

# SYMBOLISM

**Poetic, dreamlike theatre seeking the profound or mysterious in life.**

**Manifesto:** Mood and atmosphere are far more important than plot or action. Let us drop the simpleminded cause-and-effect mentality. There is no need for characters to have personalities of their own, because they are symbols of the poet's inner life. Ambiguity is the key. What appears onstage is not necessarily a *clear* symbol the audience will recognize; rather, it is symbolic of the author's consciousness. Legend, myth, and spirituality come together to produce evocative theatre. Suggestion is far more powerful than explicit experience. The life shown in realistic theatre should be either changed or transcended. Let us turn our backs on objective-reality and move strongly into the subjective and intuitive. The autonomy of art frees it from any obligation to deal with social problems in political terms. Art needs to move beyond truth.

**Background:** Maurice Maeterlinck and Edward Gordon Craig began the movement in the 1890s, and it remained popular until into the 20s. Symbolism is a reaction against the growing popularity of realism. Maeterlinck was heavily influenced by Stephane Mallarme and Paul Verlaine. Adolphe Appia and Max Reinhardt also dabble in this movement, through lighting and set design respectively. The paintings of Paul Gauguin, Rousseau, Toulouse-Lautrec and De Chirico reflect the basic values. Wagner tried to fuse all the elements - music, dialogue, colour, light, shape, and texture - together in performance. Impressionistic symbolism and expressionist symbolism combine these three movements. Film, because of the control it affords, embraces elements of this movement after it falls away from theatre. The use of single, monumental, symbolic (though not necessarily comprehensible) set decoration remains, common today.

## **Images:**

Irrational self

Projected light

Filters

Your wildest dreams

Edgar Allan Poe

Claude Debussy

Federico Fellini

Bizarre juxtapositions

Mood music

Mixed analogies

Aurelian-Marie Lugne-Poe

Alfred Jarry

Decadence glorified

Omnipresence

**Sight:** Movement may be enigmatic and often accompanies music. Static poses may alternate with ritualized, frenzied, whirling moves. The space is full of shadows and mists, possibly mirrors, with an undefined, dreamlike quality. Costumes draw on a range of tribal and cultural influences and are often draped and gauzelike. Much modern dance, specifically in the Isadora Duncan tradition, relates strongly to symbolism.

**Sound:** Strong emphasis on the voice and its music. Present-day New Age music suits a symbolist production. Language may be full of mysterious references. Statements may consist only of simple nouns with adjectives rather than complete sentences. Lines tend to be rhythmic, possibly even poetic, with an electrifyingly hypnotic use of cadence and intensity to build emotion.

Symbolism contd.

**Skills:** Actors must function on a high level of abstraction to play situations associated more with dreams than with waking experience. They must be able to play larger than life, personify a quality or trait, and sometimes function like a puppet. Symbolist theatre demands a willingness to drop clarity, practicality, and definition in favour of distortion and exaggerating for effect.

**Works:**

Andreyev, Leonid

Jarry, Alfred

Maeterlinck, Maurice

O'Casey, Sean

O'Neill, Eugene

Strindberg, August

Wedekind, Frank

Wilde, Oscar

Yeats, William Butler

*He Who Gets Slapped*

*Ubu Roi*

*The Intruder*

*The Blind*

*The Blue Bird*

*Pelleas and Melisande*

*Within the Gates*

*The Emperor Jones*

*The Hairy Ape*

*The Dream Play*

*The Ghost Sonata*

*Spring Awakening*

*Salome*

*The early plays*

# FUTURISM

## **Actor as machine; totally integrated theatre.**

**Manifesto:** Reject the past, glorify progress. Anticipate a great industrial future! Theatre needs to give formal expression to the energy and movement the new machinery has provided. We need strong, broad emotions. Technology must rescue theatre from its deadly museum-like atmosphere and literary, logical bias. Machines and wars can be a source of great beauty. In fact, war is the world's hygiene, cleaning out unfortunate vestiges of the past. Barriers between arts, actors and audience need to be smashed.

**Background:** Founded by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, futurism is the forerunner of dadaism, although its purposes are quite different. Marinetti's *Manifesto of the Futurist Synthetic Theatre* is the document that most clearly defines the movement's purposes, including the effort by some Italians to wake up their country and propel it into the industrial age: The concept later influences Italian fascists. The movement runs from about 1910 to 1930. Eventually, Ionesco employs some of the techniques, as does performance art today.

### **Images:**

War games

Ideas that kill

Kinetic sculptures

Utilitarian objects

Designs of Depero

Psychology of machines

Leather, chains, steel, cement

Mechanical ballets of Silvio

Scenography of Enrico Prampolini

Mad Max macho movies

**Sight:** Futurist productions are multimedia, high-tech wonders with multiple focuses and simultaneous action. Costumes favour straight lines, metallic surfaces, and loose fit, basically turning the human silhouette into a mechanical one, although the face, arms: and legs are left uncovered. The actor is totally integrated into the setting. The setting may be controlled, or the event may occur as street theatre. The look is macho mechanical.

**Sound:** Almost anything may be asked of the actor. Language tends to be blunt, simple and direct. The sound is masculine and militaristic. Lines may involve ideological diatribes, manifestos, shouting and mechanical noises, mostly delivered in presentational fashion. The actor is the director's robot and may be asked to perform in a highly geometric, machine-like fashion, uttering just noises rather than lines. 'Music' may be created out of sirens, machine guns and other war sounds. !)

**Skills:** The actor needs highly developed technical skills and great patience and must let go completely the desire to portray realistically. The ability to eliminate your own idiosyncratic, detailed behaviour in favour of total integration into the surroundings and a strong masculine attack, along with the stamina to endure sustained violent, high-energy, repetitive sequences, are crucial.

