

NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

**The Knowing Body:
Mind/Body Awareness for Performers
ARTS-UG 1106
Spring Term 2016
Tuesdays, 6:20pm-9:00pm
715 Broadway, Rm 430**

**Robin Powell
212.533.1554
r_powell@verizon.net
Office Hours TBA**

Course Syllabus

Course Description:

Welcome to The Knowing Body. In this arts workshop you will learn about the theory and practice of body awareness techniques (along with imagery and qi qong) and apply these methods to specific areas of performance and performance preparation. These techniques are valuable for performing artists who want to gain more freedom of expression, range of motion, comfort, concentration and presence in their work and daily lives. By using focused attention or awareness to sense your body in motion and at rest, muscular tension and poor body habits that interfere with performance can be released. You will deepen your understanding and abilities in the area of Breath, Posture/Alignment, Tension, Energy, Concentration and care of the body. The course is designed for the student who is ready to commit to an in-depth investigation of their body and is ready to make physical and mental changes through quiet attention. This course is about you improving the use of your performing instrument - the body.

You will be expected to work daily/weekly outside of the classroom and practice and apply mind/ body methods that you have learned each week to your performance piece. Your reading assignments will enhance your understanding of the material presented in class. They are assigned the week before each class. You will have written assignments including a midterm and final performance evaluation. You are expected to be an active participant in discussions, to attend every session, arrive on time and to wear clothing you can move in.

I am available to discuss *anything* that has come up during or after class. Please e-mail or call about any concerns or questions you have. You are also encouraged to schedule an in-person appointment. You may speak with me before or after class as well.

Required Texts: *Discovering the Body's Wisdom*, Mirka Knaster (Bantam) Book Store
Selected Reading Packet, University Copy, 27 Waverly Place

Class Objectives:

The overall goal of the class is to improve your performance work whether you are an actor, dancer, or musician.* Objectives include:

- To gain awareness of your performance instrument - your body in daily life and performance using methods presented.
- To gain an understanding of the theory and practice of Somatic/Body Awareness methods.
- To learn specific exercises which address; breathe, posture, tension, energy, concentration and integration.
- To learn methods for performance preparation.
- To learn methods to deal with performance anxiety or blockages.
- To learn improved care of your performance instrument.

* There are those of you who are not performers but for whom the class is appropriate. We are all body users and you will identify how or what you will do for your performance. We have had a variety of artists, readers, models, jump ropes, and an ice skater. Speak with me about what you are comfortable doing.

Course Expectations/Requirements:

- To practice daily - body scans and physical performance warm-up (30 min)
- To practice a new exercises from class at least once a week (10-20 min)
- To apply methods to performance rehearsal (15-30 min)
- To read weekly readings (and discuss in class) (2+ hrs)
- To turn in assigned written assignments on time, in person, and **in hard copy**, e-mails will not be accepted. (1+ hrs)

Class Structure:

- Experiential
 - Short Physical Warm Up
- Discussion
 - Response to Material - What Noticing about Practice
 - Discussion of Readings and How Relate to Class
 - Introduction of Week's Topic
- Experiential
 - Body Scans
 - Physical Performance Warm Up

New Exercises Related to Weekly Topic

• Performance

View Performance Each Week as Relates to Topic

To Consider Each Week:

Reaction to Class

- What did you notice specifically about your body in class? For example:
 - How did your body fit against the floor?
 - Did your breathing change after the body scan?
 - What did you notice about your spine after the flexibility work?
- What did you learn about your body and performance?

Noticing Body Use

- During the week what have you noticed about how you use your body in daily activities? In general and as it relates to the week's topic
- In performance practice?

Application

- Practice exercise from class

Rehearsal/Application

- What have you noticed during the rehearsal of your piece or in performance class, in relation to the topic presented this week?

Readings

- What are the authors key ideas presented in the reading?
- How do they relate to what you are studying in class?
- What is your reaction to the reading?

