

2-28-2017

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### Recommended Citation

Sellars, Peter (2017) "Dreaming Of Light: On Edward Gordon Craig," *Mime Journal*: Vol. 26, Article 13. DOI: 10.5642/mimejournal.20172601.13

Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/mimejournal/vol26/iss1/13>

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## Dreaming of Light: On Edward Gordon Craig

Peter Sellars

Delivered (via satellite) at Pomona College, March 30, 2013. Transcribed and edited by Jennifer Buckley.

I last thought about Edward Gordon Craig when I was twenty-three, and it's time to update what I was thinking. But in the meantime, a lot of things that I have done since have been deeply, deeply in line with this man and deeply, deeply divergent from this man.

Let me say from the outset that at the time we are living in, Edward Gordon Craig's strange, twisted utopianism is so essential. Utopianism has been beaten out of all of us; we've all been told to be practical. Everything has been reduced to some budget cut; everything is what you can't do. Everything has been absently brought down to some No Child Left Behind level of deeply inadequate, nightmare simulation drained of content, meaning, or emotional weight. So Edward Gordon Craig, dreaming of content, dreaming of emotional weight, and dreaming of some kind of *genuine* utopian dream is a pretty powerful image. The aesthete part—the bizarre sense of privilege, the megalomania, and the misogyny are a little less attractive—but let's work with what we have. And let's be grateful that somebody is still holding the dream space profoundly open.

Obviously Edward Gordon Craig is, for my generation, kind of John the Baptist to Bob Wilson. Somebody had to be up for the wilderness first, and somebody had to die in prison and have his head cut off. But Bob then later went, of course, and took this kind of theater of sheer vision to a really shockingly accomplished place. I'd love to speak of two things in that regard: one is Bob Wilson's ability to create theater out of light. I think that's one of the most beautiful parts of Edward Gordon Craig, is this dreaming of light and this yearning for light in a world of shadows—and, you know, his own bizarre shadow existence in the theater world, and the idea that here's this genius living in the shadows and emerging from the shadows and creating kind of his own theatrical diatribe as shadow boxing, as a bizarre sideshow of shadows in his strange, strange publications. That idea that the real movement is in the shadow is pretty beautiful and pretty powerful.

What's different for his generation and ours is we have ways of lighting that his generation never had. But I am so moved by the determination to love gas light, and I would really love to put gas light back on stage. But in fact, you know, that's like Romney in the election debates saying to Obama, "Oh I think we don't have as many battleships as we used to have," and Obama just looking at him like, "What are you talking about? We are busy working on big, quadruple-trillion-dollar triple drone shield where we can destroy any object on earth within one hour with a drone that is moving at just outside the Earth's atmosphere at 36,000 miles per hour, and you're saying, oh, we don't have so many battleships?"

So, I know, it's a joke that I'm a little bit nostalgic for what I imagine is gas light and I love Edward Gordon Craig for that. In fact, what we have are these incredible capacities to illuminate anything right now—but together with that we have incredible capacities for creating darkness, for removing education from the lives of Americans, from dumbing down and darkening the world, from reversing the Enlightenment and turning everything into a period of vast public darkness. And that's the time we are living in, and so every candle counts, every flashlight counts, and every laser show. This yearning for light from Edward Gordon Craig I think is one of the most beautiful parts of what theater consists of, because it's kind of irreducible to the performer and the light. And that's a beautiful thing to come to.

I should admit quickly that at the moment Edward Gordon Craig research means a lot to me because of two projects that I am quite deeply in the middle of. The last thing I have been working on is the *St. Matthew Passion*, which obsessed Edward Gordon Craig all his life. And I have ... two years ago [as of 2013] staged it with the Berlin Philharmonic, and I will continue that process every three years for the next decade. I come back to it in Berlin in October this year, and then we will bring that version to America and several other places where hopefully you can see it. I've actually worked very hard on the very same problems that Edward Gordon Craig worked on in that piece, and maybe we can get into that later.

The other thing that is taking over my life right now is I am beginning to stage something that I have dreamed of for twenty-five years now, which is the final work of Henry Purcell, *The Indian Queen*. You know, it's an amazing thing to imagine theater in London in 1695, and *The Indian Queen* is not just late Purcell, it's the very end. He died while writing it. The piece is a bizarre torso with only forty-five minutes of music surviving by Purcell, and then his brother stepped in and wrote a bunch of horrible music that followed to complete it. But it was already plagued with disaster: the text by Dryden was already twenty-five years out of date when Purcell set it; Dryden wasn't much interested and sent his brother Bill over to help with rewrites, but that didn't go very well. Purcell was working with Thomas Betterton's company, the great London company, and then there was a giant financial disagreement. They bailed and started their own rival theater, and Purcell was left with a company of really second-rate actors whom he didn't know and who couldn't carry a tune. The show was a complete disaster, and he died before it was even completed.

