Coursework confirmation
Yes

Declaration
Yes

Word count
3000

Solo Theater Piece
Corporeal Mime

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(Constatineau). "Unlike Chinese masks ours was inexpressive... With the face annulled, we are challenged to replace it with the rest of the body." (Decroux, 17).

Decroux called himself a "Sculptor of mobile statues" (Constatineau). In Corporeal Mime the actor becomes sculptor and sculpture.

4 aspects of the theory include:
- articulation
- Mobile statuary
- Improvisation
- Repertory(Leabhart, 74)

Decroux paid attention to the body in three distinct ways:
- Three planes of motion (sagittal, coronal, transverse)
- Physical capacity of motion
- Anatomical structure of the body and it's appearance (Leabhart, 117)

I chose to focus on the improvisation aspect of Corporeal Mime as well as Mobile Statuary.

Mobile Statuary is the attempt to show thought through movement whilst focusing on making the body a "moving statue" this involves body isolation. This isolation of the body requires the performer to learn to move one limb at a time, separating parts of the body from one another.

The performer must learn to move the head without the neck, neck without the chest and so on (Leabhart, 115). Until which point each body part is one in it's own.

Theater Processes

Practical explorations

Once I decided upon improvisation and mobile statuary as the aspects that I would focus on and employ in my performance I began to explore with mime exercises in order to start getting used to the movement as well as the functioning of corporeal mime.

Some exercises I did in order to work on my improvisational techniques were such as invisible tug of war. I did this at home as a game with my family. I had one other person be on the different team and we "pulled the rope" the trick to this where improve comes in is that because it was tug of war I had to be able to know when I was over powering my opponent and when my opponent was overpowering me, and the audience (my family) had to see and believe that there was a rope there, as well as be able to tell which side was winning based on the tensions in the body.

What I learned from this, as an improvisational tool was how to pull and push weights that aren't there, as well as come up with different styles of pulling the fake rope in order to show what I was trying to show.

Another step I took to my physical exploration of mime was I watched videos of Yves Lebreton whereby I mimicked his movements in order to understand what it took to be able to isolate my body the way he was able to. Because at first I thought I could directly copy what he would do, but I found that it was difficult and would take practice and exercise to be able to isolate like that. Once I figured that one I stepped away from trying to do what I saw but I had to take smaller steps to learning such body isolation.

So I used an exercise from the article *Dimensions of Mime Space*. The exercise was quite simple, all I had to do was take my cellphone and hold it in one hand, then proceed to dial with my thumb but before actually making contact I would freeze my thumb then with the other hand remove the phone from my right hand. Once doing that I would look at the position that my hand is it in and freeze it there. After analyzing and remembering I would relax my hand then repeat the same position at least 3 times.

Fig. 1 (Zisengwe) Shows an example of the exercise I did, where by I mimicked the exact shape and size of one object by placing it in my hand then removing it.

I began to do the same exercise with other items such as books, neck pillows, and I started with different positions of the body. Such as putting my foot on a stool, then having someone remove the stool from under my foot.

Linking this exercise together with improvisation I started to mix different positions together at once, move from one tableau to another, and doing that I realized that creating movement in that way was quite flowing and made an interesting pattern.

However of all the explorations, the one that made a lasting influence was the tug of war exercise, as I really enjoyed all the different ways of pulling ropes and faking weights, and I knew that my vision for the piece was to show the different ways of feigning heavy weights on the body.

Fig. 2 (Zisengwe)

Fig. 2 shows a later exploration of weights. I chose to use the weights as something signifying a metaphorical weight on a person, and their heart. I thought that I would like to explore phases of grief and anxiety through the use of weights and eventually through the exploration I was doing moving from tableau to tableau I decided that the piece would follow a person's discovery of something horrifying, and the effect of that discovery.

After having decided upon that and having planned out the movements and the tableaus to be used in performance I performed the piece several times for my class and received a lot of helpful feedback.

The first time I performed the piece the feedback I received was that whilst I was trying to present grief, my facial expression showed more fear than sadness. And that at times the movements I did made no sense in relation to the piece, for example at a point I pulled a bucket, however suddenly I moved on from the bucket, and I did not put it away anywhere but in a way just forgot about it and moved on. This feedback was very helpful because I knew that I had to be purposeful about where the "props" I would be using were coming from and where they would end up in relation to the space and the performance.

I chose to perform the piece to music because I thought that music would help set the tone for the piece and give the grievous atmosphere I was going for. But feedback from my class helped me to keep in mind and make the choice of whether the music to me as a performer would just be white noise or if I was reacting to the music, as it looked like I was reacting to the music at times and at other times the way I was pacing my steps went against the rhythm of the music and I was told to be aware of that because it was distracting to the audience.

