

Erika Tsimbrovsky Portfolio

Throughout my life I have moved from place to place and as a result have needed to start afresh as an artist in each new location. So, despite my experience as an artist ranging over several decades, I feel like I approach my work very much with a beginner's mind. Having this depth of experience but also repeatedly starting again at zero, is a great act of artistic surrender. It has been ten years since I immigrated to the U.S. by way of Kazakhstan, Belarus, Moscow, Kremia and Israel. The shifting geographies of my life, the constantly changing landscapes, have shaped me as an artist.

I am a woman of Jewish/Russian heritage, born and raised in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in Central Asia, surrounded by a diverse mixture cultures. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in the early 20th century that mixed the cultures of the nations of the former Russian Empire, the subsequent reorganization after the second World War, as well as the extended journey of the Jewish people across time and space, my reality and upbringing in Kazakhstan were made possible.

I want to share some childhood sentiments. I was about two years old, and I was running around a table while all the adults celebrating something. I wished to never stop running, moment by moment, circle by circle—I was dancing! I remember this moment of awareness: 'WOW, I am dancing.' I loved to go to a steppe near my house to sit and observe the monotonous, monochrome landscape with never-changing blue sky and snow mountains far away. I dreamed about my glorious future.



photos by Said Atabekov



My first physical education was 4 years of gymnastics beginning at 7 years old. I was trained in three main disciplines: classical ballet, character dance, and the traditional folk dance of Kazakhstan. For ten years, starting at a very young age, I danced and performed with a Kazakhstani dance ensemble. Interestingly, because there is no historical evidence of this dance form, there is still a debate as to whether an ancient folkloric dance of the region of Kazakhstan actually existed. The current cultural dance of Kazakhstan, was created after the Russian Revolution and subsequent reorganization and is based upon many elements of Kazakhstan's ancient nomadic horse riding culture as well as draws inspiration from the beautiful, endless landscape. In this sense, we can see Kazakhstani dance as an "invented tradition" that exists very much in the minds, bodies, and cultural memory of people living in Kazakhstan. This invented tradition mattered to me because I drew from it while creating performances in the U.S.

For example, in 2011 I created a performance called *Rustling Silk*, which was inspired by my childhood landscape: the steppe horizon, infinite line, and the immense flat territory experienced by nomads. *Rustling Silk* explored the lost civilization of the ancient nomadic horsemen. In this full- evening, multimedia performance I combined structured improvisation, dance, music, video, and live painting to uncover our forgotten past—uncivilized, aggressive, and constantly moving—in an innovative and visually rich exploration of humankind's deep roots in rootlessness.



photo by Said Atabekov, a collaborator from my hometown and internationally- known artist.

The project—an exploration of the ancient nomadic culture of inner Asia and of our deep roots in rootlessness—is socially relevant in that contemporary society has begun to redefine the meaning of “home” through technology, particularly the internet. Personally, I cannot really say that I have roots in a specific country, and for a long time I have felt ungrounded and without a true home. With technology, I have begun to feel that my sense of rootlessness is not only natural but a common phenomenon. Society's sense of roots, home, and community has changed and we see a resurgence of the feeling of freedom, as if we were the ancient nomadic horsemen in our contemporary society.

I did my undergraduate work in Physics and Mathematics at University of Kazakhstan, which helped me to think more clearly and logically while creating dances. I then attended the Institute of Culture in Kazakhstan, where I studied the technique, composition, history, and theory of ballet, character dance, and the traditional folk dance of Kazakhstan.

In 1988 I moved to Minsk, Belarus, where I finished my education and earned my degree in choreography from University of Belarus. The reason for the transition was my marriage to Vadim Puyandaev.

As a result at present moment I have a long history of making complex, improv-based, multi-disciplinary work rooted in a collaboration with my partner Vadim Puyandaev, a visual artist. We have two children.

Starting in 1991, Vadim and I created projects uniting dance and visual art. Each of our performances over the years have included multimedia side effect exhibitions along the way, a tribute to the complex interaction of contributions to the project. Every piece of the final puzzle is represented as a side effect at some point in time, even if it is but an echo in the larger production. The side effect exhibitions show the importance of all the inspiration that went into the final piece. Our first *Side Effects* exhibition was in Belarus in 1992, which included my solo performance.

In 1994, we moved to Israel and started to work more seriously on multimedia art, first in improvisation sessions utilizing dance, live painting, and music. Then we started to develop this work into a performance. We—Vadim Puyandaev (a visual artist), Maksim Goldenberg (a musician) and Erika Tsimbrovsky (a choreographer)—formed the performance group, EVM Laboratories, and worked with a variety of artists: Peter Chaika, an outsider artist with Down Syndrome; Slava Ganelin, the legendary pioneer of Russian avant-garde jazz movement; Ismail (Israel) Galin, Natasha Zborovskaya-Sigawi, the underground band '17 megs of spring,' and others.



In Israel from 1995-2006 EVM Laboratories received numerous grants from the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Talder Group and the Israeli Lottery for multimedia performances.



In 2004-5 *Intersection* explored interactions among dancers, musicians, and artists, particularly Peter, an artist outsider with Down Syndrome.

