

(Courtesy of Karen Perlow. Used with permission.)

OpenCourseWare asked Karen Perlow, Lighting Designer for this production of *The Internationalist*, to comment on her creative process of for this project. Below is this dialogue.

Q: Were there certain references—books, magazines, photographs—that were particularly useful in your research?

A: I use different sections from many different books in my advanced class (Lighting Design for the Theatre, 21M.734, posted on OCW). I selected certain images to show [director] Janet Sonenberg as part of my take on the play, but there's one last image that was the most successful—an image of glass bricks. We both felt this image had a strong corollary to the meat of *The Internationalist*—seeing through a layer to something that looks sort of familiar, not sure what you're seeing, a disorienting view of a recognizable landscape, a see-through barrier, etc.

Q: Can you speak about your varying degrees of engagement with the text? About how you thought conceptually at the beginning, and where you ended up? What fell away, and what was added? What was deconstructed, and what became more real?

A: I was engaged with the text from the first reading—intrigued, curious, and amused (the last sentence of stage directions: “though it may not be readily apparent, the play is over” especially tickled me). I asked my husband who is an actor to read it and see what he thought—he too found it oddly compelling. I felt the play was about power—the power of language—those that have it and can “talk the talk” versus those without it, and the specialized vocabulary of business, or even the basics of a foreign language and how humbling/frustrating it is not to be able to communicate on the most simple of levels.

I had an idea early on that it might be interesting to point up Lowell's isolation/differentness with light—to highlight him when he is observing the office and not engaged with the people or situations around him—and to some extent we did this subtly when he first entered the office—the waiting room area got brighter and a bit warmer than the rest of the stage/office.

I also wanted to get the feeling of motion in the airport—having traveled more frequently lately myself—I was drawing on my own memories of the feeling of trying to get the lay of the land in a new environment—how in an airport everything and everyone is whirring around you and you're just trying to find the bathroom, or the departure monitor, or baggage claim—and how even the billboards move now. I was in an airport leaning up against a wall recently and the billboard right next to me started to scroll to the new image and it was disconcerting—the wall was moving. So, to make a short story long, that was my impetus for the pattern projected on the screen in the airport—an abstract version of the three sided moving billboards.

Once we came up with the screen/panel scenic concept (they could be walls, they could be office partitions, they could be buildings, etc.) it was pretty clear that we were going to project patterns on them with light. What the final images looked like were actually more abstract than I anticipated due to the angle many of the lights were at to their respective panels. It gave all the patterns a funky skewed quality that threw me at first, but which I ended up liking.

I originally thought I was going to use a very controlled color palette—subtle hues, cool tones—and for the most part, I did—until I got to the panels. I had hung a lot of "extra" lights that I didn't have a specific purpose for at the light hang, but which I figured would come in handy during tech week. Those, and the other lights that ended up being redundant, or impossible to use as I first anticipated, gave me a bunch of "let's try this color for this screen/window," or, "how about a pattern here" choices that I could make quickly and easily as the lights were already in the air and plugged in. I had conceived the plot with patterns on the panels only—and Janet requested more patterns on the floor—so this was an easy fix. I also hadn't realized that the patterns that were projected on moving panels would hit the floor in interesting ways when the panel was no longer there and that was a very happy accident.