



WHO IS EDWARD GORDON CRAIG?

Educational Resource Package
for Key Stage 5 (16-18 years)

© Christopher Lane BA, B.Ed, M.A.



Exploring Edward Gordon Craig's contribution to our theatrical heritage and examining the impact and the relevance of his work and theories today.

Based on a comprehensive study of key stage 5 drama and theatre studies teachers, there was unanimous confirmation that teaching resources about Edward Gordon Craig were limited when compared with those available for practitioners such as Stanislavski and Brecht. This study also revealed that this lack of a consolidated, comprehensive resource for teaching Craig's work was a deterrent that prevented teachers from actively teaching and exploring Craig in their classrooms in substantive ways. Another hindrance was the belief that Craig was largely a designer

that investigate and explore Craig's work as a designer and his theories on acting and performance. There is also an additional performance assignment that uses newly digitised Craig paintings and woodcuts as the stimulus for creating devised theatre projects. The package also includes a new Edward Gordon Craig *Mind Map* and a comprehensive set of *Timelines* that contextualise his design, directing, publishing and personal lives in one coherent printable document.

This educational resource package, along with the website and online material at www.edwardgordoncraig.co.uk, aims to fill the void in the available resources to teachers at this level. It provides a practical, interactive and physical exploration of the theories and practices of this legendary theatre practitioner.

The package owes its existence to the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, in association with Stevenage Arts Guild, Eton College Library and the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.

Special thanks are owed to Liam Doona, Michael Meredith, Christopher Baugh, Juliet May, Tim Armitage, Mike Glen, aitch:creative, Andy Purves and all those who have provided support throughout the creation of this work.

who did not seem to espouse a coherent approach to acting/performance.

In designing the resource package, it was important to provide an historical context for Craig alongside a dynamic set of lessons/assignments that would firmly entrench Craig in the ethos of twenty-first century theatre-making. In doing this, we have developed interactive, collaborative lessons that explore **Craig as a scenographer** and have also aimed to uncover what we feel are the foundations of **Craig's approach to performance**. In doing this we have been able to marry Craig's theories and approaches with contemporary actor/performance training paradigms. This provides the teacher and their students with a comprehensive introduction to the multi-faceted nature of Edward Gordon Craig's theatrical practices.

This educational resource package provides a general introduction to Craig, the revolutionary theatrical innovator. It is then broken down into two subsections: *Designing the Future of the Theatre* and *The Collaborative and Present Performer*. These subsections contain comprehensive lessons

In consolidating Craig's message, we did not attempt to tailor this package to a particular exam board. We felt it was important to empower the individual teacher to interpret and adapt the information and exercises to their needs and the needs of their students. We also set out to create two project-based assignments (in design and in performance) that allow students to undertake a creative process and that provide teachers with two opportunities to formally assess/evaluate their students. Lastly, we encourage you to explore and experiment with this information... Craig would want it that way.



Table of Contents

1. Edward Gordon Craig The Revolutionary Innovator (Teacher Notes)	03
2. Designing the Future of the Theatre (Teacher Notes)	05
3. Exploration 1 – Craig and the Designer of the Future	08
4. The Collaborative and Present Performer (Teacher Notes).....	11
5. Exploration 2 – Craig and the Performer of the Future (Parts 1 & 2)	14
6. Exploration 3 – Craig and the Theatre Maker of the Future	18

Appendices

Appendix A:

Finding the Dramatic from a Visual Text (Student Assignment)	20
--	----

Appendix B:

Visual Resources for Exploration 1	22
--	----

Appendix C:

Visual Resources for Exploration 3	29
--	----

Appendix D:

The Gordon Craig Timelines	32
----------------------------------	----

Appendix E:

The Gordon Craig Mind Map.....	32
--------------------------------	----

Appendix F:

Gordon Craig's Influence.....	33
-------------------------------	----



1. Edward Gordon Craig: The Revolutionary Innovator

Edward Gordon Craig was a revolutionary theatre practitioner who had a wide-reaching influence on the prevailing thinking and theories of the early twentieth century theatre. He also created a body of work that, was astonishing in its comprehensive scope and multifaceted nature.

Craig was born in *Stevenage, United Kingdom* in 1872 to *Ellen Terry*, the celebrated actress, and architect *Edward William Godwin*. At the age of 16 he was baptised Edward Henry Gordon and he took the surname Craig by deed poll (the legal process of changing your name) at the age of 21.

He began his life in the theatre by shadowing his mother as she worked with the legendary actor-manager *Henry Irving* at the Lyceum Theatre in London. Craig went on to work as an actor himself in Henry Irving's company but he took more to design work and studied the art of the woodcut under James Pryde and William Nicholson. In 1897 he left the company, and acting, to pursue his artistic/theatrical interests.

These screens shifted scenic design from the Realistic/Pictorial to Architectonic/Metaphoric environments. For Craig theatre spaces were not meant to be the same as 'real' spaces. He believed the theatrical space was meant to shape and inform the dramatic purpose of the story (something to which 'real' spaces are impartial). The dramatic space was to carry meaning, and to architectonically explore and express the emotional nature of the dramatic situation; to communicate its dramatic intent. **Craig's screens did this by concealing and revealing and by putting performers into dynamic spatial relationships with other performers, and the unfolding drama.**

In tandem with the design ethos Craig had established, he also revolutionised the art of theatrical lighting. Craig treated lighting as

"To make its pulse beat faster and more rhythmically and more vigorously, to discover and define once and for all the elemental forms and methods which are the bases and key-stones of the finest Theatre Art and to inspire a new Theatre into being."

A Living Theatre, 1913

It is for his work as a designer Craig is potentially best known. He reviled *Realism* (in both design and performance) and was the champion of evocative, metaphoric and kinetic scenic environments. Craig built elaborate stage models and used the woodcutting skills he learned to create model figures for these stage environments. Craig's movable screens became his most enduring scenographic achievement and revolutionized the way that scenic environments were conceptualised.

an essential instrument of storytelling and used light to reveal and establish forms. For Craig, light also created three-dimensionality that supported the architectural objectives of his scenographic environments. Craig's use of lighting, like *Appia's*, was radical in that it set out to create space, not simply illuminate objects and people. **For Craig, light was essential in creating the mood, the environment, and the world of the story being told.** This in turn made it possible to move an audience, to make them *feel*.



