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Tensions between abstraction and replication in early-twentieth-century design : Norman Bel Geddes' designs for Broadway's The Miracle

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TENSIONS BETWEEN ABSTRACTION AND REPLICATION IN EARLY-
TWENTIETH-CENTURY DESIGN: NORMAN BEL GEDDES' DESIGNS
FOR BROADWAY'S *THE MIRACLE*

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE. NORMAN BEL GEDDES AND THE NEW STAGECRAFT.....	1
1.1 MASTER OF “DESIGNS”.....	5
1.2 TERMINOLOGY.....	13
1.3 SOURCES: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	20
1.4 DEFINING AND REDEFINING: THE COURSE OF THE STUDY.....	26
CHAPTER TWO. AN AESTHETIC JOURNEY.....	30
2.1 EARLY MODERNIST PARADIGMS.....	30
2.2 “THE MAGICIAN OF LEOPOLDSKRON”.....	60
2.3 1914: THE BIRTH OF THE NEW STAGECRAFT.....	72
2.4 S, S, S.....	89
CHAPTER THREE. THE CATHEDRAL.....	92
3.1 A SCENOGRAPHIC MISNOMER: <i>THE MIRACLE</i> AS NEW STAGECRAFT.....	95
3.2 WHERE IS THE PROSCENIUM?.....	103
3.3 <i>THE MIRACLE</i> IN LONDON: 1911.....	109
3.4 <i>THE SINGING GLOBE</i>	116
CHAPTER FOUR. COSTUME DESIGN AND THE MIRACLE.....	125
4.1. STAGE DRESS AND SCHOLARSHIP.....	127
4.2 THE STUART COURT MASQUE AND THE MEININGER.....	130
4.3 GEDDES’ PRELIMINARY SKETCHES FOR <i>THE MIRACLE</i>	143
4.4. <i>FUTURIST-IC</i> COSTUMING AND <i>THE MIRACLE</i>	146
4.5. GEOMETRIZATION I: DADA, SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP AND <i>THE MIRACLE</i>	161
4.6. GEOMETRIZATION II: <i>THE MIRACLE</i> AND A BAUHAUS BALLET.....	164
4.7 THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEW STAGECRAFT IN <i>THE MIRACLE</i>	171
CHAPTER FIVE. ENVIRONMENTAL SCENOGRAPHY ON BROADWAY.....	182
REFERENCES.....	200
APPENDIX: HARRY RANSOM CENTER PUBLISHING PERMISSION.....	209
VITA.....	218

ABSTRACT

I make a major contribution to American scenographic historiography with this revised account of Norman Bel Geddes' set for Max Reinhardt's 1924 Broadway production of *The Miracle*, a design theatre scholars have consistently used not only to define Geddes' aesthetic "versatility," but also as a prime exemplar of New Stagecraft style. Based on both secondary and primary research material, I contend that the cathedral setting was neither indicative of Geddes' fundamental aesthetic principles, nor of the aesthetic principles of the New Stagecraft. I firmly establish the principles of the latter within the first definitive, concise demarcation of what constitutes New Stagecraft design as "a dialectic between European Modernism and American realism (informed by technology) that also adheres to Kenneth Macgowan's principle of simplification, suggestion and synthesis," which necessarily excludes the set from the movement altogether. Using this same definition, I also offer historiography Geddes' costume designs for the production as important, but little-known paradigms of New Stagecraft costuming. As part of the costume study, I also reveal the scenographer's preliminary sketches taken directly from his archives and align them stylistically with design practices of three major movements of the European First-Wave Avant Garde (by all indications, Geddes did not have any knowledge of them.) In doing so, I illustrate that the European theatre did not have the monopoly on particular breakthroughs in twentieth-century stage dress. Geddes' early sketches make a strong case for the position that some Modern American costume design was not derivative, but products of original conception shaped by the conditions of The Machine Age, which simultaneously

influenced theatrical design on both continents. I conclude the study by reinstalling *The Miracle* into theatre historiography with a new significance to the American theatre: its set, which included the entire house, was the first in a succession of production designs that continue to traverse the Broadway proscenium, a permanent fixture on The Great White Way for the last century and beyond.

CHAPTER ONE: NORMAN BEL GEDDES AND THE NEW STAGECRAFT

In fact all true draughtsmen draw from the image imprinted in their brain and not from nature. — Baudelaire

My first encounter with the New Stagecraft, an early-twentieth-century design movement with which Norman Bel Geddes continues to be associated, took place quite by accident in New York many years ago. I was teaching an acting class at the William Esper Studio and, by chance, noticed a flyer the school posted for a book discussion, which it held periodically throughout the year. The book at hand was Robert Edmond Jones' (American, 1887-1954) *The Dramatic Imagination*. Jones' name sounded vaguely familiar, but I knew nothing about him, and certainly had never heard of his book, which I assumed to be about acting. Knowing that anything the studio recommended its actors read would be of significance and value, I immediately walked over several blocks to The Drama Book Shop on 40th and 8th and bought a copy. I was surprised to find that Robert Edmond Jones was not an acting teacher, but a designer, and *The Dramatic Imagination* was, at least superficially, a book on the art of designing for the theatre. Jones' words, nevertheless, grabbed my attention immediately. Written in a straightforward but passionate style, I read *The Dramatic Imagination* from cover to cover that evening. I then put the book down, but certainly never forgot it as one of the most inspiring I had ever read—not only about design, but also about the possibilities of the theatre as a total art form.

Years later, in the course of my PhD studies, Jones and the New Stagecraft reappeared in a twentieth-century American theatre course. I immediately recalled Jones' book, but was now becoming acquainted with his designs, as well as those by other American designers associated with the movement, including Norman Bel Geddes.¹ With only a fundamental knowledge of the New Stagecraft and its contributions to scenic reforms in the American theatre, I recognized the recurrence of particular images of Geddes' 1924 set for Broadway's *The Miracle*, which seemed, with its replication of a medieval cathedral, a glaring inclusion of a design that didn't belong with, for example, the work of Jones and Lee Simonson (American, 1888-1967), two of Geddes' New Stagecraft peers. *The Miracle*, nevertheless, intrigued me. It was obviously an outstanding feat in its design and construction, but I wanted to know why its set, an ultra-realistic medieval cathedral, was used so often to represent the New Stagecraft; the cathedral overtly opposed the movement's fundamental rejection of total replication in favor of a suggestive, nuanced theatre artistry that incorporated elements of both abstraction and realism in its notable examples, such as Lee Simonson's *Faust*, an exemplar of New Stagecraft style (see fig. 1.1).

Beginning with my acting training in undergraduate school, I had always been drawn to design more than my classmates, or at least it seemed. In my elective costume design course I not only excelled, but also reveled in the process of creating designs for *Hedda Gabler*, *King Lear* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Performance, nonetheless, was my main interest, and it was this area that I continued to

¹ Norman Bel Geddes (American, 1893-1958) was born in Adrian, Michigan.



Fig. 1.1. Simonson, Lee. Set and Costume Design for Goethe's *Faust* at the New York Theatre Guild. Photograph by Vandamm. 1928. The Billy Rose Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. *New York Public Digital Library*. Web. 7 Mar. 2012.

pursue through an MFA in Acting, and eventually as a casting director and acting teacher in New York. By the time I began my PhD, I was ready to make inquiries into other aspects of theatre, and my interest in design re-emerged. When I began to think of *The Miracle*, I had already started writing about design, not only because I enjoyed it, but also as a way to expand my knowledge of theatre history and stage practice. *The Miracle's* set, I thought, might prove to be something to examine in writing at length. It was, at the very least, worthy of an investigation into what I sensed was an already questionable categorization as New Stagecraft. Thus began my journey into Western stage design during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. I discovered that not only did Geddes' set provide fertile source material for a dissertation, it also opened up new and broader areas of study that traversed decades, continents, styles and areas of design practice, not in the least Geddes', of course. More than an exclusive investigation of a single production, *The Miracle* led to an examination of the New Stagecraft as a whole: from the beginning, you see, one of the most apparent things about the movement is that it lacked clarification in terms of a precise definition. Despite the term's repeated use in theatre historiography, a singular, specific definition of it was nowhere to be found. If I would embark on an exploration of *The Miracle's* set and question its use as exemplary of the New Stagecraft, I first had define it categorically, which I will for the first time as one of the fundamental components of this study.

The New Stagecraft, as I would find, however, was much easier to exemplify through images than it was to delineate through language. This speaks very plainly to

the double-edged sword of writing about theatre's design elements: while there may be an extensive amount of artifacts available (and this is true of a heavily archived production such as *The Miracle*), it is countered by the fact that there very well may be a dearth of written material about these visual artifacts. Design, like the other visual arts, often speaks its own language, which is not always easily analyzed, translated or explained with words. Scholars, consequently, may often be compelled to reach in directions they may not otherwise when writing about design's role in the theatre.

In the chapter sections that follow I will provide a profile of Geddes' multifaceted and ambitious career, define important terminology used throughout the dissertation, offer a review of supporting literature, and, finally, map the course of subsequent chapters that support my fundamental argument. These are, in brief, *The Miracle's* set should be historiographically recategorized, and its costuming should be widely recognized by historiography as prominent examples of New Stagecraft design.

1.1 MASTER OF "DESIGNS"

Norman Bel Geddes was an ostensibly prismatic figure whose design career can generally be divided into two phases: designing for performance and designing for industry and an expanding consumer society during the first half of twentieth-century America. It is impossible, however, to pinpoint where one phase ended and the other began, as they ebbed and flowed in and out of his work from the very beginning of his professional design career. As a fledgling advertising illustrator in Chicago, for

example, Geddes also managed to moonlight as an extra in operatic productions, providing him with free tickets to performances in which his services as a performer were not required. From there Geddes began to build a regional theatre design career which took him to various locations across the country including Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee (where he collaborated in 1918 with Jones on a summer festival), New York and Chicago, where he returned to design productions for the Chicago Opera Association. At the beginning of the 1920s Geddes settled in New York, where he created drawings and models for his own adaptation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (see fig. 1.2).



Fig. 1.2. Geddes, Norman Bel. Set Design for *The Divine Comedy*. Bruguère photograph of Geddes' model. c. 1921. Rpt. in Norman Bel Geddes' *A Project for a Theatrical Presentation of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1924. Pl. 18. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, book collection g 2-3 (job 69). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

In 1921 Geddes needed a hit in New York. If he didn't have an actual production of *The Divine Comedy* to design, he could create the next best thing: renderings and photographs of it in as lifelike a manner as possible – and market them. The *tromp l'oeil* Bruguière² photographs in particular were used not only to create a performance that didn't exist, but also to create a career that didn't exist—yet. Before *The Miracle* Geddes had achieved a fair amount of success regionally and designed a handful of minor Broadway productions, but he was far from having a major presence in New York. Geddes, nevertheless, managed to situate his designs for *The Divine Comedy* in discursive spaces, namely international museum exhibitions, newspaper articles and reviews, and trade journals such as *Theatre Arts Magazine*,³ “a repository for some of the best examples of scene design for over three decades” (Larson 85). In 1924, the year of *The Miracle*, he dramatized *The Divine Comedy*'s photos in book form in *A Project for a Theatrical Presentation of The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Geddes' *Project*, written in a lyrical but unapologetic manner is essentially directorial. He not only shows you what you see, he tells you—exactly. Page by page, the sequential images that trace Dante's voyage from *Inferno* to *Purgatory* to *Paradise* are threaded, bound and narrated by Geddes' precise annotations that inscribe, rather than describe, each photograph. Geddes annotates the photograph above, the climax of the *Inferno* sequence, for example, thus:

² During the 1920s Francis Bruguière (American, 1879-1945) was the official photographer for the New York Theater Guild. He continued to work with Geddes throughout the 1920s before relocating to London in 1928.

³ Later, *Theatre Arts Monthly*

The whole movement culminates when an iridescent glow spreads over the swirling mass like a great nebula and gradually brightens. Over all, small sparks of fire rain slowly down. The light begins in the heart of the pit, spreading over the stage and taking in the audience. Round and round it moves, the rhythm increasing until it reaches a point when it seems that we are swirling and that everything else is standing still. The nebula dissolves in darkness. The intermission follows. (pl. 18)

Such vivid annotations not only delineate each of the photographs, but also sensorially, emotionally and spatially implicate the spectator-reader in a theatre performance on paper that even includes, in this case, an “intermission.”

Immediate published critical reaction to *A Project for a Theatrical Presentation of The Divine Comedy* was nothing less than rapturous. Consider, for example, Claude Bragdon’s review for the July, 1924 *Architectural Record*:

Denied—up to the present—the opportunity to realize his vast, ambitious dream concretely, with actors, and an audience, [Geddes] proceeds to make (with the assistance of his pupils) a small scale model of his stage, peoples it with hundreds of little clay figures, lights it with elaborate art, and then, summoning to his aid a photographer of genius, Francis Bruguière, he is enabled to present some twenty scenes to the reader with such clarity and completeness, that were it not for the clue afforded by the text, one could easily be deceived into believing that these were photographs taken of an actual production, enacted by living human beings. Indeed, one cannot but question if a regular production would be, in all ways, as good. Might it not lack some of the admirable abstractedness and mystical quality here in evidence? (95-96)

As a result of its placement in these types of arenas, Geddes advertised his work to those who mattered most: directors and producers who could hire him. This discursive proliferation of *The Divine Comedy* designs, consequently, proved to be crucial to Geddes becoming a widely recognizable Broadway artist. According to Innes, Geddes’ ingenuity as a publicist (his own, of course) was secondary only to his talent as a designer. “Throughout his career,” the author observes, “Bel Geddes planted stories

about himself in the daily newspapers: whether admiring or controversial, any sort of publicity would do” (*Designing* 30).

In 1923 in New York Geddes was introduced to the renowned director Max Reinhardt (Austrian, 1873-1943), who saw Geddes’ *Divine Comedy* designs in a 1922 Amsterdam exhibition. According to Geddes’ autobiography, the director, enthralled by the designs, hired the relatively unknown designer for *The Miracle*, to be produced by Morris Gest, on the spot. “You have what the theatre needs,” Reinhardt said to Geddes. “There are plenty of little people, but the need is for a giant or two. . . . Your conception of *The Divine Comedy* is the greatest example of international theater I have ever seen” (*Miracle* 270). When *The Miracle* premiered the following year, it was, indeed, impossible for both critics and the public not to take notice of the set, an ultra-realistic replication of a medieval European cathedral that surrounded the audience on all sides. The production instantly established Geddes as a major Broadway designer, his set design overshadowing even Reinhardt in reviews of the production.

During the late 1920s, Geddes, while remaining active in the theatre, began to make the transition to non-theatrical architecture and design, opening up shop in 1927 as head of his own industrial design firm, the first of its kind. His penchant for self-promotion, however, never waned:

He published his ideas in books—*Horizons* (1932) and *Magic Motorways* (1940)—that not only promoted his vision and conditioned the way his work should be received, but also served as highly effective advertising to attract clients for his nontheatrical business. He mounted publicity campaigns for his own work or persuaded others to do so on his behalf, as well as continually publishing statements on future plans such as *The Divine Comedy* that also served as advertisement. All this self-generated publicity . . . was what won Bel Geddes his design jobs outside Broadway. (Innes, *Designing* 31)

During the 1930s Geddes' work for Broadway shifted to a regular but slower pace as he devoted more and more of his time designing everything from radios to furniture to automobiles. Geddes soon became one of the leading design visionaries of Modern America. At his firm, "many of America's leading industrial designers apprenticed with Geddes or worked in his office, including Henry Dreyfuss, Russel Wright, and Eliot Noyes"⁴ (Maffei 51). Geddes' notable manufactured household products included his whimsical *Patriot* radio (see fig. 1.3), brass furniture for the Simmons Company and the severely streamlined, signature *Soda King* seltzer-siphon bottle (see fig. 1.4).

By the end of the decade his Broadway career had practically ended with *The Eternal Road*, another dramatic spectacle directed by Reinhardt. While some critics praised the production, a retelling of Jewish history based on the Old Testament, others in the theatre were not so enthusiastic. Stark Young, who had praised Geddes' *Divine Comedy* designs a decade before, condemned *The Eternal Road* for its overladen pageantry. "This elaboration and pretentious profusion," he wrote, "only served to remind me of what Cicero wrote to Accius and his efforts to gild the pill with spectacle—*quid enim delectationis habent sescenti muli in Clytemnestra*⁵—what do I care for the six hundred mules in [*Clytemnestra*]?" (qtd. in Larson 104).

⁴ Henry Dreyfuss (American, 1904-1972) is known for many contributions to design, including the Honeywell wall thermostat (1953) and a streamlined revamping of the Hoover vacuum cleaner (1936). Russel Wright (American, 1904-1976) designed many successful houseware products and interior furnishings, including Conant-Ball's "blonde" furniture, ubiquitous in mid-century American households. Eliot Noyes (American, 1910-1977) designed the IBM "Selectric" typewriter in 1961.

⁵ A play written by Lucius Accius (Roman, 170-c. 86 B.C.E.) based on *The Oresteia*



Fig. 1.3. Geddes, Norman Bel. *Patriot* radio. 1939. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.

During the following decade Geddes turned some of his attention to America's involvement in World War II, designing new self-camouflage for the U.S. Army's Engineer division, a model for a radio-controlled aircraft for the Air Force and miniature reconstructions of military battles, which were photographed and published in *Life* magazine. Geddes continued to place the bulk of his attention on his commercial and industrial clients, but made some forays back into the world of performance. Many of these projects, however, were comingled with big business: costumes, advertising and



Fig. 1.4. Geddes, Norman Bel. *Walter Kidde Soda King* seltzer-siphon bottle. 1938. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Web. 4 Feb 2013.

tent architecture for the Ringling Brothers, a parade float for U.S. Steel and architectural plans for hotel theatres for the Savoy Plaza, Essex House and the Waldorf Astoria, for example. In 1943, Geddes and Reinhardt did make what would be their final attempt on Broadway with Irwin Shaw's *Sons and Soldiers*, a drama starring Gregory Peck and Stella Adler, but the production was forgettable, closing in less than three weeks. Three years later Geddes closed his main office in New York.

The last decade of Geddes' life saw the designer finally give up on mounting a production of *The Divine Comedy*, a project he had stubbornly refused to relinquish for thirty years. Until his death the designer also experimented in projects for television production, commercial and domestic architecture. While Albrecht concedes that some of these late projects "are fascinating, they are little known. Most people's awareness of [Geddes'] work—if they know it at all—dates to the 1930s" (27).

Shortly before his death, Geddes began working on his autobiography, *Miracle in the Evening*, its title indicative of the designer's fondness for the production that made him a star on Broadway. Although typescript drafts with information dating up to the early 1940s exist in his archives at the Ransom Center, the 1960 posthumous published version ends with 1925's Paris production of *Jeanne d'Arc*, which he directed and designed.

Albrecht, nonetheless, upholds Geddes role as a major agent of change in America throughout his entire career:

Beyond the design of products and the imagining of fantastic schemes, Geddes played a seminal role in shaping the expectations and behavior of American consumers and helping to transform both the industrial and theater design professions into modern businesses. . . . Norman Bel Geddes sought nothing less than the transformation of modern American society through design. (29)

1.2 TERMINOLOGY

I should begin by stating that my precise definition of the *New Stagecraft* will not be included in this section. Because defining it is one of the fundamental aims of this

study, I will clarify this most important term in Chapter Two. Unless otherwise indicated, the following definitions in this section are my own.

One of the most frequently applied and imprecise terms I use, without a doubt, is *scenography*. Pamela Howard, in 2002's *What is Scenography?* attempts to define it (hence the book's title) within the broadest of parameters as "the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation" (130). I do not find her definition to be especially useful, as she may as well be defining *production*. (Designers, oddly, are not mentioned specifically as such in her definition.) There may be some hesitation on her part to define *scenography* in particulars considering the fact that she begins her study with a list of over forty wildly erratic interpretations ranging from the nebulous ("the art of time and space") to the facetious ("a spelling mistake") (xiii-xvi). For the purposes of this study, I necessarily use my own, narrower definition of the term, which is "the art of creating and/or arranging sensory design elements to bolster and enhance the act of performance." In short, the realm of scenography belongs to the designer, who may be responsible for more than one design element, as Geddes often was.

Scenery, while a portion of scenography, will be limited to set, lighting and properties design.

Per the title of this dissertation, I should, before going any further, clarify my use of *abstraction* and *replication*. When I began writing, I struggled a bit with the latter term, grappling with a word that would accurately describe Geddes' cathedral set. The cathedral didn't fall into the Baudrillardian as an example of the final order of

simulacra, the *hyperreal simulation*, or non-referential copy. Although Geddes' cathedral was, in fact, hypothetical, its architecture and decorative elements were borrowed directly from extant (or once-extant) examples, as indicated by the volume of source material in his archive. *Representation* left out the lengths Geddes went to as a designer to produce an "authentic" replica of a structure that could exist beyond the theatre. *Replication*, then, became not only the best description for Geddes' set, but also a term I define as "any attempt to produce highly accurate copies of models borrowed from the tangible world at large."

Abstract, as used in studies of art and architecture, for example, can have extremely specific denotations, particularly when combined with words like *Expressionism*, *Classically*, *Illusionism*, etc. Without denying its place in art history, I use *abstraction* very generally to mean "the representation of that which is not found in discernable, physical reality or a form of representation that does not seek to replicate the details of its referent, which is found in the discernable world."

For a general definition of the term *avant-garde*, I find Mike Sell's particularly useful. "The avant-garde," he explains, "is a minority formation that challenges power in subversive, illegal, or alternative ways; in particular, by challenging the routines, assumptions, hierarchies, and/or legitimacy of cultural institutions" (770). I identify the *First-Wave Avant-Garde* in Western theatre as European theatrical movements possessing the attributes of Sell's definition, beginning with Symbolism in the late-nineteenth century to Absurdism, which emerged shortly after the end of World War II.

Connected to abstraction and The First-Wave Avant-Garde is my usage of *Modernism*. I use the word to define “an artistic period in Western art spanning roughly from 1890 to 1950 marked by the avant-garde’s rejection of bourgeois forms of representation defined primarily by a fundamental copyism of the external world.” For my purposes, theatrical Modernism is directly aligned with the previously mentioned movements that formed The First-Wave Avant-Garde. *Modernism and Modernist* will specifically refer to artistic innovations made in Europe. *Modernistic*, on the other hand, refers to any American art form that possesses significant qualities of Modernist expression. Gay, in *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*, considers Baudelaire to be chief among Modernism’s early proponents:

No single poet, no single painter or composer can securely claim to have been the “onlie (sic) begetter” of modernism (sic). But the most plausible candidate for that role was Charles Baudelaire. . . . Like the modernists (sic) who came after him, he was a Realist with a difference: He detested the mind-numbing reproduction of the world in conventional poems or paintings, and at the same time, like the most sophisticated Romantics, had no patience with unchecked subjectivity. “What is pure art according to the modern idea?” he asked, and answered his rhetorical question: “It is to create a suggestive magic, containing at the same time the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.” (33-34)

For a definition of *dress*, I turn to Roach-Higgins and Eicher’s definition, which is:

. . . an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. . . Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements.” (1)

Stage dress is, then, dress that is used specifically in performance. Throughout, I will use *stage dress* and *costume* interchangeably, as they refer to the same thing.

Aesthetic is used primarily as an adjective to describe a set of fundamental principles that define an artist's (or artists') work. *Style*, on the other hand, refers to how these aesthetic principles are specifically made manifest in an artistic creation. To put it another way, *aesthetic* is the "why," and *style* is the "how."

Drama and *dramatic* denote productions throughout Geddes' career that were not musicals, marionette plays, opera, ballet, motion pictures or *extravaganzas*, the last term defined in *The Hunter Catalog* as "variety productions on a spectacular scale" (150). This study restricts itself to Geddes' plays and dramatic spectacles, defined in the *Catalog* as "theatrical productions emphasizing visual and sound elements" (91), such as *The Miracle*, that were produced on Broadway. *Drama* and *dramatic* are also used generally throughout to refer to narrative-based, Aristotelian theatrical performances.

I use *sublimity* or the *sublime* as a theoretical term based on the writings of Enlightenment philosophers Edmund Burke (Irish, 1729-1797) and Immanuel Kant (German, 1724-1804), who both divided the *sublime* from the merely *beautiful*. For brevity's sake, I turn to a concise definition of the *sublime* provided by Lucie-Smith:

Essentially all those who tried to characterize it connected it with ideas of limitlessness, extraordinariness, grandeur and sometimes terror. It is to be distinguished from the [picturesque], which is pleasingly irregular but does not include awe, and also from the Beautiful, which in 18th-c. art theory, tends to please through absolute harmony of proportion. (208)

Environmental scenography denotes design practices that resist and/or expand the conventional bifurcated relationship between spectator and scenography. In short, *environmental scenography* is any theatrical setting in which audiences and

scenography (but not necessarily performers) share the same physical space. I will qualify the term in depth and its specific application to *The Miracle* in Chapter Five.

Defining the term *realism* is a somewhat precarious endeavor. I will, however, establish *realism* (not capitalized) as an umbrella term that took several different theatrical forms during the time periods covered by this study. A general, all-encompassing definition of *realism* in scenographic practice can be defined by “a style characterized by the mimesis of appreciable surface detail.” Here, I use the term *mimesis* to mean a dialectic that lies somewhere between the opposite poles of replication and representation of this appreciable surface detail. Underneath *realism* (again, in lowercase) lie its various sub-styles. Each of the following is distinct, but do not depart from the fundamental umbrella definition that informs them all.

Naturalism (capitalized) refers to a late-nineteenth century European theatrical movement in which scenography attempted to represent the physical world in a kind of detail that was almost microscopic in nature. Often described as “scientific,” Naturalism, scenographically, transgressed the borders between mimesis and nature by portraying the world in a manner so meticulously factual that audiences saw not just life, but its underbelly. This was literally the case in Andre Antoine’s (French, 1840-1902) notorious Paris production of Fernand Icre’s *Les Bouchers* (*The Butchers*), in which he staged bloody carcasses of beef procured from the local butcher’s shop.

Realism (capitalized, as opposed to *realism*) identifies a late-nineteenth century European trend in scenography that is, essentially, a view of life “twenty steps back” from the probings of Naturalism. Much of its dramaturgy addressed key social issues of

the day. Ibsen, Shaw and Wilde's plays fall into this category. Hence its subject matter, scenographically it was often linked with the domestic interior; elements with which appreciable surface detail was conveyed included the box setting, the continued usage of an impenetrable fourth-wall proscenium stage, electric lighting and concern for accuracy of detail in the contemporary setting.

Pictorial Illusionism, in use since sixteenth-century Italy, is a specific form of realism that is wholly painterly, and produced by the employment of flat surfaces to project a highly pictorial form of appreciable surface detail. It is a two-dimensional attempt to represent a three-dimensional reality. Its beginnings are associated with Neoclassical Italy and France in particular, where it was heavily influenced by Greco-Roman architectural forms, straight lines, and, above all, symmetry.

Romantic Realism, as exemplified in the scenographic practices of Wagnerian opera, employed set elements of pictorial illusionism (in the form of flats, drops and wings, for example), but, according to Lucie-Smith, was a pictorial "revolt against the formality, containment and intellectual discipline of Neoclassicism" (188).

Photographic Realism denotes the scenographic tendencies of early-twentieth-century Broadway productions to replicate observable reality as seen through the eyes of the camera, hence its name. It is most associated with the work of David Belasco (American, 1853-1931). A portion of its great appeal was grounded in the technological effects Belasco employed to heighten the illusion of reality it attempted to achieve. It possessed neither the pathos of Romantic Realism, nor did it scrutinize the physical world scientifically, like Antoine's notable productions.

I define *dialectic* as a synthesis resulting from the combination of two opposing forces (thesis and antithesis.)

1.3 SOURCES: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Any study of the New Stagecraft should include, if not commence with its two major manifestos, *The Dramatic Imagination* and Lee Simonson's *The Stage is Set*. They are as vital to an understanding of the New Stagecraft as they are varying in their approach. Jones' book is essentially an expression of the designer's philosophy of scenography, but delivered in a poetic and vivid style. His vision of the theatre is, likewise, a lyrical, even mystical one. Jones believed in the power of stage art as art, and his thoughts on set, costume and lighting are all conveyed here. *Imagination* is a compelling, passionately written book that evokes, rather than describes, the potential of a non-factual style of stage design.

Simonson's book, on the other hand, is as much an account of theatre history as it is commentary and reflection on scenography. Here, the author traces stagecraft from Ancient Greece to 1930s Broadway. Using specific examples, such as 1501's *The Mystery of the Passion* at Mons, France, Simonson creates a narrative of design continuing with the Renaissances in Italy, France and England. Simonson also devotes a chapter each to the two chief Modernist predecessors to the New Stagecraft, Edward Gordon Craig (English, 1872-1966), whom he largely dismisses as a "neurotic" dilettante, and Adolphe Appia (Swiss, 1862-1928). The latter chapter includes some of

the first English translations of the Swiss designer's groundbreaking 1899 manifesto, *Die Musik und die Inszenierung* (*Music and the Art of the Theatre*.) Throughout the chapter, Simonson concedes that many of Craig's ideas were borrowed directly from Appia, a claim I will refute in Chapter Two.

Geddes, too, wrote a manifesto, but it was not centered on his contributions exclusive to the American theatre. *Horizons*, first published in 1932, is, rather, a cornerstone work for studies of Machine Age design in the decorative arts, architecture and technology. Geddes discusses some of his theatrical work, including *The Miracle*, but most of his writing about the stage focuses on theatre architecture. *Horizons*, nonetheless, is a valuable window into Geddes' aesthetic benchmarks for "good design," and mirrors the fundamental rejection of nineteenth-century aesthetics that is also found in much of his stage work. The book also establishes how rapidly Geddes had turned much of his attention to commercial and industrial design in less than a decade after *The Miracle*. *Horizons*, moreover, begins the conversation about Geddes' incorporation of theatrical elements in his projects for commerce and industry, which he acknowledges in the book. It clearly demonstrates that Geddes, rather than abruptly leaving the theatre for other, perhaps more lucrative enterprises, transitioned his stage experience into the second chapter of his design career with relative ease.

For an autobiographical account of his theatre work, including *The Miracle*, scholars of Geddes must, of course, look to *Miracle in the Evening*, which chronicles Geddes' journey from Michigan to Paris and *Jeanne d'Arc*, with Eva Le Gallienne in the title role. Geddes goes into quite some detail in the book on his work on *The Miracle*,

from his first meeting with Max Reinhardt in New York to his technical challenges in rehearsals for the production. Some of Geddes' details concerning the designs have been particularly valuable as expansions of the visual material found in his archive.

The most comprehensive historiography of the New Stagecraft to date is, without a doubt, Orville Larson's *Scene Design in the American Theatre from 1915 to 1960*. Although he credits Appia, Craig and Max Reinhardt as influences, the book focuses primarily and closely on American scene design, definitively marking the beginning of the New Stagecraft (the term was coined in 1912 by the critic Walter Prichard Eaton) with the 1915 Broadway premiere of a Jones-designed production, *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*. Larson also clearly demarcates the New Stagecraft from its European influences, providing guides that helped immensely in the formation of my definition of the movement. His historiographical study of particular events that led to the formation of new scenography in the American theatre is specific, and provides a clear and important context for Geddes' work. By his own admission, Larson extends the lifetime of the New Stagecraft well past its prime to 1960, at which point the movement had long been over. The author, however, made this choice based on the fact that many of its key designers continued working well into the 1950s. As with most historiographies of American theatre design, Larson focuses on Geddes primarily through *The Divine Comedy* and *The Miracle*. It also shares with other historiographies (as its title suggests) an exclusion of costume design in its account of the New Stagecraft.

Geddes' career, along with that of Joseph Urban, is explored in greater detail in Christopher Innes' *Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street*. The book examines the life and work of two very different, but important designers of the first decades of the twentieth century who both worked in and outside the theatre. Until the publication of *Norman Bel Geddes Designs America*, the book accompanying the fall 2012 Geddes retrospective at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, Innes' book provided the most complete objective look at Geddes as both a designer and an individual. *Norman Bel Geddes Designs America* now stands as the definitive account of Geddes' life and career and is a testament to the extraordinary output of his design work in its entirety. It also features a wealth of images culled from his archives at the Ransom Center.

English translations of publications concerning Max Reinhardt are few, particularly recent ones. Considering his place in Western theatre as one of the most prolific directors of the modern era, it is somewhat surprising that he simply has not been a subject of substantial discourse in English print. Before J.L. Styan's *Max Reinhardt*, which appeared in 1982, the last English books on Reinhardt were Huntly Carter's 1914 *The Theatre of Max Reinhardt* and the 1926 "Miracle" edition of *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre*, edited by Oliver M. Sayler, featuring Geddes' illustrations and Reinhardt's *Regie* book⁶ for *The Miracle*. Fortunately, Styan provides a panoramic view of the director's extensive career, featuring rare drawings of *The Miracle*'s first

⁶ Reinhardt is attributed as the first director to create a *Regie* book, or *Regiebuch*, a moment-to-moment record of a production's staging, including its design elements. *The Miracle* was the first of these to be available to the public.

staging in London in 1911. Geddes mentions this early production in *Miracle in the Evening*, but the images in Styan's book clearly illustrate the fundamental design of the Broadway production had been executed well before Reinhardt hired Geddes. Styan also includes the results of what must have been an exhaustive research process with a list of all of the director's productions, beginning in 1900 and ending in 1943.

Of the literary sources that identify the aesthetic principles of movements within The First-Wave Avant-Garde, Kirby's *Futurist Performance* contributes most to a discourse of costume design. Although it limits itself to Italian Futurism, Kirby's book is one of the key texts that tie Geddes' costume designs for *The Miracle* to fundamental aspects of style found in the stage dress of The First-Wave Avant-Garde. Kirby generously devotes a full chapter to machine-centered Futurist costume and acting, providing an analysis of design practices and performance styles culled from rarely historicized examples.

A source that investigates Geddes' costume practices throughout his major productions, including *The Miracle*, is Donald Stowell's published doctoral dissertation, *The New Costuming in America: The Ideas and Practices of Robert Edmond Jones, Norman Bel Geddes, Lee Simonson and Aline Bernstein, 1915-1935*. Although generous information is provided by the archive and Geddes himself, Stowell's monograph is the only source that features an assessment of *The Miracle's* costumes that moves distinctly beyond *reportage*. Some of Stowell's analysis was particularly important in my contention that *The Miracle's* costumes, were, indeed, a product of New Stagecraft aesthetic ideals.

Arnold Aronson's *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* supplies a methodology for defining and measuring degrees of environmental scenography in theatrical production. Aronson, who defines *The Miracle* as a landmark in environmental scenography, furnishes a particular tool with which to view the production and its significance in a historiography of scene design on American stages that has continued to the present.

Anne Hollander's *Seeing Through Clothes* was a tremendous, if accidental discovery in my search for historiographies of Western stage dress. While there is a wealth of material on histories of non-theatrical dress (often with *Costume* in the title, which can initially be misleading to theatre scholars), recent publications that devote themselves (entirely or in part) exclusively to histories of stage dress are quite rare. Hollander's is one such publication; in it, she specifically addresses the reciprocal relationship between artistic representation and dress. One chapter is a historiography of stage dress as seen through this lens. "More than speech and gesture," she insists, "the clothes suitable for any kind of theater cannot escape visual conventions, established by art."⁷ They are what enable us to perceive and judge costume correctly, to understand what a clothed figure on stage is supposed to look like" (239).

Beyond the scope of literature, which, for the most part, provides a necessary context for Geddes' *Miracle* designs, is, of course, the wealth of primary source material on Geddes and the production held in the Ransom Center Archives. Serving as his own historiographer, Geddes built what must certainly be one of the largest and most

⁷ The pictorial arts, including painting, sculpture and cinema

comprehensive holdings compiled and organized by an American scenographer of his or her own work. While many of his contemporaries may have left incomplete or virtually no records (it wasn't until the New Stagecraft became established that design in the American theatre was even considered a legitimate art form), Geddes hoarded everything from source material (for the world costuming files, Geddes filled ten envelopes of clippings of Alaskan dress alone) to drawings (*The Miracle* files contain nearly two hundred folders full of countless sketches, renderings, charcoals, watercolors, plans and elevations) to written material in the form of reviews, news articles, programs, letters and manuscripts concerning the production. The Geddes archive is evidence of a visionary who saw his own mortality as plainly as any of his designs. The enormity of his theatrical archive strongly suggests Geddes not only envisioned the future, he also wanted desperately to belong to it, even in death.

1.4. DEFINING AND REDEFINING: THE COURSE OF THE STUDY

This writing emerged from a single image of *The Miracle*. Soon after the research process began, my initial intention was to revise historiography by specifically removing Geddes' *Miracle* set from its identification as a representation of the New Stagecraft movement. This removal remains very much a goal of my argument. As the research process progressed, however, an unfolding of new information led to a number of discoveries about the production that asked to be explored in further detail. One of the largest misconceptions about Geddes' set, a result of a dearth of information

provided by historiography, is that it was a wholly original and unique design. A closer examination revealed some mentions of Reinhardt's original London production, but it was not until I encountered drawings and further descriptions of this staging that it became clear Geddes was adapting, rather than creating, a concept that had first been done in Europe over a decade earlier. Geddes' own writing, however, indicated that replicating Reinhardt's 1911 London cathedral was not his desire. Instead, as Geddes made perfectly clear in *Horizons*, he wanted to design something "abstract" (185). The Ransom archives support this by disclosing images of an abstract set for another production of a miracle play Geddes created in 1923, the same year he was at work on the set design for *The Miracle*.

A second historiographical absence was Geddes' costuming for the production. His designs for *The Miracle* (before the publication of *Norman Bel Geddes Designs America* in 2012) were virtually absent from recent publications, and the majority of these were only to be found in the Ransom Center Archives. These designs opened up an entirely new way of considering Geddes' design work for the production, as his costuming, on the whole, was clearly not a product of replication. These designs, in fact, identified Geddes' costume work on the production to be, unlike the set, clear expressions of New Stagecraft style. Geddes' preliminary sketches for the costumes, moreover, were even more indicative of his departure from replication, and, quite surprisingly, aligned him with Modernist costuming of the First-Wave Avant-Garde. The idea of a production of *The Miracle* using Geddes' abstract set and these preliminary costumes (also abstract) provides images of a design style that had much more in

common with the Modernists than with typical (realistic) Broadway scenography of the period. Geddes' futuristic (not *Futuristic*) vision of theatre, it seems, was more closely tied to his industrial and commercial designs than previously imagined.

An integral part of this study is, as I mentioned, a way of defining the New Stagecraft, which required an investigation not only into its stylistic qualities, but also its historiography. This narrative, while it includes several familiar figures, particularly in theatre design, threads together a series of events culminating in one of the most inventive periods of American scenography during the last century.

The final question then became, "If *The Miracle* doesn't serve to illustrate New Stagecraft style, what is its significance to Broadway?" In Chapter Five I will resituate Geddes' set in a narrative of environmental scenography on Broadway. Many images of the set don't include, whether visually or by informative text, the fact that it is a forgotten pioneer of the spatial reconfiguration of the Broadway theatre, which is largely (and, at the time of *The Miracle*, exclusively) defined by the proscenium that, even today, defines much of its set design. Geddes was the first designer not only to eradicate the proscenium, but also to create a scenographic environment that existed throughout the entire theatre. In the chapters that follow I will first provide a historiography of the formation of the New Stagecraft, which informs my definition of the movement and supports my contention that *The Miracle* should not be identified as such. I will then reveal that Geddes' set cannot be wholly credited to him as a designer. I do not claim Geddes was a plagiarist, but a highly resourceful, imaginative (and somewhat reluctant) technician Reinhardt used to translate a recycled design concept to

a Broadway proscenium space. In Chapter Four I will explore Geddes' costume designs, aligning his initial sketches with The First-Wave Avant-Garde in Europe, then establish that, while Geddes' set does not belong to the New Stagecraft, his costumes did. Last, I will reclaim *The Miracle's* significant position as the pioneer in environmental scenography on Broadway.

CHAPTER TWO: AN AESTHETIC JOURNEY

The purest form is always sullied by life. — Witkacy

2.1. EARLY MODERNIST PARADIGMS

Critics, scholars and historians have, on more than one occasion, erroneously applied the term *New Stagecraft* to Modernist scenographic reforms made in Europe during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by progressive stage designers such as Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig and Max Reinhardt.⁸ Walter Prichard Eaton's (American, 1878-1957) "The New Stagecraft", the title of his 1912 article of the same name, defined the movement as an exclusively American theatrical phenomenon. Here, in the article, he speaks on the state of American scenography at the turn of the century:

Tradition is a powerful force in the theatre; it makes us blind to many an absurdity; and it has, in the matter of scenery, forced us toward a progressively more inartistic and futilely realistic standard, till at the present time a producer who wishes to gain credit for great artistry has to call in an architect, a builder, an interior decorator, an electrician, a plumber, and erect an entire house on his stage. . . . All of this is not only extremely expensive, but we are coming slowly to realize that it is also ineffective, and that it actually dwarfs the drama. Here and there actors, stage managers,⁹ little groups of the public, are longing for a way out, an escape back to freedom and impressionism and simplicity in stage effects, and to a stagecraft which shall put the emphasis where it belongs—on the actors and the story. (104)

Geddes has always been considered one of the movement's most important pioneers since his designs for *The Divine Comedy* first appeared in the Amsterdam exhibition,

⁸ Alan Thomas Bloom, for example

⁹ Directors

despite his tendency to polarize some critics; Larson, for example, describes Geddes as an “egocentric” designer “for whom theatre was but a small part of his artistic life” (169).

In a 1919 *New York Herald Tribune* article, “American Scenic Art Exhibition This Week,” Kenneth Macgowan¹⁰ articulated the aesthetic criteria of the New Stagecraft as “simplification, suggestion and synthesis” (qtd. in Bloom 144). Bloom points out that it was actually Hiram Moderwell¹¹ who first identified these three criteria, but Macgowan who “used them to devise and defend an aesthetic argument which fused the artistic theories and practices of a visual art with those of a content based [on] dramatic art. This was a union which Moderwell adamantly opposed” (70). These fundamental criteria, nonetheless, diametrically opposed much of nineteenth-century Western scenic practices, marked by clutter, literalism and fragmentation. These were symptoms of that century’s general pursuit of the reproduction of (and, in many instances, the glorification of, as in Romantic Realism) the tangible world in its stage productions.

