

A body mind (embodied) approach to narrowing the gab between actor and character.

The Research was presented as a keynote presentation and ended up having two focuspoints/two questions:

1:

Embodying character (for the stage); how might the physical and (almost) archetypical shapes and postures used in yoga act both as an anchor and as a catalyst in supporting the actor students' feeling-sense of being somebody other?

2.

How might I as the movement teacher narrow the gap between training, rehearsal and performance?



By: Tine Damborg

This presentation covers:

An Intro:

- Who am I? - you can't take the researcher out of the research!
- What do I mean by embodied? (some quick and 'dirty' statements - the neuroscience behind embodiment is complicated.)

Then:...

The 'models/structures' /methodologies that I used for my research:

- Yoga as a body-mind practice in actor training.
- “Strike a pose!” what happens in terms of perceiving and sensing yourself in a yoga shape particularly in terms of: proprioception, interoception, and exteroception.
- Using Kolb’s learning cycle as inspiration for building progress and class-structure.

And finally.....:

What did I do... and who was involved.

Plus findings...

Intro:

Who am I? - you can't take the researcher out of the research!

My background is in contemporary dance, and being a dancer is still very much a part of my identity even if, I these days work more often as a movement teacher and MD.

“When I move more ‘freely’ as one does in improvised dance, my movements are a way of thinking, and feeling, they become embodied thoughts - not interpretations or representations of my thoughts. When I dance I don’t think of my foot, shoulder, arm, or hands separately - I focus on communicating ‘the story’ with the whole of me.”

