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**Transitive Property:**

**An Interdisciplinary Collaborative Performance**

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by

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## Abstract

*Transitive Property* was a structured improvisational performance that explored spontaneous co-creation through music and dance. The project sought to explore interdisciplinary relationships using coexistent, process-based, and collaborative creative methods inspired by Shultis, Cage, and Cunningham. In addition, the project explored how the use of collaborative improvisation in performance can incorporate the audience and physical environment in creative ways. The rehearsal process for *Transitive Property* occurred over six weeks and included collaborators specializing in music and dance. Rehearsals were planned based on improvisational and pedagogical methods of Reeve, Morgenroth, and Hahn, and ongoing feedback and responses from the collaborators were essential throughout the process. The rehearsal process resulted in the hour-long performance *Transitive Property*. Two performances of this work (Spring 2024) investigated the inherent musicality of dance and speech, the dance-like qualities of artists drawing or musicians playing, the visual artistry of written language and scores, and the performance of everyday action. *Transitive Property* demonstrated that process-based artmaking in the form of interdisciplinary and collaborative improvisation can be an effective way to strengthen inter-performer relationships and create meaningful experiences for performers and audiences.

## Introduction

My creative project, *Transitive Property*, was an interdisciplinary performance involving movement, sonic elements, visual mediums, and language. The goal of this research was to explore various definitions of art and performance, with a focus on the American experimental tradition of the twentieth century. My project explored the definitions of art that were discovered in my research and melded multiple art forms together in one temporal space. Moreover, I intended for my project to accentuate the ways that visual art, dance, and music interact with one another when created and/or experienced simultaneously. In this paper, *Transitive Property* may interchangeably be referred as my “project,” “research,” “work,” “thesis,” or “performance.”

Part of the catalyst for my thesis was an interest in the inherent impermanence of performance and the ways that the passage of time becomes a part of art itself. The act of creating art is something that occurs over a period of time, regardless of whether that time has a specific beginning or end, and even if it spans a lifetime (or more). And, while a performance can be made semi-permanent with video or audio recording, experiencing that recording is still an action that takes up a certain amount of time, in the same way that listening to an orchestra performance or looking at a piece of art in a museum does. And so, the *creation* and *experience* of art are impermanent. My project explored this idea by having the creation and experience of art occur at the same time via improvisation in front of an audience.

I named my project after the transitive property of equality in mathematics. The transitive property states that for values of the same type  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$ , if  $a$  is equal to  $b$ , and  $b$  is equal to  $c$ , then  $a$  must also be equal to  $c$ .<sup>1</sup> This title relates to the equal value I wanted to place on music

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1. “Transitive property,” Math.net.



and dance in my project. While I refer to “dance” and “music” separately throughout this paper for clarity’s sake, I believe that they are not so fundamentally different. The sounds that dancers make, such as their breathing and their feet hitting the floor, are music; the movements that musicians make while playing or singing are also dance. This ideology was inspired by a conversation I had after playing drums in an African dance class. Outside the studio, a woman asked me if I was dancing in the class, and I responded, no, I was “just drumming.” She laughed and told me that I *was* dancing. That conversation has stuck with me and changed the way I think of music and dance, not as separate entities but as extensions of each other. *Transitive Property* played off this idea by using improvisation to simultaneously create music and dance and including the audience as part of the performance. So, I argue that all art forms are interrelated and that essentially, everything is art if one sees it as art.

### Defining “Art”

Part of the argument that my thesis made is that the “art” of performance does not stop at the edge of the stage—rather, it includes the rehearsal process, the setting of the performance, the relationships between the performers, and the audience. To make this claim, I should first be able to define “art,” for which countless theories have been devised. One of the earliest recorded theories comes from Plato, who defines art as representational; he insists that all art is a recreation of things that exist in the real world (and in turn, that those recreations are inferior to the real thing). Others suggest that art reflects reality, that it must be human made, that it must express feelings in some way, or that it must have an aesthetic function. There is ongoing debate regarding the validity of *objet trouvés*, or found objects, as art. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines an *objet trouvé* as “a natural or discarded object found by chance and held to have

aesthetic value.”<sup>2</sup> This can also include man-made objects that were not intended to be “art,” but hold aesthetic value to the observer (such as some architecture), which leads to the question of intentionality in art: can something be considered art even if the creator didn’t intend it to be? And, conversely, can something be considered art simply because the creator intended it to be? Something similar could be asked of other art forms—at what point does movement become dance, language become poetry, action become theater, or sound become music? Is there a distinction at all?

There is no satisfying answer to these questions because all definitions are subjective and can be contested for their inclusion or exclusion of certain works. However, for the purpose of my project, I defined art using the following two criteria:

1. Art is any action, object, or experience that is intended to be art by the creator and/or perceived to be art by the observer.
2. Art is external (e.g., picturing a sunset in one’s mind’s eye is not art).

This very broad definition includes any movement, action, sound (including language), or visual stimulus (including things that are naturally occurring, like a landscape) that is created with artistic intent or that is perceived to be art by its observer (either an audience or the artist themselves, who often serves as both creator and observer).

I defined art in this way to show that the “art” of my performance was not just the music and dance intentionally made by the performers; it was also all the rehearsals leading up to it, the unintentional combination of the music with ambient sounds (like cicadas, birds, sirens, or

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2. Adajian, “The Definition of Art”; Hospers, “Philosophy of Art”; *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “objet trouvé,” accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objet%20trouve>.

audience coughs), the movements of the audience as they watched the performance, and how the performers related to each other and their experiences with the project. The literature discussed below provided a basis for exploring this definition of art through process-based and coexistent creation, improvisation, music-dance collaboration, and graphic notation.

### **Literature Review**

The inspiration for my work was largely grounded in the American avant-garde movement of the twentieth century. In Christopher Shultis' book *Silencing the Sounded Self*, he places artists into two creative categories: coexistent and controlling. I largely drew from the artistic principles and philosophies of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, discussed herein, both of whom primarily fall into the coexistent category. Thus, I begin with a discussion of Shultis' theory of the coexistent creative self, then move to improvisation and how it can be used with musicians and dancers to strengthen the bonds within a group of performers and to embody coexistence in artmaking. Additionally, I incorporated graphic notation into my work as both a part of the rehearsal process and as an artistic product of the performance, drawing on the work of composers like Cage and George Crumb. Finally, I discuss my inspirations for use of space, music-dance collaboration, and graphic notation. The goal of this literature review is to explore the creative ideas and methods that ultimately informed *Transitive Property*.

#### Coexistence as Creative Process

My project was in large part inspired by coexistent practices of artmaking. In his book *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition*, Christopher Shultis describes two possible "creative selves": one that is "controlling," and one that is "coexistent." In brief terms, a controlling artist is in control of the creative process, while a

coexistent one is an inseparable part of the process.<sup>3</sup> According to Shultis, the creative selves present themselves in three main ways: 1) in an artist's relationship to nature (do they consider themselves a separate observer of nature [controlling] or as an equal part of nature [coexistent]?), 2) in the way an artist uses symbolism in their work (do they impose symbolic meaning on natural things [controlling] or observe them as they are without assigning meaning [coexistent]?), and 3) in their relationship to intention in their creative process (are they intentional about the entire process [controlling] or do they leave much of the process up to chance or external factors [coexistent]?).<sup>4</sup> When considered together, these aspects represent a creative method that relinquishes control over the product and focuses instead on the process of creating, and on allowing the creation to evolve due to outside influences.

Many of the artists that inspired the current project fall primarily into the coexistent category. However, it would be remiss to say that they do not exert any control over the creative process; this dichotomy is especially clear in John Cage's *4'33"*, which despite its attempts to be fully coexistent, is still controlling due to Cage placing a time constraint on its performance (a "flaw" that was eliminated in the sequel, *0'00"*).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, my project drew on both creative selves. While creating a program and scores for the performance was on some level controlling, my collaborators and I also aimed to draw on the coexistent creative self by 1) considering ourselves an equal part of nature by considering the environment and audience to be part of our art and 2) by observing nature (and our art) without imposing symbolic meaning onto it. The project also incorporated coexistence between myself and my collaborators, as we allowed each other to freely change the art and no one person controlled the outcome.

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3. Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, xvi-xvii.

4. Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, xix-xx.

5. Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 94-96; Pritchett, "John Cage's Silent Piece(s)."

### *Chance*

The method of involving chance in the creative process means letting go of control of the final product, aligning with Shultis's idea of coexistence. A clear example of this idea in practice is dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham's use of chance in *Suite by Chance* (1953). In this work, a series of charts are filled with elements including directions in space, lengths of time, and descriptions of body movements, which are then chosen at random; a selection of one item from each chart constitutes one event and once completed, the dancer moves to the next, forming a random sequence of events "freed...from usual cause and effect relations."<sup>6</sup> Even structural choices like number of dancers, entrances, and exits are chosen by the flip of a coin. In *Transitive Property*, chance was embodied through improvisation and audience participation to further explore coexistence and letting go of control over the outcome in order to fully immerse ourselves in the process of creating something together.

### *Improvisation*

Improvisation occurs when one makes unplanned choices in reaction to stimuli, either internal or external. Improvisatory movement is ever-present in our lives; it can take the form of swerving on the sidewalk to avoid a puddle, doodling in class (this overlaps with improvisatory visual art), stretching at your desk after working for too long, or even gesturing while speaking—any spontaneous motor behavior.<sup>7</sup> In terms of music, improvisation means the same thing, but with sound. For example, drumming a rhythm on your desk, absent-mindedly humming or whistling, or the structured improvisation of a trumpet soloist during a jazz standard.

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6. Charlip, "Composing by Chance," 41.

7. Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 3-4.

## Improvising Movement with Music

The decisions people make during improvisation are largely affected by the environment and stimuli that they encounter; improvisation includes all spontaneous reactions to the environment.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, improvisation teacher Georgette Schneer chooses not to use music during her movement improvisation activities, because she is searching instead for movements in response to “the imaginative and emotional material of our own lives and environment.”<sup>9</sup> She argues that improvising with and without music might produce different outcomes. In part, this is because when improvising movement to music, one is interpreting the music rather than responding to internal and environmental cues.<sup>10</sup> However, she and Joyce Morgenroth agree that the best way to incorporate music into dance improvisation sessions is to have a live accompanist that is adaptable and can respond to the needs of the group.<sup>11</sup> *Transitive Property* actively combatted the idea that movement improvisation with the accompaniment of music has to be solely an *interpretation* of that music, and encouraged dancers and musicians to be aware of each other while consciously choosing how to respond. By doing this, *Transitive Property* aimed to explore 1) how musicians can interpret movement (a reversal of the dance-interpreting-music model) and 2) how artists choose to respond or not respond to each other when offered an equal playing field.