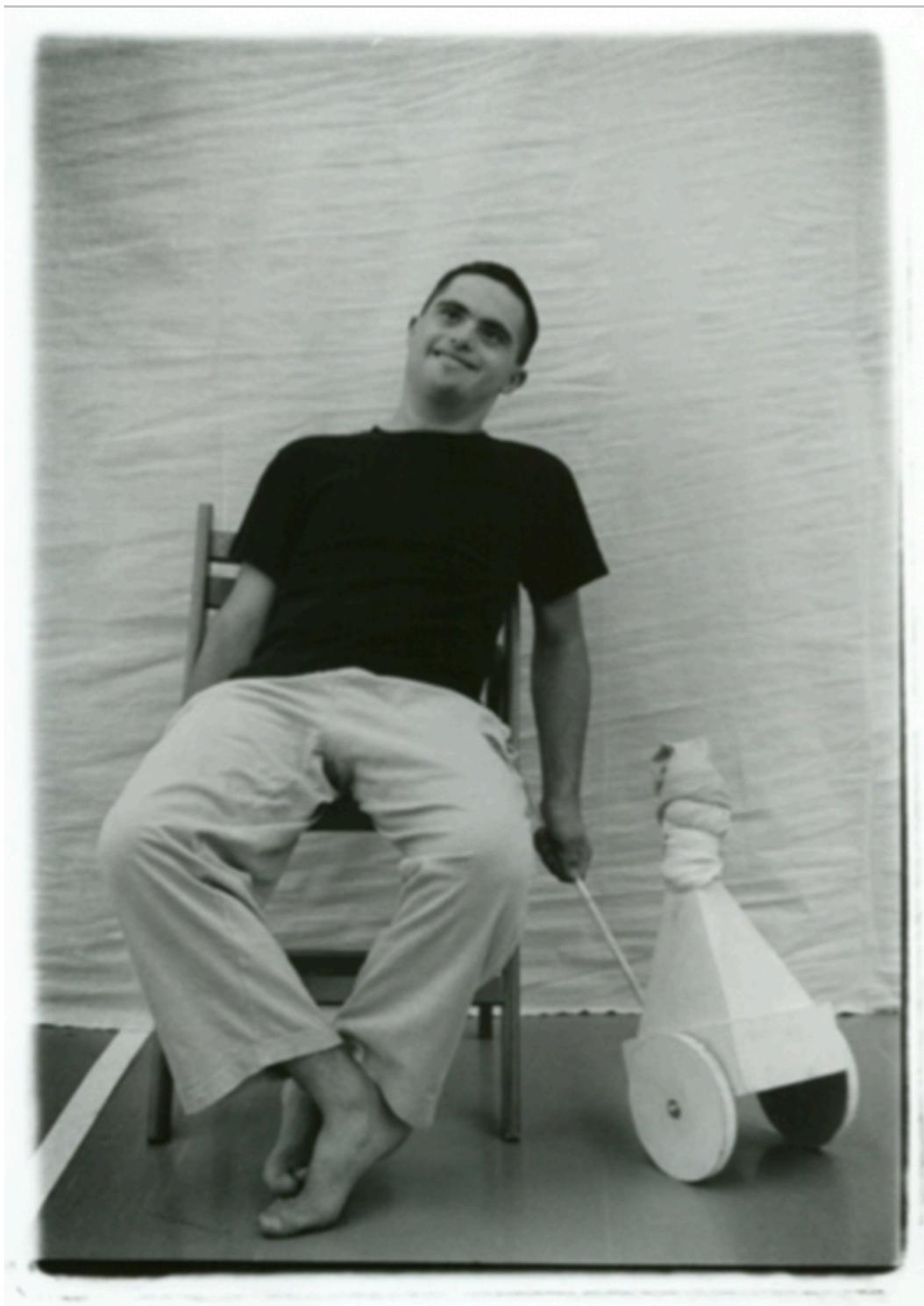
Energo-informational interaction/improvisation within a group of artists working in different styles and media with an artist outsider (a Down Syndrome artist) who, as the show progresses, was creating on stage the primitivistic portraits of audience members along the lines of Naive art. The show was about the interfacing of two universes—the rational and intuitive—including their collisions, points of conflicts, and interactions. The show is also about the inner world of the Artist, an outsider in the world, irrational and archaic, penetration into which helps restore connections and information long lost, and helps touch the present and partake of the civilizations long gone.

Peter Chayka by Natasha Zborovskaya-Sigawi





2004 *Intersection* - Suzanne Dellal center, Tel Aviv, Israel.
Avy K and Peter Chayka (Artist Outsider with Down Syndrome)
Live music by Seventeen Migs of Spring.



2005 *Intersection* - International festival 100% art, the new Cameri theater, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Avy K and Peter Chayka (Artist Outsider with Down Syndrome)

Live music by Slava Ganelin

There are many influences on my performance work – most notably the great impresario Sergei Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes in the early 20th century. Diaghilev brought together many great artists from different disciplines such as music, choreography, and visual art. These artists included Debussy, Balanchine, Picasso, Matisse, Satie, Ravel. The infamous Rite of Spring was a collaboration between Stravinsky, Nijinsky, and the visual artist Nicholas Roerich. *The Rite of Spring* was also the inspiration for Avy K 's 2009 work, *Nocturnal Butterflies*.





photos by Aleksey Bochkovsky

Collaboration and interaction between diverse art forms is very important for my work. Part of our approach is to take the methods of one art form and use them to shape creation in a different discipline. For example, the physicality of movement and the kinetic energy when Vadim paints is important for our work. Similarly, my dance is influenced by the shape and form of the painting and my movement becomes part of the visual art.

photos by Rob Kunkle





photo by Ola Vinogradsky

Another important aspect of my work is improvisation. Both Vadim and I practice a dance form called Contact Improvisation, where dancers explore the physical dynamics of bodies coming together and moving together in the moment. There's a kind of poetry in the communication and interaction between the moving bodies. This dance form has been a one of major influence on our work, both in terms of directly incorporating it into our performances, but also in taking some of the principles of the dance and using it to create the work.



Many of our performances are “structured improvisations.” Each performer— whether in dance, visual art, sound, music—is improvising in the moment. This requires a great deal of presence and listening to one another.

This approach to live performance is similar to one of Vadim’s approaches to painting. There’s a kind of chaos at the early stages of the process of creation from which the structure emerges. It’s the job of the artists to discover this structure rather than impose it from the outside. For a full length performance, this structure is discovered through many improvisation sessions that are part of creating the final performance.



Scrap-Soup by Aleksey Bochkovsky

We immigrated to the USA in 2006 and our first project was *The Garden* in 2007, a multimedia structured improvisation performed at Noh Space in San Francisco. The garden, full of faint memories, is a place we can transcend space and time—like childhood memories that suddenly appear in dreams—and connects us to nature through highly metaphoric associations with both matter and spirit. At that performance, we met Laura Maguire, a PhD in Philosophy from Stanford University. She expressed great interest in our work and invited us to perform it at Stanford University.

After that, the three of us decided to create Avy K Productions, named after our unique audio-visual-kinetic approach to performance. Avy K's first project was *Scrap-Soup* (2008), which was performed at Theatre Artaud in San Francisco.

The project investigated how technology has changed what is important to us in conveying information, and drew its inspiration from the visual aesthetics of ancient manuscripts as well as from the efficiency and mass-accessibility of contemporary texts. We used the live stream from 'Live Journal' (before Facebook) where in real time audience may make comments about the performance in the stream.



photo by Aleksey Bochkovsky

Our next performance was *Nocturnal Butterflies* (2009), a multimedia dance performance dedicated to the legendary dancer, choreographer, mad genius, and beautiful myth of the early 20th century, Vaslav Nijinsky. Nijinsky, considered one of the greatest dancers in history, revolutionized the world of ballet with primitivist choreography and sensual imagery that was highly controversial for his time. I consider this project one of the most important projects we've done. This was the first time we conducted collaborative research on the work that inspired our project—Nijinsky's "diaries," which we documented on our blog. After a mental breakdown in 1919, Nijinsky was committed to an asylum, and he spent the remaining 30 years of his life in and out of various hospitals. During the six-week period before first being committed, Nijinsky began documenting his thoughts and experiences in several notebooks. These notebooks—full of strange dreams and fantasies, often of an unusual sexual nature—formed the foundation of the research for our project.



photos by Aleksey Bochkovsky

I'm including some excerpts from the article that Laura Maguire wrote about the project for *In Dance* magazine.

