



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations

Spring 2024

Performing Trauma & Intimacy

Alexa Lowery

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lowery, Alexa, "Performing Trauma & Intimacy" (2024). *LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations*. 1313.
<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd/1313>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Performing Trauma & Intimacy

by

Alexa Lowery

A thesis presented to the

Faculty of the Department of
Theatre Arts
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts in Performance Pedagogy

May 28, 2024

This thesis has been examined and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts in Performance Pedagogy by:

Thesis Chair:

Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Ph.D.
Director of Graduate Theatre

Committee Members:

Stacey Cabaj, Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts
Graduate Faculty

Nenad Pervan, Clinical Professor of Theatre Arts
Graduate Faculty

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Syllabus & Lesson Plans.....	4
Learning Outcomes.....	5
Course Calendar.....	12
Lesson Plans.....	15
Journal.....	24
Weekly Entries.....	24
Reading List.....	30
Reflective Analysis of Teaching "Performing Trauma and Intimacy"	31
Introduction.....	31
Overview of the Course/Project.....	31
Assessment of Instructional Effectiveness.....	32
Key Learnings.....	33
Advocacy for Boundaries, Consent, and Trauma-Sensitive Approaches	34
Exploration of Human Emotions	35
Preparation for Controversial Scripts/Material.....	35
Integration of the Thesis into Future Pedagogical Work	36
Conclusion	36
Supporting Evidence.....	37
Visual Documentation	37
Exploring the Depths of Human Emotion and Connection	37
The Importance of Authenticity in Performance	37
Embracing Vulnerability.....	38
Developing Emotional Resilience.....	38
The Role of Intimacy Coordination	38
Enhancing Empathy Through Performance.....	39
Conclusion	39
References.....	40
Performance Review.....	41
Course Overview	41
Lesson Plans.....	41
Learning Outcomes and Theories	42
Demonstration of Learning Objectives.....	42

Culture of learning 43
Intension and Intention 43
Student Feedback 45
Acknowledgments and Dedications..... 47

Introduction

Performing Trauma & Intimacy

In contemporary theatre, the integration of **trauma-informed performance training** is essential for creating a safe and empathetic environment for both performers and audiences. This approach acknowledges the psychological impact of trauma and aims to equip actors with tools to navigate and express complex emotions healthily and sustainably.

Consent-forward practices are foundational in our training programs, encouraging students to practice **courage and self-advocacy**. By prioritizing clear communication and mutual respect, we foster an atmosphere where performers can safely explore their boundaries and develop a strong sense of agency.

This curriculum includes **complex, controversial, and deep scene work**, utilizing therapeutic **drama techniques**. This method serves as both a powerful artistic expression and a form of emotional processing, allowing performers to engage with challenging material in a supportive setting. Through this intricate interplay of performance and therapy, students experience profound personal growth and enhanced dramatic skills.

Syllabus & Lesson Plans



Department of Theater Arts & Dance

THEA 298-01 Performing Trauma & Intimacy

Spring 2024 Monday 4:30-7:00pm Seaver 201

CRN: 72380

Credit Hours: 3 (no lab fee)

Instructor: Alexa Lowery (she/her)

alowery2@lion.lmu.edu

323.333.4363

Preferred contact: email

Zoom Link: [meeting](#)

Office: zoom

Office hours: by appointment

(scheduled via [calendly](#))

Course Description:

Explore the depths of human emotion and connection in our immersive theater class, "Performing Trauma & Intimacy." This course is designed for actors and theater enthusiasts who are eager to delve into the complexities of performing scenes that deal with trauma and intimacy. By examining these intense and often transformative moments, you will develop a profound understanding of the human condition and strengthen your skills as a performer. You will embark on a captivating journey that goes beyond the surface of traditional scene study classes. This unique course will help you:

1. **Scene Exploration:** Dive into a curated selection of scenes from both classical and contemporary theater that authentically portray characters facing trauma and intimacy. You'll be challenged to analyze the characters' motivations, emotional arcs, and relationships, allowing you to fully embody their experiences.
2. **Character Development:** Learn how to create multi-dimensional characters who authentically express trauma, vulnerability, and intimacy. Understand the psychological and emotional aspects of your characters and how these elements influence their actions and interactions.
3. **Emotional Depth:** Hone your ability to tap into genuine emotions, bringing truth and authenticity to your performances. Develop techniques for conveying the raw emotions associated with trauma and the intimacy that can arise from deep human connections.
4. **Supportive Environment:** Create a safe and supportive space for exploration, where you can take artistic risks without judgment. Engage in open discussions and peer feedback to foster growth as an actor and collaborator.

5. **Scene Work:** Practice and perform scenes with a partner, focusing on the delicate balance between trauma and intimacy. Learn to navigate challenging scenes with professionalism and sensitivity.

6. **Cultural and Social Context:** Explore the cultural and societal implications of scenes involving trauma and intimacy. Consider the historical, social, and psychological backgrounds that influence the characters' actions and decisions.

7. **Artistic Expression:** Experiment with various acting styles and techniques to enhance your performance skills. Discover the power of physicality, vocal dynamics, and staging to bring your characters to life.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

1. **Demonstrate a Deep Understanding of Character:** Understand the psychological and emotional aspects of the characters in scenes dealing with trauma and intimacy, and portray them convincingly on stage.
2. **Master Emotional Authenticity:** Develop the ability to access and express genuine, raw emotions required for authentic portrayals of trauma and intimacy.
3. **Enhance Scene Analysis Skills:** Analyze scenes for character motivations, emotional arcs, and relationships, enabling a deeper comprehension of dramatic material.
4. **Foster Collaborative Skills:** Cultivate the capacity to collaborate effectively with scene partners, respecting the sensitive nature of the material and providing constructive feedback.
5. **Navigate Challenging Scenes:** Learn how to approach and perform challenging scenes with professionalism, sensitivity, and ethical considerations.
6. **Broaden Artistic Range:** Experiment with a variety of acting styles and techniques to expand the range of characters and situations you can authentically portray.
7. **Explore Societal and Cultural Context:** Recognize the historical, social, and psychological contexts that influence characters' actions and choices in scenes of trauma and intimacy.
8. **Create a Safe and Supportive Environment:** Contribute to a nurturing and respectful class atmosphere that encourages artistic risk-taking and personal growth.
9. **Develop Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Gain a deeper understanding of human emotions and interpersonal dynamics, fostering greater empathy both on and off the stage.
10. **Produce Compelling Performances:** Create and deliver compelling, nuanced, and impactful performances that resonate with audiences.
11. **Critically Reflect on Artistic Choices:** Evaluate and discuss the choices made in scene work, identifying areas of improvement and growth as a performer.
12. **Contribute to Deeper Artistic Exploration:** Engage in discussions about the power of theater to explore and reflect on challenging human experiences and contribute to broader conversations in the community.

Required Materials

There are not any required textbooks for this course. However, you will be expected to utilize Brightspace to access some short readings over the course of the semester and to submit assignments. You will also be responsible for choosing your own scene work material. I highly suggest utilizing Hannon's Library resources.

Assignments:

Students will complete a total of six core assignments for this course as well as short weekly journal entries throughout the semester. Written assignments must be submitted on Brightspace by the appropriate due date. If you need more time on any assignment, please notify me in advance of the due date so we may agree on an alternative due date. Please understand that with the exception of extenuating circumstances, assignments will not be accepted after any alternative deadline that is set.

Assignment 1: Syllabus Agreement/Intake Survey

Assignment 2: Monologue Presentations

Assignment 3: Scene Presentations

Assignment 4: Journal Entries

Assignment 5: Written Assignments (monologue character analysis, *Corpus Christi* reflection & final scene character analysis)

Assignment 6: Final Project (group ensemble performance)

Assessment:

Syllabus Agreement/Intake Survey	5 points
Monologue Presentations	10 points
Scene Presentation	15 points
Journal Entries	15 points
Written Assignments (x3)	30 points
Final Project	15 points
<u>Attendance and Participation</u>	<u>10 points</u>
TOTAL	100

Grading Scale:

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D	60-69
B-	80-82	F	0-59

***There will be extra credit opportunities

Work Load Expectations:

As a 3 credit hour (unit-semester hour) course in the College of Communication and Fine Arts, this course will require the student to spend (on average) a minimum of 6 hours a week outside of class time rehearsing, reading, and applying the material presented during class. Due to the

distribution of assignments in this course, a student may complete less than 6 hours of outside work one week, while another week may require the student to exceed 6 hours in order to complete the upcoming graded assignment. Should you need any assistance in managing your work load outside of class, you may email me to schedule a Zoom appointment where we can work together to develop an action plan. You may also visit the Academic Resource Center for additional assistance.

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance is mandatory, and students are expected to arrive on time, with assignments completed, and prepared to actively participate in group activities scene work, and discussions. I will give you 1 unexcused absence no questions asked. Each absence after that will deduct 2 points from your 10 point attendance total; with the exception of sickness (preferably with a doctor's note).

