Matthew J. Kennedy

WRITER'S STATEMENT

As a design and theater historian, Matthew's writing focuses on objects, environments, history, and culture. Through object- and performance-driven research and criticism, he aims to reveal meaning in cultural production, often through the lens of identity or human experience.

Matthew's writing, appearing in print and on digital platforms, has featured original research and reporting, including interviews with experts and thoughtful interpretation.

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EAST SIDE, WEST SIDE

Matthew J. Kennedy

A detective would likely tell you that a smoking gun is helpful evidence when attempting to solve a murder mystery. Though the smoking gun might not always be available, sometimes cosmetics tangled in fringe can serve as a damning clue.

"ONLY RARELY DOES ANY ONE TIME STAND OUT SO THAT WE REMEMBER IT AND SAY, 'THAT'S WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED.'"

East Side, West Side is a 1949 urban noir drama based on a novel by Marcia Davenport. James Mason and Barbara Stanwyck star as Brandon and Jessie Bourne, a New York City couple whose marriage is plagued by a past infidelity. At the start of the film, Brandon goes out one night without Jessie, and she later learns that his former mistress, Isabel Lorrison (Ava Gardner), has returned to the city after some time away—and Jessie is right to be concerned. Jess is supported by Rosa Senta (Cyd Charisse), through whom she meets Mark Dwyer (Van Heflin), with whom she develops a friendly relationship. Mark—with his nice-guy charm, receding hairline, and genuine interest in Jess—is a clever foil to the debonair, cocktail-swirling, mistress-chasing Bran. The characters' relationships swirl as friendships are made and lusts are pursued, culminating in betrayal, dissolution, and murder. As the title implies, vague tensions between east-side elites and west-side working-class community roil amid the drama.[1] With a screenplay by Isobel Lennart, the film was directed by Mervyn LeRoy, with art direction by Randall Duell and Cedric Gibbons, set decoration by Edwin B. Willis, and some textiles designed by Dorothy Liebes, including screens, draperies, and upholsteries.

Throughout the film, textiles adorn various interiors and serve to characterize space and people. Liebes weavings have a particular impact in two interiors: the Del Rio nightclub and Isabel's apartment. Both are glamorous, bright, and chic, with a hint of scandal. (These interiors contrast with the Bournes' apartment, which is grand and traditional with floral fabrics, wingback and tufted club chairs, crown molding, chinoiserie, carved-marble fireplaces, and grand staircases.) Liebes often deployed color vibrantly in her textiles, but the technology of the day required her to work within the constraints of black-and-white film. She therefore chose metallic and textural materials that would animate or evoke in gray scale while still achieving an effect that is uniquely Liebes.

In the Del Rio nightclub—to which Bran escapes on that initial, consequential night away from Jess and encounters Isabel—Liebes's textiles are almost immediately recognizable as Isabel sashays through the club and they shimmer into frame. Floor-to-ceiling panels about six feet wide flank the club's interior entrance, in addition to sectioning off other areas of the space. Horizontal rods are connected by metallic threads in contrasting tones and variable widths, creating a symmetrical striped pattern across each panel. A slight space exists between the suspended rods, offering a peekaboo effect into the club. Though the movie was filmed in black-and-white, the light gray suggests a light or muted color from which the metallic threads sparkle. It's as if the metallic actually comes through on the screen, with the sparkling effect enlivened by the movement of the camera.[2] The club is outfitted with other modernist touches, including mirror-framed doorways, a tiled glass panel above the bandstand, and an Isamu Noguchi–esque mobile suspended above dining and drinking clubgoers.

The next day, Bran is confronted by Isabel in his office and is coaxed to her apartment (he warns her to think with her brain, which he himself is not doing). For Isabel's apartment, Willis and Liebes incorporated both metallics and texture into the textiles. The use of the metallic threads, in the curtains, again brings a glamor to her space but also associates it with the nightclub and the potential for drama that entails. Throughout the living room, eclectic accessories, such as Blackamoor lamps and a Corinthian column–supported glass-top table, pose amid sumptuous but streamlined furniture.

As Isabel and Bran argue over the status of their relationship (she's a "yes!" and he's a "no! but actually not no!"), she transitions to a couch.

