

## Fundamentals of Play Directing by Alexander Dean and Lawrence Carra

The foundation of Dean/Carra's beliefs regarding directing is to discuss and present disciplines that can give the beginning director a base of operation in any form of theatre without limiting the director's own creative contributions. For the most part they orient their ideas around proscenium staging. They believe in a step by step process of analysis that serves as a teaching method for direction.

Drama is to be viewed as an art, and all art requires discipline. Concept, technique, principles common to all art, and mood all factor into how the director creates art and how the audience can appreciate that art. This can be achieved through five fundamentals: *composition, movement, picturization, rhythm, and pantomimic dramatization.*

**Composition:** emphasis, variety in emphasis, variety in planes, sequence (tying together units on stage by space), balance, audience emotions, line, mass, and form.

**Picturization:** body expression and relationship to other characters, scenic divisions, classification of scenes, inherent mood values (see handout in your packet), creating full-stage picturization (see picturization handout), precautions (using subtlety, avoid being trite, etc.)

**Movement:** movement values, body movement, stage movement (~~see handout~~), values of movement from left to right and right to left, diagonal movement, movement and dialogue, movement and picturization, building a scene solely by movement, handling violent scenes and love scenes, general kinds of movement (background, character, technical), motivation of movement, arbitrary considerations in using movement, inner considerations for use of movement, the effect of movement on mood, line and mass and form in movement, connotative values of movement (amount, strength, length, direction, intensity and rhythm).

**Rhythm:** Vitality and power of attraction, Characteristics (pattern and tempo), the role played by association, rhythm and emotion, rhythmic pattern and its connotative value (three beats to a measure convey gentleness versus four beats to a measure conveys regularity etc.), tempo and its connotative value (shorter beats or pauses convey an element of excitement, irritability, sharpness; longer beats or pauses convey an impression of composure, futility, dullness), determining the rhythm of the play, functions of rhythm (mood, style, situation, characterization locale, change of scene, cohesion, audience unity), applications of rhythm, application of tempo, timing, types of scenes and their tempos (see directing packet), and handling interpolations.

**Pantomimic Dramatization:** story, dialogue, characters, properties, locale, atmosphere, contributions of pantomimic dramatization (establish situation, character, locale, atmosphere, style, continuity, vitality), essentials of good pantomimic dramatization, applications, developing business

# PICTURIZATION

## Seven Steps in Creating Picturization

1. Analyze the scene for purpose, character objectives, and attitudes so that it may be definitely titled: a scene of struggle, of love, of forgiveness, of oppression, of suspicion, and so on.
  2. Determine the mood qualities that are inherent in the title: if it is a title of suspicion for a situation in which six people are each suspecting the others, we should have awareness, unrest, nervousness.
  3. Express the nature of the mood in terms of mood value of composition such as line, mass, and form: whether the composition is compact or diffused, large or small, regular or irregular, flat or deep, and so forth, with all the different combinations of these. In the situation of six people suspecting each other, we have isolation in space, diffused mass, and irregular line and form. Now express these in the technical terms of composition, which in the situation under analysis means: diversified emphasis, uneven sequence, and a great deal of counterfocus together with irregular body positions.
  4. Visualize the background of the situation, characters, and setting: the forces and circumstances about the situation, the social standing of the characters, the environment where the situation takes place, and frequently the time of day and season. The situation of the six people who suspect each other has been brought about by a robbery. The characters might be people of high social standing, and the environment might be the drawing room in the home of one of these people: or the characters might be gangsters, and the environment a hide-out, murky and hot. In this second instance the picturization would assume totally different qualities from those in the first.
- With a clear knowledge of what the situation is, of the mood qualities inherent in the situation, of the mood values of composition that will express the nature of the mood; and with a clear conception of the entire background (situation, circumstances, characters, and setting), we may now transfer our mental picturization to the actual stage.
5. Place your characters in roughly the proper areas of the stage and in a manner that expresses their emotional attitude in terms of their cultural and environmental background.