For the purposes of my fundamental argument, in this chapter I will necessarily retrace the narrative of the New Stagecraft from its origins in the theory and practice of late-nineteenth-century Europe to 1924, the year of Geddes and Reinhardt’s Broadway production of *The Miracle*. Fundamentally speaking, it was a journey from stages beset

¹⁰ Not only was Kenneth Macgowan (American, 1888-1963) an influential critic and proponent of the New Stagecraft, he was also a major Broadway producer. *The Theatre of Tomorrow* (1921) and *Continental Stagecraft* (1922) were among his most important book publications on Modernism in Western theatre. *Continental Stagecraft*, co-written with Robert Edmond Jones, was in Geddes’ personal library, as indicated by the Hunter *Catalog*.

¹¹ Hiram Moderwell (American, 1888-1945) published *The Theatre of Today* in 1914.

by scenographic dissonance, realism and categorically rigid notions of representation to productions inclusive of abstraction, ahistoricism and unification.

Reinhardt, although undisputedly a major influence on American stage designers, was an eclectic practitioner whose very artistic identity was defined by his embrace of varied styles of production, including those informed by realism.¹² He nevertheless sought stylistic unity in his work. His vital contributions to the New Stagecraft prior to the New York production of *The Miracle* will be discussed later in the chapter. Appia and Craig, on the other hand, sought scenographic reforms by directly opposing tropes of European scenic and costume design during the second half of the nineteenth century: namely, the strict adherence to the notion of historical accuracy,¹³ the employment of “spectacle for spectacle’s sake” and the scenographic particularities generated by the demands of various strains of the realistic theatre, such as Antoine’s *Naturalism* (see fig. 2.1). *La Terre*, for example, clearly demonstrates these tropes at work, particularly when comparing its scenography to a photograph of a French peasant family from approximately the same time period and region as Zola’s novel (see fig. 2.2).¹⁴ The stone, slant-roof architecture of the farmhouse and dress of the peasants (the wide-brimmed hat of the farmer at upper left, the *coiff*¹⁵ and black

¹² Max Reinhardt began his theatrical career as a performer, but soon abandoned acting to become a director and producer.

¹³ Also known as *antiquarianism*, it was championed in England by the director Charles Kean (1811-1868) and the producer Henry Irving (1838-1905). In Germany, it was most prominent in the plays directed by Georg II, The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914).

¹⁴ Published in 1887, Emile Zola’s *La Terre* takes place in Northern France during the last years of The Second Empire (1852-1870).

¹⁵ A type of bonnet, usually white, worn in rural France. It is particularly associated with Brittany.



Fig. 2.1. Illustration of Act II of Émile Zola's (French, 1840-1902) 1900 stage adaptation of *La Terre* (*The Earth*), directed by André Antoine at *Le Théâtre Antoine*, Paris. Widener Library, Harvard College Library, Cambridge. Rpt. in Oscar G. Brockett, Margaret Mitchell and Linda Hardberger's *Making the Scene: A History of Stage Design and Technology in Europe and the United States*. San Antonio: Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, 2010. 212. Print.

gown of the elderly female at center and the dark suit and cap of the man standing directly behind her) are all reproduced in Antoine's production. As indicated by the production illustration, candlelight, period props and live chickens were also employed to create an utter impression of external reality. Although the use of livestock onstage may seem restrained to the prior century's panoramas¹⁶ or "waterworks" productions,¹⁷ they were certainly an element of spectacle to a Parisian audience unaccustomed to seeing live animals in a dramatic production.

¹⁶ Mechanized, rolling pieces of painted scenery that created the illusion of movement, these were popular devices used in nineteenth-century Western theatre.

¹⁷ Aquatic spectacles



Fig. 2.2. Late-nineteenth-century photograph of a French peasant family in the *Sarthe* region of Northwestern France. *Myartprints.co.uk*. Web. 7 Jan. 2012.

Craig and Appia, on the other hand, sought a theatre that rejected the various attempts at realism of their day. They particularly abhorred Pictorial Illusionism, as used to heavy effect in a production of Richard Wagner's (German, 1813-1884) *Parsifal*, for example (see fig. 2.3). Appia was initially only concerned with reforming the scenic and lighting



Fig. 2.3. Jouko, Paul. Set design for Act III of Wagner's 1882 production of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth. c. 1882. *Gettyimages*. Web. 14 Oct. 2011.

methods used in Wagnerian opera. His prescriptive approach to these “repugnant productions,”¹⁸ however, would ultimately have far-reaching consequences well outside the realm of the genre.

As evidenced by the image of *Parsifal*, Wagner's grandiose, Romantic notions of what constituted scenographic realism lay in stark contrast to the stage grit of Antoine's Naturalism. The German director/composer is, nevertheless, a fountainhead of

¹⁸ “To the Greek eye, clear and pure in vision, the complex accumulation of our modern theatre would be repugnant, devoid of all significance” (*Music* 52).

theatrical thought that would forever alter Western stagecraft: In the mid-1800s he formulated the aesthetic principle of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or a “total, unified work of art,” in an effort to fuse the disparate elements of operatic performance into a vehicle for a single, potent artistic expression.

Aronson, however, contends there were fundamental problems in achieving *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Wagnerian production in *Looking Into the Abyss*:

The impetus for Wagner’s approach came not only from the belief that theater and opera were equivalent (perhaps even superior) to the other arts, but from the mundane aspects of contemporary production practice and the inherent pitfalls of the collaborative process, which often contrived to turn the typical dramatic spectacle of the mid-nineteenth century into a near incoherent pastiche. . . . settings were, more often than not, composed of stock scenic units that indicated a generic castle, interior, forest, or the like as needed . . . and the relation between the images onstage and the environment was never considered. (136)

Gesamtkunstwerk was, nevertheless, established to some degree in productions of Wagner’s own compositions that he also directed. He succeeded in achieving it, however, only in the union of the score, libretto and *mise-en-scène*.¹⁹ Kandinsky²⁰ corroborated this in his 1912 essay “On Stage Composition”:

. . . movement had before Wagner a purely external and superficial sense in opera (perhaps only debased). It was a naive appurtenance of opera: pressing one’s hands to one’s breast (love), lifting one’s arms (prayer), stretching out one’s arms (powerful emotion), etc. These childish forms (which even today one can still see every evening) were externally related to the text of the opera, which in turn was illustrated by the music. Wagner here created a direct (artistic) link between movement and the progress of the music: movement was subordinated to tempo. . . . In the same artistic but likewise external way, Wagner on the other

¹⁹ The staging and physical action of the performers

²⁰ Wassily Kandinsky (Russian, 1866-1944) was an Expressionist theorist, playwright and painter. “On Stage Composition” was first published with his *The Yellow Sound*, an early abstract theatrical work using only forms, color and sound as its performance elements.

hand subordinated the music to the text, i.e., movement in a broad sense. The hissing red-hot iron in water, the sound of the smith's hammer, etc., were represented musically. This *changing* subordination has been, however, yet another enrichment of means, which of necessity led to further combinations. (183)

The *leitmotif*, a famous Wagnerian device, was a particular example of the fusion of music and *mise-en-scène*. *Leitmotifs* were music cues that gave some degree of structure to his productions by denoting the entrance of a particular character(s) and/or establishing the particular mood of a given scene (Gay 233). The ubiquitous *Ritt der Walküren*, or *Ride of the Valkyries* from the beginning of Act III of *Die Walküre*²¹ is a familiar example.²²

Although Kandinsky perhaps acknowledges Wagner as the first theatrical Modernist in "On Stage Composition," the author nonetheless exposes the fact that Wagner neglected scenographic elements as essential components in his formula:

Apart from the fact that Wagner here remains entirely in the old traditions of the external, in spite of his efforts to create a text (movement), he still neglects the third element, which is used today in isolated cases in a still more primitive form—color, and connected with it, pictorial form (decoration.) (184)

Gesamtkunstwerk, nevertheless, lay at the heart of the Modernist scenographic aesthetic and, later, the New Stagecraft, where it served as one of the major criteria by which all productions within that movement would be tested. For example, "What constitutes good design?[']" Geddes asked his pupils at the Players Club in New York, where he taught a stage design course for five seasons from 1922 to 1927²³ (*Miracle*

²¹ *The Valkyrie*

²² Richard Wagner did not invent the *leitmotif*, but used it more than any other operatic composer before him (Gay 233).

²³ According to Hunter's *Catalog*

260). “The organization of its correlative parts, the relation of part to part. The principles of designing a building, a painting, music, a poem, or a drama are essentially the same. . . . Each part must be an essential element of the basic concept rather than something appended” (261).

Appia, however, realized much earlier than the publication of Kandinsky’s essay that Wagner had only partially achieved a total theatrical synthesis. With its scenic deficiencies corrected, however, Appia knew *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an aesthetic ideal that could be realized in Wagnerian production. His writings and drawings illustrating how this could be accomplished would establish him as the first in a succession of iconoclasts that waged war on late-nineteenth-century Pictorial Illusionism, just as the Italianate proscenium arch and its perspective scenery had revolutionized European theatre 500 years before (see fig. 2.4). Appia initiated the process of dismantling these



Fig. 2.4. Serlio, Sebastian (Italian, 1475-1554). *Setting for Tragedy*. 1545. McNay Art Museum, San Antonio. *Hekman Digital Archive*. Web. 22 Feb. 2011.

elements when *Die Musik und die Inszenierung*, his major theoretical work, was published in German in 1899. The failure of Wagner's drops, flats and wings in their attempt at representing pictorial reality was tied directly to the fact that they were two-dimensional; as soon as a three-dimensional performer entered the stage, all attempts at illusion by the painted images were suddenly destroyed by a glaring disparity of dimensions.

Pictorial Illusionism had its origins in the linear perspective of the Italian Renaissance, when the architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) first developed it circa 1425. Linear perspective was, essentially, the use of both visual and mathematical means to produce a false impression of three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. There were three primary components: first, the horizon line, which spans the horizontal image at the viewer's eye level; second, orthogonal or parallel, lines, that all meet in the third element, the vanishing point, located approximately in the center of the horizon line ("Exploring"). Although it first appeared in religious paintings from the period, it was eventually adapted to the theatrical setting, which, in many instances, had moved indoors to secular spaces since the medieval period. Andrea Palladio's (Italian, 1508-1580) *Teatro Olimpico* at Vicenza, perhaps the most prominent of these theatres, for example, was constructed circa 1580 (see fig. 2.5). *Setting for Tragedy*, however, appeared only as an illustration in 1545's *Architettura*, the first Renaissance discourse on architecture to include scenic design (Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger 67-68).



Fig. 2.5. Leventi, David. Photograph of the *Teatro Olimpico*. *Bau-Xi Gallery*. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

In *Die Musik*, Appia asserted that the two fundamental scenic deficiencies of Wagnerian opera were the antiquated employment of Serlian scenery with three-dimensional forms (not least of all, the actors) and, secondly, the non-plasticity of the lighting. Appia knew that light could be an expressive element in itself (a kind of visual poetry if you will), which could heighten the effect of the score, and, of course, illuminate the set and performers with great flexibility and change. To solve the former deficiency, Appia advocated virtually banishing flats from the playing area, giving attention to the

floor, “the primary link between the actor and the setting—the only tangible connection between the two; and instead of obscuring it, Appia insisted it must be emphasized through the introduction of a variety of levels, steps and slopes” (Beacham 23). Instead of painted, perpendicular scenery, “‘practicables’ must be used: solid objects whose mass and volume were articulated by their displacement of space. The setting was to be conceived of as a sculptured area possessing height, depth and volume, into whose . . . composition the actor introduced life and motion” (23). Appia articulated this concept in *Die Musik*:

All those parts of the setting which are not painted but are actually built and hence come in direct contact with the actor are called “practical.” Whether properties, furniture, and other objects of stage décor are usable or not is a secondary consideration. The main thing is to arrange the space not to suit the painted “signs,” or in other words to design the *fictive* form of the inanimate setting so as to relate as much as possible to the real form of the actor. Only if the use of painted scenery is limited and its importance diminished, will the *practical* scenery have the necessary freedom. Once this is achieved the scenery will be brought into a more direct relationship not only with the actor but also with the drama itself. (25)

Appia also maintained that supple, elastic lighting was an adhesive that, if utilized properly, could bind music, space and performer, forming a cohesion worthy of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*: “I have stated previously that there is no connecting link between the spatial arrangement of the setting and the flat or painted elements. Light alone can furnish such a link,” Appia declared (83). “The light acts not to enlarge or diminish the characteristic facial planes of the human face, but rather to throw them into relief or to fuse them with the rest of the scenic picture” (89). And, finally:

Now what is it if not *light* that gives that wonderful unity to the spectacle we contemplate each day, allowing us to live through our eyes? Lacking this unity,

we should be able to distinguish only dimly the meaning of things, and never their expressiveness; for in order that things be expressive, they must have form, and form without light communicates only to our sense of touch. (46)

In 1899, however, lighting technology was simply not up to par with prophecy.

Although electricity began to replace gas lighting shortly after Edison's first incandescent bulb appeared in 1879, lighting technology, and thus lighting design, was slow to take advantage of the electrical current. (Appia would contribute much to the Modernist theatre, but he was certainly not a technician.) In *The Magic of Light*, Rosenthal²⁴ and Wertenbaker neatly sum up the shortcomings of stage lighting circa 1900:

The electrified theatre was burdened with gaslight traditions. Positions for lighting remained the same and lighting was limited to floodlighting in borders and footlights and to spots and arcs elsewhere. Spotlights—casting the pools of light which are the true beginning of modern lighting design—could be hung in relatively few and severely regimented places. . . . It was primitive—but so were the expectations of the audiences. Comedies were bright; dramas were uncheerful. Day was yellow; night blue. Effects were naïve (storms, fires, clouds) and ranged from those as corny as the ones in *East Lynne*²⁵, to the refined and mysterious as in [Belasco's] *The Return of Peter Grimm*.²⁶ (54-55)

Appia did not, however, explicitly seek drastic reforms in costume design in *Die Musik*, although he does acknowledge costuming's role in scenographic unification.

²⁴ Jean Rosenthal (American, 1912-1969) was one of the first American theatre artists to practice lighting design not as a technician, but as an art unto itself. Her long and successful career spanned both genre (opera, dance and drama) and time (from the 1930s until her death.) She lit Martha Graham, The Metropolitan Opera, and the premieres of many iconic Broadway musicals: *West Side Story*, *Hello, Dolly!* and *The King and I* are but a few examples.

²⁵ A popular Victorian melodrama, Rosenthal is likely referring to the Broadway production of 1869, adapted by Mrs. Henry Wood from Ellen Wood's 1861 novel of the same title.

²⁶ *The Return of Peter Grimm* featured the appearance of a ghost, hence the title.

Rather than advocating specific costume reforms, he adds stage dress to the elements (scenery, performer, etc.) that, likewise, could be fastened together with light:

Nowadays, theatrical costumes seem to demand the same multiple role as the painted drops, and this is quite natural, since it is the only way the costumes can establish any relationship at all with the painting. The activity of the lighting, joined with the actor's subordination²⁷ in the word-tone drama²⁸, puts detail in its rightful place. . . . Therefore, we shall treat the color of the costumes in the same way as the decorative scenic materials²⁹—and the pictorial effect of the actors will take its place with the painted scenery. Here, the word “painted” is used according to our statement that the word-tone poet paints with light. (89-90)

It would not be until 1912 that Appia would address costume independently as part of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, this time in the only wholly successful stage production he designed, Christoph Gluck's (German, 1714-1787) *Orfeo ed Eurydice* (*Orpheus and Eurydice*), directed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (Swiss, 1865-1950) at Hellerau, a suburb of Dresden, in Germany (see fig. 2.6).³⁰ According to Beacham, Jaques-Dalcroze initially wanted the performers to be dressed in representational costume (97). Appia must have been all too aware that referential stage dress would have splintered the visual impact of his abstract set. Instead, he “suggested that the Furies should wear the dark leotards they normally used in their training, while Orpheus and the blessed spirits of Hades could don a more elaborate free-flowing kimono-like tunic which was also

²⁷ Integration

²⁸ Opera

²⁹ Three-dimensional forms

³⁰ Adolphe Appia designed Hellerau's stage, completed in 1912 in time for the first of two summer music festivals prior to World War I. Jaques-Dalcroze left for Geneva at the start of World War I and never returned. The complex was taken over by Nazi Germany in the 1930s and was used as a military headquarters. After World War II it belonged to Communist East Germany, when it crumbled into severe disrepair (“Premature”). The Great Hall, among other surrounding structures at Hellerau, was, however, restored in the twenty-first century.



Fig. 2.6. Appia, Adolphe. Set, Lighting and Costume Design for a rehearsal of Orfeo's Descent Into the Underworld from Act II of *Orfeo ed Euridice* in The Great Hall at Hellerau. 1912. Great Hall architecture designed by Heinrich Tessenow. *King's Visualization Lab*. Department of Digital Humanities, King's College, London. Web. 2 Feb. 2010.

used as a school garment" (see fig. 2.7) (97). Appia also wished "to underscore the pedagogic aspect of the exercise: a demonstration of the work of the school, which should be seen as an extension of life— not a spectacle—to be participated in imaginatively by the public" (97). No less than five thousand audience members saw *Orfeo*. Before World War I and Jaques-Dalcroze's departure, the institute was visited by many more, including the elite of the European art world: George Bernard Shaw, Rainer

Maria Rilke, Max Reinhardt, Oskar Kokoschka³¹, Rachmaninoff, Stanislavsky, and, from the *Ballets Russes*, Sergei Diaghilev, Nijinsky³² and Pavlova all came (Beacham 104).³³

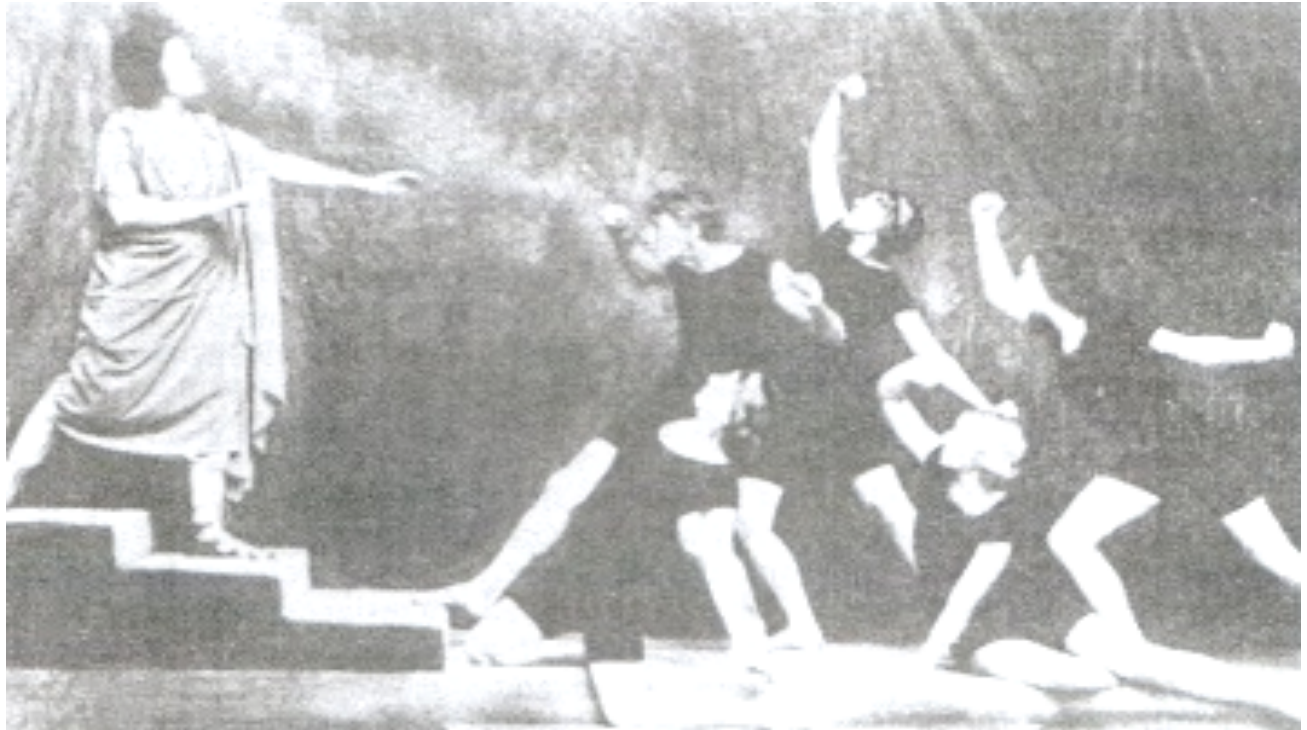


Fig. 2.7. Appia, Adolphe. Costume Design for *Orfeo ed Eurydice*. 1912. Rpt. in Richard C. Beacham's *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary of the Modern Theatre*. Camberwell: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994. 103. Print.

For those unfamiliar with Appia's work or who could not read German (Geddes, for example),³⁴ *Die Musik* very importantly contained a groundbreaking series of

³¹ A leading German Expressionist playwright

³² The famous Russian ballet dancer was a student of Jaques-Dalcroze, as was the American dancer/choreographer Ruth St. Denis, who trained Martha Graham. Geddes actually recommended to Reinhardt to cast Nijinsky as The Piper in the New York production of *The Miracle*, but he was in an asylum in Switzerland at the time. Both Geddes and Reinhardt visited him there to ask if he would play the role, but by then Nijinsky had, apparently, retreated from reality (Geddes, *Miracle* 170).

³³ The festivals were held only in the summers of 1912 and 1913. This list includes those who saw *Orfeo*, such as Shaw, or, otherwise, visited the school at other times (Beacham 104).

³⁴ In *Miracle in the Evening*, Geddes mentions the use of a translator in his conversations with Max Reinhardt.

illustrations that visually embodied Appia's theories as applied to hypothetical productions of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*)³⁵ and *Tristan und Isolde*.³⁶ "These drawings," according to Simonson, "revealed a unity and simplicity of design that could be made an inherent part of stage settings in a way that no one had hitherto conceived, Wagner least of all. Practitioners of stagecraft were converted by a set of illuminations to a gospel which most of them never read" (Foreword xi). To illustrate this, I strategically contrast a design for the climactic mountaintop scene in Act III of *Die Walküre* from the 1876 Bayreuth production (see fig. 2.8) to a rendering from Appia's hypothetical design, which appeared with explanatory notes in *Die Musik* (see fig. 2.9).³⁷ Hoffman's model epitomizes two essential trappings of nineteenth-century stagecraft: the unyielding pursuit of an exaggeratedly picturesque vision of realism (that is to say, Romantic Realism) and painted, two-dimensional scenic elements (Pictorial Illusionism) to represent three-dimensional forms. A drop with a painted sky is hung behind multiple flats and wings, all carefully positioned to give the illusion of a Romantic vision of reality. Clearly, when considering Hoffman's model, painterly technique and style (Neoclassicism vs. Romanticism) had evolved since Serlio's *Setting for Tragedy*. You are, nevertheless, looking at a nineteenth-century production that, fundamentally, utilizes the same scenic approach from three hundred years before.

³⁵ Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle was completed in 1874, consisting of four operas: *Das Rheingold* (*The Gold of the Rhine*), *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*). The four operas were first performed together as the first production of Wagner's Bayreuth Festival in Germany 1876.

³⁶ *Tristan and Isolde* premiered in Munich in 1865.

³⁷ For *Die Valküre*, these notes consist primarily of Appia's *mise-en-scène*.



Fig. 2.8. Hoffman, Josef (Viennese, 1831-1904). Model for Act III of Wagner's *Die Walküre* at Bayreuth. c. 1876. National Archives of the Richard-Wagner-Foundation, Bayreuth, Germany. Rpt. in Oscar G. Brockett, Margaret Mitchell and Linda Hardberger's *Making the Scene: A History of Stage Design and Technology in Europe and the United States*. San Antonio: Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, 2010. 199. Print.

Appia's illustration, on the other hand, calls for the mountaintop (barely noticeable amidst the debris of Hoffman's model) to be represented by a sculptural landscape (the drawing is not that of a drop), upon which the actors, liberated from perpendicular surfaces, could freely perform (see fig. 2.10). The sketch also suggests how Appia's lighting, the great unifier, could not only blend the various scenic elements,

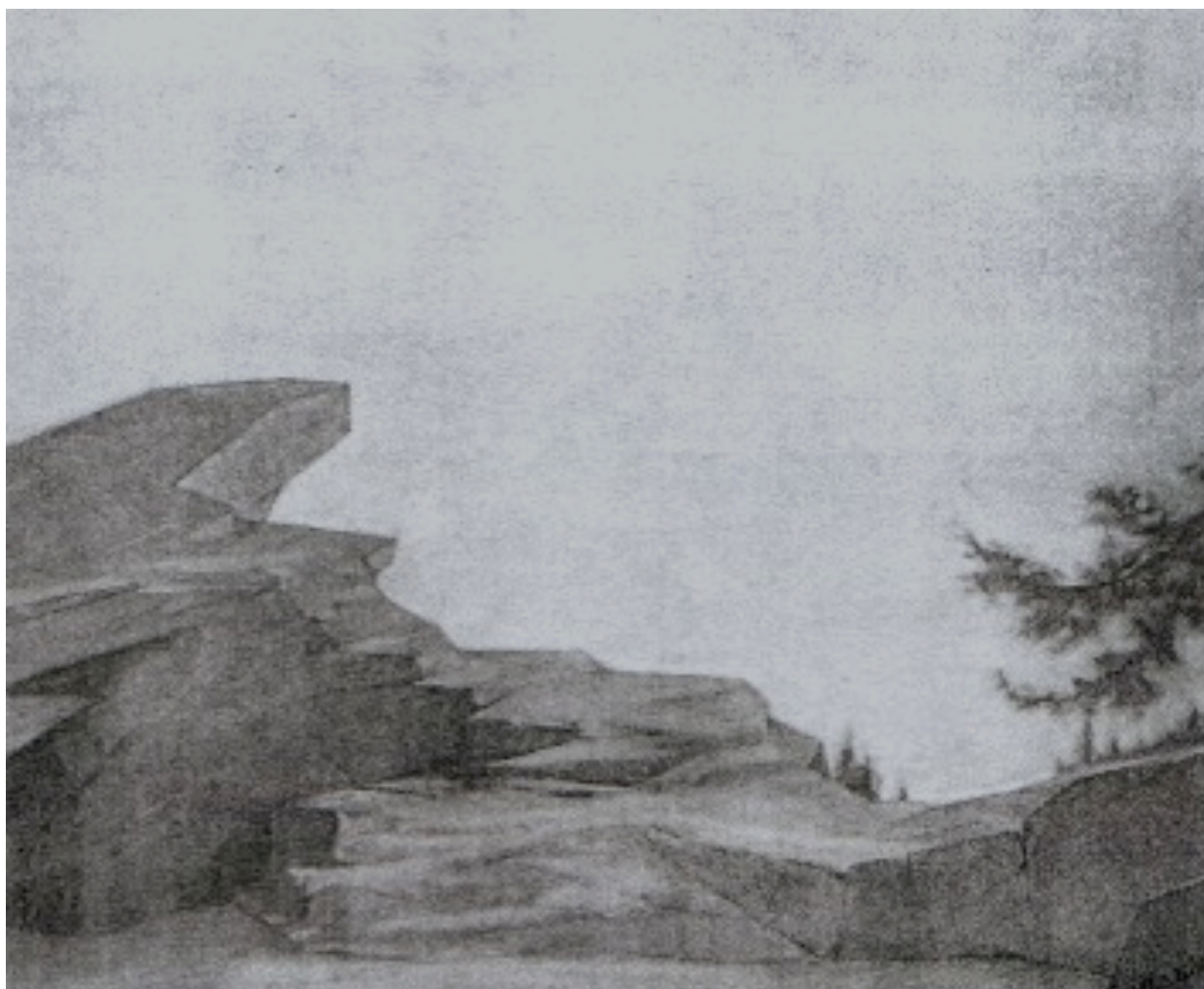


Fig. 2.9. Appia, Adolphe. *Rock of the Valkyrie* for Act III of *Die Walküre* from *Die Musik und die Inszenierung*. Rpt. in Richard C. Beacham's *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary of the Modern Theatre*. Camberwell: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994. 33. Print.

but also contribute to a visual sublimity on par with Wagner's devastating score. These renderings, of course, never came to material fruition, although Appia was able to stage *Das Rheingold* in 1925 in Switzerland at a theatre in Basel. The rest of the cycle, however, was cancelled because of conservative opposition to his scenography (Beacham 301).



Fig. 2.10. Appia, Adolphe. *Der Sturm kommt heran! Flieh', wer ihn fürchtet!*³⁸ 1899. Rpt. in Adolphe Appia's *Music and the Art of the Theatre*. 1962. Ed. Barnard Hewitt. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1981. 229. Print.

Die Musik und die Inszenierung, for all its efforts, nonetheless belongs to the nineteenth century. Despite its gesture towards a non-referential theatre, the book's illustrations indicate that Appia, like Hoffman, was still wedded to a literal representation of nature. In spite of this, Appia's and Hoffman's concepts of theatrical realism were at odds with one another. Although his 1896 illustration for *Parsifal*, with its forest of trees/temple columns gestured towards the abstract (see fig. 2.11), it would not be until the twentieth century that Appia's scenic work would move into total abstraction, as at Hellerau, for example.

³⁸ "The storm approaches! Flee, who is afraid of it!"

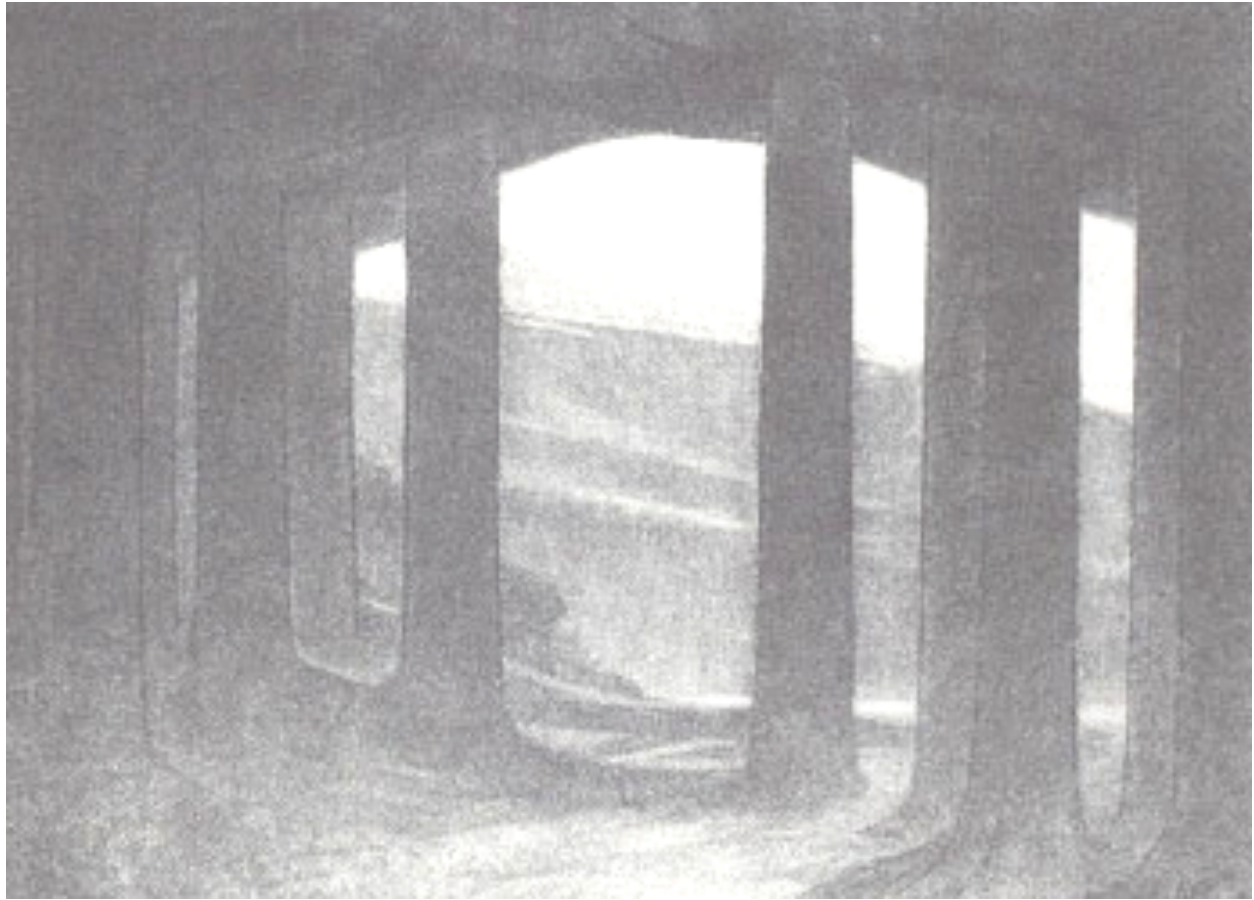


Fig. 2.11. Appia, Adolphe. *Sacred Grove*. Scenic rendering for Wagner's *Parsifal*. 1896. Collection *Suisse du Theatre*, Bern, Switzerland. Rpt. in Arnold Aronson's *Architect of Dreams: The Theatrical Vision of Joseph Urban*. New York: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2000. 21. *Columbia University Resources Archives*. Columbia University. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

Edward Gordon Craig made this leap at approximately the same time period, perhaps even earlier, as suggested by his rendering for Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Electra* (see fig. 2.12). Craig also published and experimented more frequently in actual theatre practice than did Appia. Although Appia's ethos preceded Craig's, the Londoner's writings first impacted the American theatre through his English-language publications (although Moderwell's book featured several of Appia's illustrations, *Die Musik und Inszenierung* was not entirely translated into English until 1962.) "Besides

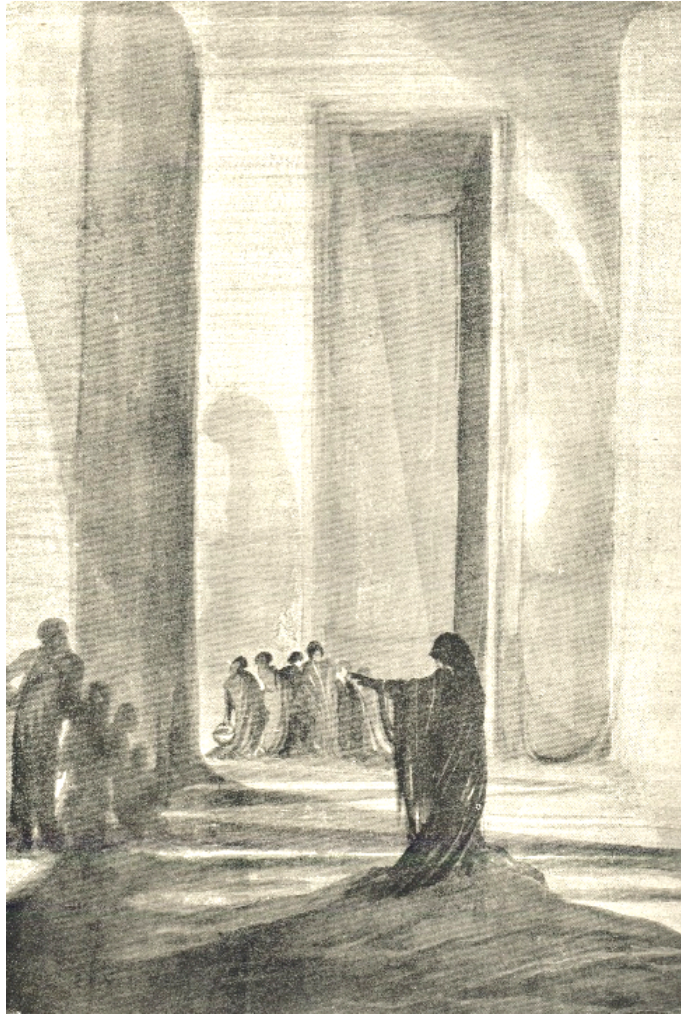


Fig. 2.12. Craig, Edward Gordon. Scenic Rendering for von Hoffmansthal's *Electra*. 1904. Rpt. in Edward Gordon Craig's *Towards a New Theatre*. London: JM Dent & Sons Limited, 1913. Front. 35. Print.

[Craig's] monthly magazine *The Mask*³⁹ (which appeared regularly in Brownes' and Brentano's bookstores) nine editions of *On the Art of the Theatre* appeared between 1911 and 1914" (Larson 36). "Moreover," observed Fuerst and Hume in 1929, "for the last twenty years Craig has had what Appia lacked, a personal organ of publicity almost exclusively devoted to propaganda for the extension of the Craig cult" (1: 24). "All this,"

³⁹ A journal of Edward Gordon Craig's theory and drawings published between 1908 and 1929

the authors continued, “has produced a continuously amusing and entertaining show for the side-lines (sic), and the world of the theatre has talked and laughed and, more important, still, has read” (1: 24). Fuerst and Hume, moreover, do not deny that, even for those fluent in German, “the books of Appia are extremely difficult to read, while Craig, on the contrary, presents his ideas and even his paradoxes in a form which, though at times cryptic, makes on the whole unusually light and easy reading. The works of Appia are to a certain extent hermetical” (1: 23).

Both artists, nevertheless, possessed a conception of theatrical art that demanded clear departures from the various species of realism seen on stages of their time. Here, in *Towards a New Theatre*, Craig makes his case against theatrical literalism remarkably clear:

The popularization of Ugliness, the bearing of false witness against Beauty – these are the achievements of the Realistic Theatre. . . . Photographic and Phonographic Realism injure the minds of the people. They thrust upon them a grotesque and inaccurate representation of the outward and visible life—with the divine essence—the spirit—the beauty of life left out. . . . For there is no poison more swift than that which eats into the mind—this false-witnessing Realism—this traitor to the Imagination—this idolatry of ugliness to which the Realistic Theatre would compel us. (89-90)

Appia, too (although not quite as vociferously as Craig) disparaged replication of the material world as a poor substitute for a scenic art that asked its audiences to reach beyond a superficial phenomenological perspective:

True art never tries to deceive the eye. The illusion created by a work of art is not to delude us regarding the nature of emotions or objects in their relationship to reality, but rather to draw us so completely into the artist's vision that it seems to be our own. This requires a certain refinement of aesthetic perception on the part of the audience. Otherwise our need for illusion is displaced and crude appearance of reality becomes for us the goal of art. The average audience will always ask to be deceived, and to be given what the ordinary man enjoys most,

that is, the most exact replica of what he is *capable of seeing* in the outer world, and the drama, of all the arts, is best suited to satisfy such a desire. (*Music* 33) Despite his success at Hellerau, Appia could never truly be considered an engaged practitioner. One can almost visualize the designer in his studio, alone, experimenting with his sketching pencils while *Parsifal* plays repeatedly on a phonograph in the background. Furthermore, Appia concentrated mostly on operatic performance⁴⁰ (and, within opera, narrowed his focus almost exclusively to Wagner), of which he was, for all intents and purposes, an aficionado. Craig, who maintained that “we go to the theatre to see and not to hear,” (qtd. in Fuerst and Hume 1: 41), however, came from the opposite side of the proscenium. In addition to his acting career,⁴¹ he designed a number of realized spoken-word productions during his lifetime, most of them staged in Europe between 1900 and 1912.⁴² The most historicized of these is undoubtedly Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1912) for the Moscow Art Theatre, which he designed and directed and Stanislavski staged.⁴³ *Hamlet*’s unit set was completely abstract. Most notable was the employment of moveable *Screens*⁴⁴ (see fig. 2.13).

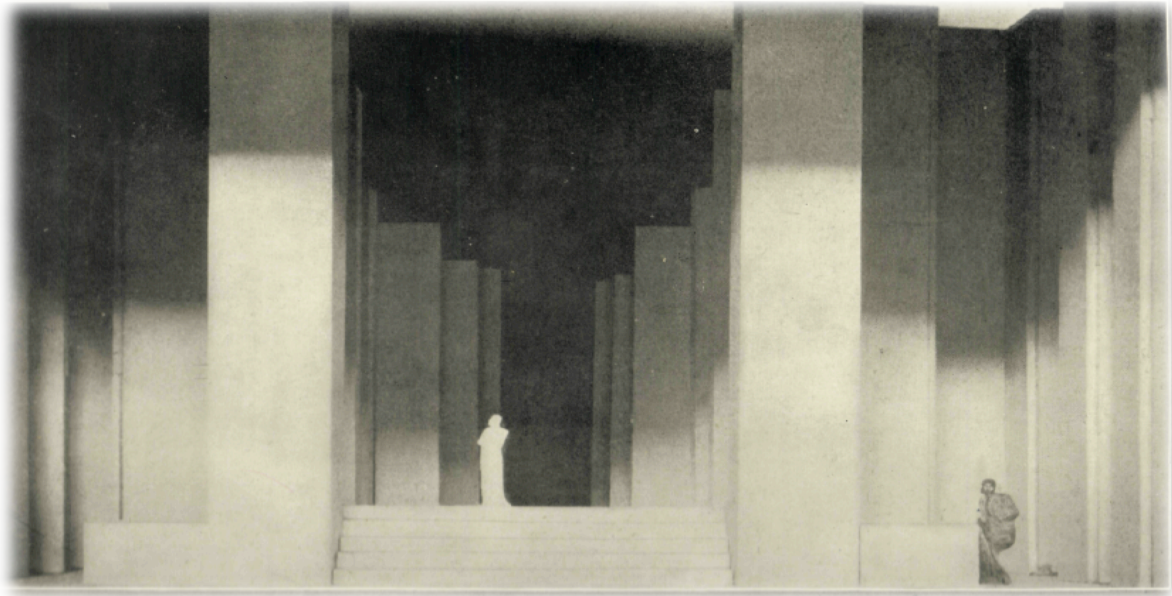
⁴⁰ Some exceptions include dramas by William Shakespeare and Henrik Ibsen (*Little Eyolf*). These projects were undertaken during the final years of Appia’s life.

