Fall 2015

Subtera: An Integration of Film and Dance

Aundrea Anderson

University of Colorado Boulder, aundrea.anderson@colorado.edu

Recommended Citation
Anderson, Aundrea, "Subtera: An Integration of Film and Dance" (2015). Undergraduate Honors Theses. 999.
https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/999

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses
Part of the Dance Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, Film Production Commons, and the Other Film and Media Studies Commons

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Honors Program at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
Subtera:
An Integration of Film and Dance

Aundrea Anderson
University of Colorado Boulder
Department of Theatre and Dance
November 4, 2015

Figure 1 “Ripping Off the Mask” Britt Ford, Taylor King, Aundrea Anderson, Sheridan Bernstein, Taylor Tolibas

Thesis Advisor:
Michelle Ellsworth| Department of Theatre and Dance

Committee Members:
Theodore Stark| Department of Theatre and Dance
Kerry Reilly| Program for Writing & Rhetoric
Table of Contents

Abstract---------------------------------------------------------------3
Prologue---------------------------------------------------------------4
The Initial Dive--------------------------------------------------------5
The Inspiration---------------------------------------------------------5-8
The Installation--------------------------------------------------------8-14
  The Drowning---------------------------------------------------------9-12
  The Transformation---------------------------------------------------12
    The Cellular--------------------------------------------------------12-13
    The Vertebrate------------------------------------------------------13-14
    The Subterranean----------------------------------------------------14-15
The World of Subtera---------------------------------------------------15
  Movement One: The Surface---------------------------------------------15-19
  Movement Two: The Drop-----------------------------------------------19-21
  Movement Three: Trauma----------------------------------------------21-23
  Movement Four: Survival of the Fittest------------------------------23-25
The Next Step---------------------------------------------------------25-27
Conclusion-------------------------------------------------------------27-28
Works Cited------------------------------------------------------------29-30
Abstract

Subtera is a thirteen minute multimedia dance performance and installation work which incorporates the two-dimensional film and three-dimensional dance forms. This paper explores the similarities of these art forms and how they relate to one another in order to create an emotive image for the audience. In particular, the work Subtera uses inspiration from various Hollywood productions to generate the content of the performance. Repetitive themes in both film installation and live dance performance reveal themes of disaster, rebirth, survival and evolution. The paper discusses how the film and dance elements reinforce one another and these themes. Furthermore, the theoretical purpose for creating this work is further analyzed. The purpose of creating this work was to generate a fully immersed multimedia performance in which the mind of a filmmaker and the mind of a choreographer are fused into one.
Prologue

In the multimedia dance piece, Subtera, and its accompanying installation works The Drowning, The Cellular, The Vertebrate, and The Subterranean, I combined my study and research in both film and dance mediums. As a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) candidate in both film and dance, my constant effort is to unlock the visual power and influences that both art forms have on one another. Throughout a year-long process, I choreographed, directed, filmed and performed the various elements of this work, fully immersing myself in my research and the execution of the piece. My goal and continuous exploration is to further meld the two mediums in the setting of a live performance space.

It is a challenge to clearly contextualize my work because both my philosophical and aesthetic research is so intertwined in these two forms. For every action in one medium, multitudes of inspiration and direction are drawn from the other. The challenge is presented in articulating the constant conversation between the two mediums. However, writing about this work, I have further clarified my process of integrating the two forms. The process is a complex and cyclical mode of creation, an interconnected web of ideas and inspiration that are in constant conversation with one another.

My intention in creating Subtera is to infuse my newly discovered process and manifest it in a final live performance. My hope is that through this paper the inspiration, research, and process can be fully articulated, painting a spider web of inspiration as various images and movements weave in and out of the work. The final performance, Subtera, is the result of constant conversation between image and movement. The two are reintegrated across the mediums of film and dance and finally into live performance work.
The Initial Dive

I have an interest in post-apocalyptic worlds. As a child, I was drawn to the endless possibility in creating alternate realities. In science fiction there are no boundaries or absurdities that are not possible, especially if the world as we know it is no longer a model of reality. I was particularly influenced by science fiction films growing up with many cult classics in this genre of filmmaking. Mad Max, Waterworld, The Road, The Time Machine and many more explore the impact of environmental change and the survival of humanity. In diving more deeply into the realities of my inspiration films, I began to construct an alternate reality of my own, one married to science fiction and dystopian society.

