

Warming Up: Preparing for Improvisational Play



Steve Clorfine

We enter the room, beginning the transition from where we've been to being here. Gradually, and in our own time, we prepare to shift from being pretty much in our heads to being more in our bodies. Shifting from "mind on mind," to mind and body both.

This first movement of transition — bringing attention to body — brings us to a fuller sense of ourselves as a whole being, a being in relationship with oneself and the environment

Simply by relating to body we bring more balance to body-mind. It is my experience that as the balance of body-mind grows, we naturally become more available to the presence of space.

Our relationship to space is one that is constant, whether we are aware of it or not. We begin to recognize this ongoing relationship and become more familiar with the feeling of it.

We may think of space as having different qualities or locations: some reflected by constant, involuntary movement (breath, fluids, cells, organs) and some by intermittent, voluntary movement (muscles and joints).

Perhaps we recognize the sensation of these movements and the space that holds them as we tune into them. Even if we approach these physical qualities intellectually, we know that they occupy a space inside our bodies.

At the same time, there is another kind of space inside, less defined than the physiology of our bodies and perhaps more familiar to us. This space is an ongoing interaction or "conversation" of feelings, thoughts, and sensations; a psychological space, you might say, or a space that makes us who we are in our individual experience and sense of self. This is the space of mind, still part of the body, though often lacking relationship or connection to the whole.

Then there is the space around us — the environment itself — floor, ceiling, walls, people, furnishings, colors, and so forth, which is tangible and changeable. There is also the space of what is in front, in back, above, below, and to either side — what I call the six directions of space. These directions are not changeable and are less tangible. They are with us as long as we are alive.

All of this is present as we make a transition into the process of warming up. We can imagine that as we begin to warm up we are coming closer to being balanced in mind and body.

So we begin simply, by bringing our attention to body. We can extend that attention by stroking it, as though stroking something natural; by appreciating whatever comes up and by repeating that attention moment to moment.

In terms of what we're doing in warming up, we are continually bringing ourselves back to the basic awareness of parts of the body, the body as a whole, the spaces around the parts and the space around the whole. Each moment of awareness is complete in itself.

Gradually we notice that our attention (through our *attentiveness* — the repeating of placing our attention) begins to go more naturally to sensory awareness — physical awareness — and that mind goes along for the ride.

What is the ride? Mind is carried with body in a more synchronized way. This is different from the ride we might be used to, where mind is the driver *and* the car *and* the gears and acceleration. Here, though the ride may be bumpy or smooth, through our repeated attention, our experience of mind-body tends to be more integrated.

Relaxation naturally follows when we allow body-mind to flex its attention, to receive the experience of space; to awaken and develop a more unified attitude and patterning and to provide us with information that we often ignore. This shift in receptivity is in itself relaxing. Mind and body are naturally one. That seems to be the big message illuminated by relaxation and the experience of space.

In warming up, that's what we are doing: warming up our whole selves; making ourselves more available to whatever comes up — a thought, a feeling, a sense perception — and linking or joining whatever comes up with our body-mind awareness.

In this way, warming up prepares us to enter the field of improvisational play, where receiving and transmitting both inner and outer movement, sound, shape, and image demands our continuous and attentive presence.

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