Samantha Nelson  
6-9 dancers  
Fall Semester  
CommunUs

I. The Seed: Project Inspiration/ Intention

The idea of my project is to show the dynamics of community. Finding a community, creating a community, abandoning a community, and transforming a community. I want my dancers and audience members to really try and connect with those around them - each other.

II. The Roots: Research Process – Investigate Your Inspiration

1. I am working with all traditional, contemporary, and fused forms of modern dance. The aesthetic form I am investigating is the participant observer form often found in the Africanist aesthetic. I want to experiment with different ways of engaging the audience – physically, emotionally, mentally, psychologically, etc.

2. My work is very similar to that of Liz Lerman’s in terms of incorporating community members into my work. I will be trying to recruit a small group of people outside the VCU Dance community to participate in my work. I am using Liz Lerman, Ronald Brown, and other choreographer’s methods for community engagement as a guide for how to find willing and able people to participate in my work.

3. I am not thinking of modeling my work after any artist. I am focused on exploring the possibilities of my work through a participant observer lens.

III. The Flowering: What do you see/ hear/ taste/ smell when you envision the work?

A. See Pinterest link:  https://www.pinterest.com/nelsonsm2/senior-project-flowering-board/

I imagine my project being somewhat like a town hall meeting; with people in the audience participating in the dance. I want the colors in the piece to be a little muted; alluding to the mood of the work. I envision the texture of the piece being smooth for the most part, but embodied with strategic edges that allow for mood/ idea shifts. I want most of the dance to take place off stage in the house, and I imagine my dancers will be in street clothes and shoes throughout the piece. I want to create a casual environment full of subtle surprises; nothing too jarring for the audience, but distinct enough to be noticed.
B.

i. I would like to have my music composed by a local musician - Macon Mann, and possibly performed live by a small ensemble. As of now, I do not have a particular sound in mind for the music of my work. However, I would like the music to have a qualitative dichotomy within itself. I imagine the qualities of the music being demanding yet soft, suggestive yet forceful, bold and almost daring, but sweet and somewhat meek. Overall, I want the music to be rich in harmony and help create an uplifting atmosphere.

ii. I will be using improvisational cuing, *bound-flow* phraseology, and as many phrases of weight shift and weight support as possible. I usually start off with a simple phrase and then ask each dancer to manipulate that phrase in a specific way. I then play with spatial patterning in the movement and proceed from there to structure the rest of the piece.

IV. Reflection**

- Have I engaged my audience to their fullest potential in the piece?
- Have I given my dancers appropriate direction for the piece?
- Do I want to do more with this piece in the future?

PROPOSAL: PERFORMANCE

WHO: Mariah Eastman

WHEN: Fall 2016
Bibliography


- This source explores the history of dance and the cultural roots of various dance movements/styles. This source is useful to my research because it shows the influence that culture has on movement; its structure, development, aesthetic, and purpose. This source has made me more attuned to the cultural mannerisms of my surrounding community, and how those mannerisms could inform the movement possibilities of my work.


- In this workshop, I was given advice on how to better incorporate audience members into my work. Brown suggested that I hold auditions within the community to find willing and able people to participate in my piece.


- Watching this performance challenged my definition of ‘concert’ dance. The piece was performed on a proscenium stage; however, the subject matter and movement were so intimate that I felt like the piece was happening next to me. This piece made me question if I needed to physically involve the audience in my work for them to be active participants in the piece. I analyzed this piece and saw how the choreographers were able to close off the stage to the audience, but still include the audience in the work. I want my work to have the same inclusive quality.


- This source provides information on the Africanist aesthetic in dance. The information in this book will give me the necessary background information to better understand the concept of the participant observer form in dance. It will also give me more information on other Africanist forms of dance that may support and inform my exploration of the participant observer form.

- This website provides information on People Dancing, the foundation for community dance. This foundation provides information on artists and programs around the world that promote dance within communities. This site opened my eyes to the global movement of ‘inclusive’ dance. The artists and works that are supported by and partnered with the foundation are revolutionizing how people view, experience, and interact with dance. I am gaining a lot of inspiration and insight from this website on how to best include community members in my work.


- This source provides a very thoughtful set of guidelines for viewing culturally influenced work. This source helped me understand the acceptance and resistance people experience when viewing cultural work. My piece will be based on my cultural background and that of my dancers. Therefore, it is important for me to have a basic understanding of how people will likely interpret my work, as well as how I would like my work to be interpreted.


- Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process (CRP) is a very interesting way to give and receive feedback on experimental work or works in progress. It reminds me of the VCU Salons or performance talk backs that I have experienced here in Richmond. I find these informal discussions to be extremely helpful in developing my work, because they provide honest and constructive insights. I would like for there to be an element of these discussions somewhere in my piece, because I feel that at the heart of these discussion is a strong sense of community.
In this class, I learned techniques for creating community movement – movement that can be done by people of all levels of ability. This class also taught me a new way to source movement from my surrounding environment. By listening to and sharing stories with those around me, I was able to pull movements and phrase work together more easily. This method of choreography was very effective, and I plan to utilize it more in my work.


This source explains Thompson’s 10 canons of the Africanist Aesthetic. It provides a comprehensive examination of the qualities commonly found in Africanist work, and the *participant observer* form is one of those qualities. This source explains the benefit, purpose, and history of the *participant observer* form.


I found this film extremely intriguing. The work had a strong sense of openness and honesty to it that grounded the piece and constantly moved it forward. I was inspired by the films’ candidness and ingenuity in exploring new avenues of movement and social commentary.