“For Tsimbrovsky and her dancers, Nijinsky’s notebooks form the foundation of their research for *Nocturnal Butterflies*. Tsimbrovsky, a recent immigrant from the former Soviet Union, started reading Nijinsky’s diary as well as Romola’s biography in a period of insomnia induced by a deep anxiety about being a stranger in a strange land, unsure about how her art would be received in the Bay Area. Something about the title *Nocturnal Butterflies* resonated with her, if only in a liminal, unexpressed way. As a dancer, she was fascinated by the rare opportunity to catch a glimpse into the internal workings of another dancer’s mind, especially one of such exceptional talent as Nijinsky. It felt to her like she had been given a key that unlocked a gate to a hidden garden, one she could only dream about on those nights when insomnia did not grasp her in its clutches. She imagined the manic Nijinsky, scribbling incessantly throughout the night, while Romola slept nervously by his side. She began to feel her way into his unhinged world, into a darkness where one navigates only by the faint sound of a moth’s wings flapping somewhere in the distance.

...Of course, the effect that Nijinsky’s writing has on the dancers is not always known on a conscious level and Tsimbrovsky encourages them to be guided by intuition rather than the rational, conscious mind. A reoccurring theme in Nijinsky’s notebooks is the emphasis on feeling over thinking. Referring to his wife, he writes, “She thinks I am mad, because she thinks a lot. I think little and therefore understand everything I feel. I am feeling in the flesh. I am feeling in the flesh and not intellect in the flesh. I am the flesh. I am not feeling. I am God in the flesh and in feeling. I am man and not God. I am simple. People must not think me.” In her rehearsals for *Nocturnal Butterflies*, Tsimbrovsky uses passages like this one that particularly resonate, ones which speak to the division between body and consciousness, between the material and the spiritual. While she prefers to remain tight-lipped about the specific techniques she employs in creating the performance, Tsimbrovsky’s dancers agree that it is a deep and interesting process. As Christine Bonansea says, “I really like how Erika uses the text. With her direction, we make the spirit and words of Nijinsky alive—we give him a resonance. It’s not about history anymore, it’s about physicality, bodies, ‘matière.’” Lindsay Gauthier adds, “Nothing is without connection to the theme, even if you are not intentionally trying to make a connection. The information expresses itself through your body and the dance because you have ingested the material. What is most interesting about how we use the text is in the ways that we don’t intend to; in the moments that something happens without expectation or planning, a discovery is made, a piece of magic uncovered.”



photo by Aleksey Bochkovsky

“I was particularly impressed with the improvisational techniques of Tsimbrovsky. This was very refined work, not just random noodling. It confirmed for me that improvisationally based work can indeed be “choreographed” as there was such a disciplined approach to the improvisational structures and the dancers all knew exactly what was intended in each distinct section of the piece. I found that I was completely engaged in the dancing and that she coaxed really strong performances from these dancers, many of whom were familiar to me.”

Joe Goode (from letter of recommendation)

“The number of pages in this book is exactly infinite. No page is the first; none the last. I don’t know why they’re numbered in this arbitrary way. Perhaps it’s to demonstrate that an infinite series includes any number.”

The Book of Sand by Jorge Luis Borges

The quote shaped the concept of our significant *The Book* project, a dance- installation project that informs my current work.

With Vadim Puyandaev I was awarded the Commons Curatorial Residency at SOMArts for the month of July 2011. *The Book* at SOMArts Cultural Center is a multidimensional, multimedia installation—reflecting the investigative process of a meditation on the inner world of the artist and the artist’s relationship with a rational society and a technological age. In *The Book*, artists and audience members allow their personal stories to enter the performance space, creating a collective public diary. Each performance is a random page from *The Book*, and each invites a different guest artist to enter the structure, created by Avy K and collaborators, in order to destroy it and give it new life. In this way, the performance mirrors Borges’s book, with its lack of beginning and end, and its infinite possibilities.



Avy K performed the next page of *The Book* at the YBCA as part of Dance Anywhere in 2013. This page included a dance diary with sculptures and illustrations. Each page of *The Book* provokes new ways of observing and perceiving dance media, as well new ways of observation of an art object (sculptures).

“The improvisational structure of *The Book* relied on an active audience, who intently observed the piece. Said Erika, “the best draw to the piece is for the audience to be active observers, because they have the chance to explore and experience the piece”. During Avy K’s performance, the onlookers proximity to the piece gave them an immediate and nuanced experience. Erika found this dimension of her YBCA performance very exciting. “You never know what will happen and how the audience will become part of the living diary that is unfolding.”

Erika is interested in the way that objects change space and distance. As part of the piece, performers improvised around statues, created by visual artist/ performer Vadim Puyandaev. “These statues were objects that changed and distorted the space. From any point of view they were beautiful”. The sculptures inspired the artists to further explore “gravitational energy and weight, they begged for contact”. they were beautiful”. The sculptures inspired the dancers to further explore “gravitational energy and weight, they [the sculptures] begged for contact.”

Natalie Marsh, Dance Anywhere blog

AVY K Productions presents



Ir-Rational

visual audio kinetic
P E R F O R M A N C E

ODC Theater 3153 17th St. San Francisco 94110 December 7th, 8th - Fri & Sat 8pm www.avyk.org

In 2012 our team worked on *Ir-Rational*, which was performed in San Francisco, at the ODC Theater. *Ir-Rational* is a grotesque fantasy about an imagined meeting between Mary, Queen of Scots and Queen Elizabeth of England. The two represent opposing archetypes: Mary intuitive, Elizabeth rational. Meeting in an era of shifting paradigms, a struggle ensues until one power inevitably cedes to the other. In the multimedia dance performance—a highly structured improvisation—the queens were portrayed as characters in the constantly changing environment of a computer game. Their collision reflects the struggle in each of us between impulse and reason. Elizabeth forewent her femininity in order to survive in a world dominated by men, but in contemporary society we begin to glimpse a shift to the emergence of intuition, as it struggles to find an opening through the pervasive control of reason. Feminine qualities are beginning to re-emerge, but not at the cost of giving up power.

A seemingly endless, sometimes unintelligible letter exchange between the queens was the foundation for our creation/research. The initial action point was the movement of two naked

bodies in constant physical contact on a plane. Dressing one another, the two innocent beings transform each other into two monster queens who struggle to survive.

The physical, visual, and audio environment was manipulated by visual artist Vadim Puyandaev, lighting and video artist Lucas Krech, and musicians Joan Jeanrenaud, formerly of the internationally renowned Kronos Quartet, PC Muñoz, and London-based musician Grundik Kasyansky. *Ir-Rational* is directed/choreographed by Erika Tsimbrovsky, in collaboration with dancers Bianca Cabrera and Ronja Ver.

