

Performative embodied identities: using acting and storytelling to explore identity and careers

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Abstract

During October 2021, Staffordshire University Department of Media, Performance and Communication hosted an intensive week for the DICO project. Looking at oral storytelling, narratology, acting and embodiment, participants explored how to use these techniques and methodologies in two ways. Firstly, as process, whereby these become enablers to reflect and explore past and present career stories, by creating a narrative around this, as well as imagining a future self. Secondly, as vehicles for product in their own right: to create a career story as an output using these forms. This chapter steps us through some of the key practices of that week and introduces the critical framework.

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1. *Embodiment, stories and acting*

At its very heart, the art of acting is the art of embodiment. Actors take the words from the page of a playwright, the ideas and themes contained within, and embody these in the creation of a character that makes actable sense. Embodiment can take place implicitly (where we are not always aware of the psychological and physical shifts that take place as a result of a rehearsal process) or explicitly (where an actor can pinpoint how and what is happening at any given moment). In reality, it is a mixture of the two. By the end of a three or four-week rehearsal period, a character is created by merging the self of the actor with the given circumstances of the world of the play, and presented to an expectant audience. Rehearsal is thereby «a[n ongoing] process of embodiment»¹, to construct the appropriate characterisation where «words should be spontaneous utterances that only they could say at that moment»². Acting coach Dymphna Callery suggests that «to truly understand a play is to discover it through embodiment»³. Therefore, a rehearsal process is «not a linear development»⁴ as embodiment is not a logical, linear process.

So, what can taking elements of acting methodologies inform us of in the creation of career stories? This chapter steps the reader through the core elements of a week's intensive residential at Staffordshire University in 2021, with Robert Marsden, a theatre director by trade and associate professor in acting and directing, Nicola Herd, lecturer in movement and embodied practice, and storyteller Maria Buckley Whatton. The residency explored how acting and storytelling techniques can be used as a tool to both reflect and articulate career journeys, as well as become a form to express these. Returning to Norrthon's quote above, the residency placed a form to the non-linear process of embodiment. As Kate Rossmannith states, there is a «physical manifestation of years of professional theatre experience involving very practical knowledge»⁵.

The same principle applies with career stories, where the body has encoded the experience of interviews, career applications, successes and failures that then manifest themselves in our psycho-physical⁶ behaviours. Returning to the acting process, the merging of the actor and their character informs the embodiment process, and therefore experiencing relates to marrying the inner life of the role with an external physicality, which (in turn) is communicated to an audience.

¹ Norrthon 2019, p. 172.

² Alfreds, in Bessel 2019, p. 92.

³ Callery 2015, p. XI.

⁴ Norrthon 2019, p. 182.

⁵ Rossmannith 2003, p. 57.

⁶ Psycho-physicality aims to close the mind-body dualistic gap. What happens in our bodies affects us psychologically and vice-versa. Psycho-physical acting technique places this inter-relationship at the heart of the process.

The residency moved participants from a place of tacit to explicit understanding of embodiment. This chapter begins with Maria Whatton stepping us through some of her key storytelling techniques established with participants. Storytelling is at the heart of career stories, as well as theatre-making, and the key principles can be applied to the content and form of articulating a career journey, as well as future hopes, needs and desires. This is followed by examining how acting and embodiment, building on the work of actor-trainer Michael Chekhov, can be used to explore how we might consider imagining ourselves into a future self. The final section explores how somatic movement practice can unlock creative potentials and reflective journeys.

Firstly, to Maria Buckley Whatton and Storytelling.

2. *Storytelling: the impact of the opening and personal stories*

I am about to tell an audience a story about how I became a storyteller. It's a story about how my dad told us Irish myths and fairy tales at bedtime. I start with a question: *How do you fancy doing a bit of maths?*

I see the audience, shift in their seats, do a double take. Their expectation is that I'm a storyteller and they have settled themselves down to hear a story, not to do arithmetic. I say:

When I was a child, I lived in a small council house in Liverpool. There were three bedrooms. Ten of us lived there. My mum and dad and eight children. My parents had their own bedroom, so how many in the other two?

