

## Thesis Statement

Sound design is a relatively new field in theatre, and oftentimes we are met with confusion from directors who wonder what it is exactly we do. Many times our “precious” sound design is cut left and right until it no longer resembles what we wanted.

I wish to explore this situation, as I feel that many times we as sound designers blame our woes on directors who we feel do not understand our job, when in fact there are changes we could make with our process and within ourselves that will better suit the creative process. Through a look at the documented processes of sound designers and directors I wish to explore the situation of differing vocabularies of the two roles. Where can we find a common ground in order to discuss the aural playworld? My thesis will explore how sound designers can better communicate and work with directors during both the creative and the technical processes in order to achieve a more thoroughly incorporated sound design.

## Introduction

While sound has been utilized in dramatic productions throughout history, sound design is a newly labeled field within theatre. Sound was identified as a separate area of theatre design only about forty years ago. Within the past few years, sound designers were still struggling to gain recognition and acceptance into United Scenic Artists 829, the American labor union of designers and artists in the entertainment industry. Lenora Brown of *American Theatre* magazine writes earlier in 2001, “With their recent admission into the designers' union, United Scenic Artists, the status of sound designers in the American theatre has officially risen.” Brown continues to write, “It has taken decades to convince theatrical

producers, directors and artists of the importance of reconsidering sound onstage — not to mention of properly compensating, crediting and incorporating the sculptors of aural space” (Brown 15). Des McAnuff, the former artistic director of LaJolla Playhouse voices his opinion on the role of sound in theatre:

Sound has to be considered equally with the other design disciplines, and I think we’re finally reaching a point where that’s beginning to be the case. The theatre was just as slow to recognize lighting’s vital role. For a long time, lighting designers were thought of more as technicians and not as real designers. They weren’t considered of the same importance as scenic and costume designers. The key role to recognize here is that sound and controlled sound plays a large role in our cultural vocabulary. It is a critical aspect of live performance. I don’t think sound should just play a role where it is aiding in the creation of verisimilitude, like car doors slamming. It’s important that sound design works creatively and abstractly in the theatre whenever it’s appropriate. I believe sound should accompany the human voice. I don’t think we should be shy about sound as underscoring, because all of the audio elements are truly wondrous and should routinely be considered part of our palette.  
(Kaye/LeBrecht 181)

McAnuff speaks to the fact that many directors are now recognizing the importance of sound in theatre, but that change takes time. When a field is so newly recognized as sound design, there are bound to be difficulties in communicating what we do, and thus, implementing a sound design that is thoroughly incorporated into the production. Deena Kaye and James LeBrecht, both prominent sound designers, write that a sound designer might find herself working with a director like Gerald Gutierrez, former Associate Director of the Lincoln Center Theater, who felt that his training as a musician allowed him to “communicate with my sound designers in terms of the music. They can understand what I’m looking for musically” (Kaye/LeBrecht 185). But, Brian Hallas, a sound designer and composer who has worked with Ping Chong, tells of “communicating with directors” as being a “challenge” within his own process, while Tom Mardikes, sound designer for Kansas City Rep and faculty at University of Missouri-Kansas City, feels that “directors, in general,

do not have a sound vocabulary” (Kaye/LeBrecht 216). Sound designers have developed their own vocabulary over the years, taken from the different worlds we work within, including theatre, music, and the world of technology and computers. Michelle DiBucci, a composer for theatre and film, when interviewed said she feels that “directors are some of the most well-informed people on the planet. Many I have worked with are both knowledgeable and articulate in history, politics, theology, literature, geography, and *all* of the arts” (Kaye/LeBrecht 214). Depending on what type of background the director comes from, the vocabulary a sound designer uses might not match up with the vocabulary a director has learned and utilizes for her own process. The two roles of sound designer and director, while both theatre-based, come from different backgrounds and thus have developed different vocabularies.

By looking at the documented processes of sound designers and directors, I wish to explore this situation of the differing vocabularies. Where can we find a common ground in order to discuss the aural playworld? My thesis will explore how sound designers can better communicate and work with directors during both the creative and the technical processes in order to achieve a more thoroughly incorporated sound design.

## The Origins

If we are to look at the role of the sound designer, let us first look at the history of theatre sound design. If we look at the progression of the design form of “sound” throughout theatre history, then we will see that sound is still quite young, which might contribute to language differences. While “sound design” is a recent label, theatre has always utilized sound. Performers in ancient Greek plays wore specially devised masks built to

naturally amplify the sound of their voices. Deena Kaye and James LeBrecht write of the use of sound in Renaissance and Elizabethan theatre. Commedia dell'arte used musical effects (such as the slapstick) to heighten the hilarity of a farcical situation. In Shakespearean and other Elizabethan drama, sound was used to place the audience location-wise, and to conjure up the imagined — what is referred to in the script, but might not be made physically tangible to the audience (4). Shakespeare's *The Tempest* opens with the stage directions of "A tempestuous noise of Thunder and Lightning heard." (1623 First Folio Ed. 1). Kaye and LeBrecht write that sound was also used in the Elizabethan theatre to establish atmosphere and create the "framing effects" of theatre (preshow, intermission, curtain call). Some plays had stage directions for specific sound effects to happen offstage. Throughout the next few eras of theatre, Restoration, Neoclassical, and Romantic, the use of sound would find itself in and out of favor, due to the other production values, lights, scenery, and costumes, becoming more elaborate and modernized (5). The playwrights of Realism, such as Chekhov, Ibsen, and Shaw, often wrote elaborate and specific sound effects into their plays. In Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, the play ends with a loud avalanche.

The mist-clouds close in over the scene—Professor Rubek and Irene, hand in hand, climb up over the snow-field to the right and soon disappear among the lower clouds. Keen storm-gusts hurtle and whistle through the air . . . Suddenly a sound like thunder is heard from high up on the snow-field, which glides and whirls downwards with headlong speed. Professor Rubek and Irene can be dimly discerned as they are whirled along with the masses of snow and buried in them. (Ibsen 89)

Stretching from the Elizabethan to Realistic theatre, mechanical sound devices were devised and employed in order to create realistic sound effects offstage. In fact, Thalian Hall built in the mid-1800s in Wilmington, N.C., used its "thunder run" in more recent times, during the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the concert hall, and in 1990 for a gala event (Morning Edition). The advent of recording eventually found its place as prerecorded

effects in the theatre. By the mid 1920s, Erwin Piscator was using recordings in his productions at the Berlin Volksbühne, and in the 1930s his protégé Bertolt Brecht followed suit in his epic plays. Sound was being used in productions, through the use of turntables and records.

But still, no one person was labeled the “sound designer” – effects were called upon by the playwright specifically or requested by the director. Then a stage manager might find the cues, and she or an electrician or two would operate the plethora of turntables. David Collison, the first credited British sound designer, remembers his “baptism by fire” in such a scenario, when speaking to the Sound Commission at the United States Institute of Theatre Technology conference in 2007 – he shadowed a stage manager in her duties of playing back sound, and in terror, watched as she operated all the turntables. One night, she showed up inebriated and unable to perform her duties. Eventually, Collison became the first person credited as a “sound designer” for a production at London’s Lyrics Theatre in 1959. Dan Dugan was billed as “sound designer” for the 1968-69 season at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. With the “rock musical” becoming a huge force on Broadway, sound reinforcement became incredibly essential – the need to properly mix the sound of the orchestra/band with the voices of the actors, and amplify both so as to be heard, but also have the words intelligible to the audience. Abe Jacob became the first credited “sound designer” on Broadway in 1971, as he introduced the Great White Way to the use of wireless microphones on Andrew Lloyd Weber’s *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Kaye/LeBrecht 8).

Considering that the other production elements had their respective designers credited since early in the last century (Norman Bel Geddes and Abe Feder were the first credited lighting designers in the early 1930s) sound design is a relatively young theatre art, being approximately forty years old. While sound has been used throughout the course of theatre

history, there might still be some confusion as to our roles as “sound designer” within theatre.

