

THEA S4215 New York Theatre Event Class Notes

05/23/2016—06/29/2016

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Introduction

Aristotle suggested that mimesis (imitation) is innate in humans. One of the purpose of this course is to express your opinions, with supported evidence and details. Some other online resources:

<http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/spd130et/LessIndex.htm>

<https://www.show-score.com/shows>

Why learning Theatre?

- Theatre as Liberal Arts
- Theatre as social force: understand society, custom, values. i.e. gay, *Fun Home*
Didactic: drama as teaching mechanism
Mimesis: drama as imitation of an action
- Theatre as a personal force
- Theatre as art forms

History of NY Theatre

<http://www.musicals101.com/bwaythhist.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/bwaythhist1.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/bwaythhist2.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/bwaythhist3.htm>

<http://www.musicals101.com/bwaythhist4.htm>

Beginnings

Dec. 6, 1732 *The recruiting officer* first play on acted on NY at NASSAU STREET THEATRE

Dec. 3, 1750 *The Beggars Opera* first musical performance

The Park Theatre

Sex in the Balcony

Race & Class (William Henry Brown), class fight

Population boom leads to entertainment

P.T. Barnum, Laura Keane (actress managers)

Civil wars

Brooklyn theatre caught on fire (monument in Greenwood cemetery)

Union square, Madison square, large arch times square

Blizzard of 1888

1904 the subway opened in NYC, more convenient to go to plays

Population move from Lower Manhattan to upper Manhattan

Playwriting

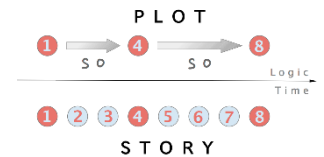
Aristotle's Six Parts of a Tragedy

(A) Plot, (B) Character, (C) Thought (theme, idea), (D) Diction (language), (E) Music (sound), and (F) Spectacle.

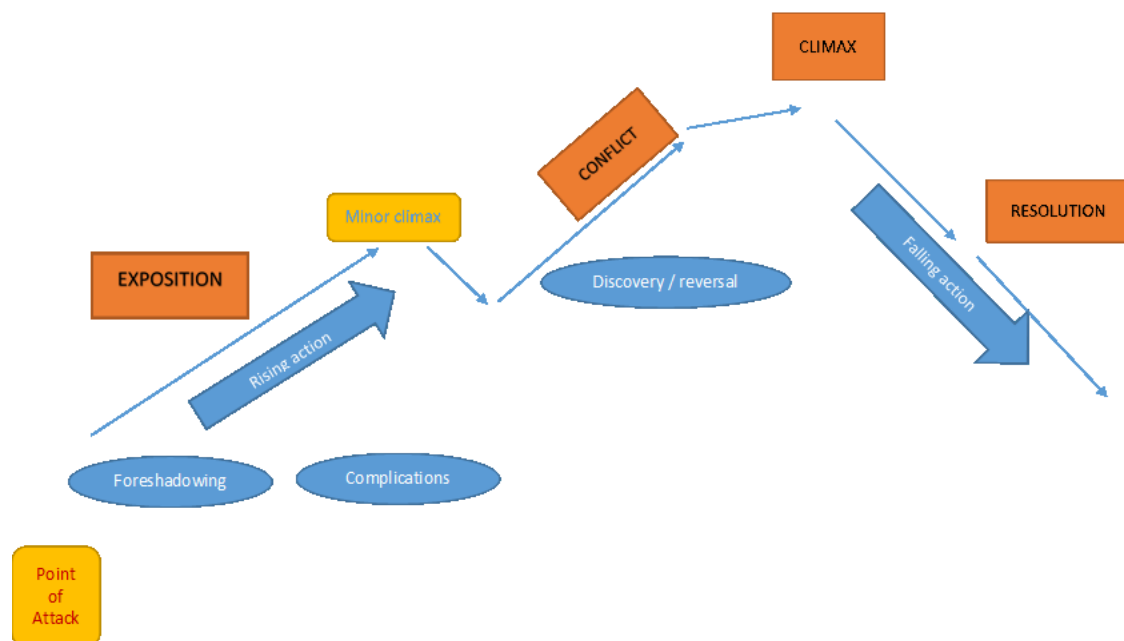
Plot

A *story* is what happens. There are five components: the characters, the setting, the plot, the conflict, and the resolution. A story is a full account of an event or series of events, usually in chronological order.

