

INTRODUCTION to 532

SPRING 2017

Intermediate Directing - Comedy

CTPR - 532

Time: Thursday at 2pm

Place: RZC Stage D

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THIS IS WHERE YOU ARE - I HOPE IT'S RIGHT PLACE



To Make sure that you are
I WANT TO GIVE YOU A SENSE OF WHAT THIS COURSE IS -- How it relates to other intermediate directing courses and..WHY I CREATED IT

I CALL THIS COURSE DIRECTING THE COMEDIC SCENE

INTERMEDIATE DIRECTING/COMEDY

DIRECTING
THE COMEDIC SCENE

THIS COURSE IS PART OF THE CURRICULUM KNOWN AS

USC Comedy
at the School of Cinematic Arts

USC COMEDY

formerly
Comedy@SCA

Most of you know what this curriculum is – if you don't or want to know me ask me during the break i'll be happy to explain — Now – First things first – Let's talk about Me



ME

Fancy stuff you can access on the internet, imdb, the website but What you should know about me —where i've been and how i got here:

Theatre Director — since 17

Never had the formal film education you have

Learned film and tv on the job

Like most i got jumped into the Comedy fraternity

I studied directing actors and scene work at Yale —

i admired tough demanding teachers

I always wished there was a book i could recommend about directing and about comedy

Arrived here with the Writers Strike with the goal of creating

The Course I Never Had

Basically – it's the course i never had, the book that doesn't exist – HISTORY OF TEACHING COMEDY...

– i hope no matter how challenging the work is or i can be –i hope i manage to communicate how much i love what i do and how much damn fun you can have making funny things happen.

who thinks they want to direct?

Becoming a Director



You've been told it's a tough target to hit = the only way i know how to do this is demonstrate the highest prof standards... i do this out of respect for you and your aspirations. I will treat you as early career professionals. I won't talk down to you -I'll take you seriously and i expect you to take the work seriously...

And you are interested in Comedy...

however hard it is to become a director...when you add comedy:

Directing Comedy



The target just got smaller –

WHAT'S A COMEDY? what's the difference what's NOT the difference

WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR FUNNY? Those are the subjects which we will also tackle and to do so we need to add an extra hour

The Extra Hour

is not enough even to introduce directing fundamentals and when you add the fundamentals of comedy... well, it's ambitious!....

-- Let's review THE SUBJECTS OF THIS COURSE

Subjects of this Course

- CASTING ACTORS
- WORKING WITH ACTORS
- THE SCENE - MINING ITS RICHES
- CREATING COMEDY

That's a lot to accomplish in one semester. The question that has always plagued me is, Where to begin?

I've tried it many ways and i've come to think that this course — as Godard said about story

“A story should have
a beginning a middle and an end,
but not necessarily in that order”



Jean Luc Godard

This course has a beginning a middle and an end but not in a perfect order.

- CASTING ACTORS
- WORKING WITH ACTORS
- THE SCENE - MINING ITS RICHES
- CREATING COMEDY

I've done this many different ways — however i do it, i wish i could start somewhere else... In the end i realized we have to start with our actors..We need to cast them first..and we must establish some criteria on which to cast them.

Then we take up the scene and we approach it as pure drama. As we will see Comedy and Drama have the same foundation

One of the principles of this course is

DIRECT
THE
DRAMA

FUNNY
WILL
FOLLOW

So we won't worry about being funny until we have built our scenes on a solid dramatic foundation —

In practice We will range around all these topics somewhat opportunistically...while always keeping our goals in mind...

