The Odyssey Project: A Martial Arts Journey Toward Recovery and Liberation

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Introduction: The Pleasure of the Play

On August 2, 2012, an ensemble consisting of six University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) undergraduates and seven boys on probation (ages 13–18) from Los Prietos Boys Camp (LPBC) united on Center Stage Theater in downtown Santa Barbara in order to perform the odyssey that they had worked collectively to develop, using Homer’s epic poem as a template. If only temporarily, they inscribed their identities into the world by articulating their failures and triumphs as seen in front of the audience of family, probation officers, classmates, city officials, and peers from the probation center who had come to serve as witnesses and jury (Fig. 1). For six weeks, the cast had been guided by their director, Professor Michael Morgan, through a rehearsal process that included writing exercises, dance, mask-making, voice work, visual art, and martial arts for four hours a day, four to five days a week on the campus of UCSB. This essay explores how performance disciplines like martial arts can be used to form transformative spaces and communities as an alternative to penality and youth incarceration. The analysis demonstrates how The Odyssey Project (TOP) drew on martial arts principles, in particular those found in aikido, as a way to narrate moments of conflict and celebration by harnessing, focusing, and choreographing the kinetic energy of LPBC and UCSB members into constructive moments of encounter throughout the rehearsal period and the final performance. Seemingly disconnected communities of prisoners and students were simultaneously embroiled in processes of rehabilitation and education. As a theatre and martial arts practitioner and a doctoral student in theatre studies writing about performance disciplines like martial arts, jazz, and dance, TOP provided me with an opportunity to meld scholarship and practice by creating the martial arts choreography for the final confrontation between Odysseus and the Suitors.

I became involved with TOP in the spring of 2011 when Morgan first approached me with his idea of building a theatre project that would partner the university with a Santa Barbara community organization. Subsequently, my work with TOP became an exploration into the ways in which performance practices (martial arts, dance, graffiti, and hip-hop poetry) can work in conjunction to be a cathartic and therapeutic tool to awaken agency and subjectivity in young people. Many youths in the prison system are imprisoned not just by the penal institutions, but also by the institutions' disciplinary practices. Yet, disciplinary practices also occur in a different form and with a different valence in the state university. Programs such as TOP, Unusual Suspects in Los Angeles, and Rhodessa Jones’s Cultural Odyssey offer models for how to make interventions with populations who have had contact with the criminal justice system, and these models also demonstrate that a radical reconsideration of how we conceptualize pedagogy through performance can fundamentally alter what are perceived as legitimate forms of knowledge-production and identity-formation. However, I would argue that TOP is unique, in that it attempts to restore a sense of the commons by actively bringing marginalized, in this case criminalized, youth into a public university, while simultaneously redirecting the state’s attention away from a mode of discipline and punish to a mode of perform and liberate.
Yet, it must also be acknowledged that the collaboration between UCSB and LPBC produced and revealed power dynamics that were not free of tension. There were moments in which the necessity of rehearsal time and focus came into conflict with the desire to enforce rules and regulations by probationary staff. UCSB was initially concerned with the image of the university and the presence of incarcerated individuals on campus. I questioned whether our impact would matter or if we were simply replicating empty rhetoric around art and social justice. Others suggested that because Homer’s *Odyssey* is a key text in the canon of European literature, we were reifying a form of Eurocentricism. When discussing these issues with Morgan, I would often refer to ethnographers, such as Dwight Conquergood and Joyce King, whose work reminds us that the overriding goal of critical ethnography is to “free individuals from sources of domination and repression” (King 1119). We sought in this project a similar liberation from the repression of Western forms through a direct engagement with the heart of the Western canon. This critical approach also requires that ethnographers work within communities and as part of the community, learning and co-performing and constructing knowledge and identity from the “ground level, in the thick of things” (Conquergood 146). Within the context of the rehearsal, class, and performance, *TOP* attempted to create a level playing field, in which all members of the cast were students who recognized the importance of supporting one another throughout the duration of the process.