So: the last opera of Henry Purcell—and, you know, when I say opera, of course what's so beautiful about 1695 is opera didn't yet exist in England. It is this beautiful moment before you can use the word opera in England, which is what excited Edward Gordon Craig and the people who were founding the Henry Purcell Society in 1901-1902. I love that Craig's great, great realized project was *Dido and Aeneas*, and all his amazing, amazing, amazing plans and schemes and astounding visions to do this little opera that was originally done in a girls' school, you know, with a totally modest set of conditions and to revive it ... after two to three centuries of silence, to found the Henry Purcell Society—to say, well, wait a minute, we need to look at these little things—to have Edward Gordon Craig, this harbinger of the new, announcing of the theater of the future by what? By an antiquarian project, by saying we are going to take this music from 1695 and this moment where nobody knew what performance could be in England, because it's dance, it's theater, it's mime, it's spectacle with machines going in and out, and paintings coming across the stage. This particular form of theater has bizarre interludes, odd non-sequiturs, [and] casting which is never one-for-one. You know, one of my favorite things about this couple of decades of theater is for example ... when the male character is thinking something, it's the woman who comes forward and sings the song that says what the man is thinking using all male pronouns but it's a woman singing it. It is so beautiful—the genders are being crossed, the one-for-one casting is being exploded, a character can appear as a dancer, as an actor, as a singer—this incredible multiplicity of identities and the kind of wild [use] of theater as sheer metaphor. Witches are a metaphor, you know, and in Purcell's *King*

*Arthur* when he wants to talk about some people in England being a little cold and it's coldness of temperament and a little bit of social chill, a little idea that we are living in a period of somewhat cold people, of course Purcell sets acting in the North Pole and we begin with the frozen spirit of the North Pole shivering, and that's how he can discuss people being a little cold in London.

Now ... that theater of bizarre, crazy metaphor: ... London theater of that period put real Indians and native peoples on stage, bizarre fauna, animals, and routinely the scenes were set either [in] the farthest outpost of what would become the colonial empire and so, you know, jungles and the Caribbees and India. All of these things fit here in these bizarre spectacles from these last decades of the 1680s and nineties. The other thrill of theater in this period is after the Cromwell prohibition. Edward Gordon Craig loved the masques that were alive with Shakespeare and just after Shakespeare—you know, pure spectacle, pure spectacle that wasn't simply flattering the audience but actually was in its form a transformative ritual. What we are looking for is social transformation and incredible, shocking flights of imagination and things that are impossible happening. And the beauty of the mass is it's a strange, cosmological harmony in a series of bizarre discords and non-sequiturs so that again, the message is absolutely anything is possible and everything in this world. As John Cage used to say, "Since everything in this world is connected, anything we come across is too." And that is the beautiful dramaturgy of these masques and why Edward Gordon Craig, you know, loved the Ben Jonson masque and the masques of Cupid and Death and all of those things that followed in the next generation. Cromwell's prohibition of British theater and this period of kind of incredible performative asceticism is an amazing thing. I think you add to that the plague, the fire of London, and you have this Henry Purcell writing in a devastated half-burnt city that's lost a third of its population. And he is beginning to start up theater again, and how do you start up theater under those conditions?

Well, you deal with witches and sorcerers, you deal with strange supernatural presences and ghosts, you deal with the specter of the dead which is always before you, and you deal with the specter of the hungry and the starving. There was spiritual hunger, and you deal with yearning; you deal with sudden reversal of fortunes. Again you're in this world of dreaming, because you have to reconstitute and rebuild everything from scratch. Under Cromwell, a certain other ideology took over and erased everything brutally and now suddenly we're back. And how do we come back from a period where, you know, the whole world moved radically backwards, how do we make it move forward again? Any of that sound familiar? I don't know.

So, I am working pretty intensely now on this *Indian Queen*, and on the masque tradition, and on this spectacle which is simultaneously all the art forms, which is both serious and tragic and light-hearted and random; [it] has strange diversionary tactics because many things can't be discussed openly or directly anymore because we live in such a bizarre court world again, where, you know, ... insurance companies and drug companies and military contractors and so on, have the ears of the court and we are not allowed to discuss simple, basic things like the starvation and hunger of children in America right now. Say nothing about a larger world where in the last twenty-five years we have tripled world poverty in one generation. And how can we not notice that? How come we're not discussing that, and how come the actual burning questions of huge injustice and outrage across the world—populations are moving into the streets to protest and we still can't hear, we still can't notice? Fifty years from now, one hundred years from now, people will say about us, "What on earth were they thinking? How could they not notice, how could they not react, how could they not respond, what was their problem, how could you not notice a series of human catastrophes?" And we're meanwhile acting like everything's fine and switching ... jumping from item to item on our Internet. You know, the jumping from item to item part is why the mass format is very useful because, you know, it's good we can jump from item to item; we can actually include

a whole series of randomly connected events and find the thread that goes through them. We can surprise the audiences, and different genders, different generations, and different cultural perspectives by exactly making a crazy farrago that avoids the master narrative and doesn't have the single narrative of the great playwright that is unfolding with its own kind of inexorable inner logic.

