Title
BECOMING-GRUESOME: An Interdisciplinary Study of Transformation Within the Theatre Rehearsal Process

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/42t2m29r

Author
Schwalm, Ryan

Publication Date
2018

License
CC BY-SA 4.0

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

BECOMING-GRUESOME:
An Interdisciplinary Study of Transformation Within the Theatre Rehearsal Process

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

MASTER OF ARTS
in
THEATER ARTS
by
Ryan Schwalm

June 2018

This Thesis of Ryan Schwalm
is approved:

___________________________________
Professor Amy Mihyang Ginther

___________________________________
Professor Daniel Scheie

___________________________________
Professor Marianne Weems

___________________________________
Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
# Table of Contents

Introduction………1

What we perceive as transformation, and the transformed………………….4

Constant Change. The Buddhadharma………………………………………….12


Gruesome Playground Injuries - “These moments together are all that we have”…16

1) The importance of breath…………………………………………………………….17

2) Our goal. What are we becoming? ………………………………………….20

3a) The room (space) ……………………………………………………………….21

3b) The time (process) ……………………………………………………………….25

3c) The apex (performance)……………………………………………………….26

4) Senses before Intellect. Artaud and the body. The web of acting……….29

Failure, Failures, FAILURE! Feel Here……………………………………………..35

Summary………………………………………………………………………………36

Conclusion…………………………………………………………………………..39

Future Studies. Finding the Purpose………………………………………………….41

Appendix A: Sitting Instructions……………………………………………………42

Appendix B: 4.48 Psychosis……………………………………………………….……..43

Appendix C: UBU RAW- A Topography in Constant Flux. Becoming-Ensemble……46

Appendix D: Juliet and Romeo……………………………………………………….49

Appendix E: Gruesome Playground Injuries, Rehearsal Exercises and Rituals…….50

Appendix F: Glossary…………………………………………………………………65

Appendix G: Gruesome Audience Surveys………………………………………66

References…………………………………………………………………………….75
Abstract

BECOMING-GRUESOME:

An Interdisciplinary Study of Transformation Within the Theatre Rehearsal Process

by Ryan Schwalm

Theatre as an art form uniquely allows for its practitioners and audiences to experience the process of transformation, of turning existing things into new things. We are concerned here with clarifying what it means to transform, and how we can catalyze the transformation process for theatre practitioners and theatre goers. We use Deleuzian philosophy on rhizomes and becoming, teachings of the buddha on meditation and mindfulness, and Artaud’s theatre of cruelty as well as many other theatre writer’s works as a theoretical framework to understand transformation as it applies to theatre. We attempt to apply these structures to the process of theatre-making from a director’s standpoint. We incorporate mindfulness practices and various somatic techniques within rehearsals, and attempt to conceptualize performance using Deleuzian and Buddhist thought.
If we are to define transformation as the shifting of one thing into another thing, and the measure of success as the speed or efficiency with which that thing transforms, we have noted several practices as consistently productive toward the goal of successful transformation. These practices are mindful awareness practices such as meditation, or awareness based physical theatre practices, particularly those meditations focused on direct perception, intention setting rituals such as check-ins or communal statement of goals, and ritualization of effective practices by repetition with intended outcome. In other words, you must become aware of what is in order to achieve clarity on where you intend to go and regularly repeat actions meant to get you there with that intention in mind.
Dedicated to D.F.

My first study in becoming.
Introduction

“Any method which does not itself reach out into the unknown is a bad method.”

-Jerzy Grotowski (1968, p.130)

Transformation is what we are interested in: what is it, how does it work, and how can it be applied? “We,” in this context, are theatre-makers, and “I” am a director/acting-teacher who has collaborated with many young-adult practitioners in the recent decade. I will use the “I” indicator when speaking personally, and the “we” indicator when speaking of collaborative effort with colleagues. I will sometimes also use “we” when referring to communal activities, society, humanity, or the reader and myself together.

Let me now say that I have often said that the only things worth saying are about semantics and suicide. The journey ahead lies somewhere in the middle of that road, between experience and conceptualization. The essence of theatre is experiential and thus, not transcribable. We can only point in the right direction and hope the discussion inspires others to the same brink of phenomenology. Lyricist/Poet/Activist Arif Mirabdolbaghi puts this rather nicely, “Every word ever written will fall short of its intent. Even sung of spoke or screamed, they will betray what they have meant” (2008, Track 7). Nonetheless, we must necessarily travel through the conceptual world of words to create maps by which others may find their way to
the very experience and appreciation of phenomenology. Keep in mind, these words alone are not enough to impart a full understanding of experience, but provide a few starting points for engagement with the work (Kubiak, 2014, p. 182).

This is a meta-analysis in that it covers a myriad of experimental methods I have acquired over several years of my own work as a theatre director/actor/producer. This is also an interdisciplinary study as it spans both scientific and non-scientific points of view in hopes of supporting holistic viewpoints. The aim of this work is to clarify rather than define what transformation is, how it works, and how it may be activated within the context of Deleuze’s theories on Becoming, Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, and the Buddhadharma, and with inspiration drawn from several of my theatrical productions, namely, Gruesome Playground Injuries, at UC Santa Cruz, 2018, Ubu Roi, in Santa Cruz, 2018, and 4.48 Psychosis, in Irvine, 2015. 4.48 Psychosis was my first real experiment in this line of transdisciplinary integration, and is referred to directly only in the appendix along with other relevant practices not central to the mentioned productions.

Within this meta-analysis we investigate transformation within the rehearsal process as it relates to the cast and crew\(^1\), and when relevant, as it relates to performance. We will apply semantical logic, experiential anecdote, and theoretical

---

\(^1\) See Appendix E4.
simile as proof of effectiveness (or lack thereof). Most of these experiments are from the standpoint of the actor/director, but occasionally broader philosophy is applied in relation to artists/theatre practitioners in general.

The broad and long search for methodology with which to catalyze transformation has yielded several consistencies for me. These consistencies take form in my work as of mindfulness practices (meditation and awareness), ritualization of means through repetition (defining purpose), and expression of intent (defining direction).

We explore these in practice with a holistic outlook that is influenced by my background in social science, however, this is not a thoroughly scientific research design; there are no control groups and very small sample sizes, and much of the evidence provided can be considered subjective to the experience of myself and my actors. Nevertheless, the work is important in that it converses with countless others who came before and meagerly attempted to answer the question of what is unique or important about existence through art. Through these means, we hope to cultivate a sacred sense around our work which supports an environment of free expression for collaborators.
What we perceive as transformation, and the transformed.

We base our understanding of transformation around the idea of *Becoming* presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Deleuze (1987) says of becoming:

...becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations...Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire (p.272).

One of Deleuze’s great examples of becoming is Captain Ahab of the story *Moby Dick*. In Ahab’s constant search for the great white whale, he undergoes many changes as his entire mode becomes an obsession on his prize. As Ahab experiences a physical and very spiritual going-toward the whale, subtly shifting his mind and being to think and understand his prey, he is becoming-whale. He has never physically been a whale, but he is able to approach the experience of whale more and more as he hunts. This is the process of desire in that we move-toward what we desire to become, oftentimes desiring to be something we haven’t been before. As Peggy Phelan says: “...desire shows itself through failure. Desire is recognizable because we are not in the image we see/k.” (p. 20).
As we get closer to our subjective projection about that experience (which is influenced by the form or outward display of the thing we desire), we get closer to becoming the thing, but we never fully reach it as it is always shifting. This is analogous to the process of acting in that the character is a subjective ideal that the actor moves toward throughout the rehearsal process.

Deleuze’s description of becoming is helpful to theatre practice insofar as theatre itself is a process of artistic creation and recreation, and the Deleuzian explanation of becoming (which can be interchangeable with my use of the word *transformation*) allows us to detach from the limitations of a dualistic experience wherein things are defined by their physical forms and intellectual conceptions. This allows for a freedom of discovery and expression essential to the art making process. Deleuze consistently speaks of becoming as an unfolding, a constantly shifting experience in which relations or associations are made with the mode of being of another person, animal (in Ahab’s case), or phenomenon. The important parts of this are that it is continuous, there is no beginning and end, that it can be done on purpose, and that the result of the Becoming cannot be known except in the act of the Becoming itself; in other words, there is no way to know what one will become until one is Becoming it, it is an act of making that which is not inherently me a part of me. There is no completion of becoming, and we are always becoming.
A completion of the act is impossible, there is only the active movement toward. I would conclude from this that an actor/theatre artist’s only real job is to identify what they are becoming. There is not a linear progression or a check list, there is only complex movement in the direction of a collectively-defined thing which the artist is to become.