## The Role of the Sound Designer

When talking to friends and family I am often met with furrowed eyebrows when I tell them I am a “sound designer” “Well, what do you do?” That is a question that many a sound designer has come across in their work, and indeed, that even those in the sound community debate over: What exactly does a sound designer do? Who is a sound designer? How are sound designers different from sound engineers? In order to explore the communication between sound designers and directors, let us first define what a sound designer does.

John Bracewell, former associate professor of Theatre Arts at Ithaca College, describes design as “the attempt to arrange patterns of sensory events in ways that will create an emotional response and, subsequently, the development of aesthetic meaning.” Design is an offshoot of art. Art is the expression of the human spirit, made tangible to the five human senses. Art is made due to a need to communicate to that same human spirit. While artists work primarily to satisfy their own needs, designers are given partners to collaborate with, a future goal or endpoint, and parameters to work within. It is these parameters that are fundamental to the design process, as they clue a designer in on how to arrange whatever it is in front of them (Bracewell 2006). In a business setting, designers work for a client and that client gives the parameters with which to work within. Design is a form of problem solving, in that designers are given bits and pieces of the equation, and through analysis and observation, come to a solution. We work in much the same way within theatre. Designers

sit down with the director, and the director expresses her thoughts, ideas, research, and metaphors with the production team. The director is the “client” who sets the parameters for the project/play. A sound designer then goes off with those parameters, and as the rehearsal process ensues, creates her work with them in mind. In his *Cirque du Soleil* biography, sound designer Jonathan Deans says that “when sound isn’t focused, it’s just noise” (Cirque site). Designs, be they sound or some other medium, are meaningful and carefully chosen and assembled. Every part of it has been thought about.

An exact definition of a “sound designer” that the entire theatre community agrees with is not easy to come by. When interviewed, Donna Riley, an NYC-based sound designer, told of her role as a sound designer as needing “to provide aural focus and help guide the audience through the emotional experiences of the production – setting the time, place, and mood through the use of music, sound effects, ambiance, and silence in conjunction with the sound of the playwright’s words” (Kaye/LeBrecht 211). David Budries, head of the sound department at Yale University, feels that sound is like its own character that is there in support of the show. Budries says:

As a conceptual sound designer, I am responsible for all aspects of the created aural environment. That’s *everything* that makes sound. I treat all sound design and composition as a creative endeavor. The primary difference is source material. I maintain that there is virtually no difference between a carefully constructed door close as a scene tuning point, and a carefully written and orchestrated musical phrase that serves the same function in the production design. Sound design is a compositional skill. In my opinion, you must give the same care and attention to the creation of music *and* sound props . . . Anything that makes sound comes under my scrutiny, from scenic elements and props to music and sound effects. As a result, I will consult with a technical director when necessary to make a moving set piece quieter (of course, only if that is important to the production) and with props people to adapt the perfect prop. I will also work with composers to realize their ideas in three dimensions and with sound effects to create abstract environments or realistic source-specific sounds . . . You need to provide an aural character that supports the scene and find ways of expressing that idea fluidly within the context of a production. (Kaye/LeBrecht 211)

Many sound designers agree that the role of sound designer entails structuring the aural world within a production in order to comment on and heighten the dramatic and theatrical experience.

The difference between the roles of sound designer and sound engineer are evident to those in the sound world, but may not be so to those outside of it, perhaps resulting in confusion. Sound engineering, like sound design, also revolves around structure. Sound engineering focuses on the physical structure and operation of the sound system, and the delivery of the work that the sound designer creates. Sound design is concerned with the compositional structure of the aural playworld and with fitting that structure into the world the director is creating.

The technical craft of any art is important, especially for sound. Traditional audio is almost inescapably an “engineering” art. Sound itself is a complex phenomenon. Control of sound requires a sophisticated technology, and audio equipment is, in general, designed by engineers for engineers . . . the theatre sound artist needs a fundamental grounding in the technology of audio . . . the sound designer must be able to imagine novel and untried uses for audio equipment in order to fulfill the strange and unusual demands that theatre can often impose. (Bracewell 2)

Sound designers are either solid sound engineers, or have a good sound engineer behind them in the process. But the two roles are vastly different. A sound designer acts more in an engineering capacity while helping set up and fine-tune the system. But, when talking to the director who does not come from that engineering world, the sound designer does well to remember that perceptions are important and appearing more as a designer rather than an engineer is important. Designers and engineers use two different vocabularies. The vocabulary of the sound designer is still different from that of the director. If the designer begins bringing in talk of “decibels” and “acoustic field”, communication between she and

the director might come to a standstill. It is important to remember that clear communication is a vital component to collaboration.

## Looking to the Business World

The business world seems the polar opposite of the theatre world, but I believe that much can be learned from their structure. As mentioned earlier, designers work within the goals and parameters of others. In theatre, we work with directors. In the business world, designers work for business clients. With both “clients”, the designer goes through the creative process with them. Like the theatre world, communication issues also can arise within the world of corporate design.

A recent review of business literature shows that many in the corporate world are concerned now with being more “innovative”. The British magazine *The Economist* wrote, “Innovation is now recognized as the single most important ingredient in any modern economy” (cited in Kelley 3). An economy is like a business, and many companies can now be seen to develop strategies on how to be more creative within their process of idea and product development.

IDEO is a California-based design consultant firm. The company has been called upon to design products, services, environments, and experiences, for a roster list that reads like a who’s who of the corporate world. In 1999, the company was featured on ABC’s “Nightline”, as they conducted a “Deep Dive”. In the Deep Dive, they focused all their attention for four days on a design problem that needed to be solved in an innovative way – creating a better grocery cart. The Deep Dive highlighted IDEO’s belief system; that innovation and the creative process rely on the strengths of the team members. In Tom

Kelley's *Ten Faces of Innovation*, he highlights roles that individuals can take in order to heighten innovation within the company. These strengths could also be facets of an individual. Some of these roles include: The Cross-Pollinator, The Anthropologist, and The Experimenter. I will first define these three roles as Kelley does in his book, and then suggest how a sound designer can look to these specific roles when structuring her own creative process.

### *The Cross-Pollinator*

The Cross-Pollinator looks to other fields and realms for innovative solutions to problems in their own field. In the business world, being “just” an engineer can lead to mental roadblocks as one problem-solves. The Cross-Pollinator creates by discovering what one field does to solve a problem, and then by translating that solution to fit in their own world, to solve their own problem. The Cross-Pollinator will delve into worlds that superficially have nothing to do with their own world and their own problems.

Computer pioneers got the idea for IBM punch cards – and arguably even the digital computer itself – from a punch-card system for weaving complex fabric patterns on a silk loom. The concept of an escalator began life as a primitive Coney Island amusement ride that has since grown into a billion-dollar industry. And most Frisbee players don't know that the basic shape and even the name of that ubiquitous flying toy was adapted from the Frisbee Baking Company's metal pie tins, tossed by Ivy League students a century ago (Kelley 68).

Kelley writes that labels and titles do not hamper these ingenious types of people. Anything can be inspiration for their own company, in how it conducts business or creates products. The key is translating what works for the one company into something that could be attempted at their own company. Kelley highlights that the best Cross-Pollinators are “T-shaped” people. Here, there is a deep focus on one particular subject, but they also have a

wide pool of knowledge of many other fields and interests. They constantly keep themselves updated as to what is going on outside of their chosen field or focus, in the worlds of science, technology, arts, politics, and so much more. Cross-Pollinators do not keep themselves hidden in their own little chosen hole, rather, they constantly expand their knowledge and their point of view in order to bring new ideas and innovations they have discovered in others' worlds to the table.

