

*More than is set down: Hamlet as text and performance*

**Inaugural-Dissertation**

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie  
der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität  
München

vorgelegt von  
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aus  
Paris

2024

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Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 6.5.2021

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## Acknowledgements

*More than is set down* was written at the Mimesis – Munich Doctoral Program for Literature and the Arts at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München. I am indebted to its directors, Prof. Dr. Tobias Döring and Prof. Dr. Christopher Balme, for not only providing this opportunity for these years of research and observation, but for accepting to supervise this project and fully embracing its challenges. I thank Prof. Dr. Döring for his invaluable support of my research and writing, for his constant attention and availability for conversation, and not least for sharing my love for and obsession with the theater even when it got in the way. Prof. Dr. Balme has helped me perfect this study through his open mind, benevolent skepticism and constant encouragement for this interdisciplinary perspective.

I thank Dr. Christian Steinau, Dr. Simon Gröger and all my colleagues from the Doctoral Program for years of fascinating exchange and mutual support, as well as Dr. Anna-Katharina Krüger for her support and encouragement in all respects. I am grateful to Christina Färber and Dr. Agatha Frischmuth for assisting me in making the very first steps of this project, and the latter for supporting me up to the finish line. My thanks also go to Dr. Jonas Kellermann, who has been a constant partner for conversation about Shakespeare's shapes on the stage, then and now, and a beacon of excellence in academia for me to follow. Last but certainly not least, I thank Martín Valdés-Stauber for carrying me through it all and much further.



## INTRODUCTION – *More than is set down*

*Hamlet* is a play about theater. The title character, Hamlet, is author, director, actor, and spectator. While performing is a subject in many of William Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* contains one of the most explicit and widely commented<sup>1</sup> reflections on theater as art form and practice. It addresses all elements of the theater performance, ranging from acting technique, spectator participation, the poetics of drama, to the relation of theater to the world. In the third act of the play, the title character himself addresses a troupe of players, presenting his own theory of what theater should be:

*Enter Hamlet and Players.*

HAMLET Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you – trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for, in the very torrent, tempest and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant – it out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.

PLAYER I warrant your honour.

HAMLET Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance – that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing whose end, both at the first and now, was

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<sup>1</sup> “*Hamlet* = Metatheater wäre eine mögliche und nicht einmal mehr radikale Anfangshypothese”, Ramona Mosse claims in “*Hamlet* als Metakommentar des Theaters”, and goes on to illustrate the endless range of comments on *Hamlet* as a play about theater across all disciplines and time periods. See especially Mosse 2014: 114.

and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play and others praised – and that highly not to speak it profanely, that neither having th'accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan nor man have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

PLAYER I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us.

HAMLET O, reform it altogether, and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. For there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. – That's villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready.  
(3.2.1-43) <sup>2</sup>

This passage combines the themes and concepts that pervade the play like a *basso continuo*. At first glance, the visit of the Players and the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*, a play apparently augmented by Hamlet himself to fit his purpose, is the centerpiece of *Hamlet's* revenge plot: before avenging his father's death at the hands of his own brother, Hamlet needs certainty about his uncle's guilt. But the passage is central for the underlying structure of the play, as well: as Hamlet instructs the players on how to perform, his words create a map of those materials, participants, and processes that make up the theater performance and reveals a unique historical constellation of text and performance at the time when *Hamlet*

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<sup>2</sup> In this study, I use Ann Thompson's and Neil Taylor's three-text-edition of *Hamlet* for the Arden Shakespeare. When quoting *Hamlet* from Ann Thompson's and Neil Taylor's 2006 edition of the second quarto, I use this format: (act.scene.verse). When quoting the first quarto or the First Folio edition, I add "F" or "Q1" to the bracket. When quoting the editors' notes, I refer to the verse annotated as (n.act.scene.verse). Cf. p. 51 for more detail on materials used.

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is first performed. Hamlet's speech can serve as an instruction not only to the players within the play, but on how to read *Hamlet* as its own reflection on what theater is.

In Hamlet's speech, there is mention of spoken word and physical action, actors impersonating characters, different kinds of spectators and their reactions, a play and its necessary question, and, according to Hamlet, a general "purpose of playing" that implies certain norms. At first sight, the map is structured as a series of oppositions centering around the phrase "more than is set down".

"Let those that play your clowns", warns Hamlet, "speak no more than is set down for them." The phrase opposes what is 'set down', to that which exceeds it, 'more than is set down'. This opposition is not a binary in the sense that its parts are clearly distinct. As one phrase contains the words of the other entirely, the two concepts they designate overlap: They are not mutually exclusive. Rather, what is 'more than is set down' to a certain extent contains what is 'set down', at times exceeding it. What is 'set down', then, is a frame of reference, the condition *sine qua non* and defining feature of what is not.

'To set down' is a common phrase in *Hamlet*. It names the process of writing something down or printing something in order to give it a lasting material shape. What is 'set down', by extension, is the material result of such a process. In the context of the instructions to the players, it refers to something, a script maybe, that prescribes to the players what they are to speak. As co-author of the play – Hamlet has earlier required to add "some sixteen lines" or so to *The Murder of Gonzago* – Hamlet suspects the player of clowns to intend to extemporize and to go beyond the limits of what is set down. Instead, he advocates a style of acting that "suit[s] the word to the action, the action to the word", keeping a balance and correspondence between the word spoken as it has been previously set down, and the physical action that accompanies it. From his perspective, actors are likely to do too much in all respects. They make disproportionate gestures ("saw the air"), use grotesque pronunciation and elocution, "mouth" the words like a "town-crier", and generally

“tear a passion to rags”. Their voices and bodies, while necessary to the visible manifestation of what is ‘set down’, tend to be and do ‘more’. Hamlet’s terms can easily be translated into concepts familiar to a modern understanding of theater that was only just emerging at the time of writing of the play. In his speech, theater is defined by two aspects: the foundation of a text, on the one hand, and the event of the performance, on the other. In word and action, Hamlet suggests, the latter should remain contained in the other, not exceeding it.

This excess is especially problematic as it endangers the “purpose of playing”: when they perform excessively, “it out-Herods Herod”: actors perform ‘larger than life’ and thereby exceed the boundary of the role. The real danger of the actors’ performance, therefore, is that it threatens to affect something implied in what is ‘set down’: a passion that belongs to a character, something that is to be expressed and represented. What is ‘set down’ needs to be protected against what is ‘more’ because it constitutes and contains the whole point, the entire “purpose of playing”.

Hamlet proposes a mimetic theory of the art of theater that is based on the aforementioned relationship of a concept of ‘text’ to a concept of ‘performance’. The latter must not “o’rstep the modesty of nature” because its goal is to imitate it. “[T]he purpose of playing”, Hamlet explains, is to “hold a mirror up to Nature”. The image of the mirror, a recurring metaphor in the poetics of *mimesis* since Plato’s *Politeia*, is here short-circuited with the formula in Aristotle’s *Poetics* according to which drama is the imitation of man in action. The purpose of playing is to replicate and represent something, and actors have the task of imitating humans, their words and actions. Their excessive performance in voice and in movement – ‘bellowing’ and ‘strutting’ – endangers this mirror effect, distorting the mirror and producing a flawed imitation of men. When the artist should make men as nature does, most stage artists are no more than “Nature’s journeymen”. Like the excessive extemporization of the clowns in particular, the performance of the actors in general threatens to obliterate what, in Hamlet’s eyes, is decisive: “some necessary question of the play” which might be “to be considered”

at that moment. Not to exceed what is ‘set down’, Hamlet claims, is the only way to accurately mirror nature, implying that the boundaries of the text are, in fact, the boundaries of “the modesty of nature”.

In the worst of cases, the style of performance that Hamlet deplors not only distorts the image but shatters the mirror entirely. In that case, imitation does take place – but not between the actors and the roles that are ‘set down’. Instead, performance can spark a process of contagion between actor and spectator. The clowns “will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh, too”. Laughter is an example of how performance is likely to cross the threshold between stage and audience and spark an imitation effect: suddenly, the spectators imitate the actors in their grotesque physical performance. In such cases, the actor’s performance specifically targets those that are disinterested in the articulate text that has been ‘set down’: “groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise”. They do not care about the spoken word and prefer to dismiss it altogether. They are generally “unskillful”, and thereby directly opposed to the “judicious”, those who “grieve” to see the “necessary question of the play” so cast aside.

The performance, Hamlet suggests, is an excess. It goes beyond limits: it is “o’erdoing”, “o’erstep[s]”, “o’erdoes”, “o’erweighs” – the limits of the text, of the role, and of the “necessary question”. In general, the time and space of the performance, shared by actors and spectators, leads to transgression as it crosses the boundary between stage and audience, between theater and world.

His criticism of the excessive performance of the actor subtly constructs and protects the boundary between text and performance. Protecting this boundary serves to erect and protect another one: that between what is represented through the performance of the text, an absent and timeless world signified by it; and the event of the performance, firmly rooted in the space and time of the world it belongs to, unfolding in time and disappearing after it ends. The mirror image produced by *mimesis* needs to be safely contained with

regards to the process that produces it, and this, says Hamlet, is achieved by containing the performance in the text.

Hamlet's speech, however, suffers from internal contradictions. His definition of the 'purpose of playing' is ambiguous. The mirroring process seems less straightforward than Hamlet's attacks against excessive acting suggest. It is only so "as 'twere", and somehow relates to an entirely different metaphor, that of the "form and pressure" that playing shows to "the age and body of the time". The physical process of impressing, or forming a shape, is here added to specify the image of mirroring, which precisely seems to contradict the notion of a transgressive and material modification, as object and mirror image usually stand alongside each other, unchanged by each other, merely asking to be neatly distinguished. While Hamlet pretends his concept of *mimesis* as imitation of nature is ahistorical – "both at the first and now, was and is" –, he advocates to radically reform current acting practices: "O, reform it altogether".

The apparent contradictions in Hamlet's speech testify to the historical moment of its creation. 'Text' and 'performance' are concepts only just forming in the complex context of the public theater in early modern England, and *Hamlet* testifies both to a newly imagined opposition between what is 'set down' and what is 'more', and to a still prevalent conception of theater that simultaneously exists as text and as performance, constituted by a dynamic relationship between these two sides of its existence. This introduction will outline the critical context of this study by showing how Shakespeare criticism and editing practice have anachronistically applied modern concepts of an immaterial text and an imaginary original performance to their study of Shakespeare's work on the page and on the stage. Starting from Hamlet's address to the Players, it will draw an alternative map of the material existence and the conceptual constellation of text and performance at the time of *Hamlet*'s first performances, investigating how these concepts manifest in the emergence of a dynamic involving agents such as the author, the actor and the spectator as authorities shaping the theater. Finally, it will present the methodology of this study, which consists

in approaching the text of *Hamlet* through contemporary performances of it, thereby testing the assumption that *Hamlet* still invites directors to newly negotiate the relationship between text and performance in the context of theories of postdramatic theater. Last but not least, it will provide an outline of the readings to be expected in the individual chapters of this study and present the sources and materials these readings are based on.

## A map to Hamlet's theater

Hamlet's call for reform bears the mark of the historical moment in which *Hamlet* is created. Hamlet is an avant-gardist in his own play. When *Hamlet* is first performed, the reform he advocates has only just begun. The play is well aware of its pivotal position within a historical evolution of theater towards the reformed state that Hamlet imagines. Between and beyond the lines, *Hamlet*, the play, says something much more differentiated than its title character does in the central speech. *Hamlet*, I argue, is aware that it is itself more than is set down. It is first written, performed and printed at a time in which the concepts of 'text' and 'performance' are still objects of a negotiation that takes place both on the page and on the stage.

Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa have made the point that “[a] fixed script or edition of any Shakespeare or Renaissance play, the printed form in which we customarily receive our versions of that peculiarly brilliant body of drama, is a chimera.” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 43) I suggest to react to the plurality and diversity of the “textual traces” (Greenblatt 1988: 3) of Shakespeare's plays not by making another attempt at locating that chimerical 'original' existence, but to read them with “an increased awareness of the fact that, from the very beginning, the English Renaissance plays we study had a double existence, one on stage and one on the printed page.” (Erne 2003: 23) This awareness shall be the backdrop of the following re-reading of *Hamlet*. It is looking for traces of this double existence in *Hamlet* itself, looking for the play's own awareness of its peculiar

position, confronted at once with a new form of theater – the public London playhouses – and a new medium for the text: print. As Julie Stone Peters has stated, “[i]t is not mere coincidence that theater and printing emerged as central forms of cultural communication during the same period [...] The printing press had an essential role to play in the birth of the modern theater at the turn of the fifteenth century. As institutions they grew up together.” (Stone Peters 2000: 1) *Hamlet* is a part and a manifestation of this common growth.

As ‘text’ and ‘performance’ are on the verge of becoming concepts whose relation will provide definitions and counter-definitions of theater for centuries, *Hamlet* shows how they are themselves constituted within a network of other concepts such as ‘author’ and ‘actor’, ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’. Far from being stable entities clearly related to each other through a network of oppositions and parallels, these concepts are instruments in economic, moral and poetological agendas. *Hamlet* testifies to an alternative vision of their relation to each other, aware of what theater can be beyond the vision that its title character defends. What is more, the play itself is not only a reflection, but an active participant in the evolution Hamlet’s speech describes.

While we might retrospectively assume the ‘text’ to be a fixed entity against which any one performance can be measured and tested, the ‘text’ is by no means a conceptual or material unity at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Around 1600, the advent of printed playtexts begins to shift concepts of text, performance and authorship towards those that Hamlet’s address to the players suggests. The reform that Hamlet suggests for the players is to some extent conditioned by new impulses that print culture introduced into the theater. As W.B. Worthen has stated, “[o]ur understanding of all of these terms – drama and theater, dramatic literature, text and performance – takes place in the historical condition of print and print culture [...]” (Worthen 2005: 8) Producing a complex interaction between theaters, playwrights, publishers, spectators and readers, the existence of printed play-texts had the effect of producing concepts of ‘text’ and ‘performance’ whose historical genesis became retrospectively obliterated, creating analytical tools hiding a number

of preassumptions about the relation of 'text' and 'performance' in theater. In fact, the evolution of the typography of printed play-texts shows that theater using a text was established itself as a distinct genre with a fixed place and form on the page and in the round of the public theater through the new medium of print.

While this new medium creates the conditions for the 'text' to become a fixed concept, this is also related to the rising to the figure of the author and more particularly the dramatist. Even though we retrospectively tend to identify Shakespeare as the epitome of the author as genius creator, the success of Shakespeare's works themselves was not initially tied to his name. At the beginning of Shakespeare's career, the author still hides within what is 'set down' in Hamlet's words. Hamlet does not mention him, but leaves it to us to assume that it is he who has devised the "necessary question" of the play for the attention of the "judicious" spectators, those who are capable of understanding it and abstracting for the undesirably distracting aspects of the performance caused by the excessive acting and the physical reactions of the spectators. This hidden presence of the author in Hamlet's address seems fitting, as it is only a few years before the first performance of *Hamlet* that authors of play-text begin to distinguish themselves from other agents involved in the production of the performance, such as the professional players that perform, among others, *Hamlet*. Hamlet therefore self-consciously addresses an antagonism closely related to the one between text and performance, the one between the author and other participants in the production of the play on the page and on the stage. As my reading of *Hamlet* will show, authors themselves shape their own image precisely by distancing themselves from the players and from the playwrights' collaboration with them in the production of theater performances. They do so by claiming inventiveness for themselves while devaluing the supposedly purely imitative art of the actor. They thereby promote the antagonism between text as the site of originality, and performance as the site of derivative representation.

The new form of existence of plays such as *Hamlet* on the page also had consequences for the conceptualization and the forms of drama's existence on the stage, with regards, for instance, to the idea of character acting. When Hamlet speaks of reforming acting in his address to the players, he does not mention print directly, but the fact that some aspects of the theater are now 'set down' is a prerequisite for a view on acting focused on the impersonation of character: The players should restrict their physical actions – not “sawing the air”, not “bellowing” or “strutting” – in order to make sure that they do not “out-Herod Herod”. He thereby joins contemporaries such as Philip Sidney and Robert Greene in reforming the scope of the actor's art. This places the actor in an antagonistic position with regards to the author: The construction of the author as antagonist of the actors that can be observed in Hamlet's speech is directly connected to the devaluation of practices of imitation and the valorization of inventiveness only permitted to the author and his textual product. Already implying a normative framework of 'playing by the book', Hamlet marks the actors' transgression out as a lack of competence. Not playing by the book is, simply, bad acting. In reverse, acting, that is: imitating, is bad writing. Early modern poets, in defending themselves against the accusation of lie and deceit that mimetic art is always vulnerable to, emphasize the inventiveness of their poetry. By the same stroke, they actively distance themselves from the actor's allegedly purely imitative craft.

As Hamlet's address indicates, the text-performance-antagonism not only surreptitiously imagines new ideas of authorship and acting style. It also distinguishes between groups of spectators, at a time when existing theater venues differently encourage or restrict active participation of spectators in the situation of performance. The distinction between the “groundlings” and the “judicious” signals towards a social distinction within the theater spaces. Reducing the proximity of the lower classes to the stage might have reduced the transgressive physical and vocal reactions to the performance and placed the “judicious” spectators that judged with their minds rather than their bodies not only closer to the stage, but made them

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visible for all as an example of correct behavior. Changes in theatrical architecture are therefore part of the reform that Hamlet advocates, as they did help bring about a different role of the audiences more familiar to us today as early as when Hamlet was first performed: “The Blackfriars introduced London for the first time to the general disposition of seating that prevailed in modern theatres.” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 29) They confirm that the audience, not the author or the actor, are the self-effacing heroes of the reform demanded by Hamlet: “Change came about because of the differences in the auditoria rather than in the plays or the players.” (ibid.) Hamlet instructs the players to reform their style of acting with a view to protecting what is ‘set down’ and, by the same stroke, the “necessary question of the play”, against the transgressions not only of the clowns themselves, but of the audience who react to them. The opposition between text and performance is not least one between diverse attitudes of spectatorship. It also requires and produces the figure of the author and a new role for the spectator.

Finally, the new relationship between text and performance that defines the theater in Hamlet’s speech has far-reaching implications for the relationship of theater to a concept that is entirely new to that period: that of fiction. If the text-performance-paradigm tends towards the making of ‘an’ author from the many authors involved in the creation of the theater performance, authors and playwrights also actively promoted a new image of the author in the context of a poetics of *mimesis*. To legitimize their creativity, authors need to defend themselves against anti-mimetic skepticism and the close association with the players, producing the author not only as important agent in the material processes that govern the printing of play-texts, but as the locus of originality and authenticity within the new, *mimesis*-oriented poetics of theater. Their defense of the positive educational effects of theatrical *mimesis*, reads Aristotle’s *Poetics* anew, freeing *mimesis* from the accusation of the lie, but at the cost of condemning the excesses of performance as the site of all things wrong with theater.

In his speech Hamlet, the character, presents text and performance as concepts that need to conform to a specific relationship, including norms for actors and spectators that secure their distinction. *Hamlet*, the play, is aware of its own double existence as text and performance and conceives their relationship as a more complex one. While its title character is adamant on containing performance within the boundaries of the text and adopts the early modern re-interpretation of classical poetics of *mimesis*, *Hamlet* explores the power of performance to dissolve distinctions and cross boundaries between author and actor, between actor and character, between actor and spectator and ultimately between the theater and the world. It thereby develops an alternative conception of *mimesis* that moves away from the image of the mirror and the ideal of imitation of nature and imagines *mimesis* on stage as a productive process that is collectively produced and transforms those who participate in it.

### *Hamlet* versus Hamlet

Since *Hamlet* itself doubly exists as text and performance, *Hamlet* is a play about theater as text and performance in two ways. One is to be found in what is, indeed, ‘set down’: the lines and stage directions that have been passed on until today as Shakespeare’s tragedy. On the other hand, *Hamlet* instructs us to read between the lines and points us towards what is ‘more than is set down’, the live event of the performance.

The readings I conduct in the three chapters of this study show that on the one hand, the dramatical situations that make up the play, its plot, and the conflicts it dramatizes, can be understood in terms of a historical debate about the role of text and performance in theater. Known plot elements of *Hamlet* – the apparition of a ghost, the imperative to avenge a murder, the title character’s choice to simulate madness, his staging a play within the play, thematize the aforementioned concepts and articulate a dramatic conflict between them: an author that provides a dramatic script and an actor who enacts a role, for example.

On the other hand, the play creates opportunities for effects that unfold in performance, and the text points towards those empty spaces and provides springboards for contemporary readers and directors of *Hamlet* to discover ‘more than is set down’. When performed or imagined in a situation of performance, possible effects of the actor’s physicality, opportunities for extemporization, and calls for and awareness of the audiences’ involvement in the performance ambiguate or contradict the concepts and dynamics visible on the textual plane. *Hamlet* thereby not only includes its existence as performance in its text by making it an object or metaphorical undercurrent of its dramatical and poetical form, but performs its own theory of a transformative theater.

In the following study, I propose a reading of *Hamlet* as a play that highlights the relationship between two modes of its own existence. The study focuses on its own awareness of its double existence: its existence as a “text” on the one hand, and its existence as “performance” on the other. I understand the terms text and performance as being permanently in inverted commas: Instead of presupposing them as theoretical concepts, I attempt to identify them as effects of *Hamlet*, the play, itself. In order to make these effects visible and readable, I inscribe *Hamlet* into the context of its early modern existence, to access what, per definition, lies outside of or rather, in between the textual traces that have been preserved until today.

The obstacle to such a reading is obvious, as the historical performances of *Hamlet* are, by nature, not accessible today. I attempt to read the textual traces left by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* from the precarious position of an observer of the past, from a point of view that is necessarily contemporary. I will therefore become an observer of what is ‘more than is set down’ by participating as a spectator in performances of *Hamlet* today, finding myself in a position not unlike Hamlet’s itself: investigating early modern drama is in many ways like interrogating a ghost. “I began with a desire to speak with the dead”, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it at the outset of the introduction to his volume of essays *Shakespearean Negotiations*. A conver-

sation with the dead, like Old Hamlet's Ghost, always remains speculative. Participation, however, can occur as imaginary reconstruction: For "the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living." (Greenblatt 1988: 1) To repurpose Stephen Greenblatt's image: I will combine the textual traces and the voices of the living directors and actors staging *Hamlet* today into a conjecture of what exceeded what was 'set down' in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In each of the chapters of *More than is set down*, I investigate one of the first three acts of *Hamlet* and address one of the central elements of the map drawn by Hamlet's speech to the players, in an attempt to uncover the play's self-awareness of its double existence on the stage and on the page.

In the first chapter of *More than is set down*, I argue that the appearance of the Ghost of Old Hamlet, who claims that Hamlet's father has been murdered by his brother (possibly with the help of his mother), and its encounter with Hamlet in act one, scene five, can be read as the encounter between an author providing a script to an actor expected to perform a revenge plot according to what is 'set down'. Their conversation dramatizes the antagonism between a newly emerging early modern concept of authorship and the players of the early modern stage, thematizing the early modern skepticism regarding the recently emerging concept of authorial invention and foregrounding the collective nature of authorship in performance, which includes actors and spectators as 'authors' of the performance. At the same time as representing as a figure of authority and authorship, the Ghost's dubious ontology deconstructs this authority from the start: While Hamlet believes the Ghost's claims without hesitation and accepts to perform according to its imperative at first, the Ghost's appearance in itself raises a number of questions about its existence as well as correlating questions about the possibility to rely on human perception and human reason to understand it. The Ghost's peculiar *hauntology* not only points towards the relationship of a dead author towards the recurring performances of its writings; it serves to deconstruct the authority of the author right

away by calling into question its legitimacy as a speaker and, therefore, the validity of its imperative. The “epistemological anxiety” that the Ghost sparks, I argue, shares many of the features of early modern skepticism towards the theater performance, making the Ghost into not only a figure of an authorship newly constructing its authority in the play-house, but of the theater performance in general and of the potentially deceitful performance of the actor in particular, shifting the author’s authority towards the actor’s performance. In addition, the witnesses of the Ghost’s appearance display a spectrum of behaviors and affects associated with spectatorship in the antitheatrical literature of the time, pointing to the effects of performance that Hamlet relies upon. Most importantly, scenes surrounding the appearance of the Ghost tend to foreground the ambiguity between characters and actors, and highlight the necessary contribution of spectators to a performance that is authored collectively and completed by the interpretation by and interaction with spectators.

Act two of the play focuses on the role of the actor for the double existence of Hamlet. Chapter two explores the ‘antic disposition’, the pretense of madness that Hamlet adopts in response to his encounter with the Ghost, as an ‘acting disposition’. Investigating the historical connection between madness and the figure of the fool in early modern popular performance culture, the ‘antic disposition’ becomes readable as the self-conscious performing of performance. Such a reading reveals a conception of the actor that emphasizes his double mode of existence between text and performance, within and outside the character, between a timeless ‘world-within-the-play’ and the present time and space of the performance. I argue that Hamlet’s often quoted delay of action is, in fact, the choice of a different mode of action: acting. While the ‘antic disposition’ has a dramaturgical function, as Hamlet intends to sound the truth of the Ghost’s claims and the honesty of his uncle and mother while hiding his intention under the cover of his own alleged insanity, *Hamlet* stages the ‘antic disposition’ to reflect upon the nature of acting as an action. While Hamlet, the character, at times shares the

antitheatrical skepticism against actors and performance as deceitful imitation, he himself acts by acting, performing the opposite of what he claims. I show that *Hamlet* appropriates characteristics of the speech, place and performance of the fool, a central figure in the popular theater culture preceding and existing alongside London's professional public theaters. Through the 'antic disposition' of its title character, Hamlet formulates its own theory of acting. The actor actively creates and shapes a community with the audience and takes on a detached, commenting attitude towards the character and the 'world-within-the-play'. Ultimately, this self-aware display of the 'antic disposition' as an 'acting disposition' lends the character of Hamlet himself a superior awareness of his own plot.

The figure of the Ghost and Hamlet's 'antic disposition' point us towards what is 'more than is set down' and firmly situate the textual traces of *Hamlet* in the event of the performance as that which exceeds, complements and completes it. In chapter three, I turn to the scenes featuring players and a theater performance in the third act of *Hamlet*. The arrival of the troupe and the performance of *The Mousetrap* provides the opportunity to reflect upon the theater performance as an event in a present time and space shared by actors and spectators with a focus on the latter. While *Hamlet* presents a theory of theater to the players in which the performance must remain within the limits of what is 'set down', presupposing that text and performance can be neatly separated, the scenes surrounding *The Mousetrap* and the play-within-the-play itself are a study on how performance precisely derives its power from the dissolution of the boundaries between them. As both the concerns of early modern antitheatrical writers and the theories of post-dramatic and performative theater state, the event of the performance consists in the transmission back and forth of something between the space of the stage and the space of the audience. *Hamlet* argues that the spectator needs to be physically affected by it in order to actively contribute to its construction. While *Hamlet's* contemporaries' greatest fear is that performance, entering the senses and thereby the minds of spectators, might change them for worse, the play fully embraces

this potential sensory and affective transformation and lasting impression as its main benefit. Incidentally, touching the spectators and provoking an active reaction is what fulfills the purpose of *The Mousetrap*: to catch the conscience of the King.

This emphasis on the participation of the spectator in the theater performance also reveals an alternative vision of *mimesis* that takes up early modern readings of Aristotle's *Poetics* and confronts them with an idea of *mimesis* as practice rather than representation. It opens the possibility that the physical presence of actors and spectators in the performance situation does not disrupt the representation of the 'world-within-the-play', but on the contrary, their presence and the passing back and forth of impressions between stage and audience space is paramount to the 'purpose of playing'. Chapter three delineates more precisely the relationship between the two images Hamlet uses to describe the 'purpose of playing': 'form and pressure' on the one hand, nature's mirror on the other. Just as *Hamlet* is only complete when existing doubly as text and performance, the practice of *mimesis* finds its purpose only in the collective process of creating a representation that relates to the world outside the theater by affecting the spectators in a way that permanently transforms them.

## Text *versus* performance

Beyond proposing new insights into a well researched play such as *Hamlet*, this study is also an attempt to go beyond the biases that anachronistic concepts of 'text' and 'performance' have caused in much of Shakespeare criticism and editorial practice. Both have long understood the two existences of Shakespeare's works to be mutually exclusive and unnecessarily hierarchized them, pitting text *against* performance.

Critical and editorial stances with regards to Shakespeare often fetishize one of two things: the imaginary ideal of a lost authorial manuscript, on the one hand, the equally imaginary notion of a pure

performance. To do so, advocates of both ideals dematerialize the textual traces of Shakespeare's works, which exist only in print, to create the idea of an abstract authorial text, or of an equally abstract authorized performance based on this text. The objective of both these strategies in much of Shakespeare criticism and editing has been to distinguish between an original Shakespeare and what is not Shakespeare by establishing an original version of, say, *Hamlet*. In both cases, there is a need to distinguish what is 'set down' in Shakespeare's manuscript or manifested in performances of his writings authorized by himself, and what is 'more than is set down': intentional or erroneous additions to the 'original' play-text by publishers, editors, printers or actors, illicit additions, cuts or interpretations of the 'work' in performance. This process has obliterated two important facts about 'text' and 'performance' at the time of the writing and first performance of *Hamlet*: that its existence as text and performance was entirely material, be it written, printed or performed, and that both its existences were equally plural. The reduction of this plurality and materiality to the abstract idea of the 'original Shakespeare' produced an opposition not unlike the one drawn by Hamlet in his speech to the players.

To speak of 'text' and 'performance' is always a reduction of a plurality of phenomena to form two abstract concepts. The neat distinction and opposition of these concepts is even more certainly an anachronism with regards to the turn of the 17th century, when *Hamlet* was first performed and printed. If neither text nor performance are singular, unequivocal phenomena, it is even more difficult to see them as such when looking back 400 years towards the period around 1600. To make matters more confusing, however, *Hamlet* is itself part of the history of fetishization of author and text, as it begins at least with the first edition of Shakespeare's works by his fellow players and shareholders with the King's Men, John Heminge and Henry Condell. The Folio edition is entitled "William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies, Published according to the True Originall Copies. London. Printed by Isaac Iaggard and Ed. Blount". Shakespeare's name is the most prominent textual element on the page, which is entirely dominated by an engraved

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portrait of the author. No playing companies or places of performance are indicated, only that the print follows the ‘true original copies’, thereby already beginning to obliterate the unclear and contingent history of transmission of the textual traces for the benefit of an ideal and singular original work. When scholars perceive their own concepts of text, performance, and authorship as part of a continuous history that includes *Hamlet*, they are therefore not entirely wrong. But Shakespeare criticism and editing practice have used the textual traces of *Hamlet* and of early modern theater in general to establish concepts of ‘text’ and ‘performance’ as well as a causal and temporal relationship between them, often directed by their own stakes in shaping a historical past that is impossible to recover with any certainty. A closer look at some instances of Shakespeare criticism and editing practice reveals much about a historical evolution of theater as determined by those two concepts, and shows that *Hamlet* marks its starting point.

### 1. Immaterial text, original performance

Criticism and editing of Shakespeare often take their starting point from the textual traces that have survived, and, from there, conjecture diverse ways of relating those traces to an imaginary written manuscript or live performance. In this process of conjecturing, the notions and different material modes of existence of *Hamlet* become instruments in the pursuit of a much more fundamental agenda: “to differentiate the non-Shakespearian from the Shakespearian” (De Grazia 1988: 70), as Margreta de Grazia observes. The means to reach that aim is to dematerialize the textual traces of *Hamlet*: “By necessity, the non-Shakespearian is physical (the compositors’ marks on the page), and the Shakespearian is immaterial (there are no play texts written in his hand). The physical elements of the book are examined so that they might be stripped off, leaving the purified authorial essence behind.” (De Grazia 2008: 70-71) Whether critics locate the essence of the Shakespearean in notions of the ‘text’ written by Shakespeare or the performance that took place using his writings, the ultimate aim is to establish an ‘essential

Shakespeare'.<sup>3</sup> Many ways lead to that objective, as Margreta de Grazia sums up in one of her numerous articles on the subject: "Devoted to what might be termed an 'incarnational text' – material in form, immaterial in essence – the study of the book as physical object thus remains metaphysically mystified." (De Grazia 2008: 82)

The project of creating an immaterial Shakespeare is significantly impeded by the fact that only printed traces of Shakespeare's works survive. More often than not, as in the case of *Hamlet*, there are several versions of plays that sometimes considerably differ in length, order and content. Editors and critics have grappled with the plurality of these printed traces by, for instance, distinguishing "bad quartos" from "good quartos", for instance for such plays as *Hamlet* and *Henry V*. This distinction, canonized by A.W. Pollard, is a means to reducing the plurality of the contradictory printed versions of some of Shakespeare's plays by distinguishing between those that were allegedly based on authorized written copy, and others that were the result of an oral practice without the author's authorization. The devaluation of those prints allegedly based on oral transmission alone, rather than on an imagined manuscript, was based on the theory of "the 'memorial reconstruction' of Shakespeare's plays, whether by actors, by other playhouse personnel, or even by scribes in the audience." (Worthen 2005: 27) More interesting than the question whether memorial reconstruction actually played its part in the production of the early prints of Shakespeare's play, is the question what purpose it has for those editors and critics that insist on it. Lukas Erne observes that "[t]he most important implication for Greg's 'memorial reconstruction' theory is that the text so diagnosed is recognized as derivative rather than original, a re-construction rather than an early draft." (Erne 2003: 201) Between the contradictory editions of a play, then, editors had to privilege one or the other as closer to the 'original', or to collate them in believing that both combined approached something that, after all, nobody could definitively recover.

Even more precarious than the agenda of reconstructing an original text is the idea of an 'original performance', which is at the center of performance-oriented criticism. As the ideal text that might have

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<sup>3</sup> There is, of course, a virtually limitless supply of criticism about Shakespeare's works and text, performance, print, theater and many related concepts, and many more than those mentioned in the introduction are relevant to and have informed this study. They usually follow the principle of pairing 'Shakespeare' with one of the concepts named. There are those works dealing with Shakespeare and the text in its abstract and/or material forms, such as Andrew Murphy's *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text* (2008), Richard Meek's, Jane Rickard's and Richard Wilson's *Shakespeare's book. Essays in reading, writing and reception* (2008), and John Jowett's *Shakespeare and Text* (2007). Others focus on Shakespeare and performance in a retrospective (historical) perspective, such as, for instance, the numerous works of Andrew Gurr, or on contemporary performance of Shakespeare, such as Pascale Aebischer and Kathryn Prince in *Performing Early Modern Plays today* (2012). Rarely, studies focus on both, such as David Bevington in *This wide and universal theatre. Shakespeare in performance, then and now* (2007), and John Russel Brown in *Studying Shakespeare in Performance* (2011). Yet others address the relationship between 'text' and 'performance' and related concepts, such as Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel in their collection *From Print to Performance in Shakespeare's England* (2008). Some of them attempt to reach beyond the binary, as Holland explains in the introduction to the latter: "While the normative movement of the early modern play is seen as being from writing to performance to print [...] there are other routes that the consideration of the twin poles, so often taken to be almost the binary opposites, of print and performance seem to pose." (Holland 2008: 1) Often, they do so by attempting to open-mindedly construct the specific role that text, book and performance had in their respective social and economic fields at Shakespeare's time, anchoring their claims in the traces of the historical context. Meek's *Shakespeare's book* for instance "examines Shakespeare's works in relation to these different contexts of production and reception" in the trailwater of David Kastan Scott's seminal study *Shakespeare and the Book* (2001), exploring "Shakespeare's relationship with actual printers, patrons and readers" and "the representation of writing, reading and print within his works themselves" alike (Meek et al. 2008: 13). Andrew Murphy's collection of essays adds to the historical exploration of "Histories of the Books" the history of editing practice and questions of "Practicalities" of editing and criticism. (Murphy 2007: v-vi) He sums up the limited possibilities of any study of the 'textual traces' of Shakespeare, caught in between the determinations of the scholar's present predisposition, and the inaccessibility of the historical past: "Shakespeare wrote the plays, but they are also rewritten in every generation by editors seeking to make sense of them from within a cultural field which shifts from generation to generation. The present volume aims, as best it can, to make sense of Shakespeare's text in the context of our own cultural moment, and also

been set down in Shakespeare's manuscript, the performance is only accessible through the prints that have been handed down in different versions. Performance, ephemeral and unrepeatable as it is, poses an even greater obstacle to the agenda recovering an 'original Shakespeare'. If the plurality of texts that connect the printed editions of *Hamlet* to the imaginary original that Shakespeare wrote is troubling, recovering a performance seems even more daunting – not only because performance is in itself an unrepeatable singular event and thereby by definition impossible to document, but also because *Hamlet* was an equally diverse phenomenon in performance as it was as text. Imagining the Shakespearean 'original' as an original performance meant assuming that performance practice was in fact somehow unified at the time. Janette Dillon rightly points out that "[p]erformances are specific to particular players in particular times and places, as are the texts they perform," and theaters were still extremely diverse spaces in Shakespeare's time: "We cannot refer to 'the playhouse' as a singular concept but must take note of the material differences between different playhouses and playing spaces and recognize that different texts may be appropriate to different performances." (Dillon 1994: 78)

Nonetheless, the title of Janette Dillon's essay "Is there a performance in this text?" shows that performance-oriented criticism and editing attempts to reach an 'original' performance through the textual traces of Shakespeare's plays to ultimately make it into another touchstone for distinguishing the Shakespearean from the non-Shakespearean. Again, the attempt is to produce singularity where

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of our current, imperfect, knowledge of the textual culture of Shakespeare's time." (Murphy 2007: 14) Inflecting the binary even differently in his *Shakespeare and Text*, Jowett argues that "'Text' is not 'the book'", situating himself with regards to historical reconstruction of the material conditions of printing and publishing Shakespeare and evoking the abstraction that is already implied in the concept of 'text'. He encourages the reader to view the printed texts as "both misrepresentations and the privileged and essential representations of the lost manuscript on which they are based. [...] To understand Shakespeare as text, it is critical to keep hold of both halves of this critical paradox." (Jowett 2007: 4)

there is only plurality. Performance-oriented critical movements attempted a recovery of their own: that of the text as it was performed. The theory of “memorial reconstruction” becomes revalued: in the case of performance-oriented criticism<sup>4</sup>, a text reconstructed by players or spectators could signify not less, but more closeness to a fervently desired ‘original’: what if the text produced through memorial reconstruction was one that brought us closer to the performance of the play? Lukas Erne somewhat polemically claims that performance criticism’s project is no less “doomed to failure” than New Bibliography’s pursuit of the imaginary authorial manuscript:

Greg’s project of recovering a lost authorial manuscript has been subjected to harsh criticism in recent times. Compared to the Oxford editor’s alleged recovers of performance, the leap of faith it requires from what exists (in the printed text) to what may have existed (in the manuscript) seems decidedly minor. (Erne 2003: 177)

In looking for the ‘original’ in the performance, scholars identify “the stage, then, as the ‘authenticity factor’ behind the play-text.” (Dillon 1994: 75) Picking up on de Grazia’s terminology, Dillon concludes: “The same is true of the search for the incarnational performance: it, too, discards the material overlay.” (Dillon 1994: 82) The tendency towards abstraction is visible for instance in Stephen Orgel’s *Imagining Shakespeare*. While Orgel acknowledges in the introduction that “[w]hat we have of the Shakespeare text, all we have ever had, is a set of versions with no original,” he also emphasizes that “the history of performance [...] is really all there is. Every text we have of Shakespeare, even the very earliest, derives from the stage and has been through some editorial procedure, if only

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed narrative about the evolution of performance criticism, cf. James Bulman’s Introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance* (Bulman 2017: 11). “The edition which has most fully embraced the shift to performance-centered criticism”, Lukas Erne analyzes, “is the Oxford *Complete Works* in which Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor claim to “have devoted [their] efforts to recovering and presenting texts of Shakespeare’s play as they were acted in the London playhouses.” (Erne 2003: 175)

the procedure involved in translating a performance script into a book[.]” (Orgel 2003: xiv) While Orgel opposes one type of finality as anachronistic – “that the text is the play, and second, that texts themselves are essentially fixed, and represent the final form of the work, the form that embodies the author’s intention” (Orgel 2003: 8) –, he installs another: that when the “text is a book; the play has been left behind, disowned, even suppressed”(ibid.) Most critics consciously name the plurality and inaccessibility of both the idea of an ‘original’ text or performance. However, the final evaluation of both usually tips the scales in favor of one. The positions I have chosen to represent here are obviously a polarizing representation a broad and diverse field of criticism across the long history of Shakespeare studies. This serves the broader purpose of illustrating the inherent implications and biases that the concepts of ‘text’ and ‘performance’ generally carry: both are eventually abstracted from their material dimension as printed text and unrepeatable event, in order to give access to an ever immaterial ‘original’.

## 2. Scattered papers, collaborative authorship

In contrast to the tendencies in Shakespeare criticism and editorial practice that I have just drafted, the historical reality of both text and performance were very different. The self-awareness of *Hamlet* as a text existing doubly, as text and performance, is directly depending on the fact that text and performance are not yet formed as univocal and opposing principles at the time of *Hamlet*’s first performance.

Instead, the printed text was only emerging and negotiating its relationship to the performance, as can be seen in Hamlet’s address to the players, in which he is so eager to relate a methodology for acting, and idea of authorship and an etiquette for spectators to the relationship between what is ‘set down’ and what is ‘more’. In this section, I would like to give a few insights into what can be retraced of that relationship at the time of *Hamlet*’s first performances, to set the scene for the readings that will follow.

### *Material diversity*

*Hamlet's* existence as a text is not one of a unified or immaterial original, but materially diverse. No manuscript of Shakespeare's works survives and the play is extant in prints of *Hamlet* that are quite different from each other. In addition, *Hamlet* was itself the product of a multi-stage process in which many hands were involved. We must assume that it existed as a manuscript (the so-called "foul papers", a rough draft from the author), as "fair papers" that were a version cleaned-up by the theater company's book-keeper, the several and separate "parts", notes that the actors received in order to learn and rehearse their lines, which usually only contained their own and the prompt words from other actors, a playbook, approved by the censor and carrying his signature, which the company would carry with them if touring outside of London cf. Gurr 2000: 43–45; Stern 2009: 2–7)<sup>5</sup> As Tiffany Stern explains, "in fact plays were from the start written patchily" (Stern 2009: 2), so that "the play in whatever form it reached the playhouse was

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the diverse material supports in which *Hamlet* existed, see – among many others – Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theaters* (2000), pp. 43-45 and Tiffany Stern, *Documents of performance* (2009), p.1-7. Stern's general approach is particularly explicit in the latter, as her meticulous work in theater history generally counteracts the fact that "the segmentation of plays from their initial construction to their first performance and thereafter tends to be ignored by modern critics." (Stern 2009: 2) She insists on the fragmentary nature of all materials involved in the performance: "Together, the fragments that the playhouse made, in conjunction with the fragments that play-writing had produced, and the additional fragments brought about for advertising and explaining the play, were the documents that amounted to 'the play' in its first performance." (Stern 2009: 3) In *The Hamlets. Cues, Qs, and Remembered Texts*, Paul Menzer dedicates an entire monograph to investigating the relation between those playhouse fragments and the printed texts: "[T]he distribution of parts to players on the early English stage substantially added to this textual proliferation and scrambles conventional theories about texts and their transmission.[...] There are twenty-six speaking roles in Q2 *Hamlet*, for instance. Thus, there are potentially twenty-six scripts of *Hamlet* to include among the textual ephemera generated by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. We should imagine then not just two manuscripts ('foul papers' and 'prompt book') but dozens that could be shuffled, revised, reproduced, reassembled, copied, and "published", in the most expansive sense of that word." (Menzer 2008: 17)

either already a collection of scattered papers, or quickly became one.”(Stern 2009: 3) Eventually, any or several of these material supports could be used as copy for printed editions of *Hamlet*. Of these diverse written and printed elements of *Hamlet*, two printed versions from Shakespeare’s lifetime survive, printed in 1603 and at the turn of the years 1604 and 1605<sup>6</sup>, before *Hamlet* was printed in the first complete edition of Shakespeare’s works, the so-called First Folio, in 1623.

The title pages of all three prints show an interesting evolution with regards to the way that they conceive their relationship to the performance of *Hamlet*.

*Hamlet* was most likely first performed before 1602. Its performance precedes the first printed publication that we know of today from 1603, in a Quarto edition now referred to as Q1. Here is the title page of the copy of Q1 as it is made available online by the British Library<sup>7</sup>:

The tragicall historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke by William Shake-speare. As it hath been diuerse times acted by his Highnesse seruants in the cittie of London: as also in the two vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where

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<sup>6</sup> For questions of dating the performances and the prints of *Hamlet*, see Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor’s *Introduction* to their 2006 edition of *Hamlet*, pp.36-59: “In the case of this edition of *Hamlet*, however, we are not dealing with one printed text but three. Neither are we necessarily dealing with one first performance: the performance history of Q1 is surely different from that of Q2, and F may be different again. And behind the printed text there may be more than one ‘completed’ manuscript.” (Thompson and Taylor 2006: 44) Their actual historical dating and temporal relationship of the early prints to the first performances is less relevant for my argument than the self-fashioning of either in relation to each other.

<sup>7</sup> The British Library provides, the transcription of all title pages of the Quartos of *Hamlet* here: <https://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/playhamletbibs.html#first>. (accessed 10.12.2020) A comparative view of the online reproductions of the prints is possible at <https://www.bl.uk/Treasures/SigDiscovery/UI/search.aspx> (accessed 8.1.2021).

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At London: printed [by Valentine Simmes] for N. L. [Nicholas Ling] and Iohn Trundell, 1603.

This text presents itself as the text of a performance, recorded after the fact. The relationship between model and recording – performance and text – is destabilized from the very beginning: Of which of these diverse performances is the text a recording? The “diuerse” performances alluded to here might therefore not be those performed in London at the Globe exclusively. To further the authority of the print, the title page alludes to the company of “his Highnesse seruants” as well as to the author, “William Shake-speare”. This reference to the author is an extremely recent practice in the publication of Shakespeare and of play-texts in particular (cf. Erne 2003: 71) and the title page makes it clear that it is in itself not sufficient to establish the identity and quality of the text that is presented here: frequent performance by a well-known group of Players, themselves authorized by their noble support, is a better recommendation for potential readers and buyers.

A year later, a second version of *Hamlet* is printed in Quarto format, now referred to as Q2 :

The tragicall historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect coppie.

At London: printed by I. R. [James Roberts] for N. L. [Nicholas Ling] and are to be sold at his shoppe vnder Saint Dunstons Church in Fleetstreet, 1604. (or 1605)

It is noteworthy that there is no mention of performance on this second title page. Instead, a connection of the print to a previous printed version of *Hamlet* is constructed. This print is “Newly imprinted and enlarged” and thereby reinstates an earlier “true and perfect coppie” of *Hamlet*. It makes *Hamlet* whole “again” by adding to the previous print what was missing from it. The title page

of the Q2 of *Hamlet* disturbs the relationship between text and performance established by Q1. While the latter presented itself as a documentation in print of something which previously existed in performance, this print augmented what was defective in the text that first recorded the performance. Q2 claims to correct Q1 with regards to a different framework: the “true and perfect coppie”. This new print, one might say more pointedly, now references not a performance, but an ideal text. While William Shakespeare is still named as author, the players and places of performance have disappeared. Instead, publisher’s names appear together with a mention of the place where the book can be bought. While the title pages do point merely to the fact that “versions of a play called something like *Hamlet* were performed”, there is no reason to believe that the relationship to that performance they claim or deny can be used as evidence “of the status of this text” (Dillon 1994: 79):

The title page is not evidence of the status of this text as an authentic “performance-text.” It claims that versions of a play called something like *Hamlet* were performed. While it bears witness to the fact that known popularity and wide appeal were appropriate lures to customers buying books, it cannot be used as a testimony for the faithfulness of its text to any single performance. (Dillon 1994: 79)

Playbooks such as the Quartos of *Hamlet* were, first and foremost, an economic venture for publishers, and the title pages express their agenda in making the playbooks attractive for customers who were by no means used to reading plays as much as to hearing them in the theater. The author as an authority was as much discovered by the publishers as a further marketing strategy, as it was constructed through the printing press itself.

### *Generic uncertainty*

In the beginning of this process of common growth of public theater and print, the different media were not coextensive with abstract concepts of text and performance, and could certainly not align to an opposition between what is ‘set down’ and what is

‘more’. On the contrary, printed play-texts from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards show that neither were dramatic texts visibly distinct as a genre by a certain form on the page, nor was performance that used a text in some way distinct from other performative genres. The use of words or the presentation of something in performance were neither of them criteria to distinguish theater as a literary and a performative genre.

In her monumental work *The Theater of the Book*, Julie Stone Peters shows how, from the end of the fifteenth century, the book and the theater were both arenas for dramatic literature to unfold: “Writers before the late fifteenth century had numerous conventions for classifying literary works, but those classifications rarely invoked specific conditions of reception.” (Stone Peters 2000: 94) Genre distinctions were not yet aligning with those conditions of reception, so that the reading of a story, a morality play and a ‘dumb-show’ were all somehow performative formats independently from which texts they used (if at all). Joachim Fiebach equally notes how, correspondingly, players weren’t necessarily performers who spoke a text on a stage. Before the formation of groups of “players of interludes”, of whom Henry VII had four in his services (Fiebach 2015: 120), and the formation of the professional troupes Common Players towards the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, performers were distinguished according to anything but questions of the text:

Ein Zeichen sich anbahnender Veränderungen im sehr reichen theatralen Leben des vormodernen England war 1469 die Gründung einer Gilde der *Minstrels*. Das Wort Minstrel wurde für eine breit gefächerte Gruppierung professioneller Entertainer verwendet, die Ende des 13. Jh. der Subdekan von Salisbury nach der Art ihrer Darbietungen in drei Klassen von Histrionen eingeteilt hatte: Die erste umfasste die, die ihre Körper durch Gesten und Sprünge verändern und die entweder “nackend” sind oder “schreckliche Masken” tragen. Die zweite Gruppe erzählte skurrile Geschichten, und die dritte, die er als einzige für annehmbar hielt, waren Musiker und die “reciters of history”. Schon 1464 hatte eine Verordnung die “players of interludes”, eine bisher ungebräuchliche Bezeichnung, von den Minstrels oder Histriones unterschieden. (Fiebach 2015: 120)

According to Fiebach, members of the guild of the minstrels were categorized according to mostly visual or other aesthetic specificities of their performance, such as nakedness, use of masks, or music. Reciting history is only one dimension of the performance of the minstrels, and, in reverse, a text that could be used in performance did not necessarily require theatrical performance when brought before an audience, but gave the choice “between merely reciting plays and ‘represent[ing]’ them ‘with [one’s] limb’s.’” (Stone Peters 2000: 8) This is the reason why for example French writer Nicolas de la Chesnaye is “struggling for the right words” in the preface to his morality *The Condemnation of Feasting* (1503-1505), explaining that his work is

one of those “representations”, or “works that we call plays or moralities”. And so one may either “play” it or “represent [it] publicly to the simple people” or “demonstrate [it] to all visibly by actors, gestures, and words on a scaffold or otherwise,” or, alternatively, those who prefer to “read it or hear it read,” for “study, pastime,” or to inculcate “virtuous doctrines,” may do so “privately or in solitude.” (Stone Peters 2000: 93)

Julie Stone Peters concludes that “there were no real conventions for reading dramatic texts as theatrical scripts, nothing that would immediately identify a given text as necessarily a performance text.” (ibid.) Before the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, then, the distinction between text and performance was nonsensical as neither dramatic literature was determined by its being a text to be performed, nor was performative entertainment necessarily including a script for actors. At the time of *Hamlet*, however, the genres of dramatic literature and theatrical performance begin producing two arenas for the tension between text and performance to play out. This tension is visible in the typography of printed play-texts of the period, not only in the changes on the title pages, in which the representation of the authority over the printed text progressively shifts, but in the typography of printed drama itself. It increasingly excludes previously common narrative elements in favor of the text intended to be spoken by actors. As the shifting typography of play-texts shows, there used to be included much ‘more than is set down’ in Hamlet’s

sense on the printed page, that is: more than what Hamlet and modern drama consider as the lines constituting dramatic dialogue. On the other hand, printed materials for performance sometimes featured indications for performance that did not prescribe any concrete words to actors. The changing typography of play-texts shows an evolution towards the notion of actors speaking ‘word perfect’, no more no less than is ‘set down’ on the page. Julie Stone Peters sums this evolution up as follows:

throughout Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century, dramatic *mise en page* looked much like the *mise en page* of other kinds of works [...] (dialogues, pamphlet tales, devotional exercises), with no *dramatis personae*, no distinctive generic identification, no mention of performance, and (most telling) narrative description rather than stage directions or conventionalized speech-prefixes. (Stone Peters 2000: 23)

By finding and exploiting new conventions for the typography of texts with some relation to performance, the printed texts and manuscripts create a new relationship between text and performance: when readers begin to be used to watching and reading theater, reader-friendly surplus of text (as narrative supplement) is reduced. The performance becomes what is not in the text; and the text becomes what the performers speak, which is pre-scribed for them – no more. As the text becomes not more than is performed, this convention lays the groundwork for performance to become no more than is set down. The opposition between text and performance could only be established as the printing press began to institutionalize the dramatic text as distinct from other verbal forms, and as a verbal form that, as a print on a page, entertained a specific relationship to what occurred in the playhouse: “Drama was understood to play itself out in two arenas: on the stage and on the page.” (Stone Peters 2000: 8) This simultaneous existence of plays in two different modes is the prerequisite of the superposition of text and performance that transpires in Hamlet’s address to the players: that one mode of existence tends to be ‘more’ than the other requires that both be related in the first place.

*Writer's authority*

As I have proposed in the mapping of concepts from Hamlet's speech above, the concept of authorship is closely related to that new relation between text and performance. The process by which "Shakespearean dramatic authorship first acquired visibility", Lukas Erne writes, "started early enough for Shakespeare to have lived through and to have been affected by it." (Erne 2003: 56) Based on "the suddenness and the frequency with which Shakespeare's name appears on title pages of printed playbooks from 1598 to 1600," Lukas Erne conjectures that "'Shakespeare', author of dramatic texts, was born in the space of two or three years at the end of the sixteenth century. (Erne 2003: 63) Erne insists that the production even of the concept of authorship during Shakespeare's lifetime was not the result of a moral concern about authority, but a highly contingent economic and social process that implied many agents. Promoting the author, Erne shows, is not necessarily only a 'reform' in poetics or aesthetics, but essentially an economic venture that makes a change, rather than reflecting it: "[T]he stationers in some way made Shakespeare (or 'Shakespeare') or, to the extent that they did not make him, catalytically enabled his (or: its) making. Not that this had been the stationers' intention: their considerations, understandably, were economic." (Erne 2003: 75) Authorship in Shakespeare's time, as the work of Erne, Stone Peters and others has shown, included many collaborators insofar as it was still a new and mostly material affair, but it planted the seed for the evolution of an authorship that defined itself through an abstract claim to authority and originality and in antagonism to those who supposedly endangered this claim. Lukas Erne parodies the argument: "Greedy publishers, often of dubious reputation, and disconcertingly incompetent printers eagerly collaborated with other cor-

rupters and pirates to deprive Shakespeare's manuscripts of the perfection they had had" (Erne 2003: 75).<sup>8</sup> The antagonism was however not a given, as twentieth century criticism has often imagined, but created after the fact.

As Lukas Erne has extensively shown, Shakespeare (and his contemporaries) were not at all disinterested in the concept of the publication of texts, but increasingly pursued the presentation of his work in both media. Put simply, "what is particular about the time of Shakespeare's active involvement with the theater in London is that plays stopped having a public existence that was confined to the stage." (Erne 2003: 14) As the stationers and publishers, then, made playwrights such as Shakespeare, they were also directly involved in creating an antagonism between stage and page that has retrospectively been assumed as a precondition of the relationship between stage and page at that time. The title page and front matter of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, published in 1590 by Richard Jones, is a striking example, that also makes the increasing prominence of the author's name on the title pages of the prints of *Hamlet* more significant. The rhetoric of editor Richard Jones directly echoes Hamlet's address to the players:

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<sup>8</sup> As Julie Stone Peters differentiates, "there is a good deal of truth to the conventional descriptions of the lackadaisical attitude towards the publication of play in the Renaissance: the absence of a developed relationship between most playwrights and the printing press; publishers' impassivity towards even theatrically successful plays" (Stone Peters 2000: 31), the output of plays between 1480 and 1630 seems small when looked at backwards from the perspective of the 17th century and compared to the quantity of printed output in other genres. This definitely calls into question the assumption that publishers would go out of their way to print play-texts at all costs. In addition, if, for instance, "bad quartos" were the results of an illegal attempt to publish while circumventing the author's or troupe's assent, there would have been good reason for the publishers to conceal their participation. However, "Since neither Q1 nor any of the 'bad' Shakespeare quartos were printed with the publisher's name omitted, it seems unlikely that any of the publishers considered their ventures fraudulent." (Dillon 1994: 80)

on the one hand, there are the “fond and friuolous Iestures” (the spelling of the last word being an obsolete variant of “gestures”, but perhaps also containing the additional idea of “jests” with its low-comedy implications) “gaped at” by “vaine conceited fondlings” (foolish persons, perhaps with the additional suggestion of groundlings); on the other hand, there are the “honorable & stately” histories or “tragical Discourses,” written by an “Authour,” to be read by “Gentlemen, and courteous Readers” after their “serious affaires and studies,” and submitted to their “learned censures.” (Erne 2003: 72)

The parallels between Jones’ address “To the Gentleman Reader” and Hamlet’s address to the players are obvious, with the difference that the author himself does not appear in the dichotomies that structure Hamlet’s monologue. He is subsumed within what is “set down”, while the other agents of the antagonism appear clearly: the actors and their allies, the spectators, who love excessive gestures, and prefer what is more than is set down. The paratext of play-texts, this title page shows, encouraged the evolution of a dichotomy between text and performance for the purpose of creating the figure of the author as an increasingly immaterial figure of authorization.

### *Collective creation*

The pre-reformed reality of collective authorship of plays such as *Hamlet* assembled theater makers around a public theater stage for which plays needed to be produced to entertain audiences. Being shareholders of the Chamberlain’s Men, Shakespeare and the actors of the troupe collectively produced the program that was on display at the Globe and pursued a common economic interest. The process of production involved not only what was ‘set down’, but much more: writing, to be sure, but also rehearsal, advertisement and performance itself. The emergence of an author figure in the interest of making the theater business profitable in the medium of print created, as I have mapped out above, an antagonism between the art of the author and that of the actor, long before the idea of intellectual property might have created a conflict over who – author or actors – had the authority to decide whether a play was printed or not. Determining what the object of such a notion of property would be, would have been difficult, as the ‘play’ was an

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assembly of fragments used in rehearsal and in performance before eventually becoming a book. The textual elements that were used in the production of the performance encountered a performance culture that still involved extemporization, counting on a collaborative interaction between which was ‘set down’ and what was ‘more’. The making of the idea of ‘the author’ and the related idea of playing ‘by the book’ that is at the center of Hamlet’s speech, by contrast, relies on the construction of an antagonism with the actors as authors of the stage: Constructing a right or a property begins with the idea that it might be infringed upon.

In their co-authored work *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theaters*, Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa justifiably point toward the material process of moving Shakespeare’s words into performance: “The players, not the authors, owned the playbooks, and they were free to cut them as they pleased or as the conditions dictated.” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 24) While the concept of the ‘original’ has found its way even into the pragmatic and impressively detailed and precise historical approach that Gurr and Ichikawa deploy, they importantly point out that authorization was not based on the need to secure an abstract intellectual property. The imperative of truthfulness to “the ‘allowed book’” (ibid.), if actors felt one, was therefore less one of fidelity to an original than one of abidance by the demands of censorship:

The phrase “played according to the printed booke” echoes the normal way of describing what actors were to do with texts that had passed the censor, opposed to the playing beside the book that could sometimes evade the censor’s controls. (Stone Peters 2000: 370)

The notion of intellectual property that would protect an author from theft of his ideas or writings is not anchored in any of the reported performance practices before print. It is print that first allowed for a discourse on “the repudiation of imitation, the identification of piracy and plagiarism as thievery, and the distinction of the poetic ‘original’ from copy – crucial to the conceptualization of the play-text as authorial property, by nature owned by the author-

creator” (Stone Peters 2000: 9), and it is the root of the retrospectively perceived antagonism between authors and actors. As Hamlet’s speech to the players shows, the advent of print in the theater left its traces by shaping the conception of authorship. It made an antagonism between actors (represented in Hamlet’s speech by “those that play your clowns”, prone to extemporization) and authors (of what is “set down”) imaginable. It created, “a normative notion of ‘theatre’: a place where comedies and tragedies were to be represented by actors ‘playing by the book.’” As Hamlet’s insistent skepticism towards the potentially transgressive performance of the actors shows, there must have been a growing sense that an already existing “licentious” theater, embracing its own populism and drawing an alternative legitimacy from a spectatorship defined in opposition to the page” (Stone Peters 2000: 8-9), was somehow infringing upon something not yet entirely established: the authority of an author’s original idea over the actor’s performance and of the printed page over the stage.

#### *Audience distinction*

Last but not least, in Hamlet’s instructions the audience is much more prominent than either author or actors as an authority over the performance. Hamlet’s speech includes into *Hamlet* what might be thought to constitutively remain excluded from what is ‘set down’, the audience and its active part in the performance. In his call for a reform, Hamlet also calls for measure and restraint in the audience, privileging an audience of judicious readers who only consider the “necessary question” of the play. Hamlet thereby once more comments on the historical evolution that Hamlet’s speech references, pointing to the specific conditions of reception in which it was itself. His speech reveals the impact of the audience on the performance, but also discriminates between diverse types of audiences, giving more authority to the “judicious” than to the “groundlings”. A different type of valorization by different classes of audience members transpires in Hamlet’s speech, one that privileges those that appreciate the necessary questions of the play through internal approval rather than the raucous laughter of the groundlings at the excessive gestures of the clowns. Whereas the aesthetical

benefit and the entire pleasure of performance relies on the approval and contribution of the audience, Hamlet's eagerness to use only certain spectators as judges of a play's quality shows the desire to seal off the stage from the spectators, protecting what is 'set down' from interventions on the side of the audience, too. A changing role of the audience in performance is also manifest in changes in the diverse conditions of reception of performance. In both the outdoor and the indoor theaters that existed in London at the time of Hamlet, "whether lit by sun or candlelight, the audiences were always visible" (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 38). Nonetheless, a reform was under way, mirrored in the disposition of the audience in different types of theaters: "Where in the popular venues the poorest were crowded in the most conspicuous positions closest to the stage, at the Blackfriars and the Cockpit they were at the rear, and the richest were closest and most visible." (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 29) The distinction between the "groundlings" and the "judicious" signals towards a social distinction within the theater spaces. Reducing the proximity of the lower classes to the stage might have reduced the transgressive physical and vocal reactions to the performance and placed the "judicious" spectators that judged with their minds rather than their bodies not only closer to the stage, but visible for all as an example of correct behavior. Changes in theatrical architecture are therefore part of the reform that Hamlet advocates, as they did help bring about a different role of the audiences more familiar to us today as early as when Hamlet was first performed: "The Blackfriars introduced London for the first time to the general disposition of seating that prevailed in modern theatres." (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 29) They confirm that the audience, not the author or the actor, are the self-effacing heroes of the reform demanded by Hamlet: "Change came about because of the differences in the auditoria rather than in the plays or the players." (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 29) Hamlet instructs the players to reform their style of acting with a view to protecting what is 'set down' and, by the same stroke, the "necessary question of the play", against the transgressions not only of the clowns themselves, but of the audience who react to them. The opposition between text and

performance is not least one between diverse attitudes of spectatorship.

## Reading *Hamlet* as text *and* performance

### *Why Hamlet?*

William Shakespeare is the author whose works are staged the most in Germany and German-speaking theaters in the past years. Since 2000, Shakespeare has been omnipresent on German stages, almost constantly holding the first rank in the “Werkstatistik des Deutschen Bühnenvereins” for at least the past five seasons – be it according to the number of new productions, of performances or of spectators.<sup>9</sup> *Hamlet* is rarely absent from the list of plays most staged and performed, right alongside *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. There is therefore no lack of productions of *Hamlet* that might be used for a study such as this one, even in the last few seasons. They cover a multitude of approaches, from Luk Perceval’s schizophrenic Hamlet, performed by two actors forming a grotesque body (Thalia Theater Hamburg 2012), Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller’s 12-hour evening “Nationaltheater Reinickendorf”, built from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Ibsen’s *The Master Builder* and Puccini’s *Tosca* (with Berliner Festspiele, 2017), Boris Nikitin’s recent one-person Hamlet starring musician and performer Julian Meding (Kaserne Basel, 2016), or Johan Simons’ staging with Sandra Hüller in the title role (Schauspielhaus Bochum, 2019), continuing a long

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<sup>9</sup> In the most recent edition of „Wer spielt was?“, the journal in which the Bühnenverein publishes its statistics, from the season 2020/2021, Shakespeare is number one author in the categories „Number of new productions“ as well as „Number of performances“, when looking at Germany only and when including Austrian and Swiss theater. He ranks number 2nd with regards to number of spectators. In that season, there were three new productions of *Hamlet*, after six new productions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* (4) and *Twelfth Night* (5).

tradition of female Hamlets. The frequency and range of the stagings show that the significance of *Hamlet* for German literature, culture and theater persists.<sup>10</sup>

The stagings used here have been chosen as they first inspired the questions and methods of this study. Thomas Ostermeier's staging of *Hamlet* revolves around the performance and the personality of Lars Eidinger, and thereby foregrounds interrogations about the distinction between character and actor, as well as the involvement of the audience into the play. Its stage set, mainly consisting of a podium and a curtain, gives the metatheatrical aspects of Hamlet a palpable shape. The long run of the production makes it especially prone to those processes of "haunting" that characterize the peculiar temporality of the theater performance that uses a well-known dramatic text according to Marvin Carlson: Audiences come to see Eidinger as Hamlet in a show that is notoriously sold out for weeks in advance, and the sixteen years that have passed since the premiere have added an additional layer of self-referentiality to the performances today (cf. Carlson 2003: 16). Christopher Rüping's staging, more recent and less prominent, places the emphasis on the role of *Hamlet* as canonical text and explores the production's relationship to the textual traces of Hamlet by making the text into an autonomous participant in the performance in the shape of an LED screen. The cast of three actors performing all roles in turn or simultaneously encourage a detached reflection upon the relationship of the performance and those that produce it to the textual traces of *Hamlet*.

Even though the stagings used here are a minuscule sample from the almost infinite range of Hamlet's staged on German stages in the past years, they are examples of a more general phenomenon. *Hamlet's* significance, I believe, is not exclusively due to the interest in Hamlet as a character, but in the potential of *Hamlet* to serve as

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<sup>10</sup> See Peter Marx' recent monograph: *Hamlet's Reise nach Deutschland. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (2021).

a mirror for directors and actors to situate themselves in contemporary theater aesthetics and institutional politics and reflect upon their relationship with to canonical works.

*Hamlet* particularly lends itself to this self-reflexive use because it is aware of its double existence as text and performance and the temporality inherent to any text to be performed. This self-conscious metatheatricality of the play has been increasingly noted, more especially with regards to the relationship between Hamlet, the character, and Hamlet, the plot. James Calderwood remarks that “seems to have created a character who is, though it seems odd to say so, conscious of his dual identity and able to express both sides of himself, almost as though he were an actor at a rehearsal.” (Calderwood 1983: 32) Lionel Abel has argued that “Hamlet is one of the first characters to be free of his author’s contrivances” (Abel 1966: 58). Margreta de Grazia criticizes that modern criticism and performance have focused entirely on Hamlet’s interiority, giving him “monadic exclusivity that alienates him from the play.” (De Grazia 2007: 5) While de Grazia proposes a reading of *Hamlet* without Hamlet that lays bare the materialist premise of the play, I read Hamlet, the character, and *Hamlet*, the play, in a dialogue that can only be made visible and understood when *Hamlet* is performed at a historical and performative distance from the abstract idea that *Hamlet* has become over the course of history. As James Calderwood argues, *Hamlet* is the most striking example of “Shakespeare’s law of the included middle (a thing may be both A and not-A).” *Hamlet* can be both a text and not a text, both performance and not performance (Calderwood 1983: xiv-xv). The potential of Hamlet to reflect upon theater has in addition been shown by the multiple ways in which it serves as a metaphor and an example for theoretical claims from all kinds of disciplinary backgrounds, be it to explain the mystery of the actor’s art (Simmel 1920-1921: 346 ff.), to explain the theatrical frame in relation to other social frames in Erving Goffman’s Frame analysis (Goffman 1974: 128 ff.), or to illustrate the actor’s double perspective on his role in Konstantin Stanislavski’s *An Actor’s Work* (see Stegemann 2007: 154 ff.). “Hamlet=Metatheater’, Ramona Mosse argues, “wäre eine mögliche und

nicht einmal mehr radikale Anfangshypothese.” (Mosse 2014: 107) That *Hamlet* is a particularly apt starting point to reflect upon the role of the text in performance and in performances of *Hamlet* in particular is built into the text itself, but also due to its long intertextual history: “*Hamlet* als Figur im ständig filigraner und komplexer werdenden intertextuellen Gewebe setzt einen Reibungspunkt zum Begriff des Metatheatralen. Mehr noch, diese Spannung beweist, wie grundlegend die Relation zum Text für das metatheatrale Spiel überhaupt ist.” (Mosse 2014: 107) Mosse notes that the metatheatrical self-awareness of contemporary stagings of *Hamlet* depend upon the relationship to a text that is always encountered in the mode of the quote, as a node in a complex net of intertextual references to the many past existences of *Hamlet*. But *Hamlet*, I argue, more fundamentally shows Western European modern theater as defined by an inseparable relationship between the performance and the text, that each performance reflects upon anew.

#### *Method and materials*

“The purpose of playing”, *Hamlet* explains to the actors, is “to show [...] the whole age and body of the time its form and pressure.” If a performance of *Hamlet* in 1600 reflected Shakespeare’s contemporaries’ concerns about the relationship between text and performance in the theater, it also tells each following audience their respective relationship to the concern of theater as text and performance, as it is defined in their specific historical moment. *Hamlet* therefore allows us to see a dimension of theater between text and performance – not only when recontextualized within its double existence on the page and the stage around 1600, but especially through its being enacted and re-enacted today.

In a reconstruction of *Hamlet*’s double existence when it was first performed, the perspective of the observer necessarily informs what they are able to see. The anthropological notion of the participant observer expresses the precarious balance of an act of observation that creates its object as it inscribes it into its historical con-

text, while remaining determined by their position as a contemporary observer of *Hamlet*, and that “analysis penetrates into the very body of the object.” (Geertz 1973: 15)

This is even more the case as the concepts I attempt to explore in and through *Hamlet* are historically and theoretically charged. The discourse of this study can itself not be free of the dichotomies of concepts of text and performance that have been historically established and ever fortified. To circumvent or at least dampen the effect of the methodological obstacles that such a reading poses, I take my methodological cues from the play itself. Far from hierarchizing the concepts of ‘text’ and ‘performance’ with which it operates, *Hamlet* on the contrary calls into question that they can be productively distinguished at all, and suggests that there exists a dialectic relationship between them that ultimately leads to an awareness of *Hamlet*’s double existence as text and performance, as the one is always present within the other. To see this duplicity requires an equally duplicitous reading of *Hamlet*. If Hamlet is aware of and reflects upon its double existence as ‘text’ and ‘performance’, one must develop the concepts from the textual traces of the play as well as from contemporary performances of it. In each of my chapters, therefore, I develop the research question at hand through an analysis from the performance of a contemporary production of *Hamlet*, either from Thomas Ostermeier’s 2008 production for the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin, or from Christopher Rüping’s 2017 production for the Münchner Kammerspiele, and then turn towards *Hamlet* as a phenomenon between text and performance around 1600. Through their contemporary concern with their own relationship to the textual traces of *Hamlet* and their differing, sometimes conflicting, position towards it, contemporary productions of *Hamlet* provide me with the opportunity to develop the research questions I would like to address. In staging their own reflections about their existences as text and performance, the contemporary productions provide the analytical tools to interrogate the textual traces in a way that, as we have seen, is closer to the play’s own historical preconditions as the tools applied from the perspective of literary studies so far.

### Binocular vision

This is why I choose to view *Hamlet* through the lens of two contemporary stagings, Thomas Ostermeier's 2008 *Hamlet* for the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin, and Christopher Rüping's 2017 staging of *Hamlet* for the Münchner Kammerspiele. Contemporary performances of *Hamlet* reflect their relationship to the textual traces they use and situate themselves towards them and the history of interpretations, editions, stagings of *Hamlet*. Contemporary directors use the play as a benchmark in the evolution of their directorial language, reflecting upon and positioning themselves towards what is conceived as canonical in a theater culture that is profoundly marked by the idea that theater is theater with text. In doing so, they reveal the potential of the play to illuminate its existence as performance around 1600, when print just began to fundamentally change performance.

This requires a kind of double vision fit to the double existence that *Hamlet* leads, just like any other piece of text-based theater. In his monograph *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms. On the Phenomenology of Theatre*, Bert States uses the term "binocular vision" to describe the audience's capacity to simultaneously perceive the performance in semiotic and in phenomenological terms: "If we think of semiotics and phenomenology as modes of seeing, we might say that they constitute a kind of binocular vision: one eye enables us to see the world phenomenally; the other eye enables us to see it significantly." (States 1985: 8) Erika Fischer-Lichte has further developed States' notion of "binocular vision" into different perceptual orders to describe the simultaneous perception of the performance as an object of hermeneutic decoding and as a phenomenal experience by the audience (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 150-151). Marvin Carlson, in turn, has adapted Bert States' term to describe the peculiar temporal conditions of reception of an audience that witness a performance 'haunted' by a well-known dramatic text. "an audience's binocular vision" is the result of "its members' familiarity with the previous treatment of this same material and their ability to draw comparisons between that and the new, rival treatment." (Carlson 2003: 27) Combining the definition of States with that of Carlson, I read

*Hamlet* and its contemporary stagings with a binocular vision in two senses: seeing the performance simultaneously as the performance of a text, *and* an event with its own phenomenology. And seeing the performance as a present reflection on a past play that is itself aware of its double existence as text *and* performance in its own time. That *Hamlet* is itself the beginning of the reform that still structures today's theater's reflection upon the relationship between text and performance is precisely the reason why an approach through contemporary performances is so fruitful. If I use an interdisciplinary approach, combining the tools of literary studies and Shakespeare scholarship with those of theater and performance studies, it is less to replace one methodology with another, but rather a consequence drawn from the double existence of the play itself.

I will therefore use an interdisciplinary approach, combining the tools of literary studies and Shakespeare scholarship with those of theater and performance studies: I will take my starting point from those branches of Shakespeare studies that research the material conditions of the writing, performance and printing of Shakespeare's plays, developing a differentiated understanding of both concepts in their historical mobility and their inherent plurality. Using the phenomenology-based approach to performance developed by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Hans-Thies Lehmann and further theorists of contemporary theater and acting such as Wolf-Dieter Ernst, I would like to look at the textual traces of *Hamlet* from the perspective of its living performance today.

In order to avoid those traps that my contemporary viewpoint and the limited tools of discourse, shaped precisely by the forces I have discussed in this introduction, as much as possible, I shall refer to definitions of 'text' and 'performance' as described by contemporary theater and performance studies, as well as rely on the work of Shakespeare scholars who have worked to situate Shakespeare's work in the historical and social context of early modern England and early modern theater in particular. To circumvent the trap of assuming that there is a causal relationship between the textual traces of *Hamlet* and its contemporary performance merely due to the fact that the textual traces of Hamlet came 'first', I will draw

inspiration from recent concepts of adaptation studies. Instead of imagining the text to be an artefact of the past that is used in contemporary performances, I understand the ‘work’ as a process, “not in terms of a tension between text and performance, but in a reciprocal relation to the Shakespearean ‘work’” (Kidnie 2009: 5). In *Shakespeare and the problem of adaptation*, Kidnie argues that “the work, far from functioning as an objective yardstick against which to measure the supposed accuracy of editions and stagings, whether current or historical, continually takes shape as a consequence of production.” (Kidnie 2009: 7) It is a premise of this study that *Hamlet* as text and performance fully exists only through individual performances of its contemporary stagings. In reverse, as it interacts with textual traces from the past, *Hamlet* in performance is “never entirely present with itself”<sup>11</sup> (Dicecco 2017: 619), always pointing back to past references and future possibilities of shaping *Hamlet* as a text or a performance.

The following study must make sure that reading *Hamlet* as text and performance does not equal reading performances, contemporary

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<sup>11</sup> Theater and adaptation scholars have been concerned with the paradoxical temporality of performance as something referring to something past while being at the same time present and ephemeral. As Nico Dicecco has argued in his essay “The Aura of Againness” (2017), it is precisely the ephemeral and iterative nature of performance that reveals the nature of adaptation at all. The tension between the possibility of a reference – i.e. to ‘*Hamlet*’ – and the unrepeatability of the performance event itself constitutes a paradox. Dicecco’s description allows for a simultaneity of the performance’s present to something in its past: “If my argument rests crucially on the recognition that the reception of adaptations is a live act, then againness helps to get at the temporal component of this encounter.” (Dicecco 2017: 614) Similarly, Marvin Carlson’s *The Haunted Stage. Theatre as a Memory Machine* (2003) analyses the way in which elements foreign to a production or performance ‘haunt’ the performance. Processes of haunting equally rely on an audience that imports expectations (for instance about the text) or previous knowledge (for instance about the actor’s previous roles) into the viewing of a performance of a play in a new production. Theater is therefore a memory machine: “The retelling of stories already told, the reenactment of events already enacted, the reexperience of emotions already experienced, these are and have always been central concerns of the theatre in all times and places.” (Carlson 2003: 3))

or historical, like a text. As Christopher Balme highlights, it is hardly possible today to liberate discourse on performance from a metaphorical or discursive reference to the governing paradigm of the text. The transfer of this imagery often implies the transfer of a scientific method. The term of ‘performance text’, for instance, leaves room for the idea that the entire performance can be decoded like a text, including a hierarchization between both:

A problematic consequence of the notion of the unitary performance text is the assumption – either implicit or explicit – that the performance layer must demonstrate loyalty to the play or text layer. The function of the production, the staging, must be to transform authorial intentions set out in the text as precisely as possible into performance. (Balme 2008: 128)

If, in this study, I do conduct an “historical ‘back-reading’”, then, it is certainly not to “test [...] the performance against an assumed correct reading of the text,” but, on the contrary, to open up a new reading of the textual traces with the help of contemporary performances. (Balme 2008: 123) When speaking of *Hamlet* as ‘text’, therefore, I will assume Christopher Balme’s definition of “texts to be performed”<sup>12</sup>, assuming with him that “[b]ecause theatrical texts are usually written with performance in mind, the performative aspect has already determined the text either consciously or unconsciously, although the exact determinants are extremely difficult to

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<sup>12</sup> In his *Cambridge Introduction to Theater Studies*, Christopher Balme carefully maps diverse possibilities of relating text and performance and their implications for the understanding and the study of theater. First of all, contemporary theater studies can no longer rely on the genre-specific typography that forms at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to determine texts available for performance: “In order to accommodate those performance-related texts that may not evince any of the usual stylistic elements of the dramatic form, the term ‘theatrical text’ has been coined, which is used increasingly in theatre studies to refer to the textual basis of a performance,” Balme explains (Balme 2008: 124). The wide definition of the ‘theatrical text’ presents the advantage of avoiding a normative assumption about the specific causal, temporal or aesthetic relationship between text and performance, and attempting to be merely ‘descriptive’ of it: “if it has been or is intended to be performed, it can be defined as theatrical.” (Balme 2008: 130)

identify.” (Balme 2008: 128) *Hamlet*’s textual traces, I assume, therefore bear the marks of performance past and intended.

When speaking of ‘performance’, I mean the event of the performance itself and its defining characteristics, which might include its relationship to a ‘text’. I again follow Christopher Balme’s definition: “The performance is what spectators actually see on any given night. It is a particular version of the production, and is unrepeatable.” (Balme 2008: 127)<sup>13</sup> I therefore do not speak of performance as a genre, for example distinct from theatre, nor of those two terms as “mutually exclusive or adversarial” (Radosavljević 2013: 20). When speaking of ‘theater’, I attempt to make its inflection clear in context, meaning respectively the theater building, the social activity, or the art form.

