

**CONNECTION IN CHAOS: CREATING & EMBODYING YOUR STORY THROUGH
MOVEMENT**

by

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This thesis is a reflection of my experience researching, designing and teaching my course, *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*. Throughout the process, my focus has been on assisting students in gaining ownership of their own creative process through the practice of adapting their own life experiences as source material for the creation of solo and ensemble theatrical work. The driving question behind my research and in the practical exploration of the course is: How, in this age of disconnection from one's self, caused by technology, cultivated social media existence, competition, fear of failure, and high anxiety, can we assist young actors in gaining ownership of their creative process and realizing the value of their uniqueness? In this course designed for a B.A. Theatre Program, utilizing physical theatre methodologies, students are able to expand their physical awareness and presence, through the extension of their physical vocabulary, and the embodiment of text. In addition, working as a collaborative ensemble, they are able to cross a threshold as actors and step into the knowledge that they are valuable for their uniqueness, gaining the invaluable gift of agency as artists.

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PREFACE

This thesis, my thesis course, and in fact my Masters degree itself, would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of a long list of teachers, colleagues, family and friends. Special thanks goes to my advisor and Committee Chair Bria Walker. She championed me, stood for me, and consistently and confidently set goals for me to help me stay on track. Even when a little tough love was required, she did it with compassion and humor. Additional thanks to the incredible women I am lucky to have as my committee members. My admiration and respect for them is enormous, matched only by my gratitude to them. Michelle Granshaw has helped to guide me through my entire graduate journey from beginning to end, and she has done it with wisdom, grace, and understanding. Kelly Trumbull has repeatedly gone above and beyond for me and my cohort, creating courses vital to our pedagogical experience, selflessly giving of her own time to serve as instructor of record for those courses.

A very special thanks goes to my cohort and friend, Sean Cook. I don't know how I got so lucky to be paired with him for this crazy journey, but I would not have wanted to make it with anyone else. I am eternally grateful to him for always believing in me: no matter how full I stacked my plate, he never doubted that I could do it. And he helped me believe I could do it too.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the students who fought for my thesis course. The class quite literally would not have happened without them, and it would not have been the same experience without their tremendous generosity of spirit, openness to new and often challenging ideas, love and unwavering support for each other, and their willingness to explore and discover.

My experience simply would not have been possible without the patience, support and childcare efforts of my loving family and dear friends. I was constantly propped up by their unshakeable belief in me. The willingness of my “tribe” to step up and step in again and again, to ensure that I could do the work was invaluable to my process, and I am forever grateful.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my sweetest Ophelia, who makes everything worthwhile. Mommy loves you, to the moon and back.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

When I was an undergraduate at NYU in the conservatory training program at Tisch, we were given midterm evaluations for each class. My first year in the program, every evaluation I received from every instructor was a variation of the same note: *You need to let yourself be wrong/get messy/FAIL*. I was not fully giving myself the chance to grow for fear of looking bad, of doing it “wrong.” I was trapped in my head; my thinking, planning mind was in tight control as it attempted to protect me from getting it “wrong.” I constantly compared myself to my classmates and peers; and the nagging sense that I didn’t measure up to the competition left me trying to twist and shape myself into someone else, believing that was the only path to success as a performer. As a student, this meant I was constantly trying to play it safe, avoiding risks and making myself small enough to fit the mold. I struggled with these things through my years of training at NYU. This struggle didn’t end with graduation, and I continued to wrestle with finding confidence in my own uniqueness through my years as a young actor in New York.

It was when I began to explore improvisation that I was able to start stepping outside of that thinking, planning mind that had kept me so focused on perfection. This commitment to risk-taking as an art form began to free me as a performer and, as an educator, I sought to introduce my students to that same freedom. To that end, I began to explore physically-based acting methodologies outside of the Stanislavski-based forms I had been trained in. I found freedom as an actor in techniques such as Viewpoints, Laban, Chekhov, and Augusto Boal. As I wove these techniques into my curricula, I witnessed time and again the transformation in my

students as they found their way out of their brain and into their bodies. They would often struggle at first, as their thinking, planning brains sought validation and wanted desperately to do it “right.” But it was ultimately inspirational to see them let go; to give themselves over to the process itself rather than focusing on a finished product wrapped up in a shiny package with a pretty bow.

1.2 INSPIRATION FOR THESIS WORK

Through my years of teaching in all varieties of disciplines, the most common challenge I see in my students is disconnection from physical body. They tend to be hyper aware of their bodies while at the same time completely disconnected from it, unable to inhabit their physical selves. I’ve watched this disconnection grow more pronounced as the students I teach are the product of growing up in the digital world. They have been raised on a steady diet of cultivated surface lives, carefully constructed on social media, feeding the myth that everyone else knows more, has it figured out, is doing it “right.” This leads to disconnection from the physical self, as well as an emotional and mental disconnect that is vital not only for their work as actors, but for happiness and wellbeing in their lives. I recognized this lack of confidence stems from not realizing it is their uniqueness that makes them interesting as actors. They often feel out of place in their bodies on stage, because they don’t recognize that they are inherently interesting. They have a voice and the right to share it. As an educator, more than anything else, this is what I want to give my students: the knowledge that what they have to say has merit and worth and importance, and to give them the opportunity to experience sharing their voice. I want my students to know that they are seen, heard, and understood. Whatever they end up doing in their

lives, whether that is ultimately theatre or any other discipline, this sense of agency will serve them well. I wanted to create a course that would help give my students what I wish I'd had as an undergrad and young actor.

As Chapter 1 continues, I will share my investigation into this thesis course. Chapter 2 will provide context for and explain the structure and progression of the course, as well as my pedagogical influences and approach. It will culminate in a presentation of my intended outcomes for the course. In Chapter 3, I will describe how I implemented the course, and my observations of the work being done. In Chapter 4 I will revisit my thesis question, as well as offer my final reflections and thoughts on future applications.

1.3 THESIS INVESTIGATION

The question I explored during my research and practical exploration of my thesis course is this: How, in this age of disconnection from one's self, caused by technology, cultivated social media existence, competition, fear of failure, and high anxiety, can we assist young actors in gaining ownership of their creative process and realizing the value of their uniqueness? In my course, *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*, I assisted students in gaining ownership of their own process through the practice of adapting their own life experiences as source material for the creation of solo and ensemble theatrical work. Further, I helped them to expand their physical awareness and presence through the extension of their physical vocabulary and the embodiment of text. This course served as an opportunity for my students to make a leap of faith. Together, as a collaborative ensemble, they experienced crossing a threshold as actors and stepped into knowing themselves to be individual artists, valuable for their own uniqueness. I

hoped that, through the course, my student actors might find a way to step out of fear and escape the habit of playing small and making small choices. More than merely teaching a set of skills, this course aimed to provide students with a sense of ownership: of the physical self, of their process, and of their ability to create and be creative.

2.0 PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

2.1 CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

The original inspiration for what would become my course, *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*, began with my efforts to create therapeutic drama programming that would serve people experiencing the effects of trauma. When I was a child, my family and I were victims of a violent crime against a family member, so I know the damages that trauma can do; psychologically, emotionally and physically. I also experienced firsthand the healing benefits that physical movement and acting, particularly as part of an ensemble, can provide.

There has been extensive research done on why and how that is possible. Bessel Van der Kolk, M.D., widely considered the leading expert on trauma today, has dedicated himself to the research of the neurobiological effects of trauma on individuals, as well as to the benefits of somatic therapies in the treatment of those effects. In his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, Dr. Van der Kolk uses extensive research and neuroscientific evidence to support his assertion that treating the effects of trauma with somatic treatments, such as music, yoga, movement and theatre, is more effective than talk therapy alone or medication.

Community is also integral to healing from trauma. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* identifies the steps required for recovering from trauma. Not only is it important for the victims to reconstruct their trauma story, they must also feel that they are seen, heard and understood. Restoring the connection between survivors and their community is essential. "Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation (Herman)."

Because trauma robs its victims of their sense of self, overcoming it requires getting back in touch with the body, with the “Self.” Theatre provides a pathway to that recovery because, as Dr. Van der Kolk puts it, “Our sense of agency, how much we feel in control, is defined by our bodies and its rhythms...In order to find our voice, we have to be *in* our bodies - able to breathe fully and able to access our inner sensations...Acting is an experience of using your body to take your place in life.” (Van der Kolk 333) The other critical piece of overcoming trauma involves telling the story within a supportive community. Here again, theatre is a powerful tool as it allows a “confrontation of the painful realities of life and symbolic transformation through communal action (Van der Kolk 337).”

The work of Van der Kolk, Herman, and their peers inspired me to research the wide variety of successful somatic programming being used for the treatment of trauma. This led me to begin exploring how I might be able to apply the use of physical acting methodologies in a collaborative process of personal storytelling creation. When I entered the MFA program at the University of Pittsburgh and began teaching the performance classes there, I was struck by the number of students who were willing to share their struggles with mental health with me. This is not an issue unique to Pitt. An American College Health Association study in 2018 reported that over 60 percent of college students “had experienced ‘overwhelming anxiety’ in the past year” and “over 40 percent said they felt so depressed they had difficulty functioning (Wolverton).” Additionally, a nationwide study spanning from 2007-2018 showed that among college undergraduates, mental health indicators such as depression and anxiety had more than doubled over less than a decade (Joseph). Although the study did not seek to identify the cause for this increase, the research team noted that smartphone use has been linked to factors affecting mental health, such as sleep interruption and decreased live person-to-person contact. In light of the

prevalence of these mental health struggles, I identified a need, and I began the process of applying the work I plan to do with trauma victims to the student community within which I was already teaching.

2.2 PEDAGOGICAL INFLUENCES AND APPROACH

We tell our stories in order to live - Joan Didion “The White Album”

Much of the inspiration for the structure of my course comes from my experience teaching at CAP21, a musical theatre conservatory training program in New York City. Specifically, I was inspired by the semester-long “Interp II” course I taught to the first year students every Fall. The course was an important step in the curriculum for these young actors, as it was geared to expand their tools of expression through building physical awareness and strength. My co-instructor and I led the students through the process of devising and storytelling, beginning with extensive exploration of physical methodologies and ensemble-building. It was my co-instructor who introduced me to Viewpoints training and the Laban System of Efforts, and I discovered the effectiveness of these modalities in pushing students out of their comfort zones, and in helping to create a solid and supportive ensemble. I consistently watched the process become the product for my students, as they transitioned from trying to “get it right” to simply committing to the exercises at hand.

Viewpoints training, as it is commonly understood today, was developed by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau as an extension of Mary Overlie’s Six Viewpoints. It is a technique of naming existing principles of movement in order to create awareness in performers. It is invaluable

useful to the process of this course, as it “allows us to surrender, fall back into an empty creative space and trust that there is something there, other than our own ego or imagination, to catch us... Viewpoints leads to greater *awareness*, which leads to greater *choice*, which leads to greater *freedom* (Bogart and Landau16).” Rudolf Laban also developed a system of identifying and notating movement principles, originally created for dancers and choreographers, but eventually adopted by actors and directors as well. He saw movement as a psychophysical process, and his system incorporates physical motion and the psychological processes associated with it. Exploring Laban’s Movement Efforts helps actors to become aware of themselves as well as others; creating an enhanced awareness of one’s own physical form and space allows for deeper connection with those around them.

In addition to Viewpoints and Laban, I wanted to include other pedagogies grounded in the physical work of an actor: the course would be built on the foundation of the body, with the intention of breaking free of the control of the intellectual mind. These pedagogies would include Augusto Boal, particularly the exercises laid out in his *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* and Michael Chekhov, with a focus on his concepts of Centers, Qualities, and Gesture. For the transition from physical exploration into the creation of stories based on their personal experiences, I used the templates of archetypal storytelling found in Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey*, and Kim Hudson’s *The Virgin Archetypal Journey*. Examining and integrating the steps, or beats, existing in recognizable myths across time and cultures assisted my students in finding a place to start in organizing their own stories, as well as reassure them that their own lives were filled with the makings of epic tales. These techniques served as the inspiration for the exercises I designed for *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*.