I observed numerous times how Morgan successfully de-centered himself in order to let individual voices be heard and let the ensemble collaborate as a collective. He has gone to extreme efforts to use *TOP* as a platform through which to get the university more closely engaged with parts of the Santa Barbara community that do not wield the same socioeconomic mobility as that of the university’s student body and faculty. He has engaged LPBC members in their homes, local youth centers, schools, and through public officials, and has successfully pipelined some former LPBC members into junior college. Similar to Derek Walcott’s 1993 Caribbean *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*, *TOP* creolized Homer’s epic poem through a third-person narrator so that each member of the ensemble had an opportunity to embody the heroic elements of the story and become, in essence, a hero. The concept of embodying the heroic element of the story was a recurrent theme throughout the rehearsal process, as it was, perhaps, what these adolescents needed to see themselves as most—heroes rather than criminals—and this concept was actualized through the martial arts choreography when Odysseus confronted the Suitors.

![Image](image.jpg)
The choreography and aikido-based exercises that I introduced during the rehearsal process offered a vehicle through which the ensemble was able to explore movement as a form of storytelling, discipline, relaxation, concentration, and conflict resolution. Because the final performance took place at a professional venue that was neither LPBC nor UCSB and included a post-performance discussion with the audience and cast, the final performance was an opportunity to transgress racial, social, and economic borders, allowing the cast to gleam, if only for a moment, a world of opportunities beyond the walls of carceral systems, be they the school or the prison. For my part, I write this essay as a way of broadening the discussion about incarceration and hopefully of inspiring and encouraging others to think critically and creatively about making attempts toward liberation through performance.

Troubling LPBC and the Mission of Santa Barbara

The County of Santa Barbara Probation Department was developed between 1906 and 1909, and LPBC was established in the summer of 1944. It was conceived of as a facility to which the “Juvenile Courts of both Santa Barbara County and Ventura County could commit boys who needed to be removed from the community, but whose records were not serious enough to justify committing them to the California State Youth Authority” (4). Currently, LPBC is located on seventeen acres in the Los Padres National Forest. The facility serves as both a school and a detention center for young men between ages 13–18, and it aims to “return wards to the community as responsible and productive members of society. Discipline, respect and responsibility are the motto of the facility” (County of Santa Barbara, LPBC). The program also embraces a zero-gang tolerance philosophy and strives to provide pro-social training opportunities and life experiences that help to broaden a boy’s worldview, as well as his attitude. The emphasis on a zero-gang tolerance philosophy is a response to the current perceived threat of a rising gang problem. Cities within Santa Barbara County like Lompoc, a community from which many of the boys in LPBC come, have responded by implementing gang injunctions. These injunctions are similar to the concept of Joseph Roach’s “bodies of law . . . a cultural system dedicated to the production of certain kinds of behaviors and the regulation or proscription of others” (55). The law operates as a function of a type of performance, in which “regulatory acts and ordinances produce a routine of words and gestures to fit the myriad of protocols and customs remembered within the law or evoked by it” (56). Designed to control populations by limiting their access to the commons and regulating the physical spaces into which bodies can enter, the injunctions are part of a longer historical trajectory of the Mission of Santa Barbara, established in 1786.

However, the Mission of Santa Barbara, as part of the colonial mission writ large, performed an additional function of affecting memory, in which certain incidents and historical facts are erased and forgotten. As Roach suggests, “selective memory requires public enactment of forgetting, either to blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or, more desperately to exaggerate them in order to mystify a previous Golden Age, now lapsed” (3). Like the amnesia that accompanies discussions of chattel slavery, memories torture themselves into forgetting the past genocide of indigenous groups, such as the peoples of the coastal area of Santa Barbara known as the Chumash and the Samala who lived in the Santa Ynez Valley where LPBC is located.

