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ANNE MARINA FIDLER

**REMEDIES FOR
CONNECTION:**

**PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE
AND POLYVAGAL PRACTICE**



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**REMEDIES FOR
CONNECTION:**

**PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE
AND POLYVAGAL PRACTICE**

ANNE MARINA FIDLER
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Anne Marina Fidler to Master Performance Practices,
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**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**

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SYNOPSIS

“Remedies for Connection” is a research project aimed at giving a new approach to participatory performance practices. It is an exploration of how performers can actively access and use vulnerability to incite participation in performance and how participation can be used to experience Peter Wessel Zapffe’s theory of sublimation. It uses the practice of karaoke as the site for its investigation and relates the function of the singing voice to knowledge gained from polyvagal theory and practice.

This thesis expands upon definitions of vulnerability and re-works them to deepen its understanding in relation to participatory performance. It breaks down different elements of vulnerability, such as failure and shame and puts them in relation to their physiological and psychological underpinnings as explained by polyvagal and attachment theory. These theories are used to inform participatory performance practices. One result of this research is new method for performers to access vulnerability on stage, which I have named “The Power Ballad Approach”. This thesis also presents a framework for participatory performance which offers both dramaturgical and choreographic scores for the audience and was used to create the performance work “Remedies Against Panic”.

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Finally, I would like to thank Jeffrey Lewis and Roger for giving me a secure base to land on, no matter how tumultuous things got.

DECLARATION

I, Anne Marina Fidler, hereby certify that I had personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, "Remedies of Connection: Polyvagal Practices and Participatory Performance"

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

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INTRODUCTION: THIS MUST BE THE PLACE THIS MUST BE MY DISSERTATION

It came to me one evening, shortly before the world was ensnared by the COVID pandemic in 2020. I was crammed tightly into the back room of a bar on Boddinstrasse in Berlin. The air was thick with the breath of those around me. Excitement and anticipation swirled amongst the tendrils of cigarette smoke. The band had just finished playing "Venus in Furs" by The Velvet Underground and the singer descended from the stage into a wall of applause. Then, there was a shift - an intake of breath - as we waited to see who would be called next to the stage to sing. It was live-band karaoke and that one crowded room seemed to encapsulate everything that was swimming in my head on the subject of participatory performance.

I had spent the day reworking an idea for a theatre piece into a research project for a certain master's degree in performance practices. The year prior had been a time of many personal tragedies and transformations, in which I had discovered an essay titled "The Last Messiah" by a little known Norwegian philosopher named Peter Wessel Zapffe. The essay, originally published in 1933, only appeared in English in 2018, and remains his only translated work.

I will provide a more detailed analysis of Zapffe's essay below, but I think it is the job of this introduction to clarify the origin of this artistic research, so I will expand briefly here. In "The Last Messiah", Zapffe, a self-described nihilist, explains the four ways which the human brain has found to circumvent the inherent pain of life. The first three of these methods (isolation, anchoring and distraction) create a state of painlessness. While they make us more comfortable in our everyday lives, they can also "betray the ego's highest potential" (Zapffe, 2018: 3), robbing us of the experience of actual joy. As Zapffe argues, "the whole of living that we see before our eyes today is from inmost to outmost enmeshed in repressional mechanisms, social and individual" (2018: 3). As our social landscape is structured by the system of capitalism, I was interested to examine how this economic model might exploit these remedies to motivate us to trade ecstatic joy for capitalist complacency.

Fortunately, Zapffe suggests a fourth remedy: sublimation. This entails turning towards the fear and pain induced by the cosmic panic of consciousness rather than away from it (2018: 6). The research I wanted to undertake at the time was a look at modern-day rituals in which humans lean into pain, and how they could be used in performance, particularly participatory performance, in an effort to discover how we might begin

to erode the capitalist system we are entrapped in. Because of the often co-operative nature of participatory art, scholars of the subject such as Bishop, Rancière, and Bourriaud have recognized it as a productive site for exploring socialist theories and concepts (2006; 2009; 2009). As a practitioner of participatory performance, however, I am fascinated by the mechanisms internal to participation, which hold an aura of mystique that I am not sure I will ever fully understand - thus making it an excellent site of research. My hypothesis was, and remains, that the potentials of participation are rooted in vulnerability and the performer's active use of it. Vulnerability, for now, can be understood as being open or susceptible to injury. The logical outcome of injury, be it physical or psychological, is pain, thus bringing us back to Zapffe.

So, as I stood in the audience of a live-band karaoke, my mind awash with the interrelation of pain and joy and vulnerability, an idea began to form. As the dull ache of my heart was tempered by the flutters of anticipation of performing and watching those around me step on stage to take the same risk, I wanted to know that all that pain of heartache and loss I felt was worth something. I wanted it to be a portal to ecstatic joy, and not just a temporary escape from malaise for a vacation in the abyss. True joy seemed impossible to find again, but I knew that my artistic practice was the best

tool I had for drawing a map, however convoluted, to ecstasy. And then it hit me. Everything I was looking for was here, in this room: joy, pain, sublimation, vulnerability, risk, failure and even painlessness. This participatory cultural phenomenon known as karaoke holds it all, and I already loved doing it.

This insight was the springboard for my exploration of participatory performance and how I, as a performer, could best invite the engagement of my audience. This line of inquiry compelled me to carve out a definition of vulnerability and set it in relation to risk, failure, shame and the psychological and physiological influences these have on the human nervous system. Thus, I explored polyvagal and attachment theory and practices, vocal theory and movement-based meditation practices.

The aim of my research is two-fold. Firstly, it provides the groundwork for a methodology that is still in process of becoming, insofar as I am its only test subject, but intends to help performers access vulnerability and create a space within themselves into which they invite their audiences. Secondly, it develops a score for participatory performance, which is both dramaturgical and choreographic, implemented by the performer who guides the audience into and through the participatory experience, leading them to a space of

'activation, authorship and community' (Bishop, 2006: 12).

This thesis will begin with a reading of Zapffe's "Last Messiah" that demonstrates how his 'remedies against panic' are used by capitalism and how his concept of sublimation can be adopted as a remedy against the current pressures of the western market economy. Next I will expand on vulnerability, giving a definition of what I have termed 'active vulnerability'. I will explore the psychological and physiological underpinnings of the nervous system, as explained by polyvagal and attachment theory and explain how these powerful tools can be used to understand participatory performance. Following, is an analysis of the role of both shame and failure have shaped my research and performance practice. I will analyse the polyvagal phenomenon of 'the calm buzz' and how it inspired the 'Power Ballad Approach' that I have created for performers as a warm-up to help them access vulnerability in performance. I will then conclude with a few insights into the dramaturgical and choreographic score I have created for participatory performance.

