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Functioning In Process...Please Standby For The Form.

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

in

Theatre and Dance (Design)

by

Bryan Keith Ealey

Committee in charge:

Professor Christopher Kuhl, Chair  
Professor Stephen Buescher  
Professor Victoria Petrovich  
Professor Shahrokh Yadegari

2023

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University of California San Diego

2023

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## VITA

2007 Bachelor of Arts in Drama, Prairie View A&M University

2023 Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Design), University of California San Diego

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Functioning In Process...Please Standby For The Form.

By

Bryan Keith Ealey

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Design)

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Christopher Kuhl, Chair

As an artist, I believe it's important to allow many aspects of my life to be embodied inside my creative process. As an avid music lover of hip-hop, this has shaped my intellect and my comprehension of the art of storytelling. Hip-hop is one of the most highly intellectual storytelling genres. From complex metaphors, triple entendre, and the use of personification, it has proven over time that it has rooted its position in the platform of providing meaning to life. I believe this to be the sole purpose of storytelling. It provides clarity in the context of real-life scenarios to the spectator. In return, my belief is that it would build empathy in our



society. For the last two decades, many artists have influenced my creative process. Lupe Fiasco is an artist who I respect and admire for his contribution to the industry. He is one of the top-tier lyricists since his introduction in 2006. Through his music is how I first learned of the term ‘FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION’ (FFF). Studying those principles has given me the opportunity to apply them to my design process. The art of design gives strong visual support that connects with the context of the story being told, and I firmly believe that the form in which a story is being performed must connect with the ‘why’ – or its function. If there is no connection between form and function, then the beauty of this marriage is lost in the whirlwind of arbitrary aesthetics! In my thesis, you will discover how I can connect the principles of FFF in my creative process, and how that is influenced by my passion for storytelling, which is a direct connection to my aesthetic and comprehension of societal relationships.

## INTRODUCTION

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION is a principle of design coined by Louis Sullivan, which was associated with the late 19th and early 20th-century architecture and industrial design industry. Sullivan states that the shape of a building or object should primarily relate to its intended function or purpose.

This idea of (FFF) solidifies my ideology and reminds me of what type of artist I want to be. I strive for my work to be beautifully intertwined in the creative projects I endeavor - to enhance and elevate - and never to distract. I wholeheartedly believe that theatre's purpose is to provide an emotional response to the spectators. Aesthetics without the fundamentals of design and how it contributes to the story serves no purpose for the show – and without this connection, this would cause the emotional response to be severed from the spectator.

My first introduction to 'Form Follows Function' came from Lupe Fiasco in the titled song, *Form Follows Function*, which appeared on the 2012 album, *Food & Liquor II: The Great American Rap Album, Pt. I*. In the intro of the song, Lupe expresses...

*"I'mma just go...*

*And then we'll figure it out from there*

*They say form follows function*

*And if you just function properly things will form themselves,*

*Yeah, that's kind of what it is*

*So on that note..."*

In this, Lupe is explaining that he is just going to begin functioning and taking it one day at a time and then the form will reveal itself. I believe he is saying, if you stay true to yourself, then everything will fall into place. This is similar to staying true to your process and honoring every step along the way.

Lupe then ends the song beautifully with,

*“This is my form, now what the function be”*

After expressing his functions, the song has now become the form and the function is the perspective of the audience. He is asking what do you think? He is simply trying to demonstrate his process and his true form will reveal itself in due time. Much of Lupe's themes deal with the ills of the world and his point of view of it. I believe this song is his artistic statement. The song doesn't have a linear storyline, but yet connects themes that create his identity as an artist and how he sees the world. For example, in the second verse, he says the following:

*“Been in the stu all day cooking food for thought*

*Now out the soup du jour for you and yours*

*Might find sushi for your soul, we call that moving raw”*

In the first stanza, 'stu' is slang or short for the studio. He is saying that he's been in the studio all day working on music that will help stimulate your mind. The metaphor is using the subject of food to deliver the message, as it's been said before that food feeds the soul.

In the last stanza, he is stating that you might find something in his music that might touch your soul or connect with you emotionally, as he continues with the food metaphor. He provides a witty pun by using sushi as the food of choice when he says “we call that moving raw”. As mentioned before, Lupe's identity as an artist is grounded in his ability to rap wittingly

about the ills of the world. Sushi is traditionally made with raw fish, and moving raw is slang for the heroin trade he's referencing in his hometown, Chicago.

