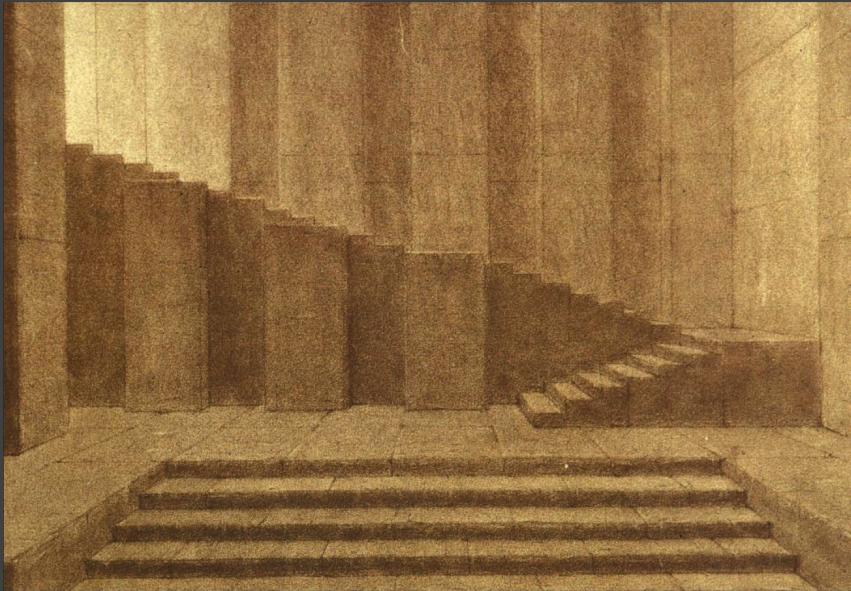


Moving Forward While Integrating the Past: The DNA in American Scenic Pedagogy



Adolphe Appia, sketch for *Orpheus and Eurydice*, 1912



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- The scenography values in the United States are traced back to the underlying storytelling principles of the New Stagecraft at the turn of the 20th century.
- Theater students in American universities study the creative impact of Adolphe Appia (1862-1928), Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), and Robert Edmond Jones (1887-1954), but usually do not know who adapted these values and teaching goals for their classrooms.
- This poster will explore the DNA of pedagogy (or the evolution of The New Stage Craft philosophies) in one line of scenic professors at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.
- Understanding this evolution can help professors and students discern what to prioritize in a discipline that is historically eclectic in terms of craft skills, digital skills, and storytelling philosophy.

The New Stagecraft (Begins approximately 1895)

Robert Edmond Jones (1887-1954)

Jones was an iconic and innovative theater designer for Broadway and beyond, a member of the Provincetown Players, author of *Drawings for Theater* (1925) and *The Dramatic Imagination* (1941), author of multiple magazine articles, and guest lecturer at several universities in the United States.



Julia Arthur as Lady Macbeth. Set design by Robert Edmond Jones (1921)

- The New Stagecraft is an anti-realistic and sculptural approach to stage design. This foiled the 19th-century painted backdrop and box set conventions used in naturalism. Appia and Craig advocated that design is not a peripheral practice but an active production element. In their vision, design, direction, and actors create a unified whole. They embraced three-dimensional structure, moving the actor through dynamic spaces. (Payne, 6)
- Craig was a symbolist, believing that beauty cannot be expressed directly but revealed through suggestion and symbol ("the visible sign of the idea"). Jones shared this design value and used symbols to evoke atmosphere. (Brockett, Findlay 208)
- In 1913, Jones traveled to Europe in search of perspective and mentorship. Craig's School in Florence rejected Jones. Instead, he spent time at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin with Max Reinhardt and designers Ernst Stern and Emil Orlik. ("Robert Edmond Jones") Reinhardt was an eclectic director and valued experimentation. World War I forced Jones's return to New York in 1914 where he began exhibiting and designing, bringing attention to this European creative approach. His first well-known design was *The Man who Married a Dumb Wife* in 1915. (Brockett, Findlay 213)