**Works:**

Balla, Giacomo

Canguillo

Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso

Settimelli

*Disconcerted States of Mind*

*Detonation*

*Feet*

*, Sempronio's Lunch*

# REALISM

**Art based on nature and real life, without idealization or distortion.**

**Manifesto:** It is time to reject the impractical and the visionary. Theatre should show how everyday people react to their environments. Characters should be multidimensional, internally motivated, and believably portrayed. Human psychology and the five senses should be employed to explore relationships onstage. Only drama that is directly relevant to the *life* of the viewer has genuine *meaning* to the viewer. We have had enough plays about kings and lords, rebels and visionaries. What about grocers? Social and domestic problems are experienced by-us all and need to be illuminated on stage.

**Background:** The French Revolution, industrialization, Darwin and Comte's theories of evolution sequentially lead to an interest in bringing social themes and scientific inquiry to the theatre. By the mid 1800s, the extravagant characters and callow insights of melodrama are declining in popularity. Freud's work on the clinical analysis of personalities, Ibsen's scripts of carefully crafted social import, and Stanislavsky's acting system all reflect an interest in seeing life portrayed onstage as it is lived offstage. The term achieves full validation when the Moscow Art Theatre names its Fourth Studio "The Realistic Theatre". For the first time in history, plays do not focus on people who are absolutely exceptional by title, power, beauty, intellect or eccentricity of personality. For the first time, characters onstage could be the people next door.

## **Images:**

Selected truth

Relevance

Writing about what you know

Explore, then reduce

Paintings of Philip Pearlstein

Novels of John Steinbeck and Faulkner

The well-made play

Democratic Individualism

Life as model

Photojournalism

Poetry of Sandburg and Frost

U.S Folk music

**Sight:** All scenic elements as accurate as possible, with some editing of irrelevant details and some partial or skeletal sets. Settings look like modifications of actual locales. An attempt is made to create the feel of a real living space, and the use of props is considerable. Largely through the influence of Emil Zola, the box set develops, although sometimes several settings are represented with a cinematic overlapping of action. Costumes and properties are true to life and therefore can be hesitant, unobtrusive, and occasionally random. Movement strives to appear motivated and honest.

**Sound:** The use of pauses, nonverbal responses, incomplete thoughts, informal sentence structure - all the characteristics of speech on the street or in the home - characterizes realistic drama. Scripts are prose and barely heightened from normal conversation. Declamatory artifice in delivery is completely rejected, but clarity is maintained.

**Skills:** Capacity for public solitude and strong sense of natural interaction with other actors, props and setting. Ability to tap internal resources and find truth. Working on character from motivations. Eye for contemporary detail, shading and nuance. No ham actors allowed. Minimal scenery, strong believability, chewing allowed.

**Works:** Earliest and most influential playwrights:

Chekhov, Anton

*The Three Sisters,*  
*Uncle Vanya*  
*The Cherry Orchard,*  
*The Seagull*

Ibsen, Henrik

*A Doll's House,*  
*Hedda Gabler*  
*The Wild Duck*

Most of the works of twentieth-century playwrights in the Western tradition, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Joe Orton and John Osborne are realism. Elements of realism are also strongly present in contemporary works, too.

# **DIDACTICISM**

## **Narrative theatre for the intellect rather than the emotions (also called Epic or Brechtian Theatre)**

**Manifesto:** Theatre should make you think and act. Actors should present characters instead of inhabiting them. Audiences should always remain aware that they are watching a performance and never lose themselves in the lives of the characters. Essentially, theatrical illusion is to be destroyed; the action must be frequently interrupted so the audience can remain emotionally disengaged and able to view the work intelligently.

Critical watching discourages passivity; audiences should feel they have the power to change a society that is not working. This disengagement is known as alienation; specifically, the play's *subject matter* is what is alienated (the term does not mean to be 'offended' or 'angry'). The original German word is *Verfremdung*, which is to see things in a new light, to step back and look again at what has become familiar.

Drama should deal with human beings caught in the midst of social or political conflict. The best theatre spreads social ideology.. Naturalism is to be rejected because it . fails to portray man within the general landscape of the whole society.. Other forms of theatre encourage audiences to embrace idealistic attitudes that have no relevance to real life.

The stage is meant to narrate (not embody), to demand decisions (not feelings), to communicate knowledge (not experience), to present arguments (not suggestions) and to appeal to our reason (not instincts). *Gestus* is the key word for the concept.

It involves the revelation of a relationship by deed, word, or look - the way all connections between people can be suddenly illuminated by some movement of the body, tongue or eye. This is achieved through productions that are epic in scope, with a loose narrative form. Numerous separate episodes are sometimes presented in the past tense.

**Background:** Erwin Piscator conceives the idea of a 'proletarian drama', which Bertolt Brecht develops and extends. Brecht, who becomes the movement's main theorist and dramatist, is strongly influenced by the expressionists but works in a far more cynical mode.

He experiments briefly with Dadaism and the ideas of Karl Marx. He develops a dramatic economy, simplicity of language, mature vision, and depth of expression seldom seen on stage before this time. Eventually he refines his work through his own company, the Berliner Ensemble. His arbitrary ideas modify with time.

Brecht's later writings reject the rigidity of his earlier statements. Delight becomes a major concern, but he defines delight as the pleasure that comes from discovering new truths about oneself and the world, which he calls the perfect reconciliation between teaching and pleasing.

His theories are subjected to many conflicting interpretations but continually stimulate directors throughout the world.

