

Chase Granoff and Nancy García in conversation with Matthew Lyons

Mathew Lyons: I thought to start off I could ask you about these objects that you are each making, which happens to be a nice coincidence with both of your pieces: Chase making a publication and Nancy making a CD. There is one element of each your pieces that is, in some sense, finished already. Nancy, how has making this recording and CD release affected the making of the dance piece?

Nancy García: Well, I've been in a band for quite a while, so making CDs is something that's been part of my practice. Making the sound and the album artwork is something that, as a band member, I was always involved in. And then, doing more solo work, I continued to be interested in working with these forms. Also, I started shooting a video component, which ties into the work and into the live performance. For me, it's an experiment to present the work sort of in fragments. The experience of the project is available not only through attending the live performance, but also through listening to the music that was composed and watching the online video. I was thinking about the opportunity to work in a proscenium, while using the Internet and your home stereo system as a venue.

Matthew: When you made the video in advance (it's on YouTube and people can find it in various ways), were you thinking about how people would probably watch that before they see the dance piece? And that they would listen to the CD last?

Nancy: Yeah. I'm interested in breaking time. Your experience of the work is not just when you come to The Kitchen, but also whenever you decide to watch that video online and whenever, if you decided to buy the CD, or if you rip it from wherever... allowing the experience of this single work to happen on your terms: at home on your computer or stereo system and/or live in The Kitchen. Seeing what that will turn out like.

Matthew: Chase, can you talk about how you came to this idea of making a book?

Chase Granoff: Maybe it's a kind of riff on this idea of various venues of performance. For the last few pieces, I have thought of performance as a platform, which leads me to this idea of a platform for distribution. It can be various kinds of platforms and platforms get used for various things, but I thought of performance and specifically choreographic-minded performances becoming a platform of distribution of information. So, I decided with this performance, what's the clearest way to distribute information, in a kind of traditional, old-fashion sense? To make a publication. I really liked this idea of just making a book, and calling the book a performance, but of course given the context in which I'm getting support to make this, I quickly realized that wasn't possible. But it was very important in my thinking to have that moment of saying: I can call a book a performance, and everybody could show up to a performance and just be handed a book, and then they have space in the theater to read it or they take the book with them. But given that it's here at The Kitchen and there's a theater and it's a shared evening, this kind of conceptual play seemed very difficult territory to navigate. Maybe it wouldn't come off the way I would want it to. That led me to the idea of what kind of performance could surround a book? I thought of a book release, and that was the beginning of where I could make a performance from and how it became one project with two objects—one permanent, one non-permanent.

I didn't try to dogmatically stick to this idea of a book release. But it got me thinking of a structure and composition that was able to help me generate movement. It also got me thinking of how each essay always has citations from other people, so it made sense to cite the things that were happening in the book. It's two different pieces of one project that can each have their own existence in life. Obviously a book is much easier to distribute and circulate than a performance with 13 performers. I like this idea that the book can hopefully find its own life, post-performance at The Kitchen.

Matthew: Can you talk a little a bit about the movement, where it's going and what you are working on?

Chase: There are different strains of thought in the performance. When I decided that we were going to

make a live performance I started looking for sources outside of just the concept of a book, and looking towards other dance books. And this kind of played into an interest I've already had of looking at different moments in dance history and citing from those moments. So we read Doris Humphrey's *The Art of Making Dances* and Simone Forti's *Handbook in Motion*. The first is definitely a textbook in dance theory and compositional techniques for modern dance, and the second is about Forti's experience of becoming a post-modern maker, pre and post, but within that I was able to read a sort of compositional handbook for how to make a postmodern dance. So, we basically stole movements from these people in the end, or cited movements from them, let's say.

Matthew: Nancy, can you talk about some of the movement and how you've been working with the dancers and the musicians?

Nancy: The movement comes from various places. I've written scores based on lyrics that are on the album. In the studio, I'll sing different lines and give each line a certain timeframe—say two minutes—singing to them while they improvise. Another method was reading specific, predetermined words and allowing whatever images appeared in our minds to affect the improv. Also, watching online videos and live musical performances and using poses and gestures from album artwork from other musicians' records. I read Iggy Pop's *I need more*, a book of autobiographical writings. There are images and writing in there that I was influenced by. The musicians in the performance are mostly moving how they need to move in order to play their instruments, and I think there's a lot in that already there.

Matthew: Are they learning to play some of the tracks that are on the recording?

Nancy: Yeah, a few. And then there's one track that didn't make it on the record, so it's a B-side or a rarity that you get to experience if you are in the performance, but you won't get on the recording.

Matthew: Chase, I was looking at this book and one of the contributors wrote about the line between modern and post-modern dance, and her feeling that instead of the Yvonne Rainer "no-manifesto", people now are saying no to no, and moving back and forth, combining these different ways of approaching choreography. Did you feel that as you were approaching each material?