⁴¹ Edward Gordon Craig’s mother was the renowned English stage actress Ellen Terry (1847-1928). She is immortalized in Sargent’s famous painting of her as Lady Macbeth, wearing a stunning green gown covered in a thousand iridescent wings of the Jewel Beetle (“Archaeology”).

⁴² A notable exception is Craig’s design work for Ibsen’s *Pretenders* at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in 1926.

⁴³ Edward Gordon Craig, who didn’t speak Russian, never worked with the cast directly. Instead, he gave instructions to Konstantin Stanislavski to then communicate to the actors (Innes, *Edward*, 159).

⁴⁴ I italicize and capitalize them to denote them as original creations of stage art and to differentiate them from what is implied by *screens*.



2.13. Craig, Edward Gordon. Stage model for the *Screens*. 1912. Rpt. in Edward Gordon Craig's *Towards a New Theatre*. London: JM Dent & Sons Limited, 1913. Front. 85. Print.

These weren't literal screens (although you could see through them into a Craigian infinity), but giant cubic monoliths made from painted canvas stretched over wooden frames (McKinney and Butterworth 20). They would ultimately become Craig's signature set piece. As Craig's model indicates, they towered over the performers, almost obliterating the presence of the single human body. (One can only imagine the challenge perceived by the actor playing the title character during the play's lengthy monologues.) Craig's partiality to design is indicated in writing in *Towards a New Theatre*, where he berates Aristotle for his "preposterous and ill-judged" (67) disregard for design as a crucial theatrical art form. "The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own," the Greek philosopher wrote in the *Poetics*, "but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry" (298). "Besides," he

continues, “the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet” (298). “Why, then,” Craig asks, “does he use the word ‘spectacle’? . . . For this gives us the idea that he is talking about something common-place and vulgar, whereas we know that the scene can be beautiful, not merely effective—beautiful” (*Towards* 67). Later, Craig reveals that he created the *Screens* (*sans* actors, *sans* words) as a rebuttal to the *Poetics*. “I suppose I was feeling that I had removed spectacle or scene from the realms of poetry,” he explained, quite sardonically, “thereby preventing any future contamination to the art of poetry. I remember. Just as I was forgetting. Enemies will always make you forget friends for a moment” (68). He goes on to lament the current state of English stage design: “Was there ever such a spectacle as this poor stage has had for centuries? In fact I have passed through London and found no other woman so poor and so low as she is. And for that reason I intend to do all I can to place her higher than anyone else” (68).

Craig also made bold strides in Modernist costume design that Appia did not. At Hellerau, Appia had essentially only corrected a directorial choice by suggesting an alternative that already existed. He didn’t “design” the costumes for *Orfeo*, at least not in the strict sense, whereas Craig had always expressed an active interest in costumes as part of his quest towards scenographic unification.

Craig’s costumes for *Hamlet* were not, like the *Screens*, abstract in themselves, but his use of them, in particular instances, was. Like the *Screens*, they obfuscated the individual actor’s presence, and this was exactly what he had in mind for at least one of the scenes. “Human facial expression is for the most part worthless,” Craig wrote in

The Theatre-Advancing in 1919 (103-04). “Drama which is not trivial takes us *beyond reality*, and asks a human face, the realest of things, to express all that. It is unfair” (104). Although most of *Hamlet*’s principal characters were costumed in drab tones of grays and beiges, Claudius and Gertrude wore costumes of bright gold, as did the courtiers in act one, scene two, forming a gleaming heap of bodies *en masse* (see fig. 2. 14) (Innes, *Edward* 151).⁴⁵ In front of the court lay another pile of bodies, completely covered in dark draperies. Hamlet lies in repose, at bottom left. Claudius and Gertrude are throned at center. A thin sheet of black gauze, acting as a kind of scrim, separates Hamlet from the court (Innes, *Edward* 152). Craig explained this choice in *Towards a New Theatre*:

You see the stage divided by a barrier. On the one side sits Hamlet, fallen, as it were, into a dream, on the other side you see his dream. You see it, as it were, through the mind’s eye of Hamlet. That which is behind him is like molten gold. It is the Court of the King and Queen of Denmark. It is the grotesque caricature of a vile kind of royalty. The King speaks as if he were an automaton; his jaws snap on the words, he grunts them out ferociously. If you will read the words in the play, you will see that they are pure caricature, and should be treated as such. It is not an actual thing—it is a vision. The barrier which divides Hamlet from the Court is what you will, but to him it seems to be like the shrouded graves of his hopes, amongst which lies his father’s body – murdered. (81)

Innes contends these costume choices stemmed from Craig’s conception of the play as a struggle between spirituality, represented by Hamlet, (traditionally robed in black) and the material world, portrayed by the amorphous, glittering mass (*Edward* 150).

Although Appia (post-*Die Musik*) and Craig’s aesthetic values privileged abstract forms, there were other fundamental differences between the two. For Appia, the

⁴⁵ The virginal Ophelia wore white, a choice made by Konstantin Stanislavski “in deference to the romantic preconceptions of his public” (Innes, *Edward* 151).

primary expressive unit, one he believed all other elements should support, was the performer. “The *actor* will take the first place, with full right,” he proclaimed (“Art” xiv). “After him will come the *setting*, or general arrangement of the scene; to place it here indicates that it is concerned solely with the actor, that tri-dimensional, mobile figure” (xiv). Craig, on the other hand, saw the performer as a formal element on par with all



Fig. 2.14. Craig, Edward Gordon. Sketch of *Hamlet*, 1.2. 1912. Rpt. in Edward Gordon Craig's *Towards a New Theatre*. London: JM Dent & Sons Limited, 1913. Front. 85. Print.

other elements of production, including design. In 1906 Craig ignited a firestorm when he published “The Actor and the Über-Marionette,” his best-known and most controversial essay, one that remains widely misunderstood to this day:

The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the Über-marionette we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name. . . . Then we shall no longer be under the cruel influence of the emotional confessions of weakness which are nightly witnessed by the people and which in their turn create in the beholders the very weaknesses which are exhibited. To that end we must study to remake these images—no longer content with a puppet, we must create an übermarionette. The übermarionette will not compete with life—rather will it go beyond it. (159-61)

Misinterpreted as a diatribe against the human actor in favor of puppetry, the essay, as Innes insightfully explains, is really something quite different than its title immediately suggests:

His argument was against the “actor,” but not against the human performer per se. He rejected the conventional approach to acting, together with those trained in it who were unable to rise above its vices. In his view, the major of these vices was the display of personality and emotions, which formed the main attraction of the existing theater but which put the body at the mercy of psychological forces under imperfect control at best. It meant that actors wanted always to be sympathetic or central instead of subordinate to the dramatic requirements of the piece. To produce a degree of emotional unity in which all the gestures, as a whole, would form a clear and distinct intellectual image—one, moreover, that would not vary from performance to performance—the actor had to have total physical control, which precluded personal vanity. (*Edward* 122-23)

“The Actor and the Übermarionette” nevertheless extended the territory of artistic unity beyond an Appian approach, which was restricted to scenography. Craig was obviously aware that a unified production was also vulnerable to the non-conformity of its performers. Just as he insisted on visual unity, “The Actor and the Übermarionette”

makes clear he also insisted on including performance as part of his conception of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Appia was, furthermore, reclusive and introverted. "My character and circumstances do not allow me so active a life as my artistic capabilities might seem to require. I only work well alone," he wrote in a letter to Craig in January of 1919 (qtd. in Beacham 159). Craig, on the other hand, was flamboyant and an overt (perhaps even a performative) radical. "For it must be remembered," Fuerst and Hume emphasize, "that Appia was only proposing certain reforms, and did not wish, as Craig did, to raze the contemporary theatre in order to build something else in its place" (1: 23). McKinney and Butterworth refute a long-standing allegation that Craig was a plagiarist, stealing Appia's ideas and delivering them as his own:

Indeed, because the work and vision of both men shared many similarities, it is often suggested that Craig copied his ideas from Appia. However, this is not the case. Craig first became aware of Appia's work in 1908 when he was shown some designs for Wagner's operas. Craig was immediately struck by Appia's designs and wanted to meet him. Unfortunately, Craig was informed, wrongly as it happens, that Appia was dead. It was not until 1911 that Craig found out that Appia was still alive and the two men finally met in 1914. Both Craig and Appia had been invited to present work at the Theatre Exhibition at the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Zurich. Up to that point the theatrical experience of the two men had been quite different. (17)

Beacham supports McKinney and Butterworth's contention:

There is considerable irony, and some cause for sadness, in this debate, since Craig and Appia themselves neither recognized nor encouraged any such mean-spirited comparison; indeed each had the greatest esteem and affection for the other, and each was serenely aware both of the merits of the other's work, and of the degree to which it was similar to or different from his own. Neither felt in the least threatened, compromised, or exploited by what each, better than most, could perceive as the independent creativity of the other. (160)

Theirs was, nonetheless, a crusade for an insurgent notion of scenographic beauty that was a powerful rebuttal to the nineteenth century's: sculptural and abstract, bordering on the religious, where these two seers would hold sway, but, at least for American scenographers, exclusively on the printed page.

It was Germany's Max Reinhardt who would bring the first distinctly Modernist production to Broadway.

2.2 "THE MAGICIAN OF LEOPOLDSKRON"⁴⁶

During the first decades of the twentieth century, Reinhardt was the foremost stage director in Germany and Weimar Culture⁴⁷, if not all of Continental theatre.

Reinhardt's status as such can be attributed to several accomplishments. First, his artistic output was superhuman. The *Centennial Festschrift*,⁴⁸ published in 1973 by the University of New York at Binghamton, indicates that Reinhardt directed 452 plays performed for 23,374 houses between 1905 and 1930 (Styan 5). Next, beginning in 1905, he headed several theatres in Berlin, including the *Schall und Rauch*⁴⁹ (later the *Kleines*), the *Grosses Schauspielhaus*,⁵⁰ the *Neus*,⁵¹ the *Deutches*,⁵² the

⁴⁶ Leopoldskron was the village outside Vienna where Reinhardt had a residence. The title of this section is borrowed from Rudolf Kommer's chapter title in Sayler's book.

⁴⁷ A profuse flowering of the arts that took place under the Weimar Republic, beginning after the end of World War I and ending when Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933

⁴⁸ A Reinhardt retrospective in the form of a collection of essays

⁴⁹ *Sound and Smoke*, a small cabaret, it was the first theatre Reinhardt founded.

⁵⁰ *The Great Playhouse*, a 3,000-capacity arena with a thrust stage. Formerly the *Zirkus Schumann*.

*Kammerspiele*⁵³ and the *Berliner*. These spaces were a platform for an explosion of consequential German dramaturgy not seen since the days of Weimar Classicism.⁵⁴ It was at the *Deutsches* complex, for example, that Reinhardt staged *Das junge Deutschland* (*The Young Germany*), a series of Expressionist plays beginning with Reinhard Sorge's *Der Bettler* (*The Beggar*) in 1917 (see fig. 2.15) (Styan 40).⁵⁵ Over the next three years, Reinhardt would also produce, among many others, Walter Hasenclever's *Der Sohn*,⁵⁶ Oskar Kokoschka's *Der brennende Dornbusch* (*The Burning Briar Bush*) and Reinhard Goering's *Seeschlacht*.⁵⁷ The series was crucial in bringing

⁵¹ At the *Neus*, he first used Karl Lautenslager's mechanically revolving stage in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Max Reinhardt's "breakthrough" 1905 production (Styan xiii).

⁵² Max Reinhardt took over the *Deutsches*, established in 1883, from Otto Brahm. The young Reinhardt appeared in several productions there during the late-nineteenth century as an actor before turning to directing with Ibsen's *Love Comedy* in 1900 (Styan xiii).

⁵³ An intimate space located next door to the larger *Deutsches*. Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*, with sets designed by Edvard Munch (Norwegian, 1863-1944), was the first production at the *Kammerspiele* in 1906. Frank Wedekind's (German, 1864-1918) landmark *Spring Awakening* premiered there later the same year.

⁵⁴ An artistic movement during the late-18th and early-19th centuries in Germany whose chief playwrights were Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller.

⁵⁵ Ritchie affirms that *Der Bettler*, or, *The Beggar*, along with Oskar Kokoschka's *Murderer, Hope of Womankind*, "is generally accepted as the earliest document of Expressionism in drama" (61).

⁵⁶ *The Son*. According to Ritchie, Walter Hasenclever's play "crystallized the Youth Movement longings" in Germany prior to World War I (76). Reinhardt's production featured Ernst Deutsch playing the title role. In his portrayal, according to Denkler, Deutsch originated "out of ecstatic pathos and sharp dialectics," the dominant style of acting in German Expressionist productions for the next ten years (qtd. in Ritchie 77).

⁵⁷ *Sea Battle*. According to Ritchie, a production that made full use of the *schrei* (scream), a stabbing vocal gesture used in some Expressionist performance. "But the most striking feature of the play," Ritchie believes, "is the tight discipline and the controlled, hard highly stylized language" that made a sharp, decisive break with the "excessively flowery" language of Neoromanticism, a popular genre that preceded it (94).

German Expressionism out of the closet (it had initially been a clandestine movement in order to avoid government censorship) and into full view of the new republic (Styan 40).

Elwood provides a general, but concise description:

In [German Expressionism] we are accorded an internal view of how one feels. . . . All [its plays] were written as if we are on the inside of an individual or a collective of individuals. Slanting walls, telegraphic speech, distorted human form and action were the devices of the expressionistic playwright. (28)



Fig. 2.15. Stern, Ernst. Scene design for Reinhardt's 1917 production of Sorge's *The Beggar*. c. 1917. Rpt. in J.L. Styan's *Max Reinhardt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 41. Print.

The stylized acting and stark, angular scenic style that came to be associated with German Expressionism was established in Reinhardt's productions in this series at the *Deutsches* (Styan 42-43). In Vienna, Reinhardt founded the Salzburg Festival with Richard Strauss, among others, in 1920. There he also opened the Theatre in *der Redoutensaal* in the Imperial Palace in 1922, and served as artistic director of the Theatre in *der Josefstadt* in 1924. In 1937, Reinhardt, of Jewish descent, left Vienna for the United States, "where he would continue his stunning, imaginative designs, though on a much-reduced scale" (Gay 420). During Reinhardt's European reign, however, these stages formed the mecca of German-language drama.

Although preceded in Germany by Wagner and The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, Reinhardt further "contributed to another phenomenon: not only in Berlin, but everywhere, serious playgoers began to perceive the work of the director, the *régisseur*, as opposed to that of the actor, as the major object of interest" (Styan 5).⁵⁸ This was most certainly a by-product of Reinhardt's pursuit, much like his forebearers, of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Reinhardt, nonetheless, was most certainly an actor's director, as Geddes attests in *Miracle in the Evening*:

Reinhardt's directing technique was the finest I have ever seen. His responsiveness to other people placed them at ease, an enormous advantage in starting a director-actor relationship. Whether the actor was third-rate or famous, Reinhardt began by telling him that he would welcome the actor's interpretation of the part and adapt himself to it. . . . When the actor's effort was unsuccessful, Reinhardt had a few words with him and the actor became receptive through an

⁵⁸ Now, in 2013, the mass marketing of actors from the world of media has caused the pendulum to swing back completely, at least on Broadway. Other than the musical, still the mainstay of Broadway box offices, and intermittent imports from Europe, today's repertoire consists mainly of smaller casts with at least one, but preferably several, television and/or film personalities.

awareness of his own limitations. Reinhardt was endlessly patient. Every actor fortunate enough to have worked with him praised him to the skies. Half of the greatest actors of Europe worked under him most of their lives,⁵⁹ not because he paid them more, but because he gave them more. Only a very great director could keep an audience enthralled for three hours without a word being spoken. That was Reinhardt's achievement in *The Miracle*. (295)

According to some critics, however, his relationship with his loyal retinue of scenic and costume designers differed quite markedly from his collaborative relationship with performers. Much like his acting company, Reinhardt employed designers for extended periods of time during his career. Along with his actors, assistants and technical crews, they were an integral part of what became known throughout Europe as "The Reinhardt Machine" (Hartley 89). One of the most prominent of Reinhardt's designers was Ernst Stern, who, like Geddes, generally designed sets, lighting and costumes for the same production. "Reinhardt knew far too well that the pictorial arts must not be masters but only helpers on the stage. So he surrounded himself with artists who could enter into his own spirit and execute his intentions almost as if they and he were one in mind and eye" (Washburn-Freund 55). This aspect of his directorial approach would eventually define Geddes' final set design for the New York production of *The Miracle*.

More than anything, however, Reinhardt is best known for embracing an astonishing range of dramaturgy and production styles from Ancient Greek theatre to The First-Wave Avant-Garde of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁶⁰

"Accordingly," according to Kommer, "he was labeled a neo-romanticist, an

⁵⁹ These included Werner Krause, Emil Jannings and Tilla Durieux, among many others, who were in Reinhardt's company.

⁶⁰ Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism and Expressionism, chiefly

impressionist, a neo-impressionist, a symbolist, an expressionist, an eclectic par-excellence, and even an ‘Austrian hedonist’” (*Magician* 4). Reinhardt, nonetheless, cannot be wholly identified by any of them, except, perhaps, “an eclectic par-excellence,” although *eclectic* implies dilettantism, of which he cannot be accused. Kommer would identify him as “an everlastingly adventurous experimentalist—if it were not for the fact that this glorious errant knight of the theatre abhors the experiment for the experiment’s sake and indulges in experimenting only when confronted with an artistic problem” (*Magician* 4). The plain fact of the matter is, unlike Craig, a purist who can be fingerprinted by anyone even vaguely familiar with his set designs, there is no definitive Reinhardt style. It simply fluctuated from production to production. Variance and unification are the only constancies that can be applied to his artistry. Craig proposed a fundamentally single stylistic remedy for all of his productions. Reinhardt, conversely, diagnosed each production differently. This is, of course, also true of many accomplished directors today, although the breadth of Reinhardt’s oeuvre remains an extraordinary *fait accompli*.

Reinhardt, however, borrowed at will from the aesthetic precepts and products of his European contemporaries outside of his company to suit his own needs. It was Reinhardt, in fact, who was most successful in promoting Craigian iconography in actual theatre practice by incorporating the Englishman’s style into his own work. Von Hofmannsthal qualifies this: “He learned much from [Edward Gordon Craig], but only in order to create out of what he learned something newer, more powerful, better suited to the practical theatre” (22). Craig’s presence is salient, for example, in *Oedipus Rex*,

one of Reinhardt's most celebrated productions, performed at the *Zirkus Schumann*⁶¹ in 1910 (see fig. 2.16). The *Screens* have been modified as columns, and, instead of light, which Craig would likely have used, the walls of a *skene*-like structure serve as a backdrop to the action. A prominent series of Craigian steps span the width of the set, clearly disconnecting the world of nobility from the citizens of Thebes in the orchestra below. The visual similarities between this production and Craig's *Hamlet* are, truly, quite striking.⁶² "Here, as elsewhere," Macgowan noted in 1921, "it can hardly be denied that Reinhardt drew inspiration from Craig, who dreamed thus of what the German producer created in his Theatre of the Five Thousand" (*Theatre* 307).

Reinhardt's 1912 visit to The United States would prove to be a major turning point in the history of the American theatre when it jump-started the American revolution in theatrical design practice known as the New Stagecraft. The production was Friedrich Freksa's (German, 1882-1955) Orientalist *Sumurun*, a powerful, direct assault on Photographic Realism (see fig. 2.17), and a major influence on the work of Geddes in particular. *Peg o' My Heart*,⁶³ which ran on Broadway the same year *Sumurun* arrived, typifies, for example, many of the prominent characteristics of Photographic Realism as applied to the domestic interior: a box setting placed behind a proscenium

⁶¹ The *Zirkus* ("Circus") *Schumann* was converted in 1919 to Max Reinhardt's *Grosses Schauspielhaus*, where he would also stage *The Oresteia* and *Lysistrata*.

⁶² Max Reinhardt directed Shakespeare's magnum opus himself in 1920 in the same space as *Oedipus Rex*. The set design was even more reductive than the production of Sophocles' play.

⁶³ The production was a "star vehicle," also typical of the period, that launched the Broadway career of Laurette Taylor (1884-1946), which would reach its zenith in her role as Amanda in the premiere of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* on Broadway in 1945.



Fig. 2.16. Orlik, Emil. Scene Design for Reinhardt's *Oedipus Rex* at the *Zirkus Schumann*. 1910. Rpt. in Hermann Bahr's "The Spiritual Sources of Reinhardt." Trans. Mrs. Frank E. Washburn-Freund. *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre*. Ed. Oliver M. Saylor. "The Miracle" ed. New York: Brentano's, 1926. Front. 32. Print.

arch, the suffocating use of three-dimensional properties, a compulsive obsession with minute (but "civilized") detail, and actors clad in fashionable dress of the period. Craig and Appia undoubtedly would have considered productions like *Peg o' My Heart*, to borrow a phrase from Roberts, "true to life and false to art" (426).

Sumurun, however, was something altogether quite different:

Based upon *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, the erotic symbolist play by Friedrich Freksa was performed entirely without words, except for a brief prologue. The production's designer, Ernst Stern, referred to it as a "pantomime musical." . . . Sans reference to particular time and place, the production employed dance, mime and stylized movement in a series of tableaux vivants and processions.



Fig. 2.17. Production photograph from J. Hartley Manners' (English, 1870-1928) American production of *Peg o' My Heart*, 1912. The Theatre Collection, The Museum of the City of New York. Rpt. in Orville K. Larson's *Scene Design in the American Theater From 1915 to 1960*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1989. 27. Print.

The production reflected the vibrant qualities of silent film, but here they were made three-dimensional; Reinhardt even expanded the action beyond the usual confines of the proscenium. Inspired by Japanese Kabuki theater, Reinhardt built a version of a hanamichi, a narrow runway extending from the front of the stage through the audience to the back of the house . . . thus breaking the fourth wall and increasing intimacy between audience and actors despite the large space and spectacular nature of the scenery and pageantry. (Wainscott 95)

"We cannot say," Eaton amusingly remarked in "The New Stagecraft," that [Reinhardt's bridge] wholly succeeds, probably because it is rather too startling" (110).

Geddes, on the other hand, was awestruck by the effect. "It was exciting and fun and

thrilling—and the theatre should be these things—when the actors not only moved through the audience but passed over our heads,” he wrote in *Miracle in the Evening* (147). “Seeing *Sumurun* convinced me of the kind of theatre I have always believed in is possible and needed” (147).⁶⁴ In “The New Stagecraft” Eaton did, however, make a case for some of Reinhardt’s scenic advancements:

. . . there is no question of the success of the stage settings, which are in the style of the “relief theatre,” as it is called in Germany, where it had been developed, with suggestions from Gordon Craig.⁶⁵ The “relief theatre” largely eliminates perspective. It is flat and shallow, and the actors move against the pictorial background almost like animated figures on a sculptured relief (see fig. 2.18). (110)

In 1997, Wainscott continued praise of the production’s intrepid design approach:

Rather than dazzle the audience with minute scenic detail, Reinhardt and Stern eschewed perspective and produced a monochromatic background with large splashes of vivid color (deep blues and indigo skies for example); vistas of white, off white and pink walls, or silhouettes of mosques and minarets, usually in single colors or deep black (see fig. 2.19). (95)

The scenography of *Kismet*, another Orientalist drama that happened to run on Broadway concurrently with *Sumurun*, by contrast, waded in the Pictorial Illusionism of the prior century (see fig. 2.20). Note, for example, the perspective drop and the layerings of angled wings that smother the playing area. It gave Eaton, who labeled *Kismet* a “faithful and elaborate reproduction of an Oriental scene, which leaves nothing to the imagination,” the opportunity to clearly distinguish the scenographic divergences

⁶⁴ Norman Bel Geddes saw a 1915 Palace Theatre revival of *Sumurun*, not the 1912 Broadway premiere that Eaton reviewed (“Trouble”)

⁶⁵ According to Larson, Walter Prichard Eaton was incorrect in his claim that Edward Gordon Craig directly influenced the design schema of *Sumurun* (39).



Fig. 2.18. Stern, Ernst. Sketch of Set and Costume Designs from *Sumurun*. c. 1911. Rpt. in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "The Salzburg Project: The Repertory of Festival." *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre*. Ed. Oliver M. Sayler. Trans. Mariele S. Gudernatsch, et al. "The Miracle" ed. New York: Brentano's, 1926. 199-208. Front. 208. Print.

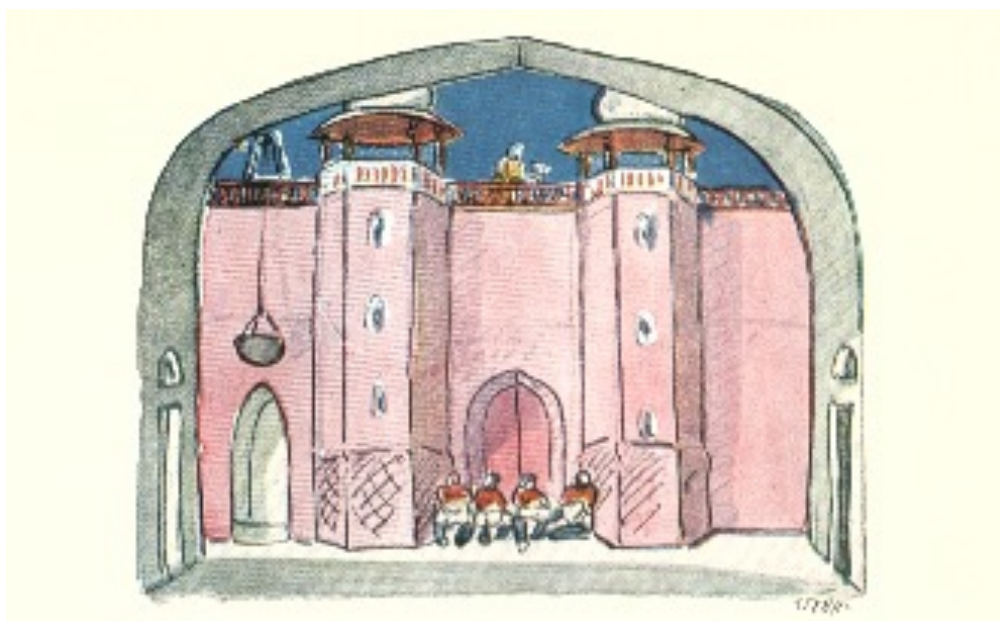


Fig. 2.19. Stern, Ernst. *The Scene Before the Harem*. Set design for *Sumurun*. c. 1911. Rpt. in Maximilian Harden's "The Genius of Max Reinhardt." *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre*. Ed. Oliver M. Sayler. Trans. Mariele S. Gudernatsch, et al. "The Miracle" ed. New York: Brentano's, 1926. 209-48. Front. 226. Print.

of *Sumurun* (“The New Stagecraft” 106). In the article, the critic also denounced Broadway’s scenography in general:

Modern scenery has become more and more cumberously realistic, less and less stimulating to the imagination, till at last our stage interiors look like a crowded corner of a furniture store and our exteriors like some child’s cardboard village, or garden, on a forty foot scale. Yet these “solid” walls of the interiors are always palpably not solid, these trees are palpably cut out and pasted on sublimated tennis nets, these beds of artificial flowers stop abruptly against a painted back drop, thus preventing all real illusion of distance and perspective, this blue sky is palpably strips of blue cloth lowered from the flies. It isn’t realistic at all, for it deceives nobody (sic). (106-07)



Fig. 2.20. *Before the Mosque* in Broadway’s *Kismet*. 1912. Eaton, Walter Prichard. “The New Stagecraft.” *The American Magazine* May 1912: 106. *Google books*. Web. 4 Nov. 2011.

Wainscott asserts that *Sumurun* was not only “unquestionably the theatrical event of the season,” but its impact “was powerful enough to sustain Reinhardt’s reputation until he returned to the United States in 1924 with *The Miracle*” (95). Its impact on the New

Stagecraft, as indicated by Geddes' reaction, was colossal. Along with the work of Appia and Craig, with *Sumurun*, Reinhardt now formed the triumvirate of Modernism's major agents of influence on the new Broadway scenography.

2.3 1914: THE BIRTH OF THE NEW STAGECRAFT

Although Eaton coined the term in 1912, the beginning of the New Stagecraft on Broadway truly belongs to 1914. I choose this year not for convenience's sake, but as a solid left bookend marked by a series of three defining events that would occur in rapid succession that year: a book publication, an exhibition and a design. In this chapter section I will establish their correlation to one another and to the movement as a whole. I will also support my definition of the *New Stagecraft* as "a dialectic formed by European Modernism and American realism (as informed by its technology) that also adheres to Macgowan's aesthetic principles of simplification, suggestion and synthesis."

In 1914, Hiram Kelly Moderwell's *The Theatre of Today* was published. It was the first comprehensive English-language narrative of Modernist scenic reforms that had been occurring across the Atlantic (Larson 35), and included illustrations of Appia's designs seen for the first time by many American stage practitioners, including Geddes. "Here were all my questions answered," Geddes would later recall. "Moderwell told about the European developments, about Max Reinhardt and Diaghilev's Russian Ballet and how they had been using designers for the last five years in just the way I had envisioned" (*Miracle* 148).

More than just a compendium of productions, *The Theatre of Today* is also very much a book of theory. Moderwell divides the entire book into a series of *Forces*: *Mechanical, Artistic, Intellectual, Literary* and *Social*. Six chapters are devoted to the *Artistic Forces*: “The Stage-Setting,” “Pure Design,” “Colour,” “Lighting,” “Stylisation” and, lastly, “Modern Scene Designing in America.” In Chapter Four, “Pure Design,” Moderwell joins the discourse concerning the dialectic between ultra-realism (or, as he called it, *facts*) and formalism (*pure design*):

Lines and masses can come to have a very great meaning—not meaning in the layman’s sense, as the “meaning” of a sentence, but meaning in terms of pure design. What wonders can be done with a few lines, or with a few masses of black or of colour, or with one or two details—important ones! Stand before some Gothic cathedral—close to it. Look against its wall and upward, and let those lines engrave themselves upon your eyeballs—lines one after another pressing tirelessly up into space. Forget that life is made of facts, forget that there is a cheap café just behind you. Let the world blot itself out and let only those lines remain. . . . And they will remain and strive, most likely, after half a dozen governments, liberal, revolutionary, and reactionary, have frittered themselves away. (85-86)

In the summer of 1914, Samuel Hume (American, 1885-1962), a former student of George Pierce Baker (American, 1866-1935),⁶⁶ staged the first exhibition of Modernist stage design in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hume, an aspiring scene designer himself, had already spent a year in Europe studying and archiving pre-war

⁶⁶ George Pierce Baker was a pioneer in establishing theatre as a legitimate field of study within the American university system. An English professor at Harvard, he founded the University Dramatic Club there in 1908. He is best known for his “47 Workshop” course, which allowed student playwrights to have their work produced. Harvard ‘47 alumni include some of the most influential stage artists of the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to playwrights Eugene O’Neill, Hallie Flanagan and Philip Barry, designers Donald Oenslager and Robert Edmond Jones also took the course. Hiram Kelly Moderwell was also a pupil. In 1925 Baker became the first Chair of the Yale School of Drama.

European scenic innovations. The trip included several months studying with Edward Gordon Craig, who was living in Florence (Larson 46). The exhibit was impressive in scope, especially given the fact that Hume researched and curated the project alone. “European designers included Ernst Stern, Alfred Roller, Karl Walser (all three of whom were Reinhardt’s designers), Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, and Leon Bakst. Joseph Urban’s models and Robert Edmond Jones’ costumes and scenic sketches for *The Merchant of Venice* were among the few American works” (Larson 46-47).

In the fall the exhibit moved to New York and was managed by Jones, then a fledgling designer, who conducted a demonstration each day until it closed at the end of the year (Larson 47).⁶⁷ Jones had recently returned from Europe, where, after being rejected as a pupil by Craig, he spent the 1913-14 theatre season with Reinhardt at the *Deutsches*. He also saw Appia’s stage in the Great Hall at Hellerau. His sketch for Belmont⁶⁸ in act one, scene two for *Merchant* (see fig. 2.21), according to Feinsod, “struck a balance between the literal and the abstract” (108), a hallmark of both Jones’ work and the New Stagecraft as a whole. Here Feinsod describes the sketch below, a truly significant breakthrough by an American scene designer:

In a few strokes, Jones captured what he saw as the essence of Belmont—its comfortable aristocracy with the whole world in its reach. How much more than the Renaissance chairs were needed to establish the period? From [Jones’] vantage point, to have everything on stage following period would be redundant; the chairs were sufficient. And what besides the cushions were necessary to project aristocratic idleness? The key feature—the round window opening to a seemingly limitless sky—captured an essential aspect of Belmont without a lot of literal detail. Moreover, Jones placed this image on a shallow stage, thus

⁶⁷ Robert Edmond Jones, like Samuel Hume, was a graduate of Baker’s ‘47 Workshop, and so the two were acquainted.

⁶⁸ Portia’s lavish home outside Venice

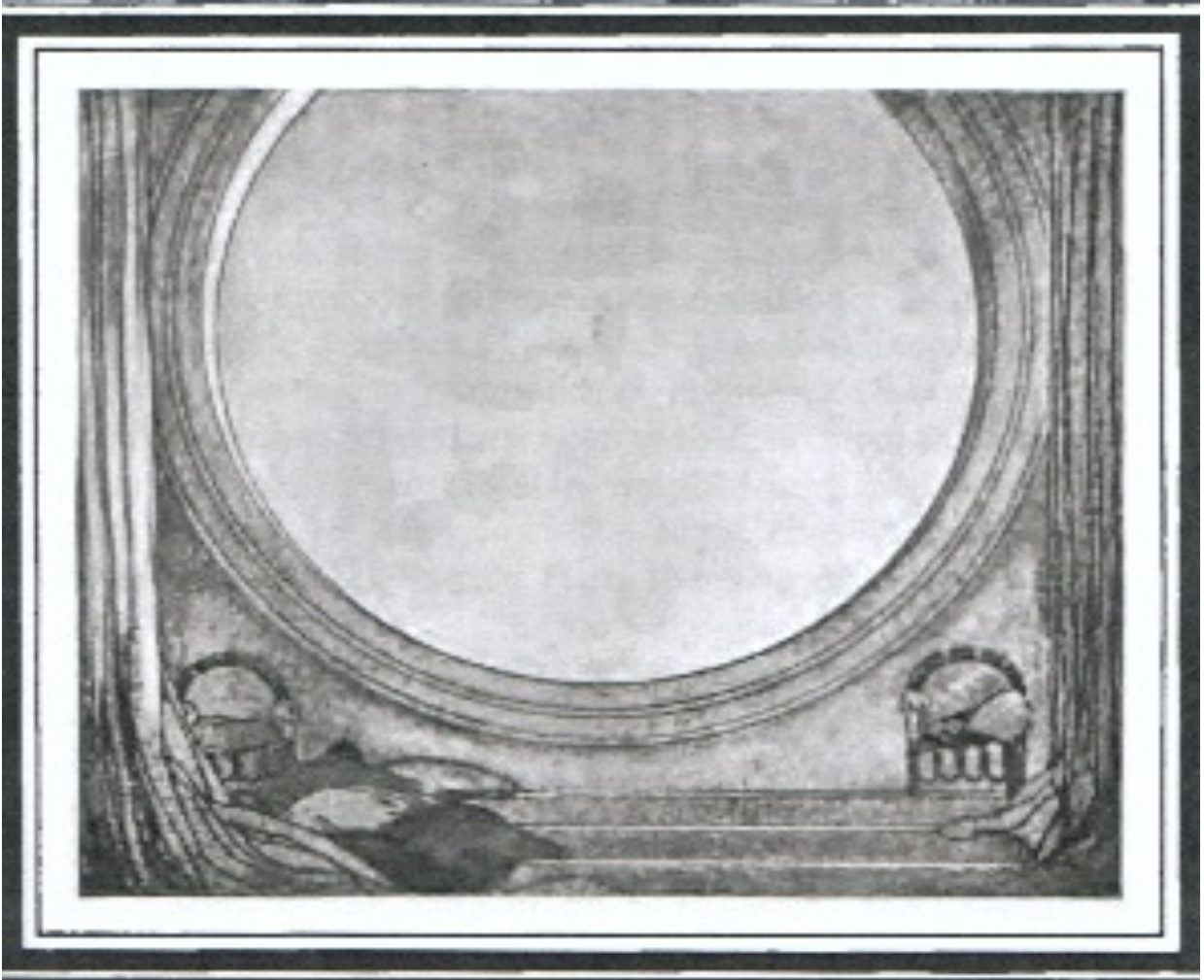


Fig. 2.21. Jones, Robert Edmond. Scenic sketch for Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, I.2. 1914. Rpt. in Hiram Moderwell's *The Theatre of Today*. New York: John Lane Company, 1914. Front. 194. Print.

restricting his performance area. He boasted about all he managed to represent with a sky "and little else." (140-41).

Emily Hapgood, president of the New York Stage Society, was struck by Jones' *Merchant* designs, and promptly asked him to design a short satire by Anatole France (French, 1844-1924), *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, which went into rehearsals

that fall.⁶⁹ Harley Granville-Barker,⁷⁰ who had been hired by the Stage Society to direct several productions that season, saw a rehearsal of *Dumb Wife*, and, when the initial production sank, asked Jones to use the same design in what would be an opener for Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* on Broadway. It would be Jones' first opportunity to design for a European producer-director (Wainscott 96). His set and costumes for *Dumb Wife*, created in 1914, would stir critics and audiences in a way not unlike *Sumurun* when the Granville-Barker production opened in January of the following year (see fig. 2.22). The set represents the exterior of a home, a scenic tradition of Ancient



Fig. 2.22. Jones, Robert Edmond. Sketch for Anatole France's *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*. c. 1914. Rpt. in Robert Edmond Jones' *Drawings for the Theatre*. 2nd ed. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1970. Plate 1. Print.

⁶⁹ Anatole France's play was about a wife who talks incessantly once her dumbness has been removed.

⁷⁰ Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) was a highly successful English actor/director/playwright during the early twentieth century.

Roman comedy (and Neoclassical France until Molière moved things indoors in the 1600s.) Actors who entered through the door (located left, beneath a small balcony) could also be seen through the large window at right and through a smaller window above the actor depicted in the illustration.

A *New York Times* article lauded Jones' designs:

Your view is of the interior of one of the rooms and of the street in front. It is a gray and black background, simple, flat, slightly conventionalized in design and unobtrusively serviceable to the movement of the quaintly clad figures in front of it and to the splotches of plain, vivid coloring that the costuming involves. All these are right and contributory, from the black hose of the agile and amative secretary to the buttercup gown of Mistress So-and-So, who goes mincing insufferably by, with her lackey literally dancing attendance. Robert E. Jones, the young American disciple of the "new school" who did the decorations, is to be congratulated. What is produced by his work and by every line and posture of the play—the contributions are indistinguishable—is a rich flavor of fanciful mediaevalism (sic). ("Second Thoughts on First Nights")

Kenneth Macgowan later reflected on *Dumb Wife's* significance to the theatre in a 1919 *Times* article, "Robert Edmond Jones":

. . . [Robert Edmond Jones] enjoys the distinction of having given America, in his first and its first native production in the new manner, a work as finished in its way and as perfect with its limitations as *The Jest*.⁷¹ That was the single setting and costumes for [Granville-Barker's] production of *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife....*" (qtd. in Bloom 147)

On January 27, 1915 the curtain rose in Broadway's Wallack Theatre on West 42nd Street. Given the fact that Jones had spent the previous season observing Reinhardt at the *Deutsches*, the likeness between Stern's *Sumurun* and *Dumb Wife* are hardly coincidental. The relief stage, limited color palette, the emphasis on the actor by the bold use of color in costuming (reds, yellows, purples and oranges), the avoidance

⁷¹ *The Jest* was a 1919 Broadway production for which Robert Edmond Jones also designed sets and costumes.

of acute historical accuracy and ornamentation were all aspects of Stern's recent work, including *Sumurun*, that Jones utilized to his advantage for *Dumb Wife*. In "The New Plays," in fact, a critic from *Theatre Magazine* called it a production "staged after the manner of *Sumurun*" (qtd. in Waincott 97). "Jones' single formal setting in shades of grey, white, and black, together with costumes in primary and secondary colors," according to Larson, "were unlike anything ever seen on Broadway in a dramatic production" (49).

"The poetic conception of stage design bears little relation to the accepted convention of realistic scenery in the theatre. As a matter of fact it is quite the opposite," Jones declared in 1941's *The Dramatic Imagination*, American scenography's answer to *Die Musik* (82). "Truth in the theatre, as the masters of the theatre have always known, stands above and beyond mere accuracy to fact. Unless life is turned into art on the stage it stops being alive and goes dead. . . . *The artist should omit the details, the prose of nature and give us only the spirit and splendor*" (82-83).⁷²

"Omitting the details" was, incontrovertibly, the opposite of producer-director David Belasco's philosophy of stage art, although New Stagecraft artists such as Jones, for example, would inevitably profit from Belasco's technological innovations, particularly in lighting. The "Bishop of Broadway," so named because of Belasco's enormous

⁷² Robert Edmond Jones had already proven the tenets of *The Dramatic Imagination*, including this one, by "practicing what he preached." He designed well over 100 Broadway productions between *Dumb Wife* and *Green Pastures* in 1951. He also maintained a long artistic collaboration with Eugene O'Neill, beginning with the Provincetown Players and, when O'Neill moved to Broadway, Jones followed; *Anna Christie* (1921), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), *"Ah, Wilderness!"* (1933) and *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) were all designed by Jones.

commercial success and curious affinity for wearing ecclesiastical garments (Fisher and Londré 54), brought Photographic Realism on The Great White Way to its apex at the turn of the century. Although the rumblings of Photographic Realism began in the late-nineteenth century, “it was not until David Belasco’s meticulous handling of ‘the little things’ in the first two decades of the twentieth century that this part of the realistic tradition reached its fullest realization” (Wainscott 4). According to Roberts, “every scenic detail, down to the smallest of properties, was arduously sought out or carefully created so that, unpeopled by the players and devoid of the play, his sets were the marvels of his audiences for their literal truth” (426). The most notorious example is, undoubtedly, his 1912 Broadway production of Alice Bradley’s *The Governor’s Lady* (see fig. 2.23). With George Gros, his leading scenic artist, Belasco managed to place an apparently functioning Child’s Cafeteria⁷³ on stage. “. . . Belasco went directly to the management and ordered a reproduction of a Child’s restaurant: tables, chairs, cutlery, glassware, trays, lighting fixtures, ceiling fans, porcelain wall tiles, and even the aroma from steam tables all came from Child’s” (see fig. 2.24) (Larson 26). The restaurant’s signature dessert, the Baked Apple Cream, was delivered in multiple from the restaurant each night to the theatre, where it was eaten by the “The Baked Apple Club” (the scene’s extras) (26).