I believe the function of this song is to provide his artistic statement and he uses it as a device to develop his form as an artist. If you stay true to yourself, then you don't have to worry about performing or keeping up with a facade that doesn't represent yourself. Lupe is comfortable in his form.

So knowing that I believe in these principles, what does it mean to me as a Lighting Designer to apply this method to my process? What are the function and needs of the project? How do I execute it and in what form? Did I consider how the angle of the light connects with the architecture and bodies on the stage? Does the color I've chosen truly connect with the action being depicted by the players? How does the timing of cues written give fluidity to the moments suspended in the reality of the play? Once I've answered these questions within the process, I will then have the key elements needed to inform my form.

## CHAPTER 1 (*ALIGNED PRINCIPLES*)

As artists, we can easily get stuck trying to figure out the final product without understanding what we're trying to make. We get lost in the infinite possibilities of what the outcome could be – focusing on creating something captivating and beautiful, but with no direction of where to apply it. This is known to be ‘Paralysis by Analysis’, which I first learned from American Record Producer, Quincy Jones. He spoke about how people in general can get fixated on all the possible outcomes in a particular situation. They will be overwhelmed by the analysis of it, and then become paralyzed in making a decision. I have fallen victim to this from time to time. This was one of my main motivating reasons to attend grad school. I was mostly self-taught and I didn't have any guiding principles in my creative process (instinctively....yes, but nothing I could put into definitive words).

In my research, I was watching a YouTube podcast featuring Lupe Fiasco at MIT. In this interview, he discusses his course “The Academic Frontier of Rap” and how he researches Rap's true nature is significantly deeper from its discovery point and quantifying the core principles. Much like in life, the context in which an idea is discovered can be very different from reality itself. The evolution of hip-hop has created a meaningful identity for people of color that has surpassed its origin story of New York City blackouts, looting, and neighborhood block parties. Record players that were stolen from electronic stores during these blackouts gave the community a creative outlet to tell their story of oppression and succession to overcome the tragedy of living in low-income project housing. For Black People, it gave us access to resources that we weren't always privy to, as it would years later evolve into a billion-dollar industry and the most profitable genre. While rap is the language, hip-hop is the culture.

I believe that is fascinating how disciplines can vary in life, but somehow share the same process or aligned principles. Much like architecture or electrical engineering, there's a pure function that tells humans how to operate and control, how to create and execute. How do we harness the power that we are still understanding without being destructive to each other? Art has been a conduit that connects each human being to the next. There's something beautiful in this common denominator that we share. This is a philosophy that is embedded in my process. This is why when I heard Lupe Fiasco speak of (FFF) first as a song, then as a further explained concept and principle, I immediately gravitated to this idea. Lupe's extraction of those principles into quantified steps and bridging those into his process has allowed me to discover that I was already invested in similar thought patterns.

Louis Sullivan and Roman architect, engineer, and author Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, who first asserted in his book *De Architectura*, that a structure must exhibit the three qualities - firmitas, utilitas, venustas — which is, it must be solid, useful, and beautiful. These 3 qualities resonate with my design principles and aesthetics — even before I was able to put a word to it.

**Firmitas** - the solid. The concrete foundation of what I consider the concept, story, and why we are here experiencing this moment together. This is the slab that will be the foundation for the story we theatre artists are building together.

**Utilitas** - useful. I align this quality within my process on how I began to execute my design. I gauge if I am honoring the concept or contributing to the forward momentum of the story. Have I picked all the right colors, thought about all possible lighting positions and angles, asked the right question with my fellow collaborators, and then gone back to the drawing board for revisions? This phase represents the building blocks and tools I will be using to execute my design.

**Venustas** - beautiful. This quality has all the infinite possibilities of what is conceived as beautiful. This is the part where deep explorations can happen and what I would call your final form in the art you are creating. All parts are equally important and necessary, but this somehow seems the most crucial. This phase is where my true artistic vision is expressed and where I invite all influences that ground me firmly in my identity as an artist, allowing my aesthetic to shine through my compositions for the stage where the audience can have an emotional response and leave with a catharsis.

In the next 3 chapters, I will illustrate how my past and future practices align with these principles, and how I plan to further explore these tools to be my building block in my forever process.

## CHAPTER 2 (EXPLORING BREAKING DRAMATURGY WITH *NAPOLI*)

In the history of Lighting Design, there certainly have been many lighting tropes used over and over throughout time. Some of these tropes have been relied on too often and because of this, innovations tend to take a back seat in these moments when used.