Of course we as humans make meanings and boundaries around things and often become stuck by our own creations, seeking that linear progression through dualistic life. As an actor, I believe that this stickiness, or rather, the inability to un-stick from conceptions and definitions in order to make discoveries, is problematic to my efficacy and creativity, and as a director, I do my best to build a supportive ground for which actors may experience becoming on their own terms. I do not propose that everyone detach entirely from their conceptual thoughts and boundaries about the world, as these are useful for us to interact and share and shape our transformations. In detaching entirely from the conceptual, as Dream Yoga practitioner Andrew Holecek (2013) warns, we risk becoming ungrounded, and carried away into the clouds (Track 3). I would simply like to present the idea that transformation, as a state of becoming-something, never ends, and to frame our work as a process of relation rather than of completion. Rather than transforming from A to B as one cycle, we are already transforming. We are always A. A is some mixture of
our ego, our identity, our given body, and our beliefs, circumstances, learning and
everything else. Through applying awareness and intention we may exercise our
free will and transform on purpose toward B or C or D or X or Q or S or č or any
other boundaries we decide to create, which may be more or less reinforced by the
societal or cultural zeitgeist. When A decides to change it is now A becoming B, A
becoming Q, A becoming &. In creating theatrical characters, actors transform to-
ward a set of boundaries known as “the character.” A becoming C, Actor becoming
Character. These boundaries may be well-defined or amorphous at the beginning of
a rehearsal process. Each rehearsal, the actor makes associations and discoveries
with C that connect in different ways to the connective network of their psychoso-
matic being. Deleuze would call this connective network of the actor a rhizome,
which in botany is an underground root system which grows horizontally and has
so many interconnective points that it’s impossible to tell where the executive con-
trol is; in fact there may indeed be no executive control (Jang, et al., 2006).
Deleuze (1987) differentiates rhizomatic structures, which is open and free-associ-
ative, from tree-root structure which is top-down and hierarchic:

The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing...A rhizome has
no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, inter-
mezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree
imposes the verb ‘to be’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and… and… and’. (p. 25)

The conceptualization of transformation as a completable A to B action can be thought of as arborescent, or tree-root structure, while the idea of constant change, becoming, and openness is more rhizomatic.

We can begin to conceive of the process of an actor creating a character in the terms of Deleuze. Territories become the boundaries between what is the actor and what is the character, and work is done to shift those boundaries rehearsal and performance. When an actor becomes character, the farther away the actor’s newly-made associations are from their currently-defined boundaries of “Self,” the more, as spectators, we may be able to perceive a change in them, especially if we are personally acquainted with the actor in question. Eventually the actor realizes they have built a pathway between the two boundaries, they can seem to switch on or off their associations in order to more quickly transform toward a more clearly defined territory of “the character.” The actor territorializes this character by creating or defining it. By the end of the process, the actor has built many pathways to tumble down in performance, none of which will be exactly the same. Each time an association is made, it is made anew and slightly different, even when it is a similar association, they have expanded their map. In *Unmarked*, feminist scholar Peggy Phelan
(1993) defines this boundary-making in the duality of subject and object relating to identity:

Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other—which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being (p. 13).

In this interdependent weave where the subject relies on the object to define itself and the object relies on the subject to be defined, there is an ongoing negotiation between things and boundaries. In declaring or territorializing, an actor defines their character for a moment. In making a new association away from the territory, the actor expands that definition into something else in order to redefine it in a different territory. This happens constantly on a subtle level whether or not we are aware of it.

Deleuze would call this new-associating a line of flight, a departure from the multiplicity that makes up the “self” or a deterritorialization (unattached) of the concept of self, and a reterritorialization (recreating, expanding upon) closer to that which the actor is becoming or transforming toward. The more lines of flight which the actor takes, the quicker they might change from A to C, but with each reterritorialization, C may be more fully created (Deleuze, 1987, p. 9-10). Territories in this sense, can be taken to mean organizations, or formations of things or people. The
territory of an apple is defined by the majority. As the computer company Apple
grows in popularity, it redraws the line of territory about what “Apple” is. In his
book *The Theater and its Double*, Antonin Artaud (1958) speaks of the power of the-
atre to reform things, change meanings, and reterritorialize: “…I do believe that the
theater, utilized in the highest and most difficult sense possible, has the power to
influence the aspect and formation of things…” (p. 79). Artaud speaks of theatre in
its essence here, which includes everything to be done onstage, and the perfor-
ance space as a space of becoming. Jerzy Grotowski (1968) theorizes a similar es-
sence of theatre, however he confines it to the actor’s specific power on stage, un-
attached from other scenic or design elements (pp. 15). I would venture to say that
the actor’s unfolding action of becoming is perhaps the central theatrical motion,
and necessary for a piece of art to be called theatre rather than performance art or
installation. Perhaps this is personal semantics, but I do think of theatre as a place
or occurrence in which somebody or something is trying to be somebody or some-
thing else. In this motion toward the object of becoming, such as an actor toward a
character, or a set toward a house, or a sound effect toward something more physi-
cally dense, we come into contact with the entire process of transformation.

As spectators witness an actor shifting into or exploring their newly defined
“self” their empathetic and mirroring brainwaves fire and they are brought into the
rhizome of the actor to varying degrees depending on their preexisting relations with the whole spectacle and the circumstantial skill of the actor to relate to that particular audience member. Spectators seem to transform with little resistance in the theatre, perhaps because theatre has been ritualized as a place of transformation, and people often go in groups to exert a communal effort of release and transformation. In the environment of communal engagement, the direction of the many becomes easier to follow as individuals. Petra Kuppers (2014) says in an article on Social Somatics: “Somatic work is exploration, and is also often shared work, as the energy of community enhances potential pathways toward experiencing oneself differently” (p. 191). In watching a play, the audience may easily tap into this energy of community in its attempt to watch a play, to be moved, or to believe in the creation of the theatrical world before them. Indeed psychological studies from Gabriel et al. (2017) have confirmed, connection to groups is highly associated with increased sense of purpose and awareness. Perhaps this is why we have groups like AA, fitness classes, and universities. Rody Walker (2013, track 10) of Protest the Hero laments, “We are nothing without the thousands of voices that make the choir.”
Constant Change. The Buddhadharma.

A practical way to apply these complex intersectional ideas can be found within the Buddhadharma, or the teachings of the Buddha. These teachings provide a systematic framework (via meditation) for cultivating awareness of the shifting and becoming of things in the mind, as well as integrating individual haecceities into interdependent weaves, which is quite useful for our method of approaching acting and characterization work. I use the phrase Buddhadharma to refer to the teachings of the Buddha rather than the cultural myths, bells, and whistles that have become associated with said teachings and created Buddhism as a religious form based on those teachings. Buddhist philosophy presents a “middle way,” a space that is between defined forms, the experience of becoming or unfolding itself, a constant ebb and flow of motion. Buddhist philosophy teaches to not hold any one philosophy above others, that there is not one cure-all for every situation, to look at each moment directly in order to understand the whole (Hagen, 1997, p. 16-24).

If we examine reality directly, as in meditation, we may become aware of the unfolding of each moment, a shifting sense of time (time itself being a concept of compartmentalization which is useful for more complex communication). This direct perception is essential transformation, for how can we choose our path if we
don’t become aware of the path we’re already on and the rhythms of our very
breath and mind? When we speak of direct perception, we speak of an awareness of
all sensations, thoughts, and the environment, free from conceptual trappings of
the thinking mind; this is experiencing, rather than conceptualizing. Many forms
(such as viewpoints, Lecoq, Laban, Fitzmaurice, Alexander, Yoga, Martial Arts, Meis-
ner, etc.) of theatre training employ methods of focusing or heightening awareness,
which is the basis of meditation in Buddhist philosophy. This direct experiencing is
ineffable, but is paramount in transformation and theatre practice. At this point,
stop. Refer to Appendix section A. Follow the 8 simple steps and sit for several
minutes before continuing if you hope to have any actual understanding of what we
are trying to explain (Meisner, 1987, pp. 16) (Farmer, 2015) (Espeland, 2015) (Dou-

If you can do this for several minutes you may begin to feel time pass differ-
ently as you open your attention to the plethora of things happening in and around
you; sensory information you may have missed because you were caught in the con-
ceptual thinking mind. You may become aware of a barrage of thoughts you didn’t
know you were having or the rising and passing of your breath and everything else
around you. You may become acutely aware of a lack of sensation or numbness, or a
tendency to wonder if you’re doing this correctly. Inevitably, if returned to enough, you will begin to notice things as they pass into and out of your awareness. The nature of everything is rising and passing, entropy, movement, rhizomatic, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, transformation. Even thoughts. According to Buddhist thought, this is the only objective reality: everything you are experience directly right now. Zen Priest Steve Hagen (1997) calls it Thus (p. 71).


Another way to term this experience of thus is Beginner’s Mind. Beginner’s Mind refers to a state of mind in which one is experiencing events as if they are happening for the first time, even if they are similar to previous events. In other words, beginner’s mind is a state in which we are experiencing reality directly, free from the illusory trappings of past and future. I actually came across this term first in a long-form improvisation class at Empire Improv in Reno, NV in 2012. In the improvisational model, beginner’s mind is paramount to practice; it allows actors to play text or scenarios that they have repeated many times before but alive and new; it frees actors from their stickiness and lets them create anew. Artaud (1958) speaks of a similar nowness in relation to poetry and playwriting in No More Masterpieces:
Let us leave textual criticism to graduate students, formal criticism to esthetes, and recognize that what has been said is not still to be said; that an expression does not have the same value twice, does not live two lives; that all words, once spoken, are dead and function only at the moment when they are uttered, that a form, once it has served, cannot be used again and asks only to be replaced by another, and that the theater is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice. (p. 75)

A purer form of this practice in theatre comes from improv comedy or improvisational theatre which typically throws away the texts and memorized words and relies more often on memorized game structures or characters. Some very advanced improv groups, such as Los Angeles based group Delicious Moments, even throw away their game structure and seek to find the game or scene from total scratch (which is never absolute blankness).

Beginner’s mind can be applied to any and all forms of performance, whether there is a preordained text, set of actions, format, structure, or even physical vocabulary between performers. It is inherently connected to direct experience, and unsticking from boundaries. It is at the heart of all truly reverent theatre work. Anthony Kubiak (2014), in his essay *Ekstasis*, describes the junctional mode that is Deleuzian Becoming, mindful awareness, Thus, Beginner’s mind, transformation, and the essential action of theatre.
In this state I enter the environs of the other, inhabit the body and time of the other, while the other, conversely, inhabits me, my time, my space. When one releases into the ecstatic, one begins to understand that the reality of self and identity is purely ephemeral, pure illusion. One understands experientially the permeability and edgelessness that constitutes the non-materiality of the world, the solidity of identity and its matters merely an idea whose substance fades the moment it appears. (p. 183)

In our journey of attempting to develop a reverent, holy, transformative relationship within the theatre, we have attempted to put some of this philosophy into practice in production.