In their appropriation of new forms of technology for sound uses, sound designers have constantly played the Cross-Pollinator in terms of the equipment of the design. Much of our playback equipment originated as forms of musical instruments, such as the sampler and the sequencer. The use of MIDI, or Musical Instrument Digital Interface, in sound design is widespread now, but in the 1970s it was still a young technology. It was a way for synthesizer manufacturers to control such aspects as polyphony and touch-sensitivity, but one manufacturer's controls did not necessarily match up with another manufacturer's settings. In 1981, the Audio Engineering Society proposed a protocol for this form of intercommunication, and within a year the sound and music community had adopted a standard for MIDI (Bracewell 144). Over the next 25 years the sound community has embraced MIDI wholeheartedly, using it to control not just digital musical instruments, but also playback of sound cues in samplers, computer programs, and even lighting consoles. And with Charlie Richmond's development of MIDI Show Control in 1991 the sound community has pushed MIDI's acceptance by other fields. MIDI Show Control is a protocol that allows devices of all production fields to "talk" to each other, by transmitting digital information. This form of intercommunication that previously had been thought only able to control synthesizers can control many types of devices by all other branches of theatrical design.

Sound design has constantly looked to other branches of theatrical designs and the world of technology for equipment and inspiration. In terms of the art of the design, sound designers can play the Cross-Pollinator and look to other worlds, such as the business world, in deciding how best to communicate with directors. Further on in the thesis I will discuss how sound designers can look to other worlds for vocabulary, including other theatrical design fields, music, and quite importantly, directing. When looking to other worlds, we see how they communicate and function in an attempt to translate what “they” do to what “we” do.

### *The Anthropologist*

Kelley writes of the Anthropologist observing everything around them with a “beginner’s mind” in that they do not judge what is in front of them. Here, a person can put aside everything they know, be it from what they have studied or what tradition and society dictates. They then observe “with a truly open mind.” Anthropologists experience “Vuja De”, the opposite of “Déjà vu”. Here, you experience something as if you are experiencing it for the first time ever. A good Anthropologist will “Ask, Watch, Learn, and Try.” They constantly go out into the field and observe the customers as they actually use the product.

In theatre, we too can play the Anthropologist, and this is easily done in the rehearsal process. The sound designer reads the script and does analysis on it, and perhaps already begins thinking up cues in their head before even going to talk to the director. When asked about his own process, Darron West spoke of his compelling need to read and re-read the script, and the importance of research:

My own particular process is to read the play. I make it a rule that I'll read the play once a day for the first two weeks right before I walk into rehearsals. I very rarely make any notes while I'm reading through the play. I just try to soak it all in and do a

lot of research. I'm a complete research freak. I very rarely have conversations about what my design is going to be. I've got palettes in my head, but I've never been one to sit down with a director before I go into rehearsal and say, "Okay, this is what I'm thinking in this scene." For me it's all about discovering it as we're making it. I love the element of surprise. I'm very reluctant to do too much preparation. I do a lot of research and then, when I walk into the rehearsal hall, I throw all the research right out the window. Creating is a visceral experience for me. (Druckman)

In his writings, Harold Clurman, a renowned theatre director, would seem to concur with Darron West. In his book *On Directing*, he writes of the Berliner Ensemble and other European theatres, where it was common for designers to sit in on all rehearsals and format their design for the show as they see it in rehearsals. With the description of the Anthropologist and from what we see with West and Clurman, we see that a sound designer has a strong foundation in the script, the story that all other members of the team are working from, and a strong understanding of the background of the world. Then, the sound designer sets aside their preconceived notions. She goes in and interacts with the director and sits in on rehearsals. Script analysis grounds us in our work, but as West describes, going out "into the field" is the best research for a designer. While in rehearsals the sound designer can then observe, come up with new questions to ask of the director, which can inspire and inform both of them. Based on what they have observed in rehearsals, it is then up to the sound designer to begin trying out many options.

We, as sound designers, can follow the European tradition Clurman writes of quite easily. When interviewed, Tom Mardikes spoke of the advantage of the sound designer. He says, "Scenery and costumes have to commit their designs very early in the process. Sound has the advantage of being able to count down to the last minute, and [create] something very specific to the production" (Kaye/LeBrecht 210). Mardikes speaks to the common practice of the scenic designer having in a set model, and the costume designer, full color renderings, by the first day of rehearsal. These two design fields also find themselves in

rehearsal, in order to see if their concepts that have been made tangible for the director, will actually work with the actors' discoveries.

Sometimes, the sound designer does not have the luxury of being in constant rehearsals due to financial restraints. Some theatres cannot pay to have the sound designer in every day, and that designer finds herself only able to attend first read-through and a designer run before tech begins. This sound designer can still utilize the idea of the Anthropologist by immersing herself in the world of the play, even if they cannot go “into the field”. When asked by Brown for *American Theatre* about creating sound in a short time frame, Janet Kalas, a New York-based sound designer, says that talks with the other designers help her begin to create. She says, “The initial process for me begins with the first discussions with the other designers. If I can see a set designer's photograph, it can give me a sense of whether the play is warm or cold, for instance. It can set me in a place so that I can start imagining what the sound would be” (Brown 16). While perhaps a sound designer cannot be physically in the space every day with the team, frequent phone calls or email conversations can be had with all involved to such a point that the sound designer has a solid idea of where the production is heading. The key is to keep in constant communication so that small changes that occur are not lost on the sound designer who cannot physically be at rehearsal.

Rehearsals are where the play springs to life. Decisions and choices are made day-to-day and hour-to-hour there that determine the shape and path of the production. Small changes occur that might not find their way into a stage manager's rehearsal reports, but ultimately affect the course of the production and the sound design. The sound designer has the advantage of being one of the designs that can custom tailor her work from the start for what the director and actors are doing in rehearsal.

### *The Experimenter*

This person is, as the name suggests, constantly experimenting with new and creative ideas. “Failure” is not a word Experimenters use as they learn from everything, including momentary setbacks. The idea here is, as Kelley writes, to constantly “make ideas tangible” be it through sketches or little innovative mock-ups of the product being discussed. When an idea is made tangible the client can then see it. It is difficult to ask a client to visualize an idea you are thinking of, as you cannot control what they conjure up. When the idea is physically presented in front of them, the client gets a better idea of what the designer is thinking of and can then comment intelligently on it. This situation requires a certain level and history of trust and confidence between the client and the designer. This idea of making ideas tangible is done quickly and many times so as to give the client multiple options. This is what Kelley refers to as “rapid prototyping”. Within rapid prototyping it is acceptable to present something not very finessed and polished to the client. The client knows that this is not the final product, rather the basic idea for a potential future product. Kelley also brings up “experimenting in real time” – being able to quickly and efficiently meet the client’s needs. If you are constantly experimenting with ideas, then you have established a “culture” where it is acceptable to change things to suddenly suit the client’s needs without too much consternation. Kelley writes, “If experimenting is part of your culture, you can respond in hours or days, changing your offerings to meet market shifts and customer demands.” The idea does not remain permanent at any time; rather it is something that is malleable and easily adapted.

The sound designer could take note of the Experimenter’s traits. Bracewell writes, “Sound is a difficult art for many people because most of us visualize but cannot

‘auditorialize’” (201). Talking about sound can be understandably difficult for a director, and so sound designers could utilize the idea of the Experimenter by making sound “tangible” for their client. We can “rapidly prototype” and create multiple sound “sketches” for the director, so that they have a foundation on which to discuss the design. In terms of his own process, and “audio sketching”, Martin Desjardins, resident sound designer at the Shakespeare Theatre, writes:

When it comes to the specific contents of my cues, my discussions with directors are very limited. I try to produce some material as early as possible; building elements, soundscapes, and compositions that are very coarse representations of what I am thinking. At this point, I rarely build "cues" specific to one part of the show. However, by choosing the right areas to emphasize in the creation of these early sketches, I am able to give the director some sense of where I am heading. This immediately makes concrete that which is otherwise obtuse and theoretical. It serves as a point of departure for the design and, even if the director's response is "nope, not what I was thinking," the sketch is a success in so much as it has allowed us to eliminate a range of possibilities. I also find that talking about a "sketch" makes other more concrete discussions about sound easier, again by providing an example off of which the director's ideas can be compared (Desjardins).