My research, depending as it does on participation, could only be conducted through performance-as-research. Therefore, I created two participatory performance works. The first, entitled "SLUT: A Love Story", was performed at the end of

my first year of study in 2021. The content of this piece was autobiographical and involved rigorous auto-ethnographic research, in the hope that offering something so personal could help to build connection with my audience. I will go into some detail of how the creation of this piece guided my research in this writing however, the main focus of this thesis will be my graduate performance, "Remedies Against Panic", which uses the device of karaoke to expropriate pop-music of the 1980s to create a post-capitalist narrative in co-action with the audience. Not only is 80s music a mainstay of karaoke, but the 1980s were also a turning point in the history of capitalism. Reaganomics and Thatcherism meant all realistic and viable forms of socialism in the west were extinguished. This time has also been marked as the starting point of late capitalism (Fisher, 2009: 16). The choice to use karaoke as a tool of inquiry was more profound than I could have realised while sardined amongst that mass of potential participants in that Berlin bar, but there was no doubt in my mind that it was the perfect place to start.

HEAVEN KNOWS I'M MISERABLE NOW

ZAPFFE, CAPITALISM AND SUBLIMATION AS ANTIDOTE

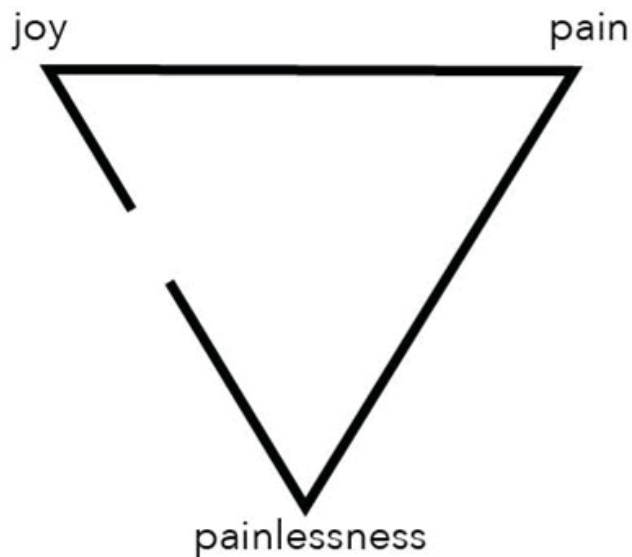
"Life is pain highness, and anyone who tells you differently is selling something" (The Princess Bride, 1987).

Peter Wessel Zapffe theorised that the human brain has evolved far past its usefulness for survival. Likening human consciousness to a long extinct deer whose horns had evolved to be so big that it could no longer lift its head from the ground, Zapffe argues that the result for humans is an overwhelming sense of "cosmic panic" (2018: 2). In considering this, why then have we evolved to understand both the inherent pain and meaninglessness of life and that being so, how is it that humans have not only continued to exist but also find a way to get out of bed each morning?

Zapffe proposes that the human psyche has developed four methods to come to terms with its own debilitating excess, which he terms "remedies against panic" (2018). The first three - isolation, anchoring and distraction - are all tools for achieving what I have termed painlessness. Through means of repression, they allow us to avoid pain, but as pain exists on the same plane as joy, it robs us of both (Fig. 1). Through my analysis, I concluded that the first three methods are used by

capitalism to trap us into thinking painlessness is the ultimate goal of our existence. Nowhere is this synchronicity more apparent than in the commodification of pain medication, as the most advanced capitalist economies also create and consume the majority of analgesic drugs. However, Zapffe's fourth remedy, sublimation, is a matter of "transformation rather than repression" (2018: 6). Capitalism cannot use sublimation as a way to reinforce itself because sublimation requires one to peak through the holes of a reality fabricated by capitalism. Therefore, a conscious application of this remedy could be deployed against this economic system.

figure 1:



These first three 'remedies' depend upon a "more or less self-conscious repression of [a] damaging surplus of consciousness. This process is virtually constant during our waking and active hours, and is a requirement of social adaptability and of everything commonly referred to as healthy and normal living" (Zapffe, 2018, 3). Indeed, the very definition of health and normality is a parameter of the repression required by a capitalist system. As an economic structure based on the "coercive laws of competition" (Marx, 1976, 433), capitalism is experienced as an imperative to be at odds with those around you and even with yourself. By resolving personal worth into market value, it can understand health and normality only in terms of optimising one's productive capacity and potential for capital accumulation.

Offered as an escape from pain, capitalism exploits painlessness and sells it to us as pleasure. In prompting us to seek painlessness rather than joy, the three remedies work seamlessly with our market economy to bind us to the comfort it claims to provide. Painlessness creates low-level anguish and dissatisfaction, which capitalism uses to encourage us to continue seeking comfort and the remedies are presented as the ultimate goals of our existence, creating analogues of pleasure and fulfilment.

Under capitalism isolation, which Zapffe describes as “a fully arbitrary dismissal from consciousness of all [that is] disturbing and destructive” (2018, 3) takes the form of both alienation and interpassivity. Marx introduces the concept of alienation as a division of one’s labour from its outcome. The worker is alienated from the product through a compartmentalization of the steps that create the product, removing the workers ownership of it, thus securing the capitalist’s control of both product and profit (1976). While our surplus labour lines the pockets of capitalists, and we lose control of what we ourselves have produced, this knowledge is ‘isolated’ and repressed, so that it seems that those who own the products of labour are more responsible for its production than the actual producers. Furthermore, in contemporary capitalist production, labour has become immaterial, leaking into our everyday lives, so that line between work and leisure is often impossible to define.

Isolation is also apparent in interpassivity, which the use of media or technology to perform certain feeling on behalf of the public, such as our dislike of capitalism (Fisher, 2009: 22). Green washing and ethical brands allow us to dismiss the human and environmental atrocities of the free market. We isolate ourselves from the intrinsic damage capitalism causes, allowing one to believe that “western consumerism, far from

being intrinsically implicated in systemic global inequalities, could itself solve them. All we have to do is buy the right products” (Fisher, 2009: 25).

Anchoring is the act of attaching oneself to a system or place that helps one create meaning, or a narrative which is larger than the self. It is present in the creation of ego, home and family, hopes and dreams, the beliefs and causes we hold on to as our own, and particularly in lineage and legacy (Zapffe, 2018). Capitalism utilises this by getting one to buy into systems of ownership and achievement. By believing it is necessary to own a house and a car or even a university degree for that matter, one invests (or ‘anchors’) oneself and one’s identity more deeply in the current system, and is therefore less likely to rebel against it. Moreover, ownership under capitalism creates an impetus for the importance of biological kin. Despite the fact that the assets acquired during life are quite useless after death, one can attempt to purchase a form of immortality via the passing on of capital to one’s heirs.

