Through Breath to Depth: Nurturing Dramaturgical Coherence in *What is The Water?*

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Abstract

This multi-modal thesis seeks to integrate an impulsive, psychophysical studio practice with vision, dramaturgical coherence and comprehension during the creation of the devised solo performance: *What is the Water?* The research identifies the character of the artistic challenge by observing my own habitual thought and behaviour patterns; it also introduces solutions that would engage the left-brain in the artistic practice, both inside and outside the studio. Through an investigation of the writings and methodologies of theatre creators such as Anne Bogart, Pina Bausch, Eugenio Barba and Rudolf Laban, my aim is to negotiate the gap between impulsive creation and conscious shaping, conjugating them into an intuitive flow. The second part of this research focuses on the autobiographical content explored in *What is the Water?* The play is a physical exploration of grounding in the face of irrecoverable loss: face to face with the powerful presence of her homeland only in absentia, a self-exiled woman from Istanbul dedicates herself to finding a new feeling of home.

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I. ARTISTIC RESEARCH DOCUMENT

Statement of Artistic Challenge

In the first years of my career as an actor and a performer, I was repeatedly praised on how strongly I was connected to my psycho-physical impulses, how clear they were and how compelling it was to watch me on stage. Directors were happy to work with me because my physical fluency could offer a lot to their directorial vision. The authenticity I offered was prized. This may be a dream come true for any aspiring performer, but it soon became a trap for me as I did not know how to repeat the authentic discovery at will in a coherent manner. I took several workshops with a desire to overcome my challenge, but most acting techniques had me stuck in my head, second guessing myself, which further alienated me from my strength. In a world that was seeking heart and authenticity, my work was suffering from a lack of conscious intention. Not knowing if the impulse was going to be there when I needed it, I started to underwork to protect it. Everyone was trying not to "overthink" (in theatre parlance) while I was under-thinking my way through my craft. This strategy ended up in a backlash, bringing fear and control in place of freedom and abandon.

With over ten years of experience in performing, I am more confident now in keeping the balance between the capacity to let go into instinctual creativity, and the ability to shape it for repeatability. During a performance, given that I am physically and mentally fit, if I relax, trust, become internally alive and engage from moment to moment, committed to the physical actions of the character, the impulse I initially have found re-emerges. When I do not try to control the outcome, I usually succeed in re-creating an authentic performance. Trust is the base ingredient of this process.

Creating my own material is still relatively new to me. Now at York University,

pursuing an MFA degree in Performance/Creation, I find myself facing a very similar problem that overpowered me as an actor for years: too much yin, not much yang; in other words, a lot of heart, not enough head. Letting go easily but not being able shape the resultant material. Leaning on my impulses for creation has seemed to work well for me, but I am afraid to let go of the initial discoveries in order to look at it closely and to see what more it offers to communicate. Akin to my experience as a performer where I am so afraid to lose the vitality of the moment, this time as a creator I end up working in plethora of material. Out of fear of upsetting my natural flow of inspiration, I keep on swimming in a pool of immediacy and do not know how to dive deeply into critical research. Moreover, these theatrical structures seemingly belong to the same piece, but because of my lack of experience and technique in crafting a greater backbone, they start losing their capacity for meaning and their consanguinity[1]. The nature of my work is very welcoming for loose structures and bindings as I am interested in non-linear narration; however, it must not be an excuse to avoid considering the overall experience of the theatrical event.

Being connected to my body, my psycho-physical awareness and being able to be present to what comes in performance is a tremendous gift. In most instances, it is much harder to teach and learn. My thesis exploration is not to shift this or extract it from my process or not even to give it less importance. On the contrary, I would like to research how I can support this natural process so that I can take my artistic practice to the next level, where it is not only visceral, authentic and alive but also coherent, layered and

[1] I borrow the term consanguinity from Eugenio Barba. In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* he uses this term to point to the belonging together of various fragments or images not according to the direction of a logical, clear plan but because of consanguinity, that they are descended from the same "ancestor" or source (59).

intact.

Mythic Imagination and Rational Mind

During a somewhat dysfunctional childhood, I had a family of gnome-like, imaginary friends, six of them, all with different names and characteristics. When I interacted with them (I would talk out loud to them, carry them from one room to the other, take their advice on things, etc.), an invisible shield protecting me from the ordinary world formed around me. The boundless desire to abandon myself to the strong pull of a play sphere of any kind meant stepping into a magical, mythical[2] universe of alternative consciousness where outstanding things were possible.

The story of this little Gülce may seem obvious to us. We may say that she had been running away from the shared reality of the outside world that was boring her, to experience a more fun, inner world. As she grew older, it was socially expected of her to find ways to conform to the ordinary reality. In his book *The Shaman's Doorway*, Stephen Larsen puts it as: "In our conceptual and abstracting socialization process the objective is to supplant this primitive, magical thinking by rational processes" (23). In fact, as I grew older, my social self developed new strategies to cope with the world—some of which included patterns of control, shame and fear—losing contact with, if not repressing, the full capacity of the mythic imagination. I found myself divided into two: the part of me that is wild and free in creation mode and the part of me that is inhibited and frozen.

I was under the impression that my challenge was engaging with the piece

[2] My research does not include the study of the phenomenon of myth itself. However by using the word mythical here, I refer to Stephen Larsen's description of the mythic imagination. Larsen in his book *The Shaman's Doorway*, accepts the separate existence of an imaginary realm as is and not as an interpretation of the reality (19). Although the book focuses mostly on the shaman's role of bridging the two worlds, I relate to this dichotomic existence in my creative practice.

dramaturgically; however, the feedback I received from the York Theatre Faculty and my cohort did not fully concur with this thought. The excerpts that I shared from my early days in the studio were received as provocative, deep and intact: dramaturgically alive. Now I see that my difficulty in carving out the creative work does not come from a lack of vision per se but from a lack of dialogue between these two selves: between my wild intuition and cerebral function, between the feminine and masculine energies of creation.

Feeling and Meaning

During the second term of my MFA at York University we often had to prepare written and oral assignments examining the piece that we were working on, requiring us to define what our work was about. These exercises were necessary in terms of learning how to publicize our work in a competitive arts community; however, trying to assign meaning to these visceral yet raw excerpts that were emerging from my studio practice put me in the mindset of a priori decision rather than discovery. I started to discern the material looking at it from outside in, concentrating on what it meant rather than what it felt like. As a result, in the studio, my thoughts have become stagnant.

The Polish-American scholar Alfred Korzybski, famously says: “The map is not the territory” (Korzybski 58) and Alan Watts, one of the philosophers who affected my perception in life most restates it with humor: “...eating the menu instead of the dinner” (Watts 115). The practice of articulating what my piece was about was in fact like drawing a map or writing a menu which resulted in my defocusing from the experience, the feeling and the flow of the piece. I was not seeing the piece for what it was, abandoning myself fully to it in the studio but I was trapped in a place of trying to understand and manipulate it.

Anne Bogart in the introduction of her well-known book *A Director Prepares* addresses the challenging co-existence between our producer selves and the artist/gift giver selves: "How can we live in this fast and competitive environment and still walk into a rehearsal able to call upon the wild, violent child in us that makes the art poetic and magnificent and dangerous and terrifying?" (5)

Accepting that pitching and promoting during the very early stages of creation is now commonplace in the field of performing arts, I am in need of a method to keep my mind alive and moving along with my body, so that it is not fixated on a premeditated result: not allowing the assigned meaning to obviate the felt meaning. After all, in my creative practice I am not looking to convey one meaning but hoping for the audience to find theirs.

To differ and heighten the function of these very different elements of my creative process, I am looking into different ways to separate my project descriptions, grant writing or any kind of production work from my creative discipline. Even as I move closer to the date of a premiere, each time I go into the studio I will tell myself something like this: "I am leaving my assumptions aside about what this show is about and giving all of myself to the service of the full discovery of its hidden meanings." To make my business obligations less horrifying, I will try to look at this part of the work dispassionately, give it assigned time frames that are never longer than what my creative work occupies each day and stop when this designated time expires.

Hidden Perfectionism

Even though my family is filled with women who are high achievers, excellence seekers and perfectionists, I never thought of myself as one of them. I was not stopped in

my tracks when stepping into the unknown or obsessed about a certain result. When in the studio or rehearsal I can feel a sense of abandon come into play without any attachment to result. However, in the process of shaping what surfaces from the realm of imagination, I stagnate, having resistance to work, and I procrastinate until an unconscious structure that yearns to be known bursts out of me. Now I recognize this as hidden perfectionism, which is a need to control, a distorted form of disbelief, and diffidence.