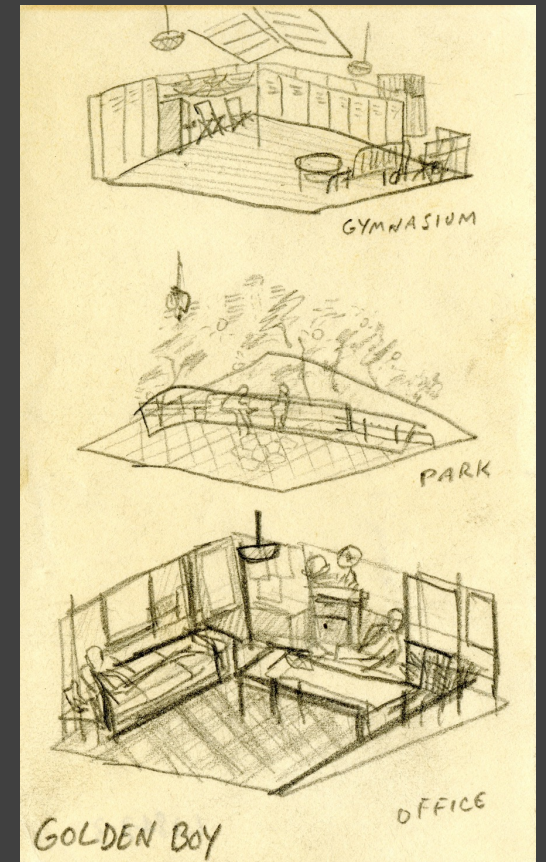
Southern Illinois University (1960-1972)

Mordecai Gorelik (1899-1990)

Gorelik designed over 25 Broadway credits, authored *New Theatres for Old* (1940), wrote plays, authored the unpublished book *The Scenic Imagination* (drawn from his teachings at Biarritz, in workshops, and especially SIU).



- Gorelik started as an illustrator. To observe stagecraft, he toured Europe in the 1920s, and met Brecht. He apprenticed with Jones and remained a close collaborator. Later, when Brecht visited the states, they worked together on Broadway. This influenced Gorelik's preference for alienation over emotionally-driven theater experiences. (Fletcher)
- Like Jones, Gorelik was driven by imagination. Unlike Jones, he was grounded in the physical theatre. Jones advocated a single approach. Gorelik acknowledged that artistic motivation changes with time and culture. To this end, he both developed and criticized theatrical isms. (Fletcher) He found value in production-driven political pieces, when the written script was highly regarded academically and Broadway commercial success was valued professionally. (Gorelik 4)
- In his teaching, Gorelik developed metaphor drills to create a thought structure and creative approach to a script. A pragmatist, he preferred to use “the scenic metaphor” in an ordered way rather than using symbol in an intuitive way. Both approaches had a shared goal: to clarify the essential themes and atmospheric essence of a play. Use of metaphor appeals to a mechanical approach, while use of symbol appeals to an intuitive approach. (Fletcher)

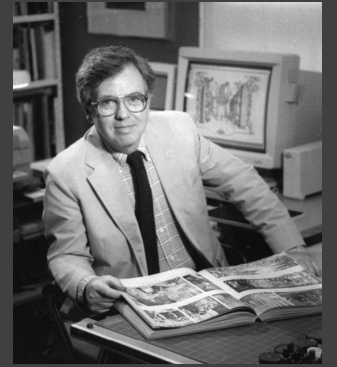


Thumbnail sketches, *Golden Boy*,
Group Theater, 1937

Southern Illinois University (1953-2001)

Darwin Reid Payne (1931-2016)

Author of *The Scenographic Imagination*, *The Theory and Craft of the Scenographic Model*, *Design for the Stage: the First Steps*, and *Computer Scenographics*. Faculty member at SIUC, Artistic Director at the University of British Columbia, and designer and director of many regional and academic productions.



