

◇ AN ACTOR'S VOCABULARY ◇

“Define, define, well-educated infant”

- Shakespeare, *Love's Labor's Lost* (1594-5)

“Every definition is dangerous”

- Erasmus, *Adagio* c. 1500

 **ASSIGNMENT: CREATE A THEATRICAL VOCABULARY JOURNAL**

**Introduction**

Theatre has a very large vocabulary — including the development and use of many slang, words and phrases created over thousands of years of theatre history. The origin of many words in a theatrical vocabulary owes a great deal not only to the country of origin of various theatrical forms (such as Roman “voms”) but also to the vocabulary of sailing ship terminology (especially technical phrases, such as: deck, bridge, loft, pin rail, rigger, etc.). Many expressions and technology overlap the nautical and theatrical. This began when many former sailors went to work in theatres in Rome and again in the Renaissance as riggers and technicians. In Rome sailors placed the first awning (“sails”) over the Coliseum amphitheatre.

**Instructions**

Each student-actor will create and keep a vocabulary journal. A place to record unfamiliar theatrical words and phrases that you encounter to help make them a part of your working theatrical vocabulary. Write down new words that you hear or read; you can record the definitions later. Challenge yourself to record 10, 15, 20 new words in your journal each week. Neatness, completeness, and clarity are a must and will be graded.

◇ **A** ◇

**above:** The area on stage the farthest away from the audience. The upstage area is above the downstage area. An actor walks above a piece of furniture by walking between the furniture and the upstage wall of the set.

**abstract stage:** One in which the bare minimum of setting is used such as free-standing doors, free-hung windows, limited furnishings; stylistic rather than realistic. This phrases is not in general use.

**Absurd, Theater of the:** See Dadaism, Surrealism, and Theater if the Absurd.

**accent:** (1) Emphasis placed on an action, word, phrase, or phase of a play. (2) a prominence given to one syllable in a word or phrase, over the adjacent syllables.

**acoustics:** The total effect of sound in a theatre, affected by size and shape of a space as well as its furnishings and floor coverings.

**act:** (1) A section of a play, usually indicated by an intermission, a full-length play has two or more acts. Acts are further divided into scenes. By the 19th

century it was customary for the “well-made play” to have four or five acts. (2) To perform a role.

**act change:** A change of setting, props, lights, and/or costumes between acts.

**action:** (1) What your character does in order to try to get what he/she wants. To *act* is to *do*. (2) The progress of the play as made clear to the audience by dialogue, movement, and development of character and character relationships. That which happen on stage to hold the audience's attention. (3) In *Method* terminology, action refers to the inner motivation of the character, his or her reason for being on stage. (In this context, see also Intention.)

**acting area:** That part of the stage used by actors during the performance. Also called the Playing Area.

**act curtain:** Curtain usually closest to the proscenium, which when opened reveals the scene of playing area to the audience. Also called Front Curtain, Main Curtain, Working Curtain, or Grand Curtain.

**acting edition:** A play text or script published after the original production which usually includes stage directions and notes from the original production. Prepared for use in future productions.

(Samuel French, Dramatists Publishing Company (for plays), Tams-Witmark, Musical Theatre International (for musicals) are the main publishers of these editions.)

**actor:** Term now used for both men and women performers. See character actor and personality actor.

**actor proof:** A play that bad acting can not hurt.

**actor trap:** A slang term assigned to any technical situation that will trip up an inattentive actor ,e.g., an uneven step on a staircase.

**actress:** A female actor.

**Actors Studio:** A New York acting school founded by Robert Lewis and Elia Kazan in the 1940s, followed by the leadership of the controversial acting teacher, Lee Strasberg, who developed his own version of *method acting*. An off-shot of the Group Theatre of the 1930's, which introduced Stanislavski to America (with Kazan, Lee Strasberg, Lewis, Harold Clurman, and Stella Adler).

**Actors' Equity Association (AEA):** Usually called simply “EQUITY,” this is the union of professional actor's and stage managers, founded in 1913. You

can join Equity is these ways, you can be signed to an Equity contract by a producer, you can join by virtue of prior membership in one of our sister unions (the 4As, AEA, SAG-AFTRA, AGMA, AGVA), or you can earn eligibility by completing the Equity Membership Candidate program. (logo below)



**adjustment:** A change in action or objective in relation to a change in given circumstances.

**ad-lib:** (*ad libitum* - literally, at pleasure) Movement or dialogue improvised and inserted by an actor in the production that is not in the script, often without approval. On occasion inserted to cover fluffs.

**adaptation:** A play taken from a novel, a movie or other literary material; updates of earlier plays; musical adaptations of straight plays.

**advance:** Refers to tickets sold before the production begins.

**advance man:** Someone who travels ahead of any traveling production arranging for the theatre, publicity, housing, etc.

**aesthetic distance:** Physical or psychological separation or detachment of the audience from the dramatic action, regarded as necessary to maintain the artistic illusion in most kinds of theatre.

**affective memory:** The recalling of details surrounding an event in an actor's life to reawaken personal emotions. (Strasberg). See also Emotional Memory.

**afterpiece:** A short theatrical piece, like a curtain-raiser but at the other end of the evening. In 18th Century London, a short comedy performed after a five-act tragedy.

**AFTRA:** The professional union The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Sister Union of AEA.

**agent:** A professional representative who take care of bookings and negotiate performance contracts.

**agit-prop:** Short for "agitational propaganda." Agit-Prop theatre is usually politically orientated and expressly designed to "stir things up."

**AGMA:** American Guild of Musical Artists. Sister Union of AEA.

**AGVA:** The professional union The American Guide of Variety Artists. Today, this union represents mainly theme park performers. Sister Union of AEA.

**alignment:** Balanced arrangement of the body from head to toe in a straight line.

**allegory:** A form of storytelling that *teaches* moral concepts

**Allen Smithee:** See Smithee, Allen.

**all-nighter:** 'Pulling an all-nighter' is working or rehearsing a production well into the late evening or early morning.

**allusion:** Indirect reference to a person, place, or thing.

**amateur:** Someone who works in the theatre for the love of it and is not paid for his efforts.

**ambiguity:** Double meaning.

**American Educational Theatre Association (AETA):** Organization in support of educational theatre found in universities, high schools, and community theatres.

**American Theatre Wing:** See Tony Awards.

**Amphitheater:** A large oval, circular, or semicircular outdoor theatre with rising tiers of seats around an open playing area; an exceptionally large indoor auditorium.

**angel (investor):** In theatrical terms a colloquialism for a benefactor who supports the theatre with financial support, but does not expecting financial rewards. Financial backer for a commercial production. Because of the high cost of mounting a commercial production (\$2 million for a "straight" play and \$5 million to \$8 million for a musical), producers look to corporate funding rather than to individual investors.

**Angel Cards :**A tradition at the Old Vic theatre in which actors draw from a deck of cards with random words on them and include whatever word is on the card in their performance that evening. (Source: Kevin Spacey)

**angry young man:** The "angry young men" were a group of mostly working and middle class British playwrights and novelists who became prominent in the 1950s. The group's leading members included John Osborne and Kingsley Amis. The phrase was originally coined by the Royal Court Theatre's press officer to promote John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*.

**Annie Oakley:** In traditional theatrical terms a complimentary ticket, named after the famous American rifle sharpshooter, because the actual ticket was punched with a number of holes (resembling bullet holes, thus the name), in the pre-rubber-stamp days, to designate that it was not purchased, but free.

**antagonist:** The character in the play most directly opposed to the main character or protagonist. The person or force working against the protagonist in a play.

**anticipate:** (or Prejudging) React to a cue, action or thought that has not yet occurred (i.e., actor falls before shot is fired; actor turns to door before knock, etcetera). Looking forward to something.

**anti-climax:** A high point in the action of a play which occurs after the main climax and is of lesser importance.

**antihero:** A protagonist that doesn't possess any of the traditional qualities of the hero.

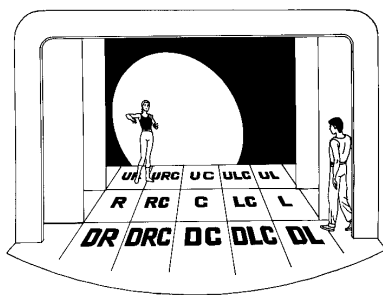
**anti-pro(s):** Stage lighting positions in front of the proscenium arch (or in the auditorium or house).

**Antoinette Perry Awards:** see Tony Awards.

**apprentice:** An individual who works in the theatre for the learning experience, usually not paid.

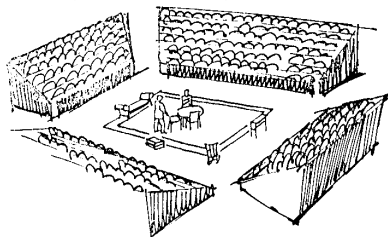
**apron:** (also forestage) The portion of the stage nearest to the audience and in front of the proscenium arch or house curtain. The extension of the stage in front of the proscenium.

## ACTING IS ACTION – Web Pages



**area(s):** A portion of the stage that has been designated for use during the playing of a scene. The stage is divided into specific areas, such as down right, up left, etcetera. (Pictured above.)

**arena theatre, arena stage :** A performance space with the audience on all sides. Also called Theatre in the Round. (Pictured below.)



**Aristotle's six elements of drama/tragedy (ladder of drama):** In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (pictured below) defines and discusses the six elements that make up tragedy: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle. Also see "The Poetics."



**articulate/articulation:** The shaping of sound into speech. Articulation is by means of vowels and consonants.

**articulators:** The organs of speech used to produce speech sounds. The most important are the lips, the front teeth, the jaw, the tongue, and the velum (soft palate).

**artistic failure:** A production that receives good reviews but does not succeed at the box office.

**aside:** A short speech intended only for the ears of the audience, and by convention not heard by other characters on stage. A typical device, for example, of nineteenth-century melodrama, it may be used to impart information or expose

the secret thoughts of the speaker. (See also Soliloquy). A line spoken directly to the audience.

**"as if":** use of a person, place, event, or thing from the actor's life (or to which the actor can strongly relate) that parallels that of the actor's character.

**ASM :** See Assistant Stage Manager.

**assistant director:** The person who acts as the liaison between the director, cast, and crew and takes charge of the rehearsal when the director is absent.

**assistant stage manager:** The all-purpose technical assistant; the backstage entry-lever position.

**at liberty:** An actor's euphemism for being between jobs or in other words, unemployed.

**at rise:** An expression used to indicate what is happening on stage at the moment when the curtain rises or the lights come up at the beginning of the play, or who is on stage at that particular moment. See discovered at rise.

**atmosphere:** The environment of the play created by staging and lighting.

**audition:** A tryout performance for a position in a play before producers, directors, casting agents, or others for the purpose of obtaining a part in a production.

**auditorium:** Area in which the audience sits. Derivation: a place to "hear", Roman.

**avant-garde:** A group of people who are ahead of all others in using or creating new ideas.

## ◇ B ◇

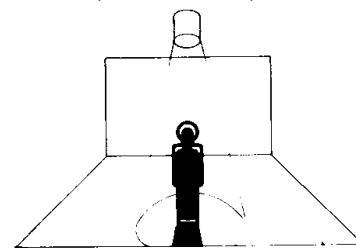
**backdrop:** Usually a large piece of canvas or other material behind the stage setting, sometimes with a detailed scene painted on it. Also called a Drop.

**backer:** See Angel.

**backing:** Flats used behind door and window openings to mask the audience's view of backstage.

**backlighting:** Light thrown on the performers from above and slightly

upstage. Backlighting by itself produces a silhouette. (Pictured below.)



**backstage:** The area in back or to the sides of the setting not seen by the audience, including the dressing rooms and the green room. Also called Offstage.

**back wall:** (a) The rear wall of the stage itself. (b) the rear wall of a box set.

**balance:** The equalization of attention by bringing actors, properties, set pieces, and other elements into harmony so as to achieve the required physical equilibrium. Keeping sets symmetrical.

**balcony:** Second tier of seating.

**balloon:** To forget one's lines or business (go up in then air, make an ascension).

**ballyhoo:** To arouse interest in an entertainment through publicity geared to flamboyant display previous to opening night.

**bard:** In medieval Gaelic and British culture, a **bard** was a professional poet/story teller, employed by a patron, such as a monarch or nobleman. In the modern period the term "bard" acquired generic meanings of an epic author/singer/narrator, or any poets, especially famous ones. For example, William Shakespeare is known as the Bard or the Bard of Avon.

**barn storming or barnstormer:** In the Theater, to tour small country towns and rural areas to stage theatrical performances, often in barns. The "stormer" part of the word is derived from the British meaning "rave" and had a derogatory connotation similar to ham. But, early airplane pilots also did barn storming (performing at county fairs, etc.)

**base:** The foundation color of makeup used for the primary skin color.

**beat or beats of action:** A term employed by *Method* actors meaning the distance from the beginning to the end of a continuing state of mind or intention of

a character, whether or not it be explicitly stated in the dialogue. A unit of dramatic action reflecting a single objective.

**bedroom farce:** A play that highlights sexual situations.

**“beginners”:** The British phrases for “Places Please!” called by the stage manager to bring those actors who appear first in the play to the stage. Also called “openers.” This does not mean those who have just started in the profession. The formality of the pre-show calls: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your thirty minute call. Thirty minutes please, ladies and gentlemen.” Then the final call: “Ladies and gentlemen, beginners please. Orchestra to the pit. Mr Bloggs, Mr. Smith, Miss Jones, ladies and gentlemen of the chorus, to the stage, please. Beginners, please.”

**below:** A position or area nearer to the audience. The downstage area is below the upstage area. An actor walks below a piece of furniture by walking between the furniture and the audience.

**belt:** To sing in a forceful manner using the chest voice.

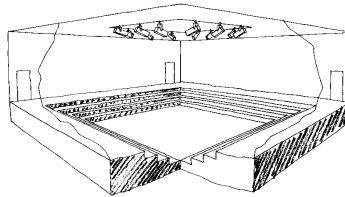
**billing:** The agreed upon (contractually) size and position of names of performers, authors, directors, designers, et cetera in publicity and program materials.

**biomechanics:** A theory and technique of acting that uses certain patterns of muscular activity to elicit a particular emotion. Developed by Vsevolod Meyerhold in Russia in opposition to Stanislavski’s method. See Constructivism.

**bit:** A small piece of business or stage action performed by an actor, usually in comedies. They might include little foibles that a character develops due to being short-sighted, hard of hearing, or clumsy. Quite often bits are added by the actors during the course of a run to keep their creative juices flowing at best and to get a cheap laugh at worst.

**bit part:** A small role in a production with few lines of dialogue, such as a messenger or delivery boy. See Walk on.

**black box theatre:** A studio theatre that usually allows various stage-audience configurations. Called a “black box” because no attention is paid to ‘house’ decoration. (Pictured below.)



**blackout:** Throwing the playing area into complete darkness by the sudden turning off of all stage lights.

**blanked out, blanked:** When an actor forgets a line or lines in a play.

**blender:** The edge of area where a bald wig meets the person’s skin.

**block, to:** Standing in front of (covering) another actor.

**blocking:** Movement of actors in the acting area, and the process of arranging moves to be made by the actors. The planned movement and stage composition of the production as developed during the early rehearsals.

**blocking notation:** Movement of actors in the acting area, which is recorded by the actors in common theatre shorthand in their scripts (in pencil).

**blocking rehearsal:** A rehearsal at which the movement and groupings on the stage are planned.

**blooper:** Error by some member of cast or crew. Sometimes called a “goof” or “boo-boo.”

**boards:** The stage. “To walk the boards” means to appear on stage. See also Deck.

**body language:** Communication without the use of words.

**body memory:** Memory retained in the body at the point of past experience; physical memory as opposed to mind or intellectual retention; sensory retention of past experiences; “Let your body remember!” (Spolin)

**book:** (1) Alternative term for the script or play manuscript (2) the prompt book or script (3) in a musical the dialogue sections (the libretto) or plot line.

**border:** Hanging scenery piece or curtain (another name for teaser) designed to conceal the upper part of the stage (the fly loft) and its equipment. A curtain hanging behind but parallel to the

proscenium to aid in masking lights, the working rigging, and the fly space.

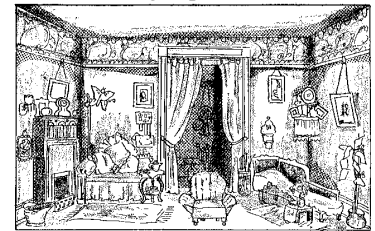
**bowdlerize:** To remove or censor material that is considered improper, offensive, vulgar or objectionable from a text, especially with the result that it becomes weaker or less effective. After Thomas Bowdler, an English physician and philanthropist, who published *The Family Shakespeare*, an expurgated edition of William Shakespeare’s work. Even famous Shakespearian actors, such as David Garrick, changed Shakespeare’s tragedies to happy endings (Romeo and Juliet “live”, etc.)

**boxes:** Audience seats on the sides of the theatre that may hang over the edge of the audience. They usually have separate entrances, and usually seat six to eight people. They were originally seats purchased to “be seen” rather than “see” the play.

**box office:** The place where tickets are sold. The name did not evolve because it at one time sold “box seats,” but from the practice of placing your admission fee in a box at the entrance to the Elizabethan theatre, such as Shakespeare’s Globe.

