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Chapter 9

Re-Routing *Hamlet*: From the Canon to Consumer Culture

Jozefina Komporaly

Following bold stagings of British in-yer-face theatre – including *Blasted* by Sarah Kane and *Shopping and Fucking* by Mark Ravenhill – that consolidated Thomas Ostermeier's reputation as an *enfant terrible* of German theatre, the director turned his attention to European classics: Ibsen, Büchner and, indeed, Shakespeare. Ostermeier contends that the 'anger, the desperation, the longing for beauty, the longing for another world'[1] so prevalent in Shakespeare is also to be discovered in Georg Büchner, Edward Bond and Sarah Kane; and he approaches canonical texts 'through the lens of Sarah Kane', aiming to shake up the conventions of theatre-making and spectatorship.[2] Ostermeier's primary goal is not to offer modern takes on classics, but an interpretation of the society in which he lives. As he declared, he aims to 'understand more about the complexities of things going on in the world', alongside 'the complexity of human relationships'.[3] In this sense, he is a social and political commentator first and foremost, and a theatre director second.[4]

I argue that Ostermeier's stagings of canonical texts are active interventions on what could be termed, in Genette's taxonomy, as hypo-texts, and they belong to a category defined by various forms of re-contextualisation, re-formulation and re-use.[5] Ostermeier's oeuvre as a whole offers a contemporary re-evaluation of the canon, and his adaptative strategies are based

[1] Andrew Dickson, 'Thomas Ostermeier: "Hamlet? The Play's a Mess"', *Guardian*, 13 November 2011 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/13/thomas-ostermeier-hamlet-schaubuhne>.

[2] Emma Hogan, 'Deutsche Bard: Are you Ready for "Hamlet" in German? Thomas Ostermeier Talks about his Controversial Staging of Shakespeare, *Financial Times*, 25 November 2011 <https://www.ft.com/content/6f0ea1b4-edc5-11e0-a9a9-00144feab49a> [accessed 20 November 2019].

[3] Ostermeier interviewed by James Woodall, 'Thomas Ostermeier: On Europe, Theatre, Communication', in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, ed. by Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 374.

[4] For the latter, the director has been regularly critiqued in his native Germany, where the predominant aesthetic of fragmentation and discontinuation pushes him to the periphery of fashionable norms, despite overwhelming international acclaim. As an exiled artist of sorts, to use Georges Banu's term, Ostermeier does not shy away from the ever deepening rift between his own form of theatre making and the current institutional opinion in German theatre.

[5] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press). p. 5.

on creative engagements with translation, mise-en-scène and dramaturgy. As such, these strategies define his working methods and collaborations to a high degree, and at the same time broaden the boundaries of how we may understand adaptation in artistic terms.

For the purposes of this chapter, I adopt Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as 'a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work', 'a kind of extended palimpsest' and 'a transcoding into a different set of conventions' (though not necessarily a different medium).[6] In the case of Ostermeier's *Hamlet,* bold interlinguistic transfer is braided with (significant) textual editing and updating, and filtered through a relational dramaturgy that encourages audience involvement. These elements are underpinned by a mise-en-scène, affiliated to an intermedial practice celebrating the continuity between old and new media, that operates as a form of adaptation, as Ostermeier's distinctive directorial approach privileges above all the reimagining and recontextualizing of the source text. Ostermeier's theatre 'never stops adapting its features to the world and the world to its features',[7] and indeed, aiming to engage in an uncompromising social and political analysis, the director is concerned with exploring the possibility of truth and truthfulness in a bourgeois society,[8] and the potential for radical thought and for genuine democracy in a capitalist system dominated by neo-liberalism.[9] He favours plays that are centred on confrontation and interrogation, rather than the clear-cut advocation of a particular position, so the audience is invited to take up the challenge of considering opposing points of view.[10] For Ostermeier, when staging historical or indeed contemporary authors, pre-existing texts constitute mere points of departure for the development of an autonomous work of art, inspired but independent from the source text, and created in collaboration with the company. Reflecting his strong political convictions, Ostermeier aims to run the theatre as a collective of equals where the company is nurtured and work is developed gradually, over a period of time, which adds a further dimension to the adaptive process. He notes:

> The prime function of the director is to describe and communicate with the actor. You discuss a dialogue, you agree on a situation in a play – and then it's up to the actor. […] When something happens in rehearsals which I don't control, when something is

[6] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 35.
[7] Laera makes this claim about theatre more generally. Cf. *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, ed. by Margherita Laera (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 1.
[8] He has approached this central topic in several productions based on canonical sources, including Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *Hamlet*, as he considers it to be *the* fundamental question to come to terms with, in our market-driven society.
[9] Jean-François Perrier, 'Entretien avec Thomas Ostermeier', Avignon Festival 2008, p. 1 <fa2008_entretien_avec_thomas_ostermeier.pdf> [accessed 21 November, 2019].
[10] Perrier, p. 2.

