A SCENIC DESIGN FOR A PRODUCTION OF
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
KING LEAR

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
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*****

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to document the scenic design and production process for The Ohio State University Department of Theatre's 2000 production of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, directed by Sue Ott Rowlands. *King Lear* recounts the destruction of a king, his kingdom and family. The play is set in a broad period, reflecting the last two hundred years. The problem set forth was to create an environment that would support a full company of twenty-three cast members, allow stage battles and still create an intimate relationship with the audience. Included in this document are discussions of the production history, the production concept and design solutions, a production journal and evaluation of the completed project. The basic limitation of such a study is that it is virtually impossible to explain in rational terms all of the processes that make up the creative experience. The scenic designer, like any artist, relies heavily on his own intuition to guide him in interpreting and presenting a visual representation of the ideas of the script. Consequently I have made every effort in this study to offer reasons for as many design choices as possible.

In preparing for the design of *King Lear*, I first examined William Shakespeare's career and the times in which he lived. I next examined the history of *King Lear*. Through my research I found that most of critics consider King Lear to be one of Shakespeare's most difficult plays. This preparatory information is presented in Chapter One.

Chapter Two is concerned with the design approach to the script, incorporating both my thoughts and the director's in Chapter Three. The production situation is
described in great detail while Chapter Four chronicles a brief outline of the evolution of the design elements. My self evaluation of the design is given in Chapter Five.
Dedicated to my Mother.

Without your support and encouragement,

I would never have made it this far.

Thank You
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I wish to show my appreciation to Mark Shanda for his guidance, friendship and patience. To Dennis Parker for helping me to see theatre from another perspective and letting me make mistakes. To Robert Krege for helping me settle into my first year of graduate life. To Jim Knapp for easing me into the computer world. To Rebecca, Jean and Judy for being in the costume shop and telling me I wasn’t all that bad at rendering costumes. To Katie for staying sane while being my editor. To Kris for teaching me that a person is never complete if he is alone and for not letting me be afraid. To Dan Gray for being a constant voice of reason, a damn good teacher and friend. The Department of Theatre for showing what a collaborative team can do and how rewarding theatre can truly be. I can’t thank you all enough or truly express how I feel. Thank you.
NOTE

A fully illustrated copy of this thesis is available at the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, located on The Ohio State University Campus, 14th floor of Lincoln Tower. The set design of *King Lear*, which is the subject of this thesis, was created for a production presented by the Department of Theatre of The Ohio State University, May 17-27, 2000, in the Thurber Theatre.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis contains documentation of the process that led to the creation and realization of the scene design for The Ohio State University Department of Theatre's production of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The production occurred in Thurber Theatre May 17-27, 2000. The text chronicles the development of the scene design from initial research through the design and construction process to opening night.

Chapter One provides a brief history of Shakespeare's play, the time in which it was written and key points in the production history of the play. The second chapter discusses the production concept as it evolved from conversations with the director, Sue Ott Rowlands. Chapter Three follows the development of the scene design concept, discussing the specific design solutions made to accommodate shifting needs and the general requirements of the scenic elements and properties. Chapter Four is a production journal that summarizes the entire design process. In Chapter Five I evaluate the process and discuss my growth as a designer. This is followed by various supporting materials in the appendices, including chronologies, examples of research, preliminary sketches, a complete set of plates of the final design drawings and photographs of both the scale model and the production.
CHAPTER 1

PRODUCTION BACKGROUND

William Shakespeare was born in 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His father was a glover and an influential member of the community. At the age of eighteen Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway and had three children by 1585. Shakespeare disappeared from public record in 1583 only to reappear again in 1592 when a jealous playwright, Robert Greene, attacked him in print. Greene was appalled by the notion that an actor could write plays. Undaunted, Shakespeare became a major power in the theatrical world of London. His position in the literary and political arenas was established in 1598 when Francis Meres circulated a listing of twelve plays and poetry credited to Shakespeare, praising the playwright and bringing him public recognition. In addition, the well-connected acting company with which Shakespeare was associated, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, built The Globe Theatre in 1598. Shakespeare owned an interest in the playhouse. His ownership in the playhouse allowed him financial stability and authority. In 1603, when James I became King of England, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men. This was a sign of the growing political affiliation between Shakespeare and the crown. After the Globe was destroyed by fire in 1613, Shakespeare seems to have stopped writing and performing. He spent the last years of his life at Stratford. In 1616 he died and was buried there. A more complete timeline of Shakespeare's life is included in the Appendix (Table 1).
Shakespeare is revered as a playwright because he was the theatrical voice of his age. His plays have relevance today because he was able to capture the human condition and expose it to audiences through his characters. There are far more modern performances of the works of Shakespeare than Marlow, Kyd, Johnson or any of his contemporaries. Literary critic Arthur Kirsch, says the durability of Shakespeare's works can be attributed to the following:

The current popularity of such views makes it urgent, I think, to reassert the less fashionable position that though Shakespeare is "the soul of [his] age," as Ben Jonson wrote, he is also "not of an age, but for all time," and that, as Dr. Jonson argued, his plays have "pleased many and pleased long," because they are "just representations of general nature," "faithful mirror[s] of manners and of life." Shakespeare's tragedies are, above all else, plays of passions and suffering that we eventually recognize as our own, whatever their social, political, or religious contingencies may have been in the Renaissance. However we may interpret the particular ideological questions King Lear seems to pose, it is the universal human anguish that gives rise to them upon which Shakespeare primarily focuses and to which audiences have responded for nearly four hundred years.¹

The first recorded production of King Lear was on December 26, 1606 at the court of James I. King Lear embodies a timeless story of generational conflict and political miscalculation. Two complex plot lines mirror the same tale. Its characters inhabit an apocalyptic world that has seemingly been abandoned by the gods.

Lear, the aging King of Britian, plans to divide the kingdom among his three daughters. He plans to keep his power but not of the responsibilities of his position. He creates an elaborate game in which each daughter professes her love for him publicly. Goneril and Regan consent and offer very "heart felt" declarations of affection, but Cordelia, whose devotion to her father is genuine, protests. Lear, furious, disowns Cordelia and splits the kingdom between the two remaining daughters.
Lear also exiles the Earl of Kent after he defends Cordelia. The youngest daughter, deprived of her dowry, is claimed by the King of France and leaves the country. In a subplot that closely parallels the main action of the play, Edmund, the illegitimate son of the earl of Gloucester, fools his father into exiling Edgar, Gloucester's rightful heir.

Goneril and Regan soon strip away Lear's authority, leaving him a broken and powerless man without an identity. Lear is left without a family and soon turns to madness as a refuge from the betrayal of his daughters. Lear wanders the heath shelterless in a fierce storm along with his loyal Fool and Kent, who disguised risks his life to serve his king. The trio encounters a babbling mad man who is actually Edgar in disguise. Edmond betrays his father, whose eyes are torn out by the Duke of Cornwall in a horrific scene. His son Edgar wandering the heath, still pretending to be a madman, finds the blind Gloucester. Cordelia returns from France with an army and is reunited with her father. The two are reconciled and then captured by Edmund's army. Goneril, Regan, and Edmund have gained a victory for the moment but the sisters have become rivals for Edmund's affections and in the end destroy one another. Goneril murders Regan with poison, then kills herself. Edgar vanquishes Edmund who dies shortly thereafter. Lear enters, carrying the body of Cordelia, whom Edmund has ordered hanged. Lear then dies with no clear successor to take control of the kingdom.

