



What a happiness it is to feel even once in a lifetime what a true actor must feel and do on the stage! When technique reaches the possibility of realizing this hope, our stage craftsmanship will become a true art. But where and how is one to seek those roads into the secret sources of inspiration? This is the question that must serve as the fundamental life problem of every true actor---Konstantin Stanislavsky

### **THR 206 Acting II: Stanislavsky as an Approach to Scene Study**

Monday/Wednesday: 1:00-2:50 p.m.

Murphy Hall 209

Dr. Peter Zazzali

Office Hours: T/W 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

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#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Arguably, Konstantin Stanislavsky has done more to influence Western acting than anyone who has walked the face of the earth. Born to a pair of loving and wealthy parents in 1863, Stanislavsky's charmed boyhood centered on a fascination for theatre and the craft of acting. He spent his adolescence producing amateur theatricals, attending professional performances, and studying the actor's art, most especially the teachings of Mikhail Shchepkin, whose approach to *theatrical realism* was foundational to Stanislavsky's groundbreaking work. In 1898, Stanislavsky joined his fellow Muscovite, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, in founding the prestigious Moscow Art Theatre, where he developed his *system* for actor training. Ever the student of the craft, his system underwent significant changes throughout his adult life, with its techniques and theories still evolving at the time of Stanislavsky's death in 1938. His legacy can be identified in the pedagogies of numerous U.S. acting teachers, namely the alumni of the

Group Theatre (e.g., Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg), as well as many others past and present. As the theatre historian Marvin Carlson notes, along with Brecht and Artaud, Stanislavsky is among “three of the most influential [performance] theorists of the [twentieth] century.”

This course will implement Stanislavsky’s system to build on the fundamental work that you established in Acting I. Thus, you will enhance and develop such skills as listening and responding to a partner, playing psychophysical actions, identifying beats and objectives, finding ease and centeredness in performance, and building character through self, all accomplished within the framework of a scene study class. You will therefore learn to approach a role by understanding such essentials as character, given circumstances, objectives, obstacles, and actions. Please note that the course requires substantial time rehearsing outside of our class meetings (a minimum of 3-4 hours weekly).

We will supplement our practical work with regular reading and writing assignments. As you apply Stanislavsky’s acting theory into practice by working on realistic scenes from contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century American dramas (1970 to the present), you will also develop your critical thinking and analytical skills through high and low stakes writing assignments:

- 1) A book review of an acting text
- 2) A short report on the career and artistry of a notable stage actor
- 3) An acting journal documenting our working process
- 4) Blackboard posts as a supplement to our course readings and practical work

In sum, these activities will challenge you to work independently and in groups within both practical and theoretical contexts.

#### REQUIRED COURSE READING

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**At the Bookstore:** *An Actor’s Work: A Student’s Diary*, Konstantin Stanislavsky, edited and translated by Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008)

Supplementary texts will be provided on Blackboard (BB).

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. You must be on time and prepared to work for all sessions. This is an ensemble-oriented course that requires everyone’s mutual support. If you are absent or arrive late you compromise not only your own experience, but that of your classmates as well. If you must miss a session, please notify me beforehand, if at all possible, and if you are missing a day on which you are supposed to present a scene you must also alert your partner in advance. If you fail to show up on a day you are scheduled to present without prior notification, you will lose credit for the assignment. After the second absence your final grade will be lowered one third of a level (e.g., a B becomes a B-).

**Preparation:** You must come to class prepared to present whatever exercise or scene has been assigned. This means that you will be spending time outside class rehearsing with scene partners,

as well as completing various homework assignments. You are expected to complete all reading and writing assignments by their due dates.

**Participation:** You are expected to fully participate in all projects and exercises. This includes keeping up with course readings and participating in both class and online discussions, the latter of which will be facilitated by Blackboard. A mid-semester evaluation will be given to you, most of which will be determined by your commitment and participation to/in our working process.

**Professional Decorum:** The nature of an acting laboratory is ensemble-oriented. Therefore, we all must demonstrate mutual respect and support, which means remaining conscientious of one another. Please be sure to turn off your cell phones before entering class. Also, there is absolutely no eating or drinking during class (water is allowed), and “side-bar” discussions are frowned upon. When a classmate is working before the group they deserve our full support, encouragement, and attention. Adherence to these considerations counts towards your participation grade.