**Gruesome Playground Injuries** - “These moments together are all that we have.”

Our recent production of *Gruesome Playground Injuries* by Rajiv Joseph (2018, Santa Cruz) has been a most useful testing ground for transformative practices within rehearsal. I took special attention in this process to not only enfranchise my actors, but to transform myself and redraw the boundaries of my territories within the rehearsal room while Acting as Director-A becoming D. Let us reiterate that everyone is always becoming, we simply used mindfulness techniques to raise awareness, identified what we wanted to become: a director, and chose to move toward it. This transformation toward director-ness involved a purposeful choice of affect and conduct. In becoming-director which is similar to becoming-
leader and becoming-caretaker, I shift the way I treat people during rehearsals, dis-
appearing almost entirely from the sphere of social media and existing more as a
puzzle-solving-machine than a social-animal; I change who I am during that time to
achieve a different purpose than what I aspire to in my quotidian life. This purpose
manifests in rehearsal as a seriousness toward the work, a repetitious focus to the
task at hand, a limitation on tangential storytelling, a release from the need to en-
tertain, creativity, listening, micromanagement, and a humorous curiosity. All of
these settled into being as we mindfully set group intentions within the cast and
crew, and silently agreed to transform to our various aspects in the abstract ma-
chine that was the rehearsal room. I attempted to pull the designers into some of
these practices, but as they were less frequently in the room, the effect may have
been more marginal for them.

1) The importance of breath

In our sticky, conceptual world, we perceive things as lasting and solid and
unchanging, and we perceive a difference between the internal and external, sub-
ject and object (Holecek, 2013, Track 1). The breath is uniquely situated as both an
internal and external body object. It is also uniquely passive and active (as is our
heartbeat, but it is easier to control the breath). We can change the way we breathe
just by trying, but if we don’t try, the breath continues to happen, it is autonomic and controllable at the same time (Artaud, 1958, p. 134). Breath is the perfect device to break through our binary experience because it exists in many perceived places at once, which makes it an incredibly useful tool for approaching a felt sense of expansion such as a deterritorialization, or the subtle act of becoming as breath literally bring in and out tiny particles of the body (Fitzmaurice, 1997) (Deleuze, 1987). In many philosophies and healing practices (which I believe theatre is), breath is a means whereby to attain awareness and healing (Douglas-Klotz, 2009, p. 197). In discussing the Full Awareness of Breathing Sutra, Vietnamese Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh contributes “Breathing is a means of awakening and maintaining full attention in order to look carefully, long and deeply, to see the nature of all things and arrive at liberation.” (as cited in Douglas-Klotz, 2009, p. 197). Neil Douglas-Klotz (2009) connects the conversation of the importance of breath within many spiritual practices to that within Western therapeutic healing practices:

...somatic therapy traditions generally focus on increasing one’s awareness of the breathing wave itself. One simply observes the feeling of the breathing without intervening, becoming increasingly aware of the many, minute sensations and the emotions linked to them. (p. 200)
In our practice, breath awareness was trained nearly every day of rehearsal and it allowed us to become more aware of the subtleties in our rhizomatic maps and how they were connected, thus allowing us to make conscious decisions toward change or motion. Attention + Intention for Transformation. A + I = T

It seems to me that bringing attention to the breath in moments of focus shifting or theatrical storytelling is a highly effective way to facilitate an intended direction for an individual (actor) or group (spectator/group of actors). As a spectator, I am inclined to breathe and reminded of my own breath when my attention is guided to the breath of another (an actor). As an actor, I can use my breath as a physical tool to implement a rhythm, or a shape to my body, and to bring about the necessary support to begin speech (Fitzmaurice, 1997). Many of the actors’ ritualized character switches started with a purposeful breath, and some utilized specific patterns of breathing to bring awareness to a certain aspect of the character. When the actor playing Dougie, Jesus Pedroza-Moreno, would enter into scene 5, a scene where his character has just gotten beat in a fight, he would begin to breathe rapidly and sporadically, exhaling punctuative gusts as if he were having the wind knocked out of him. His exhaustion was portrayed much more realistically when
there was a specific shift in the breathing. In rehearsals, we would utilize breath in meditative techniques to gather awareness and focus intentions.²

2) Our goal. What are we becoming?

We wanted to do extraordinary work. We wanted to make rehearsal a special place where we could achieve the unlimited. We wanted to engage in a Becoming-extraordinary or a Becoming-sacred, a transformation away from our quotidian-general lives outside of rehearsal. This was a call to duty reminiscent of Artaud’s (1958) Manifestos of Cruelty “…a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heat.” (p. 84) and Grotowski’s (1968) Poor Theatre, “To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness, fulfill ourselves.” (p. 21) We wanted to embody something with our full beings and go beyond the ordinary to a place in which magic was possible, something rigorous and attentive. We again point to Artaud’s (1958) call to gravity and respect for the unknowable act of becoming:

What is important is that, by positive means, the sensitivity is put in a state of deepened and keener perception, and this is the very object of the magic and the rites of which the theater is only a reflection. (p. 91)

² See Appendix E for details of purposeful breaths in performance rituals.
Starting from a goal that was difficult to describe, with no measure of objective success, I decided to break down the aspects of my effort into three categories: Space, Time, and Characterization (Performance).

3a) The room (space)

Transforming the room was simple. We wanted a sacred space, one that felt special, somehow different from the rest of the spaces we occupied throughout our days. To do this we had to enter into a state of awareness and communal intent to treat the space in a way that felt special. At the start of rehearsal each day, I would put away whatever joke or anecdote I was involved in and call the cast into a small meeting circle. We would share a communal breath and a short awareness exercise much like the 8-step meditation instructions described earlier. We would all decide on a goal to work toward (not accomplish) for the rehearsal, we would define where our playing space was, and we would get to work.

Because we had so many rehearsal spaces it was important to come together and take a moment to figure out where we were. Even if we weren’t realizing at the moment, we were doing that. (V. Finn, personal communication, March 1, 2018)
The setting of a group intention was incremental in keeping us moving in the same direction. As the rehearsal process went on, we used several different rehearsal spaces and it became important to prepare each one in this way. Through the repetition of this process, these check-ins became their own ceremonious ritual, and we understood and respected their purpose more. When we would go on break, I would relax from the hyperfocus into a more colloquial behavior.

Coming back from breaks, we would repeat a shorter version of the ceremony, check in to see if anything had changed, take a breath, and resume working. Sometimes our triumphs or struggles within scene work would shift as we worked on them, and it was useful to update each other to retain understanding. Occasionally we would spend longer or shorter on a scene than we had anticipated, and it was helpful to communicate about how to shift the remaining rehearsal time effectively. We had to build our relationship with the rehearsal space each day, much like one may build a relationship with a patch of forest where one goes to meditate, or an office space where one goes to focus and work.

Ours was a relationship of work, comfort, and exploration. The stronger this relationship became the more it allowed us to be inspired by the space itself. Rather than treating the spaces as stagnant holding areas, we were persistent in bringing awareness to the shadows, corners, and reverberation of sounds within
each room. We attempted to communicate with the spaces as beings themselves, containing some aspect of mood or affect which could affect our work. The more we treated spaces as beings deserving reverence, the more inspiration we were able to draw from, and the less confined our playing space felt, the more welcome the mood became, for spaces have their own energies and personalities that we must respect (Măniuțiu, 2014, p. 246).

In the end, we are the show, we created it, when we do the work, the space is shifted and transforms on its own. We didn’t shift the space that much physically, we shifted it psychically with our work. (J. Pedroza-Moreno, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, authors of The Viewpoints Book (2005) and proponents of its exercises (which I have often directly used with no personal adaptation), might classify this attentiveness as an exploration of the viewpoints of architecture, shape, and time (p. 8-11) (See Appendix E2 & E3). We and the space became like a well-oiled machine that worked together in our different parts to create motion and distribute energy. In other words, it was easier for the actors to participate in the imaginal exercises in a space that felt welcoming and in which objects did not feel as if they were stagnant or set in their ways. Our meditative practices helped us to deterritorialize objects the room and reterritorialize them within the
context of our imaginary world of the exercises and the play. This allowed for a great deal of play and imagination in a very limited physical space.