Distraction is perhaps the most obvious of the three. We are often well aware that we are using a plethora of meaningless activities to distract ourselves from despair. The fear of boredom, then, is in truth a fear of allowing oneself the time

to contemplate the painful reality of life. This is why boredom is used as a form of punishment, with prisoners denied the means of diverting themselves, while distraction is liberally applied to pacify children from infancy (Zapffe, 2018: 5). The nagging dissatisfaction of painlessness feeds a constant craving for consumption as a form of distraction, forming a vicious circle which feeds the market economy.

By contrast, sublimation embraces the unfathomable horror of existence. A reference to the Kantian concept of the sublime, rather than the Freudian term of the same name, sublimation is a willingness to lean-in and stare at the abyss, micro-dosing all the fear and pain that comes with it and using its transformative power to experience the elation of unmediated awareness. Here Zapffe seems to develop Nietzsche's concept of Rausch in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which both identify art, and particularly music, as having a potent capacity to effect sublimation. Nietzsche says, "Art alone can redirect those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live" (1999, 40).

If sublimation is the only remedy which cannot be employed in the service of capital, then perhaps it could be used as a weapon against it. By confronting the horrors capitalism

alleges to protect us from, even in a small way, could we erode this system we are captive to? Can a leaning-in to fear and pain through a collective ritual of sublimation shift us towards a more joyful future? And what if the collective ritual we used to do that was karaoke? This cultural phenomenon appropriates pop music, an artistic output that has been co-opted by the capitalist machine, and reclaims it as a vehicle for expression. It is a place where we confront fears, such as singing in public, and convey both deeply painful and righteously joyful emotions for our community. And it's a lot of fun.

While karaoke has been exploited by capitalism as a method of distraction thus an excuse to sell things, interestingly the man who invented the first karaoke machine, Daisuke Inoue, has acquired very little capital from its invention. He never patented the idea and accredits much of its popularity to this fact: "I may not have the original patent [...], but I have good friends and family that I love, and I can't help but smile every day," (Inoue interviewed by Real, 2019). Thus the origins of karaoke, much like the origins of music, are not tied to profits. When we sing, we use our voices to traverse the boundary of the body with past experiences of pain, grief and joy and actively connect with those around us. Karaoke offers a space in which non-professionals have access to this pursuit,

and has the ability to “transform a collection of individuals into a group” (Drew, 2001: 52). Singing is released from the individualistic clutches of virtuosity and given over to energetic expressions. As Fronäs argues, one cannot

foresee what the performers will do with the music at hand. We may fill the void in karaoke music with the voids in ourselves...But we may also choose to sing with passion, off key and hoarsely, but full of our unique experience (Fronäs, 1994: 13).

Nietzsche states that “from highest joy there comes a cry of horror or a yearning lament at some irredeemable loss” (1999: 21), and so too, I believe that the individual cries of pain and rapture found in karaoke create pathways of connection and co-operation opening us to experiences of ecstatic joy.

DON'T YOU WANT ME, BABY?

ACTIVE VULNERABILITY: A PARTICIPATORY HYPOTHESIS

Before embarking on this research, years of casual observation and practice had led me to the hypothesis that vulnerability was at the heart of what made participation work. For me, vulnerability is an umbrella under which exists risk, failure, shame, fear and pain. Unpicking how all of these things are present in my body and how they interact with each other in my performing body was key to understanding how I could use vulnerability in performance.

The first definition of vulnerability that seemed to sit well with me came from Brené Brown, which explained it as a state of “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure” attached to feelings of shame and fear of rejection (2010). While Brown’s definition provides a useful starting point, it does not fully encapsulate how I want to use vulnerability as a performer. As it is often easier to define something through reductive rather than additive means¹, I began with what I knew was not part of the vulnerability I sought to define.

¹ This approach was also used in ‘Remedies Against Panic’ to help define the post-capitalist future the audience wants to create, in asking the audience what they want less of rather than more of in the future.

The human body is innately vulnerable. We are soft creatures with little in the way of natural armour to protect us from physical threats. Although physical vulnerability is a universal human trait, it wasn't the device that I wanted to use to incite participation, as putting my body in danger of physical harm seemed more likely to alienate the audience than to invite them in. While physical pain ties us together as humans, it is also often seen as a lonely or solitary state, for one can never precisely know the pain of another (Ahmed, 2004: 21). Emotional vulnerability also seemed to be an excessively limiting definition for my research. While it is as universal as its physical counterpart, emotion is "viewed as beneath the faculties of thought and reason [...] it is to be reactive rather than active" (Ahmed, 2004: 3). Brown's definition, too, which ties vulnerability to a fear of rejection, relegates it to a state of reactivity. However, as a performer inviting audience participation, I had the imperative to be active rather than reactive in what I was doing.

In my analysis of vulnerability in Ann Liv Young's performances as Sherry, I found that while she is very active in creating a microcosm which allows her to magnify others' vulnerabilities, this usually results in a deflection from her own, creating fractures between her and the audience. But I knew her forceful way of preying on the public was not what I wanted

either. I was much more interested in Alice O'Grady's notion of "creating spaces in which participants might experience vulnerability critically [as] a deliberate aesthetic choice that foregrounds notions of openness, accountability, and trust (however precarious, contentious, and slippery those terms might be)" (2017, xi). Where Young's use of character helps her evade her own vulnerability, I had no desire to hide behind layers of façades, and instead to find a way to expose a core of my being which is often hidden.

Through the lens of polyvagal and attachment theory, I was able to analyse the interplay between physical and emotional vulnerability and come to a new understanding of how to use it. Humans have survived despite their susceptibility to mortal injury because of their ability to form connections with others. Emotional vulnerability is the tool we use to build trust and forge alliances, thus somewhat paradoxically; it is our ability to be emotionally injured that has kept us alive. We need to feel safe, however, in order for our nervous systems to activate what is known in polyvagal theory as the "social engagement system", which is what we use to form and build attachments (Porges, 2017). By making use of this theory to analyse the mechanisms of participatory performance, I could better understand the physiological hurdles to connecting with an audience, thus allowing me to create the

conditions necessary for engagement. In my lexicon² I came to the term active vulnerability as a way to describe the way I use vulnerability as a tool for participatory performance. I will quote directly from my lexicon for this definition:

“Active vulnerability means openness to the risk of being hurt and of experiencing pain. It is an act of reaching out with our vulnerability, not with the expectation that it will be fixed, for human vulnerability is inexorable, but to use it as a tool with which we ardently create the connections in which we want to be entangled [...] Through this expansion, one can hold out an open hand to another’s vulnerability without judgement, leading to a space where we are no longer merely reactive to fears and challenges, but active participants in the building of vital connections” (Fidler, 2021: 4).

In “Remedies Against Panic”, I create the conditions for active vulnerability with my audience through the use of polyvagal practices, failure and invitation, meshed with a careful balance of control and flexibility.

² An essay written for the conclusion of the Post-Body Reflections module in Autumn 2021, in which I defined three terms important to my research.