> liberated in the actors, then I leave the rehearsal room in bliss. I don't get that from feeling 'fine, my concept works'.[11]

Ostermeier's *Hamlet* provides a complex and multi-faceted case study for exploring this approach to adaptation. It was conceived as a high-profile, internationally relevant production, commissioned for the Avignon Festival, and is still touring the world after five years in repertory. This reflects the reputation of the Schaubühne theatre company and its artistic director as one of the major export hits of German subsidized theatre. Ostermeier chose to direct the play to counteract the frequent representation of Hamlet as an honest romantic hero in a corrupt world. His approach – though not altogether new, as Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 1966) and Charles Marowitz (*The Marowitz Hamlet*, 1968), for instance, had practised it previously – transforms the protagonist into an obnoxious and impulsive character who interrogates the very category of the heroic and is unable to break out from his dysfunctional immediate family.

Ostermeier stated in his manifesto when he took over the direction of the Schaubühne in 2000 that theatre 'can be a place for society to gain consciousness', 'to be repoliticised', and for that aim 'we need a contemporary theatre […] which is not 'the simple depiction of the world as it looks […], it is a view on the world with an attitude that demands change'.[12] Ostermeier's productions aim to politicize spectators by engaging an often young audience with ongoing issues of their time. This does not mean that Ostermeier considers theatre to be a political event or that it is capable of sparking a revolution, rather that he treats it as a forum for observing human behaviour.

Ostermeier, Translation and Adaptation

Over the years, Ostermeier has worked with several in-house dramaturgs with significant contribution to the Schaubühne's agenda; these partnerships bear the hallmarks of a shared artistic platform, and a mutual interest in contemporary playwriting (represented by the likes

[11] Ostermeier quoted in Michael Merschmeier and Franz Wille, "Ich muss es einfach versuchen": Ein Theater Heute-Gesprach mit Thomas Ostermeier', *Theater Heute*, 5, pp. 26-30, also quoted in Peter M. Boenisch, 'Thomas Ostermeier: Mission (Neo)Realism', in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, ed. by Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 355.

[12] Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, 'Der Auftrag' [The Mission], originally published in the inaugural programme brochure for the theatre's Spring season 2000, reprinted as 'Wir müssen von vorn anfangen' [We have to start afresh], *Die Tageszeitung*, 20 January 2000, p. 15.

of Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Franz Xaver Kroetz) and a desire to revisit canonical texts in a fresh light. In other words, reinterpreting the canon for the twenty-first century, by including relatively contemporary work, is a hallmark of Ostermeier's artistic approach, and so is his concern with the reception of historically distant material in languages other than their original. Endorsing the generally accepted view that translations lose their relevance and immediate connection with contemporary culture much faster than original works, Ostermeier practically re-evaluates the canon in the light of translation and adaptation. Laera points out, referencing Venuti, that 'transferring pre-existing material into another language, culture or medium involves an exercise in self-definition through an act of appropriation of the foreign, which raises issues around a given society's self-representation and the reiteration of ideological exclusions'.[13] As a rule of thumb, despite the existence of several alternative German versions, Ostermeier tends to commission fresh translations of canonical works to be used as a basis for his productions, so that these can resonate with the flavour of the German language as spoken at present and reference, as much as possible, contemporary concerns. Indeed, as Hutcheon stresses, drawing on Bassnett, 'translation involves a transaction between texts and between languages and is thus "an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication"'.[14] Marius von Mayenburg's new version of *Hamlet* is intended as a blueprint for contemporary self-representation, and confirms and consolidates the ideologically motivated role of translation and adaptation as creative strategies for addressing the present through the lens of the past.

As Michael Billington observes in his essay 'Shakespeare in Europe', 'something strange happens when you lose the English language and context: you release the play's metaphorical power'.[15] Indeed, if we look at examples of Marius von Mayenburg's translation strategies, taken from Act I, Scene 3, what becomes instantly apparent is the opening up of an interpretive space in the wake of the ruthless excision of well-known lines. To put it differently, Mayenburg's direct manner of translating allows for additional creative freedom in the mise-en-scène, and avoids the static productions often seen in English-language stagings. In Shakespeare, this is how Laertes addresses Ophelia in the opening of the scene:

LAERTES:

[13] Laera, p. 9. Cf. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995) and *The Scandals of Translation: Towards and Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998).
[14] Hutcheon, p. 16; Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 9.
[15] Michael Billington, 'Shakespeare in Europe', in Billington, *One Night Stands* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), p. 357.

> For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,
> Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
> A violet in the youth of primy nature,
> Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
> The perfume and suppliance of a minute; No more.