The measure of our success in raising awareness and building relationships with spaces was the efficiency with which we could adapt things to our purpose, or adapt to the needs of a scene. On the less successful days, these preparations took longer, or were shallow and facile, resulting in utilization of stereotypes, habits of speech and movement that were not embodied or real-feeling, or low energy. These less successful days were often associated with sleep-deprivation, frustration or fatigue in the creative team. However, it must be noted that rehearsals which started with low or negative energy were always and easily shifted through the process of rehearsing, but only when communal awareness practices were held, and the state of being was acknowledged. On days where improvement was made, there was a marked difference in the speed with which actors were able to understand and implement notes, there were fewer instances of text or blocking mistakes, and the actors were able to shifted into greater intensities with less perceivable struggle. On slow days where we failed to check in, the work stayed slow and did not rise from the dregs. These are results I noticed without fail: taking the time to go through the ceremony allowed the proceeding work to be more attentive, no matter the state of things at the beginning of rehearsal.
3b) The time (process)

To begin our consecration of space every day we would first respect our clocks as guardians, we would start on time, and end on time, and take 10 minutes of break per 3 hour rehearsal. We were always clear in what we were doing from day to day, and in our goals from week to week. We would check in with mindfulness practices at the beginning of rehearsals, after breaks, and at the end, to keep track of our goals and progress and remain on the same page. This was more than formal punctuality, the specification of goals in rehearsal time became its own ritual which allowed us to achieve a greater focus and reterritorialize the time in a way that made it different from quotidiem-time. In shifting our relation to and conceptualization of the time period itself, it became sacred-time, the actors did not show up on time because they had to, they wanted to share in this ephemeral experience; rehearsal-time was special, and for extraordinary art, not for ordinary activities. This transformation of our time improved effort, fulfillment and efficiency for the whole team, as well as freeing up mental space by lessening distraction during rehearsal times, and lessening worry about rehearsal progression during ordinary day time. Rehearsal time took on its own haecceity, like dinner-time or bedtime, which are in essence, for eating dinner and preparing for bed. Rehearsal periods took on the essence of rehearsal. Even in the intervals, during break times, the effect was that we
were in between chapters of the larger book, rather than returning fully to our social media and escapist tendencies, breaks were often spent writing notes, journaling, or simply integrating the energy of what we had stirred up during the preceding hour.

3c) The apex (performance)

When we speak of transformation within performance, we mostly refer to the transformation of the actors toward their characters. Characterization is another way to term this, or Becoming-Character, in this case Jesus Pedroza-Moreno Becoming-Doug and Violet Finn Becoming-Kayleen. We will discuss here how this transformation applies to our performance in front of an audience, and include a section in Appendix E detailing the foundational work which was done in rehearsals to discover associations and experiences of the characters.

The play *Gruesome Playground Injuries* by Rajiv Joseph follows two kids, Doug and Kayleen, through their lives from ages 8 to 38. We see them every 5 years but out of chronological order: the scenes alternate, jumping forward 15 years and then back 10 years. We see the couple go from age 8 to 23 to 13 to 28 to 18 to 33 to 23 to 38. Within these parameters, the actors have vast opportunity to explore characterization, or transformation, or building a rhizomatic map of the characters at
different ages. My hope was to engage the viewer with the actors’ transformations without trying to indicate to the audience the exact way in which it was happening. The script itself includes long transitional periods in between scenes in which the actors change costumes and apply new makeup. I thought this was indicative enough to imply a shift on a purely visual level. The bulk of our exploratory work in rehearsal involved making connections to the character’s physical, imaginal worlds. In other words, it happened through many micro adjustments that eventually made up a cohesive whole, but no gesture or indication was taken out of the context of the influence it had on the actor’s entire being.

In our creating of characters, we devised rituals to bring the actors into and away from the territories of the characters as they exist at the beginning and end of each scene. These rituals made their way into performance, and were kept in full view of the audience, but were not choreographed with the audience in mind. The actors were instructed to find simple actions that brought them closer to the different ages and circumstances of the characters, and were encouraged to continually experiment and change their actions in any way that clarified their path of transformation into the character. These rituals were done at the end of each costume/makeup change, just prior to entering into the next scene. Some of them were done onstage, and some in full view. The movements of the rituals were never fully set,
but their instructions were, so they shifted slightly from day to day, and even into
performance. I believe that these rituals were personal exercises of mindfulness for
the actors and a sort of move out of the neutral, unassociated mind-space they in-
habited during transitions. Combined with our extensive psycho-somatic explo-
ration of ages during rehearsal, these rituals served to speed the process of which
the actors could enter into the center of the rhizosphere most closely associated
with each age of their character, crossing boundaries and redrawing territories of
association as they went. Physical descriptions of these rituals are included in Ap-
pendix E4, ordered by scene. What was truly happening in the minds of the actors
during these rituals may not be fully known as I decided to leave some aspect of it
to their own personal secrecy and haecceity.

Additionally, at the end of each scene, the actors were to find an action that
best expressed their current relationship as the characters Doug and Kayleen.
These actions would come to a completion, and then the actors would take a com-
munal breath, after which the costume/makeup change would happen. This breath
was a communal effort between the actors to unstick from their current territories
of the characters Doug and Kayleen, and return to a neutral space of awareness,
closer to the territories of the actors Jesus and Violet. Violet found this end of scene
breath to be particularly useful in bringing about a feeling of specialness or importance to the action onstage. Jesus found the into-scene breath favorable.

Audience members who were surveyed almost unanimously reported that they found themselves also breathing in and out with the actors in these moments of ritual. While many found it to be profound or interesting, one report found it to be forced.\(^3\)

4) Senses before Intellect. Artaud and the body. The web of acting.

In most of the acting work for this process, we would dive into an explorative experience first, and reflect on it afterward, allowing the frame to be set by the action itself rather than by our conceptual intellect. Antonin Artaud writes extensively in his book, *The Theater and its Double*, about the primacy of the senses and the body. Much of our experimentation with Artaud’s ideals within rehearsal process developed through a production of Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* in 2015, see Appendix B for details. Artaud wrote in a time when theatre seemed to be limited and contained by psychological realism, when Freudian analysis and the scientific method were taking over and providing a plethora of defined concepts with which to view the world intellectually. To Artaud, this containment of the spiritual, the

\(^3\) See Appendix G for audience survey responses.
magic experience of the unknown, of becoming, was deadly to theatre; he understood that the true power of theatre was to provide a space in which people could have a novel experience of the world, a place where they could relate to their senses in a new way and rewire their conceptual mind. In the academic setting we often place critical analysis above all else; we live in the world of thought. Artaud was not opposed to thought being involved in the theatre (after all, part of the mind’s nature is to think). Rather, Artaud realized that we could get trapped in habitual thought and forget to feel or think in new ways (Artaud, 1958, p. 68-73). In our approach to the scene work of Gruesome Playground Injuries, we often employed this senses-first ideology in our physical explorations. We also made sure to continuously relate our work in physicality to other aspects of Western acting pedagogy such as voice, desires, and objectives, so as to not confuse the actors into thinking that thought and body are entirely cut off from each other (Artaud, 1958, p. 133).

I used a rhizomatic model of acting coaching, something I like to call the Web of Acting, or the Web of Expression. The metaphorical picture is a spider’s web: somewhat circular, with many attachment points. In a spider’s web, there is not one entry point, and any movement on the web will affect other areas of the web, allowing the spider to feel where prey is caught, or when the web is in danger, and react accordingly. In acting, this web can be visualized as a web of thought,
emotion, body, and breath. Any change in thought (thought is the typical entry point for actors of Western Realism) will affect the emotions, the body, and the breath, any change in breath will affect the body which affects the emotions which shift the thoughts and so on. Artaud (1958) notes similarities between the physical activities of athletes and the psycho-somatic actions of actors in his chapter An Affective Athleticism:

What the athlete depends upon in running is what the actor depends upon in shouting a passionate curse, but the actor’s course is altogether interior. All the tricks of wrestling, boxing, the hundred yard dash, high-jumping, etc., find analogous organic bases in the movement of the passions; they have the same physical points of support. (p.133)

This points to a connection between the body and emotions, tow entry points on the web. For example, clenching the fists, furrowing the brow and widening the shoulders is a physical adjustment which often simply by bodily association makes us feel anger; these muscular adjustments will inevitably change how the breath is able to flow as the lungs are constricted in different ways depending on the bodily position, and we may begin to breath heavily; as all these conditions come into play, we may be reminded of a time in our lives when we had this reaction to another stimulus and begin to think thoughts of an angry interaction in the past, or find things to be angry about in the present (my foot hurts, my scene partner isn’t help-
This method draws from the Buddhist/spiritual thought of interconnection between all things, and bears similarities with the area of somatic work, which can be thought of, as Petra Kuppers (2014) notes, as “contemporary articulations of ancient practices” (p. 186).

Artaud, in the same chapter, alludes to the entry point of breath:

The question of breath is in fact primary; it is in inverse proportion to the strength of the external expression. The more sober and restrained the expression, the deeper and heavier the breathing, the more substantial and full of resonances. Similarly an expression that is broad and full and externalized has a corresponding breath in short and broken waves. It is certain that for every feeling, every mental action, every leap of human emotion there is a corresponding breath which is appropriate to it. (p. 134)

This points to connections between breath and speech, expression, and emotion. This realization of interconnectivity is central to much of Buddhist philosophy, from which we draw many of our awareness practices applied throughout the process, as well as the rhizomatic model of associations with Deleuze. Thich Nhat Hanh (2009) propounds this idea in commentary on the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing:
Breathing and body are one. Breathing and mind are one. Mind and body are one. At the time of observation, mind is not an entity which exists independently, outside of your breathing and your body. The boundary between the subject of observation and the object of observation no longer exists. (as cited in Douglas-Klotz, p. 206)

Additionally, F.M. Alexander, a theorist important to the development of somatic therapy in the west, whose pedagogies are used in many MFA and BFA acting programs across the U.S.A. and Europe, discovered links between certain breathing patterns and tendencies of thought. (Douglas-Klotz, 2009, p.198)

Many of these understandings of interconnection between breath patterns and mental, physical, and emotional states come to me through acting workshops with Mihai Măniuțiu, artistic director of the Romanian National Theatre, in January-March of 2015, and Fitzmaurice Voicework™ classes with master teacher Cynthia Bassham in April-June 2015.

These four entry points, breath, body, emotion, and thought, may be broken down and personalized in as many ways as is helpful to the actor, and are by no means an exhaustive list. In our scene work, we would identify difficult moments and address them through one of these entry points, often briefly pausing when something worked to notice the shifts in the web. After working with one entry point, we would often return to the same scene on another day and use a different
entry point to attempt the scene. After time and practice the entry points began to meld together and fire simultaneously, influencing back and forth like an infinity mirror. This translated into performances when the actors were instructed to put together their pre and post-scene rituals in which a combination of these aspects were used to approach the intended state of the scene. Some of these rituals were mostly physical, some incorporated very specific breathing patterns, and others were action-driven (look for her everywhere except where she’s standing, your tension increases until you can find her).

