

TDM 90BR: PRODUCTION STUDIO

BODIES AND THE METAVERSE: PERFORMING "THE SINGULARITY PLAY"

KEENAN TYLER OLIPHANT, JAY STULL and MADI FABBER

MONDAYS - 3-5:45PM

FARKAS 303

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course leads students through a new play development process, culminating in a fully rehearsed and designed production of "The Singularity Play" written by Jay Stull and directed by Keenan Tyler Oliphant. The course is primarily focused on performance with a full production component and seeks serious actors with intrepid ambition. Students with interests in playwriting, directing, or theatrical design are also welcome, although enrollment in the course will necessarily involve performance of some kind. Questions guiding our exploration in performance are spurred by the preoccupations of the play itself and the director's vision for the production: what is the performance of consciousness? Of embodied existence? Of prescribed gender? How does a virtual world (a Metaverse) affect behavior in the actual world? What constitutes the boundary of human-ness and how does proximity to that boundary affect behavior, performance, and power?

APPLICATION AND ENROLLMENT

Enrollment in the course will be via audition.

Students should first acquire and read the script of The Singularity Play by emailing Madi Fabber at madisonfabber@g.harvard.edu to request a copy of the play.

Auditions will be held remotely, via Zoom, on Wednesday, January 11th (2pm-4pm ET), Thursday, January 12th (4pm-6pm ET), Sunday, January 15th (11am-1pm ET), Monday, January 16th (2pm-4pm ET) and Tuesday, January 17th (2pm-4pm ET). Students may schedule a 20-minute audition slot on these dates by using this link: calendly.com/thesingularityplay. Students interested in the class but unavailable to audition any of those days should contact Jay (jstull@fas.harvard.edu) or Keenan (keenanoliphant@fas.harvard.edu) directly via email to schedule an audition time, pending their availability.

The audition will consist of a conversation about your experience performing, your experiences in theater, your questions about the play and the production, and your interests in themes of performance and embodiment/disembodiment.

And, although no significant experience in performing is a prerequisite to enrollment, we'd certainly like to get a sense of your facility with the script. As such, students who audition will prepare the role of either GREG or LAUREN from Act One of the script, beginning on the top of page 47 with LAUREN's line, "But that feels completely against what would normally happen" and ending on the bottom of page 49 after GREG's line, "It was a bug, Lauren. It wasn't an evolution. It was an error in the math."

Enrollment in the course will be indicated no later than Wednesday, January 18th through MyHarvard.

SCHEDULE

The course itself is an extended rehearsal that builds, gradually, into a significant time commitment in the weeks leading up to the production. Official class time will, therefore, be treated equally to that of scheduled rehearsals and scheduled rehearsals will be treated as meaningfully as official class time.

Because attendance is crucial to making any piece of theater, **students should ensure ahead of registering for the class that they can make every performance, tech rehearsal, and rehearsal.** Absences due to illness are permitted, but, because of the ensemble nature of the play, the class generally cannot accommodate other, pre-existing scheduling conflicts. If you have a question about any existing

conflicts, please ask us about whether it can be accommodated.

The comprehensive schedule (including Classes, Rehearsals, Tech, and Performances) is:

Monday, January 23rd: 3-5:45pm - Class

Monday, January 30th: 3-5:45pm - Class

Monday, February 6th: 3-5:45pm - Class

Monday, February 13th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Monday, February 27th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Monday, March 6th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Monday, March 20th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Sunday, March 26th: 1-5pm - Rehearsal

Monday, March 27th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Sunday, April 2nd: 1-5pm - Rehearsal

Monday, April 3rd: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Tuesday, April 4th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Monday, April 10th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Tuesday, April 11th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Wednesday, April 12th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Thursday, April 13th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Sunday, April 16th: 1-5pm - Rehearsal

Monday, April 17th: 3-5:45pm AND 7-11pm - Class and Rehearsal

Tuesday, April 18th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Wednesday, April 19th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Thursday, April 20th: 7-11pm - Rehearsal