In *Big Magic*, her book about creative living, Elizabeth Gilbert describes perfectionism as fear in "fancy shoes and a mink coat" (167). Perfectionism is where playing ceases to be fun. If it is not fun, why should I do it? I start to put off the fun task. Gilbert also touches on the relationship between perfectionism and being a woman:

> "Too many women still seem to believe that they are not allowed to put themselves forward at all, until both they and their work are perfect and beyond criticism. Meanwhile putting forth work that is far from perfect rarely stops men from participating in the global cultural conversation" (168).

As I come to identify some of this resistance as a patriarchal message that occupies my brain, I am declaring war upon it. I am now ready for tools to embrace my creative work more fully, tame and befriend my mind to enhance its focus and engagement with the creative work. Elizabeth Gilbert proposes an attitude of curiosity instead of fear (9). Fear is repetitive. It whispers the same exact tune into my ear all day long: "You will never be brilliant, this is too difficult, tone your ambition down…" These inhibiting mantras bother many of us every now and again. They create resistance in the form of laziness or impatience that need to be overcome in order to get hard work done. Properly armed about the facts of the nature of resistance to work, I want to turn my mind into an ally that engages with the world more creatively, but I need to declutter it first.

Daily Routines

> "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too" (Murray, The Scottish Himalayan Expedition).

I lived through my twenties as a "tormented" artist who would go about impulsively from one activity to the next. I did not see the value in routine. My untamed desires, wonder and instincts pulled me to and from one place to the other. Listening to my impulses allowed me to throw myself into experiences I may have missed if I thought about them twice. It also helped me learn the lessons that life wanted to teach me, but lack of routine never gave me a chance to cultivate the wisdom I might have gained from those experiences.

As an inspiration seeker of thirty plus years and as a person who comes from a highly impulsive culture, I know it is not easy for me to jump into a way of life just by deciding to do so. As I was searching for a way to trick my system, I found Alex Soojung-Kim Pang's book: *Rest*. Pang does thorough research on the working habits of acclaimed artists, innovators and scientists, supporting it with relevant research on brain activity. I realized that, if I shaped my day around a designated time for deliberate rest of my body and mind, I could tackle the resistance to work. This way I would not spend endless, fruitless hours in the studio or in procrastination. According to the foreword by Arianna Huffington in *Rest*: "Very creative people work in highly intensive daily bursts of four or five hours (divided into 90 to 120-minute periods, with short breaks)—and call it a day" (qtd. in Pang xvi). But these very creative people also have a very particular way of spending their non-working hours: disconnected from excessive socializing or the use

of social media, exercising seriously to keep their body operating at its peak, with plenty of time to sleep, walk and nap. Apparently, many exemplary creative figures also do their most intense work early in the morning with their freshest mind, before the world crawls into their day (Pang 53-86).

A dear cohort member said to me recently regarding my work: “I just wish for you to be able to stay in one thing for a longer amount of time.” Such a great insight. Profound work cannot be done in a frenzy. My mind cannot be left unleashed if I value my work enough to give it the deep state of focus it deserves, in order to thrive.

To de-clutter and make the best of my mind, I am going to introduce a daily routine: I will practice waking up early and give my best self to my work for four to five hours. I will meditate in the morning and exercise later in the day. In the afternoon I will nap, rest, walk, muse, read, meet with friends, run errands and finally, at night, go to bed early. This structure holds much freedom within but still asks of me a daily dedication to discipline. When I make deliberate time for rest everyday, a structure that would have suffocated me years ago, feels not only doable but is also a relief.

After accepting that I must face resistance and work my way through it every day like all artists do, it is now time to look at the different ways of engaging my analytical mind—my left brain—in the creation process.

Connecting with Artistic Ancestors

My theatrical language is rooted in Expressionism: the form in which I am interested reveals physical expressions of a subconscious inner reality and explores its relationship to an outer reality (Bogart 33). During the natural flow of my creative practice and artistic research I have realized that I am following in the footsteps of

German Expressionist Dance. I have always admired Pina Bausch's work but as I researched more deeply into her creation process and her artistic ancestors such as Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, et al., I recognized a similar creative thinking pattern that I share with them. To give an example of many similar coincidences: I thought I came up with the term "movement-poetry" while trying to describe the nature and the form of the work that interests me, until I read in Karen K. Bradley's biography of Rudolf Laban, that he said: "good directors are movement poets" (Qtd. in Bradley 28).

I relate very much to Pina Bausch's impetus to express and the challenges she faces while working. Bausch talks about her process to Royd Climenhaga:

> I wanted to express something that I could not express with words at all. Something I have to say urgently, but not verbally. These are feelings or questions, I never have an answer. I am dealing with something we all sense, that occupies all of us in a similar language. I am the audience as well. And when I see, I feel something. I can only come from my own instinct. When I trust my feeling, I believe it's not only mine. I share it with others (qtd. in Climenhaga 40).

I feel similarly while exploring in the studio. Furthermore, though I am devising a solo piece for my MFA thesis, my interests are not limited to solo performance. I have already started to explore more broadly in this style with other theatre practitioners.

Both my creation process and the creative excerpts that result from it are outside of any conventional dramatic structure. There is no pre-written text or a character to jump from, but merely a series of moments. I feel something simmering inside of me, a feeling accompanied by images and sensations, in need of finding a way out. To assist the expression, in my studio practice, I tune into a psycho-physical, interoceptive way of being and I follow that thread. Just like a writer whose pen seems to have a life of its own while writing, this inner need for expression moves me in a certain way and I follow that

need. Usually it starts with a vision. At times it almost feels like watching things happen with my mind's eye. It might give birth to text, to song, to a relationship/interaction with an object or stay in the language of abstract gestures. It may also be, as it is in most cases, a combination of the above. This instinctive, impulsive approach anchors the work in a metaphorical realm that has a life of its own. Since the impetus is deeply personal, the theatrical excerpts that derive from this process retain a certain quality of presence, seduction and coherence for the audience; however, they remain devoid of an intentional thought process that runs through them to tie them together. As excerpts start to emerge, the theme and content make themselves more apparent, starting to demand a certain quality of focus and expertise in weaving them together. When I find myself in this phase of the work, I panic. Anne Bogart, in explaining Martha Graham's Expressionist approach, states: "…a performer must search for the meanings behind gesture and expression and then reassemble them, working them into a pattern, a design, a purpose" (38). I am having difficulty in seeing or creating this pattern.

Seduction and Comprehension

In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, according to Eugenio Barba, a performer's seductive energy quality can draw the audience's attention in a way that precedes intellectual understanding. However, he adds that, "Neither seduction nor comprehension can last for very long without one another: the seduction would be brief, the comprehension would lack interest" (54). Physical and mental action are inseparable, and it is essential to work on the bridge which joins the physical and mental banks of the river of creative process. "The relationship between these two banks," he continues, "does not only have to do with a polarity which is part of every individual at the moment

when she acts, composes, creates. It also links two wide, specifically theatrical polarities: the polarity between the actor and director, and the subsequent polarity between performer and spectator" (55). Working on a solo thesis performance created, performed and directed by myself with little dramaturgical outside help asks of me to create a strong bridge between the two and integrate an adapted way of thinking with the impulsive nature of my practice. What way of thinking would enhance and contribute to my physical creation process?

As the bulk of my material has been created in an attempt to bring about a cohesive, evening long event, I started to test each and every excerpt with a rational approach which lead to a loss of the initial sense of an inner, almost unconscious direction I had. Prioritizing comprehension turned out to be an attack on the mysterious seductive pull and the autonomous mystical life of the performance. I was dividing my artist self into two parts: one that creates and performs, the other that shapes and directs. My creator/performer was competent in what she was doing but my shaper/director was an amateur. I needed a new language to hold space for their opposing tensions to work together.

It is easier to free the mind during the very early stages of creation; the shape of the piece is still vague enough for the mind to sit back and relax. But as soon as some meaning or content start presenting themselves, my mind is stuck in the past or the future. I need to give the mind something to do in the present, so that it can be engaged in the amaranthine creation process; so that it can abandon the idea that it is either fully responsible for executing an organic, instinctual action or unwelcome in the creative process, and needs to beat it.

Dilated Mind

According to Eugenio Barba; just like there is a pre-expressive level of a performer's body—the level at which the performer directs her presence on the stage independent of and before her final goals and expressive results, there is also a pre-expressive level of her mind. A skillful performer's body seems slightly expanded during performance; also, the mind has a similar capacity to expand. These qualities are named respectively as: dilated body and dilated mind (55). They are interdependent, two faces of the same process that has to do with performer's body/mind in life[3]. Three modalities characterize the dilated mind: peripeteia, disorientation and precision. Peripeteia, the term borrowed from Aristotle's Poetics, in this context is used as leaps in the train of thought. Allowing a story or physical actions within the story to develop in unexpected ways or to change their context by applying the negation principle as a mental attitude (56). The physical negation principle that is present in many performance techniques, can be described as starting an action in the opposite direction of its conclusion: kneeling before jumping, stretching the arm back to throw a stone, etc. (57). How does this negation principle present itself in the way a theatre creator thinks? Negating, in this sense, is a voluntary disorientation. It is the pre-discovery of a new direction. There is danger of falling into chaos as one negates the meaning, the point of departure (58). But right action is to follow this unknown thread of thought just as I do with my body in a physical exploration, up to its conclusion. It is about thinking the thought; moreover, it is about letting the thought be thought. Barba explains:

> "To think the thought implies waste, sudden transitions, abrupt turns, unexpected connections between previously unrelated levels and contexts,

[3] See Franco Ruffini's essay "The Dilated Mind" in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (67).