## Improvisation in Groups

Group improvisation fosters a sense of “mutual awareness and sensitivity,” confidence, respect, and intimacy; it is a tool that encourages members of the group to interact with each other in new and deeply personal ways and encourages innovation as the group combines their

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8. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, ix; Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 3.

9. Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 5.

10. Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 5.

11. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, xvi-xvii; Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 5.

imagination to create something larger and more varied than what each could do individually.<sup>12</sup> Improvisation also offers practical benefits in terms of generating movement material that is interesting to watch and exciting to perform,<sup>13</sup> and it allows for flexibility in rehearsal and performance. It is specifically this awareness between performers that I wanted to draw on in my research as a tool to bring the collaborators together as a unified group and to examine the ways in which artists are influenced by each other, their audience, and their environment.<sup>14</sup>

### Rehearsing Improvisation

Some key considerations for organizing rehearsals for improvisation are time, space, number of participants, and planning of activities. Morgenroth posits that ten to twelve participants are the ideal number and that a group should meet at least once per week in order to foster a sense of cohesion. Meetings should occur in a large, clean dance studio or can be done outdoors, on a stage, or in another large space.<sup>15</sup> It is important that the floor is safe for dancers, that the space is free from hazards, and the temperature is not too hot or cold (which could cause heat-related exhaustion or torn muscles, respectively).<sup>16</sup>

In planning activities, Morgenroth advises to keep in mind that the activities done early in a rehearsal will affect activities done later, which can be used to the rehearsal director's advantage if they plan accordingly. For example, an introductory exercise that encourages artists to focus on spatial awareness will encourage participants to keep thinking about that awareness in the rest of the day's exercises. Additionally, it is the organizer's responsibility to lead participants from activity to activity, plan approximate lengths for each improvisation, and

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12. Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 25-28.

13. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, ix.

14. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, ix; Schneer, *Movement Improvisation*, 3.

15. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, xv.

16. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 2, 6.

encourage discussions following each activity and/or at the end of the session. Discussions are important for understanding one another's decisions, and for reflecting on our decisions and what may have influenced them. Reeve suggests asking participants to provide constructive and positive comments using the terms "relationships, actions, dynamics, and space." As Morgenroth says, "the discussions should not aim to decide what went right and what went wrong, but to understand the consequences of the choices that were made." Another way of gathering information is video recording, but Reeve cautions against using this method during every meeting, as it may affect some participants' decisions, either by making them camera-shy or by shifting their focus to a perceived audience.<sup>17</sup>

Since my collaborators were all dancers and/or musicians, the project drew on literature designed for dancers and musicians. The improvisations that were utilized in rehearsals for this project were primarily sourced from *Dance Improvisations* by Joyce Morgenroth, the first workbook of *Soundpainting: The Art of Live Composition* by Walter Thompson, and *Dance Improvisations: Warm-Ups, Games, and Choreographic Tasks* by Justine Reeve. Each rehearsal was arranged using Reeve's method of choosing a theme, then choosing a selection of improvisations that fit that theme, allowing time for the artists to fully explore each exercise and to discuss afterwards. Reeve and Morgenroth agree that a central tenet of rehearsing improvisation is to remain flexible and be willing to change plans if needed;<sup>18</sup> this became a guiding factor throughout the creation of *Transitive Property*.

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17. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, xvi-xviii; Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 2-3, 8-9.

18. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, xvii-xviii; Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 2-3.



## Interdisciplinary Approaches

### *Space*

An important facet of my project was the idea of simultaneously occurring arts (intentional or not) in one space. This idea has been explored in depth by John Cage, a strong figure in the post-war avant-garde artistic movement as a composer, philosopher, visual artist, and poet. One of Cage's many interests was the interplay of various art forms. He writes the following about an experience he had while traveling in Europe: "In Sevilla on a street corner I noticed the multiplicity of simultaneous visual and audible events all going together in one's experience and producing enjoyment."<sup>19</sup> Later in his life, Cage collaborated with many artists and scholars, several of whom he created projects with at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. There, he made the first "happening," which he describes as follows:

The audience was seated in four isometric triangular sections, the apexes of which touched a small square performance area that they faced and that led through the aisles between them to the large performance area that surrounded them. Disparate activities, dancing by Merce Cunningham, the exhibition of paintings and the playing of a Victrola by Robert Rauschenberg, the reading of his poetry by Charles Olsen or hers by M. C. Richards from the top of a ladder outside the audience, the piano playing of David Tudor, my own reading of a lecture that included silences from the top of another ladder outside the audience, all took place within chance-determined periods of time within the over-all time of my lecture.<sup>20</sup>

In this type of performance, many types of art occur simultaneously in one space and influence each other. No part of the performance is subordinate to another; the music doesn't exist just to serve the dance, nor vice versa. The spatial layout contributes to this idea of equality because the audience is not seated on just one side of the performance area, but instead surrounds it so that the performance can be experienced from all sides.<sup>21</sup>

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19. Cage, "Autobiographical Statement."

20. Cage, "Autobiographical Statement."

21. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, xi.

### *Music-Dance Collaboration*

Merce Cunningham, referenced above for his use of chance in choreography, was one of Cage's closest collaborators. Cage writes, "In our collaborations Merce Cunningham's choreographies are not supported by my musical accompaniments. Music and dance are independent but coexistent."<sup>22</sup> This collaborative model aligns with one of the goals of *Transitive Property*—to explore how musicians and dancers can interact with each other without either group being subordinate to the other.

"How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run" is an energetic and in some ways humorous work choreographed by Cunningham.<sup>23</sup> It is accompanied by John Cage reading passages from his book *Silence* while he "smokes, sips at a fine vintage champagne, and sometimes is joined by a second reader."<sup>24</sup> The dance itself involves simple costuming and is energetic in nature. It opens with a soloist performing quick, frantic movements, jumping, and running, before being joined in his antics by fellow dancers. After this, the energy lulls as the dancers fall, then move to sit in a semicircle. From there, the energy of the beginning returns as the soloist sparks a recapitulation with exuberant energy that continues until the end of the performance. This piece was a pioneering example of dance accompanied by speech (though Cage may argue that speech *is* music, and so are the silences between passages). While this piece had more specific choreography than was employed in *Transitive Property*, the overall style and mood of the piece as well as its unorthodox accompaniment are aspects that I drew on in my performance. The "coexistence" in Cage and Cunningham's collaborations is something that I aimed to incorporate

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22. Cage, "Autobiographical Statement."

23. Video recording of "How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run," performed by Merce Cunningham & Dance Company and John Cage at the 1970 Holland Festival, can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJtD8vdl4Ec>.

24. McDonagh, "Merce Cunningham," 11.

into my own work. By developing the visual and sonic elements of the performance simultaneously in rehearsal, they were equally inspired by each other and neither was created in a vacuum. *Transitive Property* combined this coexistent collaboration with aspects of improvisation and chance through audience participation.

### *Graphic Notation: Connecting Visual and Performing Arts*

One of the ways that audience participation was incorporated into the performances of *Transitive Property* was through graphic notation. Figure 1 shows the first page of Merce Cunningham's *A Pictures Book for J.C.: Xmas 1984*, which Cunningham gifted personally to John Cage.

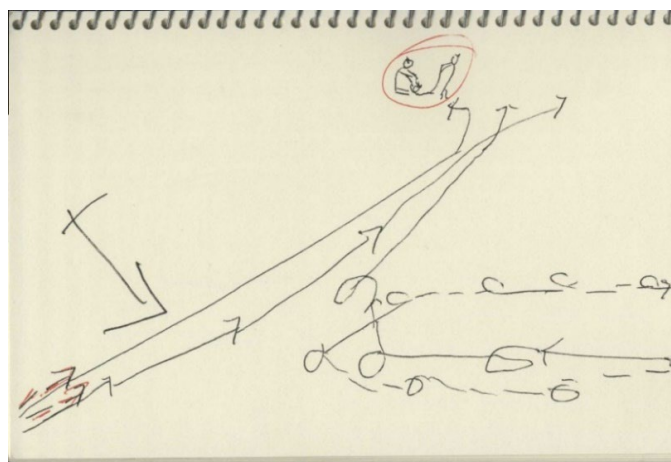


Figure 1: Page 1 of *A Pictures Book for J.C.*<sup>25</sup>

This book of sketches directly relates to “Pictures,” one of Cunningham’s stage works. It provides a unique look into the notation of dance, something that is naturally difficult to do with spoken or written language.<sup>26</sup> Cunningham’s approach uses stick figures, lines, circles, and arrows to communicate floor paths, arrival points, and other information. While this drawing

25. Cunningham, *A Pictures Book for J.C.*, 1.

26. For more information about the established method of dance notation Labanotation, see Guest, *Labanotation*.

would make perfect sense to a dancer who had already learned the choreography from Cunningham, it would be an entirely different task to try to “read” the image without first seeing the movements. There are many ways that someone could interpret this image through movement.

This practice of using imagery as notation extends to music. The term *graphic score* encompasses any score that does not use traditional notation (in the world of western classical music, traditional notation is typically a five-line staff with notes on it). A graphic score can include any number of elements including symbols, lines, numbers, colors, shapes, letters, and words. For example, George Crumb uses a combination of graphic scoring and traditional notation in parts of *Makrokosmos, Volume II* (see figure 2).

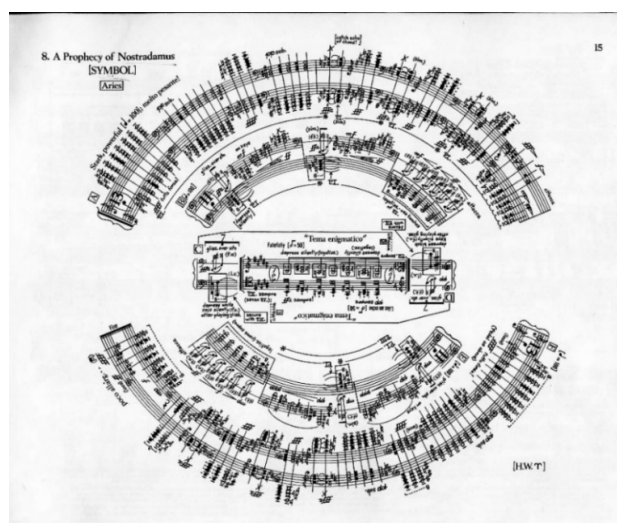


Figure 2: Page 15 of *Makrokosmos, Volume II*.<sup>27</sup>

On this page of Crumb’s score, he creates a symbol (in this case, a circle) to add extramusical content to the piece. Unlike many graphic scores that utilize improvisatory elements, the notation in this score is very concrete. However, I was particularly interested in the purely visual aspect of

27. Crumb, *Makrokosmos, Volume II*, 15.

the score, and the idea that a musical score can exist as its own piece of art, independent of the music it describes.