Sunday, April 23rd: noon-11pm - Tech

Monday, April 24th: 7-11pm - Tech

Tuesday, April 25th: 7-11pm - Tech

Wednesday, April 26th: 7-11pm - Tech

Thursday, April 27th: 7-11pm - Dress Rehearsal

Friday, April 28th: 7-10pm - Performance One

Saturday, April 29th: 2-5pm AND 7-10pm - Performances Two and Three

Sunday, April 30th: 2-5pm - Performance Four

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To rehearse, perform, and produce a new work of theater from table work, through blocking, choreography, tech rehearsals, and performance. To develop approaches for giving feedback and collaborating with a director and playwright. To hone the questions an actor must ask themselves when creating a character for the first time in a premier production of a new play. To understand the role design

plays in storytelling and how the performer can work in collaboration with that storytelling. To investigate the boundaries of gendered performance and to cross those boundaries. To investigate the boundaries of human performance and to cross those boundaries. To invent new performative styles to meet the demands of the play.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

We approach this class as collaborators.

As collaborators, we make the following commitments to one another: we will show up, we will demonstrate respect by providing our full attention, we will listen, we will communicate what we need, our limits, our potential, our worries, and our ideas. We assume best intentions, and we assume people fuck up. We welcome errors, missteps, failure, and correction.

We will show up.

We will be flexible. We do theater because we think the practice of building community is a practice that has important meaning in the world. We will recognize distraction when it distracts us. We will hold two priorities in tension in our approach to making theater: that we must care for ourselves and that we must collectively place the project above our personal egos.

We will show up.

We are making theater as collaborators. We invite you to join us in the commitments above.

We believe that the responsibility of maintaining community is as important as creating community. We will, as far as possible, meet our collaborators where they are. That said, we can neither create nor maintain community without attendance.

Regular absences will result in no credit.

PRIVACY

For the purposes of building trust in the classroom, we promise - and we ask students to promise - to:

-Not video record any class, lecture, meeting, or rehearsal without announcement to and consent of everyone subject to the recording.

-Not take a still picture of anyone without announcement to and consent of everyone represented in the still picture.

-Preserve the confidentiality of our classroom by not sharing what others talk about with anyone outside this class.

MATERIALS AND ACCESS

Post Dramatic Theatre, "Aspects" by Hans-Thies Lehmann, p. 145-174

Theatre of Movement and Gesture, Chapters 1,2 p. 1-26 and 5 p 67-92 Lecoq

Towards a Poor Theatre, "Towards a Poor Theatre"; "The Theatre's New Testament"; "Theatre is an Encounter" Grotowski p 15 - 55

The Director's Craft, Mitchell, Chapters 1-6

To The Actor On the Technique of Acting, Michael Chekov, Chapter 1

Optional Material:

The Empty Space Brook

A Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction Murray/Keefe

The Secret Life of Theatre: On the Nature of Theatrical Representation Kulick

The Actor and the Target Donnellan

Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid, Hofstadter

Ex Machina, Garland

Westworld, Season One, Noland, Joy, et. al.

[*Dirty Computer \(Emotion Picture\)*](#), Janelle Monáe

All materials will be provided on Canvas or via the library.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING PROCEDURES

Assignments:

Perform in a production of *The Singularity Play* (April 27-30)

Complete a 1-2 page reflection paper post-production (due May 5th at 11:59pm)

The work-flow of this production class is unique and requires students to plan their schedules to accommodate rehearsals. The time commitment for the course is, combining in-class, rehearsal, tech, and performance as follows:

Week 1 to Week 3: roughly 3 hours / week

Week 4 to Week 7: roughly 7 hours / week

Week 8: roughly 11 hours

Week 9: roughly 15 hours

Weeks 10 and 11: roughly 19 hours

Week 12 (TECH): roughly 16 hours + 5 performances

Grading Procedures:

