

Schrodinger's X:
The Endless Possibilities
by
Qinzi Lei

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Robert Kaplan, Co-Chair,
Cynthia Roses-Thema, Co-Chair
Wendy Williams

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ABSTRACT

In this project, Schrodinger's X, I explored a way of promoting a more neutral understanding among people from the same or different cultural background and the possibilities of one performance. I created an online interactive, immersive performance by combining dance, role-play games, and film. In this project, instead of sitting and watching, the audience is also part of the performance. They have the power to explore the world of this performance by making options during the performance. Each audience member sees the specific content and ending(s) based on their choice. At the end of the performance, the audience also has options to replay the performance or explore another character. There is no reference or model or documentation that relates to online interactive video performance. Thus, I explored the form of performance on my own. As the leader of this project, the author played the role of both the director and choreographer, coordinator and collaborator with six dancers, one cinematographer, and three composers. The diversity of the members of this project is extraordinary: Asian, Asian Americans, and Americans. Each member had contributed their unique voice and perspective to this project. The final product of this project contains a traceable online interactive video that audiences can replay anytime with a demonstration video and this document.

Keywords: interactive videos, dance, interactive performance, cultural difference, role-play games, online performance

I have been receiving unconditional and eternal love and support from my family: Hui Xu, Meiping Li, Yang Xu, Bo Lei. My dad and my grandfather, Jun Lei and Jiyou Xu, still illuminate my way forward after they passed away. Your exemplifications of love, bravery, kindness, and strength guide me to the endless possibilities of my life.

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Schrodinger's X: The Endless Possibilities

I developed Schrodinger's X from the thought experiment named Schrödinger's Cat by Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger. In short, before opening the sealed box that cannot be observed from the outside, the cat in the box is both dead and alive. Like many situations in life, I don't know the exact consequence of my actions until I have made my actions. The uncertainty of the experiment theory attracts me deeply. In mathematics, X can represent the not yet known. I feel all the possibilities are unknown. They require peoples' actions to calculate and dig them out. Thus, I name my multi-ending interactive video performance that includes audience input: Schrodinger's X.

As an international student who is studying in America, I continually encounter cultural differences in my daily life. My social environment in China is different from the social environment here in America. Two examples that are prominent to me and pertain to my inspiration for this project I relate here. The first example pertains to the classroom. It is curious to me that in China my experience as a student has been when my instructor asks a question, I answer only that question. In America, I find students will answer the question and then expand on their thoughts. If I were going to expand my thought during the class in China, it would be considered that I took too much time for me. The Chinese culture believes that the class time is for all students in the class. If I have a question and I assume that question is not interesting for other students, I will hold my thought and come to my instructor after class. The second example relates to the

speaking about death. I was stopped by a man who said he was a Christian with his partner in front of Memorial Union of Arizona State University.

“Do you believe in Jesus?” he directly asked me.

“No.” I said.

“Do you know if you die you will go to hell?” he continued.

I was so mad because in China we avoid talking about death. Some people in China even forbid the number of 4, like 13 in western culture, just because it sounds like death's pronunciation in Chinese. I assumed he just wanted to promote his religion to me.

“I do not think so and I do not want to die today,” I responded to him.

The education I received as Chinese asked me to politely ask the other party not to continue this conversation. I thought my meaning is obvious.

“What if you die today?” he stares at me with wide eyes.

I had not been angry about any cultural differences until today. Speaking of death to a person who is alive is considered a curse for Chinese people. Taking deep breaths, I glared at him. His friend said sorry to me and took his sleeve and asked him to stop talking. I walked away saying nothing. I felt offended because he spoke to me of death so vehemently. I had met other Christians before but none of them had asked me what if I died today.

These two stories make me think about social differences because these were moments when I was reminded that what is appropriate to say in one culture may not be appropriate in another. These moments have propelled me to do a creative inquiry in order to figure out a mutual attitude towards cultural differences.

In the spring of 2020, a terrible pandemic happened worldwide. It was found the first case was from my hometown, Wuhan, China. My entire family lives in Wuhan, and I could do nothing but call and worry about them. I still remember the feeling of sticky asphalt all over my body, the shadow of Covid-19 was following me everywhere. I couldn't focus on my studies or student work for three months because I was so worried should my family contract the disease. Socially, some people called the virus the Chinese Virus or Wuhan Virus and denounced my beloved hometown and country. In spring 2020, I had already started my project. At that time my intention was to create a project that related to cultural differences and mutual understanding. The outcome was to be an immersive in-person performance that happened simultaneously in three different locations. The performance length of each location was to be fifteen minutes long, and the audience would be separated into three groups. Each group would start from a different location and switch locations every fifteen minutes. My first thought was as long as I separated my audience into groups so they could maintain the six feet of social distance, my performance could still be in person. However, things got worse, and everything was locked down, my "immersive performance with safety social distance" could not continue. I appreciate that around late spring 2020, I came to the realization that I might have to shift my project online since the situation was getting worse. Thus, I began to look for a new possibility.

I moved to a new apartment with a massive tree outside the balcony in June 2020. That was a lovely afternoon, the pandemic in Wuhan, China, began to get better, and I stood on the balcony talking with the pigeons. Suddenly, a car passed by and my pigeon friends got scared and flew away to hide in the tree. I saw them disappear into the heavy

crown of the tree with some leaves falling. Those leaves redirected my gaze to the main body of the tree. It looked so beautiful, like a liner maze from a thick entry divided into thinner and thinner lines. Just like life, making a choice first, and then another based on the previous one. I realized if I made any choice differently in my earlier life, I would not be standing here, in Tempe, Arizona, and thinking about the question. This unique “ending” is the result of my previous choice. Then, I linked this to my favorite form of game: roleplay games. In the game, the player plays or helps a character and moves towards a specific ending based on a series of choices. This is a common form of game and feels like an online immersive performance that allows an audience to explore their unique adventure. I started to look for an available online platform that would allow me to create my own game. The first platform jumping into my head is Bilibili, since I played interactive videos on it a lot and I use this website since high school. After I did more research, I found that it’s the only website that allows users to build an interactive video for free without limitation of length, size, and public time. Moreover, it’s based on Chinese, my first language. Thus, I chose Bilibili as the platform for this project.

Social environment is an interesting aspect to look at. In this case it means the social environment the people grow up in, the education they receive that affects their thinking, and the experiences they have. After I learned Social Somatic in ASU, I’ve been attracted to how my body reflects the social environment I live in. How I am in the present, right in the moment, is based on my past, which reflects on all decisions I made. Understanding of the past helps me understand my present self. Humans are social animals. I’m living in a social context where people from all over the world study and

interact in a campus, living in the same state. Eastern and western cultures merge here, which is when divergence appears.

I'm using three tools to choreograph my final project: Narrative inquiry, Role-play Game and Interactive Video. Narrative inquiry helps me get authentic information directly from narrators. Roleplay Game can be an exciting way to call empathy from audiences or participants of the project since they are playing a character. Interactive video is the media that allows audiences to enjoying the show by watching and exploring the materials they choose to see, having a unique experience even though they are watching the same show. I will explain each of these.

Narrative inquiry, asking questions of people, is the easiest and most effective way to gather data for my research. I needed authentic answers from people of certain cultural backgrounds to explain why they make decisions and how they think about the same things in their own, unique way. I felt that understanding individuals in a group could help me explain why people do not agree with each other or have different attitudes about certain things.

Moving to Roleplay Game (RPG), regardless of gender, age, culture and race, people usually love games. It is even natural for many animals to play. Instead of asking the audience to sit and watch a show, I prefer to offer them an active role in the game. In this way the audience is able to use empathy to understand how a character might be thinking and making decisions under certain circumstances. Each choice a player makes will affect the ending of their game in certain way. In roleplay, just as in real life, people make choices based on their own living experience, and all choices affect our future. Again, I'm trying to call on audience empathy through my game performance.

Here is an example of interactive game performances I made. I tried a Qin style presentation on my portfolio review on 2019, the end of my first year in graduate school. The name of this game is “graduate maker”. The audience helped the character, me, graduate from graduate school with a huge dice. There are two main section of missions: Entertainment and Learning. The audience needed to arrange all missions at the final round of the game or, “I”, the character, failed my graduate school. Learning missions were classes required in the Dance graduate program, which may decrease or increase pressure on the student depending on whether or not the character pass (depends on audience action). Pressure ranges from level 1 to 6. The audience needs to go through with dice, and the number of dice equals or exceeds the number of pressures on the mission card. If an audience member fails, the character’s pressure level increases. If the pressure exceeds character’s tolerance, character will quit the program since it is too much to afford. Thus, an appropriate use of entertainment to reduce pressure is important. Different mission cards trigger different things to happen on stage: live performance, interview, a rehearsal with audience, etc.

