CHAPTER 1

Shakespeare Performance Studies

Shakespeare Performance Studies: the words themselves summon a host of questions, though nothing should seem more straightforward. Surely Shakespeare – that consummate poet, playwright, actor, and sharer in the dominant theatrical enterprise of his era – has always had to do with performance? Today, though, the two terms – and, more important, what they represent to various audiences and agents of scholarship – often point to alternative ways of understanding the common ground between them, dramatic performance. Shakespeare's contemporaries saw him as a maker both of poetry and of theatre, a recognition that has gained greater, though not uncontroversial, traction in the past half-century or so. And yet *performance* perhaps implies something more unstable than *theatre*, at least in the context of contemporary scholarly and disciplinary debate, leveraging a sense of the stage resistant to notions of authorial, literary, textual determination.

For this reason, though, Shakespearean drama remains a rich site of inquiry into the work of writing in performance: as foundational documents in western print culture, Shakespeare's plays have a distinctive status in literary, cultural, and theatrical history. Performances of Shakespeare's plays number among the defining landmarks of the development of western theatre from the early modern period to the present, and mark the expansion of new technologies of performance from the rise of the professional stage to the dissemination of digital production. They also sustain a (constantly changing) definition of theatre – if "definition" is the right word for the rangy cohort of events taking place in your local high school or college, on Broadway and the West End, in the Schaubühne and the Cartoucherie, in workshops and experimental venues from Stratford to Singapore, nearly everywhere "theatre" is encountered.

To be sure, Shakespeare performance cannot be definitive of performance per se; but Shakespeare performance provides a powerful instrument for examining the intersection of dramatic writing, the institutions of

theatre, and evolving ideologies of performance. Yet, Shakespeare performance sometimes seems to evoke a specific and relatively narrow sense of genre: performance that depends on, exists to reproduce, is defined by the determining algorithm of Shakespeare's writing. Is Shakespeare performance a sub-subset of performance, a subset even of dramatic theatre, where special rules about the proper role of the text – a principle of the conservation of textual meaning – should prevail? Perhaps. Yet, at the same time, the uses of Shakespeare's writing by an ever expanding range of stage practice, from the *Lear*, *Desdemona*, and *Search: Hamlet* of Ong Keng Sen's TheatreWorks to Ivo van Hove's *Roman Tragedies* with Toneelgroep Amsterdam, dramatize a more mobile, decentered, yet not quite deauthorized understanding of the ways writing can be made to function in performance. Is the accent on *Shakespeare* or on *performance*?

Shakespeare Performance Studies considers how stage Shakespeare articulates a vision – a critical vision – not of Shakespeare but of its medium: contemporary dramatic performance. My title intentionally joins two sometimes antagonistic disciplines: Shakespeare Studies, constructed through centuries of textual scholarship and interpretation and so perhaps constitutively dismissive of the work of Shakespeare onstage, and Performance Studies, engrained with a disciplinary suspicion of the regulatory work attributed to writing, textuality, and the archive in performance, and so perhaps constitutively dismissive of dramatic theatre. The Shakespeare in/as/through performance question arises at the intersection of the shifting ideological paradigms that govern, license, and institutionalize both performance and the disciplines of performance studies. It is also a function of the technologies of cultural creation and transmission, the means of "knowledge representation" within which Shakespeare is understood – in manuscript and print; through dramatic, nondramatic, and critical adaptation; on the stage, and on film, television, and digital media (Kirschenbaum, "Digital Humanities" 419). As writing, acting, and the entire practice and material structure of theatre constantly change, so their purchase on one another and on the Shakespeare they evoke change as well. To seize Shakespeare performance today is to ask how Shakespeare has become an instrument for exploring the continually contested parameters of performance, the boundaries between writing and doing, between onstage and offstage acting, between literature, theatre, and other technologies of mediated performance. In this book I use contemporary Shakespeare performances to explore some of these frontiers, marking the interface between the imputed origins of Shakespeare's writing (as literature, as theatre), the modeling of licensed modes of engagement with