**box seats:** Expensive seats located in front of and to the right of the balcony and separated from other seating areas.

**box set:** Setting which encloses the acting area on three sides. Conventionally in imitation of a room in which the fourth wall has been removed. Interior setting consisting of three walls and often a ceiling as well. One of the most common of modern settings. (pictured below.)



**“break a leg”:** A theatrical superstition/tradition. Traditional phrase used in American theatre instead of wishing “good luck”, which is bad luck. SEE: merde.

**breakaway:** A costume, property or set piece that is constructed or rigged to be ripped off or break when it comes into contact with the actor, usually in fight scenes.

**break(ing) character:** To say or do anything, as an actor, during a rehearsal or performance, which is not consistent with what the character portrayed would say or do or “dropping out of character”.

**bring up:** To increase the intensity of lights, sound, volume, et cetera.

**broad comedy:** *Slapstick* boarding on *farce* or *burlesque*. Overdone for the sake of the *groundlings* and lacking subtlety.

**Broadway:** That area of New York City on and adjacent to the street named Broadway where the commercial theater of the United States is concentrated. See West End.

**bridge:** A transition from one scene to another, usually using music.

**brush-up rehearsal:** A rehearsal called after the production has opened to clean up or keep fresh the performances. Usually called if there are a number of days off between performances, such as in amateur productions. Usually done as a speeded-through.

**build:** The increase in energy, tension, or emotional key directed toward a climax, either in a specific scene or through the progress of the play. Accumulation and gradual acceleration of tempo, emotional intensity, and action by the dramatist, actors, or director at any point in a play, but particularly in the approach to the climax.

**building:** The term used by costumers for making a costume.

**Bunraku:** Japanese drama that features marionettes about four feet tall; also called the Doll Theater.

**Burlesque:** Common form of low comedy, seen in television skits and in performances by stand-up comedians; exaggerated acting often referred to as “ham”.

**bus and truck company:** In American professional theatre a “third level” touring company, usually performing in medium sized cities for one or two performances only. Named thus, because they traveled by truck (scenery) and bus (cast and the crew). This practice has all but disappeared today due to financial considerations.

**business:** Detailed pieces of action developed to enhance characterization, establish mood, and so on. Not the same as the basic stage movement.

**business manager:** The person responsible for handling the financial part of a production, printing and selling tickets; paying bills; keeping financial records.

**busker** (n.), **busking** (adj.), **buskins** (n.): An old English word for a traditional street performer. The name is derived from a laced half boot worn by actors of Greek and Roman tragedies (buskins). Busking has been around for hundreds of years in almost every country and culture. They can trace their roots back to the court jesters, early troubadours and minstrels. In fact, the earliest known busker image appears in an ancient Egypt illustration which includes a busker assistant passing the turban among the spectators. After Roman Emperor Justinian closed the theatres in the sixth century, street performers provided the only theatrical escape for the common people for the next several centuries. For almost five hundred years the Gypsies, jesters and minstrels risked excommunication from church and even death to bring street level entertainment to the people.

**byplay:** An action that takes place to the side while the main action of the play goes on. The byplay usually catches the attention of the audience and adds to the humor of the scene but does not completely distract from the main action.



**cacozelia:** See Malaprops.

**call:** (1) The announcement that warns actors when they are to be needed for rehearsals, performances, and individual scenes. (2) Posted announcements placed on a call-board, usually placed near a stage entrance, telling actors or crew when they will be required to rehearse or work.

**callbacks:** The cast selection process by which actors return for a second or third tryout.

**call board:** The bulletin board used to post announcements for actors and crew, such as rehearsal schedules and costume fittings, usually placed near a stage entrance.

**call the show, cast call :** the countdown to curtain provided by stage management, usually half-hour call, fifteen minute call, five minute call, and places.

**cameo:** Important, but small, character role.

**canon:** An entire body or collection of an playwright’s writings.

**cast:** All the actors playing characters in a play.

**cast by type:** Actors cast in straight parts who really play themselves.

**casting:** Difficult task of matching the actors who auditioned for the production with the roles in the play or musical.

**catastrophe:** An unlucky event in a play that may strike the leading character or one of the major characters.

**catharsis:** A Greek word meaning a purging or cleansing that comes as a result of emotional release of fear and pity of audience members as that experience tragedy, which Aristotle uses in his definition of tragedy.

**cattle call:** An open audition where any and all can attend without appointments.

**center** or **centering:** An actor’s term for the point of convergence (an internal point of concentration) of the muscular, respiratory, emotional, and intellectual impulses within the body, that focuses mental energy and from which all effective balance and movement derive.

**center line:** Imaginary line running down the center of the stage from up center to the stage apron. All objects placed on the stage are measured from the center line.

**center stage:** The area in the center of the acting area.

**central axis:** The deepest point onstage that is just off-center.

**Chamber Theatre:** Is a method of adapting literary works to the stage using a maximal amount of the work’s original text and often minimal and suggestive settings. In Chamber Theater, narration is included in the performed text and the narrator might be played by multiple actors .

**changing booth:** A small temporary booth in the wings where an actor can make a costume change without going to the dressing room.

**Character(s):** A character (or fictional character) is a person in a narrative work of arts (such as a novel, play, television series or film).<sup>[1]</sup> Derived from an ancient Greek word, the English word dates from the Restoration, although it became widely used after its appearance in Tom Jones in 1749. From this, the sense of "a part played by an actor" developed. Character, particularly when enacted by an actor in the theatre or cinema, involves "the illusion of being a human person."

**character actor:** The true character actor alters his personality to fit the demands of any role. They try to become unrecognizable in the role. Laurence Olivier and Alec Guinness are among the best known. In contrast see personality actor.

**character-centered action:** An approach to telling a story which places a character or group of characters in different situations.

**characterization:** Putting together all facets of a character to make that character a living, convincing human being.

**character parts:** (1) Roles in which actors deal with traits that differ from their own to produce a desired character. (2) A term given to older actors and roles in comparison to lead roles and ingénues.

**cheat - cheat out -cheat open:** To play toward the audience while seemingly conversing with others on stage. A stage technique where an actor pivots the torso and turns the face toward the audience.

**Chekhov, Michael:** See psychological gesture.

**chew the scenery:** To rant and rave on stage.

**chiaroscuro:** In makeup the use of highlight and shadow to create the face. Also the interplay of light and shadows in stage lighting and scenic painting.



**Chinese Opera** or Classical Peking Opera of China (formally traditionally called Peking Opera): Of the many major forms of regional theater in China, Peking opera is by far the most famous. It is a dramatic form that blends dance, theater, music, and acrobatics. Character types are associated with vocal styles. For example, main male characters sing in the baritone range; secondary male characters (usually unbearded scholars or lovers) sing in falsetto; and virtuous female characters sing in high falsetto. The characters use make-up as mask. In Chinese Opera the make-up is symbolic. The color red indicates uprightness and loyalty. (drawing above from Macgowan and Melnitz) Accompanying instruments include bowed and plucked lutes, drums, clappers, gongs, cymbals, bamboo flutes, and oboes. A Chinese actor impersonates a general (on a San Francisco stage in 1884) below.



**choreographer:** Dance director.

**choreography:** Pattern of the dance as directed by the choreographer.

**Chorus:** In ancient Greek drama, a group of performers who sang and danced, sometimes participating in the action but usually simply commenting on it. Also, performers in a musical play who sing and dance as a group rather than individually.

**circumflex inflection:** Using the voice to blend two or three sounds for a vowel

that normally has a single sound, allowing the actor to stress a particular meaning- or to change a word's meaning. Circumflex means "curved" or "bending," indicating that pitch rises and falls or falls and rises before sustaining. A circumflex inflection can be used at any time that a sustained inflection is appropriate.

**clambake:** An older term for a poorly constructed or rehearsed program that is much below standard.

**claque:** Paid members of an audience hired to applaud so that audience members think the play or actor is popular, or a group of friends and relatives of the actors. Opera had a tradition of paid clagues.

**clear please:** Warning for everyone who is not in the next scene to leave the acting area.

**climax:** (1) The high point of interest and/or action in a play, act, scene, or speech. The climax of a play will invariably occur in the second half of the piece. The turning point in a play in which the major conflicts of the plot are resolved. (2) a figure of speech characterized by the arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of increasing importance, often in parallel structure. Also known as a build or a list.

**clip cues** or **clipping:** To cut short the end of another actors lines, to pick up cues very quickly, to overlap the ends if lines. When an actor begins to speak his lines before another actor finishes his cue phrase.

**close:** To turn or adjust the body position so that the actor is turned away from the audience.

**closed audition:** A tryout open only to union members.

**closed turn:** A turn on stage in which the back of the actor is seen by the audience during the turn. (See also Open Turn.)

**closet dramas:** Plays meant to be read rather than acted.

**closing:** The last night of a show.

**cold reading:** A tryout when the actor uses material never seen before.

**clown white:** White foundation makeup often used by clowns.

**colorblind casting:** See Nontraditional casting.

**color coding:** Matching characters by color or pattern.

**come down:** Instructions to an actor to move towards the audience.

**Comedy:** A play that deals with treating characters and situations in a humorous way.

**Comedy of manners:** A play that laughs at or satirizes the manners and mores of a particular segment of society, usually the upper class. See also Restoration Comedy.

**comic opera:** Humorous or satirical operettas.

**comic relief:** Humorous episodes in tragedy that briefly lighten the tension and tragic effect.

**Commedia dell'Arte:** Professional improvised comedy that dealt with stock characters, called *masks*, and set bits if business, called *lazzi*. It developed and flourished in Italy during the Renaissance and continued till the 18th century.



"Razullo and Cucurucu," (pictured above) by Callot, Jacques (1592-1635), French engraver and etcher, an important innovator in both the technique and subject matter of printmaking, was one of the first artists to depict a complete cross section of society. Razullo and Cucurucu, an engraving depicting Florentine character masks, is in the *Gabinetto dei Disegni e Delle Stampi* in Florence, Italy.



Pantalone, one of the stock comic characters of the Commedia dell'Arte in traditional costume of red tights and long black coat. (Pictured above.)

**commercial theatre:** A production where risk capital is intended to be recovered, plus profit, as distinct from non-commercial which implies that the performance is subsidies against losses by organizations, contributors, and/or grants.

**community theatre:** Amateur, non-profit theatre that provides an opportunity for the non-professional to take an active part in all phases of theatre from acting to design.

**comp:** Short for a complimentary, or free, ticket. See: Annie Oakley

**company:** The persons involved in the production of a play. May also refer to a permanent group involved in a succession of productions, as a "summer stock" company.

**complication:** In a play any incident that further tangles the plot. In acting the things that get in the way of a character achieving his goal, also called an obstacle.

**composition:** Arrangement of people in a stage group through the use of balance and emphasis to achieve an aesthetic picture to promote mood.

**composite photograph:** An actor's publicity photograph made up of a number of headshots on one picture.

**concentration:** The ability to direct all thoughts, energies, and skills toward a given goal. Focused attention.

**concept musicals:** A series of independent scenes loosely tied together.

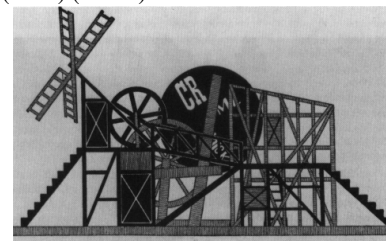
**conflict:** Tension and a struggle between two opposing forces in the dramatic situation.

**connotative meaning:** the associations and overtones of a word or phrase. See Triggers in the text.

**Conservatory:** A school developed for dramatic arts or one of the other fine arts.

**Constructivism:** An abstract style of stage setting and production that employs skeletal structures instead of realistic props. This non-realistic theatre was

developed by the director Meyerhold in Russia in the 1920's in opposition to the Stanislavski method. See biomechanics. Setting by Lyubov Popova for Meyerhold's production of Crommelynck's *The Magnificent Cuckold* (1922) (below).



**contact sheet:** The address book of a production, comprised of sheets that contain the phone and address of everyone on a show. These sheets are sometimes broken down and given out by department.

**continental seating:** An arrangement of audience seating without a center aisle.

**contrast:** differences emphasized by the presence of the opposite.

**control booth:** (light booth/projection booth) small, glass-enclosed room at the back of the auditorium; used to house light and sound equipment. The stage manager often runs the show from the control booth.

**convention(s):** A common practice that is generally accepted and understood by audience and performers, developed through custom or usage. A special or traditional way of doing things, such as house lights dimming to indicate the start of a play, or an idea, not necessarily true, that the public accepts, for example: blue light for moonlight and yellow light for sunlight (although in reality daylight is more blue). Something that has come to be part of a style or form.

**conversation piece:** A comedy in which there is much talk and little action.

**coordinates:** Costumes that are separates or interchangeable, sometimes reversible, such as ties, vests, et cetera.

**copyright ©:** The playwright, director, and designer's legal ownership and control over their own creative work. After 75 years, most works are in the public domain and can be performed without the permission of the author.

**corpsing:** Corpsing is British theatrical slang for unintentionally breaking character by laughing. In North American TV and film this is commonly referred to as breaking. The origin of the term is unclear, but may come from (provoking an actor into) breaking character by laughing while portraying a corpse.

**costume designer:** The person who researches the costumes, decides which styles and fabrics to use, and then draws or paints the costumes in renderings.

**costume fitting:** The meeting where costume personnel measure actors and test-fit their costumes.

**costume parade:** An event held in the theatre where each actor walks onstage wearing his or her costumes, one at a time. Designed to show the costumes to the director.

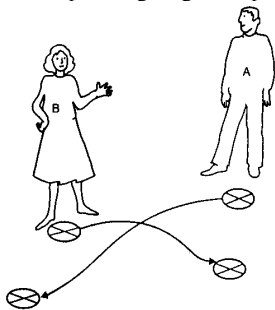
**costume plot :** List of the cast in a show indicating what costumes they will wear in each scene.

**costume props:** Costume accessories used by the actors in executing business - fans, gloves, walking sticks, and handbags, for example.

**costume silhouette:** Each historic period's own distinctive line and form in dress.

**“cough and a spit” :** a small or brief role in a play.

**counter or countercross:** A shifting of position to compensate for the movement of another actor in order to achieve a balanced and pleasing stage composition.



**Countercross Directions** (pictured above) : When character A crosses from his UL position to DR, character B will move from UC to LC to balance the stage, to offset the movement of A, and to avoid being blocked by A's new position.

**cover:** To hide from the view of the audience another actor, a property, or a

piece of business. Often used deliberately so as not to make obvious the faking of an extremely difficult piece of business, as in a stage fight, stabbing, and so on.

**Craftsmen of Dionysus:** The first known actors' guild, which originated in Athens in the 4th century B.C.E. The name was derived from the annual festivals held in honor of Dionysus, the god of fertility, wine, and theatre.

**crew:** The backstage team assisting in mounting a production.

**crisis:** Turning point, a moment of decision for the leading character; the highest point of unresolved conflict.

**critic:** A specialist in judging plays. Someone whose verbalized responses to the play or script are thought to enrich the experience for others. The response can take the form of newspaper articles, television reviews, or public talks.

**Critic's Circle:** A group composed of all first-line New York critics from newspapers and magazines, who by secret ballot award prizes, the Critic's Circle Awards, to the best American and foreign plays and musicals each spring.

**critique(s):** Evaluations wherein both strengths and deficiencies are noted. A positive or negative evaluation or suggestion.

**cross:** In blocking, a movement on stage from one area to another.

**cross above:** To move upstage/behind a person or prop.

**cross below:** To move downstage/in front of a person or prop.

**crossfade:** One effect fades out, lighting or sound, simultaneously with the new one's being brought up.

**crossovers:** When characters walk across the stage together or enter from opposite sides and meet on the stage.

**crowd scenes:** Scenes involving a number of extras or bit parts.

**cue:** The action or dialogue that signals that the next line is to be spoken or certain business, movement, or effect (lighting, sound, et cetera) is to take place. As a verb, the word may be used by the stage manager, who "cues" all

technical personnel either verbally or on a light, and "cues" actors by giving them their line when they have forgotten it.

**cue sheet:** List of particular effects executed by one department in a production.

**cue-to-cue:** A rehearsal of technical effects in a production with actors. The scenes is rehearsed in sections, beginning with a cue for standby and concluding when the effect is finished.

**curtain:** In addition to its normal definition relating to draperies, a term used to indicate the start or end of a performance such as "Five minutes to curtain" (five minutes to the start of the performance).

**curtain or “curtain up” or “curtain going up”:** The stage manager's call to start the play.

**curtain call:** The receipt of applause by the cast as the curtain is raised at the end of the play. The appearance of a play's cast in response to an audience's applause. Formerly actors were called before the curtain by the audience.

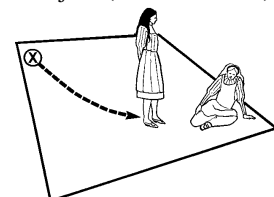
**curtain line:** (1) The imaginary line across the stage that marks where the curtain closes. (2) The final line in the play. Also called the Tag Line.

**curtain raiser:** A one-act play presented before the main play of the performance. It may be something similar in tone to set the mood, or it may be something quite dissimilar to form a contrast.