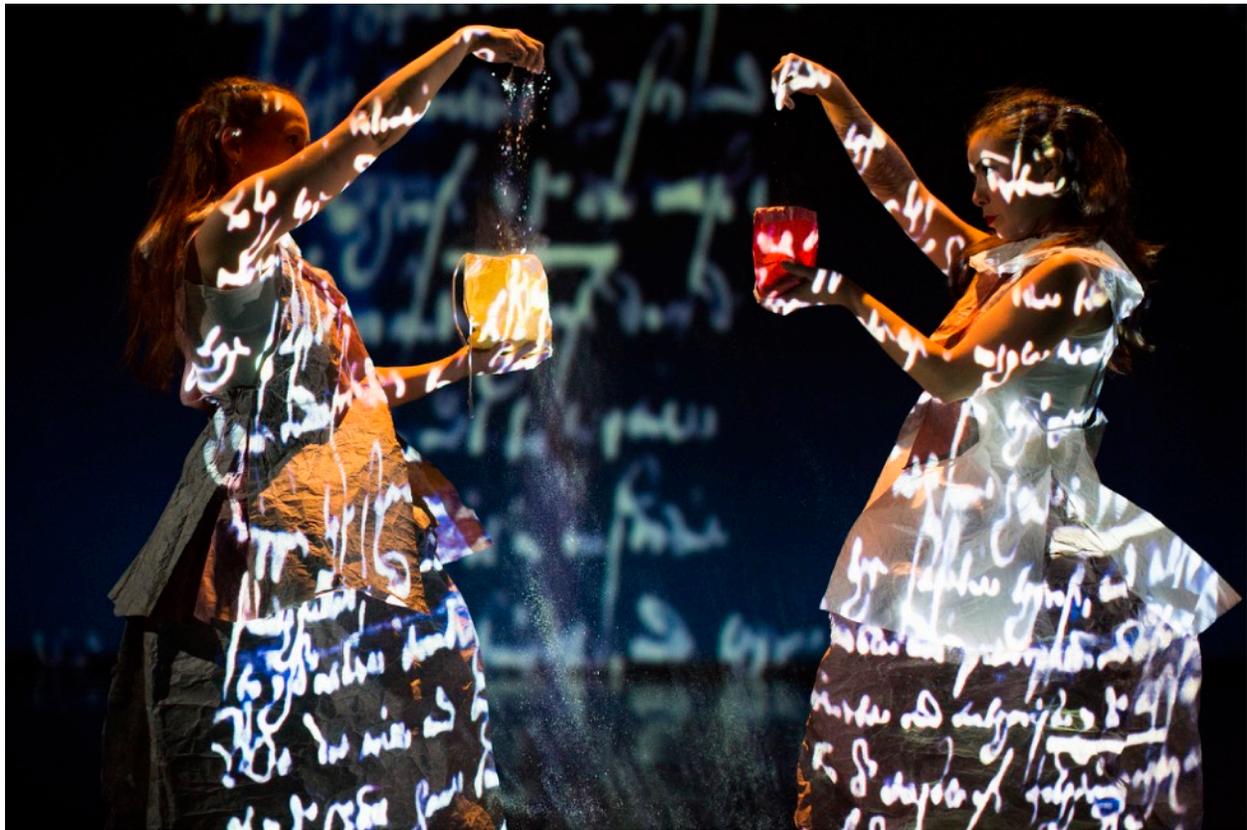


photo by Aleksey Bochkovsky



photo by Kirill Krylov

Minotaur was selected for a Dresher Ensemble Artists Residency (DEAR) Center fellowship in 2012. The project was developed with composer Alexander Sigman, light/video artist Lucas Krech, visual artist Vadim Puyandaev, and choreographer/artistic director of Avy K, Erika Tsimbrovsky. *Minotaur* was performed as a work in progress with musician Alexander Sigman, *LAByrinths: Audio-Visual-Kinetic 1*, at the Center for New Music in San Francisco in 2013! The 2015 version of *Minotaur* performed with musicians Ken Ueno and Matt Ingllse.

Minotaur is an ongoing series of multimedia installations/performances combining dance, music, and visual art. Conceived by Erika Tsimbrovsky & Vadim Puyandaev as a re-casting of the Greek myth of the Minotaur—filtered through the lens of Borges and Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt—the *Minotaur* assumes the form of an installation-performance, situated at the core of a plexiglass-walled labyrinth.

This project is prompted by a fundamental, but dangerous quality of our time: there exist seemingly limitless desires which can be fulfilled all too easily. The *Minotaur* portrays a mutant of our urban world with similar, yet insatiable, desires. The audience experiences a labyrinth of feeling and sound, a convoluted world of spirit and flesh, and comprehends this mutant as a reflection of ourselves.

“...he danced his advance, and she danced her retreat, he his penetration, and she danced her embrace. They danced, and their reflections danced, and he didn't know that he took the girl, and he also didn't know that he was killing her...”

Friedrich Dürrenmatt

Recently, *Red Wind / Ruah Aduma* was presented as a graduate dance thesis project at Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University. *Red Wind / Ruah Aduma* is a structured improvisation, combining dance, visual art, and music in a poetic abstract installation/performance. The project is dedicated to a spirit of revolution and inspired by the Russian avant-garde. *Red Wind* continues the artists' search for what is beyond form and what is behind the mind in a place between the sky and the earth—exploring the horizon.

While creating my recent graduate thesis work, I contemplated on the meaning and meaninglessness of art making. I thought a lot about artists' radical experiments, about craziness and the weirdness of their actions. I thought about the huge gesture of Pina Bausch, who brought earth on stage in *Right of Spring*. I thought that maybe the average person would find it difficult to understand Richard Serra's monumental arcs, spirals, and ellipses, which were made of huge steel plates. I thought about Ai Weiwei's conversation with government and society using *Sunflower Seeds*. Ai displayed 100 million handmade and painted porcelain sunflower seeds. These seeds weighed about 150 tons and were made over a span of two and a half years by 1,600 Jingdezhen artisans. Doesn't that sound crazy?

One of the founders of Russian Futurism, Velimir Khlebnikov, spent his entire life searching for a new poetic language and developing mathematical theory of the relationship between time and history in order to predict the future. An interesting fact I discovered from reading his bio is that when no one wanted to publish his *Tablet of Destiny*, he said, "I'll read it to horses."

Nothing can be proved about the ephemeral territory of art-making, so the decision to continue to search the 'meaningless beauty,' no matter what, makes art valuable.

Art Making

I'm a choreographer/performer living in San Francisco. For almost two decades, I have been making experimental interdisciplinary projects, exploring aspects of improvisation, particularly structured improvisation. In Israel, where I lived for twelve years, I co-founded the award-winning experimental performance group EVM Laboratories to research the interaction between diverse media. When I moved to San Francisco in 2006, I co-founded Avy K Productions and we have created about 20 full length interdisciplinary projects, in collaboration with a variety of artists, including dancers, visual and installation artists, video artists, composers, and sound artists.