The actual location of Los Prietos is haunted by both its geography and its discursive function for marking blackness (indigenous or African) as Other. Literally translated from Spanish, the ancillary meaning of the word prieto means dark or blackish. While Erwin Gudde’s California Place Names suggests that “the descriptive adjective, meaning ‘dark,’ ‘blackish,’ was repeatedly used in Spanish times and is preserved in the names of several mountains” (257), it is also believed that this term was used as an adjective for the Samala people who originally inhabited the region. In the racial coding that describes one’s social relationship in Spanish, certain words may be used in exchange for others; for example, “the term trigueno was chosen over negro, prieto over moreno” (Dominguez 275).
In the transformation from the Catholic Church’s colonial mission to the secular imagined community (nation) of the United States and the state of California, the indigenous population is substituted through surrogation, a process through which “culture reproduces and recreates itself” (Roach 2), for the Chicanas/os and African Americans who fill the void and are marked as “Los Prietos.” As scholars like Michelle Alexander and Victor Rios have demonstrated, “the primary way by which racialized populations are regulated is through punitive social control, which in turn establishes social control as a race-creating system” (Rios 30, 31). The “prison regime” and the school-to-prison pipeline have placed black and Latino bodies disproportionately in the crosshairs of the state and “the war on drugs,” in turn leading to a racialized caste system that Alexander posits as “the new Jim Crow” (3). If the school-to-prison pipeline maintains the twenty-first-century Jim Crow system through the panoptic scope of the prison regime, it simultaneously operates to maintain whiteness as an extension of colonialism and the normative mode of the university. In contrast to the predominantly white campus of UCSB, of the seven young men from Los Prietos, two were Caucasian, one was African American, and the other four identified as black or Latino. When the young men would make the twenty-two-mile trip to the UCSB campus four times a week for rehearsal, they were in effect contesting the university as a white space, a fact of which Morgan and I were acutely aware, being two of the few African American men on campus. Ironically, of the six UCSB students in the company, all but one came from departments other than the Department of Theater and Dance. This open-campus and interdisciplinary system of casting created a more diverse ethnic mixture of UCSB student participation, which, despite the homogeneity of the overall student body, included two Asians, two Latinas/os, and two Caucasians. Unlike the all-male LPBC cast members, the UCSB contingent consisted of three men and three women. As an intervention tool, TOP collapsed personal experience into a convergence of embodied theory, practice, and pedagogy in order to contest normative modes of epistemology and ontology.

Pedagogy and Discipline as Acts of Recovery

My interest in working with the ensemble using martial arts principles early in the rehearsal process emerged out of experiences as an actor and martial arts practitioner. Placing emphasis on exercises to develop relaxation and concentration through corporeal discipline are essential in preparation for movement and attuning one’s embodiment through proprioceptive awareness. As Shaun Gallagher writes, “[m]ovement and the registration of that movement in a developing proprioceptive system (that is, a system that registers its own self-movement) contributes to the self-organizing development of neuronal structures responsible not only for motor action, but for the way we come to be conscious of ourselves, to communicate with others, and to live in the surrounding world” (1). However, martial arts is also a strategy for cultivating a sensitivity of one’s relationship to a community, which may further foster understandings of subjectivity that transcend beyond the immediate performance environment, such as rehearsal or studio space.

By cultivating the physical body and the body of the community, TOP attempts to disrupt Foucaultian notions of discipline as punishment by reanimating the body as a knowing subject through an act of recovery—as a way of reclaiming the voice, which hopefully chafes against the regimented and, at times, oppressive disciplining of the state apparatus. Each ensemble member brought a vitality and vibrancy that was both creative and destructive, and the martial arts exercises became a conduit for harnessing the focus of an “unruly body” (Saddik 121), preparing the performers to engage in other forms of public presentation and understanding the other through socio-somatic praxis. Similar to dance, a martial art like aikido is a practice in which the tactile experience of skin touching skin allows for both an exchange of embodied knowledge and a reconsideration of identity as the body becomes accustomed to engaging with the other physically in a noncombative and cooperative construction of knowledge.
Martial arts in *TOP* represents a synthesis of the kind of polemic work that Fred Ho does, as well as that of theatre scholar-practitioners like Phillip Zarrilli and Eugenio Barba who have approached the interconnection of the actor’s body and martial arts disciplines as a form of theatre and performance anthropology. Performance disciplines offered in *TOP* operate as both cognitive exercises over the material body and as specific cultural ideas about movement. Barba’s theory of “dilating the body,” in which the “body is above all a glowing body, in the scientific sense of the term: the particles that make up daily behavior have been excited and produce more energy, they have undergone an increment of motion, they move further apart, attract and oppose each other with more force, in a restricted or expanded space” (Barba and Savarese 52, 53). As a form of opening and preparing the body for physical expression, this concept of the dilated body becomes even more palpable when considered in conjunction with the stymieing effects of violence experienced in the home, the street, the school, or within carceral space. Opening up to the other members of the ensemble or an audience also means becoming visible and creates a sense of exposure. Using martial arts movement can be a vehicle through which to harness and focus the attention of those who are most vulnerable and afraid to open up, often times because they have been wounded (including experiencing physical abuse) in the past. Thus, performance disciplines offer confidence and prepare the body for the stress of being vulnerable and exposed when on the stage and in daily interactions. This kind of training and preparation requires an acute attention to one’s breathing, posture, and kinetic energy.

