

Educed Play:
An Investigation of Synergy and Improvisation
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ABSTRACT

Educed Play is a performance installation that investigates spontaneity and the invisible communication that can exist in improvisation and collaborative play. The work unites the mediums of dance, drawing, music, and video through improvisational performances. The multimedia installation entitled Educed Play was presented in the fall of 2012. Inspiration came from the idea of relics created by ephemeral interactions, using improvisation as a means to performance, and working within a genuine collaboration. This document encompasses an overview of the project.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
3 CREATIVE PROCESS.....	9
Collaborators	9
Rehearsals.....	10
The Scores.....	14
The Exhibit.....	18
4 ANALYSIS	20
5 CONCLUSION.....	24
REFERENCES.....	26
APPENDIX	
EDUCED PLAY PHOTOGRAPHS.....	28

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Image 1:

“Boat” Photo by Brian Ganter (page 28)

Image 2:

“Pre-Show Media” Photo by Amanda Ling (page 28)

Image 3:

“Performance 1 remnants: Cloud” Photo by Amanda Ling (page 29)

Image 4:

“Last Performance accumulation” Photo by Amanda Ling (page 30)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ink drips from the bristles of paint brushes both elegant and spontaneously down paper because it is at the mercy of its landscape. Droplets of ink linger on paper according to their density and position to gravity, much like moving bodies in space. Moving my body and exploring through dance is what I am accustomed to, so naturally my perspective has been crafted to notice the aspects of movement that exist in the world. I moved to Arizona to further my studies in dance and found myself intrigued by the movements within drawing.

As I fumbled through a graduate drawing class in my first year of graduate school, I found a connection between improvisation and the marks I was making on paper. Improvisation has instilled spontaneity, listening, and patience within my personal dance practice. After talking to the people in my drawing course, I began to realize that not many visual artists consider improvisation to be a part of their practice. Perhaps it was my lack of technical ability and training that drew me closer to the messy spontaneous marks I was making in my drawings. These marks led me to question what it meant to find the movement of a line and how to create authentic marks on paper. I also became aware of the dances I was creating through various actions of large-scale drawings and sketches.

Typically, I make dances individually and work as a solo artist. I have chosen to mostly work alone because working collaboratively has proven in the past to be daunting and unsuccessful. In an academic setting, collaboration is often unsuccessful because the work becomes disconnected through miscommunication, forced partnerships, and stubborn attitudes. I admit that I have been both the culprit and victim of such instances. In dance it seems that collaboration is commonly referred to as situations where someone says, "I will make the dance, you do the lights, they will make the costumes, someone else will do the

music, and then we can put it all together in the end." Artists in this situation can work in their own field of expertise using collaborative discussions to compile all of the elements, resulting in a creation that may not have been possible had the collaborators worked on their own. This way of working is one way to collaborate, but I wanted to explore a more integrative method of working together.

It can feel risky to share authority when making art with a group of people, but sometimes when you trust the ones you are working with you may end up being pleasantly surprised. In creating Educued Play, I wanted to take a truly collaborative artistic approach with artists from various disciplines creating work through improvisation in multiple mediums. The collaboration that conspired Educued Play consisted of a musician, a visual artist, a dancer, and a dance media artist. I was fortunate enough to find three other interdisciplinary artists who were interested in improvisation and collaboration. These artists were completely dedicated to the exploration of Educued Play and were invested in the integrity of both the process and the product. We collectively created an improvisational vocabulary and designed a space to perform in.

One of the things I love most about improvisation in performance is the expanded range of human communication possibilities, being able to communicate with others in a space with out necessarily having to rely on words. Instead I use body language and knowledge of my partner's habits to know where to go and what to do. I have been lucky enough to share many dances with friends and improvisers, establishing a connection that allows me to trust in the intuitive flow of movement and choice making possibilities, to create experiences where I can connect with artists in fluid yet spontaneous dances of decision-making and playful intuition. Working with improvisational scores facilitates this process and is something that I have adopted in my personal aesthetic. I believe that scores

can help establish a common language, tone, goal, and sense of time in an improvisation.

