Winter Session
Immersive Theater: Experiential Design, Material Culture, and Audience-Centered Performance
January 8 – 23, 2019
Class Meeting period: 12:00PM – 4:00PM
Rehearsal/research period: 5:00PM – 8:00PM

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Instructors: Tom Pearson, Third Rail Projects
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Course Credit: 1

As conceived, the course currently has 48 hours of in-class coursework, 36 hours of scheduled research/rehearsal work (afternoon period) as well as the expectation for an additional 36 hours of reading, writing, class preparation, and rehearsal work for a total of 120 hours of coursework.

This course requires no previous theater, dance, or performance experience to participate, and each student will be allowed to enter the course work through his/her own lens and expertise.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course offers a comprehensive exploration of Third Rail Projects’ approach to crafting and performing in immersive performance formats. Students will work closely alongside Co-Artistic Director Tom Pearson to explore Third Rail’s toolbox of techniques, including:

• Developing presence and clarity around audience engagement
• Remaining spontaneous and responsive to the changing landscape of an active audience
• Generating game play for crafting immersive scenes
• Understanding ritual, narrative, and audience initiation through the study of a scene from one of our immersive productions

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
1) To model a new idea together based on site, research, original story, and design.
2) To walk through the research, generative, and assembling process, teaching and learning by doing together.
3) Culminate everything learned into a final performance showing

STRUCTURE OF COURSE:
This course meets once a day for four hours of intensive workshops, which will explore a new aspect of immersive theatre in depth each day. Students are expected to come to class having completed the assigned readings as well as the individual/group research required for each class period. Students are expected to spend three hours each afternoon doing individual/group project work, which they will present to the class the following day. This class will also travel into New York City on Wed. Jan. 10 for a performance of Then She Fell. Students should familiarize themselves with the work, the company, and Lewis Carol’s Alice in Wonderland before attending the performance.

DRESS CODE:
Please bring dance/yoga wear or similar comfortable clothing to class (such as sweat pants or loose-fitting clothing). Although there is no strict dress code requirement, participants should be able to move in a way that allows full exploration of movement possibilities. Keep in mind that some of our site-
specific explorations will require street shoes that allow for dance/movement in many different situations. Any specific requirements will be announced prior to the date.

COURSE WORK:
The course will include daily readings, writing assignments, research assignments, scene work, group and individual projects/presentations.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:
- 15 points: Class preparation and participation
  - This course is an experiential program that functions in a specifically designed environment; its purpose is to expose students to the techniques of immersive performance creation. Class attendance, informed and willing participation, positive attitudes, and willingness to take part in activities constitute the essential standards for evaluation of grades. Points will be marked off for tardiness, incomplete assignments, or lack of participation or effort.
- 15 points: Reflection paper on *Then She Fell* performance
  - Students are expected to attend *Then She Fell* on January 9th, 2019 at 7:30pm (transportation will be coordinated by Wesleyan). There is absolutely no late admission to the performance. Missing the performance will result in receiving 0% for this portion.
- 20 points: Individual research project and presentation
  - Students will conduct research on a historical aspect of Chinese history, culture, architecture, and/or material culture as it relates to the larger immersive theatre project.
- 50 points: Final Performance Project and Individual Short Paper
  - Students will present a final scene project that incorporates the fundamental elements of immersive theatre as examined through the course. Students may choose to focus on aspects of the immersive experience that suit their individual interests: performance, music, scenic design, sensory experience, audience interaction, etc...

COURSE MATERIALS: Required Texts

**BOOKS:**
- *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (Clarissa Pinkola Estés)
- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Joseph Campbell)
- *101 things I learned in Architecture School* (Matthew Frederick)

**ONLINE ARTICLES:**
- “Lewis Carroll’s ill-fated Obsession with the Prepubescent Alice” *The New Statesmen*
- Review of *Then She Fell* and Interview with Zach Morris [https://bit.ly/2o1HcTF](https://bit.ly/2o1HcTF)
- “Third Rail Projects Presents *Then She Fell*” Culture radar Interview with Jennine Willet
• https://bit.ly/2Lk88XY
  