Craig's other notable innovation was that of the *Über-Marionette* and the controversy that has surrounded his early call to rid the stage of actors in favour of large puppets. He believed that these marionettes would be able to exist in a pure world of movement and silent language, free of an ego, which Craig clearly believed was corrupting actors and the theatre's ability to connect authentically and spiritually with an audience. Craig's first writings on the Über Marionette appeared in his monthly magazine *The Mask*, and this one idea, of replacing actors with puppets still confounds people today. Craig never realised this theatrical hypothesis and thus conjecture abounds as to what he actually meant to achieve by this interesting and ideological perspective.

It is on this note that the information in this resource package aims to step beyond what we know concretely of Craig's work. In researching his views on actors, it becomes apparent that, whilst he saw transcendence in performance being achieved through the Über-Marionette, he believed that actors had a prominent and necessary place in the theatre. To this end, in 1913, Craig finally opened his school for actors and designers at the *Arena Goldoni* in Florence, Italy. Had the school not been forced to close in late 1914 as a result of the onset of WWI, we would most certainly have seen the development and solidification of the 'Craigian' approach to actor training. With that said, there is a substantial amount of evidence supporting Craig's thinking on the subject. Through the prospectus, school rules and accounts from students during the short life of the Arena Goldoni one can piece together a credible understanding of what Craig envisioned for the actors under his tutelage.

This, combined with his writing on his experiences with *Stanislavski and Hamlet in 1912*, and his work on Ibsen's *The Crown Pretenders* in Copenhagen in 1926 (amongst other documents), rounds out a belief system that sets Edward Gordon Craig as a founding father of modern drama school training.

With all that said, **it is likely Craig's magazine, *The Mask*, which was truly his most profound legacy.** *The Mask* was a monthly publication/magazine (1908- 1929) that by Craig's own admission was "... the first and only serious journal... devoted to the art of the theatre." *The Mask* served Craig primarily as a vehicle to espouse and disseminate his vision of the theatre of the future. However, it was also a place where leading practitioners contributed their musings as well. Whilst Craig had moderate success as a director and theatre-maker, he had an astonishing reach across the theatre communities in England, throughout Europe, Russia, and North America as a result of *The Mask*. **This publication is how Craig embedded his ideas about scenography, lighting and performance as foundational principles in the zeitgeist of early 20th century theatre. Through *The Mask* he paved the way for the theatre that we know today, over one hundred years later.**



2. Designing the Future of the Theatre

Edward Gordon Craig was a big ideas man. In saying this, one might conclude that his work was elaborate, showy and busy. However, Craig's big ideas were intertwined with creating feeling within an audience and for capturing the essence of a story, be it a play, opera, drama or other theatrical genre.

With this in mind, Craig's 'big ideas' meant that he based his work on simplicity and essential dramatic and scenic requirements. In doing this he challenged his audiences and performers to use their imaginations in ways that were completely unprecedented in the theatre at the turn of the twentieth century. Actors and audiences were to participate in a 'theatrical conversation' together and be moved by the drama, not merely entertained by it.

Craig was a visual artist as well as a theatre-maker and he therefore sketched, carved and printed many designs for the productions on which he worked. ([See online media gallery](#)). He also worked with scale models of his scenic environments, complete with carved wood figures for placement in the scene. From his drawings and models we gain a clear understanding of the scale on which Craig was keen to work. He was also a prolific advocate for this work and

"Actor and scene being one, they are to be kept as one before us, or we shall be looking at two things and so lose the value of both. Their value lies in being one."

Craig's design work was anchored to the following key principles:

1. **Keep the design simple and essential.**
2. **Visual poetics are essential to the creation of the drama; the essence of the story overrides a playwright's notes about location, time-period, etc. The poetic/metaphoric/symbolic approach is superior to the realistic/pictorial approach.**
3. **Build a scene around a single motif/property thus giving it great significance (often a specific piece of furniture, costume or symbol)**
4. **Use bold, 3D architecture... not flat painted sceneries.**
5. **Employ the use of straight lines and play with scale, high contrast and shadows.**
6. **Lighting is essential to the design and communication of the story.**

his publications and notes are also excellent resources for uncovering Craig's design agenda.

He often created a proscenium of above average width (creating a letterbox view for the audience) and developed what he referred to as a kinetic stage; one that could move and reform and, therefore, was able to create many scenic configurations from a basic set of building blocks. Craig developed and patented a set of moving white/grey screens that would transform the stage by virtue of their mobility and relying on lighting to change the mood of the production. Mention should be made that he used these screens as the foundation for the set design for his production of *Hamlet* with Stanislavsky at the Moscow Arts Theatre, and that W.B. Yeats commissioned a set of them from Craig for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin during his tenure there as artistic director.



Moving screens were the pre-cursor to a more dynamic vision Craig had for scenic design. In developing the ethos of a kinetic stage, Craig was working towards creating a scenic environment that could shift and move independently of the use of people; an *Architectonic* environment that would require actors to react authentically to the ever-changing environments in his productions. He envisioned what we would now understand to be a mechanical/motorized stage constructed of sections or blocks that could be raised and lowered in order to change the location of the scene and the feeling that the scene created (in tandem with the lighting).

One cannot talk about Edward Gordon Craig without acknowledging that he, in addition to pioneers like *Adolphe Appia*, changed our understanding of theatrical lighting design. Craig credits the 'limelight men of the Lyceum Theatre' for giving him the stimulus to think about lighting differently in his youth. Craig believed that one needed to create environments with light, and that lighting was essential in defining the narrative of the drama; it needed to be more than a static tool to illuminate a playing space. He removed the conventional footlights from his stages and instead lit his productions from the sides of the stage and from above. In doing this Craig changed the atmosphere of his productions and shadows became a design element that he used to great effect. In understanding and exploiting the use

of electric light in theatres, Craig not only changed the visual appearance of the theatrical experience but also disrupted the purely linear approach to storytelling. He created space for the drama to be episodic in nature and this allowed for concepts like flashbacks to emerge as a storytelling tools. All one needs to do is look to his *drawings* and prints to see this in *action*.

Craig also used coloured lighting as a means to create atmosphere and meaning throughout a production. When colours were projected onto his screens and large architectural sets he was able to create environments that moved audiences and actors alike. **This combination of dynamic, alternative lighting choices and simple, architectural sets revolutionised the way theatre-makers thought about scenic design.** In being on the cutting edge of using electric lights in theatres, Craig developed ideas, designs and productions that catapulted the theatre towards a design ethos that continues to resonate even more than a hundred years after he began exploring and developing them.