Should circumstances arise that prevent you from attending class or arriving on time, please communicate with me in advance (or as soon as possible) as well as any scene partners who may be affected by your absence. While it is understood that on occasion, events may occur that reasonably prevent a student from attending class, please know that your conscientious effort to participate in all class meetings for the entire duration is a matter of respect for the course and for your fellow classmates. I will be flexible and understanding but please do your best.

Zoom: This will be an in-person class. However, if you are sick or have a circumstance that won't allow you to be physically present in class, I am willing to let you join in via Zoom. This will need to be pre-arranged with me prior to class start time. Our meetings will NOT be webinars; they will be meetings which means you will be fully heard and seen during class. Please mute your microphone if you are experiencing background noise while someone else is speaking. You will utilize your webcams and microphones as we engage in class work.

Space: Please sit at the tables provided in Seaver. Some of the chairs are on wheels, be careful. This room is somewhat of a computer lab. Not the most ideal for creating scenes but we will do our best. There may be times we shift over to Foley or go outside.

Devices: A computer or laptop is acceptable to be used when necessary in class. However, please do not take advantage of this or let it become a distraction. No phones! I understand we all have lives outside of class but when we are present let's be fully present with each other so we can truly dive into the work. You will be given a break halfway through class, that is the time for checking phones.

Attire: Casual clothing that is moveable and breathable (please nothing offensive or distracting) and comfortable footwear. Due to the physical nature of the actor's training, activities and warm-ups may require movement that is unrestricted by your attire. Exceptions to these wardrobe suggestions will be when you are dressing in character for in-class performances.

Brightspace: This course has a fully supported presence on Brightspace, LMU's learning management system and that will continue throughout the semester. Our syllabus, schedule,

assignments and grades will all be posted on Brightspace.

Student Comfort: Theatre work may sometimes involve language, topics, or physicality that is uncomfortable to some. If anything in class feels uncomfortable to you, please notify me immediately so we can address this together. We will establish a “safe word” (button) together and this will be a classroom of consent. There will be agreements and expectations set in place before any physicality occurs. I am here to keep you safe ☺

University and CFA Policy Statements:

Academic Honesty: Academic dishonesty will be treated as an extremely serious matter with severe consequences that can range from receiving no credit for assignments/tests, failing the class, to expulsion. It is never permissible to turn in any work that has not been authored by the student, such as work that has been copied from another student or copied from a source (including Internet) without properly acknowledging the source. It is your responsibility to make sure that your work meets the standard set forth in the “Academic Honesty Policy” (see <http://academics.lmu.edu/honesty>.)

Special Accommodations: The DSS Office offers resources to enable students with physical, learning, ADD/ADHD, psychiatric disabilities and those on the autism spectrum to achieve maximum independence while pursuing their educational goals. Staff specialists interact with all areas of the University to eliminate physical and attitudinal barriers. Students must provide documentation for their disability from an appropriate licensed professional. Services are offered to students who have established disabilities under state and federal laws. We also advise students, faculty and staff regarding disability issues. Students who need reasonable modifications, special assistance, academic accommodations or housing accommodations should direct their request to the DSS Office as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. The DSS Office is located on the 2nd floor of Daum Hall and may be reached by email at dsslmu@lmu.edu or phone at (310) 338-4216. Please visit <http://www.lmu.edu/dss> for additional information.

Tentative Nature of the Syllabus: This syllabus and its contents are subject to revision; students are responsible for any changes or modifications announced or distributed in class or posted on LMU's course management system.

Expectations for Classroom Behavior:

- As an LMU Lion, by the Lion’s Code, you are pledged to join the discourse of the academy with honesty of voice and integrity of scholarship and to show respect for staff, professors, and other students. The following documents are available for reference:
 - LMU’s *Community Standards* (<http://studentaffairs.lmu.edu/administration/judicialaffairs/studentcodespolicies/>)
 - The Lion’s Code (see LMU’s *Community Standards*)
 - Guidelines on LMU Student Classroom and Course-Related Behavior (<http://tinyurl.com/hbeokxl>)

- The LMU Student Affairs brochure *Disruptive and Threatening Student Behavior* (Fall 2010)
(<http://www.lmu.edu/Assets/Student+Affairs+Division/Judicial+Affairs/Disruptive+Behavior+Brochure.pdf>)

Email Communication:

I will communicate with the class and individual students using campus Lion mail, so it is essential that you regularly check your lion.lmu.edu email account or if you prefer another email address please let me know.

Reporting Requirements of Sexual or Interpersonal Misconduct: As “responsible employees,” faculty are required to report any case of suspected sexual or interpersonal misconduct and cannot protect student confidentiality. For information about confidential counseling on campus and for general information about consensual relationships, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, please see the LMU Cares website:

<http://studentaffairs.lmu.edu/lmucares/>

Emergency Preparedness:

To report an emergency or suspicious activity, contact the LMU Department of Public Safety by phone (x222 or 310-338-2893) or at the nearest emergency call box. In the event of an evacuation, follow the evacuation signage throughout the building to the designated safe refuge area where you will receive further instruction from Public Safety or a Building Captain. For more safety information and preparedness tips, visit

<http://www.lmu.edu/emergency>

COVID-19 Precautions:

- Free COVID testing is available to all students, faculty, and staff regardless of vaccination status. Sign up at the On-campus COVID-19 Testing Center.
- Please read the LMU Community Advisories and LMU This Week to ensure you are aware of the latest updates and important information/action items.
- Students are expected to abide by all safety policies. For additional information and updates, please review the LMU Together website with “A-Z index” of resources where many of your questions can be answered:
<https://www.lmu.edu/together/resources/matrix/#covid>
- It is the student’s responsibility to get in touch with their instructor when they get sick and when they are required to quarantine or isolate. Student Health Services do not issue medical notices, but you will get a note if you are required to isolate or quarantine and you may want to reach out to the Dean of Students if you want your faculty member to get further information.
- Being a Lion means you learn to be one for others and take up responsibility in the world. We are responsible for each other in many different ways, including protecting each other’s health as best as possible. We can take care of the community that sustains us all only if we protect the most vulnerable.

Important and Useful Student Resources Links:

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
- [Campus Ministry](#)
- [Seaver College Center for Student Success](#)
- [Career and Professional Development](#)
- [Course Tutoring](#)
- [Disability Support Services](#)
- [Ethnic and Intercultural Services](#)
- [Financial Aid Office](#)
- [Office for International Students and Scholars](#)
- [Public Safety](#)
- [Student Health Services](#)
- [Student Psychological Services](#)

Classroom Community Guidelines:

The student and instructor of this class generated the following guidelines on 1/08/2024. As members of this class, we will adhere to and uphold the following guidelines when in class and when rehearsing/engaging with each other outside of class:

Take space/Make space: we will leave room for others to speak if we tend to dominate conversation and challenge ourselves to speak up if we are normally quiet.

Confidentiality: What happens in this class stays in this class. If someone shares something vulnerable, it stays in the room and is never used against them.

This is an anti-racist classroom. We love and accept members of the LGBTQ community. This is a classroom built on trust.

Injury: If we cause someone harm and they bring it to our attention we will acknowledge it, apologize for it, and move on.

Demonstrate empathy and respect: we will meet people where they are and treat them with understanding and kindness.

Keep it real: we will be authentic in our speech and action. Be supportive and encouraging: we will build each other up to better foster learning and growth.

Provide thoughtful and mindful feedback: constructive criticism can be valuable and is always offered with respect and kindness; criticism for the sake of criticizing is rarely valuable to anyone.

Have fun: be creative, play, don't be afraid to look foolish and try new things. Be willing to look silly and make mistakes in the interest of growing and learning as artists and humans.

Be kind: we will keep our dialogue respectful, even if we disagree.

Be open-minded: to other's ideas and opinions. You may not always agree and that is ok but always listen and take what resonates with you.

Ask Permission: always ask permission before touching someone. There will be times we work on intimate scenes or exercises. It's important to always ask our partners what is ok with them and what is not ok.

Boundaries: if it's not an "enthusiastic yes" it's a NO! Saying no is ok in this classroom and we will respect each other's boundaries ALWAYS.

