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**SYLLABUS**

FALL 2017

THR 801 Graduate Practicum – “The Gaps in *My* Fossil Record” or “How I Learned to Stop Worrying, Let Go, and Love My Inner Bomb”

**COURSE LOCATION AND TIMES**

Auditorium 244

Monday, Wednesday 10:20 – 12:10

Course website on D2L MSU

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Mark Colson

Office: 300

Email: [mcolson@msu.edu](mailto:mcolson@msu.edu)

Office Hours Monday 1:00 – 2:00

Tuesday 1:00 – 2:00

**MATERIALS**

The Presence of the Actor Joseph Chaikin

Towards a Poor Theatre Jerzy Grotowski

Works of Sam Shepard TBD

Works of Harold Pinter TBD

**COURSE PHILOSOPHY**

Experiential and experimental practicum focusing on advanced acting techniques. Internal monologue, depth of character, letting go of the trappings of performance. Advanced exploration into an actor’s presence through the work of Joseph Chaikin. Heightened examination into losing self-consciousness in performance. To find a method of losing track of how you appear or are perceived by the audience. Non-linear physicality can unlock new areas of discovery in performance. To embrace the unknown and see what happens ---to let go. Understanding the importance of making something happen each and every time you go on stage, in rehearsal and performance. Understanding that the techniques and methods acquired in this class are connected and essential to creating meaningful and profound art.

**COURSE GOALS**

To cast off the baggage and tricks of the actor, developed over time.

To only be concerned with how the character feels and what they need. Anything else is indication and excess.

To fight against the *perceived reality* of the actor and strive to find the true and honest reality of the character.

To banish self-doubt and judgement from the rehearsal room.

To push your acting to a place that is unfamiliar, unchartered and surprising.

In rehearsal, when entering a scene, to never think about the outcome or end of the scene--- -----There is only the beginning, given circumstances, character need and no preconceived notions of how the scene will end.

To surprise yourself at least one time during the course of the semester.

To be fearless while working/ performing. Working without a net.

**PROCEDURES FOR ACCOMPLISHING GOALS**

Prepared and focused participation in class and the desire to better yourself as a performer.

To unflinchingly focus on character, given circumstances, and connecting to another character.

Applied understanding of the terms and theory covered in readings and discussed in class.

Active participation in all discussions.

Physical exercises designed to turn off your brain and just respond and connect.

Continually demanding of yourself to try and find more emotional depth.

Successful presentation of projects. *Success* defined for this class: Exploring unfamiliar and deeply personal territory as an actor. The work must cost you something.

Respect for others and their time.

Written critiques of four films. (Personal observations regarding the craft of filmmaking and acting. Continue to refine your voice as a practitioner of your craft.

Time management. Plan ahead. Do not just meet deadlines.

Respect, support, and encouragement of classmates. The nature of the work we do in and out of class is personal. Be respectful of each other.

Don’t betray the instructor during the course of the semester.

**WRITTEN WORK**

Essay / Journal (2) One midway thru the semester, the other at the end. 4 pages. Documenting the work being done in class, discoveries made.

**Four Written Critiques** 2 – 3 pages. All films will be decided upon by the instructor.

Focus on elements that interest you and that you are confronting in your own projects. Advanced acting concepts regarding production, storyline, execution, personal connection, etc.

**PROJECTS**

**Ambiguous Dialogue Scene**

With a scene partner you will create the circumstances, genre, environment, time period, characters, conflict, and objectives for the scene. All dialogue will be performed as written. No section of the scene will be glossed over or unjustified. Do not look for easy answers or solutions. Create a scene that has depth, meaning, and costs you something. You **cannot** be actors/ performers or mentally insane. You must construct the scene in a realistic environment. These scenes will be the groundwork for the Pinter section.

* *This exercise tests your imagination in constructing a scene that can be justified using only the words provided.*
* *A free exchange of ideas with your partner as you collaborate to reach a solution in solving this theatrical equation. Problem solving.*
* *An exercise in finding theatrical life in between the lines.*
* *Living in the non-verbal.*
* *Finding the life of the scene before the first word is spoken, in transitions, and after the last word is spoken.*

**Grotowski / Shepard**

This will be a semester of exploration using the writing of playwright Sam Shepard in conjunction with the physical work of Jerzy Grotowski. We are interested in finding non-linear physicality as a key in finding methods of freeing your mind and emotions from preconceived ideas about acting in general, scene work, and character development. The exercises will shift the body into non-habitual patterns/poses and will test you physically. Shepard’s use of magical realism with its sometimes, hallucinatory imagery, battling between reality and abnormality will be the perfect companion to Grotowski’s physically motivated work and will help to keep the actor far away from the familiar and comfortable.