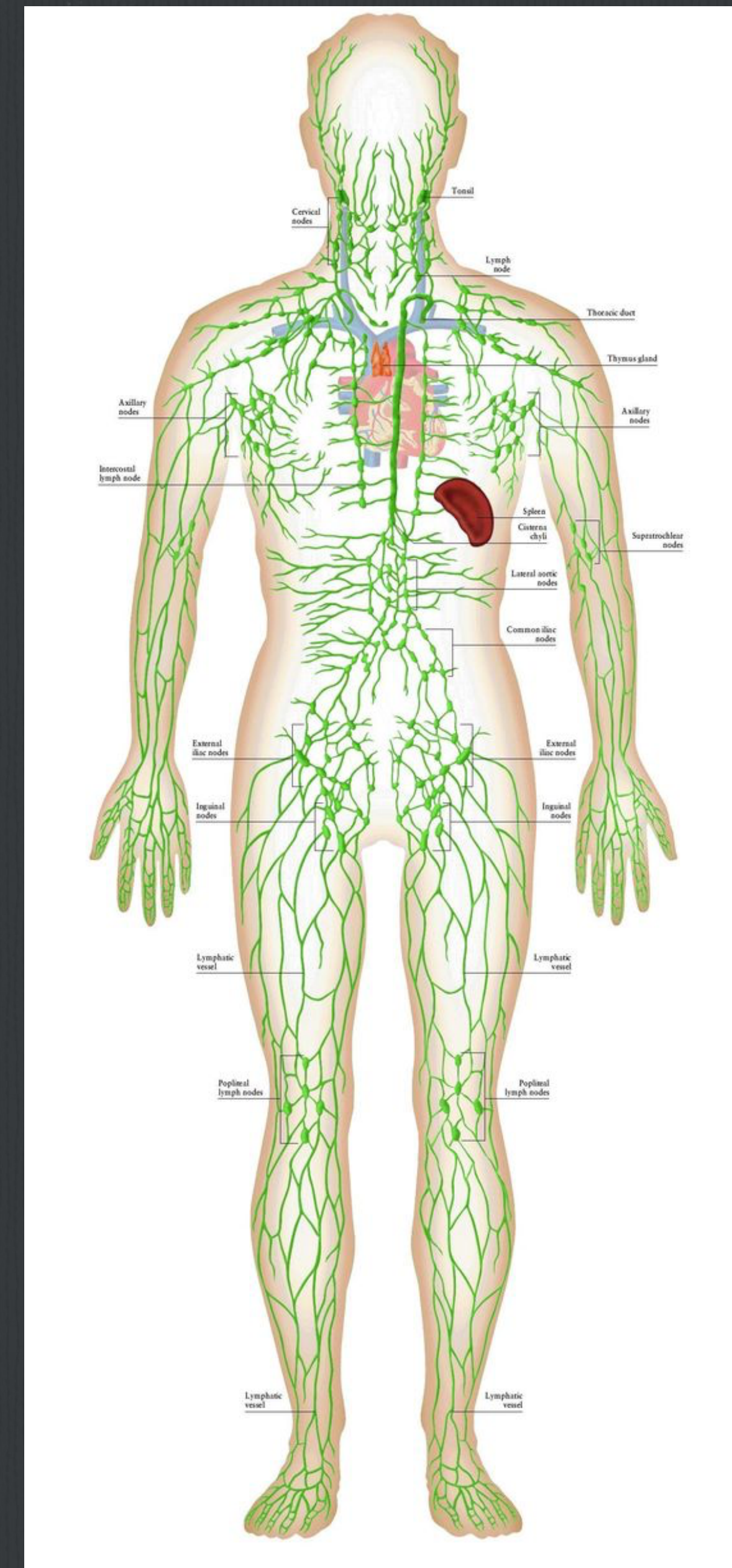
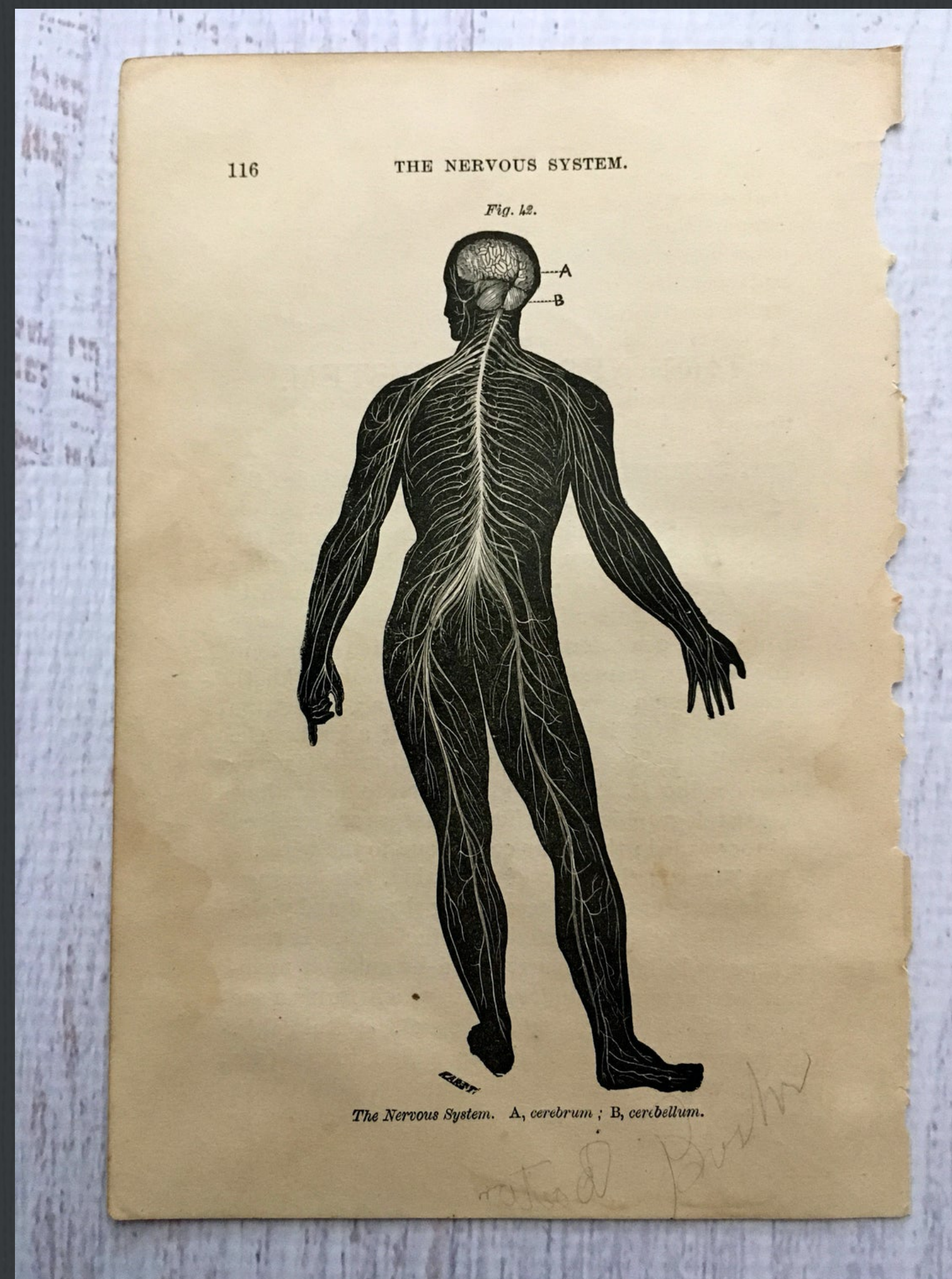
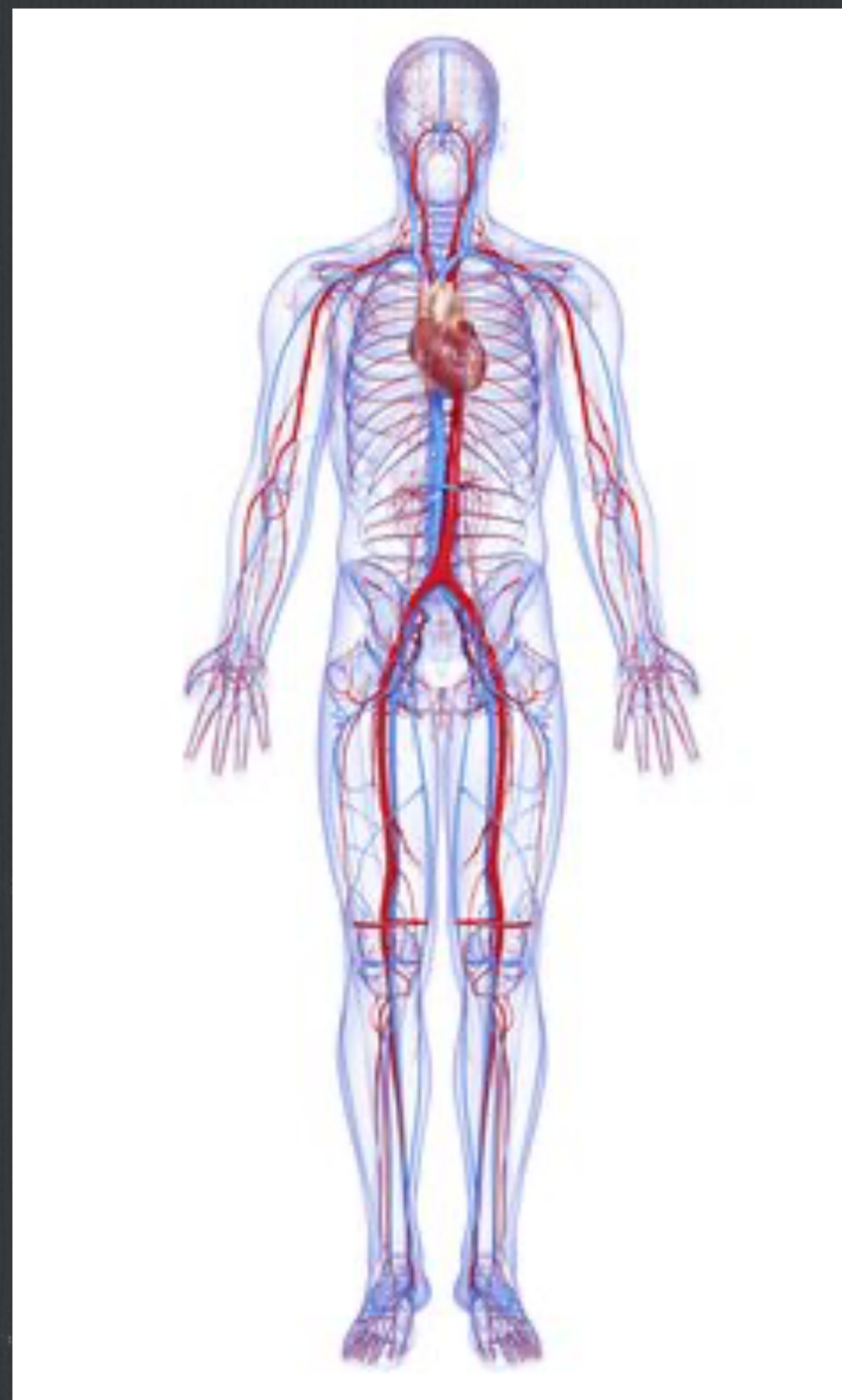
Statements on embodied movement