COURSE CALENDAR

Date	Topic/Focus	Learning Activity	Homework (due next class)
Jan 8 (week 1)	Introductions/ Syllabus	Holiday break check-in & introductions, name learning warm-up, Syllabus Breakdown Develop Community Guidelines, Grandma's footsteps game "letter to our younger selves"	Intake Survey/Syllabus Agreement
Jan 15 (week 2)	NO CLASS- MLK Day	Find a contemporary monologue (a list of playwrights will be available on Brightspace)	Find a contemporary monologue
Jan 22 (week 3)	What is vulnerability? Monologue table read	Emotion wheel check-in, name warm-up w/juggling balls, vulnerability craft exercise, monologue table read	Character analysis paper due on Brightspace by Monday, Jan 29th
Jan 29 (week 4)	Monologue rehearsal	Check-in, warm-up & monologue rehearsal	Memorize your monologue
Feb 5 (week 5)	Monologue performances	monologue performances	Journal on how you feel your monologue went
Feb 12 (week 6)	Day 2 monologue performance, notes	Day 2 monologue performance, notes, journal reflection	"Staging Sex" reading on Brightspace pg. 15-23

Feb 19 (week 7)	Improv + button/fences/gates	Hitchhiker improv game, discussion on button/fences/gates, boundary improv scenes w/ scene partners	Visit Carly's website/possible introductory reading?
Feb 26 (week 8)	NO CLASSES Feb 26 – Mar 1	Spring Break	Enjoy ☺
March 4 (week 9)	Trauma sensitive theater spaces	Guest speaker- "Carly D.W. Bones" will guide us in a workshop on Consent Based Practices as Trauma Sensitive Practices and the intersections of staging intimacy and trauma sensitivity	Journal/take notes from the workshop
March 11 (week 10)	Workshop discussion & exploration + intimacy coordinating	Check-in, workshop discussion, explore trauma sensitive theater, intimacy coordinating introduction & exercise from IDC Professionals	Go watch <i>Corpus Christi</i> , take notes. If you can not attend, please read the play and write the reflection paper***
March 18 (week 11)	No- Class go watch " <i>Corpus Christi</i> "	<i>Corpus Christi</i> Directed by Doug Kreeger at Barnell Theater 3/21, 3/22, 3/23	Reflection paper due on Brightspace by Monday, March 25
March 25 (week 12)	<i>Corpus Christi</i> debrief + rasa boxes	Check-in, <i>Corpus Christi</i> discussion, rasa box day	Choose material for your partner scenes
April 1 (week 13)	Easter Monday	NO CLASS	Memorize your scenes, rehearse outside of class, rehearsal journal
April 8 (week 14)	partner scene performances	Partner scene performances	Review guidelines for final project, journal on how your scene went

April 15 (week 15)	Final project rehearsal	in-class rehearsal	Final scene character analysis due on Brightspace by April 22
April 22 (week 16)	Final project rehearsal	in-class rehearsal	Memorize your final scenes, rehearse outside of class, rehearsal journal
April 29 (week 17)	(Finals week) Final Project	Good luck with finals! Final scene Performances	

Syllabus Agreement Form

I have read this syllabus in its entirety, understand its contents, and agree to abide by its policies, expectations, and deadlines.

[Click here to sign Syllabus Agreement](#)

**If necessary, this syllabus and its contents are subject to revision in the best interest of the class as a whole, at the professor's discretion; students are responsible for any changes or modifications announced or distributed in class or posted on Brightspace or via email.*

Alexa Lowery

Lesson Plans

A Letter to our Younger selves:

Instructions:

Write a one page letter to your younger self. You can write this in your journal, on a piece of paper or in a word doc. There are two links on Brightspace, under “letter to our Younger Selves” that can help you brainstorm how to get started. Read those links then read the prompts below and write your letter. These letters will be shared with the class in hopes of getting to know each other better in a creative way. So please only write down what you are comfortable sharing out loud.

Prompt Questions:

What were you like as a child? Where did you grow up at? What things did you like to do for fun? Did you have a two-parent household or single-family home? Did you have siblings? What type of schools did you go to? What are some important parts of your culture or traditions your family does?

Now that you are an adult, is there any advice you would give to your younger self? Anything you wish you could go back and do differently? What are some of your strengths/weaknesses? How did your childhood shape who you are today?

Example letters:

<https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/letter-my-younger-self-0>

<https://apurposeinpain.com/a-letter-to-my-younger-self/>

Contemporary Monologue Performances:

Students were asked to find a contemporary & controversial monologue (2-3mins, 1 page in length) I gave them some options under content on Brightspace but encouraged them to bring in options of their own. Here are some examples of the monologues I gave: “*I Ate the Divorce Papers*”, “*Breaking up with Brandon*”& “*I Kissed Marissa*” all from the play *Unbearable Hotness* by Gabriel Davis.

Student’s brought in their monologue options with them to class and I met with each of them individually to discuss if it was a good fit for them. Next they were asked to memorize their monologues for performance and to write a character analysis essay.

Perform actions, no words:

After the students finalized which monologue they wanted to use, I asked them to sit down in class with their scripts to do a bit of analysis. I asked them to find the 5 given circumstances (who, what, where, when, why) and the overall super objective of their character. After that I asked them to identify 3 to 5 different emotions that their character experienced during the scene (guilt, frustration, sadness, joy, anger, etc.) Considering our actions achieve objections and help us overcome obstacles, I asked the student to put an action with each emotion. This action could be a physical gesture, level change, fast/slow, etc. Then the students performed these monologues with just the actions, no words.

Monologue Character Analysis Essay:**Instructions:**

Type up a 1-2page essay describing the backstory of your character. This will be due on Brightspace by Monday, January 29th at 12pm. Please label your paper with your name. Also please let me know the title of your monologue and where it came from as well as your character's name. What are the Given Circumstances? Given circumstances refer to the specific details, conditions, and situations surrounding a character in a play or a film. They include aspects such as a character's:

- Background
- Relationships
- Beliefs
- Desires
- Motivations

They also include the broader social, cultural, and historical context in which a character exists. In short, it's the who, where, when, why, and how of your character. Understanding these circumstances helps you develop a comprehensive understanding of your character, allowing you to make informed choices and deliver a more authentic performance.

Think back on the activity we did in class around action and emotion. What actions does your character take to achieve their overall objective? What is your character's deepest desires? What obstacles do they have to overcome to get what they want? What type of trauma or emotions does your character feel and experience during this monologue? Can you relate to your character and their experiences? Are there any themes or lessons being told within the character's story that you hope the audience will receive?

Staging Sex- buttons/fences/gates

Students were asked to read an excerpt from the book *Staging Sex* by Chelsea Pace (pgs. 15-23). This reading discussed how to establish boundaries between scene partners by using buttons/fences/gates. A button being a pause, a fence being a hard boundary and a gate gives permission to open/close or change your boundaries. I wrote all of this down on the board for them and then the students got on their feet and partnered up. They then discussed and modeled their boundaries with scene partners. After this, we did ‘Boundary Improv Scenes’.

Boundary Check-in Improv Scenarios

Learning Goals:

- Students will analyze consent forward practices
- Students will apply the boundary framework language with their scene partners
- Students will practice their understanding by creating scenes that utilize the boundaries they set in place

Materials needed:

- Material 1- scenario options (typed up)
- Material 2- clear instructional language for navigating boundary check-ins (could also be typed up or presented in a PowerPoint)

Introduction:

Students will learn how to self-advocate by clearly stating their physical boundaries to their scene partners then acting out a given scenario using improv techniques.

Activity Description: Students will be debriefed on proper verbiage to structure their boundaries using the model: _____-to-_____. Ex.) No hand-to-groin contact. No tongue-to-tongue contact. No hand-to-buttocks contact. Teacher will model how it’s appropriately done. Then students will find a scene partner and choose a scenario from the options (A to F) listed below. After each partner has taken a turn identifying their boundaries the group will then act out their scene using improv. All grouped pairs will practice simultaneously, then volunteers will be given the opportunity to present in front of the entire class if they so choose.

Lesson Modifications & Variations: This exercise can be modified for any accessibility needs. Physical disability; can be done sitting. Visual impairment can be replaced with sound cues & verbal instructions instead of a PowerPoint, etc. If students don’t like the scenarios that were presented to them they can create their own; whatever makes them feel most comfortable. The important part is that they learn the proper language and how to set clear boundaries for themselves with their scene partners.

Scenario Options

Scene A:

"The two friends are making their way through the dark woods, flashlights in hand. As A begins to stumble on the uneven terrain, B keeps them from falling."

Scene B:

"Sitting side by side in the lecture hall, A passes B a note. B begins to smile, then quietly giggles. They can't hold back their laughter! A tries silently to get them to stop before the professor notices the disruption."

Scene C:

"A sees B across the train station. They wave to get their attention. B sees them and their face lights up. It is almost as though no time has passed since the siblings last saw each other. They rush across the platform into a joyful embrace."

Scene D:

"They both know that these are their final days together. It hasn't been spoken yet, but the weight of it hangs in the air. B reaches out. A holds them in their arms. They breathe together. For now, they are here. Together."

Scene E:

"Their eyes meet. The noises of the carnival fade away. The whole world seems to pause on the suspension of their held breath. They kiss. For this one moment, the world is sweet and light."

Scene F:

"B struggles to stand. A helps them up. It is a challenge. Then, together, they gently begin to sway to the music. They are transported to their youth."