As indicated by the images below, Belasco, contrary to theatre historiography, didn’t utterly replicate a Child’s. He did, however, use key properties and decorative

⁷³ The title character of the play clandestinely meets her lover in a Child’s cafeteria. Child’s was a chain of New York restaurants, popular at the time of Belasco’s production (Larson 26).



Fig. 2.23. A production photograph of the Child's restaurant scene from Belasco's *The Governor's Lady*. Rpt. in Orville K. Larson's *Scene Design in the American Theater From 1915 to 1960*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1989. 23. Print.



Fig. 2.24. Postcard depicting the interior of a Child's restaurant in Syracuse, New York. c. 1920. Private Collection.

elements from the restaurant to represent it on stage. The set for *The Governor's Lady*, nonetheless, was typical of the lengths Belasco would go for his productions. It was his innovations in lighting, necessitated by the requirements of his realistic stagecraft, however, that would be a particularly important contribution to the New Stagecraft. "The greatest part of my success in the theatre," he acknowledged in *The Theatre Through Its Stage Door*, "I attribute to my feeling for colors, translated into effects of light" (56). In his 1900 production of *Madame Butterfly*,⁷⁴ Belasco created one of the most astounding feats of lighting technology seen on Broadway up to that time:

Butterfly proved to be a sensation, . . . thanks to the performance of leading lady Blanche Bates and to Belasco's technical wizardry, which transfixed audiences during the 14 minute span between the play's two scenes—14 minutes during which not a single word was spoken, as Butterfly, her servant Suzuki and her child Trouble await the arrival of Pinkerton, whose warship they had spotted arriving in the harbor. As night fell, stars appeared and Butterfly lit candles for lanterns, which flickered out into the darkness, replaced by the grey light of dawn and eventually the rosy glow of sunrise as birds sang in the cherry trees in the garden. ("The Bishop Who Birthed Butterfly")

"I have been asked many times what I consider my most successful achievement in stirring imagination through the agencies of scenery," Belasco wrote in *Stage Door* (237-38). "I invariably reply that the scene of the passing of an entire night in 'Madame Butterfly' has been my most successful effort . . ." (238).

New Stagecraft critics, of course, blasted Belasco's work. "Let us rejoice that [Shakespeare] did not possess scenery," Eaton remarked in *At the New Theatre and*

⁷⁴ David Belasco adapted John Luther Long's (American, 1861-1927) novel into a play. Giacomo Puccini (Italian, 1858-1924), who saw Belasco's production, then adapted the play for his opera, which premiered at La Scala in Milan in 1904. (Puccini would later adapt Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905) into an opera.)

Others, and “that there was no Belasco in Elizabethan England!” (qtd. in Feinsod 17-18). Belasco, however, bequeathed the New Stagecraft two essential components of its scenic art— its realism and the lighting technology created and employed by Belasco’s studio, which was then utilized by New Stagecraft designers to light stages expressively in ways that Appia had only imagined. For Belasco’s 1904’s *The Music Teacher*, for example, Louis Hartmann, Belasco’s leading electrician, invented baby spotlights—five-inch lenses that emitted a concentrated, narrow beam (Belasco 174; Wild).

Jones, for example, would use them strikingly in Arthur Hopkins’⁷⁵ *Macbeth* in 1921 (see fig. 2.25). Although Jones’ drawing places them inside the masks (presumably his original intention), in production the baby spots were actually placed in footlight positions to illuminate the masks from below (Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger 260). Unlike *Dumb Wife*, *Macbeth*, as illustrated below, unmistakably subordinates performer to scenery; even with the Wyrd Sisters costumed in red, the dimensions and lighting effects of the enormous silver masks dominate the stage.

Fuerst and Hume corroborate the dues designers like Jones, Geddes and Simonson owed the historiographically scorned Belasco:

In fact, naturalism, in its way, developed a better understanding of stage requirements and a better comprehension of the function of the stage setting, thus opening the road to modern experiments. In the period which followed, the men of the theatre, in attacking the new problems presented, began by making use of those means which the naturalist theatre had bequeathed to them. It is from Antoine, Brahm and Belasco that Reinhardt and his followers have sprung. (1: 8)

⁷⁵ Arthur Hopkins (1878-1950) was an American director with whom Jones collaborated more than any other.

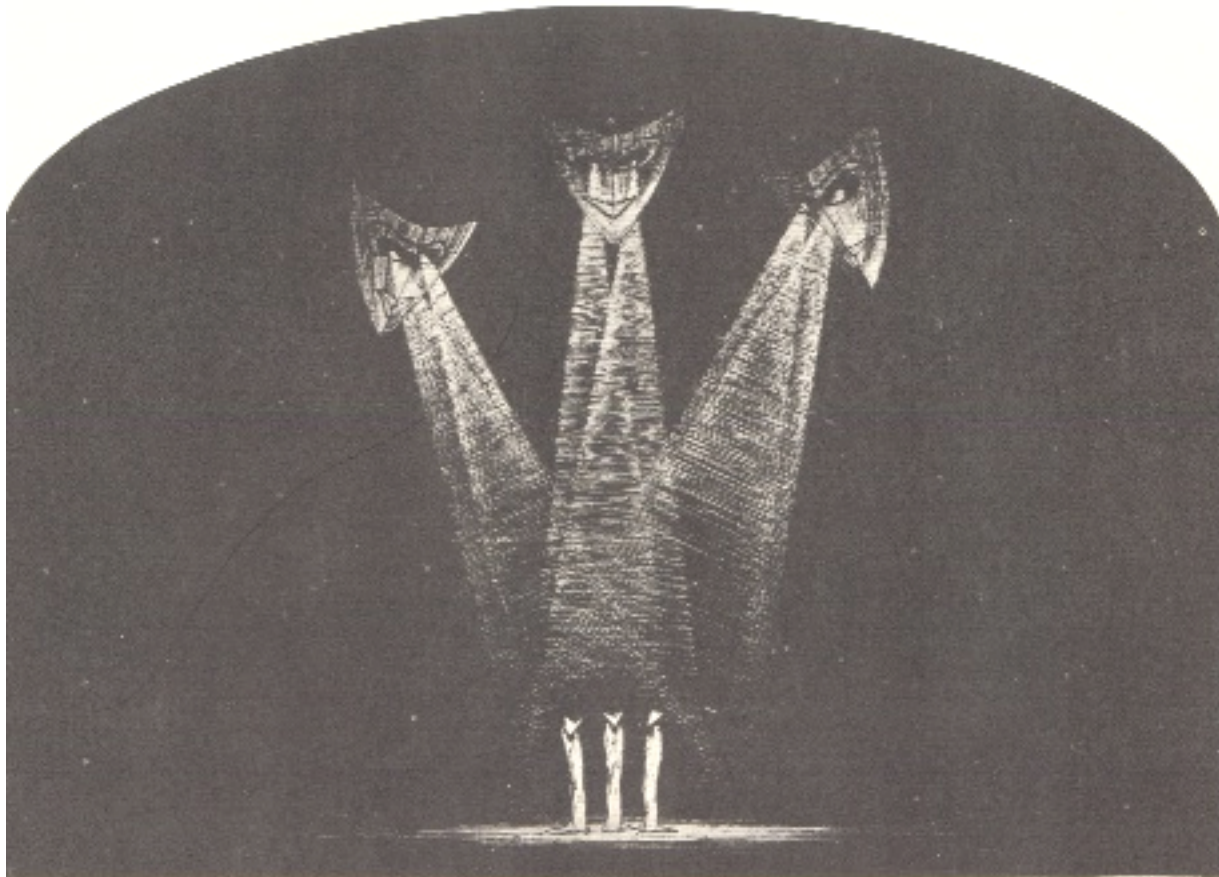


Fig. 2.25. Jones, Robert Edmond. *The Three Witches*. Sketch for *Macbeth*, 1:2. 1921. Rpt. in Robert Edmond Jones' *Drawings for the Theatre*. 2nd ed. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1970. Plate 12. Print.

It must not be forgotten that Belasco, too, realized a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his productions. He was not only a designer (using a chorus of highly inventive designers and technicians), but a director, producer and playwright. As ultra-realistic as his productions were, Belasco is not unlike Appia and Craig in that these productions were, indeed, scenographically unified. Although he transformed theatre technology to suit his needs in the twentieth century, Belasco's wholly external philosophy of stagecraft, nevertheless, belongs squarely in the nineteenth. Belasco, in fact, called

Craig a “mouthpiece” who “has accomplished little more than to ventilate his fantastic theories in an inexplicable book, entitled *On the Art of the Theatre*” (*Theatre* 234).

While theatre discourse has designated Jones’ designs for *Dumb Wife* as the beginning of Belasco’s demise and the commencement of the New Stagecraft, it has not settled on when the embers of the new movement died down. Whereas some scholars, such as Larson, suggest that the movement continued well after the 1920s, others maintain it ended very shortly after it began. Wainscott, for example, places the beginning of the end of the New Stagecraft a mere seven years after *Dumb Wife* in 1922 with Jones’ set and costume designs for *Hamlet*:

This stunning production was the zenith of Continental stagecraft given native expression – an interpretation that finally freed American designers to apply the lessons from abroad without being mere imitators. It was the maturity of the New Stagecraft, thus rendering the term passé.” (122).

As he puts it bluntly, by 1922 “the New Stagecraft was no longer new,” acknowledging that the style was, by then, “free to evolve in its own way apart from the shadow of Europe” (122). Feinsod seems to support Wainscott’s view. With *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, as he observes in *The Simple Stage*, “an American designer had made a Broadway stage strikingly simple and spare, a precedent that would be followed intermittently for the next seven years” (144). Others, such as Bloom, contend that in America “the progress made in all areas of theatrical production [during the early-twentieth century] shaped its distinctive character for the entire century” (ix).

I am of two minds about these remarks. For the most part, the strict adherence to the aesthetic standards established by *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife* (simplification, suggestion, synthesis) began to weaken in New Stagecraft productions

during the 1920s. I also agree with Bloom: reverberations of the movement undoubtedly continue to define American stagecraft up to the present. The New Stagecraft, however, was not European. It was, as I mentioned earlier, a dialectic created by Modernism and technologically defined American realism. The style that evolved “in its own way apart from the shadow of Europe,” is, in fact, exactly what the New Stagecraft was. This evolution did, indeed, take place during the 1920s. Although Broadway dramas, broadly speaking, maintained unification, or, synthesis, they nonetheless began to gradually curve back towards productions fundamentally realistic in design by the middle of the twentieth century. There is little doubt this was a direct result of American dramaturgy, and explains why the New Stagecraft was often integrated into period productions (it is no accident that Shakespeare has authored many of the productions I have presented thus far.)

The man who designed *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife* (with its distant medieval setting), for example, also designed Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* almost a decade later (see fig. 2.26). Clearly less Modernistic than *Dumb Wife*, *Desire* featured an 1850s New England farmhouse divided into four rooms. Panels that could be opened or closed revealed two bedrooms upstairs and two larger rooms on the first floor, all minimally furnished with naturalistic furniture and properties. In production, the set was not unlike Mordecai Gorelik's (1899-1990) homage to Jones' design for a 1952 Broadway revival, although Gorelik did away with the panels altogether and heightened



Fig. 2.26. Jones, Robert Edmond. Sketch for O'Neill's Broadway production of *Desire Under the Elms*. 1924. Rpt. in Robert Edmond Jones' *Drawings for the Theatre*. 2nd ed. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1970. Plate 23. Print.

Jones' suggestion into a more realistic interpretation (see fig. 2.27). The 1924 tragedy, itself, as George Jean Nathan⁷⁶ sees it, was simply realism with *gravitas*. "The result is a drama of passion and incest that . . . by and large amounts to a satisfactory

⁷⁶ George Nathan (1882-1958) was a well-established critic of the American theatre of the first half of the twentieth century and O'Neill's "staunchest supporter" (Senelick 362).



Fig. 2.27. Gorelik, Mordecai. Scenic rendering for *Desire Under the Elms*. 1952. Rpt. in Orville K. Larson's *Scene Design in the American Theater From 1915 to 1960*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1989. 228. Print.

realistic treatment of some of the elements of classic Greek drama” (376). The set, accordingly, was a synthesis created by abstraction and accuracy, as a *New York Times* review of the premiere confirmed: “[Jones’ design] was for all practical purposes built there on the stage, with a wall of actual stone coming down to the footlights; a scene that was realistic but at the same time strangely and powerfully heightened in effect (Young).

In terms of the New Stagecraft's imprint on today's Broadway productions, one need only consider Derek McLane's set for the 2011 production of Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (see fig. 2.28). Some of its set elements are textbook



Fig. 2.28. McLane, Derek. Set Design for *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. 2011. tumblr.com. Web. 10 Jan. 2013.

New Stagecraft: the avoidance of literalism (topiaries represent the zoo animals), a relatively bare stage and heavy use of lighting effects in place of realistic scenery, for example. The metonymic use of the Islamic arches can be traced back to the Islamic arches of Reinhardt's *Sumurun*. McLane's design, however, is not New Stagecraft. It is, rather, a product of New Stagecraft style informed by cultural and artistic forces of the 21st Century. Many Broadway dramas today are this same hybrid, which I refer to as *Neo-New Stagecraft*.

2.4 S, S, S

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, it was Hiram Moderwell who first identified simplification, suggestion and synthesis in 1914 as standard aesthetic principles for a new theatre art. Bloom, however, points out that Moderwell “cautioned stage designers about the dangers of aesthetic extravagance” (69). “In the modern theatre the artist’s⁷⁷ influence has been so strong,” Moderwell wrote, “that we begin to feel pure design as a value in itself. But we ought to regard it only as a means of envisioning and ordering the practical facts”⁷⁸ (qtd. in Bloom 69). This hesitancy is in direct opposition to Craig’s strident remarks regarding his abstract *Screens*, for instance, which exemplify his general aesthetic stance that scenography is at least equal, if not superior to other “more important” Aristotelian elements.⁷⁹

Over the course of several years, however, it was Kenneth Macgowan, not Moderwell, who instilled “The Three S’s” in the minds of American scenographers, and it is to him they owe a sizeable debt. “The methods of scenic design practice as taught today in American colleges and universities,” Bloom noted in 1996, are based “upon the principles of simplicity, suggestion and synthesis” (113). The writings of Clive Bell (English, 1881-1964), one of Modern art’s first major critical advocates,⁸⁰ would guide Macgowan in his untempered dissemination of “S, S, S” to twentieth-century

⁷⁷ Here he refers to, among others, Appia, Craig and Reinhardt.

⁷⁸ “Plot and character

⁷⁹ In descending order of importance, they are, according to Aristotle, Plot, Character, Thematic Content, Dialogue, Music and Spectacle.

⁸⁰ The Ransom Archives list Bell’s *Since Cézanne* (1922) and *Enjoying Pictures* (1922) in Geddes’ library.

scenography, according to Bloom, who plainly insists that Macgowan “patterned the construction of his aesthetic argument after Bell” (94). Here Bloom summarizes Bell’s essential aesthetic mindset:

Bell’s theory of art was a radical departure from existing modes of aesthetic criticism which were devised to support the significance of the narrative aspects and representational forms in visual art. Bell asserted that the aesthetic significance was produced by the relationships between the formal elements of line, shape[,] color, and mass. Attentiveness to and application of these formal qualities could release the artist from the conventional modes of narrative, representational painting which governed artistic practice since the Renaissance. (79)

Both Bell and Macgowan, according to Bloom, shared a similar view of “ornament as crime”⁸¹:

The dictum of “less is more” certainly applied to the reductive methods which Macgowan endorsed to stimulate the imagination of the viewer. Abstraction of form became, then, the guiding means by which the environment of the play was presented. . . . According to Bell, “Simplification is the conversion of irrelevant detail into significant form.” Macgowan joined Bell by asserting that the principle of simplicity endowed an object with value. (qtd. in Bloom 98-99)

Continuing to construct his aesthetic pyramid, Macgowan adds suggestion, which, he implies, penetrate both the eye and the soul of the spectator:

Simplify as much as you please; you only make it more possible to suggest a wealth of spiritual and aesthetic qualities.... On the basis of simplification, the artist can build up by suggestion a host of effects that crude and elaborate reproduction would only thrust between the audience and the play. (qtd. in Bloom 99)

Macgowan’s concept of synthesis is, essentially, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the great adhesive, as indicated by a 1919 *New York Herald Tribune* article:

Finally, the quality above all in modern stage production is synthesis. For modern stage art...is a complete and rhythmic fusion of setting, lights, actors and play. There must be a consistency in each of these, consistency of a single kind or consistency that has the quality of progression in it. And there must be such

⁸¹ Here I allude to the title of Adolf Loos’ (Viennese, born Austro-Hungarian 1870-1933) *Ornament and Crime* (1910).

consistency among them all. Half the portrait, half the landscape, cannot be in Whistler's technique and the other half in Zuloaga's.⁸² The creation of a mood expressive of the play is, after all, the final purpose in production. (qtd. in Bloom 145)

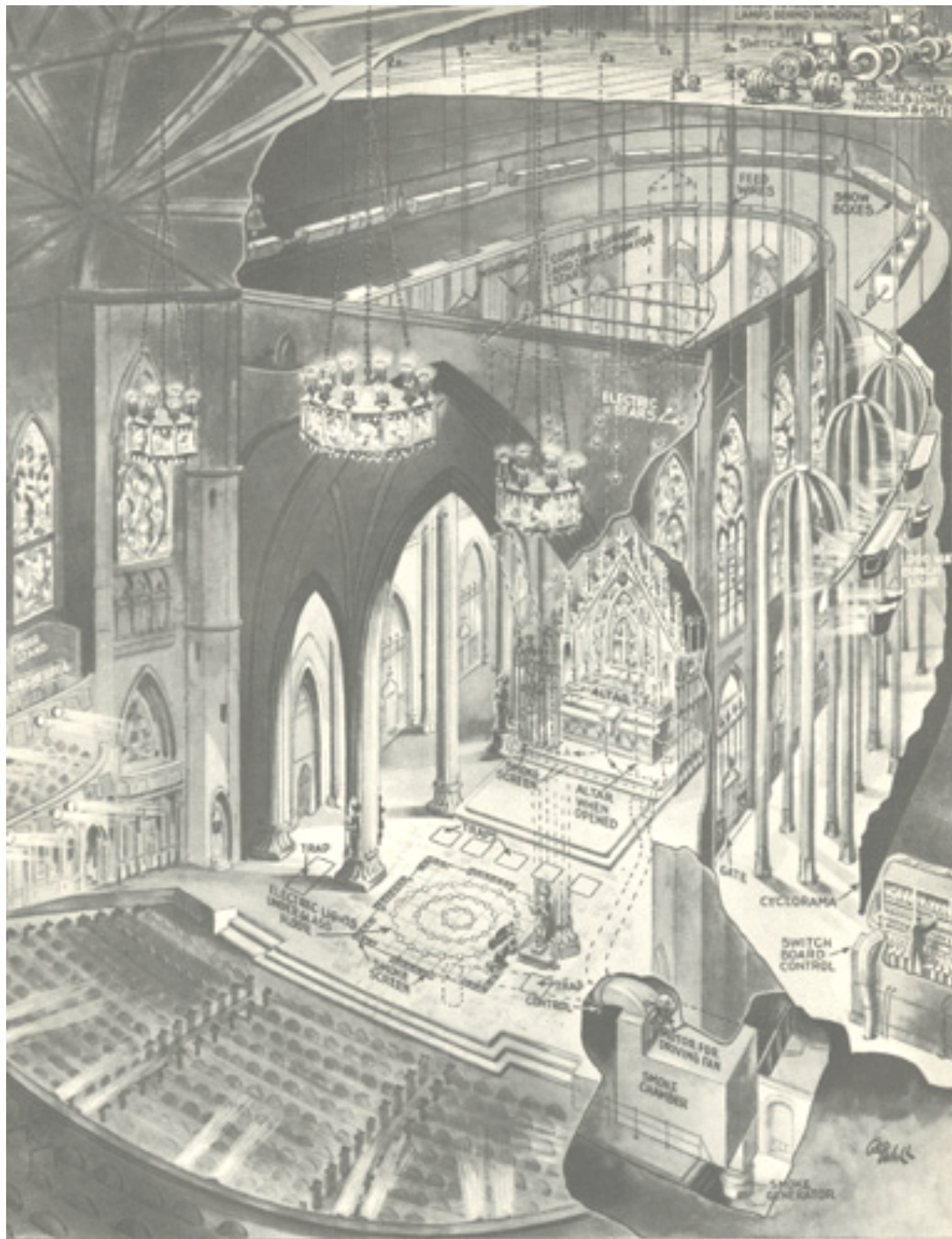
⁸² Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta (Spanish, 1870-1945) was a painter, noted for his portraiture from the early-twentieth century.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CATHEDRAL

We are cluttered with images, and only abstract art can bring us to the threshold of the divine. — Dominique de Menil

Much of theatre historiography visually establishes Norman Bel Geddes as a founding father of the New Stagecraft with images of two set designs: *The Divine Comedy* and *The Miracle*. The former is usually one of the Bruguère photographs of Geddes' model, lit theatrically and staged with tiny figurines. The latter is often represented by either a photograph or a diagram of its massive and elaborate chancel (see figs. 3.1 and 3.2). One of the most prevailing of these publications is undoubtedly Brockett and Hildy's *History of the Theatre*, an encyclopedic summation of (primarily) Western theatre historiography, and one of the most widely used textbooks of its kind by American theatre instructors and students for over four decades. The same holds true, moreover, for scholarly publications devoted exclusively to design: Larson's 1989 book, for example, and, more recently, Innes' *Designing Modern America*, published in 2005. Through their consistent reproduction in key publications with the exclusion of other Geddes set designs,⁸³ many theatre scholars, if they are familiar with Geddes' work at all, presumably associate him with one or both of these productions and nothing more. To say that many readers are completely misled by these images is a statement somewhat extreme. To uphold *The Miracle* as an exemplary model of the New Stagecraft, however, is a major historiographical oversight for which a revision is long

⁸³ Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger's textbook is a rare exception.



Courtesy SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

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THE ENTIRE STAGE BACK OF THE FIRST COLUMNS IS ARRANGED SO THAT ALL THE SCENERY IS RAISED AT ONE TIME WHILE OBSCURED BY A SMOKE SCREEN. THE SPACE IS SO LARGE THAT THE ARTIST HAS HAD TO TAKE CERTAIN LIBERTIES WITH THE GRIDIRON TO GET IN ALL OF THE MECHANISM.

Fig. 3.1. Geddes, Norman Bel. Set design of the Century Theatre production of *The Miracle*. c. 1924. Illustration by George Wall. *Scientific American* Apr. 1924: n. pag. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 94, folder 1 2 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

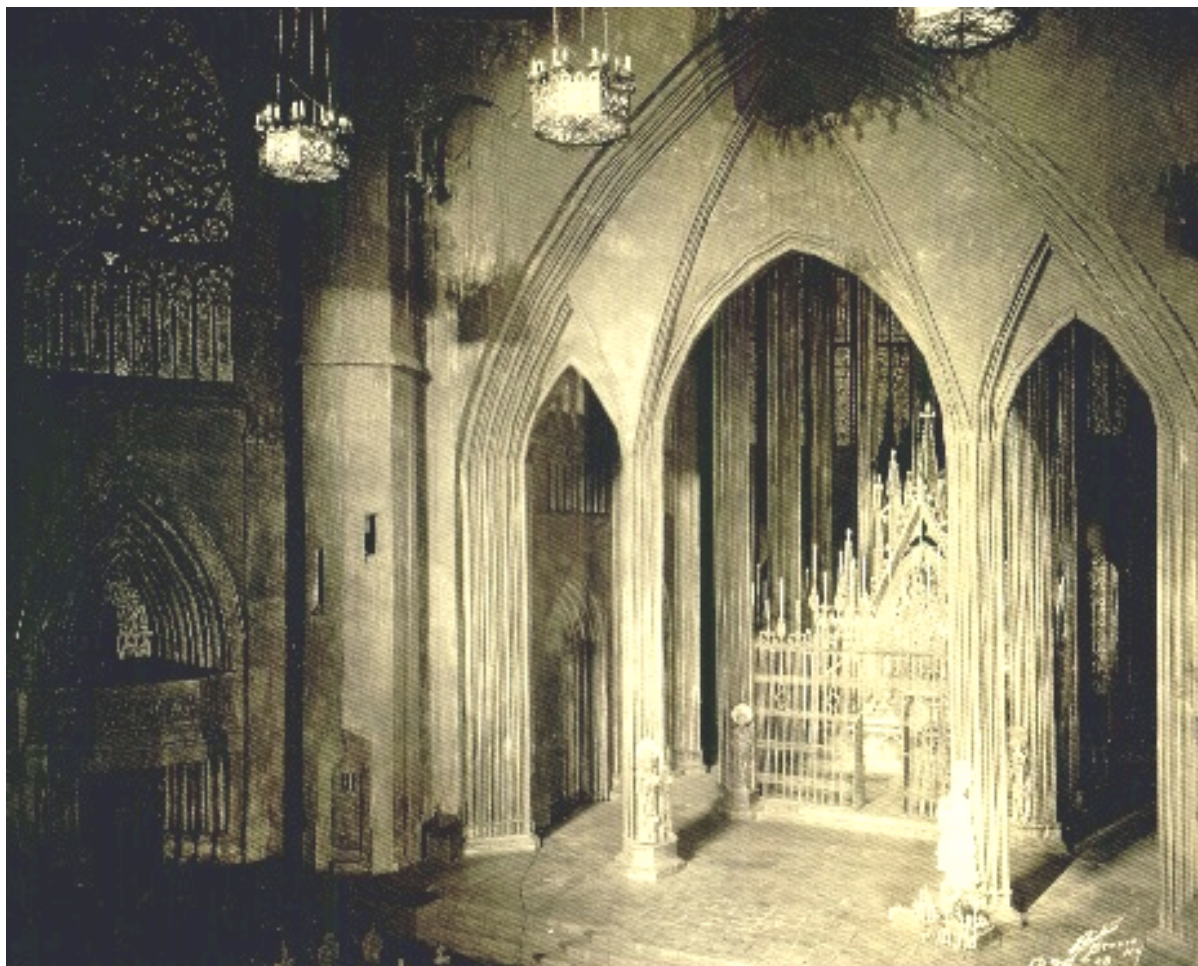


Fig. 3.2. Geddes, Norman Bel. Chancel set design for *The Miracle*. Photograph by White Studio, New York. c. 1924. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Rpt. in Oscar G. Brockett, Margaret Mitchell and Linda Hardberger's *Making the Scene: A History of Stage Design and Technology in Europe and the United States*. San Antonio: Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, 2010. 238. Print.

overdue. In 2010, Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger's *Making the Scene* included, in addition to images of *The Divine Comedy* and *The Miracle*, side-by-side images of Geddes' sets for *Dead End* (1935) and *Jeanne d'Arc* (1925) to illustrate the designer's "versatility" within the New Stagecraft style. Because of its relevance to *The Miracle*, I will shortly address the authors' misuse of Geddes' *Dead End* set in this manner.

The fact of the matter is that a single, clear, comprehensive and widely accepted definition of *The New Stagecraft* has never been established. Is it European? Is it American? Not only where, but when did it occur? And, perhaps most importantly, what are the specific aesthetic principles that inform its style? I reiterate my definition: a dialectic formed by European Modernism and American Realism (as informed by Belascian technology) that also adhered to Macgowan's aesthetic principles of simplification, suggestion and synthesis.

In theatre scholars' defense, dramatic theory and historiography, beginning with Aristotle and continuing to the present day, tend to disregard design. At best, *scenography* is a footnote of theatrical discourse. To go even further, designers (Geddes among them) are considered a footnote to a footnote.

In this chapter I will challenge existing discourse that has already misused the set of *The Miracle* as an icon of the New Stagecraft, reveal Geddes' subordinate role in a design concept for which he is fully credited almost without exception, and, finally, provide evidence supporting Geddes' intentions for the set of *The Miracle* as a wholly Modernist design that Reinhardt vetoed.

3.1 A SCENOGRAPHIC MISNOMER: *THE MIRACLE* AS NEW STAGECRAFT

Geddes' set for *The Divine Comedy* was entirely too abstract to ever be considered part of the New Stagecraft. Using badges of Modernist theatre design (steps, sculptural scenery, the diminished performer, highly evocative lighting), he

essentially wrote a *billet-doux* to Craig and Appia. Had it been produced in the 1920s, however, the set's lack of referential detail would likely have been met with the same bewilderment from both critics and audiences who saw Jones' *Macbeth*, staged in 1921, the same year Geddes created the *Divine* models. Despite their abstraction, the masks of the Wyrd Sisters in the Jones production were, in fact, the most referential of the designer's jagged set elements, all of which he placed in a pitch-black void, like sculptures in a Modernist garden in Hell (see fig. 3.3). "The Jones settings were

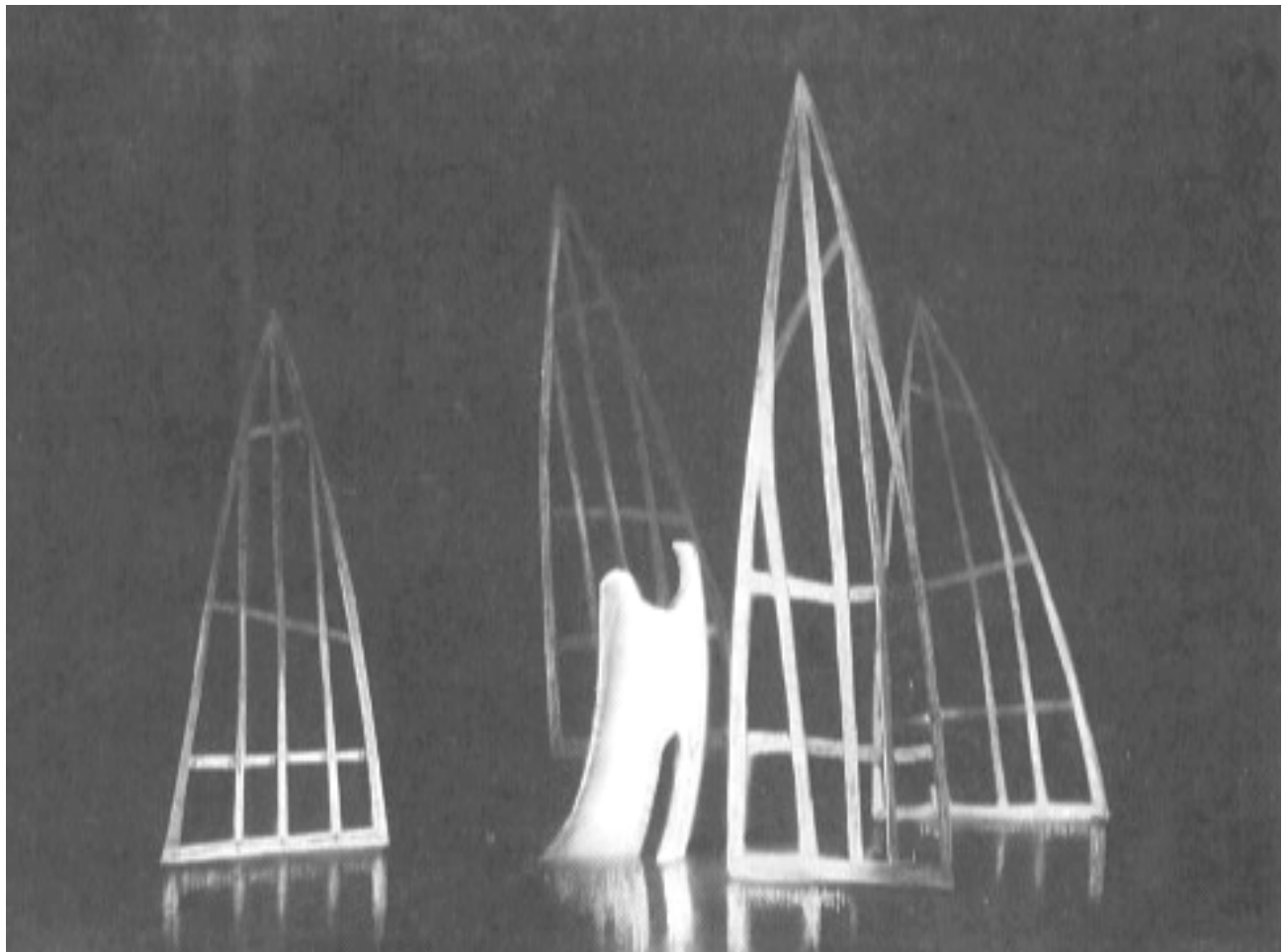


Fig. 3.3. Jones, Robert Edmond. Set design for *Macbeth*. 1921. Harvard Theatre Collection, Cambridge. Rpt. in Thomas Alan Bloom's *Kenneth Macgowan and the Aesthetic Paradigm for the New Stagecraft in America*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996. 47. Print.

marvels of stagecraft,” conceded Wainscott, “but audiences frowned at the gigantic symbols and were disturbed by the absence of literalism” (110). The author continues:

Some reviewers, who had little respect for the experiment, described Macbeth’s castle as “a giant molar tooth pitched rakishly in space.” The most vituperative attacks seemed to be attempts to stave off the onslaught of modernism. Hornblow⁸⁴ considered the sets a “fadistic combination of futurist effects and imaginative conceptions so eccentrically bizarre as to be quite without the ken of human comprehension.” (110)

Another aspect of the production that both Wainscott and Bloom believe led to its popular and critical demise was the atonality created by the awkward juxtaposition of Jones’ Modernistic design with the naturalistic performances of the actors. Bloom remarks thus:

John Mason Brown⁸⁵ said that the play failed because “...Mr. [Lionel] Barrymore and Miss [Julia] Arthur were constantly at war with the symbolical (sic) abstraction of Bobby’s scenery.” The objective of the simplified, formal setting was to focus less of the audience’s attention upon the setting and more upon the actor. Unfortunately [Jones’] austere scenic environment served to amplify the main actor’s inadequacies. (46)

The Divine Comedy, on the other hand, was, like *The Miracle*, planned as a large-scale pantomime, and thus would likely not have been attacked for a lack of unity between set and performance style: unlike naturalistic speech and behavior, the heightened quality of the pantomimic harmonizes with the demands of abstract design. Broadway audiences in the early 1920s, as proven by *Macbeth*, however, were clearly unprepared for the radical obliteration of referential scenery. Hence, the dialectic between abstraction and realism that constitutes part of my definition of the *New Stagecraft* was vital in order for these then-radical stage settings to be palatable to

⁸⁴ A critic from *Theatre Magazine*

⁸⁵ John Mason Brown (1900-1969) was a notable American drama critic.

those unconditioned to pure scenographic formalism in the theatre. Macgowan's principles of simplification, suggestion and synthesis were rules by which to play, but the New Stagecraft was not the explosion of Modernistic style Geddes created for *The Divine Comedy*. Some degree of realistic detail, however small, had to be synthesized in order for these types of productions to be accepted on Broadway. One year later, in fact, Jones modified his approach for the set of *Hamlet* (see fig. 3.4), starring Lionel Barrymore's brother John (American, 1882-1942):

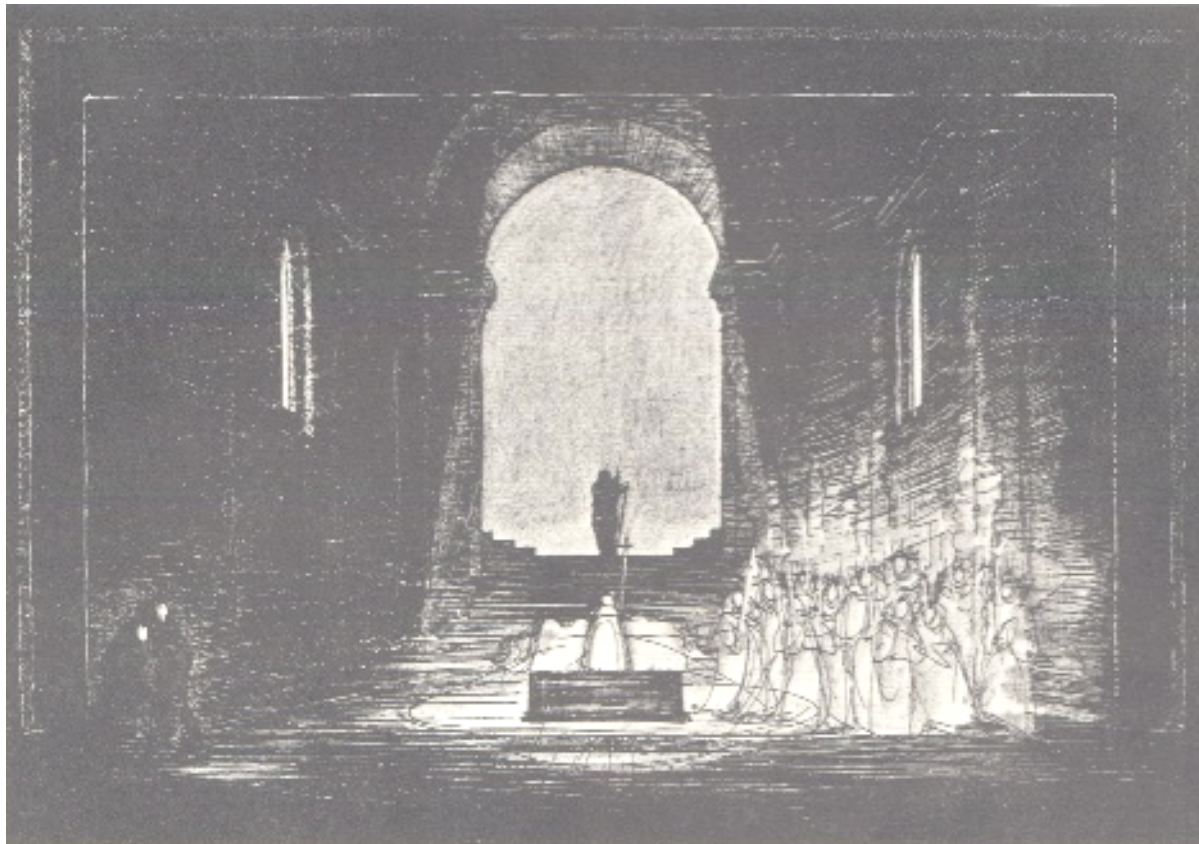


Fig. 3.4. Jones, Robert Edmond. *The Burial of Ophelia*. Scene design for Broadway's *Hamlet*. 1922. Rpt. in Robert Edmond Jones' *Drawings for the Theatre*. 2nd ed. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1970. Plate 23. Print.

For this production Jones returned to the formula he had used so successfully in *Richard III*: the permanent setting. Adapted with curtains and screens, it

portrayed a large hall with a stairway at the rear leading through a high Romanesque arch onto a parapet serving as the battlement of the opening scene for the appearance of the ghost. Curtains were flown in front of the main setting for short scenes played “down in one.” The inflexibility of the set determined how much of the play was staged, and this break with tradition again gave rise to much discussion and criticism. However, Jones was not scourged as badly as he was for *Macbeth*. (Larson 70)

Although they ultimately embraced the New Stagecraft, playwrights and critics would, according to Lee Simonson, continue to prefer “the concrete road of realism to any other avenue of development” (*Stage* 123). As an example, consider Elmer Rice’s (1892-1967) *The Adding Machine* in 1923, one of the early experiments in Expressionism⁸⁶ by an American playwright. Six years later Rice returned to realism with his next play, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Street Scene*, in 1929. When a young Jo Mielziner,⁸⁷ “much against his will, had to reproduce the façade of a particular flat-house in the West Sixties for *Street Scene*, he was astounded to receive the most enthusiastic press of his career up to that date” (Simonson, *Stage* 123).

Although Jones would ostensibly pinpoint the dialectic and aesthetic requirements of the New Stagecraft with *Hamlet’s* set, Geddes’ next major project after *The Divine Comedy* was an ultra-realistic replication of a medieval European cathedral. Rather than “simplify” and “suggest,” *The Miracle* only continued the evolution of the nineteenth century’s exaltation of the tangible world in a manner that far exceeded Belasco’s baked apple creams:

⁸⁶ *Expressionism* is a catch-all phrase that is generally used to denote theatre that is non-realistic in nature that doesn’t belong to any of the other “isms.” It cannot be delineated by a particular manifesto, alliance or country (although many plays labeled as such came from Germany and, to a lesser extent, Russia.) Besides *The Adding Machine*, in America Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* is another prominent example.

