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THE THEATRE THAT WILL BE: 'DEVISED THEATRE' METHODOLOGIES AND  
AESTHETICS IN TRAINING AND PRACTICE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

LISA KATHELEEN JACKSON  
Bachelor of Arts, Duke University, 1998  
Master of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Director: PROFESSOR JANET B. RODGERS  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
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To my colleagues and friends who have been part of so many of my devised pieces, I am thankful. Deserving special note are John Basil and Elizabeth Keefe of the American Globe Theatre, Matthew Morgan, Rachel Scott, Melinda Ferraraccio, Jennifer Saltzstein, and Dennis Schebetta.

And last, but certainly not least, to my students in Spring of 2005 and Fall of 2005: thank you for all you have taught me. To the sandbox!

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## Abstract

### THE THEATRE THAT WILL BE: 'DEVISED THEATRE' METHODOLOGIES AND AESTHETICS IN TRAINING AND PRACTICE

By Lisa K. Jackson, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: Janet Rodgers  
Associate Professor, Department of Theatre

This thesis details my process of teaching Devising Theatre, a course of my own design, in Spring of 2005 and Fall of 2005. I address my curricular development from semester to semester (readings, assignments, assessments) as well as the students' responses to the material. Additionally, I discuss my reasons for teaching the course and the place that alternative theatre can and should have in theatre training programs and in the realization of feminist pedagogy.

## **CHAPTER 1 Introduction: Personal Travels with Devised Theatre**

Creating and teaching a Devising Theatre course in the Spring of 2005 was the culmination of a long process. A process begun, I suppose, in 1995 as an undergraduate at Duke University, which progressed along a winding path that brought me to Virginia Commonwealth University in the Fall of 2004. Little did I know a light bulb that had been waiting to be turned on would flicker to life as I sat in Dr. Aaron Anderson's class contemplating the intersection of theory and practice, his continual direction to us, his students.

The composition of original work, "devising", of a non-traditional aesthetic, either from found sources or from texts, has comprised a great part of my artistic endeavors both at my undergraduate institution and in my professional life. A large part of my training at Duke University was in contemporary physical theatre methods. Having the opportunity to work with devisors and original members of the Roy Hart Theatre, Ellen Hemphill and Rafael Lopez Barrantes, during these formative years of my life provided the foundation for much of the work I have pursued as a voice teacher, director and artist. My acting and directing coursework at Duke focused on the body as interpreter of the text, the body *as* text. Christine Morris, Jeff Storer, Jody McAuliffe, Jeff West and Jonathan Cullen were among my instructors and examples in these areas.



In addition to the focus on the body, the theatre education I received at Duke from 1995 to 1998 was one of autonomy and experiment. Three of my eight primary instructors ran their own theatre companies while a fourth served as artistic director at Raleigh Ensemble Players. Archipelago Theatre was then overseen by Barrantes Lopez and Hemphill together and presented devised work developed from their training with Roy Hart. *Manbites Dog*, managed by Jeff Storer, presented new works, often addressing gender and sexuality issues. The intersection of theory and practice, I realize in reflection, was inherent in my training at Duke, ready to be tapped by Dr. Anderson. Equally important and inherent in my training was an adage: “If the theatre you believe in does not exist where you are, make it.”

From Duke I moved to New York City where, through a number of training and practical experiences, I began to produce and devise my own work. I am indebted to a great number of colleagues and mentors in New York who have lent their talents to ensembles, supported my work, and given me space—actual and philosophical—to, as John Basil, Artistic Director of American Globe Theatre would say, “kick around in the sandbox”. To detail their contributions and name them all would take too long, but a few of them are noted in the acknowledgements section of this paper. As I developed my process and aesthetic first as an actor and later as a director, the voice and body continually resurfaced as priorities in my work, as interpreters not only of text but of space and story. My interest in the physical instruments of performers led me to investigate voice and movement training programs. I desired to learn how to train actors, not only for my work,

but in a larger sense, in order that they may learn to fully develop, and ever evolve, their bodies and voices to meet the demands of multiple forms of theatre.

Virginia Commonwealth University presented both voice and movement teacher training. Theatre 603: Modern Theory and Practice, presided over by Dr. Anderson in the Fall of 2004 was one in a constellation of important experiences with faculty, students, and fellow graduate students at VCU that moved me to create, and continually challenge me to evolve, Devising Theatre. Dr. Anderson, in particular, was and is a continual pedagogical, philosophical and inspirational touchstone for me in Devising Theatre. Professor Janet Rodgers, head of voice and speech, also possesses a keen interest in alternative forms of theatre and physical theatre, particularly as is developed in Eastern Europe. She was in Romania, actually, on a Fulbright, my first semester at VCU, and though Dr. Anderson and Dr. Noreen Barnes may have initially ignited and encouraged my proposal to teach Devising Theatre, Professor Rodgers has been instrumental in its development. I have also had the honor to study at VCU with David Leong and Patti D'Beck as well, who have further influenced my development as a teacher, scholar and artist.

I feel as if Devising Theatre is where all of my training and experience intersects. In addition to the teachers at VCU and Duke, I have trained with a variety of Roy Hart teachers and creators as well as with Augusto Boal. I have pursued, in study and in witness, the work of Anne Bogart, Mabou Mines, the Wooster Group, Theatre de Complicité, DellArte, Ping Chong, National Theatre of the United States, Robert Wilson, Joanne Akalaitis and others. Using methods adapted from and inspired by these artists in addition to my own exercises, I have created multiple pieces of my own and have self

produced off-off Broadway at venues such as chashama, NY Fringe Festival, HERE and American Globe Theatre.

It is in addressing how to teach devising theatre and why, that I have begun to define what “alternative” and “experimental” and “devising” mean to me as well as evaluate how these terms and the theatre they describe can be useful pedagogically. I proposed the course in Fall of 2004, spurred on by Dr. Anderson’s challenge to combine our theory with practice and inspired by Dr. Barnes Theatre History class which helped me to orient my kind of theatre within a context. Also, I was lonely aesthetically and personally for alternative theatre, for ensemble creation and physical stories. Richmond was a culture shock, coming from New York, and my affiliation with and affinity for alternative theatre felt like an anomaly. Faced without the theatre I cared about in my new home, I sought to make it.

The course was very successful in Spring 2005 and I was approved to teach it again in the Fall of 2005. Dr. Barnes, Dr. Anderson and Professor Rodgers encouraged me to make the course into my thesis project. The project stretched over two semesters and was contextualized by my life. This thesis attempts, first, to orient the reader towards a definition of devised theatre, filtered through my personal lens of understanding. I summarize my teaching of the Spring 2005 course in order to historicize the curricular development that benefited the Fall 2005 course. I detail my teaching of the course in the Fall of 2005. The conclusion locates Devised Theatre within a feminist theatre history while simultaneously scrutinizing my feminist pedagogy. Finally, I include appendices ofcourse-pack contents and syllabi.

## **CHAPTER 2 Toward a Definition of Devised Theatre**

Devised theatre is difficult to define because by nature it is incredibly diverse aesthetically, philosophically and methodologically. The means of devising are multiple, limited only by one's imagination, and are often inconsistent from project to project. As a form it is fluid, multifaceted, extremely ephemeral, and often undocumented.

Contemporary devising includes a host of international figures and institutions: Julie Taymor, Simon McBurney and Theatre de Complicité, National Theatre of the United States, DellArte, Mary Zimmerman, The Wooster Group, Ariane Mnouchkine, Dah Theatre, Augusto Boal, Ping Chong, Julie Atlas Muz, Pig Iron Theatre Project, Lee Breuer, Joanne Akalaitis, Peter Schumann and Bread and Puppet Theatre, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Anne Bogart. . . and many, many others. The reader need only to know a little bit about a few of these artists to begin to appreciate the vastly diverse aesthetics, methodologies, purposes, politics and processes of devised theatre. The commonality amongst all of these artists is the creation of original work, either inspired by a script that may be deconstructed, or by a theme, by an event, a thought or a story.

The term "devised theatre" has become en vogue of late and serves as a useful catch all name tag for this genre of original work, previously often categorized as physical theatre or avant-garde/experimental theatre. "Devised theatre" is, I feel, more specific as a term than "physical theatre", though many companies can be included in both categories,

and broader than “avant-garde theatre.” Certainly devised work has been known to hover at the fringes of the theatre scene, and yet it also crosses into the mainstream, most notably and recently in the form of Mary Zimmerman’s Metamorphoses. Regarding the moniker “experimental”, I say all theatre is experimental in some way. We are always experimenting to make things work.

Professor Rodgers, in referring to the original performance pieces she has built said to me: “I have never had a name for the theatre I have made. . . I have just done it.” Joan Schirle, of the Dell’Arte Theatre Company and Training Program, writes:

When I picked up Alison Oddey’s *Devising Theatre* a few years ago I realized that I’d been deeply involved in “devising” for about thirty years. What we had at various times called “collaborative creation”, “original work”, “ensemble-created pieces”, even “making it up ourselves” and so on, were all devised works. (3)

I, too, found the term “Devised Theatre” quite late, not until the summer of 2004 at the Lincoln Center Director’s Lab. As a breakout group of directors, we were addressing original work, adapted work, director-creator, or ensemble work and were struggling to find a relevant name for it all. Our British colleague used “devised”, as an umbrella-like term, to describe it. All of a sudden I had a name for what I had been doing since Duke University: creating original pieces of theatre, physically based, often with an ensemble, without a prescribed script or traditional process.

When I refer to a “traditional process” I mean the established way the American institutionalized theatre works. In the established theatre, there is a hierarchical structure of

director, playwright/written text, producer, designers, actors. Each creative team member has his/her own duty. The director is not the writer, actor or designer. The actor is not the designer, director or writer and so forth. Each ensemble or team member only comes to rehearsal when they are needed. That is, the designer may come to the read-through to present his/her sketches, revisit intermittently, and then return for the build and tech. S/he need not be in rehearsal for the entire process. Though there is, at its best, an amount of collaboration inherent in the system, each contribuant's additions to the whole are demarcated according to his/her artistic responsibilities in his/her specialty. Though there are variations, the rehearsal process follows a rough outline of table work, blocking, stumble through, refining, tech rehearsal, dress rehearsal, and opening night. The final product may evolve as the process progresses, but there is fairly clear idea of what the product will be, of what the end will be, at the beginning. The time period of rehearsal varies but is generally fairly limited. From two weeks for a summer stock show to six months for a full scale Broadway musical.

As Jonathan Becker, a colleague and fellow graduate student at VCU in 2004-05, says, we define what something *is* by what it is *not*. This supposes a binary system of interpretation, which I will challenge in a later chapter, but it is a good starting place in orienting devised theatre.

Devised theatre's process *is not*, is alternative to, that of the conventional theatre. To begin with, there need not be a text with which to start. A devised piece may begin with a theme or an event that a group, or solo artist, wishes to explore. Its creative genesis can be anything from a picture, to a theme, to a poem, to an existing piece of dramatic or non-

dramatic literature. Creative duties are often shared in “an autonomous method of creation”:

Instead of the two process system of the conventional theatre—a playwright writing a script in isolation and other artists staging it—the autonomous method involves a single process wherein the same artists develop the work from initial conception to finished performance. (Shank 3)

The text in devised theatre is conceived of more broadly. The text includes the written word but also equally prioritizes image, body, space and sound. As such, the text may be written, or composed, by the director, if there is one, or by the ensemble.

Often the creative team members share responsibility in design, costume, and staging. The highly developmental nature of the work requires each team member to be in the rehearsal room more often than in traditional theatre. Rehearsal time can be much longer to permit the material to be developed. A group may work on a piece for months and months or even years. The rehearsal process is looser; often the piece is still being developed the night before opening night or during its run. “The group” in devised theatre is often a company of people who continually work together, over years, to develop theatre pieces. Devising “suggests a means of working, a *how*, based on the intentional relations of artists to the making of the work and to each other” (Schirle 96). Devising theatre requires a shared vocabulary and a community which may be formed for the purpose of one piece but may also be applied to a series of pieces. In a way, this vocabulary and community can substitute for the playwright’s script as the common starting point.

Because devised theatre is, largely, not the conventional theatre, it is located within the “alternative” theatre. At this point we confront a collection of terms that are often used interchangeably but which, actually, vary in shades of meaning. The conventional theatre may also be called the commercial, mainstream, institutionalized or traditional theatre. Each of these terms more or less help the mind to understand the subject to which they refer. The alternative theatre may be identified as experimental, avant-garde, fringe or non-commercial. These terms are more fraught and require further investigation.

I had at first thought I could, in this thesis, locate devised work within the alternative theatre by exploring its historical emergence and relation to experimental and avant-garde theatre. What I found, through my research, was that these terms are not universally agreed upon between published authors of books and articles nor between these authors and myself. What the terms mean and which artists are labeled with them is contentious. In attempting to elucidate how I define “devised theatre”, which by its nature is bound to one’s personal interpretation just as it is bound to the ephemeral processes it generates, I will briefly summarize my research findings regarding these terms. I will then posit my own case for what I think devised theatre is at this particular moment. It is the latter that I imparted to my students and therefore, perhaps, the most pertinent part of this chapter.

The moniker “experimental” is particularly problematic because everything is experimental at its beginning. James Roose-Evans writes:

To experiment is to make a foray into the unknown—it is something that can be charted only after the event. To be avant-garde is truly to be way out



in front. Each of the key figures in this book has opened up the possibilities of theatre as an art and for each of them experiment has implied something different. (1)

In his book, Experimental Theatre from Stanislavski to Peter Brook, Roose-Evans takes an international viewpoint. He includes chapters on artists we expect to be labeled as experimental (Grotowski, Roy Hart, Barba, Meyerhold, Robert Wilson) as well as those we now consider mainstream, such as Stanislavski and Copeau. Roose-Evans is vital to my understanding of devised theatre because he orients “experimental” as contingent on a specific moment in time. Each of the experimental artists in his book is reacting to, or against, a dominant mode of production, aesthetic or training. Roose-Evans does not differentiate between experimental and avant-garde. Published in a fourth edition in 1983, the book ends with a chapter entitled “Towards AD 2000” which envisions a continuing experimental theatre.

Arnold Aronson, on the other hand, specifically locates the artists in his book, American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History, in the avant-garde. Among them are some names in common with Roose-Evans as well as some new ones: The Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, Andrei Serban, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and The Wooster Group. For Aronson, writing as he is in 2000, the avant-garde is no longer avant-garde. It has become expected, institutionalized and dependable.

No longer locked in opposition to the mainstream, the avant-garde

continues now as a form of classicism. The annual productions of the Ontological Hysteric and near annual works in progress of the Wooster Group, and the periodic creations of Robert Wilson (which are guaranteed media events) draw regular audiences -- some of whom were not even born when these theatres began to produce -- equivalent in a way to audiences who attend Shakespeare Festivals. (211)

For Aronson, the avant-garde is dead.

Theodore Shank's Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre is broken into two historical epochs: the 1960's to 80's and after 1980. The first part contains the usual suspects: The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, El Teatro Campesino, Richard Schechner, Bread and Puppet, Robert Wilson, Wooster Group, and Richard Foreman. In this section we recognize Aronson's avant-garde categories: the rise of group ensembles, or "collectives", in reaction to the socio-political historical moment, the "formalists" emerging from the world of visual arts, and the emergence of performance art theatre. Though Aronson says the avant-garde "fades away" in the 1990s (211), for Shank it goes on by shifting to reflect the history of which it is a part. Although Shank does not use the term "avant-garde", he is writing about the same artists as Aronson, locating them in "alternative theatre".

In explaining the beginnings of alternative theatre in the 1960s and its consequent evolution, Shank writes:

There were those who looked outward, exploring human beings in society, analyzing social institutions, considering political issues and sometimes

advocating social change. The other perspective was inward looking and involved consideration of how we perceive, feel, think, the structure of thought, the nature of consciousness, the self in relation to art. In the late sixties and early seventies those groups with a social perspective were predominant; but after the success of the civil rights movement and the withdrawal of American military forces from Vietnam, companies and individuals focusing on intuition, perception, and form were in the ascendancy. Some theatres disbanded, others remain active after fifteen or twenty years, and new ones continue to be formed. (3)

Post 1980 the terrain Shank attempts to render is rockier. Alternative theatre evolves further and splinters into still more aesthetics and processes. Shank includes performance artists such as Karen Finley, Holly Hughes and Annie Sprinkle; socially minded groups such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and Anna Deveare Smith; technologically advanced artists Ping Chong, George Coate and others; and closes with a chapter entitled “self-reflections” in which the work of The Wooster Group, Richard Foreman and Mabou Mines is further addressed. Though he does not use the term, the avant-garde, for Shank, is part of the alternative and, at times, vice versa.