By using a stage roleplay game, I told the audience what I had experienced in graduate school, and about my interests. After that portfolio review, I realized nobody else used a real game as part of a performance, thus I decided to explore more about roleplay on the stage especially with dance for my thesis project. This the focus would not just be on me, but also on my dancers’ and narrators’ stories and how they think about cultural conflicts.

The final media and the platform of presenting this project is through interactive video. This provides a vivid world with explorable content for an audience. Usually, an

interactive video has many ramifications while playing. The audience can choose the direction that they are most interested in, and the content is then based on their choices. In my opinion, interactive video can be a new, advanced form of online immersive performance for worldwide audiences to explore their own adventure without the limitation of location. The changing of standard stage settings requires time, as does moving the audience from place to place, especially in dance performance.

During a traditional dance performance, the audience simply sits in their seat, watching. When watching a conventional dance performance, I am sometimes curious about the stories that appear but are not explained. I've always thought about the stories behind even a picture since I was very young. I looked at a painting at my grandmother's apartment and thought about what's happened before and after that moment in the picture. I also love watching movies because it allows me to look closely at what is happening and usually, I will buy the movie and watch it repeatedly to get all the details I can. With an actual live performance, I have to buy tickets each time, and there are tiny differences between one performance and another. I am also restricted by the location and time of a performance. Even when I meet all these requirements, I can only see the limited context of the performance, instead of exploring it on my own, in my own way. This is a gap that interactive videos can fill: it empowers the audience to step in and discover more possibilities based on their own interests. In Schrodinger's X, almost none of the same content can be accessed, even for an audience member who watches twice. There are more details of this function later in the chapter titled My Process.

Instead of a performance with a single, set storyline, Schrodinger's X, all the main stories, and the background stories of each character in an immersive performance. I

combined and explored multiple scenes and my personal ideology into an online, interactive video from an Asian, Chinese, Qinzhi Lei point of view. Interactive video enables me to present my world, inviting the audience to explore and arrange their unique journey. The audience, the platform program, and I are making the performance together.

My creative inquiry was to find ways to create an atmosphere that could promote audience empathy. If I could better understand cultural differences, and how they affect behaviours among different people, it would be helpful in my future career as dancer, dance choreographer, educator and artist. It has been my experience that regardless of culture, people that study art are more open to different social environments. To that end, I was looking for the best way to combine narrative inquiry, roleplay games, and interactive videos to build a thought-provoking performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I was planning to use narrative inquiry, roleplay with the idea of intertextuality to build an immersive performance. Owing to the limitation and quarantine policy of the pandemic, I was no longer able to present my project as an in-person performance. However, after research on my own, I did not find anyone that had made a traceable online interactive, immersive performance that allows the audience to explore their own endings based on their choice that combines dance, roleplay games, and film making. Prior to the beginning of this project, I was unable to find anything in the literature documenting the combination of elements I was going to use in an online performance. Neither could I find media evidence or a real online interactive performance. Thus, I developed my own method and process. The knowledge of immersive performance did

help me while developing the setting of this project. Thus, I decided to keep it in the review of the literature. In this section of the document, I review narrative inquiry, roleplay, and immersive performance separately. The literature I reviewed was all western-centred. As an Asian, I'd like to explore and present my work from an Asian/Chinese perspective and involve my cultural and values. As an Asian, Chinese, I live in a specific era and different cultures are blending with each other. People in different worlds come to the same country to live and study together, but due to changes and cultural differences, conflict inevitably occurs. I can see that misunderstandings still exist, times are changing, and so are the people who live in them. However, opinions and facts are not always updated at the same time: I see orientalism still existing. The real China does not match the China that is presented in the news. I very much hope that as a Chinese living in a Western country, I can show Eastern culture as I understand it to promote mutual understanding between different cultures. Multiculturalism, equality and critical thinking are the ideas I pursue and spread as a choreographer and teacher.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Narrative inquiry or narrative analysis emerged as a discipline from within the broader field of qualitative research in the early 20th century. Narrative inquiry uses field texts, such as stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artifacts), and life experience, as the units of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives as narratives.

Patricia Hill Bailey, Phyllis Montgomery, and Sharolyn Mossey (2019) believes that narrative inquiry is a process where individuals can express and understand their stories most effectively. To ensure that the story can be understood, there must be a clear storytelling environment which is the social context (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Under the certain background, the story has a certain meaning. The functional analysis model, the structure of a story, is comprised of seven elements: story stimulus, abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda (Labov and Waletzky, 1972). This functional analysis model can effectively help people complete telling a story.

Labov and Waletzky's (1972) focused on the application of narrative inquiry in the field of nursing and how to let patients share their stories. I align myself with Labov and Waletzky's view of narrative inquiry that it is a useful method to gathering stories and meanings from interviewees. I believe that the Narrator doesn't need to be a patient, and audience doesn't have to be a therapist. This form of inquiry could also be use in the arts and put on stage to present different perspectives on cultural conflicts.

Lessard et al (2019) discuss that in a research, researchers should be aware of who the subject is and their possible vulnerabilities. Researchers should try to be objective rather than preconceived with personal ideas when researching (Connelly and Clandinin 2006). Connelly and Clandinin point out that narrative inquiry is an observation of events within experience. Lessard et al (2019) claimed that it is not possible to separate events from the circumstances in which they occur. To understanding an event in the background which it happens is important to my research. Because my research is looking at ways people from different backgrounds can understand different cultures,

noticing where the conflicts happen can be the important for finding solutions. Conflict is the event that occurs in a cultural collision (Lessard et al, 2019) It is my understanding that the role that authority plays in an investigation cannot be ignored since it may change the answers or behavior of a narrator. The narrator is who offers the story. But under authority, people's behaviours and thinking may change. So, the answer of the interviewee may not be authentic, which is not the truth researcher is trying to find out. According to Lessard et al (2019), research naming is also an important part of narrative inquiry, because different names can bring different emotions to the outside world and the subject. Narrator may be affected by the name of the research; they may feel be offended. Also, other people may judge narrator based on research's name. It is important to get the true story and present it without bringing an uncomfortable feeling to the narrator.

Thus, the vulnerability of the narrator in a project is another aspect of narrative inquiry that must be considered. Ignoring the vulnerability may lead to Psychological trauma of narrator. So, researcher has to consider how to ask questions properly because it may bring trauma to narrator or lead to unrealistic answers from same. Lessard et al (2019) bring awareness to the question: if the problem a researcher wants to study may cause secondary harm to the participants, should researcher continue? They bring awareness of vulnerability to researcher, but I'm exploring a solution of getting the answer without frustrating the narrator. In my view, everyone's story has value to share.

When Narrative Inquiry is conducted, researchers usually want to find key events and analyse them (Kleinman, 1988). Mattingly (2012) mentioned a concept: Dramatic time. It is "a time when we would say something significant is happening" (Mattingly

2012). Dramatic time is another word for key event. The key event must be worth telling about, such as something that deviates from the normal (van Hulst and Ybema, 2020), that is uncommon, strange, abnormal feelings (Bruner, 1990; Labov, 1972; Polanyi, 1979; 1985).

Mattingly (2012) indicates that Narrative Inquiry enables vivid communication of content that could not have been imagined. Cheryl (2012) points out that experience and actions form the structure of Narrative. It can help patients explain the past and propose ideas for the future (Csordas, 1994; Gaines, 1991, 1992; B. Good, 1994; M. J. Good, 1995; Kleinman, 1980, 1988; Kleinman, Eisenberg, & Good, 1978). Another interesting element is healing rituals across a wide array of cultures, which looks like drama therapy. There are six elements of narrative time: plot, motive, desire, transformation, trouble, and suspense (Mattingly, 1994, 1998a). From a choreographer's perspective, I believe can also be used on the stage.

In summary, narrative inquiry can be a tool of revealing a key event that is worth to telling about in this project. I used narrative inquiry as the main story-building and discovery method in the project.

Roleplay

Steve Jackson Game Company (1980) defined that Roleplay game, RPG, is a game in which players assume the roles of characters in a fictional setting. The history of role-playing games dates back to an earlier tradition of role-playing, which combined rulesets of fantasy wargames in the 1970s. This gave rise to the modern role-playing game.

