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The very nature of the proscenium theatre makes an actor standing downstage nearer the audience more important than an actor in an upstage position. The relative importance of the various positions on a bare stage is shown by **Figure 2-5a** by first dividing the stage into six equal parts and then numbering the areas in the order of their importance.

Such devices as raking or angling the side walls of the set to force the action in the weak upstage left and right areas toward the center, placing furniture to bring important scenes into good sightlines, and using levels in the upstage areas to increase their importance are just a few examples of staging techniques in scene design. When the stage is cut, left-to-right, by a series of portals or large arches, the staging becomes more two-dimensional. It falls into a series of horizontal planes related to the portals, each traditionally referred to by numbers. Beginning at the apron and downstage strip is number one, the next number two and so on upstage. The staging can be directed by indicating whether an actor or piece of scenery is to be in "one," "two," or "three," as desired (**Figure 2-5b**).

Figure 2-5a: *The stage divided for easy identification into basic areas that are numbered in order of relative importance.*

Next Heading

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Figure 2-5b: *A second method of dividing the stage, a series of horizontal planes determined by the location of portals or wings*
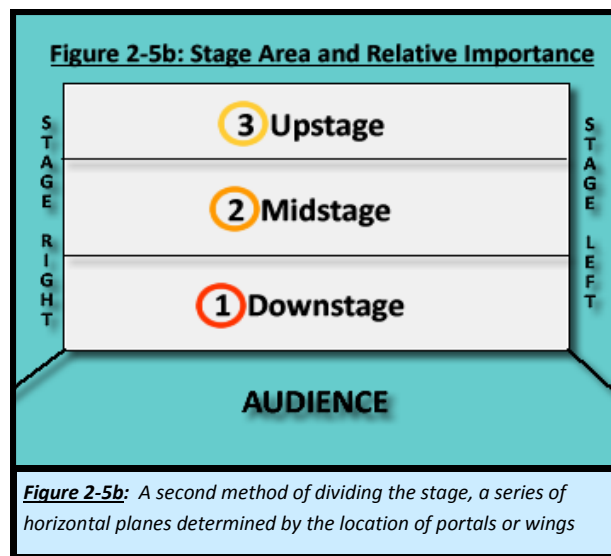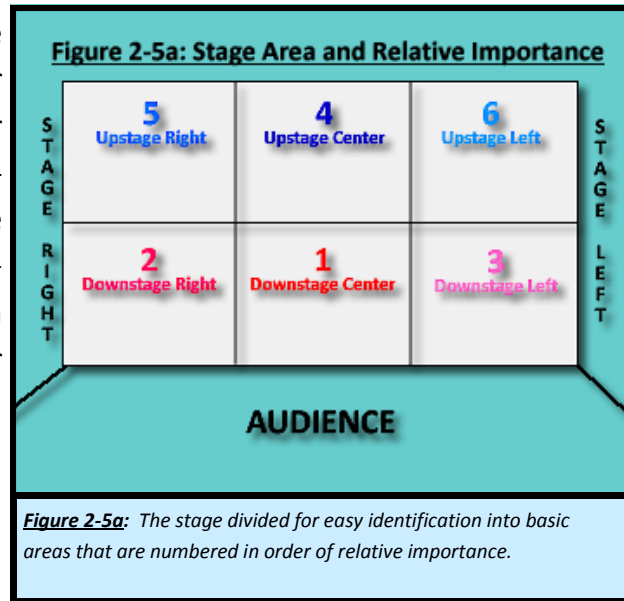
Both are regulated by the dictates of the playwright, the concepts of the director, and the limits of the performance space. In other words, emotion and feeling become the ideal, thought and intellect the reality, the first being the gal and the second the realization. The greater the skill and ability to realize the ideal, the more successful the designer.

Composition and the Elements of Design

Composition, in general terms, *is the composing or organizing of the elements of design in space into a unified form*. The result may be a single form or the interaction of several froms acting as a whole. The elements of design are the elemental factors that make up the visual form, whether it be a two-dimensional shape or a three-dimensional sculptural object.

The elements of design can also be thought of as forces that, by manipulation, can singly dominate a composition and help give the form meaning. The reason for meaning of any visual form brings to the composition a unity of purpose that is particularly important when designing in the theatre. The meaning attached to the designing of a visual form may be dictated from the outside, or may come from within the artist, often formulated by the simple desire for personal expression.