• A Series of Features and Reviews related to Third Rail Projects’ Immersive Works in THE NEW YORK TIMES:
  o https://nyti.ms/2o9aUG5
  o https://nyti.ms/2o7PqcN
  o https://nyti.ms/2PHw1fs
  
• A Series of AMERICAN THEATER Features and Reviews related to Third Rail Projects and Immersive Work:
  o https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/02/23/dance-or-theatre-yes/
  o https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/02/23/a-sense-of-the-space-where-dancetheatre-leads-us/
  o https://www.americantheatre.org/2013/07/06/in-immersive-theatre-the-audience-are-the-actors/
  
• Some other Articles on Third Rail and Immersive Theater:
  o FORBES: “This Immersive Theater Production Is As Close To Time Travel As Most Of Us Will Ever Get” by Seth Porges https://bit.ly/2wng6dj
  o THE WASHINGTON POST: “The friendly specters of ‘Ghost Light’ work their incandescent charms” by Peter Marks https://wapo.st/2PB2RhP
  
COURSE MATERIALS: Optional Texts

BOOKS:

• The Sandpiper’s Spell by Tom Pearson https://www.amazon.com/author/tpearson
• The Heroine’s Journey by Maureen Murdock https://amzn.to/2OZ1JUi
• The Future of Ritual by Richard Schechner https://amzn.to/2nYeMd8
• The Writer’s Journey by Christopher Vogler https://amzn.to/2IBnMNC
• How to Do Things with Words by J.L Austin https://amzn.to/2OZnhjw
• Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture b Johan Huizinga https://amzn.to/2whY8c4
• Empty Space by Peter Brook https://amzn.to/2BAomww
• Site-specific Performance by Mike Pearson https://amzn.to/2PtJWFH

AUDIO:

• Theatre of the Imagination (Audio Series – 12 hours total) by Clarissa Pinkola Estés
  o (from Sounds True or on iTunes) Vol 1 Episode 1 for La Calavera and Life/Death/Life Cycle – especially!
  o Vol 1: https://amzn.to/2BEOAxO
  o And Vol 2: https://amzn.to/2BDEiOy
ONLINE ARTICLES:

A Series of Features and Reviews related to Third Rail Projects’ Immersive Works in THE NEW YORK TIMES:

- NYT Behind the City Review: https://amzn.to/2nYeMd8
- NYT Ghostlight Review: https://nyti.ms/2rPEaRE
- NYT The Grand Paradise Review: https://nyti.ms/2BCF9it
- NYT The Grand Paradise Feature: https://nyti.ms/2Liadn6
- NYT Genuine Plastic Reliquaries Review: https://nyti.ms/2w5G85z
- NYT Governors Island Feature: https://nyti.ms/2wis2Nh

A Series of American Theatre Features and Reviews related to Third Rail Projects and Immersive Work:

- https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/10/21/teaching-moments-in-albany-parks-learning-curve/

COURSE CONTENT AND OUTLINE:

Note: Written homework assignments are all to be turned in via Blackboard, unless otherwise noted. Other creative assignments are due in class as noted.

Class Meeting Time: 12:00PM – 4:00PM
Individual or group projects/research time: 5:00PM – 8:00PM

Winter Session is, by nature, an intensive, immersive course experience. This course meets six days a week with one free day per week. Students are expected to put in the same number of hours as for a semester-long course. Students are encouraged to eat meals together and spend time together outside of class in order to further promote and develop the tenets of the immersive performance experience. Students are also encouraged to spend the mornings completing their readings/assignments for the day and preparing for the research or individual projects they will work on in the afternoon.

JAN 7 Move in day.

Jan 8 Morning: OVERVIEW & INTRO TO SITE WORK & IMMERSIVE; SITE-SPECIFIC TOOLS – OBSERVATION, RESEARCH, EXPLORATION
Afternoon: Group scene work

JAN 9 Morning: RESEARCH AND POINTS OF ENTRY – EXPERIENCE DESIGN
Afternoon: Group scene work

JAN 10 Morning: ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES & DEVISING TECHNIQUES
Afternoon: ATTEND THEN SHE FELL @ 7:30pm

JAN 11 Free day
JAN 12  Morning: CONFLICT SERIES PART 1: ENVIRONMENT (SOFT BODIES, HARD – WORKING WITH REAL WORLD ARCHITECTURE)  
        Afternoon: Group scene work

