Chapter 1 - WHAT IS THE THEATRE?

The origins of theatre are ancient. The English words for theatre and drama have their roots in Ancient Greece. Today, we use the word “theatre” in a variety of ways, as a place for dramatic performance, a company of players with a vision that animates them, and an occupation. A theatre may be an elaborate structure in size, decoration, and functionality. The only requirement of a theatre is, however, an empty space with a place to act and a place to watch. Theatre may also suggest its nature as a collaborative art by indicating the company or troupe into which its practitioners have formed. Additionally, theatre may refer to a larger group of artists, plays, buildings, and practices that constitute, for instance, the American theatre or the Elizabethan theatre. Finally, theatre is an occupation and an avocation. As such it involves the work of many people in multiple functions. Theatre also holds relationships to play, games, and sports that suggest its impulses originate in human nature. Theatre is also artistic work that involves a quality unique in the arts, that of impersonating characters. As an art, it utilizes differing modes of performance, representational and presentational. Theatre is a live event putting performers and audiences in an immediate and mutually affecting relationship.

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<th>Theatron</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Playwriting</th>
<th>Representational</th>
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<td>Dram</td>
<td>Designers</td>
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<td>Producer</td>
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<td>Director</td>
<td>House manager</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Company</td>
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Chapter 2 – WHAT IS A PLAY?

As the basic unit of theatre, a play is not a thing so much as an event, an action surrounding a conflict. It can also be seen as a piece of literature, and its 2500 years of written practice has given rise to two ways to understand the nature and potential of dramatic form. One method of understanding plays is to classify them. Duration is one method of grouping plays, but the more useful, although subjective approach is through genre. Tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, dark comedy, farce, melodrama, documentary, and musicals are some of the classifications that have been given to types of drama, but generic classification is subjective to a high degree, and plays often escape easy designation. Historically, scholars and theatre practitioners have relied upon two primary ways of analyzing the structure of particular plays. Aristotle initiated analysis of a play according to its components 2500 years ago, and yet his list of a drama’s six parts, with the modern addition of a seventh, convention, is still useful to understanding how a play functions. Another way to evaluate a play’s structure is to break down its temporal order. With an appreciation that plays exist in time and therefore within a theatrical experience, Aristotle’s observation that drama has a beginning, middle, and end can be expanded to include the groupings of the preplay, the play proper, and the postplay.

- Action
- Conflict
- Genre
- Tragedy
- Comedy
- Interlude
- Cycle plays
- History plays
- Tragicomedy

- Dark comedy
- Melodrama
- Farce
- Documentary
- Plot
- Characters
- Theme
- Diction
- Music

- Spectacle
- Convention
- Procession
- Transition
- Exposition
- Climax
- Denouement
- Curtain call
- Critics

Chapter 3 – THE ACTOR

Being the most public, the actor is its best-known theatre artist to audiences, and acting is the art of the theatre that most people believe they know most about. Since the time of the Ancient Greeks (our term Thespian comes from Thespis, the “first” actor) theatre artists have recognized two different and seemingly contradictory notions of acting. In one, the actor
"presents" a role to the audience through physical and vocal skill, abilities to imitate characters, and related talents, such as dancing, singing, fencing, improvisation, etc. Such a "presentational" approach is developed through a program of training that originates from an external instructional process. This is the traditional EXTERNAL method seen in the work of great British actors like Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud and Kenneth Branagh. The second notion maintains that acting originates from inside the actor. The actor attempts to enter, through the imagination, the world of the play and live the life of the character. Because such an approach seeks to represent, not just present, all aspects of the character portrayed, it is known as representation. This is another way to describe the INTERNAL approach or "The Method" originated by Stanislavski and taught widely in the U.S.

The debate over the respective value of these two notions has been debated for centuries but, somewhat paradoxically, fine acting contains elements of each. The development of vocal, physical, and mental skills has been a traditional attraction of actors throughout history, and while the rise of realism created a temporary eclipse of such virtuosity in the middle of the twentieth century, traditional skills of the theatre have made a comeback in recent decades. Unlike most artists, the actor's instrument is the self. Training the actor's instrument, therefore, requires development of the physiological and psychological instruments. Training of the voice includes improving basics such as breathing, phonation, and resonance, as well as elements of speech, such as articulation, pronunciation, and phrasing, to create clear projection. Movement is trained through dance, mime, fencing, acrobatics, and other disciplines to develop relaxation, muscular control, and economy of action. Psychologically the actor develops discipline and three areas of imagination. In creating a role, three elements of an integrated acting technique are shared by nearly all approaches. The first is pursuing the solution to the "character's problem." Some teachers call this objective, intention, task, victory, want or goal. Second is identifying the tactics necessary to reach the goal, and last is researching the style of the play and mode of performance that will govern the production.