I specialize in multimedia, improvisational dance performance, particularly an approach to performance which I call "audio-visual-kinetic". The core idea is to facilitate a dialogue between artists of different media and unite them under a common theme. Everything occurs in real time so a conversation between artists can emerge. I use the principles of visual art and the tools of physical movement and improvisation, and although much of my inspiration draws from theater, I try to escape from the traditional understanding of theater in my work, resulting in an experimental/visual theater of dance.

I have worked collaboratively in multimedia performance with a variety of artists, like Peter Chaika, an outsider artist with Down Syndrome, Slava Ganelin, the legendary pioneer of the Russian avant-garde jazz movement, cellist Joan Jeanrenaud, formerly of Kronos Quartet, film artist Paul Clipson, composers Ken Ueno, Matt Ingalls, and Alexander Sigman, choreographer Scott Wells, visual artist and long-time collaborator, Vadim Puyandaev, and many others.

Every artist involved in any given project has a huge responsibility, as the structured improvisation model requires them to make decisions in real-time. There is a certain amount of risk involved in this type of project, but the most wonderful aspect is the high level of trust and

respect that is shared among the collaborators. While improvisation gives the artists freedom, it is also important to have a clear theme that unites the collaborators and to still use a rational—in addition to an intuitive—approach. It is thus essential that all of the collaborators work together over time to find a structure for the piece that reflects its central themes, so that everyone is prepared and feels comfortable with each other and the structure. They are then free to make their individual decisions within the broader terms of the structure.

Themes I explore in my work are the presence of ancient archetypes in our urban reality, the flow of information from past centuries into our technological and mass media world, and the intersection between the rational and the intuitive within ourselves and nature. I use elements of the absurd, not only to break thought patterns, opening channels to which the audience previously had no access, but also to add an element of humor, facilitating the audience's understanding of a complex and multi-layered work.

These themes are reflected in the way I create a new work, using both rational, deliberative approaches, as well as more spontaneous and intuitive approaches. I like to explore the tension and imbalance that results from combining these two opposing approaches to find a dynamic equilibrium in the work. For the rational, deliberative approach, I spend a lot of time researching the topics and themes I'm engaging with, and I ask my dancers to prepare intellectually by reading and memorizing texts. This conscious preparation allows the dancers to work in a spontaneous way with the background knowledge that all participants in the project share.

A deeper exploration of 'the rational and the irrational' as a theme was started in our *Nocturnal Butterflies* (2009). We explored Nijinsky's diary. During the six-week period before first being committed to an asylum, Nijinsky began documenting his thoughts and experiences in several notebooks. These notebooks—full of strange dreams and fantasies, often of an unusual sexual nature—form the foundation of our research for our own *Nocturnal Butterflies*. Our goal in this performance is to penetrate the illusory world the genius preferred to the real one. Like a nocturnal butterfly, exposed to the harsh daylight, Nijinsky and his art were too beautiful and vulnerable for the cold world of rationality.

And another notable project *The Book*, at SOMArts gallery in 2011. A multimedia installation, *The Book*, meditated on the inner world of the artist and the artist's relationship with a rational society in a technological age. In each "page", we allow our personal stories to enter the performance space and leave behind an intimate message using diverse art media to create a collective public diary. It was an exploration of new ways to engage the public as an active observers.

Currently, dance installation projects are my primary focus. I am interested in exploring my ideas in different sites (open/alternative spaces, galleries, museums etc.) that invite new ways of perceiving dance and other traditional art mediums (painting, sculpture etc.). I am investigating a body language in all its manifestations and I use emotions and sensations as a raw material to build fleshy kinetic sculptures to provoke a physical response from the viewer. I define dance as a ritual of sacrificing flesh for spirit.

I know three languages and I bring the perspective of someone who grew up multicultural yet rootless, living in six different countries. I have demonstrated an artistic excellence in interdisciplinary exploration, using innovative methods, experimenting with performance practice as a way of contemplation on a world around and using live performance practices to connect with the surrounding environment, that is crucial in our internet age, where technology and virtual reality separate us from the physical, corporeal world.

Structure of Ir-Rational

Overture: *2 queens roll starting upstage left, begin to dress at stage right, queens continue to dress (each other) at front of stage (paper pre-set), then powder each other in center stage, go upstage and exit*

Active observers: start in audience area, observing (maybe very small reactions, shifting positions when

queens dress each other); when queens exit, 2 active observers will slowly roll sheets of paper up and remove them to the sides of the stage. Possibility of participation of active observers in culmination of overture (after queens exit, music builds).

Part 1: *Elizabeth onstage, seated on throne, makes speech. Duet with "dead" Mary.*

Active observers: build reactions for active observers, maybe some in audience and maybe some on sides

of stage (maybe two active observers open the door upstage at beginning).

Part 2: *Begins with empty stage; performers are behind screen and in audience area. Mary's solo (Bianca's adagio), develops with speaking (madame, my good sister). After development, everyone joins upstage center, move slowly downstage in line with portraits.*

Active observers: come onstage with development of "madame, my good sister"; echo words, disorientation for Mary, come in close, back away, very simple manipulations (very brief, random force affecting her, then move on). Active observers join Mary and Elizabeth upstage, begin line downstage, exit by going up stairs in audience.

Part 3: *2 rooms: Mary and Elizabeth trace patterns in squares, begin developing speaking: poetry, letters (computer voice), then free with patterns, patterns intersect. Elizabeth spins with vocal, Mary repeatedly falling on floor. Use sheets of paper to develop movement, use "talking kisses." Elizabeth builds path with papers, Mary gathers papers inside skirt, continue dancing, talking with mouths close together. Transition to "prayer." E & M do a phrase, spiral pattern, breathing, bodies move up and down.*

Active observers: when Elizabeth spins and makes vocal "scream" active observers enter, echoing scream, bring sheets of paper, exit to sides of stage and/or audience area. (Possibility to build Daniel/Rajendra duet as a shadow of E & M.) Medieval text begins (humors, alchemy). Then active observers put on long paper skirts, come into space, make "round dance" after Mary and Elizabeth dance with mouths close. Exit to sides of stage. Possibility to support queens during "prayer" with subtle gestures, breathing.

Finally (epilog): *Circus! Queens do supported cartwheels, dancing, competition with tricks. Then queens joust, then ending...?*

Active observers: onstage, repetitive tricks, assisting queens (maybe 2 sides, 3 with each queen) with competitive tricks. During joust, observers strong reaction, cheering, booing, also jousting gestures or with other active observers.

