

**Instructor:** Debbie McMahon

**Office Hours:** By Appointment. Suggested: Tues/Thurs at 12pm, Mon/Wed before/after class. Office hours are highly encouraged.

**Contact Info:** [debbiem@usc.edu](mailto:debbiem@usc.edu). 818.554.9554 (Email prefer.)

### Course Description and Overview

This course trains actors in physically and emotional heightened expression of acting through styles: Melodrama and Grand Guignol. The styles explore Truth and Size, finding authenticity in stylized theatrical performance. Students will learn principles and tools related to the control of energy through tension and release, articulation and control of movement. Melodrama focuses on heightened emotional expression and archetypes. Grand Guignol teaches the control of tension through suspense and incorporates elements of a psychological approach to the craft of character.

### Learning Objectives

1. Develop physical articulation through specificity, economy of movement, focus, and control of tension;
2. Find extreme yet authentic physical expression by stretching energy and gesture in heightened emotional states to build muscle memory of expression;
3. Learn the stylized theatrical forms of Melodrama and Grand Guignol through the development of scenes.

### Course Structure

- I. Poetic Dynamics: through daily extended warm up trains presence, the control of energy, physical control, focus, articulation, imagination, and the regulation of energy. This will build a physical vocabulary and principles to be applied in building physical character for the semester play, the world of Strindberg and in the following sections.
- II. Melodrama. The Athlete of the Emotions: the actor trains in 'Truth and Size,' the authentic physical expression of heightened emotional states culminating in a presentation of scenes. Grand gesture and high stakes stretch the actor's repertoire of physical expression.
- III. Grand Guignol: The Theatre of Laughter and Terror. Short scenes will focus on tension through suspense, and the craft of physical character. Special effects may be incorporated pending Instructor discretion.

### Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. **READINGS**: reading assignments will be posted on Blackboard.
  - a. Antonin Artaud on "The Theatre of Cruelty" from *The Theatre and Its Double*.
  - b. Eric Bentley on "Melodrama" from *The Life of the Drama*.
  - c. *Dracula* and *Orpheus & Eurydice* story synopses. The groups in *Dracula* must read the entire scene from *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.
  - d. "The House of Horrors" by Agnes Pierron, Deborah Treisman - *The Drama Review*
  - e. "The Théâtre du Grand Guignol" by Frantisek Deak - *The Drama Review*
  - f. Grand Guignol scripts as assigned (student to print copies as needed): *The Crime in the Madhouse* by André de Lorde and Alfred Binet, *The Laboratory of Hallucinations* André de Lorde, and *The Final Kiss* by Maurice Level.

2. **NOTEBOOK/JOURNAL & WRITING UTENSILS:** A bound Class Journal to be brought to each class will be required for class observations, rehearsals notes, and prompted responses. The journal will be submitted at midterm and the final class.
3. **ATTIRE:** Appropriate attire is mandatory. Failure to dress appropriately will affect your participation grade. You may be asked to sit out for the duration of class.
  - a. Dark, plain, fitted clothing in which you can move easily. The work will be very physical. No logos or printed material. Loose clothing hides the body and its movement. (i.e. Black leggings, yoga pants and a fitted black top. Barefoot or shoes that provide easy movement (i.e. sneakers, dance shoes). No jewelry. Hair must be off your face. No jeans, skirt/dress, oversize or midriiffs.
  - b. Rehearsal attire appropriate for characters in scene work (i.e. rehearsal skirts, shoes, hats, wigs, etc.)
  - c. Messy clothing that can stain for Grand Guignol (*pending effects*). Bring an extra set of clean clothes to change and a plastic bag for soiled clothes and towels.
4. **USC BLACKBOARD and EMAIL:** Course information, readings, assignments, supplemental material, announcements including last minute changes. <https://blackboard.usc.edu/>. Please check your USC email and respond that you have received email from the instructor.
5. **WATER BOTTLE:** filled prior to class start. Please hydrate. No food or other drinks are allowed in the studio.
6. **THEATRICAL MAKEUP:** White face (water base preferred), white powder, applicator, sponges, liner, rouge, lip color, shading colors and make-up remover. Make up can be found locally at Cinema Secrets or Naimie's or online. You are welcome to share kits.
7. **PROPS/EFFECT MATERIALS:** Props, costumes, and special effect tools as dictated by scenes.

**Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments**  
**SCHOOL OF DRAMATIC ARTS GRADING POLICIES:**

1. *No late papers, exams, projects, etc. shall be accepted unless **advance** extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher, or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*
2. *There are no unexcused absences allowed.*
3. *A grade of IN (incomplete) shall only be awarded under exceptional circumstances, according to University Policy.*
4. *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*
5. **Grading Scale for SDA:** ***A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.*

Students who follow all of the instructions on this syllabus and in-class are of "good quality" and can expect to earn a B grade. An A grade is given for students "of excellent quality" who exhibit exceptional engagement in the course.

**Participation** 15 pts  
 Contributes to the ensemble, shows generosity on and offstage, ACTIVE LISTENING (see below), participate in-class discussions, feedback, questions, prepares and restores classroom, and an open and flexible attitude to direction and feedback. Don't always wait for others to be first for exercises. Promptness is paramount. Be in the warm-up circle by 3pm without Instructor prompt.

**In-Class Exercises and Performances** 15 pts  
 Graded on Effort, engagement, focus, risk (if you never fail, you failed to try hard enough).

**2 Live Performance Analyses** 10 pts  
 Students will analyze movement of two live productions applying principles and terminology learned in class. Students will be graded on the detail of analysis, application of principles from class, suggestions for improvement and expository writing. Please proofread. A detailed description of this assignment will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class. You are encouraged to review off campus productions. Hard copies must be submitted at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below.

**10 1-2 page (mostly) writing assignments** (10 x 2 points each) 20 pts  
 These assignments will be graded by the intellectual engagement and thoroughness. Detailed instructions will be given. 1) Personal movement Bio, 2) Final Self-Evaluation, 3) Artaud article, 4) Bentley article, 5) Grand Guignol articles, 6) Tableaux Dracula, 7) Tableaux Orpheus, 8) Melodrama scene Points of Tension, 9) Make-up Proposal (photo posted on Blackboard), 10) Grand Guignol Scene Analysis (Instructor will give individual instructions).

**4 Minute Warm-up Assessment** 5 pts  
 Students will be tested on the memorization, accuracy and ability to perform the 4 minute warm-up correctly.

**Journal (2 submissions x 5 points each)** 10 pts  
 The journal is assessed by active notes from class, rehearsal notes (list date/who was present/goals and what was accomplished, challenges), in-class prompted responses. This will be submitted at mid-term and on the final class.

**Melodrama Presentation** 15 pts  
 Students will be graded on following the rules of the assignment, participation in their ensemble, incorporation of physical principles learned in class, physical images created for the characters, individual character work, and evidence of incorporating notes and coaching.

**Grand Guignol Final Presentation** 15 pts  
 See Melodrama Presentation for grading assessment.

**Grading Breakdown: 100 Total Points**

Assignment	Points	% Grade
Participation (observation, active listening, presence, engagement)	15	15%
In-Class Exercises and Performances	15	15%
2 Live Performance Analyses (5 pts each)	10	10%
10 1-2 page writing assignments (2 pts each)	20	20%
4 Minute Warm-up assessment	5	5%
Journal (submitted twice – 5 pts each)	10	10%

Melodrama Presentation	15	15%
Grand Guignol Presentation (Class Final)	15	15%
<b>Final Grade</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Assignment Submission Policy

Hard copies of written material must be submitted in class by the beginning of class on the due date. Assignments may be submitted prior to the due dates. Late assignments will be accepted only upon discretion of the Instructor. If accepted, points will be docked for tardy submissions.