A *plot* is how it happens. It's a selection and arrangement of scenes. Aristotle, in *The Poetics*, said that plot is the soul of tragedy: it holds story together contains the incidents in the play, produces tragic effects, has the most tragic element (reversals, discoveries). It may not be continuous like story.



The Elements of Plot



Rising Action

- 1. Exposition:** Everything the audience needs to know to understand the play. What is the setting (time, place) and situation (character, dialog)? How is this information revealed? (through dialog, monolog, action, flashback, major characters, minor characters, etc.)
 - (1) *Antecedent action* is what information is revealed about events that occurred before the play began (the past).
 - (2) *The point of attack* is where does the play begin in relation to the story.
 - (3) *Foreshadowing* is what may happen later.
- 2. Conflict:** the clash of opposing forces.
 - (1) *Inciting incident* is the event that occurs in the play to begin the major conflict. The inciting/initiating incident of the play must occur within the play itself. The inciting/initiating incident cannot be part of the antecedent action.
 - (2) *Complications or Obstacles* is the catalyst that begins the major conflict. (Unknown information, new insights, confusion of the issues, surprises)
- 3. Climax:** the point at which one or the other of the forces is favored; the point at which events must turn in one direction or another. It is the turning point in the story that occurs when

characters try to resolve the complication. Not necessarily the “high point”. *Minor Climax* is usually end of Act 1.

Failing Action

4. **Resolution:** whatever comes after the climax. The set of events that bring the story to a close.

Three Types of Plots

Climactic, Episodic, and Non-sequitur		
Climactic	Episodic	Non-sequitur
Late point of attack (background info comes primarily from exposition) Short span of time (<i>Oedipus</i> -- only the time of the play - - <i>Ghosts, Phaedra</i>)	Early point of attack (in Shakespeare's plays, we need to know very little that has happened before the play begins—most of what is important happens during the play itself)	Theatre of the Absurd – not a unified school or theory Beckett, Ionesco
Limited number of long segments (Greek – 5 episodes separated by choral odes) Neoclassical – 5 acts Now – 2 acts	Longer period of time sometimes years (<i>Lear, Caucasian Chalk Circle, R&J, Hamlet</i>) Many short, fragmented scenes—tries to grasp various facets of man	Inconsistency, meaninglessness (absurdity) form and content both express absurdity
Restricted locale – usually one room or place	May range over entire city or many countries (<i>Othello</i> —from Cyprus to Venice)	verbal nonsense
Limited number of characters – 6 - 8	Many characters – dozens in Shakespeare's plays	Existential characters – have little background, no clear causes for actions
Causal structure – linear – few subplots or counter plots Plot A-B-C-D	Many threads of action parallel plots, comic relief, subplots, etc. juxtaposed scenes	Non-traditional structure
Action is causal	Not necessarily causal complicated web of causes	Causality minimized
Compressed	Expansion	Chaos

Workshop

Workshop had been a process of receiving critiques and improving the play. However, workshop has also been controversial because most of the times a play has gone through so many workshops but never been to the production process. (Reading: *Workshopped to Death*)

Giving Feedback

Ask neutral questions. Focus on things you enjoy while avoiding radical opinions. Don't tell them what to do but ask them what they think. See reading *The Art of Giving Feedback* and *Critical Response Format*.

Critical Response to a Play

Describe a landscape the play portrays (still), compare the changes over time (moving), and talk about how progression finally impact spectators/viewers. See reading *Some Questions to Ask a Play*.