Chase: I had never read, before this project, the book, *The Art of Making Dances*, but any kind of preconceived ideas I had of what Doris Humphrey's work was, I tried as much as possible to let them go and just read her words and understand what she meant without my subjective filter. It was really beautiful for me, actually. And, of course, there are moments in her writing where it feels dated, or you may kind of chuckle, but I found her writing, for the most part, to be very contemporary and insightful. A lot of her ideas were very relevant. I didn't know how I was going to use this information. At one time I thought, "How can I take these Doris Humphrey techniques and ideas and make a 'contemporary dance'?" Then I was talking to a friend, someone who I respect a lot, and they said, "Well, why would you do that? Why don't you just make the dance that Doris Humphrey would make?" I didn't really know what that is either, you know, but I realized 'yeah, why don't I really just make the dance that the book instructs me to make and not worry if it's contemporary or not-contemporary, this or that, and be very sincere. That became very clear to me, that I wanted to make a very sincere dance. It's not about making fun; it's actually trying to be a modern dance. It's not the idea of a modern dance or of referencing Doris Humphrey, and it's not trying to be Doris Humphrey, but it's really trying to make the dance that I would make with that information. I mean, I have this other information and I can't help but use it somehow, but to be very earnest with that.

Matthew: Is that the aspect that you felt was unusual for you?

Chase: Yeah. It pushed me in directions of making that I would have never gone into on my own. Also working with a performer, as my main collaborator, Jennifer Sullivan, who is not a trained dancer—she's a very comfortable performer, but in a sort of performance, visual art manner—forced a different kind of movement and body articulation that was at least recently new for me. I think I had done it earlier on, but not recently. We worked very improvisationally to generate material, but it's definitely choreographed, to the T. In the end, I found something about Doris Humphrey's work more pedestrian than more post-

modern work, which was really a beautiful occurrence for me. The little bit of video I watched of her work is way more pedestrian than something like *Trio A* or *Huddle* (the Simone Forti score that we're citing). That has more virtuosity, in an athletic sense, than Doris Humphrey. Hers is more gestural or coming from exaggerated gestures of pedestrian activity, I feel.

Matthew: Although you've said 'in a very sincere way', I remember watching you do the Ishmael Houston-Jones piece with the cinder block and that seemed like a very sincere homage.

Chase: Yeah, I think I was influenced by that. That was slightly different because I wasn't the instigator of it. He was curated, but he didn't want to perform, so he asked three people to perform his thing. I also got into this thing when Joe Levasseur came to rehearsal and knowing that I have this ballet training, he said 'oh, now I see it'. I'm like, 'but you've seen it before when I danced with RoseAnne Spradlin'. Doris Humphrey's gestures flow in a sense of *port de bras*. From ballet, *port de bras* is a kind a design of movement of the arms and how they move and pass through space and go from one designated position to the next designated position. But the *port de bras* is actually the kind of transitional moment. So somebody who has good *port de bras*, it's not that they hit good poses, it's that they transition from pose to pose in a very beautiful way. With this piece I am exploring this kind of idea with *port de bras*. A more contemporary word might be flow, but I don't know if flow is so contemporary.

Matthew: Did you guys have any questions that you wanted to ask me? Or something in particular you wanted to talk about?

Chase: I feel like this was a very considered pairing. And that, often times, dance split bills or shared programs are a hodge-podge of different artists who are at similar points in their career, but it's not necessarily about a consideration of how these artists will relate to each other. Which compared to a more visual art situation, if you do a two-person show or a group show, there's definitely a consideration of that pairing or grouping.

Matthew: There's always an element that is instinctual, because when I'm talking to each of you about doing a shared evening, it's before I have even asked you to tell me anything about what you'd like to make, and since then your initial ideas can change very much. I guess I had a sense that each of you, in different ways—outside of and inside of theaters—seemed to share an interest in pushing the boundaries of what belongs in a theater as opposed to another kind of space, and that it would be interesting to see something in a theater. And of course also something about a sense of shared community and things like that.

When I'm making pairings, it is not from a place of 'this is like this', but 'this is different from this'. It is about allowing meaning to come from difference. Contrasting textures. In this case, I knew that Nancy was probably going to have live music and there would be that kind of energy of guitars and things like that, and I knew that probably Chase would have some kind of textual, performance history reference.

It's the same in the visual art context. I never know what people are going to make beforehand. For me, as a contemporary arts curator, almost every situation is like a leap of faith. I'm used to that by now and comfortable with it.

Nancy: Have you, forgive me if I don't already know the answer to this, but have you curated a ton of dance here before?

Matthew: No, this is the second thing that has my name on it, officially.