**curtain sets:** The use of curtains as a backdrop for a play.

**curtain speech:** An out of character address to the audience by a cast member or participant.

**curved cross:** While crossing to a person or object above or below you to cross in a curve so to arrive not above or below the person or object. (Pictured below.)



**cut:** (1) The order to stop whatever one is doing. (2) to eliminating lines from a



script or (3) a character from a performance.

**cut-off lines:** Lines interrupted by another speaker and indicated in the script by dashes (---)

**cyclorama** (also **eye**): A curved backdrop surrounding the setting on three sides. Occasionally used to represent the sky, it is nonspecific in detail.

**cycle:** (pronounced “syke”) The entire sequence of plays performed from pageant wagons or stages on wheels by guilds in the twelfth century.

### ◇ D ◇

**Dadaism:** An artistic-philosophical movement of the 1920’s that favored disruption and unlikely combinations. The principal spokesman was Tristan Tzara of Switzerland. Dadaism developed into Surrealism by 1924. It is also the ancestor of the theatre of cruelty and the theatre of the absurd. The term derives from the French *dada*, meaning “hobbyhorse” which was said was chosen at random.

**dance captain:** Nominated senior or “lead” member of dance team.

**dark** or **dark nights:** Days when there are no performances. The actors day off. In professional theatre usually Monday or Sunday.

**dead spot:** A place or area on the stage that is in shadow or not lit properly or acoustically where actors cannot be heard properly because the setting or stage soaks up the sound.

**deck:** The stage floor, derived from ship terminology.

**decor:** Furnishings, props, draperies, and decorations of a setting.

**deadpan** or **deadpanning:** Getting laughs through using no facial expressions.

**dead spot:** 1. Improperly lit stage area; 2. Place in the auditorium from which it is particularly difficult to hear the actors.

**debut:** Player’s first appearance in public, in a new place, or in a new production.

**deck:** The stage floor, or a temporary floor that has been built on top of the

permanent floor. Many expressions and technology overlap the nautical and theatrical. Phrase comes, as many phrases do, rigger, pin-rail, from sailing ship terminology.

**delivery:** The way an actor says his lines.

**denouement:** An element of the plot that is the solution of a mystery and/or an explanation of the outcome.

**designer:** One who designs scenery, costumes, lighting, or sound in consultation with the director.

**Deus ex machina:** Literally “the god from the machine.” In Greek classical drama, an actual machine - a crane - that lowered the actor playing the god on to the stage. Now the term means any contrived ending to extricate the actors from impossible situations.

**deuteragonist:** A character in a play who is second in importance to the protagonist. A phrase not used often today.

**dialogue:** The words spoken by the actors in the play. The lines of a play spoken by characters.

**diaphragm:** A tough, double-domed muscle that separates the chest and abdominal cavities. It is the main muscle of breathing.

**diction:** The selection and pronunciation of words and their combination in speech. The accuracy and clarity of speech.

**dilettante:** A nonprofessional part-time dabbler in the arts.

**dim:** To make the lighting less bright.

**dimming down:** Gradually reducing light.

**dimming up:** Gradually increasing light.

**Dionysus:** The Greek god of fertility, the harvest, wine, and since the first theatre festivals to celebrate the harvest were to honor Dionysus (The Great Dionysia or City Dionysia, held in the Theatre of Dionysus), also the god of theatre.

**diphthongs:** In voice, these are double combination vowels where the lips and tongue move their position; some incorporate a transition from tongue to

lips, others from lips to tongue. “How now brown cow?”

**director:** The person in charge of molding all aspects of production - the acting, scenery, costumes, makeup, lighting, et cetera - into a unified whole. His/her artistic decision is usually final, except in the case of a commercial production where the producer has this right.

**director’s concept:** Central idea, metaphor, that forms the basis for all artistic choices in a production.

**director’s notes:** The comments the director presents to the cast after a rehearsal or performance, either verbally or in writing.

**discovered (at rise):** On stage when the curtain opens or lights come up.

**discovery:** Sudden knowledge— the audience or a character realizes something about himself or another person or a given situation that might alter the whole course of the action.

**dissolve:** a cross-fade to another scene or section, serves to connect scenes.

**“DLP” (“Dead letter perfect”):** A phrase meaning to be word perfect in line memorization, used in the theatre in Great Britain. Example: “You must be DLP by dress rehearsal.” (Source: Hugh Grant, *Inside the Actors Studio*)

**dock:** Area for scenery storage, often under the stage.

**domestic comedy:** Play that explores the contradictions and eccentricities both within and between individual characters. Example: *Life With Father* by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crosse.

**domestic drama:** Addresses the problems of ordinary, middle-, and lower-class people in a serious but nontragic manner. Example: *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett and *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson.

**double:** To play two or more characters in the same production.

**double bill:** Two short plays presented as an evening’s program instead of the more usual single full-length play.

**double casting:** The casting of two actors or sets of actors who alternate in performances of roles, usually only done in amateur and academic theatre.

**double take:** To look and seem not to see anything out of the ordinary and then look again with enhanced recognition and surprise, usually for comic effect.

**down ending:** a vocal inflection that occurs when the speaker lacks a clear objective. In such a case the line drops off in every way— volume, pitch, and (most importantly) intent. A down ending should not be confused with a resolve inflection.

**downstage:** The general stage-area nearest to the audience.

**downstage right/left:** Acting area closest to the audience and on the right/left side of the stage as you face the audience (the actor's right).

**Drama:** A Literary composition in prose or verse, performed on stage. A composition adapted to be acted, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action; a play.

**drama critic:** One who attends a performance to criticize it for a newspaper or magazine.

**Drama Queen:** A slang, usually derogatory, term for a person who "acts" more offstage than on stage.

**dramatic action:** The movement of a play towards its superobjective.

**dramatic devices:** See: conflict, crisis, resolution.

**dramatic irony:** Derived from the audience's understanding of a speech or situation not grasped by the characters in the play.

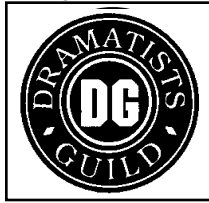
**dramatic poetry:** verse language of a higher order that is in dialogue form and is used to tell the story of a play through the words of the characters in that play.

**dramatic time:** The period of time that elapses in a script as opposed to physical time which indicated the actual length of the production.

**dramatis personae:** A historical name for the listing of the cast of a play.

**dramatist:** Writer of drama (therefore the play).

**Dramatists Guild:** The professional association, not a union, for playwrights, composers, lyricists, and book writers nationwide. (Logo below)



**dramatization:** To rewrite into a drama a work otherwise not written for the stage.

**dramaturg and dramaturgy:** One who studies a play, the text, the language, the period, the manners and mores of the characters, the clothing and customs, to interpret it for a company of actors. He or she shares in selecting plays, their revisions, or adaptations, choosing translations, and writing program notes.

**draw:** To attract the public.

**drawing room comedy:** A play dealing with the social life of people who are well off, usually set in a drawing or sitting room and bordering on farce.

**DRC:** Abbreviation for down right center (stage position).

**dress:** See Counter and Dressing the stage.

**dressers:** The wardrobe crew members who actually help actors in and out of their costumes and assist with quick changes.

**dress parade:** The final check of costumes before a dress rehearsal. The cast parade each of their costumes in order under stage lights before the Director and Costume Designer so that any final alterations, changes, or improvements can be made.

**dress rehearsal:** A rehearsal prior to performance that unites all the elements of the production exactly as they will function during actual performance.

**dressing a set:** The decoration of the set with items that are principally for aesthetic purposes only.

**dressing room:** A space for performers to hang costumes, put on makeup, and otherwise prepare for their show.

**dressing the house:** The practice of scattering a small audience through-out the house, leaving seats vacant here and there, to give the impression of a larger audience than is actually present. See papering the house.

**dress(ing) the stage:** Keeping the stage picture balanced by moving actors, especially to prevent covering and upstaging.

**drop:** A large cloth piece of scenery that may be lowered from overhead.

**dropping out:** When an actor loses focus and attention on "living the moment."

**dried up:** To forget one's lines. See Go Dry and Went Up.

**dry tech:** extended rehearsal, without actors, devoted to setting (and, if time allows, practicing) the various technical elements of the production (lighting, sound, flying, set changes, trapping, and so on). Basically a "cue-to-cue" without actors. Also called a "paper tech."

**dumb show:** A show-within-a-show conveyed entirely in gestures, or pantomime; for example, when the players in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* silently reenact a murder scene.

## ◇ E ◇

**educational theatre:** Theatre done by schools, colleges, and universities in their training programs for students.

**effect:** Sound, visual, lighting cues intended to enhance a production

**elevation:** A drawing to scale of the front view of the stage setting.

**eleven o'clock number:** A show tune which provides a big finish shortly before the musical ends.

**Elizabethan drama:** Written during the reign of Elizabeth I of England (1588-1603).

**EMMY:** Annual award for excellence in all phases of television production. (From "Immy"— an engineering term relating to the Image Orthicon Camera Tube.)

**emotional or subjective:** The playing of roles in such a way that actors weep, suffer, or struggle emotionally.

**emotional life:** an honest connection to the primary emotion of one's character at a particular point in a play.

**emotional memory:** One of the most famous aspects of the Stanislavski system. By the development of a technique through arduous training the actor is able to evoke the memory of an emotion similar to the one the character on stage is to feel. recalling specific emotions, such as fear, joy, or anger.

**emotional recall:** See Affective Memory and Emotional Memory.

**empathy:** The emotional identification with someone or something outside oneself. Ideally, the audience develops empathy with the characters in a play.

**emphasis:** The highlighting or accenting of a particular portion or feature of the production. The actor may give emphasis to a specific action or to a key line and even to one word. The focus of the audience's attention on some part of the stage.

**encore:** A request by an audience through applause for a performer to repeat part of his performance in a musical or opera.

**endow:** to enrich or furnish with any "gift," quality, or power of mind or body; to invest (imaginatively) with a quality. See text for exercises.

**energy:** The fuel that drives acting, enlivens performances, creates empathy, and makes forceful characters.

**ensemble:** Sense of "family" unity developed by a group of performers during the course of a play; the willingness of actors to subordinate themselves to the production as a whole.

**ensemble acting/playing:** A theatrical presentation in which the stress is on the performance of the group rather than the individual.

**entrance:** Coming on stage in view of the audience. Can also refer to the opening in the setting that permits the actor to make his or her way on stage.

**entr'acte:** (1) Intermission, (2) short scenes performed before the curtain, (3) in a musical the second act overture.

**environmental theater:** Contemporary theater space in which the audience space and the playing space are intermixed, so that the audience finds the action occurring all around them and may even have to choose where to look as they would in real life.

**enunciation:** Accuracy and clarity of speech.

**Epic Theater:** A leading theatre style that developed in Germany between the two World Wars that causes the audience to think deeply about important social problems in order to correct them.

**Epilogue:** A scene, speech, or poem that follows the end of a play, usually addressed to the audience. Common in classic plays.

**Equity:** See Actor's Equity.

**Equity waiver house:** In California a theatre with fewer than 100 seats in which an equity member may work without receiving minimum wage.

**escape stairs:** Stairs or steps, unseen by the audience, that an actor uses to "escape" after an upper-level exit. Of course, used for entering from these levels also.

**esprit de corps:** The common spirit pervading the members of a group. It implies enthusiasm and devotion to the group.

**establishing number:** Song providing essential exposition to the audience about the locale, time period, plot, characters, or theme.

**exeunt:** Latin word referring to an actor's exit

**etiquette:** Proper behavior.

**exaggeration:** An overstatement; an enlargement of the truth.

**existential theatre:** Theatre that supports the philosophy that human beings do not really begin to live until they define their existence.

**exit:** Leaving the playing area of the stage. It can also refer to the doorway or other opening in the setting through which the actor leaves.

**exit line:** A line delivered just before or just as an actor leaves the stage.

**explosive consonants:** Like the word that's used to describe them, these consonants are an explosion of breath. They are: B and P. C and G. D and T.

**exposition:** Material in the play that is included to give the audience the background required in order to understand the development of the story. Often refers to action that has occurred prior to the beginning of the play. Hence the exposition in a play is most likely to occur in the opening scenes. The information put before an audience that gives the *where, when, why, and who* facts of a play.

**Expressionism:** A highly symbolic and poetic type of playwriting, usually in revolt against realistic forms of drama. Expressionist are concerned with producing an inner emotional, sensuous, or intellectual reaction. The inner emotion is expressed, which does not necessarily bear a relation to the outer aspects of life. Really an extension of Impressionism as opposed to Realism or Naturalism. (From a school of thought that developed in Germany in the late 19th Century.)

**exterior:** An act or scene of a play in which the locale is out of doors.

**externalization:** When an actor shows the audience a character's true personality through interpretation, nonverbal expression, voice quality, pitch, rate, and physical action.

**extras:** Actors who appear in a play with no lines and little or no characterization - more usually in films and television. They are needed to perform a certain function in the play, as in the case of a member of a crowd scene. Used to be called *Supers* (Supernumeraries. Still are so called in opera productions).

**extreme sightline:** The seat in the auditorium that, by the nature of its location, has the best view of back stage; used to determine masking requirements.

## ◇ F ◇

**facial mask:** A plaster casting taken of the face.

**fade-off lines:** Lines that actors trail off because they do not finish them.

**fade in, fade out:** Gradual dim up or out of light or sound.

**fake, faking it:** to ad lib, or to make up actions because you haven't rehearsed or you forgot.

**falling action:** The series of events following the climax.

**falling inflection:** Using the voice to signal the end of a statement or to express depression, finality, or firmness.

**false blackout:** A blackout that occurs within a scene but does not call for a scenery or prop change. Usually denotes a passage of time.

**false proscenium:** A constructed piece placed behind the real proscenium for decorative or practical purposes (usually to make the proscenium opening smaller).

**Fantasy:** A play that deals with unrealistic and fantastic characters unrestricted by literal and realistic conventions of the theatre and usually distinguished by imaginative uses of the supernatural and the mythological.

**Farce:** A kind of comedy when everything is done strictly for laughs with little regard for probabilities or realities. A play that aims to entertain and provoke laughter. Its humor is the result primarily of physical activity and visual effects, and it relies less on language and wit than do so-called higher forms of comedy. Violence, rapid movement, and accelerating pace are characteristics of farce. Example: *Arsenic and Old Lace* by Joseph Kesselring.

**fast change:** A costume change that must be done very quickly, and is therefore done in the wings instead of in the dressing room.

**fat part:** A role with lots of good lines in it.

**feed lines:** Deliberately given so that the responding actor can get the maximum effect out of his return line.

**fight director:** The person who stages, with an eye for safety, any fight scenes in a play.

**finale:** Conclusion of a play or, more commonly a musical, when all the cast

take part. Often leads directly to the curtain calls.

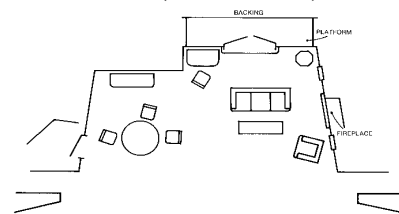
**Fire Curtain:** A non-flammable curtain hung directly behind the proscenium that protects the audience from fire or smoke emitting from the stage. May be the same as the Act Curtain. Also called Asbestos Curtain or Fireproof Curtain.

**fitting:** A 'call' for an actor to attend for the purpose of trying on costumes or wigs, et cetera.

**flat:** A scenic unit, a light wooden frame covered by canvas that constitutes the primary unit used to build such settings as the box set.

**flexible theatre:** Seats can be arranged for proscenium, arena, or thrust (horseshoe) staging.

**floor plan:** A scale drawing of the stage as seen from overhead, showing where all scenery and props are placed. Also called a Ground Plan. (Pictured below)



**floodlight:** A large lighting unit used for illumination of broad portions of the stage, general rather than specific in the area it lights, as it cannot be focused.

**flop sweat:** When an actor becomes nervous because he believes his performance is going badly.

**fluff, or flub:** A blunder during performance, such as a missed line or one that is garbled in its execution.

**fluffed line:** A stammer, stutter, twisting of words, or other faulty delivery by an actor.

**fly or to fly:** The process of bringing scenery in and out of the stage area vertically.

**fly loft or flies:** The area immediately over the stage where scenery can be raised by a system of pulleys and counterweights.

**fly catching:** Movement, business, or sound made by an actor to attract attention to himself when emphasis should be elsewhere.

**focal point:** The point of greatest interest on stage during the playing of a scene.

**focus:** The direction of an actor's attention, action, emotion, or line delivery to a definite target.

**fold:** If a show folds, it ends. "Fold" usually implies a very short run and suggests a failure.

**folk drama:** Early drama performed by villagers usually during holidays and festivals.

**follow spot:** A spotlight that is not permanently focused on one position but can follow the movement of an actor about the playing area.

**footlights:** Lights located in the stage floor at the edge of the forestage and permitting general illumination of the stage. Being used less and less in modern theatre. Modern techniques in lighting and makeup render footlights virtually obsolete.

**forestage:** See apron.

**foreshadowing:** Action or dialogue in one part of a play that gives hints to something that will happen in another part of the production.

