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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

**Cross-Cultural Design: a Study of Lighting Design
In the American Culture**

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Design)

by

Elba I. Emicente Sanchez

Committee in charge:

Professor Christopher August Kuhl, Chair
Professor Robert J Castro
Professor Lorena Mostajo
Professor Victoria A Petrovich

2024

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The Thesis of Elba I. Emicente Sanchez is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and all my family in Mexico, who have supported me from afar. To my brother, whose unwavering support helped me achieve this goal. To my partner, who has been by my side since I first mentioned my desire to pursue a master's degree abroad, supporting me every step of the way and believing in me at every moment. To my friends in Mexico, who have remained steadfast despite the distance and lack of communication. To my friends and collaborators in San Diego, who made my graduate school experience enjoyable. To the professors who were my guiding angels, offering support at every turn. To the lighting designers, choreographers, and artists I encountered on this journey, who provided invaluable support. To the dance, which keeps me moving and grounded simultaneously. To future lighting designers who may find guidance in this thesis as they navigate their paths in this field. To the audience members who attended the performances I contributed to, whose laughter, cheers, and tears will forever live on in my memories. And finally, to "mi gente"—both those I know and those I have yet to meet—for future collaborations.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Cross-Cultural Design: a Study of Lighting Design In the American Culture

by

Elba I. Emicente Sanchez

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Design)

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Christopher August Kuhl, Chair

In the past fourteen years, lighting design has been a central aspect of my life, influenced by the rich traditions of both Mexican and American cultures. This thesis serves as a comprehensive reflection and analysis of my learning process and a compilation of my work over the last two and a half years, particularly during my study

and research of Lighting Design at UC San Diego, CA. This transformative experience has undoubtedly shaped my identity as an artist and a lighting designer.

This thesis documents personal growth and professional development and emphasizes sharing acquired knowledge and experiences. As an artist and designer, I recognize the value of extending this insight to fellow designers navigating the dynamics of these two cultures for the first time, particularly those seeking to broaden their perspectives beyond the Mexican context and venture into the American theatre journey.

As part of my research, I have organized this thesis into fifteen steps for understanding, preparing, and applying the creative and technical production process. It also includes visual examples to facilitate a greater understanding of this field. I would like to emphasize that these practices may be adapted to individual experiences. Furthermore, I reflect on my experience of living in American culture and ongoing challenges to adapt my methods while maintaining the authenticity that defines my work.

INTRODUCTION

The lighting design profession within the performing arts has seen growing importance worldwide, and Mexico is no exception. However, it has yet to establish a robust presence within the Mexican academic sphere at the master's degree level, unlike in the United States, Canada, and several European countries, where it has been an integral part of theatre and dance programs for many decades.

This gap underscores Mexico's substantial delay in recognizing lighting design as a profession. However, it also presents a unique opportunity for individuals like myself dedicated to advancing and professionalizing this practice.

Despite this lag, Mexico boasts a small community of lighting design professionals who have contributed significantly to the field over the past decades. One notable figure is the architect and lighting designer Alejandro Luna, who was critical in its development. However, my immersion in American theatre design has revealed that many techniques and methodologies in Mexican lighting design are heavily influenced by American culture. However, this influence does not suggest a deficiency in our design approaches or methods originating locally. We have distinct mediums for creating designs and possibly methodologies that we have developed through our practical experience.

For this reason, one of my primary aspirations upon completing the MFA Lighting Design program at UC San Diego is to create pathways for future lighting designers in Mexico to have more extensive opportunities than those available to me at the outset of my career. My foremost goal is to impart the tools and experiences garnered throughout

my career to elevate lighting design into a respected and professional vocation in Mexico, capable of competing with international standards.

In this thesis, I will focus on identifying and reflecting on the theater and dance production processes that I experienced at UC San Diego, serving not only as a reflection on my personal and professional journey in lighting design but also as a reference for emerging designers seeking to refine their skills abroad in this field while considering the cultural challenges they may encounter.

Chapter 1. Understanding the creative process

The creative process is a fundamental component of making theater and dance productions. Drawing from my experience in theater, dance, and live performance, I can attest that creative and production processes vary significantly from one context to another. It requires adaptability to the unique needs of each performance, artistic group, or venue.

In this chapter, I highlight the significance of the creative processes I have developed intending that others can integrate into their productions as needed. It's essential to note that this is not a definitive formula but rather a malleable guide capable of changing or being adapted depending on the circumstances. While I present these processes in sequential order for clarity, it's important for designers reading this thesis to understand that they can adapt the order or skip specific steps based on their individual needs and preferences.



Figure 1. Light laboratory test

Step 1. The first reaction

The initial reaction marks a starting point in the lighting design process, intertwining intuition with personal connection to the project, whether it is a theatrical production, dance piece, or experimental performance. At this step, I contemplate the intersections between myself and the plot of the play or the movements of the dance piece, considering how I can infuse my experimentation into the lighting design process. While specific themes may initially resonate, it often must be determined whether they will effectively translate into practice.

What I usually do after reading or watching a reading of the script, I visually respond by extracting words that evoke meaning and experimenting with various techniques. This exercise allows the unconscious exploration of emotions, colors, shapes, and moods. I found the collage a useful tool to coalesce many thoughts or ideas. Depending on the project, this helps me find connections and understand different interpretations. The collage work is usually limited to the materials that I have and deemphasized precision.



