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**ACHIEVING SELF-AWARENESS THROUGH DANCE: A GUIDE FOR BEGINNING
PERFORMERS**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Marquice Perrera

December 2022

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ABSTRACT

ACHIEVING SELF-AWARENESS THROUGH DANCE: A GUIDE FOR BEGINNING PERFORMERS

Marquice Perrera

My research is an investigation of how I created a learning space that resulted in beginner performers heightening their self-awareness. I believe I was able to achieve this by implementing dance and movement exploration in my classroom. I wanted to know how and why I was able to achieve this amongst my beginning performer students enrolled in a theater arts course in higher education. . What are the qualities of my practice that can bring about creative innovation? How can dance inspire people? How can disciplined bodily control be achieved through creative movement exercises? How can dance strengthen the relationship between mind, body, and emotions within the individual? This investigation required an in-depth analysis of my dance-based background, various dance practitioners' teaching methods, and other philosophies in regard to the expressive qualities within dance. I have structured my thesis as a reflexive autoethnography. The purpose of this thesis is to reflect on the past and future inspirations informing how I developed my creative way of teaching. I hope to increase accessibility for other practitioners who are teaching beginning performers.

Introduction

I believe traditional dance training does not take on a role in solving health and body problems like stress management, emotional dysregulation, and performance anxiety for beginning performers. For me, dance is an intimate and expressive art form that reveals the thoughts of the dancer that they may keep internalized; through their movement, their vulnerability becomes bare and visible to the audience. Dance allows our bodies to speak with actions rather than words. Though most mainstream and well-known forms of dance involve the embodiment of a character, as in musical performances or theater, the branch of improvisational dance in particular encourages the dancer to create movement as “active imagination,” (Whitehouse 9). There are no guidelines, from the routine to the individual’s appearance. This makes for a medium that has heavy personal involvement by the participant—more so than other forms of dance. I want to discover a method where students can use sensory interactions and rhythmic activities to increase their mindfulness and decrease performance anxiety.

My hope is that my practice allows for transformation. I want to help beginning performers reframe and reimagine their weaknesses, doubts, and insecurities into a strength that can manifest in performative energy on stage. I decided to focus on mitigating mentally and physically destructive conditions like depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety. This implementation of emotional introspection through movement is a core source of improvisational dance—the practice revolves around finding a way to summon a state of mental and emotional serenity, which aims to blend the aspects of dance that have benefits beyond toning the body. As a result, I created my very own workshop inspired by the techniques and outcomes of Embodiology and Anachoreography, which I discuss in the next section. I choose five elements of dance: action, time, space, energy, and body. My workshop

was created as a result of my participation within dance-based research that centers around the teaching of self-expression in dance and movement. My goal has been to teach beginning performers how to express emotions through dance movement as an organic alternative to language.

My transformative, hour-long dance exploratory workshop is titled Imbued. Through Imbued, I highlighted ways improvisational dance can communicate innovation through physical movement. I create a safe environment for beginning performers to make mistakes, learn, and experience the difficulty of discovering their performative strengths in a judgment-free space. The first demonstration laid the groundwork for my improvement in both teaching methods and the choreographic process, setting the stage for future workshops. Directing and teaching Gerald Casel's dance class in his absence allowed for further reflection upon the creative process, as well as a space for more detailed feedback from the participants. I also implemented similar practices in my previous and future Intro to Acting classes amongst my students. Methods of qualitative data, creation of dance workshops, and utilizing my experience in West African improvisational dance have helped to back the assertion that dance can be an act of constructive self-care and an art form.

Finally, in this thesis, I have adopted the methodology of autoethnography. I want to find a way to portray my lived experiences into my thesis so that other performance arts-based educators or readers can reflect on their own experiences and stories and be inspired to implement the same techniques I used in my reflective practices into their own. Autoethnography is research, writing, and method that connects autobiographical and personal experience to wider cultural, political and social context; this form usually consists of concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection (Belbase, 88). The author of an evocative narrative writes in the first person, making them the object of

research and thus breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subject. I chose autoethnography because it allows me to create a setting, tell a story, and narrate my experiences, practices, theories, and art for readers to contextualize in their own lives.

I have noticed that autoethnography feels as though I am writing a diary excerpt or a personal essay; it feels at times too personal and not “factual.” Often, autoethnography is dismissed by scientific standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, analytical, or too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic (Ellis 283). Auto-ethnographers have been criticized for participating in little fieldwork and not spending a substantial amount of time using different resources (Ellis 283). Furthermore, this style of using personal experience as research has been criticized for equating to biased data (Ellis 283). However, through autoethnography, I was able to identify the benefits of participating in a creative movement. In both of my acting and dance classes, my beginning performers experienced increased trust and openness in themselves through their performative journey in the classroom. I believe dancing can create a sense of grounding in their bodies by being in the moment of the performance.

Engagement with the Literature on Embodied Practices

I had a strong idea of what my next steps were for developing my thesis and that was to find evidence and methods behind the benefits of dance. I found myself reading and reviewing articles about dance therapy, healing trauma through dance, and psychological breakthroughs. I believe all of these things can manifest through dance, but I do not have a psychological background. It would be challenging to prove these assertions to be true. For the sake of defending my thesis proficiently, I had to narrow down my research. In my daily practice, I have affirmations like: let your nerves be your allies, embody yourself to the fullest, and there would be no insecurity without the word security. I discovered the

commonality amongst these is that they all pertain to the concept of the self.

According to the web article “What is Self-Concept?” The self can be defined as how one perceives their behaviors, abilities, and personality traits (Cherry). Carl Rogers, a humanist psychologist, believed that self-concept is made up of three different parts: the ideal self, the self-image, and self-esteem (Cherry). I was impressed by Rogers’s breakdown of his concept of self because I always thought of the self as being who you are deep down. In my text analysis class, a guest speaker Dr. Lazlo Pearlman held a brief discussion about the social roles an individual plays throughout their lives. He said that “the situations we are in, the people we interact with, and our physical surroundings influence the individual, or rather the many pieces of the individual.”

Rogers asserts that nobody is themselves consistently; we are constantly receptive to new and old influences that guide our way. I think about how a majority of my childhood and teenage years have influenced my present life subconsciously. For example, I have experienced very toxic friendships and relationships over the years, and now I am very mindful and observant of similar toxic traits in my interactions with people so that I do not repeat a past mistake. When it comes to teaching beginning performers about character work, I always tell my students that characters are blank canvases, and our emotions, personalities, and life experiences are the paint brushes we need to use to create a character. I noticed this instills a greater sense of self-discovery within my students. I know this because it is frequently difficult for me to externalize my life experiences into words on a page, and some students experience the same problem. However, learning to externalize my emotions and experiences into creating a character or into choreography allows me to be creative with my emotions and not repress them.

I wanted to know more about the idea of self-discovery but through a performative

lens as my thesis is based on dance-based practices. I can not rely on psychological evidence alone. . The first book I read was *Maroon Choreography*. The author, fahima ife, frequently speaks about a “sense of being-and-not-being-composed, of moving through a series of disembodied lapses, outside any sense of bodily identities,” (ife ix). They seek to find a way out of “captivity, indebtedness, and ecological ruin” through a way of “refusal,” (ife ix). In this way, ife theorizes the idea of “anachoreography.” Anachoreography can be defined as a repetitive practice of refusal. Anachoreography began with a series of questions on the “imaginary” human body, questions about proprioceptive sense limits, how a body moves in space, how one can make sense of human movement in space, and how to expand the body’s limits (ife ix).

Proprioception is the body awareness. It is an awareness that tells the person where their body parts are without having to look at them. Examples of proprioceptive behaviors would include walking without having to look at your feet or being able to know your right hand from your left with your eyes closed. In the dancing world, I would describe it as a feeling of what am I doing as a dancer, where am I in the space around me, and how my positioning is from balance to weight distribution.

As a practice, anachoreography “involves opening up to, stammering, and moving again inside our quiet, entangled, and pneumatic intimacies,” (ife, xi). ife began revealing her methodology by examining her interest in the rhythm of enacting queer, black, radical traditions of breaking form; she began making new forms derived from prior fugitive movements that are as undocumented as wind and breath. I believe ife is referring to anachoreography as a process of improvisational dance. I came to the understanding that improvisational dance is impossible to document in a strict, tangible form. In other words, it is not strictly choreography as there are no written or arranged movements, steps, or patterns.