> routes which intersect and vanish. It is as if different voices, different thoughts, each with its own logic, were simultaneously present and began to collaborate in an unplanned way, combining precision and fortuitousness, enjoyment of the game for its own sake and tension towards a result." (59)

To concretize the doings of a dilated mind, in the same book, "A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology," Franco Ruffini examines Stanislavski's "perezhivanie"; semantically revealing the word as "vitalization of the mental horizon" (65). Perezhivanie entails bombarding the actor with questions (magic ifs and others) until the clarity of the given conditions start vitalizing her mind, bringing her to a state ready to act. Ruffini states:

> "Perezhivanie is the construction of a substitute psycho-mental apparatus which supplants both the daily apparatus and the interpretative clichès... ...it causes the actor to vitalize his mind rather than relive something in his own mind" (65).

In the same essay, Ruffini points out Stanislavski's method is engrained in the way Stanislavski teaches. Maieutics is both the teaching that Stanislavski is pointing at and the form of Platonic dialogue between Torzov and Kostia[4]. Ruffini explains that "Maieutics, which means the art of the midwife, is the art of bringing thought to life and therefore of making thought breathe" (66).

My studio practice can benefit a lot from this technique of inexhaustible questioning, in order to change the preconceptions that I withhold looking at the process from a distance. Instead of trying to see things from outside to nail them down, I will start asking questions to specify and concretize the condition in which my body is moving. I have not been asking enough questions, with the assumption that I know where the creative impulse is coming from. My misconception was that I had to remove myself

[4] The mentor and mentee who are in dialogue throughout Stanislavski's celebrated books: *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*

from the work in order to work on its coherence; however, with a “dilated” mind I could stay in the work and discover its potentialities. Now I must discover what kind of questions I need to ask.

Asking questions was a long-standing method that Pina Bausch developed, clarified and used in every piece. In *Pina Bausch: Dance Dance Otherwise We Are Lost* by Marion Meyer, Bausch's dramaturgical collaborator Raimund Hoghe's rehearsal notes from *Two Cigarettes in The Dark*, 1985 appear:

> “...asks for something 'in waltz step' and sentences 'in which God is mentioned', when does one say shit and how one can use the word mother, gives 'a little happiness' as a prompt, asks the dancers to 'do something with your stomachs'...” (Qtd. in Meyer, 59).

Not only are her prompts open-ended questions but also her point of departure to find the underlying metaphor of her pieces comes from a close examination of questions. Working on *Kontakthof*, she started with the idea of “tenderness” then the questions follow: “What is it? How does one do it? Where does it go? And how far does tenderness go at all? When isn’t it tenderness anymore? Or is it still tenderness?” (qtd. in Climenhaga 72). Another famous example of the type of questions she brought to the rehearsal was that she asked, “how do you cry?” instead of “why do you cry?” (Climenhaga 52); a subtle but a very important shift in perspective. She looked for how each individual is different in their expressions and also how each one relates to the question at hand. These questions and prompts do not come from the intellect. They have an instinctual common ground. They are like hints to a story that is waiting to be discovered; Bausch was the detective revealing slowly what was behind the curtain. In this sense the process speaks to Barba’s *peripeteia*: thinking the thought. About her own questioning process Pina Bausch said:

> "...I know precisely what I am looking for, but I know it from my feelings and not my head. That is why one can never ask directly. That would be too clumsy, and the answer would be too banal. I know what I am looking for, but I can't explain it." (Qtd. in Meyer 60)

Based on the research in this chapter, as an experiment, I will work with two different types of question: firstly, I will work on asking questions that address the overall feeling of the piece, questions with the potential to create a magnet that would pull the excerpts towards a common inquiry. Secondly, I will exercise maieutics to discover the potential of each excerpt that has been created.

Asking questions will help me discover the path of the piece, freeing me from making assumptions or working with premeditated answers, but what are some other ways in which I can work towards decisiveness, articulation, repeatability and specificity?

Violence

Creating great art demands dancing between flow (impulsive) and shaping (conscious) and a crucial step in shaping is discerning emergent material: choosing and eliminating what belongs to the piece and what does not. The process of working on *What is The Water?* feels like putting together a three-dimensional puzzle all by myself, of which I do not know the end shape. I need to change the pieces around, turn them upside down trying to connect them to each other; some of my favorite pieces may not even belong to the end shape. However, there are endless options. I could feel my way through them forever. How does one know where to stop looking? One doesn't! As Ann Bogart puts it clearly in her book "A Director Prepares", to stop means to "to choose death" (50). She states:

> "Committing to a choice feels violent. It is the sensation of leaping off a

> high diving-board. It feels violent because the decision is an aggression against nature and inertia. Even as seemingly small a choice as deciding the precise angle of a chair feels like a violation of the free flux and flow of life" (57).

She offers an attitude of exactitude even about the things one does not know. "It is not about the right idea or even right decision…rather it is about the quality of decisiveness" (60). In the shaping phase of my work I shall dare to take more risks, just as I do while in the early stages of creation where this abandonment comes more easily to me. These decisions do not have to be any less intuitive just because they are made from a place of seeing the bigger picture. I cannot imagine a painter or a sculptor dividing their creative process firmly. They just follow the flow both when the shapes are yet to appear and after the shapes have emerged. Theatre creation has in fact different stages, many aspects, but at the end of the day it is one complete action of birthing and for things to be born, other things need to die.

Precision

Therefore, the fear of choosing death is not limited to shaping the piece. Also within the exact articulation of any given moment my work suffers from vagueness that results in a lack of coherent style. I prioritize working from impulse and according to Royd Climenhaga, impulse is "always a specific person in a specific situation" (99). A specific person in a specific situation demands precision of physical action augmented by the emotions at stake. In the way I aspire to work, to feel is always more valuable than to understand; I resist creating one-ended meanings. I prefer to keep my work intrinsic, in abstraction.

The pioneer of Tanztheater, Rudolf Laban, sees style as being grounded in one's own appetites and suggests that what it reveals most about personal style is the process of

change within movement (qtd. in Bradley 46). Rudolf Laban had developed the movement training called *Effort*, which is the inner attitude towards a motion factor such as time, weight or focus (Bradley 42). His aim was to capture the essence of movement in dynamical shifts. Bradley explains:

> "…capturing Effort changes through notation is a way of developing the eye to see and commit to the specificities of quality. The actor/dancer/performer can read movement and recapitulate the ephemeral aspects" (52).

Since my studio time is about visceral discovery, while improvising I unconsciously move in one way and when I try to repeat the improvisation I might change or miss out a small detail whose importance I neglect. But that subtlety can cost a moment its entire essence. Especially for this work, towards the end of the rehearsal period I will invite Jewels Krauss as an outside eye into the studio, who will systematically observe what Laban described as my "latent capacities" and "typical tendencies" (52). In order to know what to look for, we are going to use, but not be limited to Laban's Effort vocabulary. The aim of this process is going to be to expand meaning through specificity but also to gain more control of the performance through awareness of my own movement makeup.

II PERFORMANCE RESEARCH DOCUMENT

The Longing

Making art for me is practicing my heart-sight[5]. I am fascinated diving into the rich darkness surfacing with gestures, movements, characters, images, words that spring

[5] Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's inspirational character the Little Prince states: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly: what is essential is invisible to the eye." I have lived by this quote; it reminds me of the depth and mystery of life whenever I am stuck in the hassle of everyday life or in a narrative in my head.

out from our shared limitlessness. Within this limitless unknown, I find a reoccurring theme of longing for home and wholeness. Even when I think I am set out to tell a different story, I find myself trying to tell the same story over and over from different perspectives.

I have always felt a piece of my heart was missing in me: as if my heart was broken to begin with, the pieces were roughly glued together except for one. The core piece was still obscure, hidden somewhere deep in my universe, waiting to be found, like a jewel. One might say that this need is in fact the need of my wounded inner child, who is trying to mend the broken relationship of her parents or it may be a recollection rooted in my DNA, from my time in the womb, so warm, soft and so lost. More existentially, this longing could be of the soul, feeling like an estranged alien in this world, looking for its home: a longing for truth with a capital T, the search of an ever-present divine fire that I desired to burn with.

