

Okay. Hi. Hi. So I'm just going to introduce myself to the people who are watching.

My name is Gabriella Petrov. I'm an instructor at Concordia in the Department of Theatre. And today I'm very happy to be joined by Elle Belvedere, who recently graduated from Concordia's Department of Theatre, the acting program, I believe. And the reason I wanted to connect with you, Elle, is because we met when I first started at Concordia, you were in one of my first courses, and that was Ensemble. And since then you took, I think like maybe in every semester or certainly every year, you took courses with me. And so we've had a really lovely continuity in courses together where I have been developing and experimenting with my approach to contemplative pedagogies, which is the sort of theme of this educational resource that we're contributing to. So I'm excited today to ask you some questions about that experience.

And over the last few years since you graduated and what it was like for you to engage with these contemplative practices as I was sharing them with you over the years. So maybe I'll just get us started with a question for you.

And if we want to add any context about the practices and where they came from, then we can talk about that as we go. So my first question for you would be, what was your experience of first learning contemplative practices? And some examples that we shared, that I shared with you over the years were our sitting practice, kind of coming into the room, checking in, sitting in silence, and having that somatic awareness during that process of sitting, grazing, that sort of observation practice that we do, aimless wandering as an approach, and personal awareness practice, which was sometimes we would start classes with a time to really just be present with yourself. So yeah, why don't you just share with us what that experience was like for you over the years of engaging with those contemplative practices? Yeah.

Learning these contemplative practices through my education has been so meaningful.

I think especially with the sitting and checking in right at the beginning, it gives me time to ground myself and just honestly self-regulate myself in the current moment. Also, being with everybody in the room, it reminds me that people are navigating their own day just like I am. And also something I've learned from the check-ins that we do, it was a way for me to learn how to articulate my goals for myself in front of other people and share any boundaries. If I was feeling that I needed to share them on a certain day, when it comes to personal awareness practice, honestly, it's really amazing the freedom that is done in that because sometimes it can look very different each time I do it. But it's about preparing my mind and body for collaboration and work or to create something. But almost always in my personal awareness practice, I do like to do warm up and also the kinesthetic exploration, kinesthetic delight, which is something that always brings me joy. I genuinely find so much excitement in the level of connectedness that I find in my body after doing that and the connection with the breath I have. I feel like specifically as a performer, for me, I really look for that connection with my breath and my body. And when I do personal awareness practice, even if it's just like, it's getting what I need to prepare myself. And given that time and that dedicated purpose, it really benefits me before I begin a process or if I'm talking and working with people. Yeah, I think grazing is something that I find something new every time I do it. And it's like the dedication to stillness and just observing one thing is so profound for some reasons. Like I remember when we did it through the workshop that we did for the somatic inquiry workshop for the week long, we had that day of silence. And after the workshop was done, when we all like left for the day, I was just like so amazed with how I was able to just let like judgment, like negative judgment of things just go by my head. When before I would feel so like needed to be like, oh, I need to attend to my thought about this person and what backpack they have on. But then I was just like walking home and I

was like, that's a good backpack. I'm gonna go home now. Like, it's okay. I don't need to think 10 things about somebody's backpack. And just that, that time to really focus to detail and like observe something for a set amount of times really beneficial to other profound things in my life. What a great anecdote that is.

Like, oh yeah, backpack, cool. You know, what else? I think that's kind of touches on a lot of quite fundamental principles of like contemplative practice, which is yeah, just like being with what's here and now and not needing to do a lot more than that. You know, not needing to hold on further than just what's here and now. So that's a beautiful way to describe that. And I think you're speaking to grazing.

Maybe I'll just say a little bit more, which is that grazing is a term that comes from the Viewpoints, the Six Viewpoints, Mary Overly's work. I teach a whole course just on that work at Concordia. And so that grazing is really a mindful observation practice where you're just observing and taking in information, you know, visually and through your senses. You said so many lovely things about your experience with personal awareness practice. I'm just curious if you had to very quickly explain what that is to people who've never done it before. What would you say? I'm just curious what at this point after years of doing it, what is it for you? What is that practice? Yeah, I think that personal awareness practice is it's like you're your own professional and you are responsible for getting yourself to a place where you're able to collaborate with others or collaborate with yourself. And sometimes it can be hard to get there.

But personal awareness practice is a way.

It's a way for me to get myself ready and get especially my mind ready. I find that like if I have if I think that something is going to block me and take me out of a moment that I'm supposed to be and want to be very present in, then I'm going to do that thing before we start so that I can be all in for what I'm learning about or what the project I'm trying to do. Yeah, so it's it's getting what I need. And it's it's sometimes I would think, oh, like, this is kind of selfish of me to go to the bathroom. But no, if I need to go to the bathroom, then I'm going to do that so that I can. Yeah.

Yeah, that's beautiful. And for me, in guiding that that practice, it's really as much as it is about it, like, as you say about what do I need to do kind of preparing yourself, it's also about just leaving that space quite open for that aimlessness of like, yeah, what what can I notice about what I need to just tap into that to take the time to notice? What am I in this moment? And what might I need to do to get more comfortable or to arrive for what we're doing next, especially as an artist, as you say. Thank you.

I want to jump to just I mean, we can kind of continue this conversation, but I'm wondering if you over the last years started to see what these types of practices did to your learning. As a student and how they might have supported or challenged or kind of, you know, done something to your educational experience a little more broadly. Yeah, I think for sure these practices have changed my learning deeply.