- The question is not what is a body, but rather what is it like to have a body.
- It's being aware of how your you-ness is reflected through your body?
- 'Movement is what we are, not something we do' (Emilie Conrad, Embodiment teacher)
- Being more embodied means insisting on things to come from the body, and..
- ..that experiences are being received through the body.
- 'Embodiment is being able to tap into the (hidden) intelligence of the body'. (The Neuroscience Of Embodiment – Amanda Blake, 2021)

More on Embodiment...

“We are grown from a seed not stuck together in parts”

- you are closer to being a plant (also grown from a seed) than a car assembled on a line.
(Tom Meyers Anatomytrains)



POWER POSES.



STANDING, WIDE STANCE

Amy Cuddy: Found that a person performing 'power poses' before a demanding meeting like a job interview would perform better - 'Power Poses'; are postures that we associate with confidence and agency in inter-relation matters!

Her research has since been some what criticized (mainly because others weren't able to repeat parts of the research)

**ARMS CROSSED
BEHIND THE HEAD,
SITTING OR STANDING**



HANDS ON HIPS

**ARMS RAISED IN A "V"
ABOVE THE HEAD**



Yoga Poses Increase Subjective Energy and State* Self-Esteem Comparison to 'Power Poses'

*selvtillid i modsætning til selvværd

The research suggests that expansive, three dimensional yoga postures*, presumably due to the alignment with the autonomous nervous system / vagal nerve**, bring on changes in peoples' psychological state, increasing the levels of personal energy and subjectively, simply making them feel 'better' about themselves, more empowered, with good self esteem!

*awareness seeking, lifting the spine, opening the chest, and eyes, coordinating breath . **(through chest-opening/lifting/and thereby effect on breath)

“The study tested the novel prediction that yoga poses, which are not associated with interpersonal dominance but increase bodily energy, would increase the subjective feeling of energy and therefore increase self-esteem compared to 'high power' and 'low power' poses.” (de Zavala, Lantos and Bowden, Department of Psychology, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2017)