While the collaborators of this project had never participated in such a process, they were intrigued by the concept of interacting with one another through multiple mediums using an improvisational score as our overarching structure. So, for the installation of Educated Play we wrote two original improvisation scores that we performed live throughout the course of a week.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My interests in improvisation and the idea of using it as means of performance began when I was in college. Early on I was inspired by a multitude of improvisational artists and choreographers such as Steve Paxton, Anna Halprin, and the Judson Dance Theater. Research on the subject of improvisation and collaboration has been established for many years, but I was mostly inspired by personal experiences to produce Educated Play. Some of the best memories I have of dancing were when I was improvising and those moments have made me who I am as an artist. I have learned that the pure experience of improvisation is a process, more than just the product, which is what I value in my work and daily life.

Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.

- John Dewey, Art As Experience

Philosopher John Dewey describes experience as interaction with people or environments. The communication that occurs within those interactions is one of the things that I am most drawn to in improvisation. When improvisational artists develop a clear method of communication the interactions and choice making becomes effortless and intuitive. The communication instigates choices that constantly create fleeting occurrences. Most improvisational performance art is ephemeral, it happens and is seen or heard, and then it is gone. The process of figuring out what to do in the moment can be equally as beautiful as the product it creates. R. Keith Sawyer references Dewey in saying that, "the work of art is a psychological process." Dewey speaks of the process as being "active and experienced. It is what the product does, it's working" (Sawyer pg. 153). It can be blatant and

clear, or it can be silent and subtle, either way the art that is illustrated in improvisation is often found within the processes.

The concept of language, whether through words or expression, is to establish a common understanding. Collaborative artists strive to develop a common vocabulary in order to more successfully interact with one another. Sawyer points out that, "Each art has its own medium, and each one is like a different language, with our spoken language being just another one of the modes of communication" (Sawyer pg. 155). Dewey believes that, "Art is the most universal form of language ... it is the most universal and freest form of communication" (Sawyer pg. 270). He also emphasizes the communal aspect of art by saying that, "[art] is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity" (Dewey pg. 81). Simply, we can all communicate and collaborate through art.

In Educated Play we communicated with one another through the framework of an improvisational score. As documented in his book, *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment*, Lawrence Halprin explored various types of "scores" and the ensuing relationships between different fields. He pointed out methods that are process-oriented not just result-oriented and researched a variety of scores from primitive, mystical, environmental, to artistic. Even though artists may have differing mediums and different ways of interpreting a score, it is still possible to interact and create relationships with one another through a score.

Halprin's book breaks down the scheme of scores organizing the values, decisions, and performance aspects. The procedure described in the following acronym RSVP represents; Resources you have to work with, Scores that describe the process, Valuation

which analyzes the results of actions, and finally the Performance. This scoring procedure can be done in a number of cycles by rearranging the steps or starting from any of those points. The process of creating Educued Play was a realization of the RSVP acronym. We defined our resources, created two improvisational scores, analyzed the results of our actions in the rehearsals through discussion, and then concluded by having live performances. Our scores were crafted based on what visual moments we valued most, what resources we chose to work with, and also by analyzing the timing and tone that was created by our actions.

During my time at Arizona State University, I have had the opportunity to study with conceptual artist Thomas Lehmen who also worked with various methods of scoring. His book SCHREIBSTÜCK, describes a choreographic score that is performed by three different groups in a canon who have interpreted the score separately. His book illustrates the construction of the score and the possibilities within the versions that are not yet realized. Lehmen's method of scoring focuses on how one defines the parts within the score and when it is necessary to leave something open for interpretation. The SCHREIBSTÜCK score has been an inspiration and supporting reference for my work and reflects collaborative approaches for making choices in a group.

In a creative course with guest artists Michael O'Connor and Brandon Gonzalez I came across the term "generalized reciprocity," which is originally coined as an anthropological expression but also applies to the work we do in improvisation. The concept of generalized reciprocity and the use of focus in improvisation is something I have been utilizing in my practice, but did not define until recently. Nina Martin is an improvisational artist who also utilizes these concepts in her practice and her descriptions have motivated my collaborative work. In an article from Contact Quarterly titled, "Ensemble Thinking:

Compositional Strategies for Group Improvisation,” Martin describes a system of improvisational thinking that enhances the communication between improvisers in a group. Martin describes “conscious composition” that enables individuals within a group to frame their efforts in relation to others so that choices can be clear and a group vocabulary can be built. She introduces concepts of generalized reciprocity that she describes as the skill of “Taking Focus,” which is imperative to working with a group through improvisation. This concept revolves around the practice of being humble yet active and supporting the actions of the group. The concept of generalized reciprocity helped orient my research in making Educated Play to create shared strategies and compositional goals.

