**Intro to Performance**

**Michelle Ong-Hendrick**

**Fall 2023**

**Tue/Thurs 9:25-10:40**

**Welcome to THDN 107!**

This course is a terrific gateway into the Department of Theater and Dance. We will investigate how movement, voice, ritual, physical space, and design are basic elements of performance. By examining several different traditions and modes of practice we can deepen our knowledge of the performing arts as human expression and meaning making. Celebrating our individual and shared stories we will play with new contexts and intentions to develop artistic potential. Through practice, reading, writing, and viewing we will engage with a combination of historical, theoretical, and experiential perspectives that prepare us for further creative study. Our work in this studio class is collaborative, imaginative, rigorous, and joyful!

Please let me know if any of your religious observances fall on a class day. If you miss class for religious reasons, I will make sure you do not miss any important information. The class will include some reading (electronic handouts on Moodle), some watching (links on Moodle), some talking (discussions of these) and some collaborative writing (3 reflection papers, prompts on Moodle).

**COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS**

Our theater class is a gathering. We meet with the intention to create a space of creativity, trust, and exploration. Our mission requires us to have deep conversations about the actor’s instruments: our thoughts, emotions, and our bodies. Our goal is to do the work of the theater maker from a place of curiosity and compassion which honors our shared artistry, humanity, and stories. This will in turn create the possibility of compassion and curiosity for the characters we will embody. Below are our agreements:

**We bring RESPECT.**

This class values the sharing and listening to other perspectives.

**We build TRUST.**

We value a space where actors can be vulnerable and courageous. This can only happen if we trust one another, so we will do the work needed to build a classroom culture of belonging.

**We have COMPASSION for and HONOR people’s varied journeys.**

Our journeys are unique and varied. We celebrate difference. We believe identifying difference is a way to embrace how we can all show up on stage as our fullest, most authentic selves without shame. We acknowledge and embrace those things that are varied in us and in turn within our characters.

**We expect and accept DISCOMFORT.**

The work of the artist is to be a mirror for humanity. This is not always easy.

**We assume the BEST about one another.**

Theater making is hard. Be patient with yourself, with your colleagues and with me.

From *The Body is not an Apology* by Sonia Renee Taylor.

**Section One: Getting to Know You**

September 5, 7 and 12

In these classes we will begin to create our ensemble. We will thoroughly go over our antiracist classroom statement, community agreements, this syllabus and essay assignments. We will begin work on learning the monologue “Oh for a Muse of Fire” from Shakespeare’s Henry V collectively, as it will be a reference point for our work throughout the semester. We will warm up with improvisation and theater games. We will create our **Specifications Grading Contracts**, to be discussed in class.

**Assignments this week**: Your Specifications Grading Contract will be due at the end of the day on Sept 12.

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**Section Two: Movement**

September 14, 19, 21 and 26

In these classes we will complete a mindfulness exercise and a check in. We will examine theatrical movement concepts by watching practices of Kathakali and the Filipino Folk Dance Tinikling. We will focus on aspects of Balance, Dilation, Energy, Equivalence, Face, Eyes and Hands. We will practice variations of Tinikling, learning to be “clappers” and dancers with bamboo poles, and rehearse speaking text while moving (Oh for a Muse of Fire”).

**Assignments this week**: Read *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theater Anthropology* 8-22 by Eugenia Barba and Nicola Savarese and be prepared to discuss what you have learned and are curious about.

**Paper 1 due at the start of class on September 26 (see Moodle for assignment).**

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**Section Three: Our Voice**

September 28 and October 3, 5 and 12.

In these classes we will complete a mindfulness exercise and a check in. We will begin to look at theatrical vocal techniques by watching practices from the Peking Opera, classical Greek plays and modern plays which require rigorous vocal technique such as *The America Play* by Susan Lori Parks. Our focus will be breathing and articulation/pronunciation. We will apply what we have learned toward our monologue “Oh for a Muse of Fire”. Lastly, we will befriend a letter from the phonetic alphabet and decorate a paper version of it.

**Assignments this week**: Read *The Persuasive Actor* by Milan Dragicevich PP 1-59; **Stretching the Text: Balance** and **Powering the Text: Amplification** and be prepared to discuss what you have learned and are curious about.

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**Section Four: Ritual**

October 17, 19, 24 and 26

In these classes we will complete a mindfulness exercise and a check in. We will begin to explore theatrical ritual by examining the Dance of the Yoruba from the Egungun Masquerades. We will learn how ritual has informed and continues to inform and inspire theater making. Our attention will be focused on how objects, movement and text are used in ritualistic spaces and how these sequences (possibly) evolved into what we now understand as strophe and antistrophe, the Greek chorus. We will play with creating our own short Dithyrambs, using sections from our monologue “Oh for a Muse of Fire”.

**Assignments this week**: Read PP. 3-48 in *History of the Theater* by Oscar Brockett and be prepared to discuss what you have learned and are curious about.

**Paper 2 due at the start of class on October 5 (see Moodle for assignment).**

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**Section Five: Time and Space**

October 31, November 2, 7 and 9

In these classes we will complete a mindfulness exercise and a check in. We will begin to explore how Time and Space are fundamental elements of all theater making. We will examine some stage principles of Noh Theater and begin to consider how composition informs our storytelling. We will also learn how contemporary picture books are mini stages and how elements of Time and Space are used theatrically in them.

**Assignments due this week**: Read *The Water Station* by Mizu no Eki and be prepared to discuss what you have learned and are curious about.

**Section Six: Design**

November 14, 16, 21 and 28

In these classes we will complete a mindfulness exercise and a check in. We will begin to explore how design impacts and informs theatrical work. Our focus will begin on aspects of design from the Chinese Dragon Dance and Japanese dance theater Butoh. We will look at contemporary design including the work of Es Devlin and Robert Wilson. Lastly, we will create a paper bag puppet that is self-study.

