

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 515a Advanced Movement

Units: 2

FALL—Tuesdays and Thursdays—10am-11:50am

Location: McClintock 107

Instructor: Sabina Zuniga Varela

Office Hours: 10:20am-10:50am PED 204

*By Appointment Only

Contact Info: zunigava@usc.edu

* I will respond within 24 hours

“The actor is an athlete of the heart”

~Antonin Artaud

Course Description

In our journey of exploring advanced exercises in movement for the use of the body in relation to the stage, we will deepen our relationship with our dynamic physical self. Through conditioning, improvisation, repetition, experimentation and breath we will develop a movement vocabulary within our ensemble. With this physical language we will execute personal, partner and group creations utilizing rigor, freedom, balance and control with our bodies. In addition we will share and develop methods of decompression and self-care for our bodies to create a culture of resilience and sustainability for our creative physical selves moving forward in the MFA training journey.

Learning Objectives

- Build and strengthen your relationship with your creative physical body, including (but not limited to) meditation, stretching, conditioning, experimentation, execution and decompression.
- Utilize physical theatre games/exercises (inspired by Augusto Boal, Viola Spolin, Jaques Lecoq, Anne Bogart, Jerzy Grotowski and others) as an ensemble to develop trust, a physical vocabulary and communal language that can be used in your MFA training and beyond.
- Develop, rehearse and present individual, partner and group projects that utilize elements from the course as well as personal creativity and inspiration
- Understand and execute *The Cat*, a movement progression inspired by Jerzy Grotowski and Andy Robinson.
- Obtain a personal arsenal of wellness techniques to support self-care, stress relief and decompression.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Acrobat of The Heart: A physical approach to acting inspired by the works of Jerzy Grotowski
by Stephen Wang

Available to order from [AbeBooks](#), [ThriftBooks](#), [Amazon](#)

Handouts will be provided from *The Book of Qualities* by J. Ruth Gendler

Paperback copies are available to order from [ThriftBooks](#), [AbeBooks](#), [Amazon](#)

Suggested reading *The Empty Space* by Peter Brook (PDF link [HERE](#))

All three books can also be ordered or picked up at LA's

[The Last Bookstore](#)

Description and Evaluation of Assignments

Rodin Remixed- Sculpture Project 15%: This individual assignment will utilize movement work learned in class with a presentation of 6 or more sculptural imitations with creative transitions, set to music and presented to the class. The assignment will be evaluated through three aspects: Creativity/Precision/Completion

Partner Elemental Strangers Project 15%: Inspired by the elements of nature, partners will create a movement piece accompanied with music to express a non-verbal conversation between strangers. The presentation will be evaluated through Creativity/Precision/Completion *Evaluation Rubric can be found at the end of the syllabus

The Quality Project: 30%: This group presentation will be a combination of the above sculpture project and partner elemental stranger project. Using movement, music and text the ensemble will create, rehearse and present a devised piece that explores human qualities inspired by *The Book of Qualities* by J. Ruth Gendler. This will be rehearsed and presented during the culminations of SDA MFA fall semester 2021 and only evaluated by completion.

Required Reading Reflection Papers: There will be three reading response papers due this semester. Each paper should be 2-3 pages in length. Papers will only be evaluated by completion.

The Cat: A group assignment that will not culminate in a presentation, rather it will be an ongoing exploration through out the semester. Evaluation will be based on participation as well as personal assessment with this practice and constant communication with the instructor and ensemble members for needed improvement.

Project Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Exemplar (5)	Developed (4)	Limited (3)
Creativity	The presentation contains original and personal movement ideas that promote a clear understanding of the actor's playfulness and curiosities in regards to their body.	The presentation contains a few original and personal movement ideas and vaguely promotes an understanding of the actor's playfulness and curiosities in regards to their body	The presentation contains very few original and personal movement ideas and it is unclear what the actor's playfulness and curiosities in regards to their body are.
Precision	The actor demonstrated excellent control of their body throughout the presentation for a fluid and exact performance.	The actor demonstrated an efficient amount of control over their body throughout the presentation that could have been improved through more rehearsal.	The actor was unable to demonstrate control over their body throughout the presentation.
Completion	The actor rehearsed and completed a fully realized presentation on time.	The actor rehearsed and completed a partially realized presentation on time.	The actor was unable to present a completed presentation and/or did not complete the project on time.
Total _____(15%)			

Grading Breakdown:

Participation: 15%
Attendance: 35%
Assignments: 50%

Grading Scale

A: Exemplary Work
B: Good Work
C: Poor-Quality Work
D: Unacceptable Work

Assignment Submission Policy

Reading Response papers should be submitted via e-mail no later than midnight on the assigned due date.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course evaluation

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

Participation Requirements

No absences are permitted except in case of illness or emergency.

