



# DIRECTING TERMS

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# ACTION

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❖ What one is doing most at any given time. May be successful or unsuccessful.

# BASIC ACTION

❖ The essential action, over time, perceived by the audience of the event. It should be active, not passive. It's useful to perceive it in three parts (after Aristotle, although it need not be linear): beginning, middle and end. The beginning defines the state of the subject and his/her/their initial action; the middle develops that action; the end ends it.



# BASIC IDEA

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❖ The most basic theme or message of your production. Often stated as: "This is a play about \_\_\_\_\_, and this is how we want the audience to feel about that topic: \_\_\_\_\_."





# TONE

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❖ The feeling or emotional quality of a play, scene, beat, etc. An adjective.



# THEME

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- ❖ The main idea of the play.



# AUDIENCE

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❖ Those who fulfill the theatrical event by witnessing it, thereby changing it and validating it.



# CONCEPT

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❖ Why a director is doing a production here and now. Requires three elements: director's self-analysis regarding motive (usually incorporates a story); an active transitive verb (which creates a bridge to the audience and becomes the event itself); and the intended, or target, audience (its wants and needs).





# FUNDAMENTALS

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❖ The basic tools for understanding, fulfilling and controlling the work as you develop it on the stage. They are: composition, movement, rhythm, pantomimic dramatization and picturization.



# COMPOSITION

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❖ The physical relationship of items (including people) on stage, understood in three dimensions. Composition has inherent meaning and creates focus. It can enhance issues of power and intimacy, opposition or closeness.



# MOVEMENT

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❖ A change of composition. Movement includes compositional changes made by actors, scenery or lighting. Movements may be direct or indirect, strong or weak, depending on how the composition is changed. Usefully understood as push/pull or neutral energy (or positive/negative, convex/concave, etc.)



# PANTOMIMIC DRAMATIZATION

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- ❖ Movement within a composition by an actor, revelatory of inner state or character. How a character moves or does things physically. Stage business, often connected to props.





# PICTURIZATION

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- ❖ The revelation of subtext through the combined use of the other four fundamentals.



# RHYTHM

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❖ The pattern within any given unit of time. Rhythm carries with it emotional associations, and is very useful in creating feeling. Note that rhythm may stay the same as tempo varies (for example, a waltz may speed up but it is still a waltz rhythm).



# SCRIPT

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❖ The words and annotations of a playwright's imagination. Usually, the inspiration for the play that is performed.



# PLAY

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- ❖ The theatrical event you develop from the script.





# STORY

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- ❖ 'The primary event, starting at point "a" and moving to point "b."'



# SUBJECT

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❖ The subject of the play is the central character(s) understood in their most basic qualities. It relates to topic and theme. For example, the subject of Hamlet could be a young man, a jaded student, an abused son, a revenging revolutionary, a dysfunctional family, a rotten state, etc., all depending on what the play is about to you.



# TYPE

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❖ Attitude the material takes to certain relationships, namely: ego (generally central character), society and cosmos. Examples: comedy, tragedy, farce, melodrama, tragicomedy, drama.



# TRAGICOMEDY

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❖ A type of play which moves back and forth between tragedy/melodrama and comedy/farce. It does not mix these elements (as in drama), but keeps them separate, usually for maximum emotional or dramatic effect.





# TRAGEDY

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❖ A type of play which is fundamentally serious, dealing with issues which cannot be reconciled to each other or to our logical understanding. Hence: an event of cosmic and unknowable or mysterious proportions. We are primarily interested in the relationship of individual(s) to cosmos.



# MELODRAMA

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❖ A type of play where the issues appear to be tragic but are actually dramatic. Creates an emotional roller-coaster of ever-increasing dynamic. Usually a nightmare with happy ending, melodrama tends to simplify the issues to a clash of good vs. evil, without letting on that it is doing so. NOTE: "melodrama" is also an historical term to denote those early plays which combined popular music and drama; as these were often melodramatic as well, there is potential confusion about the use of the term. Also, some people use the term pejoratively to denote false emoting.



# FARCE

❖ A type of play which mixes humor and derisiveness, whose fundamental value system is that people's true motives are their selfish and lowest-common denominator desires and needs. Often, there are comic characters as foils.



# DRAMA

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❖ A type of play which is basically serious or has a balanced tone such as we find in life. the important issues are psychological or social. We are primarily interested in the psychological relationships of people within their society.





# COMEDY

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❖ A type of play which is essentially light and life-affirming, and which generally, through humor and wit, reconciles individuals within their society.



# GAME

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❖ A social event in which people who start out the same become, as a result of the event, different in some fundamental way. The opposite of a ritual.



# RITUAL

❖ A social event, which may include any number of ceremonious or repetitive actions, in which people who start out different, become the same in some fundamental way (for example, any rite of passage).

Opposite of a game.



# STYLE

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❖ Attitude the material takes to reality. Modified by distance from reality, or direction away from it. An infinite and variable continuum.





# ABSURDISM

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❖ An unlikely mix of styles, for the purpose of keeping the audience off base, such that there is no stable awareness of, or attitude to, reality.



# CLASSIC

❖ Style of theatre which embodies and promotes a balanced, socially ideal point of view. Form is often more important than content.



# EPIC THEATRE

❖ A style of theatre pioneered by Piscator and Brecht which emphasizes the socio-political context (perhaps to epic proportions) of every action or situation. The dialectic of any given moment is emphasized; notice always the form or context. The context may be created by music, irony, supertitles, simultaneous actions, or any number of other theatricalist techniques. We need to see both the way things are and the way things might be.



# EXPRESSIONISM

❖ Style of play, appearing like a dream or nightmare, which typically follows the inner experience of a central character or characters through a psychological journey. Usually moves from realistic beginning to fantasy, provoked by a traumatic event, and back to reality. May be understood as an objective view of subjective reality, or as society's struggle with its psychologically unstable members.