For example, I would argue that someone could design a moment on stage that could be dramaturgically true to the scene but somehow reads as flat or not interesting onstage. I would consider that design to not have reached its highest potential. It's almost as if the scene 'just works', but doesn't give an emotional response. If a scene is lit as night: Does it just work to just have deep blue top light and cool white face light? I would yes, it technically does work. This is an age-old trope. However, could the scene be lit where the designer is exploring more shadows and how the light will fall among the body? Using two-tone colors could give a sense of direction of light. Sitting in a dim room at night with one lamp source on doesn't feel like the deep blue and white light explained above.

On the next page is a production photo of *Machinal* (UCSD/ 2022) where a newly married couple spent the first night of their honeymoon in a hotel.





Figure1.1 *Machinal* Production Photo

In this scene, there is a back diagonal light coming from the left side of the photo. This light is creating the warm light that is projected on the right side of the actor's body. The left side of the body is left in shadow to create a sense of direction of light. I then added blue top light to give the composition a melancholy feel and a nighttime room glow.

In my process, it's important to have a solid concept (**firmitas**)... The 'why' we are here experiencing these moments together. Then allow that concept to guide your decisions, the tools you use to execute (**utilitas**) - and how you choose to execute. The (**venustas**) is up to the individual artist to push the boundaries and drive the emotional response home - and not be locked guarded by the dramaturgy and doing what 'just works'.

A prime example, I consider my aesthetics having the ability to make dynamic and strong gestures within my composition. So I will typically allow my aesthetics to spill out into my work

and challenge the rules of dramaturgy — still honoring the concept and rules of exception I've given myself.

In the production *Napoli*, which took place in the Potiker Theater of UCSD. The play suggests the small French Quarter of Naples, Italy. The set represented a low-income family living in a tight-family home. Even though the play took place solely inside the home, it was important for the presence of the outside alleyway to be just as prevalent as the inside living quarters. So in this, the scenic designer chose to have a free-standing door upstage of the playing space. This allowed the audience to see straight through the home and beyond the outdoor courtyard. This design choice led other design choices to have an abstract lens to them. I took this as a liberty to abstract the lighting whenever necessary. The use of two parallel aesthetics when the world is rooted in reality as far as the characters are concerned, but the lens through which it's presented to the audience isn't based on realism. The words I kept referring to in my process were abstract-reality. Their reality has been abstracted to a certain degree.

The photo on the next page shows the full scenic design for the production of *Napoli* designed by Micheal Wogulis. The hanging fabric on the clothing lines reminds the audience of tight living quarters. Dramaturgically, the designs of the clothing lines are not based on realism inside the world of the play, as the height and positioning are not functional in real life or the life of the play. However, the design gives an emotional aesthetic to the world in which these characters live. We can assume that design the is conveying the aesthetics of the region and cultural reference for their world. This is connected to my abstract-reality idea.

The use of clothing lines is based in reality for the world of the play, but the proximity to the playing space is not.



Figure 1.2: *Napoli* Production Photo 1

In the next two images, I share some examples of what I call reality vs abstract-reality. In the photo to the left, you will see the character Gennero coming home unexpectedly after being missing for over a year from his family due to an air-raid attack during WWI. You will notice him in the doorway while his wife Amalia is shocked to see him. I can argue that the lighting is very reminiscent of naturalistic warm-interior lamplight inside the home. The photo to the right expresses more of an emotional shift. The photo is moments later...time has not progressed forward, but I choose to suspend reality and lift this moment into this abstracted-reality where I express the emotions these characters were feeling and what I would like the audience to experience. I chose to shift the warm colors on the back exterior wall to shades of deep blues and rich amber tones, which ended up mixing to create subtle hues of magenta.



Figure 1.3: *Napoli* Production Photo 2



Figure 1.4 *Napoli* Production Photo 3

It is as if the exterior wall turned into a canvas, and this canvas was able to express its emotions. It was painterly in its regard. Furtherly, I connect this concept to the idea of Diegetic vs Non-Diegetic sounds. The sounds within the world that the characters hear and respond to vs what is meant to score and give emotional support to the moment being portrayed for the audience to experience. These are the sounds the characters are not aware of. It gives the room and everyone experiencing it the emotional soundtrack it needs to fully engage at the moment. The same concept applies to lighting The photo on the left is the lighting the character sees in their world. The photo on the right is for the audience to see, feel, and take in all at once. The characters wouldn't see the wall turn into deep blues and ambers, but the actors would have it as a source to draw an emotional response. This would add value to their performance and give gravity to the form of the design.