Belonging to a Place

> "The lure of the local is the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies. It is the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to prevailing alienation."
> (Lippard 7).

> "The incomplete self longs for the fragments to be brought together. This can't be done without a context, a place" (Lippard 25).

I left my country after a disheartened resistance. Separating from my life in my beloved home city Istanbul with this feeling of defeat, fit the bill. My story of a broken home mirrored itself majestically in this loss and a primordial longing translated itself into falling erotically in love with the beautiful Istanbul. Her everlasting presence has been inspiration to so many artists throughout history. It is mesmerizing to me how

Istanbul was endlessly seized, captured, violated, dominated by different greedy rulers over the eons and how every new commander made sure to humiliate or destroy the legacy of the previous one. Yet, amid all this, Istanbul with all her sweet wilderness continued to be just her magnetic self, extending her arms into east and west, laying bare naked like an open wound without losing anything from her hypnotizing essence.

The initial working title of this piece was *I Thought I Could Live Without*, researching the possibility of living without the sense of belonging. Then the piece found its title when I read this joke sometime this year, as I was working on my project: A fish asks another fish: "How do you like the water?" The other fish replies: "What is the water?" (Krajeski).

Leaving Istanbul, in consideration of a self-exile to Canada, made me realize how intrinsically I am bound to this unique place in the world. I did not grasp in what ways Istanbul was carved deep down within me before I left. My body is an extension of hers.

An aspect of this piece is an incessant quest to find ways to understand how Istanbul's intricacies are present in my body and to pay an homage to its radiance, personifying Istanbul as a lover, like many artists have done before me and will do so until the end of time.

Being from Istanbul means being neither this nor that: It is being in between. It is being both. No one is really from Istanbul. When I say I am from Istanbul, the question: 'Which Istanbul?' immediately follows in my mind. Istanbul is so many things; constantly shape shifting. One can only accept her as a temporary lover. We are all just passing by, lucky to be witnessing her majestic dance between the extreme opposites: oriental and occidental, heart and mind, feminine and masculine, order and disarray.

Intoxicated by her being, my fate is bound with hers even from afar. I feel her heartbeat inside of me as a bridge that interconnects past, present and future.

Belonging to a Story

> "Finding a fitting place for oneself in the world is finding a place for oneself in a story." (Lippard 33).
>
> "The ones that remain, have to tell the story of the ones who have left, for as long as they shall live" (Temelkuran 62)[6].

In June 2013, an environmentalist group of Istanbulites occupied a park to protect an ever-dwindling cluster of centenary trees from a governmental gentrification project. Gezi Park, one of the last green areas still standing in centre city, was facing the threat of being bulldozed to become a shopping mall. Many other cultural and historical places were facing a similar destiny of demolition for profit. This spark brought together hundreds of thousands of people against the oppressive policies of the government and soon after what started as Gezi Park Protests turned into a nationwide movement of solidarity and resistance with creative and peaceful protests. Engin Geçtan, a renowned psychiatry professor and a writer, defines the movement as one of a kind, stating that it was trans-ideological (Geçtan). Gezi Resistance brought together many people from different world views and backgrounds. It leaned on values like freedom of expression, solidarity, diversity, democracy and community. There was hope for change: a dream of living in peace was not just a concept but a practice.

The summer turned eventually into fall as the police violently interfered with the occupation of parks and squares, subjugating the protests that were now spread nationwide. People who wanted their voices to be heard continued to get together in their

[6] Translated by candidate.

own neighbourhood parks, organizing forums to discuss how to bring change. A generation was politicized. The Gezi Spirit gave birth to a new political party from the left wing, however it failed to unify the opposition. Through the various elections that followed, the solidarity was so strong that almost half the population, including myself, would volunteer to be present counting votes and to ensure their safe delivery to the Supreme Committee of Elections, to impede any possible fraud. Finally, in 2015, the ruling party AKP lost its secured position of ten years, not getting the majority in votes. However, the backlash was severe. In July 2015, soon after the elections, as the negotiations for forming a new government were happening, a bomb exploded at a peace march in Suruç, a city in east Turkey with mostly Kurdish population, killing 33 people and injuring hundreds. In October 2015, a bigger peace march was organized in the capital Ankara, in solidarity with Suruç, demonstrating that the young people of Turkey were not giving up on their demand for peace and human rights. Two other bombs exploded in this peace march, with 96 killed, 246 injured: the deadliest attack in Modern Turkish History (Cunningham). The organizers of both attacks remain obscure to this day and the victims were all innocent and unarmed people, mostly young university students and bystanders. In November 2015, the elections were repeated and AKP secured its previous position of majority in the government.

Since then, the oppressive government continued its transition into a callous regime wherein Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the single authority, imprisoning and domineering all who opposed him. There was less and less air to breathe for the country's youth, the country was economically getting weaker. The government kept demolishing cultural, historical and ecological heritage for profit.

Even though Gezi Park and the trees remain intact for the time being, the past five years led to a massive brain drain, with the country's educated-secular youth leaving home in search of a better life, losing hope in their country's future. I am one of them. History already has a name for us: "Gezi Diaspora" (Gürsel).

The decision to leave home is never an easy one. In retrospect, I can see that it was somewhere between the bombing and the election that I made an inner decision to leave my country, at least for a while. Since I have left, I feel like I am in a constant state of leaving. A decision that grows stronger each day. It feels impossible to even consider going back to live there until some major shift in the political situation occurs. I have left my family and friends behind to grow old, without me. I feel lost in a big ocean, having left the motherland, with no sight of land on the horizon.

Creating *What is The Water?* I have been influenced by the journalist and writer Ece Temelkuran's book *Iyilik Güzellik*, a collection of articles that she has written from 2013 to 2017. These dates may mark the dawn of what will likely be remembered as the Erdogan Regime. The state of the people of the country, especially the ones that was participant in the Gezi Resistance, throughout these years is very well reflected in her writings, as well as in the works of the Gezi Diaspora. The prolonged loss of power, surrendering a battle at a time everyday, the scab we formed and little bubbles we created for ourselves to deal with the inevitable loss, dissipation of our new found sense of community, collective delusion, collective depression, collective alcoholism, anger, desperation, oppression, fear, and many other inexplicable feelings that emerge in the face of this unexplainable turmoil that were present in Temelkuran's writings, reminded me the depths of my feelings during those years that led up to my leaving.

Belonging to Memories

> "For those of us who lost a "heartland" memories are all we have… we must re-member and re-invent and create new contexts for our histories and ourselves" (Lippard 66).

> "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Homi K. Bhabha 215).

Lucy R. Lippard states: "Lure of the local is not always a place but the illusion of home, as a memory" (32) The character I created in *What is The Water?* has a compulsion to remember. She tries to forget and leave the burden of the memories to form herself a new identity to live by. As she forgets her past to build a new future, the protective bubble she constructs around her grows bigger, leaving her numb and rootless. Memories are all she has to feel at "home". How can she reconcile with what has been lost but still carry the burden of the memories? Where does she belong now?

What I experienced in the Gezi Movement; I cannot explain fully. What my city is like, I would not know how to describe. I am clinging to half-imagined memories, with the impossibility of telling her story, my story. Words lose their meaning, as my heart echoes with longing. By working on this piece, I am trying my hand at discovering the universal layers of the question of grounding and belonging.

The Show

What is The Water? is a one-woman physical theatre piece. I am creating, directing and performing the show with a minimum outside help. At this point, my estimate is that the show runs at approximately 40-minutes. The set consists of 10 chairs, a carpet and a piece of chalk that I use as storytelling tools, creating images and metaphors by physically engaging with them throughout the show.

The final thesis performance at York University will be on February 28th, 2019 and March 1st, 2019. *What is The Water?* is also going to be part of the microfestival YESFest at Theatre Centre from April 22nd-28th, 2019. The festival is financially supported by York University and organized by the 2019 MFA Performance/Creation cohort.

The Collective: Under the Umbrella

In January 2018, Jewels Krauss and I co-founded the performing arts collective "Under the Umbrella". Under the Umbrella is a Toronto-based, international performing arts collective that explores devised storytelling through an image and movement-based practice. Inspired by the 20th century Art movement Expressionist Dance, our work is process oriented, cross-cultural and is rooted at the threshold between dance and theatre. Our mandate insists that we exist on the grounds of artistic integrity and aesthetic risk-taking. Our work explores the depth of human condition and strives to contribute to the diversity of the stories being told. We would rather ask questions than come up with answers. We use the condition of the performing body in space as one of the primary sources of inspiration enabling us to communicate beyond the limitations of words.

In July 2018 Under the Umbrella made its debut at the Toronto Fringe Festival with the collective creation "Thousand Beginnings," with Margaret Muriel Legere joining the collective as a co-creator and director of the piece. *What is The Water?* will be the second show that Under the Umbrella produces.

