

# ***Realm of the Dead: An Installation Performance***

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## **Educational Guide<sup>1</sup>**

This guide is meant to support professors to organize activities and assignments for their Participants who will participate in the *Realm of the Dead*, an art installation, premiering October 3<sup>rd</sup> through 17<sup>th</sup> at the University of Michigan School of Social Work.

### **Viewing Schedule**

**October 3rd - Oct 17th**

Monday - Friday: 8am - 10pm

Saturday: 8am - 6pm

Sunday: noon - 10pm

The installation is free and open to the public.

## **Description of the *Realm of the Dead: An Installation Performance***

*Realm of the Dead* is an installation performance, freely adapted from Pinto's award-winning play entitled *Marília*, after his deceased sister. *Realm of the Dead* is a solo autobiographical and ethnographic installation performance, often referred to as self-referential theater. This work, grounded in pedagogy and theater of the oppressed, connects to autoethnographic social work research and practice, recommended as vehicles for critical reflection, self-healing, personal growth, and/or advocacy. *Realm of the Dead* includes both autobiographical (i.e., personal) and autoethnographic (i.e., positionalities) material, such as explorations of ethnicity, race, gender, class, and other identities. Autoethnographic content is recommended for social work Participants to help them experience the power of artistic creativity and imagination to learn about specific forms of oppression and how to use their own privileges to create diversity and advance social justice (**Privilege, Oppression, Diversity, and Social Justice – PODS**).

### **Recommended Readings to be read prior to participating the *Realm of the Dead Installation***

These readings and videos supplement the artistic and social justice themes of the installation.

Pinto, R. M., [Marília](#), unpublished play script. Available at the [U-M Library Deep Blue](#).

Gant, V., Cheatham, L., Di Vito, H., Offei, E., Williams, G., & Yatosenge, N. (2019). Social work through collaborative autoethnography. *Social Work Education*, 38(6), 707-720.

Jensen-Hart, S., & Williams, D. J. (2010). Blending voices: Autoethnography as a vehicle for critical reflection in social work. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 30(4), 450-467.

Witkin, S. (2014). *Narrating social work through autoethnography*. Columbia University Press.

Oswald, A. G., Bussey, S., Thompson, M., & Ortega-Williams, A. (2020). Disrupting hegemony in social work doctoral education and research: Using autoethnography to uncover possibilities for radical transformation. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1473325020973342.

Paterson, D. (1999). *A brief introduction to Augusto Boal*. Community Arts Network.

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### **<sup>1</sup> Recommended Citation**

Pinto, R. M & Arthur, M. (2021). Educational Guide: *Realm of the Dead: An Installation Performance*

## Activating Content on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity & Social Justice – AC-PODS

The following standalone didactic activities (about 60 minutes each) can be conducted in advance or after Participants participate in the *Realm of the Dead*. These activities will foster an inclusive learning environment drawing on the autoethnographic themes contained in the installation performance. **Pick the activity the best fits the content and/or methodologies in your syllabus.**

### *Realm of the Dead, Didactic Activity # 1: “The Hair Dresser”*

#### Objectives

Grounded in Pinto’s rendition of his work experiences in the United States, first as poor immigrant, and later as a hairdresser, this activity will help Participants to **(1) practice improvisational and collaborative empathy and (2) develop listening and empathy skills around issues concerning grief, poverty, immigration, gender identity, and/or LBBTQAI2+.**

#### Warm up

Without talking or contact, participants walk around the space. The goal is for participants to become aware of space and how their bodies occupy space. They are asked to fill in any empty space and move faster. The group leader shouts “freeze” and everyone reflects on where they are in the space. This exercise is repeated with different tempos of movement three times. Lastly, while they are moving quickly, they are asked to stop next to one person. This person becomes a partner for the exercise.

#### Exercise

- 1- Everyone picks a partner and chooses who will be the hairdresser and who will be the client.
- 2- The person playing the client must tell a short narrative about an experience of grief, poverty, immigration, gender identity, and/or LBBTQAI2+ (fictional or real depending on comfort level).
- 3- The client sits in a chair and the hairdresser stands behind pretending to cut or treat their hair.
- 4- The client narrates a personal account (a secret?) that they slowly reveal to the hairdresser.
- 5- The hairdresser may not speak during this part, only listen. Then the hairdresser is asked to restate the narrative and offer a point of empathy.
- 6- Switch roles and do the exercise again.

#### Recommendations for optimal pedagogical impact

- Each narrative should be no more than five minutes long.
- Remind the participants to tell their story like something that they are revealing for the first time.
- They should be encouraged to think about how they feel as they share their stories to the hairdresser.
- The hairdresser should be reminded to focus on listening deeply so as to be able to repeat it back in detail if asked.
- They should focus on making the relationship feel as real as possible and providing positive reinforcement for their client’s story.

#### Critical Questions for Discussion

- This exercise **accomplishes**: First, it gives instructors a sense of how comfortable the group is with improvisation and scene work, both of which are common in field placement and social work practice. Instructors can get a sense of how focused Participants are by watching them interact in a safe but potentially intense situation. This can help Participants prepare for social work practice. Second, the activity asks Participants to engage with PODS content through performance and play, a subtle and powerful way to discover how those in the room view communication about social justice.
- With the group, talk about how the topics were spoken about, what was taboo and what felt normal? What didn’t come up? What were some of the patterns across different scenes? And how did it feel to listen or speak?

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### *Realm of the Dead*, Didactic Activity # 2: “Marília Moment”

**Objectives:** This activity builds specifically on Pinto’s transformative epiphanies in his installation performance, codified here as “Marília Moments.” A Marília Moment occurs when Pinto must face difficult situations as he recounts his journey out of a childhood of poverty, sexual trauma and domestic violence into being an undocumented in the United States, as well as his experience of grief and mourning for his little sister. In these moments, Pinto evokes the help of his dead sister in order to gain the strength he needs to overcome the numerous obstacles he encountered in his life as a gender non-conforming, poor, mixed race/ethnicity, immigrant. Therefore, this exercise will help participants to **(1) embody a gesture or a characteristic of someone who has passed away (or still alive) and on whom they may have relied and to (2) develop a social justice methodology based on this person.**

#### Warm up

- 1- Ask the group to form a circle.
- 2- Ask each person to say their name. Continue until everyone in the class knows everyone else’s name.
- 3- Ask for a volunteer to walk across the room, and then ask the group to describe the walk.
- 4- Finally, the volunteer walks across the room again, “showing” what previously they were just “doing.”
- 5- Ask the group to describe what were the differences between “walking” and “showing walking.”

#### Exercise

**Part 1:** In *Marília*, Pinto has a “Marília moment,” “when she enables me to do things I could never do on my own.” Give participants a “trigger warning” and ask them to find a place in the room and sit comfortably, close their eyes, and imagine a friend/relative/pet who passed away, or to choose an object that is special to them. Ask participants to “embody” that person/object by remembering them, their voice/sound, physical characteristics, scents, and then think of physical gestures or shapes of objects that reflect those memories. Start with small movements of hands, feet, head, and so on. After about 3 minutes, ask everyone to pick one movement and practice it. Ask everyone to open their eyes and to form a circle again. Go around the circle and ask participants to perform the gesture they focused on at the end of the last activity.

**Part 2:** Ask participants to partner up with the person next to them and find a place in the room to have a conversation about their gestures. Ask them to discuss two questions. Question 1: What did you experience during the process of embodying your person or object? What felt good? What was challenging? Question 2: Does the final gesture you performed for the group reflect or relate to your cultural heritage or the culture you were brought up in? How so? After this conversation, instruct each pair to take turns telling a story about how they had a “Marília moment”—when their relative or friend enabled them or changed their perspective in some way.

