

THE ART OF SCREEN ACTING DC 250 - Spring Quarter 2015

DC 250
CDM 924
Tuesdays
1:30 - 4:45 pm

Instructor: Lee Madsen
lmadsen3@cdm.depaul.edu
Tel: (323) 304-8805;
Office Hours: TBA

Course Description (from the Course Catalog):

This course will examine the role of acting, actors, and actor-director collaboration in the development of narrative cinema. The screen demanded a new approach to acting that differed markedly from the theatrical traditions that preceded it. Seminal practitioners of actor training such as Constantin Stanislavski and his American interpreters Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, and Stella Adler and their students (such as Brando, Pacino, DeNiro, Hoffman, and Duvall) have had an incalculable influence on how screen actors prepare for a role and work with directors. This course will survey the major acting techniques and approaches, examine major films as case studies, and explore contemporary approaches to screen acting and actor-director collaboration in the cinema. While primarily a critical studies course, this class will also incorporate a hands-on creative component (i.e. in-class acting exercises) to provide a practical perspective on the art of screen acting. This course carries Liberal Studies Arts and Literature Domain Credit.

Prerequisites

None

Course Objectives

This course is designed to expand students' understanding and appreciation of the art of performance in cinema and to encourage the acquisition of a critical eye and analytical/critical vocabulary. At the end of the term, a student will be expected to:

- articulate orally and in writing the job of the actor and director with specific attention to preparation of roles and scenes.
- analyze a film or dramatic scene for character facts and objectives
- possess a working knowledge of the historical framework of the development of the major acting schools and techniques used in the American cinema.
- have achieved fluency in the major terms and techniques of Stanislavski-based actor training
- understand the essential difference between an actor's work for the stage from that of the screen
- have studied, analyzed, written critically and presented about one film actor's body of work, a notable actor-director collaboration, or the technique of a director who is known for his or her process of working with actors. These findings will be presented in written form as well as an in-class presentation.

Learning Domain Description

DC 250 The Art of Screen Acting is included in the Liberal Studies program as a course with credit in the Arts and Literature domain. Courses in the Arts and Literature domain ask students to extend their knowledge and experience of the arts by developing their critical and reflective abilities. In these courses, students interpret and analyze particular creative works, investigate the relations of form and meaning and through critical and/or creative activity to come to experience art with greater openness, insight, and enjoyment. These courses focus on works of literature, art, theatre, or music as such, though the process of analysis may also include social and cultural issues. Students who take course in this domain choose three courses from such choices as literature, the visual arts, media arts, music, and theater. No more than two courses can be chosen from one department or program.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to explain, in well-written prose, what a work of art is about and/or how it was produced.
2. Students will be able to comment on the relationship between form and content in a work.
3. Students will be able to assess the formal aspects of their subject and put those qualities into words, using, when appropriate, specialized vocabulary employed in class and readings.
4. Students will be able to contextualize a work of art. They will be able to do so with respect to other works of art in terms of defining its place within a broader style or genre. They will also be able to contextualize a work of art in terms of contemporaneous aesthetic, social, or political concerns, discussing how these might shape the work's reception and how that reception might differ amongst various peoples and historical periods.

How Learning Outcomes Will Be Met:

The Learning Outcomes outlined above will be met through various assignments throughout the course which are detailed in the Overview of Major Assignments section. These assignments culminate in the **Final Paper and Presentation Assignment**. In this assignment you will be expected to conduct in-depth research on an actor's body of work and/or an actor-director collaboration and produce a well-written paper which articulates a ***specific thesis of your own and supports that thesis with evidence from your research***. This paper (and its verbal expression in the presentation) should include ***close examinations of film performances which articulate an actor's unique interpretation of character*** (and therefore the given circumstances provided by the screenplay) and as well as ***research into how the film performance was created*** (techniques used, actor's research, preparation, experiential work, training, collaboration with director, etc.). The paper should also ***contextualize the body of work and/or collaboration in the context of the historical period***. This includes broader ***movements and styles in cinema and related art forms as well as social, political, and cultural currents*** which influenced (or were influenced by) the screen performances which you will examine.