⁸⁷ A New Stagecraft scenographer in the beginning of his career

Six stories high with the existing ceiling removed, the whole auditorium was transformed into a cathedral transept: flanked by pillared cloisters—aisles widened and paved with cracked flagstones—all arched by a vaulted Gothic roof and lit almost entirely through eighty-foot-high imitation stained-glass windows around the perimeter. Even the wall behind the audience, at the back above the balcony (the front of which was hung with feudal banners) was brought into the illusion—being decorated by an enormous rose window through which colored light that changed to reflect the times of day in the piece fell across the audience. The ushers were dressed as nuns in full robes and wimples. The sound of bells tolled above. Organ music swelled to fill the space. The faint scent of incense wafted on the air. And there was the impression of a continuing life half-seen even as the spectators entered the theater—for instance, the crippled bell-ringer slowly lighting his way up the winding circular stair, his figure briefly glimpsed as he passed by lozenge-shaped openings in its wall. All this made the whole effect extraordinarily realistic, and every one of these details was commented on at length by the first-night reviews, indicating how convincing the whole atmospheric immersion was. (Innes, *Designing* 66-68)

Between *Comedy* and *The Miracle*, Geddes did, however, create settings somewhat characteristic of the New Stagecraft for both Sheridan's *The Rivals*⁸⁸ in 1922 (see fig. 3.5) and the premiere of Clemence Dane's⁸⁹ (1888-1965) *Will Shakespeare* in 1923 (see fig. 3.6). Whether or not Geddes' pairing of Craigian *Screens* and period furniture in *The Rivals* achieved a kind of synthesis is certainly arguable; it is clear, nevertheless, from the production photograph that Geddes was at least attempting to formulate a production design that lay somewhere between the abstraction of *The Divine Comedy* and the realistic theatre. The designer was perhaps more successful, at least in New Stagecraft terms, in his set for *Will Shakespeare*: here, Geddes modified the sparseness of the earlier production with a set containing enough metonymic details

⁸⁸ The set was designed to be reused, as it was in subsequent productions of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (*Miracle* 258).

⁸⁹ A pen name used by the female British playwright Winifred Ashton (1888-1965)



Fig. 3.5. Geddes, Norman Bel. Set design for *The Rivals*. Photograph by Bruguière. c. 1922. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 72, folder h 1 (job 60). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.



Fig. 3.6. Geddes, Norman Bel. Set model for *Will Shakespeare*. Photograph by Bruguière. c. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 78, folder h 8 (job 81). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

(a lantern, a handmade ladder, period doors) to adequately suggest the back room of an Elizabethan playhouse rather than recreate it in Belascian detail.

These four contiguous productions (*The Divine Comedy*, *The Rivals*, *Will Shakespeare*, *The Miracle*) typify the spectrum of scenic representation Geddes would draw on during his dramatic Broadway career: that is, the Modernistic, the New Stagecraft, and Ultra-Realism. From 1918 to 1943 Geddes seemed to voluntarily navigate across these modes in a carefree, haphazard manner, producing a curious, even erratic design narrative that defies any sense of stylistic linearity or identity. In 1935, for example, Geddes would create another ultra-realistic setting for Sidney Kingsley's (1906-1995) *Dead End* (see fig. 3.7). Set in modern New York, "the front of the stage was lined with pilings to keep the end of the street from spilling into the river, into which the Dead End Kids jumped at frequent intervals during the action, climbing back up onto the pilings dripping wet" (Larson 102). Two seasons later Geddes would shift back to a Modernistic style for *The Eternal Road*. The critic Katherine D. Gridley, however, observed this pattern (or lack thereof) much earlier in her response to Geddes' set for *The Rivals*:

Unlike so many artists both on and off the stage whose treatment of all subjects is so dismally similar, Norman Bel Geddes stands out as a very definite relief. You can't card-index him. It is impossible to say this is a typical Geddes setting just as it is impossible to know what he is going to do next to startle the theatrical world. (qtd. in Geddes, *Miracle* 256)

A closer look at *The Miracle*, however, points to a core artistic identity diminished and concealed by the trappings of a Broadway career that, at least on the surface, seems inexplicably random.



Fig. 3.7. Geddes, Norman Bel. Set design for *Dead End*. Production photograph. 1935. Rpt. in Orville K. Larson's *Scene Design in the American Theater From 1915 to 1960*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1989. 228. Print.

3.2. WHERE IS THE PROSCENIUM?

On January 15, 1924, the curtain did not go up in the Century Theater for the Broadway premiere of *The Miracle*, a three-hour, virtually wordless pantomime with music, produced by Morris Gest (American, born Lithuanian 1875-1942). This is not to say there wasn't a performance that night. There simply wasn't a curtain, nor a proscenium, nor blackouts, nor, for that matter, a house, at least not according to

*Beaux-Arts*⁹⁰ architectural conventions of the period:

[Geddes] completely removed the proscenium, turning the side boxes into arched doorways, with a winding staircase above on one side and a pulpit on the other. This cathedral setting extended throughout the auditorium: he replaced the existing plush audience seating with wooden church pews, and all floor and wall surfaces were covered by a composite material, so as to resemble stone to the touch as well as sound. (Innes, *Designing* 66)

It was the first major Broadway production that did not take place behind a proscenium arch (Dresen 137).

Accounts such as Innes' usually give prominence to Geddes' ruthless obliteration of the Century's interior⁹¹ and his mammoth cathedral as a monument to early-twentieth-century American set design (see fig. 3.8). His ambition, technical prowess

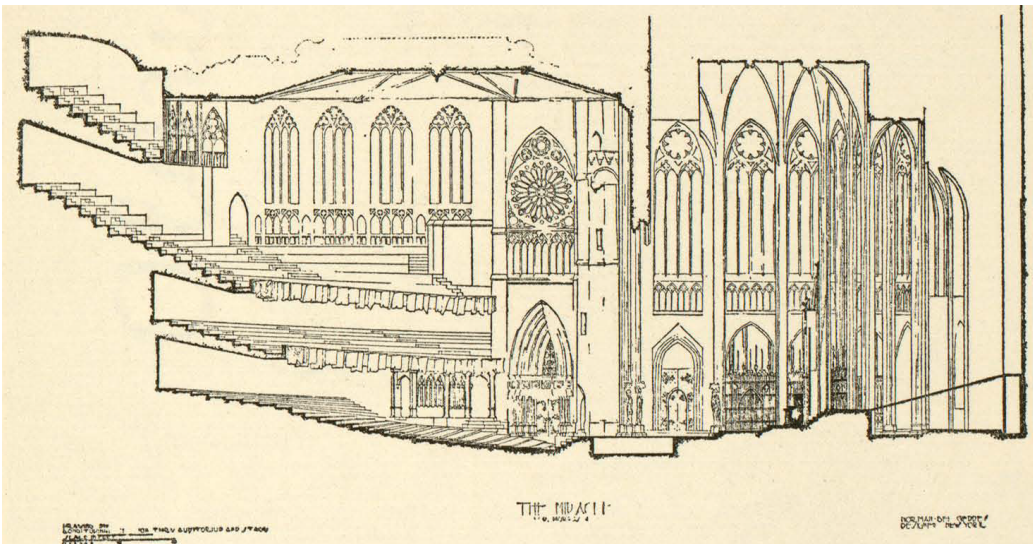


Fig. 3.8. Geddes, Norman Bel. Drawing of a section of the Century Theater on a longitudinal axis as designed for *The Miracle*. "Five Plans for The Miracle." *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Mar. 1924: 173. Print.

⁹⁰ An extravagant architectural style marked by mass, neoclassical forms, gilding and heavy ornamentation. Named after the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, it was the dominant style of Broadway theatre architecture during the early-twentieth century. Because few new Broadway theatres were built after this period, it remains so.

⁹¹ As part of the production contract with The Century, Geddes had to design the set in such a way so that the theatre's permanent interior would be left fully intact and able to be completely restored to its original state after *The Miracle* closed.

and masterful resourcefulness in creating a spectacle of these dimensions inside a Broadway house have been established, not in the least by the designer himself:

In point of sheer volume of work, *The Miracle* was probably the largest theatrical production any designer had yet been assigned. For the permanent architectural structure, which was 200 feet long by 120 feet wide by 110 feet high, 871 drawings were required. There were 474 water-color (sic) drawings for the costumes, 206 for properties, 44 lighting diagrams, 18 diagrams for mechanical scenery changes, and 71 action charts for actors. The stained-glass windows needed 86 color drawings; the scenery 42 color drawings. The 1,812 final drawings, each of which had been done three or four times, were accompanied by written specifications describing materials, finish, use and other details. (*Miracle* 275)

The Miracle was based on a medieval legend of a young nun, Megildis, who renounces her vows of chastity by fleeing a cathedral with a handsome young knight, taking with her the infant Jesus belonging to a statue of The Madonna (see fig. 3.9). Upon the errant nun's departure, the statue suddenly comes to life, keeping vigil over the cathedral in Megildis' absence. The bulk of the action is a long dream sequence in which Megildis is progressively degraded by the secular world. The two lovers are soon captured by a Robber-Count and his Huntsmen, who murder The Knight. After the Robber-Count loses Megildis in a game of cards, she is forced into marriage with The Prince, whom she despises. Before the marriage can be consummated, however, The Prince is accidentally murdered by his own father, The Emperor. The Emperor goes mad and claims Megildis as his Empress. During the coronation ceremony, a crowd invades the hall, leads The Emperor away in chains and drags Megildis to the street. The sequence climaxes in a Tribunal Scene where Megildis is almost beheaded by the mob (see fig. 3.10). After escaping the hypnosis of The Piper (Satan), who has



Fig. 3.9. Geddes, Norman Bel. Scene and costume design for *The Miracle*. White Studio production photograph, #5936-30. c. 1924. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 93, folder h 3 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.



Fig. 3.10. Geddes, Norman Bel. Scene and costume design for *The Miracle*. Production photograph of the Tribunal Scene. c. 1924. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 94, folder i 2-3 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

masterminded all of this, she returns to the cathedral, bearing an infant she has borne. After Megildis discovers the infant has died, The Madonna reaches down, takes the child, and she (The Madonna) is returned to stone.⁹² *The Miracle* was both a critical and commercial triumph – starring not the cast nor Reinhardt’s staging, but the cathedral, as indicated by a *New York Herald* review:

One comes away now with a deepened respect for Prof. Reinhardt and for Mr. Geddes – especially for Mr. Geddes, who is a great imagination and a great craftsman. The very stuff and color and cut of his costumes half tell the nightmare which is the legend of “The Miracle.” Then the transformation of the Century itself is his. By some secret of line and light he has turned a squat building into a cathedral that reaches to the skies. He found heights and distances in the Century which its builders did not dream were there. Probably he used a little magic. He has some. (Woolcott)

The Broadway spectacle grossed over two million dollars⁹³ in less than ten months and continued its New York run until November of 1925 (Sayler, Foreword vii). Gest then took the production on tour across the country, garnering even more profits and critical accolades, such as Ashton Stevens’ *Chicago Herald and Examiner* review, calling it “the biggest, boldest, bravest assault upon the senses that I can imagine; as simple as a Gregorian chant and as stinging as a prize-fight” (qtd. in Sayler, Foreword xi).

⁹² Maurice Maeterlinck (French, born Belgian 1862-1949) adapted the legend earlier in the century into the drama *Souer Béatrice* (*Sister Beatrice*) in 1901.

⁹³ Roughly \$25 million in 2013

3.3 THE MIRACLE IN LONDON: 1911

Much of theatre historiography implies, by the omission of no less than seventeen prior European productions of *The Miracle*, that Geddes' set design was a unique and a wholly original conception. This, as I will demonstrate, was simply not the case. Prior to 1924 Reinhardt staged *The Miracle* in London, Vienna, Leipzig, Dresden, Elberfeld, Breslau, Cologne, Prague, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Karlsruhe, Berlin (two productions), Sweden (Stockholm, Goteborg, Malmö, Helsingborg) and Bucharest. Although some scholars briefly mention earlier productions, the fact of the matter is that most historiographies of Geddes' role in *The Miracle* are misleading. Prior productions, even if they are referenced, are not illustrated by images, nor do scholars always frame these productions as the prototypes for the Century set. Geddes himself, however, noted in his autobiography that many of the European productions "were staged in arenas similar to but larger than Madison Square Garden. My problem was how to adapt a large, circus-type production to a theater proscenium" (*Miracle* 274). The key word Geddes uses here is *adapt* – not *originate* – and that largely defined his role as set designer for the Broadway production. Images of the 1911 inaugural production in London's Olympia Stadium (see fig. 3.11), furthermore, clearly reveal that it was Ernst Stern, not Geddes, who was the first of Reinhardt's designers to transform space into facsimile in a production that also rejected the proscenium arch.

A year or so before the London set was constructed, the English producer C.B. Cochran (1872-1951) saw the Berlin production of Reinhardt's *Oedipus* at the *Zirkus*



Fig. 3.11. Newspaper illustration of the premiere production of *The Miracle*. Olympia Stadium, London. 1911. *The Bioscope*. Web. 8 Nov. 2011.

Schumann, and hired Reinhardt to direct in *The Olympia*, a massive Victorian exhibition hall covered in iron and glass. At the time of *The Miracle*'s premiere, the floor space was 110,000 square feet, and the apex of the roof was one hundred feet high (Styan 96). For *The Miracle*, eight thousand seats were assembled in stadium-style rows that flanked the production on three sides. The production opened two days before Christmas and ran for a brief time in order to make way for the *Daily Mail*'s "Ideal Home" Exhibition (Styan 96). Well before Geddes even began to design professionally, Reinhardt and Stern transformed *The Olympia* "into a cathedral and its audience into a

congregation” (Styan 86). Von Hofmannsthal underscored this:

When Reinhardt produced “The Miracle” for the first time in Olympia Hall in London—in a building that had been constructed for the accommodation of automobile shows and athletic meets—he was bold enough not to treat the twenty or thirty thousand spectators⁹⁴ as a mass in front of which to build the structure of his medieval cathedral. He took his audience, as part of the production, into the church—a church whose walls had been built inside the hall, partly of actual building materials, partly of monstrous masses of shadow. The whole room which so held the tens of thousands of spectators and the thousands of performers was lighted dimly by a Gothic window at an immense height, a window, if I am not mistaken, of thrice the diameter of the famous rose window of Notre Dame in Paris. (25)

Stern placed a large platform at the center bearing the cathedral nave and the statue of the Madonna (see fig. 3.12). “This platform,” as Carter describes, “was made to sink, so that each time it rose it could bring a complete change of environment. By this means the action was carried uninterruptedly from banqueting hall to bed-chamber, to inquisition chamber, and so forth” (230-31). In all, the spectacle required two thousand actors (call-boys on bicycles delivered their entrance cues), five hundred choir members and an orchestra of two hundred (Styan 100). The entrances and exits of the hundreds of pilgrims and clergy during the first scene took place through a set of sliding doors at the west end of the hall (see fig. 3.13) through which the surrounding hills and countryside were visible. “So great is the distance,” commented a London critic, “that at first they look no bigger than dwarfs . . . fantastic little figures dancing on the green sward. Little by little, as they advance towards the figure of the Madonna, they assume the proportions of men and women” (qtd. in Styan 97). Another critic noticed that “when [Reinhardt’s] stage is not full it looks empty; when scenes essential to the plot, but

⁹⁴ Hugo Von Hofmannsthal is probably referring to the total number of audience members who saw the production.

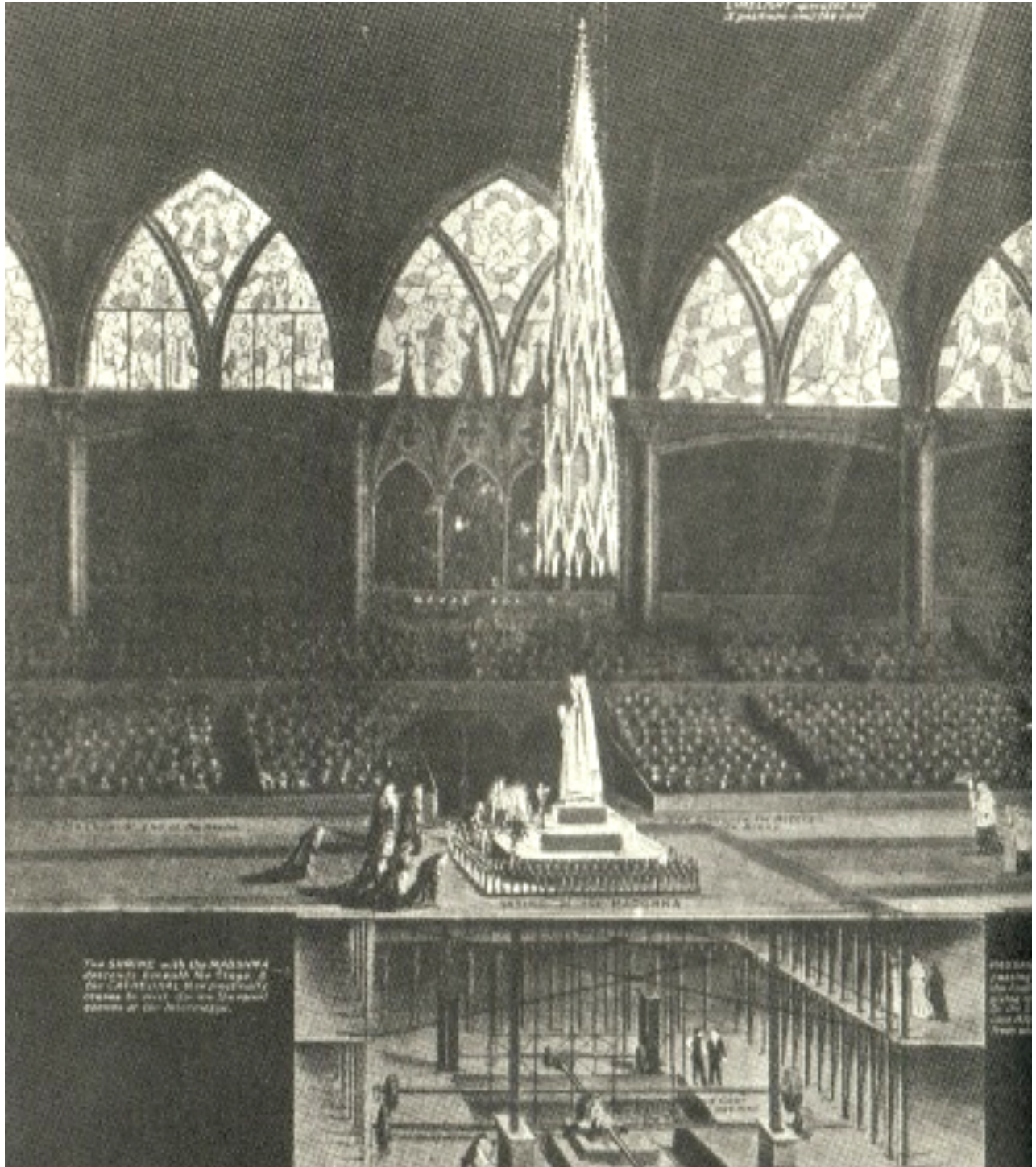


Fig. 3.12. Illustration of Ernst Stern's theatre design for *The Miracle* staged in The Olympia, London. c. 1911. Rpt. in J.L. Styan's *Max Reinhardt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 94. Print.

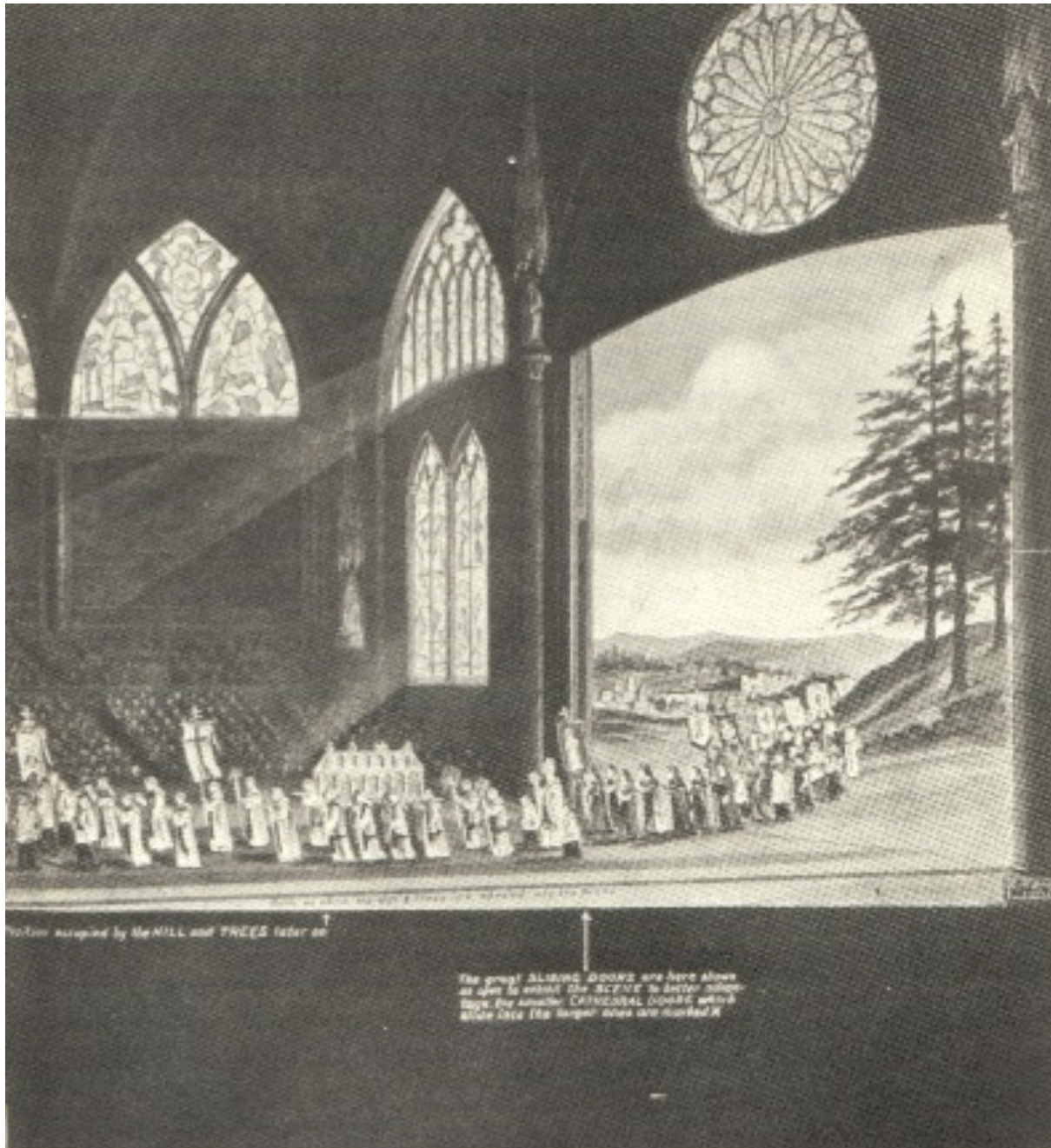


Fig. 3.13. Illustration of the entrance of the crowd of worshipers in the London production of *The Miracle*. Theatre design by Ernst Stern. Circa 1911. Rpt. in J.L. Styan's *Max Reinhardt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 94. Print.

requiring only a few characters, are played in the huge theatre, they seem to drag and to be dwarfed by the tableaux in which the masses of people take part” (qtd. in Styan 100). However critics responded to Reinhardt’s set, the director’s vision was

immaculately precise, despite its technical challenges:

Reinhardt had always been fascinated by the pageantry of the Catholic Church, and his study of the medieval drama had inspired him with the desire to produce a play in a real cathedral – if necessary built for the purpose – where there should be no gulf between the celebrants of a mystery and the faithful who play a silent but none the less (sic) real part in religious rites. There was to be no audience at Olympia, only a single communion. ‘The Miracle’ was to be performed in the midst of a believing multitude, and those who were present are almost unanimous in declaring that a miracle really happened. The whole course of the action was interpreted and reinforced by music, and the eye was led on from one impressive pageant to another, until the spectacle culminated in the return of the Madonna to her pedestal and the final triumph. Of the religious value of ‘The Miracle’ opinion will probably always be divided; there could be no disputing its effectiveness as a piece of dramatic production. London flocked to see it, and the immense cost of staging the piece was quickly repaid. (Laver 235)

Carter supports this implication that the production’s scenographic configuration was

Reinhardt’s conception alone:

There can be no doubt that Reinhardt was seeking for a means to break away altogether from the picture stage, to develop the idea of producing a drama that can be acted within the auditorium instead of within the picture-frame, and to afford a still further illustration of what a play gains in intimacy when its characters become part of the audience. (227-28)

Reinhardt’s tendency to use his designers primarily to realize his own designs, as I established in Chapter Two,⁹⁵ at least partially explains why historiography credits not the designer, but the director himself for the London production’s scenic achievements.

Although this would not be the case in America, Reinhardt evidently demanded the same director-designer relationship with Geddes for New York, an especially crucial production for both of them. Not only would it be Reinhardt’s first “original” American production (*Sumurun* was an import) but also, despite its many prior stagings in Europe, it was an enormous hedging of bets financially. With his commercial and artistic

⁹⁵ See pg. 68

viability in America at stake, Reinhardt was banking on Norman Bel Geddes, a relative unknown, to carry out the innumerable, costly details of the scenography, the production's major selling point. Reinhardt, to ensure Geddes would complete the job to his satisfaction, hosted the American designer and his family for an extended stay at *Schloss Leopoldskron*, his palatial home near Salzburg, during the summer of 1923. Geddes described the exactitude of the pre-production process after Reinhardt examined the designs:

Then came the real work of going over my manuscript.⁹⁶ It was read aloud. After every sentence, Reinhardt either nodded approval or made additions or corrections or asked questions. Then the next sentence was read. It required five weeks of this, from midnight⁹⁷ until seven or eight in the morning, to finish the job. (*Miracle* 286)

In a September 1923 letter to Geddes, Rudolf Kommer (Austrian, 1886-1943), Reinhardt's translator and occasional emissary in the English-speaking world, conveyed the director's "pure joy" in working with Geddes in the Leopoldskron sessions. In the same letter, however, Reinhardt sent a clear, strong directive to the young designer (possibly in anticipation of artistic objections or budget concerns from Gest): "In no case should [Geddes] sacrifice anything essential of his ideas, before having communicated with me."

⁹⁶ In all probability, Norman Bel Geddes' *manuscript* was a kind of prompt book detailing the play's scenographic elements: lighting and set changes, sound, special effects and the like.

⁹⁷ When Max Reinhardt liked to begin his "day"

3.4 THE SINGING GLOBE

That Reinhardt used Geddes chiefly as a technician to recreate *The Miracle*'s set is further established by the designer's initial intentions, which were, in fact, diametrically opposed to what Century audiences saw on opening night. This is no mere supposition, but a claim Geddes himself substantiated in 1932 in *Horizons*: "In order to stage the play," he wrote with some displeasure, "it was necessary to create the atmosphere for it. To be sure, it could have been done in an abstract style and in fact I endeavored to persuade Reinhardt to do it in such a way, but this is beside the point" (185). As I have established, the Broadway set for *The Miracle* was not an original Geddes conception, but a pre-existing prototype that he could, at most, embellish, and, more importantly for Reinhardt, reengineer for a proscenium space. To attribute *The Miracle* to Geddes without this caveat is, thus, highly misleading in terms of the designer's aesthetic leanings.

I further support this contention based on a dominant Modernistic tendency in a narrative of Geddes' sets, his own theories of design, documentation of his resistance to designing another ultra-realistic set later in his career, preliminary sketches for *The Miracle* and a model of a wholly Modernistic set for *The Singing Globe* (another "pantomimic miracle play")⁹⁸ that he created during the pre-production phase of *The Miracle*.

⁹⁸ As described in Hunter' *Catalog* (26)

Unlike Jones (*The Dramatic Imagination*) and Simonson (*The Stage is Set*), who both published major discourses of stage design theory, Geddes did not, per se.

Horizons, published in 1932, is Geddes' cornerstone design manifesto. While the book includes two chapters on theatre architecture, he devotes most of it to projects for industrial and commercial design. Beginning with architecture and objects from Ancient Egypt and Classical Greece, Geddes concludes *Horizons* with an adjuration for reforms necessary for The Machine Age:

By the middle of the present century, I anticipate that we shall have begun consciously to achieve that complete mastery of the machine which is to-day (sic) a more or less unconscious goal. By that time, it will be one of the profoundest facts of our existence. . . . But at the moment, we still are thinking too much in grooves. We are too much inclined to believe, because things have long been done a certain way that *that* is the best way to do them. Following old grooves of thought is one method of playing safe. But it deprives one of initiative and takes too long. It sacrifices the value of the element of surprise. At times, the only thing to do is to cut loose and *do the unexpected!* It takes more even than imagination to be progressive. It takes vision and courage. (293)

Courage (or, in this case, the lack of it) is also used by Geddes in *Horizons* to assess the work of some of his theatre design contemporaries:

When working in the theater, it was my endeavor to handle any materials in terms of my own time rather than that of my grandparents. As a matter of fact, I have felt a sense of duty about it. I have felt, and still feel, that it is primarily laziness and a lack of courage on the part of many of my colleague designers that they fail to do so. (6)

In preparation for his Players Club course, Geddes wrote several notes and essays, including "Expressionism on the Stage," "Artistry in the Theatre" and "Lack of Art in the Theatre."⁹⁹ These, combined with typed manuscripts of the lectures

⁹⁹ Norman Bel Geddes planned to publish a book based on these lectures, but the project never came to fruition.

themselves, according to F.J. Hunter, are “fundamental to the others and . . . show most completely his attitudes toward art” (33). In lieu of a published monograph, here are some of Geddes’ most telling remarks on scenography. The first concerns ornamentation and is found in *Miracle in the Evening*:

Design is not a synonym for ornament or decoration. Ornament is the embellishment of a surface. In the majority of cases it is detrimental and unnecessary to the structure. . . . In this class you are to disregard ornament. If you can learn to design without it, you can always apply it later. Under no circumstances think in terms of any stage setting as interior decoration. Interior decoration is entirely a use of ornament on an architectural surface. It is applied design; whereas stage design should create a scheme for unfolding a specific drama to the eye, as the actor’s voice and movement does to the ear. (261)

F.J. Hunter published a 1962 article, “Norman Bel Geddes’ Notes on Art in the Theatre,” for *Theatre Survey*. The following comments by Geddes on his aesthetic criteria are culled from the article. In the first of these, the designer elucidates his fundamental view of art:

A sunset sky is a beautiful thing to behold, but in no sense is it art, for it is not the work of man. And this work of man must be an expression of his innermost feelings, not an imitation of nature but a projection of consciousness. Art is an abstract quality apart from subject, idea, or technique, that arouses in the spectator a feeling of response regardless of the medium through which it is expressed and invariably lifting him from the plane of common life. It is not technical dexterity but a spirit radiating from the work which moves us emotionally through the aesthetic sense. (34)

In the next passage, Geddes philosophizes on the idea of theatrical truth and its relationship to dramatic structure and the replication of the material world on stage:

There are obvious reasons why there is no great art in the theatre at the present time. How many workers have for their objective the creation of a work of art? The majority of them do not think of the theatre in such terms at all. . . . Their illusion is, briefly, that a play perfectly constructed, “the well-made play” is a work of art. Or they believe that an actor, if he truthfully portrays a human being is a

great artist. The result is the photographic play which has the value of a photograph and nothing more.” (F.J. Hunter 35-36)

Although he is never named, the following is even more clearly a critique of The School of Belasco:

The fundamental point in which the younger men differ from their predecessors is in their emphasis on simple design. They conceive their form and color simply, because by this method an idea is carried faster and more impressively to the mass of the people. They believe in the elimination of the unessentials regardless of how charming these details are in themselves. In fact, the more interesting these details are, the more they should be eliminated to prevent their distracting the audience’s interest from the main current of a production. This principle of non-essentials only will, in time, rid the stage of the necessity for the tremendous amount of paraphernalia required by the naturalistic method of staging. (F.J. Hunter 39)

Despite these later articulations of his philosophy of theatre art and design, in 1923 the ambitious but struggling young designer would have had considerable difficulty disabbling someone with Reinhardt’s stature (although from his remark in *Horizons*, Geddes apparently had the audacity to try.) By 1935, however, Geddes had not only established himself as a major Broadway artist, he also successfully transitioned his career to working primarily in industry and commerce. Thus, when asked to deliver another scenic replication—this time of an East River neighborhood for *Dead End*—Geddes was more than politely reluctant. Sidney Kingsley (1906-1995),¹⁰⁰ who wrote the play and directed the Broadway production, recounted his struggle with Geddes over *Dead End*’s set:

Originally, Geddes and I were going to coproduce the play, but I finally chose not to get involved in that phase of it, although I did have an iron-clad contract that I

¹⁰⁰ Sidney Kingsley had just won the Pulitzer Prize for 1933’s *Men in White*, a critical and commercial triumph. Produced by the Group Theatre with Lee Strasberg at its helm, *Dead End* ran for almost a year, with 351 performances (Hauser).

was to cast the play, direct it without any interference, and the set was to be designed according to my specifications. When we came to designing the set, Geddes wanted to design a series of levels as he had done with *Lysistrata*. I insisted that I wanted a superrealistic set. Geddes had never designed a realistic set,¹⁰¹ and he was afraid of it. However, he did design a realistic set, which was great but had some serious defects. . . . The set had to be turned around 180 degrees so that the River (sic), instead of being an upstage backdrop, was out front in the pit. . . . Geddes refused. He called Jo Mielziner to design it, but Mielziner was too busy. I sat down with pencil and paper and demonstrated what I wanted, and finally Geddes agreed to do it, all the while protesting that it wouldn't work; but since our contract was ironbound, he had to design it my way. He did, but when he gave it to the builders, Cirkor and Robbins, he told them that I was "a young man and crazy, stubborn – but this is what he wants, so build it; but I am going on record, saying it won't work." (80)

The set did, in fact, "work," at least in terms of box office receipts. According to Kingsley, it had the tenth-longest run of any Broadway production at the time and "established me, as one admirer so elegantly put it, as no 'splash in the bedpan'" (81).

The Geddes Papers at the Harry Ransom Center contain several sketches the scenographer created during the early stages of designing *The Miracle*. Like *The Divine Comedy* and, to a modified extent, *The Rivals*, they further support not only Geddes' abstract aims for the Reinhardt production, but also a clear indebtedness to Edward Gordon Craig. Below I have contrasted two preliminary *Miracle* renderings with sketches by Craig (see figs. 3.14, 3.15, 3.16 and 3.17). The first set contrasts a *Miracle* sketch with Craig's illustration of *The Steps, IV*.¹⁰² Like Craig, Geddes prominently uses steps and an obscure image of the performer in what appears to be a shadow in his drawing. The two designers even share the same blurry, slightly indistinct manner of

¹⁰¹ Kingsley likely uses *realistic* to mean a contemporary set.

¹⁰² *The Steps, IV* was not a production, but a hypothetical drama Craig used to illustrate four distinct "moods" using a unit set. The curved forms in the background look like arches, but are actually fountains (Craig, *Towards* 47).

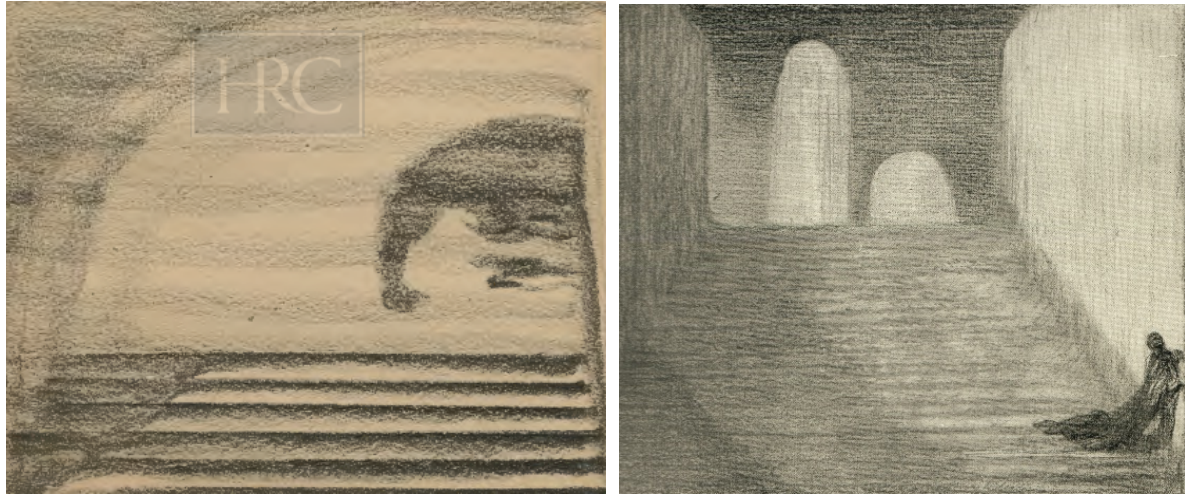


Fig. 3.14 (left). Geddes, Norman Bel. Preliminary rendering of set design for *The Miracle*. c. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder e 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Fig. 3.15 (right). *Steps, IV*. 1909. Rpt. in Edward Gordon Craig's *Towards a New Theatre*. Edward Gordon Craig. London: JM Dent & Sons Limited, 1913. Front. 47. Print.

pictorialization. In the second set of renderings, Geddes' proscenium is a Romanesque arch, behind which he concentrically arranged several more. The repetition of form is very much akin to Craig's design for *Macbeth*, act two, scene one, at Inverness. Notice, also, how both Geddes and Craig depict lighting effects by emphasizing the beams as projected inwardly, as if hidden behind a proscenium. The Ransom Archives also contain materials for a planned (but never realized) production of Marion Craig Wentworth's (1872-?)¹⁰³ *The Singing Globe*, "A Modern Miracle Play or Symbolic Spectacle in Three Parts" (Wentworth n.pag.). Despite the fact that it was never produced, it is considerably relevant to *The Miracle* given both its time of creation and Geddes' plans for a Modernistic set design (see fig 3.18). *The Singing Globe* folder

¹⁰³ Marion Craig Wentworth is perhaps best known for her *War Brides: A Play in One Act*, a considerable success when it premiered in New York in 1915.

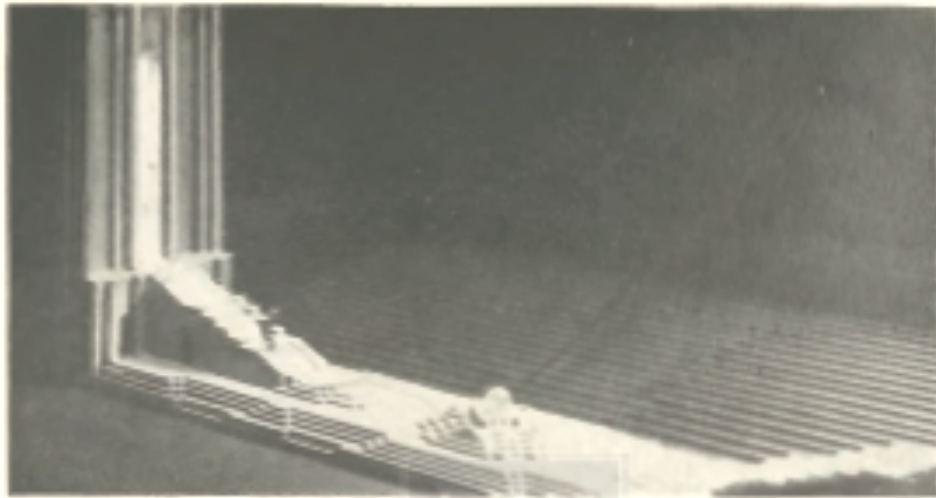


Fig. 3.16 (left). Geddes, Norman Bel. Preliminary rendering of set design for *The Miracle*. c. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder e 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Fig. 3.17 (right). Rendering for *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene 1. Rpt. in Edward Gordon Craig's *Towards a New Theatre*. London: JM Dent & Sons Limited, 1913. Front. 71. Print.

contains a Bruguière photograph of Geddes' model, created in 1923 (Frederick J. Hunter 186) and photographically reproduced in both a promotional pamphlet for the production and the January 1924 issue of *Theatre Arts Monthly*. According to Hunter's *Catalog*, the set was to be housed in a theatre in Santa Barbara, California, constructed specifically for Wentworth's play. Featuring a crystal globe atop a pyramid as its centerpiece (Wentworth),¹⁰⁴ the model was described in *Theatre Arts Monthly*:

¹⁰⁴ The combination of the globe and pyramid as shown in the model is probably Norman Bel Geddes' homage to Theosophy, an interest of his. The Theosophical Society and its teachings are often considered part of the Occult Revival of the nineteenth century.



Photograph by Francis Bruguière

HRC

On this and the following page appear reproductions of photographs of a model designed by Norman-Bel Geddes for the presentation of a symbolic spectacle, *The Singing Globe*, by Marion Craig Wentworth. It is planned for production in an armory in February. The stage will be a very long platform reaching from a high-columned doorway at one side of the auditorium to a similar doorway at the other. The audience will be seated upon each side of this raised stage and the action will be so directed as to be equally clear and significant to both sides of the house. There are small doors under the flight of steps and in the walls below the main door.

Fig. 3.18. Geddes, Norman Bel. Model for *The Singing Globe*. Photograph by Bruguière. *Theatre Arts Monthly* Jan. 1924: 49. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 160, folder i 1 (job 91). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

The stage will be a very long platform reaching from a high-columned doorway at one side of the auditorium to a similar doorway at the other. The audience will be seated upon each side of this raised stage and the action will be as directed as to be equally clear and significant to both sides of the house. There are small doors under the flight of steps and in the walls below the main door. (49)

That the model is absolutely Modernistic is indisputable. According to the cover of Wentworth's promotional pamphlet, in fact, "Mr. Gordon Craig, eminent authority on

the new theatre, writing from Italy, commends Mr. Geddes' model in the highest terms" (Wentworth). What is substantiated by archival records is that Geddes was creating two sets in 1923 for two pantomimed miracle plays—one employing abstraction, the other, replication. Given the available evidence, I argue that Geddes would have designed *The Miracle* according to the aesthetic principles that he used for *The Singing Globe* had he been given the agency.

CHAPTER FOUR: COSTUME DESIGN AND *THE MIRACLE*

The history of the theater is the history of the transfiguration of the human form. It is the history of man as the actor of physical and spiritual events, ranging from naïveté to reflection, from naturalness to artifice. — Oskar Schlemmer

Geddes, as I have established, made a major concession to Reinhardt when, instead of an abstract set, he built a replication of a cathedral for *The Miracle*. Despite making Geddes a major new force in American scene design, the set was, nevertheless, an extreme compromise, given the designer's preference for abstraction. Rather than establishing Geddes' identity as a forward-thinking, prescient radical, the cathedral distinguished him as a technically innovative showman capable of producing scenic spectacle at its grandest and most stunningly referential. Aspects of his Modernistic preliminary sketches for *The Miracle's* costumes, on the other hand, managed to emerge very clearly in some of the final designs for *The Century* production. Taken together with the preliminary sketches, the final renderings suggest that Geddes, rather than having abandoned his initial thinking for the production's costumes (as he had done for a set that Reinhardt presumably quashed), simply modified his first approach to please the powers that be—and to ensure that elements of his original ideas showed up in the final designs.