Improvisational dance is spontaneous, momentary, and very fugitive-like as the movement can not be replicated or mimicked.

When I introduced improvisational dance to my beginning performers, I noticed signs of stammering and stuttering because most of my performers were frustrated when attempting to communicate with their bodies. I believe most beginning performers get fixated on the idea of what they should be or look like as a dancer. However, most learn when they close their eyes that their body is not cooperating with the image they created in their head—this is a proprioception limit. To counteract this limitation, I formulated a practice built in sustained slowness, suspension, ambiance, aeration, and durational grief. I began to document “this [impulsiveness] as a nonperformance, not choreographic, in the [existential] captive sense of the written body... [a] sense of free movement like a [irrepressible] contemporary dancer who flails/ shakes the body off in undulation” (Ife, 82). I understood Ife’s use of symbolism behind the contemporary dancer, as I think about contemporary dance as a free and self-expressed dance style that pulls from traditional dance styles like jazz and ballet, but it creates its way of storytelling by breaking away from strict techniques of other styles. It is an interpretive dance style that embraces innovation and discovery of the human body.

In a way that feels similar to Ife’s exploration, I use contemporary dance exercises to help introduce both my acting and dance beginning performers to bodily awareness. It helps them learn to be attuned to their needs, emotions, and resources, and to discover their limitations. Limitations can manifest in performers trying to discover a balance between vulnerability and comfort. Through improvisational dance styles like contemporary dance, I found it easier for beginning performers to experiment and trust their instincts. Not following a choreographed or scripted routine allows for performers to develop a sense of proprioception like understanding how much force to use, developing mind-body

coordination, and bodily awareness. iife founded anachoreography as they refused the “choreographed apparatuses of coloniality, its methodologies, and naming rituals.” (iife ix) iife described it as “the feral spirit of study, rehearsals, practice, intimacy, wake, pause, etc... bestowed to us [through] the poiesis of black, performance, affect, and indigenous studies,” (ix).

In my own experience, I believe iife is describing the truth behind the source of self-discovery. Self-discovery is not solely an activity where an individual brings something to their essence of being that did not exist before, rather it is the essence of what an individual chooses not to be: that is the discovery. I believe the feral state can be related to the act of being untrained and the act of not knowing how. Performers learn to rehearse, practice, and memorize their choreography all in the act of knowing how to do it. However, not knowing anything leads to knowing everything. I argue that performers experience more innovation from not “knowing how” because we rely on our imagination or subconscious.

Going on this explorative journey of achieving self-discovery through the imagination of the subconscious, I discovered two influential artists: Mary Stark Whitehouse, and Janet Adler. All three explore the realm of imagination, the body, and mind as a way to discover embodiment of the self through improvisational dance. The author of the book *Authentic Movement*, Janet Adler, focuses on the development of the relationship between moving and witnessing. Throughout the movement, there is the presence of the “mover” and the “witness.” Throughout this unique collaboration, Adler argued that “both mover and witness are concentrated to develop an ‘inner witness’... a [personal] understanding of consciousness” (Adler). In “A Brief Description of the discipline of Authentic Movement,” Adler continues:

The inner witness is initially externalized, embodied by a person—often a

teacher—who is called the outer witness. Another person—the mover—embodies the role of the moving self. After immersing in the mystery of an ineffable field of movement, of stillness, the mover returns to their witness and speaks directly from their embodied experience, which may include sensation, emotion, image, and/or energetic phenomena such as vibration or light. Their witness listens and then speaks from their own inner embodied experience of witnessing, in close and careful relationship to the mover’s gestures and words. Within this dialogue, language bridges experience from body to consciousness. Commitment toward the practice of conscious speech is a core element of the practice. (Adler)

After reading this article, I had some ideas on what type of Authentic Movement-inspired activities I could incorporate into my teaching practice—like a partner-based mirroring exercise I created for my intro to acting class, but I will discuss it in further detail towards the end of the thesis.

I continued to read up on Authentic Movement and I found out that Adler was not the sole creator of Authentic Movement. Dance therapist Mary Stark Whitehouse focused on expressive movement originating from an unconscious source and inspirations from Jungian thought (Whitehouse 4). Whitehouse instructed her students to follow their impulses. She believed the physical movement of the body was a personal analogy to the cognitive movement that leads to the “center” of the body. I interpret Whitehouse to be referring to the word breath as the center of the body. Breath is also one of the key components of Dr. Wary’s dance practice, called Embodiology. I will go into more detail about my experience with Embodiology in the correlating section of my thesis, however, I think it is important to introduce the topic earlier on. According to the associated website, “the Embodiology praxis enables an optimization of creativity through engaging in distinctive breath-informed,

rhythmic movement and music concepts,” (Wray, “Embodiology”). It is an improvisational-based practice centered around invoking body awareness, joy, being aware of surroundings and space.

Dr. Wray created a model containing, “six main components that conjoin to produce dance and music improvisation practice, as seen across many West African cultures. [These components] as follows, are identified as: ‘1 Dynamic Rhythm; 2 Fractal Code; 3 Inner Sensing and Balance; 4 Play and Decision-Making; 5 Collaborative Competition; and 6 Audience Proxemics,’” (Wray *British Dance: Black Routes* 61). These would be the foundation of her award-winning methodology practice called Embodiology. Here is a condensed devised breakdown of each component in Dr. Wray’s words:

1 Dynamic Rhythm (DR)

Dynamic rhythm is the meta-structuring component of this schema which itself contains three interrelated features namely prosody, repetition, and silence. Prosody refers to the poetic quality of language, its cadence, pitch, tone, and melody. Repetition focuses on retranslating purpose and effect. While silence defines the shape of the rhythmic layer within the movement.

2 Fractal Code (FC)

The fractal code is a social knowledge system; it appropriates a mathematical term, fractal, signaling repetition, to denote performances that use repeated structures that vary in scale yet retain essences.

3 Inner Sensing and Balance (ISB)

Inner sensing and balance represent the inner life of the performer. In the case of the dancer, his or her interior landscape, cognitive and somatic, subsequently controls the capacity to generate novel movement and engage

with others meaningfully.

4 Play and Decision-Making (PDM)

Through conscious play and decision-making performers remain on high alert, a flexible state of physical and mental readiness. They operate to maintain a sharp focus on the objective of a particular maneuver. This cognitive dimension of PDM allows individuals to build upon ideas presented to others, as well as to pursue a self-reflexive exploration of movement.

5 Collaborative Competition (CC)

Rather than generating a simple winner collaborative competition generates cooperation through artistic antagonisms.

6 Audience Proxemics (AP)

Audience proxemics focuses on the meaning of the spatial relationship between performers and audience. (Wray, *British Dance: Black Routes*, 61-63)

In my experience of Embodiology, I learned how to recognize the entirety of myself not only as a performer or an artist but also as a human being through my progression in the program. I gravitated towards Embodiology because it focuses on fostering innovation and connecting a flow between an individual's body and mind, developing sensory intelligence into knowing, connecting, and communicating with others more effectively. Using the core ideas of Embodiology, I communicate to all of my students that, if you can see the value of yourselves, you can see the values of others, and we can teach others their value. It is my unique way of introducing empathy to my students. In this way, Embodiology creates the conceptual framework for helping my students develop self-capacity.

Self-capacity is the ability to stay connected to and grounded in oneself, even when

experiencing strong negative feelings. The negative empathetic feelings I aim to tackle are all performance anxiety-related, like stage fright, memory block, stress management, and emotional dysregulation. I noticed these were common negative problems that my students experienced in my classes. I believe it is because of the fear of shame, inadequacy, and vulnerability within a performance. I noticed there is an intolerance to being visible or exposed on stage. Performance invites an idea of failure to the performers if they forget their line, can not cry on cue, or have no sense of rhythm. I was trying to find a way to teach performers to take responsibility for their anxiety by transforming their self-doubt defense mechanism into an offensive approach. I started with analyzing emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation is an emotional response that is poorly regulated. This ranges from mood swings to uncontrollable emotional responses. I believe it is very important for performers to be in control and touch with their emotions as they need to portray a character's authenticity to the best of their ability. However, most beginning performers are not fully trained in self-awareness, and thus they can experience a heightened emotional reaction if they dive too deep into an emotion that is foreign to them. I discovered a way to counteract emotional dysregulation and that was through the presence of breath.