To understand the relationship between *Hamlet* as text and *Hamlet* as performance better at the historical moment of its first performances, I use early modern sources and critical work following the line of Stephen Greenblatt and many others to inscribe Shakespeare’s plays into a historical context in which they are no detached artefacts, but part of an ongoing negotiation that permeates the boundaries between the theater and the world. Stephen Greenblatt has early on challenged the stability of the “text”, suggesting to describe the textual aspect of *Hamlet* as “textual traces” (Greenblatt 1988: 3), who

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<sup>13</sup> The characterization works best in relation to the terms of play and production, which I also use following Balme in this study: “(1) The play or theatrical text constitutes a structure of linguistic signs regulating the story and the characters. If it is a well-known one, there will be considerable expectations on the part of the spectators regarding how it will unfold. (2) The production, or staging (the French term ‘mise-en-scène’ is also used) is a particular artistic arrangement and interpretation of the text with a high degree of stability. It includes the set design, the lighting plot, usually the same actors performing the moves they have learned. Cuts to the text and questions of casting such as doubling roles or cross-casting all belong to the realm of the production or staging.” (Balme 2008: 127)

are the products of extended borrowings, collective exchanges, and mutual enchantments. They were made by moving certain things – principally ordinary language but also metaphors, ceremonies, dances, emblems, items of clothing, well-worn stories, and so forth – from one culturally demarcated zone to another. (Greenblatt 1988: 7)

For a better understanding of the complete multidimensional existence of theater at the turn of the 16th century, I rely on the work of scholars such as Robert Weimann, Tiffany Stern, David Mann, Andrew Gurr and many others, who have reconstructed the early modern performance with an dynamic text-performance-relationship in mind, assuming that for Shakespeare “the written word is itself a kind of technology: perhaps as much a technology as stage architecture or actor's voice.” (Karim-Cooper and Stern 2013: 3) In the Introduction to their work *Shakespeare's Theater and the effects of performance*, Tiffany Stern and Farah Karim-Cooper insist that “for early modern playgoers, attending theatre performances was a fully embodied, sensuous experience, its emotions arising as much from the physical environment as from inscribed textual moments.” (Karim-Cooper and Stern 2013: 2) Building on these convictions, I will attempt to reach out to the experience of the past in reading *Hamlet* as a play aware of its double existence as text and performance around 1600.

### Texts and performances

The following analyses use Ann Thompson's and Neil Taylor's three-text-edition of *Hamlet* for the Arden Shakespeare. The editors justify their decision to edit and publish three *Hamlets* as follows: “Each of Q1, Q2 and F is a version of *Hamlet* which appeared either in, or soon after, Shakespeare's lifetime. Each includes a printed claim to be by him.” (Thompson and Taylor 2006: 91) The benefit of their edition is that, instead of “choosing between alternative readings when they exist, or correcting perceived errors”, Thomp-

son and Taylor provide an edition that allows to view all three versions of Hamlet's textual traces separately.<sup>14</sup> When quoting Hamlet from Ann Thompson's and Neil Taylor's 2006 edition of the second quarto, I use this format: (act.scene.verse). When quoting the first quarto or the First Folio edition, I add "F" or "Q1" to the bracket. When quoting the editors' notes, I refer to the verse annotated as (n.act.scene.verse). When quoting other plays by William Shakespeare, I add the play's title to the bracket, for example: (*Henry V* act.scene.verse) and quote from the Arden edition of the *Complete Works*.

My observations on Thomas Ostermeier's production of *Hamlet* for Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (Berlin premiere: 17 September 2008) are based on two distinct live performances witnessed on 27 October and 12 December 2017, and again on 31 January 2019. To check my observations from the performances, I used the professional recording of the production filmed at the Festival d'Avignon in July 2008 for arte (Avignon premiere: 16 July 2008). When quoting directly from the recording, I provide the time code of said recording (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: [hour]'[minutes]'[seconds]).

I additionally use textual materials with different relationships to the production. Marius von Mayenburg translated and adapted *Hamlet* for Ostermeier's production. Quotes from his published translation are attributed to Mayenburg as author, for example (Mayenburg 2008: [page]). There are two textbooks ("Spielfassung") compiled by assistant director Anne Schneider that document

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<sup>14</sup> In my reading, I focus mainly on Q2 and F. As Q1, also due to the edition history illustrated above, has been less canonized than the Q2 edition and is rarely the basis for contemporary translations and productions of the play in German, it is a less prominent dialogue partner for the contemporary performances I use in this study. A more complete approach to the questions at stake here would require additionally observing possible interactions of the Q1-*Hamlet* with productions today, in order to also shed light on the relation of Q1 to Q2 and to the Folio edition as well as to the early modern performances of *Hamlet*, and to produce a comparative study of Q1's possibly diverging awareness of *Hamlet*'s double existence as text and performance.

changes made to Mayenburg's published version of the text in the course of rehearsals leading up to the first performance at the Athens Hellenic Festival on 7 July 2008. I use the earlier version dated 21 September 2008, recording the state of the text to be performed closest to the production's premiere. In addition, there are two director's books ("Regiebuch") equally established by Anne Schneider including all non-verbal elements of performance, blocking, technical cues, situations and 'moods' agreed upon in rehearsal. I use the later book dated 19 March 2010. I refer to the "Spielfassung" as (SF 2008: [page]) and the "Regiebuch" as (RB 2010: [page]).<sup>15</sup>

I have witnessed two performances of Christopher Rüping's production of *Hamlet* (Premiere: 19 January 2017) at the Münchner Kammerspiele on 26 April 2018 and 2 February 2019 respectively. To check my observations, I have used an internal recording of Rüping's *Hamlet* dated 21 February 2018, which I refer to as (Rüping 2017: [hour]'[minutes]''[seconds]). I have been generously granted access to the production's unpublished text to be performed (dated 24 January 2017), which I quote as (Rüping 2017: [page]).

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<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz and Thomas Ostermeier to have allowed access to these documents.



1 Lars Eiding as Hamlet, reading © Arno Declair

## CHAPTER ONE – Haunting the stage, staging the Ghost

### Digital imperative

Christopher Rüping's production of *Hamlet* begins with its end. To the threatening sounds of a trumpet sampled by a musician live on stage, three actors flood the stage with buckets of blood that they fill from containers at the back to symbolize the carnage that ends the play. They also bring in and carefully position furniture, props, and costumes. During the back-and-forth of the actors, an LED screen hanging to the left of the stage successively displays *Hamlet's* dramatis personae, slowly crossing out their names. This process is interrupted as the screen suddenly displays a direct address to the actors moving about on stage: "ICH BIN GETROFFEN" (Rüping 2017: 2). The music stops as the LED-screen, tongue-in-cheek called "Hamletmaschine" in the production script<sup>16</sup>, proceeds to display Hamlet's dying words to his friend (cf. Fig. 2):

HAMLETMASCHINE  
HORATIO!

HORATIO (Alle)  
Ich bin hier, mein Prinz.

HAMLETMASCHINE  
HORATIO, ICH STERBE.

HORATIO  
(Nils) Dann lass mich dir folgen.  
(Katja) Hier ist noch ein Schluck übrig.  
(Walter) Dann lass mich dir folgen. Hier ist noch ein Schluck übrig.

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<sup>16</sup> It alludes to the title of Heiner Müller's 1979 adaptation of *Hamlet*, *Hamletmaschine*, which itself alludes to the lines of Hamlet's letter to Ophelia: "*Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him.*" (2.2.120-121).

HAMLETMASCHINE  
 NEIN.  
 ICH BIN HIN.  
 DU LEBST.

HORATIO  
 (Katja) Nein. Ich lebe, ich sterbe mit dir.

HAMLETMASCHINE  
 NEIN.  
 SEI EIN MANN!  
 ATME.LEB.BERICHTE.  
 ERZÄHL VON MIR UND MEINEM AUFTRAG.  
 ICH BIN HAMLET. ICH BEFEHL ES DIR.  
 (Rüping 2017: 2)

The Horatios on stage are reticent; they want to follow Hamlet into death. The screen insists, now quickly unfurling Hamlet's injunction from left to right: "Gott, Horatio, welch versehrter Name, bleibt all dies Dunkel, wird mich überleben. Wenn Du mich je in deinem Herzen trugst, so bleib dem schönen Tod noch eine Weile fern, und atme schmerzhaft in der rauen Welt, um HAMLET zu erzählen." (Rüping 2017: 3) As the Horatios don't react, keep hesitating, the screen – Hamlet's spokesperson – keeps speaking the same injunction over and over – until Horatio agrees to stay alive, and Hamlet can finally die:

HAMLETMASCHINE  
 WAS?

HORATIO (*Alle*)  
 Ich will gehorchen und tun, wie du befehlst.

HAMLETMASCHINE  
 HORATIO, ICH...  
 ICH!  
 ICH ... –  
 DER REST IST –  
 (Rüping 2017: 3)

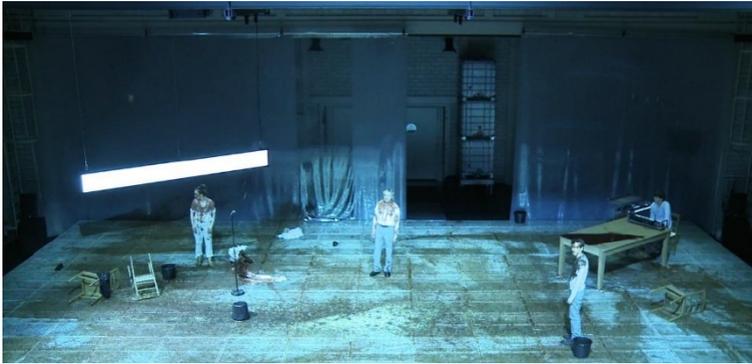
Katja Bürkle, Walter Hess and Nils Kahnwald all react as Horatio, speaking the character's lines in response to the text on the LED screen. Their responses overlap, eager, scared or resigned. Hamlet's final words demand from Horatio to tell his story to posterity. When Horatio finally agrees not to follow Hamlet into death, but to remain alive to narrate what led to the "Schlachthaus" (Rüping 2017: 4) before us and to thereby clear his name, the screen shows Hamlet's last words: "Der Rest ist – ". They flicker and dissolve into bright light that suddenly illuminates both stage and audience space. The three Horatios turn towards us, the spectators, and welcome them, before beginning right away with a narration *ab origine* of the plot of Shakespeare's play, accompanied by the romantic sound of a harp: "Am Anfang war ..." (Rüping 2017: 4)



2 Horatio (Katja Bürkle) and the HAMLETMASCHINE © Thomas Aurin

The framework created at the beginning of the production lays bare the process that produces the performance. It does not create the illusion of an autonomous world behind a transparent fourth wall, but insists on the materials and processes that are needed to produce Christopher Rüping's *Hamlet*: the musician is visible on the entirely bare stage from the beginning; there are no wings to hide

before entrances and after exits, the backstage area is visible through a transparent plastic screen. (cf. Fig. 3) The actors work as stagehands, bringing in and setting up their own props and costume. That which we usually assume to precede the arrival of the audience and the beginning of the performance is here part of it.



3 Stage set by Ramona Rauchbach (still from recording of Rüping 2017: '10'06)

But there is more. When the text of *Hamlet* begins to appear on the LED screen, one might argue, *Hamlet* hasn't yet begun. Hamlet's last words spark the performance of his *Hamlet* by the three actors. In Rüping's production, Hamlet's dying words frame whatever follows as story-telling, revealing its outcome. But, as it is the end of what spectators might know of *Hamlet*, hasn't the act of storytelling that Hamlet demands from Horatio already taken place? Beginning the performance of the play with its last lines not only reorganizes the relationship between its beginning and its end, but also assumptions about the causality between text and performance. The text, instead of being a part of the performance as a dialogue between characters, sparks the performance of *Hamlet*. The end, rather than being the result of a string of events, somehow arrives before the beginning, becoming the cause of what it seemed to conclude. Rüping's production calls into question where the origin and authorship of the play reside.

The fact that Rüping's production lends *Hamlet* as a text a distinct existence within the performance is a means to reflect on the relationship that one might assume they entertain, causally, temporally or aesthetically. It stages a conflict between text and performance by giving the abstract, disembodied concept of 'text' a physical shape. It speaks to the director and the actors from a long lost past. Their reaction to it and interaction with it, as we will see in the course of the following chapter, opens the way for their autonomy and their opposition to the imperative to "narrate Hamlet" in a certain way. Confronted with the authority of the disembodied text, they claim their part in the authorship of *Hamlet*, situating it in what is 'more' than the text: the performance. Rüping's *Hamlet* creates a dramatic dialogue between a printed text by William Shakespeare written around 1600, and a team of theater makers<sup>17</sup> in 2016, a dialogue in which they negotiate who is to tell the story of Hamlet.

When looking closely, however, such a dialogue is by no means external to *Hamlet*. This seemingly invasive reorganization of the play by Rüping's production, I argue, is a part of *Hamlet* already. *Hamlet* is not *only* a disembodied text – written, printed or on an LED-screen – that interacts, conflictually or not, with directors and actors that produce a performance. *Hamlet* always already exists as text and performance. Even more: as a play, it has internalized the conflict that is here made explicit and literalized by Rüping's set-up.

The first element of the internalized reflection upon its double existence as text and performance is the Ghost of Old Hamlet. A ghost is present in Rüping's staging from the start. The beginning of Rüping's version is obviously different from act I, scene 1 of *Hamlet* as it has been printed in 1603, 1604/1605, and 1623. Instead

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17 I use the term in a similar sense and with a similar purpose as Duška Radosavljević: "The choice of 'theatre-making' as a titular denominator of the study's main scope covers the processes of writing, devising, directing, designing, performing and even dramaturging (whose Greek etymology is considered to imply concern with the making of action: 'drama' - action, and 'ergos' - 'work/er'). This is intended to place an emphasis on the process (of making) rather than on the text [...]" (Radosavljević 2013: 22)

of presenting the first scene featuring the sentinels on the walls of Elsinore, discussing the mysterious apparition of a ghost, it begins with the final verses of what has been established as act five of the play. But the production nonetheless features a digital “questionable shape”: The shape of the words appearing on the LED screen. This replaces the Ghost’s imperative to revenge with the imperative to narrate, once more, the story of *Hamlet*. The screen emits the words of a script that haunts today’s theater stages, is performed and repeated, multiplied and reproduced in stage productions, adaptations for the screen, rewritings and new versions. The production thereby uses an iconic figure from *Hamlet* to reflect upon its own relationship to the play as a textual trace who, like Old Hamlet’s Ghost, also asks to be remembered: “Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me!” In Rüping’s *Hamlet* for the Kammerspiele, the text is not only spoken, but present as an autonomous entity on stage: The LED-screen gives it a place and the illusion of an agency of its own. The production sets the scene for a metatheatrical reflection of the actors upon their relationship to an author’s text that is supposed to dictate their actions. The performance here incorporates the text as an independent element in order to reflect upon its own relationship to it.

Rüping points us towards something that the printed traces of *Hamlet* confirm, that is, the fact that the relationship between ‘text’ and ‘performance’ is not necessarily a unidirectional, temporal one, one that views the text as a starting point, an origin that is then augmented, changes shape and media to become performance. Even though Rüping’s *Hamlet* begins with its end, it unveils that the scenes surrounding the Ghost’s appearances in act one introduce us to a play focused on its own double existence as text and performance. Like the LED screen, the Ghost of Old Hamlet figures the imaginary phantasm of an abstract, disembodied and authoritative text, a pure voice delivering a dramatic script from beyond. But this voice depends on its embodiment either on the page or on the stage: he cannot be conclusively read as either text *or* performance, as a metaphor of either page *or* stage. In presenting us with a Ghost whom it immediately deconstructs, *Hamlet* opens with a statement

about an authorship that is an uncertain authority at the time of its first performance.

## A ghost's double existence

Rüping's production reveals that *Hamlet* sets a self-reflexive frame within itself through the appearance of the Ghost at the outset of the play. Its first act can be read as the exposition of an ensuing reflection about the relationship between text and performance as the two existing modes of *Hamlet*, exploring possible relationships and opening up new readings for the play. The first act introduces *Hamlet* and its seemingly contradictory double existence by staging a Ghost. It stages an antagonism between an author and an actor figure struggling for authority (*Ghost writing*), deconstructs the Ghost's authority as an author figure by reflecting upon the peculiar mode of existence of performance as a recurring and possibly deceitful representation of something absent and past (*Ghost performance*), and foregrounds the active authorship of actors and spectators in the making of performance (*Doing performance*).

At the beginning of the play, the Ghost is established as the voice of the author. Like the words on the LED-screen, it is a disembodied voice issuing an imperative from the past: Hamlet is to "revenge when thou shalt hear" (1.5.7) and to "remember" (1.5.91). The Ghost dictates Hamlet his conduct and provides him with the script for the revenge tragedy that he is the main character in, and he may therefore appear at first to be a figure of authorship with an absolute authority over the actor's performance and the spectators' interpretation. This is fitting with the emergence of a concept of the author around 1600 as an autonomous, creative authority. What is more, this concept is fashioned by means of constructing an antagonism with the actors that so successfully perform the playwright's works in the public theaters. In *Hamlet*, the author appears as a disembodied voice that delivers a script to be performed and an imperative to do so. The Ghost as a figure of authorship conveniently allows to construe the idea of the text as something original, as a

spiritual presence to be obediently and accurately embodied by actors in performance, all the more as it belongs to the past and can therefore no longer be interrogated or called into question. The notion of its return from the grave additionally aligns the text-performance-opposition with one between past and present: the past text, Rüping's production also seems to suggest, brings the contemporary performance to life in a dialogue with actors who have a duty to perform it today.

But the Ghost's peculiar existence also makes it readable in terms of an early modern skepticism towards performance in general and the actor in particular. *Hamlet* reveals that the Ghost as author constructs its authority in an antagonism with the actor as a creator who hides their true being behind the screen of a fiction to trick the mind into acknowledging the existence of something which is not – much as the Ghost does with its spectators. The Ghost is quickly deconstructed as a figure of authorship as it poses an epistemological problem undermining its authority. This is as nourished by the skeptical philosophy of the time, the peculiar role of ghosts in the process of the reformation, and the fervent invectives against performance that reached a climax in the 1590's. Its appearance as a soldier with "his beaver up" (1.2.228) denies certainty through the ambivalence of its full-body armor, and this inconclusive appearance thwarts the power of its imperative. The author and his text cannot exist entirely disembodied: To come into existence, the Ghost requires the armor that at the same time makes it opaque and inscrutable. To come into existence, the text needs the performance.

The Ghost is all the more problematic as an authoritative author figure as it sparks "epistemological anxieties" (Maus 1995: 2): A historical skepticism towards arts as mimetic here meets with an interpretation of *mimesis* as a faulty representation of a more essential truth, which performance is particularly guilty of insofar as it imitates in the flesh: it affects and potentially betrays all senses, as does the Ghost, who might just as well be a figment of the imagination.

The Ghost is a likeness, an image of something gone, and its presence therefore begs more general questions about the status of appearance and essence and the relationship of original and copy. Therefore, reading the Ghost not only as a figure of the author and his disembodied text, but simultaneously as a figure of the performance that gives it a visible shape, allows us to link the Ghost scenes to the debate around the actor's role in the authorship of performance that surrounds the rise of the public theaters.

However, the Ghost also allows for another interpretation of performance: its very own power lies in its effects on its spectators. Instead of an ineffectual screen of fiction, it is a powerful agent that affects the senses, works on the imagination and transforms the mind. Despite its allegedly ontologically faulty status as a copy, the Ghost seems to have tremendous power to affect those that watch it, making them into co-authors of the performance created by the actors. They determine what they see by letting themselves be transformed and becoming believers rather than scholars. The first active and creative actor-spectator of the Ghost is Hamlet himself. The Ghost's name, speech and function, it turns out, is provided and produced by him. In addressing it, he names and creates it, placing himself in the space that seemed occupied by the author. By the same stroke, he extends authorship to take place both in the spaces of the text and of the performance. Unlike the phantasm of an author remaining outside his fiction, the Ghost engages in a dialogue with the character to whom he addresses his imperative to revenge. In their encounter, *Hamlet* explores a different image of the actor, one that confers on him the creative agency to create his own character, others and, in fact, his whole plot – or to refuse to perform it altogether. In addition, Hamlet as the essential spectator of the Ghost also suggests the spectator's role in the collaborative process of authoring the performance. The author is no longer a figure of authority over the performance through the text. Text and performance both become dependent upon the actor's body and voice, and spectator's gaze, submitted to their authority and autonomy.

## 1. Who's there?

The Ghost scenes of *Hamlet* are designed to point beyond what is 'set down' towards what is 'more' from the very start of the play. By beginning the play with reflections upon the nature of performance and of acting in particular, *Hamlet* explicitly refers to the situation of the performance and thereby invites the audience to perceive what follows in its terms. The Ghost scenes themselves provide an entryway into *Hamlet*. While not addressing the audience openly and without being clearly distinct from the action of the play 'itself', they still establish the situation as that of a theater performance, and thereby open up the possibility of a 'binocular vision' of what follows. What occurs next can be understood in the framework of a fictional universe clearly distinct from the sphere of the audience. But it can also be read as an address from actors performing a play, to those watching it, within their common space and time. The Ghost can be perceived as a phenomenon in its own right, while signifying the revenant of Old Hamlet. A present apparition, it evokes something past and builds on the audience's memory and expectation, therefore reflecting one of the basic conditions of theatrical reception. By making the possibility of a binocular vision in the sense of both Bert States and Marvin Carlson obvious in its first act, *Hamlet* invites us to watch and read the remainder of the play with the same binocularity and to become aware of its double existence as text and performance. The Ghost scenes framing the first act of *Hamlet* encourage an awareness of the simultaneously semiotic and phenomenal vision of the theater performance. The Ghost as the figure of a return thematizes the simultaneity of the audience's knowledge and expectation of the performance, and its actual experience of it.

The very first line of the play: "Who's there?" references the context of performance, as it entirely depends on it for its interpretation. A combination of two deictic pronouns, it is an utterance semantically open. Its meaning can only be established in relation to its context, and it right away foregrounds what Andreas Mahler calls

a “presentational” (Mahler 2007: 147) mode of signification by placing the deictic center of the question in a space shared by the actors and the audience (cf. Mahler 2007: 152). The ensuing dialogue is similarly undetermined:

BARNARDO Who’s there?  
FRANCISCO Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.  
BARNARDO Long live the King.  
FRANCISCO Barnardo?  
BARNARDO He.  
(1.1.1-3)

The initial question exposes that the communicative framework of each utterance in performance is twofold. Freddie Rokem teases out the effect of such a doubling on the spectators:

For the spectators it raises the question of what it is we are watching on the stage: actors, fictional characters, or both: who’s there, on the stage? And for the actors addressing the spectators it could also mean that they want to know who’s there, sitting in the auditorium, watching tonight’s performance. (Rokem 2014: 54)

Before the Ghost has appeared, the play presents the spectators with a sentence that announces the plurality of its potential significations. It opens the spectators’ minds to the possibility of reading all following utterances with that plurality in mind.

While a structuralist approach to the communicative situation of drama would fail to see this plurality as it remains rooted in that which has been passed on as the text, a performance-oriented vision of this scene entails an increase in its complexity. The approach of literary studies to drama is determined by its derivation from narrative theory, as we can see in Manfred Pfister’s definition of it: “Der Unterschied der beiden Modelle liegt darin, daß in dramatischen Texten die Positionen S2 und E2 nicht besetzt sind, das vermittelnde Kommunikationssystem also ausfällt.“ (Pfister 1994: 21) Pfister describes the doubleness of dramatic communication as a reduction in complexity: the mediating level of the narrator, which

frames any dialogic interaction of the characters in narrative prose, is 'missing' from the communication model of the dramatic text. However, he concedes that "dieser Verlust' an kommunikativem Potential gegenüber narrativen Texten wird jedoch schon dadurch kompensiert, daß dramatische Texte über außersprachliche Codes und Kanäle verfügen, die die kommunikative Funktion von S2 und E2 zum Teil übernehmen können [...]" (ibid.)

The fact that the text is performed on stage makes its pragmatics much more complex. Each utterance has a twofold speaker (actor/character), and, therefore, twofold addressee. The addressee of each utterance can be the actor it is spoken to, and the character the actor embodies. In addition to that, an external communication system includes the spectator as an additional addressee. Each utterance is pragmatically *also* addressed to him, in order to allow him to follow the plot unfolding on stage. Whether we read an utterance as addressed to a spectator, a fellow actor, or a character will determine the meaning of the sentence which, in turn, yields a different meaning for each of those pragmatic settings. At the very opening of the play, "Who's there?" presents the spectators with a semantic openness that reveals the diversity of what can be seen when 'binocular vision' is being adopted.

The pragmatics of the utterance in performance is thereby one of the basic conditions of performance. That it is made explicit at the beginning of *Hamlet*, also makes the spectator aware of the specific binocular vision they apply in their reception of it. Early modern performance conditions were probably prone to encouraging such a reception, and it can be assumed that spectators could 'take the hint' contained in the first sentence of *Hamlet*. Much has been said about the paucity of the Elizabethan stage, and the particularity of performing in daylight. These peculiar conditions are one of the reasons why place and time of day are signified with a few simple sentences: "'Tis now struck twelve." (1.1.5); "'Tis bitter cold" (1.1.6). But this means identifying the text as supplementing the 'shortcomings' of the conditions of performance. Appeals to the



HORATIO

A piece of him.

BARNARDO Welcome Horatio, welcome good Marcellus.

(1.1.12-19)

The scene keeps staging processes of identification and naming. It is night, and after Barnardo has relieved Francisco, the latter leaves, running into Horatio and Marcellus on the way. When these two then encounter Barnardo, the process of identification begins anew. This is due to the fictional situation of a relief of the guard, in which the friend-foe-question is crucial – especially given the poor visibility conditions of a cold night in Denmark. But the repeated questioning also allows for an enhanced awareness of the theater situation, and the binocular vision it invites. Barnardo asks: “Say, what, is Horatio there?” (1.1.18), reiterating the same question for the third time. The editors Ann Thomson and Neil Taylor note that “It is presumed that Barnardo cannot see Horatio in the darkness.” (n.1.1.18). Accordingly, Horatio’s response: “A piece of him.” (1.1.18) could signify what Thomson and Taylor conjecture: “a stretched out hand in the dark” (n.1.1.19). This reading would help make sense of the sentence’s meaning as a clever pun made by the character, Horatio. Implicitly, it also points to the ambiguity of the first moments on stage, in which the fictional universe and the attribution of character and actor are still in progress. We participate in the ascription of absent meanings, of dramatic characters, to the actors’ bodies piece by piece. But the contrary process can also occur: The actor playing Horatio can make sure to point out that the hand stretched out at the individual time and place of *this* particular performance belongs to a body that is *not* Horatio’s. “Who’s there?” does not oppose an understanding of a fictional universe with one rooted in the space-time of the performance or the non-theatrical world inhabited by the spectators, then and now. From the perspective of a performance of *Hamlet*, both are *always* the same. When Tiffany Stern claims that “the very moment when the *characters* appeal beyond the limits of the world, the *players* resituate the words back in the theatre” (Stern 2013: 18) this is true for these first scenes of *Hamlet*, too. The very moment when the characters appeal beyond the limits of the theater, building the fictional universe that

they are playing a role in, the players resituate the words in the present time and space that each performance of *Hamlet* is embedded in.<sup>18</sup>

The pragmatics of the beginning of *Hamlet* are closely connected to the epistemology and ontology of the Ghost that is the object of the upcoming conversation between the sentinels. As much as a deictic utterance's meaning depends on context, as much is the Ghost's mode of existence introduced mainly through the spatio-temporal context of its appearance. Once Horatio and Marcellus have arrived, the community of sentinels is gathered, and Horatio asks about the reason for which he joined the guard that night: "What, has this thing appeared again tonight?" (1.1.20) Horatio carefully leaves open what exactly has appeared, leaving spectators in the dark for now. The first thing we learn about the Ghost is that its presence is repetitive – just like the performance of *Hamlet* that it is a part of. The question suggests that the Ghost, like a theater performance, has a precise show time. Freddie Rokem untangles what this implies for the mode of existence of the Ghost:

"This thing" is not only the ghost of Hamlet's father, which has appeared on the ramparts for several nights before the action of the play begins. It is also the performance of the play, the *thing* that we are watching on the stage in which the actors are appearing "*again tonight*" in the mirror cabinet of theatrical repetitions, where each repetition is unique. (Rokem 2014: 54)

Like the theater performance, the Ghost is the paradoxical repetition of something past (existing *before* the action of the play) that still is entirely unique. Its double existence consists in a doubled temporality. Like performance, it points towards something irrevocably past, but exists in the present only. That the Ghost appears several times allows for it to reflect the constitutively iterative and

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<sup>18</sup> As William B. Worthen points out, this lack of determination in the formation of 'character' is also performed by the specifics of the printed text of Shakespeare's plays on the page: "The text provides ambiguous information about who the characters are, who is speaking, precisely by refusing to name the roles as characters in the modern sense." (Worthen 2005: 33)

therefore paradoxical nature of performance. From the first time the Ghost is mentioned, we learn that it must be read as a premiere and as a repetition at the same time:

Still more precisely, everything begins in the imminence of a re-  
apparition, but a reapparition of the specter as apparition *for the  
first time in the play*. The spirit of the father is going to come back  
and will soon say to him “I am thy Fathers Spirit” (I, iv), but  
here, at the beginning of the play, he comes back, so to speak,  
for the first time. It is a first, the first time on stage. (Derrida  
[1993]2006: 2-3)

Viewed as a fictional phenomenon within a universe with its own timeline, it appears *again*. It is not the first time that Barnardo and Marcellus see the Ghost in the fictional life of the characters. The ‘again’ references a fictional past outside of the time and space of the plot of *Hamlet*, and of course of the performance. Within the existence of the performance of *Hamlet* that the spectators watch, the apparition of that fictional Ghost is, however, its first time on stage. To this paradoxical temporality of ghosts and performance corresponds the “binocular vision” – now in Carlson’s sense – that the audience brings to it. When we go see *Hamlet* today, we are in the position of *both* Horatio and the two sentinels Barnardo and Marcellus. We see this performance for the first time, since it is unique and unrepeatable. But, as any other performance of *Hamlet*, it is a return of something, something that we know of, have heard of, and recall even before we have seen it. Like the apparition, *Hamlet* never ceases to exist and always comes back. Again.

It is no accident that before and after the Ghost’s appearance, *Hamlet* insists on the analogy between the Ghost’s mode of existence and its own double existence as a play by foregrounding the situatedness of either in the context of performance. The play repeats this emphasis at the end of act I, after the appearances of the Ghost. After Hamlet has encountered the Ghost in scene 5 of act I, his friends, who he has abandoned to speak to the Ghost, finally find him:

HORATIO My lord, my lord!  
MARCELLUS Lord Hamlet!  
HORATIO Heavens  
secure him!  
HAMLET So be it.  
MARCELLUS Illo, ho, ho, my lord!  
HAMLET Hillo, ho, ho boy, come and come!  
(1.5.113-115)

Any attempt at performing this dialogue ‘realistically’ must rely heavily on stage conventions and the spectators’ willing suspension of disbelief. The choice of several distinct areas of the walls of Elsinore as a setting for this dialogue – one where Hamlet leaves his friends at the end of scene 4 of act I, another where Hamlet actually converses with the Ghost – oddly clashes with the fact that all participants leave and then are brought back together on the probably around “twelve hundred square feet” (Gurr 2008: 158)<sup>19</sup> of the apron stage of the Globe; and on the larger stages of modern theaters. In an odd call and response, actors can attempt to signify an open space of the walls of Elsinore and a darkness that justifies such calling for the purpose of finding each other. It is hardly imaginable, however, that an attempt to produce the illusion of such a situation is its only purpose. I argue that, like a response to the initial situation in which the sentinels’ gathering turns into a prologue that conjures up the unique repetition that is a performance of *Hamlet*, the final moments of act one disenchant the Ghost right away by anchoring it, as Tiffany Stern argued, in the “theatre as prop” (Stern 2013: 11). Instead of attempting to justify the elaborate illusion of a ghost’s apparition on the walls of a fortress, it draws attention to the facticity of the performance situation by highlighting the architectural features of the theater building. At first, Hamlet is hesitant to reveal what passed between him and the Ghost; he insists that his friends be sworn to secrecy:

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of the architectural features of the London playhouses since the building of the Red Lion in 1567, cf. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean stage, 1574-1642*, pp. 150-168, and especially archeological evidence on the probable dimensions of the stage, cf. p.158.

HAMLET Never make known what you have seen tonight.  
 HORATIO, MARCELLUS My Lord, we will not.  
 HAMLET Nay, but swear't.  
 HORATIO In faith, my lord, not I.  
 MARCELLUS Nor I, my lord, in faith.  
 HAMLET Upon my sword.  
 MARCELLUS We have sworn already.  
 HAMLET Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.  
 GHOST (*Cries under the stage*). Swear.  
 (1.5.143-149)

The textual traces of the swearing episode are so messy that it has the potential to be rather comical on stage. Swearing, the performative utterance par excellence, depends like all speech acts on diverse contextual and internal conditions that make it successful and prevent it from being infelicitous (see Austin 1963: 14 ff.). While Horatio and Marcellus think to have already sworn, Hamlet voids their speech act and insists that they swear again under different conditions, “upon my sword”. More decisive for the relevance of the speech act at stake here is that there actually is something to be sworn to, and it is by no means sure that all involved are on the same page regarding this question. Horatio already qualifies Hamlet’s words as “wild and whirling” (1.5.133) when they meet, even before Hamlet presents the results from his conversation with the Ghost. Hamlet does indeed ask his friends to “be secret” (1.5.121), but does not at all let them in on what they are to be secretive about. Instead, he stays mysteriously vague: “There’s never a villain dwelling in all Denmark / But he’s an arrant knave” (1.5.122-123). Horatio is incredulous that this is what all the fuss is about: “There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave / To tell us this.” (1.5.123-124) The validity of the Ghost’s appearance and of its dialogue with Hamlet is challenged the moment that he attempts to include others into his experience. What if this is, indeed, the product of Hamlet’s imagination? Far from being an essential question about what *actually* happened, or an equally psychologizing speculation about Hamlet’s sanity, the ambiguity of the situation at the end of act one has repercussions for the perception of *Hamlet* as text and performance.

With regards to the Ghost's existence, *Hamlet* uses the performance situation to simultaneously maintain two possible hypotheses. From the perspective of the textual traces, it can be argued that Hamlet's conversation with the Ghost is mere projection; the longed-for confirmation of his own interpretation of the illegitimacy of his uncle's advancement and his mother's alleged betrayal. In performance, however, Hamlet has a number of witnesses: the audience. Depending on the production and on each individual performance, the degree of inclusion of the audience into – or its deliberate exclusion from – the encounter between Hamlet and the Ghost varies. The question of belief in the Ghost that divides the community on stage can be answered either way considering the binocular vision that the large community of potential believers off-stage adopt. If we assume that the Ghost's legitimacy also depends on Hamlet's belief in it, the play carefully employs the fact that it is performed to both support a kind of complicity between Hamlet and the audience, prone to believe that they witness the 'actual' version of events, and to foster doubts about it by foregrounding the theatrical facticity of the entire performance. When Hamlet tries to swear his friends to secrecy, the Ghost intervenes. His presence in the scene can, of course, be read to consolidate the collective belief in its existence. But this effect is counteracted by the fact that the voice comes from "under the stage", as all three printed editions of *Hamlet* say. It is localized at a prominent spot of the Globe theater, emphasizing once more the theater building as a prop in performance: "[n]ear the front of the stage in most playhouses was a large trapdoor." (Gurr 2008: 151). The stage directions themselves make the paradoxical double existence of the Ghost palpable: it is the Ghost that "cries" (Q2 and F) or simply is "under the stage", and it is not in the beyond, invisible or whatever one might assume it would be as a supernatural occurrence. Interestingly enough, Hamlet himself seems to be the driving force behind ridiculing and de-realizing the Ghost. He contributes to the enhanced perception of the stage space as what it is, a concrete space that assembles the bodies of actors and spectators alike in a common time and space, on, behind, around or under it, by commenting on the space and

the bodies' movements as the Ghost chases the characters on stage around from below:<sup>20</sup>

HAMLET Ha, ha, boy, sayst thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?  
 Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage?  
 Consent to swear.  
 HORATIO Propose the oath, my lord.  
 HAMLET Never to speak of this that you have seen,  
 Swear by my sword.  
 GHOST Swear.  
 HAMLET Hic et ubique? Then we'll shift our ground.  
 Come hither, gentlemen, and lay your hands  
 Again upon my sword. Swear by my sword  
 Never to speak of this that you have heard.  
 GHOST Swear by this sword.  
 HAMLET Well said, old mole, canst work i'th'earth so fast?  
 A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.  
 (1.5.150-162)

As opposed to his reaction to Old Hamlet's Ghost in their encounter just moments ago, Hamlet's attitude to the Ghost hardly denotes respectful awe: "Haha, boy, sayst thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?" Most of his comments point to the materiality, the real spaces, of the Globe's stage. If the staging reflects the stage directions, there is, indeed, a "fellow in the cellarage", speaking the lines of the "old mole" that "work[s] i'th'earth so fast". This emphasizes that the Ghost is also impersonated by an actor of flesh and blood, turning the scene into a game of catch that has its purpose in itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa have meticulously reconstructed what the lines suggest is happening on the Globe stage at a performance of Hamlet at that moment: "[Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus] meet at front stage, and exchange wild and whirling words. Hamlet [...] draws his sword to make them swear secrecy on its cross-shaped hilt, and the 'Ghost cries under the Stage' for them to swear as they start to do so. Hamlet moves them across the stage, and the ghost moves under the stage with them. The third time they move to centre stage, over the trap, and the fourth time near the *frons*, each time followed by the voice of the understage ghost." (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 132) Still, this reconstruction, in asking about a probable representation of the fictional situation, fails to consider the *effects* of the choice of *mise en scène* they argue the text implies in performance.

Of course, the movements of the Ghost might as well be read as an expression of its supernatural ubiquity: “*Hic et ubique?* Then we'll shift our ground.” “Ubiquity“, says the editors' commentary to these verses, “is traditionally a property shared by God and the devil” (n.1.5.156), favoring an interpretation in which this scene seals the legitimacy of the Ghost by reading it as a sign of the existence of the metaphysical framework its existence requires. But Hamlet's jokes can also be related to Protestant reformers' invectives against the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, who are intent on relegating ghosts to hell, with no opportunity of wandering the earth while waiting for their eternal judgement (see *A questionable shape*, pp. 89 -92).<sup>21</sup> Ridiculing the idea of a corpse coming to life, Hamlet references the post-reformation theological doctrine that purgatory, this in-between world in which ghosts were situated in Catholic faith, is no more than a wooden cellarage, a winter's tale in the realm of fiction. The causality between ‘heaven’, ‘hell’ and the Globe's apron stage is blurred. Does the Ghost follow around Hamlet and his friends, or are they chased by it? In the general hustle-bustle, the playful aspect of this game of catch cannot be completely overpowered by the metaphysical framework that the return of the Ghost evokes. The theater does not metaphorize a system of heaven, earth, and hell, but reveals it as a feature of the theater building, with its ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’<sup>22</sup>. The final moments of act one closes a frame opened at its very beginning and emphatically situates the Ghost in the context of a performance that is made up of moving bodies in the same time and space. Consequently, Hamlet's appeal to imagination is the final element of the prologue-like structure of the first act:

HORATIO O day and night, but this is wondrous strange.  
HAMLET And therefore as a stranger give it welcome:  
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

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<sup>21</sup> See Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), esp. the first chapter, “A poet's fable”, in which Greenblatt shows how Protestant reformers attempt to discredit purgatory as a poetic fiction.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Stern 2013: 21.

(1.5.150-166)

Read as an address to the spectators, Hamlet's words invite them in the most general terms possible not to supplement what is lacking from the stage by their imaginations, but to 'welcome' anything that follows on stage as something akin to a dream, real and imagined at the same time, as much as it might contradict our rational impulses, to let themselves be invaded and transformed by it.

## 2. Ghost writing

The scenes in which the Ghost is present on stage further develop *Hamlet's* reflection about its own double existence as text and performance. It does so by dramatizing it. If a dramatic situation can be described as a situation of conflict between two parties and their opposing interests, the first act of *Hamlet* dramatizes the relationship between text and performance by confronting two factions: an author and an actor. As the theater in which and for which *Hamlet* was written was a theater of the book and began defining itself in relation to the medium of print in the 1600's, poets attempted to fashion an autonomous creative authority independently of the collective production system of the theater performance. They did so in relation and increasing antagonism to the actors as well as the third party involved in the performance's creation, the spectators.

In *Shakespeare und die Macht der Mimesis*, Robert Weimann identifies a specific function of the concept of authorship within the broader context of tectonic shifts in the notions and sources of authority (political, religious and literary) in early modernity, thereby linking the discourse of the *author* to one of *authority*. This authority, Weimann shows, is defined as the power to create, as opposed to the faculty to imitate.

Imitation is not first and foremost a word identified with the activity of the actor, as Hamlet's address to the group of players seems

to suggest. Rather, it is part of a shift in discourse around the concept of *mimesis* as it was coined in ancient Greek philosophy with relation to the arts (while by no means exclusively limited to that domain). At the time of *Hamlet*, poets began to call into question a medieval version of a poetics of *mimesis*, re-reading it in a way that allowed them to establish themselves as authorities over their creation (cf. Blumenberg 1981; Fiebach 2015: 106–110). Philip Sidney, for example, mobilizes great rhetorical prowess to save poetry from the shackles of the ideal of “ars imitatur naturam” (Blumenberg 1981: 56). He confers to the author the authority over his invention, that his name derives from:

There is no art delivered unto mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth.[...] Only the poet, disdain[ing] to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit. (Sidney [1595]2004: 149)

Sidney’s choice of image for the description of the principle of *imitatio* is symptomatic: the creativity of the poet, founded purely in “his own wit”, constitutes itself in stark contrast to an art whose nature is pure reproduction, repetition, transmission – which applies to the activity of actors and players. He confronts it with that which the 1623 Folio address “To the Reader” claims for Shakespeare: the author’s wit, impossible to capture in a visual likeness.

Robert Weimann has illustrated how the *mimesis* on the public stage becomes the object of power struggles comparable to those affecting religious or political authority. (Weimann 1988: 90-122) A polemic of poets writing prose or poetry broke out against their colleagues working in the play-writing business of public theaters.

'Legimate' poets were eager to protect their image of original creators from the proximity to the acting trade that authors such as Shakespeare used to have. Authors such as Shakespeare, Greene suggests, are ruined by their proximity, even fellowship with the actors, and become associated with the production of illegitimate copies instead of creative originals, as Robert Weimann sums up:

Der Angriff auf die Institution des volkstümlichen Theaters erfolgt von oben herab; offenbar erscheint – in den Augen Greenes – die Schaubühne gar nicht qualifiziert und erst recht nicht legitimiert, aus ihrer Mitte heraus selbst dramatische Texte zu produzieren. Die Schauspieler sind ja bloße „Puppets“ lächerliche „Anticks“, die ihren eigentlichen Ruhm den gebildeten Textdichtern mit Magistertitel aus Oxford oder Cambridge verdanken. (Weimann 1988: 111)

The discourse on authorship, it seems, required the opposition between the page and the stage, the poet's creativity and the actor's reproductive activity.

#### *A haunting voice*

This historical construction of an antagonism occurs at a time in which playwright and actor were by no means clearly distinct professions within the process of producing a performance for early modern public theater (cf. *Scattered papers, collaborative authorship*, pp. 29–42). The early modern debate exacerbates a self-reflexive tendency of dramatic theater itself, as it was founded as an art form in Greek antiquity (cf. Fiebach 2015: 42-43). This tendency invites precisely the self-aware reflection upon its own existence that *Hamlet* exacerbates with regards to the specific historical context of its creation.

According to Christoph Menke, from the moment that theater begins to include a text, two types of action are immanent to drama. Two types of acting and speaking, and thereby two authorities are then involved in dramatic theater:

Den einen Typ bildet die dramatische Person. Sie ist eine Instanz des Selberhandelns und -sprechens – eines

Selberhandelns und -sprechens jedoch, das ihr bis ins letzte vorgeschrieben ist. Die dramatische Person ist reiner Vollzug, aber als bloßer Nachvollzug. (Menke 2005: 57)

The dramatic character seems to consist entirely of autonomous action. However, the actions it carries out are completely determined, 'set down', in a script produced and controlled by a dramatic author. The relationship between the two voices cannot be defined by a simple opposition, but dramatic character and author each have voices that mutually define each other and that are not actually their own: "Das dramatische Theater der Tragödie erfährt in der Doppelgestalt von Person und Autor Subjektivität nicht als Vermögen der Freiheit, sondern als Schauplatz sich verselbstständigender Macht." (Menke 2005: 59) What the dramatic character utters is never entirely submitted to its own authority, as are the words of the author, as they are always already another's, the dramatic person's, voice.

In *Hamlet*, this basic dramatic property of the double authority of two voices is superimposed to a specific historical situation in which this constitutive feature of text-related theater is further replicated in the production process of the performance by a peculiarly dynamic and egalitarian relationship between playwrights and actors as authors of the stage. Robert Greene uses a metaphor that seems to name precisely the structure that Menke evokes: The playwrights "spake from our mouths", appropriating the authentic voice of legitimate poets and thereby infringing on their authority. This, he argues, is caused by their proximity to those that professionally practice this kind of paradoxical appropriation of foreign speech. What is missing from Christoph Menke's analysis is therefore the agent that lends their voice to the dramatic characters lines, the actor. The latter therefore detains an autonomy that can, in performance, override the authority of the authors text.

The encounter between the Ghost and Hamlet in the fifth scene of act one is a dramatization of this underlying structure of the structure of the dramatic text and early modern debates. In it, *Hamlet* reflects upon its own status as text written by an author who creates

dramatic characters that are to be performed by actors. The Ghost may be read as the author of a script, determining the course of events, who ascribes to Hamlet, the actor, the role of truthfully performing that script. Such a reading can be further supported by *Hamlet's* close relationship with a genre particularly popular at the time of its first performance, the revenge tragedy. It is with revenge tragedy on the horizon (Döring 2014: 77), as Tobias Döring writes, that *Hamlet* encounters its Elizabethan audience. Its generic implications are brought up at the very beginning of the dialogue. Revenge is the subject of the Ghost's fourth line, situating what follows within genre conventions well-known to the audience:

GHOST Pity not me, but lend thy serious hearing.  
 To what I shall unfold.  
 HAMLET Speak, I am bound to hear.  
 GHOST So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.  
 HAMLET What?  
 (1.5.5-8)

The imperative to revenge constitutes a prescription for Hamlet not only in that it demands action on his part. It also symbolizes the power of the author to create his character, and to prescribe words and actions to this character. It is all the more salient here because the imperative precedes the story that the Ghost will narrate: apparently, its power is not depending on the persuasiveness of the Ghost's story. Hamlet might well hear an explanation later, but it is certain that he *will* take revenge as soon as he does hear it. *Hamlet* references all the well-known ingredients of the revenge tragedy, thereby drawing on an additional kind of authority:

Hierzu gehören die Erscheinung eines Geistes, der den Befehl zur Rache gibt; der Wahnsinn, angenommen oder echt, in den ein Rächer vor der Tat verfällt, die Ränke, die geschmiedet werden, und ein Spiel im Spiel, in dem die Handlung ihre eigene Verfasstheit als blutiges Theater beziehungsreich herauskehrt. (Döring 2014: 78)

Tobias Döring's hint at the close connection between the genre and metatheatrical elements will be further explored in chapter two. For

now, let us note that the internal dramaturgical workings of the revenge tragedy are themselves built on the system of reduplication that presupposes the enactment of a dramatic script in performance:

Der Rächer erhält seinen Auftrag wie ein Skript, im Sinne einer vorgeschriebenen Handlungsanweisung, die er im Weiteren zu befolgen und zu realisieren hat, kaum anders als ein Schauspieler die Rolle, mit eng umgrenzten Freiräumen für eigene Gestaltung. (Döring 2014: 84)

Only *after* having made a claim to the performative power of his word, the Ghost proceeds to identify himself as a legitimate speaker of that word: “I am thy father’s spirit”, he claims, thereby confirming previous interpretations of the apparition by its on-stage audience. Even before the Ghost has spoken to him, Hamlet intuitively that the Ghost calls out to him and will prescribe a course of action: “My fate cries out” (1.4.82).

The authority of the Ghost is decisively supported by a peculiar property of his appearance. When Horatio tells Hamlet about the apparition he has witnessed in the second scene of the first act, Hamlet thoroughly questions him:

HAMLET Armed, say you?  
HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO Armed, my lord.  
HAMLET From top to toe?  
HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO  
My lord, from head to foot.  
HAMLET Then saw you not his face.  
HORATIO  
O yes, my lord he wore his beaver up.  
(1.2.224-228)

The Ghost is fully masked, his body and face covered by an armour. Fully masked? No: there is one opening in its shell, a visor in the helmet that was lifted and, according to Horatio, allowed for them to identify him as Old Hamlet. It creates a paradoxical situation in which the Ghost is at the same time visible and invisible. It derives a peculiar power from it, consisting in the possibility of concealing

itself and the source of its imperative – notwithstanding the fact that, according to Horatio, the visor is lifted:

For the helmet effect, it suffices that a visor be possible and that one play with it. Even when it is raised, in fact, its possibility continues to signify that someone, beneath the armor, can safely see without being seen or without being identified. Even when it is raised, the visor remains, an available resource and structure, solid and stable as armor, the armor that covers the body from head to foot, the armor of which it is a part and to which it is attached. (Derrida [1993]2006: 7-8)

That the visor is “up” provides the decisive ambivalence that confers the Ghost its power. Because the visor indicates the *possibility* of an interiority that determines if and when it reveals itself, and because it merely signifies it without revealing it entirely, the Ghost detains “the supreme insignia of power: the power to see without being seen.” (Derrida [1993]2006: 8) From this *visor effect* derives the authority that gives the Ghost’s speech the powerful quality of the law:

To feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross, that is the *visor effect* on the basis of which we inherit from the law. Since we do not see the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction (which is, moreover, a contradictory injunction), since we do not see the one who orders “swear”, we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice. (Derrida [1993]2006: 7)

According to Derrida’s interpretation, the Ghost’s imperative becomes a binding, ‘legal’ requirement for Hamlet because its source cannot be identified. Because of the irreversibility of its gaze, its voice’s authority cannot be challenged. Marjorie Garber describes the *visor effect* in so many other words: “[T]he ghost – in *Hamlet*, as well as in a number of other literary guises – presents itself not only as a trap for the gaze but also as a trope for the voice.” (Garber 1987: 137) This trope for a voice whose authority derives from its partial invisibility is valid in particular with regards to the author of *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare himself, whose scarcely documented

life has left unlimited room for a posthumous speculation that usually reveals less about Shakespeare than about the concerns and pressing questions of each time invested in identifying Shakespeare anew. The Ghost's peculiar attire, then, is the condition *sine qua non* for it to be read as the disembodied voice of an author, signifying an origin that remains invisible – and thereby unquestionable. We are reminded how Rüping's production of *Hamlet* transposes this reading by giving the mechanism of imagined projection a literal shape on stage, where the Ghost's lines are projected onto a screen that is, in accordance with the ambiguity of the English term, something that makes visible and conceals at the same time. As it does through the Ghost's armour in the textual traces, in Rüping's staging, even more spectral as it is digital, the text has attained a maximum level of abstraction. Disconnected from the material supports of voice, paper, print, or ink, it consists of shapes formed by light on a screen. In the contemporary performance, the Ghost can thereby become a figure of the existence of *Hamlet* as a text, haunting *Hamlet* as performance today:

Indeed, in the relationship between the pre-existing dramatic text and its enactment onstage, we can already speak of one kind of “haunting” that lies close to the structure of the theatrical experience, in which the physical embodiment of an action that is witnessed in the theatre is in an important sense haunted by a pre-existing text. (Carlson 2003: 16)

Rüping takes Carlson's image literally: He transposes the visor effect that the Ghost's performance exploits in 1600 into a haunting digital text on stage, that thereby becomes a potential sparring partner for him as a director and his actors. Carlson's monograph, however, explores the process of haunting especially with regards to its temporal, historical aspect, as the subtitle *The Theatre as a Memory Machine* posits. Jacques Derrida explains how the pastness of the Ghost's gaze reinforces the asymmetrical power relationship the *visor effect* and the acousmatic situation establish:

This spectral *someone other looks at us*, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part, according to an absolute

anteriority (which may be on the order of generation, of more than one generation) and asymmetry, according to an absolutely unmasterable disproportion. Here anachrony makes the law. (Derrida [1993]2006: 6-7)

The law is all the more insurmountable as it does not belong to the time and space of the one addressed by it, submitted to it, and its pastness generates an asymmetrical power relationship at the cost of Hamlet, and/or the directors and actors performing *Hamlet*. Carlson's and Derrida's analysis point us towards the fact that not only can the Ghost be read as a metaphor of the author in general. When *Hamlet* is performed, the author of *Hamlet* is haunting the performance of his own play.

In *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, Marjorie Garber has convincingly explored the idea that the metaphor of the author that the Ghost represents in *Hamlet* might well be extended to understand the concept of authorship that underlies the historical and ongoing controversies around Shakespeare as an author. For ghost writers to posthumously write the specter of Shakespeare as an author into life, it is crucial that a lack of certain information about Shakespeare persists:

A great deal seems invested in not finding the answer. It begins to become obvious that Shakespeare is a towering figure he is for us not despite but rather because of the authorship controversy. [...] Shakespeare as an author is the person who, were he more completely known, would not be the Shakespeare we know. (Garber 1987: 11)

Garber reads Shakespeare as the author that not only writes ghosts but becomes a ghost writer – and derives his authority directly from the mystery that surrounds him: “‘Shakespeare’ is present as an absence – which is to say, as a ghost. Shakespeare as an author is the person who, were he more completely known, would not be the Shakespeare we know.” (Garber 1987: 11) It is tempting to retrospectively read the myth – true or not – that Shakespeare, who also acted in his company, might have cast himself as the Ghost of Old Hamlet, and his son as Hamlet, as a prefiguration of the way ‘Shakespeare’ would haunt future versions of his work: “We know that

Shakespeare played the part of the Ghost in *Hamlet*’, Garber claims. “What could not be foreseen, except through anamorphic reading, was that he would *become* that Ghost.” (Garber 1987: 176) Ghost writing, as the most famous of Shakespeare’s ghosts instructs us, is a constitutive feature of a text to be performed. The repetitiveness of performance allows it to return again and again, from the very first of its repetitions: When *Hamlet* was first performed, authors were beginning to claim their presence on stage, as a haunting imperative with the authority of a ghost. Christopher Rüping’s staging of *Hamlet* gives a physical shape to this haunting authorial voice, symbolizing both the ‘binocular vision’ required to see *Hamlet* as text and performance, and to remember that each performance is haunted by a past text.

#### *A questionable shape*

The authority of the author as it is first constructed at the turn of the seventeenth century, I have argued, manifests itself as the power of a ghost to speak unidentified from the past. The Ghost’s authorial authority is undermined precisely by that which seemed to guarantee its unquestionability: its ghostliness. That which seemed to support the Ghost’s absolute power from beyond is undermined by its sheer presence on stage, the way in which it crosses the boundary not only of life and death, but of its own narrative, to step into the action of *Hamlet*. Its mode of existence is highly problematic and inherently paradoxical especially *because* it comes back: as a repetition of something, it lacks the substance and legitimacy of the premiere. It claims the author’s authority, but lacks the power of the original, as it is itself an imitation of something else. Marjorie Garber explains the Ghost’s uncanniness through its status as a copy:

The effect of uncanniness produced by the appearance of a ghost is related simultaneously to its manifestation as a sign of potential proliferation or plurality and to its acknowledgement of the loss of the original – indeed, to the loss of the certainty of the concept of origin. (Garber 1987: 15)

As such, the Ghost is vulnerable to the same attacks as artistic *mimesis* in general since Plato’s *Politeia*: the danger of *mimesis* can only

be averted when the original can be clearly established as the source of the deficient and deceptive apparition. According to Garber's definition, the Ghost cannot be traced back to the origin, to that which it is the likeness of. It thereby gains the potential to take on an infinite plurality of significations: Likeness without original, signifier without referent. While *creating* a mimetic work of art, as we have seen from sources such as Sidney and Greene, is considered an act of original creation, the mimetic art work itself remains problematic in ways that, as Marjorie Garber shows, directly associated with early modern theater itself:

This peculiar characteristic of ghostliness – that the ghost is a copy, somehow both nominally identical to and numinously different from a vanished or unavailable original – has special ramifications for art forms which, like Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, are regarded by their contemporary cultures as marginal, popular, or contestatory. (Garber 1987: 16)

The Ghost and dramatic texts – text to be performed on a stage – share a mode of existence insofar as they are likenesses without an original. They are: “nominally identical and numinously different”. Once more, Jacques Derrida's analysis of *Hamlet's* ghost helps interrogate this particular mode of existence more precisely by enquiring about the difference between the father and “thy father's spirit”, the word with which the Ghost identifies itself:

*What* is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. (Derrida [1993]2006: 10)

The *hauntology* is that of a *mise en scène*. It is staged to open up the question at the center of the above quote: Is there a difference between ‘the thing itself’ and the ‘simulacrum’? That “this thing [has]

appeared *again* tonight” (1.1.20) makes it a “questionable shape” (1.4.43), in the sense that it begs questioning of its mode of existence between past and present, and between original and copy. Like the performance of a text, the Ghost's appearance is a repetition of a lost original. Also in the following scenes, attempts at description and definition of the Ghost generally fail: “this thing” is described as “your father’s spirit” (by the spirit himself, nonetheless), “a figure like your father”, and establish a duality of two modes of existence between which there must be a gap. While the Ghost claims a link with something past, its questionable mode of existence deconstructs that claim right away: on the way to an original, any copies are by nature deficient and doubtful. This is also valid for the textual traces of *Hamlet*: The distinction between good and bad quartos, which we have already identified as one of the results of the need for an ‘incarnational text’, can also be the starting point for understanding the origins of an “authorial spectre” (De Grazia 1988: 82). Margreta de Grazia points out the proximity between genealogical certainty and the treatment of the extant texts of Shakespeare's works: “To put it crudely, switching from corpses to corpses, must the paternity and lineage of a body be determined before an autopsy can take place? Must the body have been legitimately conceived to qualify for anatomical dissection?” (De Grazia 1988: 77) Authorship, understood as fathership, is an important part of the genealogical endeavors that attempt to confer ‘Shakespeare’ the decisive authority over the work. The need to retrospectively distinguish the authorial hand from others is the belated consequence of the early modern enterprise to make the author into a figure of interest and to distinguish it from the other members of a collective of whom the textual traces that have survived the past 400 years bear the mark: the awareness of the collaboration between author, actors, bookkeepers, editors, publishers and copywriters invites criticism to embrace “non-authorial writing; that is, a play text recording a wide array of collective and extended contributions and transformations.” (De Grazia 1988: 82) In front of that historical backdrop, the emergence of the author figure becomes all the more salient.



So horridly to shake our disposition  
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?  
Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?  
*Ghost beckons.*  
(1.4.38-57)

Hamlet here takes the opportunity to flesh out the ideological and discursive prerequisites that govern the belief in ghosts at that particular period, between remnants of Catholic faith, vernacular traditions and Protestant doctrine. It is noteworthy how much Hamlet insists on the concrete topography and corporeality of the Ghost and his provenance: He “revisits”, i.e. comes *back* from death, and that requires overcoming the material barrier of the grave and tombstoned. The topography is contradictory: the Ghost has been cast *up* from the grave, but might bring with him “airs from heaven or blasts of hell”, like a draft through an open door – wherever it came from. Hamlet’s description emphasizes the impossibility of the Ghost’s presence on earth and the alleged impermeability of the distinction between earth and either heaven or hell.

This topographical situation of the Ghost contributes to marking its status as a poetic fiction on stage, a fiction whose status oscillates between original creation of an author and second-hand imitation. The Ghost’s and Hamlet’s words allude to the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, which Protestant reformers rejected and displaced into the realm of fiction. Brian Cummings explains how the Ghost’s and Hamlet’s words both conjure up that element of Christian faith especially contested during the moved times of the Protestant reformation in 16<sup>th</sup> century England:

His “doom” is his fate or destiny, but the word also puns with the Last Judgment, or “doom,” an image of which was often depicted in wall paintings at the west end of the church although sometimes at the entrance to the choir above the rood loft. Both idea and image were clearly associated with the doctrine of purgatory. (Cummings 2019: 202-203)

The Ghost exists in-between places and times, in purgatory during the day, and haunting earth during the night. He is not exactly in

hell, but waiting in a liminal space for time to literally end in the Last Judgement. Till then, he is caught in the compulsion to return to the place of its death, earth. This representation of the Ghost is, however, by no means still ‘doctrinal’ when *Hamlet* is written. In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt takes *Hamlet* as a starting point to investigate the role of ghosts on the Shakespearean stage; a role that is decisively determined by the contemporary transformations in ghost lore through the religious reformation still in process at the time. Purgatory is a vivid example of those changes:

In the funeral service in the first Edwardian prayer book (1549) the dead person was still directly addressed: the priest is instructed to cast earth upon the corpse and to say, ‘I commend thy soul to God the father almighty, and thy body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’<sup>3</sup> These are the words that anyone in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England would have heard. (Greenblatt 2001: 244-245)

They illustrate a new-found need to strictly distinguish the realm of the living from the realm of the dead, but, as Greenblatt’s analysis shows, “[t]he security of the boundary was inevitably called into question by the appearance of ghosts.” (Greenblatt 2001: 245) A ghosts therefore necessarily engenders an ambivalent attitude of the believer – and the skeptic – at the time: “It is caught between a corporeal Catholic culture of death and a Protestant belief in the immanence of spirit.” ‘Only’ a theatrical ghost, Old Hamlet comes as close to being real as something can on a theater stage, showing “the impossible appearance of the ghost as simultaneously ethereally spectral and clumsily, shamblingly, real” (Cummings 2019: 204), exacerbating the already precarious existence of ghosts in the post-reformation belief system. The Ghost’s self-description and Hamlet’s address situate the Ghost in the ‘impossible’ liminal space of purgatory – a doctrine that “was among the earliest of Catholic ideas to be rejected by the English Reformers.” (Cummings 2019: 203).

“Purgatory was thereby declared a fiction, a cognitive invention, something that cannot be brought to mental apprehension but exists only in the fantasy of the imagination,” (Cummings 2019: 203) and this reliance on imagination allows for ghosts with an ambivalent mode of existence: “the space of Purgatory becomes the space of the stage where Old Hamlet’s Ghost is doomed for a certain time to walk the night.” (Greenblatt 2001: 257) Against a still virulent popular belief in ghosts, reformed theologians made an interesting argumentative move that would influence that which was presented in dramatic texts on stage: Ghosts and related concepts “are for a moment at least deposited not in the realm of lies but in the realm of poetry” (Greenblatt 2001: 250), thereby sharing the ambivalent status of the mimetic art work on stage: close to, but not quite a lie, as Philip Sidney argues in his famous “A Defence of Poesy” (1595):

Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth: for, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth; the poet never maketh any circles about your imagination to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth. (Sidney [1595]2004: 153)

Similarly to Sidney’s assessment of the relationship of poetry and, by extension, mimetic art in general, to truth, theologians do not condemn the belief in ghosts outright on a dogmatic level, claiming that their existence is a lie. They salvage ghosts by figuring them as a fiction.

Tellingly, rather than providing some kind of evidence of its connection to Old Hamlet, the Ghost relies on its qualities as a skilled narrator, speaking about the effects that a true tale of its origins could produce. The Ghost announces:

[...] But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison-house  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood  
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,

Thy knotted and combined locks to part  
 And each particular hair to stand on end  
 Like quills upon the fearful porpentine –  
 But this eternal blazon must not be  
 To ears of flesh and blood.  
 (1.5.14-15)

It presents itself as a narrator of infallible knowledge, that narrator with a divine, outside perspective; and vividly describes the effects his tale of purgatory would have, if it did not need to remain untold. Itself playing with the ambiguous status of purgatory by hinting at it without describing it all, leaving the rest to the fearful spectators' imagination, it can be read to ironically comment on its own ambiguity between its own positioning as an omniscient, superior narrator, and the place it comes from, which marks it out as a fiction in the context of reformed Protestant Elizabethan England. One of the problems of the Ghost as a writer, then, is that it is itself only the result of a tale, the content of a fiction. As a narrator, it seems inherently infallible at first, speaking the Law from the beyond and watching the living with its irreversible gaze. As the object of the fiction that is *Hamlet*, it is inherently subject to the doubt that assails elements of the Catholic faith that it uses in its self-fashioning.

But the Ghost's association with purgatory and, thereby, with the fictions of imagination and the stage, does not necessarily need to be disempowering and problematic. The Ghost in *Hamlet* gains a different kind of validity as a ghost performed in a concrete performance on stage. And, as Stephen Greenblatt explains, there is a sense in Shakespeare "that ghosts, real or imagined, are good theater – indeed, that they are good for thinking about theatre's capacity to fashion realities, to call realities into question, to tell compelling stories, to puncture the illusions that these stories generate, and to salvage something on the other side of disillusionment." (Greenblatt 2001: 200) As much as the Ghost is discredited as a narrator of his own fiction, his proximity to the fictions represented in performance make him also a figure of the power of that performance in itself. As its mode of existence mimics that of the performance, it is a figure of self-conscious theatricality. That is, his ghosts are

figures who exist in and as theater, figures in whom it is possible to believe precisely because they appear and speak only onstage. The audience is invited to credit their existence in a peculiar spirit of theatrical disavowal: ‘I know very well that such things probably do not exist, and yet....’” (Greenblatt 2001: 196)

As we have witnessed in Christopher Rüping’s staging, the Ghost returns in each performance, as a ghost writer whose implied but unstable absolute authority provides an opportunity for dialogue with something absent, something past. In the first act of *Hamlet*, the Ghost is not only the haunting presence of an authoritative author determining the performance, it is also a dialogue partner that enters the realm of performance itself to figure it and make its specific mode of existence graspable. The following chapters will address how the Ghost therefore creates a frame of reference that shifts authorship from the author towards other participants of the performance, the actor and the spectator.

### 3. Ghost performance

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to show that the Ghost is a trope for the author’s precarious authority as writer of a text to be performed at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Ghost’s *hauntology* also pointed us towards the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance, as its “questionable shape” shifted its meaning towards the notion of a fiction, an imitation. This chapter will investigate in how far the Ghost’s *hauntology* exploits the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance in order to make visible how the authority of the author is undermined by the paradoxical existence of the character through the body of the actor, on the one; and the interpretation of the spectator, on the other hand. The Ghost’s appearance is reflective of early modern concerns about interiority and interpretation that the theater with a text manifests in particular. The Ghost’s armed appearance, therefore, becomes readable as a metaphor of the actor’s performance and its double existence between character and actor.

The Ghost's status as a copy of an absent original is extensively thematized through the vocabulary of likeness. That the Ghost is understood mostly in the terms of similarity makes it the object of skepticism towards its perception and its interpretation. A skeptical attitude towards not only supernatural apparitions, but the world at large becomes manifest in the second scene of act I, carefully embedded within the appearances of the Ghost. It contextualizes its appearance within the greater issue of the opacity of any subject's exterior appearance and its interiority. Even before encountering the Ghost, Hamlet formulates the paradox that makes it irrevocably questionable: His longing for access to the interior truth of his fellow humans is particularly frustrated by the Ghost, whose outer fully armed appearance signals towards an interior without ever fully disclosing it. Against Hamlet's skepticism, the Ghost's armed appearance leaves open the possibility of thinking the actor's performance as a productive rather than an expressive process.

*A troubling likeness*

"Who's there?", the question opening the play, has a broad scope from the outset, addressed to characters, actors and spectators alike. In the course of the first scenes and even before its first appearance, the question "Who's there?" is most relevant when addressed to the Ghost. Its shape remains "questionable", doubtful, because the Ghost is discussed in terms of its *likeness* and, by the same stroke, foregrounds its difference to the original that it claims to refer to: Old Hamlet, Hamlet's father.

Barnardo is just recounting the Ghost's first appearance – the one that precedes the beginning of the performance of *Hamlet* – when the Ghost appears, interrupting them as they tell the story of its earlier appearance:

BARNARDO  
 Last night of all,  
 When yond same star that's westward from the pole  
 Had made his course t'illuminate that part of heaven  
 Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
 The bell then beating one –

*Enter* GHOST.

Peace, break thee off, look where it comes again.

(1.1.34-39)

Jacques Derrida has commented on the fact that the Ghost's visibility and the possibility of a discourse representing it are mutually exclusive in this first scene of the play: "The Thing is still invisible, it is *nothing* visible ("I haue seene nothing") at the moment one speaks of it and in order to ask oneself if it has reappeared." (Derrida [1993]2006: 5) Seeing the Ghost and speaking about it remain separate also during the Ghost's appearance because the meaning of its wordless presence is unclear and invites discussion about its interpretation. In the following lines, the characters watching the Ghost make conjectures:

BARNARDO

In the same figure like the King that's dead.

MARCELLUS

Thou art a scholar – speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO

Looks 'a not like the King? Mark it, Horatio.

HORATIO

Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS

Speak to it,

Horatio.

HORATIO

What art thou that usurp'st the time of night

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee speak.

MARCELLUS It is offended.

BARNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak.

*Exit* Ghost.

MARCELLUS 'Tis gone and will not answer.

(1.1.40-51)

'Like' occurs no less than four times as adverb or preposition. The gap between original and copy that Marjorie Garber commented upon is explicitly addressed here. Specifying "this thing" implies describing what it is *like*. But the apparently close similarity of the

Ghost to an ‘original’ is precisely the origin of a doubt about its “true nature”. Especially in the context of the reformed faith, the apparition of a ghost denotes a “a failure or obstruction in the traffic of souls from one life to the other.” (Cummings 2019: 208). As Cummings concisely sums up, “Ghosts deal in the malfunction of religion.” In Protestant faith, as we have seen above, the dead are not supposed to come back, and this might also be a reason why the sentinels are reticent to call the spirit by Old Hamlet’s name: he is, after all, dead and buried: “like the King *that’s dead*”. The distance between the Ghost’s apparition and that of what it is a likeness is enhanced even more as the ontological problem of likeness is expressed through the vocabulary of political representation. It is “in the same figure”, i.e. shape, but only “like” the King. The phenomenon is a usurpation, an illegitimate pretense to adopting a certain form. The theatrical representation of political representation, of the “form in which the majesty [does] march”, is a dangerous *mise en abîme* of the representation of power itself.

‘Likness’ can be perceived as an act of usurpation of the power of an original by a copy. This perception is in line with a long tradition of anti-mimetic thought, which informs skepticism towards the theater and the practice not only of writing fiction, as we have seen, but of acting in early modern times, as well. In his *Politeia*, Plato defines the relationship of art and more particularly poetry to nature in a deliberately pejorative way as *mimesis*. Poetry is subjected to intensive scrutiny in order to establish its useful or damaging qualities within the ideal state Plato is drafting. What is problematic about poetry, and indeed about all arts, is that they are mimetic. They represent objects, people and events outside of themselves by imitating them – however, it is in this act of imitation that art becomes guilty of producing the illusion of actual creation. In order to justify his final verdict to ban poetry from Plato’s ideal state, Socrates (one of the interlocutors in the fictional dialogue that Plato invents to expound his political theory) chooses a metaphor:

“I suppose the quickest way is if you care to take a mirror and carry it around with you wherever you go. That way you’ll soon create the sun and the heavenly bodies, soon create the earth,

soon create yourself, other living creatures, furniture, plants, and all the things we've just been talking about." "Yes", he said, "I could create them as they appear to be. But not, I take it, as they truly are." (Plato [390-370 B.C.]2013: 596 d-e)

Plato emphasizes the representational dimension of poetry as appearance and its opposition to essential truth in order to define and exclude it from his ideal state as *mimesis*. At the time of the creation of *Hamlet*, anti-mimetic skepticism still runs deep especially in anti-theatrical thought: Despite the efforts to re-appropriate *mimesis* as a form of creative authority, as does Philip Sidney, for most opponents to the theater, fiction is not yet a viable concept, as it cannot be distinguished from the epistemologically and morally condemnable lie: "The notablest liar is become the best poet; he that can make the most notorious lie, and disguise falsehood in such sort that he may pass unperceived, is held the best writer." (Munday [1580]2004: 78)

The Ghost is a problem as an apparition that is likeness more than identity. Appearances might lie even when perceived with one's own eyes, on the walls of Elsinore or on stage; and this suspicion is preserved after the Ghost has disappeared:

HORATIO Before my God, I might not this believe,  
Without the sensible and true avouch  
Of mine own eyes.  
MARCELLUS Is it not like the King?  
HORATIO As thou art to thyself.  
Such was the very armour he had on  
When he the ambitious Norway combated.  
(1.1. 55-60)

The inexplicable likeness of the Ghost to a certain image of Old Hamlet, one that they all remember, is oddly qualified by Horatio: "As thou art to thyself". Stephen Greenblatt rightly comments that

Horatio's words in response – "As thou art to thyself" (1.1.57-58) are an emphatic confirmation, but a strange one. The strangeness – if one stops to reflect upon it – has to do with an erasure of the sense of difference that enables one to distinguish

between likeness and identity: Marcellus is not “like” himself; he *is* himself. Since Horatio does not seem to be saying that the apparition *is* the old king – for by the sensible and true avouch of his own eyes he knows that the old king is dead and buried – his words “As thou art to thyself” have a different implication: they raise the possibility of a difference between oneself and oneself. (Greenblatt 2001, 212)

This “difference between oneself and oneself” that Greenblatt talks about here is particularly raised by the Ghost when we consider its existence in performance. Beyond being a trope for the author’s voice, it can also signify the difference between actor and character in the event of the theater performance. The specific dissemblance that is acting becomes a metaphor for the subject’s difference with itself, and vice versa. The actor playing Marcellus, at this moment, is *like himself* insofar as the phenomenon of his physical presence is unquestionably his. In another perspective, he also *uses* it to represent the corporeality of the fictional Marcellus. The Ghost is a figure of play-acting; and, by the same stroke, the likeness that characterizes both can be understood as a feature of any subject. In the following lines, the emphasis on the relationship between actor and spectator is reinforced: Horatio refers to costume (“the very armour he had on”) and mimic (“frowned he once”) that the Ghost skillfully uses to impersonate the King. The epistemological troubles that the Ghost raises as an appearance, then, is further exacerbated through its reference to the practice of playing. Not only does theater produce a deceptive mirror image, it does so through individual acts of dissemblance, through acting:

For Francesco Robortello, writing in the 1540s, tragedy is a scenic art, its audience those “present at performances”, the “auditors and spectators of tragedies” who “hear and see people saying and doing things.” In fact, if tragedy was an imitation of an action (in Aristotle’s famous definition), it was the *actor’s* imitation through acting (not only the poet’s imitation through words): “Representation ... is not only poetic but also histrionic”; “imitation” in tragedy refers to “the actor as he acts”, who imitates the action. (Stone Peters 2000: 99)

Subjects used to that practice, and others watching them, were in grave moral danger, as Tanya Pollard sums up:

The emphasis of Protestant thought on the hypocrisy of external appearances, and the primacy of hard-to-reach interior truth, fueled these concerns. Actors, who relied on external show to deceive people for a living, seemed to many the antithesis of the ideals of sincerity and transparency. Besides competing with the church, and making public displays of sinful behavior, then, the very heart of the theater – make-believe, or playful pretense – raised troubling philosophical problems about truth and its accessibility. (Pollard 2004, xiv)

Like an actor's performance, the Ghost's similarity to something or someone inherently implies a difference that sparks a doubt about its identity. The 'likeness' that all three witnesses to the apparition identify is questionable, in the sense of 'doubtful'. When Horatio recounts his own encounter with the Ghost to Hamlet in act I, scene 3, the notion of likeness keeps producing misunderstandings. Their exchange retraces the trajectory of the Ghost from irrevocably past to present, from the imaginary towards the real, from the original to the (repetitive) copy. And still, in performance, the Ghost's presence is an undeniable phenomenon. Since the spectators have already witnessed and followed this trajectory in the flesh – both metaphorically and literally – a little earlier, the dialogue carries a more literal layer:

HORATIO I saw him once – 'a was a goodly king.  
HAMLET 'A was a man, take him for all in all,  
I shall not look upon his like again.  
HORATIO My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.  
HAMLET Saw, who?  
HORATIO My lord, the King your father.  
HAMLET The King my father?  
(1.2.185-190)

Hamlet, honestly believing that "I shall not look upon his like again." (1.2.187), inadvertently produces a misunderstanding. While Hamlet means that he will never encounter a man as excellent as him, Horatio and the others have indeed encountered a "like" of

Old Hamlet. Horatio, in turn, evokes the relationship between the unique instance of “once”, which carries the sense of past and of unique occurrence, and the repetition that occurred “yesternight”, by using a parallel structure that maladroitly suggests that both instances of “seeing” are equal. Horatio confusingly leaves out the “like” that usually signifies the gap between the original and the copy. After the large variety of lexemes that have been employed to distance the Ghost from Old Hamlet whom it could be interpreted to represent, the text here chooses to have him make a claim that can only be confusing for Hamlet, who is, indeed, dumbstruck.

The dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio further differentiates the relationship between original and copy, between Old Hamlet and his likeness, as one between past and present. The question of remembrance becomes crucial in scene five of act one, in the dialogue between the Ghost and Hamlet. But already in the first scene, the temporal gap that separates the King’s past from the Ghost’s present can be bridged by Horatio’s and Hamlet’s mind through memory. Greenblatt makes clear how the ontology of the memory shares decisive attributes with the process of embodiment on stage:

Yet Aristotle – who observes that the moving force of recollection is particularly powerful in “persons of melancholic temperament” (720) – come closest to the central issues immediately raised by the Ghost in *Hamlet*, an issue inseparable from the Ghost as memory and memory as a ghost: the perception of likeness. For Aristotle, this perception is the way one knows, when one is contemplating a mental image or *phantasm* that is in fact a memory – the remembrance of something that belongs irrevocably to the past – and not something that fully exists in the present. The mind is aware of a ratio between what is imagined and what actually once existed: a memory is grasped as a likeness, as he puts it, “relative to something else” (716). To be sure, the likeness also could in some sense be said to exist, but it is, Aristotle writes, like a painting – that is, both an object in itself and a likeness of something else. (Greenblatt 2001: 215)

Via the *tertium comparationis* of ‘likeness’, remembrance and artistic *mimesis* are connected in the simultaneity of being “itself *and* the

likeness of something else.” This additionally links the apparition to the performance of the actor, with whom it shares the iterative character of this apparition, the fact that it is always already the return of something whose original – the dead King – can never be represented again – or is a fictional character in the first place. In the end, it remains *this* thing in particular, since its undetermined existence is still tied to the uniqueness of each of the instances of the re-apparition of Ghost and character on stage. The only existence that the apparition ultimately refers to is its own embodied one – despite its similarity to the memories of a King long buried. And this apparition produces, in the minds of the spectators, everything that they might later falsely perceive as a reference pre-existing the performance itself. Alike to something in its apparition, it must always remain ontologically different from what it presents. The Ghost frustrates the need to interpret it, and therefore makes visible another kind of presence. Its effect is the “erasure of the sense of difference that enables one to distinguish between likeness and identity.” (Greenblatt 2001: 212) In its first lines, the play plants the seed for this breach between likeness and identity to open, and to reflect the gap between actor’s body and character’s existence, theatrical performance and dramatic script.

### *An unbelievable sight*

If something is to be learned from the Ghost, it is not what the characters so desperately wish to know: “Who’s there...?”, but rather: Why do we need to know? More interesting – and accessible – than the Ghost’s *hauntology* might be the question that its presence poses to the eye of its beholder. *Hamlet* makes clear that the actor’s puzzling existence between indisputable presence and lost ‘originality’ is directly complemented by the spectator’s contribution to what occurs on stage. Again, the Ghost helps identify what the double existence of a play between text and performance means from the spectator’s perspective. Being a ghost and being performance poses similar issues to a spectator, as Stephen Greenblatt’s analysis of the Ghost on the Elizabethan stage shows:

[T]here are three fundamental perspectives to which Shakespeare repeatedly returns: the ghost as a figure of false

surmise, the ghost as a figure of history's nightmare, and the ghost as a figure of deep psychic disturbance. Half-hidden in all of these is a fourth perspective: the ghost as a figure of theater. (Greenblatt 2001: 157)

The figures that Greenblatt names here all designate epistemologically problematic states, illusions: the false perception, the dream, the madness. It shows that, if revenants from purgatory and purgatory itself have been displaced into the realm of fiction by protestant doctrine, the apparition of a ghost does not only beg the question of the possibility of its existence, but, reversely, calls into question its spectator's rationality. The Ghost is a figure of theater because theater, too, presents itself as a trope of the dream, of madness, of the false perception. As Brian Cummings describes, seeing a ghost – and what we see in performance – might tell more about the spectators than anything else:

Credence in ghosts is hedged around with incredulity, in the past as in the present. However, their intervention is also more serious than we might think. [...] they show the contradictory impulses of remembering the dead: the need to forget as much as the urge to recall. (Cummings 2019: 209)

Following Cummings' suggestion, I will analyze how the Ghost foregrounds and calls into question the epistemological frameworks that govern the perception of spectators of ghosts and of performances. Facing the potentially interminable spiral of epistemological skepticism that both induce – if they cannot be explained, why should anything else? –, the possibility emerges that instead of a likeness of something gone, both might be the effect of an impulse to misread and to create something while doing so.

