

Preface

When the great stage director Sir Tyrone Guthrie used to speak to students he referred to his lectures as “pie-jaw.” In his native Ireland “pie-jaw” was the expression given to the “good advice” that grandmothers used to give to children. In a manner of speaking, this little book is a bit of “pie-jaw.”

Although I usually avoid the invitation to give advice, these chapters are composed of some common-sense techniques for young stage directors. The book had its genesis in a series of lectures on directing that I gave at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. I have allowed myself great latitude in the style of presentation—now and then including the young directors’ questions in the text, occasionally addressing the students directly in the second person, and permitting myself to meander off into personal reminiscences and little stories to provide examples.

The material in this book is divided into two sections. The first section is devoted to the principles that influence the director’s primary decisions. The second section deals with the practical do’s and don’t’s of stage direction—the specific techniques of our work. I suggest that the impatient reader jump right in and begin with chapter 4. But for the reader with more time, the first three chapters include reflections on some of the

theories that serve as the underpinning of the director's purpose.

My motive in putting this material into written form was threefold. For one thing, there seems to be a concern in the American theatre about the emergence of skilled directors. "Where are all the young directors to come from? Who will carry on the great legacy of Guthrie, Brook, Kazan, and Nichols?"

Secondly, I have received an increasing number of questionnaires and requests for interviews from university teachers and students asking, "How do you work?"

My third reason for jotting down these impressions on directorial technique is that most of the members of our A.C.T. company have, at one time or another, been asked to direct new plays or student projects. By putting all my answers in one place, I hope to satisfy the odd assortment of questions that have dotted our conversations through the many seasons of our creative work together.

I have used a very informal approach in this book, in part to preserve the spirit of personal talks with the students. Directing is not an exact science and does not lend itself easily to academic textbook treatment. Indeed most of the texts devoted to techniques of directing strike me as bloodless and impractical. I harbor a faint hope that somewhere within these pages the young theatre lover may come upon a sentence, a phrase, a word that may unexpectedly crack the great dark crust and let in a thread of light—a moment of illumination that will make things clearer.

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