**Formalism:** a stylized mode of production with strict adherence to, or observance of, prescribed or traditional forms. Scrupulous or excessive adherence to outward form at the expense of inner reality or content,

**found space:** Acting/audience space that was designed for another purpose. Productions in the streets, bus terminals, gymnasiums, parks, and the like are said to use found spaces.

**foundation:** a base color in makeup.

**fourth wall:** Term that began with the advent of the proscenium stage, originally referring to the space occupied by the audience. Because only three of the four walls of the theatre consisted of the set, actors needed to use their imaginations to complete the environment in their mind's eye, transforming the space occupied by the audience into the "fourth wall" of their set. The term is used in reference to the realistic box setting that comprises three walls. The audience, by convention, is

permitted to look at the action through the fourth wall. Today, with the proliferation of thrust and arena stages, actors must often use their detailed imaginations to fill in two, three, and even all four walls.

**Foyer:** Entrance hall into a theatre.

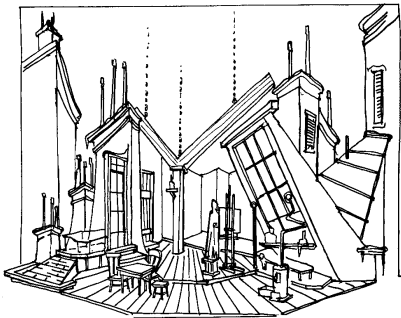
**freeze:** To remain motionless on stage as if for a picture; especially for laughs.

**French scene:** In a play a section of a scene or act which begins and ends with the entrance or exit of each named character and the number of characters is constant. A “French” scene is not marked in a script. A French scene is so named because the entrance or exit of a character designated a new scene in classical French drama. Since the entrances or exits change the dynamics of the scene, it is sometimes useful to break up the action for rehearsal purposes, especially blocking rehearsals, into French scenes.

**front or front of house (FOH):** A colloquialism for the auditorium and/or lobby, as distinguished from the stage. Used in such terms as front of house and out front. “Playing front” means direct to audience.

**front curtain:** Also called the main drape, usually directly behind the proscenium arch.

**front elevation:** A scale drawing that gives a front view of the set. (pictured below.)



**full back, full front:** See illustrations below.



**full house:** Sold out performance. See SRO.

**full stage:** The entire area of the stage that can be used as the acting area.

## ◇ G ◇

**gaffer:** Stage crew head.

**gag:** A line delivered to get a laugh.

**gagging:** Slang for unauthorized improvisation or revision of lines by an actor.

**gallery:** Highest balcony in a theatre. In England called the heavens.

**gel:** A piece of colored medium, now made out of plastic, but originally of gelatin, thus the name, placed in front of the lens of a lighting instrument to change the color of the light.

**generalization or generalizing:** Playing the general emotion (happy, sad, et cetera) rather than the objective. Acting the cliché comes out of generalizing.

**Genre:** kind; sort; style. There are many genres of theatre. A type or category of drama such as comedy, tragedy, farce, and so forth. Shakespeare's plays are of the genre of Elizabethan drama or Renaissance drama.

**gesture:** A movement of any part of the body to help express an idea.

**George Spelvin:** See Spelvin, George.

**ghoster:** Slang for working an “all-nighter”.

**ghost light:** A light left on when the theatre is locked up for the night for safety reasons. The phrase is derived from the superstition that since all theatres have ghosts that inhabit them, they also must have a light to perform by. Monday night is Ghost Night. Most theatres are dark so the ghosts have a night to perform their plays.

**ghost walk, the:** A theatrical history phrase meaning payday, or the somber, silent line the actors made to receive their pay on that day. A theatrical tradition states that in Shakespeare's time, the actor playing the Ghost in *Hamlet* was also the stage manager who delivered the pay to each actor. Thus, when it was payday the ghost walked among them.

**gibberish:** Meaningless sounds substituted for words so as to force the

actor to communicate by physicalizing (showing). (Spolin)

**give stage:** To change stage position so as to permit greater emphasis to be focused on another actor.

**giving the scene:** Shifting audience attention from one actor to another.

**given circumstance:** A term utilized in the *Stanislavski* system referring to any dramatic occurrences that will affect the actor's playing a scene. Everything that the playwright has written about your character's past, present, and expected future. The given circumstances of the play are all of the facts that the playwright provides in the dialogue of the characters. These may take place during the play or may have occurred before the beginning of the play. The death of Hamlet's father before the play begins is a given circumstance.

**glottal shock:** A raspy little bark or a sharp click or pop on vowel sounds, which may result from extremely tense vocal folds.

**glow tape:** Tape that glows in the dark, placed in small pieces around the set so the actors and crew will not bump into anything during a blackout.

**go:** (1) A verbal instruction to perform an action or cue. (2) Word written in the prompt script to indicate the same. In a cue light system *Warnings* are red and *Goes* are green. the magic word; the universal way to tell someone to do their thing. See also Warning

**goal:** A long-term objective that explains a character's desire or need throughout a complete play.

**gods:** In English theatre terminology used to define the very highest gallery seating in a theatre.

**go dry or go up:** When an actor ‘loses’ or forgets his lines and must be assisted to resume. See also Went up.

**go on:** To enter on the stage.

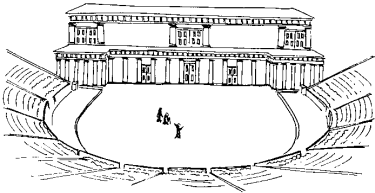
**gopher or gofer:** A production assistant who gets the title from the fact that he or she is frequently sent to “go fer” something.

**greasepaint:** The traditional name for stage makeup, so named because they originally were made with an oil base.

**Greek Theatre:** The height of the Greek Theatre was between the 6th and 5th century B.C.E.. Tragedy, Comedy, the Satyr play.



Tragic Masks of the Greek Theatre (above). The large dignified masks made a strong facial expression visible in the vast theatre. Between episodes they could be changed to indicate a change of emotion. Drawn by Martha Sutherland (Kernolde)



Greek Theatre in which the original wood skene building has been replaced by a stone structure. (Colyer) (pictured above)

**Green Room:** Actor's lounge backstage. Traditionally the gathering place for actors in the backstage area, often serving a social function as well and were cast members meet their public. It is not true that it got its name from the first green room, or the "retiring" room in Covent Garden Theatre in London, which was said to have been painted green. Some believe it got its name from Greek theatre, when actors would rest offstage in a leafy grove. Most professional theatres do not have green rooms today.

**grid:** (Gridiron) A framework of steel beams above the stage that supports the rigging required to fly scenery.

**gridding:** The process used to enlarge a sketch to a drop.

**grips:** Stagehands who move scenery.

**gross (income):** The money taken in for a performance before paying bills, salaries, taxes, etc.

**Group Theatre, The:** A New York acting company and school founded in the 1930's which introduced Stanislavski's techniques to America (with Elia Kazan, Lee Strasberg, Robert Lewis, Harold Clurman, and Stella Adler).

**grotesqueness:** An unusual or distorted feature.

**grounding:** For an actor consists of connecting yourself firmly to the earth and maintaining a relaxed, secure physical stance, firmly resting on the floor.

**groundling:** A term used by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* (and in general use at the Elizabethan period) to refer to a spectator who stood in the pit in front of the stage. These were the cheapest of tickets, and those who stood were often unruly.

**ground cloth:** A canvas covering the floor of a stage used as a padding for the acting area usually painted to represent grass, stones, etc.

**ground plan:** See Floor Plan.

**groundrow:** A low profile of scenery that can stand by itself and is used to mask the bottom of the backdrop or background curtain.

**grouping:** Placing the cast about the stage.

## ◇ H ◇

**half hour:** Half hour call. Warning to company given 30 minutes before the performance. In professional theatre all actors must report by half hour.

**ham/ham acting:** Exaggerated overacting. An actor who is bad or pretentious, or both.

**hamartia:** A tragic flaw which is the undoing of a particular character.

**handbill:** A printed announcement of a forthcoming show (flyers and postcards now do this also).

**handle:** A word that an actor adds to the begging of a line, that was not originally written in the script: Oh, gee, gosh, well, but, et cetera.

**hand-off:** The action of a crew member handling a prop for an actor at a designated time and place during a performance.

**hand prop:** Any small prop handled by an actor, such as teacups, letters, books, and candles.

**hang the show:** To hang all the flying scenery and lights for a play.

**hanging plot:** A listing of all the flying scenery and lighting and what is on each piece (pipe), prepared by the technical director or the stage manager.

**Heads Up! or Heads!:** A warning indicating a piece of scenery or other object is falling or being lowered.

**heavy:** Role of a villain.

**head shot:** An 8" x 10" portrait photograph of an actor which is attached to a resume. (sample below)



**heroic drama:** Period play written in verse. In contrast to tragedy, it is marked by a happy ending, or an ending in which the deaths of the main characters are considered a triumph and not a defeat. Example: *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand.

**high comedy:** A play that includes comedy of manners and satire and uses clever lines, word play, and allusions. A play using a subtle type of comedy designed for an intellectual audience with characters who are often artificial and display false emotions.

**highlighting:** The term used when applying lighter colored makeup to bring out facial features.

**Hirschfeld, Al** (caricaturing himself below): Has been Broadway's premier caricaturist for 72 years. A Hirschfeld drawing is theatre as surely as Shubert Alley. His work has been appearing in *The New York Times* since the late twenties. Has done caricatures for film, T.V., dance, and theatre performances and personalities. He is most famous for "finding the Ninas?" The word "Nina" was introduced into all of his drawings in 1945 to herald the arrival of his daughter and which he kept as a brain-teasing parlor game ever since. His trick of hiding the word Nina in the folds and sleeves and hairdos of his subjects has become a national obsession. If the name appears more than once, Hirschfeld puts a

small number by his signature. Fans become frantic if they cannot find all the Ninas. He's on CD-ROM (*Hirschfeld: The Great Entertainers*) and video (*The Line King*, a 1996 documentary).



**hit:** A successful play or performer.

**hit the mark:** A direction for an actor to go to a certain place onstage and deliver a line, make an entrance, or perform some stage business.

**hokum:** Deliberate simulation of emotion by artificial means, and also the means used. Sure-fire and time-worn theatrical tricks.

**hold:** To stop the action of the play, whether movement or dialogue, usually because of applause or laughter.

**(to) hold book:** To prompt, take blocking notation, and make notes on line readings and changes and cues during rehearsal.

**holding for laughs:** Actor and/or director creating business to cover while waiting for audience laughter to diminish before continuing dialogue.

**hot spot:** The brightest part of the center of a lighting area.

**house:** The part of the theatre in front of the footlights, as opposed to the stage and backstage areas. Usually the auditorium, as in "How's the house tonight?" meaning "How many seats are filled?"

**house left/right:** The left/right side of the auditorium, from the audience's point of view. This is the opposite of stage left/right.

**houselights:** Auditorium lights used before and after the play and during intermission.

**house manager:** The person responsible for distribution of programs, seating of the audience, and training the ushers.

**house seats:** Audience seats retained by the management to cover errors or to be given to distinguished guests. Released just before curtain time.

**hue:** The purity of color.

**hues:** Various colors seen in the spectrum of a beam of light that passes through a prism

**humanities:** Branches of learning having primarily a cultural character, such as drama, music, literature, and art.

**humor:** An appeal to the heart, where the audience feels tenderness, compassion, love, or pity.



**IATSE:** The International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees, the union for stagehands. (Logo below)



**identification:** A feeling that a character or situation is like someone or something the actor or the audience has known or experienced previously.

**"illusion of the first time":** Making the audience believe that each performance is the first

**impresario:** A producer and promoter of musical shows such as opera. The term is less used today.

**impressionism:** a type of play which seeks to make the audience react and see as a character does when stirred by intense emotion.

**imaginary circumstances:** those circumstances invented by the actor to help make a fuller connection with the written material of the play.

**Impressionism:** Theory that productions should be concerned with artistic interpretation, evoking a sensory response, rather than with reality. In design one strives for psychological reaction by use of color and light. The term was borrowed from the French school of painting that flourished from about 1870 to 1910. Although short-lived

as a movement in the theatre, it gave rise to expressionism.

**improv:** Short for improvisation.

**Improvisation:** The performance of dialogue and /or pantomime without any determined plan from any source other than the actor's own creative spirit, often "on the spur of the moment." The impromptu portrayal of a character or scene without any rehearsal or preparation. Many actors train in improvisational theatre techniques. The Second City in Chicago is the most famous troupe of improvisational actors. Viola Spolin is credited with being the creator of modern improvisation techniques.

**improvisational audition:** A tryout at which the actor is assigned a character and given a brief description of a situation to perform with no preparation.

**improvising:** Performing without preparation.

**in:** To the center of the stage.

**incidental music:** Music within a performance of a play used for dramatic or atmospheric effect, not as a sound effect.

**inciting incident:** Incident near the beginning of a play that gets the main action started.

**in one, in two, in three:** "In one" is the acting area just upstage of the main curtain line, that takes in the area between the main curtain and the first set of legs. "In two" is the area that runs parallel across the stage between the first set of legs and the second set of legs.

**inclination:** Moving each body part one at a time.

**incongruity:** That which seems out of place, out of time, or out of character.

**inconsistent consistency:** That trait of a character that an actor chooses to emphasize such as a dialect.

**indicating or indication:** The external display of a contrived emotion without inner justification or going through the process of feeling it. The imitation of doing.

## ACTING IS ACTION — Web Pages

**inflection:** Modulation, variety in pitch; any change in tone or pitch of the voice.

**ingènue:** A young romantic female lead between the ages of 16 and 30.

**initial incident:** The first most important event in a play from which the rest of the plot develops.

**inner action:** See Objective, Subtext, and Problems.

**instrument:** A unit of lighting equipment on the stage.

**intensity:** The brightness or dullness of a color.

**intent:** Inner force driving the character's behavior.

**intention:** A term used in the *Stanislavski* system that refers to the actor's real reason for being in a scene, regardless of what he may be saying. If a character hates another character, but because of others present is required to speak pleasantly to the person, the proper *intention* of the relationship must still be conveyed by the actor. (term used by Robert Lewis. See also Subtext, Objective, Inner Action and Problems.) Something a character wants to accomplish immediately.

**interior(s):** Set that represents indoor scenes.

**internalizing:** Getting within a character to learn what the character is like.

**intermission:** A break in the action of a play during which the actors or performers do not appear and the audience members may leave their seats.

**intermission crasher:** A person who enters a theatre without a ticket during the intermission of a performance.

**intermission dropout:** A member of the audience who does not return after intermission.

**investor (angel):** Financial backer for a commercial production. Because of the high cost of mounting a commercial production (\$2 million for a "straight" play and \$5 million to \$8 million for a musical), producers look to corporate funding rather than to individual investors.

**in the moment:** Living the actions and words of a scene and not anticipating what comes next.

**IPA:** acronym for the International Phonetic Alphabet. The IPA provides a symbol for every vowel, diphthong, and consonant in the English language as well as other languages.

**irrelevant:** Unimportant.

**isolations:** Separating parts of the body for individual development and expression.

**Italian rehearsal:** Has nothing to do with Italy. The term refers to a run-through in which the actors run through their dialogue at a fast clip (which to someone, apparently, sounded like a foreign language). It's normally used in educational and community theatre when a cast has had several days off and then must gear up for the weekend. Also sometimes called a "speed run." Some people don't recommend "speed runs" because they believe they effect the tempo of the next performance. I believe they are an effective method to keep the performances fresh.

## ◇ J ◇

**jack:** A triangular stage brace that holds up scenery.

**James-Lange Theory:** A psychological theory which holds that our emotion is a bodily manifestation. If the motor activity associated with an emotion can be reproduced correctly, the emotion itself will come. "fright-flight" In the 1980s many teachers of acting found uses for this technique. William Ball of A.C.T.: "Do the act, and the feeling will follow." This can be termed as working from the outside in, in comparison to the Stanislavski system, which advocates working from the inside out. (Developed separately by turn of the century psychologists, C. H. Lange, 1885, and William James, 1890)

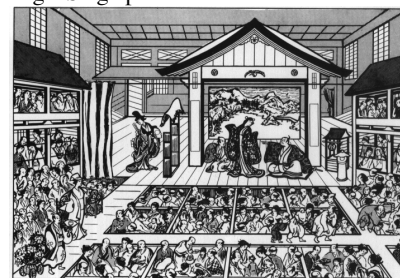
**jog:** In technical theatre a narrow flat or piece of lumber attached at right angles to another flat to add a touch of variety and interest to the straight walls of a box set.

**justification:** The reason for a character's behavior or actions.

**juvenile:** A young romantic male lead between the ages of 16 and 30.

## ◇ K ◇

**Kabuki:** Japanese drama from the sixteenth century, originally an imitation of both the No and Bunraku forms of drama. All the actors are men, and some specialize in playing women's parts. They wear very stylized makeup and wigs. Stage pictured below.



The actor below is playing a demon.



**key light:** The main source of light.

**kill:** (1) To spoil the planned effectiveness of a line, a movement, a piece of business, or a technical effect, usually by a miscalculation in timing. (2) instruction to cease use of a particular element of the production (lighting, prop, sound, costume). It is now dead.

