

A **Focal Press** Book

ROUTLEDGE

THE HEART OF LIGHT

A HOLISTIC PRIMER FOR A LIFE AND CAREER
IN LIGHTING DESIGN AND PRODUCTION



DEANNA FITZGERALD

The Heart of Light

The Heart of Light: A Holistic Primer for a Life and Career in Lighting Design and Production is a fresh look into the ever-evolving fields of lighting design and technology for arts and entertainment.

Full of practical information, historic perspectives, engaging projects, and opportunities for deep inquiry, practice, and reflection, this book offers a well-rounded foundation in the art, technology, and industries of light. It explores a wide range of topics, including:

- how to observe, communicate about, and use light effectively
- how quietive practices can deepen the creative process
- current lighting equipment used across the various arts and entertainment industries and strategies for keeping up with its rapid innovation
- how to choose a career path that keeps you inspired, as well as ways to search for work with dos and don'ts of effective career building
- how to cope with and celebrate the unknown and related challenges of implementing a design under pressure
- considerations for using self-reflection to be successful and impact positive change.

From her perspective of lighting designer, educator, and contemplative practitioner, the author explores lighting not just as a subject, but as an invitation to a fulfilling lifelong adventure.

Written for students of Theatrical Lighting courses and emerging lighting professionals, *The Heart of Light* is a must-read for anyone intrigued by the power of light.

Deanna Fitzgerald is a professional Lighting Designer and member of United Scenic Artists. Her lighting design credits include a wide range of theatre, dance, opera, circus-themed shows, puppets, architectural lighting, and more. She toured as the Lighting Director for the international tour of *STOMP* for six years and designed its Las Vegas incarnation *STOMP OUT LOUD*. At the University of Arizona she is an Associate Dean for the College of Fine Arts and a Professor in the School of Theatre, Film, and Television where she directed the BFA and MFA lighting design and technology areas for 12 years. Deanna serves on the Boards of Directors for URTA (University Resident Theatre Association), USITT (United States Institute of Theatre Technology), and the Western Region Exam Committee of United Scenic Artist Local 829. She is a yoga and meditation teacher and conducts classes and workshops focused on using these and other quietive practices to aid in the creative process.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

The Heart of Light

A Holistic Primer for a Life and Career in Lighting Design and Production

Deanna Fitzgerald

Map and icon graphics by Mandy Wagner

Cover image: Courtesy of University of Arizona School of Dance and Benny Fung, choreographer; photo by Deanna Fitzgerald

First published 2022

by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2022 Taylor & Francis

Map and icon graphics © 2022 Mandy Wagner

The right of Deanna Fitzgerald to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fitzgerald, Deanna (Lighting designer), author. | Wagner, Mandy, illustrator.

Title: The heart of light : a holistic primer for a life and career in lighting design and production / Deanna Fitzgerald ; map and icon graphics by Mandy Wagner.

Description: New York : Routledge, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021034231 (print) | LCCN 2021034232 (ebook) | ISBN 9780367901172 (hardback) | ISBN 9780367901196 (paperback) | ISBN 9781003022725 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Stage lighting—Vocational guidance.

Classification: LCC PN2091.E4 F58 2022 (print) | LCC PN2091.E4 (ebook) | DDC 792.02/5—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021034231>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021034232>

ISBN: 978-0-367-90117-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-90119-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-02272-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003022725

Typeset in Sabon

by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
1 Introduction and an Invitation	1
2 Observe	7
Quietive Practices and the Creative Process	8
Being More Informed than Influenced	12
Light as it Naturally Occurs	14
Interior Light	15
Exterior Light	16
Geographic Location	17
Period	17
Just Physics	18
References and Resources	26
3 Inquire	27
Light in Art	27
Impacts of Light for the Artist	27
Engaging the Observer	28
Art, Reality, and Plausibility	30
Light as Storyteller	33
Light in Entertainment	34
Developing your Language for Light	37
Helpful Vocabulary from Folks Who Thought a Lot About It	40

