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CRAIG TOWARDS THE *ART OF THE THEATRE*
THE *MORNING POST* ARTICLES OF 1903*

Foreword

It is customary – and correct – to date Craig's theoretical work to the 1905 publication of *The Art of the Theatre*, the volume in the form of a dialogue in which he very clearly – even peremptorily – illustrates his vision of theatre as a specific language, and directing as an authorial rather than purely executive and representational element. In actual fact Craig had already published something, two years earlier, in 1903, the year which proved a crucial turning-point in his career. This was the year of *The Vikings*, based on Ibsen's *Hærmændene paa Helgeland* (*The Vikings at Helgeland*), written by Craig for the "family" company Ellen Terry had set up after leaving the Lyceum and after Irving's departure from the stage, with her son Edward as director and her daughter Edith as costume designer. In visual terms the performance was revolutionary, departing sharply from Ibsen's directions in favour of a stark scene reduced to essentials but charged with symbolic value. It was however a failure, its starkness, according to several critics, ill-adapted to the conventional and realistic style of the actors, most of them ex-Lyceum, and the part of the diabolic Hjordis unsuited to Ellen Terry's particular talents. *The Vikings* closed after a few days, and Terry reverted to one of her mainstays, Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*; her son was again the director, and again the set-design was minimalist and essential. The experience of the family company ended here, although in her memoirs, rather than the lack of success Terry remembers the innovative, experimental aspects, not without a certain ironic pride:

> I hope it will be remembered, when I am spoken of by young critics after my death as a "Victorian" actress belonging to the "old school", that I produced a spectacular play of Ibsen's in a manner which possibly anticipated the scenic ideas of the future by a century.[1]

The failed show did indeed have unexpected developments. It was seen by Count Harry Kessler, a German nobleman with a passion for British culture with which he was keen to establish connections, possible first steps, he believed, towards a project of European modernism on an artistic but also political level (a project destined to end tragically in the First World War). Kessler was fired by Craig's directorly vision and invited him to Germany the following year. One result was that *The Vikings* was

* Translated by Anita Weston, Università degli Studi Internazionali di Roma. From L. Mango, *L'officina teorica di Edward Gordon Craig*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2015.

[1] Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life*, London, Hutchinson and Co., 1908, pp. 326-327.

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to prove Craig's last English production (though it should be added that thereafter he produced very few plays anywhere), his last organic contacts with the culture of his native country basically ending in 1903.

The year was also marked by another fact however, more closely concerning the present essay and testifying to Craig's relationship with English theatre. Throughout 1903 he wrote a series of articles in the *Morning Post* giving his diagnosis of the English stage – in serious decline, in his opinion, since the end of Irving's "reign" – and adding possible observations and proposals as to the way forward. The first article came out in January and the last in late December, thus spanning the entire year; revisited in the light of Craig's successive development they read almost as a last lingering contact with his theatrical origins, destined in the following years to morph into a more European, not to say universal vision, to return only – and significantly, I would add – in the final phase of his theoretical production, not least in the memorable biography of Irving, a book about his mentor but equally or even principally the often nostalgic account of a lost era.[2]

The first article is from 23 January and is entitled 'Stage Management. The New Way which is the Old', followed on 1 April by 'On Theatres and Actors', on 29 September by part two of 'On Theatres and Actors', on 13 October by 'On Stage Scenery', and on 26 December by 'The Theatre: Trade or Art', five articles in all which, while not representing an organic overview of theatre, develop a cohesive line of thought around a common thematic core. Lacking both the verve and theoretical clarity of *The Art of the Theatre*, written two years later, they still constitute an important step towards it, and represent an important cog, as it were in Craig's theoretical works of the period.[3] Significantly, when Craig arrived in Germany in 1904 and was looking for a theoretical visiting card, it was one of the *Morning Post* articles, 'On Stage Scenery', which he opted for arguably the most incisive on the subject of linguistic innovation and the one least linked to the British context. Count Kessler was instrumental in its publication and on 9 May 1904, in answer to Craig's request for advice of five days earlier, suggesting the periodical *Kunst und Künstler*. The article was accepted and came out in issue number 3 of that year under the title 'Über Bühnenausstattung', with an introduction by Emil Heilbut.[4]

The *Morning Post* articles all work from the basic premise stated above: the crisis of English theatre after what can be defined as the "Irving era". He considers Irving as an unparalleled model: an exception whose genius transformed everything he touched into precious substances. Genius however, while sufficient to justify and nobilitate the era in which it emerges, can have neither successors nor imitators (Craig considering genius to be begotten, not created) who could only produce a decadent, second-rate copy of all that shone and excelled in the original. If, then, Irving represented the acme of the actor's art, the alchemical miracle which

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[2] E. Gordon Craig, *Henry Irving*, London, Dent, 1930.

[3] The critical bibliography on Craig makes practically no reference to these articles with the exception of Edward Craig's volume *Gordon Craig. The Story of His Life* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1968) and the notes by Lindsay Mary Newman to the critical edition of the Craig-Kessler letters, *The Correspondence of Edward Gordon Craig and Count Harry Kessler* (London, Maney & Son LTD, 1995). Neither, however, goes beyond simply stating the articles' existence.

[4] *The Correspondence of Edward Gordon Craig and Count Harry Kessler*, pp. 20-21.

transformed a fifth-rate play into a work of art, his retirement will leave a void which will gape all the wider for being "filled" by arrogance and artistic incompetence. No salvation is to be looked for in a new Irving, unlikely in the extreme and which in any case will require years if not centuries. Rather than muttering consolatory noises of faith and hope, what was needed was a shrewd assessment of the situation and a look at its limits and possibilities.

The main object of Craig's polemics in the *Morning Post* is the *actor manager*, or rather the whole *actor manager* system (his argument specifically concerns English theatre: the little knowledge he had of the rest of Europe was often second-hand). On an artistic level the system was based on the centrality of the main actor, an anti-artistic position, he maintained, in being completely separated from the quality of genius, Irving's unique legacy, but superimposed on indifferent and randomly-assembled performances based on a montage of non-cohesive elements resulting not from a communal project but from the accidental convening of several diverse factors. On the productive level, on the other hand, the most apparent limit of the *actor manager* system was the mania for stage decoration involving an absurd and unproductive waste of funds.

A further aspect of the English scene excoriated by Craig with equal vigour is the brand of realism which, from his words, emerges as the futile attempt to reconstruct on the stage a representation of the real which is irreconcilable with what the art of theatre must and, basically, can do. The realism which was to become one of Craig's primary targets – and emerges as such in his earliest theoretical observations – is denied to theatre in these articles on the grounds both that art in general has a different objective, i.e. beauty, and that realism is in any case incompatible with the artificial and deliberately fake nature of the stage.

Having listed what seemed to him the greatest limits of the contemporary English stage, Craig then offers possible solutions. His strongest argument, which is to return irrefutably in *The Art of the Theatre* – to combat the decadence of the period by means of a thorough reform of the stage: total, not partial, extending organically to all aspects of theatre production and not singling out one decontextualized aspect. What was needed, Craig seems to be saying, albeit indirectly, was a complete overhaul of the whole system.

The two main elements of this reform were on the one hand the constitution of ensemble companies (a completely different matter from the "single focus" of the *actor manager*), and on the other the need of a director. As early as 1903, then, Craig was looking at the central role of the director, although in a manner which, while proposing some of the directorly aspects described in *The Art of the Theatre*, never reaches its authorial absolutism. The director prefigured in 1903 was, as will emerge below, one consonant with a representative theatre system which had not as yet challenged its linguistic statutes: at some distance, then, from the theatre artist of 1905, but a necessary enabling step towards that figure.