When I first began collaborating to produce Educated Play, my compositional goals were focused around the idea of genuine mark making. Two Artists whose experiences in the fields of dance and drawing that have been inspirational in my compositional goals and who also make very genuine marks as a part of their work are Tony Orrico and Katrina Brown. Tony Orrico is a visual artist and choreographer whose drawings are conceptual scores for which he uses his body as a measuring tool of movement. Orrico is a former member of both Trisha Brown Dance Company and Shen Wei Dance Arts. His performance description states that, “He performs his ideas live as a shared process that yields a unique impression or print of the original concept.” I think this quote takes us back to what John Dewey was saying about artistic processes being active and experienced. The idea of a live-shared process was what I strived to create in Educated Play.

Katrina Brown is a European interdisciplinary choreographer who researches and performs the dialogue between movement and drawing. Brown’s movement vocabulary is influenced by the lines she draws and vice versa. Her drawings are reflective of the negotiation between space and time, body and sensation. The materials Brown uses in her

performances are a poetic display of how the tools, which could be anything from the body to charcoal, are stabilizing factors that give awareness to the sensations within a situation. Like the work of Katrina Brown, we attempted to let the lines we drew become a reflection of our movement impulses and a way to heighten our awareness of one another.

All of the aspects of this project were not always fluid and successful in communication. A good reminder of how to deal with those bumpy places throughout the process was a book titled *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* by Stephen Nachmanovitch. It illustrates the struggles and triumphs of artists from various fields and how they utilize improvisation in their practices. The poetic approach to describing the effort of everyday creators walked me through realities of artistic blockage and reminded me to revel in both the process and the product of my creations. Nachmanovitch's text emphasizes body mind connection and how to find peace with one's practice and the complex concept of getting out of one's own way. While creating *Educated Play* I had to get out of my own way a lot. I found peace within my practice by trusting my instincts and allowing time for myself outside of the project. I think that both time and trust were what made up the foundation for our collaboration.

CHAPTER 3

CREATIVE PROCESS

Collaborators

It's often difficult to find a group of people to collaborate with that can establish a pleasant working environment resulting in an equally created and well-developed product. I've been truly fortunate in my artistic research to find three artists, who had humility and a dedication to exploration, with which to make and perform Educated Play. Being a solo artist and independent choreographer, I was worried in the beginning about sharing artistic authority in this work. The anxiety turned out to be unnecessary because early on the collaborators and I established a patient, and respectful give-and-take relationship that allowed the work to unfold. Each of the collaborators came from a different area of the arts: dance, visual arts, and music. After a few months of rehearsal we realized the need for an active videographer in rehearsal to document the process. We mutually decided that it was beneficial to add the videographer as a fourth member of the collaboration to help us interact and improvise with media in the work. Our fourth member was a dance and arts media artist, whose inclusion supported us with perspectives from both mediums.

The collaborators were: myself, a graduate dance student from the School of Dance; Inkyung Lee, a graduate dance student from the School of Dance and Arts Media Engineering; Rossitza Todorova, a graduate drawing student from the School of Art; and Caio Vissicaro, a musician and undergraduate student from the School of Business and Sustainability. Together we delved into each other's aesthetics and the concept of collaboration and improvisation. Our unique personalities and combined talents created an effective team.