CONTENTS

Industry Perspectives and Quirks	49
Theatre and Plays, Opera, Dance and Musical Theatre	49
Concerts and Music Touring	52
Live Immersive, Non-narrative, and/or Experiential Situations	53
Television	55
Architectural Lighting	59
Architainment	61
Themed Entertainment	63
Film	65
The Artistic/Aesthetic Standard-Bearers	66
References and Resources	69
4 Gather	71
Orientation and Preparation	71
Part 1: The Basics	73
The Technical Standard-Bearers	74
An Introduction to Workplace Safety in Entertainment	78
The Lighting Brushes	81
Powering It All: Entertainment Electricity Basics	95
Part 2: Pause, Step Back, Absorb, and Reflect	105
Part 3: The Big Bites	111
The Lighting Brushes for a New World, Advanced Technology	111
Moving Lights	112
LED Lighting Fixtures	116
Color Changers	117
Other Kinds of Advanced Technology and Accessories	117
Projections and Other Digital Media in Live Performance	118
Atmospheric Effects	120
Controlling It All: The Evolution of Lighting Control	121
Dimmers	122
Control Boards and Consoles	122
DMX512-A	125
DMX512 Recommended Practices	127
The Alphabet Soup of Lighting Systems Control	127
Part 4: The Wind Down	129
Color	129
Primary and Secondary Colors of Light	131
Complements	132
Getting the Blue Dress Blue	133
Lighting Skin and Skin Tones	133
Opponent-Processing Color Theory and Bleaching	137

The Spectral Energy Distribution Curve or SED	139
LEDs and Color	140
CIE Chart of Photosensitivity	140
References and Resources	147
5 Choose	149
Approaching the Design	149
Laying Out the Light Plot	155
Laying Out the Light Plot (Continued)	159
Lighting Teams, Organizational Structures, and Why the Variations	162
The Collaborative Process	167
Working with Directors	167
Working with Other Designers	168
Working with the Rest of Your Team	169
References and Resources	173
6 Do and Adapt	175
Coping with and Celebrating the Unexpected	175
Focusing the Rig – Getting the Light “Right”	176
The “Tech” Period: Getting It Done While Everyone is Staring at You	177
Some Common Live Level Setting Proficiencies	179
References and Resources	187
7 Reflect	189
Markers of Success	189
Learn to Seek Out and Receive Criticism	190
Documenting Your Work	191
Ready to Do It Again?	191
References and Resources	198
8 Inspiration	201
References and Resources	202
Appendices	
1 How Do I . . .	203
Hang Lights?	203
Getting It on the Hanging Position	204
Finishing the Instrument/Fixture	205
Common Mistakes	205
Cabling Dos and Don’ts	206
Troubleshooting Tips	207

CONTENTS

Focusing Tips	208
Strike/Loadout Tips	209
Communicate My Ideas?	210
Create Technical Specifications?	212
2 Live Performance Lighting Design Case Studies	214
As “Traditional” as it Gets: <i>The Man Who Came to Dinner</i>	214
Challenging Configurations: <i>Hands on a Hardbody</i>	215
Grass Roots to Spectacle: <i>STOMP OUT LOUD</i> , Las Vegas	217
Don’t Blind the Acrobat: Cirque Mechanics, <i>Boom Town</i>	218
Pandemic and Streaming Lighting: <i>Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein</i>	219
3 Getting a Job	221
Contacts, Contacts, Contacts	221
Resources for Finding Work	222
Resume Perspectives	222
Portfolio/Website Development and Resources	223
4 Suggestions for Scaling This Book	226
For Educators Teaching. . .	226
Majors in Professional Training Programs	226
Theatre and Entertainment Majors Not Focused on Lighting	227
Other-than-Theatre Majors	227
High School or Vocational Students	228
If You’re Learning on the Job	228
Just Curious	228
Glossary	229
Index	231

Acknowledgments

My first acknowledgment has to go to Tori Mays who started it all with me by transcribing my lectures and cheering me on every step of the way. Fly Jamerson helped me tune my inclusivity meter; Don Fox test drove the text with our students and gave me great feedback; and Steve Terry graciously spent a lot of time trying to help keep me out of trouble. The too many folks to list who took the time to fill out my survey, “Share Your Pro Wisdom: What Do Our Aspiring Lighting Pros Need to Know?” helped focus in much of this work. I honor my teachers Tom Rahner, Phyllis Gibbs, Paul Muller-Ortega, Douglas Brooks, and Jim Gage. And I especially honor the students I have had the privilege to teach and who have been some of my greatest teachers. The students are too many to name but many have made appearances in this book, both in the Pro-perspectives and in the work used as examples. My no-nonsense higher education mentors Peter Beudert, Bobbi McKean, Brant Pope, and Laura McCammon lit the way to my academic career progress, making it possible for me to write a book.

