

Preface

This book is about the nature of the relationship between playscripts and theatre designers. I believe that the playwright's words lie at the absolute center of every fully realized production of a play. Those words constitute the implicit or explicit subject of every conversation that takes place between directors, designers, performers, and other members of all producing groups. The playwright's words are also the subject of the dialogue that takes place between the production and the audience every time a play is performed, the dialogue that is the heart of every theatrical event.

Good conversations happen when people listen to each other, think before they respond, respect each other's opinions, and know what they're talking about. The aim of this book is to explore the ways in which theatre designers prepare themselves to take strong, active roles in production collaborations by first entering into fruitful conversations with the playscripts themselves.

Theatre designers create with images; playwrights create with words. During the process of reading and hearing the words on the pages of a playscript, a theatre designer quite naturally begins to have a series of exploratory thought conversations with the characters in the play (who are usually humans but may also be gods, animals, ideas, or even teacups), and with the playwright (who may be alive and well and working on rewrites, or may have died in ancient times). As these thought conversations develop, the designer thinks (discovers, imagines) images. It is a magical process. But because theatre designers engage in this magical process on a daily basis, most of us take it for granted. We only puzzle over its mysterious and complex qualities when we get stuck or when we attempt to explain the process aloud. In those instances, we discover to our dismay that the script-to-design process does not lend itself easily to words.

There are definite pitfalls inherent in using words to describe a visually dominant process. I have tried to step carefully around the most obvious of these pitfalls. I have, whenever possible, included drawings and pictures to illustrate the ways the words of scripts inspire theatre designers to think up rooms, furniture, shaped spaces, dresses, lamps, hats, qualities of light, buckets, baskets, and trousers—all the specifics that in successful productions become inseparable from the words on the page, and that together with them