THTR 252a (Intermediate Acting)
Spring 2015 — Tues & Thurs — 9:00 – 10:50a
Location: MCC 112

Instructor: Jeremiah O’Brian
Office: MCC Adjuncts’ Office (2nd Floor MCC)
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Info: jeremias_mail@yahoo.com  
(will return messages within 48 hours)

Course Description and Overview
The mission of THTR 252a (20th Century American Modern Realism) is to polish the actor’s performance and scene study skills through scene analysis and class performance using scenes from this genre and time period; exploring and expanding the student’s knowledge of modern acting principles. This class will develop and deepen the students understanding of the central ideas and practices of contemporary American acting as seen through the lens of 20th Century American Modern Realism using exercises, discussion, writing, improvisation and scenework. We will be drawing on ideas from masters in the fields of Acting and Theater including Konstantin Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, Stella Adler, Mel Shapiro, and others.

Learning Objectives
This course is designed to give students a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the art of acting and 20th century modern realism. Please think of this class as process-oriented, not result-oriented. It’s better to think of this class as a series of experiments and rehearsals, with the intent of exploration and discovery. The goal of the class, and simultaneously, students will get the most out of the class if they maintain an open mind, relinquish preconceptions of self, take bold risks, cooperate with and respect self and fellow students, be present and punctual (to be early is to be on-time), and learn from each other.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
The aforementioned texts can be purchased on Amazon.com

Required Plays:
Picnic - William Inge
A View from the Bridge - Arthur Miller
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof - Tennessee Williams
The Children’s Hour - Lillian Hellman
Zoo Story - Edward Albee
American Buffalo – David Mamet

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments
Attendance
Attendance is mandatory. The experiences students have in the classroom are the foundation of their learning and each class meeting builds on the previous class. The Theater Department’s policy is that students are not allowed any unexcused absences. Two tardies (which includes leaving class early) equal one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence lowers the student’s grade by one full letter grade. Further, if a student misses class the day of a monologue or scene showing, she/ he will be expected to
make up the performance on the day of return. Failure to do so will result in a zero for the project. For any excused absences, please notify the instructor prior to the start of that class. **Perfect Attendance will earn you 20 extra credit points.**

**Class Participation**
Acting is a subjective art form and students will not be graded on talent but instead on participation and commitment in class to self, partners/teammates and the class as a whole. This is an experience based course where participation in class activities is essential for students to gain a deeper understanding of their work. Keep in mind, that attendance affects in-class participation and overall grade.

**Class Conduct**
Theater is an offering (a communion of oneself with others); a sharing of beliefs, ideas, emotions, experiences, etc. through the voice, body and mind. Respect and thoughtfulness are essential. Disrespect of any kind is not tolerated, as this work requires trust and safety to work effectively. Under **No Circumstances** are real weapons (of any kind) to be used or any other potentially harmful instrument(s) to be used in a scene, including fists and/or feet.

**Attire**
Wear comfortable clothes and shoes that you can move in - we will be moving in this class. *Acting is doing*; it’s physical, can be sweaty, and it’s important to be prepared by dressing appropriately. Closed-toed shoes are preferred to bare feet.

**Eating In Class**
There is no eating or drinking in class. (Exception: Water is acceptable in a container that can be closed.)

**Preparation**
Acting is a collaborative art form and students will be required to coordinate rehearsals with scene partners. Rehearsals of monologues and scenes will be done on the student’s time, outside of class, in order to have a prepared and workable piece when presenting in-class.

**Scene Work**
The instructor will assign the scenes unless students make a request prior to the assignment. Scenes will be no longer than five minutes (approx. 3 pages of a play). Students will be expected to be memorized and ready to present on the date specified (TBA). Failure to do so will result in a loss of those points. Precise period costumes and props are not required, but the more thought and attention given to costumes and props (exhibiting the student’s comprehension of the acting concepts and world of the play) can only help the work.

**Journal**
Students will be required to keep a journal of their thoughts, feelings, reactions and insights about their work in class. Journal entries will be reflections of any class work or any other observations related to class work and/or ideas; this can be in life, theater, or film. If you’re having trouble writing, start by asking yourself after each class... “What have I learned and how do I feel about it?” This should not be an intellectual exercise per se but rather an exploration of what is connecting, making sense, triggering, energizing or not working for you as an actor and artist to be used in the work.

**Written Assignments**
All work will be typed, double-spaced and stapled in an easy to read font (Comic Sans preferred), 12pt in size. Each assignment should include the **student’s name, the date, the assignment, and the section of the class – including the day and time the class meets**; this will be the standard heading on all assignments in this class.
1. **Journal Response** (a descriptive paper describing the students experience of chronicling their progress in the class) – 2 pgs.

2. **Students** will turn in a two page typed paper, the day of the presentation of your respective scenes, answering the questions from Chapter 4 of Mel Shapiro’s *An Actor Performs*, which the instructor will provide. – 2 pgs.

3. **Take Home Final Exam Reaction Response.** 1 pg.

**Late Assignments - I do not accept late assignments.**

**Final Exam**
The Final Exam will be a take home reaction response to a prompt that the instructor will provide the final week of classes. This exam will be no less than 1 page and will be emailed to the instructor during the final exam hours on Tuesday, May 12 between 8-10 a.m., which this class meetings final exam period.