2.3 COURSE DESIGN AND PROGRESSION

I designed and organized *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement* with the intention of maximizing the benefits of working in an ensemble, even when working on solo pieces. This type of work requires vulnerability on many levels. Sharing personal experiences and being physically present and embodied is not common or comfortable for most young actors. I would be asking them to step (far) outside of their comfort zones. Therefore, I structured the course to begin with a focus on laying a foundation of trust and freedom through ensemble-building exercises and somatic work designed to activate the physical body over the thinking mind. As an ensemble, we would progress through a series of exercises inspired by the worlds of Viewpoints, Boal, Chekhov, and Laban. Once that foundation had been laid, we would then begin to explore ways of telling stories, beginning with the introduction of the Hero's Journey and the Virgin Archetypal Journey. We would then move on to exploring other styles and approaches to building and telling stories, using gesture and nonverbal work, incorporating existing texts, and adapting styles inspired by a variety of solo performers. Students would then begin to create and perform their own solo pieces, working both collaboratively as an ensemble and on their own. The course would culminate in a performance of these pieces.

2.4 INTENDED OUTCOMES

I believed that, by combining physical acting methodologies with the creation of personal performance pieces, I could create a pathway for my students to reach the goal of expanding

their emotional awareness and accessibility by expanding their physical vocabulary. This intention of emotional availability would serve them not only as actors, but as young adults beginning to navigate the world independently. I wanted the ensemble to play a pivotal role in the creation of the solo work. The ensemble needed to do more than provide the safe space to explore and make mistakes that every acting class requires. This ensemble would need to function as a community - as sounding boards, and as witnesses to the pieces of the selves the students would choose to share. In the process of getting to know themselves, getting to know each other is imperative.

Based on my research and personal understanding of the pedagogies, and my experience as a student, performer, and educator, I created a one-semester course designed to:

- Allow students to develop greater confidence, articulation, and expressiveness as performers
- Expand the boundaries of the possibilities for self-expression through the synthesis of body and sound
- Give students the opportunity to explore and adapt their personal life experiences as source material for the creation of dramatic work
- Encourage them to develop, refine and take ownership of their own individual and personal creative process
- Offer a safe space to work collaboratively in the creation and development of solo and ensemble theatrical performance
- Provide a working vocabulary of physical acting methodologies to support further performance endeavors

The prerequisite for *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement* was an introductory level performance course. This prerequisite helps to prepare students for this course by exposing them to basic acting concepts (improvisation, listening and responding, making choices) as well as familiarizing them with the process of working in front of their classmates.

Through working somatically as an ensemble, my students would be able to find empowerment, and confidence in their own uniqueness, voice, and personal history. In finding a new means of grounding, and expanding physically through this process, they would be able to continue to explore and deepen their own processes of discovery going forward. And they would take with them the centering knowledge that they have a right to speak their truths, tell their stories, and to take up space, on stage and in the world.

3.0 COURSE IMPLEMENTATION

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*. The course structure was built as a progression through three steps, with the intention of culminating in the performance of self-created solo and ensemble pieces:

- *Physical Foundations and Building the Ensemble*
- *Exploring Storytelling*
- *Telling Our Stories*

3.1 PHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS AND BUILDING THE ENSEMBLE

I knew that the work of this course would require my students' vulnerability, both as individuals and with each other. I therefore began the course by focusing on creating an atmosphere of trust and openness. Continually and consistently connecting with my students was imperative, so I would begin every class with a check-in, encouraging them to identify how and what they were feeling. I then reminded them, rather than trying to "leave it at the door," as we are so often told, to instead be aware of their emotional, physical and mental state and approach the work of the day from that place. This check-in also allowed me to assess the energy of the room and make slight adjustments to my plans for the day's work accordingly, teaching to what my students needed rather than clinging to my own intentions.

When I planned the structure of the course, I began with a focus on building trust among the students, and creating the space necessary to allow for exploration, through the use of physical exercises. As Claire Heggen, co-founder of Théâtre du Movement, succinctly puts it “The body always has ways of escaping the net of the mind. (Keefe 12).” Because one of the issues I see my students struggling with is feeling separated from their bodies while trapped in their minds, I wanted them to shift their awareness away from that sense of separation. One of the first readings I assigned was a chapter from the book *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader* titled “Reframing the Journey” written by Lorna Marshall, in which she addresses this imagined separation:

The common use of the two words ‘mind’ and ‘body’ in everyday speech and training vocabulary reflects a false perception; in reality the organism is already a...single inseparable unit, and our physical being (including the brain) is the actual site of emotions, thoughts, reactions and other aspects of the inner landscape (163).

To support this unity of mind and body, physical warmups paired with breath and focus exercises were an important part of starting every class. The beginning of the course focused on Physical Theatre and ensemble-building exercises. The first class was largely consumed by going over the syllabus and Course Calendar, but in the second class, we were able to dive into some Improv-inspired exercises to start to break the ice. Once they were physically warmed up and beginning to warm up to each other, I began to introduce them to some “gamesercises” from Augusto Boal’s *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, which is a handbook for creating spontaneity and community. My objective was to help them tap into spontaneity and free them from self-censoring, so the Boal “arsenal” provides a clear avenue to that, while also firmly rooted in the importance of developing a cohesive ensemble. For these early explorations, I chose to focus on games that are physical explorations and not reliant on verbal language. Boal’s games that break down habitual movement were quite useful in helping guide my students to creating awareness

of their physical bodies as curious observers rather than critical judges. “The Greek Exercise” proved to be a very effective way to combine that awareness with an exploration of working as an ensemble. In this exercise, one student begins a simple movement, slowly and with purpose, and the other students use their bodies to help complete the movement, so the initiating actor appears weightless. I coached the students assisting with the movement to resist the urge to manipulate the movement but to allow the student being supported to initiate the movement. Although slightly awkward and uncertain at first, the students were focused and determined and found their flow. In our discussion after we finished, the students whose movements had been supported by the group talked about the experience of feeling both in and out of control: they knew they were controlling their movement, but as they allowed their classmates to support them, they were able to let go and trust that the moment would happen on its own. The exercise was a challenge for my students, but proved to be a direct path to creating physical awareness and freedom while quickly developing trust and vulnerability among the class.

The next week we began to deepen our focus on physical acting, as I introduced some Viewpoints exercises and combined them with a continued exploration of Boal. I find much of Boal’s work to coincide nicely with and reinforce many of the Viewpoints. Boal’s system is based on the concept of unity: first of all, the unity of the physical and psychological (reminiscent of Marshall’s assertion in “Reframing the Journey”), and secondly of the senses. “(n)one exists separately, they...are linked. Bodily activities are activities of the whole body. We breathe with our whole body, with our arms, our legs, our feet...(Boal 49)” “Viewpoints awakens all our senses, making it clear how much and how often we live only in our heads and see only through our eyes...we learn to listen with our entire bodies (Bogart 38).”

As I was working with limited time, I wasn't able to go through an extensive progression of exercises to introduce each Viewpoint; I had to streamline the process. I began by working with Lanes, as a way to drop in multiple Viewpoints and as a preparation for getting them on the Grid (Appendix D). I lined them up and asked them to imagine that they each had their own lane stretched out in front of them, and that was the space in which they could move and explore. I gave them the following options for movement: Walk, Run, Drop, Jump, and Stillness, and let them begin. I noticed that they were tending to fall into a habit of closing off the room around them, focusing only on the space directly in front of them. I encouraged them to start observing others, and to copy, or "try on" their movements. I then asked them to play with Tempo and Duration, creating repeated patterns, reminding them that movement exists in multiple levels. Finally, I opened up the room, allowing them to take their patterns outside of the lanes, exploring the entire space. As I always do when teaching Viewpoints work, throughout the exercise I reminded them to work kinesthetically; reacting and responding to what was already happening as opposed to trying to *make* something happen. As Anne Bogart and Tina Landau say in their Viewpoints book, "...keep reminding the group that the way *around* is actually *through*. Self-consciousness is a kind of prison, consciousness is freedom (37)." After a brief discussion of the Lane work, I built on it further by asking them to create a short non-verbal scene. I placed a book on a block centerstage and gave them the following actions to complete within their scene: enter, pick up book, look through book, put book down, exit. All they were to do was to complete that sequence of actions, and incorporate, in any order they chose, Walk, Run, Jump, Drop, and Stillness. I encouraged them not to focus on "acting" the scene, but to do the physical actions and see what arose. I gave them about five minutes on their own to work out their physical scores, then they presented their work to each other. It was somewhat challenging for them to resist the

urge to *act*; to add on an emotional landscape to the sequence of physical movements. This was not unexpected, as it is a common trap for young actors - the awareness of being watched, of being “onstage” creates a pressure to perform, a desire to be “interesting.” As this came up in a majority of the scenes, I encouraged them to try it again, focusing on being fully committed to their physical score rather than on showing us their emotion. I asked them to see what happened if they let go of the need to tell us a story and instead let their bodies reveal the story to them. It was difficult for many of them to drop the performance and inhabit the moment, but they were able to find moments of presence. Those moments helped them develop awareness. It was a good lesson for them in a central concept of Viewpoints: “Let go of all preconceived ideas and be where you are. Listen. Receive. Respond. *Use it* (Bogart 38).”

In the coming weeks, I continued to work with them on physical awareness, through the use of exercises focusing on Shape and Gesture. I culled these exercises from a combination of pedagogies: Viewpoints, Boal, Michael Chekhov and Laban’s System of Efforts. Boal’s “Rhythm with Chairs” helped to get them working spontaneously, reacting with their bodies without thinking. I placed five cubes in the space, and placed a student on each cube, and each was given a number from one to five. I instructed them to make a shape or “still image” in relationship to that cube, and then, in order starting with number one, they each demonstrated their shapes and the other students recreated that shape in their own body. They then began to move through the space, and when I called a random number, everyone would find a cube and make that image. Finally, I added the variation of calling two numbers and asking them to mold their body into a shape that felt to them like the combination of the two images. I thought this might be a challenging variation for them, but they took to it eagerly, allowing their bodies to

create unique shapes. It was interesting to see how differently they synthesized the two numbers into one shape.

I used elements of Michael Chekhov's techniques, beginning with an exploration of the "Three Centers," finding the "Ideal Center," and accessing the sense of the "Inner Body." I then introduced them to the concepts of Radiating/Receiving and Contraction/Expansion to help them develop an awareness of the underlying qualities of movement. This led naturally into working with Qualities, a part of Chekhov's PsychoPhysical Exercises (PPEs). The PPEs are representative of all of the basic energy patterns identified by Chekhov, which he believed to be essential to expression. The Qualities explore how energy either expands or contracts, and the degree of resistance that energy faces. Chekhov breaks how that energy moves down into four Qualities: Molding, Flowing/Floating, Flying, and Radiating.

We began with Chekhov's Ball Toss warmup (Appendix D), centering their attention on the simple physical movement of throwing and catching and connecting with their peers. From that place of relaxed, focused energy, I began to introduce the Qualities. One at a time, I asked them to explore how they might throw the ball while Molding, Flowing/Floating, Flying, and Radiating. Developing the exploration out of the simple warmup allowed the students to approach the concept of Qualities with a sense of ease and playful exploration, without getting stuck in figuring out how to do it "right."

After working with Chekhov's techniques, we segued into Rudolf Laban's System of Movements. Working with the Eight Efforts help to sensitize actors to the links between their physical movement and their mental/emotional state, allowing the actor to understand their own movement and that of others. It is therefore a transformative part of the work of *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*. "Understanding effort enables the actor to expand

beyond their limits and discover ways of expressing meaning that they did not dream existed. They learn the key to transformation - how to fully and articulately embody different ways of being (Ewan 1).”

I began with an exploration of Laban’s concept of Kinesphere, the spherical space surrounding the body. I find that awareness of the Kinesphere can help young actors better understand and embrace the idea of taking up space physically. Expanding beyond the self-imposed and limiting boundaries of their movement, carrying this awareness with them allows them to own and inhabit the space they occupy.