Rehearsals

Charcoal dusted floors enlaced with footprints by black dusted palms and feet whisper as a relic of today's rehearsal. As the four of us look around the room at the blank openness, in comparison to the corner we have dirtied with our experiment, we each kind of grin in accomplishment. I begin to ponder how to clean up the space, while Rossi, who is accustomed to being in this charcoal infested environment, goes about restoring order in the way she typically does. As I crumble up the thirty-foot line drawings and designs we created in the score today I briefly glance over the moments we shared making them. There is a slight mist of contentment as I am washing my hands in the hallway bathroom sink. We have rehearsed several times and practiced a number of scores but there is something different about today's practice. There is a cheerful investment in what we are doing; it's a mixture of outgoingness and oblivion. This rehearsal functioned well and I think that this particular event was needed because it has now set an air of excitement to what we can further develop. The aftermath of rehearsal as we are cleaning and packing up is a kinesthetically resonating event. The product and mess we made illustrates our interaction and personally instills a feeling of satisfaction. It seems that all three personalities of the collaborators are organized and controlled, so to both witness and partake in the disorder has been a fulfilling experience. The qualities of playful spontaneity and sprinkled laughs from our rehearsal spark some assurance of the possibilities and hopes I have for this work. The awareness of the left over charcoal staining my hands reminds me of the success I feel in the residue of our rehearsal. I am left feeling eager to participate in our messy rehearsal again, like a child awaiting recess at school. This is an unfamiliar feeling, because I am very particular and obsessive about cleaning up messes, and this time I feel happy lingering in the dust.

(Rehearsal journal entry from April 3rd, 2012)

Our rehearsals shifted a lot from spring to the fall of 2012. By August we had added another collaborator to the group and shifted from using charcoal for our drawings to using ink with large extended brushes. I booked Arizona State University's Step Gallery one year in advance to house this collaborative installation and we were fortunate that our first two weeks of rehearsal were in the gallery space until the first exhibit of the fall semester went up. The first two weeks of fall rehearsals set the tone for our process with Educued Play and helped us to shape a concept for how to put the exhibit together. Even though we were only in the space for a few days, those days allowed us to collaboratively envision the orchestration of the space for our eventual installation.

In the beginning the rehearsal process for Educued Play felt slow because we were all nudging at ideas rather than diving into anything full force. I initially acted as a sort of facilitator for the rehearsals so that we could begin to develop some interactive concepts. After a process of trial and error over the course of about a month we developed a series of games, prompts, and visual instigations. We invested a lot of time developing the concept of “conversation” during rehearsal, striving to create conversations through drawing, dancing, and sounds. Some of our rehearsal consisted of us sitting at pizza restaurants conversing over what themes seemed to work for us in previous rehearsals and what we wanted the scores to include. We started collaboratively writing scores that would allow us to communicate seamlessly with one another as well as with the audience.

When discussing what the scores needed we decided that strong visual moments, which spontaneously evolved in rehearsals, could be re-invented as initiations for sections within the scores. We had assistance choosing these visual moments from outside viewers who came to witness our rehearsals. It was helpful to get periodic feedback from people outside of the work. It can be difficult not having a constant outside eye to craft a work, and since this was a collaborative project we were all always inside of it. We did take time to watch one another in rehearsals in order to better comprehend each other’s mediums and movement habits. After several months of rehearsal we felt quite in tune with one another. While the element of being able to read off of each other felt nice, interacting inside the work, we thought that it might also create a predictable evenness from the outside perspective.

In order to mix things up and change the tone throughout the scores we tried improvising all in one medium to create a sense of unity or focus. Sometimes in rehearsal we found ourselves lost in our individual mediums and feared we looked disconnected. We

determined that it was okay to individually notice or take moments of stillness, not to drop completely out of the work, but to participate through witnessing. The concept of witnessing from inside the work plays off of the idea of generalized reciprocity. We had to learn how to navigate with and around one another during improvisations, while being able to comprehend what the piece needed and how to go about making it happen. We figured this out over time and by being honest with one another, genuinely growing close in the process of making Educued Play. This allowed us to be assertive and articulate within the group about what was needed, without people taking offense.