Journal Entries:

I purchased leather-bound journals for each student and gave it to them on the first day of class. We visited these journals periodically throughout the semester. I often would write reflection questions on the dry-erase board and give students time at the end of the class to reflect on what we worked on that day. I did not read these unless they asked me, which most students did. It became a way for us to communicate about sensitive thoughts or topics privately and I would write notes back to the students if they asked me to read their journals. Some did not want me to read them, and that was totally fine, I gave everyone full participation points. To give you an example of the types of reflection questions I gave, I will show you the questions I asked on the last day of class.

Ex) How do you feel you did this semester? What are some of your takeaways from this class? What did you like? What did you wish could have been different?

Choreography: a roadmap for the physical movements and emotional journey of the scene. It is a framework within which performers can safely and effectively work physically and emotionally with one another. Choreography can be hyper-specific, or it may create containers for consensual impulse exploration.

Points of Choreography:

- 1) Tableau- the outline or shape of a body or bodies in space.
 - a. *Open/close* (expand/contract)
 - b. *Symmetry/asymmetry* (Symmetry is a state in which both halves of the body mirror each other. Asymmetry is a state in which both halves of the body do not mirror each other.)
 - c. *S-Curves* (In an s-curve, part of the body is closed or turned away from a scene partner while another part of the body is open to them.)
 - d. *Low/high* (The vertical LEVELS that characters are in relationship to each other can help an audience visualize status as well as other important storytelling dynamics.)
- 2) Motion- a single behavioral or expressive body movement that has a beginning, middle, and end. Examples: sit, jump, turn, touch, grasp, approach, lift
 - a. *Pathways* (the “trace” that a person or part of one’s body would leave behind if they were moving through a substance)
 - b. *Tempo* (The speed of a physical body action) Fast/Slow (Other terms: staccato/legato, quick/extended, brisk/languid)
 - c. *Duration* (How long a physical body action lasts) measured in breaths or counts
- 3) Elements of choreography specific to partner work
 - a. *Points of contact:* specific locations of physical contact on the body ie: hand-to-waist, chest-to-chest, or elbow-to-knee

- b. *Level of pressure*: the amount of weight, tension, or compression at a specific point of contact. Level of Pressure can often be specified on a spectrum ie: from light to strong or from soft to firm
- c. *Proximity*: How close together or far apart two things are in relationship to each other. (closing and opening distance)
- d. Which character *initiates/ends any shared action*:

Watch & Respond:

- Clip from Wedding Season: Pallavi Sharda as Asha and Suraj Sharma as Ravi. No IC was credited on this film <https://vimeo.com/869631306/96be88955d?share=copy>
- Clip from Lovecraft Country: Season 1, Ep 2: Jurnee Smollett as Letitia 'Leti' Lewis and Jonathan Majors as Atticus Freeman. Teniece Divya Johnson was the IC on this episode. <https://youtu.be/HkdJZDkmgI4?si=2OR0LN51eQqZl9Ag&t=85>
- Clip from Sleeping With Other People: Alison Brie as Lainey and Jason Sudeikis as Jake. No IC was credited on this film <https://vimeo.com/869642976/1f2d33715a?share=copy>
- Clip from Antonio & Cleopatra, Dir Gutemberg Brito Theater Festival in Mexico: <https://youtu.be/w0zGsqiavVg?si=WtjXyowzMzyTRpvp>
- Clip from In The Next Room or The Vibrator Play, Wilma Theater: <https://youtu.be/rDrffdPFnic?si=r89ZKpOaEOsS4sXE>

**Analyze each of the videos using the elements of choreography from today's class. Which points of choreography do you see? WHAT do you imagine the effect on the audience might be for each piece? and HOW do the artists create that effect?

What are Rasa Boxes?

Rasa Boxes originated from Professor Richard Schechner of NYU and “The Performance Group” in the late 1960's. He studied Grotowski (Polish Theater Director who's method teaches actors to “think with their bodies”) and Cieslak's psychophysical practices and combined them with “rasas” (emotional states), described and theorized in the Natyasastra (an ancient Indian Manual of performance)

Why do we use Rasa Boxes?

Used to enhance students' ability to portray and emit emotions by drawing, breathing, and physically being able to show emotions by stepping into them.

Why is it important for our class?

Considering our class explores the depths of human emotion and building believable characters within controversial texts, I feel rasa boxes will help us be able to analytically see and feel the various emotional states. <https://www.richardsilberg.com/rasa-boxes-introduction>

THE RASABOX GRID

Figure by Richard Schechner



Eight Performance Rasas (flavors, juice, essence)

<i>Sanskrit Word</i>	<i>English Equivalents</i>	<i>Bhava (feeling response awakened In an audience)</i>
<i>Sringara</i>	<i>The Sensual</i>	<i>Well-being, love, pleasure, contentment, Eros, the Erotic.</i>
<i>Hasya</i>	<i>The Comedic</i>	<i>Laughter, merriment, joy</i>
<i>Karuna</i>	<i>The Sympathetic</i>	<i>Sadness, sorrow, pity, empathy</i>
<i>Raudra</i>	<i>The Raging</i>	<i>Anger, outrage, indignation</i>
<i>Vira</i>	<i>The Heroic</i>	<i>Courage, heroism, valor, strength</i>
<i>Bhayanaka</i>	<i>The Terrific</i>	<i>Terror, fear</i>
<i>Bibhatsa</i>	<i>The Odious</i>	<i>Disgust, loathing, repulsion</i>
<i>Adbhuta</i>	<i>The Mysterious</i>	<i>Wonder, awe, amazement, sacredness</i>

Corpus Christi

Students were asked to either go watch the production of Corpus Christi or read the play (which I posted the full PDF on Brightspace for them). Two of our students from Performing Trauma & Intimacy were acting in Corpus Christi, and I worked on it as the Intimacy Director. Also, my good friend was also the Director and the play dealt with a lot of sensitive and controversial topics which were aligned with topics we discussed in class.

Corpus Christi Reflection Paper Instructions”

Please write out a 2-page reflection paper sharing your thoughts on the play *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally (Directed by LMU's Doug Kreeger).

How familiar are you with the Catholic religion and the story of Jesus Christ and his Apostles? What are your thoughts on McNally's depiction of the Christ figure being embodied by Joshua, a gay teenager who's coming out in modern-day Texas?

It's hard to imagine a story with Jesus in which people say (the F-word), but that's the kind of thing that makes the play so current and powerful. How did you feel about the sexual references and profanity used in this play? ((If you were a part of this play, please elaborate on how it felt to act out these types of scenes))***

Did you enjoy the comedic aspect of the play and seeing the apostles as everyday people? OR Do you see this as disrespectful of Jesus and his teachings?

To combat hate crimes, rising murder rates, and suicides among LGBTQ+ communities, many believe that “Corpus Christi’s” message of love is needed now more than ever. What are your thoughts on the intimate relationship that forms between Joshua and Judas? How did it make you feel when Judas ultimately betrayed Joshua, which in turn led to his crucifixion?

For this staged reading, we removed all kissing and sexual intimacy and replaced them with symbolic shapes and physical gestures. After learning about the points of choreography, do you think replacements or placeholders are still accurate ways to show intimacy?

As you can imagine, when this play first came out in 1988, the world was not accepting of Jesus being portrayed as gay. The show received numerous bomb threats and protestors marched outside of the theater in NYC in an attempt to shut it down. How do you feel about LMU, a Jesuit University, allowing a production that discussed the intersectionality of Christianity and homosexuality?

Feel free to discuss your favorite or least favorite parts of the play or any other thoughts you wish to share :)

Performing Trauma & Intimacy: Final Performance

Instructions: Choose a 7-10 minute scene preferably from a play, but it can be from a movie or TV show (if you have something in mind). Choose a partner you are comfortable with to be your scene partner; there will be one group of 3. I've compiled a list of potential plays to choose from below. You are responsible for researching and finding the appropriate scene to use. The goal is to choose a scene in which the character experiences a form of trauma or intimacy (remember this can also come in the form of conflict/resolution).

Goal: We will talk these through step by step and choreograph them so that you get a feel for what it's like to work with an Intimacy Coordinator. We will use consent-forward practices, discuss boundaries, buttons/fences/gates, and utilize points of choreography within your performances. I encourage the use of music, lighting, costumes, props, and furniture for your final which will be on Monday, April 29th @ 4:30 pm!

Here are some examples of scenes that I could support as an Intimacy Choreographer, that are not obvious simulated sex scenes: grieving siblings at a graveside, childbirth, someone having a flashback to a traumatic experience, someone struggling with a form of self-harm, a first kiss, stylized or period-specific intimacy, developing character movement distinct from personal movement patterns, undressing/being undressed for medical examinations, bathing, or simply changing onstage, etc.