During my participation in the Embodiology summer program, which I will go into more detail about later, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Carol Penn. Dr. Carol Penn has a background in dance and science focusing on wellness to optimize human potential. Dr. Penn specializes in meditation, movement, and mind-body medicine. Dr. Penn explains that breathing is controlled by both the autonomic nervous system (unconscious) and the voluntary nervous system (conscious). Penn discusses in further detail that “breathing can both respond and influence an individual’s emotional state” (Penn). For example, hyperventilation is usually caused by fear, anxiety, and panic attacks; it is an emotional

response. that can be mediated by slower diaphragmatic breathing, which can induce relaxation. It is very similar to the relaxed state induced in yoga, where breath is central as a space between movement and mind.

I find the connection between Embodiology and Dr. Penn's work is the means to work towards generating empathy, practicing joy, and restoring body and mind awareness to a state of creativity, confidence, and repose. Thus, when I am teaching beginning acting or dance, I like to tell my performers to treat breathing as a pause in the movement or the dialogue and not a stop. My intention for this is simple: when a performer forgets their lines or choreography, they often tend to freak out, freeze, and express confusion or frustration on their face, thus breaking character. However, I have found my teaching methodology behind breathing to aid this a majority of the time. I use breath as a figurative lever to help beginning performers direct, or rather process, their thinking "train" into their next movement or dialogue destination. There have been numerous times that I have forgotten my lines or choreography and I resort back to my subconscious as a defense mechanism. However, once I allowed myself to breathe, I noticed that my breath allowed me to communicate through my hands, my legs, my nose, and my mouth. Breath is a force to generate innovation in movement.

In my work, I find that Embodiology, as a practice for finding the idea of self through rhythmic, breath, and empathy exploration, aligns with the goals of anachoreography. Anachoreography has opened my eyes to see the possibilities of what the self can be based on the ideologies of who I refuse to be. It is a very peculiar experience because I never really considered the concept behind refusal within not just my practice but my daily conversations. I never realized how choreographed my conversations were. I follow the same step-by-step tutorial on promoting myself in a positive way that is very surface-level. For example, I was

trained since I was a child to answer questions like: What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you like to do? How would you describe yourself? Almost all the time, I answered with an immediate response; there was no thought process. My answers were rehearsed. I was subconsciously involved in a naming ritual: here is everything Marquice Perrera is, but I never asked what Marquice Perrera was not. I asked myself, was I teaching the idea of self-discovery wrong? What do I need to practice asking myself in my work more while making the discovery possible?

Fred Moten, an American cultural theorist, poet, and author, mentions in *Maroon Choreography*: “if dance is the city’s mother tongue, then what secret lives inside the city, in us, before the city, as us, before the clearing, inside air? This is not the only mention of air being a symbolic presence within discovering the Self as ife themselves have mentioned, [they] began to think of the air around us as an ongoing shape lineage of refusal,” (qtd. in ife p 88). Fred Moten and ife’s self-discovery process can be further explained through Mary Whitehouse’s choreographic process of Authentic Movement. In an interview, Whitehouse explains:

The process of getting into your depths is the process that makes you able to accompany someone else into their depths. I make a connection between the reality of the psychic life and my experience, and the reality of my own psychic life is the prerequisite...An unknown part of oneself doesn’t have to be the same, it is only the unknown part’. It can come up quite differently...What you had to work from is your experience of your awe and surprise and emotional reaction to the unknown part of yourself. Movement is a way to get in touch with yourself-the invisible part. Physical Movement is a revelation, as a show of the inner thing. The psychic attitude is displayed by the physical movement. Different ways of trusting yourself and it's

based on being willing to be wrong, being willing to make mistakes and misread, knowing perfectly well that was a possibility- what you saw. Inner movement of the psyche we're working on and trying to free. Non-movement is movement too.

Movement means growth. (16)

My engagement with the literature on embodied practices brought me to an important realization. Previously, I was looking for how to go about teaching self-discovery while trying to discover myself through my work. If I was training students to make an interpersonal discovery within themselves, I had to go to the raw, feral depths of my psyche. As scared as I was to face my bodily issues, keeping to myself would be life's method of refusal. Instead, I had to be open. I discovered movement was my main outlet in which I face my fears and insecurities.

At the time, I was researching ways to combat my persistent body dysmorphia. Body dysmorphia is a mental health condition in which the individual persistently thinks negatively about one or multiple attributes in their appearance (Bray 427). Growing up as a performer, I would habitually look at my stomach in the mirror and constantly poke and pull at my obliques and intensely focus on the layer of fat around them. There have been times that I would not be able to leave the house if I did not do an exercise first. I had an intense fear of becoming fat or gaining weight. On paper, it sounds very simple to be encouraged to love your body daily, and to feel incredible in your skin no matter what. However, that false body positivity often has a large overlap with my truth. Western and particularly American society is built upon Euro-centric standards of beauty; small faces, dainty features, and light skin are weaved into the mainstream depictions of ideal beauty (Sekayi 468). In contrast, I wanted to work against all the pre-existing expectations I set for myself as a result of my surroundings.

Connecting with all parts of the body rather than rejecting or wishing to change certain features is the basis of self-discovery that I instilled in my process. I am not necessarily saying change is bad, and one of my fellow professors has informed me that this previous statement can come off as transphobic. What I am stating is the rejection of outside influences that distort our body image for ourselves. Instead, we need to reshape or recreate our self-image. I found my technique of reshaping body image to be very similar to the life's practice of anachoreography, which argues that "nominal predispositions, naming rituals, linger in terms of race, gender, sexuality, ability... and are reanimated through an ongoing sense of self-regard, or relentless in looking back at, of having moved through, of being connected, to history" (ife 4).

My review of the literature helped me appreciate how important one of the goals behind my teaching practice is to promote body appreciation and admiration; coming as you are and not who you need to be. It is important to not put all focus on parts of the body that we regularly appreciate, but to distribute that same affection to the neglected limbs, aches, and emotions we typically ignore. This can help individuals admire "flaws" rather than be ashamed of them—our bodies are our allies and not our enemies. For example, I am not the most flexible, but I still practice ballet religiously. There are technicalities to the art of ballet, but it has helped me to become confident in my body as I am practicing something outside of my comfort zone. Self-confidence can help access full expression within art.

My routine of teaching self-expression continues with my methods and practices that I stated previously above. I encourage my students to express themselves to the fullest not as an individual but through collaboration with their classmates as a whole. Every class, I gave my students the creative freedom to explore their active imagination by implementing improvisational theatrical games and exercises. Most of the time, I would give a brief

demonstration about how to do the exercises or choreography, and I never would explain the objective behind the exercises at the beginning. I do this because I believe it creates an expected result or outcome; whenever I outline an exercise from start to finish, most of my performers took the quickest route to get to the end of the exercise. I have also noticed that a few of my students get upset or look down upon themselves when they do not achieve the expected “objective” of the exercise that I outlined in the beginning. I understand with acting and dance we have character objectives, however getting to the end goal of a character or dance’s arc does not make a person an amazing performer. I believe it is the journey to achieving that end goal that is where the ignition of the active imagination sparks. I believe setting objectives limit a beginning performer's creative expression and urge for exploration. This is why I think it is important to introduce my beginning performers to the act of improvisational acting and dance before teaching character objectives.