TAKE ON ME

POLYVAGAL THEORY, SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND CO-REGULATION

“If you’re singing, you can’t be running from a sabre-toothed tiger” (Brandt, 2020)

Polyvagal theory is named for its relation to the vagus nerve; a large nerve at the core of both our nervous system and the body itself. The nervous system has three modes: sympathetic, dorsal and ventral. The sympathetic mode, more commonly known as ‘fight or flight’ and the dorsal mode, more commonly known as ‘freeze’ or ‘play-dead’ are the spaces we enter when we are under threat. The job of the vagus nerve is to move us between these states as is deemed necessary by our environment, with a goal of spending most of our time in a ventral vagal state, more commonly known as ‘rest and digest’. However, it is important to note that the different autonomic states are not fully independent from each other, but rather they can mix and overlap to various degrees at any one point in time. An individual might be dorsally sympathetic or sympathetically ventral.

While the sympathetic and dorsal modes have been very important, evolutionarily speaking, to our survival, the flooding of our systems with adrenaline and cortisol while in

a sympathetic state narrows our senses to be hyper-focused on all potential threats. The dorsal mode initiates a semi-shutdown in which both breathing and heart rate are limited. In both conditions we lose the capacity to perform basic biological functions such as sleep and digestion, and the neural circuits that support emotional regulation and social engagement become inaccessible. It is only in the ventral vagal state that we have the capacity to connect with others. (Porges, 2017).

This is vital because it is the social engagement system that allows secure attachments to be formed and maintained and it is these connections that keep us safe in the world. In other words, we need to feel safe in order to form the bonds that will allow us to continue to feel that way. When one is in a space that the nervous system deems to be secure, i.e. in a ventral state, “a fuller range of access to empathy, compassion, playfulness, humour, and tolerance in differences are all potentiated, resulting in a richer opportunity for lived experience and purpose in one’s life” (Flores, Porges, 2017: 241). This positive feedback loop is known in polyvagal theory as the vagal brake. Polyvagal practices inform us on how one can stimulate the vagus nerve, instigating the vagal brake and bringing us back to and keeping us in a ventral vagal state (Brandt, 2020; Fern, 2020; Porges, 2017).

Unlike many of the other larger nerve systems in our body, such as the sciatic in the leg or the ulnar in the arm, the vagus is placed deep in the torso, running from the brainstem to the groin, never nearing the surface of the skin. Therefore, stimulation of the nerve through direct manipulation is impossible. Fortunately there are other, more circuitous methods for vagal nerve stimulation, which include deep breathing, eating, pooping, orgasm, laughing and singing (Brandt, 2020). Having already decided to engage with karaoke as a site of participatory performance, this connection between vagal stimulation and singing was rather serendipitous. I knew that I wanted to create feelings of safety and connection among my audience so that when I asked them to participate, they felt secure enough to do so. Imagine my delight in discovering that the main tool I had chosen for participation seemed to already have a built-in mechanism for creating these same feelings of safety and connection. By asking the audience to step on stage and take the risk of performing in front of others, I was pushing their nervous systems into the outer edges of the ventral plane or even into the sympathetic, and then, by asking them to sing, I was effectively asking them to activate the vagal brake thus bringing their nervous systems back into a place of safety. In order to sing, one must breathe. Breath work is one of the foundations of polyvagal practices. In simplified terms,

an inhale leans the nervous system towards the sympathetic mode and an exhale leans it toward the ventral. Singing requires long exhalations as one pushes air through the vocal folds to create sound, as well as activation of the facial muscles. In order to keep the rhythm of the music, the time for an inhale is often very short, thus limiting the amount of time sympathetic pathways are open, maximising the ventral vagal pathways and slowing the heart rate. Singing is an exercise in turning on and off the vagal brake combined with the neural regulation of the muscles in the face and head, including those of the middle ear, larynx and pharynx, thus becoming a complete exercise for the “entire integrated social engagement system” (Porges, 2017: 26).

Music is a vehicle for emotion, be it excitement, passion, joy, pain or trepidation. The act of listening to and making music activates the social engagement system: “Often we are sad because we feel misunderstood and disconnected. Music makes us feel connected again and can express the feelings we don’t have words for” (Darling, 2021). However, because of the vocal system’s placement in relation to the vagus nerve and the complex activation that singing requires, when we sing we immerse ourselves in the soothing powers of the vagal brake. Singing about trauma and pain allows our nervous systems to deal with these powerful emotions without pulling

us into sympathetic distress or dorsal dissociation. We remain present and feeling, but not threatened.

Moreover, as is often said, ‘calm is contagious’. This is known in polyvagal and attachment theory³ as co-regulation or attunement. This is what happens when the ventral-vagal state of one person helps to bring about a feeling of safety in someone who is either sympathetically or dorsally dysregulated (Fern, 2020). The origin of co-regulation is thought to lie in the relationship between mother and infant, a mother’s soothing voice tempering cries of distress (Cazden, 2017: 143; Porges, 2012). The centrality of voice to this dynamic places vocalisation at the heart of co-regulation: “The voice is a transparent indicator of our physiological state and an extremely (if not the most) potent trigger of the physiological states of others” (Porges in communication with Cazden, May 31, 2016). This is amplified by instating the vagal brake through singing, as it automatically calms the singer and helps to attune listeners to the singer’s ventral state. If someone is apprehensive, thus dysregulated before singing, hearing another person singing or singing with them will help restore them to a ventral vagal state .

³ Attachment theory can be seen as the psychological articulation of the physiological happenings explained by polyvagal theory.

I WANT TO BREAK FREE

SHAME: WHERE I FOUND IT AND HOW I USED IT.

Shame is the belief that we are, for one reason or another, fundamentally unworthy of belonging to a group (Brown, 2012) thus making it a vital underpinning of expressions of vulnerability. This element of risk of being cast out from our social group, which through the lens of attachment theory we can understand as a direct threat to our survival, elevates mere exposure to a highly vulnerable state. However, for me, shame is often elusive, especially while performing. This hinders my efforts to engage with vulnerability as without shame, my attempts to transgress myself lack risk, thus working more to alienate my audience rather than inspire empathy. I can be easily entertaining or engaging, but remain a sort of unobtainable figure; the performer to be watched from a distance rather than one wanted to join. As stated in the introduction, I created two participatory performances over my two years of research. While the content of the two shows is radically different, it was shame that connected them.

'SLUT: A Love Story' in a one-woman manifesto examining my changing relationship to the identity of being a slut. My connection to this identity had always been effortless, but became more strained in recent years. Somehow, I bypassed much of the shame that others learned to feel about their

sexual selves and their sexual bodies and therefore, much of my artistic practice in the past has focused on sexuality in one way or another, be it as a burlesque performer, peep-show dancer or feminist pornographer. It was comfort with the subject that attracted me to it as a site of inquiry and because of the very personal subject matter, it allowed for a more controlled approach to participation. I had to think carefully in how I would conduct my research at that time because of the then current corona restrictions. Singing, particularly in groups such as choir and karaoke, was deemed an effective way of spreading corona, so it felt appropriate to put my exploration of karaoke on hold.

