

**ACTING, DIRECTING
&
DESIGNING LIGHTING &
SCENERY
for
THE THRUST STAGE**

**SUPPLEMENT
CHAPTER
TO
ACTING IS ACTION
by
Phillip Rayher**

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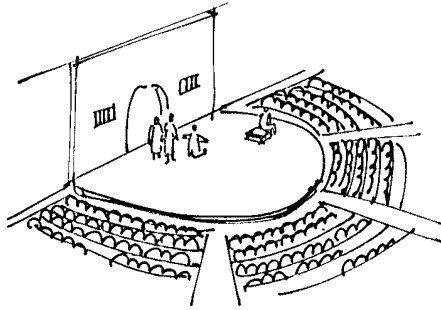
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BOX OR THEATRE-IN-THE-ROUND?

GLOSSARY OF STAGE TERMS UNIQUE TO THE THRUST

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***“On the thrust stage, a play may be likened not to a painting
but to a constantly moving sculpture.”***

— THE GREATEST ACTING SPACE IN THE WORLD, Stratford Festival of Canada, 2002, p. 8



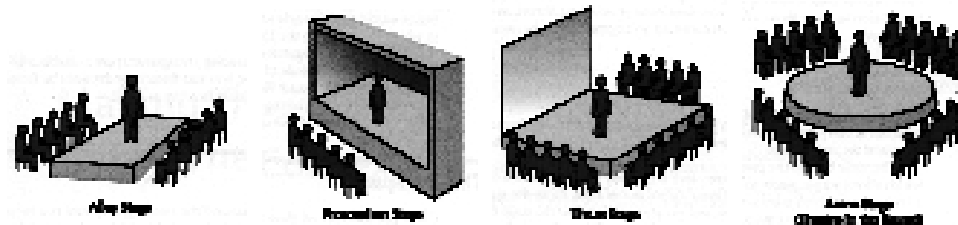
WHAT IS A THRUST STAGE

The *Thrust Stage* or *Thrust Theatre* (also called the *Open stage*, *Platform Stage*, or *three-sided arena stage*) is a theatrical stage without a proscenium, in which a raised platform— usually a square, round, or trapezoidal — juts into the auditorium— the stage seems to *thrust* out into the audience— allowing the audience to surround the stage on three sides. The audience is usually rising up from the stage and sitting in a highly raked (angled) area— in a manner resembling the seating at a football stadium. The stage is usually backed by occasional scenery pieces or a permanent architectural structure. The thrust stage ordinarily has no hanging scenery, and what scenery it does have must be limited by the audiences sight lines. The stage is large enough to accommodate the full staging of a performance and performers can enter a Thrust Stage from all sides.

WHY THIS SUPPLEMENT?

I was very surprised when I started to gather sources for our student actors, directors, and designers to read so that they could better understand the requirements of working in our school’s new 100 seat thrust stage at the magnet arts high school, School of the Arts in San Francisco that other than a few slim chapters in one or two directing and stage craft books I could not find the materials needed to create a common vocabulary and detail methods necessary to direct, design, and act on our stage. Why hadn’t someone written a guide to the “starting points” needed to develop as an actor, director or designer for the thrust stage— which is a space that is not that unique in high schools and universities, not to mention community and commercial theatre? I’m still surprised that someone hadn’t taken on this task. So, out of necessity, here is what I have gathered from the sources I located and in person (either directly or indirectly) from directors, actors, and designers who have made a major part of the career work on the thrust stage.

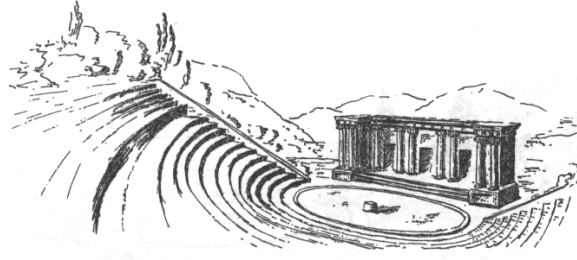
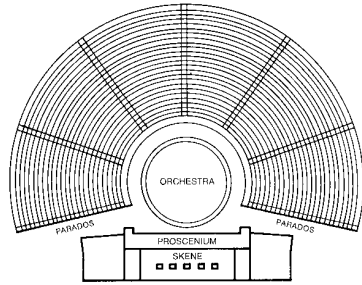
THE FOUR BASIC THEATRE SPACES.



Above is illustrated the actor-audience relationships in four basic theatre configurations: ally (audience on two sides of the actor); proscenium (audience on one side); thrust (audience on three sides); and arena (audience surrounding actor).¹

¹ Cameron, Kenneth M., and Patti P. Gillespie. *The Enjoyment of Theatre*. Sixth Edition. Pearson Education, 2004