Two further, important concepts are linked to the above: a return to the value of the play as opposed to the virtuosity of the actor (an aspect which with the hindsight of the following years emerges as decidedly unCraighian), and formal stylization in place of realism. With these general co-ordinates in mind, the different issues will now be analyzed singly to see precisely how Craig develops his argument and different subjects.

23 January. 'Stage Management'

The aim of the first article is clearly stated in its title: to examine the question of *stage management*. The subtitle then starkly underlines the approach: 'the new way which is the old'. Craig's declared aim – and this from a man at that very moment in the front line of stage innovation – was not the modernization of the canon in terms of staging so as to offer a viable paradigm of the new. He presents himself right at the beginning of the article not as a reformer but as one keen to restore theatre's lost beauty:

> It is not my vocation to write, nor in any way to pose as a reformer, but where the theatre is concerned I would wish to have things return to the original and best form, and no longer remain ugly and shapeless.[5]

Dissembling surprise at the reception of his work with the Purcell Operatic Society as state-of-the-art innovation, he then adds: 'The ideas I have on the subject seem to me very old. I have tempted to return to a convention which the stage has discarded in favour of Realism'.[6] Craig examines theatre's decline and immediately attributes the responsibility to its "ugliness", the result of the realism deriving principally from Garrick and de Loutherbourg: 'who are reported to have been the first to introduce a practical and realistic bridge on which untrained supers have ever since fought their battles of Bosworth Field and Dunsinane'.[7] These first eighteenth-century glimmers were in his opinion signals from the abyss of realism into which theatre had fast fallen, losing its identity and vocation, namely to generate beauty. It was necessary to face the strenuous climb back out of the depths. Away with wobbling castle as Macbeth's army passed by, vainly attempting to convince the spectator of their bricks-and-mortar reality. An audience should be taught to perceive what he saw as 'right' – the objective of art – and not 'real'.

To do this, Craig seems to be saying, rather than inventing something new it should be sufficient to go back to theatre's authentic origins. Rather than simply opposing realism by reverting to the conventional curtains and mediaeval scrolls beloved of the pre-Raphaelite tastes of the times, this meant going much further back, to the 'first players' and 'first plays'. This is a crucial point in his reasoning. While recognizing that he was personally drawn to a particular Zeitgeist with its roots in the stylized and ascetic world of the pre-Renaissance, Craig also recognized that something more was needed to effect the overhaul he had in mind. What he had in his sights was another, more remote place, more of the mind than of history: the originary. Interestingly, his initial approach to a theory evinces a theme which is to become central to *The Art of the Theatre*. This reprising of the first model of theatre is already the fulcrum of his dramatic vision in this phase, in which the terms of discourse are enunciated rather than developed – though firmly and unequivocally. Just when it would have been logical to expect a proud affirmation of all that was ground-breaking in his proposal for the future of theatre, Craig wrong-foots the reader by underlining the need to reprise the ancient and the primary, rather than the modern (although, paradoxically, perhaps Craig was never modern, at least not in the

[5] 'Stage Management. The New Way which is the Old', *The Morning Post* (23 January 1903).
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

sense that was to be the propulsion of the various avant-gardes). The "first theatre" he has in mind is that which celebrates absolute beauty, uncontaminated by the relativism of realism and representation, a subject which is again debated and developed in 1907, in his magnificent *The Actor and the Übermarionette*, where it is located within a broader theoretical perspective, not least in the conclusion where the "degenerate" birth of the actor as we know him is expressed through the metaphor of the two women who imitated the perfect but remote beauty of the original marionette, which they used as commerce and representation in the world.

His guide and master in this battle for theatre's ancient beauty – promoted, he claims, through the work of the Purcell Operatic Society – was the chosen master of a whole generation of artists: John Ruskin. The debt is acknowledged in a quotation at the beginning of the article which encapsulates the need to return to a healthily authentic vision of theatre. 'The modern stage', Ruskin writes, 'is ruined by its realization of scenery which is contrary to all noble art. A picture, whether on canvas or on the stage, should give us an idea, not its realization'.[8] It was Ruskin's idealizing stylization, then, which pointed the way back to the original conventions of theatre. In discussing one of the productions of the Purcell Operatic Society Craig commented:

> I asked my carpenter to remove the flapping sky-piece which had waved so many years over the heads of the actors, and my limelight manipulator was asked to take up a position not entirely opposed to that assumed by the sun at noon.[9]

A number of the solutions experimented in early productions, such as eliminating all the furnishings which worked to transform the stage into a representational optical box, or replacing footlights with projections from above, are indicated here as the means whereby to free the production from a cumbersome and purely simulated reality. The examples he uses to illustrate his thesis could not be clearer. Craig banished from the nineteenth-century stage everything which was fake and paradoxically artificial – elements more linked to convention, in actual fact, than to realistic illusionism. A good example is the extent to which light naturalistically defined Antoine's theatre by replacing the artifice of footlights with more realistic positioning. The realism Craig shuns, then, was at this point not so much the extreme form of naturalism, but the hybrid version of conventionalism and illusionism then triumphing on the English stage. The "cleanup" he himself encouraged as a director is the first step towards a stylization which, by emphasizing pure form and disincarnated (but authentic) image, meets the need Ruskin recognized for visual allusion as opposed to representative realization. Ruskin's so totally corresponded with his own position that in the article Craig muses whether he had already been aware of the passage when developing his own stage designs, or whether he had only come across it later.

Theatre reform, however, was not his prime objective in this first article, which focuses on theatre's more structural aspects. The first point for Craig in 1903 was the need for theatre which, as he states simply, was "beautiful". Everything can and must

[8] Craig does not cite the source. Ruskin's passage comes from the transcription, made by Edward T. Cook, of some scattered notes and aphorisms taken from his series of lectures entitled *Readings in Modern Painters: 1877*. See Edward Tyas Cook, *Studies in Ruskin: Some Aspects of the Work and Teaching of John Ruskin*, London, George Allen; Sunnyside; Orpington, 1891, p. 211.

[9] 'Stage Management. The New Way which is the Old', *The Morning Post* (23 January 1903).

start from this, since no actor can be entrusted with extracting beauty from anything. There was such an actor, Irving, but it would be useless even to try to imitate him, or to illude ourselves that another might be born within a reasonable time span. Craig seems to be saying that absolute stage perfection is also to be found – and he may even mean primarily – in the interpretation of a great actor, but with all the limits of genius: of being unique and limited to one short moment in time. What theatre requires is a protracted and concretely plausible period of reform, and for this the quality of the play, which regards the whole performance, should replace the singular and partial (but no less perfect) quality of the actor, insists the Craig of the *Morning Post*. No more is added: the work's beauty consists in the statement of the idea.

Craig then moves on to his next point, closer to his directorly heart and one on which he has rather more to say: the actual structure of the company, or *stage management* of his title. His main argument here is that a theatre company should model itself on an orchestra, and transform itself as the latter does into an organism the principle of which is, he states, quoting his beloved Dumas – 'one for all, all for one'.[10] An English company's greatest fault, he insists, is its lack of homogeneity: of a single force targeting all aspects of the stage towards a unified end. As things stand, any member can make such suggestions or proposals as he thinks fit, for the most part founded on nothing more valid than the promotion of his own stage interests. The fault here lies both with the *actor manager*'s indifference towards any unified goal and with the director, who has 'an imperfect knowledge of his calling'.[11] His word *calling*, of course, contains the idea both of trade and of vocation, or mission. In an orchestra, on the other hand the single components remain each in their place, and rely on the unchallengeable guidance of the conductor. Theatre's best course, then, lies in:

> a director with imagination, and under his bâton an orchestra of actors, supers, painters, limelight men, musicians, and costumiers, who, playing in time and with inspiration to animate their instruments, take you who sit in the audience to Elsinore, Verona, Fairyland, anywhere. Anywhere out of the theatre'.[12]

Quite what this 'imagination' consists in is not stated but clearly belongs to the creative directorly dimension based on the autonomy and perfect mastery of his artistic instruments which will be defined in *The Art of the Theatre*. The factors consenting the audience's "escape from stage reality", on the other hand, are more precisely specified: stylization and allusive essentiality. The plan as to structure is clear: the forming of a homogeneous ensemble under the absolute guidance of the director. An ensemble – an orchestra called on to play the music of beauty – to which actors and technicians all make their non-hierarchical contribution, creating the basis of the integral and harmonious language of the scene which represented Craig's mature ambition.