The Renaissance in England, ranging from 1559 to 1603 in the Elizabethan period and 1603 to 1625 in the Jacobean period, reflected a turbulent time of change and unrest. The social, political, and religious structure of the country, lacked stability and created a climate of unrest. Life itself was uncertain; death could come at any time through plague.

or violent acts. Trivial misdemeanors could bring down the wrath of God and the threat of hellfire and damnation was seen as a reality rather than a fiction. Magic and malice were palatable explanations for distress, masking a sudden death feared above all else leaving because the individual had no time to repent their sins. This society thrived on violence and constantly sought portrayals of direct violence in its entertainment. That violence manifested itself in the popular entertainment of the period, surfacing in public executions, popular reading material, sporting events, and finally, the theatre. Public execution was one such venue. Executions were common entertainment for the masses and were extreme examples of violent action taken against the human body.

The full penalty for treachery, not usually inflicted on the well born or those with influential friends, was to be hanged, drawn, and quartered: the traitor was taken down from the gibbet while he was still alive, castrated, disemboweled, dismembered and displayed. Beheading was not only more dignified and perhaps less painful but also, since the severed head was commonly sewn back on before burial, one which minimized mutilation and was therefore less offensive to those who believed in the resurrection of the body.²

This direct violence was well attended and well received by the common masses. It served as a regular alternative to attending sporting events or theatre. The gruesome nature of witnessing an execution was routine and considered high entertainment. Mutilated bodies and headless corpses were not uncommon to the public. This helps identify a reason for the large amount of violence found in Shakespeare’s plays. He was competing for audiences with bear baiting and public executions.

He felt compelled to insert graphic examples of violence into his play, particularly in the tragedies when the plot and dialogue weighed down the story. Violence touched all ranks
of society from the refined population to the illiterate masses, connecting Shakespeare's audience in a love of spectacle and blood sport. King Lear does not escape this blood lust for violence.

The political situation in England at the time of the first presentation of the play was very similar to that of Lear's reign. Audiences of the day would have recognized that the character's of the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, named after King James's two sons, bore striking similarity to the current players in a political situation, created by the division of the kingdom. Unification of the Kingdoms of England and Scotland was being debated before Parliament. The play was an effective treatise on the danger of separating a kingdom and a reflection of the growing public discord concerning the rights of succession to the throne. This caused political unrest among the people James hoped to address this by when he commissioned Shakespeare to give a voice to this issue through the characters in King Lear. There are sympathetic attitudes towards James's position found in the mad rantings of Lear.

King Lear is regarded as one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies due to its vast scope. It is a hallmark of an actor's career to play the complex character of Lear as well as a challenge to any director. John Irving said, "Lear can't be acted". Despite this, King Lear has been performed more in the last half of the twentieth century than in any other period before World War II.  

The horrors of war and the damages of separation from a safe collective keep the words of King Lear resonating in the ears of the masses. The universal themes of power and

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3 Parsons, Keith. Shakespeare in Performance. London; Salamander Books. (112)
humanity's competition with nature are directly reflected in the machinations of Lear's household, as it is destroyed from within and direct competition with the natural world.

*Shakespeare in Performance* cites nine notable productions of *King Lear* in the twentieth century. They embrace several media and a wide variety of production approaches. (Table 2) By the end of WW I a shift had taken place in dealing with poetic plays. The common 19th Century approach of strict realism was no longer the standard for creating theatre. New psychological approaches were coming into their own, best illustrated by the work of Adolph Appia and Edward Gordon Craig during the 1920's and 1930's. "The designer's aims were to present the whole play against non-realistic background whose changes could be made swiftly managed without interrupting the flow of drama, allowing the verse to elaborate the décor."4 Much of the new resurgence of interest in *King Lear* can be traced to a changing approach to theatre.

Early attempts to stage *King Lear* in this new style met with much success. Influenced by Appia and Craig, a 1904 production in Paris and the London Haymarket production of 1909 approached the production from this new psychological approach. Ricketts design for the 1909 version of *Lear* defined the visual elements that would become standard for several decades. "He aimed for a symbolic effect of barbaric massiveness by the manipulation of space and gray tones, backing the scene with an arrangement of huge cromlechs (monoliths)."5

John Macready and Charles Kean would modify this new approach in a 1937 production. Referring to Lear as a "proud monument in the gap of nature" and "a piece of

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4 Bratton, *Plays in Performance: King Lear* pg. 42-43
5 Bratton, pg. 43
ancient granite\(^6\), Macready and Kean used the image of druid stone circles to create historical accuracy. When combined with John Irving's portrayal of a crumbling monarch in a ruined palace, this production would become the metaphoric image for the decay of a king and his kingdom. Large dark objects of stone suggestive of the powerful forces of nature that have been corrupted by man, ruled the approach to *King Lear*. However this too would evolve into another incarnation.

In 1926 Norman Belle-Geddes created a design that included fire as an ever-present natural force that would drive the play. Though this effect was not used for the production it was designed for, it would later resurface in Komisarjevsky's 1937 production.

Komisarjevsky broke from the dark monotoines but retained the suggestion of a barely architectural massiveness by the means, which Granville Barker had suggested, the use of flights of steps. His breath-taking play of light and color included Bel-Geddes's idea of fires: an ascending column of smoke, lit up with an eerie glare, backed the battle scenes.\(^7\)

Stairs appear in another version of *King Lear* in 1953. Robert Colquhoun designed Lear for George Devine at Stratford, "the swirl of steps with a central megalithic heap of rock used as a throne and for other locations."\(^8\)

\(^7\) Bratton 44
\(^8\) Bratton 44
CHAPTER 2

PRODUCTION CONCEPT

The ideas presented in this chapter became the foundation for The Ohio State University Department of Theatre's production of King Lear. The concept evolved through the efforts of the entire production team.

Several faculty members and students had the privilege of being part of a delegation that was sent to the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) celebration of theatre design. Amid the booths and displays of designs from all over the world, the foundations of the design concept were born. The variety of work presented was a vivid springboard for ideas. The director, Sue Ott Rowlands and I were able to visualize a whole world of possibilities. After taking several days to digest the work displayed in the PQ, the first informal production meeting was held over a dinner of stag and cranberries. From this meeting it was clear the direction the production was headed. There was, however, a lot of information that had to be distilled down to a manageable form. At the end of our stay in Prague, the design concept was broad and all encompassing. Design options ranged from black plastic sheeting and performers in spandex bags creating a living forest as well as a raked stage with severe cracks running across the floor.
After returning from Prague and reading the play several more times a visual began to form as to the makeup of the environment of *King Lear*. I saw the environment filling the auditorium. As with many of my designs before this I set the action as far downstage as possible. For *King Lear* I kept seeing the action spilling over into the audience space. This was also metaphoric; Lear is a very human play to which most audiences can relate. To force that relationship to develop, I would force the audience into the action. Sue had suggested a central extension to the downstage edge of the stage. I would push that extension to the limits of the space.

The central playing space was to be oval in shape. *King Lear* is full of circular images. Kent makes reference to a circle (the wheel of fortune) when he is in the stocks. "Fortune, good night; smile once more, turn thy wheel II.iii.170." And Edgar repeats the circle imagery in the final scene when he says with sword in hand; "The wheel has come full circle V.iii.175-176." 

This circle image represents the kingdom, the earth and universe. I took elongated this image to show that there had been some mutation of the world of the play. The ramp behind the oval as well as the walkway into the house reflects the orientation of the central oval but are representative of the total corruption of that line.