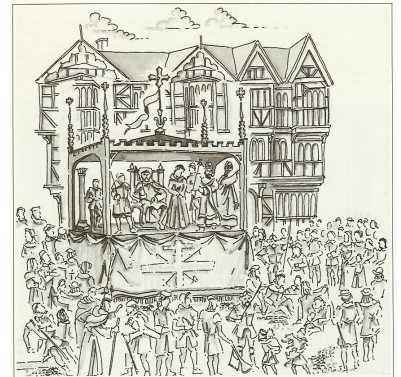
THRUST STAGE HISTORY



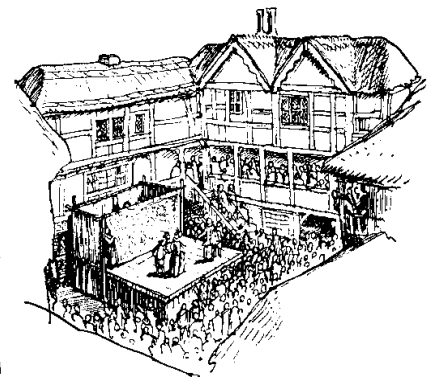
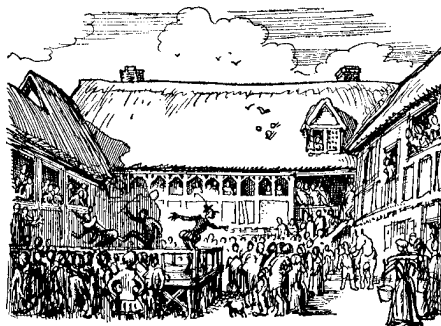
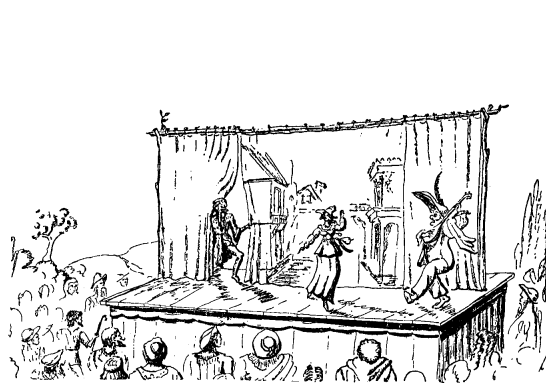
The thrust stage and its variants isn't a new development. They were (and are) used by the majority of great national theatres, particularly those of China and Japan (in the traditional No and Kabuki theatres of Japan, illustrated in the below painting). They were used in the Renaissance in the booths of the Italian commedia del arte (shown below). They were used as the Elizabethan public and private playhouses. They were used in Spain's Golden Age of theatre (beginning about 1570) where they were called *corrales*— the areas in the court yards of Inns or between town houses (see the illustrations below).

The thrust stage was also used in the first London playhouses, including the Globe (the “wooden O”), which were built during Elizabethan times. In the theatres of Elizabethan England, the actors performed in the very midst of their audience. Their theatre had evolved from the courtyards of inns, in which a raised platform was erected for a stage. Some members of the audience stood around it while others watched from windows and galleries surrounding the inn yard.

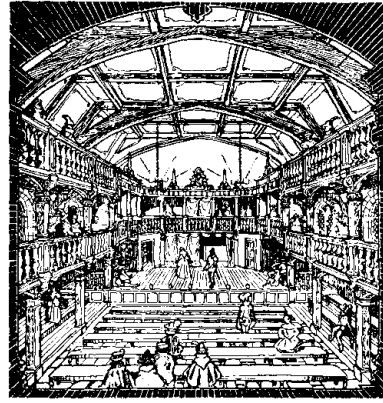
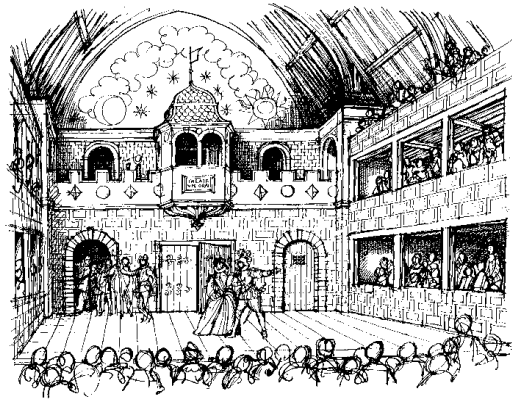
Actually, a contemporary thrust stage has a greater affinity with the theatres of the Greeks in ancient Athens (see the ground plan and drawing above). Nevertheless, today the thrust is used for every kind of production, including modern realism. Exciting theatre can be produced with any audience/actor relationship, as long as the audience can see and follow the action of the play clearly.



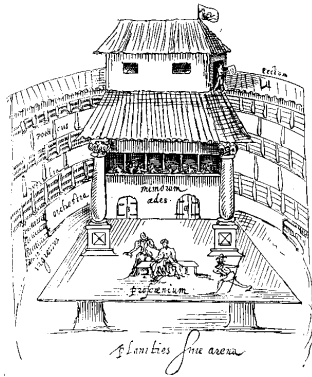
Left, A painting of the traditional Kabuki theatres of Japan showing the actors and the audience. Center, Medieval audience gathers on three sides of platform stage to watch a morality play. Right, Medieval audience gathers on three sides of the more formal pageant wagon to watch a passion play.



Left, A traveling platform stage, as used by the Italian commedia del arte. Center and Right, Two illustrations of performances in the Renaissance court yard, such as Spain's *corrales* (i.e., the areas in the court yards of Inns or between town houses).



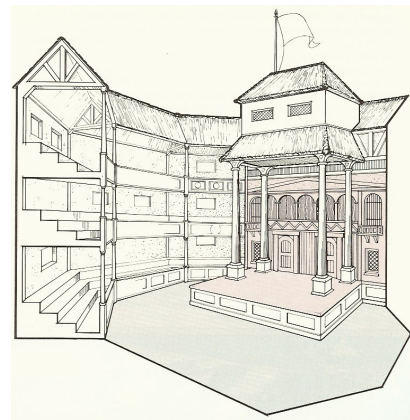
Left, The Elizabethan indoor or “private” theatre used during the winter by the professional companies. Right, the Blackfriars Theatre, an Elizabethan indoor theatre. (A reconstruction of the second Blackfriars, 1597.)