Figure 2. *The Women of Trachis* collage

Figure 3. *The Women of Trachis* collage with back light

In the second example, you see a watercolor piece showcasing two distinct reactions. On the left side, you'll observe the initial response to the play "नेहा & Neel" by Ankita Raturi, while on the right side, you'll see the first reaction to "I Found a Zipper" by Milo Cramer. These images emerged following the first readings of the respective plays, capturing visual impressions that surfaced during the process.

In "नेहा & Neel," notice the subtle shifts in the blue and green color palette, forming horizontal lines intersected by irregular gold metallic strokes. This composition aims to visually convey a literal representation of the main character with a zipper crossing their body, along with elements referenced throughout the story. In the background, two contrasting colors represent the contradictions and conflicts that this character faced through the play.

It's important to mention that this step may or may not align with the director's interpretation of the play or dance piece; instead, it reflects a personal perspective on the artistic work, whether it's a play, choreography, or music piece.



Figure 4. नेहा & Neel / I found a Zipper watercolor

Step 2. Visual references

This step often requires more time than anticipated. Following my initial reaction, I delve deeper into envisioning the aesthetic essence of the play or dance piece. I contemplate the looks, moods, and color palettes that I convey with the play.

Two primary variations characterize this process. Firstly, the director may introduce initial imagery reflecting the play's mood, incorporating scenic elements, costumes, lighting, props, or conceptual ideas. Alternatively, the lighting designer may lead in establishing visual references for the production, particularly when given freedom by the director or when connecting with the play through various mediums such as text, poetry, architecture, color, or music.

In my experience, it is essential to engage in close dialogue with the director and extract visual references and identify strong visual ideas from the stage notes in the script. I organize these visual inspirations into mood boards using various apps or websites, categorizing ideas related to light, color, scenery, concept, and mood. Additionally, I generate imagery through prompts for generative AI programs, exploring real-life locations relevant to the play, capturing photographs, or making hand-drawn sketches for inspiration.

During this step, I also begin contemplating potential color palettes for the production, identifying cool and warm moments throughout the story arch, and selecting suitable lighting inventory and systems. In the following example, you observe visual inspiration created for the play "Mojada" by Luis Alfaro, showcasing scene-by-scene depictions of mood, color palettes, and textures.



Figure 5. *Mojada* lighting inspiration collage with color palettes

Step 3. Non-visual references

I often take inspiration from non-visual references, such as sounds or text relevant to the lighting design. For instance, during the play *Blu*, the script referenced the sound of helicopters. In response, I researched the sound of helicopters to envision the helicopter searchlight's magnitude, timing, and brightness during a significant scene. In the following example, I will visually represent the final result in this scene.

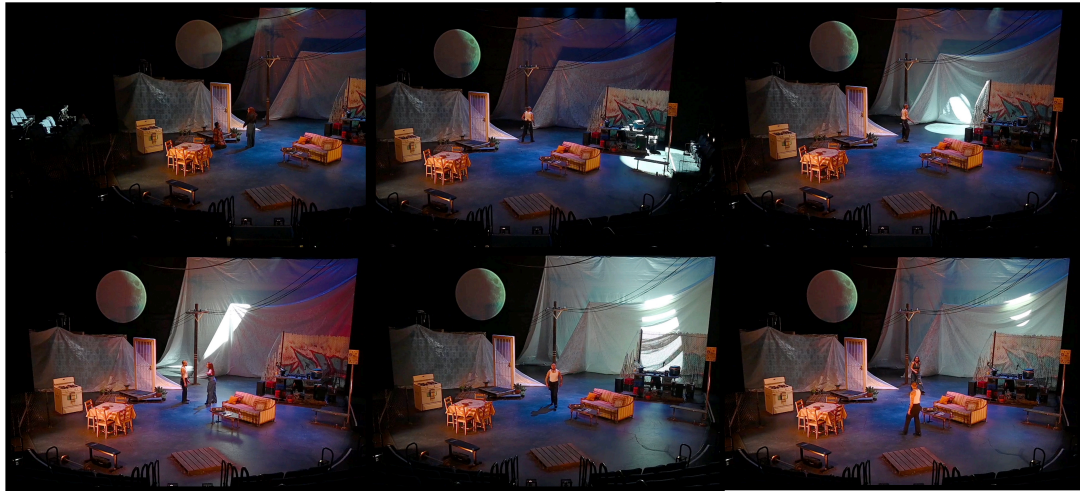


Figure 6. *Blu* helicopter searchlight sequence

Step 4. Lighting score

The lighting score, inspired by Richard H. Palmer's work in "The Lighting Art," serves as a document for organizing ideas derived from the director, script, and my interpretation of a play or creative work. It delineates various aspects of each scene, which are dynamic rather than static, evolving as I receive input from the director or other designers. This document considers such the use of the stage, the color, and temperature, overall brightness over a visual timeline. While many of these aspects may initially be estimations, creating the lighting score is a valuable exercise in conceptualizing the big picture of the play, including transitions between scenes.

The following example illustrates the considerations undertaken as I prepared to design the lighting for Virginia Grise's play *Blu*. Scenes are categorized according to the script, with transitions noted between them. Additionally, I incorporate ideas from the director, providing a basis for comparison and ensuring alignment with the original concept throughout the process. Although I primarily created this document for my

reference, I share it with the director to ensure mutual understanding of the various aspects of the play and to address any misconceptions.