Theatre Criticism

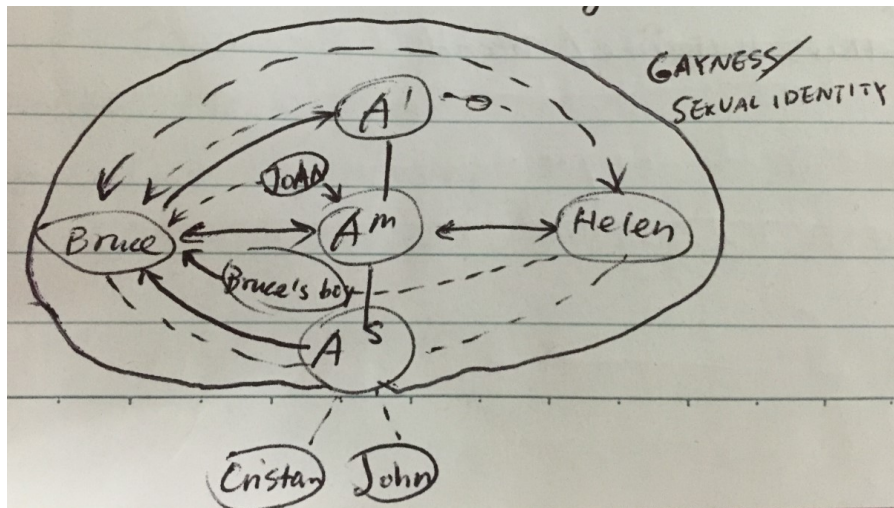
Criticism are controversial. They sometimes are biased and sometimes too critical. Critics can influence the success of a play but it also can destroy a play. People read critics because they want to arrive at opinions without by their own. More readings on folder *Week 2 (Wednesday) – Playwriting*.

Character Constellation

How character group together

1. List all characters (people you see in the play)
2. List characters not seen on stage but being talked about a lot
3. Usually start with people on stage; find a center among the list to start from

Example: character constellation from *Fun Home*



Directing

Introduction video Hamlet's *Speak the Speech* (Hamlet's advice to the players)

The History

<http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/spd130et/director.htm>

"choregus"

playwright stage and cast the play in ancient Greek.

Roman theatre → medieval theatre "Master of Secrets" and "Keeper of the Register"

Managerial rather than artistic.

Notion of Directing comes from tradition of "Actor/Manager".

- Moliere (producer, actor, writer): find a way to link cohesively
- Richard Wagner: wanted total control over production; focused on illusionistic theatre; "gesamtkunstwerk"
- David Garrick: no audience on stage (class loyalty on stage to be seen); natural style of acting; importance of scene design; not called a "director" but called as producer.

How things change

- George II, Duke of Saxe Meiningen: Specialized in historical drama

Contemporary Director

- Andre Antoine (founder of contemporary director): challenged static and declamatory nature of acting of his time; sought truthfulness

Moving to Contemporary Director

Start late 1800. Need for a unification of theatrical elements. Three Trends.

(1) Actor or Ensemble Based Theatre

- Constantin Stanislavsky & Nemirovich-Danchenko
Play is the starting point for the director's work
Realism to work with actor
Great appreciation of playwright
From *external realism (external objects)* to *psychological realism (emphasis on interior characterization, motives, circumstances, and internal action)*
- Otto Brahm
Sense of *naturalism (like realism, the play is close to the real world)*
Created an ensemble by focusing on individual talents
Inner spirit of work

(2) Plastic or Physical Theatre

- Catching physical reality
- David Belasco
Used sensory approach (highly detailed sets, used scents in the vents of theatre)
Used cutting-edge technology like lighting
- Edward Gordon Craig (see reading *On the Art of the Theatre First Dialogue*)
Designers wanted to control variable and unpredictability of actors (control actors, physical movements like puppets)—never realized
Wanted “uber-marionettes”
- Vsevolod Meyerhold
Bio-mechanics (system of actor training)
Create truth thorough gesture (like dance)
In place of *naturalism*, he sought *symbolism (symbolic, exaggeration, not realistic)*
Improvisation