COURSE GOALS

TO SHARPEN YOUR ABILITY TO

TO SHARPEN THE DIRECTOR'S ABILITY

- TO **SEE** AND **SAY** WHAT YOU SEE
- **CAST** AND **DIRECT ACTORS** FOR COMEDY
- TO EXERCISE **CHOICE**
- **INVESTIGATE** THE SCENE -- AND DELIVER ITS **EVENT***



FIRST OF ALL:

This course is about seeing and saying with clarity and honesty

in this class you will discover that SEEING is something we have to learn to do

as the creator of Sherlock Holmes tells us



*The world is full of obvious things
which nobody by any chance ever observes...*

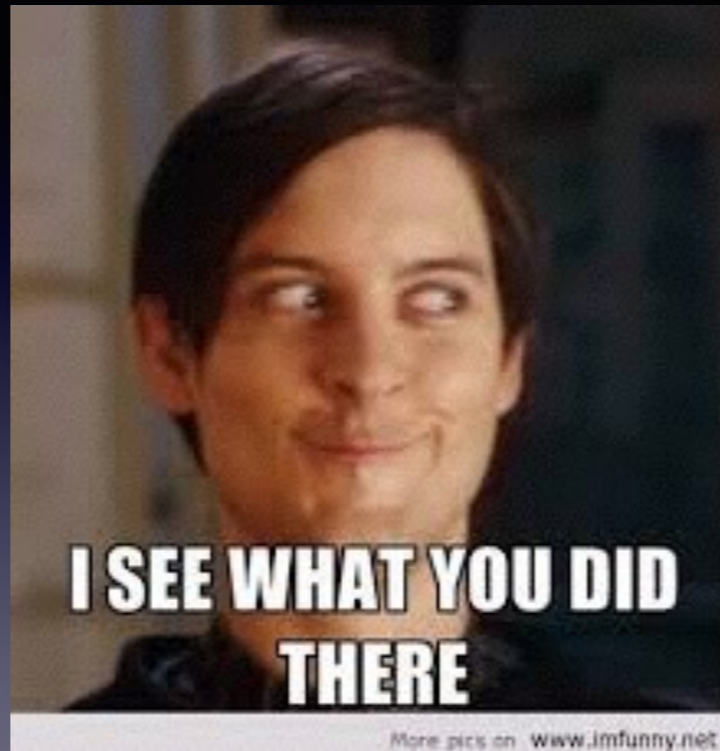
Arthur Conan Doyle

Or as Harper Lee said: People generally see what they look for and hear what they listen for

In here we will try to learn to see what's actually in front of our noses



and cultivate the ability to SAY what it is we see



We will work TO SHARPEN YOUR ABILITY TO CAST AND DIRECT ACTORS FOR COMEDY – CLICK



CASTING

WORKING WITH ACTORS



We will consider the challenges of CASTING in general and CASTING COMEDY in particular

And much of the course will be focused on ways to work with actors that enhance your chances of helping them to give their best performances

One outcome: "You won't be afraid to talk to actors "

Next We will learn how to make CHOICES

CHOICE

choice (noun)

the act of selection; an alternative or option based on your decision

Choices are The decisions made in order to shape, focus and drive a scene.
They are not absolutes. They are not hard, provable facts.

Making Choices is the #1 responsibility of the director — CHOICE is the directors' creative act!

Next we TO LEARN HOW TO INVESTIGATE AND INTERPRET A SCRIPTED SCENE

*we will be using the word “event” lot - it's an important but elusive concept — anybody have an idea what we mean by event..?

THE EVENT

“The Audience lives for the privilege of seeing something real and true happen in their presence.”

Don Hotton

The Goal of our work is to make something happen in front of our audience – by making it happen to our actors

Our building blocks will be MOMENTS —



MOMENT

MOMENT





MOMENT



MOMENT



EVENT?

determining the event is an act of choice.... of interpretation.

We will Engage with the concept of Interpretation

INTERPRETATION

SCRIPTED, DIALOGUE-DRIVEN

FOR MANY OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DEALING WITH DIALOGUE...
FOR MANY OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DIRECTING A SCENE YOU DIDN'T WRITE –
FOR MOST OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DIRECTING MATERIAL YOU DIDN'T EVEN CHOOSE!

Opportunity

This is a great opportunity to isolate certain crucial elements of the director's craft. You will be working with proven material...material with depth and substance...you won't have to rewrite it – you won't be able to rewrite it, you won't be able to shoot around it...you will have to learn how to realize it...how to make it “happen”

DIRECTING A SCENE

YOU WILL BE SURPRISED AT HOW RICH, COMPLEX AND REWARDING AN ENDEAVOR THAT CAN BE –
EACH OF YOU WITH SPEND THE ENTIRE SEMESTER FOCUSED ON JUST ONE SCENE

ONE SCENE
PER SEMESTER!