This is an A/B/no credit class. Participation in the collaboration - namely fulfilling the promises of attendance, attention, fair participation in generating material, flexibility, and communication - will result in students receiving an A or B. Failure to regularly attend class and rehearsals will result in no credit.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

We do not foresee issues arising from academic integrity in this production course in part because there are no academic responses required for this class. That said, integrity in how we represent the ideas of the script, the perspectives of the director and our collaborators is essential to worthwhile theater making, and we commit ourselves to interpretation and creation with integrity.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

We honor the time each of our collaborators requires to complete tasks and we recognize that each of us may have a different pace of work. Although we work under the deadline of a production, we welcome early and frequent communication from our collaborators about what they require to contribute meaningfully to the production. Some collaborators may require more time than others. Because all collaborators have committed to the project, we welcome whatever results from sustained and fair work on the project. We welcome any and all discussions about accommodations that stem from neurodiversity with individual students and promise that such conversations will remain confidential.

In accordance with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA), and the Americans With Disabilities Act Amendments ACT (ADAAA), TDM provides accommodations and support to students with documented disabilities on an individual, case-by-case basis.

For more information: <https://accessibility.harvard.edu>

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: THE WORLD AS WRITTEN

In this unit we will discover the world of the play through a close-reading of the play itself, and refract that world critically through ideas of both performance and artificial intelligence.

Week One (January 23)

A theatrical introduction. Explanation of expectations for the course. Collaboration Agreement + Cultural Share. A read-through of "The Singularity Play"

Homework for Week Two:

Document questions, connections, or thoughts that arose from the first read-through. Develop a curiosity map.

Week Two (January 30)

A stance toward criticism - how we give feedback - a process of delight. Designed facilitation of a conversation that invites reactions / thoughts / ideas from both the play and the material. Conversation about what defines the Metaverse, the Singularity, and our aspirations for the production. Present the evolution of ideas that make up "The Singularity Play".

Homework for Week Three:

Read "The Singularity Play" again. Word by word, circle any word that provokes confusion or invites another question. The Director's Craft Katie Mitchell, Chapters 1-6

Week Three (February 6)

Answering questions of confusion in the play page by page, provoking conversations about the actual world of the written text - what all performers must know as characters in this play. Carving out beats + identifying actions/events of each beat.

Homework for Week Four:

Now that you have characters, we invite you to prepare your *Act One character* (not your Act Two character) using the text as your sole resource + utilizing the lists of facts and questions Katie Mitchell describes in The Director's Craft. Please be prepared to share with the class next week any/all of the information you compile below.

Inspired by pages 24-28 in Katie Mitchell's The Director's Craft: List facts about your character from Act One. Put them into chronological order. Create questions based on those facts - what do you *not* know from what you already know?

Inspired by pages 68-69 in Katie Mitchell's The Director's Craft: List things your characters say about themselves. Write out a list of quotations from the play. Write your "I am _____" statements. Try to stay as *directly related* to your quotations and as *simple* as possible.

Inspired by pages 70-71 in Katie Mitchell's The Director's Craft: Write your character's opinions about all other characters in the scene with them (and their opinions about characters that they hear mentioned in the play but who are not in the scene with them - Alice may have opinions about Jason's wife Emily, say; or Lauren about the people Greg mentions who are funding this experiment). Use the text as the basis for your character's opinions of others.

Only write your character's opinions of other characters with whom your character interacts; unlike Katie Mitchell, you will not need a "global" assessment of all character interactions in the play.

Julia will prepare "Lauren" in Act One; Kayla may choose to prepare "Heidi," or "Alice" in Act One; Ryan may choose to prepare "Jason," "Henry," or "Greg" in Act One; Sam may choose to prepare "Heidi," or "Alice" in Act One.

Week Four (February 13)

What are actions? What are the verbs beneath our lines? Which verbs are easy to "play?" Which are difficult? Who are the specific characters in this play? What do they think of everyone else?

Homework for Week Six:

First, demarcate the units of Act Two of The Singularity Play. Remember, a unit is a collection of beats with a single event.

Second, determine and title the events of each unit in Act Two.

