

## «A Theatre for Those Born in the Theatre»

### *E.G. Craig: The Need for a Language of and for the Stage\**

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Although Edward Gordon Craig addressed many issues related to theatre and staging as a protagonist in the revolution of theatrical practice in the early twentieth century, his contributions related to the *metteur en scène*, role of the actor (if there was one), function of language and overcoming of realism on stage have had a great impact on the renewal of the theatre.

Craig always considered himself a rediscoverer rather than an originator of theories on theatre. In fact, above all, the theatre of antiquity, especially the Greek theatre, is the model on which he wanted to build the “theatre of the future”, an idea flanked by his great admiration for the Commedia dell’arte in theory and practice, as well as Oriental theatre<sup>1</sup>.

Among his contemporaries, with whom he dialogued (although one must say they were mostly monologues) through articles, analyses, and provocations, were some of the most important theatrical theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among these were the Duke of Meiningen, Maurice Maeterlinck, André Antoine, Adolphe Appia<sup>2</sup>, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt, Jacques Copeau, and Alexander Hevesi.

Throughout his life, Craig strongly opposed various movements and artistic and literary currents, including Realism, Naturalism, Cubism and Futurism. He vilified and lauded, at times in the same breath, numerous contemporary actors and directors and harshly criticised several playwrights. For Craig, naturalism and realism have nothing to do with art. Moreover, he found realism to be an abominable form of art and believed that it hurts human minds, offering only a grotesque and

inaccurate representation of the outer world and, thereby, betraying the imagination that allows us to see, feel, and understand the world beyond tangible experiences. Realism provides false testimony, worships the ugly, and pays no attention to art. According to Craig, where naturalism ends is where real theatre begins. He stated that realism is dangerous and that we need to eradicate it from all the arts<sup>3</sup>. The first thing to do, according to him, is abandon the idea that there are natural and artificial actions—there are only unnecessary and necessary actions, and the necessary ones will consequently be natural ones (Craig 1912a: 35).

His stance against realism spills into his theories on acting. In fact, in the same chapter of *On the Art of the Theatre*, Craig seems to have anticipated some of Bertolt Brecht’s considerations about epic acting, although for completely opposite reasons<sup>4</sup>, as he writes that instructing a company of actors to reproduce on stage the actions that are seen in a living room, in a club, in a tavern or in an attic, is «nothing less than tomfoolery». The well-known fact that there are companies trained in this way seems almost unbelievable for its childishness. For Craig, one must find a series of significant actions, keeping in mind the clear division that exists between mass action and individual action, and remembering that no action is better than little action (Craig 1912a: 36). His opposition to naturalistic acting had been tackled in his very controversial article entitled *The Actor and the Über-Marionette*<sup>5</sup> in the second number of the first volume of «The Mask» (Craig 1908a: 3-15).<sup>6</sup>

Speaking of naturalism versus artificiality in acting, Craig writes:

And now we talk of Irving’s artificiality by the side of Antoine’s natural acting. “It is Nature itself,” cry the critics, and soon Antoine’s natural acting is to become mere artifice by the side of the acting of Stanislavsky.

What, then, are all these manifestations of this “Nature”? I find them one and all to be merely examples of a new artificiality, the artificiality of naturalism. Dramatists, actors, scenic artists are under a spell, do you remember the story of the Sleeping Beauty? and the spell must be broken before they can awake. To break it will be at once most hard and most easy, most hard to those who were born to sleep, most easy for one born to awaken; but most assuredly until this spell be broken, utterly and entirely destroyed, all the plays, acting and scenes on the stage of Europe must and will remain theatrical (Craig 1912a: 90-91).

He thus disagrees with Stanislavsky’s methods, however, he had travelled to Moscow in November 1908 to make the first arrangements for the staging of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre despite being completely at odds with the use of realism on stage advocated by Stanislavsky<sup>7</sup> as a means through which the actor can detect the playwright’s psychology. He did, however, praise the Russian actor/director for creating a non-commercial theatre with top-notch actors. In particular, Craig praised the actor Stanislavsky (Craig 1912a: 132-136). However, his attitude drastically changed after his experience in Moscow in 1912. In fact, while acknowledging the organisation of the Moscow Art Theatre as perfect and reiterating that it was the best theatre in Europe, Craig thought that it had not been faithful to the principles of art because Stanislavsky had not wanted to close it for a few years, preferring to complete Craig’s experiments with the staging of *Hamlet* in January 1912<sup>8</sup> (Craig 1912a: 285). Instead, he admired the work of Adolphe Appia, whom he considered a significant artist-creator, describing him as the greatest set designer in Europe and calling his drawings for the scene «divine» (Craig 1912: VIII)<sup>9</sup>. However, Craig also made a fundamental objection to Appia, saying that he was not truly a theatre artist but, rather, an artist working in the theatre. In fact, when Craig wrote about the decadence of the art of theatre and the possibility of a group of new reformers restoring its past glory, referring to a time when theatre was not merely for entertainment, Craig counted Appia amongst the reformers. But then, Craig declared that since others would use and execute Appia’s ideas without Appia himself being involved, the content of his works were diluted and modified so much that his innovations were ineffective (Craig 1919: 161-162). Craig’s initial negative judgment of Antoine’s