When we can rapidly prototype sound ideas, the director now has more tangible/audible sound before her. As she rehearses and keeps these sketches on her mind, more feedback can be given regarding the sound design. In a personal interview, Darron West explains that “sound cues mean nothing until they are juxtaposed over a scene . . . Syntax is incredibly important when working with a director” (West). West feels that just presenting a director with a CD of cues is not useful, as they are not presented in context with the moments the sound designer has in mind. West prefers to “rapidly prototype” in the rehearsal setting, where he can create context for the cues. When there are sound ideas being rapidly produced, there is more time to play with the ideas. Then there is more feedback, and the director and sound designer can begin agreeing on the sound “palette” of the show. In painting, a “palette” would be the range of colors an artist would choose from

for a particular piece they are working on. So in sound design, we too can have a “palette,” or a certain sound “vocabulary” we have established early on in a show that we then can choose and pick from during the course of the process. According to Bracewell’s idea of designers attempting to arrange patterns, the sound designer would try and keep all cues within that “palette” throughout the show.

These quick “sketches” can be done through the use of laptop computers and sound editing programs. Logic is a Digital Audio Workstation that, unlike ProTools the popular Digidesign sound editing software, does not need a hardware interface in order to create simple sound ideas for a director. A sound designer could, in minutes, import and edit a sound file and have it ready for a director to preview, perhaps even in the rehearsal hall with the actors, with just their laptop in hand. If a sound designer spends an inordinate amount of time on one cue, then all of that time has been lost if it is cut due to new rehearsal needs and developments. But if the sound designer and the director discuss ideas first and the designer then observes the actors and quickly creates “sketches” revolving around their work, then less time is spent on something that obtains more feedback. Brian Hallas says that he creates many “sketches” for a director to listen to. Hallas continues:

Developing a soundtrack simultaneously and in the same room while the performers make their discoveries is my favorite approach. Many of the more satisfying elements for my soundtracks have come about at the same moment as a performer made a major find. This happy synchronicity needs to be nurtured . . . My favorite director has been my most frequent collaborator, Ping Chong. He wants a soundtrack to be just that – the aural blanket against which the action plays out. He is visual, includes movement and text within his pieces, and expects the soundtrack to be cinematic. We share a similar sensibility in the way music and sound work, and as a result, we’re game to try anything (Kaye/LeBrecht 213).

While the cue may not be perfectly finessed, if a sound designer is constantly bringing in new sound ideas and updates on the previously rehearsal-tested ideas, then they build confidence and trust with the director, and as Kelley writes, a “culture” has been

established. When interviewed by Kaye and LeBrecht, Gerald Gutierrez said “inevitably, problems happen when I work with somebody new”. In Gutierrez’s situation of working with a new sound designer, confidence and trust had not yet been built up and he found himself having to “forcefeed a concept” to get what he was thinking about, sound-wise. Gutierrez says that this situation is not the way he prefers to work with a sound designer as he feels it is “door-slamming and negative” (Kaye/LeBrecht 191). Jack O’Brien, artistic director of the Old Globe Theatre, would rather employ a hands-off approach, dealing with a sound designer he knows and trusts. O’Brien says, “If I know the work of the designer, I don’t want to be involved at all. I want him to just do it. And then I want to respond to it” (Kaye/LeBrecht 187). Many directors prefer a situation where they have worked with a sound designer before and have established a good working relationship and culture. When this has been established, a director will find it acceptable that the cues are not show-ready but rather very “tangible” ideas and “sketches” that are also malleable as progress and changes are made in rehearsal. The idea can then become refined and finessed later in the process.

## Removing Gear from the Process

In sound for theatre we use a lot of complicated pieces of equipment in order to input and process sound cues or voices. All of the knobs and buttons make sense to us, and once we have an understanding of that particular piece of equipment, we find that we can quickly fine tune and make changes to the equipment while in the midst of the chaos of a technical rehearsal. But to anyone who is not involved in sound, especially the director who may not come from a technical background, the “wall of blinking lights” could look quite

intimidating. Lauren Keating, current assistant director to Daniel Sullivan on Shakespeare in the Park's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, feels that sometimes technicians and engineers "use gear and technology to distance other people. The gear shouldn't be part of the dialogue". When changes need to be made, she is of the opinion that she wants "to know that it can happen, but I don't need to know how" (Keating). Keating feels that the technology is available and can be used as seen fit, but that when conversations need to happen, the gear plays very little role in the shape the design develops. She knows the gear is important to the design, but would rather not know about its intricacies.

When asked about the biggest change in sound design in the past couple decades, Michael Hooker, a former Imagineer for Walt Disney and present sound faculty at the University of California-Irvine, says that it has been the "digital revolution" within sound design. Hooker continues, "There is a new generation of sound designers out there who really have no grasp of the art they are creating. To them, sound design is about the toys . . . it really is the thought behind and the content of the show tapes that counts" (Kaye/LeBrecht 253). The "wall of blinking lights" easily seduces young sound designers. When talking to a director it is the story of the script that is important and not all of the gear that makes the sound possible. The sound designer acts more as the "graphic overlay" for the director, filtering out the nonessentials for the director. The director already has much on her mind with the actors and their staging, and the other design arts, and so on. As the sound designer discusses cues or changes that might need to happen, it is good to understand that the director does not need to know the mechanisms of what she does, just that she can do it, and that the director will then hear the appropriate changes.

In terms of equipment there is very little that can be done about the size and amount of equipment at the Front-of-House position (besides using a digital console, which

eliminates much of the processing gear). But, we can control the director's perception of us as the sound designer. The scenery and costume designer sit in the house and do not have much in way of the tools of their trade with them as they watch technical rehearsals. The lighting designer hands off programming to the light board operator typically, and so she tends to be left with a monitor and a Clear Com headset for communication. Many sound designers now have less at their own tech table. Samplers, playback computers, and other playback devices find themselves totally moved to their final show position, up at Front-of-House. Through MIDI control and a solid VNC client, which allows the user to be able to view and control a playback computer that would be at Front-of-House, many sound designers now have just their laptop with them at the tech table. This looks much less imposing and intimidating than all the equipment that was there previously. Suddenly, the sound designer who was previously perceived more as an editing device is now a human designer sitting there, whose job it is to tell a story through the use of sound.

## Examining Others' Vocabularies

Sound designers come from the combined worlds of theatre design, technology, and music, and have developed their own vocabulary as the years and the art have progressed. Many directors come from a more textual vocabulary, while others come from more of a visual background and vocabulary. Previously, I mentioned playing Cross-Pollinator and looking to the other theatre arts. This is to see what their vocabulary consists of, in an effort to see if there is a way to translate what they do as more visual designers, to what we do as sound designers.

## The Vocabulary of Lighting Design

First, let us examine how theatre designers talk about the work they do. I would like to compare and contrast sound and lighting designers. The forms of lighting and sound design are closely entwined. Bracewell writes, “Scenic art had a long history of painting and architecture to build on. Costume had the entire tradition of fashion as its base. Electric lighting and audio-based sound entered theatre as developments of electrical technology and engineering” (Bracewell x). Bracewell speaks to the fact that in America, lighting and sound are tied, due to their backgrounds and histories within theatre. Sound designers constantly work closely with lighting designers in terms of coordinating cueing. In the 1998 Broadway production of “Wait Until Dark,” Darron West, and lighting designer, Brian MacDevitt, “worked closely to heighten the tension with certain effects, like strobe flashes combined with unnerving camera-clicking sounds”. Darron West says of his collaboration with MacDevitt, “Brian and I had a great time; he's a fabulous collaborator. I'd been working on this photo flash idea. When I played it, he said, 'Oh, my God!' and set up some strobes. We ran back and forth between each other's tech tables, working on it” (Barbour 22). Sound and lighting designers often work hand-in-hand. While directors might have a hard time “auditorializing” in the words of Bracewell, many are able to sit down with a lighting designer and discuss general lighting looks, and know specifically what lighting effect might need to happen for a specific moment.

