to-do list for the week. Jacques Rancière suggests that distraction,

or free gaze enables the worker (in the case of *possible performance*, the performer or the watcher) to be more than their labour: “The divorce between labouring arms and the distracted gaze introduces the body of a worker into a new configuration of the sensible; it overthrows the ‘right’ relationship between what a body ‘can’ do and what it cannot” (2008/2009, p.71). Hence in *possible performance*, participants are part performers and part themselves, simultaneously fulfilling themselves and doing a “job”.

That there is no live audience, causing the performers to simultaneously play the part of the spectators, is a staging strategy I used to embody this model of division, simultaneity and emancipation. The specificity of a performed singularity and subjectivity by the performer is automatically transferred to the spectatorship. My hope is that it also extends to the viewers in the exhibition space. To this end, the fact that the performance is not done live in the traditional sense also means that the viewers are not triggered into assuming the regular quiet, stationary or seated way of watching. Also, there is the element of confusion. That the terms of the performance are not clear is a strategy intended to inspire the audience to act as they choose, by default of not being told how to react.

With regards to the documentation of *possible performance* that the viewers in the exhibition space will see, I would like to suggest that it will be a performance video that unfolds in unentertaining ways. As such, it will also extend its time-space logic unto the spectator: the distracted viewer will only give the performance a certain amount of attention, without knowing what to think or how to be, which in effect, is the condition of the collective performance. The viewers, like the performers, remain themselves while sharing space with the image. Interestingly, this is how we most often interact with artworks. Practicing this with performance, with people, is different. Because performance is an elaboration of the basic self and other

relationship that manifests as part of daily interactions, it imports the expectations, habits and power dynamics that govern our behavior.

Being alone together does not imply the disappearance of responsibility. Singularity, Andre Lepecki argues, also means collectivity (2016, p.7). The complexity of the assembled disparate characteristics that make up a singularity and the instantaneousness of its actualisation means that a singularity is also an event in itself, a gathering, a collection. As I have stated, the gestures are written in second person in order to embody the sense of responsibility that comes with doing. *possible performance* is sensitive. Where impossibility re-enters the picture is through the inability to perfect this collective arrangement, this “democratisation of art presentation” (Eikels, 2012, p.17). But “getting better at something is different from being good at something” (Eikels, 2012, p.17). In the collective performance of doing and watching this entails restructuring our expectations and our ways of contributing to the event.

The other windfall of inviting friends from my community to perform as opposed to a designed group of socio-culturally or professionally specific individuals is that the group is already a spontaneously self-organized unit. That is, the group is a collection of individuals who have for multiple and incalculable reasons come together in formless ways. By working with this group, that is nevertheless variable and transient, changing greatly from session to session, I am creating a continuation of a pre-existing and authentic community. By staging and framing this group as *possible performance*, by imposing something else on to it, I introduce the artificial.

CHAPTER V

REHEARSAL

You call something something it isn't.

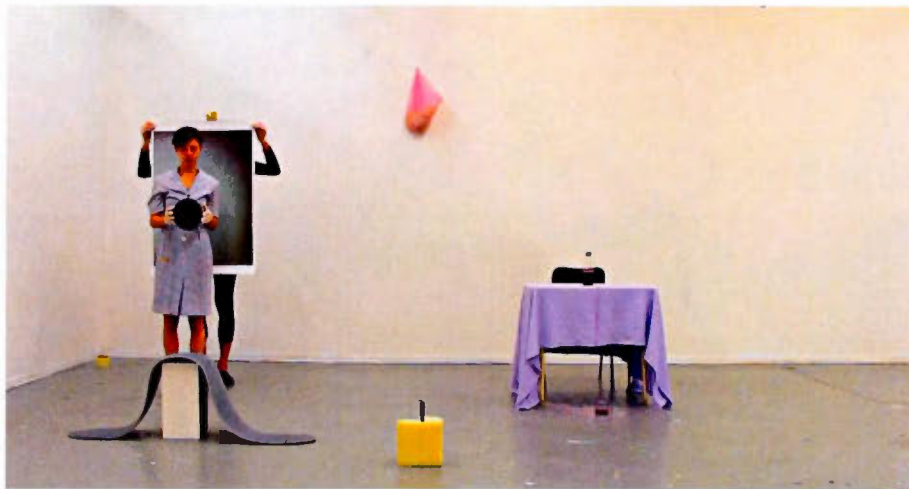
Yorgos Lanthimos' 2009 film *Dogtooth*, opens with three young adult siblings in a bathroom listening to the audiocassette recording of a woman reading out words with the wrong definitions. Motorway is defined as "a very strong wind" and sea is defined as "a leather armchair with wooden arms." Eventually, we realise that this is the characters' way of learning language and that it is their mother dictating these false definitions to them as a means to implement the secluded utopic/dystopic reality enforced by their father.

