Runescores in [Cage(d) Time] | Strategies of Scoring Indeterminacy

Joséphine A. Garibaldi & Paul Zmolek

Runescores\(^1\), directed by Joséphine A. Garibaldi and Paul Zmolek, Artistic Directors of Callous Physical Theatre, is a group-sourced collaborative project of performance scores structured in response to each of twenty-five rune stones of the Norwegian Runic System. In the egalitarian spirit of Fluxus, a non-curated call to participate was published via social media. Participants received one of the scores determined by drawing a rune from the bag. From this, collaborators solved the score, creating responses in the medium(s) of their choice and submitted digital files for this online installation.

Contributing artists (in alphabetical order) include Logan Castro, Bridget Close, Joséphine A. Garibaldi, Robert W. Dillon, Jr., Aaron Ellis, Mandy Herrick, Gary Lappier, Katie Stricker Lappier, Aigars Larionovs, Julie Leir-VanSickle, David Ollington, Cathy Santome, Jennifer Wolbrecht, Gary Zmolek, and Paul Zmolek.

How Runescores Emerged

Spring 2020, rummaging through the bins in the depths of our closets, Jo uncovered Paul's new age bundle of Rune Stones, Tarot cards, and crystals that had been in storage since the ‘80s. The stones and cards were placed on the dining table, thinking that we could maybe utilize them in our artistic research. Preparations for our Cagevent 2(020): Sometimes it works, Sometimes it doesn’t Redux at the (Re)HAPPENING\(^2\) at the historic site of the Black Mountain College included a revisiting of Fluxus events, John Cage’s seminal book *Silence: Lectures and Writings*\(^3\) and William Fetterman’s incredibly detailed *John Cage’s Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances*.\(^4\) Unfortunately (Re)HAPPENING had to be canceled due to the pandemic but our research sparked an interest in exploring Cage’s aleatoric approach to creating non-determinant scores structured with time brackets for actions to occur. Neither of us are familiar with the I Ching (John Cage's oracular device), but we had the tarot cards and the rune stones and a "why don't we" challenge quickly emerged. The seventy-eight cards in the tarot deck were a bit whelming so we opted for the smaller collection of twenty-five runes and Runescores emerged.
The Process

Scores corresponding to each of the runes were created. The draw of fifteen stones (determined by the number of operations that fit neatly on the line paper in Paul’s notebook) ordered the score of actions. Guided by Ralph Blum’s *The Book of Runes*, actions were defined by ‘significant’ words (a technique from our *dialogic devising* methodology) extracted from Blum’s description of each corresponding rune (the interpretation of each significant word is always the problem the collaborating artist must solve). Based upon the number of the rune (as presented by Blum) and following the structural logic of John Cage’s time brackets, the timing of each event was progressively notated as either positive or negative: if a rune drawn was upright, time was notated as positive; if the rune drawn was reversed, time was notated as negative. The shortest score is 1:26, the longest score is 5:19.

For the entire Runescore project, go here: [http://callousphysicaltheatre.weebly.com/runescores-2020.html](http://callousphysicaltheatre.weebly.com/runescores-2020.html). While each individual work is complete in itself, viewing all of the works successively with their accompanying process statements provides a fuller sense of the project as a unified work. Navigate the site via stone icons and the sidebar. A larger screen and headphones are recommended for best viewing experience.

The Presentation (text of script follows below)
Script of Presentation

1 Mannaz - The Self
This presentation about our Runescores project is divided into three distinct sections.

2 Gebo - Partnership
The first section follows the standard linear academic format, complete with PowerPoint slides and video examples.

3 Ansuz - Signals
The second section, Entr’act a la Runescores, is a (re)structuring of the source material of this presentation with the aleatoric devices we utilized for Runescores.

4 Othila - Retreat
In a nod to the Aristotelian rise and fall, the third section returns to the standard academic format to provide our thoughts and conclusions as a coda to the presentation.

5 Uruz - Strength
Our artistic research is dedicated to deepening our understanding of the potentialities of dialogic devising, our aleatoric creative methodology that we have been excavating and expanding upon for over 20 years.

6 Perth - Initiation
Runescores is a group-sourced collaborative project with indeterminate scores aleatorically structured utilizing the twenty-five rune stones of the oracular Norwegian Runic System.
Runescores provided the platform to play with John Cage’s compositional strategy of ‘time brackets’ (for structuring indeterminate scores) to further push our dialogic creative practice.

Scores corresponding to each of the runes were created.

Time brackets for each event were determined by the numeric order of the runes drawn.

If a rune drawn was upright, time was notated as positive.

If the rune drawn was reversed, time was notated as negative.

Overlapping time brackets were common results of this approach.

A draw of fifteen stones (determined by the number of operations that fit neatly on the line paper in Paul's notebook) ordered the score of actions.

Following Cage’s approach of mining words from text(s) to determine sounds and actions as described in William Fetterman’s *John Cage’s Theatre Pieces*, actions were defined by 'significant' words extracted from Ralph Blum's *The Book of Runes*.

A non-curated call to participate was published via social media.
16 Berkana - Growth
Participants received one of the twenty-five scores determined by drawing a rune from the bag.

17 Ehwaz - Movement
Collaborators solved the score, creating responses in the medium(s) of their choice and submitted digital files for the online installation.

18 Laguz - Flow
Viewing the installation from the first to last score we have been struck by how much the entire installation works as a cohesive whole.

19 Hagalaz - Disruption
We believe this is due to our use of Blum's text to cull 'significant' words for the scores and, even more so, the brilliance of Cage’s insight into time as a compositional element.

20 Raido - Journey
Going through this process and experiencing for ourselves the structural power inherent with Cage’s idea of time brackets has been revelatory.

21 Thurisaz - Gateway
The indeterminate scores we have created previously through our dialogic devising provide powerful rubrics to elicit creative responses from our collaborators yet we tend to impose traditional 'rise and fall' that typifies of Western theatrical craft.

22 Dagaz - Breakthrough
The beginnings and endings of chance determined time brackets provide structure while allowing us to stay true to the aleatoric approach that drives our collaborative methodology.
23 Isa - Standstill

Drawing inspiration from John Cage’s theatrical works foregrounds the serious importance of the sense of play.

24 Sowelu - Wholeness

Borrowing from John Cage, we delight in “Purposeless Play.”

25 Odin - The Unknowable

Runescores is an ongoing project and we welcome participation from anyone who may be interested in creating their own solution for one of the indeterminate scores.

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3 Cage, John, Silence Lectures and Writings (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2013).
5 Blum, Ralph, The Book of Runes (St. Martin’s Press, 1984).
13 Cathy Santome, “Runescore 5 Uruz,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
14 Jennifer Wolbrecht, “Runescore 6 Perth,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
http://callousphysicaltheatre.weebly.com/runescore-6-perth.html.
15 Joséphine A. Garibaldi, “Runescore 7 Nauthiz,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
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16 “Runescore 18 Inguz” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
17 Aaron Ellis, “Runescore 9 Eiwaz,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
18 “Runescore 10 Algiz,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
19 Paul Zmolek, “Runescore 11 Fehu,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
20 Joséphine A. Garibaldi, “Runescore 12 Wunjo,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
21 Katie Stricker Lappier, “Runescore 13 Jera,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
22 Paul Zmolek, “Runescore 14 Kano,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
23 William Fetterman, John Cage’s Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances (New York: Routledge,
1996).
26 Bridget Close, “Runescore 16 Berkana,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
27 Gary Lappier, “Runescore 17 Ehwaz,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,
30 Logan Castro, “Runescore 20 Raido,” Callous Physical Theatre, accessed December 9, 2021,