**Attire:** Much of our work will be physical, as every class will commence by warming up our bodies and voices. Therefore, you are required to come dressed in loose clothing that does not restrict your movement. To be exacting, the following are prohibited: jeans, hard-soled shoes such as heels or boots, large jewelry, hats/caps, dresses or skirts, and shorts. Sweat pants, a simple tee shirt without logos, and/or dance attire are examples of what to wear. Having said this, you will be changing into suggestive dress according to the characters you create in your scene work. Sufficient time will be allotted after the warmup activities for you to efficiently change into your character clothes as needed.

**Evaluation of Performance Work:** While it is commonly assumed that evaluating acting is subjective, there will be set criteria by which each student’s progress is graded. Bearing in mind that our work is process-oriented and perfection is no more sought than it is expected, growth in the following areas will ultimately determine one’s progress and evaluation:

1. *Preparation*: memorization of lines and blocking; breaking down the text into beats; understanding of character, environmental surroundings, given circumstances, action/obstacle/objective work
2. *Technique*: demonstration of physical ease and efficiency of movement; vocal clarity and intention; psychophysical concentration and attention to detail
3. *Performance*: demonstration of a clear score of actions; listening and openness to one’s partner; emotional expressiveness and willingness to take creative risks; “truthful” representation of **theatrical** reality

***GRADING BREAKDOWN\****

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<b>Participation/Attendance:</b>	100 points
<b>Readiness Scene:</b>	50 points
<b>Life Study Exercise:</b>	50 points
<b>Scene Work (2 projects):</b>	500 points (200 for scene #1; 300 for scene #2)
<b>Stage Actor Report:</b>	100 points
<b>Book Review:</b>	100 points
<b>Acting Journal:</b>	50 points
<b>Blackboard Posts:</b>	50 points
	<b>1000 points</b>

**Grading Ranges:** A=900-1000/ B=800-899/ C=700-799/ D=600-699. Please note that your final score will be adjusted for excessive absence, tardiness, and other matters relative to your work in the course.

## INSTRUCTOR POLICIES

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- I encourage you to visit during my office hours (T/W 11:00 am to 12:30 pm) or by requesting an appointment.
- I am always available by email and promise to respond to your messages within 48 hours.
- Acceptance of late assignments is at my discretion, and if accepted, your grade will be penalized.
- KU Accessibility Resources (<http://www.disability.ku.edu>) coordinate accommodations and services for our students. If you have a disability for which you may request an accommodation, please contact AR as soon as possible.
- Any written work you submit must be your own. Plagiarism is in serious breach of academic honesty and will be treated according to KU policy. For more on this matter, please see [http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism\\_guidelines.sh](http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism_guidelines.sh); also <http://www.studenthandbook.ku.edu/>

## *ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES*

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**Readiness Scene:** To give me a chance to gauge the current state of the class' acting technique and to create a foundation for our working process, you will prepare and demonstrate a short "readiness" scene that does not have a context or setting, oftentimes referred to as a "contentless" or an "open" scene. The selection of partners is your choice for this activity. **50 points.**

**Life Study Exercise:** To test your observation skills and to develop your imagination and sense of play, you will examine a human subject on multiple occasions and use your findings to create a character through improvisational exercises and theatre games. The purpose of the Life Study is to demonstrate the power of the actor's imagination through observation of others towards creating a character. An explanation of the activity will be provided in class. **50 points.**

**Scene Work:** We will practice the techniques and approaches of Stanislavsky's system by work-shopping two scenes, both of which will be chosen from the contemporary repertoire (1970-present) of American realism. While there are many worthy dramatic styles and texts from other cultures and time periods, we will focus on this subsection of U.S. drama because—given our socio-historical context and the nature of Stanislavsky's

system—it affords us the clearest and most identifiable material to practice what we are learning. I will choose the partners and texts for the first round of scenes, and we will collaboratively arrive at assignments and partners for the second scene, which will also serve as your final exam. Both scenes will be work-shopped three separate times in class. **500 points total (200 for scene #1; 300 for scene #2).**