The actor's professional routine contains three stages, which cover the attainment (usually through an audition), preparation, and performance of a role. For nearly all actors, auditioning for roles is necessary, and is done through "cold readings" from the script of the planned production or prepared audition pieces, which are usually one- or two-minute monologues from plays or other works of literature. During the rehearsal period of a play—usually a few weeks—the actor learns the role, investigates the character's biography, subtext, thoughts, goals, and the world of the play itself. In addition, lines and movements are memorized and the actor experiments and discovers the possibilities of the role. Performance brings with it a fundamental shift in the actor's awareness, since the addition of the audience requires adjustments in the general sense and specifics, such as timing, of performance. Performance also carries potential problems, such as stage fright and keeping the performance fresh after multiple performances. The excitement of acting lures many people who wish to become actors, but, statistically, the chances of developing a longstanding acting career are slim. To do so requires great talent, skill, perseverance, and personal fortitude.

Konstantin Stanislavsky
Denis Diderot
The Moscow Art Theatre

The Actor's Paradox
Lee Strasberg
Patrick Stewart

The Actors Studio
Meryl Streep

Chapter 4 – THE PLAYWRIGHT

The playwright is both the most central figure of the theatre (from whose work the enterprise originates) but the most peripheral artist to the creation of the event. In a playwright’s career, writing the play is the first step, but the work is not complete, ultimately, until on a stage. There are a number of ways by which plays reach “the boards.” Open rehearsals, developmental workshops, staged readings, solicitation by theatres, new play festivals, developmental theatre companies, contests, agents, and fellowships all provide means of getting new work produced. The written script is, in a sense, a blueprint for the play. Also in contrast to other literary forms, its core is not descriptions or observations but an ordering of observable, actable events. Its core is action.

Qualities such as credibility and intrigue, richness, depth of characterization, gravity and pertinence impart the weight, depth, dimension, and sense of importance to life that great plays contain. Speakability, stageability, flow, compression, economy, and intensity constitute its more easily discernable craft and give a specific and effective form to a play. In the end, all fine plays, concerned as they are with an art bound up so intimately with life, are a celebration of life. Some of the
most exciting playwriting of the twentieth century was done in America. Eugene O'Neill was noted internationally both for his realistic and antirealistic works. American playwrights after him have often, like Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, blended elements such as realism, poetry, social commentary, and antirealism into a single play. Today, however, women, persons of color, and persons who write openly from the viewpoint of their sexual orientations have entered the ranks of the country’s most produced and admired playwrights. Examining the work of a group of playwrights who have gained an international audience suggests the vitality and diversity of perspectives and forms in American playwriting today.

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<tr>
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<td>Tom Stoppard</td>
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<td>Anton Chekhov</td>
<td>Harold Pinter</td>
<td>Neil LaBute</td>
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<td>Arthur Miller</td>
<td>August Wilson</td>
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<td>Tennessee Williams</td>
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<td>Lynn Nottage</td>
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Chapter 6 – THE DIRECTOR

Because the product of the director's art is not directly visible, audible, or sensed, it is perhaps the most ambiguous and mysterious in the theatre. Although the development of the director as an independent theatre artist has occurred in the past century, directing has been going on since theatre began. This evolution of the modern director can be divided into three phases: Teacher-directors, Realistic directors and Stylizing directors.

The director today serves a number of different functions: When an independent producer is not involved, the director accepts responsibility for the financial support of the production. Fundamentally, the director envisions the primary lines of the productions and provides the leadership to realize that vision.

The steps necessary to do so divide into two phases. In the preparatory phase, before rehearsals begin, the director selects the play (if the producer has not done so), formulates the guiding concept for the production, selects designers, guides and collaborates in a process of designing the look and sound of the show, and casts the actors.

During the implementation phase, much of the director's focus turns to the actors, as he or she stages the movement and positioning of actors and objects, coaches the actors toward effective performances, conducts the pacing of each section of the play, coordinates the designs with the acting and general staging in the final rehearsals, and gives the performance over to those that will present it.

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<tr>
<th>Georg II the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen</th>
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<tr>
<td>Konstantin Stanislavski</td>
<td>Julie Taymor</td>
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<td>Andre Antoine</td>
<td>Susan Stroman</td>
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<td>Mike Nichols</td>
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Your notes