What's interesting about these strange composite art forms is that we're living in a time of composite histories, a time of composite aspirations. You know, no one point of view actually is enough. What we all need to do is engage in collaborative work because we need to make a demonstration, a clear demonstration for politicians all over the world that the only way forward will be collaborative, and you're going to have to learn to work with the very people who want to kill you. Until you work with them you're not doing anything, and until you find a place at the table for the people who you disagree with most, you are not doing anything. And so the task in these bizarre, multiple spectacles is to find a place where everyone could actually be seated, and be part of the same spectacle and have something that interests, honors, welcomes everyone. That means it has to include multiple viewpoints, it has to have a lot of vignettes, it has to have a lot of strange reversals, and it can't just be a giant propaganda exercise for one thing that you want to put forward because that by itself is not going to move anyone forward, has no political traction, and has no possibility of turning into real life. And real life is going to be working with enemies, is going to be creating some kind of charmed, enchanted universe where we can get past our really bitter, bitter, bitter differences. So that's why, you know, in the end Shakespeare figured out, after the bitter, bitter, bitter end of, you know, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and *Othello* and *Timon* and all this rage, all this disappointment, all this bitterness over the mass injustice that's surrounding us, you finally got to just calm down and figure out *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and get to *The Tempest*. We all need the masques, we all need the romance, we all need this magic universe which actually permits us to calm down, back off, and not only recognize each other as humans but also realize nothing is going to happen without some magic.

That was, I think, Gordon Craig's big crisis with incipient realism that was being announced as the future of theater. And obviously, you know, the point of realism is *super* important, and politically it was [that], yes, the actual condition of minors should finally be shown, demonstrated, and so thank you to Émile Zola. You know, yes, there are actually real things that have been falsified in our public life and therefore the theater itself has to be the site where something, the *real* facts of something can be demonstrated and can demonstrate viscerally. So yes, realism as a social project is absolutely essential.

But, Gordon Craig was absolutely onto something crucial in the fact that realism by itself is actually reductive, materialist, and condemns people to a fate worse than death—that is to say this world of pure, pure social and material limitation. Right? All of us, you know, we have to recognize our limits. Of course, that's one thing about being humans: figuring out your limits, realizing what limits are, realizing how limits deepen your practice, deepen your experience, deepen your need to search for a deeper and better solution because the limits don't just let you do anything. So we all have to dig deeper because of those limits.

On the other hand, we're infinite beings, and that part of ourselves which is infinite ... connects to what the Buddhists call the four immeasurables: love, compassion, insight, and courage. Those things are not in limited supply. Those things, there's enough of those, there's more than enough of all of those things, forever, for all of us. There's always going to be more courage. You can reach in and draw on more courage if you want. Courage is inexhaustible, and you will not run out of it. Those inexhaustibles, that part of ourselves as human beings which actually is unlimited, which in fact touches infinity, and where infinity is flowing through our beings, you know, that is not well-represented in realistic theater. In fact, realistic theater takes a metaphysical being and reduces them

to a physical being. And how do you get the sweetness, the depth? The power of metaphysics is as it's actually embodied, and as metaphysics becomes not just of the head, not just intellectual, philosophical proposition, but something that is physically embodied and actually can be manifested through healing and healing of the body and healing of social wounds.

So that healing prospect is about creating a space where magic is not just imaginary and not just wishful thinking but is real, and where magic gives human beings the possibility to have a kind of fluidity that lets them exit the nightmare of the identity which either they have constructed or has been thrust upon them by someone. You know, we all have these bizarre hard and fast identities which we are trapped in. And a businessman is that and a gang member is that, and these are just, you know, stereotypes. What does it take for any of us to escape the stereotype ... that either we've put ourselves in or someone else has put us in? Can we demonstrate that our humanity has to do with our diversity, that every single human being is diverse, let alone that no two human beings are the same? You know, that no human being doubles or matches or replaces any other human being—every single person is needed and is different and has something else to offer? Real equality is in our difference, not in our sameness. Our sameness is what actually, you know, all these standardized testing—all standardized approaches to what humanity is in fact just create greater inequality. And equality is based on the fact that each of us has a very different gift, and that we need everybody in the world because you can do something that I can't do, and therefore that's the basis of equality.

So this idea that every human being needs this place from which their identity becomes fluid—that is a magical place. And that means stepping into a circle where the magic gives you permission to become someone else, to reimagine yourself, to actually begin to think another way, to actually notice feelings that have been suppressed that have always been there, or to actually notice an absence of feeling and maybe explore that. In other words, to just break down the entrapment of what we have told ourselves is realistic but in fact is not realistic—it's a giant falsification. And the nightmare of the real world is that a bunch of it is just made of lies. So it's bizarre, but the only way you can get past the lies of the so-called "real world" is to explode them with fantasy, with fantastic non-sequiturs, and to explode the fake logic of the war in Iraq, the fake logic of why we must invade Afghanistan, the fake logic of why we have to shut down schools and slash education budgets, the fake logic of why we're not allowed to fund breakfast programs for schoolchildren in poor neighborhoods but we will make the richest level of profiteers that have ever existed in human history with obscene levels of wealth now, as a democracy, with people voting for that. You know, we're into such twisted warped logic that is presented as realism, and in fact all of these things are purely fantastic and totally fake and completely artificially contrived. But they're presented as realism.