With immediate logic the audience respond with the answer: *There are four children in each bedroom.*

Yes, that would be correct if there weren't seven girls and one boy. My only brother had his own bedroom.

Now the audience have made the cognitive leap and worked out that seven of us girls had to share a room. There's a sense of surprise and laughter. The audience have a picture in their heads of the cramped conditions. Now they are possibly considering the kind of chaos that might ensue with seven girls sharing that small space. I validate their mathematical working out.

Yes, there were seven of us squeezed into one small bedroom – three bunkbeds and one single bed, and being one of the youngest I longed to make my way to that single bed which was always the domain of the oldest sister.

In this short exchange which takes no more than two minutes, a lot has happened between teller and audience, before I even get to the part where my

dad comes to the door of the bedroom and begins to tell the stories. The story telling relationship has actively begun between me the storyteller and the audience. We have quickly sparked a dialogue.

Over the last twenty-five years I have been telling stories in theatres, at festivals, in schools, prisons, and community settings. I work in the traditional role of an Irish Seanchaí. For hundreds of years the Seanchaí “storytellers of Ireland” would tell folklore, history, myth and legends that were not written down. It is an oral tradition. The tales were (and are) a source of information, entertainment, reflection. A community comes together to listen and interact.

There is no “fourth wall” in storytelling. The storyteller has a live relationship with the audience. Storytelling is an active art form about listening as much as it is about telling. It has an edge. There is no safety for the storyteller behind the illusion of theatre or the written page. The storyteller is present and needs to have a substantial compendium of stories to draw upon that will be the right stories for this particular audience. In that sense the storyteller also needs to have a good internal storytelling compass, to be able to “read” the room and be willing to let go of the stories they thought they might be telling and choose the stories that feel right for the audience that is sitting in front of them. If there is an extraneous noise, or someone wanders in who shouldn’t be there, or as has happened to me – a member of staff walks directly in front of you mid telling and starts scooping noisy chunks of coal into a scuttle for the fire, it is the storyteller who must have the skills to deal with it. In that moment the storyteller must choose to ignore it, incorporate it or diffuse the situation with a quick wit.

This improvisational, live element of the oral tradition differs to film, scripted theatre, novels and television; the oral tradition also stores some of the greatest secrets of the most effective ways to tell stories of any form. Storytelling has been a human tool of communication for thousands of years. We can only guess that alongside the ancient cave paintings in Chauvet and Lascaux, oral stories were told. Those narrative paintings are 30,000 years old. Our urge to tell stories and hear stories is innate. Over thousands of years, we have honed our ability to tell narratives about ourselves and the world we inhabit.

Stories compel attention. Great stories absorb the listener. A well told story makes the audience want to hear more and find out what happens next. In the simplest terms, all stories have a beginning, middle and an end – even if it does not feel like an end or is episodic so that one ending leads to another section of narrative. All stories have a shape, a structure, character/s, event/s, language. Each story presents the audience with the possibilities of meaning making. Each story has its own dance, its own rhythm, and its own music. A brilliant story will snag the audiences’ attention and have each individual audience member mentally identifying with the protagonist, rooting for them, no matter what that character’s flaws or heinous errors.

In my personal story about sharing a bedroom with my sisters, it is worth looking at what happens in that economic interaction between myself and the audience. I could choose to say: *I am from a large family, and we were poor – seven of us shared a bedroom.* Instead, I say: *we lived on a council estate* (which infers our class status) and I ask the audience to work out the mathematical configuration of family members per bedroom.

Why do I choose to open my story in this way? It is because I understand that the opening of any storytelling is crucial. The storyteller chooses how they are going to bring their audience across the threshold from inhabiting the real world into the world of the imagination. The storyteller is the host, the audience is being invited inside the story. The audience have an expectation that the teller is going to give them a satisfying evening. So how does the storyteller make that happen?