Fig. 3 (Zisengwe). Shows the atmosphere I was looking to create with music mirrored with lighting. I knew that I wanted to use blue because the piece was about sinking, and blue is a color associated with water, but blue is also associated with calm and serenity. This choice of using blue was to show that confusing nature of emotional sinking. Between the two shades of blue, I chose the one shown on the left, as the one on the right was more of a black light, and would be distracting to the eye, as well as the fact that the audience wouldn't be able to see my face.

Because I'd chosen to use "rope" I had to keep in mind one of the more important parts of the theory of Corporeal Mime which is that it is not the action that is important but the effect the action has, my peer mentor had me ask myself the question *what does the rope symbolize?* Once I made that decision, my reaction to touching the rope had to be coherent with what the rope symbolized to me. I decided that the rope was a symbol of some type of hope, pulling the rope being a search for hope and therefore the way I would pull the rope meant that it was something important to my survival.

Another piece of feedback I received was about the tangible prop I used; a black cloth. I had to be clear about what the cloth symbolized and therefore had to react accordingly when handling the cloth. I decided that the cloth symbolized protection and hiding.

Feedback I received from my teacher was I had to remember space substance when handling things such as the rope, I couldn't keep closed fists because there has to be room for the rope in my palms, and that choice would all show the audience how big the rope was, and thus give an idea about the weight of the rope.

The music became a problem as after performing once for my teacher I had to keep in mind that I couldn't use licensed music in an original work, this was problematic

Theater in Context

I chose to study Etienne Decroux's Corporeal mime after doing some research where I found out the basic premise of the theory. I found I was attracted to the type of theater that has a performer commit to something other than a script and speech, but instead urges a performer to communicate through the body.

Etienne Decroux

Etienne Decroux (1898 – 1992) was the son of a mason who educated him about music, sculpting and poetry (Leabhart, 2). Decroux worked as a mason until the age of 25, however he did several other odd jobs, including serving in the army and working as a nurse in the First World War (Leabhart, 2).

As a result of his upbringing Decroux enjoyed watching old style pantomime, going to the circus and enjoyed sports (Leabhart, 3).

By 1923 he had saved money as was able to go to theater school at Jacques Copeau's "Théatre du Vieux-Colombier" (Leabhart, 8). His experience at this school made a long lasting impression him, and took away plenty of what they learned (Leabhart, 9).

Students performed on stage without any set or costumes, and sometimes without scripts. At times students would perform with their faces covered by veils, and something with their backs turned to the audience (Kusler).

It was there that Decroux learned that the actor's body was seen as an instrument and therefore had to be well tuned.

Corporeal Mime

Corporeal Mime focuses on using the body as the main means for creation, and instead of a director or a choreographer; a performer is the starting point for creation. The process of creation for a performer in Corporeal Mime must allow the actor to show their thought through movement rather than speech and the performer's goal is to be present onstage and this presence is to be shown through the body (Leabhart, 73).

In Decroux's Mime the body plays a very important role, as it is what the spectator sees, what carries the voice and sustains the costume... the body is the "hand in the glove" (Decroux).

How a mime actor performs an action is much less important than the effect of the action. "Actions in themselves do not interest us. We are interested in the interrelationship or in their manner" (Decroux, 147).

Mime has to avoid the many aspects of body language, such as the gestures that usually accompany speech (Constatineau).

Corporeal mime draws focus away from the face and the hands, which are often used along with speech and brings attention to the rest of the moving body

because the piece was timed to the music and I only knew what to do based on the lyrics. It also meant having to find new music to perform to. Eventually I found a band; Sigur Rós that permits use of their music as long as it is not for commercial purposes. The fact that I had chosen improvisation as an aspect to focus on became really helpful because I was able to rework my piece.

The song I had first chosen according to my peer mentor was scarier than grievous and the new song *Fljótavík*, was sadder and slower and fitted more with the intention of the performance and I was finally able to get the atmosphere that I had been aiming for.

Presenting Theater:
Theater in Practice
In the first 28 seconds of the performance, I have a white Fresnel on me. The choice behind choosing that light is because I thought the Fresnel would be the best to represent life, and earth and being on the ground, as well as the brightness showing that there is nothing to hide. Within that time I remove the black cloth covering me after looking around suspiciously, the choice there was to show uncertainty and a type of fear. Since the cloth presents protection, I thought that removing the cloth, removing the protection would be an important step for the character.