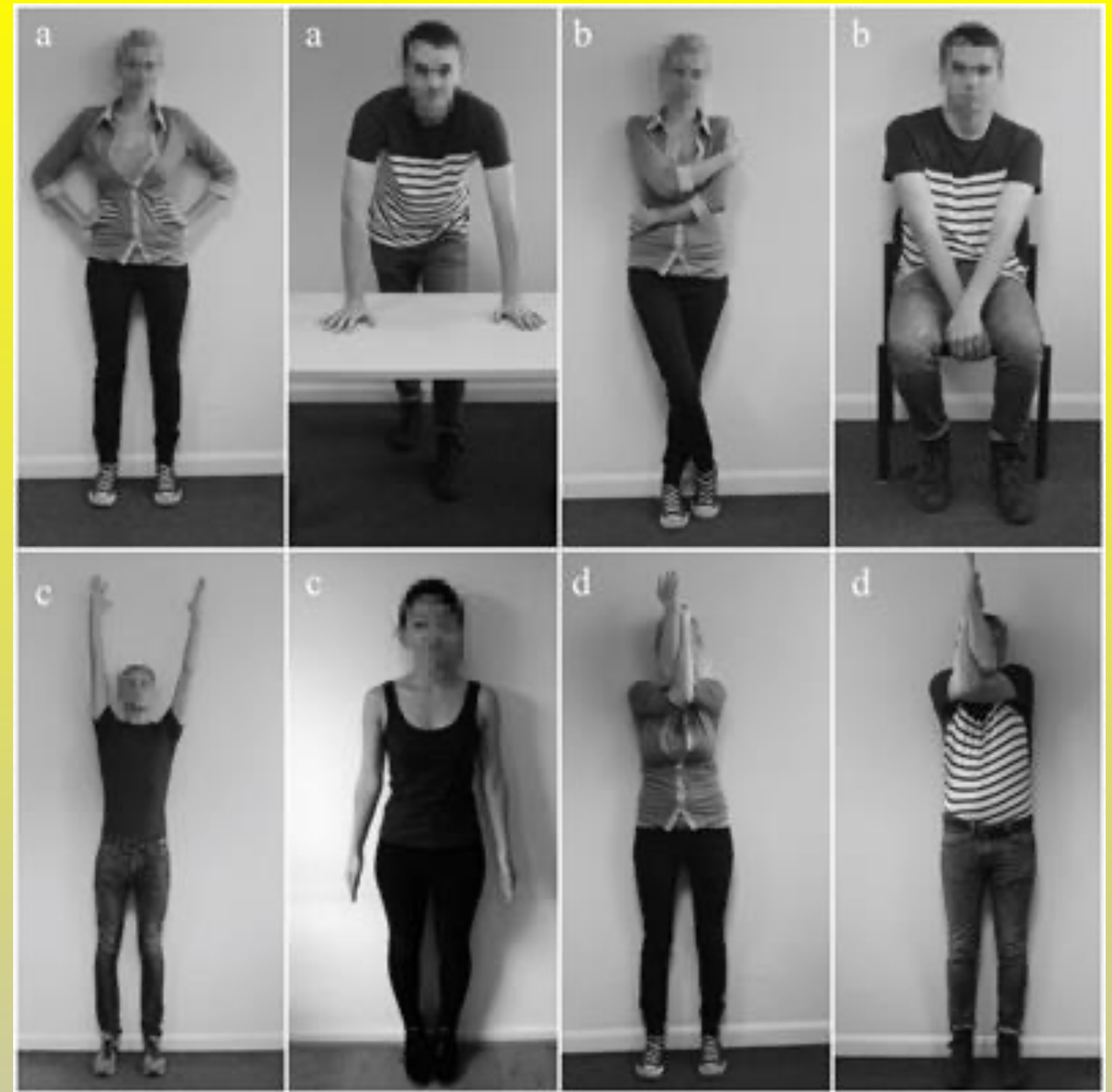
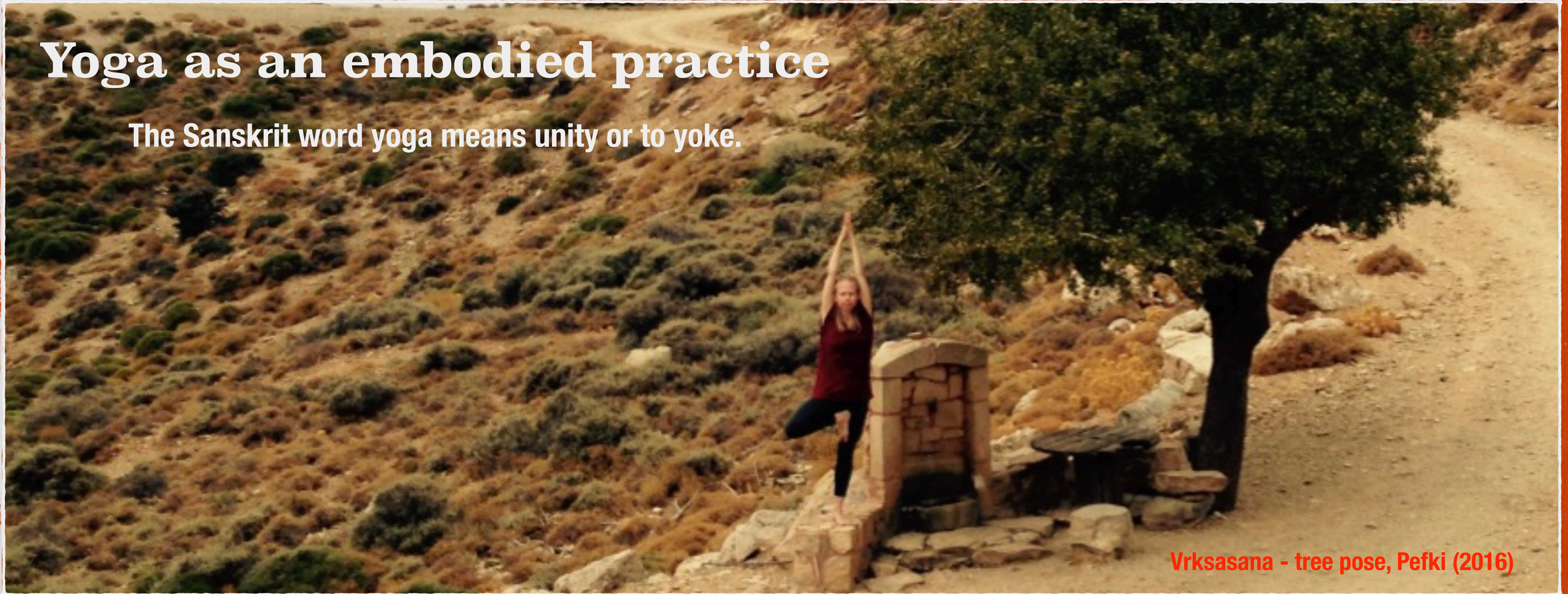


FIGURE 1 | The pictures of model poses used by the experimenter to make sure participants held the pose for 1 min to this standard: (a) expansive power poses, (b) constrictive power poses, (c) open front of the body yoga poses, (d) closed front of the body yoga poses.