I am fascinated by this scene because of the way the recording is used as a tool for them to practice a reality. The repetitions of the definitions, the *répétitions*, are a rehearsal for the performance of being in an alter-world. Admittedly, they did not choose that reality, but throughout the film there is something about the hesitancy and will with which they perform what is dictated to them. There is a slow-footedness when we enter a language that alienates us. It brings with it a struggle and a labour but also a will to know despite that impossibility.

This kind of hesitancy accompanies many of the *possible performance* gestures. I like to think of the gestures as almost-actions. For example: *You go to make an 'ok' gesture but you don't, over and over. You try to jump but also try not to jump.* These gestures never step fully into themselves as performances and never conclude. There is no ta-da moment because an image, pose or "privileged moment"²⁵ is never rendered. Going back to the list of impossibilities, this hesitancy expresses the

²⁵ By "privileged moment" I am referring back to Deleuze's *Movement-Images* (1983/1986, p.5).

inability to make a choice. It also enacts resistance to definitions and to their tasking²⁶. It is a way to turn the gesture over and explore it in all its capacities. Imagine a word in your mouth as an object and instead of spitting it out, you turn it over in your mouth, feeling all of its sides. You are going over the word. You are rehearsing it.



A video still from *possible performance: Julia & Jordan*, 2015. Performers (from front to back): Julia Thomas, Jordan Leopky-Kolesnik

It is worth noting that rehearsal is closely related to the term “practice”. In fact, when translating the word “rehearsal” into French, I chose *répétition* but I could have also opted for *pratiquer*. I find this interesting in that there seems to be a tendency within the visual arts, for artists to talk about their practice more than about the actual works they produce. We could say that these artists are practicing the conditions that will give rise to an art object. And when the work does emerge, it is as though it is selected as one of many potential ways to emblemize the total potentiality that the practice entails.

²⁶ By “tasking”, I am referring back to George Bataille’s *Informe*. (1928/1985, p.31)

Similarly, rehearsal is closely related to re-performance. The fact that *possible performance* is, at its foundation, a script, lends itself to that re-performability. This notion of re-performance of course calls into question many of the same issues I have addressed in this memoir through my discussion of delegated performance, translation and the performative: What is the original? Who is the author? Where is writing? This process lets you go back and redo, prepare more, re-ask those questions and to actualize different and plural answers. Accordingly, this act of calling something something it isn't, through rehearsal and hesitancy, is nonetheless paired with a commitment to the possibility of knowing and laying down the conditions for something else.

What if I called *possible performance* a rehearsal? Well, it would be a rehearsal. The analogy is not as improbable as that between an armchair and the sea, so it is more believable. Though the discrepancy between believable and unbelievable demonstrates the relativity on which we base our knowing and sense of authenticity, what really interests me is the meaning of "what if". This is, the pretense of the *mise en situation*: preparing for the potentiality of something or a potential event. Much like Agamben's "means without an end" (2000)²⁷, *possible performance* entails a *means without an event*. I like to think of it as a perpetual rehearsal for a performance that will never get completed. This is another reason why I have chosen to not have it performed live. Again, the goal of getting better at something is different from the goal of being good (Eikels, 2012, p.17). I am more interested in getting better.