Most graphic scores involve some level of aleatory or improvisation on the part of the performer, making them a highly flexible vessel for artistic idea and expression. Graphic scores exemplify the marriage of visual and sonic arts because the musician directly interprets what they see in front of them into musical ideas. And, just like the dance notation in Cunningham's aforementioned book of sketches, graphic scores can serve not only as notation but as art in and of themselves. *Transitive Property* explored the idea of graphic notation and sought to incorporate visual arts in the form of Floor Mapping. Floor Mapping demonstrated that the *creation* of a graphic score can also be art by incorporating drawing a graphic score into the performance itself, and it resulted in a physical artistic product (floor maps) that could stand alone as visual art outside of the performance or be used as graphic scores for re-performance.

*Transitive Property* aimed to explore artistic intersections: the inherent musicality of dance and poetry, the dance-like qualities of artists painting or musicians playing, and the visual artistry of written language and music scores. This was achieved through incorporating a coexistent creative process as defined by Shultis, concepts of graphic notation and scoring, and Cage and Cunningham's model of independent coexistence in music-dance collaboration. *Transitive Property* evolved over time in response to the collaborative rehearsal process; however, the literature discussed herein guided the creation of my rehearsal plans and the overall goals of the project.

## Methodology

### Phase 1: Research and Preparation

The creation of this project involved two main phases. The first phase occurred during fall 2023 and included recruitment of collaborators, considerations of performance spaces, scheduling rehearsals, and research into pedagogical methods and exercises to create detailed rehearsal plans (see table 1 below).

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Recruit collaborators	October-November 2023
Select and reserve performance venue	December 2023
Schedule rehearsals and reserve rehearsal space	December 2023
Pedagogical research	September-December 2023
Create rehearsal plans	November 2023-January 2024

*Table 1: Phase 1 timeline.*

### *Collaborator Recruitment*

*Transitive Property* was created in collaboration with six students from the College of Fine Arts at Ohio University. This document will only refer to collaborators by their initials. I recruited these artists through personal conversations, email, recommendations from my thesis adviser, and social media. Initially, I had envisioned an equal number of dancers and musicians, but all the collaborators I chose were comfortable inhabiting both roles. Other factors I considered when selecting collaborators were prior experience with experimental works and pre-existing relationships with the other artists. Since our rehearsal time was limited, it was beneficial to already have some level of comfortability with one another before beginning the rehearsal process. However, there were no exclusion criteria. I decided not to seek out more than six collaborators for three main reasons: 1) scheduling would become more difficult with more

people, 2) a smaller group would allow us to perform in a small space that placed the audience very close to us, and 3) we could all perform at the same time without providing too much sonic and visual information at once. Instrumentation included violin, percussion, flute, and a variety of toy instruments.

My collaborators brought valuable experience and skills in improvisational music and dance to the process. Working with others also provided more ideas to explore, and in performance offered a variety of ideas that were happening simultaneously and offered spontaneous inspiration. Having collaborators in the performance also allowed me as the director to embody coexistent artmaking more fully because I was not solely in control of the outcome of the performance.

In addition to performance collaborators, a videographer recorded both performances.<sup>28</sup> The benefits of recordings were twofold: they served as artifacts of the project, and they allowed me to observe the performances from the audience's perspective to aid my post-performance reflections.

### *Performance Space Considerations*

Performance venue was an important consideration for this work because according to my definition of art, the environment itself is part of the artistic product. Therefore, it was assumed that the piece would be strongly influenced by its location. My practical considerations included space availability and how well I thought each venue suited my project based on size, accessibility, proximity, safety, and atmosphere.

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28. See videos in Appendix A: Performance Recordings.

The first location I visited was Central Venue (Athens, OH). Some things that stuck out to me right away were the preexisting decorations (many from Passion Works Studio, a collaborative community arts center in Athens, OH), high audience capacity, and exposed brick. The main thing I loved about it was the flexibility—we could arrange the seating, bring in decorations, lamps, and rugs, and modify the lighting to frame the performance space. They had a piano and drum set already in the space, which was an added benefit because they provided more music-making options. I also liked the entrance, which was a large garage door that made the space feel welcoming and would allow passers-by to walk into the performance. The only challenge with the space was its echoey acoustics. However, that effect would be minimized once people were in the space to help absorb sound. In addition, the floor could safely be danced on in socks or with bare feet. Also, this venue was readily within walking distance to campus and was wheelchair accessible. After considering all these factors, I decided to hold both performances at Central Venue.

It is worth noting that alternative spaces were also considered. I visited the McCracken Hall Atrium, and it was appealing because of its large windows and multi-tiered layout for viewing the performance. The different levels could be an interesting aspect to play with in the performance, and I liked how informal and intimate the setting felt. Ultimately, I decided against using this space because the tiers could also obscure audience views or separate the artists from each other. In addition, I considered The Ridges Auditorium, Glidden Recital Hall, the common room in 35 Park Place, and the Athens Public Library. Each of these spaces were ruled out for a variety of reasons including size, seating configurations, and availability.

Early in the process, I also considered using two different locations for each of the two performances of *Transitive Property*. This aligned with my interest in how the performances



would differ based on the environments. However, after further consideration, I decided that a singular location, used for both performances would better serve the artists and the purpose of this project.

### Phase 2: Rehearsals and Performance

The bulk of my work occurred during the second phase in spring 2024. This phase included all rehearsals with my collaborators, publicizing *Transitive Property*, performing the work, and collecting feedback (see table 2).

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Rehearsals	January-February 2024
Performance publicity	February 2024
Performances	March 2024
Feedback collection	January-March 2024

*Table 2: Phase 2 timeline.*

#### *Rehearsals*

We met weekly for six consecutive weeks (January-February), ninety minutes per rehearsal, leading up to the performance. During rehearsals, we worked together to generate material and scores for the performance. The rehearsal plans drew on the pedagogical research that was conducted in the fall, which provided prompts and exercises for improvisation. We used movements, sounds, and ideas from the rehearsals in the development of the final work. Each of the six rehearsals had an overarching theme that guided the activities: 1) introductions, 2) awareness, 3) space & time, 4) environmental art, 5) performance scoring, and 6) dress rehearsal.

I came to each rehearsal with a premade rehearsal outline that defined the exercises for the day, a timeline, materials needed, and main ideas for thought and discussion.<sup>29</sup> My role as director and performer was a balancing act of leading rehearsals and effectively communicating what I wanted aesthetically out of the performance, while also making space for my collaborators to insert their own ideas and desires into the final product and giving them control over their artistic choices. This approach was in alignment with Shultis' coexistent creative self. I documented the rehearsal process and collaborator feedback through written notes, video recordings, rehearsal plans with exercises and prompts, and artifacts from rehearsal (e.g., drawn floor maps).

### *Publicity*

To publicize *Transitive Property*, I created a poster that was shared on personal social media and with friends and family, hung in Glidden and Putnam Halls (the physical homes of the School of Music and School of Dance, respectively), and sent to be distributed in school mailing lists.<sup>30</sup>

### *Performance Scoring*

The outline of the final performance included four written improvisation scores that were performed in a set order. The scores were: Paint the Space, based on the work of Justine Reeve; Soundpainting, based on the work of Walter Thompson; Mirroring, based on the work of Joyce Morgenroth; and Floor Mapping, an original score created in collaboration with my adviser and fellow performers.

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29. See Appendix B: Rehearsal Plans. However, note that plans were not always followed exactly due to choices made based on collaborator feedback and my own observations.

30. See Appendix C: Poster.

Other ideas for performance scores were also considered. These ideas included a dance score accompanied solely by environmental sounds; a chance-based score involving two people (possibly audience members) playing chess and two or three musicians, where each square on the board is assigned a musical cell to be played when it is occupied; and a cyclical score in which dancers paint with their bodies and musicians “read” the painting as a graphic score. Ultimately, I decided not to include these other ideas because the environmental dance wouldn’t include making music (I decided that every movement should include both music and dance creation), the chess piece would require more rehearsal time than we had available, and the paint score would require a large amount of materials and have the potential to damage the performance space.

### *Feedback Collection*

Throughout the rehearsal and performance process, I asked my collaborators for feedback. During rehearsals, this took the shape of discussions which typically occurred at the end of each rehearsal. Discussions were guided by specific questions that I prepared and offered about the activities we did, along with more broad questions about the themes of the rehearsal and the direction of the performance as a whole.<sup>31</sup> During these discussions I took notes, including direct quotes from the collaborators. Unsolicited audience feedback was collected through informal conversations after the performance. Audience feedback was documented via personal notes.

The feedback from collaborators and the audience helped to determine if my project was successful in incorporating the environment in the performance, allowing my fellow performers

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31. For specific questions, see Appendix B: Rehearsal Plans.

to be heard in the creative process, and providing a fulfilling experience for the performers and audience members. For example, success based on audience feedback would have been evidenced by responses that said that the performance was interesting to watch, that it was surprising or challenged what they thought art was, and that the audience felt like they were an active participant in the performance. Success from a performer standpoint might have included responses that said the process felt welcoming and open to a variety of ideas, that they felt a strong connection with other performers, the audience, and their environment, and that the dance and music elements of the project felt equally valued and inextricable from one another. The results of this feedback collection are discussed in detail in the Feedback section below.

## **Results and Discussion**

### Rehearsals

*Transitive Property* was prepared over the course of six weeks (January-February 2024). We met for one ninety-minute rehearsal each week in a dance studio in Putnam Hall. I brought small percussion instruments to every rehearsal, including shakers, a toy xylophone, a lap harp, tambourines, a small drum, drumsticks, a triangle, claves, and others. RP and I brought our flutes to most rehearsals, and ZT brought their violin. I also provided visual art supplies for Rehearsals 4 and 6. Six of us were able to attend Rehearsals 1 and 3-6, and five were able to attend Rehearsal 2, meaning that the first time all seven of us interacted was at the first performance. My goals for the project became clearer throughout the rehearsal process, so my notetaking also became more specific with time.

#### *Rehearsal 1: Introductions*

The goal of the first rehearsal was to get myself and my collaborators comfortable with each other, with the rehearsal space, and with the project premise. Building a strong foundation

of familiarity among collaborators would allow us to relate more deeply both metaphorically, in terms of artistic ideas and connections, and physically, in terms of contact improvisation. Four activities were chosen to emphasize interaction and connection.

“Sign In”<sup>32</sup> was a quick activity to learn names and warm up. “Group Unison”<sup>33</sup> was a difficult second activity that might have been more successful if used later in the rehearsal process. Group unison was challenging because there was little variety in movements. I attributed this to the fact that not all collaborators were comfortable being the leader of the group for long periods of time and/or we weren’t all comfortable moving in front of a group so early in the rehearsal process.