"There is no question," Stowell confirms, "that the use of factual detail on the stage in America was a thoroughly entrenched practice before and during [the early twentieth century]" (105). Geddes' preliminary sketches (their titles slashed out in red pencil) were extreme, not only in their blatant rejection of realism, but also in their

expansion of what a costume, and even dress itself, could be. Although eventually modified, most of *The Miracle's* archived preliminary sketches boldly challenged notions of costume's semiotic boundaries in the Broadway drama. Even Geddes' final designs for the dream sequence could never be described in any way as *factual* within a largely mimetic Broadway context.

I will begin this chapter with some thoughts on the tenuous relationship between theatre scholarship and stage dress. Next, I will offer an account of the evolution of costuming's role as a fundamental element of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, first bringing to light scarcely known observations regarding an early incidence of visual unity in costume, dress and stage design in the Stuart court masque. I will then offer a necessary account of permanent changes in approaches to costuming made during the Victorian era that altered its fundamental practices in professional Western theatre. I will furthermore use several examples of Geddes' preliminary and final sketches to demonstrate how fundamental aspects of his initial costuming ideas for the production coincided chronologically and stylistically with three movements of the First-Wave Avant-Garde in Europe. Last, I will credit Geddes with producing historiographically hidden, but outstanding examples in costuming belonging to the Euro-American dialectic informed by the aesthetic standards of simplification, suggestion and synthesis that was the New Stagecraft.

4.1. STAGE DRESS AND SCHOLARSHIP

If set design is underhistoricized in contemporary theatre scholarship, research on costuming is unquestionably negligible. The thematic title of the American Society for Theatre Research's annual conference for 2012, "Theatrical Histories," a tremendously wide net by its own admission, offered, for example, only one of 34 working sessions that overtly invited scholarly treatments of stage dress (McIvor and Cook).¹⁰⁵ As to why costume design is (and has been) rarely a topic of American theatre historiography and scholarly discourse, a number of possibilities exist. During the first half of the twentieth century, for instance, American pedagogy focused very heavily on theatre as dramatic literature. Known as the *New Criticism*, Terry Eagleton insists this methodology isolated the dramatic text, which became, with the exclusion of all other defining factors (including costume), a kind of "fetish" (42):

Even if I do have access to Shakespeare's mind when reading *Hamlet*, what is the point of putting it this way, since all of his mind that I have access to is the text of *Hamlet*? . . . The poem¹⁰⁶ became a spatial figure rather than a temporal process. Rescuing the text from author and reader went hand in hand with disentangling it from any social or historical context. One needed, to be sure, to know what the poem's words would have meant to their original readers, but this fairly technical sort of historical knowledge was the only kind permitted.

¹⁰⁵ ASTR and its journal, *Theatre Survey*, are generally recognized as one of North America's most prestigious institutions of collective theatre scholarship. According to ASTR, its 2012 conference is "consciously broad" and "intended to encourage plenary and working group proposals from theater historians and practitioners, performance scholars and theorists, and everyone between and beyond those designations" (McIvor and Cook). Although there are several other sessions that could include theatrical dress scholarship, only "Objects and Things: The Histories of Theatrical Actants" addressed "design elements" as part of its broader discussion of theatre history.

¹⁰⁶ Here Terry Eagleton uses *poem* to designate all forms of literature, including drama.

Literature was a solution to social problems, not part of them; the poem must be plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into a sublime space above it. (40-41)

Studies of material aspects of scripted drama, such as costuming, were, hence, considered inconsequential to studies of an art form whose ontology for scholars and students lay primarily in an inalterable text. Now, of course, text is often no longer considered by some scholars to be indicative of performance, nor are its artifacts, as Peggy Phelan, one of the most influential performance theorists of the twentieth century, insists:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance. (146)

Costumes are, moreover, inextricably intertwined with dress. In the nineteenth-century American theatre, for example, costume and dress were often separated only by location, as "productions requiring modern dress would be costumed out of the actors' own wardrobes, supplemented with the occasional purchase of garments for stars the management desired to keep satisfied with their current state of employment" (Owen, *Costume* xiii). This practice was not exclusive to America, nor to the 1800s. Isolated incidents of "historical accuracy" in costuming occurred in France during the late-eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Many actors during this period, however, used their personal tailors to create modified versions of their own fashionable dress (Hollander 279).

¹⁰⁷ Mlle. Clairon's (1723-1803) Orientalist costumes for Voltaire's *L'Orphelin de la Chine* in 1755 is considered a landmark moment, for example.

Much of theatre is, of course, still rooted in the representation of a tangible, discernable world. Even “during the centuries of art and theater when real people were shown inhabiting legendary or imaginary scenes,” Hollander astutely notes, “their clothes had to have some connection with the dress of the spectator. However fantastic, they had to connect with the public’s sense of itself in its own clothes” (245). Costume is, thus, often necessarily framed not only by larger considerations of dress, but also those of fashion, a very touchy subject, apparently, for some academics. Showalter, however, takes issue with the general consensus in academia regarding fashion:

“There is this suggestion that fashion is not an art form or a cultural form, but a form of vanity and consumerism,” said Elaine Showalter,¹⁰⁸ the feminist literary critic and a professor emeritus at Princeton. And those, Ms. Showalter added, are dimensions of culture that “intelligent and serious” people are expected to scorn. Particularly in academia, where bodies are just carts for hauling around brains, the thrill and social play and complex masquerade of fashion is “very much denigrated,” Ms. Showalter said. “The academic uniform has some variations,” she said, “but basically is intended to make you look like you’re not paying attention to fashion, and not vain, and not interested in it, God forbid.” (Trebay)

If most theatre scholarship doesn’t deem dress a subject of *gravitas* (Showalter being an exception), one theatre theorist/practitioner who did was Robert Edmond Jones. Consider the following passage from *The Dramatic Imagination*:

. . . A stage costume has an added significance in the theatre in that it is created to enhance the particular quality of a special occasion. It is designed for a particular character in a particular scene in a particular play—not just for a character in a scene in a play, but for *that* character, in *that* scene, in *that* play—and accordingly it is an organic and necessary part of the drama in which it

¹⁰⁸ Elaine Showalter, a self-proclaimed feminist scholar and fashion aficionado, wrote a controversial article for *Vogue* in 1997, “The Professor Wore Prada,” in which she examined and proclaimed her lifelong affair with fashion.

appears. . . . We go on from day to day, most of us, beset by uncertainties and frustrations, and try to do the best we can, not seeing very clearly, not understanding very well. And we say, Life (sic) is like that! But drama is not in the least like that. Drama is life, to be sure, but life seen through the eye of a dramatist, seen sharply and together, and given an arbitrary form and order. We see our own lives reflected as in a magic mirror, enlarged and amplified, in a pattern we had not perceived before. Everything on his stage becomes a part of that other order—the words, the situations, the actors, the setting, the lights, the costumes. . . . And each element—the word, the actor, the costume—has the exact significance of a note in a symphony. (92-94)

4.2 THE STUART COURT MASQUE AND THE MEININGER

One major shift that has been established by theatre historiographers is that costume design (in the contemporary sense, as part of a unified production) is both an embodied practice and a concept that did not begin to widely take hold in Western theatre until the late-nineteenth century. For the most part, historiography indicates this is, indeed, the case; the idea of a costume designer, an artist working in tandem with other stage artists to consciously create a visually unified dramatic production didn't emerge until the late 1800s and didn't become established as the norm for professional dramatic productions on Broadway until the early-twentieth century. Although the actors of Ancient Greece, for example, "had distinctive and highly stylized clothes and masks associated with them, just as the European Commedia dell'Arte came to do," these types of costumes, as Hollander points out, "cannot really be considered *designed* as much as they were *codified*" (270). There is, however, a widely held misconception that the unification of costume—to other costumes and the theatrical setting—never existed in Western theatre until the nineteenth century. According to Hollander, there was, in fact, a brief period in Europe when isolated, intermittent incidents of scenographic

unification did occur—but not in drama and not for the masses. In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Hollander points to the Stuart court masque, in which set and stage dress, governed by pictorial art, did, in fact, merge stylistically:

The link between pictures and theater was maintained for stage dress through the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but only in the kind of theater that was nourished at refined courts for royal self-celebration, and no longer in view of the general public. The final distillation of the Renaissance connection between dress in art and on the stage occurred in the Stuart court masques of the early seventeenth century. Designs for the clothes worn in them show this connection, and so does the design of the theatrical space. After the dramatic part of the masque, the empty floor filling the space between the actors and audience was the meeting place of both, and here nobles in courtly dress danced with other nobles in fancy dress, both then intermingling the beauty and significance of each other's mode of costume. The two modes blended together because they were constructed and embellished according to the same high standards and out of the same materials. The scale of trim and degree of detail were the same; they were intended to be seen from the same range of distances, under the same quality and intensity of artificial lighting. An entirely fanciful costume designed by Inigo Jones for Queen Henrietta Maria would also have been made by the same persons who made actual court dresses, with real pearls and cloth of silver tissue used for both. (246)

The rendering below, for example, is from *The Masque of Blackness*, the first of the court masques written by Ben Jonson (English, 1572-1637) and designed by Inigo Jones (English, 1573-1652), who also designed the set in The Banqueting Hall at Whitehall Palace in 1605 (see fig. 4.1). Jones had become acquainted with Italianate scenographic practices earlier and introduced them to the court of James I:

The proscenium arch, behind which the illusion of receding space was to be created scientifically, was clearly suitable first for painting and then for the kind of theater most dependent on painting: the theater of illusion. And it was for indoor courtly entertainments, produced (like panel paintings) at great cost by great artists for private patrons, that this kind of theatrical effect was developed. (Hollander 246)

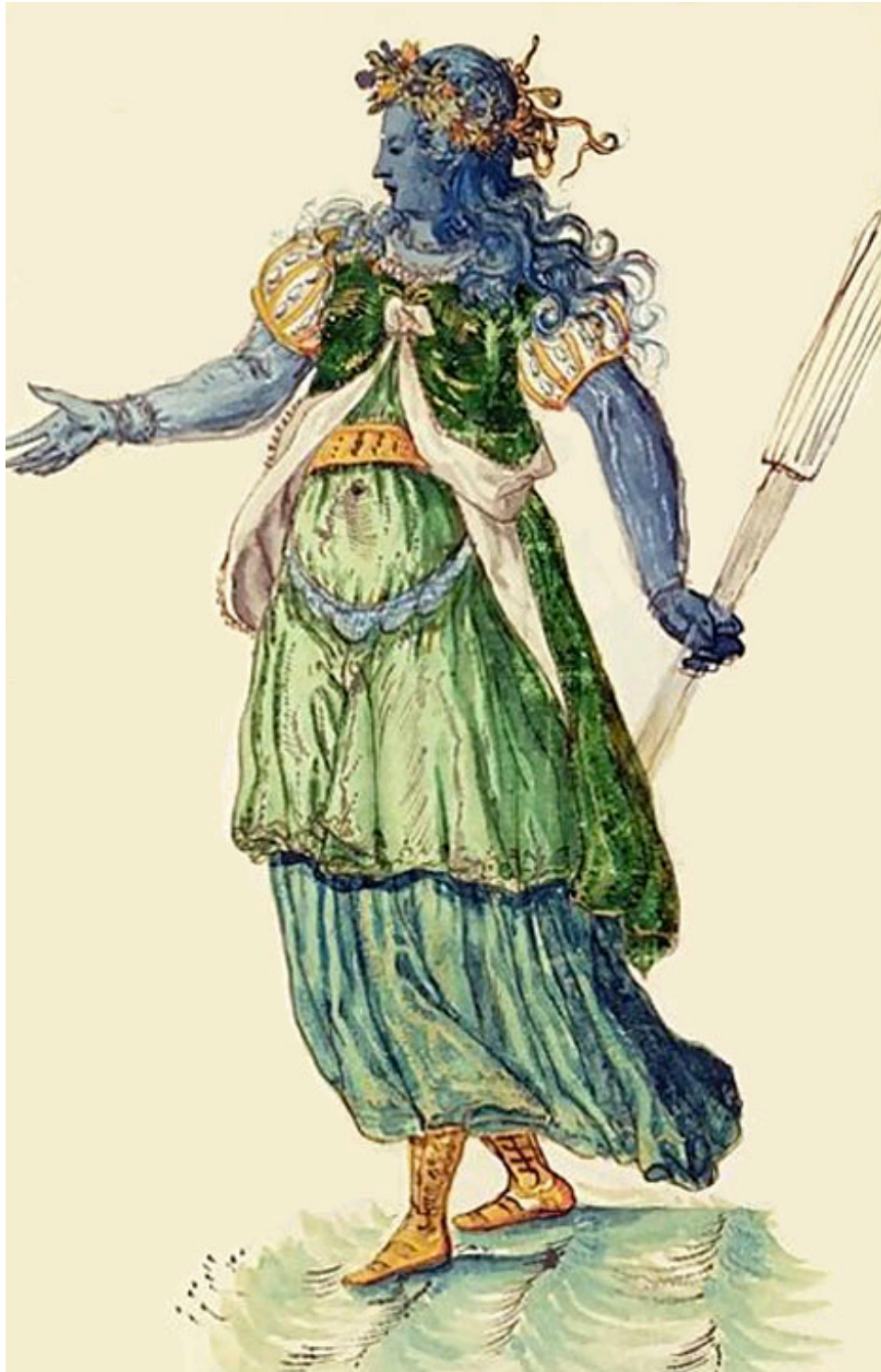


Fig. 4.1. Jones, Inigo (English, 1573-1652). Costume design for *Torchbearer of Oceania* in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*. 1605. Private Collection. Schelling, Felix E. "The English Masque." *Luminarium*. Ed. Anniina Jokinen. 1996-2010. Web. 4 Feb. 2013.

Drama, “which flourished in schools or in Chambers of Rhetoric or in professional productions, did not have the illustrative imaginative services of visual designers, even when it had money. Art and drama were not seen to need each other; art and theater were strongly bound” (Hollander 271). Most Renaissance dramatic productions, thus, had to use secondhand dress as costumes, “preferably sumptuous, of course” (271).

Despite the visual harmony present in the Renaissance court performance, they should not be mistaken as early examples of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“a total, unified theatrical work.”) *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a theatrical ideal in which visual unity was only one ingredient, albeit a significant one. First and foremost, these spectacles had much more in common with the replication of the pictorial arts than a consciously unified theatrical production. The Stuart court masques were “living paintings,” much like the *tableau vivant*.¹⁰⁹ “Visual aptness and unity of set,” Hollander affirms, “were thus a Renaissance theatrical phenomenon, made possible by the intellectual conception that a coherent image might express a coherent idea. . . . Acting in plays or scenarios was different from creating significant apparitions” (269). The pictorial unification was, moreover, completed serendipitously by the participation of the courtiers, who dressed themselves for the occasion. Lastly, the fundamental aim of the court designer was to celebrate the power of the reigning monarch by creating images of physical beauty that would dazzle the eye. Unification was only a by-product of this kind of beauty, not the impetus.

¹⁰⁹ “Living picture.” Generally speaking, theatrical performances in which the performers do not speak or move, they often featured elaborate scenery and costuming. In Western theatre, they can be traced back to the medieval Mass.

“As long as plays have been presented,” explains Owen, “choices have been made about the environment in which they occur, the garments the performers wear, and how to focus the audience’s attention” (*Costume* xi). A vast array of cultural and artistic forces informed these “choices,” as they do now. There is, however, an important distinction between the costumes of an early-nineteenth century professional production and a contemporary Broadway staging of drama: all costumes for the latter will be created uniquely for the production as part of an overarching design concept.

Theatre historiography credits George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, as establishing this aesthetic principle when he took over the court theatre in Meiningen in the 1870s (Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger 194).¹¹⁰ Lee Simonson, in *The Stage is Set*, gives an outstanding account of how The Meininger¹¹¹ productions transformed approaches to Western costume. Before the company began its frequent tours of Europe,¹¹² “any consistent attempt to relate the style of costumes to the general style of a production was almost unheard of and any attempts to bring them within a hundred years of the period portrayed by a play almost always unsuccessful” (294-95). Costumes may have been created for a production—but not for *the* production. Here Simonson recounts Stanislavsky’s humorous anecdote about the vain struggle to

¹¹⁰ Meiningen was a small principality in pre-unification Germany. For all of the company’s productions, Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen served as director, set designer and costume designer.

¹¹¹ The name of Saxe-Meiningen’s company

¹¹² According to Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger, the ensemble played in 38 cities in nine countries between 1874 and 1890, giving approximately 2,600 performances of 41 plays (196).

acquire historically accurate costumes in late-nineteenth-century Moscow¹¹³:

“There were only three styles in vogue at the *costumiers*’ shops: ‘Faust,’ ‘Les Huguenots,’ and ‘Molière.’ ...Have you some sort of a Spanish costume, like ‘Faust’ or ‘Les Huguenots’? was the question usually asked of the *costumiers*. ‘We have Valentines, Mephistos and St. Bries of all color,’ was the usual answer.”¹¹⁴ Like every other department of theatrical production, costuming followed operatic tradition. No leading actor would think of wearing a ruff or a high collar. The neck must be free or one’s voice was strangled. Leading juveniles played their love scenes in one adaptation or another of the Byronic shirt. And every actor wore pretty much what he or she pleased. At best the general effect achieved was that of the usual costume-ball (sic). (*Stage* 295)

Meiningen’s personal wealth enabled him to pay for all the production costs, thus presumably affording him total control of all production elements. He performed an exhaustive amount of research for each production, and spared no expense when it came to costuming his actors in a manner that was in tandem with his fundamental design concept: unification by a strict reproduction of dress based on historical artifacts. Here, Simonson relates the lengths to which Meiningen would go to in his quest for historical accuracy:

At Meiningen costumes were designed for a play with the same care as its settings, and the drawings for both made at the same time. For the first time audiences in the theatre became aware of the differences in line and silhouette that distinguished the modes of the Renaissance in Spain, France, and Italy. Verrochio, Dürer, Holbein, Raphael, Velasquez, or a Roman statue supplied the models, instead of a theatrical tailor. The full flare and scale of historic modes were recovered, whether in a coronation robe, a farthingale, or a toga. . . . Each costume was delivered to a dressing-room (sic) with a slip of written instructions as to how it was to be worn. No actor was privileged to change a fold or a button without the duke’s approval. When typical brocades and velvets could not be

¹¹³ Like many European directors, Konstantin Stanislavsky saw a Meiningen production on a tour.

¹¹⁴ *Valentine* and *Le Comte de Saint-Bris* were roles in Giacomo Meyerbeer’s (French, 1791-1864) 1836 *Les Huguenots*, an opera set in sixteenth-century France. *Mephisto* is from Charles Gounod’s (French, 1818-1893) *Faust* (1859).

found, they were especially woven. The characteristic differences of arms and armour of different periods were as carefully distinguished. Theatrical armour that could be purchased being almost as grotesque as the usual theatrical costumes of the day, an armourer was installed as part of the Meiningen workshop. (*Stage* 295-96)

Below, one of the Duke's drawings contains examples of armour he created for the title character and French soldiers in his production of Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (*The Maid of Orleans*)¹¹⁵ (see fig. 4.2). Underneath her *coat of plates*,¹¹⁶ Johanna (Joan of Arc) wears an *haubergeon*, or short coat of mail. True to the notion of historical accuracy, the armor features a bascinet¹¹⁷ with a hinged visor, an innovation in European military dress that had indeed developed by the beginning of the fifteenth century (Tortora and Eubank 169). In a sketch of rehearsals of *Die Jungfrau* the actors are on break, but their costumes accurately reflect French dress of the period (see fig. 4.3). Examples include the women's *hennins* (tall, conical hats worn with veils attached) that peek out from the crowd in the rear, the short-skirted jacket, hose and *poulaines*¹¹⁸ of the musician and the truncated steeple headdress of the female figure to his right.

It may be surprising to some who are not acquainted with *The Stage is Set* that Simonson, one of the principal scenographers of the *New Stagecraft*, devotes an entire chapter in his narrative of theatre design extolling a figure who is synonymous with ultra-

¹¹⁵ Written in 1801, Friedrich Schiller's play was based on the life of Joan of Arc (French, c. 1412-1431).

¹¹⁶ Solid armor, as opposed to chain mail

¹¹⁷ A type of helmet that extended its coverage of the face and neck area, its early forms date from the fourteenth century.

¹¹⁸ Shoes or boots with pointed toes. According to Wilcox, in France they were known as *poulaines* (*Polish*) based on their Polish origins. In England, they were known as *crackowes*, after the city of Cracow (Krakow) (49).

realism and the “trend toward archaeological exactitude, which is supposed to have hampered the growth of improvisation and hindered the development of a ‘theatre theatrical’” (*Stage* 296). Simonson, on the other hand, also defends Meiningen by



Fig. 4.2. Saxe-Meiningen, Georg II, Duke of. Drawing of Amanda Lindner as Johanna in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (*The Maid of Orleans*). 1890. *Hekman Digital Archive*. Web. 6 May 2012.

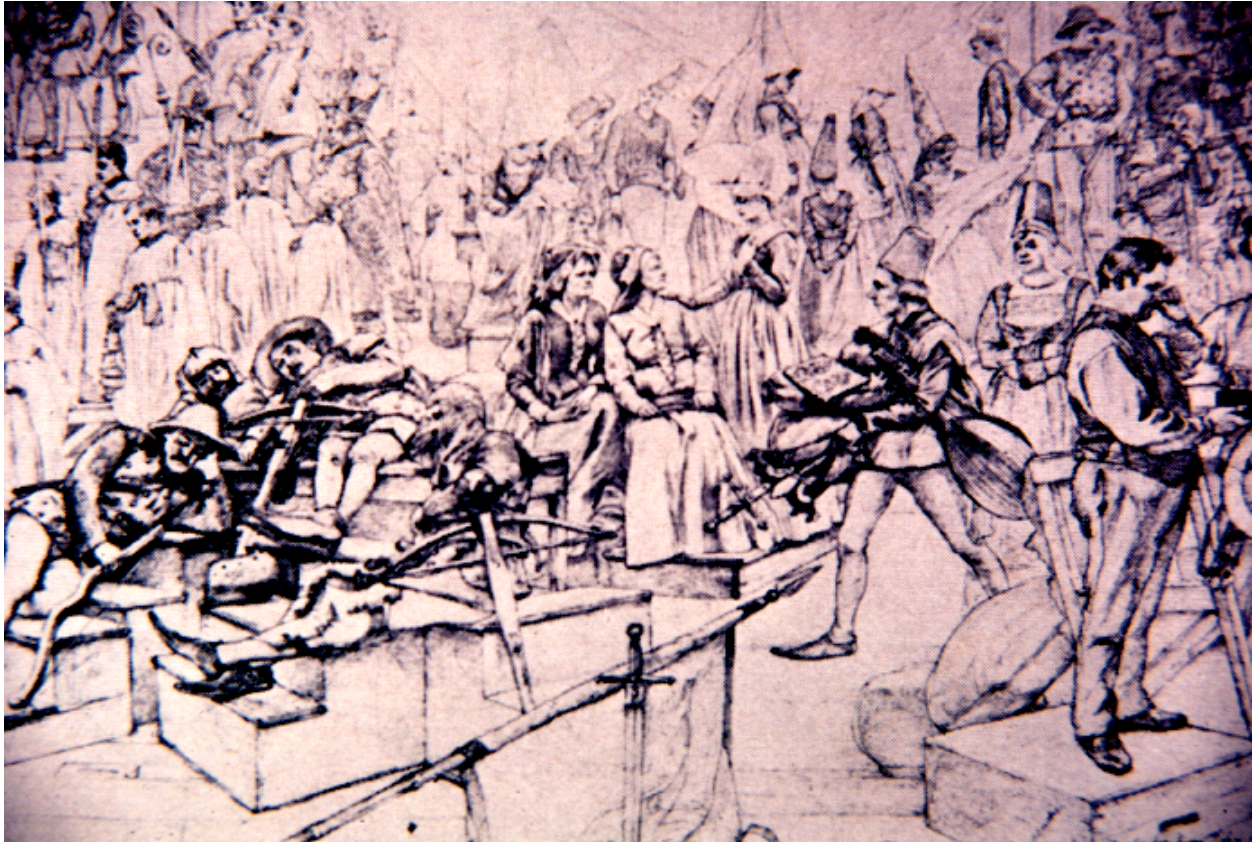


Fig. 4.3. Saxe-Meiningen, Georg II, Duke of. Drawing of preparation for the coronation scene in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. 1890. *Hekman Digital Archive*. Web. 3 May 2012.

asserting that all costume designers should first be trained in historical research and dressmaking, which gives them the necessary fundamental knowledge to then depart from realism. Jones upheld this notion in *The Dramatic Imagination*:

In learning how a costume for the stage is designed and made, we have to go through a certain amount of routine training. We must learn about patterns, and about periods. We have to know what farthingales are, and wimples, and patches and calèches and parures and godets and appliqués and passementerie. We have to know the instant we see and touch a fabric what it will look like on the stage both in movement and repose. We have to develop the brains that are in our fingers. We have to enhance our feeling for style in the theatre. We have to experiment endlessly until our work is as nearly perfect as we can make it, until we are, so to speak, released from it. (85-86)

Both Jones and Simonson clearly realized that without Meiningen's reforms, historical realism would not have become common practice in Western drama by the

early-twentieth century, providing a platform for reactions against it (Modernism) or modifications of it (the New Stagecraft.) “The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen,” according to Simonson, “did not exhaust the scope of costume design in the theatre, or indicate its imaginative goal. But he laid the foundation for both” (*Stage* 300). In America, by the 1920s, even in so-called “period productions,” the precedent set by Meiningen for extreme degrees of historical authenticity had been overturned by the new practitioners of costume design, Geddes among them. As Fuerst and Hume declared in 1929, period stage dress “must never be a literal copy of an illustration found in a document of the period. Here, as in the case of the setting, the copy must be replaced by interpretation—an interpretation of the general characteristics” (1: 82). As indicated by his thoughts on period costuming from a draft of his stage design textbook, Geddes concurred with this notion. “For historical costumes,” he wrote, “the important thing is to make them as contemporary as possible. If you depend on books for your inspiration you will have the ordinary historical affair than which (sic) nothing is more banal” (*Stage Design* 52-53; ch. 5). Many of Geddes’ period costumes were, thus, often stylized and/or simplified, but recognizable as vaguely inspired by historical models (see figs. 4.4 and 4.5).

Using *Hamlet* as an example, Stowell clarifies Geddes’ definition of *contemporary*:

Norman Bel Geddes practiced his own dictum about making contemporary the line of historical fashion in his costumes for [*Hamlet*] (1931). Although the costumes have an “old-timey” quality through long skirts and tights, other linear characteristics are decidedly of the 1930s, such as a diagonal opening on several of Laertes’ tunics. . . . A chevron pattern, typical of art deco motifs, emblazoned across the bosom of Gertrude’s court gown, as well as its shoulder and bust lines

are reminiscent of women's fashions of the 1930's (sic). For these and other [*Hamlet*] costumes, Bel Geddes pared away the complexities of real clothing, whether historical or contemporary, and emerged with a set of costumes which lack any particularized historical quality, but have a direct affinity to [twentieth-century] dress without being "modern dress" costumes. (155)



Fig. 4.4. Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume design for Mary Servoss as Gertrude in Broadway's *Hamlet*. 1931. Photograph by Maurice Goldberg. Rpt. in Donald Albrecht's *Norman Bel Geddes Designs America*. New York: Abrams, 2012. 169. Print.



Fig. 4.5. Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume designs for *Jeanne d'Arc*. 1925. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 58, folder h 1a (job 99). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Even within a discourse of early 20th-century scenography, it may surprise some scholars that Jones, Simonson and Geddes, all historicized overwhelmingly for their set work alone, designed as many costumes for Broadway drama as they did. Although Geddes, for example, never designed costumes for Broadway productions whose sets he did not also design, he costumed nearly half of his thirty or so produced Broadway dramas (Owen, *Broadway* 43). This does not include his more experimental work for

unproduced projects such as O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed* and *The Divine Comedy* (see fig. 4.6), both of which were to be masked. Given the agency to control all production

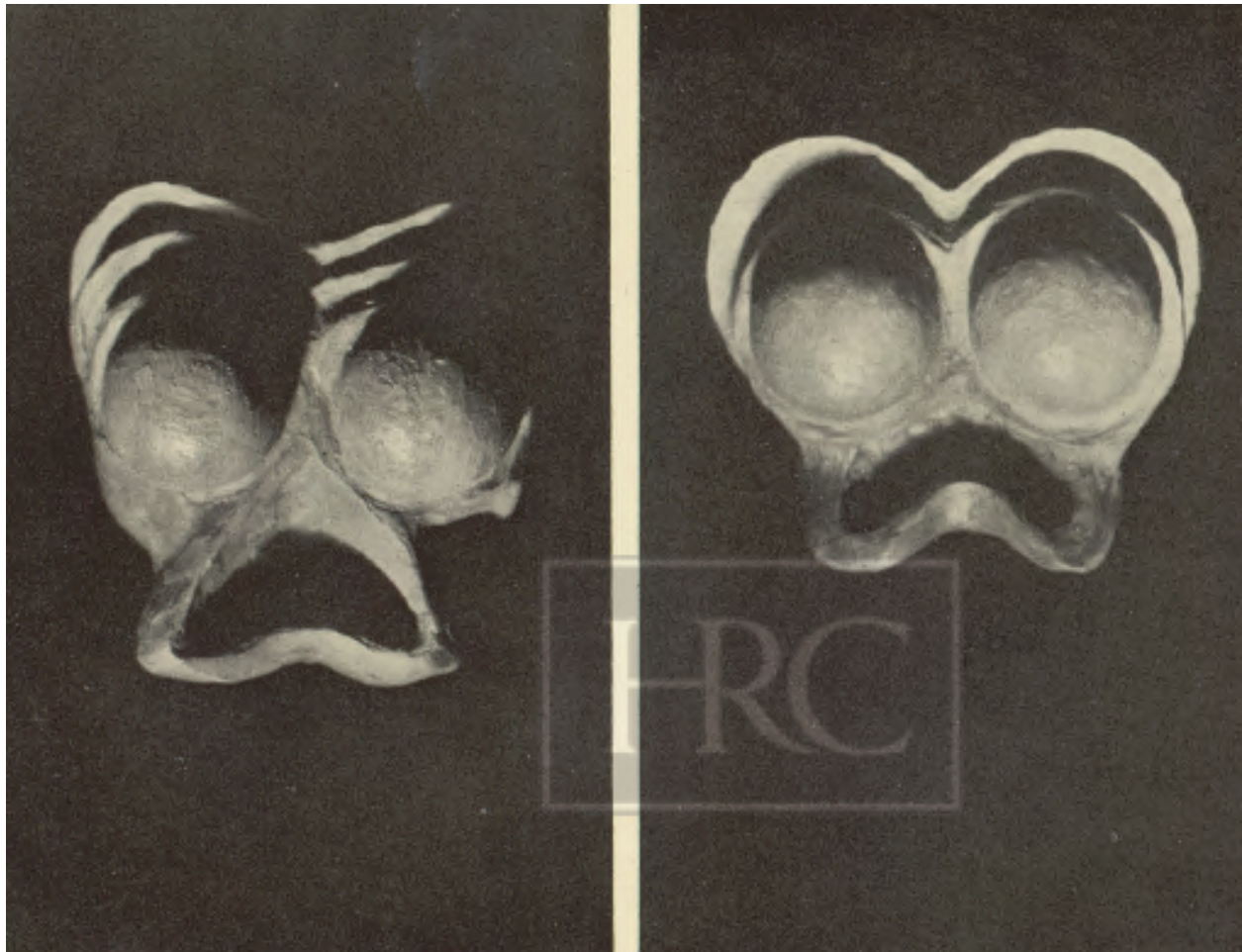


Fig. 4.6. Geddes, Norman Bel. Models of *Seventh Dante Mask* (left) and *Eighth Dante Mask* (right) for *The Divine Comedy*. Photographs by Bruguière. c. 1922. Rpt. in Norman Bel Geddes' *A Project for a Theatrical Presentation of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1924. Pl. 31, pl. 32. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, book collection g 2-3 (job 69). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

design elements as an ideal of new approaches to scenography, however, this is quite logical. The first page of the draft of Geddes' stage design textbook, for example, contains the following statement:

The field in which the designer has to work is the theatre. His specialty is the visual element, but he must never lose sight of the theatre as a whole or the significance of his work will be diminished. His aim is to unfold drama to the eyes of the audience as the voice of the actor unfolds it to their ears. This he accomplishes not by scenery alone, nor by costume, but by a combination and development of these and other things which will intensify and strengthen the idea which they represent. (*Stage Design 2*; ch. 1)

4.3 GEDDES' PRELIMINARY SKETCHES FOR *THE MIRACLE*

"I Have Seen the Future," proudly declared the buttons visitors took from the most notable design of Geddes' entire career, the *Futurama* Exhibit held at the 1939-40 World's Fair in New York. Almost an acre in size, the *Futurama*, created for General Motors, was a simulacrum in miniature depicting the designer's utopian vision of the American City of 1960. Geddes also designed the enormous building in which the exhibit was housed (Speck 294). "As he had done so dramatically in *The Miracle* fifteen years earlier, Geddes immersed his audience in a carefully orchestrated theatrical experience. Lights slowly dimmed as visitors left the bright glare of the outdoors and descended zigzag ramps into the cavernous space of the Map" (293). While seated, spectators gained a complete view via a mobile auditorium that hovered over it (see fig 4.7).

In terms of theatrical dress, Geddes, too, saw the future—his early *Miracle* sketches align themselves with coincident, forward-thinking experimentations in costuming. Here I will identify parallels between Geddes' preliminary sketches for the court scenes (scene four, "The Mock Wedding," and scene five, "The Coronation") and those of the First-Wave Avant-Garde— namely, Futurism, Dada and The Bauhaus.



Fig. 4.7. Photograph of Spectators on Revolving Chairs at the *Futurama* Exhibit. Circa 1939. *Viz.* Web. 9 Dec. 2012. Image Credit: GM Media Archives, General Motors LLC.

Their correspondences to Geddes' work is astonishing, given that there is absolutely no evidence in the Geddes Papers to indicate that he was influenced by, or even aware of these scenographic practices when he began work on *The Miracle*. "Although certain ideas that Geddes put into scenery could possibly be traced to European origins," Stowell affirms, "his practices and theories in costuming apparently developed quite independently of such influences" (24).

The fundamental anthropomorphism of the costume designs Geddes and the Europeans created, nevertheless, likely emerged from a response to multiple “overnight” technological developments and the accelerated conflation of human and the object that took place in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For some of the avant-garde, this fusion of human and object manifested itself in Modernist art and literature specifically by the fusion of human and the machine. Kern uses several examples, beginning with passages from Luigi Pirandello’s (Italian, 1867-1936) novel *Shoot: The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator*.

The identification with his occupation becomes so complete that Gubbio finally loses his identity to the camera: “I cease to exist. *It* walks not, upon my legs. From head to foot, I belong to it: I form part of its equipment.” This fantasy of self-abnegation culminates with the outburst, “My head is here, inside the machine, and I carry it in my hand.” With metaphor and fantasy, artists sought to portray the impact of technology on human experience. Leblanc¹¹⁹ envisioned the union of man and bicycle winging along the open road, Léger¹²⁰ fused humans and machines in sleek metallic forms, and Pirandello created a character whose head got lost in a camera. (qtd. in Kern 119).

Geddes’ preliminary costume sketches, with but a few notable exceptions, did not conflate the human with the *machine*, per se, but they clearly cross-bred (and, in some cases, replaced) the visible performer with costume-objects. “The ability of costume to express an idea is enormous and very little realized,” Geddes pronounced in “Visualizing Costumes,” a chapter from his design textbook (53; ch. 5). For *The Miracle*, the designer indeed expanded notions of what a costume could signify and how it could be used in performance far beyond its mimetic purposes. What Geddes did for the set,

¹¹⁹ Here Kern is referring to Maurice Leblanc’s (French, 1864-1941) novel *Voici des ailes! (Here are wings!)*, in which a character’s legs are transformed into bicycle wheels.

¹²⁰ Fernand Léger (French, 1881-1955) was a Cubist painter and sculptor.

he completely overturned with *The Miracle*'s preliminary sketches. These sketches for the court costumes would reappear, albeit in "humanized" form, in the final designs for the production. (Even in modified form Geddes' production designs still indicate a stylistic affinity with some the First-Wave Avant-Garde in their fundamental objectification of the biological.)

4.4. FUTURIST-IC COSTUMING AND *THE MIRACLE*

Italian Futurism was an artistic movement that officially began in Europe prior to World War I with the publication of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's (Italian, 1876-1944) first *Futurist Manifesto* in 1909. An angry and vitriolic movement, it emerged as an aggressive artistic reaction to the nineteenth century's weighted obsession with an ancient past. Futurism "called for the destruction of museums and libraries (scorned as "mausoleums") and glorified speed, violence, and warfare. 'A roaring motorcar,' Marinetti wrote, ' . . . is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace (sic)'" (Atkins 109). Instead of looking back at history, it looked ahead (hence its name) with militant anticipation to the potentialities offered by a highly mechanized future. "The central preoccupations of the Futurists," agree Cardullo and Knopf, "were speed and technology; they were particularly drawn to the intoxicating power of machines" (189). A rupture with the previous century's concerns with the "natural" and the historical, it was one of the first major movements of the First-Wave Avant-Garde. In this section, I do

not propose to discuss Futurism in its entirety (it lasted sporadically for decades,¹²¹ invaded several countries and spanned a number of art forms other than performance) or identify Norman Bel Geddes as a *Futurist* (although he was certainly a *futurist*.) I choose, rather, to identify striking examples of common ground between early Futurist design theory and Geddes', then draw parallels between some of its costuming practices and the initial sketches Geddes created for *The Miracle*.

Geddes' relationship with the machine was, in fact, a long and solid affair that permeated most of his entire design career, well outlasting his engagement with dramatic productions. Nowhere was this more apparent than at *I Have Seen the Future: Norman Bel Geddes Designs America*, the Fall/Winter 2012-13 Ransom Center retrospective exhibit of his career.¹²² Quite plainly, Geddes loved technology. He was, in fact, obsessed with it, and soundly set about modernizing the casings in which it was manufactured beginning in the 1920s. Yachts, steamships, flying automobiles, revolving aerial restaurants, kitchen appliances, radios, railroad cars and even staplers—Geddes could create or redesign anything that moved—and these are only a few examples from the enormous catalog of his offstage design work.¹²³ In 1932 he published *Horizons*, his “ode to streamlining.”¹²⁴ Consider two passages, the first from

¹²¹ Cardullo and Knopf indicate that the movement lasted until Marinetti's death shortly before the end of World War II.

¹²² I attended the exhibition in November of 2012.

¹²³ Here I purposely use the word *design*. Like some of Geddes's theatrical work, not all of his commercial designs went beyond a prototype.

¹²⁴ In the book, Geddes refers to Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, containing the lines, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Geddes claims that had Keats had known about airplanes, he would have written a similar tribute.

Sant'Elia and Marinetti's "Futurist Architecture" and the second from *Horizons*:¹²⁵

Material possibilities and attitudes of mind have come into being that have had a thousand repercussions, first and foremost of which is the creation of a new ideal of beauty, still obscure and embryonic, but whose fascination is already being felt even by the masses. We have lost the sense of the monumental, of the heavy, of the static; we have enriched our sensibility by a 'taste for the light, the practical, *the ephemeral and the swift*.'¹²⁶ We feel that we are no longer the men of cathedrals, *the palaces*, the assembly halls; but of big hotels, railway stations, immense roads, colossal ports, covered markets¹²⁷, brilliantly lit galleries, freeways, demolition and rebuilding schemes. (35-36)

Almost twenty years later, from the other side of the Atlantic, Geddes speaks:

Standards of art are changing as rapidly as standards of wealth and government. Past generations have looked at statues erected on corners and parkways; future generations will make monuments of a different caliber. . . . I foresee art being released from its picture frames and prosceniums and pedestals and museums and bursting forth in more inspired forms. I firmly believe that the statue on its pedestal and the painting in its frame will eventually vanish as mediums of expression. Art in the coming generations will have less and less to do with frames, pedestals, museums, books and concert halls and more to do with people and their life. In the point of view of the artist who fails to see an aesthetic appeal in such objects of contemporary life as a railway train, a suspension bridge, a grain elevator, a dynamo, there is an inconsistency. (7)

Although Geddes was clearly not a participant in the Futurist movement, the contiguous arrangement of these disparate manifestos demonstrates, quite strikingly, that Sant'Elia, Marinetti and Geddes shared this preoccupation: the beauty of the modern machine. In a sketch for Megildis' scene five coronation costume, for example, Geddes borrowed a mid-nineteenth-century silhouette and modified it with objects

¹²⁵ Antonio Sant'Elia (Italian, 1888-1916) and Mario Chiattone (Swiss, 1891-1957) exhibited architectural plans for a "New City" in Milan in 1914, a radical conception of a modern metropolis. The catalogue to the exhibition, written by Sant'Elia, was "reinterpreted" by Marinetti and published four months later as a *Manifesto of Futurist Architecture* (Sant'Elia and Marinetti 34).

¹²⁶ The words and phrases in italics indicate Marinetti's changes.