Dystopian by definition is an unpleasant world. The opposite of an idealized utopia, dystopian worlds are widely the result of social or environmental degradation (Hughes, 23). For example, the film Mad Max is an iteration of this social decline of society leading to chaos. Similarly, The Road, Waterworld and The Time Machine are all the result of environmental events that erases society as we know it. I was drawn to the chaos attached to these worlds as well as the resulting depiction of humanity. In creating my world of Subtera, I wanted to explore the rebuilding of a human-like species. A new civilization that possesses the animal aggression of evolution as well as the intellectual precursor of modern humanity. Thus, Subtera began to take shape as an abstracted science fiction narrative told through both film and dance.

The Inspiration

Melding ideas from these Hollywood blockbusters, I created the world in which this work could exist and then began to flesh out the creatures that inhabit that
environment. The creatures are what I imagined first. They are scaled beings with webbed hands; they have gills on their necks and forearms as a result of evolving in a deep-water environment. Their appearance was very specific as a result of both environment and evolutionary survival. In interpreting this image and bringing it into reality, I was interested in the visual of a performer that was also an alternate representation of humanity. These creatures are intended to bring out an animalistic persona in a new world order. This is the reflection and integration of dystopia, a loss of known civilization.

A new experiential environment became very important to me in the creation process. With creatures that are physically and psychologically so specific, the environment in which they live needed to exhibit a similar level of clarity. I investigated water and deep ocean space in all of my work up to this point. Specifically, I was influenced by deep-sea free divers. The divers travel as far as they can into the dark abyss with only the promise that their will to survive will return them to the surface. Thinking of the increasing pressure that these bodies experience, it was only natural that a pressurized underwater habitat is where the creatures of my own creation exist. Largely the films *The Abyss* directed by James Cameron and *Waterworld* directed by Kevin Reynolds inspired this environment. Both films are of the science fiction genre, but more importantly, they resemble pinpoints in cinema where water was a perpetrator of conflict and discovery. My intention, through both the pre-installation and the live performance of *Subtera*, was to actualize a visceral deep underwater environment inhabited by this new civilization.
This new world became progressively clearer to me and the creatures became characters in a very detailed story. However, the “characters”, similar to characters in a film, required further development. I began with an examination of gender in this new world order. All of my performers: Britt Ford, Sheridan Bernstein, Taylor Tolibas, Taylor King, and myself identify as women. I saw my creatures living in a single gendered society as a result of being influenced by feminist theory, specifically the work of Laura Mulvey and the male gaze. In Mulvey’s text, she describes the male gaze as intrusive, sexual and a projection of the male ego. For the female body this act of looking is termed “to-be-looked-at-ness.” It is the result of an active male look onto a passive female body (Mulvey, 10). This theory is practiced in film studies. However, there is a similar sexualization and passivity practiced on the body of female performers.

I did not want my performers to be subject to the patriarchal male gaze within the space of the stage. In a single gendered society these female creatures would not experience inequality based on sex, nor would their own physical strength be diminished as a result of a patriarchal driven male gaze. Without the presence of a male form, societal patriarchy and the objectification attached to it cannot exist within the stage space. A male body in the space would inherently establish a gendered hierarchy in the work, which is something I desired to neutralize and avoid.

My female creatures are my personal manifestation of mythical Amazonian society. As symbols of female power and strength, the Amazons are the definition of female warriors. It was important to me to exhibit and channel this level of physicality and athleticism in order to establish these women as a master race, and sole remnants of
their homosapien ancestry. The aggression, physicality and unison movements are also elements that inform and have established my current movement aesthetic.

The character, environment and inspiration were all clear to me at this initial point of creation. However, I still had questions about the development of these creatures. How did they come to be? What made them the way they are in the world in which they live? “Without intention, dance loses its significance” (Anderson). In this instance, intention for the work starts with the past. This was my inspiration to develop the installation film works proceeding Subtera’s live performance.

**The Installation**

Film has a unique ability to manipulate as well as communicate the traditional narrative structure. As a story, I saw the entirety of Subtera as an abstracted narrative. The earth is submerged in water as a result of a catastrophic environmental event. Subsequently, terrestrial life ceases to exist causing a new process of evolution. Cells begin to divide and basic life forms evolve from these small cells, ultimately giving rise to a more intellectually developed civilization. The narrative development was important to me in order to communicate to my audience in a more visual, experiential, and visceral way than simply writing a paragraph in the program notes. For this reason, I looked to film to communicate through image and movement the abstracted development of my narrative structure.
The Drowning

It all started with the Drowning. I am falling through water in a vast empty space, looking at my body in a medium wide shot tracking downward. My white gown billows weightlessly around me. Cut, the camera has moved to a point-of-view shot as brown curls obscure my vision. Downward, I progress into the dark green sea. Back arched, sternum exposing my heart to the surface, arms reaching out as though I am greeting this beautiful death with an embrace. A slight tug at my ankle brings a new realization; something from the darkened abyss is keeping me under (Anderson).

This excerpt is taken from a memory of a vivid dream documented in my journal in September of 2014. In my dreams, details are made more present, as though the experience I am having is actualized through the lens of a camera. The outer voyeur’s eyes on me create a second layer of looking. But I am that same voyeur looking at
myself, as I am the character in a disjointed film of the subconscious. This ability to see and experience within my dreams makes a miniature film in my head. Cut-ins and varying shots make up the experience and focuses my attention to otherwise minute details. I was wearing a golden ring in this dream as I drift down, a detail presented to me with a brief close up. In this dream I was drowning purity, but it was a gentle death.

A similar image can be found in the final scene of *The Piano* directed by Jane Campion, a famous moment frequently referenced in film education. The main character, Ada McGrath, who is mute, is on a boat with her most prized piano wanting to throw it overboard. Obligingly the piano topples into the sea. Strategically placing her foot in the rope that had tethered the piano to the boat, Ada is pulled down with it. She sinks towards the ocean floor connected to the object that symbolizes both her freedom and captivity. In the epilogue, the piano is again referenced as Ada imagines it in its watery grave and she is suspended above it. This image of a drowned woman suspended in the water is what inspired the content and movement in *The Drowning*.

In creating *The Drowning* for the installation portion of my performance, it was important to communicate the concept that everything from the old world has been consumed by water.

*Hand twists up to forehead, palm facing out, a deep inhale of water. Quick swipe down left hand comes to the ribs, right arm driven down straight into the space, forcing air from the lungs. Reset to a quiet neutral. Snap, back arched, hands flared at ribcage, a rigid inhale. Reset and repeat.*

This is the movement sequence in the first film installation performed by three female dancers in the 16mm film loop entitled *The Drowning*. The women of this looped
film are stuck in the monotony of time and space constantly swallowing water, but never fully drowning. They are metaphorical virgins sacrificed to the sea as the Earth is swallowed in water.

This process of generating movement is a strategy I developed and practiced throughout the creation of the work Subtera. Through this process, I take movements viewed in various inspiration films and interpret them on the canvas of the dancing body. It is a process of transposition in which movement from the two-dimensional screen is reformatted into the three-dimensional world of a live performing body. The movement of this film is drawn from scenes in films such as The Hours directed by Stephen Daldry and The Abyss directed by James Cameron. A detailed indentation of the scene from Daldry’s film in which the character, Laura Brown, is about to commit suicide by swallowing a bottle of pills was my prominent muse for this section.

As Laura contemplates death, staring into the camera laying on a hotel bed, water rushes out from beneath her, swallowing her body as she takes a desperate gasp of air. Her back arches up towards the camera, which is in a birds-eye view overhead. This image inspired the arched back that is prominent in this scene of The Drowning and is later a revisited movement motif in the live performance of Subtera.