BLU by Virginia Grise. Directed by Cambria Herrera			
LIGHTING SCORE			
Lighting Design: Elba Erico			
Scene:	PRESHOW	1	Transition
Scene description:	Preshow scene. No actors on stage	Gemini the explorer	Song - Soledad needs a smoke
Page:	4	5	5
Time:	Just before sunset	Sunset	Night transition
Day/Night	Just before sunset	Sunset	Night transition
Place:	The streets and seating	Roof of family house	Crossing the house street
OVERALL BRIGHTNESS	50%	70%	50%
USE OF STAGE	US layer 1-3 DS SL(DJ Booth) Door Special	USR-Moon(Sunset->Full Moon) Door Special	Soledad en door x C SR vom(Erme) SL vom(Hallstorm)
TEMPO	Moderate - Festive	Slow	Slow
MOOD MARKER BY DIRECTOR	party, fun, something connecting stage and audience, water/layer of ocean	start with just a lighter and then light grows to a sunset with light pinks and oranges fading and night coming, a crossroads moment between day and night, city lights (street lights ?), Dim on Soledad's door special	Transition to night
FOCUS	DJ & Audience	Gemini	Street Vom?
TEMPERATURE	Warm	Cold	Cold/warm
COLOR	Water effect over the visqueen, silhouettes in Soledad on the scrim door, sunset on haze and roof	Moonlight	Moonlight, amber
PRACTICALS	/	Lighter, Candle ??	/
PROJECTION	1+2 Down Projected water 3 Down water effect	1 Down Projected Water 2 Down fading sunset glow? 3 Down fading sunset glow?	

Figure 7. *Blu* lighting score detail

Step 5. Testing lighting ideas

Similar to the scientific method, the production process preparation involves experimentation with light and its interacting materials to explore various possibilities and draw conclusions. Conducting these experiments in the light lab, equipped with theatrical instruments and software for testing light sources, colors, intensity, angles, effects, and other parameters, is an efficient approach before transitioning to the theatre. These lighting tests serve the lighting designer, the director, and other

designers, aiding in visualizing ideas before starting the technical production process. Collaboration with scenic designers is often necessary during these tests to incorporate proposed materials and analyze potential adjustments in the concept or idea.

For instance, in collaboration with director Cambria Herrera and scenic designer Michael Wogulis for Virginia Grise's play *Blu*, we tested ideas including transparent Visqueen plastic walls, white fabric for the moon practical¹, and a door with a scrim as part of the set design.

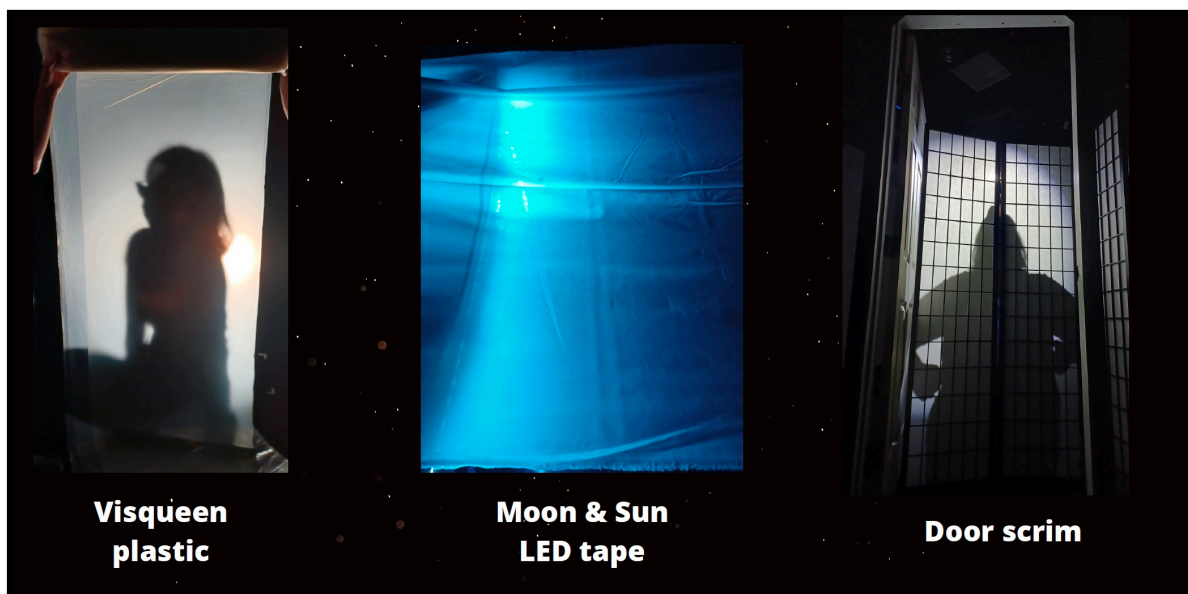


Figure 8. *Blu* lighting test

¹ A practical is a prop or piece of set that produces light. E.g. a table lamp, fairy lights, or a physical streetlamp.



Figure 9. *Blu moon practical*

Another method for testing ideas is by utilizing the model provided by the scenic designer or sometimes I create a rough version of a three dimensional scenic model to test in the laboratory. This allows for placing scenic elements and characters within the model space to test light angles, colors, or other proposals, visually representing how the lighting will illuminate the set and performers.

In the following example, I present my interpretation of the set design for "The Four Note Opera" by Tom Johnson. I initiated this exploration by crafting a small model, allowing me to experiment with lighting and color possibilities while considering the lighting inventory available at the theater where the production took place.



Figure 10. *The Four Note Opera* lighting model test

Step 6. The rehearsal room

Attending rehearsals in the rehearsal room is an aspect of the creative process that occurs at different points of the process. I have discovered the significance of staying updated on blocking decisions, observing the development of acting and directing, and witnessing how props or scenic elements interact with the actors. The rehearsal room is a hub for gathering much information collected in previous steps and fostering ongoing discussions with the director-choreographer and other designers.

Lighting designers typically compile this information in a cue sheet, which organizes the lighting cues utilized during the performance in sequential order. This document contains details such as cue number, page, placement, text or movement, color, track number (sound), and relevant notes. I like to view the cue sheet as the practical manifestation of the lighting score, as it represents the progression of the lighting design in real-time practice.



Figure 11. *Somewhere out there*, rehearsal room

Chapter 2. Preparing the technical production process

The production process of any live performance requires meticulous planning and extensive paperwork to ensure all aspects are thoroughly addressed before the technical rehearsals. The duration and complexity of this process vary depending on the scale of the performance and the number of collaborators involved. In this thesis, I will not delve into details of creating each piece of paperwork. Instead, I aim to provide an overview of the steps involved, recognizing that the elaboration of these steps will vary in every theatrical or dance production.

"IAZÚCAR!" - choreography by Ana María Alvarez							
LX CUE LIST							LD: Elba Emicente Sanchez
Cue #	Time	Hazer	SCENIC	Text / Movement	LX Notes	SOUND	RUN NOTES
327	7	ON	SUGAR CANES, MOONROCKS, OPEN BLACK CURTAIN	TRANSITION	Dim light DS	Long track (8 minutes)	
500	14	ON	moon rocks 1st position	ENTRANCE - PROCESSION (earth) ancestors coming from 5 entrances	moon rocks light, aisles specials, lights on the audience	Long track (8 minutes)	
501	23	ON	sugar cane enters	OPEN PORTAL (water) - caña dance	strip lights, footlight front specials, shadows on the back, side light ... build		
502	20			1st SHHHHH..			
503	10	ON		ULI heat sugar cane	"BOOM" - autofollow to something else		
506	0	ON		All walk around and prep for spirals (Uli caña)	2nd "BOOM" - autofollow to sugar cane gobo, high side. spirit in individuals bodies	music changes	
509	1	ON		Dancing on a big circle w/ sugar cane on top	spotlight on center, fx speed around		
511	20	ON	sugar cane drop	Dropping the sugar cane	FX		
513	7	ON		Salsa CC -SLOW MOTION - human form	(Facing all directions)	music changes w/ voice	
514	1			Voices	FX		
515	8	ON		Create the row on CC		music intensify (10 counts)	
518	5/2	ON		Locked into the line at CC - hands flow			
521	10	ON		Spread with same shoulders movement.	FX		
523	16	ON		Norma goes US TO DS unison same movement			
526	0	ON		Norma 1st Boom (boom, boom,boom) FX	FX		
>526.5	2	ON		End of Fx			
530	8	ON		WARRIOR (fire) spirit speaks / wave / breath / inhale & exhale grounding in these human bodies. Norma starting DS	zero count change after 4 counts with Norma	music- how do you learn to heal?	
532	8		moon rocks 2nd position	Moonrock movement			
533	8	ON		1st Hands up moment	booms, voms		
536	6	ON		3 Canons	build (3 canons then all together)		
537	4	ON		After the 3rd cannons			
538	6	ON		When all goes US			
539	5	ON		When all goes to the boom specials	bodies are gone, only hands	voice	
542	3	ON		Drowning			

Figure 12. *¡Azúcar!*, cue list example

Step 7. Lighting plot and other paperwork

Once the information has been gathered from the creative process, it's time to translate those ideas onto paper, taking into account the venue's lighting inventory and technical specifications. The lighting designer must merge the technical requirements with the creative vision and consolidate everything into a light plot.

This document is a blueprint where the lighting designer draws symbols representing where the lights will be hung while calculating their optimal placement to achieve the lighting design. Additionally, the lighting designer must factor in the budget, if applicable, to help determine equipment rental or the need of sourcing other lighting instruments such as specialized practicals.

One method that I have employed is to create a light plot using Vectorworks Spotlight software, which is freely available to students. This software allows you to draw every element on stage meticulously and provides predetermined symbols representing lighting instruments, pipes, soft goods, and other theatrical elements. It facilitates the creation of an accurate plan depicting what the designer intends to hang in the performance space.

As the plotting ideas progress, ongoing dialogue with the Master Electrician or Head of the Electric Shop is crucial. These individuals typically oversee the provision of technical inventories and address any venue related queries. Negotiations or agreements may arise during this process, requiring all parties to find common ground. At times, consulting other shops or designers in facilitating these agreements may be necessary. Below is an example of a light plot from the play X, directed by Rosie Glen-

Lambert. This plot illustrates explicitly the FOH plan, indicating only the front-of-house positions of the instruments hung above the tension grid area.

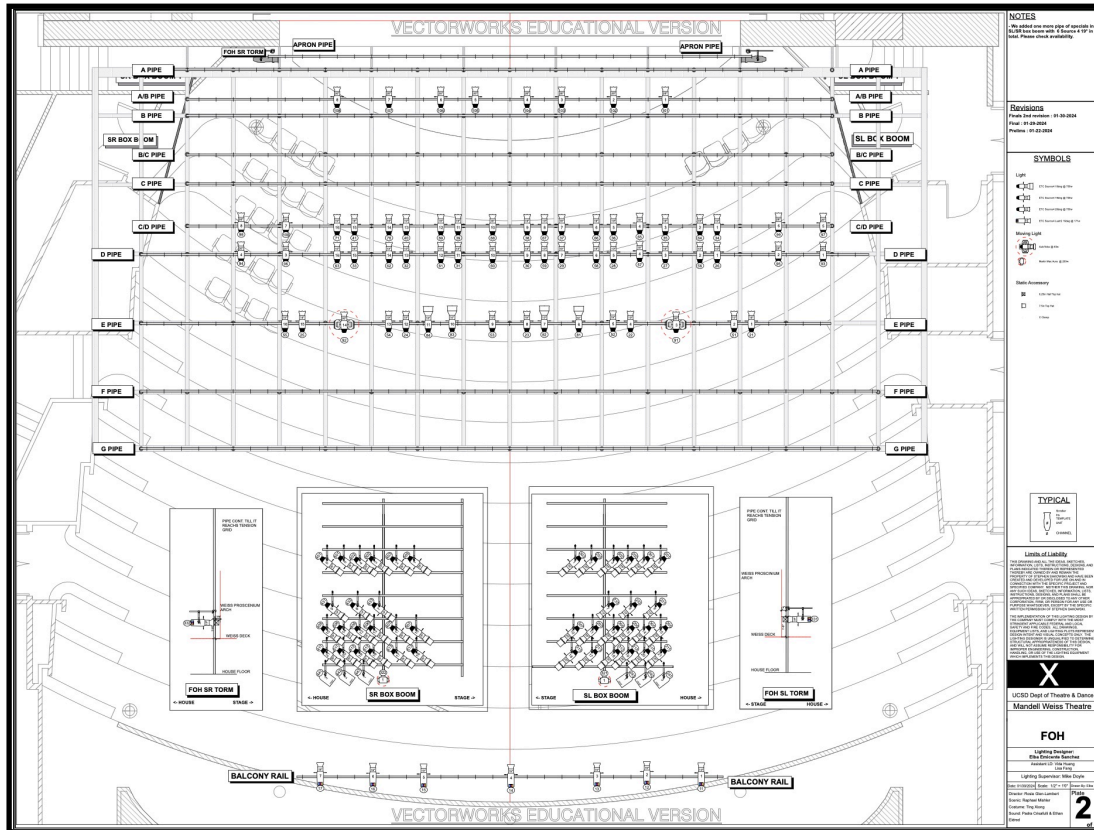


Figure 13. X, FOH light plot

Step 8. Color

Color plays a significant role throughout the creative process, manifesting in the lighting score and tests. However, color selection becomes more specific during the production process as it directly relates to the lighting instruments employed. Incandescent lighting involves selecting color filters, which must be specified in the light plot according to the standard naming convention of the filter colors. These filters can be sourced from manufacturers such as Rosco, Lee, or Gam, and it's essential to

conduct color tests in the light lab to make informed decisions. In the case of moving head lighting fixtures that contains a color wheel, thorough research into manufacturers and a review of technical specifications are imperative to anticipate color mixing.

In the following example, I present the set design by Raphael Mishler, in Alistair McDowall's play "X," directed by Rosie Glen-Lambert. Practical lighting is predominantly LED tape installed in different parts of the set. For instance, the panels downstage (DS) simulate fluorescent lights using LED tape with cool white and warm white variations. In the upstage (US) area, RGBW ceiling tape facilitates color mixing by combining primary colors with white. In contrast, I included incandescent can lights in the upstage (US) area. This setup extends to elements like the kitchen, table, footlights, and lights facing the audience.



Figure 14. X, LED and incandescent practicals



Figure 15. X, LED practicals facing the audience

Step 10. Paperwork submission

At this preparation step, all paperwork is completed and ready for submission to the electric shop. I typically make a preliminary submission while the design is still under construction and subject to change. This situation occurs when the director or other designers must still solidify specific ideas that may impact lighting instruments or position decisions. Once the creative team reaches an agreement, it is possible to make the final submission, and the electric shop can begin ordering requested materials or organizing instruments for the hang. Additionally, they are responsible for assigning addresses² and reviewing power considerations to ensure the design can be effectively implemented in the space.

² An address is the location in the 512-channel universe that the DMX device begins.