Interior of the Del Rio nightclub featuring a Dorothy Liebes panel in *East Side, West Side*, 1949; Directed by Mervyn LeRoy (American, 1900–1987); Art Direction by Randall Duell (American, 1903–1992) and Cedric Gibbons (American, 1890–1960); Set decoration by Edwin B. Willis (American, 1893–1963); Textiles designed by Dorothy Wright Liebes (American, 1897–1972); Distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Beverly Hills, California, USA); Via Prime Video

Upholstery of a couch and pillow in the interior of Isabel Lorrison's apartment in *East Side, West Side*, 1949; Directed by Mervyn LeRoy (American, 1900–1987); Art Direction by Randall Duell (American, 1903–1992) and Cedric Gibbons (American, 1890–1960); Set decoration by Edwin B. Willis (American, 1893–1963); Textiles designed by Dorothy Wright Liebes (American, 1897–1972); Distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Beverly Hills, California, USA); Via Prime Video

In the couch and accompanying pillow upholstery, rows of long, lustrous pile create a restrained, fur-like texture that welcomes touch and conveys elevated comfort.[3] As Isabel questions why Bran has not yet left the apartment despite his resolution to stop associating with her, she reclines on the couch, removing her earrings and shoes. "Earrings off? Shoes off? Same old routine," Bran responds to her unsubtle seduction, adding, "Aren't you getting a little obvious, darling?" Isabel allows her coiffed hair, structural face, and slender frame to nestle invitingly into the fabrics. After some further dialogue, the scene cuts away, and Mr. Bourne does not make it home to his wife for dinner that evening.

"WHEN A GUY DITCHES A GIRL, WHY IS HE ALWAYS THE ONE WITH THE LONG, SUFFERING FACE?"

There is a bar in *East Side, West Side* that serves as a stark contrast to the otherwise expensive, modern or traditional interiors presented throughout the film.[4] Mark meets Rosa there when she hopes he has time to spend the evening with her, but he only has time for one drink. The cheapness of this bar is partly conveyed through the non-Liebes, gingham-like checked tablecloths—the look is more "family picnic in the park" or "beers with your buddies" than elegant, impressive date night. All speaking women in this scene know that they are being dumped in one way or another. Mark admits to liking Jess so Rosa insists that her interest in him is a mere "kid's crush"—at least that's what she tells herself to make his rejection bearable. It is also here that Felice Backett (Beverly Michaels), a secondary love interest of Isabel's sugar daddy, Alec Dawning (Douglas Kennedy), is officially introduced. "Are you sure that Lorrison dame won't mind?" she angrily presses regarding his being there with her. Her feathered hat, pearl necklace, mink wrap, and long gloves look ridiculous and perturbed against the checked cloth.

"SHE THREW A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE IN HIS FACE AND WALKED OUT."

When getting a manicure, do you ever think, *which color would be least conspicuous should I be implicated in a murder?*

The story's dramatic climax begins when Bran leaves a message for Jess to call him—at Isabel's telephone number. He reports that he has found Isabel dead in her apartment. The characters quickly assemble at the crime scene to better understand the situation. As a member of law enforcement, Mark takes charge. In the bedroom with Isabel's dead body, Mark sifts through a disheveled pile of fringe from a lampshade (possibly the murder weapon) until he finds a small, triangular, dark-colored chip that appears to be a broken-off fingernail (red, as is later stated and given the fashions of the time). He immediately checks the fingers of the deceased victim to see if it might be hers—no match. He returns to the living room, where Jess hurriedly approaches him and asks if everything will be okay. While he comforts her, he holds her hands and subtly inspects her tips: her unvarnished nails are intact.

Mark follows clues to the murder back to the Del Rio club. He learns that Alec has rented out the club for the early evening, during which Isabel and Felice had a confrontation. As Mark questions the situation with the club staff, Felice enters the club, disgruntled and framed by the sparkling Liebes panels. The sparkle has become cinematic shorthand for a glamorous troublemaker. Mark convinces Felice to accompany him to a party, after which an uncomfortable physical altercation ensues that renders Felice unconscious. In the next scene, Mark enters the police precinct, closely followed by Felice, who is now conscious but seemingly in shock. Her long gloves have been removed to reveal that, in an anti-Cinderella moment, the broken nail from the crime scene matches the jagged break and color of her third fingertip.

Although Isabel's murder is solved, Bran and Jess's marriage is not saved. He claims that Isabel is no longer between them, and she retorts, "You're not innocent of her death. You just didn't kill her." She leaves him, and the final shot of the film is of his back as he gazes at the view out their east-facing terrace.

Liebes textiles excel materially through the motion picture; despite being devoid of color, they still read as Liebes's designs.[5] They also contribute to the use of modern design in film set decoration to characterize that which is anti-traditional, transgressive, and—in the case of *East Side, West Side*—glamorous and sexy.

This article was originally published on the digital platform A Dark, A Light, A Bright: The Designs of Dorothy Liebes.

NOTES

Note on section header quotes: the first is said by Jess in her opening voice-over monologue; the second is said by Rosa to Mark before he breaks up with her; the third is said by the host at Del Rio, who is recounting Felice's behavior before she left the club to go murder Isabel.