¹²⁷ Here, Sant'Elia anticipates the development of the indoor shopping mall.

belonging to The Machine Age: the leg-of-mutton sleeves¹²⁸ consist of car tires and the bodice suggests a submarine window (see fig. 4.8). Although the sketch indicates

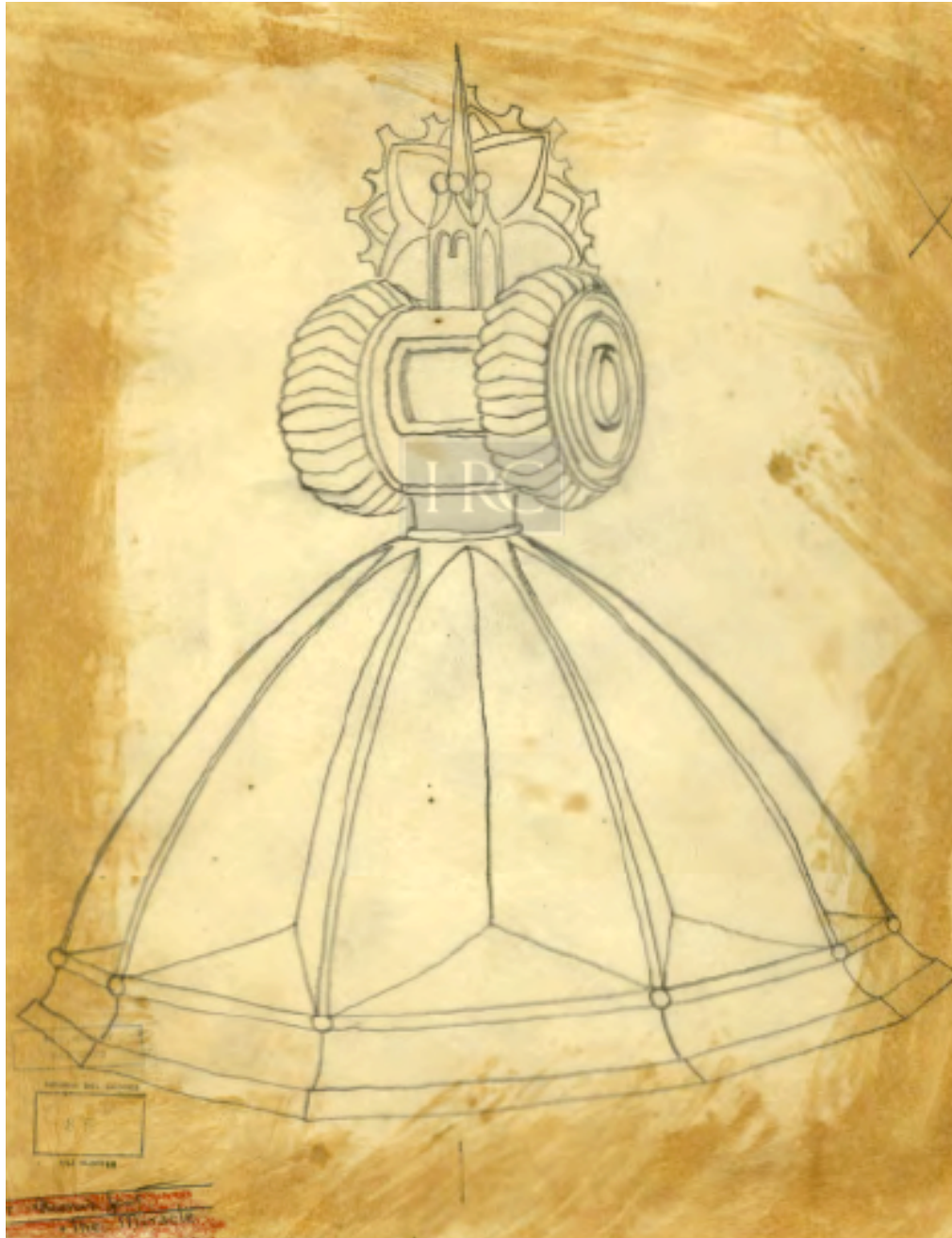


Fig. 4.8. Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Empress*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

¹²⁸ Large, puffed sleeves

Geddes may have struggled in integrating elements of the modern machine in *The Miracle*'s costuming, archived preliminary drawings with overt representations of twentieth-century machine components, such as the coronation gown, are anomalies.

"Theoretical and practical aspects of Futurist costume design and acting," Kirby observes, "primarily focus around two concepts: the integration of the performer with the setting and what could be called the mechanization of the performer" (97). For the former, one need only consider a 1927 Paris production of *Cocktail*, a Futurist pantomime by Marinetti and Silvio Mix. Enrico Prampolini choreographed the one-act performance, and also designed the scenery and costumes (see fig. 4.9). An example

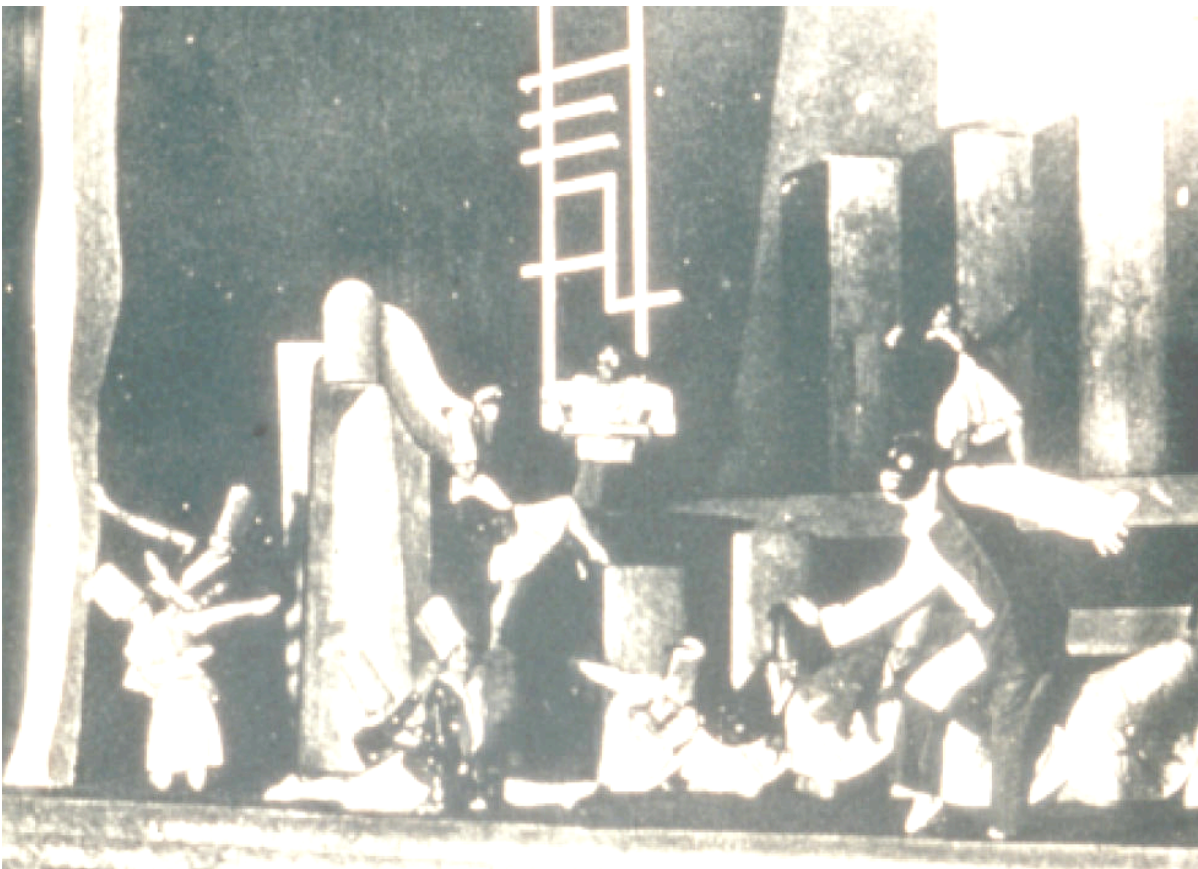


Fig. 4.9. Prampolini, Enrico (Italian, 1894-1956). Set and costume design for *Cocktail*, presented at the *Théâtre de la Madeleine*, Paris. 1927. *Hekman Digital Archive*. Web. 11 May 2012.

of the latter is Pannaggi's 1926 costume for Prisoner G/H2 in *L'angoscia Della Macchine* (*The Anguish of Machines*), which reimagined the performer as a cyborg (see figs. 4.10 and 4.11).



Fig. 4.10 (left). Pannaggi, Ivo (Italian, 1901-1981). Costume rendering for *Prisoner G/H2* in Ruggero Vasari's¹²⁹ *L'angoscia Della Macchine* (*The Anguish of Machines*). Watercolor and collage sketch on paper. 1926. *Tumblr*. Web. 8 May 2012.

Fig. 4.11 (right). Photograph of the costume in performance. *Hekman Digital Archive*. Web. 8 May 2012.

Regarding the Futurists' synthesis of performer and scenery, consider Geddes' sketch for *The Miracle's* altar (see fig. 12). At a glance, it appears to be a highly

¹²⁹ (Italian, 1898-1968)

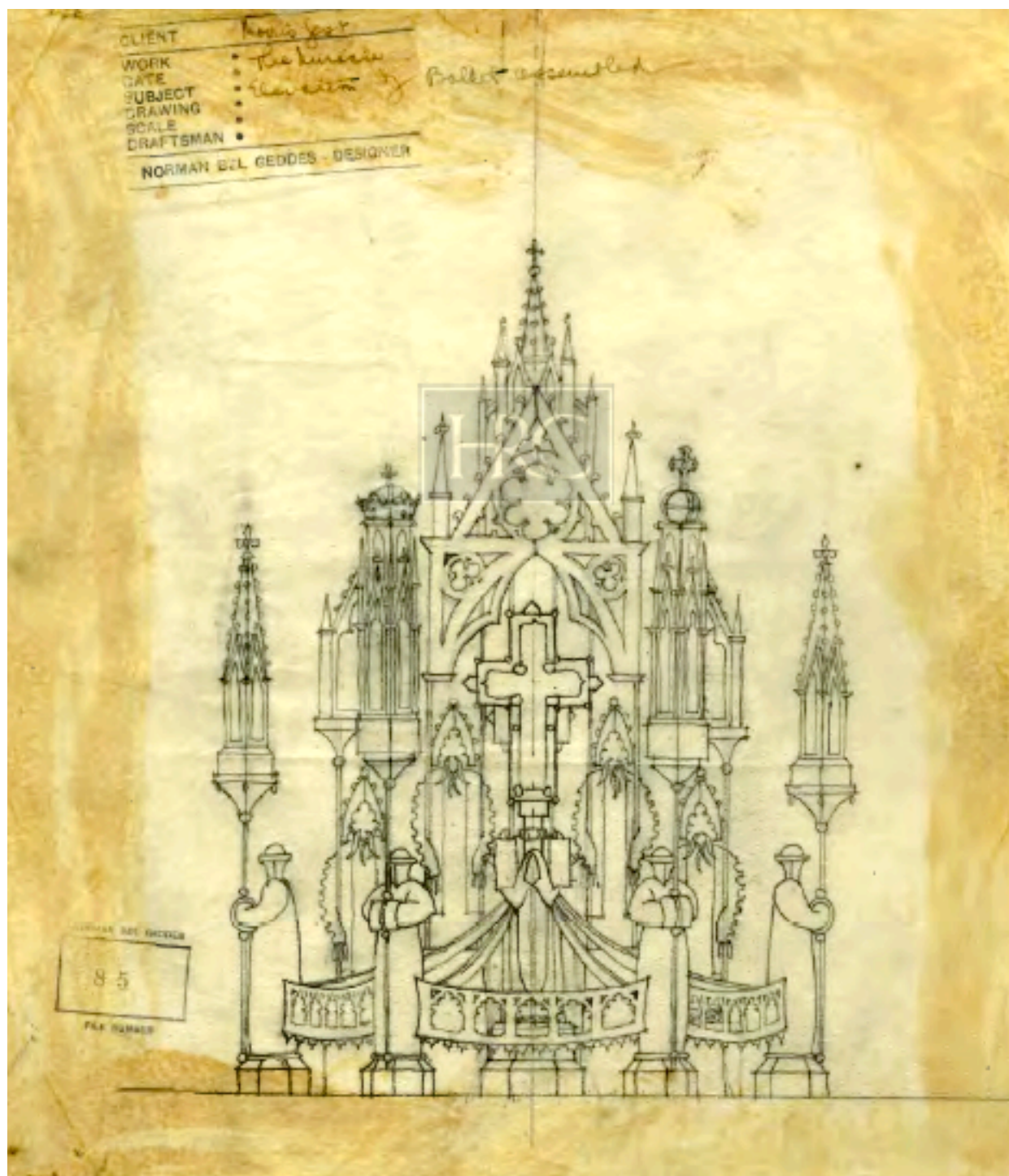


Fig. 4.12. Geddes, Norman Bel. Preliminary drawing for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder e 2 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

symmetrical elevation plan. A closer look, however, reveals that it is constructed largely of human performers in what can only be described as a kind of assemblage of set, performer and costume. The female figure at center wearing a large, tent-like skirt is likely Megildis. Several “columns” consisting of actors holding poles topped by Gothic finials surround her. Their footwear are plinths.¹³⁰ Behind her are four figures wearing headdresses, two of which also carry finials on poles.

“Costumes are scenery worn by actors,” Geddes declared in his Players Club design course (*Miracle* 262). With the altar configuration, he clearly took this concept much further than Craig for the first court scene in *Hamlet* described in Chapter Two.¹³¹ In the latter, Craig used monochromatic color and blocking to form the scenic “heaps of bodies” that formed the masses beneath Claudius and Gertrude. Geddes, on the other hand, created costume designs that, even when removed from a scenographic construction such as the altar, are as much scenery as they are stage dress. The preliminary sketch for scene five’s *Footman* costume (see fig. 4.13), for example, blurs the boundaries between set and costume, dress and architecture, and performer and object to an even greater extent than the altar configuration. With the Footman, they are virtually one: the human silhouette is reduced to nearly unrecognizable form, faintly present only in the central “head” and “arms,” bearing candles.

¹³⁰ Architectural structures that stand at the base of columns, serving as supports

¹³¹ See p. 57

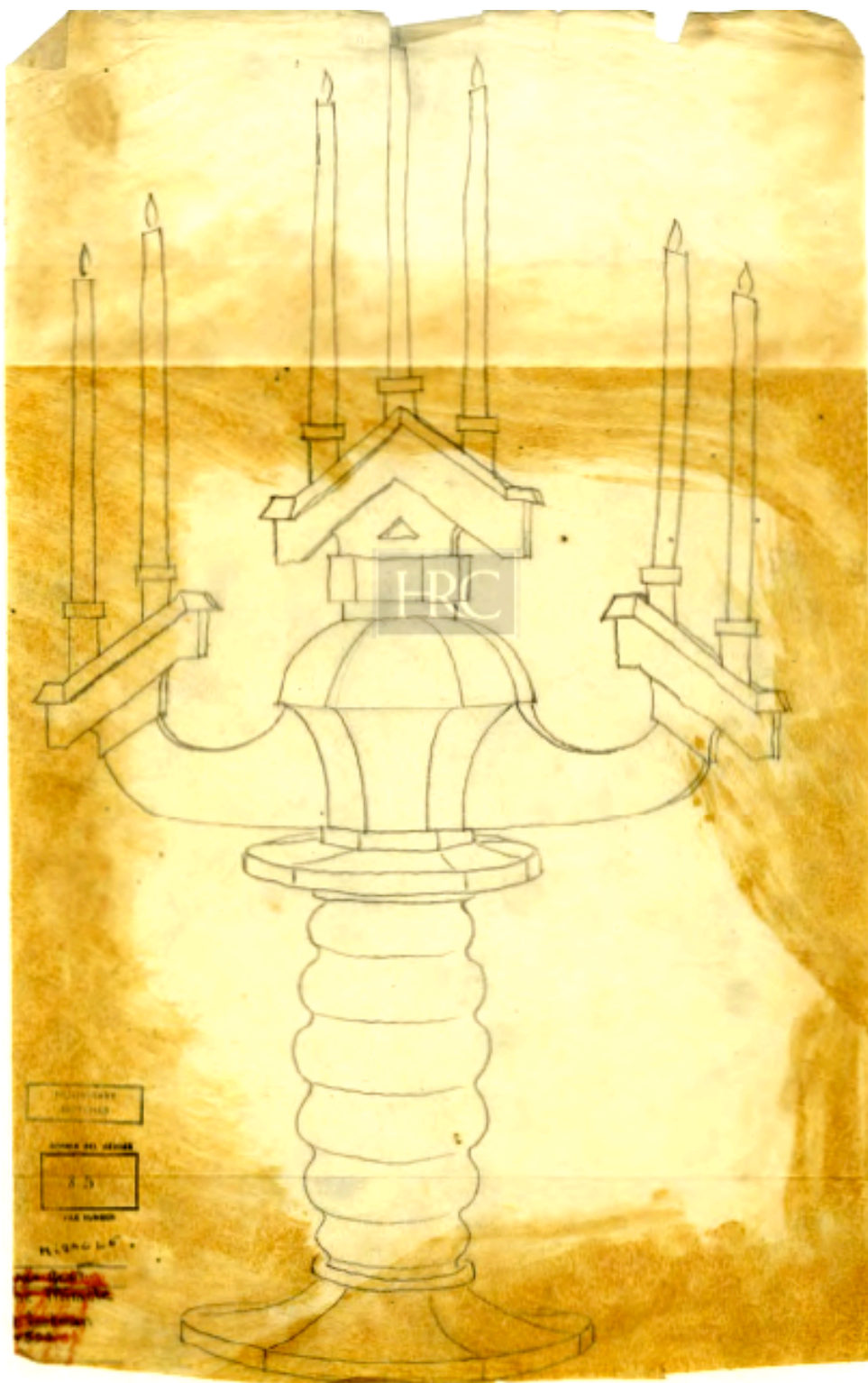


Fig. 4.13. Geddes, Norman Bel. *A Footman*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Like Pannaggi's GH/2 costume, Geddes' Footman brings to mind the second thrust of Futurist costume: that of man as machine. Although, as I have previously mentioned, Geddes did not mechanize the performer in the manner the Futurists did, he clearly shared the same fundamental view that costume need not necessarily represent a biological figure. The Footman costume, although not a machine, is a mold representing a non-biological object, designed to contain and conceal a human performer who animates the object in performance. Rather than depicting the performer as a machine, Geddes, it can be said, uses the performer to animate the inanimate.

For the Futurists, however, the object/machine-performer concept was embodied in a wide range of costume and performance styles. In Giacomo Balla's *Macchina Tipografica* (*The Printing Press*) of 1914, for example, mechanized "costume" was expressed purely through movement (see fig. 4.14):

The performance was to take place in front of a drop and wings that, rather than indicating a place, merely spelled out the word "TIPOGRAFIA" in large block letters. Twelve performers were to become the parts of the machine; the sounds and movements of the machine were to constitute the entire piece. A sketch by Balla shows six performers, represented by simple stick figures, and indicates something of the movement. Standing one behind the other with their arms extended rigidly in front, two performers rock forward and back, making what could be a piston or drive shaft. There are two such pairs of performers, and each "piston" seems to drive a "wheel," created by another performer who sweeps his arm or arms in a full circle. The two "wheels" face each other, the overlapping of their arcs and the indication that their hands are held at right angles to their arms suggest that they are "cog wheels" whose movements work together. (Kirby 93, 95)

In other instances, such as Pannaggi's *Balletti Meccanici*, the performer is costumed as an robot (see fig. 4.15). Based on these designs, there are further distinctions that can be made between the performer-machines of Futurist

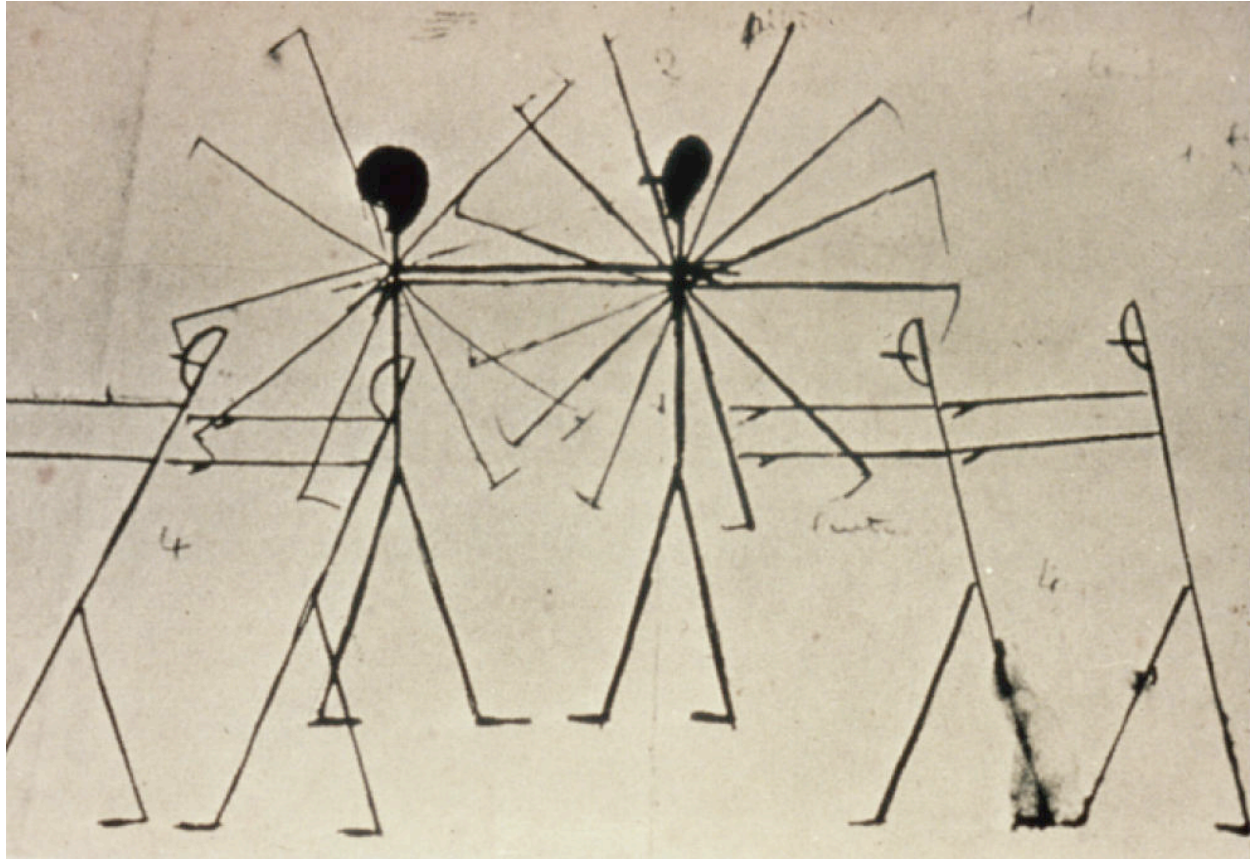


Fig. 4.14. Balla, Giacomo (Italian, 1871-1958). Sketch of Actor Movements for *Macchina Tipografica (The Printing Press)*. 1914. Hekman Digital Archive. Web. 12 May 2012.

costume and Geddes' performer-objects in *The Miracle*. For the Futurists, a machine was a kinetic form of technology that belonged either to the modern world (such as the printing press) or to the future (Pannagi's "Mechanized Man," for example.) In either case, the human form was, nevertheless, present. The Futurist body of the biological performer was either visible, as in the former, or was concealed and replaced by artificial anatomy resembling the human body, as in the latter. Kirby supports this observation:

It is tempting to make the generalization that with the Futurists stage decor became a machine that replaced the actor while acting and costuming turned the



Fig. 4.15. Pannaggi, Ivo (Italian, 1901-1981). Costume design for “Mechanized Man” in *Balletti Meccanici* (*Mechanical Ballets*). Circa 1919. *Hekman Digital Archive*. Web. 9 May 2012.

performer into a machine and an element of scenic design. To some extent, this is certainly true; it must be understood, however, in terms of the concept of personification. (91)

In some of the initial sketches for *The Miracle*, on the other hand, Geddes utterly removed any traces or suggestions of the human in carapaces representing

architectural elements (see fig. 4.16). The sketch below, quite plausibly from The Coronation scene, provides an example of Geddes' total object-ification of the human (unless, of course, you consider the plinth as an indication of human feet), taking his concept of "costume as scenery" to its utmost extreme. Here he has created a mask, not just for the face, but for the entire body.¹³²

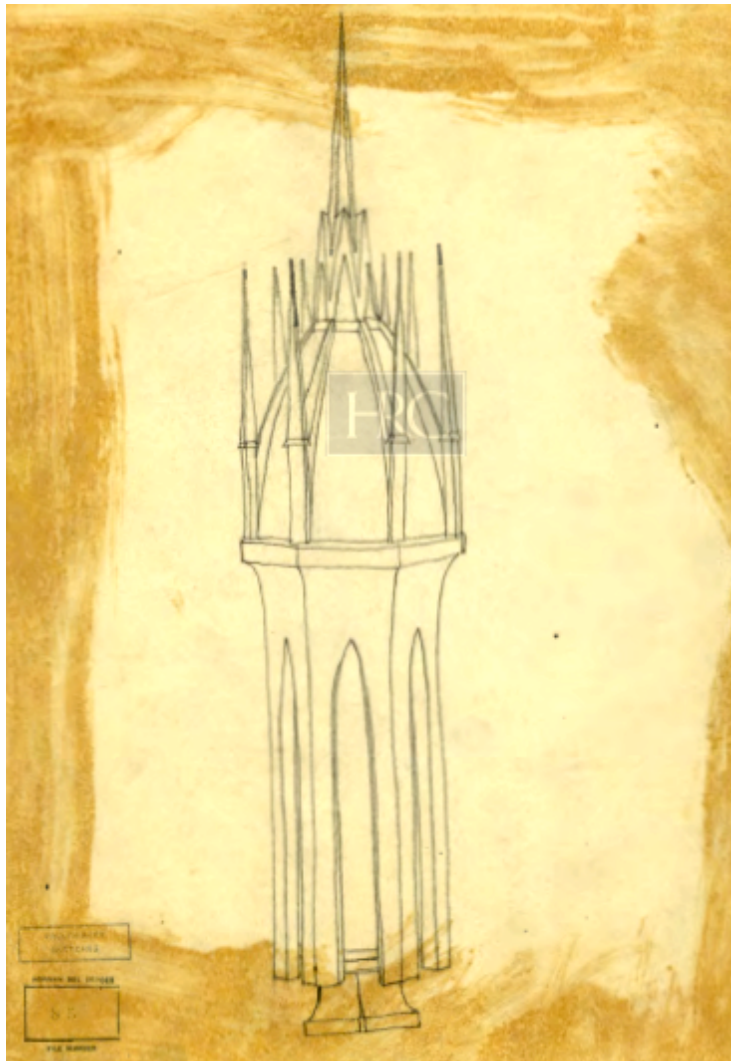


Fig. 4.16. Geddes, Norman Bel. Untitled preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

¹³² According to Stowell, Norman Bel Geddes used the term *body masks* to denote his costumes for *The Divine Comedy* (240).

Sheppard contends that “by masking the individual performer” in Modernist performance, “the creator of ritual music theater (whether composer, choreographer, dramatist, or producer)¹³³ intended to proclaim his own presence and power more forcefully” (247). This notion is particularly applicable to Geddes: it is certainly evident, for example, that the subjugation of the performer to scenographic elements is a pattern that runs throughout much of Geddes’ design work. Larson points out that not all reviews of *The Miracle*, for example, ignored Geddes’ penchant for emphasis on scenery and costumes at the price of character-driven action:

All critics agreed that the production was magnificent in its conception, elaborate in its presentation, with moments of great beauty and theatricality. More discerning critics, however, hinted that a main line of emphasis was lacking, that the simple story of the nun was overladen, if not buried, in the splendor of the pageantry. It was the first suggestion of a characteristic that was to become evident in future Bel Geddes productions: the tendency, if not a compulsion, to overlay theatrical commissions with a largeness and a grandeur that often did more to destroy than to enhance their beauty. (76)

Geddes, tellingly, often avoided portraying the human face in many of his costume renderings from various productions throughout his career. As early as 1919, as shown by his costume sketch for *Boudour Ballet*, for example, Geddes is (literally) rendering the performer anonymous (see fig. 4.17). He repeats this practice in several final costume illustrations for *The Miracle* (see figs. 4.18, 4.19 and 4.20). If not technically, as in the case of the Cymbal Bearer, Geddes effectively masked the actors by portraying them either holding objects in front of their faces or turning away from the gaze of the viewer.

¹³³ Sheppard does include designers in this list, but it can be assumed that they, too, are *creators*.



Fig. 4.17. Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume rendering for A Dancer in *Boudour Ballet* for the Chicago Opera Company. 1919. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 115, folder c 6 (job 60). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.



Fig. 4.18 (left). Geddes, Norman Bel. *A Cymbal Bearer*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Fig. 4.19 (center). Geddes, Norman Bel. *A Choir Boy*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Fig. 4.20 (right). Geddes, Norman Bel. *Widow in Mourning*. 1923. *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre*. Ed. Oliver M. Sayler. New York: Brentano's, 1926 ed. Front. 260. Print.

4.5. GEOMETRIZATION I: DADA, SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP AND *THE MIRACLE*

Hugo Ball (German, 1886-1927), the Father of Dada Performance, founded the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916 with the actress Emmy Hennings (German, 1885-

1948). Here, they and their artistic compatriots¹³⁴ began their assault on “all European culture—past, future and present. Even the Italian Futurists had not gone so far with their love of warfare, machinery, and their own Futurist art. The Dadas attempted to debunk the whole modernist notion of elite aesthetics” (Gordon 14). Like Futurism, Dada was an art movement that crossed territorial European borders and art forms—painting, sculpture and performance among them. Borrowing its name from the French word for *hobby horse*, Dada would count among its members Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968), the creator of 1917’s notorious *Fountain*, a urinal signed “R. Mutt.” Violence, shock techniques, performances with deliberately nonsensical language and assaults on its audiences were all part of Dada’s various theatrical incarnations in Zurich, Germany and Paris, where the movement morphed into Surrealism.

Some Dada stage dress would ridicule costume design as much as its theatrical perpetrations violated bourgeois expectations of performance (see fig. 4.21) Ball’s *objet-trouvé* cardboard costume that he created for himself for a recitation of his *Lautgedichte*,¹³⁵ *Gadji Beri Bemba*, is sartorial nonsense. The costume, in which Ball had to be carried onstage, is, in its essence, a negation of the art of costume design itself, not unlike Duchamp’s urinal as art object.

¹³⁴ Namely, Tristan Tzara (French, born Romanian, 1896-1963), Hans (Jean) Arp (Alsatian, 1886-1966), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (Swiss, 1889-1943), Marcel Janco (Romanian, 1895-1984) and Richard Huelsenbeck (German, 1892-1974).

¹³⁵ “Sound poetry.” “For Ball, the *Lautgedichte* were akin to wild episodes of glossolia, the speaking in unknown or divine tongues; he called it religious verse without words” (Gordon 14).



Fig. 4.21. Ball, Hugo. Costume design for *Gadji Beri Bemba* at The Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich. July 14, 1916. Roberthughesartloverdai.blogspot.com. Web. 4 Dec. 2012.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Hans Arp's wife, on the other hand, could be considered Dada's "legit" costume designer-in-residence during its formative years in Zurich. Taeuber-Arp, a teacher of weaving, was also a fabric designer, interior decorator, architect and visual artist (she and her husband collaborated on many works) (Rotzler and Oberli-Turner 86). She created costumes for the Zurich group, and even performed in its productions as a dancer (see fig. 4.22). Producing much of her life's artistic work

in the form of weavings, “her austere geometric art” according to Lanchner, “arose from her belief in the innate expressive power of colour, line and form, and was informed by unusual wit and freedom.” (see fig. 4.23). The mask, based on Native-American Hopi models, is, like her weaving work, unapologetically cuboid. Unlike Futurism’s human machines, Taeuber-Arp’s costuming lies somewhere between a robot and an abstract composition.

Although it is speculative whether or not the performers were costumed as such, Dada (like Futurism) produced several theatrical pieces in which the characters were inanimate objects: Tzara’s *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine, Fire Extinguisher* and *The Gas Heart*, George Grosz (German, 1893-1959) and Walter Mehring’s (German, 1896-1981) *The Race Between the Sewing Machine and the Typewriter* are two examples.

This abstract/robotic style would also be found in her most notable design achievement, the Zurich Dada’s marionette production of Gozzi’s *King Stag* in 1918 (see fig. 4.24). “The pronouncedly mechanical, machinelike marionettes and the geometrical stage sets are among the earliest examples of ‘abstract theatre,’ which,” observe Rotzler and Oberli-Turner, “was continued by [*The Triadic Ballet*]” (92).

4.6. GEOMETRIZATION II: *THE MIRACLE* AND A BAUHAUS BALLET

The Bauhaus was a comprehensive art and design institute founded in Weimar in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius (German, 1883-1969). It closed in Berlin in 1933

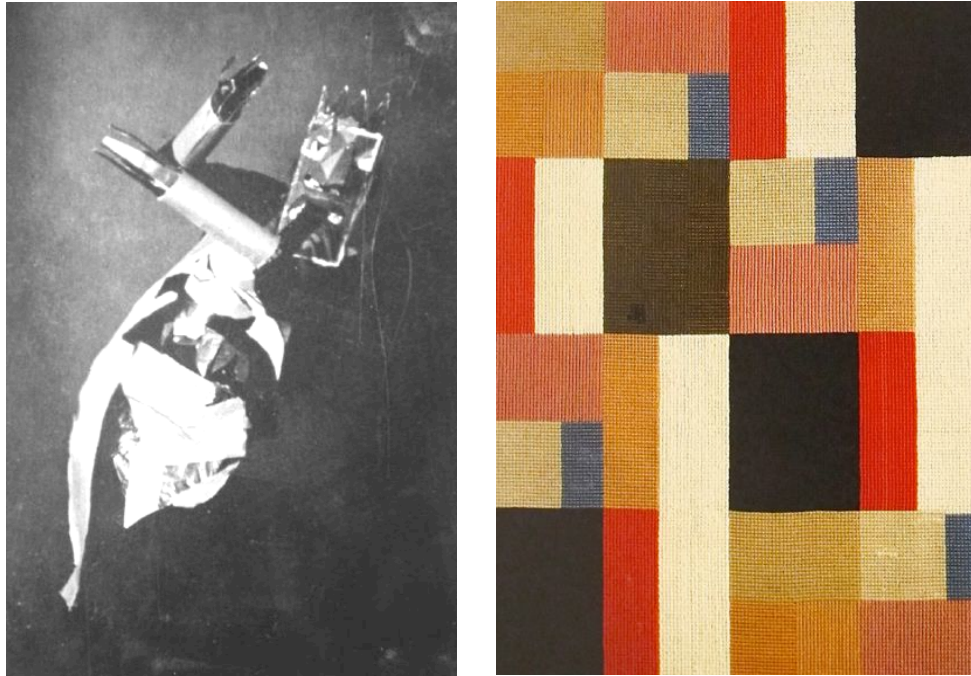


Fig. 4.22 (left). Taeuber-Arp, Sophie. *Hopi costume* for the opening of the *Galerie Dada*, Zurich. 1917. *Mondoblog*. Web. 6 Dec. 2012.

Fig. 4.23. (right). Arp, Sophie Taeuber. *Vertical-Horizontal Composition*. 1916. *Mondoblog*. Web. 6 Dec. 2012.

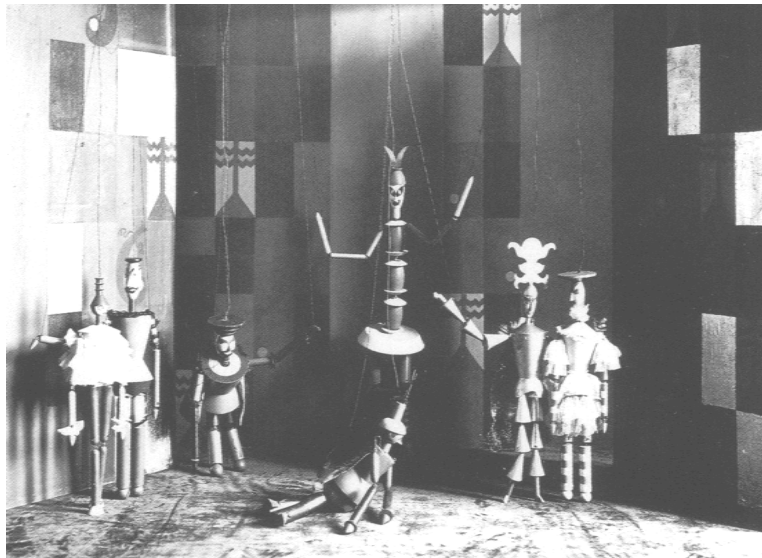


Fig. 4.24. Taeuber-Arp, Sophie. Set and marionette design for *King Stag*. 1918. Rotzler, Willy, and Maureen Oberli-Turner. "Sophie Taeuber-Arp and the Interrelation of the Arts." *The Journal of Decorative and Propoganda Arts* 19 (1993): 84-97. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

under Hitler's Nazi regime. Gropius originally conceived of The Bauhaus as a school dedicated primarily to training architects, painters, sculptors, theorists and craftsmen/technicians (cabinetmakers, weavers, enamellers, etc.)¹³⁶ It was "perhaps the most important art school of the twentieth century, certainly one of the most influential. Its example of democratizing the distinctions between artists and craftsmen, theory and practice, and between the arts is unparalleled" (Huxley and Witts 370).

Although its primary emphasis was on material process and production, Gropius appointed Lothar Schreyer (German, 1886-1966) to head its theatre division, which he directed until departing in 1923. Oskar Schlemmer (German, 1888-1943), active at The Bauhaus almost from its inception to 1929 (by which time the institute had relocated to Dessau) replaced Schreyer, bringing with him a geometrized conception of costuming not unlike those depicted in Taeuber-Arp's *King Stag* marionettes. Here, Wesemann describes Schlemmer's *Figural Cabinet* using Cubistic cardboard costumes, presented to the public in 1923 as part of The Bauhaus' premier theatrical production, which dubbed itself a "mechanical cabaret":

The human body, which before World War I was still the object of an unbridled ideology of liberation, now plays the part of a "mechanical master of ceremonies." The real actors are now canvasses, cardboard flats and rhythm—a sculptural theater which, as in the Japanese Bunraku puppet play,¹³⁷ gives human beings the role of mechanics. The artist appears as an engineer and almost vanishes behind his mechanical creation. (540)

¹³⁶ According to Walter Gropius' 1919 *Programme*, all students, regardless of their specialization, were required to learn a craft (52).

¹³⁷ Using scripts by prominent Japanese playwrights, *Bunraku* reached its peak of popularity in Japan during the eighteenth century. By this point, the puppets had developed into highly articulate, almost life-size figures with joints and other moveable body parts ultimately requiring three handlers to operate them.

It was Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*, however, that would become The Bauhaus' preeminent theatrical production (see fig. 4.25). Although only about one thousand audience members attended performances of the piece from 1922 to 1932 (Wesemann 532), it remains an enduring work of scenography through its postmodern appropriation in music videos, commercials and fashion. So named for its use of three performers, three acts and three bold set colors (yellow, pink and black), *The Triadic Ballet* is better known for the puppet-like, architectonic costumes Schlemmer created than the



Fig. 4.25. Schlemmer, Oskar. Some costumes from *The Triadic Ballet*. Photograph circa 1926. *Pictify*. Web. 9 Dec. 2012.

performance itself (see fig. 4.26). There were, however, some departures from Futurism and Dada, as McKinney and Butterworth point out:

Schlemmer's experience in The First World War, where he was twice wounded, clearly affected his outlook and desire to re-establish links between the human

figure and its habitation in a developing mechanical world. Due to this concern he did not wish to present the human figure clothed in costumes dictated by the aesthetics of the machine, in the way the Dadaists or the Futurists had done, but he regarded the relationship between the actor/dancer and the costume somewhat differently. He considered costume to be the wearer of the actor/dancer (and not the conventional way round) in attempts to reach out to the surrounding space. His observation and recognition of parts of the human body and their representation as squares, circles, spheres, cylinders and cubes formed the basis of his concern for abstraction (see fig. 4.26). (25)



Fig. 4.26. Schlemmer, Oskar. Costume for *The Golden Sphere* from *The Triadic Ballet*. 1922. *Flickrriver*. Web. 9 Dec. 2012.

Like Schlemmer's *Golden Sphere*, shown above, Geddes (at almost the exact time period) was influenced by highly geometrical forms, as clearly evidenced by four preliminary costume sketches reducing the human figure almost completely to formal design elements (circles, half circles, triangles, straight lines and curvature) (see fig. 4.27). Geddes advanced this strategy in many of the previous preliminary sketches.