Jesus was able to find a strong way into scene 5 (18 years old) by working with emotions as an entry point, particularly the emotion of anger. He focused on feeling anger and his body posture shifted to be more rigid, his movements became more frantic, his breathing became faster, and his fists clenched. He noted how working in this way helped him connect to the scene.

Violet was able to find a greater connection to scene 6 (33 years old) by working with a body entry point. I taught Laban (Rudolf Laban) movement efforts in our rehearsals, which attach a transitive verb to a pattern of motion involving three or four aspects. We focused on the aspects of space (direct or indirect), weight (heavy or light) and time (sudden or sustained), and not on the fourth aspect of flow. We applied these effort actions not only to physical movement, but expanded it to
include voice as well. Originally, Violet expressed some difficulty in learning the
movement efforts, but when applied in the scene context she was able to be more
creative and connect deeper to scene 6 by using the Laban efforts of Float and Dab.
Vocalizing Laban efforts is also a technique I learned in voice classes with Cynthia
Bassham between April-June, 2015. (Espeland, 2015)

Failure, Failures, FAILURE! Feel Here.

Always there are failures, and muddiness, and slow days, and marks not hit.
The real failure lies in becoming stuck in frustration when expectations aren’t met.
When awareness is brought to the problem, either the expectation changes, or the
means of fulfilling the expectation change, when we stop and take a moment to feel
what is happening, we can usually find a way to adapt with this feeling. Failures for
us in this work often takes the form of faulty communication, skipping important
rituals of preparation, or becoming stuck. When proper time for setup and com-
munion is not provided, rehearsals are often unfocused and unenergized. When
communication breaks down, we can tend to set disparate intentions and start
heading in opposite directions, leading to confusion and frustration later down the
road. When we don’t check in for a long time, we run the risk of missing changes
that have happened in our relation to each other and the work and the process it-
self. Sometimes we simply become stuck, and can’t see the way out—another eye on
the outside is helpful for this, such as an assistant or a savvy stage manager or a
trusted friend of the cast. Our Assistant Director, Magenta Howard, was incremen-
tal as a lifeline for me when I became stuck. As she was a relative stranger who was
familiar with the pedagogies of Viewpoints and other physical theatre techniques, I
was able to look to her for grounding when I became distracted or lost.

 Sometimes we’re just too tired to pay attention, and the work goes slowly
on those days, but we forgive ourselves so that we may return to diligence the next
day. Failure is always a learning experience, and a reminder of what our intentions
are. Jesus attributed our slow days to lack of communication, not checking in, and
people being on different pages, needing to arrive at the same place before we
could work. Violet described a barrier between herself and the work which she ex-
perienced on days when we did not prepare ceremoniously (V. Finn, and J. Pedroza-
Moreno, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Summary

Transformation, as we have termed it, inherently encapsulates reality. We are
always changing, we are always transforming, or becoming. Perhaps the greater
question is what are we becoming? What are we transforming toward? For Deleuze,
this is a process of redrawing lines on a map. For Artaud, this is a process of continuously destroying the established and establishing infinitely new forms. In Buddhist thought, there is a middle path between the formal and the formless in which we can witness the inherent transformation of all things in interconnection. As we cultivate these awarenesses through our multifarious techniques and theories, and apply them to the act of creation within theatre, we are practicing transformation.

In the act of creation, there must be a clear intent on what is being created. The actual form of this created thing, this *what*, is tied to the rhizomes of our beings, and the territories we draw that mark out our definitions of things.

In recount, we set out to discover what transformation was and how we could activate it. We had an inkling that the key lied in mindfulness practices and Artaudian theatre theory. We experimented over years of performance and directing, developing a plethora of spiritual, physical, and psychosomatic techniques, and arrived at a recent experiment within *Gruesome Playground Injuries* wherein we attempted transformations of space and time as well as transformation in characterization. This transformation of space and time was not so much physical as it was psychic and associative, a shift in the way we treated these concepts naturally begot a transformation of their essences. Each transformation used a ground of meditative practice to open awareness and facilitate motion. In the characterization trans-
formation we employed an approach of interconnectedness which I call the Web of Acting, as well as Viewpoints and other mindfulness based techniques. This allowed us to approach our subject matter from many angles simultaneously and affected a fuller performance, a more layered transformation. We faced obstacles when we strayed from the ritualized preparations, but continually and mindfully returned to them time and again to find ease and success. The audience response for the shows involved in this meta-analysis have been mixed, but generally positive, and quite often inarticulate. There have been at least several people from each audience who have approached me trying to explain how these plays facilitated an exciting new experience that they did not know was possible until experiencing it. Audience members have cited increased awareness of their body and breath while viewing these plays. I view these as some sort of success, even in more frustrated reviews; if awareness is not involved, then purposeful transformation is not possible. In all of this work, I have most importantly learned the value of remembrance, of returning to the now, to the exploration, to the unfolding of transformation all around us. Unless we can remember again and again, we run the risk of escaping, checking out, mindlessness, and apathy, which are all things that stifle creativity.
Conclusion

The work is never finished. The illuminations I have made in the last few productions, namely Gruesome Playground Injuries, 4.48 Psychosis, and Ubu Roi (See Appendix for B, C and D) will continue to illumine further methodology and philosophy as they are applied to wider groups of artists and practitioners. To boil the import of all these processes into a set of precepts would be unartistic and sticky, but I will present a list of current consistencies in the work which I/others have found most valuable.

Consistency one is attention. Mindful awareness. In practicing meditative techniques of mindfulness we learn to unlearn and relearn, we can let go of the old in order to create the new. This must be a constant process, it is never finished or done. The moment it is finished, all stands still and art is dead, we become stuck and resist the motion which is necessary for creation. Through our mindfulness practices and training within actor groups, we seem to access a deeper creative capacity and expand boundaries of what is possible within theatre and transformation. The more we practice letting go of attachments, the more space we have to create new forms. This practice of awareness is important for creating an artistic habitat that is ultimately creative, as the act of creation itself is one of unlearning and relearning. It focuses on the process of transformation and movement rather
than a goal, rather than achieving a certain aesthetic or qualifier. Simply put, if the art moves it is good, if the art is stuck, it is not art.

Consistency two is intention. Purpose and ritualization. Repeat, repeat, repeat. We make actions into rituals by including strong intention for their effect. Intention is everything. Intention is motion, and facilitates transformation. Awareness without intention is inaction, the opposite of activism. Intention without awareness is ignorance, the folly of nationalist mobs. Awareness with intention allows for adaptability, compassion, action, motion, and transformation. To resist change is to suffer. To be aware of change and flow with it is to have power over the course of the river. This is what is necessary in producing, designing, directing, or performing in the theatre. Through our work in repetitively assigning intentions to actions, such as the pre and post scene rituals in Gruesome, and our abstract communications in 4.48 Psychosis, we have experienced mindful creation of meaning.

Consistency three is Direct Experience. Without experiencing the phenomenology of the work, there is no way to fully communicate about it. It is not something which can be expounded through writing alone, and writing may not even be the best medium to study theatre and transformation. The experience of reading about the work and living through the work is essentially different, but peripherally related. As Petra Kuppers (2014) acknowledges in her classroom somatic work, ”...
the written work is not enough. In order to understand and feel our way into the somatic, we need to engage in exercise work, observing our own breath, and watch each other breathe” (p. 185). We hope that this writing has inspired readers to attempt a direct connection to the work, or to pay a little more attention to their direct perception of reality. We hope the meditative techniques listed in the appendix will be helpful to other practitioners should they choose to experiment with them, and we hope that we ourselves have gained a little insight into what we are becoming through the practice and writing of this. As Playwright John Patrick Shanley (1992) so simply puts it, “There is no illusion. It is all the same thing. Acting is the same as (play)writing” (p. 7).

Future Studies. Finding the Purpose.

Moving forward with this work, I think it would be useful to experiment outside of the typical time frames imposed by institutional theatre. We have attempted and experienced a transformed sense of time through a necessary pressure of time constraint; it would be revealing to see what happens in the opposite situation, when there is no projection of an end to the process, since we do not have the power to upset the ingrained concepts of time as they exist in our culture. When Grotowski conducted his Laboratory Theatre, his most fruitful findings, sometimes
miracles as he called them, were born out of an extremely long explorative process.

In the 5 or less week model of the American theatre, many potential discoveries are cut short simply due to our conception of the pressure of time. I would like to work on a show with no projected opening date, and consistent meeting times. This might be very hard to do in this country, where arts are not subsidized. Perhaps if I were to conduct this work in America I would need to find Grotowski’s (1968) ideal group “A few madmen with nothing to lose who aren’t afraid of hard work” [sic] (p. 50).

Appendix:

A

Sitting instructions:

1) Sit straight on the floor or a chair, back straight, chest open, eyes forward.

2) Take several deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth.

3) As you breathe, feel the rise and fall of the whole body being moved by the lungs.

4) Allow your peripheral vision to come into your awareness.

5) Allow sounds near and far to come into your awareness.
6) Allow your skin senses to come into your awareness. (Cold, heat, tense, relaxed, itchy, etc.).

7) Notice your thoughts coming into being and passing out of being. Let them come. Let them go. Don’t grasp at them, don’t expand upon them.

8) Simply note everything you notice as it arises and passes. (Sounds, Thoughts, Feelings, Distractions, Emotions).

