

OLLI Spring 2024

9:30-11:00am Wednesdays

Instructors: Tom Mitchell and Joi Hoffsommer

Creating a Role: How Performances are Made

Wed Feb 28

WEEK 1 Overview of Acting and Directing: Theatre, Film, TV

Audiences today might watch performances in large auditoriums or small studios, on massive movie screens, home televisions, or tiny phones. Some performances offer live experiences in which actors exchange energies with group audiences, while others are recorded, “fixed,” and mediated performances in which the audience (often an individual) only experiences the flickering light of technology. How do those mediums relate to the preparation of performance? And what range of performance modes do we tend to encounter?

OVERVIEW

Week 1 Acting and Directing: Theatre, Film, TV

Week 2 Acting: What is it?

Week 3 Acting in the Moment: Improvising, Experiencing, Relating

Week 4 An Actor Prepares: Analyzing the Script

Week 5 Acting: Communicating with Voice and Speech

Week 6 Acting: Moving with Expression

Week 7 Acting and Directing: Collaborative Creation

Week 8 Acting and Directing: The Big Picture

Class Goals

To provide tools for understanding and appreciating performances.
To introduce approaches that might have application to other endeavors.
To stimulate creative thinking and re-examine common experiences.

I. Performance Spaces

1. Stage
2. Big Screen
3. Small Screen

II. Presentation Medium

1. Live
2. Recorded
3. Recorded, Mediated and Enhanced

III. Performance Modes

1. Character
2. Personality
3. Tour de force

EXAMPLES: A scene from Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*

I. Gertrude Lawrence

II. Katharine Hepburn

III. Joanne Woodward

IV. Critical description of Amy Adams

DISCUSSION

- A. What are some of the most memorable performances you have experienced?
- B. Who is your favorite actor? Why? What is it they do? What roles do they play?
- C. Are there actors or performances you have not liked? Can you say why?

Wed Mar 6

WEEK 2 Acting: What Is It?

The beginnings of acting approaches: Delsarte vs Stanislavski; Melodrama vs Naturalism. In the 19th century as more people were able to spare the time and expense of attending theatrical performances, more thought went into preparing those performances. Improvements in architecture, lighting, and acoustics made it more possible to experience performances. Out of this growth came two particular directions: representation vs presentation. How are these different? And how do we value each?

Quick History of Acting

Cave Dwellers: Reporting the Hunt

Fire circle.

Greek Theatre: Declamation, Impersonation of Gods, Choruses

Large Amphitheatres

Medieval Theatre: Presentation of Biblical Lessons;

Cathedrals or Town Squares

Commedia dell Arte: Masked Improvised Comic Sketches

Town Squares

Elizabethan Poetic Dramas: Stories based in history or current events

Halls or Playhouses

Nineteenth Century Melodrama: Good vs Evil with Sentimentality

Gaslit Proscenium Stages for large audiences

Naturalism: Depiction of real-life in close detail

Proscenium Stages for more select audiences

Expressionism: Stylized and abstracted movement and language

Flexible stages experimenting with audience placement

Development of Musical Theatre

Oratorio

Opera/Operetta

Musical Theatre

Development of Movies and Television

Silent Movies: Dependent on Movement and Expression

Talkies: Combining language with photo-reality

Modern Film: Locations, Editing, Digital Effects

Acting Essentials

Personality

Character

Tour de force

Representation vs Presentation

Presentation of Character: Showing

Representation of Character: Experiencing

EXAMPLE: Scenes and Characters from *You Can't Take It With You* by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart

DISCUSSION

Who is an actor who always seems to play themselves no matter what the story or character?

Who is an actor who changes their voice and behavior from one role to another?

Who is an actor who shows off their particular skills in movement, language, singing, or dancing?

Wed Mar 13

WEEK 3: Acting: Improvising, Experiencing, Relating

In the long history of performance, spontaneous improvised moments have sometimes characterized the exchange between performers and audience. The Commedia dell Arte is a performance style that is still evident in popular culture. The American "Method" of acting crept into the culture in the 1950s and is also still part of performance approaches. Other acting theorists and directors have added to the practice and preparation of performers.

APPROACHES

- I. Experiencing: Stanislavski System
- II. Experiencing: Lee Strasberg and American Method
- III. Relationships: Sanford Meisner and Neighborhood Playhouse
- IV. Improvising: Viola Spolin and Second City

An Actor's Work by Stanislavski

Amateurism: Love of the Art

Discipline

Danger of Superficial Impressions

Self-Consciousness

Truth and a Sense of Belief

EXAMPLE: *Baskerville* by Ken Ludwig

DISCUSSION

How do you remember playing "pretend" when you were a child? What kind of role-playing did you do?

