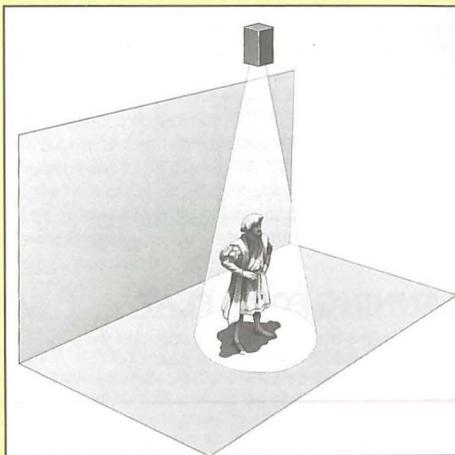


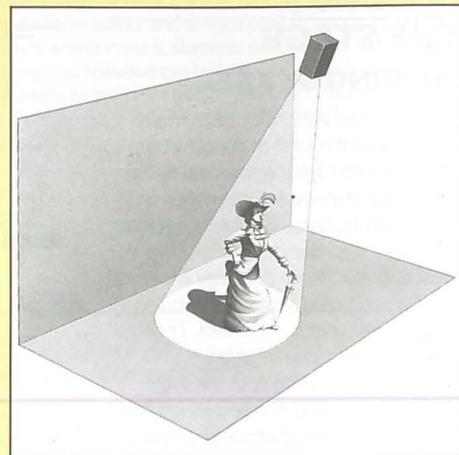
CHOOSING LIGHTING POSITIONS

LIGHTING FROM THE FRONT

Consider the effect of a light starting as a vertical downlight on an actor; then moving in a frontal plane until its beam becomes horizontal and then carries on to light from below. How visible will be the actor's face, particularly eyes and teeth? To what extent will face and body be modelled or flattened? What area of stage will be selected and what will be the size and direction of shadows cast on floor and scenery?



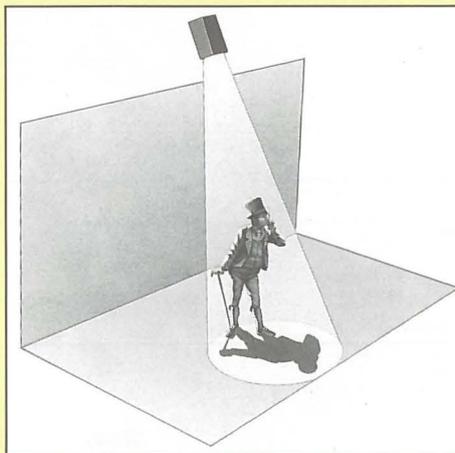
A vertical beam is the most selective light possible. The lit area of stage, and the shadow cast upon it, need be no wider than the widest part of the actor. However, the actor's eyes will be black pools and a highlighted nose will shade the mouth.



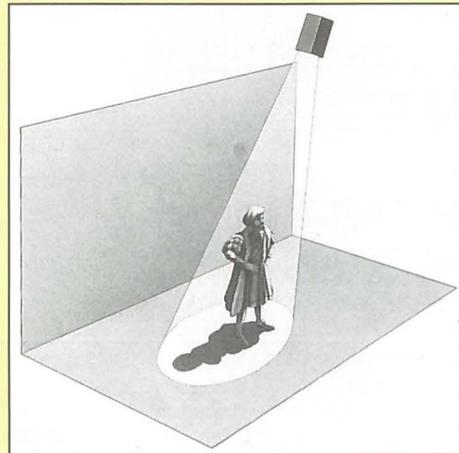
If the light comes from a little forward of the actor, it will start to reach the eyes and mouth (provided that she keeps her chin up and is not defeated by a hat brim!). However, the lit area, and shadow cast, starts to extend upstage from the actor – ie the light is slightly less selective.

LIGHTING FROM THE BACK AND SIDE

Now consider a light from behind. Then a light or lights from a series of side angles (ie lights at right angles to those considered above). Once again the criteria is visibility, modelling, selectivity and shadows.



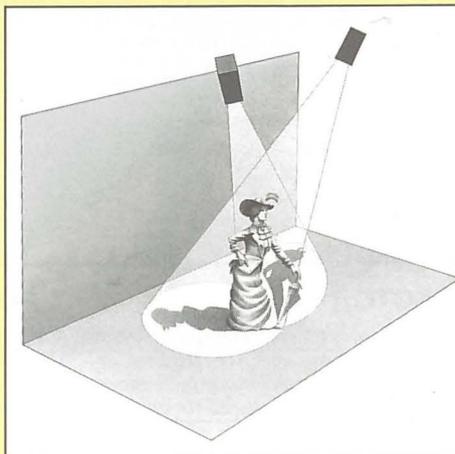
A light source behind the actor does not illuminate the face, but it helps to give depth to the stage by separating the action from the scenery through creating a haze and highlighting head and shoulders. The shadow of the actor is cast forward, helping the selection of areas. Since the light does not fall on the face, strong colours can be used.



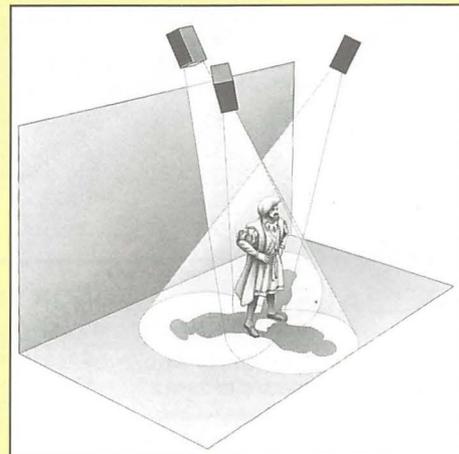
If the light comes from a little to one side of the actor, it will start to reach the eyes and mouth on that side. The area lit, and the shadows cast, will extend along the stage floor on the other side.

FINDING THE COMPROMISE

We normally seek to light an actor for maximum visibility and maximum modelling, with minimum shadow. Additionally, in many productions, we need to select as tight an area as possible. Which combination of angles offers the optimum compromise?



The basic compromise that has long been the standard approach is a pair of beams crossing on to the actor (one for each side of the face) from positions which are both forward and to the side of the actor. The suggested angle is often around 45 degrees in both directions – ie midway between vertical and horizontal; and midway between front and side. However, to restrict the shadows cast and to give a better 'join', the lights are often positioned closer to the vertical and to the centre.



A backlight added to the basic crossed pair brings depth to the scene and generally enhances the 'look' of the actor. The backlight can be used for strong atmospheric colour if required, while the crossed pair maintain a more natural tint on the actor's skin tones. *Note:* The actor is now lit by three beams with a 120° separation between them.