Interior of The Swan Theatre sketched by Johannes de Witt (c. 1596). The original drawing does not survive. This is a copy made by Arend van Buchell, who presumably copied a drawing by DeWitt, or, as some believe, drew it based on a written description by DeWitt. DeWitt was a Dutch traveler who visited London around 1596 and made a drawing of the Swan Theatre, of which this copy has survived. Its accuracy has been questioned, but its major features are probably correct. It is considered by many the only known

AN ELIZABETHAN PLAYHOUSE

The drawing on the right shows the kind of stage on which the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were first presented. A platform stage juts into an open courtyard, with spectators standing on three sides (called “groundlings”). Three levels of enclosed seats rise above the courtyard. There are doors at the rear of the stage for entrances and exits and an upper level for



2

In Western theater from the 17th century until the 20th century the **proscenium stage** dominated theatre and few dreamed of building a theatre in other than the now traditional proscenium style. This style consists of a horseshoe auditorium in several tiers facing the stage— exposing only the front of the stage to the audience— from which it is divided by a large archway or picture frame— the proscenium (from the Greek *proscenion*, or “infront of the scene”). The proscenium is at or near the front of the stage and supports the curtain which can be lowered or drawn closed. The audience directly faces the stage, which is typically raised several feet above front row audience level. This stage lends itself well to attempts to create the illusion of reality, which formed the dominant movement in staging during that period.

In a proscenium-style stage, the audience faces the performance in one direction, as if the action were in a 4-sided room with one side removed. The main stage is the space behind the proscenium arch, behind the curtain the backstage machinery facilitates quick changes of illusionistic scenery. Proscenium stages range in size from small enclosures to several stories tall. This type of theatre was developed for Italian opera in the 17th century. From the proscenium theatre’s introduction, productions of plays of all themes have tended to exploit the audience’s pleasure in its dollhouse

² Wilson, Edwin. *The Theater Experience*, Fourth Edition. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988.

realism. The proscenium theatre therefore separates the audience from the performers. Performers are therefore "blocked" or arranged as if they are composed in a picture frame.

Sometimes, the stage has an apron, or area in which the stage juts out into the auditorium. Unlike a Thrust Stage design, the apron is not sufficient to accommodate the full staging of a production. The thrust stage, like the arena stage, is primarily a creative alternative to the proscenium format.

A typical variation on the proscenium stage is the **modified thrust theatre**, in which a large front section of stage extends outward into the audience, with people seated on both sides of the extended thrust. It is not required for there to be a proscenium arrangement, though that is usually the case. A stage may have a thrust of any size or shape, though it typically takes the form of a walkway a few feet wide.

MODERN THRUST STAGES

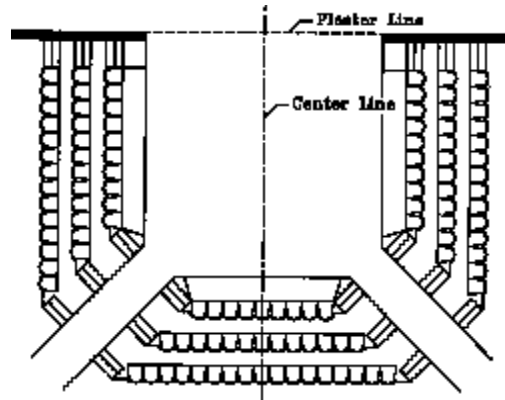


Illustration: A ground plan of a Thrust Stage Theatre

Thrust stages have come into use again in modern productions that stress actor-audience contact rather than illusionistic effects. The thrust stage was common in many countries until the 16th Century, but did not achieve popularity again until the latter half of the 20th century. The thrust stage was rediscovered by directors who wanted to move the action of the play out of what they felt were the artificial and limited confines of the proscenium stage.

In the early years of the 20th century, the English actor-manager William Poel suggested that Shakespeare should be staged so as to relate the performers and the audience as they had been on the Elizabethan stage. His ideas slowly gained in influence, and in 1953 just such a “thrust” stage, with no curtain and with the audience sitting on three sides of it, was built for the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Ontario, Canada. The renowned director, Tyrone Guthrie asked Tanya Moiseiwitsch to design a stage for the Stratford Festival in 1953, the year he accepted the directorship. He wanted one that would break away from the convention of the proscenium arch and return to the thrust style of stage on which Shakespeare's own company played. The design was revolutionary because it was the first thrust stage built in the Western theatre since Shakespeare's time (according to the festival). Her design for the Festival stage, first housed in the tent and now covered by the permanent building, has since been widely imitated. Later, she designed variations on the Stratford stage for the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and the Crucible Theatre in England.³ A considerable success, it had a strong influence on subsequent theatre design.

In the early days of the rebirth of the thrust stage, critics thought that the types of plays suitable for thrust staging were severely limited, proving suitable only for Elizabethan plays. For example, it was thought that because the playing space is small, large-cast shows and plays with multiple sets should be avoided. But the vast *Inherit the Wind* has been successfully staged on a tiny thrust stage, as well as shows with multiple sets such as *Summer and Smoke*. The author of *Directing for the Stage*, Lloyd Anton Frerer and this author have participated in thrust stage productions of *Oedipus Rex* on stages no more than fifteen by twenty feet. Obviously, directors and designers of thrust stage productions are limited only by their own imaginations.⁴

The thrust stage is not only suitable for Elizabethan plays, but also for a wide repertoire. Probably it will never completely replace the proscenium, which remains more suitable for the countless plays that were written with such a stage in mind, such as the comedies of Molière or the highly artificial comedies of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Oscar Wilde. On the other hand, the more realistic plays of Ibsen, Shaw, and Chekhov, all written for the proscenium theatre, lend themselves well to the thrust stage.