Sexuality is an obvious place where we are taught to hold shame. Patriarchy and monotheistic religion has spent millennia driving home that sex outside of marriage, particularly for women, is immoral, shameful and still today can be punishable by death (hooks, 2014). In fact, in German, 'Scham' (shame) is used as a prefix for the words of the female external genitalia. Pubic hair is 'Schamhaar', the inner and outer labia are 'Schamlippen' and the entire vulva can be referred to as simply 'Die Scham' or 'the shame'.

My relationship to sexuality is, however, for the most part shameless. In contrast to this, my relationship to my voice has been riddled with shame. I did not sing out loud, even when alone, until the age of twenty-six, with the exception of one

or two very drunken karaoke exploits. As shame is part of the equation of vulnerability, having these opposing standpoints in my body allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the subject.

As mentioned above, the vagus nerve runs from the brainstem to the pelvic floor and can be stimulated via orgasm. The pelvis is considered in many somatic practices to be the root of movement (Blades and Nelson 2002). Signals originating in the brainstem track down the vagus nerve and are bounced back by the perineum. Here, I found a similar route for my research. I could gain new insight in this topic I was already knowledgeable of, by placing it in the light of polyvagal informed participation. I hoped this new understanding would create a solid base to spring from as I went on to explore the role of shame in the voice in the second year.

However, in the creation of "SLUT", vocal moments kept cropping up. Notably, I ended the show with a song I wrote. I had never written a song before, and was not really trying to do so, so this was quite a surprise. However, I believe it helped to offset some of the comfort I have in the topic of sexuality by leaning into my discomfort with music. It allowed me to show a questioning and insecurity that other modes of performance could not.

There is a dichotomy to the voice which, while being extremely

revealing, as ‘it implicates a correspondence with the fleshy cavity that alludes to the deep body, the most bodily part of the body’ (Cavarero, 2005, 4), is also something we have to use in our everyday lives. Sexuality’s ties to shame are obvious and we have been taught to hide our sexuality away in the day-to-day. The voice, on the other hand, has a much more subtle relationship to shame. However, most people, even professional singers, find it difficult to open their mouth and sing if asked to do so on the spot. Furthermore, there is a common narrative concerning the horror of hearing one’s recorded voice. The voice is tied to the body and therefore reveals the body. Furthermore, it leaves the boundaries of the body to reach out to others but in doing so leaves one exposed and vulnerable. There is a double bind to this experience, both “empowering and exposing, which marks the vulnerability of the individual [and] is what distinguishes the voice as a site of courage” (Benjamin , 2018). As the “transparent indicator of our physiological state” (Porges in communication with C, May 31, 2016), and thus of our psychological state, the voice leaves nowhere to hide. Moreover, the shame that lies in the singing voice amplifies this vulnerability. Therefore, and particularly because of the intense shame I learned to feel about my singing voice, when I sing, I can access a depth of vulnerability which is not possible for me in other performance modes.

DON'T STOP BELIEVING IN FAILURE

(EVEN WHEN YOU'RE FAILING TO FAIL CORRECTLY)

“I believe if I want my audiences to experience the range of their humanity, and I do, then I must reflect back at them, authentic success and authentic failure” (Mac, 2013).

I stopped believing in perfection many years ago, and as such, failure has been a favourable tool in the creative arsenal of my artistic practice. However, when one dismisses the need for perfection, there is temptation to file all imperfections under purposeful and appropriate failure, enhancing the work’s approachability and humanity. Failure implies one has taken a risk, thus placing it in the matrix of vulnerability. However, as I discovered in this research, not all failure is created equally.

Failure is unavoidable in karaoke, and is also one of its many charms. Karaoke singers “take the stage under conditions so unstructured and unpredictable that many trained singers would be frightened off. They risk failure in the most intimate, diffuse performance contexts, where failure can feel very personal” (Drew, 2001: 17). Karaoke host, Alexander Cameltoe, who I interviewed as part of my ethnographic research on karaoke, shared their maxim of “No divas, no stags” (2022). ‘Divas’ refers to singers who are very polished and only interested in the songs they sing and not in the other performances, and ‘stags’ refers to large anonymous

groups such as stag parties. In both instances, we see a lack of risk thus a lack of vulnerability, which disengages us from the performance. Audience members want to have an investment in the success of performances. Without risk and failure, the audience cannot imagine itself as being crucial to the performance through supportive observation. It is “those moments of failure that build empathy for the character” (Bustamante, 2002) and without it, the collective effort is lost. In Rob Drew’s ethnographic exploration of karaoke, he found that some singers even pretend to be first-time karaoke performers in an effort to manufacture an audience’s empathy (2001, 46).

My strong stage presence often works well with failure as I can pass off technical mishaps with finesse. My body responds “on the spot and in the moment of performance to the new configurations of space and uncertainty” (Halberstam, 2011: 144). However, learning how to purposely use failure was something I found tricky in this research, for it is not as simple as not rehearsing. When I chose to begin “Remedies Against Panic” with REM’s “It’s the End of the World as We Know It”, I thought the fast cavalcade of lyrics perfect for an opening number full of failure. My only worry was that if I performed it too much I would become too good at it. However, this initial approach was wrong. Even though I wasn’t trying to do a bad job of the song while performing it, I also wasn’t trying hard enough to do it well in the first place, thus rendering the

failure as a mechanism for vulnerability useless.

By working with an improvised narrative, I wanted to find a way to give control to my audience and create a space where I truly would not know what was going to happen, setting the bar so high for me as a performer that failure was inevitable. Failure may be “simply one of the strongest agents for change the universe has to offer,” (Stanley, 2013: 05) but it must be executed in earnest. The advice given to me many times over the development of the work was to have some pre-set parts of the narrative to anchor the story, thus making it better or more plausible. However, I knew this would result in losing the teeth behind the failure I was trying to engage with. It wasn’t until I decided to lean into failure, making it part of the dramaturgy that I learned how to use it to my advantage.