Scrap-Soup review 2008

Genre-Defying Dance

By Silke Tudor

Speaking about gravity's effect on postmodern dance, experimental choreographer and contact improvisation guru Steve Paxton said, "If you're dancing physics, you're dancing contact. If you're dancing chemistry, you're doing something else." For locally based, globally derived Avy K Productions, such demarcations are quaintly outmoded. Avy K dances physics, chemistry, technology, anthropology, architecture, and poetry. Sometimes its members don't even dance — the group's co-founder, Vadim Puyandaev, is most often seen onstage creating live, wall-sized

paintings that both echo and arouse the bodies before him. By freely combining media — sculpture, radio, movement, film, and toys all find a place — with chance, Avy K's Kazakhstan-born artistic director and choreographer Erika Tsimbrovsky has taken a galvanizing approach to dance. The result has earned numerous awards for EVM Laboratories, the company Tsimbrovsky and Puyandaev ran in Israel before coming to the U.S. As always with Tsimbrovsky's work, improvisation is the soul of Avy K, but these multimedia performances are not without elegant arrangements. In its San Francisco debut in 2007, three red apples offset the fluttering “wedding” dresses of three dancers; flickering projections broadcast urban rivers across naked, protracted bodies; a ream of crumpled butcher paper became a heaving shell, shelter, and/or ball gown. Tonight's debut performance of *Scrap-Soup* includes 3D video, live painting, music, and mutating installations.

Structures Red Wind / Ruah Aduma

In this project, the audience is in the center of the space. The action takes place around them, with the walls serving as an interactive frame for the performance.

Structure for the first rehearsal at the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University, 2017

1) Mummified Bodies

- breathing, anxious walking with poem
- wall dance
- paper dance
- exit

2) Erika and Vadim

- animals
- constructions
- separating w/ poem around audience
- poem backwards with wall
- belly button talk/sing

3) Angels

- singing into movement
- round dance
- angel warriors movement

4) Chaos

- exhaustion/wailing

5) Icon-corner dance

5/21/ 2010

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing in support of Erika Tsimbrovsky and Vadim Puyandaev , the artistic team of Avy K Productions. I had the distinct pleasure of seeing their recent multimedia production entitled *Nocturnal Butterflies* (2009). It was a delightful mash up of visual design and experimental sound and video design. The subject matter was the incomparable Nijinski and his rather opaque and fascinating writings. It was an apt choice for this particular team and their aesthetic which is bold and unapologetically experimentalist.

I found it refreshing that this work has found its way to San Francisco. I fear sometimes that the spirit of alternative dance making that once thrived in our community is endangered. To see these artists who bring a Russian/Israeli/Euro inflected work into our midst buoyed me and made me feel glad at heart. I was particularly impressed with the improvisational techniques of Tsimbrovsky. This was very refined work, not just random noodling. It confirmed for me that improvisationally based work can indeed be “choreographed” as there was such a disciplined approach to the improvisational structures and the dancers all knew exactly what was intended in each distinct section of the piece. I found that I was completely engaged in the dancing and that she coaxed really strong performances from these dancers, many of whom were familiar to me.

Nocturnal Butterflies was performed at Theater Artaud and Puyandaev and his visual collaborators made me remember the days when that space was truly a hub of experimentation. I felt like I was back in the warehouse where each corner was transformed by some small installation and one had to delve deeply into each visual moment to plumb its depths. This is very interesting and worthy work. I would like to see it in many different settings, especially those where the viewer is free to move within the work and participate volitionally in how it might be seen.

Their newest project, *The Book*, promise to be as compelling as their last. I would very much recommend these artists for funding. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any further assistance in this matter.

Yours truly, Joe Goode

Artistic Director, Joe Goode Performance Group 2007 General Kennedy Drive
San Francisco , CA 94129

Article for Dance Anywhere blog by Natalie Marsh February 11 2014

As the clock struck 12 noon on March 25th 2013, Erika Tsimbrovsky and Avy K productions moved to a percussive drum beating in rhythm to the chimes of the clock tower. From fast paced, directional movements, the dancers slowly turned inward, improvising in insular and private patterns throughout the space. Onlookers watched in awe as the performers performed with large white statues. The work provided an intimate and raw glimpse of these performers as they interacted in an external and highly public environment.

For dance anywhere® 2013 Erika Tsimbrovsky and Avy K Productions performed their improvised multimedia performance work, *The Book*, in front of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, CA. The work intended as an “open diary for the audience” explored the internal state of an individual versus the external sphere of technology and media. *The Book* is a multidimensional installation in which guest musicians, artists and dancers are invited into the structure of the piece to contribute their own unique statement on this internal versus external paradigm.

The improvisational structure of *The Book* relied on an active audience, who intently observed the piece. Said Erika, “the best draw to the piece is for the audience to be active observers, because they have the chance to explore and experience the piece”. During Avy K’s performance, the onlookers proximity to the piece gave them an immediate and nuanced experience. Erika found this dimension of her YBCA performance very exciting. “You never know what will happen and how the audience will become part of the living diary that is unfolding”.

Erika is interested in the way that objects change space and distance. As part of the piece, performers improvised around statues, created by visual artist/ performer Vadim Puyandaev. “These statues were objects that changed and distorted the space. From any point of view they were beautiful”. The sculptures inspired the artists to further explore “gravitational energy and weight, they begged for contact”.

Surprisingly, this performance for dance anywhere® was Avy K’s first foray into site- specific performance. “This was a very important step for Avy K in that so many new things happened and it begged so many new questions”. Erika found it interesting to explore the dynamic of the public entering the performance space and interacting more directly with the piece, thereby breaking the fourth wall. “The dynamic of audience- performer relation added a whole new layer to the theme of an open diary”.

Structure for *The Book*, July 7th:

-Start in light installation room: start slow, one person make their portrait at a time, start to expand, explore space...come out of the room into...

-Stones (groups of 4: Ronja, Kristen, Daniel, Justin...and Daisy, Andrew, Mihyun, Kristina): start slow, use shape, slowly advance toward center, begin to interact, can use portrait, use breath, use the space, develop into...

-Flocking (not set who to follow...maybe Vadim but not necessarily, just find each other): develop into 2 squares (diamonds) with diary immediately; develop and play with the structure and space, fill the space, until...

-Fallen angel/rectangle: leave a lot of space, not too squished; develop, into Andrew solo...

-Duet for Daisy & Mihyun: others can observe, invite audience to observe...transition into...

-Vadim draws circle

-Round dance for women (irrational), rational portrait for men (Kristina portrait in windows, Virginia Woolf)...transition into...

-Paper: Daisy, Andrew, Daniel, and Ronja do paper (start formal, wrap up in paper, talking stones); Justin, Mihyun, Kristen, and Kristina do formal, when paper noise take up the space, return to place; when talking listen to stones, then transition into wild forest (primitive noises, paper forest)...paper stones transition to behind book, J, M, K, and K follow, Daisy does solo while rest change into pedestrian clothes behind book...

-Portraits: everyone finds a frame/color block to do their portrait, more freedom for this portrait (possible solos? will find out Thursday who will do solos)...transition into...

-Words/Japanese writing: Andrew starts this (i.e. "water"), others follow, takes you down through the space to the book, begin words/stream of consciousness (words having to do with body, nature, and human nature), transition these words slowly into words having to do with *The Book* (i.e. writing, diary, pages), and this transitions into your diary...