A particular thanks to those who helped me shoot the photos specific to this book: Peter Bleasby, Shannon Wallace, Chris Mason, Forrest Tallbull, and Connor Green. Relatedly, a warm thanks goes out to Cindy Meier, Joe McGrath, and the ever-inspiring Rogue Theatre. Lastly I thank my wife Danielle for doing without me for long stretches while I worked on this and my mom for starting it all by taking to me to experience Peter Pan flying over my head when I was a little kid.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I especially thank the folks who dedicated time – without expecting anything in return – to sharing their Pro-perspectives with the readers. Allow me to introduce you to them.

Jess Creager is an associate lighting designer based in New York City who works on a wide variety of projects, with a special love for working on new and developing musicals. She recently worked on *Company* (Broadway), *Disney's Frozen* (West End), and *Dear Evan Hansen* (Broadway, International, Tour). Originally from “a little bit of everywhere”, she holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Arizona and is a proud member of IATSE Local USA829.

Samuel Schwartz is a lighting/production designer who has found a foothold in live event production, from concerts and festivals to experiential marketing events and film shoots. He has worked with Ghostmane, Chris Lake, VT Pro Design, and many others. His jobs have taken him to China, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and all over Europe/the US. He started his journey at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts and continued his theater education at the University of Arizona.

Scot Gianelli is a multi-disciplinary lighting designer with an extensive background in theatre, experiential events, and architecture. Scot's focus is in using this diverse background to cultivate work that explores the way those often divergent mediums interact, overlap, and blend into each other. His passion is creating engaging work in which the vibrant aesthetic and technological innovations of lighting are married together into unique, harmonious, and engaging new experiences.

Travis Hagenbuch is a West Coast-based lighting designer whose work spans a variety of genres, including multi-camera television, ceremonies, live events, concerts, and theatre. He collaborates with Full Flood, Inc. and 22 Degrees, Inc. He is a Director of Photography in IATSE Local 600 and a member of the Television Academy “Lighting, Camera, and Technical Arts Peer Group”.

Rachel Gibney, LC, Assoc. IALD, MIES, began her career as a theatrical trained lighting designer. Her interest in architectural lighting design led her to join Available Light, initially as an intern, then as Senior Associate, and now as one of the company's shareholders. She has been instrumental to the success of many of Available Light's award-winning projects. Rachel contributes to the field of lighting design in her involvement with Women in Lighting + Design, IES technical standards committees, and as adjunct faculty at North Carolina School of the Arts.

Steven Young is a Los Angeles-based Lighting Designer for Visual Terrain, Inc. His projects include architectural designs at Choctaw Casino, Akin Gump Law Offices, Argosy Casino Kansas City; themed attractions

in Hollywood, Orlando, Seoul, New Orleans, and Zhuhai, China; and theatrical designs for South Coast Repertory, Arena Stage, and Pasadena Playhouse. Steven has been awarded a box full of statuettes, plaques, and certificates for his design work.

Steve Terry is currently the Director of Standards and Industry Relations at ETC. From 2001–2017 he held executive positions at ETC including VP of Research & Development. In 1986, he chaired the USITT committee that created the internationally accepted DMX512 standard. He founded the USITT National Electrical Code Committee in 1980, and has represented the USITT as a member of NEC Code Panel 15 since 1994. He was a founding member of the ESTA Technical Standards Program.

Richard Cadena is an ETCP Recognized Trainer and Certified Entertainment Electrician with 35 years of experience in live event production, and the author of *Automated Lighting: The Art and Science of Moving and Color-Changing Light* (third edition) and *Electricity for Entertainment Electricians and Technicians* (third edition). He is also a columnist for *Lighting & Sound America*, *Lighting & Sound International*, and *Protocol* magazines.

Don Fox is a professional lighting, scenic, and media designer who served as Assistant Professor of Practice teaching Lighting Design at the University of Arizona. Fox designs the lighting for Moscow Ballet's *Great Russian Nutcracker* and specializes in designs for musicals, dance, and dramatic theatre.