This becomes obvious from the very first discussion of the Ghost's appearance at the beginning of the play. The purpose of Horatio's presence at the convention of the sentinels in act one, scene one, is that he, too, might see the show that has been on for two nights, and secure the truth of the others' interpretation. The following

verses describe the epistemological confusion that the Ghost triggers:

HORATIO

What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy

And will not let belief take hold of him

Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.

Therefore I have entreated him along

With us to watch the minutes of this night

That, if again this apparition come,

He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

(1.1.20-28)

The initial question is whether “this thing” has “appeared”. Carefully choosing his words, Horatio, the skeptic, introduces the possibility that what has been seen is ‘only’ an apparition from the very beginning – which, as Greenblatt demonstrates, might also be due to psychic disturbance or false surmise. Barnardo confirms that he has “seen” nothing. Not seeing the Ghost however, only means not seeing it yet: “It is still nothing that can be seen when one speaks of it. It is no longer anything that can be seen when Marcellus speaks of it, but it has been seen twice.” (Derrida [1993]2006: 5) To close the gap between vision and discourse, Horatio has been summoned: “And it is in order to adjust speech to sight that Horatio the skeptic has been convoked. He will serve as third party and witness (*terstis*)” (Derrida [1993]2006: 5). Horatio, a non-believer, has been convened to this event in order to reconcile sight with the truth of things. The crucial terms brought up by Marcellus neatly sum up the issues troubling skeptical philosophy at the time that *Hamlet* is written: “belief” is the flipside of a newly-awakened doubt of the truthfulness of the senses in skeptic philosophy, and an antidote for the dangerous aporia that skepticism can entail. It is the sense of sight that is the vehicle to the skepticism concerning the reality of the Ghost’s presence. In her analysis of skeptical philosophy of the late 1580’s, Katharina Eisaman Maus quotes Sir Walter Raleigh to illustrate the crucial role of the sense of sight for the epistemological uncertainty that preoccupies philosophical thought:

“If a man rub his eye, the figure of that which he beholdeth seemeth long, or narrow; is it not then likely, that those creatures which have a long and slanting figure of the eye, as goats, foxes, cats etc., do convey the fashion of that which they behold under another form to the imagination, than those that have round pupils do.” (Maus 1995: 7)

Raleigh’s statement expresses the possibility of a deforming organic precondition of sight, which would make the same object seem different to different observers. More importantly, it would relegate their perception to the status of an ‘imagination’, leaving the object as such ever inaccessible through the senses. As Maus emphasizes, the program of skeptical philosophy “emerge[s] at least as vividly from a program of faith as from a program of doubt.” (Maus 1995: 8) What is asked of Horatio is not certainty or proof, but belief: He will not “let belief take hold of him”. The apparition demands to be apprehended with conjecture and interpretation, with belief in its signification rather than certainty. Horatio is strongly affected by the Ghost: “How now, Horatio, you tremble and look pale.” “Is not this something more than fantasy?”, Barnardo asks, and Horatio admits: “I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes” (1.1.53-57) Given the skepticism that has just been raised regarding the visual appearance of things, Horatio’s correlation of sensory perception with truth seems less than convincing, even to himself. It is telling that even the passages after Horatio has seen the Ghost with his own eyes do not resolve the epistemological dilemma that surrounds it as much as the theater performance. For Horatio, who remains a learned advocate of the seemingly univocal power of rationality against deceptive sensory impressions, the paradox that the Ghost presents him with needs to be believed *against* all rational conviction. After the second apparition of the Ghost and a second unsuccessful attempt at eliciting an answer, Horatio attempts to salvage the rationality of events by constructing an explanation that is at least infallible within the framework of contemporary ghost lore:

BARNARDO

It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO

And then it started like a guilty thing  
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard  
The cock that is the trumpet to the morn  
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat  
Awake the god of day and, at his warning,  
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,  
Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies  
To his confine – and of the truth herein  
This present object made probation.  
(1.1.146-155)

Horatio's reasoning and style attempt to treat the inexplicable phenomenon by means of scientific discovery, presenting the Ghost's appearance as an experiment that proves the hypothesis that ghosts do indeed have a right time and place: their haunting is at least limited to the night, the light of day summons them back to the place where they belong – maybe purgatory. But Horatio's attempt seems weak, as it does actually leave the realm of knowledge – of the truth his reasoning allegedly establishes, to move into the realm of religious faith, as Marcellus' follow-up argument clearly indicates:

MARCELLUS It faded on the crowning of the cock.  
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated  
This bird of dawning singeth all night long,  
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,  
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
So hallowed and so gracious is that time.  
HORATIO So have I heard and do in part believe it.  
(1.1.156-164)

Marcellus' response shows that ghosts inherently move outside of that which the scholar Horatio can establish as truth or lie. In contrast to the rhetoric of logical deduction, Marcellus uses the discourse of the myth and the fairy tale, associating the Ghost with other imaginary creatures such as witches and fairies – creatures who share a common space with the Ghost: the stage. Horatio is oddly caught between his rationalist convictions and his sight, his



Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem',  
For they are actions that a man might play,  
But I have that within which passes show,  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.  
(1.2.76-86)

Singling out one word from his mother's question, Hamlet posits the fundamental opposition that fuels, among others, Plato's opposition to artistic *mimesis*: to *be* and to *seem* are ontologically and morally fundamentally opposed modes of existence. The explication of what only 'seems' contains all attributes of theatrical *mimesis*: an "inky cloak", a "customary suit", "windy suspiration of forced breath", a "fruitful river in the eye", in sum: "all forms, moods, shapes of grief". They are "actions that a man might play", defined by their affinity to that which actors do on a stage. The definition of the opposing term is symptomatically short: "I have that within which passes show." Similarly cryptic as that which is "more than is set down", that which reaches beyond the external attributes of grief remains unsaid. All we learn is that Hamlet struggles with the separation of "actions that a man might play" and "that within which passes show", and hierarchizes them in keeping with the skeptical philosophy and theology of his time:

The point of such distinctions is normally to privilege whatever is classified as interior. For Hamlet, the internal experience of his own grief "passes show" in two senses. It is beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it. And it surpasses the visible – its validity is unimpeachable. The exterior, by contrast, is partial, misleading, falsifiable, unsubstantial. [...] The alienation or potential alienation of surface from depth, of appearance from truth, means that person's thoughts and passions, imagined as properties of the hidden interior, are not immediately accessible to other people. (Maus 1995: 4-5)

Beyond its topography (within vs. without), not much is said about the interiority that Hamlet mentions here; especially the question how it can truly "denote" remains uncertain, as it remains, per def-

inition, “not immediately accessible to other people.” Reversely, anything made accessible through words or outward signs and behavior, is per definition falsifiable – even Hamlet’s own manifestation of grief:

[Hamlet’s] black attire, his sigh, his tear fail to denote him truly not because they are false – Hamlet’s sorrow for his father is sincere – but because they *might* be false, because some other person might conceivably employ them deceitfully. [...] The mere, inevitable existence of a hiatus between signs (“trappings and suits”) and what they signify (“that within”) seems to empty signs of their consequence. [...] Hamlet’s conviction that truth is unspeakable implicitly devalues any attempts to express or communicate it. (Maus 1995: 1-2)

Hamlet’s monologue conveys the problem and the consequences at the heart of skeptical philosophy, which Maus extrapolates mostly from Walter Raleigh’s work. The first step of this philosophy is to consider sensory perception a barrier to a reality whose existence precedes it. The second step is to presuppose the same inaccessibility for the interior of other subjects: “Raleigh destabilizes convictions about direct access to ‘things-in-themselves’ by insisting that the internal working of other minds, what he calls their ‘inward discourse’, is remote and inaccessible.” (Maus 1995: 7) The consequence of such a thought makes the subject, indeed, a fortress that can be assailed only with difficulty:

Raleigh’s skepticism links the imperviousness of the perceived other, whose mysterious interior can never fully be displayed, with a troubling corollary suggestion about the limitations of the perceiving subject. (Maus 1995: 8)

The Ghost exacerbates both reasons that trouble the skeptic. Its armor is a literal barrier to the gaze, literalizing the metaphor of the impervious interior of the subject. In the perspective of Raleigh, all subjects are armored ghosts, peeking out from an inscrutable helmet with a gaze that cannot be returned. On the other hand, it challenges the assumption of the subject that anything it perceives – not only others – is even an accurate perception of a reality that exists

independently from it. The Ghost has become a figure of the successful actor, disappearing behind the armor of his or her role. If “[T]he inwardness of persons is constituted by the *disparity* between what a limited fallible human observer can see and what is available to the hypostasized divine observer, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid” (Maus 1995: 11), the Ghost’s claim to that hypostasized position is undermined the very moment it appears, as itself might be just a product of its spectators’ imagination, not outside their dramatic plot, but inside their minds.

### *An armored body*

The skeptic’s interpretation of the subject is figured in the contemporary image of ghost, on the one hand, and of the actor, on the other hand. As we have noted before, the Ghost has picked a ceremonial dress for its apparition:

MARCELLUS Is it not like the King?  
HORATIO As thou art to thyself.  
Such was the very armour he had on  
When he the ambitious Norway combated.  
So frowned he once, when in an angry parle  
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.  
‘Tis strange.  
MARCELLUS  
Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,  
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.  
(1.1.57-65)

It is worth noting that the Ghost has put on a costume for its appearance. It is entirely and exclusively visible through its dress. In the light of Hamlet’s and the contemporary skeptic philosophers’ reflections about an unexpressed interior and a theatricalized exterior, the Ghost’s dress becomes a metaphor of the assumption that subjects have a surface and a depth. The problem of identifying the Ghost is not only due to the uncertainty that the apparition of a ghost poses to rational thought and to the reformed faith. It is much more pragmatically due to the fact that nobody can see what is actually inside the armor: “that fair and warlike form / In which the

majesty of buried Denmark / Did sometimes march” does not allow insight into who or what is wearing said form. The armor provides the apparition with an opaque exterior that conceals the body. This is all the more noteworthy as it is unusual. It is the marker of an unusual period of transition, as Catherine Belsey has noted. The particular corporeality of medieval ghosts that still structured the vernacular belief makes them more akin to the modern zombie than to a wandering, body-less soul. This might be the reason why Hamlet, in his encounter with the Ghost, addresses him as a “dead corpse, again in complete steel”, assuming that, as a revenant, it is his body who returns and is dressed for the occasion:

[M]edieval revenants were generally understood to be corpses in various states of decay, naked but for the tattered remnants of their shrouds. Visually, they probably resembled the grinning, capering cadavers of the Dance of Death, or the lean, worm-eaten figures of the Three Dead, whose macabre legend was painted on the walls of so many parish churches. (Belsey 2014: 38)

Hamlet quite insists on the Ghost’s corporeality, which would still have been more frightening to early modern audiences than a more enlightened vision of the Ghost as pure spirit:

It was not until the Enlightenment confirmed the Christian tradition of mind-body-dualism, effectively divorcing ghosts from the materiality of the flesh, that the heavy corporeality of Shakespeare’s armed and voluble revenant lost its power to frighten audiences. We expect our phantoms to be ethereal, weightless figures, more evanescent and probably more reticent than Old Hamlet, if that is indeed who he is. (Belsey 2014: 37)

But Belsey’s historical distinction as well as Hamlet’s telling formula might well point us to the fact that instead of being a representant of the corporeality of medieval ghosts, the Ghost of Old Hamlet might be announcing the changes that the confirmation of the “mind-body-dualism” will finalize. It clearly has a body – the question is whether it is only the body of steel that one can see, or whether there actually is something *inside* the armor. It is part of the

apparition's uncanniness that, besides the fact that it is animate, it is also not empty, as Hamlet quickly finds out upon questioning his friends. Let us go back to this passage once more:

HAMLET Armed, say you?  
HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO Armed, my lord.  
HAMLET From top to toe?  
HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO My lord, from head  
to foot.  
HAMLET Then saw you not his face.  
HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO O yes, my lord, he  
wore his beaver up. [  
...]  
HAMLET His beard was grizzled,  
no?  
HORATIO It was as I have seen it in his life  
A sable silvered.  
(1.2.225-227)

The Ghost's cover is not complete: "he wore his beaver up". This entails that part of the face of the wearer of the armor must be visible. This detail emphasizes that under the mask, there seems to be a body, of a concrete corporeality, with a beard, therefore a skin and a face. The visibility of the beard introduces the idea that something is to be found in the depth below the surface of the armor, in accordance with the Ghost lore of the time, as Belsey points out: "Perhaps, then, the complete steel that covers Old Hamlet serves to mask an emaciated and decomposing body impossible to show on stage in the broad daylight of the Globe theatre." (Belsey 2014: 38)

We have already mentioned above how this *visor effect* is the foundation of the Ghost's power through its ambivalence: the possibility of one-sided invisibility confers the Ghost's voice the power of the law. The open beaver, however, can also be interpreted from the perspective of the one that sees the apparition. Derrida interprets the Ghost's armor as a device or surrogate body: "The armor may be but the body of a real artifact, a kind of technical prosthesis, a body foreign to the spectral body that it dresses, dissimulates, and protects, masking even its identity." (Derrida [1993]2006: 7) I

would argue that it is precisely the detail of the lifted beaver that allows for the ambiguity to subsist about this spectral body. The full-body armor, beaver *up*, shows the glimpse of a beard, just enough to spark interpretation, but conceals too much to gain certainty about the assumed depth behind it. The Ghost thereby urges to be questioned: Is there something inside the armor? As Derrida makes clear, the Ghost allows for opposing answers at the same time:

[T]he specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some “thing” that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter. (Derrida [1993]2006: 5)

The Ghost must be embodiment, as it needs a body in order to become a phenomenon, to appear at all; through the armor – this is my reading of Derrida’s argument here, which might originally be inflected slightly differently – , however, this phenomenal substance is at the same time obstructed and obscured. The armor is that which gives the Ghost substance by at the same time questioning its depth.

The dialectic between apparition and dis-apparition that Derrida speaks about here is one of its decisive analogies with the actor that embodies a character on stage – and therefore, a ghostly dialectic that is perpetuated when an actor embodies a ghost on stage. In order for the apparition to become a phenomenon – for the character to exist – it needs to assume some form; it needs to be embodied by an actor. Stephen Greenblatt quotes an interesting catholic treatise on ghosts which attempts to resolve the necessity to leave alone the corpses of the dead, while still justifying their apparition:

The king’s actual body, were they to exhume it, would bear the signs and the smell of decay. They are seeing something else,

then, something perhaps that the Catholic Pierre Le Loyer, in a 1586 book on apparitions, calls a “phantasmal body”: “It is certain that Souls cannot return in their body, which lies in the grave, reanimating it and giving it the movement and life it has lost. And hence, if they return perchance to this world by the will of God and appear to us, they take not a real but a phantasmal body. And those who believe that they return in their true body deceive themselves greatly, for it is only a phantom of air that they clothe themselves in, to appear visibly to men.” (Greenblatt 2001: 212)

The Ghost’s likeness to Old Hamlet is preserved in its ambivalence throughout the first act even into the details of its appearance and its physicality. Its “phantasmal body” is trapped between appearing and disappearing, and it is ultimately its voice that emphatically demands the assumption of some kind of interiority. The armor and the voice as starting points for the supplementation of a body that remains phantasmal, a prosthesis, a prop for the imagination of its spectator – in all these, the Ghost’s physicality points towards the paradoxical existence of the actor embodying a character on stage. This reading encourages the Ghost’s proximity not to the revenant corpses of the Dance of the Dead, nor to the bodiless spirits of the enlightenment. Instead, it is a creature that takes its sense only as a phenomenon on stage. Ghosts performed on the early modern stage combine anxieties about ghosts as much as those about acting, and both are particularly apt images to translate a newfound anxiety about subjectivity itself. It is in this context that Old Hamlet’s ghost yields the most interesting reading.

#### *A pure surface*

For Hamlet’s contemporaries, the actor is the epitome of an inaccessible interiority surrounded by a theatricalized exterior. With regard to the metaphorical implications of the Ghost’s armor, this entails two things for the notion of the actor that is being articulated in *Hamlet*: The performance of the actor and the costume of the Ghost both exacerbate the epistemological anxieties prevalent at the time by suggesting the possibility not of inaccessibility, which would be troubling enough, but of emptiness. What if, after all, the

surface of performance is all there is? What if the mask is all there is, and the interior plays out on the outside?

If one considers the armor a mask, and a mask one of the props traditionally associated with the theater, its etymology provides a helpful starting point for such a reading. The Oxford Latin Dictionary translates *persona* as follows:

- 1 A mask, especially as worn by actors [...]
  - 2 A character in a play, dramatic role;[..]
  - 3 (without an idea of deception) The part played by a person in life, etc. [,,]
- (OLD s.v. *persona*, n.: 1356)

A structural similarity is suggested by the semantic of the Greek *πρόσωπον*:

- I. face, countenance (κατὰ πρόσωπον: in person)
  - 2. front, facade
  - II. One's look, countenance
  - III: = *prosopion*, mask (worn by an actor)
  - 2. dramatic part, character
  - IV: person
- (Liddell et al.: 1996: 1533)

Both *lemmata* inscribe the mask in the context of the theater performance. In addition, they both cite a metaphorical dimension of the mask for a conception of 'personhood': *persona* also means a part played "in life", *πρόσωπον* first means face, countenance, and also: outward facade, front. This allows us to sum up: The Ghost of Old Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is a literary and literal representation of the entanglement of the meanings of *prosopon* and *persona*. It presents its own masked state as a template for the performance of the actor, and for what it means to be a person according to *Hamlet*. A mask, one reading of the Ghost might suggest, is an opaque surface that covers something else, making it invisible. Through the open beaver of the armor, however, the mask of the Ghost creates an impression of depth behind the mask. It creates the phantasm of a depth behind the surface, a phantasmal body.

But the play immediately introduces an ambiguity into the paradigm, by extensively showing a problem that all those face who encounter the Ghost: Can they identify what the Ghost is, through what it is like? Does the mask accurately signify the Ghost's identity? This question is related to a general early modern concern with a newly assumed division of the self into an outward and an inward component. Hamlet himself metaphorizes the subject as an actor that performs a part, thereby concealing an imagined inwardness behind the mask of outward words and action. In Hamlet's view, every subject plays a part that masks its true feelings and intentions. Hamlet, therefore, seems to suggest a structural analogy between the mask and the performance of the actor. The basis of this analogy, the idea of a topographical opposition between surface and depth, also structures what it means to be a person in *Hamlet*.

The peculiar nature of the "armor effect" as I have described it so far, however, also points towards a strikingly modern understanding of acting in *Hamlet*, as Katharina Maus concisely sums up: "But inwardness as it becomes a concern in the theatre is always perforce inwardness displayed: an inwardness, in other words, that has already ceased to exist." (Maus 1995: 32) "Inwardness displayed", Shakespeare's contemporaries perceive, is the inwardness of something else, of a character, and therefore a display without substance. Antitheatricalists, of course, operate under the assumption that there actually is a more legitimate interiority – even if it should be inaccessible – that is, the one of the person 'behind' the role. Interestingly enough, they also use the image of the open visor – even more than that of the mask – to express their concern: "These players, as Seneca sayeth, *malunt personam habere quam faciem*, they will rather wear a vizard than a natural face." (Northbrooke [1577] 2004: 13), John Northbrooke writes. In his 1587 *Mirror of Monsters*, William Rankins (who interestingly went on to become a playwright himself, cf. Rankins [1587]2004: 124) finds an even more vivid image for the moral dangers he sees in performance. It is essentially an adroit cover for personified vice:

Of which sort of men (the more to be lamented) are these players, who do not only exercise themselves in all kind of

idleness, but minister occasion to many to incur the like.[...] Whose shape must needs, in respect it marcheth among men, having some veil to cover its deformity lest, being easily discerned, it be not so well allowe, especially since that the nature of men (though not so soon deceived with plain enormities) is quickly seduced with colored pretenses, and as these maskers (as custom requireth) cease not to seek the fairest vizards to cover their foul faces, the better to smooth the poison that lurketh in their minds. (Rankins [1587]2004: 128)

It is remarkable that a mutual metaphorization cements the connection between idleness and acting: players are prone to idleness, but idleness itself masquerades and acts to better possess the minds of men. Stephen Gosson is equally quick to condemn the stage in his *School of Abuse*, with reference to the ultimate antitheatrical argument in Plato's *Politeia*.

But if you look well to Epæus' horse, you shall find in his bowels the destruction of Troy[...] pull off the vizard that poets mask in, you shall disclose their reproach. Plato, when he saw the doctrine of these teachers, neither for profit, necessary, nor to be wished for pleasure, gave them all drums' entertainment, not suffering them once to show their faces in a reformed commonwealth. (Gosson [1579]2004: 21-22)

One can clearly see that the success of the antitheatrical faction's argument relies on the assumption that performance creates a surface which covers up something; that this something is, in addition, morally doubtful, will be more relevant to our argument in chapter two. For now, let us focus on the fact that the "vizard" is here the emblem of the performance of the actor concealing something behind is "colored pretenses". Providing the ghost with a vizard, then, allows for it to figure not only the voice of the author, but also the paradox of the actor as an interiority that manifests in a surface that also renders it inaccessible – at first sight.

The mystery posed by the Ghost, then, and the virulent rejection that performance triggers in its critics, might lie in a flawed premise: "As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are

not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the specter.” (Derrida [1993]2006: 11) This disturbing notion of an interiority that has already ceased to exist cannot be comprehended by what Derrida calls traditional scholars, those who “don’t believe in ghosts, but believe in the separation of the real from the non-real, the effective from the non-effective, the living from the non-living” (Derrida [1993]2006: 12). But if external performance were not the unreliable and potentially distorting mirror of a real inwardness, but, instead, the production of something from “nothing”?<sup>23</sup> It is crucial to the evolution of the character Hamlet as a theatrical phenomenon that, despite his skepticism, he assumes a position from which he can speak to the Ghost and enter a dialogue that will allow him to penetrate the opacity of its paradoxical apparition, and, eventually, adopt its ontological status as a character whose existence depends on its embodiment, again and again, by an actor, who thereby becomes the author of his own appearance, word and action.

Such a stance towards the Ghost would move away from the question of likeness. It would move away from the epistemological focus of ghost and performance in general, and reframe it from two sides: from its effect, on the one hand, and its production, on the other. Performance does something to those who watch it. And somebody does the performance. In both cases, *Hamlet* shows, those who are affected by it aren’t necessarily different from those who effect it.

#### 4. Doing performance

In the previous chapters, I have read the Ghost as a trope for the author’s voice, as well as shown that its open visor opens it up to be read as a figure of the actor and of those epistemological concerns that a new idea of interiority poses to its spectators. These

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<sup>23</sup> Tobias Döring has made the point that for this reason, what Maus calls the “inwardness *topos*” might more aptly be named the “inwardness-Effekt” (Döring 2001: 362).

properties have been so far discussed with a focus on their deconstructive power with regards to an author's authority through the lens of anti-mimetic resentment, epistemological skepticism and anti-theatrical invective, who all consider the actor and spectator problematic antagonists endangering the author's authority over his original creation. However, the scenes of *Hamlet* featuring the ghost also allow for a reading emphasizing the productive, collaborative process of creation that produces *Hamlet* as text and performance. Rather than in terms of the opposition between original and copy, between deceitful surface and hidden depth, the actor's craft could be understood as a productive skill that creates a real impact and effect on the spectators. In that perspective, the author proposes a text to be performed, handing it over the actor's and spectator's common authority over the performance's appearance and interpretation.

#### *What performance does*

Once more, let us go back to the beginning. The aim of convening Horatio to the meeting of the sentinels in act one, scene one, is twofold: "That, if again this apparition come, / He may approve our eyes and speak to it." (1.1.27-28). Both aims are connected: Corroborating the apparition's existence by reinforcing the intersubjective value of the shared perception is the first step to interacting with the Ghost in order to find a solution to the malfunction that it represents. Both demands, however, can also be read to represent radically different approaches of *Hamlet* to its own existence as performance. On the one hand, it acknowledges the epistemological trouble it provokes by questioning whether anyone can rely on their sense perception at all. On the other hand, it also proposes that a productive engagement with this strange reality is possible, even if it cannot be grasped with the means of the mind. The program of skeptic philosophy is, after all, not to somehow "fix" the problem of the subjectivity and fallibility of perception, but to replace an idea of verifiable truth with a decision for a common faith. Shifting the perspective on performance from the question of surface and depth, appearance and essence, that antitheatrical resentment focuses on, towards a notion of collective belief, transforms

the danger of deception, I argue, into the possibility of a transformative and creative interaction between those involved: actors and spectators. As Katharine Eisaman Maus has argued,

It would not be surprising if the complexities of intersubjective comprehension should be closer to the surface here, presented more immediately by the conditions of the performance [...]. Theater involves, too, a deliberate, agreed-upon estrangement of fictional surface from “truth”: the plebeian actor concealing his identity under the language and manner of a king, the prepubescent boy donning Cleopatra’s sumptuous robes, friends from the repertory company butchering one another in a stage duel. (Maus 1995: 31)

While Maus goes on to explore the implications of Elizabethan theater for the early modern idea of subjectivity and more precisely for the assumption of the surface-depth-paradigm, it is fruitful to also follow the reverse route, and to ask what the negotiation of this paradigm in *Hamlet* as text and in performance reveals about the conceptualization of actors and spectators.

Spectators, it turns out early in the play, aren’t pure minds, ready to receive anything that they are confronted with on stage. They bring their own preconditions to the performance. When Marcellus and Horatio join Hamlet at the end of act one, scene two, to report the appearance of the Ghost, the apparition is in a sense already present:

HAMLET [...] My father, methinks I see my father.  
HORATIO Where, my lord?  
HAMLET In my mind’s eye, Horatio.  
(1.2.183-184)

The confusion between the image (the imaginary) and the literal can be staged as a comical misunderstanding here. Bewildered – “Horatio and Marcellus sometimes look around in alarm at this point” (1.4.184 n.) – Horatio asks: “Where, my Lord?”, understanding from Hamlet’s answer that he speaks of a product of the mind, more precisely: a memory. The rationalization that is inherent to

Hamlet's response, since it reassures his interlocutors that he has not seen an apparition such as they have, resonates with an image previously employed by Horatio: "a mote it is to trouble the mind's eye" (1.1.111), Horatio had said after first seeing the Ghost. While attempting to explain the apparition through historical examples of revenants interfering in unresolved political issues, Horatio had (maybe unwittingly so) acknowledged the impossibility to entirely subsume the apparition into the rational framework of "philosophy" that he, as a scholar, brings to the encounter here. The apparition is "a mote", a piece of grit, something hardly visible, but of too much sensory reality to be cast away as a metaphor. Like the Ghost, Hamlet's memory of his father has its undeniable presence in his mind. The Ghost blurs the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical. What seems real might be imaginary, but the reverse is also true: Might Hamlet's memory of his father have a reality that goes beyond his mind's eye? We have discussed this aspect from the point of view of the skeptic philosopher, of the one attempting to neatly distinguish that which exists from that which is merely false surmise and impression, but Aristotle's analogy also allows for a different view. Like the art work, like the Ghost, Hamlet's memory is there and not there, a paradoxical mode of existence superposing modes that were assumed to be separated. Hamlet cannot allow his memory to rest. In him, another Ghost lives on. This reading might seem to yield no more than the questionable psychological analysis of a character whose 'interiority' we thereby presume to be able to access before even understanding his mode of existence between text and performance. More interesting is the question of what the confusion between Horatio, Marcellus and Hamlet reveals. It shows that the apparent 'interiority' of subjects – their minds and memories – can be productive. The memory in Hamlet's mind might become just as material a "mote" as the apparition, which can well be illustrated by Marcellus' and Horatio's reaction, when they assume that he is speaking about an apparition, too.

Even though Hamlet's speech in scene two of act one, which so clearly distinguished and hierarchized the opposition between interior and exterior, might seem to draw upon and feed into the argument of contemporary polemicists against the theater, that which follows immediately upon it can be read as a desire – similar to that of not letting go of his father, providing him a ghostly existence in his mind, of unraveling the distinction itself:

HAMLET O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,  
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter: O God, God,  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
(1.2.129-134)

Hamlet clearly suffers from the distinction that he himself assumes to be stable. His wish for the opaque “suit” of his body to dissolve, might of course be read as a colorful way of expressing his desire to end his existence. But this desire itself can be fueled by a longing to transgress the limits between the living and the dead, as long as his memory – “Must I remember?” – does not allow his father to let cross that threshold.

Hamlet wishes for a material transformation of the solid into the liquid, and the variations of the different editions of *Hamlet* testify to the multiplicity of his expression: In Q2's reading, Hamlet deplores being *sallied* (assailed) by the circumstances that force it to act and react, and from being prevented from expressing his interiority adequately: “But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.” (1.2.159) In F's reading *solid*, he deplores being isolated from the exterior by the opaque and inert materiality of its *solid* body. Finally, another possible glosse of the term, *sullied* in the sense of “contaminated”, transports the same frustration with the distinctness of interior from exterior, while clearly acknowledging the possibility of a transgression between both through contamination.

This can also echo the permeable relationship between stage and spectators in the space of the theater, the exact opposite of a notion

of the closed, interior subjectivity precluded from the outside. The liquefaction of his body that Hamlet wishes for is peculiarly akin to the formulation with which the opponents of the theater describe one of the main dangers of the stage:

The idea that objects or actions perceived through the senses could have a penetrative effect on human emotions, psychology and behaviour also preoccupied the anti-theatrical polemicists of the early modern period. [...] anti-theatrical writers, in particular, saw the senses as being uniquely vulnerable to theatrical performance. (Karim-Cooper 2013: 217)

Performance's capacity to affect the body through the gateways of the sense – and to then transform the mind deeply, transgressing all limitations between outside and inside, even the limits between subjects themselves:

If we be careful that no pollution of idols enter by the mouth into our bodies, how diligent, how circumspect, how wary ought we to be, that no corruptions of idols enter by the passage of our eyes and ears into the soul? We know that whatsoever goeth into the mouth defileth not but passeth away by course of nature; but that which entereth into us by the eyes and ears must be digested by the spirit, which is chiefly reserved to honor God. (Gosson [1582]2004: 91-92)

Performance penetrates the body through the senses, Gosson argues in his later text *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). If it does not outright dissolve its outer barrier, as Hamlet wishes, it still seeks a material passageway into the body and is then consumed and digested within the body by the spirit. In *The Theatre of God's Judgement* (1597), Thomas Beard agrees that body and spirit can hardly remain the same in such a procedure:

It resteth now that we speak somewhat of plays and comedies, and such like toys and May-games, which have no other use in the world but to deprave and corrupt good manners, and to open a door to all uncleanness. The ears of young folk are there polluted with many filthy and dishonest speeches; their eyes are there infected with many lascivious and unchaste gestures and

countenances; and their wits are there stained and imbrued with so pernicious liquor that (except God's good grace) they will ever savor of it. (Beard [1597]2004: 167)

The imagery of liquefaction and pollution from Hamlet's monologue is here used to describe the way in which performance, entering the spectator like a poison liquid that can find its way through all the orifices of the body, transforms it inside: staining it and mingling with it into an indissoluble mix. It is interesting that the anti-theatrical polemicists generally perceive the physical contiguity of spectators and actors within the round space of the public theater to produce a contiguity of minds and morals that dissolves the distinction between bodies and minds of performers and onlookers alike: "Only the filthiness of plays and spectacles is such as maketh both the actors and beholders quilty alike." (Munday [1580]2004: 66)

Farrah Karim-Cooper emphasizes that this conception of what performance does is more or less shared by those making theater and those criticizing it: "Thus interior effects of theatrical performance, whether manifesting as weeping, laughing, or moral laxity are often imagined in tactile terms, and the seeing and hearing of plays are frequently characterised as synaesthetic activities with the capacity to penetrate and transform the self". The difference is that this transformation is "a result feared by the anti-theatrical writers, but desired and seen as essential to the playgoing experience by the playwrights and actors." (Karim-Cooper 2013: 230) Might Hamlet's yearning be less the suicidal desire of a mourning person, and more the longing of a theater maker to transgress the boundaries between himself and others to transform and be transformed? While I will discuss in more detail how this desire manifests in the play-within-the-play in the third chapter of this study, the scenes surrounding the apparitions of the Ghost in act one certainly announce such a preoccupation with spectatorship.

*Hamlet* leaves no doubt about the dangers of such a transformation through performance. In their encounter in scene five of act one,

the Ghost requires Hamlet to follow him. Horatio “show[s] that he knows his vernacular ghost-lore” (Belsey 2014: 38):

HORATIO What if it tempt you towards the flood, my lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
That beetles o'er his base into the sea  
And there assume some other horrible form  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason  
And draw you into madness? Think of it:  
The very place puts toys of desperation  
Without more motive into every brain  
That looks so many fathoms to the see  
And hears it roar beneath. (1.4.69-78)

The Ghost's mode of existence allows it to transform itself, to assume, like an actor, different shapes. Its metamorphic quality might affect the spectator, Hamlet, to the point of transforming his mind from reason to madness. The Ghost's supernatural mode of being is dangerous – but so is the sensory experience of a place such as a cliff. If this is the case, the danger of transformation might well lie rather in the subject perceiving than that which is perceived. Nonetheless, Horatio's words draw on a ubiquitous and well-known discourse about ghosts, that is closely associated with practices of playing and performance: “The majority of the Byland revenants are desperate, shape-shifting figures, who represent a danger to those who see them.” (Belsey 2014: 38) The dangers of ghosts are part of vernacular belief, as well, and are recuperated for Protestant attempts to discredit their existence. They aren't actual revenants but the product of histrionic prowess of demons that impersonate them: “Although there were no ghosts, demons might impersonate them in order to lure the gullible into temptation.” (ibid.) A new affinity of the Ghost with the actor appears: Its shape-shifting, on the one hand, and the latter's effect on the spectator, who is driven into madness and contaminated by the contagious emotional effect of the vision. The very place that puts “toys of desperation / Without more motive into every brain”, the cliff that makes those mad who approach it, could also mean the place where these words are spoken: the apron stage of the Globe, the “platform where we

watch” and where the apparent ‘nothing’ of the actor’s performance effects something in every spectator’s mind.

But Hamlet seeks the encounter that Horatio fears. Without even having seen the Ghost, he concludes: “My father’s spirit – in arms! All is not well; / I doubt some foul play.” (1.2.253-254) The “corrosive inwardness” that Greenblatt speaks of and that transpires in Hamlet’s first words to his mother decisively shapes the outcome of his encounter with the Ghost, and his consecutive infamous hesitation. If the “father’s spirit” introduces an element of doubt about its legitimacy as a speaker, Hamlet’s predisposition requires him to know first what is impossible to uncover, and to look beyond the visor and discover the inwardness of the armor. In his grief, Hamlet’s perception of what follows might be colored by wishful thinking. The imagination that he as a spectator supplies to the appearance does, indeed, play a major role in his interpretation of the events. “I doubt some foul play”, Hamlet knows, not suspecting that the foulness of the play may stem as well from him as a spectator as from the Ghost. That Hamlet, as all spectators, brings his own expectations, assumptions and associations to the play, make him, indeed, “apt” to hear – and believe – the tale that the Ghost then unfolds. When hearing the revelation that “The serpent that did sting thy father’s life / Now wears his crown”, Hamlet exclaims “O my prophetic soul!” within the same verse, as if the Ghost’s performance and his own imagination had become one.

The insight that Hamlet gains from his performance with the Ghost is therefore not literally an in-sight *into* the actual interiority of the Ghost, just as the benefit – or danger, depending on the perspective – of going to a performance is not the process of understanding what the performers are playing (or, for that matter, *that* they are *only* playing). It is the result of an aptitude to believe, not in general, but to believe certain specific things, and its encounter of the things performed. When Hamlet sums up, after the disappearance of the Ghost, that “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” (1.5.165-166), he invites Horatio to accept the “weirdness” of an apparition that is no longer accounted for neither in rationalist thought nor in the dominant

religious discourse. By the same stroke, he invites the spectators of the play to let themselves be transformed by a performance whose precise mode of existence might precisely lie in its simultaneously being present and apparent. As Stephen Greenblatt concludes, “*Hamlet* immeasurably intensifies a sense of the weirdness of the theater, its proximity to certain experiences that had been organized and exploited by religious institutions and rituals.” (Greenblatt 2001 : 253)

Experiencing this ‘weirdness’, Hamlet instructs its spectators at the very beginning of the play, means moving beyond the limitation of the question of appearance and essence, beyond the need to clearly distinguish the real from the unreal, and the performed from the performance. This acceptance opens the way to contributing to the transformation that is the performance, and being transformed. Even more: spectators need to actively contribute to a dynamic that re-members that which, on stage, is decomposed, an imperfect apparition that only hints towards that which it represents:

[Die Imagination wird] mitten in das Zentrum der theatralischen Transaktion hineingestellt: freilich nicht als gefälliges Geschenk des Theaters an sein Publikum, sondern als Forderung zur Mitarbeit an einer kollektiven Unternehmung. (Weimann 1988: 147)

Hamlet conceptualizes performance as a collective enterprise and uses the Ghost’s appearances to illustrate how the epistemological approach to performance that fuels large parts of antitheatrical criticism can be replaced by a different concept of performance. It suggests instead to view performance as a collectively effected transformation that includes actors and spectators alike and renders the neat distinction between inaccessible interior and theatricalized exterior inoperable. In return, it opens the way for a perception of performance as a creative process that produces much more than just deception.

*Who does the performance*

The first scenes of *Hamlet* also have the function of establishing precisely this perception of performance. Using the apparition of the Ghost in front of the sentinels as a ‘play within the play’, it boldly places the spectators in control of the performance from the outset. In the beginning, Horatio represents a skeptical, uncooperative spectator, actively refusing to “let belief take hold of him”:

HORATIO Tush, tush, ‘twill not appear.  
 BARNARDO Sit down awhile,  
 And let us once again assail your ears  
 That are so fortified against our story  
 What we have two nights seen.  
 HORATIO Well, sit we  
 down,  
 And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.  
 (1.1.28-33)

In contrast to Hamlet’s desire to dissolve the boundary of his body, Horatio has, on the contrary, fortified his senses: a good scholar, he is determined to only follow his reason in assessing his sense perception, not letting himself be transformed. Barnardo’s strategy to assail this fortification is to deploy the most effective weapon of all: to tell a story. Like the platform from which the gaze of the sentinels is directed outside the fortification of Elsinore, the incredulous spectator’s mind is a fortress to be assailed through the sensory spectacle of the theater performance:

BARNARDO Last night of all,  
 When yond same star that’s westward from the pole  
 Had made his course t’illumine that part of heaven  
 Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
 The bell then beating one –  
*Enter* GHOST.  
 (1.1.34-38)

Barnardo begins with an elaborate version of the “Once upon a time”, situating the apparition in space and time in no less than four verses. This goes beyond the assumed necessity of creating time, place and décor that could not be represented on the Elizabethan

stage. It comments upon the nature of performance as presumed repetitions of the same. Barnardo invites his audience – Horatio, but also the audience of *Hamlet* in performance – to imagine a past situation in expectation of its reproduction. The actual entrance of the Ghost is preceded by and contrasted with the narrative of its last apparition on stage, and thereby opens up the possibility that the narrative not only narrates past events but produces their present reiteration. Barnardo tells the story so well that the apparition indeed materializes on stage, like an actor appearing precisely on cue. Making the Ghost’s appearance a question of belief in the first place, I would like to argue, explicates the implications of dramatic language as a performative speech act, producing something to appear on stage – not describing it:

b. “Conjuration” signifies, *on the other hand*, the magical incantation destined to *evoke*, to bring forth with the voice, to *convoke* a charm or a spirit. Conjuration says in sum the appeal that causes to come forth *with the voice* and thus it makes come, by definition what is *not there* at the present moment of the appeal. This voice does not describe, what it says certifies nothing; its words cause something to happen. (Derrida [1993]2006: 50)

Barnardo’s narration does not even reach the point at which he describes the past apparition of the Ghost: His speech act is designed to provoke the second apparition of the Ghost instead, making a description superfluous. The entrance of the Ghost at this precise moment can be read as the successful conjuring of a soul up from the dead, speaking to the ancestors, and the like. But Derrida’s analysis of the voice that provokes the presence of something, speaks it into existence, is particularly loaded in the context of performance. On stage, the passage reaches a whole new ambiguity: Have the words scripted in the play for the character Barnardo actually conjured up a ghost? Popular belief would not have excluded that, despite the protestant opposition against these alleged superstitions. But the question is superposed with the relationship between one actor’s words and the other actor’s entrance. The cue is a speech act whose perlocutionary force exclusively unfolds in this

particular context, and provokes the Ghost's appearance insofar as the actor impersonating the Ghost will arrive *on cue* – which is of heightened importance at this moment since Barnardo needs to be interrupted mid-verse. Through this beginning, *Hamlet* does more than helping the spectators in the Globe to a smooth transition into the world of the play, conjuring up their 'imaginary puissance' for the play to elicit their belief. It includes them into the logic of the performance itself, as if they were active players, too, by placing the characters of the first scene in the position of spectators, more or less credulous. Even The fortification of Horatio's ears has been shaken: "It harrows me with fear and wonder" (1.1.43); the others notice that he is affected, too, and deduce that the effect of the Ghost convinces him of its existence: "How now, Horatio, you tremble and look pale. / Is not this something more than fantasy?" (1.1.52-53)

This effect is enhanced by the second demand to Horatio, namely: to actively engage with the Ghost and speak to it. As Jacques Derrida has observed, this is an attempt to control the albeit mysterious apparition: "By charging or conjuring him to speak, Horatio wants to inspect, stabilize, *arrest* the specter in its speech: '(For which, they say, you Spirits oft walke in death)—Speake of it. Stay and speake.—Stop it Marcellus.'" (Derrida [1993]2006: 13) Horatio hopes to interrupt the confusing dialectic of the apparition's existence through a dialogue. Horatio's address fails, I argue, because it steadfastly holds on the idea that the Ghost can be identified, its surface conclusively interpreted, and its essence ascertained:

HORATIO

What art thou that usurp'st the time of night  
Together with that fair and warlike form  
In which the majesty of buried Denmark  
Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee speak.

MARCELLUS It is offended.

BARNARDO See, it stalks away.

HORATIO Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak.

*Exit* Ghost.

MARCELLUS 'Tis gone and will not answer.  
(1.1.45-51)

Ubiquitous and ephemeral as the performance itself, the Ghost does not engage in dialogue. It might be because even Horatio's second attempt to address the Ghost betrays a remainder of disbelief: "Stay, illusion", he demands upon the reappearance of the Ghost. He ritualizes his way of speaking to the Ghost, proposing several options that explain the unnatural event, bidding the Ghost to choose whether "there be any good thing to be done", whether "thou art privy to the country's fate, or "if thou hast uphoarded in thy life / Extorted treasure in the womb of earth" and to speak out. But these, *Hamlet* seems to suggest, are all the wrong questions:

HORATIO [...]  
*Enter* GHOST.  
 But soft, behold, lo where it comes again;  
 I'll cross it though it blast me. Stay, illusion.  
 [...] Stop it, Marcellus!  
 MARCELLUS Shall I strike it with my partisan?  
 HORATIO Do, if it will not stand.  
 BARNARDO 'Tis here.  
 HORATIO  
 'Tis here. [*Exit* GHOST]  
 MARCELLUS 'Tis gone.  
 (1.1.125-141)

It confronts its interlocutors with the uncontrollable autonomy of performance: "'Tis here. 'Tis here", as long as it is; and then: "'Tis gone."

As the Ghost keeps frustrating their need to identify it. *Hamlet* signals to its own audience that the performance, like the Ghost,

[i]t is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. (Derrida [1993]2006: 5)

The spectator that approaches the performance with the intent of knowing will be frustrated just as Horatio, Barnardo and Marcellus :

“Finally, the last one to whom a specter can appear, address itself, or pay attention is a spectator as such.” (Derrida [1993]2006: 11)

If Horatio wasn't in the best position to speak to the Ghost, the group conjectures, Hamlet might: “This spirit dumb to us will speak to him” (1.1.170), Horatio recreates the setting that, in the very first scene of the play, Barnardo and Marcellus had created for him (and for the audience). He goes back to the basics by situating the Ghost's apparition within the context of a tale:

HORATIO Season your admiration for a while  
With an attent ear till I may deliver  
Upon the witness of these gentlemen  
This marvel to you.  
HAMLET For God's love let me hear!  
(1.2.191-194)

The crucial elements are assembled once more. A spectator, struck in admiration (a word that will be completed by multiple synonyms such as ‘amazement’, ‘awe’, ‘woe’... throughout the play), and initial disbelief. A problem that can be resolved if the “marvel” is delivered in the right way and especially in front of a collective of witnesses. Hamlet's reaction is markedly different from that of Horatio, the skeptic: he is predisposed to hear and believe the tale of this father's spirit's apparition. Like epilogues in general, the Ghost scenes in *Hamlet* point to the fact that spectators were literally able to make a play in Shakespeare's public theater, too:

[H]is surviving prologues and epilogues manifest [...] some telling comments on their attachment to the plays to which they are latched. They are full of nervous anxiety about what the judgmental audience will think of the play, and whether it will be ‘approved’ or condemned – typical first-performance concerns. (Stern 2009: 118-119)

Stern argues that the comments are not necessarily to be read from the viewpoint of the characters' liminality, but in terms of the mutability of the play-text in the production process of the time. At



to it and prepare his address. His elaborate descriptions of the Ghost and the processes that brought him back to earth denote that the shape of it does actually not seem questionable to him as it was to Horatio, more skeptical towards the apparition: That it has left its grave, donned an armor, and returned to earth is unquestionable to Hamlet. His question is: Why? Ready to accept an imperative from the Ghost before the latter has even spoken, Hamlet asks for his fate to be delivered onto him, like the obedient actor that playwrights of the time might have wished for.

But Hamlet's words suggest otherwise. In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt reads the encounter of Hamlet with the Ghost of his father as a process of "*prosopopeia*" (Greenblatt 2001: 250 ff.). The Oxford English Dictionary Online lists three definitions under the lemma *prosopopoeia*:

1 A rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting; the introduction of a pretended speaker; an instance of this.

2 a. A figure of speech by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or as having personal characteristics, esp. the power to think or speak; an instance of this;

†b. In extended use: a person or thing in which some quality or abstraction is embodied; the embodiment or epitome of something. *Obsolete* (OED s.v. *prosopopeia*, n.)

*Prosopopoeia* can then be defined as a rhetorical device that consists in the dramatization of something or someone absent or dead. According to Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, instances of *prosopopoeia* are first and foremost "fictiones personarum" (Quintilian [ca. 90 C.E.]2002: 50). They create *personae* by lending them speech. Some even speak of *prosopopoeia* only if the fiction includes the lending of a body *and* speech to things that usually don't possess either: "et corpora et verba fingimus" (ibid.). They create the fiction of *personae* by lending even inanimate things speech and actions. In rhetoric, the voice that lends this speech belongs, of course, to the orator all

along. In this sense, *prosopopoeia* can be considered an act of authorship. In rhetorical terms, the making of a person consists of temporarily imitating a character's speech. In the context of the dialogic dramatic text and its performance of stage, however, the figure of *prosopopoeia* gains an additional dimension: The process of creating the fiction of body and speech is literalized in the actual performance of the Ghost's dialogue with Hamlet on stage.

It is in this sense that the Ghost's shape is also questionable: it begs questioning. The apparition sparks the dramatic interaction; even more: it *requires* the action of a counterpart to come into existence: By first of all naming the Ghost: "I'll call thee King, father, Royal Dane", Hamlet names the Ghost and thereby brings it to life. In the encounter with his father's spirit, Hamlet identifies the Ghost not by un/masking it, but by making it into a potential partner in (dramatic) dialogue. It is this invitation and possibility for questioning, I think, that allows us to see "beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility" (Derrida 2006: 13), and between masking and unmasking: if the armor of the Ghost is a template for the performance of the actor and the performance of the self, the interactions of actors on stage show how the person as mask is made: in dialogue.

Long before the Ghost speaks his imperative, seemingly unquestionable because of the *visor effect*, the reading of the encounter between Hamlet and his father's spirit as that between an omnipotent author and an obedient actor is challenged: Instead of questioning what the Ghost is, Hamlet makes himself the author of its meaning. This not only means that Hamlet might be psychologically predisposed to assume in advance what the spirit tells him a few moments later. When Hamlet names it, the Ghost transforms from a potentially illusory phenomenon, a psychic disturbance, into a dramatic persona, characteristically submitted to scripted fate. It is by authorization of Hamlet, that the Ghost can become a partner within a dramatic conflict that confronts an author and his script to an actor and his performance. Through his address to the Ghost, he

achieves to secure a certain reality to the Ghost, and therefore erases the precondition for its authority: The Ghost's strategy to establish its authority, as we have discussed above, "locates power in absence: absence of personality, absence of fact, absence of peculiarity" (Garber 1987: 21). But to speak, it depends on a presence that can only materialize through the address of a fellow character.

The act of naming the Ghost, therefore, is not an attempt to clearly delineate whether it belongs to the living or the dead, whether it exists or not; or whether it is a demon masquerading as a spirit. It is a creative act that precisely depends on these distinctions not to be clarified. In the *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian concedes that the use of prosopopoeia is always a walk on the edge of a precipice, and demands, therefore, particular audacity:

But great powers of eloquence are needed for this, since things which are false or in their nature unbelievable must either strike the hearer with special force, because they surpass the truth, or else be taken as empty nothings, because they are not true. (Quintilian [90 C.E.]2002: 53)

The particular eloquence of Hamlet, the boldness of his gesture lies in his identifying the Ghost and naming him – not as an "apparition", a "thing", an "illusion", but with a name, lending him the name and authority of his father. In the context of the stage, this utterance has not merely the effect of creating the vivid impression in front of the audience's "mind's eye". It does not *fake* the impression of seeing an action performed. It literalizes what rhetoric can achieve through the figure of *hypotyposis*, which follows prosopopoeia in the *Institutio oratoria*: "the facts seem not to be told us, but to be happening [non enim narrari res, sed agi videtur]" (Quintilian [90 C.E.]2002: 59) Hamlet's conjuration of the Ghost does not vividly narrate the image of the Ghost in front of the mind's eye, but produces the visible reality of it as a dramatic persona on stage, engaging in dramatic dialogue, subject of the dramatic action. As Marjorie Garber has pointed out, "Hamlet *chooses* to name the ghost with those names which are for him most problematical: King, father, royal Dane. Hamlet addresses the 'questionable shape' and

brings it to speech, and therefore to a kind of life.” (Garber 1987: 146) He makes the Ghost a dramatic persona in dialogue with another, Hamlet: “It is precisely a *dramatic* situation that is produced by this structure of address, which is why it is plausible to say that Hamlet constructs his own Ghosts, makes use of the ‘gracious figure’ of his father by utilizing the equally gracious figure of *prosopeia*.” (Garber 1987: 146)

I argue that Hamlet not only *dramatizes* the Ghost, but at the same time highlights that both, Hamlet and the Ghost, are performed by actors. Hamlet resolves the epistemological issue presented by the Ghost and by performance alike by actualizing the presence of the actor, as a partner in dialogue for the actor playing himself. In the perspective of performance, the Ghost’s response illustrates that there is actually a body wearing the armor and speaking from inside, an actor costumed and taking on that role because Hamlet addresses him. The Ghost becomes present as a dramatic persona and thereby as an actor performing with the others on stage.<sup>24</sup> The interaction between the Ghost and Hamlet, who names it and therefore affords it the possibility to speak, is a testimony to the contemporary union between the stage and the page to create the institution of dramatic theater: to make the voice of the dead heard, to bring the Ghost to life, an actor needs to speak, and another to speak back. In addition, it allows to dissolve the distinction between the sphere of non-fiction that the omnipotent author allegedly speaks from and the sphere of the dramatic persona, allegedly submitted to its imperative, by introducing the level of performance into the play. Considering the semantic inflections of the Latin *persona* and the Greek *πρόσωπον* that we have evoked earlier, *Hamlet*, also presents us with a different idea of the mask. In the encounter of Hamlet with his father’s spirit, the spectator witnesses the making of the Ghost as a dramatic person and at least potentially relates

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24 Directorial decisions to not show the Ghost or make it a product of Hamlet’s mind tend to reduce the metatheatrical aspect of the entire drama in favour of its psychological dimension. The choice to “materialize” the Ghost or not is, therefore, decisive.

it to the process of making the mask. Taking this performative, productive dimension of the mask seriously opens the way for a different reading of the play's conception of performance as more than an illusion. Identifying a person might actually not be a process of taking off the mask and revealing what is underneath, but the dialogical constitution of a masquerade that is, in fact, as immanent to what it means to be a person – as it is to the interaction of actors performing on stage. Acting as a person and acting as an actor are in this sense only different degrees of the same masquerade.

### *Who makes the play*

The making of the Ghost as a character through an act of naming transforms what presented itself as an antagonism between an author with absolute authority over the script and an actor who must carry out the actions and speak the words set down for him into a relationship of dialogical creation: the foundation of the text in performance is that actors mutually create their characters.

When Hamlet exclaims “O my prophetic soul!” upon the revelation of the Ghost that his father has been murdered by his uncle, he reveals his own predisposition to have faith in the Ghost's claim, since he already believes what the Ghost tells him. But Hamlet can equally be considered to stand his ground in an ongoing dialogue with the authority of the script issued by an author who, compared to his *present* performance, is always irrevocably past. Facing the Ghost as representant of the genre of the revenge tragedy and of a new concept of authorship at the same time, Hamlet accepts the role of an actor while at the same time interpreting it as a creative part in a project of collaborative authorship. Last but not least, Hamlet takes the stance of a spectator here: one that watches the Ghost's apparition and then grants his faith to it, or not. More than that: Hamlet as spectator of the Ghost seems to have an equal part in the authorship of the imperative as do author and actor.

Let's return to the staging by Christopher Rüping I have discussed how it points us towards the decisive role of the antagonism between author and actor in *Hamlet* by framing the entire play as the narrative of Horatio. It is no less revealing how it introduces the

scene between Hamlet and the Ghost. In Rüping's interpretation, the origin of the Ghost's imperative is Hamlet himself. First of all, it is Hamlet who first speaks aloud the disembodied, transcendent text on the LED screen, literally issuing the imperative to unfold the plot of *Hamlet*: It is also he – now performed by all of the actors on stage in turn – that directs the other characters into their actions throughout the entire production. In the scene following the opening scene, Katja Bürkle as Hamlet conjures up the Ghost herself and forces Horatio (Walter Hess) to approve her vision:

HAMLET (*Katja*)  
 Mein Vater – ich sehe meinen Vater  
 Mein Vater! Da vorne auf der Mauer Rücken.  
 Siehst du ihn nicht? Da vorne schreitet er  
 Mit schwerem Schritt vorbei, gekleidet ganz  
 Von Kopf bis Fuß in seiner Silberrüstung.  
 HORATIO (*Walter*)  
 Ich kanns nicht sehen...  
 HAMLET [...]  
 Siehst du ihn nicht?  
 HORATIO (*Walter*)  
 Mein Prinz, ich ..  
 HAMLET (*Katja*)  
 Noch immer nicht, Horatio? Da vorne geht er,  
 Von Kopf bis Fuß gerüstet, mit offenem Visier,  
 Ein Ausdruck mehr von Kummer als von Wut,  
 Sein Bart ein dunkles Silbergrau –  
 Des Vaters Geist – in Waffen! Siehst du ihn?  
 (Rüping 2017: 6)

The causality of the tragedy has been reversed: Hamlet does not verify what the Ghost says, but speaks into being what he wants to be true, including the appearance of the Ghost itself. Instead of willingly adopting the position of a dramatic character condemned to act out the plot of a revenge tragedy dictated by an omnipotent author, Hamlet has become author, actor and director of his own plot.

This shift is no directorial rewriting of the plot of *Hamlet* going against the grain of the play. The imperative of the Ghost is rewritten in *Hamlet* the very moment it is spoken, even more: It is not

necessarily the Ghost's unclear mode of existence that threatens the authority of its words, but the role that Hamlet, as a close collaborator, takes on. Hearing and writing, receiving and authoring the imperative are so close that they are hardly distinguishable:

GHOST [...] List, list, O list  
If thou didst ever thy dear father love –  
HAMLET O God!  
GHOST – Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!  
HAMLET Murder!  
GHOST Murder most foul – as in the best it is –  
But this most foul, strange and unnatural. (1.5.22-28)

The Ghost's words and Hamlet's reactions are closely intertwined, the verse structure is frequently interrupted and fragmented by Hamlet's exclamations. While they might at first sight denote actual surprise at learning something so far unknown, this contradicts the aptitude, the predisposition to believe in some "foul play" in the death of his father that we have encountered early on. Indeed, Hamlet is more than ready to revenge:

HAMLET  
Haste me to know't that with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love  
May sweep to my revenge.  
GHOST I find thee apt.  
(1.5.22-31)

It is noteworthy that the imperative to revenge immediately fulfils its illocutionary intent to "stir" Hamlet to a positive response. Even before hearing details or proof of what the Ghost claims, he assures him of his collaboration.

But Hamlet's role in rewriting the imperative that the Ghost delivers extends even further than an aptitude to believe or a certain amount of wishful thinking. Stephen Greenblatt points out that "the metaphor Hamlet uses has the strange effect of inadvertently introducing some subjective resistance into the desired immediacy, since meditation and love are experiences at a far remove from the

sudden, decisive, murderous action that he wishes to invoke.” (Greenblatt 2001: 208) The play opens a rupture within the imperative of the Ghost itself. When looking closely, it consists of two imperatives. After confirming Hamlet’s aptitude, the Ghost lengthily tells the tale of the murder of Old Hamlet by Claudius, while asleep in his garden. He concludes his tale as follows:

GHOST [...] Fare thee well at once:  
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near  
And ‘gins to pale his uneffectual fire.  
Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.  
(1.5.91)

By the end of the Ghost’s powerful speech, the imperative has changed: It is no longer “revenge”, but “remember” that Hamlet is required to do. “Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me. *Exit Ghost*”, are the words that Hamlet focuses his entire attention on in the monologue following the Ghost’s exit. Remembrance, Greenblatt argues, is the opposite of vengeance; it produces resistance in that it delays any action that would put the memory of the deceased to rest. In a reformulation of Stephen Greenblatt’s main thesis in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, one could argue that instead of issuing an imperative to fulfill a particular dramatic action, by forcing Hamlet to *remember*, the Ghost opens up the possibility of a rewriting. In the process of re-remembering, reconstituting the Ghost’s imperative in his performance, the actor of Hamlet has the occasion of rewriting his own plot, haunted by the author’s imperative, but able to autonomously interpret it and diverge from it, as Christopher Rüping or any director directing a production of *Hamlet* can.

We have seen that the genre of the revenge tragedy, which is constantly present as a foil at the time of *Hamlet*’s first performances, is highly metatheatrical in itself: An imperative, usually from a transcendent sphere, is issued and executed by the avenger, just like an author’s dramatic script is enacted by an actor. The decisive shift that *Hamlet* conducts with regards to the revenge tragedy is that it takes the metatheatrical potential of the genre seriously and rethinks the relationship between author and actor. Tobias Döring points

out that the equivalent to the shift from revenge to remembrance that Greenblatt highlights is a shift in the meaning of the word ‘to act’ in the context of *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy:

Dem Doppelsinn des Wortes *act* entsprechend, den der Totengräber so gekonnt entfaltet (V.1.10-12), setzen herkömmliche Rachedramen ganz aufs Handeln, *Hamlet* aber setzt aufs Schauspielen: *to act* heißt beides. (Döring 2014: 85)

Taking the double sense of the word “to act” seriously, as Tobias Döring suggests, means reading the project of *Hamlet* as a replacement of its literal with its theatrical meaning: instead of acting out his father’s and the genre’s commands, Hamlet chooses to act – something else. *Hamlet* constitutes a “fortdauernde Musterung” of the generic authority and its legitimacy, it scrutinizes the role of the Ghost as figuration of the genre and therefore, author of the script. This scrutiny, Tobias Döring postulates, is a structuring dramaturgical principle that drives the tragedy of *Hamlet*, instead of executing the revenge plot. *Hamlet* explores ways in which the authority of the generic horizon in which it is necessarily viewed can be overcome. A horizon that, by definition, always already points towards its transgression:

Horizonte [sind] provisorisch und porös. Im Bestreben, sie ständig zu erweitern und zu verschieben, bricht sich ein Drang nach Selbstbestimmung Bahn, der vorfindliche Grenzlinien der Welt, in die man einst hineingeboren wurde, als vorläufig begreift[...]. (Döring 2014: 77)

It is the power to determine his own fate, outside of the horizon of the genre *and* the ontological determination of the dramatic character, that Hamlet explores in the aftermath of the Ghost’s exit, by reflecting on possible sources of an alternative authority. When including the idea of *Hamlet* as performance, we can expand Christoph Menke’s model: the “reiner Nachvollzug” that Menke speaks about, the autonomous performance of the dramatic persona, the “Selbsttätigkeit” of the character finds a tangible expression in the freedom of the actor to deviate from the script in performance. Like *Hamlet* exists as text and as performance, Hamlet exists as character

and as an actor, and both modes of existence dynamically interact – though through an actor masquerading as a character that lives through a prescribed plot. As Lionel Abel has put it in his seminal work on *Metatheatre*: “Why not for once justify the great character stuck with a bad plot?” (Abel 1966: 68)

That the imperative to remember is an invitation to rewrite becomes obvious immediately after the Ghost’s disappearance. Hamlet’s obedience materializes in an act of reduplicating the Ghost’s imperative – tellingly, in writing:

HAMLET O all you host of heaven, O earth – what else? –  
 And shall I couple hell? O fie! Hold, hold, my heart,  
 And you, my sinews, grow not instant old  
 But bear me swiftly up. Remember thee?  
 Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat  
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
 Yea, from the table of my memory  
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
 All saw of books, all forms, all pressures past  
 That youth and observation copied there  
 And thy commandment all alone shall live  
 Within the book and volume of my brain  
 Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven,  
 O most pernicious woman,  
 O villain, villain, smiling damned villain,  
 My tables! Meet it is I set it down  
 That one may smile and smile and be a villain –  
 At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.  
 So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word.  
 It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me'.  
 I have sworn't.  
 (1.5.92-104)

Hamlet’s perception of “his word”, by which he has been bound, is not the imperative to revenge, but the one to remember. As Marjorie Garber argues, this scene is closely bound up with the appearance of ghost as figures of authorship: “The appearance of ghosts within the plays is almost always juxtaposed to a scene of writing. Hamlet takes dictation from the Ghost of his father.” (18) If we are precise, it is actually a scene of first writing something down that

has only been expressed orally. The Ghost's words are gone as soon as they are spoken, just as it disappears itself. Like in the editing history of *Hamlet*, Hamlet here 'sets down' what would otherwise be lost with the end of performance, literally carving the words of the Ghost into his tables while metaphorically erasing all previous 'imprints' – literal ones such as books, metaphorical ones such as memories and images – from the tables of his brain. The close proximity of the vocabulary of writing and print used in the literal and the figurative sense further supports the dissolution of the boundaries between the imagined, the perception and the written. Like a faithful spectator of the Ghost's appearance, Hamlet is ready to completely transform his mind and imprint in it only the imperative of his father from now on. But this scene of copying (not to say: printing copy), while seemingly confirming the authority of the Ghost as original author, also undermines it. The Ghost's nature as a revenant, a reduplication, lends itself to its own erasure through the reduplication of its word. When looking closely, Hamlet can be considered the only and original author of the imperative:

“Thy commandment” (to revenge) replaces all the saws and pressures, or seals, of the past. In this post-Mosaic transmission of the law from father to son one kind of erasure (or “wiping away”) is already taking place. The Ghost himself is under erasure – “‘tis here, ‘tis here, ‘tis gone” – visible and invisible, potent and impotent. (Garber 1987: 19)

As Garber points out, the act of rewriting is also an act of replacing. The Ghost's precarious mode of existence that resists interpretation is overwritten by another act of authorship, one that defines it and thereby confers its authority onto another. Like the act of naming, the act of copying the Ghost's imperative is in fact an act of autonomous creation. The Ghost first demands revenge, and then remembrance. But there is another shift between what the Ghost utters and what Hamlet writes down: “Meet it is I set it down / That one may smile and smile and be a villain” (1.5.107-108), Hamlet writes down, and thereby “writes himself into the story and writes the Ghost out, revising the revenge imperative (and the imperative of the revenge play).” (Garber 1987: 19)

Garber names the peculiar circularity of the encounter between Hamlet and the Ghost: Hamlet's obedience in writing down the imperative suggests that the Ghost can be read as an author, prescribing the fate to their character. Through the original act of naming it "King, father, royal Dane", Hamlet not only writes himself into the story, but empowers the voice that then delivers an imperative to him. Garber would go even further, reading not only the Ghost's discourse as a creation of Hamlet's address, but even that "the son imputes to the Ghost commands and wishes he would like to receive from the father, and which have the dual authority of concurring with (because they personate) his own desires, and presenting themselves as externally (and paternally) motivated instructions, imposed *upon* rather than *by* the ambivalently situated son." (Garber 1987: 141)

Indeed, in his act of remembrance, Hamlet immediately modifies the Ghost's imperative, rewriting it to fit his own perception of his plot. This allows for a new reading of the relationship between the Ghost and Hamlet: Hamlet becomes the author of his own fate, just as the performer writes himself into the drama when performing it life on stage, where his authority overrides the authority that the author claims over the dramatic character that is his creation. Instead of choosing to act out the revenge plot, Hamlet chooses to *act* like an actor. This includes an act of writing, but one that is dramatic from the beginning, as it refers to and interacts with another one, that of the Ghost-author haunting the play that the actor performs.

The last part of the scene humorously highlights how the actors distance themselves from the plot the author has suggested. Horatio and Marcellus, who have been following Hamlet, catch up with him. When Hamlet finally tells his friends the big secret, his interpretation of the imperative differs again from what he set down on his tables, and is a tautology to boot: "There's never a villain dwelling in all Denmark / But he's an arrant knave." (1.5.121-122) That *Hamlet* is at odds with the blueprint of the revenge tragedy is clearly illustrated by Horatio's disappointment at Hamlet's revelation:

“There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave to tell us this.” (1.5.123-124) One might read this as first tongue-in-cheek manifestation of the actor’s impertinence regarding the prescriptions of genre and dramatic text. Clearly, for the impertinent and autonomous play of the performer on stage, the authority of the dramatic text – come from the grave, i.e., old and dusty – is unnecessary. Lionel Abel has pointed out this structure at the outset of *Hamlet*:

This is not a struggle between two characters, but between two playwrights. And the better playwright, Hamlet – in terms of consciousness – happens to be the lesser playwright in terms of zeal. Hence his dramatic retaliation has to be humorous. (Abel 1966: 47)

Hamlet’s retaliation is humorous indeed. Within the chaotic episode of the oaths, like the imperative, the content of the oath that Horatio and Marcellus are to deliver shifts: While they first swear to “never make known what [they] have seen tonight” (1.5.143), they are then sworn not to unveil Hamlet’s secret plan:

HAMLET [...] But come,  
Here as before: never – so help you mercy,  
How strange or odd some’er I bear myself  
(As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on) –  
That you at such times seeing me never shall  
With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake,  
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase  
As ‘Well, well, we know’, or ‘We could an if we would’,  
Or ‘If we list to speak’, or ‘There be an if they might’,  
Or such ambiguous out to note that you know aught of me.  
This do swear,  
so grace and mercy at your most need help you.  
(1.5.167-178)

This ending to the series of scenes that revolved around the profound mourning, suicidal thoughts and deep epistemological trouble that Hamlet experiences in the aftermath of his encounter with the Ghost is an odd segue. The tragic context of his father’s death

dangerously exposes Hamlet to retaliation at Claudius' court, should the latter find out that Hamlet knows of his guilt. Instead of taking action with the support of his friends, for example, this conversation between Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus suggests a common joy in acting. Hamlet extensively illustrates the gestures, tones and attitudes that he wishes the others *not* to assume, impersonating them for a brief moment, and thereby giving them a taste of the performance that will follow: "How strange or odd some'er I bear myself..." When the Ghost participate in the 'swearing scene' – "Swear" (1.5.149) – Hamlet almost belittles him: "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit. So, gentlemen..."", as if he had already moved on to his new existence as an author-actor. The final exchange of act one prefigures the "humorous retaliation" that Abel speaks of. It takes the shape of the "antic disposition" that the second chapter will explore and read as an 'acting disposition'. It is, however, no simple opposition of a rebellious actor against an author. *Hamlet* imagines the actor as a hybrid existence, that, through transformation in himself and his capacity to effect it in others, can help reach another knowledge beyond the binary of text and performance, of surface and depth.

In the first chapter of this study, I have attempted to present a first draft of the way in which *Hamlet* shows its awareness of itself as text and as performance through focusing on a new concept of authorship and its contradictions as manifested in the appearance of the Ghost. The figure of the Ghost, I have argued, lends itself to articulate alternative and contradictory understandings of the relationship of both modes of existence as text and as performance. It does so by reflecting on the role of the author and the role that actors and spectators play in creating the text in performance. The Ghost vexes its spectators, it turns out, as long as it haunts the stage as an author speaking an authoritative word whose origin cannot be ascertained. Its imperative raises the question of its mode of existence and produces an epistemological anxiety that, as I have shown, is usually triggered by the theater performance itself. It has appeared that the pursuit of the rational distinction between appearance and essence, that is at the core of the criticism of *mimesis* in general and

the opposition to the theater in early modern times in particular, is not fruitful with regards to a performance whose potential lies in collective, collaborative creation by actors and spectators who participate in the authoring of the play. This process of creation, my reading of the Ghost shows, relies less on the desire to produce the accurate likeness of a plot prescribed by an omnipotent author, but by the wish to transform and be transformed on the side of actors and spectators.

The following two chapters focus on these two aspects of *Hamlet* as text and performance. Chapter two explores further the role the actor plays as an author on stage and in performance. As Hamlet chooses to act by not acting the part of the avenger, but performing as an actor instead, he continues the self-aware reflection of *Hamlet* on its double existence as text and performance by introducing an acting theory that gives the actor a double existence of his own: as a fool, in between actor and character. His 'antic disposition' is an 'acting disposition'.

## CHAPTER TWO – Antic disposition, acting disposition

### Hamlet never stops

Lars Eidingen has been impersonating the title role in Thomas Ostermeier's production of *Hamlet* since 2008, in Berlin and in over 30 other cities in the world. Nonetheless, in the live event of the performance, even he finds himself surprised by the audience. During the performance in Schaubühne's "Saal A" on 31 January 2019, a spectator intervened in scene two of act three, minutes after the performance of *The Mousetrap*: "Komm, mach weiter jetzt!", the clearly irritated spectator demanded of Eidingen.

What had happened? Franz Hartwig, impersonating Rosencrantz at that moment of the performance, asks Lars Eidingen's Hamlet: "Mein Prinz, gestatte mir ein Wort mit Dir" (Mayenburg 2008: 35), but the latter, in keeping with his 'antic disposition', prevents Rosencrantz from delivering his message by wilfully misunderstanding him. Hamlet diverts the conversation from the subject, and, not the least, sprays Rosencrantz with water from a hose. Impatiently, Rosencrantz remarks: "Mein Prinz, lenk das Gespräch in geregeltere Bahnen, und schweif nicht so wild vom Thema ab." (Mayenburg 2008: 36) Eidingen's Hamlet pursues his strategy to distract Rosencrantz from the purpose of his visit, and the rest of the dialogue proceeds with difficulty. Rosencrantz, offended by Hamlet's unwillingness to speak openly and reasonably, takes it personally: "Mein Herr, du hast mich früher mal gemocht!" (Mayenburg 2008: 37) Hamlet offers Rosencrantz his hand in mock reconciliation: "Das tu ich immer noch, ich geb dir dieses Werkzeug zum Greifen und Stehlen darauf" (Mayenburg 2008: 37). But before Rosencrantz can shake it, Hamlet suddenly retrieves his hand and begins imitating a mime's performance, transitioning into a few amateur breakdancing moves, a silent physical performance. The dialogue of the text

hangs in the air, both Hartwig's Rosencrantz and Horatio/Guildenstern (Damir Avdic), who stands nearby, seem unsure how to proceed.

On January 31st, the physical prowess of Eidingers's Hamlet was crowned by Hamlet rolling around on the floor and loudly farting. Eidinger reacted to a few tentative claps from the audience: "Na los, trauf Euch!" he ironically encouraged them to applaud one of his apparently most valuable capacities: "Ich kann auf Kommando pferzen." This set off the extenuated spectator's comment: "Komm, mach weiter jetzt!"

Eidinger was irritated by this. But not, as one might suspect, because he disapproved of the spectator's intervention per se. Eidingers's Hamlet uses the audience as an accomplice, a playing and a dialogue partner from the beginning of the performance. By the time the spectator intervened, he had already commented on the spectators' idiosyncrasies, occasionally asked them to actually respond to questions in Hamlet's soliloquies. This time, however, was different: A spectator was addressing not Hamlet, the character, but Lars Eidinger, the actor, asking him to "continue" – presumably, to continue with the script of the text. Eidingers's increasingly angry enquiries, repeatedly met with the same imperative from the spectator, culminated in Eidinger exclaiming: "Es geht weiter! Es geht doch die ganze Zeit weiter, das ist das Missverständnis!" The apparent discrepancy in the perception of the situation can easily be attributed to opposing perceptions of the relationship between text and performance, what is set down and what is 'more than is set down'. The spectator did not precisely explain what was to be continued here, but they felt that something had been interrupted – we can only assume that it might have been the sequence of events constituting the plot and, by extension, the accurate representation of the character. Some sensation of transgression was felt, as if the integrity of Hamlet (that is: of an expectation of Hamlet) had been tampered with, as if Eidingers's play had exceeded some kind of limited space. Somehow, in their view, Eidinger was doing "more than is set down" (3.2.37). Eidinger, for his part, was disturbed by an interaction that explicitly addressed him as actor to continue with

the impersonation of his role, implying that he had interrupted his play for a digression. His bewilderment illustrates that in his perception, there was a continuity between the dialogue spoken and his physical acrobatics, that all formed a continuity to illustrate the state of mind he explains a few moments later:

HAMLET Herr, ich kann nicht.  
 ROSENCRANTZ Was, mein Prinz.  
 HAMLET Euch eine vernünftige Antwort geben – mein Verstand ist krank.  
 (Mayenburg 2008: 36)

The fact that Hamlet decides to play insanity in act two of the play is closely related to the misunderstanding that occurred between the spectator and Lars Eidinger. Eidinger's claim of continuity in his performance depends, I argue, on the way in which the 'antic disposition' is presented and unfolds in Hamlet. This is not the case because his performance 'actually' remains within the limits of what is set down, and the spectator is therefore 'wrong'. Instead, Eidinger's performance highlights the way in which Hamlet questions the boundary between what is 'set down' and what is not. It does so by presenting an alternative vision of the actor as author and creator of his performance, a performance that does not erase, but fulfill the role set down for them in the text.

At the end of the first act, I have argued, Hamlet, the character takes his fate into his own hands. He rewrites the imperative of the ghost and refuses to impersonate the avenger. By "put[ting] an antic disposition on" (1.5.170), however, he does not simply move 'outside' the boundaries of what the Ghost sets down by delaying action or by not acting. The 'antic disposition' is a radically different mode of action: that of the actor performing a character. It is the choice to emphatically play-act, that is: to reveal what it means to act as an actor performing a character, prescribed by an author. For Christoph Menke, as we have already seen, this self-awareness is part of tragedy itself: "Sie ist eine Darstellung von Handelnden, die zugleich eine ‚Mitdarstellung‘ des Darstellenden ist; die Verhältnisse

zwischen den handelnden Personen stellen die Verhältnisse zwischen Person, Text und Autor mit dar.” (Menke 2005: 61). While Menke does not mention the actor as an element of this self-reflexive presentation of tragedy, in performance, the dramatic person has a ‘double existence’ of their own: They are performed by an actor. By showing Hamlet’s double existence as a character and an actor, *Hamlet* reflects upon its own double existence as text and performance.