“Paint the Space” is an activity by Reeve that focuses on improvising with the mental image of “painting” with one’s body.<sup>34</sup> According to my collaborators, this activity was particularly successful because it began with individual improvisation that was very floor-oriented and meditative. This structure invited us to expand into collective improvisation at our own pace. During this exercise, some collaborators devised games to play using instruments or mimed objects like balls, and vocalizations including speech and laughter were frequent.

The fourth and final exercise of the first rehearsal was “Encounters.” In this exercise, the group was split in half; everyone would walk freely around the space until I called “freeze,” at which point one of the groups would freeze, making a shape with their body, while the other group continued to move around and interact with the shapes in creative ways.<sup>35</sup> This activity

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32. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 70-71.

33. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, 8-9.

34. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 76-77.

35. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 116-17.

continued the playful energy from Paint the Space and further encouraged interaction in partners and small groups.

Together, these exercises were very effective for beginning to form a bond within the group. This rehearsal also marked the emergence of two main themes in this project: theatrics and play (detailed later in this section).

### *Rehearsal 2: Awareness*

The focus of the second rehearsal was inter-performer awareness, imitation, and interpretation within and between music and dance. These goals related back to Cage and Cunningham's independent coexistence and served to explore how music and dance can be interwoven using improvisation.

We started with "Pass the Movement," an exercise where participants stand in a circle and pass a movement (or sound, as we added) around the circle via imitation.<sup>36</sup> We passed around movements first, then tried passing around sounds made with the body, but discovered that when imitating sounds, we ended up also imitating the movement to make the sound. For example, if someone clapped and then stomped twice, the next people would do those same movements to illicit the sounds rather than only trying to recreate the sound. So, we did one final round passing sounds with our eyes closed to encourage us to focus on replicating the sound over the movement that created it. This resulted in slightly more variation in movements as more focus was placed on the sounds. For example, if one person created a patting sound on their thigh, the next person might reproduce that timbre by patting their chest or arm instead.

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36. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 58-59.

We then moved to “Mirroring,” a partnered imitative exercise.<sup>37</sup> We started with both partners moving, and then shifted to one partner moving while the other played an instrument (see figure 3). Since there were an odd number of us in attendance at this rehearsal, I did not participate and instead called leader, partner, and medium changes throughout. My collaborators chose their own partners to start with, but I ensured that every individual paired up with every other individual at least once, and everyone got to move, dance, lead, and follow; this forwarded my goal of getting everyone comfortable with each other and with performing both music and dance, as they would be asked to do in the performance. While the movement-only mirroring was very literal (one partner copied the other as precisely as possible), the movement-sound mirroring was more abstract and required interpretation.



*Figure 3: Collaborators explore Mirroring prompt.*

When incorporating instruments, MB, JT, and MJ (all primarily dancers) expressed that playing the instruments felt almost boring and like a supporting role because they struggled to find ways to vary the sounds and to creatively mirror the mover. ZT, on the other hand, did not find being the instrumentalist to feel like a supporting role, likely because of their familiarity

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37. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, 5-6.

with their instrument. MJ liked using the shaker because they could easily follow the movements of the dancers and sound would be produced incidentally—they felt that while dancing was trancelike, playing music didn't come as naturally or feel as comprehensive.

Limited sound vocabulary led many artists to branch out into extended techniques, like ZT's violin techniques or MB dragging the toy xylophone on the ground and shaking it around. Everyone generally agreed that it was more difficult when the mover was leading and the sound-maker was following, rather than the other way around. This was because when interpreting movement as sound, they relied largely on literal imitation or contrast. When the sound-makers were leading the movers however, the movers found it much easier to play off of their partner's music, listening to qualities like speed, circularity, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, tone, duration, connectedness/disjointedness, register, and pitch. This didn't change any of the choices we made for the performance, as we still decided to include Mirroring; however, it was valuable to keep in mind as a director. Because of this comfort imbalance, I worked to incorporate music and dance equally throughout the process while also giving my collaborators freedom to choose the medium they'd prefer to use. Later in the process, Soundpainting served as a great way to vary mediums because the conductor could ask the performers to shift between music, dance, and speech.

We ended the rehearsal with free improvisation based on the mirroring score. The room was split with movers on one side and sound-makers on the other, but we could move freely between the sides and decided independently when to lead and when to choose someone to follow/mirror. This prompt was a bit chaotic and overwhelming at times, but collaborators said that this could be overcome by choosing one sound, movement, or person to focus on. They described it as a mental change of pace and mentioned working on changing their focus



frequently and not getting stuck on any one thing. This activity also encouraged collaborators who were primarily dancers to incorporate sounds like speaking and stomping, because there was already noise from instruments. Interestingly, props (specifically water bottles) and theatrical improvisation played a major role in the direction this activity took. Collaborators carried water bottles around and eventually even poured water on each other and the floor. I was surprised that it took this turn, because I was personally so focused on the mirroring aspect that I hadn't considered incorporating props.

### *Rehearsal 3: Space & Time*

This rehearsal was focused on space and how it can affect or be part of the art we make, inspired by coexistent relationships with the environment.

The first exercise was “Covering Space: Quick Solos,”<sup>38</sup> in which we all took fifteen seconds to cover as much of the room as possible with our bodies. I called out the beginning and end of each solo, counting the seconds in my head, and offered no suggestions about where or how to move aside from the definition of the exercise. Some of us took different approaches like running, jumping, or spreading our arms to the sides or above our heads to reach more vertical space. The goal of this exercise was to get us to think about what constitutes usable artistic space. For example, a few collaborators ran to a nook in the corner of the room that we very rarely used in our other activities. Later, collaborators returned to this nook for a different exercise, demonstrating that at least for this rehearsal, it was viewed as part of the artistic space.

Floor Mapping is an exercise in which artists are asked to follow a “map” that directs where to travel in the space. The “map” is a sort of graphic score with a continuous line that

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38. Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, 17-18.

serves as a physical pathway to guide improvisation. In this first iteration, we each drew our own floor maps on pieces of notebook paper that we could carry with us while we improvised. Then, half of us took instruments and sat or stood as “roadblocks” while the others followed their maps twice through, improvising movement along the way; any time two people met in the room, they had to interact in some way. The groups then switched and performed the same process.

Collaborators mentioned in discussion that following the maps twice offered a good opportunity to re-choreograph and make different choices, and that interactions were more interesting the second time. To me, the first run-through involved mostly walking and looking at the floor map in order to follow it exactly. During the second, however, we incorporated larger movements and diverged from the floor maps more often. My collaborators also expressed that this exercise was a balancing act between literally and abstractly interpreting their maps. MB in particular felt that the exercise was “isolating” because the focus was on each individual artist’s task. If we were to do this activity in the future, they’d like to add more components for interaction and find more creative ways to interact, particularly between movers and sound-makers. This was our first discussion of possibly introducing audience participation for this prompt and inviting the audience to draw floor maps for us to follow (revisited in Rehearsal 6 below).

Our final activity was inspired loosely by Reeve’s “Space Race,” in which dancers are asked to improvise movements to transport them between various points in the space.<sup>39</sup> In my adaptation, I asked everyone to explore and meditate on four places in the room: their favorite, their least favorite, one that they were indifferent to, and one that was unfamiliar to them. At

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39. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 98-99.

each of the places, we paused for a few minutes to observe what it felt, sounded, or looked like. Then, I prompted us to individually improvise movement between each of our places in order. The next step was for everyone to choose a partner and show them each of their places, then have their partner share their places. At each of the places, lots of movement imitation emerged naturally. For example, one pair laid down in the sun, one hunkered underneath the piano, and one laid in the corner with their legs straight up against the wall together.

Sound also emerged in the form of speech; some collaborators decided to verbally introduce their places, while others simply gestured silently. MJ and MB mentioned in discussion that this exercise helped make the rehearsal studio, which held some negative emotions and connotations for them, feel new and exciting. Exploring unfamiliar places opened them up to playfulness and curiosity, and it was an exercise in seeing the space with new eyes and ears. JA and I found an interesting juxtaposition: their least favorite place, two sunny patches in the corner of the room, was my favorite place. At first, JA chose that as their least favorite place because it was hot and uncomfortable, but after laying there for a moment, found a silver lining in the breeze through the open window. Other collaborators shared similar experiences with their least favorite place and found things to like about it while they were there.

For the rest of our discussion, we talked about how space and time affect us as artists. For most of us, we agreed that audience proximity plays a large role in how we feel while performing—seeing faces, making eye contact, and having audience interaction offers a very different experience from “staring into the void” from onstage. ZT, however, said that space doesn’t matter much to them, as they’ve developed confidence and comfort in themselves and in being where they are at any given moment.

In terms of time, we talked about how we perceive time while performing, while watching others perform, and what it means for a performance to end. The first two questions resulted in a variety of answers, but the general consensus was that regardless of whether one is performing or not, fun and engaging activities seem to go by faster. Additionally, when we're in an artistic flow, "time just doesn't exist" and it is easy to get lost in the moment.

The final discussion question considered if we were still performing as we sat and talked. MJ said, "when I'm talking, I'm always performing." This was a sentiment that I shared. Others said that this was an individual choice. JA concluded that we were performing because the discussion is just as much a part of the creative process as the rest of rehearsal, and because it fit into the performative action model, which states that as long as an activity fits certain criteria—it has characters, procedure, and sincerity—it qualifies as a performance. This reflects one of the larger ideas behind this project, which was that art creation (in this case, the rehearsal process) is art/performance in and of itself.

#### *Rehearsal 4: Environmental Art*

The main ideas of this rehearsal were interacting with the environment in new ways and consciously integrating the environment into our art. This relates to Shultis' definition of coexistent artmaking by creating art as a coexistent part of our environment.

The rehearsal began with an adaptation of Hahn's "Bonding in Parallel, a Writing Collaboration." In Hahn's original exercise, partners independently write about an object, then align their writings side-by-side and annotate, highlight, or otherwise connect them to create a collaborative poem/art piece.<sup>40</sup> Instead of working in pairs for our version, we all worked

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40. Hahn, *Arousing Sense*, 40-42.

together. First, we spent approximately ten minutes individually writing about objects of our choice in the room. The objects chosen were embroidered/sewn cloth, socks, mirror, fire alarm, flute, and latex gloves. When finished writing, we came together and each read our writing aloud before taping our pieces of paper together in a way that thematically and visually made sense. Then, we annotated, drew on, and talked about our collaborative art piece (see figure 4).<sup>41</sup> The goals of this activity were 1) to create art (specifically writing) based on something in the environment, and then 2) to work together to combine our works and create something new, an exercise in coexistent collaboration.

