

Pantheatre Summer University 2007

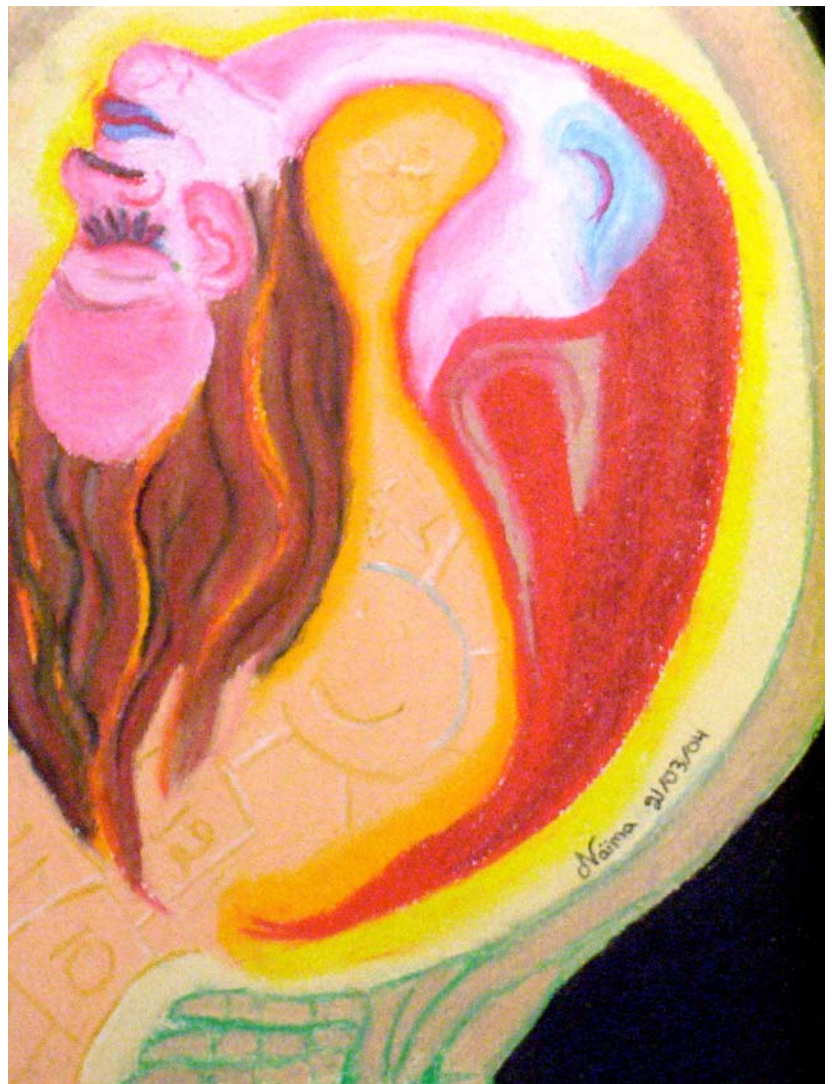
Notes written by Naïma Phillips

My experience at the Myths and Theatre Festival and Summer University has left me with inspiration, some answers, and more questions. It was a process that was both intense and nourishing. I would like to share some of the notes I have written as after thoughts on choreographic theatre and the themes we discussed. Here I dip my toe in a blend of realizations, experiences and beginnings.

Sirens, Sibyls and Sexuality

-My drawing and comments on my relationship to a theme

I'd like to take the opportunity to share a drawing I made a few years back which in my opinion ties in with the theme of Sirens, Sibyls and Sexuality. Drawn mostly from the talks, performances and exploration of the themes through practice during the workshops, I came to my own definitions of modern Sirens and Sibyls. I associate one aspect of sirens to the pleasure of a woman in manifesting her sexuality and her power to arouse desire and other emotions; and of sibyls to the state in which a woman allows herself to be driven and possessed by sexuality or other forces. I witnessed these sirens and sibyls at different moments in the various women at the workshop and festival. It was thrilling to see women of different ages - and have my own go at - "playing at" being sexy, glamorous, Aphrodite sirens...



Often this moment was juxtaposed with the expression of pleasure in distorting our bodies and voices, sometimes to the extent of convulsions and spasms. The sudden break from this deformation with a telling smile resulted in a plentiful audacity that consistently seduced the audience.

Why is it that "beauty" and "ugliness" so often feed into one another? Perhaps it is at this moment, when we make ourselves aesthetically "ugly" (monsters, creatures, rolling on the floor, screaming, growling, distorting our bodies), that we are most connected to our

inherent beauty and perhaps even more so, to our sexuality. Then I find myself asking are men sirens too?? And sibyls?

Another potential track for thought would be to associate sirens to artistic depression. Many artists experience a form of depression at some point in their creative life. It could be interesting to compare the pull of depression with the call of a siren, and deep depression to drowning. In such a case an artist who falls deeply in depression might be mistaking a siren for a muse... But an artist who learns to cycle depression might, similarly to Odysseus with the sirens, manage to look into the eyes of his soul without jumping in...