Maintaining all of these key elements of embodiment (breath, posture, and kinesthetic awareness) under duress while simultaneously remaining relaxed and focused presents a “psychophysical” challenge for the actor (Zarrilli 2009). I introduced embodied aikido exercises like irimi tenkan and basic body mechanics found in ukemi during rehearsal. I attempted to address the psychophysical challenge by bringing the ensemble, those involved in the martial arts choreography in particular, to a point of dilation, where the body attempts to achieve a “state of awareness in which it is poised to act on the edge of a breath and able to ride an impulse through the breath/action/thought” (McAllister-Viel 172). During moments of unpredictable violent encounter the body can become flooded with adrenaline and endorphins, constricting the breath and elevating the pulse, whereby the ability to react and maintain control over bodily actions is impaired. Conversely, the rush of adrenaline and endorphins within a physical confrontation can create a state of euphoria. In an interview featured in the *TOP* documentary film, an LPBC member, Alan, states: “My family . . . like, my mom’s side of the family and my dad’s side of the family, they’re both kind of gang-related, so they have a lot of violence in them. I was mad at everything. I got into that one fight, and when I got into that one fight, it was like taking that first hit from the drug. It relieved me. All of my problems just went away.” As Alan’s experience with street fighting suggests, violence acts as a kind of euphoric rush, as if taking a hit from a drug. It is this psychophysical impulse and kinesthetic energy that musicians like the aforementioned Fred Ho cultivate through “kung fu breathing” when extending the boundaries of playing the baritone saxophone. Furthermore, as chen taijiquan practitioner and teacher Stephan Berwick suggests in the 2013 documentary film *Urban Dragons: Black and Latino Masters of Chinese Martial Arts*: “Chinese martial arts have a very clear cut sense of family and that family structure can supplant that structure that young people are finding in gangs. . . It can appeal to different groups who need to find ways to not only protect themselves, but to find pride within themselves within the groups that they are a part of.” Following Berwick’s lead, we can see how intercultural appropriations through performance disciplines offer possibilities for practitioners and communities to embody alternative identities.

In addition, practitioner-scholars like Ho, M. T. Kato, D. S. Farrer, and John Whalen-Bridge have demonstrated how the connections between “martial arts discourses” (Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011) and popular expressive practices like graffiti, rap, and break dance have resonated with marginalized youth as epistemologies and modes of identity-formation. Unlike traditional forms of writing, in the United States, these vernacular forms of knowledge-production ignited the evolution
of hip-hop aesthetics starting in the late 1960s and early ’70s, coinciding with the popularization of the kung fu cultural revolution in cinema (Kato 179). Thus, martial arts, along with graffiti and break dancing, became a part of America’s city landscapes against the backdrop of broken writing on broken walls, breaking racialized borders through soundscapes and visual inscriptions. Yet, these very practices of cultural expression have been denigrated by law-enforcement agencies, subsequently re-enforcing normative codes to maintain hegemonic regimes and discourses of power. The temporal regulating of bodies as a system of population control allows the state, through the prison regime, to punish such vernacular practices. These codes recall Roach’s bodies of law, which are also aimed at training certain populations to perform in order to become “consumer citizens” (Lipsitz 114)—good consumers—or otherwise face criminalization. In TOP, these vernacular ways of knowing, being, and doing are embraced not only as a form of self-expression, but as a “blues epistemology” (Woods 1998), which contests the dominant forms of knowledge-production that the current “teach to the test” model cannot support.