The Screen vs. Stage Acting Assignment will require you to articulate in your own words, the difference between the two media from the point of the actor and the audience. The role of the actor in each form is essential and but the differing *forms* of theatre and cinema affect the *content* of the actor's contribution and require you to articulate some of the key distinctions.

Throughout the course you will be expected to assimilate a *vocabulary of technical terms* drawn from both actor training and theory and well as from the domain of cinema studies which focuses on screen performance. Vocabulary will be included in lectures, readings, and handouts and tested on the midterm. Two written assignments (**Actor Training Reflection, Scene Analysis Assignment**) will build on vocabulary use in preparation for the Final Paper and Presentation.

Writing Expectations:

Students will be expected to complete a minimum of 5-7 pages of writing for this course.

How Writing Expectations Will Be Met:

The writing expectations will be met by the following written assignments:

Actor Training Reflection (1-2 pages)
Stage vs. Screen Acting Comparative Assignment (2-3 pages)
Scene Analysis Assignment (2-3 pages)
Final Paper (6-8 pages)

Course Management System:

This Course will use D2L. Here you will find important course documents, media resources, and assignment description and the D2L dropbox. Assignment grades and comments can also be viewed here as they become available.

All Written Assignments should be submitted online via D2L in MS Word or in PDF format. Follow the submission instruction posted on D2L. Certain assignments will also be due in hardcopy at the class immediately following the online deadline. Other pertinent documents, video materials, and information may be posted on D2L throughout the quarter.

Required Texts:

Acting: The Basics by Bella Merlin (Routledge, 2010)

Reframing Screen Performance by Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke. (University of Michigan Press, 2008)

Suggested Text:

Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft, Cardullo, et al, editors.

Recommended Texts for further study:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Ball, William | <u>A Sense of Direction</u> |
| Caine, Michael | <u>Acting in Film</u> |
| Clurman, Harold | <u>On Directing</u> |
| Shurtleff, Michael | <u>Audition</u> |
| Stanislavski, Constantin | <u>An Actor Prepares, Building a Character, Creating a Role</u> |
| Weston, Judith | <u>Directing Actors</u> |

Course Requirements and Policies

This will be a challenging and intensive course. If you give it your full commitment you will learn a great deal about acting, directing, cinema, and the creative potential of cinematic storytelling and also have fun in the process. Here is what I will expect from you:

Get to class on time.

Come to class prepared and complete readings in advance.

Participate in all in-class activities and discussions.

Respect one another.

Do not interact with any electronic devices during class without prior permission.

Do not consume food and beverages during class, other than hydration from a water bottle.

Be open to challenging and different ideas and points of view.

Share your honest opinions but also be prepared to justify and analyze them.

Commit yourself fully to the projects and assignments.

Learn the art of collaboration with your peers.

Keep all appointments.

In cases of emergency, follow up with me as soon as possible.

A Note Regarding In-Class Acting Exercises / Experiential Unit during Weeks 2 and 3:

These activities provide an experiential perspective on some of the rigors of actor training.

I invite your full (mental, physical, intellectual, emotional) participation. Because of the nature of this work, it is possible that emotions may arise and personal experiences may be shared. I ask for your cooperation in creating a trusting environment for all by respecting personal boundaries and keeping any personal experiences that may be shared confidential to this class. Also, while I encourage you to give the activities a full try, you may communicate limits that must be respected and you have the option to opt-out of specific activities.

ATTENDANCE and LATENESS POLICY:

Because this course is scheduled to meet only once a week for over 3 hours, each session will be broken into two parts. We will break for between 10-15 minutes approximately mid-way through the session. Roll will be called (or a roll sheet passed around) twice: at the beginning of the class and after the break. I will inform you of the time we will resume. It is your responsibility to be back in class by that appointed time.

Each time you are not present during roll or when the roll sheet is passed around, you will receive a half-absence. Each student will be allowed one full absence (or two half-absences) during the quarter with no negative impact on his or her grade. **All subsequent absences will result in a grade reduction of 10 points for a full absence and 5 points for each half-absence deducted from your participation grade.**

Being absent is designated as not showing up for class, showing up after roll has been called, or *leaving class while class is still in session*. Please take care of personal needs before class begins, during the break, or after class. If attendance and lateness are not problematic issues in the class (as I hope will be the case), and it is clear that all are present, I may dispense with roll and/or sign-in sheets at that time.