### **Images:**

Being forced to make a decision

Clarity, strength and reserve; nothing wasted

Social significance above all



**Sight:** Didactic theatre is best presented in a proscenium space with a blank screen on which images can be projected. In keeping with the central idea of *Verfremdung*, actors may carry placards to describe scenes and remove suspense, and auditorium lights may be left on. Consciously theatrical props (such as a paper moon) may indicate time.

The scenery is likely to be constructivist - simple stairs, scaffolding, revolving stages. The same devices originally intended to remind observers of the theatrical work are common stage conventions in our era. Because present-day audiences tend to disregard the naked mechanics of a performance, these traditional choices may be replaced by any constant reminder (cameras, amplification, multiple screenings), that the event is a theatrical one and not real life.

The movement runs the spectrum from realistic to highly stylized. Changes in time and place are frequent and abrupt.

**Sound:** The language in didactic theatre is clear, distinct, strong and often harsh. Dialogue is mixed with narration and singing interludes, which have a vaudeville-like feeling.

Music is used to neutralize emotions instead of intensifying them, the opposite of its usual function in theatre. Dialogue may be poetic in a blunt, colloquial way, full of both malice and wit. Strident prologues and epilogues are common. Audiences are frequently addressed directly and a wide range of dialects may be employed.

**Skills:** Actors may be called on to use their capacity to step in and out of character, to comment and 'demonstrate' character with some flexibility, and to make an idea crystal clear rather than enforcing emotional involvement. Training in mime, clowning and oriental acting techniques is helpful.

Brecht recommends that actors develop the ability to think of their characters in the third person and to 'quote' the behaviour of the character, with the same immediacy as someone who has experienced an accident and now feels compelled to recreate the event for listeners.

The distancing, therefore, is by no means to be equated with the dropping of commitment.

**Works:**

Brecht Bertolt

*Mother Courage and Her Children*  
*The Good Woman of Setzuan*  
*The Threepenny Opera*  
*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*  
*Galileo*  
*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*

Kipphardt, Heinar  
Tabari, George  
Weiss, Peter

*In the Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer*  
*Brecht on Brecht*  
*Marat/Sade*



# ROMANTICISM

## A rejection of classical order in favour of imagination and emotion.

**Manifesto:** Feelings are more important than thoughts. Anything that is natural is good. A true hero is often forced to stand outside society in order to live life as passionately and fully as it should be lived. Beyond mere earthly life lies a higher truth that is found through art and feeling. True happiness can be found in the spiritual realm. The sublime in nature and art must be worshiped. Everything exotic and picturesque has value. Even something ugly and grotesque has worth, if it elicits a powerful response. We long for the past.

Our heroine or hero often must die by the final curtain as a result of following her or his heart in an uncomprehending world too full of reason, machines and rules, a world that has become spoiled by moving too far away from its natural state. Still, to die and leave the physical world is not too great a price to pay for being true to oneself.

**Background:** By the late 1700's, the Neoclassical movement is losing ground. Strictly ordered works depicting the ideal, rather than the natural, are declining in appeal. A group of German writers dominated by Goethe, Schiller and Klinger develop a school of writing called Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress), which espouses the rights of the individual, the glory of nature, and the power of emotion. The English poets Coleridge, Wordsworth and Forrester catch the drift. A form of drama evolves that is still, in some

### Images

Terror of the self

Music of Chopin, Liszt, Wagner, Tchaikovsky

Love through death

Byron's poetic drama Sardanapalus

Poetry of Shelley and Blake

Brighton Pavillion

Honour and duty above all practical consideration

Delacroix's operatic paintings

Turner's landscapes

Rich, lush, heavy, sensuous, operatic

**Sight:** Large casts and spectacle are common. Settings are often long ago and/or far away. Bold and fluid movements, grand, graceful, majestic maneuvers, and great sweeping curves predominate. While Romanticism is influential in bringing about historical accuracy in costuming, the look is likely to be flamboyant: flowing garments, thick capes, scarves, billowing fabric. The vision of nature focuses on glorious sunrises and tornadoes, not the humdrum or everyday. A romantic hero need not be beautiful but should somehow be extraordinary.

**Sound:** The plays are verse or poetic prose on a grand level. Great variety of expressiveness and a large vocal range are desired. Delivery should be defiant and sentimental without becoming strident and cloying.

**Skills:** Romantic acting is tour de force bravura playing, demanding great bravado and expressiveness, a willingness to hit operatic heights and a soulful and expansive nature. Training in classical ballet and great beauty of tone help. Can you suffer deeply and defy society? Of course you can. Romantic drama is basically full-blown melodrama and is not for actors who take a half-hearted approach and giggle easily.

### **Works**

Dumas, Alexandre

*Camille*

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von'

*Faust.*

*Les Miserables*

Rostand, Edmond

*Cyrano de Bergerac*

Shelley, Mary

*Frankenstein*

Shelley, Percy

*Prometheus Unbound*

# CONSTRUCTIVISM

Build a story, don't tell it.

**Manifesto:** Sentimentality and individual feeling have no place in the theatre. Theatre has been too interested in illusion, and it is now time to strip all that away. The unsightly clutter of the naturalistic stage needs to be replaced. An architectural vision will wipe out a pictorial. It is time for acting to turn back outward, replacing psychological and emotional nuance with gymnastic and acrobatic precision. A play is just a vehicle for examination and revelation.

Constructivism precedes today's deconstructivist theatre, in which a play is taken apart with no regard to the playwright's intentions, to reveal a theme of current interest. The script may then be reconstructed in a new configuration.