Possible plays to choose from Available in Hannon Library:

- *Sweat*- Lynn Nottage
- *Intimate Apparel*- Lynn Nottage
- *In the Next Room*- Sarah Ruhl
- *Spring Awakening*- Steven Sater
- *Rent*- Jonathon Larsen
- *Next to Normal*- Brian Yorkey
- *Chapter Two*- Neil Simon

Available on New Play Exchange:

- *What Happened While Hero Was Dead*- Meghan Brown
 - *Love | AWETHU Further* by A.K. Payne
 - *The Locusts*- Danielle Mohlman
 - *SWAY*- SMJ
 - *Sad Girl Hours*- Libby Carr
 - *Blue*- Ali Viterbi
 - *Fireflies*- Tina Esper
 - *Enda and Oona*- Sophie Weissoff
-

Journal

Weekly Entries

Yellow represents the day of class for the journal entry. There are 16 weeks in LMU's Spring semester; minus Spring break, Easter holiday, and MLK day.

All assigned Readings in red will be given within the 'Reading List' at the end of the journal***

January 8, 2024-

1st day of class. We sat in a circle and I introduced myself and allowed the students to each introduce themselves as well. We then played the ball with a set of 3 juggling balls that I brought in, this helped us to learn each other's names and build community. After this we played a fun game of "Grandma's Footsteps" to get warmed up. One person plays Grandma (or grandpa) and sits in a chair with eyes closed on the opposite side of the room from the rest of the students. Grandma nods in and out of sleep while the students try to be stealth and quiet and tap Grandma before she wakes up. The winner gets to be Grandma the next round. This game got a lot of laughs and the students seemed to have fun playing it. After this we did a writing activity called "Letters to our Younger Selves". I posted the instructions as well as examples of letters from bloggers and gave the students 30 minutes of in-class writing. I purchased leather-bound journals and gave them all their own journals to write in. At the end we circled up and I offered students the floor to share their journals, only if they were comfortable. Many of the students read small excerpts or discussed what came up for them. This activity was super helpful to learn about the actors individually from childhood to adulthood and to help us all more deeply connect. One student, student A, came up to me after class and said that the exercise was hard because it brought up a lot of emotion. The student expressed a fear of continuing on with my class. I reassured student A that they would be safe and would always have a choice to not participate if an activity was too overwhelming. Student A ended up staying and I'm glad they pushed past the discomfort. Two other students also approached me after class, students B and C. They thanked me for creating such a unique class and gave me big hugs—that felt awesome!

January 15, 2024-

NO CLASS (MLK Day) I had the students choose a couple of options for a contemporary monologue to bring to class next week. I posted several options on Brightspace as examples they could use. On Brightspace I placed the monologues into three different categories; male monologues, female monologues, and gender non-conforming. A few titles that were picked for class use were; "*I Ate the Divorce Papers*", "*Breaking up with Brandon*" & "*I Kissed Marissa*" all from the play *Unbearable Hotness* by Gabriel Davis.

January 22, 2024-

Today I held a mock casting session and had each actor meet with me individually to go over their monologue scene choices and together we chose the best option for them. I previously posted the monologue scene criteria on Brightspace. They needed to be 3-5 minutes in length, contemporary with controversial topics. Here is the order of events we did in class:

- 1) Intro stretch (I showed gratitude for week 1 and letter to our younger self's vulnerability)
- 2) Monologue casting individually, had students come up and chat with me one by one
- 3) We then sat in a circle and read monologues out loud
- 4) Had students sit w/ their scripts then do a quick exercise. Here are the instructions; find the 5 given circumstances, find the super-objective and identify the emotions your character undergoes during their monologue. With each emotion, define an action that fits that emotion then underline/write down the actions (pick at least 5), our actions achieve objectives and help to overcome obstacles
- 5) Finally, the students performed their monologue with just the actions no words. It was interesting how the students chose to display emotion using only physical gesture, repetition, sounds, fast/slow movement, and levels.

January 29, 2024-

- 1) Check-in (emotion wheel for yourself out loud). For the character; write on paper place in bowl folded for later.
- 2) Stretch, vocal/facial warm-up
- 3) Circle game; pass the line (play with pitch, tone, pace)
Perform monologue in pairs; had students choose an emotion from the bowl and act it out, audience guessed the emotion.
- 4) Perform them again with their own chosen emotions, took notes/gave notes

February 5, 2024-

NO CLASS; We experienced torrential downpours in LA, roads were extremely flooded, tree debris fell from the winds and there were mudslides. I also received an email that our classroom Seaver 201 was flooded due to the ceiling leaking so I unfortunately had to cancel class. I wish I would have had more time to find a different classroom space to use but sometimes life happens and Mother Nature wins.

February 12, 2024-

- 1) Roses, buds & thorns check-in *What is something beautiful that's happening, something budding/blossoming and something that's bothering you?*
- 2) Theater floorplan exercise (have students get in groups of 3-4 and designate Actor/Director/1st AD/Stage Manager) then design their floorplans on paper with cut-outs and boards I made. Each student will take a turn designing their own floorplan for their monologue.
- 3) then improv their monologue in the space they created. By using improv this allows them to not get too hung up on the words, helps to ease any nerves.

- 4) final monologue performances w/ scripted text. I took notes
- 5) Assignment: “Staging Sex” reading on Brightspace

February 19, 2024-

President’s Day but class is still in session ☺

- 1) Sound/gesture check-in
- 2) Watch the last three students perform their monologues
- 3) Journals/monologue notes
- 4) Trust fall exercise
- 5) Discussion on buttons/fences/gates. Wrote definitions on dry-erase board
 - a. Button (pause) fence (hard boundary) gate (permission to open/close)
- 6) Boundary improv scenes with partner check-ins using buttons/fences/gates

February 26, 2024- SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

March 4, 2024-

Today we had guest speaker who is a well-established Intimacy Coordinator and Community Theater Facilitator in Los Angeles. I posted their website and info on Brightspace prior to their arrival so the students could read up on them and come up with any Q&A questions they may have. At the top of the class, I did a check-in with the students I asked how their spring break went and we all went around in a circle and chatted. Then our guest speaker took over and did introductions. They had the students introduce themselves with names, pronouns, zodiac signs, and any questions they had about intimacy and consent-forward practices. I took notes during the workshop, here are some discoveries we made together:

- 1) Consent boundaries are different for everyone based on lived experience.
- 2) A safe space = a brave space
- 3) Always “speak in draft” as things are subject to change
- 4) Recipe for Intimacy Coordinating-
 - a. Honor the intention of the playwright
 - b. Serve the Director’s mission and vision
 - c. Respect the actor’s boundaries
- 5) FRIES model of consent
 - F- freely give (yes)
 - R- reversible (you can change your mind)
 - I - informed (ask questions)
 - E - embodied (check in with your own body & scene partner’s)
 - S - specific (who/when/how/why)
- 6) The stigma around the word no (there’s a pressure to uphold standards, fear of judgement, receiving punishment for saying no, makes people feel small/bad/guilty/uncomfortable, could cause hurt feelings of personal rejection, retaliation or make the other person shut down).

Questions from the students?

1) *How do we advocate for ourselves (actor → director)?*

Answer: ask if there will be an intimacy director or if the Director is trained in intimacy work. Write down your boundaries before verbally expressing them. Have an ally in the cast. Always communicate with the Stage Manager.

2) *What to do if your scene material is a trauma-sensitive topic that you've experienced in life?*

Answer: build a container of boundaries between yourself and your character. Always have an opening and closing ritual (mantras, affirmations, breathwork & de-roling) ex.) I will not hold onto my character's trauma when I leave this class!

3) *How do you meet people where they're at?*

Answer: fill out the actor boundaries worksheet before beginning to rehearse so you can gain a better understanding of where that person is at. Can always use "stoplight" or buttons/fences/gates when in the moment.

4) *How do you deal with people who have real relationships in intimacy work?*

Answer: Treat them the exact same as two strangers working together.

5) *How can we be the collective change?*

Answer: Always value humanity over productivity and profit.

March 11, 2024-

NO CLASS I was on set for 12 hours for an Amazon show. Here's my email to the students:

"Hello actors,

I apologize for the last minute notice but it's not looking like I'm going to be wrapped from set in time to make it for our class. Therefore, CLASS IS CANCELED today.

Also PLEASE RESERVE YOUR SEATS FOR CORPUS CHRISTI!! It is required for us all to go see it but please let me know if the dates do not work for you:

<https://buytickets.at/corpuschristi/1181303>

I'll be back on campus tonight for Corpus Christi rehearsal to do some Intimacy Directing, those of you in that cast, see you there. Everyone else see you next Monday, March 18th! Please email me with any questions or concerns. Have a lovely week!"