The back panels framed as the representation of man’s manipulation of nature. They are created from naturally occurring minerals that have been combined into an unnatural state. Nature however does regain the upper hand by reclaiming them. That is why all the metal in the show was to have a corroded look.

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10 Shakespeare, William. 135
Nature is breaking down this material is organic form and trying to correct man's temporary manipulation. This is also very close to what the King is going through in the play. The natural order of things is thrown out of sync when Lear tries to satisfy his own ego by devising the elaborate game of dividing his kingdom.

The texture example for the panels is drawn from the work of British Scenic Designer Ralph Koltai. His work was featured in an exhibition while I was in Prague. The design for *Simon Boccanegra* (Plate XX) has a heavily textured and pock marked metal surface. It is this texture that I used as a model for the back panels. This corrosive image also became the image used for the poster and program (Plate XXVIII).

His design for *Brand* (Plate XXIII) was also another strong source of visual inspiration. I was struck by Koltai's strong use and manipulation of geometric shapes in the creation of a playing space with many irregular pitches in the surface intrigued me.

Koltai's designs for The Ring Cycle (Plate XXVI & XXV) were also very important images to me while I was designing. A strong sense of masculinity and power can be seen in the intersecting horizontal lines of the composition. The image of the world, represented by a silver orb being compressed as depicted in Koltai's design for *The Ring Cycle* was important to the development of the design for *King Lear*.

The Spanish entry to the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) would also prove to be influential in my thinking. The exhibit included a model of *As Five Years Past* designed by Jon Berrondo (Plate XXII). This design created a variety of playing space as well as potential for wonderful stage pictures.
Another source of visual support for the panel designs came from the work of Jocelyn Herbert and artist, Harry Bertoia (Plate XXVII). In Herbert's design for Julius Caesar (Plate XXVII) there were large textured panels that created a variety of backdrops for the action. I thought this look could create an environment on which to frame the action of King Lear.

The director wanted a sense of nature underlying all the man made elements of the play, like it was waiting for the opportunity to reclaim this world. I interspersed rocks and concrete monoliths amid the corroded metal to allow this sense of nature to pervade the rest of the play. Practically it would provide the actor a variety of places to sit and more levels to climb. As an example of a strong natural element the director had one image that was shown or mentioned at each meeting, a gnarled and twisted tree. I represented this several ways. It began as an inverted realistic tree with the roots creating the crown of the tree. These roots would be covered with dirt and a piece of sidewalk (Figure 10). The literal tree was later represented within the metal backing panels as cut out branches. I would use real branches interspersed between the panels. The hanging branches were later cut in fear of cluttering the stage picture.

As the informal meetings progressed, the need for a definite distinction between the world before and after the division of the kingdom was clear. To solve this, the idea of a map was introduced. The map began as a parachute suspended in the opening of the proscenium arch. After much discussion it became a large realistic map painted to have the appearance of parchment. The map would be torn down in Lear's fit of rage and reappear throughout the play. Lear would wrap up and sleep in it during the storm on the heath.
Cordelia would see it as a sign of her father’s presence after she returns from France. The map would be modeled after a 16th century map of England and after great discussion it would be labeled with the Roman names for the cities of Gloscter, Corawall and London. The map would show clear divisions so the actor playing Lear could gesture to them as he delivers the following lines;

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forest and with champains riched,
With plenteous rivers and wide skirted meads,
We make the lady. 1.1.63-66. 11

Underneath the upstage ramp upstage a large head appearing to be a cast bronze representation of a face would be placed. To me this head was the presence of an outside force watching the action of the play. It had two hollow eyes that peered out into the audience. We discussed Poor Tom using the portal created by the eyes to make an entrance through one while on the heath. The eyes became an important image in the play. Lear refers to seeing and eyes often in the text. Gloucester's eyes are put out in hopes of preventing him from seeing what is going on.

The face was based on early Roman bronze heads and on an installation I saw in Vienna, while on a side trip during my stay in Prague. (Plate XXIX & XXX). The sculptures would become significant to my design after I had returned home and looked through the photos I had taken on my trip. Although I didn’t document the artist or the title of the works, I was fascinated by the use of material and textures. I also liked how the artist depiction of man changed from sculpture to sculpture by changing the material. Using clay that was cracked and peeling the artist captured a sense of age. Polished bronze was used to depict strength and youth.
I also looked at lighting design images that conved a sense of atmosphere. In particular the lighting of shapes in Jesper Kongshaug’s production of *Operation: Orfeo* in Copenhagen (Plate XXI). His work with the composition of stars and the lighting of the space that they are composed in reminded me of the work of Appia and Craig.

The director had wanted to incorporate the image of dead bodies piled up and strewn about the space. Kongshaug’s work depicted such bodies in very focused manner and sculpted surrounding objects adding importance to the geometric shapes at play in his composition.

As the director and I continued to talk about the visual make up of this world, the production concept began to solidify. On January 18 Sue Ott Rowlands presented her director’s concept (see appendix A for the complete statement) in the Department’s first official *King Lear* production meeting. The director would draw particular inspiration from the 1971 film of *King Lear*, directed by Grigori Kozintsev.

Sue Ott Rowlands resolved the make-up of the visual environment in the following passage:

> …we see layers of man-made construction: a present, crumbling kingdom built on the rubble of former kingdoms. Underneath it all there is the suggestion that nature still exists. We see elements of it, though barren and seemingly lifeless poised to reclaim the environment - the ultimate inevitability of nature's dominance. Visually, we should think in terms of a blasted landscape of sand and broken marble, rubble walls, curved steel pock-marked and charred as if by fire, edges peeling back like rusted skin.\(^\text{12}\)

It was empowering to see the words and visuals like the rusted mental, and the physical representation of the hapes that were exchanged between the director and myself during informal meetings become part of the final vision for the work.

\(^{11}\) Shakespeare, William, 5.
\(^{12}\) Rowlands, Sue Ott. Director’s Concept, 1. Appendix A
The director concluded her statement by addressing the use of props and several scenic requirements that would be added.

Finally, in considering several practical issues surrounding the production, I would say this: the putting out of Grouster's eyes will be brutally realistic event (possible done by gouging with the heel of Regen's shoe and perhaps, a crowbar) so blood effects will be needed; props, though minimal will be used and will be, in most instances, carried on by the actors. A giant scrini with the map of the kingdom should be considered for the first scene (this would be torn down and used by actors in subsequent scenes); bodies will be carted, carried and dragged on and off stage through the evening; much stage combat (hand-to-hand, staff, swords and knives) will be incorporated...

Though the minimal use of props was mentioned to me by Sue, I had to consider that an optimistic vision. I have yet to encounter a simple prop show! This would impact the budget significantly and I planned to watch this area closely to accommodate the ever-increasing props needs.

Another consideration of the production was the cast size. It was estimated in the Director's Statement that the cast would range between 22-24 based on the text. This would mean a large number of costumes and a need for large playing spaces to allow staging with a full compliment of performers. Such a large cast could easily cause for a props list to grow exponentially as well.

The resources for The Ohio State University Department of Theatre's production of King Lear were seemingly quite substantial. The budget for scenery was approximately $2200, while the allocation for properties was $1800. The labor force would consist of a shop supervisor, GTA's, workstudy and Theatre 205 students. The equipment and labor was shared with the spring production of Viet Rock in the Roy Bowen Theatre.

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13 Appendix A
From the first production meeting on January 8 I had two weeks to design the set. Construction was scheduled to begin on March 6. The set was to be loaded in on Monday May 1, but the director proposed that the day should be moved up one week to April 24. This would allow the actors to use the varied terrain of the space as much as possible. Pushing the date forward one week would give the cast two full weeks on the stage by the opening on May 17. Needless to say this created a definite urgency to have the set “actor-ready” by the end of the day on April 24. The technical director determined the runway into the house the first priority.

