

New York State Choreographers Initiative - June 22-July 2, 2022

Solange Rodrigues

It's the day after completing my 10 day NYSCI residency, and I am feeling immense growth and fulfillment. I was worried that the 10 days would fly by and escape me, but I felt we had the perfect amount of time. I felt like I had the most control, I felt calm, I felt able to facilitate and tap into a type of creative process that gave me something new each and every day. And I truly think I picked the right group of dancers to do it.

We worked a lot with imagery, so before jumping into movement, we did several written activities that worked and challenged our minds.

The themes I chose to explore are ones that have been on my mind for some time.

Detail/Specificity, Memory, & Interpretation.

Detail and Specificity, from my senior year at SUNY Purchase up until this residency, I have been talking about this. How I felt like individuality and freedom was so emphasized (which is beautiful of course), but I felt like it caused me to lose some cleanliness and precision as a budding choreographer setting movement on other people. And as one that was and still is developing her choreographic voice, I found that to be a challenge. Also, I'm finding that in process in the present day, whether I am the choreographer or the dancer, cleanliness can be something that is not as prominent. And there can be many factors as to why. For *one*, attendance. With how sporadic attendance is due to the freelance lifestyle, it's hard to get everyone on the same page. We can all be doing the same step, but doing 7 different versions of it. *Two*, movement styles. We all come from different backgrounds, and we have our specific ways of moving. We're freelance, we move differently. *Three*, TIME. Sometimes there is just not enough time to get into the nitty grit specifics, and we have to gauge our time carefully while continuing to move forward so that we're ready by showtime. *Four*, sometimes that's just how the choreographer roles, which can also be valid. I feel like we're so used to just moving, that we forget about all the little nuances that can be in a step so simple. I wanted to take this opportunity to challenge this, to see how specific we can get, how many details we can clarify and solidify, and how thorough we can be with our intentions. But I didn't only do this with dancing.

For the first activity, I partnered the dancers up, partner A was given a photo, and partner B was given a pencil and a piece of paper. Partner A had to describe as clearly as possible what was in the photo, and partner B had to draw it! With a starting time limit of 4 minutes, each round getting more difficult, and alternating roles, or partners. It was interesting hearing what role was harder and why, and how their way of communicating developed as the game went on. Each partner had to learn how to be more comprehensible, and precise with both direction giving, and direction taking. I liked this activity because I feel like it forced an equal amount of attention and focus between both partners. After the game, it was fun to compare the partner's drawing to the original, and understand what the describer could've said differently, or how the drawer could've interpreted differently! We then took the drawings, and translated it into movement.

I find this activity valuable and interesting because it parallels the notion that communication in general is such a vital key to functionality. Leading and facilitating activities like this challenged me to be as clear as possible with my direction and intentions. I am constantly striving to improve my communication skills both creatively and in my everyday life.

Memory. The brain fascinates me. But the brain on art fascinates me even more. Based on an activity from my 11th grade AP Psych class, I wanted to test the memories of my dancers. This is where we worked the most with imagery. I would place an image in front of my dancers for 8-10 seconds and then remove it, either quizzing them on the contents of the image, having them draw the image on paper as a group, or having them recreate the image on their bodies. I am curious what details we remember, and what parts our brain discards. I am curious what stands out to us and why? This all can be based on personal preferences, interests, and experiences, and I enjoy seeing the differences and similarities between people. One of the most interesting parts was hearing some of the dancers (Zoe) pick up on parts of the photo that I didn't even notice, and I'm the one that picked the photo... The activities we did for memory were all group tasks, and so seeing how they evolved as a group, or adjusted their methods to succeed together, was lovely. And I cannot help but think that the partner activity from the day before (mentioned in the previous paragraph) helped them communicate better 😊.

Interpretation. I find it interesting how we can all interpret things differently, even the same information. We interpret things based on context, experience, and state of mind, therefore interpretation is so personal to the individual. Interpretation was the last theme we explored,

therefore the most elaborate. For the first activity, I guided the group individually through movement instructions, I then partnered them up, and gave them a piece of paper with the same instructions on it. For this activity we had four dancers, so two couples. The paper had specific instructions for partner A, and partner B. I let each couple work independently to come up with a movement phrase based off of the paper, my only rule was to follow the instructions as literally as possible. Here were the first few:

Partner A - start on the right side of B, grab and lift B's arm

Partner B - when they drop your arm, react and follow through ending with your weight to the left

A - end on B's leftside and catch them in some way

Separate from each other

...

Putting the two couples next to each other and seeing how they interpreted the same instructions differently was fun. I then switched the partners but had them keep their original movement, which created an entirely new duet! We continued with activities like this. For the next one, I had the dancers individually make a movement phrase, then transcribe it as thoroughly and literally as possible, coming up with 7-8 precise movement instructions. They then had to lead the rest of the group through their movement instructions with the goal of all the dancers interpreting it the same way oof!! The amount of detail that is required for a task like that! It is even a challenge for me to describe these activities on paper in a paragraph like this, and have it make sense... which ties back into my theme of *detail/specificity, interpretation, and precision*. Hopefully you're able to understand what I'm describing.

And if you think our brains weren't fried enough, we concluded the residency by revisiting a condensed version of all the activities from throughout the week, adding some more games to the mix as well. I even brought my parents into the studio the last day to help me facilitate some of our final activities <3

I truly feel like I have grown and matured as a choreographer from this process. I learned how to listen, and I learned how to trust. Before this process, I often came into my rehearsals with a set vision in place, and most of the choreography done, which is completely valid and often necessary. But with the nature of this project, a different approach felt like the right move. I had a plan, but no steps, I had themes and concepts, but no structure. Most importantly I had

the right people. By saying I learned how to listen, I mean I learned how to follow the flow of the rehearsal, and ride that momentum by trusting the natural progression of what was being created between my dancers and I. By coming in with not a single step planned, going with the flow, not being married to anything, letting things (movements) come and go, planning day by day, and looking at things from a variety of perspectives, I feel like I found the right balance between set material, and play time within this process. And for that, a big thanks goes to my mentor JP, Jason Parsons. In the beginning, I found myself looking to JP for so many answers, but he didn't input too much. He gave just enough for me to do what I needed to do, and it worked out perfectly. I describe it as "the perfect balance of JP mentor brain, and Solange brain" haha.

Lastly, I have so much love for and would like to give a big thank you to my brothers Jon, Nick, and bestfriend Rae that all traveled from NYC, and three dancers I've had the pleasure of getting to know in Rochester during the pandemic, Zach, Zoe and Nanako. Thank you to the legendary Lois Welk, the NYS DanceForce, and NYS Council on the Arts for this exceptional opportunity.