(3) Writer Based Theatre

- Bertolt Brecht
“*Verfremdungseffekt*” (alienation effect)—alienation of reality
Play is a representation of reality, not reality itself
How? Direct address, speaking stage directions (i.e. directly saying “I will do X” and do it), use of songs, unnatural lighting
- Max Reinhardt
Atmosphere of text set by production whether realistic or not
Importance of theatre itself for story

Note: the authoritarian director resulted from industrialization (regiment what is happening)

Early 1900 “Director” widely used

Contemporary trends in directors

(1) Actor or Ensemble Based

- Steppenwolf theatre
- Anne Bogart/SITI Company

(2) Playwright Based

- Most theatre companies

(3) Design or Vision Based

- Peter Brook
- Mary Zimmerman

Types of Director

- (1) Artistic Director: the producer who chooses materials to produce and leads the company. He/she also serves as a liaison between company and stage directors.
- (2) Stage Directors: in charge of everything happens on stage (directing).
- (3) Casting Directors: oversee casting, choose/appoint actors.

Casting Director is the head of admissions. Artistic Director is the head of department. Stage Director is the professor who teaches the class.

Directing vs. Producing

Directing focuses on show and artistic elements. Producing is operating the business (money, profits, etc.). Directing is not a process of producing.

Investors interact with producers (CEO). Produces are liaison between playwrights and directors (COO).

Artistic & Managerial Functions

Director pulls all theatrical elements together. *On the Art of the Theatre First Dialogue* suggests that elements are action (gesture movement), scene (designer), and voice (spoken word). Its job involves interpretation of scripts, casting, working with other theatre artists in designing the production, rehearsing actors, and coordinating all elements into a finished performance. Directors try to empower everyone working together towards a goal. It involves artistic and managerial functions.

Artistic Functions

- (1) Script Selections
- (2) Analysis of the Script

To help director understand the play and to make director's consciousness capable of staging the play.

- (a) Interpretation

Choices: "interpretative" or "creative"

(Worshipful approach) Scripts creates theatre and Stick to the script VS.

(Heretical approach) Director's job is to interpret the text in order to make a theatrical entity of the entire production for the audience. Use the text to say what you want to say (interpretation)

Writer-Director Relations: playwrights control the copyright (only a few gives up the copyright, see free plays on www.charlesmee.org). some playwrights allow directors to modify their original works, but some are not. Some directors thus like to work with dead playwrights. There are some cases in which playwrights become directors, but it's not good to have a very power person from start to the end. You can have a strong playwright, a weak director; or a strong director and a weak playwright.

Revising the Play: director, actors, and the playwright sit in a room for the first 10 minutes. Then playwright leave. By the end of the meeting the playwright will listen to any problems found. Any problems with acting, talk to director. Any problems with the script, the

playwright may change. When the playwright finds out that the interpretation by director is not what he/she want, here's how "conflict" begins.

(b) Determining the tone of production, relative importance of elements, giving circumstances of the play.

(3) Coordinate the Production Design

Setting the ground plan while being creative
(all pre-production work)

(4) Coaching Actors

Different style: authoritarian, vague, guru-like, etc.

(5) Staging the Play

Managerial Functions

(1) Scheduling

(2) Casting

(3) Rehearsals

Source-works: Viewpoints, and Composition. See reading.

Viewpoints: get actors inside their identities; physical/ensemble; how to move and function as a group; a tool to unlock actors.

(4) Opening night (press)

Acting

<http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/spd130et/acting.htm>

The History

"thespis" considered to be the first actor

Acting was not really widely a "profession" till the 16th century.