With the directorial parameters in mind, I began to determine the best way to achieve the production’s design concept. My first concern was to design a playing space large enough to accommodate a cast of twenty-three and a large combat scene. The space needed to be as flexible as possible, allowing rapid and fluid entrances and exits between scenes. I designed a large oval with a 0’-9” raked deck to accommodate all these needs and to showcase the choreography. This rake allowed the audience to watch the movement of the actor across the space and add an important visual dimension to the action. Though significant enough to highlight this action the rake was also shallow enough to allow the cast especially those who would be in high heels easy mobility. The rake also added some visual interest and helped to define the playing spaces. It took the shape of an oval to reflect the timelessness of the piece and be representation of the world. The oval was designed 26’-0” from end to end and 12’-7” across at the centerline.

The entire set would be pulled as far downstage as possible. This would make the space very intimate, even within a proscenium theatre. It also served a very practical need by aiding with the actor’s projection.
An upper level or ramp was then created to wrap around the back of the central oval. This ramp would start at 1'-4" and finish stage left at 8'-6". The rake would be more severe than that of the central area. This generated a concern, but the addition of texture to the ramp put the director at ease. It would create a surface more managable by the actors. The ramp would not get the complex traffic that the oval would encounter except by those in appropriate shoes.

The ramp incorporated eight actor access areas. Two at stage right, three, at center stage and four at stage left. Stage right had a small two-step staircase that led to the stage level as well as a fire escape that crossed the upper level and led off stage right. This unit was composed of two landing areas connected by a set of stairs that led to a platform and another set of stairs that created an off stage exit. The central playing area had three actor accesses from the ramp. The head that was placed underneath the ramp level would be stable enough to scramble up or down. There was also a large metal panel on the upstage side that had a cut-out access that would lead down a series of steps that terminated through a trap in the floor and finally into the trap room below the stage. Near the panel on the downstage edge of the ramp was a metal ladder that led onto the oval. Stage left had access under the ramp platform where it reached its 7'-4" height. There would be a ramp off of the central oval that led to the upstage area behind the set as well as one against the proscenium that would lead off into the wing. This surface was to be treated with diamond plate steel sheets, however the cost of this material if purchased new was impossible with in the scenic budget. Mark Shanda suggested looking at a local scrap yard for the metal materials that would be needed.
The price of scrap was .25 a pound, much discounted from the retail price.

Though the first trip was fruitful in terms of material, no diamond plate was to be found, in manageable sizes.

The backdrop included several large panels and the cyclorama. The original concept for the background included a tree suspended upside down and a series of small metal panels composing a cascade stage left. Through conversation and refinement the backdrop became five large panels and six branches suspended between the panels. The panels would make a significant visual impact through their arrangement and have the appearance of being rusted and weathered. To reflect the desired natural elements and reinforce the branches suspended among the composition, branch shapes would be cut out of the large metallic panels. The branches evolved from the visual image of the twisted and gnarled tree that was ever present in the conversation between the designer and director.

The panel painting and texturing would follow a favorite Koltai visual of the director and designer (Plate XX). The oxidized appearance of the metal reflected the rotting and disease of the major character and the world he inhabits. It was my intention that the branches and the "burnouts" in the panels would make an interesting addition to the storm by becoming lighting. The cyclorama could be used to create a general color for the mood to be determined in consultation with the lighting designer.

The downstage area was extended into the house to allow more intimacy with the audience. The close proximity also allowed for an easy visual and physical transition into walkways that extended into the house. These areas reflected a sense of concrete that was broken and stained.
The oval acting area was separated from this plane by the rake and these walkways became the foundation on which Lear's kingdom was built. This reflected the director's idea of the stratification of the kingdom.

There were two acting areas that would be at the house level downstage of the orchestra pit. These areas allowed access to the stage via ladders left and right of the "intersection" located near the centerline of the stage space. These areas also served as transitional areas from the world of the play to that of the audience.

The walkway that lead from the stage deck to the center of the house was created with a 6'-4" wide platform that extended on a diagonal 18'-2" into the house and terminated at a central playing area that connected to the outside aisles of the theatre by crossing Row K. These walkways were a continuation of the concrete slabs perforated with grates to allow lighting instruments to shine up from below. There were two reasons for this; one was practical. It would create an angle from below to illuminate the actor since the lighting positions in the house were not designed to support scenery outside of the confines of the proscenium. The other was an aesthetic on. These positions would allow the lighting designer to create a sense of isolation and a mood of uneasiness. The house right exit to the aisle transitioned to the floor by means of a ramp. The house left exit used two steps.

The impetus for this walkway into the house was derived from Japanese Kabuki theatre. Kabuki uses a hanamichi (an area of the stage that extends out into the audience) to break through the fourth wall and create a very strong playing area. Though it was elongated and given a stronger presence, it did in fact create a very strong playing area as
well as allow for more innovative blocking and two more entrances and exits for the director to manipulate.

The set design provided The Ohio State University Department of Theatre's production of *King Lear* a powerful environment within which the characters could react and interact with each other and the audience. However, it was only one aspect of a tightly integrated production. The unification of the setting, lights, sound and costumes, acting and directing would make the world of the play cohesive and the production a success.
CHAPTER 3

PRODUCTION SITUATION

The differences between an actualized scenic design and a theoretical one are the spatial needs and the artistic vision of the director, the physical limits created by the theatre and budgetary limits enforced by the producer. In order to reasonably evaluate a design it is imperative to understand the conditions and limitations that are imposed upon it.

Thurber Theatre is the primary and largest performance space of the Department of Theatre at The Ohio State University. It is a proscenium theatre with continental seating for 600, including wheelchair access. The auditorium interior has decorative paneling over the side stages and a sculpted wooden acoustical wall in the back of the house. The 600 seats are covered in maroon fabric. The seats are bolted to the floor onto threaded studs set into the concrete of the seating risers. The risers are a poured concrete floor, which also serves as a plenum for the heating system. Rising from a low point of 3'-0" below the stage level, the floor terraces up between four to six inches with every 3'-0" row. The auditorium floor reaches the height of the stage at Row K. On either side of the seating are antechambers that include coat closets and usher stations. Towering over these antechambers are sidewalls of tunable acoustical panels.
At the rear of the house are the control booths. The booths above the last rows of seats are divided into three sections. The first booth houses the lighting control station equipped with a Strand 520 system with a dimmer per circuit. In the center booth are two Colortran Xenon follow spots, and the production stage manager's station. In the front of this booth a removable lighting position was installed to accommodate the unique lighting opportunities for the production. The third booth contains the sound control equipment.

Two lighting positions or beams in the ceiling designed to cover the downstage area with a 45-degree down light provide the front-of-house lighting. Side front light is provided by two tormentor positions set into decorative architectural coves in the house. Another side light position has been created by the installation of removable pipe in the caliper area on the left and right downstage of the proscenium.

The Thurber stage is framed by a proscenium arch that is 35'-0" wide and height of 22'-0" high. The stage apron is a bow shape that ties into two triangular side stages that have movable panels. The downstage 8'-0" of the apron is on a hydraulic elevator that can be lowered 7'-0" below the stage level for use as an orchestra pit, and is accessible through a basement door. The stage continues upstage of the proscenium for 40'-0" to the back wall. There is wing space on either side of the stage and to stage left; the wings open to the scene shop for additional storage.