Kim (2018) describes the effectiveness of using role-playing to help participants use scripts for collaborating with others in a team and for mastering new skills. In certain situations, roleplay can enhance or train participants' critical thinking and self-efficiency (Jeffries, 2005). In Kim's experiment on 2018 showed that playing different roles enables students to understand their responsibilities within each role, and to better cooperate with each other. It is also important to note that students prefer to combine simulation training with role-playing (Redden, 2015).

It is Kim's (2018) view that roleplay is an effective tool to improve student's critical thinking and promote empathy of another role. My question is how can one quantify learning through roleplay games. I ask this question because in a game, people will directly see the points they get from each activity. How many points they need to improve a character's ability is defined. I do not see a number in real life while making effort to gain a skill. And the total effort for me to obtain a skill is unknown. While I realize the issue of quantified learning is problematic, what attracts me most to the idea of using games in my project is that it involves visualization. It is my view that, eventually, there will be a qualitative change in the visualization corresponding to a clear change in one's learning. Kim's (2018) article agrees that roleplay is a useful tool for learning.

Warland and Smith (2012) discusses that online roleplay provides more time for thinking, which is an advantage over traditional face-to-face roleplay (Schellens and Valcke, 2005). Not only can students learn communication skills and collective decision-making, but they can also see how a process needs to be done together from different perspectives (De Wever et al., 2008). Students will play different roles and use different

voices to discuss a decision because they have enough time to understand the background of the character, investigate and then speak (Warland and Smith, 2012). Using visual and physical-motion perception, rather than just listening, makes it easier for students to remember and become familiar with a role (Warland and Smith, 2012). Warland and Smith (2012) confirm that playing in a role before actually being in that role is helpful to gain the skills required for that role. It must also be noted that the level of reality of the simulated environment also determines the level of students' investment.

Donahue and Parsons (1982) describe that through role playing, teachers and international students use empathy to understand each other and help international students learn a new language and integrate into a new environment more easily. Role-playing, or role-swapping, allows students to take a more objective look at themselves and the new environment (Szanston 1966), change the way they express themselves, and how they listen to others to promote mutual understanding between people from different cultures. When a person encounters a new cultural environment, he/she is learning about others as well as him/herself (Casse 1981). Donahue and Parsons (1982) show that recurring themes are very useful when pre-playing in a role, because it builds upon experiences students learned before. This is important to me as it reminds me that linking new knowledge (culture) to familiar knowledge (scenarios) allows the brain to establish new connections faster (Donahue and Parsons, 1982). It also shown that roleplay allows groups to communicate with each other without external intervention. I found, from this example of Donahue and Parsons (1982), that part of this roleplay observation is through body language rather than spoken language alone.

Overall, roleplay is helpful for developing audience empathy for a character. This was important for developing in choreography in my project. Remote role-play game could also be a new form of online performance in which an audience could watch from anywhere in the world, especially as these technologies improve during the COVID-19 pandemic. This new approach to storytelling has had a great impact on me as a director, a choreographer, and as an artist.

Immersive Performance

According to The Theatre Company, immersive theatre is all about creating participative theatre experiences where audience members give up their “observer” status to become co-actors and co-creators of the narrative and of the storytelling process. Audience members are action-wise performers who direct the story by making decisions, choosing from specific options and negotiating the process.

Hogarth et al. (2018) mentions that immersive performance is different from traditional stage performance. The audience and actors may have different levels of interaction and therefore each performance may be different. Performers may face different situations, so they need to manage the participation of audience (Hoare ,2013; Balfour, 2016 and Hepplewhite, 2016). According to Hoare, Balfour and Hepplewhite, to them stimulation of the five senses can make the audience associate. Letting a performer experience the performance first, as an audience member, may change the performer's performance style, such as promoting their understanding of trust and adventure, improving their performance skills, enhancing their ability to respond and listen to the audience (Hogarth et al. (2018). Hogarth et al. (2018) also mentions the fictional world,

the now world and the imaginary world. These became the framework of my immersive performance design.

Walton (2014) indicates that immersive performance allows the audience not only to passively watch the performance but to actively research and participate, mobilizing all the senses of the audience. Defining a space enables participants to associate themselves with what is happening in the space and create associations (Walton, 2012). Walton (2014) also brings out the concept of setting up problems to make the audience want to explore. This is the creator's job, with the hope that an audience will develop passionate thinking as they explore the new environment or problem in front of them. In Walton's book (2014) he demonstrates that audience will positively initiate exploring the pre-set environment. With this point of view, I agree with him that the level of initiation is different for every audience. Thus, the researcher can arrange something that allows an audience to explore, and other things that will directly happen without their involvement.

White (2012) focuses on how immersive theatre can create an inner space for audiences to dive into. What the audience explores, or the indoor environment they are in, affects their overall perception of the work (White, 2012), and the performance provider can use the space to create an illusion for the audience. Immersive theatre is still a way of persuading the audience rather than a way of performing. White's (2012) article mentions that in Punchdrunk's work, the audience will put on a mask, so people pay more attention to unmasked performers. White (2012) mentions that in Heidegger's 1930s' work, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, he describes a moment of strife, which is an

amazing moment as the essence of a piece. As a researcher, this is what I am trying to build into my project.

I agree with White (2012), that multi-sensory stimulation can be used as a tool to trigger an audience's senses during a performance. As a dance major, I usually only pay attention to sight, followed by sound. Trying to explore the sense of touch and smell, and maybe even taste could be additional sensory methods to consider when building an environment for an immersive performance. Alston (2016) clarified that in order to promote the audience's original thought upon an immersive work, only the necessary materials should be delivered. He points out that too much professional knowledge may also make the audience lost. If the audience is just reading the information of the performance as a producer, then it cannot be called immersion (Alston, 2016). I align with Alston that the audience may not be immersed in the place that the performer and producer expected. However, this is not a mistake but another chance of creating new possibilities for the immersive experience.

A performance may begin before the audience officially enters the space. The silently arranged details can be used as a metaphor, a wedge opening into a different space. My understanding from White (2012), Walton (2014) is that besides the environment, an audience will also be influenced by others in the audience. I'd like to explore putting an actor in the audience as an audience member. This article taught me that the setting of the performance environment is more important than the dramatic setting itself.

MY PROCESS

In this section, I include a journal of my whole process making the project in a non-chronological way. This includes my approach to working with the dancers, composer, cinematographer, as well as the platform used to create and present interactive videos. I address the methodology of combining dance, role-play games and videography. First, as a choreographer, there is no doubt that my project contains my choreography. Second, role-play games have been part of my life since childhood. In them I could find myself on new adventures without the concerns of actual life. In the context of Schrodinger's X, exploring a character deeply helps to develop a multi-dimensional character. Looking at things this way can morph them into more realistic images or relationships.

My favourite director, James Wan, mentioned in one of his interviews that the characters and the main story make a good horror movie, not the bloody special effects and sounds. I am not making a horror movie, but I do love telling visual stories. Thus, I focused on telling one main story with multiple side stories for each character in the project. Online performance was not my preference at all in my original blueprint, however, Covid-19 happened. I realized that I had to find a way to present the project without losing the original intention. I reshaped my ideas of building an immersive performance into an online performance. Covid-19 brought constraints and protocols to the project: all dancers had to wear masks and maintain social distancing during rehearsal and filming; and one dancer had been exposed to a Covid-positive friend. Making a project was difficult during the pandemic but it also forced me to find a new creative tool: an online platform that allowed me to make my own interactive video. Nevertheless, the

platform was based on Chinese, and I had no experience with it. Even though my first language is Chinese, the intended audience of my thesis were English speakers. I had never edited a whole video on my own before this, not to mention adding special effects and learning how to build all this into the interactive video platform. Thus, I was working and learning at the same time.

When I reviewed my nonlinear process and in reflection, I feel it is best to communicate the different elements by demonstrating their interconnectivity through the geometric shape of a pyramid. Figure 1 shows a pyramid with four equally important faces: Dance, Filming, Editing, and Music. Even though I am a dancer and would normally begin with the movement, in this project, I started with filming. I captured the inspiration of the moment as I would see an interesting scene in front of me. I saw how the angles, colors and the arrangement of objects can create an atmosphere. A major component of this piece was building an online performance through visual narrative. I realized dance and music are also important, but they don't have to go first. This chapter is a deconstruction of this pyramid illustrating how I constructed the whole project from the bottom up.

