

B b O a N r E e S: A Multimedia Installation

by

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by

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Abstract

Deterioration is a process that contains the potentiality to catalyze the unique unification of detached associations. Deterioration affects how a tangible or abstract object can serve an alternative purpose despite its designated function. This new purpose or state of being that follows deterioration may, in fact, be a more favorable outcome. *B b O a N r E e S* was an evening length multimedia performance installation that explored the cathartic process of deterioration as it relates to discovering vulnerability. This collaborative project incorporated dance performance, cinematography, spoken word poetry, photography, lighting design, set design, and visual art. The performance environment provided observers with the opportunity to view and physically manipulate the work at various proximities, blurring the line between observer and performer through interactive tasks such as taking photos of audience members to put on display during the work. The project questioned if deterioration exists only to negatively erode the self as illustrated in the consuming selfish natures of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. This interactive performance not only widened my professional creative portfolio as I prepare to begin my professional dance career but also presented a case for how the fine arts can present unparalleled work when utilized through collaboration.

Artist Statement

As an artist, I am an innovator. I generate narratives convinced that every movement has a catalyst. Initiation, whether a physical or mental impulse, drives my desire to communicate with others and, at times, to undergo the process of emotional transformation brought about through dance. I enjoy the physicality of dance while also taking delight in the mental and emotional resonance gained from interacting with the space and the humans with which I share the space. My movement style is athletic and gestural. I relish in the rise and fall of stillness and its association with eye contact or lack thereof.

As a choreographer and a writer, I am inquisitive of how relationships can be presented and developed onstage. My work is a study of curiosity and collaboration. An environment that allows my dancers and I to create work that prompts audience members to reflect on their lives is something I treasure, as it possesses the potentiality to have my work become a catalyst for change. My choreographic aesthetic utilizes the power of difference and asymmetry in my passion for blurring the line between observers and performers. I value individual choices and want my movement to be adopted and showcased in a way that adapts to the individual performing it. Exploring differences in the connection between body and gaze, dynamic physicality into and out of partnering, shared versus individual impulses, and the contrast of speed and stillness allow me to generate and present a myriad of movement qualities.

My choreography displays a range of physical and psychological extremes with an aim to provoke visual interest, cultivate inquisitive thought, and evoke personal application. Dance can be used as a platform to voice my concerns for those socially silenced, to study perspectives on philosophical questions, and to comment on thoughts about humanity and its frailty. Dance has the ability to speak loudly in a world filled with superficial noise. My art is my voice in both my bodily movements and the poetry that I often integrate into my works, which typically serves as a major resource to fuel my creativity. It is most pleasurable to articulate my voice through a multimedia approach, allowing my voice to speak and be heard through different methods of artistic performance.

Concept Development

Selecting a concept for this work often felt like choosing a prom dress. One seeks to find something that shapes their fancy and fits their style yet sets them apart from their usual appearance and creates something extraordinary with a resounding impact. This was my approach when attempting to pin point exactly what thought or idea I wished to perpetuate into movement and artistic product.

Reading novels is a method that frequently provokes my curiosity to explore character development and relational communication. After finishing *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, I was agape after reading how a single interaction transpired into the demise of love and the swarming creation of bitterness. Although the end of the novel is not quite a fairytale ending, there is a beauty that remains in the peaceful resolution that is reached as Catherine and Heathcliff lay side by side in their graves, together at last. This work instigated my determination to see deterioration and decomposition as processes that can produce beauty, not just brokenness, and cultivate healing, not just pain. My multimedia installation was developed with the intention to encourage audience members to perceive deterioration as a process with the potential to create valuable outputs.

The concept continued to develop throughout the rehearsal experience, slowly centering on the functionality of how the self deteriorates in relation to vulnerability and honest disclosure. I was fascinated by secrets - who we share secrets with, why we hide secrets, who do secrets harm or protect, and how relationships can be strengthened through honesty. The choreography showcased motifs such as hugging, pushing, staring, and leaning towards and away. These movements displayed the various possible reaction responses of one who is in contact with vulnerability, either as the supportive listener or the vulnerable individual.

The work itself presented audience members with the choice of whether or not to be vulnerable with others in the space about their secrets. Near the end of the work, the observers had the opportunity to write a secret on the back of their Polaroid picture (which they had taken as they entered the performance space) and "choose its fate." The options provided for these photographs were to bury them, color them, cut them, trash them, or share them. It was fascinating to watch as approximately 90% of audience members participated in this social experiment with nearly 75% of individuals choosing to share their secrets. It was at this moment during the final show when I realized that my work had not

only taken form of my idealized expression of my concept of vulnerability but it had created an experience for viewers that produced an impact lasting far beyond any memory of the performance.

Multimedia Collaboration

Investing into and directing a collaborative process is a time-consuming experience that presented the power to produce astounding, immeasurable outcomes. In addition, there was an increased risk when I participated in more than one collaborative process at a time. During the span of the creation of *B b O a N r E e S*, I was involved in nine separate collaborative projects to develop a full multimedia approach. These artistic mediums included dance performance, spoken word poetry, photography, cinematography, music performance, lighting design, sound design, set design, and visual art. Designating how the show would progress and unveil these projects as a solidified unit proved to be an obstacle. I attempted to create a cohesive flow for audience members' focus to follow one artistic medium while being able to easily transfer to another.

These collaborative relationships and outputs proved to be the most satisfying and expectation-defying aspects of my project. It was an honor to work with students who were willing to share their talents and skills to further the development of how deterioration can be presented in a multitude of forms. For example, these forms range from a poem about honesty with one's self as well as a strong purple backlight design that saturates the performance environment with an intimate glow that narrows in and gives light only to the performers interacting closely onstage. These collaborative ventures became one of the most fruitful artistic experiences I have encountered at East Carolina University, incentivizing me to continue locating not just one but many voices that can share a unified concept through creative expression.

Audience Context

The audience context for the work was incredibly rare, as there was no audience seating provided – no chairs, no risers, only the floor. As nearly 75 observers entered the performance space each night, they were immediately involved in the installation, choosing for themselves the initial perspective from which they wished to view the work. It was fascinating to watch how individuals remained on the perimeter of the space, as subconsciously associating center stage as a place reserved for those who are performing. Yet, as the work unfurled each night, the observers' mobility increased during the performance, creating flocking patterns that generated different influences and pathways each night. It was a joy to take on the challenge of crafting an environment that was able not only to be physically replicated every evening but also maintain conceptual autonomy while allowing for flexibility in regards to observers' and performers' interactive personal choices. Likewise, the location of the observers greatly impacted how my dancers and poets interacted with each other during the show. This experience perpetuated viewers into constant activity and vulnerability, shifting them into the role of a performer without gathering permission and deeming their sustained gaze just as important as any recited poem or executed movement phrase.

Performances

The installation ran from February 17th-19th in the Archie Burnette Studio Theater with show times at 8:00p.m. The entire work lasted approximately one and a half hours and was followed by a talkback session to discuss how the work psychologically impacted viewers and to answer queries. The total audience attendance surpassed expectations, as nearly 240 individuals attended the performances. Presenting this non-traditional installation cultivated a unique fine arts experience within and for the Greenville community. This installation showcased how collaborative innovation can produce a unified concept that will drive personal reflection and social experimentation, challenging the norms of artistic performance and creative development.

Video Link

A video of the performance can be found by clicking on the link below or by copying the link into one's browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7l7XPprC18&t=4519s>