1 April and 29 September. 'On Theatres and Actors'

The next two articles share both subject and title: 'On Theatres and Actors', thought they are two separate pieces rather than two parts of one long article. Having

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

made a first foray into the area, Craig returned to it some months later, repeating but also developing a number of his points in more detail at a distance of some months.[13] In the interval *The Vikings* had premiered, on April 15, shortly after the first article, published at the beginning of the month. No reference is made to it however in the 29 September article: no mention of either its staging, or the economic problems which had made it necessary to close almost immediately, or the disagreements with the actors. The maturer developments of the second article may, though, be due in some measure to the Imperial Theatre experience.

Both 'On Theatres and Actors' deal more articulately with the question behind 'Stage Management', namely, the search for instruments with which to give stage practice some artistic dignity – which at this stage, it should be remembered, meant producing dignified performances of the classics. Craig deals with it from a productive and structural viewpoint, leaving aside both aesthetics (the possible nature of anti-realism) and form (e.g. stylization), proposing a reform which aims at the support structures of theatre production: the actual building and the structure of the company itself.

The article of 1 April opens with the subject of theatre construction. London, Craig writes, is beyond doubt the European city most endowed with theatres, yet none of them meets the prime requisite: for a play to be heard and seen as clearly as possible.[14] This might seem an obvious if perfectly sensible comment, but its quasi-banality conceals something more. What Craig is foregrounding is the seeing/hearing juxtaposition, a prelude to the conceptual deterritorialization which in *The Art of the Theatre* is to present theatre as the art of the visual. The focus on the visual is immediately underlined when, in noting the architectural limits which allow only a severely restricted view to many of the balcony and gallery seats, Craig makes an interesting comparison with painting:

> A play when produced on the stage is as much a picture as a painting is, and to view a painting it is necessary to stand in front of it, the centre of the picture being on the level of the eye.[15]

This minimum requirement is beyond the range of a large number of contemporary theatre-goers, literally put in the position, he adds wryly, of a person attempting to view a painting from the top of a ladder behind a half-closed door.

Playhouses as they stand, then, are viewed by Craig as insults to art. The reasons adduced for the extravagances of theatre architecture, he continues, hinge around the cost-effective need to accommodate the highest number of people at affordable prices, but this could easily be solved by abolishing expensive scenery, thereby drastically reducing production costs. From this he moves on to his second impediment to the dignity of the contemporary stage: the actor. If it is true that the actual consumer-conditions of a performance hamper its creative potential, it is equally true that actorly and directorly limits represent even stronger limits. What is missing, he states peremptorily, is an orchestra of actors, where 'orchestra' is deliberately foregrounded as a departure from the customary 'company'. An

[13] Besides the organization of the subject-matter, the fact of these being two separate articles from separate periods is also testified by the opening of the second in which Craig introduces his subject by marvelling (or pretending to marvel) that he had received no response to his provocation of a few months earlier.
[14] 'For an audience demands that it shall see as well as hear, and a play demands that it be seen well as well as heard'. 'On Theatres and Actors', *The Morning Post* (1 April 1903).
[15] Ibid.

orchestra in the musical sense of the term differs from a company in being a unified body: formed as a unit, directed as a unit, and with the inevitable end result of a unified entity. Craig expounds the theatre metaphor, reprised verbatim in *The Art of the Theatre*, at some length, adducing the Queen's Hall, conducted by the then very prestigious Henry Wood, as an exemplary case in point. Comprising excellent musicians, it never however contemplated the figure of the star soloist (such as for example Sarastes, Hollmans, or Paderewski). This in no way marred the perfection of the orchestra's interpretation of Mozart or Beethoven. If one such musician were to try to assume the role of soloist it would be labour wasted: not only could he add nothing to the orchestra's performance, but he would have to comply with group norms, squandering his own individual genius. On the other hand, Craig is keen to underline, genius never authorizes maltreatment of Mozart's and Beethoven's magnificent symphonies, which are to music what Shakespeare's plays are to drama. It would be reasonable, then, to expect that in the same way a theatre should produce a company of equally talented actors, directed by the firm hand of a figure possessing complete power, yet this is far from the case. In the meanwhile, it is useless to continue the theatre debate. This, then, should be the starting-point: a new approach and mindset regarding the theatre profession itself and the material craft of the stage.

The discursive leap on Craig's part here is not inconsiderable. The concreteness of his reasoning hones directly in on the most material aspect possible: pay. A musician earns on average five pounds a week; an established actor, between ten and a hundred. The shortfall is marked, and made more so by the reverse reasoning: extras and minor company figures had to make do with a few shillings – an unbalance which inevitably extends beyond pay to roles and prestige and is the prime cause of company disunity, with all its effects on artistic dignity and group performance. The unbalance needed correcting, and a simple raising of salaries for the minor actors and trimming of the star actor's salaries was not enough; in the case of the former, their roles and abilities needed to be nurtured so as to make them actors to all effect. Only then 'each man on the scene will be as important to the play as his neighbour and will receive as his due his share of praise – his share of profit', thereby profiting at the level of performance and the fully dignified staging of theatre masterpieces.[16]

In the article of 1 April Craig writes in totally pragmatic terms of the question of theatre buildings and the figure of the actor. Starting English theatre on the road to reform means modifying the architecture in parallel with the organization of the companies. On 29 September he returns to the subject with similar but more detailed arguments. In favour of his hypothesis that the stage's greatest limit is the inflated ego and equally inflated recompense of the actors, he begins his article with a long passage by George Edwards, producer of the Gaiety Theatre, famous for his extravagant musical comedies (thus particularly useful evidence for Craig), who had published an article on the same subject in the *Daily Telegraph*. West End theatre was subjected to the whims and interests of the actors, Edwards had written, citing the instance of a young actress "taken out" of the chorus by the director and promoted to a speaking part. She was greatly lauded by the critics who, however, were unaware of the immense efforts required of the author, composer and producer during

[16] Ibid.

rehearsals; the same day, the actress presented herself in the producer's office, demanding to convert the acclaim into cash and implying that she would otherwise take the nearest stage door exit. Craig takes the "confession" as confirmation of his thesis as to the absurdity of theatre relations and draws the wry conclusion that: 'The theatres, instead of being run for the public and the plays, are run for the players'.[17]

The rot, then, lay for the most part in the egoism and self-referentiality of the players. The reference to Edwards usefully allows him to refer directly to the situation in Britain and the London stage in particular, of specific concern to him at that moment given that he was about to launch himself into a production adventure – *The Vikings* – the opening of which was actually to prove its immediate end. In his reference to immediate circumstances however – expressed in a rather rhetorical complaint that his first article had elicited no reply – it now seems possible to glimpse his new aesthetic conception of the theatre. His main concern is still with the material construction of theatres, given that every aesthetic aspect of the stage is an aspect of production, and he returns to the need for an ensemble arrangement to replace the star system and the cult of the diva and restore the organic nature of performance. The orchestra image is here used differently however. He no longer speaks of the actors, or not exclusively, but of the universe of invisible workmen – *stage carpenters*, *flymen*, *property men*, *wigmakers*, etc. – 'whose work is […] as arduous and as excellently done as is the work of the best actors in the city'.[18] It is time for these people to step forwards and be recognized for their true worth, while those who had had the limelight until now should take a step backwards.