WHAT???! YOU'RE THINKING -- HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? HOW CAN YOU SPEND THAT MUCH TIME ON JUST A COUPLE OF PAGES? that's because...click

You don't know what you don't know...

THERE ARE KNOWN KNOWNS
THERE ARE THINGS THAT WE KNOW THAT WE KNOW, THERE ARE
KNOWN UNKNOWNNS
THAT IS TO SAY, THERE ARE
THINGS THAT WE NOW KNOW WE DON'T KNOW
BUT THERE ARE ALSO
UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS
THERE ARE THINGS
WE DO NOT KNOW
WE DON'T KNOW
AND EACH YEAR WE DISCOVER
A FEW MORE OF THOSE
UNKNOWN
UNKNOWNNS

The point is that there is much more going on in a good scene -- a scene worth shooting -- than you are likely to realize at this point. IN THIS CLASS WE LEARN TO SLOW DOWN - SO WE CAN GO FAST LATER..... (learning to drive)

My goal is to help you see what is there...and to begin to be able to do the forensic that will allow you to see what's there on your own. I warn you know -- the journey we are beginning tonight isn't easy...it will require - click 4 times

- TIME
- PRACTICE
- PATIENCE
- A THICK SKIN

clicks -- Why a thick skin...THE LEARNING CURVE IS STEEP...This class may not be right for those who bruise easily — Directing might not be the profession for those who bruise easily



i will try not to be unkind....but my critiques are very specific. when we get to in-class rehearsals, I will be pointing out things you have overlooked. Many of you are perfectionists. You set high standards and expectations for yourself. You may find yourself feeling embarrassed or frustrated. It is not my desire to embarrass you – nonetheless, it may happen. when i'm moving quickly, or get over-excited or because i'm trying to cover a lot of ground, i may seem brusque..Let me apologize in advance .Please don't take it personally... don't let me shut you down... The challenge for you will be to get past these feelings as quickly as possible and, instead of thinking "I made a mistake," embrace the learning moment. That's the process. That's the game we're here to play. ok?

WELCOME TO



Also you will discover that you need all the time you can get on a scene to find the funny. To mine its comic opportunities. Because comedy, by its nature requires degrees of detail, precision, exactitude and minute examination and a willingness to take risks that exceeds the requirements of other forms. it's less forgiving than drama..They're either laughing or they're not!
another thing that will take time is getting rid of MISCONCEPTIONS most people bring to Comedy

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMEDY

- COMEDY IS “RANDOM”
- LOGIC IS OPTIONAL
- REALITY GETS IN THE WAY

CLICK 3 TIMES

People think comedy is random...that logic is optional....that reality gets in the way of comedy

CLICK 4 TIMES

- COMEDY MUST BE “BIG”
- COMEDY IS IMPROVISED
- FUNNY ACTING IS BEING SILLY

that Comedy must be big...that it's all improvised...and that Funny equates with Silly
CLICK 3 TIMES
Also

- COMEDY IS ABOUT TRIVIAL THINGS
- COMEDY IS EASY

Also that Comedy is about Trivial Things...and finally, most incorrectly, they think that comedy, because it's fun, is easy
These, as i said, are MISCONCEPTIONS

Let's start by examining the notion that Comedy is easy: Listen to Jerry Seinfeld

The image shows the logo for 'The New York Times Magazine' centered on a dark background with a faint grid pattern. The text 'The New York Times Magazine' is written in a classic, ornate serif font. Below it, the word 'presents' is written in a smaller, simpler font.

The New York Times Magazine
presents

THAT'S GREAT COMIC WRITING –"Oh, he's telling us a story!"
before we continue....perhaps it's time for a short



bathroom break



TWO YEARS

Jerry said he worked on that story for TWO YEARS!

Let's imagine the pop-tart joke is your scene. It you had to write it, it might take two years.

Given that metric, I hope you can start to understand why we might take a semester to figure out how to realize the scene.