#### Recommendations for optimal pedagogical impact

- In Part 1, offer a trigger warning, allow participants to opt out if desired.
- Guide participants offering advice, “think of how this person moved,” “how do you remember them?”
- If Participants get lost, or if their conversations end early, instruct them to continue practicing and refining their gestures that embody someone who has been lost.

#### Critical Questions for Discussion

- This exercise **accomplishes:** First, it gives instructors a sense of how comfortable the group is with movement and improvisation work, both of which are common in field placement and social work practice. Instructors can get a sense of how focused Participants are by watching them interact in a safe but potentially intense situation. Second, through performance and play, Participants can engage with PODS content in a subtle and powerful way to improve communication about social justice.
- Discuss the process of creating the gesture, what felt vulnerable, empowering? What came up during the conversation with their partners went? How did it feel to reflect and listen?

## **General critical questions to be used in conjunction with either workshop**

**Objective:** Participants will synthesize materials and themes from *Marília* and *The Realm of the Dead* into their regular course work. Here are some following methods:

**I- Spend some time visiting *The Realm of the Dead* installation, end the class with a discussion relating to how the materials, music, text, video that comprise the contents of the suitcases can transform public spaces, local communities, and institutional structures.**

*What is the usefulness of using art-making processes to raise awareness about social justice issues?*

*How do these suitcases offer a case study in addressing contemporary issues of immigrant rights? What specifically do the suitcases achieve in terms of expressing political tensions in the US?*

*Do the suitcases make you think differently about gender identity? Which suitcases made you uncomfortable and why? Which suitcases made you reflect on your own gender?*

**II- Ask participants to reflect on the boxes that they created during their time visiting the installation *Realm of the Dead*.**

*How did you decide what you put in your "suitcase"?*

*What do the materials in your imaginary suitcase say about who you are as a person?*

*How do personal objects can help you tell a story about who you are, and about your many identities?*

**III- Connect thematic ideas and political horizons: immigrant rights; gender identities; childhood poverty; and sexual trauma.**

**Some examples:**

*How might you relate a class discussion with the suitcases in the *Realm of the Dead*?*

*Ask participants to do a close reading of Dr. Pinto's play *Marília* and locate ideas and recourses they can use to talk about contemporary social justice issues that impact their clients.*

**IV- Lead a seminar in which you ask participants to imagine ways to incorporate arts-based practices into their social work agendas.**

*Ask participants to identify the usefulness of mediums (e.g., theatre, music, sculpture) and artistic processes (e.g., dance, performance art) that can be integrated into social work practice to advance social justice. Specifically start with the art forms of theatre and installation art, and use *Realm of the Dead* as example.*

*Ask participants to evaluate how specific art forms and practices can support social work in different contexts, taking into account client diversity, and student's own research and clinical practices.*

## **FURTHER READINGS ON USING ART IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION & PRACTICE**

Huss, Ephrat, and Michal Sela-Amit. "Art in Social Work: Do We Really Need It?" *Research on Social Work Practice* 29, no. 6 (September 2019): 721–26.

Helma Lutz. "Intersectionality as Method." *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1-2 (2015): 39-44. Accessed August 26, 2020. doi:10.11116/jdivegendstud.2.1-2.0039.

Anthony Nicotera (2019) *Social Justice and Social Work, A Fierce Urgency: Recommendations for Social Work Social Justice Pedagogy*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, 55:3, 460-475, DOI: [10.1080/10437797.2019.1600443](https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1600443) ([Links to an external site.](#))

Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, George Lipsitz, "Improvising Community: Rights and Improvisation as Encounter Narratives," *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Cocreation*, (Duke University Press, 2013).

Petra Kuppers, *Community Performance: An Introduction*, Chapter 6: Documentation, Evaluation, Reporting, Routledge, 2007

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971), chapter 1, 43 – 67.

Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002), "The Early Forms of Forum Theatre," 241 – 252.

Anita González, "Diversifying African American Drama," in *Theatre Topics*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 19, Number 1, March 2009 pp. 59-66.