The passage is conceptually significant compared with what he had written previously. The universe of workmen hidden behind the scenes (the *craftsmen* in *The Art of the Theatre*) are now accorded a role which is no longer subordinate but worthy of considerable respect: it is here that the show is actually created. 'Bouquets for the limelight artists and nosegays for the ladies of the wardrobe': the habits and, above all, the conceptions of the period are now at a clear distance.[19] For the first time Craig concentrates on theatre's material, technical universe which in future years was to become a decisive reference-point in defining and constructing the figure of the theatre artist: compare with the apprenticeship described in *The Artists of the Theatre of the Future*.

Here Craig unexpectedly looks to the actor for his solution. Instead of reiterating the limits previously enumerated, Craig is unusually optimistic. 'There is progress in the air', he writes: a number of young actors are putting themselves forward, unmarred by money, disenchantment, and the slack cynicism towards their profession which their senior colleagues are eager to convey. They regard the stage as something other than a pit in which to dig for a steady income.[20]

He leaves it at this, with no hint of anyone specific in mind, but keen to perceive signals of change in the air. What is emerging, besides a new generation of actor-artists, is the awareness that the days of gaudy and grandiloquent staging are over, giving way to a thriftier but more purely artistic way of composing a show which can reach levels of astonishing beauty deriving precisely from this choice of the essential and the rigorous. Again Craig names no names but it is hard not to believe that his

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[17] 'On Theatres and Actors', *The Morning Post* (29 September 1903).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid. Limelight, produced by a fusion of oxygen and hydrogen heated in a cylinder of calcium oxide was introduced into theatres in 1820.
[20] Ibid.

words indicate a specific reference to his work with the Purcell Operatic Society and later with *The Vikings*. The air is freshening, then, and bringing with it fresh new developments. English theatre, recently orphaned by Irving's death, it should be remembered, and still in search of a new identity, far from being at its last gasp appears to Craig 'in the position of having just found its feet'.[21]

There is a small cloud on this horizon however – or rather, two. One is the factor already mentioned: the architecture itself; the other is the as yet unmentioned polemical figure of the *actor manager*. 'The modern English theatre is out of date', he insists. 'It is as useless to us to-day as the old flagship Victory would be if used in modern warfare', since what was perfect for 1700 is obsolete in 1900.[22] The point is interesting, alluding to a central question of theatre modernity which is as central as it is generally unacknowledged: the need to find and project a new type of building suited to the contemporary stage. Craig seems to be moving in this direction only to stop short and return to the need for constructions which are substantially more efficient (but not structurally different), like those beginning to appear in Germany: buildings, he reiterates, in which a play is seen and heard in the best possible manner.[23]

The blame for this short-sightedness lies first of all with the *actor manager*, defined as the most absurd invention in the history of theatre, closely followed by the theatre owners who sweep aside all talk of modernization. The problem of the English theatre's structural inadequacy now has name and surname: it is the system itself which is sick, from the head down – the *actor manager*, unable to see beyond his own personal protagonism and box-office requirements. A solution to the impasse, then, beginning with a different theatre architecture, was to seek the only person fit for purpose, the *stage manager*:

> the stage manager is probably the only man whose knowledge makes his opinion of any value – for there is no one else who studies the subject from the same point of view, and it is from the stage manager's point of view that all theatres should be designed, provided he is at the same time an artist.[24]

This is virtually a quantum leap in his reasoning: a line of argument new both to himself and to English theatre. The *stage manager* suddenly moves to occupy a central role in theatre reform, where previously he had been a secondary albeit prestigious figure, virtually the *actor manager*'s right-hand man, overseeing all the material aspects of staging which were below the notice of the company director. He knew all the techniques and tricks of the trade, all the problems of staging and how to resolve them, it was he who generally took the extras through their parts in rehearsals, and was responsible for general stage harmony. His "reign" was the Christmas pantomime, where the accent fell mainly on spectacle and visual effect. A *stage manager*, in short, was a technician: one of – indeed, head of – the group of artisans underpinning the quality of the show from behind the scenes. He would be the person to consult as regards the basic elements – technical, but which also become artistic – of the ideal theatre, since his concern is essentially the staging, the only truly

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Here too Craig makes no explicit reference. Bayreuth is a possibility but not a certainty.
[24] 'On Theatres and Actors', *The Morning Post* (29 September 1903).

essential point of view. All this is predicated on his being an artist, 'but, unfortunately, stage managers are more often actors than artists', and content themselves with minor adjustments to the old, tried-but-no-longer-trusted, model (of the structure of the theatre of course, but especially of staging).

The point is worth pursuing. Craig is actually introducing a completely new notion, that of the viewpoint of the *stage manager* which should replace that of the actor, to the extent that if he is and remains basically an actor, then he will fail in his mission. What he must be is an artist. Craig is not talking here of any role shift or specific and autonomous form of creativity, he is not yet thinking of the ideal *stage manager* predicated in *The Art of the Theatre*. What he means by being an artist is, I believe, basically two things: that the *stage manager* should possess a greater awareness of his work and consider the visual plane of the show as the true locus of the art of the theatre, and that he should resemble in this resemble the painter, composing a scene as if it were a painting. Significantly, from this point to the end of the article the frame of reference changes radically, directly hinging on the introduction of the figure of the *stage manager*.

If the problem facing the theatre in the early twentieth century was to find a new unitary principle to identify and qualify it in artistic terms, if this effort, at a European level, is being made at the level of new forms of directorship, and if the majority of Craig's arguments in the *Morning Post* fit relatively organically into the general frame of reference, there is one element which distinguishes his position from the start and becomes positively explosive in *The Art of the Theatre*. The long period of gestation towards directorship in most cases begins with actors who take a step sideways and begin to direct externally or, at an earlier stage, as a result of writers bent on extending their authority to the actual staging. The relationship between budding director and previous authorial practice is one of consanguinity, so to speak: both belong to the noble family of the theatre trade. We might expect Craig to consider the figure of the *actor manager* "purged" of his actorly vices as a possible and plausible guide towards the 'unified stage picture' so close to his heart – basically, this was the case of someone like Antoine. Not a bit of it. Craig approaches the subject from another viewpoint. The unifying subject is to come from the very lowest levels of staging, where the material and artisanal trades are carried out: those which no-one mentions when speaking of art but which everyone appreciates when watching a well-crafted performance. In 1903 Craig is not only thinking that the director is what is needed to reform English theatre, but is also starting to think of who the new figure might be: not a made-over actor, but a technician who by contract has the task of overseeing the global aspect and who might graduate from the material to a more complex level. Craig's (embryo) director must literally be a son of the stage.

The continuation of 'On Theatres and Actors' in the 29 September article is worth close examination. Craig first treats the question of the relationship between material and artistic requirements. The *stage manager* has a privileged viewpoint of course, but he also has decided limits which make him unsuited to the extremely important task Craig seems to have in mind. At this point Craig was too absorbed by the reform of stage machinery. All his attention was given to the new contraptions, not least the Asphaleia revolving stage with hydraulic pumps which could lower or raise different stage sections: useful, perhaps, Craig seems to be saying, to raise audience appreciation too,

but useless to further the aims of art.[25] What *stage managers* fail to consider is that 'the theatre is or should be for them the place for the individual expression of the poetry, beauty, and mystery of life, according to their own gospel'.[26] Put differently, they should be making a writerly effort which they ignore, and should seek out the poetry, not the machinery, of space and stage. Craig still shies from considering the intimate nature of this poetry from a theoretical aspect, but he is certainly aware of it. For the moment he simply underlines the singular divergence which has come about between the acceleration of mechanical inventions for theatre and the basic inertia surrounding what he considers its most vital needs.