Assignments and Exercises: Assignments must be completed by the date to which they are assigned in the syllabus. Consequently, late work will not be accepted without prior consent of the instructor. Late work, if accepted, will be marked down significantly and under no circumstances will late work ever be accepted more than one week past due.

Email: Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at <http://campusconnect.depaul.edu> is correct.

Changes to Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

Brief Overview of Major Assignments

Note: Additional information regarding assignment requirements and expectations will be provided in class and/or posted on D2L.

Reflection Papers:

Essay Response to Actor Training - This will be a personal reflection in response to the readings, lecture, and most importantly, the in-class exercises exploring key actors training techniques such as Sense Memory and Meisner Repetition. (1-2 pages)

Stage vs. Screen Acting Comparison Assignment - You will need to attend a live theatre performance in order to complete this assignment that will ask you to consider how acting performances function in a live theatrical context and compare and contrast how similar dramatic material would be treated in a cinematic context. (2-3 pages)

Scene Analysis - A close reading of a key scene from a classic film, such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which you analyze each character's circumstances, backstory, needs, wants, obstacles, and conflicts in order to gain insight into the actor's preparation for a role. (2-3 pages)

Midterm Exam - A Written Exam testing your grasp of concepts and materials covered during the first half of the quarter. The exam will emphasize vocabulary, concepts, and key historical figures.

Comedy Clip Assignment - A participation assignment in which you will be asked to bring in a short clip that you consider to be one of the funniest moments ever captured on film. We will compare clips and responses in order to breakdown the chemistry of comedy.

**Research Paper and Final Presentation on an Actor's Body of Work, An Actor-Director Collaboration, or A Director's Approach to Screen Performance.
(Paper 6-8 pages; Presentation 12-15 minutes)**

This is the major assignment for this course and constitutes the largest portion of your grade. As part of this class you will be expected to research, write, and do a presentation about a significant practitioner of screen performance from the history of cinema. There are three main possible approaches (although variations can be proposed for instructor approval):

- 1) Analyze a significant screen actor's body of work by examining at least his or her work in at least three films and doing research about his or her training, life experience, and working process.
- 2) Analyze and actor-director collaboration to explore how actors and director worked together to create characters and achieve truthful, unique, and compelling performances.
- 3) Choose a director who is noted for working with actors and research and analyze her or his method and working process with actors.

You will be asked to propose *three* possible thesis topics. Your final topic is subject to instructor approval. You should begin thinking about interesting topics for you paper and presentation early in the quarter

Presentation

Your presentation will be given BEFORE your final paper is due. You will be assigned a slot on Class 8, 9, or 10 and you will be expected to present on that day. You should have completed the bulk of your research and formulated your thesis in advance in order to present an articulate and compelling perspective on your topic. You would be prepared to field questions and hear comments from the instructor and your peers. You may incorporate the insights and new ideas gained from doing the presentation into your final paper. Presentation should be 10 - 12 minutes and must include at least 3 film clips comprising no more than 4 minutes of the total presentation.

Final Paper

More details will be provided in class and on D2L. However, paper must be between 6-8 pages double-spaced. You must include a bibliography of works cited which included *at least 5 reputable text sources*. The Works Cited page does NOT count towards the 6 - 8 pages. In addition, audio and video interviews with your subjects may be important sources for your research. Your paper should have a clear thesis that is supported by your research. Choose one of the major citation styles (MLA, APA, Harvard, or Chicago) and remain consistent throughout your paper.

Final Exam on Peer Presentations

All students should attend, take notes, and actively participate in the Final Presentations of their peers. In order to ensure this and that everyone's research deepens and expands everyone's knowledge, the Final Exam will consist of questions related to the topics of the Final Presentations. Take notes so you have them with you during the open-note Final Exam. (Your notes should be handwritten or printed on paper; no electronic devices during this open-note exam.)