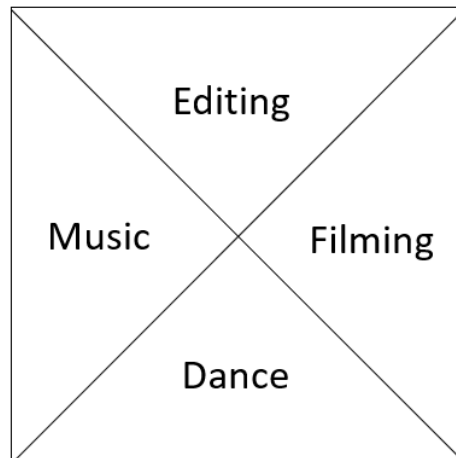


Figure 1. Pyramid of Schrodinger's X (aerial view)

The pyramid's base above (figure 1) is a quadrilateral shape consisting of four faces: dance, filming, editing, and music. Why did I select these four faces? First, as a choreographer, dance is undoubtedly one of the main elements of my project. Second, due to Covid-19, my performance had to be transferred into an online form, thus, I filmed it in a way that combined the eye of stage and camera. Third, editing was a huge part of this project since it reveals how the narrative is revealed. Last but not least, music reinforced the atmosphere in the online performance environment.

The base of the pyramid is where the majority of the weight is located and thus maintains the stability of the pyramid. The more towards to the top, the less materials are used. People only see the apex of the pyramid, like the final material presented to the audience after a series of possible endings. My philosophy ideas, ideology and the inspiration of the moments in the past 182 days are the ingredients of "the brick: the story" (Figure 2). The story decentralizes each face, illustrating how the pyramid is built brick by brick. 183GB of original data and 306 files of raw filming and music that make up the wide base of the pyramid; the editing, reviewing, and adjusting are the mid parts of

the pyramid; and the apex is the final project that consists of selected and refined materials. Now, I'd like to explain each face separately. But remember, when building a real pyramid, a builder starts from the bottom. In this project, I built the four faces simultaneously from the base in a nonlinear way. The timeline of filming, music composition, and video editing with program building (world tree) are different, but they parallel with each other. All four faces of my pyramid are equally regarded as invaluable and interact with each other.

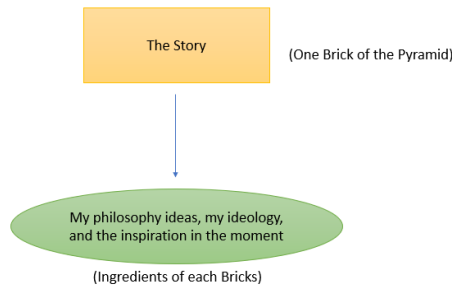


Figure 2. One Brick of the Pyramid

The Face of Dance

I explored different choreographic methods in this project. Except for the section, *The Gambling* (2020), the dances were choreographed without music but with movement-scores, command, narratives, story, site dance, and improvisation. Figure 3 shows the sequence of my work process throughout the project.

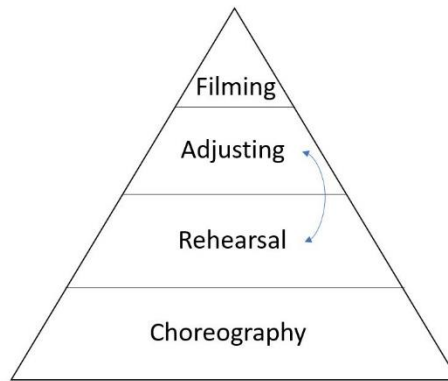


Figure 3. The Face of Dance

Rehearsals varied, ranging from three to five times per week. Sometimes working with a whole group, other times working independently. I had to be flexible because dancers' schedules were often changing.

No matter which choreographic method I used, I began looking at the unseen movement sequences in my mind; visualizing, then bringing it into my body. I would then refine the movement until I was satisfied and built it into the existing material.

When I finished the choreography for one rehearsal, I would teach it to my dancer(s) and observe how the movement looked on their body. According to the real time feedbacks from dancer(s) and my own observations, I might adjust different aspects, such as tempo, space, movement level, movement sequence, and the feeling or quality of the movement. Improvisational approaches allowed us to explore the framing and delivery of the movement for at least 30% of the sequences.

After the movements were “digested” by dancer(s) and the whole sequence confirmed, the dancer(s), me and my cinematographer would met together to film the

section. When the filming was complete, the cinematographer and the dancer(s) would not re-work the material. I continued to work in new sections.

However, owing to my non-linear approach to working, problems would arise. From the moment I started the piece, my dancers asked me: what is the whole story? Where are we right now? Since I worked in a non-linear way, I know where I started, but this starting point could be anywhere in this project. As a witness of the story, I assume that I observe each character and see how the story goes in my mind. When I know the character better, I begin to know how she thinks and reacts. Thus, her reaction can be predictable. At times I was also wondering where the story might go. There's no absolute answer, yet I was able to offer my dancers glimpses into the whole story.

Working in a non-linear way may not be comfortable for some people. It requires plenty of time, work, brainstorming, and trust in the director; and it is difficult. I often worked in my dream-state, while sleeping, which sped up the process of figuring things out. I will probably continue to use a non-linear way of working only with myself, or with a group capable of this working approach and who trusts me.

The Face of Filming

Filming is perhaps the core of an online performance. Traditionally, it happens towards the end of a dance project. However, for this, filming was spread across the whole project: preliminary preparation, middle of the project, and the postproduction. Figure 4 shows the routine of filming of this project.



Figure 4. The Face of Filming

Filming was at times difficult, and other times easy. I have been working with my Cinematographer (DP), Anze Su, since my first year in graduate school. Thus, we were familiar with each other which contributed to the efficiency of our approach. On the other hand, this project was not filmed chronologically. We had to mark everything and be prepared to film supplementary materials anytime, not to mention needing to work with the whole group and individual characters at the same time.

Before beginning the filming, I talked with the DP about the blueprint of the whole piece, and we agreed that we would be working on the piece together. Before each filming, I made a story board of the general blueprint of this particular part. We talked about the following to estimate the total time, equipment, and camera movement required for a filming:

1. Who is/are the dancer(s) or how many dancers in the scene?
2. What is the story (if have) and what is/are the quality(s) of the movement?
3. What storyboard or shot list do I have?

4. Where is/are the location(s) of this filming?
5. When will be the filming date and time?

We would review each shot before going on to the next to see if it was ideal or needed adjustment. The shooting and reviewing process repeated at least two times for each filming, as it is very unlikely to get the best footage the first time. All filming consisted of at least 2 full shootings from different angles and 1 or more close-ups with Gimbal, Fixed shot, and Follow-up. During the filming, if I had an inspiration for something new, we paused the filming and captured the new material. This kept the process intuitive and connected to the evolving vision of the work.

The Face of Editing

Editing happens after the filming. I would edit materials the same day of filming.

Figure 5 shows the editing progression.

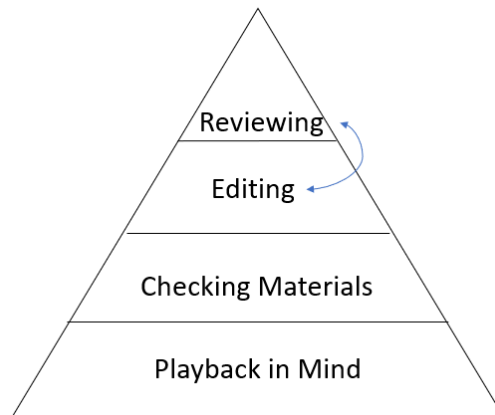


Figure 5. The Face of Editing

Just as when creating choreography, I reviewed and pictured all the materials, and considered the ideal sequence in my mind first before physically starting to edit. Once I had a broad idea of how a part should be, I reviewed all the footage while taking notes. Before deleting anything, I wrote down the exact location of the section, accurate to the second, and then cut them out. The editing and reviewing usually was repeated at least six times before I exported the first draft. With the first draft, I began playing with the video by adding a special effect or changing the sequence, as well as possibly replacing some material shot from another angle. I played the exported second version of the video to my roommate, since she was there at all hours of the day or night. I used the audience view to help myself refine the video. Next, I sent it to my composer, before scheduling a meeting to talk about music; reminding him again that the video could still change. However, the final version of the video was usually confirmed before the final version of the music was composed. Although small adjustments were sometimes made during the process of synchronizing the music and video.

