

TH346-15 Acting in Character

21/22

Department

SCAPVC - Theatre and Performance Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Natalie Diddams

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module explores a range of considerations to do with creating and presenting a character in dramatic performance. It is taught in the Autumn Term. You will study selected approaches to understanding and developing character in performance; explore and apply these in a workshop setting; prepare your own character-based performance for presentation through monologues; and develop your own actor's handbook of key findings, techniques and tasks geared to your own interests and development as a performer. The module will help you to gain confidence and capability for onward acting projects, and will have wider benefits in terms of your understanding of dramatic texts, constructions of character, and approaches to performance; and your confidence as a performer.

Module aims

This module aims to

- Examine how character is constructed both in dramatic texts and in the interpretative work of the actor.
- Explore key techniques for and approaches to characterisation, critically engaging with these in a workshop setting.
- Develop your skills and experience in acting in and through character.
- Facilitate examination of effective acting and performing in exemplary performances on film

or video.

- Explore key theories of acting and characterisation.
- Enable a sustained personal and critical perspective upon the work of the actor in relation to dramatic text.

This module is intended for those who want to explore acting and characterisation from the inside, examining specific techniques and aspects of acting through embodied practice. The module addresses what it is to be (and prepare to be) an actor in a dramatic setting.

The module is taught mainly through studio-based activity, broken into smaller segments that address key principles and ideas, reference points, and specific approaches and techniques. Over the course of the module you will experience and evaluate particular approaches to characterisation, explore your own relation as a performer to specific characters, and develop in depth specific characterisations for presentation. You will also be encouraged to watch performances live and on video that connect with the topics of the module. You will undertake facilitated independent study in order to build your own 'actor's handbook' outlining key approaches and your personal engagement with the themes of the module. The handbook will be submitted for assessment, while it is also intended to be a dynamic document that will support your work and onward development in the future.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

AUTUMN TERM

Classes typically move between presentation, discussion and workshop exploration. Most classes comprise one workshop of c. 2 hours ('A' in each case, below), and a discussion/seminar of c. 1 hour ('B' in each case); but activities may be managed more fluidly depending on the topic in hand and the needs of the group.

WEEK 1

- A. [Workshop] What is character? Preparing to perform. Thinking about casting.
- B. [Seminar] Contexts for acting: systems and approaches. Briefing for 'Monologues' and 'Actor's Handbook'.

WEEK 2

- A. [Workshop] Strategies for exploration and preparation. Text analysis (bits, tasks and rhythm). Psychological drives
- B. Stanislavski's psycho-physical system

WEEK 3

- A. [Workshop] Given circumstances. Exploring the character's 'backstory'
- B. Tributaries and Departures: approaches to actor training

WEEK 4

- A. [Workshop] Animal studies. Imagination in character development
- B. Close analysis of case studies

WEEK 5

Monologues investigation and exploration

WEEK 6

Reading Week

WEEK 7

A: Alternative traditions for accessing character

B: Interrogating cultural contexts for acting: inclusive and diverse performance

Discussion: 'Actor's Handbook'

WEEK 8

A. [Workshop] Non-naturalistic approaches to character

Preparation for monologue presentations

WEEK 9

Presentation of monologues

WEEK 10

Debrief

B. Approaches to character

'Actor's Handbook' briefing

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of specific approaches to character and characterisation, both in terms of dramatic text and the interpretative work of the actor.
- Understand ways in which specific exploratory and rehearsal techniques can support the creation of character in performance.
- Articulate the relationship of the actor's work to the import of dramatic text, particularly insofar as it concerns the depiction of characters within specific contexts of performance.
- Prepare and present effectual character-based performance, responsive to the demands of dramatic text and context.
- Demonstrate skills in self-reflexivity, preparation and communication.

Indicative reading list

Binnerts, Paul (2012) *Acting in Real Time* (trans. by the author and Stephen Wang), University of Michigan Press.

Chaikin, Joseph (1991 [1972]) *The Presence of the Actor*, New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Chekhov, Michael (2002) *To the Actor on the Technique of Acting*, New York: Routledge.

Hess, Elizabeth (2016) *Acting and Being: explorations in embodied performance*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Krasner, David (2000) *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*, New York: St Martin's Press.

Loui, Annie (2009) *The Physical Actor: exercises for action and awareness*, London and New

York: Routledge.

Loui, Annie (2018) *The Physical Actor: contact improvisation from studio to stage*, London and New York: Routledge.

Lockett, Sharrell D., with Tia M. Shaffer (2017) *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Merlin, Bella (2007) *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, London: Nick Hern Books.

