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Acting Fundamentals TH131, Professor Lizzy Cooper Davis, PhD

Emerson College

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**Learning goals – What we’re working on:**

Connecting with cultural practices in our upbringing

Growing in our understanding of how cultural performative practices shape our theatremaking

Reflecting on where we come from and who we are as performers

Practicing of the sharing and receiving of theatrical offerings, in this case, gestures connected to cultural memory and words about who we are as performers

**Practices – What we’re working with:**

Conversation surrounding an excerpt from Tadashi Suzuki’s “On Acting” in *Culture is the Body*

Conversation about social gatherings in our upbringings

Movement-based theatrical practices: Viewpoints-based exploration of gesture and memory

Writing in response to our movement and sharing

**Desired outcomes – What we’re working towards:**

Individual and shared reflection on who we are and where we come from as performers

- Class discussion
- Sharing with partners and with the group of a devised gesture expressing our memories of a social gathering

Identification of what goes into our personal theatrical aesthetics in response to our performative, movement-based exploration

**Plan:**

Introductions (5 minutes)

- Introduce self, explain the goals for this session and what we’ll be doing (a conversation, a movement warmup, some movement-based work with gesture and memory, and identification of what goes into our personal aesthetic in light of cultural practices in our upbringing.)
- An ice-breaker question: Everyone shares their name and pronouns and “A food that is special to you because someone makes it for you.”
- What words wisdom can we learn about creativity from cooking?

Discussion of the Suzuki piece (10 minutes)

- What resonates with us? What are we curious about? What words of wisdom do we find in the text?

The words of wisdom I find: Suzuki highlights the specificity of actors and audiences *and* the unique spaces where theatre happens. Offer that today as we look at our cultural upbringings, it will be valuable to pay attention to the specific spaces where people interact.

Thinking about our cultural upbringing (5 minutes)

- Brainstorm a list of social gatherings that people did in our communities growing up. Are there performative aspects to these? “Later each of us will work with one of these cultural practices.”

Movement warm-up, Exploring the space together (10 minutes)

- Moving individually - seeing new things in the room, stretching our bodies, moving in ways that the space allows.
- Walk/Stop/Turn/Repeat. Invite students to move with this repertoire of four actions, explaining that other options will be layered in. Prompt the group to explore tempo and repetition. Prompt the group to discover the “group game” that is happening. Do they choose to join in? What is it like to play a different game?

Exploring memory and gesture (10 minutes)

- “Continue walking in the room. Choose a social gathering that we talked about earlier. What are you taking in with your senses? What do you remember? What movements? What feelings do you have? Create a gesture that expresses your feeling about this memory - could be abstract, could be literal.”
- Give two examples - one more literal, one more abstract.
- Share your gesture with someone, who will repeat it back, and then share with you. Repeat this process a couple times.

Checking in, circling up (5 minutes)

- What was this process of sharing and receiving like?

Writing (5 minutes)

- Students write three sentences with these prompts:  
I connect with...  
To me, performing is...  
I come from...

Sharing, circling up (8 minutes)

- Invite anyone from the group to share a sentence, a word, a moment of what they’ve written. “If someone says something that you resonate with, pay attention to that!”

\*Or

Assets Circle (4 minutes)

- Standing in a circle, individuals step in to voice a component of their cultural upbringing that they find is meaningful to them, beginning with the words “I come from...” or “To me, performing is...” Anyone for whom the statement is also true join them in the circle for a brief moment before everyone steps back to listen.

\*Bill Evans’ “Piece Peace” is good music for this moment.

A final gesture (2 minutes)

- Going around the circle, sharing a quick gesture that expresses a takeaway from their learning from the session.