Collaborators

Jewels Krauss

My artistic partner, Jewels Krauss intends to act as an outside eye for the last

three weeks of the rehearsals. She is going to help me birth the story dramaturgically. Her experience in physical theatre and the fact that we have worked together as performer/creators in three different projects makes her a right candidate in terms of observing the habitual patterns in which I move, noting the shifts and variety in my tempo, spatial use or lack of them, along with the quality of movement in different sections of the piece. Jewels Krauss will also translate the first part of the show from Turkish to English.

Can Kömleksiz

Can Kömleksiz is an actor from Izmir, Turkey who is also undertaking his MFA in Theatre at York University. He appears in two scenes briefly, once singing as a confederate from the audience and the other time running into stage to hug the character I play, Azra. His presence in the piece is the materialization of the distant memories that the character Azra is wrestling with. He appears as a metaphor for a forgotten feeling. He will not be credited as an actor in any promotional material, such as posters or flyers because he is intended to be an element of surprise in the play.

Important Support

During the creation process I have gotten a lot of feedback and support from my colleagues in the Solo Performance Creation class and Erika Batdorf. I had a six-hour dramaturgy meeting with Ric Knowles and a five day residency in Montreal with Seçkin Çınar as an outside eye, a colleague from Istanbul who recently immigrated to Canada.

Timeline

October 2017 - March 2018	Early Studio Research	The core ideas of the piece emerge along with some improvised excerpts
March 2018 - July 2018	Forming the Collective	Under the Umbrella Collective created Thousand Beginnings a devised piece on womanhood
October 2018 – December 2018	Dramaturgy and first attempts at shaping	Dramaturgy meetings with Ric Knowles and Lucas Olscamp. Intensive residency with Seçkin Çınar in Montreal. First trials for structuring
January 2019 – February 2019	Rehearsals & Going over design elements	Going into rehearsals with the established direction in artistic challenge document, Jewels Krauss steps in as an outside eye.
25-28 February 2019	Tech-Dress Rehearsals	Adjusting last details for the York University Showing
28 February – 1 March 2019	York University Showings	
1 April - 20 April 2019	Rehearsals for YESFest	
22-27 April 2019	YESFest	

Future Plans

After the piece premieres in Theatre Centre Toronto at YesFest, I plan to apply for developmental funding for the piece to work on it with a dramaturg, an outside eye and a designer. Furthermore, I will submit the project to different festivals and residencies especially in Canada, U.S and Germany.

Venue Specifications

The performance is suitable for any venue that is a black box with ranked audience on one side.

General Funding Overview

EXPENSES	**REVENUE**	**IN KIND**
Space Rental - $2000		York University (Rehearsal Space) - $2000
Artist Fees - $1000	Box Office YesFest: ($1000?) The box office revenue will be shared among artists that work for this piece	
Props - $100		Borrowed from York University - $100
Total: $3100	**Total: $100 + $2000 = $2100**	

Conclusion

On Building Routine

Having defined my artistic challenge as a lack of dialogue between my strong artistic instincts and perfectionist, under-thinking rational mind, what was ahead of me was a deliberate shift in the working mechanism of the body/mind. In order to de-clutter my mind of various fears and control patterns, I intensified my daily spiritual practices orienting them towards the cultivation of a sense of trust and letting go of the thought patterns that no longer serve me. Trusting that a Higher Power is taking care of me, of my day and of my work always, accepting that the result is not in my control, all I needed to do was to show up with gratefulness and acceptance. This attitude not only helped me get back up on my feet at a personally difficult time, but it also changed my entire approach to creation, creating a sense of spaciousness daily. Operating from this new found empty and spacious place, I no longer identified as the owner of my thoughts or insights but rather as their observer. Thoughts came and went, and I started playing with them like a surfer on the waves: choosing which ones to ride and practicing how not to be brought down by unexpected waves of insecurity, fear and self-consciousness.

The daily routine which I introduced to my life, consisted of waking up early to do the most important work in the morning and later giving myself permission to rest, has been mind altering. I have realized that starting the day with the work not only gives the work my best self but also sets the tone for the day, allowing my mind to expand even after the active working hours are over. One day after another this same routine enriched the experience of any given day, shifting it from being full of anxiety about getting things done to wonderment about what is to come next. As a result, I started feeling more like

an artist everyday. Having said that, changing life long habits and behavioral patterns takes weeks, if not months or years. Admittedly, this routine was easier to incorporate while working on the written portion of the thesis and proved to be more difficult for studio practice. Needing an hour of travel time, back and forth to the university to use the studios, took away from the quality of both the working and resting hours, leaving me depleted and dysfunctional after the afternoon nap. Regardless of this difficulty, starting the day in the studio enhanced the feel of play, given that my rational mind is not fully awake in the early morning and the energy of the day has not yet picked up. I was able to resolve many more artistic problems than I would have had if I were to linger in the studio for six hours or more in the evening. Another reason the routine was harder to sustain for the studio practice was that it was a lot harder to detach my brain from the creative practice than it was from the academic writing. My brain was *on* for at least a couple of hours after I had left the studio each day.

Over all, I agree with Soojung-Kim Pang, when he emphasizes in his book *Rest* that a routine of balancing work with rest is a system that only works if you do it everyday. When I fall out of this routine, do not exercise vigorously, overschedule, let myself become distracted by social media, I swing back to the old mindset. A structured routine such as this has little room for impulsive decisions, and I have yet to find the balance between this daily construct and enough freedom to let the unexpected wonders of daily life be welcome.

On Building Trust in Creative Process

Incorporating the way of working that I researched in the chapters Dilated Mind, Violence and Precision allowed me to bridge the physical and mental banks of the

creative process for me. Prior to these practices, the improvisational movement work I was doing lacked vision and the creative deskwork was simply spinning in place. One of the exercises that got me out of the loop was storyboarding. I meditated on the beginning image of the show and I drew down the elements that were clear, disregarding the rest. Then, whatever I was not certain about, I put them down in the form of question right next to the image I had drawn. Deciding on something *violently* while still keeping the questions alive opened the door of the creative dam. One image started to follow the other in my mind's eye and as the process went on the questions were answered without me actively focusing on them. Deciding on something and committing to it without obsessing whether it is right or wrong is an act of trust and trust always lets the creative flow in.

As I got up on my feet to work with this new storyboard sketch, pieces that were missing started to come into focus. A true weaving process emerged between imagining, drawing, putting the excerpts back on their feet, writing the missing parts, asking questions: going back and forth in improvising and shaping. Through this new found practice, I was able to assemble the pieces together, realizing that I had an hour of material. This process became easier over time, especially with Jewels Krauss' presence in the room as an outside eye for the last three weeks of rehearsals. Finding the transitions between sections also helped it come into shape but the process was still lengthy.

During this three week period, the section that Krauss and I felt most stuck in was *The Birthday Party*. This excerpt involves the character hiding in the theatre space, running away from her own birthday party, which is "not here, but there", all the while

infantilising herself and needing to be rescued from her own demons. The non-existent birthday party intends to convey to the audience the absence of the missed home. The character is lost, not knowing what she needs. She touches some memories and each time, like having touched a hot stove she escapes from one thought to the other always coming back to the reality of the abandoned birthday party. I find this section very Blanche-esque[7] and its delusionality makes sense as a response to trauma. The character is finally driven into a state of almost delirium, only to be awakened from this frenzy by hearing an old Turkish song that a confederate, Can Kömleksiz, sings from the audience. This song serves both as a nostalgic lullaby and as a calling. It is the reminder of what she has lost that in the end will push her to embrace her pain.

When this excerpt first came about, it was seductive and to the point. The content did not matter much as it did not belong to a whole yet. The emotional content that needed to be expressed was strongly present. As the show developed, the Birthday Party concept started losing its connection with the whole. Right now, in the piece, it has new movement and new text to it. It stands in the middle of the show, with the mission to carry the story and the emotional reality through a rhythmic dynamic to the last third of the show. For a long time, I did not have the right tools to approach this now out-of-place segment. The trust and courage I introduced to the rehearsal room helped me make decisions and loosely tied the excerpt into the piece, but its ties to the overall narrative arc are still weak. It cannot carry out its mid-piece mission and it has also lost its power from when it first was devised.

[7] Tennessee Williams' delusional character Blanche Dubois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Having introduced “maieutics” and open-ended thinking, I was able to delve more deeply into understanding the role of this excerpt; the possibility of aligning it with the underlying structure of the larger work began to emerge. I can now say that the essence of the Birthday Party scene is about being lost, feeling isolated and the spiraling loss of one’s own power in that isolated place. For the next iteration of *What is the Water?* that will be presented at YesFest in April, I am looking forward to working on it again. I now feel confident to use this segment as a starting point with the intention of bringing the scene to a fully realized place and have it be a bridge that ties the show together. It may cease to exist as a birthday party per se but the essence of *lostness* must be explored further.