Improvisational acting and dance helps performers develop interpersonal relationships by trusting their instincts, and emotions, and interlocking their minds and body. This was evident when I taught my students improvisational games like Bus-Stop and Rooms that focused on developing creativity. In the game Bus-Stop, there is a row of chairs that represents a bench, and three students will enter the stage one by one after reaching into a bowl and drawing a piece of paper with different character types written on them. Then the students will sit and interact with each other while they wait for their bus to arrive. The goal behind the game is that students have to embody the character they were assigned through specific behaviors and bodily expressions without spoiling too much information to the audience, as the audience is trying to guess the character the actor is portraying. What I tend to focus on is how my students learn to embody a character than rather portray a character. I believe it is very simple to portray a character: portraying a “role” requires minimal effort

and little imagination. It becomes a game of what is universal or stereotypical for each character. For example, I had a student in class who decided to do Elsa from Frozen, and they instantly went with a “universal” portrayal and decided to sing “Let it Go” and within five seconds of the scene, the class knew who they were. I try to explain to my students that I want to understand the unknown of a character rather than what is familiar. I ask them questions like, what makes your “character” different from another actor’s interpretation? What do you want to bring out of yourself to be shared through the character? How can this character tell a story from your book of life? This is what I believe leads to embodying a character. Utilizing the authenticity of the self as a primary source for characterization can lead to outstanding development. I was not much aware of the potential my teaching practice had until I discovered renowned actress Ivanna Chubbuck’s “Chubbuck” technique. “Chubbuck” is a technique that builds upon Stanislavski’s methods but mixes modern techniques in behavioral sciences and psychology to help recreate “authentic” human behavior in a performance. From her studio website, Chubbuck explains the process behind her methods for acting:

[Looking] at the psyche of the character in the script and [we can] see how that particular character negotiates life. Using the Chubbuck Technique, I will teach you to replicate the character from your personal needs and life experiences. This creates a character that is vivid, authentic, and living and breathing at the moment. The Chubbuck Technique is a way to realize and embody a character so that the character becomes you, and you become the character. There are certain human, primal constants regarding what one seeks from life (power, love, sex, a job, validation, etc), and these are the needs that dictate our behavior. However, it is how an individual manifests his or her needs (the “Objective”) that make us all wonderfully unique. It

creates an arena for your one-of-a-kind affectations and mannerisms to truly emerge. We are creatures of action, emanating from the survival instinct that is both physical and emotional. Bottom line: we do not just feel, but rather our emotions are a reaction to action. If we love and we do not get love back, we will feel bad; if we love and we do get love back, we will feel good (and all the shades of gray in-between). This is the real human spirit. This way of working realizes a true, multidimensional human being, not an acted-out version. The Chubbuck Technique also helps recreate the actions of a dynamic individual. We go to the movies, watch TV and go to the theater to see, not ordinary or dull, but extraordinary people. How a person dealing with pain and trauma overcomes and wins, by using that pain as fuel. This is what I teach.

(Chubbuck)

I do agree with Chubbuck on a few things. I agree with her idea of replicating a character from the actor's own experiences. Through my experience, this technique allowed a majority of my beginning performers to establish character development at a quicker pace. I realized this through the feedback I received from my classes. Most of my students confided in me that they felt they were able to connect to their characters on a deeper level because they were given the opportunity to challenge and confront their insecurities. Most of my students achieved this by utilizing the insecurity that debilitates them most and choosing to embody this insecurity as one of their character's strengths. For example, I had a student that dealt with depression at times, and for one particular improvisational exercise, they decided to become a therapist that specializes in mental health. They created a very interesting scene where they were diagnosing an invisible patient—they later revealed to me it was their way of symbolizing how their depression may be invisible—but the presence physically exists. Chubbuck mentions that her method allows for performers to use their trauma or pain as fuel.

I would say my teaching method does not use an actor's pain as a fuel, but rather it presents them with a new awareness on how to control and nurture their traumas through non-traditional psychiatric methods. I do not agree with the wording of Chubbuck's method; I am not expecting a result out of my actors, nor am I trying to cure them. Most beginning performers that I have taught do not have a mature understanding of their emotional capacity yet, so expecting performers to overcome their "trauma" or use it as a primary tool in acting is too high of an expectation.

I also have to slightly disagree with Chubbuck's statement that "emotions are a reaction to an action." I argue that most times, emotions are more of an initiation toward an action. For example, at the start of my day, I usually wake up with a certain emotion whether it is happiness, sadness, anger, or some such feeling. These emotions usually facilitate how I am going to interact with my daily environment. Often, I tend to tell my students to allow their initial morning emotion to give them new ideas and answers to the questions within their new day. I have found this experimental daily ritual to be very beneficial in strengthening a performer's emotional capacity and emotional exploration. For example, I would default to my natural optimistic personality despite waking up feeling melancholy and upset. I would say I was okay, and it came to a point where I would emotionally "stack" all of my problems in my mind. I did not realize the effect this habit would have over time, as it started to affect my acting and my environment. For example, when a scene called for sadness or anger, I never really understood how to invoke those emotions, and it would come off fake, numbed, and emotionless. I noticed I was weakening my emotions by choosing not to experience them, so when it came time to exhibit sadness or anger, I would mentally freeze and shut down. I know the power of initiating an emotion before an action because it was something that I have learned to do for myself, and I have overcome the emotional "barriers" that I have set

for myself; which is why I teach my students this important skill of being in the moment. It is very humbling to see my students walk into the performance room and say they are tired, and I respond, “Ok, let’s create some choreography about a tired college student that was up all night.” I acquired inspiration for this method from one of my mentors Dr. S. Ama Wray, who I will discuss later on in my thesis. In Dr. Wray’s TEDxTalk titled “Bodily Steps Through Innovation,” Dr. Wray challenged the audience members to find a day when they had enough time to go about doing their daily routine, except to do tasks like waking up from bed, brushing their teeth, or making coffee with the non-dominant side of their body. I tried this task, and it was incredibly confusing and frustrating for me; I have given up a thousand times because I am not left-handed and all I could think of was that I can not eat with my left hand, are my teeth getting cleaned enough, am I writing legibly. However, this was the end goal behind Dr. Wray’s exercise. Dr. Wray wanted the participants to, “think & reflect on the sensations that occurred throughout the body; as she would say, ‘to be in the moment and allow your external senses to come in together with your internal senses and create a cluster; it's synesthesia.’”

Once I allowed the frustrations to happen, I noticed that I was focusing just on the task at hand and my mind was not distancing itself into other thoughts like errands I had to run or homework I had to do. I was present in my frustrations. It felt like I was extending the plane of my self-awareness and creating more avenues for my imagination to explore. Oddly enough, the brushing my teeth portion of the assignment did open up communication between my senses. I was so worried that my teeth were not getting cleaned enough that I had imagined many unfortunate scenarios in my head, yet I can see that my teeth were fine, I didn’t taste anything bad, and my breath smells minty, it was an amazing feeling that my physical senses were listening to my body and came to aid my mind. I felt that I gained more

perception and innovation, and got more intuitive with my mind and body. I thought to myself, How can I inspire my beginning performers to achieve innovation within themselves? As inspired as I was by reading about Ivanna Chubbuck's acting technique and the praise it has gained from helping actors embody their characters, it was not the method I wanted to teach my performers. I do not teach my students how to play better characters—I wanted to teach my beginning performers how to learn to embody themselves. But I needed more in-depth information and research on this process. I prompted a few questions for myself: How can I get my beginning performers to trust their intuition? Learn to interact with their senses? Build upon body and mind innovation? Gaining more perception of who they are as a performer? I then put all my questions together and came up with the answer, and that answer was my incredible mentor, Dr. S. Ama Wray.

Engaging Embodiology

Dr. S. Ama Wray creates new ways to foster innovation. Embodiology is an experience of self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-analysis, but at the same time it is about developing community amongst others as well. I was an active participant in an extension of Dr. Wray's Embodiology work, J.I.M. (Joy In Motion), and I recently attended the Summer 2022 Embodiology 5-day program. Before I talk about my recent experience within Embodiology, I need to start with how I came across Dr. Wray's teachings. I first heard of Embodiology after Gerald Casel sent me a flier to an Embodiology course held near Santa Cruz. The class was canceled due to low enrollment, but I reached out to Dr. Wray directly and she linked me to her program Joy In Motion.

As of December 2021, I have been participating in Dr. Wray's J.I.M. (Joy In Motion) dance class almost every Saturday. J.I.M. is a practice that improves communication, shared responsibility, collaboration, deep listening, resilience, empathy, compassion, confidence,

physical awareness, and sociability and creates trust between people. After taking these classes, I have noticed I have become more receptive to my senses and established a balance with my body and mind. In each class, we begin with a meditative breathing exercise directed by Dr. Wray. In one particular class, Dr. Wray was explaining to us that we all have a central place within our body where we speak and breathe life into. At first, I was a little confused with the statement, however I metaphorically understood the intention of Dr. Wray's words. I discovered I speak through my heart, as I am an open, honest, and emotionally connected person. Most of the time my thought process is not mechanical, but emotionally involved; I interact instead of reacting first. This can be simplified as I base my interactions or my decisions on my emotions and the mood of the room, and I adapt the tone of my voice and expression of my body language to this. I was introduced to body awareness techniques within a choreographed routine. Dr. Wray would ask the class to explore a dance pattern usually toward the end of class.

