

Acting: How to Harness Your Creative Power ~ Enact Characters, Scenes, & Find Your Artistic Voice | The 2026 A. David Tobin Seminar in the Arts

Faculty: Theo Black, Senior Lecturer, Performing & Media Arts and Professional Actor

Week One: July 5 – 11, 2026

Schedule: Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

Location: Black Box Theater, Schwartz Performing Arts Center, Collegetown

from: "A Practical Handbook for the Actor"
by Melissa Bruder & Lee Michael Gh

The Job of the Actor

J. D. Salinger once said, "You were a reader before you were a writer." By the same token, all actors started out as audience members. What were the first things that struck us about the theatre? What are the things that draw us to the theatre again and again? What creates those moments that every audience member has had of sitting up in his chair because something has struck him in the gut? These moments are under no one person's control; their creation is shared in equally by audience, actor, director, and technician. Realizing this, the actor must understand that it is not rational to say, "It is my job to create these magical moments." Instead, he should realize that all he can do is bring himself to the theatre in optimum condition to participate in the play at hand. Identifying what things he can do to put himself in optimum condition and then doing them consistently so that they become habitual to him will give the actor the satisfaction of always knowing what to do, what his job truly is.

The actor will find, however, that while his job may

be clearly identifiable, it will not be easy. For example, to be in optimum condition to do a play, the actor must have a strong, clear, resonant voice. But developing this type of voice takes most people many years of training, of applying the will to working daily on effective vocal exercises. The actor knows he must develop a body that will do whatever is asked of it, but this again requires the discipline to exercise as well as the study of movement so that the body will become as strong, supple, and graceful as the physical constraints within which he was born (about which he can do nothing) will allow. The actor must look at himself honestly, which requires a great deal of bravery, and use his common sense to determine what his own shortcomings are. Then he must determine which of these shortcomings it is within his control to change. Given this, he must devote himself to doing everything he can to correct those things within his control; he must use his will to become to the fullest possible extent that person he would ideally like to be. Then when he comes to the theatre, he can have the satisfaction of saying to himself, "I know exactly what my job is. I have done everything in my power to be ready to go onstage." This will free him to be more completely involved with the play as it unfolds onstage, because he will not be worrying about what he could have done to be more prepared.

The best thing you can do for yourself as an actor is to clearly define and list those things that *are* your responsibilities and separate them from those things that are *not*. In other words, itemize what is within your control and what is not. If you apply this rather stoic philosophy of working on only those things within

your control and not concerning yourself with those things that are not, then every moment you spend will be concretely contributing to your growth as an actor. Why not devote your time and energy to developing measurable skills such as your voice, your ability to analyze a script correctly, your ability to concentrate, and your body? On the other hand, how can it possibly help to concern yourself with the views others choose to take of you, the overall success or failure of the play, the ability (or lack thereof) of the director or other actors, which critics are sitting in the audience, your height, your feelings, and so forth? You cannot and never will be able to do anything about any of these things. Consequently, it makes sense to devote yourself only to those things which you have the capacity to change, and refrain from wasting your time, thought, and energy on these things you can never affect.

As an actor, you should never concern yourself with "talent." Talent, if it exists at all, is completely out of your control. Whatever talent might be, you either have it or you don't, so why waste energy worrying about it? The only talent you need to act is a talent for working—in other words, the ability to apply yourself in learning the skills that make up the craft of acting. To put it simply, anyone can act if he has the will to do so, and anyone who says he wants to but doesn't have the knack for it suffers from a lack of will, not a lack of talent.

Another major part of the actor's job is to find a way to live truthfully under the imaginary circumstances of the play. Thus the actor must be able to decide what is going on in the text in simple,actable terms. If the actor

gives himself something physically doable that he has a personal investment in for every scene, he will always have something more important to put his attention on than the success or failure of his own performance. Again, the actor must use his common sense to identify what is and is not within his control. Your feelings are not within your control, so it is not within the bounds of common sense to say "I must feel this certain way" for any particular moment of the scene. Instead, you must be able to say, "This is what I am *doing* in the scene, and I will do it irrespective of how it makes me feel."

You must understand that acting, like carpentry, is a craft with a definite set of skills and tools. By assiduously applying your will to the acquiring of those skills and tools, you will eventually make them habitual. Once your skills become habitual, you need no longer concentrate on your technique; the craft you have developed will work *for* you and allow you to operate freely within its bounds. For example, if you have worked long and hard on your voice, then you are free to put your attention on what is going on in the scene rather than on being heard.

If this sounds like an awful lot, it is. Acting requires common sense, bravery, and a lot of will: the *common sense* to translate whatever you are given into simple actable terms; the *bravery* to throw yourself into the action of the play despite fear of failure, self-consciousness, and a thousand other obstacles; and the *will* to adhere to your ideals, even though it might not be the easiest thing to do.

In our world it is becoming harder and harder to

communicate with each other simply and honestly, on a gut level. Yet we still go to the theatre to have a communion with the truth of our existence, and, ideally, we leave it knowing that that kind of communication is still possible. The theatre can put forward simple human values in hopes that the audience may leave inspired to try to live by such values. Seeing an individual doing his best against impossible odds and without regard to his fears allows the audience to identify that very capacity within themselves. That iron will is the will of the actor bringing not some "magnificent performance" to the stage, but his own simple human values and the actions to which they drive him. When truth and virtue are so rare in almost every area of our society the world *needs* theatre and the theatre needs actors who will bring the truth of the human soul to the stage. The theatre may now be the only place in society where people can go to hear the truth.