**Background:** A joint project between sculptor Lyubov Popova and director Vsevolod Meyerhold in 1921-2 produces the idea for a 'machine for acting'. Meyerhold develops an accompanying approach to acting, called *bioenergetics*. Frederick Taylor Winslowe's research into efficiency finds a theatrical corollary. The movement reacts against the Moscow Art Theatre in its attempt to go as far away from detailed, lengthy, painstaking internal work as possible. Meyerhold takes an engineer's approach to the stage, demanding purely functional use of space. Although the acting approaches do not remain popular, the use of a 'bare bones' skeletal set is still common. Deconstructivism now focuses not on mechanical elements of production, but rather on pulling apart the mechanics of the text.

## Images:

Costumes by Goncharova  
Message above text  
Social masks in relationships  
El Lissitzky, Naum Gabo, Kazimir Malevic  
Vladimir Tatlin's Model for Monument

Vsevolod Meyerhold  
Biomechanics in action  
Script as mere libretto

**Sight and Sound:** A production may involve circus techniques, acrobatics, highly physical performances, and machinelike sets that strip away traditional decor and illusion. The entire support

structure is clearly in view, and all platforms are unfaced and unadorned. A curtain is never used, and the entire set is completely in view from the time the audience arrives until it leaves. Set of ramps, wheels, ropes, pulleys, elevators and conveyor belts may all be employed. Actors may be asked to use exaggerated, rhythmic, repetitive movements. Garments may be geometric creations or work uniforms. Sound is dominated and determined by movement. The sounds of wheels, pulleys, conveyor belts or hammers may all

**Skills:** Constructivism calls on the actor's circus techniques and broad, farcical caricature ability; skills in gymnastics, acrobatics and mime; dance training; an intensely controlled, precise, athletic body; and the capacity to step out, examine and then dive back in.

**Works:** Because constructivism is a production concept only, there are no scripts. The most famous early production was Meyerhold's mounting of Fernand Crommelynck's "The Magnificent Cuckold." Any current deconstructivist production will be controversial, because it will not be the same play many of the audience will be expecting to see. (A recent deconstructivist performance of Twelfth Night in one act consisted of Shakespeare walking on stage with a pair of six shooters and asking the audience had they seen the director, taking out his guns and walking off.)

## Theatre by, for and about women

**Manifesto:** Women have a voice, too long neglected and pushed inside, which must be released and heard. Drama has been dominated, to our great loss, by male perceptions. Fewer than 10 percent of plays are written by women and less than one-fourth of the roles in plays are for women. Invaluable insight and artistic expression come out of women's lives.

Not only are women in no way inferior or less important than men, but their lives: offer extraordinary theatrical richness. Women's experience must be considered in any future decisions for this art. Old plays need to be reexamined and new works must be generated from a feminist perspective.

Inadequate patriarchal forms must give way, through cultural revolution, to new forms that serve a new perspective. We must move from self-destructive misogyny to creative justice. Women must have freedom to set their own life patterns.

**Background:** The roots of feminism are political rather than artistic. Out of the woman's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century grew the feminist movement of the last half of the twentieth century. The early movement, whose leaders include Mary Wollstonecraft, Sarah M. Grimke, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone, is associated with anti-slavery. The later movement takes inspiration from civil rights activism and is a recognition of subtler enslavement, in terms of the deprivation of economic and social rights.

Feminism is precipitated by women filling the labour force while experiencing job discrimination. The influential works of Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*) and Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*) finally bring the term into universal use by the late sixties and 1973 is a watershed year with the publication of *Ms* magazine. Feminism has been co-opted, merged, redefined and expanded beyond its essentialist origins towards pluralism and diversity. Materialist (Marxist), Ecological (environmentally based, formerly cultural) and radical (separatist) feminist movements now approach the issues from diverse perspectives. The arena of identity politics involves multiple feminist perspectives.

Although many regard Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* walking out the door and leaving her family as feminism's first step in the theatre, the movement has no clear playwrighting history and its issues are only beginning to be fully explored. Deconstructionist production, performance art, choral plays and dramatic collages are the most common forms through which the movement from disenfranchisement to empowerment are explored.

### Images:

Affirmative action

Sex object

Myth: Women are weak, passive, dependent, overemotional

'Domesticity Deadens'

Landmark titles: *A Vindication of the Rights of Women; Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women; Our Bodies, Ourselves.*

Fighting words

Inclusive language

**Issues:**

Reproductive freedom, contract/property rights, economic/policy power,

Independence, child care, equality, autonomy

Balance of power

Rachel Rosenthal's performance art

Groundbreaking theatre troupes: Split Britches and At the Foot of the Mountain

From oppression to autonomy

**Sight and Sound:** More and more productions are carefully considering each of the issues above. Women are likely to look and sound stronger. There are likely to be more of them in any cast as all roles are reexamined and alternative casting seriously considered.

Most productions of scripts that deal directly with issues are simply mounted, with a minimum of technical effect and maximum feeling. The direct audience address monologue is common, as is narration interspersed with episodes.

Close attention is being paid to the natural rhythms of women's speech. Language is likely to be vernacular and associative. Preconceptions of what is appropriate are dropping in favour of what women actually share. As in the early phases of naturalism, there is the laughter of recognition as moments in life appear onstage and we wonder why it took so long.

**Skills:** Actors in the genre require ease in breaking the fourth wall; the capacity to play simultaneity and drop linearity; the ability to discover and enlarge creative/impassioned rituals; the capacity to work in communal, nonhierarchical collaboration; and a flair for transformational playing, with immediate embracing of new identities, contexts and actions.

**Works**

Churchill, Caryl

Fornes, Irene

Kennedy, Adrienne

Lamb, Myrna

Lavery, Bryony

Norman, Marsha

Shange, Ntozake

Terry, Megan Wolff,

*Top Girls*

*Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road*

*Fegu and Her Friends*

*Funny House of a Negro*

*Apple Pie*

*More Light*

*Getting Out*

*for coloured girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*

*Transformations for Three Women*

*The Abdication*



**Manifesto:** Play with the past without embracing nostalgia. See life with quotation marks around it. Place the new up against the old. The present sells; history is dead; ideals are illusion. Forget consistency, continuity, originality. Embrace splicing and blurring of forms, stances, moods, and cultural levels. Enshrine the discontinuous.