As time went on, Dr. Wray would instruct the class to play up the order of the choreography or interact with different planes and levels within the space that we are in, or even the control and speed of the pattern. Instead of simply following the choreography, I found myself analyzing the intention of my movement, something that I rarely did. I started to formulate questions like: Why am I moving in this direction? What is the intensity behind my movement? How can I play with time and energy displacement? What is my mind trying to communicate through my bodily movements? Throughout the exercises, Dr. Wray repeatedly says, "Remember to breathe", "focus the breath into the movements," and "the breath grounds us and helps flow with our movements." We did several breath exercises in Embodiology that I will discuss later on in the thesis. Dr. Wray has opened the doors for me as an individual to express more sensory intelligence, to be more intuitive with my motor

skills, physical environment, imagination, and mind. I think as a performer I get caught up in performing the choreography to the best of my ability for the audience, yet I do not ask myself what I am getting out of the performance. My only awareness was embodying the character I was playing on stage, but never was I self-aware or checked in with myself on the stage.

Similar to J.I.M., the benefits include an improved sense of community, deeper insight into one's body, mind, and spirit, and enhanced creativity. Another similar technique is the "Alexander Technique," which is an educational process that has been teaching people to tune into their physical awareness. Participants are encouraged to break habits and respond in a way that works against the auto-pilot physical reactions (Arnold). I mentioned this previously in my thesis when I talk about my students utilizing their nerves as their allies and finding innovation through moods they wake up in. This is also similar to J.I.M. because both programs encourage stepping away from the expected and stepping into new interactions within the surrounding environment. Dance can be an essential component in eliminating distress, anguish, and affliction, as well as minimizing emotional trauma. Achieving these benefits through dance has been thoroughly explored by Dr. S Ama Wray. Dr. Wray's creative practice consists of investigating West African improvisational dance in the hopes of developing a model that can be applied to Western contemporary dance (Wray 56). As a result of her research, Dr. Wray founded her award-winning movement method called "Embodiology." Dr. Wray received the Emerging Scholar Award from The International Comparative and International Educational Society in 2018 for Embodiology.

Throughout my studies of the history of African dance, I learned about the roots of ritualistic performance in several regions throughout the continent and the ways Embodiology incorporates these sentiments in its practice. Embodiology focuses specifically

on movement originating in the Ewe ethnic group, a tribe of peoples scattered across the coast of West Africa (Wray 58). In Embodiology, Dr. Wray talks about creating a space for the individual to “heal” themselves. I know the word healing can be a very loaded word in academia because I can not necessarily prove someone is healed. I find I face the same accusations when I talk about the word “spirit” and its relation to dance. However, through an Africanist lens, there is a relationship between body, mind, and spirit within a performance. Brenda Dixon Gottschild explains the conversation in more detail in her 1996 book, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance Dance and Other Contexts*. Gottschild explains:

Africanist religions are geocentric(earth-centered) and based on the beneficence of polytheistic forces, or attributes, whose identifying characteristics represent particular facets of the human personality. Deities make contact with humans when they are embodied by their followers in dancing ceremonies. Thus, dance and the dancing body are manifestations of the mind-spirit. [While], Christian(particularly Protestant) thought mind-spirit to be separate from the body... it's a [very] maternalistic and monotheistic belief system. (8)

Growing up in a Caribbean household, I was introduced to the word spirit relating to my energy, my feeling of wellness, or relating to the effect of my mood. For example, if my mom told me I was very spirited it would mean I was filled with a lot of energy, cheerfulness, and confidence. Another example is when an individual is called a free-spirit it means they are independent and uninhibited. My mom has also called me mean-spirited whenever I was being very selfish and inconsiderate. I agree with Gottschild’s claim. I believe that there is a relationship between mind, body, and spirit that is inseparable. I believe the “spirit” in the relationship is the process of the individual's thoughts being externalized through a mixture of

emotions and physicality; or in my words, emotional physicalization. Notice that in all three of the examples that I used, I have talked about myself in a state of being. It is almost as if spirit can also be defined as the process of interactive play between the mind and body, where both in the Eurocentric belief, are separated, but they finally come together to be in a moment of innovation. Along these same lines, North America also has a history of ritualistic dances for similar reasons. New Orleans Jazz Funerals incorporate a procession filled with musicians, dancers, and loved ones marching to the beat of a brass band from the Wake, to the funeral home, and finally, the cemetery, ultimately celebrating death in a joyous lament (Sakakeeny 1). The dancing typically consists of purely improvisational movement, fueled by both sadness and joy. The dances can range anywhere from somber footwork to dances involving the whole body, raising arms, and twirling others around. Some Native American tribes like the Navajo and Cherokee have a generational history of ceremonial dances as well. The most known is the rain dance: this entails dancing and chants to summon rain from above to help nourish the crops and eliminate drought. This shows that the sense of eliminating distress and focusing on revitalization within dance is shared among other cultures, even those that had no contact with Africa centuries ago.

In the 1980 novel *Anthropological Structures of Madness in Black Africa*, the authors dive deeper into the influence of social interactions and their effect on an individual's relationship with both the physical and spiritual world. They explain that in many parts of West Africa, "some factors that influence illness are the transgression of society's social bounds regarding relationships and social roles, the harmful intentions of another person, angering God or spirits, and spirit possession," (Monteiro and Wall 235-236). This topic relates to my own experience, as one of the main components of my dance practice is treating nerves and debilitating emotions as allies rather than enemies. This can be achieved by

participating in an exercise referred to as “three affirmations and one ‘flaw’” that will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis. The name of this exercise itself is pointed in its quotation of “flaw,” as I can argue that no human truly does have flaws.

Though I believe no humans are built incorrectly, individuals sometimes can benefit from emotional fortification against the judgment of their societal environment. For example, throughout my own experience, I have always affirmed that “I’m confident, melanated, and a grounded air-head,” but I am also working on becoming more emotionally vulnerable. I believe there is a universal problem with the word flaws: I think there is a preconceived notion that imperfections in appearance or behavior can define a person’s character as subpar or lacking. In American culture, there are expressions like, “birds of a feather flock together,” and “one rotten apple spoils the whole barrel,” insinuating that a single visible flaw can be contagious or poisonous to those in their surroundings. I am teaching my beginning performers ways of alleviating the “negative” connotations and refining it into a tool for strengthening interpersonal skills.

In my classroom, I had numerous introverted beginning performers who were very shy and quiet. I had one performer whose voice was very mouse-like and whenever they were participating in a scene, their voice would dissipate amongst the room. They doubted their acting potential because they did not know how to be loud. I had a conversation with my performer, and said, “Hey, you can still be quiet and outspoken in a performance, all you need is the direction.” I taught the performer movement choreography to help them learn to talk with their body. I played improvisational games teaching the power of status and relationships through poses. I also let them know if they are ever in a partner scene, always talk through the person above them or to the side of them, as establishing a direction helps with projection.

Did I heal my performer of their shyness and quietness? The answer would be both

yes and no. No, I did not heal them of their introverted nature, as that is a part of their personality and who they are. However, due to their increased progress in class, there was a transformation. I motivated the student into alleviating the negativity surrounding their “quietness.” No longer was this “flaw” of quietness a weakness or a barricade blocking the student from their performance potential; it is now a resource of innovation that the student can call upon. The performer became an active listener and is still in the process of exploring their new sound potential.

Exploring new ways to discover innovation was the main goal I wanted to achieve by taking Embodiology. Dr. Wray shared a quote from one of her inspirations, on the first day of Embodiology : “The foundations of improvisation are based on information that is known, that is understood, [and] not sort of outside of ourselves but inside [a] concrete knowledge of what the community holds and where the innovation and creativity expands themselves.” Brenda Dixon Gottschild says something very similar to this in her book. Gottschild’s explains, “even [in] language (the written and, especially, the spoken word) is conceived as a mobile concept, a shaker, and mover, with the power to effect change... words are verbal movement, and the gesture is a physical manifestation of Nommo [translated as “the power of the word”] (Gotschild 11). For example, on Day 4 of Embodiology, the lesson of the day was focusing on establishing Inner Sensing and Balance. Dr. Wray taught the class about kinaesthetic mapping, developing multi-sensory engagement, synesthesia, moving towards joy and inspiration, and *seselelame*.