### CHAPTER 3 (*HELLS CANYON* RESEARCH AND PATH TO DESIGN)

In this next chapter, I will dive into my research process and how I can connect it to my final product. Much like any process, I am tasked with a level of homework when making design decisions. How do I begin?

Typically as I read the script, I begin realizing these two-dimensional characters on paper from 2D to 3D, and the story begins to come to life in my mind. I aim for the first read to be for pure comprehension of the story, but as a lighting designer, it is hard to not think about lighting while reading. I am looking for a sense of the time of day, seasons, region, interior, exterior, or both at the same time. Style is essential to how lighting is composed and connects with the concept. So once the creative team has been able to share thoughts and ideas, I begin diving into the rabbit hole of research and creating my collages, which is the typical form I choose to share my research in. In the image below, you will see a select page from my *Hell's Canyon* collage research.



Figure 2.1: *Hell's Canyon* Research 1

Director, Vanessa Stalling described *Hell's Canyon* as a thriller movie made for the stage. It takes place in a mountain cabin in Oregon near the Snake River. A group of 5 friends travels to vacation at this cabin and on the first night of their stay, a series of paranormal events begin to happen which leads to murders by the end of the night. While the story of the play is fiction, the events in which the Hell's Canyon Massacre happened are very much true. I immediately felt responsible for researching the actual Massacre, which allowed me to explore the darkness of what the play called for.



Figure 2.2: *Hell's Canyon* Research 2

It was important for the moments of horror to seem as if it's sourced from the main character, Ariel's presence. She's the reason why these paranormal events are happening, so every surreal and horrific moment must seem like a response to Ariel's emotions. This was a prime opportunity for lighting to be a key element in the storytelling for this production. In the next photo, you will see how I use light to give architectural shape to the body, air, and space. The left photo is the research image and the right photo is a production photo. The picture shows how I can pull elements from explorations and apply them to the realized stage picture.



Figure 2.3: *Hell's Canyon* Research 3 Figure 2.4 *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 1

Giving focus on a strong visual beam of light projected through space with an unusual angle reinforces this idea that something unnatural is happening and that Ariel is the cause of this event. This is the first time we see Ariel and also is the first character to appear in the play. Establishing this design choice early in the play automatically informs the audience that in some form, Ariel is connected to these paranormal events that are to take place in the story.

Another key job for a Lighting Designer is to help establish the architectural reference in the scenic world of the play. Beyond the scenic design, how I do help define the container of the playing space and add depth? In the early stages of play development, the playwright, Keiko Green had written the script to have several wall structures in the scenic design. It was important for this cabin to feel authentic for the story to captivate the intention. In the stage directions, she specifies, “It’s as if someone took a knife and cut straight down the middle of the doll house, and this is what we’re left with”. This already gives a significant amount of information to work with and understand how scenery and light intersect.

A key element in my design aesthetics is to always capture the architectural landscape of a set. In my process, I find ways that I can feature the architectural nuances of scenic design. If there are windows in the set, I am plotting fixtures that are focused on the window to portray the idea of a light source - whether natural as the sun or fabricated as a street lamp, projecting inside the cabin from the outside world. In the figure below, I give you an example of how I was able to execute this idea.





Figure 2.5: *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 2

In the figure above, you can see the difference between the warm light for the interior of the cabin versus the cool light that is shuttered to the window frames. The light fixture is also a color-changing LED, so there is flexibility to shift in color and tone for the time of day and emotional moments. In this example, I am contributing to the storytelling and providing the audience with a sense of the time of day from the warm lamp light inside the cabin, and the cool moonlight projecting from outside the window.

Another way I am working to accentuate the architecture of the set is to study the vertical and horizontal features of the scenic design. Meaning - what is standing above human height and how wide are those objects? This is important because the scenic backdrop is the first thing the audience will see as they enter the theater. How the lights fall upon the set will begin to inform the audience of the world they are going to experience. When I consider how the light will intersect with the set, I have the opportunity to add depth and richness to the complete stage

picture. For example, if I were to add a light and focus it on the back wall of a set that has wood paneling, I can now bring out the richness of that wall. This would avoid light bouncing from other fixtures and adding flare to the wall in an unpleasant way. That intentional light that I hung will cancel out the undesired bounce.