I agree with Aronson and Savran. Perhaps their avant-garde is dead. However, as Shank shows and Roose-Evans suggests, for the rest of us the avant-garde has simply moved on. Aronson posits that since there is nothing identifiably “traditional” in mainstream theatre, the avant-garde has nothing to react against and, ergo, it is moot (211). I beg to differ. At the beginning of this chapter, I presented a collection of traits of the

mainstream theatre and a collection of traits of the alternative theatre. The alternative theatre, and devised theatre in particular, is the new avant-garde, reacting not only against the pigeon-hole processes of the conventional theatre, but also against its exclusivity in terms of economics, aesthetics, training, class, race and gender.

Aronson writes:

Avant-garde performance strives towards a radical restructuring of the way in which an audience views and experiences the very act of theatre, which in turn must transform the way in which the spectators view themselves and their world. Traditional ways of seeing are disrupted so that habitual patterns, which inevitably reinforce social norms, are broken. A change in an individual's attitudes, associations or beliefs is effected not through a straightforward presentation of ideas but through a fundamental restructuring of perception and understanding. In other words, the very notion of what is theatre is brought into question. It requires, in the words of Lyotard, "letting go and disarming all grasping intelligence. (7)

If this is so, and I believe it is, then I do not think the avant-garde can die. It is merely in need of new terminology. Margo Jefferson in the New York Times declared "I don't really like to use the words avant-garde anymore. I don't really believe in them right now. They don't take in enough variety" (E1). I concur. For my purposes, I will call devised theatre *alternative theatre*.

For me, alternative theatre *is* that which *is not* institutionalized theatre, in process and/or product. Devised theatre, then, is located within alternative as well as experimental theatre. Devised theatre in the United States is best historically traced to American theatre

in the 1960's, tied to the emergence of Off-off Broadway, Café Cino and LaMama and inextricably informed by the socio-political historical moment in which it began to flourish. At the same time, it is undeniably influenced by and bound to famous current and historical international figures such as Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Antonin Artaud.

My focus is devised theatre that is ensemble created and physical, which includes both socially and aesthetically oriented groups. If devised theatre inherently resists traditional definition, it is useful, I think, to consider devised theatre in terms of a collection of characteristics rather than seek a staid definition. To borrow form from Richard Foreman's tenets of Environmental Theatre, I say that devised physical ensemble theatre:

1. Is developed via alternative rehearsal and production processes.
2. Emphasizes poor theatre aesthetics of stripped down productions and "theatrical" designs. As such, it considers the possibility of space to be rendered in non-proscenium ways, in non-theatre buildings.
3. Considers everything as language: the written and spoken word, the body, sound, space, props, music, image and so forth.
4. Is created anew in response to a script, theme, idea, picture, or event in a process that permits a plurality of ideas. As such, one often does not know what the end will be at the beginning.
5. Requires artists be trained across traditional theatrical and other disciplines as theatre-creators. DellArte calls devised theatre the theatre

of the actor-creator, but for me it is more than that. It is theatre of the director-creator, the writer-actor-creator, the designer-creator-director. . . the theatre-creator.

6. It is “total theatre”, in that one knows “a piece will have movement, text, music, and possibly masks, dance and multimedia” (Schirle 95).

## CHAPTER 3 Curricular Development: Spring 2005

In creating the syllabus for my course in the Spring of 2005, I felt that three things were important. The students needed to be informed of the history and influence of devised work in the United States. They should also be exposed to the wide variety inherent in the contemporary devised theatre scene. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the students should be given the opportunity to make their own work. It was vitally important to me that I give the students permission to find for themselves an intersection of theory and practice true to their individual aptitudes, points of view and opinions. I had to provide an environment in which these could be aired, shared, and explored in safety and confidence. Continually echoing in my head as I prepared the course material was Dr. Anderson's challenge to us: form your own practice and ideas. He had told us the first day of class that he was interested in teaching the *next* theatre artists: informed, opinionated and brave. It was my intense desire as well, in Devising Theatre, to help the individual artist in each student rise up, reach forth, and be heard.

The syllabus for Spring 2005 was a project in process. At first, I worked on my own, scouring my notes from my course proposal and sifting through what I discovered was a fairly large bank of information I had never realized I possessed. My initial tack was to use scholarship about the artists as well as the artists themselves via their work, interviews with them, and essays by or about them. This, of course, led me to a heretofore

overlooked question: who were the artists anyway? Restarting from this place brought a flood of possibilities as I brainstormed all devising theatre artists who had worked in United States from the 1960's or so onwards. My list was long and diverse, ranging from Joseph Chaikin to Julie Atlas Muz to Richard Foreman to Augusto Boal. The rich variety of contemporary work was astounding and vast.

With class being held only one day a week, I had to choose some artists and not others. As I curated my syllabus, I realized that I would be exposing students to my greatest hits lists. To round out the information, I required each student to write a report on a contemporary artist of their choice. In actuality, this became a wiser choice than I could have foreseen. I provided the students with my list of artists and it inspired them to not only research my list, but to go beyond it in search of artists that spoke to them. Half of the students reported on artists not on my list, artists I had not heard of, or had overlooked. This enabled us to learn from each other. During one class discussion, I mentioned the genre mixing of the Ridiculous Theatre Company. It piqued a student's interest and he came back next class asking to report on Charles Ludlam. Another, inspired by Jonathan Becker's Grotowski lab, sought out, in a roundabout way, Etienne DeCroix. Another rediscovered the Sojourner Theatre Company, with whom he had worked briefly in high school. He not only reported on them but applied for an apprenticeship with them. Still another found a troupe by the name of Horse and Cart in the southwest of England. Looking to go abroad, what she found out about them and experienced in Devising Theatre inspired her to change her application from a school in



Northern Ireland to a program in the south of England which concentrated on devised work.

My aim in the Spring of 2005 was to expose the students to a wide variety of artists in a short amount of time. At first, my syllabus looked very much like a syllabus for a graduate class. This was due to a number of factors. Having been immersed in graduate classes and particularly inspired by the rigors of Dr. Anderson's classes, my thinking was geared towards a graduate level research and reading class. Additionally, excited by the volumes of information I was gathering, I was eager to include as much as possible. Furthermore, while I was finalizing my syllabus over winter break, I had very few students registered. Six, actually, three of whom were graduate students and one of whom was terrified of performance and was only taking the class, initially at least, because of the political theatre portion of it.

I had in my mind that the class would be a reading and discussion class. With so many examples to read about it, this initially made sense to me. I also felt I needed to make up for anyone who had not seen devised work. Since Richmond is not exactly a place where you can hop downtown and take your pick of twenty odd alternative theatre pieces on any given weekend, it seemed that the best way was through reading.

Additionally, I was a bit terrified myself and, perhaps, was hiding behind the readings. I had never taught devising theatre; it was just what I did and what I knew. I was unsure how to pass my knowledge on while at the same time maintain a balance between sharing my point of view and encouraging individual points of view in my students. That is, I did not want to tell them "this is how you do it". For starters, I was not sure what that

even meant. I was only familiar in practice with my own process, evolved from the examples presented to me by my professors at Duke and governed by, it seemed, intangibility. My “process”, in the Spring of 2005, eluded me when I tried to articulate it, grounded so much as it was in the energy of whatever group I was working with and marked indelibly by own private idiosyncrasies as an artist and as a person. In addition to the slippery-ness of my process, elusive because of its nature and indubitably because of my own skittishness about putting words to it, I was intent that each student find their own, or at least the beginnings of their own, process.

My first syllabus is included in Appendix A and proves itself to be very heavy on research, reading and writing. The content of my class was not the six scholars I had anticipated. To my surprise, in my first class, there were ten students. The number would go up to sixteen the next week, when some people dropped and others I turned away to make us twelve the following week. Ultimately we would be a class of thirteen, fourteen including me. The class was a diverse group, appropriate to the subject material. Our final thirteen included two graduate students, one senior lighting designer, two sophomore performance majors, five junior performance majors, one senior performance major, one sculpture major and one religious studies major. The latter were not in the theatre department at all, but were referred to me by fellow graduate students Michael Vetere and Jocelyn Buckner who had taught them, respectively in an acting for non majors class. The syllabus was destined to be revised and, after three major turning points, was reconfigured in week four.

First, as we were working during our first three weeks in class, I realized I was not finding time in class to discuss the readings. When we did address the reading, I found our sessions to be fairly directionless, more a collection of commentary than a discussion. This led me to question the relevancy of the readings since the group had such varied levels of education and experience. Secondly, my students, many of them overloaded undergrads, were drowning in readings. And, finally, our large and diverse group was different from the first I had envisioned when I wrote the syllabus. My original plan was not working to my satisfaction. I wanted the students to be exposed to a variety of artists through history, but I also wanted them to create. I wanted them to engage practically and physically with the ideas we were reading about. I decided the class should become more like a practical lab, modeled to an extent on the LeCoq school in Paris, as explained to me by fellow graduate student and Grotowski instructor Jonathan Becker, where students would be given a theme and then create and present a performance piece on it.

My first step was to pare down the readings, only keeping those that I found particularly exciting or useful. My second step was to distill the points of every reading, assign them appropriately, and align them with the practical, creative assignments I had planned. Reconfiguring the syllabus and the readings in this more interconnected way permitted me to structure the practical assignments more specifically. Every creative assignment incorporated the reading, building on ideas as they accumulated while setting considerations, requirements, and limitations.

For example, the reading on Robert Wilson was, I knew, too advanced for most of the students since the author was working with semiotics and other performance theory

terms. However, the author also had very specific categories of Wilson's use of language, which, if distilled, could be directly applied to creative, practical assignments. To accommodate the variety of levels of my students, I required them each to read only two sections in the article and directed them to come up with a main point from their section on Wilson's use of language. During the following class we went around the room, each student attempting to summarize their section of the text, and succeeding to greater and sometimes lesser extent. I presented a "cheat sheet" outlining the author's categories of words and sounds in Wilson's work. The cheat sheet not only generated a discussion on language, but also on how abstract work is written about. This led us into a discussion on how one records, and passes on, non script based work. In that week's creative assignment, which was to "compose a scene" from Historia Calamitatum, the students were directed to use one of Wilson's linguistic methodologies in their piece.

The class sessions each week followed the same basic structure, in order to facilitate a discipline to our work, a feeling of ensemble, and a safe space. To focus the students and permit them to bring themselves fully to the work, I believe, as a teacher, in creating a small ritual to begin and end each class. Professor Rodgers and Jonathan Becker both excel at this, in different ways, and I am further developing my own methods of doing so based on their example. When I was working with Augusto Boal on techniques in Theatre of the Oppressed, he did not provide the workshop participants with, what I call, a leave taking ritual, an opportunity to divest oneself to a healthy extent from the work at hand. Sharing our oppressions day after day took its toll on us and we carried not only our own, but each other's, out of the classroom with us. We made our own leave-takings in

groups, usually in the form of simple exhalation and stretch, in order to acknowledge the we had participated together and were moving forward. Although Boal's pedagogy taught us self-reliance, as a teacher I wished, as a teacher, to provide these small rituals. I feel it is my responsibility to care for, acknowledge and respect the personal work I am asking the students to perform.

Our classes started with a group warm-up either led by me or done collectively, individually, according to the demands of the day. We would then progress to practical group work with gestures (detailed in Chapter 2), take a break, and return to either continue our practical work, share creative assignments or discuss the readings. We would end with a moment of quiet, as a group, related philosophically to Steven Wangh's "hunker", where the student sits by his or herself to reflect on the experiences of the day. When there were longer assignments with cleanup and set up time to be presented, the format of class varied. We would have a warm-up and then devote the day to watching presentations, often running out of time to discuss. This was, I think, a disservice to the class and to the students. Since the students were independently journaling on the reading assignments, without class discussion they were not getting the opportunity to share their reactions to the readings.

As we progressed through the semester, the creative assignments built in complexity by incorporating more and more ideas we read about or worked on in class. Sometimes I stipulated which ideas to include and at other times the students took their own initiative. For example, after we had engaged with the work of Julie Taymor, students

were asked by me to use or consider ideographs<sup>1</sup> in their work. After we had read about Ping Chong and other multi-media performers, a few students took it upon themselves to incorporate video into their work.

A major goal of mine in creating the aesthetic of the class, was for the students to regard everything in theatre as language. Words, sounds, music, image, gesture, set, lights, costume, audience and so forth should be viewed as equally viable languages, each of which could at any time be prioritized above any of the others. The creative assignments reflected this idea as students were continually asked to use alternative sources of light and to consider audience configuration as part of their whole piece. Alternative sources of lighting at first were always candles but eventually the students branched out into using static TV screens, flashlights, lights from their desks or dorm rooms, or Christmas lights. Their final projects reflected their mastery of these ideas.

Developed through the semester their final assignment started with a photograph from Robert Frank's Collection The Americans (1998). The students first brought to class a collection of objects, gestures and props inspired by the photograph and their reaction to it. The midterm required students to incorporate their "collage of objects" into a one person presentation of five to seven minutes in which they considered the various methodologies and aesthetics we had covered so far. As I sought to emphasize the capability of the body to render story as well as challenge the students to tell stories

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<sup>1</sup> In Playing with Fire, Eileen Blumenthal explains ideographs thus: ". . .pared down forms that contain(ed) the essence. . . In practice these compact, spare moments helped the director and performers capture and express the kernel of each action without the distracting details. . . Ideographs not only carried concentrated meaning but also became icons of a sort, a theatrical sign language that facilitated the layering and

without intelligible words, these presentations could not use spoken text, though sounds were permitted. Finally, the students worked in groups to devise ten minute long pieces addressing America and The Carousel of Progress, drawn from the application requirements for HERE's American Living Room Festival application in 2005 ([www.here.org](http://www.here.org)).<sup>2</sup>

There were three final pieces presented to an audience of over fifty in the basement of PAC. In "Carousel", students arranged chairs into a circle, used revolving lights and handed out popcorn and tickets to audience members, inviting them to take a ride on the Carousel of Progress. In "Low Prices", students divided audiences between two rooms, speaking only in Wal Mart-ese (Roll back! Low prices!). In "The Only Fruit", audience members started in a small dressing room, lit with candles, as if they were guests at a funeral conducted in gibberish. Then they were ushered into a larger room (serenaded by a live cellist), and were treated to movement piece replete with video and one student dropping from the rafters (who, incidentally, assured me he had done the same for his movement final with Dr. Anderson.)

Along with the final presentation, students were required to complete an application packet for HERE as well as a self evaluation for me. The former I included in order to acquaint the students with the reality of applying to and presenting an alternative

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counterpointing of subtexts" (12). Taymor was introduced to them via Herbert Blau. They are also resonant with Brecht's *gestus*.

<sup>2</sup> Originally I had hoped that each student would devise a ten minute solo piece for public presentation, but the size of our class would have meant an evening of over 2 hours. My solution was a group project. It was meant with resistance by some of the students as moving into an ensemble project would mean leaving some of their ideas behind and compromising into a group idea. I respected their pain, but felt, ultimately, it was a good exercise for them in collaboration, negotiation and compromise

work in a festival, a hands on lesson on the “real world”. The self evaluation I included because I have always felt it is useful for an artist to evaluate their own work. I was required to do so in every creative class at Duke and again required to do so for Jonathan Becker’s Grotowski Lab at VCU. Additionally, as a teacher, students’ self evaluations are useful to me in determining their grade (perhaps they can express understanding of the process they went through in class even if they could not execute assignments brilliantly) and in determining the efficacy of the class and its exercises.



## **CHAPTER 4 Evaluation of Spring and Planning for Fall 2005**

Reflecting on the Spring semester, there were definite successes and definite challenges pedagogically, practically, and philosophically. I will discuss them in terms of specific class sessions and assignments as they were important considerations in planning the course for Fall 2005. Additionally, in pondering the successes and failures of the course overall, I have made realizations about myself, my pedagogy and my artistic aesthetic.