For the Schaubühne production, translator and (at the time) in-house dramaturg Marius von Mayenburg does away altogether with the blank verse and opts for transparent contemporary prose, rendering the entire speech via a single compact sentence:

> Was Hamlet betrifft und sein Flirten, Ofelia, das hältst du am besten für eine Laune und triebhafte Spielerei, einen Duft, eine Zerstreuung für den Augenblick, mehr nicht.[16]

The backtranslation into English of his version would be something like:

> As far as Hamlet is concerned and his flirting, Ofelia, you'd better take this to be a whim and [a form of] toying with (sexual) desire, a scent, a distraction for the moment, nothing more.

It is instantly visible that the translation eliminates the allegorical connotations and focuses directly on the ephemeral nature of instinctual (sexual) urges and desires. Of course, being familiar with the cultural code of the time, Shakespeare's original audience would have had no difficulty in accessing such explicit allusions inherent in the text (be it here or in other plays), however, instead of inviting a decoding of historically and culturally distant conventions, Mayenburg chooses a directness characteristic of our age. This directness and overtness is metaphorically matched in the mise-en-scène by a simple rectangular earth-filled set, a site of rot and corruption in which the characters slip and stumble. Soil is smeared by Hamlet onto the players, envelops the entire cast and gradually threatens to smatter the audience. Mud is also the visible revelation of Hamlet's madness, and, more obviously, acts as a non-verbal double to the negotiation of lust and desire that underpins the play.

Ostermeier's staging of the translation addresses the feeling of being out of control in a world governed by excess, where there are no clear allegiances anymore and where

[16]<http://www.henschel-schauspiel.de/de/media/media/theater/TI-3314_LP.pdf > [accessed 6 September 2016].

conspicuous consumption and the cult of celebrity is the new ideology. This is exemplified by the following dialogue between Ophelia and Polonius:

OPHELIA:
He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
Of his affection to me.
LORD POLONIUS:
Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?
OPHELIA:
I do not know, my lord, what I should think.
LORD POLONIUS:
Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby;
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;
Or--not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus--you'll tender me a fool.

Mayenburg opts to do away with the multiple puns and language games that characterise the original, and condenses the passage into sober and colloquial language, which is marked by a matter-of-fact tone even when psychologically informed. In this way, the sparse simplicity of the set is reflected and further amplified by the simplicity of language, and draws attention onto the actors and the moral questions at the core of the play.

OFELIA:
Er hat mir in letzter Zeit oft seine Zuneigung signalisiert.
POLONIUS:
Zuneigung, puh! Du redest wie ein Mauernblümchen, das mit so gefährlichen Situationen keine Erfahrung hat. Glaubst du seinen Signalen, wie du es nennst?
OFELIA: Ich weiss nicht was ich denken soll.

> POLONIUS: Dann werd ich es dir sagen: Denk, das du selbst ein Baby bist, wenn du diese Signale, die Falschgeld sind, für bare Münze nimmst; mach dich rar, sonst machst du mich zum Idioten.[17]

The back-translation into English would read as follows:

> OFELIA: Recently he has often signalled his affection.
> POLONIUS: Affection. Pooh! You talk like a shy young thing, inexperienced in such situations. Do you believe his signals, as you call them?
> OFELIA: I don't know what I should think
> POLONIUS: Then I will tell you. Imagine you are a baby when you take these fake signals at face-value; make yourself scarce, otherwise you make me look like an idiot.

Patrice Pavis calls attention to a paradox whereby 'Shakespeare is easier to understand in French and German translation than in the original, because the work of adapting the text to the current situation of enunciation will necessarily be accomplished by the translation'.[18] Susan Bassnett concurs, stating that 'Chinese, Czech, Italian and Japanese translations [...] are not bound to the text by a sense of reverence, but motivated to ensure that Shakespeare reaches a new audience';[19] and indeed the Schaubühne's new version has successfully tried and tested this premise of accessibility. The main changes engineered by von Mayenburg in his German version thoroughly de-poeticize Shakespeare's dramatic language, institute vulgarity as a legitimate mode of expression, behaviour and perception (even in places where Shakespeare is not himself vulgar), and destroy any hint of theatrical illusion. Polonius describes Hamlet to Claudius as a 'depressive' figure, who displays such modern-day symptoms as 'lack of appetite, sleeplessness, exhaustion and dizziness',[20] thus offering an up-to-date diagnosis of contemporary ailments typical of an affluent society. As Ostermeier contends, translations can

> rewrite how people talk. English people always have to deal with the fact that it is probably the most beautiful literature that was ever written but at the same time it sounds a bit awkward and dated, and even some English audiences don't understand

[17] <http://www.henschel-schauspiel.de/de/media/media/theater/TI-3314_LP.pdf > [accessed 5 Sept 2016].
[18] Patrice Pavis, 'Problems of Translation for the Stage: Interculturalism and Post-Modern Theatre', trans. by Loren Kruger, in *The Play Out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*, ed. by Hanna Scolnicov and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 28.
[19] Susan Bassnett, 'Neither Rhyme Nor Reason', *ITI Bulletin* (September-October 2015), pp. 26-27.
[20] Marius von Mayenburg, *Hamlet*, German version for the Schaubühne, Henschel Schauspiel, p. 17. <https://henschel-schauspiel.de/de/werk/3314> [accessed 21 November 2019]. My back-translation into English.