Fig. 4.27. Geddes, Norman Bel. Four preliminary costume sketches for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

In his sketch for *The Priest*, however, Geddes almost avoids referentiality (architectural forms, machinery, household objects) altogether (see fig. 4.28). Knowing that the costume was for a clergyman, the symbolism inherent in the overall crucifix design is apparent. Otherwise, Geddes replaces the performer with formal elements of geometry: the torso, head, arms and lower body are formed by a series of cubes,

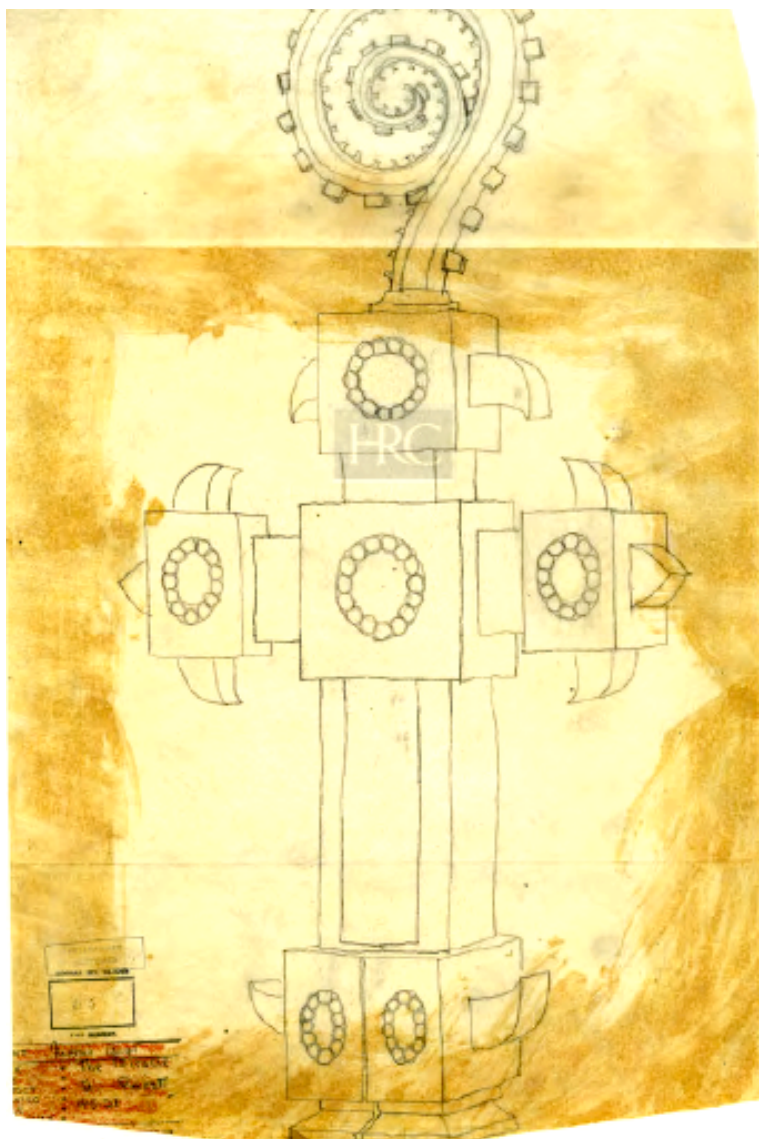


Fig. 4.28. Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Priest*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

embellished with circles, crescents, rectangles and squares of all sizes (again, note the title of the sketch covered in red pencil.)

Geddes' preliminary designs for *The Miracle* only underscore the idea that he shared the idea of the human body with the Modernists as less of a biological container for an ineffable soul and more of an artificially constructed casing (not unlike his car and

airplane designs), a major thrust of First-Wave Avant-Garde thought. “Man,” as it were, is now subjugated to the “manmade.” In terms of costuming, consequently, the biological performer is now defined by the scenographic criteria that were part of Modernism’s break with antiquarianism and realism. Although acting independently of each other, both Geddes and the Modernists were clearly responding in similar ways through costume to a world in which technology, objects and machines were already integrating themselves as inextricable components of everyday Western life. Unlike Romanticism’s aesthetic affinity for the untamed (as in the drop used in *Parsifal*),¹³⁸ the Modern era claimed order and rigidity. Unlike the nineteenth century’s glorification of the *real*, moreover, it could be said that much of Modernist costuming now glorified the *thing*.

4.7 THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEW STAGECRAFT IN *THE MIRACLE*

Although the production of *The Miracle*, taken as a whole, cannot be designated as such, Geddes’ costumes nevertheless do fulfill my criteria for New Stagecraft design: “a dialectic formed by European Modernism and American Realism (as informed by its technology) that also adhered to Macgowan’s aesthetic principles of simplicity, suggestion and synthesis.” The Ransom archives clearly show that some of Geddes’ final designs ultimately belonged to the New Stagecraft. *The Master of Ceremonies* costume from Scene five, for example, was reimagined, overtly retaining only the

¹³⁸ See p. 35

spiked, lancet-arched crown in the form of a headdress in the costume worn in the final production (see figs. 4.29 and 4.30). The headdress is, nonetheless, evocative of architecture and design from The Machine Age: harsh, angular, symmetrical and, in this



Fig. 4.29 (left). Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Master of Ceremonies*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Fig. 4.30. (right). Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume design for *The Master of Ceremonies* and puppet of *The Emperor's Son*. c. 1924. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 92, folder g 6 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

case, threatening (apropos to the fact the role was played by The Piper), with its long spikes radiating outward from the helmet like barbed rays from a mechanical sun.

(Although it was constructed five years after the premiere of *The Miracle*, one cannot

help but associate its form with the spire of New York's Chrysler Building.)

These modifications were almost certainly in response to Reinhardt's stylistic grip on the production, as further indicated by the September 1923 letter to Geddes from Rudolf Kommer, containing the following orders from the director:

Finally I should like to suggest to [Geddes] not to overdo the "stylisation" (sic) of the costumes. I do not mean that he should use anything really existing (especially not in dream scenes) or least of all historical models. I do not desire this in the least. Everything may be so as it is nowhere in the world, but it should be so as it could be anywhere in the world. The basic principle, which he formulated here himself, that he imagines all things at first quite realistic, only to lead them afterwards slowly into the unreal (sic) correspond entirely with my views. I do believe that all things in art may (and should) grow to the heavens (in any form, even the most phantastic (sic) one as long as they are really rooted on this earth.

Here, Reinhardt laid the foundations that compelled Geddes to create compromises between the "unreal" (the abstract) and that which is "rooted on this earth" (replication) in the final costume designs for *The Miracle*, as prominently exemplified by the progression evident in the above. The comprehensive collection of Geddes' archived final costumes for the production, in fact, by and large illustrate this abstraction/replication tightrope was a stylistic thread that ran throughout the dream sequence, which, of course, contained most of the play's action. Although there are many examples from which to choose, I offer Geddes' watercolor renderings of *The Falconer* (see fig. 4.31) from scene two, the "Summer Forest", and *The Executioner* (see fig. 4.32) from scene six, "The Inquisition."¹³⁹

¹³⁹ See p. 107 for the Executioner costume in a production photograph



Fig. 4.31. Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Falcon Keeper*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 7 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.



Fig. 4.32. Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Executioner*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 3e (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

The former leans heavily toward a form of stylized historical realism, as can be seen in the figure's single glove, *poulaines* and tunic, decorated with biased striping. Geddes, however, has added a non-realistic device to the costume in the form of a hooped vest that serves as a perch for the flock of birds. The Executioner costume, likewise, features elements that subvert the otherwise realistic costume in the form of glaring red eyes that appear to be painted directly onto the flesh of the actor.

According to Geddes' autobiography, American ingenuity was most certainly at work in the technology Geddes devised for costuming *The Miracle*:

Only in the beginning and at the end of the play were the people of the church and town in realistic garb. Several of the sets of costumes utilized materials which were new to [costuming]. The enamel costumes were actually painted oil cloth. At the coronation of the mad emperor, the forms of the religious objects of the cathedral were of paper-thin sheet brass on wire frames. Such costumes could not be put on and taken off as ordinary clothes. They were hung on pipe rigging on the ceiling of the dressing rooms and slowly lowered on to the actors. Each person turned and snapped two hooks in the garment of the person on his right. They were removed by the same method. No dressers were required. The press of a button started the motor which lowered or raised the pipes. The most interesting costume was for the Madonna who stood on a pedestal at the base of a column. This stone garment was made of monk's cloth, sprayed stiff with concrete, making it look and feel like stone. The miracle of the play was the transformation of this cold stone image into a warm human being in a few seconds. . . . When the time came for her transformation, it was done as a magician does sleight of hand. While the audience was looking at [The Piper], a property man within the column behind the Madonna pulled a trigger on a thin iron bar which caused the overlapping part of the concrete costume to open on hinges. Two seconds later, a nun stifled a scream as the Madonna stepped from the base of her column to the altar immediately in front. The effect upon the audience was breathtaking. (*Miracle* 294)

Simplification may not be a word that immediately comes to mind when characterizing Geddes' costumes for *The Miracle*, particularly when examining them individually and in watercolor renderings. It must be considered, however, that this was

not the perspective of the audience, who saw the costumes at a distance, lit and staged in a 2,300-seat Broadway house. With this in mind, Stowell's insightful observation that the "simplified and exaggerated line¹⁴⁰ of the costumes," as well as their silhouettes, lent a "clear and uncluttered" quality to their overall effect (170). Geddes' use of bold, determined line is especially apparent in The Falconer's tunic, for example, as well as in the pronounced vertical trim on the robing worn by The Oriental Gentleman (see fig. 4.33).



Fig. 4.33. Geddes, Norman Bel. *An Oriental Gentleman*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 4c (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

¹⁴⁰ Interior line, as opposed to exterior line (silhouette)

Suggestion in the New Stagecraft is, essentially, a product of its dialectic, and undeniably runs throughout the costumes for the dream sequence. While Geddes' preliminary sketch for The Noble Gentleman costume is essentially a giant goblet (see fig. 4.34), for example, the final design (see fig. 4.35) avoids historical realism while

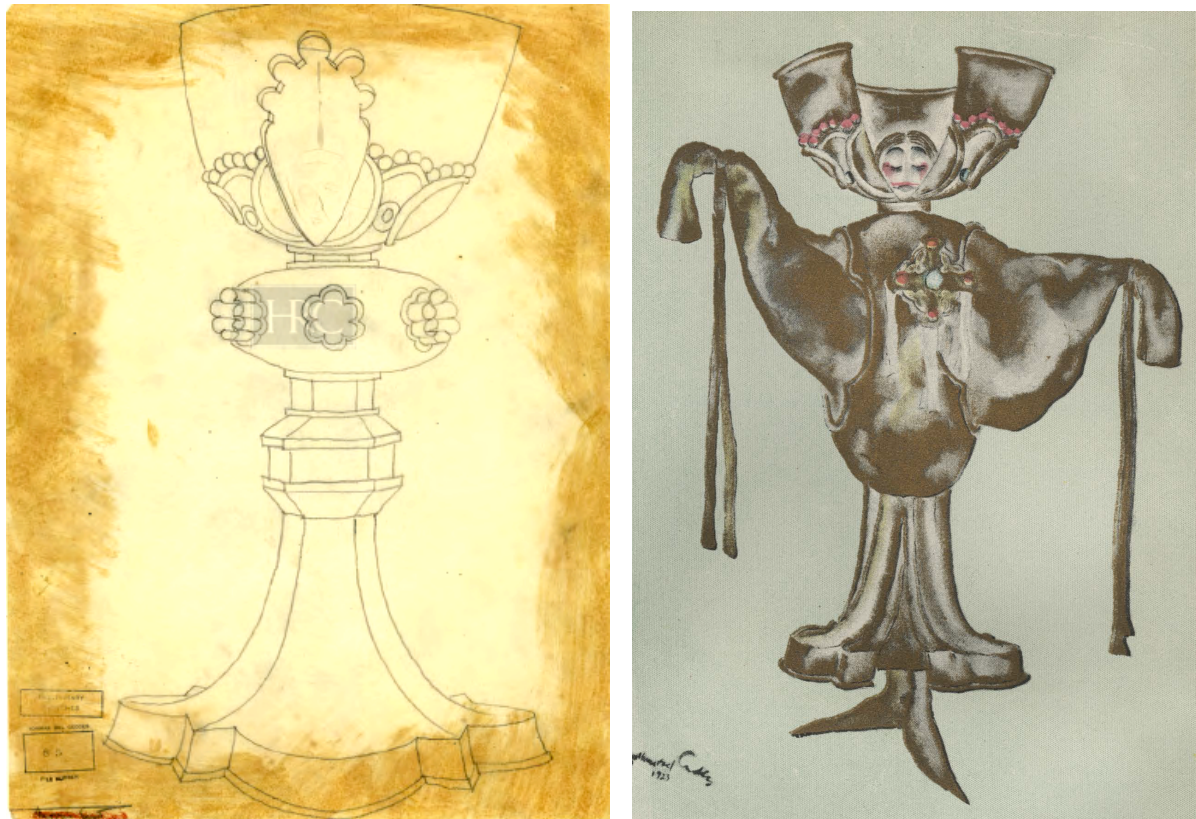


Fig. 4.34 (left). Geddes, Norman Bel. Untitled preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Fig. 4.35 (right). Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume plate. *A Noble Gentleman*. From *The Miracle*, a published record book of production, n. pag. c. 1924. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 94, folder i 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

maintaining a sense of the period: the bowl has been converted to a high, stiff collar, and the goblet's stem forms a kind of *houppelande*¹⁴¹ that accommodates the performer's arms and legs. To this end, Geddes added poulaines and a Byzantine cross. The adaptation, nevertheless, retains its "gobletness," with just enough modifications to imply, rather than replicate the period.

Synthesis manifests itself in many ways in Geddes' designs. Each of the individual nine scenes, for example, were unified by a predominant color palette. The annotated *Regie* Book Geddes created under the supervision of Reinhardt indicates specific, somewhat limited ranges in hue the designer applied to the performers' costumes for each scene. For scene three, "The Banquet," for example, Geddes made heavy use of violets, ranging from red-violets to blue-violets, as exemplified by two *Gypsy* designs (see figs. 4.36 and 4.37). These two designs also indicate another unifying device Geddes employed for each of the scenes, which was the visually thematic use a specific type of material, motif or object: Geddes chose stained glass as a visual cue when designing scene three's costumes, and the patterns of the gypsies' scarves and gowns, indeed, resemble those of Tiffany lamps, a prominent, manufactured luxury item found in many well-to-do American households during the early-twentieth century. Like much of Art Nouveau design, many of Tiffany Studios' lamps incorporated imagery from the natural world. Geddes obviously transposed the wing motif from Tiffany's popular *Dragonfly* design when he created the *Gypsy* costume at left. The costume at right incorporates a butterfly.

¹⁴¹ A garment worn by both men and women in medieval Europe, it was a long robe with generous, draping sleeves.



Fig. 4.36 (left). Geddes, Norman Bel. *A Gypsy Woman*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 9 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.



Fig. 4.37 (right). Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume Plate of *A Gypsy Woman*. 1923. *Max Reinhardt and His Theatre*, 2nd ed. Ed. Oliver M. Sayler. Trans. Mariele S. Gudernatsch. 1926. Pl. 268. Print.



Fig. 39. Driscoll, Clara (1861-1944) for Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company, New York. *Dragonfly Library Lamp*. c. 1899. Leaded glass with metal filigree, bronze. The Neustadt Collection of Tiffany Glass, New York. Neustadcollection.org. Web. 29 Jan. 2013.

The insects are an example of a third technique Geddes used to unify the costumes. Within the larger visual framework defined by materials, designs or objects, Geddes, as Stowell points out, chose particular patterns that also integrated the costumes within each scene:

Exaggerated motifs of ivy, oak leaves, acorns, flowers, harts, and crowns decorate costumes for Scene II, for which tapestry was the scenic motif. . . . Fantastic animals and interlocking patterns of enamel work decorate costumes for Scene IV. This practice served to unify the line in a scene and thereby the mood or atmosphere of that scene (170).

The costuming created for *The Miracle* stand as feats of Geddes' stage artistry, his determination and what must be one of the most important examples of New Stagecraft scenography. A strong possibility for further investigation lies in how these challenging designs were made manifest from a technical perspective. Geddes provides some evidence in *Miracle in the Evening*, but the Ransom Archives surely can provide much more than the book.

These costumes were not commonplace, and it likely follows that the "means of production" were not commonplace, either. With an overview of the designs, a monograph or journal article combining studies of Geddes' aesthetic choices and his talent as a craftsman are strong possibilities for what is to come next.

CHAPTER FIVE: ENVIRONMENTAL SCENOGRAPHY ON BROADWAY

Painting can depict space, poetry can form an image of it, music can offer an analogy, but only architecture can create it. — Stephen Kern

Although Geddes' costume designs and unrealized plans for *The Miracle* are certainly not to be ignored, the production's most salient relevance to existing theatre historiography lies in Geddes' removal of the ubiquitous Broadway proscenium arch and the modification of the entire Century house. The capstones of the Broadway production's scenography, together they allowed the total spatial unification of audience and spectator under one literal and proverbial roof. Even with the entire house transformed, the presence of a physical proscenium would inevitably have preserved the scenic fourth wall to a large extent, resulting in a phenomenologically Janus-faced production indeed. As I have strongly suggested, *The Miracle* has been erroneously preserved as an icon of the New Stagecraft. Theatre historiographers should, accordingly, excise *The Miracle's* set from further accounts of New Stagecraft style. They must, on the other hand, maintain its importance to the American theatre with a new, accurate classification: the first full-fledged spatial synthesis of set, theatre architecture and house that resulted in a radically novel and compelling way of experiencing the Broadway event. To put it more succinctly, it was the first major instance of environmental scenography on The Great White Way.

Before going further, and for the sake of clarification, I must again distinguish *environmental scenography* from that which is implied by *environmental theatre*.

Although they are certainly not always mutually exclusive, the former does not necessarily include the latter, as in the case of *The Miracle*. *Environmental theatre* is a term coined by the American scholar/director Richard Schechner (1934-) in his 1968 manifesto, “Six Axioms for Environmental Theater” (Puchner 315).¹⁴² Since, it has become a widely used term which, by and large, describes a theatrical event in which space, performance and spectatorship are reconfigured from the “safety” (on the part of both performers and spectators) of voyeurism to the relative (or, in its most extreme cases, total) integration of all three, as exemplified by a 1968 landmark Schechner-directed production, *Dionysus in 1969* (see fig. 5.1):

Schechner was anxious to destroy the customary, easy actor-audience relationship in which the audience becomes a passive spectator. Here, the audience was absorbed into a vortex of the action from the beginning and the spatial dispositions fragmented conventional seating patterns. On arrival, the audience was dispersed. Patrons were greeted by the actors and promptly separated—husband from wife, date from date—frequently, the actors bore them off by force and set them down in different parts of the room. This *sparagmos*¹⁴³ of the audience thus, uncannily, foreshadowed the *sparagmos* of Pentheus in the play, and a public wrenched from its comfortable habits watched the action with a sharpened attention. . . . the audience at the Performance Garage¹⁴⁴ became an element in the production. In the group ritual which reenacted the birth of Dionysus, participants were sought from the spectators. A mass embrace later in the play found willing collaborators. Schechner recalled the spirit of the performance as akin to a group therapy session, or a revivalist meeting. (Arnott 370)

¹⁴² Richard Schechner, widely considered one of the key founders of the academic discipline of Performance Studies, taught in the early 1960s at Tulane University, where he founded the experimental New Orleans Group before he left for New York later in the decade.

¹⁴³ “Dismemberment.” *Dionysus in 1969* was based on Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, in which Pentheus, as punishment for rejecting the god Dionysus from Thebes, is literally torn apart by his mother Agave, who returns with her son’s head piked atop a staff.

¹⁴⁴ The space used by Richard Schechner’s company



Fig. 5.1 A performance of Schechner's *Dionysus in 1969* at The Performing Garage, New York. c. 1969. Rpt. in Arnold Aronson's *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981. Pl. 108. Print.

The Miracle was decidedly not the theatre of Schechner, nor of his predecessors, Antonin Artaud (French, 1896-1948) and Jerzy Grotowski (Polish, 1933-1999). Even scenographically, both, like Schechner, rejected existing theatrical convention altogether, focusing instead on how redefining space could serve their primary purpose: not the fusion of scenic elements and spectator, but that of performer and spectator. Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* called for a kind of holy, visceral shock to the systems of its audiences in order to eject them from the somnabulence of existence. To help achieve this, in 1938 Artaud called for a new "spatial expression" (112). "Direct contact will be

established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience,” he declared, “from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it” (115). McAuley’s remarks on Artaudian concepts of performance deserve some attention here:

What Artaud perceived so clearly, and what so many of his contemporaries thought to be the ravings of a madman, is now widely acknowledged. The specificity of theatre is not to be found in its relationship to the dramatic, as film and television have shown through their appropriation and massive exploitation of the latter, but in that it consists essentially of the interaction between performers and spectators in a given space. Theatre is a social event, occurring in the auditorium as well as on the stage, and the primary signifiers are physical and even spatial in nature. (123)

The theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, according to Peter Brook in 1968’s *The Empty Space*, “is as close as anyone has got to Artaud’s ideal” (60). “By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous,” Grotowski himself wrote the same year, “we found that theatre can exist without . . . scenography . . . It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, ‘live’ communion” (281).

Aronson conceives of *environmental scenography* (as opposed to *environmental theatre*) in terms of the degree to which audiences are spatially united with a production’s scenographic elements, either real or implied. The spectrum, or, *continuum* as he calls it, is necessarily quite broad, and can range from a spectator’s mere perception of spatial inclusion to total sensory engrossment in a production’s scenographic elements. Hence, Shakespeare’s verbal scene-painting, in which Elizabethan performers (without scenery) would “paint” the environment using only language, lies at one end of the continuum. Take, for example, Duncan and Banquo’s (and the audience’s) first appropriation of Macbeth’s castle:

DUNCAN. This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

BANQUO. This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet,¹⁴⁵ does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here. No jutty, frieze,
Buttress nor coign¹⁴⁶ of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle.
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
The air is delicate. (1.6.1-10)¹⁴⁷

An example of the opposite end of Aronson's continuum is the utter physical immersion of the audience in the scenery and properties of Punchdrunk's¹⁴⁸ *Sleep No More*, an Off-Broadway *Macbeth*/Hitchcock-inspired haunted house of sorts. The production, which has been running in New York since 2011, masks its spectators, who are free to wander at will for over two hours through the one hundred (or so) rooms of three abandoned Chelsea warehouses while simultaneous performances and interactive, performerless assemblages, such as *Hecate's Apothecary*, are staged (see fig. 5.2).

¹⁴⁵ A bird (swallow, swift) that builds its nest in masonry, walls, etc.

¹⁴⁶ Projecting corner/angle of a building

¹⁴⁷ Most of the general editor's annotations have been removed. Otherwise, they have been duplicated in the preceding footnotes here.

¹⁴⁸ A British company known since its inception in 2000 for its productions featuring the environmental scenography of its "cinematically detailed" productions (*Sleep No More-New York*).



Fig. 5.2 Barrett, Felix, Livi Vaughan and Beatrice Minns. *Hecate's Apothecary* in Punchdrunk's New York production of *Sleep No More*. 2011-present. *New York Times*. Web. 17 Mar. 2012.

Sleep No More's audiences are not implicated in the biological performances. The production, rather, swallows its audiences by allowing their engagement with the physical setting. According to Felix Barrett, Punchdrunk's Artistic Director, *Sleep No More*, like the rest of its productions, scenographically "aims to erase the fourth wall as much as possible" (qtd. in Piepenburg). "In our world," he adds, "every single drawer, cupboard, wardrobe that can be opened should be opened, because you'll find something inside." (qtd. in Piepenburg). In *Hecate's Apothecary*, for example,

audiences rummage through a room filled with assorted herbs, jars, bones, soils and a miscellany of other peculiar objects. Other performerless, interactive spaces include a detective agency with file cabinets spilling over with papers, *The Sweet Shop*, where you can (at your own risk, of course) sample traditional British candies, and a hospital office filled with thousands of hair samples (some of them left behind by previous audience members) (Piepenburg). Laura LaTreille, an actor who saw several runs of *Sleep No More* in a co-production with Cambridge's American Repertory Theatre before the show transferred to Manhattan, verified the production's scenography, not its cast, lies at the heart of *Sleep No More's* impact:

They held it in an abandoned elementary school building in Brookline. I didn't really watch much of the actors. I simply wanted to explore the space on my own. There was a bar where you could stop and have drinks with a live band playing, but what was really incredible, if you found them, you could take a stairway down to another room directly below the bar, where there was an exact duplicate of the bar upstairs, except that it was the remains of a mass murder that had happened a hundred years before. The sinks were filled with blood and what looked like body pieces, but they weren't fresh. The band's stage instruments were exactly like the ones upstairs, except they were rusted, molded and filthy. The fact that it was directly below the vibrant room made it that much more haunting. . . . And I'll never forget this particular space, filled with rows of bathtubs and children's cots. All the tubs were empty except for one, half-filled with water with a long, thin eel slithering around in it. Some of the bathroom stalls had paper bags filled with bird claws. The banquet scene from *Macbeth* didn't have any performers. It was the set of the banquet as if everyone had just left. If you got closer, you could see that it was real food, but so ancient that it didn't have a smell. . . . It's interesting—the actors and the sets were reversed; the actors were the supporting elements—they supported the set.

Using his *continuum*, Aronson would position *The Miracle* halfway between Shakespearean performance and the scenographic quicksand of Punchdrunk's sets. While he concedes that Geddes was successful in materially unifying *The Miracle's*

audiences with the drama's environment, Aronson also points out these same audiences were positioned for most of the performance in forward-facing seats, "and the spectator, while watching the otherwise frontal performance could not therefore take in the total scenography" (*History* 5). Perhaps further complicating *The Miracle's* set, Aronson suggests, was the dichotomy between the cathedral and the limited degree to which it could extend, or even negate the audience's suspension of disbelief:

In *The Miracle*, illusionistic scenic elements surrounded the audience, but it is questionable whether the spectators ever really believed that they were in a church, let alone within the time and place matrix of the play. An implied environment or a unified space may, in the case of an illusionistic production, have the effect of further distancing the spectators rather than increasing the sense of reality. The spectators may become acutely aware of the disparity between their contemporary dress, for example, and the period sets and costumes of the actors. (*History*, 41)

According to many immediate critical responses to the production, however, the opposite was the case. Take, for example, Heywood Broun's *New York World* review:

"The Miracle" is an extraordinary event in the history of the American stage. Max Reinhardt has brought into the theatre more beauty than we have ever seen there before. And combined with this beauty there is a mad, terrifying excitement. The spectator, less aloof than usual, is in the very tumult. He is likely to feel that when the mob cries out his voice is among them. He is one of the worshippers in the cathedral and his prayer will join that of the rest. . . . [*The Miracle*] achieves an intensity of effect new in our theatre. Norman-Bel (sic) Geddes who designed the production has set a mark in magnificence. And not even the Russians of the Moscow Art Theatre have made man in the mass more completely alive. (n. pag.)

"Hardly realizing what is taking place," proclaimed another New York critic from *The Outlook*, "the audience is drawn into the spirit of the play that soon surges and sweeps about it. Illusion is transmuted to reality" ("Miracle"). Some evidence does, however, support Aronson's claim that "the sensory impact of environmental settings or performer

activity may intensify the experience and aid in the suspension of disbelief, but it is difficult for the spectator to maintain the illusion for long" (*History* 161). In his review of *The Miracle*, Broun, while acknowledging "the beauty of 'The Miracle' is continuous," also observed that "the imagination of Reinhardt is too exuberant. The story of Sister Beatrice has been elaborated somewhat beyond the capacity of attention. Even glory can go on a little too long" (n. pag.)

Aronson, nevertheless, acknowledges *The Miracle's* unique position in a narrative of Broadway design practice:

American scenography between the wars had developed primarily in response to the esthetics (sic) of the New Stagecraft under the leadership of such designers as Robert Edmond Jones, Norman Bel Geddes and Lee Simonson. While there was some tendency toward a unification of stage and auditorium in their work, only Geddes' set for Reinhardt's *Miracle* could be considered in any way environmental. (*History* 154)

The Miracle's set appeared at a major crossroads on Broadway. The Great Depression would commence less than six years later, slashing the kind of production budgets that allowed for grand scenic gestures like Geddes' overwhelmingly verisimilar cathedral. In 1932 in *The Stage is Set*, Lee Simonson articulated another significant economic challenge to the commercial viability of Broadway production: the demise of the Broadway touring company. Here the author explains:

The former prosperity of the theatre as a commercial enterprise was based on its ability to avoid complete concentration in New York by exporting its surplus to the entire country. The public for plays was not a fraction of the population in one large city and its potential purchasing power provided the American theatre's financial reserves. The American producer used to be prosperous because he was able to subsidize the risk of his new ventures by royalties that continued to come in from his travelling companies, who rolled merrily along not only to all the larger cities but to towns so small that they were "one night stands." (399)

Simonson attributes the decline of “the road” (and, hence, Broadway) to three factors: rising production costs (demanding actors and unionized crews, more complex costume and scenery construction and spikes in railroad fees), the scarcity of New York “smash hits” whose press could sufficiently sell the productions to Middle America, and, of course, the rise of cinema. Simonson points to Hollywood for its appropriation of the theatre’s “star” actor (one of the most important ingredients of successful touring productions) as well as the commercial viability of cinema’s middlebrow dramaturgy—“the hypocrisies, sentimentalities, and evasions, the fairy-tale stereotypes, the life-lies and sex-lies” (401). Between the great wars, motion pictures would, of course, replace the theatre as the primary source of commercial dramatic entertainment in America, reaching “an all-time high in the years immediately after World War II. At this point many American adults would have seen several movies a week” (King 123). (Even Reinhardt would devote some of his career to film in the decade preceding his death. In 1934 he signed a contract with Warner Brothers and directed a film version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In 1938, after immigrating to the United States, he opened the Max Reinhardt Workshop for Stage, Screen and Radio in Los Angeles.) While Simonson blames the movies in part for destabilizing Broadway’s commercial footing, he also underscores how the hegemony of cinema also raised scenographic standards on The Great White Way:

The usual diatribes against the competition of the movies are very largely based on the fact that the success of the motion-picture (sic) has forced the theatre to be original both in the choice and in the treatment of its material. Playwrights have abandoned their old subject-matter to the moving picture, but they have appropriated much of its technique, so that a play like *Grand Hotel*, a superficial heightening of the sentimentalities and pathos of old-fashioned melodrama,

requires, in order to be successful, a coordinated technique of presentation entirely beyond the imagination of old-time producers who knew when to turn on blue moonlight and to play soft music. (*Stage*, 398)

Ironically, it would be in Art Deco cinema architecture that houses designed in the manner of *The Miracle* were widely constructed to replicate “cathedrals, Chinese pagodas, Egyptian temples, Spanish courtyards and the like” (Geddes, *Horizons* 184). Although Geddes credits *The Miracle* with inciting this trend, John Everson (American, born Romanian 1875-1954) built the first atmospheric movie house, *The Majestic*, in Houston two years before *The Miracle* premiered on Broadway (see fig. 5.3) (Naylor 69). “The open-air illusion,” according to Naylor, “was enhanced by the stage-set walls



Fig. 5.3. Everson, John. The house of *The Majestic*. Circa 1922. Houston, Texas. Rpt. in David Naylor's *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981. 70. Print.

encircling the auditorium, creating the feeling of being enclosed in an ancient Italian garden. Vines trailed over the walls and, overhead, a few stuffed birds hung in mock flight” (68-69).

After World War II, alternatives to the proscenium stage began to appear throughout the country,¹⁴⁹ but not on Broadway, where relatively few new permanent theatres have been built since the first three decades of the twentieth century. If you attend a Broadway show, even tonight, you will likely be in a gilded, Neoclassical pre-war theatre much like The Century, with a proscenium arch separating you from the performance. (An important exception is Lincoln Center’s Vivian Beaumont Theater, designed by Eero Saarinen.¹⁵⁰) “The judgment, taste and design exemplified in ninety-five per cent of the theaters of America is the most atrocious display of bad taste and waste of money that I know of anywhere,” Geddes unapologetically claimed in *Horizons* (143).

Despite Geddes’ opinion, it is the spatial modification of these spaces, just as the designer had first done on Broadway in 1924, which is important to contextualize as resonances of his environmental stagecraft. Today, however, *The Miracle* has been forgotten, even by the New York theatre *cognoscenti*. Charles Isherwood, in a 2010 *New York Times* article, “The Exploding Art of Set Design,” proclaimed 1982’s *Cats*, with the “modestly scruffed up,” garbage-strewn Winter Garden Theater as the “pioneer”

¹⁴⁹ Notable examples include Theatre ‘47s theatre-in-the-round used by Margo Jones’ Dallas theatre company beginning in 1947 and the thrust stage of the Guthrie in Minneapolis, constructed in 1963.

¹⁵⁰ Eero Saarinen’s (American, born Finnish 1910-1961) theatre, which opened in 1965, is actually located outside the theatre district on the Upper West Side of Manhattan as part of the Lincoln Center complex, and features a thrust stage.

of environmental scenography on Broadway, crediting 1996's *Rent* as “the real model” for future productions that “took the notion of remaking a theater in the image of the show it is housing further.” The image below illustrates Paul Clay's urban scaffolding, carried over from the proscenium set and into the house (see fig. 5.4). The effect was further enhanced by the Nederlander being “splattered with graffiti and repainted in lurid colors to suggest the D.I.Y.¹⁵¹ ethos and funky down-market allure of the East Village, where the aspiring artists in the musical lived and died” (Isherwood).



Fig. 5.4. Clay, Paul. Theatre design for Broadway premiere of *Rent*, Nederlander Theater, 1996. paulclaydesign.com. Web. 9 Feb. 2011.

¹⁵¹ Do It Yourself

In addition to *Rent*, I attended the Broadway revival of Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* at Studio 54 in 1998. Originally a theatre, then an infamous nightclub, the first production in the newly refurbished space in midtown Manhattan housed a set that was a hybrid of both (see fig. 5.5). Robert Brill's transformation of Studio 54 into a 1930s Berlin cabaret made the unifying attempts of *Rent* seem like a slapdash afterthought. Illuminated by period chandeliers and cabaret lamps, round café tables near the stage formed prime seating areas, where spectators sat for cocktails before and during the performance.



Fig. 5.5 Brill, Robert. Theatre design for The Roundabout's Broadway revival of *Cabaret* at Studio 54. c. 1998. *Broadwayworld.com*. Web. 26 Feb. 2013.

Several productions in recent Broadway seasons have been mounted that are also part of *The Miracle*'s legacy. In 2010-11 at the Bernard B. Jacobs, for example, an enormous stuffed horse (see fig. 5.6) hung atop the audience as the centerpiece in *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson*, described by *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley as a "loopy Wild West side show":



Fig. 5.6. Werle, Donyale. Theatre design for *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson*. 2010. donyalewerle.com. Web. 11 Jan. 2012.

The horse was an atmospheric accent in the riot of bric-a-brac blanketing the stage, the proscenium and the auditorium of the theater, designed to put the audience in the proper frame of mind for Alex Timbers and Michael Friedman's acerbic musical essay on current affairs ingeniously disguised as a history lesson. The set by Donyale Werle doesn't stop decorously at the edge of the stage, where that fourth wall is supposed to be. Instead, vintage paintings and chandeliers and piles of antique-looking gewgaws crawl up and around the sides

of the theater. It is as if the entire contents of a Brooklyn flea market had been scooped up and flung around. (Isherwood)

Rock of Ages, another musical (still running at the time of this writing), attempts to place its audiences in the middle of a hair-band nightclub (The Bourbon Room) on the Sunset Strip circa 1987 (see fig. 5.7). The deployment of period billboards, neon signage and

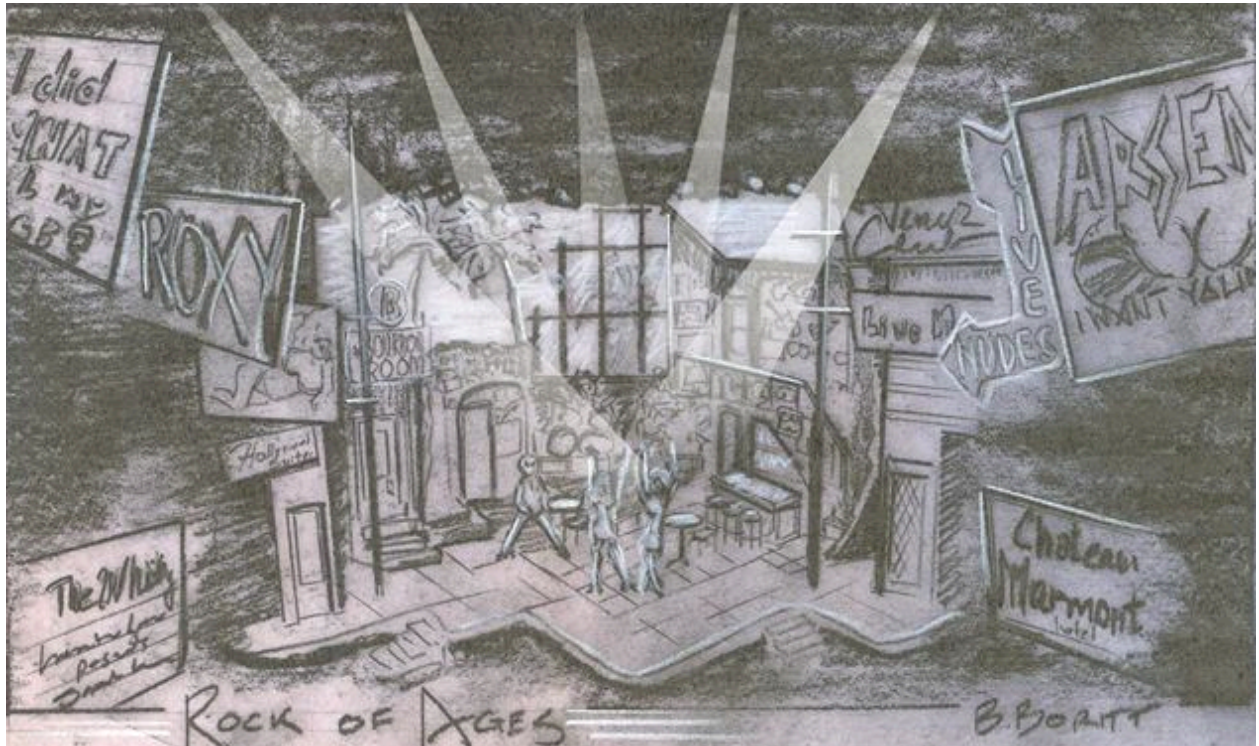


Fig. 5.7. Boritt, Beowulf. Theatre design for Broadway's *Rock of Ages*. Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York. 2009. beowulfboritt.com. Web. 9 Apr. 2012.

table service throughout the house are as much a part of the spectacle as the performance. "These elaborate atmospherics," Isherwood observes, "serve a clear purpose. They signal the offbeat nature of the show you are about to experience. The message: Expect the kind of show you don't expect to see in a gilt-trimmed, grand old Broadway palace."

During the Century run of *The Miracle*, some audience members removed pieces

of the cathedral walls to take home as souvenirs. Although presumably unencouraged, this act may stand as a primitive form of immersive theatre as exemplified by *Sleep No More*, in which audiences are encouraged to take objects from the set, and even modify the scenography by leaving objects of their own. The key word is *object*, which will likely serve as a central term in further areas of study. How do objects perform all by themselves? The majority of articles and reviews of *The Miracle* that I have encountered indicate the set was the production's chief player. Very little commentary is devoted to the biological performers or to Reinhardt's directing. By all indications, moreover, the scenography of *Sleep No More* was not only its central performer, but in some instances stood on its own, without need of human actors. The scenography and the ability for audience members to interact with the set turned them into performers, their "scene partner" being set elements.

While audiences touching and modifying scenography is not exactly new, its encouragement in the so-called "legit" theatre is. Punchdrunk's production has already inspired the creation of similar productions, and immersive theatre is now the "hot, new thing," with many new productions cropping up all over New York. The idea of tracing immersive theatre from *The Miracle* to its current manifestations is yet another layer of discovery provided by the Geddes production, a fertile and important production in American scenography.



Fig. 5.8. White Studio, New York. Photograph of Norman Bel Geddes with set model for *The Miracle*. c. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, folder g 6 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

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5/11

Geddes, Norman Bel. Set design of the Century Theatre production of *The Miracle*. c. 1924. Illustration by George Wall. *Scientific American* Apr. 1924: n. pag. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 94, folder i 2 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

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- Geddes, Norman Bel. Preliminary rendering of set design for *The Miracle*. c. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder e 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.
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- Geddes, Norman Bel. Models of *Seventh Dante Mask* and *Eighth Dante Mask* for *The Divine Comedy*. Photographs by Bruguière. c. 1921. Norman Bel Geddes, *A Project for a Theatrical Presentation of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1924; print; pl. 31, pl. 32). Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, book collection g 2-3 (job 69). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

- Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Empress*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.
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- Geddes, Norman Bel. *A Footman*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.
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- Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume rendering for *A Dancer in Boudour Ballet* for the Chicago Opera Company. 1919. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 115, folder c 6 (job 60). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.
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Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Master of Ceremonies*. Preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume design for *The Master of Ceremonies* and puppet of *The Emperor's Son*. c. 1924. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 92, folder g 6 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. Four preliminary costume sketches for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Falcon Keeper*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 7 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. *The Executioner*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 3e (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. *An Oriental Gentleman*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 4c (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. Untitled preliminary costume sketch for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 91, folder c 30 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. Costume plate. *A Noble Gentleman*. From *The Miracle*, a published record book of production, n. pag. c. 1924. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, theater box 94, folder i 1 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. *A Gypsy Woman*. Watercolor costume rendering for *The Miracle*. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, flat file c 9 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

White Studio, New York. Photograph of Norman Bel Geddes with set model for *The Miracle*. c. 1923. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, folder g 6 (job 85). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

Geddes, Norman Bel. Set design for Act Five of *The Divine Comedy*. Bruguière photograph of Geddes' model. c. 1922. *A Project for a Theatrical Presentation of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Geddes, Norman Bel. New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1924. Pl. 18. Print. Call no. Norman Bel Geddes, book collection g 2-3 (job 69). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

VITA

John Mabry earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism with a Theatre Arts minor from Texas A&M University. From there he studied acting at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California. He continued his acting training in the MFA Conservatory Program at Brandeis University in Boston. After moving to New York, he eventually began to work in casting, where he has collaborated on productions for major regional theatres including The Guthrie, Denver Center Theatre, Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage, The Pittsburgh Public, George Street Playhouse and The Alley in Houston. For Broadway, he assisted on Peter Hall's revival of *Amadeus*, Anthony Page's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and Arthur Miller's *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* directed by David Esbjornsen. His West End credits include Robin Phillips' production of *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Notable Off-Broadway credits include the New York premiere of Tracy Letts' *Killer Joe* and Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*. Film and television projects he has worked on include *The Thomas Crown Affair*, *Strangers with Candy* for Comedy Central and several Showtime series. John has taught acting classes at Rutgers University and at the William Esper Studio in New York. He is a certified teacher of Sanford Meisner's acting technique. At LSU he was the Artistic Director for *Outworks* and directed Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker* in the newly restored Shaver Theatre. He has also served as a costume designer and set designer.