In order to get to the System of Efforts, I first introduced the Motion Factors of Weight, Time, and Space, inviting them to experience what each of those factors feel like in their body, and the differences between them. Then, by combining the Motion Factors in different combinations, the students were able to “build” the Eight Efforts (Press, Wring, Glide, Float, Thrust/Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick) in their bodies. Laban’s theory is that the efforts exist in duality and relationship to each other, with one holding the dominant role. I had the students explore that duality by having them choose one effort to explore internally and a different one that is external. This challenged them to explore somatically rather than relying on their rational brains to think their way through. In our discussion after, several students shared emotions that had come up when they paired certain inner and outer Efforts. One student said that she discovered when she explored an internal Wringing with an external Gliding, she realized that’s how she lived much of her life; feeling the anxiety was squeezing and suffocating her inside, while outside she struggled to make it look as if everything was smooth sailing. The Laban exploration not only brought physical discoveries for the students, but gave them some important emotional insights

as well. And by being able to be vulnerable and share with each other, the sense of community among the group grew stronger.

3.2 BEGINNING TO TELL OUR STORIES

In his “Games for Actors and Non-Actors,” Augusto Boal refers to the Proustian concept of ‘*la recherche du temps perdu*’ or “the pursuit of lost time.” This is the idea that we cannot fully understand our experiences while we are living them. That is why, Boal says, “memory is important, but only when it is transported to the present - when memory becomes the present, when ‘I have felt’ becomes ‘I am feeling again.’ In theatre, to remember is to live again, with the same or even greater intensity, with the same or even broader and deeper knowledge of what has happened, how and why. (Boal 39)” Through the creation and performance of stories about their lives, students have the opportunity to transport their memories to the present, re-living them through the lens of understanding.

To begin the process of creating and structuring their stories, I introduced my students to the fundamental elements of myths and epic tales found in Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* and the “Archetypal” steps outlined by Kim Hudson in her book, *The Virgin’s Promise*. The steps are as follows:

The Hero’s Journey, by Joseph Campbell

Ordinary World
Call to Adventure
Refusing the Call
Accepting the Call
Entering the Unknown
Supernatural Aid
Talisman

Allies/Helpers
Tests and the Supreme Ordeal
Reward and the Journey Home
Restoring the World

The Virgin Archetypal Journey, by Kim Hudson

1. Dependent World
2. Price of Conformity
3. Opportunity to Shine
4. Dresses the Part
5. Secret World
6. No Longer Fits Her World
7. Caught Shining
8. Gives Up What Kept Her Stuck
9. Kingdom in Chaos
10. Wanders in the Wilderness
11. Chooses Her Light
12. The Rescue
13. The Kingdom is Brighter

To familiarize the students with the structure of the Hero's Journey, I had them watch the following: video footage of Bill Moyer's interview with Joseph Campbell and two videos breaking down the steps in understandable and recognizable form, "The Hero's Journey according to Joseph Campbell," and "The Hero's Journey/Monomyth." I also had them read selections from *The Virgin's Promise* to introduce Kim Hudson's response to Campbell's male-dominated blueprint.

3.3 “DO YOU THINK WE’RE ALL HEROES?”

The day we started the section on Hero’s Journeys, as people were trickling in before class, one student asked, “Do you think we’re all heroes?” It was an unexpected question, and a sweet moment, as it brilliantly illuminated the importance of the assignment I had planned. It’s incredibly important to me that these students recognize that they are indeed all heroes of their own story, and their stories deserve to be told.

First, we went through the steps in Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey*, reviewing what they had been assigned to read. We had a discussion, with students identifying each step in recognizable/iconic existing stories they’ve read in books or seen in films. I then got them up on their feet for an exercise I call “The Clock (Appendix D).” I placed cubes in a circle around the room and asked them to choose one and have a seat. I then told them that each cube represented a step in the journey, and that we would go around the circle in order, and each student would stand and describe how their step appeared within a recognizable existing story. We would then go around the circle again, and each student would choose a word or phrase that represented that step. The next time around the circle, they would choose a gesture embodying that step, and perform it while speaking their word or phrase, repeating it three times. In the final trip around the circle, they would perform the gesture only.

A powerful moment occurred during the gesture round of the exercise: a student had chosen the gesture of an embrace as the embodiment of the Allies/Helpers step. When she initially performed the gesture, she half-heartedly hugged the student next to her. She completed the action technically, but without intention, without allowing herself to fully embody the gesture she had chosen. I asked her to try it again, and to see if she could allow herself to *actually* embrace her classmate; to commit herself to being present in that simple physical movement.

She repeated the gesture, this time really connecting with the other student, and not escaping the vulnerability of the moment by distancing herself physically. In that moment she found herself flooded with emotion, tears coming to her eyes. I am by no means the type of acting instructor that believes the goal of an acting class is to make students cry: the tears were not the point. The magic of the moment was in her willingness to be vulnerable and fully present in her body, to trust in herself and her classmate enough to embody the physical representation of “Helper.”

This work brought us to the first performance assignment of the course, the Hero’s Journey (Appendix C1). I asked the students to choose either Campbell or Hudson’s steps of the journey, and recall an experience from their life that taught them something, changed them in some way, and/or they wish had ended differently. I gave them time in class to pair up with a partner and share their experiences. They then helped each other begin to identify the steps of the journey that showed up in their life experience. After brainstorming together in class, they worked on their own at home on the steps that didn’t inherently exist in their actual stories. For these missing steps, they were given free rein to come up with fictionalized versions. I encouraged them to think big and be fantastical; absolutely nothing was off the table. I asked them to be aware of what style was developing as their stories started to come together, and to lean into that style. If it was starting to feel like a fairy tale, then they should feel free to make it something straight out of the Brothers Grimm.

The day they presented their stories to each other was one of my favorite classes. While every student’s piece was unique and different, reoccurring themes began to appear throughout the presentations. They shared a common experience of striving to find balance in their lives, and of struggling to choose a path in life - the push and pull of making the “safe” choice or following their hearts. Their personalities, points of view and senses of humor and wit, even when sharing

painful moments from their lives, shone through. Students offered each other feedback and we began to brainstorm ideas of how we might be able to further physicalize and theatricalize and embody the stories. In particular, I encouraged them to think about how they, as the ensemble, might add to or support each story if it were staged as an ensemble piece. It was inspiring and exciting to see them respond to each other's stories. They were enthusiastic and creative, supporting and respecting each other's work while genuinely offering their thoughts and suggestions.

Through this assignment, my students were able to get to know each other on a deeper level, expanding the sense of trust in the room, and strengthening the ensemble. Several students said that, after sharing their stories, they were even more eager to continue sharing with each other, and to see what else others had to say.

3.4 EMBODIMENT: WORKING WITH EXISTING TEXTS AND GESTURE

At this point in the semester, the explorations of Laban and Chekhov had expanded the students' vocabulary of movement and gesture, so I was able to introduce them to Open Viewpoints. Open Viewpoints is an improvisatory practice that synthesizes the Nine Viewpoints and asks the participants to work together, listening with their entire bodies and responding kinesthetically to one another. The students really took to the practice, and it became a common part of our warmup. Being able to freely create physically and spontaneously got them centered, free, connected to each other, and ready to work.

Our class work began to focus on preparation for the next assignment. The students were assigned to choose a piece of existing text that represented a painful or difficult event from their

life (Appendix C.2). They would not be required to share the actual event with us, merely choose text from a book, poem, script, screenplay or song that resonated that experience for them. To help them begin to embody the spoken word, I had them explore using Laban's Efforts while speaking pieces of their texts. I then invited them to utilize all the gesture work we had explored from Viewpoints, Boal and Chekhov to create a chain of physical events that embodied a remembered event from their lives that still elicited a strong sting of emotion. I stressed to them that they should resist the urge to *act*, or put emotion on top of the action sequence they created. They only needed to commit 100% to the physical score itself and then react kinesthetically to the movement in the moment.

I gave them time to work individually to experiment with different movements, then make decisions on a sequence of movement and rehearse it. Then I brought them back together to perform their sequences for each other. Once everyone had performed their physical score, I had them repeat the sequence while speaking part of their chosen existing text. I reiterated that they were not to *act*. I knew that by adding language, they would be tempted to add emotion on top of their movement. I was glad to notice how much more aware many of them were of this temptation; they could actually notice it while it was happening. I coached them through, encouraging them to keep stripping away the "performance" and instead more fully experience what was happening physically.

Next, borrowing from Exercise 3: Action and Speaking in Chapter 9 of *The Viewpoints Book* (Appendix D), I had them work with a partner to create a movement piece using the following actions in any order: Overcome Resistance, Catch, Bow, Kiss/Embrace, and Run Off. I gave them only about five or ten minutes - I didn't want them getting stuck in planning and talking about it; I wanted them to make choices and get up on their feet. Each pair presented their

movement pieces, with the same directive of focusing on the physicality itself and resisting the urge to *act*, or put emotion on top of the action. The goal was to react kinesthetically to the movement and to their partner. After all the pairs had presented their work, I asked each partner to add a piece of their text to the scene they had created. The text they chose did not have to make sense or tell a coherent “story.” They were to stay committed to the physical score and just let the words be an extension of that. Any emotion that came through physicality would be the “right” emotion. This proved to be a real struggle for the majority of the class. They couldn’t quite grasp how to just let the words be an extension of their physical movement; they really wanted to wrestle the text into the movement. Helping them let go of that struggle involved consistent and repeated side coaching, helping create awareness when they were pushing and encouraging them to focus on their breath and body awareness.

Before our Spring Break, I gave them their next assignment, the Gesture and Existing Text performance piece (Appendix C.2). Students were to create a sound and movement piece about an experience from their life that caused a strong emotional response for them (either the experience they had used for the exercise we’d done in class or another of their choosing). Any and all dialogue had to be from an existing text or multiple texts. They would create a sequence of physical gestures or movements that embodied the event. They would perform their piece three times: (1) The gesture/physical score only, (2) Physical score with their chosen text(s), and (3) Speaking only their text. As in the class work, they would focus on strong physical commitment and embodiment, and allow any emotional response to come from there, resisting (as always) the urge to *act*. They would perform their pieces for each other when we returned from our break.

3.5 COVID-19

As it turned out, we never were able to return to the classroom. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic during the break, the university made the decision to turn to remote learning for the remainder of the semester. This obviously required major amounts of adjustment to my course plans but, more importantly, my students were forced to adjust to a sudden disruption to every aspect of their lives. The irony was not lost on me that my initial inspiration for *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement* was a desire to work with people experiencing the effects of trauma and I now found myself teaching the course to a group of young adults experiencing a common trauma. Every one of them had been uprooted and unsettled, and found themselves facing a torrent of unknowns. Trauma causes physical distress because it leaves its victims stuck in Fight or Flight, as they try to deal with a threat they can neither fight nor escape. As Dr. Van der Kolk puts it, “If the fight/flight/freeze response is successful and we escape the danger, we recover our internal equilibrium and gradually ‘regain our senses.’ If for some reason the normal response is blocked — for example, when people are...prevented from taking effective action...the brain keeps secreting stress chemicals, and the brain’s electrical circuits continue to fire in vain (Van der Kolk 54).” This is the situation in which my students and I suddenly found ourselves.

My outcomes had to shift slightly to prioritize the mental health of my students, and to provide the elements essential to mitigating and healing from trauma: the ability to speak the truth of the experience, restoring connection with others, and providing a safe space to be heard. There was no doubt that the community I had planned to build had changed: we could not be together in the classroom, working physically as an ensemble. We would instead have to rely on virtual Zoom interactions. But in many ways, it became stronger and took on a different and

greater importance. Because of the work they'd been able to do in the first half of the semester, they had built connections and trust in one another. They were able to find strength and solace in it, once in isolation.

Our new reality meant that I would also have to make allowances for the realities in which my students found themselves: limited space, being surrounded by people and perhaps unable to find time to themselves, as well as being sensitive to their physical, mental and emotional exhaustion and overwhelm.