The First thing we have to do is BREAK IT DOWN

BREAK IT DOWN

DIGEST IT

JERRY CAN'T TELL HIS WHOLE STORY AT ONCE -- WHAT WOULD THAT WOULD BE?

"WOW, POP TARTS ARE GREAT!"

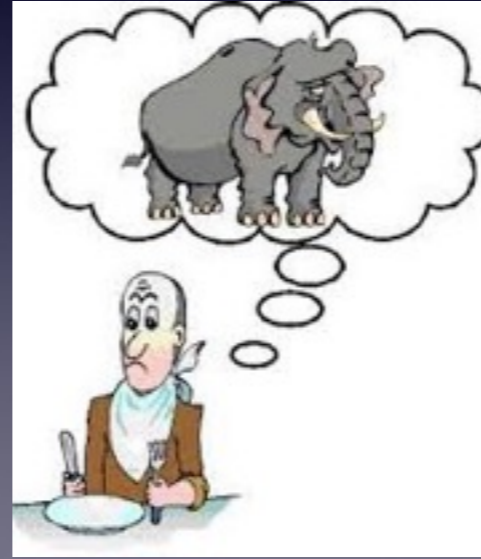
LIKEWISE AN ACTOR CAN'T ACT A WHOLE MOVIE OR EVEN A WHOLE SCENE AT ONCE

A DIRECTOR CAN'T DIRECT A WHOLE MOVIE OR EVEN A WHOLE SCENE AT ONCE

IT HAS TO BE BROKEN DOWN INTO MOMENTS, INTO SPECIFIC DETAILS, CHOICES AND ACTIONS

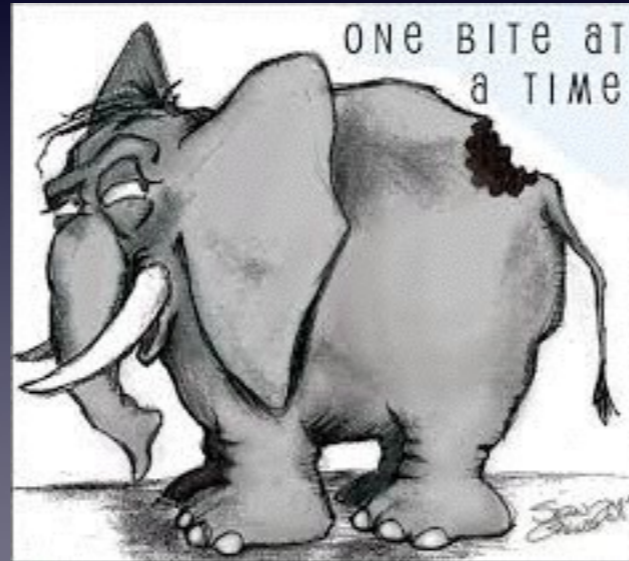
LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION:

How do you eat an Elephant?



ANYBODY KNOW HOW YOU EAT AN ELEPHANT

ONE BITE AT A TIME!!!



LET'S TURN THAT NOTION INTO A RULE -- LET'S REMEMBER THAT RULE WITH A SLOGAN

HOW
DO YOU EAT
AN
ELEPHANT?

THIS COMMON SENSE SLOGAN REMINDS US TO BREAK OUR SCENES DOWN...INTO

- MOMENTS
- BEATS
- AN EVENT

MOMENTS -- BEATS - AN, FINALLY, AN EVENT -- You'll hear much more about all of this later....DON'T WORRY - I WILL REPEAT THE CONCEPTS OF THIS CLASS OVER AND AGAIN

So: WE WILL LEARN HOW TO DO SCENE BREAKDOWN THROUGH HOMEWORK, AND ACTIVE INVESTIGATION

- HOMEWORK ---- SCENE ANALYSIS
- INVESTIGATION & EXPLORATION
----- IN REHEARSAL

CONTRARY TO COMMON FILM-SCHOOL MISCONCEPTION REHEARSALS ARE NOT

REHEARSAL

- NOT FOR LEARNING LINES
- NOT FOR GIVING BLOCKING



FOR PRACTICING LINE READINGS AND GIVING BLOCKING

WE USE REHEARSAL

- TO CREATE “PLAY” SPACE
- TO EXPLORE BEATS AND MOMENTS
- TO PENETRATE THE SURFACE OF THE SCENE
- TO EXPLORE THE COMIC POSSIBILITIES OF THE SCENE