A more accurate title might then have been *potential performance* but potentiality and possibility are not quite the same. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Muñoz (pointing to Agamben, who points to Aristotle)

²⁷ Here, I am referring to the title of the book *Means Without an End* (2000).

articulates that while potentiality is not in the present, possibility is. Potentiality is in the horizon. It is of futurity. Possibility is what exists now (2009, p.99).

I understand the necessity of demanding more of the conditions of the present – especially for marginalized people, for whom the conditions of the present often serve injustice. I am committed to those demands. That’s what “what if” imagines. That’s the source of all of the refusal I perform. But I also favour doing *less with less* and *more with more*, as opposed to the more common and austere measured approach of doing “more with less”. What liberties do we have within the finite of this particular version of this performance that is taking place? This performance will involve distraction or the performance of parts. It might not be much and it might not be impressive but it is what is possible. If we move away from the idea-of-the-thing, “the aggrandized moment” and rehearse other possibilities we inevitably shift the conditions of the future. Eikels (2012) states, aptly:

...Let us be easy on the future and high in appreciation for what happens presently among contemporaries. The pleasure in performing that which is easy contains, or rather *is*, a sense of direction. And this sense of direction comes to the aid of political orientation insofar as it makes us turn towards performative equality. We will rehearse a democratic collectivity in which each of us performs things everybody can do. (p.17)

Pointedly, the only moment I ever considered the possibility of inviting a more identity specific group of people, was when I thought to invite doctors. They would have made a magnificent group of performers -intelligent and detail oriented, yet somewhat awkwardly insulated from years of study, long hours of work and financial comfort. Funnily, I can’t think of any group of people more inaccessible to me, no group for whom it would be more impossible to acquire the resources to have them perform. (I’ve been on a waiting list for two years just to have a family doctor for my basic medical needs.) The people I invited are the resources that are possible.

When rehearsing a dance sequence, dancers will sometimes replace certain movements with other movements that signify the movement that is actually to be in the choreography. For example, in lieu of pirouettes, a dancer will lift the knee and take the shape of a pirouette but instead of turning, they will clap their hands or twirl their finger the amount of times the choreography designates. A split jump is replaced by a simple kick of the front leg. The most obvious reason for this is that there is no point in expending the resources required to execute such ideal moves. It is preferable to focus on other aspects of the choreography such as the musicality, the sequence or the spacing. Other conditions must be prepared. Other areas must be explored, besides the ideal.

Of rehearsal, Richard Schechter points out that early rehearsals are “full of actions with high information potential, but very low goal orientation,” and that “the director doesn’t really know what s/he wants and the collaborators are looking around” (1977/1988, p.182). Relating this to *possible performance*, the director, not knowing what she wants, refers to myself, while the collaborators “looking around” describes beautifully the distraction that I invite both the performers and audience to engage in.

But Schechter also goes on to say that if a goal is not found, then the project is a failure. So, the questions I would like to raise are the following: What constitutes failure? What if you don’t participate in the system that distributes the value which determines whether or not the project is a failure? What if you call failure something it isn’t –like “fun”? Or, “whatever”? (going back to Agamben’s whatever singularity) What if you eliminate the notion of failure altogether? You erase the word and write something over top of it? Failure –going back to the list of impossibilities- is a strategy for refusing to participate in a system that gives us no other choice. Failure is a possible path when all the other paths are impossible.

The fact that there is no traditional public or audience in *possible performance* (there are the other performers, myself and the camera but none of these are traditional audiences) is one strategy that ensures that the performance remains a rehearsal. The other strategy is that, again, I sincerely did not know where these *possible performance* sessions were going. That I stay committed to that “sentiment of incertitude” (as written in the second chapter) is what makes *possible performance* radical, if only in a barely visible way. In fact, *possible performance* prioritizes the barely visible. And for this, I would describe this as making art in a political way, as opposed to making work about politics.

CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSION

STRANGE TRUISM

"I don't know what else to say about those two but those are... relationality and strangeness."