The motion is violent and desperate, needing the accompaniment of a gasp for air. Within the narrative structure of the piece, the women are gasping for air as they have just been washed ashore. Similarly, the movement of the punch down as the left fist comes to the ribs is inspired by the film The Abyss. Towards the end of this film, scientist, Lindsey Brigman, lets herself drown in order to be carried back to the underwater compound and revived. CPR is performed. There are violent pushes on her
chest, just below the ribs. The movement created is a reflection of that; giving yourself CPR in a struggle to revive. From these scenes that exist within the second dimension, movement was inspired within the space of the third. This movement was then reintegrated, being caught on film for the installation loop of *The Drowning*. The process is a cycle, constantly transitioning back and forth, as one medium is necessary in the creation of the other.

**The Transformation**

*The Transformation* is the second part of the three-part film installation in which I characterized the evolution of these creatures. I drew much of the inspiration for this section from evolutionary science. In evolutionary science, life comes from water. For this reason, life lost to a great flood would logically be reborn in this new water world. I wanted to explore the transformation in time periods, equivalent to how we currently classify the Jurassic Period or the Mesozoic Period. To do this, I sectioned off time as categories of evolutionary history and depicted them through projected images in a three part projected installation.

The Cellular

![Figure 3 “Mutation”](image-url)
This is the stage in which evolution begins. I had seen work of flow visualization, the process of making the physics of fluid flows visible, from a class taught by Jean Hertzberg at the University of Colorado Boulder in the fall of 2014. I relished in the slow and organic development of liquids as they evolved finding new pathways through water. This film is the two-dimensional representation of this three-dimensional process.

Shooting on an iPhone 6, I utilized the slow motion application to turn the flow process of ink in water into a meditative transformation resembling the mutation and development of cells. To further this microscopic visual, the films were placed in a circular mask. The circle becomes a motif. In the context of the live performance, the circles are reintroduced through textured projections of light and color.

The Vertebrates

Figure 4 “Small Organism”
In evolutionary progression, the evolution from cells results in more complex creatures, ones that have spines and bones. These creatures are distant relatives of the present inhabitants, therefore, I equated the existence of these creatures with that of dinosaurs. I drew this inspiration from the computer-generated beasts from Discovery’s *Dinosaurs*, specifically focusing on the prehistoric sea creatures presented in the work. In order to enforce the passage of time, those viewing these creatures in the present would revisit them as fossils. I went to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and filmed the many bones and fossils that are on display. It was not important for me to give full visuals of these creatures because they are meant to be incomplete. The ambiguity of their actual appearance is a result of the lack of higher thinking beings, at the intellectual level of humans, to analyze the remains. The image projected is further distorted to look antiquated, as though it came from an old TV or VCR recording in order to further emphasize a progression of time.

**The Subterranean**

This final installation is shown inside the performance space. It is a written explanation of the time period in which *Subtera* exists. As the audience walks in, text is projected onto the curtain similar to a title card in a museum exhibit. The creatures and the live performance now become the final installation. Standing in the space the audience is literally transferred from the representative world of the two-dimensional film, shown through the outside film installation, into the three-dimensional world of *Subtera*. The space is tangible and molded to reflect a deep-sea environment. An ambient underwater soundscape is playing as the audience takes their seats. They are no longer voyeurs in the space but rather participants and inhabitants of this new environment. The
creatures slither from behind the curtain taking their space on the stage. With this action, the creatures become a live representation within the final installation space.

**The World Of *Subtera***

The installation work prior to this exhibit is presented to the audience in order to establish narrative context for the environment they are about to enter. It was important to me, that as the audience enters, they would be transported into an entirely fictional world; the deep-sea world of *Subtera*. In this work, the film projections are used as textured light play in order to enforce the aquatic environment in which the live performance takes place. The film is projected onto the floor similar to how the texture of the surface reflects light when looking up from below. Playing as the audience enters is a subtle ambient track incorporating identifiable water noises with spacious drones as though the audience is inside a submarine. Maintaining the intention of integrating the two and three-dimensional space of film and dance, the move into the live performance draws projection in as a part of the choreography. Projection is used in the live performance as a manipulator of space and a visceral tool used to enforce environment.