WE HAVE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT USES FOR REHEARSAL:

CLICK FOUR TIMES

CLICK TWICE THRU BLANK – AND FOUR MORE

- TO DEVELOP PERFORMANCE
- TO STAGE AND FRAME THE MOMENTS AND JOKES
- AS ORGANIC PREPARATION TO SHOT DESIGN

CLICK 4 TIMES

REHEARSALS ARE FOR TRIAL AND ERROR (Scientific Method) – AND ERROR IS A GOOD THING!!!

REHEARSALS ARE TRIAL & ERROR

WHERE WE MEET FAILURE
AND MAKE HIM OUR FRIEND

REHEARSALS ARE WHERE WE UNWRAP OUR SCENES — and explore them through TRIAL & ERROR

FAILURE IS A FRIEND WHO WILL GUIDE US TO SUCCESS – AS WINSTON CHURCHILL SAID:

“Success consists of going
from failure to failure
without loss of enthusiasm.”



Winston Churchill

REHEARSALS ARE THE PLACE TO FAIL OUR WAY TO SUCCESS

In this class we want to change our attitude toward so-called Failure and lose our fear of making mistakes

“Failure is not a bullet.
It’s not something that paralyzes you.
It’s something you can learn from.”



Mike Nichols



Miles Davis

“Don’t fear mistakes —
there are none.”

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS CLASS -- MAKE AS MANY MISTAKES AS YOU CAN



**TRIAL &
ERROR**

If at first you
don't succeed;
call it version
1.0

REHEARSAL IS OUR PROCESS
IT'S OUR PLACE OF DISCOVERY
IT IS OUR WORKOUT

In this class i am asking you to – Sign up for aggressive, rapid learning –

I'm asking you to

Fail early and fail fast

TO SUCCEED AND SURVIVE AS DIRECTORS WE MUST LEARN TO LOVE OUR PROCESS

THIS COURSE IS ABOUT PROCESS NOT PRODUCT

IN HERE WE ARE IN TRAINING – WE ARE LEARNING A WORK PROCESS

(You don't even have to do your whole scene!)

WE LEARN

HOW TO BUILD A PROCESS

...an approach...a discipline...a workout...a work ethic...
something that will sustain us as we log the 10,000 hours that leads to mastery
HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE 10,000 HOURS?

LOGGING 10,000 HOURS

from Malcolm Gladwell's OUTLIERS --- the story of success -HE TALKS ABOUT BILL GATES, THE BEATLES, WORLD-CLASS ATHLETES...HE SORTS THROUGH GROUPS OF PEOPLE WITH EXCEPTIONAL TALENT AND EXPLAINS WHY SOME SUCCEED AND OTHERS FAIL TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL - IN IT HE QUOTES A NEUROLOGIST saying that studies show that

“...ten thousand hours of practice
is required to achieve
the level of mastery associated
with being a world-class expert in anything”

neurologist Daniel Levitan

THIS POINT IS IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT GOD-GIVEN TALENT AND NATURAL ABILITY

IT'S NOT JUST
HAVING
GOOD IDEAS.....

TO BECOME A MASTER..

TO BECOME A MASTER AT ANYTHING...

- YOU HAVE TO LOG THE HOURS
- YOU HAVE TO PRACTICE A LOT
- YOU HAVE TO FAIL A LOT

CLICK THREE TIMES

I WILL BET THAT -- NO MATTER HOW TALENTED YOU ARE -- NONE HAS LOGGED YOUR 10,000 HOURS. PENN & TELLER SAY THEY HAVE 20,000 HOURS



SO LET'S RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT YOU ARE HERE AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR 10,000 HOURS...YOU'RE BEGINNERS - AND THAT'S A GOOD THING...A THING TO EMBRACE. YOU'RE LUCKY -- I ENVY YOU - ENJOY IT - AND FIGURE OUT WHERE AND HOW YOU ARE GOING TO GET THE 10,000 HOURS YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

HOW DO YOU PRACTICE DIRECTING?