> when they hear the lines on stage for the first time. We don't have this problem. That's my overall and highest aim when I'm doing Shakespeare: to have a translation where you understand every line.[21]

This ambition to make the play comprehensible on a textual level is paralleled by the production's carefully chosen performance aesthetic.

Editing the Plot, Updating the Scenario: The Postdramatic and the Metatheatrical

Ostermeier follows an 'inductive approach' in his work, through which the '*Stoff* of the playtext and the present (of director, actors, audiences) communicate'.[22] In his view the very purpose of *Regie* is 'to stage a play in the present', and the production's aim to is to 'fill the dramatic situation *(Spielsituation)* [...] with our life and actions; which is why presenting Hamlet 'as a spoilt brat [...] is only possible on the back of our own time' and staging a play becomes 'translating literature into a dramatic process *(Vorgang)* that happens in the here and the now'.[23]

Ostermeier recalls that for Ibsen's *Nora,* for instance, they wanted to 'change the text, do a modern adaptation of the language, change the surroundings, and the end – having Nora shoot Torvald'.[24] Eventually, though, he chose not to edit but to retain Ibsen's text and, together with dramaturg and translator Maja Zade, focused on adapting aspects of plot and staging by adding contemporary elements to it while removing outdated contexts. In the case of *Hamlet*, at Ostermeier's request, Mayenburg produced a highly trimmed stage script, with several plotlines and characters removed, that in performance runs under three hours with no interval – as opposed to five-hour long versions created by numerous companies when using the full Shakespearean text. This reflects Ostermeier's view that from a playwriting point of view Shakespeare's plays pose problems for contemporary audiences: they are 'much too long, [there are] too many plots […]. Hamlet is […] the worst-made play. But genius.'[25] As we have seen, his radical version is achieved through various modalities of adaptation, including textual

[21] Hogan, op. cit.
[22]Ostermeier in Boenisch, Peter M. and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 133.
[23] Ostermeier in Boenisch, Peter M. and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 133.
[24] Ostermeier interviewed by Woodall, p. 371.
[25] Ostermeier quoted in Andrew Dickson, 'Thomas Ostermeier: "Hamlet? The Play's a Mess"', *Guardian* (13 November 2011).

editing paired with *mise-en-scène* as an additional layer of adapting the source material to a new context through contemporary references. For example, by blurring the boundaries between funeral banquet and wedding celebration, staged as an orgy featuring takeaway food and drinks served straight out of cartons and cans, and alluding for instance to (then) celebrity gossip involving French president Nicolas Sarkozy and Carla Bruni, whom he later married, von Mayenburg's contemporary German text is further contextualised and brought into the realm of the here and the now. This new irreverent and funny version not only chimed in with its modern audience, but also invited a fresh engagement with Shakespeare and theatre as an art form, making the audience delight in the live qualities of theatre making, as in Shakespeare's day, and experience a wide spectrum of sensations from the uncomfortable to the perplexed and mystified, but above all engaging and drawing them into the flow of the performance.

This *Hamlet*'s aesthetic is to some extent indebted to postdramatic theatre, in its essentially fragmented structure (there is no climactic point in the production, even Hamlet's iconic monologue has been uprooted), its ongoing celebration of the artifice of theatre, its experimentation with form and genre, its integration of intermediality, its body-centredness and its constant blurring between performer and audience fault-lines.[26] Audience participation or involvement is a constant, either via direct engagement (by responding to cues from the protagonist) or, more often, through the indeterminacy of meaning. As David Barnett argues explicating Lehmann, the postdramatic 'proposes a theatre beyond representation, in which the limitations of representation are held in check by dramaturgies and performance practices that seek to *present* material rather than to posit a direct, representational relationship between the stage and the outside world'.[27] Indeed, Ostermeier contends, 'in a world where there are no more coherent narratives, because there are no more acting subjects that could be properly identified, I can't build up any dramatic action. My experience of the world is disoriented, I don't know who is responsible for what's happening; yet this is the world I try to reflect and I can only do it through postdramatic theatre'.[28] Scaling the cast down to only six performers –

[26] It is worth saying, though, that despite the influence of the aesthetic of the postdramatic, this *Hamlet* engages too much with the world outside the theatre to qualify as a case of pure postdramatic theatre.

[27] David Barnett, 'When is a Play not a Drama? Two Examples of Postdramatic Theatre Texts', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 24:1 (February 2008), p15. cf. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).Ostermeier's work, especially his recent output, has also been viewed (by Peter M. Boenisch, 2010, for instance) as an instance of neo-realism in the theatre – an interpretation the director also welcomes.

[28] Thomas Ostermeier, 'Der Kapitalismus liebt die Stille nicht: Gespräch mit Byung Chul-Han', *Schaubühne Spielzeit für 2013-14* [Capitalism Dislikes Silence: Thomas Ostermeier in Conversation with Byung Chul-Han], p. 4.

five male and one female – meant that the same actress was cast as both Ophelia and Gertrude. The Schaubühne marketed the production by focusing on the actors' constant changing of roles, making the defining point that 'Hamlet's progressive loss of touch with reality, his disorientation, the manipulation of reality and identity are mirrored in the acting style, which takes pretence and disguise as its basic principles.'[29] Ostermeier's theatre celebrates the theatricality of theatre, it places the exploration of meta-theatricality – as a revelation of the inner processes of theatre making and a self-conscious examination of the relationships between theatre and reality – at the core of this production of *Hamlet*.

Staging Media, Mixing Genres and Audience Interaction

We have seen how Ostermeier utilizes creative interventions rooted in translation and dramaturgy, which he underpins by mise-en-scène as a form of further adaptation and cultural appropriation; to this, we should also add the key ingredient of intermediality. In his production of *Hamlet* he draws on consumer culture as a potent point of reference and offers his audience a diet they are all too familiar with from their own daily lives, many examples of which dramatize the interactive dimension of multi-media experiences: a mash-up of reality and TV game shows, video recording and projection, references to the world of showbiz, accompanied by the ongoing consumption of fast-food and drinks, whose packaging is still in evidence, all to the tune of contemporary pop music orchestrated by real-life DJ Lars Eidinger (Hamlet). Songs such as 'Theater', a German Eurovision song from the 1980s, or the Hip Hop number 'Krawall and Remmidemmi' [Ruckus and Riot], which topped the German charts at the time of rehearsals, were found intuitively and ended up seamlessly fused into the production. Likewise, a moment of fooling around led to the making of an iconic moment: Eidinger's scratching, using paper plates, a casual replication of a DJ's gestures, became adopted as part of Hamlet's on-stage vocabulary. Moreover, on a monthly basis, *Hamlet* performances were followed by a complimentary event of sorts, called *Autistic Disco* and bearing the motto **'**Pop is pop, and art is art', which was essentially a late-night party, held at the theatre venue, with DJ Lars Eidinger. Thus, Eidinger further transcends the boundaries of his role as Hamlet and fuses his public and private persona with that of the Shakespearean protagonist. Through DJ-ing this event, he also assumes further ownership over the material, musical and otherwise,

[29] Schaubühne website <http://www.schaubuehne.de/en/productions/hamlet.html> [accessed 14 November 2013].

presented in the production, encouraging a mixing up and a hybridity that is quintessentially contemporary.

As Ostermeier notes, Shakespeare also collated heterogeneous material from many pre-existing sources, presented in a broad variety of styles, and in the Schaubühne's *Hamlet*, intermedial references and borrowings abound: Claudius confesses his crime in the style of live TV chat shows, and Hamlet/Eidinger urges the audience to chant with him or to volunteer their contribution, such as naming the play-within-the-play or commenting on how evil Claudius looks. Through the 'bodily co-presence of actors and spectators',[30] this *Hamlet* production celebrates a feature that is unique to live performance: the active or 'emancipated' spectator (as Jacques Rancière's terms it), who possesses the capacity to interpret the spectacle on offer, and generate their own associations and contextual updates. Rancière's notion of emancipation blurs the boundaries between looking and doing, and grants agency to the aesthetic experience inherent in the pleasure of spectating. It shows an affinity with the concept of 'porous dramaturgy', articulated by Cathy Turner and Duska Radosavljevic, who draw attention to 'attempts to engage the audience in co-creation through [...] interactivity, immersion and site-specificity'.[31]

Ostermeier's production titillates the audience with memorable and spectacular scenes that have an immersive and interactive quality, tapping into our fascination with the visual. 'The Mousetrap' scene, which could be classed as an autonomous piece of live art, is a case in point. Hamlet, shedding the physical attributes associated with his character, transforms into a potentially neutral performer, who then engages with the performer previously playing the part of Horatio, covers him in clingfilm and pours tomato juice-cum-blood and milk down his constrained body. Another example of immersive and interactive dynamic can be seen in the opening of the production, where we see the full cast smoking and drinking at a table behind a gold screen-cum-curtain. This tableau is held for the entire duration of the spectators' taking their seats in the auditorium, and then morphs into the funeral and wedding banquet scenes. Remnants of cheap consumer products (cartons of tomato juice and milk, beer cans, plastic cups and plates) are abundant throughout, chiming in with the tone of the improvised dialogue with the audience (some of the chanting Eidinger propagated in December 2013 included 'we want to party/we want some pussy').