When we began the semester again, we met on Zoom and spent some time checking in. I wanted to allow time and space for my students to be able to connect with each other, and to acknowledge how they were feeling. They then shared with each other the Gesture/Existing Text stories they'd been assigned before spring break. There were changes to the performances that I'd been expecting, of course. I knew many of them had very limited space in which to work, and were trying to work out lighting and sound issues within those spaces. What I hadn't thought of, and what struck me powerfully as these incredibly generous, brave and resilient students shared their pieces, was how difficult it must have been for many of them to do this work in their family homes. Not only were they hyper-aware of themselves because of the proximity of family members, the experiences that many of them had chosen to work with involved the very family members they were living with, and they were sharing their stories in the houses that held those memories. When I had that realization, I brought it up the next time we met online. It was important to me that I acknowledge that for them, and let them know that I recognized the added emotional strain they might be under. We were able to have a discussion about the significance of being at home while doing this work. I believe that (because I gave them that recognition) the

conversation we had as a result helped to open them up to the remaining work of the course. Being seen, heard and recognized is a powerful force of healing.

3.6 EXPLORING ADAPTATIONS

The next assignment, Adaptations (Appendix C.3), began with the students watching clips of performances I'd chosen because they were prime examples of solo performance artists' ability to fully embody and inhabit characters in the stories they tell, using personal source material. These covered a variety of styles, encompassing the work of John Leguizamo, Nilaja Sun, Sarah Jones, and Whoopi Goldberg (Appendix E). My original plan was to have them write a brief scene/monologue/performance using an experience from their past. Using the viewing assignments as inspiration, they would be asked to adapt the piece. The gesture work we had done through Viewpoints, Laban's Efforts, and Chekhov's Gestures and Qualities would help them to build the physical characterization within their piece.

Because we were all living in a new reality, and I knew that most of the students were dealing with limited space in which to work, I adjusted my plan for the assignment. I decided to use the situation in which we found ourselves for inspiration. I had them create a character with a polar opposite world view from their own regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The character could be inspired by someone they had seen on the news, on social media, or in their lives. Exploring the beliefs and feelings of people completely different than ourselves ultimately gives us the opportunity to know ourselves better. It can force us to solidify for ourselves what we do believe, what is important to us, and why.

The assignment was to create a short “monologue,” introducing themselves to the group as that character and sharing their thoughts on the situation. Taking into consideration the fact that they were working in small spaces, I asked them to use the artists in the viewing assignments as inspiration and find a way to embody their character fully, incorporating their physicality and voice into the performance. After all students had presented their characters, we would have a “panel discussion” in which the characters could interact with each other, responding to their opinions and asking questions.

I was impressed with what my students came up with in their characters for this assignment. Presenting via Zoom meant that physical embodiment of character, originally a key element of the assignment, was not able to be fully explored in the way I’d imagined. But nevertheless, my students created clear characters with strong points of view, and they remained committed to those characters through their presentations and what became a quite lively panel discussion. A few of them even changed their Zoom ID from their name to their character’s name for the class. Though the assignment had changed from using an experience from their personal history, the characters they chose to create still did connect to them personally, and to their life experience. One student chose to don the persona of an uber-religious aunt who believed that COVID-19 was only infecting “non-believers.” Another chose an archetypal nightmare customer she’d waited on at Starbucks in varying forms during the pandemic. Though they were stepping into the shoes of people they normally would not, they were still able to use the assignment to process some of what they were experiencing. Particularly during the panel discussion portion, their own beliefs and opinions became clearer as they ventured into discussing the beliefs of the characters they’d chosen to inhabit. In our discussion afterwards, many students seemed to have discovered a newfound confidence in themselves. And, as an

added bonus, the opportunity to take on the persona of someone far outside their own belief system wound up providing some much-needed levity and release for them amidst the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic.

3.7 SOLO PIECES

My original plan was to spend the final five weeks of classes working on the final assignment of the course. This was meant to be the creation and refinement of individual solo pieces, which would then be woven together into a performance piece. We would also work together to develop ensemble moments to support the solo pieces, as well as to serve as opening and closing scenes for the piece. The performance was to occur the week of finals, and would be open to invited guests from the faculty and student body. The reality of COVID-19 made the idea of a public performance impossible, and it also meant that I would need to adjust my expectations of how the group would function together through the process. Creating ensemble pieces no longer was feasible, so I would have them focus their energy and attention (both in shorter supply for my overwhelmed students) on the solo pieces instead. The ensemble effort would, by necessity, need to function virtually instead, by providing feedback and support during the creative process.

Another important change I decided to make was in the subject matter of the solo pieces. Originally, they would have chosen something they'd already begun to work on in one of the previous assignments (Hero's Journey, Gesture/Existing Text, and/or Adaptation), and develop it further. This would have meant that they would be working with a past experience, using our creative process to theatricalize an event from their personal history. But because we found ourselves in a situation that was overwhelming and all-consuming for most of my students, I

wanted to give them the opportunity to acknowledge that; to give them a chance to process some of what they were facing and feeling. I wanted to give them room to explore, to offer them a sense of freedom in the face of the constraint they might be feeling in sequestration. With this in mind, I gave them the theme of Isolation, whatever that meant to them or ignited in them.

I gave them their assignment and had them work on their own to begin to brainstorm what they might want to do. I encouraged them to try journal writing, to pay attention to their dreams and to what they were seeing and hearing on television, social media and in the conversations they were having. In our next class on Zoom, each student was able to share the ideas they were working with, and to talk us through their thoughts on how they imagined expressing themselves. I then opened up the forum so they could receive feedback and creative suggestions from their peers before I offered my own thoughts. It was important that none of the suggestions, from me or the students, cross over in to being prescriptive. I wanted everyone to maintain a complete sense of ownership of their piece, to know that how they chose to express themselves was entirely up to them.

During our online brainstorm session, I was absolutely blown away by what my students brought to the table; in the ideas they'd come up with for their pieces, and the generosity and creativity they shared with each other in their feedback. The solutions they had found to the limitations of their living situations, their desire to dig deep, their willingness to be vulnerable, to reveal themselves to me and to each other; it was more than I could have imagined or hoped for. Their ideas were as different and clever and creative as they were as individuals. One of my main goals for the course was for them to be able to recognize and own their uniqueness, and to find confidence in that uniqueness. And in the midst of a pandemic, that is exactly what they were bringing to the challenge.

I had them send me a first draft video of their piece, including whatever they had been able to get filmed, and talking me through anything they hadn't. I sent them feedback and gave them some suggestions, but I made it a point to be clear that I was merely offering thoughts their pieces inspired in me. They could take the suggestions or make different choices. I wanted them to be sure they knew that this was *their* piece. It was important to me that I remain committed to the course goal of offering them a sense of agency, and ownership of their creative process.

Instead of the live performance for an invited audience I had planned, the "final showing" of the solo pieces were recorded and submitted to me, and then, when we met on Zoom for our final class, the students were given the choice of whether or not they wanted to share their piece with the class: every student did. And they responded to each other's pieces with a sense of wonder and celebration.

When I considered how I might adjust my course plan for the reality of remote learning, I found it really hard to let go of the thoughts of what we would be losing: the electricity of a live performance in front of an audience, the space of a theatre in which to explore, the ability to stretch the boundaries of physical expression. And to be honest, those are actual losses to what the course might have been. But being forced to tell their stories in a recorded form lit a fire in the ingenuity and resiliency of my students. They rose to the challenge and took advantage of the benefits of technology. Utilizing video cuts, voiceovers, and musical scores, for example, allowed them to think bigger in how they wanted to express themselves. In some ways, being able to create multimedia pieces gave them a freedom they might not have found in front of an audience.

Their creativity and vulnerability were truly awe-inspiring. One student chose to personify the voice of Anxiety in her head and she created a scene expressing what the constant

battle in her head between those anxious thoughts and her “self” felt like. Another explored the isolation that came with the knowledge that in her decision to move to New York to pursue acting after graduation, she would be the first in her family to choose to break the tradition of returning home to get married and have kids and stay put. Another created a visual and auditory loop of the same repeated day it felt like she had been having since social distancing began. And on and on. I found myself to be quite emotional during our last class together online. I was so grateful to these students for taking this journey with me over the semester, and humbled by the commitment, drive, resiliency and vulnerability they showed in the process.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 THESIS QUESTION REVISITED

When I entered the M.F.A program at the University of Pittsburgh, I already had plans of developing theatrical programming to help people suffering the effects of trauma in their healing process. But when it came time to create my thesis course, I couldn't see a way to translate that programming into a course for a B.A. program. I struggled for a long while to figure out what I wanted my course to be. It was when I recognized the tremendous pressures these oftentimes triple-majoring students were under, and the overwhelming rates of anxiety they were experiencing that I found my way to *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*.

As I developed my course, the question guiding me was is this: How, in this age of disconnection from one's self, caused by technology, cultivated social media existence, competition, fear of failure, and high anxiety, can we assist young actors in gaining ownership of their creative process and realizing the value of their uniqueness? Based on my research and personal experience, I believed, through the process of creating solo performance material using their personal experiences as inspiration, my students would find confidence in their uniqueness and gain agency over their creative process. My research proved to be correct: working with an expanded awareness of physicality and embodiment, my students were able to access connection to their physical body. And finally, by developing and working as an ensemble, they were able to discover a stronger sense of self rooted in the support of a community.

There were a number of challenges I saw in my students that the course addressed: they tended to be disconnected from their physical bodies, their anxiety and insecurity trapping them

in critical judgmental mind and feeling separated from their body. There also tended to be a lack of confidence that stemmed from them doubting themselves as individuals, feeling they have nothing “interesting” to offer. They seemed unaware that they had their own unique and valuable voices, and they deserved to be heard. Giving them the opportunity to share their personal experiences through various storytelling lenses began to release them from the paralyzing grip of fear that had kept them playing small and making small choices. Tapping into their own personal histories, they were able to recognize that they are the heroes of their own stories.

Through the use of physical exercises and techniques from methodologies such as Viewpoints, Augusto Boal, Michael Chekhov, and the Laban System of Movement, and through assignments exploring the creation of personal theatrical work, students succeeded in meeting these course objectives. They:

- Developed greater confidence and expressiveness as performers.
- Expanded the self-imposed boundaries of expression through the synthesis of body and sound.
- Explored and adapted personal life experiences as source material for the creation of dramatic work.
- Developed, refined and took ownership of an individual and personal creative process.
- Worked collaboratively in the creation and development of solo and theatrical performance.
- Developed a working vocabulary of physical acting methodologies to support further performance endeavors.

This course is designed for B.A. students, both majors and non-majors, who have had basic beginning acting training as preparation for the methodologies introduced and explored.

There is, I discovered through this process, a tremendous benefit to teaching this course to B.A. students, and that is in the diversity these students bring with them. These are students with a wide variety of interests and often with multiple majors and minors. This means they bring to the work a vast array of life experiences and hopes for the future. It is these life experiences; their hopes, fears, successes and failures, that make them interesting, unique individuals, and *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement* gave them a fresh lens with which to view themselves: as artists. And despite all of the differences in their stories, through this course they were able to find commonality. Throughout the exercises and assignments, they discovered over and over that the core of what they were dealing with (the worries, fears, pressures, expectations and struggles that could feel so isolating) were the same. As they shared themselves with each other, they found reassurance that they were not alone.

4.2 REVISIONS AND FUTURE APPLICATIONS

This was the first time that I was able to put many of my ideas for this course into action, and to get the majority of the exercises I had developed up on their feet. The course therefore became a learning process in real time for me. From the first class, I was up front with my students that this course would be a work in progress, and I asked them to be willing to be flexible with our course calendar. I could not have had a more flexible group: these students were not only adaptable, but they were also incredibly open, willing to dive in to the unknown, and supportive of each other. As the course progressed, I was still researching and developing new ideas, and making changes along the way based on those ideas.