Another reason that I am facing this challenge is probably because, even though the images and feelings belong together well and they create an emotional journey for the audience, what I am trying to communicate with the piece is still unfocused. All elements are there, they are not vague but there is almost equal emphasis on all the following themes and more: losing memory, survivor’s guilt, immigration, finding one’s story, losing a revolution, missing home as a lover. Here I can see the importance of working with a dramaturg especially in a devised piece. I can write, perform and direct with the help of an outside eye but a dramaturg that shines a light to the path, would carry the piece to a next level.

Lastly, I would like to address the notion of precision within the abstract movement sections in the piece. For quite some time I have swung between high energy improvisations that were true to the impulse but not contained in a chosen form and the need to choreograph every move. I am neither trained nor interested in choreographing

dance. I needed a method to make these abstract gestures and movements precise to an extent so that I do not unconsciously repeat my own movement patterns, nor lose enough that I could maintain the authenticity within that shape. I discovered that knowing the stages of progression of the impulse/action of any given movement section was going to help me to both have specific enough of a shape and have enough freedom in it to breathe. I started approaching movement with acting tools.

In the very beginning of the piece I wrap myself in the rug and it becomes a progressive struggle of wanting to be wrapped up it and trying to get rid of it. This section emerged from the idea of there being no escape from my *culturedness*. The moment I decide to express myself I am a cultured being and coming from Istanbul I am constantly in struggle with my own culture and identity. This idea is told through the relationship I have with this rug and a very specific way to move in it which reminds the movements of a belly dancer. The movement gets interrupted with glitches until the rug is on the ground and it starts to pull me back upstage until I am out of breath and find refuge in one of the chairs (grandpa chair) that are lined up upstage. This movement section, like most of them in the piece, is a structured improvisation. The progression is trying to express not being able to speak and being overpowered by movement, trying to move in a different way and finally struggling with the rug itself that has fallen to my feet. When I follow the impulses through these steps precisely the same experience is created every time with slightly different movement patterns.

On Building a Piece

I have been trying to find a premise for the piece, a visceral action-loaded sentence that summarizes its raison d’etre. Only after the research that I have done,

specifically on Pina Bausch's artistic practice, have I become convinced that the premise for this show yearns to be a question: an action question that can be applied to test every scene, so that the scenes can be brought together.

After my dramaturgical conversations with Ric Knowles, the theme of *grounding* has already started to make sense as a magnet that could pull the excerpts toward themselves. However, I was still lacking an encompassing question. I did a two page maieutics exercise on the word grounding, asking questions about its etymology, about the need to ground and I became clear on what I meant by grounding and the central question that brought about the idea for this work revealed itself: "How do we ground ourselves in the face of irrecoverable loss?" The question was discovered, not invented. It was there all along. To elaborate on that question, *What is The Water?* explores how we react when the grounds we stand on are systematically swept away from under our feet? In an increasingly uncertain world, what do we hold on to?

Having one solid question that is deeply rooted in personal experience made it possible to address the universality of this question; after all, loss, grief, holding on, grounding, these are themes we all share regardless of our specific story of them. The clarity of the question opened up the possibility of staying in metaphor, coming up with ways in time/space to explore different responses to loss, making it possible to show rather than tell. Attempting to grasp the reality of this question and coming up with solutions through action in space started to work for me as an anchor to come back to whenever I felt lost while working on the excerpts. It helped create another layer of trust to test the excerpts without the fear of losing or shifting their meaning.

Going into the rehearsal room with Jewels Krauss with these questions at hand put us immediately on the same page. This had not been my experience with my colleague Seckin Çınar with whom I had a chance to work with in Montreal in early December, months before Krauss joined in and before I had come up with a unifying question to test the excerpts.

Cinar agreed to be an outside eye for a five-day residency period in Montreal, and I, not knowing what to ask of them, put them in a difficult position. Their initial enthusiasm towards working together turned into confusion and eventually withdrawal from my work, not knowing how to locate themselves in the creative process.

Nevertheless, the experience of working both with Krauss and Çınar, given they did not have the same intense emotional connection to the work as I did, put the material in perspective for me, making it easier to look at it dispassionately. I wish I could have done that earlier in my process to allow the piece to be more realized before the final showing.

The experience and presence that Jewels Krauss brought to the rehearsal room helped also with discerning the material, making decisions and committing to them. Being accountable to her helped me have artistic integrity as a performer and her tireless questions forced me to make decisions as the director.

A conflict I had with Krauss was about the number of chairs used in the piece. I had arbitrarily decided on the number of chairs (ten) that I was to play with, and it remained as such without addressing the reason behind it. While Krauss insisted on focusing on this question, I saw it as low priority so close time to the showing, trusting that the reason would show itself to us either in this iteration or the next one. Though a

satisfying answer is yet to come, I remain curious to explore the reasons behind the ten chairs. Even though not having the answers still frustrate me, the lack of them does not stagnate me. After my methodological research, I have a greater capacity to keep exploring in the unknown.

To conclude, the danger of falling into chaos in creation does not scare me anymore; I feel a sense of security knowing that I have a practice of asking instinctual questions. I can return to and leap from one thought to the other without obsessing about losing the initial impulse. I know what it means to have daily discipline and its necessity for a wholesome artistic life. Most of all, the exercise of writing this document in relation to my creation of *What is The Water?* helped engage the left side of my brain in an integral way within my artistic process, allowing specificity to my impulsive choices and helping me cultivate more trust in myself as an artist.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Selected Writings from *What is The Water?*

The Spell

If I have to say goodbye one day
I will climb up to one of your solemn hills
at dusk
no probably at dawn
I will light cigarettes in chain one after another
the waves, the sky, the seagulls, the ships, centenary plane trees
I will salute
all the lit windows as far as I can see
I will keep it long and boring to make it easier to leave
then to make sure I cannot forget you
in an incomplete moment
with an incomplete feeling
I will close my eyes
and inhale your smell to the suburbs of my lungs
I will keep my eyes shut until I go away
to engrave your entire face into my breath.

The Story

Before I forget. I have to tell you something.
A story. You need to know everything in order to understand.
Many things happened. But nothing did.
First you need to know about the park. No.
About how it feels to wake up
From a slumber
How thousands walked the bridge at dawn

From Asia to Europe to join the resistance
How we were the news, but the revolution was not televised
I have to tell you about Ali Ismail and how the police beat him to death
about that girl who was shot in the head with a gas canister
and how I held her hand
how we all went from being complete strangers to being
what? what did we become? what happened to us?
Many things happened but nothing did.
This is the most important thing.
I have to tell you a story.
I don't know where to start nor what my story is about.
It is not war, so no need to panic
I have a feeling that my story should be about being a woman,
about a diverse culture, a story about minorities so that I can reach my target audience
about power about immigration
about the third world countries
about patriarchal society
toxic masculinity
sexism fascism extremism
rise of the right
fall of capitalism
resilience victimhood oppression impunity
that's not my story!

To My Lover Istanbul

It is impossible to speak about your presence

Without declaring your absence

I search for new ways of missing you

I look at your photos and you are not there

Do you think it is easy to love you Istanbul?

Did you leave me, or did I leave you?

When did you ever care about anyone?

Your head always up high

Indifferent

I tear your absence to pieces

I think I have forgotten you

Then I remember

You are the one who is going to forget me

Appendix B: Support Material

This appendix comprises of some songs, writings and images that have been intrinsic to the creation process.

Yalnızız

The song *Yalnızız* by the band Incesaz, one of many other poems and songs that speak directly to Istanbul, revealing the longing that resides within the culture of the city. This is my rough translation of the song:

> "Day is over, everyone went their own way
> Taking shelter behind doors with forty locks
> A secret covers over the black night with a touch
> You wrapped your glamourous solitude around
>
> I am lone, tell me Istanbul are you happy now?
> We are lone, you are responsible for all that has happened
> You are lone, tell me who is going to cry for you now?
> We are lone, no one left to grieve"[8]

Ece Temelkuran

As I have mentioned in the Performance Research Document, Ece Temelkuran's book of her collected articles *Iyilik Güzellik* has been a tremendous inspiration to me as I was deepening my research in the content. Her accuracy in defining various stages that we went through collectively helped me reconcile my relationship to the lost resistance and the corrupt government.