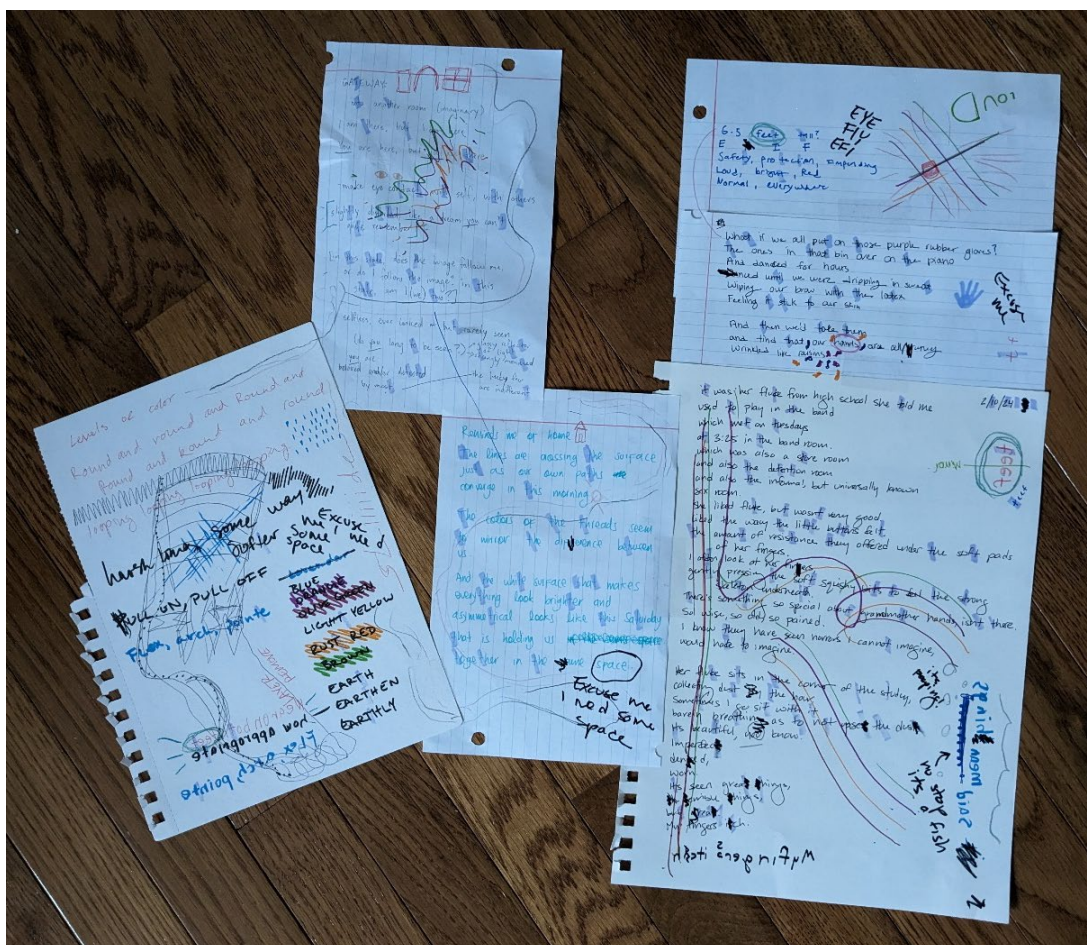


Figure 4: Collaborative art piece from Rehearsal 4.

41. For closeup images, see Appendix D: Rehearsal 4 Images.

The next section of rehearsal was an open improvisation with the guideline to take inspiration from the art piece we had just made in some way, either literally or more abstractly. We all took varying approaches to this task. Many of us put latex gloves on our hands, feet, or clothes. I drew on MB's writing about the flute to play flute, starting with key clicks and extended techniques, and later playing long tones to produce harmonies with ZT's violin playing. ZT mentioned emulating textures, and they felt their inspiration from the art was "by proxy"—rather than drawing on the art itself, they drew more on the other artists who were directly drawing from the art. JA said that when translating visual media into percussion music, they tend to draw on the motion or action of the thing they're pulling inspiration from, since percussion is such a physical instrument. MB mentioned that the discussion and annotation portion of the exercise was particularly meaningful and helpful because it gave us a shared experience of creating and understanding the art piece. For example, a recurring theme in our improvisation was fish (specifically, fish being carried in latex gloves). However, fish weren't mentioned in anyone's original writing about their objects—it was only because of a misinterpretation of a drawing of a flute (see figure 5) that fish were mentioned in the annotation step and became a sort of inside joke for the remainder of the rehearsal.

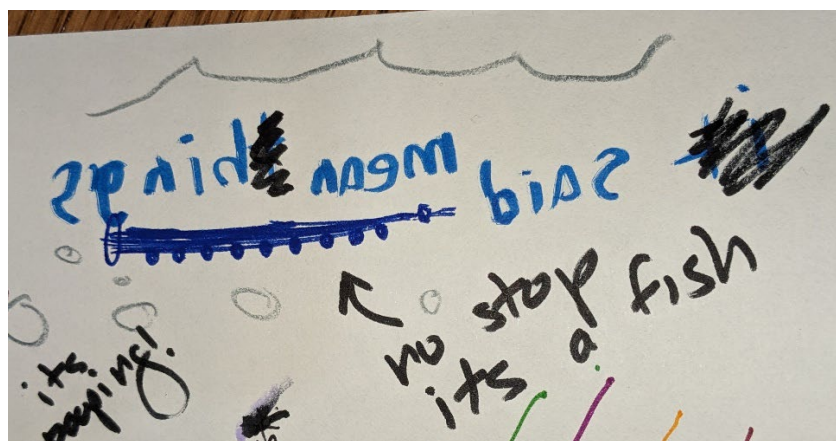


Figure 5: Closeup image of "flute fish" from the collaborative art piece.

This reflects more broadly on the entire rehearsal process and supports the decision to include discussion to ensure a shared understanding, open communication, and free flow of ideas throughout the creative process. Effective communication was extremely valuable for preparing this performance on such a short timeline because it made the process more efficient and allowed us to connect more authentically during the performance. Humor played a large role in the ways we interacted throughout the process, and while we were certainly serious at times, humor repeatedly returned even in the performance as connective tissue among ourselves and with the audience. When unexpected things happened, especially in performance, it was important for us to have an established trust with one another that was made possible by our effective communication and the curation of shared experiences.

#### *Rehearsal 5: Performance Scoring*

This rehearsal was our last opportunity to try out new prompts before deciding on the final performance program. We warmed up with “Inner Voice-Overs,” which involves verbally expressing one’s inner monologue; for our purposes, we did this while moving and/or playing music.<sup>42</sup> My collaborators noted that this exercise was made difficult by the broadness of my description: I told them to say anything and everything that came to mind during the activity. This quickly became overwhelming, and we agreed afterward that this activity would be more effective with a narrower prompt that only focused on one sense, like touch or sight.

“Soundpainting” is a live composition method devised by Walter Thompson in which a conductor uses defined gestures to guide performers through improvisation.<sup>43</sup> This was a very engaging activity and led to a lot of experimentation with improvised speech, but there was a

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42. Hahn, *Arousing Sense*, 87-90.

43. Thompson, *Soundpainting*.

steep learning curve; JT said it was “like trying to speak a language [they] didn’t know,” and we collectively agreed that a key of Soundpainting gestures would be helpful for future iterations. For the performance, I created a key using images directly from Thompson’s workbook to illustrate the gestures that we used the most. The key also included brief descriptions of what each gesture meant in the context of our performance.<sup>44</sup>

For the rest of rehearsal, we briefly discussed all the activities we had explored so far and narrowed down our final program. We decided to perform our own variations on Paint the Space, Soundpainting, Mirroring, and Floor Mapping for ten to twenty minutes each. This was a mixture of exercises we felt very comfortable with along with some challenging exercises to keep us engaged. All the prompts were very open-ended and would provide lots of creative freedom for improvisational decisions in the moment, and they offered ample opportunity for audience participation in Mirroring and Floor Mapping. Finally, we discussed what instruments we would use and what materials we’d need (markers and a large roll of paper), as well as performance dress. Performance dress was simply comfortable clothes, without any requirements for color, texture, or shape. This dress was meant to honor the autonomy and comfort of my collaborators in alignment with the intentions of my project. In addition, wearing casual dress aimed to make us more approachable to the audience as our clothing did not set us apart.

#### *Rehearsal 6: Dress Rehearsal*

Our final rehearsal was dedicated to performance logistics and a run-through of each prompt in program order. As a collective, we made key decisions about the performance. For example, to move between prompts during the performance, we decided to look at the clock and

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44. For specific Soundpainting gestures, see Appendix E: Soundpainting Key.



say the time out loud. This was our agreed-upon signal to begin the next prompt. We also determined our exact procedure for audience participation in Mirroring and Floor Mapping. At the beginning of Mirroring, I would address the audience and ask for seven volunteers to pair up with the seven performers. Then, three or four pairs would perform the prompt while the others sat or stood to the side until I announced a change for the other three or four pairs to perform. In this way, we would all have space to move around and have a break from constantly playing or moving. For Floor Mapping, I would similarly address the audience and invite them to draw floor maps for us to follow on the provided paper roll. Each floor map would fill a rectangle drawn on the paper, and the only rule of the floor map was for it to be one continuous line. After this rehearsal, I sent a follow-up email with the tech schedule and logistical details.<sup>45</sup>

### *Theatrics and Play*

While each rehearsal varied in focus, we tended to gravitate toward similar ideas each time. Theatrics and play were both themes that noticeably emerged halfway through the first rehearsal during Paint the Space.<sup>46</sup> During this activity, we slowly evolved from independent movement improvisation into interactive improvisation using our bodies and instruments. My collaborators surprised me with creative uses of instruments, like sliding a small drum across the floor, playing soccer with a clave, wearing a tambourine as a hat while dancing around the room, and miming a game of catch, complete with verbal expressions and outbursts. Laughter played a large role in the soundscape of this activity. This laughter-filled connection returned throughout rehearsals, especially during the open mirroring score in Rehearsal 2 and in my adaptation of Space Race<sup>47</sup> in Rehearsal 3. This spark was an easy clue for which activities would be most

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45. See Appendix F: Tech Schedule.

46. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 76-77.

47. Reeve, *Dance Improvisations*, 98-99.

effective when translated into a performance environment—the more we rehearsed, the more I realized that we felt most connected to each other when this aspect of play was involved. This connection among ourselves would be the key to connecting to the audience as well.

### Performance Notes

*Transitive Property* was performed on Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, and Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>. The performance program order is outlined in figure 7.<sup>48</sup>

#### **7:00 *Paint the Space***

Performers “paint” the space with their bodies, and “paint” the silence with sounds. [Based on an activity by Justine Reeve.]

#### **7:10 *Soundpainting***

A leader guides the group with predetermined signals. [Based on the work of Walter Thompson.]