The major factors that make up a visual form can be listed in the order of their importance to the creative process:

1. **Line**
2. **Dimension**
3. **Movement**
4. **Light**
5. **Color**
6. **Texture**

Of these elements, line and color are the most forceful; in terms of design, light and movement are unique to the theatre. All the elements interact, one influencing the other as the composition begins to take shape. Although none usually stands alone, each has unique features the contribute to the overall effect sought by the designer.

Line

Line, as an element of design, *defines form*. It is a most important force in a composition because it is present in many different ways. Line can *enclose space as outline and create shape (two-dimensional form), or as contour lines it can suggest three-dimensional form*. Line in a composition can appear as real line in many different modes (straight, curved, spiral and so on), as linear shapes that take on a line-like quality, or as suggested line by the eye as it follows a sequence of related shapes (**Figure 3-1**).

Production Sound Design

Design of music and audio effects for theatrical production is certainly the most creative and perhaps the most important function of sound in the theatre. Such design requires that person have a strong background in general theatrical production, a good knowledge of sound equipment, as well as an interest in and familiarity with music and sound. In addition, music composition skills are a big plus. The manner in which sound design may contribute to theatrical production can be broken down into three categories:

- Evoking a specific atmosphere or mood

- Reinforcing the action of the play

- Commenting on the action of the play

Evoking Atmosphere or Mood

The most familiar way a sound can evoke a specific atmosphere or mood is by using environmental sounds in a realistic manner Examples are abundant: the bright chirping of birds for a cheerful morning scene, the ominous rolls of thunder preceding a storm, or the sad notes of waltz music coming from a nearby dance hall.
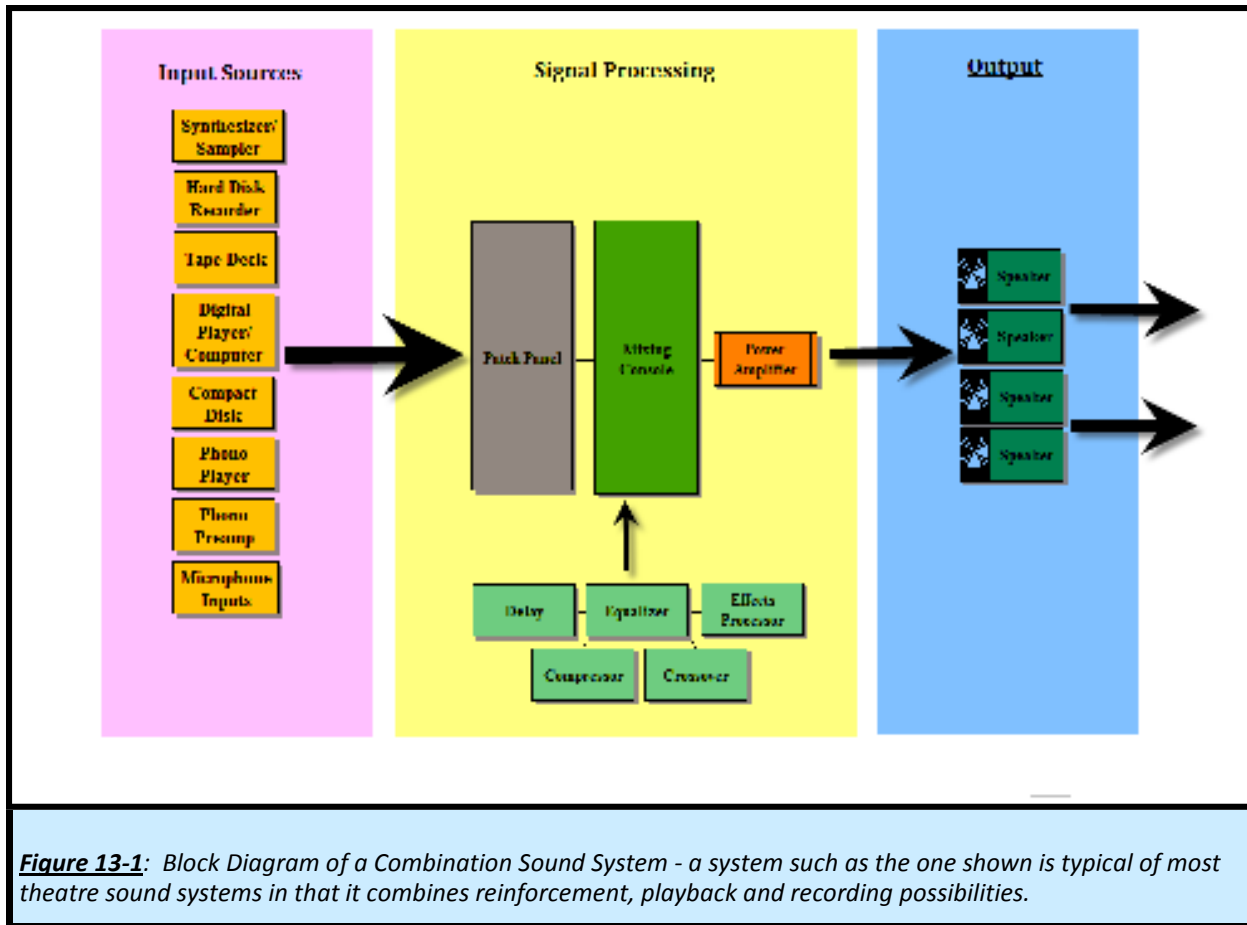
Figure 12-8: Sound design can contribute to a theatrical production in three different ways.
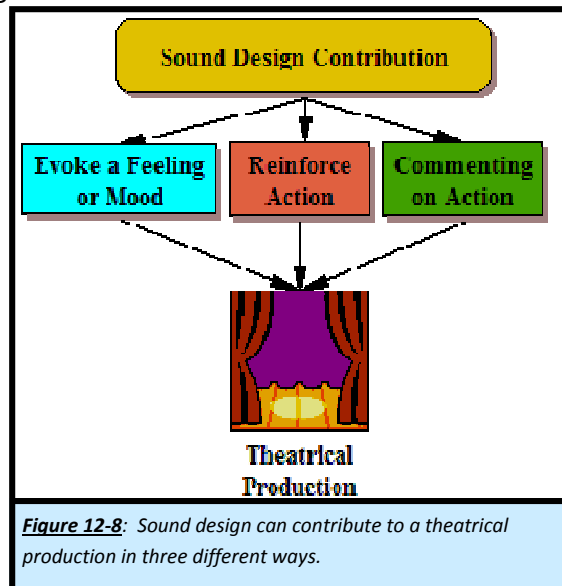
While it must be handled with some degree of caution, realistically motivated sound is one of the easies to use due to an audience's inclination to readily accept such sound.