Creating ensemble is part of devising theatre. It was my job as instructor to create an ensemble of the class. I touched on this in the previous chapter, addressing ritual and the importance of a safe space. The challenge, for me, was more than practical. It was ethical as well. I joked in the first week of the semester that I had the misfits of the department in class -- misfits because they could not get cast in the main stage, because they were overweight or not pretty, because they were dissatisfied with what they knew theatre to be, because they were looking for something more, or, in two cases, because they were not theatre majors. Before classes had begun, my fellow graduate students and some of the faculty queried me about who my students were. I was greeted with various responses to my class list, from "it is too bad she is so overweight", to "he's lazy and will never be employable in real theatre", to "he is not worth anything", to "she works hard but has no talent", to "too bad she is not pretty enough to be cast-able." I joked that we were

misfits, but, in reality, we truly were within the microcosm of the VCU Theatre Department. I took my colleagues' comments with a grain of salt as students, both the "stars" and the "ne'er do wells," are different for different teachers, in different years, in different classes. I, as a teacher, have certainly been guilty of writing off a student to a colleague based on an ill experience with them in class. I have also been unimpressed with the attitude or performance of a student my colleagues have raved about. We are, after all, human beings, subject to influence and full of opinions. But, as a teacher, my job is to teach whoever is in my class and facilitate our ability as an ensemble to learn from each other.

The diversity of the class, in terms of experience, aptitude, age and world view was truly, I believe, a boon to our class. Not being comprised of solely performance majors and dealing with a topic that was, for most, completely new, leveled the playing field and forced the students to view each other as resources rather than competitors. The non majors brought levity to the theatre majors' serious-ness, and the age variance ensured depth in discussions and creative presentations. I had originally planned to permit students to form their own groups for assignments, but, seeking to enrich the experience in general, I decided ultimately to assign the groups myself in order to balance and diversify skills and points of view. Part of devising theatre is creating ensemble autonomously, however. In order to permit students to have some choice as well as to challenge them to articulate their instincts, for the final assignment I requested each student give me a list of three people in class they would like to work with and why.

Ensemble also cultivates identity. For the pieces students created, we ranged throughout the basement of PAC, using 53, 57, 72, and the hallways. During the midterm, we were all out in the hallway outside of PAC53, listening to a tape recorder that interspersed directions to us (such as “one person may enter but may not sit down”) with the instrumental version of “The Girl from Ipanema” when a few graduate students came by. One asked what was going on, and the other good naturedly replied, “oh it’s Lisa’s class with all the weird stuff.” The remark was not delivered in a cruel or judgmental way, and we all laughed. The truth of the matter was, however, that for VCU, the class was the “weird stuff” and that takes some bravery to put forth in the classroom and, ultimately, in public. As we adventured together into devising theatre, I certainly did develop a fondness for and a protectiveness of my students and their work. It was necessary to an extent in order to develop an environment in class that was safe for risk. One student passionately proclaimed towards the end of the semester that in our class “we trust each other, we are safe and we do things we have never dared do before.” I myself was always a little afraid that I would be called in to justify our work, or, worse, to be reprimanded for cultivating such free ranging aesthetics.

Another challenge I faced was deciphering who could visit our ensemble and when. It is difficult to balance the insularity of a group with a need to open it up. Professor Rodgers was an easy guest to accommodate as she was a respectful observer during her time there and the students all enjoy and respect her. Dr. Barnes was another vital guest, who was able to talk with us about her life in devised theatre, her work with Joseph Chaikin as a dramaturg and her work with documenting physical theatre pieces. However,

these visits happened quite late in the semester; as I would like to have more visitors and earlier it will be more of a consideration in the Fall.

A practical challenge for our class was space. Physical theatre requires an open, safe space in which to move. The composition of scenes benefits from a large space where the artists can use distance, closeness and levels and can arrange audience members. Impulse and gestural work requires focus and concentration. We began in PAC 72, which is a great space to work in, but were soon forced to leave as the shop above was increasingly noisy and distracting. We moved to PAC 53, which was much smaller and cluttered with tables and desks due to its having to be used for other types of classes. Additionally, it presented the challenge of pins on the floor, increasing the danger for barefoot work, and during the run of the main stage shows, we had to evacuate our space by 5:30, resulting in the loss of 30 minutes of class time. The unexpected benefit, however, was that no one else wanted to use PAC 72 during shop hours either, so my students could have the option of presenting in 72, if they wished, giving them more choices. My explanation for the room change and spatial challenges was that it was part of the instruction: devising space as we devised theatre.

A further challenge to the course, addressed earlier, was the lack of devised or alternative work immediately available. Dr. Barnes was a huge resource in this way because she could speak first hand to her experiences. Also of use was the “Experiments in Theatre” episode of Egg The Arts Show which showcased Richard Maxwell, Julie Taymor and Reverend Billy, among others. Information on the show was available on the web at [www.eggthearts.com](http://www.eggthearts.com) and Dr. Barnes lent me a videotape of the episode. As I wrote earlier,

I was hesitant to share too much of my own work with the students, partially for fear of being too authoritative, of encouraging students to “be like me”. I have considered this further and in hindsight I do believe that my tentativeness about sharing my own ideas and work hindered our initial explorations of gestures in the spring of 2005. I was unsure and protective. I was afraid of being vulnerable myself and of being “wrong”, the very things I wanted my students *not* to fear. Voice and Speech I imbued with my own passion and knowledge, but in Voice and Speech I was teaching a required curriculum. In devising theatre, I felt completely unbound and, hence, unsure.

Aware of this, I returned to my roots and attended Ellen Hemphill’s The Woman in the Attic at Duke University in April of 2005 in order to re-evaluate and attempt to articulate the elusive “gesture” work. This proved to be useful to me as well as I devised In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs for HERE’s American Living Room Festival in New York in August of 2005. Both experiences have, I believe, better prepared me to communicate and pass on “gesture work” and its application in the Fall of 2005.

A “gesture”, I can now articulate, is a kinesthetic response to a prompt, a full body picture that encapsulates one’s own personal relationship to the prompt. The gesture should be specific, repeatable and able to be held for a period of time. They should have an emotional content, as they are outside to inside and back to outside. In other words, the actor hears the prompt and “swallows” it. The prompt swims inside of the actor and his/her reaction or relationship to it is manifested outwardly as a gesture. This is not the same, exactly, as Michael Chekhov’s psychological gesture. The gestures I teach are aimed towards making a physical vocabulary for a performance; though they may be tied

to character development, they are not solely intended for it. As the gestures find their way on stage, they become the text with which the actor speaks (if there is no written text), or a manifestation of subtext to spoken text, or a stylistic gestural body. The gestures can vary in size, tempo, repetition, and intensity. Often I use Laban efforts to explore the various efforts a gesture can take. Gesture work was a priority within the class for the Fall, as it was one of the most difficult challenges I faced in the Spring of 2005. Who I am as a teacher is also a resource for my students, a fact I need to endeavor to remember.

Finally, in terms of context, some students did not have knowledge of some foundational texts, from which much other work developed, including, to name a few, those of LeCoq, Grotowski and Artaud. I felt that this hindered our awareness of historical contexts and left us a bit adrift aesthetically. I did a crash course lecture on theatre in the 60s and the emergence of off-off Broadway to ameliorate this slightly, but hope, next time, to incorporate context more intentionally.

Despite these many challenges, students developed and presented their own work, free from any limitations save those of their imagination. They stretched their bodies as well as their minds. They challenge their ideas about what theater is and, most importantly, their part in choosing what they create. Additionally, they enjoyed feeling like pioneers, I believe, as did I. Perhaps they discovered more than they invented, but there is empowerment in both. And perhaps, as Joe Sampson, acting professor at VCU in Spring of 2005, and myself mused, their work was not always “great” aesthetically or even enjoyable, but it was alive and riveting, true to an imaginative impulse and free of imposed limitation and perceptions. It was brave.

At the end of the spring semester, I looked forward to my next class with bittersweet nostalgia for the first semester and exhilarated anticipation for what the next semester would bring. My ideas had shifted, focused and refocused. My approach was quite different, more bound to me personally. My students, too, would be completely different.

In Spring of 2005, I had found what worked best when teaching Devising Theatre was when I could pull out and name concepts, techniques or methodologies from our readings to include in assignments. Not only did this clarify for the students a direction in which to head, but it also distilled for me what exactly constituted the aesthetic we were striving for, drawn from such various artists. In reviewing the syllabus for Fall 2005, I wished to maintain many of the concepts and strengthen the theoretical and practical direction of the class.

For Fall 2005, I pared down the readings further, leaving us more time in class to present and discuss work. I discarded specific figures in favor of foundational readings (Towards a Poor Theatre, for example), historical synopses (Dymphna Callery's Through the Body), and reflections and guidelines on process (Sheila Kerrigan's The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process).<sup>3</sup> Kerrigan was suggested to me by Professor Janet Rodgers after I had shared with her a recurring question from the students: "How do I begin on my own?" In her "how to" handbook, Kerrigan addresses exactly that, giving suggestions for getting started on devised pieces, as well as addressing the challenges to group collaboration.

Creative assignments were also pared down to give the students time to develop processes and evolve pieces. I intended to incorporate gestures from earlier on in more specific ways, based on my experience this summer with In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs. Creative assignments, as evidenced by the syllabus in Appendix B, also changed quite radically, reflecting, I think, not only my experience in the Spring but also my current interests in development.

A further addition to the syllabus are readings on arts funding. In Geographies of Learning, Jill Dolan challenges educators to connect theory and practice in their teaching. One of the ways she suggests is to “teach the conflicts around arts funding, censorship, and ‘community standards’ of decency” (64) I was completely inspired when I read Dolan’s book for Dr. Barnes’ Pedagogy class in Summer 2005 and, hence, am taking her advice.

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<sup>3</sup> Complete bibliographies of coursepack contents and readings are included in Appendices A and B.



## CHAPTER 5 Curriculum in Practice: Fall 2005

The second semester of devising theatre was indeed different. Not only had I clarified what I was teaching, but the students were also more informed. With the exception of two new graduate students, nearly all of them had seen the final projects of Spring 2005 and had heard about the class throughout the previous semester. They were oriented towards where we were going to go.

The class was diverse in terms of age and experience, ultimately comprised of thirteen students: three graduate students, three senior, three junior and two sophomore performance majors, one junior design/tech student, and one sculpture student, who, out of interest, was repeating the class from last semester. Contrary to the Spring of 2005, the group was more mixed in terms of their activity in the theatre department. Many of the performance majors made regular appearances on the main stage. Overall, the group was assembled out of interest in the subject as much or more so than out of dissatisfaction with what they knew theatre to be.

Of all the innovations I made in the syllabus, the requirement that students post a response on Nicenet to the reading assignments rather than keeping a journal was the most successful.<sup>4</sup> I encouraged them, as Dr. Anderson does, to truly react to the readings personally, to write what they liked and did not like and why. The postings enabled me to

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<sup>4</sup> Nicenet is a free “internet classroom assistant. . . first conceived as a web-based classroom environment that could be used by post-secondary teachers with their students. The system was designed not as a replacement for the classroom, but rather as a supplement allowing greater communication and sharing of information among students and between teachers and their students.” (www.nicenet.org)

gauge how each student, and the group, was handling the reading. They also provided signposts for me as to what needed to be clarified or discussed in class on a weekly basis. Students, overall, were able to form more cogent and specific responses to the reading over Nicenet. Additionally, since the class only met once a week for three hours, discussion time was often limited. Nicenet permitted a venue for students to discuss, with each other, me, and themselves.

As you can see from the syllabi presented in Appendices A and B, I streamlined the course in terms of reading and practical assignments, allowing more time for preparation each week and for multiple showings of work. The details of the assignments were thus able to evolve week by week, and students could truly develop their own impulses and ideas, rather than merely experiment with the methodologies of another artist. As a class, were able to engage more fully and deeply with the material at hand. The practical assignments in the syllabus were intentionally left open ended as I developed their format and structure based on the class's progression, aptitudes and interest.

I was very proud of the work the students did. Although I would like to recount all of their pieces, that would require dozens of pages in and of itself. Also, theatre is, in essence, live and ephemeral, not easily or effectively captured by the written word. Since my thesis is devoted to detailing my pedagogical process and curricular development, the following is focused on my journey as a teacher with the class rather than on the work presented by the class.

## Week One

Since it was the first full Wednesday of the semester, and, therefore, full of departmental and class meetings, our first class was a short class. We had thirty minutes in which I went over the syllabus and gave out the first practical assignment, which was due the following week along with the reading post. The first assignment was an “Autobiographical Collage” and is included in Appendix B. As opposed to the previous semester, I wanted the students to immediately begin looking into themselves for inspiration. The requirements of the assignment also introduced them to the vocabulary and ways of working we were going to adhere to throughout the semester. Anne Bogart writes, “We all tremble before the impossibility of beginning”(9). I believe this, and, so, I plunged my students in as quickly as possible.

The reading for week two included Callery’s introduction which historicized physical and alternative theatre and her section on *complicité*. The former was intended to introduce students to the vast array of artists and methods we can include in physical and alternative theatre. Drawing on such varied artists as Brook, Copeau and Grotowski and contextualizing her book within the contemporary British physical theatre scene, Callery points out that though there is no unifying methodology amongst practitioners, there are particular ways and means of preparing the body to create. She presents as a “broad paradigm” :

The emphasis is on the actor-as-creator rather than on the actor-as-  
interpreter. The working process is collaborative. The working process is

somatic. The stage-spectator relationship is open. The live-ness of the theatre medium is paramount. (5)

These tenets were key to work I planned to pursue in the semester.

The second section of Callery deals with *complicité*, another foundational idea for our work during the semester. Callery writes:

The word *complicité* has crossed the channel via Jacque Lecoq and his one time colleague Phillippe Gaulier. The word has a deeper resonance than the English word “ensemble”, and for Theatre de Complicite the fact that is also means a shared belief between the actor and spectator is of crucial importance. Both Lecoq and Gaulier also use the phrase ‘*le jeu*’, or play. It is the essence of their work, the foundation of all their training. (88)

Students also read an essay by Simon McBurney, artistic director of Theatre de Complicité, on the importance of the imagination and play in theatre creation. He included specific examples of his own work as well as his own childhood. In having students read these selections, I wanted to instill in them permission to play, to be open, and to trust the class room would be safe for them to do so.

## **Week Two**

The collage assignment had been left open-ended, and as such, students created a variety of things. I was reminded that strict time limits must always be imposed on the presentation of work, in order to facilitate the class moving along, give equal opportunity to each student, and, also, to encourage choice. I had expected students to bring in actual

collections of papers and pictures and objects. Instead, and to my delight, over the half class had constructed performance pieces out of the assignment. While this ate up more time than I had planned, it was a happy, happy accident. It let me know we were going to hit the ground running. In essence they plunged themselves in, even faster than I had hoped.

The projects ran a gamut from video movies to solo pieces already containing a beginning, middle and end. Others had made more traditional collages and presented them by talking about them. Across the board, however, each student had taken time to look into his/herself. The next part of the assignment was to create a performance piece (included in Appendix B). Students were instructed to “take the collection you have constructed and choose the most important/salient/resonant event/image/moment/idea. Use this snippet as the heart or spine of a three minute autobiographical, one person performance piece with a beginning, middle and an end.”

Many of them were well on their way. However, the piece was still an evolutionary step for each of them, as they were instructed to time not only their performance, but clean up and set time. They were allotted a total of only five minutes. Additionally, they had to include gestures (introduced in the latter part of week two’s class), and could not set the piece entirely to music. Nearly all of the presentations had been set entirely to music which, I feel, evocative as it is, is often used as substitute or an easy answer. I wanted the music to be only one element of the piece, an element that *supported* the story but *was not* the story.

In explaining the next step of the assignment, I encouraged them to continue to be brave in their choices. Jeff West, my acting teacher at Duke, told me once to only choose the monologues that broke my heart, either joyfully or sorrowfully. I shared this with the class. It might be hard to share the heartbreaking work, one may run the risk of the audience not “getting it”, but if one is passionate about the work, the work will garner respect. It may be loved or hated, but it will be respected. In saying this, I hoped to push the students to not fear being wrong, to embrace the terror, and to be true to their own selves.