Assignments and Grading Scale:

Additional information regarding assignment requirements and expectations will be provided in class and/or posted D2L.

| ASSIGNMENTS | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Actor Training Reflection Paper | 5% |
| Stage vs. Screen Acting Comparison | 10% |
| Scene Analysis | 10% |
| Midterm | 20% |
| Presentation | 15% |
| Final Paper & Proposal (6-8pp) | 20% |
| Participation, Attendance, and Preparation | 10% |
| Final Exam on Peer Presentations | 10% |
| TOTAL | 100% |

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-88, B = 87-83, B- = 82-80, C+ = 79-78, C = 77-73, C- = 72-70,

D+ = 69-68, D = 67-63, D- = 62-60, F = 59-0. A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D indicates unsatisfactory work, and F is a failure to demonstrate an understanding of course concepts.

The Art of Screen Acting DC 250 - Spring 2015 - LEE MADSEN Course Schedule of Week-by-Week Assignments, Topics, and Readings

| <u>DATE</u> | <u>Screenings / Clips</u> <i>(Subject to Change)</i> | <u>Readings & Assignments</u> <u>DUE</u> |
|--|---|---|
| <u>CLASS #1 - March 31</u> | | |
| Course Intros & Overview What is Acting? Outside-In vs. Inside-Out Stage vs. Screen and the Unique Demands of Acting on the Set | Living in Oblivion | |
| <u>CLASS #2 - APR 7</u> | | |
| Vaudeville, Melodrama, & Stanislavski's Revolution in the Theatre The invention of the Movie Star Screen Performance during the Silent & Studio Eras Stanislavski's American Heirs: Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner (Pt 1) | Excerpts from Silent & Studio Era Stars: Chaplin, Davis, Bogart, etc | Merlin, Ch. 1 |
| <u>CLASS #3 - APR 14</u> | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Stanislavski's American Heirs: Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner (Pt 2) Case Study: The Method and the Actors Studio in the 1950s. In Class Exercise: Meisner's Listening & Repetition | Streetcar Named Desire | Merlin, Ch 2 & pp. 160 -186. Baron, Ch 1 Live Performance Reflection due Actor Training Reflection Assigned |
| <u>CLASS #4 - APR 21</u> | | |
| Stanislavski's Building Blocks of Drama & Character: Circumstances, Objectives, Actions, Obstacles, & Beats. Stella Adler's interpretation of Stanislavski: Justification and The Method of Physical Actions. | Method Acting in 60s' Hollywood: Hoffman in The Graduate & Midnight Cowboy | Merlin, Ch 4 & pp. 186-208 Baron, Ch 2 Actor Training Reflection due Scene Analysis Assigned |
| <u>CLASS #5 - APR 28</u> | | |
| Thinking Systematically About Acting: Methods of Critical Analysis of Screen Performance from Delsarte, Laban, and Stanislavsky | Method Acting in 70's Hollywood: Pacino, De Niro, etc. | Merlin, Ch 5 Baron, Ch 3 Scene Analysis Thesis topic assigned |
| <u>CLASS #6 - MAY 5</u> | | |
| Cassavetes and Acting in U.S. Independent Cinema 1970s - 1990s; How to research and analyze screen performances. | A Woman Under the Influence Boys Don't Cry | Baron, Chs 8 & 9 Thesis topic proposals due Mid Term Exam |
| <u>CLASS #7 - MAY 12</u> | | |
| The Case of Comedy - Humor & Use of Improvisation on the Screen | Comedy Clips, TBD | Comedy Clip Assignment |
| <u>CLASS #8 - MAY 19</u> | | |
| Presentations and Individual Meetings/Check-In | Presentations | Presentations due as scheduled |
| <u>CLASS #9 - MAY 26</u> | | |
| Presentations and Individual Meetings/Check-In | Presentations | Presentations due as scheduled |
| <u>CLASS #10 - JUNE 2</u> | | |
| Presentations and Individual Meetings/Check-In | Presentations | Presentations due as scheduled |
| <u>CLASS #11 - JUNE 9 - THE FINAL: 2:45 - 5:00 PM</u> | | |
| Final Exam and Self Evaluations | Final Papers Due | <u>Final Paper Due</u> <u>Final Exam in-Class</u> |

University and College-Wide Policies:

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their

instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in [CampusConnect](#).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the [University Academic Calendar](#). Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment.

Students with Disabilities

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd. Phone number: (312)362-8002 Fax: (312)362-6544