### *Hamlet’s acting studio*

Hamlet’s speech deploys a view on acting that is strongly focused on the impersonation of character: The players should restrict their physical actions – not “sawing the air”, not “bellowing” or “strutting” – in order to make sure that they do not “out-Herod Herod”. He thereby joins contemporaries such as Sidney and Greene in reforming the scope of the actor’s art. The type of theater he advocates needs to privilege the text in order to access the source of true original creativity, the authorial ‘wit’. In a way, Hamlet’s speech prefigures an acting theory that will be further developed in the century following the first performance of the play. While for the time of Shakespeare’s writing, “[t]here is not very much direct evidence about the style of acting that developed in London from the 1590’s onwards [...] [o]ver-acting was a target at different times in every playhouse. Even Burbage in the person of Hamlet in 1600 could condemn the unnatural or ‘ab-hominable’ excesses of an over-doing adult player. It says little about how naturalistic or stylized the body language of a good player might have been.” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 70)<sup>25</sup> This has promoted a tendency to approach early modern acting retrospectively with a theory focused on the impersonation of character, that is, from the stance of reformed acting that Hamlet speaks about. This is on the one hand,

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<sup>25</sup> A number of scholars have of course reconstructed important information on the creation of the acting profession in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in London, as has Tom Rutter in *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (2008). He illustrates how professional acting must have seemed a paradox in the light of Early Modern antitheatricalism, which either discredited actors as inherently idle, or accused them of making money from creating false representations, i.e. doing nothing.

the consequence of the focus on text and the reduction of the performance to the representation of the ‘world-within-the-play’ contained in it that Aristotelian poets of the Renaissance newly defend. One-and-a-half centuries after the writing of *Hamlet*, the theory of theater is mainly a theory of eliminating or at least hiding the theater performance itself, and more particularly, the bodily aspect of the actor’s performance. Joachim Fiebach identifies a particular emphasis of 17th and 18th century theater on the actor and places it in its context under the telling title “Verbergen des Theaters” (“hiding the theater”):

Das verstärkte Interesse nicht nur an den Geschicken und den Besonderheiten des einzigartigen Individuums, sondern gerade auch an seiner inneren Verfasstheit, seinem geistig-moralischen Leben, seiner Seele, äußerte sich in einer neuakzentuierten Aufmerksamkeit für den Schauspieler, den Träger und Schöpfer der einzigartigen Bühnencharaktere. (Fiebach 2015: 140)

Similar to the shift towards the ‘world-within-the-play’ contained within a dramatic text that is inherent to the early modern rereading of Aristotelian poetics (cf. *Distinction*, pp. 289–299), the tendency towards character impersonation that Hamlet describes in his speech is only the beginning of an evolution towards the perception of acting as the verisimilar expression of the interiority of an imaginary character. Denis Diderot’s *Paradoxe du comédien*, first published in 1770, is an interesting and influential example of a more developed state of this evolution. In order to gain access to the interiority of the absent character, the actor paradoxically needs to take an emotionally cold stance towards the character, effacing his own feelings, let alone his individual physical features, to rationally approach the interior world of the character. Denis Diderot’s *Paradoxe du comédien* defined acting as the self-eliminating approximation of the actor to a *modèle idéal* of the character:

Spielt dagegen ein Schauspieler aus der Überlegung [réflexion] heraus, auf Grund des Studiums der menschlichen Natur, in beharrlicher Nachahmung eines ideellen Modells [modèle idéal], aus der Einbildungskraft und aus dem Gedächtnis, so

wird er aus einem Guß [un], in allen Vorstellungen ein und derselbe und immer gleich vollkommen sein. (Diderot [1769]1991: 159)

The imitation of nature has become narrowed to the imitation of human nature, which permits the actor, provided he acts from a standpoint of measured reflection, to create a unified representation of a character that is always true to itself in each of its repetitions. The actor imitates the character, producing a faultless representation by ascertaining the rational control over his performance through premeditation on the ideal model he holds in his imagination and, when he rehearses and performs, increasingly in his memory. The actor, Diderot explains, can only represent the character from the standpoint of cold rationality, in order to remain master of his performance, not ‘out-Heroding Herod’ by letting his own uncontrolled emotions run free: “Die kühle Überlegung muss den Tunnel des Enthusiasmus mäßigen.” (Diderot [1769]1991: 159) Decisively, the skill of the actor has become entirely interior, as it consists in the careful balance of his enthusiasm through reflection. In fact, in Diderot’s description, the objective of the actor’s performance is as immaterial as is the ideal “incarnational text” (De Grazia 1988: 82): the cool, rational actor leaves his body for the character, this purely immaterial but entirely autonomous existence, to enter him. No regular man, Diderot says is capable of a superior imitation of nature –

es sei denn, er könnte sich selbst vergessen, könnte sich verleugnen und mit Hilfe einer starken Einbildungskraft neu schaffen und könnte nun seine Aufmerksamkeit dank einem unverwandelbaren Gedächtnis fest auf die Phantome gerichtet halten, die ihm als Modelle dienen; aber dann würde er nicht mehr selbst handeln, sondern der Geist eines anderen, der ihn beherrscht. (Diderot [1769]1991: 162)

For the character to live as a ghostly presence, the actor has to die. The actor’s body is therefore dematerialized to function entirely as a sign for an immaterial other, becoming a pure signifier by eliminating as much as possible the individual features of the actor’s individual body and its features. In the paradigm theorized by, among

others, Diderot, “[o]nly a ‘purely’ semiotic body could communicate the text’s meanings ‘truthfully’ and perceptibly to the audience. Embodiment thus presupposes disembodiment” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 79). The seed of a character-focused and disembodied conception of the actor impersonating a character, while not yet entirely spelled out, is already present in Hamlet’s speech to the actors. This is, however, entirely contradictory with regards to the skills that we can assume to have been required for performing a play such as *Hamlet* on the early modern stage. In *Early Modern Actors and Shakespeare’s Theater. Thinking with the Body*, Evelyn Tribble investigates the range of the early modern actors’ skills that combined into a complex distribution of “cognitive ecologies” (Tribble 2017: 4). She estimates that

the categories through which we view plays are often too firmly tied to the printed page. Language present on the page can render the bodies that speak such language invisible, and the skill of the actor is often glimpsed only in the interstices of language. Gaps and inconsistencies are stitched together as attempts, successful or otherwise, to convey character. (Tribble 2017: 145)

Again, the distinction of the skill of acting as ‘more than is set down’ from the alleged fixity and unity of a character ‘set down’ in the text is facilitated by the fact that theater now existed as print, too. Hamlet’s speech to the players points towards a new imagination around the actor’s skill. The metaphor of the “incarnational text” (De Grazia 1988: 82) reincarnate in its respective editions, troped by the mechanics of print, is also an important master metaphor for the actor’s work, as print produces a “sense that performance is merely a reiteration of the text by other means, means that aspire to conditions of mechanical reproducibility that seem to guarantee the work’s ghostly substance across a varied range of incarnations.” (Worthen 2005: 7-8) We have seen in the first chapter that the Ghost can metaphorize a new conception of authorial authority. It also transports the corresponding vision of the actor’s task of willingly executing that author’s will. The imagery of the ghost which

immaterially exists, looking to possess bodies of print or of performers, is particularly charged with regards to theories of acting. The immaterial essence of the representation – the author’s ‘wit’ – contained in the work remains the same, only reincarnating itself in diverse bodies. This idea has particularly heavy consequences for the work of actors, as ‘incarnation’ becomes the main image that tropes his work in performance. In addition, the typography of printed play-texts contributes to the idea of ‘character’ as a unit:

[O]n the printed page, every character ‘sounds the same’ since typography tends towards conformity. [...] To speak casually, as we do, of ‘Hieronimo’s lines’ or ‘Hamlet’s lines’ performs a conceptual (if not ideological) work, shaping the way we think about acting, as though the parallel lines of printed dialogue suggest a conformity of histrionic approach to which all players, perhaps, ‘evolve’. (Menzer 2013: 155)

But the printed texts and the documents of performance which were, as we have seen with Tiffany Stern, fragments that were only later patched together to a playbook that might have served as copy for print, both indicate that early modern actor’s performance rather followed an “aesthetics of variety” (Tribble 2017: 145) than of character unity. Speech prefixes show that thinking of ‘Hamlet’s lines’ didn’t yet make sense to early modern printers etc.: “The text provides ambiguous information about who the characters are, who is speaking, precisely by refusing to name the roles as characters in the modern sense.” (Worthen 2005: 33)

Hamlet speech, on the contrary, seems to condemn digressions from what is set down as an illegitimate transgression of the actor beyond the limits of this character, much as did the spectator encountered in the performance mentioned above. We must assume that Hamlet’s demand to remain within the limits of character is recent around the turn of the 17th century. His words are directly opposed, however, to what can be gathered from his actions as a character from the moment he has encountered the Ghost. The way in which early modern performance imagines the simultaneity of character and actor is made manifest in *Hamlet* through the choice of the ‘antic disposition’. The ‘antic disposition’, I argue, is

in fact an 'acting disposition'. Madness and performance are structurally analogous concepts so much so that performing madness in fact means 'performing performance'. As the spectator's reaction shows, it is irritating insofar as it troubles the distinction between character and actor: If a character performs a pretense, pretends to be an actor, the distinction between both is no longer clear. This is only irritating, however, insofar as what is 'set down' is associated with the lines and actions of a character, and what is 'more' is assumed to belong to the transgressive performance of the 'actor'. Hamlet proposes an alternative vision of the actor's performance, in which what is 'set down' and what is 'more' are inextricably connected into a double existence of the character and the actor. Centuries later, Lars Eidinger's performance of Hamlet presents us with this vision anew. Its features are best described with the theory used to analyze performance in the aftermath of the imperative of dramatic theater and disembodied acting, connecting theories of the 'post-dramatic' with those pre-dramatic theories preceding and still determining the performance of *Hamlet* around 1600.

In the first part of the following chapter, I will present aspect of Lars Eidinger's performance that make the characteristics of the 'antic disposition' visible. Directorial decisions and improvisations developed and repeated over the now 12-year run of Ostermeier's Hamlet can be subsumed under three types of procedures.

Eidinger's utterances on stage often seem to leave the realm of the text of *Hamlet*, as we might find it in contemporary editions and translations. However, these utterances take their meaning in the context of the performance situation. The performance of Eidinger and his colleagues provide them with additional meaning, allowing the audience to 'make sense' of them. A number of directing and acting choices consciously blur the line between the characters and the actors on stage. Eidinger regularly addresses his colleagues in ways that seem to place him clearly 'outside' of his role. He thereby foregrounds the performance situation as a collective process that produces *Hamlet* precisely by ambiguating his own double existence as character and actor. The first two types of procedures have the

effect of creating a community, a complicity between Eidinger / Hamlet and the audience, as well as between actors and the spectators as participants in the performance situation. Eidinger's performance takes place and highlights the liminal space between the space of the audience and the space of the stage, and interacts with the audience without clearly positioning himself as either 'Lars Eidinger' or 'Hamlet'. Finally, Eidinger's physical performance enhances the effect of the first two aesthetic strategies of Ostermeier's staging. The vocal and physical acrobatics of which I have presented just one example proliferate and make it increasingly impossible, I argue, to interrupt the constant oscillation of the perception of Eidinger as 'actor' or as 'character'. Audience reactions testify to this. The 'antic disposition' as performed by Eidinger is not the performance of a clearly delineated character by an actor, but the constant metamorphosis of a body and voice whose meanings are no longer distinguishable from its effects.

The procedures that become apparent in the performance analysis resonate with the popular theater culture that early modern public stages are still closely connected with. Eidinger's performance highlights the central elements of performances especially of the figure of the clown or fool, who is an important element of moralities and mystery plays, and other kinds of popular performance. His physical and vocal acrobatics can be related to the root of the 'antic', which is also an important element of theater performances before and at the time of *Hamlet*. The 'antic', a part of the early modern theater performance usually attributed to the clown of the company, is per definition located just outside the limits of the dramatic script, contradicting, assailing, delimiting and defining it from the outside. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'antic' (the adjective) as 'grotesque or bizarre', pointing out that the term is archaic, originating in the early 16th century, from the Italian term "antico 'antique', used to mean grotesque" (OED s.v. antic, adj. and n.) 'Antic' denotes something out of the usual, be it aesthetical or behavioral. The 'antic' is situated at the edge of what is still story but also comic, entertaining and thereby frivolous. It is 'more than is set down', but stays related to it as its defining principle: it is located next to,

around, or after the tragedy. Retracing the historical roots of the theater of the Elizabethan era in the multitude of popular traditions of performance will allow us to discover the acting theory contained in the figure of the fool and to unlock the deep connection between the fool's antic disposition and Hamlet's acting disposition.

### *Double entendre*

Following the appearances of the Ghost, *Hamlet* becomes a play involving several stagings: Hamlet stages and performs the play of madness, the other characters stage situations to understand the origin and intention of his madness. In the first scene of act II, Urs Jucker / King Claudius and Judith Rosmair / Gertrude<sup>26</sup> move behind a curtain as Robert Beyer / Polonius addresses Hamlet in front of it. The encounter between Polonius and Hamlet in the first scene of the second act is the first of several "screen scenes" (Rokem 2014: 18). They create performance situations within the performance of *Hamlet*. Freddy Rokem explains the structure and effect of such scenes as follows: "The second form [of eaves-dropping, E.L.] is realized by an eavesdropper hiding behind a curtain or under a table, while the third is based on the appearance of a supernatural character – for example the Ghost in Hamlet – who we somehow assume (or even take for granted) watches the events of

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<sup>26</sup> In a repertory theatre such as the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, actors and actresses join and leave the troupe, but they are also taking on roles in other productions, resulting in overlaps that may cause scheduling issues. The original cast of *Hamlet* on opening night consisted of Robert Beyer (Polonius / Osrik), Lars Eidinger (Hamlet), Urs Jucker (Claudius / Ghost), Judith Rosmair (Gertrud / Ophelia), Sebastian Schwarz (Horatio / Güldenstern), Stefan Stern (Rosenkranz / Laertes). Since then, Franz Hartwig took over from Stefan Stern as the latter took on the lead role in Ostermeier's *An Enemy of the People* (2011). Judith Rosmair, the original Gertrude and Ophelia, shared the part with Lucy Wirth until the 2013/2014 season, when Jenny König took over. Most recently, Sebastian Schwarz, when leaving the Schaubühne's ensemble, passed on his roles as Horatio and Güldenstern to Damir Avdic in October 2016. Lars Eidinger, Urs Jucker and Robert Beyer remain as members of the original cast. For reasons of simplicity, I use the original cast's names, except when referring to a specific performance and its cast.

the play from its very beginning.” (Rokem 2014: 58) Rokem’s definition confirms my assumption that the Ghost scenes and the scenes developing the ‘antic disposition’ share the structure of a ‘play within the play’. Like the Ghost scenes, “screen-scenes” rely on an on-stage audience “repeating the spectator function” (ibid.) Since the audience is the only one informed about the fact that the ‘antic disposition’ is a performance, there are suddenly two plays, one for the on-stage, and one for the off-stage audience. My reading of the ‘antic disposition’ as ‘acting disposition’ shows that the off-stage audience of a performance of Hamlet, however, knows more than only the fact that the ‘antic disposition’ is performed. It learns the double sense of the actor’s speech as both outside and inside what is set down, and has the opportunity to fully perceive Hamlet’s double existence as an actor and a character.



*4 Stage set by Jan Pappelbaum © Jan Pappelbaum*

The ‘arras’, a kind of curtain that made possible a so-called “discovery” on the early modern stage, plays an important role for the sequence of “eavesdropping scenes” (which Freddy Rokem, alluding to the physical barrier they imply, terms “screen-scenes”, Rokem 2014: 53) that characterize act two of *Hamlet*. In Schaubühne's neutral black box (with no pre-set wings and proscenium stage) set, designer Jan Pappelbaum creates an analogous topography (see Fig. 4).

His set is standing directly on the floor, with no frame or wings to create a closed stage space. Instead, the set consists of a large, elevated square surface, covered in dark earth. A mobile podium, rather narrow in depth, takes up almost the entire width of the stage and can move back and forth on two metal tracks, thus expanding or limiting the part of the earthy platform that will be available for performance in front of said podium. Numerous slim gold chains hang from a metal frame that can also move up- and down-stage, independently from the podium. Densely hung, the chains do, at the same time, constitute a surface on which video can be projected; and which separates the upper from the lower stage. They can easily be passed through by the performers and only partly hide anyone standing behind them. With a “stage-upon-the-stage” and a theater curtain half-way between opacity and transparency (according to the lighting), Pappelbaum’s stage creates a situation in which hidden on stage audiences mirror the off-stage audience, looking at Eidinger’s performance from the opposite position. This is fitting, as Eidinger’s utterances take different senses for the different audiences that watch him. While the King and Queen hide behind the curtain, Polonius approaches Hamlet carefully:

POLONIUS [...] Wie geht es meinem guten Prinz Hamlet?  
 HAMLET Gut, vielen Dank.  
 POLONIUS Wissen Sie, wer ich bin, mein Prinz?  
 HAMLET Ganz präzise, Sie sind ein Fischhändler.  
 POLONIUS Ich? Nein, mein Prinz.  
 HAMLET Dann wünschte ich, Sie wären so ehrlich wie ein Fischhändler.  
 POLONIUS Ehrlich, mein Prinz?

HAMLET Ja, mein Herr, so wies um die Welt steht, bedeutet Ehrlichsein, dass man als einzelner Mensch aus zehntausend herausgepickt wurde.

POLONIUS Das ist sehr wahr, mein Prinz.

HAMLET Weil, wenn die Sonne Maden in einem toten Hund ausbrütet, so als Gott, der einen Kadaver küsst.... Haben Sie eine Tochter?

POLONIUS Die habe ich, mein Prinz.

HAMLET Lassen Sie sie nicht in der Sonne spazieren. Hoffnung ist ein Segen, aber wenn die eigene Tochter guter Hoffnung ist... passen Sie auf, mein Freund.

*(Liest wieder.)*

(Mayenburg 2008: 23)

Polonius enquires about Hamlet's well-being, the latter answers calmly and civilly – before breaking into a series of unintelligible exclamations, splutters, and snorts. He yells out “Ficken!” (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: ‘44’39), after which he quietly goes back to reading his book as if nothing has happened. The following conversation with Polonius is often interrupted by those linguistic outbursts. In his conversation with Polonius, Eidinger's Hamlet displays symptoms of Tourette's syndrome. Leaving aside the equally interesting implications of the Tourette syndrome<sup>27</sup> for Menke's analysis of the dramatic person's speech as simultaneously scripted and autonomous, Eidinger's performance foregrounds that his speech works on two levels simultaneously: “Gut, vielen Dank” is delivered in the normal tone of a polite exchange. A few noises, splutters, puffs and raspberries follow, that, by contrast, represent ‘another’ speech. In Polonius' eyes, they are nonsensical sounds, a manifestation of illness. But Eidinger's outbursts can be made sense

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<sup>27</sup> With its vocal tics as well as the frequent coprolalia (“the use of obscene language by reason of insanity or for sexual gratification“, *OED* s.v. *copro'lalia*, n.), the illness constitutes a metaphorical interpretation of the partial loss of autonomy over one's own language. Tourette's main characteristic being a dysfunction of those brain areas responsible for linguistic expression. The victims of this illness cannot control their utterances. They are “being spoken”, and can thereby be used as an extreme image for actors enacting a script. The illness that Eidinger's Hamlet suffers from is the same as all dramatic characters, at the hands of the dramatic author, it is, in Menke's already quoted words, “reiner Vollzug, aber als bloßer Nachvollzug.” (Menke 2005: 58)

of by the audience. Eidinger's Hamlet asks the question: "Haben Sie eine Tochter, mein Herr?" and places an alleged Tourette outburst right after Beyers response: "Ja, die habe ich, mein Herr", yelling out "Ficken, ficken, die Fotze." (SF 2008: 18) This is not necessarily nonsensical. The spectator can associate those misogynistic insults with Hamlet's relationship to Ophelia; any insult, in fact, can also be interpreted to be directed at Polonius. It is particularly interesting here that from the perspective of the character / actor of Polonius, the Tourette outbursts seem to be 'more than is set down', digressing from the path of the sensible conversation in the text. They 'belong' to the conversation from the perspective of the audience who hears them in the context of performance, however.

Eidinger's speech thereby blurs the relationship between what is set down and what is more. That which lies 'outside' what is set down, the 'outbursts', provide the framework of the 'outside' just to reintroduce its connection to the 'inside' in cases in which it becomes set down once more. The opposition between 'outside' and 'inside' correlates with the one between 'sane' and 'insane', 'mad' and 'not mad'. Just as Eidinger's speech is both inside and outside of what is set down, what he says can be both sane and insane. The latter is the only possible perception from the perspective of the other characters on stage with Hamlet at that moment. When Polonius tests Hamlet's sanity simply by enquiring: "Wissen Sie, wer ich bin, mein Prinz?". Hamlet's answer, while delivered in the same calm and rational manner as the first replica, seems to deviate: "Ganz präzise, Sie sind ein Fischhändler." This obviously wrong statement is contradicted by Polonius, but goes on to lead to a true insight: "Dann wünschte ich, Sie wären so ehrlich wie ein Fischhändler. [...] Ja, weil so wies um die Welt steht, bedeutet ehrlich sein, dass man als einzelner Mensch aus zehntausend herausgepickt wurde." Polonius can only acquiesce: "Wohl wahr, mein Prinz." After this short dialogue, delivered by both partners in the tone of a normal, polite conversation, Eidinger's Hamlet suddenly veers off track and delivers the first sentence of the following dialogue in a shrill, mad voice: "Weil, wenn die Sonne Maden in einem toten Hund ausbrütet, so

als Gott, der einen Kadaver küsst ...” Eidinger choses to foreground those parts of his alleged ‘mad talk’ that directly apply to the situation of the dramatic plot by switching back to a normal voice and delivery: “Haben Sie eine Tochter?” and “Passen Sie auf, mein Freund” can be read as nonsensical comments due to Hamlet’s madness as well as comments following the logic of rational conversation. It is especially the Tourette-outbursts that help make sense of Hamlet’s misogynistic remarks: “Ficken die Fotze” unfortunately makes sense, given Hamlet’s relationship with Ophelia and her recent rejection of him. The ambiguity between sense and nonsense in Eidinger’s/Hamlet’s words is directly correlated to the previously explored ambiguity between that within and that without, an ambiguity that only performance can create though an actor’s performance that signals the double existence of his own speech.

Decisive for the double perception Eidinger’s / Hamlet’s speech is the twofold communication structure or the theater performance. The structure of the “screen scene” emphasizes that the audience of Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’ on stage has a different perspective and therefore different possibilities of reading and understanding Hamlet’s utterance than has the off-stage audience who is involved in Hamlet’s plan. The latter can read his utterances in the light of the present time and space of the theater performance they witness and are part of with the actors:

POLONIUS Was lesen Sie, mein Prinz?

HAMLET Worte, Worte, Worte.

POLONIUS Und worum geht es, mein Prinz?

HAMLET Zwischen wem?

POLONIUS Ich meine, worum geht es in ihrem Buch, mein Prinz?

HAMLET Pöbeleien, mein Herr; dieser satirische Fiesling behauptet nämlich hier, dass alte Männer graue Bärte haben, dass ihre Gesichter verschrumpelt sind, dass ihre Augen bernstein- und pflaumenfarbiges Sekret absondern, und dass sie einen unerschöpflichen Mangel an Hirn haben und dazu noch äußerst schwache Schenkel; was ich alles voll und ganz glaube, bloß finde ich es nicht in Ordnung, das so hinzuschreiben, denn Sie selbst, mein Herr, sollen mal so alt werden wie ich ... falls Sie, wie eine Krabbe, rückwärts gehen könnten.

*(Er liest wieder.)*  
 (Mayenburg 2008: 24)

Polonius asks Hamlet what he is reading, and means the content of the book. Hamlet, on the contrary, answers with reference to the text as a material object: What he is reading are printed words on the page. Attempting to clear up the misunderstanding, Polonius restates his question. The second misunderstanding of the question and Hamlet's response manifests the sanity of Hamlet's insanity. Eidingen's Hamlet addresses it to Beyer directly, even making a threatening move towards him, which usually causes Beyer to retract or even run away into a remote corner of the stage. Hamlet chooses to hear that Polonius references some kind of conflict: "Zwischen wem?", and, through his response, insinuates that their current interaction might itself escalate. The matter at hand, Eidingen's performance suggests, is the one between Polonius and himself – signaling that Hamlet might know exactly what Polonius' intentions are. The situation of the 'play within the play' that is the 'antic disposition' lends additional sense to the seemingly nonsensical exchange – albeit only for the external communication system of the performance, for the audience that has knowledge of Hamlet's pretense and his real intentions, i.e. to first ascertain the new king's guilt, than avenge his father.

This effect is even more pronounced in the account that Hamlet gives of the content of his book, that is always present and part of the performance. The potent semantic contradiction – is the kind of generality that Hamlet reads out from the book here even real satire? – is emphasized in play because the alleged content of the page perfectly applies to Polonius. This is heightened by Eidingen's Hamlet modifying Mayenburg's version in play in the "Spiel-fassung":



5 "Was lesen Sie, mein Prinz?" Hamlet (Lars Eidinger) and Polonius (Robert Beyer) perform for Claudius (Urs Jucker) and Gertrude (Judith Rosmair) hiding behind the curtain © Jan Pappelbaum

HAMLET: Ach so. Pöbeleien, mein Herr; dieser satirische Fiesling behauptet nämlich hier, daß alte Männer graue Bärte haben, dass sie im Alter auf Zwergengröße zusammenschrumpfen und erblinden und deswegen billige Kassenmodelle tragen müssen und daß sie einen unerschöpflichen Mangel an Hirn haben und dazu noch keinen mehr hoch kriegen; was ich alles voll und ganz glaube, bloß finde ich es nicht in Ordnung, das so hinzuschreiben, denn Sie selbst, mein Herr, sollen mal so alt werden wie ich... falls Sie, wie eine Krabbe, rückwärts gehen könnten.

*(Er liest wieder.)*

*(SF 2008: 18)*

During the delivery of those lines, Beyer moves down-stage, looking offended, but also presenting himself to the audience. This

makes the possible interpretation of Eidinger's words in light of this particular performance situation more evident. That it is the situation of the performance – of each performance – that confers its paradoxical sense to Hamlet's elusive words in this scene is even more emphasized when, upon developing the mysterious image of the crab walking backwards, Eidinger's Hamlet walks backwards, imitating with voice and body the visual and auditory effect of a rewinding video tape. As he approaches the gold curtain behind which the eavesdroppers are hiding, Polonius, fearing that he might discover them, quickly gestures for him to "walk out of the air" (2.2.203): "Wollen Sie nicht aus dem Luftzug treten, mein Prinz?" Eidinger's Hamlet obeys, not without expressing what he thinks of his interlocutor: "HAMLET: Ja, in mein Grab. Du Muschi. Tschuldigung." (SF 2008: 18)

The point in this is not only to illustrate the virtuosity and the range of the actor or to represent madness as a behavioral and linguistic inconsistency. The diversity of the performances associated with each of the incoherent pieces of dialogue gains their meaning through the pragmatics of the theater performance. Eidinger and his playing partners use their lines, more and less that is set down, to create an additional signification. In the 'antic disposition', Hamlet's lines means different things for different audiences. What seems to move outside the realm of what is 'set down' can therefore very well be part of the performance of the character as interpreted by Lars Eidinger and Thomas Ostermeier. Even more: the ambiguity between actor and character is precisely what Hamlet's 'antic disposition' requires.

### *On the edge*

Eidinger's performance of Hamlet has firmly established the double existence of the 'antic disposition's' speech inside and outside the text, superposing a new sense of the utterance in performance to the utterance on the page. Polonius retreats confused and without having been able to clearly establish Hamlet's madness, let alone find out its cause. He makes way for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, charged by Claudius and Gertrud to spy on their son and nephew.

As Hamlet encounters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his performance builds upon the connection established with the audience to explore the liminal space at the brim of the stage, making visible his double existence as character and as actor. He openly plays with the boundary between the character and the actor, conjuring up and dissolving the distinction between what is ‘set down’ and what is more by using the topography of Pappelbaum’s stage.

This begins with a clownesque greeting: Eidinger, running towards his friends to embrace them, misses his goal and entangles himself in the gold curtain. Eidinger’s Hamlet, while leisurely engaging in a dialogue with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, begins preparing the stage for his interaction with the two friends. I am quoting the entire passage of interest here from the “Spielfassung”:

GÜLDENSTERN: Mein verehrter Prinz!

ROSENKRANZ: Mein lieber Prinz!

HAMLET (blickt auf): Meine lieben Freunde! Wie gehts dir, Gildenstern?

(Er steckt sein Buch weg.)

Ah, Rosenkranz! Wie gehts euch beiden, was habt ihr verbrochen, daß man euch hierher ins Gefängnis steckt?

GÜLDENSTERN: Gefängnis, mein Prinz?

HAMLET: Dänemark ist ein Gefängnis. (auf sein Zeichen: VORHANG auf)

ROSENKRANZ: Dann ist die ganze Welt eins.

HAMLET: Ein sehr weiträumiges, in dem es viele Trakte, Zellen und Kerker gibt. Dänemark ist einer der schlimmsten.

ROSENKRANZ: Das finden wir nicht, mein Prinz.

HAMLET: Dann ist es halt für euch kein Kerker; (Hamlet schiebt den WAGEN auf Position Mutter) – wer gibt? Bierchen? Musik? ,Yeah! Put the needle [sic] on the record! Put the needle on the record and then just go like: ,Scratch it, yeah! Yeah, back and for [sic], back and for – but let me tell you something: Don’t try it at home with a dead stereo, only with a hiphop-supervision alright? Don’t push me, cause I’m close to the edge, I’m trying not to lose my head, aha, ha, ha, ha. Party People in the house com’on and let me hear you say ,Yeah! Party people in the house com’on and let me hear you say ,yeah! [sic!]

R/Gü: ‘Yeah!’, Wiederholung mit dem Publikum

Es gibt ja nichts Gutes oder Schlechtes, es sei denn das Denken macht es dazu. Für mich ist Dänemark ein Gefängnis. (SF 2008 19-20)

At Eidinger's gesture, the gold curtain opens. The theater here works as Eidinger's prop, and his gesture establishes Hamlet as the master of not only the situation he is in with his two friends, but the entire (technical) dimension of the performance of this *Hamlet* at Schaubühne, Berlin. This is increasingly true in current performances, in which Eidinger often adds: "Vorhang auf!". When noticing that the golden chains are entangled and the mechanism does not work, he comments on it instead of trying to smooth it over: "Scheisse" (27.10.2017). Eidinger's Hamlet moves the podium downstage and sits at the table, all the while conducting the dialogue about Denmark being a prison with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as if making small talk. The dialogue evolves as scripted until Eidinger's Hamlet sets up his stage. In the middle of the following lines, Eidinger's Hamlet seemingly interrupts himself and brings the situation of the performance and the playing partners to the fore. "Wer gibt?" He interrupts the course of the Shakespearean dialogue to reference the theater situation itself: Sitting down at the center of the long banquet table, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern each at one end of the mobile podium, Eidinger's Hamlet challenges the dumbstruck Stern and Schwarz: "Wer gibt?", thus suggesting that he might address them as playing partners who have forgotten their text.<sup>28</sup> For a moment, it is unclear whether Eidinger, the actor, demands of his playing partners to follow the script, or Hamlet speaks to them ironically pointing out that they are altogether acting in the performance of a friendly meeting, well-aware that this is a *mise en scène* to draw from him the reasons of his madness. "Wer gibt?" participates in the double existence of the 'antic' speech, while add-

<sup>28</sup> In German theater jargon, "Wer gibt?" signifies: "Whose turn is it to speak?". It might also be a sentence addressed to the prompter in case an actor has forgotten their text. While absent from Mayenbourg's published translation, "Wer gibt?" actually roughly corresponds to the "Come, come, nay speak" of the Shakespearean script.

ing a metaleptic potential to it, opening up the potential of its meaning to change the position of the speaker from that of character to that of actor.

Eidinger performs along the entire sliding scale that Michael Kirby, quoted by Hans-Thies Lehmann, suggests to circumscribe the performance of the postdramatic actor. Between the extremes of “acting” and “not-acting”, there are a number of other stops on the scale, such as “non-matrixed acting”, “symbolized matrix”, “received acting”, “simple acting”, “complex acting”, “full matrixed acting” (cf. Lehmann 2006: 134–135). Lehmann explains:

Only when fiction is added can we speak of ‘complex acting’, acting in the normal sense of the word. The latter applies to the ‘actor’ while the ‘performer’ moves mainly between ‘not-acting’ and ‘simple acting’. For performance, just as for postdramatic theatre, ‘liveness’ comes to the fore, highlighting the provocative presence of the human being rather than the embodiment of a figure. (Lehmann 2006: 135)

Eidinger, I argue, moves between extremes: at times evidently ‘acting’ the role of Hamlet, at others, the role of Hamlet performing the madman; at times highlighting the presence of his voice and body, as in ‘simple acting’, which means that “a clear emotional participation is added, a desire to communicate” (ibid.), but without yet doing so as a fictional figure. The decisive trait of Ostermeier’s staging at this moment is that Eidinger’s Hamlet and the off-stage audience perceive that ambiguity – Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, on the other hand, ignore it and react, like Polonius, with confusion. The boundaries of what is ‘set down’ become blurred in the situation of performance, as they are drawn differently by the on-stage or off-stage audience. According to Lehmann, this distanced and self-aware stance towards the relationship between text and performance, actor and character, is precisely a feature of ‘post-dramatic’ theater. At the turn of the 21st century, theories of theater and performance root theater firmly in the three-dimensional conditions of the theater performance as simultaneous production and reception in a shared space (Lehmann 2006: 12). A disciplinary reorientation determines performance as the central element of a “new theater”

(Lehmann 2006: 17): “Through the development of Performance Studies it has been highlighted that the whole situation of the performance is constitutive for theater and for the meaning and status of every element within it.” (Lehmann 2006: 85) Performance might have a textual element, but it is detached from the concatenation of processes of imitation that, beginning with early modern Aristotelian criticism, it had been submitted to: “the actor in it is only an agent of the director who, in turn, only ‘repeats’ the word prescribed to him by the author (the author himself being already bound to a representation, and thus repetition, of the world.)” (Lehmann 2006: 32) Post-dramatic theater, on the contrary, “wants the stage to be a beginning and a point of departure, not a site of transcription/ copying.” Rather, it seems it is “exactly the omission of an originary source/agency of discourse combined with the pluralization of sending agencies/sources on stage that lead to new modes of perception.” (ibid.) A ghostly author’s authority, as we have seen in chapter I, asks to be questioned by the actor. As one of several pluralizing “sending agencies” (Lehmann 2006: 32), the actor is revalorized as an author of the stage, post-dramatic performance art conceives of the actor’s performance as a creative process producing a present reality, rather than the representation of an absent, fictional reality scripted in the shape of a dramatic text. What Eidinger’s performance shows, is that this idea of a production of the character and its world through the performance of the actor is deeply rooted in not the erasure, but the presence and virtuosity of the physical performance of the actor. It “mark[s] corporeality as fundamental to the process of embodiment, regardless of whether they simultaneously bring forth a fictive character [...] or not” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 90). This is why an aesthetics of the performative is often based on strategies that “emphatically direct the audience’s attention to the specific and individual qualities of the actor’s ‘phenomenal body’” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 88). Lehmann concurs: “The actor of postdramatic theatre is often no longer the actor of a role but a performer offering his/her presence on stage for contemplation.” (Lehmann 2006: 135) In the case of Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’, I argue, this process of embodiment through emphatic presentation of the actor’s presence on stage is the object

of the character's performance itself, thereby highlighting at the same time the presence of the actor and the character it brings forth.

This situation in-between is literally staged in Ostermeier's *Hamlet*. When none of his partners react, Eidinger's Hamlet further develops the theme of a celebration – which might seem appropriate for this allegedly surprising reunion of friends, i.e. the dramatic situation at hand from Hamlet's perspective. He uses a plastic plate and fork to represent a turntable, beatboxes, climbs onto the table and quotes the word of Grandmaster Flash: "Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge / I'm trying not to lose my head" – while threatening to fall over.

This is more than a fun interpretation of the 'antic disposition' with a contemporary song. Quoting Grandmaster Flash's 'The message', Eidinger represents Hamlet's situation in a specific light: "It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under", raps Grandmaster Flash in the iconic early hip hop track *The Message* (by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 1979), before continuing with the chorus that Eidinger quotes: "Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge, I'm trying not to lose my head." Both verses echo utterances made by Hamlet earlier, and can be assumed to reflect his position after the encounter with the Ghost – on the one hand, the epistemological anxiety it has generated; on the other, the odd liminal position of the 'antic disposition' itself. The rotten state of Denmark, that is a prison to Hamlet, is expressed by Eidinger's Hamlet in his appropriation of Grandmaster Flash's critique of the unbearable conditions of the inhabitants of the Bronx in the 1970's and '80s. In addition, Hamlet's performance literalizes the imagery used by the song: Standing on the edge of a precipice, Eidinger balances the relationship between actor and character. In his scene with Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, he uses the table as a stage over and over again, finally falling over and grasping at the golden curtain in order to avoid falling down. For a moment, he hangs between both spaces, literally on the edge: feet still on the podium, head and hands hovering in the void. Already stretched out between the space of the character and the actor, in his scene

with Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, Eidinger's Hamlet is on the edge in another way: hanging in the balance, he bridges the gap between the time and space of *Hamlet's* fictional world, of the character of Hamlet, and that of the performance and therefore, spectators' time and space.

The characteristic quality of Eidinger's performance is not due to a modification, disruption or erasure of some imagined existence of the character. Instead, in the moment of his introduction of Grandmaster Flash's verses into Hamlet, Eidinger provokes a topographical shift: In creating a link with the audience in their present time and space, the imagined border between the space of the character-actor and the spectator shifts. In moving across the frontier of the curtain in his 'antic disposition', Hamlet erases it altogether. As the 'Spielfassung' well shows, the audience is required to play a part in the 'antic disposition', as well: Eidinger's Hamlet stands on the table, looking at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's empty faces and tries to test their readiness to indulge Hamlet's 'antic disposition'. He yells at them: "Party people in the house, com'on, and let me hear you say: YEAH!"<sup>4</sup>, holding the microphone towards them. At the second (sometimes third) attempt, both awkwardly utter a weak YEAH. Turning around to the audience, at first to share his disappointment and disgust with the dullness of his partners on stage, he acts as if discovering that the people sitting behind him actually are potential participants, too – and turns around. Eidinger's Hamlet first elicits the audience's answer "YEAH", continuing until a majority reacts. In interacting with the audience, Eidinger's Hamlet does not, I argue, leave the ground of what is 'set down' even though he moves outside the space behind the fourth wall where actors can disappear behind their character. Instead, he consciously uses the audience as a playing partner whose actions can by definition not be scripted. In comparison to the original shows in the "Cour d'Honneur" of the Festival d'Avignon, where the production toured after its premiere at the Athens Festival in 2008, the actor Eidinger has also considerably expanded this moment: he deliberately tested the audience's willingness to react – and to take responsibility for their reaction – by creating situations that should,

at the same time, make the audience uncomfortable about their willingness to participate. For example, he asks for the repetition by “all the Ladies: When I say gang, you say bang“, which leads to an awkward declamation of “Gang – Bang” by Eidinger and the female audience. The audience thereby experiences the performance as an active participant, who cannot afford to be passive or to refute responsibility for their actions. Ostermeier’s staging, all the while constructing character whose acting skill is part of its universe, includes the spectator in ways akin to the aesthetics of post-dramatic theater and performance art. The spectator becomes a participant in Hamlet’s self-fashioning for the benefit of the characters that witness his ‘antic disposition’ on stage. Fischer-Lichte’s description of embodiment in the aesthetics of the performative correlates with a redefinition of the performance situation from the perspective of the spectator. The confrontation between those two aspects of the actor’s body on stage places the spectators in a liminal state between two types of perception. The one perceives the actors’ ‘phenomenal body’ (“the perceptual order of presence”, Fischer-Lichte 2008: 149). The other, hermeneutic approach reads the bodies on stage as representations of characters and actions composing a coherent mythos in the Aristotelian sense (“the perceptual order of representation”, Fischer-Lichte 2008: 150). Lehmann also emphasizes that spectators have a particularly active part in the framework of post-dramatic theater, as it creates events “in which there remains a sphere of choice and decision for the spectators; they decide which of the simultaneously presented events they want to engage with but at the same time feel the frustration of realizing the exclusive and limiting character of this freedom.[original emphasis]” (Lehmann 2006: 88) Performance art that does not exclusively focus on the representation of characters and actions contained in a dramatic text leaves the spectators the freedom, so to speak, to be “groundlings”, interested in the phenomenon of the performance as a “dumb-show” and “noise”, or “judicious” spectators looking to find a “necessary question” to what they see.

When Hamlet highlights his presence and contribution to the performance, he also calls for the audience to evaluate their position

and take responsibility of their perception of what is ‘set down’ and what is ‘more’.

### *Endless shapes*

So far, Eidinger’s performance of Hamlet has brought to the fore the double existence of the ‘antic’ speech between a semantic and a pragmatic meaning, and the liminal position of the actor performing the character’s ‘antic disposition’, produced by the actor’s constant crossing over the boundaries both of the character to the actor and the space of the actors into the space of the audience, revealing both boundaries to be imaginary products of a presumed distinction between what is ‘set down’ and what exceeds it. His performance, however, also emphasizes a physical and vocal variety and prowess that enhances the confusion between his presence as an actor and his existence as a character. This becomes most obvious in his interaction with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. As the “Regiebuch” shows, numerous physical acrobatics have been blocked during rehearsal: Every few words, there is an indication for a physical action or a change of voice:

HAMLET: Überhaupt nicht, ich werd euch nicht zu meinen andern Dienern schlagen, (dreht sich zu R und Gü) weil, um ehrlich zu sein, (ruft ins Off) ich werde hier schauerlich bedient... (er kommt zurück) Aber, um auf dem Tri-, Tra-, Trampelpfad der Freundschaft zu bleiben, (setzt sich wieder) was führt euch hierher nach Helsingör?

ROSENKRANZ: Wir kommen dich besuchen, mein Prinz.

HAMLET: Falsch! (er schlägt eine Tetra vor sich mit rechts kaputt, nimmt das Mikro, Blick zu R, ins Mikro:) Hat man euch nicht gebeten zu kommen? (Blick zu R) Ist es (steht auf und geht zu R) euer eigenes Anliegen? Ein freiwilliger Besuch? (hält R das Mikro hin) Kommt, kommt, (Blick Gü) seid ehrlich mit mir, (hält R das Mikro hin, der stammelt etwas, H wiederholt es) na kommt, kommt, sagt schon. (hält R erneut das Mikro hin)

GÜLDENSTERN: Was sollen wir sagen, mein Prinz?

HAMLET: Irgendwas, aber bitte zum Thema... Man hat euch gebeten zu kommen! (zum Tisch, steckt das Mikro in den Ständer) Ihr habt eine Art Geständnis auf euern Gesichtern, die Schamesröte ist nicht stark genug, das zu überschminken, (geht nach hinten) ich weiß, (ruft ins Off) der gute König und die Königin haben euch gebeten zu kommen.

ROSENKRANZ: Warum sollten sie, mein Prinz? (HAMLET hält im Gang inne, dreht sich um)

HAMLET: Das müßt ihr mir sagen, aber ich beschwöre euch bei unserer Freundschaft, seid klar und offen mit mir, ob man euch gebeten hat zu kommen.

(Rosenkranz und GÜLDENSTERN zögern.)

Wenn ich euch was bedeute, dann verschweig mir nichts.

GÜLDENSTERN: Mein Prinz, man hat uns gebeten zu kommen, ab...

HAMLET: Aahh, ha, ha, ha! (BOGEN vor – Position RAP)

(HAMLET schreit, weint, lacht, weint, lacht, weint, geht dabei an den Tisch und setzt sich, stülpt sich Tetras über die Hände, schlägt mit beiden Händen auf den Tisch, dann Bruch, ernsthaft, als Persiflage:)

Sein (öffnet rechte Hand Richtung R) oder nicht sein (öffnet linke Hand Richtung Gü), das ist die Frage. [...]

Entschuldigt, kommt ihr kurz vor, dann sag ich euch, warum man euch geschickt hat und ihr müßt euch nicht selbst enttarnen, (kommt vor, ROSENKRANZ über links, GÜLDENSTERN über rechts vor, alle setzen sich) und eure Diskretion dem König und der Königin gegenüber läßt keine Federn.

(RB 2010: 17-18)

At the level of the play's dramaturgy, the 'antic disposition' is a means to elicit the truth about Rosencrantz and GÜldenstern's visit while masking his own intentions. In this scene, he does succeed in obtaining a confirmation of his own suspicions. But there is another way in which he 'knows more' than the other characters. Eidinger / Hamlet displays his awareness of the performance situation at large, and flaunts it by illustrating his range and his autonomy as an actor. Moving about in the space of the stage, he takes possession of the front, the back, addressing some of his lines to the absent King and Queen, acknowledging their presence backstage, playing with the gold curtain to symbolize his liminal position. Most importantly, his performance alternates between parody and earnestness at a dizzying pace, taking into account the urgency of Hamlet's situation as a character, and the joyful possibilities of his performance as an actor. A casual tone ("Es gibt nichts Gutes oder Schlechtes außer das Denken macht es dazu", RB 2010: 16) alternates with emphatically theatrical enunciation: "Und, was bringt Euch hierhör / nach Helsingör?" (ibid.) But Eidinger's Hamlet has

by no means lost track of the actual stakes of the situation: When Rosencrantz answers: “Wir kommen dich besuchen, mein Prinz, sonst nichts.” (Mayenburg 2008: 25), he is met with a sudden and angry outburst: “Falsch! Hat man Euch nicht gebeten zu kommen?”. Eidinger’s Hamlet reacts with an accusatory: “AHA!” to their confession, that morphs into a hysterical laugh, in turn transforming into an artificial, loud sob, whose ridicule is often supported by his faking “tears” with remnants of silver glitter he finds on the table. Increasingly, the purpose of Eidinger’s performance of Hamlet becomes to display the actor’s physical virtuosity and capacity to transform.

The full exploitation of the spectrum of physical and vocal play by Eidinger further erodes the assumed distinction between actor and character through the sheer rapidity of the diverse stage collapsing into each other faster than the spectator can follow. It provokes what Erika Fischer-Lichte has described as the oscillation between “orders of perception” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 148). Through procedures such as those used by Eidinger here, the spectator’s perception “moves back and forth between the perception of the individuality of the actor’s body (phenomenal body), and its capacity to signify a character (semiotic body): “At all events, aesthetic perception here takes the form of oscillation. It switches focus between the actor’s phenomenal and semiotic body, thus transferring the perceiving subject into a state of betwixt and between.” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 88-89) The liminal space of Eidinger’s foolish performance, the dance on the edge of the stage, is mirrored in an analogous liminality of the spectator’s perception.

Eidinger thereby proposes an idea of the actor’s performance that is inherent to Hamlet’s reflection about the nature of performance and its relationship to its textual mode of existence. The Ghost’s armored appearance suggested a divide between theatricalized exterior and inaccessible interior as a template for the relationship between actor and character, the actor’s ‘actual’ body being concealed behind the armor of the impersonation of the character. Eidinger’s

performance of Hamlet suggests an alternative view of the mode of existence of character as the result of a process of embodiment.

Here embodying denotes the emergence of something that exists only as a body. The bodily being-in-the-world of the actor provides the dramatic character with its existential ground and the condition for its coming into being. The character exists in the actor's physical performance alone and is brought forth both by his performative acts and his particular corporeality. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 84)

Eidinger's performance draws attention to his own corporeality and to his capacity to control and change it as well, thereby showing that it does not need to disappear to make way for a character, but that it is the source of a multitude of possible versions of the latter. As Fischer-Lichte emphasizes, "[t]he human body knows no state of being; it exists only in a state of becoming. It recreates itself with every blink of the eye, every breath and movement embodies a new body." This mode of existence of the body in general poses a particular obstacle to the imperative of self-canceling impersonation, and reveals its own creative power as it "vehemently refuses to be declared a work of art, or be made into one. The actor instead undergoes processes of embodiment. Through these processes, the body is transformed and recreated. The body happens." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 92)

The procedures and effects of Eidinger's performance, his play with the double sense of his utterances, his transgressive interaction with the audience, and his metamorphic physical performance, can be described in the terms of Fischer-Lichte's *The transformative power of performance*. But it is might not be far away from what Richard Burbage delivered on the Globe's stage around 1600. There is reason to believe, as Lois Potter has argued in her biography *The life of William Shakespeare*, that Hamlet is a play not only destined to faithfully represent the tragedy of the character, Hamlet, but also written to provide the actor Richard Burbage with an occasion to display "everything that Burbage did best, which is why he is everything that an actor wants to play and everything that an audience wants an actor to be" (Potter 2012: 281). As Evelyn Tribble comments, "In this

reading, the apparent inconsistencies of Hamlet's character are at least partly explained if we imagine the part as purposely written as a vehicle for the display of actorly skill [...]” (Tribble 2017: 140). While Hamlet might claim that the “purpose of playing” is “to hold the mirror up to Nature”, Hamlet, the play, testifies to a different purpose of the theater performance, especially as the notion of character and of self-canceling acting is not yet developed in early modern theater. Evelyn Tribble quotes one of the rare accounts of the early modern actor's set of skills, *The Rich Cabinet* (1616): “A Player hath many times, many excellent qualities: as dancing, actiuitie, musicke, song, eolloquution, abilitie of body, memory, vigilancy, skill of weapon, pregnancy of wit, and such like[...].” (Tribble 2017: 3) The notion of the actor's ‘wit’ – attributed to the author as mark of his inventiveness - is quoted alongside a diverse set of skills that mingle physical, cultural, musical, and vocal skills. More especially, the quote points to a peculiarly experiential and physical type of creativity: the actor “resembleth an excellent spring of water, which growes the more sweeter, and the more plentifull by often drawing out of it: so are all these the more perfect and plausible by the often practice.” (Tribble 2017: 3) The author of *The Rich Cabinet* considers the actor a creative source in its own right, which is augmented in processes of repetition and training. “The often practice” even might be thought to help with the Aristotelian imperative to make “plausible” the character and action ‘set down’ in the plot. Against Hamlet's definition of the actor's physical and vocal potential as a dangerous instrument to transgressing the boundaries of character, early modern acting precisely valued the body as a means to create and produce, not unlike the aesthetics of a “post-dramatic” theater. While related to the historical period in which ‘dramatic’ theater dominates European stages, the roots of the ‘post-dramatic’ view on theater and acting that Eidinger's performance testifies to reach back to an earlier performance tradition that runs deep in *Hamlet*. It is uncovered by reading the ‘antic disposition’ as an ‘acting disposition’. The fool's speech, place and performance before and in the early modern public theater will help us access those central elements of early modern acting that draw attention

to the double existence of the body as actor and character, and, thereby, to *Hamlet* as text and performance.

## A foolish figure

The ‘antic disposition’, I have said it above, is in fact an ‘acting disposition’. Performing the ‘antic disposition’ by definition means questioning the boundary between what is ‘set down’ and what is not, by questioning what it means to be acting. At the time of *Hamlet*, since there are no acting theories, the notion of acting that *Hamlet* ponders is best explained through the affinity of acting with madness. Not least, this affinity helps us understand that, just like the concepts of text and performance themselves, concepts of acting are standing on the verge of a historical change.

At the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, madness and performance are structurally analogous concepts. Performing madness in fact means ‘performing performance’. As Hamlet refuses to follow the imperative of the Ghost to impersonate his own fate, he develops the ‘antic disposition’ as a different kind of action. Hamlet stages the ‘antic disposition’ as a metatheatrical reflection on the performance of the actor. Read through the tradition of the figure of the fool, Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’ reveals the double existence of the character allegedly ‘set down’ in the text. Eidinger’s performance has shown us what to look for in the textual traces: The double sense of Hamlet’s words, opportunities for him to move across the threshold of the stage, and a performance that foregrounds the process of embodiment, revealing that acting is an uncontrollable, productive process that certainly does not remain in the realm of a character, let alone within the round of the theater itself.

The fool and the madman are closely connected concepts. The idea of folly pervades the popular performance culture of the time, and thereby constitutes a convenient *tertium comparationis* between madness and theater. The tradition of the performance of the fool within popular theater opens the way for it to provide the dramatic

theater of the public stages with a metatheatrical element, as Robert Weimann retraces in his extensive study of the connections between the popular theater culture of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in England and Shakespeare's drama:

[Die Dramen] übernahmen einige dramaturgisch-sprachliche Eigenarten dieser älteren Tradition, wobei sie das närrische Moment mit dem klassischen Wahnsinnsmotiv vereinten, als echten, angenommen oder 'melancholischen' Wahnsinn stilisierten und es mehr oder minder thematisch, handlungsgemäß oder charakterlich rechtfertigten.  
(Weimann 1975: 202)

Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin has subsumed this popular culture under the term of the carnivalesque and emphasizes how much early modern literature depends upon it: "Not only *belles lettres* but the utopias of the Renaissance and its conception of the universe itself were deeply penetrated by the carnival spirit and often adopted its forms and symbols." (Bakhtin 1968: 11) The figure of the fool is key to understanding the function of the 'antic disposition' in *Hamlet*. In putting on the 'antic disposition', Hamlet does not simply pretend to be mad, but adopts the characteristics of the fool's speech, place and performance in the Elizabethan tradition and in the broader context of carnivalesque popular culture.

The transition between the Ghost scenes and the second act of *Hamlet* prepares the ground for a perception of 'madness' in terms of the theater performance. When we first hear of Hamlet's madness in *Hamlet*, all elements of its foolishness are already hinted at. Ophelia reports a visit of Hamlet to Claudius in act two, scene one, as follows:

OPHELIA [...]  
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,  
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,  
Ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle,  
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,  
And with a look so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.

(2.1.75-81)

Hamlet presents her with the common stereotype of the melodramatic lover, mad through disappointment in love. An echo to the appearance of his father's Ghost is unmistakable, as editors Taylor and Thompson note: "At this point the otherwise slightly comic picture of the melodramatic lover becomes frightening: Hamlet, for the audience, if not for Ophelia, resembles his father's Ghost." (n.2.1.79-81). Pale as a sheet, he looks as if, like the Ghost, he had come directly from hell to speak of things that "would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres / Thy knotted and combined locks to part / And each particular hair to stand on end / Like quills upon the fearful porpentine." (1.5.16-20). Hamlet's ominous silence and capacity of finding his way without his eyes (2.1.95) add to the parallel with the apparition of his father's spirit:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard,  
Then goes he to the length of all his arm  
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow  
He falls to such perusal of my face  
As 'a would draw it. Long stayed he so;  
At last, a little shaking of mine arm  
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound  
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
And end his being. That done, he lets me go  
And with his head over his shoulder turned  
He seemed to find his way without his eyes  
(For out o'doors he went without their help)  
And to the last bended their light on me.  
(2.1.84-97)

Just like his father, Hamlet looks as if his grave had spit him out again in order for him to speak of something. Just as the Ghost, he remains silent. Like the Ghost, who beckoned, Hamlet waves and gestures without words. Finding his way out of the door without his eyes, his gaze upon Ophelia, he might remind us of the one-directional gaze of the Ghost behind his visor. His performance climaxes in a sigh that seems to "end his being". While he displays

symptoms of love-sickness, he also recalls the Ghost of his father. As his illness is introduced in analogy to the Ghost's ambivalent apparition, *Hamlet* also suggests that Hamlet's madness shares some of its qualities. Among others, like the Ghost, madness has its place at the brim of the world of the living, and at the edge of the stage. As we have seen in chapter one, Hamlet takes the Ghost's place, and becomes himself a revenant moving between different realms. This reading can be supported by a closer look at the topography and meaning of madness in early modern thought.

Ophelia's description introduces the cosmic dimension of madness in the early modern age. Hamlet's apparition, in analogy to the one of the Ghost, takes a liminal position between being and its end. Like the Ghost, the uncertain origin of the silent apparition points towards a realm beyond. This place of the madman at the brim of 'being', gesturing towards what lies beyond, is firmly rooted in the genealogy of madness in the early modern imagination. As Michel Foucault has analyzed in *Madness and civilization. A history of insanity in the age of reason*, medieval concepts of madness take the discursive place of the leper (Foucault 1973: vi). While the latter directly symbolizes the vanity of human existence and the omnipresence of death in life, the madman articulates a similar concern with 'non-being'. But his presence is integrating it into the realm of the being, confronting the living with it and opening up the liminal, in-between space that the Ghost occupies, the space of purgatory and the stage. Contrary to the space of the dead, the space of madness is simultaneously on the inside and on the outside: "What is in question is still the nothingness of existence, but this nothingness is no longer considered an external, final term, both threat and conclusion; it is experienced from within as the continuous and constant form of existence." (Foucault 1973: 16) Being mad means to be in touch with the other world from the inside of the present one. Long before the "great confinement" (Foucault 1973: xii) violently excludes the madman from the realm of reasonable discourse by creating the asylum, the madman, like the Ghost, leads a double existence between inside and outside of the world of the living.

The analogy between Ghost and the madman also regards their effect on their spectators. Hamlet comes before Ophelia “As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors”, but he never actually speaks. Instead, his appearance shares the uncertainty that characterized his encounter with the Ghost. Hamlet confronts Ophelia with an inscrutable outer shell. She is left to describe his attire, his gestures, his unfaltering gaze – without being able to interpret them conclusively. Madness, this scene seems to suggest, hides its meaning as the manifestations of the supernatural do. More importantly, it remains particularly inaccessible to perspectives that attempt to strip it of its outer shell. Michel de Montaigne includes both in a list of beliefs that he used to consider as pure folly:

Somnia, terrores magicos, miracula, sagas,  
Nocturnos lemures, portentáque Thessali.

HOR.ii.Ep.ii.208.

Drames, magike terrors, witches, uncouth-wonders,  
Night-walking sprites Thessalian conjur'd-thunders.

I could not but feele a kinde of compassion to see the poore and seemly people abused with such follies. And now I perceive, that I was as much to be moaned myselfe: Not that expervence hath since made me to dicerne any thing beyond my former opinions: yet was not my curiositie the cause of it, but reason hath taught me, that so resolutely condemne a thing for false, and impossible, is to assume unto himself the advantage, to have the bounds and limits of Gods will, and of the power of our common other Nature tied to his sleeve: And that there is no greater folly in the world, than to reduce them to the measure of our capacitie, and bounds of our sufficiencie. (Montaigne [1580] 1967: 191)

This quote from John Florio’s 1603 translation of Montaigne’s essays on the one hand confirms the proximity between “such follies” and “Night-Walking sprites”: Montaigne keeps Ghosts right with other phenomena that a reasonable person would condemn as folly. However, he has learned that his condemnation of folly was folly itself, and that the otherworldly objects of its imagination, unfathomable for the learned man, might need to be welcomed “as a

stranger” (1.5.164), as Hamlet demanded of his friends with regards to the Ghost. More decisively, the condemnation of follies equals the attempt to put boundaries to the wisdom of God and nature, which is the greatest folly itself. Wisdom, instead, is the awareness that only human reason has its boundaries. It is striking that it is “la raison”, reason itself, that has taught him that his condemnation illegitimately placed him in the position of God’s unfathomable outside perspective on the world, thereby limiting it to human scope. Madness, therefore, like the Ghost’s appearance and the performance of the actor, questions assumed boundaries and distinctions: In a culture in which the boundaries life and death and reason and madness are shifting, those between what is ‘set down’ and what is ‘more’, are too. Foucault calls this conception of madness the “tragic experience of madness” (Foucault 1973: 28), which interprets it as a manifestation of divine reason, compared with which all human wisdom is nothing but folly. Just as Hamlet who scares Ophelia by his unfaltering gaze, the figures of this other-worldly wisdom are fascinating, too: “[M]adness fascinates because it is knowledge. It is knowledge, first, because all these absurd figures are in reality elements of a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning.” (Foucault 1973: 21)

Hamlet’s appearance before Ophelia tells the tale of that undisclosed wisdom, normally inaccessible to man before his life ends, fascinating but equally threatening. Hamlet here references a culture in which the madness is not a defined, segregated place outside the realm of reason, but rather a dynamic which points to the quality of that distinction as humanly made and temporary. This topology had a literal pendant in the tradition of the “Ship of fools”, fictionalized by Sebastian Brant in his *Stultifera navis* (Foucault 1973: 7). Fools, beggars and others living on the margins of a city’s society were assembled and chased outside the city limits, often entrusted to seamen on a ship or even sent down the river without guidance. (Foucault 1973: 8) Their wandering, placing them in the hands of the God that their presence was testifying to, was thought to literally lead towards premature salvation. Their exclusion from cities is a

passage into another realm: "It is for the other world that the madman sets sail in his fools' boat; it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks. The madman's voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage." (Foucault 1973: 11) The fact that people on the ships regularly returned to their city of provenance emphasizes the reading of their exclusion as a process that, instead of reinforcing a community's boundary against the non-reasonable, showed this boundary to be porous. The place of the fool, then, is outside and inside at the same time. He is perpetually crossing the assumed boundaries between the two. This is, at the same time, the knowledge he conveys: that human-made boundaries can be crossed and questioned.

Like the Ghost's appearance was confronted with an incredulous scholar such as Horatio, Hamlet's foolish performance is confronted with the opposite position in order to flesh it out more clearly. Polonius' reaction to Ophelia's report is far from the insight into the relativity of the boundary between reason and madness. Without reacting to any of the singularities pointed out by his daughter, he immediately delivers his definitive interpretation: "Mad for thy love?" (2.1.82) is his very first conjecture after Ophelia's first few lines. The following details only confirm his first impression:

This is the very ecstasy of love,  
Whose violent property fordoes itself  
And leads the will to desperate undertakings  
As oft as any passions under heaven  
That does afflict our natures. (2.1.99-103)

In his incorrigible incapacity to challenge his own intuition, Polonius is the perfect example of the foolish wise man that Montaigne described. In Desiderius Erasmus' *Encomium Moriae*, written when Erasmus was staying at Thomas More's in 1509-1510, and translated into English by Sir Thomas Chaloner and printed in 1549, the first person narrator Folly herself finds an apt term for allegedly wise men such as Polonius: "Such men therefore, that in deede are archdoltes, and woulde be taken yet for sages and philosophers,

maie I not aptelie calle them foolelosophers?” (Erasmus [1509]1965: 10)

The creation of the term ‘foolelosopher’ points us towards the characteristic of the foolish performance that Eidingen’s performance of Hamlet has made visible. When distinctions collapse, the opposites they were assumed to keep distinct suddenly become effects of a performance. Erasmus’ Folly is a salient example of how the relativity of wisdom and folly found in Montaigne leads to a confusion between the planes of the inaccessible interior and the theatricalized exterior that are supposed to be neatly distinct in the actor impersonating the character. Unlike the wise man that turns out to be a fool, Folly is quite the actor, but remains true to herself at the same time. Folly defines the ‘foolelosophers’ as those who pretend to be one thing, and are another; who would be taken for something, but in deede are something else. It is interesting that in the passage immediately preceding, she defines herself as follows: “For in me (ye must thynke) is no place for setting of colours, as I cannot saie one thyng, and thynke an other: but on all sydes I dooe resemble my selfe.” (Erasmus [1509]1965: 11) Presenting herself to an audience, she shows that she has no reverse, no hidden depth, no deceitful surface – as opposed to those fools who “take vpon them most semblant of wysedome, and walke lyke Asses in Lyons skynnes. That althoughe they counterfeite what they can, yet on some syde their longe eares pearyng forth, dooe discover them to come of Midas progenie.” (Erasmus [1509]1965: 10) Folly claims for herself to submit to no regime of distinction between inside and outside. Her truth is that she is all surface, to begin with. Pure likeness, Folly resembles her own self on all sides, implying that she is also reproducing herself incessantly. The opposing faction is equally presented in three dimensions: They indeed adopt a surface, a “semblant of wysedome”, that hides something in the depth below: “Asses in Lyons skynnes”. The theatricality of their existence, costuming themselves to perform wise men, becomes obvious since “on some syde their longe eares pearyng forth.” It is decisive here that, unlike the Hamlet of act one, scene one, Folly does not construct an opposition within the surface-depth-paradigm, in which

accurate representation opposes dissemblance. She opposes an altogether new third, one of absolute surface and, as we will see, metamorphosis, that Hamlet's 'antic disposition' appropriates to present us with an acting theory that does not yet rest on a clear opposition between actor and character, what is 'set down' and what is more.

The 'antic disposition', as I will show in the following chapters, is generally characterized by a "double existence" that tends towards the dissolution of boundaries into a third. Lars Eidinger's performance points us towards those qualities of foolish speech, place and performance that help us read the 'antic disposition' as an 'acting disposition'. I will look for three features of the 'antic disposition' in my reading of act two, in which it unfolds during the second scene that makes up almost the entirety of the act: the 'antic disposition', it seems, bears no structuring interruptions: "Es geht doch immer weiter!", as Lars Eidinger claims.

First of all, Hamlet's foolish speech can be read as nonsensical and disqualified from the perspective of "reasonable" discourse, but becomes sensible when read in the complete context of the theater event, including the spectators and the day-to-day reality they move in. Hamlet's madness has "method" when read as addressed not only to the dialogue partner, but to the audience. It references their life and environment and thereby points beyond itself, beyond the dramatic script, towards the contemporary reality of the spectators.

Second, the topography of the early modern theater space contains two spaces. Like the fool in popular performance practices preceding the rise of professional theaters in London, Hamlet moves between the space of the actors, that of his fellow characters, and that of the audience. Continuing the tradition of the performances of wandering troupes of players or carnivalesque festivities, Hamlet strategically uses the distinction between the space of the *locus*, a space that signifies a fictional place, and the space of the *platea*, that performers and spectators share in the present time and space of the performance. Hamlet intentionally creates situations in which

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Hamlet moves between both spaces and includes the spectator's perspective in their performance.

Third, what we can reconstruct of the discursive and socio-historical conditions of the creation of *Hamlet* can be complemented by early modern reflections on folly such as those of Erasmus and Montaigne, and the carnivalesque culture it stems from. This allows us to conjecture what the 'antic disposition' transports in terms of a theory of the actor's performance. Instead of thinking of play-acting as a "show" adopted by an actor who therefore conceals his own physical and psychological individuality to impersonate a role, the foolish performance blurs the lines between surface and depth, between 'essence' and 'appearance'. It proposes a view on life as constant process of metamorphosis and transformation and imagines human existence as self-aware role-playing: a necessary illusion that, however, should not be taken for true nature. Hamlet's performance of the 'antic disposition', as I will show, foregrounds the physical, phenomenal aspect of this illusion: Performance transforms not only a surface that conceals a stable entity underneath, but the actor and his body change and morph in a way that produce a character that cannot be distinguished from its performance.

### 1. Fool's speech

In the first scene of act two, the first after Hamlet has adopted 'antic disposition', Hamlet does not speak. His ghost-like appearance has revealed the topology and the relationship between madness and reason. In the first scenes of act two, in turn, the 'antic disposition' first of all manifests as a linguistic phenomenon – one that unfolds fully only in performance. As Foucault has explained it, when Folly enters the universe of discourse, it loses some of its metaphysical weight and now structures the relationship of man to himself:

In a general way, then, madness is not linked to the world and its subterranean forms, but rather to man, to his weaknesses, dreams, and illusions. Whatever obscure cosmic manifestation there was in madness as seen by Bosch is wiped out in Erasmus;

madness no longer lies in wait for mankind at the four corners of the earth; it insinuates itself within man, or rather it is a subtle rapport that man maintains with himself. [...] There is no madness but that which is in every man, since it is man who constitutes madness in the attachment he bears for himself and by the illusions he entertains. (Foucault 1973: 26)

While Foucault is interested in the way that folly is disarmed in the context of the epistemic shifts that occur between Renaissance and ‘age of reason’, it is his description of the subtle, playful nature of foolish speech that interests me here. As Folly becomes an all too human matter that regulates behavior, it becomes properly dramatic, governing all human interaction. As we will see, the scenes of *Hamlet* which display and discuss the ‘antic disposition’ are full of this type of foolish discourse: It emphasizes the material side of words, uses carnivalesque images of the grotesque body and the circularity of life and death, and references the foolish *topoi* of nonsense-speech or topsy-turvy-patter characteristic of diverse clownish figures from the tradition of English popular theater. The constitutive feature of fool’s speech, however, becomes visible only in performance. As Eidinger’s performance does, early modern foolish speech is designed to build references to the context of spectators. Robert Weimann connects this characteristic feature of *Hamlet*’s ‘antic disposition’ to its precursors in popular theater:

Und dennoch ist dieses volkstümliche Erbe so bedeutungsvoll und so folgenreich, weil das sprachliche Stilmittel, und gerade das Wortspiel und die närrische *impertinency*, fast immer eine bestimmte szenische Position und publikumsbezogene Dramaturgie stützt und reflektiert. In verschiedenen Szenen ist dies ganz unterschiedlich ausgeprägt; die der Vice-Tradition entsprechenden sprachlich-dramaturgischen Einstellungen sind aber gerade dort wirksam und beherrschen gerade jene Szenen, in denen *Hamlet*’s *antic disposition* (I.5.172) und *madness* (II.2.149) gestaltet sind. (Weimann 1975: 203-204)

Weimann traces the literary and dramaturgical procedures of the scenes in *Hamlet* that develop the ‘antic disposition’ and *Hamlet*’s madness back to those forms of folk play that work with word-play

and impertinent, irreverent speech. They both support what Weimann calls a certain ‘scenic position’ and ‘dramaturgy referring to the audience’. Extending Weimann’s analysis, I claim that this speech produces awareness of the ‘double existence’ of *Hamlet* as text and performance, as the fool’s speech is characteristically ‘doubly addressed’: to the fellow characters that constitute the on-stage audience of his antic show, on the one hand, to the spectators in the theater, on the other. As Robert Weimann points out, Hamlet establishes a close relationship with the outside addressee of any dramatic utterance right from his first line: “A little more than kin and less than kind” (1.2.65), depending on how we read it, is exclusively or at least partly addressed to the audience:

Da war zunächst die (für die dramatische Gestaltung eines Prinzen ganz ungewöhnliche) publikumsnahe Position, die Hamlet von Beginn an, freilich mit unterschiedlicher Konsequenz, einnimmt. Schon seine ersten Worte artikulieren im Umkreis der versammelten Hofgesellschaft eine gleichsam *platea*-bezogene Gegenposition, die sich, dramaturgisch gesehen, dreifach, durch ein beiseite gesprochenes wortspielerisch abgewandeltes Sprichwort, aufbaut. (Weimann 1988: 203)

Long before performing the ‘antic disposition’, then, Hamlet’s use of language is ‘foolish’ in the sense that it includes the spectators. He early on establishes his speech as one that is inherently ambiguous through word-play and through the reference to a well-known proverb, which references the time and place of the audience. It is ambiguous in its address in that the sense of his speech depends on who decodes it. The double meaning of the ‘antic disposition’, in turn, is enhanced by the fact that it can rely on the discrepant awareness between onstage and offstage audience. Hamlet doubles his bond with the off-stage audience in speaking all the more like a fool since he acts the madman. As Robert Weimann shows, one of its characteristics is to reference the contemporary context of the theater performance, creating references that are situated outside the fictional universe of the play. The speech of the fool points outside of the dramatic script from its inside; it is ‘more than is set down’

even when it is, in fact, set down within the dramatic script. The carnivalesque and popular traditions informing Hamlet's speech during his performance of the 'antic disposition' allow him to speak 'more than is set down', and thereby to speak to the present time and place of the spectators. The fool's speech thereby allows Hamlet to take the place of what Andreas Mahler calls an "intermedial go-between": They are the agents of "presentational gestures" that "mediate for between the fictitious story and the material needed for its realization; they mediate between the medium of the written text and the medium of oral – and bodily – play[...]" (Mahler 2007: 148) Reading *Hamlet* in this light, however, contradicts Mahler's conclusion that the two levels mutually disrupt each other. While he argues that "[t]he more a performance hides its art, the more impressive will be the effect of illusion; the more, however, the actual performance displays itself, the less important the fictional world will appear," (Mahler 2007: 151) *Hamlet* shows an interest in the process of mediation between two levels itself, and makes its title character its go-between through speech, place and performance. It is precisely by providing Hamlet with this role that the character is produced.

### *Honest nonsense*

This becomes obvious from the beginning of Polonius' interaction with the allegedly mad Hamlet in the first scene of act one. From the start, their dialogue revolves around the theme of honesty and deceit, thereby pointing towards the trap set for Hamlet by Polonius, Claudius and Gertrude:

POLONIUS [...] How does my good lord Hamlet?  
HAMLET Well, God-a-mercy.  
POLONIUS Do you know me, my Lord?  
HAMLET Excellent well, you are a fishmonger.  
POLONIUS Not I, my Lord. (2.1.168-172)

While seemingly making a mistake in his response by calling Polonius a fishmonger, Hamlet uses it as a starting point for making a valid remark:

HAMLET Then I would you were so honest a man.  
 POLONIUS Honest, my lord?  
 HAMLET Ay, sir, to be honest as this world goes is to be one  
 man picked out of ten thousand.  
 POLONIUS That's very true, my lord.  
 (2.1.173-177)

Hamlet's answer seems to be beside the point. For the audience, however, who knows of Polonius' scheme and has seen the Queen and King hiding to witness the conversation, Hamlet's answer is justified. While his statement about honesty must be perceived by Polonius as a generality with no relation to what he has enquired about, the audience understands the truth of this statement in the context of this specific situation. In the context of the situation in which the audience is 'in' on Hamlet's pretense, Hamlet's answer implies that he does, indeed, "know" Polonius. Eidingen's performance illustrates how the performance situation lends seemingly decontextualized nonsensical speech – such as his Tourette-outbursts – another sense. In the case of early modern speech, this sense is often one that is more honest, truer, than the sensible speech of conventional conversation. Erasmus' Folly says so herself: "it hath euer best lyked me to speake streight what so euer laie on my tongues ende." (Erasmus [1509]1965: 9) By contrast, wise men are double tongued:

A foole speaketh like a foole (id est) plainly. For what soeuer he hath in his thought, that sheweth he also in his countinaunce, and expresseth it in his talke. Whereas theses wisemen are thei, that are double tounded, as the aforesaid Euripides telleth vs, with the one of whiche they speake the trueth, with the other, thynges mete for the tyme and audience. (Erasmus [1509]1965: 49-50)

This passage is worth a closer reading. The description that Folly gives of the wise men here actually rather applies to her. Speaking "like a foole" means speaking plainly. Whether speech is plain or honest, however, cannot be determined by its content or form, but by the pragmatics of the utterance. In contrast to wise men, who assess what is appropriate for the time and place of an utterance

and adapt what they call “the trueth” to their audience, Folly claims to “speake streight“, without hesitation. The difference is that Folly’s speech is always addressed to two audiences: those who devalue her speech as nonsense, and the others, who understand the plain truth it contains. The semblance of direct, unreflected speech places the fool in a unique position as a speaker of truths: A word that is involuntarily honest can be uttered without danger of punishment:

Now so it is in deede, trueth (for the most part) is hatefull to princes. And yet we see, that of fooles oftentimes, not onely true tales, but euin open rebukes are with pleasure declared. That what woorde comyng out of a wisemans mouthe were a hangyng mattier, the same yet spoken by a foole shall muche delight euin hym that is touched therewith. (Erasmus [1509]1965: 50)

The fool has license to speak the truth, even though his word will be undistinguishable from the wise man’s truth, his particular position in relationship to the center of power – the prince – guarantees its being protected. The decisive element for the epistemological value of this words is not its semantic, but its pragmatic aspect. Like the wise men that Erasmus’ Folly accuses above, what they speak is “mete for the tyme and audience” in the sense that it takes its sense in the time and space of the audience. In *Hamlet*, this effect is even more emphasized through the fact that Hamlet is in the peculiar position of occupying both positions at the same time – or rather, of being one and acting the other, being the prince and acting the fool. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, performs the ‘antic disposition’. His speech thereby has different senses for his on-stage addressees, who perceive it as entirely out of context and therefore mad, while it makes sense to the spectators in the auditorium. It can be read into both of two “deictic systems. The inner level comprises the characters’ dialogues and monologues constituting the world-within-the-play. The outer level describes the interaction between actor and audience within the framework of a theatrical production.” (Mahler 2007: 149) The double existence of his foolish

speech also emphasizes the ‘double existence’ of Hamlet as an actor and the actor performing Hamlet:

Wie wir in “Hamlet” sehen werden, besteht die Macht der Mimesis gerade darin, daß sie zwischen dem repräsentierenden Darstellertext (des plebejischen Schauspielers) und dem repräsentierten Rollentext des Prinzen von Dänemark) einen Zustand der Kongruenz und zugleich der Divergenz hervorbringt, so daß auch im Augenblick der scheinbaren Illusion und Geschlossenheit das Repräsentationsgeschehen nie so ganz der Autorität des Dargestellten (also der höfischen Welt zu Helsingör) unterworfen wird. [...] (Weimann 1988: 44)

Robert Weimann describes this as a peculiar type of *mimesis*: “Die Illusion des Spiels wird hintergangen, aber nicht eigentlich durchbrochen.” (Weimann 1988: 252) We have observed this effect in Lars Eidinger’s performance: As the speech is doubly addressed, carrying a semantic and a pragmatic meaning within the situation between the actor-characters, and an additional meaning in the situation with the audience, it foregrounds the double existence of the performance as a whole, shifting the focus from the play within to the outside of the play while preserving both the awareness of illusion as of its production. Mahler’s analysis also sees a connection between the doubleness of the speech of the go-between and an emphasis on the physical, material aspect of performance. The Shakespearean stage, he explains, “is a site where the intrinsic doubleness of theatrical communication is put to the productive use of mediating between an incoming mode of signification focusing on a closed, illusive ‘world-within-the-play’ and an outgoing mode of signification foregrounding the actor’s body and its mimic force.” (Mahler 2007: 147) The doubleness of Shakespeare’s theater, and, I argue, of Hamlet’s speech during the ‘antic disposition’, precisely consists in the fact that it “makes use of both modes of signification, the representational as well as the presentational one, privileging neither the one nor the other” (*ibid.*), leaving the distinction between both to the spectator’s perception: “Meaning is shown to underdetermine representation.” (Mahler 2007: 153)

It is in this sense that we can understand Polonius' astonished asides towards the end of their conversation:

POLONIUS [aside] Though this be madness yet there is method in't. – Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET Into my grave.

POLONIUS [aside] Indeed, that's out of the air. How pregnant sometimes his replies are – a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperous be delivered of. (2.2.202-208)

To Polonius, the truth of Hamlet's words is the product of 'happiness', of a lucky guess: "So bringt die Mimesis der 'Impertinenz' eine unkontrollierte Methode tiefsinnigen Bedeutens hervor." (Weimann 1988: 249) Polonius refers to the same rhetorical figure that Hamlet already used at the very beginning of their conversation: Giving a general response to a specific question, in both cases decontextualizing Polonius' question. From a perspective that embeds Hamlet's foolish speech into the context of the performance, the method of his madness is to be found in the way in which it points towards its own double existence as the actor's and the character's speech.

### *Productive signifiers*

The same dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius also reveals a property of foolish speech that enhances the general notion that text and performance, what is 'set down' and what is 'more', do not relate to each other as distinct opposites. On the contrary, Hamlet's use of words is a way of revealing that what is 'set down' has never only one meaning, and can be made productive to breed a sense that carries beyond the text and towards the situation of the performance. As Polonius intuits, Hamlet's words are "pregnant", carrying a hidden meaning that grows and multiplies. Hamlet himself hints that words carry more matter if one considers their material shape.

HAMLET For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion – have you a daughter?

POLONIUS I have, my lord.

HAMLET Let her not walk i'th'sun: conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend – look to't.  
 POLONIUS How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter! Yet he knew me not at first, 'a said I was a fishmonger! 'A is far gone, and truly, in my youth I suffered much extremity for love, very near this. I'll speak to him again.  
 – What do you read, my Lord?  
 HAMLET Words, words, words.  
 POLONIUS What is the matter, my lord?  
 HAMLET Between who?  
 POLONIUS I mean the matter that you read, my lord.  
 HAMLET Slanders, sir. For the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit together with most weak hams – all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down. For yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am – if, like a crab, you could go backward.  
 (2.2.177–201)

The first line of this passage does not connect thoughts logically. In fact, the dash in the middle of Hamlet's first sentence suggests an interruption, a dissociative train of thought that jumps from one to the other, making it difficult to follow Hamlet. Being fool's speech, however, the sequence can on the contrary be read as particularly coherent at a second glance: In Hamlet's responses, a metaphorical connection is established between the "good kissing carrion" ("good piece of decaying flesh to kiss", n. 2.2.179) and the "daughter". Both are involved in a material process of production: While the cadaver, being left in the sun, breeds maggots, the daughter might become pregnant. The notion of breeding and conception is a shared capacity of both the dead and the living body – the first conceiving on a figurative, the second on a literal level. The seemingly stilted image gains all its sense when we remember the pun that Hamlet makes in his very first lines in the play: "I am too much in the sun" introduces the ambiguity between the homophonic "sun" and "son". If Ophelia walks too close to the "son" of the state, i.e. Hamlet himself, she might get pregnant. The phonetic similarity of the signifiers, as it foregrounds their material aspect, entails the literalization of a metaphor and the dissolution of the

distinction between its figurative and its literal level, as Hamlet's and Ophelia's bodies materially become one in an act of penetration.

In keeping with a carnivalesque tradition, Hamlet introduces into discourse what is usually excluded and blends what seems opposed – death and procreation – into one material process affecting and transforming bodies. Mikhail Bakhtin reads this cosmic connection between death and life in a positive light: “The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all-popular festive and utopian aspect. [...]The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and brimming-over abundance.” (Bakhtin 1968: 19) In contrast to Bakhtin's description of the “folk culture of humor” (Bakhtin 1968: 4) in general, I will insist that the comparison is a violent one, one of the first instances of Hamlet's misogyny, that cannot be simply explained away via the detour of the ‘antic disposition’ – as are the insults that Eidingen's Hamlet sputters forth, which are exclusively misogynistic slurs. It is, however, not only the theme of the imagery used by Hamlet that points us towards the foolishness of his speech, but the idea that language can be productive beyond a ‘simple’ mechanism of signification by focusing on the materiality of language. The material aspect of words, Hamlet's responses show, are more ‘pregnant’ than their mere semiotic connection.

This becomes directly addressed when Polonius asks Hamlet about the content – the “matter” – of the book he is reading. Hamlet's answer is not false per se, but instead of responding to the question at the level intended by Polonius, i.e. of the sense of what Hamlet reads, he chooses to respond by indicating the material that the book consists of, thereby conducting a typical “lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract [...] to the material level” (Bakhtin 1968: 19). The answer “Words, words, words” is in keeping with the foolish practice of emphasizing the material before the spiritual sense of the signifier. The comic effect derives from the simultaneity of the truth of the answer and the awareness in the audience that it does not respond to Polonius' question as it was intended. Polonius, the ‘fooleosopher’, is interested in the matter, the content, of

the book. But Hamlet's foolish speech entirely relies on the play with words, making their "matter" productive in conveying them a double sense in text and performance. The metaphor of pregnancy used in this passage to place the 'antic disposition' in the context of carnivalesque culture returns in Polonius' final comment and ascribes the same productive nature of pregnancy and decay to Hamlet's performance of the 'antic disposition', lending it a creative as well as an epistemological value: like the actor, Hamlet's madness delivers replies that rationality could hardly have given birth to.

### *Acting disposition*

So far, we have been looking at characteristics of fool's speech that foreground the twofold meanings it unfolds when read in the context of what is 'set down' or in the context of the performance. In the final passage of the conversation between Hamlet and Polonius, the fact that their dialogue also exists as performance becomes more strongly visible and further highlights the performative dimension of fool's speech.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare exploits the genealogical relationship between the popular figure of the fool and the performance of the 'antic disposition'. The dramaturgical situation that he creates – Hamlet's 'antic disposition' on the one hand, the other characters' 'stagings' to find the reason of Hamlet's madness on the other – give the second act a metatheatrical structure to begin with. With Rokem, I have argued that the metatheatricality of the "screen-scenes" that pervade act two of *Hamlet* relies on "the spectator function" (Rokem 2014: 58) The metatheatrical strategy of the 'screen-scenes' is to represent a spectating situation on stage, in order to provide Hamlet's alleged nonsense with a broader sense, and honesty only to be understood by an audience in a performance situation. While this structure is inherent to the plot himself and, as Eidinger's performance shows, helps situate *Hamlet* in the time and space of performance at any given moment, the association of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' with carnivalesque culture and its foolish figures is enhanced by the audience's familiarity with performance practices that actually do include a fool or clown performing.

An early modern audience would know these practices and therefore situate Hamlet's 'antic disposition' in that framework.