-End: as we do our diaries, all lights but one will go out, then last light goes out Take a bow! :)

CV:

Erika Tsimbrovsky is an innovator in the field of improvised dance performance. Born in Kazakhstan, she studied modern and contemporary dance in Belarus, Moscow, and Amsterdam. In Israel, where she lived for twelve years, she co-founded the award-winning experimental performance group EVM Laboratories to research the interaction between diverse media structures and to develop specific improvisational performance techniques. Avy K Productions is the San Francisco-based incarnation of her and visual artist Vadim Puyandaev's 20-year collaboration, featuring their signature "audio-visual-kinetic" approach, which brings together contemporary dance, live painting, evolving material installation, video projection, and live music to create unique and vital performances.

Education:

M.F.A. in Dance Hollins University, 2017

B.A. in Choreography University of Belarus & South Kazakhstan State University, 1986-1991

Kazakhstan State University (studied Mathematics & Physics), 1982-1986

Awards and Grants:

Tsimbrovsky has been awarded funding from the Stanford Arts Initiative, CASH grant, LAD grant, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, the Guzik foundation, Lincoln University. With a visual artist Vadim Puyandaev, she has been awarded the Commons Curatorial Residency at SOMArts Cultural Center for *The Book*(dance-installation, 2011), and the Drescher Ensemble Residency Program for *Minotaur*(2011). She has also been awarded the CHIME mentorship program, and the LiveBlessay (best director) for *Ir-Rational*(2012). She received numerous grants from the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Talder Group, and the Israeli Lottery for multimedia performances in Israel (1995-2006).

Selected Performances:

2018

Red Wind / Ruah Aduma, a structured improvisation combining dance, visual art, and music in a poetic abstract installation-performance, the Joe Goode Annex San Francisco, CA

2017

Red Wind / Ruah Aduma, a structured improvisation combining dance, visual art, and music in a poetic abstract installation-performance, the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum Hollins University

2015

Un Still Life, a dance installation at Vorres Gallery S.F., CA

Un Still Life, a dance installation Hermitage Art Center SF, CA

Minotaur, an audio-visual-kinetic installation/performance at NOHspace SF

Mutually Assured (structured improvisation), a collaboration with Scott Wells (co-director) at ODC Theater SF

2013

LAByrinths: audio-visual-kinetic #1, an installation/performance at the Center for New Music SF
PSi19 Now Then (artists marathon), Performance Studies International Conference 19 at Stanford University - Experiencing Temporality (Solo work - 'Right of Spring' as a diary note from The Book project)

The Book: 'Page Two at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts SF, CA (dancing with sculptures)

2012

Ir-Rational , a multimedia structured improvisation at ODC Theater SF, CA

2011

Rustling Silk, a multimedia structured improvisation at CounterPULSE SF as part of Summer Special Program.

The Book, an evolving exhibition including contemporary dance, live painting, sculptural installations, photography and video projection. Exhibition runs July 1-29. Accompanying performance-installations July 1, 7, 14, 21 & 29 at SOMArts Cultural Center SF, CA

2010

“Full Moon Syndrome” as part of WestWave Dance Festival at Cowell Theater Fort Mason Center, SF, CA

The Book # 2, a performance-installation and workshop as a part of the SF Conservatory of Dance's Dancemakers' Forum

Iph..., a choreography for theater production of American Shakespeare Company presented by Brava Theater and The African-American Shakespeare Company SF, CA

The Book # 1, Resident Artist Workshop at The Garage SF, CA

2009

Nocturnal Butterflies, an audio-visual-kinetic performance (structured improvisation) and exhibition “side effect” in Project Artaud Theatre SF, CA

2008

Scrap-Soup, an audio-visual-kinetic performance (structured improvisation) and exhibition Side Effect in Project Artaud Theatre SF, CA

“The Silence of Stones” as part of WestWave Dance Festival at the YBCA SF

2007

The Garden, an audio-visual-kinetic performance (structured improvisation) at Stanford University. Co-Sponsored by the Stanford Arts Initiative & Introduction to the Humanities “Art of Living” and in NOH Space, SF, CA

“iR-Rational” – choreographed by Erika Tsimbrovsky, and performed in ODC Pilot 51: Next, SF
Untitled, a live painting & dance as part of Moment's Notice - a monthly salon devoted to improvised music, dance & theater, Berkeley, CA

2006

The Process, a marathon 10 hours of audio-visual-kinetic performance/process and exhibition of live art, Eilat, Israel

Scrap-Soup, an audio-visual-kinetic performance (structured improvisation) Suzanne Dellal center, Tel Aviv, Israel

2004-2005

International Festival 100% Art – *Intersection* New Cameri Theater and Suzanne Dellal Tel Aviv, Israel. (Project with Artist Outsider with Down Syndrome)

MoonFlaw, an audio-visual-kinetic performance (structured improvisation) Suzanne Dellal Center, Tel Aviv, Israel

Jazz Globes Festival – *Ad Libitum*, an improvisation with Slava Ganelin (the legendary pioneer of Russian avant-garde jazz movement) Jerusalem, Israel and Suzanne Dellal Tel Aviv, Israel

2004

Fifth Significance, an audio-visual-kinetic performance (structured improvisation) at Suzanne Dellal Center, Tel Aviv, Israel

1994 - 1998

Immigration to Israel and participation in local and international festivals and solo performances.

1991 - 1994

Solo performances in the post-Soviet Union (Moscow and Minsk) with a group of visual artists.

Anthony Julius Williams's writing on MINOTAUR, 2015

What's an artist to do these days? Anything with the prefix "post-" has become a tired cliché, and repeating the prefix – as in "post-post-modernism" – only doubles the sense of cultural exhaustion. The aesthetic apocalypse of our current moment pervades Avy K Production's *Minotaur*, a multimedia installation/performance in which dancer Erika Tsimbrovsky, artists Vadim Puyandaev and Stanislav Groz, musicians Ken Ueno and Matt Ingalls excavate the ancient Greek myth for signs of life within a labyrinth of Plexiglas and tissue paper. Desire usually plays the devil in ancient mythologies, and it's no different in this production, influenced as it is by a Luis Borges short story about a prince whose hermetic life is spent in a house of infinite corridors, and a Friedrich Dürrenmatt poem about a pair of lovers whose doom plays out amid halls of mirrors. In both literary inspirations, the half-bull-half-human of the production's title figures prominently, reflecting the Avy K artists' archetypal struggle to create an audio-visual-kinetic language for desire in an age in which many people seek escape from a materialist narcissism that foretells our destruction.