For example, when I embark on the telling of an improvised narrative with my audience, they need me to try my hardest to do what I say I am setting out to do. I take them along on this journey and they help me with their contributions through the participatory activities. However, I must really try to tell a good story, and I do, even if I set the audience up for disappointment, warning them that it probably won’t be very good. This is similar to the supplications of ‘bad’ singing by some of the karaoke singers interviewed by Drew to create a “collective sigh of relief”, as the audience then “understands there are a hundred other good reasons to want to sing”

(Drew, 2001: 46), or in my case, participate in an interactive improvised narrative. And when, at the climax of the show, I give up on the narrative because of how badly it is going, I have to have really exhausted all my options. However, what I have not made apparent to my audience is that the story we have actually been building is one of their activation, co-operation, and authorship (Bishop, 2006: 12). Thus, if my failure is real, the investment from the audience will also be real and they will be ready to pick up the reins and finish the show without me.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

THE POWER BALLAD APPROACH AND 'THE CALM BUZZ'

Throughout my research, I imagined how a performer might prepare their body for vulnerability. Could I devise a series of steps that would bring about an actively vulnerable temperament? Or perhaps a 'warm-up for vulnerability' could just shift one's energy slightly, subtly opening up access points for my audience. I knew that I did not just want to be some reactively vulnerable presence on-stage, leaving myself to the will of the audience, but rather an active and inviting example of vulnerability. As my natural stage presence is decidedly not vulnerable, it felt important to understand how to fine-tune my performance demeanour. While the phenomenon of 'stage-presence' is somewhat enigmatic, polyvagal theory can shed some light on the physiological mechanisms one has at one's disposal.

In my first year of research I experimented with techniques borrowed from Osho meditation practice, a dynamic form of movement-based meditation, to see if they could somehow unlock a mode of vulnerability within me. I was particularly attracted to the methods of shaking and catharsis within the Osho practice. I also began taking vocal lessons in order to help me understand the physical components behind singing in the hopes of better understanding vagal nerve stimulation.

During this tuition I learned many new vocal warm-ups which were steadily integrating themselves into my practice. Before I went on stage to perform the premiere of "SLUT: A Love Story", naturally, I warmed-up first. However, as this show involves some singing, I incorporated vocal exercises in addition to my more standard movement-based warm-ups. These were all chosen haphazardly on the spot, however the resulting state was unlike any I had known before using a purely movement-based warm-up.

Despite my extreme comfort on stage, I sometimes do, of course, get some butterflies before performing. These flutters of anxiety are usually a comforting sign of excitement. The week before the premiere of "SLUT", however, I was unusually awash with nerves. And yet, from the moment I finished this vocal/movement warm-up I felt calm yet alert, more comparable to the way I feel before I step on stage to perform an old cabaret act. This state, as I discovered later in a paper by Joanna Cazden, has been labelled "the calm buzz", and is described as "a strong buzz of arousal balanced with strong internal sense of calm" (Cazden, 2017). Through my vocal warm-ups I had instigated the vagal brake, thus edging myself out of the heightened sympathetic state of nervousness, without losing any of its energy. My body was alert and ready but not afraid.

The "calm buzz" has been offered by Cazden as an explanation of the physiological underpinnings of stage-presence. The

sympathetic and ventral vagal states are both engaged at the same time, co-regulating each other, providing enough adrenaline to be alert and aware, without blocking the social engagement system. Interestingly, in relation to the content of "SLUT", this is a similar physiological state to that which we experience while engaging in sexual activity (Motofei and Rowland, 2005: 81). As explained above, the anatomical proximity of the vagus nerve and the vocal system lends itself to an exceptional relationship from the standpoint of polyvagal practice, thus vocal exercises are a particularly powerful way to engage the vagal brake; the force which helps recover and maintain a ventral state.

During my residency at Communitism in Athens, Greece, when I was conducting weekly performance experiments to develop "Remedies Against Panic", I continued to work with the idea of creating a warm-up for vulnerability, which would place me in a state from which active vulnerability could be communicated to my audience. As the "audience-as-communication-partner requires the same balance of safety and excitement in order to remain engaged, and senses directly whether the performers are, in fact, secure in what they present (Cazden, 2017: 42), I wanted to concoct a presence that was not just secure and enthusiastic, but also had an expansive openness. Not merely available for connection, but decidedly charging towards it.

Building from the knowledge I gained in my phenomenological experience of the “calm buzz” and its activation through vocal exercises, I experimented with other modes of vocalisation, combining them with both movement and non-vocal vagal brake stimuli, in addition to further experimentation with Osho meditation practices. Music choice was something I always found challenging when engaging in these warm-ups as it was such a powerful addition to the experience. And while silence is definitely appropriate for some of the activities, others needed music to create timing and mood. I had been selecting music somewhat intuitively from my own playlists of favourite songs and artists, and as I was deeply involved in the building of a show that used music from the 1980s, much of what was swimming in my head at that moment was just that.

The power ballad is a mainstay of 1980s music and its rousing and expressive energy make for a perfect union with the melodrama and bravado often present in karaoke. While, “ballads court intimacy [as] a singer imparts what comes across as deeply felt emotions and draws in listeners through delicate candour” (Metzer, 2012: 439), the power ballad goes beyond this. The power evokes frisson in the listener. The steady, commanding drums vibrate deep in the body, not merely tugging but wrenching at the heart. The power ballad is not simply an expression of emotions but an all-encompassing call-to-action.

While experimenting with my ‘warm-up for vulnerability’ practice, it came to me that the power ballad might be the musical expression of “the calm buzz”. They are at once warm and soothing pieces of music, combined with surges of uplift and engagement, coating outbursts of intense, painful emotions in swathes of euphoria. They are “extroverted songs” putting the singer’s deep despair and longing on show, giving an “emotional adrenaline rush” as put by David Metzer in his 2012 paper “The Power Ballad”, which professes to being the first study of this often academically overlooked musical form (438). Metzer places the power ballad as a specifically post-1970s sub-section of what he titles “ecstatic ballads” (443). In the mid-70s power ballads began to establish themselves through a more standardised means of escalation to those methods used by earlier ecstatic ballads of the 50s and 60s.

The power ballad starts tempered and restrained, like the knot in the throat and the welling of the eyes before one succumbs to tears. It then runs through a series of “expressive plateaus” (Metzer, 2012: 438) like outburst of violent sobs, interrupted by a temporary regaining of control; a few deep breaths, before emotion overwhelms again. This formulation for assertive and propulsive expressions of vulnerability provided me with a structure I could use as a base to inform the warm-up I was trying to create, which I have since named “The Power Ballad Approach”.

Similar to the introspective and lightly scored introductions common to power ballads (Metzer, 2017: 439), I start with low, almost inaudible hums, ten seconds in duration. With each breath I move up in pitch, traversing at least two scales. While I pay attention to any breaks or wobbles, I try not to correct them, and continue without force or increase in volume. I then move on to a series of neck and shoulder stretches combined with ever increasing phonic yawns, akin to those first softly sung lyrics of the first verse. I arch my back as I yawn, opening my chest, pushing my heart forward. I stretch and massage my face and tongue here as well. Then just like the first hit of percussion that comes into any power ballad, I hug my knees and drop heavily into a backwards roll. I breathe in as I come back up to sitting and allow the floor to push the air out of me as I roll back again, succumbing to the steadfast resistance of the earth until my momentum propels me to come to a standing forward fold.