[1] In the 1940s, the Upper West Side of Manhattan was home to immigrants and the working class, in contrast to its current affluent, uptown status.

[2] Susan Brown, "Glitter," in *A Dark, A Light, A Bright: The Designs of Dorothy Liebes*, eds. Susan Brown and Alexa Griffith Winton (New York: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 160–61.

[3] Susan Brown, "Texture," in *A Dark, A Light, A Bright: The Designs of Dorothy Liebes*, eds. Susan Brown and Alexa Griffith Winton (New York: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 112–13.

[4] Later in the film, Mark's working-class roots are also reinforced by a visit to his West Side neighborhood, depicted through brick walls and pavement of the streetscape—no sumptuous or sparkling textiles there.

[5] Alexa Griffith Winton, "Vibrance and Luminosity," in *A Dark, A Light, A Bright: The Designs of Dorothy Liebes*, eds. Susan Brown and Alexa Griffith Winton (New York: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 74.

Matthew J. Kennedy

FRAMING THE BULLIES

Bright-faced youths peer back at you from a vibrant web of floral foliage. But this wallpaper, titled Bullies, strikes a scornful tone.

Multi-disciplinary artist Virgil Marti sourced the portraits seen in the wallpaper from his junior high school yearbook, selecting pictures of boys who had bullied him. When Bullies was displayed at the Armory Show art fair in New York in 1999, art critic Holland Cotter described it as "every shy, gay 98-pound weakling's idea of sweet revenge: to enshrine the bullies of the world in a public Hall of Shame."[i] Revenge can be a dish served cold, or simply screen-printed on Tyvek.

Designed in 1992, Bullies was first installed in the boiler room of a former elementary school in Philadelphia—the choice of place alluding to secluded spaces, away from supervision, that often precipitate adolescent bullying and other mischievous activities.[ii] The paper was also cheekily installed in the men's restroom on a wall behind a row of urinals at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, where Marti is a master printer. Marti often designs his wallpapers to be installed in a variety of locations, allowing the different physical contexts to inflect their meaning.

The tension between "good taste" and "bad taste" permeates Marti's work. In Bullies, the wallpaper's pattern is an appropriation of the eighteenth-century French toile motif, which typically boasts vignettes of pastoral figures embedded in leafy, flowery frames. But Marti intentionally bastardizes this traditional pattern, saturating the color palette to a garish flamboyance with Day-Glo inks, burdening the visually busy surface texture with black velvet flocking, and maintaining the boys' 1970s hairstyles. In doing so, he feminizes the boys and questions our attachment to the status of objects, however we encounter them.

Marti came to wallpaper as an extension of his work in painting, enjoying the constraints of the medium imposed by architecture.[iii] Bullies was his first foray into wallpaper, and is part of his larger interrogation into the nostalgic and cultural meanings that wallpaper and interior decorative elements can hold for people. The color palette and flocked texture of Bullies, in particular, were inspired by his 1970s upbringing. Marti's engagement with wallpaper, as well as with popular and mass imagery, places him in the lineage of transformative twentieth-century Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol (see his Cows in Cooper Hewitt's collection) and Robert Indiana, who also looked to wallpaper as an outlet for their artistic practices.

NOTES

[i] Holland Cotter, "Virgil Marti," *The New York Times*, May 28, 1999.
[ii] Elissa Auther, "Wallpaper, the Decorative, and Installation Art," in Maria Elena Buszek, ed., *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2011), 126–127.
[iii] "Virgil Marti Interview Part Two," Daniel Abraham, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm9eGRdEWk8.

This article originally appeared as part of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's "Object of the Week" blog series.

Sidewall, Bullies, 1992 (USA); Designed by Virgil Marti (American, b. 1962); Screen-printed, rayon flock on tyvek; H x W: 574 x 138.5 cm (18 ft. 10 in. x 54 1/2 in.); Museum purchase from General Acquisitions Endowment and Friends of Wallcoverings Funds through gift of the Raymond Family in honor of Paul Raymond, 2002-4-1; Photo by Matt Flynn © Smithsonian Institution

BEHIND THE NUMBERS: PAUL RAND

Matthew J. Kennedy

LOT 255 Wright's Paul Rand: The Art of Design sale, September 13, 2018: Collection of twenty-eight Christmas drawings. With an estimate of $2,000–$3,000, the group sold for $16,250. Some reasons for the high price:

THE POET AND THE BUSINESSMAN

Paul Rand never completed any formalized graphic design education, yet he created some of the most recognizable graphics of the twentieth century. From his early days—beginning in the mid-1930s designing for Esquire among other well-known magazines—he applied a modernist aesthetic composed of simple, geometric shapes and effective contrasts to the editorial and commercial realms. In 1955 he launched his freelance career, a perspicacious move, as in 1956 he was hired by both Eliot Noyes, to design the new corporate branding for IBM, and Yale University, to a teaching position he held for almost forty years.