We established a set of ritualistic interactions during our rehearsal process that carried over into the live performances. I began sharing short spontaneous poems during our time outside of the rehearsal room as a way of bringing our collective focus together entering the space. This practice became an essential part of beginning any performance. One day during rehearsal Rossi informed us of a quirky little trick she had read about. She had read that if you rise up onto your toes in a relevé position and then quickly let the weight drop through your heels to come down, that the vibrations sent through your body mimics the physicality of laughing. Therefore, in doing these heel drop actions you can release the same “happy” endorphins into your body as if you had just been laughing. So, we began doing these heel drops as a part of our entrance ritual to share a sense of happiness with one another. I believe that our improvisations often took on a ritualistic quality because the scores we performed were shaped around concepts of repetition. Our practice could have also resembled a type of ritual because of the way that we carefully created some of the images and the unintentional preciousness that we had for particular moments.

Rehearsals were often hit or miss. We had several days where we were disconnected because of fatigue or simply being distracted by outside factors. But the days when we were

really connected to one another, one hundred percent invested in the moment, allowed us to notice the differences in each experience and realize what we should strive for in the live performances. Rehearsals were also very messy. It never failed that we would leave covered in ink splashes with stained hands and feet, but in a way those messy encounters created camaraderie amongst us. It was amazing to feel the shift in the air and tone of our rehearsals. About a month before the show it was evident that everyone in the collaboration had given themselves completely to the process and exploration of Educated Play, producing a sense of pride and excitement.

The Scores

We collectively wrote two scores to use as a framework for our improvisations. The scores are as follows:

Score 1:

Mad music scientist
Individual repetition
Machine
Duets
Unison (sound)
Discarding action (silence)
Stillness
Boat (exit)

Score 2:

Four (action/ reaction)
Duets in repetition
Unison
Long line image
Break to boats
Unison (shift to one boat)
Four brushes (exit)

It took several sessions of writing, re-writing, and much trial and error to decide on the final two scores. We performed the two scores repeatedly and wanted to make sure they

each created a cohesive dialogue while retaining contrasting qualities so that they could instigate two different kinds of performances. The two scores individually ranged between 30-35 minutes in length. We performed the scores multiple times throughout the course of the weeklong installation. We wrote the scores with the intention of the visual artifacts being created in performance, and accumulating throughout the week.

The scores were listed on programs for the audience to read with some themes that were loosely labeled and open for interpretation. Each section listed was a theme that we either had an inexplicit definition of or used as a transitional reference. The sections were not restrained by time but after practicing each score we began to develop a regular pace with each section. The scores included seven to eight sections some of which repeated. The concepts of repetition and unison were both reoccurring themes from our rehearsals we made them central elements in both of the scores. Even though it is not listed, each score started off with us huddled up outside of the gallery doing our “rituals” and began as we entered the space from the front door.

The following is a breakdown of the sections of each score.

Score 1:

Mad music scientist - This is the beginning section of the score where all artists would experiment creating sound. We labeled it “Mad music scientist” because Caio, who we referred to as our musical scientist, would guide and initiate sounds on various instruments and then the rest of us would develop chaos there after. It started out as a “musical experiment” and we set it as our introductory section to set a loud tone for the score that could vibrate into other sections. We moved on to the next section of the score once someone turned all sounds on the mixing board off.

Individual repetition – This section included designating spaces to improvise based on the

theme of repetition.

Machine – The cue to start this section was for everyone to line up on the longest straight edge of the laid out paper. Then we would proceed with the machine action where one person’s action triggered the person beside them to react and so on.

Duets – After the Machine we seamlessly made our way into two duets. We improvised based on the pure concept of having a duet with one of the other collaborators.

Unison (sound) - The Unison section came back to the idea of making sounds like we started the score with. We transitioned into this section easily from the Duets by just adding sounds to both dances to bring all four of us together.

Discarding action (silence)- Our concept of discarding came in the form of discarding the sounds from the previous section to create dynamic silence.

Stillness – After discarding sound and creating silence we also decided to find stillness where ever we were before moving into the final section.

Boat (exit) – This final section was labeled “boat” because we moved into a new area of the gallery onto a long strip of paper that in rehearsal had resembled a boat that we did not want to fall off of. The long strip of paper was strung up between two wire lines that ran the width of the gallery and once we were on the “boat” we all attempted to stay on it and interact together without falling off. We found our exit off the boat and out of the gallery by finding a connected web between the four of us that would eventually break and send us out.