Over the stage area is a complete counterweight system and a partial hemp system. The battens are arranged on average, on approximately 1'-0" centers. The first six line sets are single purchase lines, which are run from stage right wing. The remaining twenty-eight line sets are double purchase and run from a gallery position above stage.
right. The hemp lines are also run from the gallery. As included in the hang plot, there are four hardwired electric positions and a cyclorama.

The director's concept for the staging of *King Lear* presented many ideas requiring serious consideration when applied to the physical realities of Thurber Theatre. The major issue was adapting the theatre for the production by changing auditorium seating. Sue presented me with the idea to expand the playing space into the house. I conceived of the ramp and crossover, which necessitated the removal of some seating. This created several issues that required collaborative solutions. Among these was the physical act of removing and storing the seats. A procedural precedent had been set in 1987 during the production of *Candide*. *King Lear* however would require a greater number of seats to be removed to accommodate the design.

In addition to the physical demands of transforming the seating area, a safety issue would be created by the removal of the seats. The seats are attached to the floor by a series of bolts mounted in the concrete. Each removed seating position left two bolts that protruded from the concrete 0'-1 1/2" As the studs could not be removed, they have to be covered to prevent injury to the audience and cast members. Rows A, B and K were completely removed and platforming was installed in these areas. Row K became an 11'-4" high elevated playing space. Rows A and B were platformed as well, but only to a height of 0'-4". These playing spaces solved part of the safety problem, but obscuring many of the exposed bolts left from the seating. The platforming connecting the stage to the gangplank covered the remaining exposed bolts, alleviating any safety issue for cast and audience.
Thurber Theatre is a multi-use space. It is booked as the venue for educational events, recitals, community events, and departmental functions. This created yet another set of issues. Events booked in Thurber during the *King Lear* design process included the Columbus Youth Ballet, a staged reading for the 30th Anniversary of *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* and a corporate rental. All of these events prevented the installation of the scenery or the removal of the seating necessary to the production process before April 25. It also meant that the large scenic pieces could not be built and stored on stage until the load-in date. Figures 10-15 illustrate the need for building much of the scenery in place.

A few of the platform units were built before the installation but they couldn’t be finished until they were in their final position. The load-in and scheduling of the production will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the Production Journal. This limited the amount of work the shop could do in the theatre prior to load-in. Since much of the set had to be constructed in place, this had a detrimental effect on the construction phase of the project, compressing the time frame for both construction and painting.

A final issue for the producer's consideration was that the removal of 150+ seats would mean a loss of revenue. Averaging $10.00 per ticket, the loss of seats could mean upwards of $750.00 per performance, if the house was sold out each performance. This formula took into account that the first two rows of seating are usually not sold. The previous production that removed seating made allowance to re-coup some of the lost revenue by seating patrons on the stage itself. In this production, however, that was not an option. The large amount of combat and the physicality of the action were deterrents to this idea.
The next issue to be addressed was lighting the new spaces within the house. As Thurber was not originally intended to for use as an environmental space, there was no provision for lighting areas other than the stage. After several conversations with the Lighting Designer, Martha Mountain, the issue was addressed, but new problems began to surface. We considered creating new positions by installing some truss work that was in stock. However, after examination of the trusses it was determined that if they were hung horizontally they would not be strong enough to support the weight of lighting instruments. Technical Director, Mark Shanda suggested using pipes to create the desired position, he felt pipes would be easier to hang and were readily available from our stock.

The scene shop at the Ohio State University was an additional factor in the design equation. The shop located in the Drake Union, is a group of workspaces, with access to Thurber Theatre by means of a large, rolling, overhead garage door. At stage level are the carpentry and paint shops in which most of the assembly, painting, and properties work was conducted. Below, on the trap level, is the metal shop, where the chair, armature for the head, and the other metal structures would be assembled.

Two full-time staff members and one faculty position support the scene shop. Faculty member and Technical Director Mark Shanda is usually in charge of the administrative end of production, however, on this production Mark drafted the construction drawings and created the schedule of production as well as being very involved in the shop. The staff includes, Michael Jon Washer, who is in charge of overseeing the student labor force, procuring construction materials and maintaining of the equipment and the Production Coordinator, James Knapp was also available for assistance. Aiding the full-time staff were three graduate teaching assistants.
These are twenty hour per week appointments. One of the teaching assistants was also the designer. There were also several workstudy employees and Theatre 205 students fulfilling laboratory hours in the shops. Skill levels varied widely among the students but there was a great deal of enthusiasm. Also included in the production team was property designer, Vicki A. Horning. This position was created as an assistant to the designer. The student would take the designer’s ideas and preliminary sketches and create the properties for the production.

As the designer, the amount of skilled labor was a definite factor but I decided to design the set remaining true to my artistic vision. Scaling back the design was an acceptable compromise if required. However, there was never a mention of being unable to do anything that was requested. The only limitations given were in the materials that would be used. Those were simply budget constraints.

I also chose to do all my drafting in AutoCAD. This was a challenge for me since my computer skills are limited. The other option was to hand draft, but when I considered the amount of time needed to draft and redraft changes by hand, I opted to do it with the aid of the computer. I did all my elevations and ground plans in AutoCAD and was very pleased with the results (Figures 1-9).

As mentioned earlier, schedule and budgetary factors were a consideration in the completion of the design project. The budget proved to be less of a constraint than the demand for space in Thurber Theatre.
CHAPTER 4

PRODUCTION JOURNAL

In regards to the treatment of this chapter, I see it as less of a day by day account of the design process for King Lear but as more of a summation of the way the design for this production evolved over the five-week build period to the completion of the show.

From the time the director’s concept was shared to opening night, there were several items that got revised and redefined. Perhaps the largest of these was the textural debris that filled the negative spaces in the set. The rocks and inverted tree were replaced by empty space. The director took a more refined and streamlined approach to the shapes in the scenery, opting for a very spare, Asian look to the design. The layers of rock included in the design were removed. A monolithic concrete pillar and hard legs that continued the idea of broken concrete into the masking were also cut.

The requirements of battle scenes were also ever-changing. In the beginning we discussed fight choreography that would be created using swords, staves and shields. These would also be created using existing tools of destruction owned by the department due to budgetary and time constraints. However, through the rehearsal process the combat evolved into an ail sword and shield extravaganza. Because we didn’t own enough swords, this approach necessitated the purchasing of two additional swords at a
total cost of around $230. One of the purchased swords was broken by second dress
rehearsal much to the chagrin of everyone involved.

The chair originally designed for the torture and blinding of Gloucester also grew
in importance. The chair became a throne for Lear in the opening scene as well as a chair
in General’s home. This multi-functional approach became complicated because of the
different surfaces it needed to play upon. The metal chair was placed on an incline and
had to allow for a choreographed movement down the ramp onto a grated fire escape.
Resting on the fire escape the grating often managed to catch the feet of the chair.
Consequently the chair was built and rebuilt three times.

Another element that changed was the use of ship ladders that went from the stage
level stage left and stage right to the house level at the front of the stage. Wooden steps
replaced them for rehearsals and became part of the design. I think this was due in part to
the availability of the stock stairs and a concern for the speed at which they were
ascended and descended by the actors.

Safety was a large consideration on this show because of the use of real fire as
and the irregular nature of the playing space. Keeping everyone healthy had to be an
important goal. We held a training session for the crew and cast to deal with the special
needs for the use of a live flame. It was also imperative that the stage manager was
informed of the new surfaces that were added as each scenic element was completed.