Nancy: Are there unofficial releases?

Matthew: There are other things that I was very involved in just by the fact of being one of the in-house curators here. And there are other things that I feel I brought to The Kitchen in some way or that my feedback contributed to someone getting a show here. But this is the second thing where I am named as curator; *robbinschilds* was the first. Definitely, in the dance context, it's a new thing.

Chase: I really appreciate it because I've seen you for a few years now attending dance performances. As somebody who is very invested in the community, I appreciate this kind of slowness.

Matthew: I really had to dive into it because it wasn't what I was hired to do. But my curatorial responsibilities grew, and I felt a great responsibility to see as much as I could, and I really enjoy getting to be a part of this community, feeling very interested and invested in it. It's been a great surprise because it wasn't something that I had that much exposure to before, but it's been incredibly rewarding.

Nancy: What is rewarding about it? Or what struck you or made you dive in further?

Matthew: I am interested in abstraction in general, and I really responded to the kind of abstract aspect of dance—the approach to meaning and its relationship to speech and language in contradiction to theater. I felt it was a very new experience of thinking about work from the visual art world, where there's so much printed and critical discourse about it, which is also inseparable at this point from the making of it. With the dance work that I've been looking at and working with at The Kitchen and in New York in general, I felt it was very challenging to process and think about it. I responded to that challenge basically. It was more like: 'I want to understand this better' more than anything else.

Chase: I feel like that's where the most interesting things happen. When curation can become a kind of dialogue. You curate to give opportunity because you want to see what might happen or you won't understand what might develop. And there's the other side of curating, where it's like a ready-made that you select, but this feels very different.

Matthew: Yeah, it's very different.

Chase: It's like the curator as artist a bit more.

Matthew: Just the fact of being a contemporary curator, whether it's in the visual arts or in performance, you are always dealing with new things, not only new works, but with artists pushing whatever form they are in. You have to give the artist the benefit of the doubt. If you don't understand something, it doesn't mean that there isn't a reason why certain choices have been made, and it's up to you to figure that out. By talking with the artist or thinking about it again and again, and coming back and looking at things multiple times.

Chase: That's been an interesting thing working with The Kitchen. There hasn't been a whole lot of pressure to frame what I'm doing or what we're doing in the language of The Kitchen or the language of what The Kitchen wants. That definitely happens to varying degrees at different venues in New York. What I'm saying is, I write what I want in the brochure and certain venues want to either, what I would call, dumb it down or shape it in a way that is more palatable to a general audience. But here I felt like I could just write what I wanted and if maybe I'm talking more directly to people who are invested in this form, it was okay. That was a really nice thing for me.

Matthew: We definitely don't have a real marketing department working on snazzy blurbs and things like that. I mean, we want them to be reflective of what you're making, but we do try to make them clear.

Chase: I've had the experience of submitting things in other situations and getting an email back with something that was not recognizable, and feeling like they didn't understand what I was doing, and they turned it into something that sounds generic. Artists are inherently smart people, they're invested in their work, and they're not going to purposely write about their work in a stupid way. It might need more articulation or clarity, but the language they are choosing is important, most of the time.

Matthew: Are there any other things that you guys wanted to say about these works?

Chase: I'll just say one last thing; I'm excited to work with a real proscenium.

Nancy: Me too.

Chase: Since I did Fresh Tracks at DTW, I haven't been in a situation of frontal proscenium. It became very interesting reading these books, because both talk about that from different points of views. So I've been working on trying to figure out ways of showing both points of views when I have this architecture to deal with.

Nancy: I feel I deal with proscenium when I play in clubs and things like that, but here the space is very particular. It's this large, black box and it's been just as much a challenge and interesting as doing something site-specific like *No Keys*, the work I made for adjoining, multiple rooms at the Greene Naftali Gallery. For instance, thinking about the relationship between the gaze of the dancer outwards towards the audience, versus remaining interior or towards each other.

Matthew: I wonder what your experience is of being on the stage at The Kitchen? Do you sense the large scale in terms of height and things like that? Do you feel like the audience is close?

Chase: I think because it's a true black box, and the first row is on the same level as the performers, there's such the possibility of getting close and touching or grazing them. And the fact that there are no wings and you often have to enter from behind the audience. Every time I've been at The Kitchen, I am always being made aware of the space behind me, and that really shifts things for me. It's an interesting thing to go into a space where you have seen a lot because there's a personal history.

Nancy: I realize how small and intimate it can become once you turn the theater lights on. And I'm definitely thinking about sound and how that brings the audience into the space or takes the performer into the audience, or surrounds the audience and stage.

Matthew: Thanks guys.

Chase: Thank you.

Nancy: Thank you.

Matthew: We'll see you in two weeks everyone.