Score 2:

Four (action/ reaction)- This beginning section was a play off of the idea of four, whether that was making four lines, stacking four paint brushes, creating four sounds, and also representative of us as four collaborators. We came up with the idea of this section from an

image and two occurrences from rehearsal. The image was Inky setting up four paintbrushes against the paper. What occurred afterwards was the action and reaction part, Rossi proceeded to drip ink in elegant lines down the same lines that Inky had initially created by the brushes, of which Inky subsequently pushes down all of the brushes in reaction. This incident sparked our improvisational theme of four with the concept of acting and reacting to what we each were creating.

Duets in repetition - In the first score we investigated the idea of repetition individually so in this score we created duets that improvised with repetition.

Unison- The concept of this section was quite true to its name. We wanted to attempt to all be doing something together and within an unidentified medium. Sometimes we would end up all drawing the same kind of lines or moving back and fourth in the space with the same pattern. Sometimes we would all be in separate mediums but all riffing off of the same unified idea.

Long line image - To transition out of the unison section we created a visual image that stood out to us from rehearsal. The Image was one that Inky crafted of all of us stretching a line across the space held together by the long paintbrushes that were connected to dowels. We always knew to try to recreate this image once someone distributed paintbrushes to everyone. From there we usually moved based on weight shifting and resistance between the rods and then eventually stretched across the gallery arms and brushes extended.

Break to boats – This was our transition to the next section, we would feel the weight shifting through the rods in each others hands and then we would in unison drop the brushes to floor breaking the line. From there we shift to the two “boats” of paper hung across the gallery where we would have two duets on each boat.

Unison (shift to one boat)- After improvising in our duets we would fold up the farthest

paper boat in the gallery and all come together on the front boat. From there we would improvise collectively in the confined space.

Four brushes (exit) – We returned back to the beginning concept of four in the end, except with the specificity that we would all four come together with brushes. Usually we ended up pointing with the brushes in hand and walking towards the same spot on the paper. This would develop into a short play of mark making over one another. While this image is not listed in the specific score, it was known amongst us that the final unison dance on the boat would contain the visual image of us closing ourselves inside the paper and making what we called a “house” out of the paper. This was usually the last image of the score, with all four of us huddled around one another in the paper teepee, before we would exit the space.

The Exhibit

Setting up the gallery exhibit for Educued Play was unlike any technical production I had ever had to put together. Fortunately I had assistance from all of the collaborators, which included Rossi who has set up numerous gallery exhibits on her own, as well as a hired production person from the School of Dance. When I arrived for the load in, the Friday before the opening, all the power tools, screws, and mounting devices that I had never used before overwhelmed me. The production of a gallery exhibit was just as, if not more time consuming, than a technical rehearsal in a theater. From measuring, cutting, and putting grommets on the giant strips of paper, to leveling, hanging, and taping everything down I learned an entire new set of handy skills. We spent two full days in the gallery, with the help of collaborators and friends, installing the exhibit.

The Educued Play exhibit was presented in the Arizona State University’s School of Art Step Gallery the week of November 5th through the 9th, 2012. We created a pristine

paper layered corner in the gallery that extended out towards the windows to hold our live performances. It of course did not stay pristine once we began improvising in the space because then it would also hold the relics of our interactions. We hung two large strips of paper laced with grommets by four wires across the gallery to create rollout paper barriers or what we referred to as “boats” (see appendix image 1). The uncovered sidewall housed a TV that played a video reel of some of our rehearsal footage as well as two other monitors on the floor of our paper corner that ran throughout the day (see appendix image 2).

The first show in the gallery was our shortest because there was an excited urgency in our improvisation. The gallery exhibit that opened on Monday initially had a clean exposed look to it, but once we had our first live showing at noon that day we marked the space with a grey cloud like drawing (see appendix image 3). Throughout the week we performed three more days during which six more live performances would take place and accumulate in the space. On the first day of the exhibit we used light diluted grey ink that then grew in gradation from light to dark each day. The opening reception Tuesday evening was the most vibrant of all the performances because the crowd was so large that came to see the exhibit and we had already broken in the space and settled in to how it felt to be in front of the audience.