Throughout the semester, I discovered a number of elements were key to the success of the course. The exercises I included and/or adapted from Augusto Boal were vital to the process, because Boal's methodology focuses on community, transformation, and giving voice to the voiceless. Using the blueprint of the *Hero's Journey* as an introduction to storytelling, and implementing The Clock exercise to work on embodying that blueprint, proved to be invaluable. It served as an accessible and natural bridge for my students to begin crafting their own stories after our early work focusing on physicality and building the ensemble. While I still feel strongly that my original plan for solo pieces performed live is an integral part of this course, the unexpected necessity of having students record their pieces provided them additional avenues of expression. In future applications of the course, I would incorporate recorded solo pieces as a separate assignment, utilizing these remote and digital components that proved to be successful.

The learning opportunities for me came with both the successes and the challenges my students faced. Through teaching this course, I got a better idea of how long to spend on certain exercises and how to manage the progression of exercises. I also gained insight into the concepts and exercises I could have been clearer in my introduction and instruction. There were days when the work seemed to be too abstract; when I tried to do too much too fast and I could feel them struggling to stay invested. My attempt at introducing Chekhov's Psychological Gesture was an example of both poorly conceived progression, and of lack of clarity in instruction and concept. I had begun working with them successfully in a previous class on Chekhov's techniques of Leading Centers and Qualities. They had responded especially well to working with Qualities and Radiating/Receiving. The following class, rather than segueing into Psychological Gesture, which would have been a natural transition, I chose to introduce the Hero's Journey segment. This meant that it would be a full week and a half before we returned to

Chekhov, and the momentum and understanding we'd built had faded. Additionally, I found it challenging to help students grasp the concept of Psychological Gesture without them having scripted characters to work with. That challenge for me meant that my instruction felt muddy. Going forward, I would examine whether or not Psychological Gesture would be useful to the course at all. If I did choose to teach it, I would move it so that it could transition out of the exercises exploring Qualities, Radiating and Receiving.

Conversely, Augusto Boal's Image Theater exercise that I'd planned as only a brief part of a class turned out to be more productive and useful for the students than I'd imagined. They responded with excitement and creativity to the process of creating images by positioning the architecture of the room (cubes, chairs, mirrors) and the bodies of the classmates. The students leapt at the opportunity to create images representing their classmates' journeys, taking on the task of molding and shaping their peers with tremendous focus and enthusiasm. Because they were digging so deep into the exercise, I decided in the moment to expand the exercise a step further: I asked the student whose story was being represented to step out and observe the created image. I asked them to make any adjustments necessary to the image, if there was anything they would add or change. The pictures they created were creative and moving (Appendix F). In future applications of the course, I would devote more time to this exercise, perhaps even spending an entire class on it as an additional means of building and telling stories.

Because the majority of these B.A. students are juggling multiple majors, extracurricular activities, and jobs, as the semester went on, it was clear they were starting to reach overload, and their mental and physical health was being affected. Attendance became an issue. There were classes when multiple students were absent, and I had to adjust my plan for the day, as the smaller class size would make the planned exercises less effective. About midway through the

semester, I had to have a serious conversation with them about the importance of attendance, not only for their college experience but for their future endeavors as well. That conversation seemed to help, and by and large, they took their attendance more seriously afterward.

During our discussion about attendance, one student confessed to the group that there were days when she found it extremely difficult to force herself out the door to come to class, but that she consistently did because she always left class feeling better. This was not only valuable as encouragement to her classmates; it was also important for me. Reflecting back on this moment, I am reminded of the weight of the emotional work I asked these students to explore in class, and the tremendous responsibility that comes with that as their instructor. In future applications of this course, I will build into the class structure more strategies for creating and maintaining a safe psychological space for the work. For instance, taking time at the beginning of the first class to collaboratively establish group agreements is a valuable tool for creating the safe space necessary to allow for a productive process. Additionally, I will include a brief period of reflection at the end of every class. This is simply a time for coming together as a group to address anything that arose individually or collectively. This creates the opportunity for the class to maintain the sense of group cohesion and safe space, and as a way to leave the work in the room. Additionally, it can serve as a consistent “ritual” to end the work each day. Rituals such as this can be an invaluable tool for students’ self-care. Finally, I will provide outside mental health resources for students to consult if they begin to feel the emotional toll (Appendix G).

The experience of adapting the course I’d planned to remote learning during a global pandemic has inspired me to consider how to accommodate people who are experiencing current ongoing trauma, rather than focusing solely on past experiences. Victims of trauma resulting from past experiences “are terrified to feel deeply. They are afraid to experience their emotions,

because emotions lead to loss of control (Van der Kolk 337).” When a trauma is repeated and ongoing, this fear is ever-present, because the traumatizing event is not something they are able to control. Taking appropriate steps to avoid retraumatization becomes even more imperative than when the events are in the past. Taking inspiration from Dr. Van der Kolk (338), these steps can include:

- Create a safe space for them to be able to be present within their body, and with each other.
- Resist the urge to try to move too fast; go slowly and allow them to engage as they’re able. Slowing things down physically is especially helpful in reestablishing a connection with the body and the sense of self.
- Group movement and collective music can be a powerful tool in providing a sense of hope and courage.

Viewpoints exercises provide an invaluable method of entry when working with groups of people who have suffered trauma. “The initial challenge is simply to get participants to be more present in the room... You have to make it safe for them to notice each other (Van der Kolk 338).” Viewpoints is the articulation of “a set of names for things that already exist, things that we do naturally and have always done, with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness and emphasis (Bogart and Landau 7).” Because it places the individual’s focus on what physically exists in the here and now, beginning Viewpoints work is a low-stakes way to get participants up and moving, first becoming aware of the space they’re in, and then, gradually, each other.

Moving together as a group through space, exploring the physical Viewpoints builds courage and community. The foundational Viewpoints principle of “soft focus (Appendix D)” is also key to this process: direct, extended eye contact can be triggering for traumatized individuals, as they

don't know who is or isn't a threat. Allowing visual information to come *to* them provides expanded awareness, without giving away their sense of control or safety.

4.3 FINAL REFLECTIONS

Where you stumble, there lies your treasure. The very cave you are afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you are looking for. The damned thing in the cave that was so dreaded has become the center (Campbell 24). ~ Joseph Campbell

In my plans to develop somatic theatre programs for traumatized people, I had never considered that might include people who had recently, and were still actively experiencing, trauma. When I developed *Creating & Embodying Your Story Through Movement*, I assumed that my students would use experiences, emotions, and issues from their past history as their source material. The COVID-19 pandemic changed virtually everything, and it required that I adjust my thought process, along with many of my plans for the course. We were all operating under a new reality, and so I had to be realistic about what was happening, and adaptable to where my students were physically, mentally and emotionally. This required a new kind of moment-to-moment awareness of and sensitivity to my students, as they were in the thick of trauma every day.

My final thoughts on the outcomes of this course are encapsulated by an experience from our final class, when my students were sharing the solo performances they had created.

I'd first met one of my students over a year ago when she was in my Introduction to Performance class. She had been extremely quiet and painfully shy, seemingly unable to find stillness or peace in her own body. The class had been a challenge for her as she battled her own insecurities and anxieties, but I could see how hard she was working and how determined she was. It reawakened

a love of acting in her, and she signed up for my Acting 1 class the following semester. Again, she fought through those same fears and self-doubts, and continued to make progress, not only in our class, but as she told me herself, she was seeing that progress pay off for her in her other classes as well. And so, she signed up for this course, and dedicated herself to the work with her usual commitment. Then the pandemic happened, and she was forced to move back to her family home. She was finding that the anxiety that she had worked so hard to manage, and finally felt under control, was overwhelming her once again. She took that struggle, and the feeling of defeat she was experiencing, and used it for her final project.

Watching the video when she submitted it to me, I was overcome with emotion. I was proud of her for sure, but even more than that, I was amazed by her. She showed up for that assignment with complete vulnerability and a bravery that was humbling. She was able to open up and reveal herself, reveal the things she believed to be so broken and wrong about herself. And she did it with a physical presence, fullness, and grounded energy I hadn't seen in her before. On top of that victory, there was the way her classmates received her, and her piece. They absolutely celebrated her. They were so proud of her. They saw what I saw in her. In her piece, she had personified her anxiety into a viciously mean character that towered over her, berating her. One of the accusations Anxiety hurled at her was that no one liked her or wanted her around, because she had nothing to offer. After watching her video, another student said to her, "That voice is wrong: we love having you around and we always want to hear what you have to say." Seeing her face on screen as she received that acceptance was basically my thesis question being answered in real time.

This thesis course is ultimately a beginning step in a greater lifelong plan. The lessons I learned and the experience I gained, both expected and unexpected, will help me to continue

developing the work I find important as a professor, as well as an artist. I look forward to realizing my long-held dream of working with victims of trauma, and I am eager to continue to develop and refine ways of integrating this work into existing college theatre programs. Above all, I am excited to continue to engage in the process of assisting others in the journey of physical reconnection and personal agency. In the words of George Tabori, “As baring wounds allows them to heal, so the painful process of self-discovery brings hope (Feinberg 70).”

APPENDIX A SYLLABUS AND COURSE CALENDARS

A.1 SYLLABUS

SPECIAL TOPICS IN PERFORMANCE
Creating and Embodying Your Story Through Movement
Spring 2020
Course: THEA 1392-1060
M/W: 3:00-4:50 PM
Classroom: Heymann Theatre

Instructor: Meg Pryor **E-mail: map390@pitt.edu** **Phone: 239.273.4419**

**Note: Email is the best way to reach me. Please feel free to email any concerns or questions that you may have at any time. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours; not including weekends and holidays.*

Office Hours: M/W 1:15-2:45 (or by appointment) **Location:** Cup & Chaucer

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will be exploring the creation of solo and ensemble theatrical work by utilizing individual personal experience as source material.

The foundation for this work will be based on the concepts and techniques from physical and methodologies such as Viewpoints, Chekhov, and the Laban System of Movement.

The process of individual discovery in concert with collaboration will be fundamental as we examine storytelling through the use of sound and movement, expanding our verbal and physical vocabulary.

The class will culminate with a public performance in which students will share the works they have created.

Pre-requisite: Introduction to Performance

COURSE GOALS

Students will build upon skills gained in Introduction to Performance, such as vocal and physical awareness, presence, embodiment of text, development of imagination, and collaboration. Students will learn to adapt their own life experience(s) as source

material for the creation of solo and ensemble theatrical work, thereby gaining agency and ownership of their own process. Students will also develop and utilize critical thinking skills in evaluating their own work and the work of others.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- Develop greater confidence, articulation, and expressiveness as a performer.
- Expand the boundaries of self-expression through the synthesis of body and sound.
- Explore and adapt personal life experiences as source material for the creation of dramatic work.
- Develop, refine and take ownership of an individual and personal creative process.
- Work collaboratively in the creation and development of solo and ensemble theatrical performance.
- Develop a working vocabulary of physical acting methodologies to support further performance endeavors.

CLASS GUIDELINES/REQUIREMENTS

This class involves participation in exercises that may make you or others feel vulnerable or uncomfortable, and lead to discussion of various topics. Although creating and maintaining a safe environment will be our top priority, know that you may encounter artistic ground that brings up personal feelings. It is vital that you respect your own feelings and thoughts, as well as those of others. Throughout the class, we will be examining diverse issues and cultures. We each have a unique point of view - part of the work of this class is identifying and strengthening that point of view so that you can hone it in your craft. This class offers an opportunity to share the different experiences that influence our perspectives as we enlighten and educate each other. You might share some thoughts and ideas with your classmates, but you might also disagree or feel uncomfortable with certain ideas, topics and views shared. I strive to create and support an open, respectful, and trusting environment, and the work we will be doing in this class requires that we work as a supportive, respectful, giving ensemble. We are all responsible for making this classroom a lively, interactive and open place where we are free to take risks.