Figure 2.6: *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 3

In *Hells Canyon*, walls were something that ended up being cut due to budget limitations. The first round of drawings from the scenic designer, Micheal Wogulis had several vertical slats that were constructed in a way to make one connected wall surface. We were left with the challenge of how we could revise the design to fit the needs of having walls, doorways, and isolated rooms in this cabin that the script called for. I took the challenge as an opportunity for the lights to do some heavy lifting in this iteration. The final scenic design was creative. The main playing space was a living room center stage with the kitchen directly upstage. The master bedroom was stage left of the living and the guest room was stage right. There were doorways connected to each room, including the upstage bathroom that led offstage and the main entryway of the cabin, which was stage left - upstage of the guest room. There were three freestanding

windows, one for the master bedroom, one for the kitchen, and one for the guestroom. Bookshelves were placed around to add more vertical structures.



Figure 2.7: *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 4

After talking with the director, I began to understand that it was important for the world to have the ability to shift between realism and surrealism. I worked closely with the set designer on ways to install practical light fixtures, which is a term used to describe non-theatrical light sources that would truly function in a show, ie. table lamps. We would also discreetly install theatrical lights in positions that would seem unnatural to have in a lodging cabin. For instance, there was a table lamp per room, and a floor lamp next to the bookshelf. In these same areas, I worked to put small footlights called Birdies amongst where the practical lights lived. Using this method, I was able to light the scene naturally using practicals along with conventional lights from the lighting grid. This gives off the aesthetics that the light is coming from the table lamp

itself. So in the moments of surrealness, I shifted to the light that came from the lower positions to feature light on the subjects that would seem unnatural to previously established realistic light. For instance, there is a moment when Ariel is sleeping walking in the middle of the night with a knife in her hand, and she is stuck in a trance. I use the birdies to light her from the deck to give an eerie glow. The lighting surrounding her was cool and white to give off the time of night, and using the warm birdie added contrast and allowed that gesture to read as a surreal shift.



Figure 2.8: *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 5

As I kept brainstorming about this idea of surrealness vs reality, upon my research I came across the idea of adding footlights to surround upstage of the playing space, right behind the painted deck. The lights were roughly 2 feet apart, pointed up at a 45-degree angle, focusing downstage with a gobo in each fixture. A gobo is a steel cut-out template that can be placed inside the gate of a light to project any image desired. I was inspired by the fact that everything paranormal that happens is sourced from Ariel, and the land that the cabin sits on is connected to her ancestors. So Ariel's presence is causing the land to react. This also sparked my intrigue with the land, woods, and beyond the cabin. I felt it was informative to understand the outside

environment since the land has a history to Ariel's bloodline - and ultimately is a character in the story.

One of the benefits of having to cut the walls, I was able to make use of that negative space. This allowed for those footlights to be architecture in the air. This added another layer of depth to the scenography. The lights were used in Ariel's heightened emotions when she would have a trance, which was to connect her with the ties of the land. Using these lights with a gobo and haze, I was able to create dynamic beam architecture in the air. It was something reminiscent of tree branches. Below is an image that inspired my design decision



Figure 2.9: *Hell's Canyon* Research Photo

The next image shows how I was able to take this idea from the research and experiment in our light lab on campus. Since I knew I wanted to replicate this idea theatrically, I considered what tools I had. I took lighting instruments and placed them on floor plates with a gobo, and I used haze to understand how they would be actualized.



Figure 2.10: *Hell's Canyon* Lab Research Photo 1

The most informative part of this experiment was inviting the director, Vanessa Stalling, into the lab to explore with me. I wanted her to have a clear understanding of what I was conveying in my concept. We learned since this was such a strong gesture, that it would best be used when Ariel is at the peak of her emotions, which is the most climactic part of the play. Since we decided that this is an Ariel light, I made sure that the color of the light should be gold, which was her color. Gold is the representation of her ancestors who were murdered for the gold they were mining down by Snake River which is the origin of 'The Hell's Canyon Massacre'.

The next photo is the final realized version. This moment takes place in the first scene of the play. Ariel is having an emotional reaction to the cabin as she enters for the first time and has no idea that her ancestors are tied to this land. As she is the first character to appear, I connect

this lighting composition to Ariel's presence and the emotions she is invoking at this moment.  
The land is calling out to her!