[30] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 138.
[31] Cathy Turner and Duska Radosavljevic, 'Porous Dramaturgy: "Togetherness" and Community in the Structure of the Artwork' (2012) <http://expandeddramaturgies.com/?p=687> [accessed 20 November 2019].

Ostermeier has argued that the problems and conflicts he is scrutinising are primarily sociological rather than psychological, and his inclination is to look at society in its broader context. As Peter Boenish claims, in Ostermeier's theatre 'playtexts provide a (dramatic) narration whose constituent situations are put into theatral play(ing) so that they offer models of the existential conflicts within our societies'.[32] Ostermeier reveals that his ultimate directorial approach is 'to be honest with the writer, with the text, and get to the core of the play'.[33] Crucially, though, Ostermeier doubles his serious intentions – to read Shakespeare's plays as inherently political – with a laid-back manner, and makes *Hamlet* profound and entertaining at the same time. This is a version of *Hamlet* where the audience is encouraged to interact with the performers and to reward their jokes with laughter as and when they see fit, thus inviting a well-tried pattern of spectatorship common in Shakespeare's day, though often neglected in so-called canonical productions. Arguably, Ostermeier's *Hamlet* constitutes a trans-generic form as it refuses to conform to traditional genre markers, and what was written as tragedy by Shakespeare is played, at least in places, as comedy. This is rooted in postdramatic attempts to trouble contemporary expectations of how to interpret a text, and its rejoicing in the disruption of the hierarchical order: generic and political alike. In this way, when Lars Eidinger as Hamlet places the crown upside down on his head, he challenges the symbolic importance of royal lineage, status and privilege, and invests a moment rooted in tragic solemnity with irreverent comedic accents.

Ostermeier's touring production takes advantage of the monumental scale offered by venues such as Avignon's Palais des papes or London's Barbican, and designer Jan Pappelbaum utilised an enormous moving frame holding a beaded-curtain made of long gold chains, allowing for dramatic entrances and the projection of film captured by Hamlet's invasive hand-held camera. The incorporation of digital technology into theatre practice is a significant feature of late twentieth and twenty-first century performance, and we live at a time when social and political action is firmly framed by documentation and media capture. Practically nothing can take place in contemporary life in the Western world, be it public or private, that is not recorded or documented in some way or other; and in this production of *Hamlet* video-cam technique institutes the protagonist as a documenter of other characters' actions. In addition, as Hamlet carefully records everyone (including himself), he not only

[32] Peter M. Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 6-7.
[33] Thomas Ostermeier in conversation with Peter Cramer, *Talking Germany* programme, Deutsche Welle, broadcast on 15 April 2012 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaUHxKXjkwI> [accessed 20 November 2019].

creates an archive arguing against the ephemeral nature of live performance, but also unravels the mechanisms through which everything and everybody can be amplified to larger than life scale. Images are projected onto the mesmerising gold bead curtain, while simultaneously the action unfolds on the stage behind the curtain – both of which are visible to the spectator.

Live theatre has become, in Elleström's terms, a 'strongly multimodal media', having acquired , according to Chiel Kattenbelt, the additional capacity to be a hypermedium which 'stages' other media.[34] Consolidating over the last decade and a half, and known as digital, multimedia, mixed-media and, most frequently, intermedial theatre, this form reflects on the increasing impact of new technologies in a globalized world and acts as a platform for raising pertinent social and aesthetic concerns. *Hamlet's* intermedial dimension – whereby live and documented performance is situated side by side – offers some of the most striking moments in the production. The audience watches Hamlet film his co-performers, whilst they also watch the live footage generated by the latter, thus witnessing the way in which documentation is superimposed upon live events. The use of this type of technology and methods is far from unique to Ostermeier; Katie Mitchell and Franz Castorf, to name but two other directors, tend to make much more consistent use of intermediality in performance; however, they all have in common a preoccupation with experimenting with the boundaries of staging classical works. In addition to textual and cultural adaptation, these directors adapt the canon to a new medium and constantly changing audience expectations, arguing for correspondences between the importance of creating a fresh version in the target culture that resonates with the here and the now, and speaking a new visual language tuned in to current technological developments.