JAN 13  Morning: COMPOSITION & STAGING TECHNIQUES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL SPACES  
        Afternoon: Research day

JAN 14  Morning: CONFLICT SERIES PART 2: CONFLICT WITH SCENE PARTNERS – OPPOSITES IN PERFORMANCE, SUBTELTY & SENSATION  
        Afternoon: Research day

JAN 15  Morning: CONFLICT SERIES PART 3: CONFLICT WITH SELF – USING IMAGE AND MOVEMENT TO CREATE SOLILOQUY  
        Afternoon: Research day

JAN 16  Morning: CONFLICT SERIES PART 4: CONFLICT WITH AUDIENCE – CRAFTING THE COVETED ONE-ON-ONE AND OTHER INTIMATE EXPERIENCES  
        Afternoon: Final group project rehearsals

JAN 17  Morning: DRAMATURY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE WORK – APOTHECARY OF PERFORMANCE  
        Afternoon: Final group project rehearsals

JAN 18:  Free day

JAN 19  Morning: ARCHETYPES, MYTHIC STRUCTURES, AND LOCATING THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORK  
        Afternoon: Final group project rehearsals

JAN 20  Morning: ART AND EXPERIENCE – MEDIAL NATURE AND ORIGINAL VOICE – WHERE STORY COMES FROM AND HOW TO CARE FOR IT – CUSTODIANS OF CREATIVITY  
        Afternoon: Final group project rehearsals

JAN 21:  Last day of classes  
        Morning: Workshop final group projects  
        Afternoon: Final group project rehearsals

JAN 22:  Reading Day

JAN 23:  EXAM DATE  
        Morning: WRAP-UP AND REHEARSALS  
        Afternoon: FINAL SHOWINGS  
        Evening: RECEPTION

JAN 24/25:  (First day of spring semester: possible presentation of showings to theater students and faculty depending on theatre department interest)
DETAILS

JAN 8    OVERVIEW & INTRO TO SITE WORK & IMMERSIVE; SITE-SPECIFIC TOOLS – OBSERVATION, RESEARCH, EXPLORATION

Introduction to site-specific and immersive performance and total “topographical” approach. This four-hour workshop will share the methods and skills that Third Rail Projects has developed to create movement in site specific and immersive environments, investigating how to yield into, counter, locomote over and explore what's possible when moving on architecture and furniture. This workshop will delve into the questions that arise: How do we take care of our bodies? How do we take safe risks? How do we make movement that is organic to the particular structure we are working on?

JAN 9    RESEARCH AND POINTS OF ENTRY – EXPERIENCE DESIGN
Introduction to site-specific and immersive performance and total “topographical” approach continued.

JAN 10  ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES & DEVISING TECHNIQUES | ATTEND THEN SHE FELL @ 7:30pm

This day will look at the various methods Third Rail Projects employs to generate content, borne from our individual stories, and how to shape these into theatrically meaningful and varied material. We will look at devising theater from everyday action, through site exploration, playback, improvisation, and image juxtaposition. We will also look at the ways we can reach our audience via sensory perception—from the more common senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste to intuition and subtler shifts in balance, acceleration, time and topographical texture—to create a fully experiential work. We will also look at methods for researching and referencing literary archetypes, tropes, and structures in order to hook our creative content into legible frameworks. Finally, we will experiment with what it means to make space for our audience within our work.

JAN 12  CONFLICT SERIES PART 1: ENVIRONMENT (SOFT BODIES, HARD – WORKING WITH REAL WORLD ARCHITECTURE)

The first in our conflict series looks at one of the most unique and rewarding components of all site-specific and immersive work: the ability to partner with real-world architecture. Treating an environment as a partner and pulling from energy-based techniques as well as good contact improv methodologies, we will explore a spectrum possibilities for creating movement in relationship to objects, furniture, and architecture that ranges from meditative nuance to percussive abandon.