The Face of Music

There were 12 songs used in the project. 10 of them were composed specifically for it. There were three musicians working on the music of this project: Niluo, Mengjie Wu, and Xunze Zhou. Except two songs, *The Gambling* (by Niluo), and the *Theme Song* (written by Xunze Zhou but not specifically for the piece), the rest of the background music was composed by my composer, Xunze Zhou, specifically for this project. Mengjie Wu is a musician that plays accordion, who I knew since my junior year of undergraduate school. He contributed the song, *The Opening*, to this project. I had never worked with

Alan Xunze Zhou before, but my friend recommended him to me due to his sensitivity to music and his interest in collaborating with choreographers. We watched each other's work and met several times. I was grateful that he was patient and willing to work on such a complicated project with me. He became the main composer for this project. Due to the fact that we lived in the different time zones, we only met online. Figure 6 demonstrates how I worked with my musician, Mr Zhou.

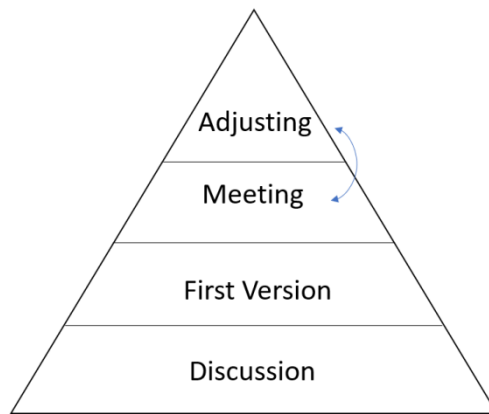


Figure 6. The Face of Music

My relationship with Mr. Zhou is collaborative in that we decided what vital elements we needed to know before starting to work on the music. Our discussions followed this general progression:

1. Who is this character?
2. What is the background story of this part?
3. What is the atmosphere or color of this part?
4. Is there any specific moment I'd like to highlight?
5. When is the deadline of this part?

We recorded all our answers before he would see the movement. Questions 1,2, and 3 helped give him an overall feeling of what the music might be. Question 4 alerted him to specific choreographic moments that could be highlighted. Question 5 is simply practical. He started writing the music on his own by developing the first version of it. For the next level of the face of music (figure 6), we met in the middle of his composing process, talking about the overall feelings we had for the section first before starting to listen to the music together. I explained my ideas for the section and he explained how his music met my design. He also suggested possible things to add or subtract from certain parts of the video in order to achieve a better sense of flow. After this first version, we adjusted independently and messaged each other with questions or updates. From here on, the next two levels of the face of music, meeting and adjusting, kept looping at least four more times. I usually finished editing the video before he composed the final version of music. Then, we synchronized the video and music with tiny adjustments, if necessary, together.

Assembling The Four Faces of the Pyramid and Building the World Tree Online

My original intention was to complete an immersive in-person performance. Owing to the effect of Covid-19 instead, I created an online interactive video on a Chinese video website: Bilibili, which is similar to YouTube, but its original target audience was animation and comic fans. Bilibili has the function that allows members to create and upload their own interactive videos. Fortunately, my bilingual abilities enabled me to use this website and make this project happen. The idea of creating an interactive game is not new to me. In this instance, putting everything together online with an interactive video program was new and challenging. The interactive video-making

program operates linearly while I create in a non-linear way. This is to say, I had to figure out the order of the whole world tree, which is also the order of the project, before I could build the world tree on the website. And once the main world tree was made, I could only continue to build the world tree from the end or by using the “*jumping to another block*” function for a specific block of the world tree. Even though the content of the world tree can be replaced, I could not add a block in the middle. I did have the authorization to copy and paste as many parts of the tree as necessary. Although, I had to reassign each *jumping to another block function*. To save time and to learn how to use Bilibili, I made four world trees of an interactive video before starting to build the final one, each with a different purpose: to show others the process, to explore the program’s functions, to synchronize the videos and the program, and finally, to include all options and assemble everything, respectively. The four world trees helped me communicate my ideas to others and learn the program by working with it. Each change I made through editing the videos had ramifications. Each edit required me to re-upload a video, change it on the world tree, submit the whole thing to the website, and wait for its approval. All videos had to be approved before they could be displayed on the website to ensure there was no immoral content (defined by the website). To give the reader an understanding of the extent of getting the project ready for the final performance, here are some statistics that allows the reader to take a glimpse of this section:

- The entire time to accomplish this project..... 180 days
- The comprehensive materials have been used or produced..... 187GB
- The total materials of this project..... 306 files

- The total materials of interviews and solos..... 167 clips
- Filming locations of this project..... 10 places
- Dates of filming..... 14 days
- Original endings of Schrodinger's X..... 9 endings
- Endings I presented to audience..... 5 endings
- Original music that made for Schrodinger's X..... 10 songs
- Samples of world tree of interactive videos..... 4 prototypes
- Coconut milk that was killed by me while working..... 25184 ml

These statistics may help readers understand one reason for why assembling all the materials together was the most difficult part of the project.

Since there is a gap in the literature that combines dance, role-play game, and filming, I will further describe details of my process building an interactive video on Bilibili, in case anyone wants to follow this form of making an online interactive performance. The following is part of the chronological sequence of how I made this interactive video.

I uploaded the final version of all videos and started to build the world tree. World tree, figure 7, is the story timeline of the program where optional choices happened. The story timeline begins with everyone seeing the same scene until a certain moment. The audience has to make a choice of where to go next at this moment. My prior gaming

experience helped me envision how to build such a tree.

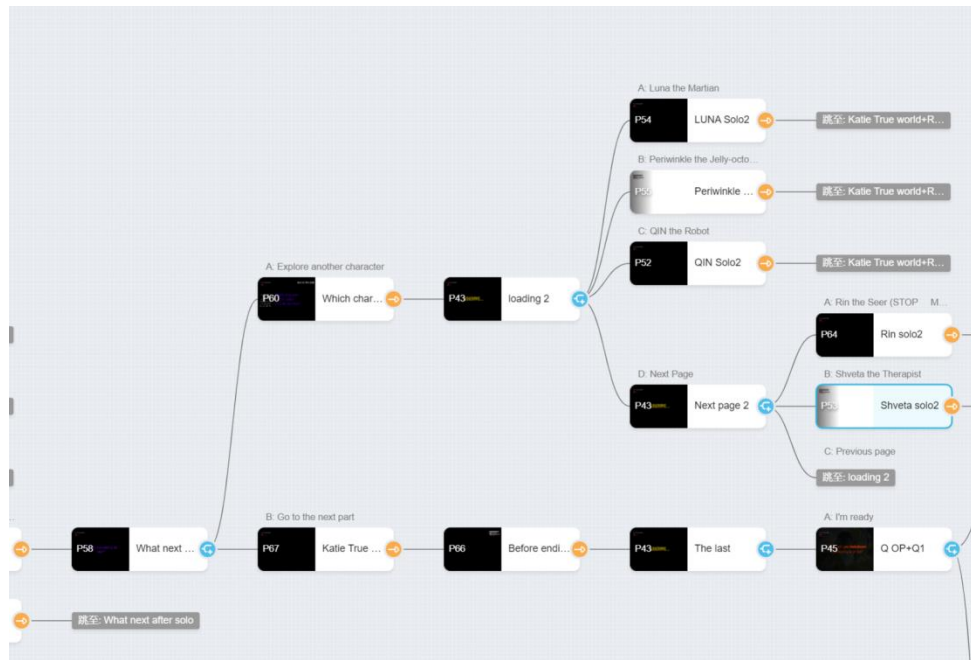


Figure 7. Part of the World Tree of Schrodinger's X

Figure 7 shows how the world tree developed different branches. At the end of P58, the video 58, the audience makes a choice between A: Explore another character or B: Go to the next part. Depending on their choice, they will be re-directed to either P60 or P67. I built the frame of the world tree and selected a video of the part, named the unique part and built it with the following branch. All optional videos must be uploaded independently so the audience can choose to watch a specific part or not. I combined the “main body” parts together. I wanted to take out all the distracting things to make sure my audience didn’t accidentally click something and become lost, so I simplified the “tools” on the bottom of the screen. My audiences are mostly English speakers, so when they watched the performance, they could no longer click on the dots to affect the

progress of the performance. I tried to simplify audience controls to make sure each choice contained a whole section.