In order to get a better sense of Craig's design ideas, and more importantly how they have become part of our current theatre practice, one does not need to look very far. Taking the stage adaptation of *The Lord of The Rings* as an example we see an architectonic set in action. We also witness the realisation of an idea Craig could only have dreamt of at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the YouTube videos below, pay particular attention to the stage floor itself and how it is built in sections. Each section rises and lowers in order to create the epic world of Middle Earth. A moving, dynamic floor, combined with energetic, atmospheric lighting not only changes the locations in the play but also the feeling of the theatrical space. Also, note the massive scale of the staging and how the show's creative team used the height of the space and not just the stage level to tell the story.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e_CzZTRXec

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ngg7wcbwEU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxcjfPQ9aDs#t=64.88847659>

There are several other theatrical productions that have used Craigian design methodologies to stunning effect in recent years. The National Theatre's *War Horse* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owIpAD5NyHU>) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYDFdy3IZBM>) are both excellent examples of simple scenographic environments that are innately kinetic and manipulated by light to create astonishing, visceral environments for both the actors and the audience. Additionally, Glyndebourne's 2016 production of the opera *Beatrice and Benedict* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dN6lXiYvE>) was a striking example of a contemporary set design using white/grey boxes; clearly an adaptation of Craig's original kinetic stage design ideas whether intentional or not. This production also made brilliant use of movement, and simple, monochrome lighting to create a visually compelling production.



It can also be said that Craig is a likely forefather of immersive theatre and companies like Punchdrunk. As does Punchdrunk, Craig believed that the audience needed to be immersed in the world of the drama. Many of Craig's works also required a huge scale and an environment bigger than the one that a conventional theatre would allow, as do *Punchdrunk's productions*.

Above all else, Craig believed that theatre needed to be harmonious. In his eyes, the movement/choreography of the performers, the lighting, and physical design and the musical orchestrations and soundscapes all needed to support each other and work together to **create a unified whole**. He believed that if this could be achieved one would raise the imaginative stakes for the audiences and the performers alike. In doing this we would finally embark on a theatrical journey that would not only change the way people saw theatre but also change the theatre itself. It is safe to say he was correct.



3. Exploration 1: Craig and the Designer of the Future

This exploration is designed to get your students working with an architectural theatrical space through the building of a model for a specific scene in a play (as Craig did). Additionally, the element of lighting is explored and provides the students the opportunity to literally shine light on their models and see how they can change the dramatic environment through changing colour, shadows, angles and lighting positions. The resources required for this exploration are listed below.

Resources:

- Architectural objects that can stand on their own and be wrapped/covered in white or light coloured paper (i.e. Cereal boxes, other food boxes, cans, box files and other objects of various shapes and sizes)
- White paper: A4 or larger if you can get it. This will be used to cover the architectural objects that they collect to make them white and 'Craigian'.
- Transparent tape and/or glue for fixing the white paper to the architectural objects
- A Proscenium viewing portal: create a proscenium arch which you can make from fabric, wood, cardboard or anything that allows you to have a stage area and an audience area. This is not meant to be life sized but a of a scale that will allow you to easily see the sets that will be made from the architectural objects mentioned about. (100cm x 50cm x 50cm is suggested) It might be that the teacher constructs this proscenium on behalf of the students before Exploration 1 is undertaken.
- Table (4'x6'): can be used as the floor of your stage for the models (or anything else that you think suitable)
- A variety of LED torches or mobile phone torches. Free colour gel swatches can be requested from [Stage Electrics](#).
- Human Figures: action figures, Lego figures, small artist's mannequins or something similar. The size of the human figure will change the scale of the scenographic environment and can be a good point of conversation around the effectiveness of the design.
- Any motifs: single items of interest that may or may not be added to the scenic design (ie: chair, table or other item that relates to the specific scene being created).
- Craig images for discussion/ stimulation ([Appendix B](#)) A teaching space that can be completely (or reasonably) dark when the lights are turned out. This is necessary for the sharing process.
- Music of the students' choosing for each presentation.

This section will be built around designing a set for a scene (or whole play if you feel ambitious) that your students have studied or are studying. It is important that they have a solid grasp of the play as a whole before they begin. You can either have them choose the scene themselves, or you can choose a scene for them and part of the sharing process can be to examine how one scene can have many different design possibilities even when all of the scenographic building blocks are similar. Once you have determined the play that you will work with, take your students through the following exploration. It is suggested that students work in groupings of *no more* than four. It is also a good idea to explain the nature of the assignment ahead of time to the students so that they can start to compile the above-mentioned resources in the classroom/studio.

"What is painted
in ancient sceneries
I paint with light:
there is no paint
at all used."

Scene, 1923



Part A

1. Through either a lecture style presentation or through a research based endeavor teach your students about Edward Gordon Craig's design ethos and share with them the photographic exemplars that can be found in Appendix B, pages 22-28
2. Have your students design (by way of using architectural objects they have access to in your classroom, and a simple, moveable light source) simple scenographic environments for the following:
 - A space for two characters to share a secret
 - A space to show that one character is more important than another
 - A space for two characters to have an argument
 - A space for a celebration
3. Invite your students to discuss the choices and thought processes behind their designs and steer the conversations around how abstract forms become figurative in the context of dramatic action and development.

Part B

1. Next, introduce the play and/or scene that you will use as the basis for this project
2. Have each group read the scene and re-examine the play and determine the themes and possible motifs that occur throughout. Considering that it will be the same play for the entire class it might be worth sharing each group's findings with the class. This could also be done as a whole class discussion if time is of the essence.
3. Once the above information has been discussed each group should decide on the *essential elements* of the setting that need to be in place to tell the story.
4. Next, using Craig's design ethos as their benchmark, tell them that they will be designing a set for the abovementioned play/scene and that they will be constrained by the following:
 - They will be bound by a white/neutral coloured set
 - They will have to use architectural forms to create a three-dimensional space for the performance and **will not** be permitted to create a literal set/environment.
 - They will create this design in three dimensions using the resources listed above.
 - Once built they will light the space and share their design with the class in a model showing.
5. They can add a musical underscoring to the presentation to enhance the dramatic impact of the design they have created.
6. They will need to explain their reasons for making the decisions they did and talk about how these decisions relate to both the play and Craig. Additionally, they can submit these findings in a written document.
5. Have the groups make a drawing/sketch of their design to use as a template for building the model.
6. Before the physical construction of the set begins it is important to decide whether the groups will share a common proscenium arch in which to present their models, or if each group will create their own. If a common proscenium is decided upon take some time with the groups to decide on its dimensions and how you will construct it (materials, colour etc.). It is recommended that the proscenium be at least one meter wide and fifty centimetres in height and that the depth of the 'stage' is at least fifty centimetres as well. (*The above applies unless the teacher builds this aspect of the assignment in advance*)
7. Have your students compile their resources and construct their set. Remind them that in the spirit of Craig (and all professional designers) that there must be human figures in their designs as well.
8. Once their designs have been completed have each group turn to the lighting aspect of the project. With this said, they should have been thinking of the lighting



of the set throughout this design process, as the two work in tandem with each other from the outset.