Yoga as an embodied practice

The Sanskrit word yoga means unity or to yoke.



Vrksasana - tree pose, Pefki (2016)

Yoga is the practice of quieting the mind. - Sage Patanjali -

Yoga is the perfect opportunity:

- to be curious about yourself
- to pay attention to the experience of how body, breath and mind expresses itself
- to play with both willpower and surrender
- to allow thoughts and mind to take a step back and felt bodily sensation to take a step forwards
- The pace is slow giving you sufficient time to listen, discern, and respond. Through discernment you are also taught how to be your own best teacher
- Yoga is also a chance to tap into the archetypal powers and rescourses of the poses. Like becoming familiar or reacquainted with fx. the aggressive powers of the Warrior poses, or rooting down in a pose like Vrksasana /Tree.

Yoga combines the use of our perceptual capacities; proprioception, interoception and exteroception by:

“ [...] proprioceptively taking a shape and then with interoceptive awareness sensing how that shape feels while exteroceptive awareness can ground us in the reality of the now, and in the space.”

(Talk on 'yoga and the vagus nerve' by Dr. Arielle Schwartz 2020)

PROPRIOCEPTION

What Linda Geddes calls an **INTERNAL TOUCH**

Proprioception:

is from Latin proprius, meaning "one's own", "individual", and capio, capere: to take or grasp.

Thus to grasp one's own position in space and in relation to gravity, including the position of the limbs in relation to each other and the body as a whole.

Proprioception:

Knowing where the body is in space. Allows you to walk through a dark room without falling over. Gives a sense of agency (ejerskab) and body awareness.



The brain interprets information coming from multiple inputs

Receptors in the inner ear send information about; rotation, effects from gravity and whether or not the body is vertically aligned.

Visual information comes from the eyes

The position of body parts in space is perceived through stretch receptors in the skin, muscles and joints.

Exteroception

External sensory awareness;
seeing, hearing,
touching, smelling, tasting

When sensory information occurs from sources outside the body (e.g. smell, vision, changes in light, sound, touch) it is known as exteroception.



Interoception

Sensing internally;
temperature, thirst, hunger,
alertness, sleepiness, tensions, pains,
and emotional content.

Interoception is knowing what happens inside the body. It is what allows us to feel our stomach growling of hunger, the heart racing under pressure, shifts in temperature that tells us to put on an extra sweater, or remove it

The research what did I do....

The development of the research fel in 4 stages:

Stage 1: Introducing the yoga principals to class using Kolb's learning cycle

Stage 2: Bridging current state of feeling and the rehearsal room.

Stage 3: Taking the principals into character work. 'Yoga for Character'

Stage 4: Distilling the principals and using them with the first year students as a preparation for performance,and as a way of embodying the sensation of character.