During the “assemble section” of this project, there were more puzzles to solve. The timeline of this project didn’t become clear until the middle of the process. I placed the first dance I started within the near end of this project. I had no idea where the piece should be, but I knew it would be placed in somewhere. The same situation repeated itself until the middle of the project: the interview section. At the time, I wanted my audience to get a sense of the bigger picture. Thus, I asked each character different questions allowing them to introduce themselves by telling a story. I ended up using less of their actual speaking and more visual narrative as the primary method to tell their story; their words were still a considerable part, as I believe there are things that only words can communicate. In a role-play game, the description of a specific thing (a character, an object, a scene) and the conversation between characters are vital since they provide critical information of what was, is, and will be happening. That information can help the player decide where to go the next, and it can also reshape the player's understanding of a particular thing by directly giving definition to the player. In the final piece, the audience saw each character's solo or stop motion animation with narrative, but I edited the narrative by editing out and changing the order of words to convey a story.

The Use of Random Before the Endings

The web site, Bilibili, has the function of forming a random number during the process of playing an interactive video. I selected this function in my project and authorized the program to form a random number, from one to a hundred, that would

affect the ending the audience will see. A different ending would appear based on audience choices and the random number they got from the program. I created 9 different possible endings. Near the end of the performance, the audience was presented a series of questions to help guide them towards selecting their own ending. In figure 8 below, you see four different endings: *Miss Fortune*, *New Normal*, *Coming Tomorrow*, and *Card of Misfortune*. Each option in the section is worth a certain number of points: point 1 and 2. The point of 1 and 2 will increase, or not, based on the audience's choice. The last question will affect not only the points of 1 and 2 but also the random points. Each ending will only be triggered with specific points of 1, 2, and random.

Using Ending *Mis Fortune* as an example, this ending happened when the audience's point one is equal or bigger than 35 and random number is between 85 and 100.

Ending <i>Miss Fortune</i> :	①	②	R
	≥ 35		85-100
Ending <i>New Normal</i>	①	②	R
		< 40	1-84
Ending <i>Coming Tomorrow</i>	①	②	R
		≥ 40	1-84
Ending <i>Card of Misfortune</i>	①	②	R
		> 45	20-60

Figure 8. Four Endings of Schrodinger's X

The number of endings of Schrodinger's X was nine instead of four. When I explored the endings of Schrodinger's X, I thought carefully about how each element in the ending questions might affect the ending. I realized some endings in the nine options might be crucial, and I may need to present an ending that nobody would ever want to experience. I told my mother all of the endings. She was silent for a while, and then asked me: "what if you played a game and saw such desperate endings?" I realized that even though I'd like to present my world to my audience, this is still a project that I have to think about how an audience might feel after watching it. Thus, I kept 4 endings that are dramatic in a reasonable way yet not so disturbing.

Referring to the nine endings, I know my audience may not think about each option's logic, but for me, they were vital. By logic, I mean a different choice could lead to a different result. For example, while making the final decisions, if the audience chose all the altruistic options, then he or she would avoid the ending *Card of Misfortune*, an ending that humans failed the war while fighting the disease, since in that case, all humans are fighting together. The rest of choices, and the random number lead the audience to one out of the other three endings. When a team works in an organized, well planned way, it is logical that this team would have a big chance for success and is unlikely to make end up in disaster.

This project is a microcosm of my understanding of how this world works. Each decision we make leads us in a certain direction. Our life is a drawing on a wild tree. We were born from the bottom and keep drawing on the growing branches. When we face a choice, we diverge from the main body of the tree to smaller branches and passages, we pick a direction and go. Sometimes we recognize bad choices and turn back to explore

another passage, but our current choice is still based on the previous one. If I have to value the rightness of a choice, I will judge it from the way I would judge it from a macrocosmic angle based on reflection of the result. However, I also know that the result is caused by a series of choices, and the last choice is a reasonable and not really important step of a longer march. Conflicts and misunderstandings are not caused by words but the variation of individual's beliefs and their own understanding of the words.

As an international student, a Chinese person who studies in the United States, I did and may still be facing this type of misunderstanding in my daily life. I thought it was because of different cultural backgrounds and living experiences we have as human beings. During the process of doing this project, I realized the misunderstanding exists not only because of the different cultures but also because of individual differences. When it comes to decision making, everyone focuses on their thoughts, trying to make the best choice based on their ideologies, beliefs, and preferences. Misunderstandings often arise. Even a group of people who grow up in the same community still face friction and conflict in daily life. My project is just an extreme example of how people think differently about the same thing.

CONCLUSION

In this project, I created an online interactive video to explore the possibilities of advancing altruistic perspective among people from different cultural backgrounds. As I mentioned in the introduction, my creative inquiry is to produce a form of performance that sparks audience empathy which could lead to more altruistic decision making. The interactive video is a performance that combined dance, role-play games, and filming,

which offers the audience the chance to explore their own story instead of watching a show delivered to them. For the final interactive video, I uploaded 34 videos. On a humorous note, I neglected to put the needed watermark and had to upload all videos again. The world tree contained 52 modules. I included five possible endings, as well as ending X, which only happens when the audience decides without any information. The performance, which was to play the interactive video, lasted between 25 to 50 minutes based on an individual's choice during the performance.

This chapter begins with answering my creative inquiry question: what combination of performance making tools could create an atmosphere to promote audience empathy? Following will be my reflection on these themes:

- Integration: The intergraded four faces of the pyramid of this project I mentioned in My Process.
- Non-linearity: How is my non-linearity in the creative process different from recursive in most creative works? Why and how is the non-linearity complex for my dancers and me?
- Collaboration and coordinating: How to collaborate and coordinate the different perspectives in the process of doing this project.
- Adapting: Adapting choreographic outcome or product to the online computer program

Theme one: Integration

I consider myself a choreographer who usually puts dance as the priority when I create a project. What I learned in this particular project was that each of the four faces of this project: dance, filming, editing, and music, supported and enhanced each other to such a degree of integration that none could be privileged in this project. As the project leader, my job was to find the balance of the pyramid. That is to say, a scene was considered balanced when it delivered a whole story. The proportion of each face's contribution to that balance could vary as long as the story was delivered. One such instance of finding this balance occurred when I almost finished filming and then realized that I had to change Rin's solo. Rin was a seer that could see the future and past. Usually, I would create movement for her, but due to time constraints, this was not possible. Considering her character as a seer, it seemed reasonable for her story to be shown symbolically as a vision. Consequently, I decided a stop-motion animation using found objects and paper cut could support her story. Adding the stop-motion animation balanced her story by presenting abstract images to the audience, allowing their imagination to connect the dots of the story.

Among all the themes, integration is the first one because it is most important to the whole project. Without it, the project would be in pieces instead of a unified whole.

Theme two: Non-linearity

Working in a non-linear way with other people is hard, especially when working with people that are not used to this method. By non-linear, I mean the order of process

of making this project was not sequential from beginning to the end. The timeline did not emerge until I settled on the majority of videos for this project. I worked in a way of jumping back and forth by editing all my original materials, settling on a timeline, and rearranging or replacing videos as needed. Consequently, this was difficult for my dancers. They preferred to know the timeline and the whole story first because they felt like they lost their direction while building their own character's background story. "What do you want me to say in this section?" and "what is this part for?" were their most common questions. One dancer told me that she felt lost, like she was floating in the space for two months. I didn't have the whole story or chronologic play to satisfy my dancers. I tried to explain to my dancers that I envisioned the final performance that would be delivered to my audience as a map. My creative process is like playing a game that combines exploration of the map, puzzle, and drawing. First, I take an adventure starting from a certain point on a mystery map, I know the point is on the map, but I have no idea where I am or how the map looks. Only after I explored the map, I mark it on my parchment as a journal and the puzzle fragment of the map begins to take shape. I can fly to another place on the map with my "eureka moment" during the adventure and repeat the exploration, marking that section. When I have enough fragments, I start to build up the puzzle. The puzzle gradually builds itself over time. I carefully rearrange it and try to draw in the blanks with my imagination, creating new materials based on the current info. I also keep re-puzzling and replacing the map until the last second of the project to explore the endless possibilities of the project.