DIFFICULT TO DO – discuss – Larry Barnett practice even while returning the ball
IT'S EXCITING – BUT IT'S ALSO DAUNTING TO CONTEMPLATE ALL THE WORK AHEAD – THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO DEVELOP A PROCESS – A PRACTICE –
THAT YOU ENJOY...THAT MAKE THOSE HOURS A KIND OF PLEASURE.
I PLAN TO TEACH YOU HOW THE REHEARSAL PROCESS CAN BECOME A KEY COMPONENT IN LOGGING YOUR HOURS AND MASTERING THE CRAFT OF
DIRECTING

**THIS COURSE
IS LIKE ONE BIG
REHEARSAL**

IT'S A WORKSHOP!

So we are going to rehearse directing — we are going to practice our way into becoming better directors...Does this sound like common sense?

COMMON SENSE

I BELIEVE THAT Directing is the marshaling of common sense. It is the mastery of the simple. It is the observing of the obvious. Unfortunately these are not easy things to do. Most of us have common sense. That's why they call it "common". Often, however, we ignore it. In directing we do so at our peril.

THIS COURSE INVITES YOU TO AWAKEN AND DEVELOP YOUR MOST UNDERRATED SENSE - YOUR COMMON SENSE AND BE GUIDED BY IT - -- WE HAVE TO BE WARY OF THE TENDENCY TO INTELLECTUALIZE

BEWARE OF INTELLECTUALIZATION!

DIRECTING INVOLVES THE USE OF INTELLIGENCE, BUT IT IS NOT AN INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY.
OFTEN THE KIND OF CRITICAL THINKING YOU HAVE BEEN REWARDED FOR IN ALL OF YOUR SCHOOLING TO DATE WILL GET IN THE WAY OF THIS COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO DIRECTING -



Content vs Disposition

Students come to this class looking for content...hard facts and a set of instructions — a “how to” for directing actors. That’s very understandable — but it’s not in my opinion – the best approach.

There will be “content” of course. but content is – i believe – something we gather BUT only assimilate over time through practice.

Initially, “Content” is very difficult to use.



Story: I've actually considered writing a book to show off all the things i've learned about tennis that i can't execute:

All the lessons I learned from tennis teachers form a checklist

Eye on the ball. Turn shoulders. Low to high. Hit in front. Step

Hit.

The more i consciously think about these things the more i tie myself in knots

What i've learned both as a perpetual student of tennis and as a teacher of this course is that the content is imparted and implanted in the form of Time bombs

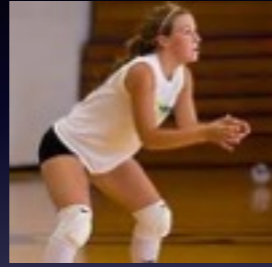


It's my experience that things you learn – that you grasp intellectually – you won't necessarily be able to execute — sometimes for a long time. But then one day you will be in the situation where that information applies and, if you are in the right disposition, you'll reach for it and – boom – it will work and then you'll own it.

My goal in teaching this class is to set time bombs – but more immediately – to model the right DISPOSITION

DISPOSITION

READINESS



What I really want you to take from this course is an understanding of the DISPOSITION of the director at work — in relation to the actor – in relation to the EVENT

It's about finding a position of balanced readiness about learning to Balance preparation with responsiveness to challenge and opportunity

One of last semester's students described this as

“The perfect combination of
premeditation and spontaneity”

That's the attitude – the disposition i'm hoping you will develop this semesters; So to sum up with some Clues to this class:

- DIVE IN
- TAKE RISKS
- EMBRACE PLAY
- LOVE MAKING MISTAKES
- OPEN YOUR EYES, EARS, MOUTHS
- LOVE THE MOMENT - THE JOURNEY



BREAK

AFTER A BREAK WE'LL DO OUR FIRST EXERCISE...AND START TAKING RISKS