March 18, 2024-

Check-in, warm-up, then we discussed points of choreography in Intimacy work. I wrote down all of the definitions on the dry erase board and typed up a cheat sheet for myself on my clipboard to make sure I accurately explained everything. I arrived 30 minutes early to class and

bought my own markers & eraser and wrote everything before the students arrived. I used some of the content from my IDC Professionals Certification program I showed 6 different videos from clips of TV shows, movies and theatrical performances that had moments of Intimacy so that the students could identify the points of choreography. We then did a performance exercise in pairs. I had the students tell improved stories using at least 3-5 of the various points of choreography. In their first performance, they were asked to show a story of conflict. In their second pass, I asked them to show resolution to that conflict using 3-5 different points of choreography. The rest of the audience guessed at the end which points were used.

March 25, 2024-

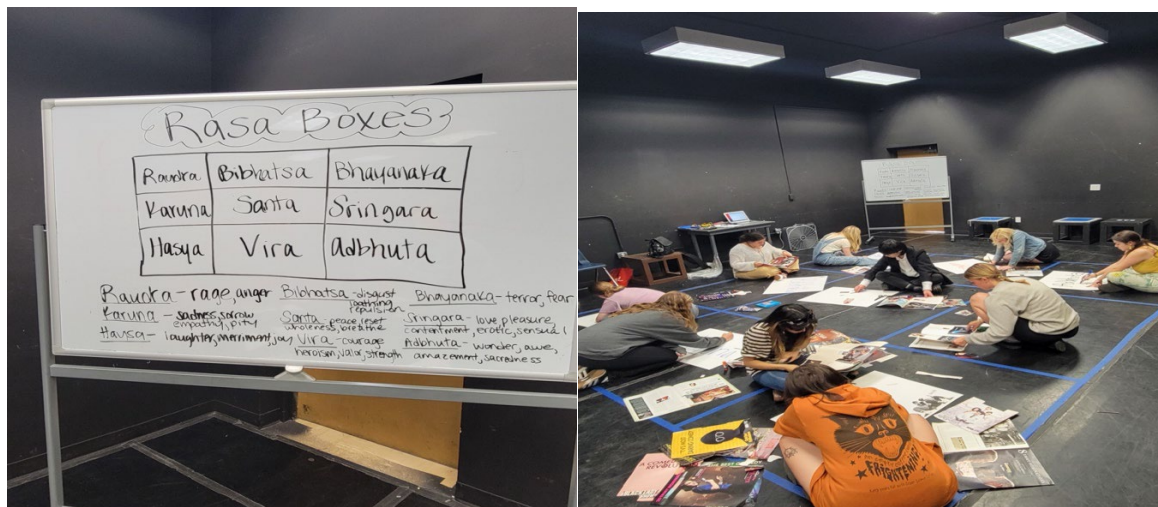
NO CLASS: I flew to NYC for LMU's Entertainment Career Trek being put on by the Careers and Professional Development office. I assigned the actors their Corpus Christi reflection paper due on Brightspace and asked them to start discussing among themselves who they would like to partner with for their final scene performances. I posted the instructions for the final scenes on Brightspace and some examples of 7-10 minute scenes they could choose from. I graded papers remotely and gave each student individual feedback via Brightspace.

April 1, 2024- Easter Monday NO CLASS

April 8, 2024-

Rasa Box Day exploring emotion. I had to do quite a bit of prep for today; I purchased 8 white poster boards and gaff tape, and gathered craft supplies (magazines, scissors, glue sticks, markers, etc.). I also had to refresh my memory on the history of Rasa and Richard Schechner and typed up a lesson plan the day before. I made sure to arrive to class early to write down the Rasa names and meanings on the board. Then I grabbed a few students to help me tape the floor and distribute the posters and supplies. I asked the students if any of them had heard of Rasa boxes and none of them had. After explaining the history I gave everyone 20mins to get crafty and decorate each box with creative words, images or magazine cut-outs that correlated with that specific represented emotion. I played music while everyone worked and walked around answering any questions or passing around the two pairs of scissors LOL. I then played a PowerPoint presentation that explained the pronunciation of each box and gave examples of sound gestures that could be used to portray the emotions. I then had students walk through the boxes exploring what each one meant, we eventually added in sounds and physical gestures. After this I split the class in two teams and let one team sit to watch while the other team moved through the boxes then we switched. After this I had students partner and explore boxes together in various ways; being in the same boxes together or using kinesthetic response while in different boxes. I had them choose one line of text and say it with different emotional meaning behind it. Lastly, we did some improve using the Rasa boxes and we had a lot of fun.

See photos below***



April 15, 2024-

- 1) Mind/body/soul check-in ex. My mind feels scattered, my body feels sore, my soul feels calm
- 2) Re-cap on Rasa Boxes for those who missed class
- 3) Scene partner casting session (students present me with their script ideas, we read through them together and choose which one is the best fit)
- 4) Table read and prop selection (students sat in a circle on chairs next to their partners and read their scenes out loud. At the end we discussed which furniture and props they plan to use)
- 5) I presented the extra credit opportunity to provide honest and helpful feedback for the class. Kept a few students behind from class who were missing their papers, spoke with them each individually and privately.

April 22, 2024-

Today is the day that my advisor visits our class!

- 1) Check-in: Did you do anything radically restful over the weekend? What's the name of your autobiography today? Ex) Procrastinate and wait; fear of being great
- 2) Have students get into their scene groups to go over any blocking/choreography/idea. I will walk around and visit each group and see if they need help choreographing the intimate scenes. Reminder they can use points of choreography within their scenes and physical gesture
- 3) Rehearse scenes with furniture and props. I take notes
After class my advisor and I chatted, they gave me feedback and I took notes which I plan to incorporate in my reflection 😊

April 29, 2024-

My advisor visited our class again. Today is our last day of class!

- 1) Check-in: Gifts/gratitude (gifts, words of wisdom, insight to share with classmates, and what you are feeling grateful for from our class or in your life) Each student had

- a moment to share and I got some really lovely feedback that I will share in the feedback section of this paper
- 2) Final Performance Rehearsal: I had students get with their partner(s) to have one last rehearsal before their final rehearsal. I went around and individually worked with each group side coaching and helping with any intimacy work or last minute choreography. Some groups went into the hall or into other classrooms for less noise.
 - 3) Running order: I wrote a list on the board of who would like to go in what order. We had 6 groups total. I announced each group before they went up, I explained where their material was from and gave trigger warnings. I gave the students the option to sit out in the hall at any given point if there was a scene that they didn't want to watch. Several students took me up on this for a couple of the heavier scenes.
 - 4) Final Performance time! Here are the scenes they chose:

Group 1- “Sensitive Guys” by MJ Kaufman

(scene 4- student/dean conversation in the Dean's office, triggers; assault/rape)

Group 2- “Rent” by Jonathan Larsen

(scene – Roger & Mimi “best ass below Brooklyn”, triggers; drugs, exotic dancing & sexual language)

Group 3- “Dry Land” by Ruby Rae Spiegel (Amy & Esther bathroom scene, triggers; abortion, abortion pill, suicide, mention of blood and graphic language)

Group 4- “Night, Mother” by Marsha Norman (scene with Mama and Jessie, triggers; suicide, epilepsy, mother/daughter relationships)

Group 5- “The Proposal” by Anton Chekhov (2nd half of the one-act play between Stepan Chubulov, Natalya Stepanovna & Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov, triggers; heart conditions/physical ailments, suicide, marriage/proposal)

Group 6- “Friends” by David Crane and Marta Kauffman (Rachel & Ross “cheating scene, triggers; cheating/affairs/infidelity)

Reading List

Staging Sex by Chelsea Pace (pages 15-23 buttons/fences/gates)

Reflective Analysis of Teaching "Performing Trauma and Intimacy"

Introduction

Teaching "Performing Trauma and Intimacy" has been a profound journey, one that has challenged my pedagogical approach and deepened my understanding of the complexities surrounding trauma and intimacy in performance art, and teaching at the university level in general. As I reflect on this experience, I aim to evaluate the effectiveness of my instruction, delve into the lessons learned, and explore how the central thesis of the course will shape my future pedagogical endeavors. I truly believe "Performing Trauma and Intimacy" should be a class that is taught within all undergraduate theater programs. "This class teaches students how to advocate for themselves, establish boundaries with scene partners, understand the role of an intimacy coordinator, and bravely prepare to portray characters in complex and controversial stories."—Lex Lowery

Overview of the Course/Project

The course began with a circle activity on January 8, 2024, fostering community through introductions and a lively game of "Grandma's Footsteps." We delved into personal narratives with the "Letters to our Younger Selves" writing activity, which sparked valuable insights and connections among students. This also helped me to get a better understanding about the students history and backstory. I made sure to share my backstory with them too. Despite initial apprehensions and fears, the class evolved into a supportive and engaging environment. We took many of our warm-ups and exercises out onto the lawn of sunken garden to ground with nature (emotion wheel check-in, Simon says with boundaries, voice infliction using lines from their

monologues, etc.) Some of my favorite days were seeing the students perform their monologues and final scenes. It made me really proud to witness their bravery and see them put their learned skills to use. It was also really cool to teach them how to advocate for themselves and to witness them expressing their boundaries and concerns throughout the semester! I was taking the last level of my Intimacy Coordinator Training from IDC Professionals simultaneously while I taught this class so I was able to effortlessly integrate the two and really teach the students the most up to date information surrounding Intimacy Directing.