Challenge all arbiters of good taste. Undermine seriousness with kitsch. Respect all uncertainties. See erosion as art. Theatricalize the mundane; politicize the theatrical. Replace declarations of faith with .declarations of

**Background:** Postmodernism first appears as a rebellion against modernism in architecture, then painting, then dance. The term was coined by J. Hudnut in 1949 and the major first work was Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, followed by Susan Sontag's 'Note's on Camp' (1964) and Charles Jenck's *The Language of Post-Modern ArchiteCture* (1977).

Modernism, existing roughly from 1750 to 1960, is based on production in the factory, capitalist society, linear time, nationalist orientation and bourgeois culture. Postmodernism replaces these with production in the office, global society, changing/cyclical time, pluralist orientation and taste-centred culture.

It is essentially a reaction to the 1960s, when our collective belief in progress explodes and old values are shattered but none move in to replace them. The term is not really used in theatrical circles until the 1980s. *Postmodern* is now used as indiscriminately as *Gestalt* was in the 1970s

**Images:**

Lite dog food

Bill Irwin

The Wooster Group

Music of Philip Glass

The global village

Ecological art

Selfhypnosis

Directors Kaptor and Mnouchkine

Sam Shepard

Tom Wolfe

*The Gospel at Colonus*

Spalding Gray.

Cyberpunk

David Letterman

Jennifer Blande's sculpture-photo blends

Mark Kostabi' s hired out original paintings

Movies that use clips from old movies

Photos of Photographers

Fiction by Bret Easton Ellis, Anne Beattie, Tama Jonowitz

Radicchio

Mabou Mines

David Byrne

Frederick Jameson

B & Bs

Julina Schnabel and Bad Painting

Tanning clinics .

*Sharper Image* catalogue

Warhol's multiple screen images

Twyla Sharp

Laurie Anderson

“Moonlighting”

The Portland Building

**Sight:** Designs are likely to evoke the past and present simultaneously, with period detail executed in new and unexpected materials, colours and shapes. A first impression will alter with extended viewing, through quirky, informed touches and sly insertions.

**Sound:** Old sounds reverberate with new cadences. The tone is blasé, exhausted, bemused and self-conscious. It helps to be a devastating mimic of celebrities.

**Skills:** Postmodern theatre calls on the actor to express enthusiasm for any phenomenon while simultaneously mocking it; to ferret out humour and irony and find political implications in every possible source; to balance the raucous and disrespectful with the bland and the meek; and to develop vocal technique to convey a feeling and its alternatives. Knowledge of television, shopping malls, garage sales and suburbs as sources of information also helps. Although postmodernism is rooted in disillusionment, it is not a hostile performance style; rather, the performers show delight in the invention of themselves and respect for their differences. Actors turn to

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### Lingo

Reflexivity - authorial confession or intrusion into a work

Intertextuality- mixing traditions, genres, texts

Pastiche - ironic collage

Appropriation - stealing or heavy modelling (eg Madonna's Monroe)

Androgyny - resistance to gender codes for normative behaviour

Neologism - an invented word that defies definition (like *postmodern*)

Deconstruction - reading against the grain for what is latent or unsaid.

### Works:

Churchill, Caryl

Cogdan, Constance

Durang, Christopher

Guare, John

Hwang, Henry David

Lapine, James and Steven Sondheim

Lucas, Craig

Mann, Emily

Shepherd, Sam

*Cloud Nine*

*Tales of the Lost Formicans*

*Laughing Wild*

*House of Blue Leaves*

*M Butterfly*

*Sunday in the Park with George*

*Reckless*

*Still Life*

*Cowboy Mouth*

*Angel City*

*The Search for Signs of Intelligent*

*Life in the Universe*

Wagner, Jane

# NATURALISM

## Life with details, including the ugly, the distracting, the irrelevant

**Manifesto:** Realism only *begins* to oppose artificial theatricality and does

not go far enough. It chooses which elements of life it wishes to present.

What is needed in the theatre is stark reality, with no compromise. The keys to all truths are scientific method and careful scrutiny. Individuals cannot be held responsible for what they do, because heredity and environment overwhelm them. Plays should be more human and less social in orientation.

No characters are specifically sympathetic; they just *are*. Plays do not need to progress rapidly, be briskly paced, or have clear climaxes. Endings can be pessimistic, ironic, cynical, and even disappointing, like life. Actors should *live* the life of their characters onstage rather than *play* them.

**Background:** All the forces influencing realism, with the addition of a rising interest in socialism and the average working man, combine to form naturalism. Emile Zola coins the phrase 'a slice of life' and writes, *Therese Raquin*, the first consciously conceived naturalistic drama. His introduction for that play is the true complete manifesto of the movement.. The movement catches on in France (Andre Anton and the Theatre-Libre), Germany (Otto Brahm and Freie Buhne), and Russia (Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre). Jack Thomas Grein's Independent Theatre and George Bernard Shaw attempt to establish the movement in England but the British don't care for it. Eventually, filmmakers adopt the attention to detail necessary for naturalism, but the movement's impact remains in theatre today. Naturalism is the alley behind realism's street.

### Images:

Warts and all

Person as victim

David Belasco's sets

Theatre Libre

Documentary

White noise

Who need's an ending?

Don't look away

Effects of the environment

Scientific scrutiny

Degas' last works

Tight close-up

The uncensored mind

Eavesdropping

**Sight and Sound:** Set detail may be extensive - water runs, stoves cook, and (in a famous Antoine production) real flies buzz around real beef hanging in a meat market scene. A highly contained box set is frequently employed.