#### **7:25 *Mirroring***

Performers partner with audience for an exercise in responsiveness. [Based on an activity by Joyce Morgenroth.]

#### **7:40 *Floor Mapping***

Audience invited to draw “floor maps” that the performers will follow, to produce an entirely new piece scored by you!

*Figure 6: Performance order from program.*

### *Performance Space*

The performance space was Central Venue, located in Athens, OH (see figure 6). Collaborators and audience members alike commented that they enjoyed the space, saying that they liked the hanging flower decorations, high ceilings, and large area, and that they thought the space had a welcoming and artistic vibe.

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48. For full program, see Appendix G: Program.



*Figure 7: Central Venue; collaborators prepare for Friday's performance.*

The chairs were set up in a circle with four openings to enter and leave the “stage.” The instruments and materials, including drum kit, flutes, violin, toy instruments, markers, and large paper roll, were stored in the opening at the back left corner of the performance area. Because the audience surrounded the performers on every side, there was no front or back to the performance, and each audience member got a unique and proximal view of the show. The intent of this setup was to apply Shultis’ coexistent model to the audience by involving them in the performance itself and removing any control over what parts of the performance were “downstage” or viewed as important.

This seating lent itself well to audience participation by putting audience members very physically close to the performance. During both shows, my collaborators and I were able to encourage audience participation by sitting in seats and talking to audience members. Not all of the performance occurred on the “stage” as delimited by the circle of chairs; in a few instances,

performers moved behind and around the chairs. This use of space related back to Rehearsal 3, when we investigated exploring all available space.

*Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>*

The premiere performance had an audience of thirty-three, which exceeded my target of twenty-five. The show began on time with *Paint the Space*, which started out very quietly; we made little sound and performed slow, grounded movements. As we moved around the space, JA and MB joined in an embrace, as if hugging, and began to pat each other's backs. This motif spread as more of us started to pat each other's backs and legs in a slow crescendo. This patting became a recurring theme throughout the night's performance, notably returning at the very end of *Floor Mapping*.

During *Mirroring*, audience members were enthusiastic about joining the performance, though a few did so because they knew myself and/or my collaborators. Later in *Floor Mapping*, there was still no shortage of audience participation. Figure 8 shows collaborators performing based on the audience-drawn floor maps. Two small children drew floor maps, and one actually joined in the performance when ZT handed them an egg shaker. They dropped the shaker on the floor, and a few of us followed suit, dropping shakers or other objects like markers repeatedly to create noise.

The audience participation demonstrated that we successfully created an inviting environment for the audience to join in on the performance. The performance exhibited coexistence in terms of intentionality, in the form of improvisation and releasing control of others' decisions, and in terms of the environment/nature, when we expanded the performance beyond the stage and involved the audience.



*Figure 8: Collaborators perform Floor Mapping during Friday's performance.*

After we bowed and left the stage, the audience remained in their seats. Because of the nature of the performance, it wasn't clear that it had ended; it was possible that our bowing and leaving was simply another part of the show. This relates to some of the questions I posed about space and time in Rehearsal 3,<sup>49</sup> and demonstrated that the performance was successful in blurring the boundaries of performance spacetime. Once we returned to the performance area, an audience member approached me and asked to tear off a small piece of the floor maps as a keepsake because they had been so moved. At first, I hesitated, because tearing the floor map would alter it and perhaps damage its authenticity, but I decided that giving them the piece was the most authentic thing to the performance (and maybe even a part of the performance).

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49. See Appendix B: Rehearsal Plans.

*Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>*

Forty-four audience members attended Saturday's performance, but the change in audience size did not seem to majorly impact the performance. Paint the Space began quietly again, but gained energy and volume more quickly than the previous night. The theme of patting each other and the ground from the first night returned during this prompt. During Mirroring, a child paired up with RP to perform, and ZT's mother partnered with them. Both these pairings demonstrated how this improvisational method of performance created a welcoming space, regardless of age (see figure 9).



*Figure 9: Collaborators and audience members perform Mirroring during Saturday's performance.*

The audience seemed even more willing to participate this night, and we had to roll out more paper after starting the prompt because we wanted to ensure that space was made for everyone who wanted to participate (see figure 10).





*Figure 10: Audience draws floor maps during Saturday's performance.*

Partway through Floor Mapping, some of my collaborators began walking on and scrunching up the floor maps. This evolved into tearing up the maps and performing a variety of activities: crushing it into balls to hold, throw, and pass around, rolling up a bat to play baseball, rubbing it together and with one's hands to create sounds, and tearing it up into tiny bits of confetti. My thought process was almost identical to when someone had asked to tear off a piece of the floor maps the previous night—initial hesitation because I didn't want the evidence of our work to be destroyed. In the moment, I ultimately decided that I should let the performance evolve freely without interfering: I remained committed to the spirit of coexistent artmaking.

Like the night before, the audience waited in their seats after our bow, unsure if the performance had truly ended.

### *Feedback*

The prevailing sentiment among audience members that I spoke to after the performances was some variation on “I don’t know what I expected, but it wasn’t that,” followed by “it was fun, though.” Many also called it “interesting” and told me they enjoyed being able to participate in the performance and being so close to the performers. My Mirroring partner from Saturday’s performance told me that as a faculty member, they were curious about experimenting with similar methods of improvisation and incorporating movement into the New Music Ensemble. The same audience member who took a piece of the floor maps Friday night returned to watch the second show and brought a letter; in it they say, “the movement, fluidity and acception [sic] that was oozing out of the performance rocked my world. ... This performance gently reminded me that we are all just humans on the earth, walking, moving, creating as we go. I gained confidence in accepting the unknown as I watched.”

Together, this feedback fully encapsulated all the ways *Transitive Property* was effective in its original goals and intentions: responses said that the performance was interesting to watch, that it was surprising or challenged what they thought art was, and that the audience felt like they were an active participant in the performance.

My collaborators, similar to the audience, expressed that the process was fun and that it was an explorative and learning experience for them. They stressed that they appreciated the opportunity to create something so open-ended and have fun with a group of other artists. One of the most important takeaways from this process was how much joy it brought each of us to be able to create something together that seemed to truly connect with and move the audience.



The performance was meaningful to me in several ways. I felt an incredible connection with my collaborators. The unique combination of our seven identities and arts experiences created a one-of-a-kind performance experience. I was also pleasantly surprised by the throughline of physical connection with my collaborators, despite us only having worked together for seven weeks. While the performance was “successful” in all the ways I had hoped, this was not the most enlightening part of this project for me. My learning and discovery largely came in the form of researching, rehearsing, and exploring many types of exercises and experiments with my collaborators. I found the entire process of coexistent creation to be extremely difficult at times because I was not used to valuing the artistic process over the aesthetic product. However, this process was equally gratifying because it provided me with a new outlook on how art can be made, especially when strong collaborative relationships are cultivated.

### **Conclusion**

The bounds of art and performance are in constant flux due to new experiments; artists and audiences alike challenge preconceived definitions of art. My thesis argues that that the creation of art is an art within itself, and similarly that any action (or inaction) can be a performance if it is intended or perceived to be so. In my personal experience, I used to think that fields of art were independent—I thought that at any given time, I could only be a dancer *or* a musician. However, I’ve been reconsidering how much dance remains in my life despite having chosen to pursue music in college, and that it may be possible to embody both at the same time. I’m curious what it would look like to see music as dance and dance as music, and to extend that multiplicity to daily life: How can we view even the most mundane of things as art?

*Transitive Property* was an opportunity to combine my love for music and dance and to learn about things both within and outside of my field: the history of avant-garde performance art and improvisatory performance, pedagogical methods for rehearsing improvisation, how to direct, compose, and perform in a large-scale performance, how to be a strong interdisciplinary collaborator, how to incorporate nature and the audience into my creative work, and how to effectively write about all these things. Because of my experiences with this project, my personal artmaking has become more flexible and more open-minded in terms of what is “good art;” it is easier for me to create without self-judgement and to find meaning in the act of creation rather than only the perceived quality of the product. Having such innovative and open-minded collaborators pushed me to release my inhibitions and allow our performance to move in many different directions, whether that meant emotionally salient moments of contact improvisation or exciting and humorous moments like playing baseball with torn up paper. The project also encouraged me to use more movement and spoken word, both of which I hope to continue to incorporate into future works. If I were to create another work like *Transitive Property*, I would aim to have more rehearsal time to develop ideas and relationships more fully with collaborators. In addition, I would want to incorporate more opportunities for audience participation into the performance to blur the line between performer and audience even more.

Through two months of rehearsals with collaborators specializing in music and dance, we structured and scored an hour-long improvisational performance. *Transitive Property* used coexistent creative properties defined by Shultis, drew on concepts of graphic notation, and applied improvisational activities by Reeve, Morgenroth, Thompson, and Hahn to explore the interconnectedness of sound, movement, and visual art. Ultimately, *Transitive Property* was an investigation of the indefinability of art and collaborative creation that transcends disciplines.

## Appendix A: Performance Recordings

Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>: [https://youtu.be/O\\_iM41rntmk](https://youtu.be/O_iM41rntmk)

Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>: <https://youtu.be/JwS5OQXsYyU>

## Appendix B: Rehearsal Plans

### Rehearsal 1 – Introductions (1/20/24)

#### Main ideas:

- Introduce artists, get them comfortable with each other
- Get comfortable in the rehearsal space
- Build connections
- Get moving/making music right away
- Have everyone equally involved in each activity

#### Outline:

1. Hello, this is Transitive Property! – 5 min.
2. Sign In (Reeve 70) – 10 min.
  - a. Musicians and dancers all participate
  - b. Introduce artists to each other
  - c. Learn names
3. Group Unison (Morgenroth 8) – 15 min.
  - a. Quick way to get all the dancers moving and paying attention to each other
  - b. Musicians will choose a leader of their own. The leader begins to play and then the others imitate them in style/play off of them, then switch leaders
4. Paint the Space (Reeve 76) – 20 min.
  - a. Encourages visual thinking in dancers, considering how their movements leave “paint” in the space around them
  - b. Musicians can also paint, but on their instruments (e.g. a string player might “paint” a design on the neck of their instrument, a marimba player can “paint” shapes across the keyboard)
5. Encounters (Reeve 116) – 25 min.
  - a. Gets the dancers to interact more closely with each other and possibly to physically connect
  - b. Musicians can participate in this activity with the dancers or improv their own accompaniment to the activity
6. Discussion – 15 min. (record in a voice memo)
  - a. How did it feel having music and dance being improvised simultaneously?
  - b. Were there moments where you felt particularly connected to the other artists in the room?
  - c. Were there moments where you felt particularly disconnected from the other artists?