For the rest of the class, we worked with gestures. The work had been met with resistance and confusion the previous semester and I was never able to express the importance I wanted “gestures” to have as a tool for building theatre pieces. This semester, I decided to plunge right in from the beginning and use a successful music exercise from the previous semester as a starting -- rather than a culminating -- point. This was, incidentally, particularly well timed as we had just discussed the use of music as an image in and of itself in relation to their autobiographical pieces.

We first began walking in space as an ensemble to which I added what may have been familiar variables. Drawn from acting classes I have had, the students were instructed to make eye contact and then let the eye contact breathe for a moment in stillness before moving on. In short, to connect to impulses: their own, each other's and that of the space. I then added that they should, without talking, choose one person to have a secret crush on and one person to be jealous of. At the end of the game, students were instructed to find their own space in the room to begin working with gestures.

I explained a “gesture” exactly as I articulated it earlier in this thesis. A “gesture” is a kinesthetic response to a prompt, a full body picture that encapsulates one’s own personal relationship to the prompt. The gesture should be specific, repeatable and able to be held for a period of time. They should have an emotional content, as they are outside to inside back to outside. In other words, the actor hears the prompt and “swallows” it. The prompt swims inside of the actor and his/her reaction or relationship to it is manifested outwardly as a gesture.

The prompts I gave to the class were “child”, “man”, “woman”. The students were to find three to five gestures, physical responses containing emotional and imaginative context, for each of these prompts. I instructed the students to explore and change the gestures’ size and tempo and levels, to experiment with how they may follow each other, to note any images or emotions they may bring in different sizes or combinations. We repeated the walking through space game, but, this time, at eye contact or during any observation of activity within the ensemble, they could “say” something with their gestures. We then worked in pairs, having gesture conversations; if the actor felt an impulse to move, s/he funneled it into a gesture.

The discussion following the exercise centered on the difficulty in only having a small set of specific gestures to communicate a wide range of emotions or desires. This was completely valid and, actually, exactly the point of gesture work: to communicate physically and stylistically an entire story. Gestures, I explained, become a mix of the intellectual and the impulsive. An actor may “curate”. That is, s/he chooses and choreographs his/her first instincts in rehearsal and in improvisational situations. With the

gesture, one responds in the moment. If it works, it is kept and may morph as the process of piece creation progresses.

For the final exercise of the day, students worked in their own spaces and used music as a partner for the gesture conversation. The piece I chose was Holly Cole's version of a Tom Waits song, "I Don't Wanna Grow Up". The imagery is nicely resonant with man, woman, and child gestures. I played the music three times, each time coaching the students to listen to the words and the sound and respond physically to external or internal impulses.

At the end of the exercise, they observed how connected they were, eventually, to the song, that their brain turned off and their bodies responded. The way they listened, with their bodies, to the music is how they can listen to a partner or ensemble. Music, I explained, can be a worthwhile partner, but only if it does not always lead.

For week three, students read from Joseph Chaikin's The Presence of the Actor: "Notes on Content" (1-26), "Notes on my Training" (42-55), and "Notes to the Actors" (56-67). I included Chaikin for a number of reasons. First off, his book was one of the primary texts in my contemporary acting class as a student and I found, and continue to find, his observations, insights, and opinions illuminating and challenging. Secondly, he was an important figure in the history of alternative theatre in the United States. And thirdly, not only were his ideas and experiences relevant to our class, but the very structure of his book -- a combination of anecdote, fact, and favorite quotes -- was illustrative as an example of non-traditional format.



Chaikin re-enforces the primacy of the actor's body in theatrical creation. He writes "All of one's past -- historical and evolutionary -- is contained in the body. In America many people live in their bodies like in abandoned houses, haunted with memories of when they were occupied" (15). Throughout all three sections, Chaikin returns to the idea that it is acceptable, even necessary, to think, imagine and act without boundaries. "The word reality comes from the Latin word 'res' which means that which we can fathom" (8). Furthermore, the aesthetics he espouses matched up well with the aesthetics and process I was aiming to direct students towards. In "Notes to the Actors-1965", Chaikin writes:

When questions are alive to a company of actors, there comes a dangerous point when discussion must stop and the questions must be brought to the stage in terms of improvising actions. . . Discoveries are usually made after one exhausts trying through the planned means. The most articulate performances are always those that have been pared away. All that's non-essential, all that's accessory, all that's indulgent, all that's outside the center has been dropped, and what remains is a spare language of tasks which speak of life and nature. (64-65)

After class, I felt I should lay some ground rules for how we "play" in Devising Theatre to ensure we were all on the same page and to prioritize my students' safety and reasonable comfort. On Nicenet, I posted the following guidelines for Devising Theatre:

- 1) Please refrain from complete nudity.
- 2) Please do not set anything on fire. Though candles may at times be used, mind

their smokiness and strive for some that do not billow. This also means no cigarettes, and no burning of objects.

3) Please do not make yourself or anyone else bleed or bruise or break on purpose.

(in general, do not break yourselves or each other).

4) Please do not destroy anything that does not belong to you, i.e. chairs in PAC, etc.

5) Please do consider your audience, i.e. don't get them dirty unless they give you permission to do so.

6) Please bring all cleaning products you could possibly need to class (this is easy, because we are timing our cleanup and set up, yes?).

### **Week Three**

Class began with the students presenting their three minute solo pieces and, happily, they took to gestures. Some of them had too many gestures, which occluded the pieces, others were rushed, others lost the sound and voice when the body was working, and still others were right on -- well balanced, well executed and clear. Overall, the class was more comfortable this semester than last with not using text and focusing solely on image and body. Last semester became about how to use text without speaking it, that is, how to get around the limitation.

I believe the increased comfort with non verbal work has partly to do with the students being better informed as to what the class Devising Theatre is, but I also think I reaped the benefits of half of my students having worked last year with my colleague, Jonathan Becker, on either Grotowski or Lecoq based clowning and mask. Half of the

students already had an understanding of physical vocabulary, of the body as text, as well as groundwork in non-verbal composition.<sup>5</sup>

I gave specific feedback to all the students, pointing out aesthetic choices or story structure that worked particularly well or was especially exciting or revelatory. I also directed attention towards what was rushed, what was a good image or juxtaposition, and where breath was absent. I did not label anything as “wrong.” Rather, I kept my comments and notes focused on technical aspects.

After we shared the pieces, I gave my crash course in theatre of the 60’s lesson. It was a cursory treatment intended to merely orient the students to who was doing what, when, and where.

Then we talked about the Dah Theatre. Janet Rodgers organized a trip to go see the Dah perform their latest piece, on capital punishment, at Longwood College. At first the trip was open to the graduate and senior voice classes, but when space was left over, I asked if my Devising Theatre students could join. Janet wholeheartedly supported the idea and seven of my thirteen students were able to see the devised, physical theatre piece. It enabled us to have conversations we never could have had without it.

The students had a tangible experience and could explain the show to, or at least share their varied impressions with, those that had not seen it. In essence, a major impediment to the class -- not having access to alternative works of theatre -- was overcome. We talked about linearity and lack of, of what resonances the show brought up,

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<sup>5</sup> In Through the Body, Callery lays out what she considers should be training for devised and physical theatre: from basic physical awareness, to mask work, to play and emotion, to, finally, devised work. I

and of choices made. Most importantly, a number of students spoke about how they were really “into the show” and then were jerked out of it when one performer, in a sing-song voice, conducted interviews about capital punishment. Comments ranged from “the piece didn’t work” to “the tone pulled me out” to “the section confused me and took me away from the story”. I asked “Might it have not been on purpose? Might they not have wanted to push you out, make you think?” I referred to Brecht’s alienation effect. There was silence, thoughtful silence, in response. I then read Arnold Aronson’s quote, included previously in Chapter One of this thesis, from American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History:

Avant-garde performance strives towards a radical restructuring of the way in which an audience views and experiences the very act of theatre, which in turn must transform the way in which the spectators view themselves and their world. Traditional ways of seeing are disrupted so that habitual patterns, which inevitably reinforce social norms, are broken. A change in an individual’s attitudes, associations or beliefs is effected not through a straightforward presentation of ideas but through a fundamental restructuring of perception and understanding. In other words, the very notion of what is theatre is brought into question. It requires, in the words of Lyotard, “letting go and disarming all grasping intelligence. (7)

I asked the students to consider this experiential restructure in what they had seen at the Dah performance and in what they would create the rest of the semester.

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firmly believe we were able to progress faster and further in the Fall semester than in the Spring, partly because many of the students had been prepared in just such a way.

The lack of live performances is a question that weighs on me in teaching this course. If there is a lack of performances to see and witness, how do we teach it? We can show video, and I do, but it is no substitute. As Callery says, the “live-ness of physical theatre is paramount”. Ideally, field trips are necessary, perhaps as part of the curriculum, but if one is not near a major city, seeking out the work gets more difficult. The experience with the Dah convinced me of what I thought to be true: that the students must see the work, in flesh and blood. When this is not possible, where can they turn? I have no answers at this point; it is and will be an ongoing consideration.

The readings for week four were two of what I consider foundational texts to our work: Artaud’s “No More Masterpieces” and Grotowski’s “Towards a Poor Theatre.” Additionally students were to read Historia Calamitatum, an abstract, unpublished play by Catherine Rogers. They were instructed to treat the play as found text and, from that, compose one moment from the play. The assignment’s requirements included that each piece should 1) contain a beginning, middle, and an end, 2) include one line or word of text and no more, 3) use an alternate source of lighting, i.e. something other than the classroom fluorescents, 4) consider the audience and their role, 5) use three gestures in some way, and, finally, there was 6) the option of using one prop.

#### **Week Four**

The presentations of the solo composed moments were overall successful, some more than others. One of the most difficult things for the students to accomplish was a clear beginning, middle and end. They were, in essence, writing short plays-- a task that is inherently difficult. Much of my feedback focused on the lack of story structure. Even

though the journey did not have to be linear, it still needed to be recognizable as a journey. Elsewise the piece was an experiential pastiche, not, in my opinion, theatre. Gestures continued to be a large part of their work. Even though we had only done gesture work once in class, students were making new gestures to serve their pieces. They were also borrowing from each other, building off of one another's ideas and critique.

One student's piece was particularly successful, not only in structure and content, but in his having a wonderful sense of his own timing as an actor. Each moment lasted as long as it needed to and no longer. Each moment was simple and led to the next moment. This led us to discuss how traditional training and alternative theatre can inspire and inform one another. Actor training -- understanding beats, rhythms, tone, tempo, action, objective -- is vital to any form of theatre. Making clear executable choices is a help to any text, verbal or non verbal, devised or script based. In devising Historia, I had asked them to do that and more: to make choices beyond and under and over the text and to apply their actor training even more vehemently.

I realized from the posts that the students did not know Artaud had indeed spent time in an asylum. I decided there was a "lecture" to happen, to orient them on the bits of Artaud and Grotowski I considered important for us to bear in mind in the semester. I also wanted to introduce another idea for them to think about, drawn from my classes with Dr. Anderson: who is doing theatre, why and for whom?

We organized ourselves in a circle in the classroom for discussion. I requested the students think of Artaud as a prophet and a poet, calling for revolution in the theatre that was not always practicable. His call for "blood in the aisles" may not have been meant, or

taken, literally. For our purposes, the aesthetics of Grotowski were most important, along with the *via negativa*. We needed also to be aware of Grotowski's spiritual skew to his theatre.

On the chalkboard, I wrote out a chart for us to contend with.

Table 1: Does Theatre Work?

<u>Does theatre WORK?</u>		
Alternative	mainstream	The Text
Experimental	commercial	The Canon
Physical	traditional	The Training
Europe vs. America		
Nonprofit vs. profit		
Community vs. for community		
<u>Who is doing it, why and for whom?</u>		

We addressed each of these terms, struggling to define them for ourselves. It was not a free for all debate; everyone raised their hand to speak and I called on people in order to prevent any one voice from dominating the conversation. I also called on students who did not have their hands raised in order to involve everyone. I had, and have, no answers to give. I was interested in getting the students to think and persevered in asking more questions. I asked them to think about why they do theatre and if Theatre VCU was reflective of the department, the VCU community, Richmond. Did it matter? I asked them to think about what kind of theatre they want to do. Was it different from what they would

do for a paycheck? I asked them what was in their hearts. And, perhaps most importantly, how would they feed their souls. . . *and* pay their bills?

The reading for week five was the first section of Sheila Kerrigan's text, The Actor and the Collaborative Process. Kerrigan has striven to make a sort of "cookbook", to borrow one of my student's phrasing, for devisors. She covers ways of getting started, possible exercises, and insight into group dynamics. It was the one book in the syllabus I was, upon closer perusal, unsure of; I found it a little facile, perhaps more geared towards a non-theatre performer. But, at the same time, I thought it might be useful to the students in its straightforward recipe structure, written simply and cleanly. Overall, the students, in their posts, reacted fairly negatively to the book. They appreciated what Kerrigan was attempting (to nail down the very amoeba-esque and ever diverse process of devising) as well as the various exercises she presented. They felt they could dip into her "in a pinch". Generally, however, they thought she was talking down to them, reiterating in a far less exciting way things they had experienced or read in Chaikin, Callery, or McBurney.

### **Week Five**

The week five assignment required the students to work in groups, which I assigned, to compose a scene from Historia. Again, the text was treated as found text and, in addition the requirements of the first Historia, language was to be considered malleable. Students were asked to: "Look beneath the surface, look for subtext, images, associations. Consider additional characters inherent in the script but absent in actual form (God, for instance; the Church; a Lie . . . ), consider language as character, consider feelings and consciousness as characters (guilt, lust, love, rage, loss)."



Four groups presented four very different pieces. The most important part of week five's class was the presence of Professor Rodgers. I invited her to come see the pieces. She readily agreed and was a willing participant and audience member. As I have said, Devising Theatre as a class is the building of an ensemble. Therefore, I felt I needed to be very judicious in who I invited and when in order to maintain our insularity while at the same time opening us up to our ultimate goal, an audience. Professor Rodgers was an excellent and welcome visitor to the class. Students felt safe with her and trusted her to be open and supportive; indeed they were very excited at the prospect of her seeing their work.

Professor Rodgers' presence, fairly early on in the semester, was a vital step for the class. She joined our feedback circle, in which I gave notes on what I saw and what worked. Students commented as well and then Janet asked if she could speak. She told the students that though she had not read Historia, she was able to pick out what she thought were the common themes of the play from the four pieces. She went on to recount her experience of the four pieces, the story that unfolded before her and within her, and the resonances the experience had with other parts, past and present, of her life. The students were astounded, not that she had "enjoyed" the pieces, but that someone from outside of our class had "gotten something" from the work. It gave them confidence, I think, as well as conviction.

After our feedback circle I shared images from Julie Taymor: Playing with Fire, with the students and introduced the term "ideograph." In essence, they already had been thinking symbolically and metaphorically, had already been using ideographs, but I wanted

them to have a name for it. In my never ending quest to expose the students to as many examples of alternative theatre as possible, we watched the Egg Arts Show “Experiments in Theatre” episode, borrowed from Dr. Barnes.

The reading for week six was more of Kerrigan, which garnered similar responses to those posted in week five. The practical assignment was the first of a three part partner piece that would culminate as the midterm project: a devised piece of theatre based on a relationship between two people. The people could be fictional or historical, but had to be from a *source* (i.e. a classic text, a famous painting, an historical moment). The first part of the assignment was an associative collage, which built on the class’s first experience with creation via collage.

### **Week Six**

Class six was only an hour long. VCU Theater’s visiting guest artist, Kwame Kwei Armeh, was giving a workshop in the afternoon that many in the class, myself included, were involved in. Fortunately, the format of Devising Theatre permitted a bit of flexibility in the class plans. Students presented their collages in a museum like format. That is, everyone in the class milled around, independently taking in the stationary collages-- comprised of drawing, images, video, sound, props. The rest of the class time was free for students to either attend the workshop or work with their groups on the next part of the project.

