THR 817-1000  
Theories of Acting and Directing  
Thursdays from 3:00-5:30 PM  
Murphy 341

Dr. Peter Zazzali  
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Acting has long been an art in which the representation of dramatic figures is manifest through a joint expression of the human mind, body, and emotions. From the ancient Greek actor Polus’ use of his deceased son’s ashes to capture the grief of Electra to Early Modern England’s Charles Macklin, who would violently shake a ladder in the wings in preparing to enter as an outraged Shylock, actors have historically used numerous techniques, approaches, and theories to practice their craft. In the 19th century the art of acting approached modernity in conjunction with the advent of psychology, biology, and the behavioral sciences, developments that radically shifted our understanding of the human condition. Coincidentally, the modern director emerged to alter the course of theatre history, and by extension, the work of actors. Some 75 years later an intercultural movement in western theatre started to inform both acting and directing theories. Today, stage acting and directing continue to evolve.

This seminar will examine the theories and aesthetics that have shaped acting and directing throughout theatre history. Organized chronologically, the course is constituted as five modules that range from Ancient Greece and Rome to the current moment. While it is not possible to render an exhaustive study of this topic, the subjects and examples selected for analysis have significantly influenced the prevailing ideas and approaches to acting and directing in western theatre. As such, our methodology will be to critically engage discussion questions while analyzing weekly readings. A combination of writing assignments consisting of Black Board posts, a short research paper, and a term paper will complement these discussions and provide a mechanism to support your development as scholars.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Critical Writing
Term Paper: You will write a term paper (15-20 pp.) with the goal of having it serve as either a future conference paper or the beginnings of a journal article. I strongly suggest that you meet with me to discuss formulating a topic and research methodology for this assignment. Guidelines for the paper will be provided. DUE DATE: MAY 7

Acting Theorist Paper: To provide an active start to our work and to give me a sense of your writing, you will complete a short (5-7 pp.) paper analyzing a particular acting/
directing theory and/or theorist. Again, guidelines for the assignment will be provided.

**DUE DATE: FEBRUARY 26**

Module Responses: As noted above, the course is chronologically organized into five modules. As part of a Blackboard discussion, you will write approximately a 300-word response to a question pertaining to each module at select times of the semester. The due dates for these posts are as follows: **Module 1 (February 19); Module 2 (March 12); Module 3 (April 2); Module 4 (April 23); Module 5 (April 30)**

**Attendance and Participation**

In-Class Presentation: You will all present and lead a discussion of a text (book) that we cover. Your 10-15 minute presentation will contextualize the reading by examining its relevance to our discipline, putting it in conversation with other texts, addressing its research methodology and argument, and determining its overall effectiveness. The due date of this assignment is dependent upon the text you choose to present.

Readings and In-Class Discussion: This is a seminar and therefore the learning outcomes are largely reliant upon you having read the assignments and being prepared to discuss them. I expect that everyone will heartily contribute to our in-class conversations. As a former teacher of mine once said, “The more you contribute to class discussions the more you reinforce what you are learning.”

Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes. If for some unforeseen reason you need to miss, you are responsible for the readings and must contact me about your absence in advance of that particular class. Please note that even a single absence could compromise your learning and grade.

**COURSE TEXTS**

Required (available in bookstore or online):

8. Nancy Kindelan. *Artistic Literacy: Theatre Studies and a Contemporary Liberal*

**All other readings will either be available via Blackboard or online. In the case of the latter, a link to the appropriate webpage will be provided.**

**GRADING**

1. Attendance and In-class Participation: 30%
2. Blackboard Response to Module Prompts: 5%
3. Presentation of a Course Text: 5%
4. Acting/Directing Theorist Paper: 10%
5. Term Paper: 50%

**ETHICAL MATTERS**

Academic Honesty: As you know, scholarship is largely defined by contributing original research to a given field of study. When you borrow ideas or quote another source, you must reference them. Please cite according to either the MLA or Chicago Manuel of Style.

Disability Statement: The KU office of Disability Resources coordinates accommodations and services for all students who are eligible. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted DR, please do so at 22 Strong Hall; their phone number is 785-864-2620.

Changes to the Syllabus: Though it is doubtful that I would do so, I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus based on student needs. In the unlikely event that this happens, I will notify each of you and provide a new copy with all changes clearly marked.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Module 1: Antecedents to 20th and 21st Century Acting Theory

Class 1: January 22

**Question(s):** What is acting/directing theory? How can we historicize acting and its varied approaches and practices?

**Topic:**
Course introduction; Assignment of texts for weekly presentations; Begin discussing and framing antecedents to 20th and 21st century acting/directing

**Assignment Due:**
- *Actors on Acting* (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  - Introduction (xiii-xvii)
  - Greece (Plato and Aristotle, 3-12)
  - Rome (Cicero and Quintilian, 21-30)
- *The Art of Poetry* (Horace)

Class 2: January 29

**Question:** How was an actor’s passion—emotional sensibility and expression—dealt with in Early Modern theatre?

**Topic:**
Investigate 18th century English style towards tracing the relationship between the player’s mind, body, and emotional sensibility in theatre history

**Assignment Due:**
- Actors on Acting (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  - Introduction to English acting (92-96)
  - A. Hill, Macklin, J. Hill, and Garrick (122-38)
- Edwin Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting*, 1963 (selected chapters)

Class 3: February 12

**Question:** What is the history of the so-called “paradox” of the actor’s dual consciousness? How has it informed Western theories of acting? Can this tension be reconciled?