Amara McNeil is a Junior Lighting Designer at Fordham University. When she isn't working on shows, you can find her advocating for her peers, holding those in power accountable, or talking up a storm like the extrovert she is. Amara is a member of Design Action and is an American Theater Wing Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation Scholarship recipient. She is also a recipient of the 2019 Pat MacKay Diversity in Design Scholarship. She looks forward to what she hopes will be a successful and fulfilling career in the arts.

Dawn Hollingsworth, CLD, FIALD, WELL AP, Principal of Darkhorse Lightworks, is a Certified Lighting Designer (CLD) and a WELL Accredited Professional. Dawn is a Fellow of IALD. She has diversified expertise in theatrical and architectural lighting design and control systems, marketing, business management, product management and development, manufacturing, scenic design, and event production. Her practice includes design of lighting and control systems for commercial, hospitality, educational, municipal, retail, and entertainment projects.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction and an Invitation

One of the exciting things about lighting design is that it requires both artistic and technical skills, not to mention management, leadership, organization, patience, and a good sense of humor. Not only must you harness the elements of design and create effective compositions in the way that other visual artists do, but you must do those things by using technology and skills that in some ways feel unrelated to the product they produce.

Think about a painter who picks up a brush, dips it in the paint, and applies that paint to canvas to create their work. Painting requires planning and technique, but consider the unique gap between the tools a lighting designer uses in order to get to a product and the product itself. The effective picture that the lighting designer creates requires schematic drawings, lights that have to be plugged into cables connected to mechanical rooms, and hours of computer programming in a syntax that doesn't sound anything like a visual image. This is part of the reason that *lighting programmer* and *entertainment technician* are their own careers separate from lighting designer, but imagine a painter trying to create a painting by telling someone else with a brush in their hand what to do. You might argue that scenic designers have to be able to instruct scene painters in that way, but even in that case there is still usually a hand connected to a brush, connected to the paint, connected to the canvas. For the lighting artist there are usually more pieces of technology and more space between the artist, their medium, and the observer, who – by the way – may not even realize that medium (light) is there.

My approach to lighting design and the education of designers is informed by years of another vital set of practices, which we'll call

quietive practices. If you think about the kinds of over-arching skills a lighting designer or collaborative artist need – an awareness of what is around them, an ability to maintain focus on objectives as ideas evolve, an openness to others’ perspectives, an ability to keep generating fresh ideas and hold a lot of information in their head at one time, stay calm under pressure, etc. – all of these things can be a routine outcome of many of the quietive or *contemplative* practices available. If you’ve tried any of these things and think it’s not for you, I invite you to keep an open mind and read on, because there are lots of examples of pros who thought the same thing but just hadn’t found what they needed yet.

Consider this: in order to create a good design, we have to be able to generate new ideas. In the 1990s, popular psychology told us that our minds come up with an awful lot of thoughts throughout the day, but most of them are the same thoughts. Truly new ideas come when our minds stop looping through all the information we already know. If quietive practices can help us do that, isn’t it worth a try?

If we honor this incredible gift of our minds, but take the time to condition it away from constantly chewing on immutable information, we may find ourselves with a vibrant, creative life. People will often say to me, “I tried. . .” (insert any quietive practice you think you don’t like) “. . . and I can’t clear my mind, so it doesn’t work for me.” Or “I tried that and I couldn’t sit still.” In the kind of quietive work I teach, sitting still isn’t the goal, nor will I ever instruct you to “clear your mind”. Think of the irony of this. We have spent our whole lives developing our ability to think, solve problems, communicate. . . But now we think we’re going to make that lifetime of conditioning stop by sitting down and willing it so? This is not likely to happen. And why would we want to? Research shows that we might be happier not thinking about the past or future, but we also wouldn’t be able to create a lighting design or manage much about life.

Are you ready yet? It won’t take much time to get started. We’ll go further on this idea in the next chapter, but for now, engage with the project “Getting Started Being Quiet” at the end of this chapter and give it a try!