This is where I really want to take up Edward Gordon Craig's powerful critique because for me, more damage has been done in Hollywood and with television to the acting profession. And Edward Gordon Craig's fury at the presumption of acting that is quote unquote realistic—and in fact, I would just emphasize, what he was kind of touching on but later, you know, in our time, has become a blight that is beyond anything he could have imagined is, you know, the crime show and the crime movie that has in the last fifty years convinced Americans that they are in the middle of a giant crime wave ... and has had Americans, white Americans in particular, voting to lock up black and people of color—young men—because we are all going to be threatened by them. This is based on no facts because there has been no crime wave, but [is] just based on watching TV and movies written by people who live in big, pink mansions in Beverly Hills and have never been to South Central LA in their life. They're writing the gritty street scenes that are supposedly about these dangerous crime zones. And, you know, I'm sorry—this television and movies, this world where the actors are pretending what they're doing is real—this is being sold to people as realism, has actually affected voting patterns, and has meant that exactly in those neighborhoods all across America, we have voted for the schools to be shut and for prisons to be built.

And we have—where I live, in California—we have the largest prison gulag in human history. We have built more prisons in the state of California than Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin put together since 1984. And we have voted for that because an entire world was created that convinced and frightened white, suburban voters that they were being threatened. What were they being threatened by? Bad acting.

So, that incredible, shocking, commercial exploitation has actually resulted in a nightmare society of tyranny, mass injustice, mass exploitation, and a shutting down of democratic possibility. And, you know, my big lesson from—you know, Tom Leabhart sent me a nice header about this, saying, now, do we understand [that you became interested] in puppetry when you were young? The answer is yes, I started when I was ten, apprenticing at the Lovelace Marionette Theatre in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which was a garage in East Liberty, a converted garage, which was fuchsia and had puppets and masks from all over the world on the walls. And my first theatrical impressions were Javanese shadow puppets and *bunraku* and the woman who ran it, Margot Lovelace—of course, classic name for women, a master of the Midwestern *commedia* tradition. Margot Lovelace would go every summer somewhere in the world—the Yucatan, to Osaka, to Moscow—and come back, and bring us back in Pittsburgh *bunraku* puppets or the Russian avant-garde, the Polish avant-garde, or the Romanian avant-garde, or Egyptian theater. And when I was growing up as a teenager in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I was seeing all of these incredible forms of theater. And Margot, you know, we did, every weekend ... *Beauty and the Beast* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*, but every show—with marionettes—but every show she set in some part of the world. So *Beauty and the Beast* was done with Japanese puppets and Japanese music, and it was my education in Japanese culture. And *Rumpelstiltskin* was set in Cairo, and with costumes and the whole thing. So growing up as a ten-year-old, all these things are flooding into your imagination. You know, the world is open wide and I'm busy packing the popcorn on early Sunday mornings next to a giant Balinese mask, and you're thinking, hello, good morning? What is that mask saying? What is going on here?

Meanwhile, Margot every spring did a, quote, adult performance. You know, after all the children's shows. She did plays that puppets could do better than people, so I grew up with the French surrealist avant-garde. And the first plays I saw were, you know, [inaudible], Cocteau, Pinget, and Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words* done with puppets—in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And, Margot would say to me ... when I was twelve, she said you have to go to New York and see Andrei Serban doing the Greek Trojans. And she would hand me a book of the scenography of Joseph Svoboda and said you should learn this and look at it. And so I had an amazing theatrical upbringing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but one really poor dimension of it was doing shows in schools and libraries and birthday parties—and learning how to work in a shopping mall or in a department store window, learning how to do six shows a day while people are going by and what are you going to do that makes them stop, first of all; second, stay there; and third, actually put money in the hat in hand. That was my theatrical training. My other theatrical training from Margot was when she said to me, Peter you are going to have to learn that everybody is going to desert you and you have to do the show that you can just take yourself, in a fix, in a taxicab. So, hello, I was prepared for this era of theater!

At the same time, you know, I started—what always happens when you apprentice is you begin by imitating, you know, the people you are learning from even though you have huge personal disagreements with them and you're sure you're doing something else, in fact you're just imitating them. And my early shows I was very much imitating the Lovelace marionettes. But, one, I didn't get it and I imitated them very, very, very badly. That was Punch and Judy. And if you're talking about, you know, the British theater in 1690, hello: Punch and Judy. Punch and Judy is still performed to basically the same script across the centuries. It's been pretty well refined over time. But Punch and Judy was one of the deepest lessons of my life. You guys know the story of Punch and Judy, right? You know, it's a great thing with Punch showing up and Punch is supremely ugly, he has a giant nose, he's hunchbacked, he's deformed, he has a giant wart on his nose, he's super unpleasant, he has a high-pitched, squeaky, horrible voice, and he thinks he's really good-looking and very attractive and totally [inaudible] about every part

of his disgusting self. That's already the first joke with the audience. Then he introduces his wife, and it's really horrible. They scream at each other and then she leaves and then he goes and gets the baby and then the show really starts properly. The baby's crying and he's gonna make the baby shut up, so he takes a stick and pounds the shit out of it and then the baby cries more and then it didn't work and so finally he throws the baby out the window—which is one of the all-time great theatrical moments, throwing the baby out the window. And then his wife comes back and says how come you killed our baby? Then Punch gets irritated and kills his wife, and then the dog comes from next-door and bites his toe so he kills the dog. Then the next-door neighbor who owns the dog comes over and gets annoyed so he kills the next-door neighbor, and then a cop shows up and so he kills the cop. And then—it's a nice story. It's a very, very, very socially friendly. And then, finally, I think a ghost shows up, I think the last—no, the devil shows up, right, the devil shows up and then Punch kills the devil, and then the ghost shows up and Punch gets really scared.