B

4.48 Psychosis

In early 2015, I directed a play by Sarah Kane called 4.48 Psychosis. Sarah Kane didn’t know it at the time of writing, but her scripts were immaculately conducive to Antonin Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty, robust with experimentation of form and transformation of space. The script of 4.48 has very little indication of which text refers to stage direction, how many people are in each scene, or even what the plot is. In approaching this play I enlisted 10 actors to discover our theatrical manifestation of this text. In order to handle the unrecognizable form of the play script, I thrust the team into explorations of expression that were new to all of us.

In early rehearsals, I arranged the cast into different partnerships and tasked them with communicating the text or their emotional reactions to it into an
unknown form of expression. These expressions ranged from physical-metaphorical dance-theater pieces, to simple topographical rearrangement of furniture, to expressive back massage, to communication strictly through exhalations and inhalations or sounds and percussion, and more. What we ended up with was an environment in which any expression was equally valid insofar as it transferred something tangible (feeling, thought, emotion, physical object) from the performers to the audience or between performers. The Web of Acting was highly personalized and expanded for each ensemble member of this piece, and we eventually built a mutual trust and diligence in exploring moments that ebbed and flowed. The show was never the same twice, but it was always a journey that fully included the spectators.

To facilitate this trust between actors and creativity with forms, I taught several meditation techniques, beginning rehearsal with a group meditation, and a space for anyone to share particularly imperative thoughts or feelings with the group. The script itself was full of darkness and violence, and we were able to deftly navigate its pathways by cultivating a group intention of healing and compassion. For us and the audience, the performance was more of an exorcism than a possession, reforming relationships with daemons and darkness, recontextualizing the fear of life and death, purging and creating space. On occasion throughout the
process, there was frustration when we weren’t able to ground our novel experimentation with our relation to known forms. This was a learning experience, and continued to show me that acting is a Web and not a linear progression with one correct method of approach.

Artaud’s book, *The Theater and its Double*, was a foundational text for me in the journey of this show, offering a constant reminder to go toward the unknown, to release from what I thought I knew in order to discover new expressions and forms, to release from forms once we had established them and continually re-arrange our components for a deeper and more total experience. We had audience seated in-the-round, facing outward, in a long, rectangular, enclosed, carpeted room with very little reverb. We built crossover booths out of PVC pipe and black curtain on the extreme ends of the rectangle, which covered all four corners. Action was sometimes played in all areas of the room at once, sometimes framed into a prosce-nium platform on one end, sometimes ushered into the center of the circle, and sometimes in the laps of the audience. Sound and lights were used in a score of textural intensities which emphasized emotional qualities, feelings, and unique semiotics which were created through the process. The mediums through which we worked were multifarious, inspired heavily by suggestions in Artaud’s two manifesto’s of Cruelty. Artaud’s Cruelty refers not to an enjoyment in causing pain, but
to a rigor, an immediacy, an engagement which is imperative to survival. We incorporated film on a small box TV, live music, recorded sound, practical lighting effects through flashlights, multiple languages spoken and written, gifts given to audience members in one-on-one experiences, chairs ripped away from the audience and the spatial focus of the room rearranged, sculptures brought out as sacrifices, interpretative dance, movement theatre, socio-realistic theatre, mantras, harmonized musical theatre, hambone, massage, jump scares and smell design. The sensual journey (some would say ordeal) made use of as many forms as we could discover through the process, and opened new paths for both performers and audience members to participate in a journey together.

C

UBU RAW: A Topography in Constant Flux. Becoming-Ensemble

We are currently in workshops and rehearsals for the play Ubu Roi by Alfredy Jarry, an absurd satire on high art and power dynamics through a lens of monarchal culture. Our style is highly physical and very low-tech, reminiscent of El Teatro Campesino’s Rasquachi concept and Jerzy Grotowski’s Theatre of Poverty. Our show is designed for adaptability, to be constantly transforming, in that we have no consistent performance or rehearsal space other than what we define and
find for ourselves, much like a flash mob, or a Commedia Dell’arte troupe. In result of this, we have developed a key that is best compared to musical notation, which tells the musician the pitch of their vibration and perhaps several other quality suggestions, but not where or exactly how to play it. We have entrances and exits marked “within audience” or “separate of audience” or “from far away” depending on where the audience may be in any iteration. We have leaders of different movements who determine where to lead other actors onstage, depending on each performance space. We even have a series of suggestions for how scenes may play out depending on different venue circumstances. Much is in the hands of the actors and the ensemble to collectively decide during performance.

In order to cultivate the trust and vocabulary necessary for a show of this nature to work, we have been running a series of highly physical workshops with the cast. These workshops include counterbalance, weight sharing, non-verbal communication, props of no discernible purpose, and sometimes musical improv. In this freeform play with great attention, the ensemble has become a deeply connected rhizome which can adapt to almost any situation. We have an adaptable ensemble in which everyone knows the scenes, and can do the lines, and a shifting map determining who plays which parts depending on which combination of actors are present on any given day.
In workshop we explore the viewpoints of spatial awareness and include many group-mind building exercises I have picked up from Annie Loui of Counterbalance Theatre, and other improv teachers. The group-mind allows for large movement of bodies onstage with great awareness to rhythm.

I have never applied the improvisational model so heavily to spoken and written text with any degree of success but somehow it is working to our benefit this time. The ensemble is constantly Becoming-Ubu, who is the character at the center of action, and filling in different holes depending on who is present. Many different actors may play the same parts and through the mindful ensemble physicalization we arrive each day at a more consistent version of those characters, which are influenced by each person who plays them. The group defines the characters, and as the characters become more defined, their imaginary boundaries seem to influence the actors that are playing them more and more. The longer we work together, the more the individual haecceities of the actors combine to form the territory of the ensemble, which is infinitely more powerful and affective.

D

Juliet and Romeo
In early 2016 I directed a production of Romeo and Juliet. Our cast were students connected through the theatre department of UC Irvine. In this production we worked in transforming performance space, largely through design elements. Our performance space was a simple wood floor studio in which all theatre students of UCI take voice and acting classes. There are bright fluorescents, blue mats to lay on the floor, and a large wall mirror. With the knowledge that most of our audience would be part of the UCI community, and that they would be accustomed to a specific utilization of that particular studio, we decided to shift known items around in a repurposing of the studio. We sat the audience in 3/4 round, using all of the blue floor mats stood up on end to create a wall around the backs of the audience seating. We repurposed a riser from another theatre space, which is typically used for seating and which we framed with fabrics made to look like curtains, as an occasional proscenium focal point. We covered the mirror wall except for the extreme ends which were used for light reflection. We installed our own lighting grid using light trees, tension cables, tall ladders, and clip lights clipped onto the tops of the blue mats, hooked on the walls, and open doors. We installed speakers underneath the seats. Every aspect of our defined “performance space” was something that nobody had ever seen in this room before, and was built out of objects that mostly already existed in the room. Our staging and acting style was
actually very minimal and reminiscent of what might be an Elizabethan style, how-
ever the immersive set and proximity to the action allowed many audience to relate
to an old hat story in a novel, experiential way. We brought attention to our rela-
tionship with the space, and an intention to draw the audience in with us, and we
created an experience of transformation, a sort of in-between area in which the
passage of time, life and death, and magical phonation seemed to flow creek-like
through the circle.

Gruesome Playground Injuries, Rehearsal Exercises and Rituals

Pre-rehearsal Warmups/Focus rituals/Mindfulness Practices:

Communal breath


Physical Trust/Weight Sharing
1) Clasp hands. Sit back. Allow the mutual tension between your hands to help you hold onto something as you both sit down. Stand back up, using the others hand to pull against.

2) Stand behind your partner, place your hands on their upper back. Slowly lower them down at an angle while they remain rigid like a board. Bring them back up. Use other points of contact to lower them, shoulder, back, head.

3) Palm to palm, slightly push against your partner. With mutual pressure, allow your hands to move wherever they want to go. Allow the motion to transfer into other areas of your body, maintaining mutual pressure wherever you make contact with your partner.

**Body Scan**

Breathe. Starting at the top of your head, scan down through your body. Notice areas of discomfort, relaxation, heat, cold, itchiness, or anything else. Don’t judge the sensations, just feel them. Be curious about how they feel.

**Hand Magnetism**

Palms on top or below your partner’s palms, touching. Feel the physical connection between your hands. Feel the warmth of your partner. VERY slowly pull away so
there is only the slightest distance between your hands and they aren’t touching.

Feel how the connection changes. Feel the space between your hands. Feel electricity jumping between your finger tips. VERY Slowly pull even farther and farther apart, noticing how the space changes each moment until you cannot feel your partner anymore.

**Standing Meditation**

Standing, feel your feet press into the ground. Breathe. Feel how your weight distributes between your heels, the sides of your feet, and the balls of your feet. Feel your head strung up as if by a string. Body scan. Watch your breath, don’t try to control it. Feel the small space of time after an out breath before inhaling and after an in breath before exhaling. Open your eyes, allow your peripheral vision to become part of your awareness. Allow sounds from all around to come into your awareness. When your vision focuses on something, try to see the middle of it rather than its edges. When your hearing becomes focused on something, try not to visualize what or where it is. Visualize blue fire rising from the floor to your head, covering your body, and filling you with life and energy. We would do this medita-
tion standing so as to not fall prey to the sleepiness that comes of certain lying
down meditations.