No lateness permitted.

Violation of these requirements will result in grade deductions.

Attire & Conduct:

Please wear comfortable clothing that you can move in and bring water to every class.

We will work without shoes and socks for this course.

Masks must be worn for the entire class period.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

*** Subject to change depending on the ensembles needs and desires.***

EDI @SDA: Professional Development/Mandatory EDI Training

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

All SDA students are welcome to join an interactive community building experience that explores how we integrate core values of equity, diversity, and inclusion into our educational and artistic journey at SDA.

Competencies that will be covered will include, but not limited to, Anti-Racism as Everyday Practice; Equity-Mindedness (w/colleagues from USC Race & Equity Center); and Theatrical Intimacy & Building Cultures of Consent. More details will follow.

NOTE: All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort. We encourage all to participate.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1	<p>Weeks 1-5: Conditioning and Ensemble Building</p> <p>To begin this course we will explore various strengthening exercises that will focus on sustainability and precision. Through investigating 6 points of movement (Fast/Slow; Heavy/Light; Direct/Indirect) we will begin to form a daily workout that will be used for the remainder of the semester. Through physical theatre games the ensemble will develop a communal language in order to create physical manifestations of their work both in a group and as individuals. We will begin reading <i>Acrobat of the Heart</i> together and complete a written reflection on our impressions, connections and questions. (Preface- Page 125)</p> <p>Generally Tuesdays will be general course work and Thursdays will be dedicated to working on <i>The Cat</i> movement progression. This is due to change depending on the needs of the ensemble.*</p> <p>TUE: Introductions/Warm-Up/Exquisite Corpse/Begin 6 point work with Fast & Slow movement work</p> <p>THUR: Ensemble building exercises & Begin working on <i>The Cat</i></p>	<p>Order required reading book <i>An Acrobat of the Heart</i>.</p>	

Week 2	TUE: Warm-up/Continue 6 point work with the addition of Heavy & Light movement work/ ensemble building exercises THUR: Warm up/conditioning and working on <i>The Cat</i> /Wellness Workshop (*every two weeks we will explore various methods of decompression, stress relief and self-care work on Thursdays)	Begin reading An Acrobat of the Heart (Introduction-Page 125)	Introduction through Page 125 should be completed by the end of Week 5 (September 26th, 2021)
Week 3	TUE: Warm-up/Continue 6 point work with the addition of Direct & Indirect movement work/ Continue ensemble building exercises THUR: conditioning and working on <i>The Cat</i>	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	
Week 4	TUE: Warm-up/Continue 6 point work and introduce Rodin Remixed Sculpture project/ ensemble building exercises THUR: Warm-up/Wellness Workshop/ Sculpture project rehearsal and/or conditioning and working on <i>The Cat</i> /	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart Develop and rehearse sculpture project at home	
Week 5	TUE: Warm-up/Continue 6 point work with the focus on the Sculpture project/ensemble building exercises THUR: Warm-up/Present individual sculpture projects in class on Tuesday September 26th, 2021/conditioning and working on <i>The Cat</i> if class time permits.	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart Develop and rehearse sculpture project at home	Reading Reflection Paper (1-2 Pages) Due by Midnight of September 26th, 2021) Class presentation of sculpture project on September 26th in class.
Week 6	TUE: Warm-up/Introduce Elemental work/ Partner Influenced exercises/ THUR: Warm-up/Wellness Workshop/ Continue working on <i>The Cat</i>	Start the second section of Acrobat of the Heart. (Pages 136-232)	Pages 136-232 of An Acrobat of the Heart should be completed by the end of Week 10 (October 31st, 2021)
Week 7	TUE: Warm-up/Continue Elemental work & Partner Influenced Exercises/ Incorporate Stranger Studies THUR: Warm-up/Continued work on <i>The Cat</i>	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	
Week 8	TUE: Warm-up/Continue Elemental work & Partner Influenced Exercises/ Begin developing partner elemental stranger presentations THUR: Warm-up/Wellness Workshop/ Continued work on <i>The Cat</i>	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	