Referring to the atmosphere of solidarity in Gezi Park during the resistance she writes: "It was as if they were reunited after years of separation. It was as if they have always wanted to fly and finally they were reunited with their wings.[9]" Talking about

[8] Translated by candidate.
[9] Translated by candidate

strategies that we have developed as a nation in turmoil in order to keep going with our daily lives she states: “At the end of the day what people want most out of life is to forget. I learned that people have so many things to forget. I learned that the disease of forgetfulness is the only remedy that this country can find.[10]” In reference to the state of the world she brilliantly articulates: “This century passes by as we are shocked by how people can stand still with tons weighing on their conscience and understanding the reason why.[11]”

[10] Translated by candidate
[11] Translated by candidate

Appendix C: Selected Journals

30 October 2017

(translated from Turkish)

Nothing really interests me more than what is going to happen to us. In order to understand the sickness without, I need to understand the sickness within. Don't justify. Sickness without is the sickness within. What is without is within. And memories. How do we tell our story from now on? What do we keep from this time? What do we tell our children? Is it even important? Big bang. How does memory work? What is existence? What is evolution? What is our next step from here? As humans beyond that which is political, beyond that which is personal, what makes sense to do now? What is going to happen to humans? What is going to happen to the species on Earth? It is all a story, a spark in the nothingness. And memory. We keep forgetting everything. What have we forgotten? What have we forgotten as humanity? What have I forgotten? What if this is the investigation?

In my country, a culture is broken into pieces… and not all at once. Like frogs in boiling water. We are waiting like frogs in a pot with water coming to a boil. Slowly. All that we called "ours' has been disappearing. One by one. Buildings, people, parks, movie theatres, habits have vanished one by one. I have been thinking about memory. If I could revive my entire life in Istanbul in my body. If I could restore everything, is my heart big enough to carry it all? The festivals, trees on Istiklal Street, cobble stones of Nevizade—their disappearance is so painful. As if the absence of things that I do not remember and how they disappeared solidified into a black wound in my heart. I see myself standing in

a threshold, I hold everything up. Everything turns into dust. To ash. To sand and I want to take in all the ruins. We have forgotten who we are.

15 November 2017

(translated from Turkish)

I hate it—also it is the thing that I love most in this world: My country. I am so angry. At everything. How it all turned out. How we lost. And now I am here in Canada. English penetrates my brain. I tell myself English is a more poetic language. I speak its beauty. That is why I create in English supposedly. Today in studio I spoke in Turkish for the first time in a long while. The pain is unbearable. I can't even touch the wound. It is like my tongue itself is a wound. Swollen back to my throat. And everyone and everything is there, and they are moving away from me. And me, right in the middle of a sea, I can neither see where I have come from nor where I am going to. I am lost right in the middle of the sea. I am searching. What is there to hold on to? What can I connect with? A part of me is always going to be there. My country, to which I never felt I belonged—I belong to it now that I am here. I am a romantic. A nostalgic. If I was to go back for a month—I would hate it and would want to be back here in Canada. I lost myself without ever finding who I was. I used to ask myself when I was there, where is home, I needed to leave it to find it. My home was already missing—a missing Istanbul fit the whole perfectly. A lost city sits now in the throne of my missing home.

16 January 2018

(translated from Turkish)

Again. All alone in this studio.

In this country. In this city. Everything I used to know disappears.

For instance, I see all my memory being erased—one memory at a time.

To have children on this land would mean that my kids will not know about things.

They will not know about you my love. They will not know who you are.

How can I tell that generational gap?

It is a hole.

5 March 2018

Vision writing about the chair: The character holds up a chair and carries it from one place to the other across the stage. Maybe trying to find the perfect place to set up camp? (hidden action) Chair cannot be separated from the person. Everybody has their own chair. Chair is important. Chair is burden. Chair is status. It is our past. It is our stuffed animal or a cigarette bud that we still hold on to from the first time we fell in love. It is our home. It is what makes us who we are. It is our camouflage. It is what needs to be left behind. It is our back story. It is our lover. Our reason. It is an attachment. It is a privilege to be seated. Chair is a container for our dreams. Chair is our memories through which we know who we are. Chair is the last piece that belongs to the lover. I take it home with me. It is a reminder of where you are from.

Vision writing about the character: She is carrying a chair. A loved one. She is trying to keep the chair safe. She is drawing lines. She is trying to forget. She is in a support group for constant remembrance. She is saying goodbye. She is trying to go back in time. She dances. She is stuck. She searches for something. She is in a relationship with time. She is trying to settle down. She is trying to find balance. She is trying to remember a reason to live. I must want to know why I am alive. I cannot relax before I know that.

20 July 2018

Bringing the piece together—5 major sections/themes:

1 - LOVE/FREEDOM/REVOLUTION: There was a brief moment in time where we thought we could actually make a difference. Felt and lost one moment of freedom. Connection. Gezi Park.

2-FEAR/DEFEAT/DESTRUCTION: Memory in a place creates identity and that place is broken.

3- BUBBLE: How can we live our lives as if they only belong to us? As if all that is important is our individuality. We become a society in denial.

4- BRAIN DRAIN: Lost. Forget/Remember in order to survive. Losing ground.

5- GRIEF: Is possible only with remembering. What I have lost is what is essential in me. And I can recover it by memories only.

TIME: Is a separate important element in the piece. How can I play with it? Time that shifts. Time that does not exist. Time that we are bound to. Past is missing. Future is broken.

Note to this journal entry on 5 March 2019: Now, in retrospect, I realize that all these sections actually do exist in the final piece.

15 September 2018

Today I went into the studio so sure of what needs to be done. With a perfect outline. My creative process has brought me to a place of knowing what is next. My through line seems solid to work with. I can de-structure it as I go, but my body/my performer was not able to free flow within the needs of my creator/director. I saw myself stopping and not following through with the creative impulse—because that impulse was not initiated in

the body. It was a structural impulse. Even with the simplest of tasks, I could not follow through.

2 November 2018

I am approaching the work forcefully. Head on. Juxtaposing everything I have create so far. The work cannot breathe. Creation process has its cycles: “birth - death - birth” and I am ignoring, not trusting them. I have lost the lightness and joy in creation. Just producing for deadline. In order to shift this, I have decided to put the entire material I have aside and create movement piece with certain check marks to hit. Now i will try to practice trust. Relationship means mystery. My relationship with my project is right now is that of control. Also, another thing I have realized is that my creative process is so much alive with and within me and it is affected by my life. My life is going through a major shift now: coming out of a relationship, changing homes. I choose trust and wonder. A detoxification, a reveal, a new beginning. Lucas Olscamp and I created this structure as an exercise of trust. That is also how I am dealing with my life now: trusting the unknown. I cannot push or control it. I am going to be vulnerable. I am not going to act with fear. I am choosing trust. William Paul Young says: “Relationship introduces us to mystery, and we lose control.” Power and control are the two ends of the same stick. I more powerless I fell the more I have the need to control. The more I let go of the driving wheel the more I am in my power. I will let this piece dream out of me. Dream away yourself. Just use me. I am your humble servant dear piece that wants to be created.

After note: After trying this exercise again I went right into my head instead of opening up. I closed up even more by an exercise of form that does not come out of a need, of an action. I could not tie content with a rigid structural form.

20 November 2018

After our 2-day dramaturgy meeting, Ric Knowles' feedback focused around 3 major things:

1) I am not sitting enough inside the gestures that I was coming up with so that they could travel somewhere. They are staying in the realm of chatter, not reaching to their potential, to their depth. They are not fully explored.
2) The piece, especially the text and the movement language did not have a coherent choice of style.
3) The central magnet needs to be found. If every excerpt could tie to a central question, a central exploration, what would that be? Right now, there are a lot of related ideas but not one major focus point.

Honestly, I don't know where to go from here. Ric suggests a central dramaturgical structure to hang the piece on and see how the rest of the stuff that have been created so far can stay in it. This way the piece itself will let me know what can stay and what can go. Ric also mentioned that the "putting together" part of theatre is always magic. It looks like it will never come together and somehow by pulling the threads they do come together. Again, staying in the unknown is an important part of the process. The next step I will take is going to be the exploration of what it means to be grounded. Explore a visceral relationship with the ground. Go back to zero to go to the depth.

5 December 2018

(translated from Turkish)

I am in Montreal with Seçkin. My colleague from back home. We did the same BA program in Istanbul Bilgi University with almost 8 years apart. They also being from Turkey and sharing a similar language of creation I wanted to get their help as an outside eye and work with them in the studio showing what I have got. We scheduled a 5-day residency and I am struggling. I cannot seem to know what to ask of them specifically. There is only so much Seçkin can do if I do not know where the piece is going and what I want to say with it. Today I woke up not having a clue what the piece is about. I lost my feel into it and I cannot find the trust I had in my body. I believe this has to do with trying to figure out what the piece is about all the time. Did MFA do this to me? I don't know. Is it about having to work in a certain way? Is it about not knowing how to work in a certain way? However, Seçkin's presence helps a lot. At least while there is a gaze looking at the performance space and holding compassion I can let go of thinking and just move into the feeling. Maybe something will come out of that.