When working on creating choreography for the fight scene between Odysseus and the Suitors (Fig. 2), it was extremely important to build trust over the six-week rehearsal period. Because each of the Suitors was attacking Odysseus with weapons at different speeds, different heights, and different lines of attack, proper attention had to be paid to the way each body moved through space. The goal was to build an awareness of one’s own physical abilities and limitations, while simultaneously increasing an appreciation for others within their immediate environment and beyond. We built the choreography through collaboration and discussion rather than the regimentation that the boys are so accustomed to when receiving orders in the camp. Similar to the military, in the camp, the boys respond to the probation officers (POs) with “Yes, sir” and “No, sir” and observe militaristic codes and gestures, such as saluting, marching, and standing at attention with hands at their sides or standing at ease with their arms interlocked in the small of the back. In contrast to this form of regimentation and stiffness of the skeletal frame, at no point did I want them to develop the choreography through a rote memorized form, or kata. Rather, I introduced the jo (a cylindrical piece of solid white oak used in aikido) as both potential tool and weapon, suggesting that it was up to them to decide how they would use and move with it. That discovery had to be found within their own bodies and through their own choices. I encouraged the Suitors to think of the movement of the jo as a metaphor for their own intentions and how, like Odysseus, we are all presented with choices and possess both creative and destructive energy. Thus, the aikido-based movement and choreography, in conjunction with dance, mask-making, and construction of the actual script, were vehicles through which company members could recover their voices and own the stories of their own odysseys. The exercises for building vehicles of creative expression became moments through which performers could assert agency and control over their situation, even when they were feeling tired or noncompliant under the watchful gaze of the state.

At times, martial arts training also presented a challenge to the LPBC boys, some of whom wanted the simulated violence that we were learning to resemble that found in video games or the violence they had experienced in their own lives. This process benefited from the fact that a UCSB alumnus from the department who had been involved in the previous incarnation of the project served as a role model for the LPBC ensemble members who were involved in the fight scene. The rehearsal process also created the opportunity to have discussions and moments of insight about how we might use our bodies in different ways that were not destructive or harmful, despite the fact that we were dealing with inherently violent material within the world of the play. In the simplest terms, we had to “give in to get our way” (Dobson and Miller ii) and recognize that we were there to tell a collective story. In order to do this, I used aikido-based principles that enabled us to construct a base of agreed upon vocabulary and repertoire. Morgan observed that the movement exercises assisted in focusing the energy of the ensemble members, and we, in turn, began to integrate these exercises among the entire cast. Because we were unsure of the physical limitations and abilities of UCSB and LPBC members, we started the group exercises slowly and gradually progressed to more taxing movement skills.
By introducing physical training as group exercise, we had the opportunity to observe each participant without “auditioning” them for the actual scene. The choreography would necessitate that each of the Suitors would be neutralized by Odysseus’s energy as they attacked. To make this neutralization visible, the ensemble members involved in the choreography would be required to attack, fall down, roll, recover, and attack again before being finally frozen and meeting their demise. One of the exercises most important to the work was getting the ensemble comfortable with falling down and rolling on concrete. While the standard forward roll taught in aikido was acceptable, the roll can often be painful on the joints, particularly the shoulder, when performed on a hard surface. The Suitors were also attacking using the jo and would have to roll and recover with the prop in order to attack again. Thus, we turned the angle of the roll from a direct linear, 180-degree roll to more of a forty-five, so that body would meet the ground at a horizontal angle, thereby smoothing out the impact. In the case of Jay, who suggested that his shoulder was beginning to bother him from a previous injury, we allowed the energy from Odysseus’s parry to turn the axis of his body so that he would meet the ground with his gluteus maximus muscles first and then rotate into the roll and recover.