Our last show of the week on Thursday night had a nostalgic tone. A photographer blogged about the show that night and said, “It was poignant, melancholic, and familial. Each movement was thoughtful and slow- they didn’t want it to end” (<http://brianganter.com/?p=917>). And he was exactly right; we did not want it to end. After so many months of rehearsal, research, and a week full of thrilling performances we had grown close to one another and to the work. It felt bittersweet for it to come to an end. By the last day of the installation the once clean space was obscured by a giant collection of

grey and black ink patterns, prints, splashes, rips, and tears that had accumulated throughout the week (see appendix image 4). The joyful and chaotic piece that ultimately inhabited the space was a reflective relic of our existence and experiences throughout the exhibition.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

I feel that I was successful in creating a genuine interdisciplinary collaboration and a performance installation that reflected my research on improvisation and collaboration. I think that this collaboration worked well because of the respect I gave to the process and time it takes to let things progress. Our mutual respect for the research and each other allowed an ensemble process to evolve. Being able to let go of the “control” aspect of my ideas and letting the form and relationships genuinely develop allowed for more cohesive ideas to emerge.

The overall design of the gallery was close to what I had originally envisioned. The collaborators were not afraid to share ideas they had for the space and the fusion of all of our images crafted a space that was better than what I could have constructed on my own. Even though it was a collaborative effort, the installation still embodied my personal aesthetic. I often refer to my aesthetic as a type of organized chaos or what I call a “dusty kind of sparkle,” it gives the illusion that something pristine has been dirtied; when in reality the dirt is as intentionally placed as the clean. I think the initial clean lines and objects we placed in the space that were then splashed and torn exemplified this quality.

I knew early on that this project would not work well on a traditional proscenium stage. A traditional stage set up would not have highlighted the detail of the communication between the collaborators, and also would not have allowed the designs we envisioned to exist. The scale of the Step Gallery was a key component that shaped our final product. The gallery is fairly small and has one wall that is all windows. The intimacy of the gallery space drew our interactions into close proximity with the audience. The windows allowed the exhibit to be viewed alternately from outside of the gallery and also produced a natural

source of light during the day that was less stark than track lighting. The Step Gallery was an appropriate venue to produce Educued Play.

The specific artists who collaborated to create Educued Play were one of the main factors for the success of this work. The key component that made our process and performances strong was humility. We never pulled away from each other in the midst of a struggle in the improvisation, we stayed invested and figured out how to solve the problem. We found trust in what we didn't know and how to listen to each other and move forward together. Each collaborator approached the space and scores with an open mind and sense of stability that came from the group dynamic. Educued Play would have been a completely different piece had I worked with another group of people.

An effective strategy in the performances was the intermingling of each performer's artistic medium. The only medium that was unequally utilized was use of live feed and cameras. While we did attempt to share that aspect in the show, it was the resource we practiced with the least. I think if I were to reset this piece I would start rehearsing with the use of the camera and live feed from the beginning. I do not regret using the live feed because I do believe that it created an opportunity for the audience to see the work from various perspectives, but I do wish that the media interactions had been more equally integrated in the scores.

Throughout this process I was challenged by several tasks within mediums that I was unfamiliar with. I had to constantly consider how audiences coming from both dance and visual arts worlds would view the Educued Play exhibit. It was challenging to negotiate the production timeline and procedures for the use of the gallery because I am so accustomed to working based on the technical systems of the School of Dance versus the School of Art. An ongoing frustration for me throughout this process has been trying to describe the

ephemeral nature of Educated Play in words. We had set the use of words aside while communicating within our improvisations. It can be frustrating to describe performance art using writing as the vehicle, but I understand its value and I have considered that maybe writing can be another discipline adding to the improvisational conversation that is Educated Play.

If I were to do this performance installation again I would utilize the methodologies we developed to find specificity in new interactions. We started the process of creating the performance scores with few parameters and were later able to clarify the intent of the interactions and the composition. The specificity that developed came forth over time. In order for the work to develop with a new group of people, the process and our practice together would certainly require generous scheduling. However, now that I know when the specificity and careful placement of each of the elements surfaced I can aid in instigating the understanding sooner. Our approach to the instruments and our awareness to the overall composition arose after we chose and shaped the environment we would perform in. The importance of the space and its design was essential to establish how we would interact and react during the live performances. Recognizing the group aesthetic or overall atmosphere we were striving to create was crucial in finding specificity in the actions.