**Movement One: The Surface**

As the live performance begins, various spotlights fade in and out on five female creatures that inhabit the stage. The movement is slow but alert, moving at their own pace, the dancers collectively return to a crouched position. All goes to black as an abrupt drone comes in. There is a slow fade up of three circular projections. Deep red in color, the projections reflect the calm texture that takes place on the surface of water.
As though activating a collective military unit, the five women curve up through their spines, hands clawed and tactile moving up the legs. There is an air of precision, awareness, and animalism. The first movement of this work is the shortest, but it functions to establish mood and character. All elements enter into dialogue with this initial introduction in order to present a clear environment in which this piece takes place. The initial reaction is focused on how the creatures look, a factor that was the initial visual in my head at the start of this process.

Slow fades of light in and out only give glimpses of the creatures as they sequence through the movement. The mystery of their appearance builds tension until they come together as a single unit. Emilie Muldoon created the costumes for this work.
She helped to craft the image of these creatures by placing them in full body suits in order to resemble a protective layer of skin. There is variation in color to reflect evolutionary differences between the creatures, but uniformity is presented through the collective militaristic jacket overtop. Various deep-sea creatures whose scales and coloring is developed as a result of existing at such depths influenced the texture and metallic quality of the costume. Referencing their vertebrate ancestors, the creatures have scales down the side of their legs as well as decorative scales over their breastbones. These designs were inspired by Alexander McQueen’s spring/summer collection of 2010, which exhibited an underwater theme focusing on patterns, metallic and textures.

The uniformity was important for me in its relation to the context of the work. I pictured these creatures as a school of fish. Moving together and in unprescribed cannon, there is a reflection of a collective mind, all locking into each others’ movement. The collective mind of the species is a tactic for survival, being aware of your ‘pack’ assists in the survival of the species. All parts are contributing to the survival of the whole. Influenced by pack hunting species, there is a success and power that can be found in collective movement. It was my intention to channel this same power through moving female bodies. Collective mind requires unison of the species, which repeated in movement, is enforced by costume. These creatures are completely non-human while still resembling the human form.

In this opening section, projection brings the two-dimensional form into the performance space with the purpose of giving context to depth and enhancing a kinesthetic textured experience. The introduction of projection is tactile. Texture was an important element for me to communicate because environment was such a driving force...
behind the creation of this work. All elements that are introduced are a result of being in a deep-sea environment. The projections serve the function of expressing varying depth.

There are five zones to the ocean, which correspond to varying depths (Collins 32). Corresponding to these depths is the color spectrum at which varying wavelengths of light are absorbed by water. The order that colors fall out on the color spectrum is as follows: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet (Collins 34). The color and textures exhibited by the projection, therefore, correspond and function to further depict the descent of this species into the greatest depths as the piece continues. The placement of projection equally plays a choreographic role as separate entities that are both image and movement.

The first sets of projections are red as a result of being at the shallowest layer of the oceanic zones. It holds space in conversation with the bodies that move in and out of the textured patterns. The textures of this projection and the projections that follow throughout the performance were inspired by installation artist, Lachlan Turczan, and his piece “Cymatic Sun.” In this work Turczan uses a glass bowl filled with water and a speaker projecting the water displacement onto a wall. This resulted in textures that changed with the varying sound waves. I didn’t have the same availability to materials nor skills to achieve Turcanz’s method. However, I found that the textured reflection of light through water yields a similar effect. Placing a light in front of a filled fish tank I was able to reflect the textures of moving water onto the wall and record them. The colored filters of the textures were added in post-production.

The physical movement of this first layer also reflects the depth at which the creatures are moving. There is ease to their movement in this section. Slowly they move
through positions remaining constantly aware of their surroundings. In directing the
performance quality of this feeling to my dancers, I wanted them to sense this feeling of
being watched as though they were in a fish tank. There is a vulnerability that the
creatures have in being looked at from all sides. At the most shallow depths there is also
the most visibility. As the piece opens, the creatures are in the least amount of danger
because they are near the surface. However, as they move to greater depths, the
vulnerability to danger as well as vulnerability to the environment becomes greater. This
results in more frenzy as well as greater displays of aggression.