We are at the end of the first verse, and there is a break in percussion, allowing the singer to return to a previous albeit more strained vocal tone. I breathe in, feeling all the places I can hold my breath in my back, keeping those spaces open as I breathe out and allow my upper body to sway. I breathe in again and roll myself up with a high-pitched trill of the lips; the adding of an instrument in the pre-chorus. From a wide stance standing position, I begin to twist my body while I continue the lip trills, aiming for the sound to remain constant,

despite my twists becoming more dynamic. I allow my hands to slap my sides vigorously as I whip myself back and forth.

I am then ready for the first chorus, in which I shake my body while focusing on fears and painful memories, done to a song of my choosing. I try to make the shaking potent and unrestrained, finding the parts of my body that seem unshakable. Afterwards, I take a moment, in the style of the second verse in which the band has pulled back from a larger arrangement. I shout to the other side of the room. I try to take all of the physical and emotional disturbances felt in the shaking and pull it from the centre of my body allowing it to sail across the room and hit the opposite wall. This escalates as I feel the power of my emotions come through and out of my body, but I am careful to not strain my voice in the doing. The power should come from the base of my pelvis; the bottom of the vagus nerve.

I am then ready for the final chorus, for which I put on another song that I use to dance to as a method for catharsis, allowing any expressive whims of pain, fear and helplessness to come through my movement. When the song finishes, I stand still, or come back to sitting. In the style of a musical outro, I close my eyes and let the first song that comes to my head out through my mouth. Just as I was in the first stage of humming, I am attentive to imperfections without trying to correct them or strain my voice. I think about opening a pathway from my

groin to my throat, allowing a sound which attracts all that I have felt through the warm-up to pass unhindered through my body and out of my mouth.

The power ballad approach is still in its infancy, having used the complete series as a pre-performance warm-up only a handful of times. There will most likely be developments and adjustments made as I continue to use it in my practice. Unfortunately, it seems impossible to find any concrete evidence of the difference this warm-up makes for the audience, as in order to do this I would have to perform the same show, with and without the warm-up, for the same audience, but without them having seen the other version of the show first. However, my phenomenological experience feels concrete and, as a practice-based researcher, the next step for this inquiry would be to share the technique with other performers to see how they experience it and what it does to their feelings of presence both on and off stage.⁴

⁴ A video of 'The Power Ballad Approach' is available to watch here: <https://vimeo.com/724527838/28f3633fcc>

WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PARTICIPATING AUDIENCE

"I believe, to learn what your audience needs, is the job. But caution that sometimes we confuse need with want. Giving our audiences what they want is not the job. Sometimes giving them what they want is a fringe benefit or happy accident but it is not the job" (Mac, 2013).

YOU INVITED THEM TO A SHOW, SO MAKE IT A SHOW

I, the performer, walk on stage. I denote myself as the centre of attention through focused lighting, a marvellously shiny costume and the use of my voice, which is singing in the style of REM to the karaoke backing track of "It's the End of the World as We Know It". It is clear that I have invited you, the audience, here to look at me. Besides my technical assistant, Stelios Troullakis, I am alone on stage. I am all-show and all-showing-doing, (Schechner, 2013: 28). I struggled with what my role was on stage during development. I knew I was more than just a facilitator but I needed to be more than someone to just be passively watched. Through experimentation, I became a conduit. I take both narrative and emotional input from the audience and shift around my body, finding how I can push the boundaries of the space while keeping a feeling of safety in the room.

The song is very fast and not only does the work of setting the theme for the content of the evening, but also, through the breakneck pace at which the words must leave my mouth, makes micro-failures inevitable. These failures are made

more apparent through the projection of the lyrics for the audience to see. A second projection invites the audience to join in at the end of the chorus with the line, 'and I feel fine', which is exactly how I want them to feel. However, within the first two minutes of the performance, I tell the audience that they will be participating in its creation. It is a dance of subtle but active vulnerability. "The journey towards agency begins with an experience of vulnerability and an awareness of its productivity as a generative tool" (O'Grady, 2017: 15). I am confident and in control, but there are moments in which my authentic failure exposes my humanity in a reach for connection. I offer a way for the audience to support me through the simple and collective action of singing one line, instigating the vagal brake, before pushing them towards sympathetic anticipation with the suggestion of participation.

SET THE RULES, EXPOSE THE WHY

My mode of performance changes with the end of the song and a lighting transition. I am quieter, standing at a microphone in the corner of the stage. Hushed and steady tones are aimed at making my audience feel safe again. Borrowing directly from a device that Taylor Mac uses in "24-Decades of Popular Music", where before asking the audience to perform a participatory task, he speaks about how he tends to dislike shows which require participation because he feels, as an audience member, that the performers are trying to "force fun" on him (2019, Berlin). In "Remedies Against Panic", I

acknowledge the fear and discomfort that participation can often incite, and I make it clear that this is how I want my audience to feel.

There is then an offer of baseline participation, that of witnessing, for "a witness is not a bystander, but rather a perceiver whose presence makes a difference [...] Being a witness makes you responsible. Once an observer, you have become a participant" (Bogart, 2007: 56). This opens the possibility for those in the audience who find just the thought of participation unfathomable, that since in a way they are already doing it, perhaps it's not as bad as they think.

Next, I set ground rules for the activity we will embark on - the creation of a post-capitalist narrative musical using the pop music of the 1980s, making sure the audience knows that I have created these parameters around my own desires. I am still in charge because they need me to be in charge. I have invited them here and thus it is my responsibility to be a confident leader as we step into the unknown together. I also let them know that the narrative we will construct together throughout the evening will probably not be very good, as it is derived from a lineage of substandard story-telling, that being the jukebox musical. I have set the stakes high for myself by improvising a narrative on the spot in an attempt to supplant my own highly adaptable confidence and ease on stage. An effort to knock myself down a rung, thus bringing

me closer to the abilities of the audience.

Furthermore, I provide a motivation for the participation which is not just being 'good' at it, or being part of telling a story, but rather an exercise for revolutionary change. As I explained above, the nervous system's ability to deal with stress is one that can be made more resilient. One does not flip between a ventral and sympathetic state like a switch, but rather glides through the ventral until hitting a certain threshold. This threshold is different for everyone and can be pushed to expand the ventral vagal state in spite of stressful stimuli, and as explained by "the calm buzz", the sympathetic can even be co-regulated by the vagal, using qualities from both states at once. By creating a controlled environment, I offer the audience a somewhat safe space in which they can push into the upper verges of their ventral vagal state. I explain that this is a necessary skill we need for inciting change rather than just succumbing to it. In talking about the participation in Taylor Mac's "24-decades", Murray-Román proposes that, "these ritual exercises are not in themselves a social transformation, but are an occasion to practice the gestures that would enable anyone to take up direct action in the world outside" (2019: 12). This is an act of sublimation; a collective leaning-in to fear and pain in the hopes of transforming it into ecstatic joy and a hopeful future.