How to bridge the gap is his immediate concern, how to accelerate real and not just technical reform of the theatre? Craig is of course talking about theatre in the sense of a building, but he is clearly also thinking of reform which touches all aspects. For this to come about architects and builders need a point of reference which is not the *stage manager* (possibly too compromised by staging's mechanical logic), but a new figure, not included in official theatre professions, who Craig calls the 'play designer'. He omits to specify his functions other than to say that he should have artistic control of the process of linguistic unification of the stage: a fusion, we can imagine, of *stage designer* and *scenographer*, except that instead of designing the set, the *play designer* "designs" the whole play. What Craig is doing is looking for a new term to define the equally new function, part-director, part-author, which is indispensable for theatre reform. The choice of terms proposed in 'On Theatres and Actors' is extraordinarily important if we think in the first place of the "misadventures" about to befall him with Otto Brahm, who accepted his collaboration and finally understood it only in terms of a *stage designer* whose sketches he could freely use, and then of the battle Craig fought (and lost) to have the function of general *stage director* acknowledged him, beginning with the sketches he had produced. If indicating the *stage manager* as a point of reference was already a radical departure from contemporary custom, the introduction of the *play designer* was a decided move in that direction. Today, he concludes, a production is the combined efforts of the *stage manager*, *stage designer*, *electricians* and *costume designers*, the result being an inconsistent patchwork. When a synthesis of these efforts are concentrated in the hands of the *stage designer* alone, then theatre too will have achieved that unity which is the prime condition of every work of art.

Clearly, then, by *stage designer* Craig intends a directorly role and his not designating it *stage director*, as he had signed himself until then, says a considerable amount. Craig is not always precise and consistent in his choice of definitions, but it is difficult to believe that his choice of term here was random or accidental. While still probably not possessing the irrefutable command of theatre language, substance and form which he has acquired by 1905, Craig is searching carefully to define and represent the process of the unification of language with a term deriving from the stage and its various components. Rather than playing with the orchestra of actors it is first necessary to learn to play with the orchestra composed of all the trades which come together in

[25] *The Art of the Theatre*, it will be remembered, begins with the *stage director* and the *playgoer* returning from inspecting the machinery of a theatre. The director starts by remarking that, having once seen what a theatre is materially able to do, it is time to ask oneself what it actually is in terms of a work of art.
[26] 'On Theatres and Actors', *The Morning Post* (29 September 1903).

staging. Unifying the theatre certainly involves harmonizing the interpreters, but even more it means thinking of the stage as a unified body directed in a unitary fashion.

13 October. 'On Stage Scenery'

The article immediately following, on 13 October, was almost inevitably entitled 'On Stage Scenery' and dedicated to the question of staging, which had now emerged with all its innovating urgency. This, it might be remembered, was the article which Craig wanted to translate to present his ideas to the German public. It was also clearly the one with which he most closely identified. If, as I believe is the case, the articles in the *Morning Post* were not written and planned as a series, but are the result of various points Craig considered as they presented themselves, the central position of 'On Stage Scenery' is more than understandable. This is not so much because it speaks of staging, as because it posits the set as the necessary place for the unification of theatre language: as the privileged object of reform.

Compared with the previous articles, here Craig puts problems of a more aesthetic nature albeit still linked to the conditions of English theatre. At the same time he begins to look outside national confines, with an interesting reference to Antoine and his Théâtre Libre. The terms of his reasoning however remain profoundly English. The theoretical issue lies in identifying the qualities – both artistic and expressive – required by the set if it is to meet theatre's more intrinsic needs. Put differently, Craig is beginning to ponder a subject which is to become almost a leitmotiv in the years to come: the linguistic conditions which correspond to theatre's original nature and the real foundation of its artistic being. The problem, that is, lies in the authentic, the true and the original, and not in the new, as he had already stated, though slightly rephrased, in the opening of his first *Morning Post* article.

'There are three kinds of stage scenery, the imaginative, the realistic, and the very bad', he pronounces: an arresting and effective if possibly unscientific aesthetic taxonomy.[27] The last, 'very bad', and the least defined terminologically, is the one he deals with first and most amply, possibly because it is the most common in London theatres, and the most clearly indicative of the limits and shortcomings in the contemporary approach to the stage. Understanding these limits – of conception, not of realization – can help to identify the conventions of habit to abandon and, viceversa, the potential areas to explore.

The first problem with 'very bad' scenery is that it claims to be simultaneously very real and very beautiful, without actually managing to be either. Craig's explanations for this state of affairs lay in the premises of the model itself, which could be defined as the scenery of bad habits or, to use Craig's own expression, 'a cardboard affair' scenery. The conditions in which it is produced are equally flawed: on the one hand the *scene painters* (as Craig significantly describes them) are not given a free hand, which would make them responsible for the entire set from the design through to the first night. At the same time, their conception of the set tends to reflect what they have in mind rather than the dramatic vision of the playwright: a singular statement which may even appear contradictory. The *scene painters* – I prefer to use Craig's expression – seem to be both over-conditioned and at the same time too arbitrarily free. The problem of the 'very bad' scenery could be said then to

[27] 'On Stage Scenery', *The Morning Post* (13 October 1903).

derive from a lethal mixture of the lack of authentic creative freedom combined with their subjective will. A statement which is clearly at variance with his words in *The Art of the Theatre* when he energetically sustains the autonomy of the set as a language, an element representing the keystone of his new theory of theatre.

His reasoning in 'On Stage Scenery' still seems to belong to what in *The Art of the Theatre* is defined the craftsman's dimension of stage productions, belonging to a level preceding art. On the other hand, as analysis of the 1903 articles has consistently shown, a general view of the trade, a "how to proceed" rooted firmly in production procedures then used in London is a privileged point of reference in Craig's rationale. This is the main reason why, in underlining the responsibility of the 'bad scenery' model for unsatisfactory artistic results for the purposes of artistic results, Craig gives us to understand that the figure responsible for this state of affairs is the *actor manager*, again underlining his point that he is hardly the figure to guide the process of unifying the various registers which comprise the language of a production. Here the *actor manager* cannot be considered a resource, as we might think, but a very definite obstacle. His substantial incompetence regarding sets (defined, significantly, 'art and craft') never stops him from interfering, with catastrophic results at every level – form, colour and shade – all the subject of the *scene painter*'s painstaking work which the *actor manager* would proceed to demolish one after the other in order to suit the scenery to his own selfish actorly needs. Whether the scenery is beautiful or, more importantly even, makes sense vis-à-vis the script is of no importance. All that counts is that the *actor manager* (and he alone) should find it a suitable back-drop.

The *scene painter*'s temptation is inevitably to take refuge in a comfort zone in which he can feel free to create the scene he has imagined. Craig defines the zone 'eidophusikon', after the curious visual experiment conducted in the eighteenth century by Philippe Jacques De Loutherbourg, whose name is cited, singularly, for the second time in these *Morning Post* articles. The *eidophusikon* was a miniature theatre in which De Loutherbourg experimented with a show based on images alone – an ingenious play of lights, projections and painted images – which could create an appealing effect of painting in motion. Craig writes: 'In this entertainment actors were dispensed with […] Why should the actors and actresses spoil the view by standing between the scene and the audience?', adding with some gusto, 'rather let these gentlemen erect a board with a notice that "trespassers will be prosecuted" or "keep off the stage"'.[28] A statement of the kind immediately alerts the Craig specialist, adumbrating the incompatibility between the actor's physical body and the art of the theatre which is to explode a few years later in 'The Actor and the Übermarionette'. As yet this is simply an early warning signal, and not to be overemphasized. Craig himself leaves it at a wry quip.