## Written Work

**Book Review:** While we will be reading Jean Benedetti's translation of Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, two seminal texts in Western actor training, it is important to be aware of other relevant works in the field. Thus, you will be responsible for submitting a 3-5 pp. critique of an acting theory text. I have provided a bibliography of possibilities on Blackboard. If you would prefer to choose a text that is not on this list, please check with me to make sure that it will facilitate the assignment's learning outcome. Guidelines for this activity will be provided in class and on Blackboard. **100 points. DUE DATE: OCTOBER 16**

**Stage Actor Report:** Contextualizing Stanislavsky's system in the history of acting is a useful way to better understand what you will be learning in this course. You will therefore be responsible for drafting a 5 pg. research paper documenting the artistry and career of a notable stage actor. You are free to choose your subject, but you must clear him/her with me beforehand. Again, guidelines for this activity will be provided in class and on Blackboard. **100 points. DUE DATE: NOVEMBER 25**

**Acting Journal:** *An Actor Prepare*'s journalistic structure demonstrates the usefulness of documenting one's experience when learning how to act. Like Stanislavsky's young student, you will also keep a journal that traces your progress and reinforces relevant information, thoughts, and experiences. Each entry should be roughly between a paragraph and a page in length; if you choose to write more, that's perfectly fine. The timing of entries should coincide with each class as a reflection of its activities. Because I will be collecting and grading your journals twice during the semester (the midterm and the final week), I recommend that you use an individual notebook for this activity. **100 points. DUE DATES: OCTOBER 9; DECEMBER 11**

**Blackboard Posts:** In keeping with the course's commitment to wed theory and practice, you will be responsible for regular Blackboard posts to underscore our reading assignments and class discussions. The prompts will be posted by Friday 12:00 PM, thereby giving you ample time to formulate your answer by its due date: 12:00 PM the following Monday. You are also expected to read one another's posts.

**Scene Study Text Analysis:** Stanislavsky's work lends to text analysis, insofar as actors must understand their characters in relationship to their given circumstances, physical surroundings, objectives/obstacles, and through-line of action, among other considerations. The goal of text analysis is to allow the actress to become increasingly specific in her immersion into a role, thereby freeing her to explore a range of acting choices and to take emotional and physical risks in doing so. As such, scene study is a practical exercise, not a cerebral one. You will be responsible for submitting a prescribed text analysis document on

the first showing of each of your two major projects (there is no text analysis requirement for the Readiness Scene). Again, guidelines for this work will be covered in class and on Blackboard. Please note that this activity is part of your overall evaluation for each scene.

## *CLASS SCHEDULE*

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Monday, August 26 (1)

**Class Topic**

Course Overview and Expectations; What is our understanding of acting and actor training?  
Who was Stanislavsky and why is he significant to the Western tradition of acting?

Wednesday, August 28 (2)

**Class Topic**

The need for craft in learning how to act; Building our ensemble; Developing a learning culture based on trust and openness

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 5-15 ("Amateurism")

Wednesday, September 4 (3)

**Class Topic**

Introduction to Stanislavsky's system; Building our ensemble; Assign Readiness Scene

**Assignment Due Today**

Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, Alison Hodge ed.; Cole and Krich Chinoy, "The Moscow Art Theatre and Its Tradition," in *Actors on Acting* (BB)

Monday, September 9 (4)

**Class Topic**

Begin work-shopping Readiness Scene

**Assignment Due Today**

Readiness Scene

Wednesday, September 11 (5)

**Class Topic**

The actor's physical apparatus; Training the body and voice in conjunction with emotional expressivity; Readiness Scene

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 355-380 ("Physical Education"); Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (BB); Readiness Scene

Monday, September 16 (6)

**Class Topic**

Getting psychophysically "centered"; Assign Scene #1; **Finish Readiness Scene**

**Assignment Due Today**

Felner, "Centering," in *Free To Act* (BB); Readiness Scene

Wednesday, September 18 (7)

**Class Topic**

How to use and develop the actor's imagination; Building character through self; **Begin Workshopping Scene #1**

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 60-85 ("Imagination"); Hagen, "Identity," and "The Character" in *Respect for Acting* (BB); Scene #1

Monday, September 23 (8)

**Class Topic**

Examining the text's given circumstances and how to play an action; Scene #1

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 37-59 ("Action, 'if', Given Circumstances"); Scene #1

Wednesday, September 25 (9)

**Class Topic**

Identifying character objectives; Scene #1

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 135-151 ("Bits and Tasks"); Hagen, "The Objective," in *Respect for Acting* (BB); Scene #1