This differentiates his bond with the audience from that of the other characters, who also attempt to create complicity with the audience. Insofar as Polonius, and the hidden King and Queen are spectators as well, the performer of Polonius feels entitled to address the off-stage audience as a witness: "How say you by that?". But while Claudius and Gertrude indeed repeat the spectator function, and Polonius is an actor in his own scheme, there is a double discrepancy between him and Hamlet as the actor of the 'antic disposition', and the off-stage audience vs. the on-stage audience. The discrepancy is one of knowledge: Hamlet can expect that he is probably being tricked, Polonius does not know that Hamlet is acting the 'antic disposition'. Nor do Gertrude and Claudius. The off-stage audience, however, knows about all parameters that constitute the pragmatics of the situation.

One of the parameters of this situation is the world outside the theater. Hamlet's foolish speech, in addition, integrates elements that are clearly referencing a world that the audience would have been able to relate to:

Dem entsprechen die ungemein vielseitigen, oft ländlich-plebejischen Bezüge seiner Bildersprache, deren charakteristische metaphorische Spannung so oft durch ihre Bezogenheit auf die elementaren Gegenstände und Erfahrungen des Volkslebens bestimmt war. (Weimann 1975: 203)

The fool's speech, as Weimann shows, points out the continuity between the world represented on stage and the world that produces that representation. Even more, it points out that the actors that perform on stage are also aware to that world at the moment of the performance, as opposed to dissolving into the characters of a timeless, absent 'world-within-the-play'. Robert Weimann quotes an example that shows how the awareness of this double existence of something performed was deeply anchored in the audiences of the time:

King I'm a King and a Conqueror too,  
 And here I do advance!  
 Clown I'm the clown of this noble town,  
 And I've come to see thee dance!  
 King A clown come to see a King dance!  
 Clown A King dance! Ask thee good fellow? Didn't I see thee  
 tending the swine 'thother day – stealing swine I meant to say?  
 King Now you've given offence to your Majesty, thee must  
 either sing a song, or off goes your head.  
 ("The Ampleforth Play", in Chambers 1933: 137-138)

The comical effect of this exchange resides in the tension between the roles represented, and the roles that the actors have in their life outside the theater event. The Clown is accused of an illegitimate reversal of social roles, a behavior inappropriate to its own and its interlocutor's rank, a foolish procedure in itself. In addition, it counters the King's reprimands by crossing another threshold, that between the character and actor represented, in calling the King, performed by the swine-herd of the community, a swine-herd. This possibility relies on the close connection between the fool and the spectators. It takes its sense in performance only:

Es ist der Narr, der die Fallhöhe zwischen Spiel und Wirklichkeit respektlos überspringt; er vermag dies, eben weil sein Blickpunkt nicht im Rahmen der Handlung liegt, sondern zugleich die Perspektive der Zuschauer einschließt. Dies freilich setzt voraus, daß der Vorgang ritueller Verkörperung bereits durch dramatische Mimesis und ästhetische Publikumsbewußtheit aufgehoben ist; denn nur durch den Bezug auf die dörfliche Wirklichkeit wird die komische Spannung zwischen mythischem König und mimendem Schweinehirten überhaupt realisiert. (Weimann 1975: 91)

The fool's speech reaches outside of the frame of "Handlung", i.e. the dramatic plot, toward the context of the audience and integrates their perspective. The seemingly nonsensical statement that the King is tending, even stealing swine, makes sense if the audience is aware that the actor impersonating the King actually works as a swineherd – and only then. Weimann does not note that the moment that the fool activates the audience perspective, the rhyming

structure of the first few lines of the exchange is given up: the first four lines, introducing the roles that the players represent, are rhyming. But the fool's lines transgress the boundaries of the plot in that they negate the integrity of the dramatic fiction: The fool, like the audience, has come to "see thee dance", i.e., see the performance. The short exchange quoted shows that the fool's speech is simultaneously 'set down', and not, when it exists as text in performance. It is a speech that can be part of the written dramatic text – inside the text – and at the same time point towards the outside realm of the performance. In the case of the 'antic disposition', Shakespeare uses the property of the fool's speech to give the discrepancy it highlights a dramaturgical function. The Prince impersonating the madman is similar to the swineherd impersonating the King. This double performance – a character playing something else - has the corollary effect of splitting the role, Hamlet, from the actor. To highlight the gap between actor and character is a property of performance practices including a fool. David Mann has identified this as the function of the clown performers in English public theater, such as the famous Will Kemp:

In the tradition of Kemp, the performer shares with us his character's foolishness, inviting us to laugh both with and at the material; both distancing and then defining the comic world in which he lives, at once different from our world and from that of the serious plot. This process of distinguishing the actor from the material and commenting upon it is present, or potentially so, in all confrontations between performer and audience on the Elizabethan stage. (Mann 1991: 2)

The 'antic disposition' allows Hamlet to become the audience's accomplice in commenting upon the other characters in the fictional universe of Hamlet. The property of the fool's speech to take roots in the present time and space of the performance, however, allows this effect to be duplicated in Hamlet, as the 'antic disposition' makes him into a clown that who has the distance to comment on not only the others', but his own role, together with the audience. Hamlet's lines allow the performer, like the fool, to exist doubly, as Hamlet (performing the 'antic disposition') and as performer of

Hamlet, and to comment on his own and the entire play's double existence as text and performance.

Let us take a second look at the dialogue as well as at the remaining parts, with the double address in mind. When asked what he reads, Hamlet responds the following:

HAMLET Slanders, sir. For the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful wit together with most weak hams – all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down. For yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am – if, like a crab, you could go backward. (2.2.193-201)

These lines always have two truths: the general one, common places about old age set down by a satirist – and the individual one, insulting Polonius in the safe hyde of the madman's speech. If what is 'set down' are hardly slanders, Hamlet's slurs against Polonius certainly are. Like the fool insulting the King as a swine-herd, Hamlet here repeats the spectator-function by sharing with the audience an awareness of the double sense of his speech as text in a book and performance on a stage. It is no accident that Hamlet is given a book to read from here – or to pretend to read from. His autonomous speech is independent from what is "set down", and he does not play by the book, but transgresses its boundaries "to speake streight what so euer laie on my tongues ende." (Erasmus [1509]1965: 9) It is through the fool's speech that the present time and space and the community of actors and spectators is made to matter, and to become the "matter" that this is all about. That Hamlet play 'the antic disposition' gives his words meaning for Hamlet, the character, and the performer of Hamlet simultaneously.

However, the tendency of the foolish speech of the 'antic disposition' to address the spectator has a lasting effect on the boundary between the 'world within the play' represented on stage and the space of the audience time and space of the performance. As one of the characters presents the gap between his role and the process

of embodiment that produces it, he cannot fail but contaminate the other character / actors into his notion of acting. Aren't they all bodies performing, after all? If Hamlet addresses the audience as one of them, aren't they all alike?

The 'antic disposition', we have seen, does paradoxically not hermetically seal the fool's speech within the framework of the dramaturgy of Hamlet by making it an element of the dramatic plot itself: Hamlet plays the madman and performs like a fool, and uses the transgressive potential of the fool's speech to reach outside the body of the text, while remaining inside the trajectory of his character. While the audience must suppose that Hamlet's utterances are calculated and intentional, that he is, intentionally, acting by play-acting, the attributes of foolish speech that characterize his performance at the same time place him just outside the boundaries of the fiction that the dramatic text supposedly contains and in the space of the audience, as one of them. In addition, the performance of the 'antic disposition' and the performance of *Hamlet* in general creates the same opaque surface of performance. It is not only our belief that Hamlet is "only performing" that yields the most aesthetical pleasure. It is the simultaneity that does precisely not require to decide. The awareness that Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, character of *Hamlet*, performs the 'antic disposition' within the framework of the dramaturgy of the play, fades and another awareness becomes possible: that of the 'acting disposition' to produce both performances alike, through his autonomy, during the event of the performance.

## 2. Fool's place

When he performs the 'antic disposition', Hamlet uses the fool's speech. In performance, it has the effect of foregrounding that Hamlet exists between text and performance, and that the character exists through the actor, both being present at the same time. Liminal spaces are decisive sites of this effect: The simultaneity of two terms is most visible when the distinction between both is called

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into question. At the end of the previous subchapter, I have drawn attention to the topographical aspect of Hamlet's foolish speech. His utterances reference the context of the spectators, as they cross the imagined boundary between stage and audience space and thereby generate new senses by foregrounding their double existence as utterances in text and in performance. The fool's place, however, can also be understood to be quite literally in-between. In this chapter, I will investigate the topography of the Globe and the popular forms of performance that it is rooted in. Like Eidinger hanging in the balance between the banquet table and the mud pile on Jan Pappelbaum's stage set, Hamlet adopts not only the fool's speech, but takes the fool's place, making the 'antic disposition' more clearly readable as 'acting disposition'.

In medieval societies, the fool lives imprisoned at the border of the city. As a representant of carnival in everyday life, he constitutes an enclave close to the symbolic center of power, the King. He speaks the truth of those excluded from official culture, crossing the brim between those 'below' and those 'above'. As the public theater and professional actors remain firmly rooted in the popular performance culture preceding them, the early modern player is also imagined to be in a liminal space in between as well from a literal as from a figurative perspective. Hamlet references the peculiar place of fools and actors in order to make visible a literal liminal place in performance: the brim of the stage, where the distinction between actor and character, and actor and spectator, blur into one. I will read Hamlet's encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for clues that connect the place of the actor with the place of the fool, and for the way in which the theater as a place makes the 'antic disposition' into an 'acting disposition'. References to the tradition of the fool and to the players that are about to enter the stage draw the attention to the fact that Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern perform on the brim of the stage, not entirely within and not entirely without.

The place of the fool is closely associated with the early modern notion of madness and its place in society and discourse. His position is most easily defined in contrast to the strict separation that, according to Foucault, the 'age of reason' begins to draw between the madman and the reasonable one:

From now on, madness is exiled. If man can still be mad, thinking, as the manifestation of the sovereignty of a subject who sets himself the task of perceiving what is true, cannot be insane. A division has been drawn which will soon render impossible an experience so familiar to the Renaissance: that of an unreasonable Reason, of a reasonable Non-reason. (Foucault 1972: 58, my transl.)

Before madness becomes exiled from human experience entirely as not to endanger the distinction between reason and non-reason, the fool is outside and inside the city at the same time:

[T]he madman's liminal position on the horizon of medieval concern—a position symbolized and made real at the same time by the madman's privilege of being confined within the city gates: his exclusion must enclose him; if he cannot and must not have another prison than the threshold itself, he is kept at the point of passage. He is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely. (Foucault 1973: 11)

The madman is excluded within a specific space on the threshold of the city. The fool's presence points towards the existence of an outside like an index without being quite there yet. As Foucault concludes, his place is a dynamic rather than a static one: the fool is a figure of passing and of crossing. His existence thereby opens up the space of a threshold.

In *Hamlet*, the title character assumes the fool's position on the threshold when performing the 'antic disposition'. He uses the concrete space of the theater and the historical place of the player in his time to position himself as an actor on the brim of the stage, about to leave the space of the character and to cross into the space of the audience. This is possible because in dramatic theater, the fool's position presents a challenge for the distinction between what

is 'set down' and what is 'more'. In his analysis of medieval and early modern popular drama, Robert Weimann argues: "Der Narr steht nicht vollkommen auf dem Boden des dramatischen Geschehens; seine Reaktionsweise sprengt den Rahmen der in diesem Geschehen verkörperten Auffassungen und Wertmaßstäbe." (Weimann 1975: 50) Weimann uses a spatial metaphor: the fool metaphorically does not stand on the "ground" of the "dramatic events". But in many forms of popular theater that Weimann genealogically links to the Elizabethan stage, the fool literally occupies a liminal place. By alluding to this place in his speech and conjuring it in his performance, Hamlet uses the popular tradition of the fool to highlight the 'acting disposition' in his 'antic disposition' and to place his own existence both within and without what is 'set down'.

#### *A place in between*

In the scene between Hamlet and Polonius, Hamlet's foolish speech creates a connection with the audience through the spectators' discrepant awareness of the play-within-the-play-situation and through references to the audience's present. After their conversation, for example, Hamlet dismisses Polonius with the words "These tedious old fools" (2.2.213), addressing the audience in an aside. Hamlet, at this moment, joins the audience, taking a stance off-stage towards Polonius and the spectacle he makes of himself, complicit in their derision of the 'fooleosopher'. If we imagine Hamlet's position on the stage of the Globe, Hamlet could be standing on the edge of the apron stage, his back to the spectators and looking at the spectacle with them, conversing with them about it from time to time. In his encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the three performers further explore the position of the actor between character and spectator on the edge of the stage. They do so by referencing themes of the carnivalesque culture and placing themselves in a liminal space that is well-known to audiences from popular performance practices. The distinction between *platea* and *locus*, a constitutive part of popular theater practices, lives on in the topography of the Globe. In the conversation between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, references to the place of the fool

in early modern popular tradition becomes literalized in performance, creating an analogous space for the actors at the brim of the stage:

GUILDENSTERN My excellent good Lord.  
ROSENCRANTZ My most dear Lord.  
HAMLET My excellent good friends. How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?  
ROSENCRANTZ As the indifferent children of the earth.  
GUILDENSTERN Happy, in that we are not ever happy. On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.  
HAMLET Nor the soles of her show.  
ROSENCRANTZ Neither, my lord.  
HAMLET Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours.  
GUILDENSTERN Faith, her privates we.  
HAMLET In the secrets parts of Fortune?  
O, most true – she is a strumpet. What news?  
ROSENCRANTZ None, my lord, but the world's grown honest.  
HAMLET Then is doomsday near – but your news is not true. (2.2.222-229)

Their exchange carries the marks of foolish speech: Rhetorically artful play with oppositions who are brought into apparently paradoxical relations through wordplay (happy / not ever happy), connections between repeating signifiers (happy), the allusion to the material, bodily aspect of the image chosen – the body of Fortune: (waist / her favours / her secret parts). The discussion around the well-being of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, specifically references the spatial imagery of the turning wheel of Fortune: Guildenstern feels lucky to not be permanently in luck, since the wheel of Fortune keeps on turning, transforming the lowest into the highest and vice versa. Being the “button” of Fortune can quickly transform into being the “sole of the shoe”. Mikhail Bakhtin points out how the idea of the “world inside out” is deeply rooted in carnivalesque culture:

We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the “inside out” (à l'envers), of the “turnabout”, of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous

parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a “world inside out”. (Bakhtin 1968: 11)

Hamlet picks up on Guildenstern’s metaphor and builds on it, drafting the concrete image of Fortune as a woman’s body. The center” of the wheel would revolve around “the middle of her favours”, or, as Guildenstern explains, her private parts. The obscene allusion is in keeping with the materializing nature of fool’s speech, and the image draws on the topography of the carnivalesque world view that, behind the one world, a second one is hid that only waits to come into being through the dynamic of constant reversal.

Being “in the middle” can be understood as a self-aware description of the position of the actor between the space of the character and the spectator, and his own double existence as performer and character performed simultaneously. Hamlet takes the detour of carnivalesque imagery to associate the place of the actor with the place of the fool and draws on the historical proximity between carnivalesque culture and popular performance practices. With strong ties to the celebrations structuring the year and to religious as well as popular festivities, they were based on a central dichotomy of the place of performance. Weimann minutely analyses diverse forms of premodern theater – mysteries, moralities, and minstrels, the Guild’s pageants, Mummer’s plays and May games – to illustrate how all of them rely on the distinction and interaction between the *platea* and the *locus*. Weimann insists on the continuity of a dichotomy that persists even if the architecture of the space in which the performance takes place varies, from a cart to a fixed round theater:

Hier wie dort sind zwei szenische Grundgegebenheiten hervorzuheben: einerseits eine platzartige oder plattformähnliche Spielfläche, eben die *platea*, andererseits ein Gerüst, der Hochsitz, der Thron, eben der *locus*. [...] Hier wie dort steht eine fixe, symbolische Örtlichkeit neben und auf der weiteren, mehr neutralen Spielfläche. (Weimann 1975: 123)

They represent two opposing ways of signifying the places and times of the dramatic plot:

Im Gegensatz zu diesen symbolischen *loca* wurde die *platea* nicht von vorneherein als geographisch entfernte oder fiktive Örtlichkeit betrachtet. Es war der in helles Tageslicht getauchte Schau-Platz, auf dem die kommunale Festlichkeit in Szene ging. [...]das Grundlegende Verhältnis von Gerüst und Platz ist durch den (mehr) fiktiven und symbolischen Charakter der *loca* (also der scaffolds und mansions) und den (mehr) realen und nichtsymbolischen Charakter der *platea* bestimmt. (Weimann 1975: 130)

Weimann's analysis, I argue, does not sufficiently mark that the space of the *platea* is, in fact, a liminal space that somehow constitutes an in-between between the space of the *locus*, which is inhabited by actors signifying characters, and the space of the audience. The *platea* is a place where actors and spectators can theoretically mingle. It belongs to the here and now of the performance process and thereby connects the absent worlds signified by the *loci* to the space outside of the performance space: the world that the performance is embedded in. The distinction between *platea* and *locus* is instructive, but it also conceals the fact that, in performance, the entire space is rooted in the present time and space shared by audience and the performers. What is more, the symbolic spaces signified in addition exist only through the concrete space in which the performance takes space.

Theater houses, therefore, are structured in order to construct the distinction between the here and now of the performance, and the fictional world to be represented, while at the same time foregrounding their simultaneous, double existence. In the morality *The Pride of Life*, performed in a theatre in the round (cf. Weimann 1975: 124), actors performing characters of the main action are standing on a scaffold each. They are even concealed by a curtain that marks the distinction between the fictional world signified from that in which the performance takes place. When they are acting and speaking, they come forward, once their part is done and the action moves to a different scaffold and figure, they retreat into their small

backstage space. (cf. Weimann 1975: 128-129) In the practice of performance, the division between *platea* and *locus* depends upon what Weimann calls the “Simultanprinzip“: the spectators move between different spaces that all exist at the same time. This set-up bears witness to a somewhat hybrid situation: the *loca* are spaces that signify another, fictive spaces, but they are not yet capable of signifying any fictive space involved in the action on their own. While in modern theater, the spectator stays still and all transformation occurs in the space of performance, structuring the stage space through his perspective, according to the “Simultanprinzip“, the fictive spaces need actual material spaces existing alongside each other to be signified by them. This entails that spectators and performers at times share a common space: “Hier standen die Zuschauer – zumindest bei der Aufführung von *The Castle of Perseverance* – auf dem gleichen Platz, wo auch die Schauspieler (inmitten der wogenden Menge) wirkten.” (Weimann 1975: 130)

As Joachim Fiebach confirms, the Elizabethan theater draws on carnivalesque popular culture. It uses its means and procedures, but, in contrast to the “Simultanbühne“, it modifies the topography of this popular form of theater that took place anywhere in the realm of a city or other communal space and moves the dichotomy of *locus* and *platea* into the round of the public theater:

Die wandernden Common Players hatten Interudien in der “epischen” Tradition aufgeführt: Die Darsteller verkehrten dialogisch mit Zuschauern, die Kunstfiguren stellten sich selbst vor. Sie spielten in den Innenhöfen der Gasthöfe auf einfachen Bühnen(-podesten). Die Zuschauer befanden sich sowohl vor (oder auch um) diese und auf den Galerien an den Innenseiten der Gebäude. Die öffentlichen Theaterbauten folgten dieser Raumgestaltung. Wie die einzig erhaltene Abbildung zeigt, gab es eine breite, weit vorspringende Plattform als eine Art Hauptbühne, vor der um die herum ebenerdig (die “Grube”) das Publikum stand. (Fiebach 2015: 123)

The Globe as a whole constitutes a now closed space in which, however, the dichotomy of *locus* and *platea* persists: the dialogical



6 Lars Eidinger's Hamlet affected by the 'anti disposition' © Arno Declair

exchange with the spectators, the positioning of the spectators, and the “doppelte Dramaturgie” that produces a tension between the closed fictional universe of a play and the present tense of the performance are mirrored in the different spaces of Elizabethan theater. However, theaters such as the Globe already hint towards a stricter separation between a neutral stage space, serving to signify any fictional time and space, and the invisible space of spectators in the present time and space of the performance. The Elizabethan apron stage constitutes a hybrid space in-between: Even though performers usually do no longer move around about the audience, the apron stage that protrudes into the auditorium can be part of the *platea*, of the audience’s space, and signify certain places at the same time. The diverse *loci* have transformed into one ‘discovery’ behind the arras that can also signify diverse absent spaces. The distinction between *locus* and *platea* is therefore not entirely subsumable into the round of the Globe. The decisive differences, however, can be transferred: While the *locus* is the space belonging to *dramatis personae*, only, actors and spectators share the *platea*. The performance tradition that Weimann evokes is characterized by a moving perspective on the *platea*, not a centralized one, and this remains the background for the audience’s experience in the public theater, as well.

The representant of the movement between the space of the audience and the space of the characters is the fool. He exists both in the space of the audience and in the space of the *dramatis personae*, for instance in religious plays:

Der Narr ist eine ganz eindeutige *platea*-Kreatur: Er spricht zu den Dienern, Bettlern und Soldaten wie zum Publikum; aber die hochgestellten Personen scheinen ihn einfach zu übersehen. Für sie existiert der Narr nicht, auch wenn er – zum Publikum sprechend – ihr Tun und Handeln ausgiebig kommentiert. Dies wird in dem volkstümlichen Saint Didier wohl besonders beispielhaft deutlich: Dort kann er den Boten auf einem Esel folgen, und doch ist er für die seriösen Figuren einfach nicht anwesend: Er selbst steht nicht in ihrer Welt und nicht in ihrer Zeit, sondern nachweisbar auf dem Boden des Publikums. Ja, der Narr kann sogar die Stoff-Zeit des Geschehens von dieser

Figuren-Position her distanzieren: “Dies muß vor sehr langer Zeit passiert sein”, bemerkt er über das Stück zum Publikum! (Weimann 1975: 128-129)

Weimann’s analysis clearly shows that the distinction between inhabitants of the *locus* and those of the *platea* allows neither for a distinction between what is ‘set down’ and what exists in the time and space of the performance, nor actually between actors and spectators. The fool and a few other actors are actually both: they share the space of the *platea* and a distanced position towards the worlds signified in the space of the *locus*.

Tiffany Stern has more precisely differentiated the spaces of the early modern stage and their different attributions to the spaces that Robert Weimann identifies, and equally argues that the topography of the theater includes a liminal space, a place in-between:

When ‘A vast and stately Theater’ is described as being ‘adorn’d with a Scene magnificently drest’, the ‘scene’ is shown to be a crucial aspect of the theatre’s sumptuous visual life; while, when backstage actors are said to ‘put their heads through the hangings of the Scene’ in order to see the audience, the scene is shown to straddle a crucial divide – its curtained entrances allowed actors to be partially in the fictional world of the stage, and partially out of it in the factual backstage world of the tiring-house. (Stern 2013: 23)

In Stern’s description, the Clown was literally “in between” the discovery and the apron stage, straddling the boundary created by the arras in front of the tiring house. When Philip Sidney deplores how playwrights are “mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion[...].” (Sidney [1595]2004: 161) he alludes to the specific location of the clown in the theater, sticking his head out of the hangings of the scene to see the audience. Sidney’s concern with generic distinctions betrays his Aristotelian affiliation and the related suspicions against the clown’s speaking ‘more than is set down’. It is consistent

that Sidney uses a spatial image: In the public theaters that inappropriately mingle genres, there is a literal space in which all actors are also present as such, not just as characters. Hamlet's 'antic disposition', the performance of a madman by a Prince, is a literalization both of Sidney's complaint and the position of the actor in a space in-between.

The first interaction between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can therefore be read as an allusion not only to the carnivalesque culture of joyous relativity, that never forgets about the reversibility of high and low. It is also an allusion to the place of the actor in the round of the theater:

'The Actor', says Webster, 'is the Centre', and this is a statement both literal and metaphoric. Positioned towards the front of the stage and in the very middle of the auditorium, the Elizabethan player commanded the theatre like the hub of a wheel and was the focus of attention whether he spoke or not. (Mann 1991: 1)

This means not only that he is the center of attention, but that he is "in the middle", able to move to the brim of the apron stage and create a common ground with the audience, being vehicular to their participation in the world presented on stage. If the actor is the hub of a wheel, the attribution of spaces for characters and spaces for actors hinges on him, and his performance can reverse their position like the wheel of Fortune. If the 'antic disposition' can be more generally understood as an 'acting disposition', it necessarily does not remain limited to Hamlet. At the beginning of their scene, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern join him in a moment of foolish, carnivalesque play, that simultaneously comments on their place in the theater.

### *The theater as place*

While Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern speak about their place as actors in the theater, their conversation also reflects upon the place of the theater in the world surrounding it. Instead of having the world of the characters drown out the world that the theater,

the actors and the spectators live in, it references it. As Mahler describes, the actors and the audience “share the same deictic centre”, which “forms the basis for a great number of quasi-spontaneous, and spontaneous, ideas using the deictic centre of the outer level to produce confused, disrespectful, carnivalesque laughter.” (Mahler 2007: 153) Instead of producing an illusion of its own, it highlights the reality the theater stands in, using Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as “intermedial go-betweens” (Mahler 2007: 148) in order to produce moments of “presented representation” in which “the audience’s attention is unmistakably drawn to the fact that they are this very moment watching a play.” (Mahler 2007: 148). Expanding on Mahler, however, I argue that this does not necessarily distance actors and audience from the ‘world-within-the-play’ that the performance is presenting, but anchors this world in the theater as a place that itself constitutes a threshold between stage and world, the space of the characters, and that of actors and spectators.

Reading Ann Thompson’s and Neil Taylor’s Q2-based edition only, the dialogue might simply be understood to stage Hamlet’s successful scheme to tease forth the fact that his friends are actually spying on him. Indeed, Hamlet’s pretense is not at all comprehended by the rather dull pair of courtiers, who let themselves be pressured into acknowledging: “My Lord, we were sent for” (2.2.257). In the Folio, however, there are several additions to the text in this scene. They continue the tone of witty word play of the first few lines, and thereby keen emphasizing the liminal position of all three characters as they pursue their common reflection on the state of the world and their respective position in it. The fool’s position in the world becomes a theme of their conversation:

HAMLET Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERNE Prison, my lord?

HAMLET Denmark’s a prison.

ROSINCRANCE Then is the world one.

HAMLET A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons – Denmark being one o’th’ worst.

ROSINCRANCE We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.

ROSINCRANCE Why, then your ambition makes it one: 'tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space – were it not that I have bad dreams.

(F 2.2.238-2.2.267 / 1-18)

Rosincrance and Guildensterne, as they are called in F, fail to understand Hamlet's allusion to his situation: He chooses a metaphor to describe his state to his friends. Imprisoned in the enclave of the 'antic disposition', he is forced to hide his true intentions. In fact, the imagery of the episode successfully blurs the relationship and reverses the intuitive order between spaces within and spaces without. If Denmark is a prison to Hamlet, Rosencrantz jokingly says, "your ambition makes it one: 'tis too narrow for your mind." If the prince feels constrained, it is due to his aristocratic power drive. But Hamlet claims precisely the opposite: "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space – were it not that I have bad dreams." Hamlet is no ordinary prince, striving to expand – as opposed to Fortinbras, seeking to add more and more territories to his kingdom. Like a fool, he is always at the center of things, attached to the King and closest to the power, almost as powerful as the king himself in the nutshell of his foolish enclave: "Like Triboulet at the time of Francis I, they were not actors playing their parts on a stage, as did the comic actors of a later period, impersonating Harlequin, Hanswurst, etc., but remained fools and clowns always and wherever they made their appearance:" (Bakhtin 1968: 8) In *Hamlet*, prince and fool are closely connected in the space of a nutshell, like actor and character are in every performer taking on the role of Hamlet.

The prison episode from the Folio edition of *Hamlet* uses the image of the prison to transpose the place of the fool as a carnivalesque enclave within society to ascribe the round of the Globe and the performance that occurs in it an analogous role. As an actor, Hamlet's infinite kingdom is only limited by his "distracted globe"

(1.5.97), where the “tables of [his] brain” contain writings and re-writings – and by the limits of the nutshell that is the Globe theater itself. That the borders of the theater are the borders of the imagination means not necessarily and not exclusively that it can signify anything; but also that, in its function as *platea*, it always relates to the world that surrounds it here and now, during the performance. Like the world represented in the *locus* does not exist without the theater, the character does not exist without the actor’s performance. Both, building and body, have their own real and present place, and Hamlet’s conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern makes sure to show that this place is not necessarily different from the one represented. The stage is maybe just one cell in a larger prison.

The theater, Hamlet contends, is not a neutral space which signifies all spaces absent. As its close association with the position of the fool, Hamlet, suggests, it is a place with its own present existence in performance. Even the spaces it signifies within its “distracted globe” (1.5.97) are in turn relatable to and rooted in the world that the theater itself exists in. This is highly contingent on the architectural structure of the Elizabethan stage. Tiffany Stern astutely points out that, like the actor, the theater as an architectural object did not necessarily have to ‘disappear’ to make way for the ‘airy nothing’ of a fictional place in time, produced by the mere imaginative addition of the spectators. She conjectures that “Shakespeare wants not to be constrained either by the overarching metaphors of his stage, or its crude realism” (Stern 2013: 31), attempting to move beyond a simple microcosmic representation of the ‘world’, its heaven, earth and hell, in the architecture of the globe, while at the same time referencing other places in the simple wooden space of the theater building. “Imagination”, Stern argues, “seems, for Shakespeare, to be scarcely distinguishable from its theatrical home and ultimately located there.” (Stern 2013: 32) It does have a ‘local habitation’, and this habitation need not necessarily be ignored or overridden by imagination, but sparks it and leads it in peculiar directions, too:

A fixed prop, the playhouse itself dictated and circumscribed imaginative space for Shakespeare's audience, not in an overtly literary fashion – though the result is literary – but by its locational, visual and aural presence; in so doing, this chapter has argued, it prescribed the imaginative world of Shakespeare himself too. (Stern 2013: 32)

That the theater might be shaping the imagination rather than being transcended by it becomes obvious in the short monologue in which Hamlet explains his condition to his friends – or rather pretends to do so, after they have admitted to spying on him in the name of the King and Queen:

HAMLET I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and Queen moults no feather. I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason? How infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable? In action how like an angel? In apprehension, how like a god? The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so. (2.2.259-276)

“Look you”, Hamlet says. The actor might gesture and point towards the ‘heavens’: “Over the stage, extending out from the tiring-house above the balcony or tarras, was a cover, ‘shadow’ or ‘heavens’ usually supported by two pillars rising from the stage.” (Gurr 2008: 151) The actor of Hamlet also re-situates himself in the space of the theater, pointing out its concrete elements and spaces: “This goodly frame / the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory” (2.2.264-265), says Hamlet, most probably standing on and pointing to the apron stage jutting out into the sea of groundlings, just like “a point of high land that juts out into the sea or a large lake; a headland: a rocky promontory.” (OED s.v. promontory, n.)

Tiffany Stern shows how Hamlet's monologue gives an additional sense to that which 'seems' and that which 'is' by using the theater as a prop. His explanation might be read as a description of a melancholic state: everything beautiful seems ugly to Hamlet. But, according to Stern, Hamlet also directs the attention to the beauty of the theater building and to that which, in fact, 'is' in the moment of performance, rather than that which it 'seems' to be – that is, a fictional place in Elsinore:

For Hamlet, the 'earth' seems a sterile promontory, but is a 'goodly frame'. 'Frame' as well as 'earth' was a way of describing the stage - Thomas Nashe portrays a 'Theater of peasure' as having 'a artificial heav'n to overshadow the faire frame'. The 'canopy', meanwhile, seems a congregation of vapours, but is a 'brave ore-hanging [...] roof, fretted with [...] fire' - a stage-heavens was fretted ('embossed') with stars. Even the congregations of vapours may give Hamlet the excuse to gesture towards the 'groundlings' standing below the stage in an area congruent to 'Hell'. (Stern 2013: 20-21)

"This goodly frame the earth", "this most excellent canopy" are concrete elements of the theater's architecture. Therefore, as Stern notes, Hamlet's monologue works to foreground the fact that himself, the other actors and the spectators share a common space in the theater: When they are "asked to acknowledge by gesture the heaven and hell defined by the contours of the theatre [...] the very moment when the characters appeal beyond the limits of the world, the players resituate the words back in the theatre" (Stern 2013: 17-18), Stern concludes.

Hamlet's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern thereby not only tells us something about the place of the early modern actor on the threshold between character and audience, looking back onto the character with a distance. It also reveals the place of the theater in the world. It is precisely not defined exclusively as a neutral space in which absent worlds are signified, according to what is allegedly "the master-metaphor" of Shakespeare's canon: a metaphor Shakespeare used to remind the spectators that they themselves were not much different from actors, with movements

and will prescribed by God, or the Devil, or the King.” (Stern 2013: 16) I agree with Stern that this metaphor is turned upside down by those references to the world that actually correspond to the architectural reality of the theater. Those references, I have shown, do not distance the audience from the fiction presented but, on the contrary, allow for them to recognize the relationship between their own present time and space and Hamlet’s world. As Stern points out, “Hamlet is trapped in the story of Hamlet enacted on the beautiful stage of what is tellingly named, in Hamlet, ‘this distracted globe’ (1.5.97)” (Stern 2013: 21) Hamlet exists in the world of the character in the Danish Elsinore, and in the Globe’s wooden round simultaneously.

### *The place of the players*

The scene between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern extensively references carnivalesque culture and the place of the fool in society and in performance practices in order to draw attention to the place of the actor in the liminal space of the *platea*. By the same stroke, it also uses the theater as a place where fiction and world are made to relate to each other not only metaphorically, but concretely through the present time and space of performance. While the passages I have read so far manifest this peculiar, self-aware nature of the ‘antic disposition’ as ‘acting disposition’ through the pragmatics of the utterances and the choice of imagery, towards the end of act two, there is talk of an actual theater performance. Ironically, the remedy for Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’ is supposed to be the arrival of players. The exchange that follows about the troupe of players whose arrival Rosencrantz has announced situates the performance of *Hamlet* itself within a historical evolution in which players ‘settled down’, thereby opening up a reflection about the place of the players in early modern society, which in turn feeds into potential readings of Hamlet as a character.

Rosencrantz announces the arrival of the players to distract Hamlet from his melancholy:

ROSENCRANTZ To think, my lord, if you delight not in man  
what Lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you;

we coted them on the way and hither are they coming to offer you service.

HAMLET. He that plays the King shall be welcome,—his Majesty shall have tribute of me; the Adventurous Knight shall use his foil and target; the Lover shall not sigh gratis, the Humorous Man shall end his part in peace; and the Lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ Even those that you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.

HAMLET How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation an in profit, was better both ways.

ROSENCRANTZ I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

HAMLET Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

ROSENCRANTZ No, indeed they are not.

(2.2.281-299)

The short exchange between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern thematizes the transitional period that precedes the creation of groups of Common Players and their residential activity at London public theaters. The troupe of players that come to Elsinore seem to reverse the direction of the historical evolution of the past century. As long as actors were associated with nomadism, they were regarded with skepticism by audiences that Fiebach estimates “frühkapitalistische, besonders dynamischen Schichten”:

So dürften diese Gruppen eine tiefe Abneigung gegen die wandernden Common Players als die Fremden, Unsteten, Flüchtigen gehegt haben. 1545 hatte eine königliche Verordnung sie in eine Reihe mit “the Navy ruffians, vagabonds, masterless men” gestellt, und 1572 stellte sie ein Gesetz mit den strafrechtlich verfolgten Vagabunden auf eine Stufe, um, wie es hieß, “to stop poor strollers from pestering the country”, und so die Anzahl lizenzierter Truppen zu beschränken. (Fiebach 2015: 122)

When troupes of Common Players were founded and public theaters built, players became ‘sedentary’ (ref. Fiebach 2015: 120-122). The topographical change fundamentally modifies the situation for professional theater makers:

Jedoch änderte sich die soziale Diskriminierung der professionellen Theatermacher fast schlagartig, als sie sich als gleichsam gut bekannte, vertraute Ensembles in den nun stehenden Theatern niederließen und so zu Ansässigen, zu “Beheimateten” geworden waren. (Fiebach 2015: 122)

All this shows that historically, indeed, Players’ “residence, both in reputation and in profit, was better both ways” when the Players who are coming to Elsinore did not travel. Introducing players as *dramatis personae* gives Hamlet the opportunity to discuss the status of the players performing *Hamlet* by introducing fictional Danish players who represent a past just overcome. As David Mann extensively shows in *The Elizabethan Player. Contemporary Stage Representation*, this scene from the second act of *Hamlet* is only one of many examples of the appearance of ‘player-roles’ in early modern drama. Players are the object of harsh criticism, biting parody and passionate defense in early modern drama. Independently from the judgement and perspective of the respective instances, their appearance is a reflection of the historical circumstances:

The phenomenon of the player-role is part of an historical process which proceeds quite rapidly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It can be seen in the broader context of dramaturgy as a series of mediating techniques, but from a social perspective it is a recognition, at least partly acknowledged, of changing circumstances[...]. (Mann 1991: 217)

The itinerant troupe that visits Elsinore is an anachronism with regards to the assumed historical date of the fictional plot, and can therefore be assumed to deliberately relate the events on stage to the changing circumstances in question. As Robert Weimann points out, this reference to players in general and to those performing *Hamlet* in particular has, once more, the effect of distancing the performer from its character:

Die Antwort enthält somit eine Anspielung auf zeitgenössische Verhältnisse; die Figurenposition auf der *platea* fördert wiederum einen Anachronismus, der dazu dient, die Welt des Stückes mit den Bedingungen der wirklichen Welt zu

assoziiieren – wodurch die schon vorhandenen Spannungen zwischen dargestellter Rolle und darstellendem Schauspieler nur noch verstärkt werden mußten. (Weimann 1988: 248)

Weimann's analysis emphasizes how the diverse procedures we have observed interact with each other. The fact that Hamlet's 'antic disposition' takes place on the *platea* and thereby references the spectators' time and space, and their world outside the theater, allows for the allegedly Danish players to be clearly perceived in terms of the situation of English players in and shortly before public theaters. The discussion about the players' situation then directs the attention towards the players that currently perform characters named Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The players that visit Elsinore come from another time; but the conversation about them draws Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from the atemporality of their fictional location into the here and now of the performance, in which they, players performing *Hamlet* discuss the latest innovation of their trade. At that moment, they are theater makers that reflect on their origins and the future of their trade – which depends on the audience that stands in front of them, in the same space, at the same moment.

### 3. Fool's performance

Hamlet uses the 'antic disposition' to reflect upon the performance of the actor as something 'more than is set down', but producing it at the same time. In the first act of the play, the Ghost's appearances problematize a view of the actor's performance as the concealment of a true interior by a theatricalized exterior. As an alternative, the scenes around the 'antic disposition' develop a notion of acting as a process that rests on the simultaneous existence of actor and character and ultimately dissolves the boundaries between actors and spectators to create a community between them. The fool's speech, as we have seen, while seeming nonsensical, gains contradictory but simultaneously valid meanings from mere semantics and its pragmatic context. The place of the fool is simultaneously outside and inside, a traveling threshold that crosses the boundaries of society

as well as the boundaries of the actors' and the spectators' space, revealing that the space and time of fiction takes root in the present time and space of performance and the world surrounding the theater.

In the following subchapter, I will read the scenes of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' in the light of the early modern's fools relation to transformation and metamorphosis. The early modern perspective on madness and its carnivalesque corollary, Folly, associates both with the power to transform. For Shakespeare's contemporaries, metamorphosis is one of the dangers of madness and of play-acting alike. In Hamlet, the 'antic disposition' presents a more complex vision of performance. Neither condemning it as deceitful dissembling, nor idealizing its alleged authenticity, it highlights the aesthetic pleasure of transformation in itself. That Hamlet adopts the 'antic disposition' allows him not only to dissemble, but to transform with a virtuosity to be enjoyed by the audience. This additionally connects Hamlet to the spectators participating in the performance, as the fool's transformative power – unlike the imagined talent of an actor pursuing a *modèle idéal* – is accessible to all. The so-called "Fool of Clayworth", quoted bei Robert Weimann, states it simply:

In comes I that's never been yit  
 With my big head and little wit.  
 My head's so great my wit's so small  
 I can act the fool as well as you all.  
 (quoted in Weimann 1975: 80)

This play presents a fool in performance. In keeping with his particular place, this fool comments upon his own entrance and his role: acting the fool. The fool here claims that he is performing foolishness like a role – but as well as anybody else. The fool's line therefore proposes a view on human existence as self-aware role-playing, and role-playing as the creation of an illusion that should not be taken for 'nature', but that can also not be isolated from the performance itself. Building on the seemingly contradictory performance of the fool, Hamlet's performance of the 'antic disposition'

foregrounds the physical, phenomenal aspect of play-acting, showing how the actor and his body change and morph in a way that produce a character that is co-extensive with the performance but can be commented upon and watched from a distance. Like the Clayworth fool's, Hamlet's foolish performance creates a continuity between him and the spectators in the Globe, and between the performance of *Hamlet* and the world that goes on outside, before and after it.

*Performance transforms*

As we have seen above, Hamlet's 'antic disposition' is first described to the audience of *Hamlet* by others. When Claudius describes Hamlet's behavior to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the beginning of the second scene of act two, he interestingly avoids the paradigm of madness and reason:

KING [...] Something have you heard  
Of Hamlet's transformation – so call I it  
Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man  
Resembles that it was. What it should be  
More than his father's death, that thus hath put him  
So much from th'understanding of himself  
I cannot dream of.  
(2.2.4-10)

Claudius describes Hamlet's state as the result of a transformation. The change he is going through affects his interior and exterior feature, so much so that he no longer resembles himself. The Ghost as a figure of the actor was troubling because of its similarity to something obviously absent and past, implying an unsettling distance to the lost original, or even a deceitful usurpation of its shape. Hamlet's 'antic disposition', Claudius attempts to explain, cuts the ties with 'Hamlet' altogether. In his words, this entails a transformed relationship of Hamlet to himself. He has been put "so much from th'understanding of himself", has been displaced and disoriented from the knowledge of who he is. Of course, Claudius has trouble describing Hamlet's new state without recurring to the idea of a clear separation between a theatricalized surface and an

inscrutable interior. Claudius presumes to have insight into the “inward man”, the impossibility of which, in keeping with the skeptic philosophy of his time, Hamlet has precisely identified as the root of the epistemological anxiety he suffers from. Through his transformation, Hamlet has become an enigma for a subject theory that usually assumes that access to the “inward man” can only be had through the “theatricalized exterior”, assuming by the same stroke that the latter be the result of an intentional and self-determined expression. Claudius’ analysis is paradoxical: Does the transformation of Hamlet’s outward performance, his “theatricalized exterior”, denote the complete inner transformation accurately? The construction “nor... nor” would seem to suggest that a disconnected transformation of the one without affecting the other might be possible. Claudius is certain that Hamlet’s disposition is precisely not a false play, an outward transformation leaving the interior untouched. But, like a baffled spectator, Claudius is unsure of the relationship between Hamlet’s performance and his interior, and opens up his mind to the possibility that the relationship of both might, in fact, not correspond to the idea of a surface-depth paradigm after all. Maybe the Queen’s concise addition to the description goes in a similar direction: the changes operating in her son are too deep, her son is “too much changed” (2.2.36), to assume some kind of corrigible error or temporary disturbance in an otherwise stable relationship. Claudius’ circumscriptions mostly illustrate the lack of precise understanding of Hamlet’s disposition at the historical moment right before the oppositions structuring acting as well as madness stabilize, that is: before both madness and acting become equally illicit and permanent delusive forms of existence. It is “more than he can dream of”, and he cannot quite put the finger on what it is, precisely. Taking Claudius’ description seriously as part of the ‘acting theory’ that the ‘antic disposition’ serves to develop in Hamlet, it paves the way for an understanding of acting as a fundamental transformation that preserves a distanced relationship between one’s self and to the self one represents. While Hamlet’s madness threatens the integrity of his person, play-acting, on the other hand, makes the process of transformation visible as a powerful and pleasurable process of production. Performance,

Claudius' lines suggest, goes beyond the surface-depth-paradigm and the corresponding notions of impersonation and character representation.

Hamlet's transformation might better be understood in terms of the figure of the fool and the properties of its performance. The carnivalesque culture and the foolish figures that carry it over into the literature of the Renaissance abound in figures of transformation of a dizzying pace. Robert Weimann, among others quotes a Vice of the apt name of Haphazard, starring in the play *Appius and Virginia*:

Haphazard

.... Yea, but what am I? A scholar, or a schoolmaster, or else some youth.

A lawyer, a student, or else a country clown:

A broom-man, a basket-maker, or a baker of pies,

A flesh or a fishmonger, or a sower of lies?

A louse or a louser, a leek or a lark,

A dreamer, a drumble, a fire or a spark?

A caitiff, a cutthroat, a creeper in corners,

A hairbrain, a hangman, or a grafter of horners?

By the gods, I know not how best to devise,

My name or my property well to disguise.

A merchant, a May-pole, a man or a mackerel,

A crab or a crevis, a crane or a cockerel?

Most of all these my nature doth enjoy;

Sometime I advance them, sometime I destroy....

As big as a beggar, as fat as a fool,

As true as a tinker, as rich as an owl:

With hey-trick, how troll, Trey-trip and Trey-trace,

Troll-hazard with a vengeance, I beshrew his knave's face;

For tro and troll-hazard keep such a range,

That poor Haphazard was never so strange:

But yet, Haphazard, be of good cheer,

Go play and repast thee, man, be merry-to-yere.

(*Dod.*, IV, 118)

(quoted in Weimann 1975: 196)

The Vice figure Haphazard disguises, but it also devises. It conceives and creates in order to transform its victims, in turn, to "advance" and "destroy". Its different shapes are no costumes, but

states that its nature enjoys, like a temporary mode of existence. Weimann compares this proteic figure with the Danish Prince, thereby confirming that the “transformation” that Claudius identifies can also be read as a positive vision of a performance that is not limited by the notion of a necessary correspondence between inside and outside:

Es ist eine so vieldimensionale Gestalt wie – auf ganz anderem Niveau – Hamlet: ein Scholar, ein Student oder doch – ein country clown? Ein Korbmacher und ein Fischhändler, aber dann auch ein Träumer und ein drumble, (laut W.C. Hazlitt “a slewwpy-head or a stupid” – ein verträumter Dummkopf). Auch Prinz Hamlet, der Scholar und Student, bezeichnet sich selbst als “rogue and peasant slave”, als “A dull and muddy-mettled rascal”, und vergleicht sich mit “John-a-dreams” (II.2.543, 561 f.) (Weimann 1975: 196)

Weimann’s comparison between Haphazard and Hamlet is limited by his view of Hamlet as a literary text and Hamlet as a character only. In his double existence as a character performed by an actor, however, the proteic dimension of Hamlet opens the possibility that performance might not remain a disguise on the surface, but only be the beginning of series of potentially endless transformations that go beyond the dichotomy of interior and exterior.

### *Power of performance*

For all the fun its transformation promises, Haphazard does also flaunt its power to “advance” and “destroy”. Its position on stage is a privileged one, as is Hamlet’s when he performs the ‘antic disposition’. The dramaturgical function of the ‘antic disposition’, that is, to reveal others’ true intentions, is of course not entirely obliterated by the foolish self-reflexive effects that it produces in performance. Especially in his interactions with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’ reveals the power of his performance over the other characters which are equally hiding their intentions to reveal the reason for his madness. The peculiar power of his position is, I argue, that he has a different understanding of performance altogether, one closer to Haphazard’s idea of transformative performance.

The game in which all parties attempt to reveal the opponent's deception by deceit reaches an impasse when Hamlet conjures up Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's old friendship with him as a reason for more honesty:

HAMLET Anything but to th'purpose. You were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour. I know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ To what end, my lord?

HAMLET That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonance of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more deat a better proposer can charge you withal, be even and direct with me whether your were sent for or not.

ROSENCRANTZ What say you?

HAMLET Nay then, I have an eye of you. If you love me, hold not off.

GUILDENSTERN My lord, we were sent for.  
(2.2.243-258)

Simulating intimacy and honesty on his side, Hamlet draws forth the corresponding behavior on his friends' side. Hamlet points out right at the beginning that the situation requires a feat of play-acting. However, in keeping with the aspects of the fool's performance that the 'antic disposition' emulates, Hamlet's encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern calls into the question the view of acting in terms of the surface-depth-paradigm nonetheless.

Mirroring the scene of Rosencrantz' and Guildenstern's confession is a short scene in act three right after *The Mousetrap* (3.2.286-363). After the performance, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz join Hamlet in order to transmit his mother's request for a meeting (another "screen-scene" arranged by Polonius, who will watch, to finally find out what is troubling Hamlet so much). Hamlet's foolish joking prevents Guildenstern from properly delivering his message, and he asks of Hamlet: "Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame and start not so wildly from my affair." (3.2.300-301) But the latter excuses himself with his madness: "Sir I cannot. [...] Make you a wholesome answer. My wit's diseased." (3.2.310-312) Using

his ‘antic disposition’ like an inscrutable armor, Hamlet prevents his interlocutor from performing their task correctly – and mocks their incapacity to do so, to boot. As the players return with “recorders”, flutes, Hamlet requests one for a demonstration:

HAMLET [...] Will you play upon this pipe?

GULDENSTERN My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET I pray you.

GULDENSTERN Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET I do beseech you.

GULDENSTERN I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET It is as easy as lying. Govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

GULDENSTERN But these I cannot command to any utterance of harmony. I have not the skill.

HAMLET Why, look you now how unworthy a thing you make of me: you would play upon me! You would seem to know my stops, you would pluck the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ. Yet cannot you make it speak.

(3.2.342-360)

Hamlet draws an analogy between playing the flute and his friends’ attempt to uncover the reason for his behavior. When he tells them that it is “as easy as lying”, it is a way to let them know that he already knows of their betrayal. But it also signals that their acting – the way in which they only act like friends while being spies – assumes the wrong definition of acting. Intended to “pluck the heart from [his] mystery, to sound [him] from [his] lowest note to [his] compass”, implies that Hamlet and his ‘antic disposition’ are only a surface beneath which his interior truth is concealed. If Guildenstern lacks the skill to play him, Hamlet, like an instrument in order to make it speak, it is because he goes about it with the wrong idea of play-acting. Hamlet here rejects the attacks of antitheatrical critics against actors as liars, and still claims a peculiar knowledge and power for performance: “[T]here is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ”, he assures, insisting on the actor as a

material instrument, an organic body with a voice. The actor's instrument is his body, Hamlet insists, and others cannot play it. It might be a stretch to argue that Hamlet here also implies that each actor's individuality determines the product of his performance, instead of concealing itself behind the performance of a role. Nonetheless, Hamlet's pun can be read in terms of a different idea of performance. It transgresses the surface-depth-paradigm that characterizes Rosencrantz' and Guildenstern's approach to it and is best described as the circular movement between theater, folly, and illusion that Foucault describes: Folly "has merely to carry its illusion to the point of truth." (Foucault 1973: 34) In their capacity to transform illusion into truth and vice versa, theater and madness are structurally analogous: "In this extravaganza, the theater develops its truth, which is illusion. Which is, in the strict sense, madness." (Foucault 1973: 35) The 'antic disposition' and the 'acting disposition' are akin by sharing the one truth: that their truth is illusion. Appearances are the business of Folly and of the theater. However, it does not follow a logic of sudden revelation from the outside, of a 'truth ex machina', but simply affirms that the ambivalence between appearance and essence might be resolved either way. Theater's truth is the illusion; and this is, strictly speaking, madness. As the truth of madness is the awareness of the limits of reason, the truth of performance, is the awareness that access to the inner truth might, in the end, be inaccessible – even to itself.

Instead of losing "th'understanding of [one]self", Hamlet is in fact having a clearer understanding of himself as a character performed by an actor's transformative performance, playing his organ like no one else can. It is in this understanding of the actor's performance that Hamlet draws most on the foolish performance as it for instance manifests in the self-description of Erasmus' Folly. Robert Weimann has untangled it in terms of the 'acting disposition' as it is articulated in Hamlet:

Dieser Diskurs kennt "weder Schminke noch Verstellung": "Wie ich äußerlich erscheine, so sieht es auch in meiner Seele aus". Diese unverschämte Ironie umgeht den allegorischen Bruch von Bild und Sein und andere Konventionen der

Trennung von Innen und Außen, Seele und Sinnlichkeit. An ihre Stelle tritt ein neues, komplexeres Verhältnis von Darstellendem und Dargestelltem, das die Allmacht des Allgemeinen besser zu repräsentieren weiß. (Weimann 1988: 32)

Folly transcends categories of interiority and exteriority that govern not only the rules of the social performance of daily life, but a certain understanding of play-acting, as well. Folly stands for a new, more complex understanding of performance that conveys a specific power. Indeed, the power Hamlet's 'antic' or 'acting disposition' consists in the consistent questioning and dissolution of all boundaries, including the one between character and actor, actor and spectator. While the theater thereby becomes a place of collective transformation in which the actor's power to perform is equaled by an analogous capacity on the spectator's side, figures such as Hamlet convey power also because they introduce into the theater the life of those who watch it, encountering "[die] Repräsentation der Macht mit einer neuen Macht der Repräsentation [...], die die Quellen ihrer andersartigen Kraft aus der Aneignung und Kommunikation des wirklich gelebten oder erhofften Lebens vieler bezog." (Weimann 1988: 35)

#### *Pleasures of performance*

The power of performance partly resides in the pleasure that actors and spectators derive from the self-aware and boundary-crossing transformation that is possible during the present time and space of the performance as event. The Vice Haphazard constantly transforms, possessing and enjoying each of the natures named in its monologue: it is of "good cheer", "merry-to-yere" within the play of his natures. We have already seen above how the fool's speech creates references to the audience's time and space, placing Hamlet in a space in which he, as an actor, takes a spectator's stance towards his own performance of the 'antic disposition' and of Hamlet in general. Robert Weimann describes precisely the visibility of the divide between the actor and the character as a source of pleasure. In his reading of *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare und die Macht der Mimesis*, Wei-

mann alludes to the simple fact that the actor that performed Hamlet in the first performances at the Globe – most probably Richard Burbage – was not, himself, a prince or an aristocrat. The fact of the divergence between the social position of the actor producing the representation and the social position of the role represented can be concealed in an illusionist agenda, however, the ‘antic disposition’ creates an opposite effect: For the aristocrat and the prince Hamlet, it is particularly inappropriate to represent the madman. But the role of the fool is closer to the social status of the actor, even more: It is pure performance, showing the character as its ephemeral and almost accidental product. The aesthetical pleasure might lie precisely in not concealing the divide between actor and character, and in enjoying the transformation instead: “Die in Frauenkleider gesteckte Mannsperson oder das Königskostüm des Dorfnachbarn sind doch zunächst deswegen komisch, weil Maskierung und Wirklichkeit dem Zuschauer gleichermaßen gegenwärtig bleiben.” (Weimann 1975: 92-93)

It is the historical proximity of Shakespeare’s theater to joyful transformations of Vices and fools in popular theater, according to Weimann, that helps explain the huge popularity and aesthetic appeal of plots and roles involving disguises – just as Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’. The aesthetical pleasure stems from the simultaneity of two modes of perception that remain in constant tension with each other; on the one hand, ‘believing’ the earnest dramaturgical element of the prince’s pretense, on the other hand, enjoying the transformative achievement of the actor, on the other. As a medium between both, the actor’s person on stage becomes perceivable as an agent of this joyful transformation. Erasmus’ Folly also emphasizes the pleasure that arise from her performance under different names. In a characteristically paradoxical rhetorical move, while claiming to be most enjoyable as ‘herself’, she still insists that she comes under different guises:

And yet I can not tell to what purpose it shoulde serue, to represent a certaine shadow, or image of my selfe, where as presently ye maie discern me with your eies. For I am here (as ye see) the distributrix and dealer of all felicitiee, named Moria

in Greeke, in Latine Stultitia, in Englishe Folie. (Erasmus [1509]1965: 10)

The evidence of her appearance in the perception of the audience contrasts with the different names that Folly presents here: like Haphazard, she devises many names for herself, but remains the same, distributing felicity through performance. To perceive the foolish performance of, say, Haphazard, as a deceit to be unveiled would take away the pleasure of the theater experience altogether, as Erasmus' Folly makes clear:

Ye shoulde see yet straightwaies a new transmutacion in thynges: that who before plaied the woman, shoulde than appeare to be a man: who seemed youth, should shew his hore heares: who countrefaited the kynge, shulde tourne to a rascall, and who plaied god almightie, shulde become a cobbler as he was before. Yet take awaie this errour, and as soone take awaie all together, in as muche as the feignyng and counterfaytyng is it, that so delightet the beholders. (Erasmus [1509]1965: 37–38)

The “transmutacion” that Folly describes is a source of aesthetical pleasure – if one is disposed to accept its illusory status. Erasmus' Folly expands her insight to make a statement about human life in general, using the common metaphorical relation between theater and life; in reverse, her digressions about a self-aware transformation in life can help flesh out the alternative understanding of the actor's transformation that transpires in Hamlet's ‘antic disposition’. As Paul Menzer shows, the transformations of well-known actors from one Playing Company between different roles is a central aesthetic asset of repertory theater as it first came up in London in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

After all, repertory playing requires if not relies upon versatility. Consider the dexterity an actor like Richard Burbage commended since, as John Astington recently noted, ‘When we imagine Burbage's playing as Hamlet, Lear, or Macbeth, we should also think of him, say, as Malvolio, adapting his physique, face, and voice to the frosty confines of that role’. Indeed, it was often for their ‘Protean’ abilities that the period's leading players were celebrated. (Menzer 2013: 143)

The close connection of Hamlet with early modern popular culture and especially the figure of Folly, therefore, makes visible an acting style relying much more on the idiosyncrasy of the actor's bodies and performances as starting points for a virtuose transformation, than on their capacity to conceal themselves behind the roles. If the pleasure of transformation stems from its inherent tension to something that somehow remains recognizable as the same, Claudius' description of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' is that of a pleasurable theater performance. If he no longer resembles himself, that is precisely what makes his performance of the 'antic disposition' pleasurable, as the performer of Hamlet becomes visible beneath both parts. The focus on the Protean that transpires from the few sources that provide insight into the reality and theory of early modern acting seems deeply connected to Lars Eidinger's performance of Hamlet in Ostermeier's staging of the play. In their staging, they fully embrace that the 'antic disposition' in itself has a predisposition to encourage a performance that, while part of the role of Hamlet, foregrounds the actor that produces it, by inviting him to use the full spectrum of the instrument that is his body.

This is all the closer to early modern performance, as 'antic' also designates popular performance practices and their styles that involve the human body as an instrument. Thomas Lodge describes the practices involved in the carnivalesque practice of instauring a Lord of Misrule as "to coine bitter ieasts, or to show antique motions, or to sing baudie sonnets and ballads" (quoted in Weimann 1975: 64). Folly equally reports similar physical action at a pageant she imagines Greek Gods to hold:

[W]han the gods are sette at bankette, he plaieth the iester, now with his lymphaultyng, nowe with his skoffyng, and nowe with his ouerthwarte woordes, to prouoke them all to laughter. Than cometh Silenus that horeheaded louer, treading the hornpipe, with Poliphemus boisteously stampyng, and the Nymphes trippyng barefooted, The Satyres halfe gotes dauncyng the Antikes. (Erasmus [1509]1965: 24-25)

The antique or antike is part of a series of performance formats that involve the use of body and voice – juggling, limping scoffing,

stamping, tripping, singing. This enumeration recalls the categorization of performative practices quoted by Joachim Fiebach, based on the physical action that is performed. Practices that involve a narration or another object of representation, such as the “interlude”, are distinguished from the others from the middle of the 15th century onwards:

Die erste umfasste die, die ihre Körper durch Gesten und Sprünge verändern und die entweder “nackend” sind und oder “schreckliche Masken” tragen. Die zweite Gruppe erzählte skurrile Geschichten, und die dritte, die er als einzige für annehmbar hielt, waren Musiker und die “reciters of history”. (Fiebach 2015: 120)

Nakedness and terrible masks show a range of physical performances that are not necessarily associated with the impersonation of a character. Critics of the theater such as antitheatricalist Philip Stubbes even insist on the close connection of the theater with these practices of ‘purely’ physical performance in the popular culture of his time. He outright designates these as “madness”, strengthening the connection between ‘antic’ and ‘acting’:

then, marche these heathen company towards the Church and Church-yard, their pipers pipeing, their drummers thundring, their stumps dauncing, their bells iyngling, their handkerchiefs swinging about their heds like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters skirmishing amongst the route: [...] Then, the foolish people they looke, they stare, they laugh, they fleer, & mount upon fourmes and pewes to see these goodly pageants solemnized in this sort. (quoted in Weimann 1975: 63)

At the center of this kind of performance is the physical feat of transformation. The sudden changes of countenance, the incoherence of outward expression and its incongruence with a hypothetical inward truth are characteristic of Folly. She describes those that behave like fools under the influence of a divine possession as follows: “and sodeinly without any apparent cause why, dooe change the state of theyr countenaunces. For now shall ye see them of glad chere, now of as sadde againe, now thei wepe, now

thei laufh, now they sighe, for briefe, it is certaine that they are wholly distraught and rapte out of them selues.” (Erasmus [1509]1965: 23)

In *Hamlet*, the type of performance that foregrounds the virtuosity of the individual performer is adopted by the protagonist of the tragedy and serves to produce him as a character. The effect of this performance is to dissociate the actor’s body from the role of the Prince, not in order to oppose the actor to the role, but to connect both through a transformative performance that foregrounds the metamorphic quality of the ‘antic’ and the ‘acting disposition’. The metamorphic acting that Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’ presents and values is closely related to the idea of the actor as authority over his creation, in dialogue with the author and what the latter has set down for them. The fluid boundary between improvisation and what is ‘set down’ in Eidinger’s performance of *Hamlet*, for example, exploits the play’s self-awareness of its existence between the antagonistic forces of two concepts only just forming, the text and the performance. Within that tension, Hamlet’s ‘acting disposition’ proposes to keep the antagonism dynamic by using the actor’s leeway to fill out what has been ‘set down’ with his own autonomous individuality. In fact, to play ‘more than is set down’ is, in many existing performative genres that evolve at the same period as the theater of the London public stage, at the core and the objective of the performer’s artistic prowess. It is true that forms of performance preceded and accompanied the performance of play-texts in the public London theater that did not rely on a book that actors were to play by, but instead gave prompts or indications for a performance that would then remain improvised. Joachim Fiebach sums up the importance of the actors’ performance for early modern theater at large:

Bei den populären Truppen der Engländer waren für einige Jahrzehnte die Schauspieler, die lebendigen Körper als Macher des neuen Theaters zentral, nicht die Dichter, die Schreiber, auch wenn deren Texte unabdingbare Grundlage der neuen Kunst wurden, und die Commedia dell’Arte formierte sich im 16. Jahrhundert als aliterarische Commedia all’improvviso, die

gleichsam nur in den während der Aufführung ausgeführten Aktionen der Darsteller produziert wurde. (Fiebach 2015: 119)

The *Commedia dell'Arte* is, per definition, 'more than is set down', as its appeal lies precisely in the inventiveness of the performers – who often narrate structurally similar plots, the so-called *lazzi*, in diverse variations. What is set down in medieval performance texts is often

merely pointing to cultural set pieces or offering a description of speech or frameworks for the improvisational arts of the performers: "Then let the lover approach, and let Mary greet him; and when they have talked a little, let Mary sing to the young women", directs the *Benediktbeuern Passion Play*, without specifying what Mary and the lover are to say. Certainly improvisation continued to have a central place in Renaissance culture (theatrical and otherwise). (Stone Peters 2000: 103)

Fiebach's formula aptly designates the actors as the makers of theater, those who perform (the performances) in the double sense of the word. What is certain is that, at the turn of the 16th century, actors were so important as co-authors of the play-text that their name has often been transmitted to us through the printed traces of the plays, sometimes more so than the playwrights: "The play is not only 'anonymous' (and has remained so), but the title page [of *A Knack to Know a Knavel*] points out that it 'hath sundries tymes bene played by Ed. Allen and his Companie. With Kemps applauded Merriementes.'" In a reversal of the roles that have been established since, "Edward Alleyn and William Kempe, two of the most famous actors of the 1590s, here serve to authorize the play-text an anonymous playwright has produced." (Erne 2003: 42) Even more, the title page indicates that their performance was not 'more than is set down', but what is 'set down' promotes that it contains the entirety of performance, both that contributed by the author and that contributed by the actors.

This degree of prominence of the actor's contribution to the play in performance is characteristic for early modern performance practices in the early moments of the opposition between text. An

intriguingly similar view on the relation of the actor to what is ‘set down’ is articulated by theories reimagining acting within post-dramatic theater’s critical stance towards the dramatic text. Wolf-Dieter Ernst’s theory of the actor in the era of the post-dramatic focuses on the performative, energetic and affective style of acting:

Jetzt tritt wieder stärker ins Bewusstsein, wie der Schauspieler, verstanden als affektiver Schauspieler, performativ agiert. Seine Tätigkeit wird dabei als eine energetische aufgefasst: Der Schauspieler spielt mit der Entladung und Hemmung von Energien, er nimmt die Rollenfigur als eine Vorschrift, die er affektiv über- und unterbietet. (Ernst 2012: 11)

Wolf-Dieter Ernst provides a way to reflect acting neither as the self-eliminating representation of a role by an actor; nor as the entirely independent presentation of the actor’s presence. It places the actor’s performance in a distant, but necessary relationship: as an ‘over-’ or ‘underachievement’ with regards to the frame of the role. Ernst’s formula seems particularly apt to analyze the ‘antic disposition’ as he describes the position of the actor as a dynamic relationship not only with the spectator, but with the role scripted by an author. It incorporates the idea of a norm, an expectation created by an author – and reproduced, for instance by a spectator such as the one who admonished Lars Eidinger to “continue”. This norm, however, is constituted not by an ideal model that the actor seeks to identify with, but is the object of a dynamic process of approximation and distancing:

Der Akt der Identifikation ist nicht auf der Achse von ‘sein’ und ‘als ob’, von tatsächlicher und behaupteter Verwandlung angeordnet. [...] Man kann daher folgern, dass der Schauspieler sich zugleich anähert und Distanz zum affektiven Kern der Figur schafft. Genauer: Er schafft Distanz durch Annäherung[...]. (Ernst 2012: 43-44)

The ‘affective’ dimension of acting of which Wolf-Dieter Ernst speaks here is especially relevant for the ‘antic disposition’ as it counters a conception of acting that aims at mastering the body and

its expression in order to then, master the audience through a particularly convincing representation of character. Instead, affect introduces an element of the loss of control by the actor that de-centers it and at the same time consciously accepts the unpredictable nature of the audience as part of a collective physical experience:

Damit übersteigt der Affektbegriff freilich das subjektzentrierte Denken, welches gerade auf die Herrschaft über den affektiven Leib und das Publikum abhebt. Der Affekt stellt den Bezug zum Anderen der Vernunft her, den körperlich erfahrenen Kontrollverlust, den ein Subjekt im Affekt erleidet, sowie die Unberechenbarkeit, die von einem Publikum ausgehen kann. (Ernst 2012: 16-17)

The foolish performance that is Hamlet's 'antic disposition' is a manifestation of this idea of acting. In the threatening self-estranging transformation perceived by Polonius, in the powerful uncovering of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's intention, and in the close complicity with the life and times of his early modern audience, moving over the brim of the stage into their space, Hamlet performs and requires exactly this type of unpredictability on both sides. It is a play with the boundary that comes close to the image that Wolf-Dieter Ernst choses to illustrate the idea of the 'affective actor':

Der Schauspieler schafft sich also einem Tier gleich sein Revier auf der Bühne, sperrt sich dort ein wie in einem Käfig und erzeugt damit einen Abstand zum Publikum vor dem Käfig. Und wie sich angesichts jeden Käfigs die Aufmerksamkeit darauf richtet, wie man der Gefangenschaft entfliehen könnte, so kann nun – diesem Bilde nach – auch der Schauspieler unsere Aufmerksamkeit deshalb fesseln, weil wir wissen, dass er in der Lage ist, nach einem Ausweg aus der Gefangenschaft zu suchen. (Ernst 2012: 22)

The image of the escape from a prison is telling with regards to Hamlet, who feels that "Denmark is a prison.", and instinctively rejects the shackles of the Ghost's imperative and the genre of the revenge tragedy. Imprisoned not only in the prison of a possibly usurped state of which he might be the legitimate heir, Hamlet is at

the same time an actor ‘imprisoned’ on stage. Other than the imprisonment of Hamlet, the prince, that of Hamlet, the actor, has an aesthetic value. In the possibility that the actor might effectively cross the boundaries of the role ‘set down’ for him and into the present time of the audience lies the aesthetic pleasure. Ernst’s description of a contemporary performance involving an actor and a dog seems apt to describe the challenges of a style of acting that needed to compete with the equal passion of Shakespeare’s contemporaries for the bearbaiting ring, where they saw a chained wild animal from a more or less safe distance. In fact, as Andreas Höfele has shown, not only did the stage of the Globe and bear-baiting arenas share a common space in the topography of London, but animals and actors became the object of a

double vision or synopsis, in the literal sense of ‘seeing together’, of superimposing one image upon the other. What spectators perceived as human or as animal no longer exists in clear-cut separation; it occupies a border zone of blurring distinctions where the animal becomes uncannily familiar and the human disturbingly strange. (Höfele 2011: 15)

Being instructed and edified through performance might not have been the audience’s aim, but to expose themselves to the liminal experience of potentially destructive transformation with the help of the animal in the cage of the stage.

The pleasure of transformation resides as much with the spectators as with the actors. In the performance of Hamlet, the scenes of the ‘antic disposition’ create a complicity between Hamlet and the spectators: together, they enjoy the spectacle of the other characters making fools of themselves, but also the potentially unlimited transformations undergone by the performer of Hamlet. The position of the antic Prince on the *platea* which I have discussed in the previous subchapter warrants the occasion for a collective experience that, at times, is entirely detached from the plot of *Hamlet*, and consists in the common experience of the phenomenon of performance in the theater. After the performance of *The Mousetrap* in act three, Polonius and Hamlet share such a moment with the audience:

POLONIUS My lord, the Queen would speak with you, and presently.  
 HAMLET Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?  
 POLONIUS By th'mass and 'tis like a camel indeed.  
 HAMLET Methinks it is like a weasel.  
 POLONIUS It is backed like a weasel.  
 HAMLET Or like a whale?  
 POLONIUS Very like a whale.  
 (3.2.365-373)

This short moment is an interesting hiatus in the frenetic race of joking and cunning performance that is the display of the 'antic disposition'. As the editors of the Arden Hamlet note, "this scene is supposedly set indoors at night, it is generally played as if Hamlet is pretending to see clouds and Polonius is humouring what he assumes to be madness." (n.3.2.367-373) However, another effect is possible: "It would have made different and better sense in the open-air Globe (where indeed, in 2000, spectators looked up at the sky as Hamlet gestured)." (ibid.) Polonius and Hamlet might be standing at the edge of the apron-stage, foregrounding the common place of the fool and the audience on the *platea*, looking up at a sky that is ambivalently located between metaphor and fact. Including Hamlet as text and performance into our considerations and readings provides insight into what is 'more' within what is 'set down', and into where to look for the effects of performance within the textual traces. It gives us the opportunity to read this moment as an expression of what those on the *platea* – actors and spectators alike – see in the mirror of the sky: their own infinite potential to transform through performance.

### *Performance kills*

In this chapter, I have read the scenes in which Hamlet performs the 'antic disposition' for evidence of an 'acting disposition', one that proposes an alternative to the modern notion of play-acting as self-canceling character impersonation, and, therefore, foregrounds the play's ongoing self-awareness as text and performance. In the last subchapter in particular, I have evoked the play's notion of acting as a practice of transformation that makes the character visible

as a product of the actor's physical metamorphosis, and allows the actor to make this process of performance visible for spectators, even to join them in a community of potentially transformable individuals.

As much as early modern theater references its relationship to the world surrounding it, and evokes the possibility of autonomous self-fashioning, the play – intentionally or not – implies how this power is not available to all. Some simply submit to the destructive violence of such a process, as the creativity that transformation yields is precluded from them. The only transformation away from the rigid misogynistic gender ideals that the female characters carry in *Hamlet* is the one from life to death.

It is precisely the joyful and autonomous transformation of Hamlet and the actor performing him on stage that comes at the price of a deadly and entirely non-theatrical fate for Ophelia. It also shows that the theater is also reflective of the gendered violence pervading other public spaces at the time. Allegedly driven mad by his rejection, which must remain mysterious to her, Ophelia drowns at the end of the play. *Hamlet* shows – adequately, one might say – that theater and performance are no egalitarian spaces, as Ophelia's performance turns into fatal madness.

Hamlet's experimentation with the madness of acting also demonstrates its limits. While the fool might be able to enchant and disenchant from the safe position of his enclave, madness can transform in dangerous ways, literalizing the transformation of the living into the corpse that Hamlet, the fool, evokes so often in his foolish speech, beginning with his comparison of Polonius' daughter with a rotting cadaver. In *Shakespeare's Festive Comedies*, C.L. Barber describes a generic difference that rather precisely describes the difference between Hamlet, whose "fooling with madness in the comedy is an enjoyment of the control which knows what is mad and what is not" (Barber 1959: 261), and Ophelia, who "moves into regions where the distinction between madness and sanity begins to break down, to be recovered only through violence" (Barber 1959: 260-261) Ophelia's fate is an example of the latter principle.

For her, there is more at stake in the attempt to make sense of Hamlet's state. She remains entirely invisible in between her final encounter with Hamlet in act three, and her appearance in act four, in which she is already labelled as 'mad' by the other characters. As part of his pretense, Hamlet violently denies any affection for her in their encounter in the first scene of act three. The 'invisibility' of this characters' evolution, which is of course due to its actual absence from the textual trace nor as performance, prevents Ophelia from creating the complicity with the audience that the antic Hamlet benefits from and from enjoying the powers of performance. Relegated to her room, to a space backstage, Ophelia remains an instrument of Hamlet's virtuosity. Mere spectacle, she remains a surface for the attributions of all audience members, on and off stage:

[...] Her speech is nothing  
 Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
 The hearers to collection. They yawn at it  
 And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts  
 Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.  
 (4.5.7-13)

It is Claudius again, who finds similar words for Ophelia's state as he did for Hamlet. She, too, becomes "Divided from herself and her fair judgement" (4.5.85), and Claudius adds: "Without the which we are pictures or mere beasts" (4.5.86) In terms of Wolf-Dieter Ernst's 'affective acting', Ophelia's madness leaves the space of the actor's performance. Far from manifesting the actor's autonomy over the boundaries of the cage it is placed in, Ophelia's fate is literally that of a prisoner<sup>29</sup>, only taken out of her room by father, brother or lover when needed for their schemes or for the plot of

<sup>29</sup> In their 2015 production *Ophelia's Zimmer* (opening on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz), Alice Birch and Katie Mitchell have imagined Ophelia's existence in her room during the play, showing how she is slowly killed by the violence of her repetitive life in the captivity of them en in her life. For a more detailed reading of the gendered aspects of acting in performance, cf. Leroy 2020.

the play. Within the universe of *Hamlet*, Ophelia's last performance in act four draws the conclusion, so to speak, of Hamlet's division from himself, and illustrates its consequences on others:

*Enter OPHELIA*

LAERTES Let her come in.

How now, what noise is that?

O heat, dry up my brains, tears seven times salt

Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye.

By heaven, thy madness shall be paid with weight

Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May,

Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia,

O heavens, is't possible a young maid's wits

Should be as mortal as a poor man's life?

OPHELIA (*Sings.*) They bore him bare-faced on the bier

And in his grave rained many a tear.

Fare you well, my dove.

LAERTES Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge

It could not move thus.

OPHELIA You must sing 'a-down a-down', an you call him 'a-

down-a'. O how the wheel becomes it. It is the false steward  
that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES This nothing's more than matter.

(4.5.151-168)

Ophelia's performance of madness is not unlike that of Hamlet in terms of literary form. She speaks in songs and seemingly non-sensical speech which, given the context of Polonius' recent murder, makes complete sense. Speaking about Polonius' demise, Ophelia uses the carnivalesque *topos* of the wheel of Fortune, and makes a reference to "the romance tradition, where servants steal their masters' daughters" (n.4.5.166-7) that the audience will be familiar with. While not necessarily joyous, it is an entertaining performance drawing on the contemporary frame of reference of the audience, with song and possibly dance. It is the comments of Ophelia's brother Laertes that direct the attention towards the lethal turn that the foolish performance takes in the case of Ophelia. The parallels that Laertes draws to Hamlet's situation are remarkable. Ophelia's apparition, like the Ghost's, sparks revenge – through the mere effect of her performance. It is, as Laertes confirms, "more than matter", pointing out truths about the context more than 'sensible'

speech would. But his statement is not accidentally different from Polonius' interpretation of Hamlet's speech as "madness" that "hath method in't". The emphasis of Laertes' description can well be placed on "nothing". While Hamlet's foolish performance displayed the power of the actor to transform at the edge of the precipice, and to transmit the dissolving powers of metamorphosis to the audience by forming a joyous community with them, Ophelia is a victim of the dissolution of the self that looms, in madness and performance alike. Ophelia's madness is also a spectacle, but one in which she becomes mortified by the gazes of the onlookers, too.

Most importantly, it is one in which she does not participate but that requires her death to be enjoyable. Beyond any psychologizing reading of a character's fate, the difference between Hamlet and Ophelia is the difference between two ways of acting, two styles of performance, one vivifying, the other mortifying. Hamlet, as we have established above, is a living body that "refuses to be declared a work of art, or be made into one". As an actor, he "instead undergoes processes of embodiment. Through these processes, the body is transformed and recreated." Ophelia's performance and body, however, are transformed into a work of art: "The human body might turn into an artwork only through its mortification, as a corpse. Only then does the body temporarily achieve a state of actual being, even if this state can only be maintained by a swift mummification." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 92) As a woman, she can not act as an artist, only be eternally petrified as an art work. "Kein Wunder, dass Ophelia dem Wahnsinn verfällt", Andrea Ochsner believes; and goes on to explain the inherent desirability of Ophelia as a dead woman, part of the creation of a "Nekro-Ästhetik" omnipresent in our culture:

In der Kontrastierung von Hamlet und Ophelia wird für manche Interpreten Ophelias eigentliche Stärke klar: Ophelia geht den Pakt mit dem Tod ein, den Hamlet in seinem Monolog nur in Betracht zieht. Sie gibt der "consummation devoutly to be wish'd" (III.1.63 f.) im Geschlechtsakt mit dem Tod nach, weshalb ihr toter Körper in der Rezeption unablässig erotisiert wird. (Ochsner 2014: 457)

In Hamlet's 'antic disposition', the idea is developed that in performance, the body happens and transforms, embodies itself and others. In a relationship between performing and being that is continuous through the matter of the bodies through which both exist, the horizon is the ultimate transformation from life to death. Ophelia is an example of the fact that the actor, in control of these processes, is ultimately safe, whereas Ophelia is literally killed by the 'antic disposition' of her former lover, which she has caught like a disease. As Fischer-Lichte points out, the end of her performance is the end of her life, and the beginning of a historical mortification into an eternal work of art, enshrined in a final image of lovely madness: "Thoughts and afflictions, passion, hell itself / She turns to favour and to prettiness." (4.5.180-181), Laertes claims, forgetting that this can merely be true for him as a spectator of Ophelia's madness. For Ophelia, only one transformation is possible: From pretty virgin to pretty corpse.



*7 Nils Kahnwald as Ophelia © Thomas Aurin*

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## CHAPTER THREE – The spectator in the mirror

*Hamlet* is a play about theater. In chapter one, I have shown how Hamlet dramatizes the author-actor-relationship and contextualizes its own double existence as text and performance by deconstructing the authority of the author and highlighting the active role of actors and spectators in the event of the performance. Chapter two has taken a closer look at the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance by reading Hamlet's 'antic disposition' as an implicit acting theory that is informed by the popular performance tradition of the fool. In both chapters, the figure of the spectator has been present time and again as the subject decoding and experiencing the performance of *Hamlet*; and characters from *Hamlet* have been spectators in various situations: as witnesses of the appearance of the Ghost, when listening in on staged situations (the so-called "screen scenes"), and as baffled spectators trying to make sense of Hamlet's 'antic disposition'. If *Hamlet* keeps representing its own awareness of its double existence as text and performance, it necessarily includes the audience as an indispensable element of its performance context. Chapter three, which reads the scenes from the arrival of the Players at the end of act two through to the performance of *The Mousetrap*, focuses on the spectator. This focus is determined by the play itself: in its third act, it shifts its attention from the negotiations between what is 'set down' and what is 'more' towards the actor-spectator-relationship. In the scenes of act three in which the Players are involved and *The Mousetrap* is performed, the play anchors itself within the historical performance context, situates itself with regards to the early modern readings of classical poetics of *mimesis*, takes a stance towards the antitheatrical discourses of its time and situates itself within an evolution towards the distinction between text and performance. When reading act three of *Hamlet* closely, its reflections on the role of the spectator reveal a conception of *mimesis* that attempts to valorize the double existence of the play as text and as performance. Instead of imagining the performance as an

obstacle to the purpose of the play, it develops a concept of theatrical *mimesis* that fully realizes the purpose of what is ‘set down’ through what is ‘more’, only in the performance and through a reciprocal connection between actors and spectators. It develops its own theory of *mimesis* as a process of crossing and exchange between the interchangeable positions of actor and spectator in performance. According to *Hamlet*, the constitution of the ‘world-within-the-play’ in performance requires ‘more than is set down’, an affective and effective connection between actors and spectators that requires of both to cross the boundary between stage and audience space. The spectator is the key to a different concept of *mimesis* in *Hamlet*.