JAN 13  PROJECT 1 DUE | COMPOSITION & STAGING TECHNIQUES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL SPACES
How do we design and shape work that attends to viewpoint and aperture? How do we define our relationship to the audience and control the way in which they experience our narratives, through proximity, perspective, voyeurism, isolation of focus, and image-release? This is a how-to workshop where we will mostly be moving and experimenting in small groups, staging scenarios, and framing our way through each. In the second half, we will discuss and experiment with ideas about translating immersion into film and film into immersion, asking how they relate, what can each do uniquely, and how they can complement one another. Examples from new work and Tom’s current creative process will be referenced.

JAN 14  
CONFLICT SERIES PART 2: CONFLICT WITH SCENE PARTNERS – OPPOSITES IN PERFORMANCE, SUBTELTY & SENSATION

Part two of the conflict series redefines the traditional two-person scene. We will look at creating movement-based duets for unusual spaces and unusual circumstances, considering that our audiences are also a part of the dynamic and population of the scene. What are the stakes between two people when a third party is implicit and how does that alter the tactics, the structures, and the way in which a narrative unfolds? We will look at a series of strategies for allowing our story to emerge through opposites and tasks, as well as through competition and shifting status.

JAN 15  
CONFLICT SERIES PART 3: CONFLICT WITH SELF – USING IMAGE AND MOVEMENT TO CREATE SOLILOQUY

The third section of this four-part series introduces the idea of theatrical conflict as it applies to immersive theater. We will look first at dynamic solo movement as a way of crafting soliloquy, allowing the viewer into more private and symbolic spaces with a single character. How do we craft immersive solo material, and how does it fit into the larger structure of our work? How are movement soliloquies useful in leveling audiences through an experience-based narrative? And what are the messages they can convey? What is the audience relationship to these “overseen” moments?

JAN 16  
CONFLICT SERIES PART 4: CONFLICT WITH AUDIENCE – CRAFTING THE COVED ONE-ON-ONE AND OTHER INTIMATE EXPERIENCES

The fourth and last in our conflict series will look at the one-on-ones, where one audience and one performer share a space and a scene together. It is at its core the most coveted and unique experience available to audiences within the immersive format. Creating dynamic one-on-one engagements and intimate encounters requires a very different kind of storytelling, one which both requires the presence of an audience member and allows them enough space and recognition to be themselves and not have to pretend to play a part. What can we do with an audience? How can we be legible to them? How can we challenge assumptions and deliver a unique experience to them that is carefully crafted and leads them through a narrative experience, while simultaneously honoring their own choice-making and sense of agency?
JAN 17  DRAMATURGY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE WORK – APOTHECARY OF PERFORMANCE

This section will focus on story as medicine for our times — as both empowered by, and the antidote to, technology. Looking at our stories as the balm for cultural wounds and the performance of these stories as apothecary for our audiences, how does a creator make work that invites audiences in and seals a safe and consensual space for reflection, symbolic thought, and insight? How do performers adjust the dosage of their performance to be responsive, and responsible, to the trust and availability of audiences? We will look at what it means to work from intuition in the delivery of interactivity.

JAN 19  ARCHETYPES, MYTHIC STRUCTURES, AND LOCATING THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORK

This workshop will dive even further into Jungian theory and archetypes, as well as Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey, as a way to analyze stories and tighten narratives around recognizable conflict. What happens when we hook our ideas into the collective unconscious as a way to orchestrate experience through symbolic language and cultural signifiers? For those who seek to devise their own material and work as authors, directors, and designers in theater, dance or other creative practices, this workshop asks key questions — and will build upon and hone material we begin in session one.

JAN 20  ART AND EXPERIENCE – MEDIAL NATURE AND ORIGINAL VOICE – WHERE STORY COMES FROM AND HOW TO CARE FOR IT – CUSTODIANS OF CREATIVITY

This section makes an esoteric inquiry into methods that explore the personal and archetypal images of our dreams and active imagination. It explores how we can integrate these extracts of symbolic meaning into our work by addressing three specific areas: finishing the script of nightmares (or going beyond the crisis moment), de-coding the subterranean messages of dreams and active imagination, and practicing, as art-makers, our own medial abilities.

JAN 21:  Last Day of classes

Jan 22:  Reading Day: Rehearse final project and finish papers

JAN 23  EXAM DAY: FINAL RESEARCH DUE | WRAP-UP AND REHEARSALS/FINAL SHOWINGS