There are four solid reasons for preferring the thrust stage. First, more people can be accommodated in an audience given cubic space if arranged around the stage instead of just in front of it. This is important not merely for the economic advantage of a larger capacity but also for artistic reasons — the closely packed audience generates more concentration and excitement. A second reason for preferring the thrust stage is that the actors are nearer to more of their audience and can therefore be better heard and seen. This point is contested by adherents of the proscenium stage, who claim that the actor at any given moment must have his back turned to a large part of the house and, as a result, must be more difficult to see and hear. If the thrust stage is used efficiently, however, the actor's back will never be turned to

³ "open stage" *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2006. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9057183>.

⁴ Chapter 18, *Directing for the Stage* by Lloyd Anton Frerer, NTC, 1996

anyone for more than a few seconds at a time. The third reason is that members of an audience seated all around the stage are far more aware of the presence of the others than is the case in an opera house. The performance thereby is appreciated more as an event jointly shared and created by the audience and the actors. The fourth reason deals with the use of the thrust stage in actor training, prepare the actor for a versatile career in the arts — the intimacy needed for TV and Film and the realism of the majority of small theatre available today.

Since the arguments for the thrust stage were first made, theatres such as the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., have been designed “in the round” so that the audience completely surrounds the stage. Other theatres have followed the example of Grotowski’s Polish Laboratory Theatre by taking as the starting point an “empty space,” in which a different environment may be constructed for each production, radically altering the relationship between actors and audience for each play.

When more narrative forms of action appeared in drama the thrust stage quickly developed its versatility. Intimate and ritualistic qualities in the drama could be combined with a new focus on the players as individual characters. While thrust-stage performance discouraged scenic elaboration, it stressed the actor and his role, his playing to and away from the spectators, with the consequent subtleties of empathy and alienation. It permitted high style in speech and behavior, yet it could also accommodate moments of the colloquial and the realistic. It encouraged a drama of range and versatility, with rapid changes of mood and great flexibility of tone. It is not surprising that in the 20th century the West saw a return to the thrust stage and that recent plays of Brechtian theatre and the theatre of the absurd seem composed for thrust staging.

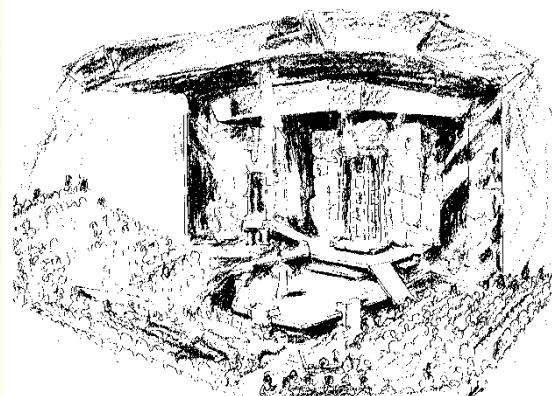
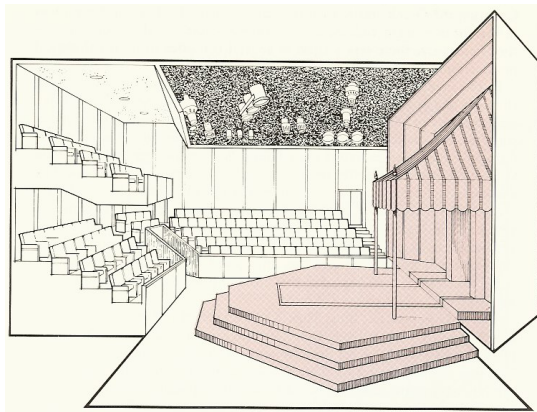
So, a thrust has the advantage of greater intimacy between audience and performer than a proscenium stage.

VARIOUS MODERN THRUST THEATRE TYPES & DESIGNS **(from the simple to the complex)**

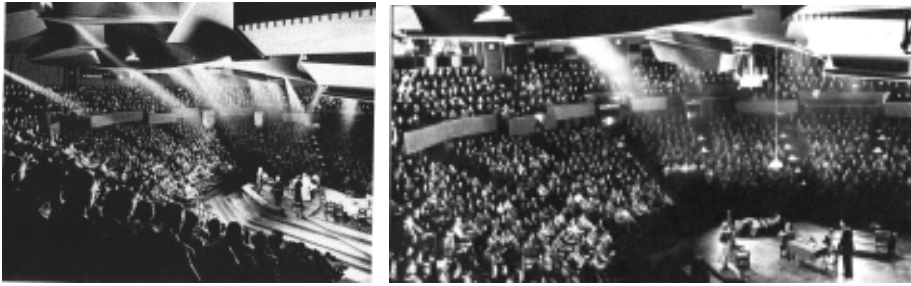
The Stratford Festival of Canada, opened in 1953 with 1,500 seats in a tent surrounding the permeant five-sided platform stage structure — originally surprisingly small at about 11 feet deep and 18 feet wide — with modifications made on the stage space in 1962, 1975, 1977 and in 1997 when the arc of the 175 degree slopped amphitheatre patterned after the classical Greek theatre at Epidaurus auditorium seating was changed from 220 degrees to 180 degrees. The number of seats was thus reduced from nearly 2,200 to 1,820, with no audience member farther than 65 feet from the 30 feet wide by 36 feet deep stage. It inspired more than a dozen other venues around the world, including the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and the Chichester Festival Theater in England.

Newer regional North American theatres rely extensively on thrust stages, notable among them are the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut: and the Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts theater in Santa Maria, California. Many Universities have built thrust stage theatres to supplement their proscenium stages, and many community and off-Broadway theatres use the thrust stage as their only theatre.

