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21M.732 Beginning Costume Design and Construction
Fall 2008

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BASIC FUNCTION OF COSTUMES

I. Defining Character – differences between characters must be clearly visible to audience, even when other characters are confused. What does an audience need to know?

1. Defining a Character

- A. Setting a character in time and space
 - 1) Historical period
 - 2) Geographical or imaginary place
- B. Establish approximate age and gender of character
 - 1) Wigs, hemlines, fabrics, colors, fit, makeup
- C. Establish rank or social status
 - 1) Even in plays without royalty there are social and economic hierarchies
- D. Establish personality
 - 1) Nora in Doll's House
 - 2) Sometimes costume must belie character to contrast with what that character pretends to be
- E. Reflect changes – richer, poorer, older, injured, fatter, etc.
 - 1) Change costume
 - 2) Alteration of costume
 - a) distressing

2. Supporting Theme, Concept, and Mood

- A. Theme – play exists because playwright has thought to express. Playwright's comment or point of view is the theme.
- B. Concept – director's interpretation of the theme. Costumes must express director's concept.
 - 1) Concept based on study of script and action/language of play is organic
 - 2) Concept found elsewhere and applied to surface of play
- C. Mood – emotional feeling which pervades the experience
 - 1) Melancholy, joy, anger, despair, etc.

II. How the Costumes Support Theme, Concept, Mood

1. Style – the manner or mode in which the costumes are created to best interpret the mood and concept

- A. Realism – as close to actual dress as the demands of play and theatrical values will allow
- B. Stylization – clothes depart from real clothes in some obvious way
 - 1) Exaggeration of shape, silhouette, etc.
 - 2) Distillation of period
 - 3) Mixing of periods
 - 4) Abstraction
- C. Color
 - 1) Individual
 - 2) Whole picture
- D. Scale – size of an object relative to a norm or other related objects
 - 1) Realistic
 - 2) Exaggerated larger or smaller (horror, humor, etc.)
- E. Texture