As stated previously, engineers talk in a more technical language and designers also know this language in order to get a system up and running, a system that can do the cueing the designer has in mind after watching rehearsals and collaborating with the director. The lighting designer is, like the sound designer, also concerned with the playworld and the goal of storytelling.

In terms of sound design, John Bracewell writes:

The art of sound in dramatic production may be considered under three primary aspects: the functions of sound in theatre, the properties by which a designer can manipulate sound as a dramatic element, and the methods by which sound for dramatic production can be accomplished (207).

He writes that there are seven functions of sound in the theatre, including audibility, motivation (environmental ambience), music, vocal alteration, vocal substitution, extension of dramatic space/time, and mood. Stanley McCandless, the first theatrical lighting design educator, wrote of the functions of lighting design. The functions included visibility, naturalism, composition, and mood. Here, we see similarities between the two design forms.

Both are concerned with the basics, audibility for sound and visibility for lighting. A director's concern when sitting down with the lighting designer will eventually include the basic one of "we need to see the actors". With sound, a director cannot focus on subtle sound cues being played, when she cannot hear her actors in the large theatre that has acoustic problems. The basics of visibility and audibility are simple, but necessary.

With naturalism in lighting there is a concern of orienting the audience in time and space. Naturalism will vary according to the style of the play, but lighting can tell us that this particular scene happens early morning in the outdoors. Meanwhile, sound too concerns itself with placing the audience spatially and in a particular time. In the same opening of the scene, as the lights establish themselves, the sound is that of chirping songbirds and a rooster crowing. Bracewell calls this an extension of dramatic space/time, and writes that inevitably, audience members will have different types of associations come up as they listen to the sounds that are there to "refer to events outside of the physical space" (208). Both designs are concerned with situating the play in a time and place.

McCandless writes of the lighting designer having control over the *mise-en-scène*, or the surroundings and environment, of the stage. After talking to the director, the lighting designer knows how to approach the show and works within her own lighting “palette” and becomes concerned with what Bracewell calls, motivation of lighting within the world (208). The sound designer is concerned that the dog bark effect comes from the loudspeaker off left that the actor is referring to and not the one centered on the proscenium and that it is the bark of the puppy referred to in the monologue and not one of a mastiff. Likewise, the lighting designer wants the beam of sunlight to come through the window that is being referred to, and not from the kitchen on the other side of the stage. The lighting designer is concerned with the pictorial aspect of the stage and uses the qualities of lighting to create a unified composition. Sound designers work within their sound palette and through motivation, music, and effects, create a unified world where these things can suddenly occur without sounding out of place. A sound designer is concerned with the aural composition of the playworld.

Both sound and lighting focus on mood, which is the more abstract of the functions stated. Mood lies more in the psychological realm. It involves “the manipulation of all of the other functions in order to enhance the mood and emotional character of a play” (Bracewell 208). Mood, for both lighting and sound, deals in the general feeling of the playworld at that specific moment in time. It can determine the overall color of both sound and lighting palettes.

These functions of sound and lighting are made up of physiological characteristics that when varied and played with, can affect the overall function as need be. Bracewell lists the “controllable properties of sound” as intensity, frequency, duration, envelope, timber,

and directionality. McCandless lists the “qualities” of lighting as intensity/brightness, color, form, and movement.

Both design forms focus on intensity. With lighting, this means the amount of light on the stage, and with sound, this is the focus on the amplitude, or perceived loudness of a cue. Both designs are concerned with “color” and “form” of specific cues. Bracewell splits these up into specific sound terms. But looking at the definitions, if sound could be translated into the visual, frequency would be the “color” of the sound. Sound frequency is the “number of cycles per second of physical vibration” (Bracewell 3). Light is similar in that the color is also made up of cycles, but through the transmission of light. Where sound frequency equates to “pitch”, light frequency equates to “color”.

Duration, envelope, timber, and directionality could be equated with “form.” McCandless writes of form in lighting being concerned with “size, shape, and position” and that the eye is attuned to patterns and then departures in the patterns. Duration is the length of time in which a sound occurs, envelope is the “variation in loudness if a single sound plotted against the duration of the sound” (in physics, this would be called the “momentum” of this particular sound, with energy over a certain amount of time), timber is the quality of the sound produced by a sound source, and directionality is spatially where the sound cue is coming from as perceived by the audience member (Bracewell 209).

McCandless writes of movement as being the changes in the aforementioned qualities over time and the recognition of this by the audience. He brings up a term that can also be applied to sound design. Once a sound “palette” and patterns have been established, effects and cues designers have built in signify the changes in the world. In lighting, this could be cues that take the audience from a serene and pleasant world to one that is darker and gloomier. In sound, we can manipulate previously played effects that develop distortion

or move into different movements within the musical composition. Here, we can add another term to our vocabulary, and begin discussing the movement of sound in the playworld over the course of time.

Overall, lighting and sound designers actually speak similar languages. If a sound designer finds herself working with a director who has trouble discussing sound but seems to work well with a lighting designer, then perhaps she can appropriate some of the language of the lighting world. Instead of discussing the “envelope” and “directionality” of the sound cue, perhaps the sound designer could discuss the “form” of it and refer to its size, shape, and position.

## The Vocabulary of the Visual

Previously it was mentioned that both lighting and sound focus on forms of frequency in their respective designs, lighting being color and sound being the pitch. As *Cross Pollinators*, perhaps sound designers could use this as a stepping stone and use the world of color and color psychology and symbolism when discussing the feeling of a cue. In an old Appalachian folk song, the lyrics highlight that color has meaning in every culture - “Blue is true/Yeller’s jealous/Green’s forsaken’/Red is brazen/White is love, and/Black is death.” (qtd. in Myers 308) Color cues, when put alongside visual cues have meaning and can prompt an emotional response from a person. Color works alongside other visual signs. A blue ball will not get the same response as blue skin. The following are various responses that colors can bring about within Western society:

Red: Passion, anger, violence, blood, physicality, rage, aggression, sexuality, materialism, glamour, danger, excitement, fire, hate, lust, revenge

Orange: Vulgarity, vivacity, boldness, uniqueness, contrariness, clowns, artificiality, vitality, assertiveness, fire, pumpkins, harvest, autumn

Yellow: Excitement, sun, warmth, day, cheer, children, drought, riches, buoyancy, expansiveness, happiness, spring, morning, caution, disease, cowardice

Green: Nature, growth, prosperity, freshness, delicacy, spring, youth, progress, Ireland, money, sickness, evil, envy poison, snake, reptile, swamp

Violet: Royalty, wisdom, age, power, penance, wealth, ritual, old women, security, religion, feyness, snobbery, femininity, gentility, effeminacy, isolation, loneliness

Blue: Peace, calmness, compassion, serenity, loyalty, friendship, innocence, intelligence, eternity, emptiness, depression, sadness, vastness, coldness, austerity, sky, ocean, iceberg, water, night

Brown: Earth, mud, fertility, autumn, wood, richness, animality, leather, malleability, warmth, reliability, nature, dullness, unadventurousness, subservience, poverty

Black: Death, evil, blindness, darkness, secret, strength, mystery, coldness, formality, sobriety, stricture, puritanism, conservatism, officialdom, dignity, permanence, infinitude, fright, the unknown, the void, abyss, loss, sorrow, depression, absence, emptiness, sophistication

White: Birth, purity, innocence, virginity, holiness, goodness, ritual formality, cleanliness, antiseptic, light, ecstasy, enlightenment, clarity, old age, vulnerability, sophistication, winter, snow, clouds, bride, wedding, strength, knowledge, wisdom, peace, spirit

Grey: Age, ashes, ghosts, softness, confusion, uncertainty, obedience, conformity, depression, decay, lack of motivation, lifelessness, drabness, ordinariness, conservatism, lack of ambition, clouds, fog, vagueness, bleakness, boredom, tedium, mechanization, militarism, institutionalism, government

Gold: Wealth, splendor, heat, sun, lion, ancientness, preciousness, value, sensuality, the exotic, class, timelessness, ritual, ceremony, heaviness, riches, greed, power, corruption, idolatry, glamour

Silver: Coldness, swiftness, hardness, moon, “secondness”, machines, technology, shininess, chromium, futurism, impersonality, impenetrability, inanimateness, security, numbness, formality, enigma, dignity, stability, ice

This idea of likening sound to color is not new. Isaac Newton created a color wheel, with the colors of the spectrum shown in sequence, as wedges between the musical notes of the Dorian scale.



Figure 1 – Isaac Newton’s Color Music Wheel

Myers writes, “Many composers have associated specific hues with various tones or chords. Many persons see colors when listening to music.” He also goes on to say that color can “symbolize abstract concepts or ideas” (Myers 312).

An offshoot of color is texture. While color is a two-dimensional quality, texture is three-dimensional and shows the depth of a form. In sound terms, “texture” would be more equivalent to “timber”. Max Lord, a Boston-based sound designer and musician, says that it is difficult for two people to sit down and talk about sound design choices. He writes:

Talking about music is like dancing about architecture, but sound design isn’t music and experienced practitioners use a universal design vocabulary that should be familiar. Still, talking about the specific qualities of different sounds can be challenging. Most people have a handle on pitch, duration, and volume. When describing a sound’s texture, people begin using a lot of made up words and obscene vocalizations (Lord).

He continues, noting that he has created his own sort of sound texture wheel that he uses when he and a client reach a sort of roadblock in communication. The terms are relative, but he finds it helpful in achieving basic communication between designer and client.



Figure 2 – Max Lord’s “Color Wheel” of Natural Timbers

This “color wheel” is one that Lord has found helpful in his own work as a sound designer. The four timbers of metal, wood, pure, and skin are naturally occurring. Pure is that of whole tones, being generated electronically or by instruments with “few overtones” such as flutes. Skin sounds are like that of a drum, more percussive sounds. Metal can be more like a piano, and wood would be that of an acoustic guitar. He writes that as one moves away from the fundamental sound, you would then have the sound of say, a car door.

Perhaps a director and the sound designer cannot agree on the specifics of what will be heard. Before the sound designer even begins playing the Experimenter and creating a sound palette to work from and “rapidly prototyping” ideas, perhaps he and the director could sit down and discuss the show in terms of colors and textures/timbers. Depending on the situational use of the color, the aforementioned color cues are accepted within Western society. Texture/timber can then make the talk of the qualities of sound much more three-dimensional and have form. Then, the talk could move beyond the visual and into the aural. When such a basic starting point is given basic communication can be had which then opens the doors to further discussion and creation of sound design.

## The Vocabulary of Music

Sound designers constantly use music in their work. Bracewell writes that there are three types of music that can be employed in a play, incidental, underscore, and integral (208). Incidental music is the “framing effects” of a sound design, in that it opens and punctuates acts and scenes and provides transitions. Underscore is music that is used as an “emotional highlighter” when put under the action and dialogue of a scene. It “enhances the emotional impact of the scene” and is done in such a way as not to distract from what is being said or done on stage. Integral music is that which is specifically called for in the script by the playwright, and has been written into the action of the play. Sound designers use the music when creating their designs, and so perhaps we can look to the world of music to see what the language consists of in order to further our discussions with directors. Many directors might be better able to speak in terms of the musical realm when discussing sound design. Learning the basics of music theory might prove helpful when working with a more musically inclined director.

Music theory provides the fundamentals of the mechanics and construction of music. Music’s elements consist of melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, and structure. Melody consists of pitches, played in succession, usually in respect to scales or modes, which are collections of tones. The vibrations of a sound, as mentioned earlier, determine pitch. For example, “concert A” (the note used by musicians to tune before a performance) is typically defined as 440 Hertz, or 440 physical vibrations per second. An interval is the difference between two pitches. The most basic interval is the octave. This would be a note and another note twice its frequency, say 440 Hz for concert A, and then 880 Hz for the A

above it, or 220 Hz for the A below it. In western music theory, the octave is divided into 12 notes, each called a semitone, or a half step. Patterns of these half and whole steps make up a scale in that octave. The most used scales are major (Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do), the melodic minor (Do-Re-Mi Flat-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do), the natural minor (Do-Re-Mi Flat-Fa-So-La Flat-Ti Flat-Do – this is commonly used in much ethnic music), and the harmonic minor (Do-Re-Mi Flat-Fa-So-La Flat-Ti-Do - used frequently by Mozart). The key of a piece determines the scale used. Basically, changing the key in a musical composition changes the feel of the piece as it changes the relationship of the composition's pitches to the pitch range of the instruments that are performing the piece. When talking to a more musically minded director, such as the aforementioned Gerald Gutierrez who was musically trained, this could prove valuable when discussing music choices as something as simple as a key change could highlight an emotional undercurrent in the production.

Rhythm is the arrangement of sounds in time. Meter creates regular segments or groups of beats, and these are called measures or bars. The time signature denotes how many beats there are per measure, and what a single beat consists of. The rhythm of a melody is often based on the inflections of language or the physical rhythms of a particular dance. Rhythm is also tied into heartbeat, the very fundamental of life. Rhythm could be a valuable point of discussion between a sound designer and director, as directors also work with “beats”, which will be discussed further, and these beats could be tied into musical rhythm.

Harmony occurs when two or more tones sound simultaneously, but can also be implied when the sounds are produced successively. Consonance is harmonies whose tones compliment and reinforce each other. Dissonance is those harmonies that create more complex sounds. Simplistically, consonance and dissonance could be viewed as pleasant

sound versus unpleasant sound. Dissonant sounds are sometimes thought of as “unstable” and that they want to “resolve” toward consonance. Compositions often consist of consonant and dissonant harmonies. Dramatic productions too, consist of consonance and dissonance, as characters discover and deal with revelations throughout the course of a story. Comedies are the product of order (consonance) turning into chaos (dissonance), which then rights itself back to order (consonance). It is compelling to watch/listen to stability turn into tension and then resolve itself into stability, or perhaps even not resolving itself ending in dissonance (in theatre, tragedies). When discussing the overall shape of the sound design to the director, this could be explored, as it follows the general scheme of drama, and could reflect on the emotional structure of the show.

Musical texture is the overall sound of a piece of music. It is commonly labeled according to the number of and relationship between parts or lines of music. For example, when a performer rehearses with a pianist and just wants their “line” played, they are listening to a monophony, or the texture of a melody heard only by itself. In homophony, there are many notes being played, but the melody is usually in the highest notes so that it “pops” out. In polyphony, there are several simultaneous melodies of equal importance being played. When a director asks for a “simpler” piece of music the sound designer can play the Anthropologist and talk to the director to see if perhaps what they mean is the same piece of music but with a simpler texture, perhaps as a monophony rather than a polyphony. The sound designer can then go off and bring in another “prototype” of the stripped-down song.

Musical structures, or what “genre” the musical piece is in, is also valuable to know. Some popular Western structures include the fugue, sonata, canon, theme and variations, the rondo, and so many others. The form of a piece of music can be reduced to sections, and

these sections can be further reduced to musical phrases. Typically, a pause or strong sense of musical resolution indicates the end of a section, and then smaller pauses and lesser sense of musical resolution indicate the ends of phrases within a section. Not only can a sound designer discuss various musical structures with the director, but also the editing process. Knowing that music consists of sections and phrases, the editing process could go a bit smoother when the two can communicate quicker about the structure of the piece.