work (Craig 1912a: 110) was totally reversed in his review of a book dedicated to the French director’s theatre some twenty-five years later. Here, Craig described him as the greatest and most important personality in contemporary French theatre and, surprisingly, denied that his was naturalist theatre (Craig 1927: 35-36). However, Appia, Stanislavsky, and Antoine were considered mere actors, only actors’ directors, and playwrights; for the English theorist, the real artist of the theatre should be involved in everything related to staging so that everything that appears in the scene is the work of both the mind and, in part, the hands (Craig 1912a: 20). Further, he also affirmed that a real artist must create a unified and autonomous work of art. He argued that theatre must be a distinct art, independent of all others. According to him, this can be achieved only when a single person, with an overall vision, directs all aspects of the staging. This concept is fundamental in Craig’s idea of theatre to the point that the artists called to work in the theatre—the writer/author, musician, and painter—are, in his opinion, all useless:

Let me repeat again that it is not only the writer whose work is useless in the theatre. It is the musician’s work which is useless there, and it is the painter’s work which is useless there. All three are utterly useless. Let them keep to their preserves, let them keep to their kingdoms, and let those of the theatre return to theirs. Only when these last are once more reunited there shall spring so great an art, and one so universally beloved, that I prophesy that a new religion will be found contained in it. That religion will preach no more, but it will reveal. It will not show us the definite images which the sculptor and the painter show. It will unveil thought to our eyes, silently.... by movement.... in visions.

So, you see now.... I hope you see.... that the Theatre has nothing to do with the painter, or painting, just as it has nothing to do with the playwright and literature. You also see that my proposition is a very harmless one.... some of you will say a very foolish one.... this of restoring our ancient and honourable Art (Craig 1912a: 123-124)<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, Craig not only believed that it was necessary to eliminate all stage painting, but also considered the presence of painters harmful to theatre. In pointing out that painters, together with musicians and writers, usurped a territory that did not belong to them, he called for «a theatre for those born in the theatre» (Craig 1912a: 121)<sup>11</sup>. However, it is important to remember Craig’s fertile collaboration with Martin Shaw, the musical

director of many of his productions<sup>12</sup>, which likely tempered Craig's condemnation of musicians in the theatre. In fact, Shaw had a particular respect for Craig: «My admiration for Craig's work increased with each new production. In his broad and innovative style there is something that belongs to us, something national» (Shaw 1929: 36). Such was Shaw's devotion that he accepted and executed Craig's directives to the point of risking his own life. What he wrote in his autobiography is exemplary:

[...] immediately over the conductor's head (mine) a local builder, under Craig's direction, had built a plank platform, which sagged a little lower at every performance. I felt like the man in Poe's story of the inquisition, where the ceiling descended towards him every day. He just managed to escape in time and so did I (Shaw 1929: 33).

Craig's criticism in his writings on the theatre of his time stemmed from the practical problems he'd actually had with those who had hindered his work. The staging of *The Vikings of Helgeland* in 1903 (financed by his mother Ellen Terry, who had recently formed her own theatre company), was based on the work of the same name by Henrik Ibsen; with this staging, the first purely experimental phase of Craig's praxis was exhausted and can be taken as an example of the many difficulties he encountered<sup>13</sup>. As in his previous stagings, *No Trifling with Love*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *The Masque of Love*, and *Acis and Galatea*, Craig did not take into account the playwright's stage directions<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, he had serious unforeseen problems with directing the actors of *The Vikings* because he had previously worked with only amateur actors and now had to deal with professional performers who did not always accept his direction. In fact, almost all the actors had a solid theatrical experience behind them and were unwilling to change the way they acted; thus, they were reluctant to follow Craig's directorial needs.