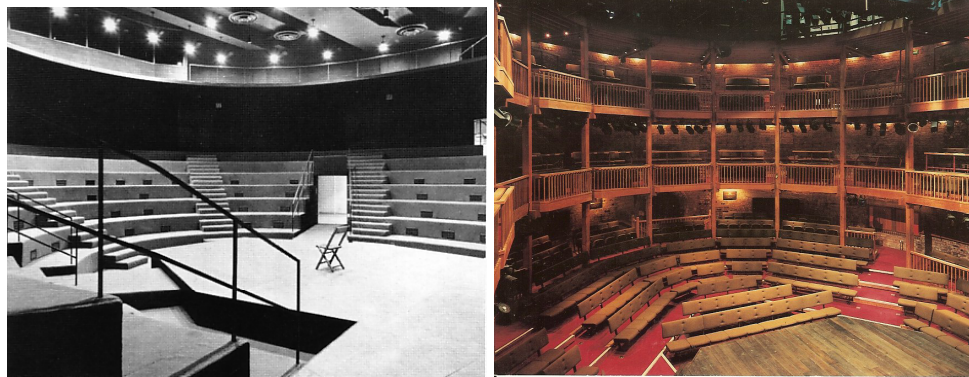
When creating a thrust space it is best and preferred to have an equal number of seats in each of the audience sections. This psychologically prevents the audience from perceiving that they are seated in a superior or inferior section of the house. It also prevents the actor, director, and designers from unconsciously favoring the center section. I am even reluctant to call this area the “center section.”



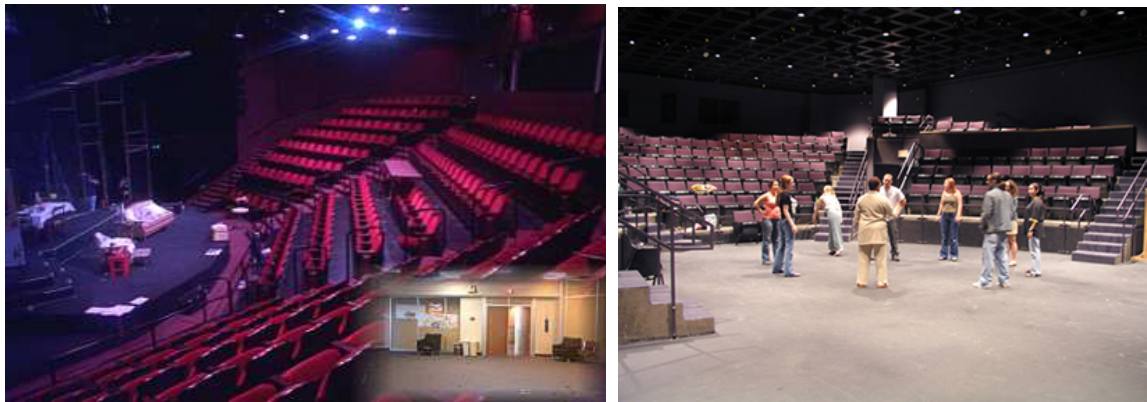
Left ⁵ and Right, A thrust stage very similar to the Stratford Festival and the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. The stage is surrounded on three sides by the audience. Sometimes seating is a semicircle. Entrances and exits are made from the sides and backstage. Spectators surround the action, but there is still the possibility of scene changes and other stage effects.



Left, A Modern Thrust Stage, Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, staged by Sir Tyrone Guthrie at The Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. The action is almost entirely projected into the midst of the audience, The dark patch right center is a vomitorium access to the stage. Right, Again the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, which was one of the first theatres to restore the thrust stage— an older type of actor-audience configuration. The stage is at the right, and the audience surrounds it on three sides. This stage provides intimacy for the spectators but also allows a scenic background for the performers.

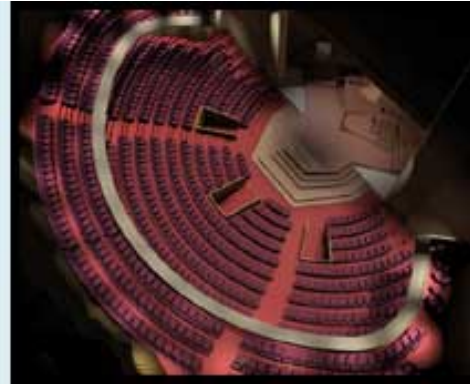


Left, Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre, Lincoln Center, New York.(notice the gutter/mote between the audience sections and the stage foot print.) Right, The Swan Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-on-Avon

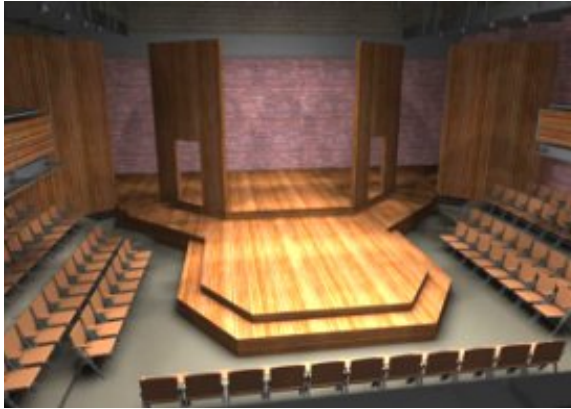
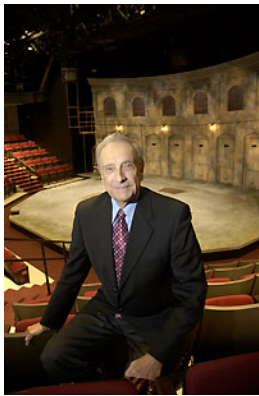


Left, Colony Theatre, Burbank CA. Right, Gladys Davis Theatre, West Virginia University

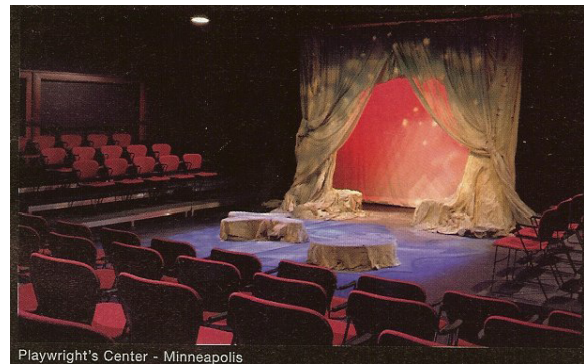
⁵ Wilson, Edwin. *The Theater Experience*, Fourth Edition. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988.