Even in a design-novice crowd, it's difficult to find someone who hasn't seen Rand's work. IBM, ABC, UPS—numerous combinations of letters conjure images of his iconic brandings that still radiate throughout the mediascape. Rand mastered the semiotics behind branding, understanding meaning and morphing the utopian ideal of the "universal" into the recognizable, marketable, and mainstream. As great a contribution as he made to the visual identity of corporate America, he also dedicated his efforts to academia, teaching at Cooper Union and Pratt Institute before going to Yale. László Moholy-Nagy, legendary modernist of Bauhaus fame, synthesized these commercial and pedagogical strands, describing Rand as "an idealist and a realist using the language of the poet and the businessman." While indoctrinated in the rigid modernism of the movement's European pioneers, Rand's creativity and sense of humor relaxed the discipline for a mass audience. As Richard Wright, president of Wright, observes, "He had the talent and the courage to make modernism human."

EYE-BEE-M & HO HO HO

While a sense of whimsy winks from behind much of Rand's corporate work, that sensibility reveals itself in full festive force in this collection of Christmas drawings—a mix of prints and original drawings in acrylic on paper and wallpaper samples. Lacking the refinement of a corporate branding system, for sure, the drawings are a study in Rand's spontaneous creativity, while still utilizing many of the visual principles employed in his broader work, such as reduced, recognizable shapes packed with meaning. A series of colorful dots on a green background suggests a Christmas tree, and red lines on a pink-and-white-striped background emerge as a candy cane in an abstraction that is both sophisticated and cheerful. The set offers twenty-one depictions of Santa Claus in which he takes various forms, including bowling pins, balloons, and a stand-in for Lady Liberty. As an ad man, Rand grasped the popular importance of Christmas and its crowd-pleasing character. Wright speculates that these drawings were intended to be given away rather than formally produced.

HOLIDAY SALE

Rand's work is rarely on the market, primarily because the ubiquity of mass-produced American modernist graphic design seldom produces high sales margins. Further, after Rand's death in 1996, his archive was deposited at Yale with select pieces entering museum collections. "Graphic design isn't an active market, per se, for design," Wright notes. "The success of this sale begins and ends with Paul's reputation in the community." Consisting of almost four hundred items, including pieces from his own collection of fine art and design—all acquired directly from Rand's estate—the sale comprised an alluring capsule of his inspiration and the work of his contemporaries. The fact that the pieces came directly from Rand's collection appealed to bidders, and the sale attracted a broader market than expected. While the iconic branding designs sold for high prices, the market also demonstrated appreciation for Rand's lesser-known, more intimate work. These Christmas drawings drew multiple phone bidders and online interest, but were won by the Letterform Archive in San Francisco, California, which took home a number of other lots as well.

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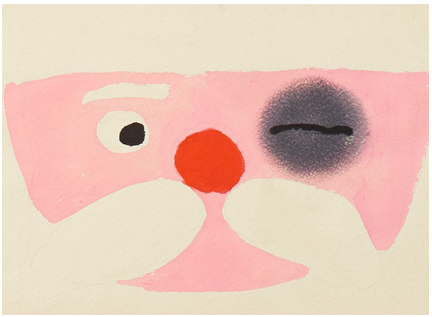

All images from a collection of vintage Paul Rand Christmas drawings, ca. 1955. Courtesy of Wright.

SEEING AND FEELING THOUGHT

Matthew J. Kennedy

Time.
Space.
Now.

These three words accompany intersecting lines projected onto a graphic and gridded black and white stage at the beginning of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night- Time*. The universality of the first two words and the immediacy of the third situate the viewer in a strange but scientifically logical place. Perhaps it is not often that we think of ourselves as points plotted on a grid (although, with Google Maps, maybe it is), but however you may think about yourself and the world, you are asked to think about it in this way—highly quantifiable and conceptually justifiable—for approximately the next two hours and thirty-five minutes of this play because this is how its main character thinks about himself and our world.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (a production of the National Theater, which opened in London in August of 2012 and transferred to Broadway in October 2014) is based on Mark Haddon's 2003 novel of the same name and follows 15-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone as he attempts to pinpoint the culprit in the murder of a neighborhood dog, a crime for which Christopher was falsely accused. What takes the story beyond your standard detective procedural is that Christopher has an unspecified mental condition (likely Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism), and the situation that surrounds him and the truth of the dog's demise are far from ordinary. Rather than being a story about man's best friend, the play profoundly addresses the challenges of being mentally different in a complex, evolving, and relentless world whose circumstances do not always allow for precise and calculable solutions, despite what those intersecting lines on the gridded stage might suggest. The circumstance is instead a messy web of highly unquantifiable issues of family, immorality, sexuality, and mental anxiety—the discovery of which is all catalyzed by the search for truth around the dog. The show's production has been much heralded for its "high-tech" qualities, but truthfully it employs the standard lighting, projection, and sound that grace most theatrical stages on a nightly basis. Its triumph is the implementation and integration of these devices with the story, fusing design, character, and narrative to make visible what is invisible: the mind.