The second part of the midterm partner assignment required the students to compose a piece about their people. They were given four minutes performance time, three minutes clean up and three minutes set up. The assignment asked students to include

all of the considerations (of space, language, gesture, story, props) we had worked on so far.

The reading for week seven returned to Chaikin, which the students, from their posts, were excited about. Students were most excited about his section on “Jamming”, a way of working explained thus:

The term comes from jazz, from the jam session. One actor comes in and moves in contemplation of a theme, traveling within the rhythms, going though and out of phrasing, sometimes using just the gesture, sometimes reducing the whole thing to pure sound. . . . Then another comes in and together they give way and open up on the theme. During the jamming, if the performers let it, the theme moves into associations, a combination of free and structured form. (116-17)

The term “jamming” is one I have adopted and use quite regularly both as Chaikin explained and in reference to any sort of collaborative brainstorming or rehearsing. I was glad the students took so readily to it.

### **Week Seven**

Between weeks six and seven, I sought out Dr. Anderson for a conversation on pedagogy. I felt I had been giving feedback only on what worked in the students’ presentations and I wanted to begin talking about what did not work, as a way to move the pieces forward. I was not sure how to do this. I voiced to Dr. Anderson my concern over whether or not I had the authority to say what does not work. Dr. Anderson assured me that I did, that my experience lent me a knowledge of structure and form, of timing, of

beginning, middle, and end, of craft and skill. As long as the feedback was kept to the structural, rather than the personal, it would be useful. He suggested that even though a reaction of “I do not like that” is personal, it is usually grounded in something technical or structural. My job, as a teacher, was to ferret out the structural from my personal reactions. Additionally, and more importantly, my job as a teacher was to push the students to do the very best work they were capable of, to encourage them to try new things, and to challenge them to not hide behind themselves in the face of something new. This applied not only to practical assignments but to discussion and reading responses as well. Finally, Dr. Anderson admonished me to have faith in what I knew.

At the beginning of week seven’s class, I informed the students that I would be giving them feedback on what does not work in their pieces. One student gasped and blurted out: “The via negativa?!” Though I was pleased she remembered the term, it was not exactly nor solely the tact I was taking. I also re-iterated the necessity to be open in class, in group work, and in reading responses. The necessity, as Joan Schirle writes, “. . . to agree to not say ‘no’ for five minutes (or) to put it another way. . . agree to consider *anything* for five minutes”(92).

After each presentation, I gave them specific feedback about structure and form, what was unclear, and what could be clearer. They took it and, overall, appreciated it. I felt great about it. I was really proud of myself for taking the time and energy to truly assess and comment on their work.

In week seven, the sixth, of seven overall, presentations was problematic. Two students presented a piece that was dangerous to the other students in the class. We

entered into the room, after their setup, and were confronted with darkness and loud noises and the two male students screaming “Get down!”. There was also the recorded sound of gunfire. Then, one of the male presenters picked up another student and, without warning or choreography, moved her, and dropped her back to the floor. He grabbed a second student and dragged her while, at the same time, the second presenter grabbed me around my throat. At that point I finally shouted “Actors HOLD! Everyone freeze, turn off the sound, I’m getting the lights.”

I should have stopped the piece in the first thirty seconds but I was disoriented, unsure of what was truly happening. Once the lights were on, I asked the class, sternly, “What is one of the first rules of Devising Theatre?” Someone responded “Don’t hurt anyone.” I informed the student presenters that their work was unacceptable; I instructed them to clean up and find a safe way to present their piece the following week.

One of two young men acquiesced, apologized to the class and to me, and proceeded to clean up. The other of the two stormed his way out of the room and did not return until the end of class, two hours later, at which point he refused to speak to me. He crossed his arms angrily and would not look at me. I informed him I would contact him for a meeting with myself and the head of acting. We met with Janet Rodgers the following week, and the student expressed his regret as well as his own difficulty with anger management and appropriate behavior.

I was very upset with what had happened. I felt that I, and the class, had not only been placed in harm’s way but had also been betrayed. I had placed my trust in the students; we all had placed trust in each other. On the upside of it all, the final group,

presenting an alien abduction, was able to cut through the negative vibe and complete their presentation in a safe and considerate way. Their piece could have been a trifle spooky, especially as we were all fairly shaken up by the previous presentation. However, the two men managed to take extra care with the audience, considerately and attentively leading them to where they were to stand, and taking care to ask permission before handing any audience member an object or slip of paper.

The violent presentation also permitted us to have a worthwhile and important conversation about physical, emotional and intellectual consent, responsibility and accountability, amongst ensemble members and between ensemble members and the audience. There was no reading assignment for week eight; the only homework was to prepare to present, for a second time, the partner pieces, as the class midterm.

### **Week Eight**

The midterm presentations were very successful. The students took the notes and the performance pieces truly started to become theatre with form, structure, and transitions. Goals for the pieces were clarified, much was cut away and the pieces were focused on story. I was very proud of their work. Even though we would not be showing the pieces again, after each presentation I still gave feedback on what did and did not work and on what notes had been taken.

Later, in our discussion circle, we talked about the common thematic questions that threaded their way throughout the pieces: who is the Other, who is the freak, who is the outsider. I suggested the pieces could conceivably be strung together into a night of

theatre, perhaps called something like “The Alienation Effect”. This was particularly exciting because the class started to jam on it in the circle and later on Nicenet.

We also talked about the issue of documentation and the difficulty in writing a script from a physically based devised text. We addressed the even more difficult task of writing a script that could be handed on to other performers. As James Roose-Evans points out, experimental theatre groups have often

failed to develop any sense of continuing traditions: their works were primarily performance scores rather than dramatic texts and so could only be enacted by the groups that had created them. They failed to develop any way of transmitting performance knowledge from one group to another.

(188)

I felt it was vitally important that we broach the topic as the survival of devised theatre depends on it.

The reading for week nine was a selection from Augusto Boal’s work Theatre of the Oppressed, “Experiments with the People’s Theatre in Peru”. Many students responded to the reading by saying they liked his ideas but were either skeptical of their efficacy or felt his revolution was exclusionary, intended only for the *very* oppressed. For the next three weeks in class, each student had one practical assignment: a written report and accompanying ten minute presentation, which could be creative, on an experimental or alternative theatre artist.

## Week Nine

The students began giving their reports and week nine's list of artists included Julie Atlas Muz, Ellen Hemphill, Charles Ludlam and Elizabeth LeCompte. At the end of the presentations I noted that three of the four artists presented were women director-performers while the fourth was a gay man. I shared with the students that part of my interest in and passion for alternative theatre is that it has proven to be a haven for populations traditionally excluded from mainstream theatre, either aesthetically or politically. As Jill Dolan writes in The Feminist Spectator as Critic, theatre performance has been constructed, in North America, to please the ideal spectator, who has been assumed to be "white, middle class, heterosexual and male"(1). I maintained that while my primary interest, as a feminist, is in the presence and work of women, alternative theatre has also permitted the voices of sexually and racially diverse groups to be heard. Furthermore, "feminist", I proposed, is not a "dirty" word. So many men and women are loathe to call themselves feminist; yet, I said, if you think a woman should have the right or ability to read, you may be considered radically feminist in some countries. I urged the students to rethink the words "feminist" and "feminism", to examine their ideas of what the words mean and to research, personally, what they actually *could* mean.

After the break, we formed into a circle and began a conversation on Boal. I explained his background by reading sections from "Why this book? My Three Theatrical Encounters" in Rainbow of Desire. I thought we might do some exercises, as we did last semester, but instead we headed into an animated discussion that precluded the need for the exercises. In the spring, I had used the exercises as a way to help the students



understand Boal's philosophy of theatre as a rehearsal for revolution. The students this semester already understood the premise; they wanted to talk about whose revolution it was and if they could have a part in it. We discussed "political theatre" as well as "black theatre", "gay theatre", "Latino/a theatre" and "women's theatre". We examined the labels themselves. We found ourselves facing the questions of not only who is doing it, why and for whom but, also, who is *allowed* to do it. I asked hands to be raised so that I could mediate the discussion, ensuring no one voice dominated the conversation and trying to permit everyone to have a say. I did not offer my opinion but did pose questions in reference to statements made, in order to prod the students deeper into the debate. The conversation turned, towards the end of class, to attempting to decide who "owns" a text.

For week ten, the reading consisted of two additional sections of Callery's book. I mentioned to the students that their final project might use The Tempest as source materials. I had been considering multiple possibilities, from Marquez to Wintersen, for the final assignment, based, loosely, in adaptation. I decided to draw upon what I knew best, which is devising works of theatre from Shakespearean texts. In preparation, I had also decided I would share some of my own work with the students and, for week ten, gave them a ten page section of Inside the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs, the show I had devised and put up at HERE Arts Center over the summer. I asked the students not to post on my script. Although I was open to questions and comments, I wanted the script to be regarded as my sharing of work, not as an article to be pored over.

**Week Ten**

Dr. Barnes was on sabbatical for the Fall semester but was back on campus for one week in November. She had visited the class in the Spring, speaking for an hour on her experience with devised, alternative and feminist theatre and her work with Joseph Chaikin. The students had completely enjoyed having her in class. I was delighted that she agreed to visit Devising Theatre in the fall, despite only being in town for one week. We organized ourselves in a circle and she shared her documentation, and recollection, of a piece on Medea constructed during her study at Tufts. It was particularly useful, I believe, for the students to see a script of physical theatre, as we had recently addressed the issue of documentation. She shared her processes working with Chaikin, as well as descriptions of two other pieces, Hidden A Gender and another on eating disorders. After Dr. Barnes' visit, three more reports were presented.

I had decided that The Tempest would indeed be the basis from which we would devise the final pieces of the class. After the break, we reconvened and I shared a few sections, that of the script plus a few other scenes, of the DVD of In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs. I was nervous, showing the recording of my work. To quell the anxiety I commented on the piece technically and aesthetically, for the most part, in order to maintain the DVD's status and function as a teaching tool. I drew their attention to the presence of gestures, to the juxtaposition of tones, and to the melding of classical and contemporary text with popular entertainment forms. Although many of the students wanted to watch the whole DVD, I decided class was not the place to do so and offered the possibility of finding an alternative, and optional, time of viewing the show in its entirety.

I made hard copies of The Tempest for each of three groups. As the text is widely available, both in libraries, bookstores and on the internet, one copy per group sufficed for them and was economically sensible for me. I had struggled over whether to assign groups or let the students divide into their own groups. I decided, ultimately, to assign the groups in order to distribute strengths and experience more fairly. I always agonize over groups, wanting to be fair not only in distributing skills but also in teaming personalities, ways of working, and interests.

For week eleven, I removed the Buckley reading assignment, asking the students, instead, to spend some time on The Tempest and with their groups. I thought this was fair as I had originally planned the adaptation to be of a short story, permitting time for students to read an additional article. The Tempest, of course, was a much more formidable text.

### **Week Eleven**

The final five reports were presented. From 4:30pm to 6pm, I shared some exercises with music and gestures, taken from my own experience as a director and student. I wanted the students to have some knowledge of my process, along with the examples they were gleaning and using from Chaikin, Callery and Kerrigan. Whether they students “liked” my work or not was irrelevant. What mattered to me was that I share some of my own methods with them on incorporating gestures and music into their own pieces.

I started by re-doing the walking through space exercises we had experimented with in week two. I instructed the students to find their own space in the room and to

make a series of body gestures: one for the wrists, one for the head, for the stomach, for the hips, and for the thighs. As they worked, I coached them to explore size, repetition and quality of movement with the gestures. The qualities I drew from Laban vocabulary: flicking, floating, slashing, punching, and wringing. I coached them to experiment with how one gesture might inspire another, how series of gestures might develop, how proximity of gestures may change the meanings of them.

We then all sat on one side of the room and in pairs, or groups, the students took turns exploring gesture conversations: interacting with themselves, each other, and while recorded music of various styles played. They used their bodies as languages, their gestures as their texts. After each example, I asked what the students saw and then offered possible ways the exercises could be further developed in rehearsal and, ultimately, in the construction of performance.

For week twelve, the students prepared five minutes of their adaptations of The Tempest. They were also required to read a section on the NEA Five from Shank's Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre. I asked them to post on what "art" they thought should and/or should not be funded by the government and why.

### **Week Twelve**

I gave the students the first twenty minutes of the class to convene with their groups, do preliminary setup and their own warm up. I do not mind, as a teacher, giving over a little bit of class time to autonomous preparation. I try to schedule time for it, especially when big presentations are looming. As many of my students came straight

from another class to mine, some in class prep time permitted them to focus and calm themselves, to become present in our class space.

In watching the first five minutes of the students' final projects, I was very pleased with the structural and creative work they had begun. I realized that in teaching gender and feminism as part of a curriculum, the students had naturally begun to grapple with it as well, in their pieces. I must admit I was particularly delighted to see this. In each piece, the students were addressing gender roles in some way. I cannot definitively say that if you teach grappling with gender, the students will absolutely take it on. I would, though, put forth the possibility as a strong one, based on my experience. I gave each group structural and technical commentary, posed questions for them to think about, and opened the feedback session to the rest of the class. Though we had never discussed how feedback was to be given, the students, having experience in talk backs in their acting classes and having listened to my examples, were respectful and supportive of each other, commenting on structure, story, and why they liked or did not like something.

The posts on the NEA readings had been opinionated, heated and animated, which was great. I feared a group discussion would be too unwieldy to manage in an effective way. Also, I did not want us, as a class, to just talk about our opinions. I wanted the class session on the NEA to more active, more pro-active, than that. After the break, I commented on salient points each student had brought up in their posts. As they began to chatter about them, I asked them to keep their thoughts to themselves for a moment longer. I asked them to count off in threes to divide into three small groups. Once they had coalesced in the groups, I told them they had been put in charge of the NEA's theatre

budget and should, as a group, discuss and come up with ways to dole it out. Later, I brought the discussion to a more local level, putting each group in charge of a theatre development grant for Richmond. I asked each group to discuss how the money should be allotted and to come up with five main points of their plan to present to the class.

Even though the students were discussing in small groups, independent of me, I still circulated to listen in on the conversations. Sometimes I posed further questions. Sometimes I reminded the groups to permit each person to talk-- to adhere to collaborative behavior even in conversation.

On a side note, the student with whom I had encountered a problem in week seven was, in class, peeling an apple with a hunting knife. I immediately, upon seeing it, instructed him to put it away, saying the classroom was not the place for sharp objects. I was disturbed. I decided to bring the issue up to Janet, expressing my concern over the student's behavior, and asking her to bring it up before the performance faculty. On one hand, I felt the student may, indeed, just be rebelling and testing boundaries. On the other hand, however, I worried that the behavior may allude to deeper seated problem. However, I left the issue with the performance faculty.

We had no class on week thirteen due to the Thanksgiving holiday. For week fourteen students were required to prepare up to fifteen minutes of their Tempest projects as well as read, and post, on The Wooster Group's production of Routes 1 and 9, which brings together issues of adaptation and funding.

Weeks fourteen and fifteen were devoted to developing the final fifteen minute presentations which would be shown publicly. In addition to the creative work each group

was developing, the students were also required to write a proposal for their piece, based on the parameters of the proposals invited by HERE's American Living Room Festival. As I told the students, it was important to me that I give them experience in pursuing alternative theater and self producing in practical, real ways. Students were instructed to write an application, presented neatly, consistently, and professionally. The information required, adapted from HERE's website ([here.org](http://here.org)), included:

- (Working) Title of Project
- A category that best describes the work (performance, dance, puppetry, music, film/video, multidisciplinary)
- A one page artist statement
- A quantitative description of the project
- An excerpt from the script (no less than two pages and not to exceed ten pages)

Though the written portion of their final was not due until the final showing of the performance pieces, I assigned it in week twelve in order to give them time to ruminate and prepare. For me, the written portion was equally important to the practical portion.

#### **Week 14**

The end of the fall semester, the two weeks after Thanksgiving and before finals, was slightly scattered. Having two weeks after the break was really more equivalent to having only one week. The first week back was largely devoted to re-gathering momentum and refocusing under the stress of looming finals.