Written Assignments:

This is an experiential class. You will learn and practice methods for your body/mind that will enhance your performance as well as your daily living. Yet, your personal experience can only be measured/graded in terms of your written reflection on the experience and of your academic learning. The written work will enhance and deepen your learning experience.

Performance Write Up

After your first performance identify areas you will focus on, using class criteria, class feedback and your own observation. Be specific, not "I think it went well". Why did it go well, in terms of what we are looking at? (2 pages)

Write what you saw in general in the other performers. (1 page)

Mid-Term Learning Assessment (7-8 pages)

1. Define Body Awareness using a minimum of 3-4 different sources (including Powell, Knaster, Hanna and Jones). What are the key concepts of body awareness techniques?
2. What are the key concepts of Kinetic Awareness and how do they relate to performance?
3. How do these methods specifically enhance performance in terms of presence, sense of self, artistic expression, preparation and concentration? Discuss each using what you have been studying.
4. Since starting class what have you noticed about your body in daily use, and in performance (in classes, rehearsal, performance)?

Final Assignment: (8-10 pages) Performance Write Up

See handout for instructions for 4 week performance preparation and final performance evaluation.

Grading Policy:

Your grade is influenced by the following:

- Regular attendance (grade will be lowered after two absences, twice late equals 1 absence)
There are no "excused" absences, all are the same
- Coming prepared to discuss, in class, reaction to readings, course work (15%)
- Showing improvement in performance (30%)
- Written assignments (Self and performance, observation of performance, daily practice notes) (15%)
- Mid-Term Learning Assessment (20%)
- Final Analysis Essay (20%)

Incomplete grades must be arranged in advance with instructor.

Academic Integrity:

As a Gallatin student you are expected to maintain academic integrity. The University takes this matter very seriously. Behaviors that compromise this integrity include plagiarism, and doubling or recycling course work. You have been asked to document author's ideas for this class. You must give credit for the ideas you discuss whether they are direct quotes or ideas from the author.

January 26: Introduction/Overview/Use

Introductions/Class Expectations

Body/Mind Use in Performance

Developing Evaluation Criteria for Performance Pieces

Experiential:

Body Scan and Breathing

Movement Sequence/Body Warm-Up

Hang Out

Reading for Next Class Discussion: (Read this Week to discuss 2/2)

Steinmann, The Body as Home, *The Knowing Body*

Powell, Using Breathing Exercises, *Working Woman's Guide*

Dowl, On Breathing, *Taking Root to Fly*

Assignment: (1-2 pages)

Write out how you use and see your body as an instrument in performance (or daily life)?

How is your body knowledge?

How do you feel about your body in performance?

Due 2/2

February 2: Breath

Body Awareness and Performance (From The Knowing Body)

Breath and Performance

Experiential:

Body Scan

Breathing Work

Jaw/Sounding

Animal Movement

Performance:

Look at Performance Focusing on Breath

Reading Next Class Discussion:

Knaster, *Discovering the Body's Wisdom*, Chapters 1

Powell, Body Therapies, *Journal of Holistic Nursing*

Dowl, Finding your Center, *Taking Root to Fly*

Olsen, Axial Skeleton, *Body Stories*

Assignment

Daily Body Scans and exercise practice

February 9: Posture/Alignment

Performance and Posture

Body Awareness Techniques and Performance - Key Concepts

Experiential:

Plumb Line

Hang Out (Review)

KA Balls

Assignment:

Document daily practice either for the week or for 3 weeks and turn in

Prepare for Performance

Performance:

Notice Alignment

Reading Next Class:

Knaster, *Discovering the Body's Wisdom*, Chapter 3

Jones, *Body Awareness in Action*

Hanna, What is Somatics? *Bone, Breath & Gesture*

February 16: Show Performance Pieces

Experiential:

Body Scan/Breathing/Movement

Performance Pieces/Performance Criteria

Assignment:

When you perform: (2 pages)

Write up your own performance experience and what you will be working on during the semester and turn in. See Instructions. Keep a copy for yourself.

When you are not performing: (1 page)

What did you see in general (not specific performances) in these performances in terms of the criteria?