6. Apply the factors of composition that will, in particular, stress the emphatic characters or objects.

Having approximately related our characters, we now work for an articulate and clear-cut quality. We make definite use of our technical knowledge of composition, applying the proper emphasis and the necessary stability, sequence, and balance, with a careful eye to avoiding monotony and achieving an enriching variety.

7. The last step is the attitude of the individual actor.

Have your actors give their emotion body expression and reaction. Individual picturization is more or less instinctive with the actor, as a result of the emotion that he is striving to portray, or it may often be the result of technical skill resulting from his observation. According to normal expectations, if he is defiant, he will express this physically with feet firmly planted and the body erect and forward; if frightened, he will cringe; if humble, he will relax with head bowed. This physical accompaniment of emotion in man is a universal language that he speaks and, as with the picturizing arrangement of the group, arouses in the audience an immediate conception of the emotions and emotional relationships that are in action onstage.

In arriving at our final picturization we have worked from the general to the specific. We first made known to ourselves the title for which we would work, and then through a series of steps starting with a rough sketch we have arrived at a detailed visualization of it.

After the picturization is completed, check on each individual factor, and make sure that the picture tells the title, the story, and the background.

### THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS OF PLAY DIRECTING

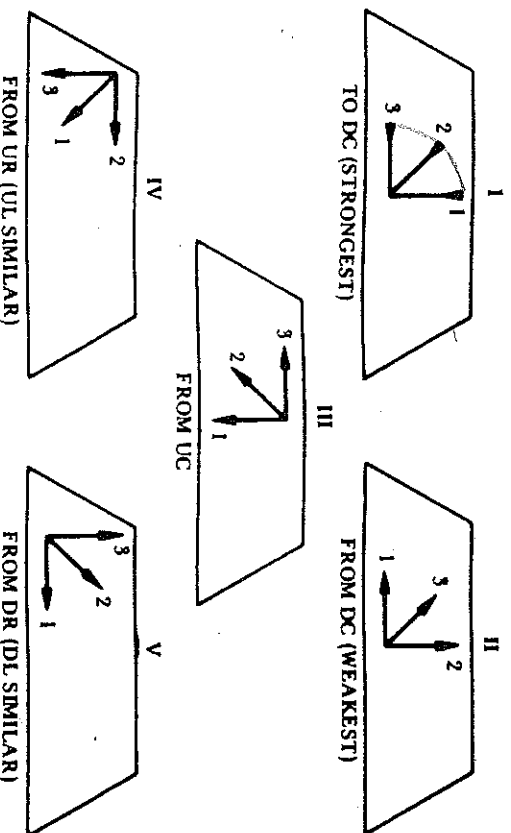


FIGURE 34 Charts showing relative strength of movement

## *Rehearsing Your Play*

### Organization

Avoid spending a disproportionate amount of time on the first part of your play, and neglecting the middle and/or last part. (remember: the part they will remember the most, and forgive the least, is the end).

### Number of rehearsals

Things to consider

- ◆ number of acts
- ◆ number of scenes
- ◆ number of characters
- ◆ dramatic values/"stage-worthiness"
- ◆ style/period
- ◆ experience of your actors

### Rehearsal process

#### Study/orientation period

- ◆ The director should help the actors to grasp the story, or plot, of the play. The director and cast look at the basic attitude, purpose and major interests—the general outline. This will help not only with memorization, but which lines to emphasize. Next, focus on character relationships. Allow your cast to ask questions and make sure the theme of the play is clear. As a director, you should explain your general purpose, concept, scheme and style in producing the play. Once you move from the general, move to the specific. What is the character's "spine"? Locate the small units of action, motivations, responses in terms of mental images and physical action.

#### Blocking

- ◆ Introduce your ground plan, costume ideas, scene design. Make the environment as clear as possible. Where are entrances, exits, areas of playing, main directions of movement. Find the general pattern of movement and large bits of business necessary to reveal the plot and character relationships. Key words: composition, picturization, and movement.

#### Enrichment

- ◆ Time to polish! Here you can work with individual actors and groups of actors. Squeeze every drop out of each moment on stage, each nuance of character. Build character and situation, modifying and rearranging positions for technical considerations or what have you. Think of sight lines, balance, emphasis and the like.