Elements of Acting

Acting is (1) a series of task in a situation (2) done as somebody else (3) using imagination.

"The paradox of Actor" by Denis Diderot: "to appear real, the actor must be artificial"

3 basic ingredients of the actor: (1) native ability (talent) (2) training (3) practice

Training

A. Voice and Body

Understanding limitation of body; first have to arrive at "neutral state"

B. Imagination and Observation

Observe and imagine people in various relationships. Adapt one's mannerism and realize where things come from.

Affective Memory: refer to use of the actor's memory to find things in his/her life that are similar to, or could evoke, the emotions required by the character on stage. This would involve **emotional memory** (remembering feeling from the past), **sense memory** (remembering sensations), and **substitution** (mentally replacing the thing / person in the play with something / someone in real life).

C. Control, Discipline, and Concentration

Actors must learn how to develop their powers of concentration.

Acting Process

A. Analyze the role

- (1) Answer “givens” in a script
- (2) Define goals
 - Objectives: what characters want from each scene (intention/purpose)
 - Super Objective/ “Spine”: what characters want from the whole play
 - “Beats”: sub-objectives, changes of mood, intention, subject, etc., in a scene.
- (3) Character relationships
 - Relationship communication: Content of message and relationship of message—subtext, what is underneath the line
- (4) Function the Role Plays
 - Protagonist, antagonist, or foil, a major or minor character.
- (5) Sensitivity to Subtext
 - Not what you say but how you say it
- (6) Role in the overall production

B. Psychological and Emotional Preparation

Ways of inducing belief in self and character when actor finds difficulty fitting self in situation.
The “what if” – what would I do if I were that character in that situation.

Emotional and sense memory – “affective memory” and “substitution,”
Sense memory – clothes, air etc. – how do they affect your senses?

Emotional memory: remembering action/feelings from own life that resemble character's in play.
Substitution: substituting a real person (mentally) for other actor.

C. Movement and Gesture

Stage business: Obvious and detailed physical movement of performers to reveal character, aid action, or establish mood.
Body language/gesture
Blocking: the arrangement and movements of performers relative to each other as well as to furniture and to the places where they enter and leave the stage.

D. Vocal Characteristics

E. Memorization

F. Conservation

External vs Internal Acting

External: technique-based acting. Discovering ways to convey emotions vocally and physically and project to the audience. Requires an intellectual understanding. Uses more of an “outside-in” approach. Do the action and then the feeling will follow. (viewpoint)

Internal: method-based acting. To help actors discover the emotional truth of the character—works best with “realistic” scripts. Uses more of an “inside-out” approach. Think the thought and the action will follow.

Uta Hagen’s Six Steps

See the pdf file in the acting folder.

Notes from *Friend Art*

1. The details are changing overtime in a way that is totally different. Some parts are changing and keep revising until the last moment. (like who didn't use drugs...)
2. There's no clear directions on how to approach the play. No clear answers—keep exploring and wondering
3. Actors have to figure out the role in the overall production. Rehearsal in part of the play has different understanding in the overall production. Actors are trying figure out the characters in a line in the whole play instead of sections and parts. (Role in the overall production)
4. Affective memory – everything that is related to personal life makes it hard for actors to separate themselves from characters in a play (personal judgment attached to things) so that they won't think and behave like the characters in the fictional of the play in a different setting anymore. Actors are trying to wear different shoes, pants, curl their hairs, wear glasses to make them feel “different” and separate from themselves.
5. More of a symbolic instead of realistic acting.

Design

Additional Information <http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/spd130et/designers.htm>

Intro & History

A play is more than words.

- How can setting and character bring an audience into a scene?
- The dramatic imagination

Periaktoi (Greek theatre), Medieval Mystery Plays, Shakespeare's globe, Renaissance Scenic Stage

The Purpose of Design

- Establish a sense of place and time (when/where are we)
- Remind audiences of where the actors are (supposed to be)
- Stimulate imagination of audience
- Answer the “givens” in the script
- Support the emotional content of a production (happy/sad/funny, etc.)