The following rules will be practiced:

2. Everyone in class has the right and obligation to participate in the exercises and discussion.
3. All questions, perspectives and opinions are important and valuable - you are encouraged to share and discuss.
4. Demonstrate respect and tolerance for all ideas, beliefs and people.
5. Avoid making assumptions, generalizations and stereotypes.
6. If you are offended by something (even if spoken by an instructor or TA), please let us know immediately. You can do this anonymously or in the moment.
7. When offering criticism or comments on performance work, follow Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process, which will be reviewed in class.
8. **NO CELL PHONES.** Please turn them off completely and leave them in your bag during class. If a cell phone rings, it will be counted against you as part of your participation grade. If you are on your phone during class, you will be asked to leave and be marked absent for that day.
9. Please no food or gum in class.
10. Water bottles are preferred, but other drinks may be acceptable if properly contained.
11. Photos or video of class are not permitted.
12. Please clean up after class. Leave the space better than you found it. Pick up litter, put all furniture back where you found it. Others use this space; be respectful.
13. Please take care of all physiological needs BEFORE you come to class - entering and exiting during class discussions, exercises or scene work is extremely distracting and you miss out on valuable learning opportunities when you leave the room.

This is a very active class so please dress appropriately in clothing that is not too tight or revealing that allows you to move freely. Limit jewelry. No piercings that will hinder speech or might get caught on clothing. No flip-flops, high heels, open toes or backless shoes. Barefoot or rubber soled shoes are recommended. No hats should be worn in class and hair should be pulled back from the face (religious headgear is the only exception). As a courtesy to your classmates, please go easy on the cologne/perfume - you will be working closely with each other.

How to Be Successful in This Class:

- Actively participate! Acting is not for those who want to sit on the sidelines; acting is DOING. You must actively participate to receive full credit. Play. Dare to be seen and heard. Each of you has something unique and special to contribute. Please share!
- Be Proactive and Prepared.

- Ask for help when you need it. I want you to succeed and will help you with your work (but keep in mind that I can't do the work for you)
- Think positively. You are the owner of your own learning. You can be responsible for your own growth as an actor and a student.
- Remember that I can't read your mind, and I may assume you know what I'm talking about when I give a note. So please ask questions if anything is unclear. You can do this in the moment, email me, or stop by during office hours for clarification on anything you may find confusing.
- If you are having issues in this class, PLEASE do not wait until the week of midterms or later to let me know. Get ahead of any problems you're having so we can work on a solution together.
- Please do not wait until end of semester grades are posted to become concerned about your grade. Take measures and implement strategies for success before you run into problems. Find ways of managing your time effectively. Like any other class, Acting requires a commitment of time and energy.
- **I will not discuss grades via cell phone or email.** If you have an issue with your grade, you must make an appointment to meet with me directly in person.

Class Participation (30% of final grade)

It is vital that you participate in all aspects of the class. Your attitude and desire to work is a reflection of your commitment and will be taken into account for your final grade. In this class you will be performing and watching others perform; both of these activities are active, not passive, and require a true generosity of spirit. Please arrive on time and ready to work! **Two late arrivals will count as one absence.** Arriving just as class starts is not "on time". It is late. You should be in class and ready to work at our start time. Please note that appropriate clothing and shoes fall into this category, as inappropriate clothing and footwear effect your ability to fully participate in class activities. If you do not have appropriate attire for class after one warning, you will be asked to observe rather than participate, and 15 points per infraction will be deducted from your overall Participation score.

Out of Class Work (5% of final grade)

It is expected that you complete all assigned readings and viewings so that you are able to fully participate in class explorations and discussions. All assigned out of class work is pertinent and imperative to the work we'll be doing IN class. Consider it part of class and do it, so that you can get the most of out the class.

The Following Actors Work and Written Assignments will be discussed as we approach them in the semester, with Guidelines and Rubrics handed out at the time of the assignment:

Actors Work Assignment 1: Hero's Journey (100 points)

Actors Work Assignment 2: Gesture/Existing Text Story (100 points)

Actors Work Assignment 3: Adaptation (50 points)

Actors Work Assignment 4: Solo Piece (100 points)

Written Work Assignment 1: Hero's Journey Script (50 points)

Written Work Assignment 2: Solo Piece Script (75 points)

Written Work Assignment 3: Semester Reflection (75 points)

GRADING

Assessment and Grading:

You will be graded on a 1000 point scale based on the following:

In-Class Participation	300
Out of Class Work (readings, etc)	50
Actors Work Assignments	350
Written Work	200
Solo/Ensemble Development/Performance	100
Total Points	1000

Standard University of Pittsburgh grading scale:

970-1000 =	870-899= B+	770-799 = C+	670-699 = D+
A+	830-869= B	730-769 = C	630-669 = D
930-969 = A	800-829= B-	700-729 = C-	629> = F
900-929 =			
A-			

ATTENDANCE

You will be allowed two absences during the semester. Each absence, after two, will lower your OVERALL GRADE by 4% (i.e. 90% becomes 86%) Late arrival interrupts the focus of those students who are on time. (2 late arrivals = 1 absence). If you are absent on a day you are scheduled to present, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance, and it is up to my discretion and our class schedule as to whether you will have the opportunity to reschedule.

UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENT POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. (Plagiarism, copying of assignments, and cheating will not be tolerated. Violating the University-wide policy on academic honesty will result in automatic failure of the assignment and possible failure of the course.)

DIVERSITY CLAUSE

All participants of this class, both students and instructors, are required to help promote and maintain, at all times, a positive atmosphere in which everyone displays and receives respect, tolerance, and encouragement regardless of race, gender, religion, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background.

SEXUAL HARRASSMENT

The University of Pittsburgh is committed to the maintenance of a community free from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment violates University policy as well as federal, state and local laws. It is neither permitted nor condoned. The coverage of this policy extends to all faculty, researchers, staff, students, vendors, contractors and visitors to the University. Notify your instructor, and/or another trusted University of Pittsburgh official, as soon as possible if you feel you have been sexually harassed.

THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT MEDIA POLICY

In accordance with “The Pitt Promise: A Commitment to Civility,” The University of Pittsburgh Student Code of Conduct, and the professional standards and expectations of our field, students, staff and faculty in the Theatre Arts Department agree to the positive, responsible and respectful use of social media. The Theatre Arts Department’s commitment to civility includes zero tolerance for public aspersion upon students, classes, facilities; the un-approved posting of production videos or photos, per Equity guidelines; cyber bullying. Any member of the university community may file a

complaint in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct. The Student Code of Conduct and its procedures can be accessed here: <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/studentconduct>. The Pitt Promise may be accessed here: <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/pittpromise>.

THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT CASTING STATEMENT & MAINSTAGE AND LAB SEASON MISSION

We are committed to producing stories from multiple cultural perspectives, of diverse styles and structures and from multiple time periods. To tell every story upon our stage, students and artists of all abilities, races, genders, sexualities, nationalities, and religions are needed for our casts, our crew, and our production teams. As a department, we are committed to analyzing and understanding a playwright's intentions for location, time and character. We are equally committed to challenging ourselves to think beyond the strictures of given circumstances and historical expectations in production. We are committing to cultivating within our students and faculty a space for artists who are willing to take risks, to stretch themselves and to see each class, audition and production opportunity as a fresh opportunity for greatness.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TDD) to schedule an appointment. The office is located in 216 William Pitt Union. www.drs.pitt.edu. This information is confidential and the instructor may not discuss it in the class unless you choose to do so.

OFFICE HOURS

If you have specific problems, concerns, or questions during the course of the semester, please feel free to talk with me during office hours, or make an appointment to see me.

A.2 ORIGINAL COURSE CALENDAR

COURSE CALENDAR

(The Course Calendar is subject to change based on individual class progress)

Week 1 Monday 1/6	Introduction, Syllabus/Course Calendar Review/Exercises	Assigned: Anne Dennis Essay and <i>Reframing the Journey</i> excerpts (on CW)
Wednes day 1/8	Exercises: Body connection/Ensemble-building	
Week 2 Monday 1/13	Exercises cont: Boal, Chaikin, (Viewpoints, time permitting)	Assign: Chekhov reading and viewing (on CW)
Wednes day 1/15	Exercises: Chekhov	<i>LAST DAY TO ADD/DROP: Jan 17</i> Assign: Hero's Journey reading
Week 3 Monday 1/20	MLK Day: No Class	
Wednes day 1/22	Introduce Hero's Journey Exercise: The Clock	Assign: Actors Work 1 (Hero's Journey)
Week 4 Monday 1/27	Continue Hero's Journey	
Wednes day 1/29	Introduce Virgin's Promise Begin work on Hero's Journey Presentations w/partners	
Week 5 Monday 2/3	Actor's Work 1: Hero's Journey Presentations	Due: Written Work 1: Hero's Journey scripts
Wednes day 2/5	Exercises: Laban Chekhov Psychological Gesture	Assign: Augusto Boal readings/viewings (on CW)
Week 6 Monday 2/10	Exercises: Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors	

Wednes day 2/12	Viewpoints/Boal Image Theatre	
Week 7 Monday 2/17	Begin:Existing Text/Gesture Stories	Assign: Existing Text selection
Wednes day 2/19	Laban's Eight Efforts	
Week 8 Monday 2/24	Existing Text work continued	
Wednes day 2/26	Laban Eight Effort continued Exercises: Shape and Gesture	
Week 9 Monday 3/2	Open Viewpoints Exploring Gesture	Assign: Actors Work 3: Existing Text/Gesture stories
Wednes day 3/4	Open Viewpoints Existing Text/Gesture Story prep	Assign: Viewing Assignment
Week 10 Monday 3/9	Spring Recess: No Class	
Wednes day 3/11	Spring Recess: No Class	
Week 11 Monday 3/16	Present: Gesture/Text Stories Begin Solo piece work	
Wednes day 3/18	Solo piece continued: development	Assign: Written Work 2: Solo Piece Script and Ensemble Viewing Assignment
Week 12 Monday 3/23	Ensemble exercises Ensemble pieces:The Call/Benediction	Due: Written Work Assignment 2: Solo Piece Script
Wednes day 3/25	Exercises Ensemble pieces continued	
Week 13 Monday 3/30	TBD/Makeup Day	
Wednes day	Workshop Solo and Ensemble Pieces	

4/1		
Week 14 Monday 4/6	TBD/Makeup Day	
Wednes day 4/8	Work through all pieces in order	
Week 15 Monday 4/13	Run/Work/Run	
Wednes day 4/15	Last Class - Final "Dress" Discussion/Semester debrief	Due: Written Work 3: Semester Response Paper

A.3 POST-COVID COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1 Monday 1/6	Introduction, Syllabus/Course Calendar Review/Exercises	Assigned: Anne Dennis Essay and <i>Reframing the Journey</i> excerpts (on CW)
Wednes day 1/8	Exercises: Body connection/Ensemble-building	
Week 2 Monday 1/13	Exercises cont: Boal, Chaikin, (Viewpoints, time permitting)	Assign: Chekhov reading and viewing (on CW)
Wednes day 1/15	Exercises: Chekhov	<i>LAST DAY TO ADD/DROP: Jan 17</i> Assign: Hero's Journey reading
Week 3 Monday 1/20	MLK Day: No Class	
Wednes day 1/22	Introduce Hero's Journey Exercise: The Clock	Assign: Actors Work 1 (Hero's Journey)
Week 4 Monday 1/27	Continue Hero's Journey	
Wednes day 1/29	Introduce Virgin's Promise Begin work on Hero's Journey Presentations w/partners	
Week 5 Monday 2/3	Actor's Work 1: Hero's Journey Presentations	Due: Written Work 1: Hero's Journey scripts
Wednes day 2/5	Exercises: Laban Chekhov Psychological Gesture	Assign: Augusto Boal readings/viewings (on CW)
Week 6 Monday 2/10	Exercises: Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors	
Wednes day 2/12	Viewpoints/Boal Image Theatre	

