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### Thea452 Phase 2-Final Devised Show Reflections

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The Devising Showcase 2019 was made by seven of us as students from the THEA 452 devising class. We had created and devised all aspects of the show including the script, scenography design, dramaturgy, choreography and performance. Devised Theatre Showcase run April 24 to 26, 2019. The final performances of the Devised Theatre Showcase were included in UFV's second annual Interpret Festival (April 26), a year-end celebration of the work of students in all creative and fine arts programs.

On the basis of phase 1 performance (which was done in January and February, 2019) and the audience's feedback, those visual performance parts (dance sequences) of our show seem to be abrupt and unclear. Therefore, on March 18th, 2019, in compliance with our discussion, we together determined to work more on scene transitions. Belle revised the lines and the scene order, and I preceded to combine the dance elements with scene transitions and in an attempt to shape my character not only a dancer but also an "onstage worker", in order to eliminate transitional blackouts between each scene. Augusto Boal et al. addresses that "actors try to transform everything into works of art." (1990, p.73) In my opinion, under a framework of a devised theatre performance, if we fail to transform everything into theatre, into art or into acting, it would never become a devised piece. Our goal was to create a completely coherent show with everything happening on stage (except costume changes), as we should realize the true meaning of "devising". Hedden and Milling write, "when used in non-theatrical settings, 'devising' suggests the craft of making within existing circumstances, planning, plotting, contriving and tangentially inventing" (2006, p.2). In other words, by manipulating the scene transitions and coming up with new methods of fully integrating those transitions into the show itself, we would confer necessary meanings to the transitions, making them indispensable in such a devised ensemble, and especially, in this case, I found a good way to make more sense of my dance sequences, while Belle, Kirsten and Des tightened the connections between each scene, and we collaborated to figure out the unity, coherence and resealable dramatic arc of our show, which was a win-win situation.

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Visual performance parts remained, meanwhile, the scene transitions and scene contents became smoother and more natural than phase 1, this is a remarkable improvement for us.

On March 20, 2019, Alana visited our class and gave us movement mentoring. Because I lacked something specific to play within my choreography, for example, I had no idea how I could interpret the feeling of “lost in woods” as a piece of specific dance. I did know how I can act that feeling, but I could not transform it into choreography. Alana’s help was thus mandatory. What I had not ever expected was that Alana did not directly show me the specific choreography, instead, she just gave me simple movement tasks and dance suggestions, for example, I need to maintain the strength from my belly when I do a sudden head-up, and this was based on the fact that I did hurt my neck that day after I did those head-ups without my self-consciousness and enough physical protection. For those specific movement tasks, here was my interpretation of those tasks that Alana assigned to me:

#### Dance sequence 1 “Lost in Woods”

Treat Lily and Erin also as two trees in the woods (same as those trees displayed in the background projection), looking for interaction and relationships between the trees and me, use maximum 2 body parts to make no more than 3 simple actions as a set of movements to build the relationship between the trees and me, try to get as close as I can when doing the “navigation” or “measuring” movements while paying attention not to actually touch the trees. When I acquire a set of movements, memorize it and do the same movements around other trees. This looks like the copying and pasting of movements. Do a few repetitions of this set of actions before I acquire another set. Adding shape, level and tempo elements to my movements. As I stay longer and longer in the woods, trying to accelerate the process of “copy and paste” of movements and feel how the anxiety of getting lost in it gradually increases.

#### Dance sequence 2 “Drowning”

Imagine the “drowning in water” process in reality, or imagine there is a roof slowly coming down and vertically narrowing the space. Use any 2 body parts at a time to draw “O” and “U” shape. At the beginning of this dance piece I should be standing, then I gradually bend my knees, bow, kneel, sit down, lastly lie down onto the ground.

#### Dance sequence 3 “Under Control”

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Alana suggested that either I shall find an assistant dancer or continue to do a solo piece, making simple and easy movements with no more than two body parts to show “as if my body was under the control of something or somebody else.” This should be an emotionless piece. I should not inject any of my personal emotions into this choreography. I was then considering to quit the third piece of dance or use another form to replace it.

I thus cultivated my habit to create choreography based on movement tasks since then. I had discussions with other modern dance artists on this special dance technique. We all came to an agreement that choreography designed by this technique is flexible, innovative, versatile and highly applicable. It provides new dance learners and inexperienced dancers with a great opportunity to explore choreography at their own pace and with their own moving habits. It balances the random improvised movements with fine-toned movement frameworks with significant rational intervention. From my perspective, it is also an efficient way to arouse performers’ and choreographers’ creativity and help develop the ability to deal with real-time problems in live performance situations. This method is also relevant to “the Happenings”, which is a postmodern art concept that advocates contemporary arts to focus on the liveness and liveliness, as well as the accidental part of the art-making process (Hedden & Milling, 2006, p.73-74). Since the choreography created by this methodology performed excellently in this project, I would like to continually use it as an effective tool for choreography in my future performance projects including live shows and films.