Left, Hass Stage, Arden Theatre, England. Right, Unknown



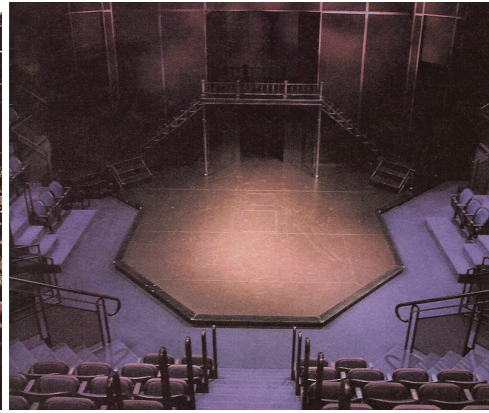
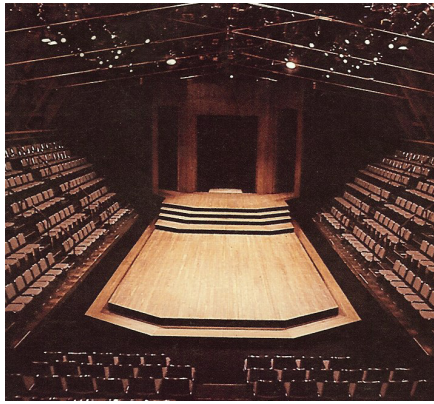
Left, University of Connecticut Katter Theatre. Center, Young Theatre, Canada. Right, Department of Theatre Arts, Furman University, Greenville, SC. Furman's small, intimate theatre, with its thrust stage and seating capacity of 110, viewed from the center of upstage.



Left, The thrust configuration of the Shakespeare Theatre, Washington, D.C. Right, Playwright's Center, Minneapolis, Mn.



Left, The Bolton Theater at Kenyon College. Right, Looking Glass Theatre, Chicago



Left, Tom Patterson Theatre, Stratford Festival of Canada. Right, Studio Theatre, Stratford Festival of Canada



Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts (SOTA)
THEATRE DEPARTMENT — DRAMA STUDIO 2010

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A **THRUST STAGE** AND A **BLACK BOX** OR THEATRE-IN-THE-ROUND?

I included the following sections on the Black-Box Theatre and Arena Stage as they have many traits and staging requirements in common with the thrust stage.

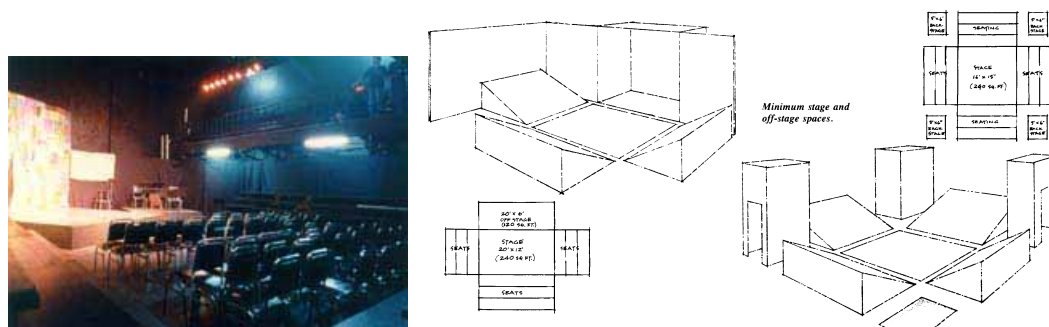
A **Black-Box theater** is a relatively recent innovation, usually a large square room consisting of a simple, somewhat unadorned flexible performance space that allows for a variety of seating arrangements. Usually this kind of space has a flat floor and accommodates anywhere from 50 to 200 people, and is used in experimental theater productions. The name is derived from the common practice of painting the walls black.

Such spaces are easily built and maintained, and are usually home to plays or other performances with very basic technical arrangements— limited sets, simple lighting effects, and an intimate focus on the story, writing, and performances rather than technical elements. The seating is typically loose chairs on platforms, which can be easily moved or removed to allow the entire space to be adapted to the artistic elements of a production.

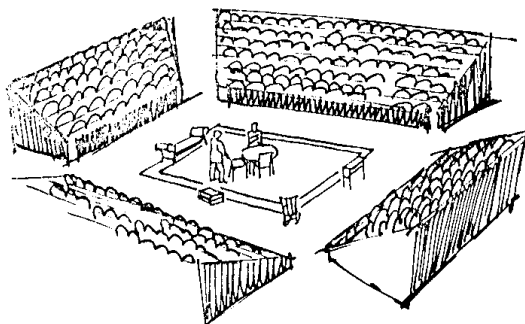
The black-box theatre is especially favored by colleges and other theatre training programs because the space is versatile and easy to change. Many theatre training programs will have both a large proscenium theatre, as well as a black-box theatre. Not only does this allow for two productions to be mounted simultaneously, but they can also have a large extravagant production in the mainstage— mainstage theatre is that which falls between studio theatre and large-scale events— while having a small experimental show in the black box.