Week 7 Monday 2/17	Begin:Existing Text/Gesture Stories	Assign: Existing Text selection
Wednes day 2/19	Laban's Eight Efforts	
Week 8 Monday 2/24	Existing Text work continued	
Wednes day 2/26	Laban Eight Effort continued Exercises: Shape and Gesture	
Week 9 Monday 3/2	Open Viewpoints Exploring Gesture	Assign: Actors Work 3: Existing Text/Gesture stories
Wednes day 3/4	Open Viewpoints Existing Text/Gesture Story prep	Assign: Viewing Assignment
Week 10 Monday 3/9	Spring Recess: No Class	
Wednes day 3/11	Spring Recess: No Class	
Week 11 Monday 3/16	ADDITIONAL BREAK FOR REMOTE LEARNING PREP	
Wednes day 3/18	ADDITIONAL BREAK FOR REMOTE LEARNING PREP	
Week 12 Monday 3/23	Check-in, Warmup/Stretch Present Gesture/Text Stories Discussion/Feedback	Assign: Viewing Assignments
Wednes day 3/25	Due: Watch Viewing Assignments Check in, Warmup/Stretch Discuss Viewing Assignments	Assign: Adaptation
Week 13 Monday 3/30	Due: Adaptations Discuss Solo Piece Assignment	
Wednes day 4/1	Work on Solo Pieces (on your own)	
Week 14 Monday	Solo Piece check-in Group feedback/workshop	Due: Written Work 2: Solo Piece Script

4/6		
Wednes day 4/8	Due: Solo Piece Round 1 video Discuss pieces/offer feedback	
Week 15 Monday 4/13	Due: Solo Piece Final video	
Wednes day 4/15	Last Class - Check in View Solo Pieces Discussion/Feedback Semester Reflections	Due: Written Work 3: Semester Response Paper

APPENDIX B SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

B.1 SAMPLE LESSON PLAN 1

Lesson Topic: Body Connection/Building the Ensemble

Instructor: Meg Pryor

Date: January 8, 2020

Time: 3:00-4:50 PM

Lesson Description:

A beginning exploration of the ensemble, physical work, and an introduction to the process in which we will be working

Lesson Objectives:

- Continue building the ensemble
- Exploration and development of physicality: Grounding, Breath, Expansion of movement, Connection to center
- Tapping into spontaneity, freedom from self-censoring

Class Structure:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 14. Welcome/Introduction/Plan for the Day | 10 minutes |
| Collect Syllabus Agreements | |
| Brief discussion of readings | |
| 15. Get to know you Exercise | 10 minutes |
| “Hi my name is...” - with 3 things that are the complete opposite of what you really think/feel, said with complete conviction | |
| • Warmup | 20 minutes |
| -Neutral stance, close or focus eyes, scan body, ground in the breath, in the room | |
| -Stretching with breath and sound (reach up, drop over, shake head no, nod head yes, roll up; building, adding in shoulder/head rolls, building in volume and energy. Leg stretches, neck stretches | |

- **Exercises/Games** **40 minutes**
- Exaggeration Circle into Puking Dinosaur (sound movement passed around circle, starting small and subtle each person building it. Puking Dinosaur = same but crossing circle.
- YES scenes in circle (Using only one word i.e. Yes or Huh, have a complete conversation with another person. Only move on when it feels that the conversation is over. Resist the urge to ACT - rather, communicate.
- Shapes: 1 person goes in to circle and creates a shape. Others add on 1 at a time:
 - Copy it exactly
 - Copy it but in a different orientation
 - Create a shape that is a reaction or response to the shape(s) created
- Family Portrait: Give title, 1 at a time add in to create that “portrait”
- LANES: Options = Walk, Run, Drop, Jump, Stillness
 - allow them to work for awhile, then add in:
 - observe others, copy/try on their movements
 - play with your own movements: tempo, duration
 - play with creating repeated patterns, then play with tempo, duration, levels
 - take these patterns outside of the lanes, exploring space
 - Place book on block. Give them the “staging” actions: enter, pick up book, look through book, put book down, exit. Just do those actions, incorporating Walk, Run, Jump, Drop, Stillness. Give them a few minutes to work it out, then present to each other.
- **Discussion/Observations/Wrap-up** **5 minutes**

B.2 SAMPLE LESSON PLAN 2

Lesson Topic: “Physical Theatre” Exercises

Instructor: Meg Pryor

Date: January 13, 2020

Time: 3:00-4:50 PM

Lesson Description:

A continued exploration of “Physical Theatre, ” introducing exercises from Augusto Boal, Joseph Chaikin and Viewpoints

Lesson Objectives:

- Continue building the ensemble
- Exploration and development of physicality: Grounding, Breath, Expansion of movement, Connection to center
- Tapping into spontaneity, freedom from self-censoring

Class Structure:

- **Welcome/Plan for the Day** **5 minutes**
- **Warmups** **25 minutes**
 - Neutral stance, close or focus eyes, scan body, ground in the breath, in the room
 - Stretching with breath and sound (reach up, drop over, shake head no, nod head yes, roll up; building, adding in shoulder/head rolls, building in volume and energy. Leg stretches, neck stretches
- **Boal Exercises/Games** **30 minutes**
 - Pushing Against Each Other (?)
 - The Greek Exercise: actor in middle starts a movement (SLOWLY) - everyone else has to use their bodies to help actor complete the movement - like they're weightless. They do not manipulate movement, actor decides/initiates
 - Rhythm with Chairs: 5 actors, 1 chair each. Make shape/still image in relationship to chair - each one gets a # 1-5. Move through space, when instructor calls #, everyone makes that image. Variation = call multiple numbers
 - Breaking Down Habitual Movements
 - Divide up the movement
 - Walks:
 - Slo Mo Race
 - Leaning Walks

- AEIOU: actor in middle expresses feeling/idea using sound of a vowel with movement/gesture. All in circle repeat 3 x, then new actor goes in with new feeling

- **Chaikin: Sound & Movement** **20 minutes**
 - Actor 1 sharply focused action with voice & body (non-pedestrian/not representative of inner emotion; “pure action” — Actor 2 responds impulsively, “appropriating its dynamic form”
 - Transmitting energy, creating a dramatic event
 - * In Lines:
 - Actor 1 begins, repeating SM while moving toward Actor 2. When Actor 2 realizes they’ve been chosen, they begin, moving toward Actor 1. They share for a moment, then 1 replaces 2 in line & 2 impulsively transforms SM

- **Viewpoints Exercises** **20 minutes**
 - Continue Lanes/Grid work
 - Morph in to Boal’s Walk/Stop/Justify

- **Discussion/Observations/Wrap-up** **5 minutes**

B.3 SAMPLE LESSON PLAN 3B.3

Thesis Course

Lesson Topic: Viewpoints and Boal’s Image Theatre

Instructor: Meg Pryor

Date: February 12, 2020

Time: 3:00-4:50 PM

Lesson Description:

An exploration of the Viewpoints of Shape and Gesture, and an introductory exploration of Augusto Boal’s Image Theatre.

Expanding the ability to express ourselves through our physical selves, without verbal language. Continuing to build ensemble, develop the imagination and spontaneous mind over the thinking/planning mind. Discover different ways of telling our stories.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will identify and explore the Viewpoints of Shape and Gesture both individually and as an ensemble.

Class Structure:

- **Welcome/Plan for the Day** **5 minutes**
 - Plan for the day/Next week

- **Warm-ups** **15 minutes**
 - Stretch and center (Sun Salutations)
 - Sound and Movement: 1 person makes sound, others do corresponding movement (“visualizing” sound)

- **Viewpoints** **30 minutes**
 - SHAPE
 - Linear, Curves, Combination
 - Allow shapes to fluidly move from one to the next; move in space, merge with others

 - GESTURE
 - Transition from Shape — now there is something behind the movement (feeling, thought, idea), with a Beginning, Middle, End
 - Expressing Emotions
 - Expressing Ideas (Freedom, War, Balance, Chaos, etc)
 - Note parts of the body you rely on, those you ignore
 - Allow gestures to transition from Expressive to Behavioral (Abstract to Pedestrian)
 - move quickly, it’s ok for these to show up as cliches and stereotypes - more important to act spontaneously
 - Genres (Slapstick, Westerns, etc)
 - Body/health (sneeze, yawn, injuries, illness, temperature)
 - Connotations: Gestures that say something/intention behind
 - To entertain, to warn, to quiet
 - Say the following without words:
 - Hello, screw you, what’s up?, come here, enough

- Work on one like Hello with more specificity - someone you know well, a stranger, etc
- Experiment with different ways of “saying” Hello: hiya, howdy, Hail, S’up, etc

- **Image Theatre**

30 minutes

Use themes/words from Hero’s Journey presentations

- Illustrate a subject/theme with your body
- All at once, in succession
- Different ends of the theme (i.e. Victim/Victimizer)
- One person creates image using bodies of others to illustrate a theme
- Work fast to keep out of thinking/planning mind
- Each person in the image add a phrase that fits the character
- Sculpt images inspired by words or phrases from other students’ Hero’s Journey presentations
- Have the student whose story is being represented step out of the image. Ask if there is anything they would adjust/add/change.

- **Discussion/Observations/Wrap Up**

10 minutes

- Share thoughts/feelings/observations on this process
- What’s next: Read/View Laban on CW for next week
- **ASSIGN: Chekhov Reading and Viewing (on CW)**

APPENDIX C ASSIGNMENTS

C.1 HERO'S JOURNEY

THEA – 1392-1060 SPECIAL TOPICS IN PERFORMANCE— Spring 2020
Instructor: Meg Pryor

Hero's Journey (100 points)

The Hero's Journey assignment will enable students to begin the process of culling performance material from their own life experience. Student will be able to synthesize and apply the information read, discussed and explored on Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" and Kim Hudson's "Archetypal Virgin Journey" by creating their own monologue story using either Campbell's or Hudson's steps as a template. Students will have the opportunity to present their Hero's Journeys to the class in an energized, embodied and theatricalized manner.

Goals of this assignment:

- To integrate the lessons on Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" and Kim Hudson's "Archetypal Virgin Journey" into a monologue story based on an experience from your own life. This should be an experience in which you learned something, grew or changed as a result, and/or you wish you could write a different ending.
- To develop and nurture creativity and imagination in fleshing out your story into an epic Hero/Virgin tale.
- To identify and embrace style, knowing the world that your piece fits in and leaning in to that world in the creation and presentation of your piece.
- To present this piece in an embodied, theatrical, energized, and committed manner
- To fully embody the text you are speaking, focusing on connecting your sound to your movement, and maintaining physical awareness of your body

- Creativity and Creation. This piece should reflect your own points of view, thoughts, feelings, and life experiences. Make it yours.

Late Policy:

You must present your performance piece on the date assigned. Make-up performances will only be allowed at my discretion (assuming a university-approved excuse) and will affect your grade on the assignment. Each class session that the performance is late will cost 10% of the final grade on the assignment. If you know in advance that you cannot perform on your assigned date, please discuss a make-up ahead of time with me to avoid the grade penalty.

Grading:

This assignment is worth a total of 100 points.

Preparation, Creativity & Style	___/20
Understanding/Application of Hero/Virgin Journey	___/15
Theatricality/Energy	___/20
Commitment/Focus	___/15
Physical presence/Awareness	___/15
Volume/Articulation	___/15
TOTAL	___/100

C.2 GESTURE/EXISTING TEXT STORY

THEA – 1392-1060 SPECIAL TOPICS IN PERFORMANCE— Spring 2020
Instructor: Meg Pryor

Gesture/Existing Text Story (100 points)

The Gesture/Existing Text Story assignment will enable students to synthesize the explorations into Gesture and Shape covered in classes, encompassing the techniques of Augusto Boal, Joseph Chaikin, Michael Chekhov, Laban's System of Movement, and the Viewpoints by Ann Bogart and Tina Landau. Additionally, students will deepen their ability to embody existing texts, incorporating them into their own personal experience.

Students will create a performance piece about an experience from their life that holds an emotional charge. They will create a physical score, consisting of a chain of gestures (expressive and/or behavioral) that represents this experience. They will also choose an existing text or texts that is resonant for them, evoking the memory of the experience for them.

