This class will approach acting from the belief that an actor’s job is learning how to rehearse. During the semester we will investigate what makes for joyful, effective, and exciting rehearsal, striving to develop a process that is as powerful as any performance. How do we make the events of the play happen “in the room”? How do we take responsibility for what our character says and does from the first read-through? How do we connect with poetic or complicated language? How do we speak and listen from the same “place”? What are the purposes and possibilities of “table work”? How do we make authentic physical choices? As we pursue these questions, we will engage with several of the actor’s technical and artistic challenges with a focus on developing the acting instrument through voice & speech, physicality, and style work. Our work may also include ensemble building and games. We will begin with Shakespearean monologues to build a common vocabulary and technical foundation, and transition to modern and contemporary scene work that will culminate in a public presentation – giving each student the chance to share his/her work with an audience. Students must wear appropriate rehearsal clothes and will be required to rehearse outside of class time.

During the semester, students will complete 3 short papers. Topics may include: 1) using Shakespeare as a jumping off point, an analysis of how dealing with poetic or heightened language affects acting choices; 2) a proposal and conceptualization for a production of a play based around the ethos of the “rehearsal aesthetic”; 3) an in-depth analysis of the issues and solutions that arose in the rehearsal process of a classmate’s scene work.

Students will read a selection of Shakespeare’s plays and 20th century plays from which monologues and scenes will be taken. Other readings will be assigned from various acting texts, possibly including Year of the King, True and False, and Being an Actor.

Calendar

January 24 – Intros, “What makes great acting?”, Games, Learning the Vocal Warm-Up, Building Vocabulary; Begin Shakespeare work: Verse & Prose = WTF?

January 31 – Monologues: taking responsibility, making events happen, making meaning

February 7 – Monologues: modal variety, nuance and trust, taking the gift
February 14 – Monologues: physicality in space, “now that’s a set!”

February 21 – Monologues: freeing the expressive voice

February 28 – Monologues: FINAL REHEARSAL SHARING/

March 7 – Begin 20th Century Scene Study: Being at the Table; styles, challenges, questions

March 14 - NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK

March 21 - Scenes: text, partner, self, audience; events, language, finding out by committing

March 28 - Scenes: giving yourself what you need, making it happen at the table

April 4 - Scenes: getting up and how to make physical choices

April 11 - SCENES: FINAL SHARINGS

April 18 - The world of the clown

April 25 - Group scenes: the dynamic rehearsal

May 2 - Group scenes: FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Attendance

You must attend every class. Be ready to work. Be fired up. Care. Watch and listen attentively and actively. Support each other. Theater is a collaborative thing – we are all in it together. Every unexcused absence will result in your final grade being lowered by a half grade. (E.g. if you miss one class the highest final grade you can get is an A-; two classes the highest final grade you can get is a B+, etc.)

Participation

The reason that we study acting collectively rather than individually will become self-evident. For now, suffice it to say that you will learn as much by watching other people’s work and listening to other people’s work as you will from being up in the space doing your own work. When I ask for feedback, I expect you to offer it, and to offer it with grace and generosity of spirit. I expect you to be as invested in the success and growth of your classmates as you are invested in your own.

Clothes
You must wear or bring appropriate rehearsal clothes to class. This means clothing you can move comfortably in, and don’t mind getting sweaty/dirty/etc. Please do not wear tight jeans or skirts. If you choose to bring rehearsal clothes, you must be changed into them by the start of class.

Grading

Grades in this class will be based on attendance, attitude, passion, and participation (see above). No one will be evaluated on “talent”, whatever that means. Your talent should not be your concern, and it certainly won’t be my concern. Every unexcused absence will result in your final grade being lowered by a half. (e.g. one missed class = A-, two missed classes = B+, etc.)

Final Grade:

50% - in class work (group work, monologues, scenes)
25% - written work
25% - participation and attendance

Incomplete Grades

Please do your work. Please do not find yourself in a situation where you have to file for a grade of Incomplete. Be aware that a grade of Incomplete can only be given with permission from the instructor, and under approved circumstances.

Academic Integrity

Students in this seminar will be expected to uphold the high standards of academic integrity outlined for all NYU students in your handbook. Plagiarism of any kind is strictly prohibited, and will result in a failing grade, and subsequent punitive action by the Gallatin School.

Ben’s work outside of class

One of the reasons I teach this class is because I have a life in the professional theater outside of Gallatin that gives me the personal confidence to teach you all something that I am actually and practically engaged in on a daily and ongoing basis outside of this class. While this comes with great advantages, it also comes with some drawbacks. Namely, there will be times when I have to miss or shorten class due to outside professional commitments. I will try to avoid this whenever possible. When I cannot avoid it, I will make sure that your in-class experience on that day is a positive and forward-moving one.

Using NYC as a Resource

One of the main intentions for this course (and one of the main missions of Gallatin and NYU) is that you make New York City your oyster. Studying acting and theater in New York is an
embarrassment of riches (and sometimes just an embarrassment), so take advantage of all the institutions, resources, and people that are available to you.

Contact

My NYU email address is bs97@nyu.edu. You may email me anytime with questions, but please keep in mind that I am a part-time employee of Gallatin, not a full-time professor. I have a full-time job outside of this school, so I only check NYU email when I can during the week. Please do not email me over the weekend and expect a response before Monday. I will always try to respond to you promptly, but may not be able to.