Figure 2.11: *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 6

As I further learned that beam architecture was critical to the story we were telling, there was an opportunity to discover more possible lighting positions and directionality. In the light lab, I set up some mannequins to explore how light would feel on the body. While using haze and mock-up practical items, I was able to confirm some aesthetic choices that I wanted to convey onstage. I knew that I wanted to use low-angle side lighting, which is called booms. These positions are really useful to accentuate the architecture of the body and scenic elements, as side light typically highlights features of a subject, and front light will traditionally flatten it out. The figure below shows select images of my lab exploration.



Figure 2.12: *Hell's Canyon* Lab Research Photo 2

In this final section of this chapter, I will display the importance of research and lighting explorations in model form. During this process, I was able to do lighting tests with the model that the Scenic Designer created. It was helpful to truly understand the relationship between bodies in space and the furniture inside the set. I learned a significant amount about how shadows would fall and cascaded on the floor and other scenic items. I was able to get a true understanding of how the booms would react to their focus point onstage. I understood the relationship between the boom positions and where the light would land onstage.

In the figure on the next page, you will see how I was able to learn from the model lighting exploration to the final realized design.



**HELL'S CANYON**  
LIGHTING RESEARCH  
Light Lab Exploration



Figure 2.13: *Hell's Canyon* Lab Research Photo 3

This image shows the translation of ideas from the lab to the final stage composition.



Figure 2.14: *Hell's Canyon* Production Photo 7

From photo research to the collective conversation with the creative team, and lab explorations, you have witnessed the steps in my process. Each decision made came from either calculated strategic research or allowing for organic discoveries to reveal themselves. This was stimulated through meaningful conversations with the creative team and understanding the tools we have and what the true intended purpose was. As Lupe would say “The form revealed itself from truly understanding the function”. We could have not gotten to this final place without deep exploration in this process and the comprehension of what we wanted to say.

## CHAPTER 4 (*BUNNY BUNNY* A DEVISED PIECE WITH NO BOUNDARIES)

Written, Directed, and Choreographed by Raja Feather Kelly, *Bunny Bunny* is an evening-length ensemble dance-theater performance. The project dissects Power, Greed, Fear, Betrayal, and Love. By appropriating reality television, celebrity culture, and social media, the work celebrates and criticizes popular media while creating a surreal and dystopian docu-fiction melodrama.

*“This is the fantasy of seven bunny rabbits, running away from home and having their lives surveilled. Tune in to find out what happens when these bunnies stop living life and start living fear.”*

- Raja Feather Kelly



Figure 3.1: *Bunny Bunny* Production Photo 1

This work was a devised piece of theatre, where the process allowed for theatrical discoveries to organically reveal themselves inside the rehearsal room. While the initial script had plot structures and ideas of staging, we were not held captive by those devices. Allowing for new ideas and happy accidents to take life in the process, Raja’s practices allowed for fluidity to

occur in the rehearsal room to create a safe space where each individual felt comfortable contributing to the project.

Within days of the first rehearsal, he began to stage the show while working on choreography and developing the structure for the blocking. He was interested in shaping the form first, as this may differ from other rehearsal practices. In most traditional cases, there could be at least 1 - 2 weeks where directors will focus on table work. This is where a director sits down with the cast to do a deep script and character analysis before staging the show. This would allow the performers to discover the meaning inside of their dialog and the relationships from one character to another before staging happens. This is equivalent to understanding the function of the character's role and how they affect the story. Raja wasn't interested in working that way.

Since the scenic design had several moving parts including a turntable platform where the majority of the staging took place, it was important for the characters to become familiar with these elements and how they would function in the scene transitions. For this reason, Raja staged the entire show, working from the last staged moment of each scene and how it flowed into each transition. This all became before doing any detailed scene work or running lines in the context of the staging. He admitted to the cast that it was important for them to take the time and learn their lines outside of rehearsal, as this process would not allow them to get off-book by running scenes continuously.

Once the form was established, the actors were then given the challenge of how their characters would arrive at these locations. This created some great discoveries for character development along with how the design would coincide with the world. What would be the motivation behind the characters moving to their next spot with an emotional drive? How does

lighting follow the same journey or how do I as the Lighting Designer provide their motivation? How does my form delegate the character's function? It seems as if we may be working backward with the principles of 'Form Follows Function', but that is the true nature of devised work.

