

Johanna Meyer

219 E. 7th St, #14, New York, NY 10009

johanna@thinaar.com

917.561.0133

I love to watch dancers think, and to help thinkers move. I teach with the perspective that dance is embodied thinking and choreography is the arrangement of that movement as thinking. In the professional world I have worked as a choreographer for dance and theater, and as a dramaturge for other's work. In these roles I aid performers and makers as they create and engage in rigorous practices designed to increase their awareness of their actions and facilitate more options for movement and expression. My work as a teacher in a college environment derives directly from these practices. My goal is to enhance each student's awareness of their body's movement potential and to inspire students to use that awareness to guide personal choices whether they are creative, intellectual, or, professional.

Teaching dance means having a continuing conversation that reflects my experience of somatic work, choreography, and years of attending theater, film, visual art, and dance performances. When I'm teaching a movement class this conversation continues. Even as I am involved in and inspired by a wide arrange of artistic practices, I am drawn back to contemporary dance because it is rich with possibilities. Drawing elements from different techniques (ballet with yoga, Limon with martial arts) allows performers to value and critique a wide range of movement aesthetics. I call on students to meet my collection of interdisciplinary knowledge through embodiment in ways that excite them and open them up to innovative ways of considering dance and choreography.

I believe the body is inherently smart, and use different techniques to unleash this intelligence from somatic approaches to modern dance. I provide students with a wide variety of tools including: Bartenieff Fundamentals, Alexander Technique, kinetic awareness, Pilates, and yoga and help them to discover which practices work best for their bodies. I have taught beginning students and professionals, and worked with actors as they use my movement phrases as a platform for interpretation. I view my teaching practice as a means of offering an array of choices for students rather than one in which I hand them specific tools, because I see each student I work with as having a body with an intelligence and history of its own.

My class starts with body-work, and transitions into improvisation. Set dance exercises are interwoven with explorations that promote centering by integrating students' own movement potential. I use approaches I call "phrase-mapping" and "sketching," which are scores that help dancers take a choreographer's movement and embed the material into their own bodies, resulting in an integrated and rich performance. I promote a space where curiosity and creativity can be explored in movement, and allow for the development of intuitive risk-taking. It is important in my choreography that dancers find their own way of interpreting material. Lessons from composition, dance history and performance art are folded into my technique coursework so that students may put their embodied interpretations and ideas in dialogue with each other and the contemporary dance field. As a class we devise strategies to adapt movement to students' imagination and bodies.

In my classes I want students to not only encounter a wide range of somatic practices and techniques existing outside of their bodies, but also the range of physicality that exists within them. One aspect of opening a dancer's internal landscape is through a range of physical exertion from release technique to athletic phrasing. I stress the importance of feeling the weight of one's bones and finding directionality through intent and opposition. I want dancers to be able to work deeply and find the joy of movement in their joints for long term use. In my classes, students experience the anatomy of joint release and the subtle connections of the limbs to torso, while refining alignment and allowing the body to regroup. My class encourages the cultivation of a highly specialized skill set, one in which dancers are asked to develop an anatomical awareness of subtlety while remaining capable of vigorous movement. By offering a range of experiences and practices I hope to allow students to witness the intelligence inherent in their own bodies, and to see themselves as capable of calling upon and channeling that intelligence.

In my dance history and appreciation courses I call on the interdisciplinary practices I've developed as an artist who works across and in-between dance, theater and somatic practices. My approach begins with the understanding that as a student I was taught within a particular paradigm of lineage. As a teacher I am more interested in helping students to construct their own understanding of lineages. My students leave my course with their own maps of aesthetic influence. I encourage my students to understand not only how an artist may be relevant to a culture, but also to their personal interests.

In my dance history course for undergraduates I seek to expose students to the ways dancing, embodied thinking, is part of the cultural dialogue while developing a deeper appreciation of live performance. I use technology to expose students to contemporary and historical works and illustrate where performances fall in the continuum of modern dance. Students are encouraged to use their personal technology to bring examples of their definition of dance into the classroom. As an artist, I have developed a practice of watching widely and looking to many sources as research for my work. As a teacher I encourage my students to "google" widely. We move from looking at the short clips students bring to class to documentaries and documentation, moving eventually into attending live performances. My goal is for students to look at media more critically and help them develop a deeper appreciation of live performance.

Along the way I offer many exercises attuned to different learning styles that bring forth a more nuanced understanding of what we are watching. Drawing on practices from many fields I ask students to storyboard pieces we have watched or to respond with improvised movement of their own. Its important to me that I offer many avenues into understanding as a way of acknowledging that students come to class from a variety of fields, cultural contexts and histories. I want students to utilize their own research skills and to actively identify means of examining work that they find helpful for themselves. By the end of a course I want them to feel that they are savvy viewers of dance; able to discern aesthetic choices that emerged from particular contexts and to appreciate the importance of live performance. I feel my classes are a success when students are able to explain, in their own terms, the difference between live and mediated performance and the ways in which contemporary dance can evidence a lively, thinking embodiment.