A large change in the composition of the design was the eliminating of a column
of purple fabric. Originally it was designed to help create a more elegant world of the
court for the opening scenes. The fabric column would be flown out as Lear tore down
the map. This movement would represent the destruction of the kingdom.
It was located stage right of the central oval. With the sightlines in Thurber Theatre, the fabric created a large visual obstacle for portions of the audience. It would have blocked the actors crossing behind it down the ramp. It also partially obstructed the view of Lear pulling down the map. The director and I explored other areas to hang the fabric but it didn’t work anywhere else in the composition. To compensate for the loss of color, I added a regal purple color that was found in Lear’s first costume into the border of the map.

There were also a series of stairs that evolved over the course of the build. This set of stairs connected the oval to the fire escape. They began life as a set of two wooden steps that were 0′-8″. The steps did create an uneven flight up to the fire escape due to the modifications made to the fire escape landing. The modification created a need to increase the height of the steps. The steps were rebuilt to be a set of two 0′-10″ stairs. The technical director and I had conferred about the nature of these steps and determined the amount of space they occupied in the playing area was more important than the actual rise of each step. We guessed wrong, the director determined that this next set of steps did not allow for graceful movement. The stairs were built a third time as a set of easily climbable open-faced metal structure that was very appropriate to the movement and visual look of the design.

A primary concern I had within the production was the method of communication. It seemed that certain design changes were made without my knowledge or consultation. I realize that the compressed time frame of our production calendar necessitated prompt decisions and I acknowledge the occasional difficulty created by my schedule as a graduate student.
However, as this production was presented as a professional project, I would have preferred to be included in all design discussions. I was specifically concerned about the central upright panel. The suggestion made by my advisors to the director was the logical solution, and had I been present during this discussion I would have suggested it as well. The trap room access cut through the center panel allowed the actors to emerge unseen onto the center of the ramp.

Upon reflecting, most of the changes to set were not major. However, at the time I felt as if I was having large pieces of my design cut away. I didn’t always handle myself as professionally as I should have and allowed my emotions to be very evident in my facial expressions. In that regard I have learned a valuable lesson about having a “poker face”. It is very important to pick your battles and realize that you won’t win them all. In all the designs I have been fortunate enough to have in my tenure here as a graduate student I feel I have learned to be pretty flexible and open to changes. I think I have perhaps allowed myself to be a little too flexible at times. I need to be firmer in my expectations and stay committed to my original ideas as long as they serve the production. I may not get all of them but I have to be diligent and clear in their defense.

I will say that overall experience was one of the best design experiences I have had to date. My design was completed and realized the vision that I had depicted in my renderings and model. I learned a great deal about the importance of communication and how to be active in pursuing the answers I need to move the process forward. The scene design combined with the costumes, direction, sound and lighting created a very strong production and one that I can be very proud to have been a part of.
CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION

On Wednesday, May 17, 2000, The Ohio State University Department of Theatre's production of *King Lear* opened. With very limited time to reflect on the success and possibilities for improvement in the design of the show, my evaluation is as follows.

Overall I was very happy with the finished look of the design. Though any artist will say that a work is never really finished, you do have to admit that your time on the project has come to an end. The playing space itself had a very unified feeling and created very interesting visual pictures. It also created a look not usually encountered by our regular patrons. The metal panels read as corroded metal and the cut out branch shapes reinforced the disintegrated nature desired in the set. The branches also added a sense of nature into a heavily industrial vision. The simple geometric shapes and crisp lines of the large units created a very universal space.

The actors seemed to very comfortable with the layout and flow the set created in their movement. The ramps and rake were an initial concern of mine because I was afraid the actor would feel unsafe and that their movements would look very unsure. In the end this anxiety was unwarranted.
Several factors made the irregular surfaces less of an adjustment for the actors. One factor was the costume designer’s forethought in having the majority of actors in very sturdy and low heels. The additional schedule for the actors to work on the set itself also proved invaluable. Another factor was the fact that the cast was able to move into the space early and work on the ramp and rake.

One particularly successful element of the design was the number of access points available to the performers. This allowed the space to become extremely flexible as a performance venue and also allowed the audience to become a part of the action rather than remaining distanced as in a strictly proscenium presentation. The use of the space by the director, most notably in the battle sequence, allowed Lear’s mad world to consume the audience, disintegrating the lines between audience and actor much like the lines between sanity and madness presented in the play.

If I were given the opportunity to refine the design even further I would change a few things. I think the overall design would have benefited from moving the entire set two feet stage right. I believe this would have helped alleviate sight line issues stage left as well as improving the overall aesthetic. Moving the set stage right would have helped close in the empty void that was created underneath the stage right hanging panel. I would also have raised the rake on the central oval back to the original 0’-11” in height. In the process of building the oval it became apparent that the 0’-9” rake did not have the visual impact of the 0’-11”. The compromise of lowering it was due to actor safety issues and increasing the performer’s comfort level. Also, the rake was originally designed to follow the centerline of the oval from stage right to stage left. This was simplified by the Technical Director and proved to be advantageous to the design.
The rake moved from the downstage edge of the oval to the upstage edge parallel to the plasterline. I think it allowed much stronger movement patterns in the blocking as more of the down stage edge of the oval was in contact with the stage floor.

I also think that the demarcation of scenes needed more scenic support. I think lighting fixtures, such as a chandelier for the first scene, a tall burning brazier, in Regan’s home and possibly standing torches for the scenes at the encampments would have helped define the different locations and reinforced the visual variety of the scenes. It would have provided opportunities to advance the idea of a broad period. I am not trying to say that the only way to define a space is through the use of scenery. However, the repeated use of a chair as the throne, a chair at Goneril’s home and as the chair that Gloucester was tortured in may not have given the scenes enough variety in terms of visual support.

Another modification would have been the introduction of hard masking. The stage right fire escape masking leg would have created a much stronger visual transition from the scenery to the wings if it had been treated as a textural element instead of using a soft black drape. Along with the texture of the hard masking, added texture to the underside of the upstage ramp and to the house platforming would have created more visual support the disruption of nature and the cycle of reclamation.

The branches cut out in the upstage panels are another area of possible modification. The branches became a bit too regular. The branches took on a very similar layout, size and direction. The introduction of a more varied layout would have reinforced the idea of turmoil and disintegration as visual metaphors for the production.
The original concept of real branches used in conjunction with the cutouts suspended up stage of the ramp was cut. I believe this was detrimental to the visual look of the production and removed an element of the natural that would have juxtaposed against the industrial feeling of the overall scenic design. However, I think the branches would have cluttered the stage picture if they were hung in their originally conceived location. I do think that if they had been incorporated into the area around above the oval and out into the house they would have helped the environmental nature of the design by extending the scenic elements above the audience and the stage extensions.

In terms of the surface treatments the painting could have been a little subtler on the walkway and crossover in the center of the house. I think it is a little too painterly. To solve this issue it would have helped if I had been a little better prepared in terms of elevation and colors. The treatment would also have benefited from more physical texture and more time to work with the painted details. However, if the treatment had been a little less graphic in nature it would have blended better into the rest of the scenery on stage.

The predominance of the head as a scenic element and metaphoric reference to Lear's emotional transformation was as strong as I had hoped. Some of this was due to blocking and lighting, but the removal of the original scenic element of several rock formations from the surrounding area early in the design process also detracted from this cast bronze monolith rising from the metallic environment. Without the contrast of the natural elements of rock and branches to combat the industrial world, the head was absorbed into that visual world, losing its clarity and individuality.
In addition, the compressed time frame for construction reduced the amount of time devoted to this particular element and affected the eventual representation of this element.