Seselelame is an Anlo-Ewe term that roughly translates in English to sese(feeling) le(in) lame(body), “feeling in the body.” Author of the article, “On Rocks Walks and Talks in West Africa,” Kathryn Linn Geurts, explains that *seselelame* treats sensation, emotion, disposition, and vocation as a continuous stream in a domain of bodily experience rather than

as separate entities,” (Geurts 186). From my experience, it was very confusing to understand. However, I translated *seselelame* into my own words and discovered what it could mean using my intuition as a tool for inspiration for creating choreography. For example, I participated in an exercise where I was instructed to move across the floor, but with each movement I had to name a body part and the form of direction; like the left elbow forward.

On my first go at the exercise, I thought it was very simple. This was not the case, as another instructor informed me, that I was only moving with direction and not communicating through my mind and body. I was confused entirely about what the statement was supposed to address because I did what the task presented. The second part of the exercise had me follow the same directions, but I had to verbally communicate my directions in my head first and then move. I have found this exercise to be the most troubling because it was really hard to sense my inner thoughts and emotions, then express them outwardly through my movements; I could not achieve a balance. I did not know what I was supposed to communicate or how to; I felt out of touch and lost. However, through my confusion, I realized that I do not know how to reach into myself for an answer. I do not know how to validate my thoughts and feelings because I expect other people to do it for me or give me an answer on how to do it. I understood what the instructor meant by “only moving through direction” because I noticed that I externalize a majority of my thoughts, emotions, and energy. I rarely keep enough of those items to internalize and self-reflect. I was, in a sense, stifling my creativity and innovation. I was not communicating with my body and mind where my creativity originates, as Drewell has said. I was becoming more self-aware with myself, by unlearning and not understanding myself, and Embodiology showed me how.

Improvisation is at the center of Embodiology. In a presentation given by Dr. Wray, Margaret Drewell, a leader in performance studies and author of books *The State of Research*

on Performance in Africa and Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency, believes improvisation is omnipresent across Africa. It is present in most theatrical performance forms like storytelling, music, dance, and acting. Even in non-improvisational dance forms, the ability to improvise can be key in creating choreography. It is creative freedom; an imaginative movement that is materialized on the spot. Dr. Wray wanted to design a study that would venture out into the explorative of improvisational practices while keeping true to indigenous roots. Dr. Wray participated in Ewe dance-drumming events ranging from formal apprenticeships to social and spiritual community events to discover an answer for her practice (Wray 57). As a result of her participation, Dr. Wray explains:

“The task of defining improvisation-as-performance from the point of view of today’s practices begins by referencing my own geographical and professional position. My outlook emerges from the diaspora and my initial [conceptualizations] of West African approaches to improvisation-as-performance emerge from two centers: my work with jazz music, which has a well-documented ‘Afro European’ genealogy; and my direct participation in West African dance practices (Guinea, Nigeria, Senegambia, and Ghana) and the African diaspora (Cuba, Trinidad, USA, UK). Formations of improvisation found within both these contexts explicitly demonstrate an aesthetic that comes from a knowledge base. The ability to increase expertise comes from mastering sets of skills, which can lead to innovation.” (Wray 58)

Improvisation is the heart of this knowledge. Improvisation allows the body to learn and increase the range of movement, opening the doors to self-awareness. It allows for the individual to start becoming more secure with thinking differently and trusting their abstract ideas at the moment. Any of these abstract emotions can be something that was previously

closed off, sheltered, or submerged underneath traumatic experiences. At times, improvisation can lack awareness and discipline, and it can be pedestrian in terms of anybody who can experience it. However, improvisation is a skill. Dr. Wray presents a relatable situation to my direct experience with improvisation within acting and dance. People may not understand from the outside where the innovation is, but performative art forms allow for creativity and an intertwining of the mind and body, providing directions for our emotions and thoughts to come together. Personally, acting has given me opportunities to channel an emotion that I normally do not acknowledge within myself.

While presenting my workshop for the first time, I had no expectations for the participants to achieve heightened emotions, self-awareness, or even achieve any feelings of cathartic release. My end goal was to allow my participants to become open and aware of the process of self-discovery and become more informed in acknowledging what is hidden within them. I learned how the movement of my body can build upon new ideas, develop layers of awareness, and how to use my rhythm as a generative force of joy and inspiration. I came up with the conclusion that both Anachoreography and Embodiology can help performers in many ways. The first is Feeling Awareness: awareness of bodily signs and sensations. The second is Feeling Identification: learning the power of words associated with feelings. Third is Feeling Modulation: using various strategies to control emotional and physical distress. Finally, Feeling Expression: using skills to express emotions constructively. This model helped me shape the ultimate goal behind the practice of my workshop and that goal is to teach my performers how to create and use the idea of self to create original work. It is my idea of transformation. I am taking my beginning performers' weaknesses and trying to redirect the energy of that weakness into a strength that manifests on stage.

Imbued Movement Workshop

My workshop has given individuals the opportunity to physically express themselves. Body movement is very communicative. Dance allows the body to tell an individual's story and convey emotions and feelings. I chose five choreographic themes based on five elements of dance, according to KQED art school, and I intertwined them with elements of the earth: air is space, earth is body, water is time, fire is energy, and self is action. I decided to choose the elements of the earth because they coexist within an individual's daily life. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the warmth from the sun, and the soil of the earth provide humans with the essentials of life.

The goal behind my workshop at the time was to teach my participants the process of evoking self-catharsis. Throughout the workshop I implemented several exercises centered around expressing emotion, empowering the body and mind, and connecting to spirituality, all through improvisational movement. I wanted my participants to understand that everyone expresses themselves differently and therefore we all move and dance differently. Similar to emotions, there is no right or wrong way to express yourself; the important part is living through the moment—the now. Even though my workshop included a large group of participants, the focus was the individual's journey. A journey that helps the individual interlace their body and mind together in hopes of establishing emotional and physical well-being. As a result of my participation in Embodiology, I have added a few excerpts to some exercises of new ideas that I would incorporate in my workshop. However, the exercise remains unchanged to reflect my previous findings.

3 AFFIRMATIONS AND 1 INSECURITY

In the first three movement sections, I explored body neutrality. I started by asking the participants to choose three things, whether physical or emotional traits, that they admire about themselves and one thing that would be considered a “flaw.” This is a beginner exercise

to start things off because it helps to bring body consciousness to the surface. My three affirmations are that I am talented, melanated, and confident. These are words I forged into the daily thinking process that no one can take away from me or tell me differently; these are my strengths. The “flaw” that I carry is that I might not be the most emotionally vulnerable person, but I’m not going to be ashamed of it or store it away; I take this quality along with me as I do with other qualities and traits that I cherish habitually. Taking away the word “flaw” and reframing these self-hating thoughts into simple acknowledgments can provide a feeling free from shame or stigmatization. I do emphasize the word “acknowledgment”—the goal is not to instantaneously get rid of these insecurities. The first step is self-awareness and bringing them to the forefront.

I want to mention something that I always say: “Without the word “security” there would not be “insecurity.” Rather than holding insecurity to a lesser perspective, it is important to treat both security and insecurity as equals—they are two sides of the same coin that could not exist without the other. Thus, the goal is to find a balance between this existence and learn to live alongside both without disagreement. The next time I present this workshop, I will teach my class the idea of social skin. In Embodiology, we once came to class dressed in an outfit that describes our outward appearance, and we all sat in a circle and discussed our social skin choices. For example, I talked about why I wear crop tops often because it allows me to practice vulnerability. I still am in the process of becoming more emotionally vulnerable, though I am very confident in my physicality and personality. The message behind the exercise helps to validate my goal. It is allowing my participants to commit to a multi-sensory engagement within themselves and amongst their fellow performers.