In the beginning phase, I was lost and didn't quite understand the script. On the first design meeting with Raja, he asked if we understood the play – and if we did, then to let him know, because he had no clue as well. This was a true testament to Raja's director style and process. He truly wants this to be a collaborative endeavor with all parties. I understood at that moment, the function was to come last, as the form was the anchor of this project. Much like Lupe said, *"I'mma just go... And then we'll figure it out from there"*. In the song, Lupe hasn't developed a form yet, so he just begins to rap (or function). So while staying true to himself as an artist, the form revealed itself. At the end of the song, he states, *"This is my form, now what the function be"*. The concept has now inverted itself. It is similar to the age-old question, "What came first, the chicken or the egg". I relate this much to Raja's process. He started with a script based on themes of McCarthyism and allowed that to anchor the little function he needed at the time. In the next phase, he developed a conceptualized idea for the aesthetics of the show. In our first meeting, he shared his broad sense of visuals with the creative team. The missing piece to the puzzle was – How does it all connect? How do we develop the devices needed to relate to an audience? We were missing that function, but he had developed the shape enough to devise a way in connecting the pieces.

After understanding what the process was going to be, it freed me to think differently about how I would proceed with my design. I admittedly was still confused with the show but took comfort in diving into the research and directions he led me. During a one-on-one meeting

with Raja, he gave me a foundation of visuals of where I could begin to explore. We talked about having different categories of aesthetics we would develop throughout the piece. One of the first things he mentioned, he didn't want the lights to feel overly theatrical. He wanted it to feel like the light was coming from within the playing space.

The turntable platform was broken up into 4 rooms with dividing walls: the living room, bedroom, kitchen, and hallway. I worked with the scenic designer, Raphael Mishler to place practical lighting inside each room of the platform. We wanted the scenes to feel as if they were lit by practical lighting fixtures to feel realistic to the lives of the characters.

The figure below shows the scene configurations in model form. Each practical was wired to a battery and controlled through wireless DMX, which is a signal protocol used to control theatrical lights through a transceiver. We used this method because the turntable needed the flexibility to do full 360° rotations without the legs of the platform getting tangled in the cable path.



Figure 3.2: *Bunny Bunny* Scenographic Model

Having the flexibility of these wirelessly controlled practical lights gave us the ability to keep light contained in each room. The next image shows a production photo from a scene that was primarily lit by practical lights.



Figure 3.3: *Bunny Bunny* Production Photo 2

In this scene, the characters are solely lit by the practicals with no exterior conventional lighting support. The practicals consist of one horizontal vanity light that can be seen in the photo. It's providing the key light that's lighting the upstage half of the body, adding a sense of mystery. The other practicals are two vertical fluorescent tubes with cool white LED tape installed inside. There is one mounted to the left edge of the wall. You can see it provides a soft white glow on the back of the actor that is standing left of the photo. The second tube is mounted on the wall, on the right side of the door. This light is providing a subtle soft white glow to

highlight the contour of the actor standing right in the photo. In this scene, the two characters are holding a conversation in a private moment, where they hope to not draw too much attention. The dim lighting conveys the idea and is the motivation for this design choice.

Outside of the use of realistic practical lighting, there were themes of surrealism that we wanted to explore as well. After discussing this idea with Raja, he informed me to watch the 1977 version of *Suspiria* to research some aesthetics he was interested in exploring with surreal lighting. *Suspiria* is an Italian supernatural horror film that takes place in a ballet school where suspicious deaths keep occurring. The figure below shows screenshots from the referenced movie.



Figure 3.4: *Bunny Bunny* Research Collage 1



After watching the movie, I was inspired by the use of saturated colors and how it was applied using complementary color theory. The red against the blues and the blues against the oranges gave me a color palate to build the foundation of my design. Typically I would want a firm grasp on the story first, but I allowed myself to break those rules nonetheless. I took these ideas and constructed the form of my design. I gave myself the tools needed to make swift changes, even when I did not have a full sense of how I would design each moment. I made certain that I plotted color-changing LED fixtures that would give the flexibility to quickly shift colors and lighting positions that would project a dynamic highlight to the architecture of the body and scenic elements. I plotted lights that were focused on all the windows and exterior doorways that could give a unique aesthetics to the stage picture. The image below shows how I was able to make a design decision based on my understanding of the form before I knew how it would function.



Figure 3.5: *Bunny Bunny* Production Photo 3

The red hue of light is coming from the window to the right of the photo, creating a complement of colors on the body that's reminiscent of the movie, *Suspiria*. I would've not been able to make this design decision when plotting my lighting systems without understanding the devices I created through research that developed into my form.

