



# ACTING I

## THEA2870/2

Fall 2011

Tu/Th 10:00 am - 11:50 am, NC184

Instructor: Dr. Pamyla Stiehl (Ph.D. from CU/Boulder; Actors' Equity Member, 20 years)

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*"The playwright's job is to be God and see the world from everyone's perspective, and the actor's job is to see it from their completely specific perspective on a level of detail I simply cannot see." -- Tony Kushner*

When asked about his own method, Konstantin Stanislavsky apparently said: *"Create your own method. Don't depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you."*

He also said, *"The person you are is a thousand times more interesting than the best actor you could ever hope to be."*

**Course Learning Objectives:** Through this course, you will start to fill your proverbial "actor's toolbox" with many different tools, as well as learn how to choose those tools thoughtfully and utilize them with confidence and ease. The aim is that you become an expressive conduit of the script on stage, giving the playwrights' words physical, vocal, and dramatic truth, color, and action. As part of this process, you will learn to see and analyze the architecture of a play's text, including the playwright's construction of character, relationships, objectives, given circumstances, environment, beats and playable actions. I also want to encourage you to experiment with the quieter, less presentational aspects of acting: reflection, balance, concentration, listening, vulnerability, introspection, observation, and curiosity. If we work toward these goals together, we can establish a safe, empathic and playful work environment.

**Required Texts:** *13 by Shanley* by John Patrick Shanley (published by Applause Books)  
*A Practical Handbook for the Actor* by Melissa Bruder, Lee Michael Cohn, et. al.

**Required Equipment:** Yoga Mat

*Our bodies are the loci of pain, pleasure, and knowing. They hold the stories of our life, death, love, and loss.  
They are the generative place from and about which great art is made and healing manifests.*

**Required Theatre Ticket Purchase:** *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Denver Center Theatre Company, Stage Theatre, September 30 – October 23 (cost: approx \$10 student ticket, which you can purchase on your own for any performance before it closes. Visit [www.denvercenter.org](http://www.denvercenter.org) or call (303) 893-4100 for more information.) I have also linked the site on Blackboard for your convenience.

**Other Reading (via E-Reserves and handouts):**

- 1) *20<sup>th</sup> Century Actor Training*, edited by Alison Hodge (chapter 1, "Stanislavsky")
- 2) *Acting One*, Robert Cohen (e-reserve sections as designated in syllabus)
- 3) *The Viewpoints Book*, by Anne Bogart & Tina Landau (chapters 1-3)

Instructions for accessing E-Reserves:

Go to <http://blackboard.du.edu/> to log into DU Blackboard using your DU ID# and passcode (same as WebCentral ones). Then, click on the course number from the list in the right-hand panel. From the course page in Blackboard, under "Course Management" (in the left-hand panel) click on "Course Reserves" menu item. (You may be asked to agree to a © agreement the first time you sign on.) After a few seconds, this links to E-Reserves which will list all your reading selections. Just click to view and/or print the PDF file.

## Tips for Success:

- Arrive to class a little early and ready to work. Two late arrivals (later than 5 minutes) equal one absence.
- Wear exercise clothing. If you need other "character" clothing for scene work, bring items that you can slip on over your exercise clothing or change during class. We will be physically warming up with yoga. Be prepared to be on the floor and barefoot. We will most likely be working up a sweat. We will also be working our voices. Bring water, and please turn off phones. No texting EVER in class (unless your character does it in a scene).
- Come to class with an open and willing attitude. Be willing to try all the exercises *before* you pass judgment on them. And then be willing to try them again.
- Participate in discussions. Your thoughts and observations are integral to our development in this class, and I expect you to share them. Ask questions! Challenge assumptions (and me – I have thick skin).
- Be respectful of your classmates: listen to them during the exercises and in the discussions and respond thoughtfully, even if you disagree with their choices or comments. Frame responses in a constructive manner. Do not try and "direct" your fellow actors.
- Always communicate with me about any concerns or questions you have regarding the course, your progress, further areas of exploration, how this connects to other coursework you're doing, and so on.
- Decide to have fun and enjoy the work we do together. If finding yourself overwhelmed, step back and practice the mantra: "I am enough for me today." Then, dive back in and be ready to share yourself with others in a variety of playful and inquisitive ways!