Though I would love to have a chance to fix several elements, I am very proud of the work that I did and its contribution to the overall success of the production. I think that the set created a strong visual statement as well as an interesting environment for the action. The scenery created a corroded and rotting world that is reflected in the words and actions of the characters. The final design reinforced the director's concept through the fluid movement between scenes, allowing the composition of interesting stage pictures and a strong visual representation of the research that I had presented.
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Figure 6. Stair, Head and Tree Elevations
Figure 8. House Platform Elevation
Appendix B

Plates
Plate III: Crossover Center Platform
Plate XII: Production Photograph
Plate XVII: Detail Photograph of Head
Plate XVIII: Detail Photograph of Runway Surface
Plate XXIII: *Brand*, Ralph Koltai
Plate XXIV: The Ring Cycle, Ralph Koltai
Plate XXIX: Artist Unknown, Face 1
Appendix C

Tables
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>History, Politics</th>
<th>Literature, Theater</th>
<th>Religion, Philosophy</th>
<th>Visual Arts, Music</th>
<th>Science, Technology</th>
<th>Daily Life</th>
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<tr>
<td>1591</td>
<td>Henry IV of France excommunicated by Pope Gregory XIV</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>Henry VI</em> pt 1; Sidney: &quot;Astrophil and Stella&quot;</td>
<td>Pope Gregory XIV dies; Pope Innocent IX succeeds him</td>
<td>Various births and deaths</td>
<td>James Lancaster leaves Plymouth on first voyage to E Indies</td>
<td>Skittle alleys become popular in Germany</td>
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<td>1592</td>
<td>Portuguese settle Mombasa</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>Richard III</em>, Comedy of Errors; Kyd: Spanish Tragedy</td>
<td>Pope Innocent IX dies; Pope Clement VIII succeeds him</td>
<td>Tintoretto: &quot;The Last Supper&quot;</td>
<td>Pompeo discovered, Juan de Fucua discovers British Columbia</td>
<td>Plague kills 15,000 in London</td>
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<td>1594</td>
<td>Edict of St Bermainen-Laye grants Huguenots freedom of worship</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>Two Gentlemen of Verona</em>, Love's Labour's Lost, <em>Romeo and Juliet</em></td>
<td>Giordano Bruno seized by Vatican for supporting Copernican theory of the universe</td>
<td>&quot;Dafne&quot; by Jacoba Pelet--first opera</td>
<td>Ralph Fitch returns from overland journey to India; Galileo's Golden Rule</td>
<td>Lancaster breaks Portuguese trade monopoly in India</td>
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<td>1595</td>
<td>Henry IV declares war on Spain; Dutch colonize E Indies</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>Richard II</em>, <em>Midsummer Night's Dream</em>, Jesuit poet Southwell hanged</td>
<td>Pope Clement VIII absolves Henry IV</td>
<td>Annibale Carracci: &quot;Venus and Adonis&quot;</td>
<td>Sir Walter Raleigh explores 300 miles up Orinoco River</td>
<td>English army abandons bow as weapon of war; heels on shoes first appear</td>
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<td>1596</td>
<td>English sack Cadiz; Spanish take Calais</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>King John</em>, <em>Merchant of Venice</em>; Spenser: <em>Faerie Queene</em> bk 4-6</td>
<td>Rene Descartes born</td>
<td>Caravaggio: &quot;Basket of Fruit&quot;; Zaccagni: &quot;Practica di musica&quot; (reprint)</td>
<td>Galileo invents thermometer; van Ceulen calculates pi to 20 places</td>
<td>Tomatoes introduced to England; First water closets</td>
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<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td>King Felipe II of Spain dies; Felipe III succeeds him</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>Much Ado about Nothing</em>; Henry V; Jonson: <em>Every Man in His Humour</em></td>
<td>Edict of Nantes gives French Huguenots freedom of worship</td>
<td>Jan Brueghel: &quot;Adoration of the Kings&quot;</td>
<td>Tycho Brahe: <em>Astronomiae Instaurae Mechanica</em></td>
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<td>1599</td>
<td>Earl of Essex made Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, arrested on return to England</td>
<td>Shakespeare: <em>Julius Caesar</em> as <em>You Like It Twelfth Night</em>, building of the Globe Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Earl of Essex tried for misdemeanors in Ireland, loses offices</td>
<td>James VI of Scotland: &quot;Basilikon doron&quot; on divine right of kings</td>
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<tr>
<td>1601</td>
<td>Earl of Essex revolts against Elizabeth I--tried for treason and executed</td>
<td>Various births and deaths</td>
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<tr>
<td>1602</td>
<td>Spanish army lands in Ireland, surrenders to English at Kinsale</td>
<td>Various births and deaths</td>
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<td>1603</td>
<td>James IV of Scotland succeeds Elizabeth I; becoming James I of England and Scotland</td>
<td>Golf and fashion become fashionable</td>
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<td>1604</td>
<td>Peace between England and Spain; England and France sign commercial treaty</td>
<td>First postal rates fixed in Germany; plague in Spain</td>
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<td>1605</td>
<td>Guy Fawkes arrested in cellars of Parliament. He later becomes subject of English (holiday) saying: &quot;A penny for the Old Guy&quot;</td>
<td>First postal rates fixed in Germany; plague in Spain</td>
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<td>1606</td>
<td>Guy Fawkes and fellow conspirator sentenced to death; King James I's proclamation for a national flag</td>
<td>Golf and fashion become fashionable</td>
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<td>1607</td>
<td>&quot;Flight of the Earls&quot; from Ireland to Spain, fearing arrest for attempted insurrection</td>
<td>First postal rates fixed in Germany; plague in Spain</td>
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<td>1609</td>
<td>Twelve years truce between Spain and Holland</td>
<td>Shakespeare: Cymbeline; Jonson: Epicoene, or the Silent Women</td>
<td>Congregation of Female Jesuits founded</td>
<td>Blue Mosque, Constantinople built</td>
<td>Henry Hudson explores Delaware Bay and Hudson River</td>
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<td>1610</td>
<td>Skirmishes between English and Dutch settlers in India</td>
<td>Shakespeare: A Winter's Tale; Jonson: The Alchemist</td>
<td>Cowell's The Interpreter burned for enhancing the authority of the crown</td>
<td>Michelangelo Caravaggio dies</td>
<td>Tin-enamelled ware made at Delft, Tin-enamelled ware made at Delft</td>
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<td>1611</td>
<td>Dissolution of Parliament by James I</td>
<td>Shakespeare: The Tempest; Donne: &quot;An Anatomy of the World&quot; (Elegy)</td>
<td>Authorized version of the Bible-King James Version published</td>
<td>Erection of Musjid-i-Shah, Royal Mosque at Isfahan, Persia</td>
<td>Galileo observes Jupiter's moons; Harriott discovers sunspots; Pierese discovers Orion nebula</td>
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<td>1612</td>
<td>Treaty between Dutch and King of Kandy in Ceylon</td>
<td>Shakespeare: Henry VIII; Drayton: Polibobion Part 1</td>
<td>Last recorded burning of heretics in England</td>
<td>Orlando Gibbons: First Set of Madrigals and Motets</td>
<td>Simon Marius rediscovers Andromeda nebula</td>
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<td>1613</td>
<td>English colonists in Virginia destroy French colony at Port Royal, Nova Scotia</td>
<td>Globe Theater burns; Lope de Vega: Fuentoviviana; Cervantes Novelas ejemplares</td>
<td>Francisco Suarez: Defenso catolicae fidel contra anglicanam sectae errores</td>
<td>Guido Reni: Aurora, frescoes in Rome</td>
<td>Copper coins come into use; John Denys The Secrets of Angling</td>
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<td>1615</td>
<td>English fleet defeats Portuguese off coast of Bombay</td>
<td>Cervantes: Don Quixote Part 2; George Chapman: translation of Homer's Odyssey</td>
<td>Jesuits count 13,112 members in 32 provinces</td>
<td>Inigo Jones becomes England's chief architect</td>
<td>Galileo Galilei faces the inquisition for the first time</td>
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<td>1616</td>
<td>Sir Walter Raleigh released from Tower to lead expedition in search of El Dorado</td>
<td>William Shakespeare and Miguel Cervantes die, Apr 23</td>
<td>Catholic opprobrium intensified in Bohemia</td>
<td>Collegium Musicum founded at Prague</td>
<td>Galileo prohibited by Catholic Church from further scientific work</td>
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Appendix D

Director’s Concept
KING LEAR
by William Shakespeare

Director's Concept Statement

We wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall for short of the subject, or even of what we ourselves conceive of it.