Monday, September 30 (10)

**Class Topic**

Listening and being in communication with your stage partner; Scene #1

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 229-257 ("Communication"); Scene #1

Wednesday, October 2 (11)

**Class Topic**

Review and specify psychophysical action as foundational to the actor's craft; Scene #1

**Assignment Due Today**

Hagen, "The Action," in *Respect for Acting* (BB); Felner, "The Psychophysical Connection," in *Free to Act* (BB); Scene #1

Monday, October 7 (12)

**Class Topic**

Changing tactics to pursue an objective; Scene #1

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #1; *An Actor's Work*, pp. 258-271 ("An Actor's Adaptations..."); Scene #1

Wednesday, October 9 (13)

**Class Topic**

Identifying a character's super-objective and through-line of action

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #1; *An Actor's Work*, pp. 306-321 ("The Supertask, Throughaction"); Robert Benedetti, "The Through-line of Action," in *The Actor at Work* (BB)

**\*\*JOURNALS DUE**

Wednesday, October 16 (14)

**Class Topic**

Merging the actor's internal and external expressivity; Scene #1; Assign Life Study Exercise

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 273-291 ("Inner Psychological Drives" and "Inner Psychological Drives in Action"); Scene #1

**\*\*BOOK REPORT DUE**

Monday, October 21 (15)

**Class Topic**

Continue exploring the actor's psychophysical state; **Finish Scene #1**

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 292-305; 579-580 ("The Actor's Inner Creative State" and "The External Creative State in Performance"); Scene #1

Wednesday, October 23 (16)

**Class Topic**

Begin work on Life Study Exercise; Observing human behavior as a form of character study

**Assignment Due Today**

Life Study Exercise; Boleslavsky, "Observation," in *Acting the First Six Lessons* (BB)

Monday, October 28 (17)

**Class Topic**

Life Study Exercise; Understanding a character's tempo-rhythm

**Assignment Due Today**

Life Study Exercise; *An Actor's Work*, pp. 463-506 ("Tempo-Rhythm")

Wednesday, October 30 (18)

**Class Topic**

Transforming into a character by making bold external/physical choices that inform the actor's internal/psychological experience; Assign Scene #2; **Finish Life Study Exercise**

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 516-535 ("Physical Characteristics"); Life Study Exercise

Monday, November 4 (19)

**Class Topic**

Crafting a repeatable performance while keeping it organic and seemingly intuitive; **Begin Workshopping Scene #2**

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 507-515 ("Logic and Sequence"); Scene #2

Wednesday, November 6 (20)

**Class Topic**

Learning to play unconsciously; Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

*An Actor's Work*, pp. 322-348 ("The Subconscious and the Actor's Creative State); Scene #2

Monday, November 11 (21)

**Class Topic**

Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #2

Wednesday, November 13 (22)

**Class Topic**

Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #2

Monday, November 18 (23)

**Class Topic**

Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #2

Wednesday, November 20 (24)

**Class Topic**

Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #2

Monday, November 25 (25)

**Class Topic**

Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #2

**\*\*ACTOR REPORT DUE**

Monday, December 2 (26)

**Class Topic**

Stanislavky's legacy in the U.S.; Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Krasner, "Strasberg, Adler, Meisner: Method Acting," in *Twentieth Century Acting Training*, Alison Hodge ed. (BB); Scene #2

Wednesday, December 4 (27)

**Class Topic**

The founding of the Moscow Art Theatre and its facilitation of Stanislavsky's system; Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Stanislavsky, "The Founding of the Moscow Art Theatre" in *My Life in Art* (BB); Scene #2

Monday, December 9 (28)

**Class Topic**

Scene #2

**Assignment Due Today**

Scene #2

Wednesday, December 11 (29)

**Class Topic**

Closing conversation regarding Stanislavsky's significance to Western actor training and theatre;

**Finish work-shopping Scene #2**

**Assignment Due Today**

Stanislavsky, "My Life in Art," in *My Life in Art* (BB); Scene #2

**\*\*JOURNALS DUE**

**FINAL PRESENTATION OF SCENE #2 WILL HAPPEN DURING EXAM WEEK.  
PLEASE CHECK WITH THE REGISTRAR FOR AN EXACT DATE AND TIME**