Okay, nice, it's a nice show. But if you don't know how to do it, as I found when I was thirteen years old, it is a disaster. I went and, thinking I was imitating the way the Lovelace marionettes did Punch and Judy, I did Punch and Judy for a birthday show. And it was horrifying. And all of the children started to cry. They were scared, they were horrified by each new thing that happened. And I kept thinking I was doing it right, and I would do each new step of it, and the kids were crying and running away saying I don't want to watch this, and I was, you know, hired to do a puppet show for a birthday party. It was a disaster. And so I had to go back to Margot Lovelace's kitchen and say, I really, really, really messed up Punch and Judy. And she gave me one of the most important lessons of my life, which is what I had done was destroy Punch and Judy by making it realistic, is that Punch and Judy is metaphor, and that art is a metaphor, and you don't actually want to throw the baby out the window, you just want to think about throwing the baby out the window, and you want to have for one moment this strange dream of what it would be like to throw the baby out the window, which is secretly exhilarating. But you didn't actually do it, so it's not horrifying. And therefore the baby, which Margot is very clear to me, she said the baby cannot be anything that looks like a baby, the baby has to be a bowling pin with a handkerchief wrapped around it. And that way when you throw the baby out the window, first of all the kids love to catch it, but second of all it's not a baby, it's a bowling pin. And in fact, the tradition of the great Punch and Judy puppets are that they're totally these beaten up, you know, piece blocks of two-by-four with, you know, strange features stuck on them. They're just basically blocks of wood, they're not human beings. They're these—bizarre, wacky simulacra. Which was the whole point of Punch's high voice, which I had not, when I was thirteen, bothered to master, so I had Punch talking in a much more normal voice. But the whole point of Punch is that it's pushed *way*, way out to this other limit of theatricality, irony, strange humor, and doubleness. That it's itself, but it's really actually a symbol that itself turns out to just be a rag and a piece of two-by-four with paint on it.

And so when Punch comes out and says [high-pitched voice] “HI EVERYBODY, I'M PUNCH. DON'T YOU LOVE MY NOSE? I BET YOU CAN SEE IT FROM WHERE YOU ARE,” and you—then he calls his wife and he says “JUDY, WE HAVE GOT THE UGLIEST AUDIENCE I HAVE EVER SEEN. THESE PEOPLE ARE SO UGLY,” and, you know, it goes on. It automatically sets up a whole set of relationships to the audience that go beyond the words that are being spoken, because everything has double and triple levels of irony and is being received in these concentric circles of reinforcement and at the same time undercutting. Reinforcement, undercutting, reinforcement, undercutting, reinforcement, undercutting. And the thing becomes an exhilarating, bizarre, bizarre, liberating dream.

And when you see Punch and Judy done by a master like Percy Press—Percy used to do a routine that was one of the most incredible things I've ever seen. Punch had a friend Joey, who was basically, I think, like, a “Negro” in white-face ... who was very prideful. And Percy Press did a routine with Punch that I will never forget as long as I live. Punch, after he's killed all these people, he decides to count them. And so Punch brings all the dead bodies up on the play board and starts counting. And puppets are really

good at being dead, and so he just starts piling them up. And Joey puts himself in the pile of dead bodies, so Punch is always counting one more. And then Joey goes back and puts himself in the pile again until Punch counted the dead bodies, gets up to like forty. And he knows then something's wrong. And then, Joey goes and removes a body each time Punch is going to go count a body ... Joey removes another body so Punch can never get past three. And he knows something's wrong. This sequence of counting the corpses is one of the most macabre things in all of history, but when Percy Press did it with the swizzle in his mouth giving Punch that high-pitched voice and Punch screaming and then deciding one of the bodies is actually alive and is going to find out which one it is and so he takes his stick and beats to a pulp every single one of the dead bodies. All over again, killing them all over again. That happens in a room of children screaming with delight, with pleasure, and with liberation. And at the end of that spectacle, those kids leave the theater so calm, so amazingly adjusted, then having gotten all kinds of evil, evil stuff out of their system. How? Through magic, through metaphor, through poetry, through a bunch of blocks of wood actually substituting for all the violence in your life and giving you a place to put the violence in your life so that the exorcism happened. As opposed to a Martin Scorsese movie which claims to be interested in violence and claims to be critiquing violence but is actually offering violence and creating and surrounding us with a culture of violence, intensifying and deepening that culture of violence.