Initially, the set is sparse: a gridded, cube-like structure with dimly glowing beams outlining the space's shape. Beyond these few delineating and distinguishing lines, it is minimalist and sanitized, as if it is a room prepped for surgery. What you come to learn is that this austere atmosphere reflects the ascetic and dutifully accurate visual scape of Christopher's mind. As the play's director Marianne Elliot describes, "Christopher's got a very unique and wonderful and extraordinary and imaginative brain, and the light, the set, the projections, the music, and the sound are all supporting the fact that this is inside his view of the world."[i] The grid reinforces Christopher's penchant for systems, precision, and routine that aligns with his way of thinking. It aligns also with his aversion to touch, a sanitized diagram that supports his physical recoil from proximity to other humans. It is this world—Christopher's world or the way he perceives the world—that is the visual and thematic precipice of this very curious and compelling incident.

As rigid as it might initially seem, this set is also the mind of an energetic, endearing 15-year-old boy. Scenic designer Bunny Christie explained her thoughts on the space: "It needed to feel like a fun environment, more like a computer gaming room, or a club, or a nightclub, or something that had a kind of an energy or excitement to it. And I really felt like it should be a space where Christopher would feel at home."[ii] What allows the set to truly come alive in a playful but meaningful way is that this box of lighting and projected images becomes a tool of space and perception. "Light can do a million different

Scene from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

things," said lighting designer Paule Constable, and in *Curious Incident* it is asked to be a determinant of space, thought, and emotion.[iii] Lights—not the famed theatrical spotlight or racing bulbs on a marquee, but rather flashing LEDs, beams, and screens—create an electrifying dynamism similar to that of a pinball machine or the virtual world of a video game. The simplicity of the gridded canvas of the stage allows a combination of light and projected images to create an imagined materiality consistent with Christopher's very specific, constructed, and thoughtful world. A beam of light signifies a room in a house; a flood of projected graphics captures a busy train terminal; a moving line of LEDs chart Christopher's path of motion; a vast projection of stars becomes the universe of Christopher's daydreams as he imagines being an astronaut.

Beyond just designating space and location, like a map or blueprint, the lighting becomes a manifestation of Christopher's thought process as well as his perception of his place in the world. "How [the environment is] perceived, how it's brought to life is what the lighting designer does," says Constable.[iv] In the early twentieth century, pioneering theatrical designer Adolphe Appia introduced this idea of light as an emotive force in the performance space. Rejecting nineteenth-century conventions of painted drops lit straight on, he favored light for its sculptural quality and employed architectonic sets (such as columns and staircases) to cast dramatic shadows, arguing: "Light is distinguished from visibility by virtue of its power to be expressive."[v] In light of Appia's and Constable's congruent theories, the lighting designer becomes an agent to perception; in *Curious Incident*, when perception, by the character or, by extension, the audience, is integral to the telling of the story, the lighting becomes a translator. Through the use of lighting and projected images, the space of the stage becomes an illustration of Christopher's mind, a playing field that adapts as a surrounding on a thought-by-thought basis.

Christie explains the emotional effect of this buffeting, this integration of thought and space: "At…times, as his energy levels and his anxiety tips out of control, the space can tip out of control as well so that the kind of neurons of his brain are going crazy and fizzing and the energy of that is evident on the set as well."[vi] The character's internal anxiety is reflected in his (and our) external space. For example, Christopher has been taught to recite exponential numbers when he feels stressed to clear his mind of a disturbing social situation. As he recites, the numbers are projected around the stage. But as his anxiety builds in panic and the coping mechanism appears to fail, the numbers overlap into a dizzying, unintelligible mess of numerals while strobe lights flash. More than just seeing a human reaction, the audience is confronted with an overwhelming spectacle as the play's visual presence is engulfed in Christopher's struggle. In a more subdued but no less poignant moment, the near absence of lighting also tells the story. Christopher tries to sleep in a sleeping bag. He lays alone in a dimly lit square while his parents fight, yelling boisterously in total darkness. The darkness echoes Christopher's lack of emotional understanding of the dramatic scene, with the shiny and slippery red material of his sleeping bag reflecting the dim light in a skewed, almost pixelated manner as he rocks or writhes uncomfortably. In scenes such as these, the lighting design makes clear, aided by the otherwise unobtrusive set, that, while other characters are not insignificant, we are with Christopher on his journey; we are inside his mind. It is through his understanding of his situation and the world—his "Now" from the opening projected lines—that we, in turn, learn to empathize with his struggle.