Real clothes are better choices than costumes, which require minutely accurate detail. No gels and no makeup are preferred. The environment is a major character and has more influence than any human in the play. Movement needs to seem spontaneous. The fourth wall is very much in place, and the audience is never acknowledged. Actors are less likely to cheat or use open turns and are more likely to turn their backs to the house and generally drop theatrical conventions in favour of accuracy. All movement comes from inner experience.

One of the most vivid touches of naturalism in television history was the sound of Archie Bunker flushing the toilet in *'All in the Family'*. This was a naturalistic show but it was a naturalistic moment. When we hear a flush on television, we think of offstage noise and life sounds usually edited in performance. Programmes like *Roseanne* and *Only Fools and Coronation Street* popped the bubble of tidy middle class interiors and svelte, beautifully dressed actors.

Speech in naturalistic plays may be muffled or even mumbled if it is true to character. Language is basic, gritty, prose, often lower class in syntax. Conversations do not necessarily go anywhere. Snatches of dialogue may be lost or

**Skills:** Naturalistic acting demands great subtlety and a complete lack of artifice. The performer must have a willingness to dispense with charm, charisma, and the need to command an audience. A simplicity that belies technique is essential. Naturalistic acting is much more difficult for most actors than it first seems, because they are so accustomed to editing themselves for performance. A complete concentration and a highly developed ability to play in the moment and to go with the moment are needed,

as are deeply rooted psychological comprehension of character, strong empathy and

**Works:**

Gorky, Maxim

Hauptmann, Gerhart

Steinbeck, John

Strindberg, August

Lawrence, D.H.

The Lower Depths

The Weavers

Of Mice and Men, Grapes of Wrath

Miss Julie

The Nottingham Mining Plays

# IMPRESSIONISM

## A higher world, artificially created and emotionally sublimated

**Manifesto:** Theatre should attempt to capture the moment through feeling, mood and atmosphere. We accept some aspects of realism but reject its need for identifiable motives and dramatic plot elements. There is no need for a clear-cut climax, beginning or end. Characters may be generally bewildered and indecisive, because that is what we all are. Human desires are half formed and our impulses rarely followed through. Violence and rage often smolder and remain unreleased. Art should not reflect our pervasive passive and/or helpless state.

**Background:** The movement evolved from a famous painting, *Impression Sunrise* by Claude Monet and developed first into a school of painting, beginning in Paris in the mid 1870s. Next, the movement developed in music. Impressionism's influence remained strongest in the scenic elements' of a production. In performance, impressionism is a reaction against the nearly strident intensity of romanticism. It lingers in theatre in the form of mood pieces without recognizable structure.

### Images:

Fleeting light

Rough brush strokes

Spontaneity

Repetition of hue

Small planes of colour

Quick rendering

Filtered boulevard, distanced landscape

Vantage point

Juxtaposition

Paintings of Pissarro, Caillebotte, Cassatt, Morisot, Renoir, Bazille, Sisley

Cafe Guerbois

Scrim (gauze curtains used for dream effects)

## Impressionism contd.

**Sight:** The foreground disappears into the background. Movement tends to be tentative, half-formed, and incomplete and is often juxtaposed with tableaux. The emphasis lies completely in the creation of mood.

**Sound:** Overlapping dialogue, isolated fragments of speech, and heavy use of background sounds may be employed and orchestrated. In the purest form, voices blend with each other and with other sounds to become at times distinguishable.

**Skills:** Impressionistic drama demands that the actor be able to sustain a mood effectively and perform compellingly without a recognizable through--line or sense of character development and to blend with the environment, both physically and vocally, when required to do so. Because impressionistic works often contain elements of realism and expressionism, the actors may be asked to blend elements of all three. This “ism” is more likely to involve the design team than the actors.

### **Works:**

Maeterlinck, Maurice  
Strindberg, August  
Zola, Emile

*Pelleas and Melisande*  
*The Father*  
*Nana*

# DADAISM

## **Theatre dedicated to contradicting expectations.**

**Manifesto:** Nothing is sacred! Theatre should take a nihilistic approach to life and a revolutionary attitude towards art. Anti-art is the way to think; 'creative' acts are worthless. Audiences should be infuriated, enraged, and moved beyond rationality to passion. All elements of the past need to be destroyed. All beliefs have no reason. The future smacks of death, so the moment is all that matters. Spontaneity is the closest anyone can come to creating; the more shocking and violent the better.

**Background:** Inspired by the writings of Franz Kafka, the movement is conceived in Zurich by Tristan Tzara and spreads to France, led by Hugo Ball. Dadaism itself defies the keeping of records, so its progress is only randomly transcribed. The Dada Gallery is established in 1916, and the ideas remain prominent until 1922. More a means of creating a theatrical event than writing scripts, dadaism does not produce a body of work. It tends to be favoured at private entertainments, soirees or Happenings.

### **Images:**

The Sex Pistols

Antiart, Antireason, Antithought

Kurt Schwitters

Terrorism

Fingernails scratching on a screen door

Eating garbage, worm and excrement

Your own personal worst gross-out

Nonsense

Car horn locked on

Freewheeling, unconnected, non-verbals

**Sight and Sound:** Dadaism is largely improvisational and spontaneous. Dialogue is incongruous, full of non sequiturs, shouting, singing, berating, gibberish and obscenities. Space tends to be vast, bare, unlocalized and abstract, but it may be littered with irrelevant items. Laughing at the audience is a common mode of attack.

**Skills:** Dadaism demands a willingness to humiliate yourself and others aggressively; an imaginative sense of what will strike others as obscene and sacrilegious; audacity; and a confrontational defiant nature.