9. Using lighting gels and torches and/or mobile phone lights have the students experiment with adding light to their model.
10. It is suggested that an introduction to the *colour wheel and colour theory* be presented at this stage. This does not have to be a thorough lesson but should at least serve to remind them of the difference between warm and cold colours and how colours can evoke meaning when used effectively.
11. Take an opportunity to remind each group that the lighting should evoke the spirit of the play and the scene and help move the audience and create an atmosphere that serves the story. Once they have explored the lighting they should decide on a final lighting design for their model.
12. When the models have been completed and the lighting designs have been determined, have the groups present their models to the class using the proscenium arch as the viewing portal for the audience. They should show the design to the class complete with their lighting and human figures (and music if included) while they discuss how they arrived at their respective designs and how the design serves the story they are telling.

Extension Activities/Adaptations:

- Create the scenic design digitally using *Sketch Up* or another computer graphics programme.
- Build the design in human scale on a stage if you have the resources (flats, rostra, wooden risers and boxes, lighting rig). This could be undertaken as an entire class if desired.
- Find a site around your school or in your community and use that as the scenographic environment and stage a scene there.
- Be sure to use the architecture to help tell your story. The lighting aspect of the project may have to be set aside if you are using an outdoor space.



4. The Collaborative and Present Performer

It is no secret that Edward Gordon Craig had strong opinions about actors. He is probably most remembered for his notable belief that actors should be replaced by the Über-Marionette (Craig's visionary large-scale puppet). This belief, however, is far from the reality of Craig's view on acting. By 1912, Craig had stated publicly that the Über-Marionette was only a metaphor and that he had never believed that the actor should be replaced altogether. It seems his actions the following year support this statement more than any words could.

“Today they impersonate and interpret; tomorrow they must represent and interpret; and the third day they must create – by this means, style may return.”

‘The Actor and the Über-Marionette’, On the Art of the Theatre, 1911

In 1913, after years of thought and planning, Craig opened opened The School for the Art of the Theatre at *The Arena Goldoni* in Florence Italy.

This was the culmination of a dream that Craig had long held. The Arena Goldoni was to act not only as a collaborative creative workshop for professional theatre makers, but was also to be a holistic theatrical training ground for young performers/practitioners. Throughout his time directing and producing theatre in the first part of the new century, Craig was consistently dismayed at the lack of sensitivity actors had when working within his theatrical conventions. He believed the only way forward was to provide actors with a training programme that would ground them in all aspects of theatre making and transform them into proper theatre artists who would be multi-disciplinary in their approach to theatre making.

ÜM =
ACTOR + FIRE
– EGO

To fully understand why Craig's perspective on the actor was a departure from the predominant thinking of the time it is best to be familiar with concepts of Realism and Naturalism as theatrical and performance conventions. A good, quick reference guide can be found here: [A Summary of Realism and Naturalism](#). It is also imperative to remember that Craig and his contemporaries were challenging the need for the 'actor' and advancing the notion of the 'performer' and non-narrative performance. Experimental dance, abstract sculpture and other post-textual art forms were also emerging and helping to shape the views of Craig and his kind.

If we look to the *Über-Marionette* we can find a clear sense of what Craig valued most in performance work. Craig famously stated that the Über-Marionette was equal to the actor, plus fire minus Ego.



It is from this statement that we can arrive at the fundamental principle underlining Craig's philosophy on acting. Being *present* is the fundamental tenet of modern actor training. As *presence* essentially side-lines the ego and puts the actor's focus solidly on the collaborative work that he/she is engaged in. If Craig's ultimate actor was a passionate performer who could leave his/her own ego at the door and fully engage in the process of storytelling, then it seems logical to conclude that he was seeking out performers who were less concerned with themselves and driven more by the desire that comes from living in and for the theatrical experience: something Craig believed was inclusive of the audience as well.

The school at the Arena Goldoni only lasted until August of 1914 (due to the start of WWI) but the syllabus, and curriculum tell us a great deal about the kind of training Craig wanted for his students. The students (who would be made up of a select few) would be trained in the following areas: gymnastics, music, voice training, movement training, scene design and painting, fencing, dancing, mimo-drama, improvisation, lighting theory, history of the theatre, marionette (design, making and performing), stage model making, and stage management.

Over a hundred years later, one might expect to see the same list (with some updated terminology) in the prospectus of a contemporary theatre training course.

Jacques Copeau, the founder of the Theatre du Vieux-Colombier (a theatre company and actor training school in Paris), regularly visited the Arena Goldoni before its closure. Copeau actively adopted the fundamentals of Craig's approaches within his own school in 1921. It was from this theatrical training that the legendary theatre maker and teacher, *Michel St. Denis* emerged. It has been argued that the training programme that St. Denis implemented at the *London Theatre Studio* in 1936 was a system that Craig would have strongly supported and seen as a solid evolution of his work at the Arena Goldoni.

The guiding tenets of Craig's actor-training model are as follows:

- Harmony
- Vitality
- Authenticity
- Passion
- Exploration
- Honesty, modesty and open mindedness

Craig's acting philosophy was built on the following core trainings:

- Movement
- Improvisation
- Imagination
- Voice

Movement, and the need for the actor's body to be fundamentally free and communicative were at the heart of the training; authentic body language seems to have been a paramount concern for him (although it wasn't phrased like that). Craig was opposed to the actors thinking their way into the characters and thus opposed the principles inherent in Stanislavski's 'Method'.