- Darwin Reid Payne was native to southern Illinois. He earned his BS in Fine Arts from SIUC in 1953 where he developed his sculptural impulse. He was encouraged to earn his MA, which he completed in 1954. Gorelik arrived at SIUC in 1960, and Payne joined the SIUC theater community and was mentored by Gorelik through 1972 (“Darwin Reid Payne”). Payne was an active faculty member at SIUC until 1983. He continued to design until 2001. He was well-known and respected in the field especially for his publishing. (Naverson)
- Payne took an evocative approach to design driven by audience experience through real production, like his mentor Gorelik (“Darwin Reid Payne”). Similar to his contemporaries, such as Ming Cho Lee (1930-2020), he was driven by 3D form, using the depth of the stage in bold compositions. However, his own style was driven by craft, with an illustrative, textural gesture developed through years of hands-on shop and model-building techniques. “He would abstract the idea of a time period, rather than reach for direct representation.” (Naversen)
- Like Gorelik and Jones, Payne theorized how to approach and teach design in an impactful way. His book *Design for the Stage: the First Steps* was the first text to treat design separate from—but connected to—stagecraft.



Production model, *A Christmas Carol*, Southern Players, 1979

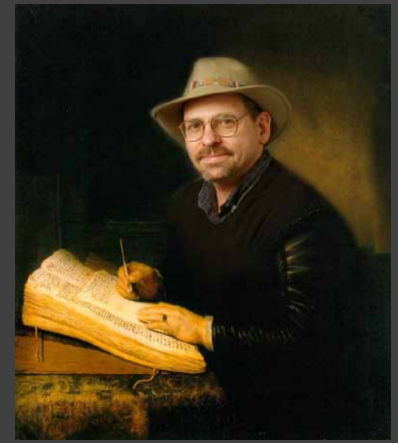
“... Craft and art are not separate activities with different aims, but that each should assist the other to something greater than either one; ideally, each should grow out of the other.”

-Darwin Reid Payne, *Design for the Stage: First Steps*, 1973 (page xvi)

Southern Illinois University (1986-2020)

Dr. Ron Naversen

Dr. Naversen designed nearly 250 productions. He researches mask making, puppetry, and camouflage. Naversen and Brad Carlson are updating Payne's book, *The Scenographic Model*. He has curated retrospective exhibits of Gorelik and Payne. Naversen has been a member of USITT and USA local 829 and is also a nuanced mentor and storyteller.



Set design, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, SIUC 2000

Conclusions: SIUC School of Theater & Dance has a rooted connection to in-house craft work, assessable concept building, and valuing the audience experience. By tracing how The New Stagecraft has evolved from professor to professor, practicing designers can assess curriculum and pull in new influences while recognizing what has creatively driven the school's history.

- Dr. Ron Naversen earned a BA from Miami University, an MFA from Carnegie-Mellon University, and a Ph.D. from SIUC. Oren Parker introduced him to Gorelik's work, and he met Payne in 1986. Dr. Naversen greatly appreciated Payne's assemblage approach and the practice of looking for influence from other disciplines. (Naversen)
- Dr. Naversen is an eclectic designer rooted in craft, especially props, masks, and puppetry. His flexible approach to stage design, using traditional media and white card models, allows him to distill themes and characterization quickly and meaningfully. He creates value-rich storyboards to show critical moments, and scenery shifts. To translate dramatic action, he walks the stage with a director to identify movement patterns that support the ground plan. He values real theatrical space. In his process, making the set is as essential as the exploratory studio work and rehearsal process. (Naversen)
- Dr. Naversen's teaching is also structured but flexible. With scaffolded skills, his classes move quickly, allowing students space to experiment. He developed the curriculum at SIUC. It emphasizes traditional design processes, professional-level crafts, with influence from other design areas.