Martial arts represent a profound paradox of resistance and control wherein the process of corporeal discipline is a strategy for gaining control over one’s body, often to prepare for resistance against an entity of domination. In places like China, Japan, Brazil, and even the United States, marginalized martial arts practitioners have found themselves in conflict with the state when organizing for political mobilization. Perhaps the contradiction between martial arts as acts of resistance and control was best embodied in the tension between the LPBC boys learning and practicing a martial arts repertoire, while simultaneously being surveyed by the watchful eyes of POs, many of whom have martial arts experience in their backgrounds. The POs are sworn peace officers of the state of California and sanctioned to carry out the duties of any local law-enforcement official. Equipped with walkie-talkies, handcuffs, mace, and batons, one cannot help being cognizant of their authority. The POs closely monitored, recorded, and reported the daily behavior of the LPBC boys to the Los Prietos officials. I emphasized to the LPBC performers the importance of maintaining their focus and safety at all times, especially since we were using wooden oak sticks in such close proximity.
In contrast to the *jo* carried by the Suitors, Odysseus used two folding fans as a way of defending himself from the Suitors’ assaults. While in Richmond Lattimore’s translation of *The Odyssey* (1967) Odysseus uses a bronze spear to defeat the Suitors, Morgan and I wanted to present the idea that Odysseus is able to transcend the kind of gratuitous violence that he had been exposed to and had himself enacted during the Trojan War and his epic journey home. The use of the fans provided dynamic visual and sound effects, but also offered the suggestion that Odysseus’s energy harmonizes the aggressive violence of the Suitors. The fans, used both in Japanese and Chinese martial arts practices, offered another layered and hybrid part of the semiotics of the choreography. The fan can be seen in many chen taijiquan and kung fu forms and practices, but I drew on my own experiences and understanding of the fan as an extension of the body and alternative to the sword, thus diminishing the overall sense of violence, while still remaining martial. The movement and choreography within the scene was predicated on spontaneous and organic movement between each Suitor’s attack with the *jo* and Odysseus’s response in the moment. This call-and-response relationship allowed Chase, who played the role of Odysseus in this particular scene, to improvise during rehearsal and find his own kinetic response to each particular thrust and strike from the *jo* of the Suitors, who had fanned out and surrounded him in a circle. The ensemble members were thus forced to listen to one another’s bodies as each thrust and parry with the *jo* operated as a dialectic between the Suitors and Chase. One by one, each attacked and Chase responded effectively, allowing their energy to continue past him as he entered and turned based on the irimi tenkan principles we worked on throughout rehearsal. After each performer had passed and Chase had addressed the intention of his attack, Odysseus froze him in his place by sending his energy out to the periphery of the circle, where each of the Suitors prepared to attack again. Odysseus then flipped open the fans, one in each hand, which forced the Suitors’ bodies to stiffen as if struck by a thunderbolt from Zeus. Odysseus then closed the fans, folded his arms, and dropped his head, causing the Suitors to drop their weapons simultaneously and retreat to the underworld. With this scene, *TOP* attempted to speak to the conflict and violence that many of the LPBC boys have experienced in their lives. Rather than cutting or stabbing the Suitors with a sword, Chase’s movement sought to harmonize with the Suitors’ aggression. The closing of the fans brought a resolution to the conflict within the immediate moment of the play, but also sought to ground the participants within a different understanding of how conflict may be resolved by making alternative choices and performing a creative corporeal discipline (Fig. 3).

Creative corporeal discipline embodied within the martial arts of the scene between Odysseus and the Suitors also provided a symbolic sense of closure for the journey that had begun six weeks prior by UCSB students and LPBC members. Within the symbolic order of the narrative, the conflict between the Suitors and Odysseus is also the penultimate event before Odysseus can finally bring peace to his house and reunite with his wife, Penelope. To mark this transition within the story, Chase briefly performed a ritual similar to that by a Chumash elder at the beginning of the play. Chase cleansed the stage with sage brush and an eagle’s feather, an act that served to clear the negative energy of the Suitors, who had retired to the underworld at the end of the fight scene. This cleansing ritual also prepared the space for the reunification of Odysseus and Penelope. For the audience, the ritual reiterated the fact that the action of the performance witnessed onstage had transpired on hallowed ground.