Without knowing it, Craig was espousing a performance and movement paradigm that is now clearly supported through somatic paradigms like *Laban*, *Viewpoints*, *Alba Emoting*, and yoga, and by scientific enquiry in the fields of neuroscience and energy medicines. Voice was treated separately and he was clear that words were less important than the sound the performer could make and possible soundscapes that could be created. **Words needed to come from a body that was engaged and connected otherwise they were not worth hearing.** He also believed in the necessity for good improvisation skills, as this was needed so that the actors could collaborate well with each other, and with the scenic environments they were working in.



Whilst imagination isn't a course of study per se, it is a fundamental aspect of good actor training, especially in a Craigian environment. **In light of the metaphoric and minimalist spaces Craig created, having performers that could harness their imaginative powers was essential to creating harmonious, vital and coherent stories.** If the actors could see the intricacies of the environments they were inhabiting, then the audience was likely to see them too: the old adage 'seeing is believing' was never more appropriate.

The tasks in **Exploration 2 – Craig and the Performer of the Future (Parts A & B)** all embody the principles of a Craigian acting philosophy. It warrants mentioning that Craig was a pioneer in this approach to acting but seeing as his school was so short lived we need to look beyond Craig to contemporary theatre practitioners to find exercises that bear Craigian hallmarks. The following are solid examples of exercises that move students into a state of presence and into a kinesthetic interaction with their immediate environments.

Exploration 3 – Craig and the Theatre Maker of the Future challenges your students to use Craig's most dynamic visual offerings and create pieces of devised theatre from them. This exploration will provide your students with the opportunity to combine all that they have learned about Craig and create an original 'Craigian' inspired performance.

Note: Whenever possible you will be directed to resources that will help you flesh out this work if you choose to move beyond the parameters of this resource package and explore these techniques in more detail.



5. Exploration 2: Craig and the Performer of the Future

Part A: Spine Explorations

This exercise can be done as a stand-alone session or as a warm up before sessions. It can last from 10 minutes to 40 minutes depending on time and the focus of your students (it is recommended that you provide 20 – 30 minutes for the student's first experience with this exercise). Essentially this exercise gives the students the opportunity to experience a state of presence and also ensures that they are properly warmed up. (*This activity is adapted from Lorna Marshall's Playtime for Hips as described in her book [The Body Speaks](#)*)

"I ask only for the liberation of the actor that he may develop his own powers, and cease from being the marionette of the playwright."

Letter to Ellen Terry 1917

Instructions:

1. Have students find a spot on the floor where they can lie down on their backs in a supine position. They should have enough space around them that they are not touching any of the other students.
2. Have them *close their eyes* and have them focus on their breath.
3. Talk them through a 'Box-Breathing' cycle (inhale for five seconds, hold for three seconds, exhale for five seconds, hold for three seconds, inhale... repeat). It is best to establish this kind of breathing pattern from the beginning as it relaxes the student and focuses them. I'd work on this breathing pattern for at least three minutes... and encourage them with exhale to let their bodies sink/relax into the floor.
4. Once you feel your students are properly relaxed and focused, have them take their attention to the bottom their spine (found at their tail bone and not in the small of their backs). Have them choose a colour and then have them pull the colour up their spine to the top (in their heads between their ears and behind their eyes). When they have completely painted their spine, have them follow the spine back down to their hips.
5. Have them focus on the lower portion of their spine (section from tail bone to belly button) and have them imagine that that portion of their spine begins to glow and warm up and energise that area of their body. Tell them to let the lower portion of their spine lead them and move them.
6. At this point you need to remind them that this is a physical and not an intellectual activity. The idea is to let the hips, buttocks and lower abdomen lead the body. Whatever and wherever that area of the body wants to do and go is fair play. This movement may take them onto their fronts, into kneeling/standing positions and then back to the floor. The rest of the body should follow as the hips lead the way. They participant must silence the voice in the head and just follow the body. If it feels awkward, silly, uncomfortable, scary then they are moving in the right direction. Start with small movements and let them grow. It is, at the end of the day, a way to personally stretch the body so they need to listen to their body and respond accordingly. Encourage them to work slowly so that they can accurately hear the body's wants and needs.



7. Once you have spent a reasonable amount of time (between five and ten minutes) having them explore the lower body, have them imagine the glowing spine energy shifting from their pelvis up into the top of their spine (from the shoulder blade region up into the head). Have them now listen to this area of the body and let this area (shoulders, chest, neck, head) lead. Again, they are to listen and respond. If they find that their minds wander they can focus on the breath or back into the area of the body that is in the lead.
8. Once you have spent a reasonable amount of time having them explore the top part of the spine, have them extend the glowing energy throughout the length of their spine, have it extend down the bones of each arm and into the bones of each leg and encourage them to let whichever part of the body that wants to lead, lead. Encourage them to follow their bodies and remind them that they do not have to be on their backs the entire time. They can move throughout the different levels that the body can move through continually during this exercise.
9. Throughout this exercise the students' **eyes should remain closed.**
10. Once you have determined that the students are both suitably warmed up and in a good focused headspace you can have them return to the prone/supine position they started in. Once on the floor, have them calm the body and return to a focus on the breath. Once they have settled you can have them return to the room by slowly opening their eyes and sitting up.
11. It is useful to ask them for feedback once everyone is sitting and 'back in the room'. Simply asking them to tell you about their experience will give you a good sense of who was able to lose themselves in the exercise and who couldn't get out of their head. It is important to note that sometimes people fall asleep. Don't worry. Let it happen if it does. Also, it is best to do this for at least 20- 30 minutes to get the full benefit of the exercise. Be sure **NOT** to tell the students in advance how long you'll be doing the activity. It is a sign of the successful execution of the work, and the student achieving a sense of presence if, when you ask them how long they were doing it for they suggest a length of time that is considerably shorter than the amount of time they were actually working. Success all around if you lead them for 30 minutes and they think it was only 10 minutes.
12. It is worth reminding the students that Craig wanted actors with agile, physically expressive bodies and who were without EGO. This exercise creates a very personal warm-up for the actor. Also, your EGO can't drive you and your work/decisions if you are present. This exercise not only gives you first-hand experience with the state of being present but also, over time, helps you to find that state of presence more quickly and easily.



Part B: The Performer is the Architecture

Note: Before starting it is important to remember as we move forward that the following definition is important: A **TEXT** is anything that you can read, and from which you can get information. By this reasoning, music, scripts, lighting, architecture, temperature, sounds, all types of visual arts, etc., are texts. To this end, you can advance this activity by moving students to different spaces around your school and have them let an unfamiliar architecture move them (ie: gymnasium, art classroom, cafeteria etc.).