From my dancers' point of view, they had never worked in this way and were curious about the story. I could not give them the answer of what the whole story was,

since I was exploring it too, but I did explain any information that I could provide at the time. I told them the topic of this program is exploring the possibilities to promote understanding of others by calling on the audience's empathy. They are the characters of the "Game". Katie is the main character who is facing a problem and the other five characters are going to help Katie solve the question by providing their suggestions and opinions based on their unique background. Each character was going to introduce themselves and explain why they hold their opinions by answering certain questions offered by me. Everyone's voice is important, and each character's self-introduction was to help the audience understand why each character held her or its opinion. I also let them know that I didn't know the problem Katie was facing yet, but once I do, I would let everyone know. Thus, we started to build the part that I knew: the *Opening dance*, the *Gambling* (when I started this piece, it was nameless until in the middle of the choreography, I realized it should be gamble with destine), and each character's background story as well as their solos.

One difficulty that non-linearity made worse was when building the individual choreography for each character's solo, there was a loss of authenticity in each dancer's movement and voice. In my opinion, everyone's voice is important which means that authentic and movement quality can also deliver their voices. Thus, I offered to each dancer the feelings or raw movement sequence of the certain scene and asked them to embody the movement in their own understanding to achieve their authentic voice. But, all my dancers started to feel uncomfortable and lost again. "Where should I put my arm? Do you want it to be ninety degrees?" They started to ask me to offer a very detailed choreographic instruction. I explained that I don't know the inner world of your

character, but I do know that everyone moves in a different way that reflects their history. For example, after I taught the character, Luna, about her movement, I asked her to change the quality of it. “You’re from Mars with less gravity. Thus, when you’re dancing on the scene on Mars, the movement’s quality should be lighter. Luna loves adventure, so you can make the movement look interesting.” I was trying to elicit from each dancer the authenticity of their stories and movement. However, at the beginning of the project, I didn’t have the whole story or specific topics for each character, thus we kept modifying each character’s story and movement, which also led to the loss of authenticity in characters. The non-linearity negatively affected the development of the embodiment of the personality of each dancer’s character.

Theme Three: Collaborating and Coordinating

The collaborating and coordinating have two parts: A and B. Part A is about how my view, as a choreographer, expanded after collaborating and coordinating with my cinematographer. Part B encompasses how I, as a director, collaborated and coordinated with the people in this project.

Regarding part A of collaborating and coordinating, I discovered that I could not use the classic proscenium idea to make all videos. I listened to my cinematographer to explain that the image people see with their bare eyes is different from on the screen. First, the screen is a two-dimensional platform that works differently than an actual human's eye. When I put a scene into the camera, if I do not use the foreground, midground, and background, I might lose the depth of the scene. When I was setting the scene, I had to use a screen eye to look at the movement prior to and after filming. In

addition, the reality is different than my imagination. Therefore, I had to check the materials every time after the filming to see if there needed to be any adjustment or re-filming. Second, when I was filming a dance, I could play more with details since I could highlight moments in the choreography for my audience. I could shoot a movement from different angles or edit the movement with different sequences and locations. Third, unlike a live show, all audiences would see different materials from the same content. Which is to say, the audience would be more critical of the content because they have choices within and after the performance. Within the performance, they could choose the content they were most interested in due to the limitation of time. After the performance, the audience could always come back and see a specific part of this project again. They would see the same movement and hear the same music, and this would allow them to view the content in more detail. Therefore, I had to coordinate the materials carefully so that with the repeated viewings the audience's experience was enhanced rather than diminished.

Through Part B, I learned how to coordinate different perspectives in order to promote a mutual understanding inside the group of the project. This was important so the group of people could work more efficiently and contribute their own unique ideas to the project. As a result of facilitating this type of collaboration, I realized that misunderstandings among people exist not only because of different cultural backgrounds but, in this instance, because of individual differences between people within the same culture.

I'd like to give an example of the misunderstanding of people from the same culture. Four people in this project, the dancer Kathy Luo, the Cinematographer Anze Su,

the composer Xunze Zhou, and myself, were raised in a similar background, and we speak the same language, Chinese and English. However, there were misunderstandings during the time while we were working together. For example, when we were filming the part *Before the Decision*, I told Kathy: walk into space, open the computer, heave a sigh, and turn your head up by looking into the distance. She said: okay. Then I turn to Anze: give her a full shot when she is walking and change the camera to a close-up to her face. In my mind, I thought walking and looking is different from dance. Those were daily, or pedestrian movements, and the point of filming this part was to record the mood of this moment. They both understood my words in their own way, but I did not realize it at the time. So, when we started the filming, Kathy walked as if she were dancing and Anze focused on the proportion of the image and lighting on the screen instead of the movement of Kathy. Nevertheless, for Kathy, as a dancer, she assumed that a movement should be a dance movement. For Anze, as a cinematographer, the screen's image was his focus because that is his job. As director of this project, I was trying to deliver a story and create a visual environment for my audience to think and explore. We were working on the same thing in particular roles and focus, but it was not always the right thing for this project. This happened again when I talked about the background music with my composer Xunze of *Before the Decision*. I told him the part when Kathy's character, looking into the distance should have no music, and he said yes. My understanding of no music is silence, but he assumed that music could also be the sound effect that contains no melody. So, when we met and listened to the part together, we were both surprised and then started to explain our understanding of music. Through this incident, I recognized how many misunderstandings in my life may happen. I needed to carefully

explain my ideas in more detail and stop assuming others automatically understand my words the way I do.

Theme Four: Adapting

There are two main adaptations in this project: the program view and the screen view. Regarding the program view, this is the first time I worked with this interactive video platform, therefore I had to make a lot of adaptations of the source materials. The interactive video program, Bilibili, is a block system that allows the user to build their own world tree. However, to “play” the system, I had to shape my materials to the program’s recognizable block. For example, the block means that the media I uploaded had to be a video that was longer than one second. In order to use the program, I had to upload all videos to the website first, before I starting to arrange the order and options of the interactive video. As a consequence, it meant that for any tiny change in one video, even just to correct wrong spelling of the subtitles, I had to reexport the video, upload it to the website, replace the original video and rename the block. Then, the website processed the video before I was able to submit the whole world tree for approval.

While working on a computer program, I had to change my human way of thinking to thinking like a computer. This completely modified my working method. I had to learn how this program worked. I made four prototypes to help me explain what this form of video is to others, and explore the program's higher functions, which was the random number that was attached to unique choices the user made. In the prototype I would create four requirements that would trigger four different endings. One ending is what I call the normal ending, the *New Normal*, that would also appear when no

requirement matched. Having different endings is important to me and this project since it represents the possibilities that came out from choices the audience made. It is part of my ideology that by changing our choice, we can change the world, at least in this performance.

My final adaptation was that the program of this platform could not work as I pictured it. I had to adapt my thinking set to a "one out of A, B, C, or D model" instead of "A, B, C, otherwise D". I learned that a computer program can only function in the way the platform was designed for interaction, which means when working with it, one cannot give a command to the program that is even just a little beyond its function. For example, an ending appeared only if it matched all the requirements pre-set by me. The command I could put into the program was just one range instead of several ranges. For example, I can put: if the range of the Random Number is from eighty-five to a hundred, option A, Miss fortune, will appear. But I cannot put the command as follows: if the range of the number is from one to sixty and ninety to ninety-six, option A, Miss Fortune, will appear. Thus, I could not recreate the complexity of reality. Furthermore, with the audience's choice of different options, if there are no pre-set matches, the whole program stops at the end of the current video. When this situation happens, the audience could not see any ending, which not only prohibited me from delivering the idea of possibilities based on personal choice, but it also broke the fluency of the performance. When I was trouble shooting this bug, I also learned that the program does not notify me when there is an uncovered range of numbers. In the beginning, I used three values of numbers for each ending-related option: A, B, and Random. I made six questions, and the last question contains the Random number from the range of zero to a hundred. When the audience

makes a choice, it increased numbers A and B differently from the range of zero to fifteen. The program judged numbers A, B, and Random and redirects the audience to the matched ending. After the pre-opening, I realized three values of numbers was too complicated for me and the program. During the pre-opening showing of my project, several audiences gave me feedback that they got stuck before the ending showed up. Instead, they only saw a blackout and their shocked face on the screen. I double-checked the range of numbers and discovered the bug. Thus, I changed the pre-set from three values to two or one, and the ending would be triggered with two values. I am pointing out that the adaptation was significant because it happened one day before the performance and even though I changed it, it still occurred once during the performance. I would like to further emphasize that during the performance, I would not, and could not interfere with my audience's choices. The audience made choices in the moment with this unique form of interactive performance. When this bug occurred, the interactive performance stopped in the most exciting moment which could disappoint the audience a lot. The atmosphere would be broken and could not be reproduced in the same, original way. The boundary of the real world and performance world would return, and the process of calling audience empathy would stop too. Thus, I wrote down this adaptation in such detail to show how important it was in both timing and ramifications.

