

Post-Chromatic Mini-Responses

Posted on

May 12, 2016 by stairssite

The following are anonymous responses from performers/bodyguards reflecting on last Saturday's (5/7) performance installation at Chromatic.

1. What stood out to me about the Chromatic action was the chaos that surrounded it. I'm not a person who is anti-drinking or anti-sex at all, but you learn so much being sober in party spaces. There were a number of people who were kind to our performers, but there was also some noteworthy rudeness at Chromatic. A freshman who was *really* sick got pulled out of the basement at one point, and most of the partygoers acted like this was somewhat routine, or at least not noteworthy. The Chromatic action taught me that perhaps there are spaces that are too frantic or soggy to receive our message. That being said, what I saw at Chromatic has heightened my resolve to use Stares/Stairs as a platform to think through how we treat each other in this community... and not just Monday through Friday. Because if I'm being totally honest, I was not impressed by much of what I saw on Saturday night, and I think that as a collective, we can do better.
2. Doing the action last Saturday made me reflect on how vulnerable (to violence) we each are in party spaces at Middlebury, especially because as a resident of another ridgeline house, this action felt "closer to home" and the negativity and chaos were jarring when I'd expected community. It strengthened my conviction that these performances are so, so, important—and that they should not be confined to any particular space on campus. I am grateful for those who created the piece originally and brought me into it—I am grateful for the community that surrounds the piece and supports each other. This was my first experience as a performer, and while I hadn't thought that would change how I experienced the performance much, thinking back now I realize that I internalized people's reactions more. As a bodyguard/person who talks to observers, I was much more focused on other people's experiences or safety which gave me some distance from the piece. I also became more aware of my desire to "make it ok" for the observer—to smile and have them smile back at me, to accommodate their discomfort.
3. One of the most disappointing things I heard at Chromatic was a male presenting person's comment towards our most dressed performer. "You didn't go all the way. She's in her underwear," he said. He laughed and walked away. The energy in Chromatic was more chaotic this time. More frenzied, more drunk. I saw many more people at this party whom I know than I ever do in Atwater. Performing in Atwater, I have been able to distance myself from the reality of where sexual assault occurs. In Atwater, when people would ask us why we were there, we boldly responded, "because this is where sexual assault happens." However, as a person who lives in an interest house, it was terrifying to see the responses when our performance art piece was brought closer to home. And this is exactly

what needs to happen. My friends go to these parties. I go to these parties. This was important for us to see.

4. It is wonderful to see the positive responses. The groups of women who come up to us and thank us. It is sad how gendered the responses we receive are. It is good also to feel angry. I take energy from this anger and chose to keep performing.
5. I'm glad we did this performance, even with only one ten-minute session, because each time we do this piece we learn so much. This time was different because we were really in the party, and there were a lot more people moving through the piece a lot faster than previous installations. I guess I had assumed that Atwater would be the most difficult location to perform, but this is making me second-guess that. Also, one of the organizers brought up in our debrief that we shouldn't set a standard for ourselves to feel shitty or emotionally or physically in danger each time we do the piece. I'm thinking about how to balance what's best for the piece, with what's best for us, and how those don't have to be different things.