Winter Session
IMMERSIVE THEATRE:
EXPERIENTIAL DESIGN, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND AUDIENCE-CENTERED PERFORMANCE
January 8 – 23, 2019
Class Meeting period: 12:00PM – 4:00PM
Location: TST 101 (Theater Studio)
Rehearsal/Research Period: 5:00PM – 8:00PM

CONTACT INFORMATION:
I**nstructors:** Tom Pearson, Third Rail Projects
Email: tpearson@wesleyan.edu
Course Credit: 1

SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – READINGS AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS ARE FIXED

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Though this course is centered around theater, live performance, and experience design, the course requires no previous theater, dance, or performance experience to participate. Each student will be allowed to enter the course work through his/her own area of focus.

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:

- Working from original material to craft immersive scenarios and scenes
- Developing presence, clarity, and responsibility regarding audience engagement
- Honing intuition, listening, and responsiveness to the changing landscape of an active audience
- Understanding ritual, narrative, and audience initiation through scene study from one of Third Rail's immersive productions

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1) To examine techniques for generating story and working from personal associations, dreams, and creative practices to develop original work;
2) To look at myth, ritual, and symbolic thought as the structural basis for experience design;
3) To learn to design for all the senses;
4) To model a new creative experience together based on site, research, original story, and design;
5) To walk through the research, generative, and assemblage process, teaching and learning by doing together;
6) And to 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 evening on individual/group project work or assignments given in class, which they will present to the class the following day as assigned. This class will also travel into New York City on Wednesday, JAN 9 for a performance of *Then She Fell*. Students should familiarize themselves with the work, the company, and the critical response as assigned below in "Required Online Articles" before attending the performance.

DRESS CODE:

Please wear 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 possibilities. Keep in mind that some of our site-specific explorations will require street shoes that allow for movement in many different situations. Any specific requirements will be announced prior to the date.

ETIQUETTE:

Because this is a course in designing experience, presence is essential. Please show up on time and turn cell phones, laptops, and other devices off completely. Any notes should be handwritten in notebooks and transposed later if needed.

COURSE WORK:

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

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:

Please note that all written homework assignments are all to be turned in via email to tom@thirdrailprojects.com unless otherwise noted. All written assignments are acceptable as PDFs, Pages, or Word documents. All written assignment page length requirements are specified in individual items below. All written assignments should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and in 12-point font. Please use a simple, standard font such as Helvetica, Arial, or Times New Roman, and number your pages. Please write your name, email address, and course title on the top right of the first page, your name at the top right of each subsequent page, and please title your paper.

Further details, writing prompts, and specific paper topic requirements will be emailed to students for each assignment after registration closes.

Grade Point Breakdown:

- 15 points: Written Assignment DUE **JAN 1** [Start reading these now!]. A reflection/comparison paper on:

- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (Commemorative Edition featuring Introduction by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés): Introduction; Prologue "The Monomyth"; and all of Part 1 "The Adventure of the Hero."
- *Women Who Run with the Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D.: Introduction "Singing Over the Bones"; Part 1 "The Howl: Resurrection of the Wild Woman"; Chapter 10 "Clear Water: Nourishing the Creative Life"; and the Afterword "Story as Medicine."
- Paper length: 5-7 pages (covers both readings).

- 5 points: A written assignment DUE on **JAN 8**:
  - *Theatre of the Imagination* by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés (AUDIO Series): Volume 1/Session 1 (77 minutes) "La Calvera (Godmother Death)," the life/death/life cycles of creativity, and symbolic thought; *and*
  - Volume 2/Session 8 (52 minutes) "The Fisherman's Wife" and the growth of the father, idea of masculine.
  - Reflection paper on symbolic thought and storytelling and the concept of masculine/feminine in the psyche.
  - Paper length: 2-3 pages (covers both audio episodes).

- 5 points: Reflection paper on *Rage and Forgiveness* DUE on **JAN 8**:
  - *Theatre of the Imagination* by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés (AUDIO Series): Volume 2/Session 10 (65 minutes) "The Crescent Moon Bear," The Boundaries of Rage and Forgiveness; *and*
  - *Women Who Run with the Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D.: Chapter 12 "Marking Territory: The Boundaries of Rage and Forgiveness"
  - Both of the above consider the same story and material but in slightly different ways, and one is written and one spoken. Please read and listen to both. Some material will be reiterated, but it is central to our creative inquiry, so please spend time with this and focus on the concept of "descansos" and the four stages of forgiveness.