Choreographic Theatre

Lines, bends, circles...

- Work of leader as similar to sculpting/moulding clay.

A text is being read. As a leader, you are thrown into the space, and without carrying the responsibility of the text, without giving it direct importance, or resistance, you create an image that adds dimension, or space, to it. You are the visual layer of the reader's world, or dream. You facilitate some process that occurs simultaneously with your trajectories, but somewhat independently of your own will.

I think the work of the leader through space is similar to sculpting or moulding through of a big slab of clay. Sometimes you get resistance (slow movement) sometimes you slip through a bend or line (fast movement) and you get to places where you listen... what brought me here? What is there to see, hear, and touch? Sometimes the clay is wet. Do you roll on the floor? Or spin standing up? What is your relation the other objects/bodies you encounter in this space? And you encounter gap. Is it an invitation or a hole? What used to be there? Sometimes you get caught in a bit of rough clay. A suspension occurs. Are we the tool that toils the earth? Or the hand works it? Sometimes I believe we are both the tool and the clay... Do we mould the space, or does it mould us?

I make this comparison after doing leader work with Natacha's text. When I look back at the trajectories I made, they were simple and sparse. But within those spaces, I experienced emotions, moods and sensations which I feel are the product of a body and a text working through the space. All three, body, text and space, spiral around each other like electric currents and the area around them comes alive. But the leader remains a body that carves his/her way through space, with desires, fears and relations.

Responsibility as a non-leader

- Confessions of an impertinent mover

I am often called impertinent. I do have a rebellious fibre in me. Can I get away with this? (For space, ha! They've left this whole space empty and I'm stealing it!) But when it works, it does not usually come from mere mental reasoning. For example, in early stages, Enrique has us follow strictly and in line. At some point this inevitably becomes unbearable for me. I can't stand being stuck in a set and rigid structure. I get the urge to move. So during one session, I get up and start the exercise even though I'm not a leader. I walk to the wall, slide my head down, my back arcing to follow the movement until my head touches the floor. I keep following the impulse that leads me into other movements until I break out of it and join Frédéric at a window. I am now

moving with the group, but the individuality of exploration was still present in me... This time, I get away with breaking the rules. Perhaps that's because I didn't question what I was supposed to do to please the outside eye as or ask "Why?" or "Can I?" I wait for the moment when it's no longer a question of "I would like to break the rule." But rather, "This must be done." That's when I make my move, and then I'm in trouble. I've broken a rule, and even scarier than a band of potential angry music Gods is the fact that I'm dangerously threading the line of arrogance, and I've got a room full of artists who can make me look like a dunce if what I do next isn't up to scratch. "Okay, what next?" I listen for impulse (external and internal) and developed what come. And stay attentive: "what is this feeding into?" This brings me to my follower as a responsible leader theory... You might think I'm just toying with words here, but this distinction has been really useful for me. It helped me break out of my total confusion with the role of the one who must not be named (I guess it's the follower, but I've noticed we often don't even refer to this one with a name...).

When I started doing this work, I had a hard time figuring out what I was supposed to do in general, but especially when I was a "follower". I lost any sense of power and presence. This tends to creep up again when I am faced with a leader who is either more experienced or has a very different physical background, both due to the factor of intimidation and my eagerness to learn from them.

While the leader is discouraged from acting responsibly towards the other bodies, it has been useful for me as a "follower" to act as a responsible leader. In such a way, it becomes clear that in some instances I must strictly follow the leader in the interest of the image/geometry we are creating in the space. In such an instance, I sometimes like to tell myself "Ha! She thinks she's the leader, but really, I'm only following her because I'm the leader!" Keeping my individuality and sense of the whole picture, I service the image that is being created by the leader while maintaining some vivacity in my body. Sometimes servicing the image means suspending a movement that needs to be isolated rather than immediately following the leader into another movement. Or it could mean switching to a different leader. I find myself asking myself is there too much of the same? As a "follower", or responsible leader, I can balance the equilibrium or shake it out of order.

From the Lab to the Stage

- Where is choreographic theatre headed? How does it translate to performance?

What was most striking to me in watching the other performances was witnessing just how many possibilities the work lends itself to. One of the unique characteristics of this work is that even with its rigid rules and structure, it allows for the individual to develop his/her fantasies and works with his/her palette of skills and styles.

A poignant question Séverine brought to my attention was: how does the promise of the choreographic work translate in performance?

I have seen hints or even clear elements of the work seep through most of the performances. However, a part of me couldn't help feeling a bit nostalgic of the magical coincidences that occur in choreographic theatre labs. It's not to say that choreographic theatre is the end all of artistic expression. But I think the answer to Séverine's question is still in gestation. Which is good news (right?) as it means we can keep working on it.