## *Hamlet’s* Regietheater

Ostermeier’s *Mousetrap* features no troupe of professional players. It is a performance conceived, directed and performed by Hamlet himself. After Rosencrantz and Guildenstern failed to draw the true reason for his ‘antic disposition’ from Hamlet, he nonchalantly invites them to come see it: “Ach so, das habe ich euch noch gar nicht erzählt. Heute Abend wollten mein Freund Horatio und ich ... wir wollten heute Abend so ein kleines Theaterstück aufführen. Vielleicht habt ihr ja Zeit und Lust vorbeizukommen.” (SF 2008: 22)

Before the performance of Ostermeier’s version of *The Murder of Gonzago* begins, the audience witnesses the necessary preparations: the mobile podium with the banquet table features as a kind of backstage area, where Hamlet (Lars Eidinger) and Horatio (Sebastian Schwarz) are seen preparing. Eidinger has removed the crown he was wearing upside down during the scenes in which he performs the ‘antic disposition’; his body is partly hidden by a dark, open trench coat. He holds the camera in his hand and is heard directing Rosenkranz (Stefan Stern): “Also, ihr seid eingeweiht... das legst du da hin, das hast du präpariert...” (Ostermeier and Rosacher 2008: 1’11’10) Horatio steps in front of the golden curtain to set up his props, overseen by Hamlet: “Das legst du da hin, die

Folie, das Blut...” (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: 1’12’16), while Hamlet frantically moves from the backstage area to the front, camera already in hand. As Sebastian Schwarz disrobes to reveal his costume for the play-within-the-play – cowboy boots and white briefs, a crown, beard and sunglasses clearly reminiscent of the costume of Claudius / Old Hamlet –, Hamlet briefly dispenses final acting instructions: “Und sprich die Texte bitte so, wie ich sie dir vorgemacht habe. Und fuchtel nicht so mit den Händen in der Luft herum!” (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: 1’12”22) Polonius (Robert Beyer) enters, arriving a little early, and walks into Hamlet and the scantily clothed Horatio:

POLONIUS. Um Gottes Willen!

HAMLET. Jetzt spieß mal nicht so rum, ey. Wird sich der König unser Stück ansehen?

POLONIUS Zusammen mit der Königin, und zwar sofort.

HAMLET Sagen Sie ihnen bitte, sie mögen sich beeilen.

(SF 2008: 29)

Polonius suspects that the play will contain something unworthy of a royal audience, but reluctantly goes to fetch Gertrude and Claudius. Like a director right before an opening night, Hamlet uses the few minutes before the beginning of the show to remind Horatio – and the audience – of the main purpose of staging the *The Mousetrap*:

HAMLET Ok, wichtig. Hör mir zu! Nimm mal die Scheißbrille ab. Also, wenn die Szene läuft, die den Todesumständen meines Vaters ähnelt, dann beobachte mit allen deinen Sinnen meinen Onkel. Wenn sich an der einen Stelle nicht sein Gewissen wie aus einem Zwinger befreit, dann war’s ein böser Geist, was wir gesehen haben, und ich hab schmutzige Phantasien.

HORATIO Hamlet, wenn er während der Vorstellung irgendwas stiehlt, ohne dass ich’s merke, werde ich’s bezahlen.

HAMLET Ok – da kommen sie zur Vorstellung. (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: 1’12”38-1’13”00)

The show begins before Claudius, Gertrude and Polonius have even taken a seat on the brim of the mobile podium, facing the off-stage audience, who watches the performance staged by Hamlet as well as the on-stage audience’s reactions to it. As they slowly arrive,

rushed by an impatient Hamlet – “Es hat schon angefangen! Setzt euch dahin, bitte. [...] Und macht ihr bitte eure Telefone aus! [...]



*8 Dumb-show: Lars Eidinger / Hamlet as Player Queen rejoices in usurped power after poisoning the Player King (Sebastian Schwarz) © Arno Declair*

Es gibt eigentlich keinen Nacheinlass!” (RB 2010: 22) Horatio begins to perform the ‘dumb-show’ preceding the play-text of *The Murder of Gonzago* (SD 3.2.128.1):

He kneels in the dirt, wields a long sword, a demonstration of military and virile force, accompanied by groans of effort and pain. His performance is filmed live by Hamlet, then Polonius, and replicated larger than life on the gold curtain. Hamlet, after handing over the camera to Polonius, disappears behind the gold curtain, where he takes off his trench coat and makes a dramatic entrance with accessories that copy the costume elements that Judith Rosmair (Ophelia, Gertrude) wears when playing Gertrude. Wearing an exact replica of the wig that is part of Gertrude’s attire, the same sunglasses and otherwise only black lace panties and black stay-up stockings, there is no room for doubt as to who Hamlet is impersonating, and Gertrude herself seems to realize it: She immediately gets up, surprised, then annoyed. Hamlet’s outfit as “Player Queen” signals the purpose of *The Mousetrap*: The Player Queen, it indicates, actually is Gertrude, and the latter is supposed to recognize herself.

The Player Queen squeezes blood from a little bottle that trickles down from each of her nipples, obviously taking sensual pleasure from it, while the Player King continues to brandish his sword and edgy rock guitar riffs play louder and louder in the background. Claudius and Gertrude watch, embarrassed. The Player Queen approaches the Player King, and they share a passionate kiss. As if fulfilling an odd sexual fetish, the Player Queen proceeds to entirely wrap up the Player King’s torso in a large roll of plastic wrap, now assisted by Rosenkranz. The Player Queen first demonstratively pours milk, then blood between the Player King’s body and the plastic – while the King first seems to enjoy their games, his moans progressively become moans of pain and fear; Rosenkranz sprays the plastic wrap with water that he drinks from a goblet and spits from his mouth. The Player Queen triumphantly grabs the crown and places it on her head, as the Player King falls to the floor, frantically slapped by an overenthusiastic Rosenkranz (cf. Fig. 8).

Hamlet, now back in his role as young director, interrupts the show: “Also, vielleicht erstmal bis hierhin.” (SF 2008: 30)

Gertrude seizes the occasion to voice her disapproval of what is obviously an attack against her: “Was bedeutet das, Hamlet?” – but Hamlet deflects: “Wir werden es gleich von diesem Menschen erfahren: Schauspieler können ihren Mund nicht halten, sie sagen immer alles.” The dramatized version of *The Murder of Gonzago* begins, not without a final hissed indication from Hamlet to Horatio, as he begins to speak the Player King’s monologue: “Ich hab’s dir gesagt, Mann, nimm die Hände runter...” But the indication does not help: What follows is the parody of a declamatory style of acting, in which bodily gestures illustrate the content of what is spoken in an exaggeratedly mannerist way – clearly “out-herod[ing] Herod”. The Player Queen swears her undying love to the Player King. The climactic moment of the monologue is addressed directly to the actual Queen Gertrude by Hamlet who replaces the high-pitched, fake woman’s voice by his own: “Als Nonne in der Zelle will ich leben, im Diesseits und im Jenseits, sollen Qualen mich ohne Ende jagen, wenn ich jemals als Witwe eine zweite Ehe schließe.” Eidinger takes off his wig to make a commentary on the play, breaking his role and speaking as Hamlet again: “Oh, wenn sie das Versprechen jetzt bricht...” (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: 1’16”05-1’18”22) The Player King retires for his nap, sitting down next to Urs Jucker, to stare at him while snoring loudly.

The first scene of the dramatic version of *The Mousetrap* is over, and Eidinger changes back into Hamlet. He openly dons the fatsuit that had been disguising his body all along, while making casual conversation with his mother (cf. Fig. 9):

HAMLET Und, Mutter, wie gefällt dir das Stück?  
GERTRUDE Die Dame übertreibts mit ihren Beteuerungen, finde ich.  
HAMLET Oh, aber sie wird ihr Wort halten.  
CLAUDIUS Bist du dir sicher, dass es nichts Verletzendes enthält?  
HAMLET Nein, nein, das ist nur gespielt, kein echtes Gift, gar nichts Verletzendes. (Mayenburg 2008: 34)



*9 Hamlet / Lars Eidinger changing back into his fatsuit © Arno Declair*

Hamlet proceeds to narrate the plot and announces to Claudius: “Du wirst bald sehen, dass es ein fieses Stück ist, aber was solls? Du, König, und wir, wir haben ein gutes Gewissen, uns berührt das nicht – soll der wundgeriebene Gaul zusammenzucken, unser Nacken ist unversehrt.” (Mayenburg 2008: 34) Meanwhile, after putting the fatsuit back on that is part of Hamlet’s costume, Eidinger has added a few costume elements and changed into Lucianus, nephew to the Player King, with a small beard, a sober black shirt and suit and an avenger’s cape. He encourages himself: “Los, Mörder, lass die scheußlichen Grimassen und fang an!” (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: 1’19”51) and begins performing, accompanied by Rosenkranz playing the flute on the carton core of the plastic wrap – only to interrupt again after pouring ‘poison’ from the empty milk carton into the Player King’s ear. He explains, just in case it had remained unclear: “Er vergiftet ihn im Garten wegen seiner Position, sein Name ist Gonzago, die Geschichte ist überliefert und in einem sehr gewählten Italienisch verfasst; gleich werdet ihr ihn sehen, wie der Mörder die Liebe von Gonzagos Frau gewinnt.” (Mayenburg 2008: 35) This is too much for Claudius – he gets up and attempts to leave but falls over his feet into the curtain. Moments later, a jubilant Hamlet jumps around on the stage. He has put the crown back on, upside down, of course; and has become his – ‘antic’ – self again.

### *Crossing boundaries*

As a director of his show, Hamlet controls the production of the play-within-the-play: he instructs his players about the blocking and directs their acting. Eidinger’s Hamlet controls the temporal thresholds into and out of the performance, by marking its beginning and its end (from “Es hat schon angefangen” to “Also, vielleicht erstmal bis hierhin”, SF 2008: 29-30) Starting from the textual traces of *Hamlet*, this staging adds an additional turn of the screw to *The Mousetrap*: As director of the play-within-the-play, Hamlet directs not only others, but himself, too. By awarding Hamlet multiple functions in the production of the play-within-the-play, Ostermeier’s takes the opportunity provided by the play to ‘reduplicate’ not only positions such as the author’s and the actor’s within

the play, but also that of the director and the spectators. The foregrounding of the double existence of Hamlet as actor and character continues in his staging of *The Mousetrap*: It is the first moment of the show in which Eidinger takes off the fatsuit that had been disguising his figure to reveal his actual body. The attention is drawn to the trim and trained, almost naked body that had been hidden precisely in order to picture Hamlet as a fat, physically rather unattractive person, therefore begging the question: is it really Eidinger as Hamlet that is impersonating the Player Queen here? Or are we finally witnessing the 'real' Eidinger behind Hamlet, now in the role of Player Queen? In *The Mousetrap*, Ostermeier and Eidinger further exploit the strategies found for the 'antic disposition': as it becomes ever more unclear when Eidinger performs Hamlet, in turn performing other roles, and when he switches between the impersonation of different characters, the constant crossing of these imagined boundaries between planes of fiction and reality – the world in which Eidinger performs and the off-stage audience watches, the 'world-within-the-play' of *Hamlet*, the world within the play-within-the-play – the distinction between what is performed and the performance itself becomes increasingly unreliable. When the spectator intervenes in a play, the idea of the play as the *mimesis* of something contained in it becomes fundamentally disrupted. On the contrary: it is precisely the capacity of the *Mousetrap*'s characters and events to be related to the reality outside the play and to touch its spectators, who recognize themselves within the play, that completes its purpose: "to catch the conscience of the King."

Ostermeier's director-actor Hamlet gives all the instructions for the production of *The Mousetrap*, and carries them out himself; at the same time, like the character in the textual traces of *Hamlet*, he is a spectator of the play-within-the-play, as well. After foregrounding the double existence of Eidinger's Hamlet as actor and character in his staging of the 'antic disposition', Ostermeier highlights the active part that spectators take in theater by making Hamlet into not only spectator, but also director of the play-within-the-play.

The director is the first spectator of any play from the first day of rehearsal onwards. Usually, the director loses his agency the moment that the performance plays. But in the case of Ostermeier's *Mousetrap*, the director gives instructions in the middle of the performance ("Ich hab's dir gesagt, Mann, nimm die Hände runter!", Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: 1'16"19); enquires after a spectator's opinion ("Und, Mutter, wie gefällt dir dieses Stück?"), SF 2008: 32), and helps the audience get to the 'right' interpretation of the play: "Er vergiftet ihn im Garten wegen seiner Position..."(SF 2008: 32). The multiplication of Eidinger's roles – Hamlet as director, actor and spectator of the play-within-the-play – reaches its climax when Hamlet, the director, encourages Hamlet, the actor, to finally act out the script of the character Lucianus: "Los Mörder, lass die scheußlichen Grimassen und fang an!"(SF 2008: 32) Through the shifts between different positions involved in the performance of the play-within-the-play, Eidinger / Hamlet moves constantly between two planes whose distinction might be taken for granted by modern spectators: he jumps back and forth between the world-within-the-play – identifying it as "das Stück" – as opposed to the reality of the situation in which the *Mousetrap* is performed.

Thomas Ostermeier decides to reinforce the boundary-crossing potential of the *Mousetrap* from the beginning. Chapter two left off as Hamlet ended his encounter with Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, for whom he has successfully performed the 'antic disposition'. In the staging by Thomas Ostermeier, Lars Eidinger makes an exit chanting the lyrics from Katja Ebstein's song *Theater*, released in 1982:

Theater, Theater, der Vorhang geht auf  
Dann wird die Bühne zur Welt.  
Theater, Theater, es ist wie ein Rausch,  
und nur der Augenblick zählt.  
(SF 2008: 22)

Ostermeier's directorial decision to include this modern song highlights that, just as it comments on the genre of the revenge tragedy, *Hamlet* adds another turn of the screw to the concept of the inner

play, this popular metatheatrical device in plays of the Baroque or Renaissance, which is connected to the notion of *teatrum mundi*. In this metaphor, the world can be described as theater – as ‘the theater of the world’. Theater performances must then be understood as plays within the larger play that is the world, as Shakespeare’s famous melancholic character Jacques explains in *As you like it*:

All the world’s a stage,  
 And all the men and women merely players.  
 They have their exits and their entrances;  
 And one man in his age plays many parts,  
 His acts being seven ages [...].  
 (As you like it, 2.7.140-144)

Jacques uses the theater as a metaphor for life, more precisely for the changing roles that each individual performs according to their age and position in society. The metaphor is incomplete: Immediately following the general statement at the beginning of the monologue, it focuses in on the actor. There is no mention of a director, spectator or author. It especially does not include the fact that the *teatrum mundi* metaphor can be read both ways, as Tobias Döring explains in his definition of the German composite noun “Welttheater”: “Was hier vielmehr gesagt wird, ist grundsätzlicher und doppelter Natur: Das Theater ist die Welt, und die Welt ist ein Theater.” (Döring 2020: 216) The German noun leaves the relationship between both components – ‘world’ and ‘theater’ – open. Theater is the world, and the world is a theater – but none takes ontological or causal precedence. “Diese Umkehrbarkeit erscheint bemerkenswert”, Döring writes, “ja beunruhigend.” (ibid.) In the Prologue to Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, a chorus addresses this uncertainty by interrogating the relationship between the theater and the world right away:

[...] Can this cockpit hold  
 The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
 Within this wooden O the very casques  
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
 (*Henry V* 0.11-14)

These lines from *Henry V* signal some doubts about the accuracy and completeness of a metaphor that seems to distinguish and relate world and theater all too neatly. The play-within-the-play has the effect of unsettling the boundaries between itself and the play it is embedded in. The boundary becomes even more troubled in performance: the relationship between theater and the world is mediated by the form of its representation, and the theater performance straddles the threshold between the dramatic fiction signified by the events on stage, and the present time and space of the theater performance. Theater, *Hamlet* shows, is not like the world nor is the world like theater: The performance simultaneously is part of the world and is theater.

Pappelbaum's set, featuring a mobile gold curtain as central element, draws the attention to the threshold between the 'world-within-the-play' and the world without just as much as the refrain of Katja Ebstein's song strategically placed before *The Mousetrap* takes place. While Ebstein suggests that "Theater, Theater, der Vorhang geht auf / Dann wird die Bühne zur Welt", Eidinger and Ostermeier exploit and foreground the fact that Hamlet has a much more pronounced interest in the porosity of the curtain itself. *The Mousetrap* serves the purpose of questioning the possibility of properly distinguishing between the world presented on stage and the process of the performance that produces it. It stages a number of movements crossing allegedly stable boundaries between the play-within-the-play, the play without, and the context of performance of *Hamlet*. *The Mousetrap* conforms to the traditional definition of the play-within-the-play:

The Play within the Play [...] is a theatrical device or convention, or a kind of sub-genre within dramatic literature and theatrical practice. Dramaturgically speaking it describes a strategy for constructing play-texts that contain, within the perimeter of their fictional reality, a second or internal theatrical performance, in which actors appear as actors who play an additional role. This duplication of the theatrical reality is often reinforced by the presence onstage of an 'internal audience' which acts as a double to the actual audience. [...] (Fischer and Greiner 2007: xi)

Greiner and Fischer describe that the performance of such a play-within-the-play reduplicates the aesthetic experience of the performance, too and, thereby, the relationship between actor and character in a separate fiction within:

Its most salient feature is that it doubles an aesthetic experience which already presents a dual reality: the actor, who appears on stage both in his/her own physical presence and in the part he/she portrays, assumes and plays yet another role, thus adding a third identity which itself is constructed in the context of a third level of time, space, characterisation and action. (Fischer and Greiner 2007: xi)

This multiplication of roles, Ostermeier's staging of the *Mousetrap* shows, unsettles the imagined boundaries between play-within-the-play and performance of *Hamlet*, an between theater and the world it relates to.

#### *The character as director*

As Eidinger / Hamlet directs and performs in *The Mousetrap*, Ostermeier stages Eidinger / Hamlet as director and performer in *Hamlet*, thereby blurring the distinction between performer and character as we have already touched upon in chapter two. As if to prepare the metaleptic effects of *The Mousetrap*, Eidinger provokes a moment of uncertainty about planes of performance and the 'world-within-the-play' while announcing the play to his friends. When announcing: "heute Abend wollten mein Freund Horatio und ich ein kleines Theaterstück aufführen" (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: '56'05), Eidinger looks at Sebastian Schwarz, who impersonates *Güldenstern* in that scene, and pauses for a second. He is obviously unsettled by the presence of Sebastian Schwarz, who also impersonates his friend *Horatio* in the Ostermeier production, and who will star in the "kleines Theaterstück" he is just speaking about. Tongue-in-cheek, Eidinger signals to the audience that in the end, all of them are on the same plane as performers, in one space and time with the spectators, constructing the distinction between Schwarz as *Güldenstern* and Schwarz as *Horatio*, but from

the same phenomenal starting point of Eidinger and Schwarz performing *Hamlet*. Providing his own analysis of that moment, shortly before leaving the stage, he recites the next lines from Katja Ebstein's song: "Es ist alles nur Theater, und ist doch auch Wirklichkeit", he hints towards the paradox of the actor stepping 'out of character' produces. Does the space of the theater performance even allow to neatly distinguish between the planes of 'Theater' and of 'Wirklichkeit'? Eidinger would seem to answer this question in the negative, not through Ebstein but through the words of Deichkind's REMMIDEMMI:

Deine Eltern sind auf einem Tennisturnier  
Du machst eine Party, wie nett von Dir  
Impulsive Menschen kennen keine Grenzen  
Schmeiß die Möbel aus dem Fenster,  
wir brauchen Platz zum Dancen!  
(SF 2008: 22)

"Impulsive Menschen kennen keine Grenzen": *The Mousetrap* makes the remainder of this production of *Hamlet* readable as a repeated movement of characters between the positions of producers of their own representation and participants of that representation. It does so by emphasizing that actors can become each other's directors. As Eidinger waltzes off stage, he asserts his directorial authority over his fellow performers. The command "Und... Text!" gives Urs Jucker, Sebastian Schwarz and Stephan Stern their cue to begin the dialogue between Claudius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern which follows.

Ostermeier's *Mousetrap* makes the character, Hamlet, into the director and actor of *The Murder of Gonzago*. It produces the illusion that it is Hamlet that directs when other characters of the plot speak their lines and act out their scenes, thereby crossing the threshold of his own plot into the realm of the author that scripts the characters' actions. Seeing Hamlet as a director of *The Mousetrap* opens the possibility, therefore, of an additional crossing: That of the character itself outside of his world and onto the plane of the performance

that produces it. Lionel Abel and Christoph Menke have investigated in how far *Hamlet* deliberately gives agency to the title character to move across the boundary of the fiction he is embedded in, to contest the plot scripted for him by a haunting dramatist. This boundary-crossing ground structure of the play depends on the actor in performance. The play-within-the-play allows to expose that process and project it back onto the general metatheatrical structure of *Hamlet*: Not only can the character take on the role of an author or director that then intrudes on the fiction he produces through the play-within-the-play. The character crosses the boundary of the representation he is embedded in by out-growing it, to then become the author, director and actor in the performance of *Hamlet*.

Lionel Abel has identified this procedure as the core of the peculiar metatheatricity of *Hamlet* that does not restrict itself to producing an awareness of the fact that *Hamlet* is theatrically produced, but more radically assumes that the characters in *Hamlet* are “aware of their own theatricality”. Abel argues that at some point, take the role of playwrights for each other:

In calling the important characters of *Hamlet* “playwrights”, am I relying on a metaphor? To an extent, yes. On the other hand, I claim that no other metaphor could throw an equal light on the play’s movement. Suppose that we called *Hamlet*, the Ghost, Claudius, and Polonius “poets” and compared their rhetoric. This could be done, and might lead to some discovery. But not, I think, to any important discovery about the play as a whole. When I say that the important characters are “playwrights” what I want to underscore is that each of them has the consciousness of a dramatist as well as that of a character. (Abel 1966: 49)

Building on Abel, I argue that even though “there is hardly a scene in the whole work in which some character is not trying to dramatize another”, (Abel 1966: 45) there is a decisive difference between *Hamlet* and the other character-playwrights. It becomes obvious in the performance of *The Mousetrap*: While the eaves-dropping scenes usually work through reinforcing the understanding of the borders between the levels of representation, i.e. through the awareness of

audience and eaves-droppers that there are characters that are involuntarily being dramatized, while others are the authors or designers of that involuntary plot, Ostermeier's *Mousetrap* enhances the idea of Hamlet's agency as a character by making him author, actor, director and spectator at the same time, because he as a character develops an awareness of his existence in performance, and thereby becoming capable of crossing the boundary of his own play into its performance context. The metatheatricity of the play can only be understood if one assumes Hamlet's awareness of himself as a dramatic character performed by an actor on stage:

I suggest, though, that the reaction of Hamlet is that of a man with a playwright's consciousness who has just been told to be an actor and is now determined to make an actor of the very playwright who had cast him for an undesired role. (Abel 1966: 47)

It is remarkable that Abel switches terms here: Instead of continuing to speak of the double awareness of the character as dramatist and character, the actor comes into play. He switches from the consideration of *Hamlet* as dramatic text, to considering *Hamlet* as theater performance.

Ostermeier's staging finds an impressive image for this "double existence" of the actor-playwright by making Hamlet into a director even of himself as an actor of in *The Mousetrap*. In the middle of changing for the part of Lucianus, Eidinger begins a conversation with his mother, asking for Gertrude's opinion of the play. With the fatsuit half on and half off, without Gertrude's wig, he speaks to her as a son and director who is curious about the effect of his master piece – as Hamlet as himself, and as Eidinger as himself simultaneously. After that, Eidinger's Hamlet transforms into Lucianus in front of both on- and off-stage audience. He dresses in a sober ensemble of shirt and pants, a short cape – resembling a children's carnival costume – and a fake beard visibly attached to Eidinger's ears with a string. But the boundaries of the play-within-the-play and of *Hamlet* alike have been so thoroughly blurred that his own injunction: "Los, Mörder, lass die scheußlichen Grimassen

und fang an!” must now be understood not figuratively, but literally. The murderer begins when Eidingen decides to.

Instead of multiplying borders to reflect upon the safe distinction between ‘reality’ and fiction, Ostermeier’s staging creates short circuits between those levels. Instead of more neatly distinguishing theater and ‘reality’ from each other by adding an additional distinct ontological sphere, they reduce all representations to the effect of one phenomenon: the theater performance itself. The most important means to do so is to highlight the actor’s body as physical material, as sensory phenomenon. When the actor that impersonates Hamlet becomes visible as a distinct subject in the theater performance alongside the character that his performance produces, Hamlet, in reverse, gains autonomy over the plot that seemed to contain him in the first place. He out-grows it. As Ostermeier’s staging illustrates, it means that, by developing an awareness of their status as actors, the characters can literally outgrow the plot in performance.

#### *The spectator as actor*

In the play-within-the-play, the other characters of *Hamlet* are present as spectators on stage. The on-stage audience in the play-within-the-play functions as a reduplication of the off-stage spectators and therefore as an intermediate, a go-between, as Freddie Rokem describes not only for actual plays-within-plays, but for all “screen-scenes”:

The fact that the eavesdropper is situated between the characters on the stage and the spectators who are watching this scene from the outside is also very important for understanding the potential effects of screen-scenes. The eavesdropper occupies an intermediate, liminal position, ambiguously situated between presence and absence, between the stage and off. (Rokem 2014: 57)

This on-stage audience, consisting of performers of *Hamlet*, and now watching while themselves on display, draws attention to the idea of a more active role of the spectator as performer: Through

the intermediate position of the spectator of the play-within-the-play, the spectators off-stage can learn to perceive themselves as performers and producers of the theater performance, too. The play-within-the-play allows the off-stage audience to see that those that watch the performance actually constitute its sense from the phenomenon they witness and are therefore an instrumental cause of its existence as performance.

Freddie Rokem consequently assumes that, in reverse, the spectators off-stage “are also in a sense eavesdroppers [who] watch the action on the stage through a symbolic curtain or a fourth wall, but can of course not move in and out of the action as the eavesdropper in the fictional world does, unless addressed directly from the stage.” (Rokem 2014: 57) I would argue quite the opposite: Just as they share with the on-stage audience the position of watching a performance – the one staged by the on-stage characters eavesdropping on, say, Ophelia and Hamlet –, they also might become aware of the porous quality of this fourth wall. They might realize that, in the event of the performance, they do have the possibility, just like the eaves-droppers, to move between their realm and the realm of the stage; between the ‘world’ and the ‘theater’ that they are watching.

The dissolution of the boundary between the on-stage and the off-stage audience, and the attribution of activity to both, prepared and aided by the fact that the protagonist of *Hamlet* has, as Ostermeier’s staging shows us, himself adopted a flexible stance that combines the functions of director, actor and spectator. It is constitutive for the director’s position to interrupt the performance, move into it, perform to show the performers what he sees, wants or does not want to see, then moves out again to take the position of the spectator. By making Hamlet into the director of *The Mousetrap*, along with all clichés of the trade, artistic aloofness and postures of authority described above, Thomas Ostermeier introduces into *Hamlet* the position that can, indeed, move across all thresholds of representation and switch between all positions, and thereby include the spectators into the production of the performance. While *The Mousetrap* runs, Hamlet, the director-actor ‘activates’ the audience

by checking in with them and commenting upon the action: “Na, wie gefällt dir das Stück, Mutter?” He explains and summarizes the action, flaunts his knowledge about the play and provides the interpretation that the spectators should reach:

Er vergiftet ihn im Garten wegen seiner Position, sein Name ist Gonzago, die Geschichte ist überliefert und in einem sehr gewählten Italienisch verfasst; gleich werdet ihr sehen, wie der Mörder die Liebe von Gonzagos Frau gewinnt. (Mayenburg 2008: 35)

Even though Ostermeier cuts Ophelia’s comment: “Du ersetzt einem den Chor, Hamlet” (Mayenburg 2008: 34); his situation as a director is staged to be equally liminal, mediating and directing the spectator’s impressions by commenting on the plot. The chorus has the function, in classical drama, to represent the audience on stage and articulate their insecurity, deliberation and judgement: Hamlet as director has the function of the chorus here, and thereby implicates the audience not only of *The Mousetrap*, but of *Hamlet* in the events on stage. While he did do so as the foolish performer of the ‘antic disposition’, as well, when he does so from the position of the spectator in *The Mousetrap*, spectators can identify with him not only through the shared time and space that the performance is set in too, but by understanding that they have agency in the performance context, as well.

Hamlet’s encouraging comment “Los, Mörder, lass die scheußlichen Grimassen und fang an!” also alludes to a spectator’s stance that can very well ignore those conventions that separate ‘world’ from ‘theater’ and make the latter immune to interventions from the former. It recalls the spectatorship of “children screaming at the top of their lungs to warn Punch that the policeman is approaching”, or the episode in Cervantes’ *Don Quichotte* “in which the angry knight climbs on Master Peter’s stage to massacre the Moors of the Marsile King with his rapier, who fortunately turn out to be only cardboard puppets.” (Genette 2004: 50) Gérard Genette describes this kind of intervention as a misconception, an illusion that “virtually makes the abused spectator cross over to a new level of

representation.” (ibid.) While, from the perspective of the theories of narrative fiction, such a situation might look at if the spectator had indeed been deceived into believing that the performance was actually part of his reality, *Hamlet* in performance suggests quite the opposite, that is: that the spectator becomes aware of the degree of his own agency in the situation that, through suspension of disbelief, he might have forgotten.

In doing so, Hamlet certainly aligns with the agenda of contemporary performance artists. While Françoise Lavocat claims that “[e]mpathy provoked by fiction does not invite us to take action: it is fundamentally different from empathy provoked by a real situation” (Pier 2016, my transl.), performances such as Marina Abramovic Lips of Thomas are premised precisely on challenging this claim. Inflicting torture on her own body, Abramovic provokes a contradictory impulse in the audience between observing the conventions that assure if not the ‘fictionality’ of performance, then at least its integrity, and the empathetic impulse provoked by her apparent ordeal: “After she had held out for 30 minutes without any sign of abandoning the torture, some members of the audience could no longer bear her ordeal. They hastened to the blocks of ice, took hold of the artist, and covered her with coats. Then they removed her from the cross and carried her away.” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 11) If one believes that the proximity between Hamlet and such performance artworks might be a false impression based on the staging of Ostermeier, we need simply to recall the dramaturgical function of *The Mousetrap*: to provoke Claudius to an empathetic reaction that will allow to trap him. Like Abramovic’s spectators, he is touched by something that crosses the boundary between the performers and himself; and reacts by exploiting his agency in the performance contexts.

### *Moving mirrors*

In Thomas Ostermeier’s staging, the multiplication of the functions of Lars Eidinger and his Hamlet draws attention to the porosity of the distinction between play and world, be it within the ‘world-within-the-play’ of *Hamlet* or outside of it. This becomes obvious not least because spectators are shown to actively intervene in the

performance. With regards to the purpose of *The Mousetrap*, this intervention is presented as the result of a different, but related, boundary-crossing: it is because the spectators can perceive a relationship between what they see in the ‘dumb-show’ and the *Murder of Gonzago* and their own plot, that they react to it. The original role of the spectator, then, is to be touched by the performance by relating it to themselves. While interrupting the performance of a play might be perceived as a disruption of its purpose of presenting an intact ‘world-within-the-play’, Ostermeier’s staging of the *Mousetrap* illustrates that the spectator’s intervention can also be the intended result of a performance, only then fulfilling “the purpose of playing”.

*The Mousetrap* foregrounds this since it is deliberately designed to provoke a reaction from Claudius, the King. It shows that the constitution of a ‘world-within-the-play’ does specifically not preclude the awareness of spectatorial agency, and that spectators’ interventions, in turn, do not disrupt the performance and the constitution of the ‘world-within-the-play’, but are, in fact part of its purpose. Through the play-within-the-play, thereby, *Hamlet* manages to present an alternative view of *mimesis* as a mirror image whose purpose is not to provide a perfect copy of reality neatly sealed off from it, but precisely to cross the boundaries of the stage to reflect back onto those that collectively produce it in performance, as Ostermeier’s staging well shows. Claudius reacts to the performance – at least to the dramatized version of *The Murder of Gonzago* – by getting up and attempting to leave, and thereby putting an end it. For this to happen, there needs to be a figurative distance between the play-within-the-play and what it pretends to mirror:

Wir wollen vor meinem Onkel so etwas spielen wie den Mord an meinem Vater, ich will darauf achten, wie er schaut, ich will ihm die Sonde bis ins wunde Fleisch bohren, und wenn er auch nur zuckt, weiß ich, woran ich bin.... Das Stück ist die Falle, in der ich das Gewissen des Königs fangen will. (Mayenburger 2008: 26)

The nature of the relationship is described with the same vocabulary as that between Old Hamlet and his Ghost: “so etwas wie”, Hamlet describes to Horatio, “something like the murder of my father” (2.2.530). Later, when asked by Claudius about the content of the play, he explains further:

KÖNIG Und wie heißt das Stück?  
HAMLET Die Mausefalle. Und wie ist es gemeint?  
Metaphorisch. (Mayenburg 2008: 34)

The figurative relationship, that is implied in Hamlet’s description of *The Mousetrap* as “etwas wie den Mord an meinem Vater”, describes the distance that exists between *The Murder of Gonzago* and the alleged murder of Old Hamlet, and that exists in general between ‘theater’ and ‘world’, according to the words of another chorus – that of the Prologue of *Henry V*:

O, pardon! Since the crooked figure may  
Attest in little place a million;  
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work.  
Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confin’d two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.  
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:  
Into a thousand parts divide one man,  
And make imaginary puissance;  
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i’ th’ receiving earth;  
For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times,  
Turning th’ accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass; for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history;  
Who prologue-like, your humble patience pray  
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.  
(*Henry V* 0.15-34)

In *Hamlet*, the relationship between the play-within-the-play and the cosmos of the play is “tropical”, it is figurative. One is a “crooked

figure” of the other. As the chorus of *Henry V* explains, however, this figurative relationship needs to be bridged through the “imaginary puissance” of the spectators, “piecing out the imperfections” of the reflection with their thoughts. Transgressions are required to occur back and forth between the “crooked figures” and the spectator’s imaginary forces that they work upon.

Claudius seems to have a premonition of what might come. He asks Hamlet:

KÖNIG Bist du dir sicher, was den Inhalt betrifft? Enthält das Stück nichts Verletzendes?  
 HAMLET Nein nein, das ist nur gespielt, kein echtes Gift, gar nichts Verletzendes.  
 (Mayenburg 2008: 34)

Hamlet claims a secure boundary between what lies behind the curtain, and the space of the spectators, even though his aim is precisely the opposite: for the play-within-the-play itself to hurt, to poison Claudius’ conscience:

Dieses Stück schildert einen Mord, der in Wien passiert ist. Der Fürst heißt Gonzago, seine Frau Baptista; du wirst bald sehen, dass es ein fieses Stück ist, aber was solls? Du, König, und wir, wir haben ein gutes Gewissen, uns berührt das nicht – soll der wundergeriebene Gaul zusammenzucken, unser Nacken ist unversehrt... (Mayenburg 2008: 34)

Hamlet invites Claudius to relate the play-within-the-play to himself and to feel the pain of the Player King as if it were an additional wound inflicted on him, in the same place that his guilt-ridden conscience is troubling, like the saddle does the wounded horse, while daring him to pretend that it does not touch him. Going even further than the chorus in *Henry V*, who invited the spectators to understand the “crooked figures” as the physical imprints of the proud hoofs, Hamlet insinuates that plays, while constituted imaginatively by all spectators, touch some differently than others – depending on the wounds they already bring to the performance. The

play-within-the-play requires the spectators to finish the trope and might then leave traces in their minds and on their bodies.

That this effect concerns the audience of the performance of Hamlet becomes clear from a scene preceding *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet explains his plan to use a play in order to gather more evidence about the King's guilt to Horatio. Eidinger and Schwarz stand at the brim of the set, looking out at the audience. With a quick gesture, Eidinger gives a signal to the technicians to switch off the sound and change the lighting. The audience space lights up, and Eidinger signals Schwarz to follow him to the footlights and face the audience with him. Eidinger speaks Hamlet's following lines in a tone that signals a more intimate, private, 'natural' way of speaking, and inserts references to single members of the actual audience sitting in the theater watching Ostermeier's Hamlet – for instance on the night of the TV recording in July 2008 at the Festival d'Avignon:

Hm, ich hab gehört, es ist schon vorgekommen, dass Verbrecher, die im Theater saßen, – so wie der da, mit der Brille.... Oder der da, mit dem weißen Sakko!, – daß die von einer gut gestrickten Handlung so ins Herz getroffen wurden, dass die an Ort und Stelle ihre Taten gestanden haben. Mord spricht nämlich mit ganz eigentümlicher Stimme, obwohl er keine Zunge hat. (Ostermeier and Rossacher 2008: '58"20 ff.)

Through those small inserts – that have become part of the "Regiebuch" as early as September 2008, after the production's premiere in Berlin, and, therefore, of what has been 'set down' in the performance script –, Eidinger, each night anew, addresses the audience of each performance respectively, as audience of *The Mousetrap* to come. He thereby includes the entire audience of *Hamlet* into the 'world-within-the-play' of *Hamlet* and the world in which it is situated, placing the audience in that theater on the same plane as Claudius, Gertrude and the on-stage audience of *The Mousetrap*. To further multiply the uncertainties about the source of authority over the events on stage, Eidinger has, over the ten years that *Hamlet* has been shown, constructed a broad range of improvisations that have a different degree of spontaneity; the audience of each night's performance is respectively in the dark about what is scripted and what

is not. One audience member is usually asked to stand up, turn around for everyone to see. Each spectator's performance is different: Some attempt to use this moment for an emphatical gesture, a comical answer to this situation; many are too embarrassed by the gazes of about 300 people on them. But it signifies a change of role for all of them: from allegedly passive participants, they have taken a function and a place within the plot of *Hamlet*. The point is clear: The label "Verbrecher, die im Theater saßen" potentially applies to all audience members. The improvisations, which might extend even further, support the confusion over the question whether Eidinger addresses the audience as himself, or as Hamlet; and, in reverse, invites the audience to take their active role and perform as themselves, as well. Most importantly, their activation occurs through a process of recognition. Ostermeier's staging literalizes the conception of *mimesis* that operates in *Hamlet* through *The Mousetrap*: a practice that relates the play to the audience through a practice of representation and recognition, shifting the mirroring process from an idea of mirroring 'nature' to the idea of mirroring the audience itself. Only when the latter recognizes itself, is the "purpose of playing" completely fulfilled.

That this activation of the audience contributes to presenting a conception of theatrical *mimesis* as a practice including an active audience is further supported by the way in which the off-stage audience is not only watching *The Mousetrap* in Ostermeier's staging; it is watching the on-stage audience of *The Mousetrap*. Both these audiences become conflated into one space, one surface: The remainder of the acting ensemble, consisting of Judith Rosmair (Gertrude), Urs Jucker (Claudius), Stephan Stern (Rosencrantz) and Robert Beyer (Polonius), take their seats on the brim of the mobile podium, directly facing the off-stage audience, so as to be clearly visible for the latter while at the same time mirroring them. The performance of *The Mousetrap* takes place in the stage space between both audiences. In addition, Lars Eidinger asks Robert Beyer (Polonius) to take the camera that projects a live video onto the golden curtain. During the show, Robert Beyer will point the camera alternately at

the on-stage and the off-stage audience. This allows for two processes of reflection to take place: the off-stage audience observes the reaction of the on-stage audience, mainly Urs Jucker (Claudius) and Judith Rosmair (Gertrude), and are given the possibility to recognize themselves, as spectators, in their position. Their reaction is the ultimate aim of the play-within-the-play. At the same time, the off-stage audience is confronted with a mirror image of their own faces projected onto the chain curtain, as if to place them under a magnifying glass for thorough introspection. The on-stage audience and the off-stage audience mirror each other but share the same space on-stage: the golden curtain that indifferently displays both their images through the mediation of the camera.

This shift in the idea of *mimesis* as mirroring can be traced well into the detail of the staging of *The Mousetrap* in Ostermeier's Hamlet. At the crucial moment in which Lucianus pours poison into the Player King's ear, Sebastian Schwarz is sitting right next to Claudius, mirroring him in a kind of awkward symmetry, his costume clearly reminiscent of Claudius' / Urs Jucker's physical appearance. But it also gives Horatio, the performer of the Player King, better opportunity to watch Claudius react to his performance. As they watch each other, only a few inches apart, *The Mousetrap* manages to shift the positions of performers and spectators from one characterized by two separate spaces – one silent and dark, the other brightly lit and filled with activity – to one connected across a porous threshold, between 'world' and 'theater', watching to identify how and if they mirror each other. By encasing several processes of mirroring into each other, which constitutively require reflections to pass back and forth between the realms of "Welt" and "Theater", *The Mousetrap* creates a mirror cabinet that precisely describes the dynamic between both poles in the *teatrum mundi* metaphor:

In jedem Fall wird uns bewusst, wenn wir dergleichen Welttheaterreden im Theater folgen, dass hier ein doppelter Verweis stattfindet – vom Theater zur Welt wie von der Welt zum Theater –, das sich mithin die Spiegelungsverhältnisse vervielfachen und am infiniten Regress immer wieder nur dieselben Spiegelbilder spiegeln – eine unendliche Mise-en-

abyeme, die uns schwindeln macht und alles einschließt, da sie keine Außenposition mehr zulässt. (Döring 2020: 218)

For the distinction between the play within the play and the play without to exist, an “Außenposition”, an archimedal point outside of all intersecting fictions needs to be found. In theater, we assume that external position / perspective to be the spectator. The moment that the spectator stops occupying a fixed external position from which the boundary between ‘theater’ and ‘world’ can be precisely defined, the distinction collapses. As *The Mousetrap* englobes the spectator into the realm of performance, it creates a mirror cabinet that makes the mirror image indistinguishable from the ‘original’, the play within from the play without, the ‘world-within-the-play’ from the performance and the performance from the world surrounding it. Through the play-within-the-play, the theater performance becomes a space in which the fiction materializes into a shared reality that does not halt behind the curtain, and thereby calls for a reformed idea of *mimesis*.

## Transgressive *mimesis*

In my analysis of Thomas Ostermeier’s *Hamlet*, my aim was to show that *Hamlet* reveals a different view of the connection that exists between theater and the world. In *The Mousetrap*, *Hamlet* articulates the relationship between text, performance and *mimesis* to present a notion of theater that is indeed much ‘more than is set down’, as it actively involves and materially affects its spectators and their world. Unlike the neo-Aristotelian stance of its title character, it suggests that *mimesis* is not the accurate reflection of the ‘world-within-the-play’, but is itself a transgressive process, creating and imprinting a form into the minds of the spectators. In fact, act three of *Hamlet* shows that the purpose of *mimesis* can only be reached if reflective processes occur between stage and audience space, between theater and world.

The play-within-the-play illustrates the birth of a new conflict between text and performance. It shows how the ambivalent power of performance is, at the time of *Hamlet*, begins to be restrained through Renaissance poetics that will place the text at the center of theater in order to contain the poisonous potential of performance behind the mirror image it also produces. It does so by adroitly pitting the stance of its title character, Hamlet, against alternative conceptions of text and performance and their relationship. His own instruction to the Players, I will show, contains images for the “purpose of playing” that seem to contradict but actually complement each other. I will tease out the relationship between Aristotelian notions of *mimesis* as imitation, as they are re-interpreted by Renaissance thinkers and poets, with notions of theater that perceive it as a process affecting the spectators directly through their senses, drawing on the antitheatrical literature of the time. These sources show that the main fields of imagery used by Hamlet, that of the “mirror” and that of “form and pressure”, to describe the “purpose of playing”, are not yet mutually exclusive, but connected in the figure of the spectator. It is them who are impressed with the performance, an effect that is not disruptive, but indispensable for the necessary reflective processes between what is shown on stage and the spectators’ world to occur.

In Hamlet’s instructions to the players, the need to distinguish between different types of *mimesis* in the theater is first articulated through a distinction between spectators. In fact, in Hamlet’s instructions, the audience is much more present than either author or actors. Hamlet’s speech includes into *Hamlet* what might be thought to constitutively remain excluded from what is ‘set down’, the audience and its active part in the performance. In his call for a reform, Hamlet also calls for measure and restraint in the audience, privileging an audience of judicious readers who only consider the “necessary question” of the play, what can be transmitted through a suitable impersonation of what is ‘set down’. *Hamlet* thereby once more comments on the historical evolution that Hamlet’s speech references, pointing to the specific conditions of reception in which

it was itself performed. His speech reveals the impact of the audience on the performance, but also discriminates between diverse types of audiences, giving more authority to the “judicious” than to the “groundlings”. A different valorization of different audience members appears, one that privileges those that appreciate the necessary questions of the play through internal approval rather than the raucous laughter of the groundlings at the excessive gestures of the clowns.

In creating a distinction, however, Hamlet himself testifies to a different valorization of the different aspects of performance by early modern audiences that came to watch the play. The audience’s presence in the public and the private theater seems to have underscored the value of performance against the boundaries of what is ‘set down’: “While the ‘laws’ of the critical treatises were underwritten by the authorities and identified with the world of the book,” Julie Stone Peters writes, “those declaring their liberty from the rules regularly asserted that the live theatre had its own principles, underwritten by the public.” (Stone Peters 2000: 126). Robert Weimann confirms that in the collective production process of the early modern performance, the final author and authority of approval is the audience itself:

Viel mehr als bei Spenser und Milton wird Autorität von dem produzierenden Autor hinweg in den Produktionsprozeß selbst gelegt, in dem das Publikum als fordernde und geförderte Instanz die Selbstlegitimation der Bühne mittragen muß. Nur durch den eigenen, selbstbestimmten Beitrag der Zuschauer kann sich das gespielte Stück durch den Verkehrseffekt der Kommunikation, durch den Gewinn an Vergnügen und Weltaneignung, also im Prozess und Produkt der Theaterarbeit rechtfertigen. (Weimann 1988: 148)

Whereas the aesthetical benefit and the entire pleasure of performance, according to Weimann, heavily relies on the approval and contribution of the audience, Hamlet’s eagerness to accept only certain spectators as judges of a play’s quality shows the desire to seal off the stage from the spectators, protecting what is ‘set down’ from interventions on the side of the audience, too. A changing role of

the audience in performance is also manifest in changes in the diverse conditions of reception of performance. While in both the outdoor and the indoor theaters that existed in London at the time of Hamlet, “whether lit by sun or candlelight, the audiences were always visible” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 38), a reform was under way, mirrored in the disposition of the audience in different types of theaters: “Where in the popular venues the poorest were crowded in the most conspicuous positions closest to the stage, at the Blackfriars and the Cockpit they were at the rear, and the richest were closest and most visible.” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 29) The distinction between the “groundlings” and the “judicious” signals towards a social distinction within the theater spaces that will support a reform of the practice of performance tending towards a clearer distinction of the “necessary question” from the performance, by moving those spectators away from the stage that tend to express reactions that might affect the stage. Reducing the proximity of the lower classes to the stage might have served to reduce the transgressive physical and vocal reactions to the performance and placed the “judicious” spectators that judged with their minds rather than their bodies not only closer to the stage, but made them visible for all as an example of correct behavior. Changes in theatrical architecture are therefore part of the reform that Hamlet advocates, as they did help bring about a different role of the audiences more familiar to us today as early as when Hamlet was first performed: “The Blackfriars introduced London for the first time to the general disposition of seating that prevailed in modern theatres.” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 29) They confirm that the audience, not the author or the actor, are the self-effacing heroes of the reform demanded by Hamlet: “Change came about because of the differences in the auditoria rather than in the plays or the players.” (ibid.) Hamlet instructs the players to reform their style of acting with a view to protecting what is ‘set down’ and, by the same stroke, the “necessary question of the play”, against the transgressions not only of the clowns themselves, but of the audience who react to them. The opposition between text and performance is not least one between diverse attitudes of spectatorship.

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In the following chapter, I will explore how the distinctions that Hamlet's instruction to the players are so eager to protect are deconstructed by the play itself in the scenes containing, preceding and following the play-within-the-play. While Hamlet attempts to attribute a conception of *mimesis* that is best troped as mirroring to the containment of what is 'set down' in the performance, the *Mousetrap's* success depends on the way in which the performance transgresses the limits of the stage, affects spectators and thereby provokes an affective reaction from them.

I will first connect Hamlet's argument to the anti- and pro-theatrical discourses of his time (*Poisonous mirror*). Hamlet's instruction to the players develops a notion of *mimesis* drawing on the Platonic metaphor of the mirror and Aristotle's definition of tragedy as imitation of action. Especially his distinction of different groups of spectators shows that the clear distinction of the textual aspect of performance from what is 'more' follows an agenda that attempts to confine *mimesis* within the definition of a mirror image that only affects the intellect through controlled delight and erudition, sealing off the 'world-within-the-play' from the present time and space of the performers. Hamlet's own words, however, allude to alternative conceptions of *mimesis* as a process of negotiation and crossing between permeable spaces and bodies, relying on an Aristotelian notion of sense perception to reveal that the "purpose of playing" can not be fulfilled without things crossing back and forth from stage to audience space. Especially in the scenes surrounding *The Mousetrap*, *mimesis* is also imagined as a process of impression and contagion, consumption and transmission rather than static reflection.

In *A/effective acting*, I read the impromptu performance of a speech by the First Player for more concrete evidence of a conception of the transmission of affect between actor and spectator, which Hamlet imagines as a physical process of liquefaction and transmission of fluids across the boundary of the stage. This process, however, depends upon a relationship of similarity with a difference between what is represented in performance and the world in which it takes place, a difference in which the connection between the two can

occur. The speech also has the function of a rehearsal for *The Mousetrap*, as it allows Hamlet to experience the training of the actor's body for an effective performance, which he will himself use in his function as a commentator during *The Mousetrap*.

In *A spectator's perspective*, I finally analyze *The Mousetrap* itself to foreground the role of the spectator – Ophelia, Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet himself – in the constitution, interpretation and event of the performance. *Hamlet* gives the spectator a central role for the constitution of theater between what is 'set down' and what is 'more'. As *The Mousetrap* places its spectators in a position of display and active involvement, Hamlet's activity of commenting the performance shows how not only the others' predisposition, but his own determine his perception of the performance and the other spectators' reaction. Hamlet's behavior during *The Mousetrap* finally begs the question: Is *Hamlet* itself no more than a performance directed, performed and watched by Hamlet himself?

### 1. Poisonous mirror

Hamlet's address to the players is reflective of the early modern debate about the benefits and dangers of the theater performance and presents a complex notion of *mimesis* that predates the text-performance-opposition and is closely connected to the debate around the benefits and dangers of the theater performance. In its instructions to the players, Hamlet includes an entire range of early modern perspectives on the theater, including the Renaissance poetics drawing on the sources of classical antiquity, to constitute a prism that does not narrow, but widen the scope of the text-performance-relationship: practices of *mimesis* on stage include processes of reflection *and* transgression. The introduction to *The Mousetrap* leaves the reader or spectator with the impression of a multivocal medley of positions, full of internal contradictions. In a closer reading of Hamlet's instruction to the players in scene two of act three, I will illustrate how Hamlet evokes the conception of *mimesis* as a mirror reflection, well distinct from what it reflects; only to call it

into question by drafting concepts of *mimesis* as impression and contagion, and transmission. In the end, as *Hamlet* exists as text and performance, *mimesis* might be best conceived as a process of mirroring and an effective practice involving the participation of all at the same time.

### *Distinction*

At the time of *Hamlet*, theater was associated with dangerous processes of indelible impression made on the spectators' souls, and the uncontrollable contagion of those minds and bodies. The means to contain these dangers was to firmly confine theater in a concept of *mimesis* as static and inoffensive mirror image, and to reread the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of *mimesis* in order to emphasize the educational value of mimetic representation before its danger as a deceitful illusion. While this inoffensive *mimesis* was imagined to be contained within the text and its 'necessary question', the performance was increasingly seen as the site of impression and contagion. The dramatic text was imagined to guarantee the clear distinction of the mirror image from reality.

This is also visible in Hamlet's instructions to the players at the beginning of the third act. He famously exhorts them: "O, reform it altogether, and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them." (3.2.36-37) Within the context of the entire speech, the semantics of the phrase are clear: Hamlet has expounded what he dislikes in players that he has seen play and heard others praise (3.2.28-29), that have "so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably." (3.2.32-34) The Player reassures him: "I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us." (3.2.35) Hamlet encourages him to pursue that process of reformation and adds his caveat about the clown's performance, marking that the latter is a precondition of the former.

Hamlet's judgement about performance implies that theater is *mimesis* and gives two different possible leads for a definition of the term. Art, Hamlet implies, needs to approximate nature's creative

potency. The actors that Hamlet criticizes apparently failed at that attempt: not “Nature herself but some of her hired workers” (n. 3.2.33) have “made men”, therefore “not made them well” (3.2.33-34). By adding that “they imitated humanity so abominably”, Hamlet hints at the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as *mimesis*: “*mimesis* of an action” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1449b25), meaning of humans acting. Hamlet’s turn of phrase however also alludes at the Platonic one, that uses *mimesis* as a pejorative term to describe a creative activity of the third order, one that imitates those objects of the phenomenal world, perceivable by the senses, that are themselves only poor imitations of the ideas of those things who populate the metaphysical realm, perceivable only with the mind. Hamlet, it seems, uses this criterion – the proximity or remoteness to the realm of the idea – to judge the success of players he didn’t like. While he does not condemn their imitation of men in itself, he mocks their failure at the attempt to emulate nature’s creative capacity. His encouragement of the players to pursue the perfecting of their imitation of humanity not only emphasizes that Hamlet adheres to a poetics of imitation of nature. It at least syntactically links the success of such a reform – “reform it altogether” to an imperative to reform the relationship between text and performance: “let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them.”

Within a few lines, Hamlet links the conception of theatrical representation as *mimesis* with the issue of the play’s existence as text and performance. The speech from which these lines are taken corroborates that *Hamlet* itself is created in a historical situation of aesthetic reformation: the play negotiates different conceptions of *mimesis* in front of a backdrop of heated debate about the theater as aesthetic and social practice. The debate combines reflections about the dangers and benefits of *mimesis* from an epistemological, ontological and moral point of view with reflections about the nature of theater as theater of the book, shifting the emphasis from the imagery of the mirror image towards that of a sensory impression and printing process.

The notion of *mimesis* reaches the Renaissance in two traditions:<sup>30</sup> Plato's critique of *mimesis* as an ultimately deceitful practice, doubly remote from the highest ontological state of ideas in his *Politeia*. In order to justify his final verdict to ban poetry from Plato's ideal state, Socrates (one of the interlocutors in the fictional dialogue that Plato invents to expound his political theory) chooses a metaphor:

“I suppose the quickest way is if you care to take a mirror and carry it around with you wherever you go. That way you'll soon create the sun and the heavenly bodies, soon create the earth, soon create yourself, other living creatures, furniture, plants, and all the things we've just been talking about.”  
 “Yes”, he said, “I could create them as they appear to be. But not, I take it, as they truly are.” (Plato [390-370 B.C.]2013: 596 d-e)

Plato's treatment of *mimesis* in the broader context of his political theory is at the origin of the mirror metaphor. Decisively, he introduces *mimesis* as a pejorative term that is not inherently linked to art or poetry in particular. While all subjects in Plato's state are supposed to have one expertise and to exert only their particular task for the commonwealth, so-called “imitators” pretend through imitation to be able to do all and any tasks. The objects they create are doubly remote from the ontologically superior level of ideas, shadows of shadows: “Then the tragedian will be this too, if he's an imitator, being three stages away from the king and the truth, along with all the other imitators” (Plato [390-370 B.C.]2013: 597e). The artist producing such objects is, by consequence, a fraud, and a disruptive element to the ideal state. Those on the receiving end of mimetic art are incapable of judging the danger they are in: “[A]ll this kind of thing seems to me to be a corruption of the minds of their audiences who don't have the remedy of knowing exactly what

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of the ways by which Aristotle's *Poetics* found its way into the works of Philip Sidney, Thomas Lodge and their contemporaries, see Micha Lazarus, “Aristotelian Criticism in Sixteenth-Century England” (2016). While the *Poetics* were first published in England in 1623 and translated into English only in 1705, Shakespeare's contemporaries extensively draw on it and even literally quote it (Lazarus 2016: 4-6).

it is really like.”(Plato [390-370 B.C.]2013: 595 a-b) Hamlet’s use of the mirror metaphor and his concern with the effect of performance on those audiences least equipped to understand the danger they are in resonate with Plato’s own skepticism towards *mimesis*, but it is combined with and softened by Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in his *Poetics*:

Tragedy, then, is *mimesis* of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections; employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotion. (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1449b24-29)

In this definition, *mimesis* has a function for the definition of tragedy as one of several kinds of mimetic artworks. Even though Aristotle understands it as a general human technique, its context within the *Poetics* has made *mimesis* into a specifically artistic and poetic concept. Aristotle unburdens *mimesis* from the accusation of deceitful reproduction: bodies, objects, actions and utterances on stage work together to represent a coherent composition of actions into an overall fictional narrative or plot, the *mythos* in Aristotelian terms. In the particular fictional universe contained in each *mythos*, the poet represents not an exact copy of nature, but an exemplary illustration of the laws governing human action, as commentator Arbogast Schmitt confirms: “‘Nachahmung’ ist gerade nicht die Kopie der Wirklichkeit, sondern der Nachvollzug des möglichen ‘Werks’ eines Charakters in einer konkreten Einzelhandlung.” (Schmitt 1984: 209) While Plato reduces *mimesis* to the defective creativity of the mirror, Aristotle differentiates *mimesis* as representation of the possible action of a character. In addition, tragedy uses a peculiar mode of *mimesis*: “the direct enactment of all roles” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1448a24) While the medieval understanding of performance does not know the distinction of a dramatic text from other text, Aristotle’s definition clearly designates tragedy as a text lacking any narrative mediation. The dramatic text can be performed on stage because of its non-narrative, dialogical form. What Aristotle names ‘enactment’, then, is a feature not of a certain reception situation, but of the dramatic text itself. Even though *opsis*,

the spectacle, is one of seven parts of tragedy, Aristotle strictly regulates the *mimesis* occurring in tragedy by establishing a normative bias between the dramatic text and the performance. According to the *Poetics*, only the *mythos*, the careful combination of single human actions into a coherent whole, is decisive for the *mimesis* that makes tragedy a mimetic art form. The effect of tragedy, “through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1449b27-28), is reached by what is set down in the dramatic text. *Opsis* is less important than all other parts of tragedy, and only accidental to *mimesis*: “[S]pectacle [opsis] is emotionally potent but falls quite outside the art and is not integral to poetry: tragedy’s capacity is independent of performance and actors [...]” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1450a38-b18) Hamlet’s fear of the contagious laughter of the groundlings is deeply rooted in Aristotle’s definition of performance as accidental and unnecessary for the “purpose of playing”. What is essential to the *mimesis* of tragedy is the *mythos* of something possible, not something actual. The imitation of this possible fiction provokes affect in the audience – not the multisensory dimensions of the performance.

The key to Hamlet’s concatenation of the purpose of playing with the mirror metaphor and the distinction between what is ‘set down’ and what is not is the early modern reinterpretation of Aristotelian poetics for its understanding of the theater, especially with regards to the notion of fiction. In “Mimesis bei Aristoteles und in den Poetikkommentaren der Renaissance”, Arbogast Schmitt sums up the difference as follows:

Ähnlich wie die Aristotelische Nachahmung auch in der Deutung der Renaissance keine eigentliche Nachahmung ist, hat diese angeblich Aristotelische Fiktion die Besonderheit, dass sie eigentlich keine Fiktion ist. Sie ist zwar subjektive Erfindung, aber Erfindung, die sich an objektiv gegebenen Maßstäben orientiert. (Schmitt 1998: 23)

As Schmitt writes, the early modern version of the Aristotelian *mythos* narrows its scope: it is an invented fiction, but within the close frame of reference of what Hamlet’s calls “the modesty of Nature”.

*Mimesis* on stage looks for the middle ground between the – impossible and deceitful – exact mirror image, and the entirely free invention detached from any verisimilitude. The connection between mimetic art and nature is structural rather than specular, as Hamlet formulation itself shows: the first finds its touchstone and frame of reference in the “modesty” of the second. The question about the precise nature of this relation remains open, and the issue of the difference that resides between art and nature in mimetic art is troubling Renaissance commentators deeply. Their answer is to regulate *mimesis* with regards to the given reality that surrounds it:

Was ist also die “Natur”, die in der Dichtung nachgeahmt werden soll? Die seit der frühen Neuzeit übliche Antwort auf diese Frage lautet: Die Dichtung habe nach Aristoteles das Allgemeine, die eigentliche Natur darzustellen. Unter diesem Allgemeinen versteht man allerdings seit der frühen Neuzeit eine aus der sichtbaren Wirklichkeit gebildete Abstraktion bzw. einen Begriff, der an der ‘Realität’ gemessen wird. [...] Der eigentliche Bezugspunkt der Dichtung bzw. das Vorbild der Dichtung ist damit die gegebene Wirklichkeit geworden. (Schmitt 1998: 26)

As Arbogast Schmitt shows, Renaissance commentators interpret Aristotle’s *Poetics* in a way that ties the dramatic performance to a notion of ‘nature’ more closely; and this, in turn, makes the text and its unity the site and criterion of successful *mimesis*. The dramatic text and its performance are now bound by the unity of time. Joachim Fiebach sums up early modern readings of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the service of a more strongly normed theater focused on the literary text:

Parallel zur naturgetreuen Gestaltung des Bühnenraums entwickelte sich das Dogma des “geschlossenen” normativ regelgemäßen (literarischen) Dramas, verstanden als der Kern, ja das Wesen von Theater. Die Handlungen und Beziehungen der Figuren sollten sich hauptsächlich, ja ausschließlich in ihren verbalen Dialogen konstituieren, die Vorgänge seiner fiktiven Geschichten sich linear-kausal einer nach dem und aus dem anderen ergeben. Die rigid-normierende Deutung gründete auf dem Wahrscheinlichkeitsprinzip, einem neuartigen extremen

Rationalismus und dem entsprechenden Wahrnehmungsdrang.  
(Fiebach 2015: 106)

Commentators such as Francisco Robortelli (1548), Julius Caesar Scaliger (1561), and Lodovico Castelvetro (1570) produced detailed rules for dramatic theater, mainly reinterpreting Aristotle's rule of the consistency of the plot into the norms of the unity of place, time and space. In their treatises, the main concern to secure a strong connection between theater and 'nature' by establishing a norm of verisimilitude of the events presented in the dramatic literature. While renouncing to the exact reproduction of the mirror image, their aim still is to reduce the gap between the actions and events represented, and the bodies, props and processes that produce that representation to a minimum:

“Lügen nämlich sind den meisten Menschen verhasst. Deshalb kann ich weder die Kämpfe noch die Sturmangriffe von Theben gutheißen, die innerhalb zweier Stunden ihr Ende finden. Ein umsichtiger Dichter wird es auch vermeiden, jemanden im Nu von Delphi nach Athen oder von Athen nach Theben reisen zu lassen.” (Scaliger, quoted in Fiebach 2015: 107)

This passage from Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* quoted by Joachim Fiebach applies the norm of verisimilitude to performance understood as a direct representation of what is narrated in the text. If, in the two-hour span of time that a performance lasts, characters successively wage wars or travel impossible distances in the few minutes lying between one scene and the next, the verisimilitude of the mythos is in danger. The unity of time, space and action means that the present time and space of the performance closely corresponds to the time of the fictional action represented. Since its purpose is to represent a plot, the verisimilitude of the actions on stage guarantee the verisimilitude of the actions dramatized in the text, and this verisimilitude is the only thing that distinguishes the dramatic text and the theater performance from the lie.

While one consequence of these reinterpretations is to free poetic *mimesis* from the burden of creating a false image remote from reality, it imprisons it within the realm of the author's invention. Creativity is attribute entirely to the text at the expense of performance, reinforcing the text-performance hierarchization already under way. In the logic of verisimilar representation of the action of characters within a 'world-within-the-play', there is no room for the arbitrariness of a transgressive actor's performance and the audience's participation and intervention. The text becomes the container of a plot whose fictionality guarantees its distinctness from the lie. That it is nonetheless firmly regulated by "the modesty of nature" the time's deep epistemological insecurities and newfound rationalist thirst for a clear distinction between truths and falsehoods. This need becomes particularly obvious in writings about and against mimetic arts in general and the theater performance in particular, for example in Anthony Munday's *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres* (1580): "The notablest liar is become the best poet; he that can make the most notorious lie, and disguise falsehood in such sort that he may pass unperceived, is held the best writer." (Munday [1580]2004: 78) The most famous defense against this accusation, from Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry or Defense of Poesy* (1595), is well-known and has become one of the most notorious modern strategies for the nobilitation of poetry:

Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth: for, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth; the poet never maketh any circles about your imagination to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth. He citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry called the sweet muses to inspire unto him a good invention: in troth, not laboring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. (Sidney [1595]2004: 153)

Poetry is *mimesis* of nature with a difference, as opposed to *mimesis* as identical copying of reality, which Sidney identifies as a possible

misunderstanding on the side of the recipient which would indeed constitute an epistemological problem:

What child is there that, coming to a play and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive at that child's age, to know that the poets' persons and doings are but pictures, what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively, but allegorically and figuratively written; and therefore as in history looking for truth, they may go away full fraught with falsehood. So in poesy, looking but for fiction, thy shall use the narration but as an imaginative groundplate of a profitable invention. (Sidney [1595]2004: 153)

Confirming that nature is a frame of reference, a starting point for the poet's unlimited creativity, Sidney adroitly associates the dangerous misunderstanding of *mimesis* as the presentation of something true (not only truth-ful or veri-similar) with the stage and with the spectators that stand in front of it. Looking for fiction, as Sidney puts it, frees poetry from the mirror-like representation of what is; while not absolving it entirely from the frame of reference that is the "groundplate of a profitable invention." What is decisive for his argument and similar to Hamlet's instructions: the way the spectators receive what they see, the way they interpret it, is the site of the profitability or the dangers of poetry. This means that the worth of dramatic literature is precisely not to be found in the text, but in the playouses.

It is those playhouses as the context of performance that critics of the theater then focus on. Hamlet himself mentions it in his speech: the playhouses are the site of an excess that disrupts *mimesis*, as it caters to those groundlings that are interested less in the "necessary question" than in "dumb-shows and noise" – those, in fact, who do not care about the text at all. And while reinterpretations of *mimesis* successfully freed the theater from the accusation of the lie, it did so at the price of condemning its other side: The theater in the 1580's deem theater dangerous to its critics no longer mainly because of the potentially deceptive mirror image it presents, but because of the performance and the practices of imitation that create

it. These practices of imitation are deemed dangerous precisely because of their transgressive tendency to cross and thereby destabilize important boundaries between fact and fiction, performers and spectators, classes and genders. The power of performance lies in its capacity to impress itself on the senses, thereby modifying the mind through the body, and in its propensity to incite precisely the imitation that is needed on the part of the performers, who ‘imitate’ the actions of fictional characters, in the spectators, who might then imitate the morally condemnable actions of these characters – but also adopt the practice of imitation itself: a contagious propensity to ignore distinctions and boundaries necessary to a morally commendable social existence.

Let us take a look at how this slippage is visible in Hamlet’s instructions to the players as a whole. Hamlet at first seems to entirely embrace a text-oriented interpretation of *mimesis*, and to articulate a corresponding notion of the ‘purpose of playing’ and the acting techniques that will allow to fulfill these:

HAMLET Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance – that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of which one must in your allowance o’erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play and others praised – and that highly – not to speak it profanely, that neither having th’accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan nor man have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature’s journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. (3.2.16-34)

Hamlet’s instructions follow a rhetorical pattern that relates distinct terms and spaces while preserving their distinction: Playing is distinct from nature, and relates to it by the process of mirroring it.

Virtue and Scorn are shown themselves, but through an image or certain of their features. The mirroring relationship, as Hamlet implies, occurs indirectly: Representation is neither an image of an absent fictional universe, nor the exact replica of what is found in front of the mirror, but the one through the other. In the actions and words on stage, spectators will see the image of Virtue and Vice and be able to relate it to their own virtues and vices. Rather than a binary relationship, then, even when conceived as mirror, *mimesis* is triangular: through the representation of a fictional universe, reality is shown a particular image of itself, highlighting and focusing certain of its aspects. The means for the production of such a mirror image is another relation of two distinct features, namely the perfect commensurability of action and word, that need to be suited to each other.

The connections evoked in Hamlet's speech make sense as long as their respective spaces remain intact and distinct. But the medium of *mimesis* in the theater is a imitation of human action *through humans acting*, and, as we have seen in chapter two, a distinction between both seems difficult to pin down: like Eidinger's body remains the same whether he impersonates Hamlet or the Player Queen, the phenomenon of the human actions conducted on stage are the only site and expression of the imaginary actions they imitate – much like Old Hamlet is present through the phenomenon of the appearance of the Ghost. The instruction to ensure that the relation between both is suitable is an expression of a need to create, rather than preserve, a neat distinction between the two. The aim of good acting is to not “o'erstep” the modesty of nature: those players that Hamlet criticizes perform their roles ‘larger than life’, using mimics, prosody (“th’accent”) and gestures (“gait”) that go beyond the boundaries of what is ‘natural’ in the Aristotelian sense of ‘human’ (here inclusively described, according to early modern religious topography, as the Christians, the pagans and – to be sure – all others): “to bellow” literally designates the noises made by cattle or other animals “when excited” (OED s.v. bellow, v.). Figuratively applied to humans, it often designates expression perceived as for-

eign, grotesque, inappropriate. “To strut” is immediately understood as a mannered way of walking around (“7.a. To walk with an affected air of dignity or importance, stepping stiffly with head erect”), but the now obsolete senses of the word literally designate ways of sticking out, protruding – exceeding an imagined natural boundary, for example “2.a. To bulge, swell; to protrude on account of being full or swollen.” (OED s.v. strut, v.). Coming “tardy off” is another variant of that type of playing that leaves the territory of the “modesty of nature”. In general, this condemnable style of acting is remote from the Aristotelean imperative to imitate human action by revealing its internal structure, and to arrange them in a sequence governed by necessity or probability and plausibility: “And these elements should emerge from the very structure of the plot, so that they ensue from the preceding events by necessity or probability.” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1452a20)

From this original Aristotelean emphasis on the plausibility of the plot, in keeping with the neo-aristotelian readers of his time, Hamlet shifts the focus to the representation effected by *mimesis*. The imitation that the players perform in word and action, Hamlet explains, should aim for the closest possible proximity with the nature it represents, while always remaining clearly distinct from it. In fact, it seems that the acting style advocated by Hamlet is in the service of the purpose of reflection: “the purpose of playing” is to “hold as ‘twere the mirror up to Nature”. Hamlet’s definition of the purpose of playing thereby evokes a connection between the theater as mirror image, and the wish to contain it within boundaries. To preserve a clear distinction between mirror image and nature is part of a broader desire for distinctions that are endangered by the practice of performance. While the debates of the 1580’s still mingle social, epistemological and moral arguments, the metatheatrical scenes in *Hamlet* crystallize the need for a distinction that will ultimately become one that opposes text and performance in a re-interpretation of *mimesis* that ignores its non-textual aspects entirely. Defendants of the theater ultimately turn towards the values of poetry, salvaging dramatic literature at the expense of the theater performance, whose practices of transgressive imitation are condemned as abuses

of an intrinsically valuable form of imitation as clearly distinct representation. They neutralize the performative dangers of imitation for the sake of the instructive benefits of the example that it can set, if understood as representation. They reform *mimesis* by inoculating it within the text, rejecting performance altogether as a necessary evil of its existence, and reintroducing the imagery of the mirror not as a critique of *mimesis*, but as an ideal: "The mirror is the emblem of instantaneous and accurate reproduction; it takes nothing from what it reflects and adds nothing except self-knowledge." (Greenblatt 1988: 8) However, this ideal of a *mimesis* from which nothing emanates to cross the boundaries of the reproduction towards spectators contains an internal contradiction: if *mimesis* is the useful representation of a plot and characters 'set down' in a text that needs to be protected from the effects of performance, how is the instructive potential of this *mimesis* to reach the spectators? Equally, attacks on the theater combine two mutually contradictory criticisms: either *mimesis* is a neatly sealed off perfect but empty copy of nature, without substance; or it is a powerful effect of transgression that affects and transforms spectators. Hamlet's instructions to the players contain this apparent contradiction, and the play-within-the-play itself and the scenes surrounding it resolve it: *mimesis*, too, is a double phenomenon, existing as representation and practice, as mirror image that does not reflect, but give form and pressure to what it creates: in the mind of the spectators. The dangerous effects of performance on the mind are addressed by Hamlet's utterances about the clown's performance and its effect on the audience. It is in them that a differently conceived, salutary idea of *mimesis* resides: in Hamlet's speech to the Players, "[m]imesis is always accompanied by – indeed is always produced by – negotiation and exchange." (Greenblatt 1988: 8) That is precisely what makes it effective.

David Mann has noted that "Shakespeare's plays likewise exhibit a recognition of the indivisible mixture of the positive and negative aspects of playing", and that "Hamlet charts the various stages of his own ambivalence towards the players." (Mann 1991: 206) Unlike Sidney, who takes a poet's stance and thereby already focuses

on poetry as text entirely, Hamlet – like Eidinger in Ostermeier’s staging – is speaking as a director, giving aesthetical instructions about the practice of acting to the players: “suit the action to the word, the word to the action”. And, after the famous phrase about the purpose of playing, the details that ensue immediately direct the gaze to those in front of the stage: the spectators. It is they who are supposed to see the mirror image of their virtues and vices in that which occurs on stage. Within this sentence, a slippage occurs: an issue of perception and understanding – the question of the theatrical illusion – becomes an ethical question of the behavior performance might effect. Producing the illusion and consuming it are not static relations of reflection or representation, but processes that affect all involved. This is why Hamlet instantly relates his instructions to that which apparently affect the players most, the reaction of the audience: “Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of which one must in your allowance o’erweigh a whole theatre of others.” (3.2.24-28)

The implications of this turn towards the audience are twofold. First, it emphasizes that Hamlet is well aware that something crosses over from the stage into the audience. Second, it introduces the notion that what passes back and forth between actors and spectators in the event of the performance can be valued according to its relationship to the text and the performance. Either it is ‘only’ the effect of a performance tickling ribs, or it is a “necessary question” ‘set down’ in the play, something worthy of the judicious’ attention. As such, Hamlet is a child of his time: while firmly defending a reformed vision of *mimesis*, based on the integrity of the text and the ‘world-within-the-play’, he cannot but include the power of performance into his reflections, if only to defend against them. While Hamlet, however, takes the stance of a defendant of poetry such as Sidney, insisting on distinguishing between the right style of acting, destined for the right addressees, and the clownesque one, Hamlet introduces elements into his instructions to the players that imply a different ‘purpose of playing’: one that considers precisely processes of impression, contagion, consumption and transmission

between stage and audience as a potential of performance. While apparently advocating the distinction between nature and mirror, suited and transgressive styles of acting, and different spectatorial stances, Hamlet's instruction to the players point us towards the double existence of theatrical *mimesis* as text and performance, representation and practice.

### *Impression*

At the end of this enumeration, Hamlet eventually defines the "purpose of playing" as: "to show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." As Thompson and Taylor note, "form and pressure" seem to form a *bendiadys* but are semantically contradictory. The editors gloss them as "likeness and impression" (n.3.2.24). While they appear to belong together rhetorically, they express a static relation of similarity on the one, a process of material inscription, on the other. Stephen Greenblatt has famously commented on this shift of imagery in Hamlet's speech:

Yet even in Hamlet's familiar account, the word pressure – that is, impression, as with a seal or signet ring – should signal to us that for the Renaissance more is at stake in mirrors than an abstract and bodiless reflection. Both optics and mirror lore in the period suggested that something was actively passing back and forth in the production of mirror images, that accurate representation depended on material emanation and exchange. Only if we reinvest the mirror image with a sense of pressure as well as form can it convey something of its original strangeness and magic. (Greenblatt 1988: 7-8)

This active movement between the theater performance as textual, but also sensory phenomenon, and the spectators, was a concrete material process in the early modern imagination, based on the Aristotelian assumption that sensory perception generally functions as an emanation that leaves a form impressed on the mind: "the object sets in movement only what lies in between, and this in turn sets the organ in movement" (Aristotle [350 BC]2001: 419a27) Seeing, for example, implies that the air between the eye and the object it sees is moved by the color of said object. That this process leaves lasting traces on the mind is according to Aristotle evidenced by the

potential of memory and dreams: the material form of the objects that reach the eye leave an impression on the mind, much like a seal in wax: “even when the external object of sense perception has departed, the impressions it has made persist” (Aristotle [350 BC] 2001: 460b1). Much like a Ghost, the trace that has been left is then *like* the object that caused the perception: Dreams are “the remnant of a sensory impression taken when sense was actualizing itself; and when this, the true impression, has departed, its remnant is still immanent, and it is correct to say of it, that though not actually Coriscus, it is like Coriscus.” (Aristotle [350 BC] 2001: 461b22–25).

The expression of “mirror” and of “form and pressure” in Hamlet’s speech are therefore less contradictory than complementary in Hamlet’s speech: the mirror image, like other visual impressions, reaches the spectator’s eye and impresses itself on their mind. It then is similar from it, an imprint, but not an exact replica. This complementarity, I argue, can also be applied to the double existence of the play as performance and as text. While the defendants of poetry would like to seal the latter off against performance, the imagery associated with the text as a product of print shows that the processes producing the text and the effects of performance are connected in a mutual metaphorical relationship. The history of the *lemmata* ‘impression’ and ‘pressure’ around the time of the first performances of *Hamlet* support this argument: Beyond being defined as a physical process or the discomfort caused by it, between 1604–1809, ‘pressure’ can be used figuratively to express “† figurative. A form produced by pressing; an image, impression, or stamp. Obsolete.” (OED s.v. pressure, n.) ‘Impression’, on the other hand, signifies “A mark produced upon any surface by pressure, esp. by the application of a stamp, seal, etc. Hence, any depression, indentation, etc. such as would result from pressure; also, the figure produced by stamping or sealing; a cast, mould, copy” (OED s.v. impression, n.) as early as 1398. While the cast or mould could not, at the time, signify the body of the letters used to physically create printed text on paper, ‘impression’ is associated with that process from 1509 onwards: “The process of printing. Now rare”. (OED

s.v. impression, noun) Despite the apparent contradictoriness of the rhetorical and syntactical form of Hamlet's expression, then, all terms except for "age" and "time" share a common semantic affinity to the technical terminology of print. A new metaphor for the effects of performance is introduced, one that is associated with Hamlet's textual existence as print. Paul Menzer has argued "the master tropes of print potentially occlude rather than clarify our thinking about early modern acting, since print privileges qualities quite alien to performance: standardization, reproducibility and, above all, uniformity." (Menzer 2013: 141) In the formula "form and pressure", something else is signified: the quality of a visual representation that is *like*, but not exactly like what it represents; and imprints itself in the mind of the spectators through a movement across the boundary of the stage.