JA absent

## Rehearsal 2 – Awareness (1/27/24)

### Main ideas:

- Awareness of each other
- Ability to imitate movements/sounds
- Ability to interpret movements as sounds and vice versa
- How can we make sure that neither medium overpowers the other—that each group is responding to the other, and the relationship is not one-directional?

### Outline:

1. Pass the Movement (Reeve 58) – 20 min.
  - a. Practices imitation and strong awareness of others
  - b. Can be done three times – once with movement, once with sound, and once combined (either each artist chooses one medium, or the motif being passed includes both)
2. Mirroring (Morgenroth 5) – 15 min.
  - a. Same goals as previous exercise
  - b. Could be done with pairs of one musician and one dancer, to further practice imitation in different mediums
3. Rhythm is a Dancer (Reeve 94) – 10 min.
  - a. Gets everyone thinking about rhythm, not just the musicians
  - b. Option for people to move to instruments for step 5
4. Rhythm Do (Reeve 112) – 20 min.
  - a. Fleshes out the previous exercise while adding actual body sounds to the phrases
  - b. Ties in with thesis argument that the sounds dancers make are music
  - c. Musicians could listen to the rhythms of the dancers and improvise along with them in the same tempo/similar rhythmic pattern
5. Discussion – 15 min.

RP and JA absent

## Rehearsal 3 – Space & Time (2/3/24)

### Main ideas:

- What does the “performance space” entail? Is it separate from the outside world?
- When does the art begin/end? How long is it and how long does it feel?
- Where can a performance be?
- How long can a performance be?
- Note to self – bring visual cues for delineating spaces and props from home

### Outline:

1. Covering Space: Quick Solos (Morgenroth 17) – 20 min.
  - a. Encourages thought about how large the space is and where its boundaries are
  - b. Musicians will be encouraged to participate in this activity with the dancers; alternately, they could stand in a new area of the space to play
2. Floor Mapping– 20 min.
  - a. Have artists draw out a pattern, then start walking/improvising along the pattern. Explore intersections with others, and listen to what each area in the room sounds like.
  - b. Add props as points on the road
  - c. If this goes well, it can become an opportunity for audience participation—big roll of craft paper on the floor
3. The Journey (Reeve 89) – 30 min.
  - a. Ties movements to specific points in space, making the space a part of the art
  - b. Musicians can do this with time – each musician is assigned a dancer to “follow” (with sound). When that dancer encounters another, they have to change what they are playing to reflect it. When the activity is repeated, they still have to play the change even if the dancer doesn’t have the same encounter
4. Space Race (Reeve 98) – 25 min.
  - a. Generates movement material while still focusing on connecting points in space (not just horizontally, as in the previous exercises, but also vertically)
  - b. During this exercise, musicians will stand at various points in the space and explore the “space” of their instrument (ex. pitches, dynamics, tempos)
5. Discussion – 15 min.
  - a. To what extent do you think the space you are in affects your performance? Your mood? Your artistic choices?
    - i. Would you perform differently in a small space vs. a large space, or in a room with more or less reverb?
  - b. Are we still making art right now? Why or why not?
  - c. Will we stop making art when we leave this rehearsal?
  - d. Do you feel that time slows down or speeds up will you are performing and/or improvising?

RP absent

## Rehearsal 4 – Environmental Art (2/10/24)

### Main ideas:

- Interacting with the environment in a new way
- Consciously integrating the environment into the art we make

### Outline:

1. Bonding in Parallel, a Writing Collaboration (Hahn 40) – 30 min.
  - a. Step 1 – 5 min.
  - b. Step 2 – 10 min.
  - c. Steps 3-6 – 15 min.
  - d. Encourages awareness of objects in the room and provides material for improvisation
2. Improvisation based on the previous exercise – 20 min.
  - a. Artists may choose to simply read the writing from the exercise, to move or make music in a way that expresses their chosen object, or even to use their chosen object as part of their music or movement
  - b. If they feel inclined, artists can include aspects of others' writings/objects in their improvisation as well
3. Sound, Moving (Hahn 51) – 20 min.
  - a. Encourages awareness of sound in space
  - b. Utilizes sounds that may not otherwise be considered “music” (but are according to my thesis)
  - c. Everyone can take turns being the sound-maker
  - d. Alternate activity: take 5 minutes for everyone to find a space and write about what they hear (ex. breaths, footsteps, AC/heating, etc.)
4. Discussion – 20 min.
  - a. How would your responses to the first activity be different in the performance space?
    - i. Talk about objects/textures that will be in the performance space and how that may change their reactions
  - b. What aspects of your environment did you feel more aware of during these activities?
  - c. Did you feel more attuned to your environment after this rehearsal?

Bring writing/drawing materials to this rehearsal (or ask artists to bring their own); RP absent

## Rehearsal 5 – Performance Scoring (2/17/24)

### Main ideas:

- This rehearsal will introduce a few final options for performance and include lengthy discussion about performance logistics and which activities we may want to include, as well as how we could adapt them for performance.
- Artists should leave this rehearsal with a clear idea of the WHAT, WHEN, and HOW of our performances

### Outline:

1. Inner Voice-Overs (Hahn 87) – 20 min.
  - a. Very different from previous activities and could add contrast to the performance
  - b. Encourages self-awareness and use of voices
2. Sound Painting (Thompson) – 30 min.
  - a. More structured improvisation with one person directing the events while others still get to exercise creative freedom
3. Discussion – 40 min.
  - a. Bring a comprehensive list of activities we've done and a proposed performance outline to discuss
  - b. Which activities would you like to perform for an audience?
  - c. How would those activities work with an audience?
  - d. What materials would we need? What instruments?
  - e. How will we keep time?
    - i. Possibility of Christi/Prof. Braun being timekeepers
  - f. Discussion of anonymity/use of names in public document
  - g. Costumes
  - h. Finalize performance outline
  - i. Performance logistics
    - i. Call time, loading instruments/materials, warmup time, any striking, etc.

MJ absent



## Rehearsal 6 – Dress Rehearsal (2/24/24)

Main ideas:

- Performance preparation
- Final changes to prompts

Outline:

1. Warm up – 10 min.
2. Run through performance order with timers – 60 min.
  - a. Paint the Space – 10 min.
  - b. Sound Painting – 15 min.
  - c. Mirroring – 15 min.
  - d. Floor Mapping – 20 min.
3. Discussion – 20 min.

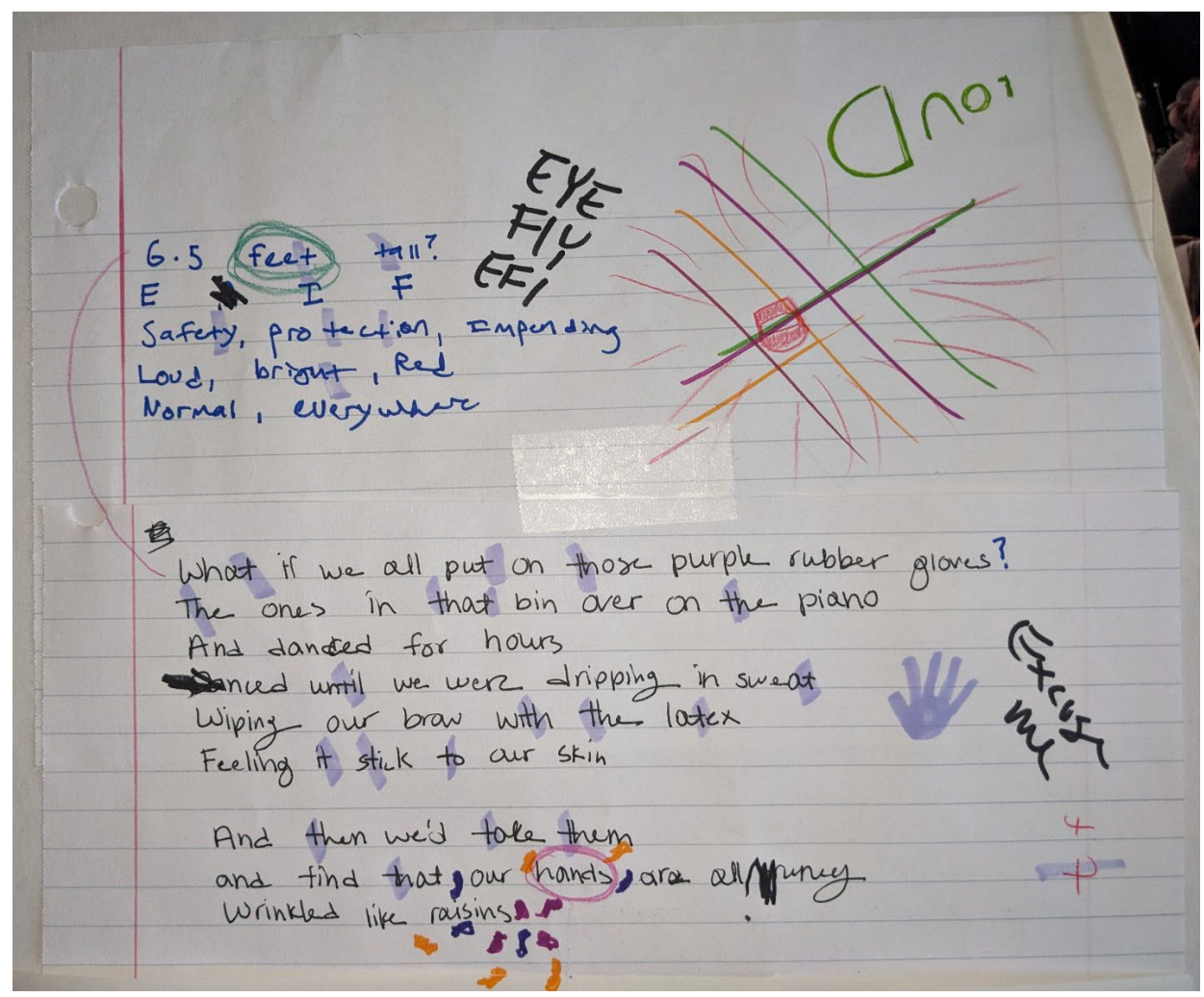
Bring paper roll for floor mapping; MB absent

Appendix C: Poster



Censored to anonymize collaborators' full names.

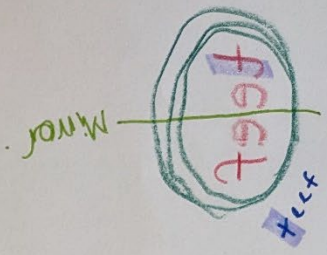
Appendix D: Rehearsal 4 Images





2/10/24

it was her flute from high school she told me  
used to play in the band  
which met on tuesdays  
at 3:25 in the band room.  
which was also a store room  
and also the detention room  
and also the informal, but universally known  
sex room.