At same time, as Aneta Mancewicz points out, new media often 'refashions stage practice by evoking strategies of old media'.[35] This claim to continuity can be usefully illuminated by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of remediation, which contends that a medium 'is that which remediates [...] and appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real'.[36] Although Bolter and Grusin do not specifically address theatre, their claim that a medium in our culture can no longer operate in isolation is paramount; endorsing this view Mancewicz argues that 'the ongoing relationship between pre-digital and digital technologies contributes

[34] Lars Elleström, 'The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations', in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. by Lars Elleström (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), p. 38; Kattenbelt, Chiel, in Chapple, Freda and Chiel Kattenbelt, eds., *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (Rodopi, 2006), p. 37.
[35] Aneta Mancewicz, *Intermedial Shakespeares on European Stages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), p. 108.
[36] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (MIT Press, 2000), p. 65.

to refashioning thematic resonances in Shakespeare's plays and their performance in contemporary Europe, while calling for a redefinition of live performance in relation to other forms of communication and production'.[37]

As Peter M. Boenisch contends, though, the relations between various types of media in a multitracked text – a self-consciously postmodern text which operates on several layers and mediatic levels – are ultimately a matter of perception and interpretation, in that intermediality in the context of the theatre is an 'effect of performance … created in the perception of observers because the relational aspect between thing and sign is a matter of experiencing'.[38] On the one hand, mediatization is essentially taken for granted and, hence, almost invisible in day-to-day life, but in Ostermeier's *Hamlet,* the multiple levels of performance, live and mediated/mediatized, have the potential to make us aware of these different layers: if one only concentrates on the live performer on stage, Judith Rosmair/Lucy Wirth (as Gertrude) wearing dark glasses appears as a woman of undefined age, but the (simultaneously) projected video image of her hugely magnified face – reminiscent of cinematic as well as painterly techniques – references current tabloid images of celebrities beleaguered by pestering paparazzi.[39] In live performance, Urs Jucker is first and foremost Claudius, however, when filmed images of him playing the ghost of old Hamlet are projected onto the screen, he excels at rendering the haunting quality of the ghost, which is then juxtaposed with the seediness and moral corruption of Claudius. The production's opening image is Hamlet reciting his iconic monologue with his face blown up so large that only his eyes and nose can be squeezed onto the screen. This separation-cum-emphasis of the performer's key facial features, again rooted in old media forms such as painting or cinema, resonates with the notoriety of the lines, which have taken up an independent life of their own, being used to such an extent outside the context of the play that they have become devoid of meaning.

'To be or not to be' are the first words spoken in the performance, however, instead of being glorified they are made insignificant by a soft-spoken Hamlet, squatting behind the bead curtain, ignoring both audience and onstage cast, and filming himself. His focus is the creation of a document through which he can witness the events taking place, and by opting to film

[37] Mancewicz, ibid.
[38] Peter M. Boenisch, 'Aesthetic Art to Aisthetic Act: Theatre, Media, Intermedial Performance', in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), p. 113.
[39] The link with celebrity culture is further amplified by the insertion of a Carla Bruni song: after the funeral, Gertrude dedicates a song by the (at the time) new wife of then French president Nicolas Sarkozy to her own new husband, Claudius.

himself and later on, the other guests at the table, he draws attention to the importance of perspective. Since the production deliberately uses a transmitter with bad and noisy signal, the streamed images come across as fairly dark and rough, thus helping to interrogate the question of Hamlet's madness as well as reiterate the idea of chaos in a world out of joint. As for Hamlet's most famous lines, they are repeated twice more in the production, in instances different from Shakespeare's original text. Hamlet warns the audience in an aside that he has a monologue to deliver; and the speech, rather than uttered with romantic solemnity, is delivered with contempt: Eidinger simply gets through it while standing on a table, drunk, no skull in hand, and with a plastic crown placed upside down on his head.

Improvised Roles

The production not only restructures Shakespeare's text by relocating elements of this most iconic of plays, by changing the flow of the original Shakespearean text, and by exploring various facets of intermediality, as explored above; it also blurs the boundaries between performers embodying characters and performers as individuals. Lars Eidinger, cast as Hamlet, has ongoing interactions with the audience as an actor playing the role of Hamlet, thus transcending his position as an actor playing a role and becoming an emblem of sorts for the production in a personal capacity as well **(**Eidinger preceded Ostermeier at the Schaubühne, starting there in 1999, and has been a staple of his productions over the years). Ostermeier references Polish director Krystian Lupa's metaphor of the actor dancing with their character, and indicates a similar dramatization of the relationship between Eidinger and Hamlet: the actor's and the character's identity each being foregrounded at different moments of the production.[40] Eidinger chats to the audience, requests instant feedback and acknowledges foreign languages and locations when touring. In fact, Eidinger even integrated genuine accidents into the fabric of the performance. When he smacked his head into a pillar, a dialogue with the audience ensued in which he asked whether he should continue and when urged to do so, he did despite the obvious pain and bleeding. It is unclear whether it was he who did not want to stop or if the audience pressurised him to continue to perform, but, on the whole, performances have become slightly longer over time as Eidinger has settled into his role and developed a taste for this interactive platform with his audience. This interactive

[40] Thomas Ostermeier (2016) *Teatrul şi frica/Theatre and Fear*, ed. by Georges Banu and Jitka Goriaux Pelechová, trans. byVlad Russo (Bucharest: Nemira), p. 32.