On November 14 we do not have class, in order that you can participate in the Bicentennial Events on campus.

**Assignments due this week**: *Watch Mind-blowing Stage Sculptures That Fuse Music and Technology from TED.* (Be prepared to talk about what you have learned and are curious about.

[**Es Devlin: Mind-blowing stage sculptures that fuse music and technology | TED Talk**](https://www.ted.com/talks/es_devlin_mind_blowing_stage_sculptures_that_fuse_music_and_technology)

**Section Seven: Final Project**

November 30, December 5, 7 and 12

In these classes we will complete a mindfulness exercise and a check in. We will create and rehearse a 60 second performance piece based on what we have learned and that uses the text “Oh for a Muse of Fire”. Our work will be performed during Last Night, which is the Department of Theater and Dance’s showcase of the current semester’s class work.

**Paper #3 due at the start of class on November 30 at the start of class (see Moodle for assignment).**

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**Requirements:**

There are three Theater and Dance productions that you must see this fall. Pick from this list:

1. **Joy** Directed by Tandy Beal Friday Oct 13 @7:30, Saturday Oct 14 @2 and 7:30 Goodwin Theater AAC
2. **Machinal** Directed by Teri Incampo Thursday Nov 30-Saturday Dec 2 @7:30 Goodwin Theater AAC
3. **Senior Thesis** Arouba Swaray Thursday Dec 7 @7:30 Performance Lab/Trinity Commons
4. **Last Night** Monday Dec 11 @ 5:30 Performance Lab/ Trinity Commons
5. **Trinity LaMama Showcase** Wednesday Dec 13 @4:30 and 7:30 Performance Lab/ Trinity Commons

**Specifications Grading**

In this class we will be using principles of Specifications Grading to calculate your final letter grade for the semester. Also called Contract Grading or Ungrading, these tools for evaluation center growth mindset, learning, collaboration and positive relationships between students and professors. There are many ways that teachers can approach alternative ways to grade. This class will focus on these tools:

**Contract Grading:**

You, the student, will decide how much work you wish to do for this class and by such also the grade you wish to earn. You will contract a grade for yourself and adhere to the qualifications for such a grade. We will begin by using a standardized model for this, and students will edit, with my help, according to what they need and want for the class. This contract will be created by the student, approved by me, and will specify in advance (by our third class) the requirements as well as the penalties for completing or not completing the mandate/s of your contract. This will be further explained and created in class. Contract grading models for each letter grade are below, and these will be our starting place.

**Peer Review:**

In our class, peer review will establish guidelines for what will constitute satisfactory work for the written components of the class. Groups of three will work together to write and present an essay at three different points in the semester (for a combined total of three different essays) to be further explained in class. Each group will hold the responsibility for evaluating each other, using our collaborative guidelines, and determining if a body of written work has been completed with satisfaction or will need to be edited further. We will use these questions as a starting place:

-Was your peer present for class during the time when this essay was discussed/presented?

-Had your peer done the readings necessary to be a valid contributor?

-Was your peer a good listener?

-Was your peer a good volunteer?

-What else would you like to share about this group member’s participation?

-What grade do you think your peer earned for participation in group work?

**Self- Evaluation:**

You the student will reflect on the following questions and be prepared to discuss them as we evaluate the final project.

1. Were you present for the in-class rehearsals and for the performance at Last Night?
2. Were you a good listener?
3. Were you a good volunteer? Did you make contributions to the conversations and rehearsals?
4. What else would you like to share about your rehearsal process? This can include what has prevented you from being an ideal collaborator- nobody is perfect, and we are all striving to become better students, even teachers!
5. What grade do you think you earned for the final project?

**CONTRACT MODELS**

**Requirements for a grade of A**

Class attendance is required. If you contract for an A in this course, you may miss two classes in total. If you have more than two absences, your grade for the entire class will drop by 5 points. If you miss 4 classes, it will drop by one letter grade. Attendance at three Theater and Dance events, including Last Night, is required as well.

There are 6 sections to this course. Each section is worth 10 points. To successfully earn the ten points, you will have done the readings for the section, be prepared to participate in class discussions and be a contributor to the rehearsals. I will evaluate these sections.

There are three collective papers in this class. You will work in a group of three to create these essays. You may not use ChatGPT. They will be peer evaluated. Each paper is worth ten points.

Peer evaluation is a part of this course, and you will take it seriously. The evaluation requires honesty, courage, mindful assessment, and there is a written component. Peer evaluation is worth 4 points and will be evaluated by me.

Breakdown:

Six Sections- 60 points (10 points each)

Papers- 30 points (10 points each)

Peer Evaluation- 4 points

Attendance at (3) Theater and Dance events, including Last Night- 6 points

**Requirements for a grade of B**

The requirements for this grade will be the same as the above, with the exception that you may opt out of one of the papers and you may miss up to three classes.

**Requirements for a grade of C**

The requirements for this grade will be the same as the above grade for an A, with the exception that you may opt out of two of the papers and you may miss up to four classes.

**A Note on D and F Grades**

I reserve the right to award a grade of D or F to anyone who fails to meet a contractual obligation in a systematic way. A grade of D denotes some minimal fulfilment of the contract, to warrant the passing of the course. An F grade is the absence of enough satisfactory work, as contracted, and does not warrant the passing of the course. Both a D and F grade denote a breakdown of the contractual relationship implied by signing any of the contracts above.

Adapted from the book *UNgrading* by Susan Blum

**ADVICE:**

Please talk to me if anything is on your mind. I’m looking forward to a great semester learning with you!