THINGS ARE LESS SCARY IN A GROUP, SO THAT'S A GOOD PLACE TO START

By starting participatory activities in a group, I offer both anonymity and autonomy, with the collective support of the audience. This collectivity has the added bonus of co-regulation. This "workout of the social engagement system in [a] group strengthens the vagal brake, enabling it to efficiently modulate emotional arousal levels and visceral states" (Flores, Porges, 2017: 214). No one stands out, but each has their part to play. I do not ask anyone to get on stage and make it clear that the singing we undertake is about expression and not virtuosity, as "our understanding of singing as a form of competence can blind us to its flexibility as a means of expression" (Drew, 2001: 40). The audience are told that while they might be singing, they are not singers here and if they should feel the need to express themselves through screaming or wailing instead, that is fine. After a simple warm-up, adapting some of my methods from "The Power Ballad Approach", to add both humour and a bit of contextual 80s flair, I hand over some control by asking an audience member to pick the first song from the stack of song slips they were all asked to fill out beforehand, choosing songs they might want to sing from a curated list (Appendix 1). The songs from this opening number grouping have all been divided into different sections to create a karaoke choir. The audience is separated into groups corresponding to the different sections and we begin. It is raw and unrehearsed.

There is a lot of failure. We step into the unknown together, actively exposing ourselves and in the small moments of success, a bond begins to form.

SINGLE SOMEONE OUT TO TAKE A RISK, BUT DON'T LET THEM DO IT ALONE

We move into the narrative in earnest. There are some world building exercises, with each of the questions posed to one of the groups from before, giving them all some footing in the narrative landscape. There is an option here for people to move to the stage to become part of the scenery, adding a 3D element to the projected background. Then we move to the next song, known in musical theatre as the 'I Want' song. The first song sets our starting point and this one gives the reason for our journey. I ask someone at random to pick the second song, and then ask the person whose name is on the slip if they want to sing it. This is a big ask. More than one person can sing if really necessary, but it's important to genuinely up the stakes here. I talk softly when directly addressing the chosen participant, looking at them in the eye with a calm and relaxed face. I remind them they don't have to be good at singing as long as they express whatever the song makes them feel. To expose and diffuse a bit of their shame and fear, I ask what they think will be the hardest thing about singing the song, and then, depending on the answer, ask the audience if they can assist the person to overcome this difficulty. I hand over a piece of my costume to help them

feel more stage ready. Using the information from the world building exercises and the content of the two songs that were chosen thus far, I continue to build a narrative, which will give the singer a bit more motivation. Once the song has started, I go around the audience and suggest a simple choreographic action, fitting with the narrative, that they are to execute on stage before coming back to their seat. When the song is over, I ask the singer(s) to remain on stage, as they are now the protagonist of this story.

KEEP ADDING PROTAGONISTS AND LET THEM KNOW THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

The next song position invokes a struggle or conflict in the narrative. This is the perfect opportunity to add more people to the stage. Here I choose two people to be at odds with those who have already sung and the rest of the audience is asked to support in some way. In the Arnhem rendition, the audience was asked to do a simple choreography from their chair during this song.

At this point it's all about getting the audience invested in as many ways as possible. The more elements that are happening the harder it is for me to pull out a promising narrative. I ask for new people to sing the fourth song, hoping to find a way out. Dance moves reminiscent of a childhood recital serve as a vehicle to get more and more people on stage, each having a small moment in the spotlight.

GO FOR FAILURE AND GO HOME

This is the climax, which was expanded on in my section about failure. I am not faking my failure to tell a post-capitalist tale. I really have failed, and this is genuinely scary for me, as I desperately want a post-capitalist world to be possible. But if I can't imagine it, can it ever exist? The societal challenges we face today seem insurmountable and I boil all that frustration down to this moment. This is my narrative anchor and the steady, sublimating rock of life's inescapable uncertainty means it will remain there. I collapse in my failure and exit the stage, leaving a final offer of participation for my audience in the form of a song slip. I place it on the stage, so they have to actively move to see it. If I have manifested enough of a collective mood through the rest of the performance, then they will be ready to sing this song and finish this narrative without me. I watch from the audience as they do this, and as they do, my despair at my failure turns to joy. Collectivity abounds and their success is my success is our success. I return to the stage, my costume having been shared amongst the audience throughout, and I perform with them, no longer a leader, but as part of the community I helped to create .

PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE

WITH DIFFERENT STARTING POINTS, WHICH MEANS THE END POINT IS DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE AND ENDINGS ARE HARD.

Each of our nervous systems are aligned differently, thus the thresholds of social engagement, safety and activation are different for everyone. Something that invites calm excitement in one person can cause another person to freeze. Therefore, when studying participation, what is required is an adjustment of one's understanding of what constitutes effective participation. For some audience members, it might just look like a slight change of posture in the seat they have been frozen to, while others would have participated no matter the conditions. So far, my audiences have been limited to those who have, for the most part, found it easy to be on stage (with a few exceptions, whose feedback was extremely valuable to my research).

At this stage, I can say that I have a secure base from which to continue my research on participation through the knowledge I have gained of polyvagal practices and particularly vocal-based applications. I look forward to sharing "The Power Ballad Approach" with other performers and deepening my understanding of what it does in different bodies. I am excited to share "Remedies Against Panic" with unknown and diverse

audiences and it will also be a pivotal test of the research to extract the score I have created for "Remedies" and apply it to new participatory performance pieces.

When I began this research, I believe I was grasping for control, hoping to find a way to know that every time I invited participation it would be met with enthusiasm. But this, I know now, is impossible. As I continue this research I am sure the response from my audiences will be varied, but that even small responses are still a valid form of stepping outside the comfort zone and creating micro-moments of sublimation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

REMEDIES AGAINST PANIC – SONG LIST

SONG 1 – OPENING NUMBER

Under Pressure - Queen

People are people - Depeche Mode

Here comes the rain again - Eurythmics

1999 - Prince

Livin' on a Prayer – Bon Jovi

SONG 2 – The “I/we Want” Song – (The Motivation for our Journey)

I want to dance with somebody - Whitney Houston

I want to break free - Queen

Heaven Knows I'm Miserable now - The Smiths

Some Guys have All The Luck – Rod Stewart

Material Girl - Madonna

SONG 3 – THE STRUGGLE/CONFLICT

Shout – Tears for Fears

Running up that Hill – Kate Bush

We don't need another hero - Tina Turner

Take on Me - Aha

Don't you want me baby – The Human League

SONG 4 – CLIMAX

Burning down the house – Talking Heads

Don't Dream it's over (Hey Now) – Crowded House

Rebel Yell – Billy Idol

Against All Odds (Take a look at me now) Phil Collins

Eternal Flame – The Bangles

SONG 5 - CLOSING NUMBER

This must be the place – Talking Heads

We Belong - Pat Benatar

Don't stop believing – Journey

Nothings gonna Stop us now –Starship

Everywhere – Fleetwood Mac

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