**Topic:**
Discuss Diderot’s theory of the actor’s dual-consciousness in the context of modern acting
Assignments Due:
° *Actors on Acting* (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  Denis Diderot and Clairon/Dumesnil (161-78)
° William Archer, *Masks or Faces*, 1888 (12-37)

Module 2: Modern Acting/the Stanislavski Turn

Class 4: February 26

**Question:** How did Stanislavski’s system significantly change western acting? What is the socio-historical context for its emergence? What is the legacy of his system?

**Activity:**
Discuss the theory, practice, and legacy of Stanislavski’s work as an actor, an actor trainer, and a director

**Assignment Due:**
° *Actors on Acting* (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  The Moscow Art Theatre and Its Tradition (475-501)
° Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* 2nd ed., 2009
  “Action, If, Given Circumstances” (chap. 3)
  “Imagination” (chap. 4)
  “Belief and the Sense of Truth” (chap. 8)

Class 5: March 5

**Question:** How did Stanislavski’s system inform the pedagogies and practices of his Russian heirs?

**Activities:**
Identify the ways in which Stanislavski’s work as an actor trainer and director influenced the work of his most salient disciples

**Assignment Due:**
° Actors on Acting (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  Meyerhold, M. Chekhov, Ilinsky, Vakhtangov, and Boleslavsky (501-29)

Class 6: March 9

**Question:** How did Stanislavski’s system become the so-called “Method” in the US? Who were the prominent players therein and how has this surrogation shaped the course of American acting and actor training?

**Activity:**
In identifying the legacy of his system, we will examine the specific and varied ways that American actors and acting teachers have interpreted Stanislavski’s pedagogy.

**Assignment Due:**
- Actors on Acting (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  - Stella Adler (601-06)
  - Lee Strasberg (621029)

**Module 3: The Emergence of the Director**

**Class 7: March 12**

**Questions:** How did the emergence of the director influence theatre history and the work of actors? What role has Brecht had in this trajectory?

**Activities:**
To discuss and trace the history of the stage director; identifying the significance of Brecht’s theatrical (directing) theories and how they have shaped theatre history and approaches to acting.

**Assignment Due:**
- Actors on Acting (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
  - Germany, Lessing, Goethe (254-276)
  - Piscator, Brecht, and Weigel (301-16)
- Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willet (1964)

**Class 8: March 23**

**Question:** What exactly is Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and how has it influenced the work of 20th and 21st century directors? What implications does his theory have for actors?

**Activity:**
Analyzing Artaud’s theatrical theory, especially the Theatre of Cruelty, and identifying its significance in 20th and 21st century performance.

**Assignment Due Today:**
*Actors on Acting* (Cole and Krich Chinoy)
Julian Beck and Judith Malina (652-69)

**Class 9: March 26**

**Questions:** How can Grotowski’s system for training actors and his theatrical direction be seen as part of a lineage that includes Stanislavski and Artaud? How can we identify elements of his oeuvre in current theories and practices of acting and directing?

**Activity:** To study Grotowski’s training system in relationship to his theatrical direction

**Assignment Due:**
° Zbigniew Cynkutis, *Acting with Grotowski*, 2015 (selected chapters)

**Module 4: The Postmodern Actor/Director—An Intercultural Approach**

**Class 10: April 2**

**Question(s):** How have eastern performance traditions influenced actor training in the west? In what ways has this “postmodern” move shaped western theatre? How can this trajectory be traced to Artaud and Grotowski?

**Activity:**
Discuss the significance of eastern performance traditions on western acting over the past 50 years?

**Assignment Due:**
° Phillip Zarilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavsky*, 2009 (Parts 1 and 2; and “The Beckett Project,” 115-143)
**Class 11: April 9**

**Question:** How does Suzuki’s system for developing actors inform his work as a director? How has the system impacted US actor training over the past 30 years?

**Activity:**
Understanding Suzuki’s actor training system and its foundational role in his directorial aesthetic

**Assignment Due:**
- Tadashi Suzuki, “Culture is the Body” in *Acting (Re) Considered 2nd* ed., ed. Phillip Zarilli (163-67)

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**Class 12: April 16**

**Questions:** What has been Anne Bogart’s contribution to American theatre and actor training? How can her work be analyzed in relation to other specialists in physical theatre (e.g., Suzuki, Meyerhold, Grotowski, etc.)?

**Activity:**
To gain an understanding of “the Viewpoints” and how it has shaped Bogart’s directing and teaching

**Assignment Due:**
- Porter Anderson, “The Search for a SITI State: When Anne Bogart Secures the Right Base for Her Company’s Work, on Whose Hill Will This SITI Be Shining” in *American Theatre* 25.3 (March 2008): 81-83

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**Module 5: Current Approaches to US Actor Training**

**Class 13: April 23**

**Question:** How have the cognitive and neurological sciences altered how we understand an actor’s consciousness relative to his mental, physical, and emotional expressivity?

**Activity:**
To investigate the actor’s work through the lens of cognitive theory and neuroscience

**Assignment Due:**
Class 14: April 30

**Question:** What is the current state of US actor training and theatre departments/programs? How do the various incarnations of theatre in higher education (e.g., BFA, MFA, PhD, BA) function? How might we consider changing it for the better?

**Activity:**
To examine US actor training today by identifying its successes and drawbacks; to identify and discuss the current moment in US acting, actor training, and educational theatre

**Assignment Due:**

Class 15: May 7
WRAP UP AND SHARING OF FINAL PROJECTS