

neither of the planes, frontal or side, that we have just been discussing.

They are a compromise of the compromises. Light coming from the front of the actor (for visibility) but off-set to the side (to help modelling). Mounted high enough to keep the shadows low enough for the actor to dominate them, yet low enough for the light to get into the eye sockets (if the eyebrows are not too bushy or the hat brim too wide) and into the mouth with its all important teeth (if the nose be reasonably restrained in its projection).

The problem in using these angles is threefold. First, they throw diagonal shadows in two contrasting angles away from the actor, making it very difficult to control the light falling on the set. Secondly, they light an area of stage floor considerably in excess of the acting area provided with good face lighting – and that area of lit floor is in a markedly different position from the area where faces are lit. Thirdly, once the angles have been chosen, the compromise between visibility and modelling is fixed. The balance between visibility and modelling is one of the most important features of lighting design. It is such a vital part of the palette that to gain total control we really ought to have separate angles (from separate instruments on separate dimmer channels) for frontal visibility and side modelling.

In other words, should we abandon the traditional pair of spots crossing from side fronts to hit the left and right sides of the face?

Well, with the experience of lighting for the open stage plus a growth in the general number of lighting instruments available (and the dimmer wherewithal to control them) that is precisely what has been happening over the past decade – spurred on by scenic design styles which not only ask light rather than scenery to delineate space, but leave enough free space above the stage for the lighting to be rigged at the necessary angles.

But before considering this further, let us just remind ourselves of the importance of backlight. During earlier stages in the development of lighting, the priorities had to be first to get enough plain illumination and then to add modelling and area control. On considerations of cost-effectiveness, backlighting just had to come well down the list. However if light is to be the actor's environment on the stage as it is in nature, then the light must come from all around. Accordingly we now give a high priority to backlight, rejoicing in, (a) the haze above and behind the actor which helps to separate actor from scenery, (b) the modelling highlights on heads and shoulders, and (c) the possibilities of strong delineation of the acting area.

The vertical angle of backlight is not critical: it need only be twenty or so degrees beyond the vertical and indeed, in many tightly hung rigs, the backlight is virtually a downlight. Whether it is offset to the side is largely dependent on whether it is necessary and desirable to introduce a directional key as part of the motivational concept of a particular lighting picture.

Therefore when we use our compromise-angle two-spot system for the face, we

usually add a third spot as backlight. Thus each acting area is lit with *three primary angles* with a separation of approximately 120 degrees between them. We often mix in a little from other spots from the front and from the sides, but these are *secondary angles* often used as washes to include several areas within their focus settings – and added only in the bigger scenes.

On the other hand, when using a straight-in front light and a pair of side lights, plus a backlight, we are lighting with *four primary angles* with a separation of 90 degrees between them. We may also add a bit from a midway frontal angle, but these are *secondary angles* used only when we can afford to widen out the selected area.

Note that, with the exception of the backlight, the primary and secondary angles become reversed between the two methods.

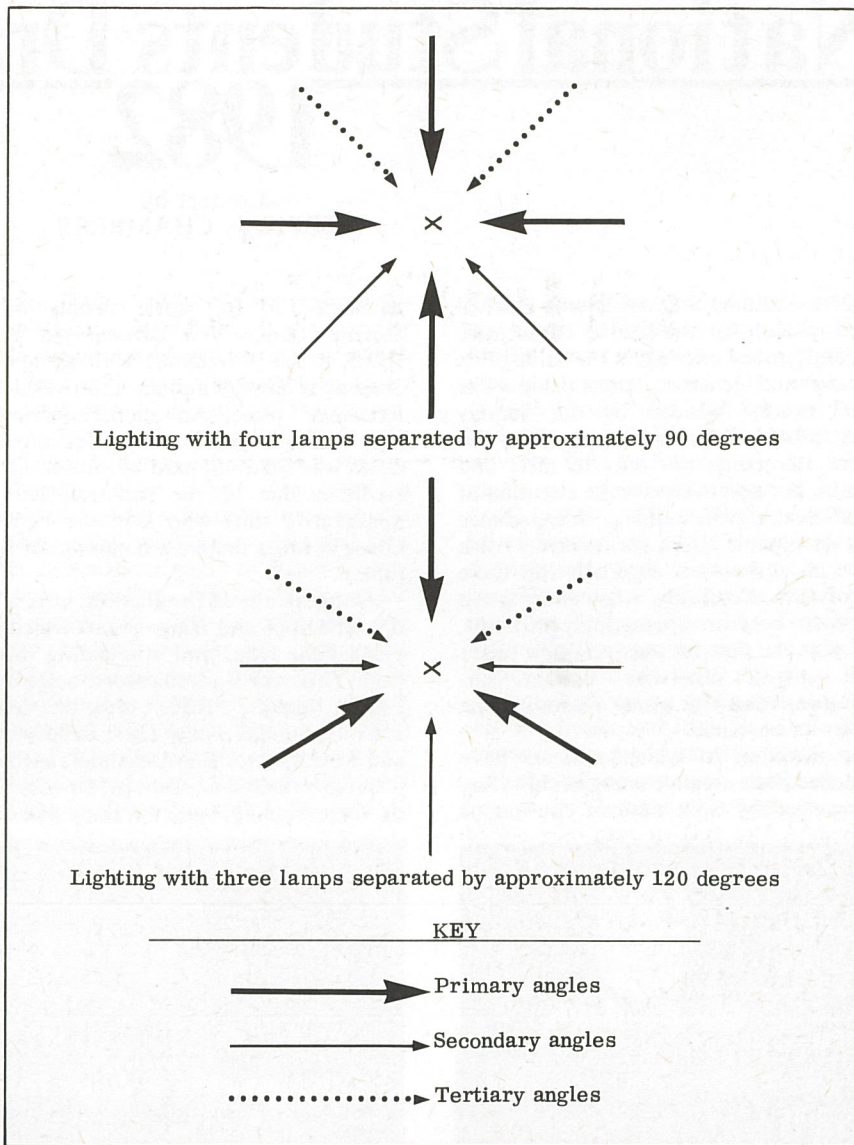
I should add that I have found it convenient, for my own working, to think of directionally motivating backlights as *tertiary angles*.

Which system to use?

Well, assuming the possibility of rigging it, the "4 lights at 90" has a lot going for it – particularly tighter area control because

the side lights can be more vertical if the front is looking after eyes and teeth; and finer quality control because illumination and modelling are on separate dimmers.

But if the stage is cluttered, the auditorium lacking in forward bridge or bar, and equipment a bit short, then there is still a lot of life yet in McCandless angles, updated with backlight.



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