

Theatre designers are people in whom the natural human propensity for noticing things, consciously, unconsciously, and through all the senses, is highly developed. Everything a designer senses and perceives throughout life influences the ideas and images from which designs are created. It is impossible to predict what sights, sounds, experiences, scents, tastes, or feelings will shape a designer's work.

Lighting designer Liz Stillwell describes an incident that illustrates how a strong visual image from her childhood influenced one of her recent designs.

I have a great story about a dance I lit for Ballet Pacifica. It was about the Jews in America riding trains in the U.S. during World War II, while being aware of the Jews in Germany and the trains they were riding. The title is *Different Trains*. I had very strong images when I heard the music and saw the movement. I immediately sketched light shafts and round train headlights and geometric shapes. I also immediately felt the need for bare branch gobos and cold blue and white light for a feeling of black/white/gray.

Later, after the concert, I was having dinner at my mother's and noticed a painting she had that used to hang in my room as a child. I was born in Germany on a military base and my parents bought the painting from a 13-year-old German girl. It is all shades of blue/gray with a cubistic sky, a bare tree, and a round cold moon. I realized all these images, colors, and textures were in my design of *Different Trains*. Germany to me is that painting and I hadn't been aware I had used it verbatim in my design.

Like Liz Stillwell, many theatre designers can recall at least one occasion in their professional lives when they were able to connect a design insight or decision with a specific event, separated in time and often in a vastly different context from the task at hand. In most cases, their awareness of the connection comes after the fact, and often, as in Liz Stillwell's case, seemingly by accident. Actually recognizing a specific connection, however, is the exception rather than the rule. Memory, like imagination, works in mysterious ways, its wonders to perform.

What Do We Remember?

My grandmother was a firm believer in the "universal storage" theory of memory. Whenever I was trying to remember some elusive fact, perhaps in preparation for a school quiz, she would reassure me: "Don't fret. When you