The first movement ends with a downward left swipe, the activating movement
leading into a charge. The performance then moves into chaos as the creatures dive to the
next depth.

**Movement Two: The Drop**

The dancers swipe left into a charge. Mixing up the space they fall out of unison
moving as fast as they can in and out of the floor. The red textured projections are still
present upper stage right, falling out as the creatures meet up in a hard plank, focus
unmoving, hardened at the downstage corner of the space.

The purpose of the aggressive initiation of this movement was to establish frenzy
and panic; similar to how a caged animal in the zoo acts out throwing objects around the
constructed habitat and hitting the glass. The speed and intensity of this movement was
further inspired by “the machines” in a popular Hollywood film, *The Matrix* directed by
Andy and Lana Wachowski. In the story, the machines have taken over earth and utilize
humans as biological energy to power their existence. The machines have a solid circular
body attached to many engineered tentacles. As they move, collectively they clump,
melding in and out of one another to create an organic fluid organism. Again, this is a similar reflection of a school of fish found in nature. The clumped mass organically evolves around itself. This same fluidity within a collective mind was what I was trying to establish with this movement up to the point of the plank in this section.

From this point forward, the group moves as a collective. The energy switches from frenzy to militaristic precision, a planned attack rather than a panicked dispersion. The creatures’ shift in intention also influences a spacial change. A circle of orange textured light comes up in the downstage corner of the space as the collective unit moves towards it to pause in a calmed clump within the circular light. The orange is a representation of a drop in depth; the frenzy is a representation of the dive. As a result, the projection acts as a beacon to regroup the creatures so that they can proceed to attack in an ordered fashion. A regrouping in this clump is also a reestablishment of the collective mind. In order to survive at greater depths, the creatures have to function as a unit.

Next, the hands swipe down the chest from the ribcage and settle to the side of the body. This is a call to attention. The movement of the swipe down is a revisited motif in the work. Inspired by The Hours, the swipe down is a reference to the 1950s housewife smoothing out her dress. In the film, the act is meant to be a motion of recollecting the self, a woman putting herself together so that she can be “presented” as being more put together. For these creatures, however, the swipe is an act of defiance and a call to collect. There is no authority in this movement, but rather the swipe acts as a reset to the collective mind. The movement sweeps to the ground powering forward on a sharp diagonal. The creatures charge forward in low-grounded steps, right leg swinging around
to propel them forward to the end of the stage. This is a charge towards the audience. The charge ends the second movement.

**Movement Three: Trauma**

This is the harshest drop in space. The creatures come up in a line as an amber linear shadowed projection comes up in a long rectangle, all other stage light drops out. The creatures are tapping their hearts with their right hand. This action is the reminiscence of trauma from the past. After such a catastrophic event this panic reflects the possibility of past lives resurfacing, the hand tapping the breastbone is similarly a reflection of the heart palpitating from anxiety. The process of creation between film and movement is most prominent at this point because of the reintroduction of the movements projected in the installation of *The Drowning*.

*Right hand twists up, palm out, head dropping back. Right hand thrusts down into the space as left comes up to meet the ribcage. Left arm whips back into space coming forward to hold a fist. Repeat.*
This is the point of least control exhibited by these creatures. In the lack of control and trauma, I introduce a new concept: survival. Giving into trauma and emotion in a hostile world can be associated with weakness and a weakening of the species. Thereby bringing in the concept of Darwinism, not all individuals can make it to the next step of evolution. In essence, someone has to die in order for the race to become stronger.

The creatures collect in a low crouched position. This position, referenced throughout the performance, was directly inspired by the Morlocks in Simon Wells’ film *The Time Machine*. In this film, the Morlocks, a race of all male gorilla-like animals, evolved as a result of the moon colliding with the earth centuries before. The creatures are more animal than man, exerting a masculine energy layered with an innate aggression. I was interested in the power of this position. Crouched and very unlady-like. I wanted my female creatures to posses this same power and command that the Morlocks exhibited in this film. As they collect, the creatures pause, simply looking out at the audience. At this moment, the fish tank mentality of defensive awareness shifts into the creatures taking power over their observers. The voyeuristic world of the stage is inverted so that the audience becomes the observed object.