She liked flute, but wasn't very good.  
liked the way the little buttons felt,  
the amount of resistance they offered under the soft pads  
of her fingers.

I often look at her fingers,  
gently pressing the soft squishy bits to feel the strong  
skeleton underneath.

There's something so special about grandmother hands, isn't there.  
So wise, so old, so pained.

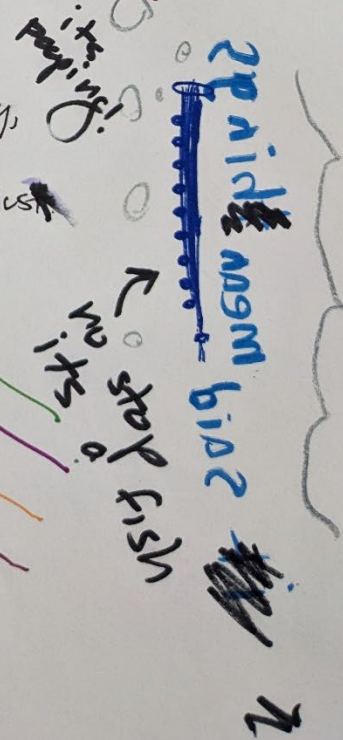
I know they have seen horrors I cannot imagine,  
would hate to imagine.

Her flute sits in the corner of the study,  
collecting dust by the hour.

Sometimes I go sit with it  
barely breathing as to not upset the dust.  
It's beautiful, you know.

Imperfect  
dented,  
worn.

It's seen great things,  
seen terrible things,  
but great.  
My fingers itch.



Wtlnp rnti 2



are indifferent

Reminds me of home



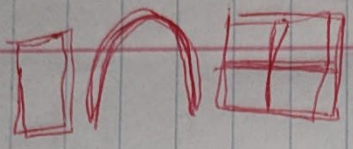
The lines are crossing the surface  
just as our own paths ~~are~~  
converge in this morning

The colors of the threads seem  
to mirror the difference between  
us.

And the white surface that makes  
everything look brighter and  
asymmetrical looks like this Saturday  
that is holding us ~~together~~  
together in the ~~same~~ space.

Excuse me  
I need some  
space

GATEWAY:



into another room (imaginary)

I am there, but I am here

You are here, but you are there

- make eye contact with self, with others

[slightly distorted, like a dream you can't quite remember]

[in this state, does the image follow me, or do I follow the image? in this state, am I (we) two?]

selfless, ever looked at but rarely seen

(do you long to be seen?) → glossy reflector of light → strongly mounted

you are beloved and/or detested by most

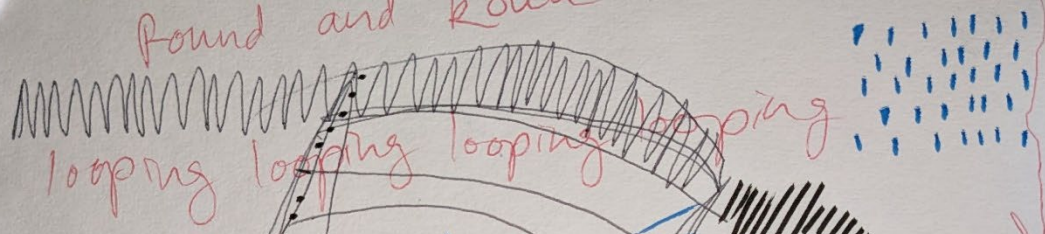
the lucky few are indifferent

red  
blue



Levels of color

Round and round and Round and  
Round and round and round



looping looping looping looping

harsh lines some way

softer some excuse  
some space we d

PULL ON, PULL OFF

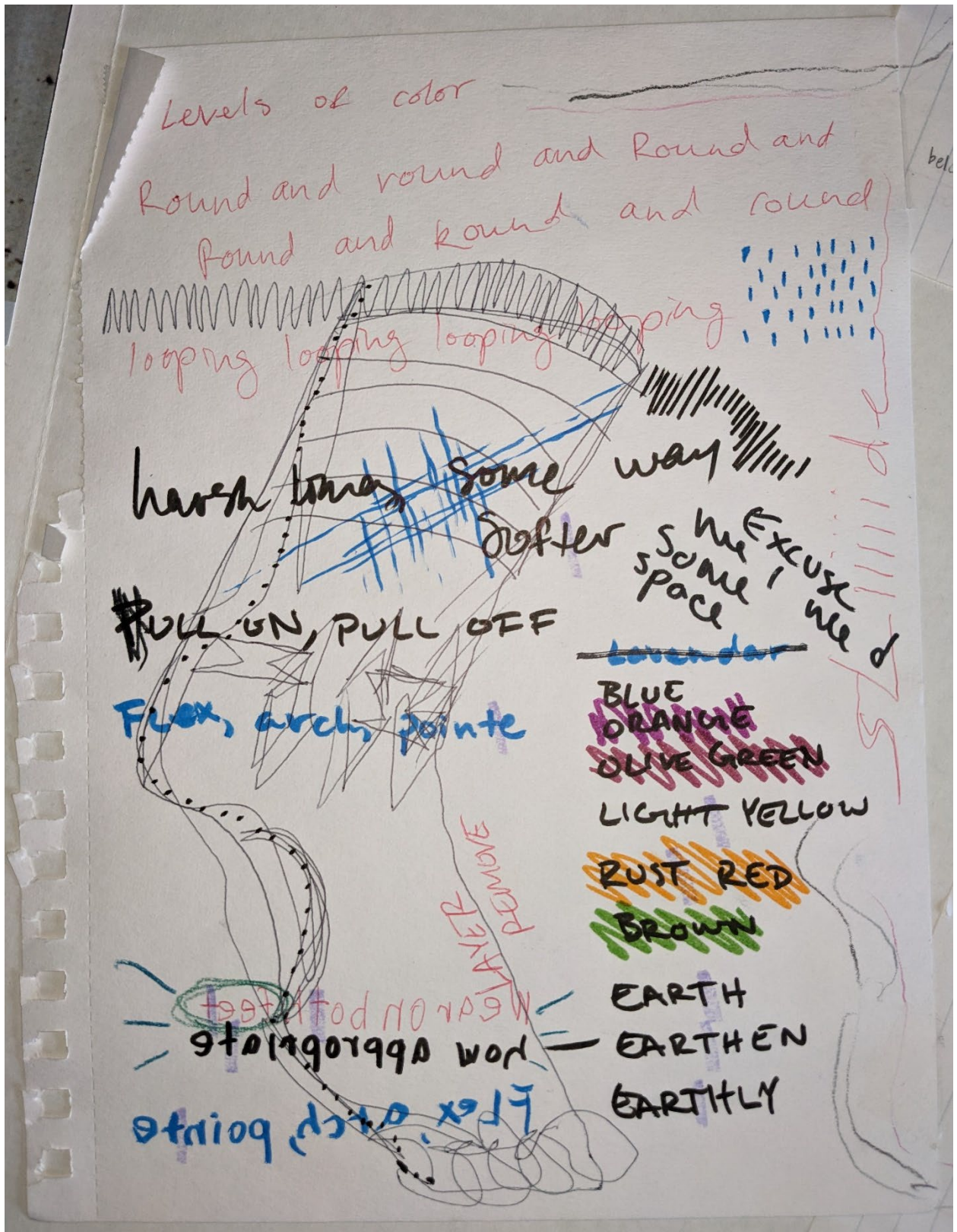
Flex, arch, pointe

- lavender
- BLUE
- ORANGE
- OLIVE GREEN
- LIGHT YELLOW
- RUST RED
- BROWN
- EARTH
- EARTHEN
- EARTHLY

EMANATE

test  
near on post  
won appropriate

Flex arch, pointe



## Appendix E: Soundpainting Key

LONG TONE



POINTILLISM



For density, hold hands close to or far from sides of head

RELATE TO



MINIMALISM



CHANGE



MEMORY



HIT



IMPROVISE



(For sound, point to ear. For dance, make wave shape with hand)

LAUGH



SPEAK



(for ABOUT, make circle with ASL "A")

AIR SOUND (whoooooosh)



WHISTLE



VOLUME FADER



TEMPO FADER



FADE IN



For FADE OUT, do the reverse

All images from Thompson, *Soundpainting*, pp. 21-44.



## Appendix F: Tech Schedule

The shows will happen on March 1st and 2nd at 7pm at Central Venue (29 E. Carpenter St.). Anyone is invited and admission is free.

Performance timeline:

[Friday only] 5:30 Arrive, set up chairs and tape floor

6:00 CALL TIME FOR FULL CAST

Video/audio check

Set up instruments/materials

6:30 Doors open

Cast warmup backstage

7:00 Performance begins with Paint the Space

Free improv based on Paint the Space prompt, with or without handheld instruments. Score changes are announced by any cast member saying the time out loud (ex. 7:10, 10 after 7).

7:10 Soundpainting

Begin by handing leadership to someone, then everyone moves to a circle in the middle of the space. Leadership can shift by passing the "crown." Key will be printed and located with instruments. If you have some material that we can read from during this score, like poetry, please bring it!

7:25 Mirroring

Ask for 7 volunteers to pair with 7 cast members. In each pair, determine who will make music and who will dance. 4 pairs move to side and sit.

- 7:30 group 1
- 7:35 group 2

7:40 Floor Mapping

Audience is invited to come to the stage and draw floor maps for us to follow. We choose a floor map to follow, handheld instruments optional. At any point in the map, we can pause for a while, but complete an entire map before choosing a new one.

8:00 Performance ends, bow to each side, leave stage area

Return to stage area for post-show mingling

Finish cleanup by 9:00 (we will be able to leave chairs set up and items in the space Friday night)

## Appendix G: Program

March 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024  
7pm

Central Venue  
Athens, OH

### Transitive Property

An Interdisciplinary Collaborative Performance

Transitive Property is a structured improvisational performance that explores co-creation through music and dance. Join us in a celebration of collaborative artmaking!

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#### *7:00 Paint the Space*

Performers “paint” the space with their bodies, and “paint” the silence with sounds. [Based on an activity by Justine Reeve.]

#### *7:10 Soundpainting*

A leader guides the group with predetermined signals. [Based on the work of Walter Thompson.]

#### *7:25 Mirroring*

Performers partner with audience for an exercise in responsiveness. [Based on an activity by Joyce Morgenroth.]

#### *7:40 Floor Mapping*

Audience invited to draw “floor maps” that the performers will follow, to produce an entirely new piece scored by you!

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**Thesis presented by Allison Rollins.**

**Collaborators:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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This project is generously supported by Dean’s Funding through the Ohio University Honors Tutorial College. Thank you!

*This performance is being professionally recorded. Out of respect for the performers, please silence or turn off all mobile devices and refrain from flash photography for the duration of the performance.*

Censored to anonymize collaborators’ full names.

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