

and or with but on in to...

End of Residency Report for Forsøgsstationen 2024

GENERAL INFORMATION

Title *and or with but on in to...*

Main question / line of inquiry

Investigating dramaturgical and choreographic strategies for building 'binomials' in real time.

Contact info

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Name & backgrounds of participants

Maya Dalinsky, dance artist and translator

claire barrera, dance artist, activist and educator

Schedule/timeline for research

Three full studio days and a fourth day to present our work in progress to a small audience.

April 18, 19, 22 / work-in-progress showing on April 23, 2024

PROJECT BACKGROUND

and or with but on in to... is an exploration in writing and dance inspired by the work of Gianni Rodari, an Italian teacher and children's book writer whose pedagogy valued children's innate playfulness and nurtured their imaginations as writers through collective processes. In *Grammar of Fantasy* (1973), his 'introduction to the art of inventing stories', he explores the belief that children—and all humans—have a basic right to play, and further that creativity is essential to social justice movements.

Of the many exercises and experiments Rodari guided with his students, the 'Fantastic Binomials' struck a particular chord with dance-artists claire and Maya. This exercise prompts writers to find two not-easily-related words and bring them together to spark the storytelling imagination. claire and Maya were inspired to translate Rodari's 'Fantastic Binomials' exercise into dance and movement, with the aim of developing a time-based work.

This project has been ongoing since 2020, first as research in creating written 'binomials' and then as a time-based project working across dance, performance and live storytelling. Our artistic process is rooted first and foremost in our friendship, which has spanned 30 years and several countries. As we live far away from one another, we can only manage to nurture this project in-person once a year for a few days at a time. In between those moments, we must work at a distance.

This year's residency at Forsøgsstationen (2024) takes off where our research the previous summer left off. During a one-week residency at Greywood Arts in Ireland in 2023, we focused primarily on 'danced' binomials and how to play with soloing and duetting as ways to give form to a gestural or word-based binomial. We explored different "sources" from which to begin our binomials – finding the danced equivalent of a word in a particular "gesture" or pose.

In our time apart, we both independently continued to find methods for relating two distinct gestures, and hoped with this new research period in 2024 to pool our solutions and try out scores in the studio that we might shape into a longer piece. We also experimented with new 'source images' for our poses/gestures, finding photos from our personal archives as well as seeking images from shared references on the Internet.

Plan for Forsøgsstationen

As this piece is as much about the work on binomials itself as it is about our friendship, we entered the studio each day with the idea in mind that we can hang out, do things we like, revisit some of our ideas and memories, talk and journal, and play with movement and creating dance binomials. We hoped to try out some of the scores that Claire has been experimenting with in Portland, OR in workshops with other artists and projects, as well as leaning on details that arise from the photos themselves and our associations with them.

Our studio time was spent warming up the body and voice through karaoke, touch-based exercises and individual dance warm-ups. We took time to consider our shared passions, past and present, and how they might figure into our work: songs we currently can't live without, photos of our travels together over the years, materials from our vast 'friendship' archive (such as journals, letters, photos, clothes, objects...), and other references like current affairs/politics, our respective socio-cultural contexts (Claire & Portland / Maya & Copenhagen), literature, art, family, friends, etc. Whenever possible, we tried to see how these areas of our lives might provide an image to work with (found on the Internet, or extracted from our archive) or a beginning posture.

From there we continued to explore scores for soloing and duetting as well as revisit scores from our time at Greywood, taking turns to watch the binomials unfold, or sometimes pursuing a longer duet or session together without necessarily trying to maintain an 'outside eye'. We didn't film very much this time around, preferring to focus on the larger framework for presenting the binomials: what order, what kind of space, how do we share the images, what is important for a potential audience to see and understand about this process?

The process is one of score-building, which means that the movement outcome is improvised, however framed by a very precise set of instructions. In this context, it was important to understand first how the order of scores supports us in creating binomials and understanding what they are, rather than producing a specific kind of dramaturgy for the audience. We hoped to create an order of events that not only could be readable from the outside, but would engage us in a stimulating 'binomial' process where we could follow our creativity and improvise freely, together.