This exercise is designed to get the students to play in an improvisational and spontaneous way with the architecture of the studio/room in which you are working. It also trains them over time to listen and respond to different texts both physically and vocally. This can be done as a stand-alone exercise or can be married to the Spine Explorations detailed above and used an exploration of space that follows on from an exploration of the body.

1. Have your students find a space in the room and state of presence (through any exercise possible... the Spine Explorations are a good way to do this). Whether standing or sitting have them silently study the studio/room that you are in. Direct them to study the details of the room (big and small) and take in as much as they can. As they do this over the next two - five minutes, direct their attention to the following aspects of the room in any order that seems relevant (but be sure to cover all of them):

- Lines (straight, curved, diagonal, zig zag, swirls)
- Light (from areas of extreme brightness to areas of extreme darkness and all in between)
- Textures (rough, smooth, sharp, bumpy, soft, fuzzy, sandy, scaly, silky, prickly, etc.)
- Shapes (round, angular, spherical, rectangular, cubes, ovals, amoebic, organic, inorganic, etc.)
- Colour (vibrant, bland, neutral, monochrome, warm, cold)

NOTE: It is worth mentioning here that the students will need to stop the critical voices in their heads and/or do their best to tune them out. Their personal critic (EGO) has no place in this work. If they find themselves looking at others, telling themselves that this is stupid, feeling like they can't do it, laughing at the activity, talking to classmates, being limited physically then they are letting their EGOS drive them and not their innate, creative impulses. If it feels scary, uncertain, silly, or if they have thoughts like: 'I can't believe I'm actually doing this', then they are doing this correctly. Lean into the discomfort/awkwardness and good results will come.

- Space (open, full, natural vs. man-made)
 - Items like: the flooring, ceilings, tiles, air vents, lighting, paint colours, drapes, props and other set pieces that might be present. All of these provide good architectural starting places for the student's explorations.
2. Once you have given them a chance to take the room in (and look at it differently) have them begin to walk around the space. It is wise to have them always move to the empty spaces and to move through the centre of the room to a peripheral of the space and then change direction and pass through the centre (or central area) again, and so on. This approach avoids the 'circling herd' reality that often happens when students are asked to physically explore a space. **Be sure to tell them that they are in control of where they go and how they get there.** Get them to settle into this for long enough so that they can become present in the work.
3. Once they are settled into this walking exploration direct them to shift their focus and to let the room move them. They are no longer responsible for their movement, the room is. Their job is to let their earlier 'architectural' discoveries lead them and their movement. The specific pieces of architecture determine their tempo, levels, shapes, paths (straight lines or curves) and their expansiveness or contractedness. The students should let the architecture transform them and move them.



4. Encourage them to work with the aspects of the architecture that come into their view and shift them up regularly. Make sure that as the teacher you constantly remind them to let the room move them. They are not to make the decisions, the room is. It is worth noting with them afterwards that this practice of letting the 'text' move them is essential for present, focused and EGO-less performance: "Don't move the text, let the Text MOVE YOU" is the most essential acting lesson that they can take away with them.
5. This exploration of the room should last anywhere from 15 minutes to 40 depending on the time you have. It is essential that they work without speaking and with only the teacher side-coaching being the vocal presence in the room. Again, as with the Spine Explorations, you need to invest time in the activity so that they can get out of their heads and into their bodies. Time should fly for them if they are doing this correctly.
6. Side coaching notes for the teacher can include:
 - Remember to always move into the empty spaces
 - Feel free to explore and play with a variety of levels
 - Feel free to explore and play with a variety of shapes
 - Whatever the room tells you to do, do it, don't judge, DO!
 - Play, feel silly, and dance with the room.
 - The only wrong way to do this is to resist it.
 - Don't move the room. Let the room MOVE YOU!
7. As an extension activity, you can add in the voice to this exploration. As they let the room move them, have it extend to their voices as well. Have them allow the pieces of architecture to move them physically and vocally. What sounds do the specific architectural pieces create in them? Encourage, through side coaching, an exploration of volume, tone, rhythm, smoothness, staccato, tempo etc.. Be certain that this 'voicing of the architecture' emanates from the body and isn't something that they are 'putting on'. Remind them that in the same way the room moves their bodies, it also moves their voices: They don't get to decide the sounds that they make... the room does. Abandoning verbal language in favour of sounds is a wise practice for this exercise.
8. A caveat for teachers. It is highly recommended that once the session is started DO NOT single any student out during the exploration process. It is recommended that you approach an individual student who is having difficulty or missing the point and quietly encourage them, or treat the group as a collective and correct the 'problematic' behaviour by positively side-coaching the group as a whole. Centring an individual student out (even if the intention is good) will drive all of the students back into the protective safety of their EGO's and will, to a greater or lesser degree, stop them from getting the most from the exercise. Creating a space where students can be vulnerable enough to play by themselves in the presence of others is essential for this exercise, and the Spine Exploration above, to be successful.
9. Once the students have had a good physical exploration of the room you can bring them back to stillness (either standing, lying or both). Have them close their eyes and just take their attention back to their breathing. Once the energy of the room has settled, have them open their eyes and 'come back to the room'. As in the exercise above, ask them to tell you about their explorations and let the discussion of the work start there.

Note: If this style of work is of interest, it is recommended that you read *The Viewpoints Book* by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. It is a comprehensive actor-training paradigm grounded in the same fundamental principles that seem to be inherent in Craig's work. It is very accessible and can be adapted to suit a variety of academic expectations in a drama classroom.



6. Exploration 3: Craig and the Theatre Maker of the Future

This exploration provides your students with an opportunity to combine their learning on Craig's scenographic and acting approaches in a devised project. The 'texts' that will be used are selections from Craig's archive of paintings and woodcuts that we believe are rich stimuli for discussion and deconstruction.

It is recommended that your students have at least one class session to devise this project with a sharing to be had in a separate session.

However, you could have them do a 'light' version of the exploration in a single session if that is all the time that you can permit. If you are going to work with a simplified version of the work (and you will likely know in which way to best simplify it for your students) it is recommended to focus the outcome on the performative/actor centred aspects of the project and leave the scenic aspects out of the equation.

This activity works best in groups of approximately five students. If you have a small class (ten students or under), it is possible to do this as a large group activity. If that is the case, it is possible for the teacher to be part of the devising process functioning as an 'outside eye' so that the creative process can be kept on track.