In the example I have given, I choose a participatory technique that involves the audience in solving a simple bit of arithmetic while simultaneously confounding their expectations. By getting the audience to work out the maths I am also subtly letting them know, that this story experience will not be a passive one. They will have to exercise their brains. I am asking them to be alert. I am establishing that there is no fourth wall, that there can be dialogue, and that this is a working relationship. Very soon they are going to be doing the work of hearing the story and imagining it. I must rely on their cognitive workings to make this story experience happen.

It is the storyteller's responsibility to consider how they will engage the audience in those first vital few minutes of the storytelling. Recently I watched a storytelling performance in which the storyteller wove significant incidents from his own life into an ancient tale about dreams. Ten minutes before the storyteller stepped onto the stage, a musician played a medley of well-known songs about dreams. It was fascinating to watch how the audience drifted into the auditorium unable to resist joining in, singing along while they found their way to their seats. By the time the storyteller began to speak, the audience had become part of the performance, the ideas about what dreams can mean flying from their tongues winged by the lyrics.

There are innumerable ways to transport the audience into your storytelling. It is important that the storyteller is aware of the choices about how to do this and to make decisions about what will be the most effective methods to engage their audience. The storyteller may choose to strike up a conversation with the audience, to sing or play music that enhances the atmosphere and mood. The storyteller may want to use a stock phrase such as "once upon a time..." an idiom so well known in our culture that those four words immediately introduce the expectation of a fairy or folk tale about to be told. They act as a superhighway to storyland.

In Caribbean countries the performance tradition of the call and response "crick" and "crack" binds the storyteller and audience together. This perfor-

mance tradition involves the audience throughout the storytelling. The teller says “crick” the audience respond “crack.” Audiences understand that a storytelling is participatory, they will need to be attentive. At any moment, the storyteller may shout “crick” to which they need to respond “crack.” This is no place to fall asleep. The leader is the storyteller, and the chorus the audience. They are both vital to the telling of the story.

When I run workshops on the “Art of Storytelling”, I set exercises for my groups to explore what I call “the invitation – into the house of story”.

Questions to ask yourself about the invitation stage of storytelling

How are you as the host/storyteller going to invite your audience into your house of story?

How do you want to engage your audience or reader quickly?

What methods will you use to help your audience cross the bridge from reality into suspending disbelief in the imagined world? (This could be with music, a riddle, call and response, posing a question that sparks a dialogue, percussion, a short poem, a song, or a traditional conventional phrase).

Before the story even begins how might we engage our audience? How might we metaphorically lay down the red carpet so that the listener will want to step over the threshold into the realm of story? How might we deliberately switch on the audience’s curiosity to hear more? How might we involve the audience so that the story becomes a shared experience from the outset? In the case of the career stories, how do we hook in a potential employer? This could be on a CV, in an interview, on the first page of the website or through a voice over narration on a career story.

Exercise: Writing your own personal story

Life is a story. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. When we look back over our own lives, we can identify noteworthy events that have happened. Each event began somewhere, it evolved and was completed in some sense.

Choosing a memory

- Stop for a few minutes and consider where you are in your life now and what you are doing in terms of your career path. You may be in a job, studying at college, or on a sabbatical, for example.
- Now trace back to the event, incident, moment in your life where that choice began.
- For me it was my dad standing in the doorway of our bedroom, where me and my sisters slept. Switching off the light he would tell stories. His voice flowed into the darkness. It comforted me, appealed to my creativity, informing my dreams. It was soothing. Those stories lit a fire for me about language, voice, the power of story.
- I always suggest to a group that they should allow their minds to settle on a memory that is positive and that they feel happy to share within a group.

- Spend ten minutes alone reflecting on that memory. If you find it difficult, I offer you a visualisation that may help.

