

Internal Impulse: Breath

This is a loose course outline for a guided improvisation class that meets at least twice a week for four weeks. I have categorized the pool investigations into four possible headings to better organize the teaching of a guided improve to a larger group. I intend to begin students with an internal focus of breath as the initiation for movement, leading to a more conscious external exploration of this concept. After a few sessions with these focuses the goal will be to integrate the members of the group into a contact improvisation focused on light touch, while keeping breath as the initiator of all movements and connections. The final stage of this exploration will be sessions of contact improvisation that incorporate a more deliberate manipulation of partnering, weight-sharing and movement. The following explorations were developed in a therapy pool with depths between 2 feet to 3.5 feet; exercises will need to be adapted for pools with greater depths.

At the end of each session I want the students to journal about their experiences, both for themselves to be more conscious of what really happened, and as a reference for me. Exploring each segment of this improve in two sessions should allow students to gain a full exploration of all the possibilities and really immerse themselves in the experience. Depending on the structure of the course I'm teaching, I think it would be very interesting to spend at least two sessions after this experience in a studio discovering how the movement of breath initiation could be continued without the aid of the water. Perhaps this is a section of a study in lightness? I'm unsure at the moment how I would fit this section of lessons into an improvisation/composition course. I believe that these water explorations will give students a better understanding of breath and the suspension in movement that it can create. As well as create a stronger understanding of their internal movement impulses. I believe the water creates a safe way for inexperienced students to explore the possibilities of partnering without the fear of being dropped, or dropping someone. The group work will also enhance a feeling of community and connection between students that will be useful for them in other parts of their coursework.

Individual Internal Investigation: Two sessions no shorter than 50 minutes

Begin at a depth you are comfortable kneeling in. Close your eyes and focus on your breath; the sensation of filling your lungs with air and then the compression of exhaling. Release any tension you're holding in your neck, shoulders, elbows, and wrists. Allow your body to be weightless, floating on the impulse of your breath. Visualize the expansion of your body and allow that impulse to go beyond your core and to breathe into your distal ends. Feel the water shift around you as you expand and contract with the breath; the water is supporting you. As your breath begins to infuse your body with movement allow yourself to follow the impulse; you do not have to stay on your knees. If your breath begins to take you somewhere, allow yourself to follow. At times the water may seem to take over and be pushing, or pulling you in a direction; that's alright, just be sure you continue to breathe with your movement. If you feel yourself begin to focus too much on making movement, bring yourself back to simply breathing. Notice how the smallest muscular pulse can shift your whole body as the water reacts to your presence. Allow yourself to yield to the will of the water and the impulse of your breath.

What would it be like if your lungs were in a different place in your body? How would you move if your left knee could breathe? Or the back of your neck? Choose one body part, or joint, and focus on breathing from that place. Spend a long time with this chosen body part, don't bounce around from one place to another, really explore all the options of breathing.

Individual External Investigation: Two sessions no shorter than 50 minutes

Begin as we have before: on your knees, with eyes closed and focused on breathing. As you begin to feel very centered and you no longer have to be conscious of your breath, open your eyes and maintain a soft focus on your surroundings. Breathe movement impulses into your distal ends and begin to explore how the breath-energy can move you from your center outward. You may have to pause and bring yourself back to breathing if you begin to feel lost in the movement. You may find

rocking, or reaching movements within your breathing. Or you may notice your limbs are reacting to the breath with a gathering motif. Just notice what your breath and the support of the water allow you to do with no judgment on the movement itself. Allow your movements to travel through the space and allow the pressure of the water to influence your movement choices.

Place yourself inside a giant bubble. The center of the bubble is connected to your core and as you move, the bubble shifts with you. No matter how much you reach for the circumference, it will always be just out of touch. Your only goal is to come into contact with the edges of your bubble. While you focus on attaining this goal, try to maintain your movement impulse from your breath.

You are still in your giant bubble, but now you are more interested in the space between you and the surface of your bubble. What is the texture of the water between you and the bubble's edge? How does the space inside your bubble support you, or hinder your movement? Spend some time exploring all of the options between you and your bubble's edge.

Group Light Contact Investigation: Two sessions no shorter than 50 minutes

Kneeling in a circle, as closely as possible, feel the light contact of the knees and the arms with the people on either side. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Feel your tailbone reaching down toward the floor as you kneel and breathe with each other. Allow your eyes to open with a soft focus, trying to be more aware of the breathing you feel and hear from your partners, than on the images you can see. As the breath impulse begins to softly move you, allow the contact that follows to happen. As the circle begins to disintegrate notice where the moments of light touch happen and how the breath influences these interactions. Do not use your hands to grab your partners, but rather find the weight shared when you rotate together in the water. As the breath makes you fall into one another, enjoy the brief contact before moving on with your breath. All interactions should be initiated by your breath. If you become isolated from the group, focus on your inner impulse of breath to move, you will eventually be re-incorporated. If you find yourself forcing movement, or partnering contact, stop and

close your eyes to re-center your focus on the breath. When interaction occurs, try to find the suspension of the breath within the movement. It may be necessary to restart this session a few times within one meeting period. The human impulse to come together is hard to resist when separation occurs. For a variation, have students start kneeling outward in the circle.

Group Strong Contact Investigation: Two sessions no shorter than 50 minutes

Begin kneeling in a circle, as we have before. Keep a soft gaze as you focus on breathing and the light touch of your companions. As the breath begins the movement and partnering, allow a more deliberate manipulation to occur. Still try to avoid the use of hands as the primary support, but explore the partnering possibilities the water allows. Movements of weight-sharing, scooping, pushing, supporting and pulling with feet, legs, arms. Try not to plan ahead, but truly let the impulse of breathing guide the experience. If you become separated, or you see someone else who has become separated, do not shift your focus. Maintain the breath initiation and allow yourself/the other person to be re-integrated naturally. Begin to play with levels as the group moves into the deeper water. Not just by going under the water, but by standing and falling, or pressing partners upward.