Embodied Art:

1. In a Socratic way, review with your students the fundamentals of Craig's approach to theatre and acting from the first two sessions. Put the notes on a board, chart paper and keep your review available for the students to see throughout this process.
2. Explain to the students that this final exploration/experiment is an opportunity for them to test the theories of Edward Gordon Craig in a holistic way and that his ideas should be evident in their work and that they will have to be able to talk about their work in 'Craigian' terminology (this can be done by way of a written assignment or via a group discussion when the work is shared).
3. Hand out the document in **Appendix A** called '**Finding the Dramatic from a Visual Text**' which outlines the assignment. Talk them through the process. When you have finished this divide them up into groups and have the groups gather in various parts of the studio/room.
4. In whatever way works best for you, distribute the paintings/woodcuts to the devising groups and have them get started on their 'deconstructions'.
5. Remind students of the time limits on the project (determined by you based on your class schedules, students, academic calendar etc). You will likely have to work as an outside eye at times and keep them in a state of forward momentum.

By way of resources you can make this as simple or as detailed as you and your students would like, but it is recommended that 'Elegant Simplicity' be an anchor in the work as this is most in keeping with Craig and the ethos of his theatre making. You will need to make copies of **Appendix A: Finding the Dramatic in a Visual Text page 20-21**, and will also need to have high quality printed colour copies of the digitised images of Craig's artwork (**Appendix C pages 29-31**) for the students to work from. We'd suggest that you print enough copies so that each group can work from a different painting/woodcut (text). Conversely, if you want to draw attention to how one piece of art can create multiple interpretations have the different groups all work from the same text.

"But what is that experiment for?... It is for the sake of experiment; it is in order to find out, and know more than others. And we come across such things everyday when making our experiments."

'Thoroughness in Theatre', *The Theatre Advancing*, 1919



6. When they have finished their devised pieces, gather the groups for a sharing of the work (the formality of this part of the process is up to you). There should be a discussion of the individual presentations with the whole group either after each piece or once they have all been performed

and the students should be encouraged to discuss how they see evidence of Edward Gordon Craig's theories and ideas in the work. These projects can be evaluated and assessed, via different exam board criteria, by the teacher and students.

Caveats and Other Interesting Tidbits:

- a. As Craig says **“Pooh, pooh nothing until you’ve tested it.”**
- b. **First impressions** are important... don't diverge too far from them.
- c. As Craig says: “Simplify the possibilities of the drama”.... **Keep it Simple!**
- d. Make sure that Unity and Harmony underpin the stage pictures/action you create.
- e. Capture the **Spirit of the Text...** Do not reproduce it literally



APPENDIX A:

FINDING THE DRAMATIC FROM A VISUAL TEXT

This assignment asks you to deconstruct a visual text by Edward Gordon Craig. You will have to harness the spirit and visual aspects of the work and turn it into a dramatic performance of approximately five minutes. This performance must incorporate movement, voice (sounds and soundscapes, not words) and appropriate scenographic elements/techniques from your study of Edward Gordon Craig. In order to do this, you will have to deconstruct the visual text provided to you so that you can create/generate compositional material with which to build your performance.

It is important to remember that devising an original piece of drama/performance work happens in three very important phases.

Phase ONE is the **Composition Phase** where the work is dissected into component parts and you compile all the inspiration you can so that you can create the building blocks for your work. Phase TWO is the **Structuring/Rehearsal Phase** where the material you created is interpreted and rehearsed into a new format/order. Phase THREE is the **Finalisation/Belief Phase** where you firm up and commit to the final version of the work and then present it. Think of this in terms of baking a cake:

A. Composition Phase:

Gathering the ingredients

B. Structuring/Rehearsal Phase:

Combining all the ingredients together in the right amounts, in the correct order and then putting them into the pan.

C. Finalisation/Belief Phase:

Baking, icing and serving the cake

We generally have a good understanding of Phases TWO and THREE but Phase ONE is often where we get stuck and spend too much time. The following suggestions should help with the work in Phase One and will give you the resources to generate a great deal of compositional material with which you can build your performance.

Methods for generating compositional material for the devising process

- 1. First Impressions:** As a group, look at the text and record (either individually or as a group) your first impressions of the text. What does it remind you of? How does it make you feel?
- 2. Historical Analysis:** What is the historical context of the text? What did the artist have in mind when he painted it? Why did he paint it?
- 3.** When deconstructing visual texts, it helps to analyse their structure/composition using **The Elements and Principles of Design** as a starting place.

The Elements of Design

- | | |
|------------|---------------------------|
| a. Colour | d. Line (straight/curved) |
| b. Shape | e. Form |
| c. Texture | f. Repetition |



The Principles of Design

- a. Unity/Harmony
- b. Balance (Symmetrical, Asymmetrical)
- c. Scale/Proportion
- d. Emphasis/Hierarchy
- e. Contrast

As a group look at each of the above and note what you see and let these individual elements inspire your work. These should be somewhat familiar to you as you were introduced to them as concepts when you embodied/moved the architecture of your studio/classroom.

4. Consider how the visual text embodies the Elements of Movement:

- a. Tempo/Speed
- b. Direction/Use of Space
- c. Levels (Low, Medium and High)
- d. Weight (Where is the piece heavy, where is it light?)

5. PLAY! PLAY! PLAY!

- a. Play with the text physically and vocally.
- b. Be irreverent so that you can stretch the text and find more options to play with.
- c. Get to know the text through play... It will inhabit your body so make sure you trust it and that it trusts you.

REMEMBER:

All the above is about providing you with different ways of finding your way into the text. Do what you need to get into it and start your exploration. Certain things will work, others will not. There is no right or wrong regarding your exploration as long as you are not hurting yourself or hindering your exploration in any way, shape or form.

It is also worth mentioning that time management is essential. Look at the overall amount of time that you have and budget accordingly. It is useful to consider it like this: **Phase One** should amount to about **40%** of the total time. **Phase Two**, about **40%** of the total time and **Phase Three**, **20%**. These are guidelines but they will help you keep your project on track and should help you avoid a panic situation as your performance draws near.