20 December 2018

Both in Pina Bausch and Eugenio Barba there is attention and focus on the underlying structure, the operating system, the underlying metaphor of the story. So, if I was to know what the story is, I could dig into its structure? Go deeper than the story? The story is of immigration. The character leaves their home reluctantly and then forgets where they have come from in order to survive and assimilate, familiarize with the arrival place. However, the more she negates her origins, the more she is uprooted and lost. She cannot quite function. She has no idea of her place in the world. She has to remember. When she remembers, is she free? She is searching for grounded-ness.

28 December 2018

Analysing the movement patterns, I have so far: My movement expression is either daily, mundane, not deliberate, casual, naturalistic to a degree of no conscious choice or it is fully engaged, big, too much, scared to be not enough. It travels in these two extremes. First one being me daily, second one being my performer's habits—how I learned to move—to express. Just having an outside eye in the creation process with whom I speak the same vocabulary and agreed on a style, on what to look for can ease the way into a gestural dramaturgy. The exercise we did with Lucas Olscamp, just before the end of term showings, did focus on gestural dramaturgy; however, it failed at bringing more clarity to the piece itself. For me as a dancer/performer, it allowed me to sit in a certain shape specified by a certain style. It gave my performer freedom to be in a preconceived performance shape which was co-created by Lucas Olscamp and I together, mostly directed and choreographed by him. But with that, I lost ownership of the piece and approaching it from a performer's perspective this time I found completely spiraled out of its dramaturgical coherence for me, leaving my creator/director hat on the side to re-engage my performer/player with the piece.

6 January 2019

Supposedly, according to Eugenio Barba, Eisenstein managed to sit in front of his filmed material with complete ignorance. After the 2018 Fall term I have been advised to, look at my work dispassionately, objectively to bring it together. It is kind of the same thing. How does one do that? Sitting in front of the material with ignorance. Welcoming death! Being in a deliberate state of "let go" means making peace with death. If this is the nature of all that which is feminine, therefore it is the nature of artistic endeavours, practices. It means being with it in death—being with it when it is alive and during its aliveness. With

most relationships we try to stagnate. Anything we get a hold of we try and assign them a meaning and say it is one thing and not the other. Eliminating the potentiality of all the other things that it might become. But if we do not specify and choose then there is no room for shape. What the artistic process asks from us is “holding space”, “being with” as the dance happens and to dance with it as well. Be there to join the dance. I still do not know how Eisenstein sits behind the montage table with a clean state.

8 January 2019

I have been going through my notes on my thesis show. And I do that when I work, probably like most people. I take very confusing chaotic notes as I create or write, then a couple of days later go back and go through them like picking stones from uncooked rice. Now I realize as I do my artistic challenge research that I ask so little questions as I go through this process. The example I am going to give is about notes on cue cards. I look at the cue cards rather deadly, looking back at what has happened. Then I judge my thinking (not in the sense of harsh judgement but like discernment) when I wrote them and decide if the concept or the paragraph is useful, if it stays or it goes away. This is ridiculous: I am judging the decisions I made in the past, from the point of view of the present. I am time judging myself. I look at an inspiration that the past Gülce had and decide if it is relevant or not. That is not a very fruitful conversation to have in a time machine. Today however, I look at a note and I ask a question. And because I am not very good at asking questions, I at least try to bring my mind around a state of questioning which I just realized is very similar to free association.

So right now, I am looking at a note that read: “Types of questions that I should ask myself”. I already wrote about the two types of questions that I would ask for my studio

practice in the thesis. Normally I would just cross this note with a pen marking it as done. Now I look at it and I let my mind drift into a “questioning state” I blank. I let myself deconcentrate. My eyes wander in the room, resting on a painting that I did the other day. It is on the wall. It is a lotus flower. I painted it and a friend suggested that I hung it upside down. She asked the question “what if”. I had a form, she said: “What if this side is up?” Then my eyes drift to a photograph right under the painting. It is me, my dad and our dog running on a beach. I am 4-6 years old. I ask what if my mum was also in the picture? The thought that she could have been, negates the fact that she is not in the picture. With this exercise I found out that “What if” is one of the questions I will ask myself during rehearsals and studio practice.

Since I got a lot of feedback around needing to stay with things deeper, now I stay with the same cue card: “what type of questions I should ask myself”

I feel sleepy all of a sudden. I move my body, stretch and yawn. Even as I do that I can sense that I force myself to think about the question. I am trying to come up with a good answer, trying to control the process, not very different than an actor trying to reach to an emotional result.

I try again.

I try singing and moving this time. Words of the song gets to me. I write down a verse. It is related to the content of my project, it is a song in Turkish, it says: “We are just like rivers looking to merge with their sea” Then I notice my mind jumping off of the stone like it is a hot stove. The first thought of the verse is its metaphorical meaning. It is so poetic it hits me. It is already art. I immediately interpret it a “search for wholeness”, “search for home”. In every sense also rather spiritual. But so far, I have nothing else but

the feeling of: “This relates to my project” and “I wish I came up with this verse”. In the past I would have stayed there and now I am asking a question to it, I immediately judge the question as stupid as I am coming up with it, but I ask it bravely: “What do the rivers look like that run to the sea?” Maybe the rivers are creating all these vein-like shapes all around the earth. Because they are searching for the sea. All water searches for the sea, longs for the ocean. But what makes a river any different? All of its dance around the Earth. It is not the embrace but the journey to the embrace that gives the river its essence. It is what makes it special. Everyone thinks that Bosphorus of istanbul is a river. But it is not. It is the sea. It is just the conjunction of two huge entities of water crossing each other.

More about river that looks for the sea: What kind of river is this? Frantic? Happy? Lost? Dried on its way to the sea? If the sea is the truth, the absolute, river is the dervish. What is the negation of this image? The opposite of it? A desert. In the desert there is the imagination of water. A mirage: 1) An optical phenomenon that creates the illusion of water, often with inverted reflections of distant objects, and results from distortion of light by alternate layers of hot and cool air. Also called: “fata morgana” 2) Something illusory or insubstantial.

Azra’s memories are like mirages. From past present or future. Memory as mirage? If this was a week ago i could have come to the conclusion: “Memory as Mirage” (maybe not even have come to this conclusion because probably I wouldn’t have been able to make the journey up to here) and stayed here confidently with a couple underlines and exclamation points around it. Now I go forward; Let’s see: “memory as mirage”. What kind of questions I should ask myself? Which memories are mirages? The memories that

give us hope. The entire stage is also a mirage. The chairs, the rug. I long had a question about if I stack the chairs on top of each other during the performance or if they are already stacked when the audience comes in. Now this is a slight tangent to where I have started everything but maybe this is *Peripeteia*, just following the thoughts make their leaps to one another and follow them to the shore.

5 February 2019

First rehearsal with Jewels. She made me name all the chairs. I got acquainted with them. Who they are what they are. I have police, grandpa, myself in the future, the delicate revolution, my mom's old house where we used to live, York and a shameful chair… I do not want to make it about the chairs and who they are. I want to keep it vague enough that the audience can project onto them their own experience. But they have to be specific enough that there is relationship happening on stage. There are details and specificity. So that they are not random. "Why chairs?" and "Why ten chairs?" is still a question hanging in the air. Seems like how much ever I respond to it still the answer is not satisfied. It is not like: "of course chairs!" I do not know if I know how to or if I want to answer this question. Then everything gets so symbolic. I know why the chairs are there. They are the crowd, the protestors, the loneliness, they are an abandoned party, they are individuals. Chairs people stood up from. Chairs we ground ourselves with. They are on top of which Deniz Gezmiş stood the moment before he was hung.

1 March 2019

Especially in a devised piece it is impossible to know what the piece is about before it reaches the audience. The feeling reflects back from them to me and I feel what it means. I can feel where it needs to be directed. I wish I had more time to run the show as is

before the actual showing or I wish I had a chance to test it off of an audience with the excerpts tied together. The first day was all my committee, other faculty members and two colleagues who watched the show. I had no clue how it landed. The second day I had a full audience all friends and colleagues and undergraduate students along with 2 Turkish people who constantly cried. I could feel the engagement throughout. I felt where I had them and where I lost them. A friend of mine from Israel said he could not speak for an hour after the show and that he questioned his own sense of belonging. When I spoke with him for further feedback, I realized that the feelings passed really well but the content got lost. I have always invested on conveying feeling rather than an assigned meaning, however now I start to think that a strong theatre experience speaks both to the head and to the heart. It needs intelligible content. Does it? Maybe not! And what do I mean by content? Not a story necessarily, but some sort of conflicting actions, a Is there a way to convey meaning, give away content without losing emphasis on the feeling, without the story getting ahead? I can't wait to get back to the studio to explore more on this. What is it that I am trying to say? After the performance—two things came to me around what I wanted to say that I could not articulate as clearly before:

1) Political is personal

2) We are powerless on our own, but we are so powerful together.

These messages that I got from the Gezi Resistance are ingrained in me. I would be interested in making the audience question these notions. But is the piece so far removed from them?