- 20 points: In Class Assignments
  - Students will be given short in-class assignments and will be graded 2 points each for completion (10 total)

- 5 points: "Transcendent Function" paper DUE on **JAN 12**
  - Written assignment based on individual relationship to dreams, stream-of-consciousness and free-writing, and other creative practices and where we seek to avail ourselves to inspiration and new ideas. This is meant to be a reminder map to your own creative process. More details will be given after enrollment closes.
  - Paper length: 1-2 pages

- 5 points: Reflection paper on *Then She Fell* performance DUE on **JAN 16**.
  - 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.
  - Reflection Paper length: 1-2 pages (referencing also items from the Required Online Articles list below).

- 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.

- 30 points: Final Performance Project DUE on **JAN 23**
  - Students will present a final performance scene 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. Collaboration is encouraged, but each student must lead an aspect and will be graded according to a demonstration of their effort in this area.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:
Texts, Audio, and Online Articles:

All course materials are either free (articles) or available for order online at Amazon or other outlets (texts and audio).

BOOKS (REQUIRED):
See details above in Graded Assignments as to which sections of the following are required reading.

- *The Portable Jung*, Edited by Joseph Campbell, The Viking Portable Library: https://amzn.to/2O6MxDK
- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell – Commemorative Edition with introduction by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés: https://amzn.to/2yuiu3V
- *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D.: https://amzn.to/2uxto82

AUDIO (REQUIRED):

- *Theatre of the Imagination (*Audio Series) by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D. (from Audible.com, Sounds True, Amazon, or on iTunes):
  - VOLUME 1/SESSION 1 "La Calavera – Godmother Death" (77 minutes); and
  - VOLUME 2/SESSION 8 "The Fisherman's Wife" (52 minutes)
  - VOLUME 2/SESSION 10 "The Crescent Moon Bear" (65 minutes)
  - The rest of Volume 1 and 2 (a total of 12 sessions) are optional but strongly recommended for further listening:
    - Volume 1: https://apple.co/2JfOsoD
    - Volume 2: https://apple.co/2POAdcO

ONLINE ARTICLES & VIDEO (REQUIRED):

NOTE: The following online articles are all relatively short reviews, interviews, topical pieces, and feature articles pertaining to immersive theater, and in many cases specifically Third Rail Projects and *Then She*

Fell. All are required reading and should be bibliographical references for the reflection paper on *Then She Fell*.

- Familiarize yourself with the work of Third Rail Projects at: thirdrailprojects.com, thenshefell.com, and globalperformancestudio.com.
- "Constructing Consent" by Leah Abelson: https://bit.ly/2LicO0s
- "Tom Pearson on Dream Logic" Interviewed by Odyssey Works: https://bit.ly/2nYUGiR
- "Lewis Carroll's ill-fated Obsession with the Prepubescent Alice": https://bit.ly/2o1HcTF
- Review of *Then She Fell* and Interview with Zach Morris: https://bit.ly/2o1HcTF
- "Third Rail Projects Presents *Then She Fell*" Culture radar Interview with Jennine Willett: https://bit.ly/2Lk88XY
- A Series of Features and Reviews related to Third Rail Projects' Immersive Works in *The New York Times*:
    - https://nyti.ms/2o9aUG5
    - https://nyti.ms/2o7PqcN
    - https://nyti.ms/2PHw1fs
- A Series of AMERICAN THEATER Features and Reviews related to Third Rail Projects and Immersive Work:
    - *Dance or Theater?:* https://bit.ly/2D29DdC
    - *A Sense of Space:* https://bit.ly/2yuNEYE
    - Immersive Theatre and Audiences: https://bit.ly/2CZw6rN
- FORBES: "Theater for the Video Game Generation" by Seth Porges: https://bit.ly/2Lq7rML
- DEEP MEDIA: "How Immersive Theater Resonates with the Digital World" by Frank Rose https://bit.ly/2SrHoJU

COURSE CONTENT AND OUTLINE:

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.

OVERVIEW:

JAN 1 DUE: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and *Women Who Run with the Wolves* paper.