Most older black boxes were built more like a television studio. A television studio is an installation in which television or video productions take place, with a low pipe grid overhead. Newer black boxes typically feature a catwalk, tension grids, or a bridge— a narrow pathway high in the air (as above a stage). The latter providing the flexibility of the pipe grid with the accessibility of a catwalk.

Black-box theatres became popular and wide spread particularly in the 1960s and 1970s during which low cost experimental theatre was being actively practiced as never before. Since almost any warehouse or open space in any building can be transformed into a black-box— including abandoned cafes and stores— the appeal for nonprofit and low income artists is high. The black-box is also considered by many to be a place where more “pure” theatre can be explored, with the most human and least technical elements being in focus. A fine example of this space is the Tanghalang Batute (formerly the Gantimpala Experimental Theater) in the Cultural Center of the Philippines.



Left, the Tanghalang Batute in the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Right, an example of a ground plan of a flexible “Black Box.”



Above, a typical Theatre-in-the-Round

The **Arena** or **Theater-in-the-Round** (also called Central Staging) is a type of open performance space which allows the audience to completely surround the action on all sides. It is a circular or oval shaped public space (akin to a classical amphitheatre). It is surrounded on all sides by raised, usually tiered, seats or benches for spectators. The key feature of an arena is that the event space is the lowest point, allowing for maximum visibility. The advantage to this type of theater is that audience members can have an intimate view of the performance, and it enables producers to offer more experimental programming.

The modern arena stage came into use in the late 1930s out of a desire to produce plays on low budgets during the years of economic depression. Since scenery was eliminated, it appeared, in its earliest uses to be even more lifelike than the proscenium stage— like a play in someone's living room.

This arena type of staging may have a more intimate appeal than that of the proscenium but certain actions may be lost to some portions of the audience because of its limitations in perspectives. However, this type of staging has some strong advantages like its personal interaction with an audience.

Various Illustrations and Photographs of THEATRE-IN-THE-ROUND.

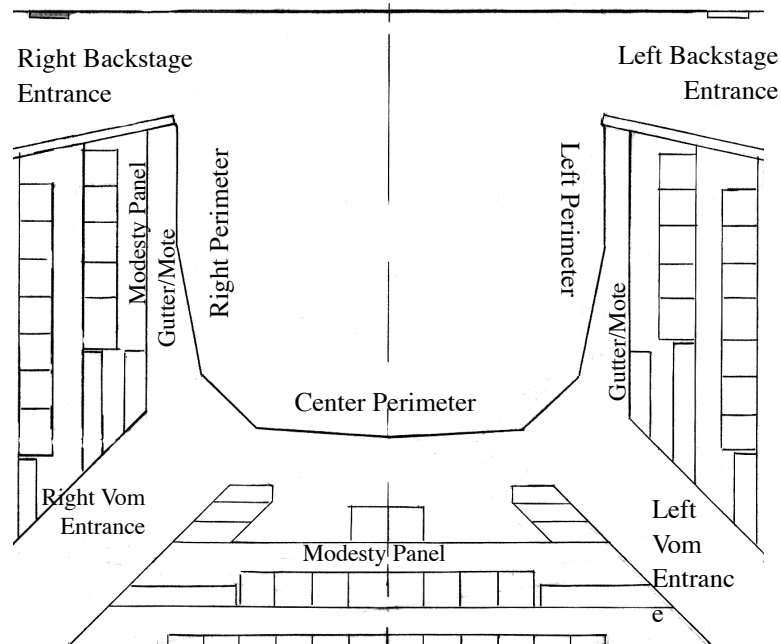


Left, Central staging in a small theatre, Croyden, England. Center, Body Positions— Arena Set: in the arena the actors face the audience from various directions. *The Toy Cart* by King Shudraka. Bates College Theatre. Right, The original Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., with the properties set for *Mother Courage*.



Left, Tufts University production of *Under Milkwood* in an arena theatre. Right, Arena— Vertical View: the arena audience sees actors from numerous viewpoints. The Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Audience and stage space conceived and designed by Peter Wexler

GLOSSARY OF STAGE TERMS UNIQUE TO THE THRUST



Arena Stage: see Theater-in-the-Round

Central Staging: see Theater-in-the-Round

Gutter: The area surrounding and separating the stage foot print and the audience seating sections. This small trough creates an aesthetic gulf between the actor and the audience members.

Modesty Panel: A low wall or railing positioned in front of the first row of each of the audience sections. Used in thrust and arena (theatre-in-the-round) theatres. In certain theatres these are the only items separating the audience and the acting area. Sometimes these are used as scenic elements and designed for a specific production. The origin of this phrase “modesty” panel comes from the need to protect the female audience members who wear skirts sitting in the front rows from the eyes of those in the audience section opposite them. This phase is also used for the front panels on desks and tables.

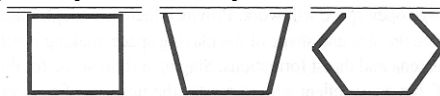
Moat, another word for the “gutter” defined above.

Open Stage: An alternate name for a thrust stage, used predominately in England.

Perimeter: The outer edges of stage area which can have its name designated by the audience section to which it is in proximity, ie., right perimeter, left perimeter, center perimeter (depending on the number of sides of the stage foot print)—these areas are still designated, as usual, from the actors view point, not the audiences. Called the apron or downstage in a proscenium theatre.

Platform Stage: An alternate name for a thrust stage, used predominately in England.

Stage foot print: the actual size and shape of the thrust stage. They vary from a square or rectangle or having as many as eight sides or angles. Shapes of thrust stages vary considerably, with three of the most popular variations shown here.



Theater-in-the-Round (also called Central Staging or Arena) is a type of open performance space which allows the audience to completely surround the action on all sides.