The lift of memory

- Think about your current age now. Let us say 43 years old. If for example you think you were about 14 years old and you were in a languages class when you suddenly felt a surge of confidence as you spoke French. Everything clicked into place, and you realised you loved speaking a different language. You remember your teacher congratulating you and it felt good. You may even have thought – this is what I want to do in the future.
- To help you discover more about that moment imagine yourself in front of a lift. When the doors open, and you step inside, look at the numbers of the floors. Illuminated is 43 (your age now). The doors close. Inside the lift you watch the dial go from 43, 42, 41, 40 etc. as the lift descends.
- When the dial points to 14 the doors open. You can step out straight into that classroom at that moment you felt good speaking French. You have permission to have a good look around and notice the details – What is on the walls? What is the teacher wearing? Who else is in the room? How are you feeling – at the beginning, throughout the scene and at the end? Has anything changed?
- You are allowed to be very nosy and have a thorough inspection of the scene. You can listen to any conversations taking place. Note the weather – Is it sunny, hot? Is there rain streaming down the windows? Use your 5 senses: sight, sound, smell touch, taste.
- When you have spent a bit of time there, you can step back into the lift and watch the dial go upwards. It will stop at 43. You can step back out into your current space.

When you have thought about your memory in detail immediately begin to write. Do not over think it. Write down what you remember. Write what happened. Write spontaneously. This is not going to be marked. It is for you. If further details arise as you write, include them. Take twenty minutes to write as much as you can.

Telling the story memory

- Read back what you have written to yourself, then put your writing aside. Choose a partner you feel comfortable sharing with. You have five minutes each. One will listen, one will tell. Share your memory with a partner.
- Try to bear in mind where you decide to start the story, what happens in the main body of the narrative. How will you decide to end it?
- Take another ten minutes to ask each other any questions about what you have heard. These questions may prompt more memories and further detail to be added to your memory.

What happened when you told the story? What did you notice about your own narrative structure and/or your partners? How did it feel telling the story?

Finally, when we are constructing career stories, we may need to be extremely economical. You may only have a strapline to communicate who you are on your website's homepage, or a specific number of characters on your LinkedIn summary profile. Try the below exercise to unlock this.

Exercise: economic writing

Ernest Hemingway set a challenge for himself. We believe he authored a six-word story:

*For Sale:
Baby Shoes,
Never worn.*

The meaning of this story is open to interpretation. Has something terrible happened? Did the shoes simply not fit the baby? Is the baby's family in such dire poverty that they must get money by selling their own child's foot ware?

The point Hemingway makes is about brevity. Flash fiction also encompasses this economic form – a story in 50 words, 100 words or a maximum of 750 words.

Consider each stage of your career journey and write a six-word story for each. Here is an example from my own story:

Dad told Irish myths. Imagination soared.

3. *Acting and embodiment*

All acting is storytelling, and all storytellers embody, somatically encoding information from the page into the body. The work undertaken within the residency was taken from the spirit of Russian acting practitioner Michael Chekhov (1891-1955). Finishing his career in Hollywood in films such as *Spellbound* (1945) and *Rhapsody* (1954), he arrived there via his years exiled from post-Revolutionary Russia which included a spell heading up a seminal acting school in Dartington in England in the 1930s, as well as periods in New York, Lithuania and Germany amongst others. Nephew of the playwright Anton Chekhov, he began forming his practice in acting and directing at the Moscow Art Theatre, made famous by Konstantin Stanislavski, often colloquially referred to as the grandfather of contemporary acting practice in the West. Whilst at the Moscow Art Theatre, he became interested in psycho-physical acting techniques, whereby movement in the body affects the psychological states (try jiggling your leg up and down rapidly as you read this. Do you feel anxious at all? I do!) and vice-versa: what we think can affect what happens within the body.

Chekhov's work is built around 5 core pillars.

- I. Imagination: we imagine ourselves differently. That imagination can affect how we respond psycho-physically.
- II. A primarily external set of exercises that can cultivate a rich internal life.
- III. Psycho-physicality.
- IV. Energy: all of the work needs to be committed to with a physical energy.
- V. Radiation: it is not enough to internalise the work we do with the Chekhov technique; it needs to radiate from the self into the space and to other human beings.