Anyway, for me the cost of the realistic theater is the perpetuation of the very thing it claims to be treating. And the power of the metaphor, the power of the act of imagination, the power of the release, the power of something that's not like the thing it claims to be, but we actually invest it with that likeness. You know, that we're gonna allow you to be King Lear for the next three hours even though we know you are not King Lear. That is so powerful.

I think that's where Edward Gordon Craig is so excited by Henry Irving, because it was this style of acting where you didn't ever for one second confuse Henry Irving with anyone other than Henry Irving. And the acting was so wild, over-the-top, bizarre with the pronunciation of words and the frozen moments and the hyper-intense, semi-abstract physicality. The plays themselves, they were always about, you know, those Henry Irving vehicles like *The Bells* were about ... you know, you killed an old Jew for his money and you think you can get away with it, but in fact your whole life you are haunted by strange bells even though you become the mayor of the town. In fact, the weird message is that your success at the expense of other people who you thought were expendable will never work. Now that's a pretty deep message for the world we're living in at the moment where everybody has gotten extremely rich—or, not everybody—a smaller group of people have gotten extremely rich by creating subhuman conditions for two-thirds of the planet, where there are famines where there have never been famines ever, and those famines have been organized and are purely man-made.

Where the level of profiteering now is obscene, a performance of Henry Irving's *The Bells* would be perfectly useful. And that bizarre thing of having to create an image that allows people to recognize that you are haunted by your conscience, because at the moment we don't have a way of showing that, because it is so foreign and unthinkable, and you need something as extreme as a bell going off and as extreme as Henry Irving's acting as this pillar of success who's actually completely haunted—haunted not by just not being able to speak to his daughter but by something deeper and weirder and more metaphysical than that: bells. These strange plays that Henry Irving brought his own strange authority to have a moral intensity and fierceness exactly because of their abstraction. And the abstraction is what lets theater have its—earn its kind of metaphysical dimension is that we're dealing with a world in which we ourselves are not simply material beings getting away with something, but where we are actually divine beings, spiritual beings, metaphysical beings, on a huge lifelong scale of right and wrong. And every tiny thought and every second of every moment of our lives has this consequence that goes way beyond what is immediately apparent, that goes to previous lives, future lives, not just in some kind of abstract notion of reincarnation, but ... also realistically, things we're inheriting from our great-grandparents and passing on to our great-grandchildren. That's not abstract, that's totally real. But it's not real to us, which is why

we plan the world without thinking of our great-grandchildren. So we need something that bizarrely makes the reality of our great-grandchildren real since we seem not to be able to imagine them at all. So we need some kind of set of images that call to mind something that is not immediately visible before us, and tells us that actually the things that are not visible are the most important things in your life and the things that are visible are kind of less important and less consequential, and that the high stakes are all the invisible things. And so we have to find a way to make the invisible visible, to make the real real, because at the moment the realism is self-erasing that we're surrounding ourselves with. We're surrounding ourselves with this phony realism.

So the result is we need strong, strong measures to get past the voting patterns of violence and to get past this way in which we're actually dismissing other human beings and saying they're less than human, this incredible idea that, you know, we innocent Americans were attacked on 9/11 and we're just the innocent victims of these terrible people crashing planes into buildings. And you wanna just say, excuse me? Excuse me? Excuse me. We are busy, you know, bombing people with drone planes and wiping out entire villages trying to find one person who is on some list that we get from our quote unquote intelligence, and we have legal people in the White House at this moment justifying that because those other people in the village who were killed in that drone strike were collateral damage. And here we are announcing that, you know, the West values human life, and all of these other cultures ... don't have the value of human life, and that's what separates the West from the rest of the world? And that is just, again, obscenity, that we truly imagine that the deaths of other children don't matter. And we can say, you know, yes, we're upset about Newtown but we have no problem with the kids who are dying every day or two days or three days in the drone strike in Northern Pakistan, and that when we're listing now that we're leaving Afghanistan, after we left Iraq, we're not even listing how many Iraqis were killed because it doesn't matter, the only thing that matters is how many Americans were killed.

This is truly a nightmare, not being able to see human beings as human, and not being able to recognize human beings and not even being able, like Punch, to count the dead. Like Punch, you've murdered so many people you can't even count the dead, and you're wondering why you're not gonna sleep well tonight. Because you can't even count the people you killed because you've decided they don't count. I would say this is a problem for humanity, and I would say that theater, because it's the art form that is about human beings and that features as its main element a human being—theater is the art form that needs to respond. And we need to respond in a way that one human being can represent more than one human being. One human being has to represent more than themselves. They have to be able to have larger powers of representation. Again, that is where theater of metaphor has to take over, that's where a theater of understanding the immensity of a single human being and the immensity of the human drama of a single human being, which actually extends to the lives of millions upon millions of human beings. And that these things are linked, and that whatever happens to somebody in one part of the world actually will come back as a consequence to somebody in another part of the world. And again, that is not an abstract thing, but we seem to have difficulty seeing it and recognizing it and recognizing where these cycles of violence go ... . We have created this texture of lies, this texture of falsified world, where there is no moral center and no moral accountability; and we are sitting on top of so many lives which are built on so many injustices to create an artificial, thin crust of outlandish prosperity at the top, and in order to support that bubble, a massive, massive level of failure to engage the talent and gifts of nine-tenths of our populations.