**Works:** The concepts that underlie dadaism discourage scripting. .  
Some elements of the movement appear in the works of :-

Weiss, Peter

Stoppard, Tom

Shepard, Sam

Cummings, e. e.

Stein, Gertrude

*Marat/Sade*

*Travesties*

*Unseen Hand*

*Him*

*Four Saints in Three Acts.*



# SURREALISM

## **Spontaneous creation without interference from reason.**

**Manifesto:** Insanity is often true sanity. Freed from the need for reason, morals, or aesthetics, the artist's mind is finally capable of creation. The subconscious mind is the source of the most significant perceptions. Once your logic and ego are neutralized, truth has a better chance to surface. Those elements which appear at first glance to be opposites, can, in hypnotic or dreamlike states actually be reconciled into a new vision. Great theatre has plasticity (freedom to manipulate appearances) and musicality (freedom to allow the subjective mind to explore). Under these circumstances, the spirit can be liberated from the flesh, and the unreal can become real. True theatre has the power to disturb viewers to the depths of their being.

**Background:** Antonin Artaud, working in the 1930s, is the major figure associated with this movement, but its origins go much further back. Alfred Jarry's 1896 production of *Ubu Roi* strongly influences the surrealists, as does Freudian psychology. The term is first coined by the French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917. The manifesto is written in 1924 by Andre Breton, who claims that surrealism rises out of the ashes of dadaism. Under Artaud, the movement evolves from one that places emphasis on words to one that invents a new language to express psychic experience. He breaks away from the others and creates a 'Theatre of Cruelty', in which actor and audience are asked to suffer a painful psychic transformation in order to achieve purification. His work influences Jean Genet, Albert Camus, Jerzy

### **Images:**

Jean Cocteau's blends of ballet and drama

Pablo Picasso

Salvador Dali

Music' of Pierre Boulez

Guillaume Apollinaire

Grotesque as path to liberation

Spontaneous gesture as the key to true inner self

Andre Breton

Leonide Massine

Psychic automatism

Plasticity

'Twin Peaks'

**Sight:** A dream world and a realistic world are often both explored for contrast. A high level of distortion, optical illusion, objects in sizes, and unexpected juxtapositions are all possible. Scenes occur in unusual locations and two seemingly unrelated scenes may be played back to back. A strong sense of lyrical ritual emerge.

**Sound:** Dialogue favours poetic imagery, but verse is free, without specific metre. Characters do not tend to answer each other directly; one person's shared internal monologue may motivate but not otherwise connect with another's. Language is used, not for communication, but for exploration, interweaving and ritual. Musical tones may dominate. Artaud develops an entire nonverbal vocabulary. Sound attempts to free itself from the traditional slavery of the written word into full exploration of the nonverbal.

**Skills:** The capacity to play archetypes and to blend sexual characteristics is helpful. Characters are often androgynous or hermaphroditic. A full range of sounds beyond language may be tapped. A priest-like commitment to the

**Works:**

Apollinaire, Guillaume  
Artaud, Antonin

*The Breast of Tiresias*  
*Jet of Blood*  
*The Philosopher's Son*  
*The Burnt Belly*

Cocteau, Jean

*Antigone*  
*Orpheus*  
*Parade*

Garcia Lorca, Federico

*The Ox on the Roof*  
*The Butterfly's Spell*  
*Blood Wedding*

Jarry, Alfred  
Vitrac, Roger

*Ubu Roi*  
*The Mysteries of Love*

*From "Style for Actors" by Robert Barton*

# ABSURDISM

**Manifesto:** Understanding is impossible. Sudden changes of mood and motive are what life is all about. All laws of probability and physics are suspended. Sartre's statement "If man can recognize and accept the simultaneous existence of his absurdity and his responsibility to give himself definition through choice and action, there is hope." is probably the most optimistic statement associated with the movement. Man's *only* freedom is the exercise of his conscious mind. He is in a state of moral paralysis. There is no illusion or light left in the universe; there is only metaphysical anguish. (*Absurd* is used here in a broader, sadder sense than 'ridiculous'.

It is derived from the original musical term for 'out of harmony'. Life has lost reason, logic and propriety. Man has lost touch with his roots, so existence is useless and meandering. The laughter that may emerge comes from a deep state of pain. Laughter is a coping tool, often the only coping tool.

It is difficult to communicate with others, so we need to fill time, as if life were spent in a waiting room with an inner office, by playing games, joking, dancing, singing and indulging in silly routines or escapes.

Space, linear time and conventional structure are to be abandoned; plots, therefore, are often circular (everything that happens has happened before), and the play ends exactly where it began, with the ever-expected explanation never arriving.

**Background:** Although the first absurdist plays were written in the 1940s, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) was the genre's first major success. The ideas of futurism, dadaism, and surrealism culminate after World War II in the brutal awareness that humanity is perfectly capable of destroying itself. Continental Europe had experienced the greatest devastation of this war, with massive human, economic, agricultural and architectural loss everywhere. Fatigue and disillusionment were rampant, and the idea of life was meaningful was suspect. Memories of concentration camps and gas chambers are vivid.

This is the canvas of absurdism. Philosophers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Satre (and the whole philosophy of existentialism - using will instead of reason to deal with problems arising from a hostile universe) began to influence playwrights. Another major influence is the work of silent film comedians, including Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Keystone Cops and later Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers, who often exist in an, often nightmarish, black-and-white world beyond their comprehension.

The movement was popular in the fifties and early sixties. Some writers point to Samuel Beckett's short play *Breath* as the official end of absurdism, but absurdist elements are present today in some of the works of Sam Shepard, David Mamet and David Rabe.