In the meantime, get ready for a book about lighting that will inspire you to create like someone who cultivates skill in action (one of the many ways the work of yoga is sometimes defined) and channels creative potency. We’ll start our journey by considering how we can most accurately comprehend the visual world around us (Observe, Chapter 2). Next we’ll dive deep into what is known about light and consider how we can go about knowing more (Inquire, Chapter 3). After that we’ll take a long trip through the resources the industries utilize, while strategizing on keeping up with its constant innovation (Gather, Chapter 4). Then we’ll begin the process of coalescing this information into your own choices (Choose, Chapter 5). After that we’ll consider how the artist turns choices

into actions, and then hones the result (Do and Adapt, Chapter 6). We'll begin to wrap-up by learning to self-assess and grow (Reflect, Chapter 7).

In the last chapter, I'll offer some inspiration (Chapter 8) for your new life's journey and ask you to consider your contribution. Following that, the Appendix will be a potpourri of important information waiting for you when you need it. For those of you using this book to teach a class or classes, jump to Appendix 4 now for "Suggestions for Scaling this Book".

If you've ever been to a yoga class, you may have heard the word *Namaste*. Don't worry, you don't have to do yoga to be a lighting designer,



Figure 1.1 Performers waiting for technical adjustments during a musical theatre rehearsal under light at the University of Arizona

Photo courtesy of Danny Gurwin

but since I do, I infuse some of the gifts of my practice into my teaching. I respectfully borrow the word *Namaste* from east Indian culture. It has been translated in many ways, but I invoke my former students, colleagues, and collaborators who prefer this version: “The light in me sees and honors the light in you.” *Namaste, y’all!*

Project: Getting Started Being Quiet

Why?

To condition the mind for creative thought.

What and How?

If you have just a moment:

- Sit or stand comfortably.
- Close your eyes.
- Bring your attention to your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Don’t try to control the breath, just observe it.
- Notice any sensations in the nose, throat, chest, or abdomen.
- Continue with this for a few moments or minutes as you are able. When you notice that thoughts or other things have interrupted (and they surely will), bring your attention back to the breath. Do not try to engage, argue with, or judge the distractions. Just favor your breath.
- When you feel ready to come out of this, relax for a moment, tilt the head forward to shield your eyes, then open the eyes slowly.
- Be sure to rest for a few moments before reengaging with things. An abrupt switch from quiet to engaged can cause agitation. The longer the quiet moment the longer transition needed.

If you have a half an hour or more:

- Try a little movement before sitting. Walking, yoga, tai chi, a gentle bike ride, swim, or just moving around as you are able may help to unravel tension as long as you can work with favoring the breath or another focal point. Modifications to yoga and other quietive practices exist for different kinds of mobility and physical or mental considerations, so don’t hesitate to look around for resources (a local class or an instructional video) that meet you where you are.
- When you are ready to be still, follow the instructions above.

Measuring Success: This kind of activity does not allow for an immediate measuring of success. You can use a *more-often-than-not* meter, but know that how you feel about quieting can be affected by all kinds of things in your life. If “more often than not”, you feel lighter and more clear headed in the time following a quietive moment, then it is likely that you are experiencing the positive effects of these practices. If after practicing for some time, your quiet practice feels like a safe place – familiar and warm – this also can be a sign of success. But remember that almost nothing is a sign of failure. Feeling like “it didn’t work” and resistance to taking the time usually has more to do with what is going on around you than the quietive exercise itself. It takes commitment and a certain degree of trust, but it will pay off.

Timetable: If you are new to this, start with a minute at a time two to four times a day. If you have access to a device app that can randomly cue you throughout the day, that can be helpful, or maybe you can find a buddy. After a minute a few times a day seems doable, try five minutes in the morning or in the evening, and then try both. After that is comfortable, follow your instinct to lead you to longer periods or join a meditation group. However you go about it, consistency is key. The more consistent you are, the more comfortable it will be; the less consistent you are, the more challenging it will be. Set a goal that is practical for your particular situation and stick with it.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Observe

We'll begin Chapter 2 by jumping right into a project designed to hone your ability to observe thoroughly.

Project: Lighting Moments

Why?

One of the lighting designer's most important tasks is to use light to affect others. In order to do that, they must gain an awareness of light around them and its impact. In this project you observe, document, and reflect on single moments when the light in the experience affected you in some way. In the beginning, favor moments in which the light is naturally occurring (rather than designed), because those take more practice.