A far more ample and articulated treatment is reserved for the second characteristic of the *eidophusikon*, its spectacular illusionism, something Craig was keenly interested in at that moment. He describes the effects produced by De Loutherbourg's machine, emphasizing some of its bewitching results, such as, for example, a shipwreck. The waves breaking against the ship, the whistling wind, the lightening flashes rending the sky, the rain and crash of thunder mixed with the

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[28] Ibid.

crew's desperate cries are all etched with great painterly effect. 'Each particular detail was carried out to perfection – probably the nearest approach to reality that has ever been attempted', he states, delectable for the eye although rather in the manner, he adds, with enthusiasm-tempering irony, of a firework display.[29] No sooner has the *eidophusikon* been offered as a plausible answer to the problem of the stage-set than it is dismissed as a spectacular toy, duly fascinating but hardly a device to apply to a Shakespeare play and thus unsuited to the art of the theatre.

Craig's position comprises three distinct levels of argument which could perhaps benefit from clarification. Firstly a relatively clear distinction is made between two different levels of theatre: the more basic practices, among which he places the *eidophusikon*, and the artistic practices, as always to be identified with Shakespeare. His second point (though this is actually the main element) is that the question of the position of scenic language in defining the artistic nature of theatre cannot be resolved by emphasizing the visual dimension. What is needed is not "more scenery", materially, but a different linguistic use of it. The third point concerns the close and interdependent relation between the theatre text and the scenographic dimension, where the force of the poetry takes precedence over the visual aspect. At a closer reading however it becomes clear that Craig is saying something slightly different. It is not that he is already contemplating the autonomy of the set, but that the real question concerns not the relation between the scenography and any theatre text, but between the scenography and a text of Shakespeare's, the absolute and unattainable. What Craig is talking about is not the stage-set for a play, but the stage-set for a Shakespearean play: two profoundly different things, whatever their similarities. The *eidophusikon* is unable to meet these requirements and so can be of no use in theatre reform.

It is of use to Craig, however, who uses it to fuel the argument at the centre of his polemical attack on the cardboard set: perfect illusion. If this was tenable (though only to a non-artistic extent) in De Loutherbourg's stage toy, the illusion will inevitably vanish in the staging of a play, i.e. Shakespeare, particularly if we illude ourselves that accuracy of detail will do the trick. His targets here are the "historical" sets for Shakespeare plays and the claims of an *actor manager*, celebrated for his historical knowledge (Charles Kean?), that it was perfectly possible to reconstruct the setting for a play such as *Macbeth* down to the last accurate detail. The same *actor manager* would send his scenographer off to museums, make him consult books and picture archives and have him make drawings of the putative real-life settings – all to produce an accurate reproduction of the colossal castle of Glamis shrunk to the rather more modest dimensions of the modern stage. And this is called accuracy of detail, Craig concluded ironically.

Perfect stage illusion is indeed an illusion, a chimera, and the claim to obtain it through painstaking historical reconstruction is a deluded folly: 'The manager – like Hamlet – cries out to this ghost "Stay, illusion!" and then tries to stop it with a partisan?'.[30] Craig is underlining the intrinsic absurdity of stage representation which aims to create illusion through realistic descriptivism. Material conditions make scenic truth impossible: not just the proportions, already mentioned, but the materials (wood and cardboard) make a grotesque fake of what we hope will create the illusion of authenticity. As his example he takes the arrival of Duncan, Malcolm,

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

Macduff and the rest of the Scottish nobles at Glamis. The morning air is sweet and pleasant and their words describe a scene of enchantment which no contrived construction can ever make visible: indeed the world of cardboard will serve only to cripple the lyrical and evocative power of the words.

A similar consideration leads Craig to some interesting reflections of a more general kind on the relation between representation and natural reality. The cardboard realism of the stage set is a vain and illusory attempt to render the perceptual and emotive wealth of nature:

> for it is impossible to reproduce accurately the light of day; it is impossible to reproduce the exact movement of the branches and the leaves of trees […] Most of these things can be suggested, but they cannot be caught as in a net and removed bodily to the stage of a theatre...[31]

including, significantly, 'the noise of the growing forest'.[32] Besides the appealing terms of the argument itself, it is interesting to note how Craig is posing the problem of the distance – a distance he deems insuperable – between art and reality. Reality (that of the natural world, it should be noted) is presented as a biblical marvel, the infinite variety of existence: a composite of tiny, often ineffable signs, like the sound of a growing forest. The play of all these signs in their fleeting, ungraspable, marvelous lightness is what we perceive as "life", made up of infinite movement, metamorphosis and continuous transformation which no artistic sign should dare to reproduce but may at most, when magnificently realized, evoke. Craig's objection to the possibility of creating true illusion in the theatre is that at best what is obtained is a coarse and superficial copy of nature's external forms, with little resemblance to the thrilling vibrations representing its authentic soul. These can only be expressed in the theatre through non-mechanical reproduction.

The first part of 'On Stage Scenery' ends with the drastic and definitive rejection of stage illusionism. We would, then, expect the concept to be repeated in the paragraph on set realism, but as often happens Craig wrongfoots the reader. 'Realistic scenery is only in its right place when it is made the setting of the realistic plays', he writes.[33] The declaration is almost tautological but is important for at least two reasons. Firstly because Craig seems not to be assuming an anti-realism position tout court but one which is against the "cardboard realism" of contemporary sets in particular. He is presuming that there can be a well-founded stage-set realism for texts which are themselves realistic in the first place. The objection to realism in the *Morning Post* articles, in short, is more to a professional practice of the English theatre than an aesthetic conception. Realism and anti-realism appear not to be absolute values. A further point encountered at the beginning of 'On Stage Scenery' now re-emerges, namely that the value of a stage-set is measured by its consonance with the dramaturgical direction dictated by the author.

We are not here confronted with that prejudicial rejection of realism which is to become one of the constants of Craig's pronouncements on theatre, though it is true

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

that having momentarily endorsed it on principle as an adequate model for staging realistic theatre, in the next breath he states his many conditions. First and foremost it is only plausible and workable for interiors: exteriors, as he has just stated, disallow any form of representation by their intrinsic nature. He then introduces a further element which may justify realism. A set aiming at realism should be constructed prior to rehearsals, so that the actors can learn to move within it as if it were their characters' concrete world. What should not happen is precisely what is common practice in English theatres: that the cast first develop their stage movements and are only later introduced to the set, which then functions as a disconnected backdrop to their actions. First set construction, then decisions as to stage movement. In *The Art of the Theatre* Craig is very precise on this point, but what is interesting is that his reference to Antoine comes here, when illustrating this line of argument. After stating that he has never seen Théâtre Antoine productions, he adds that he believes they follow the method he proposes. Antoine and his theatre reform was certainly known in London, but the precision of his statement would imply a more direct familiarity with his methods of rehearsal. It is not clear how this might have happened. He may have come across some article on Antoine's work, but it is more enticing – though so far unproven – to think that Craig may somehow have read his 'Causerie sur la mise en scène', published on 1 April 1903 in *La Revue de Paris*. For the moment this remains a hypothesis which if proven (and if provable) would be of enormous interest in linking the process of writing of *The Art of the Theatre* with that which was to all effects the first theoretical work on the *mise en scène* as an art. Here, without emerging as a naturalist, Antoine squarely faces the question of the linguistic means and the active procedures able to transform the trade of the stage into the art of the stage. In this context the relation between the set and the actors' movements is not only determining, but expressed precisely in Craighian terms. Granted, Antoine is simply cited, but as often happens with Craig, vast interpretative vistas open up, disclosing the mental procedures – always complex and varied – of his thought processes. It is as if, with this brief aside, Craig were extending a bridge towards the methods of the nascent evolution in direction, whatever its stylistic and formal declination.