One of the most impactful moments of this process and the translation to the final stage picture was this four-minute-long dance sequence to the music of *Cut To The Feeling* by Yawning Portal. To describe, it was the climax of the play for what we called "The Birthday Party Death Scene". There was a birthday party thrown to mask the planned death of one of the characters, Noms, to where he would be killed by a surprise attack. The story of this staging sequence was completely told through dance. The cast first learned the complete dance and just focused on learning the counts. Once the dance was taught, that's when Raja began to structure how the death would take place within the scene. He started with the form first, then he was able to deconstruct the dance to add the function.

The most beautiful part of this moment was bringing the dialogue to a halt where we experienced this intense dance break for four minutes straight. We invited the audience to be stimulated by the emotions they were evoked with. The music was very trance-like with a mix of emotions between happy and sad...similar to a crying clown. It was energetic, but subdued.

The moment when the actual death took place, all of the characters took out confetti canyons, except for Noms while dancing in slow motion. These characters then turned facing towards Noms and shot the confetti cannons in the air to symbolize the murder and death of Noms. He then fell to the ground and died.

I took this as a key design opportunity to be playful with the form and not be held bound by dramaturgical constraints. Dramaturgically, nothing could be provided to make an informed

design decision. This moment was based on absurdity, so I heavily relied on the venustas - the beauty. I started the dance sequence with subtle flickering lights to accent the slow-motion dance. I then transitioned to fast-paced white strobe lights as the drums kicked in and the focus shifted solely to the dance party.

Once the confetti cannons were fired, I transitioned the fast-paced white strobe lighting to slow-rotating colors that were projected to where the characters were dancing. I also included a faster rate of rotating colors to the walls of the mezzanine above the playing space to accentuate the explosion of confetti cannons and match the sound of fireworks. It was hauntingly beautiful. Below are two production photos. The first photo shows the start of the birthday party and the second photo shows the death explosion of the confetti cannons.



Figure 3.6: *Bunny Bunny* Production Photo 4



Figure 3.7: *Bunny Bunny* Production Photo 5

In conclusion, working in a devised process invites the form to have the duality of being solid, yet malleable – defined, but unconstrained. We set rules, but by no means were the rules ‘The Law’, except when the action actively worked against the purpose of the process. It is similar to saying, “The only rule is, there are no rules”. As soon as a player presented themselves as having the urge to make logical sense out of what was happening onstage by the direction, they are now actively working against the purpose, the form, and the function. The play is not based on logic, so those rules of the world that we live in daily do not apply to the logic of *Bunny Bunny*. The purpose is to be embodied in this absurd dystopian docu-fiction melodrama. So how do you add logic in a world with no logic? You build a frame, a world, a set of rules, and a function; you then break those rules to find the meaning of what you are trying to say cohesively.

The rules I created for the lighting design were based solely on the form. It began with building a toolbox of aesthetics, translating them into my lighting plot, and carrying them throughout the rehearsal and tech process. Only once when we were in the technical rehearsal phase did my function truly come to life. The function followed my form, and I followed the function. This process showed me that it's not always one following the other, but it must be a unified marriage of both principles to create one cohesive process and experience. As a designer, I am the form into which I bring my aesthetics based on influences in how I see the world into the process. My venustas! This is the true nature of devised work. Only once you know the rules can you break them!

## CONCLUSION

In my journey of grad school, I am walking away with a new refined identity for the type of artist I've grown to be. I am now more confident in my ability to be a strong and efficient collaborator with fellow artistic partners. I've gained clarity in the form of my process. Once I was able to allow all the influences that define me as a person first, I allowed those same influences to align with myself as an artist. We are both the same!

The art of hip-hop and how the genre can craft compelling stories in its rawest and lyrical form gave me the intellect needed to dissect a script from my perspective of the world. The culture of hip-hop has a dynamic and bold influence on the world culture as a whole, whether it be spoken word, music, dance, or art. The genre is cemented in poetic essence and a vernacular structure that connects to an emotional and deeply rooted cultural reference for people of color. I embody all of this with my artistic voice. My design aesthetics are just as bold and daring.

Combining my cultural identity with the structure of the 'Form Follow Function', I have given myself solid principles to plant myself and support my design decisions. I truly believe that we as artists must exhibit these three principles when creating. Everything you do must be solid, useful, and beautiful. I will continue to hold these principles up when formulating future my design research.

I have defined the gravity of the principles that I hold dear to myself and my creative journey. I will continue to refine my process as I travel further into my career, and develop new ways to be an impactful and influential artist of my time and beyond.

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