## The Vocabulary of Directing

Perhaps the most important place to look when learning and appropriating terms in order to better talk to directors is that of the world of directing. Designers look to directors for concepts and parameters as they create. It is appropriate that we learn from directors their vocabulary, as it is easier to speak to someone in their own language. In order to learn directors' vocabularies, let us look at a director of the realistic tradition who began his career earlier in the last century. William Ball has influenced the generations of directors now working.

The director is the one who interprets the world of the play and playwright that the production team and the actors then all commit to. William Ball, director and founder of the American Conservatory Theatre, writes in *A Sense of Direction* of a type of script analysis directors can go through when sitting down and reading through the play and developing ideas about it. He writes that a play consists of Predominant Elements, which consist of Plot, Character, Theme, Spectacle, Language, and Mixtures. When he speaks of Predominant Elements, he suggests that one of these elements will appear to supercede the others just in the text, and that a director does well to pay close attention to this.

Many directors go into rehearsal without having decided on a predominant element. A director will find himself in trouble, for instance, when he has filled the stage with spectacle . . . only to realize that he is doing a play whose predominant element is language. In this case, the scenery overwhelms the language and the audience becomes the loser (Ball 27).

Mixtures, then, would be a combination of all the previous five, as a play tends not to consist of just one of the elements. However, most plays do have one element that rises above the others. Ball recommends that directors focus on an element or two in order to make them incredibly specific, which allows more creativity. Ball writes:

Limitation frees creativity . . . Given unlimited space, time, and money, and artist will probably dawdle, and the focus of his work will disappear in the meanderings of indecision. Necessity is, in fact, the mother of invention, and limitation is the springboard of creativity. In choosing a metaphor for a play, the director imposes limitations on himself and on the entire production from the beginning, and these limitations fire his creativity and the creativity of his designers and actors. These limitations ultimately provide the production with greater punch, clarity, meaning, unity, imagination, vigor, wit, power, invention. The metaphor is a limitation that pays off in extraordinary creativity (Ball 35).

Limitations actually help the creative process, as they allow more exploration within the boundaries. When a designer creates for the show and has questions, looking back on the director's limitations can guide her. A designer works within parameters, and as stated previously designs are meaningful and carefully chosen. These limitations allow the designer to make such meaningful choices.

Next, the director focuses in on the "world of the play." The word "style" is loaded with preconceived meaning within the theatre, so Ball prefers to use the term "world of the play" (30). The world of a play is then like a picture frame in that it sets the boundaries of the picture. The picture cannot expand onto the rest of the museum wall; it stays within those parameters of that frame. It is the director's job to determine the world of the play and the rules of the "game" of this show. As with rules of any other game, you tend to play

the game according to them. There are exceptions which can be played around with, but the director tends follow the parameters that he has set up for himself and the team. All design and acting choices would then play by these same rules.

The director would then find the “metaphor” of the play. With a metaphor, an object IS a visual image. Ball uses very clear examples to highlight his point of the metaphor:

- *The Visit* by Duerrenmatt is “a nightmare of sadistic power.”
- *Thieves’ Carnival* by Anouilh is “a vanilla-and-strawberry ice-cream sundae.”
- *The Bald Soprano* by Ionesco is “a household of robots.”
- *The Girl of the Golden West* by Belasco is “a daguerreotype print.”
- *Ab, Wilderness!* by O’Neill is a “memory of Norman Rockwell.”
- *The Circle* by Maugham is a “delicate celadon oriental vase.”
- *The Dance of Death* by Strindberg is “a cockfight.” (Ball 33)

When a director creates a metaphor for the play she creates limitations for herself, the actors, and the production team. Ball again writes that limitations, as seen with designers, are actually very good for creativity.

Exercising great discipline in conforming to one metaphor tends to give the production visual unity, consistency, and power. Without a metaphor, one is working at random with unlimited resources of color, line, and texture. In such productions, the fact that the ingredients are unlimited causes the work to look like a shamble of accidents. Since we seek unity in a work of art, there is a great advantage in using a device that forces unity into the production. There should be only one metaphor – a painting, for instance. More than one metaphor would be immediately confusing and disunifying (Ball 35).

When there are no limitations, one lacks focus, as there is so much to think about. The final product is nowhere near as unified than when parameters are set up. One can then focus in on what can be in this world, be it design or acting choices. The director then does not focus on the extraneous that does not fit in this world. The production finds power in being

completely unified in all of its elements, which the metaphor helps to serve. The director only picks one metaphor for the show.

Ball mentions Stanislavski's "Golden Key" as being an actor and director's "in" to a character. Here, the Golden Key is the character's wants. Wants move not only theatre, but also life forward, and make both compelling (74). With a System of Wants, Ball writes that characters tend to want nouns, but it is the verbs that are actually the wants that directors are concerned with. A director eliminates nouns and adjectives as wants, such as "I want candy" or "I am mad with Matthew". Wants include a verb, a receiver, and a desired response. So, "I am mad with him" could now become "I want to get even with Matthew to honor my sister's memory." The play progresses, and the characters' objectives change from moment to moment. These are then separated out into beats, but overall relate back to their "superobjective" which remains constant throughout. Stanislavski developed the idea of "beats" with his approach to acting. In their look at behavior sequences, two scientists, Carver and Schreier, examined Stanislavski's approach to behavior division. They write:

Stanislavski saw any role as essentially a long sequence of behavior. To help an actor make sense of this sequence, he instructed the actor to divide this long sequence of behavior into units, each with a single objective. Over time in the United States, each behavioral unit came to be called a beat. Stanislavski instructed actors, when first working with a part, to segment the script into as many beats as needed but then, later in the rehearsal process, to try to resolve the part into about 10 beats to serve as the "marked channel" of the play, all 10 directly serving the superobjective. He called this sequence of major beats the through line of action. He believed that a well-developed through line of action would exert an essential and organic influence on the many thousands of movements, gestures, and inflections, most of them outside the conscious control of the performing actor, that must coalesce - and coalesce at the proper moments - to create an effective portrayal of a character. (Bilgrave/Deluty 5)

The director's job then throughout these beats is to constantly ask himself and the

actors “What is your objective?”

As stated, verbs are vital to wants. Ball writes that, “not all verbs are actable”. In literature, we might prefer more intellectual verbs; Ball prefers more “down-and-dirty” verbs, as they provide more bite and insight into that character’s wants (85). More visceral verbs are more actable verbs. After eliminating the more intellectual and existential, and otherwise, un-actable verbs from her vocabulary, a director finds that she uses a group of verbs over and over again from show to show. Ball writes that this is perfectly normal to find, and that “the conditions that surround these actable verbs vary widely, and these different conditions give definition and color to the drama” (88). A director challenges herself and the actors to constantly “upgrade the choice” in verb, to something stronger and with more meaning and purpose. When an actor determines that her character wants to “flatter” another character, the director pushes the actor to continuously upgrade that choice in verb, in such a way:

I want to FLATTER him.  
          becomes  
I want to PRAISE him.  
          becomes  
I want to STRENGTHEN him.  
          becomes  
I want to GLORIFY him.  
          becomes, with the receiver and the response included,  
I want to GLORIFY him into realizing his true worth. (Ball 90)

Strong verbs are better verbs, and provide clearer and stronger wants. These then translate into clearer and stronger storytelling.