Immediately, however, there follows a final, definitive objection to realism (indicatively allocated the most reduced space of all). Its limit lies in remaining anchored to the material, in being unable to open towards spheres beyond itself as only the third stage set, the imaginative, can do. 'An artist manager should be able by suggestion to illustrate for us the whole heart of nature'.[34] For a set to transmit the vibrations of living things, or at least a suggestion of them, then the flat and inevitably materialistic reproduction of the world's appearances must be left behind. Its task lies elsewhere. Before entering this "elsewhere", another small terminological clarification is necessary. Craig here introduces a term which is new, both in his writings and in general: *artist manager*. Not *actor manager*, not *stage manager*, not *scene painter*, not *stage designer*, nor *play designer*, but still a *manager*: a manager who has made himself into an artist. At this point Craig is probably not actually coining a new conceptual definition, as he later does when speaking of the theatre artist, but his choice of term is clearly pointing in that direction. Following and ordering the progression of his terms, as we have done, we see a very pronounced process emerge which, departing from the flawed and hasty logic of the profession as it stands,

[34] Ibid.

searches out the professional figures which are most fit for purpose and best suited for leading the artistic transfiguration of the theatre, at the same time as seeking the term which best defines that figure.

Craig's 'imaginative stage scenery', then, was clearly the best: the (only) one suitable for both Shakespeare and opera (here he probably has Purcell in mind). This was not, though, to be reduced to the standard issue of three curtains and a mat provided by most producers. It is not clear who his specific target is here, but the general objection is to the tendency towards mannered stylization which solved the problem of a non-realistic set by introducing a few austere drapings: poor imitations of Craig's designs for the Purcell Operatic Society and for *The Vikings*. The imaginative set had to be something more or it is only imaginary scenery, he writes. This "something more" however is not so much a matter of style or form, but of the ability to create a poetry of the set in response to the poetry of the text – the Shakespearean text, that is. What exactly does he mean by this? He is introducing an argument which will be repeated almost exactly in *The Art of the Theatre*. Responding to the text is certainly not a question of following the stage-directions. If Shakespeare is our blueprint, then we have to remember the directions in his texts were added by later editors arrogant enough to seek to "improve" what was already perfect. The descriptions of locations are redundant overstatements of what Shakespeare had already marvelously expressed in the text. Craig cites the case of the opening scene in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare

> draws us an imaginary picture; a sweep of dark sky is indicated with one solitary star; it is a cold night, nothing stirs. Suddenly a bell tells the hour. A man, hidden until now in the shadow, is seen to rise slowly, and remains listening. […] His march continues. He passes in front of us; now he is engulfed in some huge unfathomable shadow, from which he presently emerges into the grey light. He seems like some ghost; that which he fears to meet, is that which he most resembles.[35]

This is an extraordinary imaginative description of Francisco on the battlements of Elsinore. The terse emotional atmosphere of the text is objectively correlated in a highly efficient description of the scene which is much more than a set direction, rather than scenography. It presents a vision of the mind's eye, listing with precision the scene's chromatism, the play of the shadows, the character and his position in the scene and set (cf. the various aspects shared with his fourth design for *The Steps*). Without stating it directly, and perhaps without realizing, Craig has moved from scenography to direction. His description of the opening scene in *Hamlet* is to all effects a directorly response to what can be "seen theatrically" in Shakespeare's lines. The scene must be a poetic correlative of the word (a poetry of the image), not a historically informative backdrop which would be an overbearing scenic kiss of death. Accuracy of detail is useless, indeed prejudicial when staging Shakespeare, who is himself, in any case, anything but accurate and precise in constructing his settings, which has often, obtusely, been held against him. Would a historically more accurate *Hamlet* be a better one? Craig's answer is unsurprisingly no.

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[35] Ibid.

Inevitably then all documentary sources, historical directories, or volumes such as *Moore's Illustrated Shakespeare* or *Gustave's Illustrated Melton* are time wasted. 'What is important is that the play producer shall weigh each scene and each part of a scene as an orator weighs every syllable of his speech. Nothing must be left to chance'.[36] The comparison with the orator is apt and extraordinarily important. Clearly in Craig's mind the staging process is defining itself technically as a form of writing, or more precisely a rewriting of the word to render it expressive. He also adds that 'the shape of the scene is as important as the colour', indicating how the theatre's "formal rhetoric" lies in the scenic elements, which in their turn are based on the essential principle of form and colour.[37] This is further reinforced shortly afterwards when, in his continued tirade against *actor managers*, he lists among their many faults 'their entire disregard for the value of line and colour'.[38] In the last part of 'On Stage Scenery' Craig not only points to the set as being the main instrument in translating the word and all its scenic suggestiveness, but he does so by indicating a linguistic aspect which was anything but obvious: the reference to line and colour which he repeats verbatim in *The Art of the Theatre*.

All the above marks 'On Stage Scenery' as a text of primary importance in mapping out the genesis and gradual development of Craig's thought and practice. The elements of interest go well beyond these however, and in the last lines of the article Craig poses a question to which he will return in the *Introduction* to the 1905 dialogue: the public. The subject emerges from one of Craig's sudden flashes of inspiration. Theatre (by which he means high-brow theatre) needs to put its house in order because on a different but equally important level Music Hall is growing in strength and quality. To read a 1903 reference to Music Hall as a model of stage behaviour, ten years before Marinetti's *Manifesto del Teatro di Varietà* (Manifesto on Variety Theatre), is emblematic of Craig's extraordinarily fine-honed powers of observation and analysis. Hamlet is suddenly less interesting than Harlequin, he writes, and theatre needs to make up lost ground. To accuse the public of a sudden taste for the vulgar would be a gross failure to grasp the actual state of affairs. It is not the public but the theatre which is at fault, continuing to serve up the same lackluster menu. The English theatre-goers, sophisticated and demanding, take their custom elsewhere.

26 December. 'The Theatre: Trade or Art'

"Episode" five closes an ideal discursive circle, as it were, returning to issues Craig had raised when he started writing for the 'Morning Post'. The title itself, 'The Theatre: Trade or Art' marks how his interests have on the one hand returned to the production aspect, to the theatre as a system predicated on particular linguistic choices but, more basically, a way of considering the "trade" and its practices. At the same time, it reveals that he is again concentrating above all (perhaps exclusively) on the situation in Great Britain. These are all questions introduced in the first of the 1903 articles, introducing Craighian theatre rationale, and which now return to conclude it.

The article revolves around two main subjects: the commercial decline of the theatre and Henry Irving's legacy. The two are distinct but to an extent combined in

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

an organic reflection on the state of the English theatre. The first one ends in a violently polemical attack on the *actor manager*, who shoulders the moral and artistic responsibility for squandering its extraordinary inheritance, reducing it to the transactions of a shopkeeper. *Actor managers*, writes Craig, resemble the decayed nobility who prostitute the dignity of their name and centuries-old lineage by soiling their hands with the corrosive effects of commerce. The market tactics of the *actor manager* are even worse, debasing to the level of goods those which are and should continue to be the monuments of our culture: 'for the best tradition of an art is the estate left us by our ancestors. Our duty is to guard the place carefully, and to preserve all its glories'.[39] He then continues: 'The giants of the theatrical world of the past have erected a monument which these children regard as a toy – something to play with and to pull to pieces'.[40]

Giants and dwarves face to face, then: great masters who have raised the theatrical art into the most solemn and grandiose image of their times, and children out to destroy the same magnificent tradition in the name of their puny and insignificant vanity. This marks the return of a theme from the first 'Morning Post' article: the restoration of the values of a lost tradition – tradition with a capital T and no connection with customary practice which dresses in tradition's robes but is nothing more its decay made concrete. And if tradition is theatre's monument, it will immediately be clear that its most significant, *the* monument of and to the English stage, is Shakespeare, and it is Shakespeare who is being profaned in exactly what way Craig explains as follows. The *actor manager* needs Shakespeare since he rightly represents the greatest force of attraction for the public, but instead of putting himself at the bard's service and staging him in the most honourable way possible, he maintains that his duty is to renew him. The "renewal" of Shakespeare is a blasphemous travesty and resolves itself in the *actor manager*'s placing himself centre-stage. He modifies and modernizes Shakespeare simply to appropriate him and make of him a sound commercial proposition.