Scenic Design

Creating the space (4 types)

(1) Realistic

- Creates a specific environment
- Strong attention to detail
- Audience is peering into a slice of life
- What wall do you remove?

(2) Lyric

- Create a mood
- Detail less important than effect
- Audience peer into the subtext of the world
- Color & texture

(3) Iconographic

- Usually in musical

- Creates place through simple gesture
- Minute details combine a graph
- Quickly evoke time and space as a whole

(4) Symbolic

- Elements represent themes
- Architecture and color to evoke character
- Style can be subtle or bombastic

Costume Design

Supporting the character, emotional support of actors

- (1) Finding inspiration (board—general feeling of the world)
- (2) Creating a look (sketch)

Lighting Design

Making invisible visible

Purpose of lighting

- Establish time (morning/night)
- Convey a mood
- Support the dramatic intention
- Focus the attention of the audience

How's achieved

- Color/hue
- Density (how bright)
- Projections (light filter through the leaves)
- Focus (underlight)

Sound Design

Touching the soul

Purpose

- Support the requirement of the script
- Reinforce a sense of place and time
- Ensure audience can hear the actors (whether actors are mic-ed or not)
- Through subtle suggestion support the emotional content of the play

How

- Sound effects
- Microphones and speakers (now the mic is super small, stick to the edge of the hair, and fixed—audience cannot see it)
- Music or sound
- Placement and timing

Sound design is not what you hear but how you hear. The music performed by ensemble in a musical is not part of sound design.

Projection Design

The new frontier

Digital mapping

Ex. The yellow rectangle boxed around actors projected on the ground in *Fun Home*

The things displayed on the screen in *Les Mis*

Purpose

- Many same with set design
- Create more cinematic design
- Sometimes used to replace lighting
- Traditional method: more expensive and cumbersome; projection design requires higher technology

Producing

Mixed review

The pros and cons, review by producers

Packed on Tuesday	empty seats
Universal themes	limited appeal
Catchy songs	mediocre score
Character you know	caricatures, silly
Drop-dead funny	slight story
Touching	not enough of spectacle
...	stupid songs...

Money

It's about money: much better bets in Los Vegas

It's sometimes about money

It's never about money: produce it just for the art

--producer: love the show and choose a show you think others will like and attend.

Things to Consider

<http://www.playbill.com/grosses>

Weekly Cost

Initial Capitalism: money to get into the theatre

Weekly Amount of money have to make to survive

Four-Wall Deal

A deal in which the Producer is essentially renting the theater from the Presenter. In a "four-wall deal," Presenters typically receive their Fixed Expenses, ticket commissions, and possibly a very small percent of any overage. The Producer assumes all the risk in a four-wall deal.

(From <https://theroad101.wordpress.com/glossary/>)

Producer has to bring all the things on stage and rent all the props and costumes. Instead of buying, renting covers the fee to maintain and repair.

See reading *Hamilton* from NY Times.

Broadway Theatres

Theaters with seats more than 499 and within a certain area (around Times Square plus Lincoln Center) are considered Broadway theatres.

All Broadway theaters are now owned by theatre companies (non-profit).

Second Stage 1	Helen Hayes
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Lincoln Center Theatre 1	
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Manhattan Theatre Club 1	Samuel J. Friedman
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Roundabout Theatre Company 3	
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The Shubert Organization 17	Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre, Ambassador Theatre, Broadway Theatre, Majestic Theatre, Imperial Theatre, etc.
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For-profit company 34	
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...

Board members of the theater company are also in the theatre development fund, a thing that is too complicated to explain.

Many Broadway producers have legal experience.

How Do We Communicate

Director set the rule; Stage Manager maintain the rule.

Producer, Actor, and Playwright can all go to director—director needs to handle all of the people and keep them happy (more like a mediator).