The protagonist of the production, Ellen Terry, was a traditionalist actress who had been the leading lady of Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre; her audience expected her to be the focal point of the staging, whereas in Craig's *The Vikings*, she was one of the many elements that made up the *mise en scène*. The experience of the actors worked directly against Craig's directorial concepts,

particularly against his unified vision of a staging. In addition, he called for a ritualistic performance that the actors cast for *The Vikings* were unable or unwilling to offer. He tried to achieve emotional and aesthetic unity in the drama by personally dealing with the lighting, designing costumes and scenes and directing. To emphasise this unity, his name appeared some five times in the program with the following diction under the title: «The entire production was designed and directed by Edward Gordon Craig»<sup>15</sup>. In the spectacle, all the characters wore helmets with very high crests that, together with the shadows produced by the lighting coming from above, helped obscure the actors' faces as much as possible. Craig's choice sparked much criticism, and many viewers and journalists complained about not being able to see the actors' faces. Perhaps the only critic who fully understood the significance of this choice was Max Beerbohm, who wrote that «nothing would be lost if all the actors wore masks» (Beerbohm: 1903: 23).

More difficult to overcome were the bad habits of the actors, particularly the habit of acting in a naturalistic manner. To try to hinder this, Craig set on the stage irregular platforms that represented the rocky cliffs of the first act to prevent the actors from freely moving around on stage and taking on the theatrical attitudes popular in those years, such as constantly looking at the audience or making catwalks along the stage. When Craig first asked the actors to fight on these platforms, they refused, and he had to show them how he wanted them to fight. The scene was described in detail by his son Edward:

[...] Ted [Craig], wanted Oscar Asche and Holman Clark to fight with swords, but these traditionalists thinking of the usual broad sword technique used in *Macbeth*, where they delighted in pacing about the stage, said it was impossible. Ted explained that it should look more like the ancient Samurai fighting with their enormous swords, slow movements, with sudden flashes. That, they thought, would make them look absurd. Ted, using Carter to help him, showed them how (Craig 1968: 171).

James Huneker's review of *The Vikings* is highly interesting; in it, despite sharing the widespread belief that Ellen Terry had been terribly miscast, he praised the remarkable visual qualities of the staging (Hunker 1905: 31-3)<sup>16</sup>.

*The Vikings* was Craig's last production in England and represented, in many ways, his awareness of

the impossibility of achieving the goals he had set for himself without compromising his artistic ideals. In a letter to Martin Shaw, he wrote the following:

My feelings about *The Vikings* are just like yours. But I feel convinced that no *Vikings* can be done unless each character will listen to the stage manager and hear what character he has to play. What the hell is the use of act one, and what's all the bother about on the rocks, The Rocks and the Giants, and the swords ten inches thick and the blood flowing, the wrestling of limb and brain, if Hjordis is not the exact opposite of all her exterior might. What is the storm of the play, if not the counterpart of the storm inside her heart, and that has exterior storminess to do with her - absolutely NOTHING. [...] "To side with the wild sisters" and all that is the cry of her soul not the instinct of his physique. The soul is to her what physique is to every other one in the play. [...] You did the *Vikings* and I did the *Vikings* and the rest were doing jokes and they never got rid of their skins, much less into any others. And only because, as it goes today, that is any impossibility. The theatre is upside down (Craig 1968: 171-172).

Craig left England the following year and moved to Berlin on invitation from Count Kessler, who had asked him to carry out some projects for several stagings that were, however, never realised<sup>17</sup>.

Another staple of Craig's theories is that theatre should do without literature. With this idea, Craig drew the most extreme consequences from the distinction between theatre as a spectacle and as a work of literature, stating that dramatic poetry and its staging are two distinct works of art—a literary work should only inspire the director who will shape the dramatic text, informing him of the necessary elements to make it 'representable'. In this manner, an original work of art that has only a thematic relationship with the literary text can be created.

Above all, Craig rejected the classics as representatives of the *modus operandi* of theatrical entourage, specifically its servility to literature, due to which the theatre had been subdued for a long time. In claiming the full autonomy of staging from literature, he went as far as to reclaim the theatre's complete autonomy from an *a priori* written text, at times theorising a performance in which the text is created on the stage.

In *The Art of the Theatre*, published in 1905 (Craig 1905)<sup>18</sup>, the distinction between a text to be read and a text to be performed was clearly expressed by Craig. Here, actions and not words become the

main means of theatrical communication (Craig 1912a: 139-141).