### Additional Policies

1. **ATTENDANCE:** Notify in advance if you will miss a class.
2. **PROMPTNESS:** Be ready to START the warm-up at 3:00pm without Instructor prompt. Being in the room but failure to be in the warm-up circle at 3:00 (not 3:01) is late. Three tardies is considered an absence.
3. **ATTITUDE:** a positive and open attitude with a sense of curiosity, discovery, generosity, play, ferocity, and risk. Be respectful and attentive.
4. **ACTIVE LISTENING** is most valued class participation. Chatting, silent conversations, sleeping, and excessive fidgeting while others have focus is considered non-participation, disrespectful and highly unprofessional. You may be asked to leave the class and will be considered absent for that day. Lack of risk, ferocity and engaged play will be reflected in grading. Take notes, observe, engage, be present, and focus.
5. **PHONES/ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** must be out of sight during class. No texts, calls, email for the duration of the class.
6. **WORKSPACE:** All students must assist in the preparation and restoration of classroom without Instructor prompt.
7. **PHOTOGRAPHY/VIDEO:** is prohibited in class without prior permission.

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

*The schedule is subject to change pending student progress.*

**Bold reflects Assignments Due.**

WK	Dates	FIRST CLASS	SECOND CLASS
1	8/24 & 8/26	Intro/Syllabus	PD/Mask Intro & Neutral/ <b>Bio</b>
2	8/31 & 9/2	PD/Neutral/Character <b>Artaud Article</b>	PD/Character Mask
3	9/7 & 9/9	Labor Day	<b>4 Minute</b> /Intro Melodrama
4	9/14 & 9/16	Melodrama Emotion	<b>Bentley article</b> /Emotion
5	9/21 & 9/23	<b>Melodrama Tableaux</b>	Melodrama Scenes/Character

6	9/28 & 9/30	Melodrama Scenes/ <b>Tension</b>	Melodrama Scenes
<b>* TUES. 9/29 Make-up Proposal</b>			
7	10/5 & 10/7	Melodrama scene	Melodrama scene/ <b>Journal</b>
<i>(10/3-11 Mansfield Park)</i>			
8	10/12 & 10/14	Video Clips/Melodrama	<b>Melodrama Final</b>
9	10/19 & 10/21	Intro to Grand Guignol/ <b>Show Analysis</b>	Grand Guignol <b>GG Article response</b>
10	10/26 & 10/28	GG Madness/ <b>Crime discuss</b>	Intro Special Effects <b>GG Scene Analysis</b>
11	11/2 & 11/4	GG Scenes	GG Scenes
12	11/9 & 11/11	GG Scenes	GG Scenes
13	11/16 & 11/18	GG Scenes Rough Run	GG Scenes Rough Run
14	11/23 & 11/25	GG Scenes/ <b>Show Analysis</b>	Thanksgiving
15	11/30 & 12/2	GG Scenes	GG Scenes/ <b>Journal</b>

**Due Dates**

- Wed. 8/26: 1-2 page personal movement bio (2pts)
- Mon. 8/31: Artaud article, 1-2 page response (2pts)
- Mon. 9/16: Bentley on Melodrama, 1-2 page response (2pts)
- Wed 9/21: Read synopses *Dracula & Orpheus and Eurydice*.  
Due: Melodrama Tableaux – 2 copies brought to class (4pts)
- Mon 9/28: Melodrama Points of Tension (2pts)
- Tues 9/29: Makeup Proposal photo on Blackboard (2pts)
- Mon 10/5: Detailed Guidelines on Blackboard. (5pts)
- Mon 10/7 Journal Submission (5pts)
- Wed 10/14: Final Melodrama Presentations (10pts)
- Mon 10/19: First Show Analysis Due. (5pts)
- Wed. 10/21: Grand Guignol Articles – written assignment (2pts)
- Mon. 10/26: Read *Crime in the Madhouse* for discussion

Wed. 10/28: Grand Guignol character/scene analysis (2pts)

Mon. 11/23: Second Show Analysis Due (5pts)

Wed. 12/2: Journal Submission (5pts)

**Final Examination Date:** Monday, December 14, 2-4pm.

**Due 12/14:** Grand Guignol Final (15 pts) + Self-Evaluation (2pts)

#### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

#### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus) or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

#### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.