The presentations in week fourteen were crammed with ideas that had not been practiced or evolved and that felt, due to the break I think, rushed. One group, that of the

mixed genders, requested to not present at all, explaining they had not been able to fully incorporate their new ideas. I permitted this because the group had been much further along than the other two groups the previous week. They had demonstrated not only a clear idea but a format, structure and design. Hence, I suggested they speak to us about their process over the last week and where their piece was headed. This not only tested that the group had indeed done some work, but also challenged them to verbally articulate their ideas as well as the problems they were facing.

The women's group presented twelve minutes of material in a more cohesive format than previously and with a strong point of view. My feedback for them focused on streamlining their ideas, on making the strong bits even stronger and letting go of the weaker sections. The issue they faced, in trying to be democratic, was that each of them was presenting a different take on the wedding of Miranda and Ferdinand. Each take was interspersed with transitional jokes and acts. I commended them on their ideology as well as their success in using transitions to tie all of the scenes together. However, I encouraged them to focus on the twelve minutes they had, which was comprised of only three scenes, rather than trying to shove two more scenes into the mix. It was important to me that the students were challenged to rework material and make it repeatable, to evolve their ideas rather than continually add new ones. Additionally, there were a number of safety issues they needed to address, including open flames near a billowing sheet, the use of a large hand truck while they were in bare feet, and Christmas lights strewn on the ground. Some of my commentary was specifically directed at the sculpture major in the group. Being untrained theatrically and physically, her kinesthetic awareness was fairly



low, resulting in precarious situations with props and scenery. The scenes containing her needed to be, I said, particularly looked at and cleaned up.

The third group, the men's group, was a disappointment. They were struggling due to personality conflicts, I knew, and I was torn as to how to give them feedback on their piece. I was honestly not sure whether they were lazy or if they were doing the best they could do. In essence, nothing at all happened in their piece. There was no story, there were no characters, there was no specific point of view or location, and no point of orientation for the audience. I could feel, during their ten minutes, the other students looking towards me, monitoring my reactions. There was very little time for me to make a decision on how to handle the situation; I wanted to encourage the men but also challenge them to meet the standards their classmates, and I, expected and set.

At the end of the presentation, I complemented the group on their incorporation of feedback from the previous week. I then told them that their piece, at this point, was simply dull to watch and it would difficult to control with an audience. I observed they had been using the class as a lab, which was fine, but now they had to evolve their piece into a viable piece of theatre. I recounted themes I had seen in their presentations and made multiple "what if" suggestions to steer them towards stronger points of view, action and specificity. The other students joined in and we, as a class, had a small jam session on the piece.

At the end of the presentations we discussed strike/set up between each piece and assigned tasks amongst the students to ensure smooth and short transitions. We took a break and returned to speak briefly about The Wooster Group. Many of the posts had

referenced racism and personal conflicts with it, with freedom of expression, with permissibility and responsibility on stage, with confronting their selves, with their own personal “hot buttons” borne of experience. I read a section from each of the posts aloud and thanked them for their personal sharing. I then shared my own story with them. I felt it only fair that I, too, recount the difficulties I continue to struggle with on these themes and issues.

I recounted to them how I prided myself on not being racist. I was in New York City for 9/11 and when all the news stories first came out, I was horrified at the one sided images of the middle east. I sought out books sympathetic to the peoples, countries and cultures there in order to educate myself in forming opinions. However, six weeks after the event I was getting ready to board a plane to London, for work, and a group of turbaned Muslims performed, in JFK, a prayer ritual. I heard their chanting and looked around. My stomach flipped, my breath caught and I was terrified they were going to be on my plane. I walked away for a few minutes and returned, calmer, but shaken. I was shaken not because of their presence but because of my own reaction to them. My own reaction was evidence of feelings I could be capable of, beyond rationality.

I told the students I had no answers; that I shared with them these struggles. I also suggested these issues are vitally important to the work we do and the work we support. Furthermore, I said, they could interrogate issues and aesthetics on their own, without me. They could create work, without me.

It is imperative to me as a teacher that I foster independence, that I send my students off on their own, that I give them not only skills to make their own work but

permission and encouragement to do so. Though I am available to them for advice, insight and referrals after a class, I never want them to feel dependent on me, to feel the experience will never be repeated with another teacher, to feel I am the only right. I want them to fly away really, free to question and build on what they have learned.

### **Week Fifteen**

Each group presented their pieces as dress rehearsals. I felt each group worked up to their full potential, but my feedback varied greatly among the presentations. I was reminded of the discussions we had had in the 791 Graduate Movement Seminar in Spring of 2005 about the differences between teaching, coaching and directing. I will use these terms in recounting the pieces and my feedback to them. I will also refer to the groups by the titles of their pieces, videos of which are included in Appendix C.

“How to Make Kissing?”, the first group, still had some fine tuning to do but I felt I could give them “real” notes. That is, I could go beyond teaching and coaching and speak to them as an outside eye, as a director. I addressed timing and possible opportunities in their text for bits or moments. Although the structure of the piece was quite sound, their characters still needed more development.

“Eucharistic Ministry”, the men’s group, was surprisingly strong. They had taken our last class to heart and focused on a very specific place and point of view, and had developed characters accordingly. The themes we had teased out in the previous class had been embraced and spelunked for the dark and the light. Furthermore, they used each group member’s idiosyncrasies to great advantage while keeping the audience focused and undistracted. The group still required coaching in terms of moment to moment clarity. The

structure was, overall, more a skit than a theatre piece. Though it was not particularly innovative in a devised way, it did have a tenuous beginning, middle and end --which was much more than it had previously even hinted at.

“We are such stuff: Tempest reclaimed”, the women’s group, had succeeded in cleaning up the safety issues and some of the murky physicality and moments. They still required a good deal of coaching on structure. The piece itself was very complicated with the different scenes and the weaving of them together to make a whole piece. They had begun to dabble in character, but the structure was the main focus for me and them. The next step, once the structure was clearer, would be to truly evolve the characters and each women’s transition into and out of them.

We ended early as course evaluations needed to be filled out. In addition to the university questionnaire, I provided my own short answer evaluation asking for the students’ input on strengths and weaknesses of the course and so forth.

### **Final Presentations**

In preparing for the final presentation, I made programs for the audience that included information about the course objectives and the assignment in order to orient them on and include them in our process. I hoped to inform the audience about our whole semester as well as our final projects. Also, I wanted the work to be viewed and evaluated in light of the whole semester, rather than simply being seen as “good” or “bad”.

We had a huge turnout for our showings, including much to my appreciation and the students’ delight, faculty members Dr. Barnes, Dr. Pettiford-Wates and Janet Rodgers. There were approximately fifty people in attendance which was very exciting. As ever, I

felt a twinge of anxiety for my students alongside a twinge of protective hope that their work would be, if not liked, then respected. I felt immensely proud of them. I also acknowledged the bittersweet pang of letting go and watching them fly on their own.

Despite much interest in the course, I have decided not to teach it a third time in order to give me some space from which to evaluate in my thesis, the work I have done. I will miss the course immensely in the coming semester. Many of the students told me they consistently looked forward to coming to every class; as did I. I learned and gained as much as, and probably more than, the students did.

## **CHAPTER 6 Conclusion: The Pedagogical Relevance of Devised Theatre**

Defining devised theatre is a difficult but important task. Perhaps more important, though, is the task of articulating why one teaches it. For me, it is personal, as was alluded to in the introduction of this thesis, as well as political. My theatre training at Duke was complemented by a major in Women's Studies. Hence, at the same moment in which I was formulating the foundations of my theatrical aesthetic, I was developing an awareness and commitment to feminism. Devised and alternative theatre has often served as a haven for under represented populations, ostracized due to gender and/or race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality. The process and history of devising theatre can be inherently feminist as is, I hope, my teaching of it.

Women's place in theatre history, indeed in history itself, is obscured at best and completely lost at worst. As articulated by Sue-Ellen Case, patriarchal culture has, in the English speaking world, monopolized documentation and expression; for centuries the "ownership of property, the public arena, written language and theatre itself have been exclusively, or almost exclusively, male" (28). Case locates the genesis of this exclusion as the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. in Athens when the practice of celebratory ceremonies, comprised of various types of performance began to be known as "theatre" (7). Although women were excluded from the stage, and perhaps even ostracized from the audience,

there is evidence that they created alternative spaces for themselves in which to celebrate Dionysic worship. This alternative space is both a blessing and a curse. Though the ingenuity of women in creating their own theatre can be applauded, women's position extends into modern history as one of marginalization. Women working outside of national theatres in fringe spaces or regional companies, adopting a migratory existence without a theatre of their own, or creating their own theatre in response to not finding the opportunities to work within mainstream theatrical institutions has kept them out of dominant histories. As more and more women move into writing history, the overlooked and alternative work of women is coming into view but, as reviews are still dominated by male voices, there continues to be an overshadowing of women's initiatives, contributions and accomplishments. (Schafer 11)

Micheline Wandor states that "The theatre industry, like other cultural industries, operates through a hierarchical structure, in which artistic and administrative decisions are largely in the hands of men" (xx). Near the top of the artistic theatrical hierarchy lies the director. Women's presence in the field of directing seems scarce and the work of women directors is written about less often than that of men. Women's particular obscurity as directors is due to a number of factors. Women directors may not sustain careers into notoriety as they are "given a harder time" than their male counterparts, consistently being assigned to higher risk productions with smaller budgets and under the challenging conditions of touring.

Traditional curricula spend a brief amount of time, if much at all, on the U.S. contemporary alternative theatre scene that evolved out of the experimental theatre

movement of the 1960s. But if we turn to alternative theatre, we can find important female role models who have either managed to secure a theatrical establishment of their own or have succeeded in cultivating an alternative aesthetic. Alternative theatre provide us with examples of many women artists who have crossed into mainstream theatre, as well, bringing their alternative aesthetics into dominant institutions. Julie Taymor, Anne Bogart, Joanne Akalaitis and Mary Zimmerman are a few names that come immediately to mind. All four women's styles can be characterized as innovatively visual, freely adaptive and radically staged. As Fortier writes, "Theatrical adaptation is particularly rich in the methods available for remaking the meaning of past works. . . (and) A radical staging changes the meaning of a work even when the words are relatively the same" (90). Women, and men, in the contemporary alternative theatre are remaking culture and challenging their audiences to do the same.

Devising Theater as a course is founded on challenging the hegemony of traditional theatrical styles, aesthetically, philosophically and physically. Devising Theatre requires an active embodiment of practice and knowledge. As a course, it was an experiment within the VCU theatre department as, overall, the students' training is geared much more towards employability as actors and designers in the narrow margin that is commercial theatre. I intentionally opened my class to non-performance majors, both within and outside of the department, and to students of all ages and experience in order to create a diverse community, representative of a wider world than individual disciplines may permit. Additionally, devised theatre is counter to traditional aesthetics not only in form, structure and content, but in body type, gender, race, etc. It has permitted many diverse groups to be



heard in unique ways. Pieces such as Shange's For Colored Girls Who Have considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enough and Ensler's The Vagina Monologues are, for example, devised pieces. In my course, I permit and enable students to make their voices heard; voices that may have been silenced elsewhere.

My pedagogy aligns itself with feminist principles of education. I participate as well as instruct, making myself an audience member alongside the students whenever I can. I insist on circles for discussion and lecture and, with difficult material, give the students the opportunity to hash it out on their own in small groups. I honor the students' production of knowledge, encouraging them in their posts to react freely, to have opinions, to question me and the readings, to share their ideas and points of view. I read from their posts, letting their ideas steer or inform the conversation of the day. In that vein, I also encourage them to give constructive feedback to each other, to respect each other's work, to listen to each other.

I keep the students safe by educating myself, by making the classroom a laboratory, by striving for ensemble, and by taking responsibility for them as the authority figure in the room. I share my own experiences with them, but not too boldly. I try to only share in useful ways, to make it safe for them to be vulnerable because I am vulnerable. I share my opinions, but not as gospel; I am not The Authority. I challenge them to question any status quo and to re-examine the ways their gender, sexualities, races and ethnicities have been and are represented in the theatre, in the work they do and in the work they support.

I ask the students to question what kind of work they want to do. I give them permission to have their likes and dislikes, contradictory or not, but I also endeavor to

encourage them to push their boundaries. Ultimately, and most importantly, I seek to empower them to make their own choices and their own work. bell hooks writes of educating as a practicing of freedom (13). I aspire, daily, to that. I encourage the students to try things, to chuck out right and wrong and explore. As Chaikin warns and dares in The Presence of the Actor: “The danger is that we will get lost. Plan on it: count on it” (67). I try to make the classroom a safe space for doing just that.

Devising theatre is a realization of feminist and activist pedagogy both in theory and practice. It fosters interdisciplinary and diverse relationships that may not happen in a more traditional curriculum. It supports the autonomy of the student and/or artist by encouraging individual ownership of and practice with methodologies and aesthetics. It broadens each student’s, and the audience’s, idea of what theatre is, who does it, how and why. It develops each student’s awareness of their place and potential in society, in order, ultimately, to empower them to take action to make theatre -- and perhaps the world -- a fairer, more inclusive, more tolerant, more vital place. I learn from my students in devising theater -- often, I think, more than they learn from me -- and that, too, is important to me.

My hope, and personal aim, is towards the evolution of feminist devised theatre beyond alternative/mainstream, beyond either/or. It is full of potential, a brave and necessary form in content, objective and process. Roose-Evans explains Grotowski disciple Eugenio Barba’s way of looking at the worlds of theatre:

The commercialized and subsidized theatre, which he (Barba) calls the First Theatre, he describes as blooming but deadly. The Second Theatre is the

established avant-garde which has abandoned the actor for the director. He cites directors like Robert Wilson and Victor Garcia who are only interested in actors as puppets to be manipulated in their displays of directorial virtuosity. The Third Theatre he describes as that which confronts an audience with messages of an inner life. These messages are intuited by the spectator at a deeper level of knowing than that of the rational mind. (165)

Devised Theatre is, or can be, of the Third Theatre.

Finally, I am convinced of the usefulness of devising in a theatre training curriculum for practical, as well as philosophical and political, reasons. It challenges young artists to think across specialties. It draws on movement, voice, directing, acting, playwriting, dramaturgy, and design. It demands the artist be trained and disciplined physically, emotionally and intellectually. As Barba writes in Beyond the Floating Islands, “All visionary explosion must be mastered: the actor must *ride* the tiger not be devoured by it. . . Lucidity and know-how are required in order to be a revolutionary: amateurs have never changed the course of history” (25).

Devising Theatre, as course, has sustained, challenged, and broadened me as teacher, artist and scholar. In answer to the question “why devise, why now?” Matthew Goulish writes “Because when it comes to theatre making, the traditional division of labor inhibits the most exciting possibilities” (129). Devised Theatre is not just a training ground for the Actor-Creator, but for the Theatre-Creator and maybe even the World-Leader. I look forward to continuing to teach it and create it.

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the Work of Jerzy Grotowski. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

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## APPENDIX A

Teaching Materials Spring 2005

### SPRING 2005 COURSEPACK CONTENTS

(In alphabetical order)

- Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. (Experiments with the People's Theatre in Peru)
- Dixon, Michael Bigelow and Joel A. Smith, eds. Anne Bogart: Viewpoints. New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, 1995. (Terror, Disorientation and Difficulty)
- Evans, James Roose. Experimental Theatre From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook. London: Routledge, 1996. (Chapter 18: The Mountain with Many Caves: Peter Brook, Alfred Wolfson and Roy Hart)
- Galloway, Terry, "The Performance of Drowning." Voice Made Flesh. Eds. Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.
- Holmberg, Arthur. The Theatre of Robert Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. (Chapter 2: The Cracked Kettle)
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Disintegration of Our Town)

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Talvi, Silja J.A. "Bringing Race Out of the Closet." ColorsNW, August 2003. (Article on The Conciliation Project and Dr. Tawyna Pettiford Wates)

**SPRING 2005 INITIAL SYLLABUS****Devising Theatre**

Spring 2005

PRFMA 72

Wednesday 3-6pm

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Instructor: Lisa Jackson  
 Email [lacksonlk@vcu.edu](mailto:lacksonlk@vcu.edu)  
 Phone: 804.827.1392

Office: SSP 307 (in the library)  
 Office hours: By appt  
 Class Number: 491.003

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**Course Description**

Alternative theatre challenges the way we see ourselves, our society and our world not only in subject and stylistic content but in the particular demands it places on the imagination and on the vocal-kinetic instrument of the performer. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to selected processes, histories, and contemporary contexts of devised theatre. I define devised theatre as the building of original theatrical pieces in response to a prompt, a theme, or a text. The course will engage with the self, the ensemble and society through creative, practical and academic work on devising theatre. Though the following spheres necessarily overlap and intersect variously, it is a means of organizing the content to be covered.