Each presentation will consist of three steps:

16. Performance of the gesture physical score only, imbued with the personal experience
17. Performance of the gesture physical score with existing text layered on top of movement
18. Performance of the text only

Goals of this assignment:

- To integrate Gesture and Shape work explored in class, using physical embodiment as a means to express the meaning of an emotionally charged experience from your own life.

- To allow emotional response to occur naturally and organically as a result of committed physical movement, rather than pushing to create an emotional moment.
- To identify and utilize existing text as a means of expressing this experience, allowing the spoken word to be an extension of physical expression.
- To present this piece in an embodied, energized, focused and committed manner, with a spirit of generosity in sharing yourself with your classmates.
- To fully embody the text you are speaking, focusing on connecting your sound to your movement, and maintaining physical awareness of your body.

Late Policy:

You must present your performance piece on the date assigned. Make-up performances will only be allowed at my discretion (assuming a university-approved excuse) and will affect your grade on the assignment. Each class session that the performance is late will cost 10% of the final grade on the assignment. If you know in advance that you cannot perform on your assigned date, please discuss a make-up ahead of time with me to avoid the grade penalty.

Grading:

This assignment is worth a total of 100 points.

Physical Expression: Energy, Embodiment, Awareness	____/25
Preparation: Text, Physical Score	____/20
Performance: Focus, Commitment, Generosity	____/25
Process and Progression	____/15
Sound: Vocal Energy & Clarity, Connection	____/15
TOTAL	____/100

C.3 ADAPTATION

THEA – 1392-1060 SPECIAL TOPICS IN PERFORMANCE— Spring 2020
Instructor: Meg Pryor

Adaptation (50 points)

The Adaptation assignment will enable students to use inspiration from a variety of solo performances in the creation of a character representing a world view and/or belief system regarding the COVID-19 pandemic that is the polar opposite from their own. Students will create and perform a monologue as this character, introducing themselves and their opinion of an element of the pandemic. Students will explore the physicality and vocal patterns of their character, incorporating them into their presentation. Students will then have the opportunity to interact with each other as these created characters, reacting and responding to each others' presentations while remaining in character.

Goals of this assignment:

- Identify your own beliefs and opinions in order to explore points of view outside of your own.
- To embody a person unlike you, creating physical and vocal patterns that help to fully realize the character of that person.
- Commit to and maintain characterization and mannerisms while interacting with others.
- Synthesize techniques, styles and forms inspired by solo performers identified by instructor.

Late Policy:

You must present your performance piece on the date assigned. Make-up performances will only be allowed at my discretion (assuming a university-approved excuse) and will affect your grade on the assignment. Each class session that the performance is late will cost 10% of the final grade on the assignment. If you know in

advance that you cannot perform on your assigned date, please discuss a make-up ahead of time with me to avoid the grade penalty.

Grading:

This assignment is worth a total of 50 points.

Physical Expression: Energy, Embodiment, Awareness	____/15
Creativity & Commitment	____/15
Preparation	____/10
Performance: Focus, Commitment, Generosity	____/10
TOTAL	____/50

C.4 SOLO PIECE

THEA – 1392-1060 SPECIAL TOPICS IN PERFORMANCE— Spring 2020
Instructor: Meg Pryor

Solo Piece (100 points)

The Solo Piece assignment will enable students to synthesize the work of the semester, both in physical acting methodologies/techniques and in the creation of original performance based on material from their personal lives. Students will create a recorded solo performance piece inspired by the theme of Isolation. Students may use any and/or all of the techniques explored in previous assignments, as well as any technological tools they choose. Students will submit a first draft of their recorded pieces to the instructor for feedback, and then, based on that feedback as well as the feedback of their classmates, they will submit a final version. The assignment will culminate in the sharing of solo performance videos with each other.

Goals of this assignment:

- To synthesize the physical work of the semester, incorporating and adapting the methodologies explored into self-created work.
- To creatively express feelings about and responses to isolation during the global pandemic.
- To utilize critical thinking skills in the evaluation to classmates' work, offering feedback and guidance.

Late Policy:

You must present your performance piece on the date assigned. Make-up performances will only be allowed at my discretion (assuming a university-approved excuse) and will affect your grade on the assignment. Each class session that the performance is late will cost 10% of the final grade on the assignment. If you know in advance that you cannot perform on your assigned date, please discuss a make-up ahead of time with me to avoid the grade penalty.

Grading:

This assignment is worth a total of 100 points.

Creativity & Expression	____/30
Physical embodiment	____/25
Collaboration: offering and receiving feedback	____/15
Performance: Focus, Commitment, Generosity	____/30
TOTAL	____/100

APPENDIX D KEY EXERCISES AND TERMS

Augusto Boal:

The Greek Exercise - One actor in the middle and at least seven or eight others around her. She starts a movement and everyone else must use their bodies to help her complete this movement. For example, if she lifts a foot, someone immediately places his body under this foot so that the actor's foot is supported. The protagonist extends a limb here, a limb there, leans this way or that, does – whatever she likes – and the rest of the group help her, inventively using their bodies to support her as she raises herself up, rolls on to her back, stretches out on her side, climbs into the air, etc., inserting themselves into the relevant space. The overall effect should be almost as if the protagonist was weightless, in space. She must always move slowly enough to allow the other participants (who must move quickly) time to discover her intentions, which should not be spelt out. To make it easier to discern these intentions, the actors must all try to be in contact with the protagonist's body and translate the muscular messages they receive. The most important thing is to avoid manipulating the protagonist actor – it is for her to decide her movements, not for them to move her around. (Boal 64)”

Rhythm With Chairs - “Five actors, with one chair each. Each actor places his body in some kind of relationship to his chair, making a still image involving body and chair. The workshop leader numbers each image - 1,2,3,4,5. Then as the actors move around the room, the workshop leader calls out a number, and all the actors must immediately assume the image which corresponds to that number. After a few times, the workshop leader starts saying two numbers at a time, and the actors must try to make both images (Boal 68).”

Michael Chekhov:

Three Centers - Intended to help the actor explore “full body participation...involving the thinking, feeling, and will areas (Ashperger 189),” the Lower Body: WILL, Head: THINKING, Arms - FEELING

Ideal Center - Chekhov says that becoming aware of “The imaginary centre in your chest will also give you the sensation that your whole body is approaching, as it were, an ‘ideal’ type of human body. This is the Imaginary Centre in one’s chest, around the heart area, imagined as if radiating streams of golden light. In the Ideal Centre Exercises, students are instructed to fill their own form by allowing the light from the chest to go down through the abdomen and through the thigh, right into the feet. From the chest it can be guided to go through shoulders and arm down into the fingertips and on up into the head, so that the whole physical form of the actor is filled with the light generated in the chest (Ashperger 187).”

Ball Toss - A circle warm-up exercise consisting of tossing an imaginary ball, with attention and commitment given to the act of giving and receiving.

Viewpoints:

Lanes -

- Five to seven participants stand upstage in a horizontal line, stage left to stage right, etc. They are equidistant, allowing a minimum of several feet between each other. The space in front of each person forms a lane (imagine a swimming pool). The participants face downstage; they are motionless and attentive, listening to each other. They will face the following limitations when they begin to move:
- Each person must remain inside her/his lane. The lane extends ideally about twenty feet. Each person is free to move back and forth to any part of her/his lane. But:
- Movement is strictly limited to five options: (1) walking; (2) running; (3) jumping; (4) dropping; (5) stillness.
- Each maintains an awareness of the space formed by all of the lanes and stays in tune with all the other participants at every moment.
- Each makes choices with particular attention to the following Viewpoints: Kinesthetic Response, Spatial Relationship, Repetition, Duration and Tempo... While doing Lane Work, there is no time to think about the individual Viewpoints, rather the participants must use all they have learned so far *intuitively*, in the moment, and in response to what is happening already (Bogart 68).

Action and Speaking -

19. Divide the group into couples
20. Give each couple the following five actions: (1) overcome a resistance; (2) catch; (3) bow; (4) kiss; (5) run off. Ask each couple to create a movement piece using these five actions in any order.
21. Once they have completed a sketch, ask the couples to intersperse their previous monologues*...within the set action, so that they are speaking dialogue while moving (Bogart and Landau 119).

**Note: My students used the existing text they had chosen.*

Soft Focus: a physical state in which the eyes are relaxed so that, rather than looking at a specific object or person, the individual allows visual information to *come to* her/him. With focus softened in the eyes, the individual expands the range of awareness, especially peripherally (Bogart and Landau 23).

The Clock (an exercise to help students synthesize and embody Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*)

After introducing and thoroughly discussing the steps of Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*:

1. Arrange up to 12 chairs or cubes in a circle and instruct students to choose one and take a seat. After students have chosen a seat, tell them that each chair/cube represents a step in the *Hero's Journey*. If there are fewer than 12 students, some may do multiple steps.
2. Going around the circle in order, beginning with the first step, have students stand and identify the step of that station within a story existing in popular culture (e.g. book, film).
3. Going around the circle in order again, have students choose one word, phrase or sentence that represents that same step.
4. Going around the circle again, have students choose a gesture that embodies that step, and perform that gesture while speaking the chosen word, phrase or sentence from the previous round, repeating it three times in a row.
5. Go around the circle for a final round, and have students perform the gesture only.

APPENDIX E REFERENCES

E.1 ASSIGNED SOLO PERFORMANCE VIDEOS

John Leguizamo, *Freak*: “Family Barbeque,” “Puberty,” and “Uncle Sanny”

John Leguizamo, Spic O Rama: “All My Life”

Whoopi Goldberg on Broadway

Sarah Jones: “One Woman, Many People”

An Excerpt from *No Child*, by Nilaja Sun

E.2 THE NINE VIEWPOINTS

Viewpoints of Space:

- Spatial Relationship
- Architecture
- Topography

Viewpoints of the Body:

- Shape
- Gesture

Viewpoints of Time:

- Kinesthetic response
- Repetition
- Duration
- Tempo

E.3 LABAN'S EIGHT EFFORTS

	DIRECTION	SPEED	WEIGHT	FLOW
PUNCH	Direct	Quick	Heavy	Bound
SLASH	Indirect	Quick	Heavy	Free
DAB	Direct	Quick	Light	Bound
FLICK	Indirect	Quick	Light	Free
PRESS	Direct	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
WRING	Indirect	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
GLIDE	Direct	Sustained	Light	Free
FLOAT	Indirect	Sustained	Light	Free

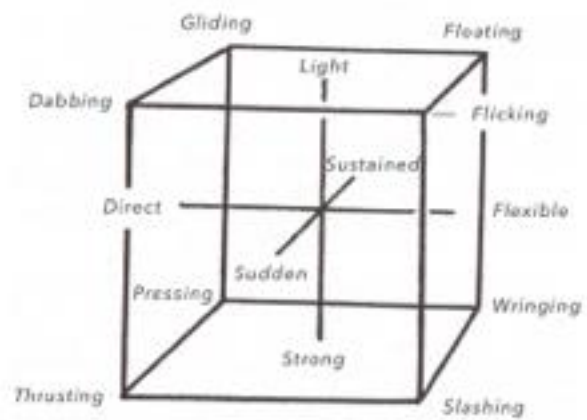


Figure 1 Laban's Eight Efforts of Movement

APPENDIX F IMAGE THEATRE EXERCISE PHOTOS



Figure 2 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 1



Figure 3 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 2



Figure 4 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 3



Figure 5 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 4



Figure 6 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 5



Figure 7 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 6



Figure 8 Image Theatre Exercise Photo 7

APPENDIX G MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

NAMI HELPLINE 800-950-NAMI (M-F 10 AM - 6 PM EST) or Text “Nami” to 741741

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/helping-someone-with-ptsd.htm#support>

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

<https://www.nami.org/>

<https://www.nami.org/connection>

<https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/mental-health-resources/grief-and-loss-resources>

<https://grief.com/group-resources/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

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Wolverton, Brad, "As Students Struggle With Stress and Depression, Colleges Act as Counselors." *The New York Times*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/21/education/learning/mental-health-counseling-on-campus.html>