Shakespeare's plays (by readers and by spectators), and the function of changing performance technologies on our knowledge of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is also a prominent object and instrument of critical practice, a particularly important site for the performance of contemporary inquiry into the practice of the humanities. Rather than taking Shakespeare Performance Studies as a linear declension – *studying*, in other words, how *performance* reproduces *Shakespeare* – I ask instead how contemporary theatre practice might provide the means for seizing alternative conceptions of the work of writing in the event of performance, and so provide a means to locate performance in dialogue with more formal critical discourse. What makes Shakespeare a productive vehicle for thinking through the means of performance is also the largest obstacle to this line of thinking: the massive cultural and literary authority of Shakespeare's writing, which tends to inflect "Shakespeare performance" as a genre finally *about* the Shakespearean text, as merely another interlocutor with Shakespeare's literary designs. So we might step back for a moment, to consider the question from a slightly different angle. What is the changing role of writing in our imagination of dramatic performance? And how might Shakespeare Performance Studies imagine a more productive encounter, a more productive *study* of *performance* through *Shakespeare?*

Postdramatic Shakespeare

To think about a conception of dramatic performance unmoored from determination by the literary text, using writing but not restricted to its "interpretation," is indeed to move sharply away from a conventional view of the dramatic theatre toward what Hans-Thies Lehmann has attempted to capture with the term *postdramatic theatre*. Despite being degraded to a catchphrase, *postdramatic theatre* describes a tectonic shift both in theatrical practice and – perhaps more accurately – in the ways the event of performance is valued. For Lehmann, both as a mode of performance and as a critical perspective, *postdramatic theatre* exerts a decisive pressure on the conventional paradigm of dramatic performance. At the same time, a postdramatic Shakespeare might well seem a contradiction in terms, pointing to the need for a significant clarification of Lehmann's informing dichotomy between dramatic and postdramatic performance.

Shakespearean drama is – and has been largely since its creation, despite its theatrical origins – the invention of print. Indeed, given the degree to which dramatic performance has been influenced by the paradigms of print reproducibility, Lehmann's useful insight into the practice of

contemporary postdramatic theatre opens out from a moment of epochal technological change: "With the end of the 'Gutenberg galaxy' and the advent of new technologies the written text and the book are being called into question," and with them a print-inflected understanding of dramatic performance, the theatre of the book. Though the specific question remains elusive, Lehmann's model of technological and cultural succession is clear enough, and sustains an implied paradigm for fashioning the "dramatic" and the capacities of the "human" as well: "The mode of perception is shifting: a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive" mode, the sequentiality of reading (*Postdramatic Theatre* 16). Lehmann's influential *Postdramatic Theatre* is surely right to draw our attention to the practices of the "new theatre," and to the range of ways written documents are (and are not) both used *in* performance and conceptualized within a justifying rhetoric *of* performance. Yet as Robert Weimann implies, noting that "on the Continent the preoccupation with performance-oriented productions of Shakespeare is most prominent and most virulent" ("Performance in Shakespeare's Theatre" 15), the tension between a productive and a reproductive vision of dramatic theatre is neither new nor definitive of recent theatre. Since "the Gutenberg paradigm does not go unchallenged by other modes and channels of information, among them such vastly different forms as oral, pictorial, and digital means," we have long been able to conceive a "theatre that is not necessarily and not entirely dominated by one (scriptural) mode of utterance and expression" ("Performance" 16). Rather than prolonging the subordinate place of dramatic performance in the rhetoric of print culture, we might take a "postdramatic" perspective as a means to review and revise the logic it seems to displace, an ideology of dramatic performance that has perhaps held critical practice captive for too long.

The critical value, then, of *postdramatic theatre* has less to do with historical description than with an altered theoretical paradigm: at its most suggestive, the term models a sense of performance that sidesteps a print-inflected view of theatre troped to the text to open a perspective in which the practices, conventions, and technologies of performance are understood to shape the function of the writings they use. Admittedly, conceiving postdramatic theatre in this way demands a recalibration of Lehmann's more tendentious reasoning. To Lehmann, dramatic theatre is a specific genre of performance in which written texts are assigned a perdurable function, and sustain a specific ideology of performance: the reproduction of textual *mimesis*. Lehmann's dramatic theatre is fundamentally a theatre