Narrative and irony are abandoned in this labyrinth, in favor of a stripped-down aesthetics of startling encounters. Each artist plays against imposed limitations: music is replaced by noise with Ingalls' improvisations on re-engineered instruments, mood is replaced by atmosphere with Ueno's eerily rhythmic breathing, character is replaced by presence with Puyandaev's autistic awakening that transforms the Plexiglas with paint, choreography is replaced by movement with Tsimbrovsky's kinetic explorations inside a paper costume, and setting is replaced by Groz's projections of video poetry drawn from urban landscapes. These striking substitutions continually draw attention to the current moment, vividly confronting the audience with the implications of desire: in one encounter, the diminutive Tsimbrovsky labors to carry the large Puyandaev on her back on all fours, while in another encounter, their lips chew through a tissue paper labyrinth wall, bleeding red liquid. Both moments juxtapose sex and death in fleshy kinetic sculptures that suggest no one escapes their inner minotaur.

—Anthony Julius Williams

Collaborative Improvisation in Media and Dance

by Lucas Krech InDance

Erika Tsimbrovsky and Avy K Productions place visual art on equal footing with music and dance, creating a perfect environment for exploring the relationship between movement and image. Performances are largely improvised and necessitate strong artists capable of observing the work of others and responding to it. At the same time they must bring their own powerful voice to the conversation. All the co-creators have total freedom within the structures of the work to create as needed moment by moment. The conceptual framework of each piece provides a common destination, yet each participant takes his/ her own journey to get there.

One of the first things I was interested in about Erika's work was the ephemeral nature of it. She works in structured improv, and while some performances are more structured than others, every night is going to be a unique event. As such, any media employed must be as immediate as the dance itself.

As a lighting artist, our first major collaboration was a month-long installation/ performance at SOMArts called *The Book* in July of 2011. During the week was a gallery show with paintings by Vadim Puyandaev, pictures and videos about the company, and a lighting installation I created. Every Friday was a performance. Some performances were only an hour or so long, others over three hours.

Because it was in an art gallery rather than a theater, I had to be a physical performer as well as lighting artist. I found myself weaving around dancers adjusting lighting throughout the evenings. And I had a blast. It was my first time physically performing since I was a kid. I've been involved in many performances designing lighting and video, but not as a performer on stage. I have some training in theatrical improvisation and *The Book* brought back my improv roots and allowed me to look at lighting more specifically as performance.

In this and other early collaborations, I only did lighting, but as Erika and I worked together more it became clear that my digital art would integrate seamlessly into these projects. My digital art ranges from loop-based video, to digital stills in the style of oil and watercolor

paintings, to animation. My animations include both abstract work and more representational pieces rotoscoping film footage. Rotoscoping is a process wherein film footage is overdrawn, in this case digitally, to turn it into a frame by frame animation.

Much of my work is conceptual. I like to take an idea and abstract it out as far as I can go. This is why lighting resonates so strongly with me. It is inherently an abstract medium even when doing naturalistic work like recreating a sunset. This type of work and creative process seemed an obvious fit in the context of Erika's performances, which often integrate live painting, improvisational musicians, and other dynamic elements. The open framework of her creative style encouraged me to move past the pure abstractions of lighting and bring digital media into my lighting environments.

In June of this year Avy K Productions had a residency at Paul Dresser Studios where we explored the use of projected media within an improvisational event. We developed both a visual vocabulary for the work as well as the technical tools for performance. This visual vocabulary included live looped video of the dancers as well as a deconstruction of form through digital manipulation. Beginning with straight video, the images were slowly morphed and manipulated into increasing abstractions until the whole thing dissolved into a field of floating particles like digital snow flurries. Much of this vocabulary we developed will be refined and presented during Ir/Rational at ODC this December.

In bringing my digital art into Avy K's collaborative environment I wanted a more immediate approach than simple video playback allows. While some content will be created ahead of time, exact cues, crossfades and compositing needs to happen in real time. Finding an approach that would work required looking at tools that allow for the manipulation of media and image to be as live and specific as a dancer improvising with their partner.

I ended up building my own interactive playback system in Quartz Composer, an apple visual programming environment. Using a simple MIDI controller I can crossfade between content, set loop points for prerecorded or live input, adjust the speed and timing of clips, and manipulate the height and width of the projection thus mapping it to various objects, including dancers. This flexibility allows the video content to build around the conceptual structure developed in rehearsals and gives me near infinite control over the specifics of each performance.

Often one can set a series of video cues, as one can with lighting, and have them played back by an operator for the run. The system we developed during our residency at Paul Dresser Studio emerged through working with improvised dance and video for a week. Thus it is specific to both my method of working and the improvisational base of the company.

What attracted me to live video looping was precisely the ephemeral nature of Erika's work. Because everything is improvised, even with structured improv, there are no repeating events. Each performance, each moment of performance, is unique. By capturing and looping segments of dance, it allows the dance to exist beyond itself. It turns the video into a partner in dialog with the dance, not merely a film playing along side it.

By capturing these moments I had to think through them as a choreographer or film director as much as a designer and visual artist. By combining different loops composited one over the other I found myself creating a second dance happening in response to the one being performed live by the dancers. Just as the body of one dancer impacted the movement of another, so too were these looped segments impacting the live dancers. Sometimes this presented a counterpoint to the movement on stage and other times a harmonious dance partner.

This summer, we took this process further with a networked performance happening simultaneously in New York City and Oakland. A music event, performed by composer Alex Sigman at Spectrum in New York City, was broadcast to us live over a Skype connection in Oakland that Erika improvised a dance to. Working with her movement and the music, I played a live video set of looping content on which I overlaid looped video of her movement. The video was a mixture of urban backgrounds and abstract shifting geometric forms. The overlay of the one on the other, combined with Erika's movement created a very dynamic visual space. This was then sent back to the music performance in New York and projected in front of the audience there in real time. Instead of weeks in an editing studio, we presented a live half hour dance movie made with no rehearsal.

These various experiments have helped guide us through the process for our upcoming work, *Ir/Rational*, that will play at ODC Theater in December. The piece inhabits two worlds. The worlds of two queens, Elizabeth and Mary, in conflict with one another. These two worlds morph from the physical to the digital over the course of the piece. Partly underwritten by a Lighting Artist in Dance grant from Dancers' Group, our initial idea of experimental lighting sources is being

expanded to include projected media.

The two dancers represent opposites yet are the same. They are discrete individuals yet they are reflections of one another. Engaged in deadly competition yet they are playing a game. We wanted to embody these dualities and similarities between the two dancers in the video content used for the piece. Right now, we are looking into shooting footage that will be rotoscoped into animations in the style of oil paintings. These animated paintings will then play along and against live sampled footage of the dancers, which will be manipulated into increasingly digital forms.

That experience of performative lighting during *The Book* will stand me in good stead. Right now we are talking about the live video components being mixed by me on stage. Rather than the traditional lighting and video operator hiding in the booth behind the audience, I will be on stage with dancers and musicians live mixing the visuals. *Ir/Rational* will combine footage shot and edited ahead of time as well as live looped video and other manipulated live feeds to create worlds ranging from 16th century England to the inside of a computer game. The work, like all of Erika's, is structured improv. More structured than either our Spectrum event or *The Book*, but still improvised. *Ir/Rational* looks to be our most sophisticated project along this line of creative exploration.