

Monster Recess Reflection

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While creating this interactive performance project *Monster Recess* centered on childhood playfulness and shame resilience, I gained several insights into the process of creating engaging (SEED – striking, engaging, entertaining, delicious) performance and into my own skills as an artist. Below I include reflections centered around six major takeaways from this class for me.

Takeaway #1: Playtesting is Designing

Karimi utilized a framework of “playtesting” to describe our rehearsal and/or experimentation with ideas for our performance. Initially, when I heard and understood this concept, I viewed it as a sort of data collection only to verify whether a mostly complete project worked. While I understood the trial-and-error nature of the process and the relatively low stakes, by the end of the course, I understood playtesting as a way of using a trial-and-error framework at multiple levels. Within a playtest, I can experiment with several options and allow the work to *play* with participants as a means of actually designing the piece. In some ways, playtesting acts as a means of co-creation. Now that I have internalized this new dynamic, I plan to utilize playtesting as a framework for rehearsal with theatrical pieces based in devising, interactivity, or co-creation, as I can see the give-and-take and trial-and-error dynamics benefiting all of these creative processes.

Takeaway #2: Consent

In tandem with my courses in intimacy direction and devising, this process led me to consider more deeply the nature of consent between audience and performers. For audience members, while the element of surprise may seem like an intriguing artistic point of manipulation, certain types of surprises lead audiences to feel violated in a disengaging *and* harmful way. Violating expectations or assuming consent about photos or other interactions kills play, contributes to possible harm, and pulls away from the richness of the experience. For performers, interactive performance often leads participant curiosity to increase in a way that can blur boundaries and make social norms less likely to completely govern behavior (due to the immersion in a new world). This leads me as an artist to consider how *boundaries* can become more easily identified by my player.

Takeaway #3: Balance & Extremes

In the process of creating Monster Recess, I often allowed my observations to lead me to swing to more “extreme” choices. For example, when I’d noticed in the prior semester that finding actors for interactive pieces was challenging, or when I noticed at Meowulf that heavy bodies of text were disengaging, I then decided to try to eliminate text or actors from my piece. Furthermore, when I noticed engagement with “cute” or accessible objects, I dove full throttle into a majorly objects-based piece. On the other side of the experience, I now see that *balance* of modalities for interaction (actors, text, objects, etc.) creates an effective interactive experience. Using the assets of the different options worked best for me, and it also made it easy for my players to engage where they felt more drawn. This learning also taught me to avoid taking observations too far without additional experimentation or deeper analysis.

Takeaway #4: Simplicity

In much of my work, I often value consideration of nuance and complexity within theoretical perspectives and human experiences. While this experience did not affect my value for complexity, it did emphasize the importance of simplicity within art and user experiences. Cramming a complex theory into a theatrical performance can often actually *cheapen* its complexity and nuance in addition to overwhelming a participant. Additionally, delicious performances become easy to enter and experience. Monster Recess taught me that while digesting complexity may be an essential initial step to creating meaningful art about a topic, reliance of instinct, organic human interaction, and the simplicity of playfulness not only leads to more engaging art but also better opens the door to more conscious consideration of complexity down the road.

Takeaway #5: Glitch

In this course we discussed “Glitch Feminism” (Legacy Russell) and the concept of the “glitch” more broadly. In this project, I noticed the way that play itself acted as a glitch. It heavily and strategically *disrupted* the space on Wednesday afternoons and during the performance by countering some of the shame-based or behavioral norms that often control our behavior or limit our ability to express our joy freely. Furthermore, the play allowed me to embrace my own inner glitch—my own tendency as a human toward playfulness and the way that I uniquely disrupt a room through my personal characteristics, flaws, or strengths. This emphasized for me as well how a glitch does not need to be destructive, nor does it necessarily have to be very publicly self-conscious about its glitch-ness (the project never said “this is a glitch right here!”). Through Monster Recess, I found myself becoming energized by the possibility of infusing “glitch”—or, in some ways, humanness—into spaces that often brush aside imperfect human beauty to make way for more “productive” or sterile systems. I hope to consider how I might frame some of my other work around glitches.

Takeaway #6: Facilitation

Facilitation has become an integral part of my own practice and artistry during my time at ASU, and the Monster Recess process led me to reconsider (1) the limits of (facilitator-led) facilitations in interactive arts-based pieces and (2) what I consider “facilitation” to include. Initially in this process, I found myself leaning heavily on my skills as a facilitator to lead activities in a room, and this simply did not work effectively for an engaging interactive piece with fun objects and audiences who often desire to interact with fun characters instead of a teacher-like figure. Out of this observation, I decided to reframe facilitation to include how certain elements like aesthetic choices, object placement, and character can act as “facilitators.” By recognizing the value of my facilitator role in other spaces and its great limits in an immersive or interactive performance, I allowed my project to better embrace fun and engagement.