JAN 7 **MOVE-IN DAY**

JAN 8 **OVERVIEW OF COURSE & INTRO TO SITE WORK, IMMERSIVE THEATER, AND EXPERIENTIAL PERFORMANCE**
DUE: *Theater of the Imagination* "La Calavera" and "The Fisherman's Wife" paper

JAN 9	**CROSSING THE THRESHOLD – ARCHETYPES, MYTHIC STRUCTURES, AND LOCATING THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORK** DUE: TBA – work on in-class assignment Evening: ATTEND *THEN SHE FELL* @ 7:30pm
JAN 10	**RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE, AUDIENCE INITIATIONS, AND RITES OF PASSAGE** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 11	**SYMBOLIC THOUGHT AND STORYTELLING – DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE ON IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 12	**STORYTELLING FROM THE CORE** – **CREATIVE SPACE AND THE GENERATIVE PROCESS** DUE: Reflection Paper of "The Transcendent Function" from *The Portable Jung*
JAN 13	**FREE DAY**
JAN 14	**EXERIENCE DESIGN: OBJECTS, EPHEMERA, SENSATION, EXPLORATION** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 15	**CREATING AND PERFORMING IMMERSIVE: OPPOSITES IN PERFORMANCE; CONFLICT WITH ENVIRONMENT, SCENE PARTNERS, AND SELF** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 16	**WHO ARE WE AND WHY ARE WE HERE? – CRAFTING INTIMACY AND IMPLICATING AUDIENCES** DUE: *Then She Fell* Reflection paper
JAN 17	**DRAMATURY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE WORK – THE APOTHECARY OF PERFORMANCE** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 18	**DIRECTING FROM THE AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 19	**FREE DAY**
JAN 20	**PUTTING IT TOGETHER – CYCLES OF CREATIVITY** **DESIGN WRAP-UP** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
JAN 21:	**LAST DAY OF CLASSES** **WORKSHOP FINAL GROUP PROJECTS** DUE: TBA – in-class assignment Evening: Final group project rehearsals
JAN 22:	**READING DAY**

JAN 23: **EXAM DATE**
WRAP-UP AND REHEARSALS
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
Evening: **FINAL SHOWINGS & RECEPTION**

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

COURSE DETAILS:

JAN 1 DUE: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and *Women Who Run with the Wolves* paper.

JAN 7 **MOVE-IN DAY**

JAN 8 **OVERVIEW OF COURSE & INTRO TO SITE WORK, IMMERSIVE THEATER, AND EXPERIENTIAL PERFORMANCE**
DUE: *Theater of the Imagination* "La Calavera" and "The Fisherman's Wife" paper

Introduction to site-specific and immersive performance and a total "topographical" approach. We will discuss considerations in experiential design as it applies to live performance and will introduce the methods and skills that Third Rail Projects has developed to create theater that is audience-centered. We will explore a number of tools and methods for activating intuition and sensation and for generating content and governing performance, including proximity, invitation, and awareness. We will discuss the "why?" and "how?" of immersive theater and lay out the parameters of the final performance project.

JAN 9 **CROSSING THE THRESHOLD – ARCHETYPES, MYTHIC STRUCTURES, AND LOCATING THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORK**
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
Evening: ATTEND *THEN SHE FELL* @ 7:30pm

This workshop will consider Jungian theory and archetypes as it applies to crafting experience as we fold in Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey as a way to analyze stories and tighten narratives around recognizable conflict. Do we agree with Campbell's model? What happens when we hook our ideas into the collective unconscious as a way to orchestrate experience through symbolic language and cultural signifiers? How to we use some of these ideas about story and ritual to map our way through an experience design, and what do we talk back to? Where are the pivot points in our narratives, and how do we keep the audience at the center of those moments? 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. And we will begin to experiment with what it means to make space for our audience within our work.

JAN 10 **RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE, AUDIENCE INITIATIONS, AND RITES OF PASSAGE**
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment

This session will demonstrate how an artist can construct a scenario from just the shard of an idea or fragment of a narrative. We will look at a scene from Third Rails' production of *The Grand Paradise*– as a way to understand ritual, narrative, and audience initiation in an immersive theater context. We will also introduce the idea of archetypes, thresholds, and world-making – and their application to the concept of "audience as hero/protagonist" We will look at world-making for Immersive Theater and go even further into Jungian thought to discuss practices for developing fully fleshed out worlds. References include Third Rail Projects own work, but also includes discussion and analysis of other successful world-makers such as popular directors (think David Lynch, Wes Anderson, etc.), other contemporary purveyors of experiential theater, and various writers who deal with mythic structure and storytelling – worlds where each theme, character, and idea is a manifestation of a single psyche at work. How do we build a complete world, develop its unique internal logic, and locate the consciousness of the work through its many parts?

JAN 11 **SYMBOLIC THOUGHT AND STORYTELLING – DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE ON IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE**
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment

This session will make an inquiry into depth practices to understand the roots of story and symbol in our work and our lives and how those can inform a creative endeavor. We will look at our own life mythologies and begin to work with our dreams and associations to lay ground work for later scene and scenario development, working with symbol and metaphor. We will pay specific attention to dream logic and working with and from dream material. As dream detectives, we have access to a nightly theater of our own making. How do way pay attention, remember and translate these perfect unconscious images into our work? We will explore how our unconscious wanderings might show new creative pathways and serve as guides in our work, specifically with regard to the world-making and experiential theater/immersive ritual that is to come.

