THR 210 ACTING I  M W 9 – 10:15
SYLLABUS
Professor Edward Gero, Instructor
<egero@gmu.edu> (X31116)
Office Hours: Monday 4:30 – 6:00 PM

CLASS OBJECTIVES:

To introduce the student to contemporary acting techniques of acting and stagecraft through individual and/or group exercises incorporating skills such as observation, sense and emotion memory, concentration, improvisations. To use lecture and discussion to familiarize student with the history and development of acting theories, selected examples of its various cultural contexts, and the various types of stage architecture and configurations. To develop student’s appreciation of the theater through attending live performances (on and off-campus), in-class critical evaluation, and written and oral reflection.

In addition, it is my hope that this class will encourage the development of the following:

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ACTORS
1. An ability and a desire to read plays, novels, and newspapers - anything and everything that expands awareness of human behavior, thought and language.
2. An understanding of English grammar, phrases and sentence structure. To breathe and phrase a text adequately an actor must be aware of the score which is embedded in the sentence.
3. An ability to read with penetration and imagination.
4. An ability to respond to and really listen to another person's words and movements. We need to focus on the "you stimulate, I respond" chain of human communication if the actor is ever to understand dialogue.
5. An awareness of body language -- one's own and that of others. According to various studies anywhere from 75% to 90% of our human communication is nonverbal.
6. An ability to acknowledge experiences in his/her own life as a source for acting. The actor must start with the germ of truth, something he/she knows, before any imaginative flights can take place.
7. The recognition of the class room and the rehearsal space as a place to explore and probe, rather than merely a place to practice getting something right.
8. A strict adherence to the basic discipline of in-class and in-rehearsal etiquette. You must learn a respect for the acting--the real work--that is done in these spaces. As you prepare your space, you prepare your mind.
9. A concern for one's health and well-being. Good creative ideas do not spring from a poorly cared for tool (body).
10. Taking as many opportunities to study good performances as possible. Young actors learn by watching mature actors make choices in rehearsal and in performance. (Taken from "Problems of the acting process," by Kathleen Conlin, Theatre News, May 1982, p. 14.)

NB. During the semester I will in performance at The Studio Theater in Washington, Dc in a production of The Seafarer. Attending this performance will complete requirement for viewing one live professional performance.

This course meets the Arts requirement, one of the Core requirements of the University General Education program. The goal of the Core requirement is to help ensure that students are introduced to the broad range of intellectual domains that contribute to a liberal education. By gaining exposure to the subject matter and ways of knowing in a variety of fields, students will be better able to synthesize new knowledge, respond to fresh challenges, and meet the demands of a complex world. For more information on General Education, please see the University Catalog, pp. 69-71, and the Provost’s Office General Education website, http://www.gmu.edu/departments/provost/gened/index.html
METHOD OF EVALUATION:

Grades are based on: 100% Class attendance; FULL participation and committed collaboration with fellow classmates; Completion of exercises and written assignments; Demonstrated understanding of fundamental acting terminology introduced by the instructor; Demonstrated progress over the course of the semester to willingly incorporate refinements in techniques introduced by the instructor.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Roget. Thesaurus

RECOMMENDED READING LIST:

Hagen, Uta. Respect for Acting
Stanislavski, Constantin. An Actor Prepares

CLASS REQUIREMENTS:

A. In-Class Exercises: A sequence of 7 individually prepared exercises to be presented in class. Each assignment will require outside preparation, including observation and rehearsal. Each exercise is explained with guidelines below.

B. Email Journal: An email to the instructor supports you to observe, reflect and comment on your journey through the class, recording and sharing what you are learning, feeling and thinking. Contents may include an account of all preparation for upcoming exercises, comments on observation of other's work in class, ideas generated from your reflection on discussions in class, any discoveries you make about yourself or the world around you resulting from or associated with the work in class. Emails should be sent to me egero@gmu.edu on the Friday following each exercise.

C. Four Theater Performances: Reaction Paper to 4 (four) public theatrical performances. One must be from the professional theatrical community of Washington (Arena Stage, Shakespeare Theatre, Studio Theatre, Theatre for the First Amendment, Theatre J etc.) and, at least one from George Mason Player's productions paying close attention to the acting values of the productions and also including other salient production values. Ticket stubs must be submitted with papers rehearsal of scene work. First two papers due by week eight of class (mid-term) and second two are due on the last day of class (Final). Guidelines for reaction paper will be provided.

D. Audition. Students are required to audition for one stage production, student, professional or community. Compete and hand in signed audition form to fulfill this requirement, along a brief written description of the experience. Dates of available auditions will be announced throughout the semester.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

1. 100% ATTENDANCE. Absolutely no unexcused absences. Emergencies must be communicated prior to the class to the instructor via phone or email. See above info.
2. All written work must be typed, double spaced, with cover sheet, affixed by staple or clip.
3. TURN OFF cell phones, pagers or other electronic devices during class.
4. Lateness policy: Late assignments NOT accepted. NO exceptions.
5. Grades: each component of the class [1.) Attendance 28 points; 2.) Exercises 7 points; 3.) Journals 7 points; 4.) Performance and reports 4 points; 5.) Audition and report 1 point] is awarded equal points. Grades are calculated on the percentage of total points earned over total points available (47) to earn.
CLASS SCHEDULE WEEK BY WEEK

I. Introduction to the aims and procedures of the course.

II/III. Exercises The following exercises are sequenced for a thorough investigation of the fundamentals of acting. They begin with non-verbal observation-based problems, then adding language and more challenging technical tasks which culminate in the presentation of monologue. These exercises build on a foundation of exploration and observation of one's own experiences as the source of inspiration that actors bring to text. DURATION OF EXERCISES: Minimum 2 - Maximum 3 minutes.