-Lina²⁸

Naturally, there are ways to treat a performance in front of an audience as a rehearsal. Nonetheless, what I have done in *possible performance* is make strategies like rehearsal self-evident and irrefutable. In this way, *possible performance*, besides being a personal project, is a truistic one. It is fabricated from truisms, statements such as: *possible performance* is not performed in front of a public, so it is a rehearsal. Or, I called it a rehearsal, so it is a rehearsal. Or, some things are impossible. If something is impossible and you try, then you fail. It is futile, absurd and strange to try. Futility is purposeless. Purposelessness is absurd.

On that note, I have not commented so much on the absurdity and futility of the gestures within the *possible performance* script. Undoubtedly, it is absurd to dip your hands in a bag. It is absurd to hold something heavy for no reason, as in the gesture *You hold "the slab" for as long as you can, arms outreached*. It is absurd to throw a book and miss because the target never existed, as in the gesture *You throw a book and you miss*. Here, absurdity is indeed wrapped up in futility and thus with impossibility. Fittingly, the theatre of the absurd, like *possible performance* stems from the existential anxiety caused by the perceived meaninglessness or purposelessness of human existence.²⁹

²⁸ Lina Moreno, *Untitled therapy*. (2015)

²⁹ The term, "the theatre of the absurd," coined by Martin Esslin in his essay "The Theatre of the Absurd (1960), is used to describe most notably, Genet and Beckett and is often associated with the existential school of philosophy.

Truisms are linked to this meaninglessness in that they empty statements of their meaning. Like Agamben's whatever singularities truisms are exactly as they are. There is no meaning beyond exactly what is stated. Truisms are also so true they are redundant to say. For this reason, saying them is always already some type of repetition or rehearsal of futility. But there is also something absurd about truisms in that their meaning seems to disappear, precisely because they are repetitions. They need not be said. They are empty and therefore, meaningless in their redundancy. There is something there about probing meaning, by returning and going over, looking for other ways to rehearse.

It calls to mind a practice that I have used on countless occasions, which is to repeat single words or short phrases for long periods of time. In *possible performance*, this is iterated through the gesture *You repeat the words "why am I not there with you"*. This repetition is a type of truism in that it is redundant to re-say what we know has already been said. The meaning of such words and phrases indeed becomes vapid, causing an existential anxiety and an impossibility to comprehend. The words also become *strange*. For André Lepecki strangeness, in its singularity, weaponizes performance, if only for singular instances: "Surprisingly we realize that there are actual, real zones of existence that opportunistic neoliberal capitalism hates and wants to have nothing to do with them" (2016, p.3).

What is stranger: throwing a book and missing, or throwing a book and missing because a friend asked you to do it? In the opening chapter of this memoir, I mentioned how in an attempt to come to grips with the impossibility of bringing different media together, I had, *strangely*, removed myself completely from the performance. Certainly, asking others to execute performances I made for myself and the acceptance to do this is the strangest strange of *possible performance*. That event, outside of the rest of *possible performance*, is perhaps the least governed moment. And yet, like a truism, that event is also the least "new" or "original."

The outcome of this research, encompasses a series of videos and images that make available to the viewer my different approaches at attempting to deal with impossibility as a feeling and the impossibilities that present themselves in the structure of the approaches themselves. They are possible outcomes only –tentative, anxious, strange. They are their own possible performances. They are translations and truisms.

In the process of selecting which images be shown, one impossibility is that of re-presentation; re-presentation in the sense of bringing back to presence what has passed but also in the sense of representing others in a way that they, themselves, would choose to be represented. I believe that an archive or documentation re-performs some iteration of the performance, precisely because the author is no longer there and that that process allows a work to actualize. However, my thoughts are that there still needs to be empathy put into the selection process. The same responsibility I deploy within the gestures by writing them in the second person and that I expect from the performer who performs them, will apply to what gets shown. My hope is that the selected visual artifacts of this process will re-embody some of the decentralization strategies that I have applied to the writing, staging, rehearsing and documenting of *possible performance* –that they will express the performative possibilities of what is felt to be impossible.

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