**kinesthetic awareness:** The sense of our body in space.

**knap:** The second sound after landing a blow - a sliding, slapping sound or clap.

## ◇ L ◇

**Laban, Rudolf:** Creator of a movement system based on theory consisting of eight basic actions.

**lampoon:** A satirical play aimed at ridiculing a person or subject.



**laugh curve:** The audience's reaction that actors listen for in order to anticipate the length of time the audience will laugh.

**Lazzi:** In Commedia Dell'arte is an improvised comic dialogue or action. Called today a **schtick**: a repeated bit of comic business, routine, or gimmick used by a star performer. See **Commedia dell'Arte**.

**leading center:** A slight or exaggerated movement of a part of the body that shows a character's personality, such as brave characters leading with their chests.

**lead or leading roles:** The main characters (leading lady, man) in a play, also called "Leads".

**left stage:** The area on stage at the actor's left as she stands center stage facing the audience. Stage left.

**leg(s):** A tall, narrow drape used to mask the wings on a proscenium stage.

**legit:** Popular abbreviation for legitimate theatre. Live theatre as opposed to movies.

**legitimate theatre:** Originally, professional stage plays; now the term that is applied to regional and community theatre, as well.

**level(s):** Another name for a platform. Also called Risers, Platforms.

**libretto:** The text of an opera or musical. Also called 'the book'. From the Italian, meaning "little book."

**light comedy:** a play written to entertain rather than to leave any serious message.

**light leak:** Light that can be seen through a crack or opening in a set.

**light panel:** A console from which the brightness of light is controlled.

**light plot:** A ground plan of the set is drawn and superimposed on it are drawings of the locations of all the required lighting, naming the type if lamp and its location and the area it is intended to illuminate.

**light spill:** Light that strikes the proscenium or set and thus "spills over" in a distracting manner, rather than striking just the area it is supposed to cover.

**lights up:** To bring up full house lights for intermission or at the end of a play.

**limelight:** A greenish light created by burning lime in lamps that were used on stage before the introduction of electricity. It was brighter than other light sources at the time, so actors tried to stand "in the limelight", that was intended for the stars, that is, the center of attention.

**limited run:** A play that is set to run for a prearranged length of time.

**"line" or "calling line":** During the rehearsal process when actors are "coming off book" the word "Line" is called to be prompted by the Stage Manager or prompter. No other communication is necessary to receive the forgotten line by the actor.

**line:** An artistic value in staging that alters proportion and affects the observer psychologically, such as the use of vertical lines in drapes to suggest dignity.

**line rehearsal:** A rehearsal specifically for running lines.

**lines:** Either (1) the speeches of the actors, an actors dialogue, or (2) the sets of ropes supported by the grid that are used to fly scenery.

**line reading:** A spoken action expressed through the inflection, tone, rhythm, or tempo of a line in order to achieve an objective.

**listening:** The process through which an actor reacts to the other characters as if hearing their lines and meaning for the first time.

**liturgical drama:** any religious drama.

**load-in/out:** Process of bringing scenery, lighting, et cetera into or taking it out of a theatre.

**lobby:** That part of the theatre between the theatre entrance and the auditorium.

**loge:** A choice box seat in the balcony used for viewing a performance.

**LORT:** League of Resident Theatre. A group of Equity theatres around the U.S. that have joined together and created a specific LORT contract. The theatres categorize themselves into LORT A, B+,

B, C, and D, according to their box office receipts. Each LORT level has slightly different rules.

**Low comedy:** A play that is quite physical, sometimes vulgar, and highly exaggerated in style and performance.

## ◇ M ◇

**Macbeth:** A theatrical superstition/tradition. Mention of this Shakespearean play by name within a theatre is considered bad luck by performers, who instead use the euphemism "the Scottish play" to refer to it.

**magic if:** In the Stanislavski method, the ability to act as "if" the imaginary dramatic circumstances were real.

**make it larger:** A direction to the actor to make the delivery of a line less subtle and more energetic.

**Malaprops (Malapropisms):** These mistakes in language use are named after Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan's play *The Rivals*, who muddled up her language. Shakespeare would have known malapropisms by the Italian name 'cacozelia'.

**mannerism:** A gesture reflecting the psychology of character.

**mansions:** A series of acting situations placed in a line (the Miracle and Mystery plays of medieval drama were performed with mansions).

**manuscript (ms):** Written or typed play, or the book of a musical. Usually used in rehearsal.

**marking or mark it:** Order to record the level of a cue or a position of an object on stage.

**marking out:** See spiking.

**marquee:** an overhanging canopy or lighted billboard over the main entrance of a theatre which advertises the current production.

**mask or masking:** (1) To conceal from the view of the audience any area of the stage not intended to be seen. (2) an artificial covering for the face, usually with artificial features.

**mask, in the:** In voice using all the vocal cavities in the head to produce sound.

**mask characterization:** An acting technique in which a “character mask” or persona is explored.

**Masks of Tragedy & Comedy:** These masks represent the two sides of drama, the traditional figures of tragedy and comedy as developed in the Greek Theatre of the 5th Century B.C.E. In Greek mythology two of the nine daughters of Zeus who watched over the arts (the muse) are Melpomene (Tragedy) and Thalia or Thaleia (Comedy). In Classical times, when the Muses were assigned specific artistic and literary spheres, Thaleia was named Muse of comedy and bucolic poetry. In this guise she was portrayed with the attributes of comic mask, shepherd's staff and wreath of ivy. Melpomene was named Muse of tragedy. In this guise she was portrayed holding a tragic mask or sword, and sometimes wearing a wreath of ivy and cothurnus boots. Her name was derived from the Greek verb meaning "to celebrate with dance and song."



**mass:** An artistic value in staging that takes into consideration bulk and weight.

**master leading gesture:** A distinctive action that is repeated and serves as a clue to a character's personality, such as a peculiar laugh or walk.

**matinee:** A theatrical performance given in the afternoon. Traditionally matinees are performed on Wednesday and Saturday, or Sunday.

**matte:** The flat or dull makeup that is achieved by powdering.

**M.C.:** Master of ceremonies, introducer of acts or participants in a variety program.

**medieval drama:** the simple religious drama originating in the 10th century and evolving over 600 years into the great European plays.

**Meisner Technique:** An off shot of the work of the 1930s Group Theatre in New York, developed by Sanford (Sandy) Meisner (1905-97) and taught at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. See: Actor's Studio.

**Melodrama:** A serious play in which the primary emphasis is on spectacle and contrived action rather than logical character development and relationships. A type of drama that arouses intense emotion and usually has a happy ending.

**Melpomene:** The Greek Muse of tragedy.

**memorizing:** Committing the lines of a script to memory.

**“merde”:** A theatrical superstition/tradition. Phrase used in dance companies and in English theatre instead of “good luck”, which is unlucky. SEE: break a leg.

**Method, The:** Refers to the Stanislavski approach to acting. An American school of acting that stresses internal development of the actor's resources for the purpose of properly motivating acting, of whom Marlon Brando is probably the best known exponent. It has grown out of the system devised by the Russian actor-director, Constantin Stanislavski, although it is modified somewhat from the original. Stanislavski founded the Moscow Arts Theatre in Russia, and was one of the worlds most influential directors. He wrote several books about acting, which are still studied today. (See also Moscow Art Theatre.)

**Mezzanine:** (1) Sometimes the first balcony of a theatre having more than one; (2) the first few rows of the balcony and separated from the balcony proper.

**Middle comedy:** A kind of comedy that includes humor, such as romantic comedy, sentimental comedy, melodrama, and social drama.

**mike fright:** Fear of performing, particularly with a microphone.

**milk it (dry):** To squeeze the maximum curtain-calls or laughs out of a line, bit of business, or situation.

**mime:** (1) An offspring of pantomime that gives the allusion to real-life action. (2) A performer who works without speech or props, usually with stylized makeup and costumes.

**minstrel show:** a type of variety show popular in America between 1850 and 1870.

**minor part:** a role with few lines necessary for advancing the plot or aiding other characters

**Miracle and Mystery plays:** Plays based on the lives of the saints or on Bible stories.

**miscast:** a situation where an actor was cast in a role that proved to be beyond his capabilities to perform.

**mise-en-scène:** From the French, meaning the “action of putting on the stage.” It refers to the total environment of a play, the overall look and feel of a production. In France another name for the director.

**model:** A scale representation of a set design which is usually shown to the cast at first reading and is then used by the technical crews for guidance.

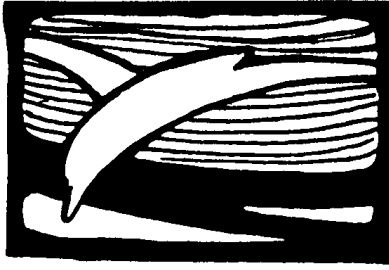
**moment:** The smallest section of dramatic action reflecting a complete cycle of communication.

**monologue:** A long speech by a single character without any interspersed dialogue by other characters.

**monotone:** Monotony in pitch; speaking continuously on one level; giving each sentence exactly the same inflection.

**mood:** The dominant atmosphere created by the various elements of the production. The emotional feeling of the play.

**Morality play:** A play dealing with right and wrong, usually in the form of an allegory.



**Moscow Arts Theatre, The:** Was founded in 1898 by Stanislavski and Nemirovich Danchenko. During the upheavals of the revolution, the theatre was saved from extinction. After a long tour of Europe and America in 1922-1923 the “method” spread throughout the world. The theatre’s actors were trained in the theatre’s own dramatic school, by Stanislavski’s method. The actors/directors/acting coaches Richard Boleslavski and Michael Chekhov (the playwright Anton’s nephew) both worked with Stanislavski’s Moscow Art Theatre. After the success of Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull* had won the Moscow public to the new playhouse and company, Stanislavsky and Danchenko, chose the design shown above as their emblem. It appeared on their programs and the front curtain of the companies theatre.

**motif:** recurring thematic element or a pattern of repetition of design elements in a work of art.

**motivated sequence:** The natural way in which a person responds to an external stimulus - the brain registers, the body responds, and then reacts - as mirrored by an actor in an improvisation.

**motivation:** Reason behind all stage action and speech. Skill with which the director and actors find the motivation for characters and incidents will determine the quality of the play. The reason behind a character’s behavior; that which “moves” or induces a person to act in a certain way.

**move in:** to cross toward the center of the stage.

**move out:** to cross away from the center of the stage.

**move on:** A movement on the same plane toward the center of the stage, either from stage left or stage right.

**movement:** The displacement of the body through space. Passing of actors from place to place on stage. See Blocking.

**muff a line:** To say a line wrong, either by mixing up the words or mispronouncing them. See fluffed line.

**mugging:** Broad facial gestures designed to entertain the audience at the expense of genuinely playing your part.

**multiple setting:** A form of stage setting, common in the Middle Ages, in which several locations are represented at the same time; also called *simultaneous setting*. Used also in various forms in contemporary theatre.

**Musical comedy:** A form of musical theatre, a combination of operetta and musical revue - loosely connected production numbers.

**musical director (MD):** In musicals and revues the conductor is usually given this title. During rehearsals the MD is responsible for coordination of all the musical content.

**Musical play** A form of musical theatre where the emphasis is on real people in real situations.

## ◇ N ◇

**name part:** A role bearing the name of the leading character in a play.

**narrator:** A character who explains background by speaking directly to the audience.

**nasality:** The sound produced when nasal passages are blocked, leaving the voice flat.

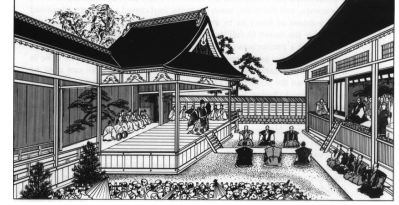
**Naturalism:** A style of the late 19th century that grew out of realism that is often sordid and shocking, presenting a “slice of life.” Same external form as Realism but emphasizes the natural function in life, with great attention to detail, as opposed to Realism which is more selective. Underlying naturalistic drama is the notion that environment determines human fate. By the early 20th century, the movement had been absorbed into realism.

**Nemesis:** Forces set in motion by the character which cause his destruction.

**Neoclassicism:** Drama imitative of Greek and Roman classical models. It was popular in France in the 17th and 18th centuries. Strict adherence to the

principles of the form was an absolute requirement.

**neutral:** (1) A ready state of the body that prepares the actor for action and reaction. (2) A physical state free of personal psychology that serves as a base for characterization.



**No (Noh) Theatre:** A six-hundred-year-old Japanese form of drama, the oldest form to be preserved in its exact form. Illustration is of a performance on the estate of a feudal lord (shown above) a Noh mask (pictured below).



**noises off:** sounds of crowds, thunder, and other effects made offstage (used primarily in English theatre).

**Nontraditional casting:** Casting a play with no regard to the ethnicity of the actors being considered, or casting a show multiethnically. Nontraditional casting may also include disregard for the actor’s race, gender, disability, body image, or other components of an actor’s identity. Also called “colorblind” casting.

**nonverbal communication:** Communicating without words, using facial expressions, gestures, and body language.

**notes:** (1) Adjustments and/or critique given by the director. (2) Also the time before or after a rehearsal or performance at which the director gathers the cast to discuss the rehearsal or performance.

**notice(s):** (1) The critical reviews of a production published in newspapers. (2) A posted note on the call board that the production will close on a particular date, thereafter all contracts will “cease.”

## ◇ O ◇

**objective:** Something a character hopes to accomplish in a scene. Something a character wants to accomplish immediately. The goal or purpose of a character at any moment in the dramatic situation. What the character wants. A reason or need to speak the words. See also Intention, Subtext, Inner Action and Problems.

**obligatory scene:** The scene of the play which the playwright has led us to expect and without which the audience would be disappointed. Sometimes referred to as “Scène-à-faire.”

**observation:** The noting carefully of people's emotions, physical characteristics, and voice and diction patterns from which characters are modeled.

**obstacle:** What is in the way of a character achieving his objectives and actions. Actors must determine what obstacles are hindering their characters from getting what they want.

**off book:** The term used to describe when the actors put down the script in the tenuous but brave belief that they now nether lines well enough to be "off-book." Having memorized all of your lines.

**Off Broadway:** Commercial theatre productions away from the central theatrical district in New York City.

**off-off-Broadway:** very small professional theaters with a capacity of under 137 seats, often subsidized, which are often set up in lofts, warehouses, or churches and are usually characterized by their experimental scripts and styles of productions.

**offstage:** The area of the stage not visible to the audience.

**Olio:** Usually variety acts following an old-fashioned melodrama.

**Olivier Awards:** In London the equivalent of Broadway's Tony Awards for theatre. Named after the late Lord Laurence Olivier. he was knighted in 1947 and made a baron (Lord) in 1970, the first actor to receive this honor.

**on (or off) book:** Unable (or able) to perform a scene without looking at a script; the stage manager flowing along in the script during rehearsal is also said

to be "on book." When either the stage manager or an assistant is following the script in order to help actors when they stumble overlies.

**one-act play:** A short play, running from 15 minutes to 1/2 hour, that is performed without an intermission or a change of scenery. It may be a curtain riser to another, longer play.

**one-quarter left:** An actor's body position on stage in which he is standing at a diagonal facing stage left, between full front and profile (1/2 left).

**one-quarter right:** An actor's body position on stage in which he is standing at a diagonal facing stage right, between full front and profile (1/2 right).

**on stage:** The playing space of the stage intended to be visible to the audience.

**OP:** The side of the stage opposite the prompter.

**operative word(s):** The key or prominent word(s) to be emphasized in a phrase, sentence or speech that carry the imagery, meaning, and/or the emotion of a passage. In Shakespeare's dialogue, these words must be emphasized over other words in a phrase, clause, sentence, and/or paragraph. Operative words often include nouns, possessive nouns, verbs of action, adjectives and adverbs.

**open or open up:** To play toward the audience. To turn or adjust the body position so that the actor can play more directly to the audience.

**open audition:** Tryout open to nonunion actors.

**open cold:** (1) To open your first public performance for critics without tryouts or preview performances. (2) To open in a play without the proper amount of rehearsal or dress rehearsals.

**openers:** See beginners.

**open turn:** A turn on stage in which the front of the actor is seen by the audience during the turn. (see also Closed Turn.)

**Opera:** A form of musical theatre, where all conversations are sung.

**Operetta:** A form of musical theatre in which the music is lighter than opera and conversation is spoken.

**optimum pitch:** The ideal highness or lowness of the voice.

**Orchestra:** The Lower floor of an auditorium with a balcony.

**organic blocking:** Process of blocking in which the director allows the actors to move at will and then uses their movement as the basis for his blocking.

**originality:** Freshness of acting style.

**Oscar:** Annual award given by the Motion Picture Academy for outstanding achievements in all phases of the cinema, (Named after Oscar Pierce, twentieth-century American wheat and fruit grower.)

**out:** A direction away from the center of the stage.

**out front:** The audience area or the FOH (Front of house).

**overlap:** To speak or move before the indicated cue, or before another speech or movement is completed.

**overacting or overplay:** To give to a scene, dialogue, or action greater exaggeration and emphasis than is required. Artificial acting. Pushing.

## ◇ P ◇

**PA:** short for public address system.

**pace or pacing:** (1) The tempo of the performance. Overall rate of production, including reading of lines, picking up of cues, movement, etcetera. (2) when speaking, the rate of speed given to a sound, syllable, word, or phrase.