My biggest concern was not having enough time with the students, meeting once per week for 2.5 hours was just simply not enough time to fully build trust and community. Our class also met on a Monday during Spring semester which meant we had several days off due to holidays; Spring break, MLK day and Easter Monday. Not to mention I was also on set myself and took a trip to NYC with LMU's Entertainment Career Trek. If I were to teach this class in the future I would suggest that it meet 2-3 times per week, and preferably not on a Monday. Considering the nature of the work, we really needed more time together to dive deeper into scenes and explore more content stemming around intimacy and trauma sensitivities. I think having more time together would have made the students feel more comfortable and confident with the material they chose for their final scenes. However, we did the best we could in the time that we had.

Assessment of Instructional Effectiveness

Throughout the semester, I employed diverse instructional methods to engage students with the course material. I used my knowledge as an actor, teacher, and Intimacy Director to devise a well-rounded class. I used my love for Augusto Boal and his book *Games for Actors and Non-*

actors to pull exercises from. I used various methods of teaching; writing, journaling, reading, group activities, arts and crafts, examples on the board, handouts, modeling, improv, mock casting sessions, seeing live theater, having a guest speaker, monologues, and scene performances to encourage active participation and exploration. Some of my famous key lines are “Would it work for you if...?” “What would happen if you tried...?”

We did have some unforeseen challenges, such as the cancellation of classes due to classroom flooding and scheduling conflicts, which required adaptability and flexibility in maintaining continuity and continued community. There was occasional pushback, students missing class or being unengaged talking with each other or distracted by their phones. I tried to have a lenient policy on electronic device use to allow the students to use their computers as needed. I always asked them to print their scripts but often times they did not do this and they wanted to read scripts off of their phones or computers. In the future, I would likely change my policy within my syllabus surrounding electronic devices. It is much more effective to have script in hand and devices put away. I will admit this is a challenge we face with Gen Z adolescents who are so accustomed to doing everything on their smartphones.

Key Learnings

Teaching "Performing Trauma and Intimacy" provided numerous opportunities for personal and professional growth. This project stemmed from my passions and was very close to my heart. Witnessing students' creative expressions and vulnerabilities reaffirmed the transformative potential of performance art. Moments of insight, such as the exploration of boundaries through improv scenes, and realizing how important and powerful touch is, highlighted the profound

connections between artistic expression and personal introspection. One thing I had to remind myself of in a class all about intimacy, is to be careful of instructional touch-- it never needs to happen! I helped the students choreograph several of their intimate moments so we worked closely together. I am naturally a very “hands-on” type of teacher, I often times will participate with my students in activities and I never ask them to do anything that I wouldn’t do. However, when modeling or showing a student a piece of choreography it is a good reminder to always use ‘the air or a chair’. A couple other topics I would have liked to work on with the students more in-depth are:

- 1) Exploring spatial relationships, distance, not upstaging each other, and engaging more with the audience in an immersive perspective.
- 2) Connecting breath to emotion, receiving each other, and using exhalation as a form of finishing a thought or emotion, instead of starting it.

Advocacy for Boundaries, Consent, and Trauma-Sensitive Approaches

One of the key pillars of this course is the emphasis on advocating for boundaries, consent, and trauma-sensitive approaches to theater performance. Through discussions, readings, and practical exercises, students learned to navigate potentially triggering material with sensitivity and respect. By equipping students with the tools to recognize and address boundaries and consent issues, we empower them to create safe and inclusive artistic environments. This not only makes them better actors but also better scene partners. This type up work is the future of the entertainment industry; safe consensual story telling.

Exploration of Human Emotions

"Performing Trauma & Intimacy" delves into the multifaceted nature of human emotions. Through experiential learning activities, such as role-playing exercises and monologue performances, students engage with the complexities of trauma, intimacy, and vulnerability. By immersing themselves in these themes, students develop a deeper understanding of the human experience, enhancing their empathy and emotional intelligence. We did several activities over the course of the semester that not only encouraged students to reflect on their own emotions but also the emotions that their characters felt within their scenes. Being able to recognize parallels in between the two and also practice removing our own personal feelings while acting is an advanced acting skill. I was able to help the actors establish closing and opening rituals, practice affirmations, breathwork and de-roling to ensure that they were always of sound mind and spirit. I believe journaling really helped them to reflect and have private conversations with me as well. I also would almost always end class 10 minutes early so that the remainder of class could be available for any students questions or concerns. It was in these last 10 minutes that I often learned and bonded the most with my students.

Preparation for Controversial Scripts/Material

In today's theatrical landscape, actors are often confronted with controversial scripts and material that touch upon themes of intimacy and trauma. "Performing Trauma & Intimacy" prepares students to navigate these challenges with confidence and integrity. By fostering open dialogue and providing practical strategies for approaching sensitive subject matter, students emerge from this course equipped to engage with controversial material in a thoughtful and responsible manner. I always remind them, why did the playwright choose this topic to move the story

forward? If the student is uncomfortable or concerned with what the audience might think, I always reminded them the audience is watching their character, not them.

Integration of the Thesis into Future Pedagogical Work

The central thesis of "Performing Trauma and Intimacy" — that performance can serve as a vehicle for processing and communicating experiences of trauma and intimacy — will undoubtedly inform my future pedagogical endeavors. This course expanded students' perspectives on consent-forward practices, paving the way for deeper explorations of embodiment and vulnerability in performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching "Performing Trauma and Intimacy" has been a transformative experience, shaping my approach to pedagogy and deepening my appreciation for the power of art to heal and connect. As I continue my journey as an educator, I carry with me the insights gained and the relationships forged in this course, eager to continue exploring the intersections of performance, trauma, and intimacy in future teaching endeavors. "Performing Trauma & Intimacy" is not just a course; it is a vital component of a comprehensive theater education. By exploring the depths of human emotions, advocating for boundaries and consent, and preparing students for controversial scripts and material, this course empowers students to become empathetic, informed, and responsible actors. I urge the thesis committee to consider the significant impact that "Performing Trauma & Intimacy" can have on the education and development of theater students across all universities.

Supporting Evidence

Visual Documentation

Exploring the Depths of Human Emotion and Connection

In this immersive theater class, "Performing Trauma & Intimacy," I aim to explore the depths of human emotion and connection by cultivating a classroom of community, consent-forward practices, trauma-sensitivities, and safety around boundaries while exploring controversial and transformative scenes. This exploration is crucial for actors and theater enthusiasts to develop a profound understanding of what it's like to work with an Intimacy Director, how to advocate for themselves on set or in rehearsal, how to establish boundaries with scene partners, and safely choreograph intimate scenes, as well enhance their overall performance skills in a brave space. By examining moments of trauma and intimacy within a character's world, I strive to go beyond traditional scene study classes and provide a captivating journey into the complexities of the human experience. So often in traditional theater classes, actors are given scripts that are "safe choices" or they choose scenes that they feel comfortable with. This is great in theory but in the real world of Hollywood and acting, actors will likely book roles that simulate real-life experiences, many of which may trigger trauma sensitivities within the actor. By teaching actors how to ask questions, establish boundaries, check in with scene partners, work together safely, create opening and closing rituals, and de-role; we are preparing them for the upmost success.

The Importance of Authenticity in Performance

Jennie Morton, in her book "The Authentic Performer," emphasizes the necessity of authenticity in performance. She states, "An authentic performer brings their true self to the stage, creating a genuine connection with the audience. This authenticity is essential when dealing with scenes

that involve deep emotional content, such as trauma and intimacy" (Morton, 2015, p. 42).

Morton's insights highlight the importance of performers being true to themselves and their emotions, which is a core principle of our course.

Embracing Vulnerability

Carol Rosenfield, in "Acting and Living in Discovery," discusses the significance of vulnerability in acting. She writes, "Embracing vulnerability allows actors to fully immerse themselves in their characters, creating a more compelling and truthful performance. This is particularly important in scenes involving trauma and intimacy, where the actor's ability to be open and exposed is crucial" (Rosenfield, 2014, p. 56). Rosenfield's perspective underscores the need for actors to embrace vulnerability to effectively portray complex emotional experiences.

Developing Emotional Resilience

One of the objectives of "Performing Trauma & Intimacy" is to help actors develop emotional resilience. Morton explains, "Emotional resilience enables performers to navigate the emotional highs and lows of intense scenes without losing their sense of self. This resilience is built through a deep understanding of one's emotions and the ability to manage them effectively" (Morton, 2015, p. 78). By focusing on emotional resilience, our course aims to equip actors with the tools to handle challenging scenes with confidence and poise.