As many of the writers reflecting upon the theater believe at the time, it is what they see which imprints itself into their minds and bodies, like a seal into wax, or the impression of the Ghost into the tables of Hamlet's brain. "I'll wipe away", Hamlet proclaims, "all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past" (1.5.100), clearly associating his act of rewriting his own plot with the imagery of the printing press, and the latter with processes of mental impression. It is remarkable that the trope associated with the medium of the printed text is at the time still closely associated with a process of shaping, rather than with the function of a reproducible container for an abstract dramatic plot. Based on Julie Stone Peters' emphasis on the constitutive relatedness of performance to print at the time of Hamlet's first performances, it is productive to read not only "pressure", i.e. what performance creates in Hamlet's speech, in relation to the printing press. If the mirror, as Greenblatt emphasizes, is less abstract and bodiless as it might first seem, so is print, who actually has a body: The 'body' determines the size of a font, pressure is obviously necessary in order to leave the impression of a form on the page. Julie Stone Peters asserts that the mutual metaphorization of print and theater as we find it here in Hamlet's speech is part of a still ongoing dynamic

between the similarities of print and performance and the need for their distinction:

[W]hile worrying about the limits of metaphor, the commentaries on print and performance repeatedly draw attention to their own paradoxes, implicitly recognizing, at the same time that they attempt to define separate media, the limits of medium distinction. Like theatre, print is fixity and unfixity, it is accuracy and error, it is enlightenment and obscurity, it is order and chaos, as the drama's conflicting attitudes suggest. (Stone Peters 2000: 111)

The famous formula from Hamlet's instruction to the players uses the imagery of print in order establish that the production of a likeness – if we follow the editors' interpretation of 'form' – is a physical process. Instead of associating the text with a per definition bodyless fiction, Hamlet includes the text into the logic of performance by laying open the performing potential of print itself. There are no natural boundaries that playing needs to conform to, theater is a process of performing that lends form and pressure: "Performanz' bezeichnet mithin ein Vermögen, einen Formungsprozess, die vertikale instantane Durchformung - Stanzung - eines gegenwärtigen Raums[...]" (Mahler 2009: 239) Performance, in the general conceptual sense used by Mahler here, is a "Strukturierungsgeste" (Mahler 2009: 235) that gives shape to a material without which this shape itself would, however, never be visible in the first place: "Die Stanzung 'performiert' mithin in starkem Wortsinn die sprachmediale Vorder- und Rückseite zugleich; durch zwei Ebenen hindurch ('per') erschafft sie 'Form' ('formiert') [...]" (Mahler 2009: 235) The text as an immaterial meaning or representation is indistinguishable from the material of either print or performance that structures materials in ways that become recognizable as meaningful only after the fact. Form is given through pressure that leaves a lasting trace.

The fact that Hamlet's differentiation of diverse types of audiences follows right after this passage, draws attention to the fact that opponents and defendants of the theater readily agree upon the po-

tentials of performance. Theater leaves an impression on those involved in the performance: actors and spectators. What they disagree upon is the role of performance and text respectively in making that impression, and their disagreement ultimately leads to a new distinction, the one between text and performance, as well as the valorization of the one and the devaluation of the other. While defendants of the theater attempt to salvage the value of performance by arguing that it conveys morally sound representations more successfully than other media, according to its critics, the inherent dangers of performance ultimately outweigh its potentials, making the text a safer receptacle for the instruction and education that poetry can constitute than the performance. *Hamlet*, as Hamlet's instruction to the players shows, is written and performed at the very center of this historical evolution.

The defendants of the theater in some points follow the line of Hamlet's instruction: Theater's use is to hold the mirror up to nature, by holding it up to the spectators, in order to shame the vicious ones and to encourage the virtuous ones by giving examples of both: "To the arguments of abuse, I will after answer, only thus much now is to be said: that the comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one." (Sidney [1595]2004: 150) Philip Sidney argues at the level of drama, defending the fictions presented by poetry more than the medium of performance that, according to him, "naughty play-makers and stage-keepers have justly made odious." (ibid.) Only few defendants even venture to root the positive moral value of theater in its medium. George Puttenham, whose objective is rather a historico-cultural aetiology of theater as a cultural practice, mentions with some admiration that it is "put in execution by the feat and dexterity of man's body." (Puttenham [1589]2004: 142); and describes it as a historical practice in order to justify performance in the present:

the poets devised to have many parts played at once by two or three or four persons that debated the matters of the world, sometimes of their own private affairs, sometimes of their

neighbours, [...] in whose behaviors lyeth in effect the whole course and trade of man's life, and therefore tended altogether to the good amendment of man by discipline and example. (Puttenham [1589]2004: 140)

That the purpose of playing as an active practice of performance is the reflection upon the Vices and Virtues of the audience is still a frequent argument in 1612. Thomas Heywood's *Apology of Actors* sounds like an echo of Hamlet's address to the players, as an allegory of tragedy lends the words to his defense:

Am I Melpomene the buskined muse,  
That held in awe the tyrants of the world,  
And played their lives in public theaters,  
Making them so fear sin, since fearless I  
prepared to write their lives in crimson ink  
And act their shames in eye of all the world?  
Have not I whipped Vice with a scourge of steel,  
Unmasked stern Murder, shamed lascivious Lust?  
Plucked off the vizard from grim Treason's face,  
And made the sun point at their ugly sins?  
(Heywood [1612]2004: 217)

“Why should not the lives of these worthies, presented in these our days,” Heywood asks, “effect the like wonders in the princes of our times, which can no way be so exquisitely be demonstrated, nor so lively portrayed, as by action?” (Heywood [1612]2004: 220) Melpomene includes both existences of theater into her defense: “crimson ink” and the unmasking of Vices, the aural and the visual are equal components in her project of showing the spectators themselves through the representation with a difference that they see on stage. Almost 30 years earlier, Philip Stubbes also assumes that theater is more effective in conveying moral example because of its existence as performance:

For otherwise (all abuses cut away) who seeth not that some kind of plays, tragedies, and interludes in their own nature, are not only of great ancientness, but also very honest and very commendable exercises, being used and practiced in most Christian commonwealths, as which contain matter (such they may be) both of doctrine, erudition, good example, and

wholesome instruction; and may be used in time and place convenient, as conducibile examples of life and reformation of manners. For such is our gross and dull nature, that what thing we see opposite before our eyes, do pierce further, and print deeper into our hearts and minds, than that thing, which is heard only with the ears[...]. (Stubbes [1583]2004: 117)

It is striking that Stubbes here distinguishes two senses, the aural and the visual, in a way that privileges the effects of performance before those of the text. Like him, the more lenient critics of the theater are ready to admit their benefit and to condemn only the abuse of the form. They can have positive effects – those that Hamlet seems to explicitly address: “Now are the abuses of the world revealed; every man in a play may see his own faults, and learn by this glass to amend his manners. [...] Deformities are checked in jest, and mated in earnest.” (Gosson [1579]2004: 23) This revelation, Stubbes shows, relies on what is put in front of the spectators’ eyes printing something in their mind, even literally piercing into their inner being.

However, what remains under sharp criticism is the potential effect of performance to not only imprint the spectators’ minds with a piercing image of Vice and Virtue, but provoke their imitation in the spectators: “the arguments (for the most part) contained the acts and doings of harlots, to the end that the custom of beholding such things might not also cause a license of following it” (Northbrooke [1577]2004: 7) Stubbes himself, who articulated this position in the Preface to the first edition of his *Anatomy of Abuses* in 1583, retracted his concession that theater might in fact be considered “all abuses cut away”: following most of his antitheatrical consorts, he now identifies all senses as pathways to the soul, that pierce the surface of the subject and thereby allow for the dangerous impression of morally unsound actions. John Northbrooke worries about what is presented to ears and eyes at the theater performance:

[T]hou beholdest them in an open theater, a place where the soul of the wise is snared and condemned: [...] where thou shalt by hearing devilish and filthy songs hurt thy chaste ears, and also shalt see that which shall be grievous unto thine eyes: for

our eyes are as windows of the mind, as the prophet sayeth,  
death entered into my windows, that is, by mine eyes.  
(Northbrooke [1577]2004: 4)

Northbrooke combines the central *topoi* of antitheatrical criticism, the epistemological scepticism against the images presented to the eyes and the moral anxiety linked to the permeability of the subject through the senses that are considered “necessary gateways to knowledge and understanding, but they must be used responsibly to activate reason, and not by sense [...]” (Karim-Cooper 2013: 216) Eventually, the danger of the abuse of those physical gateways of the mind in the sensual event of performance suffices to conclusively establish that the medium of performance itself is the root of the problem. It is no longer the content of an impression that is perceived as problematic, it is the process of impression itself that gets increasing attention as an uncontrollable process that involves all senses:

For what is there that is not abused thereby? Our hearts with idle cogitations; our eyes with vain aspects, gestures, and toys; our ears with filthy speech, dishonest mirth, and ribaldry; our mouths with cursed speaking, our heads with wicked imaginations; our whole bodies with uncleanness; our bodies and minds to the service of the devil; our holy days with profaneness; our time with idleness; all our blessings, health, wealth, and prosperity, to the increase of Satan’s kingdom, are there abused [...] (Munday [1580]2004: 65)

The problem of the theatre, according to Anthony Munday, an unsuccessful player and playwright turned into one of the fiercest critics of the theater, is that it gives the vices a platform to penetrate all senses, all “portions” of the spectator at the same time: “But at theaters none of these but sinneth” (Munday [1580]2004: 65). Stephen Gosson equally condemns theater through its power to affect the sensual dimension of the subject: “To seek this is to spend our studies in things that are merely natural; to spend our time so is to be carnally minded, but to be carnally minded is death.” (Gosson

[1582]2004: 100) Tanya Pollard neatly sums up the slippage of antitheatrical criticism from the regulation of the content of plays into a general condemnation of performance as an event:

Fundamentally, at the heart of all these arguments is a belief that the theater contaminates us with its images: we become what we see. This idea, to antitheatricalists, is alarming on the grounds both that anything we can see on stage is intrinsically unsound, and that the idea of our vulnerability to the forces of spectacle threatens a model of the self as stable and unchanging. (Pollard 2004: xxi)

While defendants of the theater struggle to distinguish the fiction from lie and the use from the abuse of dramatic literature in performance, the danger of the theater is its propensity to abolish distinctions. Distinctions between the sexes, on the one hand: “Garments are set down for signs distinctive between sex and sex; to take unto us those garments that are manifest signs of another sex is to falsify, forge, and adulterate, contrary to the express rule of the word of God, which forbiddeth it by threatening a curse unto the same” (Gosson [1582]2004: 101). Social distinctions on the other: “for a mean person to take upon him the title of a prince, with counterfeit port and train; is by outward sign to show themselves otherwise than they are, and so within the compass of a lie.” (Gosson [1582]2004: 102) John Rainolds’ almost identical version of that critique, published only one year before the first performances of *Hamlet*, basically uses the same vocabulary that Hamlet uses to keep the players’ performance within the boundaries of the “modesty of Nature”: “And so if any an do put on woman’s raiment, he is dishonested and defiled, because he transgresseth the bounds of modesty and comeliness, and wareth that which God’s law forbiddeth him to wear, which man’s law affirmeth he can not wear without reproof.” (Rainolds [1599]2004: 173) In these criticisms, it is no longer the difficulty to distinguish between fiction and lie and the ensuing epistemological anxieties it provokes that are the issue; it is imitation as a practice of transgression that leads to the destabilization of boundaries and entails a lack of distinction – especially since it is imagined to actually affect body and mind of those who practice

it professionally, the players. The performance connects actors and spectators in a chain of literal impressions: “That an effeminate stageplayer, while he feigneth love, imprinteth wounds of love”, is only possible because the practice of imitation “worketh in the actors a marvelous impression of being like the persons whose qualities they expressed and imitate: chiefly when earnest and much meditation of sundry days and weeks, by often repetition and representation of the parts, shall as it were engrave the things in their mind with a pen of iron, or with the point of a diamond.” (Rainolds [1599]2004: 174) The argument is profusely repeated by Rainolds: “Thus are your particular conclusions overthrown, even by those passions which the parties mentioned might imprint in others. How much more in themselves? [...] the seeing whereof played but an hour or two might taint the spectators.” (Rainolds [1599]2004: 176) All possible tropes are themselves mangled in this diatribe, but the imagery of text and print is ubiquitous: the pen engraves, the printing press’s ink taints everyone. The close connection of the imagery of print in the context of the performance’s power to impress clearly contradicts the idea of an abstract and distinct ‘world-within-the-play’ allegedly contained in an immaterial text: print and performance share the power to impress as equally material processes of production.

### *Contagion*

Another image is central to antitheatrical criticism and its warnings that performance might transform actors and spectators in irreversible ways. Metaphorizing performance as a contagious illness is a powerful means to scare away play-goers. If the image of impression implied that performance left a durable trace in the mind or soul through the gateways of the senses, the imagery of contagion implies a more serious transformation of mind and body. Decisively, this image suggests that it is not only the behaviors represented in the theater that can be ‘caught’ by performing and watching the performance, but the practice of imitation itself is contagious, and thereby exponentially multiplies the danger of transmission of the theatrical virus among actors and spectators. Further-

more, the imagery of contagion works towards the idea that, in performance, actors and spectators are equally active and passive participants, as both are equally transformed by the performance. It is this imagery that allows to connect Hamlet's instruction to the players regarding their acting style with his distinction of types of audiences. At the same time, in the light of the utterances of contemporary critics of the theater, his demand to reform acting appears like a prefiguration of the seclusion of the dramatic text and the world it 'contains' from the context of performance altogether.

The dangers of performance become especially visible in Hamlet's speech the moment he discusses the effect of performance on the spectators. Spectators that lack the "discretion" that Hamlet recommends to the players) are in danger of not only being impressed, but of catching the illness of performance – or at least this concerns the "unskilful" ones, "which in respect of their ignorance, of their fickleness, and of their fury, are not to be admitted in place of judgement." (Gosson [1582]2004: 87). Maybe the "judicious" might have a chance of escaping it, but they, Gosson would probably argue, are not sufficiently ill-advised as to spend their afternoon in an open theater: "A judge must be grave, sober, discreet, wise, well exercised in cases of government; which qualities are never found in the baser sort." (Gosson [1582]2004: 97) The mind needs to be trained for distinction. What is presented at stage plays is "mingle-mangle of fish and flesh, good and bad where both are proffered." (Gosson [1582]2004: 96) The mingle-mangle on stage is paralleled by the mixture of social strata that came together in a theater that combined the "unskilful" with the "judicious", as satirist Thomas Dekker humorously describes:

Sithence then the place is so free in entertainment, allowing a stool as well to the farmer's son as to your temper; that your stinkard has the self-same liberty to be there in his tobacco fumes which your sweet courtier hath; and that your car-man and tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage, and fit to give judgment on the play's life and death, as well as the proudest Momus among the tribe of critic: it is fit that he, whom the most tailors' bills do make room for, when he comes

should not be basely (like a viol) cased up in a corner. (Dekker [1609]2004: 208)

These spectators form diverse social strata were now in close physical proximity in the same space – often even in physical contact, as Tanya Pollard invites us to imagine: “Contemporary visitors to the theatres reported audiences of more than three thousand people per performance, perhaps one third of whom were groundlings.” (Pollard 2004: xii) Its critics, therefore, worry about the affinity of theater to provoke the transgression of all kinds of boundaries in the world outside the theater, too. To produce the illusion of the fiction presented on stage, actors impersonate characters from a different social rank and even sex – but this incoherence between external appearance and ‘actual’ social position or gender is even less dangerous than witnessing the practice of imitation itself. Not only does what the spectators witness impress itself in their minds: the behavior of the actors itself is contagious. The imagery of contagion is used in *Hamlet* and the contemporary discourse about performance to signify the dangerous power of performance to infect those who watch it with the contents and the practices visible and perceivable through all senses in the round of the theater.

This danger was in one sense quite literal. London theaters were regularly shut down because their spatial conditions made them “amenable to plague”: “During a period in which London frequently suffered epidemics of plague, moreover, any place where so many people gathered in a small space held out the threat of contagion.” (Pollard 2004: xii) The threat of contagion, however, was not only perceived as a physical one: “Not only could the playhouses create physical conditions, but also contemporary religious thought held that plague was a punishment for sin, and hence doubly attributable to the theater.” (ibid.) The theater provoked the plague not only physically by encouraging its spread, it was even a direct cause of the plague as punishment for moral transgression. In addition, it was thought to spread not only physical, but of moral disease. The trope of performance as contagion connects the social conditions of performance and the epistemological and moral fears

of the lack of distinction between appearance and essence and theater and world. Contagion requires contiguity – and in the most literal, spatial sense of the word, that made theaters problematic in reverse, as they were themselves contaminated by their surroundings: “Theaters were regularly situated near brothels, drinking houses, and other places of ill repute, and shared their neighbors’ stigma.” (Pollard 2004: xii) Within theaters, contiguity was a fact. “[A]udiences of more than three thousand people” (ibid.) stood in a limited space, of all ranks and genders themselves, were pressed together; not only watching, but themselves on display: “Whosoever shall visit the chapel of Satan, I mean the theater, shall find there no want of young ruffians, nor lack of harlots, utterly past all shame, who press to the forefront of the scaffolds, to the need to show their impudency and to be as an object to all men’s eyes.” (Munday [1580]2004: 75) Like germs between those bodies pressed close together, spectacle, emotions, laughter and chatter, and the moral corruption – or the example of virtue, depending on the perspective – were thought to travel between bodies and minds.

In this context of the production and the reception of the performance, the concept of imitation moves away from the imagery of the mirror image towards that of contagion and contamination. Just like the trope of impression, that of a contagious disease is situated on a sliding scale between metaphorical and literal use. Theaters are sites of actual contagion – their repeated closure due to plague outbreaks testifies to it. The practices of imitation that occur there, however, are “both source and object of contagion, referentially self-infecting artefact” (Elam 1997: 24), as Keir Elam has argued with regards to the language of the Shakespearean stage that profusely comments upon its own literal and metaphorical infectiousness. Performance connects the dangers of actual bubonic contagion through the production conditions of the early modern theater performance, and the metaphorical infectiousness of performance as imitation because of a different idea of sensory perception: that which performance imitates enters the minds of the spectators through their senses, and the practice of imitation itself contaminates them, so that they imitate it. Sensory phenomena that occur

on stage and are witnessed by spectators literally touch their senses, so that they then learn by imitation and perpetuate the condemnable practices of contiguity and potentially infectious communication that is required for them to assist to the performance in the first place. Physical processes of illness and healing are used as an image for analogous spiritual procedures, but through these sensory gateways, physical and spiritual infection can occur as the same material process:

If we be careful that no pollution of idols enter by the mouth into our bodies, how diligent, how circumspect, how wary ought we to be, that no corruptions of idols enter by the passage of our eyes and ears into the soul? We know that whatsoever goeth into the mouth defileth not but passeth away by course of nature; but that which entereth into us by the eyes and ears must be digested by the spirit, which is chiefly reserved to honor God. (Gosson [1582]2004: 91-92)

Keir Elam's essay on "communicable disease" in Shakespeare clearly demonstrates that contemporary theories of contagion with the plague allow for such a sliding scale of spiritual and physical contagious processes involved in the production of the theater performance:

'Breath infect breath': Timon's vision of moral *halitosis* discloses one of the two main rival medical theories concerning the transmission of the epidemic, namely the theory of direct respiratory contagion. The notion that the plague might be passed on through the breath, like TB in more recent times, enjoyed, as Leeds Barroll has shown, considerable currency in the early modern period. (Elam 1997: 21)

The rhetorically simple formula that Shakespeare finds for the medical theory in *Timon of Athens*, poignantly portrays the process described here: two ephemeral, but materially tangible 'breaths' face each other, and as the one transgresses the boundary of one of two bodies, both may transgress the boundary of the opposite body in turn, potentially infecting them. Jehan Goevrot's description in *Regiment of Life*, quoted by Elam, names breath and conversation as in-

terchangeable synonyms for contagious exchange between individuals through their mouths. “The logical or epidemiological step from bad breath to bad speech is short”, Elam argues correctly – before reducing the literal equation to a metaphorical one: “The respiratory contagion theory justifies not only suspicions regarding crowds or theatre audiences but also suspicions regarding language itself as a contaminated and contaminating medium.” (Elam 1997: 22)

With regards to performance, the need for distinction that the metaphorical tends serves is frustrated by the idea of a literal communication of bodies and minds amongst and with each other. This is emphasized by the fact that, while the early modern performance itself involves all sensory aspects, they are, as Farah Karim-Cooper convincingly argues, the notion of a transforming touch:

Thus interior effects of theatrical performance, whether manifesting as weeping, laughing, or moral laxity are often imagined in tactile terms, and the seeing and hearing of plays are frequently characterised as synaesthetic activities with the capacity to penetrate and transform the self: a result feared by the anti-theatrical writers, but desired and seen as essential to the playgoing experience by the playwrights and actors. (Karim-Cooper 2013: 230)

Farah Karim-Cooper identifies several “categories of touch that early modern performance constructed: physical contact (between audience members), scenes of touching (on stage) and affective touch, meaning the presumed emotional or physiological effects of performance on members of the audience.” (Karim-Cooper 2013: 217)

Hamlet’s instructions to the players are full of allusions to the material processes of touch and the senses that are involved in them:

HAMLET Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you – trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it as many of our players do, I had as life the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all

gently; for, in the very torrent, tempest and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant – it out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it. PLAYER I warrant your honour.

(3.2.1-15)

The poetic form of Hamlet's address suggests that the style of acting he advocates is particularly wary of the material, tactile aspects of acting. "[T]rippingly" onomatopoeically mimics the frequent touch of the tongue on the palate when pronouncing "trippingly on the tongue", to "mouth it" transforms the body part into a verb. When instructing the players about their gestures, Hamlet also has the occasion to illustrate what he describes: "thus", and not "saw[ing] the air", as if it was a tangible material that the player's body touches, breaks, saws, and modifies. That which is to be done instead is also explicitly described in terms of a different materiality: "use all gently", and "beget" – physically conceive – a certain smoothness. In a few lines, Hamlet describes the performance from the perspective of an affected spectator: "O, it offends me to the soul" – not "in the soul", but in a movement that pierces through the surface and touches him. What pierces through his surface is a sound – one that is capable of "splitt[ing] the ears of groundlings" – which is quite an achievement and illustrates the exaggeratedness of the noise that these players make, since the groundlings in question either hear nothing or confused sound that can only be perceived as noise. In general, the type of performance that Hamlet rejects is characterized by dismemberment that includes all kinds of physical touch: he enumerates the senses involved, the tongue, mouth, ears, hands. The practice he wants reformed is one that affects the integrity of character and play. It "tear[s] a passion to tatters, to very rags" – and uses this practice of dismemberment to also "split" the body of those that watch. The Prince emphasizes that the character – "Herod", for example – provides boundaries that are not to be transgressed; towards the end of his speech, he

seems to be guiding the players towards the intelligible presentation of a text (words instead of ‘dumb-shows’ or noise) in order to accurately represent fictional characters. In performance, of course, the description of what Hamlet rejects takes up so much more space, explores such a wide range of physical and sensory experience, and contains such poetic language, that it oddly countervenes Hamlet’s apparent insistence on the dramatic text as the boundary of performance. A skilled performer, one as clownesque as Lars Eidinger and Richard Burbage, can use the numerous alliterations and the rhetorical structure of the passage to perform exactly what the Prince claims to reject here, paradoxically generating an enjoyable display of what is *not* to be done by the actors and enjoyed by the spectators.

The potential for a transformative effect on the audience originates within the actors’ performance and the transformation that they themselves experience. When Hamlet asks the players to “acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness”, he asks them to control something that overcomes them like a “torrent, a tempest, and [...] whirlwind” and “begets”, brings into existence the same affect in the spectators. The editors of the Arden Hamlet gloss “acquire and beget” as “adopt and inculcate”, and the Oxford English Dictionary defines “inculcate” as follows: “To endeavour to force (a thing) into or impress (it) on the mind of another by emphatic admonition, or by persistent repetition; to urge on the mind, esp. as a principle, an opinion, or a matter of belief; to teach forcibly.” (OED s.v. inculcate, v.) The trope of impression is connected to the actor here. He, too, is ‘impressed’ with something through his performance:

For who will call him a wise man that playeth the part of a fool and a vice? Who can call him a Christian who playeth the part of the devil, the sworn enemy of Christ? Who can call him a just man that playeth the part of the dissembling hypocrite? And to be brief, who can call him a straight dealing man, who playeth a cozener’s trick? And so of all the rest. Away therefore with this so infamous an art: for go they never so brave [note: finely dressed], yet are they counted and taken but for beggars. (Stubbes [1583]2004: 122)

While Stubbes here still makes an attempt at securing the distinction between fine appearance a beggarly essence, other writers prefer to acknowledge outright the potency of performance's touch to effectively transform those that perform, and those that watch them: players are "imagining themselves (to vainglory in the wrath of God) to be men whose persons they present" (Rankins [1587]2004: 132), and thereby "do not only exercise themselves in all kinds of [vices], but minister occasion to many to incur the like." (Rankins [1587]2004: 128) The transmission of vice in the theater occurs just as that of a physical illness but is much more fundamentally transformative: like the performance of a character, it changes one entirely from what one was to something different through the imitation and performance of it. John Rainolds definitely crosses the threshold from metaphor to literal contagion: "Seeing that diseases of the mind are gotten far sooner by counterfeiting than are diseases of the body, and bodily diseases may be gotten so, as appeareth by him, who, feigning for a purpose that he was sick of the gout, became (through care of counterfeiting it) gouty in deed. So much can imitation and meditation do." (Rainolds [1599]2004: 175)

The spectators, physically pressed together in actual contiguity, are most receptive to the contagion with imitative practices and their transformative power – not only because their breath might actually be contagious. Thomas Dekker describes the peculiar tangibility of air in the public theater – one that one might cut with a knife or, for that matter, saw with the hands:

When discussing players in his chapter on Sloth in *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606), Thomas Dekker writes that 'their houses smoakt everye after noone with Stinkards, who were so glewed together in the crowdes with the steames of strong breath, that when they come foorth, their faces lookt as if they had been perboyld'. Here Dekker satirically observes the multi-sensory conditions within the yard of the playhouses. This portrait of the 'stinkards' or groundlings is created by the viid synaesthetic image of steaming breaths sticking them together[.] (Karim-Cooper 2013: 219)

All kinds of gases and fluids are exchanged among the spectators, and apparently make them glue together. In Dekker's account, the heat generated by the spectators themselves already transforms them physically, making everyone look red. This facial transformation might also be due to the fact that the physical proximity might well entice some sexual attraction between spectators. Stubbes' main worry is that sexually licentious behavior that this might provoke outside of the playhouse – where, as in a chain of aemulatio, it will reflect the behaviour shown on the stage – “wanton gestures” and “bawdy speeches” – and the practices of assimilation and forbidden proximity that produce these representations: “Then these goodly pageants being done, every mate sorts to his mate, everyone brings another homeward of their way very friendly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the sodomites, or worse.” (Stubbes [1583]2004: 121) Stubbes recommends to avoid the pageants altogether, then, “lest we communicate with other men's sins” (Stubbes [1583]2004: 122).

The imagery of contagion used to describe and mostly discredit the theater as a public space and by extension the performance as practice of imitation sparking imitation in turn contributes to Hamlet's alternative notion of *mimesis* as “form and pressure” rather than “mirror” by expanding on the imagery of impression and relating all bodies and minds in the round of the theater to each other, erasing the distinction between the space of the stage and that of the audience as well as the space between spectators. That Hamlet as a character is wary of the power of performance to transmit something from one space to the other becomes obvious in his clear warning to the actors. He associates specific acting techniques with the propensity to set off analogous behavior in the audience, and gives instructions aiming towards a ‘reformed’ acting style that, however, fights a losing battle against the spectators' predisposition to participate in the contagious performance of the actors.

### *Transmission*

In Hamlet's advice to the players, it seems that the clown is the extreme example of a style of acting that speaks ‘more than is set

down', leaves the 'world-within-the-play' to move into the space of the spectators, infecting them with the practices of imitation that produce the performance and distracting them from the 'necessary question', the useful lesson that the pleasantly composed play-text probably contains. The clown's performance is contagious. However, it transmits not only the dire confusion between sexes and social classes that we have investigated in the previous subchapter, but something that cannot be entirely negative: laughter. This laughter, as we have seen before in chapter two, creates a community of that which is diverse, but united in the theater.

PLAYER I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us.  
HAMLET O, reform it altogether, and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. For there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. – That's villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready. (3.2.35-43)

It seems at first sight that Hamlet is intent on protecting the boundaries that, as we have seen, become increasingly subsumed under the distinction between text and performance in the historical aftermath of Hamlet. The Player confirms that they have "reformed" the condemnable habit of leaving the boundaries of modesty; of transgressing the limits of that which is natural, of "out-Herod[ing] Herod". Reforming character acting would imply restraining clowns within the boundaries of what is "set down for them." It is noteworthy that Hamlet emphasizes the character-actor-distinction even in the case of this most ambivalent of performers, the clown. He, too, is now a character, played by someone – and there is no reason why these shouldn't stay within the boundaries of the stage, the text, the fiction. Hamlet's instructions increasingly transform into a short version of Sidney's lengthy passage on genre distinction in his *Apology for Poetry*: Sidney deplores "how their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency

nor discretion[...].” (Sidney [1595]2004: 161) The clowns are uncomfortable to the new poetics of distinction because, as chapter two has shown (cf. especially Fool’s place, pp. 162-177), they are “thrust in”, half inside the ‘scene’ behind the arras, half outside, peeking through the curtain with their head and shoulders.

The clown’s position, between fiction and world, characters and spectators, is dangerous to the moral aim that is the only justification for performance provided by its defenders. It provokes contagious imitation, setting “on some barren spectators to laugh, too” (3.2.39). But laughter is an enjoyment too remote from the instructive and moral benefits delivered in the play-text, as Philip Sidney explains:

But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong: for though laughter may come with delight, yet commeth it not of delight, as though delight should be the cause of laughter. But well may one thing breed both together. Nay, rather in themselves they have, as it were, a kind of contrariety. For delight we scarcely do but in things that have a convenience to our selves, or the general nature; laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to our selves and nature. Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present; laughter hath only a scornful tickling. (Sidney [1595]2004: 161)

Laughter and tickling have an affinity – and therefore fatally bring together those aspects of performance that Hamlet’s speech attacks: the tactility and contagiousness of tickling and the disproportion of those actors’ performance who exaggerate everything and transgress the boundaries of nature. Most importantly, however, laughter – in contrast to delight – is a “bad mirror”. Like mirrors in a funhouse, it draws forth distorting images, images of what is disproportionate. Delight, by contrast, is the result of an accurate mirroring process: We delight in things that have a connection to ourselves. Sidney’s formula recalls Aristotle’s explanation of the aesthetic surplus that artistic *mimesis* produces in addition to the delight that imitation as a practice in itself provides: “A common occurrence indicates this: we enjoy contemplating the most precise

images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses.” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1448b10) Delight, even of things that aren’t delightful in themselves at all, Aristotle claims, is produced by the accuracy of the imitation and by the process of recognizing the object of imitation – not, however, by the material from which the imitation is made: “For, if one happens not to have seen the subject before, the image will not give pleasure qua *mimesis* but because of its execution or colour, or for some other such reason.” (Aristotle [ca. 330 B.C.]1995: 1449a15) This detail, which Sidney takes up here, is decisive for the eventual movement towards a concept of *mimesis* or imitation as re-presentation. Artistic *mimesis*, including that of tragedy, is firmly rooted in the world. Without its recognizability, it becomes pure material. Without accuracy, it becomes a grotesque, disproportionate reflection that elicits laughter, but not delight. ‘Good’ *mimesis* thereby provokes a process of insight in the spectators, not a tactile transmission of sensory impulses that pollutes those who receive them.

While Hamlet seems to concur with Sidney’s view in his address to the players, it also recalls an earlier passage in which Hamlet, in the middle of his performance of the ‘antic disposition’, takes a different stance. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern announce the players’ arrival, Hamlet enumerates diverse characters that might be present in a play in early modern London. However, in Q1 and in F, one more element is present in that enumeration compared to Q2: a clown. A possible intervention of the audience in the performance was implied in Hamlet’s assumption that an interruption of Humorous Man and/or Lady might be expected. In F and Q1, the spectators are explicitly named as those that laugh at the clown’s performance, those “that are tickled in the lungs” (Q1 7.280-1) or “whose lungs are tickled o’th’sear” (2.2.322-3). While the Q1’s turn of phrase is rather straightforward, the turn of phrase in F contains a stronger judgement about the audience itself. The editors define “tickled o’th’ sear” as

easily triggered or excited, i.e. readily amused. The sear was a part of a gun controlling the hammer and released by the

trigger; OED quotes William Lambarde: ‘Even as a pistole that is ready charged and bent, will flie off by and by, if a man do but touch the Seare’ (*A Perambulation of Kent*, 1596 edn.) (F n.2.2.323)

The spectators that laugh at the clown do so only partially because of the latter’s performance. They have come ready to laugh: like a gun that is ready to go off any moment, they only need minimal stimulation. Whether this is necessarily a negative judgement about the audiences’ expectation to be amused rather than instructed or interested, it certainly introduces an important paradigm for the way in which the audience is materially connected to what happens on stage. Like a bullet, it touches them and transforms them, provoking a spontaneous, visceral and irrational reaction. Like a tickle, performance constitutes a tactile, intimate, playful bond between what happens on and off stage. There is nothing of the rationale of epistemologically valuable resemblance here, and many follow Sidney’s condemnation of it: “Comedies so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vein that they make us lovers of laughter and pleasure without any mean, both foes to temperance; what schooling is this?” (Gosson [1582]2004: 95) Thomas Dekker’s parody of the gallant in the theater indicates the possibility that this type of “tickling” occurred not one-directionally from stage to spectators, but could also occur among the spectators: “if either the company or indisposition of the weather bind you to sit it out “ (i.e., forces the spectators that are potentially under satirical attack by the poets epigrams to stay put on the stage instead of leaving), Thomas Dekker recommends “that you turn plain ape: take up a rush and tickle the ears of your fellow gallants, to make other fools fall a laughing” (Dekker [1609]2004: 211). Spectators can imitate actors and become apes themselves, be clowns and tickle everybody’s lungs. Like a ripple effect, laughter spreads across the boundaries of the stage and among the spectators in and outside the round of the Globe. As Tiffany Stern confirms, “[i]n the indoor and outdoor theatres of the time, spectators and actors clearly saw each other and borrowed reactions from one another.” (Stern 2004: 26)

In addition to reevaluating the fool's performance in positive terms, the Q1 and F formula also draws attention to the fact that the connection between the 'world-within-the-play' on stage and the spectators does not necessarily provoke the disruption of the 'purpose of playing' according to Hamlet. The joyous community between actors and spectator does contribute to creating a mirror image, albeit in a different way. The multitude of genres – the one that Polonius also enumerates as a sign of the players' versatility and repertory – corresponds to a multitude of audiences. They, too, are Majesty, knight, lovers, clowns and, indeed, ladies. It is interesting that precisely those university-trained poets who rejected the playwrights that wrote for the public stages did so also because they catered to their audiences' expectations, and were thereby ready to loosen the strict genre distinctions that newly re-discovered classical poetics was prone to impose on Renaissance literature. In the Prologue to his *Midas*, John Lyly evokes the diversity of subjects that playwrights have to treat if they were to respond to all the audiences' expectations:

At our exercises, Soldiers call for Tragedies, their object is blood: Courtiers for Comedies, their subject is love: Countrymen for Pastorales, Shepherds are their Saintes. Traffick and travell hath woven the nature of all Nations into ours, and made this land like Arras, full of devise, which was Broade-cloth, full of workemanshippe. Time hath confounded our mindes, our mindes the matter; but all commeth to this passe, that what heretofore hath been served in severall dishes for a feaste, is now minced in a charger for a Gallimaufrey. If wee present a mingle-mangle, our fault is to be excused, because the whole worlde is become a Hodge-Podge. (quoted in Weimann 1988: 138)

The different fields of imagery that Lily draws on constitute a wide range of commonplaces of the antitheatrical discourse of the time. His use of the textile metaphor of course marks him out as a man of the word, a literary writer, that draws upon the long history of the association of poetic writing with weaving, of the text with texture. The metaphorical arras, however, of the diverse people that mingle in one nation, is also an essential architectural part of the

early modern stage. Like a curtain, it is supposed to secure the necessary distinction between fact and fiction. When moving from his description of the world as an “Arras” to his justification of the mingle-mangle shape of his Midas, Lyly’s choice of the culinary metaphor of several dishes as opposed to minced meat, elegantly leads into his understanding of the work of the playwright as that of a mimetic re-creation of the world: paradoxically, if there is hodge-podge on the stage, it is because the stage is a mirror that only reflects the diversity of the audience in front of it, showing “the age and body of the time” its own shape. Precisely as in Ostermeier’s and Pappelbaum’s stage, the curtain is no means to distinguish the fictional world on the stage from the present time and space of the performance, but a mirroring surface that connects the ‘world-within-the-play’ to the reality of the audience. The collective laughter is not an interruption, but a symptom of such a connection. That it is a physical rather than a merely intellectual connection becomes obvious from the culinary imagery that Lyly chooses: “For there is no question that attending plays was viewed as a consumptive activity; this notion is ubiquitous in the anti-theatrical discourse, which time and again refers to theatres as food-producing entities.” (Karim-Cooper 2013: 243)

Ultimately, Hamlet’s instructions to the players, through their internal contradiction, clearly point beyond the heritage of carnivalesque hodge-podge and the present of early modern mingle-mangle in the round of the public theater, towards a new paradigm for theatrical *mimesis* in which the mirror-function becomes associated with the representation of a ‘world-within-the-play’ contained in a text, whose instructive value unfolds not through but despite the effects of performance. As Stephen Gosson writes the final of numerous engaged essays against the stage, his position has shifted towards one that condemns the stage, while acknowledging the value of poetry: “Therefore whatsoever such plays as contain good matter are set out in print may be read with profit, but cannot be played without a manifest breach of God’s commandment.” (Gosson [1582]2004: 102-103) By including diverse conceptualizations of *mi-*

*mimesis* as mirror, impression, contagion and transmission into his instruction to the players, Hamlet retraces the tensions within a debate that is only just taking shape. It points beyond itself, towards a new distinction on the horizon – that between text and performance as opposing aspects of theater.

## 2. A/effective acting

*The Mousetrap* consists of two parts, a dumb-show and a dramatic play entitled *The Murder of Gonzago*. The players' arrival at Elsinore leads to a multiplication of the plays-within-the-play that have been at the center of this study's attention from the very beginning. The conversations about and with the players upon their arrival, the improvised delivery of a speech by one of them, Hamlet's and Horatio's preparations before the actual play, and the performance of the play-within-the-play itself provide the occasion to explore the relationship between *Hamlet* as text and *Hamlet* as performance from ever new angles. The delivery of an improvised monologue presenting a part of the myth around Aeneas' flight from Troy pursues *Hamlet's* and Hamlet's reflection about the different possible aspects of *mimesis* in the theater performance by presenting a practical example of the actor's craft. In what the Pyrrhus speech, Hamlet skillfully articulates the intricate relationship between the notion of *mimesis* as a mirror image of something that it represents, and its understanding as a process of impression and contagion. In the Pyrrhus speech, it becomes clear that the representation of a 'world-within-the-play' as it is scripted in what is 'set down' is inseparable from and even requires the transgressions that occur in the present time and space of the actor's performance. For the representation to exist, something needs to pass back and forth between the space of the stage and the space of the audience. For affective impulses from a performing actor to touch a spectator, *Hamlet* claims, the representation of the 'world-within-the-play' is not at all indifferent. There needs to be a relation between the world in which the performance takes place, and the world represented, for the performance to take effect.

To support this claim, I will read the Pyrrhus-speech in three steps. First of all, the impromptu performance of the speech by the player, I argue, further elaborates on the conceptualization of performance as contagion by showing the transmission of affects between character, actor and spectator as a metaphorical and literal flow of liquids. The shedding of tears at the level of the characters narrated, the actor's performance and the spectators' reaction becomes a metaphor for affect overflowing the boundaries between the fictional levels in ways that destabilize them. Second, as a speech from a play, the Pyrrhus-speech references characters and a plot, the myth of Pyrrhus as narrated to Dido by Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Taking a closer look at the intertext of the speech, it becomes clear that the myth is deliberately rewritten as a series of revenge plots that presents a complex set of similarities with the story of the Ghost and the plot of *Hamlet*, but never quite allows for an exact analogy. The players' speech makes clear that its effect relies on the representation of a similarity with a difference, a gap that gives room for the affects to unfold.

Finally, the impromptu speech of the player makes the claim that, in contrast to the antitheatrical discrediting of performance as illusion, performance is a form of action that reaches and changes others. Decisively, the speech makes this visible by presenting a stage of dramatic performance rarely accessible to spectators, but at the center of theories of 'post-dramatic' acting: the rehearsal. Performance as a process of production and affective transformation becomes visible as the result of training and rehearsal that places the actor at a distance of the character he actively embodies through the workings of his own body and mind.

Hamlet draws his conclusions from the experience of this performance: in observing the player's production of affect and the effect it has on him, Hamlet understands that the affective potential of performance lies in the gap between *mimesis* and the world. In addition, he has now 'rehearsed' the effect he wants his own play-within-the-play – written and directed by him – to have on Claudius. *The Mousetrap* needs to be "something like" the murder of his

father to reach its affective goal, and it requires its multiplication into a ‘dumb-show’ and a dramatic part to establish the complex relations of similarity and difference that Hamlet has experienced when hearing the player speak. The most complex metatheatrical set-up of Hamlet, the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago* itself, as ‘dumb-show’ and as play, is now visible as a combination of mirror representation and affective effect produced by careful rehearsal and training.

### *Overflowing affect*

The conceptualization of performance as a process of impression or contagion has shown that these processes are thought of in Hamlet as literal exchanges between the participants of the performance in the Globe. In the Pyrrhus-speech, an affective connection between actor and spectator is metaphorized through a pervasive imagery of fluidity, that is literalized by the shedding of tears by characters, actors and spectators. Tears in the theater are an important example for the excessive, boundary-crossing nature of performance that its opponent criticize, and generally an expression of control or lack of control over one’s emotions: as Bishop John Lesly writes in his meditation *An Epitbrene; or Voice of Weeping*, moderate tears “gilt diesem Autor geradezu als Garant eines vorbildlichen Charakters, dessen Fähigkeit zur Selbstkontrolle sich in der Beschränkung des Gefühlsausdrucks am deutlichsten erweist” (Döring 2001: 356). Just as laughter is presented and perceived as a manifestation of the grotesque excesses of the body, tears equally represent an illicit transgression of the body’s boundaries (see Döring 2001: 359). Hamlet in particular shows how tears are the object of a debate in early modern rhetoric and poetics that is actually a debate around the epistemological and performative potential of the theater: “Die Tränendebatte jener Zeit [...] ist eine Theaterdebatte [...]” (Döring 2001: 361) Tears seem to crystallize early modern issues with acting and performance as they are, on the one hand, understood as the authentic manifestation of honest emotion, on the other hand an epitome of the actor’s mastery over his body. Most importantly, they are most often mentioned as a liquid that crosses the boundary not only of the actor’s body, flowing from

inside his body out, but that between his body and those of the spectators, “[i]ndem sie, bei aller Skepsis über ihren wahren Anlaß, zum mimetischen Mit- und Nachvollzug anstiften” (Döring 2001: 363). Like the Ghost or the contagious laughter mentioned above, while the origin of tears can never be ascertained, their transgressive effect remains undeniable.

Following Döring’s central argument, I argue that while the player’s tears impossibly denote an interiority or emotion perceived as ‘authentic’ or honest, they still have a tangible effect on the spectator. It is striking that in his encounter with the player, Hamlet focuses much less on the troubling issue of inaccessible interiority than on the powers of the actor’s peculiar skill, ultimately attempting to learn from it and emulate it as an actor, himself. While the actors are overflowing with words and affect, the spectators are touched by it and overflow themselves – an excess that is to be condemned, as well, according to Hamlet’s contemporaries:

But the poets that write plays, and they that present them upon the stage, study to make our affections overflow, whereby they draw the bridle from that part of the mind that should ever be curbed, from running on ahead: which is manifest treason to our souls, and delivereth them captive to the devil. (Gosson [1582]2004: 105)

The community assembled in the theater – actors and spectators together – thus become one metabolism, overriding the distinctive power of the mind. The affective impulse of the actor’s performance flows out into the audience and touches it – but the audience’s affect, so to speak, flows back. Streams of liquid connect both sides. Right after the Pyrrhus-speech Hamlet remains alone and reflects upon this process after everybody has left. The main mode of expression of the player, and that which has touched Hamlet most, are “– Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, / A broken voice, and his whole function suiting / With forms to his conceit –”. Leaving aside for a moment the question of how the player’s interiority relates to this outside flow, Hamlet insists on the tears that the Player obviously actually sheds, even though he lacks

any personal relation to the fictional characters from the story: “What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her, / That he should weep for her?” (2.2.494-495) If the player had Hamlet’s personal motivation for ‘performing’ sadness,

He would drown the stage with tears  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,  
Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed  
The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.497-501)

To the literally overflowing liquid of the tears, Hamlet adds the flow of speech and thereby presents it as an equally material stream that physically affects those that repeat it: it makes mad, appalls, confounds, amazes – everything that antitheatricalists feared from the irrationality promoted by excessive use of the senses in the performance situation. It is important to note that “eyes and ears” are parallel senses here, even though one might tend to dissociate the perception of “speech” from that of tears, since it might be regarded as a rather cognitive process. Drowning the stage with tears, cleaving the ear with horrid speech are processes with analogous effects. The gateways of the sensory system are all mentioned here: ear, eye, touch, taste; and all are directly part of a process of material fluids and solids crossing from outside to inside the subject and conversely. Most importantly, the effect of the performance occurs as a combination of all: cleaving the ear with speech is as much part of it as the rest. The reaction that is to be elicited from the audience is quite intentional, as Karim-Cooper notes:

Shakespeare’s and Fletcher’s Prologue to *Henry VIII*, for example, guides the audience as to the ways in which the ensuing performance should touch them:

I come no more to make you laugh: things now  
That bear a weighty and serious brow,  
Sad, high and working, full of stage and woe,  
Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow,  
We now present. Those that can pity here  
May, if they think it well, let fall a tear:  
The subject will deserve it. (Prologue 1-7)

(Karim-Cooper 2013: 228)

Polonius is, in that sense, the perfect audience: “Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears in’s eyes. – Prithee no more!” He sees the player’s tears and cannot hold back his own. After Pyrrhus murders Priamos, Hecuba, Queen of Troy, mourns him loudly:

1 PLAYER

But who – ah woe – had seen the mobled queen –  
[...]

– Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames  
With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head  
Where late the diadem stood and, for a robe,  
About her lank and all-o’erteemed loins,  
A blanket in the alarm of fear caught up.

Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped,  
‘Gainst Fortune’s state would treason have pronounced.

But if the gods themselves did see her then,  
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport  
In mincing with his sword her husband limbs,  
The instant burst of clamour that she made  
(Unless things mortal move them not at all)

Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven  
And passion in the gods.

(2.2.440-456)

Hecuba is here staged as a spectacle of affective overflow. She mourns the death of Priamos “with bisson rheum”, “blinding tears” (n.2.2.444), and she, in turn, sparks a reaction in different groups of spectators. The set-up is interesting: there is an implicit earthly spectator, and a divine spectator. They are mentioned in a way that makes them the starting point of two opposing processes that are connected: The implied spectator would have reacted verbally, “with tongue in venom steeped”, cursing Fortune – and thereby becoming himself part of the spectacle observed by the Gods, and using performative speech to elicit a ‘second degree’ reaction from them. The Gods, who are imagined as spectators as well of Hecuba’s “burst of clamour”, as well as of the imagined witness’ ven-

omous curses, should then react with tears, according to the narrative 'I' of the speech. The sight "would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven," called forth tears even from the sun and stars. The scene of Hecuba's mourning therefore also stages a series of performance situations that reflect upon the transmission of affect between character, actor and spectator. Herself a spectator of her husband's brutal murder at the hands of Pyrrhus, she reacts with overflowing emotion, a clamor that, in the words of Hamlet might "cleave" or "split" the ears of those who look on, drawing from them not only an emotional overflow in return, but a speech act that provokes an intervention from those spectators that seemed entirely detached from the performance – "unless things mortal move them not at all". Against the Homeric depiction of indifferent Gods who make use of their omnipotence to direct the fate of humans as a means to carry out their own internal conflicts, Hamlet here advocates that in performance, something flows in all directions, connecting Hecuba with an internal spectator that becomes an actor, in turn affecting external spectators on an entirely different plane.

Hamlet's theory of the connection of character, actor and spectator in performance through an affect materialized in a stream of tears is not unlike that imagined in post-dramatic theories of performance. In her *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Erika Fischer-Lichte employs an analogous imagery of fluidity; the central term of 'affect' is replaced by the term of 'energy' in her writing:

The "magic" of presence therefore lies in the performer's particular ability to generate energy so that it can be sensed by the spectators as it circulates in space and affects, even tinges, them. This energy constitutes the force emanating from the performer. Insofar as it animates the spectators to generate energy themselves, they will perceive the actor as a source of power. This unexpected energy flow thus transforms actor and spectator alike. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 98)

Performer and spectator are both receivers and sources of energy that affects them – Fischer-Lichte uses both the imagery of the stream, the circle, and of the taint that we have observed earlier.

The circularity of the process is more precisely described by Fischer-Lichte as a feedback loop: “In short, whatever the actors do elicits a response from the spectators, which impacts on the entire performance. In this sense, performances are generated and determined by a self-referential and ever-changing feedback loop.” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 39) What Fischer-Lichte describes with a view to the autopoietic nature of performance itself is analyzed by Wolf-Dieter Ernst with regards to the particular craft of the actor: affect, he argues,

[...] bezeichnet [...] dabei einen abrupten Wechsel von aktiver und passiver Bestimmung. Ein Affekt befällt uns gleichsam wie eine Krankheit und zugleich kann ein Affekt – wie etwa im Falle des Zorns – im Extrem ausgelebt werden. [...] Der Affekt stellt den Bezug zum Anderen der Vernunft her, den körperlich erfahrenen Kontrollverlust, den ein Subjekt im Affekt erleidet, sowie die Unberechenbarkeit, die von einem Publikum ausgehen kann. (Ernst 2012: 16-17)

Ernst’s argumentation is oddly akin to the antitheatricalists of Shakespeare’s time, as it shares the belief in the infectiousness of affect. The lexical proximity between “Affekt” and “Infekt” is present here, as well as the notion that the affect is established as the Other of a rational perception; as the possibility of the loss of control. This loss of control can occur on both sides, through the actor and through the spectator: the infectiousness of performance is the result of an affective style of acting and an affective style of watching it; and these overflowing affects are not opposed to the delivery of what is ‘set down’. On the contrary: when Polonius cannot hold back his tears, he is only one step away from cursing, “with tongue in venom steeped”, and decisively modifying the course of the performance. What Ernst qualifies as a phenomenon of post-dramatic aesthetics is, I argue, already present in the conceptualization of the actor in the Pyrrhus speech. The actor, “verstanden als affektiver Schauspieler”, effects affective touch by taking a detached stance towards the prescription of the role: “Seine Tätigkeit wird dabei als eine energetische aufgefasst: Der Schauspieler spielt mit der Entladung und Hemmung von Energien, er nimmt die Rollenfigur als

eine Vorschrift, die er affektiv über- und unterbietet.” (Ernst 2012: 11) The actor’s relationship to the character, just as the performance’s relationship to the “necessary question” contained in the text, is not necessarily best served by a self-effacing identification and clear distinction of performance from reality. On the contrary: Hecuba’s story is only completed when her tears move the spectators to tears, as well.

The objective of an affective actor, then, is not to create an illusory likeness to something that only exists as a “dream of passion” anyways, nor to ‘authentically’ reproduce the emotions of a fictional character, but to produce an affect by exposing the relationship between role and performance, theater and world as one of resemblance with a difference. The gap between actor and role, I argue, gives the room for the affective effect to unfold. Analogously, so does the distance between what is represented and what the spectators, such as Hamlet, have experienced in their lives and can relate to. This second gap needs to exist for the spectators to be touched by the actor’s performance.

### *Revenues past and present*

The plot narrated in the speech itself entertains many relations of similarity with other intertexts. Those intertextual relationships, however, do not only go in one direction. The story of Pyrrhus entertains an intertextual relationship with *Hamlet* itself, too, recalling the story of the murder of Old Hamlet as told by the Ghost, Hamlet’s own position as well as prefiguring the plot of *The Mousetrap*. While telling the story of the murder of Priamos by Pyrrhus, it also narrates the alleged deed of Claudius and the revenge that the Ghost demands and Hamlet has not yet fulfilled. However, there remains a difference between the revenge plots that, I argue, is the prerequisite for the effect of the player’s performance on Hamlet.

The Pyrrhus-speech is a commentary on the plot of Hamlet in that it resembles it. But the Pyrrhus-speech also reflects on the way in which spectators are touched and incited to act by performance, implying and imagining its own spectators and allowing the empirical spectators to reflect upon their status as spectators. Hamlet here

learns about the power of performance from the stance not of the actor, but of the spectator. The spectator needs to bring a predisposition to relate to the ‘world-within-the-play’ represented, but just enough distance for the effect of performance to unfold.

The first verses of the myth are spoken by Hamlet himself. He asked the player to recite the speech “if it live in your memory” – but this recitation of his rather seems to be a memory of his, an obedient recollection of what his father told him. The depiction of Pyrrhus, caked in blood, is just the kind of tale that the Ghost had promised Hamlet: “I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood...” I have argued in chapter one that Hamlet’s encounter with the Ghost is a starting point for a substitution of the position of the author with that of the player; in chapter two, this substitution has mainly taken the shape of a contestation: refusing to carry out revenge, Hamlet chose to play the fool instead. Now, a new relationship becomes visible: Hamlet has somehow taken the position of the Ghost, telling the harrowing tale of his “prison-house”; but only to set off a performance of the speech by a player. Hamlet creates the conditions to become the spectator of his own memory, the witness of a repeated performance of what he has lived through as a character himself. The speech is about another hero come straight from hell and makes his “eternal blazon” finally perceivable to “ears of flesh and blood”, those ears that wait and ask to be split and cleaved:

The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,  
 Black as his purpose, did the night resemble  
 When he lay couched in th’ominous horse,  
 Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared  
 With heraldry more dismal, head to foot.  
 Now is he total gules, horridly tricked  
 With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,  
 Baked and impasted with the parching streets  
 That lend a tyrannous and a damned light  
 To their Lord’s murder; roasted in wrath and fire,  
 And thus o’ersized with coagulate gore,  
 With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus  
 Old grandsire Priam seeks. (2.2.390-402)

Like the Ghost, Pyrrhus is depicted as armed in black, waiting in the Trojan Horse to be drawn into the city of Troy. Instead of being armed “cap à pie”, as is the Ghost’s in Horatio’s narrative, he is covered in blood caked on his body, “head to foot” – like a heraldry more dismal than an actual armor. The Ghost of Old Hamlet returns once more to the stage, but in the middle of battle: not a pale animated corpse, but in a lively state before its death. The speech does not allow for any direct parallels to be drawn conclusively. It rather constructs a faint echo through certain lexical and rhetorical choices: While the Ghost promises Hamlet that his tale would make “thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres”, Pyrrhus has “eyes like carbuncles” himself. His “flaming top” recalls the “knotted and combined locks” who would “stand on end / Like quills upon the fearful porpentine”. The Ghost is present here as well as a narrator, incarnate in Hamlet, who tells the harrowing tale of Pyrrhus, as well as Pyrrhus itself, the “hellish apparition”. Just like Lars Eidinger in Thomas Ostermeier’s staging, Hamlet takes the position not only of the Ghost, but also of the Player, taking all positions involved in creating a lasting impression through performance.

The event narrated in the following – as the player takes over – is the murder of Priamos by Pyrrhus – more commonly known as “Neoptolemos”. It relates to two murders in the plot of Hamlet, one in the past, one in the present: the alleged murder of Old Hamlet by Claudius, and the planned revenge murder of Claudius by his nephew, Hamlet:

1 PLAYER Anon he finds him,  
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword,  
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,  
Repugnant to command. Unequal matched,  
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,  
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword  
Th’unerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium  
Seeming to feel his blow, with flaming top  
Stoops to his base and with a hideous crash  
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear. For lo, his sword  
Which was declining on the milky head  
Of reverend Priamos seemd i’th’air to stick.  
So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood

Like a neutral to his will and matter,  
 Did nothing.  
 But as we often see against some storm  
 A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,  
 The bold winds speechless and the orb below  
 As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder  
 Doth rend the region, so after Pyrrhus' pause  
 A roused vengeance sets him new a-work  
 And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall  
 On Mars' armour, forged for proof eterne,  
 With less remorse than Pyrrhus bleeding sword  
 Now falls on Priam. (2.2.406-430)

The dramaturgy of the passage is obviously related to that of Hamlet's murders and revenge plots, past and present with regards to the delivery of the speech. While creating the expectation of analogy, it avoids any consistent resemblance with the constellations that determine Hamlet. It introduces multiple differences and contradictions instead. Pyrrhus is a son – son of Achilles, who killed Hector, Priamos' oldest son, and was killed by Paris, another of Priamos' sons. Priamos is a father-figure. Several pointers – his designation as “grandsire”, the “o’erteemed” loins of his wife, Hecuba –introduce him as a father, first and foremost, and it is as “unnerved father” that he falls in this passage. The opponents are “[u]nequal[ly] matched”, as are Claudius and the allegedly helpless Old Hamlet, entailing the deed's unnecessary cruelty. Pyrrhus kills the father of his father's murderer, who had killed that father's son...a chain of killings whose similarities are always made incomplete by one slight difference. Priam's “milky head” reminds us of the “sable silvered” (1.2.239) of Old Hamlet's Ghost. At the same time avenger and dishonorable murderer of an old, defenseless man, Pyrrhus is a confusing figure. At the moment of the Pyrrhus speech, then, Hamlet, who mourns his father and a King, witnesses the story of a father's violent death at the hands of a murderer; and a successful revenge by a son – whose honourability is, however, strongly called into question even by himself. But he also witnesses his own past and future at the same time: Hamlet has “stood aghast, and there rose before [him] the form of my dear father” earlier in the play; a form that, as we have seen, bears strong similarities to

the shape of Pyrrhus himself in the lines that Hamlet himself speaks.

The similarities at the level of plot elements are as undeniable as they are inconclusive. Pyrrhus might also be read by Hamlet as an impersonation of the avenger that he has promised to become, showing him what he will do – at the same time as his doubts about it. Pyrrhus' momentaneous inaction makes him akin to Hamlet, but more precisely, to Hamlet as performer with regards to questions of action and inaction. Shakespeare however introduces an ineffective weapon in his rewriting of the Pyrrhus motif. This produces a slight pause in the action of the scene, that becomes extended to a moment in which all action is frozen; and not metaphorically, but as the literal result of a mysterious intervention:

[...]For lo, his sword  
Which was declining on the milky head  
Of reverend Priamos seemd i'th'air to stick.  
So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood  
Like a neutral to his will and matter,  
Did nothing. (2.2.415-420)

Verse 420 of this scene is the pivotal point of the speech's dramaturgy. Like the interrupted action it describes, the verse is truncated. The lines in the passage narrate that right before killing Priamos, Pyrrhus' sword and his arm are immobilized in the air above the head of the elderly king. While the first verse suggests that some magic might be at work, the following rather implies that there is an issue between Pyrrhus' will and his action. "Like a neutral to his will and matter", a hendiadyoin, connects two equivalents that are actually cause and effect, separated by the 'and': As if he had no desire, were neutral to his own will, Pyrrhus cannot act – and the matter of the story is put on hold. At the same time, we can read this line like a description of the performer's stance facing his own tragic plot. Neutral to his own matter – the term that Hamlet repeatedly uses to describe the plot or content of a play -, a "painted tyrant", like a performer indifferent to his character's fate, has the freedom of not acting it out, of doing nothing; as Hamlet can be

viewed to have done by putting on the antic disposition. He, too, so far has ‘done nothing’. On the other hand, the moment also prefigures scene 3 of act III, when Hamlet lifts his sword to do the deed – but eventually spares the praying Claudius, fearing that it might send him to heaven. After a moment’s ominous immobility, the storm of Pyrrhus’ revenge is unleashed:

But as we often see against some storm  
 A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,  
 The bold winds speechless and the orb below  
 As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder  
 Doth rend the region, so after Pyrrhus’ pause  
 A roused vengeance sets him new a-work  
 And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall  
 On Mars’ armour, forged for proof eterne,  
 With less remorse than Pyrrhus bleeding sword  
 Now falls on Priam.  
 (2.2.421-430)

Is it accidental that the speech does once more reference two of the constitutive components of the stage’s topography: the heavens and the “orb below”, that “Wooden O”, that “distracted globe”? The pause, it is definitely clear now, is Pyrrhus’ – after Hamlet’s pause, one is tempted to ask, will the “roused vengeance” set him new a-work? The Pyrrhus-speech provides Hamlet himself with an image of his own ‘pausing’ and the reflection of his own moral doubts about revenge itself; and, most of all, of the potential circularity of revenge. If *Hamlet* as performance is a circle that repeats ad infinitum because, per definition, it can exist only by being performed over and over again, it is no wonder that the protagonist hesitates at performing his part in it. The episode between Pyrrhus and Priamos is only one of a concatenation of revenge killings: Achilles’ was avenging the death of his best friend Patroclus by killing Hector and shaming him by dragging his corpse around Troy. Paris, Hector’s brother, kills him by an arrow that Apollon guides straight to his Achilles’ heel. One of the central elements of *Hamlet* as a parody of the revenge tragedies of the time – a genre that also frequently use plays-within-the-plays – can therefore be read, in the metatheatrical perspective, as a comment within its existence as text

on its existence as performance. According to Christoph Menke, like the excess of performance, revenge itself can also be viewed as an excess that entails repetitive circularity: “Denn jeder Racheakt, der sich gegen ein übermäßiges Handeln ‘ohne Recht’ richtet, trägt in sich ein Übermaß, das wiederum ‘ohne Recht’ ist und erneut gebrochen werden muss. (Menke 2005: 94) Revenge itself, as a principle, carries its own excessiveness, like performance does; and in *Hamlet*, the end of the circle of excessive vengeance that only generates new violence is at least temporarily interrupted, and hangs in the air like Pyrrhus’ sword, through performance. The story of Pyrrhus not only sheds a light on the revenge plot of *Hamlet*, but especially on the self-aware foregrounding of its existence as performance that interrupts the play as its title character explores his own affinities with the experience of the actor.

That Hamlet is touched by this performance in a manner that incites him to stage *The Mousetrap*, I argue, is precisely due to the fact that no exact analogy can be drawn. In this perspective, the Pyrrhus-speech is not a mirror image of Hamlet. All three intertexts resemble each other with certain differences. It is this structure that produces the affective touch that makes the *mimesis* of the theater performance as performance so dangerous, and, in the case of *Hamlet*, effective. Mimesis as a mirror and performance as effect are not separate but linked. As Hamlet witnesses something that presents him with distorted mirrors of his past and future, he understands that a spectator will be affected by a similarity within him that is touched by what he sees. This might in turn elicit a reaction, an unwanted overflow that manifests physically. While the antic disposition delayed action through performance, performance here becomes a mode of action that elicits a reaction. While the mirror image seems to provoke an insight, it rather provokes an externalization of something that was only waiting to be touched.

### *Rehearsed actions*

Hamlet, the actual spectator of the player’s performance of the Pyrrhus-speech, consequently does not remain indifferent towards what he sees. What incites Hamlet’s plan to stage *The Mousetrap* is not the insight he allegedly needs to have before proceeding with

the plot prescribed by the Ghost. It is the touch of performance itself, an affective touch that sets free an emotional reaction. In a way, the presentation of the Pyrrhus speech by the actor can be understood as a rehearsal of the performance of *The Mousetrap*, presenting a test of the effects Hamlet counts on. The player presents it impromptu, “in his travelling clothes, unpainted and unprepared, at Hamlet’s prompting summons up through his person in the bare presence chamber the tale and the personages of the ancient myth, by turns triumphant, desperate, and heart-broken; the very stillness of the actor contrasting with the vivid imaginative world of teeming horror created.” (Mann 1991: 45) As Hamlet witnesses what performance can do, he rehearses for his own active use of performance. That the player’s performance requires only his body to produce it, no additional props or settings, focuses Hamlet’s attention on the essentials of the effect of performance: The training of the body to produce impulses through the representation of something like, but not quite, that which the spectator can relate to. As in post-dramatic acting theory, the rehearsal is here the beginning of the performance, and its imperfect state is precisely that which Hamlet will seek to emulate in *The Mousetrap*. After all, it is the spectator who will need to finish the performance by relating it to himself, as Hamlet did.

After listening to the speech, Hamlet feels prompted to reflect upon his own inaction. He perceives the player in a paradoxical way: On the one hand, what he does is nothing, as he lacks the motive that Hamlet has for action. On the other hand, the player is clearly the model that Hamlet strives to emulate. At first, Hamlet reflects upon his inaction as an opposition to the actor’s mode of action and contrasts the inaction of performance with the action of revenge:

Now I am alone.  
 O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!  
 Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
 That from her working all the visage waned  
 – Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,  
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting

With forms to his conceit – and all for nothing –  
For Hecuba?  
What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her,  
That he should weep for her? [...] (2.2.484-495)

At first, Hamlet seems to go back to the vantage point of his “I know not seems” (xx)-monologue from act one, scene two. He then claimed to possess an inaccessible interiority, one that did precisely not relate to the “outward show”(xx) of grief the others put on. The player’s performance gives him the opportunity to witness how such an appearance is produced. But Hamlet assumes the player’s performance – unlike that of Claudius or Gertrude – to be not a dissembling, but a creative act, one that forcibly produces the correspondence of “his soul so to his own conceit”. Hamlet describes performance of character as a triangular process: there is a “fiction”, “a dream of passion”, that is: the passion of the character, be it the narrator, Priamos, Pyrrhus, or Hecuba. The actor conceives of it in a certain way and produces a physical effect: the tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, the paleness stem from the working of the actor’s imagination of the character. While both these elements could be assumed to constitute an artfully polished surface that has nothing to do with the actor’s own mind and body, as antitheatrical critics of actors would tend to suggest, Hamlet does acknowledge that the player needs to include his soul into the process. Hamlet reinforces his wholistic interpretation of the actor’s creative process: his “whole function”, i.e. “all his actions and emotions” (n.2.2.489), need to be suited to his conceit. While this is an emphatic description of a very direct action on the part of the actor, with a tangible effect – he does “weep for her” – Hamlet is still baffled at the causal disconnect between the process from the “fiction”, from the “dream” that are the passions of the fictional characters that he assumes: “and all for nothing – for Hecuba?” As Tobias Döring notes, the player’s performance raises Hamlet’s admiration:

Während Hamlet das gespielte Lachen auf der Bühne ablehnt, weil es nicht nur die fiktionale Figur, sondern den Schauspieler (und erst recht das Publikum) wirklich zu ergreifen droht, lobt er die theatralische Träne deshalb, weil sie den

Fiktionscharakter ihres nichtigen Anlasses übersteigt. Die Körperinszenierung dieses Trauerspielers beeindruckt eben dadurch, daß er seine Fließfunktionen ganz der vorgestellten Leidenszene unterordnet und seine Seele willentlich zu deren physischer Vergegenwärtigung instrumentalisieren kann. (Döring 2001: 371)

Hamlet's comparison of himself with the player makes sense from the vantage point described by Döring, if we assume that Hamlet describes the actor's acted tears as the marker of a capacity to act the part (of the mourning avenger) which he, Hamlet, lacks. Hamlet's monologue mingles associations of his person and situation with the player on the one, Pyrrhus on the other hand, and attempts at first to construct a contrast between his own world and the 'real' action he is supposed to take in it, and the 'acted' action of the player's performance.

[...] Yet I,  
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak  
 Like Johan-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
 And can say nothing.  
 No, not for a king  
 Upon whose property and most dear life  
 A damned defeat was made.  
 (2.2.501-506)

He deplores that he can "say nothing", in contrast to the player; while the pause in the story of Pyrrhus might rather suggest an analogy to the latter, who "Did nothing". The editor's note attempts to prevent confusion: "Hamlet must mean 'do nothing', since he goes on to chide himself for talking rather than acting, but it is perhaps ironic that he wants to imitate the Player rather than Pyrrhus." (n.2.2.504) Viewing Pyrrhus and the actor both as possible models for Hamlet seems more productive. The shift to Pyrrhus as an example of ultimately successful and extremely violent action occurs in the following lines: "Am I a coward?", Hamlet asks himself, and goes on to identify himself as a dissembler that might rightly be accused of being one:

Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,  
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,  
Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie I'th' throat  
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this,  
Ha? 'Swounds, I should take it. For it cannot be  
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall  
To make oppression bitter, or ere this  
I should ha' fatted all the region kites  
With this slave's offal – bloody, bawdy villain,  
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain.  
(2.2.507-516)

Hamlet's guilty imagination of what he should do, were he no coward, produces no action so far, but a considerable amount of words formed into a colorful speech not unlike the one the player just delivered. Hamlet associates this verbal proliferation with prostitutes, who combine the verbosity generally associated with women in the misogynistic discourse of the time, and the sale of their bodies that has been equally criticized with regards to the players, who pretend for money, as well:

Why, what an ass am I: this is most brave, that I, the son of a dear murdered,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words  
And fall a-cursing like the very drab,  
A stallion! Fie upon't, foh! About, my brains!  
(2.2.517-523)

The excess of word and the over-consumption that performance entails are here combined with the condemnable sin of idleness, which, as we have seen, is also traditionally associated with the players. The contradictoriness of the monologue recalls the passages we have last explored; just like them, it begs more detailed investigation. Hamlet deplores that, while having a good motive to seek revenge, he can only “unpack [his] heart with words”, a criticism consistent with his scepticism towards appearances from act one and the binary image of the subject that goes along with it. But it apparently also means to “fall a-cursing like the very drab” – and to thereby perform precisely those speech acts that reach even beyond

the realm of the earth, into “heaven and hell”, conjuring the power of the Gods that watch the events like spectators at a play, cleaving their ear and moving them to a reaction.

Maybe Hamlet can be “prompted to his revenge” by something else: by the insight into the affective processes that produce the performance and that the performance produces, in turn. The content of the speech does not allow for a direct reference to Hamlet’s situation, it only increases the uncertainty of revenge’s legitimacy. It is in a different way that the speech incites him to new and different action: by understanding the player’s performance of the Pyrrhus-speech as an example of and rehearsal for his own course of action through performance.

From the perspective of an alternative notion of character performance in which the latter would be only one possible effect of the actor’s mastering of his body and mind, producing a performance that can be interpreted as representing character, but not distinguishable from it, Hamlet’s analysis begs the question: Does Hecuba really equal nothing? Can she be nothing to the player, even though he is, after all, his conceit? While the first part of Hamlet’s monologue suggests that the player’s actions are fundamentally distinct from the ‘real’ action of revenge, which emphasizes Hamlet’s inaction even more considering that he has ‘real’ motive, the following verses rather seem to assume a gradual difference: “What would he do / Had he the motive and that for passion / That I have?” Hamlet asks. Hamlet’s assumption is clearly not that the player would step out of his performance and perform revenge, as Hamlet feels pressured to do. Instead, as we have seen above, Hamlet believes that the actor’s performance would be even more effective, had he Hamlet’s motive. In Hamlet’s reaction to the player’s speech, ‘real’ and acted motives can no longer be distinguished, as their effects are all the same: In the narrative, Hecuba’s action is identical to that which the player creates: a “clamour” that provokes and produces affect. Hamlet’s actions since the Ghost’s apparition has been the same: performing, and the player’s speech prompts him to keep acting through performance. Performance, Hamlet’s

speech implies, consists in the dissolution of the distinctions between theater and world, and actor and spectator. Performing grief – be it your own or of Hecuba’s makes no difference – is an action in itself, and an action whose effect – the flowing of tears – is itself a figure of the transgression between actor and spectator that defines performance. Instead of establishing an opposition between performance as non-action and the actual action in the ‘real world’, Hamlet’s monologue establishes performance as a peculiar type of action that contains a hypothesis about action in general. It is, I argue, part of a training, a rehearsal for real action. In contrast to David Mann, I argue that the player speech precisely shows that “that the player tackles the same problems we face, that he experiences things as we do.” While Mann claims that the “tears he sheds represent no more than an advanced control over the workings of his body” (Hamlet 1991: 46), Hamlet’s interpretation shows precisely this control over the workings of his body to be an example for the type of action that Hamlet seeks to perform: performance, and performance to a violent aim:

Dabei markiert Hamlets Wortwahl, “force his soul” allerdings ebenso das Gewaltsame dieser Geste, wie ‘monstrous’ auf den monströsen, d.h. mißgestalteten wie ausgestellten Herrschaftskörper eines Richard Gloucester zu verweisen scheint. Der Tränendarsteller nutzt, so zeigt sich, seinen Körper aus, um über andere Körper Gewalt durch Rührung auszuüben. (Döring 2001: 371)

Hamlet’s reaction to the speech does not only reveals why staging *The Mousetrap* seems to him a viable step within the grander plan of revenge. The image of performance it presents entirely contradicts the notion of performance as empty reflection that the simple concept of *mimesis* as a mirror image implies. On the contrary: the Pyrrhus-speech presents performance as the result of a process of training and rehearsal that shapes not only the mind, but the body of the actors. Wolf-Dieter Ernst explains how this training is not a manner of acting entirely distinct from all the ‘real’ actions it attempts to represent, but precisely finds its sources in a culture that

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equally trains bodies and has individuals rehearse ways of feeling and acting:

Affekte sind das, was einem Zuschauer im Moment der Aufführung widerfährt, sie sind aber auch immer als Signum einer Kultur zu verstehen, welche u.a. über Proben- und Trainingsprozesse Körper produziert. Mit dieser performativen Wende richtet sich die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Diskurse und den Zeitraum, in welchen sie allmählich ihre disziplinierende Wirkung entfalten. (Ernst 2012: 30)

Wolf-Dieter Ernst investigates that which precedes a concrete performance – the rehearsals for a production, but also the more general processes of disciplining the actor’s body and the way in which they express aesthetic assumptions about the performance. We have already seen that the representation of performance as a circular process of contagion through imitation can be read as akin to the modern model of the “affective actor” or an aesthetics of the performative. In this case, it is especially the notion of performance as the result of a bodily technique and thereby a teaching and learning process that is relevant. While the analogy between player and Hamlet therefore does not really work, the opposition between performance and “real” action cannot be upheld either. Two assumptions however remain: first, that performance is a way of acting that remains in the ambiguous mode of rehearsal and draws on the emotions and actions experienced outside the theater to move them across the threshold of the stage within the theater. Second, that actor and spectator occupy exchangeable roles in this process, as they are both caught in analogous processes of training outside the theater. The Pyrrhus-speech claims an analogy between an actor’s and a spectator’s position, who exchange and share one process of affective disciplining through performance. Erika Fischer-Lichte has analyzed the way the process of reception of the performance in the shared space of the theater invites a reversal of roles:

The reversal of roles revealed that the performance’s aesthetic process is set in motion by a self-generating and ever-changing autopoietic feedback loop. Self-generation requires the participation of everyone, yet without any single participant

being able to plan, control, or produce it alone. It thus becomes difficult to speak of producers and recipients. Rather, the performance brings forth the spectators and actors. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 50)

By displaying the interchangeability of the position of actor and spectator within the feedback loop of action and reaction that constitutes the performance as event, but also the ‘world-within-the-play’ as the “something like” that sparks any affective transgression and exchange in the first place. If the performance brings forth actors and spectators as such, they are both needed to constitute what the performance represents as a result of presentation and interpretation. This conception of performance is essential to the purpose of *The Mousetrap*, too. In this sense, the Pyrrhus-speech can be considered a kind of rehearsal for *The Mousetrap*, a phase in which the inner workings of performance can be tested, and aesthetic norms remain a framework that can be underwhelmed or exceeded:

Denn diese Phase kennt noch gar keine Zuschauer im eigentlichen Sinne. Damit verknüpft geht es auch noch nicht um Affekte als besondere Präsenzeffekte, die dem Blick eines Beobachters dargeboten würden. Es geht vielmehr darum, zu probieren, welche Regeln sich eignen, um Affekte zugleich zu evozieren und zu beherrschen. Der Probenleiter und die Darsteller sind dabei in wechselnden Rollen: Darsteller und Zuschauer. (Ernst 2012: 34)

The overflowing of affect on the side of the actor is the result of a disciplined performance; and the spectator’s reaction is, while unforeseeable, also the result of a process of disciplining: as a spectator, he learns the same bodily and affective techniques. Hamlet’s final conclusion from the Pyrrhus speech, then, is the result of an experience he has just made himself:

Hum, I have heard  
That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
Have by the very cunning of the scene  
Been struck so to the soul that presently  
They have proclaimed their malefactions.  
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak

With most miraculous organ.  
(2.2.523-539)

Hamlet might of course have heard the current common places of spectators who have been provoked to overflowing emotionality, as many anti-theatricalists and defendants of the theater cite them frequently:

But how much it can move, Plutarch yieldeth a notable testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus, from whose eyes a tragedy well-made and represented drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood: so as he that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy. (Sidney [1595]2004: 151)

I would argue that, in addition to the insight that the presentation of the revenge plot of the Pyrrhus-episode might have produced, Hamlet has experienced and learned that theater is a “memory machine” (xx). The ‚rehearsal’ that we can consider the Pyrrhus-speech to be has given him the opportunity to experience the repeatability of the production of affective touch:

Aus der Perspektive der cultural performance können wir also den affektiven Schauspieler dahingehend bestimmen, dass er die Mittel der Affektmodulation nicht primär in den Dienst einer Aufführung stellt. Vielmehr interessiert ihn die Beherrschung und Wiederholbarkeit dieser Mittel, der ‘restored behaviour’, an sich und in Hinblick auf ein kulturelles Selbstverständnis über den Moment der Aufführung hinaus. (Ernst 2012: 34)

The success of the process will be measured by its results: “Wie dieser Prozess verläuft, kann eigentlich nur im Nachhinein bestimmt werden, indem man eine veränderte Fertigkeit oder ein verändertes Verhalten des Lernenden feststellt.” (Ernst 2012: 34)

Theater, if it works its miraculous magic, provokes affects to flow over and therefore enables a different “organ” – itself a metaphor for ‘voice’ that seems to produce an oxymoron between tongue and

voice here – to express itself. For this to happen, Hamlet says, he will have the players play “something like” the murder of his father:

[...] I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,  
I'll tent him to the quick. If 'a do blench  
I know my course. [...]  
(2.2.529-533)

Through the example that the Pyrrhus-speech has provided him, Hamlet now knows how to do things with performance and to observe its effects: *The Mousetrap* needs to present Claudius with something like, but not quite identical to his deed, in order to touch him and elicit a reaction. In Hamlet's staging of *The Mousetrap*, Claudius thereby becomes a central participant of the performance. If the Ghost's tale is true and *The Mousetrap* represents “something like” it, Claudius will be touched and reveal his guilt. The main actor of *The Mousetrap*, then, is the spectator: as Hamlet has experienced firsthand, he provides the final puzzle piece to any performance.

### 3. A spectator's perspective

Throughout this study, it has become clear that early modern theater allowed and required an active role for spectators in the performance for a number of pragmatical, contextual and aesthetical reasons. We have seen that Hamlet is a particularly salient case in point, as the performance of the title character frequently appeals to the audience and creates a community with them, roots the concerns of the character in the present time and space of the performance while distancing himself from the character and his world and commenting upon it. *The Mousetrap* focuses on the spectator as the real spectacle and the ultimate ‘purpose of playing’. While defenses of the theater rely on the privileging of the inoffensive text and the instructive and wholesome ‘world-within-the-play’ it presents, their concept of the theater performance securely distinguishes the space of the represented fiction from the present space and time of the

actors and the spectators. By quoting its contemporaries heated debate upon this most problematic of aspects of theater, *Hamlet* shows how the distinction between text and performance is a means to rehabilitate poetry at a very high price: the exclusion of the spectator from theater. This form of theater would need to rely on the audience's willing negation of their own presence and agency in the performance, thereby ignoring the exchange of sensory impressions that constitute the performance as *Hamlet* imagines it. *The Mousetrap*, on the contrary, entirely finds its purpose in the fact that it reaches its spectators and provokes a reaction

In the passages preceding *The Mousetrap* itself, we have seen that Hamlet quotes Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of *mimesis*, only to confront them with an alternative idea. Just as Hamlet reforms the Platonic notion of *mimesis* by unveiling its faculties for imprinting change onto the world, *The Mousetrap* fully relies on the qualities of theater that are fundamentally linked to the role of the spectator within the performance, and thereby opens up the space for a reformed concept of *mimesis* beyond the Platonic and Aristotelian dichotomies. *The Mousetrap* is not about imitation, resemblance, or styles of acting. It is about styles of spectatorship. Through its play within the play, Hamlet successfully shows these styles in action; and thereby allows a reflection about its own existence as a performance that is watched by spectators. The notion of mirroring that is so closely associated with *mimesis* is here reinterpreted to create a relationship between the spectator and what he sees: himself in the mirror.