The Cartesian dualistic binaries of inner and outer acting techniques and mind-body split has been scientifically proven to be false, yet many acting coaches and directors still talk in this way. Chekhov's work may advocate an external somatic approach to an exercise, but that is simply the way in: all acting is psycho-physical.

Through exploring future self through imaginary acting exercises rooted in Michael Chekhov's work, learners can use their bodies to aid in deep learning. Susan Hrach in her text *Minding Bodies* discusses the nature of active learning and how working through our bodies actually *rewards* learning: «we are built to learn through an integrated system, so that physical and emotional states bear on our perception and cognition»⁷. Contemporary pedagogic techniques prioritise active learning in a subject setting, so why should this not migrate and be applied to careers services when working with students?

The two exercises below are rooted in the work of Michael Chekhov. These are ways in which an individual can actively learn to tease out ideas, possibilities and future selves, as «knowledge is constructed through embodied experience»⁸. The first centres around imagining ourselves in different bodies.

Imaginary body exercise: future self

- Stand with your eyes open or closed; whatever works for you.
- Curl down through the spine slowly breathing as you do so⁹.
- Bend your knees somewhat to create “soft knees” and so you are dangling over from your torso, head relaxed and arms flopping.
- Slowly curl up, stacking vertebra upon vertebra until your head is that last thing to stack back. Ensure your eye line is on the horizon.

⁷ Hrach 2021, p. 15.

⁸ Hrach 2021, p. 17.

⁹ If curling up and down the spine is not possible, find your own adaptation. This might be breathing in and out; sitting up or down, or merely imagining curling up and down. Your own adjustments are fine.

- As you do this, and this is the key part of the exercise, imagine yourself at least twice your natural height.
- From your new imaginary body, take a walk around the space you are in. Explore the space, pick up objects, undertake some activity: drawing, reading, putting on a coat.
- Be aware of the people around you if there are any. How might you inter-act or acknowledge one another?
- How do you speak in your new body?
- Come to rest, curl down back through the spine again and curl back up again, returning to your normal body.
- Discuss or write down how you felt and what you experienced.
- Stand with your eyes open or closed again. We are going to repeat the exercise.
- Curl down through the spine slowly breathing as you do so.
- Check that you are not locking your knees again. Bend your knees somewhat to create “soft knees” and so you are dangling over from your torso, head relaxed and arms flopping.
- Slowly curl up, stacking vertebra upon vertebra until your head is that last thing to stack back. Remember to ensure your eye line is on the horizon.
- As you do this, now imagine yourself at least half your body size.
- From your new smaller imaginary body, take a walk around the space you are in again. Try and repeat the same exploration and the picking up of objects, undertaking the same activities.
- Be aware of the people around you if there are any. How do you now inter-act or acknowledge one another?
- How do you speak in your new body?
- Come to rest, curl down back through the spine again and curl back up again, returning to your normal body.
- Discuss or write down how you felt and what you experienced.
- Stand with your eyes open or closed again. We are going to repeat the exercise a third time, relating it to careers. The first two times were more of a “warming up” into the exercise.
- Curl down through the spine slowly breathing as you do so.
- Check that you are not locking your knees again. Bend your knees somewhat to create “soft knees” and so you are dangling over from your torso, head relaxed and arms flopping.
- Slowly curl up, stacking vertebra upon vertebra until your head is that last thing to stack back. Remember to ensure your eye line is on the horizon.
- As you do this, you curl up imagining yourself in a new body which is the person you imagine yourself to be in your future career. Imagine yourself in the body of a, say, a successful actor, film-maker or journalist.
- From your new imaginary body, take a walk around the space you are in again. Try and repeat the same exploration and the picking up of objects, undertaking the same activities
- Be aware of the people around you if there are any. How might you inter-act or acknowledge one another?
- How do you speak in your new body?
- Come to rest, curl down back through the spine again and curl back up again, returning to your normal body.