Like Ho’s radical theatre pieces, *TOP* attempted to stage a heroic neo-myth by synthesizing performance strategies as varied as martial arts, hip-hop dance and poetry, and indigenous ritual practice. Because of the disciplining and liberatory potential of martial arts, UCSB and LPBC were united throughout the rehearsal process and final performance, enabling them to explore a range of international and transcultural shared bodily knowledge. The discipline displayed among the UCSB students and the boys from Los Prietos sought to upend and resist preconceived assumptions that these groups held about each other, as well as about themselves. Interacting through performance disciplines afforded *TOP*’s performers an opportunity to reconsider their own subjectivity, as well as the identity of the other by embodying the characters in the world of the play and sharing their odyssey with the public.
Zachary Price is an assistant researcher in the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at University of California, Los Angeles, where he is part of a research team that examines diversity (or the lack thereof) in film and media. He is currently researching the representation of slavery in cinema. His dissertation, “Transcultural Performance Disciplines: Embodying AfroAsia in Martial Arts Theater, Film, and Everyday Practice,” examines Afro-diasporic epistemologies and identities embodied in performance practices such as martial arts, jazz, and dance, from 1945 to the present. A playwright and performance collaborator, he holds an MFA from the New School University and a doctorate from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms are used for all LPBC cast members.

2. For this particular adaptation, we used Richmond Lattimore’s 1967 translation of The Odyssey.

3. Michael Morgan, PhD, is a senior lecturer of acting and voice. He created The Odyssey Project as a course called the “People’s Voice,” a six-week collaborative classroom that culminates in a production during UCSB’s summer session.

4. Aikido is a Japanese embodied discipline, literally translated as “the way of joining.” I have been studying this art form for twenty years, including three years in Japan.

6. Discipline and punishment are, of course, concepts elaborated in Michel Foucault’s 1977 *Discipline and Punish*.

7. The analysis in this article is based on the rehearsals and production in 2012, which is partly captured in a documentary film for which I served as associate producer. The video can be viewed at <www.vimeo.com/59348805>.

8. Technically considered, “wards of the court” sentences range from 120 to 180 days. Wards have the possibility of being released back into the community either under their own recognizance or else on some form of probation.


10. According to the “Executive Summary” in the January 2012 “South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs Annual Report,” there were approximately 32,655 youths ages 5–19 years living in Santa Barbara County. Of this number, law-enforcement officials estimate that there are approximately eleven youth gangs, with 186 youths involved in gangs in the South Coast. However, these reports fully ignore ethnicity and gender.

11. For more on the Mission of Santa Barbara, see <www.missionscalifornia.com/>.


13. Dylan Rodriguez, in “The Disorientation of the Teaching Act,” defines the “prison regime” around three interrelated technologies and processes produced at the site of imprisonment: 1) the material arrangements of institutional power that create . . . routines and protocols of militarized physiological domination; 2) the place of state-ordained human capture as a modality of social (dis)organization that produces numerous forms of interpersonal and systemic (race, class, gender, sexual) violence; and 3) the prison regime encompasses the multiple knowledges and meanings that are created around the institutional site and cultural symbol of “the prison,” including those that circulate in popular culture and among the administrative bureaucracies and curriculum of schools (8, 9).


15. My observations of the population at LPBC were consistent with the demographics of the seven young participants, as well as with the averages of disproportionate prison populations presented by Alexander and Rios.

16. *Proprioception* is the ability to locate the different body parts without consciously having to think about it.

17. Fred Ho is a Chinese American baritone-saxophone player, writer, and political activist who has produced numerous AfroAsian jazz/martial arts operettas.

18. These aikido-based principles are exercises and principles that I borrow and appropriate from my aikido-training experience.

19. *Irimi* is derived from the commonly used verb *ireru*, which means “to enter”; *tenkan* connotes “changing,” in a manner that is circular or turning. When placed together, irimi tenkan translates either as “to enter and turn” or “to step in and turn.”
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20. *Ukemi* is a Japanese term that connotes the art of falling down safely in order to preserve the integrity of the body.

21. Through my dissertation project, “Transcultural Performance Disciplines: Embodying AfroAsia in Martial Arts Theater, Film, and Everyday Practice,” I have conducted extensive interviews and research on Ho and his work. Kung fu breathing represents part of his approach to creating music as a transformative liberatory practice.

22. UCSB students admitted during interviews for the film that they, in fact, felt initially concerned knowing that some of the boys had been involved in acts of violence resulting in their incarceration. The students also admitted that working on *TOP* forced them to think about what theatre is and does for its participants; they were also forced to confront their own uncertainties regarding how they felt about incarceration. At the same time, from my observation, LPBC members discovered how open and receptive the UCSB students were to their concerns. The members admitted to being inspired by the students and realizing that the university experience was one that they also could achieve.

Works Cited