What?

Explore two questions:

1. What is the physical reality of the moment? In other words, what specifically caused this experience? Where is the light coming from, what is it landing on, and what is its color, texture, and quality?
2. How and why does it make you feel? This is usually the harder question to answer when you're just starting out, but rest assured, there

is almost always an answer. If it grabbed your attention, there was an effect. For example, a sunrise that leaves you feeling invigorated, perhaps because of the vibrant red. Or maybe a movement of shadow in an unexpected place that leaves you feeling anxious. It may feel hard to answer this question at first, but the effort will be time well spent.

How?

This works well as a class exercise on a discussion board, or organized on social media. Upload a picture, answer the two questions, then view other participants' submissions and comment on them. Sharing or even capturing the images is not absolutely necessary in order to meet the basic objectives of the project, but doing so can spark good conversations and be the beginning of a useful personal library of images. Simple journaling in a notebook about an experience is also quite sufficient.

Measuring success: A progressive depth of analysis over time is the best indicator of success. If you're having trouble analyzing the impact, ask yourself why you noticed the moment in the first place. What were you feeling before you noticed it and what were you feeling after? What about the experience might have caused that change in feeling? Over time, this gets easier and your ability to detail your experience will grow.

Timetable: In the beginning, set a goal of one entry every couple of weeks. Eventually you will find yourself doing it automatically and be amazed at what was always there. Until that happens, use deadlines. If you haven't had an experience as the deadline is nearing, make some time to find one.

Always honoring my teachers, this project has evolved from one that James H. Gage called the "Lighting Diary".

Quietive Practices and the Creative Process

Quietive practices are more commonly known as contemplative practices, but I think this can be a bit confusing. In the way that I have learned and instruct quietive practices, we aren't meant to be contemplating things when we practice. So I have borrowed the word "quietive" from one of my teachers, Al Kaszniak, who holds an unusual pair of titles: professor emeritus of neuropsychology and Buddhist Sensei. For me, good

contemplation is a cherished effect of quietive practice, but not something we do intentionally when we practice.

The seemingly most popular contemplative or quietive practices are yoga and meditation, but there are many more. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (contemplativemind.org) has a tree graphic that lists other activities you may have heard of: tai chi, Aikido, qigong, even dance and some others you may not have realized can have similar results: singing, journaling, visualization, volunteering.

Not all of these activities will achieve the results that I'm suggesting we – as artists – aim for, so let's define what we're trying to accomplish.

If you've tried one of these things and thought it wasn't for you, what if you considered the long game? Think of these activities not as magic pills, but as practices, or maybe in the same way you might see your favorite exercise or recreational activity. When you first started out, was it fun *every* time? It was probably hard sometimes, but you kept doing it. Why?

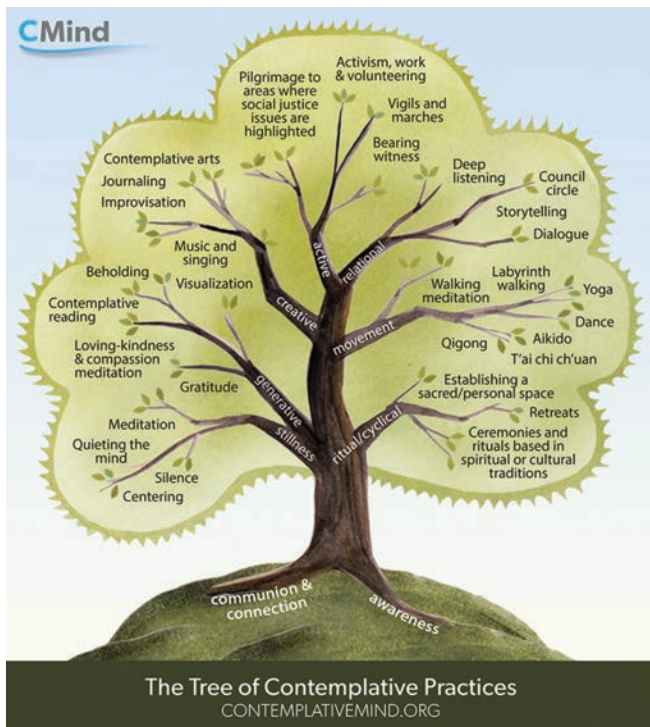


Figure 2.1 Tree of Contemplative Practices
The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Meditation and most quietive practices take some time to pay off too. *Most* of the time, *most people* will feel calmer when they are done, but it is also true that it will often feel hard, especially if you are a fast-moving, always-busy person like me. The rewards, however, are many and they get richer over a lifetime. Some of them are obvious and don't take many cycles of practice to attain, like feeling calmer, having less anxiety, having better moods, and better sleep. The longer you keep it up, the more profound the effects.