In addition to lighting and projected images, the added element of sound further intensifies this interpretation of Christopher's mind and emotions. Composed primarily of electronic music and mechanical sounds such as trains and beeping, the sound is both an identification of the real world as well as an extrapolation of Christopher's view of it. The gap between the real and the imaged is the result of technical nuance: "In a realistic setting, you cannot alter the pitch or the volume … without destroying the sense of reality. Yet by subtly altering the timing of the rhythm and the length when playing the cue, you can support the emotion of the character—anxiety, impatience, reluctance, happy anticipation, or foreboding."[vii] In the case of *Curious Incident*, this use of sound confronts any emotional or physical vacancy in Christopher's scientific world, provoking his reactions to cacophonous pounding or claustrophobic hums. Digitized beeping is sometimes melodious, but often not; sometimes it is a tool for precise timekeeping and sometimes just a frustrating flurry. The lighting, projections, and sound work in harmony to heighten Christopher's world beyond its narrative reality to the perceived realm of his mind.

Not only is the light- and sound-infused stage of *Curious Incident* a celebration of Christopher's interest in science and technology, but it is also very much a representation of the brain for the modern mind. As Christie enumerated, "I was very keen that it had a sense of technology, and that it felt very contemporary and modern."[viii] The set is so modern, perhaps, that it cleverly preys on our contemporary relationship with technology, using the entire space as a projection surface to manipulate our Digital-Age instinct to stare at any screen in our vision. It becomes a space that is simultaneously euphoric, pleasing, distracting, and frustrating, mimicking the exhilaration of our contemporary congested and over-stimulated brains, brains that constantly thirst for new information. Christopher's world becomes an extreme reflection of our world. Soci-

etally, we have become so accustomed to being flooded with media through screens that witnessing someone's brain treated as such feels almost plausible—until it becomes a challenge to handle, bordering on inhumane sensory assault. In the 1936 film *Modern Times*, Charlie Chaplin famously satirized the mechanical nature of modern man as a result of industrialization by treating the exaggerated cogs of a machine as crushing social creatures. *Curious Incident* similarly brings literally to mind our immersion into the modernized world, our gravitation to mechanical and digital technology, but this time a technology internalized in ways that cause the modern mind to implode. This is not to suggest *Curious Incident* as a cautionary tale, but rather one that accurately harnesses our modern habits in order to access the character's extra-ordinary modern mind and its potential for obstruction.

While the audience at *Curious Incident* sits in the dark, separated by the traditional proscenium, its design—its scenic, lighting, and sound design, that is—bring you through the imaginary membrane of the fourth wall, bypassing the boundary of the body and plunging you into the mind of the character. As Ben Brantley, chief theater critic for the *New York Times*, noted in his review of the Broadway production: "It forces you to adopt, wholesale, the point of view of someone with whom you may initially feel you have little in common."[ix] When you are seeing how Christopher John Francis Boone is thinking and feeling rather than just observing how he is behaving, Christopher becomes more relatable—not just as a human, but as a stream of thoughts and emotions that could very easily parallel our own, and might make each of us reflect on our own challenges and how they may intertwine with our brains' functioning. As Elliott explains: "The audience feels like Christopher is them. He isn't different from them, and he experiences things in a way that we all experience them."[x] Ultimately the set, lighting, projections, and sound invite you into the mind of someone with a mental disability who gets frustrated just as you get frustrated, who is sad just as you are sad, and who hopes to triumph just as you hope to triumph. Beyond the dazzling lights and intrigue of the canine mystery, *Curious Incident* is at its core a heart- and mind-wrenching drama about a troubled child and the parents who cannot (or will not) fully care for him. It is here that the design and technical elements overcome their dazzle to become essential rather than merely spectacular. Because what is design if not a tool to aid our navigation of the world, or, when possible, help with someone else's?

This article was originally published in Objective: The Journal of the History of Design and Curatorial Studies, Parsons School of Design, Spring/ Summer 2016.