(Alana is listening to our peers' feedback)

On March 25th, 2019, with those movement tasks in mind, I rehearsed dance sequences 1 and 2 with potential sound, lighting and projection techniques. The music for dance 1 remained (Villanelle), and we extended the raining sound length before we play the song. We also used the same “green-tone raining forest” video for the projection as what we used for phase 1. The reason was we thought more raining sounds and the green-tone raining forest background would greatly enhance the feeling of humidity, stress and drowning. For dance 2, we put this dance sequence right after Lily’s monologue is done, and we never used any music as its background music but had some water/windstorm sounds to imply the process of the action of “Drowning”. Belle and Kirsten revised the lines and change the order of scenes. Because somehow some lines did not make great sense, the transitions were loose and some scene contents seemed too disconnected. Cedric started to look for new visuals for the rest of the scenes and he got good results for projection. He actually created

attractive digital paintings and recorded the digital painting process for one piece. He successfully used all the visuals in the projection design which matched the general logic of the entire show. I from then on had realized how efficient digital painting is in scenographic design. Live digital painting is even more competitive, but we failed to do live painting in this project due to the concerns of uncontrollable factors. We only had Cedric as the projection designer, operator and manager, meaning that if any projection-related mistakes occur, we cannot guarantee remediation. I would like to try live painting definitely in the future if I engage in large ensembles and create large-scaled well-funded projects.





On March 27th, 2019, Belle created a new word file for phase two's revised script and dramaturgy. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RRHjurtmymxMJpCoHp2OoB5y0NSJPbg1gclDm9dPjVA> She added me into the verbatim scenes as a new character, by my original name, and made the character connected to those dance sequences. "Yifan" then becomes both Lily and Erin's friend, Erin's roommate, and a dancer. Belle also created the new scene 2 which basically is a small talk between the characters. The new scene 2 is a flashback logically happened before scene 1, and scene 2 smoothly links itself to scene 3. Then Des, Kirsten and I rehearsed scene 1 to 3 (including dance 1 and 2) with the new transitional part between scene 1 and scene 2 — I bring hand props onstage and pass them to Des and Kirsten, as Erin's roommate. By then we made all the cues from scene 1 to scene 3 connected tightly.

On April 1st, 2019, Bell revised scene 6 (actually it then became a scene combining the original scene 2 "first meeting in the coffee shop" and the original scene 6 "meet online"), and Des created a happy ending as our last scene 7. The new

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scene 6 is also a flashback, which happens before scene 4 and 5 (the fight and Erin's monologue) in the timeline. Besides, the new scene 6 actually includes two parts: 1# How Lily and Erin first meet online. We used screen recordings to show the lines as an interpretation of this process. Belle also found a new song to add to this part as its background music. 2# How Lily and Erin first meet offline. Its content was mainly moved from the previous scene 2, which depicts the characters' feelings and the discussion between Lily and Erin when they first meet each other in reality. This is also where Danielle played the guitar throughout this part to create the coffee shop effect, and Danielle, as the musician performing in the coffee shop, became part of the transition between scene 6 and scene 7. She ended up the coffee shop scene with a piece of gentle and beautiful solo guitar performance.

I practiced the new dance sequence 3, which had become a great transition between scene 5 and scene 6. Instead of just dancing with the theme "control" as mentioned above, I decided to sing half of the song "It takes a lot to know a man" while cleaning up the mess that Erin makes in scene 5 (Erin's monologue) and also set the props for scene 6. Because Yifan is Erin's roommate and is also a dancer, "I" (refers to the character Yifan) know what has happened to Erin and "I" understand them. As a result, it became reasonable for me to clean up the apartment—the stage, instead of Erin (since the characters are just out of mind and too tired after the quarrel scene 5), and I danced a little bit when doing the cleaning. Parjad gave me a good suggestion that I could also add puppet dance into this transitional part — option 1: do puppet dance with me singing or without me singing; 2: do puppet dance when I am moving the props; 3: sing with moving props, when I stop singing, do puppet dance. We tried several times to figure this out and finally, we chose to perform the second version. We also decided to add piano accompaniment (played by Danielle) for my singing as another piece of live music. As usual, we aimed to show more liveness in our performance. Moreover, we made decisions on potential costumes and props. We decided to wear all black and Danielle created a file to list all the potential props with some costume advice.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ya0C5mtzyY6bGLe0p2BIUT\\_CSHGoYNN\\_F82SjOEwJD0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ya0C5mtzyY6bGLe0p2BIUT_CSHGoYNN_F82SjOEwJD0)