The Role of Intimacy Coordination

Intimacy coordination has become an integral part of modern theater, ensuring that scenes involving physical and emotional intimacy are performed safely and respectfully. Chelsea Pace, in her book "Staging Sex," asserts, "Intimacy coordination provides a framework for creating safe, repeatable, and artistically satisfying scenes of intimacy and sexual content. It ensures that

actors feel comfortable and respected throughout the process" (Pace, 2020, p. 23). Rosenfield also notes, "Intimacy coordinators play a crucial role in creating a safe environment for actors to explore intimate scenes. Their presence allows actors to fully engage with the material, knowing that their boundaries and well-being are being respected" (Rosenfield, 2014, p. 89). The inclusion of intimacy coordination in our course reinforces our commitment to the safety and comfort of our performers.

Enhancing Empathy Through Performance

A key aspect of our course is the development of empathy through performance. Morton states, "By stepping into the shoes of characters experiencing trauma and intimacy, actors can develop a deeper sense of empathy and understanding. This empathy not only enhances their performance but also enriches their personal lives" (Morton, 2015, p. 105). Pace further elaborates, "Empathy is the cornerstone of performing intimate scenes. It allows actors to connect with their characters and their scene partners on a deeper level, creating more authentic and impactful performances" (Pace, 2020, p. 46). Through this process, we aim to cultivate empathetic and insightful performers who can bring authenticity and depth to their roles.

Conclusion

The exploration of trauma and intimacy in "Performing Trauma & Intimacy" provides actors with a unique opportunity to delve into the complexities of human emotion and connection. By embracing authenticity, vulnerability, and emotional resilience, and with the support of intimacy coordination, our performers can create powerful and transformative theatrical experiences. The insights from Jennie Morton's "The Authentic Performer," Carol Rosenfield's "Acting and Living in Discovery," and Chelsea Pace's "Staging Sex" serve as valuable guides in our journey to

understanding and portraying the profound aspects of the human condition. What do we become through this new way of thinking?

References

- Barclay, K. (2023). *Erotic Repetitions: A Brief History of Intimacy Choreography*. Springer
Link. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-31222-9_2
- Cohen, N. (2020). *Performing Intimacy: Exploring the Role of the Body in Therapeutic Theatre* (Master's thesis, Lesley University). Retrieved from
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/856/
- Morton, J. (2015). *The Authentic Performer: Wearing the Character and Remaining Yourself*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Pace, C. (2020). *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.
- Rosenfield, C. (2014). *Acting and Living in Discovery: A Workbook for the Actor*. London: Methuen Drama.
- Steinrock, J. R. (2020). *Intimacy Direction: A New Role in Contemporary Theatre Making* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). Retrieved from
<https://hdl.handle.net/2142/109390>
- Tyner, A.-C. (2021). *When I Grow Up: Intimacy Work and Collegiate Theatre* (Undergraduate Honors Thesis, University of Southern Mississippi). Retrieved from
https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/764/

Performance Review

Re: Observation of THEA 298 Special Studies: Performing Trauma and Intimacy

Course Overview

In the Spring Semester of 2024, I was invited to observe two class sessions of THEA 298 Special Studies: Performing Trauma and Intimacy, taught by Alexa Lowery (Graduate Teaching Fellow in the MFAPP Program). I observed the classes on April 22 and 29, during which the undergraduate students were rehearsing and performing their final scenes. The class met once weekly for 2h30m, a challenging time frame to work on the 13 students' scenes. Overall, the teaching was proficient; the instructor worked closely with students during their small group rehearsals, highlighting choreographic possibilities and offering trauma-informed practices. However, the students seemed disengaged and unfocused on their work, which suggests some underlying challenges in the course.

Lesson Plans

The lesson plan for April 22 centered on staging rehearsals for the students' final scenes. The class began with a check-in, which prompted students to share the hypothetical title of their autobiography or a defining musical anthem. Alexa (Lex) then reviewed key terminology for intimacy choreography and boundary practice (buttons, fences, and gates.) The students were directed to rehearse their scenes independently and the instructor roved between rehearsals. In

coachings, Lex focused on potential points of contact in the scene, sightlines and visibilities, and essential design elements. The class took a midpoint break and wrapped up with reminders about the homework (journaling about rehearsals and printing their scripts) before the final exam. On April 29, the students reviewed and performed their scenes for the class. Lex provided content notices, facilitated closure practices, and provided feedback on each scene.

Learning Outcomes and Theories

While I did not review a course syllabus, I observed that the classes were undergirded by some constructive alignment of the learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment tools. It may be beneficial to be more explicit with the learning outcomes, specific about the parameters of the learning activities (rehearsals), and to focus the feedback on identified criteria.

The sessions I observed were student-centered learning environments where the teacher functioned as the facilitator and side coach. There was evidence of cognitivism (encouraging students to build connections from past lessons) and connectivism (integrating digital/technology into rehearsals).

Demonstration of Learning Objectives

Given that the course was offered as a 200-level performance elective, it was comprised of theater minors, and a range of majors from first year through super senior. Their prior knowledge and experience varied widely, making it difficult to ascertain if/how the students were demonstrating their learning. I witnessed Lex and her students:

- Identifying potential points of contact and/or moments of intimacy in contemporary scenes,
- Applying choreographic tools (e.g. visible power shifts, duration, visibility/masking),
- Developing dynamic images and stage pictures to communicate relationship,
- Practicing principles of artistic self-care and maintaining a trauma-aware creative space,
- Unpacking stage directions and their role in production.

Culture of learning

In the classes I observed, students arrived gradually, and classroom management was flexible. I noticed an informal working environment where students were on their electronic devices while concurrent rehearsals were happening in the classroom; I wondered about the students' experience of the constant door slams. As a visitor, I found the atmosphere to be noisy and difficult to concentrate in. Most students were reading their lines on their phones, with a low level of investment in their scene and scene partner. I appreciated that Lex was familiar with their scenes and used invitational language to deepen the students' understanding of the material. For instance, "What's happening for you in that moment?" and "What if you tried...." It appeared that the students had a high degree of agency, but either low accountability or ownership of the essential content.

Intension and Intention

I valued the spirit of the course inquiry and the opportunities for our students to directly encounter challenging material. In terms of course structure, it may be useful to introduce the

scene work earlier in the semester with clearer scaffolding of discreet rehearsal tasks and tools. It would also be key to clarify expectations and accountability practices in the community agreement. In terms of theatrical intimacy pedagogy, be mindful of instructional touch and proximity. Instead of demonstrating choreography with (or on) a student-actor, try demonstrating with an invisible partner. Remember to integrated invitation language, rather than prescriptive direction. (i.e. would it work, what would you think, etc.) Finally, there are several books that align with the course inquiries (*[Intimacy Coordinators Guidebook](#)*, *[Lucid Body](#)*, and *[Trauma and Embodied Healing in Dramatherapy, Theatre and Performance](#)*). I look forward to the future of this work!

Student Feedback

“I’m so proud of how brave my peers have been, in the past 3 years of being in school together I’ve never seen any of them tackle such tough scene material”— Student A

“I’ve learned how to advocate for myself and I now feel more comfortable talking with my Directors and Stage Managers” — Student B

“I really enjoyed the class and journaling, it helped me a lot” — Student C

“I think your idea for the class and the thought that was put into it was so amazing and genuine. Because it was once a week and so many were missed or cancelled, I felt unprepared for the final scene. I think working on gates and fences throughout the course would’ve helped with comfortability, as well as training with emotional intimacy, before anything physical.” — Student D

“Thank you for always being so open and honest with us, you’re such a sweet and caring person.” — Student E

“After this class, I realize how important and powerful touch is within performance!” — Student F

Acknowledgments and Dedications

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Stacey Cabaj for always loaning me books and being just a text away whenever I needed assistance. Your support has been invaluable throughout this journey.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Christine Breihan for your guidance and profound knowledge about consent and trauma sensitivities. Your insights have greatly enriched my work and understanding.

A special thank you to Carly D.W. Bones for coming in as a guest speaker and sharing your expertise in Intimacy Directing. Your contributions were incredibly enlightening and beneficial to my thesis.

Thank you to the IDC Professionals for providing the training and resources I needed to delve deeply into this field. Your support has been crucial to my development and success.

I am immensely grateful to all of my Professors and MFA cohorts at Loyola Marymount University. Thank you Dr. Kevin Wetmore and Neno Pervan for being the backbones of this department. Your teaching and camaraderie have made my academic experience both rewarding and memorable.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my partner, Eric Riddick. Your unwavering emotional support has been my anchor while navigating the challenges of grad school and completing this thesis. Thank you for always being there for me. All of you <3