## Images:

Mind games

Pet rocks

A roomful of beepers

Politics

The comic strip 'Life is Hell'.

PBS fund-raising

Irrational man

Insurance

God is dead

Tackology

Toddler resumes (C.V.s)

Quality time.

Zen vacuum

*Le Neant*, the Void



**Sight and Sound:** Absurdist plays may be realistically mounted, so that the absurdity comes out of setting up false expectations, or they may be staged on a cartoon-like level. Because humans, animals and objects are interchangeable in this world, they may be given each other's qualities.

Characters may be complex and multidimensional or completely stereotyped. Casts are mostly small, and effects are minimal. Speech is disconnected, non-communicative, and rambling. People never seem to listen to each other. Rushes of sound are followed by unexpected and sometimes interminable silences.

The mood changes just as it appears to establish itself.

**Skills:** Actors must be able to make rapid-fire changes, produce massive variety, and use pauses and silence to surprise the audience. Having many voices and attacks, high energy and imagination are helpful.

Physical demands may include acrobatics, silent film technique, song and dance, vaudeville, circus tricks, quick breaks between presentational and non-presentational audience relationships, and the capacity to be real and unreal in sharp juxtaposition. Actors must be able to launch comfortably into gibberish, a robot-like monotone, a political dialectic, a catatonic trance, or high, ruthless rage

**Works:**

Albee, Edward	<i>The American Dream</i> <i>Sandbox</i>
Beckett, Samuel	<i>Waiting for Godot, Krapp's Last Tape,</i> <i>Happy Days, Endgame</i> <i>Footfalls</i>
Camus, Albert	<i>Caligula</i> <i>The Maids, The Balcony</i> <i>Deathwatch, The Blacks .</i>
Ionesco, Eugene	<i>The Bald Soprano, Rhinoceros</i> <i>The Chairs, The Lesson</i>
Kopit, Arthur	<i>Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet</i> <i>and I'm Feelin ' So Sad</i> <i>The Day the Whores Came Out to Play Tennis</i> <i>Chamber Music</i>
Pinter, Harold	<i>The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party,</i> <i>The Caretaker; No Man's Land</i> <i>Old Times, The Homecoming</i>
Pirandello, Luigi	<i>Six Characters in Search of an Author</i>
Sartre, Jean-Paul	<i>No Exit</i> <i>The Flies</i>
Shepard, Sam	<i>Buried Child</i>

# EXPRESSIONISM

## **Life seen through a single set of subjective emotions.**

**Manifesto:** Most other aims are too passive and specialized. We need theatre that is forceful, urgent and emotionally charged. Theatre needs to capture the inner spiritual struggle each of us goes through to develop into the New Person of the future. Creating a character is much less important: than presenting a strong argument onstage. Nightmarish, anti-industrial, deliberate distortions of reality are perfectly acceptable ways to deliver a harsh truth. Real theatre is not literary drama, but instead an exploration of consciousness through living performance. Dreams are a major source of truth, and the portrayal of the dreamlike state may illuminate life so that the subjective can be objectified. The real heroes are hidden among the common workers, stifled by a dangerous, dehumanizing and deadly system. The values of the older generation are useless. It is time for fresh subjectivity that mirrors inner psychological realities instead of outer physical appearances. It is time to get serious.

**Background:** Expressionism originates in the paintings of Auguste Herve, exhibited in 1901 under the title *Expressionismes* and eventually influences all of the arts. Although Herve intends his works to oppose those of the impressionists, the movement ultimately revolts against naturalism and romanticism as well. Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch are the best known expressionist painters, and George Kaiser is the leading dramatist working exclusively in the form, although the later visionary works of Strindberg and Ibsen make significant contributions to the genre. The theatre embraces expressionism most fully in the twenties. Vsevolod Meyerhold and his 'biomechanics' theory of acting (involving gymnastics, ballet and acrobatics) have some influence, as do Freud's ideas regarding the analysis of dreams. The idealism regarding change that characterizes the movement in its early days gives way after World War II to utter disillusionment, and expressionism eventually become more a

### **Images:**

Author's message, author's message, author's message

Sharp contrast and intense distortion

Spirit, soul, mind

Martyrdom

Moody, atmospheric lighting

Diagonal lines

Leaning walls

Coloured lights

Nightmares

Leopold Jessner

Later dances of Nijinsky, Cunningham and Graham

Music of Igor Stravinsky



**Sight:** Sharp angles and harsh and startling lighting and colour distinguish the look. Walls may slope, windows and doors may be deformed, dark shadows may be juxtaposed with shafts of bright light. Platforms, ramps, scaffolding, and unexpected elements, such as a trapeze, may enter the playing space. Geometric images predominate. Movement may involve stark groupings of actors and choreographed histrionic business. Actions may be fragmentary, disconnected, puppet-like, or robot-like. Some masks and Oriental stage technique may be employed. Costumes and props may be grotesquely exaggerated.

**Sound:** The explosive language of expressionism features a startling contrast between lyrical passages and staccato, almost amputated dialogue. The genre calls for a full range of sound, including nonhuman noises, shouting, chanting and barking. Movement and dialogue may be repetitious and mechanical, with tempos shifting dramatically.

**Skills:** Expressionism demands volatile, emotional playing representing an alienated state of abstraction; highly theatrical, sometimes flagrantly presentational playing representing the subconscious and the spiritual; and the capacity to remove human quality (such as greed or lust) from the characterization or to become the quality incarnate.

**Works:**

Capek, Josef

*The Insect Comedy*

Capek, Karel

*R.U.R.*

Kaiser, Georg

*From Morn to Midnight*

*Rice, Elmer*

*The Adding Machine*

Shaw, Irwin

*Bury the Dead*

Strindberg, August

*The Road to Damascus*