It is also important to consider that the reason we talk about both meditation and meditative *practices* is that meditation as we commonly think of it isn't for everyone or even for every situation. For people who have serious anxiety challenges, or even in a moment when the nervous system volume is turned up, sitting still can worsen anxiety and agitation. Very experienced meditators may be able to effectively sit through that, but for others, there are better options. In the project "Getting Started Being Quiet" in the last chapter, you noticed that I suggested walking as an option. In fact, walking meditation is standard practice in some traditions. Done with the same intentions, many kinds of movement may become meditative on their own.

Consider this finding from a meta-analysis of MRI studies published in *Biomed Research International*:

Results of the present ALE [activation likelihood estimation] analysis suggest that meditation practice induces functional and structural brain modifications, especially in areas involved in self-referential processes, including self-awareness and self-regulation, as well as in areas involved in attention, executive functions, and memory formations.

(Boccia et al. 2015, p. 14)

Meditative practices actually re-wire your brain and may make it work better. It didn't happen the first time you tried it, though, so give it another chance.

So what intentions are we aiming for? Our first objective as mediator-creatives is interrupting repeating thoughts. You can relate this to another colloquial term we've been hearing a lot lately: "creating bandwidth". When the mind is thinking, it is doing exactly what we have trained it to do: think, plan, mull, solve. There's no reason to judge or set up conflict with that. But most of the time, we don't have much influence over what it decides to think about and it will keep trying to work on a problem even when there is no new or useful information to consider. "What am I going to have for lunch?" or "Why did that other driver look at me that way?" or "I wonder what was bothering my co-worker this morning?" These are

questions you aren't likely to get answers to until more time passes, but that won't stop them from taking up bandwidth in your mind.

Meditation allows you to choose a point of focus – often the breath, or maybe a “mantra” or sound, maybe a candle flame, depending on what type of practice you choose. Then (and more importantly) it gives you the opportunity to notice when your mind wanders and practice deliberately placing it back on that point of focus. As I mentioned in the “Getting Started” instructions, it is important not to approach this as a battle of wills. The mind doesn't respond well to being *handled* in that way and mental stress can develop when you try. All you have to do is *favor* your point of focus. When you realize your mind has gone someplace else, gently bring it back. Over time, you begin to see that the freedom to direct your mind is connected to how aware you are about where else it is trying to take you.

A student once said to a meditation teacher: “I sat in meditation for only five minutes and I swear my mind wandered off at least a hundred times.” “That's great!” said the teacher. “You had a hundred chances to practice coming back! Imagine how much better you'll be at it now!” My teacher always instructs: “Do not judge the effectiveness of your meditation experience by its subjective quality.” Often it will feel great, but when it doesn't, just remember the long game. Regular yoga practitioners will tell you that even when they have a “bad” morning practice – and by that they usually mean they were frustrated by it in some way – the day that follows that practice still goes more smoothly than days when they don't practice at all. Don't expect meditative practices to be a magic pill. With consistent repetition, they will be so much more than that.

So how do we know if an activity is meditative or not? The key is how attuned you can be to what the mind is doing. How aware are you of when you are in charge versus when the mind is dragging you places? This is why seated meditation in a quiet place is the preferred method because you reduce all possible distractions except the mind activity itself. You are more likely to notice sooner when the mind wanders, so you really will have many, many chances to come back. I sometimes like to meditate when I'm hiking, but the downside is that the scenery will grab my attention for a long time before I notice that I'm not in charge anymore. For that reason, it is even possible for yoga to *not* be meditative. When the class is challenging, you might be filled with anxiety about what's coming next and it can take some time before it's just you and your body attuned to the moment. That's not to say that in a challenging yoga class you can't have a meditative experience. You can. What matters is how much opportunity you have to practice being present, and there's nothing quite like being present to what your body is experiencing. But fearing or anticipating something that hasn't happened yet is the opposite of being present.