of *speech* (*Postdramatic Theatre* 53), a logocentric theatre (93) whose appropriate purpose is to represent existing literary works: "Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text. In the theatre of modern times, the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama" (21). Insofar as the literary work encodes a "*fictive* cosmos" (31), the purpose of dramatic theatre is to deliver this "world" to its audiences. This cosmos is a closed totality: the dramatic theatre (as conceived by Aristotle and developed for over two millennia) stages the "'whole' of the plot, a theoretical fiction," which governs "a flow of time, controlled and surveyable" (40); "Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the *model* of the real" (22). This emphasis on "world representation" (54) finally demands – despite the material presence of actors, clothing, objects – "the internally necessary *exclusion of the real*" (43) from the determining form of performance. In Lehmann's account, dramatic theatre absorbs and subordinates its material vehicle to textual representation, to the fiction it conveys. Despite astonishing differences in theatre architecture and technology, dramatic style, political orientation, audience disposition, practices of performance, and habits of participation, dramatic theatre from the Greeks to Ibsen and Strindberg to the theatre of the absurd "could thus be experienced as variants of one and the same discursive form" (48). This structural dependence on the text defines dramatic performance as a parasite of literature, where the focus "on the questions whether and how the theatre 'corresponds to' the text [. . .] eclipses everything else" (56).

Lehmann tactically limits dramatic performance to a rigidly literary model of performance-as-reproduction. Nonetheless, postdramatic theatre marks an important conceptual shift in both the making and the understanding of performance, posing a "fundamental *shift from work to event*" (61). This *shift* is nonetheless considerably less a shift in practice than a shift in values and emphasis, one long marked in the disciplinary self-definition of Performance Studies and increasingly visible in dramatic performance critique as well. For as Erika Fischer-Lichte points out, the notion that the "performance's status as a piece of art, its aestheticity, is not due to a 'work', an artifact which it creates, but to its particular eventness" has a long lineage in theatre studies, which is traceable to Max Hermann's foundational work in the 1930s (*Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual* 24). The "*withdrawal of representation*" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* 172) in the postdramatic theatre undoes the critical sequestration of the presentational *means* from the represented *work*, an "unsettling that occurs through the

indecidability whether one is dealing with reality or fiction" (101). Yet the intransigent materiality of performance, its tendency to remain fully visible alongside the *mimesis* of the text's represented narrative, is an intrinsic part of dramatic theatre. In this sense, while distinctively "postdramatic" productions actively work to shed the "deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside" by "the *mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images*" (185–186), the conception of a postdramatic theatre is important not merely for demarcating an emerging performance aesthetic but more for revealing, perhaps backhandedly, the evident failure of dramatic theatre to circumscribe the undeterminable, material eventness of performance. Postdramatic performance alerts us to the mutual agency of all the theatre's participants in framing the significance of theatrical events, even those undertaken with the most fixedly "dramatic" intentions.

Theatre changes. For Lehmann, this shift from reproduction to production, "*from work to event*," marks both a conceptual and a historical opposition in the framing of performance. Yet the perception of change is often marked by imagining the past as simple in relation to the complexity of the present. Characterized as a discrete genre of textual reproduction, the "dramatic theatre" that emerges for Lehmann is thoroughly conditioned by print; or, more accurately, conditioned by values ascribed to print as a mode of cultural production. Lehmann is surely correct to point out the influence of print on the modern understanding of theatre, yet his straightforward representation of a "theatre of the book" is often at odds with the actual, material uses of written documents in the making of dramatic performance.[1] Actors in Shakespeare's company, after all, learned their parts from sides, hardly vehicles of the "'whole' of the plot." Today, a variety of iPhone and iPad apps (admittedly, only available some time after the publication of *Postdramatic Theatre*) rapidly digest a play into sides, and provide the actor with an audio track of his or her part, cues and all. That is, while postdramatic theatre – like postmodernity, posthumanism – may include "the presence or resumption or continued working of older aesthetics" (27), the textual practices alleged to drive theatrical production are richly, ideologically, differentiated. Even the most conventional "dramatic" performance today uses writing across a range of platforms (manuscript, print, electronic), cutting, rewriting, translating, and multiplying texts, all as part of leaving them *as texts* largely behind. Much more visible is an insistent rhetoric of textual fidelity, of scriptural determination alleged – by actors and directors, audiences, scholars, and theorists – to structure the dramatic theatre, a rhetoric

that Lehmann, like others, mistakes for how theatre actually uses writing in practice.[2]