**pad or padding “your part”:** add lines to a script to expand your part.

**pageant:** any elaborate display, often outdoors dealing in a historical or religious presentation.

**pancake:** A traditional name for stage makeup.

**pantomime:** The acting out of an incident or story without words. The art of acting without words.

**pants part:** A male role played by a female. In England called “breeches

part.” Shakespeare wrote many pants parts.

**papering the house:** Giving out free tickets (usually for preview nights, nights on which critics attend, or when business is slow) to fill the house for a performance and generate interest in the show.

**paper tech:** A crew-only technical rehearsal to iron out the mechanical bugs in which the crews write down all pertinent information. See also **dry tech**.

**parallel movement:** The movement onstage of two or more characters in the same direction at the same time.

**paraphrasing:** Restating lines in your own words.

**parody:** a play which is a humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece.

**part:** An actor’s role.

**part-whole memorization:** Studying cues or lines of script line-by-line until committed to memory.

**partial set:** simple set pieces, fragmentary sets, screens or skeletal scaffolding in front of curtains, draperies, or the back wall of the stage.

**passion play:** represents the passion of Christ.

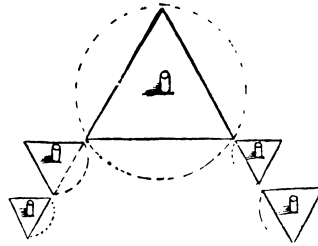
**pastiche:** a dramatic piece imitating the work of another writer, usually as a parody.

**pause:** A lull, or stop, in dialogue or action in order to sustain emotion. Usually marked in a script as (pause). Pauses are used for expression (to achieve clarity, emphasis, meaning, contrast, and variety) and for taking breath.

**pathos:** The power to arouse feelings of pity and compassion in an audience.

**Peking opera:** See Chinese opera.

**periaktoi:** Sets made up of three flats, shaped as equilateral or isosceles triangles mounted to a wheeled carriage that can be pivoted. Developed and used in classic Greek theatre. The below is a 1583 drawing of the Italian use of periaktoi. (Macgowan and Melnitz from Sabbatini.)



**period:** Any time in history which is not the present. A ‘sense’ of period is invaluable to all theatre personnel.

**period piece or plays:** Costume plays of other eras. Also, a modern play set in an earlier time.

**permanent set:** A set that never changes during a play, except when a set piece, such as a stairway, is brought in.

**personal prop:** Props that are carried by a particular character and used only by him, such as eyeglasses, money, keys.

**personalization:** The process of making the dramatic situation personally meaningful to an actor.

**personality actor:** In general it could be said that this type of actor creates a role within the framework of his own personality and mannerisms, or alters the role to fit his personality. This does not suggest that the personality actor distorts the role. James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson would be considered personality actors. In contrast see Character Actor.

**perspective drawing:** Rendering of a floor plan and elevations to perspective of the audience.

**photo call:** A cast call made specifically for the purpose of taking production photographs, whether posed or taken while scenes are ‘run’.

**phrase:** A group of words expressing a thought unit or an idea. A phrase need not be a complete sentence.

**physicalization:** The expression of a dramatic situation through the body and voice. “Showing and not telling,” “acting out” is telling, while physicalization is showing. (Spolin).

**pick up or picking up of cues:** To quickly begin a speech without allowing a pause between the first words of the speech and the cue. A command to increase the pace of the playing, often in reference to the shortening of the interval

between the cue and the next line or action, with no space between.

**picturization:** the visual interpretation of a play by the audience in which actors are placed in such a way so as to suggest their mental attitudes without having to say anything to reveal their dramatic relationships to one another.

**pilot light:** Dim light used by the stage manager to follow the prompt script. Some call the “Ghost light” a pilot light.

**pit or orchestra pit:** The part of the house directly against the edge of the apron of a proscenium stage; often it is lower than the floor of the seating section and is used for the orchestra in musicals.

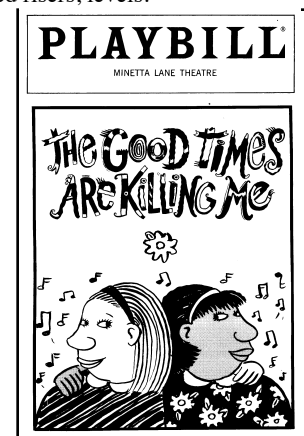
**pitch:** (1) The relative highness or lowness of the voice. (2) the tone of the voice in speaking.

**Places!:** A command instructing the company that an act, in rehearsal or performance, is about to begin and each member is to take the proper position.

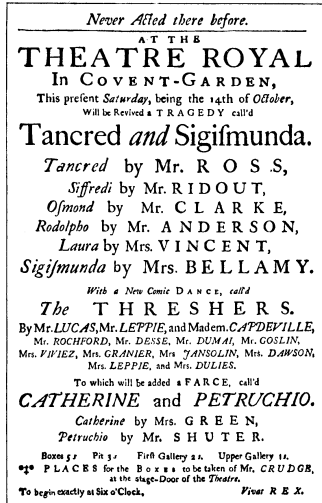
**Places please:** The final call to actor’s and technicians before “Curtain” or “Curtain going up.” In England this is called “Beginners please” to bring those actors who appear first in the play to the stage.

**plant:** To call attention to an object or fact that will have special significance later in the play. Work, object, or idea deliberately set in to the action of the play by either the playwright or the director so that the audience is lead to expect some further development from it later on.

**platform:** A weight-bearing, raised structure that can be varied in height by attaching sets of supporting legs. Also called risers, levels.



**Playbill:** In the 16th century, a small flier given to audiences to announce some details of the production. It became increasingly unwieldy and eventually was reduced in size to the program of today. The larger playbills became posters. Below is a Covent Garden, London, Playbill of 1758, “To begin exactly at Six o’Clock.” and “Places for the Boxes to be taken of Mr. CRUDGE, at the stage-Door of the Theatre.” A contemporary New York Playbill is pictured above.



**play script:** The copy of the play including the dialogue and author's stage directions.

**play up:** to emphasize some aspect of a play. To emphasize a key line, movement, or piece of business so that it will have greater significance. (Also Plug.)

**playing space:** Stage space, inside the set, visible to the audience.

**playing the conditions:** The elements of time, place, weather, objects, and the state of the individual that help actors to interpret their characters.

**playing the moment:** Responding to each line, action, and character in the permanent present, such as an actor not opening a door before the knock.

**playing the objectives:** Methods used by characters to reach goals.

**playing the obstacles:** The ways a character faces each crisis or obstacle.

**play-within-a-play:** A brief play presented during the action of another play. In each case the play-within comments ironically on the play-without.

**playwright:** Why isn't the person a "playwrite?" The word "playwright"

stems from the same base as "wheelwright," a craftsman who builds plays. A playwright does playwriting. person who writes or adapts properties known as play; in most traditions, the first and most creative artist of all those who collaborate to make theatre. It is the playwright's property that stimulates the impetus for a full-fledged production. In musicals, the writers include the writers of the music, the lyrics, and the book.

**plosive:** A constant sound made by blocking the outgoing airstream. The tongue is dropped or the lips opened suddenly, and the built-up air is released in a little explosion. The underlined sounds are plosives: pop, bib, fit, hid, lake.

**plot:** The story of the play that is developed by the playwright in a logical sequence of events. The series of related events that take place in a play.

**plot, prop plot, costume plot, lighting plot:** Charts showing where these items are placed, stored, or hung.

**plug:** See Play Up.

**"The Poetics":** Written by Aristotle (360-322 B.C.E.). The earliest critical treatise extant dealing with dramatic practice and theory.

**poetic drama:** written in verse form providing a greater economy than prose in utilizing imagery.

**pointing or pointing up:** Emphasizing or stressing action or words.

**point of attack:** The moment in the story when the play actually begins. The dramatists chooses a point in time along the continuum of events which he or she judges will best start the action and propel it forward.

**point of attention:** What the actor is focusing on.

**polishing rehearsals:** The final rehearsals at which all parts of the play are brought together so that flaws can be discovered before the opening.

**portfolio:** A folder containing photographs, resume, reviews, and other evidence of a performer's work, assembled for presentation at interviews with prospective employers.

**position:** An actor's place on stage as set by the director.

**postmortem:** A name given a discussion with cast and crew after the play has closed, which covers all aspects of the production, so that improvements can be made, and mistakes will not be repeated in the next production. It literally means an examination of the body after death, usually to determine the cause of death.

**practical:** A functioning prop that can actually be used by the actor rather than one that is ornamental and cannot be used, in the literal sense, a window that opens, a tap that runs water are practical.

**practice skirt:** Long skirt worn by actresses during rehearsals to help familiarity with period movement, etc.

**Practical Esthetics:** An acting techniques developed by American playwright David Mamet, actor William H. Macy, and others, and detailed in the books *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* by Melissa Bruder, Lee Michael Cohn, Madeleine Olnek, Nathaniel Pollack, Robert Previto, and Scott Zigler, and David Mamet's *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*. These practical acting techniques were developed at the Atlantic Theatre Company. "The idea is to not feel the lines, you have to just say them." -Scott Zigler. The actor's job on stage is to concern himself with the action of the character, not to become the character.

**pratfall:** fall on the buttocks.

**precast:** To choose actors for specific roles before the tryout period is held.

**Prejudging:** SEE: anticipate.

**preliminary situation:** A clearly defined explanation of the events in the lives of the leading characters before the start of a play's action.

**premiere:** First public performance of an art work.

**prepared audition:** A tryout when the actor uses material that has been memorized and thoroughly worked out.

**preparation beat:** The moment an actor takes to prepare himself before he starts his performance.

# ACTING IS ACTION – Web Pages

**preproduction:** The planning period that takes place before rehearsals begin.

**Presentational:** A play style in which the audience is recognized as an audience and the play as a play; consequently, the actors may speak directly to the audience. (See Kahan Chapter 1.)

**preset:** Scenery, props, costumes, or lights set before the house opens.

**preview:** Performances given prior to the formal opening. Reviewers are not allowed to attend these performances.

**prima donna:** any conceited or temperamental performer.

**primary source:** Observing a person's posture, movements, habits, voice inflections, and mannerisms in order to build a character.

**principals:** The main characters in a play.

**problems:** In Method terminology, the choice of certain small actions that will best help to project the intention of the character. (See also Objective, Intention, Subtext, and Inner Action.)

**problem play:** Play built around a difficulty of society.

**production:** All the various elements that make up the finished play ready to be seen by an audience.

**production meeting:** a meeting of production staff to discuss items of mutual interest.

**production number:** large showtune with lots of singers and dancers, spectacular scenery, beautiful costumes and effective lighting.

**production rights:** permission granted to perform copyrighted pieces of dramatic literature.

**producer:** The person who finds the financial investors, hires the director and production staff, sets the budget, and pays the bills.

**profile left:** performer faces left with his/her profile (that is, the right side of the body) to the audience. See illustration below.

**profile right:** performer faces right with his/her profile to the audience. See illustration below.



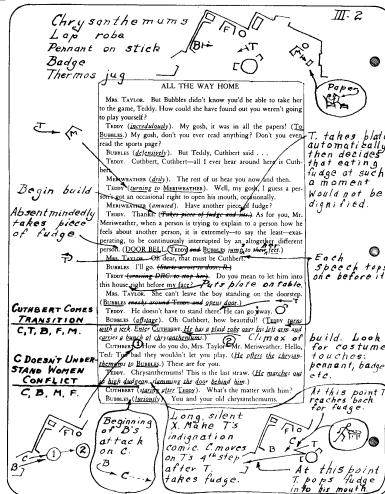
**profile sets:** Two-dimensional pieces of scenery, such as hedges or bushes.

**project/projection:** To make dialogue or movement clear to the audience by proper accentuation and intensification. Controlling the voice's volume and quality so that it can be heard clearly.

**Prologue:** A introduction to a play spoken to the audience. Common in classic plays.

**prompt:** To give lines to the actors when they miss or forget them.

**promptbook or script:** A script marked with directions and cues for use of the prompter or stage manager; it contains all the information for running the production. (below)



**prompter:** The person who keeps the director's promptbook and makes penciled notes on cues, signals, et cetera. The person who aids a forgetful actor by reading aloud key words or lines (Prompting) from off stage, usually from the wings.

**prompt side "PS" or prompt corner:** The side of the stage on which the prompter is located.

**pronunciation:** Using the correct sounds in words and placing the accent on the stressed syllables.

**prop list:** the master list of all items that could be considered props.

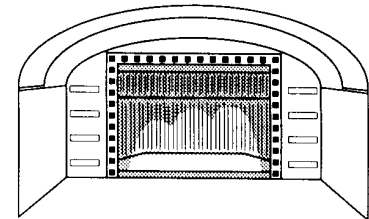
**props:** Short for Properties. All the furniture, set pieces, and objects that are seen on stage. Large pieces, or props that are not used by the actors, are called *stage props*. Small props used by actors are called *hand props*. Props used only by one character and brought on stage by the actor are termed *personal props*.

**prop table, box, cabinet:** A place in a convenient offstage area on which all properties are left prior to the performance and to which they should be returned when dead.

**property chief:** The person who is in charge of getting the furniture and props, storing them, arranging them on the set, preparing the prop table, and giving the actors the props they need.

**proportion:** Taking the human being as the unit measurement with regard to stage setting.

**proscenium or proscenium arch:** The wall and arch that set off the stage area from the audience. The type of stage that has a proscenium arch. proscenium opening. (illustration below) From the 6th C. B.C.E. Greek proscenium, the facade of the skene building. See also Fourth Wall.



**proscenium stage:** "peep-hole"; picture-frame acting area with all of the audience sitting and facing the stage.

**prosthetics:** Latex molded pieces of eyelids, cheeks, noses, and other features which are attached to the skin with additional latex.

**protagonist:** The central figure or hero of the play, from the Greek term meaning the first actor. The main character in a play.

**protection factor:** When the audience is protected by knowing things are not really happening, such as when a character in a cartoon falls off a cliff and

reappears in the next frame without a scratch.

**psychophysical action:** Purposeful action that enables an actor to connect to the emotional content of the drama.

**psychological gesture:** An archetypal gesture expressing a character's main desire. This concept was developed by Michael Chekhov in *To the Actor*.

**public domain:** See copyright.

**publicity manager:** The person who handles the advertising and promotion of the play in the press, radio, and other media.

**Pulitzer Prize:** The literary prize awarded according to the will of the newspaper publisher, Joseph Pulitzer (1847-1911). In drama the prize is given to the "best American play performed in New York." Awarded first in 1918. Eugene O'Neill won it four times.

**punch:** when speaking, the amount of "vocal force" given to a sound, syllable, word, or phrase.

**punchline:** line that should get a laugh.

**put together (rehearsal):** A rehearsal at which all elements of the production are brought together in their appropriate sequence.

## ◇ Q ◇

**quality:** The sound of a particular voice.

**queue:** a line waiting to buy tickets at a box office.

**quick change:** Speedy change of scenery or costumes between scenes or acts.

**quick change booth:** Temporary backstage dressing rooms used for quick changes of costumes, wigs, et cetera; it may be used by different actors at different times during the show.

**quick curtain:** the rapid closing of the curtain at the end of a scene to add drama, humor, or impact of the situation.

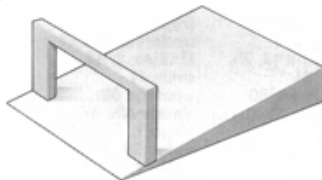
**quick study:** One who can memorize a part rapidly, usually in an emergency.

**"quiet please":** Order for silence.

## ◇ R ◇

**rag:** A crude colloquialism for a costume (USA) and curtains (England).

**rake or raked stage:** A stage with a slanted floor, higher up stage than down stage.



**raked house or seating:** A slanted floor allowing each row of the audience to see over the heads of those in front.

**ramp:** A sloping platform used to serve the same functions as a step unit.

**rant:** To deliver lines in a shouting, melodramatic and extravagant manner.

**raspberry:** a jeer from the audience.

**rate:** The speed at which words are spoken.

**rave:** an enthusiastic appreciate of a show by a critic.

**Readers Theatre** is a style of theater in which the actors do or do not memorize their lines. Actors use only vocal expression to help the audience understand the story rather than visual storytelling such as sets, costumes, intricate blocking, and movement. The original Readers Theatre was presented using only scripts and stools or chairs. The material performed was plays, poems, narrative fiction, and non-dramatic literature. See also Chamber Theatre.

**reading, a:** (1) Process of examining scripts for possible production. (2) A staged reading of usually a new work in which there is very little blocking and the scripts are usually not memorized. The first step in staging a new work. This style of performance of literature was initially lauded because it emphasized hearing a written text as a new way to understand literature.

**reading rehearsal:** A rehearsal at which the play is read by the director or by members of the cast.

**read through:** An early rehearsal at which the play is read by the cast usually

seated in a circle without action. Usually accompanied by discussion.

**Realism:** A style that presents life as it actually is. A selective form of Naturalism which need not adhere to a philosophy of pessimistic determinism. The movement toward realism began at the end of the 19th century with Ibsen. Realism spread rapidly and demanded a new type of acting. This led to the development of the Stanislavsky method of actors' training.