The conscious composition evolved from a common set of sounds, marks, and movements. Our approach to finding unified actions across the mediums involved repetitive indicators. We started with basic features, like short and sustained sounds and marks that were lines and circles. The repetitive nature of our initial actions allowed for a base layer that we could then add elements in context to what already existed. The base layer or instigating action was typically introduced by the “expert” artist in that area and once a revolving sound or mark had been made we could all listen and look for moments to join in. We refined our

approach to the sound and the mark making through careful listening and making specific dedicated choices. If a hesitant sound is introduced into the space the environment can become mushy and vague. Through the practice of commitment to our actions, listening to each other through all of the mediums, and striving for conversational instead of chaotic sounds, we were able to develop a more refined vocabulary.

Establishing a set of basic actions is beneficial to recreating the style of this kind of work because it gives a foundation for new material to be built upon. Building upon the accumulating layers of our drawings with the tempo of the marks being made also became an intentional part of our performances. The aesthetic definition we created for the visual remnants evolved with the specificity of the mark making. The drawings were gestural chaotic pathways that represented the movement that inhabited the space during the performances. The nature of the images contributed to the visual statement that existed even without the dance. With the knowledge of this intention we were able to specify our placement of the mark making in the composition. In recreating this work I would need to establish the environment in which we would be working, express what the aesthetic intention is behind the actions, and specify how movement can be expressed in the images.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

My research has led me to believe that the positive outcomes from collaborating and investing in interdisciplinary play are well worth the work. Educated Play has made me believe that artistic synergy is possible. While finding such a unique group of artists to work with can be rare, I now feel motivated to seek out more situations with similar promise. I have known for some time that my personal performance qualities exist well in close proximity to audiences and have come to the realization that my aesthetic thrives more in intimate gallery spaces than on large proscenium stages. I am thankful for the knowledge I have gained on gallery procedures during this process as I hope to produce work in similar venues in the future.

I began working on this project unsure of how the merging of disciplines would work and never anticipated the evolution of such a close-knit collaboration. Throughout the process I began to see endless possible ways to present the research, but by collaboratively establishing what was important we came upon a concept that allowed the work to reveal its true nature. I felt it was necessary to personally investigate collaborative improvisation in order to further develop my own understanding and creative practice of it. By creating Educated Play I found the qualities that I value most among artists I have worked with, as well as in the collaborative process itself. I value working with artists who are patient, humble, and who are able to both see and create subtle poetic occurrences. In the collaborative process I value ample amounts of time to establish an active vocabulary and to let the work breathe. Collaborating and improvising with such strong and smart artists has opened my eyes to what methodologies and factors make a work like this successful.

After establishing a working relationship with a group of artists and creating a successful performance installation, I am left wondering where this research will lead me next. I am still asking myself in what ways I could further improve and initiate the functions within interdisciplinary composition. I am contemplating how I can recreate Educued Play in different venues and with different artists. How do I implement the qualities and mindset it took to make the work? After documenting this event and creating these methodologies I feel that I can now transfer the creative processes of Educued Play to other endeavors. I am left with a curiosity for what our collaboration will inspire and what other ways we can yield artistic synergy.

My research on improvisation and collaboration has left me feeling confident in my aesthetic and ability to create interdisciplinary partnerships. Educued Play has been a meaningful experience and true culmination of all of the concepts and creative inquiries I have had throughout my graduate studies at Arizona State University. I feel extremely fortunate to have found such an incredible group of artists to collaborate in making this project. I feel inspired that my co-collaborators have been willing to explore the unknown with me, and that a prosperous art exhibit emerged as a result of our inquiry. This project has clarified the type of work I would like to experience and create in future artistic ventures.

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APPENDIX

EDUCED PLAY PHOTOGRAPHS

Image 1: "Boat" Photo by Brian Ganter



Image 2: "Pre-Show Media" Photo by Amanda Ling



Image 3: "Performance 1 remnants: Cloud" Photo by Amanda Ling



Image 4: "Last Performance accumulation" Photo by Amanda Ling