Nonrealistic or unmotivated (lacking any apparent source) sound created by the designer for a specific effect can also be used to evoke a feeling of atmosphere or mood. Musical underscoring, the process of playing music or sound effects under a performer's dialogue, is a good example. Such usage is ore difficult for an audience to accept, but can be extremely effective. A subtle touch is recommended.

A designer must never forget the power of silence! The artful process of establishing an atmospheric sound, such as crickets chirping, and suddenly cutting off the sound can be more dynamic and effective than any other device.

Further examples of the use of atmospheric sound are pre- and post- show incidental music, as well as musical "punctuations." Punctuation effects are most often used for entrances and exits of characters or at the end of scenes. They may be realistic, such as a clap of thunder; or stylistic, such as musical fanfares; or frankly presentational, such as the abstract grinding of stones together upon each entrance of a particular character as a leitmotif.

Figure 13-1: *Block Diagram of a Combination Sound System - a system such as the one shown is typical of most theatre sound systems in that it combines reinforcement, playback and recording possibilities.*

Input Sources

Anything that *sends a sound signal to the system* is considered an **input source**. Two commonly used methods of transmitting and storing a source's signal are analog and digital. While they cannot be used interchangeably, an analog signal can be converted to digital and vice versa.

Analog signals have been with us for a long time. They are *electrical waveforms carried through wires that duplicate sound waveforms*. A microphone is a piece of equipment categorized as a transducer because it changes acoustic waveforms into the electrical waveforms of an analog signal.

The fairly recent development of digital technology has offered a solution to some of the inherent problems of analog signals. In the digital process, an analog signal is converted to a rapid series of on-or-off (binary) pulses. These pulses can be read, recorded and manipulated with great precision, resulting in more flexible and accurate storage and reproduction.

Major input sources are microphones, tapes, records, compact disks, synthesizers and