To emphasise his thinking, Craig repeatedly stated that Shakespearean dramas are unrepresentable, that they had been written to be read and not staged (*ibidem*: 143-145), thus claiming the right/duty to put one's hand to the Bard's texts to make them utilisable on stage (Craig 1912a: 144-145). Even if, at first, Craig believed staging classics to be conceivable, he later stated it an impossibility before devoting three years of his life to the staging of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. In a note added in the second edition of *On the Art of the Theatre* (*ibidem*: 285), he wrote that he tried to stage *Hamlet* even though he knew it was impossible because he wanted to strengthen his opinion. After the Moscow experience, he was convinced, more than ever, that Shakespeare's plays (and, therefore, classics in general) are unrepresentable. To clarify his argument that classics should only be read and not staged, he used as an example the first scene of the second act of *Macbeth*, which is the soliloquy in which Macbeth tries to arouse the necessary strength within himself to kill King Duncan. Craig emphasised the need to read the passage several times to grasp its meaning, something that would be impossible during its theatrical representation:

It is difficult to read this one speech of Macbeth slowly, when other sounds and sights are exterminated and we are quiet in our rooms and get the full value of what Shakespeare has put there. We can read the speech three, four or five times, and then only is some of its worth caught by us. And having read this speech three, four, five times let anyone continue to read the entire play, and he will be as fatigued as though he had walked twenty miles. But he will have felt some of that which Shakespeare intended him to feel, though by no means all. That which he feels we shall not feel when we go to see the play performed in the theatres (Craig 1912a: 118).

Craig has repeatedly reiterated that Shakespearean dramas were written for the reader and not the stage. In one passage, he stated that he felt great satisfaction in discovering, after publishing his little book, *The Art of The Theatre* in 1905, that Goethe himself had written that Shakespeare belongs to the history of literature by right and appears in the history of theatre only by chance and that Shakespeare's whole method of proceeding is one that encounters a certain

amount of impracticability in the current state of the scene (Craig 1912a: 119).

The text of a classic, according to Craig, is already complete and produces magical sensations with solely its reading. Therefore, it would be sacrilege to destroy a classic piece of literature by confusing the spectators and forcing them to use senses besides their sight (Craig 1912a: 197).

At times, Craig pushed this position to the extreme, seeming to advocate for the complete abolition of the written text from the theatrical process (Craig 1913: 1-11). However, if words should be eliminated from the staging, voice becomes a fundamental aspect of the *mise en scène* for him. “Voice” replaces “Word” in Craig’s ideal theatre, which must not be a place for hearing 30,000 words babbled out in two hours (Craig 1913: 1) or even a pantomime, as explained by Craig’s Stage Director:

The Stage Director. And when I say action, I mean both gesture and dancing, the prose and poetry of action. When I say scene, I mean all which comes before the eye, such as the lighting, costume, as well as the scenery. When I say voice, I mean the spoken word or the word which is sung, in contradiction to the word which is read, for the word written to be spoken and the word written to be read are two entirely different things (Craig 1912a: 180-181).

Here, Craig did not develop the approach for employing voice in his ideal theatre; however, he justified this lack of explanation by stating that the issues concerning the use of voice instead of words cannot be satisfactorily dealt with by means of the written word:

I would like you to remember that I have clearly stated that action and voice are the other two parts which I am studying. Action and voice cannot be satisfactorily treated by means of the written word or diagrams, whereas scene to some extent can be so treated. It is therefore the scenic division which comes into this book; and as prelude to the pictures themselves, I have now something to say about stage scenery (Craig 1913: 5).

For Craig, words had lost much of their meaning, and he believed they could no longer accurately express human thought. He also maintained that words are the easiest tool to use to lie, concluding that, in the twentieth century, almost every sentence was a lie. He also agreed with Voltaire’s statement, «*Ils n’emploient les paroles, que pour*

*déguiser leur pensées*»<sup>19</sup> (Craig 1923:1). He further implied that even newborns could lie but neither infants nor sages could easily be deceptive with gestures (Craig 1923: 1).

Craig subsequently argued that the art of theatre was born from gesture, movement and dance, presenting some directorial notes for the staging of *The Steps*, a mini drama with four attached drawings, as an example (Craig 1913: 41-48). Each drawing shows the same place—a stairway—but each scenic situation expresses a different mood through the characters and/or the actions they perform on stage and the lighting.

In *The Steps* the human and architectural elements merge and come alive and communicate something. Craig emphasises gesture/action and illumination as the main means of theatrical communication, i.e. drama is achieved through gesture and lighting and not words.

Another emblematic example of what Craig believed to be dramatic can be seen in his drawing called *The Arrival*:

This is for no particular play, but it is for what I believe to be true drama. The name explains the drama. The first picture in this volume (“Enter the Army”) is a stage direction; so is “The Arrival” a kind of stage direction. It tells us of something which is being done, and not of something which is being said, and the fact that we do not know who is arriving and why they are arriving, or what they will look like when they appear, makes it, to my mind dramatic (Craig 1913: 23).