A similar intention of looking is described through Michel Foucault’s theory of the panopticon. In Foucault’s theory, a single entity of authority is placed at the center of a prison with the ability to look in on all the prisoners that surround the space. The prisoners, under the assumption that they are being watched, internalize the panopticon. As a result, the prisoners act differently on their own volition and under the threat of the gaze (Poster 182). The inverse is represented in this case. The prisoners, in this case the creatures, project the gaze rather than internalize it. The stage space becomes a mirror,
and the creatures are given the authority to look back. By doing this, my intention was to empower the performers, all women, to take back the traditionally male gaze, as well as giving them the freedom to exude masculine power.

The third movement ends with another swipe from the ribcage to reset the collective. The yellow projection fades out to bring us to new depths. Right leg swipes to the ground, pull up and charge.

**Movement Four: Survival of the Fittest**

A green organic texture comes up, revisiting the three spotlight projections of the beginning of the piece. Still, the creatures are descending to greater depths with increasing intensity. There is a swipe from the ribs to reestablish control and the collective mind. Together the collective holds the space until a unanimous decision is reached to spiral to the floor. The movement is meditative in pace. The sequence of
movement moves seamlessly through various positions. The collective ease in movement cements the singular intention of group protection but also the militaristic presentation of power. However, in the context of narrative, the danger of depth is becoming greater. Therefore, their survival requires them to remain alert to their surroundings and to function together.

The movement of this section was inspired by land animals such as lions and apes from watching their movement in the *Planet Earth* series directed by Alastair Fothergill. This visual research lead me to view the animals at the Denver Zoo. In captivity, lions are frequently seen pacing the space staring at all the observers through the glass. Foucault’s panopticon is still being exercised at this point. The audience is the main focus of the creatures, a constant threat, but similar to a lion, the creatures possess physical power. In order to maintain this power, the movement of this section is frontal, the focus and the performative energy never leaves the audience unattended by the creatures. This section, more than any other, is an assault on the audience. As a result, the audience also loses their anonymity as voyeurs looking in on the performance.

As the movement begins to slow, there are many gestural references to breath. Gestures such as hand cupping the nose and mouth reference a breathing mask or fingertips tracing the trachea referencing the gills on their neck. The creatures pull at their necks, reminiscent of the trachea that in another time functioned as an air passage. After this repeating gesture, the clumped creatures separate. This is the first time they completely disperse. Moving to each ‘wall’ of the proscenium, four of the creatures return to their ape-like stance pacing back and forth. The movement is ritualized as though they are each defending their post. The fish tank mentality returns as their
attention is now on the potential danger that could come from any direction. One creature, the performer being myself, is left standing in the downstage corner of the space.

A dark blue textured projection appears; this is the representation of the final descent. It is the final drowning. I proceed into the textured scape. At first violently, I send my energy up and fall to the floor, gasping for air. In evolutionary terms this moment is a reflection of survival of the fittest, my person is not strong enough at this depth and therefore I cannot survive. The convulsions take over and slowly the movements become less and less. In the final moments, I am arched back, mouth open, vertical in the projection of light that places me in a compressed microscope of the stage. Slowly I pull at my trachea, arms settling to reach out and swallow the last bit of air. My collective tribe is creating a safe space in which I can take my final breaths. The process is ritualized similar to the dying virgins of the introductory film *The Drowning*.

It takes thirteen minutes to drown in cold water. As the lights fade, I am sacrificed, giving rise to the next strongest in the hierarchy of this survivalist species. Thirteen minutes have passed from the start of the piece and everything fades to black.