**recognition:** In tragedy, a scene in which the protagonist either achieves an inner awareness as a result of great personal suffering or identifies a lost loved one or friend.

**regional theatres:** Theatres that present any type of play for as long as they wish, repeating plays when and if it is wise to do so

**rehearsal:** The organized periods during which the cast prepares the play for production.

**rehearsal (practice) skirt or costume:** Clothes worn by actors (skirts, coats, fans, canes, swords, et cetera) during rehearsals to help familiarity with specific period movement.

**relaxation:** The absence of physical tension that blocks movement, voice, or feeling.

**relief:** An easing of pressure. A scene, often comical, to relieve the audience from sustained emotional tension, after which the tension continues.

**rendering:** A pencil sketch or watercolor that expresses the meaning of the play.

**repartee:** short, funny replies in dialogue.

**repertoire or repertory:** An artists personal collection of performance works, such as a singers repertoire of songs or an actors repertoire of monologues. French word for repertory.

**Repertory Company:** Called Rep, a theatre company that performs several plays in alternating sequence, or that uses the same actors for several consecutive plays.

**Repertory theatres:** Theatres that present plays at regular intervals that are



familiar to the actors. Repertory: originally a store house.

**Representational:** A play performed as if the audience is watching the action through an imaginary fourth wall. (See Kahan Chapter 1.)

**reprise:** Repeat of a musical number.

**resident company:** a non-touring group using the same core of actors for the majority of its plays.

**resolution:** highest of event that settles the conflict.

**resonators:** The bony structures that vibrate and give tone to the voice, the cavities of the mouth, throat, nose, and larynx (voice box).

**resonance:** The vibrant tone produced when sound waves strike the chambers of the throat, head, nose, and mouth. The tonal quality of the voice.



**Restoration Comedy:** Written during the Restoration when Charles II was returned to the throne of England, after 18 years of no theatre in England. Women appeared on the English stage for the first time. One of the humorous devices employed in Restoration comedy was naming the characters in a way that described them, such as: Wilfull Witwound, Waitwell, Foible, Pinchwife, Sir Fopling Flutter. See also Comedy of Manners. Above illustration is of the interior of the Duke's Theatre. The apron stage, the double proscenium doors, and the stager boxes were characteristic of Restoration Theatre. Note the musicians' box above the proscenium arch.

Notice dated 1647 ordering abolishment of all stage plays in England. (below)



**resumé:** A short account of a person's career and qualifications prepared by the applicant for a position; in the theatre, an 8" x 10" headshot photograph is part of the resumé.

**return:** A flat set parallel to the footlights and at the downstage edge of the setting running off into the wings, just above the tormentor.

**Revenge play:** A popular form of Renaissance play in which many bloody deaths take place.

**reversal:** A kind of incongruity that enables the audience to enjoy seeing the tables turned.

**reversible:** a costume that is double-faced so that by reversing, the illusion of a different costume is created

**revival:** to bring a show back on stage, usually an old favorite, after a lapse of time.

**Revue:** A series of unrelated songs, skits, and dances, very loosely tied together by the title— usually some topical subject or tied together with a theme.

**rhythm:** The overall blending of tempo, action, and dialogue.

**right stage:** The area on stage at the actor's right as he stands center stage facing the audience. Stage right.

**ring down:** A command to close the curtain. Based on an old theatrical custom of ringing a bell to denote the closing of the show.

**ring up:** A command to open the curtain.

**risers:** See platforms or levels.

**rising action:** The series of events following the initial incident.

**rising inflection:** Using the voice to indicate questioning, surprise, or shock. A vocal inflection that rises in pitch.

**road company:** company of performers who travel with a show that they present in essentially the same way it was originally created in a theatre center such as New York.

**road show:** A theatrical production that tours several cities.

**role:** An actor's character, lines, and actions in a play.

**Romantic comedy:** A play that presents life as we would like it to be.

**Romanticism:** The style of romantic comedies, showing life as we would like it to be.

**rouge:** Reddish makeup materials.

**routine:** A specially rehearsed sequence of actions, as a dance or song number.

**rotations:** Moving each body part in smooth circles.

**royalty/royalties:** The fee paid to the playwright or holder of the copyright of a work in return for the right to perform the work in public.

**run:** The length of a stage engagement.

**running gag:** comic business that is repeated throughout a musical.

**run lines:** To recite the lines of a play without the accompanying blocking or stage business. This is often done to help actors get off book.

**run-through:** A rehearsal in which an entire scene or act is played without any interruptions. In contrast to a "working rehearsal."

**running time:** The length of time it takes to perform a play.

## ◇ S ◇

**SAG:** The professional union the Screen Actors' Guild. Sister Union of AEA.

**St. Genesius:** The patron saint of actors, whose Feast day is August 25 and motto is “Saint Genesius guide our destiny.” He was hired to work in a play that satirizing the Christian baptism and sacrament. During the stage performance, before Emperor Diocletian in Rome in the year 300 A.D., he received the word and was suddenly converted to Christianity. When presented to the Emperor, he declared his Christianity. He refused to renounce his new faith, even at the emperor's orders, who had him tortured in an effort to force him to sacrifice to the pagan gods. When Genesius persisted in his faith, he was beheaded. Though the legend is an ancient one, it is no more than that. His medal is considered good luck. Ideally, the medal should be received as a gift; you don't have to be Catholic to give or receive it.

The prayer to Saint Genesius goes: *Dear Genesius, according to a very ancient story, when you were still a pagan, you once ridiculed Christ while acting on the stage. But, like Saul on the road to Damascus, you were floored by Christ's powerful grace. You rose bearing witness to Jesus and died a great martyr's death. Intercede for your fellow actors before God that they may faithfully and honestly perform their roles and so help others to understand their role in life and thus enabling them to attain their end in heaven. Amen.*



**Satire:** A type of comedy that uses a humorous attack on accepted conventions of society, holding up human vices, follies and stupidity to ridicule

**Satires:** Literary works or form of comedy that ridicule or scorn human vices and follies.

**saturation:** The brightness or dullness of a color.

**Satyr play:** A Classic Greek play that ends the evening in a Theatre Festival.

**scale:** (1) A drawing or model of items made at a fixed ratio to their full size; for example, at a scale of 1/2" to 1', the 1/2" drawing will be 1' in the finished set

piece. (2) The proportion of one item to another on stage.

**scansion:** The analysis of verse to show its meter, and therefore help discover its meaning and possible pronunciations.

**scenario:** A skeleton libretto explaining the actions of each scene of a play, musical, or opera.

**scene:** Either (1) a portion of an act, which by the nature of the action, or some arbitrary division, is a distinct unit by itself; or (2) the locale indicated by the setting, as in: "The scene is set in a small living room."

**Scène-à-faire:** See Obligatory scene.

**scene breakdown:** Careful annotations of each scene in a play, with all necessary actors listed and some indication of the action and setting.

**scene change:** A complete change of scenery to change location or minor adjustments to denote passage of time, etc,

**scene dock:** See dock.

**scene-stealing:** Calling attention to your presence on stage and diverting attention away from the main actors.

**scenic artist or designer:** The person who designs the setting's, and sometimes designs the costumes, makeup, and lighting. Professional scenery, costume, and lighting designers are represented by the United Scenic Artists. (logo below)



**schemata:** A Yiddish term meaning “rag.” In the theatre refers to any costume.

**schmaltz:** A Yiddish term meaning sentimental material or sentimental treatment of material. It also refers to overacting in a serious piece so that the performance is maudlin and corny.

**schtick:** Slang, Jewish. stage business or a bit, usually comedy business, a repeated bit of comic business, routine, or gimmick used by a star performer. In

Commedia Dell'arte it is called a lazzi. See **Commedia dell'Arte**.

**schwa:** Pronunciation symbol with the sound of "ub"; every vowel has a schwa sound.

**score/scoring:** (1) The actor's record of beats and actions that create a role. (2) the marking of a script for vocal structure.

**Screen Actors Guild:** See SAG.

**screens:** Two-fold and three-fold flats used either as walls against a drapery background or to cover openings or furnishings when changing scenes.

**script:** The written text of a play.

**scrim:** A piece of loosely woven scenery material that looks solid when light shines on it from the front, but is transparent when light is shown on something behind it.

**season:** (1) Traditionally meaning the theatrical season, usually autumn to spring. Nowadays a season may be of almost any length. (2) The list of productions being presented in that time.

**secondary sources:** Books that help in characterization building.

**second banana:** The stooge of the lead comic in a show, the butt of his jokes. The term derives from an old burlesque routine about the distribution of a bunch of bananas.

**segue:** A musical term indicating that one number (or action, or line, or idea) should go immediately into the next.

**sense memory:** In the Method, the process of recalling an experience through detailed attention to sensory data (smell, touch, hearing, sight), such as remembering a smell from your past that puts you in the same emotional state as before.

**Sentimental Comedy:** A play in which the need of people to have faith in others and to lose themselves in the lives of others like themselves is met.

**set:** To make permanent the reading of lines or movement and business after a series of rehearsals. (Sometimes used as an abbreviation for Setting.)

**setting:** The arrangement of the scenery and properties that designate the locale of the action. The time and place when and where the play occurs.

**set dressing:** Items used to decorate a setting. Also called trim props.

**set piece:** A unit of scenery standing alone.

**set props:** Props that stand on the stage floor, or other props not carried on by actors. Compare to hand props.

**shades:** Dark or deep colors.

**shadowing:** Term used in applying darker makeup to bring out facial features.

**shape:** An artistic value that influences both mass and the psychological reaction to objects on the stage, by using geometric or free-forms, such as a circle symbolizing the infinite.

**share a scene:** Two actors standing or sitting parallel to each other.

**share:** To take a position on stage so that equal emphasis is afforded two or more actors. Share (ing) a scene or the stage.

**shift:** To change or move scenery.

**shoestring production:** a show put together with a bare minimum of financial help,

**showcase theatre:** A theatre whose main purpose is to obtain paid work for members of the cast. Usually presented for members of the industry and casting agents.

**show curtain:** A drop or curtain behind the front curtain that is painted to give atmosphere to the particular play being presented.

**showmanship:** A sense of what is theatrical effective.

**show-within-a-show:** A play-within-the-play. Dumb shows are usually performed as a show-within-a-show.

**shtick:** See **schtick**.

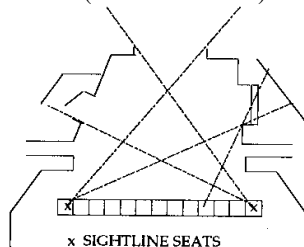
**sides:** A typed script that includes only the speeches of one actor and the relevant cues.

**side coaching:** phrase developed by Viola Spolin, the creator and first practitioner of the use of improvisation in the theatre, to mean a verbal assist given by the coach/teacher (as fellow player) to the actor/student during her work on stage to help her focus. The actor/student listens to these comments subconsciously and makes the adjustments suggested as she continues. Subsequently side coaching becomes part of the student's unconscious, a message to the total organism.

**sight cue:** a non-verbal cue usually given as stage business.

**sight gag:** visual humor from a funny prop, costume, makeup, hairstyle, or movement.

**sight lines:** The visibility of the playing area from the audience, usually from the seats on the extreme right and left sides of the house. (Illustrated below.)



**sign-in sheet:** a list of performers and crew that lives on the callboard; cast and crew should check off their name when they arrive.

**simultaneous staging:** stage arrangement in which more than one set appears on the stage at once, often with a neutral playing area (plateau) in front that can be used as part of which ever set is being used at the time.

**sitting on their hands:** Phrase used to describe an unresponsive audience.

**situation:** A problem or challenge the character or characters must face. A play may have a series of situations. The basic situation refers to the one problem that is central to the play.

**situation-centered action:** An approach to telling a story which takes a single situation or series of situations and places characters into them.

**situations:** Circumstances that are presented in dialogue and action, such as moments of danger or emotional upheaval.

**skene:** A small hut in the Greek theatre, used for concealment during a change of costume. It has given us the English word "scene."

**sketch:** a brief farcical bit found in revues

**skit:** A short scene of dialogue or pantomime, usually in a satirical or humorous vein.

**slapstick:** A double lathe stick with handle which clowns beat each other. The two lathes striking together make a slap sound. Derived from Commedia dell'arte. Gave its name to the sort of broad humor or comic business which relies on ridiculous physical activity called *Slapstick*.

**slice of life:** Naturalistic drama purporting to offer a direct presentation of reality without selection or arrangement. See Naturalism.

**slow burn:** slow, comic realization that something bad has happened; the disgust and anger builds within the actor until he/she explodes in rage.

**slow take:** actor slowly looks out to the audience as he/she slowly realizes what has been said or done.

**S.M.:** See Stage Manager.

**Smithee, Allen:** The fictitious name used by film directors when they do not want their real name attached to the credits of a movie.

**snap out:** an instantaneous blackout.

**sneak:** To bring in music, sound, or voices at an extremely low volume.

**social drama:** A problem play which seeks to right the wrongs of society.

**Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers:** Begun in 1959 the independent union for professional directors and choreographers.

**soliloquy:** A monologue spoken by the actor as an extension of his or her thoughts and not directed to, or by convention overheard by, any other actor. It is longer than an aside, and usually the actor delivering the soliloquy is alone on stage. Which usually reveal the character's inner-most thoughts aloud.

**soubrette:** A minor female part in comedies whose character calls for pertness, coyness, coquetry, intrigue, et cetera, and is frequently a show part.

**sound patterns:** all the sound qualities—loud and soft, fast and slow, up and down, smooth and rough; strong and weak, pleasant and unpleasant that characterize spoken speech.

**sotto voce:** (adv. & adj.) In soft tones, so as not to be overheard; in an undertone. In music very soft tones. Italian: *sotto*, under + *voce*, voice.

**Spear carrier:** Slang expression for an actor who appears on stage just to fill out a crowd or plays a guarding soldier. The term derives from grand opera where such a character often carried a spear. See bit player, supernumerary.

**speed run** or **speed-through:** See Italian rehearsal. A rehearsal that involves going through the whole play very quickly.

**Spelvin, George:** A theatrical tradition. Fictitious named used on a program by an actor whose real name already appears in the program, concealing from the audience that the actor is playing two roles. The name was thought to have been first used by a minor actor who doubled in the cast of *Brewster's Millions* in 1907. The play was so successful (and it was said George also got great reviews) that its author Winchell Smith, continued to have George Spelvin listed in the rest of his productions for luck. Harry Selby is another name that is similarly used. See also Alan Smithee.

**spike, spiking, spike marks:** To mark, usually with various colored tapes, the stage area to show the placing of scenery or props.

**spill:** In technical theatre light leakage from a stage light.

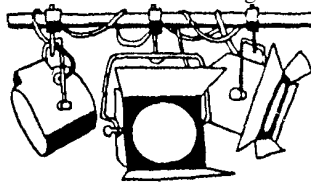
**spine:** In the Stanislavsky method, a character's dominant desire or motivation, which underlies his or her action in the play. See Superobjective.

**Spolin, Viola:** See Improvisation.

**spontaneity:** Naturalness without preplanning. Freshness; as of the first time.

**spoofs:** Literary works that poke fun at certain subjects or time periods.

**spotlight:** A lighting unit used to light only a small section of the stage.



**SRO:** Short for "Standing Room Only", or a sold-out performance.

**stage:** The entire floor space behind the proscenium arch.

**stage business:** all visual activity an actor does on stage other than personal business that fills out the details of his character.

**stage call:** Meeting of the cast and director on stage to discuss problems before a performance or rehearsal.

**stage convention:** See convention.

**stage combat:** Any stage fight, from a slap to a battle.

**stage directions:** Instructions in the play script relative to movement, business, and so on.

**stage door:** The door, usually at the back or side, by which actors enter the theatre.

**staged reading:** A performance, usually of a new work, which has had limited rehearsal, limited staging, and in which the actors do not memorize lines, but carry scripts in hand. The next stage would be a workshop production.

**stage fright:** The nervous anticipation of going on stage to perform. Fear of disapproval, indifference, or exposure. Placing the audience as judges.

**stagehand:** An individual who is always present back stage to operate a production.

**Stage house:** The stage floor and all the space above it up to the grid.

**stage left, stage right:** To the left and right of the actor when facing the audience. From the actor's point of view.

**stage manager:** The person who is in complete charge backstage during the rehearsals and performances.

**stage picture:** arrangement on a stage of performers and the visual production elements.

**stage struck:** an overwhelming desire to break into theatre as a performer, often without regard to experience or ability.

**stage turn:** a turn that keeps the actor's face toward the audience.

**stage wait:** Period of time when there is no dialogue or action on stage, usually an undesired situation caused by a late entrance or dropped line.

**stage whisper:** A stage convention in which lines or words are spoken so that the audience is supposed to hear but it is assumed to be heard only by those to whom it is intended, but other actors do not. See also sotto voce.

**stagger through:** A runthrough at which the production is pieced together, aiming at fluency but allowing for corrective stops.

**stakes:** Stakes are what the character stands to win or lose in a particular situation. They are like rewards and punishments. Stakes are intimately connected to obstacles and actions. "Raising the stakes."

**standby:** An actor who is prepared to play a role in a production but does not currently play a different role in that production and does not report to the theatre unless called to perform. (unlike an understudy, who does).