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING:

### ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION / DISCUSSIONS: 40% of final grade

This is not a class where you can get the notes and study for the test. You must be here to participate, and you must participate in order to learn and grow (as well as contribute to the progress of your scene partners). For each class attended and in which you ACTIVELY participate, you receive one point: 20 total points possible. You are allowed two absences, after which your final grade, as calculated at the end of the quarter, will drop one-third for each added absence (i.e., three absences will automatically drop an earned A- to a B+, with the fourth dropping it to a B, and then on). This is a calculation that also includes the missing attendance points. On a rare occasion, subject to my discretion, I may excuse an absence, but only if it involves a serious medical issue and has accompanying paperwork (doctor's note). Please keep in mind, however, that I have worked as a professional actor for years, performing with bronchitis, pneumonia, stomach flu, etc. This is just part of an actor's life; thus, I am not the most sympathetic when it comes to granting excused absences – just a warning . . .

### IN-CLASS PERFORMANCES: 25% of final grade

If you're absent on a day when you are scheduled to present an assignment, you have one opportunity during the quarter to make it up. I expect you to take responsibility to schedule the make-up (this may involve some negotiation with your scene partner/s as well). Performances will always include some coaching, experimentation and process work in front of the class. Performance assignments are **each worth 10 pts** according to the following rubric:

- **Preparedness** (required memorization, prep work, GOTE, etc.) = **2 pts**
- **Process and Play** (concentration, willingness, bravery, playfulness, flexibility and teamwork) = **5 pts**
- **Performance** (related to progress made during Process/Play) = **3 pts**

### Breakdown of in-class performances

- *Stranger Physicality*, Sept 15
- *Open Scene*, Sept 22
- *Monologues*, Oct 11
- *Baron's Farewell*, Oct 18
- *Physical Expression Exercise*, Nov. 10

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: 10% of final grade (5 pts possible each)

Writing is to be in personal voice, but you will not earn all 5 pts for an assignment if it contains significant/numerous spelling, grammatical, and/or punctuation errors. I must be able to follow your crucial thoughts and observations in a coherent and meaningful fashion. Also, if you do not fully explore and expound upon the requirements of the writing assignment, you will earn less than 5 pts.

### Breakdown of writing assignments:

- Monologue analyses, Oct 4-6
- GOTE sheet, "The Baron's Farewell," Oct 13
- Monologue Observations (2 classmates), Oct 18
- Acting Response Email (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), Oct 25 (must also turn in ticket stub to get full points)
- Scene analysis for Final scene; Nov 3

## OBSERVATIONS and COMMENTS REGARDING CLASSMATES' WORK: 10% of final grade

An important aspect of this course is learning how to talk about each other's work. I expect your thoughts and insights about what you observe in class to be articulate, specific, and generous. I expect each one of you to generate and share opinions about what you see. Be careful not to "direct" your fellow students, but to discuss and dissect what you saw.

## FINAL: SCENE PERFORMANCE w/ACTORS JOURNAL: 15% of final grade

- Scene will be graded similar to other *performance exercises*: **10 pts** ("Preparedness, Process/Play, and Performance" rubric)
- Journal will be graded similar to other *writing assignments*: **5 pts**

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Tues	9/13	Introductions, Discussion, Outside Observation (overheard line; stranger physicality)
Thurs	9/15	<b>Due: One line of overheard dialogue</b> <b>Due: Chapter 1 "Stanislavsky" e-reserve reading (20<sup>th</sup> Century Actor Training)</b> / discussion Scenes from Scratch <b>PERF: 1-2 Minutes of Stranger Physicality</b>
<i>Email Assignment due by September 16</i>		
Tues	9/20	Exploring and exercising GOTE <b>Due: 3 Shanley plays reading:</b> <i>Danny and the Deep Blue Sea</i> (pg. 9), <i>Red Coat</i> (pg. 54), <i>Lonely Impulse</i> (pg. 76) / discussion
Thurs	9/22	<b>PERF: Memorized Open Scene</b> GOTE cont.
Tues	9/27	GOTE cont. <b>Due: 3 Shanley plays reading</b> <i>Savage in Limbo</i> (94), <i>Women of Manhattan</i> (134), <i>Italian American</i> (221) / discussion
Thurs	9/29	<b>Due: Choose Shanley Monologue</b> <b>Due: "GOTE," "Preparing a Role," "Rehearsing" &amp; "Staging" e-reserves reading</b> / discussion
<i>9/30 – Opening night of <u>To Kill a Mockingbird</u>, Stage Theatre, Denver Center Theatre Company</i>		
Tues	10/4	<b>Due: "Creating a Monologue" e-reserves reading</b> / discussion <b>Due: Monologue coaching</b> <b>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Monologue analysis</b> (get your character's GOTE)