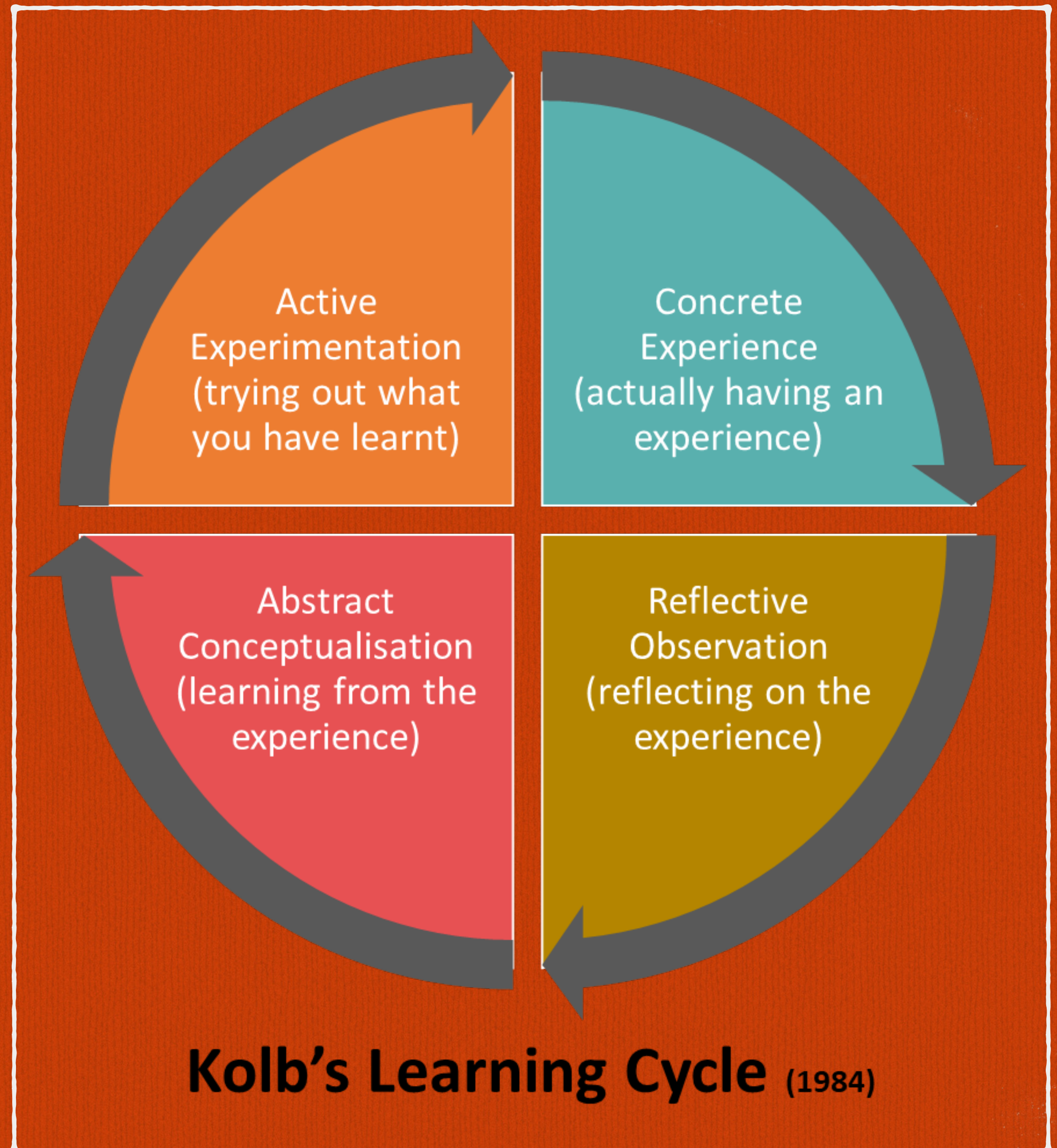
Kolb

an experiential learning cycle

"Learners learn best when they are active, take responsibility for their own learning and can relate and apply it to their own context." (Jaques and Salmon on Kolb 2007:64)

I used Kolb's model, very freely!

- as a way to structure the initial classes/preparation phase,
- a way into the actual research phase.



According to Kolb, these stages represent the process of learning from experience:

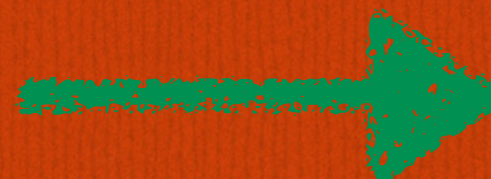
Experiencing (often called concrete experience)



In practice/in my teaching that meant:

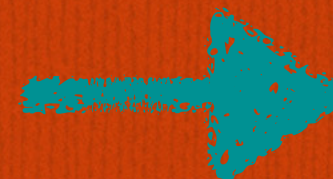
And so I would offer a series of yoga poses

Reflecting (reflective observation)



This became periods of 'active' resting in-between poses - a chance to absorb the work and listen to feedback in the shape of; different bodily sensations, feelings or thoughts

Thinking (abstract conceptualization)



Adding the knowledge of Proprioception, interception, exteroception

Active (active experimentation)



Repeating the yoga poses but with a change/a new 'ingredient' offering new ways of engaging with the poses, in order to deepen the learning and sense of agency - e.g. closed eyes, organizing sequenced poses in a rhythmic pattern of counts, adding music, 'controlled form' versus 'freedom in the form and the embodied approach of filtering the sequence through 'how your life is' at the moment.'

Where did the research take place...

Besides teaching the morning ground training which involves all the students, I also joined drama teacher Jonathan Paul (JP) Cook's Howard Barker work, with the second year students.

This meant applying my work to Barker's universe populated by 'paradoxical characters'.

According to JP, paradoxical characters; 'have inconsistent and/or conflicting agendas' (<http://www.jpcook.dk>).

Stage 1: In class.

The students would learn and then move through Surya Namaskar(SN)/Sun Salutation. For those who are not familiar with Surya Namaskar, it is a string of opening and closing movements that in an ordered sequence travels from standing, down to floor, and back up again.

After having learnt the movement pattern the students moved through SN in ways that reflected how they currently perceived their lives to be.

“In one instance the whole room changed! IT was visibly different; some picked up their pace, movements became more detailed, some held their breaths.”



In the warrior poses the students explored their personal relationship with the fiery bodily sensation of physical power, a felt sense of aggression that these poses offer. Also considering the level of familiarity and where, if at all, in our lives, we use that warrior energy...

Stage 2: Bridging current state of mindbody and the rehearsal room.

In practice that meant offering a short yoga inspired preparation before going on the floor to work dramatically.

The focus point of that prep was to embody /intentionally physicalize the states of being that were already present in the room, whether that was feelings of being; slightly stressed, tired, frustrated, dis-embodied, or restless.