The self is comprised of an individual's engagement with material and their personal choices of response.

The ensemble addresses how individuals work together to create work and engage with form and content.

The society component of the course addresses how devised theatre has and does confront social and political issues in addition to traditional aesthetic values. A large part of this section will be drawn from the work of Augusto Boal.

Investigations we will contend with include:

- The elements of devised theatre composition through the lenses of the self, the ensemble and society recognizing these three spheres are related and overlap.
- Devised theatre: non traditional spaces, non traditional "scripts", non-traditional interpretations
- What is "devising"?
- The voice and the body—how they can be text
- Sources of inspiration and elements of composition including props, music, gesture and Non traditional lighting, non traditional staging
- Use of Space: Viewpoints (Bogart)
- Creation of text with and without words

- The role(s) of the ensemble: how do traditional roles (of designer, actor, director, writer) “fit in” or not to devised work.
- What are the demands on the performer?
- Adapting non theatrical scripts
- Considering, or not considering, the audience
- The documentation of devised work
- Where does devised work “fit in”? Socially, politically, artistically?

### Required Texts

*The Passion*, by Jeanette Wintersen

*The Presence of the Actor*, by Joseph Chaiken

Coursepack, available at Uptown Color Copy

### Required Materials:

Movement Clothes

Journal for just this class

Water bottle

One 2-3 minute text, memorized for class 2 for in class work

### Course Objectives:

- To know the body; to make the body expressive; to create theatre that is language
- To integrate voice and body
- To create original non-script based performance pieces from a variety of sources
- To introduce methods of building theatre pieces as individuals and as ensemble
- To work outside of and beyond conventional narrative structure, naturalistic staging, and traditional rehearsal processes
- To develop awareness of the history of devised theatre and current artists: the who, how and where
- To engage with elements of theatrical composition including but not limited to space, audience, rhythm, tempo, energy, direction
- To address the stage adaptation of non-theatre texts
- To cultivate an individual point of view and aesthetic

### Student Objectives:

- To complete all reading, written and creative assignments
- To participate openly and actively in practical work, class work and discussions
- To challenge oneself to apply his/her personal take on assignments in class and out
- To be supportive of fellow artists and respect class as a safe place in which we can experiment and take risks

### Movement Clothes

These should be clothes you can move comfortably in: no jeans, no mid-driff revealing tops, no strappy tanks, no shorts, no skirts, etc. Clothes should be reasonably formfitting. Jewelry must be removed prior to the start of class. Students should be prepared to work barefoot, and should bring a water bottle to class.

NOTE:

The work will ask that actors be in close proximity to each other. Students should be aware of this and be comfortable working with others and in their physical space. If there is an anticipated problem, please see me.

Honor Policy

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the honor policy of Virginia Commonwealth University.

Grading:

Grading is on a 10% scale: 90-100% equals an A.

Attendance and Participation: 20%  
Creative assignments: 20%  
Journal: 20%  
Research Presentations: 10%  
Midterm: 10%  
Final: 15%  
Rehearsal logs and additional assignments: 5%

**Attendance**

Like all theatre, these processes are collaborative: we are building in each class, together and individually, methods and practice. Departmental policy permits you one absence; each additional absence will result in the lowering of your grade by one letter.

Furthermore, as we are working as an ensemble, lateness will not be tolerated. Two lates will count as an unexcused absence and will lower your grade one letter.

**Participation**

Classes will be comprised of discussions, exercises, assignments for individual or group creative work. Students should be prepared to participate with an open mind and to the best of their ability.

**Journal**

Your journal should be used as your creative notebook in which you record observations of yours or another's work in class; progress, epiphanies, frustrations. Use it to record your work on assignments. Use it also as a scrapbook for your imagination: for images that strike you, in reference to assignments in or from class or in general, for articles you come

across, for pictures or postcards, for sketches, for sounds, for smells, for music, for snatches of sensory awareness, for observations. Use it creatively and regularly. I will collect it four times in the semester; it must be legible so type your written portions if need be.

\*\*\*Additionally, every individual reading assignment should each get a journal response from you. If you are assigned four short readings, you should write four responses. *Please title the response/journal entry with name of readings and pages read.* Responses to the readings should be your personal reaction to the reading. It should not reiterate the content but should be informed by it. Make it legible—type it if you need to. \*\*\*

\*\*\*NOTE ON THE PASSION REQUIRED TEXT\*\*\* I am asking in assignments that you “dip into” this. That is read a bit here and another bit there—do not read it consecutively unless assigned to do so. Journal on images and passages that strike you. You will need to refer to it. Paste in postcards or pictures that resonate with you, write poetry or songs, doodle, draw. . . express your opinion creatively.

### **Creative assignments**

Sometimes these will be in class. Other times they will be at home work, to be presented in class. They may be individual or group work. If you are absent to present you will receive a zero for the assignment and not have a second opportunity to present.

These include, but are not limited to:

Presentation(s) from *Historia Calamitum*  
Adaptation exercises and presentations on *The Passion*  
A Forum Theatre piece, based on the work of Augusto Boal  
Assignments from *The Americans*

### **Rehearsal logs**

Per form required, to document your creative work outside of class.

### **Research Presentations**

Each student will research and present on two current artists during the course of the semester. These may be drawn from the list provided or the student may suggest another artist with my approval. Research will be comprised of websites, articles, reviews, and, sometimes, journal or other articles. The presentations should address who the person is, what they are doing, where, how is it being received. Student will give a 10 minute presentation on the artist to class as well as write 3-5 pages (to be turned in, typed, MLA format) on their findings. Creativity is encouraged. Students will sign up for dates for their presentations; accompanying paper will be due the same day.

### **Midterm**

The second part of *The Americans*; guidelines to be provided.

**Final**

An 8-10 minute solo piece on *The Americans* per specifications provided. This will be presented publicly, outside of class, possibly at a space off campus.

Additionally, a written proposal (typed, MLA format) for the piece, based on the parameters of HERE's American Living Room Festival, to be provided.

**Performance Observation(s)**

Students will observe a session of the movement lab, taught by Jonathan Becker, midway or so through the semester. The class is from 8 to 9:20 am on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Please notify me if you have a conflict.

Additional observations, tbd, may be comprised of live theatre or filmed performances.

A journal entry for each is required.

**Outline of Assignments and Course TimeTable**

*Subject to change at discretion of instructor*

Jan 19

HW:

Read Simon McBurney

Read Chaikin, foreword and pp 1-33

Dip into Winterson—read 15-30 pages

Find your 2-3 minute text for class on Jan 26

Jan 26

HW:

Prepare *American's Part I*.

Read "The Cracked Kettle", Read Kerouac intro to *The Americans*

Dip into Winterson—read 15 pages

Feb 2

**Present *Americans Part 1***

HW: Read Ping Chong and check out his website.

Read Chaikin, pp 34-55

Read *Historia Calamitum*; prepare *Calamitum* presentation

Dip into Winterson (15-20 pages)

Feb 9

**Present *Calamitum***

**TURN IN JOURNALS**

HW: Read Galloway, Devere Smith, Atlas Muz, Check out website for Atlas Muz.

Read Chaikin, pp 55-67

**\*\*Start to prepare now for midterm of Americans, part 2, due on Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>. Prepare 3 rehearsals logs for it\*\***

Feb 16

HW: Read Archipelago, Theatre of the Heart

Dip into Wintersen (20-30 pages)

**\*\*Continue work on Americans, part 2\*\***

Feb 23

**Midterm: present Americans part 2**

HW: Read Boal

Dip into Winterson (20-30 pages)

Mar 2: no class SETC

Mar 9

**TURN IN JOURNALS**

HW: Read Bogart, Complicite

Read Chaikin, pp 68-90

Read 30-40 pages of Wintersen

Mar 16: no class Spring Break

Mar 23

HW: Read Winterson front to back consecutively.

Mar 30

Present Forum theatre

HW: Read Wooster Group

Prepare Wintersen, part 1

Apr 6

**Present Wintersen Part 1**

HW: Read on National Theatre of the United States; read on The Conciliation Project

Read Chaikin, pp 91-107

Prepare Winterson, part 2

**\*\* Americans Part 3, due on April 27—start work now. You should turn in three rehearsal logs b/w now and April 27<sup>th</sup> to me\*\***

Apr 13

**Present Wintersen, part 2.**

HW:



- Read Chaikin, pp 108-126
- Check out Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival ([bam.org](http://bam.org)), [HERE \(here.org\)](http://HERE(here.org)), St. Ann's Warehouse ([artsatstanns.org](http://artsatstanns.org)), PS 122, [Fringenyc.com](http://Fringenyc.com), [chashama.org](http://chashama.org), [LaMama \(lamama.org\)](http://LaMama(lamama.org)), Richard Foreman ([Ontological.com](http://Ontological.com)), [fracturedatlas.org](http://fracturedatlas.org)
- Prepare Wintersen 3

Apr 20

**TURN IN JOURNALS**

**Present Wintersen 3.**

HW: Read Chaikin, pp127-136

Read on Finley, Maxwell.

Prepare for Americans, part 3.

Apr 27

**Present Americans, Part 3 (for feedback)**

HW: Read Chaikin, pp 149-161

May 4

Reading Day: Preparation for final presentation, 3-6pm

**TURN IN JOURNALS**

**FINAL: TBD**

**Final public presentation of the Americans; written portion due**

**POSSIBLE ARTISTS FOR REASEARCH AND PRESENTATIONS**

*\* counts as half a one and must be done with another artist*

\*Collapsablegiraffe

\*Feed the Herd

Bindlestiff Family Cirkus

Wau Wau Sisters

Ontological Hysteric/Richard Foreman

\*Julie Atlas Muz

SITI Company/Anne Bogart

Mabou Mines (Akalaitis, Breuer, Glass. . . )

Theodora Skipitares

Robert Wilson

Theatre de complicité

Theatre de le Jeune Lune

Dell Arte (Blue Lake, CA)

Pantheatre (France)

Ping Chong

Ellen Stewart (LaMama)

\*Alec Duffy

The Flying Machine (Brooklyn NY)

Happy Hour Clowns (NY NY)

THAW (Theatres Against the War)

Bread and Puppet Theatre

Prototype theatre (proto-type.org)

**Sample Rehearsal Log**

Name:

Date:

Time Began:

Who is present:

Piece being worked on:

What is the goal of this rehearsal:

What was worked on, discovered, accomplished:

What are the goals for next time:

Next rehearsal set for:

Time Finished:

## **SPRING 2005 REVISED COURSE PLAN**

### **Outline of Assignments and Course TimeTable**

*Subject to change at discretion of instructor*

Feb 9

Present Calamitum

In class: discuss Wilson (methodologies) and Taymor (Ideograph)

Begin work on Historia 2

**TURN IN JOURNALS**

HW:

- Prepare Historia #2
- Read Chaikin, pp 55-67
- Dip into some of Wintersen, whatever you can.

Feb 16

Present Historia #2

Talk about PingChong and Americans (TALR)

HW:

- Start work on Americans, pt 2, due March 9<sup>th</sup>. Prepare rehearsal logs in your journals for it
- Read Galloway—think on what it is to perform solo, write your own material
- Read Atlas Muz and check out her website
- Dip into some of Wintersen. (remember to journal on Wintersen readings)

Feb 23

In class work and discussion cont'd

HW:

- Read Chaikin, pp 68-90
- Dip into Wintersen
- Continue work on Americans part 2

Mar 2: no class SETC

Mar 9

**TURN IN JOURNALS**

**Present Americans, pt 2 (MidTerm)**

HW:

- Read Conciliation Project
- Dip into Wintersen
- Read Chaikin, pp 68-90

Mar 16: no class Spring Break

Mar 23

Theatre and society

HW:

- Read Boal
- Read National theatre of the United States
- Dip into Wintersen one last time.

Mar 30

Theatre and society; Forum theatre

HW: Read Wintersen front to back consecutively

Apr 6

Adaptation

HW:

- Prepare Winterson, part 1
- Read Bogart
- Read Chaikin, pp 91-107

\*\* Americans Part 3, due on April 27—start work now. Journal at least 3 rehearsal logs for it\*\*

Apr 13**Present Wintersen, part 1****TURN IN JOURNALS**

HW:

- Read Wooster Group: What their methods of telling/adapting stories? How is the self and society addressed by the ensemble?
- Prepare Wintersen part 2

Continue work on Americans, part 3

Apr 20**Present Wintersen 2**

HW: Read Chaikin, pp 108-137

Prepare for Americans, part 3.

Apr 27**Present Americans, Part 3 (for feedback)**

HW: Where would you, if you were to “devise theatre” like to work and why?

Check out Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival ([bam.org](http://bam.org)), [HERE \(here.org\)](http://HERE.org), St. Ann’s Warehouse ([artsatstanns.org](http://artsatstanns.org)), PS 122, [Fringenyc.com](http://Fringenyc.com), [chashama.org](http://chashama.org), [LaMama \(lamama.org\)](http://LaMama.org). . . . Like any of these? Or do you want your own theater? Where?

*Optional: Read Chaikin, pp 149-161*

May 4

Reading Day: Preparation for final presentation, 3-6pm

**FINAL: TBD**

**Final public presentation of the Americans; written portion due  
TURN IN JOURNALS**

## APPENDIX B

Teaching Materials Fall 2005

### **FALL 2005 COURSEPACK CONTENTS (In order of assignment date)**

McBurney, Simon. "Overview." Theatre de Complicité. 2006. Complicite UK.  
<http://www.complicite.org>.

Callery, Dymphna. Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre. London: Nick Hern Books, 2001. (Introduction, pp 3-16; Complicité, pp 88-95)

Artaud, Antonin. The Theatre and Its Double. New York: Grove Press, 1958. (Chapter VI: No More Masterpieces)

Barba, Eugenio, ed. Towards a Poor Theatre: Jerzy Grotowski. London: Routledge, 2002. (Towards a Poor Theatre)

Rogers, Catharine. Historia Calamitatum: (The Story of his Misfortunes). Unpublished play, 1993.

Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. (Experiments with the People's Theatre in Peru)

Callery, Dymphna. Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre. London: Nick Hern Books, 2001. (Devising, pp 159-183; Audience, 103-114)

Buckley, Peter. "Creativity and the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre." Theatre Topics 15 (2005): 41-48.

Shank, Theodore. Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. (Chapter 8: Outrageous Performance)

Savran, David. Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988. (Part One: Routes 1 & 9 (the Last Act): the Disintegration of Our Town)

**Devising Theatre**  
THEA 491 and THEA 791  
Fall 2005  
PRFMA 72  
Wednesday 3-6pm

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Instructor: Lisa Jackson  
Email [jacksonl@vcu.edu](mailto:jacksonl@vcu.edu)

Office: SSP 202  
Office hours: By appt

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Course Description:

This course will introduce students to selected practical means of creating original works of theatre in response to a prompt, a theme, or a text. In addition to their practical creative work, students will also engage with contemporary and historical figures in and practices of devised theatre. Focus will be on physical theatre.

Course Objectives:

Students will:

- Create original non-script based performance pieces from a variety of sources, as individuals and as members of an ensemble.
- Be able to work outside of and beyond conventional narrative structure, naturalistic staging, and traditional rehearsal processes.
- Develop an awareness of the history of devised theatre and current artists: the who, how and where.
- Cultivate an individual point of view and aesthetic.
- Express story, action, text and subtext through the body.
- Consider all elements of performance—space, set, costumes light, words, sound, music, the body, the voice, the audience, rhythm, tempo, image-- as languages in creating theatre pieces.
- Consider the intersection of self, ensemble and society in devised work and its creation. That is, how devised work has and does confront social and political issues in addition to, or along with, traditional aesthetic values.
- Be supportive of fellow artists and respect class as a safe place in which we can experiment and take risks.