**Extra Credit**
Extra credit may be offered throughout the session at Instructor’s discretion.
Assignments and Grading:

- 3 written assignments/ critiques: (160 points)
- Journal Response – 2 pgs. 60
- Scene/ Observation Paper – 2 pgs. 60
- Take Home Final – 1 page 40

- Participation/ Attendance: (Symbiotic Relationship) (70 points)
  - Participation:
    - Professionalism, integrity, commitment, willingness, effort 50
  - Attendance:
    - Present In Class (Must sign in every class) 20

- Exercises/ Performance: (370 Points)
  - Group Work and Exercises:
    - Warm ups 15
    - Exercises 15
    - Group work – Discussions, Improvisations, etc. 15
  - Performance:
    - Personal Monologue 70
    - Neutral/ Open Scenes 70
    - Final Scenes 80

There are a total of 600 points.

The grading scale is as follows:
540 - 600 = A
480 – 539 = B
420 – 479 = C
360 – 419 = D, and below is failing.

A - Indicates work of excellent quality;
B - of good quality;
C - of average quality;
D - of below average quality; and
F - Indicates inadequate work.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written Assignments</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance - Participation</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises - Performance</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>62</td>
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</tbody>
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TOTAL 600 100
Assignment Submission Policy
All assignments, with the exception of the Final Exam, will be turned in on the due date in-person. No emailed assignments will be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made.

Additional Policies
Mobile phones should be turned off during class, etc. If students answer phones and/ or text during class, you will be asked to leave the class for that day, resulting in an unexcused absence.
Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (16 Weeks)

Week 1
Introduction to the course – “Brilliant” monologue
**Warm ups and exercises** (every class will start with warm ups – “the feeling of ease”, etc.)

Practical problems: Composition of the Performance and the Rehearsal

Assign Picnic by William Inge
Reading: An Actor... Ch. 2-4, The Intent... Ch. 1-2

Week 2 (Important Date – Mon., Jan. 19)
Practical Problems - Acting terminology and how to internalize it
Discuss Stan. briefly and into Michael Chekhov
Read: An Actor... Ch. 5-6, The Intent... 3-4

Week 3
Awakening Emotion – The Physiological Gesture, Imagination, Sensory triggers
Discuss Michael Chekhov techniques
Present Scenework - Picnic
Assign: A View from the Bridge by Arthur Miller

Week 4
Practical problems – Pacing, Tempo, Rhythm, Props, Costume, etc.
Discuss Uta Hagen techniques
Read: An Actor... 7-8, The Intent... 5&7 (optional 6)

Week 5
Discuss Uta Hagen techniques
Present Scenework - A View from the Bridge
Assign: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams
Read: An Actor... 9-10, The Intent... 8-9

Week 6 (Important Date – Mon., Feb 16)
Individual attention on Listening and Responding and Behavior (Natural impulses)
Discuss Sanford Meisner techniques
Read: An Actor... Ch. 11, The Intent... Ch. 10-11

Week 7
Discuss Sanford Meisner techniques
Present Scenework - Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
Assign: The Children’s Hour by Lillian Hellman
Read: An Actor... Ch. 13, The Intent... Ch. 13

Week 8
Discuss Stella Adler techniques
**Mid-semester Check-In (talk about progress and areas of improvement, etc.)**

Week 9
Discuss Stella Adler techniques
Present Scenework - The Children’s Hour
Read: The Intent… Ch. 16-17

Week 10 (Important Dates – Spring Recess)

Week 11
Individual attention on Listening and Responding and Behavior (Natural impulses)
Discuss: Mel Shapiro’s techniques
Assign: Zoo Story by Edward Albee
Read: The Intent… Ch. 18

Week 12
Contrasts, Antithesis, Breath Marking
Discuss: Mel Shapiro’s techniques
Read: The Intent… 19-20

Week 13
Open Discussion on Readings
Present Scenework - Zoo Story
Journal Response Due
Read: The Intent… 22-23 (optional 21)

Week 14
Open Discussion on Readings
Assign: American Buffalo by David Mamet
Read: The Intent… Ch. 24-25

Week 15
Open Discussion on Readings
Last day for Extra Credit
Read: The Intent… Ch. 26-27

Week 16
Open Discussion on Readings
Present Scenework: American Buffalo
Read: The Intent… Ch. 28

Wrap semester discussion – learning outcome based on original goals and mid-semester pep talk
Assign Final Exam Prompt

Final Examination
Take Home Final - To be emailed to me during the final exam hours on Tuesday, May 12 between 8-10 a.m.

“Remember: Do not toil! Have fun!” – Michael Chekhov

*This syllabus is subject to change in order to fit the needs of the class.
Spring Semester 2015 (Important Dates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes Begin</td>
<td>Mon January 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King’s Birthday</td>
<td>Mon January 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidents’ Day</td>
<td>Mon February 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring Recess</td>
<td>Mon-Sat March 16-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classes End</td>
<td>Fri May 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study Days</td>
<td>Sat-Tue May 2-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>Wed-Wed May 6-13</td>
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73 instructional days

Final Examination Date:

Tuesday, May 12  8-10 a.m.

This information can be found online at USC’s site for the Schedule of Classes.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/](https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity [http://equity.usc.edu/](http://equity.usc.edu/) or to the Department of Public Safety [http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us](http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us). This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute [http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali](http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information [http://emergency.usc.edu/](http://emergency.usc.edu/) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.