On April 3rd, 2019, before our regular class time, Danielle and I spent one hour practicing my singing with her piano accompaniment. We then came to the

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conclusion that I should do some humming first as the cue and then the piano can accord with me singing. The effect was great. During class time, we rehearsed scene by scene with all the transitions. Parjad gave me advice on my three dance sequences. For dance 1, I need to express more of the intense feeling of “lost in woods”, so I decided to linger, to look around, to shuttle across the trees, to give more facial expressions of fear, insecurity and puzzle. For dance 2, I need to feel the pressure of water, and I need to visualize the “roof” is getting heavier and heavier, the water is becoming sticky and slime-like. For dance 3, the transition between scene 5 and 6, I should not have eye contact with the audience during the whole process. I took all the suggestions and kept them in the final shows.

On April 8th, 2019, Kirsten practiced Lily’ monologue beat by beat, and then we finalized a complete run-through. I kept working on my dance sequences, for example, at the end of dance 2, I decided to raise my right hand up towards the audience and look into the audience, as if I was trying to grasp someone for help, but finally fail and drop my hand onto the ground. For dance 3, when I move the blocks, I need to do something like film rewinding —— reverse and replay my actions several times. Besides, I should enter normally with a neutral body but exit with puppet dance. I found a new song called “Pina”, Sherry edited it and we decided to use it as the background music for dance 2. Sherry created a soundtrack combing raining sound, windstorm sound and thunder, and we decided to put “Pina” at the end of this soundtrack, then we got our complete soundtrack for dance 2.

On April 10th, 2019, Des practiced Erin’s monologue beat by beat, and we did another run-through. This time, Parjad’s advice for me on dance 2 was, I need to show how I feel when the rain is dropping on my face, on my body, and then I got gradually submerged in the water. For dance 3, I need to clearly identify the sense of my presence, for example, I need to show up on stage as soon as possible and let the audience recognize me before I do the cleaning. Also, Des and I should recognize each other right after I appear and make short eye contact, then Des can pass the brush to me and exits. Parjad also suggested that Danielle’s piano accompaniment should go first so as to help me quickly find the right key before I hum. We took all the advice and everything worked well.

From 11th to 18th of April, 2019, we re-recorded the voiceovers for scene 1,



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double-checked all the technology stuff (make sure the quality of soundtracks and lighting design are at the performance level), ensured that sound, lighting and projection all work well, and then rehearsed the entire show for many times. Cedric did a great job on projection, he found more dramatic videos that perfectly fit our scene contents and scene transitions than phase 1, which helps to strengthen the theatrical atmosphere and highlight the themes of each part of our show. For example, he decided to use “changing townscape” and “sunrise” as transitional projection and put them respectively before “first meet offline” and before scene 7. This kind of projection implies that time elapses and reminds the audience that the storyline is moving forward. Also, there are obvious changes in the characters’ attitudes and thoughts among the relevant scenes, so by those “time-lapses”, the audience would know the relationship between Lily and Erin would change. During this rehearsal period, we kept working on smoothening the transitions. For instance, on 15th, right before Lily’s line “So how long have you been painting?”, which is the beginning of the “first meet offline” part, Des and Kirsten added whispers before they were fully lit to create a sense of immersion and moderate the sense of a sudden transition. On 17th, for the ending scene 7, rather than “Lily and Erin are walking towards each other then suddenly encounter”, we decided to let Lily (Kristen) first sit on the block and read a book until Erin (Des) walks by and they recognize each other. These detailed changes were all aimed to enhance the coherence and integration of our devised show. I from then on realized that a live performance, especially a devised piece, is and ought to be renewed each time the ensemble practices and rehearses. The dramaturgy — devising process never ends within a live performance creation. We as performers or performance makers should never slacken the concentration or stop polishing the work.

As a consequence, since we took advantage of all the stuff that had taken place around our ensemble, our show “Life Imitates Art?” had become a complete devised piece in its true sense. We also had achieved the goal of Happenings; As Hedden and Milling demonstrate, “in the Happening, since all properties – performer, objects, time, space, place – were accorded equal status, the mode of devising used was ‘compositional’, the juxtaposition of ‘diverse materials’.”(2006, p.64) We had successfully given meanings to every part of our ensemble, and we tried our best to make everything into art. Regarding this show’s title, my answer is: this devised piece

was a piece of art, and it was also a piece of life. We were creating the live arts, while we were experiencing our artistic life.



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Works cited

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Heddon, Deirdre and Jane Milling. *Devising Performance: A Critical History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.