potential inherent in canonical works has its origins in the asides frequently used by Shakespeare himself; and from Eidinger's – and Ostermeier's – point of view, adapting the canon can legitimately include the amplification of interactive elements to an improvisational level in response to actual circumstantial concerns. These, seemingly trivial, references simultaneously connect the world of live performance with that of the immediate present and of the original dramatic text, not to mention that they help us consider what might be defined as truthful versus theatrical in performance. According to Lehmann, 'in the postdramatic theatre of the real the key point is not the assertion of the real as such […] but the disconcert that occurs through being unable to establish whether one is dealing with reality or fiction. Both the theatrical effect and the effect on consciousness derive from ambiguity'.[41]

As spontaneous ideas and observations make their way straight into the texture of the performance, we are witnessing a situation whereby rehearsals are, to a degree, bypassed. Ostermeier, in his preface to *EIDINGER (backstage)*, affectionately calls Eidinger a 'Berliner Schnauze mit Herz'/'an outspoken Berliner with a heart and charm', and amongst his key qualities notes being 'outspoken, dry, often coarse, charming, rude, with an absurd humour, edgy, non-conformist, boundary pushing'.[42] Indeed, Eidinger alters the tone of the improvised dialogue with the audience between apparent small talk and explicit incitement or even provocation. This, in principle, is part of the production's dramaturgy that integrates prompts for creative input for performers and indeed the audience, however, the degree to which Eidinger carries out these improvisational interactions varies significantly from place to place, and occasion to occasion, and involves an element of chance and unpredictability. These factors affiliate this production of *Hamlet* to relational art as theorised by Nicolas Bourriaud, and locate it in

> the space of interaction, the space of openness that ushers in all dialogue'; producing 'relational space-time elements, inter-human experiences trying to rid themselves of the straightjacket of the ideology of mass communications, in a way, of the places where alternative forms of sociability, critical models and moments of constructed conviviality are worked out'.[43]

[41] Lehmann, p. 101.
[42] Ostermeier, 'Foreword', in Michael Eberth, *EIDINGER (backstage)*, Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2011, pp. 1-3. 'Berliner Schnauze' refers to a person who speaks in the local Berlin and Brandenburg dialect, and who embodies a certain roughness by being outspoken and making use of coarse humour.
[43] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2009 [1998]), pp. 44-45.

In this sense, Eidinger's spontaneous integration of a genuine accident into the fabric of the performance is the epitome of avoiding clichés and formulaic approaches, and ushers in an unprecedented degree of agency for an actor engaging with text-based theatre. In this way, in addition to ambiguity regarding the boundaries between Hamlet the character and the actor playing Hamlet, Eidinger's increasing authorial investment in the production has started to rewrite the rules of director-actor relationship and moves towards collaborative practice.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Ostermeier addresses his society's social, moral and political concerns through *Hamlet*, and invests Shakespeare's text with up-to-date contemporary references. John Kott's thesis that Shakespeare is our contemporary is surely borne out in this production, which shows how *Hamlet* remains emblematic in many different areas. Aiming to stage a balance between indigenous and canonical drama, the question of translation and adaptation is central for Ostermeier, and his version is a thoroughly contemporary project both in its language and *mise-en-scène*. It has attracted an unprecedented interest from young audiences due to its hybrid qualities, and featured an adolescent tantrum-throwing talk-show host who blatantly embodied the fallibility of his generation. This Hamlet is in the mould of Sarah Kane's Hyppolitus in *Phaedra's Love*, who is by definition incapable of genuine emotion or action. Instead, he is an observer and documenter of contemporary mores driven to madness, not in the least through the constant intrusion of his camcorder with which he records everyone's actions, his own included. Capturing images reference contemporary society's excessive preoccupation with celebrity as well as our obsession with the self, but also point to surveillance through omnipresent CCTV cameras and a resulting sense of persecution. As these images are then instantly blown up and streamed live onto a large screen, behind which the actual live action continue to be deployed, live and documented performance continues to exist side-by-side, and invite a discussion on the modes and potential of performance. This intermedial dimension of Ostermeier's adaptation, emblematic for the prevalence of technology in contemporary performance, demonstrates an increasingly popular approach to contemporary ways of adapting the canon. Ostermeier opens up points of contact between long-

established canonical staples and fresh demands of the contemporary context. Ultimately, as he situates intermediality and interactivity at the core of his production, he asserts the need for dialogue in multiple ways: between the canon and translation, adaptation and new dramaturgies; between source and target texts; between languages; between performers and audiences; between the past and the present, as well as between various theatre, media and performance cultures. As a handful of performers slip in and out of almost two dozen parts, with the full awareness and participation of the audience, this *Hamlet* invites us to attempt all of the above, and, in addition, makes us want to simply rejoice in its playful reflection on identity, simulation and theatricality.