According to Craig, the Greeks were the first to seize the secrets of “silent movement”. Movement is not only the root of the art of theatre but also something deeper and more mysterious; movement is divine. The ontological aspect of movement was clearly illustrated by Craig when, writing about the theatre artist of the future, particularly, the actor, he explained that the actor would first imitate, then represent and, in the future, reveal. When impersonating and representing, performers made use of materials that had always been made use of—the human figure, as exemplified in the actor; speech, as exemplified in the poet through the actor; and the visible world, as shown by means of the scenography. Today, actors learn to reveal through movement the «Invisible things, [...] those seen through the eye and not with the eye, by the wonderful and divine power of Movement» (Craig 1912a: 46).

It is also not by chance that Craig saw the Commedia dell'Arte tradition as the utmost example of how theatre should be performed<sup>20</sup>. He reminded his readers that actors should be creative and improvise plays on stage, as the actors of the Commedia did. For Craig, what was impeding such a theatre was the tyranny of the dramatists and the weakness of the actors who had succumbed to the playwrights' arrogance and abuse. He reiterates several times that the absence of a playwright in theatre at the time of the great tradition of Commedia dell'Arte was what made it art, reminding readers that the name in full of the Commedia dell'Arte is «Commedia dell'Arte all'improvviso o Commedia a soggetto o Commedia non scritta o Commedia all'Improvviso». For the English theorist, the actors are also guilty as accomplices of playwrights, since they agree to stage their dramas only so as not to offend them, even if they are not convinced that it is legitimate. The strength and greatness of the actor of the Commedia dell'Arte was based precisely on their refusal to be the servants of the playwrights. The creation that takes place in the theatre and not on the page is the art of the theatre. In fact, Craig also argues that Commedia dell'Arte actors stayed together in the same company for decades and followed only one leader; their motto being, according to Craig «all for one, one for all», while that of contemporary actors, who change theatre companies all the time and are adrift, are «All for themselves, none for everyone» (Craig 1927: 49).

Finally, silence, along with music and movement, is the essential element of staging, according to Craig. The “Drama of Speech” is replaced by the “Drama of Silence”, without intending the total elimination of the sound element, but the featuring of the dramatic moment. Craig explained it as follows:

I think it is Maeterlinck who pointed out to us that drama is not only that part of life which is concerned with the good and bad feelings of individuals, and that there is much drama in life without the assistance of murder, jealousy, and the other first passions. He then leads us up to a fountain or into a wood, or brings a stream upon us, makes a cock crow, and shows us how dramatic these things are. Of course, Shakespeare showed us all that a few centuries earlier, but there is much good and no harm in having repeated it. Still I think that he might have told us that there are two kinds of drama, and that

they are very sharply divided. These two I would call the Drama of Speech and the Drama of Silence, and I think that his trees, his fountains, his streams, and the rest come under the heading of the Drama of Silence — that is to say, dramas where speech becomes paltry and inadequate (Craig 1913: 41)<sup>21</sup>.

Craig also suggested that the apex of “Drama of Silence” could be achieved through the «most noble of all the works created by men, architecture» (Craig 1908a: 2)<sup>22</sup>. He wrote that he has often thought about how to give a life (not a voice) to these places by using them for dramatic purposes (Craig 1908a: 41). In a note that followed, which was a commentary on an article by Arthur Symons titled *Pantomime and the Poetic Drama*, Craig wrote that «All the great theatre moves in silence», that nature is completely silent and that language should not take the place of action on stage. For the English theorist, it was a mistake to think that actions in the theatre cannot express ideas without the help of words. Actions can speak on their own; only actions, according to Craig, can suggest the desires and feelings of the actors because they are free from the tyranny of words, and for this reason, «the art of acting, if we really want to call it art, is more incisive than the art of writing». He ended his comment by declaring that, ultimately, words will be “silenced” in the purest form of drama (Craig 1912b: 189). By eliminating anything that can distract the spectator, especially words, Craig also tried to achieve the emotional unity of the *mise en scène* through action and movement. He did not consider theatre a multifaceted art in which painting, music, scenography, and acting merge into a new work, losing their singularity. Instead, he declared inadmissible the use of added artistic elements in the staging; only those born in the theatre, who had an understanding of all the aspects of the staging and possessed the necessary artistic qualities of the staging, were admissible. Craig's “Ideal Theatre” is the essentiality of the staging, which, considering the extreme consequences, is identified with silence. Once again, Craig seems to have wanted to provoke the reader; in fact, in the third issue of «The Mask», he refuted the above statements by writing that, although he was convinced of the small value of the text in theatrical art, he had no intention of eliminating it altogether, acknowledging that the text had some value (Craig 1908b: 61)<sup>23</sup>.