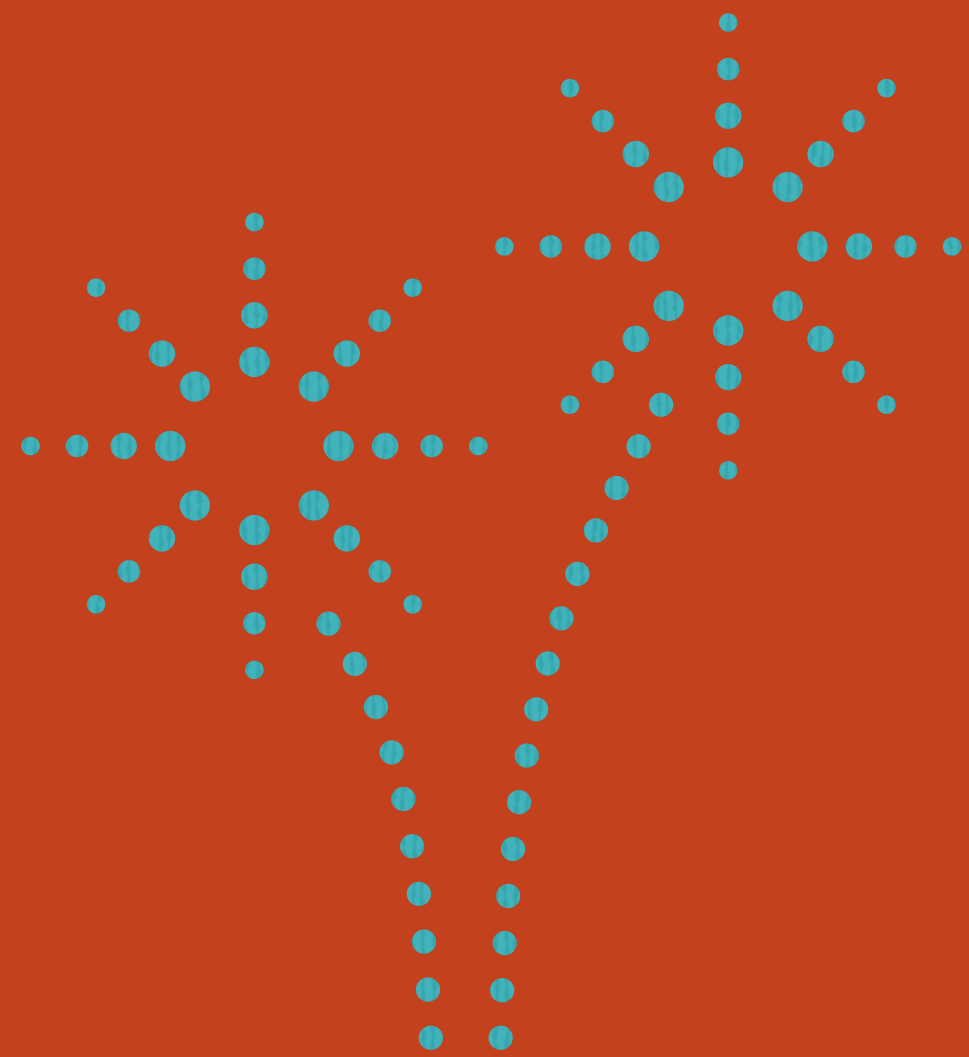


Stage 3: Taking the principals into character work. 'Yoga for Character'

Piggy backing on the principals from the prep work this stage focused on;

Working with Howard Barker's 'Not Him':

During the scene the two characters 'The Man' and 'The Woman' constantly try to "call each other out" *is it him or is it not him, coming home from the war?* and so in order to embody that constant 'tug war' or 'tightrope act' between them, and make this 'game' come alive in the actors' bodies and minds, we began working physically with two poses.



Two poses that each offered a different and contrasting physical sensation, that the actors then would move dynamically between, slow enough though to notice all the shifts and changes that occurred.

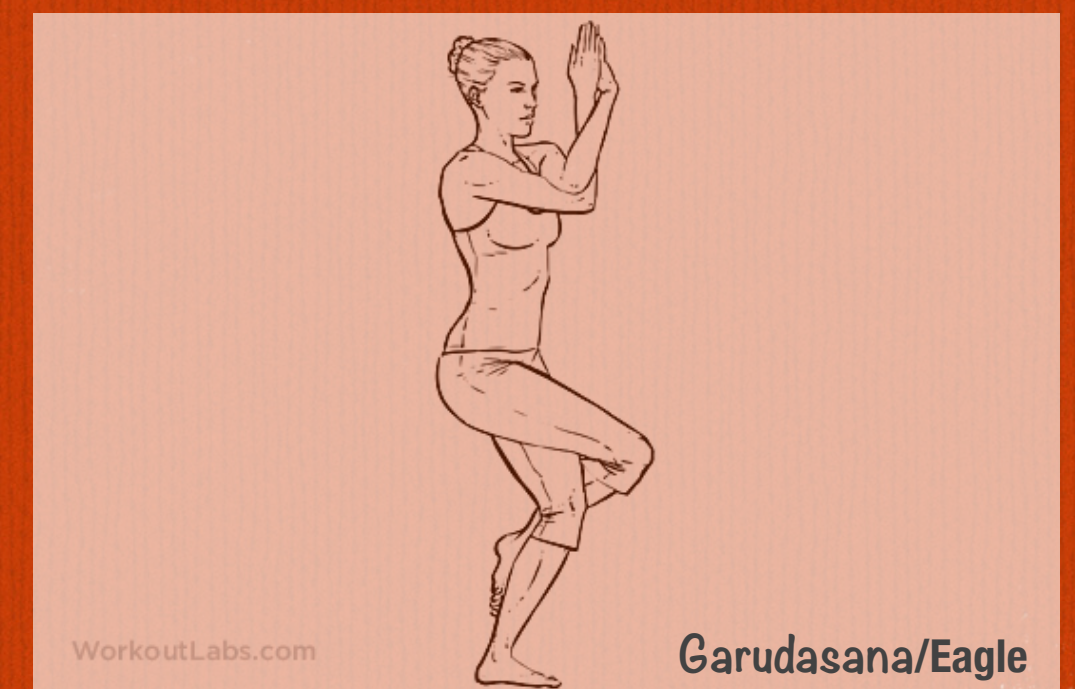
One pose offered more fire, tension in the body, moving forward, being very visible.