Thurs	10/6	<b>Due: Monologue coaching (cont.)</b> <b>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Monologue analysis (cont.)</b> <b>Due: "Scene Structure" e-reserves reading / discussion</b>
Tues	10/11	<b>Due: "Evaluation and Improvement" handout reading / discussion</b> <b>PERF: Monologue / audition</b>
Thurs	10/13	GOTE review, Choices in Acting <b>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: GOTE sheet for "The Baron's Farewell"</b> <b>Due: Choose Shanley Scene</b>
Tues	10/18	<b>PERF: Memorized "The Baron's Farewell"</b> <b>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Written observations of 2 classmates' monologues</b>
Thurs	10/20	<b>Due: Viewpoints Book</b> reading, chapters 1-3, 10 / discussion Viewpoints
Tues	10/25	Viewpoints
Thurs	10/27	<b>Due: A Practical Handbook for the Actor</b> , pp. 1-54 reading / discussion Monologue application <b>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: E-mailed "Response" to Acting Component of <i>Mockingbird</i> (must also give me ticket stub in class)</b>
Tues	11/1	<b>Due: A Practical Handbook for the Actor</b> , pp. 55-86 reading / discussion "The Baron's Farewell" application
Thurs	11/3	<b>WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE: Scene Analysis (either GOTE, Handbook formula, or combo)</b> Begin work on scenes (should be memorized)
Tues	11/8	Revisit Stanislavsky, GOTE, Viewpoints and <i>Practical</i> Scene rehearsal and coaching
Thurs	11/10	<b>PERF: Physical Expression Performance (Viewpoints or Yoga Flow)</b> Scene rehearsal and coaching
Tues	11/15	Final Run-Through of Scenes / discussion
Thurs	11/17	<b>FINAL -- SCENE PERFORMANCE w/ACTING JOURNAL, REFLECTION AND EVALUATIONS</b>

***FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, November 22, 10-11:50. Final Scenes may push out to final period. However, if scenes, as well as the necessary reflections and evaluations, are finished on 11/17, the final exam period will be cancelled.***

**EXTRA CREDIT** – Attend one of the DU productions (*Spring Awakening*, *Senior Capstone Productions*, *Some Girls*) and send me an e-mailed response in regards to acting component – 1 percentage point added to your final grade

**EMAIL ASSIGNMENT – DUE BY SEPTEMBER 16:** Please email me with answers to the following:

- 1) Introduce yourself: who you are, what name you prefer to use in class, your major(s), and one thing that makes you interesting.
- 2) What kind of career(s) are you interested in?
- 3) What are you really good at (can be related to acting or not—public speaking, computers, skateboarding, telling jokes, listening, writing a paper, etc.)?
- 4) What do you hope to get out of this class?
- 5) Have you read the syllabus thoroughly and understand my expectations and the course requirements?

# G

## **Goal ----- Expressive Action**

("I want/need to . . ." evolves into "I'm going to . . .")

# O

## **Other**

(Provides obstacles – requires constant adjustment, play & flexibility)

# T

## **Tactics / Tools**

(Strategies to accomplish expressive action/goal – can either facilitate and build "beats" or, according to some, constitute "beats" themselves)

# E

## **Expectations (of Victory) / Energy / Enthusiasm**

(Heightens life, energy, and stakes of "G" -- can also use "it's as if" for this purpose)

- *Start from a literary reading of the scene, i.e., what is literally happening in the scene (from a third-person perspective)?*
- *Leads to Expressive Action (you are now in first person as character – "I'm going to . . .")*
- *Relationships, given circumstances, subtext, character history, environment, magic "if"*