He elaborated further on the issue a few years later in an article titled "Acca: A New Stage Language" (Craig 1924: 19-21), which he signed as "Author of Films", stating that words are all "nonsense" without any value. Paradoxically, he claimed to be partially at odds with Craig, who wanted to ban words completely from theatre (paradoxically because the writer was Craig himself). In the article, he proposed experimenting with a new type of theatrical language composed only of hard or soft, high-sounding sweet sounds, excluding all interdental sounds produced with the collaboration of the letter "H". For this reason, he proposed naming this new language ACCA, which, he explained, «is the Italian equivalent of H». His reason for this exclusion was that the letter H in English had become entangled with the letter W and other letters of the alphabet, the end result being a language with too many words with interdental sounds.

Craig offered as examples a list of almost twenty-five English words that have interdental sounds that should be eliminated from the language of the stage. He continued to state that the problem exists in all Nordic languages, making it necessary to create a new language, precisely ACCA, for use in the theatre:

There is no H in the Italian language. What an Italian actor wants to say can be said without smothering the words<sup>24</sup> so that they tumble out splashed and breathless or withered up. The English, Dutch, German or Russian actor must labour with his language to the end of his days, unconscious that he is uttering hideous sounds, dying and being buried, buried quite unaware that he displeased thousands of Europeans and caused them to ask themselves, "Is that a language for poets, dramatists and gentlemen?" (Craig 1924: 19)

Once again, Craig made a distinction between a work to be read and one to be uttered, and wrote, «To read Shakespeare silently may be delicious; to read him aloud even by flashes of spluttering H-befogged lightning, can never be too pleasant» (*ibidem*: 20) The only language possible in the theatre is, therefore, one modelled on Italian and its dialects:

I returned home to Bergamo and there once more I heard a real language for human beings, real speech, and crisp and reasonable actor noises. For I must add here that I understand little or no Italian; and, while this is a disadvantage to me when eating, driving or leaving

a hotel, it is an absolute advantage when in an Italian theatre. When I go there it is to see actors and not acting (Craig 1924:19).

In the article, he emphasised that sounds and movements with meaningful gestures form the basis of acting, and this new language for the theatre would be composed of about thirty-three thousand sounds<sup>25</sup>.

Craig concludes the article with the following statement:

The tongue of the actor shall for the first time be freed: that is to say, if my dictionary of ACCA, the actor's language, reaches its thirty-third thousandth word (Craig 1924: 21).

The question of the use of voice/sounds versus words had already been addressed, albeit incidentally, in the very first year of the publication of «The Mask»; Craig saw, in the use of Esperanto during a staging, the promise of overcoming the use of national languages in the theatre:

In August [1908] the Stage took a step nearer perfection. It produced a play in a language... which few people can understand. Goethe's "Iphigenia in Tauris" was performed in Dresden by that remarkable actor Emanuel Reicher and his beautiful daughter, and the language spoken was Esperanto. It must have been an entrancing sight to see Eraulein Reicher moving gracefully through the dramatic piece and to have heard the fine voice of Emanuel Reicher without having to follow the sense of the things they were saying. The scenery, to judge from the reproductions in the Illustrated Journals, must have been appallingly bad, and the costumes seem to have been quite incorrect. Soon we hope plays will be given in a language no one can understand. Then the last tendency to preach will have been brushed away; then the Stage can turn to serious things again (Craig 1908: 203)<sup>26</sup>.

By focussing on action and movement, Craig wanted to restore the theatrical experience to its original nature of offering a mythological «absolute truth» (Craig 1912a: 46). This can only be attained, according to Craig, by returning to the origins of theatre's praxis, which is clearly present in the word's etymological meaning: "Theatre" from the ancient Greek θέατρον, "a place for seeing"; thus, espousing a language of the stage that is essentially visual and not, how it was and is mostly understood, as an auditory experience; and, in so doing, envisioning a return to the theatre and the purpose it had in ancient Greece.

Although, since Craig's writings, there have been a great deal of discussions on the need for a language of and for the stage. All too often the play, and mainly its text, has been and is still considered by many the essence of a performance, the *anima* of a performance. Instead, as Craig pointed out throughout his life, when referring to the theatre, one should not take into account only the script, the actual text, but all the signifying structures and elements that make-up a performance including the staging aspects (performance text, costumes, props, sets, lights, etc.) and the kinesic aspects of the theatre space in relation to the actors (body language, facial expressions, etc.).

Thus, as Craig formulated from the very beginning of his theoretical writings, to write about the theatre, one needs to define the language of the stage as being composed of various elements starting from space, together with the sonority, gestures, scenography, and music. And the "theatrical miracle" is precisely the fusion of all these elements that create the spectacle. The danger, however, is to treat these elements separately as this would be a serious mistake, precisely because the language of the scene is composed simultaneously of all the above-mentioned elements, and another, in some respects, perhaps the most important element of a staging, is the presence of an audience (cfr. Lotman, 1989: 1-29).