Knowing that the director based in realism is focused on wants and objectives of the play proves valuable for the sound designer to know. There is no one set script analysis sound designers undertake while delving into a show. But perhaps a sound designer could add this to her own script analysis, so that while talking to a director they could work with

similar foundations. A sound designer can talk not only of the sound effects, but also of the show moment-to-moment relating to character's changing beats. When asked about sound designers perhaps acting as dramaturges, Darron West says:

Good designers should function as dramaturges. You're trying to tell the story, too--you're just using a different tool. The best designers can carry on a conversation with the director about the play, not about whether you should use a clarinet or not. If you're talking about the play, then the play will tell you musically what's it's supposed to be. If you're doing a Tennessee Williams play and you narrow yourself into a certain time frame because the costumes are supposed to be from the 1940s, I think you're limiting your ideas (Druckman 18).

West says that if a sound designer limits herself to only thinking of sound, then there is an entire world that she loses out on. The entire team (director, actors, designers) thinks of the world of the play as a whole. In a personal interview, I asked Darron West about his early conversations with directors and how he prefers the dialogue to occur. In early conversations, West prefers "talking about the world we are making, not the cues" and avoids talking to a director about "what it sounds like". When a sound designer and a director begin talking of sound in such a way and not about the play as a whole, then West feels he gets himself "in a box talking too early about what it sounds like with a director . . . Talking about sound locks me down" (West). A sound designer limits herself if she thinks only of sound. West, in the same interview, tells of not only being in constant communication with the director and actors, but also with the other designers. West will often attend the day that props are pulled in order to see and hear the items being used. Directors constantly think of the play as a whole, and so does the sound designer, as overall, both of their jobs are about telling a story.

## Conclusion

The director's job is to set up the rules of the "game" so to speak. The director does not dictate, but, as Harold Clurman writes, is "the designer's guide, critic, and if possible, inspirer" (54). The director, like any other client a designer might have, wants to communicate her vision to the production team, including the sound designer. The sound designer ruminates on this vision. Then, through her own creative process, in the library, in the sound studio, in the rehearsal room, and ultimately in the theatre, makes this vision tangible, or rather, audible. Sometimes there are language barriers, in that the director and the sound designer come from different mediums. At around forty years old, sound design is a young theatre design form. Perhaps this is where the barriers start, in that the language we as sound designers have developed is one based not only in theatre and the obvious one of music, but due to our relatively young age, also in the world of technology. Some directors may be confused over the role of a sound designer, which can result in communication issues. There is a difference between sound designer and sound engineer - the role of sound designer entails structuring the aural world within a production in order to comment on and heighten the dramatic and theatrical experience. The sound engineer's job is to provide the means by which to play back the content the sound designer delivers.

When a sound designer sets aside the need to be surrounded by the "toys" of the field and focuses on the story being told and the shape it takes in the rehearsal process, then she and the director can find common ground. While "talking about music" might be like "dancing about architecture" there are ways and approaches in "auditorializing". A sound designer thinking as an Anthropologist constantly observes the rehearsal process, as the rehearsal is where the play springs to life and develops shape. A sound designer fully immerses herself in the process by not only going to rehearsals (if time and money allows)

but also by constantly engaging in conversations with the director and other members of the production team, and completely researching the world of the show.

A sound designer thinking as the Cross-Pollinator may find that sound “sketches” or the terms used in discussion, borrowed from the worlds of lighting, the visual, music, and directing, might help further discussion with a director who might not know how to “auditorialize”. Looking at the lighting world, we could utilize the terms “naturalism,” “composition,” “form,” and “movement” when describing the use of sound. From the world of the visual, we could now discuss “color” and “texture.” With music, we could discuss “melody,” “rhythm,” “harmony,” “texture,” and “structure.” Looking at directing introduces us to the terms of “predominant elements,” “mixtures,” “limitations,” “the world of the play,” “metaphors,” and “the golden key.”

The sound designer, acting in Experiment mode, rapidly prototypes “sketches” for the director. More ideas created in the least amount of time add up to more feedback overall. Thus, the sound designer’s “palette,” or a certain sound “vocabulary” is established. The sound designer can then choose and pick from this “palette” during the course of the process. According to Bracewell’s idea of designers attempting to arrange patterns, the sound designer would try and keep all cues within that “palette” throughout the show.

These approaches may allow a sound designer to develop an intrinsic and incorporated design with the director and her parameters, that is every bit as useful and valuable as any of the other designers’ work, and rooted firmly in the story being told on the stage. Ultimately, they have the same goal – both the director and the sound designer are storytellers who want to clearly and effectively tell a story.

## Suggested Next Steps

If further research is to be undertaken on this topic, I would suggest that one look more into the processes of those who do not have the luxury of being involved with a company. As stated previously, there are times when a sound designer cannot be at every rehearsal. It would be interesting to research the processes of those who are constantly in such a situation to see how they deal with financial and physical (ie. location) restraints when creating a sound design. Sound design is tied into the narrative so it would be appropriate to see what these designers do when they cannot be with the actors constantly. Another area to explore could be collaboration over the years. It would be interesting to talk to directors and sound designers who worked in the 1960s and 70s, when sound design began being recognized. It would also be compelling to look more in-depth at specific director-sound designer relationships. Darron West is mentioned consistently throughout the paper, and he collaborates frequently with Anne Bogart. Brian Hallas collaborates much with Ping Chong. Further research could be done on these and other specific relationships, in order to see what could be gleaned from their histories and their inner workings, as it was mentioned that when a “culture” is established, trust and confidence is built creating effective collaboration.

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## Appendix I

### An interview with Darron West

On May 21, 2007 I personally interviewed Darron West in New York City. The following is a very basic transcription. They are answers to questions I posed to him.

*How do you first approach a script? How do you approach initial sound thoughts?*

“A play is a human being”

“My primary relationship is with the actors. I will ask what they’ve been listening to.”

“I will talk about the world we are making, not the sound cues.”

“I like to think of myself like a cook. I look at the other design and acting aspects, and I will spice it up where they need it.”

*What is your role as sound designer? Are you in charge of the whole aural composition?*

“I will go to a props pull so that they sound proper.”

“I am in charge of the full composition.”

*How do you initially talk to a director? How do you initially discuss sound? Do you present audio sketches to the director?*

“When speaking to a director, I use inclusive language. It’s always ‘what if we . . .’ not ‘Well, I thought . . .’”

“I find out more in the ten minute breaks talking to the actors than I do sometimes in rehearsals.”

“I am doing the same thing as the actors with different tools. We are both dealing with subtext, and trying to answer the same questions.”

“I don’t do ‘sketches’. You just do it. The actors can’t do ‘sketches’. We move forward to answer questions. If it’s right, good. If not, move on.”

“Play cues in context with a scene. It’s not about control, it’s about flexibility.”

“Sound cues mean nothing until they are juxtaposed over the scene. Syntax is incredibly important when working with a director.”

“I don’t talk to the director about ‘what it sounds like’. Stay open to it, you’ll surprise yourself. I like to work with a massive palette before making a broad stroke.”

“You’re not doing things for the director, you’re doing things for the play, which is the actors’, and consists of scene, governing time and space.”

“Be careful about not getting yourself in a box talking too early about what it sounds like with a director. Talking about sound locks me down. Sound is a reactive art form.”

“I look for the silences first.”

“You are governing rhythm.”

*Many times I feel that sound designers use a gear sort of vocabulary talking to directors, and that might not be very effective. Would you speak to that?*

“You are the conduit of the ideas. You don’t have to explain to the director, just do it. Talking in ‘gear talk’ is based in insecurity. It’s all on you if the sound screws up.”

## Appendix II

### An interview with Lauren Keating

On May 26, 2007 I conducted a phone interview with Lauren Keating. Keating is the assistant director to Daniel Sullivan on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is a part of the Shakespeare in the Park series this summer in New York City. Keating is a graduate of New York University's Playwrights Horizons' directing program. The question posed to her was "Does the gear and technology of sound design intimidate you at all?"

"I want to know that it can happen, but I don't need to know how."

"Sometimes, technicians use gear and technology to distance themselves from other people. The gear shouldn't be part of the dialogue."

"If it is impeding the process, that is when I want to see it, to see if we can figure out how it can be fixed."