After all, most of what happens even in a conventional performance has no specification in the text at all. "Who's there?" Barnardo asks, the opening line of *Hamlet* (well, the opening line of two of the three early versions, more or less – Q2: "VVHose there?"; F: "Who's there?"; Q1: "Stand: who is that?").[3] Although these may be its first words, any production of *Hamlet* is already under way, asserting a significant space variably continuous with and distinct from the space inhabited by the audience. The audience is rhetorically positioned by the actor's performance, and by how the words s/he engages as acting are given performative force within the circumstance of their utterance, an act that transforms them from words into deeds. What does s/he use these words to do? Challenge? Question? Where is the actor facing? Toward the actor playing Francisco? Does s/he see him/her? How tall/short/thin/heavy is s/he? It's dark in Denmark: is it dark on the stage? Is it dark in the theatre? When does Barnardo recognize Francisco? Is the actor speaking English? Is Barnardo? This framework of performative signification clearly extends well beyond the text, having more to do with the ideological structuring of an event in which the text plays a part. Much as digital textuality has helped to dramatize the difference between the ideological and material structure of print – are two differently published editions of the "same" text the "same" thing? – the "postdramatic" resituation of writing among the signifying practices of performance perhaps helps us to reconsider what was there all along: that the text was never "suitable material for the realization of a theatrical project" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* 56), if what we mean by that project is the direct, uncomplicated representation of distinct fictions, the reduction of performance to the *presentation* of *the play*. The "text-based" dramatic theatre has always been a mirage, used to model a specific vision of the appropriate hierarchy of artistic relations.

Lehmann's notion of postdramatic theatre has considerable descriptive and analytic power, but much less utility as a historicizing or a periodizing term. Its value instead arises in locating two ideologies competing to define the work of contemporary theatre: an *interpretive* rhetoric, in which performance is valued for its capacity to repeat, realize, and communicate the dramatic work to an audience; and a *productive* rhetoric, in which the theatre frames performance as an event, speaking not merely *to* the spectator but also *through* the spectator's agency in the performance. Taking dramatic theatre as "the declamation and illustration of written drama" (21), Lehmann foregrounds a view of dramatic performance as a

form of textual mimesis, embodied on the stage and transmitted to a body of spectators, who perform as readers-by-other-means, so to speak. To draw dramatic performance, Shakespeare performance, into a sense of the *performance event* requires a different conception of the spectator's share, a spectator "emancipated," as Jacques Rancière might say, from the passivity sometimes imagined as the spectator's only agency in the spectacle. Surely "interpretation" of various kinds sustains the production process, and transpires during the performance, too. But dramatic *performance* cannot be valued *as performance* if it is framed in critical practice primarily as a vehicle for a readerly audience passively to absorb the stage's "interpretations" toward a fuller, richer, more dynamic understanding of the Shakespeare play. In Chapter 2 I consider how the distinction between reading and spectating is articulated in Shakespeare studies, but the notion of performance-as-textual-interpretation – Lehmann's "dramatic theatre" – has broader consequences for an understanding of dramatic performance and of the spectator's share in the performance event.

Peter Kivy has undertaken a critique of reading as a mode of performance that is useful here, precisely because it underwrites the consequences of equating performance with "interpretation." Kivy's account deploys several familiar metaphors – the text as score, the text as recipe – often used to express the determining role ascribed to writing in dramatic theatre. For Kivy, musical and dramatic works are similar in that their textual transmission provides the means for creating performances. In this regard, we might say that Kivy takes an algorithmic view of dramatic writing, framing it as – like a musical score – instructions for making the performance event in which the work of art actually emerges. (Kivy tactically – though perhaps unwisely – must, then, set reading plays apart from reading narrative fiction or poetry, despite the institutional absorption of dramatic writing to the canons of literature and the attitudes of "literary dramatists" like Ibsen and Shaw, even Shakespeare perhaps, who imagined an audience of printform readers as well as a theatrical public.)

For Kivy, what performers of any kind – actors, pianists, readers – do when they perform is to "interpret," and what they produce is an "interpretation":

> A performance is a *version* of the work performed. And in order for a performer to produce a credible performance, a credible version or "reading" of the work, she must have an *interpretation* of it. She must have her own idea of how the music goes: what makes it tick. She bases her performance on that idea; on that interpretation. Her performance, then, literally displays forth her interpretation. If she had a facility with words she

> could tell us what her interpretation of the work is, as an analyst or theorist might. But in any event, one can show an interpretation as well as tell it, as we have seen. And what the musical performer does is to show her interpretation through her performance. (*Performance of Reading* 61)