February 23: Show Performance Pieces

Experiential:

Body Scan/Breathing/Movement

Performances Prep

Reading Next Class Discussion:

Knaster, pp. 263-266

Ann-Sargent Wooster, *Drama Journal*

Frances Becker, Kinetic Awareness, *Contact Quarterly*

Green, The Use of Balls in Kinetic Awareness, *JOHPER Journal*

Assignment:

Begin work on the Midterm (See Instructions)

March 1: Tension/Use

Discuss Knaster and Kinetic Awareness

Habitual Tension/Effort in Performance

Experiential:

Exploring Tension Use

Extension/Tension

Flexibility/Warm Up Sequence

KA Ball Work

Performance:

Finish Performances

Reading Next Week Discussion:

Knaster, Ch. 2 plus pp 209-222

Crow, The Alexander Technique as Basic Approach to Theatrical Training,

YouTube.com, Marjorie Barstow

Midterm Assignment: Due 3/8/14

Follow Instructions

March 8: The Alexander Technique Nina D'Abbracci Guest Lecturer

Alexander and Performance

Experiential:

The Alexander Technique

Reading:

Barba & Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer*

Assignment:

Turn in Midterm

March 15: Spring Break

:

March 22 : Energy

Evaluate Class and Rate Learning Experience

Energy and its Use in Performance

Experiential:

Using Energy in Standing/Walking

Sensing Chi Energy

Qi Qong Exercise

Pulling up Energy (Sitting)

Reading for Next Class:

Minton, "Exploring the Mind/Body Connection with Imagery"

Powell, "Creative Visualization: A tool for Change"

Assignment:

Begin Final Performance Write Up (See Handout)

Performance:

Notice Energy

March 29: Imagery and Performance

Use in Performance

Experiential:

Visualization Exercises

Mental Rehearsal for Performance

Reading for Next Class Discussion:

Powell, "Using Your Mind to Decrease Stress"

Knaster, Chapter 6

Assignment: Take notes to share in class

Think about yourself as a performer (or a body user) and write about any performance blocks, beliefs, concerns, anxieties or behaviors that influence your performance

How have you handled these in the past?

April 5: Beliefs and Behaviors that Affect Performance

Identifying Problems in Performance

Experiential:

Visualization

Positive Statements

Reading:

Kohnlein, "Listening from the Physical Body"

April 12: Applying Body Awareness (Con't)

Where are you with application?

Daily Practice

Changing Habits

Performance Preparation

Experiential:

Body Scans

Kinetic Awareness

Alexander Directions

Performance:

Concentration/Integration/Grounded

Assignment:

Think about how you prepare for performance. Make notes

Talk to another performer and ask about how they prepare for performance

Continue work on final performance

April 19: Performance Preparation

The Performer Prepares/How to Use Methods

Review all Methods of Performance Preparation

Experiential:

Body Scan/Breathing/Flexibility

Energy

Mental Rehearsal

Kinetic Awareness

Assignment:

Prepare for Performance

Finish write up to turn in next week

April 26: Final Performances

Experiential:

Performance Preparation

Performances

Turn in Final Performance Write Up

May 3: Final Performances

Experiential:

Performance Preparation

Performances

THE KNOWING BODY: AWARENESS FOR PERFORMERS

MIND/BODY CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Use these categories to view each performance piece. Use them as guidelines when thinking about and working on your own work. Bring to class when viewing performance.

• Overall Posture/Alignment

Balanced?
Stiff?
Collapsed?

• Tension

Use - appropriate to performance?
Excess? Lack of?
Frozen tension - how manifest?

• Breath

Visible?
Flowing/integrated/appropriate?
Held?
Shallow?
Irregular?

• Energy

How much?
Low? High?
Integrated/appropriate?

• Concentration/Focus

Consistent?

• Integration

Head/Body?
Words/Body?

• Grounding

Read through the syllabus carefully and make sure you understand all the assignments and time lines.
Then sign the sheet provided stating that you have done so and turn it in to me.

I have carefully read the contents of this syllabus and understand the requirements, assignments and time lines.
