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DRAM 312.01: Physical Performance Skills I - The Body in Space and Neutral Mask

William D. Watson

University of Montana, Missoula

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DRAM 312: Physical Performance Skills I - *the Body in Space and Neutral Mask*

FALL 2000

INSTRUCTOR: Bill Watson

T/Th 9:10 – 11:00 – McGill 104

OFFICE HOURS: M/W 10-11

DESCRIPTION:

This course provides an analysis of the body in space and the signals with which physical presence communicates information: rhythm, tempo, sequence, weight, etc. In addition, the work in the mask provides tools for physical self analysis and establishes and explores a movement vocabulary that is built on in the next course of the sequence; physical characterization.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this course are fivefold:

- To strengthen the actor's ability to physically connect to the "geography" of the stage - the "space" of a performance event, and utilize the "space" in their work to communicate more dynamically with partners and audience.
- To strengthen the actor's ability to physically connect to the weight, being and presence of another performer - the "physical dialogue" of a performance event, and utilize their bodies in their work to communicate more dynamically with partners and audience.
- To give the actor an understanding of the physical and mental processes of sensory perception; the sequence and process of receiving and acting upon an event. Or more simply put, to investigate how action happens - in both body and mind.
- To give the actor the ability to understand how personality is manifested in the actor's physical presence, making the actor aware of their own physical personality and giving them tools to eliminate mannerisms or "parasites", and create a "blank slate" prior to beginning character work.
- To build on the vocabulary and understanding of Lecoq's neutral mask, moving into its uses in the construction of character and performance .

METHOD:

- Strengthen the actor's ability to physically connect to the "geography" of the stage - the space, as well as connect and communicate with partner(s) through a wide variety of improvisational techniques; spatial improvisations, contact improvisation etc.
- Move into the study of the shape, sequence and dynamics of behavioral effort through the use of Lecoq neutral masks. Individual mask improvisations will be used to gain an understanding of the actor's own physical personality and to build clear, honest sequences of physical behavior. Observation is as critical as participation in understanding and

synthesizing this work, and each scene will be observed and critiqued by the group to understand how signals have been received.

CRITERIA:

The student must participate in exercises and improvisations, demonstrating a developing ability in working from a theatrically "neutral" physical foundation in designed exercise work and developing a personal process of physical acting that has grown through the course of the semester in the following ways:

- Eliminating personal physical "parasites"
- utilizing clear, filled, accurate sequences of physical action
- Demonstrating responsiveness to and incorporation of feedback
- Increasing flow, ease and accuracy of choices
- Physically preparing for each classes' work.
- Increasing environmental specificity in mask "etude scenes"

The student must participate in discussions, critiques and analysis of each other's work. This work will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Clarity of communication skills in feedback
- Accuracy and insight in observations
- Understanding and use of vocabulary and principles

The student must prepare and perform several in-class performances of partner and group developed movement work. The work will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Professionalism: Timely, effective preparation of exercises and original material - with outside rehearsal.
- Full attendance and active participation in all group, partnered and solo exercise work.
- Give and take with partners and/or group and ability to develop and integrate improvisation within group generated material.
- Creativity of explorations

REQUIREMENTS AND SPECIAL POLICIES:

ATTENDANCE:

Full participation in and attendance at ALL classes. Sitting out the day's work is the same as an absence. This is a physical class and requires you to be in class, working. **YOU ARE ALLOWED 2 ABSENCES PERIOD.** After 3 absences your grade will be dropped a full letter and will continue to drop for each two absences after that. **TARDINESS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.** Be on time and ready to work. The Theatre does not tolerate lateness and neither does this class. **2 TARDIES EQUALS 1 ABSENCE.**

CLOTHING:

You must be ready to work every day we meet in clothes that are appropriate for the work. Sweats, shorts, or Dance wear only. **NO STREETCLOTHES AND NO JEANS.** If you are not properly dressed you will not be allowed to participate and will record an absence for the day. Streetclothes such as jeans will not allow you to move or warm-up properly and can cause

injury to yourself or others through incomplete warm-up or surfaces on the clothing that can catch or scratch.

When neutral mask work begins, only "blacks" will be acceptable as clothing for work in class. Tights, leotards or sweat pants and T-shirts with no patterns or writing. If you are not properly dressed for work you will not work that day and will be counted absent whether you are present or not. Once we move to expressive and clown work, what appropriate attire is will expand greatly.

PARTICIPATION:

There is a certain amount of risk of injury in any movement class (just as walking down the street carries some risk with it), and I will at all times stress safety and work to control and minimize the risk in all the work that we do. You are working against yourself and at your own pace and are not in competition with anyone else in the class, nor will your evaluation be based on comparisons with any of your classmates. You will be evaluated on your own progress and the way in which you work. Each person's physical abilities and physical needs differ and I am looking for you to achieve personal growth. I will not require you to move any more quickly than you are safely able to move and you will be your own judge of how far you can risk on a given day. This work is designed to help you combat physical fears and to allow you to release and take controlled risks, and you are expected to push and stretch yourself, but should you ever fear something is dangerous, then stop or opt out. It is expected that you do so. Understanding your limits (and we hope to discover TRUE limits vs. psychologically imposed ones) is as important an element of developing your physical selves as developing new abilities.

In mask work, observation is even more important to this work than participation is. You will be evaluated on the progress you make in comprehending and mastering this work both as a participant and as a critical observer.

ASSESSMENT

- Observing and responding to the student's comments, insights, and self analysis of exercises and work in class
- Observing and responding to scene and exercise work in class
- Evaluation of application of coaching notes in subsequent performances of comparable exercises and assigned scenes
- Evaluation of their ability to retain principles, notes and techniques throughout subsequent work.
- Group discussion and analysis of clarity and accuracy of exercise work.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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