- Discuss or write down how you felt and what you experienced.
- Capture what the imagined future self looks and feels like. What do you need to do to move from your current to future self? What are the subject specific, person or employability skills that you are missing potentially? How might you go about achieving those in the short, mid and long term?
- Make an action plan of skills gaps and how you might move to future self.

Variation

- Stand with your eyes open.
- Imagine in front of you is your future self, in a career you want to achieve and successful in your role. Imagine yourself in the body of a, say, successful actor, film-maker or journalist. Take a walk around your future self.
- Stand behind them, and when you feel ready, imagine “stepping inside” your new body. Think of this as inhabiting a full-size body suit.
- From your new imaginary body, take a walk around the space you are in again. Picking up of objects is good here, as well as undertaking activities such as opening windows, drawing, writing, putting on a coat etcetera.
- Be aware of the people around you if there are any. How might you inter-act or acknowledge one another?
- How do you speak in your new body?
- Come to rest, step back out of your future self’s body.
- Discuss or write down how you felt and what you experienced.
- Capture what the imagined future self looks and feels like. What do you need to do to move from your current to future self? What are the subject specific, person or employability skills that you are missing potentially? How might you go about achieving those in the short, mid and long term?
- Make an action plan of skills gaps and how you might move to your future self.

Throughout all of the above, it is important, as Chekhov expert Sinead Rushe reminds us, that we «avoid forcing or stretching our physical body into purely external shapes, exaggerations or ‘cheap outer means’ [...]. The aim is to feel how the physiology of a particular body has a particular psychological resonance»¹⁰.

By taking students through the above exercise which embraces imaginative and psycho-physical approaches, as pedagogues we «can become better at acknowledging the relevance of students’ embodied experiences to their intellectual receptivity and at adopting a holistic view of the learning process»¹¹. Also, it’s simply a lot more fun to examine career stories in this way!

The next exercise brings together two further elements of the Chekhov technique: qualities and atmospheres, of which I work within the spirit of the original practices and relate it to career stories and possibilities of future self.

¹⁰ Rushe 2019, p. 208.

¹¹ Hrach 2021, p. 18.

Qualities and atmospheres exercise

- Write down a list of qualities that you'd like to work on professionally. Think of this as an audit of personal skills.
- For example, "I will pick confidence".
- Be present in the room you are in. Take the word or words you have in front of you and let them work on you.
- Allowing that word or words to lead you, fill the room with colours you personally associate with that word. Take your time with this, there's no need to rush. The space holds these colours and holds you within it also.
- Now fill the room with textures that resonate with the words and you.
- What about sounds, images, smells? Allow these to fill the space you are in, again, relate these to the words.
- Travel and move through the space; walk, stand, sit, lean.
- Now begin undertaking activities: pick up objects, or undertake drawing, reading, putting on a coat.
- All the time connect with the atmosphere of the room. Allow it to work on you and the qualities it is now triggering. Don't force anything, simply allow the atmospheres to work on you. As Lenard Petit states, «the reaction to the atmosphere is what we should be interested in»¹².
- Come to a rest.

Maybe undertake the next set of activities:

- Think through your experience. What was it? How did you feel? What did you think about it? What changed for you?
- Role play in the space on your own or with someone else in relation to a job interview. How might you use the imaginary atmosphere to inform how you enter a room, greet another person, sit and react?
- Think back to how you have undertaken an action. You may "shake hands, joyfully". In Chekhov's work, action and quality combine.

The above exercise should enable to participant to harness the power of the imagination. This is not "acting" the personal qualities you would like to embody, but begin, using imagination and psycho-physicality, to explore a performative approach to careers. As Mark Monday states, «atmosphere is not an actable thing for an actor. Rather, it is something to be imagined»¹³. In the case of the above exercise, taking this into a role play environment of a mock interview. All the above work is best captured by Dick McCaw, who has written extensively on acting and neuroscience:

Through our imagination we can transcend our immediate situation in time and space and think ourselves into the future or the past [...]. One of the actor's greatest gifts is their imagination¹⁴.