NOTES

[i] Curious Broadway, "Creating Christopher's World," YouTube video, 2:08, May 29, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gM-H285LvbM.
[ii] Broadway.com, "Design Broadway: Tony Winner Bunny Christie on A CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME," YouTube video, 5:13, June 17, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XQux-mYNpe4.
[iii] Meredith Lepore, "Women on Broadway: Paule Constable, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," accessed December 14, 2015, http://www.levo.com/articles/career-advice/women-in-broadwaypaule-constablethe-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time.
[iv] Chris Shipman, "Listen: Paule Constable on the role of a Lighting Designer," Royal Opera House, February 20, 2013, accessed December 14, 2015, Paule Constable, http://www.roh.org.uk/news/listen-pauleconstable-on-the-role-of-a-lighting-designer.
[v] Philip Buttenvorth and Joslin McKinney, *Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15.
[vi] Broadway.com, "Design Broadway: Tony Winner Bunny Christie on A CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME," YouTube video, 5:13, June 17, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XQux-mYNpe4.
[vii] Deena Kaye and James LeBrecht, *Sound and Music for the Theatre: The Art and Technique of Design* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2013), 16.
[viii] Broadway.com, "Design Broadway: Tony Winner Bunny Christie on A CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME," YouTube video, 5:13, June 17, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XQux-mYNpe4.
[ix] Ben Brantley, "Plotting the Grid of Sensory Overload: 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time' Opens on Broadway," *New York Times*, October 5, 2014, accessed December 14, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/20 141 10106/theater/the-curious incident-of-the-dog-in-the-nighttime-opens-on-broadway.html.
[x] Curious Broadway, "Creating Christopher's World," YouTube video, 2:08, May 29, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gM-H285LvbM.

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BEHIND THE NUMBERS: FRANCES AND MICHAEL HIGGINS

LOT 617 Treadway Toomey Auctions 20th Century Art & Design sale, March 5, 2016: Mobile by Frances and Michael Higgins, 1960s. Estimated at $1,200–$1,500, the piece sold for $1,900.

BOY MEETS GIRL AND GLASS

Frances Stewart was a professor of art at the University of Georgia when, after World War II, she pursued master's studies at the Chicago Institute of Design. Stewart had been experimenting with such techniques as "bending" glass since 1942, and Michael Higgins, the head of visual design at the school, had taken a keen interest in the art of glass fusing. The two forged a professional and personal relationship over the medium and married in 1948, settling in Riverside, Illinois. Like most newlyweds, they established a home; unlike most newlyweds, their living room furniture featured three kilns frequently fired to up to 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit. Their collaboration in glass fusing in their unconventional setting fueled an inventive approach to everyday objects.

SAGGING AND SLUMPING

Frances and Michael Higgins—or "higgins," as they collectively signed their work— revitalized the studio practice of glass fusing, a technique that had been supplanted by the popularity of glass blowing. Clear sheets of glass were coated in enamels of forty basic colors or decorated with colored pieces of glass, with the resulting designs matched or contrasted with other colors to produce hundreds of secondary colors when fused in glass "sandwiches." The Higginses embraced a matter-of-fact vocabulary to describe their processes: glass heated at high temperatures could "slump" over a mold or be allowed to "sag." The Higginses' work began to glisten and gleam in retail in the 1950s, appearing in department stores such as Marshall Field's and Bloomingdale's. In 1957 the pair began collaborating with the Dearborn Glass Company to develop "Higginsware," an array of domestic products in which color and decoration were infused into the very material of vases, ashtrays, and their famous rondelays (circular discs or square tiles fastened together to create decorative hangings, room dividers, and the like). Though Higginsware garnered the couple national acclaim, they returned to private studio work in 1966, favoring the artistic independence that had been sacrificed in adapting to mass production.

GEOMETRY SUSPENDED

Rondelays are perhaps the Higginses' most iconic and enduring pieces, particularly at auction, having sustained a healthy market presence seemingly contradictory to their do-it-yourself ethos. (Still sold by the Higgins Studio today, the parts must be manually linked by the purchaser.) Lisanne Dickson of the Modern Design Department at Treadway Toomey attributes this success to the rondelays' versatility. "They mark status with no comparable in terms of style," she says, citing the Higginses' use of color and form. While the rondelays may be notable for their service to spatial functionality, a playful spirit effervesces from the Higginses' glass mobiles, also regular contestants at auction. With their pop palette of primary and secondary colors and congregation of humble shapes, an anthropomorphic personality emerges from the suspended pieces. The lot from the Treadway Toomey sale offers a particular vitality and intrigue.