RESIDENCY FINDINGS

Over our few days of intensive research and practice together, it became clear that we would have to find strategies for 'inviting' people into the intimacy of our friendship. When you have a best friend, a trusted collaborator, a person so close to you and so much on the same wavelength that you use 'shorthand' for everything, it can be difficult for people outside that relationship to understand your jokes, references, humor, etc. So it occurred to us that in this phase of wanting to share with an audience, we'd have to find some dramaturgical strategies to not only make our binomial process more transparent, but also to share who we are and what our material is with the audience.

This led us to integrate an 'introduction' to the binomial. We usually begin with two photos from our shared archive, and we each 'embody' the pose in one photo. Then we improvise, sometimes together, sometimes one after the other, in order to create a movement bridge, a dance, between those two poses. Now we are also interested in sharing how these photos became our source material, so that the poses do not seem randomly selected, rather carefully curated out of an extensive shared vocabulary of lived experience. So we project the photos for the audience to see, and take turns speaking into a microphone to share some details about each photo. Throughout this ad-libbed introduction, we offer the audience, as well as each other, insights into what we see: the composition of the photo but also the imagination it sparks, or perhaps an emotional or socio-political context in which to read the original photo and, later, our 'expression' of it as one part of a binomial.

By passing through speaking/spoken word, we also make a link between verbal and non-verbal forms of expression. There are no rules to the information we share about each photo—the point of this introduction is not to give the whole truth about the photo's origins, rather to engage with its material and imagination-provoking qualities in order to spark the binomial imagination in our bodies and activate it in the minds of those watching.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

We held a work-in-progress showing for a small audience (6 friends/colleagues from Maya's dance and parent community) on the last day in the studio to see how our 'dramaturgy' or order of events help to support the binomial-process in real time. Some of our dramaturgical strategies did indeed seem to work: introducing the photos to the audience really allowed the audience to 'enter our universe' and created space in the work for casual attention – which is very helpful for watching dance and accepting the experimental nature of the work. Passing the microphone back and forth before starting to make movement binomials also helped us ease into the process and 'tune' our thoughts and feelings prior to 'jumping in' to the poses and moving. It's nice for there to be certain textures, images, feelings, memories, experiences, compositional choices, statements, etc. in the air before delving into the binomial process, which is one that does not lead to any kind of 'resolution', rather to unfolding and opening even more unexpected correlations between verbal and non-verbal thought objects.

This work seems to be branching off into different formats for performing and experiencing friendship. Rather than only being about dance and writing, or verbal and non-verbal language, or even about individuals and couples, it seems to also be a process for experiencing and enjoying friendship. Like a role-playing game where you play many facets of yourself and interact with the multifacetedness of your best friend. It's difficult to call this a performance, per se, it's more like a game that is activated live in front of an audience, and that helps two individuals explore and deepen their friendship. While doing

so, they unfold a multiplicity of narratives and play in the overlap between narrative forms (through image, movement, storytelling and even writing).

Our next iteration of this research will take us into letter-writing territory, which is perhaps the origin of our intimacy. As teenagers living hundreds of miles apart, letters became the 'virtual space' in which we could nurture our love for one another. This was pre-Internet but even when the Internet became a tool for us, we still wrote and sent letters and journals back and forth. We're not interested in researching the impact of slow processes like hand-writing on intimacy, closeness, etc... per se, but in how correspondence affords a different time-space in which to cultivate love and creativity. So for the next six months, we intend to reflect on this project via written letter (sent by post), with the aim of editing the conversations into a self-published 'zine or for publication online.

Another idea is to continue developing the binomial practice as a workshop-lab and rather than aim for a 'finished product' that would be performed (although this remains an option too). We would like to invite other 'binomials', that is to say, other pairs of friends, to embody these scores as a way for them to open up a new space in which to nurture their friendship. And so we could multiply the 'binomials' and have them unfold side-by-side for example in a curated performance event or as an 'exhibition'.

We are currently looking for residencies to continue this work in the USA, potentially with the support of Performance Works NW (Linda Austin) in Portland, Oregon, or if we receive positive answers to general calls, for instance at 'ARTS at King Street Station' in Seattle, Washington. We also hope to publish our correspondence in an arts or dance journal such as Contact Quarterly, Critical Correspondence or similar print/online publication. We are considering self-publishing the binomials, scores, and our correspondence piece online as well, or in print, and funding the endeavor through a series of on-line performances.