¹² Petit 2010, p. 81.

¹³ Monday 2017, p. 46.

¹⁴ McCaw 2020, p. 24.

4. *Somatic movement practice*

«The body is a gateway to that which is most meaningful to us»¹⁵.

Actors, like all human beings, have a complex relationship with their bodies. Often, they are disconnected, unaware of or even at odds with their bodies. We are all embodied beings, it is just a matter of to what extent, as in, how conscious we are of the felt, subjective experience of living within and from a body's perspective. A fundamental aspect of psycho-physical actor training navigates this terrain. Embodiment practices such as those drawn from somatic movement education help to consciously reawaken and reconnect with the unity of body/mind/spirit. Much of this is accomplished through the development of interoceptive listening and the restoring of trust in body and imagination.

From a neurobiological perspective, interoception «plays a role in emotional processing perception formation and identity»¹⁶. It is a term commonly used to describe listening to the «internal and innate functioning of the body, such as sense-streams from internal organs»¹⁷. Building on Stromsted's work with *Authentic Movement*, interoception is key to listening deeply to the internal impulses, movements and imagery arising in response to creative exploration, as it carries the unconscious or culturally hidden elements of an individual into conscious awareness¹⁸.

For an actor, cultivating interoceptive listening not only roots the practitioner in their body, but creates an “inner opening” from which they can allow an expression of present moment aliveness, uninhibited by culturalised restrictions and, instead, led by intuition¹⁹. Being led by intuition, offers access to something more than the status quo of a familiar identity, perhaps something forgotten or buried²⁰. As Bacon reminds us, this kind of listening leads to an “imaginal realm”, where

intellectual thinking turns from stone into putty as we find voices and beings that can be brought into the sensible world of academia, professional arts and also our personal lives²¹.

Somatic practice alongside creative exploration invites possibility and new knowledge to arise. Enabling a reframing of situations and obstacles, or in-

¹⁵ Walsh 2021, p. 5.

¹⁶ Deiterich-Hartwell 2017, p. 40.

¹⁷ Williamson 2009, p. 40.

¹⁸ Stromsted 2001.

¹⁹ Ang, Xin 2022, p. 214.

²⁰ Hillman 1997.

²¹ Bacon 2010, p. 63.

deed of identity, as well as our relationship to the world in which we live²². Reconnection to our sensorial nature reminds us that we are a part of nature interconnected with all living things. It is from this perspective that we might better know and feel our place in the world, from which to stand firm upon and share an identity rooted in a felt awareness of the importance of our relationship to our world in which we belong.

Somatic movement pioneer Emile Conrad reminds us that «movement is what we *are*, not something that we *do*»²³. In a similar way nature is what we are and through our moving bodies we can awaken our sensorial origins and invite interoception to track the rising seeds of our belonging and identity. Through creative reflection, meaning arises which can be integrated into a story telling structure. Often in the beginning stages of learning to move freely, listen interoceptively and express inner experience through drawing; images appear undulating, circular, primal, nature based, even archetypal (fig. 1). But it is the meaning found by the maker through the emergence of movement from body to paper, body to poem that the seeds of a new, sometimes very old, story begin to surface.

Upon verbal reflection and sharing of these expressions, ideas, thoughts and feelings began to arise: a beginning, a way in, an awakening of awareness and the seeds of a story or an idea. During this particular session, sound and music were used to support the awakening phase of the creative exploration process in which participants were guided into interoceptive listening before moving and expressing experience. The use of sound especially when made by the participant themselves is foundational to the Continuum somatic movement practice developed by Emily Conrad. The effect of the sounding work resonates in the imagery in figure 1. As Gintis points out

many of the movements in Continuum are water-like... allowing the body to mimic the flowing undulating, arced and curving patterns... waves, flows, drips suspensions, gushes, drifts and spiralling vortices²⁴.