CAVEATS:

- Be sure to put the text into action and give it time to play in your bodies. This is an external sport and cannot be just an intellectual activity. It is more doing than thinking. 'Talking Heads' and 'Intellectualising' make for boring theatre: Don't Talk... DO!!!
- When you aim to be 'perfect' you kill the spirit of SPONTANEITY and AUTHENTICITY... aim to be growing and exploring new territory... when you think it's perfect, break it and put it back together in a different way.
- Take RISKS.... This is the only way to move forward and grow.
- There is No Room for the EGO! Stay PRESENT and COLLABORATIVE and the work will undoubtedly be amazing!



APPENDIX B: Visual Resources for Exploration 1









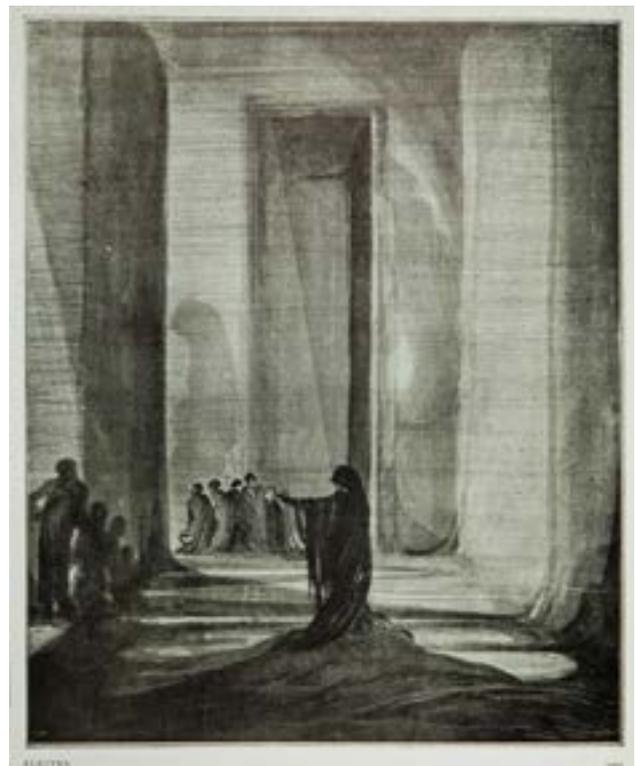
A STUDY FOR MOVEMENT



CESAR AND CLEOPATRA, ACT I, SCENE 1



PETER AND PAUL



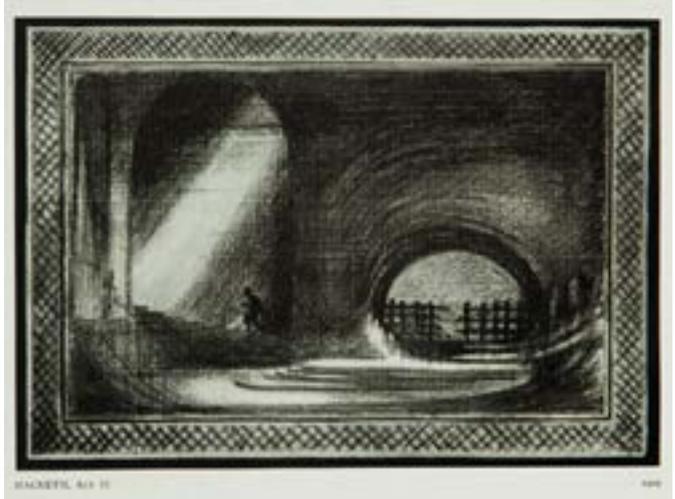
ALCINA



SACRILEGE, Act II, Scene 1



SACRILEGE, Act II, Scene 1



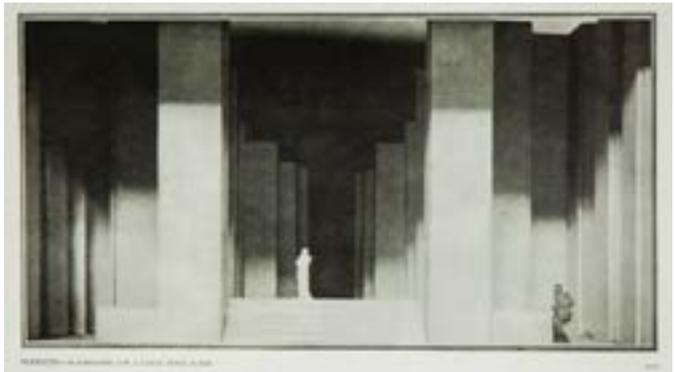
SACRILEGE, Act II



SACRILEGE—SLEEPWALKING SCENE



REMEMBERING ME



REMEMBERING ME



THE MERCHANT OF VENICE



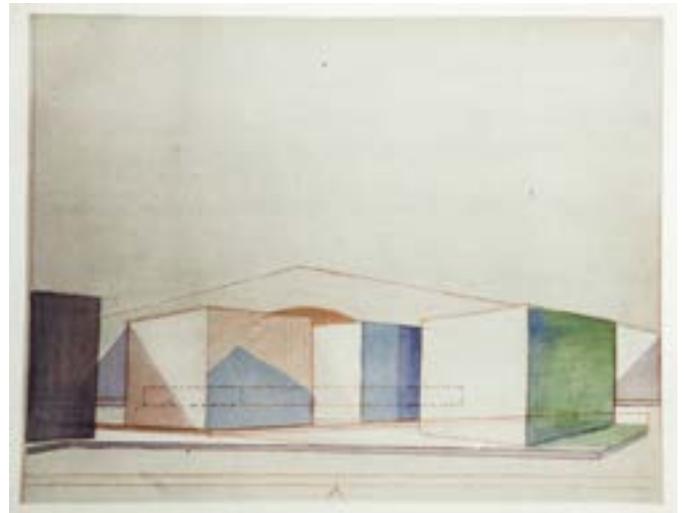
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE





APPENDIX C: Visual Resources for Exploration 3









APPENDIX D: The Gordon Craig Timelines

[Download here.](#)

APPENDIX E: The Gordon Craig Mind Map

[Download here.](#)



APPENDIX F: Gordon Craig's Influence

The following are some of the notable names that were influenced by the work of Edward Gordon Craig. Having your students research how Craig's work shaped the following practitioners is an option for extended learning opportunities.

Antonin Artaud

Jean-Louis Barrault

Stephen Berkoff

Peter Brook

Jacques Copeau

Étienne Decroux

Jerzy Grotowski

Peter Hall

Robert LePage

Vsevolod Meyerhold

Max Reinhardt

Leon Schiller

Michel St. Denis

Konstantin Stanislavsky

Joseph Svoboda

Jack Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats