

**DEVELOPMENT OF A DESIGN CONCEPT FOR
CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF**

STEVE HENRY WOODS

DEVELOPMENT OF A DESIGN CONCEPT FOR

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

An Abstract

Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Steve Henry Woods

June 1987

ABSTRACT

The design of this thesis is to discuss the process involved in arriving at a central point of view or the central image for a lighting design. Sometimes called the concept, this central image is the foundation on which the director and designer will base their ideas on how a play should be staged. The production of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof as staged at the University of Virginia is used as an example to help eliminate the constant use of generalities in the discussion of the process. The methods I used as resident lighting designer are discussed and then applied to the script. Because lighting design had evolved since the invention of the electric lighting fixture, three authors have emerged since the turn of the century to lead the field in advancements. These three, Stanley McCandless, Willard F. Bellman, and Jean Rosenthal have been included in this paper and their texts reviewed as they affect the conceptual process. Finally, a light plot has been included to show what final decisions were made for the production concerning the lighting design.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Steve Henry Woods entitled "Development of a Design Concept for Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts with a major in Theatre and Communication

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Introduction

The art of the lighting designer is one of the more difficult aspects of the theatre to discuss. Unlike the designers of scenery and costumes, the lighting designer cannot build a scale model or produce a color drawing to represent his ideas to the director and producer. Often the lighting designer and director find it necessary to discuss concept in terms of art, music, or abstract emotional feelings.

What is this central concept and how does the lighting designer go about developing it into a finished lighting design? That is the issue this thesis will explore.

The first step in finding a concept is to understand what the word concept means as it relates to the theatre. Concept is, then, the formulation of ideas or design. It is the beginning of a way to look at the solution to a question posed by a play.

The designer and director must share and work from a strong central conceptual point of view if the production is to be successful. I will discuss how a designer reads a play and what he or she looks for when searching for the general lighting demands and a central concept.

Uta Hagen, in Respect for Acting, tells the reader the serious actors begin with concept as the way to approach developing the character they will play on the stage. Why then should not lighting be approached in the same manner? The lighting of a play is in many ways a character within the production. The quality of light and how the actors move about in it will affect how the audience views what is being said and what is being seen.

In this paper I will discuss the steps I took while recently lighting a production of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by the Heritage Repertory Theatre at the University of Virginia during July, 1986.

In an effort to clear up the use of generalizations and to demonstrate what I did, I have applied my concept to the script of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof so that the reader may follow the action and see how the concept works.

In addition there will be a brief review of the works of three of the pioneers in the field of lighting research in the United States. Included are Stanley McCandless, 1932; Willard F. Bellman, 1974; and Jean Rosenthal, 1972.

Each of these designer-authors has made unique contributions in the field of lighting; together they represent three stages of advancement during the last fifty years. These textbooks have been selected because they represent the most commonly used in the training of the young designer in the college classroom.

Along with the major authors, I have added several secondary sources of study that, while important, do not merit the attention given to the primary sources. My concern with these books will be only in the areas of design concept and development.

Finally, to justify my own comments throughout this paper I have included my personal background in professional theatre as a lighting designer.

In 1973, I enrolled at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville as a student of theatre. At the time, Dr. Ralph G. Allen was chairman of the Speech and Theatre Department and Artistic Director of a newly formed Equity company, The Clarence Brown Company. While I completed my undergraduate degree, I was able to assist in construction of more than eighty productions on four stages. As a student member of the professional company, I assisted in two tours and the Broadway show, Sugar Babies. Throughout my education, Dr. Allen permitted me to leave the university environment and work with professional regional theatres, among them the Barter Theatre of Virginia.

Since my beginnings at the University of Tennessee I have worked at the Spoleto Festival, The 1982 World's Fair, with ESPN, BBC, Showtime, and numerous regional theatre, dance, and opera companies. In 1984, I was invited to become a member of United Scenic Artists Association, the union that controls designs seen primarily on Broadway in New York City.

I have been invited to lecture at the newly formed Governors School for the Arts as well as at the University of Florida. Since leaving the academic community I have designed well over one hundred theatrical events.

Chapter 1

During the ten decades since the beginnings of electrical illumination in the theatre, three designers have influenced the art of lighting more than any others in the United States. They are Stanley McCandless, Willard F. Bellman, and Jean Rosenthal.

Although others have written texts on the subject of stage lighting design, among them Richard Filbrow, Howard Bay, and Fredrick Bentham, they have not yet achieved the lasting fame of the three to whom I will devote the majority of my discussion.

McCandless

In 1932, Stanley McCandless first published what would become the most read book in the field of lighting design. A Method of Lighting The Stage. Although this book is less than two hundred pages in length, it has influenced the way we as designers organize the lighting of a stage production. The method he developed has been taught at most universities and is commonly seen in use in the theatre today. This method allows the young designer to approach a project with a

basic formula for lighting the production. Early in his book, McCandless presents the idea that each designer needs a method of approach.

The design, or more specifically, the planning and execution of the lighting for a production is often surrounded by a veil of mystery which is due, undoubtedly, to a lack of knowledge of both the limits and potentialities of the problem. The mystery arises first from the fundamental lack of philosophy of precedent in the use of light as a design medium, second, from the primitive equipment employed, and third, from the absence of a simple, well defined plan which may be applied to the solution of lighting problems.'

His goal was to provide amateur and young designers with a simple guideline to follow in setting up the stage lighting for a play. McCandless was not concerned with developing a concept to work from, but rather a technical means to achieve illumination. He did this by writing down what other designers of the period were doing elsewhere around the country.

What is the McCandless method of stage lighting? Simply stated, it is a way of achieving smooth, even light on a stage. It is a way of lighting acting areas so they have

both proper illumination and a blending of color so that the actors' skin will look normal to the audience. This method entails lighting an area in terms of the positions of the lighting fixtures with respect to the stage. To do this, one positions the lighting fixtures forty-five degrees out and forty-five degrees up from the area of the stage they are to light. To increase the appearance of plasticity of the actor, McCandless uses warm colors (pinks, ambers, straws) from stage left and cool colors (blues, greens, grays) from stage right.

The following figure is intended to help the reader visualize this system.

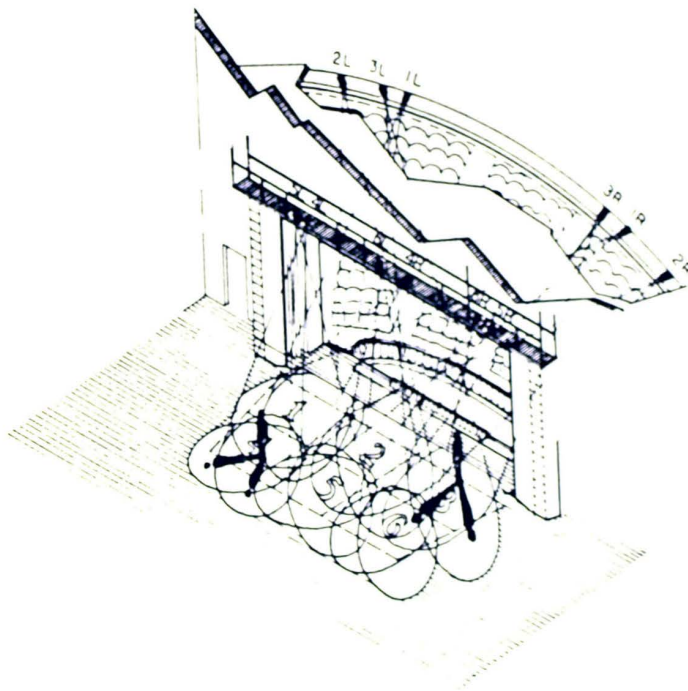


FIGURE 1

DIAGRAM OF MCCANDLESS LIGHTING SYSTEM

McCandless took his concept of warm and cool lighting from nature itself. The sun casts light, which becomes the warm side, and the resulting shadow creates the cool side.

As long ago as the Renaissance it was discovered that the best balance of light and shade to promote the effect of plasticity could be obtained by considering sunlight falling diagonally, from over one shoulder. Next to the delineation given by difference in brightness, outline and color, the light and shade on an object give the clearest sense of plasticity.²

Although McCandless never tells the reader of his book, it is important for the young designer to understand that warm and cool are relative to the needs of the designer. It could be perfectly acceptable for two shades of blue to serve the designer as both the warm and cool colors.

Although this book has shaped the way we approach a design, for the novice it provides a foundation based not upon artistic values, but upon the mechanics of illumination.

McCandless wrote a book for the novice which avoids the conceptual process. At the same time he notes that the design of a show is an art form. Somehow he never merges these two ideas clearly.

Historically, his book was written at a time when lighting designers in the theatre were rare and, for the most part, the lighting of a show was the responsibility of the scenic designer or stage manager. In addition, he described an approach that would be embraced by schools and not the professional theatre. Unlike the theatres of Broadway, most university theatres have a great deal of front of house hanging areas. Without the ability to position the equipment as McCandless demands, his system falls apart.

A Method of Lighting the Stage is a very basic starting point for the student of lighting; however, it does not explore concept beyond the most primitive levels.

Bellman

First published in 1967, Lighting the Stage, Art and Practice by Willard F. Bellman should become required reading for any serious student of lighting.

Bellman has written his book in two parts: Section 1 deals with the technical aspects of lighting. Here he discusses with the reader an overview of the history of stage lighting, the laws of physics dealing with light and color, and a brief description of the equipment a lighting designer will encounter.

Section 2 deals both with the artistic side of lighting design and the paper work that must be done to communicate design ideas.

It is in this section of his book that the reader learns of the relationship between the designer and the playwright, actor and director. Unlike McCandless, Bellman gives the reader a new starting point for the design.

The first stage in design comes when the designer approaches the script as any other interpretive artist must--alone. He must read and re-read the script until he comes to artistic terms with it.³

For the young designer it is important to realize the necessity of knowing what the playwright has said. Bellman has hit the mark here. He has given the designer a starting place in the attempt to develop a concept. It is impossible to develop a concept without a complete knowledge of the script. The script is like a blueprint that will guide the designer as he builds the concept.

As the lighting designer studies the script, he will seek information on two levels. He will need to list all essential mechanical requirements. For instance, if time of day must be established, lighting will often play part in this. Weather,

special effects, and all of the other adjunct elements often used by dramatist will be noted.⁴

Once the designer has read the script, Bellman then takes the designer to the director to discuss the way in which they together will develop the show. At this point the designer must be approaching the show and the script in the same way as the director.

Ultimately, the director is the artistic leader of the production effort. He must not allow the lighting design or any other element to predominate over the artistic unity of the whole production...thus the lighting designer must establish with the director the artistic direction that the lighting design is going to take...ultimately the designer and director come to an understanding...each should feel that he knows how the other looks at the play.⁵

Bellman spends a great deal of time in his book on the designer-director relationship. He reminds the reader that the two must be able to discuss and communicate ideas freely. It is from these discussions that the concept will be formed. Lighting the Stage, Art and Practice should be the next reading step beyond McCandless. Bellman both follows in a historical sense and presents the reader with a more modern

approach to stage lighting. In the theatre of Bellman, the lighting designer begins to take a place with the scenic and costume designers.

Rosenthal

The Magic of Light, as written by Jean Rosenthal and compiled by Lael Wertenbaker, is to date a unique text on the subject of lighting design. It is subtitled, "The Craft and Career of Jean Rosenthal, Pioneer in Lighting for the Modern Stage." On the university level this book is perhaps the least read of the three texts; however, it deals with the building of the concept behind the lighting design.

A problem in using this book as a text is that it jumps beyond the classroom and is more easily understood by a designer who has been working in the professional theatre. Jean Rosenthal has been generally regarded as one of the greatest lighting designers in the modern theatre and this book is an attempt to trace her life and work on Broadway.

Jean Rosenthal demonstrates a passion for lighting design not found in the books by McCandless and Bellman.

You, the lighting designer, are ready to listen to the words you already know by heart read by actors,

probably under stark work light on the stage of that echoing, lonely barn which is any theatre without an audience. You will be lighting, as well as their bodies and faces, the voices of the actors.⁶

Rosenthal is a romantic and wastes no time in her book explaining both in her own words and those of others how she approaches lighting design. In the method she uses, collaboration weighs heavily. The need to share ideas with the director and other designers is illustrated throughout her book. Like Bellman, she agrees that it is simply not possible for a concept to develop without this communication.

Lighting design is a collaborative profession in which the lighting designer collaborates with backgrounds, things, purposes, and people...you cannot collaborate by yourself, except by simply doing what you are told...collaboration on each single entity is based on a kind of instantaneous response to the people with whom you work.⁷

This idea of working together is basic to development of a strong central concept. To anyone reading her book, Rosenthal makes it clear that everyone involved must be working toward a single end product.

Her book follows a logical process of design. She begins with the conceptual process and reading the script, continues with the rehearsal period, the load-in to the theatre, hanging and focusing the show, and finally explains the cueing of the work. The process she describes is both complete and insightful into how one of this nation's most successful lighting designers worked.

What Rosenthal does so well in her book is to describe how she thinks about a work she is beginning to design. She begins often by creating an image in her mind of the subject she is to light.

One example comes from her involvement with lighting dance. Although Rosenthal had at one time ten shows running on Broadway, she is best remembered for her work with the Martha Graham Dance Company and her innovations in dance lighting. Her style of lighting depended upon side lighting placed on booms in the wings of the theatre. From these positions she was able to define the form of the dancers moving through space. Along with this, her method used very minimal lighting and very strong back lighting.

Her goal was, then, to create an environment for the dance to take place. A conceptual image she used was that,

Dancers live in light as fish live in water. The stage space in which they move is their aquarium, their portion of the sea. Within translucent walls

and above the stage floor, the lighting supports their flashing bouyance or their arrested sculptural bodies.*

Rosenthal then, asks the reader of her book to provide not only illumination but an environment for the play. Her book focuses on what is being said on the stage and the need for the lighting designer to reinforce that by creating a mood or reinforcing an image created by the playwright.

The problem that this book presents in the classroom is that it is written for the professional designer rather than the student. Both McCandless and Bellman wrote for the college environment. Because of this they had to devote large amounts of their texts to the most simple elements of lighting. Rosenthal takes the reader past basic electricity and illumination and begins to discuss the conceptual process. She, unlike the other authors, can rely on professional stagehands to do the technical work while she concentrates on artistry.

This book moves beyond what McCandless and Bellman discuss and should be a finishing text for the upper classman or graduate student in theatre.

Secondary Authors on Design

Pilbrow

Richard Pilbrow is one of the leading lighting designers in the United Kingdom today. His book Stage Lighting is divided into two sections dealing with both the technical and artistic aspects of design.

Pilbrow's work is similar to that of Bellman's. The primary difference is that Pilbrow writes with a skill that makes his book easier to read and understand even though it is full of British terminology.

Although this thesis deals with major American designers, I chose to include Pilbrow because his work parallels that of Bellman.

Bentham

Like Pilbrow, Bentham is a British lighting designer. However he more closely resembles McCandless in his approach to lighting. His work, The Art of Stage Lighting, outlines

the steps a designer must take to light a production. Bentham is more concerned with the technical aspects of illumination than with developing a central concept. One of the most notable points Bentham makes in his book is that the designer should be a trained stage electrician.

Bay

Howard Bay is a well known Broadway designer of scenery, costumes, and lighting. He comes from that period in time when the artist was expected to handle all areas of design equally well. In his book, Stage Design, he tells the young designer that the lighting of a show takes second place to the scenery. The primary function of stage light is to provide visibility. Perhaps his most radical statement is that the designer of stage lighting need only know how to point and turn on the lighting fixtures. In defense of Bay, his book truly is intended to be a guide to the world of scenic design and not lighting.

Summary

Each of the authors reviewed has contributed to the advancement of lighting design. Stanley McCandless provided the student of design with a foundation based upon a simple method to achieve balanced illumination. McCandless was the first to gain popularity in the field of modern lighting. He opened the door for the creation of design in the theatre.

Bellman represents the next step for the lighting designer. The designer Bellman trains has both a balance of technical knowledge and artistic understanding. Bellman makes the leap that takes the designer into exploring the words of the playwright.

Rosenthal at last brings the art of stage lighting into the modern stage. She does not ask the reader to bring a technical background to rehearsal, but more of an artistic soul.

Each designer shows a change in how the lighting designer thinks and how the artistic demands of the theatre have changed. The role of the designer, as equipment has improved, has become more complex. For McCandless, a real problem was getting light on the stage. However, both Bellman and Rosenthal are concerned with controlling that light and shaping what the audience feels.

Chapter 2

The design concept is the basis from which the lighting designer will make choices of lighting equipment, color, angle, focus, and many of the other decisions needed to light the production. This concept is how the designer will view the play. It indicates how he and the director will shape what the audience see and how they will perceive the playwright.

How then does the designer arrive at the concept?

In the previous chapter we have seen how several of the top designers approach their work. Because the art form, lighting design, is unique to the artist, I can only trace the method I used when working on Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. However, my system is based upon a synthesis of ideas provided by McCandless, Bellman, and Rosenthal.

Reading the Play

Before I ever meet with a director, in this case Terry Burgler of Theatre Virginia, I read the play we will be working with. In this first reading I want to approach the play the way one would read any work of literature, for

enjoyment. At this point it is not an attempt to develop ideas about the concept, but more an attempt to get to know the characters and events taking place within the story. As Rosenthal puts it,

You begin by holding a play in your hand...the lighting designer does best, I think, to begin with the play...read it as a whole; read quickly, all at once, without care for details.⁹

It is during the second reading that I begin to compile information about the play. This is what I would call the basic lighting needs. In this reading of the script, I am looking for the place of action, setting, time of day, time of year or season, and any working lighting fixtures called for by the playwright. Parts of this information will go into the development of the concept.

With Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, this information begins on the first page of the script.

The scene is a bed-sitting room and section of the gallery of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta. It is early evening in summer.¹⁰

From this scrap of information, I begin to visualize an old faded plantation house, the paint worn by the summer rains and heat. It has been there for years and is

surrounded by mature trees on a well kept lawn. The day of the action has been very hot and the early evening is beginning to offer relief from the late August heat. Sunlight entering the room is at a low angle and is sepia. It casts long shadows and fills the room.

For me it is an easy matter to develop this plantation house in my mind; in my early childhood my parents and I often vacationed in the Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana area. My work as a designer has taken me often to Charleston, South Carolina, and many of the Old South cities. I have grown up around these homes.

By using the information provided by the playwright, the designer can establish a definite mood. For this play it is important to reinforce the heat and the attempts of the characters to escape it.

(Maggie crosses to bar, gets an ice-cube from the ice bucket, and commences to rub her arms with the ice...she slides the ice-cube between her breasts as she speaks.)''

The lighting designer must attempt to convey that feeling of heat and the appearance of the setting sun to the audience.

As the action of Act I draws to an end, early evening is turning into night. By Act II night has fallen and parts of

the action demand that the lighting designer provide both night and moonlight.

Big Daddy: '...I don't like any kind of sneakin' an spyin---' Mae: 'Why Big Daddy, I didn't---'
Big Daddy: 'You stood on the wrong side of the moon, it threw your shadow.' '2

Once again at the end of Act II information can be found to suggest time of day and additional lighting requirements that add to the flavor of the show.

Mae: 'Big Daddy, they're startin' the fireworks.'
(the burst of fireworks can be heard and die out)...Gooper: (off stage, managing the fireworks display.) 'Let er' go!' (the fireworks blaze furiously.) '3

Finally, in Act III, Williams calls for a thunder and lighting storm to rage at one point over the action on stage.

(Thunder rolls, interior lights dim...storm clouds race across the sky...thunder clap...thunder rolls repeatedly.) '4

So, if the lighting designer begins by reading the script and looking for information, a great deal can be found.

As I read the script the information I found suggested that the play begins in late afternoon and ends late at night, perhaps mid-night or one A.M.

Before I began to re-read Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, I decided to explore information available concerning Tennessee Williams. I felt that if I could understand more about the characters, I would be better able to develop a strong concept on which to base the lighting design.

Three books proved to be valuable in this search for the origins of Brick, Maggie, Dig Daddy, and Big Mama. They were, Tennessee: Cry of the Heart, by Dodson Rader, The Kindness of Strangers, by Donald Spoto, and Memoirs, by Tennessee Williams.

Each of these works provided slightly different accounts of Williams during the period he was writing Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. All three agreed that his characters came from people he had met during his travels in East Tennessee, Memphis, and New Orleans, and from his own family life.

I began to look to these three works to provide the basis of my design concept. I already knew that Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, like the life of Williams, contained both comic and poignant moments. My goal was to reveal the hidden message that I believed was there. As Rosenthal recommends,

The play-the playwright's play-comes first. I believe that everybody involved with a play should concentrate on the dramatist's intentions rather than to expand or change them.'s

I wanted to look under the surface of the play to find an image that could act as the single thread that held together the action and lives of the characters.

Tennessee: Cry of the Heart

Dotson Rader began his friendship with Tennessee Williams during the late sixties. His book is based primarily on notes taken over the course of their relationship that lasted until the death of Williams in 1983.

Although Cry of the Heart deals mainly with the last years of the life of Tennessee Williams, Rader explores the early years. He paints a picture of a man who could be both immensely kind one moment and cruel the next. This text explores the family life of Williams, his love-life, and his professional life.'e

Cry of the Heart shows Tennessee Williams to be a man who was unaware of his own talent and at odds with himself over his many successes and failures.

This theme of success and failure runs deep in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Throughout the play the character of Brick must battle with his own failures in life, while his brother Gooper parades his many triumphs in life and business.

Of the three books I used to research the life and works of Williams, this was the least valuable.

Memoirs

This autobiography provides the reader with a dramatic contrast to the book by Dodson Rader. Williams has written a romantic account of his life and work. However, in spite of this, he has been able to share with the reader a sense of where he found his characters and stories.

After reading Memoirs I became convinced that the characters of both Brick and Maggie came from the personality of Williams. Brick and Maggie came to represent both the strong and weak sides of the playwright. The bond Brick shares with Big Daddy reflects the conflict within the relationship of Williams and his father.

When Williams writes of the struggle Brick has with coming to terms with the homosexuality of his best friend, it is a repetition of his own struggle in college with a gay

fraternity brother. This relationship is discussed in detail in The Kindness of Strangers by Donald Spoto.

In Memoirs, Williams states that Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is his favorite play.

That play comes closest to being both a work of art and a work of craft. It is really very well put together, credible and touching. Also it adheres to the valuable edict of Aristotle that a tragedy must have unity of time and place and magnitude of theme.¹⁷

What Williams means by this is that within the story of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, the running time exactly matches the time of the action, that is to say that the events follow one another in real time. We the audience see the action happen before us with no break. This is the only American play that I can find, at this time, that accomplishes this.

As I read Memoirs I got the feeling that Cat on a Hot Tin Roof presented one side of William's family life. Big Daddy, Big Mama, Gooper, and Brick were actually the stage figures of Cornelius and Edwina Williams, along with Dakin and Thomas/Tennessee Williams.

I was beginning to build the concept that I would work from. Memoirs was leading to the discovery that within Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, there was hidden a secret about Williams.

What I needed to do was to find a way to express this on stage while at the same time staying within the guidelines set forth by both the playwright and the director.

The Kindness of Strangers

Published in 1985, The Kindness of Strangers by Donald Spoto represents the last major work published on the life and work of Tennessee Williams. Of the three books I used to research Williams I found this to be of the greatest value.

Long before Williams saw Cat on a Hot Tin Roof make it to the stage, he wrote "Three Players of a Summer Game." This short story was written during a summer spent in Rome while Williams, like his character Brick, spent most of his free time drunk. In addition, Williams was separated from his long time lover, Frank Merlo. Just as Maggie was spurned by Brick, so was Williams by Merlo.

Williams wrote "Three Players of a Summer Game" about a once powerful athlete-as-artist named Brick Pollitt, who has become an alcoholic. He has an affair with the widow of his doctor and at the end is abandoned by her and is dependent on the care of his wife, who drives him around in their car

"exactly the way some ancient conqueror... might have led in chains through a capital city the prince of a state newly captured." 18

It would take two years more for Williams to change the form of the story to play and add several characters to mold it into Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

The Pollitt parents indeed are modeled on the Williams parents--but with great freedom. "I think Maggie is more himself than anyone else he may have pointed to, or claimed to be..." according to Kazan. Big Daddy Pollitt, the dying master of the Delta plantation whose combination of raw vulgarity and curious appeal was partially the figure of Cornelius Coffin Williams. "My father had a great gift for phrases, the title Cat on a Hot Tin Roof comes from him, 'Edwina, you're making me nervous as a cat on a hot tin roof.'" 19

In the character of Big Mama Pollitt, the reader can find all of the qualities which Williams accused his mother Edwina of having--among those, a deep sense of loyalty, a child-like silliness and a naive kind of nobility. Each of these traits can be found in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

In Act I we find Big Mama dealing with the problems of both her son and husband, Act II brings the need to celebrate

the birthday of Big Daddy with a cake and candles, and the final Act shows Big Mama defending the wishes of Big Daddy like a lioness defending the body of her fallen mate.

As for the character of Brick and his relationship with his homosexual roommate Skipper, that can be traced to the fraternity of which Williams was a member.

"I was deeply in love with my roommate...but neither of us knew what to do about it." According to his very different account in Memoirs, the roommate knew very well what to do about it--and offered more than indirect hints--but Tom shivered with anxiety and aborted any sexual contact. The account in Memoirs, while perhaps not a deliberate distortion of the truth, probably represents William's confusion, at the time of writing, between 1931 and a crucial period in his sexual development that occurred later in the decade.²⁰

This theme of confusion about how to react to the sexual advances of both his wife Maggie and his former roommate Skipper can be found throughout the script. Brick is just as confused about his role in the death of Skipper as Williams was about the love for him from his male friend.

As I was reading and compiling the information about both Williams and the characters of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, I

began to see a clear picture in my mind of hidden secrets,
ghosts out of Brick's past, a graveyard of painful memories.
All of these elements began shaping into the central concept.
At this point in my mind the central concept was becoming
some vast grey graveyard done in tones of black and white.

Chapter 3

The Director and Designers

When I arrived at the University of Virginia, I discovered that the set for Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was well into construction and near completion. The director Terry Burgler of Theatre Virginia, formerly The Virginia Museum Theatre, and scenic designer Ron Keller, associate professor of Theatre at the Virginia Commonwealth University, had decided to recreate the basic design used by Jo Mielziner at the Morosco Theatre in New York during the original run in March of 1955.

This would consist of a thrust stage breaking the proscenium arch and surrounded by shutters. Unlike the Mielziner set, however, the gallery or second floor porch would ring the downstage edge. The whole set would then be ringed upstage with black draperies, giving it a feeling of floating in space.

The bedroom would then have connecting hallways to the rest of the house, a bathroom off-stage, and a doorway joining it to the bedroom of Cooper and Mae.

Burgler wanted the scenery and lighting to reflect a worn quality about the house and characters. In addition, he wanted the house to close in on the characters as the action progressed. The shutters ringed the bedroom would serve as

the cage that held the action in place. The central concept he asked us to work from was the idea of elephant bones bleached by the sun.

At first this concept seemed foreign to the play; however, upon looking at it more closely I realized that it was close to my own ideas. In Chapter II I stated that my own concept was built around the idea of a "graveyard of painful memories." Using that as the basic foundation I was at ease moving into the idea of bleached elephant bones. The first image that came to mind was that of an old black and white Tarzan movie with the elephant graveyard that is always in some hard to reach, remote, and solemn area that is about to be desecrated by invaders looking to make money by stealing the ivory.

Just as the elephant graveyard and the bleached elephant bones are hard to find in the movies, I felt that the secrets about Brick's past relationship with Skipper would be hard for Brick to dredge up in Act II.

As I re-read the play I could easily see Gooper and Mae becoming the hunters. Neither Gooper nor Mae care what damage they do to their family as long as they can control the wealth. Act III of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof shows both characters at their worst. With Big Daddy's certain death common knowledge to the entire family, Gooper and Mae begin to destroy the family unit by attempting to get Big Mama to acknowledge Gooper as the heir to the family fortune.

In keeping with the idea of bleached elephant bones, I also was able to see Big Daddy as a noble creature nearing the end of his life. As he came to accept his upcoming death, he was able to free himself of the burdens of holding the family together and pass that task on to Brick.

When Ron Keller and I discussed the painting of the set, we agreed that it should reflect the faded quality of a old mansion worn by the seasons and time. Dialogue within the play suggest that the house was built late in the 1800's perhaps pre-dating the Civil War. Big Daddy suggest in the dialogue that the plantation was well established and running when he came as a young man.

Big Daddy. 'Look, Brick, I can understand, I can understand anything. Christ! The year I came here, in 1910, I wore my shoes through...Peter Ochello hired me to manage this place...'2'

In keeping with this theme of worn and faded, Ron Keller decided to do the entire set in tones of whites, greys, and beiges. The only color would come from the furniture and costumes.

The problem of having a set close in on the characters was still under discussion when I decided that I wanted to partially break from the idea of having the set float in space.

My idea was to place a cyclorama upstage of the set and a black scrim about twelve feet downstage of the cyclorama. The set would still be ringed with black draperies. My solution was to start the show with an evening sky on the cyclorama and as the act progressed, fade that sunset into night and finally into a black void by the early part of Act III. The black scrim would serve to mask the cyclorama, give the picture depth, and provide the final black curtain. By starting with a fairly open stage and an upstage cyclorama, the stage picture would appear larger to the audience; as the cyclorama faded into blackness the stage picture would appear to grow smaller. The set would then appear to have reduced in space to the audience. The caging effect would then be accomplished.

To further accent the set and playing area, I chose to light the shutters in an unnatural lighting color made up of blue and lavender.

A major problem within any group working together is the one member who does not see or agree to the concept. For us it was the costume designer. This designer was a MFA student at the University of Virginia working on her graduate project.

Two things became evident as the project progressed. First, she did not agree with nor understand the concept of the bleached elephant bones and, second, her background as a

student had not prepared her to work with professionals under a strict production deadline.

Although she was designing only one show within the four show repertory, the pressure placed upon her both to do well and to please the faculty members resulted in costumes that lacked depth.

The costume designer chose to approach Cat on a Hot Tin Roof as a period piece. I believe what happened to her design was that she convinced herself that if she could reproduce the period then the concept would take care of itself. This resulted in costumes that were historically accurate, but that did not read well upon the stage. In her attempt to re-create historically accurate costumes, the designer did not consider that in the theatre, the audience is often seated some distance from the stage and that detail must be able to be seen by all the members of the audience. The costumes had wonderful detail, however it did not carry beyond the first few rows of the theatre. A second problem in re-creating a period is that one must be careful in finding a source to base the designs. In her case, she took a Sears and Roebuck catalogue of the 1950's and applied that to the Pollitt household. From reading the play, she should have been able to reason that the family does not shop at Sears.

Big Daddy: "We got that clock the summer we went to Europe, me an' Big Mama...Big Mama bought more stuff than you could haul in a couple of box cars...everywhere she went...she bought, bought, bought. I am a rich man, Brick...close on ten million in cash an' blue chip stocks, outside, mind you, of 28,000 acres of the richest land this side of the Valley Nile!"zz

A man who has this kind of money and freely gives it to his wife and family does not wear clothing from a local department store.

During the rehearsal period the costumes of Brick, Gooper, and the children changed several times.

I felt fortunate to have the guest costume designer already in place at the theatre as she assisted our student designer a great deal in the last days of technical rehearsal.

The greatest problem posed by having a student designer working with us was that she was unable to provide input into the overall design due to the fact she lacked an understanding of the conceptual process. She understood fabric, patterns, cutting, and all the other technical aspects of her craft; however, I believe she lacked imagination.

The other major problem she faced was to both please her graduate committee and the director of the show. In this matter I thought she failed both. Because she was a student and acted like one, she was treated like a student. Her attitude reflected a lack of confidence and because of this her associates came to always double-check her work. For my own part after the third week of working with her I began to worry how her costumes would look like on stage. I got the feeling that she was discussing with me, at design meetings, not what she felt or believed, but what she had read in a book on the subject of costume design. On the MFA level she should have been further advanced.

The scenic designer, Ron Keller, was at the other end of the scale as far as conceptual design was concerned. I found him to be aware of how important it is for a team of designers to work together. During the design process Mr. Keller and I shared a central office with the costume designer next door. The interesting thing about this arrangement was that the student designer rarely came to us with ideas during the design process of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. However Gwen West, associate professor of Theatre at the University of Florida, who served as the guest designer of the remaining three productions was always in our office or us in hers offering ideas for comment.

The result in the three of us working together on a central concept was that we remained in communication about

any changes the other might wish to introduce. In addition we were able to focus our talent in one direction and make better use of our time.

Both Mr. Keller and Ms. West were equally able to move from the technical side of their work to the artistic. Because of this openness among the three of us, we came to trust each others "eye" as we reviewed our work on the stage.

Chapter 4

Applying the Concept to the Play

In this chapter I will deal with Cat on a Hot Tin Roof as a lighting designer applying his concept to each act within the play.

Act I

Act I of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is Maggie's act. She tells the audience what has been happening in both her life and that of Brick. She sets the stage for what is to come, the confrontation between her and Brick and their battle to establish themselves as the masters of Big Daddy's plantation empire of. Williams sets the entire play in the bedroom of Brick and Maggie. His play deals with both sex and power. Maggie will use her skill as a woman of sexual desire and exceptional strength both to obtain what she wants and protect Brick.

In setting Act I, Williams begins his play in the late afternoon of a summer day. Maggie tells the audience about the events of the day-long birthday celebration for Big Daddy. When we first see her on stage she is changing her

dress and trying to relieve herself of the heat by rubbing an ice-cube on her arms and legs. Both the day and the heat have exhausted her. Brick is escaping the heat by lying in bed with a drink.

In this opening scene, I want to establish two elements with the lighting. First, the heat of a summer day in the deep South in a house without the modern advantage of air-conditioning. I will use this feeling of heat to build the tension between Maggie and Brick. Second, the late afternoon will soon be turning into evening, offering relief from the day's events and temperature.

In Act 1, I want to build almost a sepia look about the stage. With this I add low side lighting to put an edge on the actors. I want to use both the hard edge and the brown tones to begin the bleached elephant bone feel.

From this opening I can move through the brown, orange, and red tones of a setting sun raking the bedroom into the night range of blue, lavender, and pinks that are present in the early evening. To effect this change I began my light move with the high pipe ends and moved down into the booms over the course of the first ten pages or so of dialogue.

The bedroom contains deep shadows which are the result of the low angle of the sun on the horizon. With these long shadows I want to create the feeling of animals of prey waiting for evening to come so that they can stalk their victims unseen. Maggie is very much an animal of prey, a

lioness who will protect her mate and provide for his well being.

Act II

Act II begins with the action holding over from Act 1. Brick and Maggie's bedroom has darkened and evening has begun. As Big Daddy enters the room, someone turns on a light switch and the practical lighting fixtures offer justification for the new brightness. The room is lighted now by both man made fixtures and the evening twilight coming in through the windows and doorways. It is important in Act II to establish a different look for the interior and exterior of the house. Brick will try to escape from the pressure and tension of the bedroom into the cool night air found on the gallery which overlooks the river in the distance. Once again the theme of predatory animals lurking in the shadows, hiding from the light, appears.

Act II is also a time for testing the power of Big Daddy and Brick. Big Daddy is forcing his son into a struggle to see if Brick can rule the family and fortune after Big Daddy has died.

I want to establish for the audience that it is a time of truth and a passing of the reins of power to the young man.

In this act I was able to take liberties with the stage lighting. I decided to present a sense of coolness about the lighting of the room. In addition, the action of the scene requires that the room close in on the characters as the conflict between them builds. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the director wanted the show to take place in a black void. I was able to translate that feeling into the night becoming blacker, a prelude to the conflict and the storm coming in Act III. As Act II comes to a close, the stage picture is very dark, the single lamp in the room cannot provide enough illumination. Night has fallen and the truth about them is known to each other and the audience. The blackness of reality and the night engulfs them both. The explosion of emotion between Brick and his father brings Act II to a close. The birthday fireworks explode in colors of gold, red, and orange. Big Daddy escapes into the night and Brick is left alone, standing in the doorway as the illumination of the fireworks play against his body. Brick has passed some ancient trial of manhood.

Act III

Oddly enough it was with Act III that the director and I had our greatest difference of opinion. He felt that Act III belonged to Maggie while I felt that it was the time that Big Mama expressed her strength. I argued that here we see Big Mama come to the defense of the two men she loves. She is able to keep Gooper away from the weakened and exposed Big Daddy, and she is working to establish Brick as the master of the household. I believe that she shares the lioness quality of Maggie. Big Mama and Maggie are both on the hunt with Gooper and Mae trailing them, trying to steal what they have obtained, waiting for scraps to be left, scavenging.

In the earlier Acts we have seen Big Mama only as a simple, weak-willed character. In Act III we see her as having the strength of Maggie. In fact, both she and Big Daddy are the aged versions of Brick and Maggie. Just as Brick has learned from Big Daddy, it is now Maggie's turn to see herself in the character of Big Mama. She is the student of Big Mama. Maggie's dreams of conquest are fulfilled by the actions of Big Mama.

In lighting Act III, I wanted the atmosphere of the room to change from the coolness of Act II and present a cold, ominous feel. It is the moment when Gooper and Mae close in on both Big Mama and Brick. Gooper is making his bid to

rule. As the battle between Gooper and Big Mama grows, a summer storm is building outside. It reflects the tension the audience can view inside the bedroom. I took this opportunity to darken the room as the clouds we never see hide the moon and the night sky grows even darker. By this act the cyc is gone and the audience view the action against a blackened scrim, the black void the director desired has appeared as if from nowhere.

At the moment of greatest conflict between the combatants, the storm outside breaks and flashes of lighting play against both the characters and the night sky. As quickly as the storm has come, it is gone. Big Mama has survived the attack of Gooper.

Often with the coming of an evening storm, a sense of freshness can be felt in its wake. As Big Daddy enters the room, that sense is felt as the mood of the lighting changes to a night time warmth of early Act II. It is still late night, however Big Daddy brings with him a feeling of hope.

I decided to end the show on that feeling of hope and mercy. Mercy for Big Mama from Big Daddy, and mercy from Brick to Maggie. We chose the ending of love between Maggie and Brick, as the stage lighting fades, he joins Maggie on the bed.

Summary

Besides being able to work in a wonderfully equipped theatre, I was for the most part, able to work and share ideas with seasoned professionals. When I arrived in Virginia, I was given housing along with the director and set designer at a fraternity house built in the late 1800's. Not only was it the same flavor of the mansion of Big Daddy, it even had a second floor gallery. The three of us along with several of the actors in the show spent many casual hours on that balcony discussing the play. It became a place to share ideas and observe nature as late afternoon turned into the twilight which precedes the night. On more than one occasion we were treated to a fast summer storm that followed the sunset.

Besides sharing a summer home with the production team, I also lived with the actors who portrayed the roles of Maggie, Big Daddy, and Gooper. Often an after hours production meeting would evolve into an open discussion of the play with not only the designers and director, but also the principal actors.

From these group sessions two elements developed, a bond between the production team and the actors and a mutual respect for each other. I was able to learn more about what the actors wanted to bring to the production. By knowing

this I was able to enhance whatever we all agreed upon as important. Without bringing the actors into the conceptual process, something that is rarely done due to time and of the departmentalization of the theatre, we as designers lose an important resource of information. In a repertory environment however, there is no reason why we as designers cannot tap this source.

Because all of us worked together, we developed a mutual respect for the others craft and at times were able to see the solution of a production problem that someone else was too close to.

By the time we entered rehearsals, I was able to bring with me clear pictures in my mind about how the stage lighting should look.

Jean Rosenthal knew that the only way to have truly excellent theatre was by collaboration.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was a successful production due in a large part to the efforts of the production team working with the director and actors to achieve a common theme.

In closing, as a designer I believe that I have a responsibility not only to the director and playwright, but also to the audience. Each night when the curtain goes up these people who have paid to see the show are affected by what I have done. They expect me to apply all my skill and talent as a designer to give them a quality production.

Theatre is an art form that deals with passions.

To this end, scenic designer Robert Edmond Jones said it best:

It is evident that this play we are about to see is no common play. It is evident that these men and women who will appear before us are no common mummers. These are Actors, Seers, Sayers. Let us honor them. For by their inspiration they intimate immortality.²³

Chapter 5

This section brings together the paperwork I created while lighting the production. Included are both the hookup sheet and the lighting plan overlayed upon the set plan. The lighting plan shows the physical position of each instrument. The hookup sheet indicates control assignment, circuit number, type description, and color for each instrument.

HOOKUP

Show: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Theatre: Culbreth

Date: June 17, 1986

Designer: S. Woods

Control	Circuit	Position	Type	Color
1.	W-13	H.R. Box	6 X 12	Lee 147
	W-15	"	6 X 12	
		"	6 X 12	
2.	W-9	"	6 X 12	
	W-11	"	6 X 12	
		"	6 X 16	
3.	W-5	"	6 X 16	
	W-7	"	6 X 16	

Control	Circuit	Position	Type	Color
4.	W-12	H.L. Box	6 X 12	X-37
	W-10	"	6 X 12	"
5.	W-14	"	6 X 12	"
6.	W-2	"	6 X 16	"
	W-4	"	6 X 16	"
7.	C-26	FOH-1	6 X 12	G-56
	C-28	"	6 X 12	"
8.	C-30	"	6 X 12	"
	C-32	"	6 X 12	"
9.	C-22	"	6 X 12	"
	C-24	"	6 X 12	"
10.	C-17	"	6 X 12	X-68
	C-53	"	6 X 12	"
11.	C-43	"	6 X 12	"
	C-45	"	6 X 12	"
12.	C-41	"	6 X 12	"
	C-45	"	6 X 12	"
13.	C-58	FOH-HS-L	6 X 12	X-54
	C-60	"	6 X 12	"
14.	C-62	"	6 X 12	"
	C-64	"	6 X 12	"
15.	C-61	FOH-HS-R	6 X 12	X-05/X-21
	C-63	"	6 X 12	"
		"	6 X 12	"
16.	C-57	"	6 X 12	"
	C-59	"	6 X 12	"

Control	Circuit	Position	Type	Color
17.	C-52	FOH-3	6 X 16	
18.	C-54	"	6 X 16	
19.	C-56	"	6 X 16	
20.	TL-4	ELE-1	6 X 9	X-30
	TL-5	"	6 X 9	"
21.	2-PLR	ELE-2	6 X 9	"
22.	C-36	FOH-SPEK.	6 X 9	"
23.	1-P14	ELE-1	6 X 9	X-67
	1-P24	"	6 X 9	"
	1-P32	"	6 X 9	"
24.	3-P14	ELE-2	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"
	3-PRB	"	6 X 9	"
25.	TR-4	ELE-3	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"
26.	2-PRW	ELE-5	6 X 9	"
27.	1-P2	ELE-1	6 X 9	X-80
	1-P17	"	6 X 9	"
	1-P20	"	6 X 9	"
28.	3-P2	ELE-2	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"
	3-P12	"	6 X 9	"
29.	TR-3	ELE-3	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"

Control	Circuit	Position	Type	Color
30.	4-P3	ELE-4	6 X 9	"
	4-P8	"	6 X 9	"
31.	1-P1	ELE-1	6 X 9	X-40
	1-P16	"	6 X 9	"
	1-P21	"	6 X 9	"
32.	3-P5	ELE-2	6 X 9	"
	3-P8	"	6 X 9	"
33.	TL-1	ELE-3	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"
	"	"	6 X 9	"
34.	C-44	FOH-1	6 X 16	X-99
35.	1-P26	ELE-1	Mini-E	X-58A
	1-P30	"	Mini-E	Lee 144
36.	1-P35	Ele-1	Mini-E	X-58A
37.	3-P6	ELE-2	Mini-E	X-58A
	"	"	Mini-E	Lee 144
38.	"	ELE-2	Mini-E	Lee 144
39.	4-PLG	ELE-4	Mini-E	X-58A
40.	4-P1	ELE-4	Mini-E	Lee 144
41.	4-P9	ELE-4	Mini-E	Lee 144
42.	C-P6	ELE-6	Beam-L	No/C
	C-P8	"	Beam-L	"
	C-P9	"	Beam-L	"
	C-P11	"	Beam-L	"
	CPCB	"	Beam-L	"

Control	Circuit	Position	Type	Color
	CPCW	"	Beam-L	"
43.	4-P11	ELE-4	Beam-L	"
	4-P15	"	Beam-L	"
44.	C-11	FOH-1	Beam-L	"
	C-13	"	Beam-L	"
45.	3-PRG	ELE-2	8" Fres. X-99	
46.	TR-1	ELE-3	8" Fres. X-99	
	TR-6	"	8" Fres. X-99	
47.	FP-6	Chandelier		
48.	TL-6	ELE-3	8" Fres. X-99	
49.	C-8	FOH-1	6" Fres. X-80	
	C-9	"	6" Fres. "	
	C-16	"	6" Fres. "	
	1-P25	"	6" Fres. "	
	1-P34	ELE-1	6" Fres. "	
	3-P34	ELE-3	6" Fres. "	
50.	C-4	FOH-1	Mini-E	X-64
51.	1-P12	ELE-1	Mini-E	No/Color
52.	FP-1	SL-Boom	6 X 12	X-05
53.	FP-5	SL-Boom-2	6 X 12	X-05
54.	C-46	SR-Boom	6 X 12	X-06
55.	FP-3	SL-Boom	6 X 12	X-32
56.	FP-7	SL-Boom-2	6 X 12	X-32
57.	FP-2	SR-Boom	6 X 12	X-32
58.	RP-2	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	Blue-Grn.

Control	Circuit	Position	Type	Color
	RP-3	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	"
	RP-4	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	"
59.	FP-9	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	LT. BLUE
	FP-11	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	"
	FP-15	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	"
60.	FP-13	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	PRIM. BLUE
	FP-23	CYC-ELE	64/X-RAY	"
	RP-1	CYC-ELE	64/X-Ray	"

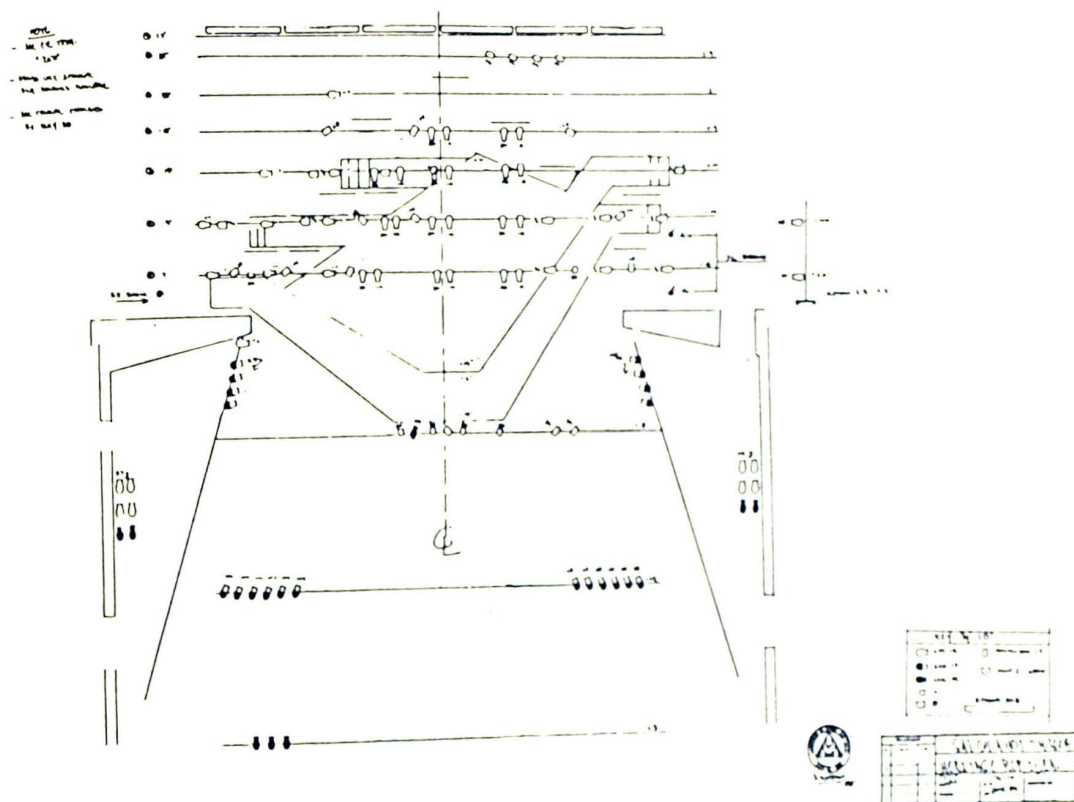


FIGURE 2

LIGHTING PLAN SHOWING PHYSICAL POSITION OF EACH
INSTRUMENT OVERLAYED ON SET PLAN

Notes

¹ Stanley McCandless, A Method of Lighting the Stage (New York: Theatre Arts Inc., 1932), pp. 9-10.

² McCandless, pp. 53-55.

³ Willard F. Bellman, Lighting the Stage, Art and Practice (New York: Chandler, 1974), p. 371.

⁴ Bellman, p. 371.

⁵ Bellman, p. 327.

⁶ Jean Rosenthal and Lael Wertenbaker, The Magic of Light (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972) p. 29.

⁷ Rosenthal, p. 29.

⁸ Rosenthal, p. 117.

⁹ Rosenthal, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰ Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1955), p. 5.

¹¹ Williams, p. 9.

¹² Williams, p. 40.

¹³ Williams, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ Williams, pp. 74, 75.

¹⁵ Rosenthal, p. 59.

¹⁶ Dotson Rader, Tennessee: Cry of the Heart (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1985).

¹⁷ Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1972) p. 212.

¹⁸ Donald Spoto, The Kindness of Strangers (New York: Ballantine Books., 1985), pp. 193-194.

¹⁹ Spoto, p. 220.

²⁰ Spoto, pp. 40, 41.

²¹ Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1955) p. 55.

²² Williams, pp. 41-42.

²³ Robert Edmond Jones, Drawings For The Theatre (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1925), p. 24.

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