After they have heard the Pyrrhus-speech – and Polonius has interrupted due to his emotional state – Hamlet asks him to “see the players well bestowed”. He warns him: “Do you hear, let them be well used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time: after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.”(2.2.460-464) The players, as Hamlet will detail in his theoretical exposition a little later, take the role of prophets, holding the mirror up to the spectators' souls: as the performance shows the “age and body of the time its form and pressure”,

the “abstract and brief chronicles of time” use a textual metaphor to metaphorize the mirroring effect of the actors themselves. Like a “bad epitaph”, they show the spectators their living image. The epitaph evokes not only a daunting and irrevocable judgement, but also a very individualized address. This is of course the case because of the function that *The Mousetrap* has for the evolution of Hamlet’s plot: *The Mousetrap* is seemingly designed for Claudius; Hamlet even insists on individualizing the play that the players apparently have “in stock”:

HAMLET [...] Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play  
*The Murder of Gonzago*?  
1 PLAYER Ay, my lord.  
HAMLET We’ll ha’t tomorrow night. You could for need study  
a speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines, which I would  
set down and insert in’t, could you not?  
1 PLAYER Ay, my lord.  
(2.2.459-481)

*The Mousetrap* is a performance that seems specifically designed for each of the spectators, mirroring them not by what is apparently mimetically represented on stage, but by the image that they themselves create in watching it, a living epitaph.

The performance of the play-within-the-play shows three things in particular. First, it confirms the experience that Hamlet has made in the Pyrrhus speech: the possibility to be affected by performance resides not in the accuracy of the mimetic representation, but depends on the spectator himself. The ‘tropical’ relationship between the contents of play-texts and the deeper, instructive sense that defendants of the theater often claimed is no use compared to the transgressive power of performance to poison the spectator’s mind, as he hopes that *The Mousetrap* will do for Claudius.

However, *The Mousetrap* also sheds light on the other spectators of the play-within-the-play and therefore develops a broader theory of spectatorship. If the ultimate constitution and interpretation of what the spectator sees, if the final step of the production of performance takes place through and within the spectator, there are as

many different *Mousetraps* as spectators who watch it. Hamlet's comment to Ophelia that the actor will "show her any show that you will show him" shifts the site of the performance's meaning and effect entirely towards the spectator and their individual predisposition. Hamlet's comments and interjections during the performance, which end up taking up more space than the players' performance itself, ultimately provide the impression that the spectator who determines the meaning and effect of *The Mousetrap*, yes, even of the entire previous performance of Hamlet, is Hamlet himself. Glossing the performance according to his own interpretation, he prescribes and elicits precisely those reactions from the others that he expects to conform to his interpretation of the plot of Hamlet. As Ostermeier's staging of *The Mousetrap* in his *Hamlet* has impressively shown, the center of the play, *The Mousetrap* suddenly introduces the possibility that the performance of *Hamlet* itself might be conditioned by the title character himself, who becomes the author and director of his own plot.

#### *Jest is poison*

As we have seen, opponents and defendants of the theater alike attempt to neatly separate play-text and performance from one another, in order to attribute the poisonous effects of theater to performance. I have shown that Hamlet especially uses its own power in the context of performance to contradict its title characters' propensity to support such a poetics of the theater. In *The Mousetrap*, however, Hamlet himself seems to count on the poisonous power that lies in the theater, and is ready to accept that it is only achieved by the combination of what is seen in the mirror, and the capacity of the mirror image to cross the boundary of the stage and to touch its audience. The relationship between theater and world is not, and not intended to be merely tropical. While there is someone poisoned on stage, the performance of this act of poisoning is actually itself poisonous: *The Mousetrap* is designed to poison Claudius as he allegedly poisoned Old Hamlet.

After all spectators have taken their seats, the players first present the "Dumb-show" (3.2.128 SD 1), in which a passionate embrace

between a Player King and a Player Queen are shown. The Player King lies down for a nap and “Anon comin in [a Player as] another man”, pours poison into the sleeping King’s ear. The Queen is courted by the murderer and finally accepts his advances (3.2.128SD1-11) King Claudius seems well aware of this danger of performance – especially after he has seen the ‘dumb-show’ and the first exchange between Player King and Player Queen, he needs some reassurance:

KING Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in’t?  
HAMLET No, no, they do but jest. Poison in jest. No offence  
i’th’world.  
(3.2.226-229)

The few lines contain in a nutshell the key elements of the text-performance-dialectic; and the contemporary interrogations about the theater’s relationship to the world that we have already extensively debated. The King’s words clearly betray a position in which offence might only lie in the “argument”, in the – potentially condemnable – content of the play. Hamlet uses the same paradigm in order to calm him down: There is no worldly offence, since all events on stage occur only on stage. His might reflect a necessary contemporary attitude of the Players:

Perhaps this is what the players actually thought they were doing, but it is worth considering how convenient and self-protective the image of the mirror must have seemed. Artists in a time of censorship and repression had ample reason to claim that they had taken nothing from the world they represented, that they had never dreamed of violating the distance demanded by their superiors, that their representations only reflected faithfully the world’s own form. (Greenblatt 1988: 8)

The tautology of Hamlet’s argument however reveals that Claudius’ question is wrongly put: As the remainder of *The Mousetrap* will show, the offence is not within the argument, but the poison lies indeed in the jest: “Poison in jest” might thereby not only be understood as meaning that the poison on stage is no real poison; but

that the jest, the performance in itself, is poisonous. Hamlet's last claim would then be an ironical comment on those critics of the theater that accuse it of being only pretense. If it were, how could it offend? The offence comes, in fact, into the world through the performance, and Hamlet has at heart that it does.

"Poison in jest" contains, in a nutshell, the paradox of the debate around the theater: If the poison being poured in Gonzago's ear is only fake poison, if the illusion remains on the reflecting surface of the mirror, the danger is merely 'epistemological': Seeing events that are only "jest" calls into question the trustworthiness of appearances in the non-theatrical world as well; and makes doubtful even human perception in itself. But this poison, poured in through the gateway of the ear through which one usually "hears a play" around 1600, works its magic beyond the reflection it is part of. *The Mousetrap* evokes the most serious political aspect of the debate around the theater here by representing a sovereign in the garden – a frequent image of the Commonwealth and allegory of good government – poisoned through the ear, just as the antitheatrical factions imagined theater to poison the Commonwealth through the poisonous representations and practices of the stage, who made their way through the ears of citizens into their minds, incepting immoral and seditious ideas in them. Gonzago's ear is analogous to Hecuba's venomous tongue.

It is for Claudius – and possibly Gertrude, as we shall see – that *The Mousetrap* is poisonous. Interestingly, what makes the poison dangerous to him, is the visibility of his own reaction for others, for whom the events in *The Mousetrap* might have been, until then, a pleasant distraction. Hamlet knows as much and openly provokes Claudius: "You shall see anon 'tis a knavish piece of work, but what of that? Your majesty and we that have free souls – it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung." (3.2.233-236) The distinction that was so repeatedly evoked in the scenes we have previously discussed – the one between the groundlings and the "judicious" spectators – is now located within the spectators themselves. They come to the performance with their bodies,

minds, memories, biographies and histories; and these factor into what they will understand as much as what they see on stage or the text they hear. While Hamlet's reassuring words suggest that the potential offence is easily warded off by the fact that it is enclosed in the inoffensive packaging of "jest", he gives them a different twist in the suggestive image of the "galled jade": the offence shows in the spectator on display, not in the performance itself. It is therefore only natural that Hamlet keeps claiming the inoffensiveness of *The Mousetrap*. Exasperated by Hamlet's inconclusive answer – or maybe an astute reader of its implications – Claudius tries another route in order to find out about the play he is already in the middle of watching:

KING What do you call the play?

HAMLET *The Mousetrap*. Marry, how tropically! This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon 'tis a knavish piece of work, but what of that? )  
(3.2.230-234)

"This play is the image of a murder", Hamlet explains; it is a reflection – but the title is to be understood "tropically" in order to take away the veil that covers its 'spiritual' meaning, so to speak; the one that will make "the jaded gall wince". The title that Hamlet chooses to tell Claudius references not what the play is the image of – as does *The Murder of Gonzago* – but what the performance is supposed to achieve: Trap a mouse, or rather: "A rat!", as Hamlet will call Claudius, whom he believes to be hiding behind the curtain in his mother's bedchamber while accidentally stabbing Polonius a few scenes later. The "allegorical sense", so to speak, of the play that Claudius is witnessing, is unveiled only by the transformative effect the performance has on the spectator.

The conversation between Hamlet and Claudius that we have dissected so far occurs after the first part of *The Mousetrap* has already been performed: The 'dumb-show'. Hamlet seemingly redundantly presents the play in two forms: one with, and one without text. This is what the murder looks like in the dumb-show: "anon come in [a

Player as] another man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears and leaves him" (3.2.128.4-6) The way in which Gonzago is murdered in this performance is everything but random. As we have discussed earlier, the physical gateway to the mind leads through the senses; and the 'dumb-show' uses all elements particularly suspicious to those opposing performance altogether, the kiss and the poison. The tongue, organ of the word and of the kiss, was the object of much suspicion, and the kiss is similarly dangerous according to antitheatrical resentment, as Farah Karim-Cooper explains:

Either way, the kiss on stage was a tangible or haptic force seen to have potentially irrevocable effects on those who witness it. Famously, Henry Crosse worries about such erotic, tactile moments: 'groping, colling, kissing, amorous prattle, and signes of Venerie, whereby the maidenly disposition is polluted with lust'. (Karim-Cooper 2013: 224)

Mouth and ear are the beginning and the end of a dangerous process in which the body is affected and changed by the poison of performance:

This anxiety, again, relies upon early modern notions about the permeability of the flesh: that it was permeable enough as to enable the sight of lovers touching to enter into a spectator's body and change it. (Karim-Cooper 2013: 224)

In the dumb-show, this common assumption of early modern performance theory is literalized into the image of a deadly substance being poured in not through the mouth, but through the ear. The ear is a dangerous pathway indeed: "But these by the privy entries of the ear slip down into the heart, and with gunshot of affection gall the mind, where reason and virtue should rule the roost." (Gosson [1579]2004: 25) "Poison in jest" seems reassuring at first – but if the jest that helps administer the poison is itself the poisonous substance, the formula becomes a tautology, whose reassuring gesture remains empty. It makes the 'dumb-show' not into an image of *The Murder of Gonzago* and of an image of the murder of Old

Hamlet by Claudius. But it also shows what the performance will do to Claudius. In seeing Gonzago poisoned in his garden, he sees himself, touched by performance and poisoned in a way that one might well connect to the moment right after ordering Hamlet's departure to England in which he relieves his guilty conscience in front of the audience (3.3.36–72). Right after Claudius has left the show and thereby caused its abrupt ending, Hamlet remarks that every spectator is touched by a different poison:

Why let the stricken deer go weep,  
The hart ungalled play,  
For some must watch while some must sleep.  
Thus runs the world away.  
(3.2.263-6)

Continuing the metaphor of the “galled jade”, Hamlet differentiates between those spectators that are touched by the performance like the stricken deer; and those that remain untouched. “The hart ungalled”, one might even read here, can keep on playing and performing; while the wounded spectator retires. “Some must watch” in both senses. Claudius has been forced to watch and now knows to watch out:

Here the way a play touches its audience is represented as targeted and individualized as Hamlet describes the tangible effects of the play upon Claudius using a hunting metaphor from an unknown ballad. He imagines the play as an arrow and Claudius as its ‘stricken’ victim; the term ‘ungalled’ here means untouched or not struck by an arrow. [...] This ‘conveyance into the interior’ is exemplified in Hamlet’s ballad. Shakespeare’s pun on ‘hart’ / ‘heart’ in this passage recalls anti-theatrical imaginings about the effects of theatre on individual ‘harts’. (Karim-Cooper 2013: 229)

Performance is what the spectators allow themselves to be touched by. Were Hamlet entirely consistent with its own idea of performance, *The Mousetrap* would actually be Hamlet’s revenge and cost

Claudius his life, becoming part of the actual revenge killing itself.<sup>31</sup> While emphatically embracing the capacity of performance to affect and touch its spectators, Hamlet is also aware that poison in jest stings, but is not lethal.

*Spectators on display*

In Thomas Ostermeier's Hamlet, the spectators of *The Murder of Gonzago* were seated opposite the off-stage audience. Instead of sitting with their backs to it, watching what goes on after the curtain opens, they sit in front of a curtain which, in turn, serves as a surface on which the faces of off-stage audience members are projected. The on-stage audience is on display itself, which is useful through the ulterior motive that Hamlet has for staging the show in the dramaturgy of the play. The off-stage audience, structurally compelled to identify with the on-stage audience when characters watch a play-within-the-play, was invited to perceive itself in a different role: as the star of the show. We have already established that the apparently conflicting conceptions of *mimesis* as mirror and as impression, consumption and touch are brought together in *The Mousetrap*. Each spectator sees a mirror image of themselves. What the performance does to them depends on his ability to recognize themselves and be touched by it. What Ostermeier's staging literally shows, then, is the fact that being a spectator is no passive stance. In the configuration that we have just uncovered it is, on the contrary, the active completion of the performance's purpose, that thereby becomes a performance, completing the transaction of imitation and impression connecting stage and pit. Hamlet alludes to literal practices of spectators on stage in early modern performance as, for example, in the Globe.

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<sup>31</sup> A principle that is famously used in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, written between 1582 and 1592 and a likely intertext for *Hamlet*: In a play-within-the-play staged by the character Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia, both eager to take revenge for loved ones murdered, they perform themselves and cast the remaining characters in a way that allows them to take revenge by replacing the prop daggers with real daggers. The play-within-the-play here does not serve to establish the distinction between truth and falsity, but to actually perform the action of revenge.

The play-within-the-play provides the ideal opportunity to put the role of the spectator on display for metatheatrical reflection by putting one of the characters of Hamlet on display for dramaturgical reasons. Hamlet explains this motive to Horatio:

There is a play tonight before the King –  
One scene of it comes near the circumstance  
Which I have told thee of my father's death.  
I prithee when thou seest that act afoot,  
Even with the very comment of thy soul  
Observe my uncle. If this occulted guilt  
Do not itself unkennel in one speech  
It is a damned ghost that we have seen  
And my imaginations are as foul  
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note,  
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face  
And after we will both our judgements join  
In censure of his seeming.  
(3.2.71-83)

Hamlet's motive is paradoxical in the way that Christoph Menke has described:

Um herauszufinden, ob der Geist die Wahrheit spricht, will Hamlet in der „Mausefalle“ diejenigen befragen, die, falls der Geist die Wahrheit spricht, nicht die Wahrheit sprechen. Dieser Versuch ist paradox, ebenso verzweifelt wie komisch. (Menke 2005: 167)

However, there is another obstacle to Hamlet's attempt to resolve his epistemological anxiety that becomes apparent in his explanation to Horatio. If the Ghost were damned, Hamlet emphasizes, he would have misinterpreted him due to “imaginations [...] as foul / As Vulcan's stithy”. The imagination of the spectator finds its way into Hamlet's retrospective understanding of his encounter with the Ghost; and it thereby establishes a similar a priori of the spectator for all remaining processes of performance and watching involved here. Claudius' watching of *The Mousetrap*, but also Hamlet's and Horatio's observation of him watching, are conditioned by their im-

aginations. It is on this that the success and the failure of *The Mouse-trap* are predicated: Claudius' guilt will "itself unkennel in one speech" *because* he is guilty – if he is. But Hamlet's and Horatio's eyes, riveted to his face, are also subject to their own misinterpretations. It is interesting that F and Q2 propose the comment of "my soul" and "thy soul" respectively, producing an ambiguity on whether Hamlet actually "wants Horatio's judgement to back his own" (n.3.2.75). The passage, while claiming to attribute an epistemological value to the performance itself based on its capacity to unveil the truth, by the same stroke emphasizes that it will unveil only the truth that each spectator is willing to discover.

Horatio and Hamlet decide to closely watch Claudius. He is the ideal character to picture the spectator's exposed position in Hamlet's conception of performance, as he is doubly on display: as a sovereign and as a spectator. This corresponds to an historically especially exposed position in the early modern auditorium. We have already seen above that spectators were themselves on display in the early modern public theater, and that they didn't hesitate to impact the performance through their presence, reactions and comments, literally encroaching on the space of the actors. Thomas Dekker describes more precisely the spectacle of spectatorship:

Whether therefore the gatherers of the public or private play-house stand to receive the afternoon's rent, let our gallant (having paid it) presently advance himself up to the throne of the stage. I mean not into the Lords' room (which is now but the stage's suburbs). No, those bores by the iniquity of custom, conspiracy of waiting-women and gentlemen-ushers, that there sweat together, and the covetousness of sharers, are contemptibly thrust into the rear, and much new satin is there damped by being smothered to death in darkness. But on the very rushes where the comedy is to dance, yea and under the state of Cambises himself, must our feathered ostrich, like a piece of ordinance, be planted valiantly (because imupdently), beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality. [...] (Dekker [1609]2004: 208)

The gallant rejects the Lord's rooms – those galleries located above the stage that in fact put the spectators seated there on the same

plane of display as the performance going on in the discovery and on the apron stage. He chooses a seat on the stage, reversing the spectator's gaze onto the stage to watch stage and spectators both; and to become part of the spectacle himself. The round shape of the Globe, like Greek amphitheaters, literalized the double sense inherent in the etymological origin of *téatron* from *téorein*.

As writers of the time knew, 'theatre' was 'Greek [...] derived from a verb that signifies to See [...] Whence a noun that signifies a Theater, where persons are brought forth to be shown unto people.' Watching and being watched, observing and being observed, and showing and being shown were activities heralded by the space – and the other round theatres that imitated it. (Stern 2013: 12)

This points towards the doubly prominent position of Claudius as a spectator on display that is already in the public eye as a sovereign. Hamlet himself alludes to the stage-like qualities of a sovereign's throne:

HAMLET It is not very strange; for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.  
(2.2.300-305)

Sovereignty, this comment shows, is largely a matter of appropriate display; of being watched. The *topos* is common at the time, not only in Shakespeare's work. As a parallel to *Measure for Measure*, Brigitte Escolme points out the central passage of John Marston's *Malcontent*:

In this augmentation, Altofronto critiques the common crowd's reception of leadership, in a lecture on the superficiality of the people's love:

Oh, they that are as great as be their sins,  
Let them remember that th'inconstant people  
Love many princes merely for their faces

And outward shows, and they do covet more to have a sight  
of these than of their virtues (5.1.138-42)

To see a prince's face is not to know his virtues, and Altofronto / Malevole here mourns the fact that faces and outward shows are all 'the people' want. Leaders are, in fact, 'as great as be their sins' and should remember the superficial, visual construct that is political power. (Escolme 2013: 133)

Taking a stance similar to that of Hamlet in act one, Duke Altofronto deplors the people's attachment to the mere performance of kingship, to the "sight of these", rather than the inner values, vice and virtue, that eventually determine a ruler's quality. The display of power shares potential abuses with the theater and invites the same epistemological doubts. As a duplicitous ruler, Claudius is thereby doubly opaque – and Hamlet's attempt to "unkennel" his guilt through theater doubly theatrical: The performance will reveal what the kingly performance has covered up.

If sovereigns share affinities with actors, and Claudius already a potentially deceitful spectacle by nature, the stage provides a metaphorical throne for him to display his power. At the same time, it is the trap that might reveal his vices. Crime, too, used to be spectacle. Usually understood as deceitful, since it tried to go unnoticed, was punished by a public revelation in which criminals were marked by being laid bare:

[...] what linked the kinds of crimes punished in this way – sedition, theft, deception and sexual offences – 'was a sense of false dealing, the inverse of what was expected of the "honest" citizen', so that the culprits' exposure through clothing or its removal would have seemed particularly appropriate. Condemned culprits of crimes of deceit were stripped of their disguises and revealed, naked, or dressed in clothes that signified what they 'really' were. (Escolme 2013: 128)

Hamlet decides to use *The Mousetrap* to unveil King Claudius' secrets, to strip him naked and lay him bare. In order to do so, we have seen, he needs to make him into the spectator that is himself on the stage. When Claudius watches *The Mousetrap*, he is therefore

located at the intersection of three positions that incorporate the indissoluble link of performance with spectatorship: the sovereign, the (punished) criminal and the gallant, splaying his body on the stage. He is trapped and delivered to his judges: “we will both our judgements join / In censure of his seeming.” That this entirely depends on the matter of the play being “something like” an experience or an expectation of each spectator is further emphasized by including other spectators into the performance, who have a different relationship to *The Murder of Gonzago*. Their reactions to the ‘dumb-show’ and the spoken lines carefully underscore the hypothesis of the individuality of each spectator’s relationship to the play presented:

OPHELIA What means this, my lord?

HAMLET Marry, this munching mallico! It means mischief.

OPHELIA Belike this show imports the argument of the play.  
(3.2.129-133)

Ophelia’s comments reveal about her that she has absolutely no connection to the plot presented. As a young girl penned up in her room most of the time, entertaining relations with the outside world through written correspondence only, she is incapable of connecting Claudius, Gertrude or Hamlet to what she sees in the ‘dumb-show’ – at least at this early stage of the performance. She expects the play that follows to give clues about the content and necessity of the ‘dumb-show’. Hamlet confirms this expectation when he announces that

HAMLET We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep council – they’ll tell all.

OPHELIA Will ‘a tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he’ll not shame to tell you what it means.  
3.2.134-139)

When Ophelia seeks to understand the relationship between the ‘dumb-show’ and the “argument of the play”, Hamlet answers by placing Ophelia in front of a mirror. He makes quite a strong claim: Only if the spectators show themselves first, that is, accept the role

of an active participant in the theatrical transaction, will the meaning of “any show”, of any theater performance, become obvious. Even more: if what the spectator shows is the starting point, what the player reflects back to them will be different for each of them. Robert Weimann has described this spectatorial performance as the expression of a different idea of *mimesis*:

jener anderen Mimesis, bei der die Bedeutung nicht so sehr dem Spiegelbild des Gegenstands, sondern der “Vorstellung” des Zuschauers selbst obliegt. Die von Ophelia zweifach gestellte Frage (“Was diese Vorstellung bedeutet?“) wird wortspielerisch beantwortet durch den Hinweis auf jene andere “show” des Publikums, die selbst eine Art mimetischer Aktivität voraussetzt: das Mitspielen in einer sozialen Rolle, die Bereitschaft zu jeder Kommunikation, ohne die keine Vorstellung irgend etwas bedeutet. (Weimann 1988: 236)

Performance is a mimetic activity that requires participation on the side not only of the performers, but of the spectators, too. Without them, no show can be meaningful. However, this claim extends beyond the obvious assumption that, spectators belong to most minimal definitions of the theater event. Hamlet, I argue, presents an even more decisive involvement of the spectator in performance, at least into the performance of Hamlet itself. This is valid, first of all, for *The Murder of Gonzago* itself. It is the play-within-the-play that inspires a reception-oriented approach to Hamlet in general. As Dicecco points out, “The work – meaning both the artwork and the work that Hamlet attempts to do – exists in the uneasy relation between the murder that was performed, its written and staged versions, and the encounter of Claudius with that intertextual predicament.” (Dicecco 2017: 620) Even though *The Mousetrap* is designed to do something to Claudius in particular, even though its purpose to provoke a performance of guilt on his side, it also reveals the other spectators’ stance at the same time – including Hamlet’s, who is also spectator of the play-within-the-play he staged, with rather far-reaching consequences.

*Limited vision*

Shortly before the beginning of *The Mousetrap* (3.2.50 ff.), Hamlet explained to Horatio how he was going to “catch the conscience of the King” (2.2.540). The end of *The Mousetrap* only confirms Hamlet’s suspicion – or by doing so, the Ghost’s narrative – at first sight:

LUCIANUS [...] [Pours the poison in his ears.]  
 HAMLET ‘A poison’s him i’th’garden for his estate. His name’s Gonzago. The story is extant and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.  
 OPHELIA The King rises.  
 QUEEN How fares my lord?  
 POLONIUS Give o’er the play.  
 KING Give me some light, away.  
 POLONIUS Lights! Lights! Lights!  
*Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio.*  
 (3.2.253 SD- 262 SD)

Claudius gets up, as Hamlet interprets a few lines later, “Upon the talk of the poisoning” (3.2.281). That is correct – but it is also true that Claudius reacts to a vision of his future murderer: Lucianus, “nephew to the King”. (3.2.237) – and to the fact that Hamlet announces the final plot element. Hamlet’s intervention at the decisive moment of the play suggests the possibility that the framework of the experiment is flawed, as it is likely to produce the result it pretends to un-earth. *The Mousetrap* reveals as much about himself as it will, or should, about Claudius. David Mann supports such a reading, arguing that, “as a result of this behaviour, his original purpose of awakening Claudius’ conscience to a confession of his guilt is accompanied, and perhaps overshadowed, by a new message, that he, Hamlet, knows of the guilt. There is more than a little suggestion too that he sees himself as his father’s avenger.” (Mann 1991: 50) In Mann’s analysis, “the covert purpose of the event only emerges over a period of time in which Hamlet gradually encroaches on the action, and no doubt into the inner play performance area, moving from being a spectator, to a director – ‘leave thy damnable faces and begin’ – end then himself an enactor, a kind of hyperactive stage chorus.” (Mann 1991: 51)

Throughout *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet indeed takes the role of a “chorus”, commenting as well on what is shown on stage, complementing it with interpretations and announcements, and actively enquiring about the other spectators’ opinions. While he seems to be eliciting reactions that will instruct him on the matter of his father’s murder, however, his insistence on certain interpretations of *The Mousetrap*, in addition to the complicity he has created with the audience already, increasingly gives the impression that it is Hamlet himself who is shaping the way in which *The Mousetrap* can be perceived by its spectators. Through the differences between what Hamlet incites the on- and the off-stage audience to see through his comments, and the reactions of Ophelia and Gertrude to his interventions, the possibility is introduced that Hamlet might also be staging his own plot in a way peculiar to him as a spectator. At the decisive moment of the play, by staging a play-within-the-play, *Hamlet* begs the question: Is the performance of *Hamlet* the subjective vision of one of its protagonists from the very beginning? Thinking through its reception-oriented performance theory consistently, it uses the play within to question the play without.

Hamlet’s behavior does raise the attention of the other spectators: “You are as good as a chorus, my lord” (3.2.238), Ophelia comments as Hamlet introduces Lucianus. The chorus was a regular occurrence on early modern stages. Thompson and Taylor rightly reference Shakespeare’s own use of choruses in *Henry V*, *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale*. They gloss chorus as “an actor whose role is to mediate the story to the audience.” (n.3.2.238) If we look back to the prologue spoken by the chorus in *Henry V*, however, we notice that it is not so much mediating the action, as it is mediating the medium, explaining the spectator’s role in the production of the performance. Hamlet’s response to Ophelia’s description of himself as a chorus certainly goes in that direction: “I could interpret between you and your love if I could see the puppets dallying”, implying that Ophelia is unfaithful to him and has a relationship with some undefined lover. On the other hand, he introduces a reference to another stage-based medium: the puppet show. Thompson and Taylor gloss verses 239 and 240 as follows: “I could act as a chorus

between you and your love (or lover) if I could see the puppets performing. Hamlet sees himself as a puppet-master who would interpret or provide a commentary on the show. It seems possible that puppets had a sexual meaning, related to the use of ‘poop’ for the vagina. Q1 has ‘poopies.’”

This peculiar combination of metatheatrical comment and misogynistic attacks has an important function for *The Mousetrap*’s general purpose. The perception of Hamlet’s role as a mediating spectator for not only *The Mousetrap*, but the entire Hamlet, is subtly prepared through his exchanges with the female spectators of the play-within-the-play, Ophelia and Gertrude. Ophelia sees herself confronted – once more – with aggressive misogynistic innuendos, allegedly an ‘inoffensive’ continuation of Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’, which also manifested in scene one of act three, in which Hamlet pretends to reject Ophelia for the benefit of the hidden Polonius and King Claudius. There, Hamlet insults Ophelia using the entire spectrum of misogynistic attacks available – and he continues now, implying in “any show that you will show him” that “what Ophelia might show is intimate or sexual” (n.3.2.137). This is pursues the innuendos that Hamlet makes vis-à-vis Ophelia earlier, as they take their places, telling her that “That’s a fair thought to lie between a maids’ legs” (3.2.112), and precedes several more: “It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.”(3.2.242-243) After a scene in which Hamlet’s denies any deeper feelings for Ophelia, and insults her as sexually depraved qua gender, these allusions prolong the violence that characterizes his behavior towards her. I argue, however, that this allows, for once, for the gaze of the audience to be turned on Hamlet himself. In assuming to know what Ophelia will show, it is him that shows what he is predisposed to see through his eyes. What else could a woman show? It is in this context, I argue, that we can also understand those scenes in which Hamlet interacts with Ophelia or Gertrude, and their misogynistic acts of verbal and physical violence. The spectacle of woman’s depravation is one that Hamlet likes to watch, and therefore to stage. Like in his encounter with the Ghost, he already knows what he is going to see.

This particular predisposition of Hamlet, in turn, allows to interpret the excerpt that we get to see of *The Murder of Gonzago* as a revelation about Hamlet's perspective on the overall situation, rather than or at least in addition to Claudius' guilt. The initial part of the action shown in the 'dumb-show' is here drawn out to a lengthy conversation between Player King and Player Queen about the yet hypothetical question of the Player King's death and the aftermath. Like a thinly veiled allegory of the ideal woman, the Player Queen insists on her undying fidelity:

PLAYER QUEEN O, confound the rest!  
 Such love must needs be treason in my breast.  
 In second husband let me be accurst:  
 None wed the second but who killed the first.  
 HAMLET That's wormwood!  
 (3.2.171-175)

Hamlet comments on what he hears – or rather: the effect he assumes it should have on his mother. Like an annoying commentator that makes the already thinly veiled relationship to his perception of reality all too clear, he interrupts again, pointing out: “If she should break it now....” Lars Eidinger's Hamlet, as shown above, while playing the role of Player Queen, spoke those lines the earnestness of Hamlet, the character, emphasizing the lack of distance Hamlet suddenly has regarding his own plot. When the Player King falls asleep, Hamlet seizes the opportunity for a quick discussion with his mother:

HAMLET Madam, how like you this play?  
 QUEEN The lady doth protest too much, methinks.  
 HAMLET O, but she'll keep her word.  
 (3.2.223-225)

The exchange can be played to imply different attitudes of Gertrude. Many things are impossible to pin down here: whether Gertrude does, like the Player Queen in the 'dumb-show', have an implication with the murder of Old Hamlet, or whether she has consciously married a murderer. What she is obviously able to see and

to deflect, is Hamlet's attack: She distances herself from the Player Queen, finding her moral absolutism excessive and thereby autonomously defending her own stance. The conversation is, however, more revealing with regards to Hamlet. He clearly believes his mother guilty.

That Hamlet's a priori suspicion of women's unbridled sexuality and the criminal behavior it might induce, well-expressed in Hamlet's conversation with his mother after the performance of *The Mousetrap* in scene four of act three, has a metatheatrical dimension especially due to the particularly vehement criticism that female spectators were exposed to:

For this is general: that they which show themselves, openly desire to be seen. [...] We walk in the sun many times for pleasure, but our faces are tanned before we return. [...] If you give but a glance to your beholders, you have veiled the bonnet in token of obedience; for the bolt is fallen ere the air clap; the bullet passed, ere the piece crack; the cold taken, ere the body shiver; and the match made, ere you strike hands. (Gosson [1579]2004: 29-30)

This passage from Gosson's *The School of Abuse*, which features extra advice "To the Gentlewomen Citizens of London", flourishing days with regard of credit, features imagery that Hamlet also uses in his attacks against Ophelia in his foolish conversation with Polonius: Walking in the sun will transform and taint the female body in unseemly ways, and women are especially vulnerable to those bullet-like impulses such as laughter that affect spectators in performance according to Hamlet. Gosson's choice of imagery recalls Hamlet's advice to Polonius: "Let her not walk i'th'sun." (2.2.180), combining a misogynistic and an antitheatrical feeling. Most importantly, "they which show themselves, openly desire to be seen" (Gosson [1579]2004: 29), and thereby deserving the negative effects that might ensue. To fend against the touch of performance, Gosson seems to think especially female spectators should refrain from showing themselves in the theater – lest they might be wounded by the show that the players will show them in response. Eyes, ears and tongue, the main protagonists of *mimesis* as impression, are all

to be suppressed in their functions here: “close up your eyes, stop your ears, tie up your tongues”, Gosson asks (Gosson [1579]2004: 31). Gosson’s quote shows that Hamlet’s perspective on Ophelia and Gertrude is timely, as he also comments on their presence at a play, paradoxically condemning them for being present at a performance itself. As much as *Hamlet* differentiates and transgresses the concepts and boundaries created by pro-and antitheatricalists, poets and players, as much does it not reflect the misogynist inflection of a culture that associates watching and being watched with sensuality, arousal and forbidden touch, and imagines femininity as something to remain invisible for its own protection. Hamlet’s injunction to Ophelia, “Get thee to a nunnary” (3.1.120) is the reverse of the play’s joyous defense of the pleasures of performance. It seems that from the character’s perspective, they should not be open to everyone.

It is ironic that his stance towards female spectatorship in general and the reactions he expects from Ophelia and Gertrude in particular unveil Hamlet’s predisposition as a spectator of *The Mousetrap*, and, as a consequence, his shaping of Hamlet as the mediating force we have revealed him to be in chapters one and two. In his commenting upon the play, Hamlet gradually increases his participation and fleshes out the play’s assumption on the individual power of the spectator for the effect of performance. To the Player Queen’s assertion that “None wed the second but who killed the first”, his comment “That’s wormwood!” is as revelatory of his own stance towards the events on stage as they are a comment on what Gertrude should feel – again, in Hamlet’s eyes. “That’s wormwood” might also be read as an involuntary expression of his own enthusiasm about the admittedly not very subtle allusion, which might stem from Hamlet’s own pen, a reading encouraged by the analogous lines in Q1 – “O wormwood! Wormwood!” – and F – “Wormwood! Wormwood!”, who rhetorically enhance the pathos of the exclamation through the doubling and the exclamation points. They might also be directed at Gertrude directly, attempting to elicit a reaction unkenning her guilt.

The same is valid for the second interruption of *The Murder of Gonzago*: After the similarly overstated expressions of loyalty by the Player Queen – “*Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife / If once I be a widow ever I be a wife*” (3.2.216-217) – Hamlet also intervenes and performs the reaction he deems appropriate for his mother, performing the suspense that he believes will make his mother uncomfortable, since – in his eyes – she knows all too well how the story ends: “If she should break it now!” (3.2.218)

These two interruptions illustrate that in *The Mousetrap*, purporting to be designed to provoke a manifestation of guilt in its spectators, all comments are at the same time expressions of what Hamlet’s believes to know, and what he, consequently, plans to do. This principle culminates with the arrival of Lucianus on the scene:

Enter Lucianus.

[HAMLET] This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King

[...]

HAMLET [...] Begin, murderer: leave thy damnable faces and begin. Come, ‘the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.’ [...]

HAMLET ‘A poison’s him i’th’garden for his estate. His name’s Gonzago. The story is extant and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.

(3.2.236.1-247)

In this passage, Hamlet explains, quotes and interprets. In all three comments, he pushes the other spectators towards certain interpretation of the performance– different interpretations, to be precise. When he points out that Lucianus is “nephew to the King”, he draws attention to the parallels between the character and himself. When he exhorts Lucianus to begin, he calls him a murderer and therefore provides the moral framework for what follows, implicitly accusing Claudius of murder. Finally, he narrates the action the spectator have just seen – “[Pours poison into his ears]” – and adds the reason for the murder, before giving away the end of the story: “the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.” If we take an attentive look at what the spectators – especially Claudius – actually get to see as a performance here, it is much less than the ‘dumb-

show had prepared them for. In the few first lines of the play that we hear, the similarity of the play performed by the troupe of players that had been touring the country to the story of the Ghost is uncanny. *The Murder of Gonzago* is, with a few decisive modifications, is the exact reproduction of the Ghost's story of Old Hamlet's murder. But when factoring in Hamlet's reactions, comments and explanations, the similarity suddenly seems forged. While Hamlet has inserted "a speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines, which I would set down", during the play, he constantly adds "more than is set down". As Hamlet himself interrupts the play to explain its relationship to the fictional reality in which Claudius allegedly murdered his brother, it hardly seems possible for the latter to deduce anything else from the little he has seen. While he attempts to reveal what Claudius and Gertrude are hiding, his own perspective on the events prevents *The Mousetrap* from even working. It is ultimately impossible to tell what Claudius reacts to – the similarity of the play to his own deed, or the open accusations and threats by the commentator, Hamlet. Even though Claudius was supposed to reveal his own spectatorial disposition in *The Mousetrap*, it is instead Hamlet who ends up doing so.

Hamlet's interventions thereby illustrate the individuality of each spectators' perception of any play. While *Hamlet* uses the play-within-the-play to explore and establish an active role of the spectator as actor in the performance, Hamlet, the character, also loses the position of superiority that his mediating role 'antic disposition' and his presence as a performer conveyed on him. Oddly, the play within the play manages to create a frame in which Hamlet, the character, loses perspective himself. By the same stroke the off-stage audience's perspective is narrowed to his. Hamlet's claim to the individualized response and participation of each spectator in the production of performance is different from a mere relativity of subjective interpretations. Rather, from the complicity between Hamlet and the spectators created by the 'antic disposition' in act two, the play-within-the-play creates a new community, one from which Hamlet might be the excluded. Fischer-Lichte connects the potential of role-reversal between actor and spectator that we have

analyzed in the scenes around the Pyrrhus-speech to the construction and collapse of such communities of spectators:

Role reversal – which may indeed be triggered by staging strategies – opens up the possibility for collective action. It is an opportunity for actors and spectators to physically experience community with another group from which they were originally excluded. This experience may be disrupted at any time by the community members or by the uninvolved spectators. The community in turn breaks down, leading the feedback loop to take yet another turn. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 55)

The feedback loop through which the unrepeatable event of each performance is generated collectively by actors and spectators is oddly interrupted in *The Mousetrap* by Hamlet, as he comments and keeps the other spectators to construct a collective in which to experience together. It can be argued that, by doing so, Hamlet also severs his link with the off-stage audience, who might become aware that the complicity shared in the previous scenes and acts might also be a limitation. As Hamlet shifts between being director, actor and performer of his own plot, *Hamlet* becomes limited by his view.

Christoph Menkes analysis of the role of spectatorship in *Hamlet* takes on a different inflection from this perspective: *The Mousetrap* does present the results of being a spectator in and of *Hamlet* not as objective insight in the accuracy of the mirror image of *The Murder of Gonzago* and, thereby, Claudius' deed, but as the awareness that *Hamlet* as performance is created by the autopoietic activity of both actors and spectators. Its plot, in consequence is caused by the performance itself: "nicht durch die neuzeitliche Idee der Erkenntnis und ihrer Gewißheit, sondern durch das doppelt ironische Bewußtsein dessen, was das Spiel gegenwärtig Geschehendes hervorgebracht hat (das Spiel des Schauspielers) und was es hervorbringt (die Verwicklungen des Schicksals)." (Menke 2005: 183) What *The Mousetrap* reveals is then not only Hamlet's vision of his own plot, which will always prevent it from unfolding 'objectively' in front of

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any spectator's eyes, but also the way in which the performance of Hamlet can only ever unfold Hamlet's fate in a certain way.

In the previous chapters, I have shown that *The Mousetrap* articulates a conception of Hamlet as text and performance centered around the active role of the spectator for the construction of the 'world-within-the-play' and its effects in the event of the performance. In the central scenes of its third act, Hamlet shifts the center of its discussion of text and performance away from the play-text towards the process of reception. The diversity of spectatorial perspectives implied and the careful orchestration of communities of spectators and actors, including or excluding the title character, shows a notion of spectatorship that signifies neither subjectivist relativity, nor univocal interpretation of the meaning of the text, but combines both:

Considered from the point of view of reception, the retreat of synthesis is a matter of the freedom to react arbitrarily, or rather involuntarily and idiosyncratically. The 'community' that arises is not one of similar people, i.e. a community of spectators who have been made similar through commonly shared motifs (the human being in general), but instead a common contact of different singularities who do not melt their respective perspectives into a whole but at most share or communicate affinities in small groups. In this sense, the perturbing strategy of the withdrawal of synthesis means the offer of a community of heterogeneous and particular imaginations. (Lehmann 2006: 83)

The offer of postdramatic theater as Lehmann describes it might seem a far cry from the early modern performance of Hamlet at the Globe. But the appearances of the Ghost and the 'antic disposition' have yielded a few affinities already. I have read the Ghost's appearances as a "perturbing strategy of the withdrawal of synthesis", and the 'antic disposition' as an acting technique based on a performance provoking the oscillation of orders of perception and emphasizing the autopoietic feedback-loop connecting spectators and actors. The community of spectators that Hamlet shows in its third act is, indeed, a community of very particular imaginations who,

however, share the same active function in the production of ‘their’ performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*.

*The Mousetrap* is the apotheosis of a practice of *mimesis* that encourages the crossing of all boundaries and turns itself inside out to make visible its double existence as text and performance. The play-within-the-play becomes the framework of Hamlet. Its allegedly invisible frame, the outside of its textual traces, becomes visible inside it. As many of the contemporary molds from which *The Murder of Gonzago* has been cast, the inner play has a prologue:

PROLOGUE

For us and for our tragedy,  
Here stooping to your clemency,  
We beg your hearing patiently.

HAMLET Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?  
(3.2.142-145)

Like a miniature version of other prologues, it contains the usual bid for kind judgement, distinguishing clearly between “us” – the troupe, the producers.... – and “our tragedy”. It invokes patience and clemency. There is no space for the mentioning of the spectator’s imaginary contribution to the magic of the theater performance, but the triangle between author, players and spectators is drawn and clearly tipped towards the third point: the spectators. In the apparent dichotomy between text and performance, and the attached opposition between fiction and world, *Hamlet* introduces a third. Hamlet finds this prologue too short: it is almost as short as the “(necessarily brief) motto inscribed inside a ring” (n.3.2.145). The ring is a fitting image for the concept of theater between text and performance that Hamlet defends: Like a seal in wax, the inscription has been engraved into the golden material of the ring. Neither can be distinguished from the other. The inscription repeats indefinitely: following the shape of the ring, the words unfold again and again, like Hamlet does each performance anew.

## CONCLUSION – *Never Hamlet*

### *Never Hamlet?*

In act five of *Hamlet*, Hamlet, the avenger, faces an alter ego. Laertes has returned from France, only to find his father, Polonius, murdered and his sister dead from grief. In contrast to Hamlet, he does not hesitate to take revenge and can only be stopped by Claudius, who sees an opportunity to channel Laertes' energy for his own purpose. After Claudius' plan to ship Hamlet off to England and to have him assassinated there has failed, he intends to use Laertes to finally get rid of Hamlet. Conspiring with Laertes, Claudius stages a reconciliation between Laertes and Hamlet that is to be sealed by a feat in the aristocratic art of fencing. Claudius' staging includes his usual *modus operandi*: poison is doubly part of his plot to kill Hamlet. Laertes' rapier, sharp instead of blunted as would be customary for a sporting match, is additionally dipped in a lethal poison. In case Laertes does not manage to hurt Hamlet with the poisoned rapier, Claudius will have a poisoned drink ready and hand it to Hamlet when the latter asks for a refreshing beverage. Revenge, legitimate though it might be in the case of Laertes, masquerades as its opposite: reconciliation.

The grand finale to *Hamlet* is another example of the situations such as the screen-scenes and plays-within-the-play that abound in the first three acts of *Hamlet*, and which provide the opportunity to read the play for traces of its own self-awareness as text and performance. Hamlet himself, for once, appears not to be in control of the theatricals going on in *Hamlet*. Nonetheless, he draws attention to the performance situation by calling upon the off-stage audience as witnesses. The spectators, who have been accomplices of Hamlet's clownesque performance and of his directing the play-within-the-play, are now judges of a larger question:

KING Come, Hamlet, come and take this hand from me.

*[Puts Laertes' hand into Hamlet's.]*

HAMLET Give me your pardon, Sir. I have done you wrong,  
But pardon't as you are a gentleman.

This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,  
How I am punished with a sore distraction.  
What I have done  
That might your nature, honour and exception  
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.  
Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.  
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,  
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,  
Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.  
Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,  
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged –  
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.  
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil  
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts  
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house  
And hurt my brother.  
(5.2.203-221)

When asked by Claudius to reconcile with Laertes and to demonstrate his willingness to do so by shaking hands with him, Hamlet asks for Laertes' forgiveness. Immediately undermining the honesty of his ask – the first step of a pardon, after all, is an acknowledgement of guilt – Hamlet seizes the occasion to plead for himself and against the accusations brought up against him. Adroitly referring to his guilt in the hypothetical mode, he uses an insanity defense, arguing that he cannot be held responsible for any wrongs he might have done Laertes due to his madness. He rhetorically reverses the positions of the offender and the victim and describes himself as “punished with a sore distraction”, implying that this should be punishment enough.

In the chapters of this study, I have looked at the first three acts of *Hamlet* and have presented a reading of *Hamlet* as a play that displays an awareness of its double existence as text and performance. I have opened up readings and effects of *Hamlet* by including the performance situation implied in the text. This approach has revealed that text and performance are not neatly distinguished from each other and opposed as what is ‘set down’ and what is ‘more than is set down’, but that both create a symbiosis that ultimately makes the

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distinction between them obsolete. *Hamlet* must be read as the connection, interaction, tension and complementariness of both its existence as text and as performance.

Hamlet's apology to Laertes and his defense are a particularly vivid example of the productivity of the approach of this study. In its concluding part, I will read Hamlet's apology to Laertes to sum up the results of the readings from the previous chapters. In it, Hamlet himself questions the opposition between what is 'set down' and what is 'more', as well as his perspective on the opposition between the inscrutable interior and the theatricalized exterior, and thereby points towards the inextricable simultaneity of *Hamlet* as text and performance that the readings of the previous chapters have revealed. I will show that my readings have productively challenged accepted views in Shakespeare criticism that remain within a paradigm of text vs. performance, and that my hypothesis can also be productively applied to the final acts of *Hamlet*: instead of a return to the revenge plot, they mirror the first acts' metatheatrical structure, and thereby figure the paradoxical temporality of Hamlet as text and performance. As Hamlet himself is aware, the character dies, but *Hamlet* resurrects.

Hamlet's apology to Laertes is an illustration of the attempt to distinguish between his existence as character and his existence as performer, and its failure points towards the idea of the inextricable connection between both. Hamlet's defense draws on the 'antic disposition' as madness in the literal sense, claiming that "in the words of the great jurist Edward Coke, 'he that is non compos mentis ... cannot commit High Treason'" (De Grazia 2007: 2). He attempts to refute the responsibility for his actions due to his insanity. To do so, he calls on an audience of witnesses. "This presence knows", he says, and Laertes "must needs have heard" that he is mad. The first verses of Hamlet's address calls all those present, on and off stage as witnesses to Hamlet's trial – a trial, however, that is exclusively staged by himself. Understanding Hamlet's trial requires the awareness of the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance.

Hamlet's defense is inherently contradictory. While the 'insanity defense' would absolve him of any responsibility for his actions, he is looking for someone or something responsible instead. But responsible for what, exactly? "What I have done" is a sentence whose exact content remains as open as the answer to the play's opening question "Who's there?", and it conspicuously stands alone in verse 208, leaving open for interpretation the question of what Hamlet exactly is guilty. As Hamlet's search for an acquittal addresses the audience, too, it indicates that it concerns not only his alleged wrongs against Laertes, but his self-dividing performance throughout the play itself. At first sight, Hamlet might seem to defend himself against the accusations brought forth by himself in act three against "those that play your clowns" (3.2.36-37): "What I have done" (5.2.208), in this perspective, means Hamlet's performance of 'more than is set down', his refusal to follow the Ghost's script and to avenge, his delay and distraction in the 'antic disposition'. For this, Hamlet, the character, rejects all responsibility: "Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes?", Hamlet asks, apparently answering his own question: "Never Hamlet." "Who does it then?", Hamlet asks, and answers: "His madness", arguing that, even though no responsible criminal can be found, Hamlet definitely "is of the faction that is wronged – his madness is poor Hamlet's enemy." Given the connection between 'antic disposition' and 'acting disposition' that we have explored in chapter two, Hamlet's response to himself can be read in terms of Hamlet's existence as performance. It is not Hamlet, the character, that wronged Laertes and left the prescribed track of the revenge plot, but the foolish performance of Hamlet, the actor. The responsibility lies with the one who performed, who digressed, who acted differently than prescribed, killing Polonius instead of Claudius, destroying Ophelia's sanity through the inscrutable concatenations of his performance between actor and character.

But the awareness of this double existence, which has been constructed over the entire performance of *Hamlet*, makes the question of guilt and responsibility as impossible to resolve as Hamlet, the character, and Hamlet, the actor, are impossible to distinguish from one another. Hamlet's defense evolves into a theory of acting that,

however, moves away from the seemingly easy distinction between what is 'set down' and what is not: "If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away / And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes' / Then Hamlet does it not", Hamlet claims. But is there a place 'away' from Hamlet, and a time 'when he's not himself'? My reading of *Hamlet* has shown that the distinction that Hamlet draws in act three between what is 'set down' and what is 'more' remains just as discursive and hypothetical as his distinction between 'himself' and 'not himself' must remain.

This passage manages to hold a delicate balance. On the one hand, it shows a character's intuition that he is somehow divided from himself and product of a performance that exceeds its own ontological plane. On the other hand, it displays the fact that not only Hamlet's actions, but, after all, *Hamlet* as a whole is the product of that peculiar "madness" that is the performance of the actors, and the spectator's active participation in it. Hamlet's defense disregards that "his madness" is no temporary psychological state within the character's existence, but a creative process through which he produces himself and the world within which he moves. It is in this sense that it is "Never Hamlet" who has wronged Laertes: At least, it is never Hamlet alone, but Hamlet performed. Performance cannot be "poor Hamlet's enemy", just as performance is not 'more than is set down' and not against what is 'set down'. The double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance urges us to understand the final verdict of Hamlet's speech to Laertes not as the clear attribution of responsibility between two parties, Hamlet or the performance of *Hamlet*. Rather, it makes the claim that performance did it all, but that what performance does is not accidental: it produces and plays with a frame of reference that is 'set down', and ultimately is the only graspable site of its existence.

#### *Always Hamlet*

The starting point of this study has been that Hamlet, the character, defends a reformed state of theater in which text and performance are neatly distinguished and the latter subordinate to the other,

while *Hamlet*, the play, defends an existence in which text and performance mutually cause and construct each other. As the readings from act one, two and three have shown, however, Hamlet as a self-aware character-actor himself performs an alternative notion of theatrical *mimesis*. He takes an active role within this self-aware representation of *Hamlet's* double existence, and therefore goes through an evolution that makes himself an active participant in the process of performance that produces its own existence. This study has not read *Hamlet* against Hamlet, but *Hamlet* as a process of convergence of their positions towards each other and towards an alternative conception of the relationship between text and performance as equally constitutive aspects of its double existence. This conception becomes manifest as act one, two and three produce figures of vexing simultaneity between seemingly opposing interpretations.

In the first chapter of *More than is set down*, I have read the Ghost's appearances as a first example of the play's double existence by showing that the Ghost works as a figure of the author. In the encounter between Hamlet and the Ghost, it dramatizes its existence as something that is 'set down' by showing the interaction between the dramatic author who scripts a revenge plot and the actor, ready to perform the character's fate. However, it frames this encounter with scenes that deconstruct the Ghost's absolute authority as an author and highlight the necessary contribution of actors and spectators to a performance that is authored collectively. Act one of *Hamlet* thereby includes the awareness that Hamlet and the Ghost mutually create their characters in acts of *prosopopoeia*, made explicit by Hamlet's naming of the Ghost, which finally allows him to take his place in dramatic dialogue. In chapter two, I have read Hamlet's 'antic disposition', the pretense of madness that Hamlet adopts in response to his encounter with the Ghost, as the self-conscious performing of an actor's performance. I have argued that Hamlet's delay of action is, in fact, the choice of a different mode of action: acting, that is always simultaneously prescribed by a playwright, and autonomously performed by an actor. I have insisted upon the fact,

however, that even the 'antic disposition' is not simply the performance of 'more than is set down', but that Hamlet's words and actions always relate to what is 'set down', and the actor takes a conscious stance towards the boundaries put to him by the character and his prescribed fate. In doing so, the actor actively creates and shapes a community with the audience. Ultimately, this self-aware display of the 'antic disposition' as an 'acting disposition' lends the character of Hamlet himself a superior awareness of his own plot, and foregrounds the fact that the character and *Hamlet* as a whole are the collective product of the actor's and the spectators' activity. This collective activity established in chapter two allows for a reading of *The Mousetrap* as an opportunity to reflect upon the theater performance as an event in a present time and space shared by actors and spectators. While Hamlet presents a theory of theatre to the players in which the performance must remain within the limits of what is 'set down', presupposing that both can be neatly separated, the scenes surrounding *The Mousetrap* and the play-within-the-play itself are a study in the way in which the performance relies on the active participation of actor and spectators and derives its aesthetic effect and pleasure from the dissolution of the boundaries between them. As the player scenes of *Hamlet* show, however, it is through its similarity with a difference that the 'world-within-the-play' becomes relatable to the spectators who, in turn, shape the performance through their unique experience and interpretation of it. This is valid for Hamlet himself in particular: Hamlet's activity as a co-author, director and active spectator of his own play-within-the-play, however, creates the impression that the title character of Hamlet might be the spectator of his own plot, authoring and shaping both what is 'set down' and what is not through his intentions, expectations and perspectives. *Mimesis* is therefore not to be understood as either a representation contained within a text and sealed off against the context of performance, nor as a purely transgressive practice of exchange without any representative potential, but as doubly existing between representation and practice, to be completed in the tension between a text and its performance.

By reading *Hamlet* with regards to its double existence as text and performance, I have read Hamlet without “the modern Hamlet, the one distinguished by an inner being so transcendent that it barely comes into contact with the play from which it emerges” (De Grazia 2007: 1). I have begun with the hypothesis that the exploration and expression of the inner being of Hamlet, the character, is not the final purpose of Hamlet neither as text nor as performance. As Margreta de Grazia has stated, “[s]cholarship has been content to treat the plot as inert backdrop to the main character who can readily leave it behind to wander into other and later works, no strings attached. Thus, for the better part of its critical history, Hamlet (to invert this book’s title) has existed without *Hamlet*.” (De Grazia 2007: 3-4) When reading *Hamlet* as text and performance, it becomes apparent that Hamlet can, in fact, leave behind the plot to wander around. He does so not as the abstract idea of an interiority sprung from Shakespeare’s imagination, but as a performer who walks a few steps away and turns around to look at *Hamlet* from a distance, only to return and to rehearse another and a new way of being Hamlet. James Calderwood assumes that Hamlet is “conscious of his dual identity and able to express both sides of himself, almost as though he were an actor at a rehearsal” (Calderwood 1983: 32). I have attempted to go further in arguing that Hamlet does not behave as though he might be, but that he *is* an actor at rehearsal, taking a stance towards the revenge plot by taking a stance towards his particular way of acting as a character performed by an actor; what is more: as a way of contributing to the performance by letting himself be touched and transformed by it. Hamlet’s assertion in his conversation with Laertes, then, can be inverted. The one who is responsible for the performance of *Hamlet* is, in a way, always Hamlet, be it as a character or as an actor.

While building on the perspective of critics such as De Grazia and Calderwood, the challenge I have sought to take on in this study is to read neither Hamlet without *Hamlet* nor the reverse, but to understand both existences of Hamlet and of *Hamlet* as double in the proper sense, as complementing apparently diverging meanings and effects into the peculiar work that is Hamlet. Text and performance

do not generate separate readings and effects that are then contradictory or complementary, but it is the doubling of both that yields the *Hamlet* that this study has uncovered, without by any means claiming that it is the actual, first, original or, in fact, any kind of stable or permanent *Hamlet*.

### *Repetitive Hamlet*

The method of reading I have unfolded in this study, focusing on those acts of *Hamlet* that prepare and lead up to the metatheatrical player scenes at its center, also yields a productive rereading of the final acts of *Hamlet*. Including the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance in fact affects the dramaturgy of the play as a whole, especially reconfiguring the relationship between the parts preceding and those following *The Mousetrap*. In fact, from the perspective of the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance, one might say that the procedures and effects of acts one through three repeats in the final acts. As if *The Mousetrap* was a mirror at the center of the play, scenes from the first acts repeat in the second part. By taking the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance seriously, it becomes possible to eschew the polarizing interpretation of performance as a deconstructive force that works against the text and the world-within-the-play it 'contains'. Acts four and five of the play confirm that those effects of *Hamlet* that manifest primarily in performance are not contradictory to the alleged demands of the dramatic text and its plot.

In many readings of the play, the formal demands of tragedy as a printed text affect the reading of *Hamlet* with regards to the dramaturgy of the final acts. The tragedy and its 'world-within-the-play' have to end in a way that makes sense of either previous events, thereby unifying the plot in an Aristotelian sense, or to explain the erratic behavior of the title character, demanding psychological coherence. Most often, this means suppressing the existence of *Hamlet* as performance, and of Hamlet as an actor. From the perspective of character-centered criticism that critics such as De Grazia seek to evade, the question of why Hamlet does not act is a psychological question. In other narratives, the problem tends to be answered in

terms of the imperatives of the plot (cf. De Grazia 2007: 171 ff.). In both cases, Hamlet's delay is seen as a problem or mistake. The solution to the mistake is thought of in terms of the opposition between text and performance: the delay creates a problem for the Aristotelian unity of time, a hole that needs to be patched: "In both narratives, the time is filled up with the pranks, ruses, and riddles [...] Shakespeare follows the same expedient: he ekes out the play through Hamlet's feigning of an 'antic disposition'" (De Grazia 2007: 172). Even when the perspective is plot-oriented rather than psychological, the notion of the precedence of the 'mistake' determines the range of possible answers to the question at stake. It presupposes "the audience's recognition of the plot's structural problem." (De Grazia 2007: 174) While the perspective gains some distance with regards to Hamlet, it still presupposes that the structure of 'the revenge tragedy', a property of the dramatic text, is somehow 'damaged'. The 'antic disposition' would then be a means to fill the delay caused by Hamlet's hesitation, and incidentally draw attention to the craft of the playwright and of the actor, who fills the void with his clownesque performance. This understanding of the first acts of Hamlet up until *The Mousetrap* entails a reading of the acts following it as a return to the plot and a means for Hamlet to finally fulfill the fate of the avenger that had been prescribed to him from the beginning. C.L. Barber argues that while "[t]here is a great deal of wonderful fooling in the tragedy", "the tragedy moves into regions where the distinction between madness and sanity begins to break down, to be recovered only through violence" (Barber 1959: 261). Hamlet's fooling, Barber seems to say, indeed confuses the distinctions between madness and sanity in a way that can only be recovered through the violent death of those responsible. Christoph Menke states that "[In der zweiten Hälfte des Stücks] ist Hamlets prägende Erfahrung nicht mehr, daß alles Handeln bloß gespielt, sondern daß es einem unbeeinflußbaren Schicksal ausgesetzt sein kann" (Menke 2005: 175), and Robert Weimann believes that, while he seems to have chosen his own fate, Hamlet realizes that "die gewollte Autonomie des modernen Charakters" reverts into "der Wahnwitz der darin beschlossenen Illusion, sobald die wirkliche Abhängigkeit und Problematik seines Selbst zum Vorschein

kommt.” (Weimann 1988: 51). Lionel Abel’s reading is equally indebted to finding a solution to the revenge plot of Hamlet: “It is only then that Hamlet kills Claudius. Dying he does what he could not do when hoping to live.” (Abel 1966: 50) Hamlet’s death is the necessary price of his successful revenge.

After the experiments with the ‘antic disposition’ and the deconstructive effects of the play-within-the-play in the third act, Hamlet’s resignation can hardly be understood as a simple return to the boundaries of his role in the revenge tragedy. Hamlet has not temporarily stepped out of his fate, ‘interrupting’ the course of events. Further research might show that act four and five pursue the trajectory and repeat those procedures from the first three acts that examine not only Hamlet as a character-actor, but the double existence of the play in general. In fact, the final two acts of Hamlet are structured by a series of “Widerspiegelungen die sich methodisch durch die Tragödie ziehen.” (Mosse 2014: 113) In those mirrorings, Hamlet encounters alter egos that show him his own „form and pressure”.

Hamlet’s encounter with his mother in scene four of act three constitutes a kind of accelerated review of the themes of act one. Polonius has elaborately staged a screen-scene and hides while Gertrude confronts her son. Hamlet attacks her with a violence reminiscent of his behavior towards Ophelia in the first scene of the same act. His attacks are directly related to the accusations of false grief that he had brought forth in act one, recalling Hamlet’s epistemological anxiety and the troubling notion of the theatricalized exterior that conceals everyone’s true interiority from the second scene of act one. In time for this concern, the Ghost, ambivalent figure of authorship and performance, makes an appearance that is supposed to reinforce the imperative uttered in act one, but once more causes more epistemological trouble than clarity. Gertrude voices the same concerns as Horatio did before Hamlet’s first encounter with the Ghost – but while he warned Hamlet from the potential consequences of the encounter, Gertrude seems to describe its results: his brain is now affected and transformed, like a

spectator's brain confused by the deceitful representations and powerful sensory effects of performance: "This is the very coinage of your brain. / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in." (3.4.135-137) The apparition of the Ghost backfires, as Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius. As a result, Hamlet is sent to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Like a reedition of his interaction with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz in act two, the voyage to England, even though only narrated retrospectively to Horatio in the second scene of act five, is another example of the fact that the two courtiers are incapable of "pluck[ing] the heart" of Hamlet's, or any, "mystery" (3.2.357-358). Hamlet discovers Claudius' intrigue and turns the plot on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. A pirate ship is providentially around to save Hamlet, who returns to England like those fools, beggars and madmen sent away on the ship of fools only to disembark and return. The moment Hamlet leaves for England, in addition, the other characters show an increased awareness of their double existence as text and performance. After *The Mouse-trap*, Claudius attempts to take over the staging of *Hamlet*, not content to let Hamlet's performance take center stage and draw all attention away from what is, in fact, an equally leading role. When he complains that "He's loved of the distracted multitude", Claudius' words echo Hamlet's reference to "this distracted globe", and thereby references the audience of groundlings that have certainly been willingly distracted by Hamlet's 'antic disposition'. While Ophelia's madness, as I have shown, is decisively different from that of Hamlet, as she has not had the chance to construct a complicity with the audience in the same way as Hamlet has, the same "distracted multitude" are still referenced in the scenes in which she skillfully performs her state. The description of her performance of madness by a Gentleman who explains her state to Gertrude does allude to a performance similar to that of the 'antic disposition':

[...] Her speech is nothing  
 Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
 The hearers to collection. They yawn at it  
 And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts  
 Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

(4.5.7-13)

Like Hamlet's foolish speech, and like the mysterious 'dumb-show', Ophelia's words make sense and find their goal only in the eyes and ears of the spectators. They marvel at the physical and vocal prowess of her performance – her winks and nods and gestures – and “piece out [...] imperfections with [their] thoughts” (*Henry V* 0.23) as the Chorus of *Henry V* demands of audiences in general.

The central theme of grief, which was at the origin of Hamlet's reflections upon the dissembling powers of performance in the second scene of the first act, maintains its place as the source of performances that might not truthfully reflect, but rather produce those emotional and physical states that Hamlet mentions in the first act. The scene of Ophelia's burial marks not only the return of Hamlet to the stage, but also bears the marks of his evolution. Instead of rejecting all “trappings and the suits of woe” (1.2.85-86), Hamlet now endeavors to outdo Laertes' show of grief, as if the performance was the thing itself:

LAERTES [...]

*[Leaps in grave.]*

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead

Till of this flat a mountain you have made

T'o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head

Of blue Olympus.

HAMLET *[Comes forward.]* What is he whose grief

Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow

Conjures the wandering stars and makes them stand

Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,

Hamlet the Dane.

(5.1.239-247)

Hamlet, admittedly, has just realized that the person being buried is his past lover Ophelia. Still, it seems that it is rather the performance of grief by Laertes and the need to out-perform him that draws him forth. He comments on the “emphasis” and the “phrase” of Laertes' grief. As a performance, Laertes' show of grief is then similarly effective as the one of the sentinels in the first

scenes of the play, when they, together, conjure up the Ghost of Old Hamlet. Laertes' grief conjures up a different apparition for the "wonder-wounded hearers", that, however goes, by the same name as the one of Old Hamlet: "I'll call the Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane", Hamlet had told the Ghost in act one. Now, he appears and names himself as a repetition of that earlier apparition: "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane." Conjured up by Laertes' words, he rises from the grave – only in jest, of course: he has had to deliberately jump in beforehand.

### *Resurrecting Hamlet*

Act five of *Hamlet* begins with a change of cast. Hamlet, the Dane, is now performed by young Hamlet. This change is presented as a resurrection: after a voyage to England that was supposed to be Hamlet's literal crossing into the other world, Hamlet returns. When Claudius learns of his return through a letter, it is almost as if he sees a Ghost: "What should this mean? Are all the rest come back, / Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?" (4.7.47-48) Unfortunately, there is no doubt: "'Tis Hamlet's character." (4.7.50) An actor that should already have said its part returns unexpectedly.

*Hamlet's* double existence as text and performance is rehearsed in the final two acts in a number of scenes that mirror the central scenes of acts two and three. The repetitions and mirror effects that spin a web of metatheatrical situations across the play present the double existence of the play as a double temporality. As did the Ghost, the repetitions of familiar, but not quite identical situations, events and people within the play represent the paradoxical temporality of the performance using textual traces. Performance, while ephemeral and unrepeatable, always first and last time, is nonetheless marked out as repetition. The material performance of the textual traces, as I have shown in the introduction to this study, is imagined as one material incarnation of the immaterial existence of abstract characters and their 'world', which exist as expectations and images in discourses and audiences. The tension between both, as Marvin Carlson's concept of "haunting" and Bert States' notion of "binocular vision" have shown, is constitutive of the reception of the performance using textual traces such as *Hamlet*. In its end,

*Hamlet* self-awarably reflects this paradoxical temporality by representing its own end as a process of death through text and resurrection through performance. It does so by transforming the initial imperative to revenge into an imperative to eternally repeat. While it seems intuitive that *Hamlet* and Hamlet must come to an end, they never quite do, as they begin anew in each performance.

Shakespeare scholars, theater scholars and scholars from adaptation studies have long grappled with the peculiar temporal relationship between the textual traces of *Hamlet* and performances based on those traces in the present. Nico Dicecco defines adaptations “both as materially significant and as spatiotemporally unique live events.” (Dicecco 2017: 613) While adaptations and performances are not in all respects comparable phenomena, Dicecco’s concept is useful for arguing that *Hamlet* as performance – while ephemeral and unrepeatable – is “never entirely present with itself.” (Dicecco 2017: 619) What is entirely present, though, is an audience that must “be there[...]with it, attending to its againness, identifying it with a precursor text, bringing to bear the influence of the formal, discursive and categorical markers that frame the adaptation as such.” (Dicecco 2017: 629) The audience in this sense perceives the performance of *Hamlet* as an entirely present event that is framed as a repetition of something past. In its final scenes, *Hamlet* shows an awareness of the peculiar temporality that comes with its double existence. *Hamlet* reflects that it will be repeated in performance, but always with a difference. Through the massacre at the end, it transpires that it will all begin again: maybe in the next minutes, or at least tomorrow night.

The theme of death, therefore, does not contrast or displace the theme of performance and playfulness in the two last acts of *Hamlet*. Rather, it serves as an occasion to perform scenes of resurrection through performance. As I have shortly sketched above, criticism has mostly assumed that, after Hamlet’s return from England, he is ready to stop playing and to die. Lionel Abel, who has boldly argued that Hamlet out-grows his plot to make *Hamlet* into a play that is meta-theater as a whole, also sees an inescapable outcome in the

end of the play and the death of the characters. After having opposed the Ghost and all other dramatists that, according to Abel, surround Hamlet in the play, “There is still another dramatist, whose dramaturgy in the end Hamlet will consent to. This dramatist is death.” (Abel 1966: 49) Hamlet’s return and death, for Abel, pertain to the logic of the dramatic script: “At this moment Hamlet recognizes the truth of that dramatic script in which no one can refuse to act: death will make us all theatrical, no matter what we have done in life.” (ibid.) While Abel reads the end of Hamlet as an insight into the finitude of all life, and therefore, all performance, Calderwood reversely connects the need for Hamlet’s death to the necessity of an ending for the play:

However, if the play is to conclude, Hamlet the singer of self must eventually be silenced. [...] What Shakespeare needs for his digressive structure [...] is an end-term that will both rescue the middle and fulfill the beginning. In the Graveyard and Duel Scenes of Act 5 he provides such an end-term. (Calderwood 1983: 32-33)

With a binocular perspective on *Hamlet* as text and performance, the scenes mentioned by Calderwood are precisely no end terms, but invitations for new beginnings. When digging Ophelia’s grave, a character called the Gravedigger (a clown) confronts his interlocutor (Man another clown) with a riddle, while Hamlet and Horatio stand closely by and watch:

2MAN Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright or a carpenter?  
GRAVEDIGGER Ay tell me that and unyoke.  
2MAN Marry, now I can tell.  
GRAVEDIGGER To’t!  
2MAN Mass, I cannot tell.  
GRAVEDIGGER Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating. And when you are asked this question next, say a gravemaker. The houses he makes lasts till doomsday.  
(5.1.46-56)

As Peter Marx has noted, the Gravedigger-scene continues the ‘antic disposition’, finding it particularly noteworthy in the encounter “dass Hamlet sich auf die Scherze der Totengräber einlässt bzw. mitspielt. Aus der Perspektive des Komischen in Hamlet ist dies umso signifikanter, als er hier erstmals auf einen Dialogpartner trifft, der seine Wortspiele auf Augenhöhe parieren kann.” (Marx 2014: 43) The comical potential of this encounter of three clowns indicates that death might not necessarily be the dominant theme of the scene. Rather, the throwing about of skulls and the discussion of the functions the corpses might have had in life place the emphasis not on the fact that performance, in contrast to life, never ends, and roles can be eternally switched:

HAMLET That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once.  
How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if ‘twere Cain’s  
jawbone, that did the first murder. This might be the pate of a  
politician which this ass now o’erreaches – one that would  
circumvent God, might it not?  
(5.1.71-75)

The idea that the scene might play with a resurrection through performance has found its way into a performance tradition: “seit den 1730er Jahren [gibt es] eine Tradition, Polonius und den Totengräber mit demselben Schauspieler zu besetzen. Damit vollzieht sich in den beiden Figuren, verbunden durch denselben Darsteller, die Wandlung vom tumben Widerpart zum gewitzten Gegenüber (sinnfälligerweise aus dem Grab heraus).” (Marx 2014: 43) In the performance tradition described by Marx, doubling the Gravedigger with the dead Polonius would support the reading of acts four and five as a number of processes of resurrection: even if the character dies, he is somewhat resurrected when the actor returns in a different role. Polonius here resurrects as the Gravedigger - who is not accidentally also labelled as a ‘clown’ in all three texts. Hamlet thereby contradicts the Gravedigger’s claim that the house made by the grave-maker lasts the longest: “The houses he makes lasts till doomsday” (5.1.54-55). If Hamlet were asked “[w]hat is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright or the carpenter?” (5.1.37-38), Freddie Rokem remarks, “Hamlet’s answer

would be 'the actor', because of the many roles and ghosts he can accommodate, while at the same time he remains one person." (Rokem 2014: 58) The vision of the Gravedigger digging a grave and moving about the skulls of those who have already been buried, recklessly displacing them like the lost souls that were sent away on the ship of fools, can be read as one last figure of performance, not in the sense, however, that life's performance always ends in death, but rather in the sense that performances do not end, but repeat, and actors take new roles.

The image of Hamlet, the fool, looking into the mirror of Yorick's skull would certainly suggest as much: "This same skull", the Gravedigger points out, "sir, was, sir, Yorick's skull, the King's jester." (5.1.171-172). Like himself, Yorick was "[a] fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy." Hamlet's mourning is not only a *memento mori* reinforced by the awareness that this dead clown prefigures his own fate. *Hamlet*, as we have seen before, usually proposes an alternative reading through its double awareness of text and performance. Might Hamlet's encounter with Yorick's skull rather produce an effect similar to the one that occurred when he watched the player perform Aeneas in the Pyrrhus speech? In that case, the common ground between Hamlet and Yorick might not be their mortality, but their capacity to resurrect and reinvent, taking new and other shapes. In describing Yorick's lips and face, with his words, Hamlet fleshes out this past character for us and brings him back to life: "Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft." (5.1.178) After resurrecting his father by becoming "Hamlet the Dane" himself, Hamlet looks in the mirror of his other mode of existence, that of the clown, whose role he has also taken after Yorick's death. The performance of *Hamlet* is already the result of a resurrection through performance, and it will not stop with the death of Hamlet, the character.

As the framework of each performance was built into the first scenes of *Hamlet*, in which the audience witnesses the beginning of a performance as part of the dramatic plot, *Hamlet* includes its own end and new beginning into the play. Like his father's Ghost, Ham-

let rises from the fresh grave of Ophelia, only for the circle of murder and revenge to begin anew – like in the story of Pyrrhus, similarly, but with a difference. It is now Laertes who avenges his father, and Hamlet, in confronting him, does not actually confront the one he intends to murder in the first place. Indeed, for a neat resolution of the revenge plot, act five of *Hamlet* poses problems. To read it as repetition with a difference, however, it is coherent. It has begun with an imperative to perform, and it ends with an imperative to repeat what the performance has produced:

HAMLETMASCHINE  
 SEI EIN MANN!  
 ATME.LEB.BERICHTE.  
 ERZÄHL VON MIR UND MEINEM AUFTRAG.  
 ICH BIN HAMLET. ICH BEFEHL ES DIR.  
 (Rüping 2017: 2)

In Christopher Rüping's staging, Hamlet has in fact become the abstracted textual instance that demands performance to begin again, condensed into an LED-screen. He demands it from Horatio, who is played by actors on stage, who then become Hamlet to impersonate the prince and narrate his tragedy. The demand to repeat and perform his story in this way is inherent to Hamlet's death in the textual traces of *Hamlet*. Hamlet's death, in fact, is deliberately portrayed as a skillful performance. The discrepancy between the text that repeatedly points out the usually unique event of Hamlet's death, and the performance of it that drags on, points out the paradoxical temporality of Hamlet as text and performance: "I am dead, Horatio" and "Horatio, I am dead" frame Hamlet's injunction to Horatio. As Hamlet addresses Horatio as part of a larger, silent audience, it seems for a minute that he will try to repeat his own story himself:

I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu.  
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance  
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,  
 Had I but time (as this fell sergeant Death  
 Is strict in his arrest) – O, I could tell you –  
 But let it be. Horatio, I am dead.

(5.2.319)

Of course, Hamlet's words also address the ignorant and innocent bystanders to the fencing match's slaughterous ending: Claudius' court and Laertes' fellows. If he wasn't dying, Hamlet could tell them what the off-stage audience already knows: how it all came to this. With Hamlet dead (again and again), Horatio needs to rise to the task. Seeing that Hamlet is about to die, Horatio attempts to follow him, before giving in to Hamlet's pleading:

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity awhile  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story.  
(5.2.328-333)

Hamlet asks Horatio to stay and use his breath to tell his story. At the center of his intention is that his name remain unsullied, and his memory redressed, as was the intention of his father. With the transmission of the task to tell his story, Hamlet transmits a political power that has not really been established as his: "But I do prophesy th'election lights / On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice." (5.2.340) Both Horatio and Fortinbras, then, have Hamlet's dying voice and the task to continue with the performance.

Hamlet's death crystallizes the double existence of *Hamlet* as text and performance, as it allows for different readings of the textual traces that depend entirely on the performance situation imagined for it. When addressed to Horatio, Claudius' court and Fortinbras and his soldiers, Hamlet's imperative is indeed to tell his story after his death. When addressed to the off-stage audience, as well, Hamlet's lengthy death and demand for Horatio to tell his story can well be understood as a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the fact that, like the Ghost, "this thing", Hamlet will appear again tomorrow. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida links the Ghost to the temporality of performance. He asks the "question of the event as question of the ghost" (Derrida [1993]2006: 10) and answers it with a number of simultaneities.

The temporality of the event and the ghost is “[r]epetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history.” (Derrida [1993]2006: 10) Derrida encapsulates the paradox in the formula of the *mise en scène* for the end of history. When thinking through the temporality of something that is always the first and the last time, always unique and repetition, only the simultaneity of text and performance allows for such a temporality to be thought. While the performance event is unique and limited in time and space, the textual traces and the expectations they raise constantly have an existence in the knowledge and memory of audiences. While the ‘world-within-the-play’ tells a story that has to end, performance allows this story to begin again and its heroes to resurrect. Hamlet’s numerous proclamations of his own death must be understood as “the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end” (Derrida [1993]2006: 10), but it is only a discourse, as *Hamlet*’s theme is, after all, the eternal resurrection: “Hamlet already began with the expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the spirit comes by coming back [revenant], it figures both a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again.” (ibid.) Like the Ghost and Old Hamlet, *Hamlet* exists as text and performance or not at all. When it takes shape, it is always entirely present and never fully there, as it points to its previous and its following repetitions. With regards to the end, this means that it never actually does: the end of the story is neither the end of *Hamlet* as a text nor of *Hamlet* as performance. When his lines end and Hamlet dies, the performance resurrects him. When the performance ends, Hamlet lives on in the minds of the spectators and the material traces of the text.

Hamlet’s dying words are therefore just as contradictory as his apology to Laertes or his instruction to the players. After he has spent so much energy encouraging his fellow actor, Horatio, to tell his story, it seems unlikely that “[t]he rest is silence.” The rest will precisely not be silence, but the performance of Hamlet. Even though Hamlet’s lines end, the performance of Hamlet does not stop, and

in his death, Hamlet, the character, seems aware that his double existence affords him many lives.

The lines after Hamlet's, the character's, death, close the frame with the very first moments of *Hamlet* on the walls of Elsinore. It situates the words and events on the stage firmly within the present time and space of the performance event and creates a community between actors and spectators as equal participants in the production of performance. Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa call it „probably the most delicate irony in the whole play” that the only person left alive to take over Denmark's government, which was, after all, at stake in the series of killings and revenges that structure *Hamlet*, is Fortinbras. “The finale's ghost-like visitor” (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000: 161) is the last in the series of ghost-like apparitions, and his arrival is a tribute to the audience's expectation of the genre: “Its ghost appearing at the beginning and returning at the end exemplified the revenge tradition which would be strong in the minds of the first viewers. They would have expected the vengeful ghost of Act one to return at the end to celebrate his victory.” (ibid.) As Fortinbras, however, is not the vengeful Ghost of act one, his arrival leaves room for a different perception of the ending. It brings *Hamlet* back to its beginnings not only by mirroring the apparition of the ghost, but by staging the beginning of a new performance. A new audience arrives in act five of *Hamlet* and is greeted by a commenting, foolish figure that opens the curtain towards a ‘world-within-the-play’ that actors and spectators will spend the coming hours creating together:

FORTINBRAS Where is this sight?  
HORATIO What is it you would see?  
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.  
(5.2.346-348)

Interestingly, Fortinbras does not ask what he is seeing, but where to look. Horatio does not give a very precise answer, vaguely announcing a story of “woe and wonder”. As if preparing for a performance, Horatio orders

that these bodies  
 High on a stage be placed to the view  
 And let me speak to th'yet unknowing world  
 How these things came about. So shall you hear  
 Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,  
 Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,  
 Of deaths put on by cunning, and for no cause,  
 And in this upshot purposes mistook  
 Fallen on th'inventors heads. All this can I  
 Truly deliver.  
 FORTINBRAS                      Let us haste to hear it  
 And call the noblest to the audience.  
 (5.2.371)

Like the town-crier, Horatio announces the mingle-mangle of elements that are part of the tragedy of *Hamlet* and Fortinbras and his court can't wait to take their seats. Horatio, the actor, and Fortinbras, the sovereign spectator, face each other, the minimal prerequisites of a new performance of *Hamlet*. Horatio will perform the role of Hamlet, the Dane: "Of that I shall have also cause to speak / And from his mouth whose voice will draw no more." (5.2.375-376) Like Hamlet is after his encounter with the Ghost, Horatio is determined to perform, using the words of another. At the end of *Hamlet*, the play reveals that it never really comes to an end, and that text and performance will come together again to tell Hamlet's story. It is with a wink, I believe, that Fortinbras points to the actor playing dead Hamlet, as someone "likely, had he been put on, to have proved most royal." While *Hamlet* has provided less proof of Hamlet's royal disposition than of his 'acting disposition', Hamlet, the actor, has been put on and performed most royally. The tragedy closes as Fortinbras orders to "bid the soldiers shoot": it ends as any performance should, with applause.

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