**Tong-Len Healing**

Close your eyes. Breathe. Envision someone you know who is suffering. Visualize
them in as much detail as possible, their clothes, hair, skin texture, posture etc. See
how their suffering affects their body. On an in breath, breathe in their suffering,
picturing it coming from them and into you as black mist. Hold their suffering in
your body, feeling the weight of it. Transform the black mist of their suffering with-
in your body into green healing light. Breathe out the green healing light into their
body. Notice how their body changes. Repeat until they have been healed. Go into
their body and feel them in total health and joy. Afterward, stand, brush off excess
residual energy from your body with your hands in three clean strokes top to bot-
tom. This was repeated with visualizations of the actors’ characters and each other.

**Permission and Admittance**

Look your partner in the eye. Make them a promise. Mean it. Say to them, “I can
hurt you.” The partner will hear this and grant permission by saying, “You can hurt
me.” Your partner will then repeat this process to you. Say to them, “I can heal you.”
They will accept with, “You can heal me.” They will repeat this to you. Take it in,
and accept. Say to them, “I can love you.” Hear them say it back. Say to them, “I can save you.” Hear it back. Repeat with any phrases wherein the actors are blocked from affecting their partner in such a way, using whatever verb applies. Grant permission to affect each other within the process of acting. Close with a statement of assurance and support such as “I am here for you,” or “I will catch you if you fall.” A hug is always nice to end with as well.

Never-Ending Sales Pitch

Sit in a chair across from your partner. The first partner must continually try to pitch the idea of an imaginary object as a product for sale. They are not allowed to stop talking, there is to be no dead air. The other partner must agree wholeheartedly to every word, yes, yes, yes. As soon as the second partner has any idea about the product, they must interrupt and share their idea. Once interrupted, the roles switch, second partner must not stop talking and first partner must not stop agreeing. Switch roles at any time someone has any idea about the product. This was a favorite of our actor, Jesus.
Physical/Vocal/Emotional/Breath Exercises:

Laban Movement/Vocal Efforts

For a full description of Laban efforts refer to the work of Rudolf Laban. In the vocal efforts workshop, we introduce actors to the movements one by one while walking around the room. The only difference is that once they have situated into the effort, they begin to say hello to each other in the feeling they are getting from the physicality. We don’t name the efforts until they have sufficiently explored physical/vocal associations made by the parameters of the efforts.

Viewpoints

Refer to Anne Bogart’s Viewpoints Book for more details. We primarily played with viewpoints of time, space, and architecture. Architecture was the most helpful.

Emotional Extremes/Emotional Scales/Magic Box/Emotional Mirroring

Reach into an invisible box. Within the box you feel something that makes you happy. Show us what is in the box through your emotional reaction to it. No words. The thing in the box shifts and you transition through the other 5 basic human emotions of anger, fear, disgust, sorrow, and wonder. Transition through emotions in any order at any speed, the most important thing is that the observer can tell which
emotion you are in. Don’t worry about feeling the emotion so much as embodying it in a way that it is clear to any watching what emotion it is.

Practice 1-10 scales in intensities of showing emotion. For instance, 5/10 angry, 8/10 angry, full 10/10 angry, 1/10 angry, 5 happy, 3 disgust, 7 wonder. Director transitions scale degrees and emotions at will. Actors respond.

Stand in a group. One person shifts into an emotion, everyone follows. Retain eye contact constantly. At some point the emotion shifts, and everyone follows. Eventually, nobody should be leading and everybody should be following the natural switches.

**Contact Improv**

Start palm to palm. Don’t try to get your partner to do anything, just respond to any little motion you feel from. Respond with a reactive motion, even if its small. Continually respond. It has already begun since before you started. Allow the motion to go where it wants, neither person leading it, both people listening and following. Allow the palms to come apart and back together as necessary. Allow the rest of your body to follow the motion through. Allow the palms to transition into shoulders, into back, into any part of the body touching the other body. Give and take weight as you feel comfortable.
Punch the Hand/Go for a Run

Assume horse stance. Very low horse stance. Punch my hand continuously for 100 punches, then do 5 laps around the room. Offer an incentive for faster lap running. Immediately after finishing the laps, play a scene from the play. This exercise is adapted from Suzuki’s work with bodies in crisis.

Vocal Tempo/Volume/Pitch Scales

Partner 1 indicates a scale with their hand. One end is really fast, the other really slow. Partner 2 speaks text, speeding or slowing depending on where Partner 1’s hand goes. Repeat with volume, one end of the scale being loud and the other quiet. Repeat with pitch, one end being high the other being low. Try to isolate pitch from volume from speed, for instance, don’t talk lower when talking slower, don’t talk louder when going higher or faster.

E3

Character Explorations:

Portal Work

Lie down with your eyes closed. Feel the weight of your body supported by the floor. Breathe. Picture in your mind’s eye, a large body mirror floating in the air
above you. In this mirror, see your character. Be curious, examine everything about
them. What are they wearing? What does their skin look like? What expression is
on their face? Where do they have hair? Where do they have scars? What color are
their eyes? Are they dirty or clean? Are there wrinkles? Do they smell a certain way?
What kind of shoes are they wearing? Be as detailed as possible. Then slowly pic-
ture the mirror float down and morph to the size of your body. Picture the mirror
encapsulating you, and your character’s body layering over you like paint. Open
your eyes, you are now your character, and it is 6am and you are just waking up. Ex-
plore. It is now 7am. It is now 8am. It is now 9am…etc. This narration continues
hour by hour until the characters are all asleep. We repeated this 7 times for each
age portrayed by the characters of Doug and Kayleen in the show. Each hour = 1
min of exploring the space and the imaginal world of the character’s lives.

Viewpoints of Age

A similar version of this mirror exercise was done but instead of progressing a full
day hour by hour, we progressed year by year from age 5-40. 1 year=1 minute. We
would return to this in later rehearsals and make larger jumps in 3 year increments,
and then 5 year increments, working from fine detail to larger strokes. In still later
rehearsals we would jump between ages at random while exploring the space, per-

58
forming random physical tasks, such as exercising, working, relaxing, studying, 
brushing teeth, etc.

- Observation. Story share. Prejudice share.

In our table work we shared many stories about people personally known to us who 
we associate with different age groups. It was fruitful to see where our prejudices 
lay in describing groups further away from our own ages. There were often clear 
stereotypes about the youngest and oldest ages, and less clear stereotypes about 
middle ages. It was relieving to see that we all have our own sets of prejudices as 
well as communal ones. We watched videos of groups of different people and tried 
to critically observe their movement and interaction habits.

E4

**Physical rituals into characters:**

**End of Scene Rituals**

S1 (8): Doug and Kayleen grasp hands and fall away from each other; then 
pull back toward each other ending in a very close face to face encounter. Breathe. 
Transition.
-S3 (13): Doug and Kayleen stand shoulder to shoulder, facing opposite directions. They hold one hand, and spin in a half circle. Breathe. Transition.

-S5 (18): Doug and Kayleen simply stand up and hug each other. Breathe. Transition.

-S7 (23): Doug comes running on, grabbing Kayleen’s hand and running past her. Kayleen counterbalances by pulling the other way and leads Doug in several circles around her like a comet in orbit, eventually letting him go Upstage. Breathe. Transition.

-S2 (23): Both characters put a hand out and search for each other without seeing each other, until almost connecting. Breathe. Transition.

-S4 (28): Kayleen walks the length of Doug’s gurney, brushing along his body with her hand, finally brushing over his face. A second later, Doug opens his eyes and gets up, in a fog, trying to remember what he was doing or where he is. Breathe. Transition.

-S6 (33): Doug and Kayleen put their hands up, reaching out toward each other, but are pulled away in opposite direction and then spun in a circle. Breathe. Transition.
End of show: The cast would run back to the dressing room in their underwear every night as a closing ritual. It was fun, dispersion, shocking temperature change, togetherness. On closing night, they walked the undie run. A sort of funeral procession for the show’s run at UCSC.

In rehearsals the cast would brush off the energy of their characters after the communal breath, before transitioning, much like the end of the Tong-Len meditation (described above). By performance we had condensed this intention into the communal breath without including the extra hand motion.

Communal Breaths Before Scene Titles

At the end of each transition, the actors would come front and center, take a breath together, and speak the current age of their characters and title of the scene they were about to play.

Into Scene Rituals

-S1 (8): Actors would play tag or hot hands or some form of childish game backstage before starting the first scene.
- S3 (13): Doug would pinch and tease Kayleen in the wings before entering. She would hit his hands away.

- S5 (18): Doug would flagellate himself and exhale sharp breaths as well as saliva as if he were getting punched. Kayleen would cocoon herself into her arms and protect herself and rock slightly.

- S7 (23): Kayleen would march from Upstage to Downstage in a funeral procession. Dougie would shake his nervous energy out through his hands.

- S2 (23): Doug would experience tension writhing up and down his entire body, eventually exploding into his eye and knocking him backward. Kayleen would pace in the wings, rubbing her eyes to wake herself, and traveling a lot of distance very fast.

- S4 (28): Doug would violently shake and then a rigid tension would strike his whole body and float him into a coma. Kayleen would walk backward. As the transition sound got louder, she would come more into realization of Doug’s situation.

- S6 (33): Doug would search high and low for Kayleen. Kayleen would wring her hands around her viscera as if performing seppuku with a box cutter.
Kayleen would twist her hands straight out in front of her and turn them upside down, then untwist them as if sifting through thick liquid to bring a precious stone toward her. Doug would grab energy and collect it right above his hips, allowing it to ground him for a moment before entering.

-In S3 Dougie has a vomiting ritual where he cocks back his head and makes terrible noises.

**End of Day Closing Rituals**

-Embraces - physical embraces to express warmth and gratitude.

-Gratitude - expressing thanks for the work put in each day.

-Intention for next day - expression what to look forward to next time.

-Affirmation of homework - If work needed to be done before the next meeting, it would be clarified and reiterated at the end of the night.