The invention of No Child Left Behind, which is something Joseph Stalin could not have thought of on a bad day [audience laughs], the idea that right now in American public schools, you know, there is a curriculum in place and a series of tests in which we are giving the highest marks to the students that repeat back what we told them. And that is our opportunity for success, is you tell us back what we told you. People who have another idea or a different point of view will get a lower test score and be

disqualified from moving forward. That is preparation to be a cog in the fascist machine, and we're running our schools like prisons and we're removing the possibility of self-expression, the possibility of creative expression, the possibility of the creation of alternative narratives, the possibility of articulating different viewpoints and different visions of a future. The entire project of vision and envisioning has been eliminated from public education; in this country everything is reduced to nightmare factoids, you know, and a fact means absolutely nothing divorced from its context. And we are now learning to work in the context of no context.

Now, for me, Edward Gordon Craig's idea that we should learn from theater in Java, we should learn from theater in Bali, we should learn from Japanese theater, we should learn from Chinese theater is so exciting. My problem is, you know, like a real Brit he never actually went and learned from them [audience laughs]. He learned from them at a distance and didn't allow his life to be changed by living in South India, didn't allow his life to be changed by living in Japan, didn't allow his life to be changed by living in Java. I think one of the deepest things that we have facing us is to break through that kind of, you know, Anglo-Saxon cultural myopia, which is what we have in newspapers and television where we send our correspondent to China to translate Chinese things back into images that we will recognize, rather than actually learn something about China through Chinese eyes. And so the result is we keep misjudging China, getting China wrong, and making every possible mistake dealing with China, because, forever, we've only been listening to our people tell us about China. That—in the past—to break through the cultural thing, they say, well, I'll worry about China but on my terms—that really is one of the most galling and saddening disappointments of the Edward Gordon Craig project, is that your curiosity is alive and interested but only extends so far, and you only want to hear the things that are in a form you are predisposed to appreciate and that flatter your own sense of omniscience. And that is a global catastrophe.

And we now have to learn about China from Chinese, we have to have Indonesians speaking on behalf of Indonesia, and we have to stop having white people ventriloquize for Africa and what Africa needs [audience laughs], and, you know, white people showing up and announcing to Africans how we're gonna fix their situation. Excuse me, no. And if you can't tell what a complete catastrophe that has been for 150 years, for God's sake, we have to stop it. So that means, as cultural workers, we have to be creating the opening to not just make a gesture towards Africa, not just make a gesture towards Indonesia, not just make a gesture towards "The Orient," but to really create systems and structures of reciprocity, of deep listening, and of willingness to learn, to think, and see in other ways. That is the cultural project of being alive in the twenty-first century. And it has to do with not presuming to, quote, learn from other people because they are your oyster and you are sucking them, with a delicious squirt—a little bit—of lemon juice, but actually you are the person who has to reorient your life, your priorities, your presumptions, and your values. Urgently. Urgently. Urgently. Urgently. It is urgent that we all learn to live in other ways on this earth in this century.

Learning from Asian theater has to do with learning other modes of being, has to do with learning the way in which knowledge is held by communities, not individuals, has to do with learning what needs to be *we* not *I*, has to do with reconfiguring all of our thinking into ecological structures. And has to do with something that Edward Gordon Craig paid lip service to, but as far as I can tell, never actually touched, which is frankly why I think he could never make the *St. Matthew Passion*. He talked a lot about the sacred, but I don't think he knew what the sacred was. And I don't think he allowed himself to enter that sacred place. And theater is a sacred place, and I so respect Edward Gordon Craig and am moved by his gesture towards recognizing what about theater could and should be sacred. Did you hear that? Recognizing what about theater could and should be sacred. But then he had no idea how to go there, and

he had no idea what the ritual is in an Asian theater form of a performer bowing to the mask, the person who made the mask, the voice inside the mask, the spirit inside the mask, that represents the mask, that recognizes the mask not as an object but as a living being, that is in fact as a whole host of living beings, that needed to be honored, welcomed, cherished, not simply manipulated.

One of the tremendous experiences in my life was planning in 1993 the Los Angeles Festival, which we were working on the year after 1992, when as a result of accumulated injustices in South Central Los Angeles, finally a large segment of the population set fire to their own neighborhood. And sections of Los Angeles were burning across the week, and the US Army came in in tanks and it was like Prague in 1968, you know, Los Angeles was occupied city, occupied by the US Army with buildings and neighborhoods on fire and the flames reaching the sky. Of course, you know, our president at the time, the elder George Bush, didn't know his Artaud, didn't know what the expression meant—"gesturing through the flames"—and what it was that a young generation, particularly people of power in South Los Angeles, felt that they had already been abandoned by America and their only gesture, a gesture of incredible pain, was to set fire to their own neighborhoods and gesture through the flames. And America still didn't know how to read that gesture.