1. Private everyday activity. Present an activity you do privately everyday utilizing all five senses. Use no dialogue. Represent, as accurately as possible, precisely what you actually do in this activity. Use the actual amount of time it takes to do it. No props. Record observed details and sequencing in a notebook.

IV/V
2. Public everyday activity. Present an activity or situation that includes a stranger. Use all five senses. Minimal dialogue. Minimal props. Use available materials to suggest place. Concentrate on observing your behavior in a social context. How do you behave in new situations?

VI
3. A Situation with Great Change. Everyday activity with one major change. Create a situation where you enter a scene or environment with one mood or emotional state when something happens that motivates a drastic change. Minimal dialogue. Concentrate on full commitment to and involvement in making the two emotional states. Make the two moods as completely different as possible.

VII/VIII
4. An Emotional Memory. Recreate an emotional moment from your past. Record as many sensory details as possible in your preparation. Make a list of details relating to each sense. If appropriate, use dialogue. Concentrate on recalling and recording as many details as possible. Use the dialogue you recall as accurately as possible. Choose a peak emotional moment. Honesty. Truthfulness. Concentration. Accuracy.

IX-X
5. Character from life. Characterization is the process of creating physical and emotional truth best modeled by people that you know. Present an everyday activity as your parent based on your experience, memory and observation. Pick an activity that best represents the characteristics and character traits of your parent. Use dialogue as needed. Concentrate on as many physical characteristics as possible: voice, look, walk, etc. Use props and costumes to make your transformation as complete as possible.

XI-XII.
6. Impersonation. Present a detailed representation of an easily recognizable character such as an historical figure, politician, celebrity, and film or television personality. It is best to do an everyday activity. Avoid using famous scenes from films or tv shows where the character is acting. You tube is a great resource for preparation for this exercise. Include props, physical characteristics, vocal mannerisms. Must be recognizable.

XII-XIII.
7. Monologue preparation. In-class exercises to prepare for self generated monologues to be presented at last classes.

XIV. 8. Monologue. To be developed and presented.
NOTES AND DIRECTIONS FOR EXERCISE FOUR PREPARATION

(A) Sit in a straight back chair. Assume a comfortable position whereby you could fall asleep if need be.

(B) Close your eyes and make the same effort to relax, both physically and mentally, as you did in the relaxation exercises.

NOTE: You must again be cautioned not to think of the experience in terms of a story to be narrated. Only the sensory steps are to be narrated. Be concerned only with these sensory sensations and only relate them to the class. For example, do not say, "I feel cold." That is too general. Try to remember exactly where you feel cold, to what degree, what kind of cold it is; a chill or a biting cold? Be as specific as possible. Try to remember exactly what it is that makes you want to say, "I feel cold."

(C) Define the area or areas relating to the experience. For instance, if it took place in a certain room, describe what you saw in the room; if the room was warm, where did it cause you to feel warm? What colors did you see? What odors? What can you hear? What things did you touch or feel? Try to bring all the senses into play.

(D) If the experience took place outside, try to remember the feeling of the sun, air, wind, or rain, against your body. Be aware of the temperature, heat and cold.

(E) Remember any physical objects you saw during the experience. This could include a person, but never say, "I saw a man." Again, this is too general. Instead, describe by Sense Memory what you, your instrument, saw with your senses.

(F) Remember the voices or sounds you heard during or leading up to the "experience." Do not repeat the words. Only describe your sensory reaction to them: the sense of hearing, the tone, the pitch, etc.

NOTE: It is again imperative to remind you that as the experience progresses, you should absolutely not anticipate the end result (in this case, the tears). Keep the concentration trained on all the sensory events that lead up to the emotion.

(G) Try to remember anything you touched or that touched you. Describe them fully with the senses. Do not say, "I am touching a desk," without describing its shape, structure, texture, color; be conscious of anything touching you like the feel of your clothes on certain parts of your body, the dust on your fingertips, etc.

(H) If pain or a sense of pain is involved, describe its exact location. If it moves, decreases, or increases, if it is a dull pain or a sharp pain, try to remember the sensations clearly as you narrate them.

(I) After you have recalled every sensory object that you are able to, and the climax of the exercise is reached, terminate it.

Go back over the Affective Memory in your mind and try to recall any "objects" of the five senses you may have omitted. Sometimes you will find it easier to remember other pertinent areas of the experience after the exercise is attempted.

You may discover a result which is very different from what you expected. Nature has a strange way of changing things around from the way we remember them. If such a thing occurs, by no means think the exercise is valueless. On the contrary, it means that you have found an experience for another emotion and this opposite emotion can certainly be utilized for the emotion that was produced.

NOTE: Each exercise should be repeated until it has become familiar to the mind and its sequences have become logical and orderly. After repeating it several times, you will discover that each time the emotion will be slightly different from the previous time. Therefore, do not think about the feeling which was achieved in the last go around. The emotion will always occur if the work is properly done, but any differences or shades should be noted and even expected. If the actor dwells on the feeling or emotion to be expressed or if he anticipates the emotion, concentration will be lost on the sensory steps that lead to the emotion. When the concentration on theses steps is lost, the emotion cannot appear.

REMEMBER TO PICK AN EXPERIENCE UNUSUAL ENOUGH TO HAVE LEFT AN IMPRINT ON YOUR MIND.

AFTER THIS PREPARATION WE SHOULD SEE IN CLASS: The sequence of events that occurred in your memory, doing them in the precise order, using the language that you used, hearing the words you heard. When the experience is complete terminate. CONCENTRATION IS THE KEY TO THIS.