I think it's helped me understand that learning can feel different and look different. I think, especially I learned this in our Advanced Viewpoints course, where Gabby you were both our mentor and our professor for this artist collective that me and four other classmates had. It was an awesome experience and we built our own learning model together with Gabby and at the end of this course we felt and through the course we all felt respected and we felt that we were getting the max potential of our learning in this course. I felt so honored to be a part of that class and yeah, I think it taught me a lot about dedication and discipline for myself when it comes to producing art or working together, collaborating with people, yeah. Great.

So it's lovely to hear that that was your experience. I'm wondering if you look back at that experience, if there were kind of any key, like what did you come together with in terms of that structure, that learning process that you co-developed with that group? What do you remember about what worked in terms of, oh yeah, we would come together and do this or we really needed to do the personal awareness practice or arrive in a certain way or communicate in a certain way? What were the things that you actually decided to do together and then would stick to and repeat that built that trust over time? Yeah, it was honestly the challenge, like one of the big challenges, it wasn't a challenge but it was like a task for us was co-facilitating.

We were facilitating all together and it was shared like taking shift of, okay, I'd like to explore this. What do you think about doing this while I'm exploring this? And then be like, yeah, and then let me add this or let me bring in this text I have. It was just like a growing process of everyone's knowledge. And then we would also have like, okay, at the beginning of each day, we map out what we're going to do for the day. And sometimes we would come in to the room and we'd be like, oh, I'm really tired today. I don't think I can do this. And everyone's like, no, I'm feeling tired too. So then we would alter it to how we were feeling. And I think it was that communication that really supported us. That's great to hear.

That sounds like a process I would want to be a part of too.

Yeah, great. So, a last question that I'll ask is, what stays with you?

And so you've had some you've had some beautiful, you know, experiences you've described. What do you take away or what do you want to go further with?

You know, you're a recently graduated artist and performing artist in the field.

And, or, you know, just as a person as a student ongoing, you know, the learning that you're going to continue. How do you think this has impacted you and what are you going to go further with? I also wanted to add something, could I, to the last answer?

Another thing that I learned in that group was that we could step out of the work at any time. When we were creating together, at times, I would stay in the center of the room, even if everyone was working, mentally being like, okay, I'm just going to observe right now. But I wouldn't like it was just a flow that we really had and respected for each other that even if it looks like we're not doing anything, trust me that I'm doing something or that, that this is going to change something or maybe it won't. Yeah.

Okay. To the next question. I think what stays with me is the type of facilitation and environment that can be created through the way that you lead, like your dedication to honesty and clarity is something that creates an environment that is so safe and supportive that I think excels my potential for learning. And it helps me learn in a way that is positive. I also had to learn, like, when we were in our first viewpoints class, people would be frustrated and I would be frustrated like, why don't I know these answers or why can't you tell me or what is the way to do this correctly. But then I learned that I'm going to get to my answer.

And even if I'm not satisfied with it, that's my answer.

And if it looks different from someone else's that's okay. I can come back to it, or I can leave it, or I can find new meaning in it through other discoveries.

So, yeah, that was really something that's going to stay with me and that stays

with me daily. Wow, I really appreciate hearing that.

It sounds to me like you have a different relationship with certainty, say, which is really a keystone of contemplative practice the way that I understand it and experienced it was, okay, how do I like make sense of everything? How do I accomplish this?

How do I do well, you know, and get that validation that I'm doing it right and there's a there's a way forward and I have to find that way and move along that kind of narrow path. But to instead kind of just let go and discover like what if what if there isn't that answer that I was, you know, assuming or hoping for and what if there's instead something I don't know yet. You know, how can I make room for what is there that I haven't seen that I haven't noticed like when you're observing a space and you see Oh, there's a tiny detail over there that I've never seen before. What environment can you set up that allows you to see those those things. So, maybe just as like a last check in how, you know, I know that I know that you've done quite a bit of facilitation now towards like the end of your educational experience. And I'm curious to see like if you are are continuing any of these practices like are these things that you continue to share with other people are these things that you do with yourself. Like where where do you sit with the practices today. Yeah, I think for sure, within my art, everything I've learned is so present from the actual like tactical personal awareness practice that is a non negotiable for my preparation. And also the somatic learnings that I've had with you. I found I had this wonderful moment one time, and I found like that my confidence and bravery comes from my heart, which is something that I've never acknowledged before. And I think on stage, I have grounding in my heart now and that it kind of carries me through a performance and it keeps me in in the moment and safe, because that's where my confidence comes from. It's kind of vulnerable and awesome. And yeah, I think just the personal skills that I learned through our years together, and it's, it's going to stay with me forever and for all my learning and every job I do. Amazing.

Well, thank you. Thank you for taking that journey with me and being in those courses and bringing what you brought to the table because I think another aspect of contemplative education is that recognition that yeah like no one has the all the answers. Certainly not the professor just because they're called the teacher professor and, and it really takes that co you know that co responsible that willingness for students to go okay I'm going to try this and I have an idea and I have an experience to to share because we all do. And so it was it was a beautiful thing to learn from you as well over the years and to keep learning. So thank you, and thank you for having this conversation with me. And I hope those those watching this might get curious about what we're talking about and want to learn more. There's a practice sheet in this resource about aimless wandering which is kind of an aspect of personal awareness practice that that people could try out. And, and yeah, thank you again.

And that's it. That's the end of this this interview. Thanks so much. And we hope people enjoyed.