These adaptations make me realize that in order to work with a computer program in a more proficient way, I have to pay closer attention to the user manual and software updates. While I was building the world tree on the program, the website was also updating it. I could not pay attention to each update; thus, I did make unnecessary work

in the penultimate prototype. When I modified it, I realized it was easier to change the world tree.

My suggestion for other users who may be interested in making interactive videos is to read the manual first to save the user's time even if they have worked with the same program before. The updates of a program constantly improve even just a little, but it can reduce plenty of working time. I also recommend to other interactive video makers, especially for this website, to make the values of a number less complicated unless they focus on the aspect of the game rather than the visual art. As previously mentioned, it is important to be aware that the program will not notify the user if there is an uncovered range of numbers. The user must self-check the world tree he or she is working on in case the bug I mentioned previously happens.

I know that I mentioned all problems I faced during the process of making this project, however, if I'm working on this program again, I would make the options, the value of options and endings more complicated. First, I enjoy exploring the possibility of different directions in real life and the game. The option to see different stories by making different choices is the reason I love role-play games. In my view, the point of life is to explore various worlds and lifestyles, and this program allows me to build or bring my world to life. Second, in this project, I mainly explored the art aspect visually and philosophically instead of the game. I would like to explore all functions of this program and maybe make my own platform for building a role-play game. I am looking for a more user-friendly platform that requires less knowledge of interactive video making programs. Creating a new program independently may be challenging. Finally, I

want to use this unique form of performance to create more pieces that allow people from all over the world to watch and play it.

Final Thoughts

Through this project, five outcomes occurred to me. 1. I developed my method of building an online interactive performance by using the platform of interactive videos. 2. I found that collaborating and coordinating processes are different while working with individuals. 3. I discovered that the views of stage view and camera view vary. 4. I realized that misunderstandings exist not only because of the cultural difference but also the direction and focus of individuals. 5. I perceived that a group of people can work together with the same goal even if their personal views vary.

My final thought relates to the timing of making this project, the clarity of communication and sharing materials between collaborators, and collaboration in general. Prior to the project, I thought the collaboration with dancers, the cinematographer, and the composer was not complex. We only needed to talk together and create the project since I have been working this way for years. The only extra hard work I thought I would have would be the program I would use to make the interactive videos, but that process would only take two weeks. After I started to build the project, I realized that it required plenty of time to get familiar with how each individual think and how the computer program works. To understand each individual, the dancers, the cinematographer, the composer and the program, their way of talking and thinking, and their different response time, was something I had to learn on the spot. This took way more time than I anticipated.

I started to realize that I should never assume my words are clear enough for others. After I encountered the problem of coordinating with the dancers, the cinematographer, the composer, and the computer program of interactive videos, I started to change how I communicated with people trying to be more specific when giving examples and defining a particular noun in my sentence. Often, when we thought we were talking about the same thing, we had a different understanding of the meaning behind a noun due to the roles we play in this project. More importantly, our background of who we are also shapes the way we are thinking. To pursue a better understanding, we must explain and open our minds to others' words. This is the thing I want my audience to understand too. Most people tend to think the way they are habitually used to thinking. In my view, when they hear a word spoken by someone, their subconscious reaction is to read it under the acceptance of their own understanding. For example, when I heard the people trying to persuade me to become a Christian member by asking me, "what if you died today?", my first reaction was: how can you curse me like that? As a Chinese, talking of death is unfortunate, and it is vulgar if the subject is the death of another person. I felt angry until my Christian friend explained that the man might not mean to be offensive. Of course, as I mentioned before, misunderstanding happens not only because of the different cultural background individuals have but also how individuals think.

By thinking differently, I believe that most people can make things differently. In this project, after people explained their ideas, we got along with each other and adjusted our way of working. We had more patience with each other and allowed time for sharing our understanding of specific topics, discussing what possibilities we could have. We had different opinions, such as dancers thought the talking scene in the middle of the game

might not be necessary, while I thought it was vital because it is part of the characters' voice. My dancers shared their opinions to me, but they also respected my role as the director to make the final decision. I appreciated that my dancers also offered me feedback like: Periwinkle is only seven years old, so she would not say sophisticated words, but simple words can deliver a significant point. Team brainstorming offered me a lot of possibilities to see different perspectives and directions of the project. Even though I directed the project, I did get ideas from the whole team. Doing a project, in my experience, is like writing a sentence. With more words, the possibilities of the final sentence are more substantial or endless. Working on a project together, the whole team does not have to share the same opinion, but they need to have the same goal: complete the project. Thus, they can work on their particular job but still hold their own opinion about it.

I must clarify that this work is not perfect, and the conclusion is based on my own experience. When working on this project, I did not find or recognize anyone who did a similar performance. So, I had no references or models but explored possibilities on my own. I always love to put multidisciplinary media together. One fundamental principle of my work is: if anyone can do the work, this is not my work. I honestly hope that my detailed experimentation in chapter three is helpful for anyone interested in doing a similar project in the future. I also realize that this program may be unable to replicate. If anyone disagrees with any points that I made in this document, I respect their voice. My experience in the project demonstrates that even with disagreement, working with an open mind and willingness to establish a sense of trust as a team, acknowledging the

diversity and creativity of individuals with their unique background, a successful project can present endless possibilities.

I will continue to explore the possibilities of making an online interactive video performance in the future. In my three years of study in the United States, I realize the misunderstanding of Chinese people by US people exists due partially to little or no understanding of the other, or one-sided understanding presented in the news. I do understand that the western world and the eastern world hold different ideologies and regimes. However, as I mentioned before, two parties can work on the same thing while holding different ideas. We are all human beings, and I believe that peace and moving forward to live in a better condition are the typical wish of each individual. I sincerely hope the project I made is thought provoking and can elicit empathy and understanding of each other. I appreciate that I worked in such a diverse group that includes Asians and Americans as we learned the different cultures and beliefs of each other. In the future, I will keep telling unique stories with my voice as a Chinese person.

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APPENDIX A
FILMING TIMELINE

2020

Aug 31: Rehearsed filming of *Opening Scene*

Sep 1: *Opening Scene*

(Nov 11 9pm: 2 days before stage filming, one of the main dancers was exposed to a positive covid-19 patient and had to be quarantined. Changing the content of *The Parade* and *The Gambling*. Reschedule the filming date for the dancer's solo.)

Nov 13: *The Parade, The Gambling, The short transition before The Parade.*

Nov 20: *Whole Group Solution, Katie Virus, Before the Decision.*

Nov 21: *Shveta & QIN's Group 1 conversation, Shveta interview and Shveta self-introduction, Shveta Box and Walking Movement, Periwinkle Interview and Periwinkle self-introduction.*

Nov 22: *Rin interview and Rin self-introduction*

Nov 24: *Luna Solo, Luna interview and Luna self-introduction, Luna Balcony Dance*

Nov 25: *Shveta Solo*

Nov 26: *Shveta Solo* (Low resolution, need to be re-filmed)

Dec 10: *QIN Solo*

Dec 11: *Katie Interview*

Dec 16: *Periwinkle Solo, Katie Solo, Trio*

2021

Jan 10-16: *Voiceover for All Characters*

Jan 20: *Shveta Solo* (failed to film, choreographer's accident)

Jan 25: *Shveta Solo* (failed to film, dancer was sick)

Feb 1: *Shveta Solo* scheduled

Feb 3: *QIN interview* and *QIN self-introduction* scheduled.

APPENDIX B

ACCESS TO THE INTERACTIVE VIDEO: SCHRODINGER'S X

Step 1:

The Tour of How to Play Schrodinger's X

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yEw8-_Tg9iTU6YfSPkw2TUlq6v8eIgRO/view?usp=sharing

Step 2:

The Performance: Schrodinger's X

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Yf4y1z7BR/>

Step 3:

Feedback Shared Doc

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1q6XheqkqxPVj2jmQ6feZoqA5kraCWv7WrZ_wn90Wp5k/edit?usp=sharing

APPENDIX C

NINE ORIGINAL ENDINGS OF SCHRODINGER'S X

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Bp-4Agu3Bbr47c85f8PGPRAKTjKTHxHa?usp=sharing>

APPENDIX D

THE POSTERS OF SCHRODINGER'S X



Figure 9. The poster of Schrodinger's X