Do you experience "improvisation" in public situations? What works best for you?

What are "tactics" you use in relationships with others?

Wed Mar 20

WEEK 4: An Actor Prepares: Analyzing the Script

Many actors today engage in some form of analysis to better prepare themselves to play a role. The kind of approach to the script offers casual play-goers and readers a concrete way to approach any kind of text.

WORK ON SELF:

Imagination
Will
Focus of Attention
Logic
Feeling

WORK ON ROLE:

Given Circumstances
Imagination
Logic and Completeness
Specificity
Action
Purpose

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES AND MAGIC IF

Playwright, Director and Actor
Environmental Requirements
Necessary Physical Action
Possible Objectives, (Intentions, Motivations)

EXAMPLE: scenes from *Come Back, Little Sheba* by William Inge

DISCUSSION

How did you play “make believe” as a kid? What were your “magic ifs?”

What are some of the “given circumstances” in your daily activities? How do the environmental requirements effect the way you do things?

How can you use this method of analysis when you read a book? Watch a play? See a movie?

Wed Mar 27

WEEK 5: Acting: Communicating with Voice and Speech

Beginning with the giant Greek amphitheaters, performance spaces have presented challenges to the performers who sought to communicate to large numbers of people. The techniques of vocal preparation can be useful not only to professional actors, but to anyone who has to communicate in public spaces.

VENUES FOR SPOKEN WORD

Outdoor Stages
Indoor Stages (Arena, Studio, Proscenium)
Recording Booth

HEALTHY USE OF VOICE

Use of Breath

EFFECTIVE SPEECH

Articulation

LANGUAGE

Natural, Witty, Profound

EXAMPLES:

Private Lives by Noel Coward
Betrayal by Harold Pinter
Odyssey adapted by Mary Zimmerman

DISCUSSION

Are you aware of speaking differently in different occasions? How and why?
Are there voices that you find especially appealing? What is it about them?
Do you ever find it hard to communicate? What circumstances? What factors affect communication?

Wed Apr 3

WEEK 6: Acting: Moving with Expression

Throughout the history of performance, actors have used their bodies to create characters and to delight audiences with skill and charm. Some of the methods of developing physical dexterity to express freely ideas and feelings can come in handy to all of us as a means of communicating and relating to others.

PSYCHOPHYSICAL CONNECTION

Relaxation, Freedom, Ease

Charm and Grace

Potential for Response

MOVING WITH STYLE

Social Values

Protection/Attraction

Relating to Clothing and Surroundings

Reflection of Character

SPECIALIZED SKILLS

Dance, Combat, Mime

Stage Combat and Violence

Intimacy

EXAMPLES:

Tartuffe by Moliere

August, Osage County by Tracy Letts

DISCUSSION

Do you find yourself moving differently depending on your mood? Time of day?

Location? Public or Private?

How do the clothes you are wearing affect the way you sit, stand, and move?

What physical skills do you admire?

Wed Apr 10

WEEK 7: Acting and Directing: Collaborative Creation

The nature of preparing a theatrical performance is almost never a solitary endeavor, but one that involves a group who shares ideas, tests hypotheses, and comes to consensus. The process of collaborative creation offers methods that may be of use to those in many other areas of problem solving.

THE INTERESTED PARTIES

Playwright, Director, Actors, Designers, Managers, Technicians

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Research: Explorer

Imagining Possibilities: Artist
Testing Choices: Judge
Committing to Approaches: Warrior
GOAL: UNIFIED and EXPRESSIVE WHOLE

EXAMPLE: *The Men from the Polar Star* by Tennessee Williams

DISCUSSION:

In what circumstances do you find yourself collaborating with others?
How can you apply the Creative Process in your own life?
Have you seen examples of stage productions, films or TV shows that impress you as being especially unified?

Wed Apr 17

WEEK 8: The Big Picture: Throughline and Superobjective

One of the ideas that developed during the 20th century was the notion of identifying the Throughline and Superobjective of a play. These are the “macro” aspects of theatre performance that are influenced by the “micro” details in each moment’s work.

UNITS AND OBJECTIVES

Actions nested within Larger Actions
Needs nested within Larger Needs

THROUGHLINE

From character’s point of view
Overall

SUPEROBJECTIVE

From character’s point of view
Overall

UNITY OF IMPRESSIONS

COHESIVENESS OF MEANING

IMPACT ON AUDIENCE

EXAMPLE: *The Piano Lesson* by August Wilson

DISCUSSION:

Can you recall films, tv shows, or plays in which a character’s Superobjective could be clearly identified?
What was your Throughline for today? What was today’s Superobjective?
Within today’s superobjective, what momentary objectives do you recall?