We were working on the Los Angeles Festival in the aftermath of that. Now, during that, because of course, as artists we know artist networks and we already have a lot of networks in exactly those parts of the city, and we're working with a lot of artists in those parts of the city. So in the Los Angeles Festival, that time, we could move across the police lines in a way that very few other people could. Because one of the great things about being an artist is that we move past the lines of the ghetto, right, we know those people; particularly in our fear-induced hysteria, most people are frightened of most places in the city they live in, and so they visit the same three places every day and whole neighborhoods are off-limits and they don't ever dare go there. And that's a terrible way to live ... . We've now ghettoized the world—even the last thirty years, you know, the world's been re-ghettoized. And what does it mean to be able to move across the lines? As an artist, you can be in the corporate boardroom in the morning and a gang hangout in the evening. And, you know, obviously both groups are gangs, and both groups are ghettos, and we can take a message from one ghetto to another and start to re-stitch the social pattern by moving back and forth as a shuttle would, which is the artist's life. Our task is to move across those lines.

In any case, in the aftermath of those fires, we began urgent meetings to plan what a Los Angeles Festival could be for a burnt and devastated city. And we had a steering committee of twenty-four artists from different parts of Los Angeles with different cultural vantage points, different cultural backgrounds, understandings. And in that room we discussed what the future of Los Angeles would be with twenty-four people who had completely different visions and understandings. And I will never forget, you know, Ali Jihan Racy, the great Arab *oud* player, the master of Arab music, with an incredible range of people. But I'm thinking in particular Paul Apodaca, the Navajo activist, because Los Angeles has the largest Native American population of any place in the United States. And so we were dealing with a lot of Native American activists at that time, and an amazing range of rap artists and video-makers from South Central. And we got into a discussion of whether we can make a festival that opened churches and mosques and synagogues across the city, and created kind of safe spaces in unsafe neighborhoods. And we could, you know, create a festival of the sacred, you know, in this burnt ... like what Henry Purcell was doing after the fires of London. You know, create some kind of refuge in a violent and angry and bitterly broken world. And so we thought, okay, we would ... deal with sacred spaces. And maybe, you know, call a part of the festival ... a call for sacred spaces. And Paul Apodaca, the Navajo activist, just stopped everybody and said, what are you people talking about? What is a sacred space? And then we got into, you know, a discussion: well in this culture and that culture, for these people, for those people. And Paul just said, I'm sorry, but where I come from, there is no space that is not sacred, and there is no human being that is not sacred. All of us are sacred.

And I think that's our message to Gordon Craig. All of it's sacred. We have to care for all of it. We have to treat all of it with infinite love, infinite care, infinite tenderness. Everything has to be given a second chance and a third chance. Everything has to be tested, experimented, opened. And everything needs to have better ideals, and we need to reweave the social fabric that has been destroyed in the last thirty years. But frankly, and more important than that, we need to weave a social fabric that was never there ever. That has always been missing. We have to heal things that were never right, that were never good, and that were never just. Ever. We have to, in our lifetime, fix the things that have always been wrong. Always. And this is not about nostalgia for the seventies or sixties; this is about things that have never been done well ever by human beings. And we now have to learn to do these things very well.

In theater, we get to work with human beings. I would say we also get to work with puppets [laughs]. You know, why are puppets beautiful and why does Edward Gordon Craig prefer puppets to people? I mean, I know he then goes out of his way to say that's not really true, but of course he prefers puppets to people [audience laughs]. You know, I would emphasize one thing as somebody who spent many, many years—I spent many years of my life with puppets. The reason why everyone from Edward Gordon Craig to Heinrich Kleist, to, you know—a lot of people were obsessed with the superiority of the marionette—was the marionette takes a human form but exists as a metaphor, exists as a permanent open possibility. And its very existence is due to the opening of a field of magic.

Nothing in this world is gonna work without magic, magic that releases us from our nightmare stereotypes, from our limitations, from our preconceptions, from our nightmare legalisms, from our absurd factoids. And that says, something that looks impossible is actually completely possible. That creates that space of belief, which opens into a space of imagination, which transforms into a place of possibility, and is then actually realized by the next generation. Renew and hold open the vision space. And do it with magic, do it with brilliance, make it with devotion, make it with humor, but make it with really, really, really, deep, deep, deep commitment, and recognize every part of it is sacred. We are fighting for our lives, and we're fighting for the life of the planet. So the first thing we have to do is stop fighting because it'll just get tired. We have to stop constructing our imaginations oppositionally. We have to, like Mozart, give the best music to the worst people. The beauty of the puppets is that the villains and the heroes are equal—they're all made out of wood. It's the same, actually, with flesh. We're equal. As soon as it's human beings, we don't recognize that equality. With the puppets, we can see the equality, and we can see these strange beings waiting to be animated by magic. Human beings, we can forget that, and we can think terrible things about them. And we don't understand that in fact, the very nature of a human being is that it is a transformable thing, that what human beings do is they transform, they change, that somebody is not the same from day to day, and that the deepest moments in your life are when your life reverses or the life of someone you know or care about reverses. And there is transformation. And it's to prepare us for that that theater was invented. So I want to thank Mr. Edward Gordon Craig.

Thank you everyone. [audience claps]

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