THST 464 01 (Summer Session): Acting: Constructing a Character

YALE UNIVERSITY/THEATER AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

THST S464: ACTING: CONSTRUCTING A CHARACTER

Summer Session: 2023

Mondays and Wednesdays: 9:00am - 12:15pm

Location: TBD

Office Hours: Wednesdays: 1:30 - 2:30 (By Appointment only)

Professor: Gregory Wallace

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Course Description

Acting: Constructing A Character is a studio based exploration of the internal and external preparation an actor must undergo in order to effectively render the moment-to-moment life of a given character. This course is meant to promote a rigorous investigation of how the actor uses the self as the foundation for transformation. While rehearsing both monologues and scenes, the class will employ a series of questions based on the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky to examine the technique of developing a character while addressing issues of social and historical context as well as physicality, rhythm, language and inner emotional life. The class will consist of close reading, research presentations, rehearsals and the occasional performance of characters drawn from a selection of classic American plays. It may also include interviews with living people in an attempt to embody the physicality, rhythms and interior emotional life of subjects the student has identified as worthy of investigation. Some performance experience is preferred for this course but not required.

The material used in Constructing A Character will be based on the specific needs and experiences of members of the class. In past renditions of this course we have focused on characters from ANGELS IN AMERICA by Tony Kushner, INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage, ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz, DRY LAND by Ruby Rae Spiegel, 4,000 MILES by Amy Herzog, SUMMER AND SMOKE by Tennessee Williams, JOE TURNERS COME AND GONE by August Wilson, THE WORLD OF EXTREME HAPPINESS by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig and many others. The choice of characters and material will be entirely consistent with the needs of each individual and will most certainly include titles not mentioned here or below.

This course is an intensive, hands-on, on-your-feet studio class which involves both the physical and emotional exploration of specific texts. The majority of class time is dedicated to exercises, rehearsals and presentations during which you will receive
coaching and constructive criticism. You will also learn to provide effective feedback to your fellow classmates.

**Course Format**

*Acting: Constructing A Character* is an intensive *studio* based exploration of the internal and external preparation an actor must undergo in order to effectively render the moment-to-moment life of a given character.

**Enrollment Cap, Selection Process, & Notification (if applicable)**

The course is limited to 8 students.

**Prerequisites**

Non-majors are encouraged to apply for this class. Instructor permission is required for entry.

**Required Course Materials**

We will be exploring and rehearsing monologues and scenes from major plays by American playwrights including *Angels in America, Intimate Apparel, How I Learned To Drive, Joe Turners Come and Gone, A Streetcar Named Desire, Death of a Salesman*. The following is a partial list of scenes to be explored as choices will be made in accordance with those taking the class.

- *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner
- *Intimate Apparel* by Lynn Nottage
- *Lungs* by Duncan Macmillan
- *Seven Guitars* by August Wilson
- *Proof* by David Auburn
- *Summer and Smoke* by Tennessee Williams
- *A Raisin in The Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
- *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller
- *Anna in the Tropics* by Nilo Cruz
- *Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morrisseau
- *Proof* by David Auburn
- *4,000 Miles* by Amy Herzog

**Assessments and Grading**

GRADING
Your final grade will depend on these activities, using the following percentages:

Class participation: 20%
Rehearsal Preparation of Scene Work: 15%
Mid term Oral Presentation of Research: 15%
Rehearsal Preparation of Monologue Work: 10%
Final Performance of Monologue: 15%
Final Exam: Performance of Scene 25%

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This class requires a great deal of participation, collaboration and generosity of spirit which means that attendance and punctuality are imperative. The instructor may make allowances for absence in cases of illness or extreme circumstances that are documented by a physician but only when such cases are communicated before the beginning of any missed classes. An unexcused absence will lower the final grade by one-third of a letter grade (bringing an A to an A-, or A- to a B+). A failing grade will result if there are three or more unexcused absences.

PUNCTUALITY

It is imperative that you arrive on time for this class. A one minute grace period is offered, though anyone arriving after that will be considered late. Any lateness of more than 15 minutes will be considered to be an unexcused absence. Three latenesses will be tabulated as an unexcused absence.

Class Schedule (Subject to Change)

Class #1
“The Way We Begin.” -
• Opening Remarks and Syllabus Review
• Introduction to class format and protocol
• Presentations of memorized two minute monologue
• Some principles of acting
• Contemporary scenes assigned

Class #2
“Acting is a physical art form.” -
• Exercise: How We Meet Each Other
• Exercise: The Importance of Play
• Introducing The Five Questions
• Begin table work and analysis of assigned scenes
Class #3
“The importance of asking questions.” -
• Exercise: Locating a character’s center
• Continued table work and analysis of scenes
• What is my personal way in to the world of the character?
• Who am I in the world of the play?
• Monologues and Research topics assigned

Class #4
“Listen through the ears of the character.” -
• Exercise: Locating the rhythm of the character
• Constructing a Scene Proposal
• Rehearsing on your feet
• Clarifying the “moment before”

Class #5
“We are what we do.”
• Exercise: Locating the tempo of the character
• What do I need the other person to do?
• Continued rehearsal with character clothing and props
• Identifying Actions and Objectives of Character

Class #6
“What is primal and underneath the language?”
• Exercise: Locating the exchange of energy within dialogue
• Midterm: Written/Oral Presentation of Monologue Research Topic
• Rehearsal of Monologues
• Review of Five Questions as they pertain to monologue work

Class #7
“How do we activate language?”
• Exercise: Koosh - Playing ball with the language of the character
• The importance of focus and the demons of interference.
• Continued rehearsal of monologues
• Continued rehearsal of scenes

Class #8
“What story is my body telling?”
• Exercise: Integrating imagination with physical placement, rhythm and tempo
• Finalizing action and objective choices for scene work
• Continued rehearsal of monologues
• Continued rehearsal of scenes

Class #9
“Finding consistency in your portrayal.”
Exercise: Koosh - Dealing with the Demons of Interference
Making physical choices of character second nature
Final dress rehearsal of scenes with notes
Final dress rehearsal of monologues with notes

Class #10
“Putting it all together.”
- Pre-performance physical warm-up
- Final presentation of monologues
- Final presentation of scenes
- “Singing the Other” presentation and final comments (TBD)

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging

Commitment to an inclusive learning environment:

This course aspires to support an inclusive learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized, respected, and valued as a source of strength. Yale College encourages students to provide feedback about the learning environment in this course at midterm and at the conclusion of the semester.

Yale adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy an environment free of any form of harassment, sexual misconduct, or discrimination.

Accessibility

Course Accommodations

If you have a disability or temporary health condition that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you should contact the Resource Office on Disabilities (ROD) at 203-432-2324, to make an appointment. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s), and ROD. If you have already established accommodations with ROD, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. General information for students can be found on the student information page of the ROD website https://rod.yale.edu/student-information