**The Next Step**

In creating *Subtera*, my goal was to meld my two interests in film and dance. I wanted to delineate the hierarchy of digital art over physical art and make both necessary to the creation process. In the creation of *Subtera*, the two forms were interdependent. The cyclical use of film and dance mediums allowed me to explore the conversation and collaboration of film and dance within a single performance. Generally in collaboration there are two artists, a filmmaker and a dancer. For this project, I could view the work
from both perspectives. I was able to view the dance from the mind of a filmmaker, editing out weaker movement, splicing and shifting sections, and manipulating lighting in order to bring attention to various movement elements. Similarly, film became a dance. The movement of the camera over the subject, the flow of the subject in space, and the rhythm of the cuts all became choreography. The projections within the live performance also became another dancer, exhibiting movement and giving depth and texture to the image within the same space as the three-dimensional body.

As a final product I think that the Black Box performance of Subtera was a single iteration of many possibilities. As a whole, the many elements of this performance worked together. Creating a museum-inspired, walk through installation that moved into the performance space was a result of manipulating the different variables within this Black Box performance. However, I think that in another iteration within a different space I would incorporate the elements in a different way.

In a second version of this performance, I would create the work in the round starting with the installation pieces. Projected on four walls, the installation films would become an encompassing history of the world. Then as the film drops out and the live performance begins, the audience in the round would then reinforce the fish tank voyeuristic experience I was hoping to accomplish.

Each element of this production was extremely important to me and thoroughly researched in this work. I was very conscious of all elements and how everything remained in constant conversation. The costumes are in conversation with the film projection in the space, which are in conversation with the movement and so on. Now that all the elements are in place, I am interested in the many variations that are possible.
In this I view every project as lineage to the next. I have made many smaller pieces leading up to the completed show of Subtera. I am now interested where this cyclical process of conversation and inspiration from this work will draw new lineage into the future.

**Conclusion**

This is a dream journal entry from December of 2013.

*I am on the ocean floor, deep into the abyss there is nothing but darkness surrounding me. A fear settles over me, I am not in this darkness alone. As I move forward, a light appears on the horizon. The lights are a sign of a deep and unknown civilization. The creatures that live there are scaled, vibrantly colored and all women. They resemble the mermaids of mythology, possessing a strength and aggression that is not illustrated in the mythical tales. I walk into a cavernous home made of stone. As water surges from the house, I take one deep breath of water, filling my lungs with the salty solution (Anderson).*

Subtera is the manifestation of my science fiction dream. It incorporates years worth of film inspiration and experiences. Encompassing feminist ideology, extreme physicality and a touch of fear and failure, the work expresses every part of me. I realize now that I was drawn to dystopias because life is frequently chaotic. I was drawn to women because of the strength I believe we have as a sex. For all intent and purpose, Subtera is an autobiography transformed and manipulated by a science fiction lens. What a beautiful life it has been thus far, especially when voiced through image and movement.

In the creation of this work, I explored how film and dance can be incorporated in a cyclical manner. I have seen many multimedia performances in which there is a film
playing on the screen while the dance is taking place in the stage space below. That is one version of multimedia. However, I wanted multimedia to mean constant integration. For this reason, it was important to me to have elements of the two-dimensional space and the three-dimensional space present at all times. One cannot exist without the other. This is how I made Subtera, through a critical and constant awareness of the two mediums as they influence one another’s creation. However, through this process of discipline and awareness, I discovered that the two mediums are actually one. When broken down to the bare bones, film and dance both possess two elements: image and movement. They were so natural for me to combine because they are fundamentally the same. I see now that the image and movement are the building blocks for my art. All dance is a film and all film is a dance; one cannot exist without the other, they are codependent. Now as I continue to make more work, I will not see film or dance as separate entities but rather both simultaneously as image and movement.
Works Cited

*Alexander McQueen Spring/Summer 2010. YouTube.* Web. 6 Jan. 2015


*Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome.* Dir. George Miller and George Ogilvie. Warner Bros., 1985. DVD.


*Planet Earth.* Dir. Alastair Fothergill. BBC, 2006. DVD.


*The Hours.* Dir. Stephen Daldry. TF1/Miramax, 2002. DVD.


*The Road.* Dir. John Hillcoat. VIDEA-CDE ; Eagle Pictures, 2010. DVD