Craig's judgment is harsh and drastic, and requires some explanation if it is not to be misunderstood. Used as we are to contemporary rewritings on the director's part, we might take it that Craig is railing against similar procedures in the interests of preserving a formal tradition, generally subsumed under a "respect" for the text (a notion as vague as it is debatable). This is not the case however, in the sense that Craig's bêtes noires, as he has made copiously clear in his articles, are the historical stagings of Shakespeare's plays. It is this tendency, combined with a staging which centres the limelight almost exclusively on the leading actor, which produces an inconsistent, fragmentary and stupidly illustrative Shakespeare. What is required is to return to the organic, unitary source of the texts and construct for them a stage reality which, as he writes in 'On Stage Scenery', is a visual correlative of the poetic intensity of the words and not a reconstruction of the settings of the plot. Authentic Shakespeare then is not that which respects a historically consistent narrative, presumed to exist in the text, nor on the other hand does Craig appear to believe in the rather different type of philology enacted by William Poell when he attempted to recreate the historical conditions not of the events but of the Elizabethan stage,

[39] 'The Theatre: Trade or Art', *The Morning Post* (26 December 1903).
[40] Ibid.

beginning with the stage scenery and the building itself. The authenticity Craig posits is very different: it means travelling through the verbal poetry of Shakespeare and creating a visual poetry able to exalt the "monument" of the word. Two years later, in *The Art of the Theatre*, he will maintain that this monument is so perfect, any attempt to give it adequate scenic embodiment is destined to fail. This is not the case, however, in 1903. At that point the problem with Shakespeare was still one of production: of finding a viable way to stage his texts.

The reference to Shakespeare offers Craig the link to his second subject: Henry Irving and his legacy to English theatre. As Shakespeare is the perfect monument to the Elizabethan age, so Irving is to the modern. Not to grasp this nor draw adequate conclusions leads inevitably, in Craig's opinion, to the decadence and brutalization of the art. We need to ask of course what exactly he means by calling Irving a monument. First of all, he created a model of staging which can be considered perfect, and which he applied principally to Shakespeare's texts (which Craig diligently lists). Irving's settings demonstrated that Shakespeare and vulgarity inhabited different universes. Part of his sublimity lay in embodying poetry without ever prostituting it to facile, banal, or sentimental commercial ends. Craig adds little more than this, giving no details which distinguish Irving's Shakespeare productions from those of other *actor managers*, but a conceptually interesting pattern emerges which sufficiently clarifies his rationale of the art of the theatre he wishes to promote. His statements evince a sharp opposition between two poles: on the one hand, a commercial theatre summarized by the three terms *shop*, *trade* and *vulgarity*; on the other, one with a vocation to art equally expressed by a trinity of terms, *tradition*, *art* and *dignity*. Within the general oppositions exist single coupled antagonists, beginning with *shop* and *tradition*, the latter defining a theatre nurtured by its remote origins, the former a type which obeys the commercial logic of the modern world. The same concept governs the second pair of terms: *trade* as opposed to *art*. The third pair, on the other hand, draws a distinction which seems more ethical than aesthetic: *vulgarity* as opposed to *dignity*. The pattern remains implicit only, but is significant of the sort of conceptual and not just operative differentiation which Craig is beginning to make among discrete theatrical models. He is allowing himself, briefly, to experiment with slippery expressions and conceptual hypotheses devoid of clear definition. At the same time, rather than confining himself to commenting on or condemning the present reality, he is clearly attempting to adumbrate future scenarios for an art he recognizes as being at a crisis point, the destiny and statutes of which he feels the need to redefine.

Irving plays a crucial role in this attempt. He will continue to be a decisive influence behind Craig's aesthetic choices – cf. his surprising reference to the Übermarionette in his 1930 biography, or, many years previously, to the idealization of the Irving model in *The Artists of the Theatre of the Future* – but here the reference is more stringent, possibly indicating that future allusions are more in the nature of reflections of considerations made in 1903. His "monument", then, is the ideal model, 'the point beyond which the art of acting cannot advance'.[41] While an invaluable resource, demonstrating all the possibilities of the art of the theatre, it conversely represents a not inconsiderable problem. If perfection is behind us – but close enough to be perceived by the senses – how to guard against betraying it? This is the question put by

[41] Ibid.

Craig – and, incidentally, the reason he moved from acting to directing – and by the English theatre in general. We have to look to Irving, but also to establish quite what "look to Irving" means. It constitutes the final question not only in 'The Theatre: Trade or Art' but basically in the whole debate running through 1903. Being the pupil of a master, he declares, in a clearly personal reference, does not necessarily mean imitating him, positively or negatively: 'To attempt to surpass Henry Irving by imitating the methods of Henry Irving leads nowhere'.[42] A new, innovative and spontaneous venture should be undertaken. The machine of art can then keep going, transporting the theatre towards the new territories which are its necessary goal. If Irving has arrived at perfection, this does not mean that theatre art has run its course.

It is as if perfection, a concept dear to Craig to the extent of making it the opening subject of 'The Actor and the Übermarionette', had a dual nature. On the one hand it corresponds to all that is most authentic, basic, and defining in the art of the theatre (*tradition*, *art* and *dignity*); on the other, it possesses an, as it were, historical dimension linked to the fact that the history of the arts is the history of their dynamism and mutation while maintaining their origins and principles intact. Craig, who greatly admired the authenticity of the theatres of the East because they remained uncontaminated and solidly anchored to their traditions, is surprisingly Western in this stress on necessary metamorphosis.

Irving, then, is perfect, but we must learn from him how to advance, experimenting the unexperimented and trying the as yet untried. The greatest master is not he who considers himself unsurpassable but he who produces pupils who supersede him, reaching limits which to him were inaccessible. Irving is this type of master. Adapting an image of Walt Whitman's, significantly placed in conclusion to his argument, he defines him a 'teacher of athletes', he whose value is proved by his pupil's ability to overtake him.[43]

The problem is not a question of hierarchy – which of the two, master or pupil, is the greatest – but of the need to explore new and different territories where the master's perfection can flourish: a perfection he reached in his turn by going beyond what tradition had handed down. The problem of Irving's heritage then is how to surpass Irving. His, though, is not individual perfection, as it were – a subjective gift –, but something more, as Craig has stated very clearly: the perfection of acting. There is no "beyond" to this road: it is necessary to look elsewhere. The conclusions to the *Morning Post* articles are extremely interesting. They show Craig's attention gradually focusing on the problematic horizon which will be the fulcrum of his theoretical reflections in *The Art of the Theatre*:

> In following Henry Irving's teaching it is our business not to emulate his style, but from his teaching to evolve a newer style – maybe a new art.

[42] Ibid.

[43] In *Song of Myself* Whitman writes: 'I am the teacher of athletes./He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own./He most honours my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher' (in *Leaves of Grass*, 2 vols, New York, 1919, I, p. 133).