Third, for your characters in Act Two, create three lists (a la Katie Mitchell): one for facts you know about your character; one for "I am" statements about your character; one for your opinion about each character in the scene with you or spoken about in the scene with you.

Fourth, for your character only, assign verbs to your actions for each line. Consider what your character wants in the scene; consider what other characters have said; consider the event of the scene. Importantly, choose verbs that are playable but non-physical. For instance, the verb "to hug" as an action would be a metaphor - how do you "hug" with language and intention?

{EVENING REHEARSAL BEGINS FEBRUARY 13th, 7-10pm}

{PRESIDENT'S DAY - FEBRUARY 20th -NO CLASS}

UNIT 2: THE WORLD IN PRACTICE

In this unit we will pivot from table work to scene work, using the traditional rehearsal process as a method to unpack the ideas of the play as the class determined in Unit 1. Throughout this rehearsal process, students are expected to be critically engaged in the material: to approach rehearsals as a lab, to have personal objectives in crafting their characters in collaboration with the objectives of the production, and to sustain their individual work by maintaining a journal of questions, thoughts, and blocking.

Week Six (February 27)

Session 1 February 27 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 February 7pm - 11pm

Week Seven (March 6)

Session 1 March 6 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 March 6 7pm - 11pm

Homework for Week Nine:

Please get "off-book" for pages 5-59 of Part One of The Singularity Play. "Off-book" means memorizing all your lines, your cues, and your blocking (once it's been rehearsed). Before Monday, March 20th, you should, therefore, memorize all lines of your character throughout the entirety of pages 5-59 of Part One,

and the blocking of your character for pages 5-38 of Part One.

Sophia - please reach out to Sam and Madi for blocking notes for Heidi from the 3/13 rehearsal.

Kayla and Ryan - no need to get "off-book" for lines but please familiarize yourself with the blocking of characters you're understudying in the scenes that have been blocked. (Ryan, please reach out to Sam and Madi for blocking notes for the roles you're understudying from the 3/13 rehearsal).

Reminder: getting off-book is a preliminary step, not the final step, of the actor's work. Knowing what you say without the crutch of the text makes space for deeper investigations of character, cause and effect, and emotional response.

Madi has office hours that she's made available to help everyone run lines. The more people who can make those office hours at the same time, the better!

{SPRING BREAK BEGINS MARCH 13 - NO CLASS}

UNIT 3: PRODUCTION

In this unit we will rehearse the play for production, adding production elements such as props, costumes, and choreography as we move toward production. **Students will be off-book (all lines and blocking completely memorized) no later than April 10th.** Students will attend all sessions (rehearsals) each week.

Week Nine (March 20)

Session 1 March 20 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 March 20 7pm - 11pm

Session 3 March 26 1pm - 5pm

Week Ten (March 27)

Session 1 March 27 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 March 27 7pm - 11pm

Session 3 April 2 1pm - 5pm

Week Eleven (April 3)

Session 1 April 3 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 April 3 7pm - 11pm

Session 3 April 4 7pm - 11pm

Week Twelve (April 10)

Session 1 April 10 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 April 10 7pm - 11pm

Session 3 April 11 7pm - 11pm

Session 4 April 12 7pm - 11pm

Session 5 April 13 7pm - 11pm

Session 6 April 16 1pm - 5pm

Week Thirteen (April 17)

Session 1 April 17 3pm - 5:45pm

Session 2 April 17 7pm - 11pm

Session 3 April 18 7pm - 11pm

Session 4 April 19 7pm - 11pm

{TECH WEEKEND - APRIL 23, 12pm-11pm}

{TECH WEEK - APRIL 24-26, 7pm-11pm}

{DRESS REHEARSAL - APRIL 27, 7pm-11pm}

{PRODUCTION - APRIL 28, 29, and 30 at 2pm and 7:30pm}

Post-Production Reflection Paper (Due May 5th at 11:59pm ET)

Please write a 1-2 page reflection on what you learned in this course.