38 seconds in, I hesitantly begin to pull a rope. Here the rope is a search but also a struggle, and the intention there was to show the struggle to find something better, something hopeful. When the pulling of the rope begins the music also comes in, this is to symbolize that the real story begins at that moment with the rope.

At 51 seconds I pull the rope over my shoulder and begin to walk. This was to show the weight of whatever is at the other side of that rope, that it requires my entire body. And as the doctrine of Corporeal Mime requires that the movement is not the focus but the effect, when looking at my facial expression there is determination but struggle at the same time.

When I remove the top of the bucket at 1:26min the aim was to demonstrate the use of Mobile Statuary, as when looking at my hands and fingers, there is the act of moving fingers first, then closing the palm step by step.

Moments later after seeing what is in the bucket I go back to the black cloth at 1:44 and clutch it to my face showing the need for protection. However I don't cover myself with it as I did at the beginning, to show a change in the amount of protection needed. I then throw away the cloth entirely, to show that this person knows that in order to move forward they can't be held back by this safety.

At 2:09min I let go entirely of the aspect of moving one limb at a time as I throw away the bucket, in a fast movement that seems lost in the rest of the piece which is very slow and constrained. This is to show desperation, and the need to get away in such a hurry that all rules are lost in that moment.

I use a blue spot when going down the steps; blue symbolizes water and the piece focuses on sinking. At 2:53 another struggle is brought up as I take on another weight but it is seen soon enough that this is one that can't be taken. And this shows the grief and anxiety as at 3:06 I begin to fall under the weight until eventually I am down on the ground, to show that the process of sinking begun. When the weight is too much at 3:20 I turn to another rope and begin to pull, once again showing the hope and the need to find something else. At this point the music also intensifies, showing the change in atmosphere.

However pulling this rope has a different outcome than the first one as this time I fall as I'm pulled deeper into this grief and anxiety at 3:33min. At that point I attempt to pull myself out of it and eventually am led to another rope but here there is no struggle at all as I don't last a second before giving up and screaming at 3:57.

This choice of screaming in silence is not because mime is the art of silence but because my intention here was to show a point of sadness where visibly a person might feel like they are asking for help loudly, but no one hears.

As a last resort I raise my hand up as a gesture asking to be helped up at 4:02, still in the blue light therefore still sinking. Whilst behind there is a white spot showing the place where I could go and be safe again. The gesture breaks a pattern of not using gestures that usually accompany speech, once again breaking a rule and trying to get help.

At 4:13 I dip my head and crouch down, the blue light goes off to show that I have now sunk into the grief and the struggle however the white spot stays up.

Evaluation
The process of creating this piece as well as the actually performance were a learning and growing experience for me as a creator. Generally my experience stays in performing and as a result this was my first time taking full control of a performance by myself, and being in a decision making position, which was something that I usually am not in the middle of.

As a creator I was able to use research and exploration to help come to a vision for my performance. I feel that exploring Etienne Decroux's techniques and doctrine of mobile statuary were very important in me knowing what I wanted to focus on and led me to having a vision and eventually an intention for my performance.

The main guide that I took for my performance was the idea that in mime the body cries and not the face, this was something very important in the conception of my performance because as a performer I tend to put most focus to my face and speech. Taking on Corporeal Mime was very important for me as a performer because of the fact that through this I was able to take myself out of being reliant on speech and instead used Decroux's methods in order to evoke emotions, perhaps in a greater way than possible with just speech.

An aspect of corporeal mime that I did not adopt however was the annulation of the face and facial expression, as once I had my vision and intention I knew that I needed to be able to connect with an audience through the use of facial expression, in a way that most performers might not. What I hope to adopt in the rest of my performances is the use of the body, and making the body something to be seen as opposed to relying so heavily on speech but would want to be seen as well as being heard. And as well as to adopt the doctrine that mime is not the action but the effect, as I feel that will help me to be more purposeful about my movement as a performer.

Following the performance I do believe that I managed to meet my artistic intention. Performing the piece which felt quite personal and emotional in front of an audience added on the fear and the type of tension that I feel I needed to be able to feel the emotions that the piece required, I felt that the fact that the audience was filled with much older people and peers as well made the emotions even more accessible to me, as a result I was able to connect with the audience as I felt from the get go that they would be able to understand the emotions and what I was trying to reach in the performance, and hopefully feel it as well.

Feedback from audience members was quite encouraging as one audience member said that it was "not in anyway cathartic but instead the emotions were felt and would stay for a while" another audience member commented on my movement, saying that the specificity in the movement and the physical expression where noticeable and were useful in getting the intention across.

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