JAN 12 **STORYTELLING FROM THE CORE** – **CREATIVE SPACE AND THE GENERATIVE PROCESS**
DUE: Reflection Paper of "The Transcendent Function" from *The Portable Jung*

This session is a continuation of JAN 11 topic on how we create a nurturing framework for our visions, and when inspiration arrives, how do we practice listening in order to decode its messages (both the personal and archetypal) – through quieting ourselves, active imagination, and dream interpretation? What, then, are the questions we ask of our visions, and how do we take the symbolic extracts and create from the threads of meaning into our work? This will be a deeper dive into three specific areas: the story-making function, de-coding the subterranean messages of dreams and active imagination, and to practice, as art-makers, our own medial abilities and transformational potential through a series of practical exercises that pull from personal narrative. The goal is originality! Practically, we will mine for narrative by looking 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.

JAN 13 **FREE DAY**

JAN 14 **EXERIENCE DESIGN: OBJECTS, EPHEMERA, SENSATION, EXPLORATION**
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
Assignment given in class

Successful immersive performance lies in the ability to marry a good and original story with exceptional experience design, putting the audience at the center of the work. For a long time now, art has been coming off the walls, moving into the street; food has been moving out of restaurant, performance out of the theater. Participation has become the key ingredient that unifies experiences of entertainment, dining, travel, and daily life, offerings that allow audience agency (ability to navigate and make choices within experiences) and have the ability to create empathy with one another via meticulously curated individual interactions. Experiential performance can place an audience in the position of hero or protagonist, making the experience and narrative for and about them. 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 session where we will mostly be moving and experimenting in small groups, staging scenarios, and framing our way through each. We will look at the ways we can reach our audience via sensory perception–from the more prevalent senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste to the lesser discussed senses of intuition, subtle shifts in balance, acceleration, time, sensation, feeling, intuition, and topographical texture – to create a fully experiential work. Through this lens, we will broach the topic of structure in terms of its many layers of time, space, and design ratios. A particular emphasis will be given this session on environmental design and material culture.

JAN 15 **CREATING AND PERFORMING IMMERSIVE: OPPOSITES IN PERFORMANCE; CONFLICT WITH ENVIRONMENT, SCENE PARTNERS, AND SELF**
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment

We will look 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 of possibilities for creating movement in relationship to objects, furniture, and architecture that ranges from meditative nuance to percussive abandon. The second part of the session 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 16 **WHO ARE WE AND WHY ARE WE HERE? – CRAFTING INTIMACY AND IMPLICATING AUDIENCES**

DUE: *Then She Fell* Reflection paper

This session will first contemplate 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? The second part of the session looks at one-on-one 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 **DRAMATURY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IMMERSIVE WORK – THE APOTHECARY OF PERFORMANCE**

DUE: TBA – in-class assignment

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 18 **DIRECTING FROM THE AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE**

DUE: TBA – in-class assignment

We will workshop individual scenes and the overall connection between them with a focus on walking through the experience, creating from and stepping into the shoes of

the audience, and directing from that perspective. We will discuss and map a plan for devising with an audience in mind, to write, choreograph, and direct as we go from this relationship to performers – and how to test our assumptions early on. We will also explore audience responses, the possibilities for things to go "wrong," and how to contain the experience and develop a response palate. How do we define the goal of a scene, its optimum result, and the leeway we want to allow an audience within this?

JAN 19 **FREE DAY**

JAN 20 **PUTTING IT TOGETHER – CYCLES OF CREATIVITY**
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment

This session is part review and part big picture overview of the process, from inspiration through devising, and finally, into production. It will serve as the culmination of the semester and bridge our classwork into the final performance projects. We will also look at what comes after production and the cycles of creativity that considers artists will have more than one project of the course of their careers and how they might navigate the ambiguous and often intimidating time between the life of a project, its end, and the beginning of a new idea. Practical advice and exercises for the business of art will also be explored, including: infrastructure, funding, marketing, and developing a mission with your work that answers the questions: 1) "What am I meant to do?" and 2) "Who is this meant for?"

JAN 21: **LAST DAY OF CLASSES**
Workshop final group projects
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
Evening: Final group project rehearsals

JAN 22: **READING DAY**

JAN 23: **EXAM DATE**
WRAP-UP AND REHEARSALS
DUE: TBA – in-class assignment
Afternoon: **FINAL SHOWINGS & RECEPTION**

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

~ END ~