1. 'Warrior 2 / Virabhadrasana II' performed with an erect spine, and a forceful open forthcoming action. Imposing will.....



The other was more about withdrawing, protective of self towards other, softer, in the background.

2. 'Eagle pose / Garudasana' performed with a strong emphasis on withdrawing slowly backwards down, towards the body's crumbling midline, chest slumping, arms as protection, while balancing on one foot. Surrendering...



.....This was overall quite challenging and so....

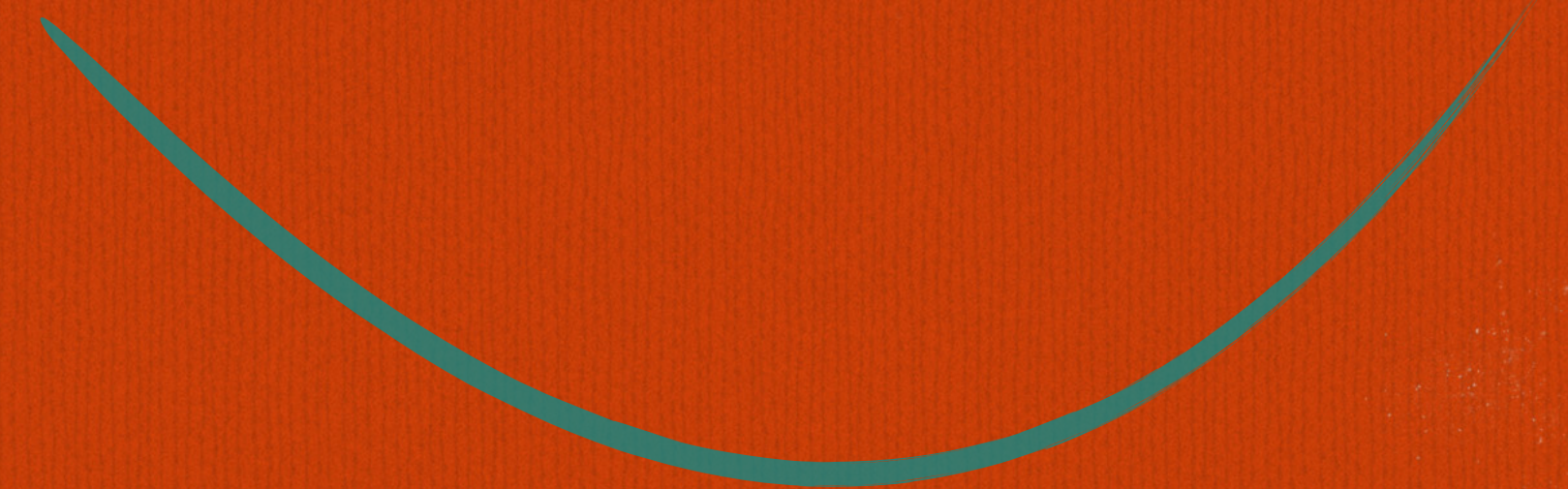
At this point we had to leave the pure asana or yoga postures of the yoga behind and transition into a 'yoga for the play', by:

- ... embodying "postures" of YES and NO that were both specific and also 'felt right' for the characters to perform - *this turned out to be extremely useful.*

By embodying the characters' yeses and noes and moving dynamically between the two; feeling the shifts from one (No) to the other (Yes) including the axis-point where they become both, the actors found that they could begin to grasp the paradoxes that shaped both the characters and their situations (of yes it is him and it is not him....) and they were quite free to investigate the relational dynamic between them from this embodied place.

Besides yes and no we also tried embodying concepts like:

- Passion, pride, suppression, revenge, loss, justice, judgement, and giving & taking.



Findings:

- Embodying a character's way of YES and NO (out of the many ways that can be done) gives the actor something to get started with, even if not much information is (yet) known - and also immediately engages the whole person!
- Embodying the Yes and No in 'Not Him' was helpful in comprehending the complex paradox of 'yes it's him, and also it's not him', even if that statement is impossible for the mind to grasp.
- When embodying the postures and movements of yes and no, the acting students were not just showing a representation of a specific attitude but creatively constructing that expression simultaneously as performing it.
- Embodying aspects of a character's life before a particular scene can help fill in the gaps with more sensory information, giving the actor the needed time to catch up with their character's (hi)story.
- Just like the touch from another can help define what is me and what is other, so might embodiment be understood as an internal touch to locate the feeling of self and character.
- To keep remembering the power of understanding concepts through the body by actual physicalization! Even if it feels like stating the obvious!
- Yoga from class to the yoga of character and play became a body mind approach to navigate different *feeling-senses of being.

*a term first developed by American philosopher Eugene Gendlin. Gendlin used "felt sense" about those non-verbal/pre-verbal 'somethings' that is experienced in the body but yet hasn't been consciously thought or put directly into words.

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