Course Requirements

Texts

*The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process*, by Sheila Kerrigan  
*The Presence of the Actor*, by Joseph Chaiken  
Coursepack, available at Uptown Color Copy



Attire:

Movement Clothes-- which should be clothes you can move comfortably in: no jeans, no mid-drift revealing tops, no strappy tanks, no shorts, no skirts, etc. Clothes should be reasonably formfitting.

Other:

The work will ask that actors be in close proximity to each other. Students should be aware of this and be comfortable working with others and in their physical space. If there is an anticipated problem, please see me.

Jewelry must be removed prior to the start of class.

Students should be prepared to work barefoot, and should bring a water bottle to class.

Honor Policy

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the honor policy of Virginia Commonwealth University.

Disabilities:

Per VCU's policy, students with disabilities should notify me in the beginning of the semester so that I can make best efforts to accommodate their needs.

Grading:

Grading is on a 10% scale: 90-100% equals an A.

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Creative assignments: 20%

Reading Responses: 15%

Research Presentation: 10%

Midterm: 10%

Final: 15%

Rehearsal logs and additional assignments: 5%

Attitude and growth: 10%

**Attendance**

Like all theatre, these processes are collaborative: we are building in each class, together and individually, methods and practice. Departmental policy permits you one absence; each additional absence will result in the lowering of your grade by one letter.

Furthermore, as we are working as an ensemble, lateness will not be tolerated. Two lates will count as an unexcused absence and will lower your grade one letter.

### **Participation**

Classes will be comprised of discussions of readings, exercises, assignments for individual or group creative work, presentation of work and feedback sessions. Students should be prepared to participate fully (that is, have completed all reading and homework), with an open mind and to the best of their ability.

### **Creative assignments**

Sometimes these will be in class. Other times they will be at home work, to be presented in class. They may be individual or group work. Presentations are due on the day noted in the syllabus or by instructor. If you are not prepared or are absent to present you will receive a zero for the assignment and not have a second opportunity to present.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Autobiographical piece
- Presentation(s) from *Historia Calamitatum*
- Partner piece
- Adaptation presentations

### **Reading Responses**

You are required to post a response to every reading assignment on nicenet by 12noon on the Tuesday before the class in which the reading is due. You are also required to read others' responses as they will form the basis for the discussion in class. Please do not summarize the readings—show me you read them by sharing your reaction to them.

### **Rehearsal logs and Additional Assignments**

A sample log is included in this syllabus and should be filled out, either in longhand or typed, for every time you rehearse a project, individually or in a group. They are to document your work and process, for me and for you. They will be collected intermittently by me throughout the semester. Additional assignments may include work in or out of class on topics covered in class.

### **Research Presentations**

Each student will research and present on one contemporary devising artist/company during the course of the semester. These may be drawn from the list provided or the student may suggest another artist with my approval. Research will be comprised of websites, articles, reviews, and, sometimes, journal or other articles. The presentations should address who the person is, what they are doing, where, how is it being received. Student will give a 10 minute presentation on the artist to class as well as write 3-5 pages (to be turned in, typed, MLA format) on their findings. Creativity is encouraged. Students will sign up for dates for their presentations; accompanying paper will be due the same day.

**Midterm**

The final part of the partner assignment, details to be provided.

**Final**

The final will be comprised of three parts:

1. A 10-15 minute group piece adapted from a text to be provided. This will be presented publicly, outside of class during finals.
2. A proposal (typed, MLA format) for the piece, based on the parameters of HERE's American Living Room Festival (to be provided).
3. A typed self evaluation (questions to be provided).

**Attitude and growth**

An evaluation of each student's professional and supportive conduct throughout the class and its activities, as well as each student's commitment to continually challenge him or herself to fully engage with the course's material.

**Outline of Assignments and Course TimeTable**

*Subject to change at discretion of instructor*

August 31

HW:

Read McBurney (CP), and Callery "Introduction" and "Complicite" (CP)

Prepare: autobiographical collage

September 7

HW:

Read Chaikin's "Notes on Content" (1-26), "Notes on My Training" (42-55), and "Notes to the Actors" (56-67)

Prepare: Autobiograph One

September 14

HW:

Read Artaud "No More Masterpieces", Grotowski "Towards a Poor Theatre" (CP) and Rogers "Historia Calamitatum" (CP)

Prepare: Historia One and Autobiograph Two

September 21

HW:

Read Kerrigan, pp 1-44

Prepare: Historia Two

September 28

HW:

Read Kerrigan 45-69

Prepare Partner Piece One

October 5

HW:

Read Chaikin "Jamming" (116-117), "A Raid on the Inarticulate" and "Notes on Exercises" (129-136) and "On the Audience" (140-148)

Prepare: Partner Piece 2

October 12

HW:

Prepare Partner Piece 3, MidTerm

October 19: Mid Term

HW: Read Boal

Prepare: First round of reports

October 26: Reports

HW: Read Callery "Devising" and "Audience" (CP)

Prepare 2<sup>nd</sup> round of reportsNovember 2: Reports

HW: Read Buckley (CP) and short story (tbd)

Prepare 3<sup>rd</sup> round of reportsNovember 9 Reports

HW:

Read: NEA readings (CP)

prepare Adaptation one

November 16

HW: Read Wooster Group

Prepare Adaptation Two

November 23: NO CLASS.

Thanksgiving Break.

November 30

HW: Check out websites

Prepare Adaptation 3

December 7

HW: Prepare for final presentations

Final Presentations: TBD

Written proposal and self eval due as well.

**POSSIBLE ARTISTS FOR RESEARCH AND PRESENTATIONS***\* counts as half a one and must be done with another artist*

\*Collapsablegiraffe  
 \*Feed the Herd  
 Bindlestiff Family Cirkus  
 Wau Wau Sisters  
 Ontological Hysteric/Richard Foreman  
 \*Julie Atlas Muz  
 SITI Company/Anne Bogart  
 Mabou Mines (Akalaitis, Breuer, Glass. . . )  
 Theodora Skipitares  
 Robert Wilson  
 Theatre de complicité  
 Theatre de le Jeune Lune  
 Dell Arte (Blue Lake, CA)  
 Pantheatre (France)  
 Ping Chong  
 Ellen Stewart (LaMama)  
 \*Alec Duffy  
 The Flying Machine (Brooklyn NY)  
 Happy Hour Clowns (NY NY)  
 THAW (Theatres Against the War)  
 Bread and Puppet Theatre  
 Prototype theatre (proto-type.org)  
 The Sojourner Theatre Company  
 Wooster Group  
 Ann Bogart  
 Archipelago Theatre (Chapel Hill, NC)  
 The Talking Band  
 The Ridiculous Theatre Company (Charles Ludlam)  
 National Theatre of the United States  
 The Conciliation Project (Dr. T)  
 The Living Theatre  
 Augusto Boal

**Rehearsal Log**

Name:

Date:

Time Began:

Who is present:

Piece being worked on:

What is the goal of this rehearsal:

What was worked on, discovered, accomplished:

What are the goals for next time:

Next rehearsal set for:

Time Finished:

## REPRESENTATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

### **Prepare an autobiographical collage.**

By “autobiographical”, I don’t mean a linear history of your life. I mean:

- What is important to you?
- What breaks your heart?
- Where have you been, where are you now, where are you going?
- What are your secrets, your passions, your hates, your loves?
- What are your fears, your dreams, your nightmares?
- Why are you in this class?
- What do you think about theatre? About life? About society?
- What is your world?
- How should the world be?
- What do you contribute?
- What do you yearn for?
- What did you want to be when you were little?
- What have been rites of passage in your life?
- What do you hope to create?
- What do you wish for?
- What have you lost and what do you miss?
- Who are your role models, your secret crushes, your most loved ones?

**Render answers to these questions. Think outside of written text.**

#### **Include:**

- Images or pictures, sketched/from magazines/postcards/photos
- Images or gestures of/on your body
- Sounds of your voice, breath, body
- Music, smells, textures, sounds, rhythms, objects

#### **Think:**

- Metaphorically
- Associatively
- Honestly
- In images
- Suggestively
- Courageously



## **AUTOBIOGRAPH ONE**

From your autobiographical collage:

Take the collection you have constructed and choose the most important/salient/resonant event/image/moment/idea.

Use this snippet as the heart or spine of a three minute autobiographical, one person performance piece with a beginning, middle and an end.

**Include:**

Personal gestures

**Consider:**

varied rhythms, images, tones, levels

**You may include:**

Music, but the piece may not wholly be set to music

No more than 5 to 10 lines of word text—any word text, delivered in any way you wish

**Feel free to:**

draw on any skill—performative, linguistic, etc—any style, any convention.

I am interested in your imagination in both concept and delivery, your sense of dynamics, of poetry, of the ridiculous, of story.

**Time yourself—you are engaging with process and discovery as well as choice and discipline.**

## MIDTERM: PARTNER PIECE

In pairs you will devise a piece of theatre based on a relationship between two people. The people can be fictional or historical, but must be from a source (ie, a classic text, a famous painting, an historical moment).

**Part One:** Associative collage—Due October 5<sup>th</sup>.  
(30% of grade)

Research your people. Find out what there is actually written about them. Then, scour your mind. What is it about them that intrigues you? What aspect of them, their relationship, their moment in time interests you? Then, find resonances. If you were doing Nance O'Neil and Lizzie Borden, for example, think associatively and metaphorically. Perhaps you would find images or other texts that address women's friendships at the turn of the century, or ghost stories, or children's rhymes.

Of this research, make a collage. It must include:

1. Five to Ten historical facts (or facts we know from the book about them or whatever.) the facts should be the most interesting to you.
2. Five images: photographs, paintings, abstract images, whatever. Find them online or in the photography books in the library. They should be images that resonate with you and with you and the people you are exploring.
3. Five other pieces of text or pieces of music. Again, that resonate with your piece.
4. At least one object or prop. Think metaphorically and associatively. Think "play". It can be literal or symbolic. One of your props will have to be used three different ways in the final piece.
5. Sketches of 10 gestures (5 each) you have come up with for the piece. These can be personal gestures, gestures already used or new gestures—relating to a theme, moment, aspect of the people/story. You may share the gestures.

These will be presented in a museum like format on Wednesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>. There is no explanation needed or expected. This is merely a showing of your ideas. Use the week to really research, pick and choose. You will have time to write and stage later. The 5<sup>th</sup> will be a short class, giving you time to work that day with your partners.

**Part Two:** Composition One, due October 12<sup>th</sup>  
(30% of grade)

You will present your composition in class for commentary to be incorporated for the final showing.

Begin by addressing these questions:

- What story of these people, or inspired by these people, are you going to tell?
- How?
- What will be its structure/format?
- How will you use your collage items? Staging the images? Projecting the images? Using the text?
- How can you continue to evolve your research as you work?

You must include:

- Gestures—explored in combination, in different levels, tempos, intensities
- Spoken text may comprise no more than 30% of your piece.
- One prop/item/costume piece used in more than one way/for more than one thing
- A clear role for the audience
- Beginning, middle and end, though it needn't be linear
- Ideograph
- Consideration of lighting, space
- Both of you in the performance, tho you need not both speak nor have same kind of role

As ever, think associatively, metaphorically, symbolically and wed yourself to the story you are telling.

Time Limit: 4 minutes performance time, 3 minutes clean up and 3 minutes set up.

**Part Three:** Composition Two and rehearsal log, Midterm. Due October 19<sup>th</sup>.  
(40% of grade)

Time Limit: 8 minutes performance though it can be less. 7 minutes for clean up/set up allotted as you wish.

You must:

Incorporate feedback from October 12<sup>th</sup>

One prop/item/costume piece used in three different ways

Incorporate other stipulations, tbc.

Turn in rehearsal logs, per provided form, for your group of entire process. These can be handed in jointly or individually.

## FINAL ASSIGNMENT

### Primary Source Material: *The Tempest*

Create something new. “Clever” choices are not valid. Eviscerate yourselves and the interrogate your choices—search their underbellies as well their hides. Superficial choices are not valid.

Darkness tinged with levity. Levity under-girded by darkness. One does not exist without the other. Use the magic of the theatre, the creativity required by necessity, and the innovation inspired by lack of budget. As ever: create visually, metaphorically, and associatively.

### PART ONE: PRACTICAL PORTION

*Consider:*

- All that we have talked about and addressed this semester, including methodologies and practices of artists, classroom discussions, individual aptitudes

You *must* include:

- At least three other textual sources/passages
- One object or prop used at least three ways
- A beginning, middle and end
- Gestural bodies

You *may not*:

- Do any scene from the *Tempest* in its entirety, verbatim
- Use spoken text as superior to any other language of the theatre (body, space, design, rhythm, sound)
- Prioritize multi-media to the point of compromising the theatrical
- Use music as an excuse

Ultimately, we are striving for a *quality* 10-15 minutes, though less may be appropriate. We will evaluate projects compositionally. This means we will look at structure, as well as execution. Acting, directing, use of space, design, sound and so forth. We may discuss process. **Final performance day: December 10<sup>th</sup>.**

### PART TWO: WRITTEN PORTION

As a group, you will complete an application for your piece based on guidelines from HERE’s American Living Room Festival. Details and form to be provided on November 16<sup>th</sup>. **Due on the final performance day: December 10<sup>th</sup>.**

### PART THREE: SELF EVALUATION

Questions to be provided post Thanksgiving. **Due in my mailbox by 4pm on Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>.**

## PROGRAM FOR FINAL PROJECTS

# DEvisING THEAtRE

## FiNal PROJects:

### Works in Progress

Three short pieces  
using **The Tempest**  
as source material:

**“How to Make Kissing”**

Laura Sullivan, Catherine Nelson,  
Logan Conner, Dave Watkins,  
Joe Carlson

**“Eucharistic Ministry”**

Mike Blouin, John DeBoer,  
Brian Vrtis, Kevin Duvall

**“We Are Such Stuff”**

Anna Sosa, Macon Reed,  
Chandra Hopkins, Julia Rigby,  
Catalina Lavallo

**Please note**, you will be  
asked to vacate 72 between  
each piece to permit set-up.  
**Thank you for coming!**

**A little bit about the objectives of THEA 491/791: Devising Theatre:**

- Create original non-script based performance pieces from a variety of sources in response to a theme, prompt or text.
- Be able to work outside of and beyond conventional narrative structure, naturalistic staging, and traditional rehearsal processes.
- Develop an awareness of the history of devised theatre and current artists: the who, how and where.
- Consider all elements of performance—space, set, costumes light, words, sound, music, the body, the voice, the audience, rhythm, tempo, image-- as languages in creating theatre pieces.

- Consider the intersection of self, ensemble and society in devised work and its creation. That is, how devised work has and does confront social and political issues

**A little bit about the final assignment, the fruits of which are on view this evening:**

*A project in playwriting, directing designing and acting.*

- *Create* something new, using **The Tempest** as source material.
- *Consider* all that we have talked about and addressed this semester, including methodologies and practices of artists, classroom discussions, and individual aptitudes.
- *Think* associatively and metaphorically.
- *Do not* do any scene from the Tempest in its entirety, verbatim, nor use spoken text as superior to any other language of the theatre (body, space, design, rhythm, sound, etc.).

## VITA

Lisa Jackson is an acting, voice and movement teacher and director. Born in 1976 in Buffalo, NY, she attended Duke University where she pursued a Women's Studies Major and studied abroad at University College Galway. She graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1998 and moved to New York City where she pursued directing and devising.

Lisa has directed off-off Broadway at venues such as chashama, HERE, the New York Fringe Festival, American Globe Theatre and the New York Renaissance Faire and off Broadway at The Women's Project and Productions. She is a member of the Lincoln Center Director's Lab and her work as a director ranges from classical to experimental, with a particular interest in feminist theatre and new work. Also a member of VASTA, she assistant directed and voice coached The American Globe Theatre's production of *Three Sisters* which won an OOB for excellence.

Lisa will receive her MFA in May of 2006 from Virginia Commonwealth University where, in addition to her graduate studies, she has taught voice and speech, Shakespeare and text, devising theatre, and solo performance. She also participated in the Richmond area production of the Vagina Monologues/V-Day campaign, as actor/assistant director in 2005 and as director/producer in 2006.

After marrying playwright Dennis Schebetta in June of 2006, she looks forward to continuing to devise, research, teach and kick around in the sandbox.