Example: "The Wizard of Oz."





# HYPERREALISM

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❖ A style of play, often exemplified by Pinter, which emphasizes a detailed, scientific view of several individual points of view simultaneously. Impossible to validate any particular viewpoint, each character seems to be suspended under a microscope, living only in the moment.



# IMPRESSIONISM

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❖ A style of play which gives impressions of the feelings of life. The focus is on the feelings, the evanescence, the fragility of human experience. Much of Chekhov, Williams and Saroyan may be profitably viewed as impressionist.



# NATURALISM

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❖ A style of theatre which seeks the most objective or scientific view of life possible. Often translates into a very detailed and unpleasant view of life at its seamiest.



# REALISM

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- ❖ A style of theatre which attempts to be as close to reality as practicable. It finds truth in reality (not the case in stylized plays).





# ROMANTIC

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❖ Style which emphasizes and sympathizes with the individual over society.



# SELECTIVE REALISM

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❖ A style of theatre somewhere between realism and stylization.

Often, unnecessary elements are "selected" away, for example, walls and everyday details.



# GENRE

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❖ The theatrical tool(s) used to communicate to an audience most effectively. Examples: dramatic-textual (the standard text-based play), puppet show, mime, intermedia, circus, parade, etc. The infinite variety of genre is particularly useful in contemporary theatre.



# COMMERCIAL REALISTIC THEATRE

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❖ The predominant genre of theatre today. The theatrical event has a commercial purpose (and, often, theme) and finds realism to be the most useful means.





# POLITICAL THEATRE

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❖ Theatre which values itself for its socio-political position and effectiveness. the art is secondary to its political efficacy. Taken to extremes, it devalues the theatrical as false in favor of the politics alone.



# POOR THEATRE

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❖ A genre of theatre. See Austere Theatre.



# TOTAL THEATRE

❖ A genre of theatre which makes a virtue of using many theatrical tools, typically music, popular forms (eg. puppets, circus, vaudeville, etc.) More is more, here. Opposite of Austere Theatre.



# AESTHETIC CONFIGURATION

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❖ The spatial relationship between the stage elements and the audience, which is reflective of the concept verb, eg., proscenium, thrust, round, environmental, railroad stages.





# AESTHETIC DISTANCE

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- ❖ The psychological and spatial degree of engagement you wish to foster between the material and the audience.



# AUSTERE THEATRE

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❖ A genre of theatre which makes a virtue of minimalism. Less is more, here.



# CASTING SHEET

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❖ There are two kinds: one for the public, and one for the director. The public one lets actors and agents know the basic outlines of the role; often these are unimaginative type-casting descriptions. The private one reminds you at a glance the fundamental aspects of the character in terms you easily recognize: may be images, lines, people from your own experience; or it can be generic, like the public version.



# CONCEPTUAL IMAGE

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- ❖ A non-verbal or abstract way of understanding or appreciating the atmosphere, environment, action or character. May often be more useful than logical analysis.





# DIRECTOR

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❖ The person responsible for envisioning and creating a theatrical event or play for an audience.



# DYNAMIC

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❖ The emotional state or flow, often expressed as levels of intensity or pitch.



# MOVEMENT

❖ A change of composition. Movement includes compositional changes made by actors, scenery or lighting. Movements may be direct or indirect, strong or weak, depending on how the composition is changed. Usefully understood as push/pull or neutral energy (or positive/negative, convex/concave, etc.)



# PRODUCTION

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- ❖ Generally, the fulfillment of the script; the play in performance.  
More specifically, the technical aspects of the play not including the text or actors.





# PRODUCTION SCHEME

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❖ The specific "Hows" of your production. Most basically, production scheme deals with how the audience is taken from entering the theatre to the time they leave: especially, scene changes, use of curtain and genre elements, black outs, sound bridges, pre-show, post-show and intermissions, as appropriate.



# PROGRAM NOTES

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❖ May help enrich the audience's experience by providing a context within which the play may be viewed. When program notes become so extensive or necessary that the play may not be enjoyed or understood without them, you're in trouble.



# PROPS

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❖ Most useful for grounding an actor. "People lie, objects don't."

An actor relating to the right prop is usually truthful. Inexperienced actors benefit enormously from props. Experienced actors know how to use props to reveal subtext and find unique ways to use them.



# QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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❖ An analysis of who's on stage when. Usually broken down by French Scene, but may be customized any appropriate way. Useful to determine: number of people on stage at any given time; patterns of characters; overall rhythms of scenes; relative sizes of roles; any number of other patterns such as locations, costumes, etc.





# STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

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❖ Understanding a play through key elements of its dramaturgical construction, most notably the exposition, starting point of the major complication, the crisis, the climax and the denouement. typical patterns are: rising action/falling action, cyclical, linear or non-linear action.



# SUBJECT

---

❖ The subject of the play is the central character(s) understood in their most basic qualities. It relates to topic and theme. For example, the subject of Hamlet could be a young man, a jaded student, an abused son, a revenging revolutionary, a dysfunctional family, a rotten state, etc., all depending on what the play is about to you.



# TARGET AUDIENCE

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❖ The audience you most want to influence or play to. May be general or specific. Once the target audience is visualized and understood, a concept can be developed.




# TEMPO

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❖ The relative speed of a moment, beat, action, scene, or play.





# TITLE

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❖ Apart from the actual title of the play or scenes, it may be useful for you to re-title the play itself or events within it to help you remember what it is, mostly, to you. It helps you keep the forest in mind when the trees are getting in the way.



# TOPIC

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❖ The subject matter of the play; the issue. Often best understood as a question or a dialectic.