* This new method will help you with being more spontaneous.
* Open to the moment.
* Unconcerned with how your acting is perceived.
* Finding non-habitual movement patterns will affect on your mind and emotions.
* You will discover unexpected and surprising moments.

**Pinter Scene Work**

This section will consist of scene study through the work of Harold Pinter. We will read several plays by the playwright and choose the scene best suited to each of you. There is sometimes a level of absurdity in Pinter’s plays that is difficult to disseminate. (Ambiguous Dialogue scenes). Pinter demands much from the actor. Through the playwright’s famous use of “silences and pauses,” the you must navigate an advanced level of communication in the non-verbal realms of character and the context of the play. The characters can change tactics quickly and go from sweet/ innocent to threatening, thus coining the phrase, “comedy of menace.”

(Learning outcomes for Pinter)

* Accessing and building a character with challenging material
* Improving onstage communication with non-verbal cues
* Working with changing tactics and shifting stimuli within the text
* Adding to the context of the play and character with engaged and connected choices.

**Final Scene**

To be determined by the needs of the students and the class. TBD by instructor and students.

**Your projects and performances will be assessed according to past work observed in class and on stage. You will need to display a genuine need to better yourself as an actor.** You will be evaluated with consideration of your individual progression and not in comparison to your classmate’s level of previous knowledge, experience or progression.

**NO CELLPHONES, iPods or other electronic devises permitted in class.**

**NO USE OF INTERNET during class time, unless sanctioned by instructor.**

**Noncompliance with Cellphone and Internet ban will result in points deducted from the Participation portion of your grade at the discretion of the instructor.**

**NO GUM, FOOD OR DRINK permitted in class.** (Except for one bottle of water per student)

**Attendance Policies:**

You will be allowed 2 absences without being penalized. Beyond these two absences, only a University sanctioned absence or medical absence will be excused (an official University or Department excuse form will be necessary to excuse you or a note from your doctor). No absences of any kind will excuse you from class responsibilities.

You, the student, will be held accountable for keeping up with class assignments and projects. Although the instructor reserves the right to calculate the participation grade see Participation) by subjective evaluation of the “quality” of each student’s participation, the primary factor in your attendance will be evaluated as follows:

2 absences = no grade reduction

3 absences = a 0.5 reduction of your final grade

4 absences = a 1.0 reduction in final grade

5 absences = Automatic failure of class

Tardiness: Tardiness is disruptive to a class of this nature and will not be tolerated. Any tardiness will be recorded along with attendance. Attendance will be taken promptly at the start of class. If you enter the room after the role-call has been completed, you will be considered tardy. 3 tardies = 1 absence.

**Participation points** will be subtracted from the Grotowski / Shepard section, if needed.

**If you enter the room anytime after 20 minutes of the official start of class you will be marked absent for that class day.** If you depart from class (for any reason) before the official end of class, you will be marked absent for that day.

***Department-Wide Attendance Policy***:  Class/Rehearsal/Performance Policy. Our primary focus is your education. Classes should take precedence over production. To ensure that this focus remain balanced we have instituted a “no class attendance means no rehearsal policy” for all BFA and MFA actors and Stage Managers.

Every course has different attendance guidelines. This policy is related to the number of allowed absences in any THR or DAN class. If you exceed the number of allowed absences for any individual class, the Director of the production that you are involved with will be notified regarding the break of policy and you will not be permitted to participate in that evening’s rehearsal or performance. Please check the attendance policy carefully on all THR and DAN syllabi.

As an example, most acting classes allow two unexcused absences.  You may use these at any time and it will not affect your attendance at rehearsal or performance. If you miss class again and have exceeded your limit of allowed absences, you will not be allowed to attend that evening's rehearsal or performance. This is related to all THR and DAN classes.

**GRADING SUMMARY:**

Ambiguous Scene 10

Grotowski/ Shepard 15

Pinter Scene 20

Final Scene 20

Essay (2 – 7.5 each) 15

Critiques (4) 20

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Grading scale: 93-100 = 4.0

88-92 = 3.5

83-87 = 3.0

78-82 = 2.5

73-77 = 2.0

68-72 = 1.5

60-67 = 1.0

59 and below = 0.0

**COURSE CALENDAR**

8/30

* Introduction to Class

9/1

* No Class – Labor Day

9/6

* Work Ambiguous Dialogue Scene

9/11

* Work A.D. Scenes

9/13

Work A.D**.**

9/18

* **Critique #1 Due**
* **Discuss *The Presence of the Actor***
* Work A.D.
* Grotowski /Shepard Work

9/20

* **Perform Ambiguous Dialogue Scene**

9/25

* TBD

9/27

* Grotowski / Shepard Work
* **Discuss *Towards a Poor Theatre***

10/2

* **Critique #2 Due**
* Grotowski /Shepard Work

10/4

* Read Pinter Scenes

10/9

* Read Pinter Scenes

10/11

* Work Pinter Scenes

10/16

* Work Pinter Scenes

10/18

* Work Pinter Scenes

10/23

* Work P.S**.**

10/25

* Work P.S.

10/30

* Haunted Aud.
* Work Pinter Scenes?

11/1

* Work P.S.
* **Critique #3 Due**

11/6

* Stratford Residency -No class

11/8

* Stratford Residency –No class

11/13

* Pinter

11/15

* Pinter

11/20

Pinter

11/22

* Pinter

11/27

* Pinter

11/29

* Pinter

12/4

* Pinter

12/6

* **Performance Riverwalk Theatre**
* **Critique of Film #4 Due**

**12/12**

**Essay Due**

# **Safety and Privilege of Egress**

The study of Theatre and Dance involves intensive physical and emotional challenges. Every effort is made to provide a supportive and safe learning environment. To aid in this regard, students enrolled in Theatre and Dance courses are responsible for the following standards:

(1) All members of the class, including the instructor, are to be treated with respect. No one may intentionally hurt himself or herself, another person or the physical space and its contents at any time.

(2) Students have the right to egress from any class activity, to step out of work that they believe may compromise their well-being.

(3) Students will not abuse the privilege of egress, a privilege that will be respected by the classroom community.

(4) Students are responsible for informing faculty of anything that might limit their full participation in the class (injuries, restrictions, etc.) Physical contact, between student and student, as well as student and instructor, can be expected in the practice of Theatre and Dance. A student who does not wish to be touched, for whatever reason, is responsible for informing the instructor.  An instructor will clearly define the pedagogical purpose and the specific physical contact that may arise from a given exercise.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report states that “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades and professional standards.” In addition the Department of Theatre adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grade; the all-University Point on Integrity of Scholarship and Grade, and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.) Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from a source. You are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in THR 201. Students who violate MSU rules may receive a penalty grade including but not limited to a failing grade on the assignment in the course.

**Accommodation Statement:** I am committed to providing everyone the support and services needed to participate in this course. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at <http://rcpd.msu.edu>. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc), so that your needs can be addressed. Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, visit <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/services/temporary-conditions> and discuss your needs with me.

**Online SIRS**: Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SIRS system, and you will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. In addition, participation in the online SIRS system involves grade sequestration, which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. We hope, however, that you will be willing to give us your frank and constructive feedback so that we may instruct students even better in the future. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

**Drop and Adds:** The last day to add this course is the end of the first week of classes. The last day to drop this course with a 100 percent refund and the last day to drop this course with no refund and no grade reported is outlined on the MSU Registrar’s website. You should immediately make a copy of your amended schedule to verify you have added or dropped this course.

**Observing Major Religious Holidays**: You may make up course work missed to observe a major religious holiday only if you make arrangements in advance with the instructor.

**Participation is Required Activity**: To make up course work missed to participate in a required activity or a university-sanctioned event, you must provide the instructor with adequate advanced notice and a written authorization from the faulty member of the course of from a university administrator.

**Attendance:** Students whose names do not appear on the official class list for this course may not attend this class.

**Disruptive Behavior**: Article 2.3.5 of the Academic Freedom Report (AFR) for students at Michigan State University states that “The student’s behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned.” Article 2.3.10 of the AFR states that “The student has a right to a scholarly relationships with faculty based on mutual trust and civility.” General Student Regulation 5.02 states, “No student shall…interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to classes…) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Judiciary process.