

I have never been one to appreciate “the moment,” to accept what is given to me in a certain place at a certain time and to really consider it. As someone who’s always been in close proximity to comedians, because of my brother, but is not one herself, I have never really practiced the improvisational concept of “Yes, and…” the idea of accepting whatever situation your improv partner has set up, and adding onto it. Instead, I overthink everything. This is probably why I found myself, on day two of the Abandoned Practices trip to Prague, quietly crying on the stairwell in the middle of working on a collaborative performance. As a writer, I was having a hard time fighting my own perfectionism, my need to impose a narrative on a way of making work that was foreign to me. It was at this time that Matthew Goulish discovered me on the steps, and I expressed my fears to him, most likely incomprehensibly. He simply responded, “You’re already doing everything right,” and this was enough not only to quell the perfectionist inside me, but also to give me permission to let go.

It is difficult for me to express all that I learned from Prague--all that I learned from Matthew, Lin, Mark, Daviel, Becky, and my fellow students-- into words, which I’ve always considered my most reliable mode of expression. But I think this lack of “correct” wording is appropriate. There was a moment in the last week of the trip, while, during an individual writing activity, I considered if written language was useful to me anymore. As a writer, I learned so much from those students to whom performance came naturally, from the writers who seemed to dip into performance as naturally as being swallowed by water. I remember thinking at one point that I was “losing language,” but now, I realize I was simply learning a new way to speak. Our bodies, these objects—we were saying everything. Abandonment, I learned, was not to leave behind, but to come into being.

After completing our second major project, Matthew told our group that “Practice is a kind of home.” I accepted this as a reminder to, as Matthew also says, “use all our intelligences,” when we are faced with the unfamiliar. When I came back from Prague, I turned in my thesis and graduated. Now I am teaching a writing class that encourages students to approach writing in the way they approach their own artwork, to use all their intelligences, to invite writing into their home. As a perfectionist, I admit that “teaching” doesn’t feel like quite the right word, though it is in my job description. I am still learning the concept of “yes, and…” I am still learning how to speak. But I know now that I am doing everything right.