From a continuum perspective, the body is a moving process one thread of a cosmic pulse, from within which there is space to know both the wave and ocean nature of identity. Time spent fostering a deeper connection to the magical, sensorial, inner world through somatic practice can uncover unknown and forgotten parts of self which might lead to creative discovery or a new story. Along with increased feelings of well-being, self-regulation, connection and belonging²⁵, the embodiment work of somatic practice provides an important contribution to an educational storytelling toolkit.

²² Halprin 2003.

²³ Gintis 2007, p. 16; original emphasis.

²⁴ Gintis 2007, p. 83.

²⁵ Williamson 2009.



Fig. 1. Participant's images from the embodiment session held in conjunction with the storytelling and acting workshops. The images emerged during the embodiment session (which was part of the week-long DICO event held at Staffordshire University)

Below is an offering of a starting point from which to begin exploring interoceptive listening; a skill that develops overtime. Feel free to play rhythmic or soothing music in the background or enjoy the spacious silence.

Interoceptive listening exercise

Arriving: Either alone or in a group, take a moment to notice where in the room you are drawn to be. Lie or sit on the ground/chair/cushion, again notice if there are sensations of being drawn to lie or sit and where in your body do you notice these sensations if you are noticing them at all – be easy with yourself if this is new, stay curious, open, awake.

Grounding: With eyes closed (if appropriate) bring your attention to whatever parts of your body are resting into the ground/chair. Can you feel the weight pouring like molten liquid into the earth or do you prefer to push against the earth, try both, try one, trust what feels right to you. Take the time you need to connect with the downward motion of gravity. Gravity is the Earth's way of letting you know that she wants you here.

Listening: Let your attention move into hearing with your ears, opening to the sounds in the room or your breath, can you imagine your ears growing, opening, reaching outwards to soak up the sounds, follow the sound or sounds that you enjoy the most.

Awakening: Gradually bring your attention to where your breath moves your body, place your hands where you sense movement, perhaps the belly or chest or both, notice any other sensations that arise in your awareness, heat, tingling, weight, pulse, colour, shape, texture.

If you don't feel your breath moving your body, that's okay. Try putting your hand on your belly and see what happens or take rest, return to listening as above and attend to the feeling of support from the ground against the parts that rest into it.

Moving: You can lay still or express any impulse to move, either from sensation, imagination or thought. You do not need to know why you are moving or understand what any of it means, just allow it to happen, trust that it is what your body needs and wants to do in this moment, which may of course be stillness. Continue to listen to what emerges for up to 10 minutes, you can stop at any time and move onto the next stage. Welcome all that arises for you, whether it be resistance or a desire to move, it is all useful information, almost like gathering data.

Expressing: Transition towards the paper and pens/chalks, staying with the feeling tone of what has been arising for you begin to move your hand/pen/chalk on the paper in whatever way feels right to you. Or if there is a strong image arising you can draw this. It can be helpful to ask the question "Who am I?" as you draw; but sometimes the best thing to do is to follow the movement, be the observer to the voice of your body as it passes over onto paper. When and if possible, let go of judging yourself and your creation, instead marvel at the colour, shapes and movement of your unfolding creation, honour all feelings by acknowledging them without judgement. If you are in a group and it feels comfortable for you, share your creations, with one another, noticing rather than analysing what you see. What speaks to you? What catches your eye? What moves you?

5. Conclusion

In the «Times Higher Education», 5th August 2021, Jack Grove explored the importance of storytelling in an article entitled *Turn a CV into a Compelling Tale*, moving from formulating lists, to constructing narratives around research outputs and, ultimately, career stories. Alexia Youknovsky, chief executive of the Paris based science consultancy company Agent Majuer is quoted in the article as saying «using vocabulary to describe emotions makes it possible to connect with the audience. Simply put, you should share your passion», countering the argument that scholars «balk at the idea of centring [...] in an emotional, even heartfelt personal story»²⁶.

Through our combined use of storytelling, acting methodology and somatic movement practice, awakening our imagination is at the core of a creative and embodied approach to drawing out past career narratives, and engaging with a potential future self.

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²⁶ Grove 2021, p. 18.

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