AIR-SPACE/BREATH EXERCISE

I believe Air is the element of breath, life, and communication. To me, it is the element that symbolizes intellect, mind, and thoughts. In yoga, breath represents concentration; it helps keep the body grounded and relaxed in the space that it is present in. The idea of space has many definitions in the dance world, however this particular exercise focuses on the space through which the dancer's body moves, whether it is personal space, direction, or focus. I started with a breathing exercise to help generate focus and stability between the body and the mind. I instructed the participants to focus their breath on their central point of communication. For example, for those who tend to speak more with gesticulations and movement, their central point is more associated with their hands or their legs; for those who speak with more vibrancy and vitality in their tone, I tend to find their central point of communication is located in their heart or their lungs.

After establishing their central point, I ask for them to then focus on providing some words of affirmation into that part of their body. After this, I instruct them to find that part of their body that is often criticized, ostracized, and shamed by societal oppression, and to acknowledge its presence by giving it some well-deserved love and gratitude. I then ask the participants to establish a link between the central point of communication to the neglected body part, ultimately creating a gateway of breath to revitalize our insecurities. By establishing this link, our insecurities do not need to feel as though they are standing in our shadow; they can be powerful amongst our securities, side by side as an ally. The movement phrases end with the participants exploring the space in their newly established form of partnership. Our emotions share commonalities with the elements of air. Emotions bring vitality into one's life; they are present within every space and are needed for survival. I would say, "allow yourself to take these emotions everywhere you go and express them freely as they are supposed to be because air cannot be tamed, it represents life, and energy and it's a

part of space that moves freely along with us.”

After having conversations with Dr. Carol Penn about breath, I wish I could have incorporated more quality breath techniques. For example, including more alterations of breath shifts and mood shifts or teaching my participants about emotional dysregulation. Now knowing what I know, I feel like my participants would have been able to visualize a space that induces relaxation and helps them become aware of the regulation of their breath and emotions and enter a state of well-being.

EARTH-BODY/ SHAKE & STROKE EXERCISE

I believe Earth symbolizes creativity, stability, and security. Dancers use their bodies in dance to exhibit emotions and to express their intention in an external matter. The motivation for this phrase is for the participants to shake off any forms of hesitation and negativity from the previous experience themselves and to stroke in some love. This is a freeing exercise that I experienced in a J.I.M class, as it switches from fast to slow movement; I allowed the participants to discover and play with their “dynamic rhythm” in the space, prompting the dancers to chant, shout, and shake as they explore the space and have fun rooting themselves in their self-expression; thus, becoming comfortable in becoming themselves. After taking Embodiology, I would want to challenge my performers a little more with this exercise. I would want them to come up with new interesting ways on how they can interact or discover new rhythms within themselves and experience *seseleame*. One of the participants that I had the pleasure to interact with was Professor Elikem. Professor Elikem was born in Ghana and is a part of the Anlo-Ewe tribe. Through his personal experience, he mentioned that *seseleame* can be explored through group participation, drum text and performance, songs and singing, and dancing. I envision my performers connecting to the sense of the rhythm and finding out more information about themselves.

WATER-TIME/ RECEIVE, RETRACT, REFLECT, RELEASE EXERCISE

Water has always symbolized me as the element of wisdom, intuition, purification, and healing. Water is versatile within the movement. It can flow upwards, downwards, it can be tranquil or loud, healing, or destructive. Water can be a liquid, a solid, or a gas. Time refers to the movement of dancers through their relationship to the music, rhythm, or tempo. My method behind this exercise is self-reflection because water changes through time. I created a fractal code using the terms in their chronological order: Receive, Retract, Reflect, and Release into a simplistic form of choreography. I instructed the participants throughout the exercise giving them the timing and directions of the choreography. Later, I gave them the control to create their choreography following the fractal code set in place while I provided commentary. Here is a breakdown of the exercise with the choreography highlighted in bold:

Receive: Throughout our daily lives we are naturally receiving information like compliments, remarks, critiques, observations, etc. Gesture hands together as you extend the gesture out as if you are receiving a gift.

Retract: What information are we retracting back into our subconscious whether it's beneficial or detrimental to our psyche? Why is the individual choosing to retract these specific thoughts or opinions? Hands are still extending out but one hand attaches to the other arm's wrist as you pull that arm towards your heart with the following hand as if you are retracting away from someone touching your hand.

Reflect: Take the time to meditate and reflect on the information you retracted back into your spirit. What do I need to reflect on? How am I processing this feeling? Place one hand over the other and position the hands on the heart.

Release: Send the answer from your reflection back into the world. What is the intention behind your release? What is the impact you want to cause? Or the reaction you

want to spark? Hands go from the heart to a high fifth position and release down to your side; like a rainbow circle.

These exercises allow for the individual to take their time to self-reflect and create a conversational check-in with themselves. Humans are constantly changing throughout time, and like water, through the seasons it becomes hard to realize what form of matter we are today. Are you a liquid? Are you solid? A river? Or a tidal wave today? Individuals get so entangled in being a part of a “water cycle” that they forget to pause and receive, retract, reflect, and release our being within our movements, our pauses, our rhythm, and our presence within time. Be mindful of your body and let flow with its cathartic release. After experiencing Embodily, I was not aware of how powerful this exercise was original. I almost do not want to change anything about it, however, I would like to add a few stages of progression. Similar to the Inner Sensing and Balance exercises, I would ask my performers to sit with their emotions and feelings for a while, and if they were ready I would ask them to advance into sitting at the edge of their discomfort. I incorporated “asking” in this exercise because I know not every beginning performer's emotional capacity is not developed enough to experience “trauma.” I want my performers to understand the truth about their emotions and how they feel rather than fight an emotional fight that they are not well equipped for.

FIRE-ENERGY/ MIRRORING EXERCISE

Fire in my opinion symbolizes energy, passion, freedom, and strength. Fire is the element of transformation and purification. Fire can burn and destroy but it also provides warmth and life. Energy is the force that drives the movement. This force helps accentuate the weight, power, and flow of the dancer. Fires differentiate on the intensity of the individual's passion depending on the certain situation the individual finds themselves in. Individuals can also correlate their intensity to being introverts and extroverts because being quiet does not

make one's fire smaller than an extrovert and vice versa. It goes back to how an individual expresses themselves and their self-interests. The focus behind the movement is developing a sense of empathy towards another. Empathy requires accuracy, self-awareness, and the ability to connect to understand emotional states.

The exercise in this section is a mirroring exercise because it helps to increase emotional understanding and enhance an emotional connection within the process of the partnership. The exercise starts with Partner A dancing across the floor while Partner B tries to replicate their movement as accurately as they can. Once they go across the room multiple times, the partners will switch. In the next interaction of the exercise, I implemented a challenge by instructing the partners to play around with levels and space; instead of replicating each other's moves, how can they create choreography to complement each other? This exercise helps the participants identify their partner's personality and moods through their body language cues, and their gesticulations. It gives a new dimension to a hands-on experience on how one can administer empathy, more authentically as both "fires" combine to create an essence of warmth and understanding.

SELF-ACTION/SELF-AFFIRMATION CHOREOGRAPHY

For the final exercise, I instructed the participants to organize themselves into groups to create choreography. I gave them specific directions on how to create a phrase, a series of movements linked together to make a distinctive pattern, by using their 3 affirmations from the beginning of the workshop. I gave the participants advice on how to create choreography for those that did not have a dancing background. For example, I told one individual to create a pose out of their affirmations and teach it to their other group members and vice versa. Another piece of advice I gave was to create individual solos but teach each other one piece of choreography out of their affirmations and create transitions that move into the next solo. I

want to express the idea of the previous topics all coming together and embodying the self. I expressed to the participants to have fun and take all the knowledge they found about themselves and design their signatures. Signatures are how they expressed themselves and how they celebrated becoming comfortable with faults in their foundation. Their synesthetic sense of awareness was present and activated in this new space of personal exploration they have built for themselves.