This last element is a fundamental condition for the existence of a language of the scene, unlike other artistic languages that do not require a human presence for their existence. One should also note that the language of the stage only occurs *hic et nunc*, that is, the language of the theatre exists only at the moment in which it is performed, seen and heard. And finally, another peculiarity of theatrical art is that the human element is at the very core of its existence. For this reason, a staging can live only in its perpetual transformation and die, to then relive at every new performance. So, writing about the language of the stage, unlike poetic, literary, pictorial or cinematic language, means writing about something that existed, but that no longer lives and that can never be the same again, as it will be different at every performance, just like life. And because of its ephemeral nature, it is no coincidence that theatre itself has been and is still used constantly as a metaphor for life (Lombardo 1981: 23-38)<sup>27</sup>.

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## Notes

\* The intent of this article, in the context of this special edition of «Arti dello Spettacolo/Performing Arts», dedicated to the text in theatre, is to offer an overview of Edward Gordon Craig's pioneering contributions to the process of reform of the theatre, and in particular, to the role, if any, an a priori text should play in a mise en scène. Although the study of Craig's manuscripts is vital for an understanding of his overall conception of the theatre and highlights his visions and revisions on the subject matter (there are innumerable manuscripts available in dozens of Gordon Craig archives disseminated around the globe with at least 120 collections in 17 countries), in this article, Craig's statements on the need for an autonomous language of the theatre (presented as much as



possible in his own words), are based almost exclusively on works available to the general public. These works consist mainly of articles from «The Mask» and his books that produced discussions and debates at the time of their publication, and which still provoke controversy and stimulate discussions today. For extensive information on the innumerable Gordon Craig archives around world (cfr. Newman 1966).

1 Eugenio Barba, in *The Paper Canoe*, writes: “Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Copeau, Craig, Artaud, Brecht, Decroux, Beck, Grotowski, are not, if we are to be precise, the so-called ‘Occidental tradition.’ Nor do they belong, obviously, to the Oriental tradition. They are Eurasian theatre: Orient and Occident can no longer be separated” (Barba 1995: 40).

2 For the superficial and sterile controversy on the alleged derivation of Craig’s theories from A. Appia (cfr. Marotti 1966: 281-283).

3 Craig wrote numerous articles and devoted dozens of chapters of his books to the condemnation of naturalism and realism on stage. These are sections of the postscript written for *Towards a New Theatre* that summarise Craig’s main points of criticism against realism, (Craig 1913: 89-90). For an in-depth overview of Craig’s theories, published and unpublished, please see the following fundamental monographs: Marotti 1961; Bablet 1962; Innes 1983.

4 Craig and Brecht represent two diametrically opposite ways of understanding theatre, although both theorised the need to have an estranged actor on stage who is not slave to their emotions. Peter Brook sees a direct line that connects Craig to Brecht’s ideas. (Brook 1955: 36). For a comparison between Craig’s and Brecht’s theories (cfr.: Gruber - Hellmut Hal 2004: 71-78).

5 Still today, Craig’s position towards the actor is considered ambiguous and widely debated. On the various interpretations of the “Über-Marionette” over the decades see: D’Amico 1929: 22; Tairov 1969: 66-67; Olf, 1974: 488-494; De Marinis 1985: 197-215; M. De Marinis 2000: 129-138; Eynat-Confino 1987: 162-174; Attolini 1996: 48-59; Mango 2003: 341-360; Schino 2013: 84; Tessari 2005: 28-37 and 68-69; Le Bœuf 2010: 102-114; Degli Esposti 2015: 4-27.

6 Later republished in *On the Art of the Theatre*.

7 For Craig’s relationship with Stanislavsky and the staging of *Hamlet* in Moscow in 1912 (cfr.: Marotti 1966: 175-272 and Senelick 1982). Perhaps the only detailed eyewitness description of the show available is by Kaoru Osanai, who attended the staging and concluded his account by declaring that “Simplicity in Craig’s artistic conception is simplicity of expression and not of content” and that for Craig, art “is not imitation of facts but their creation” (Osanai 1968: 586-93)

8 Note added to the second edition, 1912.

9 Note added to the second edition, 1912, in which he apologizes for practically having ignored Appia in the first edition [1911] because he mistakenly believed Appia had died.