X Channel Hookup

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2/14/24

LD:Elba Emicente Sanchez
ALD:Vida Huang, Lisa Fang
ME:Mike Doyle, Andrea Ryan

UCSD Theatre and Dance
Weiss Theatre
Submittal 2 ; Version 1

Channel	Purpose	Inst Type & Access	U#	Color	Position	Gb	Us
(11)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	1	<input type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(12)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	4	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(13)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	5	<input type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(14)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	6	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(15)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	7	<input type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(16)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	8	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(17)	BALCONY COLOR AREAS	Source4 Lustr2 19deg	11	<input type="radio"/> R119	BALCON Y RAIL		
(21)	FRONT US COOL	Source4 19deg	1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	E PIPE		
(22)	FRONT US COOL	Source4 19deg	4	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	E PIPE		
(23)	FRONT US COOL	Source4 19deg	8	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	E PIPE		
(24)	FRONT US COOL	Source4 19deg	12	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	E PIPE		
(25)	FRONT US COOL	Source4 19deg	15	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	E PIPE		
(26)	FRONT PROS COOL	Source4 19deg	1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	D PIPE		
(27)	FRONT PROS COOL	Source4 19deg	3	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	D PIPE		
(28)	FRONT PROS COOL	Source4 19deg	5	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	D PIPE		
(29)	FRONT PROS COOL	Source4 19deg	7	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	D PIPE		
(30)	FRONT PROS COOL	Source4 19deg	9	<input checked="" type="radio"/> R61+ <input type="radio"/> R119	D PIPE		

STUDENT: Elba Emicente Sanchez / Lightwright 6

(11) thru (30)

Figure 16. X, channel hookup example

Chapter 3. Technical production process

The technical production process marks the transition from the rehearsal room to the actual theatre space. This step is characteristic of experimentation and implementing all the pre-planned concepts onstage. It is a crucial phase where rehearsals continue using the actual equipment and conditions intended for the performance, allowing for adjustments and fine-tuning to ensure everything aligns with the envisioned concept. For the lighting designer, achieving the desired results implies adjusting at every process step. Maintaining constant communication with the director is essential to guarantee the visual aspects of the production and effectively translate their ideas onto the stage. The following figure shows two scenic props, a door and a tree, that were used during the production process of the play X. After watching these elements fly down onstage, the director and the scenic designer decided to cut them because they believed they interfered with the initial vision of the final scene.



Figure 17. X, scenic elements cut

Step 12. Focus Light

The focus day marks the dedicated time for lighting designers to precisely adjust each lighting instrument according to the calculations outlined in the light plot. It is when lighting concepts transition to tangible realities on stage as beams illuminate the performance space. Before this step, many lighting ideas existed in conceptual form or had been tested on a smaller scale.

I often see the focus day like a final exam, where the lighting designer defends their light plot and employs their experience to address any issues during the session. Preparation for the focus day involves tasks such as creating the magic sheet, another document where the designer draws focus areas with corresponding channels and organizes them into groups or systems for easy identification during the focus call.

This is one of my favorite moments of the entire process, not only because of its complexity but also because it is a moment when I can rely on my intuition. While there are specific rules to achieve a clean and precise focus of light, ultimately, it is the designer's decision whether to adhere to or deviate from them. It is the ideal opportunity to trust my instincts and align the lighting design with my aesthetic vision or what will benefit the play.



Figure 18. X, focus call

Step 13. Tech rehearsals and dark time

Technical rehearsals typically commence after the lighting, sound, and set design elements have been set up in the theatre, allowing the designers to begin collaborating with performers and directors. In conjunction with the director and designers, the stage manager establishes the goals for each tech rehearsal, determining which scenes or parts of the choreography will be addressed based on the cue sheet.

Following a technical rehearsal, the lighting designer has a designated period to refine their cues and notes, known as "dark time." This time usually occurs in the morning after the tech rehearsal, allowing the lighting designer to review any notes provided by the director, make necessary adjustments to the lighting cues and work notes, and prepare for the next rehearsal.

After tech rehearsals, dress rehearsals start. This phase involves a complete run-through of the play with all design elements in place and all at once with the timing of

the performance. Designers and performers work on adjustments during this period to ensure smooth integration of the design elements. Dress rehearsals provide an opportunity to evaluate the overall flow and timing of the play and observe how the various design elements interact and complement each other on stage.



Figure 19. *X, lighting designers tech table*

Step 14. Performance

The artistic product is complete. Once the performance is locked, designers cannot change the design after the premiere. At this stage, all design elements are seamlessly integrated with the actors, and it is the stage manager's responsibility to ensure smooth execution according to their notes made in tech and dress rehearsals. While occasional technical adjustments may occur after each performance, they are unlikely to alter the overall design concept. A designer can only anticipate and appreciate the audience's reactions and hope for positive performance reviews.



Figure 20. *New Directions 2022* performance photo

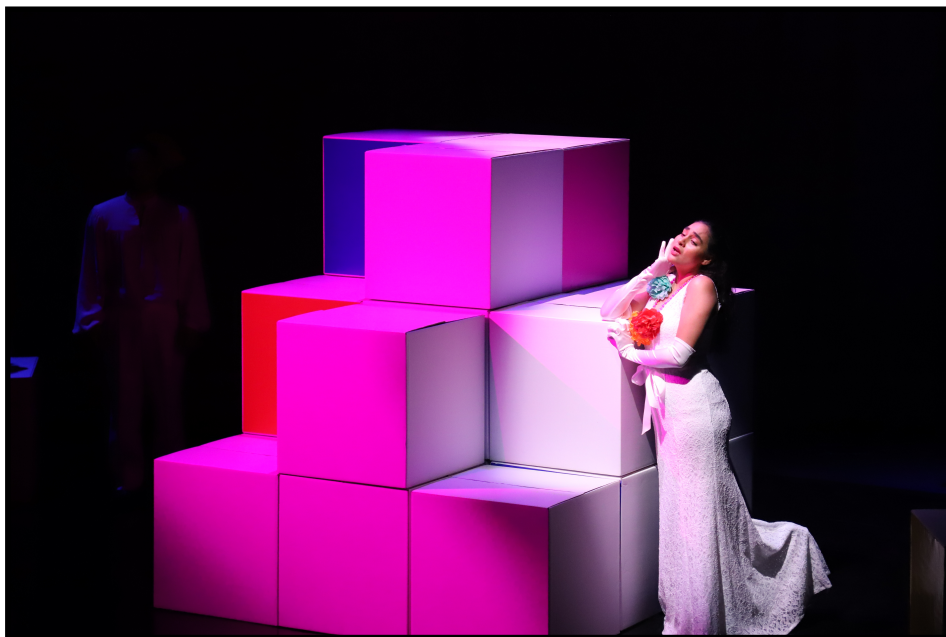


Figure 21. *The Four Note Opera* performance photo

Step 15. Documentation process

This step marks a recent addition to my process as a lighting designer. It took me some time to recognize its significance: documenting my process independently of the director or other designers. Each designer focuses on different aspects, and it is relevant to pay attention to the details that are specifically pertinent to the lighting designer. While capturing photos and videos is the primary method of documentation, saving reviews from digital and printed media is equally important. I have found it beneficial to compile all this documentation in my portfolio, showcasing the type of work I have accomplished and demonstrating my capabilities to others.



Figure 22. Portfolio cover page

"SOMEWHERE OUT THERE"
WINTER WORKS 2022



Directed and Choreographed by Yolande Snaith and Undergraduate students UC San Diego

EL HURACÁN
BY CHARISE CASTRO SMITH



Directed by Daniel Jáquez
Cygnet Theatre

NEW DIRECTIONS 2022



Directed by Yolande Snaith and Choreographed by Undergraduate students UC San Diego

Figure 23. Portfolio example

Chapter 4. Reflections about the entire process

One persistent realization I have discovered since embarking on my lighting research journey in the USA is that my approach to lighting design diverges from the prevailing American perspective. These disparities principally extend to three main aspects: communication of ideas, my conception of theater-making, and the sources of inspiration for my creative process. These aspects collectively contribute to the complexity of my artistic endeavors, particularly within American theatre practice. I find differentiations in my cultural background and unfamiliarity processes or concepts. Consequently, I aim to explain the variations of these disparities by delving into each of these aspects in detail, supported by illustrative examples.

The communication of ideas

The communication barrier became evident from my initial immersion into American theatre practice, not solely due to language or accent differences, but because I noticed a disparity in how ideas were conveyed compared to my native English-speaking classmates and professors. Verbal communication often felt incomplete and, at times, incomprehensible. However, my visual and creative abilities consistently allowed me to thrive, becoming my greatest virtue.

I needed help conveying my ideas with precision to peers, teachers, and staff members, which led to instances of miscommunication. Before this experience, I had never felt the need to be so specific in my articulation, leaving me uncertain how to proceed. Even now, I grapple with navigating situations where specificity is required without clear guidelines. For instance, when providing work notes for adjustments

during the dark time that I illustrate in step 13, I found that staff members often required more detailed instructions for clarity. Similarly, when discussing lighting concepts for a play with directors, they frequently sought more concrete examples to visualize the desired effect.

These are just a couple of instances where I find myself contending with "the nonspecific," a challenge that persists in both verbal and written communication and in professional and personal contexts. Additionally, I've recognized the prevalence of classification and categorization in American culture. Everything must fit neatly into predefined categories for comprehension. While I acknowledge the omnipresence of this practice in daily life, I struggle to find parallels within my cultural background.

My difficulties may not be uniquely tied to American culture but instead arise from my long-standing artistic development. Nevertheless, I can't help but attribute them to the American context, where deviations from established norms can lead to conflict and feelings of rejection.

Theatre-making concept

Initially, I subscribed to the notion that theater is a universal language. However, as I delve deeper into the intricacies of American theater practice, I find it far more complex and elusive. While I acknowledge that these complexities are inherent to Mexican lighting design practices, I've come to appreciate greater flexibility and freedom in my approach to theater-making.

An illustrative example of this discrepancy lies in my ongoing struggle to comprehend the role of the stage manager within this framework. Traditionally tasked

with organizing the theater company and facilitating communication among the director, cast, creative team, and production crew. The stage manager's responsibilities also extend to successfully facilitate the calling of the cueing structure. However, I have often encountered conflicts with this role, particularly regarding the execution of lighting cues.

Each stage manager employs distinct techniques, some of which may prioritize efficiency over the artistic integrity of lighting design. These sometimes create obstacles between the performers and my desire to communicate my ideas to them. Consequently, I find myself distanced from direct engagement with artists, a diversion from my preferred mode of creative practice.

Drawing from my background in dance, where establishing a connection with performers is a key element, I have struggled to develop similar connections within the hierarchical structure of American theater. This disconnect is less pronounced in American dance practice, where I still prioritize direct communication with performers despite the presence of stage managers.