MY FINDINGS

I was able to gather information and inspiration after fellow participants of my workshop posted about my substituting for Gerald Casel's THEA 30, Introduction to Dance Theory and Technique Dance class, which was being taught outside due to COVID-19, at the Sinsheimer-Stanley Festival Glen Theater on campus. In my dance-based classes, I was more focused on the body's speech through embodiment, gesture, and movement. I chose to focus more on tasks centered around feeling awareness and feeling expressions. I introduced the ideas of *seselelame*, fractal codes, and dynamic rhythm from Embodiology to my beginning dancers. The end goal for both classes was to experience a transformation with themselves, yet I knew my dancers would be able to reimagine their body movement through playful engagements in comparison to the beginning actors. In the acting classes, there is more text present. I focused on teaching my actors the skills of Feeling Identification and Feeling Modulation. In *Maroon Choreography*, ife talks about putting language to work, with forcing language against itself, with breaking language- breathing life back into it, locating an interior ambiance... words are mere words unless we are open (ife xii). For example, I asked my beginning performers to describe how their voice sounds in certain situations, like when communicating when they are amongst their friends versus their parents or bosses. I asked them to switch the power dynamic. Then, I would ask my actors to create a song by making

random sounds and later replicate those same sounds into a rhythmic pattern. I tasked my actors into reciting their favorite songs as a monologue or a narration amongst their fellow peers. By implementing these exercises, I was able to focus on strengthening my actors' musicality and sensory awareness by putting their language to work. I also implemented a different auditory exercise with my more quiet or introverted actors. I asked my introverted actors to add direction to their voices whenever they are speaking. For example, if two actors are in a scene together, I tell the introverted performer to talk through their scene partner and to the wall behind the performer instead. This method helps the actor strengthen their projection and add some guided direction for their voice to land.

Overall, the feedback I received was positive. I learned about what strategies and techniques were most effective in exploring and releasing emotions that have been suppressed. For example, most participants said that the embodied movement was a form of medicine for their body and mind. I found that by establishing an audience of proxemics, I was able to create an immersive experience through my participation and commentary throughout the various exercises. It helped the performers feel safe to create, learn, and make mistakes while discovering their creation of embodied movement. It was helpful to be more hands-on in guiding the participants through each exercise, as many were not familiar with dance terminology. For example, when it came to each exercise I never established a set choreography and welcomed feedback and ideas from the dancers throughout. When instructing the participants, I found that it was never difficult to work with non-dancers because I established with everyone that there is no right or wrong way to dance.

We are all here to participate in expressing ourselves through movement. I did notice that after saying this, more participants felt more comfortable throughout the experience of the workshop as they began to explore the space more, rather than staying off to the edges or

hiding behind trees. It presented them with a new perspective to allow their bodies to do what they want to do without fear of judgment. I highlighted the importance of group collaboration because it is a way for everyone to connect, listen, and share their experiences. This added to the experience of collaboration and competition as it deepened a sustained understanding of others in an intimate and vulnerable environment.

My use of imagery was a crucial part of my process. I found that describing certain emotional qualities was successful in garnering feelings of synesthesia. In the water exercise, I told the participants that water is forever changing between its liquid, solid, and gas form; sometimes an individual's emotional state can be a peaceful river or a torrential tidal wave, and emotions change over time. After painting different pictures of imagery, each participant infused a new quality in their movements. When instructing the final exercise where I tasked the participants to create their choreography in groups using their affirmations from the first exercise, I noticed that I guided non-dancers through the exercise more than those with a dance background. It was wrong to assume that anyone attending a workshop would have experience in creating choreography without instruction. I found it was more helpful when I broke the workshop into groups and instructed the participants to teach each member of the group one piece of their choreography. They were then instructed to go around the group and use dance transitions to each have a turn at a solo.

When experiencing this final exercise, I saw the journey of the work appear in front of me. It was wonderful to see everyone represent themselves through movement and express themselves physically. It was a celebration. This process may not always have results that are vocalized; there is no such thing as a perfect process, and at the end of the workshop there may be people who do not voice the success. However, even in those situations the participants still transform. This is apparent when they continue to participate in multiple

Imbued workshops. The process of self-discovery is a journey, and it takes time to appreciate all the highs and lows while progressing forward. Imbued allowed my performers to endure, learn, bounce back, and create meaning out of the challenges of self-awareness through collaboration. My beginning performers were able to develop the ability to tell a story and express emotions through dance. By bringing the unknown or undocumented energy of improvisation into conscious awareness, like in Embodiology, students became able to express and analyze their stress, anxiety, and emotions in the open. Through dance, they engaged in a continuous process of self-discovery, body awareness, and mind/body innovation. There was a level of groundedness in the numerous ways students choreographed or vocalized their performative energy. It was anticipated that my performers would develop a newfound wisdom to the naturalistic performative energy that they already possessed.

Concluding Thoughts

My research began with an investigation of evoking self-discovery through dance. I was always interested in discovering how I could create spaces for individuals to enhance their well-being, learn self-awareness, become coherent with their emotions and their mind, and admire their bodies through improvisation. West African forms of dance carry similar sentiments as contemporary forms of dance, which are to embrace innovation, experience uncertainty in movement creation, and conjoin the body and mind through rhythm. West African dance in particular highlights not only community, family, and unity but also makes space for an individual's personal experience among the crowd. The dance itself celebrates this mentality, and this is the sentiment I hoped to bring into the workshop. Imbued in itself borrowed from my experience participating in Dr. Wray's Embodiology. I emphasized improvisation as well as tapping into emotions and encouraging intimate self-reflection. What is important in addition to the physical environment is the headspace of the dancer. The

physical vulnerability of improvisational dance fosters a deeper connection since your body, mind, emotions, and spirit all come together for a performance or a practice. After experiencing the amazing work of Dr. S. Ama Wray and I, I was able to create my empathy-explorative workshop with improvisational dance as the core. Dr. Wray has been an incredible mentor for me, and I was inspired to create the principles of my workshop based on her six principles of Embodiology and I's Anachoreography. Both methods allowed me to create a new way of looking at the body and health. My beginning performers participated in different models to experience, experiment, and remodel the structure of the self. They discovered that the self is not static, it changes over time. They learned to realize, recognize, and respond to their performative potentials by resisting the disparaging behaviors that they previously enforced onto their weaknesses. Through collaboration not competition, the students became empowered through learning how to adapt their negative behavioral bias towards their emotions/ anxiety into a manageable strength. My practice can help students find themselves at the moment, and acknowledge the tools of feelings awareness, feelings identification, feelings modulation, and feelings expressions for the long run of their performative or casual lives.

The participants provided an experience for each other as they cheered, praised, and danced along with whoever was dancing at the moment. The feedback I received from Gerald's class about my workshop was very insightful, heartening, and productive. One individual said they "had always had a struggle with connecting their inner feelings with their outer body movements... now after the class, they feel aligned." Another individual commented on "the mindfulness of self-talk." Several individuals expressed their joy for the aspects of improvement they achieved as a result of the workshop; it allowed them "to express themselves more freely and feel embodied." Some have realized that a huge part of

their self-discovery is not only focusing on sharing who they are but also being a supporter of their friends and what their community represents. One individual in particular referenced the Receive, Retract, Reflect, and Release exercise, saying, it “resonated deeply within me as [they are] a very empathetic person and these three steps are pivotal to keep healing and come back to [their] true energy and self.” As I finished each workshop, I could sense that the energy of the space was always so light, warm, and tranquil as if repressed emotions and thoughts were purged out into the open.

The process of generating self-awareness through empowerment, connecting mind with body, embracing freedom, expressing emotions, relearning your body, transformation, and reassurance was the final product of my workshop. Dancing through creative movement allowed me to discover, reconnect, and embody their psyche. Performing has always been therapeutic for me, and most of my beginning performers have found it to be therapeutic for them as well. My workshop has imbued a restorative energy into anyone who wants to learn how to learn self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-embodiment, through improvisational movement. I do my best in supporting others through collaboration, inspiration, and innovation, and I hope to give other teachers the tools to do the same.

As a result of rewriting my practice, I started to engage in active listening. I started to restate my insecurities and problems and I learned to empathize with my feelings and desires. I started to exonerate comments that could be shaming and detrimental to my being and I became flexible in managing my behaviors. I retaught myself how to explore my problems rather than immediately seek an outside answer without consulting with my internal knowledge. Dancing empowered these students to discover a strong and resourceful place within themselves. Their body became a source of transformation. For students who do not know their bodies and their inner strengths due to lack of stress management, physical or

emotional trauma, or performance anxiety, they will be able to grow an ability to better understand, and innovate the physical, mental, and emotional structure and potential of their bodies through dance and creative movement.

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