**Breathing with Designers/As a Designer**
I also designed sound for *Gruesome Playground Injuries* and spent several long nights aside our wonderful lighting designer Charlotte. Much of the sound design was subsonic - designed to be felt on a vibrational level rather than heard and interpreted. After hours of listening to extremely low volume sound cues on repeat, I would experience ear fatigue and my attention would wane, I would become lethargic and sleepy, and I would not be able to make adequate changes to the design. I set up a practice for myself of taking breaks to close my eyes, breathe, unfocus from any particular stimuli and just let my attention rest. I would then methodically tune back into my senses in order to perceive the subtle changes I was programming. I encouraged Charlotte to practice this with me as well, particularly when she was having trouble making a complicated or subtle decision. I also encouraged her to close her eyes and take a mindful breath when unable to decide between a color change, and upon opening them, pay attention to her gut reactions. These are small adjustments, but I believe they helped in the long run to give us a greater awareness of the impact of our design choices. Occasionally Charlotte and I would stop together, travel to each other and take a communal breath together. The small community helped push us through the isolated dark nights in the theatre with more fulfillment.
F

Glossary

Transformation - That is the question

Mindfulness - An awareness of mind. An attentive watching of the shape and contents of the mind. A consciousness of where the attention is focused. Different from inner monologue.

Rhizome - a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals. A map with no distinct entry or exit point. A system of interconnections.

Direct Perception - The instantaneous experience of stimuli being perceived by the senses.

Conceptual world - The layer of experience which depends upon mutually agreed upon forms, names, definitions, words, and aesthetics. The meaning the mind projects onto perceptions. The plane of ego.

Semantics - The meanings of words.

Ritual - a ceremony consisting of a series of actions done in order to bring about an affect

Territorialization - the act of organizing as a territory.
Haecceity - that property or quality of a thing by virtue of which it is unique or describable as “this (one).”

Beginner’s Mind - having an attitude of openness, eagerness, and lack of preconceptions when studying a subject, even when studying at an advanced level, just as a beginner would.

Line of Flight - an operator which transcends the actual and ascends to the virtual


G

Audience Surveys.

To appease the social scientists, we created a spectator survey. Here are some charts.

Of course the results are too meager to be published in any reputable scientific journal, and not varied enough to draw any real statistical correlations, but the personal responses and interview responses may be slightly revealing. I think the most consistent affect which the surveys point to is that the audience was trained to take communal breaths with us before each scene. One person responded that this felt over dramatized and forced, but there will always be people who are uncomfortable following direction, unconscious or otherwise. In the question about favorite or
least favorite scenes, there was a WIDE variety of answers covering almost every scene. Perhaps this speaks first to the ability of the play to relate to a wide audience, perhaps even cross-generational, and second to the multitude of moments within our drama which caught focus and brought spectators to their own awareness of transformation. Often cited were moments of intense connection before a shift happened. These moments are like ocean waves, they happen again and again, and if we pay attention, we can ride with them, otherwise they drown us.

**Which scene was your favorite? Least favorite?**

Favorite was either when they were at their youngest or when they were 18! Least favorite was maybe when they were oldest, but even then I enjoyed it.

I loved the scene when they were eighteen. I thought it was the most distinct from the others, and it made me really wonder more about what happened between their 13 year-old selves and their 23 year-old selves. As someone in that transition, it made me think about my own life and how I will change before I turn 23. I do not have a least favorite entire scene, but I did not like the kiss at the funeral at all. I thought it did not fit and I did not believe it -- though I do acknowledge that is more on the playwright’s part.
I loved the 13 year old scene!!

First scene was my favorite. When they were 13 at the dance was really to my liking as well. I didn't like the last scene very much.

Loved the dance scene at 13 and the 18yr old scene. Great shift in that one. Did not like the last one.

Fav: funeral scene, LFav: coma scene

My favorite scene was when they were 18. I connected with that especially being an 18 year old female, and the threat of being sexually assaulted is always at the back of my mind. Because I’m that age and the actors are closest to that age as well, it felt very honest. My least favorite scene would have to be when Dougie was in a coma. I don’t know why but it didn’t feel very genuine.

My favorite scene was the bedroom scene (but the whole thing was amazing). My least favorite was the father’s funeral.

The nurses scene, both times

My favorite scene was the opening scene, where you got to see Kayleen and Doug connect as friends in an unusual way.

The whole scene in K’s room when they were 18 is my favorite, along with the other scene when the middle school dance was happening and they were in the clinic throwing up.
Favorite scene was either the school dance scene or the teenage one in the bedroom. Least favorite was the Zamboni scene.

Favorite: the in-between when they're transitioning from different ages, watching both actors dive into a different time and space. Least: wish the play had more shows for more people to watch such a moving piece.

My favorite when she comes to see him after he’s struck by lightning. It’s not my least favorite I don’t have one but just the ending of not knowing what happened.

My favorite scene was probably the scene after the wake, because of how it foreshadowed the future and moved the plot along, as well as having a nice set of stakes. My least favorite would be the middle school dance because it felt the least compelling and it kind of dragged on.

During which moments did you feel most connected to the world of the play? [14 responses]

When Dougie was upset by Kayleen (spelling?) being taken advantage of, when Kayleen put her hands on Dougie when he was unconscious, and when they were 13.
Each moment of healing and determination, each moment where a character broke from their shell and showed their true love and care for the other, and when Kayleen had to take a breathe alone.

Moments of heightened auditory elements were favourable.

During the stuff when they were younger.

Weirdly enough, during the cosine changes- hyper awareness of time and change Again, I was most connected to when they were 18. I even teared up a bit! I’m also friends with the actors and I felt like they both did an amazing job so I was very proud of them.

I felt most connected with the traumatic or dark moments of the play. They reflected my life a lot and contrasted well with the uplifting and lighthearted moments.

The play in totally almost completely mirrored my life, which was a very challenging and shocking thing to see.

Not sure

I was most connected in the scene when Doug was in a coma and Kayleen tried to use her touch to heal him.

I felt connected whenever the characters had trouble talking about their feelings or their troubles even to the person closest to them, because before they even got to put it in words I already felt it
When the two characters were engaged in dialogue, and especially when there was some background noise like the school dance scene. The silences going into the music of the next scene. When they were going in and out of transitions. Basically every time they had an intimate moment they had very good connection which kept me connected. I felt most connected to the play when the actors were most emotionally engaged with one another. Moments of great conflict or extreme closeness brought me in the most, especially because it was clear how the actors had bonded over the process.

Did you notice your breath changing at certain moments? Which moments?

The ending!! I had no idea when/where it would end.

I did not consciously notice a change.

I breathed when the actors breathed sometimes but only sometimes but also everyone is always breathing so

During their breaths together at the transitions. Love that a lot.

When the actors breathed together to begin and end the scene

I felt my breath changing at moments that felt very real, mainly during the scenes of the ages that I’ve lived thus far because I related a lot.
My breath stopped when the female bodied character had blood on her pants and I realized she had a problem with cutting. The guy had a very interesting response to seeing someone that he loved in enough pain to hurt themself. As someone who struggles with cutting I haven’t seen a person respond in that way. It was more up-lifting than I thought it would be.

The end when doug doesn’t want her to touch him.

I noticed my breath changing in moments with lots of confrontation between Kayleen and Doug, for example, her accusing him of not being there when he shows up at her parent’s funeral.

It must have been changing throughout but I only became aware of it when I teared up during the scene in K’s room when they were 18 and Doug was enraged at what K’s bf did to her.

Obviously the bridges between scenes and transitions. I felt these breaths, rather than being an actual moment of connection, were overemphasized, and the overactive physicality and loud music of the transitions very much took me out of the deep connection/emotion I felt during the scenes.

Yes. Hospital, Violets monologue.

I’m not sure but there were times when they finally were able to express how they felt that I did notice a change.
What was most engaging in the transitions between scenes?[15 responses]

Watching the actors help each other with transitions

I loved the moments where they danced to the music!

The warped sounds that affected Doug’s body

The music for sure. Also cute when they zipped each other up because they were like little dolls. So cute. But then she got mean. So I liked the transitions because she wasn't so bitchy.

See answer above. Also the music kept it fresh sometimes but also was kind of confusing for the theme and throughline of the play at other times. Jesus' dancing while changing was sick too haha

Watching them help each other into clothes, dancing to music

To be honest, at first the transitions were really cute but they started to feel longer and longer. I did like that Jesus was dancing a long to the music from time to time.

The music. I loved the music choices and it gave an upbeat break between emotionally challenging scenes.

Looking at what they are putting on and thinking what the next scene might be

I was most engaged in watching Jesus change the dramatic effects showing his character's wounds.
the interaction between the actors, because I wonder if they're interacting in char-
acter or simply as fellow actors.

It was original to see them change their clothes onstage and take on their new age,
especially when they helped each other get dressed. Otherwise, the transitions felt
to me a bit melodramatic and frantic.

The warping sound, watching Jesus prepare for the gruesome injury.

The music and them helping one another.

The performers' energy and general "business" during transitions was most engag-
ing; I distinctly remember Jesus bopping around to the music several times which
made the transitions easier to get through as an audience member. I felt extremely
distracted by the sound design during transitions.
References


Holecek, A. (2013). Dream Yoga: The Tibetan Path of Awakening Through Lucid
Dreaming[Audiobook].

H. (2006). Functional Classification, Genomic Organization, Putatively cis-
Acting Regulatory Elements, and Relationship to Quantitative Trait Loci, of
Sorghum Genes with Rhizome-Enriched Expression Plant Physiol. 142(3),
1148–1159. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1630734/