During a lecture preceding our Blu performance at UC San Diego, I was struck by a quote from playwright Virginia Grise: "Art making is the practice of freedom." This sentiment immediately resonated with me. Whenever I sense a lack of freedom in my creative process, I am compelled to push harder to reclaim it. Without this freedom, my work risks becoming merely a service rather than an authentic expression of an artistic vision.

Sources of Inspiration for My Creative Process

Some of my most innovative work has emerged from situations of limited resources. However, upon commencing my lighting research within American culture, I encountered a stark contrast: almost every aspect of my creative expression demanded support from external research sources, whether books, texts, artists, or other art forms. A prime illustration of this aspect is evident during the lighting design concept presentation. This part of the process involves showcasing our preconceived lighting design ideas to the production team. This part of the process involves a collection of images and references that express the lighting design concept for the play. I have consistently encountered challenges in curating cohesive images that accurately capture my vision. I continue refining this approach to my practice and finding a way to manifest my visual aspirations for the play.

This American vision marks a departure from my previous approach to creation, where inspiration often sprang from what I term "the nothing", an internal wellspring of ideas and possibilities untethered to external references. In the past, I rarely resorted to copying or researching other artists before conceiving my vision. This American practice challenges my method of generating new work. For me, "the nothing" embodies a nostalgic notion plunged in resourcefulness, environmental consciousness, and a determination to overcome obstacles. It transforms into "something" out of necessity rather than as a result of making a variation of existing ideas. Engaging with another culture through my research has strengthened my appreciation for the authenticity of my creative process. Despite the probability that similar ideas may already exist in the world, the uniqueness of my creations derive from their origins within me. This intrinsic

quality sets my work apart and lends it a distinctiveness that transcends external influences.

The last three intersecting points prompt me to contemplate the ongoing conflict of assimilation³ that I have experienced throughout my two and a half years of study. Undoubtedly, American practices have held influence due to my enrollment in an American institution. However, I have encountered challenges when aligning my artistic sensibilities with these practices. While I have made efforts to incorporate them, there are instances where they feel inappropriate to me and fail to elevate my creativity to new heights.

Nevertheless, this process has allowed me to identify distinct ways I infuse my personal signature into every project, mainly through exploring emotions and sensations, primarily via the kinesthetic sense. I perceive myself as both a visual and kinesthetic individual. For example, when attending a live script reading or experiencing a performance, I instinctively connect the words with physical movements, sensations, and emotions they evoke. However, I have noticed a contrast when reading a script alone at home, where I need help establishing similar connections. This challenge is exacerbated in theater practice in the USA, where the language barrier impedes my depth of understanding of the words, making it difficult to resonate with every word or situation that diverges from my cultural background.

Conversely, I have a different experience when engaging with dance, a practice where movement and bodily expression are the primary language. Here, I am

³ Assimilation is in anthropology and sociology, the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. Assimilation is the most extreme form of acculturation.

immediately attuned to my senses and emotions. Designing lighting for dance feels similar to dancing alongside the performers, accentuating movements and synchronizing change of intensity with the piece's intention.

This last example showcases just one aspect of my ongoing exploration as I continue to identify the unique signatures that define my work. It is not about rebelling against established norms but reflects my innate nature and cultural background, compelling me to express myself authentically. Additionally, my experience of living in another country has posed challenges in reconciling and understanding how my heritage influences my artistic identity. I am currently working alongside Turkish lighting designer Tuçe Yasak and I resonate with her words, "We can adapt, but we should not assimilate." I firmly believe that embracing a process of adaptation has and will continue to significantly enhance my artistic identity.

CONCLUSIONS

During the past two and a half years of my lighting research, I had yet to analyze each step of my process thoroughly. This thesis allowed me to engage in a comprehensive reflection and visualization of many aspects of my work. Alongside this exploration, I have been refining my communication style with directors and choreographers.

I am still navigating and working on adapting my process. However, I have realized that experience will ultimately provide the answers. One message I hope to impart to emerging lighting designers is that while some of the insights shared in this thesis may seem abstract or unattainable at first, it's essential to remain grounded in your foundational principles and trust in your creative instincts to guide them in the right direction.

How I understand and reflect on cross-cultural design extends beyond combining elements from diverse cultures. It manifests when the collision of two distinct cultures sparks an exchange of knowledge, reshaping the trajectory of cultural approaches and generating novel insights in various directions. This thesis embodies this collision process, evoking a continuous reshaping of lighting design within my practice. The global consequences of this collision will be reflected in the future of lighting design in Mexico. My vision is to lead a significant initiative culminating in the establishment of the master's degree program in Lighting Design in Mexico and to foster a robust community of lighting designers in my home country.

Regarding future steps in this research, I aim to develop my skills of adaptation to further my creative process. However, expanding this thesis into an educational

framework will necessitate careful planning and administrative tasks to achieve the desired outcomes. I am particularly interested in exploring the intersection of improvisation and structured planning techniques as part of this project.

Ultimately, I aspire to continue my lighting design career in both Mexico and the USA. However, what weighs heavily on my mind is forging solid connections with Mexican designers to enhance the visibility of our field and pave the way for future generations of lighting designers, solidifying and positioning lighting design as a recognized profession in Mexico.

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