Thrust Stage or Thrust Theatre, also called Open stage or Platform Stage: One of the five major theatre structure forms used today, along with the **proscenium stage**, the **proscenium stage with a thrust addition** (sometimes also called a modified thrust), the **theatre-in-the-round** (also called an arena stage), and the **flexible stage** (sometimes called a “**black box**” theatre) with multi-configurations of the seating sections/platforms— including L-shaped (the stage in the corner), end stage (proscenium type), U-shaped (with the audience on three sides), tunnel-shaped (the audience on opposite sides of the acting area which has setting areas on the right and the left and acting area connecting these down the center), and the audience split in sections to produce a number of acting areas.

tumpties: in thrust stage prop design tumpties are boxes that serve double duty as both props— such as short pillars, columns, or benches— and storage units. This word for this item was developed at The Stratford Festival of Canada. Regarding this word I could only find the following quote from *Fanny Goes To War* by Pat Beauchamp: “Packing cases were made into seats and piles of extra blankets were covered and made into "tumpties," while round the stove stood the interminable clothes ...”

Vomitary (also called a Vomitorium or **Vom**, for short.) from vomitoria— vah-mih-TAW-ree-a (Latin pl.; sing. vomitorium. English sing.: vomitory): Thrust stage entrances or exits for audience (and actors), originally vaulted passageways leading to or from the cavea; entrances piercing the banks of seats of theatres or amphitheatres. While there was something called a vomitorium (from the Latin *vomitum*, past participle of *vomere*, to vomit), it wasn’t a room set aside to vomit in. Rather a vomitorium was a passageway in an amphitheater or theater that opened into a tier of seats from below or behind. The vomitoria of the Colosseum in Rome were so well designed that it’s said the immense venue, which seated at least 50,000, could fill in 15 minutes. There were 80 entrances at ground level, 76 for ordinary spectators and 4 for the imperial family. The vomitoria deposited mobs of people into their seats and afterward disgorged them with equal abruptness into the streets— whence, presumably, the name.

INTRODUCTION TO DIRECTING & SCENERY ON THE THRUST STAGE

What makes directing and designing for the Thrust Stage different from directing or designing for any other type of stage, a proscenium or a theatre-in-the-round?

Thrust staging has many advantages. This playing area makes possible— indeed demands— fluid, three-dimensional staging and a design approach that relies on superbly constructed costumes and props, with only the most judicious use of set elements, to create the world of the play.

On the thrust stage, the world of the play cannot be created by bulky and static sets: rather, it must be defined by things in fluid motion, things that are worn and handled, and that can stand scrutiny from every angle, like a sculpture, making space and movement a vital part of the theatrical design.

Because the audience can view the performance from a variety of perspectives, it is usual for the blocking, props and scenery to receive thorough consideration to ensure that no perspective is blocked from view. A high backed chair, for instance, when placed stage right, could create a blind spot in the stage left action.

On a thrust stage with audience on three sides, the fourth side is often occupied by scenery. By virtue of having a back wall the thrust stage also retains some of the illusionistic possibilities of the proscenium stage, especially because the members of the audience are all able to see a projection or a set located there. The one wall of scenery can provide doors or an archway for entrances and exits, even a stairway and balcony could be located there.⁶ When the actors are close to that upstage end of the stage, they can be blocked as if they were on a proscenium stage. And, of course, that end of the stage provides a place where actors can stand without interfering with the view of some of the audience.

A not inconsiderable feature of the thrust stage is that since less scenery is required or expected, productions can ordinarily be mounted at lower cost. Although this is a trade off, it might cost less than a larger set, but it will require much more detail and attention.

Moreover, the fact that an audience sits on three sides is no reason to limit set design to furniture alone. You should think of this stage as having all the potentials of a circus arena, with vertical exploitation one of its important new possibilities. Thus, this stage becomes a cube which can be occupied dramatically and theatrically not only by actors but also by look-through scenery. Anything goes as long as it stays within the logic of its aesthetic. Placing covered scenery (flats or walls) on this stage would certainly obscure audience vision, but when skeletal frames are introduced you have both good vision and the suggestion of Baroque scenery. Looking through such frames is no problem at all for audiences, for we actually see much in real life through interrupted views. You must learn to exploit this stage in every possible way.

Lloyd Anton Frerer's experience with a production of *The Rainmaker* provides an example of thrust staging. The Curry farmhouse consisted of a sofa in front of the fourth wall, which contained an exit to the remainder of the house. In the center of the stage was a circular dining table and chairs. An aisle through the audience opposite the fourth wall served as the front entrance to the home. The only neutral areas where an actor could stand for any length of time were near the sofa or in the front doorway. As usual, the key to the blocking was to create a profusion of movement.⁷

But another convention operates in thrust staging that tends to break down its illusory elements: members of an audience can fully see and watch many other members of an audience. This 'panavision' creates the paradox of an audience watching lifelikeness of a very subtle sort take place in front of them at the same time it is participating in an obvious communal experience. When an audience surrounds a play, it is performing one of the oldest rituals of mankind: the tribe standing or sitting in a circle around its ritual dancers, its medicine man, its heroes who move around the fire in the center.

Thus, the intimacy of thrust staging is its prime convention, for the audience can sense the actor in a very personal way: his breathing, his perspiration, his body sounds, even the shower of his spittle when he speaks vigorously. It is a kind of motion picture in live stage form.

POWER POINTS:

Think details not grand scale.

Its not a canvas, but a sculpture.

Think not of a big picture, but an intimate canvas.

⁶ See the collection of photographs later in this supplement to examine examples of these techniques.

⁷ More on blocking and movement for the thrust stage later.