Although for Kivy the score and the script have no other purpose than being interpreted in performance, as an interpretation, the performance is not a work-in-itself, an event. The identity of the performance derives from the script it interprets and transmits; based on "that idea," it can be experienced only in relation to that absent authority.[4] Discounting Kivy's purely technical limitation of "interpretation" merely to discerning what "makes it tick," "interpretation" requires a sense of performance-as-communication: the proper operation of the medium would guarantee the appropriate transfer of the text's signifieds to the audience without too much distracting noise. There is considerable "interpretation" behind both musical and theatrical performance, assessing technical features of pace, tempo, dynamics, and phrasing toward an overall sense of the purposes of the performance, and the significantly different technical and semantic interpretation of various elements of a play, line-readings, blocking and movement, function of the *mise en scène*, thematics, character psychology and motive (if there are characters, psychology, motive), and so on. But although interpreting is essential to making the performance, should we restrict the significance of performance to the adequate communication of an "interpretation," a kind of commentary, to a receiving public?

Revealingly, for Kivy, the significant analogy between music and theatre is less between playing a sonata and the *mise en scène* of a Shakespeare play than between playing a sonata and writing a critical study of Shakespeare.

> We call what critics say about the meaning and significance of art works interpretations of them, and we call performances interpretations of them. Thus, we contrast A. C. Bradley's Hegelian interpretation of *Hamlet* with Ernest Jones' Freudian interpretation; and we contrast Schnabel's Romantic interpretations of the Beethoven piano sonatas with Brendel's rather more precise and laid back ones.
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> But, of course, these two uses of the term "interpretation" are closely related. To begin with, contrary to what some believe, it is my view that the term is applied univocally to, for example, A. C. Bradley's written interpretations of Shakespeare's plays and Schnabel's performances of Beethoven's piano sonatas. They are all literally, and in the same sense, interpretations, the difference being that Bradley's book on Shakespeare's plays *tells* you his interpretations, whereas Schnabel's performances of Beethoven *show* you his interpretations. (38)

Kivy's framing here conveniently displays the problems engrained in regarding theatrical performance as delivering a textual interpretation, a "reading." First, unlike Schnabel's Beethoven, Bradley's performance hardly claims identity with *Hamlet*. And even if Bradley chose to perform/interpret this material, his rereading of his essay on *Hamlet* would be a different performance, a different essay, lecture, commentary, conversation. If Artur Schnabel could *tell* us what his interpretation *shows* completely and fully, it would necessarily differ from his performance, and not only because words are not notes of music. Interpretation – Bradley's essay, Bradley's commentary on his essay, Schnabel's verbal account of Beethoven – makes propositions about the performance, and so cannot be understood as the performance itself.

With the possible exception of the 2007 Wooster Group *Hamlet*, in which actors visibly mimicked the "text" of the Richard Burton *Hamlet* film running on a large screen upstage, most performances absorb, work *on*, and work *with* the text rather than making "propositions *about* the text" as an interpretive essay would do (Saltz, "What" 301). Of course, interpretation happens all the time, we can't help it: a Wooster Group spectator might well be thinking – as some reviewers clearly were – that next to Burton's, Scott Shepherd's performance was less powerful, less moving, a lesser Hamlet. As Benjamin Bennett has suggested, performance might even be understood to frame a kind of "interpretivity," an ongoing effort not to grasp what the performance is proposing about the text, but to seize where the event of performance is going, what it is doing, what it might mean to participate in this act here and now, happening in this way (*All Theater* 185). Bennett locates spectators rigorously within the event of theatre; spectators engage with the processual forms, moods, and shapes of the performance, rather than merely decanting an embodied commentary on the play offered from the stage. A performance can only be *re*constructed as propositional, and "the text" or "the play" is only one of the things a performance might be conceived to make propositions about. When Lars Eidinger, playing Hamlet in Thomas Ostermeier's brilliant production at the Schaubühne in Berlin (it opened in 2008), stuffs his mouth full of dirt it's difficult to feel that textual mimesis is predominant: the corporeal materiality of this act interferes with the represented action, emphasizing the actor's opacity to the fiction. Eidinger's act gives rise to a number of interpretive possibilities: Hamlet is as penetrated by corruption as everything else in Elsinore; Eidinger is a remarkable showman; the director's authority is unchallenged at the Schaubühne. Richard Burton's or Kenneth Branagh's or Lars Eidinger's performance as Hamlet are akin