Week 9	TUE: Warm-up/Continue Elemental work & Partner Influenced Exercises/ rehearse partner elemental stranger presentations THUR: Continued work on <i>The Cat</i>	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	
Week 10	TUE: Warm-up/Continue Elemental work & Partner Influenced Exercises/ rehearse partner elemental stranger presentations THUR: Wellness Workshop/Warm-up/ Continued work on <i>The Cat</i> when class time permits) Present elemental stranger partner presentations on Tuesday September 26th, 2021	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	Reading Reflection Paper (1-2 Pages) Due by Midnight of October 31st, 2021
Week 11	TUE: Warm-up/Introduce The Quality Project & Free Play dance warm-up. THUR: Free play dance warm-up/Quality project rehearsal/continued work on <i>The Cat</i>	Read final section of An Acrobat of the heart. (Pages 236-328)	Pages 236-328 should be completed by the end of Week 15 (December 5th, 2021)
Week 12	TUE: Warm-up/Develop The Quality Project THUR: Wellness Workshop/Free Play dance warm-up/continued work on <i>The Cat</i> .	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	
Week 13	TUE: Warm-up/Rehearse The Quality Project THUR: Free Play dance warm-up/ continued work on the cat	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	
Week 14	TUE: Warm-up/Rehearse The Quality Project THUR: Free Play dance warm-up/ continued work on the cat	Continue reading An Acrobat of the Heart	
Week 15	TUE: Warm-up/Rehearse The Quality Project THUR: Free Play dance warm-up/ continued work on the cat	Complete reading An Acrobat of the Heart	Reading Reflection Paper (1-2 Pages) Due by Midnight of December 5th 2021
FINAL	MFA CULMINATIONS will take place December 13-15, 2021 Schedule TBA		

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. 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>.

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 GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Vidoe Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Health and Participation in Class

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776
<https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710
campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101
diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As actors, we are athletes, poets, psychologists, and scholars. Delving into ourselves, and realizing the expansive amount of power, emotion, experience and potential we hold, is an intimidating yet intrinsic step in our journey towards fulfilling our craft. Peter Brook believes: "*Acting is in many ways unique in its difficulties because the artist has to use the treacherous changeable and mysterious material of himself as his medium.*" Once we connect with this force, we as actors then join the artistic regiment and take the stage. We fill the space and shift the air with our undeniable presence to hold up a mirror to humanity — a generations old legacy.

To begin, an artist who chooses the path of acting must obtain control over their physical form. Just as athletes do, building a powerful relationship with the body is an essential element towards training to work as a professional actor. We can perform 8-10 shows a week for months on end, in drastically different elements. Even just standing still on stage and speaking can tax the body to its limits if one does not know how to support with lengthening, widening, and breath. Long hours on a television or film set are challenging to the physical self if one has not developed a deep relationship of listening to and with their body. With rigorous warm-ups, exercises and movement vocabulary one can learn to reveal thought, emotion and character with specificity and sustainability. Pushing the physical self to its limits with flexibility, strength and endurance is an essential key that opens doors to the emotional self. In addition, developing an arsenal of wellness techniques is essential for the working actor, learning to take care of the self, inside and out, supports resiliency as one navigates this demanding industry.

I believe that theatre is an essential part of the humanities in that it helps students deepen their sense of empathy, open themselves up to learn from discomfort and diversity, and experience how body, soul, and mind are intrinsically connected. Included in my philosophy is a conviction that, regardless of a student's career path, the life's lessons that theatre teaches will enrich their professional and personal life. As Donald Declan re- marks in *The Actor and The Target*: "*If every auditorium were razed to the ground, theatre would still survive, because the hunger in each of us to act and to be acted to is genetic.*" Striving to live as an artist comes with many challenges: battling rejection, judgement, physical challenges and self-doubt can bring any actor to their knees. With the pursuit of high standards, the discipline of training, and the consistent practice of self-care, an actor can build a professional career and fully realize their potential.

My responsibility to my students is to present as many tools, texts, and options for their transformation. Providing a space for their ability to claim ownership over themselves and their craft is one that I strive to offer wherever I find myself instructing. I am dedicated to engage with my students and learn from them, as we are all a sources of experience, knowledge, and methods in our pursuit of excellence in the practice and passion of acting.

"I see Art in the distance, coming like a storm, a saving army. I see Art coming like strength to an embattled world. Stand, link arms. Speak" ~ John Patrick Shanley

Bio

Sabina Zuniga Varela is an actor/director/educator from New Mexico. She has an MA in Special Education from UNM and an MFA in Acting from USC. She has performed on the stages of: The Public Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Pasadena Playhouse, Dallas Theater Center, Cincinnati Playhouse, The Kirk Douglas Theatre, Portland Center Stage, The Getty Villa, CalShakes, Theatre Works Silicon Valley, The Magic Theatre, The Fountain Theatre and The National Hispanic Cultural Center. Television appearances include Madame Secretary, Snowfall and American Crime. She's completed The Greek Trilogy of Luis Alfaro and is a proud member of AEA & SAG/AFTRA.

www.sabinazunigavarela.com