NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

The Knowing Body:
Mind/Body Awareness for Performers
ARTS-UG 1106
Spring Term 2017
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 (20-30 min daily)
- To practice a newly introduced exercise from class at least once a week (10-20 min)
- To apply methods to performance rehearsal (TBA)
- 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. (TBA)

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?

Reaction to Daily Body Scans
- How is your concentration?
- What have you noticed about your body today?

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 Each Week
- Body Scans (either lying, sitting or standing)
- 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, and Jones). What are the key concepts of body awareness techniques? How is awareness defined by Hanna?

2. What are the key concepts of Kinetic Awareness (Frozen tension, care of the body, etc) 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 Preparation and Application of Learning

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 (25%)

- Written assignments (Self and performance, observation of performance, daily practice notes) (15%)

- Mid-Term Learning Assessment (20%)

- Final Analysis Essay (25%)

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 24: Introduction/Overview/Use

Introductions/Class Expectations
Body/Mind Use in Performance
Developing Evaluation Criteria for Performance Pieces
Experiential:
  Body Scan and Breathing
  Warm-Up
  Hang Out

Reading for Next Class Discussion: (Read this Week to discuss 1/31)
  Steinmann, The Body as Home, *The Knowing Body*
  Powell, Using Breathing Exercises, *Working Woman’s Guide*
  Dowd, 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 1/31

January 31: Breath

Body Awareness and Performance (From The Knowing Body)
Breath and Performance
Experiential:
  Body Scans
  Breathing Work
  Jaw/Sounding
  Animal Movement

Performance:
  Look at Performance Focusing on Breath

Reading Next Class Discussion (2/7):
  Knaster, *Discovering the Body’s Wisdom*, Introduction & Chapter 1
  Powell, Body Therapies, *Journal of Holistic Nursing*
  Dowd, Finding your Center, *Taking Root to Fly*
  Olsen, Axial Skeleton, *Body Stories*

Assignment
  Daily Body Scans and exercise practice

February 7: 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 2/14
  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 14: Show Performance Pieces**
Discuss Jones & Hanna
Experiential:
   Body Scan/Breathing/Movement
Performance
   Show Performance Piece using 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 21: Show Performance Pieces**
Experiential:
   Body Scan/Breathing/Movement
   Performances Prep
Performances
Reading Next Class: Look for how each article is different.
   Knaster, pp. 263-266
   Ann-Sargent Wooster, Elaine Summers, *Drama Review*
   Frances Becker, Kinetic Awareness, *Contact Quarterly*
   Green, The Use of Balls in Kinetic Awareness, *JOHPER Journal*
Assignment:
   Begin work on the Midterm (See Instructions)

**February 28: Tension/Use**
Discuss Knaster and Kinetic Awareness
Habitual Tension/Effort in Performance
Experiential:
   Exploring Tension Use
   Extension/Tension
   Warm Up Sequence
   KA Ball Work
Performance:
   Finish Performances
Reading Next Week:
   Barba & Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer*
Knaster, Look at Chapters 12-14
Midterm Assignment: Due 3/7 Follow Instructions

**March 7: 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:
- Knaster Chapter 2 & pp 209-222
- Crow, The Alexander Technique as Basic Approach to Theatrical Training,
  YouTube.com, Marjorie Barstow
Assignment:
- Turn in Midterm

**March 14: Spring Break**

**March 21: The Alexander Technique Nina D'Abbracci Guest Lecturer**
Alexander and Performance
Experiential:
- The Alexander Technique
Reading:
- 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 28: Imagery and Performance**
Use in Performance
Experiential:
- Visualization Exercises
- Mental Rehearsal for Performance
Reading for Next Class:
- 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 4: Beliefs and Behaviors that Affect Performance
Identifying Problems in Performance
Experiential: Changing Beliefs Exercise
Reading: Kohnlein, "Listening from the Physical Body"

April 11: Applying Body Awareness
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 with body scans and work on final performance

April 18: Performance Preparation
The Performer Prepares/How to Use Methods
Review all Methods of Performance Preparation
Experiential: Body Scan/Breathing/Warm Up
Energy
Mental Rehearsal
Kinetic Awareness
Assignment: Prepare for Performance
Finish write up to turn in next week 4/25

April 25: Final Performances
Experiential: Performance Preparation
Performances
Turn in Final Performance Write Up

May 2: 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?
  - Still?
  - 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.