Being More Informed than Influenced

Designers usually need reference material for their creations. We'll look at this more in depth when we talk about the design process, but as we get started on our journey together, I want you to begin considering in what ways this exploration can have its greatest usefulness and how it can get you into trouble. Designers research reference material that is both *contextual* and *visual*.

Contextual research is usually an intellectual exercise. We look for information about the author, the period, locations, past productions, scholarly analysis – especially if you're doing a piece that people may have a strong frame of reference for – like a Shakespeare play, a classic musical, or a remake of a popular movie.

Visual research sometimes means abstract visuals such as color or texture palettes, but we may also be referring specifically to what light will look like. For instance, if we know we'll have to light a scene where people will be driving in a car at night, we might look for visual examples of people sitting in a car at night to see how exactly the dashboard light or passing headlights reveal what we see. Or maybe we are lighting something that takes place in Italy over the summer and we've heard that the summer light in Italy has a certain unusual quality about it, so we find visuals to understand what that is.

Here is my question to you: should you watch or even look at past productions? Take some time to brew your answer before reading on.

Many creatives say not to watch other productions, because it will immediately impact your choices and pollute your unique contribution to this new work. Others say do it because in order to create something that is truly new, you have to know what has come before. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages to watching other versions of things and why might you not?

One thing to consider is that you are not designing in a vacuum. When you're working with a director or producer who has 20 or 40 years' experience ahead of you, if you don't know anything about previous productions you could be sending a message that you are unwilling to do your homework, or that you are disinterested in what others have done. It is also possible that you'll come up with and get attached to an idea that seems fresh to you but in fact was done before and seems a too obvious choice to others.

For these reasons and many more, I suggest that not only *should* you take a look at past iterations, but that sometimes it is your professional responsibility to do so. This will be especially fraught with peril when you are first learning to design or when you find yourself creatively drained. Other people's solutions may become particularly difficult to *un-see*. Or it may just be that the other idea you see is so good, so definitive, that anything you can come up with feels inadequate. You need learn how to do it anyway.

So how do we do it? The simple answer is that (like everything else) it will take practice and experience. The more experiences you have and the more new ideas you take in, the more you will develop your discernment as an artist. This will allow you to more fully participate in an experience as an observer and let it become part of you, but not have it be the only thing you can imagine.

The first strategy is to get out there and experience everything you can. Ticket prices and demands on time may make it challenging for the new artist, but there are lots of creative ways to make this investment in your career and life's work. Many organizations have discount days, student pricing or invited dress rehearsals. Often road venues will facilitate shadowing so that a student can sit next to a professional as the show is going on. Sometimes volunteering to help gets you access and can help you make contacts. There are many generous people working in the business who may be willing to help you while you are learning. Take this responsibility seriously now and begin your lifelong strategy to experience all that you can.

Another strategy that will help is to consider the timing of your research. More general background information – like what the material is about, its genre, its historical or cultural context, location, time, and season – are easier to take in without being influenced. The process of exploring those things early will lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding and make you more immune to outside influence. Researching what audiences and scholars thought will be more likely to influence, so perhaps save that until you have formed your own thoughts. Looking at visuals from other incarnations of a production are the most likely to imprint deep in your psyche, so perhaps don't look at those until you feel you have a strong relationship of your own to the material.

There *are* times when it may be appropriate not to watch a previous version. If you know that the material has an iconic place in the world, you might want to check in with your director or producer about their feelings. I once designed a production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in which the director so wanted to distinguish our production from the iconic National Theatre version that she asked us not to look at it. A similar thing happened when I was hired as the lighting director for the iconic *STOMP* tour. Typically, when you are hired onto a tour that has a home show on- or off-Broadway, the first thing you do is fly in to see the home show. But the creators of *STOMP* let me know in the interview that they wanted me to stay away from their off-Broadway creation because they felt that the tour better represented the way they wanted the lighting to feel.

Hopefully you can begin to sense the qualities of a truly professional collaborator. It isn't only about making fast choices that seem fun or