**Stanislavski, Constantin, Method or Technique:** See The Method and Moscow Art Theatre.

**static scene:** A scene with little or no movement and often having a slow pace.

**status:** In acting, the relationship of various characters in response to their high/low status. Keith Johnstone of London's Royal Court Theatre created the high/low improvisation status game, in which the status of the characters shifts throughout the exercise. Various status relationships are: parent-child, teacher-student, rescuer-victim, master-slave.

**steal or stealing the scene:** The act of having one actor assume emphasis by drawing attention away from the character to whom it would normally be

paid. The term is often used in a derogatory sense.

**step unit:** One group of several steps used in the stage setting.

**stichomythia:** Rapidly delivered dialog in which the characters speak alternate lines. The effect is that each character finishes the other's thoughts. First used in Greek Drama.

**stock character:** Not only a "flat" character but a generic type found throughout drama: jealous husband, clever servant, braggart soldier, hypocrite, miser. Most common to comedy, but also found in serious plays.

**Stock Company:** A permanent group of actors that puts on a number of different plays during a comparatively brief period of time, as in a summer season. "In Stock".

**stooge:** a performer placed in the audience to act as a tool or butt of the comedian's joke.

**stop the show:** audience response for a character, scene or song which is so great that the action of the play must be literally stopped until the applause subsides.

**straight line:** line that sets up a punch line so it will get a laugh.

**straight man:** one who delivers straight lines to a comic.

**straight role:** A role without marked eccentricities, usually a young man or woman. Roles in which the actor and the character are similar.

**street theater:** open-air spaces where acting troupes try to attract audiences, often for the purpose of social activism.

**stretching a character:** Making a role unique, individual, and interesting

**stress:** The relative loudness or force of vocal utterance given a syllable or word in a sound pattern, to emphasize a word or phrase in speaking.

**strike:** To remove or take down objects from the stage.

**strong:** Having high attention value, as in a strong position or area.

**style:** The way in which a play is written, acted, and produced.

**stylization:** A blending of script and production in a deliberately nonrealistic manner.

**subordination:** To treat any element of the production as of minor or Secondary importance so as to focus emphasis elsewhere.

**subplot:** A second plot subsidiary to the main one in a play. It may parallel and comment on the main plot, it may be just a side issue, or it may help the main plot along.

**substitution:** The use by an actor of a personal experience (people, events, or things) to relate the experience of a character within a play.

**subtext:** A term used in the *Stanislavski* system that refers to the real or full meaning underlying the character's lines of dialogue— the purpose for which the words are spoken or their inner meaning. Subtext involves thought, intent, and emotion, all of which are derived from detailed and imaginative attention to given and imaginary circumstances. Hence, the lines are considered text, the underlying meaning the Subtext. (see also Intention, term used by Robert Lewis, Objective, Inner Action and Problems.) Information implied but not specifically stated in the script. Character interpretations which are not in a script but are supplied by an actor.

**Summer Stock:** A stock company that operates only during the summer.

**super or supernumerary:** Non-speaking actor not specifically named in the text, usually in background scenes, such as mobs, crowds, armies, townspeople, choruses.

**superobjective:** A term often utilized by Method actors and the Stanislavski system to describe the motivating idea or theme that pervades the entire play. Every major character has his or her own objective deriving from the spine or superobjective of the play.

**supporting roles:** Those characters who act as contrasts to others - characters with whom other characters, usually the protagonist, are compared.

**Surrealism:** From the French *surrealisme*, coined in 1924, and meaning "above or beyond reality." it was a movement attacking formalism in the arts and brought dream material and the experiences of the unconscious mind into literature. Also sometimes called Theatre of the Absurd.

**suspension of disbelief:** The audience's willingness to accept the illusion and conventions of a theatrical performance.

**sustained inflection:** Using the voice to suggest calmness, decisiveness, or steadiness of purpose by staying on the same note. A vocal inflection that neither rises nor drops in pitch. It keeps the "ball in the air" and is used when the speaker is in mid-thought or when a caesura (pause) is either appropriate or necessary for an intake of breath in the middle of a thought or action.

**swan song:** an actor's final performance, originating from the idea that the swan is supposed to make a final utterance before it dies.

**symbolic:** The use of characters, props, and sets to exemplify ideas, such as a blue bird symbolizing happiness.

**symbolist drama:** a form of drama in which subjectivity and spirituality is considered a higher form of truth than mere observance of outward appearance.

**super, supernumerary:** a performer without a speaking part who appears in a mob scene.

## ◇ T ◇

**tableaux:** A grouping of performers to make a stage picture, often used for curtain calls.

**tag line:** The final line of a character when leaving the stage or just prior to the fall of the curtain.

**take-in:** See Load-in.

**take it down:** An instruction from a director to an actor to reduce the energy, volume, or intensity in his or her line reading or performance.

**tape the stage:** the process of depicting the outlines of the set on the rehearsal room floor, using colored tape; generally done by the stage manager before the first rehearsal.

**take stage:** To assume a more prominent body position or move to the most emphatic area so as to receive the focus of attention. Take stage, Taking a Scene.

**taking yourself out of a scene:** The actor's turning away from the audience into a three-quarter back or full back position.

**teaser:** A border drapery that masks the fly space and determines the height of the stage opening. It is located behind the house curtain and immediately in front of the tormentors.

**technician or techie:** An individual who runs the technical elements of a production.

**technical director:** The person who executes the designs of the scenic artist with the help of a crew.

**technical or objective acting:** Use of learned skills of acting, movement, speech, and interpretation to create roles; no emotional response is allowed.

**technical rehearsals or tech rehearsal:** Rehearsals at which lighting, scenery, and props are used and integrated so that changes go smoothly.

**telegraph:** a play or action or moment in which the audience is able to deduce what the outcome will be.

**telescope:** To have two or more actors overlap the reading of lines or execution of business.

**tempo:** The impression that audience receives of the general rate of the production. Directly dependent upon pace.

**text:** In Method terminology, the dialogue without reference to the underlying meaning of the lines. (See also Intention, Subtext.)

**textual tryouts:** Tryouts when actors use monologues or scenes.

**Thalia:** The Greek Muse of comedy. See **Masks of Tragedy & Comedy**

**theatres or theaters:** Buildings where plays are performed. The spelling is arbitrary. Some say the "theater" is the spelling used in the United States, and "theatre" is used in England. This is no

longer true. Others say that "theater" designates the buildings where films are shown, and "theatre" where live entertainment is featured. Again, this is arbitrary. For more detail see **AMERICAN THEATRE Magazine** <http://www.americatheatre.org/2015/07/20/re-the-re-in-theatre/>

**theatre-in-the-round:** See arena theatre.

**theatre of cruelty:** 1930 movement designed to disrupt the logic of the audience and free their subconscious minds so that they might experience the mysterious forces of existence characterized by magic and myth.

**Theater of the Absurd:** A form of theatre in which language becomes the unconventional, and in which political and social problems are examined and presented to the audience in unconventional ways. Most of these plays deal with the senselessness of the human condition. The most famous play of this genre being Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The phrase was coined by Martin Esslin with the publication of his book *Theater of the Absurd*.

**Theatre of Involvement:** Theatre in which the members of the audience participate in the action of the play.

**Theatrical conventions:** See Conventions.

**Theatricalism:** The style that says "This is the theatre. Accept it for what it is, as it is." The play as a staged work. A reaction against the realism of the early 1900s.

**theme:** The basic idea of a play that gives unity to all elements.

**Thespian:** Actors are sometimes called Thespians after an Ancient Greek poet and playwright Thespis (550-500 B.C.E.), traditionally claimed to have been the first person to step from the Chorus to perform as a solo actor. Although none of his plays remain, some titles are known from ancient writings.

**Thespians:** The International High School Honor Society for actors is called The Thespians (logo).



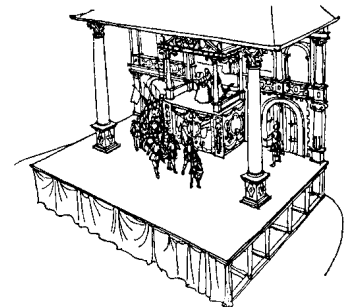
**three-quarter left:** performer turns to a position halfway between left profile and full back.

**three-quarter right:** performer is in a position halfway between full back and right profile.

**throw away:** To underplay deliberately a line or business, often to achieve greater emphasis elsewhere in the scene or play. Or throw it away.

**through-line:** The series of actions that lead a character toward the fulfillment of the superobjective. Also called through-action or through-line of action.

**thrust stage:** Type of stage which projects into the auditorium so that the audience can sit on at least three sides. Below is an illustration of an Elizabethan thrust stage.



**timing:** The exact use of time, carefully planned to achieve maximum effectiveness in the reading of a line, execution of business, or movement.

**tints: In technical theatre** light or pastel colors.

**title role:** Character whose name appears in the title of the play, usually the most important role.

**Tony Awards:** The Antoinette Perry Awards, named in honor of the actress, director, and theatre activist of the 1930s and 1940s, popularly called the Tonys, are awarded yearly by the American Theatre Wing for the best work in the New York theatre. The first Tonys were given in 1947.



**top:** To so emphasize a line or an action that it is more emphatic than the line or action that precedes it. Top, Top it, Topping.

**top billing:** the star of the show whose name is most prominent on the marquee and at the top of the playbill.

**tormentors:** Two matching flats, usually black in color, located slightly upstage of the teaser and serving to mask the wings or to vary the size or width of the playing area. Together with the teaser they effectively serve as a "picture frame" for the stage setting.

**Total theatre:** Theatre in which all the performing arts are fused into one presentation.

**tour:** To travel a production to other theatres away from "home."

**trades:** Newspapers or magazines devoted to the entertainment industry.

**tragedian:** an actor who plays tragic roles.

**Tragedy:** A play in which the protagonist fails to achieve desired goals or is overcome by opposing forces. (See Kahan Chapter 9.)

**tragicomedy:** a play which is a blend of tragic and comedic elements.

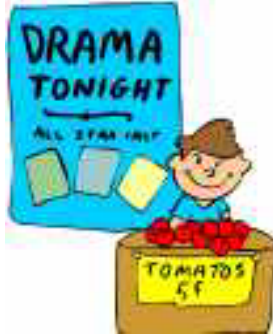
**Tragic flaw:** The factor which is a character's chief weakness and which makes him or her most vulnerable; often intensifies in time of stress. An abused and often incorrectly applied theory from Greek drama.

**trap (doors):** An opening in the stage floor that can be used for the ascent or descent of characters or objects. Usually covered by a hinged, removable door.

**troupe:** a theatrical company.

**tryout(s):** The auditioning of actors for roles in the forthcoming production.

**turkey:** In theatrical terms a unsuccessful production, a flop, a gobbler. Any badly castor badly produced show. The term originated when bad shows were opened on Thanksgiving Day to make money with the two or three holiday performances before the reviews came out and killed box office business.



**turn in:** actor is to face upstage, away from the audience.

**turn out:** actor is to face downstage, toward the audience.

**turning point:** The moment in a play when events can go either way; the moment of decision; the crisis.

**turning the scene in:** Focusing audience attention on the actor who is the real center of dramatic action.

**turntable:** Portion of the stage that revolves.

**twist:** The unexpected in a play or performance.

**twofer:** A coupon that gives two tickets for the price of one. Usually issued near the beginning or end of a play's run.

**typecasting:** Identifying and casting an actor in the same kind of role over and over because they reflect in real life the character.



**undercut:** to speak with a softer tone and lower pitch than the previous line.

**underplay:** to use a softer tone, less energy, and a more casual manner than previously.

**understudy:** An actor who is able to play a given role in an emergency, appears only when the person playing that role is taken ill. In most instances is in the same cast playing a smaller role.

**uniqueness:** The actor's ability to shape a character's personality into itself and not make it a copy of someone else's portrayal.

**unit set:** A basic stage setting from which several settings can be created. A set that can serve as several different settings by changing only one or two set pieces, or by adding different set dressing.

**unity:** When all elements of the set form a perfect whole, centering on the main idea of the play.

**Unities:** From Aristotle's *Poetics*, the 3 classic principles of dramatic structure required in a play - unities of time, place, action.

**unnatural:** Machinelike or puppetlike.

**unnatural sounds:** Those sounds such as an undulating pitch that soars up and down like a slide trombone, that draws laughter from an audience.

**upstage:** The area of a proscenium stage farthest away from the audience. Why Up Stage? Because at one time stages were literally pitched at an angle (See: raked). You had to indeed walk 'up' the stage to get to the back.

**upstaging:** When an actor, deliberately or accidentally, moves upstage of other actors and makes them face "upstage" to talk with him.



**value:** In technical theatre a color's lightness or darkness.

**variety show:** a program which may contain songs, dances, skits, acrobatics, magic, and other entertainment.

**vaudeville:** a collection of variety acts also featuring sketches and short plays in which leading actors performed.

**velcro:** Strips of material that adhere to each other when pressure is applied.

**versatility:** The ability to change style or character with ease.

**verisimilitude:** Creating the impression of reality in the mind of the audience so that it will accept the characters and the actions as true to life.

## ACTING IS ACTION — Web Pages

**velours:** velvet-like curtains used to dress a stage. They should not be touched by actors on the facing as oil in the hands tend to mat the fabric.

**version:** a script that has been altered or adapted from its original form.

**villain:** the antagonist in a play.

**visual cue:** a cue that the operator runs when she sees something happen on stage; warned, but not called by the stage manager.

**vocal coloring:** use of sound patterns to express your character's "emotional opinion" of a word or phrase.

**voiced:** Those consonants, such as *b*, *d*, and *V*, that cause vibration of the vocal folds when sounded. The underlined sounds are voiced: the, dip, azure, or, way, his, video.

**voiceless:** Those consonants, such as *p*, *t*, and *f*, that do not cause vibration of the vocal folds when sounded. The underlined sounds are voiceless: thick, should, cat, chin, sill.

**volume:** The strength, force, or intensity with which sound is made.

**Vomitorium**, noun, pl.:toria. or **Vom:** A passage providing entrance and exit in a theater, stadium, or other public place. In a theatre with a thrust stage the actor's tunnel entrance-ways which cut through, or beneath the audience seating areas—which in some theatres double as audience entrances. Taken from the ancient Roman coliseum-ampitheatre spectator entrances. The word has its origins in the Roman word "vomitorium" (meaning "To spew out.")

**vowel:** A relatively open and continuous sound that is sonorous and free of friction noise. In normal utterance (nonwhispered speech) all vowels are voiced. There are fifteen vowels in American English.

## ◇ WXYZ ◇

**wagon:** In technical theatre a platform on wheels used to move scenery quickly.

**wagon set:** In technical theatre the uses rolling platforms to move pieces on and off the stage

**walk-on:** A small role with or without any lines. (See also Extras.)

**walk through:** A rehearsal in which the actors do all the blocking and business but do not say all the lines.

**wardrobe:** (1) Costumes and all articles of dress of a play, (2) room in which costumes are stored or fitted.

**wardrobe mistress:** The person in charge of inventory, repairing and maintaining costumes for an individual show or theatre season.

**warm-up or warming up:** Exercising the body and/or voice prior to rehearsal or performance. A series of physical and vocal exercises that prepares the body to act.

**warn or warning:** (2) A verbal instruction to stand by. To notify that a cue is approaching. (2) Word written in the prompt script to indicate the same. In a cue light system *Warnings* are red and *Goes* are green. See also *Go*.

**weak:** Having relatively low attention value, as in a weak position or area.

**well-made play:** A pattern of tight and logical play construction that began with French playwright Eugene Scribe (1791-1861). It uses many now standard theatrical plot devices, such as a secret withheld until the climax, and a logical ending (denouement) that accounts for all the threads of the plot,

**"went up":** When an actor forgets his lines, he "went up" on his lines. Also called "dried up" or "gone up." See also *Go Dry* or *Go Up*.

**West End:** The London equivalent of New York City's theatre district, Broadway, where commercial plays are produced.

**wet tech:** extended rehearsal, with actors, devoted to the integration and practice of all technical elements (light, sound, special effects, and set and prop changes). See also **dry tech**.

**whole-part memorization:** To commit to memory individual lines of a script after whole units of the play have been read several times.

**wing setting:** Several hinged flats, often in matching pairs, set in sequence at stage

right and stage left masking the offstage area. Most frequently used with a backdrop to enclose the playing area.

**wings:** The offstage areas to the right and to the left of the playing space.

**wing space:** the amount of space on the stage that is not visible to the audience,

**wooden :** a dull and unemotional performance or performer which tends to be stiff or inflexible.

**word play:** Verbal fencing, punning, or mock bickering, usually between male and female characters.

**work call:** The time period during which the crew is called to work on any technical elements of the production.

**working backwards:** A technique in which an actor prepares the audience for what a character will do later.

**working rehearsal:** The rehearsal at which interpretation of the play is developed and words and actions are put together.

**work lights:** General lighting that does not go through the dimmer board, used for rehearsals and technical work.

**workshop performance:** A performance in which maximum effort goes towards acting and interpretation rather than sets or costumes, usually with a limited rehearsal period.

**workshopping:** The process of preparing a play through various workshop performances, which could extended over a number of years.

**X (cross):** notation in the prompt book that an actor crosses at that time