10 First published in «The Mask» in 1908 (Craig 1908c: 195-199).

11 In the early twentieth century, Craig was not the only one of those fighting for a “theatrical theatre”: among them were A. Appia, G. Fuchs, V. Mejerchol’d, A. Tairov and A. G. Bragaglia (cfr.: Artioli 1972: 15 - 40).

12 Shaw was the musical director of all the Purcell Operatic Society productions and *The Vikings*.

13 Indeed, *Much Ado About Nothing* would be staged a few days later to try to recover from the financial disaster of *The Vikings*: Terry, as Beatrice, ensured the financial success of the staging.

14 For a brief description of Craig’s production innovations between 1900 and 1903 (cfr.: Fisher 2009: 1-21).

15 This was noticed immediately, so much so that the satirical magazine «Players and Playthings» (also known as «Judy» or «The London Serious-comic Journal») republished the program under Craig’s name, which appears eight times with derisive comments next to it each time. (s.a. 1903: 212). A copy of the program is held at the British Institute in Florence, Edward Gordon Craig Collection.

16 Almost all the staging’s more than a hundred reviews were negative, or not entirely positive, although Craig’s innovations were often commented upon very positively. The reviews, collected by Craig in an album, can be found in the Performing Arts Special Collections at the UCLA Library, Edward Gordon Craig Papers, box 26, Folder 6.

17 The stage projects were for Otto Brahm (*Venice Preserved*), Eleonora Duse (*Electra*), Max Reinhardt (*The Tempest, Macbeth*) and Bernard Shaw (*Caesar and Cleopatra*).

18 The German translation was released first: *Die Kunst des Theaters*, Seeman, Berlin und Leipzig 1905. The following year, unauthorised Dutch and Russian editions were released. Later, in 1911, *The Art of the Theatre* was published in *On the Art of the Theatre*. (Craig 1912a: 137-268). For an exhaustive analysis of the evolution of *The Art of the Theatre* see (Mango 2011: 1- 56).

19 «They only use words to disguise their thoughts».

20 For an extensive discussion on Craig’s writings on the Commedia dell’Arte see Eynat-Confino, 1987.

21 First published in «The Mask» in 1908. (Craig 1908c: 57-70).

22 Craig, throughout his opus, points to architecture, music and movement as the three components of a great and perfect religion that allows us to see and hear the revelation of the “truth” in the theatre.

23 Later republished in (Craig 1912a: 21).

24 In an editorial footnote, it is explained that «the author of the article exaggerates, as the letter H exists in Italian, but it is rarely used».

25 As simplistic as Craig’s approach to the subject may seem, we can pinpoint what the need will be for much of the twentieth century theatre: the invention of a new and, above all, autonomous theatrical language. Many have put the same purpose as Craig’s as the origin of their research: the identification of an autonomous theatrical language. Among the many who have expressed this need, here, we want to remember Artaud, who wrote that it is not at all proven that the language of words is the best possible for the theatre. And it seems obvious that on the scene, which is first and foremost a space to be filled and

a place where something happens, the language of words must give way to sign language, the objective aspect of which is what immediately and best strikes us. In addition, he declared that the written dialogue belongs not to the scene, but to the books. For Artaud, it was necessary to create a language exclusively for the scene and independent of dialogue, a language created for the senses. It was hoped that theatre could be removed from the dictatorship of the word (Artaud 1958: 37-47). Perhaps, what comes closest to realizing Craig's search for an autonomous language for the stage is the all-important experiment carried out by Peter Brook in collaboration with Ted Hughes: in 1968, a group of actors directed by Brook devoted themselves to the study of four languages not spoken anywhere, which would form the basis for the language of the spectacle *Orghast*, which they would stage in Persepolis in 1971. The text was written by the English poet Ted Hughes in a completely invented language, thought to be pronounced aloud and composed of about two thousand words: the intent was to create a universal language for the stage. The actors, from nine countries, sometimes also communicated with each other in the language invented by Hughes. The play is based on the myth of Prometheus, and the fundamental theme of this work was to discover the existence of forms of communication that went beyond the word, abandoning any cultural and linguistic reference. The premise of this research was identical to Craig's, i.e., that the word was emptied of meaning. Brook and Hughes did not intend to banish words in favor of gesture and primitive sounds, but rather sought to recreate a specific language for the theatre. (Smith 1972). In Italy, Carmelo Bene is perhaps the theatrical artist who, more than others, has promoted the search for a language that went beyond the word. Surely Bene's "*phonè*" is an attempt to overcome the limitations of the "word" in favor of the "voice", cf. (Bene 1982: 21-35).

26 Although the editorial is not signed, it is easily attributable to Craig for its style and content.

27 On Craig's intricate and seemingly contradictory position towards the actor in the flesh on stage see Donato Santeramo (2018: pp. 55-78).