Oida, Yoshi and Lorna Marshall (1997) *The Invisible Actor*, London: Nick Hern Books (30-86).

Petit, Lenard (2009) *The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For the Actor*, London: Routledge.

Zarilli, Phillip B. (1995) *Acting (re)considered: theories and practices*, London and New York: Routledge.

Research element

You will research contexts for acting (including preparation, interpretation and presentation). You will research various texts (including monologues) and performances in order to select material for personal presentation. You will research the work of other actors in order better to understand their approaches and technical solutions to challenges. You will examine theoretical perspectives on the work of the actor. You will compile a handbook that evidences your research across these areas and further reflects upon theoretical and practical issues and perspectives.

Interdisciplinary

The module entails consideration of acting and dramatic text across different media, including theatre, film, television and online performance. While the module does not immediately entail input from other disciplinary specialists, it is relevant to interests and activities in (for example) law, politics, sociology, psychology and literary studies.

International

The module considers international contexts for acting and dramatic characterisation, including theoretical and practical positions developed by writers and artists based in (for example) Russia, the US, Germany, France and England. Depending on student interest, students may engage in close study of performances from traditions predominant in other cultures and parts of the world.

Subject specific skills

Engage creatively and critically with the skills and processes of acting and performance, particularly as they bear upon characterisation, and have an ability to select, refine and present these in performance.

Engage creatively and critically with the possibilities for performance implied by a dramatic text and, as appropriate, to realise sources sensitively through performance.

Engage creatively and critically with the creation of performance through a developed and sensitive understanding of appropriate performance vocabularies, techniques, crafts, structures and working methods.

Engage creatively and critically in appropriate independent research, whether investigating past or present performances or as part of the process of creating new performance.

Understanding of what makes specific cases of acting effective in their context.

Intelligent engagement with critical and theoretical perspectives appropriate to the study of acting and performance.

Intelligent engagement with key practitioner, practices and theorists and their cultural and/or historical contexts.

Creative and intelligent understanding of key components of performance within the discipline, such as the role and function of ideational sources, performers, body, space, text and movement.

Intelligent understanding of the responsibilities of performance practitioners to facilitate safe, environmentally sensitive, sustainable and ethical working practices.

Transferable skills

Ability to articulate the relationship between specific contexts for work and the successful completion of tasks.

Demonstration of effective time management and personal organisation in order to research, prepare and present materials.

Ability to communicate effectively in public settings.

Ability to take a reasonable and proportional view of tasks and activities in relation to aims and contexts.

Self-reflexivity and the ability to present a range of relevant materials in a coordinated way.

A developed capacity to analyse and critically examine and evaluate forms of discourse and their effects on representation in the arts, media and public life.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	6 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Tutorials	1 session of 1 hour (1%)
Practical classes	7 sessions of 2 hours (14%)
Online learning (independent)	9 sessions of 1 hour (9%)
Private study	70 hours (70%)
Total	100 hours

Private study description

Reading of selected play texts

Reading of selected critical and contextual materials for class

Independent research into critical writings, dramatic texts and accounts of acting

Viewing of videos, films and theatre pieces

Development and writing of personal handbook

Preparation and private rehearsal of performance material for class

Preparation of monologues for performance

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Actor's Handbook	40%	20 hours
Present an actor's handbook comprising the following elements:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Character notes in preparation for monologue performances (c. 250 words each = 500 words)• Personal critical reflection on your own strengths, weaknesses and selected areas of development as an actor (400 words) Analysis of the specific character presentation of an actor whose work inspires you (with a link to a video of a selected item of performance) (300 words)• Focused analysis of the challenges and potential solutions to a selected issue in acting in and through character (800 words)		
Monologues (Classical and Contemporary)	60%	30 hours
Present two monologues (each of c. 2 minutes) by characters in dramatic texts (one from a classical text, the other from a contemporary text). The assessors will pay particular attention to		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The appropriateness of your performance to the material.• The clarity of your character's actions.• The clarity of your psycho-physical technique (i.e. how well you use your body to create psychological resonance).• The relationship that you create between the performance and the audience through performance rhythm, and an ability to present a character who is 'readable' by the audience.		

Feedback on assessment

Monologues:

Formative feedback in class during preparation.

Summative feedback: Verbally in class. Written feedback on mark sheet.

Handbook:

Formative feedback in tutorial addressing plans.

Summative feedback: Written feedback on mark sheet.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 4 of UENA-QW35 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies with Intercalated Year
- UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 3 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 3 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
- Year 4 of UTHA-W422 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies