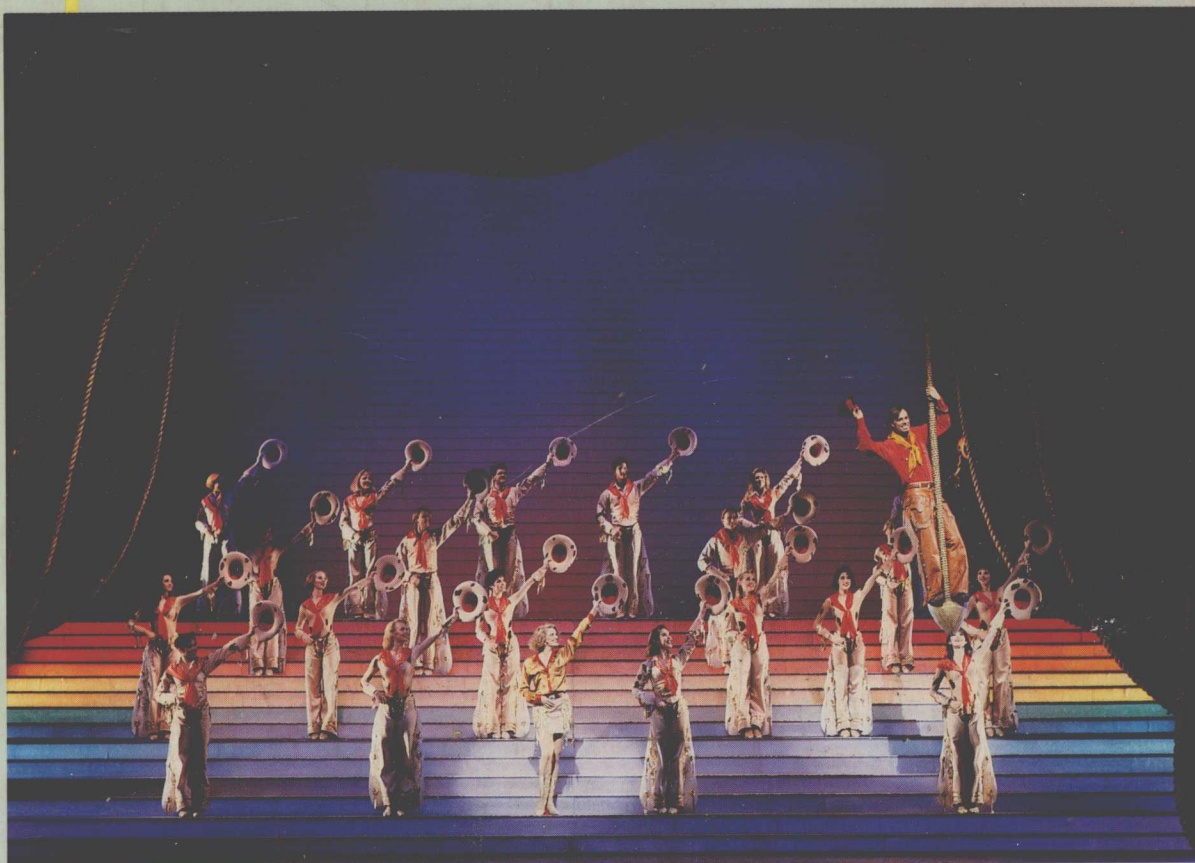


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SECOND EDITION

THEATRICAL DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

J. Michael Gillette



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SECOND EDITION

THEATRICAL DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

An Introduction to Scene Design
and Construction, Lighting, Sound,
Costume, and Makeup

J. MICHAEL GILLETTE
University of Arizona



Mayfield Publishing Company
Mountain View, California
London • Toronto

For Joyce Ann, who knows why

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PREFACE

First courses in the world of theatrical design and production, like the art they introduce, come in a bewildering array of shapes, sizes, textures, and colors. Some students receive their introduction to this subject area in a general overview course that covers the design and production elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound in a single semester. Other students may enjoy the luxury of an entire year in which to discuss the same material. Still others may take individual courses that specialize in the theory and craft of the separate areas that comprise the field of theatrical design and technical production. The course content is very flexible indeed.

To create a text that will serve the needs of all these courses is a distinct challenge. I've tried to rise to that challenge by organizing the material in two ways. The chapters appear in a logical sequence, but each chapter is also an island of information that can stand alone. My hope is that this organization will enable each instructor to pick and choose the type and amount of material that is appropriate for his or her particular course. This type of organization also makes the text a useful reference work for students to keep throughout their design and technical production careers.

Organization and Content

Just as a play wouldn't start without the scenery being in place, this book doesn't delve into technical procedures without first setting the stage. Chapters 1 through 4, *Production Organization and Management*, *The Design Process*, *Theatre Architecture*, and *The Stage and Its Equipment*, provide a grounding in real world issues and are appropriate for use in almost any type of technical production class.

Of special significance is Chapter 2, *The Design Process*. It contains material new to beginning technical theatre texts. It is a problem-solving and conceptual-thinking model created specifically for theatrical practice. Its purpose is to increase each student's creative capacity by reducing the effects of two prime ingredients of creative dysfunction—fear and frustration. The mechanism used to effect this change is a seven-step procedure that enables students to make logical, rational, and considered decisions when making the myriad choices involved in creating a design or solving a technical challenge in any area of theatrical production.

Chapter 3, *Theatre Architecture*, provides a concise chronology, both pictorially and textually, of the history of theatre architecture. I've included this information for two reasons: the functional design of the environment in which a play is produced has always been a major factor in determining the type, style, and design of technical elements used in a production, and all too frequently student designers are not required to take courses in theatre history.

Chapter 13, *Electrical Theory and Practice*, provides a concise explanation of the nature and function of electricity and electronics and the practical use of the power formula, as well as information on wiring practices and standards.

The last three chapters in the book, *Mechanical Drafting*, *Perspective*, and *Drawing and Rendering*, contain specific how-to information on the drawing and rendering techniques most commonly used in theatrical production. Chapter 20, *Mechanical Drafting*, provides information about the materials and types of drafting used in the theatre and helpful hints on the process of drafting. Chapter 21, *Perspective*, offers a step-by-step procedure *with exercises* for drawing in accurate scale mechanical perspective. Chapter 22, *Drawing and Rendering*, provides an overview of the types of paints, pastels, markers, and papers commonly used in theatrical rendering as well as information on basic application techniques used with these media.

The remainder of the text provides an overview of the function and responsibilities of the scenic, lighting, costume, and sound designers. It also contains primary information about the tools and basic techniques that are used to bring each designer's concepts to the stage.

As with any art form, the basic element necessary for creating a successful design in theatre is an understanding of design principles and chosen medium. I hope that this text not only provides those basics but also offers encouragement and inspiration to create.

Features

In many ways, *Theatrical Design and Production* is a traditional introductory text for the various design and craft areas of theatrical production. A number of features, however, strive to set this text apart.

Philosophy The underlying spirit of this text is firmly rooted in my belief that learning and creating in the various fields of theatrical design and production can be, and should be, fun. With that thought in mind, I've tried to make this text not only informative and practical but also motivating and inspirational.

Color Analysis The sixteen-page color analysis section presents a discussion of the practical applications of color theory by analyzing the interactive effects of the color selections for the scenery, costumes, and lighting for two productions—one with a very narrow, muted palette and the other with a full-spectrum, heavily saturated color style.

Safety Tips Safety tips are discussed throughout the text. They have been placed in special boxes adjacent to the relevant text to help readers integrate learning about a tool, material, or process with its safe use.

Running Glossary To help students learn and remember the vocabulary of the theatre, new terms are defined in the margin on the page where they first appear.

Boxed Material Additional material that provides further depth and practical information has been placed in boxes outside the mainstream text. This added material is included to enhance student understanding by providing insights into and solutions to real theatrical problems.

Illustration Program An extensive photo and illustration program provides a very strong adjunct to the textual information. Photos from professional theatre productions are used to provide a model that students can strive to emulate.

New to the Second Edition

In this second edition of *Theatrical Design and Production*, the basic philosophy, organization, and features of the original text remain the same as in the first edition. However, there are some significant changes in the content. The material dealing with costume design and construction has been greatly expanded and divided into three separate chapters: Chapter 16, *Costume Design*, Chapter 17, *Costume Construction*, and Chapter 18, *Makeup*. Similarly, Chapter 5, retitled *Style, Composition, and Design*, now includes a focused discussion of style in theatrical design and expanded coverage of the principles of composition and elements of design. Almost every chapter includes updated or new material. Where appropriate, additional Safety Tips have been added. New photos and drawings have been added where need to clarify techniques and processes or to update the illustrations of manufacturers' current equipment.

I would like to thank those students, friends, and colleagues who have offered suggestions for improving *Theatrical Design and Production* in the years since the publication of the first edition: Alan Billings, University of Michigan; James Gilbert, California State University, Chico; Diane Holley, San Diego State University; Bobbi Owen, University of North Carolina; and Janet Rose, University of Oregon. I would also like to thank the following people for their thorough reviews of the first edition and their specific comments and recommendations: Odis Ball, Los Angeles Pierce College; C. Lance Brockman, University of Minnesota; Donald T. Cate, City College of San Francisco; Kenneth R. Dorst, San Jose State University; D. Andrew Gibbs, University of Arkansas; Russell T. Hastings, Ohio State University; Douglas R. Maddox, Pennsylvania State University; Thrim B. Paulsen, University of Colorado at Boulder; Arpad E. Petrass, Loyola Marymount University; Pam Rank, University of Southern California; Chuck Sheffield, Richland College (Dallas, Texas); Bernard J. Skalka, California State University, Long Beach; and W. Joseph Stell, University of Georgia.

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“Great art conceals art.” That statement has been attributed to Konstantin Stanislavski, founder of the Moscow Art Theatre and developer of Method acting. He was referring to the phenomenon that occurs when actors create brilliantly believable roles. Great actors don’t seem to be working. They make us believe that they *are* the characters they are playing and that everything they say or do is happening spontaneously, without thought or effort. Stanislavski meant by his aphorism that a seemingly effortless job of acting is the end result of years of training, dedication, and just plain hard work.

Great art *does* conceal art, but not just the art of the actor. Imagine a male actor, wrapped in a heavy fur cape, standing in the middle of the stage and delivering a soliloquy. The stage resembles a craggy mountain peak, with an angular platform surrounded by an immense expanse of solemn purple and blue sky. The actor strides to a rocky outcropping. Under his weight the platform slowly starts to tip. The actor scrambles backward to save himself and catches the hem of his cape on another “rock.” The cape comes off, and the **followspot** reveals the actor standing in his BVDs with his cape around his ankles. The spotlight operator, horrified, tries to turn off her light. But she doesn’t hit the right lever and, instead of turning it off, changes its color from deep blue to brilliant white.

This unlikely scenario illustrates the fact that less-than-great art conceals little. It also demonstrates that Stanislavski’s injunction can be just as true for the design and technical elements of the production as it is for the actors. Together, they can create the delicate illusionary reality that we call theatre. The illusion that the spectators see is just that. A great performance doesn’t simply happen; it is the product of a great deal of organization, teamwork, talent, and dedication.

Theatre folk have always delighted in surrounding the process of putting on plays with an aura of mystery. This tradition stems from the probably accurate belief that a play’s entertainment value increases if the audience thinks that the production just spontaneously happens. The Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland movies of the 1930s are perfect examples. Mickey, Judy, or one of their friends says, “Let’s put on a show!” Someone chimes in that her uncle owns a barn. Amazingly, the barn happens to have a highly polished linoleum floor that is perfect for tap dancing, and the barn is equipped with a full orchestra, sets, lights, and spectacular costumes. The show is an astounding success.

The real world of theatrical production isn’t like that. Getting a play from the written word to the stage requires a lot of challenging work. The result of all this effort, the **production team** hopes, will be artistic and artful, but the business of making a script come alive on the stage is a process that isn’t all that mysterious.

Production Organization and Management

Followspot: A lighting instrument with a high-intensity, narrow beam; mounted in a stand that allows it to tilt and swivel so the beam can “follow” an actor.

Production team: Everyone working, in any capacity, on the production of the play.

Production design team: The producer, director, and scenic, costume, lighting, and sound designers who develop the visual and aural concept for the production.

Production concept: The creative interpretation of the script, which will unify the artistic vision of producer, director, and designers.

Production meeting: A conference of appropriate production personnel to share information.

Supernumerary: An actor, normally not called for in the script, used in a production; an extra; a walk-on.

THE PRODUCTION SEQUENCE

How does a play happen? What sequence of events must occur for it to move from the pages of a script to a live performance before an audience? Every play goes through several stages of development.

Script

Most productions begin with a script. This is not true, however, for every theatrical performance. The production of some plays begins with just an idea. That idea may be developed by the performing group in a variety of interesting and creative ways. Some of these concepts may evolve into written scripts, and others may remain as conceptual cores that the actors use as guides when they improvise dialogue during the actual performance.

The producing group frequently modifies scripts to suit its particular needs. New scripts are often “developed” (a euphemism for changed, rewritten, or otherwise modified) by the producer, director, and playwright to suit the needs and desires of the producing group.

Concept, Design and Construction

We will assume that our hypothetical production begins with a traditional script. After the script has been selected, the producer options it, or secures the legal rights to produce it, and hires the director, designers, and actors. The members of the **production design team** read the script and then develop the **production concept**.

The production concept is the central creative idea that unifies the artistic vision of the producer, director, and designers. It normally evolves during the first few **production meetings** from the combined input of the members of the production design team. The principles of the production concept are best explained by example. Let's assume that our hypothetical production team is working on a production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The play could be produced in a traditional manner: Elizabethan costumes and a set that mimics the appearance of the Globe Theatre, the theatre most scholars think was used by Shakespeare. Or, as in a production of this play directed by Cosmo Catellano at the University of Iowa, the performance could be set inside a World War II Nazi concentration camp. In this production, all of the actors in the play were portrayed as Jewish interns of the camp. **Supernumeraries**, dressed as Nazi officers and their female companions, sat in the auditorium and watched the play alongside the paying audience. Additional extras, in the uniforms of concentration-camp guards and carrying weapons, patrolled the stage throughout the performance. While the script wasn't altered, the radical production concept forced the audience to concentrate on the Jewish persecution themes that are very much a part of the script.

After the production concept is agreed on, the sets, props, lights, costumes, and sound are designed. Then the various diagrams, sketches, and other plans are sent to shops for construction, fabrication, or acquisition of the production elements (see Figure 1.1).

While the various visual elements are being built, the director and actors are busy rehearsing (see Figure 1.2). After the rehearsal and construction period, which usually lasts three to seven weeks, the play moves into the theatre, and the technical and dress rehearsals begin.



FIGURE 1.1
A great deal of backstage activity occurs before the production reaches the stage.