CONNECTING COLLECTORS

This Higgins mobile came from an established Chicago-based collector of modern design. "Collectors like pieces from other collectors," Dickson says. "There's an emotional aspect rather than just 'stuff' from a vendor." Mid-range prices, she also reports, attract a variety of buyers. Dickson priced the piece conservatively, both to manage and drive expectations about its value. Two absentee bids and two telephone bidders were outdone by a LiveAuctioneers buyer, and the piece went to a Los Angeles–based private collector, bringing in a high price for this type of Higgins glass. With a piece of such vibrancy and artistry, it is no mystery that a willing buyer would succumb.

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FRIENDS OF DOROTHY

Matthew J. Kennedy

Bricks were thrown.

Not yellow bricks, of the variety that Dorothy and her friends eased on down. But bricks. And garbage cans. And coins. And bottles. And rocks. All of this debris was airborne because it was June 28, 1969, and the Stonewall uprising was in full swing in New York City.

Myriad mythologies swirl around that night. Judy Garland's funeral had been the day before, on June 27, and it is purported that people were possibly in a *mood*. Possibly. It is also commonly surmised that gay men, lesbians, and people of different sexual orientations and identities had been isolated and invisible from society before that moment, when indeed history holds that these individuals had been living boldly and visibly—albeit with political and social consequences—for decades. [1] Definitely. The brick itself—as the inception of the violence—is a myth! Maybe.[2] And who threw it first, if at all? Please refrain from debating that in the comments.

The reality is—as concisely as possible—that on June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, brave members of the LGBTQIA+ community fought back against this stricture, and this counterforce precipitated a breaking point in the political demands of the LGBTQIA+ community and the gradual mainstreaming of ideologies on gay rights. Writer and filmmaker Shane O'Neil observed, "Stonewall was, at its core, about people reclaiming their narratives from a society that told them they were sick or pitiful or didn't even exist."[3]

Twenty-five years later, Cooper Hewitt's pins enter the story.

In 1994, promoters at Nocturnal nightclub in New York approached the Organization of Lesbian and Gay Architects and Designers (OLGAD) to produce an installation in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising. Conceived by design critic Jonathan Boorstein and designer Seth Joseph Weine, the installation played on the idea of the rainbow and its role as both a symbol of the gay community and its prominence in *The Wizard of Oz*. Boorstein wrote, "I pointed out that rainbows have other appropriate resonances for Stonewall 25. After all, the rebellion that is now called Stonewall was sparked when the police raided a wake for Judy Garland at the Stonewall Bar. And what was one of Garland's most famous songs? 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow.' And what is an old-fashioned euphemism for gay? A friend of Dorothy. Where do all these come from? *The Wizard of Oz*."[4] While the 1939 film was successful and widely popular with mainstream audiences, elements of it have been embraced and amplified by queer culture—themes of independence and otherness, Judy Garland, rainbows, etc. And camp. Lots of camp.

While various individual colors of the rainbow were splashed around the nightclub for the installation, Boorstein and Weine's contribution to the design was the color red: "The design skimmed red lights across the ceiling and down the wall," explained Boorstein, "while the shelf displayed ruby slippers. But not your ordinary ruby slippers: there were to be ruby cowboy boots, ruby birkenstocks, ruby wedgies, ruby construction boots, and so on…covered in red glitter."[5] Boorstein designed these ruby slipper pins as a "thank you" to the individuals who donated their shoes to be turned Technicolor with red glitter. According to Boorstein, the decorations were a disaster; the pins, however, were a hit.[6] Boorstein circulated them amongst friends and colleagues, and he soon saw them worn within the design industry and on strangers sporting them with pride.

The sheen and sparkle of the ruby slipper pins are worlds away from the grime of the Stonewall Inn, formerly a Mafia-run bar known in the late '60s as a haven for the most marginalized individuals of the gay community, such as drag queens and homeless gay youth.[7] The pins therefore represent strides of political progress—from even pre-Stonewall days to the present—forged by organized activism, tolerance, and acceptance.

And, as a friendly reminder, the Smithsonian does hold a pair of Ruby Slippers worn by Judy Garland in the film *The Wizard of Oz*, in the collection of the National Museum of American History.

SOURCES

[1] George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
[2] Shane O'Neil, "Who Threw the First Brick at Stonewall? Let's Argue About It," *New York Times*, May 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/31/us/first-brick-at-stonewall-lgbtq.html.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Designer's statement, 1995.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] *Stonewall Uprising*, directed by Kate Davis and David Heilbroner (Q-Ball Productions for American Experience, 2011).

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Ruby Slipper Pin (one of two) (USA), 1994; Designed by Jonathan Boorstein (American); Plastic, metal; 4 x 2 cm (1 9/16 x 13/16 in.); Gift of Jonathan Boorstein, 1995-9-1