(William Hazlett)

King Lear has been called a 'Stonehenge of the mind' and 'one of the monuments of Western Civilization.' The size and scope of its tragedy has been compared to the Holocaust - incomprehensible in scale and relentless in its unending destruction. Shakespeare's apocalyptic tragedy, which, writes critic Harold Bloom, "announces the beginning and the end of human nature and destiny," is riddled with much rhetoric of disease, corruption, and betrayal. This is a universe where things are, as the mighty king puts it, "not well."

We must begin with the idea that the world is rotten. Lear describes, in his carefully staged abdication ritual in the play's first scene, that the kingdom he is dividing among his daughters is abundant with life. "With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd, / With pleasure rivers and wide-skirted meads." But that fertile land exists only in his imagination - or perhaps his memory. The actual landscape Lear stumbles onto later, when his elder daughters have cast him out, is a bleak, worn-out heath where nothing grows any more.

As well, the family landscape is marred with fault lines of stress and resentment. In King Lear, Shakespeare exposes domestic dysfunction - the nuclear family with its competitiveness and grievances - as a fountainthead of destruction. That destruction is then played out in larger dimensions as well - the blighted heath and the howling storm that shake the very foundation of the universe. Family bonds and obligations break down followed by a collapse of normal, human decency and, finally, Lear's own mind. "Vengeance! Plague! Death! Confusion!" These are the words that Lear bellows upon learning that his daughter Regan and her husband Cornwall have refused him an audience. "They are sick!" the aged monarch rages - oblivious, perhaps, of the illness that infects his own body, a madness that begins in his mind, but eventually contaminates his entire body. "We are not ourselves when nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body," he continues. It is this long decline of body and mind that finally splits open the fault lines into dangerous currents, as the patriarchs become increasingly capricious and gullible while their successors accumulate grievances in the long frustrating wait for power and control.
This version of *King Lear* will be set as some kind of theatrical space, an invented world created using some real elements, but one that doesn't literally exist. Drawing inspiration from Georgi Kozintsev's 1971 film version of *King Lear*, we can think in terms of a barren expanse, a wasteland not only parched but fissured with deep cracks. The old, autocratic king only imagines a rich kingdom built on a lush, self-renewing land, which in turn reflects the equally imaginary bonds of love and respect that fill his mind until his family. Instead, we see layers of man-made construction: a present, crumbling kingdom built on the rubble of former kingdoms. Underneath it all is the suggestion that nature still exists. We see elements of it, though barren and seemingly lifeless, poised to reclaim the environment - the ultimate inevitability of nature's dominance. Visually, we should think in terms of a blasted landscape of sand and broken marble, rubbled walls, curved steel pock-marked and charred as if by fire, edges peeling back like rusted skin. This physical world threatens to disintegrate before our eyes. The landscape provides provocative images of Lear's fevered mind, polluted with dark, lurid thoughts as well as the state of Lear's kingdom, crumbling in the hands of his vicious daughters.

Practically speaking, the playing area should feel as intimate as possible. Levels are important as are a variety of possible entrances and exits. We do not need to realistically establish different locations such as Gloucester's house or Lear's apartment. Rather, we need a space, an environment for this story to happen. Hiding places either on or under the main playing area are essential. The playing area should be brought as far forward of the proscenium arch as is practical, extending it area into the house is desirable. A goal should be to have a little distance between the audience and the actors as well. Nothing moves slowly in *King Lear*, everything hurries relentlessly toward disaster, both for Lear and for Gloucester, and ultimately for the entire kingdom. Likewise, actors will need to move quickly onstage and off, the action will move rapidly and continuously through each of the two acts.

Costumes, like the set, should reflect a somewhat timeless setting. The clothes should be evocative and symbolic rather than representative of any specific period. Although drawing primarily from the past 200 years, elements of a primitive and violent society of an indeterminate century could be incorporated as well. The tension between costumes and set is important, there are well-dressed people who don't care about their world, only about themselves. After the first scene, they undress and we see how they are inside. They’re rotten there also. They’re dressed up, but there is something wrong with them inside. Sexuality, very present in the Regan/Goneril/Cornwall/Edmund characters, adds to the potential for danger and violence.

Lighting and sound are important elements. Supporting the visual images suggested above, lights will need to keep the action of the play moving while sculpting the dark, hostile world and assisting in distinguishing the various locations. The layers of existence (Lear’s kingdom, the ruins of former
kingdoms, and ever-present lurking nature) will be informed by the use of light. The lighting should be evocative, moody and meet the challenges of a playing area which extends into the house. Sound should be almost constant, the soundscape of the piece should providing a charming, metallic undertone not unlike the sound scientists have discovered droning deep inside the earth. It is the sound of time marching on, of the inevitability of life and change. Sounds from nature are probably not present in this world, sources are more likely to be found in man-made sounds. Specific needs such as the storm that rages on the heath and clamorous sounds of battle will combine with less realistic ones. Loud, intrusive sounds such as a giant steel door slamming shut will provide punctuation to certain scenes. In short, the sound design for this production will be extensive.

Finally, in considering several practical issues surrounding the production, I would say this: the putting out of Gloucester’s eyes will be a brutally realistic event (possibly done by gouging with the heel of Rogan’s shoe and, perhaps, a crowbar) so blood effects will be needed; props, though minimal, will be used and will be, in most instances, carried on by the actors. A giant serin with the map of the kingdom should be considered for the first scene (this would be torn down and used by the actors in subsequent scenes), bodies will be carted, carried and dragged on and off-stage throughout the evening; much stage combat (hand-to-hand, staff, swords and knives) will be incorporated; and, although much cutting of the text will be done, the production will still run 2 1/2 to 3 hours with 1 intermission. I anticipate casting 22-24 actors, cross-gender casting will most likely be employed, though the characters will retain the gender as written by the playwright.

*King Lear* provides an extraordinary opportunity to explore issues of the use and abuse of authority, generational antagonisms, the lust for power and its restraints, and the proper object of loyalty. Where truth and loyalty conflict, where do we owe most allegiance? To cite Hal Holbrook, who played Lear himself: “This play touches me to my heart and soul and I think that even in the final scene of death there is beauty. The beauty of truth. The truth about the pain that stalks us all if we do not learn to love in time, and which may strike us even then.”

Sue Ott Rowlands
Director
January 18, 2000

Sources cited: Introduction to *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition* (Rene Woxa); Asides and program notes. Shakespeare Theatre (Washington, DC)